

## NxNE White Ribbon Benefit Concert 2003

by Jim Kelly for [www.socan.ca](http://www.socan.ca)

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There's a lyric that Chrissie Hynde sings in the Pretenders song "Hymn To Her"; a simple truth: some things change, some stay the same.

That's certainly true of the North By Northeast music festival and conference, running this year from June 5–7 in Toronto. Now in its ninth year, NxNE is growing and evolving, having added a film component and officially changing its name to The North By Northeast Music And Film Festival And Industry Conference.

But other things have remained the same. For the past five years, the festival has kicked off with the popular White Ribbon Benefit concert. And as with the first benefit concert, The Tea Party's Jeff Martin is again leading the way, digging into his rolodex and calling upon a who's who of the Canadian music scene to drop by and lend their talents to the cause. This year the event is to be held on June 3 at the Phoenix concert theatre.

The White Ribbon Campaign is about men working to end men's violence against women. Conceived in Toronto in 1991 by a small group of men, it is now the largest such organization in the world, with offices as far abroad as Europe and Australia.

The Canadian organizers of the campaign had heard The Tea Party's song "Release" on the radio sometime in 1997. Recognizing the sentiment behind the song, they contacted the band to see if they would be interested in doing something musical to promote awareness of the campaign. The group agreed, and eventually the concert was tied in with the NxNE festival.

When SOCAN spoke to Jeff Martin about his involvement with the annual benefit concert, he was excited about this year's roster of performers.

"This year's line-up is pretty eclectic," Martin says, "with Gord Downie coming and Holly McNarland, and we're gonna get Todd Kerns back. That's a lot of bang for the buck there. And Gordie Johnson, who's pretty much been a staple for the whole thing. A very talented man."

With that kind of star power, it's no wonder the concert is a big draw. Each year the benefit raises approximately \$30,000 for the campaign. That money goes to support such things as outreach programs in schools and workplaces, as well as other initiatives. Of course, the goal of the concert is also to raise awareness, and to that end, Martin feels it's important that high-profile rock stars—especially male rock stars—are associated with this particular cause.

"Rock 'n' roll can be very influential if it's done in the right way," Martin says. "The way that the awareness comes through this concert is that young people are attending it. If people are impressionable through music, then artists getting together and taking a

stance on this and trying to bring awareness to the cause is [important]. But there's really no preaching that goes on at the concert itself," Martin adds, "because it's meant to be a celebration that hopefully things are getting better to a certain extent."

Being in the service of a worthy and serious cause doesn't mean the participants can't have some fun with the night. In fact, the concert has gained a reputation for its unexpected musical performances and spontaneous collaborations.

"For instance, last year The Tea Party did a cover of 'Under Pressure' [the Queen/David Bowie song]," Martin recalls, "and all of a sudden, when the David Bowie part came in, Steven Page [from Barenaked Ladies] ran on stage, and he starts singing it! It was hilarious. It was just totally unexpected, but it was great."

Martin also gets a kick out of the irony that the participants often choose to perform classic testosterone-rock numbers by bands like Led Zeppelin and AC/DC; bands not exactly known for championing progressive views toward women in their music.

"I find it funny that the songs they pick are by the bands that have no relevance anymore in terms of this campaign. But that's the fun of the night, where we'll play AC/DC and Zeppelin songs and all that stuff. That's the spirit of the evening, where everyone checks their egos at the door and just goes for it. So everyone wants to go back and play those songs, but no one wants to do the deeds behind them."

So, some things stay the same, but some things are changing.

"We all think of ourselves as evolving, but we'll always be humans becoming, not humans being," says Martin. "Hopefully we're becoming better by being aware that these things can't stay in the closet anymore and they're not taboo. They need to be brought out. So I feel good about being a part of this and knowing that healing is taking place, slowly but surely."