

## ST. LOUIS DEALER DIVERSIFIES

### 'Record Stores Are Dead,' Says Keith Hudson

BY NELSON GEORGE

NEW YORK Hudson's wholesale outlet and retail record chain has been an institution in the black community of St. Louis for more than a decade. But now manager Keith Hudson says the stores are in the midst of major changes, because "record stores are dead."

Despite "the record industry getting back on its feet" in the last two

## MacDonald: I'm Ready for Headliner Tour

BY HARRY WEINGER

NEW YORK Ralph MacDonald has it all—almost.

As the top session percussionist, MacDonald is in demand for album and jingle dates. A new Kentucky Fried Chicken spot, based on Lionel Richie's "All Night Long," features his steady hands.

As an arranger and writer, along with partners William Salter and William Eaton, MacDonald is responsible for a few modern radio classics, including Roberta Flack/Donny Hathaway's "Where Is The Love" and the Grover Washington Jr./Bill Withers collaboration "Just The Two Of Us." Currently the partners have two tunes on the "Body Rock" soundtrack.

As a producer, MacDonald is well represented by Sadao Watanabe's "Rendezvous" album and the latest Grover Washington Jr. release. As Roberta Flack's producer, MacDonald gave her neighbor Yoko Ono's song, "Goodbye Sadness," a reggae-ish re-tooling for the "Every Man Has A Woman" album.

Yet despite the respect and recog-  
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years, Hudson says, the family-owned operation is now moving into computer software and distribution of Fisher-Price toys to diversify its inventory. The stores now carry video accessories and some video software on special order.

"St. Louis has lost a lot of stores in the black community recently," says Hudson. "We lost two of our four retail stores in the 'depression' of the early 1980s."

Ten years ago Keith's father Ted Hudson, the founder of Hudson's, inaugurated an ambitious program to increase the number of black retailers in St. Louis. After choosing the locations and providing the finances, Hudson put eight stores in business, giving them a start and holding them to a five-year commitment to buy from Hudson's wholesale operation.

Today, only one of those eight stores survives; the rest were the victims of poor management and the economic hard times that hit St. Louis' blacks. Keith Hudson still maintains that the concept of veteran black retailers putting others in business is "viable." But, he says, the next time he tries it, "We'll go through a bank or some other lending institution, instead of putting ourselves on the line as we did."

Currently, however, the Hudsons' main concern is getting space in an old railway station in the heart of St. Louis' black community that is being converted to a mall through federal and city money as part of a development program to help local black entrepreneurs. The Hudsons hope to use retail operations in this new mall to help expand their business base.

Looking at the St. Louis sales environment, Keith Hudson says, "Blues has always been good for us and continues to be, sustaining us through the hard times. Z.Z. Hill's records on Malaco are still strong," challenging the likes of Stevie Won-

der, Prince and Rick James in Hudson's stores. Local AM station KATZ has, in Hudson's opinion, had a profound impact on the local market by playing the blues music that local FMers are avoiding.

"KATZ is reaching the 35 and over black population and has that group coming into our stores looking for product," Hudson says. He cites two independent releases as benefitting from KATZ exposure and selling strongly for him: David Dee's "Goin' Fishin'" on Vanessa Records has sold 1,200 copies in just three weeks, while Ted Taylor's "Pleadin' For Love" on his own Solpugits label has been a steady seller for six months.



Commodore Confab. Lionel Richie sits in with another ex-Commodore, Thomas McClary, while McClary cuts his first solo album. Richie sings background on the single "Thin Walls." Engineer Steve Puliot pushes buttons while McClary and Richie listen. Howard Kinney is in the background. (Story, page 72).

## THE RHYTHM & THE BLUES

by Nelson George



JUST LAST YEAR most music aimed at the youth market was dance-oriented, with a heavy emphasis on beat boxes and hip-hopping voices. But three new releases suggest that the musical balance of power may be shifting back towards ballads and more melodic material.

For example, Tommy Boy and Streetwise, two labels weaned on rap and street sounds, are finding acceptance for records with a very different temperament. On the heels of the commercial failure of the James Brown-Afrika Bambaataa 12-inch "Unity," Tommy Boy has a climbing black chart single by the Force MD's called "Tears," an old-fashioned street corner harmony record with a slow dance groove that could revive slow dancing and red light parties. The song even has adult contemporary potential.

