
SHANACHIE RECORDS CONTINUES TO BLAZE TRAILS

by Felicia Kelly

As lovers of reggae music, each of us can likely pinpoint the song and time when we became enchanted with these compelling rhythms. For Randall Grass, that love affair began after hearing Paul Simon's "Mother and Child Reunion." From that point, Randall's life travelled a path that would eventually provide the catalyst that allowed so many to discover and embrace reggae, Caribbean and African music.

Setting out to write a book about belly dancing after traveling through Europe and North Africa, Randall ended up securing a contract with the Nigerian government to train teachers, and relocated to Africa. From 1974-1977, Randall was immersed in the sounds of Nigeria and West Africa at large. It wasn't long after his arrival before he hooked up with fellow musicians and began playing keyboards and touring with a band called "Bongo and the Groovies."

When he landed stateside in 1977, he launched a radio show called *Roots, Rock, Reggae* on WXPB in Philadelphia. After two years, this morphed into the "World Beat Dance Party" throwing rhythms from around the world into the mix. In addition to his radio show, Randall emerged as the premier writer on world and reggae music contributing pieces to *The Village Voice* and *Musician Magazine*, to name a few.



Courtesy of Shanachie Entertainment

Randall Grass

Randall's passionate efforts at securing hard-to-find, imported records led him to connect with Shanachie Records. The timing was right, as they had just made a deal with Max Romeo for a record featuring Keith Richards as a guest and they were looking for someone with expertise in the reggae arena to spearhead their marketing and promotional efforts.

Shortly thereafter, Randall took the reins and began making deals with a number of African and reggae artists.

Under Randall's leadership, Shanachie quickly established itself as a pioneer in this genre. From Rita Marley's *One Draw* to Culture's *Two Sevens Clash*, Shanachie was blazing trails. In addition to some of the best reggae to emerge from Jamaica at that time, Randall brought the seminal world music acts Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Ofra Haza to the American public. Shanachie also provided a stage to African reggae artists such as Alpha Blondy and Lucky Dube. Aside from world and reggae music, Randall has his hands on Irish, country, smooth jazz and an entire label of pre-electric jazz and blues. Shanachie has recently released works by Alpha Blondy and the Soweto Gospel Choir and has a Third World album forthcoming. Randall, General Manager of Shanachie Entertainment, is currently working on a book entitled *Encounters with Great Spirits* which is a collection of life-changing music created by some of the world's greatest artists.

Shanachie is a Gaelic word (pronounced Shon-a-key), which means a skilled teller of tales or legends. www.shanachie.com ♡

Felicia Kelly currently works for the Warner Music Group as a regional manager for Rhino Records in the catalog division. She began her career with Shanachie in the 1980s and has worked with Koch Distribution in sales and Palm Pictures as a product manager. fil1luv@earthlink.net
