



## Hitting a high note across the USA

By Mary Rodrigue  
staff writer

Glitz and flash and a howling crowd are the props behind WDIV's "Saturday Night Music Machine," where contestants sing their hearts out in competition for prizes and a crack at more than fleeting fame.

The glitz is built into the set at Taboo, a nightclub in Detroit's warehouse district designed with "Music Machine" in mind. The crowd is pumped up by staffers before producer/host Curtis Gadson takes center stage for the half-hour show broadcast Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. on Channel 4.

The idea — to showcase Detroit-area singing talent on national television — is taking hold across the country.

"Music Machine" taped its 13th show, the season finale, Tuesday night at Taboo. The reigning champ, Bonnie Peele, squared off against three challengers in a battle for Entertainer of the Year. To find out who wins a grand piano, trip for two to London, England, and a recording contract, tune into the show June 27.

"One of the good things about this show is that it proves you don't have to go to the East or West Coast to produce top quality entertainment," said Eileen Wunderlich, publicity manager for the show.

"The comments we've received is that it's very slick and has a lot more sparkle than expected from a show produced in Detroit."

THE SHOW BEGAN locally as a pilot in February 1983 and returned that fall as a regular series.

"It was popular from the beginning," said Renee Abraham, a WDIV publicity assistant. "It is the number-one rated show in the 18 to 34 age group. And it is really difficult for a local show on opposite a network show. But it has done great in the ratings."

The average for the first three seasons was a 17 Arbitron rating and a 31 share, according to station research assistant Marianne Rush. The closest competitor has been "Small Wonder," the CBS offering. It regularly beats out ABC's "Entertainment This Week."

Since filming of the fourth season was delayed until April 4, while a national syndication deal was being worked out, ratings figures aren't yet available.

"The response has been very good so far. Seven shows have aired and we've had lots of letters sent in from hopeful contestants across the country," said Wunderlich.

Channel 4's "Go 4 It" promotion of 1982 was the springboard behind "Music Machine." The promotion called upon local talent to sing a station theme song and WDIV was inundated by the response.

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"The idea was, there's so much talent in Detroit, why not create a show?" Abraham said.

GADSON, a recording star himself, was involved in the "Go 4 It" talent search and became the "Music Machine's" producer and host. Talent was scouted from area shopping malls, including Troy's Oakland Mall and Wonderland in Livonia.

"If a singer could go up in front of a mall audience and perform, it showed us their integrity," said Abraham, who has enjoyed watching blue-jean-clad contestants transformed from their initial mall performance to their on-air debut in glamorous garb at glitzy Taboo.

Each show features three contestants who are judged by a panel of celebrities. As with "Jeopardy!," the reigning champion returns for the next show. Contestants have included singers from just about every metro Detroit locale, including Livonia, Troy and Birmingham.

Celebrity judges have included Pat Sajak, Vanna White, Phyllis Diller and Casey Kasem. The panel for the season finale includes Telma Hopkins of NBC's "Gimme a Break" and a former member of Tony Orlando's Dawn, jazz guitarist and Grammy winner Earl Klugh, NBC soap star Gloria Loring and Ken Komisar, vice president of Atlantic Records.

"It has the excitement of a game show and the sizzle of an entertainment show," explained Wunderlich in describing its appeal.

WHILE LIVING in Los Angeles, Wunderlich worked on the nationally syndicated "Dance Fever," a similar show with celebrity judges.

"Like 'American Bandstand,' ('Music Machine') has a lot of followers," she said.

It has also been a springboard for local talent. One former contestant is the star of a national jeans commercial and another is now a backup singer for Bob Seger.

"Since we are only half way through our first season in national syndication, I'm not sure what will happen," Wunderlich said. "We expect it to continue as a local show and hope to keep it in national syndication."



Photos by LAURA CASTLE

Producer/host Curtis Gadson ends a recent "Saturday Night Music Machine" by taking the mike himself to sing, while Toni Johnson listens in. Johnson was selected Entertainer of the Year.



(Above) Celebrity judges Gloria Loring (left), Earl Klugh, Telma Hopkins and Ken Komisar share a laugh with Gadson. (Right) Technical director Chuck Chavo (left) and assistant Scott Leiser direct things from the main control room in a truck just outside Club Taboo.



## Mini golf offers maxi fun

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The PPA is run by the Putt-Putt Golf Course Association in Fayetteville, N.C. Putt-Putt, by the way, is a registered trademark. The PPGCA, which has franchise courses across the country, owns the name.

"It's a very competitive type of sport," said Sharon Johnson, PPGCA spokeswoman.

DOWNER AND Knotts would agree. On their outing last week, Knotts was keeping score and she won. Downer said she usually wins.

"We always argue about who wins," said Downer.

They say the toughest hole on the Ford Road course, though it varies, is the Ant Hill, number 14. "My brother took 47 times to get it in this one," said Knotts.

Heikkinen says the toughest hole on the Farmington Hills Putt-Putt is course three's number

seven, with its angles, banks and obstructions.

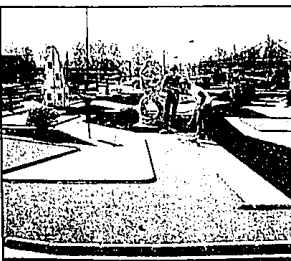
"I've seen seven and eight taken on that hole by some good putters," Heikkinen said.

This article's author found himself on the mini golf course recently. It took a few rounds to get beyond embarrassment. None of the courses were very difficult but most of them were fun.

A personal favorite course was Puttin' Time in Redford. The course is traditional. It features zany obstructions like the life-sized zebra on hole number four and a large bullroar on number three. Hole number 10 has one of those windmills with revolving sails that require a well-timed putt. Carved on the windmill in the shape of a heart is a vow of miniature golf love: "Brad and Karrie," it says.

The favorite hole, though, is number 17. It features a well-lit, 8-foot smiling kangaroo. This course also features the glare of traffic from nearby Telegraph Road.

Oakland Hills, it ain't.



STEVE FECHT/staff photographer

Many mini golf holes offer something you can really bank on.

## Where miniature golf is par for the course

A few courses for your putting pleasure:

• Oasis-Yogi Miniature Golf, 39500 Five Mile, Northville, 420-4653. Hours: 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. (11 p.m. in summer). Two 18-hole courses. \$2.50 for players over 7 years old.

• Putt-Putt Golf and Games, 30749 Grand River, Farmington Hills, 471-4700. Hours: 11 a.m. to midnight Saturday (summer 9 a.m. to 1 a.m.). Three 18-hole courses.

Amateur tournaments Wednesday nights. Tough holes: try number 7 on course 3, or no. 18 on course 2.

• Puttin' Time, 9059 Telegraph, Redford, 332-8888. Hours: 3-10 p.m. (10 a.m. to midnight in summer). 18 holes. \$2 before 8 p.m., \$2.50 after. Tough holes: numbers 10 or six.

• Ford Road Miniature Golf, 23060 Ford, Garden City, 425-9816. Hours: 2-11 p.m. Tough holes: try no. 5 or 14.