

# Motorcyclists raise funds for mobile music studio

Annual Music Therapy Ride raises thousands to bring music making to the sick

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A young patient works at the first musical studio Bandwagon at BC Children's Hospital. Photo by Submitted Music comforts and heals — that is the simple, yet powerful message behind the 13th annual Music Therapy Ride, roaring into Whistler Sept. 13.

The charity ride, which sees hundreds of motorcyclists roll up the Sea to Sky highway on route to Whistler from Coquitlam, is focused this year on raising funds for a third, self-contained, mobile music studio called a Bandwagon that will be used for music therapy.

“It is an ability for some of the (patients) to learn about music or to express themselves. The music therapist is there as the expert with them and uses music to help them with what they are going through,” said Music Therapy Ride spokesman Patrick Zulinov.

The first Bandwagon is permanently at BC Children's hospital and the second travels throughout the Lower Mainland and to Vancouver Island for six-week stays at various care facilities. The third Bandwagon will have some tweaks to the original design with a keyboard that pulls out and rotates and a screen that pulls out farther to allow patients in various positions, such as in a hospital bed, to use it more easily.

The studios are shaped like giant upright pianos and contain recording software, sound processing equipment and an assortment of musical instruments. They allow music therapy patients to record the music created during their therapy sessions.

The mobile Bandwagons also go to people in bereavement homes to leave messages and for people who are terminally ill to allow them to be creative and leave music behind for their families and friends to remember them by.

Teenage singer Megan McNeil who, after battling cancer three times, died of the disease at the age of 20, inspired the Bandwagon program.

“She stayed alive every day so she could record music. She made that clear,” said Zulinov.

Her song “Will to Survive” is a rallying cry for others fighting cancer and has been played on radio stations across Canada.

Over the years, many musical heavyweights, such as Jann Arden and Our Lady Peace have taken part in the ride. This year, the popular country group The Road Hammers will join in and the B.C. folk-rock group The Lion, The Bear & The Fox will perform in Squamish at the half-way stop on the ride.

The “fox” of the band, vocalist and guitarist Ryan McMahan, worked with McNeil on her song and that experience inspired him to get his band on board with raising funds for the Bandwagon program.

“I am a completely healthy person... and it is due in large to the fact that those days when I am not feeling emotionally, spiritually healthy that I can turn to music and it can be a beautiful distraction,” he said. “I can only imagine what (music) would do and how valuable it would be for someone who is going through a life-altering illness.”

The Lion, The Bear & The Fox raised \$10,000 over three tours to help bring the second Bandwagon to Vancouver Island, so music therapists in facilities there can also use it with their critically ill and terminal patients.

Each Bandwagon costs about \$13,000 to make and about \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year to operate one day a week for a year.

Over the past 12 years the ride has raised approximately \$600,000 for the Provincial and National Music Therapy Trust Fund.

The ride starts at The Hard Rock Casino in Coquitlam and finishes at the Garibaldi Lift Co. in Whistler.

Reservations for the ride can be made at [musictherapyride.org](http://musictherapyride.org).

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