

Everything You Always Wanted to Know About a Record Store, But Were Too Busy Buying Records to Ask

by GORDON FLETCHER

I'll bet that a whole lot of you folks reading this figure that running a successful record store is about the easiest thing this side of breathing. Oh misconceptions!

"If they only knew but half the intricacies of the retail business," declared Solomon Penthaus as he gave me this assignment, "many would no doubt heap hosannahs on their local shoppe and its employees. Go forth, then, and endeavor to tell it like it is."

More because I relished the possibility of getting high in the Washington Monument than any other reason, I opted to scour our nation's capital for the subject of my discourse, settling rather haphazardly on Record and Tape, Ltd. as my victim. "How will they react when they learn their fate?" I asked myself as I walked in, but it turned out that I was the only one to be doing the learning on this day. Youthful owner John Olsson and his youthful staff played show-and-tell so well that I went away preferring employment at the nearby White House to rocking to the retailing boogie. Boy, the redoubtable Solomon sure showed all his wisdom on this one—running the retail end of this businesses is surely a bitch.

Olsson proved very helpful in providing heaps of background material early in the day—the mustachioed managerial marvel had had 15 years experience in running DC's top retail outlet (which will here remain nameless), and as fellow-Washingtonian George Allen is found of professing, such experience pays off.



Photo of two ladies too busy buying to ask.

I asked Olsson perhaps the most basic question of all—why had he cast his lot in the retail record business?

Customer Comfort and Convenience

"Well, I could give you the standard Horatio Alger line, but the real reason is that I wanted to get out on my own, and I felt that the rapidly-expanding record industry was certainly a place where a man could make his mark. It's probably the fastest-growing business in the country, y'know, and the most amazing thing about it seems to be the way it grows irregardless of the state of the economy. *Everybody* buys records and tapes, no matter what his age, so the potential market is always increasing. In fact the biggest

worry right now is being able to keep up with increasing demand."

"Just how does a body go about setting up his own retail operation?" I then asked Olsson.

"In some ways you go about it the same way you'd approach any kind of new retail operation," he answered. "The questions of financing have to be resolved first, then you have to work on the all-important mechanics of location. Experience really helped in our case—you'll notice that we're within four blocks of three other retail outlets yet we have no problem holding our own. No surprise, either, for we've managed to isolate our own clientele in a rapidly-growing area. All we have to do to keep it is to remain competitive price-wise and provide

plenty of the services that make the difference between an average and a great record store.

"The most important concept for you to grasp," Olsson continued, "is that of customer comfort and convenience. Everything we do here is designed so that shoppers will enjoy their stay. If folks enjoy being here it's that much easier for them to buy records. And with the way the music scene is now, what with so many different kinds of music going on—everybody's going to find something he likes sooner or later, pretty much guaranteeing that he'll be back for more."

Comfort and convenience aren't so easily provided. I found out—remember that the next time you

The Retail Report

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shop. The entire concept demands that every facet of the operation be mapped out with the customer in mind—often at the cost of short-cuts that might prove far more economical to the store in the short run. As with any business, space, or rather the lack of it, can be an annoying problem. You need all the space you can get to stock a really comprehensive inventory, but on the other hand such easily-overlooked niceties as wide, spacious aisles are a must if a customer is to feel at home. Who wants to leisurely browse in a place where he's squeezed like last week's sardines, anyway? No one, and without the impulse buying that accompanies such browsing a record store would be in sad financial shape.

I'd always wondered why record stores open at such ungodly hours as 9:00, 9:30 and 9:47 a.m.

"What music freak is ever up that early?" I'd asked myself, "I've known some who don't even go to bed 'til then." Well, my visit to Record and Tape enables me to testify that those early hours are in no way mere greed or lip service to the traditional 9-to-5 day. The paperwork surrounding a retail outlet is enormous—inventories, financial statements, record ordering and of course bill-paying are both exhaustive and time-consuming chores best performed in the day's wee hours, when the mind is supposedly at its freshest.

It also helps if such work is being done by people who know what they're doing, but folks like that are currently at a premium in any record store. Polite, knowledgeable (and once again, preferably experienced) sales

help is always in high demand.

"Schwann catalogues are great," says clerk Jeff Searle, "but the clerk who immediately knows what he's looking for and where to find it can save an immeasurable amount of time."

