

Rolling Stone

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..... success*

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Stills,
Nash &
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reunion.....



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The Holy War on Gays

Everlast

*the heart-
attack kid
... is back*



Sugar Ray's Mark McGrath...

“It’s getting harder for an independent label to survive,” A&M co-founder **HERB ALPERT** told RS in 1979.

ROCK & ROLL

Death of a Classic Label

Record-company mergers close down A&M – the label that gave you Peter Frampton, the Police, Soundgarden and Sheryl Crow – after thirty-seven years

BY STEVE HOCHMAN

THE BLACK BAND WRAPPED AROUND the famous trumpet logo outside A&M Records’ Hollywood offices pretty much says it all. Sheryl Crow sits among a group of A&M employees who are doing their best to keep their chins up. Former Soundgarden leader Chris Cornell, taking a break from work on his first solo album, stands with another clutch of staffers and sighs, “Now I know how a basketball player feels when he gets traded to another team.” This sunny but chilly Thursday, January 21st is the day that A&M closes, after an impressive

thirty-seven-year run. Founded in a West Hollywood garage on a humble \$1,000 by Jerry Moss and trumpeter Herb Alpert – in order to release Alpert’s Tijuana Brass debut, *The Lonely Bull* – the company grew into an independent powerhouse that helped to define the record business of the Seventies and Eighties. And its logo became a beloved totem for more than three decades’ worth of music fans via era-shaping albums, from Alpert’s *Whipped Cream and Other Delights* to Cat Stevens’ *Tea for the Tillerman* to Frampton Comes Alive! to the Police’s *Reggatta de Blanc* to

office complex of Universal’s Interscope label, in Westwood.

The mood today is one of tears and hugs, smiles and shrugs, as employees gather to say goodbye, most of them heading into uncertain futures. Outside the bungalow that houses the office of A&M CEO Al Cafaro, Dom and Dom – Dom Perignon champagne and Domino’s Pizza – flow to numb the senses, and the appreciation expressed by Crow and Cornell cheers the staff members as they clear out their offices.

At least Cornell and Crow are still on the label’s roster as it moves to Interscope. Most of the hundred



Soundgarden's *Superunknown*. The company's La Brea Avenue offices – a cluster of bungalows built in the Twenties by Charlie Chaplin and used as his studio – have stood as a monument to the spirit of independence and nurturing for generations of artists.

But January 21st is the end. The A&M logo will live on, but the company behind it is being assimilated into the new behemoth created as Seagrams' Universal Music takes over A&M's parent, PolyGram Music. The lot is being abandoned, likely to be sold or leased, and the remnants of A&M are being moved to the corporate

or so people wandering in and out of the gathering have not been traded but, rather, cut from the team as part of the near 500 jobs lost as Universal folds Geffen, as well as A&M, into Interscope and consolidates Island, Mercury and other labels. To many of these employees, A&M wasn't only a place to work but a home. Cafaro had been with the company for

"There are a lot of artists who are deeply pissed off," says Stewart Copeland.

twenty-two years; senior vice president David Anderle had been there for more than thirty. Their involvement goes back to the time when A&M grew from being the home of Alpert's Tijuana Brass (and such related acts as the Baja Marimba Band and Sergio Mendes and Brasil '66) to becoming a launch pad for a varied list of essential rock artists: Joe Cocker, Cat Stevens, the Carpenters, the Police and Sting, Janet Jackson, Suzanne Vega, Bryan Adams, Soundgarden and Sheryl Crow. A&M – along with Atlantic, Warner Bros. and Island (also gutted in the merger) – defined the entrepreneurial, artist-oriented spirit that set the tone for the business in the days before multinational corporations gobbled up labels.

"It was a family who we were very close to," says Police drummer Stewart Copeland, recalling the support that his then-unknown band got as it earned its shot at fame by crisscrossing the U.S. in a station wagon on a no-frills 1979 tour. "It was the biggest boutique record company. Very personal. Jerry Moss was a friend. All the A&R people, promotion staff. It was a family."

Styx guitarist and singer James "J.Y." Young echoes the sentiment. "Just look at the original ownership – half owned by a guy who's an artist," he says. "Herb is a great guy, and I'm fond of him and Jerry. They created an environment that was terrific to be part of. So many of the staff – there are probably at least ten of them that I'm still friends with. And the [A&M lot]

was a magical place. I remember running into Karen Carpenter there and Joni Mitchell, Janet Jackson when she was, like, seventeen years old. There wasn't a corporate structure. They continued the magic that probably started with Chaplin."

