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"YOU CAN'T EXPECT PEOPLE TO RUN FORWARD IF THEY'RE ALWAYS LOOKING OVER THEIR SHOULDER."

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WARNER MUSIC

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In this issue...

EDITOR'S LETTER

Tim Ingham

> "The British music industry is small enough to forgive, but large enough to really matter."

It's becoming par for the course during debut lunch meetings with US major label execs.

Normally, it pops up somewhere between the main course and the arrival of the green tea we definitely don't order for show (before I definitely don't secretively dart straight to Pret to jack up on a more unwholesome stimulant).

"So... why is it that British executives seem to be taking over the world right now?"

They point to Sir Lucian Grainge and Rob Stringer, chiefs of the world's two biggest record companies. And, of course, they point to Max Lousada and Guy Moot – the global bosses of Warner's recorded music empire and Sony/ATV's worldwide creative efforts, respectively. (Who both just happen to feature prominently in the fine volume you now hold in your hands.)

I have my answer to this oft-parroted query down pat. (Complete with role-play cogitation in a bid to mask the fact that, at some point, I've almost certainly pilfered it from someone cleverer than me.)

Here it goes: "The British market is not analogous to any other major music territory because our broadcast media is not restricted by genre, and it's delivered across borders. When UK executives grow up with that in their ears, they're bound to develop an innate appreciation of a broad array of hit-making ingredients."

Then I mumble something about how lucky we are to have BBC radio in this country, before spending the rest of the day slavishly glued to the same 15 tracks on Spotify because, like many of you, I talk a good artist discovery game, but I also like what I fucking like.

My wordy justification for why British execs are soaring might sound informed, but it's actually hogwash. I'm becoming increasingly convinced that the real reason UK executives are annexing the upper levels of the US business – and, by all likelihood, will continue to do so – is all to do with their freedom to fail. Or, more accurately, their freedom to try and fail, then try and fail again, and then – the crucial bit – to learn and succeed. The British music industry affords its denizens the liberty of second chances because it's a market that's small enough to forgive, but large enough to really matter.

Allow me to qualify that, by way of Daniel Ek. According to Spotify's recent warts-and-all filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the firm turned over €444m (£390m) in the UK in 2017. This was not only significantly larger than revenues taken by Global Radio's parent in its 2017 FY (£303m) – it was bigger than a quarter of the cash (€1.6bn) Spotify generated in the United States last year. This, despite the UK's population (circa 65m) only being a fifth of the size of Uncle Sam's.

The important bit: per capita, the UK is a more lucrative market than the States for recorded music's biggest service. Good stat, right?

Meanwhile, this island's industry is still diminutive enough that superior executive talent shines brightly amongst its (numerically) slim pickings – even if it stumbles and starts during its initial professional development.

It wouldn't be right to name them, but I have spoken to a raft of British executives who've fluffed their first, second or third jobs in the industry – or simply suffered an unfair HR guillotine – only to return with a vigour (and sometimes a venom) that blows away many of their competitors over the Atlantic.

This is particularly, true, it must be said, in the sink-or-swim world of A&R, where many ex-bosses now rue the day they decided, 'Nah he/she's never gonna be good enough.'

So from now on, I won't be pilfering overwrought industry theories about the media conditions behind the rise and rise of the Brits.

I'll do the smart thing, and pilfer Einstein instead: "Anybody who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new."

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Maggie Crowe is Director of Events & Charities at The BPI. In 2005, she was appointed Events Director of the BRIT Awards and has led that project on behalf of BPI's Board of management ever since. Maggie is also the Administrator of the BRIT Trust charity and plays an intrinsic role in many areas of The BRIT School. She was awarded an OBE in 2011.

ALEX DAVISON

Alex Davison is a portrait photographer and the founder/MD of UK-based agency ADP London – whose clients have included Adidas, the Amy Winehouse Foundation, the BBC and the British Red Cross. His images appear in this issue amongst interviews with the likes of Denzyl Feigelson, Guy Moot, Barbara Charone, Jamie Binns and more.

ACH DHILLON

Achal Dhillon is the Managing Director of Killing Moon – a record label, artist management company, live concert promoter and influential music blog. He's also a board member for the Association Of Independent Music (AIM). In this issue, Ach writes all about playlist culture in A&R, and questions if the industry is doing good things for its young people.

JANE DYBALL

Jane Dyball is the CEO of the MPA Group of Companies – including the likes of MCPS, PMLL and the MPA itself. She previously ran business affairs outside of the US and Canada for Warner/Chappell, working closely with artists/writers such as Radiohead. In this issue, she tells us how used to be scared of stuff – and why she's not now.

CLIFF FLUET

Cliff Fluet is a partner within Lewis Silkin's Creators, Makers and Innovators Division and founded its media practice. He previously worked at Warner Music and Capital Radio plc. He is also Managing Director at Eleven, an advisory firm working with incumbents and insurgents in digital media and leading companies in the AI space.

RHIAN JONES

Rhian Jones is one of the UK's most respected and well-known music industry journalists. In addition to writing for *Music Business UK*, Rhian is the London correspondent at Hits Daily Double, and a Contributing Editor for Music Business Worldwide. In this issue, she interviews the likes of Tap Management, Eleven Management and Lateral Management.

MARK MULLIGAN

Mark Mulligan is the founder of London-based MIDiA Research, and one of the most respected, and widely-read, analysts working in the global music business. A technology and entertainment expert, he has been covering the digital music business for over a decade. In this issue, he predicts the future for 'Gen-Z'.

LOHAN PRESENCER

Lohan Presencer is Chairman of the Ministry Of Sound Group, which operates a world-famous nightclub in addition to divisions working in brand licensing, music publishing and more. Across two decades, Presencer led Ministry's recordings business, famed for its compilations, which was sold to Sony Music Entertainment in 2016.

DAVE ROBERTS

Dave Roberts is the Associate Publisher of *Music Business Worldwide* and *Music Business UK*. Before joining MBW in 2017, Roberts was the publisher of Music Week from 2011, where he led the transformation of the UK trade paper. In this issue, Dave interviews the likes of Paul Russell, Guy Moot, Barbara Charone and Team Take That.

PETER ROBINSON

Peter Robinson has been a music journalist for over 20 years, and keeps a keen eye on industry goings-on. Robinson has written for the likes of The Guardian, The Times, TIME, Noisey, i-D, Smash Hits, Q Magazine, Time Out, Attitude, Notion and The Telegraph, and runs his own must-read online publication over on Popjustice.

ALEX ROBBINS

Alex Robbins is an illustrator whose work has previously appeared on the likes of the New Yorker, Time Out, Wired, TIME and i-D. Oh, and *Music Business UK*. He has once again created our cover image based on a quote from our lead feature. This time, those words come from Warner's worldwide CEO of Recorded Music, Max Lousada.

ADAM WHITE

Adam White was VP of Corporate Communications at Universal Music for a decade, following a quarter of a century with Billboard – where he served as International Editor, Managing Editor and Editor-In-Chief (and, as you'll learn in this issue, met some fun people). He is the author of Motown: The Sound of Young America (Thames & Hudson).

Photo: Gavin Bond/British GQ

INSIDE MAX LOUSADA'S WARNER MUSIC

How the major's UK company is flourishing under the global purview of its guv'nor...

There can be no doubting which of the three major label post-BRIT Awards parties was the most raucous.

We're not basing that statement on any kind of empirical research, you understand. It's just bleedin' obvious.

Warner Music UK's artists romped home on British music's biggest night, collecting six gongs – representing victory in a scarcely believable 75% of domestic categories.

It was the latest mega-achievement on a rapidly expanding list for Max Lousada who, since October last year, has overseen Warner's worldwide label activity as CEO of Recorded Music.

Since he took the gig, Warner has not only dominated the 2018 BRITs but also the Grammys, while posting record annual revenues.

A significant chunk of this success has been driven by Warner's London office – home of Atlantic, Parlophone, ADA, Warner Bros and more. Lousada still calls Warner's UK HQ home when he's not jet-setting between Los Angeles, New York and beyond. It is, after all, the place where he first implemented his vision for Warner as a united, collegiate collection of labels – as opposed to a gaggle of selfishly-motivated entities screwing each other without hesitation.

"My job is the same as it always has been – to create the conditions where brilliant people can make music that has impact in the world, creatively, culturally, commercially," Lousada tells *MBUK*. "And whether you're talking about artists or the teams behind them, the same rules apply; you can't expect people to run forward if they're always looking over their shoulder."

He adds: "The best results come when you tune out those distractions and focus on making sure everyone feels supported, empowered and inspired.

"When people see opportunity rather than threat, when they're building a vision rather than a defence, that's when they do their best and bravest work. You want all the energy going into making the music matter. Everything else is just noise."

In a special extended feature, *MBUK* sits down with the head honchos at each of Warner's UK labels to get the insider scoop on The House That Max Built…

L-R: Atlantic's Alec Boateng, Briony Turner, Ed Howard and Ben Cook

'WE'LL NEVER BE SATISFIED UNTIL WE SEE A WHOLE ARSENAL OF EXCITING NEW TALENT BREAKING THROUGH'

Atlantic Records is harnessing the lessons of its top team's recent (and less-recent) history to unleash artist projects with global ambition, panache and smarts…

We've all had the occasional late night of soul-searching in the office.

You'd certainly assume that Ben Cook had more than his fair share back in the late noughties at Ministry Of Sound.

As a lead A&R at the legendary dance label, he regularly modified and spliced European club floor-fillers in order to fit the whims of UK tastes. As in, personally, sat with a mouse and some headphones, long into the evening, snipping and editing away. A lot of hits were blasted up the British charts as a direct result of Cook's ProTools skills, including the likes of Eric Prydz's Call On Me, Benny Benassi's Satisfaction and ATB's 9pm Till I Come.

But what Cook could never have known (at this point) was how well this training would prepare him for running a major record company in the Spotify age – and the unforgiving, ruthless listening habits of the modern popular music audience.

Cook celebrated ten years at Warner and Atlantic at the end of last year, having originally been hired to relaunch Asylum Records in 2007. Over that decade, he's not only recruited and nurtured an award-winning label team that is the envy of the industry, but helped to mastermind moments that have genuinely propelled acts towards global megastardom.

It's hard to look past Ed Sheeran, of course – whose record-breaking comeback, Divide, was famously booted back on course by Cook and trusted lieutenant Ed Howard, when they insisted the singer/songwriter record and release the Rihanna-bound Shape Of You as his own lead single.

As a result, in January last year, Sheeran simultaneously issued not one, but two massive comeback tracks – Castle On The Hill and Shape of You – and made record business history in the process.

Says Cook: "I remember when I was sat next to Ed on the train back from Suffolk years ago after we signed him [in 2011] and he said to me, 'I'm going to sell a million albums in the UK.' I obviously thought he was brilliant and loved his ambition, but that was a big number!

> ***"When an artist has that level of drive, they inspire their teams to do their best work."***

"What's been shown since is that when an artist has that level of drive, combined with an immense talent, they really inspire their teams to do their absolute best work."

Sheeran rather underplayed his future commercial success on said transport. Shape Of You, the biggest track in Spotify history, has surpassed 1.5bn streams on the service. It has also had more than four billion views on YouTube and is the UK's second biggest-selling single ever. The latest album equivalent sales number for Divide, if you were wondering? 14 million.

That's a figure which has no doubt been cranked upwards by the ability of Team Atlantic to get behind the record on a global scale – and to spot a nailed-down hit when they hear one. Adds Cook: "The A&R experience early in my career at Ministry was very raw and DIY, where you didn't have the benefit of a large fanbase for artists and you couldn't call on the major promotional needle-movers like big TV [ads].

"Those records really did perform simply on the merit of their music alone. It's interesting because that's exactly how records are judged a lot today – certainly when it comes to algorithms and data metrics. Having that understanding from so early on in my career has perhaps worked out as something of an advantage."

Cook's Atlantic doesn't only bring well-sharpened A&R hit instincts to the table; they're specialists in canny promotional moves, too.

Take, for example, another masterstroke within Sheeran's latest campaign: the multi-purpose re-recording of latest single Perfect.

Separate collaborators Beyoncé and Andrea Bocelli created two new versions of the song, appealing to distinct audiences at a crucial time for the Divide campaign.

The Perfect 'duets', released in late September last year, hit No.1 in over 15 countries – including the US and UK – at a stage when, with all due respect, an attention-starved world was expected to have moved on to its next favourite blockbuster artist.

"The current industry environment allows you to experiment and innovate, and we used that flexibility to approach the Divide campaign in a different way," says Cook (speaking in the very week that Ed Sheeran was officially crowned the world's biggest recording artist of 2017).

Ed Sheeran's Divide has now sold 14m equivalent units worldwide

Photo: JMEnternational

"We got there emphatically and globally, and we definitely have to be experts in delivering those big records and big launches. But in a track-led world, there's a propensity to focus on the 'brand new' and the 'right now', so we also have to be experts on how to sustain interest in a great body of work; the Perfect 'duets' were hugely important in us doing that, and were also a great example of WMG working supportively – [Warner/Chappell boss] Big Jon [Platt] was integral to making the Beyoncé collaboration happen."

The innovation and pinpoint decision-making that Atlantic demonstrated when promoting Divide can only surface when a label isn't drowning itself by working with too many artists.

That's something Cook and Atlantic UK pride themselves on – in addition to the label's long-term commitment to its artists.

"We maintain quality by only working with the artists we're really passionate about, which means there's room for our whole roster to develop here in a truly supported way," says Cook.

In addition to Sheeran, Atlantic UK's modern-day roster also includes the likes of Clean Bandit, Rita Ora, Anne-Marie, Jess Glynne, Rudimental, WSTRN and Kojo Funds.

> ***"I wanted to work somewhere that religiously supported artist development."***

A major addition to these names in recent weeks has been double-BRIT winner Stormzy, who struck a landmark joint venture deal with Atlantic UK in January that will see his future recordings released globally by the Warner label.

Cook is in no doubt as to the scale of ambition for the British trailblazer. "We've only seen the tip of the iceberg of Stormzy's potential achievements," says the exec. "He's hugely ambitious, and Gang Signs & Prayer was only the beginning. We're eyeing the world together and there are loads of strings to his bow which are yet to be fully explored."

Adds Cook: "Alec [Boateng] was a great mentor to Stormzy right back in the early stages, and we've stayed close to him since then. Stormzy transcends music alone and cuts an incredibly iconic figure, which is really exciting for pop culture.

"We're relishing the opportunity to work shoulder-to-shoulder with him and his team."

Someone Cook has himself worked shoulder-to-shoulder with over the past decade is Max Lousada, now global CEO of recorded music at Warner Music Group.

Cook remembers well why he jumped at the chance to join Lousada's team a decade ago – and says many of the same qualities are still in abundance in Warner Music's global ruler today.

"I wanted to work in a culture and architecture that almost religiously supported artist development," says Cook of his decision to join Asylum.

"I instantly loved Max's energy and I thought he offered a great vision for the company's future."

He continues: "Max has obviously grown and evolved like we all do since then, but he still has that enigmatic quality, and that very passionate love of what makes this business tick – great music, great artists and being a part of having a real cultural impact."

What does Cook make of Lousada's claim, then, that he is fostering a global environment at Warner in which individual labels operate respectfully of, and even collaboratively with, one another?

"There is absolutely a friendly respect between us as labels here," says Cook.

"We are all individually very competitive, of course, but there's undoubtedly a healthy culture across the whole of Warner in the way we treat one another."

As for the near-term future of Atlantic, Cook notes that the company is in "really good shape" following the record-breaking exploits of Mr Sheeran and others – but is "certainly not resting on any laurels".

He says: "We're very excited right now to see artists properly coming through who previously didn't have a footprint or fanbase, and we're proud of Atlantic's role within that.

"But, as an industry, we shouldn't kid ourselves and think it's time to get the party poppers out.

"There are definite green shoots happening in the UK right now – but as a label we'll never be satisfied until we see a whole arsenal of exciting new talent breaking through."

Adds Cook: "This industry is constantly shifting, and our biggest challenge at Atlantic is to ensure we remain agile and innovative within that. That's something we test ourselves on all the time.

"You can't stand still in this business – otherwise the world will just keep on whizzing past."

'We sign artists who are swimming against the tide'

Ed Howard is A&R Director at Asylum Records and – as explored below – a long-term key member of Team Ed Sheeran...

When and where did you first meet Ed Sheeran?
I first became aware of Ed when I heard a track that he'd written, but on his verse the vocals had been replaced by the rapper Scorcher. I remember thinking this was a song from an amazing talent. He went on to release The A Team and then I bumped into him in August 2010 at a gig in the Notting Hill Arts Club. He got talking to me and my girlfriend at the time and we headed back to her flat where he played us a string of brilliant songs and drank all our beer! We went on to sign him in January 2011. It struck me from the first time I met him that he was a remarkably charismatic person.

What does the Asylum brand mean in the UK?
Ben Cook's intention when he set up the imprint, and our focus over the years, has been to maintain the spirit of David Geffen's original Asylum. We wanted to encourage artists to collaborate and inspire each other, in the studio and on the road. We've helped nurture links between the likes of Ed Sheeran and Rudimental that have opened up new creative opportunities for them. We've also always been clear that we're not looking to sign the second iteration of anything. So we sign artists that are swimming against the tide. When we signed Rudimental, no-one else was doing soulful drum'n'bass. We signed Ed Sheeran when others passed him up and couldn't understand what he was trying to do.

What makes Atlantic different to other record labels?
There's a true spirit of A&R collaboration at Atlantic, both within the building and around the world. We make sure to play the music we are working on with the rest of the team in the UK and often abroad. I'll also set up sessions for US artists over here and my colleagues will open doors for my acts in the States. Over the years, Max and Ben in the UK, and Julie and Craig in the US have brought a stability to the label that has helped us drive success for our artists. Additionally, I like to think Atlantic will take time to develop artists when necessary. Mahalia is a great example of an artist who we have all believed in for a number of years and who is now starting to make waves. At some other labels she might not have gotten this far. We try to give our artists the chance to prove that they're good enough. Of course, they've got to want it as much as we do, and they've got to be amazingly talented, but if so then we'll get them their shot and we'll work with them to get it right.

L-R: Clean Bandit's Grace Chatto, Briony Turner, Jess Glynne and Alec Boateng at Warner's BRITs after-party

'WHEN SUPERSTARS LAND HERE, WE CAN HANDLE IT'

Atlantic Records UK has two newly-promoted A&R Directors in Alec Boateng and Briony Turner. But what do they really think of Warner, the industry and their competitors?

Briony Turner and Alec Boateng have added serious flammability to Atlantic's A&R firepower in recent years – pushing Ben Cook's team to new heights.

The duo won a *Music Business Worldwide* A&R Award for their work on Jess Glynne's multi-platinum debut campaign in 2016, and have both gone on to impressive further success.

Turner's signings include Clean Bandit, Plan B and Rae Morris, while Boateng has worked with the likes of Rita Ora, Kojo Funds, and WSTRN – as well as playing an instrumental role in the recent signing of Stormzy to Atlantic via the #Merky JV.

The duo were last month promoted by Cook to the joint position of A&R Director, after which *MBUK* fired over some tricky questions for them to ponder…

There are a lot of major labels. What in your minds makes Atlantic unique?

Briony Turner: The support system here is really strong. A&R can sometimes feel quite lonely, but we never allow that feeling to creep in. We are very much one team in terms of our outlook.

Alec Boateng: Passion and vision drives everything we do here – especially when it comes from an artist. It then becomes our job to help them deliver it.

What, in your opinion, is the most important thing you can do, the golden rule, to get the very best out of an artist in 2018?

Alec: Care. Genuinely care. You've got to have the artist's best interests at heart. Once we have a working relationship with an act, we've usually bought into a collective vision – our added care adds another layer of vigilance.

Briony: I would say for artists in development the key is to not go too deep into A&R'ing! We like to encourage our new artists to be prolific and expand their creative networks. For known artists there is a new challenge, to make records go international quickly, and consequently that requires a different approach with a strong focus on singles. I think it's fair to say we now give a similar amount of concentration and resource to single campaigns as we traditionally would have done for an album.

Do you genuinely feel like there's a culture across Warner's labels that comes from Max Lousada's vision for the company? How does it tangibly affect the way you do your job?

Alec: I have some of the best music and culture conversations with Max. He still loves and listens to the music we make with our artists. To have an A&R-led approach is incredibly valuable. It's great to have someone who you can play an underground Kojo Funds track to and then an amazing Rae Morris ballad, and who can give you an insightful and massively useful opinion on both, musically and strategically.

Briony: First off, Max is a brilliant A&R guy and this culture of caring about the music and the passion for records is certainly felt from the top down throughout the whole company. For a corporation it doesn't feel corporate. Like Atlantic with Ben, the whole company feels like it's run by someone who's obsessed by the music and who wants to get the greatest results possible from the artists we sign.

Obviously don't give away the secret formula... but can you provide an example of how modern artist discovery works: how did you actually get to find out about an act that you've had success with over the past couple of years?

Alec: The people we work with and around guide us into finding great new acts. By only working with the best you end up around people that are incredible – it usually leads you to other brilliant artists and creatives. For example, Sam Eldridge, who is the manager of Plan B, brought us the vocal pipes that is Jess Glynne. Ben [Cook] talks about the link from Wiley to Ed Sheeran. We're proud to work with a G like Ben and build the lineage of the Atlantic family tree.

Briony: These days there are an incredible amount of A&R 'tools', but we remain quite artist-led. We fall in love with artists and music rather than falling in love with stats, and as Alec says we are lucky to have an established network of artists and friends who bring amazing talent to our attention. That's not to say to anyone reading this that we aren't arms open wide to new friends and extending that network wider! Our door is always open!

How important is the concept of an 'album' to each of you when formulating your approach to working on an artist project? Is it becoming less of a focus as the track-led world takes over?

Briony: It entirely depends on the act and their desire, or not, to make a body of work in a traditional way.

Please name one A&R project which has taken place outside of Atlantic that has particularly impressed you over the past year and explain why.

Alec: There's a dashingly handsome guy down the road who's married A&R instincts and marketing well on projects like Giggs and Big Shaq [Boateng's twin brother Alex just happens to work for Island Records at Universal HQ]. Plus brilliant A&R work has been done on projects like J Hus and Mabel. And I love Daniel Caesar's album.

Alec, you've worked with Stormzy as part of his trusted network for some time. How excited are you to have him in the Atlantic fold via the #Merky JV, and what are you hopeful that the label can do with his career?

Alec: It might feel a bit different, Stormzy coming to us already a superstar – but when superstars land with us we can handle that just as well as we handle new artists; look at what we've been doing with Rita Ora. Atlantic is a place full of geniuses, so bringing another genius to the table is amazing. Plus we've traditionally been really great at breaking solo males.

The day Stormzy and I met, years ago now, I could see that this guy was special. His creative ambition and artist potential was scary. Meeting him early, as his team built from manager onwards, has been invaluable in really getting to know and understand how he works, how I work, how the team works, and it's helped build all-important trust before being in a venture together.

Having trust in A&R is everything – that's already been established [with Stormzy] and it's been wonderful to have the room to build it in a natural way by being there with him so early.

Moving forward into 2018, spotting stars early and allowing them to put music out, developing a sound and an identity outside of a label structure, is something we're not scared of; we completely encourage it.

Briony, the landscape of the music industry has shifted quite a bit even in the short time since Jess Glynne was last releasing records and going multi-platinum. Has the growing dominance of streaming affected the way that you're treating this campaign vs. her debut project?

Briony: Good question! We're really proud of the first campaign. Jess came in with an amazing voice, a tonne of ambition and a handful of exciting demos. Two big features gave her the time and space to really set out her own artistic agenda and collectively we got to over a million albums and built a great partnership. Since Jess's debut, the way in which we think about campaigns may have changed, but supporting Jess to make her best music remains at the top of our agenda, because ultimately if her music comes from a real and genuine place it will connect.

What's the biggest lesson that you've each learned in your career so far?

Alec: Don't take it all too seriously, plus, music and passion have to be at the centre of everything.

Briony: When it feels like everything is going wrong, take a deep breath because often it's about go right in the not too distant future. A&R is like a rollercoaster. You just have to stay on it and enjoy the highs and ride out the lows – and mostly remember that overall it's really good fun.

