

Friday March 21, 2003

## Bands raise the roof for homeless

By Allan WIGNEY, Ottawa Sun

Over the next few months we can expect to hear daily reports about people working hard to hurt others.

Over the next two weeks we here in the home of the Junos will hear even more about people working hard to help themselves.

Perhaps this is a good time to talk about people working hard to help others.

As our city is gradually transformed into one giant block of luxury condos, a growing number of people are quite literally being left out in the cold.

It's an issue that prompted Family Services Ottawa to sponsor an educational video for use in schools. And when Christina Marchant of Family Services contacted local singer-songwriter Tony Turner about creating an appropriate musical soundtrack, it ultimately became an issue that would inspire nearly three dozen local musicians to do their part.

Turner, a longtime member of local songwriters/booster-club Writers' Block, used his contacts to put together two benefit shows at Rasputin's, the cosy folk club that is no stranger to supporting worthy causes. (Indeed, Dean Verger's club played host to a benefit for Interval House, a local women's shelter, last night.) Once the ball was rolling, a tiny fundraiser in an intimate club became a two-night celebration boasting 32 performers and reaping its own benefits from fortuitous timing.

"We decided right from the first that we would do this as a performance event and Dean Verger gave us a couple of nights at Rasputin's in October," Turner explains. "It just so happened they were the same two nights that the Ontario Council of Folk Festivals was meeting in Ottawa -- the same weekend -- so I took advantage of that by putting out a call to other songwriters who were coming to that conference, to write songs on the topic of home.

"In the end, we had 32 songwriters signed up. Some had to dash from the Lord Elgin down to Rasputin's to do their songs and leave."

### WELL INSPIRED'

Sixteen of those performances can be heard on There's No Place Like Home, a benefit CD produced to aid Raising the Roof, a national organization devoted to combating homelessness. The CD features some names familiar to local folkies -- Wendy DeMos, Maria Hawkins and Turner himself -- amidst a number of new voices.

"The songs that were written were really well inspired," Turner says. "They weren't all necessarily about homelessness, but they were certainly on topic. And the musicians signed off any mechanical royalties they might have received from the manufacturing of the CD."

The Rasputin's shows raised about \$800, not bad for a small room already filled with performers. And the money helped pay for the pressing of 150 copies of There's No Place Like Home. Distribution for additional copies and further pressings is in the works, and will likely be handled by the Unitarian Youth Group with the aid of the city's Alliance to End Homelessness.

"Raising the Roof doesn't have the means for distribution in Ottawa," Maura Volante, administrative co-ordinator for the alliance explains. "It won't be a problem distributing the ones that have been made, but we hope we can build on what's already been achieved through these shows."

For now, you can find copies of There's No Place Like Home, which marries a worthy cause to a welcome showcase for local talent, at the Ottawa Folklore Centre, 1111 Bank St. It's also available (as is his own recently released solo album, A Matter of Time) through Turner's website at [www.cyberus.ca/~tturner](http://www.cyberus.ca/~tturner).

"I just feel we all have some sort of social responsibility," Turner says of the project. "If the opportunity is there you just grab it and do what you can to make the world a little bit better place."

