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circular



The Remaking of Labelle



The Making of a Manager and the Remaking of Labelle

Vicki Wickham, who describes herself in the following piece as "a straight, suburban English bird," found herself a couple of years ago faced with the challenge of remaking, producing and managing Patti LaBelle, Sarah Dash and Nona Hendryx, who had spent nearly a decade as Patti LaBelle and the Blue Belles.

She transported them to England, linked them up with Track Records (home of the Who) there and set about recording, with Kit Lambert, a ground-breaker of an album, Labelle, released in the United States on Warner Bros. last August.

Ground too continues to crunch under the trio's newest LP, Moon Shadow, just released by WB, which Circular could think of no better way to celebrate than by asking Vicki to write about the evolution of herself and Labelle during the past couple of years.

Her piece, laced by a healthy amount of managerial hyperbole, follows.

I always thought being a manager meant you had to be Jewish, fat and old, in that order. Thank heavens for Andrew Oldham and Kit Lambert, who blew this image. I realized it could happen to anyone. I had also thought that it was an "office job"—that you "managed" from a desk and a phone. Rubbish.

"Managing" a group means having a lot of front, a lot of nerve, a gift of gab, a heap of energy and enthusiasm and being willing to do anything at any time (if you are able to do more than one thing at a time you get bonus points).

With Labelle, anything that they've left too late to do or anything

that costs money, it's "Don't worry, Vicki can do it." And because of the circumstances I usually have to. Anything from being a chauffeur, a roadie, a sound-man, a lyricist, a photographer, a designer, a hair-dresser, booking agent, accountant, mother or friend. The only thing they know better than to ask me to do is sing.

It's totally incongruous for a straight, suburban English bird brought up on Gilbert and Sullivan to be working with a super funky, dynamite black girls' group in New York. We're none of us too sure how it came about, except that I have known Patti, Sarah and Nona since 1964, when they were Patti LaBelle and The Bluebelles and I was producing a TV show in England, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, on which they appeared.

Over the years we remained friends, kept in touch and from time to time we talked about me producing their records. Nothing came of it and nobody took it too seriously.

But . . . one day while we were sitting eating a Chinese meal they told me they were at last out of their rag-trade, car-dealer contracts for management, and the recording agreement was up too. I immediately said, "Forget the management, but I'll work out the recording." "Yeah . . ." they all said, and went back to their Wonton soup!

I don't know who was the most surprised when I re-appeared a couple of days later with preposterous plans for both recording and management. A few weeks later I whisked them off to England and a few months later brought them back as Labelle.

The change was enormous. In one blow Labelle swept away forever the conventional "three girl group" image and established a whole new direction for black girls in rock. Here were three dynamite girls, all with good lead voices, with good old gospel backgrounds, hav-

ing sung their way through 10 years of other people's hits and standards, suddenly singing out and out contemporary rock, but still retaining all their blackness and individuality. It was outrageous.

Add to this Sarah and Nona's writing, Pat's incredible voice and range and an over-all sensational and exciting stage-act and you have to invent a new category to accommodate them. Labelle became pioneers and the problems began.

Despite the name change they had to live down the Bluebelles' past. I had turned up just in time to save them from the Rock Revival/Oldie but Goodie shows, but still had to cope with the "just let them

"No Voice Can Do That"

Times have changed and the corny ballads are out, but Patti's changed too and not only is she working her magic with contemporary material but her vocal range, without losing any of the chilling peaks, has extended further into the lower octaves to give the sudden soarings that much more effect. More than once I've gotten up to cast a distrustful glance at the speed selector on my turntable, so uncanny is her ability to destroy normal conceptions of what voices should sound like. My greatest appreciation for Patti's talents came while listening to the version of "I Sold My Heart to the Junkman" on the Trip album (a reissue of old sides), which I was prepared to swear on my sanity had been speeded up by mistake from the original. "No voice can do that!" I declared, unaware at the time that this version was not the original, having been taken from a "Live at the Apollo" album. Having gone so far as to slow the turntable with my finger to produce a "normal" sound, I came away from the encounter with a vastly increased respect for Miss LaBelle.

