LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

When Gov. Chuck Robb instituted the "Made in Virginia" campaign, I was elated to find that someone in a position of influence was willing to push for our "local" talent and its recognition in the community as well as the state. My particular interest centered around the record industry of Hampton Roads.

It has been well over a year and very little has been done to give the least little bit of recognition to the many people involved in this part of the entertainment industry. It is time that the people of Hampton Roads knew of the disservice our local radio stations are doing to support the local recording industry and its artists.

In a cluster of cities we call home, lies the greatest saturation of radio stations in the nation; a major industry with great force and diversity.

However, these radio stations have yet to make the general public aware of the great force and diversity of recording talent that is alive and well in Southeastern Virginia.

Most people realize that an album is, in all its aspects of production, an expensive venture. Local albums are usually done at great personal expense as opposed to fully-contracted financial backing.

Few backers are found because people who have money are unaware of the local industry and therefore, lack enthusiasm. This lack of enthusiasm stems not from an absence of talent or quality, but an absence of credibility that would insure some form of return on their investment.

The barometer of credibility when referring to the music industry in any community is the amount of time and concern given to it by its radio stations. TIME and CONCERN equals PROMOTION and AIRPLAY.

Why, then, do local artists continue to try to market their talent through recording and performing when, from a business standpoint, a recording effort would be unwise? The answer is that a recording format is one of the very few ways to market your talent as a musician, vocalist, or songwriter. The artists who have done so have done it out of faith in themselves and a public they believe to be interested and receptive. The public is interested and receptive, but is also grossly uninformed.

Why have the local stations not taken the initiative in making the public more aware of the variety of recording talent? It is possible that they feel the consideration given to local talent, (airplay), would be a risk to their ratings. In other words, if it is not on the Billboard Top 40, it does not merit consideration. Are we not worthy of their time? Do they not recognize the existence of a local recording industry? Is our quality not comparable to nationally know recordings? If any of these is an excuse, then the radio industry is simply not listening.

One of the great ironies of this situation is that it hurts the radio industry when they do not consider the local artists. This injury is especially felt in the areas of progressive programming and professional notoriety. Outside of our area, very few people have heard of our local radio stations.

Stations are remembered and talked about because they helped to create a certain "musical awareness" in the communities they serve. Areas with this awareness, such as Nashville, Detroit and Los Angeles, were stimulated because the population and the music industry made it that way.

Radio stations, recording studios, clubs, concerts, other support groups and businesses recognized the talents within their midst and pushed for recognition in and beyond their own boundaries.

It was economically good for their businesses. It gave them the prestige of being truly pioneering and progressive. It instilled community pride. This pride transferred the support of concerts, record sales, and in-house performances. It fostered traditions and attitudes that are still alive and broke ground for new ones.

If the area was missing an identity or base from which to build, an effort was made to create one.

How can an area that is musically aware be formulated if there are few or no recognized local artists to make it that way? Artist become recognized through exposure and support from the business institutions that are a part of their music industry. For the recording musician, radio is the central institution of that industry. It is the "sound" of the area.

Right now we sound like a lot of other areas. What will make us alive, unique and new? Concentrate on the sound that comes from here, not from someplace else.

Respectfully yours,
Thomas R. Farley