

Makin' it in the music biz

"The music business is going through its biggest expansion in history"

by Lauren Breslin

The music business is notoriously competitive, and not just for aspiring musicians. The same is true for the people working behind the spotlight - - the unsung stars who record, produce, mix and manage our favourite artists.

In fact, competition within the music biz is stronger than ever. Thanks to a variety of factors - - such a user-friendly recording software and music download services - - the cost of making and selling music has fallen dramatically.

"The music business is going through its biggest expansion in history," says John Harris, director of Harris Institute, a private Toronto college specializing in audio production and music management. "The big studios and the major record companies are being replaced by thousands, if not millions of artists and their representatives."

With more people having the means to compete, the music business is, by definition, more competitive. This new reality, Harris says, is all the more reason why specialized training from a reputable school is so essential. "Somebody entering the music industry at this point without getting specialized training wouldn't have a chance," he says.

The Harris Institute offers one-year diploma programs in Audio

Production/Engineering and Recording Arts Management. Both programs are taught by an esteemed group of working professionals, including Jack Richardson, an award-winning producer who has



David Ramsahoye, Senior Audio Engineer, IMAX Corporation

worked with artists such as The Guess Who, Alice Cooper and Bob Seger.

At Harris, the curriculum begins with four months of theory before moving onto the fun stuff, like training in the recording studio and labs. Both programs emphasize a "real-world" education. One of the final projects in the Production/Engineering program, for example, has students scout out an artist, sign them, make a professional-quality record, and then go out and try to secure a record deal.

In the Recording Arts Management Program, one of the major projects challenges students to put together a business plan for a

new recording studio, and then pitch their concept to prospective investors. "That's an amazing project because the students have to analyze every aspect of the recording studio - - not just what technology they're going to buy, but also the number-crunching," Harris says. "It thrusts them into the real world."

Meanwhile, out in the real world, Harris graduates have gone on to work in a range of positions throughout the Canadian music industry, such as audio engineers, record producers, artist managers and live-sound mixers.

A case in point would be David Ramsahoye, who graduated from Harris' Production/Engineering Program (PEP) in 1995. Ramsahoye enjoyed a seven-year gig as an audio operator for CityTV, Much Music and Bravo before landing his current position as a senior audio engineer for the IMAX Corporation.

Ramsahoye says the hand-on training he received at Harris was invaluable for his career. "Everything was viable and directly related to the real world," he says. The other bonus for Ramsahoye was being able to make contacts with industry professionals. "If it wasn't for Harris, I don't think I would have the career that I have today."