

THE HISTORY OF HI-HAT SQUARE DANCE RECORDS

by Ernie Kinney (April 2003)

Hi-Hat Square Dance Record Company was founded in October of 1963 by Mr. Merl Olds. Merl, who for many years was the producer of SIO records and recorded with that company and was also the record reviewer for Sets In Order Magazine, decided to start his own company and produce his own records.

The very first record (New Ashmolean Band) music was recorded by the Gene Garf Quartet and the vocal (dance) was recorded by Bill Green and released in December 1964. Well, since that time and as of this writing, 406 Hi-Hat Singing Calls have been released, and 67 Hoedown Records. The first hoedown record was Deuces Wild/Pair of Kings by the Gene Garf Quartet also.

Bill Green recorded 9 singing call records thru 1968. Wayne West released his first on the Hi-Hat label in Jan. of 1964 and Ray & Joel Orme did a couple. Merl recorded 2 singing calls himself, "Wild Bill" Foross did 2. Then came Dick Houlton who recorded 19 singing calls, Don Hills, Joel Kadish, Walt Jessup, Jack Livingston, Lee McCormack, and (First Generation) Dick Weaver. Red Bates, did 9 singing calls.

Ernie Kinney has recorded 125 Hi-Hat records to date, two of which are the best sellers. HH 357 - Something Stupid and HH 471 - El Paso City. Hi-Hat 471-C El Paso City is the first square dance record produced with harmony vocals to be used by callers if they so desire. Then Ralph Sivlius did a song, Bob Wickers recorded 18 on the Hi-Hat label, Bill Peterson & Rex Coats did two or three.

Then Lee Schmidt joined the staff in 1968 and his first recording (The Crawdad Song) earned him the title - The Crawdad Man. Lee recorded 25 records for Hi-Hat, Dick Jones did a couple, Dan Shmelzer, Ken Anderson, Roger Morris, Ed Stephan, Francis Zeller, did 2 or 3 each. Tommy Cavanaugh, from England, recorded for 9 years on the label and had hits such as Who's Your Lady Friend?, Cocoanuts, don't Dilly Dally.

Glen Zeno recorded one singing call. Dave Hoffmann came on the label in March of 1974 and recorded until May of 1979. Dave recorded the first singing call on the label after Ernie bought the company from Merl, (I Don't Know Why) and Dave also recorded the first 2 couple hoedown on the Hi-Hat label (Tijuana Taxi).

Dick Waibel recorded for Hi-Hat from May of 1974 thru September of 1978. Joe Johnston joined the staff in May of 1976 and remained thru December of 1984. Joe also sang bass for the Hi-Hat Pioneers on their first release (Singing About Cowboys) in 1984. Mike Sikorsky recorded from 1976 thru 1980. Jerry Schatzer joined the staff in March of 1978 and remained until his death in 1986. Jerry was the best choreographer who has ever recorded on the label. His best selling record was a 2 couple hoedown (10-20 Hoedown).

In 1978-79 Wade Driver did 2 singing calls on the Hi-Hat label as a guest. Then along comes Tom Perry whose first Hi-Hat release was in August of 1979 and who is a permanent member of the staff. Tom has recorded 51 singing calls and has also been the Baritone Singer for the Hi-Hat Pioneers Cowboy Singing Group since 1984.

Bobby Lepard joined the staff in 1987 and is still recording for the label. In September of 1982 Bronc

Wise got on the Hi-Hat band wagon, became the tenor singer and yodeler for the Hi-Hat Pioneers. Bronc remained with the staff until July of 1995. Bronc became the number one recorder for the Hi-Hat 2 couple hoedown records, a superb choreographer.

Burlin Davis became the Bass Singer for the Hi-Hat Pioneer Group on the 3rd tape (ELK 2003 - Where The Buffalo Roam) released in April of 1986, and remained with the group until December, 1990. Kip Garvey did a guest singing call in 1988 and later in 1995 joined the staff as a permanent member with his release of HH 5199 - Sea Of Heartbreaks. Dave Abbott joined the staff in 1988 and remained with Hi-Hat until his retirement in 1991.

Wayne McDonald has been a Hi-Hat recording artist and the Bass Singer for the Hi-Hat Pioneers since October, 1990. Wayne has been involved with the recording of 14 singing calls and 3 Hi-Hat Pioneer Tapes. Buddy Weaver (Second generation-remember Dick Weaver earlier) came aboard in October of 1991 with "Fireball Mail" and has been a great asset to the staff and is a permanent member. He joined the Hi-Hat Pioneer group upon the departure of Bronc as their tenor singer. Buddy is featured as soloist in many songs on this latest Pioneer Tape - "High Sierra" EKL 2008. Buddy is also involved with the 2 couple hoedown recordings.

Marty Firstenburg recorded on the Hi-Hat label from 1991 thru 1993. In 1992 Tom Miller became a permanent member of the Hi-Hat recording staff. Erika Johansson was discovered by some of the staff attending the Cincinnati National Square Dance Convention and was immediately added to the staff and she recorded her first record which was released in February of 1993.

In December of 1995 the first record released by Deborah Parnell. Since that time she has recorded such best sellers as Hakuna Matata, Colors of The Wind, and done some yodeling on the title song of the last Pioneer Tape (Sierra Nevada).

Merl Olds and Ernie Kinney have always sought out and found the best musicians available for the recording sessions. In most cases they have been studio musicians who play for a living and can read music. Merl used many different groups, but seemed always to use Wayne Songer on the Clarinet. Wayne played with Jack Benny band for years. He also liked Neal LeVang on the guitar. Neal played with the Lawrence Welk band.

The leaders were of course Gene Garf, Art Barduhn, Jerry Vaughan, Dick Cary, Jack Stevan, Joe Leahy (Great Trumpet Player), and in 1975 Del Kacher became the band leader. Del was very unique with the guitar. He had all the phrases, etc. that were first used by Les Paul. Del played the guitar with the Les Paul & Mary Ford shows for 8 years before going into business for himself.

In January 1976 Ernie Kinney bought the Hi-Hat, Blue Ribbon Square Dance Labels from Merl Olds. Ernie as producer had his recording sessions in North Hollywood Studios owned by Del Kacher. Del was also kept on as the band leader.

In October of 1980 the music recording was moved to a studio in Fresno, California. And musicians were scouted out and obtained for this the first session to be recorded in the Central Valley of California. From this point in time Hi-Hat music has always been played with a Stand-up Bass & an Electric Bass. It is felt that the music must be made for the dancer and this of course, is the reason for the move.

Terry Christofferson was discovered at this first session in Fresno and has been playing the Steel &

Lead guitars for the Hi-Hatters Band ever since. Terry played Steel & lead for Buck Owens Hee-Haw Shows for years. The leader for the first two sessions in Fresno was Gary Smalz, Keyboard & Bass Player.

After that the new studio (Ken Carlton Recording) has been doing all the music, with their studio musicians, which includes Terry Christofferson. And now that the engineer, owner, and super musician has been trained in square dance arranging, etc. he does most of the music himself.

Hi-Hat Music is proven to be of the best quality in the industry.