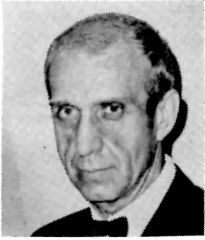


## WHO'S WHO AT MORTON DENNIS WAX & ASSOCIATES

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This month Morton Dennis Wax & Associates (promotion and public relations) is celebrating its 25th anniversary. Over the years Mort has been involved in every area of the music industry. What follows is an interview with Morton, touching on his past, present and some of his ideas for the future.

### INTERVIEW WITH MORTON WAX

Q: O.K. Mort, start me at the beginning.

A: I went to Brooklyn College and I was a songwriter....There I met another songwriter and he and I wrote some songs that Vic Damone recorded back when Damone was a definitive artist on Mercury.

Q: Did you sign a publishing deal with anyone?

A: No, I was just a songwriter.

Q: How were you eating?

A: Well I was still living at home. Meanwhile I always loved music. I collected "race records", that's what Black music was called long before it was popular. You see the record business was very segregated back then, not only Black and White, nobody played Country music in the early fifties either. That's why many of the record companies passed on Presley. They just didn't think Country would become popular. Also, nobody believed that anyone here would accept the English sound either...Any hit in England was eventually redone by Como, Frankie Laine, Eddie Fisher, etc. and converted it into an English-American sound...So everyone was passing on what ten years later would become the basis of our business, Country, Black and English music.

Q: Meanwhile, let's get back to you. What were you doing?

A: I was a writer. I had a bunch of records.

Q: Any hits?

A: No...a dozen or so records were recorded that I wrote but I got more fascinated with the machinery of the music business; you'd find a writer with a song, publish it, and go to the A&R men at the record companies and try to persuade them to direct it to a specific artist. Publishers sort of dominated the business in the 40's and 50's. They were the developers of talent.

Q: Do you think it's different now?

A: It's quite different now...I think there are still publishers like that, but many less. Those were the years that ASCAP and BMI were competing with each other and many publishers were being subsidized. That made it economically feasible, in turn, for publishers to subsidize writers. But nothing is static. The economic structure of the business has changed.

Q: Meanwhile let's get back to you.

A: So I went up to BMI where George Marlo was a key executive. I said "I love the music business; I'm a songwriter; I don't have any relatives in the business and I'd like a job". So he picked up the telephone and called Robert Mellin, and got me a job as a songplugger... I travelled all over the country in my car for Robert Mellin and in my trunk were dozens of recordings he had published. I would visit all the little radio stations around the U.S. and would try to persuade them to play his records. They were all guys just out of the military and DJs were very entrepreneurs...It was a very exciting time because the record industry was just expanding from 3 major companies, RCA, Decca and Columbia, into dozens of little companies. It was an explosive time. If you heard a song you could make a master for \$1,000, take it to a little city and persuade someone to play it. The next day that

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record would sell in a small area and two days later a major company would come and offer you \$20,000 to \$30,000 for the master and to develop the artist. It was "hands on"...at every level of the industry people felt useful.

Q: Don't you think we are seeing a bit of that time happening again?

A: Oh you are seeing it again, and that's what is attracting me back to the creative end again. By the time I was twenty-one I was managing and I had found Richard Perry around the corner from me. He was going to Brooklyn Prep and had a band. I went with a tape recorder and taped him. Then I took him into a studio and made an entire album. I still have that tape.

Q: Wait a second. When did you become a manager? I thought you were working for Robert Mellin?

A: After one year of working for Robert Mellin and then one year working for ABC Records, I went into business for myself.

Q: What did you do for ABC Records?

A: I was their first record promoter. Then I went into business for myself at about age 24.

Q: Doing what?

A: Music publishing and production...That's when I found Richard Perry. At the same time I handled Sandy Yaguda, at Far Rockaway High School, who went on to be part of Jay & The Americans. I also handled Brooks Arthur, who was then called Arny Brodsky. He was a stock room clerk at Coral Records when I made an album with him.

Q: What happened with all these artists you were handling?

A: Nothing happened...I didn't have enough money to last. So about two years later I found out you could generate a good deal of money doing record promotion. I formed a network of people all over the United States. I then worked for Streisand for the next ten years. I had all kinds of marvelous clients.

Q: Give me some dates here. When was all this going on?

A: Well I've been in the promotion business 25 years this March. I also dabbled in publishing then. I published most of the Earl's records like "Looking For My Baby" etc.; And developed some New York sounding 'doobie doobie' classics like "My Imagination" by the Five Classics and "When You're Alone" by Donnie & The Delchords. I also had a top 20 record called "God, Country and My Baby" by Johnny Burnett which was one of the last patriotic hits we had in 1960. It had to do with the Cuban crisis. Then the Viet Nam War followed and it became a very unpatriotic period and that copyright just died. I was glad I was in the record promotion business. Then in about 1967 I added a public relations capability.

Q: When did you start putting more effort into public relations and less into promotion?

A: Originally artists hired their own promotion people. Ed Ames had me on his payroll, Jack Jones etc. Then the complexion of record promotion changed. Disc jockies no longer maintained any control over what would be played. It became programming by committee and also programming by ratings. Now that's not a negative thing. It just changed the nature of independent record promotion. The personal relationships I had developed with the DJs were no longer as important. So I developed the public relations company.

Q: Are you still doing promotion?

A: Oh, sure. As a matter of fact I'm doing promotion right now for Sophisticated Ladies. I do promotion regularly for movies, shows, etc.

Q: O.K. Mort, now tell me what you see in the future for Morton Wax & Associates?

A: I think a couple of things will happen. Lots of other industries are using the record business for free promotion. All of a sudden people are enamoured over the ability of a record to sell a show or movie. Suddenly they realize that we grew up in an "oral world". Many of our discretionary buyers are audio oriented. Lots of industries are now recognizing that music is a very important selling tool.

(Continued)

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Q: How does that affect you?

A: I think we're suddenly gonna see records come from very unusual places. I envision someone planning a perfume line, or a hair conditioner, or a new car, and in the original marketing plan they will have a song written to put out a record to help sell a product.

Q: What else do you see happening that will affect you in the future?

A: I think the dynamite keg of the future in the record business is the fact that foreign recordings have been ignored for the past 25 years...and this is gonna change. I don't mean an evolutionary change, I mean an instant change when the record business, retail music business, and broadcasting become aware of the sound and energy of foreign recorded product... which has happened all of the world except the U.S.

Q: But you pointed out earlier in this conversation how difficult it is to break into radio because of programming by committee and ratings. How do you expect foreign product to break through?

A: Your question is well taken but I think they'll go for it now because AM radio stations today have nothing to play. There are dramatic stories in the trades everyday about the problems in AM radio. Major stations like ABC here in New York are going "talk". So it's a time to experiment.

Q: But what makes you think that Americans will accept foreign music when historically this has never been the case here?

A: I think the demographics of our country have changed. The teenagers who travelled in the '60s who are now 28 to 32 are more open to foreign product. Millions of American youth have travelled all over the world. Also I think you'll see we've had an inordinate number of people who have emigrated to this country in the last five years from all over Europe. Finally, and most important, the quality and innovativeness of the foreign work is of a very high quality.

Q: Well, time will tell.