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General News

SIERRA/BRIAR OPERATION

Friends Helping 2 L.A. Labels Exist

By ED HARRISON

LOS ANGELES—Sierra/Briar Records, a small specialty label, is getting by with help from its friends, allowing the label to keep costs to a minimum while paying artists higher royalties.

The label has friends who are engineers, disk masterers and writers as well as in radio and retail, all contributing their services for free or at reduced rates. All of its acts are friends. Even Gene Parsons' recent "Melodies" LP was recorded at the studio owned by label president John Delgatto's cousin.

The traditional, bluegrass and folk label also does its own color stripping and negatives, functions normally delegated to outside firms. Through a contact of Delgatto's in Michigan, Sierra/Briar is able to have color separations done for about one-eighth of the cost charged by Los Angeles firms.

Run by a staff of three, including Marsha Necheles, managing director, and Vicki Nadsady, art and promotion director, the trio goes as far as doing its own shipping.

Delgatto often borrows a truck to pick up records from the presser and delivers them to its warehouse (shared with Rhino Records) from where product is shipped. Everyone contributes to publicity and sales functions.

Sierra/Briar has progressed from a release of four albums in 1978 to six in 1979 with an additional three re-releases to a projected 10 this year.

Among the acts released on the labels are Gene Parsons, Gram Parsons, the Credibility Gap, Steve Gillette with a direct-to-disk album, plus a variety of bluegrass product.

Delgatto says that the Briar label, originally founded in 1972 and distributed by Takoma until 1976, is for acoustic, bluegrass and traditional music, while Sierra, started in 1978 when the company became a "full-time record label," is "for everything else."

Sierra/Briar has a nationwide independent distributorship of about 20, except in Southern California where it does it itself with the aid of salesman Bob Merin. Delgatto claims that "it's the best thing that's happened for us" since payments from Southern California stores "come in like clockwork."

Delgatto, who says he's getting more aggressive with distributors, believes that "folk distributors don't know much about the product or how to sell it."

The break-even point on most albums is about 2,000-3,000 units. A 5,000-unit selling album is a profit maker. Because the Gene Parsons LP was its first studio production (other product acquired through licensing deals and completed masters) costs were higher, raising the break-even level to 12,000 units.

The label's return rate is averaging about 7%, inflated because of a Gram Parsons LP. Without that, says Delgatto, it's only about 1%. All returns are used for promotion or stock when supply runs short. Delgatto, with a background in manufacturing, oversees all pressings and reports minimal defective product.

At this point the label has no "working artists" to help sales. Delgatto, however, is now seeking artists who will be able to tour.

Sierra/Briar's audience is comprised mostly of cults that have followed the careers of its artists for years. Newsletters are sent regularly to those on its mailing list.

Its radio promotion list numbers about 200, but before albums are sent, a mailer asking if the station is interested is sent. Other promo copies are sent to distributors, magazines and college radio.

All artists signed to the company must be met with approval by all three workers. "The product has to relate to all our mutual interests," says Delgatto.

About 20%-25% of Sierra's business is overseas with a licensing deal with Anola in Europe. Delgatto is looking to firm up deals in the U.K., Japan and Australia.

Set NAB Artists

LOS ANGELES—Singer Mac Davis and comedian Bob Newhart are set to perform at the NAB's 58th annual convention in Las Vegas. Davis appears in April 13th's opening general assembly and Newhart appears at the closing luncheon.

The convention, and concurrent broadcast engineering conference is set for April 13-16 at the Las Vegas Convention Center.

ARC Disputed

LOS ANGELES—The American Recording Co., Beverly Hills, is asking Federal District Court here to force Artists Recording Co., Fremont, Calif., to desist from using the acronym, ARC, in conduct of the defendant's business.

The pleading claims the plaintiff acquired its right to use ARC from a Canadian firm originally and filed it as a service mark with the U.S. copyright office in February 1965.

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