



KEN BARNES

ON THE RECORDS

REVIVED LABELS, PART IV

Artists United On United Artists

The final company in the Revived Labels series is United Artists, soon to appear directed by Jerry Greenberg with CBS distribution. In a March 14 article on the new UA, Adam White sketched the history of the old UA, so I'll avoid the corporate recap and discuss some of the artists united under the label's banner during its approximately two-decade first run.

UA was created as a vehicle for the film company of the same name, but played a key role in rock history as the label that provided Berry Gordy Jr. his springboard to Motown. UA picked up a Detroit record on the Tamla label. Marv Johnson's "Come To Me," produced and cowritten by Gordy, and it inched its way into the Top 30 in early 1959. Johnson went on to enjoy a string of hits on UA, masterminded by Gordy, including "I Love The Way You Love" and "You Got What It Takes," and stayed with the label until 1964.

UA also picked up another Tamla release, "Merry-Go-Round" by Eddie Holland, and released three other Holland singles. Holland returned to Motown for a 1962 hit, "Jamie," and of course later became the lyrical specialist for the famed Holland-Dozier-Holland production/writing team.

Other R&B success came to UA with veteran vocal group the Clovers, who after many years with Atlantic hit with the original "Love Potion #9" in 1959; and with yet another Detroit connection, the Falcons, who later featured Wilson Pickett and Eddie Floyd but in 1959 scored with "You're So Fine" on UA's Unart subsidiary.

UNITED ARTISTS



UNITED ARTISTS

UA's first Motown pickup, complete with vintage sleeve

Hit mainstays of the company were pianists Ferrante & Teicher, whose album total wound up in three figures. Southern singer Gene Thomas had his local release "Sometime" picked up by UA in 1961 for a minor hit, while Jay & The Americans scored in 1962 with their second single, "She Cried," and went on to become a UA staple act for eight years, running through two Jays (Traynor and Black) and including Steely Dan's Walter Becker and Donald Fagen in their ranks.

Songwriter extraordinaire Jeff Barry recorded for UA in the early



The Isleys got it together with that lady a decade later

'60s (and later in the '70s), and a gentleman with the unlikely name of Bertell Dache did an answer to "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow" called "Not Just Tomorrow But Always." Dache later found fame as Tony Orlando.

The Isley Bros. were with UA immediately after their "Twist & Shout" period, recording a truly inspired follow-up called "Surf & Shout" and the original version of their 1973 hit "That Lady." Garnet Mimms hit with "Cry Baby" and several other R&B smashes. The Exciters had a smash in 1963 with "Tell Him," later recording the original "Do Wah Diddy Diddy" and also inspiring a number of other girl group signings by UA, including Baby Jane & The Rockabys and the Tammys, Lou Christie's background vocalists, whose "Egyptian Shumba" might be a contender for a Bangles cover.

UA's first British hit was actually a middle-of-the-road pop tune by Danny Williams, "White On White." The film company released "Hard Day's Night," and while Capitol released the Beatles' tracks, UA did issue instrumental versions of some of the songs by Fab Four producer George Martin. Otherwise, most of UA's British signings were assigned to its Ascot subsidiary, including hitmakers Manfred Mann (who moved to UA itself briefly in 1966), Long John Baldry, and more obscure types. UA itself had the Roulettes, who included future Argent member Russ Ballard; longtime UK pop idol Billy Fury; and later (post-hits) the Fortunes.

The label continued to sign girl groups and female solo artists, many of them after their hit peaks had passed: Diane Renay, Janie Grant, the Crystals. But hits came from TV star Patty Duke ("Don't

Just Stand There") and Bobby Goldsboro, who parlayed 1964's "See The Funny Little Clown" into years of success, peaking with "Honey" in 1968 and finishing with "Summer (The First Time)" in 1973. Former doowop stars the Jive Five revived their careers with an R&B hit or two.

Moving into the midsixties, UA had a couple of oddities on the order of the original version of "Wild Thing," by the Wild Ones; and a folk tune from a Swedish group called Northern Lights which included Bjorn Ulvaeus, later of Abba. As the psychedelic era materialized, groups like the Gurus, the Crystal Chandelier, the Shaggy Boys, and legendary Texas band Kenny & The Kasuals (with "Journey To Tyme") appeared on the roster.

The label also had substantial success with an Australian band, the Easybeats ("Friday On My Mind") and Britain's Spencer Davis Group with "Gimme Some Lovin'" and "I'm A Man." Around the time of the second hit, SDG singer Stevie Winwood left, but UA kept his new band, Traffic, and had sustained LP success with them. Canadian folksinger Gordon Lightfoot also generated some album action, although his first singles success came with Reprise later.

UA tried for another Australian breakout with the Executives, another Canadian act with Willie & The Walkers, and signed a Long Island band called the Hassles for a couple of albums. The latter group's keyboardist, Billy Joel, went on to some degree of notoriety. Patti Austin cut a few singles for UA in the late '60s, as did Jeff Barry's former writing partner Ellie Greenwich.

Other acts around this time included Wynder K. Frog, the Mellow Brick Rode, Boffalongo, Saltwater Taffy, Mommy, and the Damnation of Adam Blessing. It was not the label's most successful era.

In the early '70s Transamerica folded the long-enduring Liberty and Imperial labels into United Artists, giving UA artists like the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Johnny Rivers, Ike & Tina Turner, and Bobby Womack. They had pop and/or black hits, along with the Cornelius Bros. & Sister Rose ("Treat Her Like A Lady") and folksinger Don McLean, whose "American Pie" was massive. (Another slice of pie entirely was the banned LP cover of a group called Mom's Apple Pie, who combined the two American institutions of their name in an unexpected fashion and caused UA to substitute a new cover.)

War exploded in the early '70s with several hits, as did the resurg-



Acting and singing — what a crazy career for identical cousin Patty



UA responds to the psychedelic craze with the immortal Gurus



Heavy Traffic in the vegetation

ent Paul Anka, and ELO proved quite successful. The label also released records by Bobby Vee (both under that name and his real one, Robert Thomas Velline), a duo called the Humblebums (one-half of which was Gerry Rafferty, later a UA hitmaker), British acts Family and Brinsley Schwarz, Brian Wilson's wife and sister-in-law (as Spring), Jan & Dean (plus Dean, Bruce Johnston, and others masquerading as the Legendary Masked Surfers), the Nashville Teens, space-rockers Hawkwind, and the legendary Move (part of which became ELO, part of which became Wizzard and Roy Wood solo, also UA acts).

It was a large roster. A custom deal with Fame brought soul stars Clarence Carter and his then-wife Candi Staton to the family, while a

deal with Poppy brought Doc Watson and "Pancho & Lefty" songwriter Townes Van Zandt in. Country/swing band Asleep At The Wheel, Crystal Gayle, and Ed Bruce were signed; so were Wild Cherry (pre-"Play That Funky Music") and Carlton The Doorman (as portrayed behind the scenes on the "Rhoda" show by Lorenzo Music). "Happy Days" regular Donny Most was there, and so was the Grateful Dead.

Latter-day UA hits included records by Maxine Nightingale, Rafferty, Chris Rea, and of course Kenny Rogers, from "Lucille" onward. In 1980 UA, by this time a division of EMI America, became Liberty, a label designation that survives mostly for Rogers reissues. And 1986 should see a new chapter unfold for United Artists.