



Records for a Reason

A NEW, STUDENT-RUN RECORD LABEL
PROMOTES MUSIC FOR A CAUSE.

by Crystal Hammon

If you follow the local music scene, you probably know about Tonic Ball, a one-night, five-venue concert of 65+ local bands and musicians who unite to raise money for Second Helpings. The sold-out event yields up to \$150,000 a year for a community kitchen that feeds hungry children and adults, reduces food waste, and trains people for jobs in the culinary industry.

Now the success of that charitable effort (and possibly many others) is being amplified through Beneficence Records, an experimental record label founded at Ball State University (BSU) last year. In November the student-run label releases the physical edition of its first album, *Records for a Reason: Volume 1*, featuring 12 bands/artists that performed at the 2017 Tonic Ball. The LP includes classical clarinetist Eric Salazar, who performs his own arrangement of Simon & Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Trouble Water*. The album's digital version was released on major streaming platforms last April.

Beneficence Records is the brainchild of Dan Porter, an instructor in the Music Media Production Department at Ball State University. Like many great ideas, the label's birth came by instinct. In 2016 Porter was teaching most of his BSU classes in an online format. He felt drawn to use his free time in a community-focused way that offered more human interaction. Volunteering as a delivery truck driver at Second Helpings filled a personal need and made him an eyewitness to the organization's impact.



Porter is an avid musician and fan of central Indiana's music scene, and his next step was inevitable: he joined Tonic Ball's planning committee. "Fortunately, at Ball State, I've been in a position to focus on things that are going on throughout the state and to bring our students in music media production close to all the professional touch points that are here," Porter says.

A WINNING FORMULA FOR STUDENTS, MUSICIANS AND COMMUNITIES

He wanted to show students how to pursue a career in Indiana's thriving music industry without being a professional performer. With its established audience and network of movers and shakers in the region's music business, Tonic Ball became a perfect conduit for giving students an immersive learning experience.

"We were thinking about ways to use the resources at Ball State University—the expertise, the equipment, the recording studio—in a student-driven project that draws musical talent from central ►

LEFT: Indianapolis funk/rock band, Birdmen of Alcatraz. ABOVE: Ball State University students visit Second Helpings.



Photo by Max Denari

Indiana and distributes it throughout the state, and even regionally or nationally, through recorded music.”

The concept materialized as Beneficence Records, an educational initiative that also creates wins for musicians, for music fans, and most of all, for causes that strengthen communities. For now, the record label is a pilot project funded through grants, including one from the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry at Ball State University. Porter received a 2018 fellowship that permitted him to work on the new record label, using the Tonic Ball album as a trial. His home department granted access to BSU recording studios that made the project possible.

Records for a Reason: Volume 1 is produced and promoted by an interdisciplinary team of BSU students who receive credits for their work. Tonic Ball musicians who donate time for the album see an opportunity to generate more revenue for

Second Helpings. After covering business expenses, 90 percent of the proceeds go to Second Helpings. “Everyone has the common goal of helping relieve hunger in central Indiana, using the talents they have,” Porter says.

Beneficence Records also introduces the artists to new audiences by marketing the album to a wide network of possible buyers, including BSU alumni and students, Tonic Ball’s substantial audience, and each band’s following.

LEARNING WITH A COMPETITIVE EDGE

For students like Max Denari, a junior majoring in magazine journalism at BSU, the project reinforces what he learns in class. His role included interviewing the artists for a documentary film about Tonic Ball, Second Helpings and the founding of Beneficence Records. He has also been taking pictures, writing and

ABOVE: Eliot Bigger is an Indianapolis based indie rock band.

editing scripts, and creating awareness of Beneficence Records through public relations and social media.

“I was really happy that I made the decision to be involved,” Denari says. “I feel like I’m getting good experience compared to my peers. Being in class with someone who knows what they’re talking about is important, but if you’re not going out and doing it, you’re missing out.”

Porter says 15 students recruited for the project’s spring 2018 semester got 12 to 15 educational credits in their respective majors—marketing, sales, audio production and music media production. Graduating seniors say their experience with the startup label helped them get jobs right away. “It’s a little different than an internship because students are working *with* a community partner—not

for a community partner,” he says. “We’re very much our own entity. The students take total ownership and feel like this is their startup company.”

After BSU reviews the sales data from producing the first album, Porter hopes Beneficence Records can expand the idea, producing additional albums that encourage collaboration among musicians and benefit other Indiana charities. ■

Interested in buying Records for a Reason: Volume 1? Visit BeneficenceRecords.com to learn more, or follow them on Facebook, facebook.com/beneficencerecords or Instagram [@beneficencerecords](https://instagram.com/beneficencerecords).

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