

TALENT

Peters and Lee set for the U.S.

by PETER JONES

WHEN THEY first started out as a singing duo, Lennie Peters and Diane Lee called themselves Lennie Peters and Melody, but a shrewd management decision was that the name made them sound like a reggae act.

So a more suitable title was created. And Peters and Lee went on to sell more than 2.5 million records, most of them in the British Isles. As their new album, *Peters And Lee Favourites*, is launched on the back of a £150,000 television advertising campaign, more shrewd management is being marshalled to make them a truly international act.

Peters and Lee are signed to International Artists. Laurie Mansfield looks after them from the straight management point of view and Phyllis Rounce, through the Sound Ventures division of the company, is on the recording side.

In the past year or so, Peters and Lee have broken box-office records in Britain and sold enough records to earn them a platinum award from Phonogram, the grateful record company. But the duo themselves agree it is only right that similar awards be made to the management team of Rounce and Mansfield.

Laurie Mansfield told *Music Week*: "It's easy to assume that an act like Peters and Lee suddenly appeared, from nowhere, and made it big. But it's worth remembering that Lennie Peters has been with us for six-and-a-half years. In very early days, he was on the David Nixon television series, and in fact *Daily Mirror*

journalist Patrick Doncaster did a great deal to help him along, with stories and publicity.

"Lennie actually made a couple of records for the Oriole label, and they flopped, but at least people were talking about him being the Ray Charles of London's East End. Even so, there wasn't a lot of interest until the breakthrough on *Opportunity Knocks*, when Hughie Green took a keen interest in the act."

It seems the duo could have gone on *Opportunity Knocks* rather earlier than they did but the series which really built their reputation was also regarded as a definite risk.

Said Mansfield: "A newcomer, a singer, could go on that programme and maybe get beaten by a singing dog, or a guy who played musical spoons. That was the ever-present problem, that some muscle-wiggling gimmick could beat a talented singer. So it really was a gamble for a serious-minded singing act. But Peters and Lee did well from the start."

Now another management problem was whether to try to cash in on Lennie's disability, his blindness, or whether to ignore the whole thing. That problem was solved by Peters himself who insisted that no call for sympathy was made, in any way at all.

His attitude: "The way I see things, I'm not blind. It's just that I can't see. But after we'd done a couple of the *Opportunity Knocks* series there were people writing in to ask why I should be so flash and big-time as to wear sun-glasses on the show. It was then that we



Peters and Lee with Hughie Green

figured it would be okay to say it wasn't being flash, it was being blind."

And he added: "When I first went blind I was determined it wouldn't be the white stick, guide dog and a life of basket weaving. I just wouldn't go along with that. So I took up piano and was determined to do something in music."

Laurie Mansfield: "The fact is that the Peters and Lee career is worked out according to a definite plan of campaign. In the first year, they did *Opportunity Knocks*, won it over and over again, and got themselves known to the viewing audiences. In the second year they branched out with a summer season at Blackpool, proving they could pull in the customers in a stage show."

"And the third year was a matter of building, with them breaking all records at Great Yarmouth as well as having sold so many records for Phonogram. The aim was to make them the top domestic singing act, and they did just that."

Now the aims are wider. Peters and Lee are to make a big onslaught on the American record market, and a first step has been a couple of weeks in the recording studios with Jimmy Bowen. He produced Sinatra's big comeback single *Strangers In The Night*, and has recorded Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr., and also Keely Smith, to whom he was once married. Her Lennon and McCartney Songbook remains one of Peters and Lee's favourite albums.

Said Mansfield: "A really

important point here is that there is no question of Peters and Lee not working any more with Phonogram's John Franz, who has produced all their hits. This is a one-off situation specifically slanted towards establishing them in the American market. And John Franz even helped rehearse them in preparation for their American visit."

There was obvious disappointment in the Peters and Lee camp when their rush-single release on (*Hey Won't You Play*) Another Somebody Done Somebody Wrong Song didn't make the charts. It had been "bubbling under" the *Music Week* chart for B. J. Thomas, and Phonogram reckoned that the added name-power of Peters and Lee would get it into the top twenty.

Said Mansfield: "It didn't do the trick. And inevitably there were people saying Peters and Lee were somehow cashing in, but there were other cases of songs being revitalised by another version. And *I Love You So*, by Perry Como was just one example."

Now the Peters and Lee aim is for international acclaim.

