NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

FACULTY OF DESIGN
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HOUSE STYLES

AN EXPLORATION OF RECORD LABELS WITH THEiR OWN DISTINCT VISUAL STYLES

BY
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INTRODUCTION

In his book *"The Art of Selling Songs: Graphics for the Music Business - 1690 - 1990"*[1], Kevin Edge briefly discusses the area of corporate design in the music business stating;

> "the creation of a company character had already begun in late nineteenth century with phonograph and gramophone manufacturers. This trend was well established in the 1930's, being epitomised by the strong visual identities of companies big and small like Deutsche Gramophone, Blue Note, ECM (Editions of Contemporary Music), Land, Fon and 4AD".
> **(Edge, l991.p94)**

It is this idea of label identity which has interested me since my discovery in 1987 of the music and sleeve design of the English record label 4AD. I must admit there have been times when I bought certain 4AD releases purely for their sleeve design, the music being only of secondary importance.

Since then I have tried to find out as much as I could about 4AD records and their designer, Vaughan Oliver, who creates the sleeves. This research led me to discover other record labels who have worked with designers to create an over all house style. It is this personal obsession that forms the basis of the research for this thesis.
My thesis will explore this area of music graphics where the individual designer, usually working in-house has not only created an identity for the individual artists, but has also created a more visually cohesive whole,where the consumer receives a consistent statement about the quality and the special attitude to the music that these labels record and sell.

Various people have commented on this area of music graphics.The designer Russell Mills (b. 1952), talking about the sleeves he created for 'Land' records [2], having a certain aesthetic continuity which inform the consumer that they are;

> "a purveyor of a particular sensibility and integrity"
> **(Edge, 1991, P.98)**

Ivo Watts-Russell (b. 1957) explaining the differences which he sees between his label, 4AD Records, and the big multi-nationals in relation to the music they release, and the role design has played in reinforcing this point, observed that;

> "most music is contrived and aimed at a particular market: it just not heart felt in any way It is just calculated-a number of

groups calculate what they are doing. I think that there are enough frustrated people out there, people frustrated by they are given on a daily basis, who actively look for better music. And Certainly the involvement of 23 envelope [2] over the past three years has helped focus the presentation of our releases, and has shown that all of us care about what we are doing. We care that music is special, can be an important part of one's life and that it deserves to be packaged and put together in a serious, artistic and professional way."
(Vander Lans, 1987 p 9)

The thesis sets out to explore four record labels, Blue Note, ECM, Talkin' Loud and 4AD, all of whom have used design to help express their sensibility .

The first chapter "From Mary had a little lamb to 33 1/3" takes a look at how records have been packaged since the invention in 1877 by Thomas Alva Edison of the phonograph, through the introduction of the gramophone right up to the early 1950s and the arrival of the Long Play (L.P.) record which played at 33 1/3 r.p.m. (revolutions per minute). It will look at the development in sleeve design from the earliest plain paper sleeves up to the first use of what we today have come to know as the album sleeve.

In the second chapter "From Blue Note to talkin' loud and back again", I will look at some of the record labels who have developed over a period of time an identity for themselves. This identity is not the result of these labels using a 'generic' house sleeve into which all their releases are packaged. It is more to do with the fact that while each sleeve in isolation attempts to say something about the individual musical content within that particular release, it is only when you view nine or ten releases from the particular label together that a visual identity begins to emerges. This emerging identity is due mainly to the fact that in each case, one designer is responsible for all the design for the label, and as such whether consciously or not, his or her own personal aesthetic judgement has helped lead to this emerging house style The labels and designers covered in this chapter are Blue Note and Reid Miles, ECM and the design team of Barbara Wojirsch and Dieter Rehm, and finally Talkin' Loud and Ian Swift. In all these cases the designer has become as well known as any of the other artists on the label.

The final chapter, *4AD and V/23; True Style* will take a look at the special relationship that has developed between 4AD Records and Vaughan Oliver since 1983, a relationship which has developed to such a point, that Aldersey-Williams points out that;

"people buy the company's records out of respect for its

> editorial judgement; many who would never have dreamed of listing to a bunch of Bulgars [3], do so because they have appreciated other 4AD discoveries in the past. And Oliver's strong house style helps them make these unlikely crossover's. since most of 4AD's sales are not based on huge name recognition or on pretty faces, he is free to devote his cover designs to more thought provoking associations between music and image".
> (Aldersey-Williams, 1989, p. 50)

I will examine the label and how Vaughan has created individual and distinctive series of covers for each act, while at the same time giving the label a very strong overall identity.

[1]This book was published in conjunction with an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1991 and covered the whole area of music related graphics from medieval manuscripts to the arrival of the compact disc.

[2] Land records was set up by Brian Eno to release music by various acts he admired. Before its demise in 1991 Land released twelve records all of which had sleeves designed by Russell Mills.

[3] 23 Envelope was the name under which V.Oliver and Nigel Greirson worked for 4AD.

[4] Bulgars refers to an album titled 'Le Mystere des Voix Bulgares' released by 4AD in 1987.This record contained recordings of traditional Bulgarian folk music and was both a critical and commercial success.

CHAPTER 1

FROM "MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB" TO THE ARRIVAL OF THE 33 1/3 ; *RECORD COVER DESIGN FROM THE 1890s TO THE EARLY 1950s*

INTRODUCTION

When in 1887 the American inventor Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931) spoke the words "Mary had a little Lamb" into his phonograph, he made the first recording of a human voice. He recorded this on to a metal cylinder which could be played back again and again and so a whole new industry was born.

By the early 1890s the metal cylinder had been replaced by the easier to manufacture wax cylinder and had become available for domestic use.
As these cylinders were made of wax they were understandably very fragile. In order to protect these cylinders they were housed in rigid cardboard cylindrical boxes lined with lint. It was these boxes and their labels which created the initial link between the product and the consumer, a relationship which has remained unbroken to this day.

Throughout this period each company designed their own specific label which was wrapped around these boxes and they were primarily used to promote the company who had produced the cylinders and their related hardware, in fact those labels produced by Edison's company also carried a "signed" photograph of the phonograph's inventor, this helped to personalise these mass produced objects (see ill.1).
These boxes contained no information such as song-titles or personal details and photographs of the recording artists themselves. Instead this information was contained on the cylinder itself, inscribed around the rim and in addition they were also printed on a plain circular label pasted onto the lids of the boxes.

Some of the companies were a little more artistically adventurous with the designs of these labels. They decorated their labels with motifs similar to those found in press and poster art of the period, these included art noveau tendrils, frames and idealised feminine forms. Another device used to enhance the look of the labels was the use of "Gold" inks to reflect the brassy components of the phonograph itself (see ill.1).

Although wax cylinders continued to be manufactured right up until the 1920s they never became a huge commercial success, due mainly to the very fragile nature of the product itself, it was to take another technological development before recorded sound became a viable commodity

In 1887, within two years of Edison's invention of the phonograph Emile Berliner (1851-1926) a German living in America invented the "Gramophone". The gramophone allowed music to be recorded onto a flat disc. These discs were initial]y made of rubber, then of a shellac compound, they were far more durable than the wax cylinder and being flat were also easy to store. But the main reason for the success of the gramophone discs over the phonographic cylinders was the ease with which they could be mass-produced.

By the mid 1890s, gramophone discs were being produced in large numbers. The record companies who up until this regarded and promoted discs more as a novelty now saw their commercial possibilities. These early discs were played at 78 r.p.m. and they led to the introduction of the earliest form of the record cover. The discs were first packaged in a plain square paper envelope which measured ten inches by ten inches. All the relevant details were contained on a paper label stuck to the centre of the black disc itself. The design used by H.M.V. (His Master's Voice) is perhaps the most Famous of these labels. it shows a dog (Nipper) sitting beside a gramophone player. These was based on a painting by Francis Berraud (1856-1924) and was first used in 1900. (see ill.2). In order to view these labels and the information contained on them, song-titles, recording artists, etc., without handling the fragile record itself, it soon became a convention for these labels to be revealed by cutting a hole in the centre of the sleeve itself.

As I have stated earlier the sleeves for these early records were plain with no design on them whatsoever and usually were produced by the shops themselves rather than the record companies who shipped the records unprotected.

Soon the shops began to print their own name on these bags and sell advertising space on them to producers of gramophone players and/or related products (see ill.3). The record companies seeing the advantage of this, soon began to produce their own sleeves or "bags", as they became known.

The design of these sleeves was generally used to create a frame around the label itself and were generally only printed in one colour and like the labels on the boxes for the wax cylinders carried no more than the company logotype, some decorative frames and borders with panels of text exulting the companies products.(see ill 4)

Ill.1. Wax Cylinder Boxes

Ill.2. Logo for His Masters Voice

Ill.3. In house sleeve for Halloway Stores

These outer sleeves had a very generic look, with each company having its own individual bag, but this also meant that unless you read the label one could not tell one recording from another, during this period there was no attempt to give any visual hint as to the music contained on the records.

