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Doolittle Concert Series Announces Benefit Concert for Amy Doolittle

On Friday October 12, 2007, the first Doolittle Concert, *A Musical Life*, is scheduled at the Rose Theatre in Brampton, Ontario. This is a fundraising concert preceded by a silent auction to help Amy Doolittle with costs associated with ALS, a relentless, progressive and terminal motor neuron disease for which there is no cure. Headlined by special guest, **Rik Emmett**, all the performers for this event have a close connection to Amy either by style, influence or association and have contributed to her 'Musical Life'.

Toronto, Ontario, September 10, 2007 The day the music died was the worst for Amy Doolittle.

The flutist, guitarist and vocalist from Mississauga continued to play well after the onset of ALS ... years ago, but finally has found it necessary to put performance aside.

"That's the most recent thing, and actually has been the toughest to take," she says of advancing amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's disease.

Doolittle the performer is well known to music lovers in Mississauga, the GTA and beyond, and she is equally familiar to the wider arts community as an administrator of remarkable ability.

But after years as mentor to a steady stream of young musicians and advocate for countless artists, she's in need of a helping hand herself — confined to a wheelchair and facing the prospect of diminished income and extraordinary expense.

The opportunity to help will come on Oct. 12 at Brampton's Rose Theatre in the form of a benefit concert — *A Musical Life* — featuring an impressive array of talent.

Doolittle, 47, currently is education adviser with Merriam School of Music in Mississauga, a position she is able to fill despite the disease, which amounts to a progressive degeneration of motor neurons leading to paralysis.

Other activities have been all but eliminated, however. "I can't play flute, I can't play guitar and I'm at a point now where my lung capacity has started to be compromised so singing in public, I can't do that any more," she says.

It's an expensive condition, too, with financial aid severely limited.

Attendant care, for example, is not covered beyond certain minimum levels. "The problem with ALS is that its progression is quite rapid, so you're always behind the eight ball," Doolittle says. "A funding program exists, but there is a two-year wait list. I'm on the list, but some people with ALS die before they ever get there."

"Certainly counselling or anything like that is never covered. And I think that is pretty crucial with family."

Doolittle is married to sculptor Don Dickson and has one daughter, Carolyn Hyde, 16.

Their biggest bill will come from modifications to the family home, which are necessary for Doolittle to continue living there. They have the cost of moving out while construction is under way, and then a contractor to pay. "There is a one-time grant from the Ontario March of Dimes, but it's \$15,000, and the bill will probably be closer to \$50,000," she says.

Medicines and equipment add to day-to-day costs. "The issue partly is that there is no medicine that they feel conclusively makes any difference, so the basic things like Vitamins E are just off the shelf. You have to buy them yourself," Doolittle says. "The ALS Society is able to help with some equipment, but not all of it because of the demand. When I need a better wheelchair with more options on it, that isn't going to be funded."

Enter a group of friends and colleagues whose lives Amy has touched over the years, and who believed that the best way to defray these extraordinary costs would be through a concert in her honour.

Allan Merriam, president of Merriam School of Music and principal sponsor of the event, sees it as an extremely well deserved tribute. "She is passionate about the arts; she always goes that extra mile to help bring people to music," he says. "She has touched many, many lives in that way."

That's a view shared by Laurie Pallett, who was executive director of the Mississauga Arts Council when Ms. Doolittle was that organization's office manager from 1997 to 2002. "She's been tenacious in her commitment to being an artist and supporting the arts," Pallett says.

Doolittle delivered that same zeal to earlier endeavours, especially as founder of 2Music Studio, which performed folk, Celtic and classical repertoire while offering artist representation for other clients.

Indeed, Doolittle has a diverse performing arts background, which includes a Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Victoria, an ARCT from the Royal Conservatory of Music, extensive training in dance, voice and drama and a keen interest in new music. She studied at the Banff School of Fine Arts and with several world-renowned flutists.

The Oct. 12 concert begins at 8 p.m., to be preceded by a silent auction at 7 p.m., also at the Rose Theatre.

On stage will be a wide spectrum of musical talent, all donated for the occasion. Included are accordion virtuoso Joe Macerollo, renowned flutist Robert Aitken, singer-songwriter-guitarist Rik Emmett, piano duo Eileen Keown and Jennifer Tung, the Chamber Music Society of Mississauga, singer-jazz guitarist Bill Candy, new country band Corduroy Road, the Jerry Stiff band, Scottish singer David Leask and the 30-voice Cawthra Park Chamber Singers.

And there is one more: daughter and singer-pianist Carolyn Hyde. "I can't wait for that one," Doolittle says. "I've no idea what she's going to do."

Tickets are available at \$25, \$50 or \$100 from the Rose Theatre box office at 905-874-2800. All proceeds go directly to Doolittle.