The group's debut album also includes "Let Me Love You," a summer dance club favorite that fuses hip-hop and doo-wop, and the poppy "Forgive Me Girl," which is already generating airplay. The five members of the Force MD's, all from the New York borough of Staten Island, sport a Frankie Lyman & the Teenagers look that, more than 25 years after it was introduced, looks fresh to today's record buyers.

Arthur Baker's Streetwise has a fine new single in the Stylistics' "Give A Little Love," a record that puts Russell Thompkins and company back in the sweet, ethereal setting that yielded their early '70s "Philly Sound" classics. The title of their album, "Some Things Never Change," suggests that the rest of the album is in a similar vein. Ironically, Amherst Records has just released a Stylistics "Greatest Hits" package that should help the new product and vice versa. Maurice Starr, who proved himself an able adaptor of older black pop styles with his work with New Edition on Streetwise, handled the production.

New Edition itself, now on MCA, has turned in an album that is heavier on melody and song structure than its Streetwise debut. "Cool It Now" has already shown its sales strength, but the real powerhouse cut, one that has top 20 pop potential, is "Mr. Telephone Man," another bit of catchy whimsy from the current master of the story/song, Ray Parker Jr., who wrote and produced it.

**SHORT STUFF:** Actress Cicely Tyson has been hired by Teena Marie to direct the video of the singer's new Epic single "Lovergirl" . . . Arista's Kashif performed at halftime and a post-game mini-concert at the Southwestern Athletic Conference battle between black college giants Grambling Univ. and Mississippi Valley State. The event was sponsored by Miller Beer . . . M.J.I.'s "Star Quiz," an urban contemporary music radio trivia show heard in 65 markets, has used such performers as Gladys Knight, Jeffrey Osborne, Patrice Rushen and Joyce Kennedy recently to ask questions and provide clues to listeners. "Star Quiz" is an offshoot of the successful "Rock Quiz" program . . . Mel Odoms has reactivated Mel-O Records with "I'm The Best" by Tomorrow's Edition,

a song produced by Amir Bayyan. For more info call (201) 432-5444 or (212) 566-6130.

Lydia Murdock, best known for "Superstar," her answer record to "Billie Jean," has cut a new single, "Love On The Line," to be distributed by Philadelphia's Team Records. Team can be contacted at (215) 546-7000 . . . The nominees for Ebony magazine's 1984 American Black Achievement Awards in music are Michael Jackson, Patti LaBelle, Prince and Lionel Richie . . . Original Music, the label that helped pioneer the distribution of African music in America, has released its first Caribbean album. "Under The Coconut Tree" is a collection of music from the islands of Grand Cayman and Tortola. Original, owned by Third World music scholar John Storm Roberts, can be

### Youth-oriented music getting more melodic

reached at (914) 756-2767 . . . Gary Jackson, former editor of Black Radio Exclusive, has established Gary Jackson Productions, a video promotion service. Jackson is working in conjunction with E.J. Gurren Music and can be reached at (818) 980-7501.

After a couple of so-so albums on Capitol, Ashford & Simpson seem to be back in stride with "Solid," the album and single. The single "Solid" is one of the first to mix a strong gospel feel with synth-pop production techniques . . . National Talent Associates, a Minneapolis-based artist management firm, has signed Andre Cymone to a management agreement. Prince's ex-bassist is currently recording his third Columbia album, and upon its completion he will embark on a national tour . . . One of the fall's most surprising singles is the Dazz Band's "Let It All Blow." The group had been working in the direction suggested by its top 10 pop hit "Let It Whip," but producer Reggie Andrews has made this record sound like an example of upscale New York hip-hop music, recorded in Los Angeles . . . Easy Street Records and "Monster Mash" maker Bobby "Boris" Pickett have put out a 1984 version called "Monster Rap," in time for Halloween . . . Tuff City, formerly distributed by CBS, has signed a deal with Profile, the label that has in the last year seized the mantle of top rap company from Sugar Hill and Tommy Boy. The first releases under the Tuff City/Profile relationship are Spoonie Gee's "Street Girl," the Fearless Four's "Dedication" and Output's "Say You'll Be."

Son Seals, the gutsy Chicago blues guitarist, has just released his fifth Alligator album, "Bad Axe," and is touring the East Coast after a lengthy West Coast trek . . . Larry Smith wrote the bass line on Kurtis Blow's "The Breaks" and has co-produced all of Run-DMC's singles. As producer of Whodini's second Jive album, "Escape," he finally steps forward and does a fine job, laying down the funk in the lean, muscular sound familiar to Run-DMC fans .

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