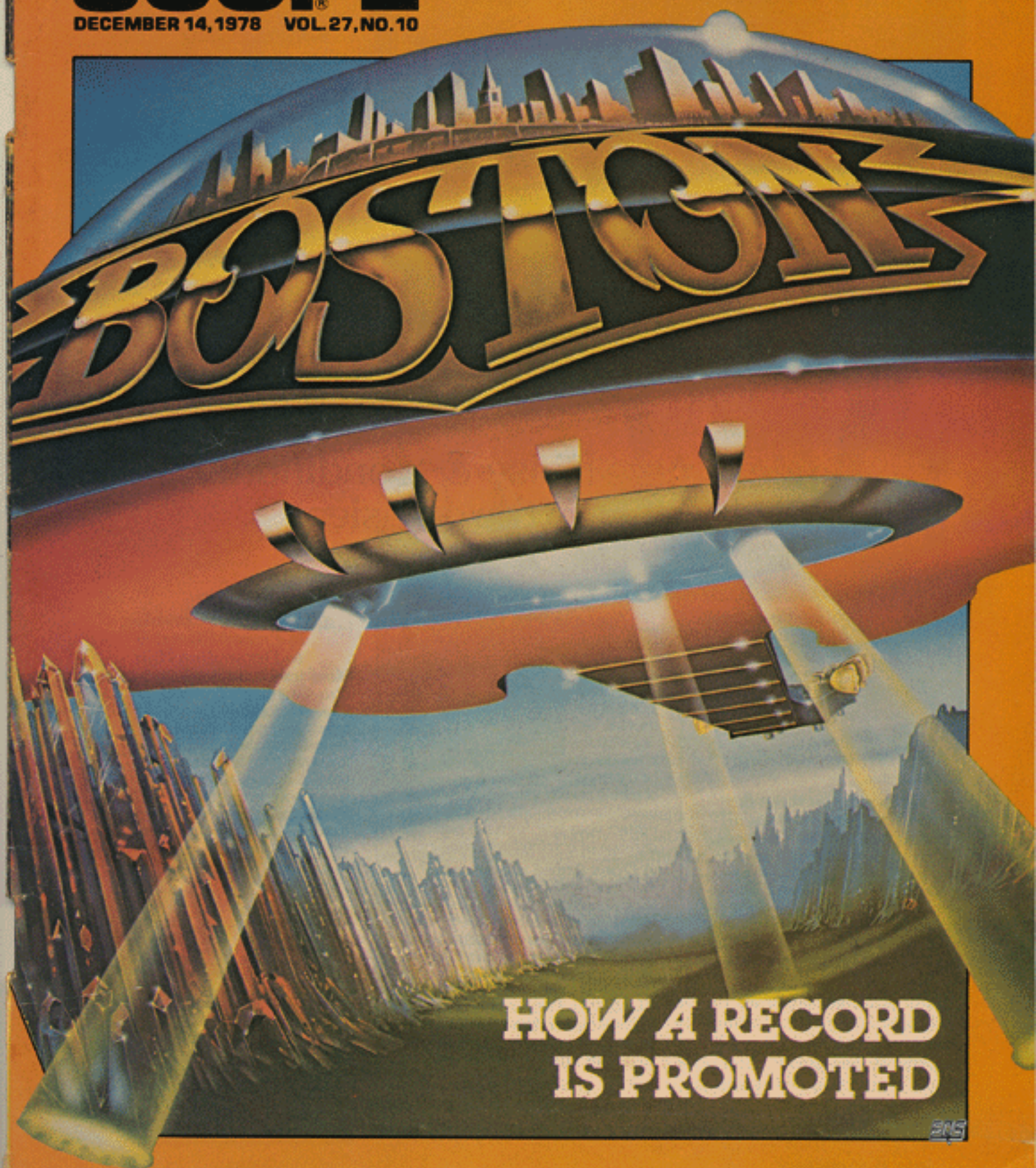


# SCHOLASTIC SCOPE<sup>®</sup>

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**HOW A RECORD  
IS PROMOTED**

Photo by Ron Pownell, courtesy of Epic Records



# HOW A RECORD IS MADE

## Inside the hit-making business

**O**f all the record albums released in 1958, only one went "gold." (That means it made at least one million dollars in sales.) It was a recording of a stage musical, *Oklahoma!*

In the last 20 years, the record business has grown much larger. Last year, more than 70 albums were better than "gold." They were "platinum." (That means at least one million copies were sold.) Most of these were rock albums.

Million-selling albums are not unusual. But that doesn't mean it's easy to turn an album into a best-seller. It's not.

Every week about 30 to 100 new albums come out. But few of them are ever heard on radio.

