SADE ABROAD: SMOOTH OPERATIONS OUTSIDE THE U.K.

By PAUL SEXTON

LONDON—A four-year absence from the recording scene and a comeback album conservatively similar to past glories doesn’t always help sell some 2.5 million worldwide inside six weeks. The exception to the rule is called Sade.

The Nigerian-born but U.K.-signed-and-developed singer was one of Epic’s most desirable commodities, from her 1984 debut, “Diamond Life,” through the 1988 set, “Stronger Than Pride,” but fell silent for fully four years, until the release last November of her fourth album, “Love Deluxe.”

From day one of its release, Sade re-established herself as one of our most relevant Brits. Around it were the first of a series of spectacular sales figures, among which, curiously, the U.K. has been one of the few disappointments.

Andy Stephens, London-based VP of European repertoire for Sony Music International, says, “The U.K. market seems to have almost shunned this, and it’s very difficult to explain why, because the rest of the world has taken this record like a duck to water.”

That cult album—historically, the best-selling longform company’s marketing might—was the result of “Love Deluxe,” according to Andy Stephens, London-based singer’s sales were around 1.5 million in the U.S., and its total international sales were around 6 million, making it “one of the few artists that have broken through year for Morrissey from his musical life,” says management associate Jo Stone, who began working with Morrissey at Rough Trade Records nearly 10 years ago.

As the album’s vry first single, “We Hate It When Our Friends Become Successful,” climbed both the Hot Dance Music and Modern Rock Tracks chart last July, Morrissey said to discover how enthusiastic his followers here were. More than 2,000 crazed fans turned out for a midnight in-store appearance by the singer at Vinyl Solution in Grand Rapids, Mich., on the eve of the album’s release. It was the first of several such events that Morrissey approved—quite to the surprise of longtime associates.

“Whatever it amounted to was that Morrissey was committed to breaking the record in the U.S.,” says Slee. “The trouble is, he is a real live hermit,” she quips. Morrissey’s reluctance to take part in excessive promotional campaigns was tempered by involving those he feels most strongly about—his fans. Thus, he was more eager to meet his listeners at a record shop than to sit down with yet one more journalist.

Howie Klein, president of Sire Records, working with label manager Sandy Alouette, acknowledged Morrissey’s wishes as the campaign for “Your Arsenal” proceeded. A tall tour of the U.S. sought to strike a balance between large venues like the Hollywood Bowl, which helped support the tour financially, and theater-size halls, preferred by the fans, “He shared Sire and Warner’s vision to take this to the next level,” says Alouette. “Everyone was very pleased and impressed with the outcome of this tour. He toured his boots off.”

( Nigel Thomas, who spoke to Billboard in December about his management of Morrissey, died Jan. 9. He was 44 )

ANNE LENNOX, BMG

By DAVID STANFIELD

MILAN—When Annie Lennox performed “Why?” at last year’s San Remo Song Festival here, she stunned some leading journalists into writing that she provided the only touch of class to an event mainly dedicated to the cream of domestic talent.

Billed as a special international guest, Lennox was giving her first performance as a solo artist here. It was witnessed by about 16 million viewers of public broadcaster RAI TV, which has the exclusive screening rights to the event.

The single “Why?” was not released to coincide with the artist’s appearance, and her “Diva” album was slated to be marketed one month later. “It was a challenge if not a risk,” comments Anriana da Aloja, BMG’s promotions director for international repertoire. “But she was a smash, a superstar who is loved by leading fashion designers like Giorgio Armani and Valentino, and the general public.

San Remo appearance set everybody’s tongues wagging.” Lennox also broke an interview taboo by talking to journalists from six major daily newspapers and spending time with interviewers at 11 TV programs. When “Why?” was released, it went to the top of the national sales charts. The album “Diva” also reached No. 1 and has sold 250,000 pieces to date—a major achievement considering that Eurythmics albums never reached sales of 200,000 units on the Italian market.

BMG released the “Diva” CD, home video and laserdisc simultaneously, a first-time experience that greatly helped the marketing effort, according to D’Aloja. “We had this incredible material to show the media,” she explains. “We previewed it all with special events in Milan and in Rome. We sent out elegant invitations that were consistent with the class of the artist.”

Precious” was released as the artist’s second single and, at that time, not a major chart success, it was a widespread radio hit. Follow-up releases “Walking on Broken Glass” and “Little Bird” followed a similar pattern. “Diva” is still selling well, according to D’Aloja, and BMG has continued widespread promotion on it. In November, 10 key regional radio stations aired the artist’s Monteux “Unplugged” concert, and BMG paid for advertisements in national newspapers to publicize the event.

“In every country in Italy, everyone was asking the answer to ‘Why?’” BMG Italy’s promotion of Lennox has continued into 1993 with the screening of her video clip for “Love Song For A Vampire,” from the movie “Bram Stoker’s Dracula.”

THE BRITISH INVASION CONTINUES

Much of the world’s most popular music has hailed from Britain, a country whose talent is known for crossing borders and breaking barriers. The following are some of Britain’s greatest ongoing success stories.

MORRISSEY, Warner/Sire/Reprise

“Your Arsenal”—UNITED STATES

By THOM DUFFY

NEW YORK—When Morrissey arrived here two days before the U.S. release of his fourth solo album, “Your Arsenal,” on Warner/ Sire/Reprise, his label was prepared to use the promotional power in its arsenal to benefit the artist. And for perhaps the first time, the sensitive and enigmatic singer was willing—within limits—to make use of his record company’s marketing might.

The result was a breakthrough year for Morrissey in the U.S., which saw “Your Arsenal” open on the Billboard 200 at No. 21 (his highest album debut to date) and go on to sell 360,000 copies a best-selling longform music video, “Live in Dallas,” a successful 12-date concert tour, including two sold-out nights for 37,000 fans at the Hollywood Bowl; and a growing awareness of this alternative music darling in the music mainstream.

It’s an excellent beginning,” says manager Nigel Thomas, measuring recent achievements against long-term expectations. “I think that a broader audience has to understand what Morrissey is all about—historically, the media felt he was more of a cult figure. That cult image, of course, dates back to Morrissey’s tenure as part of a Duran with guitarist Johnny Marr in the marvelcous and melancholic Smiths. Those who have followed the singer through the past decade believe U.S. fans are more willing to embrace Morrissey’s current music.

“The American audience has been more accepting of the changes in his musical life,” says management associate Jo Stone, who began working with Morrissey at Rough Trade Records nearly 10 years ago.

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