

855-Seat Dallas Club Going Big

DALLAS—The Travis Street Electric Co. here is making strong claim to being the hottest combination discotheque-rock nitery in Texas. The 855-capacity club has moved as many as 1,200 customers in and out its doors on a big weekend night.

The club is branching out from its discotheque base to book record artists into the club each Thursday evening with a talent budget of \$4,000 weekly.

As a direct result of a July 22 Billboard talent piece, club president Ron Crockett and talent booker Randy Shelton contacted the booker for J.J.'s San Diego nitery, Tom Brannon, and have begun a touring circuit from San Diego across the Southwest to Dallas.

The club co-sponsors the Thursday concerts with KZEW-FM, which will shortly begin live location broadcasts of each artist at the club.

Firm boasts the largest computer-lit dance floor in Dallas and offers a discotheque light and sound design service to other clubs.

Checkmates In Corp. Expansion

LOS ANGELES—The Checkmates Ltd., consistent Las Vegas lounge headliners for a decade, have formed a new entertainment corporate complex here. Their future product will be released on the Checkmates' own Rustic Label and they have also founded Charisme Public Relations and Associated Video Artists.

Checkmates Bobby Stevens, Sonny Charles and Marvin "Sweet Louie" Smith are booking a national tour through their new office. The TV production arm is preparing a program on the lives of rock stars.

Lecture Tour For Chip Monck

LOS ANGELES—Rock concert sound-lighting specialist Chip Monck will be on a college lecture tour for four months, beginning in September. Each week's four dates are being booked by the Heller-Fischel Agency here.

Monck will speak on physical planning of college concerts and show films from events he has done stagecraft for, including Rolling Stones tours, Woodstock and Bangla Desh. He is to appear at February's NEC convention.



Capitol photo

STILL SELLING—The three Lettermen, after 13 years together, still regularly sell about 200,000 of each Capitol LP and perform steadily at Las Vegas.

Lettermen Seek New Songs; Ding Covers

By ELIOT TIEGEL

LAS VEGAS—The Lettermen have intensified their efforts to have original tunes come their way so as to avoid being typed as an act which re-records other people's hits.

The singing trio, with 13 years in the business and some 30 LPs in the Capitol catalog, has a fulltime staffer, Billy Delbert, assisting manager Jess Rand, scout for new material.

After finding success in recent years by making medleys out of past hits, the group's main concentration is to secure freshly written material.

The effort is starting to bear results: the act's just released "Now and Then" package includes several new tunes.

In a sense, the Lettermen represent some middle-of-the-road acts which are "taken for granted" because they've been around so long.

"We don't want to be typed as an oldies or medleys group," notes Tony Butala, who along with Gary Pike and brother Donny Pike comprise the act.

Gary says the act is taken for granted "because people expect us to sell," which prompts manager Rand to interject that a Lettermen LP will sell 200,000 copies without any promotion. A major rack like Handleman will order 25,000 or 30,000 copies and easily disburse them among its accounts, according to Rand.

The act's distinct soft vocal blend is its calling card and its efforts over the past several years to contemporize its sound have not hurt its artistic ability.

In fact, during its 40-minute presentation here at the Hilton, the trio offers a smooth, steadily paced act which has a solid rock rhythmic base and plenty of modern guitar runs in its supporting instrumental arrangements.

These energized arrangements don't affect the trio's singing style or

its ability to be sensitive and intimate—when that's called for. But Butala notes that they are not singing the same as in past years. "We're not using a straight block pattern, but we are using close harmony in tune."

The act doesn't sing as many ballads as before but its soft tunes are still as breathy.

What keeps this act busy with concerts in major locations?

Las Vegas in a sense represents the answer. The audience is in its 30s and up. It responds to the group's past hits ("Summer Place," "When I Fall In Love," "The Way You Look Tonight," "Shangri-la," "Goin' Out Of My Head/Can't Take My Eyes Off Of You") and one realizes that many of these people first saw the act on some college campus and now have the money to see them in a club situation.

The audience has grown up with the act, which gives it a built-in nucleus of listeners.

In order to assert a new image to today's young consumers, the act has modified its name and now calls itself Lettermen, dropping the "the."

All agree the name has a negative connotation. But Lettermen could be a family and not a reference to three collegians, which was the original intention.

On stage the group works in such current titles as "Listen To The Music," "Day After Day," "Top Of The World" and a haunting melody of "Touch Me In The Morning/The Way We Were" in which lines criss-cross from one song to the other, producing a hybrid gem.

The three singers are in accord that love songs are their type of material (despite the jump tunes in the show).

The first thing Bill Cosby says when Lettermen have exited and he's in the spotlight is "They're a hip Osmonds."

Bell Chairman Of Continental

MEMPHIS—Stax artist William Bell was elected board chairman of Continental Artists, one of the largest talent agencies in the U.S. and prime purveyor of the Memphis Sound.

Bettye Berger continues as president of the eight-year-old agency. Expansion of Continental to new branches on the West Coast and Atlanta was announced at the agency's annual board meeting.

