

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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Home-grown talent

Original musical scores originate in rare penthouse

By Anne Lehmann
special writer

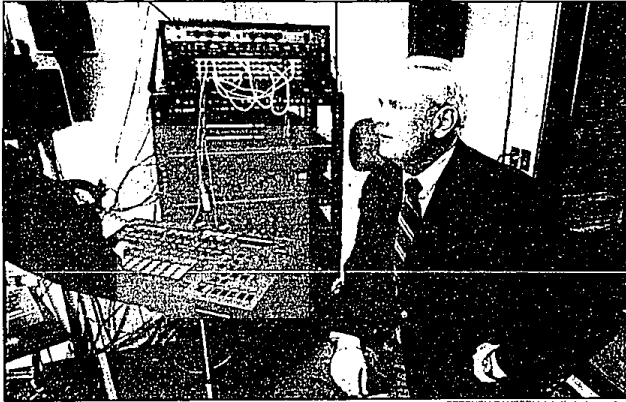
WHAT COMES TO MIND at the mention of Penthouse Productions? If it's anything other than a new, up-and-coming company that produces original musical scores for commercials, multimedia presentations or live shows, you're on the wrong track.

This modest Bloomfield Hills company takes its name from the penthouse it occupies in the Clausen Building on Woodward Avenue. Why all the fuss over a penthouse? It happens that it is the only one of its kind in Bloomfield Hills because of a zoning clause that prohibited building structures that are more than two stories high. Construction of the Clausen Building, however, preceded this clause. Hence, Penthouse Productions has something more to tout its horn about than the wonderful music it has been producing for the last year.

Formed by Detroit-area veteran advertising executive Selby (Sy) Cook of Orchard Lake, who created the well-known Mr. Goodwrench campaign, and composer/musician John Schmidt of Lathrup Village, the corporation was developed to fill a need they felt was being overlooked. Schmidt, the company's music director, says, "Most music for commercials is done in New York and Los Angeles, but with Detroit being a potent talent base for the major industry and home to many music corporations, we thought we could become a local music supplier."

COOK, PENTHOUSE'S president, adds that because of the firm's proximity, things can be turned around with greater speed and efficiency. "Sometimes a client needs a commercial right now, and can't afford to take the time to go to New York."

How are works commissioned? For this seven-month-old company, it's basically been a word-of-mouth affair. Once the company is contracted, the clients specify what Schmidt calls "loose parameters" within which to work. "Part of our



STEPHEN CANTRELL/Staff photographer

Longtime advertising executive Selby (Sy) Cook of Orchard Lake is president of Penthouse Productions, which turns out musical scores for clients' commercials and other promotional endeavors. Company offices are in Cook of Orchard Lake is president of Penthouse Productions, which turns out musical scores for clients' commercials and other promotional endeavors. Company offices are in the only penthouse in Bloomfield Hills, in the Clausen Building.

job is to put into musical terms, both lyrically and melodically, what we think it is that they want."

Cook and Schmidt have been struck by how challenging some of the assignments are. "It's really hard to create an inspired rendering for something like a fan belt or (other) automotive parts, but that's what we're sometimes called on to do," says Schmidt. "What keeps it fresh," says Cook, "is that every project is different from the last one."

Thus far, some of metropolitan Detroit's largest advertising agencies, and their clients (including Dodge, Whirlpool, National Bank of Detroit, Nike, Pontiac and Ford), and the City of Detroit (for its Cobo Hall expansion campaign), have

worked with Penthouse Productions.

Part of the attraction is the highly sophisticated equipment they work with. Schmidt quips about the more than 30,000 sound effects they have on compact disks.

"We have everything from party day at Nuremberg to people having lunch atop Mount Everest. Actually," he concedes, "we have enough to do all the incidental sound effects for a feature film."

SOUND EFFECTS aside, most of the music put out by this company has a young hip quality. The reason? "The clientele has been younger," says Cook. But he is quick to point out that the studio, with its highly sophisticated musical equipment, is capable of producing any type of

music. He rolls a tape citing the use of electronic instrumentation, with classical orchestration.

Because musical scores rely heavily on electronics, many discount the talent that goes into putting together a piece of music nowadays. Schmidt's response to this is, "It still takes a musician, composer and arranger to use the equipment. The equipment is wonderful but it's just an instrument."

"You see the results of your efforts more quickly and you can provide many different variations on something for a client, but the music doesn't write itself," he said.

Penthouse also has a phone patch, one of a few in the area, which allows singers in other cities to record long distance. "It's as though some-



John Schmidt of Lathrup Village is music director for Penthouse Productions. He and Cook started the company together, to take advantage of the fact that metro Detroit has a pool of top-notch musicians.

one miles away were recording in our own studios," says Schmidt.

With all the work, equipment and creativity, what do these two hard-working individuals do with their free time? "I sell Amway and an

Elvis impersonator," said Schmidt jokingly. "Actually, it's a time-consuming profession. It's very demanding and the competition is fierce, so there is very little time for mope else." Cook concurs.

table talk

Chefs' Festival

The Birmingham-Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce presents its Chefs' Festival Buffet from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday, May 20, at the Community House in Birmingham. Tickets are \$15 per person. The event offers the chance to taste specialties from 24 Birmingham-Bloomfield restaurants. Participating are the Appetizer, Bates Street Cafe, Bloomfield's, Beverly Hills Grill, Big Chill, Bottle & Basket,

Kingsley Inn, Machus Pastries, Machus Red Fox, Machus & Fox, Machus 160, Marianno's Kitchen, Merchant of Vino, Midtown Cafe, Monchelle Lamoure, Mon Jin Lau, Norman's Elton Street Station, Panache, Peabody's, Phoenixia, Panchino's, Richard & Beiss, 220 Merrill, Hogan's and Tony's. For more information, call 644-1700.

Made in Michigan

Ten professional and amateur

chefs are finalists in the All-Michigan Meal contest sponsored by the Michigan Restaurant Association, the Greater Michigan Foundation and the AAA Michigan Living Magazine. The five professionals, employed in state restaurants, are Jon-Louis Savitt of the Grand Traverse Resort, Acme; Harlan W. Peterson of the Tapawingo, Ellsworth; Steven Allen of the Golden Mushroom, Southfield; Terence Shuster of the Fox and Hound, Bloomfield Hills; and Chuck Rachwitz, corporate chef for the Chuck Muer Corp., Detroit.

The amateurs include Stella Patarus of Detroit, Betty Sise of Farmington Hills, Thomas D. Mather of Royal Oak, Collette Wismer of St. Joseph and Pat B. Tweedie of Port Huron.

One meal from each category will be chosen in the finals and will be unveiled as a salute to Michigan

Week, May 20-28. The announcement of the meals will take place May 20 in Schuler's in Marshall with Hans Schuler chairman and president of Schuler's Inc. serving as master of ceremonies. The winner in each category will be given a choice of a weekend for two at a Michigan re-

sort or \$500.

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