Don't Flash Smarts

Searle, who's put in over three years on the retail trail, seemed to epitomize the ideal clerk as I watched him deftly assist several less-than-intelligent customers, ever musically knowledgeable but without being obnoxious about it. "Too many times," he later told me, "customers have been embarrassed by clerks who talk over their heads, making them feel so musically unaware that some have even contemplated suicide. A customer so embarrassed just won't come back—it's that simple—so we just can't tolerate people who insist on flashing their musical smarts."

Perhaps the most fitting example of just how valuable an experienced, knowledgeable salesperson can be comes in the case of one T. P. "Wigwam" Paul, a recent arrival to the R&T staff at the time of my visit. A 10-year veteran of the retail wars, Paul managed to build up a substantial (actually, that's an *understatement*) clientele all his own at another establishment before internal politics led to his ouster. Record and Tape then offered him employment, and sure as shootin' Paul's "fan club" (as one TV commentator called it) followed him to his new location.

Such expertise is invaluable in cutting down on the time customers have to stand around idly—

which means a lot when a store is located in an area where many folks shop during their lunch hours. Also important to quick service is a lack of long lines at check-out counters.

"Long waits piss people off," clerk John Matthews informed me between rings on the number one register, "that's why so many people are going to be shooting at Halley's Comet come 1986."

Also vital to a successful retail operation is proper product merchandising. Few are the fortunate folks like yourself who get hipped to new releases via Warners' 9x9s—the average consumer has to find out what's new when it hits the racks. Thus records and tapes ("product," as they're so heartlessly referred to in the biz) must be displayed within easy eyesight of the public.

"It all gets back to that 'impulse buying' hit," says clerk Rusty Bogart. "People see something they like and instantaneously reach for it."

Surveys tend to bear out this phenomenon, showing that well over half the record-buying public walk into the shops with no concrete idea of what they're after. Observations at R&T seemed to prove it; many customers were fuzzy as to their preferences ("Got anything by Van Morrison" was a common rejoinder to the courteous "May I help you?"), while some people had come in to buy a record, deciding which one after surveying the choices.

Proper merchandising can go too far, though, and care must *always* be taken to prevent shoplifting. "If you let 'em, they'll steal you blind," I was told, and a recital of

some of the methods employed by culprits more than attested to their ingenuity and determination. There will always be the eternal turkey who'll slip an album or two under his windbreaker, but when you get clowns working in twos and threes to rip off 50 at a time, then you know that you're really up against something.

"The only solution," Olsson offered, "is to be eternally vigilant and look mean when you see somebody suspicious."

(I later found out that Olsson has an even more effective method. Seems as though on several occasions he's walked up to suspicious-looking characters and taken Polaroid shots of them to let them know he's got the goods should something "go wrong.")

Why the Price?

In-store airplay can be an important stimulus to retailing.

"Many a time," relates clerk Phyllis Nicholson, "a customer has stopped me to ask what he's listening to."

"We've sold so many records through airplay," says Olsson, "that we now make it a point to give extensive airplay to product with established wide appeal." As Nicholson so enigmatically put it—"from their ears to their rears, they're dancing in the aisles; they'll dance to the corner and buy it with smiles."

Then of course there's pricing. By now it's common knowledge that it only costs 50¢ or so to manufacture the average album (although *that's* sure subject to change with the vinyl shortage), so many of you have probably already asked yourselves "Say, how

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come all my favorite platters cost so much more than that in the stores?” The answer, of course, lies with the dratted middleman—by the time your faves reach your turntables or tape machines many sets of grubby little fingers have made grabs at your hard-earned bucks. Royalties, publishers—by the time the retail outlet buys product from the distributor that 50¢ has skyrocketed to a little over \$3 for records and \$4 and change for tapes.

“Once we add on for things like rent, salaries, utilities and all the other standard-type overhead,” said Searle, “we find that we have to sell records for much more than we’d like. But it’s the same way with everyone; to sell ‘em cheaper you’ve gotta scrimp one place or another, either on stock, or service . . . Remember, those wide, spacious aisles cost money too.”

Sales are an almost obligatory part of any retail operation, expected by the customers even though the stores seldom if ever get sale prices when *they* buy product, so the reduction in price comes out of the retailer’s profit. But if properly conducted a record and tape sale can work to the benefit of all involved. Jim Shields, whose classical expertise is often put to good use in plotting classical sale strategy, intimated that “a good sales finds the store making its profit on volume. The increase in volume generated by lower prices offsets the smaller percentage of profit per sale, so both the retailer and the customer go home happy.”

So effective has this psychology proven that almost all stores now make it a habit to sell their “hot”

new product at a special low price as long as volume sales seem guaranteed.

