

It's Some of Your BEE SWAX

Bees on Record Labels

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Entomologists understand the importance of proper labeling for insects. Labels are also a key consideration in the music business. Although (unlike me) few people buy records for the label rather than the music, having a cool name or design can increase the perceived value of a platter. Through the years, many labels have been named for insects, and well over half of those have featured bees. This article is designed to provide an overview of these “bee”-sides, focusing on vinyl releases that include illustrations. All chart information is provided by Whitburn (1992).

The first record label named for an insect was probably Busy Bee Records, which issued a number of one-sided 78 rpm records from 1906-1909. The label name was inspired by Sherwin Bisbee, an executive at the company. The records were manufactured by the O'Neill-James Company of Chicago (Hoffmann 2004). The company also produced its own line of Busy Bee turntables, which featured a rectangular lug designed to fit into a slot on their records. Records without the slot could not be played. This was a common practice in the early days of records as companies tried to corner the market (a strategy doomed to failure because phonograph records do not have corners). Busy Bee also released cylinder records until flat platters became the standard. Another early entry was See Bee, whose 78s featured a large bee with two wings and a beehive (Sutton 2011). This obscure label was African-American owned, and even put out a recording by Marcus Garvey, leader of the Back-to-Africa movement.

In the mid-1940s, The Slim Gaillard Quartette recorded three tunes for Bee Bee Records in Hollywood, CA (Visser 2006). Slim was a popular jazz musician renowned for his humorous lyrics containing nonsensical words. The bee on the label is also getting into the groove. Gaillard makes an appearance in *On the Road*



by Jack Kerouac and even wrote a Vout-O-Reenee dictionary to help listeners interpret his lyrics (Polatnick 2013). Another Bee Bee 78 from 1949 came out of Pittsburgh, but despite the name, included only a solitary bee.

The Fee Bee label was started in 1956 by Joe Averbach. Joe was a record distributor in Pittsburgh, PA, and he was convinced by Matt Furin, a songwriter and music publisher, to launch his own label. As a record distributor, Joe received lots of “freebies” (I’m guessing merchandise) from record companies to promote their releases, and he morphed “freebie” into “Fee Bee” as the label name (Janusek and Janusek 1993). The original label featured a large bee walk-

ing with a cane, presumably because two of its wings were missing. The major success story on Fee Bee was the Del-Vikings, an interracial doo-wop group. When their song “Come Go With Me” became a local smash, Fee Bee leased the record to Dot and it reached #4 on the national charts in 1957. The follow-up “Whispering Bells” hit #9. The major labels came calling, and most of the members signed with Mercury, claiming they were under 21 and not legally bound to their original contract with Fee Bee. Their releases on the new label were credited to the Del-Vikings. Corinthian “Kripps” Johnson stayed with Fee Bee, as he was over 21, and continued to record, though he finally left and rejoined his former bandmates. None of the other Fee Bee 45s sold very well, but the company continued to sporadically release new records into the 1970s, though the label eventually dropped the picture of bee.

Bumble Bee Records was one of several rhythm and blues labels from Detroit, founded by Robert West in the late 1950s (Fileti 1994). The first 45 was by Little Joe and the Morrocos, which was actually less rockin’ than subsequent releases by the Tornadoes and Leon West.

Numerous labels have been named Bee, and the most prominent was started by Grover Barbour, a boxing promoter and dry-cleaning business owner in Reading, PA (Schwartz and Yuhas 2008). He teamed up with songwriter Russ Golding to

form a music publishing business, and they used the second floor of the dry-cleaners to record demos.

Local musicians heard about the studio and began dropping by to play at this “Beehive.” Barbour and Golding decided to form a label and named it Bee, though sometimes there was simply a “B” on the record.

Their first release in 1957 was by the Honeybees (Clarke 2010), a doo-wop group featuring Rodman “La La” Beckham, who could really bend some notes.

