



Helping children rise above poverty through education.

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### **A New Music Festival with Heart**

Toronto, ON—Citytv's Jojo Chintoh will cut the ribbon to officiate the first annual Toronto Songwriters' Festival on September 24, 2006 at Hugh's Room. The festival features award-winning blues singer Suzie Vinnick, as well as other notable performers, Royal Wood, Noah Zacharin, Kat Goldman, Layah Jane, blueVenus, Peter Slack, The Undesirables, Russell Leon Band, and a spot appearance by talented comedian Alex Nussbaum.

The festival was created by new Toronto charity Jai Dee (Good Heart) Children's Fund (JDCF) in partnership with Songwriters' Unite! (a collective of 400 songwriters), to raise money for a kindergarten school in Southern Laos, which needs everything from outhouses to books, and also to actively support homegrown musical talent.

"With this festival, we want to harness the power of music to bring people together to make a difference for others," says Shawn Phelps, JDCF's president. Phelps, a magazine editor and college teacher, co-founded JDCF this past February with her partner, Thanou Thirakul, after a trip to Laos. While there they visited a local kindergarten and found that it had little more than a mat on the floor.

"It seemed like it would take so little to make a real difference there," Phelps says. "There was no toilet, no running water. They didn't even have crayons. We told them we would help, but we had no idea where we would get the money."

A few months later, they stumbled across a Songwriter's Unite! event at Graffiti's Bar & Grill in Kensington Market. Phelps was impressed by the high calibre of the artists. "I thought, 'Wouldn't it be great if we could find a way to raise money for the school in Laos while also supporting these talented songwriters,'" she says. "So we talked to Russell Leon—he heads up the organization—and he loved the idea."

"I know what it's like to teach music with nothing to children right here in Canada," says Leon, a music teacher at OISE and lead singer of an eponymous band. "So when I heard they had nothing, no crayons, no books at Anuban, I was immediately drawn to Jai Dee and to helping this school. Music connects everyone socially. We're all on the same beat, the same wavelength, so this festival will connect our world in Toronto with their world in Laos."

The most inspiring thing about the whole process of creating this event, Phelps says, has been the way people have stepped forward to help.

"We're really grateful to all the performers for volunteering their time. We've also got a team of committed volunteers doing what they can to make this thing happen. Together, we are creating what we hope will be a night of absolute magic.

I've always wanted to get more involved in humanitarian work, and didn't know how. Now I realize if you want to do something, you just have to take that first step and believe that it will all work out somehow."

**Jai Dee (Good Heart) Children's Fund** is a Toronto-based charity that helps children rise above poverty through education in developing countries at the grassroots level. It is run by a Toronto couple who decided to start it after visiting a kindergarten school in Laos and realizing how little it would take to make a difference. In Thailand and Laos, to have "jai dee" means to have a good

heart.

For more information please visit [www.jaideechildrensfund.org](http://www.jaideechildrensfund.org).

**Songwriters Unite!** is a collective of 400 songwriters run by Russell Leon. Leon is a musician who heads up an eponymous band, and a music teacher who recently volunteered to teach children with diabetes to play coffee-container drums at The Hospital for Sick Children.

For more information please visit [www.songwritersunite.com](http://www.songwritersunite.com)

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NOTE TO PHOTO EDITORS: High resolution photos of the musicians and the children/school in Laos are available online at:  
[www.jaideechildrensfund.org/pressrelease/index.html](http://www.jaideechildrensfund.org/pressrelease/index.html)

In order to download photos you will need the following (all lower case) user code and password:

USER CODE: jai dee

PASSWORD: children

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