

RED WINGS DJ SPINS A SPELL AT THE JOE
HE KNOWS WHAT MUSIC WILL SCORE WITH THE CROWD
DAVID LYMAN FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

It's supposed to be frenzied. It's Saturday afternoon, and the Red Wings are about to face off against their arch-rivals, the Colorado Avalanche, and Joe Louis Arena is packed; more than 20,000 fans have crowded in. There's been a dazzling pregame show with rink-size projections of the Wings and the appearance of a monstrous octopus three times the size of the one that usually hangs from the Joe Louis Arena ceiling.

But the fans are oddly silent.

"It's a nervous crowd," observes a Red Wings staff member on the in-house communication system. Then, the Wings' seventh man steps in.

He has no stick, no skates, no pads. Just eight tape decks, a box full of mini-discs and a musical sense as attuned to the fans' moods as Dominik Hasek's on-ice sense is to the Avalanche offensive line.

Tim Campbell -- T, as he's known professionally -- grabs a mini-disc off the top of his console, hurriedly spins a couple of knurled knobs and suddenly, the arena is filled with the furious sound of "The Launch," a hard-driving piece of techno by DJ Jean.

The video screen above center ice screams "NOISE," and the crowd erupts. They're on their feet, bellowing so loud they threaten to send the Red Wings' Noise-o-meter ricocheting to the top of scale.

And just as immediately, the game on the ice gets into high gear, the thumping and pounding every bit as intense as the sounds blaring out of the public address system.

"We're really not very aware of the music when we're on the ice," Red Wings defenseman Nicklas Lidstrom admitted at practice last week. "But the music gets the crowd going. And when the crowd is loud, it really helps us. It's like an extra push, extra energy."

From MSU to Joe Louis

Campbell never really intended to get into the DJ business.

An avid radio listener as a youngster growing up in East Lansing, he seemed to remember every musical selection he heard. Before long, he was collecting records, then dragging a few to parties. Next thing he knew, he was playing music at events catered by his late father, Jerry.

"It just snowballed into a business," Campbell says.

Things took a big turn in 1993, when Ron Mason, then the hockey coach at Michigan State University, asked him to develop a music program for the Spartans' home games. One of the Spartans' technicians also worked for the Red Wings and before long, Campbell was interviewing for the Joe Louis gig.

While the Joe definitely constituted the big time, it wasn't a job that would make him rich. He started at \$75 a game, hardly enough to cover the cost of driving his 1993 Honda Civic -- red, of course -- the 170 miles round-trip for each game.

"But this has never been about the money," says the 42-year-old married father of two, who meets a group of friends for 90 minutes of hockey every Friday morning. "It's a quality-of-life issue, you know? I love hockey. And I love music. This is the perfect job for me."

Scene and heard

Campbell may be central to the mood of the arena. But his location makes him seem like more of an afterthought. Tucked away in a drafty, oversized supply closet at the rear of section 211B, it makes seeing the game a challenge.

Campbell spends much of the game on tiptoes, his head bobbing back and forth to see the action beyond the heads of sports writers, TV monitors, decorative bunting and the chunky corner of a scoreboard.

In fact, the only view that's unobstructed is of nine Stanley Cup banners hanging from the Joe's beamed ceiling.

"It would make my view worse," Campbell says, "but it would be nice to get another banner up there."

Play my song, DJ

Everyone's trying to get a piece of the musical action. People are constantly peppering him with requests.

Some are semi-official, like the ones from sponsors.

Others are decidedly less so.

A nattily dressed stranger wanders in and forces a CD into Campbell's hands. "Nothing Rocks Like Red Wings Hockey," says the cover. The guy schmoozes Campbell as if they're old buddies. This CD won second place in a music contest, the guy tells him, but it should have been first.

"Play it as much as you want," the guy says, glad-handing Campbell one more time. "And play it often."

More than music

Officially, Campbell describes his job as "organizing the fans' enthusiasm." But that's far too dry for what he really does.

In reality, he's the human equivalent of a mood-altering substance, giving the crowd a goose when it's too quiet, trying to keep them pumped when they're already up there and offering a clever commentary on the action.

Some of his witticisms are obvious, like when the refs call a penalty against the Avalanche. First comes TV's old "Dragnet" theme, quickly followed by Ray Charles singing "Hit the Road Jack."

But those whose musical knowledge hasn't evolved since the 70s may not have grasped the significance of T's selection when Brendan Shanahan was called for Interference just 1:35 into the game: "Open Up Your Eyes," by Tonic.

It's ominous and a little mournful. It's also wonderfully droll.

He's got dozens of others stashed away and, since the Wings will go on to draw four more penalties, we'll also get to hear "What's Up?" (4 Non Blondes), "What's the Dillio" (M.E.S.T.), "Misunderstanding" (Genesis) and "What's Going On" (Marvin Gaye).

"T is the best in the business," says Ted Speers, senior director of marketing and communications for the Wings. "He understands the flow of the game, the highs and the lows and then he interprets them with music."

That's especially important during the playoffs, says Speers.

"The crowd is more tense now. It's his job to loosen them up."

He rocks the party

Just a minute into the third period, Darren McCarty scores the first of what will be three goals. The mood in the arena is jubilant. The goal is the reason, of course. But Campbell enhances it with a quick-cutting montage of hard-driving rock -- a musical parallel to McCarty's pounding, playing style.

Then, for good measure, he tosses in a quick snippet of "Mack the Knife."

McCarty scores again. Campbell pulls up "Twilight Zone," by 2 Unlimited. It's wonderfully frantic.

Miraculously, the usually low-scoring McCarty scores a third time. Now it's time for "1, 2, 3," by Len Barry.

The crowd sings along.

Campbell digs deep. He puts on "Minnie the Moocher," a song recorded by Cab Calloway more than 50 years ago. It seems chancy. But like any good DJ, he knows his audience.

"Hi dee, hi dee, hi dee hi," they chant with Calloway.

"It doesn't get any better than this, does it," Campbell asks whomever might care to listen. "It's like one big party."

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SONGS FOR THE ICE

Tim Campbell, the official disc jockey for Red Wings' home games, calls them "situational selections" -- songs he pulls from the 1,400 tunes he has on hand to add a little dramatic flair to a specific situation on the ice. They include:

- * "Just the Two of Us," by Will Smith. Played when two opposing players are sent to the penalty box.
- * "The Night Chicago Died," by Paper Lace. When the Wings beat the Chicago Blackhawks.
- * "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues," by Elton John. When the Wings beat the St. Louis Blues.
- * "Waltz of the Flowers," from Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker." Played when the opposing team returns to the ice between periods.
- * "Signs," by Five Man Electrical Band. Because of the lyrics -- "Long-haired freaky people need not

apply" -- it's often used to tweak scraggly haired players like Mike Ricci of the San Jose Sharks or the St. Louis Blues' Tyson Nash.

* "Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me," by Mel Carter. Played when the opposing team is penalized for holding.

* "Piano Man," by Billy Joel. At Saturday night games, Campbell will often set his timer for 9 p.m. Why? The lyrics: "It's nine o'clock on a Saturday . . . "

Illustration: Photo PAUL GONZALEZ VIDELA/Detroit Free Press

Detroit Red Wings DJ Tim Campbell is at work in his mini-studio overlooking the ice at Joe Louis Arena. Known professionally as T, Campbell's expertise is picking the right music for the right moment -- he knows how to get the fans roaring.

Campbell often plays Ray Charles' "Hit the Road Jack" when an opponent is sent to the penalty box.