

## THEATER

# Musical recalls '40s LA record producer

By Richard Guzman

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When Andy Cooper was first approached to write the music and lyrics for a musical about 1940s record label owner and music producer John Dolphin, the idea of modernizing the story with a hip-hop score floated around.

It would have been a natural fit for the Long Beach native since he is a founding member of the hip-hop group Ugly Duckling, a trio that formed in 1993 and is preparing to embark on a European tour later this month.

But Cooper didn't want to go that route for the musical.

"We talked about it, but it didn't make any sense to me and I started explaining how I had a real passion for rhythm and blues music," Cooper said. "I wrote some songs and they saw that I could compose beyond hip-hop stuff."

He wanted to make music that would be true to the era of the late 1940s and '50s, around the time Dolphin opened his famous Dolphin's of Hollywood record store at the edge of South Central Los Angeles and then went on to record R&B, blues, jazz, rock and western music on a series of labels.

Cooper's music defines "Recorded in Hollywood," premiering at the Lillian Theatre in Hollywood on Saturday, with a run through May 17.

The show is based on the biography "Recorded in Hollywood: The John Dolphin Story," written by his grandson Jamelle Dolphin, with a book by Matt Donnelly and Jamelle Dolphin and musical direction by Stephan Terry.

"It's a journey through being this businessman who is all about dollars and cents to actu-



PHOTO BY MARK SAVAGE

Andy Cooper of Long Beach, a member of hip-hop group Ugly Duckling, wrote 16 songs for "Recorded in Hollywood," a new musical based on the life of Los Angeles businessman, record label owner and music producer John Dolphin.

ally being affected by how music can cross all color boundaries and color lines and prejudices and how it united so many people," said Denise Dowse, a four-time NAACP Theatre Award best director recipient, who is directing the musical.

Dolphin's record store stayed open 24 hours as popular DJs of the time, including Long Beach native Dick "Huggy Boy" Hugg, spun records and broadcast throughout the night from the front window.

Recording artists signed autographs and sat in for live on-air interviews at the shop.

"Huggy Boy was hard to define, but he was a real cool cat," said Nic Olsen, who portrays Huggy Boy in the show. "The (show's) music is awesome. It's empowering music. Every song has a little different flavor to it, but it all captures that oldies flavor but puts a little bit of a modern take on it."

The show will feature a 19-member cast and a live band performing 16 original songs written by Cooper.

The original music will be accompanied by covers of hit songs first played by Dolphin in his store,

such as "Earth Angel" by the Penguins, "You Send Me" by Sam Cooke and "Wheel of Fortune" by the Hollywood Flames.

"Andy Cooper has done a wonderful job writing original music and Stephan Terry, the musical director, is bringing the magic of the music to life," director Dowse said. "So I think a lot of this story is told through script but also told through the songs."

To compose the original music, Cooper immersed himself in the music of the era to take the audience on a journey through the

## RECORDED IN HOLLYWOOD

**When:** Preview 8 tonight. Opens 8 p.m. Saturday and continues 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 3 p.m. Sunday through May 17.

**Where:** Lillian Theatre, 1076 Lillian Way, Hollywood.

**Tickets:** \$30.

**Information:** 323-960-4443, [www.recordedinhollywood.com](http://www.recordedinhollywood.com).

transition from jazz, big band and swing into rhythm and blues, rock and rockabilly, along with a few romantic songs.

"I just really tried to be true to the period, but also, you know, put a few chords here and there," he said.

Cooper, a graduate of Long Beach Poly High School, whose other famous alums include hip-hop star Snoop Dogg and actress Cameron Diaz, founded Ugly Duckling in 1993 with musical partners Young Einstein and Dizzy Dustin.

The hip-hop trio, which is preparing for its upcoming European tour with a one-night show at DiPiazza's in Long Beach on April 18, mixes old-school hip-hop, funk, soul, and jazz.

"Growing up in Long Beach you were exposed to every kind of music and style and approach and attitude," he said. "You were exposed to every different type of rhythm and musical sensibility and that's an extremely valuable thing for a composer."

Cooper also sees a lot of similarities between the music of Dolphin's era and hip-hop.

"I think the rhythms of that era and that time really are a precursor to hip-hop," he said. "Early rhythm and blues music is really street, is really rhythmic and really music of the people."