

M.S./Twinbrook Deal Fizzles Out; Conan's Restless Band Search

UNDONE DEAL: It now appears that the proposed purchase of New York-based Twinbrook Music by M.S. Distributing of Elk Grove, Ill. (Billboard, April 16), will not come to pass.

Twinbrook head **Jay Baney** says, "I think that's officially dead... Some secondary issues came up that we couldn't get together."

Baney says that while the two firms agreed on all the major deal points, "there were certain warranties and guarantees they were looking for we could not sign on."

"Our attorney said, 'If you sign this contract, I'm not going to represent you.' I said, 'Wow, I'm gonna take this as a strong recommendation.'"

John Salstone of M.S. acknowledges the terminus of the deal, which would have given the expanding Chicago-area firm a foothold on the East Coast.

Salstone says, "We kept running into some problems with the contract with them. We're at the point that we can't wait any more."

There's no bad blood in this split; Salstone says, "[For] some of the lines we have nationally, we're still using Twinbrook... It's very amicable."

M.S., which recently opened offices in the Pacific Northwest and Southern California and moved into the South via an agreement with Memphis' Select-O-Hits, now plans to open its own warehouse and office in New Jersey.

Salstone says the firm is "really close" to hiring an East Coast manager, and will ultimately hire "roughly eight people on the street, including sales and promotion."

Twinbrook plans to stay in the regional business. Says Baney, a little ruefully, "We're finding in the last couple weeks that national distribution

may not be the way to go."

CONAN GETS RESTLESS: The winner of NBC-TV talk show host **Conan O'Brien's** whimsically named "9th Annual College Band Search" will be receiving a small but significant award: A seven-inch single to be released, marketed, and promoted by L.A.-based Restless Records.

The "Late Night With Conan O'Brien" talent search was already on when Restless got involved, says label president **Joe Regis**.



by Chris Morris

"**Keith Moran**, who does college radio for us, became aware of it," Regis says. "He suggested to [publicity director] **Michelle [Roche]** that we ought to put out the single. The people at NBC loved the idea, and thought it was a good match."

Band entrants (which must be at least 75% composed of enrolled college students) were supposed to submit VHS performance tapes by May 31. The winner will be announced by O'Brien on the air in June.

Regis says the TV show makes a great fit with Restless' modern rock roster: "They definitely are the best national television platform for alternative acts." He adds that signing the winning act to a long-term contract isn't

out of the question: "Who knows—it could be the next big thing."

ERRATA: All sorts of little gremlins crept into our NAIRD coverage two weeks ago.

First, Rykodisc sales and marketing VP **Bob Carlton** points out that REP Co. was in fact very much in attendance at the Chicago confab. *Very quietly* in attendance. Or maybe they just did a very good job of dodging us.

Second, our apologies and congratulations to both Rounder Records in Cambridge, Mass., and the aforementioned Rykodisc in Salem, Mass., both of which collected three NAIRD Indie Awards, tying them with Sugar Hill Records of Durham, N.C. (Rounder won two categories and tied with *itself* in a third, so call it three.) The moral in all this: Never try to add up anything without that second cup of coffee.

FLAG WAVING: It's rare when a singer/songwriter as talented and prolific as **Townes Van Zandt**—the author of "Pancho And Lefty" and other modern classics—records an album of other people's songs. But that's what the talented Texas-born songsmith has done.

Van Zandt's new Sugar Hill album "Road Songs" is a compendium of live recordings captured during the last three or four years in diverse U.S. venues. Releasing these scattered tracks was the inspiration of Van Zandt's long-time road manager, **Harold Eggers**.

"Harold does a lot of taping from the board, and he wound up with this box of cassettes," Van Zandt says. "It was his idea—'Why don't we put together an album of songs you didn't write?'"

He adds, "I don't like to listen to my own stuff, but this one I can listen to,

'cause I didn't write 'em."

Four of the 15 songs on the album were originally composed (extemporaneously) and performed by the late, great Texas bluesman **Lightnin' Hopkins**, one of Van Zandt's major models.

"You can tell I learned a lot from Lightnin', in my guitar playin'," Van Zandt says. "I switched from strummin' to playin' notes. I also learned about gettin' the money up front and splittin'."

Two numbers are drawn from the **Bob Dylan** songbook. "He's been such an influence on everybody," Van Zandt says. "We're pretty good friends, but we don't run around together... He likes me, and I like him."

"Road Songs" also contains a cover of the **Rolling Stones'** "Dead Flowers." "I guess ['Sticky Fingers,' which con-

tains the song] is still my favorite Stones record," Van Zandt says. "I got a real good finger-pickin' pattern on [the song]."

Tunes by **Peter La Farge**, **Joe Ely**, **Bruce Springsteen**, **A.P. Carter**, and **Clarence Ashley** round out the set.

Van Zandt, who recently returned from a tour of the U.K. and the Northwest and West, says he plans to go to Austin to record an album of improvised "sky songs" (to use the term coined by the late bluesman **Bukka White**). He says, "I have a few notes. The hardest thing is to not make 'em all blues. That's too easy."

Another tour is set for September, after the release of an album he cut with guitarist/producer **Philip Donnelly**.

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