“You’ve got to remain competitive,” Olsson stresses, “and price still plays a heavy role in determining where people spend their music dollars.”

One thing that had always puzzled this writer was the nonsense about “\$5.98 list price” associated with most albums. Never in my born days had I bought, or even seen, an album listed at that high a price, so I was eager to find out what it meant.

“Nothing at all,” Bogart explained, “that’s just the *suggested* retail price the manufacturer assigns to releases. The actual retail price is entirely up to the retail outlet, and no retail outlet would be so foolish as to follow the manufacturer’s suggestions on pricing. After all, what do *they* know about selling records?”

Ordering Procedures

You’d probably think that once records are delivered to a store they go right out onto the racks, right? Nada chance. After they’ve been received there’s a complicated check-in process they must first go through. Hence the importance of the receiving clerk, the backroom wizard who’s actually the true star of the retail ballgame. Steve “Major” Minor performs that function at R&T, and listening to his bizarre incantations over tardy shipments turned out to be nearly as interesting as his description of his duties.

“Once the records arrive—” said he, “and we receive anywhere from one to 1,000 of them a day—I’ve got to count each item to check the invoice’s accuracy.

Otherwise we might be over billed fantastic amounts. Then comes the piece-by-piece sifting for special orders, which get preferential treatment. Then you’ve got to catalog the product into the store’s inventory. Then, and only then, can the product go out onto the floor, where it’s arranged by label and number.”

Once out on the floor it’s (hopefully) subjected to the clutches of mad hordes of insatiable music-maniacs, who, if plans go right, will buy it all up in a matter of an hour or two. It seldom works out that way, of course, but when it does it leads to a truly heartrending scenario. Oh how we all must know it well, for probably everybody has at some time rushed down to his local record store to find that his choice isn’t there. “Out of stock,” he’ll be told, then counseled to either come back in a few days or (if the boss isn’t within earshot) to bop up the street to a competitor. It’s disheartening not to get the record you want, but it’s just as disheartening to the retailer, who loses a lot of money by not having the product he needs.

It’s a most important facet of the biz to stay well-stocked at all times, but it turns out that some stores don’t have *any* set method for determining what and how much they order. A spot check of 10 stores in major East Coast markets showed that seven of them relied on either the salesman’s advice or on their own judgments tempered by the charts in trade publications. The potential pitfalls of these approaches are obvious—in the former case a store might fall prey to a sales-

man’s overzealous anticipation of a smash LP when there is in fact no practical justification for such enthusiasm, short of sales meeting hypola, of course.

Going by the charts doesn’t make it either, for the trades compile them from surveys of record stores, setting up a potential circular system which if extrapolated to its fullest extreme would result in an eternal Hot 100.

Keeping Track of Stock

Record and Tape Ltd. subscribes to the theory that there’s nothing better than people well-schooled in both various schools of music *and* their relative popularity retail-wise. Thus for original orders of new material the resident “specialist” in each field is asked for his predictions. The soul specialist would probably be one of the few people to immediately realize that Larry Graham used to be with Sly Stone and to order heavily in anticipation of the new smash. The rock specialist would realize that Slade has had a hard time cracking the US market and thus decide to hold down orders on their LPs despite the salesman’s insistence that they’re sure knockouts. In the end original ordering is a give-and-take operation between salesman and buyer, but a sharp, knowledgeable buyer puts the store (and ultimately the distributor, ‘cos they won’t have to spend precious time processing returns) at a distinct advantage. Once the records and tapes arrive in the store and have been duly checked in, the problem arises of keeping track of how much is left, and when and how much more should be ordered. Once again I found that some stores are sur-

Getting the Most for Your Record-Purchasing Dollar

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prisingly flippant about this—many merely filling their bins and waiting 'til inventory time to re-order. Record and Tape gets around this by employing the relatively recent "poly" system of stocking, a method that more or less developed itself in the New York City market during the 60s. In this scheme each release is assigned its own polyethylene bag (hence "poly") onto the back of which is affixed an inch-square sticker listing label & number, title, artist, classification (which browser the record will ultimately end up in) and the date of release. Thus Black Sabbath's latest would be labeled:

Warner Brothers BS 2695
Sabbath Bloody Sabbath

Black Sabbath
12/73

1111

A copy of the record is slipped into the poly which is then dropped in the bin for sale. Other copies of the record are stored in overstock. When the customer purchases the record the poly is removed, stashed momentarily and then refilled from overstock. Each sale is marked off on the adhesive sticker, and when stock runs low the poly is set aside for the salesman, who by comparing the acquisition date and product turnover has a ready-made indication of how the product is moving and can order appropriately.

