

Video saves the radio star

MVD Entertainment Group a musical family affair

By Bryan Reesman

Ed Seaman,
C.O.O. of
MVD

If one company in the music business strongly represents both the terms "eclectic" and "prolific," it is the Philadelphia-based MVD Entertainment Group, a combination distributor, one-stop supplier and label that wants to be everything music video for the world.

Back in 1986, when CEO Tom Seaman founded the company, his attitude towards music video was, why just hear it when you can see ... *and* hear it? He knew how powerful music home video would become, and during the last two decades has built a company that has released titles from artists as diverse as Gil-Scott Heron, Hawkwind, Einstürzende Neubauten, Martha Reeves, Artrosis and Glen Campbell.

"The plan was, and always has been, that we would not just be a video label but also a one-stop and distributor," explained Ed Seaman, C.O.O. of MVD, who began working with his father Tom in 1989. "We were carrying all of the major-label product on music video, all kinds of imports and harder-to-find products. From the outset, the idea was it's going to be the best supply source for music video."

A 40-year veteran of the music business, founder Tom Seaman had retail experience with Record Hunter, Sam Goody, Musicland and CBS Retail, plus wholesale experience with Jem Records. Initial videotape releases from MVD were indie titles from the Sex Pistols, and the company gradually grew from there. "Early on, there wasn't much that was exclusively MVD," reported Ed Seaman. "It dramatically started to build with the onset of DVD. But back then there were bits and pieces. We'd do some releases every now and then, like 30 or 40 per year at the most."

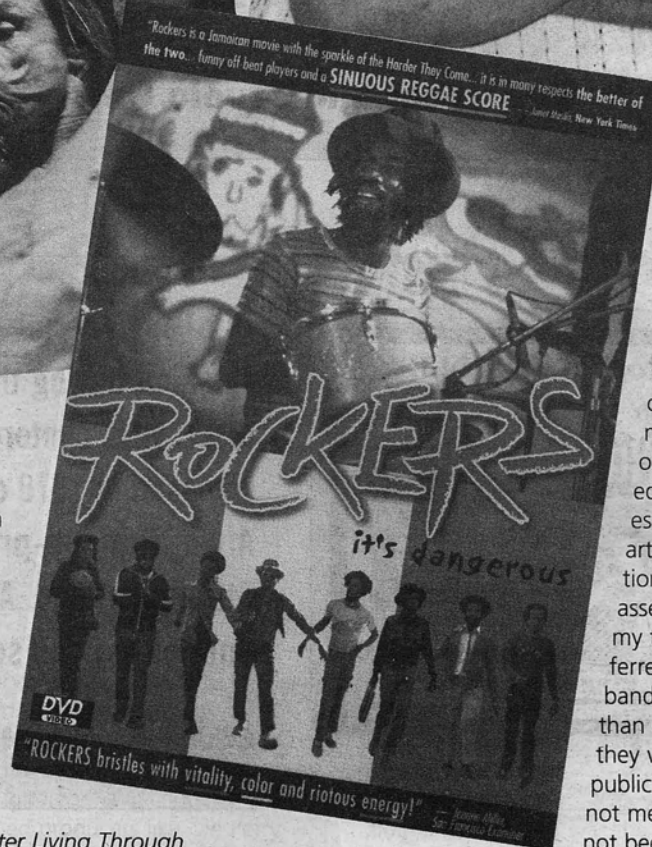
Even though VHS sales were brisk, the arrival of DVD took MVD to a whole new business level. "Our relationships with our suppliers, whether they were exclusive or nonexclusive, were very good," recalled Seaman. "We did a good job selling and a good job paying, so when DVD came around, we grabbed the opportunity and went to our suppliers and said, 'Let's take your existing content and help you get it to DVD, and we'll exploit it.' That really took off for us."

The company's inaugural release came in 1998 with *Sublime: Stories, Tales, Lies, & Exaggerations*, which has since sold over 100,000 units on VHS and DVD. "That was a great one [to] start off with," stated Seaman. "It was a fantastic, in-depth documentary on the band from start to finish. This was very close to the band and done with the band members." MVD has also distributed some



unauthorized documentaries on artists like Ozzy Osbourne and System Of A Down, but they "much prefer to focus our energies where the artists are involved and really get the artists engaged in the project, as far as the marketing and promotion aspect of things."

