Having been in the music industry for many years, Donovan Germain, CEO of Penthouse Records is celebrating his label’s 25th anniversary and musical journey with a commemorative CD and DVD package via VP records.

The label was started in 1988 at 56 Slipe Road after Germain returned to the island following a 20-year stint in the United States where he was also pursuing music.

Germain eventually relocated to Balater Avenue (the current location) because he wanted to branch out into manufacturing which would require more space for the machines.

“I was abroad for about 20 years doing music, and after a while I decided to come to Jamaica because I was fed up with doing music in America. My first exposure came from a sound system that was across the road from where I lived on Nelson Road by the name of El Toro. That was really my first exposure to music and I fell in love with music from then. I went abroad to live and I got a job in a record store which continued my love affair with music,” Germain said.

When asked about the name of the label, Germain told Entertainment that the explanation was really quite simple. “We built the studio at the top floor of the building so we just decided to use the name Penthouse.”

Steering the conversation to the artists who are currently signed to his label as well as those who started out at Penthouse, Germain recalls only fond memories.

“Penthouse started out with Nigga Mikey, Wayne Wonder, Terry Ganzie, Tony Rebel, Garnet Silk, Cutty Ranks, Buju Banton, Beres Hammond and Marcia Griffiths. I started producing Marcia long before, so you can say that she is the ‘original Penthouse artist’. What has been most satisfying is the fact that most of these artists came to Penthouse as no-name artists who were just trying to survive in life and to see their growth and their success in the journey is overwhelming. It wasn’t just about Penthouse being successful, it was a collective effort and the artists themselves have tangible results to show from their journey also. That is very satisfying to me.”

Though many of those artists are no longer with the label, and although he has a new crop of artists that he is now promoting (including Exco Levi, Dalton Harris, D Major, RC and Shuga), Germain believes that the new batch is technically better than the previous artistes. “The new artists we have now are technically better than the first set of artists we had at Penthouse. They are all talented people, but because of the different exposure to technology, it has made them technically better.”
It’s no surprise that Germain has been in the business for such a long time and is still going strong. He notes, however, that the music industry has drastically changed over the years. “The industry has changed for the worst. Because of technology, everybody can be a producer, so there is no quality control. It has affected the quality of the music. There are some unsavoury people in the music business also, so I would say it has changed for the worst. The industry has also changed because records aren’t selling as they used to. The technology is somewhat detrimental because songs are not selling, so artists aren’t earning. We’re basically giving away the music and hoping that the artists will become popular enough to get stage shows,” Germain noted.

Germain proudly showed Entertainment his tape library which houses all Penthouse recordings from 1988 to the present.

The producer is in the process of negotiating a TV special, and is already in talks to release a book, chronicling his musical journey from 1972. The book is slated for a late 2014, early 2015 release.

With several accolades under his belt, including Studio Of the Year, Producer of the Year, and two Grammy nominations with Buju Banton, Germain proudly emphasised that the record label has surpassed all expectations he had.

“Penthouse has grown tremendously. It has grown more than I imagined it would have. The fact that I am a stickler for quality, I think that’s one of the hallmarks of the label, hence the growth. I insisted on quality products. Even if the song wasn’t a hit, people couldn’t fault the product.”

What is his wish for himself and for Penthouse? “I wish that I will still be around to help young people and give them a chance to showcase their talent so they will be able to have a fulfilling career. That has always been the mandate of Penthouse. Penthouse is committed to the quality and development of Jamaican music and we are also committed to the development of young people, not just from a musical standpoint but from a human standpoint.”