

# Downloading for a Cause

## Music for Charities marries indie musicians with local charities



BRENT STURGIS

**Music for Charities founders Andre Rievers, left, and Daniel Johnson at a recent concert at Loca Luna.**

*By J. Nelson Leith*

Great things can happen when people come together from very different directions, as when Norwegian-born Daniel Johnson and Brazilian-

born Andre Rievers met in Atlanta and became close friends and roommates.

This friendship recently became a business partnership when Johnson and Rievers co-founded Music for Charities, an organization that brings together independent artists and local nonprofits through an online network that combines grass-roots activism with technology.

An independent musician himself, Johnson recognized that unsigned musicians and local charities both struggle for exposure and support. He envisioned an online networking site — like the popular MySpace and Facebook — where artists and small nonprofits could bring attention to each other.

Music fans could buy and download music for \$1 per song, similar to the iTunes model, and select a charity to which the proceeds would be donated. He took the plan to Rievers, and Music for Charities was born.

In fact, when Johnson started floating the idea among his friends, it seemed almost too good an idea not to have been imagined before. “We wondered: Is someone already doing this?” A few clicks around the Internet showed that nobody was.

Music for Charities is also unusual because the independent musicians, who are often as much in need of support as the charities, get part of the proceeds. While 75 cents of every dollar

goes to the nonprofit, 10 percent goes back to the artist. This win-win combination, with artists and nonprofits both getting a little something they need, has attracted not only the smaller charities that might never have been able to reach the Internet’s global audience, but also musicians from outside the U.S. as far away as Europe and Africa.

It was in this spirit of bringing together different elements that Music for Charities began organizing concerts in which the bands and representatives from nonprofits could interact with the public face-to-face — shows that Johnson named “Stone Soup” to invoke the classic tale in which neighbors pool their resources to make a soup much better than any of its individual ingredients.

While artists often use their music to promote a cause, Johnson admits that the confluence of live concerts and nonprofits is often counterintuitive for the leaders of nonprofit groups. “It can be hard to get across,” he said, “but you talk about all the people who will come for the music, and there’s a point where you see the look come over their face: They get it!”

Promoted on the Download Uplift site, these Stone Soup events have grown from a local Atlanta affair to a nationwide phenomenon, with people around the country intrigued by the Web site volunteering to become street-team



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**Kevin Tanner, a member of the local band Groove Theory, plays at a Music for Charities event last week at Loca Luna.**

coordinators for Stone Soup events in their own communities.

Johnson and Rievers are running with this synergetic approach, negotiating a partnership with Stretch the Skies, the Web’s second largest distributor of independent music, to manufacture CDs for Download Uplift artists, and with Atlanta’s Groove Tunes to help the artists with studio work. **IN**

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