

Local Beat

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It's nearly 100 days into his term as president of the **Memphis & Shelby County Music Commission**, and **Rey Flemings** is ready to discuss his vision for the local music community.

Now that the commission has solicited opinions from hundreds of music-industry veterans via the **Get Loud!** campaign, Flemings has prepared a plan of "tangible and measurable" solutions for reestablishing the music industry locally. Ideas include low-cost, highly visible tactics like playing Memphis music in the airport (as Nashville has done for years), relocating a music conference to Shelby County by 2004, and honing in on digital distribution concepts. Flemings characterizes each of these initiatives as a component of a five-year plan to bring the independent music industry back to Memphis.

Flemings argues that the city as a leading center for independently produced music is a realistic one: "Our addressable market as a community is not to say, 'Hey, Sony, why don't you close your New York office and come to Memphis?' Our addressable market is everything that happens up until the artist gets a label deal or a recording contract."

"Major labels are leaving the artist-development business," Flemings says. "They don't want to sign an artist until they're selling significant numbers on their own. This forces artists to secure their own airplay, build a regional following, and sell significant numbers of units on an independent basis. This is a very substantial business, and it's becoming larger because the major labels want to get further and further up the life cycle of an artist."

"That strategy plays squarely to the strengths of this community and builds on the assets of the national and international recognition we already have. We know Elvis and Otis Redding because of what they did at an independent recording company in Memphis. From **MADJACK** to **Three 6 Mafia** all of those guys are working on an independent basis."

"But," he adds, "locally, we portray our music image as legacy only. We've turned Memphis into a music museum at the expense of all our contemporary artists. We certainly don't want to run away from the legacy. We've built an eight-million-tourist-a-year industry with a \$2 billion impact. We just need to expand the definition of Memphis music in the minds of tourists and world consumers."

Look for details later this month, when Flemings rolls out an 18-pronged strategy that will become effective immediately. "You're gonna be wowed by the commitments being made by the local business community," he says confidently. "The visionaries are smiling, and the pragmatists believe this can happen."

Longtime followers of the local music industry are sure to remember producer **Terry Manning**, a prominent player on the Memphis scene throughout the 1970s. Although Manning currently resides in the Bahamas, he worked as an engineer at **Ardent** shortly after **John Fry** opened the studio doors in '69, recording artists such as Isaac Hayes, Alex Chilton, and Furry Lewis. A mutual appreciation for the Beatles led to a burgeoning friendship with guitarist **Chris Bell**; soon, the duo were practicing at Bell's East Memphis house and gigging with **Jody Stephens** and **Richard Rosebrough** under monikers like **Christmas Future** and **Rock City**.

Of course, as those of you who know your Memphis music history will recall, Chilton, Bell, and Stephens would form **Big Star** a few years later; after releasing his own solo album on the Stax subsidiary Enterprise Records, Manning would go on to produce albums by Joe Cocker and the Baha Men. Fast-forward, then, to the 21st century, when Manning, encouraged by **Rounder Records**, dug through his vaults for two archival releases, ***Rockin' Memphis 1960s-1970s Vol. 1*** and Rock City's eponymous album.

The material here is a Big Star fan's dream. Earlier versions of "Feel" and "Try Again" (which both ended up on *#1 Record*) appear on the Rock City disc with different lyrics and instrumentation, alongside unknown treasures like "I Lost Your Love" and "The Wind Will Cry for Me." *Rockin' Memphis* contains anomalies like **Thomas Dean Eubanks'** "Gotta Get Back (to Rock & Roll)" and sides from **The Hot Dogs**, **The Short Kuts**, and **The Goatdancers**. Power-pop aficionados will appreciate the inclusion of **Van Duren's** "Make a Scene," while Manning weighs in with his own obscurities, including a rock-and-roll version of Bach's "Italian Concerto" and a spirited rendition of the *Star Trek* theme. Detailed liner notes and never-before-seen photos round out the story, making these two discs a must-have for survivors of the *It Came from Memphis*-era rock scene.

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