

Rolling Stone here in April

Richards plans 'rock concert to end all rock concerts'

By Nicolaas van Rijn
Toronto Star

Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards has ended months of speculation by announcing he will give two benefit concerts for the Canadian National Institute for the Blind in Toronto next month.

The concerts will be held in the 5,000 seat Varsity Arena — home of the Varsity Blues hockey team — during the afternoon and evening of Sunday, April 22. A number of the band members will join him, but it's not known whether lead singer Mick Jagger will be among them.

Giving one benefit concert for the blind was one of the conditions set out by County Court Judge Lloyd Graburn in a suspended sentence handed down last Oct. 24 after Richards pleaded guilty to a charge of possessing heroin.

Less than a month later — Nov. 21 — the federal justice department announced it would appeal the sentence because, a spokesman said, Graburn's sentence was "too lenient under the circumstances."



Richards: Fulfilling sentence

Because Richards must be served personally with the notice of appeal while he's on Canadian territory there had been speculation Richards wouldn't return to Canada.

However, he said at the time he'd go ahead with the concert, adding that fellow Rolling Stones, including lead

singer Mick Jagger, would appear on stage with him.

A band spokesman said at the time the world's leading rock singers, including Eric Clapton, Peter Townshend, Elton John and Rod Stewart, had all volunteered to perform in "the rock concert to end all rock concerts."

Industry sources in San Francisco indicated yesterday that Neil Young was prepared to offer his services.

Joni Mitchell, the Canadian-born pop music superstar, has also said she'd be willing to participate, The Star has learned.

In a statement released yesterday, Richards said the concert couldn't be held in Maple Leaf Gardens — offered by owner Harold Ballard after the sentence was announced — because of hockey playoffs.

And, he said, he has written Bruce Shilton, counsel for federal Justice Minister Marc Lalonde, "to advise him, that I undertake to make myself available for service of the notice of

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Pop greats ready to help out Richards

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appeal April 23 at an address in Toronto designated by him."

Former Ontario ombudsman Arthur Maloney, who released the statement and is acting as Richards' lawyer for the appeal, said yesterday he'd been involved in talks about the concert with Richards, his New York attorney and other advisers in New York late last week.

"It's my understanding that an appropriate number of seats will be set aside for persons who are blind, who will be admitted without charge, and the rest will be sold to the general public," Maloney said.

"That achieves two purposes: The concert will raise money for the CNIB to carry out its work and it will also be a benefit performance for the blind persons who attend." All proceeds from the concert will go to the CNIB, Richards said.

Maloney said CNIB officials will determine the number of seats to be available to blind persons and the charge for tickets to the general public.

Free for blind

CNIB lawyer John Magill told The Star, "I haven't personally been in contact with anyone about the details, but I do know the concert will be held and that the CNIB will be the beneficiary.

"Blind persons will get in free — but we haven't even begun to determine how that will be arranged."

Maloney, asked whether fellow Stones and other rock stars would be joining Richards on stage, said, "I'm not in a position to say at this time.

"I expect further details on who'll be performing will be made public later this week."

He said he and Richards' representatives would begin consultations with CNIB officials today on concert details — the number of seats to be made available to the public, the cost, where they'll be

sold and when, and the method of distribution of free tickets to blind people.

Indicating preliminary details were already arranged, Maloney said, "I expect we'll be able to make an announcement early this week on how those arrangements have been worked out."

Yesterday, those involved — Richards, Maloney, CNIB spokesmen and Varsity Arena officials — would not elaborate on the rock guitarist's statement.

The concert is the result of charges laid by police against Richards on Feb. 27, 1977, while he was in Toronto for a six-week stay with the Rolling Stones to record their Love You Live album.

After finding 22 grams of heroin — 34 per cent pure, about three times the strength of heroin used by most addicts — police charged him with possession of heroin for the purpose of trafficking, and with possession of cocaine.

Fight with drugs

Released on bail, Richards appeared before Graburn in county court in October and elected trial by judge without jury, pleading guilty to the reduced charge of possession of heroin.

The judge dismissed the cocaine possession charge, saying the crown was unable to produce evidence to support it.

In a packed University Ave. courtroom, Richards' lawyer at the time, Austin Cooper, described the guitarist's 11-year fight with a wide array of drugs.

In 1967, "after a very grueling schedule" with the Rolling Stones, Richards "was exhausted after all the playing and touring," and started experimenting with drugs, Cooper told the court.

"In 1969 he started with heroin and it got to the state where he was taking quantities of the drug and getting no euphoria from it.

"He was taking such powerful amounts — as much as 2½ grams a day — just to feel normal."

Cooper said Richards tried to kick the habit in 1972, failed, and made a second attempt at a Swiss clinic in 1973. A third attempt failed in 1974.

'Creative, tortured'

In 1977, Richards turned to the Stevens Psychiatric Centre in New York for a cure, Cooper said, and told Graburn during the court hearing that reports indicate the musician is succeeding in his battle to end the addiction.

Contending Richards' repeated attempts to rehabilitate himself would encourage other addicts, Cooper told Graburn, "He should not be dealt with as a special person, but I ask your honor to understand him as a creative, tortured person — as a major contributor to art form.

While the maximum sentence for heroin possession is seven years in jail, Cooper noted that 187 cases of heroin possession were recorded in Canada in 1977, and 99 of them resulted in probation or fines.



Joni Mitchell: Willing to join in