



In 1975 I decided to conduct an experiment. I wanted to record an entire album in the USA, working only with American studio musicians, with a thoroughly modern, jazzy sound. In the first place, I simply wanted to try out something new and leave the well-worn tracks of the Studio Hamburg productions behind me. Secondly, we wanted to make inroads into the US market with the new material.

We were able to engage Wes Farrell as producer, who had caused quite a stir with the television series "The Partridge Family". When I met him to hand over my scores, so he could prepare the production, I asked him if he needed anything else, or whether we should give him some demo tapes. I was determined to create the perfect set-up. Wes was totally relaxed about the whole thing. "Don't you worry, your notes are in safe hands, we'll see you in the studio in a few days." Farrell lined up a troop of jazz musicians, every one of whom was – and still is – a firm legend in the American music business, such as Max Bennett on bass, Larry Carlton on guitar, Larry Muhoberac on keyboards, Tom Scott, flute and double Grammy winner Ernie Watts on saxophone.

The first day of recording finally arrived: Los Angeles Record Plant Studio. A handful of extremely chilled black and white musicians rolled into the studio, and after the briefest of hellos they sat down at their mikes and laid down the first track. My own arrangements were unrecognisable to me, it was staggering. In the control room, Quincy Jones just happened to be there and he was electrified as he listened in. This music was totally different to any of the previous James Last albums, which is exactly what I had hoped for. I called home to Hamburg every evening and played the tapes to my family over the phone: "I wrote that, just listen to how it sounds!" Criterion for the choice of songs was: what are the big mainstream radio stations most likely to play? We came up with a fairly elaborate marketing strategy. The album cover depicted the blueprints for a biplane and I had to wear flying gear for a "Red Baron" style pose at the joystick of an old Fokker. The whole LP was packed in little sacks to underline the mystery of the title "Well Kept Secret".

The album release was accompanied by an expensive advertising campaign and the American music critics proffered very favourable reviews. Nevertheless, I have to say that, in spite of the considerable efforts of our man at Polydor, Mike von Winterfeldt, "Well Kept Secret" did not prove to be the commercial success in the USA I had wished for.

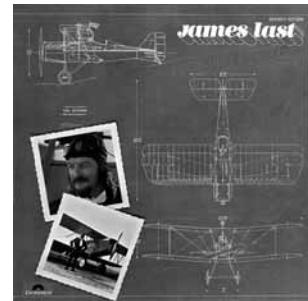
In Germany, the album was too jazz orientated for the expectations of a market more accustomed to popular music. Furthermore, the German Polydor contingent were none too happy about the record having been produced in the USA, a challenge to their supreme influence. Hence, in Europe, the LP remained just what it said on the cover – a well kept secret. Maybe I was just a little too far ahead of my time for my audience. Today, "Well Kept Secret" has attained cult status at record fairs and on the internet.

James Last

Extract from James Last's autobiography "Mein Leben" (My Life), written with T. Macho, 2006

After you know you've enjoyed every second of producing a new album, the hardest thing about being creative is knowing how to put it into words. The kicks that go down when you know you've found a new place with such a unique artist and a way of explaining what you've done, become impossible to describe. James Last is by far one of the most important talents of our time. The opportunity for us to work together and the dozens of outstanding musicians who contributed so many valuable moments, we thank for being a part of James Last's first album recorded in America. (This incredible international personality has no less than 108 gold albums to his credit ... it's mind-boggling!) And for myself, there is more than just music and thought here; there is love, and the opportunity of being able to share this album with everyone who cared so much in making it possible.

Wes Farrell, original liner notes



US release front



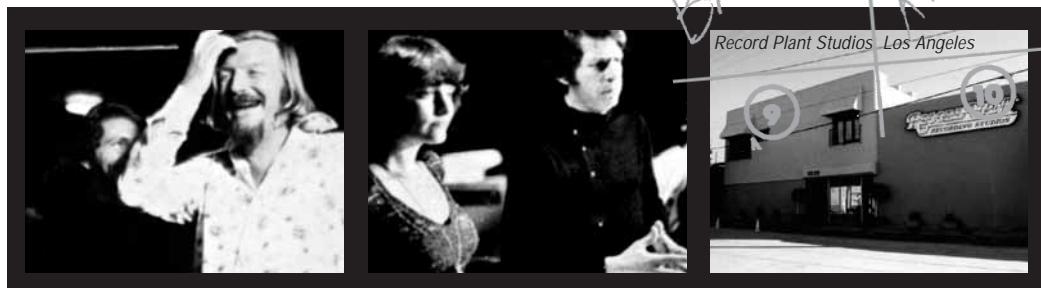
US release back

In those days, in my role and position as Vice President A&R at Polydor Inc., New York, I had the privilege and pleasure to organize, coordinate and implement James Last's first recording in the U.S.A. This project turned out to result in one of the most exciting jobs in my entire career as "record man" in the music business.

Everybody and everything mixed perfectly during those sessions in L.A.: The two "giants" James and Wes, the musicians, the chemistry in the studio, Hollywood flair and inspiration – it was all there to make this an unforgettable experience. Special memories also go to Hansi's wife Waltraud who was with us and "with it" all the time, with good ears and perfect advice.

Obviously, the target for this project then was to produce an album, that would make it into the Top Ten of Billboard and Cash Box and would break James Last in the American market. This didn't happen. What happened however, was an extraordinary recording event with one of the world's most successful and wonderful artists, and an album which still sounds as fresh, exciting, innovative and surprising as if it was recorded today! Dig it, Hansi. I love you!

Mike von Winterfeldt



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