

Local Jazz History

Out of the Mix

Entertainment monopolies have taken advantage of a fragmented marketing place, and the region's musicians - and their recordings - have simply been left . . .

While hundreds of New England Jazz musicians, singers and dancers have spent their lifetimes mastering their art forms and the region became a Mecca for educating new generations to carry on the traditions, most of the music heard on the airwaves, played in public places and heavily promoted in the record stores is of performers marketed out of New York or elsewhere.

Ironically, New England artists such as Dave McKenna, Dick Johnson, Andy McGhee, Shawn Monteiro and Rebecca Parris are rightfully presented as top-line stars on cruise ships out of Miami or in large concert venues around the world, but one would never know it by listening to Boston's radio stations or visiting a local Strawberry's, Borders or Barnes & Noble.

Our musicians and singers pride themselves on their individuality, but that does not mean that they cannot be collectively marketed on a par with music out of New York, Chicago, New Orleans, or any other region.

It is fair to say that most radio listeners, conventioners, tourists and shoppers visiting Boston area stores - indeed most New Englanders in general - are not aware of the region's tremendous pool of musical talent. It is time for all of the various recording companies that handle New England artists to get together and build some clout with the music retailers, radio stations and other media. Not doing so undoubtedly means New England jazz musicians will continue to be treated like second-class players in their own back yard.

Hopefully, New England jazz musicians and their promoters will recognize that they are not in competition with one another as much as they are with the enormously powerful marketing forces out of New York, Memphis and elsewhere that have been monopolizing the musical experiences of our young people at the dance clubs, on the airwaves, in the movie theaters, at sports arenas, in the stores, in the restaurants and even in the workplace.

Wall Street discovered long ago that reorganization (consolidation) leads to economic success. Enterprises such as AOL/Time-Warner/MTV and Disney/ESPN/ABC have become entertainment empires following that formula.

There is no reason why those of us who love jazz and appreciate our region's musicians cannot do the same.