For Moss, the artist-friendly nature of A&M was a product of its time. "That whole era is missed in the record business," he says. "There was an openness and fairness and a sense of family. You went to all the gigs, and you barbecued with the artists and hung out. It was a whole lot of fun. Basically, the difference in running a company in those days was surviving – the fact that we didn't have to get real jobs was the driving force, and every now and then you'd have a windfall.

"It's such a different business now," Moss continues. "The music then was saying something, and the country was in a different grip – there was more awareness and appreciation of what the artists were trying to do. Today there are a lot of things competing for attention, and you don't have that much time to sell [music]. In those days you took your time, wanted it to be perfect."

A certain amount of that magic was gone after Alpert and Moss – who sold A&M to PolyGram in 1989 – formally left the helm in 1992 to start a new label, Almo Sounds. Moss turned the chairman duties over to Cafaro, who worked hard to keep the label's original spirit intact. Moss notes how Crow's debut, *Tuesday Night Music Club* – a project started while he was still in charge – was patiently nurtured through one false start and a complete rerecording. Despite the fact that the album was first met with indifference from the public, Crow was given the label's full support as she worked tirelessly on the road. After more than a year, it became a huge hit.



From top: Herb Alpert (left) and Jerry Moss at the A&M offices in 1967; Soundgarden, with Al Cafaro, on the A&M lot in 1991; Sheryl Crow; Richard and Karen Carpenter; Charlie Minor, Sting and Suzanne Vega at the Roxy in Los Angeles, 1985. Far left: A&M, R.I.P., January 21st, 1999.

meetings with the new company and hate it – major people who at A&M were important acts but now just feel like another artist among many on the roster."

Moss, whose Almo Sounds made a distribution deal with Interscope last year, is less harsh. "The executives running the company now are really good," he says. "I'm associated with Interscope and don't think anyone gets it as well as [Interscope heads] Jimmy Iovine, Ted Field and Tom Whalley. The only question is, how many acts can they focus on? When you have a convergence of labels like this, there are less opportunities for artists and less time and attention these guys can give these acts. That's what all this conglomeration means."

Can any of the old magic live on in the new corporate context? "It will continue through the artists and through the people from A&M who have been assimilated into the new venture," says Cafaro. "And it will live through all the artists and staff who have been at A&M at some point through its history. How it will exist within the new venture and what it will be remain to be seen. I'm skeptical."

Wistfully, fifty-year-old Cafaro recalls buying his first A&M album – Carole King's *Tapestry*, on the Ode label, which the company distributed. And he thinks back to his first job with the firm, doing regional promotion in the Carolinas in 1977. "I sure loved that logo," he says, "that old label." ○



WHAT'S GOING ON

The World of Rock & Roll

MARCH 6th – 20th

3/7-13 Hip-hop Week (MTV) – Hip-hop's twentieth birthday is commemorated with a week of special programs (including the premiere of *Station Zero*, a sort of B-boy *Beavis and Butt-head*) and several live, in-studio appearances.

The week concludes with **25 Large: Hip-hop's Most Influential Music Videos**.

3/8 The debut of **"Rock Candy"** (VH1) – Find out what an average Joe will do for the chance to become the personal assistant to a rock star (brandy weapons, shave the boss's back hair); see how

the lyrics of **Natalie Imbruglia's** "Torn" eerily mirror old *Gumby* cartoons; and learn about one band's struggle with group therapy.

3/9 Van Morrison, "Back on Top" (Pointblank/Virgin) – This legend is not typically one to boast, but Morrison (left) is apparently confident about his new album.

Ben Lee, "Breathing Tornados" (Grand Royal/Capitol) – He's just twenty, but lucky Australian pop songwriter Ben Lee (right) is already



releasing his third album and dating **Claire Danes**. Look out! Lee lets fellow *Wonderkind* **Harmony Korine** (screenwriter of *Kids*, director of *Gummo*) try his twisted hand at songwriting.

3/13 The opening of **Linda McCartney's "Sixties: Portrait of an Era"**, the Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut – Say what you will about her music, but McCartney was one of rock & roll's most celebrated photographers. This exhibit, featuring fifty images

of pop legends, begins a nationwide tour that will continue into 2000.

3/13-17 Winter Music Conference, Miami Beach – The music industry heads down south for this annual gathering, featuring seminars, workshops and tons of performances, including a DJ spin-off. Artists will include DJs **Dmitry** and **Hurricane**.

3/15 Graham Parker, "Loose Monkeys, Spare Tracks and Lost Demos" (Up Yours/Razor and Tie) – A compilation of rare, unre- [Cont. on 26]