

INDIE BLUES ALLIGATOR BOSS RAPS

"The most visible blues label in the world," is the way Bruce Iglauder describes Alligator Records, the Chicago-based independent he founded 12 years ago. He is aware of his label's crucial role: "People were saying 'blues is dead' because it wasn't getting recorded. I announced to the world that blues was alive and well in Chicago."

With excellent recording standards and classy packaging, Alligator recordings created a buzz in the blues world and beyond. They have appeared only infrequently, however, in New Zealand import bins. Thankfully, the local branch of Virgin Records has imported a large number of titles and may press locally the new Johnny Winter album, *Guitar Slinger*, his first for Alligator. Label boss, Iglauder, has in fact visited New Zealand, as Hound Dog Taylor's manager when the bluesman toured in 1975. Since then the label Iglauder founded to record his favourite band, Hound Dog Taylor and the Houserockers, has gone on to establish several major artists who have recorded four or more albums for the label. I met Iglauder in a New York club where he was doing the promotion for new act Big Twist and the Mellow Fellows (opening act for Wilson Pickett). Between his efforts



Alligator bluesman Albert Collins and label boss Bruce Iglauder.

to ensure that the tables he had booked stayed clear for invited guests we discussed the life and times of an independent blues label. Does Alligator only record Chicago blues acts? "No, the majority of what we record are Chicago acts because I like the hardness of the Chicago sound. We recorded Johnny Winter and Shuggie Otis in Los Angeles, Professor Longhair in New Orleans and we've recorded four albums by Albert Collins in Chicago, though he's a Texas player now living in Los Angeles. But certainly our preference is for Chicago blues." Did you get involved in recording blues because the major labels were ignoring it? "For the most part blues has always been the property of the smaller independent labels. In the 40s, 50s and 60s there were the independent black record labels, then in the 70s there were the collectors labels, more directed to selling blues records to white people. Blues has always been a

minority music. It wasn't ever the most popular music in the black community — it was just one of the most popular musics." Who are the main buyers of Alligator records? "I have two audiences. Firstly, people much like myself, between the ages of 18 and 40, predominantly male, a lot of them have gone to college, white collar — old hippies if you like — people like myself who got into it during the Mayall/Clapton/Butterfield years. Or old folkies, which I was also. "Then I have a very large and growing black audience which is totally different — much like the blues artist — not formally educated, mostly raised in the south, if not living there now, and this is potentially a lot larger audience than the white audience. I'm only beginning to learn how to sell to them — it's different radio and press, different kinds of promotion and different venues for the artist to work in. "To give you an idea — the best selling Alligator artist, Albert Collins, over a period of time, can

sell 30,000 albums in the United States. Z.Z. Hill on Malaco Records, who sells virtually zero albums to whites and is a very legitimate blues artist — his last album sold 350,000. The black market for blues is much larger but tapping it is more difficult. "But I have business reply cards in my records so I'm very aware of my demographic. I know a lot of them are very label conscious and buy everything we release." Iglauder's records sell best where the distribution is efficient, where the most records get into the shops — on that score Chicago, New York and Boston are good. They'll also sell in a town with a college population. Mail order accounts for a sizeable quantity of sales. The whole of Europe is equivalent in sales to the USA and Japan takes five or 10 per cent. Are live appearances by Alligator artists important for sales? "Absolutely. We wear a lot of hats. Alligator is not only a record company. We're a booking agency, an artist management firm, a publicity firm, a music publishing

company, road management, independent promotion — we do a lot of things. "We manage Koko Taylor, Son Seals, Albert Collins and Lonnie Brooks. Albert and Koko are booked in Minneapolis but we clear all their dates. Sonny and Lonnie are booked directly by us and we publicise every date they do. "Like this Big Twist date, which we didn't even book, because he's an Alligator recording artist, in New York we mailed out close to 200 press releases, we serviced the record to various stations, arranged interviews, prepared a guest list for store people, journalists and radio folk for last night and tonight... that's part of our job. If the artist wasn't here and the only way we had to attract attention was on vinyl it would be real tough. "Plus, a lot of our artists sell records off the bandstand. For some of our artists that's a significant part of their sales. Koko Taylor is our number one distributor of Koko Taylor records. She's incredible. Besides the profit she makes on each record she sells, she gets the royalties. She goes through about 100 albums a week." As well as playing bigger Chicago venues, major blues artists appear at small clubs. Is this confined to Chicago? "Sometimes it's a fill-in gig. Our artists play where there's work for them. For example, the club Lonnie Brooks plays in Baltimore is only about a 200-seater but it's the club that's interested in blues, that will pay enough for Lonnie to go to Baltimore. The meat and potatoes work for the artist is the clubs that will book them four, five or six times a year, not the universities who do one show every two years. "There's a limit to how much exposure you can get in a small club but we're very much a grass-roots company. We depend on word of mouth, fans who come back again and again, label loyalty and performances our artists give, because of our being unable to depend on radio — which is our big problem right now." Black or white radio?

