

Step By Step For Private Domain

THOMAS K. ARNOLD | Los Angeles Times | May 27, 1987

SAN DIEGO — As far as Paul Shaffer is concerned, the third time is, indeed, the charm.

Twice in the last three years, Shaffer's band, Private Domain, signed a recording contract with a major national record company, only to have each deal fall through before any albums were released.

In January, the veteran San Diego nightclub band--originally called Bratz--was picked up a third time by yet another national label, Chameleon Records of Los Angeles.

For once, things worked out. Last month, Chameleon began shipping copies of Private Domain's long-delayed debut album to record stores across the country.

Already, the "Private Domain" album, which contains 10 "new music" songs co-written by lead singer Shaffer and guitarist Jack Butler, is getting heavy air play all over the Southwest and West Coast as well as back East. The album has also gotten favorable reviews in *Billboard* and *Cashbox*, the two leading national trade magazines for the music business.

Last week, Private Domain opened the concert by the Psychedelic Furs at San Diego State University's Open Air Theater. And Columbia Pictures has asked them to rerecord the song "Absolute Perfection" from the "Private Domain" album, for the sound track to the upcoming movie "Back to the Beach."

Shaffer, who formed the six-piece rock group 10 years ago at the height of the disco era, is breathing a blissful sigh of relief.

"Finally, we're getting our music to the public," Shaffer said. "That's always been our goal, and despite all the obstacles and bad breaks we encountered along the way, I'm glad we never gave up.

"No matter how bad things got, we always kept up hope. And now, at last, that hope has been realized."

Shaffer and several of his buddies formed Bratz in 1977 primarily as a vehicle for their collective songwriting--and a reaffirmation of their belief in the staying power of rock 'n' roll.

At the time, the disco craze was sweeping the nation, and most local nightclubs had given up on live rock in favor of pulsating dance records by such trendy bandwagon-jumpers as the Bee Gees and the Ohio Players.

Still, Bratz performed wherever, and whenever, they could, and eventually their persistence paid off. In 1979, after Butler joined, the band headlined an anti-disco celebration at the Bacchanal, kicking off the Clairemont nightclub's return to live rock.

The event was so successful that other clubs around town quickly followed suit. And as rock 'n' roll began to stage a comeback, Bratz's popularity soared.

Gradually, Shaffer said, his band started to augment its Top 40 menu with more and more originals. Throughout the early 1980s, Bratz cut several demonstration tapes, which Shaffer sent off to various Los Angeles record companies in hopes of securing a recording contract.

It wasn't until 1984, however, that Shaffer's efforts paid off: After a name change to Private Domain, his band landed a deal with the Gold Mountain label, a subsidiary of industry giant A&M Records.

"I was exhilarated," Shaffer said. "After seven years of trying, we had finally gotten a break. We went into the studio and recorded the album, and when a release date was set for the following August, we made sure the whole town knew about it.

"After all, we were the first San Diego band in years to sign with a big label. And we were all very, very proud.

"But then A&M began tightening its belt and since we were a new band, we were squeezed out. We felt like fools--here we had told everyone about our record, and now that record wouldn't be coming out."

Instead of following his initial impulse "to just give up and change careers," Shaffer and his band mates simply returned to the local nightclub scene as though nothing had happened.

"We're survivors," he said. "Instead of giving up, we bit the bullet and hit the streets again, more determined to make it than ever before."

Early last year, Private Domain landed a second recording deal, this time with Curb/MCA Records. But by year's end, "creative differences" once again led to a parting of ways, Shaffer said.

"And once again, we felt confident enough about our talents that we decided to continue playing clubs and keep cutting more demo tapes."

Within months, Private Domain managed to find yet a third record company willing to release its album. And this time, nothing went wrong.

"Chameleon is a smaller label than the other two that had signed us, but that can work to our advantage," Shaffer said. "They're giving us their full attention in terms of promotion and publicity, while a big label wouldn't be able to do that."

"Actually, this record is better than the other two would have been," added guitarist Butler. "Each time a deal fell through, we went back into the studio and weeded out the weaker material by writing, and recording, better songs.

"So that's the bright side. But at the same time, we realize now that just having a record out isn't the end--it's the beginning. We still have to work hard to sell that record and to make sure it gets air play.