

famed rhythm section, which gained fame backing rhythm and blues singers like Percy Sledge ("When a Man Loves a Woman") and Otis Redding ("Dock of the Bay").

In Philadelphia, the house band that put the city on the musical map in the Seventies was Sigma Sound Studio's MFSB (stands for "Mother Father Sister Brother"). The group backed Philadelphia International Records artists like the O'Jays in such Seventies' hits as "For the Love of Money," "Back Stabbers" and "Love Train." And they were among the first to define the contemporary disco sound with their own best-selling single, an instrumental bursting with energy entitled simply "TSOP" (The Sound of Philadelphia).

In Miami, songs like "Funky Nassau" by the Beginning of the End and "Get Down Tonight" and "That's the Way (I Like It)" by K.C. & the Sunshine Band drew national attention to the studios of TK Productions, where a stable of musicians backed hits with a funky beat and an often Latin flavor. The musicians now play in other cities, too, but they remain based at TK to back artists like Betty Wright ("Clean Up Woman") and Peter Brown ("Do You Want To Get Funky with Me?").

Q. What's the best way to land a recording contract? Do record company talent scouts really listen to all the demonstration tapes they get?

Record companies are always searching for the next hit or the new artist who can make millions. Those with the most power to get recording contracts are independent record producers with a good track record and the A & R (artist and repertoire) executives at the record companies, whose jobs depend on finding new talent. "Most of the A & R people listen to the demonstration tapes they get," says Jerry Bailey, a spokesman for ABC Records, who can also be found listening to tapes on occasion. "Usually you can tell within the first 10 seconds whether you like it or not. Tape quality isn't really all that important. What we're looking for is a good song or an unusual voice, and that comes through even on a rough tape."

"A beginner's best shot is to have his manager or a respected producer bring the tape by. They'll play the tape for us, and we'll arrange to see the artist perform if we're interested. A producer will often bring us a tape and find the song he thinks could be a hit for us. We'll foot the bill to record it and release it on spec—which means that if it hits we sign the artist, and if not we drop him or carry him for a year or two to see if he can get a hit." Record companies lose at least \$2,000 to \$3,000 on a single that flops, and they may pour \$35,000 to \$200,000 or more into

the production and promotion of an album. Since nine out of 10 acts in the pop field lose money, record companies must be selective about signing.

Q. What happens to a record when it's released? And how does it make the "Top 40"?

Getting a record played on the radio is the first step in making a hit. This is harder than it sounds, because today's major AM stations usually play no more than 20-30 different songs a day. Most of these are already hits, and stations' playlists allow for only a few new "add-ons" each week.

"We used to talk about the Top 40 for radio play," says Rick Sklar, programming vice-president at New York's WABC, the most listened-to radio station in the nation. "In the Seventies it's more like the Top 20. Our goal is to keep our audience tuned in, and we can't afford to play lesser-known songs."

Radio stations receive as many as 300 new singles a week, and music directors are besieged by record company promotion personnel whose job it is to get their records on the air. Once a song "breaks" in a major market (gets played on a major station), it has a chance to get on the national charts compiled weekly by *Billboard*, *Record World* and *Cashbox*, three music industry trade magazines.

"For a single to get on the charts it has to be added to the playlists of about five or six key radio stations across the country," says Steve Hulen of the *Cashbox* chart research department. "About 138 stations are called each week, as are distributors and major record stores. To get into the 70's or 80's on the charts, other major stations have to add the tune to their playlists. After that, chart position is determined by a combination of how well the song sells, airplay and phoned-in requests to the radio stations. If we see a tie, we go with the one that is selling better." Both *Billboard* and *Record World* chart singles in a similar way, and all three chart albums by sales alone.

Q. Does a record album's cover influence its sales? Who decides what will go on the cover?

A catchy album cover attracts attention and may even boost sales, but the cleverest packaging can't move an album that's a musical flop. Conversely, "If a record is good, you could put it in a paper bag and it would sell," says John Berg, vice-president of packaging, art and design at Columbia Records. Berg's sense of style influences all Columbia products, and he has put together distinctive album covers for artists like Chicago, Bruce Springsteen and Bob Dylan.

Art directors usually suggest or

decide the cover, but the more powerful or successful the artist, the more say he or she has in the cover design. The cover for the first Beatles' album featured a simple photograph taken as they leaned over a railing at their record company, but later the group took an active role in such extravaganzas as their cover for *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Artists like Cat Stevens, Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell have designed their own album covers, featuring their own illustrations, self-portraits, poems or hand-lettering.

The photo or illustration on an album cover can cost anywhere from 35 cents to \$20,000, with the average cost about \$3,000 for well-known artists. A simple Polaroid snapshot Berg took of Bob Dylan was used on Dylan's *John Wesley Harding* cover, while \$20,000 was spent on a cover picture for Neil Diamond's *Beautiful Noise* album (and never used because Diamond decided he didn't like it). The Eagles' *Hotel California* cost about \$15,000, including rental of the hotel set, the hiring of extras, and special lighting.

Q. Some record stores have a huge selection, while others just seem to stock what's popular now. Who determines what goes into record stores?

A store's selection depends on its size, clientele and who's stocking the records. Record chain stores like King Karol and Record Bar, featuring larger than average inventory and range of artists, are becoming more popular. These stores—virtually record supermarkets—buy their records direct from the various manufacturers at discounted prices.

The smaller "mom and pop" record retailers in downtown areas or shopping malls usually don't have the volume to buy direct from the manufacturers. They are more likely to buy from a distributor (called a "one-stop"), which stocks records from all the manufacturers. The price is higher, since smaller stores must pay for the distributor's services.

Record departments in stores like Sears, J.C. Penney and K-Mart are serviced by "rackjobbers," who buy direct from the manufacturers at the best discount of all and save the chains the bother of running a record department. Rackjobbers choose inventory, take care of the advertising, and provide the racks and fixtures that records are displayed on. All the store has to do is ring the cash register.

Radio playlists help to determine which records a rackjobber keeps in a department, but "ultimately the consumer makes the decisions," says Herb Dorfman, vice-president of Bee Gee Records and Tapes, an Albany, New York, rackjobber whose 200 accounts