

A&M - a class company - Joe Summers

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The record business became a part of Joe Summers when he was seventeen as a warehouse worker for Capitol Records in Detroit. He went on to work in a local record store, returned to Capitol as an inside salesman and finally hit the road with Decca Records at the age of nineteen. Summers graduated quickly in the business. From salesman to assistant branch manager to branch manager to regional manager and finally to national sales manager for Motown.

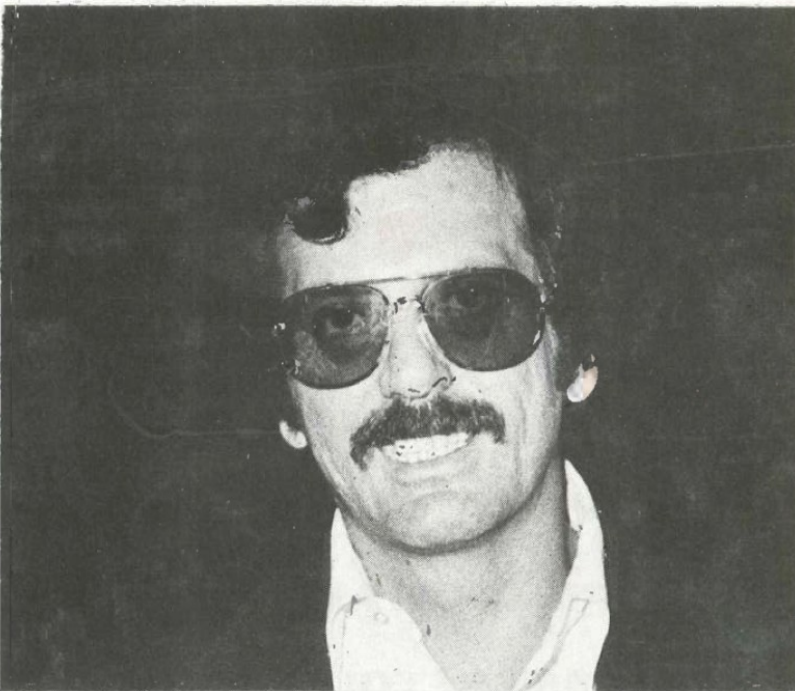
Summers took the job of national sales manager for A&M (Canada) two years ago. He believed that Canada, only a stone's throw away from Detroit (Windsor) was very similar in the marketing of records. He learned very quickly that this was a completely different market. He was asked what he found that was different in Canada:

SUMMERS: I think probably the thing that hit me most was the lack of excitement and enthusiasm. It was almost like a sin to get excited about anything.

RPM: Did you find they didn't trust you because you were an American?

SUMMERS: No . . . I think they thought he's just another American. I remember my first trip to the west and when I got back someone asked me what I thought. I said thank God I've only got two strikes against me — I'm an American and I'm from eastern Canada. If I'd had three strikes they'd probably have shipped me back in a box.

RPM: Did it take you long to get accustomed



A&M continued on page 10

Joe Summers, national sales manager for A&M (Canada).

A&M continued from page 1

to our customs and method of marketing records and tapes?

SUMMERS: I'd say it took me a year to find out where everything was. When I first came here people told me that Canada was different. I really didn't believe it. I didn't accept it. Today I agree, it's different. You have so many different regions and different ways of working each region. The basics are all the same but Canada is very regionalized.

RPM: How do you think you can change this situation or bring them together?

SUMMERS: I think we have to have people who are more knowledgeable of the business. Just like Gord Edwards said in his recent interview with you. Canada needs more professional people in the record business. In promotion, record people, rack merchandisers, buyers . . . everywhere. I read a line once — "We need record people instead of people in the record business". I think it's getting there but there is such a void compared to what it should be.

RPM: Do you push new product more than you do the established artist?

SUMMERS: No . . . you try to lay different plans for product that goes to different avenues. Obviously with a hit act you get better distribution. But with a new act you have to create a demand to the consumer than get that mass distribution everywhere.

