

# features

## Making it big

### Talented Triad bands want chance to play in rock'n'roll's big leagues

by Doug Norwood  
Managing Editor

"Too many bands think they have to be in a large metropolitan area to make it big, and I think that is a mistake," says "Rocking" Ron Phillips, programming director of Raleigh's WQDR-FM.

"They say, 'Hey we're hot here; now let's go to New York and crack that nut'. They think that they'll go up there and some hot-shot record executive with too much cocaine up his nose will discover them. But competition is three times as fierce in a place like that.

"Another way of making it

is a sort of grassroots groundswell, and that's why their chances are as good here."

Phillips is voicing the sentiments of many people in North Carolina's rock music business. While the Triad (Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill) area is not a giant in the entertainment world like New York or Los Angeles, the consensus among people in the state's music business is that North Carolina is not a detour on the road to success for musicians aspiring for rock super-stardom.

"I'm trying to help these bands become international stars," says Harry Simmons

of Simmons & Associates, a "management and artist development" company that serves many popular area bands including the Fabulous Knobs, Arrogance, Luky Owens and Revolver, Treva Spontaine and the Grafics and Glass Moon.

#### Obtaining Exposure

Simmons says that each band requires different services, but generally his duties are to "up exposure, increase revenues and get some quality studio material" — any one of which could possibly beget the other two.

To this end he employs many methods. Particularly useful and important promo-

ting the bands are exposure on radio and in print. He says he would rather have negative exposure than none at all.

Simmons says he has found college radio stations very willing to play the music of area talent — music that "doesn't sound like Led Zeppelin or Lynyrd Skynyrd, bands that aren't even together anymore."

Because these bands are, as Simmons says, "on the cutting edge" of the music industry and because "the South tends to be a tad behind in acceptance of change" many radio stations in the region are apprehensive about playing their music

But radio stations in the northeast and as far away as Washington and Oregon are playing copies of the Fabulous Knobs' record "Hugs and Kisses." sent to them by Simmons.

Both Simmons and Phillips think that the Triad area is heavily laden with high quality talent. North Carolina State, Duke, Carolina and the many smaller colleges in the area not only have their own radio stations to air the music but also offer an environment that is conducive to this talent and essential to the lasting prosperity of the bands.

For example, Athens, Ga., is a hotbed for new music, according to Simmons. Athens is also the home of the University of Georgia. Boston is the "ultimate college town" and also home for many rock bands, among them the Cars.

Phillips says a large "sophisticated, very liberal, very 'hip'" campus is sup-



portive of musical talent and innovation. He considers the Triad to be such a place.

#### Music Premieres

Another source of exposure is WQDR's Monday night program "Premieres."

Phillips says that new material from nationally prominent artists is featured on the program, but "a very important part is local bands."

"It's a tough, tough business, Phillips observes. We get 25 or 30 national releases a week, and there's no place to add 30 new songs. No one would hear enough to know what the hell they're listening to."

In screening the deluge of new music for premieres, Phillips says he considers both the quality of the music and of the recording. Much of the material is "home" recordings.

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**THE FABULOUS KNOBS**, who performed here last spring, are one of many bands with talent and regional popularity. They are above, left to right, Keith Taylor on guitar, Jack Cornell on bass, Debra DeMilo singing lead, and David Enloe on guitar. Drummer Terry Anderson behind Enloe in this picture. Photo by Nader Hamidpour.

## Fabulous Knobs reflect on past and future

A young man and woman were lying on the beach at Wrightsville Beach, listening to their softly playing radio-cassette player, when they were approached by three young men and a girl.

The newcomers asked if they could listen to a tape on the machine; the couple obliged.

They put a tape in and cranked up the volume.

To the sound of the loud music they danced and fidgeted in the sand, playing invisible musical instruments. These were four of the five Fabulous Knobs and they were listening to a new

demo tape they hope will attract a major record label.

The band had played the previous two nights at the Wit's End, a Wrightsville nightclub.

They would go home to Raleigh after a couple of hours of sunning a swimming. The next day, they were to be in Richmond, Va.

"We're not playing heavy enough to burn out," says Debra DeMilo, 26, the Knobs' lead singer.

"We're playing only four nights a week."

The band has played extensively in Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia.

"It takes a mixture of humbleness and cockiness," DeMilo says of their profession and particularly the Knobs' approach to it.

She and fellow band members guitarist David Enloe, 24, bassist Jack Cornell, 26, and drummer Terry Anderson, 25, all exude just such a mixture. The other guitarist, Keith Taylor had gone home to Raleigh.

As they talked of fabulous success that may await them, self-deprecating sense of humor came through in their constant bantering and non-to-subtle sexual innuendo.

They are their own biggest fans they say.

When DeMilo graduated from high school, she went to three different schools pursuing a political science degree and dreamed of going to law school. She tired of school, though, and decided to leave it to pursue a career in music.

She had sung in church but had never tried rock'n' roll. She said black gospel music and been an important influence in her musical background, as is often the case among rock musicians.

The Debra "Knob" of the stage and the real Debra

DeMilo of the private life are different, she said. The latter is more reserved than the frantic on-stage personality.

Anderson's parents like his being a rock musician because he likes it.

DeMilo's parents "don't like it worth a damn," she added

They said they will still be playing together in 20 years, the only difference hopefully being that they'll be a lot richer.

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