

Hot Tunes For Cool Games

By: Steve Wozniak

While sports fans pay thousands of dollars for seats at regular season and playoff games at major sporting events, DJ T. (Tim) Campbell, of east Lansing, Mich., not only gets in free... he gets paid to be there!

Some people have all the luck. But lucky is way too mild term-especially when we're talking about someone who has hit the jackpot for sports junkies! This is better than receiving a Gordie Howe signed hockey jersey... or a pair of Micheal Jordan game-worn basketball shoes... or even a rare Honus Wagner baseball card!

HOCKEYTOWN USA

Since 1993, Campbell has been mixing his passion for music with 33 years experience of playing organized hockey. That's when "Tunes By T" began integrating recorded music with videos on the giant Sony Jumbotron at Joe Louis Arena, during and after Detroit Red Wings Games.

We're not talking about playing music at just any ol' skating pond. Nooooo! We're talking about entertaining about entertaining the fanatical fans in Hockeytown, USA. This is the city *sporting news* named the 1998 number one sports town in America based on fan fervor, attendance and overall team records.

HE SCORESSZZZ!

"The Red Wings' organization learned of me when I was entertaining at perennial College Powerhouse, Michigan State University," Campbell says. With the call from the Red Wings in 1993, Campbell replaced a traditional organist with a hot, high tech approach to entertaining at the coolest game on earth.

Prior to the beginning of the hockey season, he recorded 90 seconds of each song to be used to maximize the number of selections (40) per disc. Before each game, Campbell checks his playlist for the most appropriate tunes for that particular game. The only song that the National Hockey League won't allow him to play is "Three Blind Mice" in reference to penalties called or not called by the referee.

Similar to a mobile entertainer at a wedding reception, Campbell is more than simply a music provider at these events. He is also involved in creating an entire multimedia entertainment package. Ten people on headsets work as linemates to increase fan enjoyment.

Ninty minutes prior to the start of each game, a rehersal is held to confirm that all sound, video and lighting equipment is functioning properly. This is followed by a meeting with the entire entertainment staff from the arena to review the evenings script before the opening of the "Big Show."

"Our staff is well orchestrated and spread out during each game," Campbekll points out. "We try to develop a game plan ahead of time, but we always chyange on the fly and go with the flow. I'm on my toesstanding in forward position for three sraight hours for better concentration. We have a video control room on one side of the press box. From where I'm perched in my 8' x 10' cubby hole, I can see the whole ice surface. If I were just one inch taller, I wouldn't be able to stand up!"

GAME TIME

Campbell uses his own music equipment at the “Joe” (Joe Luis Arena). This includes six mini-disc players, a dual CD player, and a mixing board.

After the face off, he alternates between hit songs, organ and drum beats and crowd chants. Unlike music in some other hockey and basketball arenas, Campbell is careful to cut a song quickly when the action resumes. “I’m there to enhance the game atmosphere,” he says. “I don’t want to compete against the game, or make it sound like a three-ring circus.”

KING OF BUMPER MUSIC

Bumper music is the sound of two vehicles meeting unexpectedly on a highway; it refers to snippets of songs interjected at points during an event. For example, at wedding receptions, “bumper music” is often used to enhance the bouquet and garter rituals. At Red Wing hockey games, bumper music refers to the songs played while the professional athletes are not playing.

“I don’t really have a name for the style of music I play to enhance the atmosphere in the arena,” Campbell says. “Our overall format is modern rock. We feel that it best relates to the game. I do center my attention to entertain as many fans as possible with a wide variety of music.”

CROWD REACTION

For the fans, Campbell’s goal is to include appropriate songs requests whenever possible. “The season ticket holders who sit nearby really appreciate that,” he remarks. “In fact, there are two season ticket holders who sit near me who just won’t leave until they hear Roger Miller’s ‘King Of The Road’.”

Occasionally, Campbell receives song requests from players. Darrin McCarty (team tough guy) once asked for the Marilyn Manson song, “Beautiful People.” After hearing it, team captain Steve Yzerman exploded-saying that he never wanted to hear that offensive song again.

According to Campbell, even the referees have commented on his song selections. He has been told that ice officials have intentionally delayed the drop of the puck on occasion because they liked a particular song being played!

“My first year, we went all the way to the Stanley Cup finals,” Campbell proclaims. “The next year we won a record 62 regular season games. The last two years, we won the Stanley Cup championship!” He wears a Stanley Cup ring that was presented to him by the Detroit Red Wings organization for the last two years of victory.

“Who knows when this amazing rollercoaster ride will come to an end?” Campbell says. “I’ve been able to ride in two Stanley Cup victory parades in front of over 1.2 million fans each!”

OFF THE ICE

Campbell founded Tunes By T in 1983. Today, he has four units dedicated to stadium/arena events. He also has five systems on a traveling road squad that takes them through a schedule that includes wedding receptions, corporate events, school dances and other social occasions.

Campbell attributes his success to putting the client's wishes first and foremost and admits his mobile DJ clients are often impressed by his association with the hockey team. He advertises this connection in his brochures, advertisements, and on his voice messages. "Actually, I'm not sure how much extra business we're getting from this experience," he admits. "Most people are more concerned with their big day, and they just want to make sure that it will go well. Their functions are just as important to me as the Red Wings' games."

Spoken like a real champ!