L-R: Warner Bros' Jennifer Ivory, Phil Christie, Joe Kentish, Nathan Tettey

'IT'S OUR DUTY TO BRING YOUNG, INTELLIGENT, EXCITING PEOPLE INTO THIS BUSINESS'

There's a renewed ambition and vigour at Warner Bros Records UK, led by a President who's proud to surround himself with a fresh-faced team who are hungry for success…

Sixteen years ago, Phil Christie applied for the Warner Music Group graduate scheme. He got down to the final three, but didn't get the gig. Funny how things work out, eh?

Christie has now been sole President of Warner Bros Records UK for nearly two years – and his label is flying.

WBR enjoyed roaring success in the past year with the revived Liam Gallagher, whose No.1 debut solo album As You Were has gone comfortably platinum.

What's more, the label is breaking its very own global pop superstar in Dua Lipa, whose New Rules is – at the time of writing – at No.6 on the Billboard Hot 100, having attracted more than a billion plays on YouTube worldwide.

A&R specialist Christie didn't get into the industry via the typical route of trundling up and down motorways as a youthful scout.

His first job was actually as a plugger, first for the Outside Organisation and then Lucid PR, before Mark Collen hired him in the mid-noughties as a junior A&R for EMI-owned Angel Music Group, which worked across adult contemporary, crossover classical and grown-up pop.

From there, Christie jumped to Warner/Chappell where, under ex-MD Richard Manners, his talent began to sparkle. Christie signed a slew of influential writers and artists including Rag N Bone Man, Michael Kiwanuka, Ben Howard and Royal Blood – a track record which quickly caught the attention of a certain Max Lousada.

A fair few in the business saw Lousada's decision to lure Christie to WBR – first as Head of A&R and then label President – as a ballsy move, not least because Christie was under 35, with no record label experience, when he made the switch.

But, as we all know, time moves fast in the modern music business.

Christie has already proven his Midas touch with multiple artists, epitomised by the two Ls (Lipa and Liam) – and, he says, there's a whole lot more where that came from...

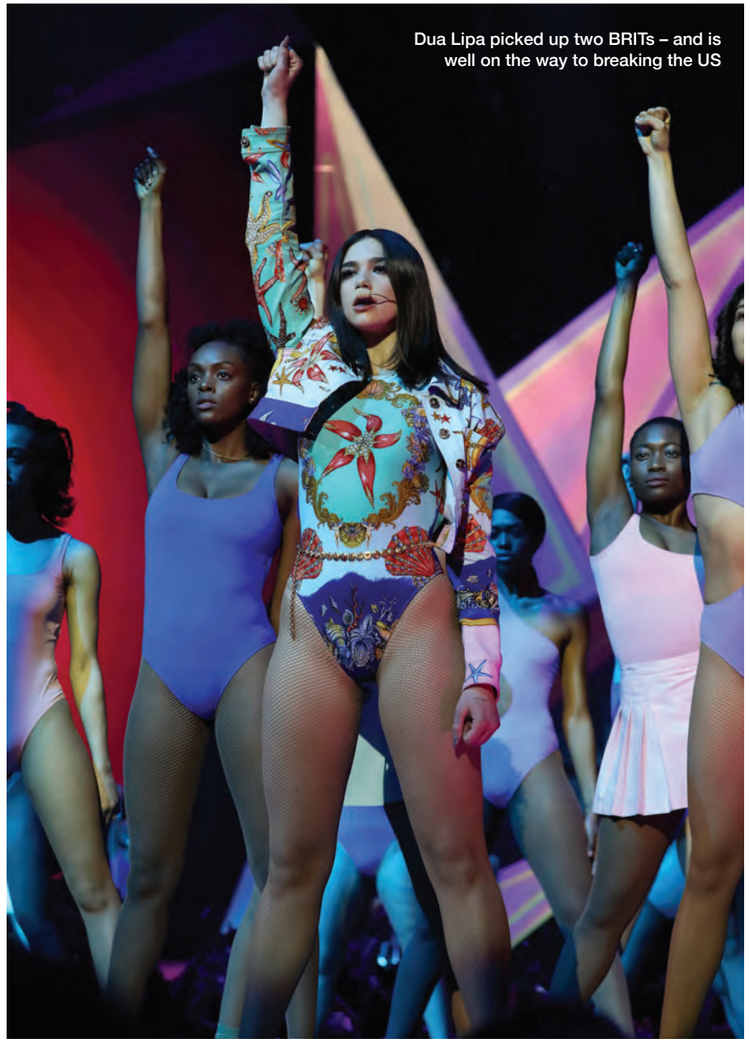
You came from the world of publishing where the song was everything. How has that background helped with running a record label – and what have you had to learn on top of it?

The power of a song has never been more important because streaming is such a great leveller. There has to be a reason for someone to go back and listen to your song again, or save it into their playlist. Working at Chappell, that was our entire business – songs and the quality of songwriting. I've learnt a huge amount at Warner Bros. So much has changed even in the past two years – the flow of records a label puts out, visual content, storytelling, all of these things are evolving at such a fast rate. People say that once you think you've figured it all out, you're obsolete; I don't think that's ever been more applicable than now.

"Once you think you've figured it all out, you're obsolete."

To what extent do you still formulate campaigns and A&R strategy around the idea of an album? Some people were down on the performance of Dua Lipa's album initially, but she's now one of the biggest new stars in the world. That same album has done over 1.5M in total consumption terms worldwide...

People still use the album as a measure of success, yet it's only one part of a million different metrics now. Dua's album did 15,000 in week one in the UK [after being released in June 2017] – yet it was still the biggest-selling female debut pop album of the year. People talked about the time it took us to get it out, but we moved that album back three or four times for good reason, partly due to demand – going in at a good position on the album chart is still important to some people in media and the industry. But internally [at WBR] the thing we were really interested in was Dua's streaming run rate and her social media presence – and both of those were massively over-indexing. Now, when statements are made about Dua being the biggest new streaming artist of the year, people are saying: 'Wow, she's really arrived.' But we were aware of that growth all along, and those were the metrics we were using internally to communicate and measure her trajectory.



Dua Lipa picked up two BRITs – and is well on the way to breaking the US

Photo: JMEnternational

Is it fair to say that Warner Bros has been having enviable success with artists which other labels arguably might not have considered the most competitive signings out there?

That sounds like a compliment, so I'll take it! Maybe we see promise and potential in artists that other people don't at first glance. Dua's signing wasn't really 'on the market' very widely because we discovered her early and were unequivocal about wanting to work with her and Tap Management – we did the deal quickly. We don't need to know that another label likes a potential

signing in order to justify us trying to sign it. Invariably, with artists that become [wrapped up] in those hype deals, it often becomes a challenge to deliver on those projects. I love the idea that we sign tricky or unconventional artists and turn them into a mainstream success.

It's no shock that some couldn't see how the Liam Gallagher campaign was going to work after his last project ended as a commercial disappointment. What do you think the key elements were in As You Were exceeding typical expectations to such a degree?
People thought Liam had been dormant since leaving Beady Eye, but his social media presence was extraordinary. I looked at his Twitter feed and saw 2m followers, following zero people – it was like a statement in and of itself. I realised that this was a guy totally in control of how he was presenting himself. We also heard some great songs written by Liam, some of which were very personal. There was an appetite out there for the return of a rock'n'roll personality.

People seemed to forget that alongside the bravado and the confidence, there's also a real human side to Liam. He's a genuinely warm character and he's great fun to be around. Plus we've had some great support at media, and the live shows were always going to be incendiary.

What do you think connects the artists your team have signed at Warner Bros?
People want authenticity – they want things that feel real. In recent years that's only been enhanced by social media; people want artists they feel connected to. That's perhaps led to less aspiration-driven pop music, but that doesn't apply to everything: you look at an artist like Kendrick and just see wildly ambitious artistry, with sophisticated music, and it's massively popular. Again, because it's completely authentic.

You are under 40. Your age marks you and only a couple of others – including Aaron Bay-Schuck, another Max Lousada hiring – as rarities at the top of major labels. What impact does your relative youth have on the way you approach the job?
Well, I guess I'm not stuck in my ways, because... I don't have any ways yet! Experience is a great thing to have, but youth in this modern market is also incredibly important. I'm by no means the embodiment of youth – I'm 37 – but the fact Max has hired me to run Warner Bros empowers me to drive a youthful culture within this label. The thing that changed within the music business since I came into it – all for the better, may I add – is this used to be an industry based on hiring young, inexperienced people, then 'teaching them the ropes' until they became of value to the business. That's totally inverted now: young people are of value *because* they're young, because of the way they consume content, because of their perspective on culture – that's been a really healthy shift in the music industry. It's our duty to bring young, intelligent, exciting people into this business – to not sit by and watch them join tech or advertising companies. And then we need to empower them to push this industry forward.

> ***"We can't sit by and let young, talented people join advertising or tech companies."***

Doing the maths, you came into the industry at a tricky time post-Napster... When many other people were looking for the exit sign!
I was having this conversation last night: anyone who joined the music industry after 1999 must be a mad romantic bastard – leaping feet-first into a business in decline! But maybe, actually, that means we're the right people to take the business back into growth. We didn't jump into a money pit; it was a stricken business in commercial [trouble]. I was madly passionate about music and the feeling it gives you; I just wanted to be near it. It's the buzz you chase your whole life.

How has Max Lousada personally affected your professional approach? And how does the way he runs Warner benefit the way you run your label?
Max has obviously had a massive impact on my career; he's shown real confidence in my abilities. I have utmost respect for anyone who backs their staff to go beyond what even [those employees] might think they are capable of. People talk about the best leaders having clear vision, and that completely applies in Max's case. He started in the UK with a vision for how the culture of Warner could evolve – born out of his belief that our future competition is not necessarily labels on Kensington High Street; for one, it's tech firms coming for consumer attention in the entertainment space. [Max] started that process in the UK several years ago, and it's been proven as a big success. Now he's exporting that ethos on a global level.

You worked under Richard Manners for a long time at Warner/Chappell, and then alongside Miles Leonard. What key lessons did those two teach you?
They've both been hugely influential and great coaches for me. Richard is an amazing publisher, an artist-facing executive I have the utmost respect for. He gave me a break and backed me at a point when I was very inexperienced. He taught me to have courage in my convictions, and only to look for artists and songwriters who would move culture; not to get blinded by insignificant, overly-aesthetic or frivolous things. With Miles, he exudes the charisma and energy of a leader who embodies the spirit of his label. And the relationships he's forged with artists are extraordinary.

Warner Bros UK hasn't been too well-regarded in the world of British urban music, but that is changing in a big way with MIST, Steel Banglez and others. Have you deliberately implemented changes that have improved your stock in that world?
There was definitely a concerted effort to move more into that area. We couldn't claim to be a modern major label reflecting popular culture if we weren't reflecting the hottest youth music movement in a generation. Jerome [Porritt] came in with Steel Banglez long before most people had heard of him, and even then we believed he could become like a UK DJ Khaled. [Banglez] has got bags of talent, with an amazing personality and take on life; he's a producer who could really become a household name. Guv [Singh] manages Steel Banglez and MIST, so we got to know MIST through that and helped him to understand how we could enhance what he was doing [independently on Sickmade Records]. MIST is a very distinctive and wildly talented artist. I'm delighted with his first mixtape, which is hugely exciting.

How would you define the culture you're building at Warner Bros? What do you want people to feel part of when they come to work each day?
Youth, excitement, vibrancy and fun. I love that the people we have working here, more often than not, are doing other things in music; they're DJs, they manage artists, they run club nights, they're musicians. That brings authenticity to the people we have in this building, and artists can see that. There's a real passion for music and popular culture at this label.

One idea that comes out when you speak to Max is his wish for Warner's labels to feel part of something bigger than just their own P&Ls – to enjoy being part of the broader entity of Warner Music Group. Would you even say you have collegiate relationships with your fellow Warner labels?
Definitely. There's healthy competition between us, but we're united under a shared goal – and that's down to Max. It feels like the individual success of the labels is feeding into the success of the wider Warner company, and that's a good thing. Sometimes [at major record companies] you can see labels operate like isolated silos. That's not the case here; there's a common goal, which is the success of the group.

Tom Corson was recently hired as COO and Chairman of Warner Bros in the US. What's your view on him as an executive?
He's fantastic. I loved some of the records he worked at RCA and the reputation he built there. I've got to know him personally only recently and I'm hugely impressed. He's a serious operator who's very experienced and ambitious. I can already sense he's going to be a great partner to work with. Atlantic UK and US have had a close relationship for many years to great effect – now Warner Bros UK and US can only get closer, especially with Aaron [Bay-Schuck] coming later in the year, which will give us a competitive edge that maybe we didn't have before.

Do you feel a responsibility to the legendary history of Warner Bros – Madonna, Prince, Fleetwood Mac, Neil Young and many more – or are you always too busy looking forward and thinking about the future?
I've spent a lot of time researching Mo Ostin and his golden era in particular. He's synonymous with an artist-friendly model at a time when that was quite radical. It's become commonplace now for labels to think that way in how they partner with artists. He was a real pioneer, and I take a lot of inspiration from that. Our complete *raison d'etre* here is to help make great artists better than even they thought they could be.

'The sky's the limit for Dua Lipa'

One of the key creative members of Team Dua Lipa is Joe Kentish (pictured), Senior A&R Manager at Warner Bros UK.

He tells *MBUK* of the patient A&R approach to her album campaign: "We knew we had someone with the ability to become a major star, but that it would probably take time and more singles than were needed in the past.

"To that end we kept the songwriting and recording process open for as long as we could, to make sure we had the best records possible and, equally, that every one of them was consistent with what Dua is about.

Adds Kentish: "There's still a very long way to go but she's so talented and hardworking and has such a great way of connecting with people on social media, in person and of course through her music, that I really think the sky's the limit for her."

‘LEADING PARLOPHONE WAS A ONCE IN A LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY’

Mark Mitchell officially became co-President of Parlophone in January, following a near-decade at Atlantic. MBUK discovers how he’s bedding in at his new label…

Max Lousada rates Mark Mitchell, saying of the Co-President of Parlophone: “He thinks like an indie while operating in a major, which means a diverse array of artists have flourished thanks to his expertise.”

Lousada should know: the duo worked closely with one another across Mitchell’s eight-year tenure at Atlantic Records UK, where the latter climbed to GM and played a key role in breaking the likes of Ed Sheeran, Paolo Nutini, Plan B and Clean Bandit amongst others.

Appropriately enough, Mitchell has solid grounding in the indie world, working as Marketing Director at independent sales and distribution hub Vital in the late ‘90s before going on to collaborate with the likes of Ninja Tune, B-Unique, Warp and Mute as a marketing consultant.

Having left Atlantic behind in January, Mitchell is now plotting the future for Parlophone, where he will soon be joined by a mystery fellow co-President (one jumping over from a Universal UK label, if you believe certain trade news websites).

It’s early days, but Mitchell knows exactly what he wants to achieve…

“Max’s vision for Warner isn’t a marketing push – it’s real.”

How did you get this new gig, and why did you take it? It’s very early days but how has the transition been?
I had an incredible almost ten years at Atlantic, I was part of a brilliant team and together we had some massive artist successes. But, leading Parlophone was a once in a lifetime opportunity and therefore an easy decision. Not least because Max is always great at pushing people forward and Ben Cook was very supportive.

No other label has represented classic British youth culture like Parlophone has for the last 60 years. I’m determined to maintain those high creative values, while at the same time bringing a forward-thinking strategy. Each of the labels at Warner have their own character and it’s been brilliant learning more about the detail of Parlophone. I’ve been spending a lot of time with the team. We’re not encumbered by a huge release schedule this year so we have an incredible opportunity to ask ourselves some hard questions and build a thoroughly modern structure.

We’re not only exploring how to have more hits, but how we evolve a full artist proposition in a track-based market – it’s still essential to establish acts, grow fanbases and get people interested in listening to whole albums.

What’s it like working for Max for so many years – and now talking to him from the position of a label boss?
In many ways our relationship hasn’t changed. Max was running Atlantic when he employed me – he just happens to be running a lot more now! He’s still incredibly direct and hugely precise, and has an ability to spot the smallest detail while looking at the big picture. One of the things I really appreciate is that our relationship is built on honesty. Occasionally that can be challenging, but I know that I can go to him on anything and have his full support. His transformation of Warner Music UK – the culture, the building, the atmosphere, the dynamism – it’s been an incredibly positive change. Everyone actively embraces Max’s vision and the underlying company values – it’s not a marketing push, it’s real.

Is there a distinctive type of artist that you’d like to see signed to Parlophone during this new era?
Parlophone has always had a tradition for taking left-field culture and amplifying it to a much bigger audience. That tradition is here to stay, if anything it’s the left-field artists that are really exciting me at the moment, and there are many culturally curious people on our team who feel the same way. We want to work with interesting artists who have something to say and are vocal in their opinions.

It hasn’t been made official, but what can you tell us about your co-President?
They’re known as the best closer in the business and I can’t wait for them to start – I’m massively excited!

L-R: ADA/East West’s Angie Somerside, Paul Samuels, Howard Corner and Dan Chalmers

‘WE SEE OURSELVES AS HAVING MAJOR LEVERAGE, BUT WITH AN INDEPENDENT TOUCH’

Within Warner UK, Dan Chalmers controls three divisions, with a roster that runs from Sheridan Smith to Noel Gallagher. He explains how he and his team keep it all together...

You won’t find a corner of Warner Music Group that works with a more eclectic set of music than that run by Dan Chalmers.

The exec’s team covers the distribution and services behemoth that is ADA in the UK, which worked Stormzy’s debut LP, Gang Signs & Prayer, to perfection last year.

Elsewhere, Chalmers manages Rhino, which specialises in reigniting interest in catalogue projects, in addition to East West, whose wide-ranging roster now includes Robert Plant, Boyzone, Simply Red and Alexander Armstrong, in addition to a handful of developing acts.

MBUK caught up with Chalmers to get a handle on his varied remit, and the independent story of Stormzy…

Starting with ADA, we have to start with special mention of Stormzy, especially as we’re speaking the day after he won the BRITs. Remind us how you came to be part of Gang Signs & Prayer’s success and the role you guys played?
Yeah, it was a phenomenal night and it’s been a phenomenal 12 months, in fact, book-ended by Stormzy delivering the performance of the BRITs last year and this year. He decided to take the independent route with Gang Signs & Prayer and it was

a highly competitive environment surrounding that deal, but we met with Tobe [Onwuka, manager] and the rest of the team and everyone shared a vision in terms of breaking Stormzy as one of the most culturally significant artists of his generation, both at home and abroad – and I'm pleased we've played a big part in making that vision a reality.
He's just an amazing artist who uses his voice to make important statements, politically and culturally, alongside and as part of great music, and he resonates with a really broad audience. He'll now continue along that path with our friends at Atlantic.

Yes, I guess you must be sad to see him go but pleased that he's not going far.
Yeah, definitely, sad that he's going, but happy that he's staying within the family. Plus we've got continued involvement with Gang Signs & Prayer and there's still a long way to go with that record for sure.

Stormzy is held up as an example of an independent success story, and Gang Signs & Prayer is an independent release, but it's not quite true to say that he 'snubbed the system' or 'didn't need a record company', because, of course, ADA, part of one of the majors, played such a huge role. How would you describe that role – and that relationship with him and his team?
Yeah, we are proud of the role we've played in how the record launched. Someone like Angie Somerside was a massive part in bringing Stormzy's full vision to reality and putting the whole Gang Signs & Prayer campaign together, advising them on the roll-out, how to market the record over 12 months, we've been involved every step of the way. It also benefitted from our relationship with Damian Christian and his amazing promotions team at Atlantic. There have been a lot of people within ADA who touched that album and helped make it what it was – and Stormzy himself was good enough to turn up here on the day it went to number one and recognise that contribution, that meant a lot to us.

"Warner is at the cutting edge of both technology and culture."

What is he – and the whole #Merky team – like to work with on a day-to-day basis?
He's amazing. A lot of our dialogue is with Tobe, and with Rachel Campbell, his publicist, and they're incredible to work with; they're very, very focused and very detail-orientated and very clear on the vision that Stormzy and they have.

Where do you think he can go from here?
The initial target we set out was half a million records-plus, and we'll certainly get to that level and beyond. But I think, maybe more importantly, it's become a timeless and legendary album that will go on and sell for many, many years to come.

Final one on Stormzy: what's the mood in the office today?
Yeah, I'm delighted for Stormzy's team and our team, of course. The nice thing for ADA is that from artists like Macklemore, who was the biggest-selling independent artist globally, and Stormzy, who's the biggest-selling independent artist in the UK, to working with someone like Noel Gallagher and the amazing Ignition crew, it shows that we can work successfully with any artist at any stage in their career. I believe we're market-leading right now and we have some very exciting new artist partnerships to announce over the coming weeks and months.

East West underwent some structural change last year, can you talk us through that and the difference that it's made?
Yeah, we announced a new set-up, with Angie Somerside and Paul Samuels, which I'm really excited about. There's also a brand new roster on the development side, with artists like Billy Lockett, Aine Cahill, Nikhil D'Souza and Dusky Grey and we've got fantastic plans laid down for all of them.

On the entertainment side, we've formalised our activity in the sector with the launch of the Warner Music Entertainment imprint. We had a terrific end of last year with Sheridan Smith, who was the second biggest breakthrough female act of the year, and we've got ongoing plans for her, building towards her next project which I hope will come at the end of the year. We've got a record celebrating 60 years in the business for Cliff Richard as well as a new Boyzone record, featuring the cream of the crop of current songwriters, celebrating 25 years in the business for them.

Angie has been with you for a year now, what has she brought to the team?
I thought very carefully about the role and I met a bunch of people, but Angie had standout qualities in terms of her experience in developing talent as well as generating success with superstar artists. That was something, particularly on the development side, that I felt we needed in building up East West.

She'd also spent a lot of time educating herself in digital marketing and promotion and she's done a brilliant job getting the structure of our digital team right. She brings a lot of experience and credibility to the artist development process.

Moving on to Rhino, one of the most famous and respected catalogue and compilation labels in the world, how is that adapting to the age of streaming?
It's a really exciting time for Rhino, because you're right, it is one of the most successful brands there is in the catalogue/heritage space and we're spending a lot of time now re-inventing the way we approach catalogue through streaming and how we can drive more consumption. Looking from an overall perspective it's about adopting a different attitude in terms of how people consume music, it's not release to release, it's always on; it's highlighting anniversaries or live events, it's creating dedicated documentaries, or other additional content, always driving great catalogue and great artists.

That's married to some really good opportunities that still exist in the physical space, of course, whether that's high end box sets or just vinyl in general, which continues to go from strength to strength. There's a huge opportunity for catalogue in the streaming space, whether that's track based or album based, I truly believe the compilation business will re-invent itself within streaming.

So, does the fact that every artist's catalogue is instantly available, and everyone can create their own compilations to share with whoever they want, make life harder or easier for an organisation like the one you work for?
I think it makes life better, makes it more interesting and definitely gives us more opportunity. Think of it this way: you might previously have been working five, six or seven year release cycles around a key artist, be that a new Best Of or a re-issue. Now you can be working with all of your artists all the time. Obviously there's more work to done and we're looking at how we resource it, but the opportunity is huge.

Finally, how would you characterise the corporate culture within Warner, and how does Max Lousada play a part in setting and nurturing that?
It's without doubt a very powerful culture within Warner, we're very respectful of our heritage and our catalogue and of people like Ahmet Ertegun and Mo Ostin, who grew the business.

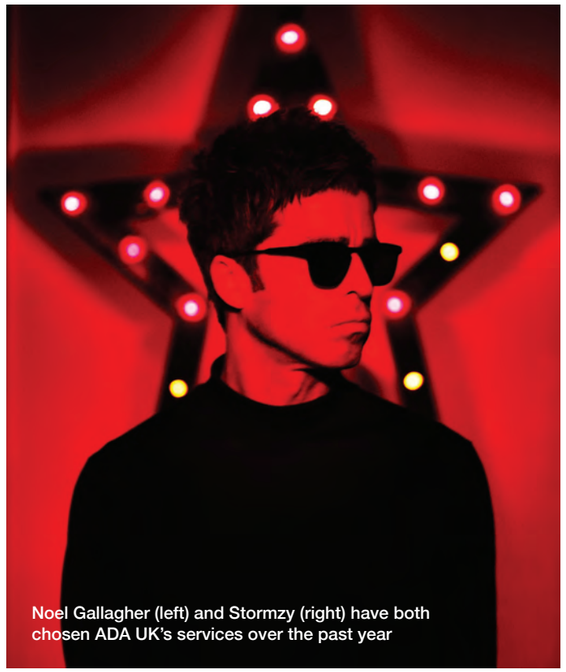
We believe passionately in long-term partnerships and that's something we focus on to a level that is unique to the market.

