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Fairfield studio nurtures rising 'stars'

By **BRUCE HARING**

It's not quite Schwab's drugstore, where legend has it movie stars were discovered sipping sodas, but S.T.A.R.S. rehearsal studios in Fairfield has lately served that purpose for the state's music community. Through showcases held at the studio, four New Jersey acts have signed national contracts with major record labels.

"A lot of contracts are made through us, in various ways, shapes and forms," said Stephen Tarkanish, the owner of Steve Tarkanish Artist Rehearsal Studios, a part of the Broccoli Rabe Entertainment Complex.

Besides serving as the rehearsal and audition site for various bands in search of a deal, S.T.A.R.S. has also sponsored major showcases and talent contests to spotlight local talent. The results speak volumes: Four acts showcasing through S.T.A.R.S. have won recording contracts in the last three years, including Bill Phillips of Piscataway; Glen Burtnick of North Brunswick; Soraya, a band from Bergen County; and most recently Omega Force, a Paterson rap group that just signed to Polygram.

Phillips, set to work on his debut album for MCA Records, was discovered by Tarkanish several years ago at a Halloween costume party held at the now-defunct Metro, a teen disco in North Brunswick.

Wearing a Prince outfit, Phillips' charisma struck Tarkanish as being something special. Taking the high school student under his wing, the studio head arranged a special showcase. Phillips, a multi-instrumentalist and vocalist, quickly justified the faith and won his deal with the giant label. His first album is expected sometime this fall.

Soraya scored its record deal in a more conventional way. The club veterans put together a set and rehearsed at the studio before auditioning for record company executives. The band endured the withering pressure of a one-shot showcase at S.T.A.R.S., winning a contract with a command performance in front of Polygram Records president Dick Wingate. The band is now planning its Polygram debut.

Burtnick, a club regular in the state, also auditioned for label execs inside the S.T.A.R.S. confines. The dark-haired guitarist has recorded two albums for A&M records and is now touring locally.

Such big-league stars as Southside Johnny and the Jukes, Joe Lynn Turner, Phoebe Snow, Prophet, The Hubcaps horn section (now touring with Springsteen), Stewart Copeland of the Police and Renaissance singer Annie Haslam have also availed themselves of the studio in recent times, Tarkanish said.

But there is one big fish that got away from the studio's influence. Some might say it's the equivalent of missing Moby Dick.

"Jon Bon Jovi wanted to rehearse here when he first got his deal, but he wanted free time," Tarkanish said. "I couldn't afford to give it to him."

Seven million albums later . . .



Jon Bon Jovi
The one who got away