

Butch Stone On Target With A 10 Year Overnight Success

by Paul Simmons

LOS ANGELES — According to Butch Stone, manager for MCA recording artists Black Oak Arkansas, the group owns almost all of the state of Arkansas. In an action considered to be well calculated, the group invested large sums of money in real estate. Stone explained: "We decided to buy the land almost out of revenge against the big business corporate farms. Black Oak Arkansas is a family of people, which includes my other clients Ruby Starr and new group Target. Most of our parents were sharecroppers, everyone lost land from big business. We now have 1,500 acres, including a U.S. post office."

Stone was in his last year of pre-med school when he met the members of Black Oak. They were only about 15 at the time, and Stone was booking concerts on the side for weekend sock hops. In '64 he was making \$1,000 a week. Jim Dandy had just been arrested for breaking into the high school. The band was in its early stage of development, by '68 Black Oak evolved into the group as it is known today.

In the winter of '68, the group moved to New Orleans, after working in small clubs for 3½ years. They intended to stay in Louisiana for the weekend and ended up living there 2½ years. Stone spoke about the group's early recording efforts. "Stax recorded the group's first LP in '69 on the Enterprise label. Black Oak was considered to be a white experiment, on an otherwise all black label. We came to California in '70 looking for a new contract. Every record company passed on the group. Black Oak played at The Corral in Topanga. Ahmet Ertegun stopped by one night. He like the band so much that he decided to sign them up for Atlantic records. He really helped the group to come a long way. I've learned more about the business from him than from anyone else. Since the move to MCA, the band has demonstrated, in the last three LP's, a real musical progression. The band has worked quite hard. The new LP title '10yr Overnight Success' is really true."

Two Clients

Stone is also heavily involved with his other two clients, Ruby Starr and Target. Starr is a wild-eyed rock singer from Ohio. Jim Dandy discovered her at the Fox Club in Evanston, Indiana. She had been singing professionally since she was nine. Now she has a group called Grey Ghost and they have two LPs out on Capitol. They have toured often with Black Oak single "Jim Dandy (To The Rescue)." Stone is interested in getting a spot for her on the NBC "Saturday Night" show. Stone stated "She's definitely going to be a star, in the true sense of the word. Right now, I'm primarily interested in developing her as an established artist. Eventually she might play Vegas. My other group Target has just released their first LP on A&M. They're a powerful rock band, having been together about two years. They had been primarily studio musicians, working with people like Steve Cropper and John Prine. The material on their LP is original and refreshing, they don't pussyfoot around. All three acts are represented by Frank Barcellona at Premier Talent. Sweet Tater Enterprises, which is an off-shoot of Black Oak Incorporated, handles Ruby Starr and Target. Target is currently on a national circuit tour, some dates with Black Oak. On the other shows they will play with Black Sabbath, Robin Trower and Lynyrd Skynyrd."

Black Oak Arkansas latest LP was released Oct. 5, moving 100,000 pieces the first week. The group's American tour ends Oct. 31. From then until Nov. 25 will be a break time and rehearsal for the European

tour, which will run until Feb. 15. This tour will also feature Ruby Starr. Stone explained further about Starr's immediate future "After Black Oak's European tour, they'll return to the studio for two months. On Mar. 1 Ruby begins a European tour with Black Sabbath. From the 15th to Apr. 5, she'll record her third LP at Abbey Road studios. After that Ruby will pretty much be on her own, doing tours as a headlining act."

Stone would like his bands to have a specific goal, other than having them become musical giants. He feels his responsibility doesn't stop with just establishing the bands. Stone said "With Black Oak, if everyone got arrested tomorrow, not that it's foreseeable, but if it did happen they wouldn't have to work another day in their life. We could sustain life very easily on our own property. We eat all our own food, there's plenty of livestock. Bull Shoals lake is one of our landholdings, and it has catfish and bass. It's one of the seven cleanest lakes in the country."

Grammar School

On Oct. 30, Black Oak will be dedicating a four room grammar school. Both Governor David Prior and Senator Dale Bumpers were instrumental in helping the group to get the school. Oct. 6 had been dedicated Black Oak Day in Arkansas, commemorating a year ago when the group raised \$25,000 for the school at a concert in Little Rock. Stone stated "The group wanted to give some of their wealth back to the people, since the people made them what they are today. The band is the biggest source of income in that part of the country. When the school was being built, all of the local people pitched in. All of the usual feuding stopped for awhile."

Stone doesn't see the possibility of the band breaking up. There are many different musical outlets within the band itself. Stone feels that each member's growth is not a threat to the group. Jim Dandy has had an offer for an acting role in a film, a possible remake of a Jesse James film. If he does take the role, it will be done in a way so that it doesn't interfere with the group's activities. Stone has greatly enjoyed working with all of his clients. He's concerned with keeping the groups' audience response on an intimate level. Black Oak Arkansas can still play in a small hall for 10,000 people.



WARTOKE CONCERN, N.Y. announces management for Elektra recording artists Television. The group has begun recording sessions for their first LP at A&R studios. The LP will be co-produced by Tom Verlaine and Andy Johns. Their last concert was at Hofstra University, opening for Patti Smith. From left to right: Fred Smith, bass; Richard Lloyd, guitar; Tom Verlaine, vocals and guitar; Billy Fica, drums.