RPM: How come A&M has had so much success with the non-established Canadian artist?

SUMMERS: I think our company has record people in it and they do have an excitement about the business. Our people know what they're doing. We have this built in enthusiasm . . . drive and energy.

RPM: How do you get the fire lit under your people? Do you give them a pep talk?

SUMMERS: Everyone kids me about the number of memos I send out. I just hope they'll pick something out of the memo that they can work on. We don't have to have pep talks . . . just keep them informed of what everyone else is doing. It's a matter of keeping the lines of communication open and letting them know that head office is backing them. I want to know what they're doing and what the industry is doing generally.

RPM: Do you work very closely with the promotion department?

SUMMERS: Very closely.

RPM: Do you think that salesmen should be promotion men as well?

SUMMERS: No. I think it's really difficult for a man to do an effective job as a salesman then try to wear too many hats. We regard our salesmen as record merchandisers. To me, a record merchandiser (salesman) should be able to walk into an account and help him sell more product.

RPM: By helping the retailer sell more product, you don't mean with discount deals?

SUMMERS: We don't have deals. We have programs. It's the total concept of trying to reach the ultimate goal, whether it be to the consumer or to break an act or whatever. Unfortunately some people believe that a promotion is to buy at a cheap price and sell for \$1.99. That's not a promotion. To me it has to be a total concept program.

RPM: Your policy on singles is pretty loose isn't it?

SUMMERS: We own every single out there until the consumer buys it. They all come back to us, if they're not sold. Every record

we sell is guaranteed. Every record, single or album, sitting in a warehouse because it doesn't sell, eventually ends up back here where it's scrapped.

RPM: You mean you don't deal in deletes?
SUMMERS: We scrap every record. No deletes at all.

(A&M is one of the few companies that destroys all unsold product. Gerry Lacoursiere, Director of the Canadian operation for A&M, began this policy when he opened in Canada and it has since become a policy with their parent company.)

RPM: Do you have your salesmen call on the accounts serviced by rackers?

SUMMERS: We're trying to do it more and more. We've just completed a program in the Maritimes just like that. Where our regional marketing man, our salesman, branch manager and our promotion man spent several weeks servicing rack accounts. It was so successful that we have appointed David Brodeur as regional marketing manager. As an example he would go into Saskatchewan and take rack inventory. He does market research and passes his information back to the local sales rep so that he can go into the rack account and point up what he believes would bring him more sales. I think we have to get more involved in that end of it. Sometimes we make money in spite of the jobbers or the accounts. When we can get past that point of . . . maybe it's a lack of communication . . . and, when we can prove that we can all make money, we'll be into a new ball game.

RPM: Do you put on a special effort to have product available when an act is playing in a certain area?

SUMMERS: Definitely. That's what it's all about. Take the Nazareth tour for instance. I've personally called almost every major rack user in the country and told them . . . 'Look, I need your distribution. I need Nazareth in every location, otherwise what good is our tour and what good is my advertising. Give me that distribution. Let the consumer decide if he wants to buy the record.'

RPM: The Nazareth happening is very interesting. A&M broke this group in North America . . . don't you think that has created a very competitive spirit with your people against their American counterparts?

SUMMERS: I don't think it's so much a competitive spirit as much as it is the self satisfaction of doing something. I think that's what the business is all about. If you have the product, be it a Nazareth, Keith Hampshire, Gino Vannelli, or you're trying to get Lorence Hud off the ground or whatever . . . there's a certain pride in that 'I did something.'

RPM: A&M has now graduated into a company that has something for everyone . . . pop, folk, rock and country. Do you find this poses any problems for your salesmen who might prefer a certain form of music over anything else?

SUMMERS: Yes, that's human nature. Again, you have to have that fine degree of being a professional and doing a job with whatever you've been given. Music is very emotional so you have to have your preferences. If everyone likes one thing it's a lot easier to go out and sell it. The challenge comes when you can do a good job on something you're really not tuned into personally.

