



Jerry Mickelson with Minni and Cooper



Mike Foster and Raquel Atkins



Megan Jones

Rock for Kids is a hit, with strings attached

By Kevin McKeough | Special to the Tribune

It's not unusual for the stage of the Park West to be strewn with guitars, but on Friday night it wasn't a concert that filled the stage with instruments — and parts of the lobby and seating area as well — but the 18th Annual Rock for Kids Charity Auction.

"This is one of the biggest nights for fans of rock 'n' roll memorabilia in Chicago," WXRT deejay **Lin Brehmer**, co-host of the event, said of the more than 160 autographed guitars, photographs, posters, records and items of clothing that musicians and actors donated for the live and silent auction.

Begun 19 years ago as a holiday fundraising drive held at concerts by employees of local entertainment promoter Jam Productions, the non-profit Rock for Kids (formerly Christmas Is for Kids) now annually serves approximately 3,500 underprivileged children — more than half of them homeless — through its music education and holiday gift programs.

"It's so empowering for young children," said Rock for Kids Executive Director **Maria Mowbray**. "They may not grow up to be rock stars, but being able to learn a musical instrument, having the attention of the teacher, builds so much self-esteem for kids. It draws them out of their daily world, which can be bleak."

A recently-ruptured tendon in her leg didn't keep WXRT deejay **Terri Hemmert** from joining Brehmer as co-host of the auction for the 16th consecutive year. "These kids up there, it's amazing what they do," she said, pointing to a line of girls playing drums onstage. "We all get exhausted during the holidays, and especially in my physically impaired state, I'm tired all the time, but when I see the kids play I'm not tired anymore."

During the auction, the crowd's buzz mixed with the classic-rock songs on the sound system, as celebrity models, drawn from the local music community, displayed items and auctioneer **Jeff Brown** deftly drove up the prices. The bidding ranged from a low of \$30 for an autographed photo of the Pussycat Dolls to a peak of \$11,000 for a replica of a 1962 Gibson SG guitar signed by The Who's **Pete Townshend** and **Roger Daltrey**.

Metro owner **Joe Shanahan** was pleased to help auction a set of **Ramones** memorabilia that included an autographed single, T-shirt and jeans (torn, of course). Jam Productions co-founder **Jerry Mickelson** and his wife, **Julia**, brought their terriers — **Minni** and **Cooper**

— who are used to noisy, crowded concert halls. "Ever since they've been born they've been going to shows," said Mickelson, who had been at the **Bob Seger** concert the night before the auction and particularly enjoyed the rocker's rendition of "Against the Wind."

David Kalt, a guitar collector and co-founder and CEO of the online brokerage options **Xpress Holdings Inc.**, was thrilled to see a **Rickenbacker** guitar autographed by **Tom Petty** among the silent-auction items. "I'm going to own that guitar," he told his wife, **Susan**, and their friends **Brad** and **Kim Keywell**. True to his word, Kalt made the winning bid of \$3,600.

Kalt also bought a 1950s **Harmony** acoustic guitar signed by the members of **Wilco** for \$3,800, and paid another \$6,000 for an hourlong guest-deejay stint on WXRT. "If it makes him happy," Susan said as they headed in for the bidding. "There are worse things he could be spending his money on."

Desmond Fairchild spent much of the evening pouting that he'd been outbid for a cymbal autographed by the members of **Metallica**, only to discover that his girlfriend, **Maggie McWilliams**, had bought it for him. "He couldn't go above \$200 because he knew I'd freak out," said McWilliams, who enlisted their friends **Stuart Cottman** and **Crystal Dinning** to cast the \$510 bid on her behalf.

A devoted **Pearl Jam** fan who has seen the group in concert 23 times, **Jason Wright** paid \$5,800 for a **Carlo Robelli** acoustic guitar autographed by the members of the band. "It's fabulous, I'm in heaven," he said. "It's for a great cause. I wouldn't have spent it if it weren't for the kids."

Photos for the Tribune by Dianne Brogan