I also think we have a great independent culture. As everyone knows, Warner was built out of a number of independent companies and that informs a business like ADA and how we are able to engage with the independent community.

We see ourselves as having major leverage but with an independent touch – and that's a powerful position to be in.

We're incredibly dynamic as a company; we're at the cutting edge of both technology and culture. And I also believe we have a collaborative culture. Obviously the [Warner] labels are competitive, but we all definitely work in the best interests of the company first and foremost. It's interesting to see how Stormzy, for example, has moved through the gears at ADA and then onto Atlantic. We meet regularly as a management team, we're very transparent and we all look to benefit each part of the business.

Some of that is obviously in Warner's DNA, but does Max play a part in protecting and developing those things?
Yeah, Max is incredibly passionate about the Warner culture and has been an amazing advocate of it and leader of it, and that filters down through the company. He's got huge energy and is really inspiring to work for.



Noel Gallagher (left) and Stormzy (right) have both chosen ADA UK's services over the past year

SEX SELLS. BUT IS IT BECOMING A BIT OF A TURN-OFF?

Rhian Jones has noticed the music business becoming less flesh-obsessed. Are the days of cheap sexualization on the way out?

Advertising gurus since the beginning of time agree: sex sells. It sells magazines, chocolate, perfume, deodorant, silly little coffee pods and just about everything else.

It's fair to say that the music business has long bought into this alluring, alliterative mantra.

You just have to recall Christina Aguilera's transition from bubblegum pop act into a chap-wearing 'Dirrty' girl, or the school-pupil turned-sex-slave evolution of Britney. And, well, I'm sure no-one needs a reminder of Miley Cyrus firmly shutting the door on Mickey Mouse, twerking as she slammed.

But something new is happening out there. If you look at the biggest selling acts of the last few years – Ed Sheeran, Drake, Kendrick Lamar and Adele in particular – it's tough to argue than any of them have regularly used overtly sexualised images in a bid to shift units.

The same trend can be spotted elsewhere in Pop Giant Land: Beyonce's 2013 Superbowl performance was themed around empowerment, rather than sex, UK breakout star Dua Lipa is wearing a full-length suit in her latest video and Lorde has always projected an image steeped in mystique as opposed to flirtation.

Even Miley Cyrus has ditched the twerking – and inflatable giant phallic live props, for shame – for a more subdued and 'authentic' style that puts her talent to the forefront.

Thanks to catalysts such as the #MeToo movement, we're all questioning the way women are treated and perceived – at work and in the world at large – especially by those in power.

It could be argued that such conversations rather jar with the 'scantily clad women draped over suited boys' trope well-known to the music industry. (This hasn't gone away completely: witness the writhing and jiggling on stage during the Grammys 2018 performance of Despacito – by a group of women next to the fully-dressed Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee.)

"This discussion goes deeper than the 'final product'."

This discussion goes deeper than just what we see as the music business's 'final product', however. Of the Top 10 biggest selling songs in the US last year, just two were co-written by women. And from 2012 to 2017, 12.3% of songwriters credited on the 600 most popular songs from Billboard's year-end charts were female, according to a recent report from the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative.

No wonder pop songwriting maestro Justin Tranter recently told *Music Business Worldwide*: "When you see most [songwriting] sessions are just filled with a bunch of white, straight dudes, you realize, wow, this industry still has a long way to go."

In the songwriting world, the likes of regular Tranter collaborator Julia Michaels – a woman who is by no stretch of the imagination over-sexualised in her own career decisions as an artist – are a shameful rarity.

It's even worse with professional female producers, only two of which were found amongst 651 counted in the Annenberg study.

So here's a question: once you have a hit song completely calculated, composed and manufactured by men, what addition can a female artist bring to it beyond her vocal? Her face and her body, per chance?

Now, let's move one notch further along the music business machinery and look at A&R. Everybody knows there's an apparent gender imbalance when it comes to those making key creative decisions (most key decisions full stop, really) in the music industry.

Good A&R is often described as 'gut feeling' – an innate ability within an executive to spot an artist with potential and then make decisions based on their own past experiences.

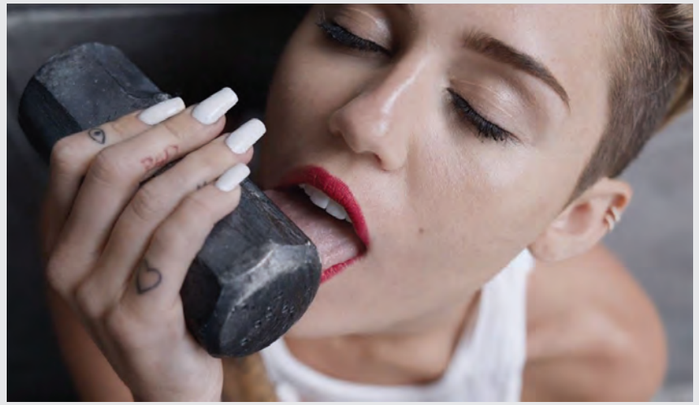
Combine this lack of diversity in the people making A&R decisions *and* the people creating the songs and you have a troubling situation. One where, most of the time in modern pop, a collection of creative males are – perhaps sub-consciously – pushing what *they* might like to hear and see, or at least guessing what someone else, who has vastly different experiences and tastes to their own, might respond to.

This is not only boring and one-note – it makes little business sense. Because evidence suggests that, actually, tuning into the tastes of young women is an agenda that record companies should be putting front and centre right now. According to research conducted by Kantar Worldpanel for the BPI, the average annual spend of UK females aged under 35 on paid streaming in 2016 rose £12.98 on the prior year – or 64% – to £33.35.

Want to take a guess how men in the same age group compared? They were the biggest spenders, granted, with a £40.27 yearly outlay on premium subscription music services. But the annual growth in this figure was significantly smaller – up £8.01, or 46%, on 2015.

So, if your fastest-growing paid streaming audience on a monetary basis is females under 35, is it an economically astute idea to be making wholesale creative decisions that cut their gender completely out of the loop?

The phenomenon of creative decision-making even partly moving away from a single, typical executive demographic is a big talking point right now. Films like Wonder Woman (directed by a female) and Black Panther have broken Box Office records while boldly shunning long-held views about what 'typical' audiences want to be entertained by.



"The average annual spend by UK women under 35 on paid streaming in the UK rose 64% in 2016."

Human beings are ever-learning creatures – we pick up ideas on how to behave by a pop culture which has, generally speaking, historically taught women to exploit sex appeal in order to gain popularity and absorb power.

But I would argue that it's only possible to be *truly* respected and heard by refusing to be objectified. Real power comes from confidence in knowing you've got skills to bring to the table. If your inner-confidence is only found in the desire of others, it will be fleeting and unreliable.

Adele and Ed Sheeran continually display this deep confidence, and we pay all the more attention to their record-breaking talents because of it. If I think back to the music that's had the biggest impact on me and those I know, it's always born out of a pure love for that artist and their output – not cheap visual stimuli. (Well, maybe aside from Aaron Carter, whose poster adorned my wall when I was seven.)

The music business has such amazing power to influence and enact change across nations. As the world threatens to enter a new age of inter-gender enlightenment, will we have more female songwriters, more female perspectives, more female authenticity in music, and less keenness to distract and titillate?

The biggest difference between the advertising and music industry is that one is selling products, while the other is selling talent.

Yes, the music business has become corporatised, publicly-traded and profiteered over the past few decades – but it's still an industry completely built on heart and soul.

Which, as everyone knows, are the most powerful selling tools of all.

‘PEOPLE AT GIGS WERE ANNOYING LONG BEFORE SMARTPHONES’

Peter Robinson responds to calls from stars such as Jack White for audiences to put away their mobiles, and focus on the show in front of them…

In the mid-to-late-2000s a manager told me that one of his new bands had taken to calling certain members of their live audiences ‘bluefaces’. They were clearly visible from the stage, not because they were hurling themselves around the place in the grip of musical euphoria, but because even at the back of the room their motionless faces were illuminated by smartphones. They were people who’d come along hoping to sign the band, but spent most of the show texting and emailing. They were A&Rs.

A decade later it’s hard to identify A&Rs when most faces are now blue. At larger venues a combination of the smoking ban and smartphone flashlight proliferation has made ballads more well-illuminated than ever, but artists must also accept that if they do anything interesting on stage their reward will be the vision of a sea of black rectangles, as fans capture the moment.

Fans enjoying themselves on their own terms isn’t always popular, though, and inevitably it’s caught the attention of caterwauling technology-avoider Jack White, the Fun Police special constable who recently made it clear that phones would not be welcome at forthcoming shows. “We think you’ll enjoy looking up from your gadgets for a little while and experience music and our shared love of it IN PERSON,” was the hilariously pompous statement that went out. He’s partnered with Yondr, a company whose pouches are handed out to punters on the way into gigs; phones are sealed during the show, and can only be unlocked in designated areas.

An anti-phone stance isn’t just the domain of self-styled pop misanthropes. At the start of this year Annie Mac told one weekly music periodical that her “fucking vibe” had been killed by what she described as modern clubland’s “constant kind of need for documentation of the night”. A collective emotional charge was being lost, she said, adding that “you’ve got a fucking screen in front of you that you have to record everything on [and] it really takes away that initial base level of connection”.

“Cheers Jack, but if I’ve paid over £50 plus booking fee, I’d like to take a couple of snaps.”

I’m not interested in embarking on a beef with Annie Mac, who stands as one of the UK music industry’s 28 best humans, and her concerns seem to come from a place of genuine passion for clubbing. Honking luddite Jack White, on the other hand, seems mainly concerned with the volume of his applause: in 2014 he complained that he was “wasting time” performing for people who “can’t even clap because they have a phone in one hand and a drink in the other”, and his proposed solution is totally out of touch with how smartphones form a part of any social event. “For those looking to do some social media postings, let us help you with that,” runs the only-very-slightly patronising statement. “Our official tour photographer will be posting photos and videos after the show … repost our photos & videos as much as you want and enjoy a phone-free, 100% human experience.”

Cheers Jack, but if I’ve paid over 50 quid plus booking fee for a concert ticket I think I’d quite like to take a couple of snaps if that’s okay — and this is a feeling that only becomes more acute when we consider big arena or stadium shows, with tickets that routinely pass the £100 barrier.

I went to see Lady Gaga in Milan recently and Instagrammed a short video of the moment she made her way from the main stage, across a bridge to one of the show’s two b-stages. People commenting on my video — irony alert! — complained about how the audience was full of people holding up their phones and I kind of thought, hold on, this is a fucking amazing moment. Lady Gaga is walking above their heads! Who wouldn’t want a souvenir of that?

I don’t even have a problem standing behind people FaceTiming an entire song to a friend who couldn’t make it, either, because they couldn’t afford a ticket that represents their entire month’s disposable income or because tickets mysteriously sold out within 30 seconds of going on sale only to reappear on the secondary ticket market. I accept that you might find this annoying, but newsflash: people at gigs were annoying long before smartphones.

Memories are all very well, and ‘experiencing the moment’ is nice, but the moment is gone in a second, and memories fade over time. Last year I embarked on the harrowing 11 day process of consolidating the last 20 years’ worth of photos into one digital library and along the way I encountered snapshots of things I would never, ever have remembered. Take, for instance, one heroically shoddy shot of three hapless warblers in pristine monochrome garb we might term ‘Westlife Whites’.

The shot triggered something in my brain: I immediately identified the trio as F.L.Y., who’d performed for media at the Bavarian Embassy ahead of the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest. I’d probably forgotten about that performance within 48 hours of it happening, and it certainly hadn’t crossed my mind at any other point during the intervening 15 years. But there it was.

Then there was a photo from, apparently, my birthday in 2009, of a man installing a billboard poster for Michael Jackson’s This Is It run at the O2. Later in the year it seems I was in a branch of HMV, where they were selling point-of-sale badges bearing the legend ‘I ♥ TITS’.

With all due respect to F.L.Y., these moments are all hugely inconsequential, even if the HMV snap probably says more about the collapse of high street music retail than a hundred news stories. But those photos and tens of thousands of others tell the story of my twenties and early-thirties, and it’s a story that would have massive gaps if I hadn’t taken photos.

I wonder if Jack White, not exactly a stranger to the concept of self-importance, has fully considered the ramifications of pre-emptively erasing himself from his fans’ future memories?

KEY SONGS IN THE LIFE OF…

Guy Moot

The musical making of the most successful UK exec in the global publishing business…

People use the phrase 'a real music man' a lot. Way too much, in fact. And almost always inappropriately.

What they perhaps mean is an industry executive who actually likes music, and maybe knows something about it.

Which, if you think about it for more than a non-plussed minute, hardly seems worthy of dedicated *nomenclature*.

Guy Moot is rather different. He, you suspect, would be described as 'a real music man' by his colleagues on the factory floor, or at the digital start-up, had he somehow failed to find his way to where he belongs, at the heart of the music industry and, specifically, behind the desk marked President, Worldwide Creative at Sony ATV – a role that makes him one of the most important (and respected) execs in the global publishing sector.

No wonder, then, that he curses as much as thanks *MBUK* for the opportunity to choose the five songs that have meant the most to him across more than three decades in the business – and even longer as an obsessive fan.

"Can I not have 30?", he begs, skipping straight past the more standard bargaining positions of 10 or 20.

Eventually he settles on a journey that takes him from 'the shires', to New York, to London and ultimately to the top of his game, powered by songs that reflect eclectic taste, underpinned by a lasting passion for cutting edge urban music...

1. The Police, Message In A Bottle (1979)

This is a track from the very first album I bought, Reggatta de Blanc.

I was a young provincial boy and this album made a real impression on me. It showed me the value of songwriting and it also gave me a love of reggae – there wasn't a lot of reggae where I grew up in the middle of the shires, so this was quite a revelation. Reggatta de Blanc was one of those records I wore out through playing it over and over again, because back then they were your main source of entertainment.

We're lucky enough to look after Sting's catalogue now and I must say I still get a little nervous around him. I have told him that, yes – but I imagine a lot of people tell him variations on that. Plus, I can't go on about it too much or I become a creepy fan rather than his extremely professional music publisher.

"I got involved in hip-hop and dance music, which was in tune with my passions."

2. Mobb Deep, Shook Ones (1994)

I was lucky enough to be going to New York a lot, and then live in New York [working for EMI Publishing], and I look back now and realise how lucky I was to be in that city at that time.

There was a real explosion in hip-hop and there were a lot of seminal dance clubs at their height.

I talk to people and they say, Wow, you were there? You saw that? You saw them? And it makes me wish I'd kept a better documented record of it. Instead, of course, I was drinking, clubbing and partying [laughs]. They were incredible times and to me Mobb Deep epitomised that East Coast/Queensbridge sound. Yhere was a lot of social commentary and people talked about their neighbourhoods, so it's very rooted in New York.

I could have picked 20 early hip-hop records, but this one has always held a special place for me and as soon as I hear it I think about driving through New York and the whole atmosphere of the place at that time.

I was a talent scout and before then I'd been doing nine gigs in shithole venues on a Monday night, which was not something I loved. It wasn't me, it wasn't my culture, even down to the way people dressed.

So when early hip-hop came along and I got more involved in dance music, that was more in tune with where my passions were.

3. Jamiroquai, When You Gonna Learn? (1993)

Back in London it was a very special time for rare groove. I was listening to a lot of old funk, a lot of old disco, going back to where a lot of those breaks came from in those classic hip-hop tracks.

It was just one of those times when a lot of things came together: it was Norman Jay, it was Subterranea, it was the time the Brand New Heavies came through…

Jay [Kay] took that whole period and that whole treasure trove of music and put it into what we then called acid jazz.

I remember bumping into one of his managers on Frith Street and Jay was with him, this funny looking fellow

in a hat. He thrust the lyrics of When You Gonna Learn? [into Guy's hand] and said, I've just written this.

I first heard the actual record on Norman Jay's show on Kiss – which was still illegal then – and I just loved it.

Eddie Piller's Acid Jazz label was right opposite me in the Charing Cross Road, I knew Jay's two managers, and so I made a deal.

It was a very special moment and a very special, game-changing year for London music; it was funky, it was soulful and Jay was such a star. I don't think he got the credit or awards he deserved back then as a songwriter.

4. Roy Davis Jr, Gabriel (1996)

It's just a very special record. It's one of those records that can never be recreated and that you can't pull apart.

It's kind of a house record, but it's very urban, the horns are off key, rhythmically the patterns are all over the place, but it just has a resonance with me.

People often ask who's your favourite signing, and of course I've been blessed to work with incredible artists, but this is without doubt one of my favourite moments because it's a record that I love and a record that I still play.

I also think it's a reference point for a lot of people right now. It was kind of a one-off thing, and in a strange way I'm quite glad, because it was just a perfect moment.

I was listening to a lot of North London pirates at the weekend, then going into the record shop on the Monday, phoning the number on the sleeve and signing it; that's how I signed a lot of those seminal early UK garage tracks, just before artists like So Solid Crew and Miss Dynamite – who I also worked with – broke through into the mainstream. It was a beautiful scene and I was very lucky to be in the right place at the right time.

5. Amy Winehouse, Take The Box (2003)

It's so hard to leave out so many great artists and great songs, but I have to include Amy.

Take The Box is a lesser known track [from debut album, Frank], but it's my favourite of hers, mainly because of the vocal performance. She hits one note in this track which will forever send tingles down my spine. When you discover an artist who can do that for you, it's a very special thing.

I love the emotion of it, I love her phrasing of it, it's just breathtaking.

Someone gave me a tape of two songs, I think You Send Me Flying was one, I can't remember the second, and it just hit everything for me.

I met her, she came in and she had something. I remember she had very dirty nails, but aside from that, she just had that thing. Sometimes the ones you can't work out immediately are the ones who go on to be the greatest, and Amy was certainly complex – she had that extra something.

She actually sung at my wedding, on her 21st birthday. No-one knew who she was at that time, so there are probably a lot of people who look back now and wish they'd paid more attention!

She was very sweet. I said, Amy, don't worry, it's your 21st birthday. She said, No, Guy, I want to come and do it, I want to sing at your wedding, and she did. She sang, The Girl From Ipanema and The Greatest Love Of All.

There was a difficult period between Frank and Back To Black; I couldn't get her to write anything. When she was in our studio she was more likely to be sleeping than writing and we were kind of at our wits' end.

I was working with Mark Ronson, I saw him New York and I ran through a bunch of projects that were out there, including Amy – although I said she might be more trouble than the So Solid Crew!

To Mark's credit he picked up on it, they got in the studio and I called them up, they both said it was going really well – but I might have arranged 10 sessions that day, that's what we do as publishers; I was doing my job.

I remember getting the long, unmixed version of Back To Black and I would just go for drives playing it, immersing myself in it. It was an amazing record and she was an amazing artist.

DON'T WORRY: YOU'RE SCARED FOR A REASON

Jane Dyball has a simple, sincere message to the music business: sense when you're frightened, and embrace it…

A few years ago someone told me that acupuncture was good for dealing with stress, so off I trotted.

When I turned up she asked me to stick out my tongue. Her diagnosis was shocking. "That's not stress," she said. "That's fear."

I realised with horror that I had been afraid my whole career.

Originally, I was afraid of being uncool. My family, school and university friends all knew that I was uncool. I knew I was uncool. How to hide that from my colleagues in the coolest industry of all?

When I went into business affairs without being a qualified lawyer I was terrified of going into battle with famously tough music industry lawyers.

When I started having to do public speaking, I wrote out every word that I would have to say. My biggest fear was not having a lecturn to lean on to stop my papers from shaking in my hands.

When I started going to industry meetings I was too scared to voice an opinion – really.

Then I met a wise man. He was quite drunk and told me about all of the stupid decisions he'd made in his very long career. "The thing is, Dyball," he slurred, "people think the music industry is about success, but it's not – it's about failure." He explained how, decades earlier, he had turned down the opportunity to manage David Bowie because – quote – he didn't want to manage a "mime artist".

(The same gentleman later turned his failures into a highly entertaining Powerpoint presentation for me called 'Seven Sackings'.)

I started to realise that the things that made me scared usually turned out okay. I was still a terrible public speaker, but the world didn't end each time I had a crack at it. In fact, gradually more people asked me to do it and so I gradually got a bit better at it.

Over the years I have seen a lot of fear in the music industry. Fear of the internet (I actually, genuinely once heard the words "how do we make it stop?" in an industry meeting during the '90s), fear of losing your job, fear of making the wrong decision, fear of trusting your instincts, fear of identifying Emperors with no clothes, fear of looking stupid, fear of ripping up the rule book, fear of saying the wrong thing and fear of not fitting in.

> **"I was too scared to voice an opinion – really."**

That time at the acupuncturist I was even afraid of being afraid.

Now I try and harness that fear and use it to propel me forwards. All the evidence shows that making the brave decision normally means making the right decision: signing the plain ginger bloke from the sticks; speaking out against bullying and harassment; speaking in public at all; standing by what you think when you believe it's the blindingly obvious; having principles; taking the odd risk.

Fortune favours the brave. Let's all help each other to be brave!

‘Artists have figured out you need to come into the game with your own situation’

How DJ Semtex became one of the UK’s most influential A&R execs and broadcasters – and helped turn Sony’s urban music game around...

There were two things going through DJ Semtex’s mind when he first met Jay-Z.

One of them, he admits with typical candour, was sheer pinch-me reverence. Or to put it in Semtex’s exact words: “Fucking hell; if the boys could see me now.”

The second, however, had, and continues to have, a profound impact on the Sony exec’s professional endeavours – and his plethora of industry talents.

“I realised in that moment that I just wasn’t doing enough,” says Semtex of his 2006 *tête-à-tête* with the rap legend.

“Here’s a guy who’s the inspiration of everything, and yet he’s a president of a label, he’s releasing a DVD, he’s doing a Wembley Arena show, he’s launching a clothing line and a vodka brand... and, in my opinion, he’s doing it all while being the greatest hip-hop artist of all time. It was like being hit by an epiphany: I’ve got to do more.”

By this point, Semtex was already something of a polymath in transatlantic urban music. He was working in A&R at Mercury Records/Def Jam, while establishing himself as one of the founding figures of BBC Radio 1Xtra, where he continues to broadcast to this day.

Meanwhile, he was opening shows on the decks for the likes of Mos Def, Dead Prez and Asher Roth – and was Dizzee Rascal’s official tour DJ.

Inspired by Mr Carter, though, Semtex was about to take his multifaceted skillset to the next level – becoming one of the most influential figures in modern British hip-hop, while helping light the fuse on its mainstream explosion.

“I did the best street campaigns in those days. Totally illegal, of course...”

Semtex was born John Fairbanks in Manchester, 1974 – son to a council worker mother and a retail manager turned ‘white van man’ father. His brother handed him down the hip-hop bug in his early teens, and the addiction mushroomed.

While studying Human Communications at Manchester Met University in the early ‘90s, Semtex spent most of his time DJ’ing professionally, including sets at the Hacienda, while hosting shows for weekly pirate radio stations.

“I was promoting my own shows, and that’s where I taught myself marketing, flyering, and street posters – I got my hands dirty,” he says. “I started contacting labels, asking if they had any promotional stuff they wanted distributed in the clubs, making those connections.”

The labels knew Semtex was packing hip-hop fans into the clubs, not least because, as he proudly beams: “I did the best street campaigns in those days, without equal. They were totally illegal, of course…”

In 1997, Sony lured him to Big London to head up the first semi-official UK major label guerrilla marketing ‘street team’ – where he ended up pushing records for Destiny’s Child, Lauryn Hill, Nas, Wu-Tang Clan and more. From there, he joined Universal’s Mercury/Def Jam UK, initially as Urban Promotions Manager before moving into A&R. It was at Mercury that his life-changing chinwag with Jay-Z took place – and inspired him to fill what was left of his diary with extra-curricular commitments, all designed to push the British scene forward.

At Mercury, Semtex worked directly for Jason Iley, who left the Universal label and joined Roc Nation in 2013 as its President of recorded music in New York.