—Greg Shaw

do a couple of the oldies" bit.

Everyone likes to be able to pin labels on acts, to say, "they're like so and so," and America already has three black girls who spell "Supremes," which is nice and respectable and lady-like and means a career of playing the Copa and Vegas. And they are just not ready for the raw strength of Labelle, who come out singing "I like it much better in the morning" and, on "Four Women," "I'll kill the first mother I see." That's too tough and too dangerous. Too tough for girls and too dangerous for anyone black to sing lyrics like that.

Well, here comes the manager to say "bullshit" to all that. I don't own a dress, so I could never get in to see my act at a supper club, and I



think those places are death. Labelle are far too good for anyone to eat their way through their act, and I never want them to have to play to middle-aged expense accounts.

I want Labelle to have something to say and to be able to say it. And, if only we can find a sound-system that can cope with five hard-driving back-up musicians and the three loudest, strongest and highest voices in the business, Labelle will be heard.

Why *Circular* Never Does Interviews, Especially Not with Sparks

For quite a long time, *Circular* has shied away from interviews. The reasons behind the policy are fourfold. Firstly, question and answer sessions are often long, drawn-out affairs that don't lend themselves to reproduction in a small publication. Secondly, a conversation with an entire rock and roll group is usually characterized by all the members talking at once, resulting in nobody remembering what the question was. Thirdly, putting on interviews is a national pastime quickly overtaking both football and bar-hopping. The trend can be traced back to 1964, when John Lennon was asked "How do you find America?" and he replied "Turn left at Greenland." And fourthly (but not leastly), an interview can often be condensed into a real article wherein the interviewer includes only the most relevant information.

In a recent lapse of judgment, *Circular* agreed to an interview with a group named Sparks, formerly Halfnelson. This month Bears-ville has re-released the *Halfnelson* LP (first issued last January) as *Sparks*—a move spurred by Sparks' new manager, the dapper Roy Silver, who felt that *Halfnelson* had not gotten enough exposure the first time around.

The group still consists of two sets of brothers and drummer Harley Feinstein, who is unrelated (except by musical bonds) to either of the other four. Ron Mael writes many of the band's songs and plays the keyboards. His brother, Russell, also writes, when he's not lead singing. Guitarist Earle Mankey also takes part in this interview, but his

brother, Jim, preferred to remain silent—probably because he was preoccupied with new bass lines. The energetic and enigmatic "Wonder Girl" has recently been released as the first single from *Sparks*.

Why the name change?

RON: We wanted to have a more electric name. That's what it said in *Circular*. We learn everything we know from *Circular*. It said we used to be under the *soubriquet* of Halfnelson. Now we're under the *soubriquet* of Sparks.

RUS: You might be interested to know that we've recorded one song that's already been banned in Germany. It's called "The Girl from Germany." I guess they think it's an anti-German song.

RON: It's also been banned because it's a *pro-German* song.

RUS: The Germans, they are a funny people, huh?

Is a major tour in the offing?

RUS: Touring Germany was our major project for the last two years. Roy Silver set up that whole thing.

So they really go for you in Europe?

RON: Much more than in the U.S.

RUS: They haven't even heard of us in the U.S.

Seriously, though, what does the immediate future hold for Sparks?

RON: We're recording a new album.

RUS: A little departure from the past.

RON: More of the live sound that we picked up touring. We were more of a studio-type sound. Now it's going to be more *killer* music.

RUS: The new album is scheduled for September release.

Are you an art-conscious group?

RUS: Art for art's sake.

RON: It's purely a moneymaking proposition. And that's where we are today. We sold out a long time ago.

("The Girl from Germany" came

blasting out through two huge speakers in the elegant CMA office. Some three minutes later, the tune came to a strategically abrupt ending.)

Would you guess that it was banned because of the allusion to Hitler?

RON: The word "girl" is a very touchy subject with the German people. Somebody suggested that it would be a natural to release the song in Germany, to see what would happen. We didn't expect that kind of reaction.

HAR: We were offended.

