

# 10 YEARS TO

**W**hen chronicling the rise of Disney-owned Lyric Street Records, it's tempting to focus exclusively on the numbers. And why not? The label has released 91 singles and 26 albums since its June 1, 1997 launch, with an astonishing 19 million albums sold. Capping that remarkable run is the fact that the label ended 2006 with the best selling album in all genres – Rascal Flatts' *Me And My Gang*.

## A Decade In, Lyric Street Celebrates More Than Success

Lyric Street VP/National Promotion **Kevin Herring** puts it in perspective: "Something like 65,000 albums are released every year and 90% don't sell more than 1,000 copies," he says. "And ours was the biggest one? Our little label? That's an 'oh wow' experience."

No kidding. And while there's no shortage of milestones quantifying Lyric Street's success (see timeline below), a qualitative assessment must include discussion of the music, business philosophy and, perhaps most important, the people.

Somehow, Lyric Street has managed to defy two of Music Row's constants – that independent labels come...and almost always go, and that employee turnover is invariably high. With a decade under its belt and fully half of the 20 employee roster having been with the label since its formation, Lyric Street has become the exception to those rules.

### Dive In, The Water's Fine

"Cast member" one, label President **Randy Goodman**, knew the crucial decision was who cast member two would be. "I knew the first, most important step for me was to begin to surround myself with the best possible people that I could," he says of accepting Disney's offer. "You have to get people who can wear a multiplicity of hats – people who are, for the most part, as egoless as possible, and who rally around this idea of doing something great under this great Disney brand name."

"**Doug Howard** was the first person I called – that was a dream he and I had since college. The next person was Teresa Vinson, who had worked with me at RCA for 18 years because I needed someone to find an office, turn the lights on and get the phones going."

Despite the goliath parent company, not everyone was sold on Lyric Street's viability. "I had several phone calls when I took this job telling me I was insane," Howard admits. "But you have to follow your gut in this business. This was where I was supposed to be. It grew stronger as we were able to hand-pick our staffs – people who believed, with no regime histories. Everybody saw this with a single vision."

VP/Marketing **Greg McCarn** was another RCA Label Group vet. "RCA released their first record January 30, 1922, so they're pretty stable," he says of the decision to leave for the upstart Lyric Street. "My first interview inside the

## LYRIC STREET RECORDS

Lyric Street office there was a computer on a cardboard box, one chair, and I sat on the floor. I thought, I'm leaving the label that made the first country recording in history.

"I was concerned, but I'd seen so many labels open around the time Lyric Street was starting. And so many of them hired producers to run the label, and that's not necessarily what they do best. But Randy was someone I knew could run a label. My decision was much more about having confidence in Randy. There was a great sense of adventure, a can-do spirit and it was terribly exciting."

### Push The Envelope, Please

After the staff, music was the priority. "The real scary thing for Doug and I was, would anybody care?" Goodman admits. "Would anybody come? We're going to give a party. We're going to open a label. Are we going to get pitched anything? With us and DreamWorks opening at about the same time, people looked at those big media names as a real unique opportunity and came."

Howard remembers some rough spots. "At first some folks were kind of condescending, saying, 'We'll bring you the hits when you have a hit.' I found that a little shocking, especially because of both Randy's and my histories. But that was rare."

Many of the label's biggest successes have been the result of what at the time appeared to be creative risk taking, whether it was edgy signings like **SHeDAISY** and Rascal Flatts, or bypassing more established names for producers **Dann Huff**, **Mark Bright** and **Marty Williams**.

"Early on we talked about signing unique, compelling artists who would get on the radio and also sell," Goodman says. "A single that goes No. 1 but doesn't sell won't allow us to survive. Doug and I were always looking at where the market *wasn't*, what the market *didn't* have. But it really boils down to things that made us say, 'This is incredible.'"