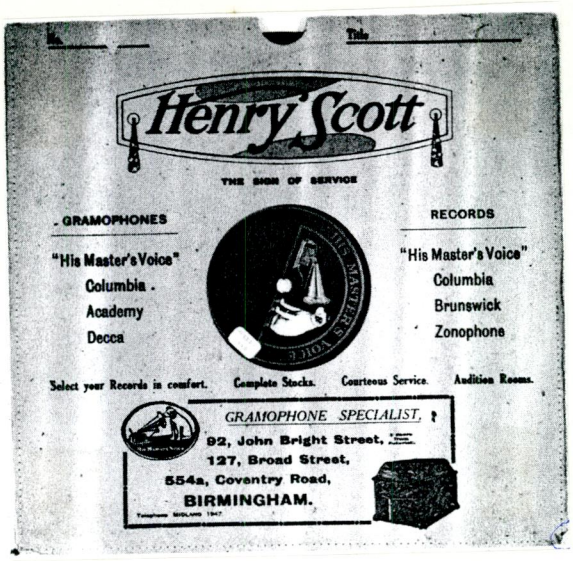
SLEEVE DESIGN FROM THE 1929S TO THE 1950S

Little changed in the way records were packaged until the 1920s when the sleeves became more expressive. They bean to incorporate imagery which tried in some way to reflect the music. Illustrations of people dancing or playing instruments began to replace the ornate boarders and patterns which had characterised the earlier sleeves. (see ill.5).

Another factor which led to the development of the recording industry during this period, was the fact that record companies found themselves in competition with radio and the new talking cinema. In response to this threat, they introduced in 1925, electrically recorded discs and amplification. Around the same time, the record companies led by Decca embarked on a price-cutting campaign. By the early 1930s records had become available in most towns and with players no longer seen as a luxury item, sales boomed. Throughout the early years of records, the generic house sleeve was the norm, and in fact some companies continue to use them today (see ill.6). But by the middle of the 1930s photographs of the big name recording stars began to appear on the sleeves, but were only inserted into the standard house bag.(see ill 7)

The first records to have specifically designed cover art resulted from the fact that recording of symphonies, operas and other long pieces of music had to be split up over several 78 r.p.m. records. In order to keep these records together they were packaged in slip sleeves bound together like a book with a cardboard cover. These books became known as record albums, a term which would later cover even single records. In order to decorate these albums, designs were printed on paper "slicks"[1], which were then stuck onto the board covers. The design of these labels was more elaborate than that of the early sleeves with drawings in gaudy colours and photographs of the artists being used in large numbers for the first time.

The 1940s saw records beginning to be packaged in slipcases with the centre no longer cut out. The same paper "slicks" which had been used on the "album" cover, were now applied to these sleeves.(see ill 8) Record cover art as we know it today began to develop at this time. 1949 saw the introduction of a major technological advance. The 78s were replaced by the new better quality 45 r.p.m. singles capable of holding one song on each



Ill.4. In-house bag for Henrt Scott

Ill.5. Trojan Supply Co. record sleeve

Ill.6. Talkin' Loud house bag

side,and the 33 l/3 r.p.m. L.P. (Long Play) records, these could play up to 23 minutes of recorded sound on each side.

The cover design for these new formats began to vary more than at any time in the past, the cover of the 45's reflected the ever-changing youth market with their use of bright colour, exciting graphics and bold typography (see ill.9) while those designed for the L.P., were seen as the preserve of the more serious classical or jazz listeners having more sombre classical graphics.(see ill 10)

By the 1950s, though most sleeves were still created by freelance designers, a new trend bean to emerge in the design of record covers. The company responsible to a large extent for this development was Blue Note Records.

Blue Note Records had been established in 1939 by Alfred Lion (1909 -)and Francis Wolff (1908 -1971) to release jazz records. In 1951 Blue Note moved from the 78s to the new 10 inch 33 1/3 format. This introduced a need for cover art. The earliest sleeves were designed by a variety of artists; Paul Bacon, Gil Melle and John Hermsnsader, but none of these gave any particular look to Blue Note releases, something which both Alfred Lion and Francis Wolff wanted.

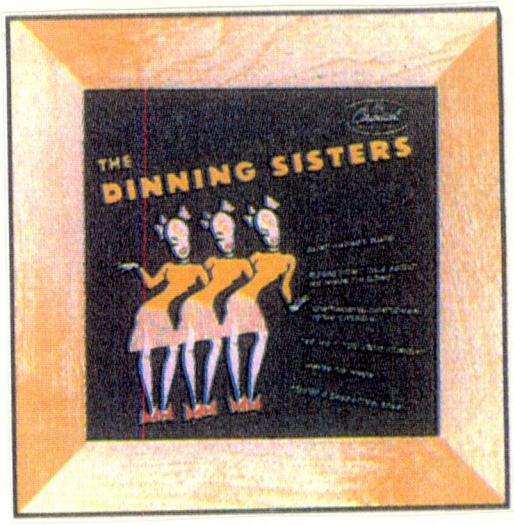
In 1956 Reid Miles, who had designed some uncredited sleeves for Blue Note in the previous few years began working as Blue Note's graphic designer. Over the next eleven years, he created almost 500 record sleeves for them, and in the process created;

> "A cannon of work so individually styled, that a Reid Miles sleeve was as recognisable as the trumpet timbre of Miles Davis or the plaintive phrasing of Billy Holiday".
> (Marsh, 1991 p.7)

I will deal more thoroughly in the next chapter with Reid Miles' work for Blue Note, as well as other designers who have, by choice or happy accident ended up working with a specific record company and created a distinctive looks for that company's releases.

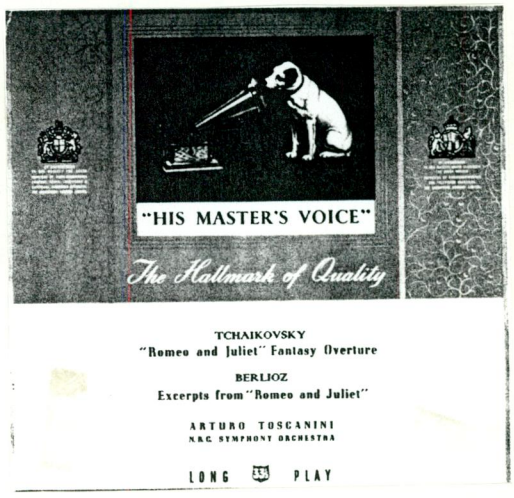
Ill.7. HMV Sleeve with photo insert,

design anon., c. 1930s



Ill.8. Cover for The Dinning Sisters

Ill.9. Pedro Gaveat, *'cha, cha cha'*



Ill.10. Tchaikovsky, *'Romeo and Juliet'*

CHAPTER 2

FROM BLUE NOTE TO TALKIN' LOUD AND BACK AGAIN ; *AN EXAMINATION OF HOUSE STYLES FROM THE 1950s TO THE 1990s.*

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will look at some of the record labels who from the 1950s to the l990s have employed a particular visual style to their album covers. I will examine three record labels, Blue Note. ECM, and Talkin' Loud, each of whom has their own clearly identifiable visual style. I wish to explore how these styles emerged and why the record label wanted a particular look in the first place and finally if this look has helped them gain a place in the market.

BLUE NOTE STYLE

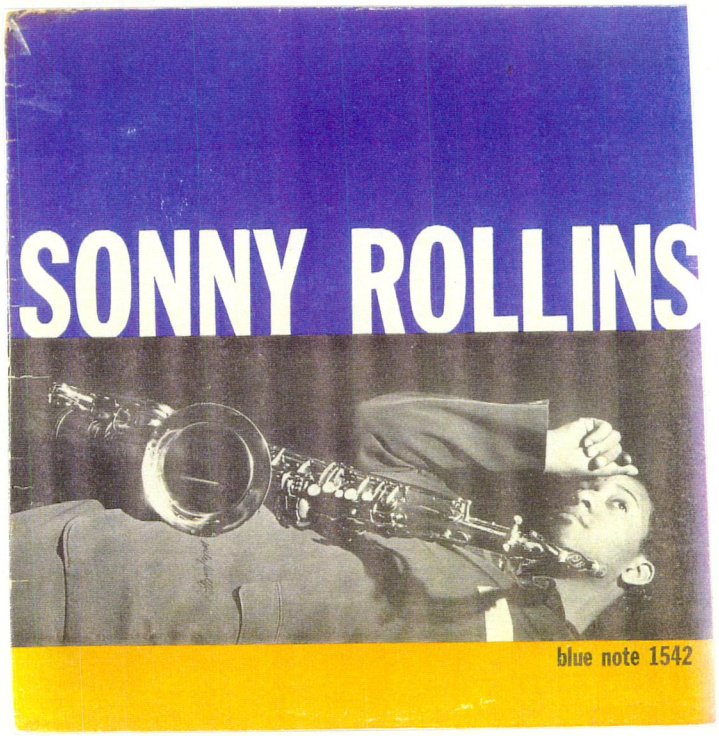
I will begin by looking at the relationship between the jazz label Blue Note and the designer Reid Miles. Between 1953 and 1967 Blue Note records with both its music and cover art;