RUS: *They* were offended.

RON: Our next song is going to be "The Girl from Argentina."

What influences has your group absorbed?

RON: Ask us about Olga Connaly.

O.K., what about Olga Connaly? (Might as well ask).

RON: She's a big influence on us.

RUS: O.K. Let's get this matter out in the open. Lookee here little fella! O.K. You got your soul singers, right? Guys who say "good God" in songs. You got folk music. (*group sings*) *Michael row the boat ashore* . . . You got that kind of people. You got jazz. Do do do do do. And you got classical (*Earle sings two bars, classical-like*). And don't forget country & western. Yaw yaw yaw. Then you got guys who aren't soulful. There's three of 'em in the world—David Bowie, the Kinks and us.

RON: We pride ourselves in being un-soulful.

RUS: It's been an English tradition.

Then why aren't you an English group?

RUS: The only two things stopping us are genetics and \$200 for the flight over. Our parents are an English group. They're a folk act. That's true. Mr. and Mrs. Oscar "Rogie" Rogensen. Is it alright to plug mom and pop? (*The group belly laughed thinly. Some kind of inside joke.*)

What's your next album called?

RUS: *A Woofer in Tweeter's Clothing.*

RON: There have been varied reactions to our music. Some think it's weird and some thing it's bubblegum.

RUS: A Houston review of us said we were an extension of the Andy Warhol Velvet Underground thing. Another review said we were exactly the Mothers of Invention, but not carried far enough. Everybody sees something different.

RON: People are finally becoming attracted to us for our curly hair.

RUS: It's one of the big factors in our

success. (*Russell primps himself.*)

EAR: When we were in Houston, we had six rooms at the Holiday Inn along the top floor. Coming in from the swimming pool, we came back to our rooms and plugged in our hairdryers. There was a flash of lightning. We had a gig in an hour, but there we were, standing in the dark with our hairdryers.

RON: Talk about problems!

RUS: If people only knew how serious we are. People think we're a joke or a put-on.

RON: The joke is on the people who bought the *Halfnelson* album and are going to buy the *Sparks* album too.



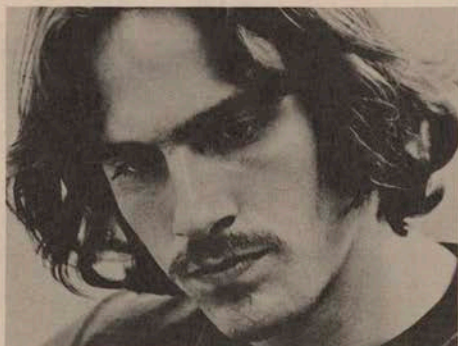
Items

Valuable Edition

★ Did any alert readers notice anything wrong with last week's *Circular*? Those who spotted the mistake (it was done deliberately, of course) should quickly realize that Vol. 4 Number 28 has immense value as a collectors' item, like those stamps with the airplane flying upside down in them. Just checking to see if you're paying attention.

All Work and All Play

★ Summering in the studio is James Taylor, who's working with producer/manager Peter Asher in hopes of a new album. Seldom-



seen-James took enough time out recently to guest on friend David Steinberg's summer TV show with friend Carly Simon, bringing to four his total number of public appearances this year.

The Mystery of History

★ Eight years ago this month WB made its bid for the popular market with the following LPs: *Charge!* by the Routers, *Terry Thomas Discovers America*, *Autumn Nocturne* by Buddy Cole, *Peter, Paul & Mary in Concert* and *The Very Best of the Everly Brothers*.

Get Your Tapes Here

★ Devious are the deals resulting from the collision and/or collusion of large record companies. Among the latest is the arrangement

whereby Warner Bros. has domestic tape rights to the *Goodbye to the Fillmore* album, which features three albums' worth of anyone you ever heard of, just about. A certain large other waxery has disc rights to the set, but they seem hell-bent on not mentioning who has tape rights in their advertising so *Circ* won't deign to give them free publicity. By the way, tape purchasers get a card telling them how to send in for a free Commemorative Fillmore Booklet, so they can be just as complete as their record-buying brethren.

