The CRMAs – a leg-up to emerging Canadian artists

As we gear up for Canadian Radio Music Month in March, I am reminded of the Guess Who and their Runnin' back through Canada Tour 2000. Between May and July last year, this Winnipeg-born band of "rock icons" played to over 120,000 fans of all ages in 24 cities—proof positive of their cross-generational appeal and the longevity of their talent. It was the highest-grossing tour of the summer concert season.

This tour was also a stirring reminder of what Canadian music is, and should always be, about, and the role of radio broadcasters in ensuring this national legacy. At a time when chart-topping tunes and faces that come and go have become the order of the day, private radio's unwavering commitment to the cultivation of Canadian artists and the nurturing of their talent beyond the "one-hit wonder" is more crucial than ever.

Enter Canadian Radio Music Month. It is a time for private radio broadcasters to pull out all the stops for a special showcase of Canada's English-language musical talent. It represents an opportunity for them to demonstrate the positive impact of their year-round support and encouragement for the best emerging musical talent this country has to offer today and tomorrow.

Canadian Radio Music Month culminates in the Canadian Radio Music Awards (CRMAs), which will be held in Toronto on March 31. Created and funded by Englis-language private radio broadcasters, the CRMAs recognize excellence and the outstanding achievement of rising Canadian recording artists representing a range of music genres like Serial Joe, Tara Lyn Hart and Boomtang Boys.

The CRMAs are presented during a gala luncheon, but the process to get there is grassroots all the way—nominees are selected based on radio airplay and are voted on by music directors, program directors, and radio personalities.

Throughout Canadian Radio Music Month, stations across Canada help generate awareness about the CRMAs by doing what they do best when it comes to supporting Canadian talent, building an audience for them and promoting initiatives that boost their careers. They air PSAs featuring the nominees, they play their music, and they talk up the awards and their importance in developing the careers of Canadian artists.

A CAB survey conducted annually since the launch of the CRMAs in 1998 shows that about one-third of Canada's English-language radio stations have collectively contributed over $1.4 million to promote artists and the awards during the past three Canadian Radio Music Months. If projected, based on a 100% respondent rate to the survey, these contributions could conceivably top the $4-million mark.

What this says is that radio broadcasters are doing a top-notch job when it comes to promoting rising Canadian artists and supporting more established performers. A love of the music drives them, as does a dedication to their listeners and a commitment to the development of enduring Canadian talent.

This commitment is central to the CAB's FuturePlan strategy aimed at increasing the supply of popular Canadian music in both English and French, and identifying, promoting and supporting the development and launch of new music artists. To achieve this we need to create tools and strategies that allow radio broadcasters and the music industry together to produce stars and foster talent that goes beyond the single hit.

Michael McCabe is President and CEO of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters. He may be contacted by phone at (613) 233-4035, by fax at (613) 233-6961 or by e-mail at cab@cab-acr.ca

Activities spearheaded by private broadcasters such as the CRMAs and Canadian Radio Music Month are a big part of moving this strategy forward and making it a reality. Broadcaster-led initiatives implemented in partnership with the music industry, such as the Radio Starmaker Fund and Fonds RadioStar, are also a huge step in the right direction. To date, approximately $20-million is confirmed for both Funds to be spread over the next eight-10 years. That is going to be a tremendous leg-up for many aspiring musical English- and French-language artists in Canada.

Call it the *Guess Who* Legacy. Canadian radio broadcasters are creating the conditions to generate music and talent that endure. Check out the CRMAs next month. Listen and look for the performer who says, "Without Canadian radio, I would not have been able to realize my dream. Thank you!"

*(For more information on the Canadian Radio Music Awards, the Radio Starmaker Fund and the Fonds RadioStar visit the CAB web site at **www.cab-acr.ca**.)*