Kevin Hunter Keeps Natalie Cole's Image Intact

by Paul Simmons

LOS ANGELES — Kevin Hunter met Natalie Cole in Buffalo, New York, 3½ years ago. Six months later he became her manager. In Buffalo, Ms. Cole sang with a rock band, doing songs like the Stones' "Honky Tonk Woman" and also some Janis Joplin and Jefferson Airplane material. There was a definite demand for a singer who was Nat King Cole's daughter. However, most record companies had their own ideas about a certain image for Natalie Cole. Hunter stated, "People didn't want to hear rock-oriented songs, and they didn't think there was a validity for Natalie doing R&B. She could've appealed to older people's tastes very easily. Natalie wanted to do contemporary music. And we decided to follow a path not to compromise."

Four actual masters came out of a recording session produced by Chuck Jackson and Marvin Yancy. Capitol records heard the tape and wanted to make a deal. Hunter and Natalie Cole were somewhat skeptical of a contract with Capitol, the reason being that Nat King Cole had recorded for Capitol and they were concerned about keeping Natalie's image intact. As it turned out though, Capitol agreed with Hunter's attitude. The first Natalie Cole LP "Inseparable" was released shortly thereafter.

European Tour

Since then Natalie Cole has been touring constantly, and winning some Grammy awards along the way. From Sept. 21-Oct. 3 there was a European tour, which included TV specials in Holland and Sweden and an appearance on English TV. Cole received nothing but rave reviews. The same happened when she appeared at the Tokyo Music Festival earlier this year. The Japanese album sales soared from 25,000 to 100,000. Hunter feels that it's important to bring an act to the foreign markets, while the act is still developing. Hunter stated, "Tokyo was one of Natalie's best shows. The ones at the Beacon and the Universal Amphitheater were also outstanding. Natalie is very personable on stage. Thirty percent of her show is adlibbed. The communication she has with her audience is similar to that of Bette Midler. Natalie covers about three or four different types of music in her concerts. There's always a lot of R&B, some ballads and even a little of her father's material. She sometimes does a nine-minute extended version of "Can't Say No," which is quite incredible. When the audience leaves a Natalie Cole concert, they feel like their skulls have been blown out."

Producing Records

Kevin Hunter had been a child performer in Canada since the age of eight. When he was nine he had his own radio show. When he was 12 he had an act with a lady. Hunter ended his performing career at the age of

23 when he began producing records for the Canadian market. Out of his 14 singles 11 were #1. His varied background also included managing public relations for night-clubs and talent coordinator for a TV series. He also ran his own record company (Citation) while managing acts. He's been managing for 13 years now. Some of his other acts were Jody Miller, famous for her "Queen Of The House" single and the group Ocean, who had a fairly big hit with "Put Your Hand In The Hand." Seven years ago he signed a group from Spain called Zaras. He was still living in Montreal when he met Natalie Cole. Hunter spoke about a commuting dilemma which soon developed. "I opened an office in New York. And before I knew it I was spending one day a week in Montreal, with the rest of the time in New York and on the road. The New Directions office opened in New York on Mar. 1, '74. I decided that I wanted a larger than one-man organization. New Directions moved to California a year ago."

Different Fields

Hunter would like his clients to be involved in different fields other than performing, for their own security. An example would be for them to own a TV or recording production. He thinks it might be a wrong idea for them to do a TV series, since music people tend to burn themselves out on TV very quickly. Hunter commented on some of his managing techniques. "I don't make decisions based on money. With Natalie there's been no compromise to cut a specific type of commercial single. You have to stick to your integrity in dealing with a long-term career like hers. You have to believe in your act before you get involved. And you have to work hard enough and spend the time to develop it successfully. Each talent needs a different game plan, but the basics are always the same. You have to be concerned with how they handle their income. It's a common trend today for entertainers to get involved in other legitimate businesses."

Client Addition

Hunter also manages Peter Nero, Peter Yarrow, Capitol recording artists Voudouris & Kahne, and Canadian acts: the Bells, Canadian Conspiracy, and Genette Reno. His most recent client addition is black singer/songwriter Peabo Bryson, who has an LP out on Bullet records. Hunter enjoys his career as a manager. He has a varied musical taste, which is important in working with different types of music. He stated, "When I go see Peter Nero conducting the L.A. Philharmonic, I feel as proud as I do when I see a Natalie Cole concert." Hunter doesn't have any strong philosophical ideas on management. He stated, "It's my job, what I do every day."

Managers' Notes

Hank Zevallos, personal manager for **Bad Axe**, announced that the group has been meeting with three separate record companies for contract negotiations. The group played their first headlining concert at the Starwood last week . . . **Bob Ellis**, manager for **Billy Preston**, reports that Preston's new LP will be au naturel, even without his wig. Release date Oct. 22 . . . The **Ozark Mountain Daredevils** are now on their longest tour ever. Bookings are by Paragon of Macon and Los Angeles. The Daredevils will interrupt the tour for a Nov. 9 taping of "Don Kirshner's Rock Concert." Manager **Stan Plessner** of **Good Karma Production**, is working with A&M executives regarding a series of "dollar concerts" to be held in conjunction with radio stations across the nation. The Daredevils would headline these shows, with **Joan Armatrading** the special guest act. Idea is to present the acts in new markets at low admission prices . . . **Joel Cohen** of **Kudo III Management** announces that Kudo III will represent for management **Michael Patakis** and **Jim & Diane Phillips** . . . **Don Blocker**, vice president of **Big Heart Publishing Co.**, has announced formation of **Mermaid Music** as their ASCAP division. Mermaid will be located at 9454 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills 90212 . . . **Steinberg, Lipsman & Associates** report that **Shawn Phillips** and **Volunteers** will perform in concert Oct. 30 at the Arcosanti Visual and Performing Arts Festival . . . **Butch Stone**, manager for **Black Oak Arkansas**, announces that the group will be the **King Biscuit Flower Hour**, Nov. 21.

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