

Life stories

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Sylebration fuses two passions of Sy Benlolo

BY LAURA FINNEY
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Even though Sy Benlolo's life was tragically cut short at age 40, he touched a lot of people through his music and his personality.

"Sy was a very lovable, friendly, funny and talented guy," said his cousin Marc Saltzman. "Everybody who knew Sy loved him."

Benlolo, who grew up in North York before moving to Thornhill, started playing music at age 10 and never stopped.

And he was more than just a musician. He was a performer.

Growing up, Benlolo and Saltzman were very close, like brothers, Saltzman said. They were even in a band Remedy together.

"Music really was our glue," said Saltzman. "We were in the band together, so every waking moment from age 10 or 11 all the way to age 25, it was all about the music."

Some of his favourite memories of Sy are from that time.

"My fondest memories of him would be playing in front of large groups, and we've had some amazing gigs as a band where we've opened up for The Tragically Hip, we opened up for Goo Goo Dolls, and we opened for Bare-naked Ladies," he said.

"Seeing him turn around with a smile on his face, ear to ear when the crowd was going nuts, is something that is forever burned in my memory."

As they got older, Saltzman began a career in technology, he

got married and had children. But Benlolo stayed in music.

He started performing at dance clubs, playing his guitar over the DJ's music.

His stage name became Sy Sylver and he travelled the world doing what he loved.

But music was not his only passion. He also loved children.

"Even though he was single, he loved kids, as well. He was everybody's uncle Sy," said Saltzman, "including my three kids, they would get so excited when he would come in the door."

'He would be blown away at the amount of interest and support for him years after he has passed on. He'd be proud that we are using that money to improve the life of kids.'

Sadly, Benlolo died in April 2012 after having an anaphylactic reaction to some of his medication while working in Mexico.

"It was a real loss when he passed away, it was a real shock," said Saltzman.

"The irony is that someone so full of life with a larger-than-life personality, very extroverted and funny, the fact that he passed away was such a disconnect. It was so opposite of what you would expect."

To help keep his memory alive,

Saltzman has helped organize Sylebration, an annual event that raises money for the music therapy program at The Hospital For Sick Children.

"The point of the event is to celebrate Sy's life to keep his memory alive," said Saltzman. "And we fuse his two passions, which are music and kids."

There have been three Sylebrations so far, each event drawing hundreds of people.

Organizers even have support from KISS, who not only made a small promotional video for the event, but also donated tickets and VIP passes to a concert, along with a guitar signed by all four members.

"He was a huge KISS fan," said Saltzman. "Since he was old enough to walk."

The event has raised \$150,000, which Saltzman said is a testament to how many people were touched by Benlolo.

"It's not easy to do that year after year and get hundreds and hundreds of people out, but because it's Sy, we're able to do it."

While Benlolo did not know about the program at Sick Kids Hospital, Saltzman said he would have loved it.

"He used to do that for family members," he said. "He used to love playing for people to make them feel better. That's Sy."

And he would be honoured that so much had been raised in his name.

"I think he would be very humbled at the attendance and support of such a charity in his



Thornhill's Sy Benlolo was both a music fan — of KISS, especially — and a performer and will be remembered for his passions.

honour, in his name and in his memory," he said.

"I think he would be blown away at the amount of interest and support for him years after he has passed on. He'd be proud

that we are using that money to improve the life of kids."

To find out more, visit www.sylebration.com.

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