

With an increased focus on breaking artists via radio and video airplay, and the constant pressure of record labels to score hit records, many wonder whether the process of artist development is a priority or a thing of the past.

According to Angelo Ellerbee, founder and president of New York-based Double XXposure (which the *New York Times* recently called a "publicity, management and image-control company that is often described as a charm school for rap artists"), artist development is the top priority.

Ellerbee, who started his full-service firm in 1987, immediately draws a distinction between what he calls "record development" and artist development. The former, he says, "is basically preparing an artist for the video: find the stylist, find the wardrobe person, the director and get the budget together." The key factors of the latter, he believes, explain best what Double XXposure is about: "Education, stimulation, motivation and finding out the who, what, why, when and wheres of the music industry. These are the fundamentals that will carry artists through and give them longevity."

Some artists Ellerbee has worked with are reggae singer Yvrad, Portrait, Shabba Ranks, Patra, and hip-hop/R&B diva Mary J. Blige.



Double XXposure's Ellerbee

GORDIAN UNIVERSALISM

Ellerbee says his inspiration came from soul music back in the day, when labels like Stax, Volt, Chess and Motown made it a point to refine the sound, style and public image of their artists: "I was always fascinated with [former Motown chairman] Berry Gordy's ability to take soul music and make it a universal music. How did he do it? His ingredients were [teaching the artists] charm, speech, diction and social etiquette."

A systemic problem Ellerbee says he is trying to address is the fact that everything is looked at in the short-term. "Many times, record companies aren't look-

ARTIST-SUPPORT GROUPS

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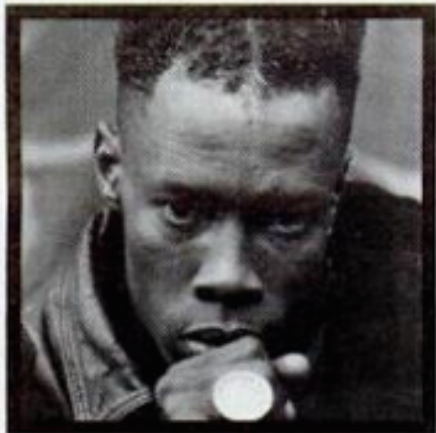
ing at the issue of longevity," he explains. "It's a machine; there's often a pimp mentality. If a record hits, they can deal with artist development later."

In an effort to diversify Double XXposure, Ellerbee recently hired music-industry veterans Ken Winnik and Pablo Diaz, who will head Double XXposure 2, a new division focusing on the Latin-music market. Clients include vocalist Lisa Lisa, WQHT-Hot 97 (New York) radio personality Angie Martinez and former adult film star Vanessa Del Rio.

PRE-GAME COACHING

For labels or artist managers looking to sharpen their artists' media image, David Nathan is another name often discussed in the industry. The London native, based in Los Angeles since 1984, started his interview-coaching service in 1990.

Nathan is the U.S. editor of *Blues & Soul* magazine, a reissue producer and a frequent contributor to *Billboard*. As a journalist, he says, he kept encountering artists who didn't know how to



Clockwise from top left: Patra, Shabba Ranks, Portrait

respond to interview questions.

"What I do definitely falls under the umbrella of artist development. If you have an artist that looks good, sounds good and can express himself articulately, it works for everyone," Nathan says. He, like Ellerbee, feels that the record-label mentality is often about getting immediate results. "A lot of times," Nathan observes, "they're not sure if an artist will be around for a second or third album."

After working with Arista artist Jeff McBride, Nathan was hired by Motown executives to coach artists Shanice and Another Bad Creation on interview skills. Word-of-mouth referrals within the industry led Nathan to assignments with a wide range of urban talent including Toni Braxton, Chante Moore, Boyz II Men, Tony Rich and Brian McKnight.

Nathan says that the artists' main job is to promote themselves and project the best image possible. "It's important that they go into an interview prepared," he says. "They should realize that media—whether it's print, radio or television—is an important channel for reaching the public." ■