

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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Producing own album has pitfalls

By James Windell
special writer

THE CLOSEST THING to Nirvana, if you're a musician, is your own album. Right? And if you've got the well-produced album, you're on your way to a best-selling record. Right again? It ain't necessarily so. Local musicians who have produced their own albums have found the way to fame and riches in the music industry is not exactly paved with vinyl.

Sheila Landis can attest to this. A singer and songwriter with outstanding talent, Sheila Landis has just produced and released her fourth album ("Singer/Songwriter") on her own Shelan label. But she's not making a lot of money from the sale of her albums and neither are they bringing her and

her band the kind of steady work she enjoys.

"I think as I keep making albums they become less important to me," said Landis, a Rochester resident.

AFTER GIVING her first album the greatest push, because she was riding on great hope and enthusiasm at the time, she now adopts a different attitude toward the making of records.

"In the beginning I had all my hopes so high and essentially nothing happened," she said. "So now I just do them as sort of a hobby." A hobby, she added, that costs her about the price of a car each year.

That translates into about \$3,000 each year she records an album. Other musicians may spend up to \$10,000 to record an album.

"I'm very realistic because I don't

expect anything to happen with my albums," Farmington Hills reeds player Larry Nozero conceded.

A musician with a large Detroit-area following and successful appearances at last summer's Montreux-Detroit International Jazz Festival, Nozero said he doesn't record his own albums for profit.

"You always want to recoup your costs," said Nozero, who recently released "Up to Your Neck" on his own Lareon label. "But you have to be realistic about what your potential is."

NOZERO is well aware of what his potential is. After appearing as a sideman and studio musician on hit singles and albums for other people while building a following with his own jazz group, Nozero can reasonably expect to sell several thousand albums locally.

It's getting the album in record stores outside Detroit that presents the greatest problem after an album is finished, however.

Finding distribution for a small label is very, very difficult, Nozero said. "Often it's not worth it for big record distributors to deal with a small independent label and deal in terms of 500 records."

If distribution of an album is a major problem after a record is finished, the economics of producing an album from the start tends to be prohibitively expensive for most musicians and band-leaders.

"I just save the money through the working gigs," said Landis, "and when I've got word of four or five thousand saved, then I hire musicians, rehearse and go into the studio."

With the experience of four albums behind her, Landis reports the largest amount of money goes to the musicians she hires to play on the album. Musicians who work in a studio must be paid union scale during a session.

THEN, THE COST of a sound studio can range from \$50 to \$175 an hour. That cost could soar into the thousands of dollars with actual recording time, overdubbing, mixing and assembling

the final tape.

The next chunk of money goes to the pressing plant where the master tape is converted into a vinyl disc. On top of these costs are expenses related to promotion and distribution.

Detroit's Wendell Harrison, a top-notch reed player who has fronted a successful jazz group for years, has put out six of his own albums. His last record, released in 1982, was "Organic Dreams" on his own Wenh Records label.

"You've got to sell albums if you're going to stay alive," said Harrison, who years ago formed Rebirth, Inc., a non-profit organization to deal with his recordings and promotion.

"To get any kind of club or concert work, you got to have an album out there — whether it's selling or not," he said.

Harrison presses as many albums as he can afford — which may be as few as one, up to 2,000. "We then try to keep them in print as long as the people want them," he said. When the demand is depleted, he records a new album.

ALTHOUGH HE, like many local musicians, has a new record project in mind most of the time, recording plans often get shoved aside when the demands of reality intrude. "Records spend money," he quipped, "while concerts and tours pay the bills."

John Katalenic, a pianist who lives outside of Redford in northwest Detroit, recently recorded and released his Katalenic-Kwek Band on his own Great Dane Records label.

This was a more expensive recording project than most because he and saxophonist Gary Kwek front a big band. Katalenic hopes the record ("Morning Sun") serves some purposes.

"The benefits of an album are that it gives you more exposure and a chance to get in the real game," Katalenic said.

The real game, as defined by Katalenic, is national distribution of an album and being able to book tours outside your hometown.

But musicians who record on their



RANDY BORST/self photographer

Reeds player Larry Nozero relaxes in the studio of his home in Farmington Hills. Nozero's newest album is "Up to Your Neck." Records by the local artists named in the story are available at Harmony House Records & Tapes, as well as some other record outlets.

own label, and therefore qualify as small independent record companies, are not equipped to distribute nationally.

POPULAR FLUTIST Alexander Zonjic recorded "Elegant Evening" on his own Danzon Record label. The Windsor musician, who plays frequently in the Detroit area, has learned some of the problems of trying to distribute a

local product across the country. Even though the album may be played regularly on radio stations in other major cities, getting the album to customers is a hazard.

"When you start sending albums out of the state," Zonjic said, "you're sending money out of state."

Please turn to next page

Area shops offer local recordings

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WENDALL HARRISON: "Organic Dreams" (Jazz)
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JOHN KATALENIC: "Morning Sun" (Jazz)
Available: All Harmony House Records & Tapes; Dearborn Records; Dearborn Records; Dearborn Records

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Available: All Harmony House Records & Tapes; Dearborn Records; Dearborn Records; Dearborn Records

CORDS & Tapes, Sam's Jams, Ferndale: Music Oasis, Birmingham; the Drum Shop, Dearborn Heights; School Kids Records, Ann Arbor

LARRY NOZERO: "Up to Your Neck" (Jazz)
Available: All Harmony House Records & Tapes; Sam's Jams, Ferndale; Mary's Records, Birmingham; Disc Records, Birmingham; School Kids Records, Ann Arbor

ALEXANDER ZONJIC: "Elegant Evening" (Jazz)
Available: All Harmony House Records & Tapes; Sam's Jams, Ferndale; Mary's Records, Birmingham; Disc Records, Birmingham; School Kids Records, Ann Arbor

JOHN KATALENIC: "Morning Sun" (Jazz)
Available: All Harmony House Records & Tapes; Sam's Jams, Ferndale; Mary's Records, Birmingham; Disc Records, Birmingham; School Kids Records, Ann Arbor

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