Gilded Alice

★ Alice Cooper now has a second album to hang alongside his olden-golden *Killer* platter. *School's Out* was just certified as a million-dollar seller by the ominous RIAA, who told Warner Bros. to go ahead and plate it.

Singular Feat

★ Expected soon from Little Feat is a two-sided single whose creation was begun last May but which is thus far unfinished. Titles are "Dixie Chicken" and "Juliette."

Dots and Dashes

★ The Weekly Singles Meeting (where all this information comes from) was only postponed three times last week—and when held not one of the eight men and three women present could repair the stereo system after it broke down two-thirds of the way through the singles. They snuck in a brand new 45 by Rod McKuen, which review may or may not make it into this issue depending on the alacrity and sobriety of *Circular's* typesetters. Another bit of hot news from the cold conference room is that Van Morrison's new album and single are being rushed out this week for sure, and he's already getting play on KRLA and KDAY in LA and KFRC in San Francisco . . .

There's a third single being rushed out this week: "Listen to the Music" by the Doobie Brothers—it was response from the field, they say, and it's getting good aerexposure on KRLA, KDAY (LA), WRKO (Boston), WRNO, WIXO and WVEC (New Orleans) and WBBQ (Atlanta) . . .

It was announced through blue lips and clattering teeth (there's an air conditioning problem in the conference room: if the temperature in the building is more or less OK, the conference room is freezing; if the conference room is heated, God knows what would happen to

the rest of the building) that Miami will be the target of an extensive campaign to popularize Randy Newman. Does this have anything to do with Political Science?

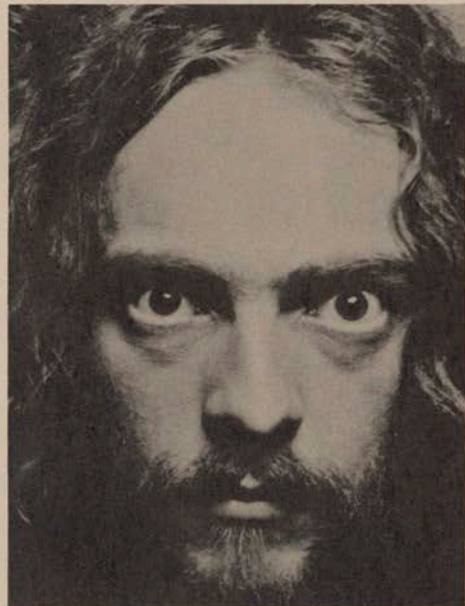
Alice Cooper, ah Alice! "School's Out" is #1 in Detroit and Atlanta, #2 in Boston and Pittsburgh, #21 at WABC in NY and #13 withabullet in *Record World*, #11 withastar in *Cash Box* and #10 withabullet in *Billboard*. **Tower of Power's** single, "You're Still a Young Man," is tabulated #30 withabullet in the Soul Charts of *Billboard* this week—it's Top 5 in Seattle, San Francisco, Philadelphia and Boston and Top 20 on KHJ (LA), WTIX (New Orleans), KLIF (Dallas) and CKLW (Denver) . . .

Arthur Conley's "Rita" was added to WVON in Chicago this week . . . The new release has been out for just about a week now and already three LPs are stretching out their little hands and opening up their sticky little eyes: *Life, Love and Faith* by Allen Toussaint (from which a single will be rushed next week), *Captain Beyond* (who are currently touring and played the Hollywood Bowl with Alice July 23) and *Toulouse Street* by the Doobie Brothers . . .

Carol Hart brought Ted Cohen from Cincinnati 'round so he'd be sure to get his name in *Circular*. So there.

Brick of Gold

★ In lieu of the standard gold-plated disc award for a million-dollar album, artist relator Russ Shaw had six bricks sprayed gold for presentation to Jethro Tull at their sold-out Honolulu International Center concert. Russ, nervous about luggage searches and unbelievable



explanations, sent the individually giftwrapped bricks (40 lbs. worth) air freight to Hawaii, where he picked them up for the presentation to the group and manager Terry Ellis. The gold records will come later.