A steady stream of rock and soul 45s continued through 1967, though none gained any significant national attention. Sonny Bloch’s Coralairs were

from Florida and had their “Baby Blue Eyes” on the Bee record label out of Detroit in 1959. The group also had singles on two other labels. In 1964, Sonny Bloch was back, this time with the Elephants as they tried to stamp out Beatlemania with “Beetle Squash,” also on Bee. Sonny later became a popular financial radio talk show host, and subsequently an unpopular talk show host when it was discovered he had bilked investors out of millions. In late 1959, Bee issued a single by Ivan Bloch, though any relation between the artists is unknown. Brenda and the Sentries’ lone release was a northern soul classic called “Don’t Make Me Lie” on another Bee label. The 45 has a nice bee illustration, though not morphologically correct. Not much is known about the group, though they may have been from Baltimore. The flip is a cover of the Beatles “Things We Said Today,” credited only to the Sentries.

Bee Records out of Church Point, LA, issued a variety of Cajun music singles, though I have only seen one of their 45s with an illustration. Their “bee” resembles a cross between a bee and a flea, which is an inevitable storyline for a Syfy channel movie. Another Bee label, this time from Silsbee, TX, issued a 45 by Malcolm Parker and the Melody Ramblers in 1959 (<http://www.45rpmrecords.com/ST/Bee.php>). Both sides were published by Big Bopper Music, indicating some association with deejay and musician J. P. Richardson, who was also from southeast Texas.

The Bee Hive label was established in Chicago in 1977 as an outlet for jazz musicians. The label features a hive on a table or bench, perhaps referencing the key of B flat. The name was inspired by the Bee Hive, a popular club in Chicago in the 1950s (Davis 2012). In latter days, Salt Lake City was the home of another Bee Hive label, christened after the state nickname. The punk band Mystery Dates were from San Antonio and put out two EPs on a different Beehive. Despite the band name, the records indicate they were released in 1982 and 1983.

Just up the interstate in Austin, the Killer Bees recorded for Beehive Jungle. The label was issued in both red



and yellow, and depicts a jaguar attacking a large hive, though on singles only the beehive was pictured. Conversely, the hymenopteran and feline on the Bee Cat label seem to be ignoring each other. Producer and performer Rula Brown begat Bee Cat in the mid-80s and has since issued numerous singles and CDs. His own "I Wanna Sex You Up" (incongruously written by Dr. Freeze) may have been more suited for the label featuring a bird and a bee, aptly pictured on a single by the Swinging Allusions. You didn't get the bird, only the bee, on the Bee Jay label from Florida. Bee Jay was a music booking agency and put out several compilations of the various Florida bands they handled, as well as a live album by the Embers.

Interestingly, Bar Bee out of Detroit featured almost exactly the same bee as on Bee Jay. The label was probably named for Simon Barbee, who put out at least two of his own singles. He also managed the Velvettes, a Motown group that included two of his nieces. He eventually became a reverend, leaving behind his Barbabes. While he looked to the heavens, an Earthly Upchurch wrote a couple of songs recorded by Wiley Humphrey for another Bar Bee from Michigan. This record featured a completely different bee and may be tied to Elmer Barbee, a Detroit record store owner most famous for helping launch the career of the great bluesman John Lee Hooker (<http://tinyurl.com/phlmtfb>). A flying bee graces the Easy Goings 1989 single on Bee-Fast, which contains the poignant "Hoboes Need Lovin'." The bum on Bee-Line probably won't get any lovin' as the terminal abdominal segments of the smiling bee appear terminal.

Another physically challenged smiling female bee is depicted on the Busy Bee label out of New York, and she apparently had to give four legs and three wings to get a gold record. The garage band The Bossmen released two singles on the Chicago-based Busy Bee, which features a not-so-busy shirtless drone. Both Bossmen 45s were numbered 1001, while the only other release, by Dino Perrone and the Suspensions, suspiciously had no number. An enjoyable label with a number is Busy-B, based in New Orleans. Their bee seems to have spent too much time on Bourbon Street. They produced several much sought-after 45s from local garage bands in the 1960s, including the New Breed, Gaunga Dyns, and Leather Pages.

