

CBS U.K. Hits New Heights With Diverse Mix Of Artists

by Fred Goodman

NEW YORK — In 1981, CBS U.K. had a banner year. Garnering eight platinum, 14 gold and seven silver albums, as well as 13 gold and 11 silver singles, the company emerged as one of the dominant forces in its market. In a recent interview with **Cash Box**, Maurice Oberstein, chairman, CBS U.K. attributed much of the company's success to its ability to actively work a diverse roster of British and international acts despite a harsh economic climate.

"I think we've had an incredible success mainly because we've drawn on a variety of sources," said Oberstein. "There's a genuine interest and investment in talent, mainly British, but also American and international."

Among the artists topping the CBS U.K. roster were such homegrown acts as Adam & the Ants, the Nolans, Altered Images, and Shakin' Stevens. But also contributing to the company's success were international artists like Julio Iglesias, Barbra Streisand, Bruce Springsteen and ABBA.

Although an American, Oberstein has been with the British outfit for 17 years and has come to appreciate certain advantages of the smaller U.K. market. "Whenever I go back to America," said Oberstein, "I recognize the problem of getting to the record buyer. When I came to the U.K., I saw that on a lot of levels it was light years behind the U.S. But I would certainly say now that the U.K., perhaps because of its innovative music, has carried with it merchandising, marketing and promotion things that I think at this point puts it ahead of the U.S."

National Advertising

Oberstein places particular emphasis on the value of the British radio and television networks, as well as the national and musical press.

"We don't have narrow broadcasting," declared Oberstein when queried about CBS U.K.'s ability to sell such diverse artists. "We have access to the public through a variety of musical formatted programs, and through the BBC and the commercial stations, we have an opportunity to test a lot of different things on the public. So the great opportunity we have here is that we can do almost anything. We can break an REO Speedwagon or an Adam & the Ants — we can get it on the radio, get it on television, and let the public say yes or no."

Speaking to the power of the British press, Oberstein noted that the size of the country was key. "We have a national press," he said, "and that makes it fundamentally different than in the U.S. Here, papers like *The Daily Mail* or *The Sun* or *The Mirror* have daily circulation figures of five million. Along the same lines, we have a music press that probably attracts 10 million readers nationally with publications like *New Musical Express*, *Sounds*, *Melody Maker* and so on. The musical press is incredibly important to us. And we can easily reach people who are interested in music through print, radio and television, all on a national level."

Although CBS U.K. has the networks through which to give almost any artist a shot, Oberstein is quick to point out that not every established artist from another market will score in Great Britain.

"You make records in America for America," he said, "and America is doing less well overseas than it used to. REO Speedwagon and Journey are great acts — great for America. If they don't sell the same way in other countries, it only means the rest of the world has slightly different tastes.

"It may be self-serving for me to say this,"



Maurice Oberstein

Oberstein added, "but we in the U.K. have converted more American acts to best-sellers in our own market than any other company with American sources. But REO was the only American act to wind up in the British Top 20 in 1981. So tastes are different.

"Perhaps at the moment your stuff is a little less interesting to the U.K. because of the political scene and the unemployment, have meant that the indigenous music of the British has become the folk/protest music of the period," mused Oberstein. "It has a very specific meaning here, the same way I would never put out Chicago's Harry Truman record in the U.K. because it doesn't mean anything to the British."

While the troubled British economy may be grist for the popular music mill, it has also had some very real effects on the record industry. While Oberstein concedes that tough economic times can hit entertainment companies particularly hard, he is unwilling to see the industry as a select victim.

"Britain now has the highest unemployment it's had since the '30s," he said. "When so many young people are unemployed, we really have a problem since that's our traditional market. But it really hasn't been the fault or particular problem of the record industry. Everybody's in trouble. I'm tired of the record industry feeling that somehow we've been singled out, that we're poorer managed or profligate with our money. It's because times are hard, not because we're silly or spent too much money on our parties."

Another major difference between the American and British markets is the power of small, independent labels to make inroads in the market. While Oberstein maintains that "the mystique of the indies is overdone," he sees them exerting very real pressures on a major company like CBS U.K.

"The indies represent a force that keeps us from being complacent," he said. "There is no ownership of the market because the small indies continue to prove that talent can come from anywhere. You don't control anything, you don't have the pop singer, the rock band, anything. They keep you alive and alert and force you to work harder."

Working harder seems very much to be the game plan at CBS U.K. While it may seem the company couldn't hope to repeat the kind of success it had in '81, Oberstein is excited and optimistic.

"Guessing what's going to be hot next year is always an insidious business," said Oberstein, "because the ones you don't mention always come back to kill you. We're very excited about a lot of projects — Bonnie Tyler, Altered Images and the next Clash album just to name a few. As far as American acts, we will sell Journey in the U.K. in '82 over everybody's feelings that they're yesterday's heroes. We already have a home run in the U.K. with George Duke's 'Shine On' single, and I'm sure we'll do very well with Luther Vandross. So I'm grateful for the work done by the people in America. They make it easy for me to sit back and be a hero."

INTERNATIONAL DATELINE

Argentina

BUENOS AIRES — The operation of the Records Supermarket by a joint society formed by the six major companies developed into unexpected intricacies when the main downtown dealers decided to boycott one of these companies, not selling its product, as a protest against the Supermarket, which has one location near Corrientes Avenue and a few blocks away from most of them.

