

Producer works to promote 'Fort Worth' sound

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Chuck Ebert

Chuck Ebert knows Nashville and he knows Fort Worth. The Grammy-winning artist (eight-time nominee) and three-time Dove Award nominee has three decades of experience in the music industry working in almost every capacity of production.

So when the award-winning producer, songwriter, recording and mastering engineer says Fort Worth is a budding musical metropolis, it's certainly worth a listen.

Ebert stops short of calling Fort Worth "tomorrow's Nashville." He said each city has its own unique sound, but he definitely believes Cowtown has something special when it comes to music – something to which folks should stop and pay attention.

Ebert is the founder, CEO and executive producer of Axon Entertainment Inc., president of B the Next LLC, and owner of the William & Clayborn Capital Group. He champions artists of all genres and the music industry.

Ebert is known for taking artists to the next level, and he has produced/engineered winners and contenders for Grammy and Dove awards such as Katy Gaby (his wife), Don Henley, The Dixie Chicks, Denver Moore, James Blackwood, The Light Crust Doughboys, The Jordanares, Ann Margaret, Kris Kristofferson, Brian Setzer and many more.

He has also worked with ESPN, HBO, The Travel Channel and the Academy Awards.

In 2017, yet another recognition of Ebert's talents came with a Grammy-contending record, Hymns from Wichita Avenue by Gaby. He has also released on the Axon label American Idol recording artist Tori Martin's single, "Woman UP," which landed in Grammy contention for 2016.

Ebert also recently produced a pair of No. 1 hits with East of Azle on amazon.com.

The name of Axon's record label, The Cabin Record Co., was inspired by Ebert's recording studio, which he designed himself. The custom, innovative music studio offers state-of-the-art recording technology in a warm, log cabin interior. Some musicians have called it 2,400 square feet of "recording bliss."

When he is not producing in the studio or directing a music video, Ebert can be found traveling the country speaking at conventions, conferences and discussion panels. Above all else, he values and appreciates the art of creating music and the dedication it takes to be successful in today's music business.

Ebert is also taking a stand for artists in their fight with YouTube for royalties. The subject has made news lately as YouTube is locked in a bitter battle with music labels over how much it pays to stream their songs.

Ebert addressed this and other topics recently with the Fort Worth Business Press.

What do you think makes the Texas sound, particularly the Fort Worth sound, so special?

I have chosen to make Fort Worth my home and want to promote music for everything it is and will be. "The Fort Worth Sound" is honest and real, not overly polished. Its heart comes from many genres – outlaw country, Western swing, rhythm and blues, jazz, Southern rock and gospel. It is resoundingly Americana and distinctly Fort Worth. We have that "proud to be Texan" attitude.

My recording studio, The Cabin, is world-class yet very Texan. We are surrounded by trees, fresh country air, right on the edge of urban Fort Worth. The Cabin is pure recording bliss. In fact, I love it so much that my label is The Cabin Recording Co. Now how much more Texan can you get?

How do you plan to harvest that sound and contribute to it?

We have been harvesting that sound for over 20 years through multiple projects. We just have to push out more, keeping the genres we all love and adapting to the ever-changing music industry. The late 90s' combination of the Light Crust Doughboys and James Blackwood is a great example of a Grammy-nominated, award-winning independent project, Keep Lookin' Up, on which I had the privilege of working.

Our group continued to collaborate, and in 2003 the album We Called Him Mr. Gospel Music: The James Blackwood Tribute Album won a Grammy for Best Southern Gospel or Bluegrass Album. It just doesn't get any better than when the Doughboys blend with Elvis' backup band, the Jordanaires, bringing old-time religion to a new generation.

Today, we are working the raw Texas sound with amazing artists from our own backyard, distinctively Fort Worth, reminding me greatly of Waylon, Willie and Merle meets the Eagles, Skynard and Buffett.

Do you see Fort Worth becoming today's Nashville?

