

Maritime music maturing

by Robb Cribb

Whenever the terms "music industry" and "Atlantic Canada" are mentioned in the same sentence, it is through a series of dubious smirks. "Did you hear the one about the local musician/songwriter who became a strong force in the music industry? Neither did I."

But what is happening in our music industry is no joke. A feeling of growth and a sense of purpose have arisen in the last six months which local industry professionals say are unprecedented in this area.

Two associations whose emergence has been awaited for years arose almost simultaneously in November of this past year. The Songwriters Association of Nova Scotia (SANS) and the Music Industry of Nova Scotia (MIANS) have arisen from the ashes of our industry and made serious and positive advances in getting industry people together, providing information and referrals, and promoting a sense of rejuvenation in what otherwise was a joke that had flopped.

SANS's attack on industry apathy has taken a couple of forms. With the executive strongly in place, the organization hosts what they call Publishers' night, where professional criticism is available to local songwriters, without them paying a fortune or climbing on a plane.

Every Tuesday night at the Parkside Restaurant and Lounge in Burnside, a large group of local musician/songwriters gathers to listen to each other's recorded material and offer ideas, criticism, and direction. The concept is as simple as it is helpful. Each musician brings a cassette tape of a song they wrote or performed. It's played, and then the other musicians give their immediate reaction to it. To assure an immediate and honest response, listeners fill out a response card that asks, "Would you like to hear it again?" Yes or no.

"The wording is kept simple because it's an immediate reaction we're measuring. It's very personal," says Rick Gautreau, president of the Songwriters Association. Just two months old, the group boasts over 55 members.

In addition, the Songwriters Association holds regular meetings at which they discuss their goals and aims within the industry and what is being addressed by committees dealing with everything from radio play to publishing information. In only a couple of months, the association has also held three information meetings entitled "FACTOR — Who Won with What", "CBC Song Contest", with Mark-Andrew

Cardiff of the CBC, and "Copyright", with entertainment lawyer Edmond Chaisson and Richard Albert of PROCAN.

If you are interested in getting more information on Publishers Night or the Songwriters Association of Nova Scotia, contact Rick Gautreau at 469-5992.

What is perhaps the most significant manifestation of the excitement surrounding our music industry from both inside the region and out came this past weekend when MIANS sponsored a music industry seminar at the World Trade and Convention Centre entitled "Thriving in the '90s." The seminar included an impressive lineup of guest speakers, including Mary Vratsideis from the Canadian Independent Record Producers Association (CIRPA), Heather Sym from the Foundation to Assist Canadian Talent on Records (FACTOR), Tim Trombley from Capitol Records, David Farrell, the owner and editor of *The Record*, and Leonard T. Rambeau, the highly esteemed manager of Anne Murray and Frank Mills. The calibre of these professionals and the obvious interest they are taking in the Atlantic region with their presence and support produced a real buzz in the Halifax music scene.

"It's simply amazing that this is even happening," said one of the participants in the seminar. "I wouldn't miss it for the world."

The event drew a crowd of 150, made up of some of the region's most talented and promising performers and writers. Keith Evans, President of MIANS and coordinator of the seminar, was ostensibly pleased with the fruits of his labour as he commenced the ceremonies by saying, "I can't tell you enough how happy I am at the turnout . . . We have the talent, we want to know what to do with it. That's why we invited these people here today."

The lack of communication that has historically existed between the Atlantic Canadian music industry and the larger Canadian music centres was often cited as the underlying reason for the relatively few major success



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stories emerging from this region of Canada. One member of the audience said, "The reality of living in the Maritimes is that we don't have the studios, producers, managers and musicians the major music centres do, and yet our material is expected to be compared with that coming out of the regions which are so much more musically fertile. There have to be some understanding and consideration for our situation."

This "have-not" argument, however, was challenged by several of the panelists, including David Farrell, who replied to the accusation of an elitist music industry with firm denial. "Being in Halifax is no different from being in any other city in North America. The fax, phone, and postal service work as well for you as they do for anyone living in Toronto." Farrell said the issue was not geographical but personal. "You've got to be aggressive and persistent, believe in yourself, and have some sort of magic."

Leonard Rambeau, originally from Dartmouth, is considered one of the top managers in the country. He corroborated the denial of regional disparity in the music business when he told the

crowd, "you're only as poor as you think you are."

So how do you succeed in breaking into this highly competitive and already saturated market which offers true financial and emotional success to so few? Although many enlightening and interesting suggestions were offered, it remains a question without an answer.

All agreed the demo tape is the most important element in the pursuit of the ever-elusive record deal. "It's your calling card," says Tim Trombley, "but you can't expect to just send in a tape and get a record deal. You have to

make it happen on your own. You have to display some solid accomplishments before you even go to the majors.

It was Richard Flohill of CAPAC who perhaps best summed up the requirements for success in the music business when he said, "Above all, the music has to be great, unique. You have to be ambitious, have the right friends . . . it's not luck. You have to have the belief that what you're doing is special and necessary."

A couple of million wouldn't hurt, either.

Continued on page 16

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