Tapes are taken care of with a similar system. Eight-tracks are stored in large display containers with plexiglass windows complete with portals for handling the product. The holes are small enough, though, to prevent the tapes from being removed without a key. So all it takes is a small "control card" attached to each eight-



track to stay on top of its progress. Said card is but the first cousin of the sticker on the poly's back, so no further explanation should be necessary.

The Cassette Process

Cassettes for some reason or another, have got a whole 'nother system, one that Olsson proudly proclaims is "the first of its kind in the country." What it boils down to is this: after being checked in, cassette cases are then slit open with an X-acto blade. The cassette is removed, the box retaped so as to appear unopened except to the sharpest of inspectors, and off it goes into the cassette display racks.

The cassette itself, meanwhile, is placed in a clear cassette holder, onto which is affixed those familiar old stickers with the same old info. It's then filed in its own section in the front counter. The customer then brings the empty box to the register, where it's filled, resealed (with more tape) and sold.

The clear cassette holder is then treated like a poly for re-order purposes.

Yes, it does sound rather complicated the way I've explained it, but it does work in practice, which is I guess all the more reason to marvel at the wizards who make the system go.

Smartasses will see a potential snag in that system, but it's nipped in the bud for whenever there's more than one copy of a cassette in stock the slit copy is the last one sold.

With all that, store personnel should be able to tell at a glance how well-stocked they are in all configurations of an item, and *never* run short. Of course things seldom run so smoothly, accidents happen and all that, so stores (including R&T) do run out of product from time to time. After all, who could predict that a whole box of *Badfinger* would be warped, or that everybody in the city would come to this one store to get a

copy of *Chunky, Novi & Ernie*? In such cases it's customary for the clerk to offer to order the necessary items, or in supposedly rare cases to recommend another shop that will have it in stock.

Actually clerks recommend other stores a lot more often than rarely, but there is one important rule of thumb in the matter—never send the customer to a store with lower prices than yours.

Middlemen

Where do record stores get their product? Well, it can technically be from any of a number of sources. While at R&T I met Ronny Bollon, local salesman for the Warner-Elektra-Atlantic (WEA) distributing combine, who explained the linear progression involved in getting sounds from the studios to the stores.

"As you probably know, all the major record companies either have their own distribution arms or else hire independent distributors to get their product out on the racks. It's a sell-or-return deal all up and down the line, with a company, let's say Warners, for instance, selling records to the distributor (in this case WEA) who in turn adds his profit margin and markets the product to either one-stops or directly to retail outlets."

"What are one-stops?" was the obvious next question.

"One-stops are companies that buy from every distributor with the idea of dealing with retailers who'd prefer to only deal with one source of product. Hence their name. But there's a price for this service, of course, for the one-stop also adds his profit margin to the cost of the record, driving the price

Foghat Hits the Sauce

even higher . . ."

Bollon's job, like many other salesmen's, is part doctor, part houseboy and part company heavy.

"I pay weekly visits to all the stores ("accounts" say the hip salesmen) to make sure they're well-stocked with all our product. I order and re-order for the store, freeing valuable clerk-time for other tasks. I even do inventories myself to make sure that there are no slip-ups. Nothing's worse for us or a store than to be out of an item, especially a hot one."

Furthermore, Bollon arranges the allocation of distributor advertising money, coveted by all retail accounts.

"I also hip stores to new releases, write up overstocked items for return and just generally assist the stores in whatever ways I can. But I'm no bun-boy, mind you," he sternly emphasized, "make sure you print *that* in your magazine!"

Well, Ronny, you've gotten your wish, and I sure hope that all you folks out there have gotten at least an iota of what's involved in running a record store. 'Tis no easy business, that's for sure, but it does have its moments, usually manifested in backroom footbox fieldgoal competition and similar feats of athletic accomplishment. So the next time you're at your local sonic emporium and you happen to hear the thud of falling plaster followed by a gleeful, "no good—wide to the right," rest assured that it's only your faithful salespeople taking a hard-earned monetary respite. Take it from me—they've probably earned it.

You Probably Thought Foghat Was a Rock & Roll Band.

