

THE HEART (continued fr. TK-6)

that we have down here somewhere, the little r&b stores. That's how we get our messages. Listen, I can talk to 10-15 people in New York, or I'll call four or five people in Chicago. Not at the distributor level; I know what they're doing, but the one-stops, the retailers, especially with black records."

Henry Stone based himself in Florida in 1946, coming from the west coast where he was an ex-trumpet player (Boyd Rayburn) and formerly with Ben Pollack's Jewel Records. He was also publishing an index of the then-emerging independent labels, all r&b, for the benefit of anyone who wanted to subscribe.

There was a warehouse in Miami and inside were around 50,000 78s on the Black and White label. The owner of them couldn't ship them out or afford the storage charges. Stone (who knew something about peddling records from the back seat of his California automobile) took them off his hands and emerged for the first time — a distributor.

Then he went with Regent Records (the Harmonicats, Francis Craig's "Near You") and back into distribution with Pan American. But as Stone says: "I always had a studio in the back of my pocket — and around this time I recorded Ray Charles on Rockin' Records, my label. I also recorded John Lee Hooker under a pseudonym.

Syd Nathan, patriarch of the King label out of Cincinnati, used to visit Miami and he and Stone got into partnership with the formation of DeLuxe Records (he was also producer for Modern/RPM, Chess/Checker). On DeLuxe, which Stone and Nathan owned jointly, Roy Brown and the Charms, whose hits "Hearts Of Stone" and "Two Hearts, Two Kisses" were covered with rather more success by the Fontanne Sisters and Pat Boone respectively. Stone was the writer of the latter tune and the other week received an \$11 royalty check for his mid-1950s creativity. On DeLuxe, Stone recorded an r&b group that became James Brown and the Famous Flames.

After two years with Nathan and still based in Miami Stone went back to distributing until the jolt from the WEA group.

However he still kept up his recording interests, forming the Glades, Marlin and Dade labels ("Mashed Potatoes" was a big r&b hit in 1960 for Stone on Dade, performed by the Swans, which was actually a group of James Brown's sidemen).

Stone now says of his present operation: "I'm not interested in buying any tired old label and picking up tons of dead inventory. I want our company to be all new, all fresh and turn out product that will move. I don't want or need any \$150,000 recording sessions.

"They're not necessary and if any artist is unhappy with our setup he can go anywhere else he would like."



"CHARLIE" MARIA LOM: office mgr. of TK & Tone
Charlie has been with TK/Tone for 8 years, since 1968 at which time Muriel Stone took her in and taught her the record business. Charlie was 19 at the time. After working as an apprentice to Mrs. Stone, learning the operation of Tone Distributors doing bookkeeping, taking orders and learning the lines, Charlie became the export secretary of Tone International for a period of a year. Charlie remembers that there were not enough desks at the time. She worked on the edge of Mrs. Stone's desks. She then went into Accounts Receivable, then Accounts Payable. Charlie is originally from Cuba. She sees TK and Tone as the melting pot... Cubans, White and Black Americans. "The warmth among the people who work here is generated from the Stones and comes through in each individual's job and in all the music.

THE SOUL (continued fr. preceding pg.)

'I'm Their Favorite'

If Alaimo has relinquished the spotlight of the performing arena for the velvet darkness of the 24 track studio, he hasn't communicated it successfully to the T.K. roster of artists and producers. He laughed when he admitted, "A lot of the T.K. stars want to record me. They say I'm their favorite, but I'm creating now. Singing and performing came easy, production is hard work. I might take a shot at singing something in the future, but I have no plans now to get back into it.

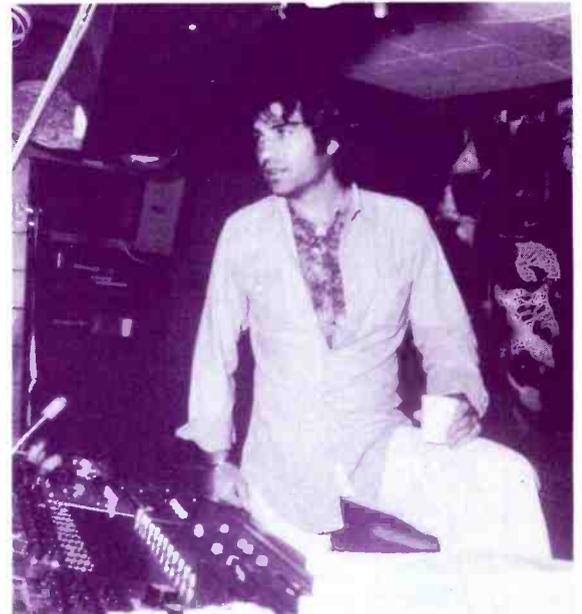
"I'm totally committed to building the careers of our artists; not to manage them, but to help them avoid the pitfalls I've encountered. We're a family — everyone sings on everyone else's records."

From a business perspective, Alaimo is quite aware of the nature of the record business. He knows that no amount of hype can sell a stiff and he realizes the importance of proper distribution. Towards that end, he has learned a great deal from Stone and is proud of the fact that he (Alaimo) is on a one-to-one basis with almost all of T.K.'s distributors. His creative career has taken on more executive dimensions of late and he says that he's interested in stepping out of direct production so he can oversee the entire T.K. operation. "I don't have to be there with Rick (Finch) and (H.W.) Casey anymore," he said candidly. "All of our producers are somewhat autonomous now. I don't care if my writers write the tunes as long as they're hits, like Latimore's 'Ladies' Man.' That's a smash if I ever heard one. Being the man behind the scenes is tough for me, but I feel it's very important. I want to keep doin' what I'm doin'. I've made my own records, I've performed in all the big rooms from the Copa to Caesar's Palace and I've made three films ('Wild Rebels,' Hooked Generation' and 'Stanley') that have all been moneymakers. I don't want to be a star."

Alaimo's viewpoint is even more praiseworthy in light of his devotion and admiration for the stars of his day who are still active performers. He said, "I'm proud of Tony Orlando. My cronies are doing well. Sonny & Cher, Bobby Vinton and Frankie Valli have really done it. I'm happy for them."

Goals

What are Alaimo's goals for T.K. in the remainder of 1976 and the future? "I want to build artists with LPs. We know we can sell them. When we get bigger than



Steve Alaimo in his natural habitat, the control room.

Columbia, we'll stop. Henry and I have built a good nucleus and it's a thrill to see a dream like this come true. I'm currently overseeing the building of T.K.'s new studio. A 24-year-old guy named Seth Snyder is designing, building and installing the new equipment. I'm training him to be a producer. He's got a great mind and is a special talent. He's another example of what we're doing here at T.K."

Putting the rosy picture in the proper gold frame, Alaimo said, "Between Henry and I, we've got to know the whole ballgame. We want to get bigger, but not at the expense of alienating any people. Our philosophy is to have fun and make money too." Obviously Alaimo has turned the irony of his fateful recording career to best advantage. He has plowed the experience and dues he's paid back into T.K.'s roster of performers and in so doing has found his strength as a producer and guiding light for performers. In a business where success is so elusive, Steve Alaimo has shown that his true colors are as bright as any rainbow.

You've been a Great Friend for more than 25 years.

I'm thrilled about your success.

Lester Sill