

'I Was Just Trying To Navigate And Survive In A Business That I Loved'

BY MICHAEL PAOLETTA

In a career that spans more than four decades, Eddie O'Loughlin has worn many hats: GM of Buddah/Kama Sutra Music Publishing, producer at Next Plateau Productions, A&R executive for Tommy Boy Records, label owner of Midland International and Next Plateau.

Along the way, the native New Yorker had a hand in introducing many notable disco, pop, R&B and hip-hop acts to the U.S. market. These include Silver Convention, Gloria Gaynor, John Travolta, Carol Douglas, Salt 'N Pepa, Ultramagnetic MCs, Sybil and Sweet Sensation.

In the late '90s, O'Loughlin sold the assets of his 15-year-old Next Plateau operation to PolyGram, Roadrunner and Warner/Chappell Music. He retained the label's name and, two years ago, relaunched Next Plateau.

The label's fourth signing, Nina Sky, is a commercial winner. In July, the pop/R&B duo's self-titled debut entered The Billboard 200 at No. 44 and the Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart at No. 21. Last month, lead single, "Move Ya Body," featuring Jabba, peaked at No. 4 on The Hot 100.

O'Loughlin is also a co-founder of the Dance Music Hall of Fame, which will hold its inaugural awards ceremony Sept. 20 in New York.

Robbins Entertainment president/CEO Cory Robbins—who also began his career in the disco trenches—credits O'Loughlin's longevity in the business to his knack for remaining musically aware.

"Eddie stays on top of the latest musical trends, beats and rhythms," Robbins says. "For more than 40 years, Eddie has consistently delivered hit records. And he continues to do so with acts like Nina Sky."

Q: In the '70s, you were closely linked to disco music. How did you proceed when the disco bubble burst in 1979?

A: It was either reinvent myself or fall apart. I chose the former. I was just trying to navigate and survive in a business that I loved. At that time, dance music was becoming more urban, more R&B- and hip-hop-based. That was the sound coming from the street. That formed the foundation for the original Next Plateau Records in 1983.

Q: Two years ago, you relaunched the label. What made you decide to do that?

A: I looked at the landscape and saw that a lot of the large companies were distracted. Several labels had merged, while others had closed their doors—something that is still going on today. I felt that, with all the downsizing and distraction at the major labels, it might be a good time to be looking for great talent.

Q: All of the label's releases have traveled through Universal Records. What is Next Plateau's relationship to the major?

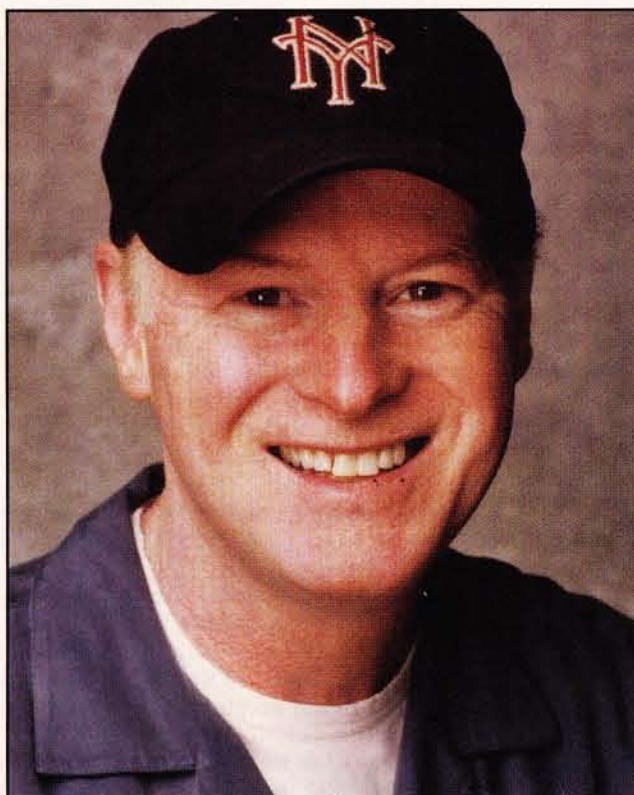
A: We are presently in a nonexclusive partnership, wherein we do the A&R and start-up marketing and promotion. Then, when a record gets to a certain point, Universal steps in and takes over. And while Universal does not own Next Plateau, it does own the masters of the recordings that we have released to date.

