

Gateway interview with Holger Peterson

Stoney road to success

Interview by Steve Hanon

Most people, when they put a record onto their turntable, don't give any thought to how that recording came into being. This interview with Holger Peterson, an Edmonton record producer and owner of the independent label, Stoney Plain Records, will hopefully give an insight into that area, from the point of view of one of the independents. Music is an art, but it is also a business which involves an exchange of value for value. This interview was done late one frigid night as Holger and I sipped coffee in the studio of CJSR radio.

Gateway: What is involved in producing a record?

Peterson: I will decide to make a record with somebody and to finance it myself. I hire the studio, hire the sidemen, work with the artist in getting his material up to the point where it's ready to record, attend the rehearsals with the group, and have an input into the arrangements.

I go into the studio and try to utilize the time as efficiently as possible, oversee the production. In my case, I try to work as closely with an artist as possible, to have a fair amount of artistic input.

I also oversee the technical end of it, and mix it down to the point where it's on tape and ready to be put on record. Years ago, at that point I would take the tape around to Toronto, Vancouver, Los Angeles, wherever, and try to get a deal for the artist.

In some cases the record would come out on a major label. In some cases the artist would decide to put it out on their own label. Eventually I started a label myself so that there would be an outlet for the material I was directly involved with.

Gateway: What does it cost to produce a record?

Peterson: For major labels now, in the States, you're looking at budgets probably of \$80,000 plus for a new band. In Canada you can do things for considerably less money. Most of the records I've produced have come in around \$20,000 for an album. That's because you can get a lot of deals on studio time.

It depends on the situation too. If you're working with a band, then that's an ideal situation, because you're able to work with the band prior to going into the studio. The band is an entity, and they rehearse together normally. They get their material up and you go into the studio to record it.

With a solo artist like Paul Hann, it would be a matter of hiring sidemen and having to pay them for rehearsal and studio time. It isn't quite as efficient. So, it takes probably more money to do an album with a solo artist using sidemen, than it does for a band which is an entity in itself.

Gateway: So it's a major investment of both money and time from your standpoint.

Peterson: Absolutely. The money is relative. \$20,000 means more to me than \$80,000 means to a major record label, I'm sure.

In terms of time, I haven't been involved in any direct record production for almost three years now. I've played a role as an executive producer, and hired a producer to work with artists.

The time commitment I found to be a little too taxing. In some situations, you're literally writing off three months of your life to produce an album. You're in the studio all the time. It's not unusual for sessions to go sixteen or even eighteen hours at a stretch. So you

go home and you crash.

There is really nothing else you can do. You can't conduct business. You get up, go back to the studio, you work again. Then you start all over. It just takes so much energy that the time factor becomes very important.

Gateway: How do you acquire talent? What do you look for?

Peterson: I went through a period where I wanted to produce a lot of blues artists. I found that there were just not that many people interested in producing them, I suppose mainly because there wasn't that much money to be made at that sort of thing. So, I was able to contact people like Johnny Shines, Roosevelt Sykes, and Walter Horton to produce albums by them. Now those people are obviously talented. They've been recognized for thirty or forty years as having that talent.

In terms of a situation where you're looking for a band that could potentially have hit singles, and recoup the money that you invest, you're looking at a good deal more investment in a band than in a solo blues performer.

There are a number of talented people around that don't have recording contracts. After I like somebody's music, and feel that it's marketable, the most important thing would be how I feel about the people themselves. Do they have a professional attitude? Do I think the band is going to be together three or four years from now? Will the band be loyal? That's a big question I always ask myself with any artist that I'm involved with.

For an independent to be involved with an artist, to sink a lot of money and energy into an artist, everything you have can be riding on that particular recording. Everything that you can borrow, everything that you can get from the bank, everything, is riding on that particular record. So you have to ask yourself: if this record sells a million copies, will the artist turn around the sign with C.B.S. for three million, and walk out of their contract?

I think most people would do that. You have to work with the people that you believe won't.

A major factor in signing anyone, too, is the quality of their original material. First of all, they have to do original material. My criterion is that it should be at least 90% original material.

As an investor into the project, as a businessman, aside from my personal love of the music, and my personal artistic and creative involvement, I probably wouldn't invest as much money in a new act unless I had the publishing on their original material, and could represent that publishing.

Publishing is a great source of revenue in the music business, and it's a way of hedging your bets too.

Gateway: Will people still be playing this music in fifty years' time, for enjoyment's sake, rather than curiosity? Will it stand the test of time?