Nashville has its own sound so to speak and it's a fantastic place to work and make music. I love creating music there. The Fort Worth sound is a more unpolished, down-to-earth, raw vibe that has a "Proud to be a Texan Attitude" no matter what the genre. Being such a large city, Fort Worth has "the big city feel with a small-time vibe," and that connection comes through the music of the artists who live here.

While different, Fort Worth and Nashville share a lot of music and talent. There is a [Nashville Songwriters Association International] chapter right here in Fort Worth of which I am a part. Fort Worth is in the development stages of defining its musical heart just as Nashville did many years ago.

We have national recording studios and tremendously talented producers available right here in our own backyard without having to go a thousand miles away. I have been working hard on bringing various professionals in the area together through NTAP [North Texas Audio Professionals]. We want artists and the city itself to know that you don't have to go to Nashville or anywhere else to do a professional recording. Our group is also working with the Grammy organization [National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences], where I am active with the Producer and Engineering Wing, to bring more notoriety and awareness of what Fort Worth has to offer.

What are your thoughts on the struggles of the independent artist?

It is harder today than ever to be a professional independent artist. You must have a team to be successful artistically and financially. The ways to make money in the music business have fundamentally shifted from just a few years ago.

Publishing was once the best way for most artists/songwriters to make a living. But today that has all but disappeared. The song is still king, but the income from it being used commercially or from public access has changed drastically for the artist. Now it's not even pennies, but thousandths of one cent for a song being heard or played on YouTube and other digital platforms.

There are basically just a few ways artists, independent or otherwise, make money in today's music economy. Live shows/touring, merchandise, then publishing, that is where the least revenue comes from. Given all of the avenues to get your music out there digitally today, your songs are always accessible.

I don't like saying this, but the market is saturated with talent, good and bad. The market share that you pull by just hoping folks will hear and like your music is not that easily captured. It takes a lot of marketing prowess and dollars to take an artist to the next level.

What are your thoughts about the battle with YouTube?

YouTube is a great avenue for music releases, especially for independents. It is a strong tool for getting your music out there. YouTube is the radio of today. Marketing music and making a profit from it is the issue. If someone is making royalties from your work, you should be paid.

Most people do not realize how many independent musicians are being paid by YouTube today, albeit miniscule and to the detriment of the individuals. Companies like YouTube set their parameters and it is up to the artist to accept or decline to work with said company. Today's market is very social media-based and YouTube is just one avenue.

Revenue streaming is not what we as professionals in the industry feel it should be. Each time a song is played or heard in the public ear, a royalty is generated for the artist, songwriter — the creator of the work. In radio, it used to be around 2 to 3 cents per play. By comparison it's thousandths of a cent for YouTube, etc.

If YouTube is generating advertising dollars using music from an artist in the background of a commercial or before a video or song is played, that paid advertisement creates revenue from the song. That is the rub. Part of that revenue should be granted to the artist, songwriter, etc. If they would agree to pay just a penny per play, that would make a difference in the music industry.

What struggles of your own have you had with YouTube, and streaming services in general?

As a producer I am constantly working around the challenges that YouTube and many other digital platforms bring to the artist. Monetizing is the struggle with most digital media services. For the independent artist, understanding what the service contract states and the payment terms themselves is a challenge. Our record label, The Cabin Record Co., uses YouTube and other digital media to boost awareness of the artists with whom I am working. Once they start to achieve notoriety and charting, live performances and merchandising are where they benefit the most.

Any additional thoughts?

Music is my avocation and life, which I share with my wife, country/gospel recording artist Katy Gaby. She earned a coveted spot as a Grammy contender for the 2017 awards for her hit album, Hymns from Wichita Avenue, which I produced. The album was recorded with her having lung capacity of only 60 percent due to an autoimmune disorder. And by the way, that album features hymns from her childhood from a church she attended in southeast Fort Worth just off Wichita Avenue, hence the name.

