

Track 20

The Games People Play

» *Beverly Hills, California, August 1969*

When Allen Klein made his move to take over Apple, Ron Kass had to go. Klein knew that this would make the well-documented Klein/McCartney contention even more precarious because McCartney wanted nothing to do with the brash New York accountant and music business manager, even though the other three thought Klein was the answer to all their needs. Somewhere in his research and planning phase he had gotten a mistaken and overblown impression of my relationship with Paul. He found out that initially Paul, along with Kass, was the sponsor of my position at Apple. Because Ron Kass and Paul McCartney were close and Ron and I were close, Klein came to the conclusion that Paul and I were close. Wrong! I did have a good relationship with Paul but not the kind or one of such depth that would allow me to sway his opinion in a matter such as the leadership of Apple.

Once Klein had decided he wanted the Apple in his basket, he put into operation, what I am told, was his standard modus operandi—creating mass confusion within the organization. He knew that an Apple divided against itself could not stand. I was told that he did this by sowing seeds of confusion, bitterness, doubt, and insecurity among the Apple staff. When he could, he would subtly pit them against each other. He then did

the same thing with the Beatles, convincing three of the four that, among other things, the music business as a whole had been cheating them. He assured them that many in Apple's inner circle were against them. He insisted that Kass was to blame for much of the band's troubles. Then, because he was the inventor of the problem, he came forward as the genius with all of the answers and obviously the only person who knew how to solve the problem. The outcome? They let Kass go and put Klein in, against Paul's stern objections. Simplistically this was like secretly setting a building on fire and then becoming a hero by arriving first on the scene to save the damsel in distress from the flames.

So, according to Klein's plan, Kass was out at Apple, and Klein was in LA and on the phone to me. He said he had flown in *just* to talk to me about the new Apple restructuring and to discuss my recent resignation from the company. What happened was that shortly after Klein's takeover of Apple, Ron Kass was appointed president of MGM Records, and one of his first official acts was to offer me a vice presidency of that division. I immediately accepted. Kass and I knew each other's moves by now, and we were very comfortable working together. He had decided to locate in Manhattan in order to keep his European liaisons more accessible. He would commute to the West Coast offices and movie lot, while I would head up the Hollywood complex and commute the other direction where I would occupy a plush executive corner office at the MGM Building in New York City on a part-time basis. (Growing up in Idaho my family didn't have an indoor bathroom until I was a senior in high school. I found that I adapted to my new life easily though, and insisting on a better suite at the St. James was a lot more fun than hiking one hundred yards down a frozen dirt trail to a frosty outhouse behind the barn. This proves the old adage—you can take the boy out of the country, but you can't do it unless you offer him a better suite.)

Of historical interest is the fact that at that time the MGM roster of English, country, jazz, and pop artists had a serious morale problem. Somewhere deep within the corporate MGM lot it had been decided that the executive staff from the Beatles' Apple Records could possibly be prestigious enough to keep the singing lion alive in the music business jungle a little while longer. My musical and marketing background made me uniquely qualified to communicate with these lost souls. The fact that the company had literally just gone through five presidents in little more than one year with no successful records rather loudly suggested that a good marketing push might be in order to help solve a slight image

problem. The label's stable of artists, which included Eric Burdon, War, Michael Parks (from NBC TV's *Then Came Bronson*), Tommy Flanders (Blues Project), John Sebastian (Lovin' Spoonful), Tompall and the Glaser Brothers, Hank Williams Jr., Petula Clark, and Bruce Palmer (Buffalo Springfield), to name a few, were starting to feel a little bit insecure, and it was beginning to look like the good ship lollipop had just about had its last lick. So Peter Asher (A&R) and Mike O'Conner (publishing) headed out of London and jumped into the lion's den with newly appointed president Ron Kass and myself (VP marketing and artist relations). We were all soon eaten alive by these magnificent movie men.

I'm not going to tell you exactly how this musical lion sufferari adventure turned out, but you may have noticed that there is no longer an MGM records.