> "represent a coherent phenomenon in which individually distinct elements combine beautifully to form a clear structure."
> (Kinross, 1990, p 74)

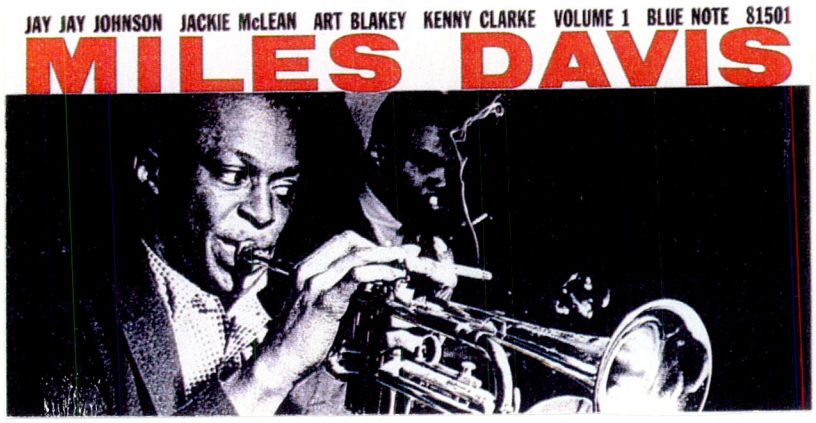
This description could describe either a Blue Note track or cover designed by Reid Miles or even B1ue Note itself. But in order to understand this phenomenon. we must first look at the early development of the label.

Blue Note was founded by Alfred Lion in 1939. Lion was a German who had emigrated to the US the previous year to escape Nazism. Once he arrived in New York he became involved in the jazz scene. The first Blue Note release was of a recording made by boogie-woogie [1] pianists Albert Almons and Meade Luxlewis, it was to be the first of many.

Then in 1941 Lion was joined by his childhood friend Francis Wolff. Over the next ten years they continued to release records by such famous jazz musicians as Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell, gaining a reputation which made them stand apart from other jazz labels.



Ill.11. Sonny Rollins, *'Sonny Rollins'*



Ill.12. Miles Davis, *'Vol 1'*

This was a result of the care and dedication with which sessions were arranged and recorded.

These early releases were packaged in a similar fashion to other records of the period, in a simple cardboard sleeve with nothing but the company logo printed on it, all other information was carried on the label itself

In late 1951, Blue Note began replacing its 78 s with new 33 1/3 LP. With the introduction of the new ten-inch L P.'s. Blue Note began to use pictorial covers with photographs taken by Francis Wolff [2]. As can be seen from these early covers (see ill 11), designed by John Hermansader and Gill Melle that Blue Note were looking for a visual style to match their music, something they did not find for another three years. In the meantime Blue Note were to get a sound of their own. In 1953 studio engineer Rudy Van Gelder began to work for Blue Note, Working from his studio in New Jersey;

> "It was Van Gelder who helped mould what became known as the 'Blue Note sound'. His attention to details, such as the audibility of the hi-hat cymbal, gave the records their definition and dimensional warmth".
> (March, 1991, p.5)

Now with the Blue Note sound in place all that they needed was for someone to give a definitive look.

Three years after the arrival of Van Gelder, Reid Miles who had designed two or three sleeves in the previous two years was to give Blue Note the visual style it wanted.
Miles had come to New York in 1952, having grown up and studied in Los Angeles. His first job was with John Hermansader where he made his first contact with Blue Note, and when he left there in 1956 he took the Blue Note account with him.

One of the first credited sleeves Miles designed was for a 1956 recording by trumpeter Miles Davis (see ill 12). It was to show the visual style and wit that he was to employ over the next twelve years He severely cropped Francis Wolff's photographs and left a vast area of white space above it. When both Lion and Wolff complained that this forced the customer to pick up the record in order to see what it was. Miles replied;

> "That's the point!"
> (Gutherman, 1990, p.104)

This sleeve and the rest that Miles designed were to give Blue Note it s own identity and style.

Ill.13. Freddie Hubbard, *'Hub Tones'*

Ill.14. Jackie McLean, *'Right Now'*

This style grew from Miles use of type, image, colour to create an exciting cohesive whole. He took Wolff's Photographs and cropped them, often severely (see ill 13) so that they became an element in the overall design, integrating with the typography which was very active and captured the excitement of the music itself. Examples of this can be seen in the photographic enlargement of the typewritten face for Jackie McLean's *'Right Now'* (see ill.14), to the redrawing of type for the Joe Henderson *'In n'Out'* cover (see ill.15). Lewis Blackwell in his book on twentieth century typography [4] talks about this inventiveness;

> "Throughout his time at Blue Note, Miles consistently found new ways of develop ing the expressiveness of typography. The cover copy was handled as a theme for exploration, akin to a jazz musician working around a tune. Many of his sleeves give motion to the type through repetition. unexpected contrasts, changes of set ting and relationships to an underlying grid."
> (Blackwell, 1992, p.56)

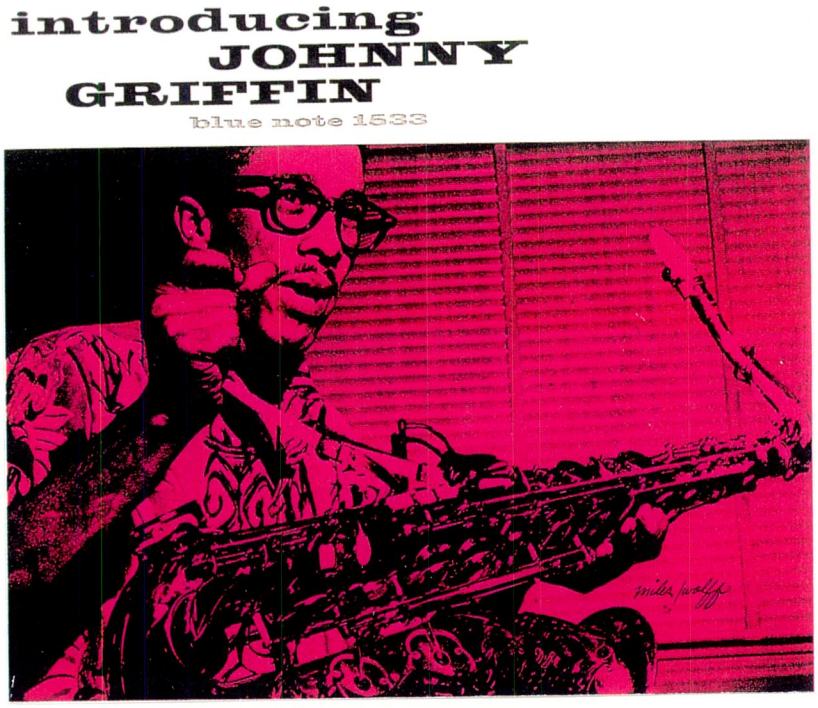
Another vital element of Miles' sleeves is his use of colour. Because most sleeves were produced on a low budget, Miles worked mainly in black and white with one other colour, this was usually applied as a tint and became as much a part of the visual style of Blue Note (see ill 16) as the type and photograph. When budgets increased and four-colour printing became available Miles rejected it. telling Lion and Wolff to:

> "keep it this way, it has more impact"
> (Gutterman, 1990, p.107)

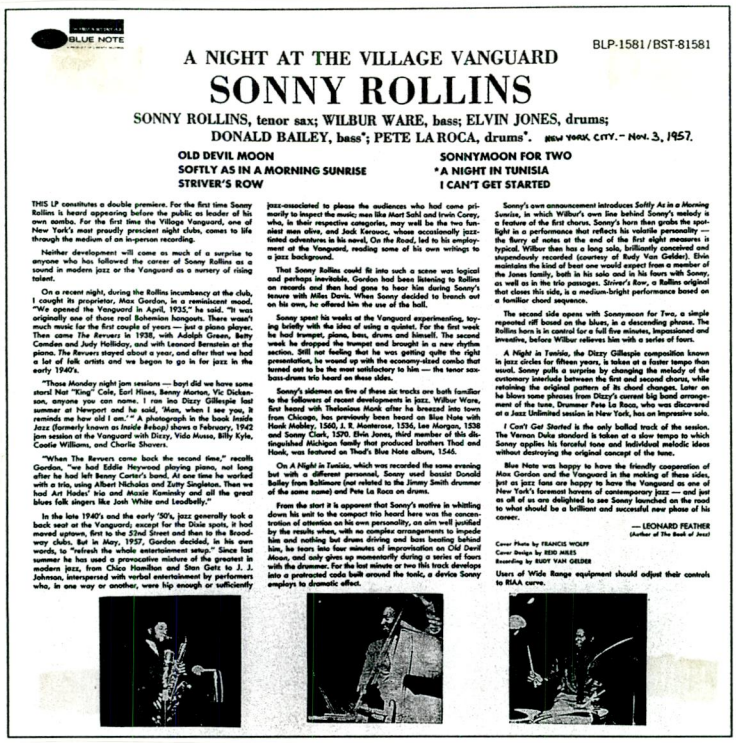
When Lion and Wolff sold Blue Note to Liberty in 1965, Miles left, leaving behind him over 500 album covers Each one individual and yet part of a greater whole. The only element which remained consistent throughout his designs was the back cover,(see ill 17) the layout never changed being used for sleeve notes and recording details. Since then the covers of Reid Miles from this period have come to be regarded as the face of jazz and Blue Note records are still collected today as much for the design as the music.

