

# The Green Monkey Records Story

2009 marks the first proper release on Green Monkey Records since 1995, with *It Crawled From the Basement: The Green Monkey Records Anthology*. So what is it? Why is it?

1983 - Green Monkey Records was born. The label ran 'til 1991, putting out 44 releases in a variety of formats: cassette, 7" vinyl, LP and at the end, CD. Founded by Tom Dyer (that's me!), a guitarist/singer sax dude in an obscure 1980 art/punky band The Adults/Colorplates (1 band - 2 names!) the label put out eclectic underground pop/rock that seemed to fit my notion of good music. Initially the label was started as an outlet for my dinky four-track studio recordings.

The first two Green Monkey releases (1983) were the *Local Product* compilation, and *Tom Dyer – Truth or Consequences*. *Local Product*, which featured a UPC bar code from a generic beer twelve pack on its cover, was mainly songwriter/musician recording projects – only six of the fifteen songs were by groups that you could actually go see play somewhere. *Truth or Consequences* was my first solo effort, in large songs where I played it all, with the usual occasional guest superstars.

In late '84, we stepped up in the world, upgrading the entire studio to eight-tracks. This was a huge improvement sonically over the four-track set up. We took the next step off the deep end – vinyl! Prudence Dredge's *Don't Stomp Away/Problem Child* was the first single, followed by another 45, *I Love You/1/4 to Zen*, by Liquid Generation, which was Bob Blackburn's band. All our singles were small run releases; five-hundred to a thousand and we pretty much sold all of them. As a general rule, the bands paid the production cost and I did all the distribution and promotion.

The Elements were an acoustic guitar-driven trio who made the label's first full-length vinyl LP with *Honest Enough*. U-Dub students, they had only been playing for a few months when they recorded this, having raised the funds to record playing a summer's worth of frat gigs.

The biggest change at the label came for me when I bought a cassette by The Green Pajamas, *Summer of Lust*. I just loved this thing and though I didn't know it, my life was about to become Pajama-fied. Of the label's remaining thirty-five releases fifteen of them would be by the Green Pajamas or one of their members, usually the brilliant Jeff Kelly. Green Monkey to a large extent shifted from being the "Tom label" and became the "Jeff label."

The PJs started as two guys in the attic, Jeff Kelly and Joe Ross, on *Summer of Lust*. By the time they got to my studio, they had added Karl Wilhelm and Steven Lawrence. We recorded *Kim the Waitress* and *Peppermint Stick* and I thought "this is magnificent." I was hooked. I was in love in the most musical way.

The *Monkey Business* compilation, released on the cusp of 1986, took everything up another notch. Unlike *Local Product*, this was mostly bands you could go somewhere and see. Three Seattle comp LPs came out that year, *Monkey Biz*, Popluma's *12" Combo* featuring the Young Fresh Fellows and Red Dress, and *C/Z's Deep Six*, which launched the infamous Grunge movement. Between the three you get a fairly decent feel for what was going on rock-wise in the town at that time; *Monkey Business* was picked by *The Rocket* as Compilation of the Year.

The *Kim the Waitress* single followed a couple months later. *Kim* got us by far the most airplay on college radio (it still gets played on KEXP!). *Kim* would prove to have legs – it was later covered on releases by Sister Psychic and on a "major label" by Material Issue. The success of *Kim the Waitress* was followed by five more cassette releases that year. *Something Quick* by The Queen Annes, The Fallouts, Keith Livingston's *i've got this room*, and The Icons - *Masters of Disaster* and *Live at the Hall of Fame*.

1987 started with Prudence Dredge's *Big Ellen*, followed by the Pajama's *Book of Hours*. Over the next year, we licensed *Book* in Germany, Australia and Greece, every one of them with different songs, just like import albums we bought – we wanted every version to be unique. *Book of Hours* got piles of raving underground press in America and Europe. In all, it was our best-selling release, but that still meant a few thousand of copies world-wide.



**GREEN MONKEY RECORDS**

Underground Seattle Rock 1980 - 2021

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The other big thing for us that year was The Life. The Life got all the Seattle media Next Big Thing props, were named best new band by *The Rocket* and made the cover of the *Seattle Times* arts section. We also did a fine single with them a couple years later.

In many ways, 1986-87 was Green Monkey's heyday. All eight releases after The Life's *Alone*, through Jon Strongbow's *Something Different* LP in '89, were either singles or tapes.

In 1988 we put out Rich Hinklin's *Contradiction* cassette, which was all this sampled Oliver North testimony from the Iran-Contra hearings and the Green Pajamas' *November*, which was recorded with Jack Endino straight-up live, like the band was playing a show, including a small audience.

There was some nice recognition of my work that year. When *The Rocket* did their "Top 100 NW Records of All Time" in their 1989 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary issue, I had six records on the list that were on my label or from my studio. Of course, when they did another list ten years later, I was down to one!

1989 also saw me make a change that would impact life and direction – I started teaching audio classes at the Art Institute of Seattle. Over time, higher education became my calling. I am now president of Argosy University, Seattle, a largely graduate institution teaching psychology, education and business.

'89 and '90 saw a lovely bunch of vinyl singles and EPs, from The Green Pajamas, Capping Day, The Purdins, Mad Mad Nomad, The Life, Swelter Cacklebush and The Hitmen, (The Green Pajamas' *Sister Anne* brought Jeff's obsession with nuns and Catholic girls to the fore!). During that same period, we did three LPs, by Jon Strongbow, The Green Pajamas and The Hitmen. The latter's *Smashface* LP was by far the most I'm-the-boss production job I've ever done with a band. The record featured the usual raft of local guest stars from The Posies, The Green Pajamas, The Life and in what was probably a total suck-up job to get airplay (didn't work), KZOK DJ Mike Jones.

For the last Green Pajamas album for Green Monkey, *Ghosts of Love*, we were using a variety of approaches. Some songs were recorded starting with Jeff and a click track and then overdubbing everything else, including drums. *The Ghost of Love* was the completely the opposite - Jeff decided he wanted to record live at midnight, so we crammed everyone in and did it. I licensed it to Bomp Records, who put it out as a joint release. We also licensed it in Greece – more recently it is available on CD from Get Hip.

By 1991, GMR was starting to wind down. That was the year I sold my recording gear and closed my studio, but not without issuing our first CD, the punk rock-fun fest of Slam Suzzanne's *On The Floor With Your Mom*. They were also the only GMR band that actually got in a van and went out and toured. Their band pretty much got short circuited when Tymber got hit by a drunk driver at a gig in Olympia. By the time she recovered, things had moved on (she's fine nowadays).

There has been the occasional release since. In 1995, before Jeff revived The Green Pajamas, we put out his *Ash Wednesday Rain*. In 2001, there was a limited edition Pajamas Christmas CDR, *The Caroler's Song*, since reissued on Hidden Agenda.

Which brings us to the present and the future. Today you have a lovely collection of under-heard GMR favorites. Tomorrow, you will see some more of these beautiful Green Monkey recordings coming your way.

I hope you enjoy this music in the spirit it was created – truth, beauty and fun!

Tom Dyer, May 2009



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