Seven Acts for Hip Trip at Sea

NEW YORK—An unprecedented jazz all-star line-up of seven acts is firmed to perform on an eight-day cruise to Nassau and Bermuda Dec. 7-14 on the S. S. Rotterdam of the Holland America steamship line.

Count Basie, Lionel Hampton and their orchestras along with the Cannonball Adderley Quintet and Joe Williams, Sarah Vaughan, James Moody and Carl Warwick are billed for the hip trip at sea.

Two New Rock Arenas Bow On Outskirts of Chicago

CHICAGO—Rock is extending out of the city and into the suburbs with the opening this month of Oakbrook Forum, a 7,000-seat arena, and the planned opening in October of the Villa Park Arena, with 6,000 seats.

Oakbrook Forum, 25 minutes from downtown via expressway, opened August 16 with Bachman-Turner Overdrive and Brownsville Station, to a sold-out crowd. According to partners Bob Destocki and Ed J. Abdo, of Oakbrook Forum Productions, a recent survey of downtown rock audiences showed that 65 percent of the audience was suburban kids. "Bigger grosses, up to \$50,000 potential, are possible in the suburbs," Destocki notes.

Oakbrook Forum Productions plans two major rock concerts a

month, interlaced with other special events, throughout the year. Destocki previously managed and produced Chase and The Ides of March. Abdo, also part-owner of the Forum, is a promoter of outdoor concerts.

Frank Fried, Triangle Productions, plans to hold 50 shows a year at the Villa Park Arena, with ticket prices comparable to downtown. Triangle Productions now produces MOR, rock and legitimate shows at the 3,800-seat Auditorium, the 4,400-seat Aire Crown, and the 11,000-seat Amphitheater.

"We want to take the shows where the people are, and there are a lot of people out here who don't come into the city," says spokesman, Gary Zullo.

Dollar Shrivels In Vegas

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oriented and the artist's draw is the key factor in determining what the public will be charged for the dinner and midnight shows.

The average cost to see a midnight show today is \$10 with the cost even higher in some instances. These are record prices for a non-food situation.

The price charged the public for a dinner show has almost doubled in five years. Frank Sinatra's recent Caesars Palace stint cost the patron \$30 a person plus tax—the highest cost to the public ever. Elvis Presley's current Hilton engagement runs \$17.50 a person plus tax.

Generally the Hilton and Hilton-Flamingo stick to minimums ranging from \$12.50 to \$15 for a dinner show. "The minimum is tied more to the draw than to the artist's salary," explains Greg Waddilove of the Hilton Hotels. "If they are a big draw, management will kick up the minimum."

"The entertainers really don't have anything to say about it," says a Riviera spokesman concerning the hotel's minimums. "The minimum is decided on how much business the entertainer has. Liza Minnelli is the most expensive because she does the most business."

Standard Riviera minimums are \$15 for a dinner show and \$13.50 at midnight.

"There are three exceptions to that," relates the spokesman. "Liza at \$22.50 for a dinner show. Engelbert Humperdinck and Don Rickles are both at \$17.50 for dinner and \$15 for midnight."

"We did have some complaints from customers regarding Liza's \$22.50 prices," the source confides. "The ultimate decision on price is made by Ed Torres."

Caesars World owns both Caesars Palace and the Thunderbird Hotels.

"Minimums at the Thunderbird are decided by Caesars World," says executive Jim Seagrave.

Patrons this summer could enjoy the Bobby Goldsboro dinner show for a \$7.50 minimum. Goldsboro broke attendance records at the resort. Next time in the Goldsboro minimum will be \$9.50.

"We can't let artists control our prices," says Seagrave. "No artist has ever complained to us about the minimums. If they had a good case management would listen."

"We don't have tremendous overhead," he continues. "We don't pay the entertainers \$125,000 a week.

Our philosophy is we don't like to leave the customers penniless by the time they get to the casino.

"We've been forced to raise menu prices due to the cost of labor and the cost of wholesale food. They are the determining factors," emphasizes Seagrave.

The Hilton Hotels have also jumped menu prices tremendously. They cover themselves from patron wrath by simply destroying old menus and printing new ones.

Along the Strip this is the price structure: the Hughes Hotels \$15 and up for dinner; Tropicana \$15 for a drinks only show in the Superstar Theatre, Sahara \$10 and up for dinner; MGM-Grand \$10 and up for dinner and the Dunes \$9 and up for its production spectacular.

Either the artists aren't aware of the skyrocketing minimums on their entertainment, or they don't care. An exception is Steve Lawrence, who proved he has enough clout to run his own show.

Steve and Eydie came into Caesars Palace in June with a strong show.

Caesars World set the dinner minimum at \$17.50. It was a \$15 minimum at midnight for drinks. Patrons gasped and there were some empty seats. Lawrence complained. Prices were dropped to \$15 for dinner. The rest of the engagement was sold out.

Lawrence-Gorme opened the following week at the Sahara-Tahoe with their entire engagement completely sold out in advance.

The Tahoe area is following the high price minimum trend with

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