Birthday Ballyhoo

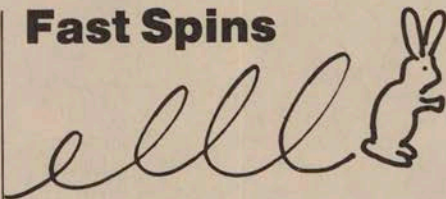
★ This week's celebrations include the following musical notables: Mick Jagger (July 26), George Bernard Shaw (July 27), Rudy Vallee (July 28), Paul Anka (July 30) and Edd Byrnes (July 30).

Inspirational Verse

The cats don't bug him
'Cause they know better
'Cause he's a mean motor-scooter
And a bad go-getter

— Hollywood Argyles
"Alley Oop"

Fast Spins



Listen to the Music

The Doobie Brothers
WB 7619

A real high-steppin' strutter from the newly remodeled Doobie Brothers. The Cinderella band from San Jose (they know the way) is a quintet now. Two of them play drums and rhythm runs riot in "Listen to the Music," which also boasts some definitive acoustic rhythm guitar. On top of all that, it has the kind of chorus that keeps recycling in the brain long after stylus and groove have parted. The 3:26 single also contains the mellow title song from the Doobies' second WB album, *Toulouse Street* (is that a pun or is that a pun?). However, you have to buy the album in order to get that immortal photo of the Doobies in cheesecake, with friends (plus the extended 4:44 cut of "Listen to the Music").

The Time to Sing My Song

Rod McKuen
WB 7620

"I've burned all my bridges/Drained all my moats/And I can set out sailing for the top," sings Rod McKuen in this happily reflective new ditty from his August-bound *Odyssey* album. The charred bridges and empty moats shouldn't impede the top-bound course of this sailer, replete as it is with a catchy refrain and exemplary backing from the Stanyan Strings. Rod sings it as he wrote it (with Michel Fugain), and tops the dual feats by producing it. The song clocks in at 3:21, with a 10-second instrumental intro. Backside of the single is the aptly-described "The Minute-Thirty-Second Waltz," an instrumental spotlighting the Westminster Symphony Orchestra, also a preview of McKuen's next LP.

Cabbage Alley

The Meters
REP 1106

New Orleans is the town that taught America how to dance. Even before the Crescent City gave birth to the jazz rhythms that revolutionized American pop music after World War I, New Orleans' Congo Square was world-famous for its weekly rave-ups. Unfortunately, the phonograph wasn't around to let us hear what they danced to in 1872. But just as the teenagers of 1920 strutted their stuff to the Original Dixieland Jass Band, their children learned to shake ass to the New Orleans sounds of the early rock era. In 1972 the Meters are incontestably New Orleans' Number One band, and the city's tradition of motion music couldn't be in better hands. Cabbage Alley, a 200-foot street that has inherited Congo Square's role in the scheme of things, has inspired this merry melange of sounds ancient and modern just in time for the grandchildren.

Brown Sugar

Eric Quincy Tate
CPR 0010

A tough Texas quartet that now makes its home in Atlanta, Eric Quincy Tate is a solid concert and club favorite throughout the South, where they know what blues bands ought to sound like. Over the last four years EQT has worked its way steadily upward through the go-go grind, and now the group's second album (first for Capricorn) is spreading the word world-wide. Their sensuous shuffle workout on "Brown Sugar" (the John Mayall tune, not the Jagger-Richard) is the colorful curtain-raiser for the aforementioned Capricorn album, *Drinking Man's Friend*. Now that Capricorn has distilled the 4:51 album cut down to jukebox-size 2:50, you should soon be able to hear Eric Quincy Tate just about everywhere, even in the places where (thankfully) they don't have to play live anymore.

Dr. Demento

Answer for Two Weeks Ago

While many physical characteristics of discs—size, speed of rotation, groove formation, material, thickness and so on—have changed considerably since the introduction of discs before the turn of the century, one aspect has not. The nature of that constant was the two weeks ago contest question. Here goes. Since the Phonographic Year 1, all disc records have

rotated

clockwise.



