

COMMENTARY: MAKING MUSIC

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FRANK MURTAUGH

After five and a half years of a Memphis Music Commission and more than one million dollars of public and private funds spent, specific goals achieved are hard to pinpoint.

Hindsight is 20/20 but here are a few things that could have been done with \$1,000,000 to promote a viable prolific music industry building on Memphis' rich cultural heritage, the stated function of the commission.

1) **Give \$5000 in studio time, record pressing, or equipment vouchers to 200 Memphis bands.**

The vouchers would be good at any Memphis recording studio, music equipment shop, or record pressing provider. The Music Commission would reimburse the businesses for vouchers tendered. Instantly, Memphis studios are working, music stores are selling, and Memphis CD manufacturers are pressing up CDs. Ask any studio owner or music gear supplier in town how much this would benefit them.

On the creative side, more Memphis bands are making and releasing records, hiring designers to create their CD artwork, and creating a new supply of Memphis music for the marketplace. The Memphis Music Commission board members could sit and watch their good tidings overflow from both the positive economic impact from the money spent in Memphis music businesses as well as the creative energy and results of the seed money for the Memphis bands. Just imagine the P.R. the music commission could enjoy from the release of 40 more Memphis CD releases a year!

2) **Stage 10 Regional festivals at \$100,000 each—two each year.** Mix in Memphis' current brightest future stars like the Kelly Hurt Trio, Candice Ivory, the Glass, Reigning Sound, Kaviious, and Half-Acre Gunroom with affordable regional acts that would draw well here like Bobby Bare Jr., Drive By Truckers, and Neville Bros, and you have the beginning of an economic festival model that draws music tourists to town and creates a huge regional and national buzz for Memphis' future stars. Cut the budget for each festival in half to \$50,000, and then you could have done it every quarter for the last 5 years. Fill up the hotel rooms while you build your musician and band base. That's music business 101. Now you have the hotel and hospitality industry on your team, too. Boo ya!

3) **Start a satellite radio channel broadcasting Memphis music and promoting Memphis music events exclusively.** Right now Graceland has an all-Elvis station running on-site on Sirius, and it appears that Sirius picks up a majority of the expenses. With seed money from the Memphis music commission, pitching an all-Memphis station is a perfectly timed no-brainer to either Sirius or XM, who are both hungry for new programming and could bid against each other for the rights to the station. Get a hot high-profile location like in the Stax Music Academy, next to Sun Studio, or in the Fedex Forum and you got a new tourist destination to boot.

4) **Fix the Shell and give them programming money to put on bigger shows with Memphis acts involved.** \$100,000 a year. Solve a problem of both historical and future significance with some long needed funds.

5) **For Pete's sake, put up a website!** Initial cost: \$25,000-50,000. Operating Cost: \$20,000 a year. The least the music commission could do is have a website that lists all of the Memphis music gigs. And I

do mean the very least. There has been money available to buy out former director Jerry Schilling's contract, chase MTV around, and build Spinal Tap-esque scale models of the Fedex Forum, but no resources have been able to list band gigs for three years?

That's a good start. Certainly more bang for its buck than what Memphis has got so far.

(Sherman Willmott is the owner of the Shangri-La record store and a frequent contributor.)

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