

Today's rockers, Cole Porter 'team up' on benefit CD

By David Bauder
AP Newsfeatures

try star k.d. lang and dance-pop singer Jody Watley.

The songs of Cole Porter have come alive again for a cause the composer couldn't have imagined before his death in 1944.

"Red, Hot and Blue," a benefit album for AIDS research and relief, matches such artists as U2, Sinéad O'Connor, Fine Young Cannibals, Neneh Cherry and the Neville Brothers to songs made popular in the 1930s and '40s.

The 20-song CD is a daydream come true for New York City artist John Carlin and his friends at the New York City law firm that manages the late songwriter's trust fund.

"It struck me that the Cole Porter songs were a wonderful way to make a contemporary record that would appeal to all sorts of people and deliver a message," said Carlin, who wanted to do something for friends dying of AIDS.

"Everyone loves Cole Porter," he said. "No one's covered his songs for 20 or 30 years. In the back of my mind, I always wondered what it would be like for David Byrne to sing a Cole Porter song, or Tom Waits."

In those cases, it sounds a lot like how Byrne and Waits sing their own songs. But other results will surprise fans of both Porter and contemporary music — like the Jungle Brothers' rap on "I Get a Kick Out of You" and the torch song stylings of coun-

"THE SONGS worked better than we dreamed," Carlin said. "What was a simple love ballad, when played in this context, took on a different meaning."

Porter's career stretched from the '20s through the '50s. His songs were a staple on Broadway and in movies, and he was known for his humorous, often boundary-breaking, treatments of love and sex.

AIDS, of course, wasn't a worry when Porter was around. On a few of the new versions of Porter's songs, particularly Cherry's blunt rap to "I've Got You Under My Skin," the disease is addressed.

It was the initial participation of Cherry and Byrne that really got the project going, because it helped convince other artists to join in, Carlin said. Carlin and two entertainment lawyers who work at the law firm that manages the Porter trust fund, F. Richard Pappas and Leigh Blake, put it together.

The album veers recklessly from style to style. There's the campy rock duet of Deborah Harry and Iggy Pop on "Well, Did You Evah," the cool soul of Fine Young Cannibals "Love for Sale," the African language version of "Begin the Beguine" by Salif Keita and the rollicking Irish duet by Kirsty MacColl and the Pogues on "Miss Otis Regrets."

Despite the album's variety, Carlin concedes there's something miss-



Fine Young Cannibal — David Steele, Roland Gift and Andy Cox — provide a cool soul version to Cole Porter's "Love for Sale" on "Red, Hot and Blue."

ing. The album has no Latin influences and not enough black voices, an important omission considering the impact of AIDS in those communities.

AND THERE are no heavy metal artists. Carlin said the lack of hard rock artists was largely by design because he didn't feel the genre was appropriate to Porter's songs. It's

also because, he said, that community is without a doubt the most homophobic in the music business.

Last year, the Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York City dropped the band Guns 'N' Roses from an AIDS benefit concert after organization volunteers noted the lyrics to one of their songs, "One in a Million," contained the lyrics: "Immigrants and faggots, they make no sense to me."

Several artists asked to partici-

pate refused because of the stigma attached to AIDS and homosexuality, Carlin said.

"There were a few big artists," he said. "I don't want to give the names of people who didn't do it for the wrong reasons. I'm surprised at how many artists we did get."

The only artist Carlin will reveal who turned down a request to participate was Prince, but it had nothing to do with homophobia, Carlin said he wanted him to record a version of "Let's Misbehave," but Prince was too busy on his "Graffiti Bridge" movie and soundtrack.

WHEN ORGANIZERS approached an artist to ask for involvement, they suggested a tune from the Porter songbook. Most took the advice. Some artists, including MacColl and Watley, had their own ideas for songs.

"We wanted the album to be very modern and very youth-oriented," Carlin said. "We wanted a club sound, not an Ella Fitzgerald sound."

Watley, known for her dance music, remembered a Fitzgerald recording she listened to as a child to use as a model for her version of "After You, Who." She said she relished the chance to sing a jazz tune, something she can't do on her own records.

"After recording this song I've

been asked by virtually everyone who heard it, 'Are you going to do an album like this?'" Watley said. "Even my mom asked me that."

An expert on Porter's work said he's excited about the project and predicted that Porter would have been, too.

"The man was insatiable in his curiosity and he traveled all over the world to listen to all kinds of performances of his music," said Robert Kimball, who's written and edited several books on Porter's music. "He was genuinely open to all different interpretations. My feeling is he would have reacted very enthusiastically to it."

A 90-minute TV special, featuring videos of artists performing their Porter songs, is scheduled to air on ABC-TV at 11:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 1. A video cassette is expected to be released next year.

The lawyers have formed a non-profit corporation called King Cole Inc. that will funnel profits from "Red, Hot and Blue" to AIDS organizations all over the world. A committee of representatives from the project, including musicians and filmmakers, will recommend which charities receive the money.

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