When Miles left the standard of sleeve design at Blue Note deteriorated noticeably and although they still continued to release records of a high quality, the feeling of a Blue Note style was no longer there.

Ill.15. Joe Henderson, *'In n'Out'*



Ill.16. Jonny Griffin, *'Introducing...'*



BLUE NOTE

BLP-1581/BST-81581

A NIGHT AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD

SONNY ROLLINS

SONNY ROLLINS, tenor sax; WILBUR WARE, bass; ELVIN JONES, drums;
DONALD BAILEY, bass*; PETE LA ROCA, drums*. NEW YORK CITY.– Nov. 3, 1957.

OLD DEVIL MOON
SOFTLY AS IN A MORNING SUNRISE
STRIVER'S ROW
SONNYMOON FOR TWO
*A NIGHT IN TUNISIA
I CAN'T GET STARTED

THIS LP constitutes a double premiere. For the first time Sonny Rollins is heard appearing before the public as leader of his own combo. For the first time the Village Vanguard, one of New York's most proudly prescient night clubs, comes to life through the medium of an in-person recording.

Neither development will come as much of a surprise to anyone who has followed the career of Sonny Rollins as a sound in modern jazz or the Vanguard as a nursery of rising talent.

On a recent night, during the Rollins incumbency at the club, I caught its proprietor, Max Gordon, in a reminiscent mood. "We opened the Vanguard in April, 1935," he said. "It was originally one of those real Bohemian hangouts. There wasn't much music for the first couple of years — just a piano player. Then came The Revuers in 1938, with Adolph Green, Betty Comden and Judy Holliday, and with Leonard Bernstein at the piano. The Revuers stayed about a year, and after that we had a lot of folk artists and we began to go in for jazz in the early 1940's.

"Those Monday night jam sessions — boy! did we have some stars! Nat "King" Cole, Earl Hines, Benny Morton, Vic Dickenson, anyone you can name. I ran into Dizzy Gillespie last summer at Newport and he said, 'Man, when I see you, it reminds me how old I am.'" A photograph in the book Inside Jazz (formerly known as Inside Bebop) shows a February, 1942 jam session at the Vanguard with Dizzy, Vida Musso, Billy Kyle, Cootie Williams, and Charlie Shavers.

"When The Revuers came back the second time," recalls Gordon, "we had Eddie Heywood playing piano, not long after he had left Benny Carter's band. At one time he worked with a trio, using Albert Nicholas and Zutty Singleton. Then we had Art Hodes' trio and Mezzie Kaminsky and all the great blues folk singers like Josh White and Leadbelly."

In the late 1940's and the early '50's, jazz generally took a back seat at the Vanguard, except for the Dixie spots. It had moved uptown, first to the 52nd Street and then to the Broadway clubs. But in May, 1957, Gordon decided, in his own words, to "refresh the whole entertainment setup." Since last summer he has used a provocative mixture of the greatest in modern jazz, from Chico Hamilton and Stan Getz to J. J. Johnson, interspersed with verbal entertainment by performers who, in one way or another, were hip enough or sufficiently jazz-associated to please the audiences who had come primarily to inspect the music; men like Mort Sahl and Irwin Corey, who, in their respective categories, may well be the two funniest men alive, and Jack Kerouac, whose occasionally jazz-tinted adventures in his novel, On the Road, led to his employment at the Vanguard, reading some of his own writings to a jazz background.

That Sonny Rollins could fit into such a scene was logical and perhaps inevitable. Gordon had been listening to Rollins on records and then had gone to hear him during Sonny's tenure with Miles Davis. When Sonny decided to branch out on his own, he offered him the use of the hall.

Sonny spent his weeks at the Vanguard experimenting, toying briefly with the idea of using a quintet. For the first week he had trumpet, piano, bass, drums and himself. The second week he dropped the trumpet and brought in a new rhythm section. Still not feeling that he was getting quite the right presentation, he wound up with the economy-sized combo that turned out to be the most satisfactory to him — the tenor sax-bass-drums trio heard on these sides.

Sonny's sidemen on five of these six tracks are both familiar to the followers of recent developments in jazz. Wilbur Ware, first heard with Thelonious Monk after he breezed into town from Chicago, has previously been heard on Blue Note with Hank Mobley, 1560, J. R. Monterose, 1536, Lee Morgan, 1538 and Sonny Clark, 1570. Elvin Jones, third member of this distinguished Michigan family that produced brothers Thad and Hank, was featured on Thad's Blue Note album, 1546.

On A Night in Tunisia, which was recorded the same evening but with a different personnel, Sonny used bassist Donald Bailey (non Baltimore but related to the Jimmy Smith drummer of the same name) and Pete La Roca on drums.

From the start it is apparent that Sonny's motive in whittling down his unit to the compact trio heard here was the concentration of attention on his own personality, an aim well justified by the results when, with no complex arrangements to impede him and nothing but drums driving and bass beating behind him, he tears into four minutes of improvisation on Old Devil Moon, and only gives up momentarily during a series of fours with the drummer. For the last minute or two this track develops into a protracted coda built around the tonic, a device Sonny employs to dramatic effect.

Sonny's own announcement introduces Softly As in a Morning Sunrise, in which Wilbur's own line behind Sonny's melody is a feature of the first chorus. Sonny's horn then grabs the spotlight in a performance that reflects his volatile personality — the flurry of notes at the end of the first eight measures is typical. Wilbur then has a long solo, brilliantly conceived and stupendously recorded (courtesy of Rudy Van Gelder). Elvin maintains the kind of beat one would expect from a member of the Jones family, both in his solo and in his fours with Sonny, as well as in the trio passages. Striver's Row, a Rollins original that closes this side, is a medium-bright performance based on a familiar chord sequence.

The second side opens with Sonnymoon for Two, a simple repeated riff based on the blues, in a descending phrase. The Rollins horn is in control for a full five minutes, impassioned and inventive, before Wilbur relieves him with a series of fours.

A Night in Tunisia, the Dizzy Gillespie composition known in jazz circles for fifteen years, is taken at a faster tempo than usual. Sonny pulls a surprise by changing the melody of the customary interlude between the first and second chorus, while retaining the original pattern of its chord changes. Later on he blows some phrases from Dizzy's current big band arrangement of the tune. Drummer Pete La Roca, who was discovered at a Jazz Unlimited session in New York, has an impressive solo.

I Can't Get Started is the only ballad track of the session. The Vernon Duke standard is taken at a slow tempo to which Sonny applies his forceful tone and individual melodic ideas without destroying the original concept of the tune.

Blue Note was happy to have the friendly cooperation of Max Gordon and the Vanguard in the making of these sides, just as jazz fans are happy to have the Vanguard as one of New York's foremost havens of contemporary jazz — and just as all of us are delighted to see Sonny launched on the road to what should be a brilliant and successful new phase of his career.

— LEONARD FEATHER
(Author of The Book of Jazz)

Cover Photo by FRANCIS WOLFF
Cover Design by REID MILES
Recording by RUDY VAN GELDER

Users of Wide Range equipment should adjust their controls to RIAA curve.

Ill.17. Back cover of a Blue Note record

Ill.18. Hans Koch, *'Accélération'*

Ill.19. Paul Motian Trio, *'It should've happened a long time ago'*

Ill.20. Pat Matheny, *'New Chautauqua'*

Four Years after the golden era of Blue Note ended, another German jazz fan, Manfred Eicher. this time living in Germany, started a record label which he called ECM. ECM. which stands for "Editions of Contemporary Music" has since its launch in 1970 emerged with both a discernable sound and look across all of its releases.