It still is, but it's also a brand new drink, guaranteed to get you going (or, rather, *Energized*, like Foghat's new Bearsville LP) and eventually drunk. Formulated by Atlanta Bar Manager Steve Dimitriou, the recipe as it came to Ruby Monday is as follows: two jiggers of gin, a little orange juice, a jigger of *creme de menthe* and bar foam. I'm not vouching for this concoction 'cause I've yet to try it. Mix yourself up a batch and put *Energized* on the turntable. See what happens. Why not? P.S. This whopper was conceived in an Atlanta bar and rock club, where Foghat are truly loved. It's called Richards'. If you're ever in Atlanta, stop in for a "Foghat" and tell 'em Ruby Monday sent you.

A Guy Named Sue. An ex-con is suing Johnny Cash and Columbia Records for \$5.2 million. Yes, it's true, at least according to *The Hollywood Reporter*. Rudolph Sandoval, recently released from Folsom Prison, claims his name and prison serial number were announced and used on *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison* without his permission. What's annoying Rudolph the most, he says, is that it might lead friends, relatives or prospective employers to believe he's still behind them bars. There'll be a sequel to *that* one, you can bet your bottom prison stripes.

Streakers Strike Record Biz at Last. An underground collegiate craze crashed its way to just plain MOR last week by overkill. Todd Rundgren, one of the first pop stars to lead a streak, has been followed *en masse* by record

company promotion men, secretaries and executives alike. Todd struck at the University of South Carolina Tuesday, March 5, after a sold-out gig. Bearsville's M. Frog opened the concert but followed Mr. Rundgren in the streak. Meanwhile, the trade magazines are carrying photos of streaking promo men to prove *their* label's right on top of it. Fortunately there hasn't been a resurrection of goldfish gulping, panty raids or sardining in phone booths lately. Photo-ed herein is a masked lady streaker who struck in sneakers last week at WB's LA sales presentation.

Ruby's Run-Ons

● From the pages of *The New York Times* come important facts. **Our Man Merlis** (WB, NYC) spends a lot of time combing its pages for data like this: "**Robin Upton**, a Suffolk pig farmer, finds pop music keeps his sows contented and helps them put on weight. 'They listen to the radio most of the day,' he said." ● Keeping fit as a fiddle is becoming increasingly dangerous, particularly if you're carrying bottles of vitamins, bags of herb teas or loads of organic fruits and legumes around airports. **George Cummings of Dr. Hook and the Medicine Show** will attest to this and may write a song about it soon. "They (customs men, of course) take everything apart, dump it out and confiscate my vitamins and food. Life on the road can really mess up your body," he moaned. Well, nobody said it was easy to be big rock singers. ● **Frank Sinatra's** sinuses are currently inflamed and forcing him to postpone his sec-



ond stint in Las Vegas. Scheduled for March 14 through March 20 at Caesar's Palace, Ol' Blue Eyes and Now Red Throat is recuperating in Palm Springs so his cavities won't trouble him during upcoming nine-city tour. ● Mutual admiration expressed recently by **Liv Taylor** and **Linda Blair**. Mr. Taylor wound up a concert at New Rochelle's Iona College on the evening of March 7, only to have Ms. Blair (Academy Award Nominee for, what else, **The Exorcist**) enter his dressing room with thanks for the swell show. Liv's accolades for this swivel-headed munchkin were loquacious, to say the least. ●

I'm a Traveling Man; I've Made a Lot of Stops All Over the World

Gregg Allman

3/19-20 Atlanta
3/23 Orlando
3/24 St. Petersburg
3/25 Miami
3/28 Birmingham
3/29 New Orleans
3/31 Knoxville
4/7 Providence
4/8 Boston
4/10-11 New York City
4/13 Passaic
4/14 Philadelphia
4/16 Ithaca, New York
4/17 Syracuse, New York
4/19 Pittsburgh
4/20 Cleveland
4/21 Detroit
4/22-23 Chicago

Badfinger

3/20-23 Atlanta
3/27 Parsippany, New Jersey
3/29 Toronto
3/21 Boston
4/5 Chicago
4/6 St. Louis

Beach Boys

3/18 Victoria, British Columbia

The Credibility Gap

4/16-18 Vancouver, British Columbia

Deep Purple

3/18 Syracuse, New York
3/19 Boston
3/20 Providence
3/22 Dayton
3/23 Madison
3/24-25 Chicago
3/28 El Paso
3/30 Ft. Worth
3/31 Amarillo
4/2 Albuquerque
4/3-4 Denver
4/6 Ontario, California
4/7 Phoenix
4/9 San Diego
4/10 Tucson