When Iley returned to London little over a year later, as the CEO and Chairman of Sony Music UK & Ireland, it didn’t take him long to make a beeline for Semtex, who joined his ex-boss as the major’s Director Of Artist Development in 2015.

In practical terms, Semtex’s role at Sony today is that of a company wide link-man. He uses his impeccable urban music network to discover talent early before passing his intel on to Sony’s labels. Then, once an artist signs, he contributes with A&R and marketing expertise.

That’s exactly what happened with J Hus, who Semtex brought to Sony’s Black Butter Records in 2015, having been tipped off by his old friend Gavin Douglas – then head of music at Reprezent Radio.

Hus’s debut album, the Mercury-nominated Common Sense, has since gone Gold in the UK – spawning singles which have changed the lexicon of British pop music, such as Bouff Daddy and Did You See.

Hus’s journey at Black Butter began with uncommon commitment from his label team – Semtex at their side – throughout the trauma of gang violence and even the threat of a custodial sentence.

As we’ve established, Semtex’s responsibilities today certainly don’t stop within the confines of Sony HQ.

He’s also an author (of the acclaimed genre history, Hip-Hop Raised Me), a broadcaster (on BBC 1Xtra), a journalist and an in-demand club DJ.

In addition, he’s now a Spotify podcaster, having been recruited by the service to present in-depth discussions with the likes of Sneakbo, Michael Dapaah, Dave and Bugzy Malone, as well as JAE5 – the long-time producer of J Hus.

MBUK catches up with Semtex in his office at Sony HQ to find out more about his life, his remarkable work ethic and his views on the future for British urban artists…

You’re a DJ, podcaster, label executive, author, radio broadcaster... how do you divide up your time?

The way I look at it, the hotter and busier I am outside Sony, the more beneficial I am inside Sony. I work with a lot of artists behind the scenes, and I get the best of both worlds: I understand where they’re coming from but I also understand where this company is

coming from. I really appreciate this situation, because you get a lot of those people in life who think if you're not at a desk then you're [skiving]. But it's actually more beneficial for Sony that I'm in a studio with someone who's telling me about great new artists.

The myth about modern A&R is that labels are sat around scouting for acts on SoundCloud and YouTube. Where do you get to hear about exciting new acts first?
Word of mouth. I couldn't say there's a site, station or streaming service [that I rely on], but I always trust my inner circle. Normally if the same name comes up in four or five conversations, that means it's poppin'. It was like that with J Hus – Gavin told me I needed to be onto him. I checked out Hus's music and immediately loved it. It was street and raw, but he also had commercially astute records; the fact he'd taken lines from Pass The Dutchie on 'Want From Me', I was like, this guy understands the game. Lyrically what he was saying was totally different to everybody else, using different metaphors, using slang in a different way.

It's a sweeping statement, but for me, Hus is the most significant UK MC since Dizzee Rascal. Dizzee used Cockney slang totally different to everybody else. 'Oi!', all of that, it was totally original. I saw it in Hus's early tracks; 'Dem Boy Paigon' is an African kid using Jamaican references within UK rap, totally audacious and totally [flicks middle finger] to the establishment.

How did you sign him into Sony?
When he dropped Lean & Bop, I said to Jason [Iley], 'We have to bring him in.' Columbia were interested, but it was before Ferdy arrived – Hus has come from the street, he's very raw, so I was a little [unsure] that was the right fit. I feed off energy, and when I took it to Black Butter, Joe and Henry were like, 'Yep!' right away.

Working with Black Butter has been an amazing experience, because those guys live it every day. There was a time in the beginning where me and Joe would be calling each other at 10pm at night, and whenever we saw those calls come in, it was like, 'Oh f*ck, what's happened now?'

To hear about a situation where Hus had been stabbed twice in the space of a week... I hadn't seen that before. To visit a young artist in hospital is not something a record label typically signs up for; seeing him there, fucked, in a hospital bed with a punctured lung. You're looking at him like, I don't know the street politics here, all I know is this is a massively talented kid who's making some amazing music. So you're like, 'Everything will be alright - you'll be cool.' That's all you can say.

I don't know any other label other than Black Butter which would have stood by an artist in a situation like that. When Hus was going to court, everyone was in his corner. You've got Joe [Gossa] and Duncan [Scott] turning up to court in suits – and then you've got Hus arriving in a red Adidas tracksuit! [laughs]

We did a two single deal with Hus, and then we were told: 'There might be a bit of a problem... Hus might be getting sent down. Might be six months, might be 12 months.' Oh, okay. But Joe and I were in complete agreement: this guy's going to be hot, now's the time to commit with an album deal. Again, I don't know any other label that would lay down an album deal in that situation. The way Black Butter have stood by Hus through thick and thin is admirable and they deserve all the success that's followed.

Creatively, Hus is a very strong-minded guy – both him and JAE5 together. There's been no, 'Let's do the pop single,' or, 'We need you to do this in order to get that.' None of that blackmail bullshit, fear-mongering to work with 'shit-hot producers' who don't really understand the music.

It's no secret that a few years ago, UK hip-hop acts were being A&R'd to create radio hits. But now that doesn't happen, which brings out more authenticity in the music. Do you think the power balance has shifted?
To answer that properly we have to go back to Boy In Da Corner coming out in 2003, and then the timeline of Dizzee's albums – Showtime, then Maths + English. Diz had always been uncompromising, fuck you, but his music cut through. Diz has a gift for that.

But when he did Dance Wiv Me [in 2009], he wanted to do something different. I was at Radio 1's Big Weekend when he first met Calvin Harris.

Calvin was walking past and Diz was just like, 'Oi! Yeah you... come here... I want to work with you!' Diz did three albums of hard, groundbreaking, genre-defining music, and he wanted to flip it. Dance Wiv Me was considered a commercial record, but it was still cool.

The success he had with that, in my opinion, encouraged other artists to try and do the same thing. I don't agree with the whole, 'The majors tried to change it and make everyone create commercial records' idea. The artists wanted the money as well. Some of them were fighting to make radio hits, and they didn't need to. But they wanted the festival slots, they wanted the cash, they wanted to break through. The end result was that there's a lot of shit that never gets played five years later. It was a learning experience for everyone.

Look at Skepta: after he came out with the Blacklisted album [on 3Beat in 2012], he rebuilt himself. Skepta's definitely been a catalyst for the, 'Fuck it, just do *you*' approach. When he came out with That's Not Me, that inspired this whole independent, Fuck it, just put it out thing.

Semtex whips up the crowd at Reading Festival

"For me, J Hus is the most significant UK MC since Dizzee Rascal."

With DJ Khaled

Chatting with Sneakbo on the Who We Be podcast

Combine that with the fact there's a new generation of kids, Hus's generation, coming through, and they really don't give a shit. Hus isn't gassed by any kind of industry standard. He did a session with Boi-1da, Drake's producer, and as much as there was mutual respect within the session, Hus wasn't fazed or blinded by the pressure to work with a renowned hit maker. Hus goes straight back with JAE5, and they have a relationship and chemistry that works for them.

You're finding that with more artists now. If you look at Dave, and how he works, he's in his own zone. Artists have matured, and they've figured out that you need to come into the game with your own team, your own situation. It's about not looking to people who don't really get the culture to come up with a solution. Artists now want to partner up with people who understand their vision, and who can help them amplify what they do. It's a different day.

> ***"The only reason I got into A&R was because I believed in Dizzee."***

How did you make the leap from promotion executive to A&R at Mercury?

Originally, I moved over to Mercury from Sony because they were having problems selling Ja Rule and Jay Z records in the UK [puzzled look, laughs]. This was a few years before Jason [Iley] arrived, and the only reason I got into A&R was because I believed in Dizzee. I asked Wiley to do a remix of Ludacris at one point, he introduced me to Dizzee, and that's how I started talking to Cage [aka. Dizzee manager Nick Detnon]. When I heard Boy In Da Corner, I was like, I need to be involved in this.

So how come XL signed Dizzee and Mercury didn't?

[Sighs] I didn't really know the game. I was banging on the table at Mercury, trying to get them to sign Diz and... to put it diplomatically, not everyone was on the same page.

I was like, 'Let me speak to [then Def Jam US boss] Kevin Liles – he gave his blessing for my role, and he's my boy.' I was like, 'Yo, if you really mean what you say about Def Jam becoming something important in the UK, this is the kid to do it.'

Kevin was like, 'If you want me to do this, if you really want me to fight Lucian, if you really want me to go all out...' And ten minutes after the call I realised, Fuck this, there's too much resistance here – we're not going to get it.

Then I got Diz a support slot with Jay-Z at Wembley Arena – I've still got no idea how I managed to do that! [laughs] And the day he played that show also happened to be the day it was decided officially, yeah, Universal aren't backing this – we're not going for him.

That night I saw XL stood by the side of the stage and I was just like... fuck. I knew they'd get it.It was a massive learning experience. To be fair to Kevin Liles, a couple years later he did admit he called it wrong, and 'didn't see it' at the time.

There's a nice ending to the story too because a couple of weeks later [Dizzee] was doing a radio takeover on BBC 1Xtra and the DJ didn't turn up. So they were like, 'Sem, you about?' At the time I had this van full of my records, so I was ready to go. I drove over, we did an amazing show... and that was it: I was Diz's DJ for the next eight years.

What were your memories of that period, trying to balance your DJ commitments with being a label exec?

Just the craziest shit. I'd do a show on a Sunday in Belgium, then get a 6am flight the next day. Then I'd be in a label meeting at Mercury for 9am, with a flight to somewhere else booked for midday. It was stupid! Jason would call me up and be like, 'Sem, where are you?' And I'd be like, 'Erm, I just had to leave the office for a bit'... at a festival in Switzerland [laughs].

Jason's decision to bring you over to Sony in 2015 just ahead of UK urban music really starting to blow up looks pretty clever in hindsight. Why did you decide to join him again?

When I was doing A&R at Mercury, there were a couple of projects where Jason backed me all the way, when other people in the building didn't.

We did Mr Hudson, Chase & Status, Maverick Sabre and D'banj together. Chase & Status's No More Idols album was an amazing experience. The team that was on that project, including Will and Saul, Jho Oakley and Jason, was exemplary - it was a masterclass in putting an album campaign together.

With Maverick Sabre, a few people [at Universal] didn't get it or understand who he was – Jason did.

Jason's move to Roc Nation gave him the best education in the urban music experience. For an English person to go over to America and work with Jay Z – you're not getting a better education in the game than that.

Jason's that guy who puts a battery in your pack. He pushes you to be better, and there's not many people who can do that in life, let alone in this industry. When he works on a project, his attention to detail, his standards – it's meticulous.

The energy he brings is brilliant. And he understands artists – he knows what to say to them and how to interact with them; he understands the cultural references, and he understands which artists will have immediate hits and which artists will be incredible in two years' time.

This interview is happening before the BRIT Awards takes place, but the ceremony looks likely to rubber-stamp UK urban music's climb into the mainstream. Where can the scene go from here?

I don't see it in those terms. What's important is more great music, more sincerity, more audacity. There are no industry measures for those things.

The challenge now is to do something different from Hus, from Skepta, or from Stormzy, in a way that's sincere to the culture. UK rap and grime is getting bigger, but in order to sustain that growth, you need to continue with innovation, creativity, passion and originality.

As for J Hus, being nominated for three BRIT Awards, to me, that means he's won whatever the outcome. He's come through with an uncompromising body of work which surpassed everything anyone expected it to do.

I had people from other labels saying, It's good - it'll do 30,000. And me and Joe were like, 'No - you're mad.'

He's going to come with it on his second album, because the work he's doing already... he's saying things no-one else is saying. He's grown, and it's clear to see how much he wants it.

You've already interviewed the likes of JAE5, Sneakbo, Dave and others for the Spotify Who We Be podcasts. Why are you doing them and what do you hope they'll become?

I'm a nerd and a fan first – and hip-hop really did raise me. Chuck D from Public Enemy wrote the forward for my book, which was mind-blowing, and he described me as a "generator across generations".

That really impressed on me that I've got a responsibility to get this right in terms of documenting the culture. I started doing my own 'Hip-Hop Raised Me' podcast because I had all these interviews left from doing the book that weren't really appropriate for radio. But doing a podcast yourself can be a very cold, solitary experience.

The Who We Be podcast is the natural progression of that. And it means working with a friend and colleague who was at 1Xtra, Austin Daboh, who's been a huge and important supporter of the culture for a long time.

This podcast presents the stories of these artists. Getting Dave to talk about what happens when you actually get a call from Drake – that isn't out there like that.

Sneakbo was ahead of his time, and we have real history together. If you're Top 30 in this day and age you're poppin' – he was doing that whilst independent, and in prison, back in 2011!

The Bugzy Malone story is incredible, flat-out incredible. It's gripping; a kid from an area where I grew up. His story is like Rocky or Creed meets 8 Mile. He's a victim of his environment, home life, street life, but also one of the most positive, inspiring people you'll ever meet. He's a champion.

This is our history we're making right now, and these are stories that need to be shared with the world.

Semtex's tips for 2018

You won't find many people with their ear as close to the ground as Semtex. We asked him to pick three names of new artists to watch in 2018. He's what he came up with…

IAMDDB

"She's the future. An incredibly strong woman, a creative visionary – she does everything herself. She's released several EPs independently, she writes her own material, she's got a fashion line – she's a very, very exciting person, let alone artist. What she's done with her debut single, Shade, flipping the use of the word 'bitch', the negative connotation, it's all pretty amazing."

BIG HEATH

"You see a lot of pale imitations of Hus, Dave and others out there at the moment. But with Big Heath, it's totally different. It's traditional hip-hop, but it fits in with what's going on in UK urban music today too. He's a big white kid with glasses, not the most obvious looking rapper, but his stage show is incredible. It takes a lot to move me - I've seen all the greats in hip-hop, and the not-so-greats. But Heath kills it live. I also want to give a quick mention to Skengdo and AM – what they're doing is pure grease; audacious talk. It's the rawest street music at this moment in time. But the way they use words, their flows, I love it. It's also produced and mixed incredibly well."

SL

"He's an amazing talent and just 16 years old. He's the guy that's going to take that UK drill sound to the next level. Incredibly articulate, and like Dizzee, and Hus, his use of language is different to what everyone else is doing. He's the first from the UK drill scene to utilise melody, which hadn't been done before. Drill is relentlessly uncompromising, it's the hardest street sound, it's for people to mosh to. Tropical by SL is an amazing song – it goes off in the clubs, it sounds great on radio. He's got a big future ahead of him."

'It was a great 'fuck you' moment to the mainstream…'

We dug around in Semtex's photos to grab some of the best pics from his collection over the past 20 years - and the man himself told us why they matter to him…

Pirate radio with Lauryn Hill (1998)

"When I first started at Sony I was managing the street team and pirate radio promotion. This was around the launch of The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill. Lauryn was several hours behind schedule and heavily pregnant at the time. She promised to record more interviews if we could wait a few hours because she needed a break. We waited, she came back and did all the work, and agreed to this shot as long as we didn't show her 'baby bump'. It was a very magical moment; at the time she was a huge artist and didn't need to attend interviews with pirate stations, but she understood the importance of what they do."

The Sony street team with Destiny's Child (2001)

"I got my first job within the music industry thanks to Destiny's Child. Myself and the street team pretty much shadowed their career in the UK. This was when mainstream radio didn't play hip-hop or R&B unless it was overtly pop… sounds like crazy talk now. At the time I wasn't aware of how radio worked, I just knew that I could get No No No Pt. 2 by Destiny's Child poppin' in the streets, clubs, and on pirate radio. No No No charted at No.8 in the national chart without any airplay. It was a great 'fuck you' moment to the mainstream, and testament to the power of pirate radio, street DJs, and the Sony street team."

With Nas (2002)

"Back in 1998 I first met Nas in New York when I was promoting his I Am album. I was doing a syndicated interview for Pirate radio which didn't go too well because he was high as fuck!

"Fast-forward to 2002, the day I first officially started at BBC Radio 1Xtra, and my first official assignment was to interview Nas. He was totally different and did an amazing interview.

"I'm fortunate to have interviewed the rap god many times over the years – he is one of the cornerstones of hip-hop, a true legend."

With J Hus (2015)

"This was taken just after we signed him. It was a very challenging time for Hus and his core team, and it's inspiring to see how he is now in a very different place.

"It's been incredible to watch how he has grown as an artist and to witness his influence on popular culture.

"He is an iconic artist, with a world sound, who will go all the way. J Hus is the future."

Saul Klein (left) and Denzyl Feigelson

‘THE WORD IS OUT. ARTISTS ARE TELLING OTHER ARTISTS ABOUT US’

How Platoon has become the most disruptive company in the UK business – and, in the nicest possible way, mystified major labels everywhere…

They might not realise it, but some of the hottest artists in the world today owe a serious debt of gratitude to Kenny Loggins.

Yep. Footloose Kenny Loggins. (Ride into the) Danger Zone Kenny Loggins. Designer-bearded, snazzy-blazered, ‘80s synth-soundtracking Kenny Loggins. Bear with us here.

Over the past year, Platoon has emerged as one of the world’s most nattered-about, thought-provoking new music companies. Offering a range of distribution, funding and marketing services to emerging and ‘unsigned’ artists, the startup has partnered with arguably the two most anticipated new acts of 2018: New York-based Yebba and London-based Jorja Smith.

(In the previous issue of this very magazine, no lesser an authority than Zane Lowe said, “I try to steer away from predicting that someone will be ‘huge’… but Yebba will be fucking massive.” Jorja Smith, meanwhile, just became the first ever independent artist to bag a BRIT Award.)

Signings like these have made Platoon’s A&R hit rate the envy of the major labels. Other artists in its network with millions of streams to their name include the likes of Mr Eazi, Maleek Berry, Gabrielle Aplin and Raleigh Ritchie, while artists like Billie Eilish and Stefflon Don have been ‘incubated’ at Platoon before being migrated into major labels.

All of the artists mentioned above are wired into modern youth culture – and, to various extents, have wriggled out of the crosshairs of big-spending label A&R departments.

With all due respect, they are a world away from Kenny Loggins. And yet, it transpires, also not.

Platoon was co-founded in 2016 by two entrepreneurs: Denzyl Feigelson and Saul Klein. The duo had differing, but mutually impressive, track records – and a shared belief that artists (and not

only music artists) could, and increasingly would, achieve global success on their own terms.

Klein was the co-founder and CEO of movie rental service Lovefilm, which was acquired by Amazon in 2011, and consequently became the lynchpin of Jeff Bezos' Amazon Prime Video service. Klein is also a venture capital kingpin with a predilection for music apps – having headed funding centres whose investments cover the likes of Songkick, last.fm, SoundCloud, Sofar Sounds and Sonos.

Feigelson, meanwhile, is well-known to the UK music industry, having been an integral part of Apple's international music strategy – not to mention the 10-year iTunes Festival – for over a decade as a special advisor to the Cupertino giant.

He was a close confidant to the Steve Jobs circle throughout Apple's third golden age: from the iPod through the iPhone, the iPad, iTunes and into the beginnings of what would become Apple Music.

Three decades before all off that, however, Feigelson was a talent manager, working with a string of artists in his native South Africa. After helping Paul Simon alchemise his Graceland album into a classic, Feigelson moved his business to the Brill Building in New York, post-Simon's multi-year Graceland global tour – before eventually settling in Los Angeles following an invite to work on A&M's Windham Hill imprint under Herb Alpert.

From there, in the early nineties, Feigelson joined legendary 'Supermensch' Shep Gordon at LA-based management outfit Alive Enterprises, looking after the likes of Johnny Clegg, the Gypsy Kings and – guess who? – Kenny Loggins.

It was entirely thanks to Loggins, 25 years ago, that an elemental belief was galvanised within Feigelson – one which would go on to form a defining philosophy of Platoon.

"One day Kenny says, 'I want to make this children's record,'" recalls Feigelson. "He was raising a family and he was tired of all the kids' records they were playing, so he decided he'd make one himself. I thought it was a great idea."

Feigelson swung by the HQ of Sony Music, to whom Loggins was signed as a bankable property, and explained the concept. He thought it would be a straightforward affair, with an advance wired their way in due course. He was badly wrong.

"I excitedly pitched the label and told them about the album, and they said, 'No way – this is career suicide, it'll never work. Plus on page 126 of Kenny's contract it clearly says you have to deliver pop albums in the vein of your first record. Contractually, therefore, you cannot make this album.'"

Feigelson was perplexed, telling the label in no uncertain terms that he thought their actions were "unfair to the creative process". After some fiery exchanges (not quite suitable for print), he informed Sony that Loggins would make the record outside of his contract with the act's own money – which he subsequently did, for a total cost of $125,000.

"[Sony's] reaction was, You'll be wasting your money, and you'll come back to us when that cash runs out," recalls Feigelson.

Fans of David vs. Goliath upsets, feast your eyes: Loggins' album, Return To Pooh Corner, became an extremely rare independently-issued success story on its release in 1994.

Featuring songs written by John Lennon, Rickie Lee Jones, Jimmy Webb and Paul Simon, it was Grammy-nominated and went on to sell over half a million copies.

Sony consequently paid up to bring the record in-house – even forming a label around its 'stars do music for kids' concept, called Sony Wonder.

Feigelson's next move, interestingly enough, was to quit music entirely. He semi-retired, skipped off to Hawaii and started a direct mail flower business, shipping rare local varieties to the US via FedEx – all purchased via a rudimentary online ordering system.

And then, one day, he had a brainwave. "I realised that the internet would revolutionise the music business for the exact same reason my flower business was successful," he says. "All these amazing artists who make records that aren't of interest to labels would be able to find an audience directly."

"If you're an independent creative, the economics have tipped in your favour."

Feigelson built Artists Without A Label (AWAL), one of the world's first direct-to-fan record websites, and moved back to California.

AWAL customers could order CDs online for $10 plus postage – Feigelson had the discs stacked up in his garage. AWAL artists would keep ownership of their copyrights, and receive the lion's share of the financial proceeds.

"What the experience with Kenny and the children's album taught me at that time was to do the exact opposite of a record deal," says Feigelson. "Instead of a 100-page contract, I created a one page contract; instead of the artist owning 15%, the artist owned 85%; instead of exclusive, I made it non-exclusive."

By 2001, AWAL was selling records by hundreds of artists across both CD and download. Feigelson soon caught the eye of Steve Jobs and Apple, and started a journey which would consume the next stage of his professional life.

After working on the iTunes US launch in 2003, Feigelson moved to London in 2004 to work on the international expansion of the download platform. However, he kept AWAL going as a background concern – eventually selling it to Kobalt for a seven-figure sum in 2012.

And that – admittedly rather skipping over the biggest digital revolution the music industry has ever seen – takes us up to the beginnings of Platoon, a venture which is enabling Feigelson to paint his passion for artist independence on a far broader canvas.

In the run up to launching Platoon in 2015, Feigelson and Klein held multiple meetings with emergent independent artists to ask what they needed to get their careers motoring in the age of SoundCloud, YouTube, Apple Music and Spotify.

The duo were told time and again that these acts had a simple plan: building their presence on SoundCloud and social media to the point that major labels would start flocking towards them. The fundamental idea of Platoon, then, was to offer a new option: providing the functions and expertise that a major label might inject into an artist's career – but with a deal heavily weighted in favour of the talent.

Today, when you snoop around the gleaming Platoon offices at Tileyard, North London, you'll find recording studios and creative edit suites on site – spaces for creative minds to fulfil their potential without the need for funding derived from traditional sources.

This level of high-touch A&R resource, combined with strong, data-driven distribution, marketing and promotional capabilities, is at the heart of Platoon's sudden-seeming impact.

"We believe that artists do their best work when they have creative and economic freedom," explains Klein. "That's absolutely true in the world of software and business, and it's absolutely true in the world of music."

Platoon also has its eyes and ears wide open to other creative sectors – books, video, education etc. – and will look to apply the same model to those industries in the future.

Adds Klein: "If you're an independent creative today, the economics have tipped in your favour. There are 3.5bn people with smartphones in the world; by 2020, that will be up to 5bn.

"If I look 10 years out, with all of the platforms we already have and imagining those which are yet to be introduced, I just can't see a world of a dominant major label system."

None of this, however, adequately explains Platoon's prolific and prodigious ability to spot and sign talent early, and to associate itself so closely with a new wave of commercially formidable new artists.

Take Mr Eazi, for example. Platoon helped to fund his various projects and create his video for single Leg Over for under £5,000. Released last year, it's now attracted over 30m plays on YouTube.