Question for Next Week

Jackie Wilson said/it was "Reet Petite,"
Can I love you darling/knock me off my feet ... —Van Morrison

Van's tribute to one of the world's first and finest soul singers inspires us to a tribute of our own, in the form of an exercise in Jackiewilsonianology. You can win yourself a copy

of *St. Dominic's Preview* (or any other WB/Reprise single catalog album) by being the first to brighten Burbank with your correct answers to the following three-decker:

- 1) Before stepping out as a soloist, Jackie made his voice a household sound as lead singer for what group? (Hint: he replaced the late Clyde McPhatter).
- 2) "Reet Petite" was Jackie's first hit record as a soloist. What year was it released?
- 3) Though Jackie Wilson may have said it, some other folks wrote

it. One of the co-writers of "Reet Petite" (and many other early Wilsonhits) is today a renowned record company executive. Identify him.

The winner of Dr. Demento's three-weeks-ago question (Q: Name four artists and groups still connected with 1950s rock 'n' roll? A: Seals & Crofts, Bob Weir, Daddy Cool and the Youngbloods) is Jack Woker of Allston, Mass., who requested *Waka/Jawaka* by Frank Zappa.

Honorable mention, but no album, to Dave Hill of Anoka, Minn.

Each week the good doctor poses a music lore question whose answer is the focus of his subsequent column. The earliest reply to his question (mailed to Dr. Demento, c/o *Circular*, Warner Bros. Records, 4000 Warner Blvd., Burbank, Calif. 91505) wins any single Warner/Reprise catalog album (please specify choice). Answers will be geographically pro-rated on the basis of two days per time zone, ties will be judged on the basis of penmanship, wit and lucidity.

Top Ten

1. Alice Cooper/*School's Out* (BS/M5/M8 2623)
2. Jethro Tull/*Thick as a Brick* (MS/M5/M8 2072)
3. Bob Weir/*Ace* (BS/M5/M8 2627)
4. Neil Young/*Harvest* (MS/M5/M8 2032)
5. Tower of Power/*Bump City* (BS/M5/M8 2616)
6. Allman Bros. Band/*Eat a Peach* (2CP/J5/J8 0102)
7. *Captain Beyond* (CP/M5/M8 0105)
8. *America* (BS/M5/M8 2576)
9. Randy Newman/*Sail Away* (MS/M5/M8 2064)
10. Arlo Guthrie/*Hobo's Lullaby* (MS/M5/M8 2060)

Artist Itineraries

California

Allman Brothers Band
8/5, Sports Arena, San Diego
8/6, Hollywood Bowl, Hollywood

The Phlorescent Leech & Eddie (Howard Kaylan-Mark Volman)
8/5, Sports Arena, San Diego
8/6, Hollywood Bowl, Hollywood

Connecticut

Alice Cooper
8/4, Dillon Stadium, Hartford

Georgia

Kindred
8/3, Municipal Auditorium, Atlanta
8/4, Coliseum, Macon

Illinois

John Baldry
8/2, Aurora Downs, Aurora

Massachusetts

Captain Beyond
7/31, Boston Commons, Boston

Mississippi

Wet Willie
7/31-8/9, Johnny's Smoke House, Pascagoula

Missouri

Herbie Hancock
8/1-5, Landmark Restaurant, Union Station, Kansas City

Nevada

Dionne Warwick
7/19-8/1, Riviera Hotel, Las Vegas

New Jersey

Malo
8/6, Convention Center, Wildwood

New York

John Baldry
8/5, Academy of Music, New York City

Labelle
8/5, Continental Baths, New York City

Kindred
8/6, War Memorial Auditorium, Buffalo

Ohio

Alice Cooper
8/5, Akron Rubber Bowl, Akron
8/6, Cincinnati Gardens, Cincinnati

Pennsylvania

Martin Mull
8/3-6, Main Point, Bryn Mawr

Malo
8/5, Pitt Stadium, Pittsburgh

Canada

Black Sabbath
7/31, Toronto, Ontario