Many radio stations play music from a tight playlist. Some stations play only 25 to 35 songs (or music from the same number of albums) per week. The songs that become hits stay

on the air for a while. So it's hard to get a new record on playlists. For every album that makes it, many others flop.

Hit records hardly ever become hits by themselves. They almost always need the help of promotion. (The main aim of promotion is to get a record played on radio.) Even new albums by famous artists usually need to be promoted.

How does this hit-making business work? To find out, *Scope* followed the course of *Don't Look Back*, the second album by Boston.

### THE MAKING OF THE ALBUM

Boston, a five-man band, is

led by Tom Scholz. He writes music and plays guitar.

Scholz used to have a 9-to-5 job. At night, he recorded his songs in a homemade studio in his basement. He played many of the guitar and keyboard parts himself. Then he teamed up with four other musicians in the Boston area. They began working on demo tapes.

These were tapes of their music. They would send them to record companies. The tapes would demonstrate ("demo" for short) Boston's talent and style. Boston hoped a record company would like their music and give them a contract.

Several companies turned



Back row, left to right:  
Barry Goudreau, Fran Sheehan,  
Brad Delp. Front row, left  
to right: Sib Hashian,  
Tom Scholz.

# PROMOTED

them down. Then Epic Records signed them up. Boston's demo tapes became their first album. The album was simply called *Boston*.

An amazing seven million copies of *Boston* were sold! It was the most successful debut album ever. (A debut album is the first album a group makes.) Many people wondered if Boston's second album would live up to its first.

The second album, *Don't Look Back*, took 20 months to make. Some people thought that was a year too long. If a band takes too long to make an album, people may forget about the band. When the album fi-

nally comes out, it may not get much notice.

The opposite can happen, though. As time passes, fans may look forward more and more to the next album.

## ADVERTISING STARTS EARLY

Long before Boston's second album was ready, Epic began to promote it. First, the album was assigned to Alan Ostroff, a product manager. His job was to see that the album became a success.

Ostroff works at Epic's Los Angeles office. He began to advertise *Don't Look Back* way before it was for sale.

The first ad appeared last New Year's Eve. A message flashed on a huge electronic billboard in New York City's

Times Square. The billboard showed Boston's guitar-space-ship — its trademark. The message was: "Boston...in the not too distant future."

Ostroff knew that TV cameras would be showing the crowd in Times Square that night. He figured the cameras would pick up the message about Boston. He was right. The message was seen by millions of viewers.

Another ad appeared on a billboard along Hollywood's Sunset Strip (see page 4). This is where many record companies have offices.

Full-page ads for Boston's second album were put in *Billboard*, *Cashbox*, and *Record World*. These are weekly magazines about the music business or music trade. They are often called trade magazines.

These three trade magazines report record sales and radio airplay. They list — in order of

## HOW A RECORD IS PROMOTED

success — at least 200 rock albums and 100 rock singles. They also have lists — or charts — for other kinds of music.

Radio and record people read these magazines every week. Why was Boston's second album advertised in them? To remind the music world to watch for the new album.

Tom Scholz finally handed over Boston's tapes early last summer. It was decided to release the album on August 14.

In July, a 10-second radio ad was made. The ad said: "Boston's new album... on its way to you." It would be broadcast a week before the record came out. It would be heard on rock stations across the country.

### FIRST, A SINGLE IS PROMOTED

The title song, "Don't Look Back," was picked as the starting single from the album. It would be released on August 7, a week before the album.

On August 7, Epic's local promotion people went into action. They work out of offices in

21 areas around the country. The main job of these offices is handling sales to record stores. But the main job of the promotion people is to get their records played on radio.

Radio airplay can make — or break — a record. One promotion man explained, "You're selling sound. If you don't have airplay, you probably won't sell much of that product."

Epic's local promotion people visited radio stations in their areas. They played "Don't Look Back" — the single — for program directors. They gave a copy of the record to each program director. They mailed copies to the program directors of other stations.

Many stations, especially Top 40 stations, have tight playlists. Not many new albums can fit on the lists. But Boston's first album was a smash hit. So, most stations wanted "Don't

Look Back" on their playlists.

The trade magazines soon reported that Boston's new single was doing very well. It had been added to more playlists than any other new single that week.

Listeners liked "Don't Look Back." They let radio stations know this. Within a week, the single was listed in *Billboard's* Hot 100 at No. 62 with a bullet. (A bullet — or large dot — beside the name of the record means a very fast-rising record.) It was listed No. 43 in both *Cashbox* and *Record World*.

### NEXT, THE ALBUM IS PROMOTED

On August 14, promotion for the album began. Local promotion people took the album to stations in their areas. They mailed it to many other stations.

