

My Adventures with Bozo the Clown, by Don Hassler
(Capitol Records, 1953-1961)

I joined Capitol Records in the spring of 1953 as a salesman working out of the Chicago Capitol (CRDC) Branch. I covered the downstate territory, which included Peoria, Bloomington, Joliet and all the suburban areas between the Chicago city line and a line somewhere below Champaign, IL.

My experience with Bozo during my time as a salesperson was selling Bozo records and phonographs to record stores and department stores. The acceptance of Bozo as a children's record character was tremendous.

I was not familiar with that part of the record business when I joined Capitol, and was amazed at how much Bozo meant to the kid business. Every new Bozo record or album release was eagerly accepted. There were other records in the Capitol children's catalog that were also successful mainly as a result of the acceptance of the Bozo series. All of this due to the Bozo originators, Pinto Colvig and Alan Livingston.

In 1955 I was transferred to Capitol HQ in Hollywood. Then in 1957 I worked as Promotion Manager out of the Capitol LA branch. During that time I was able to actually make visits and do promo work with one of the new Bozo characters, created by Larry Harman. He played Bozo after Colvig left. Harman carried the promotion on for many years after that as long as Capitol was promoting Bozo. I remember taking Larry Harman to record stores and other appearances, and watching the kids.

I can think of one particular experience when I went with Larry to a hospital in Los Angeles. We were in the children's area where they had youngsters all the way from 4 or 5 years old to 10 or even 20 some with cancer and other diseases. They were generally restricted to those wards in spite of the amount of excitement and energy that normal kids of those age have. The acceptance of Bozo by those kids was a revelation to me. I was so impressed by how they reacted and how he worked with them and the impact of a clown character on their severely restricted lives. Some of them were very sick and I watched the nurses as Bozo interacted with them. Without exception the nurses would turn and begin to cry and would hide their faces because the kids were so responsive to the Bozo character.

I would say this in respect to Bozo and his activities with Capitol that a kid record series like that was a wonderful thing to experience and a big success for Capitol. But in addition to the economic success, the inspirational result of Bozo appearances was always huge.

One more thought: Fred Rice was the merchandising genius responsible for a great amount of Bozo's success in stores. He was also the inventor of the famous Capitol Browser Box which changed the entire industry.

Tom Morgan wrote a letter and description of playing Bozo in the Hollywood Xmas parade. I worked with Tom when I was in LA but I never knew Tom played Bozo. I hope Tom has a chance to read this story.

I left Capitol in 1961 but Bozo the Clown will stay with me the rest of my life.