

Songwriters fest aims at changing the world

CYNTHIA REASON
creason@insidetoronto.com

Now in its second year, the highly successful Toronto Songwriters Festival is expanding its base of veteran acoustic musicians to include a lineup of youthful, up-and-coming talent.

Last year's inaugural event raised

more than \$8,000 for children in Laos and India, but despite its success, festival co-ordinator Shawn Phelps said it felt like something was missing.

"We realized it was young people. They are the ones who are really going to change the world, and why not start with their own music?" she said.

Given the festival's benefactor — the Jai Dee (Good Heart) Children's Fund — youth involvement was a natural progression, Phelps said.

She and partner Thanou Thirakul started the charity after a visit to the Central Muong Khong Anuban kindergarten in Laos two years ago. That inspired meeting translated into the establishment of the charity

and the organization of the festival — its only source of fundraising. And what a difference it made.

After last year's fest, Phelps and Thirakul travelled to the school in December to oversee its overhaul. Not only were their fundraising efforts able to secure the essentials — a large blackboard, educational posters, books, notebooks, pencils,

crayons, sports balls and a mini-CD player — but they also financed the construction of washroom facilities with two toilets and a sink with running water and a fence around the school.

"Most of the kids have never had clean running water before," Phelps said. "So they showed up excited the

>>>

PERFORMERS, page 3

The Bloor West Villager - A Metroland Community Newspaper

Canada Post Canadian Publications Mail Sales Product Agreement No. 40013798

Reduce Your Environmental Footprint

Performers hit the stage for fundraiser

>>> from page 1

next day with towels to bathe."

The fence, meanwhile, was built to keep the children inside school grounds, away from the dangers of a nearby river, and the wandering water buffalo away from a soon-to-be established garden which will supply the school with fresh vegetables.

"We had a riot doing all this work," Phelps said of the month-long endeavour. "We oversaw all the costs by ourselves, hired out local contractors, bought supplies locally, and had a lot of support

from local men."

As a result of these cost-saving measures, Phelps said Jai Dee had leftover funds that were funnelled to another very worthy cause — the purchase of \$1,000 worth of books for 400 students in Calcutta schools.

The proceeds from this year's expanded Toronto Songwriters Festival will continue the path to education for the children in Laos, when Phelps returns to the country's Khong district in December to create a network of the area's 16 kindergarten principals to share in the dialogue of learning.

"They all have resources in terms of creative ideas to share," she said. "If you don't have creative thinking, money won't do what you want it to do."

The Toronto Songwriters Festival takes place at Hugh's Room, 2261 Dundas St. W. on Saturday, Oct. 13 from 8 p.m. until late and on Sunday, Oct. 14 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Saturday's event, which is being held in partnership with Songwriters Unite!, will feature Joshua Bartholomew, Kat Goldman, Andy Carey, Tucker Finn, MEAStars and Peter Verity. Tickets are \$25 in

advance or \$27 at the door.

Sunday afternoon's event, which is being held in partnership with School Alliance of Student Songwriters (SASS), will feature youth Lindsay Broughton, Joey and Cierra MacDonald, Lindsay Regan, Justin Bridgemohan and Tafar-I Davis performing their own compositions.

Tickets are \$10 in advance or \$12 at the door.

For more information or for tickets, call 416-531-6604 or go to www.torontosongwritersfestival.com or www.jaideechildrensfund.org