In fact, across Platoon's 200-strong artist roster, the company monitored just under a billion streams on all platforms in 2017.

"There's no website, no submission process – the 'secret sauce' is simply our ears, and that our network is amazing," Feigelson says of Platoon's A&R potency. "Now the word is out, artists are telling other artists about us."

What those artists will be presented with in

Jorja Smith


Mr Eazi

response: Platoon's enviable track record to date – and a ringing endorsement of the upsides of remaining independent; creatively and economically free.

Adds Feigelson: "Artists like Yebba, Eazi and Jorja thrive on real-time creative freedom.

"I've seen so many artists, working under pressure, lose their light over the decades. They have all this energy and this magic. But the process can be hard on their innate creative process."

MBUK understands that the aspirational Platoon deal sees the company offer career-long support, creative freedom and marketing firepower in exchange for a minority stake in an artist's independent business.

The firm also recently launched its own publishing company, allowing it to cross-pollinate in the expansion of an artist's career. For example, an act can take out a publishing advance, and recoup it with their masters income.

With Klein's background in mind, these kind of structures are no surprise.

"We've got a long-term perspective on our artists and how the industry's going to change in the coming years," says Klein. "In the venture world, if you find someone with a truly great idea, you have to take a 7-10 year view. If they do well, you do well – that's the right kind of alignment."

Where Klein says this comparison loses its relevancy for Platoon is at the point of the 'e' word: exit.

When a venture capitalist invests in a startup, often it's with the hope that a big payday will come down the line via an acquisition. In artist land, that big cheque is, as we stand today, typically coming from one direction: the major labels.

Platoon-signed artists such as Billie Eilish (Interscope) and Stefflon Don (Polydor) have taken that cheque after building a redoubtable fanbase in lockstep with Platoon.

Won't that always be a challenge to the startup's model? It helps artists construct a brand and market presence, only for a corporation to swoop in just when these acts' commercial appeal is going mainstream?

"We're pretty label-friendly," responds Feigelson. "We have great relationships with every label and we often have 'can we do this together?' conversations."

Feigelson takes pride in the fact that Platoon played a role in helping Stefflon Don and her management think through deal structures that were more artist-friendly ahead of signing her agreement with Polydor/Universal.

"I really do think a global artist will break through Platoon and it will change perceptions," he says.

"You've got years of the deep-rooted pattern [from the majors]: 'In order to be a global superstar you need investment and global infrastructure, you need boots on the ground, you need big


Jorja Smith and Stormzy

money spent on international.' This is all true, of course, and can certainly work for a select group of artists. But we live a different world now."

As opposed to spending "big money", says Feigelson, Platoon is laser-focused on using multiple data points to guide how and when it invests in an artist's career.

It's common-sense spending, says Feigelson, but never tight-fisted in the face of opportunity, like when Platoon green-lit smart marketing funding –along with her management – for Jorja Smith's recent single and video, Let Me Down (ft. Stormzy).

"When you know how to interpret data, you can be so smart about where you spend your money," says Feigelson.

The proof of Platoon's concept will be given a great lift this year if Jorja Smith fulfils her potential as an era-defining talent, both at home and around the world.

Feigelson has no doubt that's exactly what's on the cards.

"Jorja's career is growing in the most organic and beautiful way," he says. "No-one's telling her what to do as an independently and creatively free artist – she knows exactly what she wants.

"From the first day I met her, she was like, 'My first song's going to be Blue Lights… and here's what we're going to do for my second and fourth song. Oh, and for my third song, we don't have that yet, but I can sing it for you, and here's the idea for the video."

Smith recently performed as the opening act on Bruno Mars' US tour, while Coachella dates are also in the pipeline – building nicely on her BRITs Critics' Choice win.

It's all a long way from Kenny Loggins and the children's album that Sony rejected. And yet, it transpires, also not.

"I didn't even question Kenny's intuition in that moment," says Feigelson. "He had a feeling: this album is needed in the world.

"All true artists have this unique intuition that comes from the very same place that makes them artists. Platoon's job isn't just to help that come out – it's to let it roar."

'Some record labels were apprehensive...'

By 2001, Denzyl Feigelson was running AWAL out of California, when he got a knock at the door. It was Bill Couturié – the Oscar-winning director.

Couturié explained that he was creating "industrial films" for Apple, for Steve Jobs, which were shown at the company's keynote presentations.

"He said that Steve was very particular about the music in those films, and that the person handling the licensing was not able to keep up with the way Steve works, so they could use my help," recalls Feigelson. "Then Bill said: 'We've got three weeks till the next one and I need 15 pieces of music.'"

When that project was complete, Feigelson received a personal call from Jobs complimenting him on the tracks he'd curated.

"He asked if I could do the next video and the walk-on music at the next event, and after that they kept on calling and I kept on working with them."

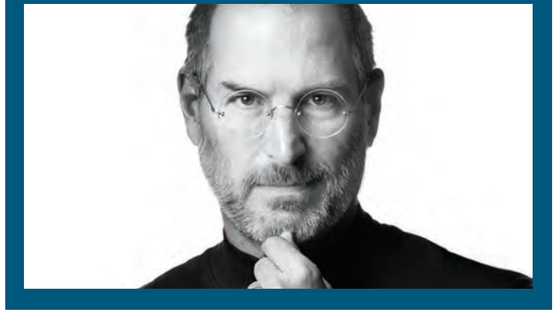
In 2003, Feigelson was invited to Apple meetings about iTunes. Soon after, he was drafted into the iTunes launch team, handling label relations and editorial. iTunes launched in the US in March that year.

"Some record labels were apprehensive," says Feigelson. "They were very fearful of slicing up the CD and selling tracks for 99 Cents. It felt revolutionary just being at Steve's table."

Says Feigelson of Jobs, "His vision was so clear, and of course he was an incredible force of nature."

In 2004, Feigelson arrived in London. Part of his duties were to launch iTunes for the UK, France and Germany, which successfully happened in June of 2004, with Jobs attending the launch event in London.

"We knew the industry needed disruption," says Feigelson. "There were some champions within labels, and of course some resistance, but we knew this was a pivotal moment that was going to change everything."



'Paul Simon totally set me up in the music business...'

Growing up in South Africa, Denzyl Feigelson was kicked out of High School for politically fundraising for a medical clinic in the Township of Alexandria. As was mandatory then, he joined the South African army in 1971, before being permitted to leave a year later, and moving to New Mexico as a foreign student.

He wound up studying jazz bass guitar and working as a music therapist while playing in "every band going". In the 1970s, after his funding ran out, he moved to Hawaii and created a band called Heartstrings (pictured). "We were *the* band in Hawaii in the '70s," he recalls. "We opened for Bob Marley, Fleetwood Mac – any band that came to the island that decade, really."

He returned to South Africa in 1982 and became a jobbing bass player, doing a few sessions with singer/songwriter Steve Kekana. Feigelson ended up producing an English language album with Kekana, before signing up as his manager – and representing other local musicians, including Johnny Clegg.

"Paul opened the door for South African music, and African music in general."

One day, he and Clegg's producer, Hilton Rosenthal, received a call from Paul Simon, referencing a specific cassette tape of South African musicians called Zulu Jive Hits Volume 3. In the subsequent months, Feigelson would send Simon packs of vinyl, before the US songwriter asked him to round up the finest local SA musicians and bring them to New York.

"We said, 'Why don't you come to South Africa? If you clear it with the ANC and Harry Belafonte and Quincy Jones, we'll find those musicians, and put them in a studio. And that's what he did."

Simon was famously lambasted for entering South Africa to record Graceland at the time, seemingly breaking a cultural boycott which existed in protest to the country's Apartheid regime.

"All of that was not fair, in my opinion," says Feigelson. "Paul opened the door, not only for South African music, but for African music in general. He paid all those people beyond fairly. He did the right thing, and I think history shows that."

Graceland took three years to finish, and Feigelson and Simon became friends during its creation.

"When the three-year tour finished, Paul said, 'Look, you're already managing all these artists [including Hugh Masekela and Ladysmith Black Mambazo] – I'll just give you an office in the Brill Building in New York. And that was the transition from being a musician and tour manager to being 'the world music manager'," says Feigelson. "Paul totally set me up in the music business."

GEN Z AND STREAMING PEAKS: THE MEDIA AND TECH TRENDS THAT WILL SHAPE 2018 AND BEYOND

Mark Mulligan lifts the curtain on the media developments that he believes will come to define this year – and impact on everyone in entertainment...

2017 was the year that streaming became the new normal. The industry-wide streaming transition will build further in 2018 but it will be shaped by broader trends in the digital media and tech landscape. Now that we are approaching peak in the attention economy, music will have to fight even harder for every minute of attention and dollar of spend that it commands from consumers. Here are four of the biggest trends that will shape the digital media landscape in 2018:

Gen Z: Digital's Baby Boomers

Millennials are now digital's elder statesmen. They have been replaced in their role as digital's trailblazing generation by Gen Z, consumers born in or since the year 2000 – true Millennials, if you like.

This is the generation that has grown up with their own smartphones and Instagram and Snapchat accounts from ages 10-12. Messaging app-era social media is shaping their adolescence in a far more profound way than Facebook and MySpace did for previous generations of digital youth. As pre-teens and young teens search for identity and acceptance, the super-connected world of messaging apps provides them with an echo chamber of like-minded souls. However, they hide under a veneer of hyper-realism, where more-than-perfect images are shared to the masses using an ever-growing arsenal of filters and effects.

A whole ecosphere of content, creators and brands has evolved around Gen Z, super-serving the needs, whims and anxieties of young people making the transition from childhood to adulthood. Meanwhile YouTube stars such as Zoella, DanTDM and PewDiePie deliver videos that speak directly to Gen Z with a voice that parents just don't get and even often dislike – a disdain not helped by controversies such as Logan Paul's suicide forest video. But that is exactly the point. With parents having co-opted most contemporary music, YouTubers are the popstars of their day. With mum and dad just as likely as their kids to enjoy Ed Sheeran or Taylor Swift, YouTubers are filling the role once played by Elvis, The Beatles and The Sex Pistols.

"Millennials are elder statesmen. They have been replaced by Gen Z."

Gen Z are digital's Baby Boomers, the generation born into a post-war era that enjoyed a higher quality of life than any previous generation. But things will not always be thus. Just as Baby Boomers are now seen as a high-water mark – with their longer life expectancy pushing down the values of pensions down and the age of retirement up – Gen Z may prove to be a digital high water mark. Many of the brands and content providers

Mexican beauty YouTuber Yuya

that super-serve these consumers are fuelled by the VC bubble, which in turn is powered by the regulatory free rein enjoyed by the tech majors (Amazon, Apple, Alphabet and Facebook). That too, will eventually face change, big change.

Tech Major Disruption

We tend to think of the internet as being a mature channel; it is, in fact, anything but. Mature markets are defined by significant levels of competition and also of regulation to ensure that markets remain open to all comers.

But the internet's big markets are all dominated by one major global player (Google – search; Amazon – commerce; Facebook – social). Although the picture is different in some emerging markets, the global scale dominance of the tech majors reflects a market with which regulation has not yet caught up.

More recently, events such as alleged Russian interference in the US presidential elections have made lawmakers question whether tech companies can regulate themselves. Though regulation of internet era tech companies is wrought with difficulty – eg. how to regulate borderless markets, how to win legal arguments when tech companies can afford armies of the best lawyers – it will happen. And the impact will be huge. To get a sense of just how huge, we need only look back to 2003. That was when the European Commission ruled that Microsoft had to unbundle Windows Media Player (the default media player in those days) from Microsoft Office. At that time Microsoft had the equivalent scale and impact of Google and Facebook combined, but that ruling sent Microsoft into long-term decline, something it is only now turning around. The equivalent rulings today could be Google spinning out search or YouTube into separate businesses, Amazon divesting Prime Music and Video, Facebook dumping Instagram or Apple losing control of iOS.

> **"Playlists are streaming music's closest equivalent to binge watching."**

Net Neutrality

In December 2017, a ruling from US regulator FCC overturned the previously established market principle of net neutrality. In highly simplistic terms, the implications are that US telcos will be able to prioritize access to their networks, which could mean that any digital service will only be able to guarantee their US users a high quality of service if they broker a deal with each and every telco.

Telcos find themselves as the squeezed middle between media companies fighting a rear guard action to try to prevent the leakage of power to distribution companies such as Spotify and Netflix. As BuzzFeed's Jonah Peretti succinctly put it: "Content may still be king, but distribution is the queen and she wears the trousers." Telcos wanted a piece of the action and were fed up of being relegated to the role of battlefield as the titans duke it out.

In its most basic form, this regulatory decision will allow telcos to throttle the bandwidth available to streaming services either in favour of their preferred partners or until an access fee is paid. For example, Sprint could decide that it wants to give its part-owned streaming service Tidal a leg up, and throttle access to Spotify and Apple Music for its users.

Streaming Peaks

The global streaming music and video markets continue to grow at pace globally, but there are early signs that growth will not be linear. Binge watching and playlists are the leading use cases for streaming but neither is showing the kind of growth that would be expected at this stage of market growth. In turn, this suggests that overall market growth may have some speed bumps ahead:

- Binge watching: In streaming video, binge watching is only growing as fast as overall video subscriber penetration. Between Q1 and Q3 2017, binge watching grew by 3 percentage points, the same rate at which video subscriptions grew. However, the good news for video streaming is that among video subscribers, binge watching penetration stands at 61%. So the activity is mainstream but needs some further nudging along to become a universally adopted behaviour.

- Playlisting: Playlists are streaming music's closest equivalent to binge watching, but adoption falls well short. Just 14% of streamers listen to curated playlists, while 31% create their own playlists. Most concerning, though, is that adoption is not growing, neither across the total population nor as a share of streaming users.

Binge watching is built on an already proven, though niche, activity that grew around DVD boxsets. Thus, it experienced swift adoption, to the extent that it is now near the top of the adoption curve. Playlists, though, do not have an analogue antecedent, so it was always a gamble as to whether consumers would take to them at scale. Although there are a lot of radio parallels for playlists from an industry perspective (breaking artists, programming skills etc) there are fewer from a user's viewpoint. Playlists lack crucial components of radio such as talk, local content, news, weather, traffic and personalities.

The data underpinning playlists and the context they deliver is vastly superior to that which existed a few years ago, but playlists have a lot more innovation yet to go if they are to replicate binge watching's success. Playlists are the future –but the future has not yet arrived.

‘I WAS GOBSMACKED BY STORMZY’S GLOBAL VISION’

Warner/Chappell UK’s A&R Director, Amber Davis, has spearheaded the publisher’s impressive signing spree in the hotly-contested world of urban music and beyond...

Amber Davis knows exactly who she would like this feature to be about. And it’s really, really not Amber Davis.

She’d much rather we utilise these pages, dear reader, to explain the brilliance all of the artist/writer/producers she has brought into Warner/Chappell over the past few years – from Dave to Steel Banglez, Swifta Beater, Raye, J Hus, Skepta and Stormzy.

(We’ll happily do that, naturally. Particularly when it comes to the double BRIT-winning man of the moment, pictured far right.)

“I like being the publisher in the background!” Davis pleads with *MBUK*, two minutes into our conversation. “Please can we try and keep it that way?”

Apologies Amber, ain’t gonna happen.

We can’t let your formidable recent record – and, consequently, Warner/Chappell’s formidable recent record – in the UK publishing game slide. Most notably when it comes to the increasingly successful realm of British urban music.

So let’s start with a monumental moment: how did Davis sign Stormzy back in 2015, when he didn’t have a record deal, and seemed openly reticent to becoming too entangled with music business machinations?

“Twin B [Alec Boateng] was the first person to tell me about him,” replies Davis – typically pushing the spotlight immediately in another direction. “I checked out Stormzy’s various freestyles and the Not That Deep video, which I loved. Then the Know Me From video was released [in 2015] and that obviously catapulted him further into the limelight. I basically stalked Tobe [Onwuka, Stormzy’s manager] savagely until he was bored of hearing my voice! In the beginning I was actually texting and calling the wrong number, before Austin [Daboh] gave me the right one.”

Eventually, correct digits obtained and flurry of “just checking in!” voicemails recorded, Onwuka began to chat with Davis about the possibility of a publishing deal. It helped, she reasons, that she had ritually begun travelling to Stormzy shows around the country as a fan – including a memorable night at Thekla in Bristol.

“Even then, you could see Stormzy was a brilliant and natural songwriter by any measure, which was a big reason I was so interested in him,” says Davis. “He came here [into the Warner/Chappell office] and we had a meeting, and I was gobsmacked by his global vision – he certainly wasn’t short-sighted about what it takes to be a star. He and Tobe had this amazing masterplan, and it felt obvious they had the ambition, talent and drive to see it through.”

Davis’s peers voted her an A&R Award winner for Hip-hop/Grime in 2016

“Stormzy and Tobe had this amazing masterplan.”

That masterplan recently culminated in Stormzy’s BRITs wins for Album Of The Year and British Male Solo Artist, and his electrifying performance on the TV show. The significance of a UK hip-hop artist bringing down the curtain on British mainstream music’s biggest pop-leaning night wasn’t lost on Davis.

“I thought his performance was exceptional,” she says. “It made a real statement to have a rapper close the BRITs live on television; even more so that it wasn’t a superstar American icon, but homegrown talent. Stormzy completely lived up to the billing.”

Davis was one of the first publishers to make a play for the signature of Stormzy, aka Michael Omari, but that wasn’t a situation which lasted. By the time the star put pen to paper with Warner/Chappell, every large-scale publisher in the UK was chasing him as a hot priority.

“I will always respect how true and honest Tobe was with me throughout that period,” says Davis. “He completely stuck by his


Stormzy closing the BRIT Awards at the O2 Arena on February 21

Photo: JMEInternational

Celebrating the double at Warner's BRITs after-party: Amber Davis, Tobe Onwuka, Jon Platt and Stormzy

Photo: Greg Williams

word, and I hugely rated that loyalty. Stormzy is a huge talent with his own very strong creative vision, but he is surrounded by people that offer great advice and insight such as Tobe, Twin B and Kieran [Jay, lawyer]."

Specifically discussing the contribution of Onwuka, Davis adds: "He's just a fantastic manager and a really decent human. He has helped deliver Stormzy's vision while staying 100% true to his artist. A lot of managers in those early stages could have been swayed by the powers that be – what labels said, or other managers suggesting they should team up. However, Tobe and Stormzy have both stuck to their guns and that's a big reason why they've achieved such greatness."

Davis's rise through the industry began back when she was 14 years old, at Parlophone Records on a week's work experience.

"It completely opened my eyes that you could get paid for listening to music and working with nice people," she says. "I was stuffing envelopes, getting paper cuts, doing mailouts for Beverly Knight and Jamelia – there were no mp3s back then. There was just a vibe in that office, music playing, artwork all over the place, people putting together samplers, and by the end of that week I thought: 'I'm going to commit to this and make it my career.'"

The next step in that commitment was working as a Saturday till girl at Virgin Megastore in Wimbledon, where Davis could indulge her passion for UK garage – from MJ Cole to So Solid Crew and Heartless Crew – and build up her retail skills before breaking into the music business 'proper'.

Before Davis joined Warner/Chappell in 2013, she spent 10 years at Sony/ATV and EMI Music Publishing – where she signed the likes of Girls Aloud, Two-Inch Punch, Katy B and Tinie Tempah. With a track record like that, it's little wonder that her ex-boss at EMI, Jon Platt – now Chairman and CEO of Warner Chappell – made a beeline to hire the young A&R after he arrived at WMG's publishing company.

For the past two years, Davis has reported to Warner/Chappell UK MD Mike Smith, and she says it's no fluke that she's been empowered to thrive when she glances up the company hierarchy.

"To have such an A&R-centric CEO and an A&R-centric MD is a really lucky thing for me, not everyone gets that situation and it can be integral to closing deals," she says. "Both Mike and Jon have great expertise and experience working with music and artists, and that completely feeds into the culture here."

The writers that Davis has signed across her career show her to be adept and comfortable in multiple genres. (Indeed, her latest signing is British deep bass supremo Tom Zanetti.)

Yet there can be no question that she has spearheaded Warner/Chappell's enviable presence within the UK's hottest modern youth movement. In doing so, she's changed the face of Chappell's London HQ, which just three years ago was best known for the

Alongside Stormzy, Amber Davis has signed talent to Warner/Chappell such as J Hus (left) and Steel Banglez (right)

likes of Ben Howard, Elbow, Tom Odell and Royal Blood. Does Davis think that UK urban music can continue its climb beyond the BRITs and even further into the global mainstream?

"In my eyes, the sky's the limit," she says. "The fact that in pretty much every category at the BRITs there seemed to be some form of urban-leaning record feels significant.

"The culture of the UK is changing, and the urban music scene has truly come to the forefront."

That march into the mainstream has been led, of course, by Stormzy – and Davis's admiration for his talent clearly knows few bounds.

"The culture of the UK is changing, and urban music is at the forefront."

"He's a really approachable, personable individual and I think one reason so many people have embraced him – above and beyond the music – is because that side of his personality comes across in the spotlight," says Davis. "One minute he's rapping in a hoody, the next he's flipping pancakes on TV or sitting on Jonathan Ross's sofa, and it's all completely natural."

Davis points out that the plethora of collaborations Stormzy has clocked up in his short career so far – from Linkin Park to Jorja Smith, Ray BLK, Little Mix, Raye and Krept & Konan – is a fine micro-display of the talent he possesses.

"He's an innovator, he always surprises you with what he comes up with," says Davis. "You simply can't be an average songwriter and have a platinum-selling album. [Stormzy]'s lyrical content is extremely on point and relevant, and it's wonderful to see him use his platform, and his voice, for everyone."

You'd be a fool to bet against further awards and accolades pouring the way of Stormzy – as well as other Chappell clients signed by Davis – in the near future.

The same could be said, on a more insular industry level, for the executive herself. In 2016, Davis won *Music Business Worldwide's* A&R Award for Hip-hop/Grime, voted for by her peers. She was nominated yet again in the category last year.

Davis might not enjoy the glare of music industry eminence – in fact, she might openly wish to remain in the shadows – but respect for her work in the field is only growing.

We'll leave the final word on that subject to Warner/Chappell UK boss Mike Smith, who comments: "Amber is an absolutely amazing A&R who has been at the epicentre of the urban music explosion in the UK. She's also the most modest person you'll ever meet in the music industry.

"Amber hates taking credit for the projects she works on, but with her string of successes, she's going to need to get used to it!"

My favourite things

Our snooping series takes us into the office of Rak Sanghvi, a man who's had quite an astonishing journey, in life and in music, and has picked up some rather cool mementos along the way...

Rak Sanghvi, the always amiable and serially successful MD UK/International of independent publisher Spirit B Unique, has a simple answer to *MBUK's* opening question, Where was your first office? Like, one word simple: "There."

He points no more than 30 yards away, across from the south side of London's Great Marlborough Street to the north, at the building that used to house Sony/ATV, which Sanghvi joined as Head of Business Affairs in 1997, before moving up to Managing Director.

"Then we moved to Golden Square, where they are now, when Marty [Bandier] came in [2006] – my fourth chairman in just under 10 years," he says.

In 2015, Sanghvi joined Spirit B Unique, then based in Chiswick – "very cool offices, but a bit of a schlep". Within a year, the firm had relocated its UK/International HQ to the heart of Soho, from where Sanghvi can literally look out of the window and see his past. And look around his office for some reminders of the songs and people that have helped get from there to here – 30 yards, 21 years, and a lot of stories...

IVOR NOVELLO

This is the first Ivor Novello Award under the Spirit B Unique operation that I received. Obviously we picked up quite a lot when I was at Sony/ATV, but this is very special.

We started operations in the year of Chaos And The Calm for James Bay, who was signed before I joined, by the way, and we won in the Most Performed Work category for Hold Back The River.

It was such a fantastic afternoon, because it was sort of my return to The Ivors in some ways, which made it nice personally. We had an after-party at The Sanctum Hotel – so it was the one year we didn't all stand round at The Audley – from there to The Groucho, and after that… not sure!

James is about to launch his second album [lead single Wild Love is out now] and we have high hopes for that, of course. He's an extremely talented dude and such a nice guy.

2 SIGNED FENDER

This is a guitar signed by Kasabian, just after I signed them for the Velociraptor! album [2011] and going forward on a futures deal at Sony ATV.

