

BREAKING NEWS

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State legislatures asked to stop impostor bands

Some groups use famous names, but contain no original musicians

By **SUSAN HAIGH**



Jon "Bowzer" Bauman, formerly of Sha Na Na, strikes his signature pose. Bauman and Connecticut state House Majority Leader Christopher G. Donovan, D-Meriden, were unveiling proposed legislation to protect the rights of performers and consumers. The "Truth In Music" bill would restrict bogus musical or singing groups from capitalizing on the names of recognizable bands.

AP Associated Press

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HARTFORD, Conn. - Doo-wop and rock 'n roll legends are asking lawmakers across the country to stop performances by some not-so-great pretenders.

There are hundreds of bands touring the country these days claiming to be The Platters, the Drifters, the Coasters or some other group from the '50s and '60s, according to the Vocal Group Hall of Fame in Sharon, Pa.

Most of them have no ties to the original artists.

"They undercut the legacy of those artists by pretending to be them," said Jon "Bowzer" Bauman, former member of the oldies band Sha Na Na and head of the hall's Truth in Music Committee.

"Almost worst of all is the way in which they steal the applause from the great veterans and pioneers that crafted rock 'n' roll music back in the 50s and early 60s," he said.

The Hall of Fame is working with numerous states to pass "Truth in Music" legislation. It would allow state attorneys general to stop an impostor band performance with an injunction and seek civil penalties of up to \$15,000 against impostor bands and those who promote them.

Earlier this week, Pennsylvania's governor signed a bill into law. South Carolina and North Dakota now have comparable laws on the books. Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Illinois, California, Florida, Michigan, Ohio, Nevada and Missouri are debating the issue or are expected to take it up soon.

To be considered bona fide under the legislation, a band must include at least one member of the original recording group. Tribute bands would not be affected.

Knockoffs hurt original artists

Carl Gardner, 77, the last surviving member of The Coasters, said he hopes all 50 states pass such laws and he can get his livelihood back.

"If they can get every state in the union to sign these papers, they'll never be able to work again and I'll be able to get all my jobs back," said Gardner, a member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. "They've cut into my business awfully bad and everybody who is affiliated, it hurts everybody."

Gardner, who is semiretired, said he typically charges \$10,000 a gig. He said the phony Coasters charge only \$1,000 and often perform badly — which he said tarnishes his reputation.

Maxine Porter, longtime manager for Bill Pinkney, the last surviving original member of The Drifters, estimates Pinkney has spent tens of thousands of dollars trying to fight the impostors. But, she said, every time one is shut down, another one pops onto the scene.

She also said the knockoffs have hurt Pinkney's earning potential. The 80-year-old member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame still performs.

Mary Wilson, an original member of the Supremes, said she knows of some original acts that can't get hired in Las Vegas. The venues would rather hire the knockoff bands because they're less expensive, she said.

"They're taking our history but they don't have our DNA," she said. "It really is a form of identity theft. It really is."

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