

The Gazette

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Tongue-in-cheek look

at Halloween

Indie rockers take aim at Band-Aid solutions

Do They Know It's Halloween Song penned by Montrealers and proceeds go to UNICEF

T'CHA DUNLEVY
GAZETTE MUSIC CRITIC

"Bob Geldof is the devil," musician Nick Diamonds said. "He patronized everyone. He patronized the planet."

Diamonds and pal Adam Gollner sat down at Mile End's Café Esperanza yesterday to explain the impetus behind Do They Know It's Halloween, their bold, star-studded spoof on Live Aid, Band Aid and Band-Aid solutions to global problems.

The CD single, to be released

Tuesday on Vice Recordings, brings together an impressive roster of indie music talent, including Beck, the Arcade Fire, Feist, Sonic Youth, Sum 41, Sloan, Wolf Parade, Devendra Banhart, Buck 65, Peaches, Malcolm McLaren, the Postal Service, Rilo Kiley and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. All proceeds go to UNICEF.

"That's his (Diamonds's) view," Gollner interjected, starting a debate.

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Sample lyrics from **Do They Know It's Halloween?**

Once a year on a spooky night
It's Halloween ...
and what a fright!

Young boys and ghouls,
in ghoulish disguise
they cover their skin,
conceal their eyes

A grave mistake to be out
when the ghosts are about
it's Halloween ...

Our time to be afraid!

In the rest of the year,
they don't observe
this bash which has become
our biggest concern

Latvia, Laos, Chad, Peru
we need their help,
or else we're through

They don't know the fear,
we endure once a year
all hallow's eve, we are afraid!

Do they know it's Halloween
... tonight?



Adam Gollner (front) and Nick Diamonds stalked celebrities to recruit them for their Live-Aid-style song spoof Do They Know It's Halloween. ALLEN McINNIS THE GAZETTE

"I don't think Bob Geldof is the devil," Gollner said. "The guy raised millions of dollars and made a huge effort ..."

"For rotting food and corrupt government leaders," Diamonds interjected. "There's no hard data that that money went anywhere."

"At least the effort was made," Gollner said. "And there is hard data that food did get over. ... I'm not cynical about that, personally. But I am cynical about the lyrics (of the original Live Aid anthem Do They Know It's Christmas)."

Cynical enough to do something about it. A day after the recent 20th anniversary of Live Aid, Gollner and Diamonds sat down to write their retort. Do They Know It's Halloween takes a tongue-in-cheek approach to an unacknowledged but ghastly crisis afflicting North American kids every fall:

"It's Oct. 31st, could it get any worse?" sing Win Butler and Régine Chassagne of the Arcade Fire. "Children on the streets, begging for treats," Beck added.

Though they whipped off the lyrics in an afternoon, and the whole thing is undertaken with an air of tomfoolery, Gollner and Diamonds had some serious issues they wanted to address:

"Fear," they said, in unison.

"There is a climate of fear — we're supposed to be scared, always," Gollner explained. "Terrorism, American foreign policy, (affected) the lyrics. It's subtle, but it was there in our thought process when we wrote it."

But the initial inspiration was Geldof's song.

"The real problem is not that Africa is a 'desert with no rivers flowing,'" Diamonds said. "It's that big, multinational corpora-

tions all over the world come in and exploit the resources and leave Africa with nothing."

Ideological arguments and creative visions aside, producing a project of this magnitude carried many hurdles. It began as an idea.

"Nick had a lot of ideas," said Gollner, who spent last fall and winter in Los Angeles, with a wry smile. "He was full of plans to change the universe."

Depressed over the breakup of his band the Unicorns, Diamonds went to L.A. for a visit last New Year's eve.

"I booked a ticket for two weeks," he said. "I stayed three months. Once we started doing this, it became a real journey."

First aboard were Montreal pals the Arcade Fire, who happened to be passing through L.A. Then came Rilo Kiley, comedian David Cross and Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore. Then nothing.

For two months, the project

languished. Gollner and Diamonds returned to Montreal. They made a trip to New York to see former Montrealer Suroosh Alvi, co-founder of Vice Magazine and its offshoot Vice Recordings.

"I thought it was such an original idea," Alvi said. "It's unprecedented ... really outlandish. But they had the best intentions, and though we were short on time, and it was incredibly hard to pull off, we said 'F-k it, we're Vice. We'll figure it out.'"

The problems were twofold — getting artists, and then getting through the bureaucracy of having so many artists involved. All under the deadline of Halloween.

Gollner and Diamonds became celebrity stalkers — phoning, emailing and shmoozing with anyone they could, for "days, weeks, months."

It wasn't easy. Beck, one of the first people they asked, recorded his part nearly six months later;

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"We're working to save the lives of children. Having the voice of popular music is incredibly important." UNICEF Quebec exec Evelyne Guindon

with only days to spare.

Meanwhile, Alvi was working out label logistics. Warner, Vice Recordings' usual parent company, bowed out of the project because of its logistical complexities. Enter Sony's online download company Sony Connect, which funded the production of 10,000 CDs, enabling all proceeds to go directly to UNICEF.

Those 10,000 copies have all been shipped out, and Vice is now looking at producing another run on its own dime.

"Everything we do is so greed-oriented," Alvi said. "This is the one thing we're doing this year that is the opposite of that. It took a lot of time, resources and effort, and it's not about putting money in our pockets. We're trying to help others."

Though UNICEF is not directly involved in the project, the organization is ecstatic, said Evelyne Guindon, executive director of UNICEF Quebec.

"It's fantastic for many, many reasons. UNICEF is an organization that has a huge reach. We're working to save the lives of children. ... Having the voice of popular music, that is edgy and political – these are all very brilliant musicians – is incredibly important.

"This year, we're talking about Darfur, and the crisis of AIDS and orphans. These are very serious issues. I'm so proud as a Montrealer that this great energy is coming from our city."

This year, all proceeds from UNICEF Canada's Halloween funding drive – including donations from the CD sales – will go toward building and rebuilding schools in Rwanda.

Guindon anticipates raising \$4 million in all. Alvi expects the contributions from the CD sales to exceed \$10,000 U.S., which will be split between U.S. and Canadian UNICEF divisions.

It's a modest sum on the grand

scale, but every bit counts. This year is the 50th anniversary of UNICEF Canada and the ubiquitous UNICEF boxes kids carry around their necks on Halloween.

"(Those boxes) are so important to me," Goller said. "I don't know why. Muriel (Jaouich, of UNICEF Quebec) told me: 'It's the first time as a child you do something to help other people. And you do it on an evening that's really fun. You're having fun helping people.'"

"This song is exactly that."

To listen to Do They Know It's Halloween, go to the website www.vice-recordings.com/halloween. The CD single will be in stores Tuesday. For more on UNICEF, go to www.unicef.ca or find out about its "Click or Treat" initiative at www.unicef.ca/tot

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