

Teena Marie Makes Chart Breakthrough

Her Legal Woes Over, Singer Clicks with 'Lovergirl'

BY ROB HOERBURGER

NEW YORK If Teena Marie's "Lovergirl" is her first top 15 pop hit, it's also something of a comeback, after the resolution of a bitter lawsuit against Motown Records and a shaky start at her current label, Epic.

Marie had recorded four successful albums for Motown between 1979 and 1982, then sued the company for nonpayment of royalties and moved to Epic. Motown countersued, claiming Marie owed them one more album. An out-of-court settlement was reached last October in Marie's favor, but in the midst of the suit, her Epic debut, "Robbery," stalled at 119 on the album chart.

"Every good artist needs a lawsuit," she says. "At the time it was going on I was very bitter and frightened, and when I won the suit there was no great euphoria. I'm just really sorry it had to happen. I still have a lot of friends at Motown. Now I don't think about it on an everyday basis—I try to look at the good things and not trip on the bad, otherwise I might really trip."

One of those good things is the success of "Starchild," her second Epic album, from which "Lovergirl" is culled. Marie admits that she went for more of a raw sound on "Starchild" than on the heavily orchestrated "Robbery," but has no easy answers for why "Lovergirl" has become her biggest pop hit.

"Maybe it's the new label, and maybe it's the fact that there's a rock guitar solo instead of a saxophone solo," she says. "But to me it doesn't sound any blacker or whiter than anything else I've done."

In the past, Marie's success has been primarily in the r&b market (during her early days at Motown she was known as Rick James' pro-

tege), and "Lovergirl" also broke first on the black chart before crossing over to pop. "My records have to break black first before they cross," she says. "That's just the way it is. If I didn't have that black base I wouldn't be able to go through the pop door."

"I think it's sad that black records have to be promoted separately, unlike the '60s, when records broke simultaneously. It's sad to turn on an awards show and see best black performance by a female, best pop performance by a 'white' male. I am proud of the fact that I have had four top 10 r&b singles, which is unusual for a person of my color."

Marie sounds a bit sheepish on that last statement, mockingly self-conscious of the fact that she's a white woman who broke on Motown and has a largely black audience. "When my first album came out, Motown wouldn't put my picture on the cover," she says. "But it feels good to know that black people buy my records, that they simply don't see my color. Actually, I don't care who I sell records to as long as I sell records."

Since her second Motown album, Marie has handled production chores in addition to co-writing and arranging her material. But it seemed unusual for Epic to let her continue producing herself after the lackluster performance of "Robbery."

"When 'Robbery' came out I was in the middle of my suit with Motown, and a lot of people at Epic didn't know or perceive who Teena Marie was," she recalls. "Many hadn't even heard the album before it came out, so it's hard to put the ball in their hands when not everyone is there. Then they realized I had sold two million albums for another record company producing

myself, so how could they take the producer's job away from me?"

Marie maintains that more female producers will emerge in the '80s, producing not just their own albums but other acts as well. She recently finished producing the Epic debut of her backup band, Q-T Hush, and also produced "Guess Who I Saw Today" for Patti LaBelle's upcoming MCA album.

"Valerie Simpson and Patrice Rushen are producing their own albums," she notes. "Sylvia Robinson has been producing records since I was 12 or 13, all those Moments records. Sheila E. is a very good producer in her own right, and I think we can expect a lot from her in the

(Continued on page 50)



They're Solid. Nickolas Ashford & Valerie Simpson perform during a rec show at New York's Radio City Music Hall (Photo: Chuck Pulin)

Guitarist Releasing All-Star Album

Chet Atkins Picking a New Tune

BY KIP KIRBY

NASHVILLE CBS Records is calling its new digitally recorded Chet Atkins album, "Stay Tuned," a precedent-setting release for the label. The album pairs the legendary Nashville guitarist with a guest list of top guitarists from the fields of jazz, rock and pop, including George Benson, Earl Klugh, Larry Carlton, Steve Lukather and Mark Knopfler.

The Columbia project also unites CBS's Nashville division, which signed Atkins two years ago, with the company's jazz/progressive music department, headed by New York-based vice president George Butler.

Notes Butler: "If we'd tried as a record company to pull off a feat like putting Chet Atkins together with Earl Klugh or George Benson, it would have been impossible. This was strictly done as an artist-to-artist project."

Butler and Rick Blackburn, CBS's Nashville senior vice president, hope to expose the album via cross-merchandising through retailers, branch coordination on a regional level, and the use of college and black radio.

CBS shot a short video clip showing Atkins, Klugh, Benson and Carlton rehearsing for their Feb. 13 performance in Nashville before a crowd of 600 industry guests. The clip will be supplied to such television outlets as "Entertainment Tonight" and VH-1.

