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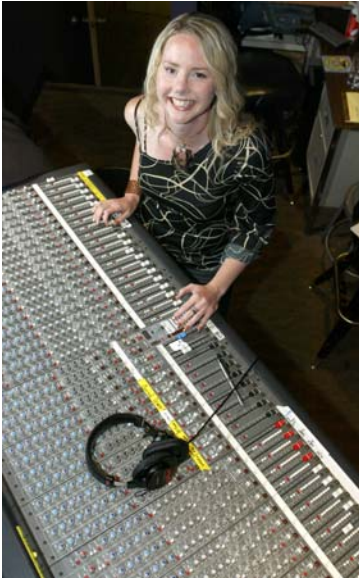


Photo by: Nick Lammers

The Woman Behind the Music

By Jenny Slafkosky, STAFF WRITER



Photo by: Nick Lammers

WHEN most people think of meeting a music industry professional, visions of middle-aged men, well-tailored suits and excessive schmoozing come to mind. So when a stylish, 33-year-old blond woman enters the room, it can be startling. "People don't expect a young woman to be doing what I do," says Kerry Silverman, owner of Strive Management, a Berkeley-based talent management business, that handles musicians including Dave Ellis, Mingus Amungus, Dmitri Matheny and Clairdee.

"All the artists I work with are people who have to play music," she says. "They have no plan B, music is just who they are, and I feel so blessed to have a job where I get to support their dreams." With a degree in kinesiology from California State University, Northridge and experience working as a physical therapist at Alta Bates Medical Center, the last thing Silverman expected to do was start a career in the music business.

But when she took a sabbatical from physical therapy in 1998, mentor and attorney Michael Ashburne convinced her to act as an artist assistant and representative for then-Atlantic Records recording artists The Braids.

Almost before Silverman knew it, she found herself hooked. As Ashburne predicted, she has the motivation and resourcefulness, along with an uncommon intuition, required to be successful in the music business.

"Management is kind of similar to physical therapy," says Silverman. "It's about helping and motivating people and being sensitive enough to know what everyone's objective is. I help put all the pieces together so people can achieve their dreams."

Put off by the frequent machismo and sales-oriented approach of the talent management business, Silverman opts to take a more personal, almost holistic approach.

"I kinda think it's a female thing," she smiles. "I have the sensitivity, compassion and caregiving skills to really work in my clients' best interests. After all, it's their livelihood we're talking about."

Silverman's love for hip-hop, rap, jazz and R&B has made her passionate about making the genres more visible to mainstream audiences. Last year when Ledisi, then a client of Silverman's, was nominated for an award at the California Music Awards (CMA), Silverman began asking the nomination committee some tough questions.

"I just kept saying 'How come you aren't nominating more hip-hop artists? What about this artist? What about that artist?'" she says. "They eventually said to me, 'Wow, you're aggressive, but you're also really, really nice about it. Why not come to work for us?'"

While continuing to operate Strive, Silverman is also the official hip-hop and R&B liaison for the CMA, and has a hopeful outlook for the future. Along with organizing two jam sessions -- one of local hip-hop talents and one of jazz musicians -- for the Sunday awards at Frank Ogawa Plaza in downtown Oakland, two of her clients are up for awards at the ceremony: Ellis for outstanding jazz album and Miles Perkins of Mingus Amungus for outstanding bass player.

"Now that I work with the California Music Awards, I get a lot of feedback from the community," she says. "Some is positive and some is negative, but I love getting suggestions. It gives me great ideas for next year."

With a repertoire of experiences and a drive to succeed, Silverman shares her knowledge about management and the music business to students around the Bay Area. She has taught classes and given lectures at San Francisco State University, the San Francisco Renaissance Entrepreneur Center and the Small Business Association in Oakland.

"So many people helped me when I was starting out on my own and teaching is a way to give back," she says. "It's exciting because a couple of my students are really on their way to becoming successful."

When she isn't running between the sound booth and the stage at Yoshi's or the Shattuck Down Low, talking to clients, teaching students, scheduling shows or working on the nomination committee for CMA, Silverman likes to design and write greeting cards.

"My dream, in addition to my artist management profession, is to have a thriving greeting card business that is motivated in the Strive theme of lifting others up."

Free evenings also will bring Silverman out from behind the music and into the audience at live music venues around the Bay Area.

"It's a pleasure to be an audience member and not have to worry about any of the details," she says. "At the end of the day it's about the music and the people and it reminds me of why I do what I do. ... I wouldn't mind doing what I do now for the rest of my life."

For more info: www.strivemanagement.com