

'There are no limits'

BY STEPHANIE PORTER

The Express

Lyle Drake, never a musician or performer, has made a living in the music business.

He started stacking records as a teenager and moved up through the ranks and around the country, eventually making it to senior vice-president of ARS records.

Then, one day it was time to move home.

"It just stopped being fun," he shrugs, sitting back in his office on Church Hill.

"I was 42 and had to figure out what it was I wanted to do."

He slipped away from music for about six months.

But it wasn't long before Drake was working part-time as a Warner Music representative in Newfoundland — a job he still keeps.

Then, in 1998, he and his wife began Avondale (then Avalon) Music.

Avondale Music's catalogue includes a long list of compilation CDs, the popular *Homebrew* series and releases by The Celtic Connection, Shanneyganock and the Government Rams, among others.

Drake loves what he does, that's obvious. But it's very much a business. CDs are referred to as "packages." Most CDs in his collection have black dots by certain song titles — tunes he hopes to draw from when designing compilations in the future.

Avondale Music has just released *A Christmas Wish 2*, a recording of new and classic Christmas songs by local artists, including The Punters, Dave Panting, Joy Norman and RASA.

Given that the first in the series sold 20,000 copies, Drake has no doubt this one will do well.

Tell me about the beginnings of Avondale Music.

In 1998, when we originally started, it was to produce one CD. It was just a side project, a compilation CD designed for conventions, basically to showcase different artists in Newfoundland. That went so well we decided, well, we have different opportunities.

We used to produce the albums here and distribute through a com-



Stephanie Porter/The Express

Lyle Drake in front of his CD collection at the Avondale Music office.

pany in Halifax. Now we do all of it, right from the idea, right to marketing and getting them in stores.

We mostly produce compilations, but also full artist packages

Is that the direction you're moving in, taking on new artists?

We'll do both, we won't move away from one for another because (the compilations are) a successful formula. But when we see the opportunity with a band we like, we'll go that route. We happen to like Shanney and what they do. We're not out to sign everyone and their dog. We'll keep it small and fairly controlled.

Do you contact the artists about taking part in a compilation?

Generally. You know, I like Rasa so I go to Rasa. I knew they put out *Coventry Carol* last year as a

openmic

With Lyle Drake

Christmas single. And I said 'What's your plans for that?' And they said, 'Well, we're never going to do a Christmas record.' And I said, 'I'm doing a Christmas record'... so I said I'd license it from them.

We've had very little problems with people doing things for us. We treat people well. We've been dealing with artists for five years and, every quarter, when it's time to pay them their money, we pay them their money.

When did you start in the music business?

I started in 1969, picking records in a warehouse. I worked right up through the system. Soon I was running a branch. After 23-and-a-half years, when I left there, I was the senior vice-president. We just finally said, 'It's time to go home.' So we moved back here, and set up a sales agency. For about six months, I was out of the music thing. Then I got right back in.

What is it that keeps you in music?

It's a great business, though I don't think my mother thinks I've got a real job yet. Music is a great love of mine, but I don't play music. I don't sing. I couldn't tell you what chord they're playing.

But I have a different gift. I can look at it from the point of view of what would the consumer like, and maybe put all the things in place to

promote and market and sell. I do listen to music constantly.

What does the future hold for Avondale Music?

I'm going to keep with what I do. I'm not going to get up tomorrow and sign a hip-hop band. That's not what I know. I know the Newfoundland/Celtic genre of music. It's still my forte. I don't intend to get aside from that.

Every year we do a new *Home-*

brew/Downhomer project. If there are bands we like, we'll bring them in the studio and record them.

We're as big as we want to be, but you've always got to have new product. I've always got at least 30 projects on the go, whether they're an idea in my head or something more. I'd like to get into music publishing at some time. There are no limits. It's just a matter of what you can think and then making it happen.



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**2
Sitting
Times**

New Year's Eve Menu

**4
Course
Meal**

- Soup** Tomato Beef Vegetable or Corn Chowder.
- Appetizer** Beef Kabobs or Smoked Salmon Salad or Grilled Vegetable Bruschetta.
- Entree** Slow Roasted Prime Rib Dinner or Stuffed Salmon with Cream Cheese and Baby Shrimp in Saffron Dill Sauce or Cornish Hen Stuffed with Savory and Partridgeberry Dressing.
- Dessert** Partridgeberry Pudding with White Chocolate Butter Rum Sauce or Boiled Raisin Cake with Maple Rum Sauce or Ice Cream Crepes.

6:00 p.m. Sitting \$50 ea.

9:30 p.m. Sitting \$60 ea.

9:30 p.m. sitting will be breaking at 11:30 for the fireworks. Return after the fireworks for dessert, tea, coffee and liqueurs. Those who wish to stay may do so.