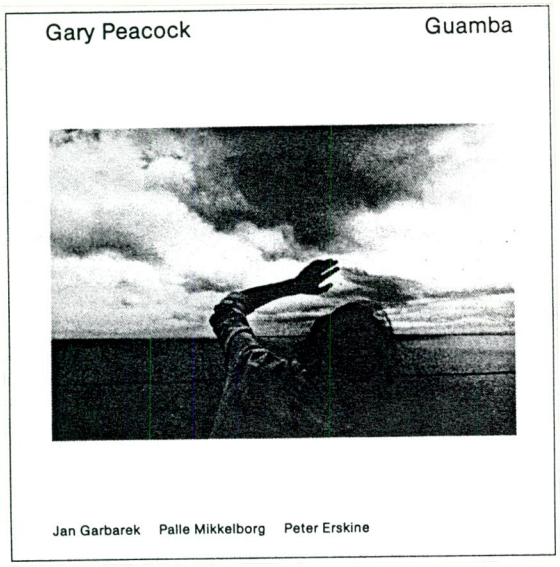
This is due mainly to Eicher's personal vision Although the music ECM releases is very varied. ranging from contemporary jazz through improvisation to composed music, it has been unified by Eicher who produces most of the records himself. This singular attention to Detail has created the "ECM sound" which John Schaefer has described as being;

> "Typified by such performers as Keith Jarrett. Chick Corea. Pat Metheny and Ralph Towner. the ECM Sound is lush, lyrical and often recorded in a way that produces a spacious effect".
> (Schaefer, 1987, p.65)

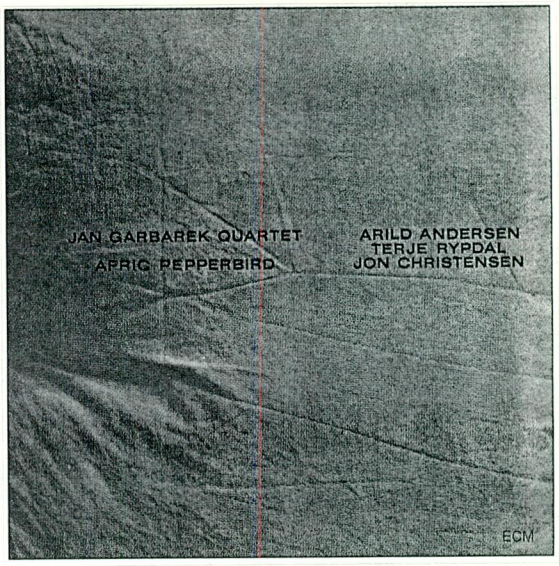
But this attention to detail not only applies to the music, but can also be seen in the packaging of ECM's releases. The designers at the outset were Barbara and Borkhard Wojirsch and they worked very closely with Eicher. Since 1978 the sleeves have been designed by Barbara Wojirsch and Dieter Rehm. The covers created by these designers have helped create distinctive ECM look to match the ECM sound. This look has evolved from a very subtle unifying approach. The style is very sparse, Deiter Rehm has described how the music plays an important part in how their design process works;

> "our graphic concept is influenced by the music, which is mostly clear and yet intense. The idea is to achieve a contemporary and individual solution in order to present the music with lucidity and clarity of form."
> (Lamacraft., 1991, p.p.26-27)

This is often achieved with the use of photography (Many of them taken by Rehm himself). Photographs of seascapes and landscapes are generally used: there are clusters of rocks (see ill 18); vapour trails against an evening sky (see ill 19); cars driving into the distance along a lonely road (see ill 20); a figure looking out across a cold sea (see ill 21). These pictures are mostly black and white, a fact hat has a lot to do with Manfred Eicher's enthusiasm for the films of Godard, Bresson, Truffant and the early works of Berman, Pasolini, Rossi and Antonioni (Lamacraft., 1991, p.27). Rather like film stills, these photographs conjure up mysterious, slightly
unsettling scenarios, as if viewed immediately before. or directly after some strange and dramatic event, images which are open to different associations, which emphasise the mediative qualities of the music.



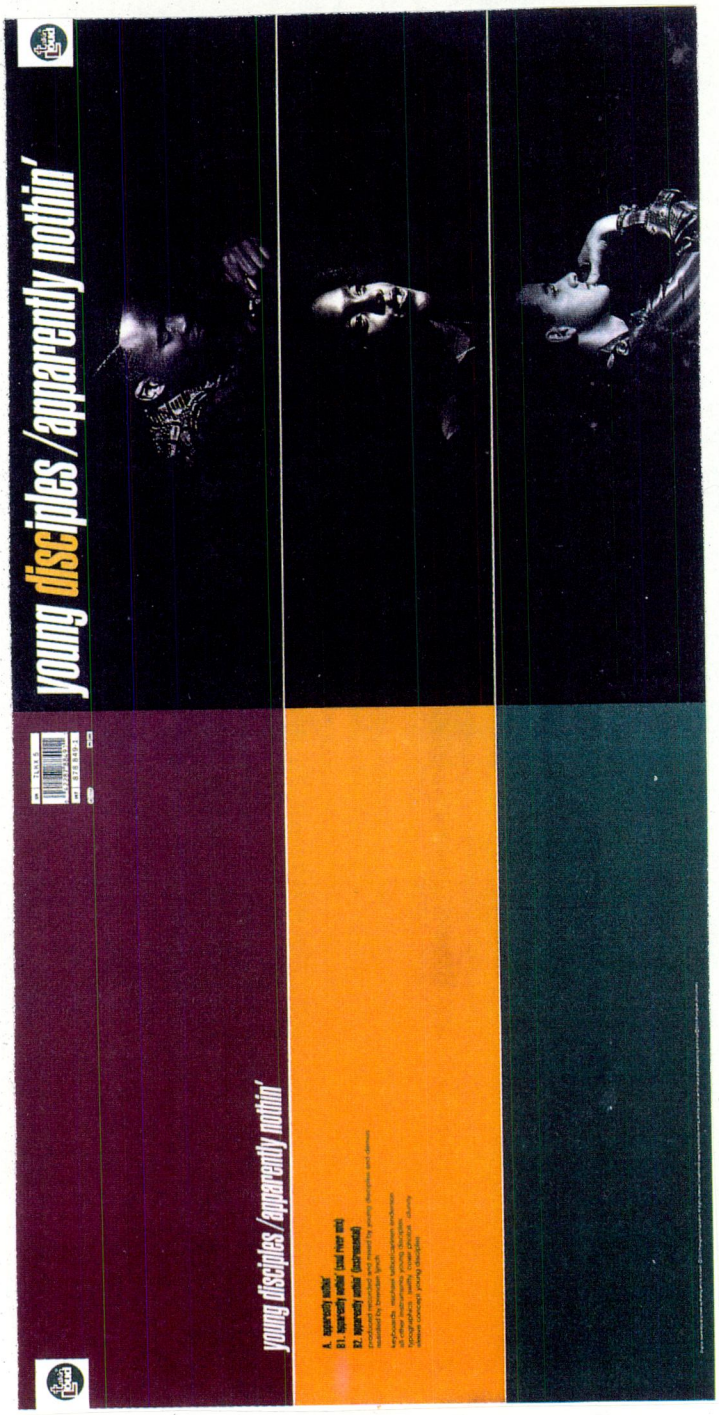
Ill.21. Gary Peacock, *'Gaumba'*



Ill.22. Jan Garbarek Quartet, *'Afric Pepperbird'*

Ill.23. Dave Holland, *'Extensions'*

Ill.24. Jan Garbarek, *'Photo With*



Ill.25. Young Diciples, *'Apparently Nothing'*

The ECM approach to typography is as minimal as the photography. The type is generally set in a small san serif face. placed in diagonal stripes across the cover as seen in the Jan Garbarek Quartet album *'Afric Pepperbird'* (see ill 22), the only time it become s expressive is with the use of hand drawn script as in the Dave Holland Quartet album '*Extensions*' (see ill 23).

With design being such an integral part of what ECM are about, it is not surprising to find the odd occasion where the design has influenced the music. This can be seen in Jan Garbarek s album *Photo with Blue sky White Cloud. Wires, Windows and a Red Roof* (see ill 24), the title coming from the cover picture taken by Eberhard Grames
(Lamacraft, 1991 p.27)

As with blue Note. ECMs attention to detail and quality has gained them an audience. The sleeve design and house sty1e have helped them gain this audience, with people able to pick out a new ECM release in the record store because of this visual unity.

TALKIN' LOUD

In calling this chapter 'From Blue Note to Talkin' Loud and Back Again', I wish to show the parallels which exist between Ian Swift's designs for the contemporary jazz label Talkin' Loud and Reid Miles work for Blue Note in the l950's and 1960's.

Takin' Loud was started in 1990 by Gilles Peterson as a dance label. It has, like both Blue Note and ECM before it, developed its own particular sound and distinctive visual style. The sound is typified by bands such as Young Disciples. Galliano and Incognito. These bands, all of whom play contemporary jazz with a dance beat have grown out of the club scene in Britain [3]. The designer who has given Talkin' Loud its look is Ian Swift, a graduate of Manchester polytechnic. Swift began his career working with Neville Brody on The Face magazine and then on Arena.

In 1990 he became art director of Talkin' Loud. Over the last three years he has created a visual look to go with the music released by Talkin' Loud. As the musicians acknowledge the
importance of music from the past on their own sound through mixing and sampling, so too has Swift acknowledged his debt to the past and Blue Note in particular. This debt can be seen in another sleeve he designed for Young Disciples' *'Apparently Nothing'* single (see ill 25) with its strong horizontal grid. cropped photographs and simple sans-serif typography.

Swift has acknowledged the influence of Miles on his work for Talkin Loud by stating;

> "The attempt is to use photographs to their maximum potential. but link them with strong typography in the jazz and Blue Notes design traditions"
> (Rose, 1991, p.46)

Another example of his nod to Reid Miles can be seen in his cover design for Young Disciples' *'Move On'* single (see ill 26) where he has placed the Talkin' Loud logo within a graphic symbol which is stolen from Miles' cover design for Horace Perlan's *Headin' South* (see ill 27).