Engineer Kearney Barton was a pioneer of the Northwest sound (Blecha 2008). His first major success was The Fleetwood's number one hit, "Mr. Blue." He eventually started his own studio and worked with northwest legends such as the Sonics, Kingsmen, and Wailers. He was also the initial force behind Kay Bee Records, which had two different designs. The first was a cartoonish predecessor of Buzz, the mascot of Honey Nut Cheerios, featured on a single by the Cables. When the studio relocated, a more realistic illustration was used. However, due to the need to actually be able to play the 45, the whole bee became the hole bee, and the bee's body became spindle-shaped when the record was placed on a turntable.

Producer Bill Boskent initiated Bee Bee. Boskent had previously worked with Lloyd Price and the King Bees (Clarke 2010). The first releases on his label were in the early 1960s by Little Sonny Warner (Benicewicz 2010). These records had only the printed label name with no pictures. A later sole soul single by Gwen and Ray features two creepy bees; Boskent was also an artist, and personally designed the label (McMenamin and Donovan 2003). The original is very scarce and valuable, but it has recently been reissued (bootlegged).

A bootlegged bee ensures that a DJ gets the point and plays the record on Bumble Bee, a one-shot label from Kent Finlay. The illustration by Ira Kennedy is one of the most elaborate and best on any 45. Kent now manages Cheatham Street Warehouse, a music venue in San Marcos, TX. In a strange coincidence, another Bumble Bee release from Nashville by Michael Finley also featured a cowboy bee, one that can really hold a note. Michael also recorded a single with a group called the Tumble Bees on ESU, but this label inexplicably pictured a butterfly.

Two bees (or not two bees) is the question on Mal Bee, as the flying legless creatures have a simian face and are wearing black gloves. Malicious bees appear on several labels. In the early 1990s, Beeswax from England released several 12-inch singles with a menacing-looking bee with a gold tooth display. Perhaps in order to adapt to a changing musical environment, Tom Tom also released their Iron Hamma EP on Chameleon Records. In the late 1990s, a different Beeswax from England issued several 12-inch singles with a menacing-looking bee with a gold body display. And in the early 1980s, a Beeswax from New England released three singles by the Angry Young Bees picturing a squadron of bomber bees. You can check out numerous videos of the band posted by drummer Craig Kahn on YouTube. Only one mad bomber is on Angry Bee, but the record by Memory Man never blew up the charts and was soon forgotten.

Representing a different emotional attitude, Blue Bee issued several reggae singles. Their bee is probably distraught, as it has no stylus and is forced to play records with its stinger. BB Productions, another British recording company, put out a record by Mark Anthony, who was probably in denial when he asked listeners to lend him their ears. The record jacket features a





variety of flying bees, while the label itself just has one.

They were happy days in 1976 when Bee Bee Productions released *The Fonz Party* by the Fonzettes. Unfortunately, the album jacket was not made of leather and the label did not picture a bee on a motorcycle. The record did contain classics such as “Fonda You Fonzie” and “Sit On It.” The latter song may be playing through the headphones on the not so busy bee on Bee Cee. Lazy B made no bones about its lethargic invertebrate, a sleeping cowboy bee, on an album by the Alabama Hayriders. The group was actually based in England, so perhaps they confused their Birmingham.

Eileen Fulton, star of the soap opera *As the World Turns*, emoted on a 12-inch revolver on Nectar Records. The label features bee visiting a flower with a record-label record labellum. The album is titled “Eileen Fulton Sings with You in Mind,” which is probably why she included the song “Go ‘Way From My Window.” Bees and flowers are also on two different Bee Gee labels, neither of which stayed alive long. The Hollywood Bee Gee has a nice illustration and released at least four soul singles around 1973. The Bee Gee from Lexington, KY, has a much more simplistic drawing, with the bee reminiscent of the one portrayed by John Belushi on *Saturday Night Live*. The label was named for a sound studio owned by Cecil Jones. The insect pictured on Bee Mark apparently imbibed a little too much nectar of the gods from flowers, as it has a severe case of rosacea.

