

# Experts tell how to break into the music industry

So many people want to be a superstar. They want to sell millions of records, hear their songs on the radio, make videos and appear before 20,000 screaming fans every night.

You see the music hopefuls each week on "American Idol" and Missy Elliott's "The Road To Stardom." Everyone feels he or she has the right stuff to be the next star of tomorrow.

While no one can tell you how to become a bona fide superstar in the uncertain world of showbiz, there are a few tips that might help you get your foot in the door.

JET talked to music industry executives and performers who offer a few solid pointers.

Mathew Knowles learned the music business while managing his first group, Destiny's Child, who features his superstar singer/actress daughter Beyonce Knowles. Coming to the industry with 20 years of experience in corporate America, Knowles said that he took a class on the business of music and took some production courses to gain general knowledge.

"You've got to have passion, think out of the box and have basic fundamental business knowledge," explains Knowles, who is now president and CEO of Music World/Sanctuary Urban Holding Group, Inc. "You must have the ability to go to talk to people intelligently. You have to come with your own plan. Be prepared to spend time on artist development and not depend on the record label to do it."

Breaking into the music industry won't guarantee riches overnight either. "On average it takes five years from the day you get a record deal to the day there is a financial reward," says Knowles. "So you've got to be prepared for that."

"American Idol" judge Randy Jackson is an award-winning producer, songwriter and musician. Working behind the scenes for more than 25 years, Jackson has worked with some of the biggest names in the industry (Whitney Houston, Destiny's Child, Elton John, Madonna, Bruce Springsteen and Celine Dion). Nicknamed "The Dawg," last year he penned the book *Let's See, Dawg, If You've Got What's Up!*, which reveals his secrets to making it big in the music industry (Hyperion, \$14.95).

Jackson says that aspiring singers may consider themselves to be the "best," but they need "qualified" people to tell them where they really are in terms of development.

"Everyone fancies himself a shower singer," Jackson begins. "People sing in their ears. Some sing in choirs, and it's 'Man, you can sing. Why don't you get a deal?' But how good are you compared to the competition? You have to be able to gauge that, work on that, practice."

He adds that aspiring performers must develop thick skin. "Look, the journey to get to anywhere near the top is really hard. In order to keep on that road, you have to have a pretty strong interior and exterior because some things are going to fall when you do that. If you focus on your career, other things in your life may fall apart."

Queen of Hip-Hop Soul Mary J. Blige recommends that aspiring artists know the business side of the industry. That means understanding recording contracts.

"Please make sure you read everything that comes in front of you," cautions Blige. "Read the fine print, get a lawyer, and go over it again and again. Pray over everything. Ask God to send you a lawyer. Be specific. Someone who's going to go over every detail with you. Someone who wants you to have at the end of the day what the company does not want you to have."

Performer Redd has been touring as a backup singer with Ginuwine for seven years. He also has done back-up work with Dave Hollister, K-Ci and JoJo and the late Aaliyah.

Redd advises, "The music industry is a bold industry. In order to break into it, you must be bold and bring something fresh and new. That means you have to know how to promote yourself. You have to have the guts and boldness to go up to people in the industry and represent. You have to network. You have to keep your ear to the street to find out who is going to be where and make yourself available. If there's a listening party for a new artist, you should try to be there. Never turn away anyone who has something to do with the industry, because you never know who might be the one who can really help you."

Redd, who also writes and is forming his own label, advises aspiring artists to look beyond the stage for success. "It is not meant for everybody to be a star, to be on television as the main attraction. You have millionaire songwriters you have never heard of. So think behind the scenes too."

The aspiring artists say that you should be prepared to do it yourself. If you haven't been able to crack into the major record labels, start one yourself or find a small independent label. You might sign with a big label, but it could take years before the album is released.

Knowles believes that those who hope to break into the music industry should "pray, pray, pray, pray."

"This is a grind. It takes a lot of hard work, a lot of discipline, and you have to be prepared for the bumps," he says. "There are going to be a lot of bumps in the road. You have to keep your head up. That's when faith, integrity, and hard work are important. I always say that luck is when you do get that window of opportunity. You must be prepared. That is a key thing. When that opportunity exists and that window is open, you must be prepared for that moment."

