

50 YEARS OF WORKING WITH CELEBRITIES: COMEDY

As a form of expression in the face of adversity, comedy has long been connected to Amnesty International and its work.

Comedy events, beginning with the launch of The Secret Policeman's Ball in the UK and continuing with numerous other live events around the world, have promoted human rights issues to a wider environment. Gaining access to an audience that might otherwise remain unaware, these events continue to provide a forum where human rights concerns and individual cases can be highlighted.

THE SECRET POLICEMAN'S BALL

A series of hilarious, irreverent and groundbreaking benefit shows staged to raise funds for Amnesty International. Beginning in 1976, the comedy events featured the cream of Britain's comedians and an astounding line-up of international musical talent.

The shows have generated a plethora of off-shoots, all working to raise funds for Amnesty International. Movies, TV specials, home-videos, albums and books have taken the comedy of The Secret Policeman Ball events and distributed it worldwide, gaining considerable international impact.

Musicians such as Bob Geldof, Bono, Sting and Peter Gabriel have credited the shows as inspiring benefit events such as Live Aid and Live 8. They have remarked that Amnesty International's work and related events inspired them to human rights activism and their subsequent construction of social organizations such as the Band Aid Trust, the Live Aid Foundation, the Witness human rights group, The Rainforest Foundation, the ONE Campaign, the Debt, AIDS & Trade in Africa DATA charity and the Global Elders.

U2's Bono told Rolling Stone magazine in 1986: "I saw 'The Secret Policeman's Ball' and it became a part of me. It sowed a seed..."

In 2001, Bono described The Secret Policeman's Ball to an Amnesty audience as "a mysterious and extraordinary event that certainly changed my life..."

In 1986, Sting told the BBC "I've been a member of Amnesty and a support member for five years, due to an entertainment event called 'The Secret Policemans Ball' and before that I did not know about Amnesty, I did not know about its work, I did not know about torture in the world."

Bob Geldof and Ultravox singer Midge Ure first at 1981's The Secret Policeman's Other Ball, which was the first benefit show either of them had performed at. Geldof credits the Secret Policeman's Ball series with having inspired his own charity show endeavours. Geldof and Ure together went on to create the Band Aid records, Live Aid, and Live 8.

Previous performers and supporters of The Secret Policeman's Ball events include:

John Cleese (who also directed the first Secret Policeman's Ball show), Chevy Chase, Seth Green, Eddie Izzard, Shappi Khorsandi, Terry Jones, Stephen Merchant, Jo Brand, Ed Byrne, Tim Minchin, Sarah Silverman

STOP, YOU'RE KILLING ME

A series of four comedy shows which featured a generation of Ireland's top comedians including Dylan Moran, Dermot Morgan, Tommy Tiernan, Ardal O'Hanlon, Pauline McLynn, Des Bishop, Dara O'Briain and Andrew Maxwell. The Stop, You're Killing Me series of events were filmed by Gerry Stembridge and broadcast on British television, as well as sold commercially around the world.