Serge [Pizzorno] is a super-talented and really nice man and I should point out that his message, 'Where the fuck are our syncs?' is not a complaint, because it was given to me just after we'd signed the deal; it's more of an encouragement, like, Right, let's get cracking!

They're such a fantastic band, I could go on and on about them. They're a truly great rock'n'roll band in a world where there are fewer and fewer of those.

I can play it, badly, I've even got the little Rak plectrum here, which was a present from my wife. I do strum it occasionally, it's not entirely for show [laughs].

3 FAMILY PICTURES

I've chosen three pictures of my family. The one at the front is me and my mum. I was two-and-a-half and it was taken in Kampala.

I'm a Ugandan Asian immigrant. Me, my mum, my father and my sister moved here when I was very young. My father passed away soon after we arrived, so looking after my family has always been a huge driver for me.

My sister very sadly passed in 2014, having been very ill, so now it's just me and my mum. I'm nearly 51 and she still sends me texts reminding me to be careful crossing the road and asking if I've eaten.

The one on the left is my wedding photo, with my fantastically gorgeous wife, Tamara.

It was an amazing day, we had a Hindu ceremony, conducted in English, and then we had a civil ceremony in the house of [English dramatist] W.S. Gilbert, called Grim's Dyke [northwest London], and that's where this picture is from. It was a mix of cultures, and a very happy mix of cultures. I've been very lucky in that regard.

Those are our children on the right, Jake and Lara, who are now 13 and 10, so this picture was taken a few years ago. It's maybe not the greatest picture ever, but you can see their personalities in it, which makes it a favourite of mine.

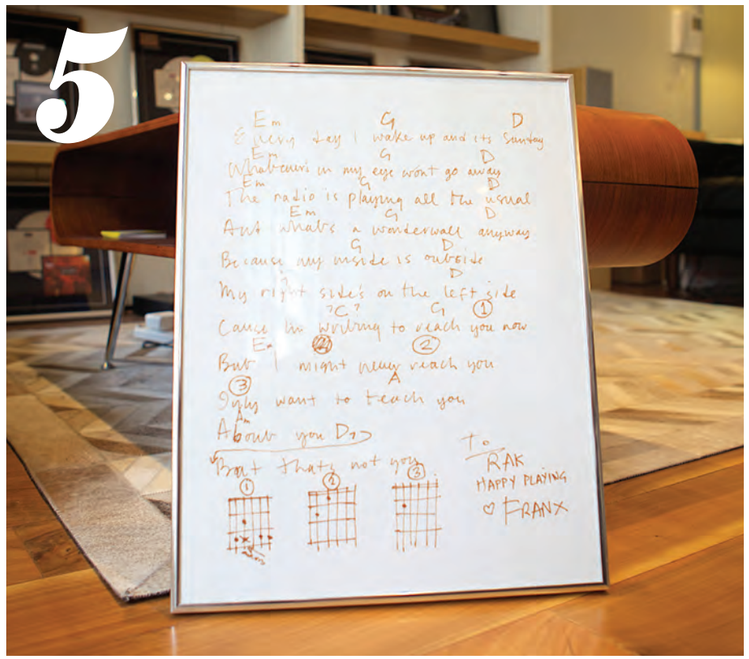
4 RAK AND ROBERT

That's me and Robert Plant, in the Trinifold Management office – and trust me, that's me looking extremely nervous.

That was just before my 40th birthday, and then for my birthday itself he and his management sent me that original 1972 tour poster, signed by Mr Plant himself. £2 a ticket – not bad value!

When I was General Manager at Sony/ATV we signed Robert for his Mighty ReArranger album [2005]. And then years later when I was MD, his deal came up, from Band of Joy onwards, plus his solo catalogue, and I had the privilege of meeting him again – and I've never been so nervous in my life.

That's a big statement, because I've met a lot of people, but I was brought up on Led Zeppelin, and you're stood there looking at the man, not quite believing the whole thing. In fact I'd met Jimmy Page earlier that same week, completely unrelated, so I was just tripping!



5 FRAN'S CHORDS

This goes back to 1998 when I was Business Affairs guy at Sony/ATV. Charlie Pinder [then Sony/ATV MD] had signed them [Travis] and I fell in love with the demo for Writing To Reach You.

It actually became a bit of an 'Our Song' for me and my wife-to-be, who was then doing marketing for Disneyland Paris, which meant it was a bit of a long distance relationship.

I took her to Glastonbury one year, she met up with Fran, we all got on etc. And then I was in the office one day, telling him how much I loved it, and I asked him to write it [the song] down for me, so he did.

I love it. I love that there are even some little mistakes in there, which are quite cute.

‘ARTISTS HAVE THE BEST CHANCE OF SUCCESS WHEN THEY GET THINGS ROLLING THEMSELVES’

Tap Management is on the up and up. Star client Dua Lipa nabbed two BRIT Awards and is breaking through in the States, and the firm is building out its own label venture...

Across its mere seven years in existence, Tap Management has steered the career of an international star, Lana Del Rey, while developing a major UK breakthrough artist (and double-BRIT winner) in Dua Lipa.

The firm – which has set up shop in the US, UK, Australia and Germany – runs a successful publishing arm, and recently announced plans to build up its very own record label.

Tap was founded by Ben Mawson and Ed Millett, who were crowned Managers of the Year at the Artist and Manager Awards in 2017, where Lana Del Rey delivered a passionate and considered tribute to the duo, praising their “principles, ethics and goals”.

The beginnings of Tap Management arrived in 2009 after Mawson, who was then a practicing lawyer at SSB, met Lana Del Rey, ostensibly to help get her out of recordings and publishing deals she’d signed early on in her career.

That working relationship turned into management – and then Mawson realised he needed help. He teamed up with Millett, who was then working at London-based Crown Management.

“At the time when Ben and I were talking about what we wanted to set up, streaming wasn’t really happening yet,” recalls Millett. It had only been a year since Spotify’s public UK launch – but Tap was already noticing change in the industry.

“Managers were doing more of the development work for artists, while labels were doing less, signing stuff later with less money,” adds Millett.

“Ben and I wanted to be in a position where we could provide all the services [that a label would traditionally provide] to an artist ourselves. Lana was almost like a test case – we developed her with what we had at that time.”

Ben Mawson and Ed Millett with their Artist & Manager Award in 2017

There was initially no label interest for Del Rey until she released Video Games alongside a self-made video. Millett and Mawson hired an online PR, released the single on vinyl and iTunes and crossed their fingers. It went viral, Fearne Cotton played it on Radio 1 and Del Rey suddenly had multiple label offers.

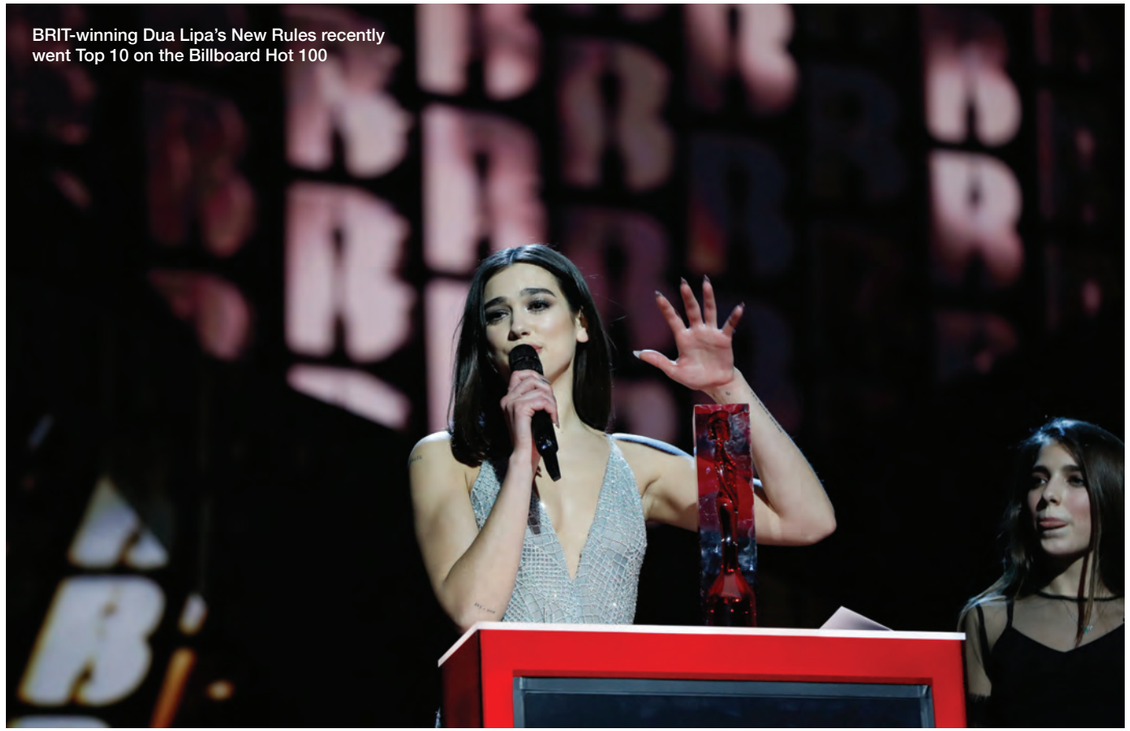
Tap eventually signed Del Rey to Polydor in the UK and Interscope in the US. She has subsequently released four albums, including three UK and two US No.1s.

Tap met a then-17-year-old Dua Lipa in 2013 when she was holding meetings with various management companies. While competing for her signature, Mawson and Millett immediately invited her into writing sessions – where what would become one of her standout singles, Hotter than Hell, was created.

“That’s what’s so amazing about Dua,” says Mawson. “We’ve seen artists who might get half a good song out of 10 writing sessions; with Dua, one in five or one in four is a banger. She gets results out of other people as well, because her personality is so engaging and she is so charismatic. She definitely has that special something.”

Last year, Dua Lipa hit No.3 in the UK with her self-titled debut LP, which was released on Warner Bros. The video for No.1 hit New Rules recently reached 1bn


Team Tap with Lana Del Rey at The Grammys



BRIT-winning Dua Lipa's New Rules recently went Top 10 on the Billboard Hot 100

Photo: JME International

views on YouTube, shortly before she swept the BRIT Awards, taking home gongs for British Female Solo Artist and British Breakthrough Act.

Of the wins, Millett says: "I wasn't that surprised because she has just eclipsed everyone. This time last year we were scoping out the competition like, who is there? She has left everyone in her wake and that's partly because she's worked so hard and is always looking to improve. Every day she gets better which is why things have moved really quickly for her."

Tap's label, quietly launched in November, exists as a joint venture with Universal Music, and the firm's publishing arm is administered by UMPG. Tap has recently hired three respected UK execs to help boost its executive firepower: Director of Marketing Hannah Neaves joined from Atlantic; Anna Neville, who was previously at Beggars Group, has been named GM & Director of Business Affairs; and Senior Manager Tony Beard brought La Roux and Rat Boy over from Maverick.

In addition, Phil Sales has joined from Three Six Zero, bringing Sasha and Disciples to Tap with him.

"Everyone was saying that management companies were the new labels."

Tap's early label clients include London artist Col3trane, who was developed by the firm's management side before being upstreamed to Interscope in the US. He remains on Tap's label in the UK.

Other priority projects for Tap this year include Grace Carter and Dermot Kennedy, while there are rumours that Millett and Mawson are in the running to sign Ellie Goulding, who is on the hunt for new management after spending ten years at First Access.

Mawson and Millett found an hour in their busy schedules to sit down with *MBUK* to chat about Tap's success, and tackle a few issues – including the #Metoo movement, *that* Lana Del Rey and Radiohead lawsuit, their recently-launched label, as well as a few thoughts about the music business at large...

How has the role of artist development evolved in the past few years?

Ben Mawson: Back when I was a lawyer, everyone was saying that management companies were the new labels, as record companies were less and less interested in projects that didn't have most of an album finished. There is the occasional exception but mainly it's moved further in that direction. [Record company] A&R exists but it's diminishing. A lot of stuff arrives at labels when it's up-and-running – that's the healthiest time to sign something. Major labels have their place, but artists can very easily put their own music out and get a much better deal. Labels are generally in a much better place to help when things are already rolling.

Ed Millett: Dermot Kennedy is a case in point – he self-released seven songs, Spotify and Apple got behind him and he has income to fund his career and touring. Streaming has made it possible to launch an artist and have them make an income without having them sign a deal, and it's also global straight away. If you've got good music, it gets to people. You don't even need to pay a publicist. It makes sense to sign a [label] deal when you've got to start spending proper marketing money. But by that stage [of development], the producers have typically created an identity with the artist. Those relationships have been built, so it's often quite hard for a label to come in and make those decisions. What you need at that point is muscle, manpower and money. Then it comes down to a conversation about the state of record deals. If we've already done the [A&R] work, taken the risk out of it, and Dermot arrives at a record deal when he's already making good money each month, what risk are labels taking to warrant a traditional deal?

"If we've already done the [A&R] work, what risk are labels taking when they come in?"

So record label deals end up becoming more akin to a label services agreement?

Ben: Whether or not it's an actual label services deal [in structure] is a deal point. But I definitely don't want to be too hard on labels. For example, Dua signed to Warner relatively early – she had a couple of big songs, but not New Rules, and that was unusual. It was to the credit of [label A&R] Joe Kentish that he wanted to get involved that early.

When I was a lawyer, I used to say to artists that the best way to get a record deal and give yourself the best chance of success is to look like you don't need one, and get things rolling yourself. That's our motto at Tap, generally speaking. And these days it's more possible than ever. You can shoot a video on an iPhone, press a button and upload music. People can find your music so easily, you can become viral with no team thanks to social platforms. That's a powerful tool.

Ed: When artists are figuring out their identity and music, keeping it within a small management team allows that artist to really experiment and build relationships with a few people.

If you go into a label system too early, the minute you open that door you've got 50 opinions from people trying to justify their position – and if you're not single-minded as an artist you get lost in that. You're suddenly wearing certain clothes because someone has pulled a favour [with a brand] and you've got all these other deals going on.

It's such a risk as an artist to enter that machine unless you're absolutely ready. So what we do is make sure that all of our artists who enter that environment have a really strong sense of self, both musically and visually, which is partly why they are successful.

What are your management principles?

Ben: We don't leave anything to anyone else. We hope that third parties are going to add value, but we don't count on it happening and we try to ensure that everything an artist possibly needs to become successful is catered for by us individually, or by people we've employed. So when there are weak spots at a label – maybe we lose a member of an artist's label team when someone leaves – we are self-sufficient.

A good label adds real value but we don't count on anyone else for our artists to be successful. In management, you've got to be really passionate and driven because you're on a percentage and 20% of nothing is nothing. There is no safety net in what we do – we are putting our necks on the line for people we believe in all the time.

Ed: All day you're thinking two steps ahead for an artist. I'm obsessed with the tiny things; I'm constantly on artists' socials, making little suggestions [to the Tap team] that someone else could probably do but I can't wean myself off it because it's so important. I think about every single detail and how people are perceiving that artist when they go out into the world. You have to have the time to be obsessive, otherwise you're not doing your job properly.

You've got offices around the world – how does that impact what you offer artists independently?

Ed: We've always had an eye on the global nature of music and we don't want to be a 'UK company'. Now more than ever it's so important to start America at the same time as everything because it drives all your Spotify numbers. We get tonnes of support across our roster in Australia, where we have an office set up by Angus & Julia Stone's manager, who was a promoter.

We also sign quite a lot of things direct in Germany because it's a great market, they can take stuff to radio and make it work and don't have to wait for the UK to drive things. That worked for Dua, for Lana and for Grace Carter, who is directly signed to Sony out there and signed to Universal everywhere else.

Ben: Lana got her record deal in Germany first – it's such a huge market. You can have a career just in Germany and be very successful. Everyone used to be kind of obsessed with the Radio 1 playlist but we've always tried to be as global as possible and put an emphasis on all of the important territories.

If you're thinking about the US first, does that mean you're shopping for a label deal over there before the UK?

Ed: We have a direct relationship with Spotify and Apple over there. We used to

have a management-allocated person and a label-facing person, and [Spotify] are now merging those people so there's one person that speaks to label and management for each artist. What that means is, we have a UK person and a US person at Spotify for each artist who you send the music to, they hopefully support with playlisting and you build the story from there. You don't necessarily need a label to do all that.

How about radio?
Ed: Radio in the US happens so far down the line now, and it's getting like that in the UK. How do you get on the Radio 1 playlist? There are hardly any entry points anymore. Dermot is a case in point, he's just sold 1,600 tickets in a few hours in London, he's selling out 1,000-capacity venues all around the world with no radio, no press, it's all done through streaming. He's up to 100 million streams on Spotify.

Is streaming a wholly good thing for the music industry?
Ed: There are a lot of negative views about streaming, but I don't share them. I have negative views about some label deals on streaming because that money does not go through to artists. All of that noise about Taylor Swift not going on Spotify was shooting the wrong guy. The money is coming from the streaming services but it's going into labels and those [catalogue] deals are based on a completely different model – selling one item. Labels get these huge advances from streaming services that don't flow through and they are sat on all the interest they are earning from that.

You've recently launched a label, what are your ambitions for that?
Ben: Our ambition generally is to have successful artists. Whether we are the managers, publishers or label is really just a rights and legal contract thing. Launching the label wasn't really about being a label, it was about having another vehicle for successful artists.

And what's the deal with Universal?
Ben: The label is a JV with Universal. So for anyone we sign for records, once we do the development work, we can upstream it to any label within UMG. For Col3trane, we have chosen Interscope in the US and we're going to be the UK label ourselves. We've spent about six months working on that one so it's been a pretty quick turnaround. We've now got three or four others we're about to sign or offer on; some we manage, some we don't. The JV with Universal is only for the label – the artists that we manage can sign to anyone, there is no restrictions on that.

Do you have any ambitions to grow your publishing arm?
Ben: We definitely want to expand the publishing side. We've got two A&Rs and we're going to bring in a third. We're looking to be very active as publishers, and we're looking forward to working with third party managers, adding our management perspective if it's needed, but not being involved on the day-to-day level. There are only so many people you can manage until you drop dead! We want to give total dedication to those we manage but I think we can also add value as part of a team, whether it's as publisher or label.

> ***"We're focused on helping Dua become the No.1 female artist in the world."***

Dua Lipa has been hugely successful – what's the plan for her going forward?
Ben: At Warner, at the beginning, I was going in and expressing urgency about just how much of a superstar she had the potential to be.

Someone who works in international said to me recently, 'I remember you were saying to me a year ago that we were competing with Rihanna and I've realised that now we really are.' Warner have been great and they are all really focused on taking [Dua] to where we've always thought she could go, which is to be the No.1 female artist in the world, not just the UK.

I really do think she's got that in her. If she progresses development-wise the way she has over the last two years, in the next two years she's going to be the biggest artist in the world.

Why did you decide to sign her to Warner Bros.?
Ed: Dua was really smart – she signed to Warner Bros partly because they didn't have a big female pop artist and they needed one. They really wanted her, so she had the focus of the team from day one.

When you signed to Warner Bros., Miles Leonard was President and now Phil Christie is. And in the US, Tom Corson stepped in at the beginning of this year...
Ben: Phil is great and everything is stable now. It was a bit different at the start! They've got an amazing radio person in Jane Arthy, Phil [Christie] and Joe [Kentish] for A&R and Alex Burford for brand marketing – it all works well.

We are really pleased that Tom Corson has joined from RCA and he has already made a difference.

And Dua is signed to Tap for publishing.
Ben: When we're looking to keep an artist out of the label system – to have the power of building it up independently first – you need a means to do that. With Dua, I wanted to get her out of her job, she was working as a waitress in a cocktail bar, quite literally, and going to bed at 3am and needing to get up again for a session.

So we gave her a monthly salary, which I think she's still on, to get her out of the job. She was 18 and didn't need too much money to live off so that's where that came from. It works well for those [management clients] of ours that we publish, in the sense that we don't [take a] commission from their publishing as managers, so there is a saving there for the artist.

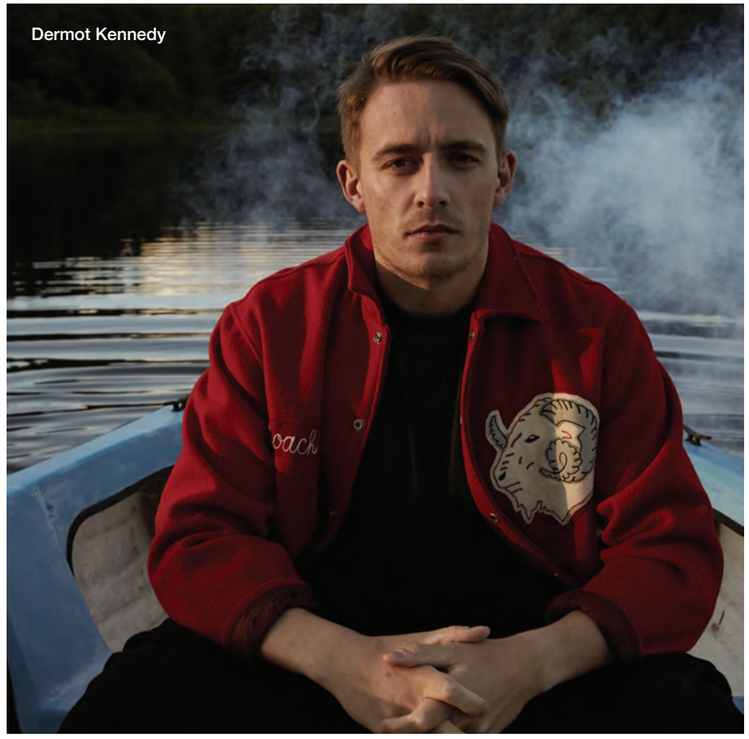
Ed: It's not about setting up a publishing company that is trying to compete with another independent publisher. It comes down to flexibility. We are administered by Universal on a short-term deal, so if we are not happy with that – which we are – we can move to a different company. Dermot has the same deal with us too. It keeps control around the artist, they can effectively change publishers if it's not working.

What's the latest with the Radiohead and Lana Del Rey lawsuit?
Ben: It will be fine and settled, possibly by the time this article comes out. It's unfortunate the way the whole thing happened and the leak to the press wasn't from us. Lana is a very credible songwriter, she doesn't steal ideas off other people. Radiohead are an amazing band and sometimes when lawyers get involved the situation gets out of hand.

During Lana's speech at the A&M Awards, she praised you both for having shared principles and gave a nod to the #MeToo movement. As managers of two female artists, do you have conversations about sexism and equality, and do those tie into marketing decisions?
Ed: The way we look after artists is a partnership and the whole point is to empower someone, to finesse them and help them get even better. Everything they do is coming from them. We've never put Dua or Lana in a position where they're told, 'You need to be sexy.'

Ben: We look after them, but they are strong-willed and opinionated females. Dua won't let anyone over-sexualise her. Lana was shot nude for GQ and there was outcry from some people saying it was in some way demeaning, but she was like, I'm having a laugh! Lana is a very strong woman – she doesn't let anyone walk all over her, and Dua is the same. They are totally in charge of their creative.

Do you have any opinions on the ongoing allegations about sexual harassment in the music business?


Dermot Kennedy

Ben: One thing that would be good is to get an independent collective of people from different labels and walks of the industry to openly discuss these issues and try and come up with solutions. There are two main things: do women have equal opportunities in the music industry? And is there an issue of harassment taking place, which is a principle of modern employment law?

> ***"We empower artists, we finesse them and we help them to get even better."***

Final question, what are your ambitions for Tap and the artists you look after?
Ed: We want to work with more artists and break more artists. We're not really set up to do small independent stuff, we want global success with everybody. But we don't have the objective to become a massive corporate management company, it's always going to be relatively boutique.

Ben: Lana is going to keep putting music out. She's got another album in the works and her fanbase is as rabid as ever. For Dua, the sky is the limit; she wants to end up performing in stadiums.

Ed: Dermot Kennedy is such an unusual and unique proposition, every time we put anything on sale it sells out. We've just sold out three shows in Australia in a few days and he's never done anything over there, it's all based on Spotify.

Is that a model for artists in the future, or is he an exception?
Ed: I don't think I know the answer yet because it's all so new.