"You visit about 10 stations in person," says Jim Jeffries. He is Epic's national promotion director. "You mail the album to another 30 to 50 stations.

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with Boston's name on it and a picture of the album. This was to mark the Boston section of the record bins.

The album hit the stores on August 16. Sales were strong from the start. *Cashbox* heard from many major record stores that Boston's album was No. 1 in sales.

It takes about two weeks for a new album to make the trade magazine charts. The most successful albums usually enter the charts at a 50-to-100 position. *Don't Look Back* entered *Billboard's* Top 100 at No. 10 with a bullet! It entered both *Cashbox* and *Record World* at No. 7.

According to *Cashbox*, it was the fastest-breaking album of the year. By the second week, *Billboard* listed it No. 4 with a bullet.

Meanwhile, the single was rising, too. By the third week, it was No. 19 on *Billboard's* rock singles chart. It was No. 14 in *Cashbox* and No. 23 in *Record World*.

(Continued from page 4)

"When you visit a station, it's important to play the record for the program director. If you just leave it, you haven't made your point. And you have to have something to say about the record. It's more than just putting a needle in the groove."

Alan Ostroff adds, "Promotion people must build a personal relationship with the program directors. They must convince the program directors that this is a record they want to hear. They back that up with good reviews of the group's records or concerts."

Most major rock stations quickly added Boston's album to their playlists. The album got solid reviews in the trade magazines. These reviews carry great weight with radio and record store people.

Large ads were placed in music magazines and other kinds of magazines. These ads appeared for three months after the album came out. They may have reached about 17 million readers.

TV and radio ads were broadcast by stations across the

country. These ads included a bit of Boston's music.

Print ads were put in *Billboard*, *Cashbox*, and *Record World*. The ads said that the album would "ship platinum." (This means that more than one million copies would be shipped to record stores.)

### PUBLICITY AND DISPLAY MATERIALS

Getting publicity is also part of promoting records. This usually means calling public attention to the musicians. And shortly before Boston's album came out, an article about the group appeared in *Rolling Stone*. Articles about Boston appeared in other music magazines, too.

These articles let record buyers know that Boston's second album would soon be out. Later, Epic wanted to let them know that the album was in record stores. So it sent display materials to major record stores.

There were posters of the album cover. There were neon displays with Boston's name lit up. Stores also got a large

Ron Pownell

Ron Pownell



Ron Powncill

## CONCERT TOURS AND REVIEWS

When a new album comes out, it's important for the musicians to go on tour. So Boston gave concerts around the country during August and September. Wherever they played, Epic's local promotion people invited key people to the concert. These included record store people, newspaper reporters, and radio people.

A publicist traveled with the group. (A publicist gets publicity — public attention — for the group.) This person's job is to arrange interviews with the group. It also includes giving information to reporters who want to write about the group.

Why is touring so important? People who attend a concert usually want to buy the group's newest album.

Reviews of the album are also important. Epic mailed *Don't Look Back* to reviewers for more than 300 magazines and newspapers. Good reviews can lead to more album sales. Of course, bad reviews can hurt sales. But for some albums, reviews don't affect sales at all.

## ASIDE FROM PROMOTION

No amount of promotion or publicity can turn a rotten record into a hit. To become a hit, the music must be there. Many promotion people have said, "If it's in the grooves, it's going to make it."

The music on *Don't Look Back* appealed to many radio listeners and record buyers. Many radio listeners called stations to request songs from the album. So program directors wanted to keep the album on their playlists.

More than anything else, it was the music that made *Don't Look Back* so successful. By its third week, it was No. 1 on *Billboard's* album chart. By early September, Epic had shipped nearly three million albums to record stores.

It is too soon to know how many copies in all will sell. But it's clear that the album is already a big hit.

With two hit albums behind them, Boston has no reason to look back. In the race to sell records, few groups can catch up with this one.

—Chip Lovitt

## MUSIC BIZ EXPRESSIONS

**an album:** a collection of songs on a 12-inch record

**a single:** one song from an album or one of two songs on a 7-inch record

**a debut album:** the first album a group makes

**a gold album:** an album that makes at least one million dollars

**a platinum album:** an album with sales of at least one million copies

**to ship platinum:** to send at least one million copies of a record to record stores

**a playlist:** a list of songs to be played each day (or week) by a radio station

**promotion:** the business of getting a record played on radio

**publicity:** the business of calling public attention to a music group and its music

**demo tapes:** tapes of original music sent to record companies to demonstrate the talents of unknown musicians

**trade magazines:** magazines about the music business

**a record listed with a bullet:** a record which is rising fast on the charts