Bee Pee Records were based in New York, though with that name, you’d expect their releases in the Gulf region. That distinction belonged to Bee Sharp from Houston, a subsidiary of Blue Star Records, which put out a series of instructional records by Square Dance Hall of Famer Dave Taylor (Brundage 2008). The long stinger on the label bee could cause a real do-si-d’oh! “I Told a Lie” was an appropriate song title for the deceptively named Big Bee records from Arkansas, as the pictured bee is very small. The tiny insect on the Bee’s Production 45 by reggae artist Winston “Taw” Harris could symbolize wee bee jammin’. Anthony and the Aqua Lads were a mid-60s soul group from North Carolina that, in keeping with current trends, submersed themselves in beach music. One of their two singles was on Gold Bee.

Several labels have been named for the honey bee. The earliest issued one doo-wop 45 by the

Class-Airs, an extremely rare record today. The label can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/penunaf>. The masked bee on the record seems apropos, as you would probably feel robbed given the amount of money you’d need to fork over to purchase one. The Honey Bee label from New York was a short-lived venture by disco producer-arranger Meco, best known for his chart-topping version of the *Star Wars* theme in 1977. That same year, the label released two albums and several singles, which could be considered Honey Bee’s Meco-nium, depending on your opinion of disco. The records do not feature a bee, though the final “e” in bee has what may be a long antenna.

A Toronto record by Christina has both sides penned by R. Beason, which makes sense, as it is a Honey Bee Production. The label has a fairly intricate illustration, though this totally Canadian indepedant [sic] record company obviously was not a spelling bee production. Across the pond, a British Honey Bee put out records by Irish duo Foster and Allen, American Ella Fitzgerald, and English folk band Lindisfarne. This could be the same company that recorded Zoot and the Roots, a high-energy white soul band, though the labels are different.

George Camarinos III was a pre-med student at Columbia when he released his first of three teen pop 45s on Buzz Records (Breslow 1960). On “Move On In,” he sounds like a real operator ready to play doctor. His musical career never took off, so perhaps he needed private practice. Singles by the Three Dots and Ricky Darwin followed on this label, which features a big hairy bee looking to find a little honey at a hive. Twenty-three years later, an English Buzz produced three singles, including one by Low Profile. The pictured bee is very similar to the one on Gold Bee. The band name and the series of Zs on the label did little to awake excitement in the buying public.

Kenny Bee and the Stingers were a new wave band in 1987, though by then, it was no longer new. The picture sleeve for their record credits the sleeve design to Grunt, who must have been buzzed to draw a bee with three antennae, catfish whiskers, and a hooked stinger. Another strange bee, this one with seven wings, is on Buzz Records. The bee is yellow on the label, but multi-colored on the album cover. This label was started by country singer Lee Morgan, and lasted for only one single and album. The label name may be derived from the inclusion of “A Fool and His Honey” on the album. A better explanation is the dedication of the record by Lee to Bill Saye, a truck driver and purveyor of “peashooters,” trucker pills designed to resemble amphetamines or other prescription stimulants. Peashooters actually contained only caffeine or antihistamines. The album cover features an illustration of a bee buzzing around a buzzed Lee, who is popping a couple of pills while straddling a semi nicknamed the “Peashooter Special.” Bill Saye also contributed the liner notes for the 1979 album, around the same time as he paid two of his salesmen to switch from pills to kills and shoot his ex-wife, and not with peashooters. He was convicted but only served one year, and then

became an evangelist, promoting a different stimulus package (<http://tinyurl.com/plzkebv>).

Producer Linton Brown tried to spark up interest in Jamaican music with Buzz Rock Records, recording artists such as reggae legend Gregory Isaacs. An indeterminate blob appears opposite the bee on the label, which could represent a swarm or perhaps a cloud of smoke.

King Bee from San Antonio released only one single, the ballad "Something on Your Mind" by Tony Rey. The colorful bee on this 45 is much more detailed than the crude drawing on the King Bee records from the early 80s. This Florida label put out three singles, including one performed by Sax Kari and another written by him. Sax had a storied musical career as both a performer and producer, starting with big bands in the late 40s and progressing through R&B and soul in the 50s and 60s. The King Bee sides may be the last of his recorded output.

