

BACKSTAGE RECORDS

(...) The California-based company is better known for its Silver Beatles **Like Dreamers Do** package. Backstage Records youthful head, Jon Johnson, kindly consented to a HWQ interview.

HWQ: *What was your involvement with Fitzgerald-Hartley?*

JOHNSON: They owned a company called Pic Disc. It started back in 1976. I joined a couple of months after the big picture record boom started. I started there as a driver. I'd left school for one semester. They wanted to keep me on fulltime and bring me up to assistant production manager. Since they offered me more money than I'd make out of college I said sure. I bring with them for three more years and basically ran all the production after awhile.

HWQ: *While you were there the Police **Ghost In The Machine** pic disc that lights up happened.*

JOHNSON: The Police pic disc was probably in my last month there. We had done lot of special projects for A&M Records. I had seen the flashing Police sign above A&M and it got me thinking. We had experimented about a year before with putting lights in records. We pressed LEDs into a picture record and brought wires out through the spindle and placed a battery on top. They worked once in a while when they weren't crushed. I thought that was really crappy, let's see if we can do something nice. So I got the help of an engineer, Mike Fleck, and about 200 hours went into the thinking of it and designing the circuit board for the program it was to go on. Then all the problems began and it got worse. It took 300 or 400 hours to make ten records.

HWQ: *So those ten were the only ones made?*

JOHNSON: There were five for A&M Records for The Police. At the last minute they decided they didn't want the record, they wanted them mounted to a plaque. They told us the day before the records were due. You know, the Police are in town, we want to give them these awards. We yanked them all apart, bought plexi boxes and put cords on them. They plugged in and did the whole thing. They were gorgeous.

HWQ: *So there's actually only five now?*

JOHNSON: There's five at A&M. I think Fitzgerald-Hartley has one too.

HWQ: *But there are five that were done as a plaque. Are there still five that are records?*

JOHNSON: There are five that are records and that's it. Everything else is destroyed and gone. I think we could have kept producing them.

HWQ: *Why did A&M turn them down?*

JOHNSON: Price and time. It took us too long to make them. If we got an order for 1000 or 5000 we could have gone into production with an electronics firm and they could've had people doing all the set-up work. We would've needed some special dies to make the records perfect.

HWQ: *How long do the batteries last for?*

JOHNSON: Good question. You let me know, you have one. I think it would depend on use. They're expensive Duracell batteries and there are four in every record.

HWQ: *When you were at Fitzgerald-Hartley you also had a number other Police picture discs that never came out – just different colors. I saw them up on the wall of your office.*

JOHNSON: We did a couple experiments for the Police. They're always willing to look at something new at A&M so were on press and said look at this. We had one ten inch that they did release as a black vinyl Police record. We threw some colors into and made about 100 of those and turned them over to A&M. They looked at them and said this is nice but they weren't exactly ready to do them. We also did it for another one of their acts Wippo. We put some colors in their records. We worked with some fluorescent paper, trying to get a glow-in-the-dark record. We also did it on a 12-unch Police.

HWQ: *Did that work?*

JOHNSON: Not real well. They didn't look great. It would have taken a lot more money.