It will be interesting to see if Talkin' Loud can last in today's rapidly changing world where one fad is replaced as quickly as the last, if it to do so the people involved will have to have the same dedication and commitment as those involved with Blue Note and ECM. But for the moment;

> "the immediate allure of the borderline kitsch typography and moody. murky colours of Swift's record sleeves are reinforced by elements deliberately stolen from past jazz classics giving the sleeve added vinyl-junkie appeal".
> (Thrift, 1991 p.26)

[1] Boogie-Woogie was a jazz form that became popular during the 1930s. chiefly a piano style, it used eight beats to the bar instead of four, and featured the traditional blues pattern for most themes. It had an intense quality that often created excitement through the repetition of a single phrase. Meade Lux Lewis and Pinetop Smith were two of its most important artists.

[2] Wolff's photographs were mainly of the musicians, taken in the recording studio. At the time ,it was felt by some that putting pictures of black musicians on the covers would harm sales. Lion's wife Ruth gives the reason why ;

> "They (Lion and Wolff) were sure that with these new artists they were introducing, so many of them were leaders for the first time, so maybe the public in harlem knew about them, but across the country they didn't... and they felt it was very important to put these men's photos as prominently as possible on the covers and they got a lot of flak from distributors across the country who felt a pretty girl would have been better."
> (March, 1991, p.10)

[3] For a detailed look at the development of dance culture in Britain see; Cynthia Rose, 'Design After Dark', London Thames & Hudson, 1991.

Ill.26. Young Diciples, *'Move On'*.

Ill.27. Horace Parlan, *'Headin' South'*

CHAPTER 3.

4AD AND V/23;
TRUE STYLE.

INTRODUCTION

Do you ever find yourself coming across a piece of music, art, film, a book or whatever and just feel yourself in total empathy with the creator of said work? My first introduction to the work of graphic designer Vaughan Oliver came about in a very roundabout way in 1986 in my first year in art college, when a friend played me a tape by (what I thought to be a group, in fact they were a collective) This Mortal Coil.
The music just grabbed me, it was unlike anything I had heard before, I just had to get myself a copy of the record. So I took myself down to a record shop and purchased a copy of *'It'll end in tears'* by This Mortal Coil (see ill 28), the sleave art on the album held me spellbound it was so unlike any other design I had seen before, it had a very haunting photograph of a woman which just seemed to compliment the music so well. The record itself was released by a company called 4AD while the sleeve design was credited to 23 envelope. I just had to find out more about both, but it wasn't until about a year later that while reading Catherine McDermott's book *'Street Style'* I discovered the identity of the mysterious 23 envelope, by which time I had gotten hold of as many releases from the 4AD label as I could get my dirty little hands on.

THE BIRTH OF 4AD

As I have already stated while I did not discover 4AD until late 1986, the company itself had been releasing records since early 1980. It released its first four singles, the most famous of which was *'Dark Entries'* by Bauhaus, it was the success of this record which allowed label founder Ivo Watts-Russell the money to fund what was to become one of the most adventurous and innovative record labels of the past twelve years.

Ivo Watts-Russell had worked in the Beggars Banquet record shop in London. While working there young bands kept handing in Demo Tapes. Ivo who along with Peter Kent wanted to release the best of this music, set up the label with the objective of releasing music that as Ivo has said is,

"special and that can be an important part of ones life..."
(Vander Lans, 1988, p.2)

They began the label with a loan of £2000 from Beggars Banquet,another record label (With whom they shared the same premises in Wandsworth until two years ago, they've now moved next door to number 15)

Initially the label was called Axis until another company of the same name called up and complained and so 4AD was born; Peter Kent left after the first year to form another label, Situation 22, an offshoot of Beggars Banquet.and brought Bauhaus with him.

4AD continued to grow and by 1983 they had 51 releases including records by the Birthday Party, Xmal Deutschland, Modern English , Rema Rema, and up until last year the labels flag ship band the Cocteau Twins. 1983 was to prove to be a turning point in the development of the label, Ivo Watts-Russell decided to focus on a small nucleus of artists in order to strengthen the identity of both label and bands.

THE ARRIVAL OF VAUGHAN OLIVER

This is where Vaughan Oliver comes into the 4AD story.proper Although he had done design work for the label as far back as 1981 including the company logo (see ill 29), it was not until 1983 that he came to work there full time. It was to prove to be a major contribution to the labels future success.

Vaughan Oliver was born in 1957 in County Durham and from 1976 to 1979 studied graphic design at Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic, under Terry Dowling, who was the senior lecturer in the graphic department. Terry Dowling was to have a major influence on Vaughan.In Newcastle the emphasis was not so much on learning any particular skills, but a more general approach to design. Terry Dowling taught people to utilise mistakes, change route along the way and not just to stick to one idea. Terry Dowling had studied at the Royal College of Art in the 1960s and although he hadn't taught there he had influenced many of the radical illustrators who came out of the Royal College in the 70s including amongst others Russell Mills and the Quay Brothers both of whom lectured in Newcastle while Vaughan was there and have since worked with Vaughan.

Having left college in 1979, Vaughan travelled to London where he got a job working with Michael Peters a design company specialising in packaging It was here that he first began to see the Illustrative possibilities of type and typography, an area he had ignored in college.

While working for Michael Peters a colleague asked Vaughan to go and see Ivo Watts-Russell because he himself couldn't complete an assignment. Vaughan brought along his portfolio to show Ivo his work, and while going through the work Ivo came across a print of Vaughan's based on a Diane Arbus photograph.The original photograph was of an elderly couple sitting in the room of a nudist colony with a dog in the background. The job that Ivo wanted done was a single cover for a Modern English song called Gathering Dust The band had also used the same photograph as the basis for a T-shirt design, replacing the dog with a television on which was written Modern English.What Vaughan Oliver's version of the photograph was I don't know, but he got the job.

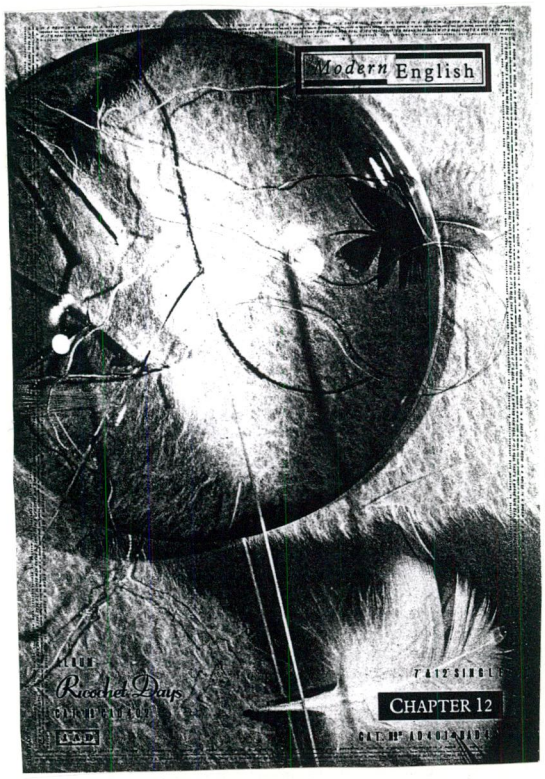
Subsequently over the next few months Vaughan met Ivo at various concerts and clubs around London, going to see the same bands. In this period, over what Vaughan has stated were a few drunken conversations he persuaded Ivo of the need for the label to have a consistency in its approach to sleeve design. Vaughan believed that not only did the sleeves need to be designed, but also the posters and adverts. Over the next two years Vaughan did some freelance work for Ivo doing some more covers for Modern English, and a few other bits and pieces.

VAUGHANS WORK FOR 4AD.

In early 1983 4AD moved to a bigger premises and Ivo offered Vaughan a full time job with the label, and he has been working there ever since. For fans of the label including myself, Vaughan's cover images have become as much part of what 4AD are about as the music itself ,in fact almost a cult in themselves. It is this visual consistency in the covers that I think I like best in Vaughan's work. Vaughan has tried to create individual identities for most of the performers on 4AD, bands as diverse as the aforementioned Modern English (see ill 30), Xmal Deutchland (see ill 31), This Mortal Coil, the Cocteau Twins (see ill 32) and the present roster of acts like, the Pixies, Lush, Ultra Vivid Scene, his name is alive and The Breeders while at the same time maintaining an over all label identity.
This has at times been criticised by various people who see this as under selling the individual bands. But as the label is so small advertising budgets are small, this identity which is due mainly to the fact that Vaughan is involved in most of the sleeves, has had a positive effect. The sleeves have made 4AD records recognisable which has ensured that any new release stands a good chance of been recognised as having come from the label,and this does help when you consider that the prospects of radio play for an avant garde independent record label are minimal. I myself have found this to be true, having come across 4AD records by bands I didn't know simply by recognising the cover art as the work of

Ill.28. This Mortal Coil, *'It'll End In Tears'*

Ill.29. 4AD logo



Ill.30. Modern English, *'Ricochet Days/Chapter 12'*(A3 poster)

Vaughan. Even today when one reads a review of any release from 4AD,one invariably finds that even if the critic doesn't like the music, they will usually make some positive comment about the latest cover from Vaughan.

