

A Scottish music industry?

Rehearsing, recording, producing and performing - under one roof?

Producer - musician Clark Sorley is the man behind the mission to give Scotland it's very own "Music Production Facilities House"



ew people would disagree with the fact that Scotland produces an abundance of musical talent. From writers to performers to instrumentalists, the Scottish contribution to the music industry cannot be ignored or underestimated.

Following the success of a number of Scottish artists recently, there is a strong case in favour of the development of the music industry in Scotland. The case is strengthened further when we consider the fact that, despite the huge commercial success of a growing number of Scottish musicians, a relatively small amount of the income their talents generate is actually returned to Scotland, largely because Scottish musicians are obliged to venture south to realise their talent.

One explanation of this is that Scotland lacks the necessary facilities. But what "facilities" are we actually talking about? As far as recording facilities are concerned, Scotland is fairly well equipped (Scottish bands such as Hue and Cry have been able to lay down at least their initial tracks here) and, focusing on record companies, it is clear that there is little point in attempting to compete with the majors as no small label could have such production, promotion, and distribution clout. Distinct from a recording studio or record label what facilities are required in Scotland, that would harness Scottish talent and allow Scottish artists (and the businesses that may have nurtured them) to have a fair return on musical rights and properties?

Producer-musician Clark Sorley thinks he has the answer. Former owner of Sirocco Studios in Kilmarnock, he is currently involved in

through his company "Kirk Productions"

Should his plans succeed then Scotland can

finally be proud of its very own music in-

dustry. Jackie Sorley investigates

the dream.

setting up "Kirk Productions", a company with several objectives, one of which is the formation of a "Music Production Facilities House" in Glasgow. This comes at the end of several years of research, commissioned by the Scottish Development Agency, examining the potential for the development of the music industry in the city.

"Our conclusions were that to develop another commercial studio as such would not be a sensible investment," said Clark. "What was needed, rather, was a production company operating within a "facilities house" of which a recording studio would be a crucial but only partial element."

Sorley is well equipped as the motivator behind such a scheme, having been involved in the music industry for 16 years. He has worked as a musician in many different environments, including pop groups, recording sessions, theatre, television, radio and advertising, and in particular, music production as owner of Sirocco Studios, one of Scotland's most

widely used facilities since it opened 10 years ago. Sorley also spent 5 years actively involved in broadcasting with Radio Clyde, first as a staff recording engineer, and then as a freelance music programme producer. During his studio career, he has worked on over 100 LP's for a variety of artists such as Andy Stewart, Kenneth McKellar, Tracy Ullman, Edi Reader and Rose Royce.

What resources would the proposed "facilities house" offer? "Well in simple terms it could be described as a total facility, offering everything from recording studios, rehearsal suites and programming rooms, to training and musical advice, a skills agency and live performance area as well as the necessary infrastructure in the way of professional, legal, and managerial expertise," he explained. "It would also have a production label and publishing company set up to control the ownership and licence of musical rights, as well as administration and office space."

With an estimated £1 million for the building alone, Sorley already has conditional offers of investment from two venture capitalists, and is seeking sponsorship for the live performance and bar area (which would have a seating capacity of around 300.) I suggested that the idea of a public performance space should be especially well received as there is a noticeable lack of good small venues for live entertainment in the Glasgow area at present. "Yes that's certainly true," replied Clark. "Many musicians have to rely on the few pubs which still consider that their bar takings will be increased by live music, as in most cases they are. If better performing facilities existed they would surely succeed, even if to begin with they needed subsidy. We only have to look at the community of Paisley's positive response to the Arts Centre for proof of the enthusiasm that is released if that kind of facility is provided."

I questioned the meaning of a "skills agency" and asked what kind of

training would be provided. "Well, opportunities for training for a career in music are few and far between," explained Clark. "As with so many professions people don't get positions without experience, and don't get experience without positions!" Our aim would be to combine courses in management and production techniques with individual tuition in music, which will hopefully give those who really want to enter the music business a basic grounding in the procedures, prospects and pitfalls involved. Who would be providing this tuition, and what form would it take? "The management and production courses would be publicly funded - we would liaise with local authorities, universities and colleges to construct a syllabus and sources of funding. The music tuition would be undertaken by freelance professionals and would normally be paid for privately." Any cynics need only to look to the popularity and success of Bathgate College's Music Management Course, the Perth Rock School and Kilmarnock's Studio One Complex (which works completely without subsidy) all of which show the need for further development along those lines. And the skills agency?