Peterson: Yes. There is so much good talent being recorded nowadays, and put on record, so much major talent surfacing all the time that is timeless. A good composition, whether it fits into any particular time period or not, usually will always be a good composition.

Gateway: Is Canadian pop music any different than American pop music?

Peterson: I think, in a general sense, there is more

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Thursday

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THEATRE

Theater 3, 10426 - 95 St.

Nightly at 8:30 p.m. (except Monday), Keith Digby directs Machiavelli's play, *Mandragola*. Tickets available at the Theater 3 box office.

GALLERIES

SU Art Gallery

Until Mar. 10, David Denyse: Prints, David Buchan: Photomurals, Mia Westerlund: Studys.

READINGS

Woodcroft Library

Mar. 10, 7:30 pm. Douglas Barbour and Stephen Scobie will be reading poetry.

CINEMA

SUB Theatre

Mar. 10, 7 and 9:30 pm, *Midnight Express*, restricted adult.

Mar. 11, *Movie Movie*, starring George C. Scott, family.

Mar. 13, Lina Wertmuller double bill. At 7 pm, *Seven Beauties*, at 9:30 pm, *Swept Away*.

Edmonton Public Library

A German Film Festival will be held at the Centennial Library on Tuesdays from March 4 to April 22. All the films except two will be in German with English subtitles. Showtime is 8 pm except for April 1 when showtime will be at 7 pm to allow for a double feature. Admission is free.

Mar. 11 *Der Aufrechte Gang/Walking Tall* (1976) 120 min., family: A "Proletariat Film" that examines four days in the life of a metalworker on a wild cat strike: his authority within his family and his relationship to his occupation, colleagues and union is shaken.

A film series entitled "You Asked For It," will be held in the Centennial Library Theatre from March 8 until April 20. Showtimes are at 2 pm and admission is free.

Mar. 8-9, *Dial M For Murder*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock. A London man tries to bump off his wife and when that plot fails, tries to twist the evidence to make it appear like she murdered the man who tried to murder her.

Arts 17

Mar. 12, 7:30 pm. The Department of Germanic Languages presents *Triumph des Willens*. Free admission.

Provincial Museum

Mar. 9, 4 and 7 pm. *Porcupine Quill Work, The Other Side of the Ledger and Indian Momento*. These films are part of a series on Canadian Indians that complements the Contemporary Canadian Indian Art exhibit from the National Museum of Man, featured at the Museum until March 24. Free Admission.

MUSIC

Orange Hall, 104 St. and 84 Ave.

Mar. 8, doors open at 7:30 pm. The South Side Folk Club presents Wheatland County and Ken Hamm. Wheatland County is one of the best new bluegrass bands around. Hamm is a native of Thunder Bay who specializes in the blues, demonstrating finger-picking, flat-pickings slide and bottleneck styles on guitar. Phone 475-1042 for more information.

St. Andrews United Church, 9915 - 148 Street

Mar 16, 3 pm. The Alberta Baroque Ensemble will present its first concert. This newly formed group of young professional musicians aims to bring good classical music to communities where there is little or none at all.

Jubilee Auditorium

Mar. 10, 8 pm, Bruce Cockburn.

Jubilee Auditorium

Mar. 7-8, 8:30 pm. The ESO, conducted by Andrew Schenck, plays works by Shostakovich, Purcell, Respighi and Mozart. Guest musician is Denis Brott, cellist.

Mar. 12, George Zukerman, bassoonist, is Canadian guest musician in the ESO's "Musically Speaking" series.

SUB Theatre

Mar. 6, 8 pm, New Wave from Britain with XTC. Tickets are available at the SU Box Office in HUB.

Mar. 9, 8 pm, "Ursula! From the Land of the Midnight Sun." Tickets available at HUB.

Convocation Hall

The Department of Music presents the following concerts and special events:

Mar. 7, 8 pm, Eileen Armstrong, organ, Senior Student Recital.

7, 8 pm. A composers forum is being held in Rm. 1-29 of the Fine Arts Building.

9, 3 pm, Art Song Interpretation with the students of Professor Alexandra Muss.

10, 8 pm, The University of Alberta String Quartet.



The Trembita Ensemble of the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians is celebrating Alberta's 75th birthday at the Jubilee Auditorium, on Sunday, March 9 at 2 p.m. The pageant with 300 performers will present historical tableaux and Ukrainian music and dance. Tickets on sale at all Woodward Stores.