Q: Do you see this partnership continuing?

A: We are actually in discussions to make it an exclusive agreement.

Q: Is that the best way for an indie label to survive in today's climate?

A: I have great concerns about people going out on their own and trying to be the new Profile, Priority or Next Plateau—you know, labels that were successful in the '80s. It's difficult today to be successful as a wholly independent label. And here is where it



The Last Word

A Q&A With Eddie O'Loughlin

Eddie O'Loughlin: Career Highlights

1971-1974: GM of Buddah/Kama Sutra Music Publishing
1974: Co-founded Midland International Records (later Midsong) with Bob Reno
1980: Co-founded Plateau Record Productions with Lou DeBiase
1983: Co-founded Next Plateau Records with Jenniene Leclercq
1998-2003: Executive VP of A&R at Tommy Boy Records
2002-present: President/CEO of Next Plateau Entertainment

becomes a major concern, because the smaller companies—the ones that give people chances—are typically where tomorrow's executives come from.

That said, I see great opportunities for a [smaller label] to act more like a production-affiliated company—one that focuses on finding and developing talent.

Q: Have you faced any unexpected challenges since relaunching the label?

A: Well, when you start a new company, you have to be prepared for a lot of rejection. And that's hurtful. So you must work that much harder. Because you're on new footing with a new business, anything you've done in the past really doesn't count. Of course, if

you've been doing it as long as I have, you get a little bit of a polite edge. But the reality is, people want to be with people who are producing success right now.

Q: What about start-up costs?

A: It has gotten more expensive to finance a new company. I started Next Plateau the first time with \$1,000 of personal money. I was able to piece together another \$150,000 from various advances from foreign distribution and foreign music publishing. These days, such possibilities aren't always there.

Q: Why is that?

A: With the recession, depression or whatever you want to call it, people are holding back. The budgets are simply not there. So I financed everything myself this time to get the label up and running. But now Universal is financing us. If you prove that you can deliver hits, labels will follow.

Q: How much money does it take to get a record noticed?

A: For me, because I've been in the music industry my whole life and know a lot of people, it takes around \$25,000. With this money, I can hire independent radio promoters who will help me find out if I have a potential hit on my hands.

Q: How important is it for an indie label to have a catalog?

A: It's the ultimate dream. But maintaining a catalog involves a tremendous amount of pressure. So, eventually, indies sell their catalogs to a large organization. You do this to keep growing as a company.

Q: In 1997, you sold assets of Next Plateau to PolyGram and Roadrunner. The following year, you sold additional assets to Warner/Chappell. What was your motivation, and what did each company get?

A: We felt that the market was about to hit a rough spot. And we thought, at the time, it was very difficult to compete as an indie company. Our indie distributors had been going out of business, in particular Schwartz Brothers. It was getting more and more difficult to get proper placement in the stores and to get records on the radio. It was becoming more of a corporate business. So we saw the signs and felt that it would be the right time to sell the assets of the company. I retained the name.

PolyGram got the masters of acts like Salt 'N Pepa, Sybil and Paperboy. Roadrunner also picked up several acts, including Ultramagnetic MCs, Tony Scott, Sweet Sensation, C-Bank and Red Alert. The music publishing companies were sold to Warner/Chappell.

Q: What's on Next Plateau's plate for the coming months?

A: We'll be releasing a number of releases from R&B/hip-hop acts, including LB from South Africa, Nina Sky co-producer DJ Cypher and Jabba, who was featured on "Move Ya Body." We also have a young Italian vocalist, Patrizio, who sings Italian love songs in English and Italian. He is signed to Universal in the U.K. for the world. Next Plateau, through Universal, has him for the U.S. I am also building a roster of new crossover reggae and reggaeton artists and producers.

Q: Why did you get involved with the Dance Music Hall of Fame?

A: I felt it was important to honor the people who pioneered and created an important genre of music that does not always get the kind of respect it deserves from the mainstream record industry.