Other early music DVD successes included the reggae film *Rockers*, *GG Allin: Hated*, and *Better Living Through Circuitry*. "A lot of the things that did well back then still do well today," noted Seaman. "Once we really got into DVD and saw that we could be good at it, by 2002 our schedule got pretty aggressive, and we started going after better and better content. That's still our primary focus." Beyond Sublime, other MVD music video successes have included *Rockers* (75,000 units), *Iggy and the Stooges: Live In Detroit 2003* (50,000 units), and the



is the *Bad Brains* DVD that we released last fall. There had never been a home video from them before, so there was a bottled-up explosion when we released that. Fans went crazy."

Despite the loss of Tower Records and Sam Goody, MVD has been holding steady and has not streamlined its release schedule. "The way we operate is [being] cautious

New York Dolls: All Dolled Up (40,000 units). "*Style Wars* is fantastic as well. It's a 1982 graffiti film that's a cornerstone of hip-hop culture," added Seaman.

Given the recent DVD boom, with many classic artists not only reviving older titles but releasing new titles, one might wonder, are people more eager for new titles by older artists or are they interested more in their vintage releases? "It totally depends on the artist and what kind of reputation and fanbase that artist has," asserted Seaman. "Personally, for my taste, I've always much preferred to see shitty footage of a band when they were great rather than great footage of a band when they were shitty. But it's really the public that makes those decisions, not me. We look for bands that have not been well exploited in audio/visual means, and a great example of that

with what we spend and how we spend," noted Seaman. "We know that with certain DVDs there are only going to be 1,500 or 2,000 that we're able to sell. But it's important for those fans, and for the market in general, to get those products in the hands of those fans, and we have no problem filling that need."

Today MVD Entertainment Group has three major divisions: MVD Visual, MVD Distribution, and MVD Audio. MVD Visual is the re-branded version of the Music DVD division and has released over 500 titles since 1999. MVD Distribution is the new name for the company's wholesale operation, which has a 20,000-square-foot warehouse in Oaks, Pa., and services major chains, distributors, one-stops, online retail and independent retail.

MVD Audio is the newest division of the company, having been founded in August 2006. MVD Audio distributes labels from Germany (Inakustik), the UK (Secret Records), and Poland (Metal Mind Productions), along with numerous independent artists. Seaman fought against the CD arm of the company for a period of time, thinking it would dilute MVD's image, but he was convinced otherwise.

"It was really a matter of saying we're doing all this stuff," said Seaman. "We've got the infrastructure in place. We've got the customer base and the supplier chain. Our suppliers have been bugging us to do their CDs as well, so we pretty much flicked the switch and had about 100 titles to release."

The audio titles have come from artists as varied as John Wetton, Arturo Sandoval, Billy Cobham and Pendragon. There has also been a stream of '80s thrash and speed-metal titles from the Roadrunner Records vaults that include bands like Atrophy, Xentrix, Sadus, and Znowhite, and they have been limited to 2,000 copies each. Plus, there is a five-disc box set from Italian thrash veterans Bulldozer.

"As far as new titles, there's the brand-new, first-run Marillion

CD [*Somewhere Else*]," revealed Seaman. "It's cool. That's the direction that we'd really like to head in, putting out new releases from important artists."

After all these years and continued growth, MVD continues to be a family business. Tom is the CEO, his wife Elinor is the secretary treasurer, Ed is the C.O.O., and his sister Eve handles finance and human resource. What started as "family plus one" in the beginning has blossomed into a 25-person operation that also includes two key personnel that Ed brought in from his childhood days: Dave Hall, operations VP, and Mike DeMonte, VP of Sales. "These are people that I knew, trusted, and are good, smart, and hard-working," declared Seaman.

When asked about an overall driving philosophy, Seaman offered a multi-form answer that reflected the diversity found within the company. "There are a few different parts of MVD to ask that question to," he remarked. "From the distribution and one-stop side, we aim to be the best supplier in the world for music DVD. We aim to be the source. If you're looking for something and it's available, you know you can find it at MVD. On the distribution side, we represent labels from Europe and want to be a very good trade partner on those products lines and exploit them as best as we can. As far as MVD the label, that puts out things like the Bad Brains or the New York Dolls, the philosophy there is to find significant artists who have not been properly exploited in an audio/visual fashion and exploit them."

Let the exploitation continue! ●

