
Sam Szczepanski

IVYWOOD PRODUCTIONS *formed January 2005*

In response to changing market conditions and a desire for greater independence, I became a freelance consultant in order to project manage releases for a number of international clients including Castle Music/Sanctuary Records, Union Square, Snapper Music, Benlin Music, and several independent artists.

Depending on a client's requirements, I offer the following:

- Archive research including provision of sleeve notes
- Compiling & packaging concepts
- Artist liaison
- Art direction & coordination
- Mastering supervision

SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL
Union Square Music METRDC571
www.unionsquaremusic.co.uk



2007 saw several critically-acclaimed releases including Pentangle's "The Time Has Come", "Keeping The Faith: 40 Years of Northern Soul", "Real Life Permanent Dreams", "Get Rhythm! Hot Wax from the Sun Vaults", Eddie Cochran: "Guitar Picker", Diana Dors: "Swingin' Dors" and The Peep Show: "Mazy".

PRESIDENT RECORDS *December 2003 to November 2004*

I joined this long-established UK independent as General Manager with a view to reinvigorating the label after a period of dormancy. By concentrating on owned repertoire and publishing copyrights controlled by President's sister company Kassner Associated Publishers Ltd., I created a small range of collector-orientated packages which have met with critical acclaim and sold through well.

In addition to overseeing all aspects of label management e.g. devising a workable release schedule, liaising with artists and suppliers, and monitoring costs, my role also involved updating the company's website, developing relationships with customers and distributors worldwide, and identifying new areas for exploitation e.g. licensing and mail order. I was also responsible for creating press releases and promo material, and coordinating mail outs. Mindful of possible deterioration, I assessed President's existing tape library with a view to optimising the way the off-site archive is maintained.

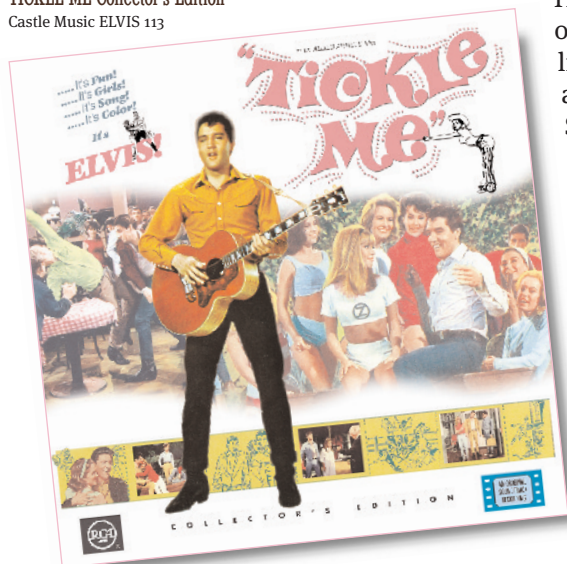
I very much enjoyed the creative process that the work entailed, the detail and decision-making involved and the challenge of producing commercially viable releases in an ever-changing marketplace.

SANCTUARY RECORDS GROUP *July 1998 to November 2003*

I joined Castle Communications PLC in July 1998 as an assistant in the Budget Audio Division. This involved working closely with the department head to create a varied month-on-month release schedule and adhering to rigid production deadlines. I coordinated all aspects of CD origination from submitting tracklistings for MCPS clearance, briefing designers, liaising with photo agencies, proofing artwork, approving audio masters and general administration duties e.g. filing, raising purchase orders and answering correspondence.

In early 1999 I was promoted to the position of Label Manager where I became responsible for maintaining the low Mid-price label Castle Select. My new role involved compiling releases from scratch, licensing in repertoire, costing-out projects, working with external consultants and presenting new releases to the Sales force on a monthly basis. As part of a small team, I was also involved in launching a new Budget-priced label, Castle Pie. An intensive release campaign followed and during a 2-year period we built a range which comprised over 200 titles.

TICKLE ME Collector's Edition
Castle Music ELVIS 113



Throughout 2000 and into 2001, I also began working on projects for other, higher-priced labels within the company, notably on a range of limited edition Elvis Presley vinyl releases exclusive to Castle Music. I also originated specialist collector-orientated product for the QVC Shopping Channel, as well as numerous retailer exclusives. Prior to Castle's move into the burgeoning DVD market, for a while I was also given the responsibility of coordinating Castle's Budget Video releases.