Not surprisingly, the dealers (who also formed a society) selected *Sicamericana* as its first target, since the company headed by **Nestor Selasco** has the lowest participation in the market of the six (the other are RCA, EMI, CBS, Microfon and PolyGram) and hence could be affected most by the move. From the label's viewpoint, the main worry was that **Rodolfo Gonzalez**, owner of the Centro Cultural del Disco and one of the most brilliant minds in the trade, joined the boycott. The Centro Cultural is one of the most important accounts in the industry.

Next thing to come, after a hard month for *Sicamericana*, was that EMI and RCA (which also distributes PolyGram and Microfon) decided not to sell records or tapes to any account who didn't buy from *Sicamericana*. This helped to end the hostilities, at least for the moment, and the situation returned to "business as usual."

In the meantime, the Records Supermarket is steadily increasing its sales and participation in the market, although its profile of product is mainly composed by catalog items. In January, it may have been more than one percent of the whole country. One of the companies, *Interdisc* — not included traditionally among the majors, although its share of the total volume is high — decided not to sell its product through it, probably as a way to avoid conflict with the downtown dealers. Thus, the Records Supermarket gets some of the *Interdisc* titles through one of the distributors, to please its customers.

The experience will undoubtedly continue and the labels are satisfied with it, but the relation with dealers, both in this zone and in other parts of the country, still has some room for improvement. At least one of the majors has been applying strict rules in the case of non-payment or delay by dealers and suspending the mailing of merchandise in case of dissent. Its share of the market may have dropped, but the financial shape of the company has improved a lot.

miguel smirnoff

Australia

MELBOURNE — **Split Enz** and **Cold Chisel** are both in the studio working up their next LPs, while **Angel City** has just released its newest, produced by **Ed Thacker** and titled "Night Attack." **Split Enz** has flown in English heavyweight **Hugh Padgham** to produce its next at Sydney's Paradise Studios. Padgham produced the new **Police** LP, "Ghost In The Machine," and the recent **Genesis** LP, among many others. Paradise Studios is the complex owned and operated by Mr. Bad Habits, **Billy Field**, whose self-produced LP, "Bad Habits," has been released in numerous countries. **Split Enz** has Paradise booked throughout February.

The *Rocky Horror Show* lives again... and again... and again... (more time warps than one can deal with)... While the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* has been doing great business for a long time now, a new production of the stage show opened in Sydney, produced by Englishman **Wilton Morley** (son of actor **Robert Morley**). Festival Records has just released an Australian cast recording (that's the 1981 cast) of six tracks in 12" configuration at a budget price.

Kamahl, the Malaysian-born singer who

is second only to country artist **Slim Dusty** in terms of Australian record sales, has just released his 21st LP, "My Love For You." Following a four week promo tour of the U.S. that included several TV and radio appearances, he came back particularly to make his 27th appearance at Sydney's prestigious Opera House (he's played there more times than anyone else) for a Royal Command Performance for the Duke and Duchess of Kent, currently visiting the antipodes.

allan webster

Italy

MILAN — **Riccardo Fogli**, CGD recording artist, won the 32nd edition of the Sanremo Festival — which took place from Jan. 28-30 — with the song "Storie Di Tutti I Giorni" (published by Come Il Vento-Parking-Sugarmusic). At the second position were **Al Bano & Romina Power** with "Felicità" (published by Televis-Maialino, released on Baby), followed by **Drupi** with "Soli" (published by Usignolo-Sensazione, released on Fonit Cetra label).

Producer **Claudio Fabi** announced the creation of his own label, *Aleph*, distributed by CGD-MM. Among the recording artists are the **Mercenaries** (A new Italian rock group) and singer **Enzo Malepasso**.

Giuseppe Gramitto Ricci, president of the Carosello record company, announced the appointment of **Mario Rapallo** as general manager of the group, replacing **Lucho Salvini**, who left the company. In addition, **Alda Faldutti** is the new head of the press office.

The 16th edition of the SIM (Music Instruments and Hi-Fi Fair) will be connected to the IVES (International Video and Electronic Consumer Show.) The fair is scheduled for Milan from Sept. 2-6, 1982. It is being organized by **Roberto Pinna Berchet**.

A new classical midline, *Viva*, has been studied by Decca Dischi Italia. The first releases will be on the market in March.

mario de luigi

United Kingdom

LONDON — Following three years at Charisma Records as general manager, **Michael Watts** joined Chrysalis Records in December as international manager. Now, with the departure of **Des Brown**, Watts has been made international director. Brown has left Chrysalis to join with video producer **Scott Millaney** to form their own company, Premier Programming Ltd. Watts' position at Charisma has been filled by **Steve Weltman**, previously with RCA in London. He is joined at Charisma by **Judy Lipsey**, who is press officer. Lipsey joins from CBS U.K. . . **John M. Hewlett** has been appointed manager, talent acquisition, at A&M Records, effective immediately. Hewlett recently returned to the U.K. after three years in America, where he managed and produced **The Dickies**, a chart act for A&M, and a new act, **Four Squares**. Previous to that, he had been in publishing with Apple and in management with Sparks and Gallagher and Lyle.

Chris Wright, co-chairman of the Chrysalis Group, has announced that Chrysalis Publishing Ltd. has concluded a deal for the U.K. representation of the Combine Music catalog. The deal was negotiated in Nashville between Combine Music Corp. president **Bob Beckham** and Chrysalis Music director **Stuart Slater**. Combine, which was previously represented by EMI Music, publishes **Billy Swann**, **Larry Gatlin**, **Tony Joe White** and **Lee Clayton**. The deal also includes *Resaca Music*, who publishes **Kris Kristofferson**, including such songs as "Help Me Make It Through The Night" and "Me And Bobby McGee."

paul bridge