**Musicians Aid A Friend In Need** - **Boston Globe -** 05/04/2000
**//** By Adrian Walker, Globe Columnist

T Max, as he likes to be called, is editor/publisher of The Noise, a magazine devoted to Boston-based rock 'n' roll, and he well remembers his introduction to Mikey Dee. Dee had written an angry letter taking exception to an unkind review of a local act. His passion and knowledge so impressed Max that Dee became a contributor to the magazine and later an associate editor. His writing for The Noise was just part of his full-time avocation as an advocate for local music and the people who create it. His crusade included a long-running college radio show and a day job for the Planetary Group, a music promotion company, touting Boston bands nationally to noncommercial radio stations.

''Mikey is the biggest champion of local music in Boston,'' Max said. ''It's just amazing how he supports so many local bands.''

Last night, the artists Dee has championed for years began eagerly returning the favors. He needs it. After surgery for a heart abnormality on Feb. 7, Dee suffered a series of strokes that left him unable to speak and with very limited motion. Currently at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, the 37-year-old faces a long road to recovery.

His friends reacted to his illness first with shock - and then with
determination to help. Thus was born ''For The Benefit of Mr. Dee,'' a five-night fund-raising celebration of Dee's passion for music that kicked off last night with a performance by Boston Rock Opera at Axis. About 90 bands will perform in 26 shows held in 16 local venues by the time the series concludes on Sunday.

Musicians regularly perform benefits, but the outpouring for Dee - sponsored by the Planetary Group, The Noise, Boston Rock Opera, and WMFO, the Tufts University station - is remarkable. Organizers hope the benefit will raise $40,000 to help Dee with the expenses during his convalescence. The effort is especially striking in a city where unity isn't a hallmark, in the music community or anywhere else.

''Boston's a city that normally can't get together over anything,'' said Adam Lewis of the Planetary Group. ''For 90 bands to come together and 16 venues to let us take the profits of their bread-and-butter nights is amazing.''

But that unity doesn't surprise Lewis. Dee is only getting back what he has given many times over.

Three of the groups he has performed with - the Boston Rock Opera, the Willard [Grant] Conspiracy, and Butterscott - will take part in the benefit.

Besides being a driving force behind the benefit, Eleanor Ramsay of Boston Rock Opera has launched a Web site (www.mikeydee.com) for Dee's friends to get updates on his condition. Musicians are moved, she said, partly by their affection for Dee and partly because the damage is so devastating.

''For me, he's always been one of the best things about the music scene,'' Ramsay said. ''He knows everything about local music and national music. He just knows tons about pop culture. He's really sort of a Renaissance man.''

The money raised during the benefit will go to the Mikey Dee Musicians Benefit Trust. Eventually, Lewis hopes, the trust will be able to assist other musicians and artists who suffer catastrophic events.

''He has insurance, but it will help with the life expenses that will come up,'' Lewis said. ''If, God willing, he doesn't need it, artists will be able to apply for it. We're going to be in the philanthropy business for a long time.''

Depressing as the catalyst for the benefit might have been, his friends have found that the act of putting it together provided a chance to celebrate Dee's excitement for rock 'n' roll in every form.

''If he was able, he'd be running around to as many of these shows as he could, talking to the bands,'' Lewis said. ''The music business can suck the life out of you, but it was impossible for that to happen to Mikey. He never lost the joy of seeing a band.''

Since his illness, his primary employer, the Planetary Group, has moved to a new office on the South Boston waterfront. His colleagues made a point of setting up Dee's cubicle in their new space.

''If he ever makes it back, it's here waiting for him,'' Lewis said.

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