"Right now we are facing a time of the greatest racial segregation of American radio since the early 50s. Now it's almost impossible to hear anything but white rock'n'roll or techno-pop dance bands on rock'n'roll radio. When Alligator started out, black radio was rejecting blues music as Uncle Tom-type slavery music. That's changed a great deal in the last few years and now blues is having a resurgence on black radio. "My problem with black radio is that we're not a major label, we don't have a constant flow of releases and promotion men walking through the door. Every few months we send them a record then call them up. We don't have the personal relationships we need and they cost a lot of money. There is still payola in black radio, as I think there is in white radio, but not so much in album-orientated rock radio." Do you still produce most Alligator recordings? "Blues records, yes. I didn't do Big Twist — I'm not an R&B producer, I'm not a horn arranger yet. Of the 50 albums in the catalogue I've produced about 30." Do you see your artists growing creatively through the opportunity to record? "If any of our artists is not especially growing right now it would be Albert Collins, but we haven't yet shown all that he can do on record yet. He is a much more varied artist than people give him credit for. "Koko Taylor's last album, she was experimenting with doing a ballad and more swing blues. Son Seals is very conscious of being a progressive blues artist and wanting to do new kinds of arrangements and instrumentation in blues. "Lonnie Brooks, if we did anything with his last album, we backtracked. On his previous albums he's been looking to a more sophisticated production. I backtracked him and tried to do a real kick-ass bandstand-style record. But as a writer he is certainly growing, both as a lyricist and an

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

MORE VINYL DELIGHTS FROM ACROSS THE PACIFIC

HERE'S A SELECTION FROM OUR RECENT SHIPMENT OF AMERICAN IMPORTS:

EXCLUSIVE : TRA SPECIAL COMICS

160 Page Book of Underground Comics
60 Minute Tape featuring : Capt Beefheart -
Art Bears - New Age Steppers
Unusual Deluxe Package features the cassette in a
Tiger-shaped Zip-Loc Pouch, with both Book & Pouch
contained in a 'Barred' Box designed after a cage.

SIXTIES COMPILATION ALBUMS

Acid Visions : The Best of Texas Punk & Psychedelic
Electric Sugar Cube Flashbacks : UK Psychedelic
High in the Mid-Sixties : Vol 1,3,6,7,8 & 9
Pebbles: Vol 9,12 & 13

MORE FROM ROIR TAPES

Human Switchboard : Coffee Break
MC5 : Babes in Arms • Dictators : Live
Alfonia Tims : Future Funk Uncut
Stimulators : Loud Fast Rules
Joe King Carrasco : Tales From the Crypt

NEW AMERICAN HARDCORE

Dirty Rotten Imbeciles • Whipping Boy : Muru Muru
Killroy : Believe in the Ruins • 7 Seconds : The Crew
Scream : Screaming • Painted Willie : Ragged Army 7"
Stalag 13 : In Control • Husker Du : Zen Arcade (2LP)
Batallion of Saints : Second Coming
BGK : Jonestown Aloha From Holland
Rat Music for Rat People : Vol 2
Tragic Mulatto : Judo for the Blind
Butthole Surfers : 12" 7 track EP

LOUD & PROUD : NEW METAL

Cirith Ungol : King of the Dead • Sacred Rite : Sacred Rite
Jag Panzer : Ample Destruction
Total Destruction : Various
Rods : Let Them Eat Metal • Znowwhite : All Hail to Thee
Wild Dog : Mans Best Friend

ACID SOAKED : CURRENT PSYCHEDELIA

Pandoras : It's About Time • Index : Index
Plan 9 : Dealing With the Dead : Frustration
Things : Coloured Heaven • Salem 66 : Salem 66
Cathedral of Tears : Cathedral of Tears
Eyes of God : Love Letters

BEST OF THE REST

Lenny Kaye Connection : I've Got A Right
Blow Up : Easy Knowledge
Phast Phreddie & The Precisions : Limbo (White R&B)
Untouchables : Live and Let Dance
(Elements of Ska, Reggae, R&B & Soul)
Neef 23 : Neef 23 (Industrial 7" Silk Screened Cover)
Crippled Pilgrims : Head Down Hand Out USA
Savage Republic : Tragic Figure
(Official 7" of the LA Olympics)
Food & Shelter : Food - Shelter
(Unique Sheet Metal Cover)
Jad Fair : Monarchs (Violent Femmes Style)
Basic Blackjacks : Basic Blackjacks
Live Skull : Live Skull (Depression)

• CALL
• PHONE
• WRITE

SOUNDS UNLIMITED
NEWMARKET

10 REMUERA ROAD
PHONE : 542-667