Following Castle's acquisition by the Sanctuary Group in 2000, I became increasingly involved in creating niche product across all price points, earning a reputation for top-selling "bespoke" packages, specialising in 1950s/60s reissues (to date Castle Pulse's "Legendary Sun Records Story" has sold in excess of 50,000 units). During the latter half of 2001, I conceived and project managed the critically acclaimed "50 Golden Years" Sun Records Anniversary boxed set for the specialist Fab-U-Lus label, coordinating and supervising all stages of this release. I also oversaw the marketing

strategy which included press and radio promotion, and mail order sales via a dedicated page on the Fab-U-Lus website. The release garnered many favourable reviews, including an endorsement from Sun founder, the late Sam Phillips and remains the top-selling Fab-U-Lus release to date.

In January 2003 I joined Sanctuary's Special Markets division. I became responsible for coordinating around 6-8 releases a month on the Castle Music, Indigo and Fab-U-Lus labels. These varied from straight re-issues of existing albums to more complex and detailed compilation boxed sets. During this time I strived to maintain and build good relationships with various licensors, and enjoyed working closely with noted artists such as George Hamilton IV, Sandy Kelly, Gene Pitney, Neil Sedaka, Jack Scott, Billy Adams, Paul Evans, Lita Roza and Linda Gail Lewis.

Where budgets allowed, I also steered marketing campaigns to ensure that more esoteric releases reach their target audience by the most efficient means possible. In October 2002 I was on hand as Sanctuary's representative when Billy Adams made his UK debut appearance at the Hemsby Rock'n'Roll festival, ensuring that stallholders had product to sell. To coincide with a Paul Evans' release in March 2003, in conjunction with the artist I drew up a schedule of live radio broadcasts/appearances across the UK, thereby securing a much higher profile for a specialist release which might otherwise have escaped wider public attention.

TOWER RECORDS January 1993 - September 1996

I joined Tower Records as a part-time Sales assistant in their flagship Piccadilly store and was quickly promoted to the position of "Oldies Buyer" within my first week. My duties included maintaining stock levels within the constraints of a tight budget, liaising with distributors worldwide to secure discounts and dealing with customer enquiries. During my first few months I created a comprehensive "Oldies" department offering one of the best ranges of Oldies-related product in Europe, including CDs, vinyl, books, magazines and videos. I succeeded in increasing the department turnover by more than threefold in the first year, by which time I had become a full-time employee.



Keeping the Oldies section ship-shape at Tower.
My fabulous assistant Lez (left) &
our much-missed colleague, the late Howard Jackson



Casey Spencer of the Jive Five drops by Hemsby, October 1994

In 1994 I was instrumental in taking Tower Records “on the road” to various music festivals in the UK by running specialist stands at key events such as the Hemsby Rock’n’Roll Weekender in Norfolk. I was responsible for transporting stock, supervising a small team, liaising with the event organisers and ensuring Tower’s high profile by means of advertising and promotional point-of-sale material. This was a first for Tower UK and it helped enhance the company’s reputation for imaginative niche marketing. I continued to maintain Tower’s presence at similar festivals until I left the company.

Cats ‘n’ kittens check out the wares at the Tower Records Stand. Hemsby, May 1995



Window display for ‘Backcombing’. Tower Records, Piccadilly Circus, London



In 1995 I brokered a deal between Tower and Sequel Records (formerly part of Castle Communications PLC) to create a CD sampler entitled “Backcombing” for sale exclusively in Tower stores. Envisaged as a marketing tool to help promote Sequel’s extensive back catalogue of 1960s’ girl group recordings and in particular their acclaimed “Here Come The Girls” series, I compiled the release and coordinated the artwork with Castle’s in-house studio. I then helped build a marketing campaign around the release, which involved in-store promotion, competitions, press and radio advertising.



In 2005 the highly acclaimed Sequel Records series “Here Come The Girls” was revisited with a 2CD compilation entitled “It’s So Fine” (Castle Music CMDDD 1159). Compiled by girl group authorities Mick Patrick and Malcolm Baumgart with annotation by Cha Cha Charming’s Sheila Burgel, the set features the series’ iconic cover art and ever-popular 60s Brit Girls sound.