When Klein called I knew he was responding to my resignation and that he deemed it necessary to sabotage my MGM appointment before I officially left Apple. I was not friendly to him when he called, but he was persistent and executive protocol did dictate a severance conference even in the madness of this situation and the associated turbulent times. I agreed to meet him at the Beverly Hills Hotel for lunch and/or whatever. After all he *had* flown in from London to meet me, and there were transitional matters to discuss. Even this concession made me feel a bit disloyal to Kass, but I knew how I felt about Klein and knew Kass knew.

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It seems that every action packed, earth-shaking meeting that had to do with my career and future always took place at poolside, in the Palm Room, or in the lobby of the Beverly Hills Hotel. Guess where Klein asked me to meet him? We met in the lobby of the Beverly Hills Hotel in order to have lunch in the Palm Room. Afterward he suggested we could have drinks poolside to finish our conversation. At first meeting I wondered how anyone could be so singularly unattractive and pleasant to meet at the same time. Our introductions were cordial, although a bit reserved on my part, and brief. Based on the misguided information about my influence on Paul's thinking, Klein wasted no time in getting to the point. He was up to full speed before we had cleared the lobby on the way to the restaurant and had made it very clear that he wanted me to stay on board.

More than that he was willing to sweeten the pot more than I could ever imagine. His opening statement was: "I am not sure what kind of money you are making, but if you will continue on as U.S. manager of Apple Records, you now earn three times as much as you did thirty seconds ago!" (Kass had negotiated Capitol into paying my salary and benefits so no one at Apple knew how much I earned as U.S. manager of Apple Records. Before Klein had made this offer, I was basking in the warmth of Kass's generous doubling of my previous salary to come to MGM.) While I was still recovering from this and hanging on for dear life to my loyalties, he added that not only would the Beatles remain my responsibility, but he would give me the Rolling Stones and Donovan responsibilities as an added inducement and a few more bright career feathers in me skullcap.

I had been warned about Allen Klein in more ways than one—I had heard all the horror stories, and even as we sat there I knew I was living in a newly altered world that was personally and adversely changed by his methods and personal aspirations. I loved working with and for Apple and the Beatles, and I really believed we had a good thing—organization and peoplewise. Then along comes this squatty New York accountant who had more bad press preceding him than "Der Fuehrer" himself. He had individually derailed my and a lot of other peoples' worlds by upsetting the Apple cart—and here I was being beguiled. You couldn't help being taken in by this guy. He was charming and disarming in some obtuse off the wall way that just didn't fit into all my learned responses. I didn't like anything about him, but I was enjoying listening to him and I liked what he was saying to me.

Because of his honed persuasiveness and my cultural unpreparedness, he was the kind of guy who was almost impossible to say no to. He knew I was a total tennis nut and as part of his personal endearment plan to me had made the mistake of bringing up his tennis game in our conversation earlier in the meeting. What happened next, I admit, is absolutely crazy and yet true. To this day I can't figure out my mind-set or understand my actions. I think too much time in airplanes reading fiction novels may have contributed to my unreal approach to this situation. In complete denial of my arbitrate cowardice, I took what I thought was an adventuresome way out by acting cavalier about the whole thing. I challenged this odd-shaped little man to a tennis match. He looked like he spent all his time sitting at restaurant tables or in meetings in windowless rooms. At that particular time I was playing every day of my life and was beginning to win some local California country club

tournaments. This was my way to get even for Kass, maintain all my loyalties, and get out from underneath his super salesmanship spell. In a manner of veiled sarcasm I told him I would accept his offer if he could beat me in one set of tennis. I would arrange for us to play at the Bel Air Tennis Club the next day, and if he could beat me, I would be on the plane with him the day after that on my way to London and 3 Savile Row. He agreed. Let the games begin. I couldn't wait. I was going to send him home red faced and with his tail dragging behind a whipped ass!

