



## This is a True L.A. Story: 'Recorded in Hollywood'

by TRACEY PALEO (@GiaMedia3)

*Dolphin's of Hollywood* was not just a record store with a DJ or an iconic music gathering place for rebellious teens during a time of segregation in Los Angeles. For many people who traveled to the original Central Avenue shop, sometimes even secretly, it was a home.

Legendary owner and music producer John Dolphin opened his doors to all ethnicities. By doing so he opened the public's imagination establishing an exciting 24/7 stomping ground where famous artists, devoted fans, eager shoppers and anyone with a dream of cutting a record could dance shoulder-to-shoulder. It was a celebration of multiculturalism through the genre of music.

I had the opportunity to sit down with Lou Spisto, the show's producer and Jamelle Dolphin, John's grandson, producer and author of the John Dolphin story. It was one of those gratifying *Made in LA* moments. **Recorded in Hollywood** which previews on July 8, 2016 as an *all-new* production at the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Culver City, is a bona fide, true Hollywood story that spotlights a vital piece of music history and the local genius who created it. John Dolphin was the heart and the soul of the '50s music scene. He dreamed of what it could be and built it.

***Changes have been made to the script since the premiere of this show last season. What part of this story do you now want to tell?***

Jamelle: A little bit more of John Dolphin, what he actually did, and the issues he faced at the time which I think resonate well with what's going on today.

Lou: Ultimately the objective is to create great entertainment. The source material is so rich. You know, this was 1950s L.A. Significant in that here John was trying to take R&B mainstream and market in South Central, which didn't sit well with the LAPD at that time because of the location. He integrated a group of record buyers, kids who were coming from all over. Dolphin's of Hollywood became an iconic destination to experience music. And there's *great music!* It's also a family story.

### ***How does a great musical get made?***

Lou: There's no real prescription. Many things that one doesn't think would make a great musical, make a great musical. Hamilton for example.

With **Recorded in Hollywood** we have something that's great. It's about the entertainment industry and songs from 1948 through 1958 which work very well for the stage. If you look at that 10-year period, there was this enormous evolution in music. We start out post war with Cab Calloway and the Big Band era then move through a decade that went through incredible transformation in Los Angeles and in the country. John Dolphin always saw the changes coming. He kept his labels and

(Cont'd page F15)

(Recorded in Hollywood from page F7)

his shop very current. By the time his life ended in '58, he was at the doorstep of Motown, the Beach Boys and the Detroit Sound. Not too many shows tell this particular period.

***Dolphin's of Hollywood is so personal to so many people. Why?***

Jamelle: Last season we had a Japanese man tell us that *Dolphin's of Hollywood* was the only place where he felt at home. After Pearl Harbor when Japanese people were being relocated into internment camps, it was one of the few places he could actually go. He just remembered how welcoming my grandfather was. A few older caucasian women also told me how they used to get harassed by the LAPD who used intimidating scenarios to try to get them to leave the South Central neighborhood. The girls would say, 'Okay, yeah, yeah, yeah, we understand,' and then just continue anyway. Another man said that while playing a Tina Turner record one day at the listener station, Tina Turner actually walked into the store.

Every musician that came into town stopped at *Dolphin's of Hollywood* because the store was selling and playing their records. They'd promote new songs, get on the radio and sign autographs in person.

***Notable visitors?***

Jamelle: Elvis. That was a great moment! Ike and Tina Turner. Also, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, BB King, The Jackson Five. We have photos of them all!

Lou: And this was before iTunes and Spotify. It was also a time when every

city had independently owned record shops, and radio stations had an open door policy, which by the mid '80s was a thing of the past.

***Anyone ever give a live performance?***

Jamelle: Well, yeah! They were playing Sam Cooke's first single over the radio one day and after the 10th or 12th time in a row, Sam himself came down to the store and gave a show. Sam was a regular and a big friend to *Dolphin's*.

Lou: John would also have the artists on his label singing in the shop.

Jamelle: He'd bring in neighborhood kids and record them right in the booth.

***What's really stands out about this piece?***

Lou: Honestly, I think it's a story that works perfectly on stage in a musical theater setting. There are stories you have to manipulate to make them work. But this one just begs to be on stage. The story itself is true. John made an amazing impact on the Los Angeles music scene, the national music scene, and the R&B and Pop world. He is a larger-than-life subject, worthy of musical theater. The goal for this production is to give Los Angeles another chance to enjoy it. I mean, it's an L.A. story and there's no better place to connect with the community than here.

John was also a marketing genius. When you think about things like *One-Stop-Shopping* and *Vertical Integration*, John was doing it. Making, promoting and selling everything all in one operation. It was radical and in your face but very

*(Recorded in Hollywood from page F15)*

practical. John invented, *Buy One Get One Free* to introduce new artists on the B-side and increase sales. Also, the whole 24/7 model had never been done before. He even put search lights out in the front of the store.

***Younger people are really drawn to this story. Why do you think that is?***

Jamelle: Younger audiences are really into the music, which is pre-Berry Gordy. They get excited. It's new information. And it's not a typical production. It's fun.

Lou: It's the place. It was special and that place meant something to a lot of people. ***Recorded in Hollywood*** pays homage to that. **FL**