During my three years at Tower, I was also involved in organising live music events in-store, as well as helping ensure the smooth running of artist PAs. From 1994 onwards I compiled a weekly chart of top-selling oldies releases which was broadcast every Sunday night on the London-based Tom Ingram Rock’n’Roll radio show. Experimental and often groundbreaking, with a philosophy that embraced the niche as well as the mainstream, I am proud to have been part of the unique Tower Records retailing experience.

The Smell of Dansette...



As soon as I was old enough to extricate myself from my buttons'n'bows high chair and operate the trusty Bush record player, I was on a mission. I would sit and play my Disney "read-along-with-Tinkerbell" 45s, alternating The Aristocats with the exotic-looking German pressings Auntie Doris and Uncle Eric would send over at Christmas.

Alfred E. Newman's 'It's A Gas' was a particular favourite, ditto Henri Salvador's 'Sportmodell' with its exciting racetrack sound effects. Others included Jethro Tull's 'Living In The Past' (oh, the irony), Fats Domino's 'Sick And Tired' and Earl Vince & the Valiants' 'Somebody's Gonna Get Their Head Kicked In Tonight' – even then my tastes were eclectic. I loved to watch the chunky plastic arm methodically swing round and clunk down gently on to the spinning vinyl below. The mechanics were oddly reassuring and mesmerising.

Our then-state-of-the-art Telefunken reel-to-reel tape recorder held equal fascination, especially once I discovered you could actually record stuff and play it back. When you lifted the lid, it had that great smell that doesn't seem exist anymore, except on those rare occasions that you get to sit in the passenger seat of a car made before 1970 and open the glove box. I call this the Smell of Dansette. It belongs to another era, like the Smell of Sweetshop: that unique blend of warm newspapers sitting atop a freezer full of not-quite frozen Mivvis, loose tobacco, peppermints, Lion brand exercise books, penny chews, Caramacs and not a sell-by date in sight.

Chris, Mark, Alex & Sue
with The Beatles, Christmas 1964

The youngest of five, I was exposed to a Stereophonic smorgasbord; everything from "Big Sound of the Drags" and the latest Trojan offerings, to Mummy's Bossa Nova Pops and Dad's Gypsy Camp Fire folk songs



"impulse buy" with its startling cover depicting a huddle of head-scarved crones banging tambourines and screeching like banshees. When the smell of grilling bacon failed to do the trick, this was played full blast on Sunday mornings to rouse tardy teenagers from their slumbers. Thankfully bedtime was a more chilled affair with Hank Levine's sublime 'Image' lulling me to dreamland.

I consider myself lucky to have been growing up in the 70s amid the pure pop silliness of Glam rock, Pan's People, The Osmonds and all the improbable fashions that went with it. Lucky too, that I had older siblings to introduce me to earlier stuff – Al's 8-track of Beach Boys hits, the Gene Pitney "Town Without Pity" budget-priced best of bought at Heston Services one night after the Chelsea Cruise, Pete Leady's "Many Sides of Rock'n'Roll" borrowed circa '75 and never returned (! – don't worry Pete, I've still got it), and the ubiquitous American Graffiti soundtrack. In a household preoccupied with



50s pop culture - most notably American cars - whole chunks of dialogue from the film became part of our everyday parlance, and the songs as familiar as the then-current Top 20.

Alphabet Alex strikes a Coen Brothers pose at legendary 'Graffiti landmark Mel's Drive-In, San Francisco, 1976.

I was also fortunate to have a 17 year-old sister just as the 70s Rock'n'Roll revival took hold. Suddenly the house was reverberating to Gene Summers' 'School Of Rock'n'Roll' and Warren Smith's 'Red Cadillac And A Black Moustache'. Fortunate, too, that said sister had struck up a friendship with a chap who did press and promo for one of the labels at the forefront of the revival. Every Friday he'd appear with a clutch of new releases under his arm before whisking her off to The Lyceum. "And don't touch my records", she'd glower at me, spritzing herself with Revlon Intimate and giving her barnet a quick once-over in the mirror. As soon as I heard the front door slam I was upstairs like a rat up a drain pipe, carefully sliding "MCA Rockabillies Vol.1" from its designated place in the wardrobe and leaving its neighbour slightly askew to mark the spot where it had to go back. Like all good vinyl junkies, I learnt how to cover my tracks.

More to come...

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your music matters