WHAT I WISH I'D KNOWN

Potty-mouthed Queen of The BRITs Maggie Crowe is one of the most popular execs in the UK music industry. For decades, she has worked with every chairman of every major record company, pulling together the glitziest show in British music. Here she throws some words of advice back to her younger self...

My parents moved from Ireland to London and set up home in Tooting. I went to a Catholic school in Wimbledon, which is why I'm such a good Catholic girl...

During the summer that I was waiting for my A-Level results, I went to Reed and they got me a temp job at Windsong International, based in a disused church in Croydon, doing their invoicing. There was this huge figure who came in now and again, who seemed very important and used to growl a lot. It turned out to be Steve Mason, the founder. One day he said, 'You seem to like getting stuck in, do you want a job?' So I became secretary extraordinaire at Windsong – this was before they bought Pinnacle. I loved the whole dynamic and the characters from day one; it was fun and everyone was young.

A couple of years later I saw a job in the Evening Standard for an assistant to the BPI's anti-piracy unit and that was my way into the BPI. Then, in the late '80s, I became John Deacon's p.a. I did that for 12 years and it was probably the best job I ever had.

John is the most astute gentleman you could ever meet in the music industry. He taught me all the skills I needed, plus the fact that your own instinct always works when you can look people in the eye or have that human chat on the phone. I don't think people used this word back then, but what he gave me was empowerment.

Because of my role, I was always in the room, which meant I knew what was going on at the top table. Not only that, I had an opinion about it, of course I did, and John, for whatever reason, never told me to be quiet and keep my nose out. Instead he used to ask what I thought, and we would discuss things.

I had a lot of insecurity, not based on being a woman, but based on how I looked on life, how I saw myself and where I came from. According to my Dad, God bless him, the only choice I had was getting married and having a couple of kids.

From day one in the business, I wanted to know about people, I was curious about everyone that walked through the door.

A couple of years after John retired to become chairman of the Board of Governors at the BRIT School and Peter Jamieson [formerly of EMI and BMG] came in as BPI Chairman. He took a look at who was doing what, and what skills we had in-house. He wanted a bit of a reshuffle.

I was off having a baby when Peter rang me and said, 'This is the opportunity of a lifetime, do you want to take over running the BRITs?'

I was really excited, of course, but also terrified, because it was such a huge job. Whether it was bravery or stupidity, I just thought, Let's have a crack at it. My first year was 2005 and it was absolutely a case of learning on the job. The thing I learned most quickly and most importantly was, you've got to be calm. Or at the very least you've got to appear to be calm.

If I could go back to the very beginning, the first thing I'd tell myself would be, Give yourself a break. I've always had a bit of a problem with my weight and with how I look and I think what I'd say is, Don't worry about it; be a bit kinder to yourself.

Rita Ora performs at the 2018 BRIT Awards at the O2 Arena

Photo: JMEnternational

Also, don't worry that you don't feel properly grown up – not because one day you will, but because actually you never will and it doesn't matter. I can be incredibly serious and professional and work all the hours God sends, but do I feel grown up yet? No.

Always take the blame. If you fuck up, admit it and take your bollocking. I've never ever palmed it off on anyone or chucked someone else in the line of fire.

If anything, take the team's bullets for them – then maybe just give them a little kick afterwards. There's a pecking order to these things and that's something you learn along the way.

I'd listen more, I'd try not to swear as much, or drink as much. Or I'd try, at least. It's about being prepared to take the pressure on, but also having a release valve.

I've enjoyed every show on my watch since 2005 and the biggest thrill with all of them is when people are happy afterwards – especially whoever's chairing the show that year, our sponsor, MasterCard, ITV and all the partners who pull together like a family to make BRITs memorable moments that can be added to our history.

> **"If I could go back to the beginning, the first thing I'd tell myself would be, Give yourself a break."**

One of the most important parts of the job is to make life as easy as possible for the Chairman and the creatives. At the end of the day, they put together what you see on screen. Plus each contractor must feel a sense of ownership so the best results are achieved. That's when everyone pulls together and magic happens. It's a big old team, with around 2,000 people working to make sure we deliver a spectacular night.

I think what sums me up is that when I got the badge [the OBE in 2011], I was panicking like mad that someone would call to say there'd been a huge mistake and, actually, they've finally worked out that I'm an imposter: 'C'mon Crowe, you've had your fun, off you go.'

When I got the letter I remember it was a Saturday morning, I was cleaning the fridge at the time, and I thought, Oh God, it'll be something to do with unpaid tax. But then I thought, hang on, I'm on PAYE, they can't be after me!

I'm privileged enough to remain involved with the BRIT School and those who know me know my heart lies there. It must be fate that where that 18 year-old Maggie first started on her road into the industry over 30 odd years ago is literally a stone's throw away.

Anyway, can I go now? I've got bits to do and I'm pretty sure no one's going to want to read this drivel anyway.

40 YEARS (OF) BC

An interview with a PR is usually a last resort, if not a complete no-no. With one very notable exception...

With the reception area recently re-decorated, MBC's offices smell of fresh paint. Which is entirely appropriate as we are here to meet The Queen – well, The Queen of PR, anyway.

Barbara Charone, known to all (and she is known to pretty much all) as BC is well aware of her regal reputation, happy to accept it and play with it.

When *MBUK's* photographer asks how she'd like to come across in her pictures, for instance, her first suggestion is, Chelsea-supporting PR legend? She laughs. Then nails it.

(Alongside pictures of long-term clients such as Madonna, Keith Richards and Robert Plant, there is a shot of Didier Drogba dispatching the winning penalty for the Blue Meanies in the 2012 Champions League final)

Before climbing to the top of the PR tree, BC worked on the other side of the great divide, as a respected journalist for NME, Sounds, Rolling Stone, Creem and others.

Before that she was music correspondent for her home town paper, the Chicago Sun Times.

And before even that she was a young music obsessive writing a column for her school newspaper, especially entranced with the music of the biggest British groups of the time, even to the extent that she knew, one day, she would heed their siren call, cross the Atlantic, make her name, build her business and claim her throne...

Which of those British groups were you listening to in particular back then?
The Stones, the Kinks, The Who… And then I came to England on a family trip, fell in love with London and ended up doing a year at University in London, on an exchange programme.

What were you studying?
Creating writing. I was also writing for The Chicago Sun Times when I was living here, and I started writing for the NME.

I went back to do my last year at University and was writing for NME from Chicago and also for Rolling Stone. I graduated, moved here and got a full time job working for Sounds, back when there were five music papers coming out every week, all

selling bucket loads. I worked there for four years, whilst also contributing to Creem, Crawdaddy and Rolling Stone in America.

We asked Keith Richards about you, and he told us he considers you "a very perceptive writer, a very canny PR and a very dear friend". You wrote his biography, published in 1979. How did that come about?
I wanted to do a book and I'd already interviewed The Rolling Stones a couple of times. Actually, the first book I wanted to do was on The Who, because I loved them. I was quite friendly with Roger Daltrey, but Pete Townshend wasn't keen on the idea. So I asked Keith if I could do an authorized biography, and he said yes.

Why do you think he said yes?
There were a couple of other journalists who wanted to do it, Nick Kent and Pete Erskine – sadly Pete's no longer with us – but both of them were caught up with serious drugs in those days and I think Keith, even in his own drug induced fog, realised that if I did it, then a book would actually come out.

I was in Paris when they were making Some Girls and I was in Canada when Keith got arrested, which became a big part of the book.

What was it like hanging out with Keith at that time?
Amazing. I'd never known anyone who took hard drugs, but, as I say, even through that fog he was incredible: funny, smart, great company – and also he loves music, he is all about the music.

What was the dynamic of the band like? Were they cool with each other?
No, because his [Keith's] problems were impacting on the band, it was just that time. After that I freelanced, weirdly, for the Daily Mail – as well as the US mags – and then I went to work for Warner Bros. Moira Bellas, who was already a friend and is now my partner in MBC, was running the press office there and I joined as staff writer.

How big a decision was it for you to cross that divide from journalist to PR?
I needed the money! I'd done the Keith book, but in those days books didn't get you a tonne of money; you were lucky to get a publishing deal and an advance. So I was writing artist biogs and press releases at Warner for maybe two years and then I started actually doing press. I was lucky, it really suited me, and I think that one of my strengths was that I'd been a journalist.

How big a help was that and in what way?
It was huge and I think it's still huge, you have an understanding of what it's like to be on the other side.

Moira started to do A&R, then became managing director, and I became director of publicity. I started working with Madonna when she was completely unknown, I would call people up, saying, I've got this new artist, she's going to be big – like you do, like I still do. And she was big.

It was an amazing time at Warners in those days, they had Prince, they had Madonna, they signed Elvis Costello and REM.

We'd also always have the opening and closing act at Castle Donington and I'd have to go really early in the morning. We'd organise a coach trip to take people there and I'd be saying to everyone: Coffee? Croissant? And they'd all be on sulphate…

What led to doing you own thing with Moira?
I'd been thinking of it and then, as ever with record companies, a new chairman comes in, gets rid of people, change happens. In this instance, Rob Dickins left and Nick Philips came in. He looked at all the labels, got his own guy [John Reid] in to run Warner Bros, Moira left, then I left and we set up MBC in November 2000.

"Madonna's not as appreciated as she should be. I'm sure she will be again."

Who was on your initial client roster?
Madonna, um…

Well that's a good start!
[Laughs] She had an album out that year as well [Music], which was great. She also got married [in December, to Guy Ritchie], so pretty much as soon as we started the phones were ringing off the hook.

When and how did you first meet Madonna?
She was on the label, she probably couldn't afford an independent [PR] and I was just the person in the office who was lucky enough to get her. Her first gig over here was at the Camden Palace – now Koko. In fact, I don't think this will ever happen again: the first gig she did in London was Koko, the second gig she did was Wembley stadium. It was unbelievable.

It's a funny period we're in now, where Madonna's not as appreciated as she should be, and as I'm sure she will be again.

Do you remember your first meeting and what you first thought?
I do – and I don't think she's changed much. She was always smart, opinionated, knew exactly what she wanted. I remember going with her in a car to her first photo shoot and she wanted to stop at Kensington market to get some shoes. I said, You're gonna be late for the shoot; she didn't care.

Did you think, Yeah, she's gonna go on and be a massive global superstar?
When you work with anyone, you always think it's going to happen for them, you have to. Otherwise it's like a football team taking to the pitch thinking they're going to lose.

I mean, equally, you can't delude yourself and you can't lie to other people. I could never call someone up and tell them, This album's really great, when it's not. And you can't write that in a press release either. I'm always telling people here that – don't call it fantastic if it isn't, because otherwise no one will respect your opinion when you do have something good.

But yeah, with Madonna it obviously escalated quite quickly.

What was it like being on the inside for that first rush of incredible fame?
It was exciting. I've been very fortunate to work with someone who is iconic in the history of music and always will be. You can probably count on the fingers of one hand the artists that have reached that level – and it's also true and very sad that the others have pretty much fallen by the wayside. I have a tonne of respect for her.

Lots of people have theories on why she has been so successful and also so enduring: what's yours?
My theory is that she's an unbelievable live performer, one of the best live performers ever – despite the fact that Elton John and Piers Morgan think she doesn't sing live; she does. There was a period when her shows were the greatest shows I've ever seen. Plus she's probably written 10 of the best pop songs ever.

How would you categorise your relationship with her?
I'm still working with her is how I'd categorise it [laughs].

Back to that initial roster, who else did you have?
Okay, so we had Madonna, REM, Simply Red and Rod Stewart. And then in January, two months after we'd opened, Daniel Miller rang and asked if I'd do Depeche Mode and Judy Green rang and asked if I'd do Aerosmith. We never looked back.

What's great is that Rod Stewart's still a client, Madonna's still a client, we still work with Simply Red, REM broke up but we worked with them up until that point and we've worked with them since on the two re-issues.

There are so many artists who we've worked with for so long. Robert [Plant], we've worked with for 14 or 15 years, I've worked with Rufus [Wainwright] for over 10 years. Kasabian I keep calling a 'new' client, but we've worked with them for about eight years. Last year we took on Foo Fighters, which has just been a thrill.

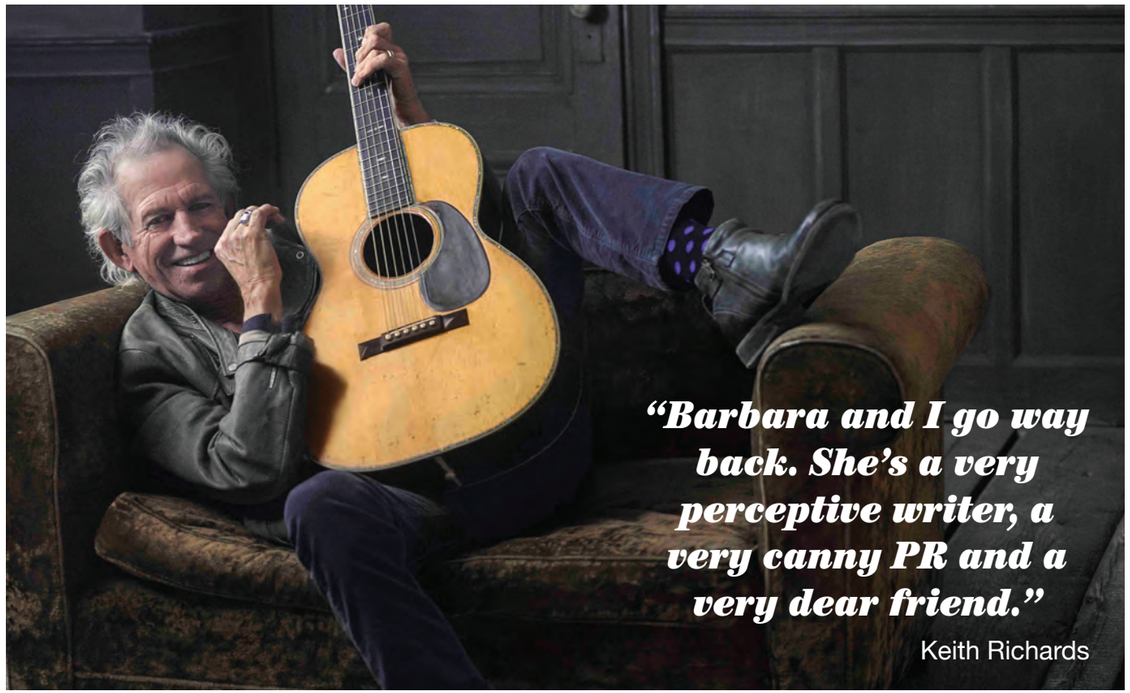
What makes them so good to work with?
They're great guys, not just Dave [Grohl], the whole band, and the management. And they treat press like first class citizens, which not everyone else does.

We took on Rag N Bone Man, which was an unusual situation, because we took him on two weeks after the album came out. He didn't really enjoy the press experience and I think his management were smart enough to get someone on board who would help him enjoy it a little more.

Has that worked?
It's been great, yeah, and he's a lovely guy. We took on Paloma [Faith} as well, and she's really fantastic with the media.

What's the key to maintaining such long relationships with artists?
Being good.

Have you ever dropped a client for any reason?
No. Look, first of all, we're a business, so if I sat here and said I adore every artist, I'd be lying. But, if you don't think the record's any good and you don't think you can do anything with it, then don't say yes in the first place. We say no when we have to. I listen to the music and base it on that. The result is that if we take on



"Barbara and I go way back. She's a very perceptive writer, a very canny PR and a very dear friend."

Keith Richards

a new artist or send a new record out, hopefully it carries some weight.

Have you ever had to have a word with a client and ask them to modify their behaviour in terms of how they treat the press?
Not too much, no. But you know, part of doing a good job is dealing with the way artists are. Every artist has something, maybe they don't like having their picture taken or whatever. Very few people are perfect – except maybe the Foo Fighters [laughs].

What's been the proudest moment of your career so far?
I would say MBC being nearly 20 years old.

What was your toughest moment?
Well there have been a lot of tough moments with Madonna, just because of the sheer enormity of her fame. I mean her last record [Rebel Heart, 2015] leaked, which wasn't really fun, having Guy Oseary on the phone two days before Christmas.

Once I talked her into doing an interview in The Sun. She let them do a photo and she wanted it cropped a certain way. She would hardly ever do this, normally we gave people photos. Anyway, The Sun assured us everything was fine, but they used the wrong crop on the front page. I wasn't very popular. It's sometimes a bit of a rollercoaster and you just have to ride it out – and also accept full responsibility.

But you know, things have changed a lot with social media. At the pinnacle of Madonna's fame, interviews were pretty much the only avenue into an artist's soul, whereas now she probably tweets or puts something on Instagram every single day.

I always joke that people like me spent a lot of our career protecting people like her – and then Instagram and Twitter came along and ruined it!

Do you think that social media of that type has been the most significant change in the media landscape in your time in the business?
Well I'm still very old school and one of the things I love about this country is that there are still so many newspapers and magazines. I think that maybe the press is more important today than it has ever been. Maybe I think that because that's what I do and I think with my press hat on, maybe some people would say I'm living in a fantasy world. But you've got so much choice [of music] these days, so a feature in The Guardian or The Times is worth a lot.

What impact do you think social media has had on fans' relationship with artists?
I think it's been great. Listen, I was a fan first, I'm still a fan, and if I could go back to those bands when I was growing up and someone in those bands was posting something I could see every day, I'd fucking love that.

Robert Plant

Rufus Wainwright

Do you think the standard of music coverage in the media, either specialist or mainstream, is better or worse than it was, say, 10 or 20 years ago?
Well I'm quite positive about it, but I'm a positive person. I go to football every week and I expect Chelsea to win. Why go otherwise?! So my enthusiasm probably colours my view.

It's true that when I was a journalist, I got way more access, I saw lots of major stars taking drugs and drinking Carlsberg Special Brew at 10am and I never wrote about it. It was great and I'm sure today's writers wish those days were back, but they're gone. You now have 45 minutes to gauge someone.

"Yes, there's less space, yes there are fewer ads – we all just have to deal with this stuff."

There are still some great magazines out there though: Mojo is a fantastic magazine and I know of very few artists who wouldn't want to be in it; NME still exists and it's great that it exists, even though it's obviously not what it was; I think there are definitely some terrific broadsheet writers, The Guardian and Observer are great, The Times and The Sunday Times are great; I think Q has absolutely re-discovered itself and I think Ted Kessler deserves a lot of credit for that.

Yes there's less space, yes there are fewer ads, yes the issues are smaller – we all just have to deal with this stuff.

You mentioned the NME. What do you think of the decision it took to go free a couple of years ago?
I think it had to take that decision or not survive. I have a lot of respect for [editor] Mike Williams; I think he's terrific. Do I wish they still did live reviews? Yes. Do I wish they did 10-12 album reviews a week? Yes. But The Telegraph reviews one album a week, it's just the way it is.

How do you cultivate strong relationships with writers?
I think the biggest thing is your knowledge of music. If they know that you know what you're talking about, that's a great starting point. And, again, don't tell them it's an amazing album when you know it's shit.

What's your approach if that tricky thing happens where someone working for a newspaper or magazine writes something about an artist you don't like?
When it comes to something like a review, it's one person's opinion and that's what you have to tell the artist. Occasionally an artist will want to contact a journalist, but I always tell them not to; I think it's a bad thing to complain, because like I said, it's one person's opinion.


Foo Fighters

What do you think your reputation is in the industry?
Good. Top of the game, I would think. I think I've got a lot of integrity, I love music, smart, great roster, loyal, very loyal to the artists but also loyal to the journalists.

Are there any other music PRs around who you think do a great job?
Yeah, there's Rich and Stu at Dawbell, there's Murray Chalmers… You know, it feels like the field has shrunk quite a bit and the people who are still around are around for a reason.

"I've got a lot of integrity, I love music and I'm loyal to journalists."

How many gigs do you go to a week?
Oh my God. I think I went to more gigs than ever last year. At one point I was going to count them, but it got to March and I gave up. I saw eight or nine Foo Fighters shows alone, six Depeche, five Kasabian, plus I go to all the new acts we do. Three a week wouldn't be unusual.

When did you first decide you were going to live in England?
Oh pretty much the first day I got here on that family visit; I loved it. I grew up listening to British music and watching A Hard Day's Night. Also, it's so close to Europe, I mean where would you rather go on a trip: Paris, Madrid or St Louis?

What would your advice be to a young journalist today or a young PR today?
One thing I'd say to both of them is that there are two types of people working in this business: people who want to work in music and people who want to work with celebrities, and there's a world of difference between them. Everyone wants to go the aftershow, of course, but it's not about that, it's about the actual show, it's about the music – it certainly always has been for me.

Finally, why Chelsea?
It's simple really, I used to live on Sloane Street when I first moved here and Chelsea was the nearest ground. So I went, I dragged people with me, and it was terrible. It was when we were in and out of the old first division. 'I was there when we were shit', as some of us sing. I never thought we'd win the FA Cup let alone the Champions League. I've been lucky.

PLAYLISTS ARE EVERYWHERE – THEY ARE NOT EVERYTHING

Killing Moon founder Achal Dhillon is becoming a little perturbed by the streaming-focused preoccupations of modern day A&R…

Over the course of the last three years – intensified particularly in the last 12 months or so by clever viral marketing and other in-ya-face advertising initiatives – it has become abundantly reported that DSPs have saved our individual and collective arses.

All hail the mighty DSPs. We have money flowing through the industry again. Revenues from streaming alone on your Q1 2018 P&Ls are likely to look better than pretty much all recorded music sales for the entire first decade of the 2000s. The good times are back.

My company, Killing Moon Group, is comprised of a record label, an artist management company and a live promotions arm, with ongoing plans to launch a publishing division this year. We have doubtlessly benefited from this new streaming situation, both in financial and promotional terms.

Not too long ago, in the heyday of blog dominance (when The Hype Machine served as the pan-industry A&R detection tool), I would go around describing Spotify as 'paid-promo' – in the sense that the concept of a monetised stream wasn't really something anyone seemed to be hugely aware of.

It's taken a while for true adoption of the streaming format to be fully realised. But now we're here and, as most B2B publications are more often than not bleating in all directions, this has created the outright message that we're entering the second Golden Age of audio.

However, outside the blinding lights and ivory towers of streaming's retail powerhouses, I feel there is a grave problem brewing – largely due to the false simplicity purported by the digital sector to the world at large.

In the last 18 months or so, in our dealings with artists, managers, or indeed other record labels, we've noticed a perception that 'all you need to do' with a new music release is to simply get it on as many streaming retail placements as possible, and gee-willy-whizz there's your music career right there.

"The logical knock-on effects of the growing reliance on playlists are numerous and problematic."

The emails pertaining to how someone on an artist's team thinks it would be a "really good idea if we landed a New Music Friday" are getting more common – generating a record amount of huffing and puffing around label offices. (Not that labels can't be as ambitious and/or arsey as anyone else, by the way.)

One problem: setting a release's objective success standard based on whether Spotify, Apple, Amazon, Deezer or whoever else have featured it is setting up that campaign for a rather immediate fall.

It is bound to feel a bit shit if you were obsessed with this perceived-perfect kick-off, and for myriad reasons it just didn't happen. (Usually pertaining to the streaming platform editor in question wanting to add, y'know, something else to their playlist.)

This type of campaign structure may well actually be counter-intuitive to what the release is designed to accomplish in the first place.

For example, in the context of an introductory single release for a new guitar band – one which at that point is completely devoid of a fanbase – the ongoing objective for at least the first few years is an exercise in fanbase-building, as opposed to playcount-building *per se*.

The logical knock-on effects of this ever-growing reliance on DSP playlists for artists are numerous and problematic. One of the most significant in my mind being that treading this path is rather misleading to younger artists and rightsholders – at the cost of other monetised areas of their business.

Streams, for example, hardly correspond to ticket sales as far as developing artists are concerned, and the temptation to leave the other plates unspun whilst solely concentrating on streams to provide a sustainable career path is borderline negligent.

From my recent experience, this mentality has even filtered into the consciousness – and therefore the practice – of the very latest generation of young music industry professionals. And that worries me rather a lot.

Killing Moon recently ran a lengthy recruitment process to hire a new management assistant, and at my own behest I was insistent that interested applicants had a basic knowledge of digital distribution.

We ended up with just shy of 80 applicants in three weeks for the position. (This was brilliant for us in the sense of seeing an array of varied skillsets – but also heartwarming to see so many young people doing so many cool things that I wish I was doing at their age.)