Mansfield said: "They have the talent and the image to do well. But though nobody ever played up the aspect of Lennie Peters' blindness, the fact is that there are always people around who say that he can really see. When he went into hospital for an operation to remove one of his eyes, there were some people who thought he'd gone in to get his sight back, could see again - but was acting blind for the sake of the act."

"Presumably people said the same thing about Douglas Bader, who moves around so well, despite having lost both legs. But if Lennie's sight came back, we'd hail it was a miracle, and so would he, and there's no question of us keeping it quiet!"

Max Boyce's prescription for success

by CHRIS WHITE

A WELSH performer who until little more than 12 months ago was unknown outside his native land, and even now still performs in the South Wales clubs, has suddenly found himself in the staggering position of number one in the album charts, despite tough competition from Elton John, Roxy Music and David Essex.

For Wales' Max Boyce, the success of his latest album, *We All Had Doctors' Papers*, has proved that the overwhelming success of his first EMI album, *Live At Treorchy*, was no fluke, and that he has joined the select band of artists with "regional appeal" who are now breaking down the musical barriers of the UK.

The story of Max Boyce's rise to recording fame is already well-chronicled. His first album was released by EMI on its One-Up midprice level, and initially the only 1,000 copies of the LP were pressed. Since then sales have surpassed the 350,000 mark - and now the success of *Doctors' Papers* has consolidated his achievement. However, Boyce's recording experience goes much further back.

He explains: "Apart from a couple of years playing skiffle music in my teens, I got into music through the folk clubs in Pontardawe. In particular, the Valley Folk Club was very well

known and singers used to come from all parts of Britain, performing their own local folk music.

"As a result, I felt the need to write songs for my own community - about their lives, work and experiences - and the result was that soon I was getting regular bookings in folk clubs throughout Wales."

In those formative Boyce years, the singer did a series of broadcasts for Radio 4 Wales, singing his own topical songs, and he also did some recordings for a Welsh record company called Cambria. "The company was very small and concentrated entirely on Welsh records - two of my fellow recordings artists at that time, both unknown then, were Mary Hopkin and Tammy Jones," Boyce explained. "One of the albums I did for Cambria actually started selling again, when the *Live At Treorchy* LP made the chart."

It was one of the Cambria recordings that brought Boyce to the attention of EMI producer Bob Barratt, well-known for his work with similar regional acts such as the Spinners, Fivepenny Piece and the Wuruzels. He was so impressed with Boyce's potential that he made a special trip to Wales to watch him perform, and after seeing the audience reaction decided to get him an EMI recording contract.

"More than anyone else I owe



Max Boyce

it to Bob Barratt," Boyce says. "He showed faith in me and gave me a chance with the *Live At Treorchy* album which wasn't promoted at all on release. Its success has just been by word of mouth; the only person to ever play a track from it on the radio was Johnnie Walker."

Boyce's only major appearance outside Wales so far has been a recent sell-out performance at the Albert Hall, but a tour is planned to next year, taking in Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol. He also plans to play at various college

and university gigs, and another major London date is being fixed.

Both his EMI albums have been recorded live before an audience, although Boyce would like to eventually do a studio LP. "Basically the mood and content of my music make it better for me to work with an audience. I like to get the most out of the people who come to see me and, because they can identify with my songs, there is a lot of atmosphere stimulated. I sing about such things as rugby club coach trips, in a humorous vein of course, and people know that they can laugh

at themselves."

Despite the success of the *Live At Treorchy* album, which is still in the album charts, Boyce admits to being "amazed" at the runaway success of *We All Had Doctors' Papers*. Although TV promotion for it has been restricted to four areas, ATV, Harlech, Border and Westward, sales are nearly 20,000 a week and there is evidence that the album is selling throughout the British Isles and not just, as some people think, in Wales. One store actually sold 1,000 copies in two hours and police had then to be called in to control the crowds!

"Obviously a lot of the new album's success must be due to the success of the earlier one," Boyce says. "People bought that one, perhaps after seeing one of my performances, liked what they heard and then decided to buy the new one. But it is still all rather overwhelming."

Boyce added: "Like Scotland's Billy Connolly, and Mike Harding from the North of England, I obviously get a certain percentage of my own people when I'm doing concerts outside of Wales. But it's important that the rest of the audience should be drawn into the proceedings and I think that because our humour and music is so universal, in that it closely relates to the lives of ordinary people, we succeed in doing it. Everybody can enter into the spirit of things at our concerts."