Vaughan has stated many times in the past that when packaging a record his main aim is to try and capture the moods of the music, the only real constraint being that it should also satisfy the musicians themselves.

Although Vaughan is sometimes referred to as a 'designer', a term that he is not very happy with, his work has much more in common with other contemporary 'fine' artists, such as the German artist Anselm Keifer, American photographer Joel-Peter Witkins (Who Vaughan describes as making the most beautiful surrealities ever.(McKay, 1991, p. 56)) and illustrator Russell Mills whom he has collaborated with on several occasions, most notably on a series of book covers for Ian McEwan.

In Britain Vaughan's achievements have been underrated and it is only recently that the design press have begun to cover his work in any kind of detail. On the other hand his work has been exhibited in Europe, most notably in France, and he has given lectures and exhibitions in Japan and America. One of the main reasons that I believe Vaughan's work has received far greater recognition abroad, is that the barriers that exist between the 'fine' and 'applied' arts are much more blurred. I believe that Vaughan is more than just an illustrator, that his work breaks barriers. Ian McKay in his article on Vaughan in Art line argues that Vaughan's work;

> "Forms a crucial link in the understanding of the developing tradition of British design which has its roots in the sensual beauty of individuals such as Burne Jones and Aubery Beardsley."
> (McKay, 1991, p.)

We can draw a link between the eroticism of Beardsley's finest work and Vaughan's collaboration with photographer Juergan Teller on the sleeve for AR Kane's *'Lolitta'* (see ill 33),or Simon Larbalestier's work on the Pixies' *'Surfa Rosa'* sleeve (see ill 34). With their work for the Pixies, Vaughan and Simon have used a darkly surreal and freakish iconography of stuffed monkeys,screaming babies and hairy backed men. These images come from Vaughan discussing the music with lead singer of the band Black Francis, whose lyrics have a similar themes to film maker David Lynch in that they deal with the surreal in everyday life. Black Francis in a quote from the exhibition catalogue of Vaughan's work in France in 1990 states that;

> "The only theme that we have running is that we like figures on the covers.

Ill.31. Xmal Deutschland, *'Qual'*

Ill 32. Cocteau Twins, *'Treasure'*

> We tell Vaughan to do what he wants, and he describes what he's doing and sends me packages in the post, proofs of the artwork, and then in the end I agree with him. I don't want to get into the artwork really, but I like it. I think he's an interesting artist, so I think it would suck if I was to work hand in hand with him and put in all my stupid ideas"
> (Poynor, 1990,p.)

As stated earlier 4AD release music that is unusual, not normally heard on the radio, and the same can be said about Vaughan. One of the best examples of this can be found in his cover for the Colourbox album (see ill 35). A friend of his had brought back a discarded printers run-off from Japan, where labels for Peach tins had been over printed on a page from a textile magazine, Vaughan felt that this image suited the Colourbox's music which was dance music incorporating samples of film and television dialogue, and also as he said;

> "I liked the idea of something that was trash being reproduced 10,000 times."
> (Poynor 1991 p.)

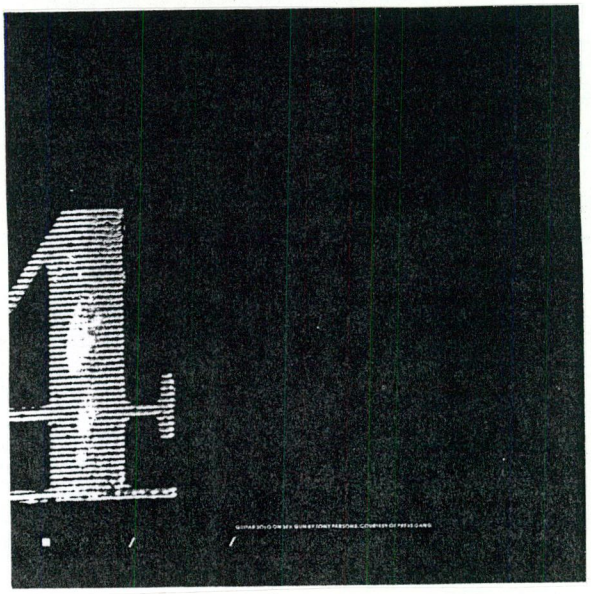
Also with the Colourbox sleeve we can see an example of his use of the PMT (photo-mechanical transfer) camera, which is central to much of his work. The PMT camera is normally used for producing black and white positive or negative images. The huge numbers Vaughan used on the inner sleeve(see ill 36) were text size Bodoni (a typeface) enlarged on the camera and shot through line screens so that they began to disintegrate. the aim was to simulate the out-of-register effect of silk screen printing.
Another technique he uses, involves interfering with the development process. By separating positive and negative photographic papers too soon, Vaughan creates blotchy, fogged and distorted images, with traces of unpredictable chemical colouring. The Clan Of Xymox self titled album cover (see ill 37) is perhaps the most striking example of these chancy procedures. Irregular fragments of paper bearing individual letters were stuck down on a sheet of tracing paper to form the song-titles, he placed this sheet under the camera, photographed it with the PMT camera and blurred it during the development. The final image is a densely textured, and in places an almost unreadable collage, with a print of dolls by Terry Dowling placed on top to represent the band. Vaughan keeps the unexpected textures that come out of these experiments in the darkroom for possible use at a later date.

He was able to use a lot of these experiments in 1987 when 4AD released the *Lonely is an Eyesore* album. The album was intended to sum up everything 4AD had achieved up to that point. It contained a track from each of the labels eight acts. The cover, scored, pitted and blurred, turned out to be a PMT of the camera's baseboard. The album was available in three versions: firstly there was the ordinary record, CD or cassette,the next version was a limited edition record with a fold out sleeve and booklet. The fold out sleeve was made

Ill.33. AR Kane, 'Lolitta'

Ill.34. Pixies, *'Surfa Rosa'*

Ill.35. Colourbox, *'Colourbox'*



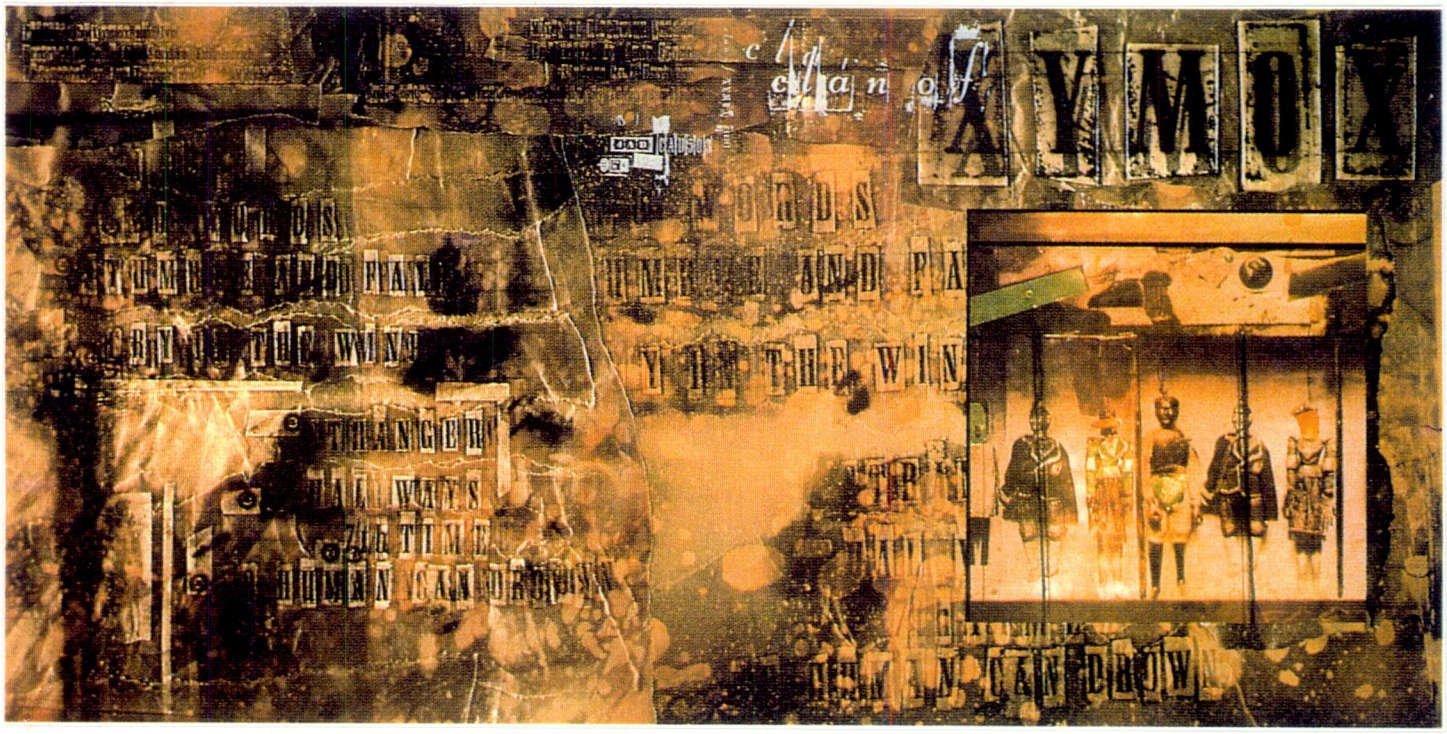
Ill.36. Colourbox, inside sleeve

up of some of his PMT experiments (see ill 38), while the booklet gave each band a double-page spread where Vaughan interpreted them and their music in different visual styles. The final version of which only 100 were produced was a multi-media deluxe version (see ill 39), this was made from American Beech and contained copies of the record, CD, cassette, booklet, two fine art prints, one of them by Terry Dowling and a video of each of the songs made by Nigel Greirson. A copy of this version is now in the permanent collection of the V&A museum in London and was exhibited in the Design Centre's print show in London during 1988.