Doobie Brothers

3/25 Austin
3/27 El Paso
3/28 Amarillo
3/29 Hayes, Kansas
3/30 Kansas City, Kansas
3/31 Manhattan, Kansas

Foghat

3/19-20 Chicago
3/21 Detroit
3/22 Pittsburgh
3/23 Philadelphia
3/24 Washington
3/25 Port Jefferson, Long Island
3/27 Atlanta
3/28 Florence, Alabama
3/29 Columbus, Georgia
3/30 Miami
4/3 Toledo
4/5 Cincinnati
4/6 St. Louis

4/7 Louisville
4/8 Green Bay
4/9 Milwaukee
4/10 Davenport, Iowa
4/11 Indianapolis
4/12 South Bend
4/13 Cleveland

Graham Central Station

3/20-22 Philadelphia
3/23 New York City
3/29 Parsippany, New Jersey
3/30 Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts
3/31 Oswego, New York
4/5 Richmond
4/6 Philadelphia
4/26 Fresno

Grinderswitch

3/19 Macon

Arlo Guthrie

3/30 Boston

Hydra

3/21 Quinton, Massachusetts
3/23 Birmingham
3/24-25 Raleigh, North Carolina
3/26 Chapel Hill, North Carolina
3/27 Greensboro, North Carolina
3/28-29 Greenville, North Carolina
3/30 Cheraw, South Carolina

Gordon Lightfoot

3/21-25 Toronto
4/18 Quebec
4/19-21 Montreal
5/11 Anchorage
5/12 Fairbanks
5/14 Portland
5/16 Seattle
5/17 Spokane
5/18 Salt Lake City
5/19 Honolulu

Malo

3/19-24 Denver
3/26 Tulsa
3/28 Portales, New Mexico
3/29 El Paso
3/30 Las Cruces, New Mexico

Montrose

3/18 Atlanta

Van Morrison

3/21-4/8 Europe
5/8 College Park, Maryland
5/12 Bridgewater, Massachusetts
5/16 Kent, Ohio
5/17 Toledo
5/19 University Park, Pennsylvania

Maria Muldaur

3/22 Vancouver, British Columbia
3/23 Seattle
3/24 Portland

Martin Mull

3/24 Detroit

3/26-30 Philadelphia
4/1-6 Cambridge
4/13 Norfolk, Virginia
4/21 Pittsburgh

Ted Nugent and the Amboy Dukes

3/20 Manhattan, Kansas
3/22-23 Milwaukee
3/29 Louisville
3/30 St. Louis
4/4 Grand Rapids, Michigan
4/5 Detroit
4/6 Toledo
4/7 Jackson, Michigan
4/8 Cleveland
4/9 Columbus
4/10 Pensacola
4/12 Miami
4/13 West Palm Beach
4/14 Sarasota
4/17-20 Atlanta
4/26 Washington DC

Parliament

3/18 Washington DC

Todd Rundgren

3/19 Allendale, Michigan
3/20 Dayton
3/21 Columbus
3/23 Akron
3/24 Detroit



3/27 Oshkosh, Wisconsin
3/28 Chicago
3/29 Bloomington, Indiana
3/31 Springfield, Missouri
4/1 Lincoln
4/2 Kansas City
4/3 St. Louis
4/5 St. Paul
4/6 Kenosha, Wisconsin
4/7 Boston
4/19 New York City

Leo Sayer

3/20-23 Boston
3/25-30 Washington DC
4/2-3 New York City
4/6 Passaic
4/8-9 New York City
4/10-13 Philadelphia
4/16 Denver
4/17 Kansas City
4/18 St. Louis
4/19 Oklahoma City
4/23-28 San Francisco
4/30-5/5 Los Angeles

Seals & Crofts

3/19 Madison
3/20 Minneapolis
3/21 Detroit
3/23 Columbia, Missouri
3/24 St. Louis
3/25 Champaign, Illinois
3/26 Louisville
3/28 Pittsburgh
3/29 Richmond
3/30 Norfolk, Virginia
3/31 Baltimore
4/15 San Antonio
4/16 Dallas
4/17 Tulsa
4/18 Oklahoma City
4/20 Houston
4/21 Corpus Christi
4/22 Austin
5/9 Charlotte, North Carolina
5/10 Columbia, South Carolina
5/12 Miami Beach
5/16 Mobile
5/17 Atlanta
5/19 St. Petersburg

Bob Seger

3/18-19 Windsor, Ontario
3/21 Davisburg, Michigan

Frank Sinatra

4/8 New York City
4/9-10 Hempstead, Long Island
4/13 Atlanta
4/15 St. Louis
4/16 Providence
4/18 Detroit
4/21-22 Philadelphia
4/24 Washington
4/26-27 Chicago

Livingston Taylor

3/23 Concord, Massachusetts
4/5 Nutley, New Jersey
4/6 Centenary, New Jersey

Tower of Power

3/20 Tulsa
3/23 St. Paul

Mary Travers

4/3-6 Philadelphia
4/21 New York City

Marshall Tucker Band

3/19 Washington DC
3/22 Charlottesville, Virginia
3/23 Toledo
3/24 Flint, Michigan

Leading the Country to Better Music?



