



FRED HAAZEN - President

INTERVIEW WITH FRED HAAZEN

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Q: Fred, let me get a bio on you.. Where did you grow up?

A: I grew up in the West Indies until I was 12 years old. Then we moved to Holland...After 3 years of University there I went to Canada on a scholarship to the University of Toronto School of Architecture...Then back to Holland to finish my studies. Meanwhile as a working student, I was assigned to a warehouse to pack records in boxes for Polydor Records. While I was there I saw quite a disorganized place and I made some suggestions. After my assignment there was over the managing director said there would be a job for me there if I ever wanted it...A little later on, after a study trip to Egypt, I came back and said 'ok...Let's give it a shot.'

Q: Why didn't you continue in architecture?

A: Well, I love architecture and I still practice it, but I wanted my own office. At that time in Europe, about '65-'66, starting out that way was incredibly difficult. You had to have a tremendous amount of money to set yourself up. So, in '65 I was 24 years old and I figured I was still young enough to do this for a while and go back to architecture whenever I wanted.

Q: What did you start off doing at Polydor?

A: I was to head up the Pop-Rock division which didn't exist because Polydor was then basically classical music. So I listened to Radio Luxembourg and Radio Veronica and they played American chart records. I heard a record that I loved called "Can't Explain" by a group called The Who. They said the label was Brunswick. Now when I was working in the warehouse I remembered seeing that label. So I checked and it turned out that it was ours...That became the first real big Pop record for Polydor in Europe.

Q: You released it through the Holland office?

A: Yes, and then Polydor Int'l took it over. Then we had another hit with the Who and when their contract was up with Decca I was instrumental in getting the group to sign to Polydor Int'l.... Meanwhile I started to learn how to produce records and I did my first record with Golden Earring.... That was August of 1965.

Q: What happened to the record?

A: It was a smash.... Then I signed some other bands that had big records... Looking back at it, I can see that I was really very lucky.

Q: You stayed in Holland doing all of this; why not the main office in Germany?

A: The Polydor group of companies began to hire young people like me and started getting more into rock and roll. In England there was a man named Roland Rennie who definitely put Polydor on the map in the UK. He was instrumental in the Robert Stigwood joint venture, Cream, Jimi Hendrix, Slade.... In 1966 he did a distribution deal with Atlantic Records and from Nesuhi Ertegun, I got the rights for Holland.... In a short time Polydor Int'l became one of the strongest international companies ever.... Then the managing director of the company was promoted and I didn't especially get along with the new man. So I was going to leave and go back into architecture when I got a call from the chairman of the board of the Phonogram group, Coen Solleveld. He said they wanted to train me.

Q: So you didn't leave the company?

A: Well I left Polydor but went over to the headquarters of Phonogram Int'l in Baarn. For a year they trained me in administration. Even though that was never my forte, at least I learned what not to do...and in this business that's something worth learning...Then in April 1968 they said now we think you should set up your own company. So, together with a great friend of mine who was the program director of Radio Veronica, Willem Van Kooten, we set up Red Bullet Productions, Dayglow Music and a management company. I think the first song we signed to Dayglow Music was "Venus" by Shocking Blue and that became a worldwide smash.

Q: How long were you at Red Bullet?

A: I stayed there from 1968 to '71 when the Phonogram group management asked me if I would like to go back to the Polydor company I had originally worked at when I was a student as its President. So from August 1971 until the first of January 1975 I was President of Polydor Records in Holland. From there I went on to become President of Polydor Records in England where I stayed until the end of 1977. In November 1977 they asked me to become the Vice President of Polydor worldwide.

Q: Was that based back in Europe again?

A: It was supposed to be based in Hamburg but there was an opportunity for me, at the same time, to become the President of Polydor in the United States. So, on the first of March 1978, I became President of Polydor Inc. and Vice President of Polydor Int'l, working out of the U.S.

Q: I can't believe you had both of those positions and also had time to sleep and eat.

A: It wasn't easy. The company exploded to the point that we even had 2 of our own records competing for #1 across the board. I underestimated what my time involvement here would be and also, not being in Europe certainly didn't help oil the wheels properly. Then the whole U.S. operation changed when Harvey Shein came in and I saw the company heading in another direction.

Q: So how did you end up at WEA from there?

A: I had a meeting with Nesuhi Ertegun, who I had become good friends with from the days he gave me Atlantic Records to distribute in Holland. The area he felt I was strongest in was signing artists...as he calls it 'being a signer'. It is an area I feel comfortable with but I also enjoy seeing a project through and making it happen. In my one-and-a-half years as a Senior Vice President at WEA for Nesuhi I went through a situation that was difficult for me because I couldn't follow through after signing an act. So I decided to go back and try something on my own again.

Q: When was 21 records set up?

A: We began talking about it in March 1982 and on the first of May I left WEA.

Q: How did you come up with the name '21 Records'?

A: In the first place, I love the number...it's a winning number...you get a 21 gun salute...you win with 21, and it is very international. In almost every country it is recognizable.

Q: What happens if both you and Polygram are interested in the same act; isn't there a conflict of interest?

A: Polydor Int'l is obviously a shareholder in 21 Records...but if we were to go after the same act I think the one who was after it first should have the right. But I have not had that problem yet...because so far I have not signed an American act for the world. The first would be Roger Glover. The rest were either British acts that I thought were suitable for the U.S. market or a Dutch act like Golden Earring. And what I signed for overseas, the rights in the United States were already gone, so they were not after those acts either. We had the Cheri record that did extremely well and now we have a deal with Tommy Boy Records.

Q: So you've found an interesting niche for yourself. You sign masters here for overseas and masters overseas for this country. Are you going to sign any American acts?

A: Yes I will...especially now with the heavy metal situation that is developing.

Q: What else are you up to, Fred...anything new in the future?

A: Well, now we have 21 Video. With that company I'll be working with an old friend, Bill Curbishly, manager of the Who.

Q: What are you going to do with 21 Video?

A: We are doing profiles of major artists. They will be primarily made up of their music but if the program is 3/4 of an hour, 12 to 15 minutes of that will be spent on how they grew up or personal problems and things like that.

Linda Gaeta - Director of Operations



Currently Director of Operations, 21 Records, Inc., since inception of company on June 1, 1982. Previously A&R Administrator with Fred Haayen at WEA International; before that Assistant to the Executive Vice-President at Polydor, Inc. (who was Dick Kline, when Fred Haayen was the President of Polydor Inc.); before that Executive Secretary at Atlantic Recording Corp. Background includes several smaller independent record labels, artist management, artist travel consultant, road manager, and limousine company (for record executives and artists) owner.