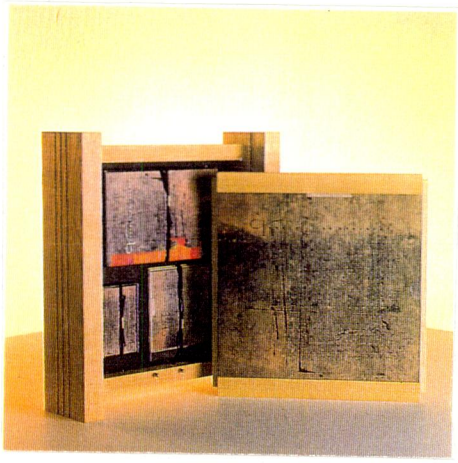
Vaughan has since described the Eyesore project as an 'exorcism' of his early approaches and themes,and it can be seen to mark the end of the first phase of his career (Poynor 1990). He felt that some of the music was less inspiring and the following year the Cocteau Twins ended what had been both a successful but also ambivalent relationship by asking another designer to work on the sleeve for *'Blue Bell Knoll'*.

But in 1988 4AD signed two new acts,the Pixies, who I have discussed earlier and Ultra Vivid Scene, both of these bands reawakened Vaughans enthusiasm for music and design. Both have led to designs that are quite different from his earlier more ethereal work with Nigel Greirson. The Pixies covers were more surreal and darker, while his sleeves for Kurt Ralske of Ultra Vivid Scene have continued the line of research indicated by, but not fully explored by his work for Colourbox. For Ultra Vivid Scene's self titled debut album (see ill 40),Vaughan used images supplied by Kurt Ralske, photographs of a tooth and a hypodermic needle. Combined with these found images, another device he used on this cover came from seeing the repeated pattern, created by a line of spines of the same record on a shelf, Also intrigued by the abstract patterns that packing tape made on the boxes in which the records were packaged, he duplicated this effect by printing embossed, metallic strips over the cover image.

Another area that is important to Vaughans recent development has been his experiences with the high-resolution Quantel Paintbox computer graphics system. His first use of the system, was for the cover of the *'Dizzy'* single (see ill 41) by Throwing Muses. The Paint box allowed him scan in various images, combine them and manipulate them at the touch of a button, changing colours and distorting them at will.
For the second Ultra Vivid Scene album Joy:1967-1990 (see ill 42),Kurt Ralske sent Vaughan another variety of found images,from photos of the Virgin Mary to a Drill. these images were then scanned into the Paintbox and altered until they produced a cohesive whole. The final cover conveys a feeling that reflects the music and Ralske's fascination with popular culture and the icons it produces. Vaughan is now doing a lot of work on the paintbox,which he feels is not just another tool to get the work done,but is in fact something that can give unexpected results which can creatively contribute to the work;



Ill.37. Clan of Xymox, *'Clan of Xymox'*



Ill.38. 4AD Compilation, *'Lonely is a Eyesore'* (Ltd Edition)

"on the Paintbox you can create something, alter it, store it and use it again later.' (Weeks, 1990, p. 34)

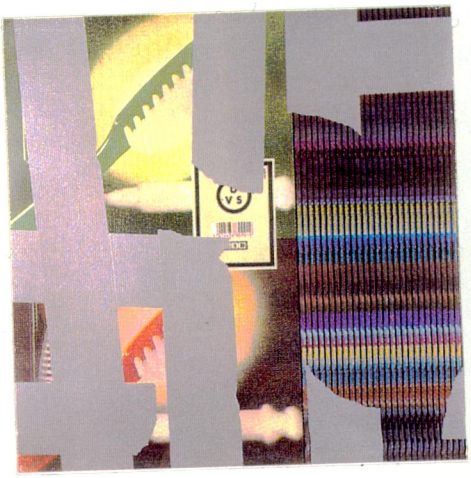
Vaughan has since won an awards work done on the Paintbox, it was for a series illustrations that he produced for the Chrysalis record company annual report (see ill 43). Since he began working with the Paintbox , Vaughan has also gotten involved in television graphics, an area he would like to get more involved in.(Weeks, 1990, p. 34) His first job involved designing the title sequence for Gimme 8 a DEF 2 program for BBC 2, he has also designed the sequence for Snub TV, a program dealing with underground music.

THE EXHIBITION IN FRANCE

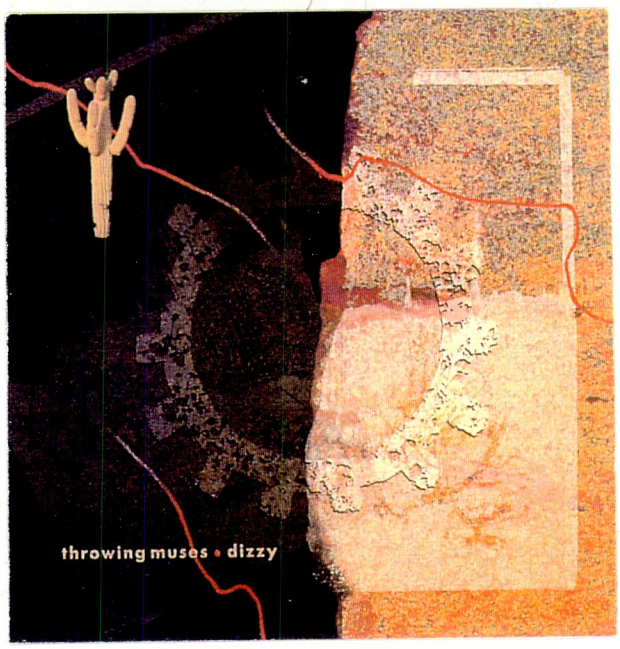
Although Vaughan had built up a cult following for his work amongst both music fans and designers, and had been championed by certain designers writers most notably Catherine McDermott and Rick Poynor, it wasn't until the French exhibited his work in Nantes in1990 that his work began to get serious critical appraisal. this exhibition covered his work from 1983 to 1990 and included over one hundred examples of his work for both 4AD and others. The exhibition received a mixed response,similar to the reception Neville Brody's show in the V&A got in 1988. The art critics questioned the validity of placing work which had been commissioned for 'mass' consumption, in a gallery setting. This was also a feeling felt by Vaughan who in the past as stated that he prefer the idea of his work in living rooms all over the world being seen by more people than any gallery will allow. But with the divisions between he fine and applied arts hopefully coming down who knows ? The exhibition has since travelled over France there are plans to show it in Belgium, Germany and Spain, but as yet no British galleries have expressed any interest in putting on the exhibition.

In any case the fact that 4AD continue to release music that is both exciting and stimulating, and Vaughan continues to design the sleeves, that for me at least is reason enough. Where else could you buy a work of art for £8.99 ? !!

Ill.39. *'Lonely is a Eyesore'* (sleeve folded out)



Ill.40. Ultra Vivid Scene, *'Ultra Vivid Scene'*



Ill.41. Throwing Muses, 'Dizzy'.

Ill.42. Ultra Vivid Scene, *'Joy1967-1990'*

Ill.43. Paintbox illustration from Chrysalis annual report

CONCLUSION

In the case of all the labels I have looked at in this thesis each has become known for both its own particular sound and visual look or house style.

This is due to the fact that each label was set up purely to satisfy the desire of certain individuals. They did this in order to record and release the music they felt deserved to be made available. As the music they chose to release is based on their own particular aesthetic, it is not surprising that each label has become known for a particular sound.

The way these labels have portrayed themselves visually is also due to this personal view, each label has found a designer whose aesthetic matched their own. All of the designers have succeeded in creating not only individually distinctive sleeves for each act, but also when a selection of their covers are viewed together a certain house style begins to emerge.

The one charge that can be laid against any of these labels in this respect is that of being esoteric. but in this age of mass popular culture it is nice to have something that you can call your own. Something that you feel attempts to speak to you on a personal level. The fact that each of these labels are still finding a receptive audience today [1] and can continue to release music is testament to the fact one need not necessarily aim for the lowest common
denominator in order to succeed. Each of these labels having grown gradually to become both a commercial and artistic success in the normally cut throat music industry.

And long may the continue to do so.

[1.] In the case of Blue Note, the records dating from the period examined in chapter 2 are still finding a receptive audience today

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