

COUNTRY

Midland signs deal with Gusto

A SUBSTANTIAL new avenue for country record sales is revealed with the recent deal between the London import/export company Sounds Express — a wing of Midland Record distribution company — and Nashville's Gusto Records.

Set into motion at the NARM Convention in Miami last spring, the deal is unique in that the Gusto product — which takes in a number of different label catalogues including Starday, Federal, King and Hollywood — is not licensed for British manufacture and distribution. Instead, the U.S. albums are being imported directly into Britain by Sounds Express and sold out to the retail outlets and specialist mail order companies.

The initial order was for the importation of 50,000 units, and this has been followed up with 3 further orders for Gusto product, the latest being placed in Nashville in September when Midland Record director Peter Riley visited the Gusto offices.

Prior to the establishment of the Gusto deal, Midland Record's main area of activity rested with the retailing of cutouts and deletions.

"Although we hadn't specifically dealt with country music, we had always noted a strong response to the country product on our lists and, over the years, had built up a good business with the country dealers," explains Peter Riley. "So, at NARM, when we were informed that the Gusto catalogue was available we were



PETER RILEY, director of Midland Record Co., pictured centre, concludes the deal for exclusive distribution of Gusto Records' product in Britain. Looking on are Moe Lytle (right) Gusto president, and Lee Trimble, Gusto sales agent.

very interested in importing their product."

The most instant selling point of the Gusto catalogue — which contained over 300 different albums — was the product from the Starday label, a recording outlet that was almost a revered name to the country enthusiasts.

Originally formed in Belmont, Texas, in 1953 by "Pappy" Daily and Jack Starnes, Starday Records started off by recording local artists like George Jones before becoming more prominently known through the efforts of Don Pierce who took over the company operations in 1958.

It was Pierce who established the

worldwide Starday Record Club and, besides recording many of the country acts of the day, also took a number of the music's old timers into the studios. After disappearing from the scene in the early 1970s, and resting inactive in the hands of a succession of lawyers, the Starday catalogue was reactivated four years ago when bought by former retailer and club owner Moe Lytle as part of an impressive new Nashville industry complex. The new company was to be known as Gusto Records, and among the other labels acquired was the King catalogue, formerly owned by Sid Nathan in Cincinnati but merged with Starday in the late

'60s. Among the biggest successes on King was the R&B artist James

Brown, and country acts the Delmore Brothers, Hawkshaw Hawkins and Cowboy Copas.

"Of course the Starday and King names gave us an immediate opening into Britain with the country music buyers, and our initial order was based upon talking with the specialist dealers and seeing which artists were the most popular," says Riley.

"Once the first shipment arrived in our warehouses the country outlets soon started buying the stock and, within three weeks, we had placed a second order." Riley adds that Moon Mullican, Cowboy Copas, George Jones, Skeeter Davis and the bluegrass and truck driving compilations are among the fastest selling items.

"In addition, the current demand for rockabilly product has created an exceptionally large demand for the Federal-Dixie albums which contain tracks by such artists as Groovey Joe Poovey, Sonny Fisher, Bill Mack and Link Davis.

"In fact, one of the main reasons for meeting with Moe Lytle in Nashville — apart from ensuring that Gusto would not do a licensing deal with any other British company — was to discuss the possibility of preparing album releases for the British market specifically, taking note of the rockabilly market and the most popular country acts as well as reissuing other material that had not been available for many years."

Among the forthcoming projects discussed by Riley and Lytle was the issuing of tracks by much revered rockabilly figure Charlie Feathers and the further packaging of truck driving songs.

Plans were also made for the occasional release of singles within Britain, with the promotional expenses on such releases to be shared jointly by Midland Record Co., and Gusto Records. Most likely the first single release will be material by current Gusto recording artist Red Sovine, an entertainer already well known to British buyers through regular tour appearances and releases over the years.

"We will be only looking for singles product that stands a chance with both country and pop buyers and the British promotion on such releases will be handled by our own staff and independent promotion people", says Riley. In the meanwhile Midland have imported a quantity of singles from such artists as Grandpa Jones, Boyd Bennett and Wynonie Harris — all available because of a specialist demand.

Other new product from Gusto this month include a number of R&B double album releases and a collection of albums from familiar country names. The country releases are: Mel Tillis — The Great Mel Tillis (GT0047); Mac Wiseman — Golden Classics (GT0049); Larry Sparks & The Lonesome Ramblers — Ramblin' Bluegrass (GT0010); Dorsey Burnette — Golden Hits (GT0050); Johnny Darrell — Greatest Hits (GT0048); and Ben Colder — Golden Hits (GT0051). All, with the exception of the Mel Tillis release, are new recordings of many of the artists' most famous songs.

Peter Riley views the whole Gusto project with utmost enthusiasm and, besides taking out advertisements in the trade and specialist publications, has hired "Waxie Maxie" Neadham as an independent publicist.

CMA (GB)
annual
awards
nominations

BRITAIN'S COUNTRY music trade organisation, the Country Music Association (Great Britain), has announced the nominations for its annual awards. The winners will be revealed when the CMA (GB) stages its Awards Dinner at London's Hilton Hotel on Monday, November 26.

Nominations are:

Album Of The Year: Don Williams — Images (K-tel); Boxcar Willie — Daddy Was A Railroad Man (Big R Records); George Hamilton IV — Reflections (Lotus); Boxcar Willie — Boxcar Willie (Big R Records); Billie Jo Spears — Singles Album (United Artists).
Single of the Year: Bellamy Brothers — If I Said You Had A Beautiful Body (Warner Brothers); Eric Clapton — Tulsa Time (RSO); Conway Twitty — Don't Take It Away (MCA); Crystal Gayle — Talkin' In Your Sleep (United Artists).

British Artist: Poacher: Little Ginny & Room Service; Mustang; The Hillside; Jenny Speller & Country Shack.

International Artist: Boxcar Willie; George Hamilton IV, Johnny McEvoy; Bobby Bare; Carroll Baker; Kenny Serratt.
Country Music Journalist: Don Ford; Tony Byworth; Spencer Leigh; Pete Smith; Alan Cackett.

British Songwriter: Brian Maxine; Terry McKenna; Mel Hague; Terry Fletcher & Alan Crookes; Stuart Ross.

Music Publisher: Skirling Music; EMI Music; Acuff-Rose Music; Sunbury Music; Burlington Music.

Marketing Campaign: David Anthony Promotions for Poacher; Drew Taylor Organisation for Boxcar Willie; United Artists Records for Billie Jo Spears' Singles Album; K-tel Records for Don Williams' Images; EMI Records for the Country Life album.

The nominations, and voting, for the Disc Jockey and Founder Chairman's Award to be determined by the CMA (GB) committee.

Tickets for the CMA (GB) Awards Dinner, which will feature cabaret spots by Boxcar Willie and Raymond Froggatt, are available from the Country Music Association (Great Britain), 1a Montagu Mews North, London W1. (tel: 01-935 0413).

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