

THE SCENE

Hot Ticket

With a band like Sugar Ray on the bill, it's easy to understand how tickets to Bet Tzedek's Justice Ball found their way onto the black market. **By Tina Spee**

Charitable legal organization Bet Tzedek's annual Justice Ball has made Hollywood's to-do list, evidenced July 10 by something typical of many Tinseltown soirees: ticket scalpers.

As guests of the Los Angeles organization's eighth evening of music, dancing and fund raising approached the gates of the fabled Hollywood Palladium, they were greeted by people trying to hustle Justice Ball passes.

"Got your tickets?" they asked, as people in everything from sparkly halter-tops to backwards baseball caps made their way down Sunset Boulevard.

With a band like Orange County's alt-pop quintet Sugar Ray on the bill, it's easy to understand how tickets to this year's event found their way onto the black market.

General admission for the show cost \$75 per person during pre-sale, while VIP passes went for \$150 a pop.

The event, which raises money for Bet Tzedek's legal programs for the elderly and impoverished, attracted the likes of Grammy Award winner Macy Gray last year.

"The Justice Ball made philanthropy look, well, fabulous," wrote Hollywood trade *Daily Variety* of this year's event.

Inside the venue, as the event activities began, comedian Bob Odenkirk was telling Jewish jokes on stage. Projected in purple and white on the curtains behind him was the Bet Tzedek torch of justice.

"I can't even think with all the talking," Odenkirk said to members of the crowd, who were curled up on white couches, chatting under the red lights of the ballroom's round ceiling.

Odenkirk's credentials might have given him a right to complain. The stand-up comic won Emmy awards writing for "Saturday Night Live" and "The Ben Stiller Show."

With its enormous white dance floor and 1940s' décor, the Palladium looks more like a roller-skating rink than a rock venue. Nevertheless, hipsters lined the bar and circled the stage, waiting for the bands.

"Isn't it terrible when comedians are awful?" one man, who would identify himself only as Cornelius, leaned over and asked with a sigh.

When the conversation topic shifted to the Justice Ball, though, the young Roman perked up.

"It's a wonderful cause, a good party, fun people," Cornelius said. He went on to rave about the ingenuity of the event's founder, Los Angeles businessman and Bet Tzedek volunteer Randall Kaplan.

Mitch Kamin, Bet Tzedek's executive director, finally took the stage.



From left: DJ Craig Bullock; bassist Murphy Karges; guitarist Rodney Sheppard; event founder and Bet Tzedek board member Randall Kaplan; frontman Mark McGrath; Lara Kaplan; drummer Stan Frazier

"All the money we raise tonight will go directly to our work on behalf of our clients, who can't afford lawyers and who depend upon us for access to the justice system," Kamin said.

Kamin went on to introduce the night's first musical performance.

"You all know him as the singer from Third Eye Blind. We know him also as a generous, kind and engaged person who has been extremely supportive of Bet Tzedek and the Justice Ball," Kamin said. "It's my pleasure to introduce Stephan Jenkins."

In a white T-shirt and brown blazer, a solo Jenkins took a chair in the middle of the stage.

Halfway through his first song, an acoustic rendition of a Third Eye Blind hit, "Jumper," Jenkins stopped.

"I forgot the words to a lot of songs in my life," said Jenkins, confused. "But never on the first fucking song."

Dan Grunfeld, executive director of Los Angeles public interest law organization Public Counsel, joined the crowd. Dressed in jeans and a black leather jacket, Grunfeld shook hands with a few members of the audience.

"He's really good," Grunfeld said, watching Jenkins on stage as the rocker cradled his shiny black guitar in his lap.

Grunfeld then disappeared into the Palladium's VIP area, where top Bet Tzedek brass, entertainment media and upper echelon partygoers mingled behind velvet ropes.

The little people milled about on the Palladium's lower level as Jenkins strummed through a few more tunes. Out on the patio, a man who identified himself as a screenwriter named Andy Kaufman argued with a friend about why the Justice Ball crowd had all but ignored Odenkirk.

"Bob Odenkirk is one of the comedic geniuses working in Hollywood," Kaufman insisted.

Back inside, well-polished young people crowded around the stage, anxiously awaiting the arrival of Sugar Ray. As the

rattling out tunes like the Commodores' "Brick House," and Nelly's "Hot In Herre" as event co-chairman Jonathan Levey of the Los Angeles office of Catellus Development Corp. checked out the turntables, wearing headphones.

Levy shared his event committee post with Allan Schweitzer, managing director of MW Post Advisory Group; Brette Simon, a partner at Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton; Jeff Sklar, an associate at Alschuler Grossman Stein & Kahan and Sandra Strassner, an associate at Skadden, Arps, Meagher & Flom.

A young guest spontaneously hopped onto the stage, which was christened in the summer of



From left: Bet Tzedek executive director Mitch Kamin and comedians Bob Odenkirk and Paul F. Tompkins

band took the stage, the crowd finally came alive, yelling for the evening's much-anticipated headliner.

After the band's first song, a cover of Devo's "Freedom of Choice," Sugar Ray's heart-throb front man, Mark McGrath, removed his pinstriped suit coat, revealing well-tattooed arms and a pink polo shirt.

"You guys do great work, and it's a great honor to be playing for you this evening," said McGrath as he engaged the crowd in a toast to Bet Tzedek before picking up a green guitar, embellished with white shamrocks, and launching into "Answer the Phone."

As more good-looking people than you can shake a stick at shook their booties on the dance floor and girls squealed at the stage, a man in thick black glasses and a striped tie danced through the crowd, holding up a book and passing out lime-green business cards.

"I love Sugar Ray," said Melrose Larry Green, a candidate in the April 2001 Los Angeles mayoral race and former regular on "The Howard Stern Show," producing a copy of his new book: "Why the Clintons Belong in Prison."

After Sugar Ray said good night, a disc jockey took over,

1940 by the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra and a young singer named Frank Sinatra. With the dexterity of a go-go girl, she launched into an impromptu one-woman dance routine that thrilled the crowd.

Having survived his second Justice Ball as Bet Tzedek's executive director, a somewhat bewildered-looking Kamin wandered across the dance floor, basking in the glow of accomplishment and pulsing disco lights.

Afterwards, Kamin said the event fulfilled its dual purposes: exposing young people to Bet Tzedek and raising money.

The Justice Ball, which accounts for 8 percent of the organization's annual budget, raised \$400,000 this year.

The added bonus was that everyone had a good time beefing up Bet Tzedek coffers, Kamin said.

"As someone who was not previously a Sugar Ray fan, I thought they put on a great show," Kamin said. "Any band that covers Devo and the Ramones and gets 2,000 young professionals dancing for an hour and a half are all right by me."