

Record companies - don't you just love them?

In the early days of Absolute Analogue I tended to concentrate on the audiophile vinyl reissuing side of the business, leaving my then business partner to deal with the hi-fi. A big mistake, but that's another story.

Anyway, two fairly trivial stories of record companies.

I was at EMI's pressing plant to listen to test pressings of a title we were issuing. Back then EMI used to press for a number of major labels apart from themselves, as well as for small fry like me. During the course of a conversation I mentioned to the Quality Control woman that I had recently bought some records. In particular I had explained that for one of them the presentation was fantastic, with a gatefold sleeve that was excellent - thick cardboard that was folded properly and nice inner sleeves. However, the record itself sounded terrible, a real fish and chip shop. The woman looked at me and said "I did the QC on that". Oops. She went on to tell me that she agreed it sounded bad and that she had rejected the test pressings, but the record company involved had said not to worry, they would take it anyway. Nice. And this was an album from arguably the biggest band in the UK at the time.

On another occasion I went to a record company hoping to get access to some titles in their back catalogue. In practice the record company decided to release records themselves. I distinctly recall that my parting comment at the meeting was to say that if they ever decided to do audiophile reissues rather than just normal reissues they should seek a partner from the audiophile world, even if it were not Absolute Analogue, as they might expect problems. Eventually the record company did indeed release some audiophile titles. On a personal note I wanted to buy about five or six of these titles for myself and in the case of one title was prepared to buy three copies - I really loved that album and wanted to always have a copy for the future. In the end I bought nothing, because I had been warned that they did not sound good. The record company had apparently done everything properly - the original artwork was reproduced, a top well known remastering engineer was used for the reissues and the vinyl was pressed up at RTI on 180 gram vinyl. However, the record company used digital sources instead of analogue. I eventually got a copy of one title some time later and it was just as bad as I had been warned - flat and lifeless. The record company probably thought that the exercise was a great success as they shifted a lot of vinyl. However, a lot of this ended up being flogged off at about one third of normal retail price - you almost could not give the stuff away - and a fair number of people considered the record company to be worse than useless.

No doubt record company executives will tell you that the music business is a *business*, first, last and always. However, that hardly justifies ignorance, stupidity and treating the customers with total contempt.

Occasionally someone gets it right. Consider the reissues of Elvis Costello's albums, remastered and complete with detailed notes from Costello himself and bonus discs with alternate versions and related songs. A very nice way to reissue the back catalogue and at a good price too. Or take the case of Alan Klein. In the annals of rock music, following his involvement with the Rolling Stones and the Beatles, he is usually cast as one of the arch-villains. However, when the hybrid SACD/CD reissues appeared of the Rolling Stones titles they were exceptionally good. A fantastic job. Real care was taken over them and both the UK and US versions of albums were released (except for the first album, blast it!). And then he did another great job with titles by Sam Cooke. So why is it that a supposed "bad guy" can do this whilst major record companies feel free to mess around with titles by some of the biggest and best acts on their labels?