Dionne Warwick

3/21-24 Houston
4/18-5/1 Reno
5/4 New Haven
5/5 Hartford
5/6-12 New York City
5/22-6/4 Las Vegas

Kitty Wells

3/18 Nattapofette, Massachusetts
3/21 Dayton
3/22 Toronto
3/24 St. Catharines, Ontario
3/30 Platteville, Wisconsin
3/31 Meguane, Michigan

Wet Willie

3/11 Carrollton, Georgia
3/21 Richmond, Kentucky
3/22 Indianapolis, Indiana
3/23 Normal, Illinois
3/27 Statesboro, Georgia
3/29 Miami
3/30 Tampa
3/31 Gainesville, Florida
4/5 Hampton Rhodes, Virginia
4/6 Greensboro, North Carolina
4/7 Roanoke, Virginia
4/12 Binghamton, New York
4/13 Springfield, Massachusetts
4/15 Boston
4/20 Providence
4/21 New Haven
4/22 New York City
4/25 Detroit
4/26 Dayton
4/28 Madison
5/2 Washington DC
5/3 Philadelphia
5/4 Charleston, West Virginia

White Witch

3/28 Florence, Alabama
3/29 Columbus, Georgia

Frank Zappa/ The Mothers of Invention

3/18 Salt Lake City
3/19 Boise
3/21 Colorado Springs
3/23 Denver

LONDON—Because it is a pleasant notion, there are those in this business who claim the return to office of Harold Wilson as a possible good portent for English music. After all, it was during Harold's last stint—late autumn of '64 to summer of '70—that many of our all-time favorite records were made. It was a labor government that laid MBEs on the Fab Four. And England swung like a pendulum did. Am I nostalgizing prematurely? Maybe. But everyone I know is thrilled to see the Hollies back in the Number One spot. And when they sing "The Air That I Breathe" on Top of the Pops, people actually stop making rude remarks for almost four heavenly minutes.

Housewives on the Wire.

Debbie Dawn continues to baffle and bemuse the few Britons who have had the chance to hear her. Charles Shaar Murray of the *New Musical Express* heard "There Goes That Song Again" here in the office and promptly declared it his single of the week. DJ Charlie Gillett, whose format is more liberal than most, played it on Radio London, where it occasioned what certain exotic American journals would call "heavy housewife phones." Meanwhile, it has yet to be officially released here, what with pernicious BBC Radio suddenly cutting its already-scrawny playlist by half . . .

Can Accountants Be Far Behind? Yes, the record business is ripe for a fresh infusion of almost anything. These days, the pop papers seem to find stars so boring they spend all their time writing about managers instead.

Everything you wanted to know about Hal Carter, Don Arden, Shep Gordon, Gerry Brandt or Dee Anthony, but were reluctant to ask, can be gleaned from the last few issues of *Melody Maker* . . .

Vile Bodies. Inevitably, streakers have made their mark on British soil. Mind you, the weather's still a bit brisk, but those devoted to true looning will not be stayed from their appointed rounds. Sadly, the novelty already palls for me. Streaking is a one-liner. And these tawdry mass-streaks lack the glory of the pioneers, the lone streakers who gave the sport class. Anyhow, whatever happened to just hanging a good old moon?

Another Price Prize. Alan Price's forthcoming album is being taken quite seriously. Certainly it

is every bit as good as his film score for *O Lucky Man!* which, on top of the award it got from the Young New York Film Critics, has now had the Anthony Asquith Memorial Award for Best Original Film Music heaped on it. Alan's newie, called *Between Today and Yesterday*, is clearly autobiographical and destined to be referred to as a concept album, although that expression has always made me cringe. The songs depict his early life in the Northeast of England—what the natives here call Geordie country—and see him through to London, success, disillusionment and acceptance. "Jarrow Song," which will go out as the single here, is a delight—masculine, spunky, rebellious and alive with that down-to-earth spirit that is Alan's hallmark.

