



THE MUSIC BIZ

Admiration of Songwriters spawns The Blonder Group

BY RON WYNN RWYNN@NASHVILLECITYPAPER.COM

When Ira Blonder, Managing Partner of the Blonder Group, LLC, relocated to Nashville from New London, Conn. 13 years ago, he viewed the city as one with great potential, fiscally and aesthetically.

As a major fan of music and songwriters in particular, Blonder saw an opportunity to put his considerable experience in real estate and financial advisory services to good use in a unique partnership with the music industry.

Today the Blonder group and CREASA Partners have been involved with several purchases and huge music business deals involving studios, companies and individuals.

They recently spearheaded the sale of OMNIsound Recording Studios, one of the city's oldest and most successful independent recording facilities whose client base includes Joan Osborne, Jewel, Porter Wagoner, Marty Stuart, Alison Krauss, Jeffrey Steele and Bobby Braddock.

Back in 2004 they sold the historic Music Row building owned by the estate of country music legend Waylon Jennings to a new corporation called Frost Insurance. The deal allowed the Jennings estate to lease it for several months while his staff moved the publishing and merchandising operations to Arizona, with the Blonder group representing the Waylon Jennings Trust and his wife and singer Jessi-Colter Jennings.

"It was always my plan to be involved with the entertainment industry in terms of both real estate acquisition and also financial consultation and advice," Blonder said. "We're among the very few companies that work with record labels, publishers and artists from the standpoint of what I call corporate intervention. One of the main reasons why I was attracted to Nashville was because of my admiration for songwriters and creative people in general. It's always fascinated me that someone could sit down and in a few minutes you'd have an entire piece written, a melody, storyline, arrangement and musical framework. For me it's been great to build the type of relationships that we have with the music industry and to be involved in many things that have helped the growth of the business and had a positive impact on the future of the city."

Located at 1187 Hickory Blvd., Suite 200 in Brentwood, the Blonder Group and CREASA Partners' (which also has an office in Memphis) numerous transactions and dealings cover everything from restaurants to hotels, apartment complexes and housing units in addition to their music business ventures.



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Blonder cites the impact of mergers and consolidation as perhaps the greatest change he's witnessed in terms of the industry since he's been in Nashville.

"Today in many cases the people making the calls about things aren't here in town anymore when it comes to the four major labels," Blonder said. "They're in New York or Los Angeles or even outside the country. Now we still deal directly with local people every day, but in many instances the final word comes from the outside. The mergers have also eliminated some of the infrastructure locally. Yet in several instances that hasn't been such a bad thing, because we've still been able to make things work locally."

A prime example that Blonder cites is the sale of the 23, the 443-square-foot Sony BMG building and adjacent parking lot at 16th Ave. South and Music Square East, a couple of years ago to music label owner and philanthropist Mike Curb.

"We had all kinds of calls from every type of conceivable buyer," Blonder said. "The only reason that we were able to make that deal was that due to consolidation they wanted to get rid of the building. Mike Curb was someone who understood the importance of the place, and especially the fact that it contained the 'Quonset Hut.' Without that you wouldn't have any Music Row in Nashville."

The Quonset Hut was encased within the structure of the building, and was the place where Owen and Harold Bradley in 1954 established country music's first recording studio, even before the entire area became known as Music Row.

Everyone from Patsy Cline and Brenda Lee to Jim Reeves, Bob Dylan, George Jones, Buddy Holly, Johnny Cash, Conway Twitty, Buck Owens and Merle Haggard recorded there. Curb eventually plans to restore the Quonset Hut.

While adding that the group is very selective about prospective clients, Blonder said they're constantly scanning the landscape for opportunities.

"There is so much talent and so many things happening right now in terms of Nashville and the music business, so we certainly have lots of opportunities. Coming here was the best move I could have made, and it's turned out even better than I thought." ^{CP}

Courtesy of Ira Blonder Ira Blonder, who owns and operates The Blonder Group, is taking Music Row by storm helping others invest in the business.