

Do judge this book by its (record) cover...

SONY MUSIC IS GETTING BEHIND the publication of a lavish new book celebrating the work of artist Alex Steinweiss – the man who created the record cover – by hosting the launch party at its central London offices.

Aged 23 Steinweiss produced the first illustrated paperboard record sleeve in 1940 for Columbia Records as an alternative to the standard plain brown paper wrapper. Within months Columbia's record sales had escalated by more than 800% as a direct result of his use of modern typography and vivid illustrations.

Steinweiss, who is still a practising fine artist in Florida, went on to produce distinctive covers for thousands of

classical, opera, jazz, country and rock'n'roll releases, initially as Columbia's art director and then for such labels as Decca and London.

"I love music so much and I had such ambition that I was willing to go way beyond what the hell they paid me for," says Steinweiss. "I wanted people to look at the artwork and hear the music."

Hundreds of his sleeves are reproduced in loving detail in the new book *Alex Steinweiss: Inventor Of The Modern Album Cover* from art publisher Taschen. There is an ultra-limited edition of 100 containing an exclusive signed print (for £650) and 1,400 signed by the artist (£300 each).

Sony's decision to launch the book at its London HQ tonight (Monday) was the idea of Columbia managing director Mike Smith. "We're really proud of the histories of our labels, and it seemed a good fit to celebrate such an amazing book at Columbia's London home," says Smith.

"Without Alex the album cover as we know it today would never have happened. He revolutionised the way that recorded music was presented to the public and his influence impacted everyone who worked in the field of design. His vision is felt through to today and is something that all of us in Columbia strive to do justice to every day with all of our artwork."