I went to see Kass that night and told him what had transpired. I was honest with Ron and told him how tempted I was: the money and prestige



I am standing with Ron Kass (right) President MGM Records and Bo Polk (middle) President MGM Pictures on the MGM back lot the day after the “the tennis match from hell”. Although Klein’s offers were attractive, the picture of my new life as an executive at this historical institution with a trusted friend as my boss was much more inviting.

and all. I told him how I was torn between my loyalties to him and to doing what was best for me and my family and career. I sought his advice as a friend and someone I greatly trusted and admired. Ron totally understood, and I knew as a friend that he wanted the best for me and would have advised me to stay at Apple if he thought it was the right choice for me to make. He then discussed with me the challenge we would undertake at MGM, my responsibilities, and the unique opportunity I would have in the overall corporate scheme of this very prestigious company. He had very little to say about Klein's proposal to me and simply offered one small piece of wisdom as I walked out of the door of his house that night into the sweet bougainvillea scented Beverly Hills air. "You lay down with pigs and you get up dirty!"

I went home that night with those words and all the wisdom they carried with them ringing softly in my ears. (I truly loved Ron Kass and feel I learned more from him and Stanley Gortikov than anyone else in the record business. Ron's early death probably affected me more than any one of the many associates I have known who have passed on. He seemed to give me special care from the very first.) After his comment I knew that even risking the long-shot chance that I might be forced to keep my word and go to work for Klein was absolute personal—and in some ways, moral—madness. The position Klein was offering me may have been great for the moment, but someday it *was* going to be over with Apple and the Beatles, and then for the rest of my professional career I would be known as one of Klein's guys.

I met Klein on the tennis court the next day prepared to back out of my challenge, and then I saw him in his tennis outfit. He looked like an egg on rejected drumsticks. All worry left me as I knew this would be a snap. I could wrap this whole thing up without breaking a sweat.

His form may have not been the greatest, but I had overlooked one thing—this was not really a tennis match—it was a negotiation, and Allen Klein was virtually unbeatable in negotiations and was not about to lose this one no matter what form it had taken. His business dictionary had only one word in it: win! A picture of Klein's smiling face followed as the definition.

I never played better, but I couldn't get the ball past him. He couldn't have looked worse and yet couldn't have been more formidable. The ball just kept coming back no matter what I did with it, regardless of how hard I hit it or placed it out of his reach. I thought I had gone to tennis hell and that this match was eternal and was never going to end. (For those who don't play tennis, a set consists of games and whoever wins six games first wins the

set. There is one caveat, though, and that is that you must beat your opponent by two games. Therefore if you get to six games and he has five games, then it is necessary to get the game score to 7–5 in order to win the set. So basically if you reach six without being ahead by two games, then you just keep going until one of you accomplishes that two-game spread.)

I finally beat Allen Klein that day by the score of 15–13. I learned the meaning of tenacity looking over a sagging net into a face and will set like flint. I saw firsthand what a tough negotiator looked like. I understood that when I extended my arms into the air to serve the ball that the tennis racket wasn't the only thing that was over my head. *I was in over my head.*

The whole time we were playing he was talking. First he would sweet talk me, compliment me, review his awareness of and respect for my past glories. When that didn't work he would fill me with fear of the future and how this would be the great missed opportunity of my lifetime and how my mind would come back to this point in time someday in the near future as I lay desolate and devastated wallowing in the sad sewer of my wasted career. He upped the ante appealing to my greed. He took me visually to the mountaintop of fame, let me look over the edge, and like the very devil himself, presented the world of fame and fortune that would lie at my feet when I joined him and his organization. When all else failed he virtually threatened me in a myriad of unkind ways.

I beat him and then it was over; it was like it never happened. We said good-bye, shook hands, left, and that was it. All intensity dissipated when this person and his mission walked off the tennis court. As of thirty seconds earlier I no longer worked for Apple or the Beatles. His next stop was 1750 North Vine, Hollywood, California, the "E" floor of Capitol Records where he would seek my replacement. I never saw him or talked to him again.

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Fall, 1969. Apple chief Neil Aspinall (right) questions newly installed Apple business manager Allen Klein, probably about how Klein could have let Ken slip away from Apple as the result of a tennis match.