"We would act as agent for freelance music business personnel - session musicians, recording engineers, accountants, lawyers, designers, video producers and so on - whose skills are always in demand but for whom, at least at the moment, knowledge of employment opportunities can just be a matter of pot luck. In the long term, we would hope to be part of a complex that also houses industries that are peripheral but still necessary to making music, such as sleeve design and photographers studios, video production companies and instrument repair workshops."

As the house would obviously be run on a commercial basis, I asked the all-important question about cost! Would most people be able to afford these facilities, bearing in mind that most aspiring musicians are traditionally skint? The good news is that costs will be related to needs. "The rehearsal facilities will be open to all areas of the business, from the up and coming to the well established. They'll be hired out at an hourly rate of about £4-5 or in the case of the bigger rooms, on a short term lease to established artists rehearsing for concert tours." Again this service is almost certain to be used constantly, as there is an appalling lack of good rehearsal space in the west of Scotland. Does this mean that anyone could have access to the facilities? "Yes anyone who has a direct or indirect interest in music will be well received," replied Clark. "But we won't encourage people to wander in and hang around. As in any professional organisation, a work atmosphere will prevail."

The actual renting of space would surely not be sufficient to guarantee substantial profit; how would the company actually make money? "The rental of space will be enough to ensure the House's survival, but to make money it has to sell music," replied Clark. "One big selling album in its first two years would place the House and the artists in a healthy financial situation, although success would depend on the production company's ability to spot potential talent and then develop and package it in



The Silencers, photograph by A.J. Barrat

a way that has popular appeal." I asked Clark to construct a possible scenario whereby an artist approaches the company with a basic tape of his or her songs. What would be the ensuing procedure? "Well, after the artist has approached us, he or she would immediately have access to professional advice on how best to protect and develop their potential," explained Clark. They would then sign a publishing deal with us, which would be beneficial in terms of percentage deal offered, and because of the

House's local position and immediate commitment to the artist's talent. The artist would then be able to use the facilities to develop their material to the stage where a production deal could be made. He or she would record a master tape which the House would then place with the most appropriate record company, to get the best possible manufacturing and distribution deal. If the record is successful then the artist would receive a share of all royalties which would be larger than they would have received with a straightforward publisher or record label because of direct access to the cheaper recording and rehearsal facilities." And how did he think the major record companies would react to this new venture, as it did after all involve moving production decisions away from London. Could he foresee any resistance to the idea from other recording studios in Scotland?

"Traditionally, the major record companies did their own talent spotting and development but a number of factors have contributed to a different state of affairs emerging over the last ten years or so. For example, the decline of live performance and the rise of video and television as the basic form of promotion has meant that record companies are more and more concerned to find bands who are already in some way

packaged. Also, the growing importance of the global rather than the national music market means that an increasing amount of a record company's work and skill lies with international marketing - they are now more concerned with taking over national stars after they have become internationally successful rather than building them beforehand. In short, the major record companies are becoming specialist sellers of material



Love and Money

that has already been developed by smaller production companies, or independent labels. There will always be a market for the output of a production house, as long as it has the 'right' sound. That's where the risk and the excitement lies. As for other recording studios - there's a feeling among some studios that a complex such as this one would threaten their market, which is tough enough at the moment. But I believe that given the wider aims of the House, it's much more likely to have the opposite effect. It would bring more business, not only for other studios but also for other service companies directly and indirectly related to music. Success in the music industry generates success, first because of ancillary services needed, and second because as one studio is inundated with work, so it spills over to the others."

The proposed site for the project is an early 19th century building in Cowcaddens, owned by the Strathclyde Regional Council, and just about to go on the market. For Sorley, two items have yet to be finalised - leases and investment - and if things progress as they clearly have been doing up until now, the future of music in Scotland looks infinitely more encouraging and exciting. Sorley's current track record already makes him one of the most accomplished musicians in Scotland today; if his latest venture is successful his name may well go down in musical history (along with that of Glasgow) as founder of the world's first music production facilities house. No mean feat!



Deacon Blue, photograph by Andy Catlin



M18

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