The label plans to promote the album as both a regular and Compact Disc release. CBS is stickerizing "Stay Tuned" with the names of the featured musicians and asking retailers to stock it in their jazz rather than country bins. It will be featured in CBS's product ads and will be highlighted in the company's national CD advertising. "Stay Tuned" ships this week in the U.S. and Canada, and will be issued in Compact Disc form in April.

Blackburn says that albums such as this one are the reason he signed the legendary country guitarist to the label in 1983. "We weren't just interested in his proven country tal-

ents," Blackburn explains. "We saw the technology changing, and CBS believes strongly in the future impact of Compact Disc. Most of our country roster isn't suited to doing CDs the way Chet is."

The label's 32 college reps (who oversee more than 50 college campuses) will be promoting the album at the local radio level. CBS is also asking Atkins to incorporate jazz dates such as the Kool and Playboy Jazz Festivals into his regular touring schedule to further promote the project.

The idea for "Stay Tuned" originated with Atkins himself. He says he and George Benson had considered the possibility of recording a few songs together, but scrapped the initial project when they had

trouble getting their respective labels to agree. The idea resurfaced after Blackburn mentioned to Atkins that he thought he could sell a contemporary CD project recorded in Nashville.

Atkins says the album fell into place surprisingly smoothly once the wheels were set in motion. David Hungate, the ex-Toto bassist now working in Nashville, was brought in to produce the project because Atkins wanted a contemporary sound totally unlike anything he had done before.

Hungate added Carlton and Lukather to diversify the album. Then Atkins decided he wanted to incorporate Mark Knopfler after hearing the British guitarist's work and rec-

(Continued on page 50)

'Happy Together' Again

Oldies Tour Is 'Bigger and Better'

By JEFF TAMARKIN

NEW YORK After completing a successful 125-date run last year, the organizers of the "Happy Together Tour" are finalizing plans for the "Happy Together Tour 1985," which they say will be "bigger and better" than the 1984 crusade.

This year's outing, says tour planner David Fishof, will be extended to 150 dates, including most of the outdoor venues utilized last year, plus a number of fairs and theatres-in-the-round. The tour will begin April 13 at the Holiday Star Theater in Merryville, Ind., and continue through October with few days off.

Returning to headline the program of '60s hitmakers will be the Turtles featuring Flo & Eddie. The other acts—all new to the tour—will be the Buckingham, the Grass Roots and Gary Lewis. Among them, the four acts logged 40 top 40 Billboard hits from the mid '60s to the early '70s.

The 1984 tour featured five acts and drew more than 750,000 attendants. Eighty-five of the 125 dates in 1984 were sellouts, reports Fishof, who also manages several sports and entertainment figures from his New York offices.

Why did a concert featuring acts which, for the most part, have had little or no chart success in the past 15 years do so well? "No other show offers as much for the dollar," suggests Fishof. "Where else can you get 40 gold hits for the price of one ticket? Also, this kind of pop music affected a lot of people, and now it reminds them of the '60s. Not everyone grew up listening to Dylan or went to Woodstock."

The "Happy Together Tour 1985" will feature a voiceover narration by DJ "Cousin Brucie" Morrow between acts. And there are plans for videotaping by Jon Small (who has worked extensively with Billy Joel) for later cable viewing, as well as a tie-in hits album from K-tel.

Tears For Fears To Tour

Electro-Popsters Push 'Big Chair'

BY ETHLIE ANN VARE

LOS ANGELES Phonogram reports that Tears For Fears' first album, "The Hurting," sold 300,000 units in the U.K., and 100,000 in the U.S. Oddly, the label notes, more than 70,000 of those records were sold in the Los Angeles area alone.

Vocalist/bassist Curt Smith has no idea why this, of all markets, has been so strong for the band. He's only been to Los Angeles once before, to shoot a video two years ago. "I haven't been around L.A. enough to discover what's different about it," says Smith. "We've never played here; the last time we played anywhere was December of 1983."

To promote their sophomore effort, "Songs From The Big Chair," in a more even-handed way, Tears For Fears will undertake their first world tour starting March 21 in England. The trek will take them throughout Europe, the U.S., Canada, Australia and Japan.

"Songs From The Big Chair" was a long time coming for the group, founded by Smith and keyboardist/

songwriter Roland Orzabal. They worked for seven months at a home 24-track studio in Bath, and had another postponement when producer Jeremy Green was replaced by Chris Hughes, who had also produced "The Hurting." The new album ended up costing about 70,000 pounds (\$77,000), according to Smith.

"I think the two singles, 'Mothers Talk' and 'Shout,' took as long as the rest of the tracks put together," says Smith, 23. "I prefer to go in and record an album first, and take a single off it, as opposed to getting wrapped up in one song." In the end, neither U.K. single was chosen for American release; the single and video here will be "Everybody Wants To Rule The World."

Tears For Fears formed out of a boyhood friendship between Smith and Orzabal, who have been playing together since they were 13. As part of the five-piece band Graduate, the pair were signed to PRT (formerly Pye) in Britain, without notable success.

(Continued on page 50)