

Features

Selling ^{the} MUSIC

Small town Kiwi lad Peter Buckleigh has been an international music industry heavyweight. But JOCELYN REIN discovers he is now happy with his life at Muriwai.

It's 1980. Peter Buckleigh is sitting in his London office when Paul McCartney enters.

"So what do you think?" asks the ex-Beatles member.

He is asking Buckleigh about his latest album, a compilation of unreleased material that didn't quite make it to the B-sides.

"I think, this album should never see the light of day," says Buckleigh.

"Look at me and say that again," replies McCartney.

McCartney's wife Linda enters. "I told you so, Paul!"

He has been the make or break behind some of the greatest bands the world has known, but today is Father's Day and Buckleigh is doing what every quintessential Kiwi dad loves to hate — cleaning the barbie. He concentrates hard on a red Phillips screwdriver as he re-attaches the grease tray of his Titan barbeque. The only tell-tale sign he is not just your average Kiwi bloke, the white t-shirt which stays spotless and tucked into his jeans for the entire cleaning process.

It's a polished performance, as the grey-haired 57-year-old strides between house and deck, collecting and disposing of various cleaning products, intent on his task. It is this same quiet determination that made him into a marketing force, turning EMI Music Company on its head over and over again.

Half an hour and one gleaming barbeque later, he closes the silver lid with a clink and shoots me a satisfied grin. We're ready to begin. It's been a wait but sitting in the sun on the wooden deck which overhangs the pool, guesthouse and tennis courts at the sprawling lifestyle block in Muriwai is not a bad Sunday setting.

"You can't have this in town. After living in London and Japan where everything's crowded, we wanted the absolute opposite."

And that's exactly what Muriwai is. Plus I doubt any inner city dwelling would accommodate two dogs, numerous stray cats, three horses and an aviary.

Although he did a brief stint straight after school at the Wallaceville animal research centre in Upper Hutt, these days he's quite happy to leave it up to his daughter Hanna and wife Lesley, who is training to be an international steward for horse dressage events worldwide. Hanna has done one year of vet school so far and is a chronic stray cat rescuer.

Peter Buckleigh's older brother Dave sits quietly beside me reading *Bruce McLaren: Racing Car Construction*. The conversation is punctuated by the anecdotes Dave finds the most amusing. The love of formula one racing goes way back for both brothers. Born in Taupo in 1947, Buckleigh had been sent to the UK for a "good British education" but after two years returned home and spent most of his school years at Lindisfarne College, a Presbyterian boy's boarding school in Hastings.

It is appropriate that the Rock top 100 songs of all time count down in the background as we talk. As the afternoon wears on, I count more than a handful of the songs in my head whose bands probably owe a large part of their success to this man.

The Rolling Stones, the Beatles, Led Zepellin, Pink Floyd, Queen, Roxette, Duran Duran. Peter Buckleigh has met, managed and marketed them and many, many more.

When a recently married 25-year-old Peter Buckleigh met the marketing director of EMI New Zealand at a radio station Christmas party in 1972, neither could have imagined the success to follow.

At the time, his only knowledge of the music industry came from working in the record shop his mother, Marie, ran in Taupo. Armed with this and a

few

years experience in the marketing department of Atlantic Oil, Peter became EMI's newest sales manager in Wellington. Over the next few months, he would be involved in the dismantling of EMI and the selling of most of its whiteware sections until all that was left apart from a few Sharp appliance stores was EMI's music sector and Buckleigh as its general manager.

It wasn't long before his marketing skills were called upon. In 1974, American music company Warner Bros arrived in New Zealand.

Overnight, more than a third of EMI's sales market disappeared.

Aware that he had to learn to use the American music that was making a comeback, Buckleigh brought over Capitol records, a small record company which EMI owned in California.

Within a year Capitol was making up the sales EMI had lost to Warner Bros.

Buckleigh was also among the first to make pioneering steps in TV advertising and the victory and success was sweet.

"We were having a great time. There were lots of parties, concerts and drugs, it was great fun. New Zealand had a great touring scene too, Black Sabbath, Rolling Stones, Deep Purple, they all came."

But despite the rock and roll lifestyle that came with marketing some of the biggest names in the world, success was always at the front of Buckleigh's mind.

"I couldn't get too carried away with the fame. You have to stay business-minded."

With Capitol having such huge success in New Zealand, the UK seemed the next logical step. In 1976, Buckleigh went to show the world how it was done.

He is not falsely modest when it comes to his accomplishments as general manager of Capitol records in the UK. Within six



months of his arrival, Capitol had grown from nothing to having the number one market share across the United Kingdom.

"When I say people used to stop and look at me in awe — they did! They would go 'How the f**k did he do that?'"

Apart from an obvious flair for the business, Buckleigh puts the success down to one factor. "The British are bloody lazy!"

"England was very cliquey. Either you were into the punk scene or heavy metal or you were still stuck in the Beatles era. No-one was looking at the bigger picture."

One thing led to another and in 1978, Buckleigh was asked to take over as marketing director for EMI Records UK.

The next five years saw him working with several of the most influential artists of the era. One day a young girl "flounced" into his office.

The girl was Kate Bush. She played Buckleigh an early version of *Wuthering Heights*.

Over the next year Buckleigh would be responsible for all of Kate's marketing. He also organised some of the first bus advertising the country had seen.

"On the day the single was released, London woke up and there were two huge pictures of Kate coming down every road," he laughs. The 300,000 single discs he had ordered sold before the first week was out.

Another of EMI's artists at the time was Pink Floyd.

"They had never done a single because they thought it would be selling out but one day they called me up and said 'come over, we think we have one'. I went and they played me *Another Brick in the Wall*, and it was just like 'Oh my god how big is this going to be?'"

The success was coming thick and fast but so was the lifestyle. Clubs, concerts and the wining and dining of artists became tiring.

"The pace had been pretty frenetic for the best part of a decade."

The managing director of EMI worldwide suggested Japan for a change of scenery.

So in 1983, Buckleigh arrived as resident director of Toshiba/EMI in Japan to a "completely different job and completely different market".

Upon realising the Japanese market was 70 per cent Japanese artists who he "knew nothing about", Buckleigh decided foreign imports were the way to go. For the next decade, the success EMI had with foreign artists in Japan was unprecedented.

"There was this incredible music boom because of CDs and you couldn't help but make money."

As well as knowing when to strike, Buckleigh also knew when it was time to stop. Fourteen years on, in a rapidly changing industry, "was a nice time to leave."

"Plus the girls were getting younger and younger and wearing less and less clothes, I was starting to feel like a dirty old man!"

"The longer you live overseas, the more this is paradise. In the end I just couldn't wait to get here. I used to get Gary McCormick tapes sent over to me in Japan and play them for myself," he laughs.

These days Buckleigh is in the watch business. He owns a watch distribution company importing Swiss brands which, he says, keeps him very busy.

Sounds like a far cry from the music biz but he insists it has its similarities.

"Well the watches don't talk back to me like artists do but there's still that emotional attachment people have to their watches."

The story is over. Inevitably, the conversation turns back to formula one.

Peter Buckleigh describes having once made his way to Bruce McLaren's shop in London.

"I always wondered what would have happened if I'd gone back the next day and got a job there instead."