—SHELLEY BENOIT

Vinyl Statistics

Circular is pleased to present a running account of newborn Warner Family Records. The past week has given birth to seven singles, two albums.

SINGLES (March 13)

"Iron Man"/"Electric Funeral"—Black Sabbath—WB 7802

"Time Will Tell"/"Oakland Stroke"—Tower of Power—WB 7796

"Circles"/"I'll Have to Say I Love You in a Song"—Mary Travers—WB 7790

"Goodbye"/"The Same Old Way"—Rex Allen, Jr.—WB 7788

"Another Park, Another Sunday"/"Black Water"—The Doobie Brothers—WB 7795

"Easy to Slip"/"Trail of Tears"—The Talbot Brothers—WB 7794

"Keep on Smilin'"/"Soul Jones"—Wet Willie—CPR 0043

ALBUMS (March 8)

Original Sound Track From the Motion Picture *Mame*—W 2773

Seasons in the Sun—Rod McKuen Sings the McKuen / Brel Songbook—BS 2785

When the Dawnbreakers Became Uncle Sound



"Beverly Hills" is the name of a song on Terry Melcher's brilliant new Reprise album. It is also the name of a completely different song, recorded by a group called Uncle Sound for Warner Bros. and released in May 1968. Richard Perry was the producer; at the time he had just finished doing the enormously successful *God Bless Tiny Tim* for Reprise. Uncle Sound wasn't as lucky with "Beverly Hills" on single #7197; the ledgers show that it sold 143 copies.

Uncle Sound's first appearance on disc turned out to be its last as well, and the rock biz lost one of its cuter group names. But there is a little more to the saga of Uncle Sound than meets the eye. The name of the publisher of "Beverly Hills" gives a clue: it's Dawnbreaker Music.

Yes, folks, Uncle Sound was actually a pseudonym for the Dawnbreakers, the Vegas-style act with which Jimmy Seals and Dash Crofts filled up the interval between their departure from The Champs and their emergence as a duo. Jimmy wrote "Beverly Hills" (and the flip side, "I'm Gonna Ask Him", as well). Though it wouldn't quite fit in with the masterful things Seals & Crofts are doing now, this 1968 disc does have at least a strong foretaste of what was to come. Jimmy's voice, for one thing, is quite unmistakable.

Question for Next Week

The Reprise catalog is well

stocked with contemporary guitar performances of high degree, from the likes of Ry Cooder (whose new album is imminent), John Renbourn, John Fahey, Bert Jansch, Jimi Hendrix, Neil Young and Peter Green. Also in the catalog—where it's been for well over a decade now—is an album by a great guitarist from another era, cited as a major influence by Chet Atkins, B. B. King and practically everyone else who really picks a hot lick. The recordings in this Reprise album were made in France back when Reprise was still just a gleam in those ol' blue eyes. Be first to name the guitarist and win his album (or any other single album in the catalog; see the mini-print below.)

Winner of Doc's 2/25 contest is Lawrence Silverman, who knew that "New Orthophonic High Fidelity" was the slogan RCA put on its labels during an exceptionally busy period of slogan-mongering in the 50s.

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, 3701 Warner Blvd., Burbank, Ca. 91505) wins any single Warner/Reprise catalog album. (Please specify choice.) Answers will be geographically pro-rated; ties will be judged on the basis of penmanship, wit and lucidity.

Inspirational Verse

I'm bad enough to make an
elephant fly
I'm gonna whip ya on a
natural high

— Eddie Kendricks
"Boogie Down"

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Top Ten

Warner Bros. sales figures
for week of March 4-10.

1. The Doobie Brothers/
*What Were Once Vices
Are Now Habits*
(W/L8W/L5W 2750)
2. Deep Purple/*Burn*
(W/L8W/L5W 2766)
3. Seals & Crofts/*Unborn
Child* (W/L8W/L5W 2761)
4. Van Morrison/
It's Too Late to Stop Now
(2BS/K8/K5 2760)
5. Black Sabbath/
Sabbath Bloody Sabbath
(BS/M8/M5 2695)
6. Tower of Power/
Back to Oakland
(BS/M8/M5 2749)
7. Foghat/*Energized*
(BS/M8/M5 6950)
8. Maria Muldaur
(BS/M8/M5 2148)
9. Graham Central Station
(BS/M8/M5 2763)
10. Todd Rundgren/*Todd*
(2BR/K8/K5 6952)

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