Female royalty is also represented, starting with a 45 by Eddie Freeman on Queen Bee Records from Beverly Hills. No information is available on this release, though the orchestral ballads on both sides suggest it is from the 1950s. The label features a curvaceous queen with a scepter being received by her court. Three other Queen Bee labels were active around 1973. The first, on which the Marcells covered the Five Satins' "In the Still of the Night," had no illustration (but was distributed by Scepter). The only other 45 on this Queen Bee was by Blended Spice and was also produced by Meco, the beginning of his involvement in apiculture. A short, squat bee lands on Screaming Jay Hawkins' record, a cover version of Paul and Linda McCartney's "Monkberry Moon Delight." Like a bee, Jay was involved in the production of *American Hot Wax*, a film about the life of legendary disc jockey Alan Freed.

A British Queen Bee was on a first-name basis with reggae artists Earl George, Len Murray, and Bill and Pete, issuing their three 45s from 1973-1974. The pair of queens on that label beats antennal clubs on Queen-Bea, started by Bea Donaldson in Cincinnati in the late 60s as an avenue to get her son into a band. She recruited local musicians, and the Heywoods were born (<http://www.buckeyebeat.com/heywoods.html>). The first 45, covers of "Hey Joe" and "Midnight Hour," had a black label. The subsequent four singles had yellow labels and the name was shortened to Queen-B. This queen also had a scepter, though no receptors. The band fared well locally, but "Heywood, you buzz off" was the national response to the Queen-B records. Their big break came when they signed with ABC. Now billed as Bo Donaldson and the Heywoods, "Billy, Don't Be a Hero" reared its head and shot up the charts to number one in 1974. They managed two more top forty tunes, and Bo still performs today with a new version of the Heywoods.

"Jamaica reggae record" was also the answer for Donnaree. His single came out on Super Supreme, which also issued a number of high-octane 45s by various artists. It is unclear whether the bee is actually a

part of the label name. No such uncertainty exists for S.O.B., which obviously features a drone. The somewhat inappropriate label name is entirely appropriate for the song "You're No Good, You're Funky (You're Mean and Nasty, Too)." Willie and the Bumblebees released several albums during the 1970s, but this appears to be their only 7" single. The Bumblebees backed Bonnie Raitt on her first album, which was produced by pianist and bandleader Willie Murphy.

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Discography (Date listed when printed on label or sleeve)

Singles

Bar Bee 105. Simon Barbee and the Barbabes. Showdown (Part 1)/Showdown (Part 2).

Bar Bee 10. Wiley Humphrey. I'm Forecasting Love/You Can't Run Away Forever (From the Ghetto).

Bee 101. Brenda and the Sentries. Don't Make Me Lie/Things We Said Today.

Bee 116. Reggie Matte and the Church Point Playboys. Lawtell Twostep/Il Faux Que Je T'oublie (I'll Have to Forget You).

Bee. Sonny Bloch and the Coralairs. Baby Blue Eyes/A Lover is a Fool.

Bee Bee 223. Gwen & Ray. Build Your House on a Strong Foundation/If It Makes You Feel Good.

Bee-Fast 2580. The Easy Goings. Most of All There's You/The Straight Life/Hoboes Need Lovin'. 1989.

Bee Gee 0001. Mercy Men. You Made It Thunder/Fifth Street.

BeeGee 112. Power. Bye Girl/Bye Girl. 1973.

Bee Hive 1314. Warren Lund. They Say/Team-Work.

Bee Jay 003. Swinging Allusions. Prove It/Farewell Darling.

Bee Line 001. Ralston Hunt. Jah-Jah Sends Us Love Again/Jah Jah Dub. 1978.

Bee Mark. John Butterworth. What Came First (The Chicken or the Egg)/I Care, Baby, I Care. 1974.

Bee's Production. Taw Harris. She is a Lady/De Bush.

Bee Sharp 207. Dave Taylor. Relay the Deucy/Relay the Deucy: Instruction Side.

Beeswax B2821. Angry Young Bees. Shake Up the Suburbs/The Bag Ladies (Are Taking Over). 1982.

Big Bee 501. Nuel "Big Bee" Bishop and the OEB Mohawks. I Told a Lie/I Guess I'll Always Be a Fool For You.

Blue Bee. Mikey General. Babylon Jump/Rainbow.

Bumble Bee 101. Michael Finley. Christmas Each Day/When God Made Friends. 1990.

