

# Pop record artists—brief shooting stars

By VERNON SCOTT

HOLLYWOOD (UPI) —

The "Top 40" in pop records has shrunk to the top 20, according to the president of ABC Records who feels the cutback is reducing opportunities to discover young recording stars.

ABC's Jay Lasker said the omnipresent payola possibilities are responsible for paring down supposedly certified hits on radio stations which feature popular music.

The fewer number of records played, the less chance for payola.

"AFTER the payola scandals of the late 1950's, radio stations got nervous about disc jockeys picking which records would be played on the air," Lasker said. "The jockeys had to justify why they chose each record.

"So the stations centralized the powers of decision on records with program directors. They kept the top 40 going, with only 5-10 new records being played each week.

"Eventually the station



**BOBBY SHERMAN**  
Virtual Has-Been

hired program consultants. They decided which records were right for certain markets.

"Now, with new payola and drugola investigations there are more constrictions than ever on what records can be played on the radio. Cutting the top 40 to 20 has reduced the risk of being suspect. It's a new era of fear for broadcasters. They lean



**DAVID CASSIDY**  
Can't Sell Today

over backwards to avoid suspicion.

"The result is fewer new stars. It's more difficult to create new acts."

A veteran of more than 20 years in the recording business, Lasker knows the life blood of the pop record industry is newcomers.

He said David Cassidy, a rampaging star for the past two years, is unable to sell records today. Bobby Sherman, an idol of three years ago, is a virtual has-been.

"And young Michael Jackson is on the verge of becoming a has-been at the age of 12," Lasker

said. "That's the way it is in this business.

"What people don't know is that the song itself is 95 per cent responsible for the success of a pop record, not the recording artist.

"A bit of sanity may be coming back to the record business," Lasker said. "For a while stars were being paid tremendous fortunes, which is okay if they can command them. But kids who had never cut a record would walk in with lawyers and managers asking for a half million dollars.

"That's ridiculous, especially in view of the fact that the price of a recording session has doubled in the past six years.

"Every artist or group thinks it can make the perfect sound by spending more money. The first recording session of the Mamas and Papas in 1965 cost \$11,000. In 1971 they cut their last one for \$125,000. And the record bombed."

Lasker said the recording industry has reduced the number of fly-by-night operations. Post World War II there were virtually thousands of labels, companies formed to make one record or album and then disappear.

"TODAY there are between 15 and 20 major companies," he said.

"They produce 90 per cent of the records in this country. The big outfits have bought up the smaller ones.

"It's too difficult to get distribution these days.

"But the whole business is a big gamble. The average single has a longevity of four or five weeks—if it's a big hit. And there's no telling how many singles are made in hopes of finding the one that will earn millions."

## TEEVEE

Jack Weston and Marge Redmond (husband and wife in private life) will star in "For Better, for Worse," a half-hour comedy program development project for NBC. Ron Rifkin will costar.

The story centers on the discordant marriage of Jack and Marge Holland, who have been wed for 18 years.

Aaron Ruben, producer of Sanford and Son, will produce and co-direct the project with Bob LaHendro. Andomar Corp. is the production company.

Bennye Gatteys, a regular on NBC's Day of Our Lives daytime series, will guest in the "Understanding" segment of Emergency. She portrays a girl who's threatening suicide as the emergency squad members try to talk her

## RADIO



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