## Walking Down The Street



**6/1/97**  
**LET'S DO LAUNCH:** Lyric Street opens its doors. President Randy Goodman's first two hires are songman Doug Howard and RCA vet Teresa Vinson. First signings: Larl White, SHeDAISY & Aaron Tippin.



**5/8/98**  
**CROSSING THE CHARTING LINE:** White's "Stepping Stone" becomes the label's first charted single. It peaks at No. 19 in August.



**7/28/98**  
**ROLLING STONE:** LS's first album, White's *Stepping Stone*, lands in stores.

**1/1/99**  
**TEN THERE DONE THAT:** Aaron Tippin's "For You I Will" becomes LS's first top 10, peaking at No. 6.



**8/6/99**  
**BIG HELLO:** SHeDAISY's "Little Good-byes" is the label's first top 5, peaking at No. 3.

**10/14/99**  
**X MEN:** Rascal Flatts sign with Lyric Street.



**11/99**  
**BANG RELATED:** SHeDAISY's *The Whole SheBang* receives RIAA gold certification.





# THE TOP

Howard adds, "It's pretty well known on the street that if you bring an act to Lyric Street and you're producing it, it's yours to lose. Unless you just come in and can't perform, I'm not going to take it away from you. I think that's neat for the town, to be honest."

And the results speak for themselves. "It seems like the music we've done has always been about swinging for the fence," Goodman says. "We've never been able to be satisfied with singles and doubles because it wouldn't build our business. I wouldn't be sitting here if we hadn't had several big-breakout projects, and you don't get those by playing it safe."

## Do I Hear 75?

There's no question that every creative decision has been made with an eye toward airplay first, and ultimately sales. "While I was at RCA, we approached everything with a great sense of urgency," Goodman explains, "but you always knew there was a certain safety net in having that catalog. Here we

were starting with absolutely nothing, and we had to get on radio."

"All the arrows point that way," Herring says matter-of-factly. "It's not just our arbitrary decision. When you do the research and ask consumers where they heard it, 95% say radio. You'd be a fool to ignore that. In terms of what we do for and at radio, a lot of us come from radio and are sensitive to their needs."

Fortunately, the music that seemed to work best at radio also seemed to be the most adventurous creatively. And that combination typically rings the cash register. "One fallacy in our business is that we spend so much time working radio that it's easy to allow those efforts to be perceived as the end game," Goodman says. "But the real end game is to sell records. Over time you create a catalog, and that creates the career and the brand."

Early success with SHEDAISY, Aaron Tippin and Rascal Flatts allowed Lyric Street to break even in year two. "The next step was to make money and pay off our 'school loans' - the investment Disney had made," Goodman explains. "Next we wanted to hit \$50 million in net revenues, and we exceeded that last year. The next level is \$75 million. From setting those top-line revenue and bottom-line profitability goals come clear strategies on how you do that with your projects and artists. We talk about these goals all the time."

## Simply The Best

That dialogue and common purpose may be the key to Lyric Street's close knit team. "Randy shares financials with everybody in the company," McCarn says. "Everyone sees the full P&Ls, so everyone knows the mission. It bonds us. The work ethic of the people around me drives me."

"And I've got to give credit to Randy for making intelligent hiring decisions. Being a relatively small company, you have to have a certain spirit. As a VP, there's no assistant. The label president doesn't have a dedicated assistant. That requires a certain type of person who says I can do it on my own. It's not a great place for people who feel a sense of entitlement."

Herring adds, "It starts at the top with the culture. Having had some success helps that as well. It's definitely the kind of place you want to stay once you're here. We really are a family and we are particular about who we hire because it's not only about being able to do the job, it's about fitting into the team."

Howard recalls an early dinner with Goodman before the deal to start the label was consummated. "We said to each other, 'How many times in your life is an opportunity like this going to happen? And how many times are you going to be able to do it with people you want to do it with?' That was the key. If it hadn't been Randy and hadn't been Disney, who knows? But at that dinner that night we started setting the plan. We just felt we could do it."

They have.

