

Suburban Life

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The jingles business

Creating on-the-spot original words and music is his forte

By Lorraine McClash
staff writer

WHITE A SHORT verse.
Now put original music to your words.

Your words and music must play for exactly one minute. But within those 60 seconds, the goal is to grab an audience, tell a story, deliver a message.

Gather up the singer or singers and the musicians you'll need to put your creation on tape. Record it and have it ready for delivery to be played at a meeting tomorrow morning.

That's an every day, sometimes several times a day, request for Dan Yessian Associates, the Farmington Hills based operation that is the largest producer of original music in Michigan. Yessian calls it "the jingles business."

"Why everything has to be done now — or at best overnight — is something my wife has been asking me for as long as I've been in this business. I've been in this business for 15 years and I haven't figured that out yet," Yessian said.

The firm has written commercials for most of the car companies, the Detroit News, Fox Network, Crowleys, Elias Brothers, to name a few. Yessian singles out the ditty "Making Your World a Little Easter" for Whirlpool as the one that has had the longest staying power.

"We're always armed and ready for the calls," Yessian said. "But we have also racked up a lot of stuff that don't work for anybody."

YESSIAN'S ADULT career began as an English teacher at Redford High School, but music was always part of his life. During his own high school days in Detroit he played clarinet and saxophone in his own band.

The music side of his life continued into adulthood with the band that played for weddings, bar mitzvahs, business and private parties. Running parallel with this, another side job began when he started booking other bands and talents for parties.

It was at one of those wedding receptions that Yessian was approached by a guest who asked if he could write a jingle for a local bank's television commercial.

"I was an English major and English teacher, but I was never too much into poetry. I wasn't really too sure that I could properly define a jingle, much less write one," he said.

"But I said yes on the spot. The only thing I think I really heard that man say was that he was going to pay me \$1,200. I was under the gun — same as I still am to produce something on the spot — and I did it. I think I bluffed my way through it. Since then it's been a little easier, you sort of develop a knack."

As it turned out Yessian was very happy with what he produced that first time around and so was the National Bank & Trust in Traverse City.

He was so very happy with that

first jingle he expected "immediate glory and the world to come knocking at my door begging for more," he said. As it was, it was almost six months before he produced the words and music for his second commercial.

YESSIAN SAID goodbye to his teaching career and opened his own business cautiously. The talent agency was the mainstay of Dan Yessian Associates, for a long time. That part of the business is now handled by others.

"There was a whole new world of business out there that I had to learn by trial and error. I was still into the music of the thing and splitting myself between that and the business side was like a Jacky and Hyde split personality. That confusion and diversion was a tough scenario to handle," he said.

"The most important thing I learned early on was that I was not my best salesman. I surrounded myself with talented sales people."

He is also surrounded by a staff that produces original words and music. He is also surrounded by tapes that come from the hopefuls who want to write words or music for him; singers and musicians who want jobs.

"This is a whole new discipline for the musicians and there's room for anybody who wants to learn this craft," Yessian said.

"For as long as I can remember

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Dan Yessian (at right) listens to a play back of the commercial being made with Gerard Smerek, chief engineer at Ambiance

recording studio, and Kathy Bartkiewicz, a producer for Campbell-Ewald advertising agency.



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— Dan Yessian

Staff photos by Randy Borst



Luis Roato, a musician from Birmingham, played the synthesizer for the making of the commercial.

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