

Label Focus - Cherry Red



Renowned UK independent celebrates 30th anniversary

In June of this year, it will be 30 years since Cherry Red Records issued their first single. The company was founded by Iain McNay (who is still the majority shareholder) during the first wave of punk and was named after a Groundhogs track. Today their vast catalogue comprises around 3,000 albums covering virtually every genre of music issued on a variety of specialist labels

The Early Days

Cherry Red originally grew out of a promotions company which had been putting on gigs in Worcestershire since 1971. By 1978 the decision had been taken to form a label and the first release was the debut single by local band The Tights. *Bad Hearts/Cracked It* was named Record of the Week in Record Mirror and the initial pressing of 2,000 copies sold out.

Other early releases included a single from Destroy All Monsters, a US act comprising members of The Stooges and MC5, which was secured for a \$500 advance and went on to sell more than 7,000 copies.



It was the innovative *Business Unusual* album

which moved the company to a much larger scale though. The album pulled together tracks from the leading UK indie labels of the day including Factory, Mute, Rough Trade and Industrial. Within weeks of its release it had sold more than 10,000 copies.

Expanding the Company

Soon the scale of Cherry Red's operations began to expand seriously.

Cherry Red's Best Sellers 1978 - 2008 Albums

1	Dead Kennedys	Fresh Fruit For Rotting Vegetables
2.	Various Artists	Pillows and Prayers
3.	Tracey Thorn	A Distant Shore
4.	Ben Watt	North Marine Drive
5.	Various	Burning Ambitions - A History Of Punk
6	Marc Bolan	You Scare Me To Death
7	Various Artists	The Is Anfield - Liverpool's FC's Greatest Hits
8	Felt	Ignite The Seven Cannons
9	Alien Sex Fiend	Who's Been Sleeping In My Brain
10	Various Artists	Celtic FC - Hail! Hail! Celtic

Singles

1	Dead Kennedys	Too Drunk To Fuck
2	Dead Kennedys	Holiday In Cambodia
3	Dead Kennedys	Kill The Poor
4	Marc Bolan	You Scare Me To Death
5	A Love Supreme	Niall Quinn's Disco Pants
6	Everything But The Girl	Night And Day
7	Tracey Thorn	Plain Sailing
8	Felt	Primitive Painters
9	Alien Sex Fiend	Ignore The Machine
10	Jane	It's A Fine Day



Initial international licensing deals were struck and new album projects included releases by the Runaways and the first Dead Kennedys' album *Fresh Fruit For Rotting Vegetables*, the recording of which was funded by Cherry Red via a deal with Caroline Exports. The album made the Top 40 and has been the company's best selling title - 28 years since it's initial release, the album is an established catalogue seller with average weekly sales in the UK this year fluctuating between 60-100 copies.

Around this time, the company began to

take an interest in music publishing and immediately made several successful signings including Blancmange, Matt Johnson (The The), Ben Watt, Tracy Thorn and The Go-Betweens. The company's publishing arm was known as Complete Music, but this was sold two years ago.

The label's A&R activities had expanded since the recruitment of Mike Alway and within 18 months Eyeless In Gaza, Felt, The Monochrome Set, The Marine Girls, Tracey Thorn and Ben Watt among others had all been signed and the label was enjoying consistent success in the independent chart.

In December 1982, the company released one of their most well known albums. *Pillows & Prayers* was a compilation



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album featuring 17 tracks from artists such as The Monochrome Set, Everything But The Girl, Thomas Leer and the Passage - it retailed at 99p, at a time when albums were typically retailing for £4.49-£4.99. It was to prove a successful experiment - the album went on to sell more than 120,000 copies.

A Change of Direction

In the early 1990s Iain McNay decided to take the company in a slightly different direction - the company continued to sign artists and make new recordings, but as there were few companies specialising in re-issues of albums from the 70s and 80s, Cherry Red began to acquire as many rights as they could from important independent labels. In 1993 the **Punk Collectors Series** was launched which has subsequently been joined by a Psychobilly, Goth and a 'British Steel' metal series.

The company has always had a keen interest in football (they are current sponsors of the Middlesex County



Football League and the Combined Counties League) and in 1995 they started the **Football Collectors**

Series which now has over 50 club-themed releases as well as international collections for England, Scotland, Ireland and Jamaica.

Some of the other important labels within Cherry Red include **RPM**, a prolific re-issue label (examples include Petula Clark, Billy Preston, Leo Sayer);

Anagram - initially formed for bands such as Alien Sex Fiend, Vice Squad and The Vibrators who didn't really fit in on the Cherry Red label;

Rev-Ola - originally launched as Creation's catalogue label, this eclectic imprint houses acts as diverse as Gene Vincent, BMX Bandits, Solomon Burke, Ivor Cutler and Maya Angelou;

7T's - launched to re-issue recordings from many famous names from the 1970s including Showaddywaddy, 10cc,

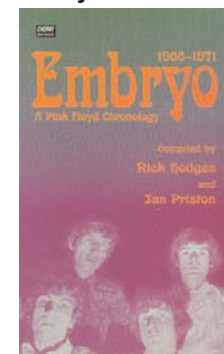


Big Audio Dynamite at the Town & Country Club on Cherryred.tv

Barry Blue and Mud;

Esoteric Recordings - established as recently as 2007, Esoteric is a label specialising in Psychedelic and Progressive Rock from artists such as Daevid Allen, Man and the Keef Hartley Band.

Other sectors of the business which have thrived in recent years include **Cherry Red Books** which was started



in 1997 with the publication of *Indie Hits 1980 - 1989: The Complete UK Independent Charts (Singles & Albums)*. To date this imprint has covered music subjects including Mott The Hoople, Syd Barrett, Pink Floyd (left), Johnny Thunders, The Rolling Stones, The Beatles' Apple Organization and A To Z Guides to various Rock genres including Black Metal and Thrash Metal.

There is also a large **DVD** catalogue which contains more than 150 titles covering many styles of music.

Current Activities

Cherry Red's current MD is **Adam Velasco** who joined the company in 1992 as an office junior. He highlights the scope of the company's activities by pointing out that, "we're a multi-media company involved in selling CDs, DVDs, books, downloads as well as offering podcasts and digital TV content via our channel on our website which is updated on a daily basis".

www.cherryred.tv is an internet TV



Hawkwind
Silver Machine
Prog Rock -

This video is from Hawkwind: Love In Space DVD. The legendary Hawkwind never fail to amaze with their stunningly presented live shows. Their numerous tours have become renowned for being much more than just the band performing th...

£1.89



A video download available from the Cherry Red shop

channel featuring some of the many hundreds of hours of unique footage of concerts and interviews that the company own or control. Featured artists include Divine, Nico, Cabaret Voltaire and Marc Almond

Cherry Red's **download store** is a key component of the website - it offers more than DRM-free downloads in MP3 format, video downloads as well as football realtones, podcasts and ebooks.

Although market conditions are tough for all independent record companies at present, Cherry Red continue with their ambitious programme of releases and expansion:

- On average the company currently issue 40 titles per month - around 500 per year.
- In 2007 Cherry Red album sales as recorded by The Official UK Charts Company increased by 8.2% on the previous year, a substantial achievement in such difficult market conditions.

- Their download store now has more than 21,000 tracks available for purchase.

"Cherry Red has grown organically and we will keep growing like that - altering our methods of distribution to keep up with downloading, streaming and the demands of the marketplace" Iain McNay April 2008

www.cherryred.co.uk