"Historically, we've achieved and sustained something that very few new labels have been able to do," Goodman says without a hint of boastfulness in his voice. "And if we're able to for another five years, then we're really getting into some rarified air. But we know how fickle this business is. We're constantly thinking about what's next. About being very nimble, very quick, lean, mean and cost-effective while maintaining a sense of urgency."

"This is an organization of great people who just blow me away on a day-in, day-out basis with their creativity. Kevin, Greg and Doug really are doing the day-to-day driving down Lyric Street, more so than myself. And they've brought on exceptional people and exceptional human beings. To see the maturation of the people here has been really exciting."

"If they fire me tomorrow, I'll still say it's the best record label in Nashville," McCarn says. "This is where I'd want to be as an artist or as a staff member. It's a special place." **CAC**



**Vice Squad: Lyric Street President Randy Goodman (c) with his VPs (l-r) Greg McCarn, Kevin Herring, Doug Howard and Dale Turner.**

## TENURED 10

The average job-length of a Nashville record label employee is 2.1 years. Okay, we made that up. But with attrition, natural turnover and the always popular regime change, it's gotta be pretty short. Here's a look at the 20-person Lyric Street staff, which still includes 10 folks who were there in the label's 1997-1998 infancy. Their start dates with the label are in blue.

<b>Kirk Boyer</b> Sr. Director/A&R 10/01	<b>Kris Lamb</b> Coord./Promotion 2/06
<b>Heather Conley</b> Dir./Marketing 10/00	<b>Renee Laymon</b> Sr. Dir./Nat. Promo 2/98
<b>Theresa Durst</b> Southeast Regional 12/97	<b>Chris Loss</b> West Coast Regional 11/02
<b>Paula Eden</b> Exec. Assistant 12/05	<b>Greg McCarn</b> VP/Marketing 1/98
<b>Randy Goodman</b> President 6/97	<b>Chris Palmer</b> Northeast Regional 1/98
<b>Robin Gordon</b> Sr. Mgr./A&R Admin. 8/97	<b>Tonya Stroud</b> Coor./A&R 10/03
<b>Cindy Heath</b> Dir./Publicity 12/05	<b>Neda Tobin</b> Southwest Regional 11/02
<b>Ashley Heron</b> Sr. Mgr./Marketing 12/03	<b>Dale Turner</b> VP/Promo Admin. 6/98
<b>Kevin Herring</b> VP/Nat. Promotion 11/97	<b>Michelle Tyrrell</b> Midwest Regional 9/06
<b>Doug Howard</b> Sr. VP/A&R 8/97	<b>Teresa Vinson</b> Sr. Mgr./Artist-Label Relations 7/97

**3/00 SHE METAL:** SHEDAISY tacks on Lyric Street's first platinum certification.

**10/6/00 MORE THAN A PECK:** Tippin's "Kiss This" is the company's first No. 1, and first multi-week No. 1.

**5/01 HONOR SYSTEM:** Rascal Flatts bring home LS's first major award: ACM New Vocal Group.



**10/29/02 SOLID LIQUID:** Flatts' Melt debuts at No. 1 on the country albums chart.

**9/28/04 TODAY SHOW:** Feels Like Today gives LS and Rascal Flatts their first all-genre No. 1 album debut.



**3/05 ROAD GOES ON FOREVER:** "Bless The Broken Road" spends six weeks at No. 1, a high water mark for both band and label.

**12/05 TOP OF THE TOWN:** Rascal Flatts close 2005 as the best-selling artist in country music.



**4/4/06 ME AND MY BANG:** Flatts' Me And My Gang opens with 721,000 scans, the label's biggest debut ever.

**12/06 FLATT SUMMIT:** Rascal Flatts end '06 as the best-selling artist in all genres of music, the first time a country artist earned that distinction in 14 years.



**4/17/07 THE BUCK STARTS HERE:** Bucky Covington bows with 60,000+ sales, the highest debut week for a new LS artist, and the highest debut for a new male country artist in 15 years.