

930 saxophonists play Hockey Night in Canada theme

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Hundreds of saxophone-playing men, women and kids who gathered at a downtown square Sunday may have blown a Guinness world record out of the books.

More than 900 sax players — professional and amateur — set what may be recognized as a world mark by playing the Hockey Night in Canada theme and other hockey-related music for five minutes in honour of the Calgary Flames' chase for the Stanley Cup.

According to the Guinness Book of World Records, that would be a record for the most saxophonists playing a single song at one time, although the feat still has to be approved by the Guinness people in England before it's officially recognized.

But participants and organizers are already tooting their horns, saying they've likely toppled the current mark of 321 saxophonists set last January in the Netherlands with a specially composed piece titled Off the Beaten Track.

"We totally kicked the butt out of the record," said Bobbi Beeson, a spokeswoman for the Shuffle Demons band that hosted Toronto's saxophone extravaganza.

Beeson said organizers will officially list 930 musicians as the total, and all the paperwork was being completed Sunday for shipment to England. It could be some time before the record is verified, she added.

The Shuffle Demons, led by Richard Underhill, are known for their exotic wardrobes and wild saxophone playing, having recorded such songs as Spadina Bus, The Shuffle Monster and Out of My House Roach.

They used the Guinness gathering to kick off their new Greatest Hits CD and a three-month cross-Canada tour beginning June 18 in Edmonton.

A mix of hockey and music lovers — many dressed in Flames jerseys in support of the team's Stanley Cup run against the Tampa Bay Lightning — converged on Dundas Square on a sunny afternoon to play their hearts out. The event also marked the day before a no-smoking ban in Toronto bars takes effect Tuesday.

"You need strong, good lungs to play the sax," said Eva Brass of the anti-smoking group Tobacco Reality Underground, one of the sponsors of Sunday's gathering.

Fergus Hambleton, a 54-year-old Toronto musician who was among the participants, said he's been playing saxophone for four decades and has never witnessed such camaraderie among lovers of the instrument.

"With this record, we'll finally be a world-class city," said Hambleton, who said he learned about the event through his pal Underhill.

Olivia Chow, a Toronto councillor running in the federal election for the NDP, revved up the players with thoughts of an NHL championship the day after the Flames beat Tampa Bay 3-0 to take a 2-1 lead in the Stanley Cup final.

"Many Torontonians have been rooting for this effort to break the world record, and so many Canadians are rooting for the Flames too," she said. "What a perfect time to hear Hockey Night in Canada, and while you're playing, send a message back to the Flames — bring back the Stanley Cup to Canada."