Bumble Bee Records BZZ-01. Kent Finlay. A Quarter Ain't Worth Two Bits/Don't the Good Times Fly.

Bumble Bee 500. Little Joe and the Morrocos. Trouble in the Candy Shop/Bubble Gum.

Busy Bee. Dino Perrone & the Suspicions. Story of a Dream/Jump Type Ballad.

Busy Bee 1001. The Bossmen. (Don't Let Her Use) That Ticket to Ride/I Can't Help It.

Buzz 112. George J. Camarinos III. You've Got Me Bugged/Move On In.

Buzz 1. Low Profile. Call Me/Call Me (Instrumental).

Buzz 33 206. Kenny Bee and the Stingers. Love at First Bite/Flight 69. 1987.

Buzz Rock. Gregory Isaacs. When Will I See You Again/Version.

Fee Bee 218. The Del Viking Kripp Johnson. I'm Spinning/You Say You Love Me.

Gold Bee 1650. Anthony & the Aqua Lads.

I Remember/The Heart That's True.

Honey Bee 001. Zoot and the Roots. Sweat and Tears/Got to Find Me a Lover.

Honey Bee 2005. Showdown. Keep Doin' It (Part 1)/Keep Doin' It (Part 1).

Honey Bee 2. Foster and Allan. Nobody's Darlin' But Mine/The Mira.

Honey Bee Productions. Christina. Till the End of Time/Love Has No Exception.

Kay Bee 102. Cables. Forget It/The Broom.

Kay Bee 106. Skip & the 102's. Dance of the 7 Veils/You Gotta' Pay the Price.

King Bee 101. Tony Rey. Something on Your Mind/Play It Cool.

King Bee 4003. Sax Kari & the Bluesville Express. I Want to Wish You a Merry Christmas Baby/The Things That I Used To Do. 1982.

Mal Bee 7801. Magnetic Force. Boogie-nized/Touch Me.

Queen-B 509. Heywoods. Season of the Witch/My Days Are Numbered.

Queen Bee 101. Eddie Freeman. Believe/Church Bells.

Queen Bee 03. Bill and Pete. So Glad You're Mine/Version.

Queen Bee Records 1313. Screaming Jay Hawkins. Monksberry Moon Delight/Sweet Ginny.

Queen Bee Records 47001. Marcells. In the Still of the Night/In the Still of the Night.

S.O.B. 179. Willie and the Bumblebees. You're No Good, You're Funky/Closer. 1979.

Super Supreme Bee. Donnaree. Ring Mi Line/Version. Extended Play 45s

Beehive Records 105. Mystery Dates. 1982.

Beeswax BWA012. Tommy Knocker. Mystery Inside EP.

78 RPM

Bee Bee 101. Slim Gaillard Quartette. Laguna/Boogin' at Berg's.

Bee Bee 5004. Tommy Carlyn's Orchestra. Sometime/Darktown Strutters Ball.

Busy-Bee Record A-150. Smile, Smile, Smile.

12-inch Singles

Angry Bee Records 001. Memory Man. Live From Death Row Parts 1 and 2.

BB Productions Bees 3. Mark Anthony. Skeletons. 1988.

Bee Cat 28. Rula Brown. I Wanna Sex You Up/Sex You Up.

Bee Pee 769. Busy Boys. Renita + That's the Flavor/Classical.

Beeswax SR1. Tom Tom. The Iron Hamma.

Busy Bee 702. Buck & Kenny. One More Chance/One More Dub.

Albums

Bee Bee Productions 1001. Fonzettes. The Fonz Party. 1976.

Bee Cee 1001. Evelyn McGee Stone. It's My Time.

Bee Hive 7008. Ronnie Mathews. Roots, Branches & Dances. 1979.

Beehive/Jungle 2001. Killer Bees. Groovin'. 1987.

Bee Jay TC-1140. Bee Jay Family Album.

Buzz Records BZ-0979A. Lee Morgan. Telling It Like It Is. 1979.

Lazy B 100. George Browns Alabama Hayriders. Just Country.

Nectar 1001. Eileen Fulton. Sings With You in Mind.

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