

The Record Year

Columbia's 33 1/3, 45-minute disk developments stir fancy on "revolutionary" probabilities; Kidisk era in 1948; Capitol's streak of hits.

(Continued from preceding page)
has generally shown signs of prosperity.

King's Solid Disk Sales

Cincinnati was put on the record industry map with the vast development of King Records into the race field with Bull Moose Jackson's *I Love You Yes I Do* and *All My Love Belongs To You*, Lonnie Johnson's *Tomorrow Night* and Wynonie Harris' *Good Rockin' Tonight* clicking the past six months after the firm had firmly established itself as an important hillbilly and race diskery.

Musicraft in the East and Four Star on the Coast have enjoyed a comeback year. Musicraft, a year ago virtually bogged in debts, has struggled back under prexy Jack Meyerson. A series of refinancing plans have succeeded in wiping out back debts while cutting costs. Meanwhile, the firm slowly has built its popular artists, chiefly Sarah Vaughan, Mel Torme and Shep Fields, to a consistent sales level.

Four Star, which Bill McCall took over with many unpaid bills, came back with a sleeper hit in *Deck of Cards*, has since concentrated on Western wax and is now operating in the black according the diskery owner.

Other West Coast diskers, after several months of uncertainty, have begun to show some positive signs of life in the past month. This after the diskers spent several months building up satisfactory distribution systems. In addition the problems of material and manpower shortages, which had plagued the Coast firms for several years, have faded. Production costs began to stabilize allowing the diskers to shape over-all operational economies. With raw materials and know-how closer to hand, the waxers were able to turn out a disk equal in quality to that produced by major firms. And as the American market began to tighten, the more aggressive Coast outfits turned to foreign export markets for new sources of income.

But most important the Coast firms, with the disk biz tightening, began to specialize rather than attempt to compete in fields which are dominated by the majors. *Aladdin*, *Spe-*

What's New

Paced by Columbia Records' new 45-minute record and 33 1/3 r.p.m. innovation (to be announced at Columbia's own dealer convention in Atlantic City, June 21), new processes and technical improvements are beginning to pop in the wax industry, and may ultimately effect all retailers.

Columbia's 45-minute record involves a vinylite, micro-grooved disk which spins at 33 1/3 revolutions per minute. To match the disk, the waxery has worked out arrangements with Philco Radio & Television Corporation to design a special adapter unit with a unique pick-up arm and a 33 1/3 motor and turntable (to be marketed at \$29.95) which can plug into the average home radio or phonograph. The micro-grooved disks will be sold at \$4.85 for the 12-inch and \$3.85 for the 10-inch item.

Trend Opening

Disclosure of the Columbia development opened up information about a small West Coast disk firm, Tempo, which has perfected a similar type record which it was going to market at \$5 per 12-inch platter. Tempo was believed to have been working with the Admiral Radio & Phonograph firm for the development of the specially required player.

There has been much trade debate in the past few weeks about what effect the Columbia micro-grooved disk could have on the industry. Some feel that the new development is being marketed at a bad time to be able to make the impact that could establish the idea. On the other hand many opine that the consumer is ready for such a change simply because the new disk helps to eliminate the home storage problem and secondly because of the convenience and economy of the micro-platter.

Cheaper Standard Disks?

Meanwhile, regular wax improvements may be forthcoming. A cheap unbreakable record may be in the offing. Cost of shellac has risen to the point where diskers think it may soon be as practical to use an unbreakable compound. A number of the smaller manufacturers have been working on cheap plastic biscuits for some time.

Another development still in the experimental stage is the hydraulic press and the multiple press. Glenn L. Martin has been perfecting a hydraulic press for almost two years but still hasn't offered it for sale. This machine is said to be able to turn out 5,000 disks per hour. A multiple press has been reported in development but the names of the inventors and researchers have been kept top secret. Press reportedly can finish 5 to 10 disks in a single operation.

cialty and Modern are concentrating on race and commercial jazz. Imperial and Pan-American are specializing in Latin American wax. Four-Star is strongest in the Western field.

Tempo, with a growing hit in *When the Apple Blossoms Fall*, is planning to expand into the classical field with the firm scheduled to open an office in Florence, Italy, where it will cut its longhair sides. Expansion plans also are being mulled by Exclusive Records, with that firm figuring to go stronger into the Western and spiritual fields. Coast Records, which formerly concentrated on Western and Latin stuff, debuted in the pop field with a roster of new artists just prior to the ban.

London Records Debuts During Ban

The Petrillo edict made it easier for something new in the biz from abroad. A new American label was born, London Records, out of E. R. (Ted) Lewis's English Decca capital and artist roster.

London made its first major Ameri-

can market dent with Gracie Fields' *Now Is the Hour*, which hit an estimated 500,000 sales. It showed its influence in the market with the original diskings of *Swing Low Sweet Clarinet*, *Fiddle Faddle* and *A Tree in the Meadow*. The firm has no Petrillo problem, recording in England and using full musical renditions of American sleepers. Firmest example is its version of *You Can't Be True, Dear* which, altho second best to the Rondo Ken Griffin-Jerry Wayne original, still looks good in the sales reports.

Of growing importance to the industry in view of the Petrillo ban, has been the Electric Musical Industries group (His Master's Voice, Columbia, Parlophone, Regal Zonophone, MGM) in Britain. With the ban a half-year gone and with the major waxers caught short on a number of tunes, the American trade has begun to look to England for hit coverage via British made wax. Victor, Columbia and MGM already have issued EMI-produced wax while other companies are either set or implementing

deals to obtain foreign masters. Mercury waxed musical backgrounds in Europe and dubbed in vocals by American artists on some current hit songs. Signature is having some sides cut in France. Continental has a deal for Swiss masters. Standard made a 10-year reciprocal arrangement with Disco Trades of Belgium. Keynote pact the rights to use the wax of the Czech Recording Industries which later were turned over to Mercury Records in a deal which resulted in the absorption of Keynote by the Chicago diskery.

Kidisks Carry The Gold Lode

Categorically, the boom of the year must be attributed to the children's record biz. Kidisks zoomed for the major diskers and introduced a good many newcomers to the industry. But most important was the development of a cheap unbreakable record, which tho currently used exclusively in the kid market may eventually become a stock medium for regular pop waxings. Also important were the tremendous strides made in the six and seven-inch plastic kidisk market with firms like Rocking Horse showing the way.

The kidisk trade served as inducements for new types of merchandising. Rocking Horse produces a Peter Pan label which is sold directly to chain and variety stores without using distributors. Similar set-up was tried with the 99-cent unbreakables of Paul Puner's Allegro Records but the system proved too trying, so that the diskery is now fishing for distribs for the line. Popularity of the children's stuff led to the organization of direct mail diskers such as the Young People's Record Club which operates its biz in a similar fashion to the Book of the Month Club operation.

Estimates on the approximate sales of kidisks since last June come to a rough 50,000,000 which would make this field accountable for about 14 per cent of the entire industry's sales. During Christmas season, tot stuff gobbles about 35 per cent of the biz. This includes the lines produced by the major diskers—Victor, Decca, Capitol, Columbia and MGM. Capitol executives have openly stated that the firm's kidisk line has been heavily responsible for the diskery holding on thru a rough period in the middle of last year. Columbia has shown interest in the seven-inch plastic line and is believed to be readying such a line at 35 cents per platter for early release.

Most consistent categories were the race and hillbilly fields. These, kidisks and other specialized lines of wax are discussed in another article in this supplement.