ROCK WITH A REASON: A TALE OF TWO NEW YORK BENEFITS

"Why don't you smile?" suggested Paul Simon to a somber-looking Bruce Springsteen as they posed for a picture backstage at New York's Carnegie Hall during the Harry Chapin memorial concert. With that, the Boss burst into a grin. Simon had shown up unannounced to perform at the Chapin tribute. A week later, Springsteen did the same at Simon's Madison Square Garden concert to benefit New York's homeless children. Turns out Simon had recruited him backstage at Carnegie Hall.

Scheduled acts at the Garden included Lou Reed, James Taylor, Ruben Blades and Nile Rodgers. Billy Joel simply showed up on the day of rehearsal. Also making unannounced appearances were Chevy Chase, who marched out with a sax to join Simon on "You Can Call Me Al"; Bill Cosby and Whoopi Goldberg, who backed Blades in the rhythm section; and baseball stars Ron Darling and Don Mattingly. Grace Jones and Debbie Harry sang backup for Reed. (Three days later, Harris and her band Tiger Bomb played a stunning set at an AIDS benefit.)

At the postconcert party, Chase said, "I'm going to move to baritone sax." He'd sported a tenor that night. And Simon was congratulated by everyone, including his son, Harper, his look-alike brother, Eddie, and his ex-wife, Carrie Fisher.

HEADS ROLL WITH ZIGGY MARLEY

"This is like a dream come true for us," says Tina Weymouth of working as coproducer with her husband, Chris Frantz, on the upcoming album by Ziggy Marley and the Melody Makers, a group that features four of Bob Marley's children: Ziggy, Stephen, Sharon and Cedella. "We were big fans of Bob Marley and the Wailers. We feel that Ziggy and the Melody Makers are starting up where Bob left off."

Those familiar with the Melody Makers' earlier efforts will be pleasantly surprised by this album: Ziggy's maturing voice has grown eerily close to his father's, and Chris and Tina's production creates a rich and earthy sound. "It's reggae all the way," says Ziggy.

Weymouth and her sisters sing backup on the song "New Love," with fellow Talking Head Jerry Harrison on piano. And Keith Richards plays guitar on "Lee and Molly."

Chris and Tina say their next project will be to complete the upcoming Tom Tom Club album and to tour with that band this summer; they hope to have Marley on the same bill.

And what have they learned from Ziggy? "Quite a bit," says Chris. "He's a really good singer. So you pick up things about how to sing naturally." Tina adds, with a smile, "You
Paul Simon hosts all-star benefit show

Bruce Springsteen and Billy Joel were among the "surprise" artists who joined Lou Reed, James Taylor and others for Paul Simon's December 13th benefit concert at New York's Madison Square Garden. The show raised $475,000 for the New York Children's Health Project, which will be used to purchase medical equipment for homeless children.

The four-hour show was anchored by none other than Paul Simon, who played several solo acoustic sets throughout the program. Others on the bill included the South African a cappella group Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Paul Simon and the World's Most Dangerous Band, Laurie Anderson, Rubén Blades, Dion, Grandmaster Flash, Chaka Khan, Nile Rodgers, Debbie Harry and Grace Jones. Also making unannounced appearances were Chevy Chase, Whoopi Goldberg, Bill Cosby and the baseball legend Don Mattingly.

Musically, the biggest surprise of the night was when Low-March, the new band formed by Simon, Joel, Reed, Taylor and Blades, played a campy rendition of "Teenager in Love." The concert was the latest and largest of Simon's efforts to benefit the Children's Health Project. Last November, Simon personally donated $25,000, as well as the same amount from his proceeds of his Graceland tour, to the project. That money, plus contributions from the real-estate firm S&W Bird and companies, the city of New York and others, took care of the project's opening.

It's not about being pretentious to think that we can solve the homeless problem in this country, said Springsteen. But what is important is that we all work together to find solutions to this issue.