

Northern California Indie Puts Together Winning Team

By Peter Holden

LOS ANGELES — The days when a group of musicians with a similar musical vision could put together a successful independent label would seem to have passed with the strengthening of the padlock which major labels have on the American record industry. Yet Exit Records, which originates from Sacramento, California, is readily bucking that truism.

Recently brought under the A&M umbrella — in a package deal with Word Records — as well as signing a label-management pact with Bill Graham Productions, this label and its tightly knit group of artists and bands is making a strong bid for commercial success with albums out by Charlie Peacock, the Seventy-Sevens and, most recently, by Vector.

Exit Records is centered around the nucleus of Mary Neely, a former host and creator of a syndicated rock radio show which grew from a one station project to one heard on over 200 stations nationwide. From her experience with local bands on that show she came in contact with Charlie Peacock, the Seventy-Sevens' Mike Roe and other musicians who felt that something essential was being left out of the music they were hearing on the radio. Neely explained, "I was doing shows on the radio which focused on certain musical movements, and during the period between 1978 and 1982, there was a lot of street level bands which we gave attention to through looks at punk music and other styles.

"After doing the show, a lot of musicians began coming around asking me if I felt the same as they did about music. Slowly, I was surrounded by friends and bands



Charlie Peacock

and we began to talk about doing something different." Neely and her group of singers, songwriters and friends helped put together a 24-track studio which was used as a forum for recording and trying out new sounds and songs. "Though we have five bands on the roster right now, we went through quite a few to arrive here," she said. "I think we are all drawn together by a certain desire to communicate above the belt. A lot of rock music appeals to the more elemental nature, and I'd say that we are united in trying to write about things that are perhaps a little less basic. We are reaching for things a little more ethereal, yet at the same time commercially accessible."

Featuring a variety of sounds from the multi-talented wizardry of Peacock to the younger demo appeal of the Seventy-Sevens and the straight ahead rock of Vector, Exit put together a formidable array of talent which led to the link with the management arm of Bill Graham Productions and a spot with A&M. Commenting, "I think they see us as able to somewhat take the place of I.R.S. I have a great respect for that label, and I think that our artists are even more commercial — I hope the sales can prove that out," Neely added, "being with BGP has really been a help also because they are so



Vector

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enthusiastic and are able to help with some of the industry aspects which I have less experience in."

One of Graham's management reps, Arnie Postilnik remarked, "It is a little unusual that we should handle a label, but it really doesn't differ dramatically from what we would do with our individual clients. All the things that we would do with handling Santana and his label Columbia-marketing strategy, promotions, publicity, etc. — we will handle with Exit and A&M. In many ways we are filling in the blanks for Mary's label administration. But aside from any financial considerations, the fact of the matter is that we

heard a lot of talent coming from the label. There are some great songs on the albums that are already out, and some of those guys are terrific songwriters. I can't think of anyone on the roster who is not a force to be reckoned with in the future."

While the results from Exit's first major foray into the commercial marketplace are yet to be tallied, the product coming from this northern California musical co-op is impressive, with more to come. "All of the people we are involved with have basically come to me. We have had a meeting of heart and mind and things have worked out naturally, though not without a lot of hard work," Neely concluded.