RPM: Do you foresee any major changes in

record company approaches?

SUMMERS: I can't foresee any changes. I would like to see companies educate their people so it's of mutual benefit right down the line. I think there should be greater communication between all the accounts. You know, there's no secrets in this business — everything always comes out — everyone always knows what's going on. I'd like to see more people, more dedicated to what they're doing. I'd like to see them spend more time feeling out their markets.

RPM: What value do you place on charts?

SUMMERS: Well, as a sales tool . . . the only way you're going to sell records is have a number on a chart, which is very frustrating in itself. I've always worked on the basis of . . . you get it played on the radio and let the consumer get exposed to it — you get the record in the store and let the consumer make the decision. If it doesn't sell, you take it back. It's very frustrating to walk into an account and tell the guy that a certain record is on the air and he asks you if it has a number. You say 'No, but it's on the air.' He says, sorry, we only have thirty baskets and if it hasn't got a number we don't buy it.

RPM: Can you see this attitude changing?

SUMMERS: A bit, but not enough.

RPM: Are discotheques selling records for you?

SUMMERS: I think they will. I don't find it now. In Quebec it's a different story. We can sell records strictly through disco play. One record that received very little airplay, sold more than eight thousand copies in Montreal, primarily from disco play. It's not happening in Toronto yet, but I think it will. Toronto will follow the trend. It's becoming the fashion in the States and I think discos can become very important to the record business.

RPM: You mentioned Quebec . . . do you think the English Canadian market will ever come up in sales to that of the French Canadian market?

SUMMERS: The Quebec market is a very exciting market. That's what excitement is all about, and it reminds me of some markets in the States where people get excited about a record and things happen and things move. I would like to see the same thing happen in English Canada, from a retail level.

RPM: Why do you think there is so much excitement in Quebec?

SUMMERS: It could be the emotionalism of the market itself. The general feeling of getting excited, being excited . . . a genuine excitement. There's a difference between a false excitement that doesn't mean anything, and a real excitement. I think they really feel the excitement of the business.

RPM: They obviously have a star system. Do you think English Canada will develop their own star system?

SUMMERS: I think we will have one. I think a lot of people are trying to do the right thing. There are a lot of dedicated people who are genuinely trying to do something for this business, and I think we will get there eventually.

RPM: You mentioned the RPM interview with Gord Edwards. He felt that record companies were out of touch. How do you feel about that charge?

SUMMERS: I think some record companies are out of touch. There are other companies though, who are really on top of what's going

on and there are those who are trying to be more in touch. If we're going to be in the record business and be successful and continue to grow we have to become more involved.

RPM: Is business good?

SUMMERS: Business is excellent.

RPM: Has the vinyl shortage caused any real problems for A&M?

SUMMERS: Our problem hasn't been vinyl as much as it has been production schedules. It seems there aren't enough presses to produce all the records we need.

RPM: How's the tape business and what percentage is it of the business?

SUMMERS: Tape business is excellent. It runs anywhere from 25 to 30% of the business. Cassettes are still behind 8-track of course, but it still looks like it could break open. The increase in tapes has been good and if the Quebec market ever catches up with the rest of Canada on tapes, it will probably equal Ontario in total dollar value.

RPM: Is A&M into long boxes?

SUMMERS: No, but I think that's the avenue of merchandising tapes. I've looked into our own long box with the option of putting it out and giving it to other people. Paying that much money for tapes, people want to touch the product. I wonder, and I'm open for facts and figures, I've always gone under the premise that if you're going to lose 2% in pilferage, if you do more business you're still going to lose 2%. It doesn't go up to 80%. It's more dollars but it still comes out to 2%, and I welcome the racks and the accounts saying let's put it out and let's try to sell some product, rather than hiding it in a locked cabinet.

RPM: Does the future look good for Canada in the record business?

SUMMERS: I'm very optimistic on the future of Canada as a whole and the record business in general. I think there's no limit as to what we can do up here.