

Recording Studio Struggles to Survive

By Olivia M. Hall

Fundraising efforts are under way to save a local recording studio from falling silent. Tucked away in the Town of Dryden, New Vine Media (NVM), previously called MasterView Studios, is a warm space with wood and stone accents, and it has served regional and national musicians for more than 30 years.

John Carter heads NVM, the faith-based, nonprofit organization that took over the studio in 2012. Carter's silent business partner is now looking to sell the property. Faced with an April deadline, NVM's board hopes to raise \$40,000 as a down payment to buy the studio. If that fails, the building will go on the auction block and will likely be turned into a rental property.

What is at stake, Carter says, is not just a physical structure with high-quality recording features, but a unique approach to embedding a studio in the community and helping young musicians fledge into the world of the music business.

The studio was custom built from the ground up in the late 1980s and sits on a hyperdense concrete slab on top of rubber and specially



Photo Olivia M. Hall

John Carter sits behind the controls at the New Vine Media studio in Dryden.

poured stone, creating a floating, soundproof structure.

Inside the main recording studio, the walls have built-in pressure plates and cavities that can be custom tuned during recording sessions. Behind extra-thick glass, the control room features Urei speakers, state-of-the-art digital technology, and a two-inch Otari tape machine for artists who request a

more old-school approach.

"Studios back then were done that way," Carter explains. "They were built per spec to be able to control the audio. Today's consumer music culture doesn't really understand all of that because they feel that plug-ins can solve all your problems, but people who really know how to record know better. There's a preservation of the trade

that needs to be recognized."

Among the musicians who have been drawn to the studio through the years are local groups such as Cornell's Cayuga Waiters as well as national artists such as Grammy-nominated guitarist and singer Phil Keaggy. The latter is known especially for recording Christian contemporary music, the genre of over half of NVM's customers today.

"Peter Hopper [who built the studio] is a pastor and ran the studio at a level that I would consider the industry standard," says Carter. "That intrigued me because I'm a Christian and have done a lot of mission work around the country and in India, but until I came here, I could never reconcile a very high standard of music with that kind of life."

Whether faith-based or not, "Our main goal is to protect the artist," Carter adds. Working with several musicians who have previously been hurt by bad management experiences, the NVM label offers a "turnkey" business model in addition to hourly recording services.

"With the advent of crowd funding and self-management, people are not interested in studios and labels like they used to be," says Carter. "So we train artists for a year and then let them go. We're generating independent artists and removing the middleman from the equation."

Training includes lessons in production, copyrighting, legal aspects of royalties and contracts, and marketing. Musicians then pay off New Vine's up-front investment over the next few years as they begin to gen-

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guest speakers. "Topics range from financial investing, socially responsible investing, what it means to get a mortgage loan, taking a hobby and bringing in extra income through that hobby, and the economy—how policy is set up to keep some people in poverty and what is happening in our country ... why wealth distribution has changed," he says.

Joe Cummins, community development educator at Alternatives, has taught the MoneyWise class for 12 years. Not long ago he reorganized the class. Cummins, who has a master's degree from the University of Vermont in counseling, starts the class by talking about his personal experiences with credit card debt. Crayons and paper are then given to attendees, and they are asked to draw a picture of how they see their financial situation.

"By putting it on paper, it becomes a problem outside of themselves so they can work on it and change it," he says. "Problems about money are not financial problems, they're emotional problems. The whole class is about discovering that and what's stopping us from managing the money in our lives."

Other Town of Dryden board members include Linda Lavine, Joe Solomon and Steve Stelick. "When former board member David Makar brought us this idea," says Sumner, "we said that we all knew people with small businesses. We knew that we had this inactive pool of money, and it seems like the best step we could take for economic development."

For more information about the Town of Dryden IDA program, contact Brendan Wilbur at Alternatives by calling 216-3445.

County

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ing and industrial projects. In the ongoing period of human-accelerated climate change, I think we as a community and society need to focus much more on local/regional sustainability and self-reliance—which in turn could mean more of a focus on agriculture and food-processing projects, rather than mainly on building things for export."

For now, this issue is unresolved until a final state budget is passed. "It's not one of the major drivers in the budget, so it is hard to get information on it. For example, I don't know whether either house of the state legislature included it in their one-house bills," Robertson says.

Recording

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erate income.

One of the first bands to take advantage of this offer was Backstage Royalty, comprising brothers Carson, Caleb and Caden Prince of Alfred. The brothers were disappointed in their previous attempt at recording an album. "All of us were in the studio for the first time," says Caleb, who plays guitar and bass and adds screams to the band's characteristic rock-techno sound. "The problem was that the engineers didn't care. They just pushed buttons." The results were less than satisfying, and the brothers discovered that they were able to do a better job with some soft-

ware at home.

"Once you lose money to a studio, it's very hard to trust somebody," Caleb says. "The difference with John (Carter) was that during the first time we recorded, we could have as much time as we wanted. I love that he cares about our product and wants us to succeed."

Now Carter is calling on the community to help preserve NVM's ability to help musicians. The label's backers have approached local foundations and have begun to write grants, and this past Saturday several of the label's artists were slated to give a benefit concert.

At the heart of this fundraising effort is a symbolic brick wall. Each tax-deductible donation of \$10 adds another brick to the \$40,000 needed to buy the studio. "A wall signifies focus," Carter explains. "Without a wall to protect us from distraction, it's impossible to do what we do. You walk in here, and it's like a time machine, you don't even realize the hours passing. So we're rebuilding the ability for artists to create."

Carter hopes that NVM's impact will extend into the community through internships in sound engineering offered to students at local colleges. "We're hoping to create a piece of music culture for the region and the northeast. If this studio became a rental property, it would be a loss not just to us but also to the community."

For more information, or to make a donation, visit www.savethestudio.com.

Families

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have taught babies-only and inter-

generational classes as well, including some at Bridges of Ithaca," Ruesink says.

The Music Together emphasis is always on developmentally appropriate activities and on music play. Children teach themselves about music by experimenting with information they gather in their musical environment. Classes provide exposure to diverse musical elements, followed by playful experimentation with these elements.

There are no achievement expectations for the children, although they are encouraged to play with staff and parents/caregivers. Having a nonperformance orientation makes the curriculum much more flexible and suited to a wider range of children. Ruesink calls the curriculum "stage-based not age-based," which means that children with developmental and learning differences can successfully participate as well.

Ruesink notes that educating young children exactly as they are, at whatever developmental level, is significant. No assumptions are made about what the children should do or how they should respond in class. Teachers are trained to be careful observers of musical and developmental behaviors, and they know that the first step for many families is to simply accept their children as they are.

The second step is to remove expectations and have fun making music together. This frees the children to experiment and find their own voices and their own ways to move their bodies. Families who come to class have fun in a low-stress, low-pressure environment. Ruesink says, "Our program ultimately seems to support and enhance family relationships."

For more information, go to www.musictogetherofithaca.com.



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