

The Independent Record Story: Pt. 1

Stiff keeps on growing

planning releases from Dirty Looks, Ten Pole Tudor, and Any Trouble.

Keeping things stiff.

To illustrate, here are a few examples...

Desmond Dekker's new album *Black and Dekker* is grassroots reggae performed and recorded in fine style.

In the late '60's Dekker was one of the first reggae artists to break into the North American market with the million-selling single, "The Israelites". Since then Dekker has not been heard from much and one wonders why. However, in this album he re-establishes himself as one of reggae's ace artists.

Helping Dekker on this album are a kaleidoscope of singers and musicians including such names as The Pioneers, Jackie Mittoo and Brinsley Schwartz. With their help he redoes his old hit, "The Israelites", and an up-tempo version of that wailing blues song, "Many Rivers to Cross" and "007" from the movie *The Harder They Come*.

Other songs include "Hippo", an up-tempo reggae rhythm special worth its weight in gold and, "Juliet", a ballad with a big bassy sound which will really shake the floor.

One minor fault of this album is the tendency to sometimes overplay the brass arrangements and the result is a raucous sound that clashes with the smoother rhythms of the band. Still there are enough good things on the album to make it worthwhile.

The press release on Jona Lewie reads like a cheap drug store romance. "Jona Lewie is only 25.

Son of a Russian countess and a Southampton dock worker, he is tall, dark and handsome. He never gets out of bed before 1:30 p.m."

Enough fancy, here are the cold facts. Jona Lewie is a superb singer and melodic songwriter who has recently released an exuberant collection of his finger snapping, romantic lullabies entitled *On The Other Hand There's A Fist*.

The lead-off tune "(You'll Always Find Me In The) Kitchen At Parties" sets up the mood of the album, with Lewie's winy, cabaret-type vocals, and cocktail-style lyrics, matched up against a loose, shuffling rhythm.

Lewie is the descriptive songwriter, too lazy to write anything too intellectual, preferring instead the atmosphere of parties; a few drinks, conversation with the nearest lass

and little snatches of observation on the back of match covers and corners of yesterday's newspaper.

His songs, dealing mainly with women, love affairs and break-ups, are sometimes only a step removed from Abba and Tom Jones, while amazingly, at other times, only a step removed from the progressive songs of new wave groups like Visage and Public Image. Even the toughest of listeners are suckers for a good, hummable tune, and more often than not, Lewie manages to hit all the right buttons.

The album's weak points come when he slides too much into the harmless waters of middle of the road, as on a couple of songs on side two, but he quickly snaps back and finds the cutting edge that gives his pop unrestrained depth, imagination and force.



Dekker auditions for Disney film, "The Dread Wore Tennis Shoes".

Elliott Lefko and Paul Ellington

The words sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll are almost synonymous with Stiff Records. Ever since its debut on the scene with the likes of Elvis Costello and Ian Drury, the independent label has managed to feature everything that is new, odd, and different in popular music.

Ken P. Uristail, president of P.A.C.T.S. (Parents Against Children That Smile), said it best when he suggested Stiff should change their motto to "If it corrupts, we'll record it," or "Stiff Records, we'll exploit anyone," or "Stiff Records, where careers are manipulated."

Stiff recently opened an American branch where with the release of albums by The Plasmatics and Jona Lewie, it has successfully managed to keep up the tradition Mr. Uristail suggests.

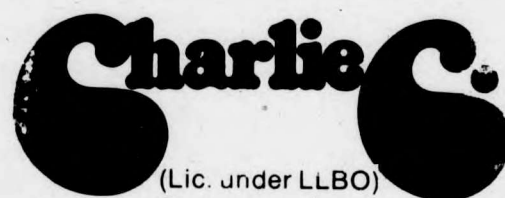
The move to open in America was considered suicide, by some industry insiders, who believe that the record industry is in a depression.

However Stiff, who call themselves "the world's most flexible record label," figured the only way to beat the fire, was to stand inside of it.

"Stiff has never been in better shape," said P.G. Phallon of the Stiff New York office. "The first year was just a rehearsal. We were just limbering up, trying out new systems, establishing relationships with new business partners, and dipping our toes into this great American pond."

In the last few months they released four new albums, opened a merchandising wing, and ran an infamous Stiff barnstorming tour, featuring five bands, called appropriately—The Son of Stiff Tour.

In the next few months they are



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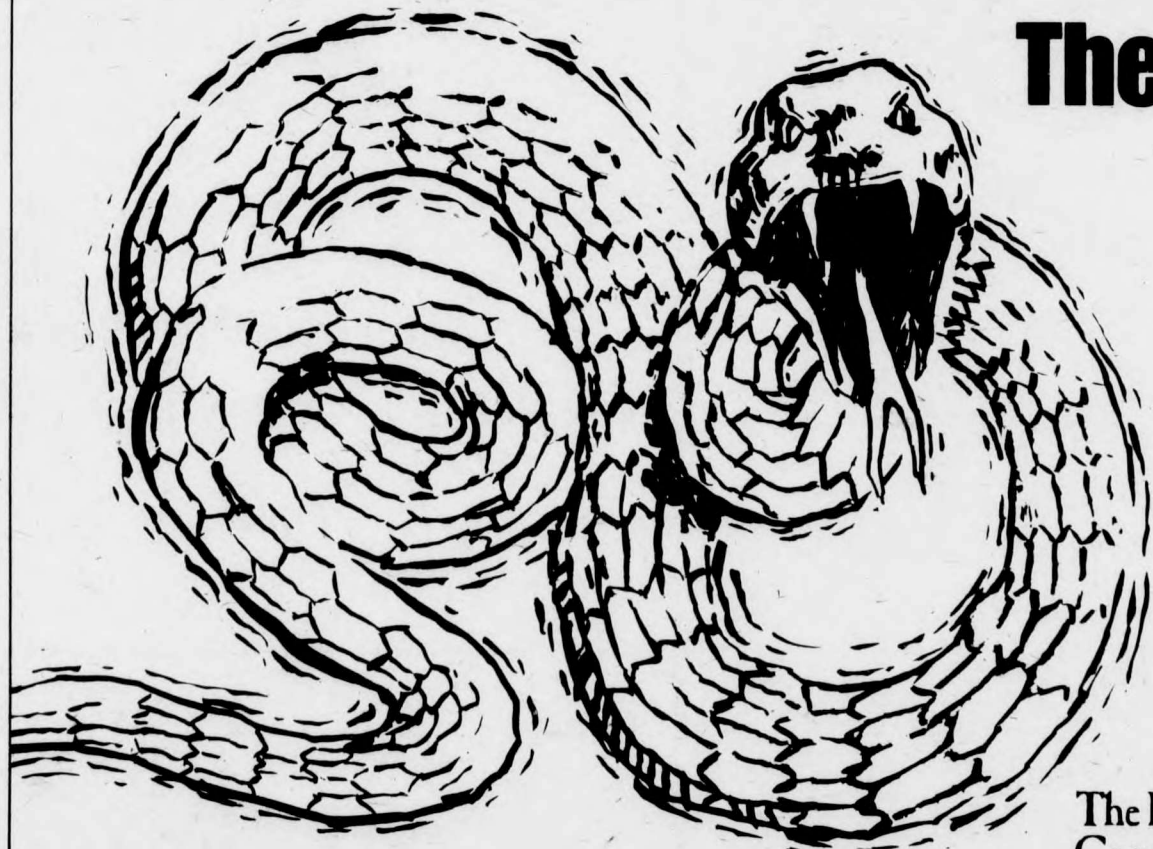
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