

"you wouldn't want to base your musical future on the last few major record labels, would you?"



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Passion. Remember that word as you read this column... The music industry is a murky place – always has been and, quite possibly, always will be. While there are and have been many happy artists who have lead fulfilled careers, there are others who, at some time in their lives, have been well and truly shafted, and others who have temporarily fallen into the financial/legal mire only to scramble back out again, relatively unscathed, losing a wedge of cash and their trust in fellow human kind.

So what's that got to do with hi-fi, then? Because, often, the unsung victim of these unfortunate business dealings is the music itself. Sometimes it's dropped from the catalogue because of legal wranglings, disappearing entirely, or the musician rights' owner may keep the masters on a dusty shelf, fearing to release it because of industry mistrust or, just as worse, it gets released via a poor quality bootleg leaving often a poorly pressed or scratched, second-hand vinyl original as the only avenue back.

However, there are honest and supportive record labels out there which can reach out to nervous musical artists, saving great music from the threat of obscurity. One of those is the independent record label, Angel Air. It has saved precious slices of our musical culture for the future, often enhancing the sound quality of that music for us all to enjoy. It is safe to say that, without the company, entire swathes of music history would remain, slowly decaying, on the shelves of, sometimes, bitter and often distrustful musical heroes.

Angel Air (www.angelair.co.uk) began its life in 1997 with a decidedly

heavy metal bias. However, there are plenty of other genres in the catalogue to give it an eclectic mix. For example, the label has just released a criminally ignored 1974 album from Adam Faith ('I Survive') featuring luminaries such as Richie Blackmore, as well as David Courtney's 1975 debut album, 'First Day: The Complete Story'. Courtney wrote a string of hits for Leo Sayer, for example. Refreshingly diverse stuff, and hardly something you see everyday in this line of work...

However, it is Angel Air's and its MD Peter Purnell's, honesty with his musicians that has drawn these stars to him like moths to a flame. Purnell not only pays them for their work, he involves them in the mastering, the artwork and more.

"We send our master tape sources to SRT (Sound Recording Technology) in Cambridge and, if the tapes are old and possibly deteriorating, they will bake them and produce a remaster from a digital result," said Purnell. Although the artist is present during the remaster, there is no chance for him to alter history and remix anything, Purnell is adamant that the original remains 'as is'. "There is nothing added, nothing taken out, we just enhance what's already there."

The core of Angel Air is two-fold. It gives credit where it's due to neglected talents and tracks a rock family tree that allows dedicated fans to complete their collections.

For the former, let's take Mike Hurst as an example. Most of you won't know who I'm talking about until, as Purnell says, "he formed the soundtrack to my childhood. When you think he produced PP Arnold's 'Angel Of The Morning', Manfred's

Mann's 'Mighty Quinn', Marc Bolan's 'The Wizard' and more. He's one of the most under-rated record producers of our time." Angel Air has a string of CDs by Hurst.

For the latter, examples are numerous; take ex-Yes man, Peter Banks and his later project After The Fire, Ex-Mott The Hoople band members and their later project, British Lions, and so on. Then there's the rare, previously unreleased works from the likes of Atomic Rooster and the Angel Air CD, 'Rarities', supplied from the private collection of the band's only surviving member, John Du Cann.

That companies such as Angel Air continue to exist, via CD and, now, via download too (you can find them on iTunes, Napster and eMusic) is a testament to Purnell's business acumen. He's not getting any help from the High Street, that's for sure. "I recently heard that HMV will only be devoting 13% of its floor space to music in the future," said Purnell. And, don't forget, only a small amount of that space will be allocated to reissues...

So it's up to us to support Angel Air and companies like it because, without them, frankly we're stuffed. You wouldn't want to base your entire musical future on the last few major record labels would you? Any dispassionate look will show that they're invariably companies occupied, not by music people but bean counters. It's like walking into your local accounting firm and staring into their faces.

So give me the likes of Angel Air, any day of the week. Here's one music business company that has surely has got its priorities right. A breath of fresh air! ●