

American MASTERS

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press information



PBS

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Timeline

AMERICAN MASTERS Atlantic Records: The House That Ahmet Built

*Ahmet Ertegun once told graduates of Berklee College of Music in Boston that he loved jazz, blues and hanging out. From the start, Ertegun devoted his career to what he loved. His incredible life is fully explored in **AMERICAN MASTERS Atlantic Records: The House That Ahmet Built**, which premieres Wednesday, May 2 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS. Below are some highlights from Atlantic Records and Ahmet Ertegun:*

July 31, 1923

Born in Istanbul, Turkey. Son of Turkish diplomat Mehmet Munir Ertegun and Hayrunisa Rustem.

Early years

Raised at embassies in Switzerland, France and England.

1932

Older brother Nesuhi takes Ertegun to see Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington at the Palladium in London.

1934

Moves with family to Washington, D.C., when his father becomes Turkish ambassador to the U.S.

1937

At age 14, Ertegun's mother buys him a record cutting machine. Taking a Cootie Williams instrumental, "West End Blues," he writes lyrics to it. With the instrumental playing on a record player he sings lyrics into the microphone as the record plays.

1944

Graduates from St. John's College in Annapolis, MD. Goes on to graduate studies in philosophy at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

Father dies, is buried at Arlington National Cemetery and, in 1946, his remains are transported back to Turkey on the USS Missouri.

1947

Co-founds Atlantic Records in New York City with friend and jazz fan Herb Abramson (a dental student and A&R man for National Records) and a \$10,000 loan from Ertegun's family dentist. They pick the name after hearing of a label called Pacific Jazz. Atlantic's first office is in the condemned

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Jefferson Hotel on 56th Street between Sixth Avenue and Broadway. The living room is used as the office.

1948

First Atlantic records released.

Late 1940s

Travels to New Orleans to scout Professor Longhair, which convinces the label to incorporate New Orleans sound in recordings. The more sophisticated and jazz-oriented session men are unable to recreate the precise sound, but in the process create the “Atlantic Sound,” which supports all the label’s singers with boogie-based, sax-lead band arrangements that are an internal part of the song.

1949

“Drinkin’ Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee” by Stick McGhee is Atlantic’s first major hit record.

Signs and produces Ray Charles, Professor Longhair, the Clovers, Big Joe Turner, Ruth Brown, LaVern Baker, the Drifters, and many others. Atlantic becomes the country’s preeminent R&B label.

Songwriting credits include Ben E. King’s “Don’t Play That Song (You Lied);” The Clovers’ “Don’t You Know I Love You;” “Fool, Fool, Fool,” and “Lovey Dovey;” Big Joe Turner’s “Chains of Love;” “Sweet Sixteen;” and “Midnight Special Train.”

1951

Jerry Wexler joins Atlantic as a partner, paying \$2063.25 for a 13 percent share.

1953

Ray Charles records a song that marks a stylistic departure, “Mess Around,” written by Ertegun under the name Nugetre.

1955

Atlantic offers Colonel Tom Parker \$25,000 for Elvis Presley’s contract but loses out to RCA.

1956

Nesuhi Ertegun joins Atlantic. He initially develops Atlantic’s album department and builds up the label’s extensive jazz catalog, producing John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, Ornette Coleman, and the Modern Jazz Quartet.

1958

Begins to produce string of hits for Bobby Darin, including “Splish Splash” and “Mack the Knife.”

1959

Darin earns two Grammy Awards, Atlantic’s first.

1961

Marries Ioana Maria Banu. Known as Mica, she becomes a prominent interior designer.

1965

Ertegun moves Atlantic further into pop world by signing Sonny & Cher.

1960s

Atlantic dominates soul music revolution with Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, Solomon Burke, Wilson Pickett, Percy Sledge, Booker T. and the MG's, Sam and Dave, Clarence Carter, King Curtis, and many others.

Ushers in groundbreaking period in history of white rock and roll, signing Buffalo Springfield, Eric Clapton & Cream, The Rascals, The Bee Gees, Led Zeppelin, Yes, Crosby Stills & Nash (and sometimes Young), and Blind Faith before the decade is out.

1967

Ertegun and Atlantic partners sell label to Warner-Seven Arts. Ertegun retains creative control.

1968

Wexler signs Led Zeppelin (consisting of ex-Yardbird and session mainstay Jimmy Page, Robert Plant, John Bonham and John Paul Jones) to Atlantic.

1971

Signs the Rolling Stones, an association that lasts 14 years.

Co-founds Cosmos soccer team in New York and serves as president of the club.

1972

Signs Bette Midler.

1973

Brings Genesis to Atlantic.

1974

Signs Manhattan Transfer.

Elevated from president to become first chairman/CEO of Atlantic.

1983

With Jann Wenner, co-founds Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Foundation. Named chairman.

1987

Inducted into Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

1991

Receives Honorary Doctorate from Berklee College of Music.

1993

Receives Trustees Award from National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences.

1994

Alaska-born vocalist Jewel releases her first Atlantic album, *Pieces of You*.

Atlantic releases an album with Jose Carreras, Placido Domingo and Luciano Pavarotti: *The Three Tenors in Concert 1994*.

1995

Main exhibition hall at new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland is named for Ahmet Ertegun.

1998

Kid Rock debuts on Top Dog/Lava/Atlantic with *Devil Without a Cause*.

2000

Honored as a “Living Legend” by United States Library of Congress.

2003

Inducted into National Soccer Hall of Fame.

Ertegun and wife Mica donate gift to establish Ertegun Jazz Hall of Fame at Jazz at Lincoln Center, in honor of Ahmet’s brother Nesuhi.

2004

Named founding chairman of Atlantic Records.

2005

Receives President’s Merit Award from National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences.

2006

Honored with opening night concert at 40th Montreux Jazz Festival.

December 14, 2006

Dies in New York City at age 83.

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