I tasked certain applicants to come up with a bullet-pointed, outlined campaign for an upcoming release.

To not shit them up entirely, we qualified this by saying there was no 'right or wrong answer' to this task. I was generally just trying to see how they approached dealing with the same problems in their individual respects.

Aside from the person that got the gig, literally every other candidate wrote a plan that largely revolved around spending vast quantities of our money on third-party promo team members – in the hope of landing on a shitload of DSP streaming playlists that we do not control.

The reliance on third parties in our industry to do the shit that we either (i) do not have time to do in the course of a campaign, or (ii) simply do not have the relationships with key contacts at big music publications/radio stations to handle, is hardly a new thing, and a lot of the time is beneficial if meaningfully applied.

However, I cannot help but feel that – by seeing streaming's amplifying mechanisms as a necessity rather than the luxuries I believe they are – we are barely progressing the state of the master audio industry from what we experienced prior to the current era.

I am indeed a proud whiner, but that's not to say that at Killing Moon we aren't constantly trying to effect changes as our merry little company dives into much bigger, more ambitious and indeed more risky campaigns.

We're not massively rich, but we are bloody keen, and so having an abundance of time in comparison to relatively small bank balances allows us to focus on getting progressively better at things we used to suck at.

KM Management client Annabel Allum is developing a strong fanbase without over-relying on DSP playlists

Photo: Rob Blackham

I don't think there are a great deal of problems in the music industry, society or politics that cannot be ultimately put right by way of education. AIM, the UK independent labels' trade body of which I am both a proud member and board member, prides itself on its Academy running throughout the year – dispensing useful, practical advice without actually bankrupting anyone in the process, ranging from legal and business affairs workshops to subject matters relating to cashflow and time management.

With more money in the record label sector should come more of a capacity and indeed a willingness to learn from the numerous mistakes of the past 20 years. Some of of those mistakes, however, are clearly ongoing. If we are to ensure this new Golden Age survives, we would do well to invest our time and money into the generation that intends to replace us all before long.

The music industry really needs to start giving a shit about the personal and professional development of those who will succeed its current generation – helping them to think past our narrow-minded pre-occupations.

It is the difference between giving a person a fish or a net if they are considering a career in the music industry. Development shouldn't be a word that's restricted to that of an artist's career – especially if we're all supposedly in the same boat these days anyway.

WHAT MINISTRY DID NEXT

In 2016, Lohan Presencer waved goodbye to Ministry Of Sound Recordings, acquired by Sony for a reported £67m. Without its label, the wider Ministry group, and its world-famous nightclub, have continued to expand. Here Lohan explains what the Ministry team have been cooking up over the past year…

"If your name's not down you're not coming in."

Problem: How to do a great shared office?

When I sold our record business to Sony Music, this was the next challenge we set ourselves. Currently there's a co-work gold rush with a new one popping up each day on every street corner.

But let's face it, they're all the same aren't they. Glass box offices with narrow corridors, rude receptionists, endless apps, terrible coffee, the gratuitous beer tap, and let's not forget the odd potted plastic plant.

What really gets us is the marketing – happy smiling faces, boasts of community and shared values, the promise of riches. How can so many people be so fulfilled?

In thinking about how we were going to do this differently and better, we reached into our heritage for the answers.

When Ministry of Sound opened in deepest darkest south London in 1991, we were the first club in the UK with an all-night licence, yet we didn't open until midnight or sell alcohol. Now there was a first.

I particularly liked our sole piece of marketing – a flyer with a logo and an address. There was nothing even to say we were a club.

Walk past The Ministry, our first building located in a giant Victorian warehouse two minutes walk from our Southwark headquarters, and there's no sign telling you what it is.

Go inside and you'll think you're in a members' club, complete with a 70-foot bar spanning the entire length of the ground floor.

Next to this is our restaurant serving simple, unpretentious food. Next to this, the best events space in London. Next to this, a secret outside courtyard serving all day coffee and drinks. Next to this, a 32-seater cinema. Next to this, serviced meeting rooms where you can order lunch at the press of a button. Next to this, sound proof studios. Next to this, bathrooms with a bar and beauticians on call for special events. Get the picture?

In trying to work out what most pisses people off about offices, we figured – it's the office itself isn't it? Soulless, airless rooms, the tapping on computers, rows of identical desks, the hum of printers and aircon, bored receptionists, smelly loos. I could go on.

Ministry Of Sound's guest list queue, 1991

We take it as read that an office should be a stunning open space, with great floor to ceiling heights, views, meeting rooms, break out and hospitality areas, and all the latest gadgets and technology. But it also needs to be so much more.

This is what Ministry did with our albums. Before we launched our record label, compilations were commoditised packages sold on TV by a poptastic voice.

Our first CD was a bootlegged recording of one of the nights in the club and sold five thousand copies. Most of all it was real. Twenty years later and we've sold 70 million beautifully packaged albums, giving people a real taste of a night out at the club.

This isn't to say The Ministry is a rave posing as an office, but we know how to entertain for those interested after hours. From small private events to a party at London's Millennium Dome for 50,000 people, we know how to get the party started. And isn't this what work should be as well? Something you enjoy, with people you like? We believe this is fundamental to a truly great workplace. Shared office providers talk about people, community, and synergy but it's all so much cliché and platitude. We know what it means when great people come together, a special kind of magic happens.

"Shouldn't work be something you enjoy, with people you like?"

The people we grew up with are now the CEOs and founders of established businesses and startups. The Ministry is for these people, for independent creatives who light the sparks which become cultural wildfires.

But, like our club, it doesn't work if we open the doors to everyone. We're unashamed about this. The Ministry is for creatives by creatives – music companies, film and TV producers, marketing agencies, PR companies, creative technology start-ups, fashion designers and the arts.

Twenty-five years ago we launched our club in what was considered a desolate wasteland. The Ministry opens in July of this year, 15 minutes on the Tube to practically anywhere in London, in one of the most vibrant areas of the UK. How times have changed.

Come and check us out – but first you'd better make sure your name's on the list.

You can find out more about Ministry's new venture at TheMinistry.com

THE REUNION: TAKE THAT, BEAUTIFUL WORLD (2006)

10 years after their helpline-bothering split, Take That (minus Robbie Williams) got back together, first for a TV special, then for a tour to promote their greatest hits LP, Ultimate Collection. Then, most significantly, after signing to Polydor, to make new music and release Beautiful World, igniting the most successful comeback in UK music history. In the second of MBUK's series on landmark records, we hear from the team behind the band...

David Joseph
Then: Co-president, Polydor
Now: Chairman and CEO, Universal Music UK

I always believed, right from the start, that one of the big factors behind Take That's success was their honesty. There was truth and integrity behind them, and because of that there was an acceptance that they wouldn't be releasing music just because it was an opportunity, but because it was good – they believed in it and they wanted to get it out there.

They had [big single] Patience before we signed them and I think that track, as a lyric that could be a love song but could also be 'Thank You For Waiting', plus a sound that was completely contemporary, was literally perfectly pitched.

The first time I heard it I was with Colin [Barlow, co-president of Polydor at the time], we'd just signed them, backstage at the Birmingham Arena, and Gary gave us a CD to listen to on the way back. We'd signed them without hearing anything, and it's fair to say that song got a fair few listens on the journey back to London.

A while after that, when they were in the process of writing and recording what would become the album, but before Patience had come out, I had a call from Gary saying, Look, I don't know if this record's going to come out – it's going well, but I just don't know if we're going to release this album. We'd paid an advance and everything of course…

Anyway, he invites me to come and sit with him and the band in his old house behind Notting Hill.

We talked about it and I just said, Look, what I'm hearing is great, it all sounds really natural and we're really excited, but don't feel the pressure. Because I think they were feeling pressure, internal pressure, tour tickets were being sold, they were about to start this whole merry-go-round again; what if it works, what if it doesn't work?

They were very calm, very articulate, but they were saying they might be on the verge of deciding to simply not release the record. I think Gary was still certain, but there were significant doubts elsewhere. I said, Look, if you don't want to release it, for whatever reason, we'll figure it out, I'll square it off.

> ***"I remember driving home thinking, Oh God, what have I done?"***

I remember clearly that night, driving home, in a Mini, always a Mini, and thinking, Oh God, what have I done? I mean, I know I've said the right thing, because what I said was truthful and I meant every word, but I also thought, Thank goodness I've got a reasonable and understanding boss [Lucian Grainge], because there's a chance I'm going to have to phone him in a few weeks and say, By the way, I've said to Take That to just forget about whatever deal we've done [laughs].

What I noticed soon after that discussion, though, was that songs like Wooden Boat came out, and other bits and pieces which were more collaborative. And after that, I think they were more of a band than they'd ever been, actually.

Patience, pre-album, gave us the perfect start, but then there's a story about open door policy and democracy.

Our plan was to go with a song called I'd Wait For Life next. It was a classic Gary ballad that played to what you would call a traditional Take That audience. So, in that respect, it felt like a dead cert.

Pippa [Evers], who was their TV promo person, came in, I can't remember if it was to see me or Colin, and she said, You're completely out of your minds; it has to be Shine; Shine absolutely must be the second single.

I was like, Okay… [laughs], I'll take another listen, but to be honest, we're fairly stuck, us and the band, on Wait For Life. I remember listening to it [Shine] and listening to it and all I can tell you is that what seems like an absolutely natural and obvious choice now, definitely didn't feel that way back then.

It wasn't the easiest song for radio, and there'd only been a couple of times when Mark had taken lead.

But we went for it, the band were happy to make the switch, and then I remember going to the video shoot and seeing Mark come down these stairs and at that point thinking, Yeah, this is the right move.

That was a massive turning point for that album: when Pippa came in and said, politely, You're all about to make a huge mistake.

I've thought a few times about what would have happened if we had got that sequence wrong, if Pippa hadn't walked in, and hadn't been so adamant, and I've used that story since to say: please share the music early, just because you have plan doesn't mean it's the right plan.

It's interesting because ordinarily you'd think that [quality of] input would come from management, from A&R, from radio maybe, but this was their TV person saying, I can see this, I can see how this works. And by my own admission, what she saw, and what she was completely right about, was not staring me in the face.

Another big factor was that, as everyone will remember, there was definitely this reserve of goodwill for Take That, this element of karma, almost. Because on the way up, right at the top and even when they were in the wilderness a little bit, they were always just so decent and honest and generous and personable – and that counts for something.

I tell you something, on a much broader level, to do with karma and basic goodness: if you're in a relationship with artists and management where you both really want the best for people, that always gets you out of a tight corner. And I can't think of any artist in the history of music that doesn't at some stage find themselves in a tight corner. That's when you want your people fighting for you, and that's when karma or whatever you want to call it, can kick in.

When I quietly walk away from all this I'll publish a small pamphlet, with a circulation of about four, called 10 Easy Ways To Get The Most Out Of Your Record Company. It will be very simple, very slim, and you can bet Take That will have done all 10 – ironically not with the aim of getting the best out of their record company, but because of basic loyalty and decency.

Another absolute crucial moment was when we'd released the first four singles. Patience and Shine had done brilliantly, Wait For Life and Reach Out were doing okay, and then we had a lunch, in a restaurant that was way too fancy, with Colin, Lucian, the band and myself. We were talking about where we could go next, and that afternoon they were going to see [film director] Matthew Vaughn, who they're friendly with. They watched an early cut of Stardust [the film adapted from the Neil Gaiman novel] and three days later I got a call and they came in and played me Rule The World [written, sharpish, for the closing credits of the film].

That track then became so central to their live show and was also, for me, the piece of absolute magic on the album, something that defines their greatness, but wasn't on the original release. It is so beautiful on so many levels.

It ended up being on the Deluxe Tour Edition and was one of the three pillar singles: Patience, which was written before the album, Shine, which we nearly messed up, and Rule The World, which wasn't even on the original record. So, you know, sometimes things work out [laughs].

I love these guys, they've been incredibly loyal and I don't think I'd be sitting in the seat I'm sitting in today without them. So when it came to release week, I just wanted it to go well and make sure they were surrounded by a team that could help them fulfil their dreams. What it sold and where it charted, of course it was important, but also, in a way, it was detail. The fact that it worked and the fact that we then knew there would be further chapters to come was the real result for me.

BEAUTIFUL WORLD: FACTFILE

Release Date:
November 24, 2006

Label:
Polydor

Highest UK Chart Position:
No.1

Revision Notes:

- The band's fourth album, first as a four-piece and first since 1995
- It spent a total of 62 weeks in the top 40 of the UK album chart, including eight at number one.
- It is the first Take That album on which all members of the band have a writing credit for every track
- It was the second best selling album or 2006 and the fourth best selling album of 2007
- Cumulative OCC album sales to date stand at just under three million, making it the 35th best-selling album of all time in the UK

Colin Barlow
Then: Co-president, Polydor
Now: Left RCA in December 2016, will return imminently with his own venture

Knowing Gary as a songwriter, there was someone that I'd always thought would be perfect to work with Take That, and that was John Shanks.

Gary was like, if you can get him, we're on, let's make a record.

So, I went to America, saw John and he'd never heard of Take That. It was literally, Who? Getting him on board was probably the toughest part of the whole process, but I was very determined. In the end John


Art Direction: Studio Fury
Photography: Tom Craig

really took a leap of faith with me, and then when he and Gary met up, they just instantly and completely connected. And very, very quickly we got Patience, that came right at the start of the whole thing and gave everyone so much confidence.

We also had some great writers coming in to work with the guys: Steve Robson, Eg White, Billy Mann, Anders Bagge. It was just one of those amazing things that happens once in a blue moon, when it just feels effortless. I remember when we first heard Shine, we just thought, Wow, we've hit the jackpot here, we're creating something really special. And the confidence just built and built.

My brief at the start was that they had to deliver a mature sound, almost become like a modern day Eagles, if they were going to make it work. And that's where the John Shanks thing came from. What we didn't want to do was try and re-create what they were.

I think the move to sharing writing credits and vocals was a massive lesson learned about doing it in harmony: if we're going to do it, let's do it altogether. It felt like the four of them were such great friends, enjoying themselves and really enjoying each other's company.

"We didn't look on them as a pop band; Take That were always more than a pop band."

They were a joy to work with and it was definitely one of the most exciting things I've ever been involved in.

I remember me and David unveiled the return of Take That at a Universal conference at the Shepherd's Bush Empire and you could feel so much love and excitement, it was one of those special moments where everyone was so thrilled to see them back.

David and I were both fans of Take That, so we were really pleased to get them, and we never once treated it as an exercise in nostalgia. We also didn't look on them as a pop band; Take That were always more than a pop band.

When people heard Patience, they fell in love with Take That all over again, then they heard Shine, which is a genius record, and then the thing that really took the roof off was Rule The World. For me that's one of the best songs Gary's ever written. And when you see them play it live, wow.

One of the greatest nights I've ever had was after we did an ITV special to celebrate their return. They played a lot of the new songs, the performance was brilliant, there was a real sense of euphoria in the room and afterwards we all went out and just partied all night. Everyone was on such an adrenaline rush.


Art Direction: Studio Fury
Photography: Tom Craig

It felt like one of those things where everything that was supposed to happen actually did happen.

You couldn't wish a second chance on nicer people and when it came, it wasn't just a modicum of success, it was bigger and better than first time around. I can't think of as many groups who have got as much goodwill as Take That; you just want them to win.

Richard Dawes
Then: Head of Press, Polydor
Now: Co-founder, Dawbell PR

The story broke that they were coming to Polydor and Selina [Webb, then Director of Publicity at Polydor] said, We want you to do it.

My first reaction was, I don't know where to start. It was like nothing I'd ever done before. At the same time, of course, wow, what an opportunity, but it was completely un-trodden territory for me.

I remember going to speak to the band for the first time, and that was when [the account] was still between us doing it in-house and another agency. They were just so famous! They were part of the fabric of British culture, so going to meet them was quite daunting. I mean I'd met quite a lot of famous people by this time, remember, but this seemed on a whole new level.

Anyway, I chatted to them, we had a really good time, I talked through what I wanted to do and I got the call saying yeah, it's yours.

I think David was really instrumental in me getting the job, he was bigging me up for sure. He showed a lot of confidence in me and it was my ticket.

Every PR knows that at some stage you get given an act that enables you to speak to people you haven't spoken to before, gives you that potential and opportunity to shine – no pun intended.

My main thought, and it's something that I stick to today, was to make sure whatever we did was quality and that it resonated. It's not about trying to tick the boxes and pile up coverage. There was also an incredible level of attention to detail. Management deserve a lot of credit for that, because Jonathan Wild was the person who scrutinised every image. His quality control policy set the bar very high.

We always kept their credibility in mind, we were doing quite cool things, Like if we did a photoshoot, it would be beautifully photographed, it would show them respect and it would really capture them.

It was so different for me, because up until then my job had been all about trying to get people to write about my artists, but this was the opposite of that. We had to say no, we had to be very selective.

From the start we knew what we wanted it *not* to be, that was the easy part: we didn't want it to be cheesy, or opportunistic, or like any other reunion that had happened previously. We wanted it to feel like a new era.

In terms of perceptions we had to shift, there was that line: Well, Gary writes everything and carries the band, doesn't he? This time around it was very different, they all contributed greatly. And then there was the Robbie question: is he coming back? And to be honest that continued right up to the moment that he did. It wasn't a problem; it didn't dominate the headlines, because they were making their own headlines, through the music and through the sheer scale of the success. I'm sure they got a bit tired of being asked, but they never showed it, they always said he'd be welcome, but they were also very good at giving the press something else to write about.

I wouldn't actually say they were pros with the media, because that sounds put-on, or cynical. They're just naturally amiable people and humble and nice. They've got lots to say, they're funny and they're always generous with their time.

I remember coming into that first week of release, and it was great, but then we got the numbers in over Christmas, and it was unbelievable, something like 400,000 copies sold in a week, and it was just, Oh My God…

There was such a reservoir of goodwill for the band, at all levels, including the media. All those young writers on Smash Hits who'd been out on the road with them in the '90s were now big-shot editors at major magazines, and because they'd had such a fantastic experience, because the guys had always been great with them, there was this sense of wanting them to succeed and embracing what they were trying to do.

I remember, actually, I persuaded them to go to the Q Awards and we were sat at the back of the room. Someone was on stage, maybe Alex Turner, or Noel Gallagher I think it was, and they made a quip about Take That being in the room, something along the lines of, I thought these were rock'n'roll awards, or, You're lucky Liam's not here. And he got booed, properly booed. They had a lot of friends there and some people misread that room.

On the day of release we had the idea of doing two in-store signings. We started in London, then flew them up to Manchester – with Mark handing out newspapers and coffees for everyone on the plane – and I remember the hysteria at both. I'd never been in a situation like that, with hundreds of people waiting round the back of HMV, banging on the van, stuff like that, it was amazing to see that first hand.

Working on that album was an absolute pleasure. They wrote a new playbook on how to come back – and they made it look easy, which it really isn't.

For me it was a catalyst without a shadow of a doubt; it helped propel me into new territory. And it turned out to be even more important than I could have known, because when Stuart [Bell] and I decided to set-up Dawbell together, he brought Paul McCartney with him and Take That agreed to come with me, which was an incredible moment.

"Young writers who'd been on the road with Take That in the '90s were now editors."

With some acts, they release an album, they maybe do a little tour, you get bursts of interest, you get a cover or two, but Take That were the first act I worked with where something is happening all the time, on a huge scale, and it's like being in the gym three times a day, all year. Not skipping sessions and slipping back, just constant, and you can't help but get better and learn. Because that's what you need, you can't learn this job out of a textbook, you have to do it and be challenged by it.

Emma Powell
Then: Senior Marketing Manager, Polydor
Now: Director, Attention Consultancy

There was a lot of excitement internally because I think we all knew quite early on that the record Colin was going to make with them was going to be a step forward and it was going to be relevant.

I think the first time we all heard Patience was a moment. I'll never forget Colin rounding the team up on our floor and taking us into his office to play that track for the first time – we were all, Wow. We knew what we were dealing with then and we knew it was going to be special.

What we had to do was make the campaign reflect the changes and reflect the fact that they had moved on. For instance, for the artwork, on the sleeve, what you didn't want were four guys in a row looking down the front of a camera. We all know they're good looking, so let's get past that and do something different.

It had to represent the album that was being made and it was a real collaborative effort to present them as a credible, grown-up band, which meant it was about the music, not how they looked.

The sleeve and the first video [for Patience] was all about them coming back together as four adults, there was an underlying theme there, but it was all done in, for want of a better word, a 'cool' way.

The sleeve photo shoot was a journey in itself, literally. Tom Craig was the photographer, he has a very distinct style and does a lot of stuff for Vogue. It was two days in Spain, in a car, on a road trip, there was no glitzy studio.

I got very involved in the creative process with them and with management. I would say Jonathan and I spoke every day for two years. The band were absolutely central though, it entirely came from them.

They wanted to move things on and push the boundaries, there was no interest from any of them in looking backwards.

It was the exact opposite of a release by numbers; it was about doing something special at each stage, to make it bigger and better as it went along, to make them as successful as they deserved to be.

It was also relentless. I actually still have a week-by-week of everything that happened in every single area, because I'm a bit weird like that, and it was just non-stop for nearly two years, but so planned out.

They all worked so hard as a band. As hard as everyone in the background was working, they gave it double. They strived for perfection on every level all the time.

They were all an absolute delight to work with and I enjoyed every minute of it. I ended up doing Beautiful World, Circus and Progress, so I spent a long time working with them and it was the highlight of my career.

Stephen Kennedy
Then and Now:
Founder, Studio Fury

We'd done art direction for quite a lot of artists on Polydor, and after they signed we got a call asking if we'd be interested in putting some ideas forward for what would be a new Take That album.

I've got a sister who's two years younger than me and she had Take That posters all over her wall, so when we were asked that was the sort of image I had in my mind. But then, as the label started to explain the vision of where the guys wanted to go, it was apparent that all that was going in the bin and what we were looking at was a complete re-boot, which we saw as a great challenge to take on.

The work that we'd done prior to this was with artists like Ian Brown and some quite alternative bands, so we figured, if they're coming to us, they must be looking in a very different direction.

Initially we put some mood boards together, with some things that were a bit more stylish, more story-based rather than just posed. We didn't want four guys sat on a sofa, we wanted to go on a trip somewhere, see what we got out of that, make it a bit more reportage.

Straight away you got a sense of who was going to take on what role: Mark was very interested in the artwork, as was Jason. With Gary and Howard, there was interest there, but they trusted Mark and Jason to steer.

I think the results have stood the test of time. It was very kind of Homme +. Or if you'd had said, this is the artwork for a new U2 record, you could have easily imagined that. There's a big compliment there, because if you look at where they'd been previously, that's quite a big jump, and they did it very stylishly and very naturally.

Testament to what they're like to work with, and to their loyalty, is that we've gone on to art design every Take That album since then – and every single campaign has been completely different.

They're brilliant to work with because they're passionate about it, they care about the work, they get behind it. No idea is ever turned down because it might be difficult or hard work. Their attitude is, If we have to do this to achieve that, let's get on with it.

In fact, if you say, Just sit here and we'll take a nice picture, that's the old days, they're not into that. But if you give them a character and a story and a challenge, they like that.

‘I KIND OF FREAKED OUT’

Coldplay are one of the biggest bands in history. They have been accompanied on their journey from day one by creative director/fifth member/co-manager Phil Harvey – apart from a very long lost weekend beginning in 2002. Here, Harvey explains why he split, temporarily, with his best friends just as they were hitting the highest of highs...

Phil Harvey has a unique relationship with and role within Coldplay. Although it’s hard to pin him down on exactly what it is.

The band view him (and list him in liner notes) as a fifth member; he’s not so sure. “It’s very sweet. And I am in the studio with them all day every day, but then I don’t play any instruments, so… yeah, it’s hard to explain why or indeed if I’m of any use whatsoever!”

Many who deal with the band see him as co-manager; again, he’s not so sure. “Dave [Holmes] is always the grown up in the room, he’s the real manager. I’m involved, but if it’s proper management you want, you need to talk to Dave.”

His official job title is Creative Director; he’s absolutely adamant. “I fucking hate it! It makes me sound like I run a ballet company or a marketing agency.”

What he definitely is (although he’d probably argue with this as well) is indispensable to Team Coldplay, and closer to the heart and soul of the band than anyone who isn’t Chris Martin, Jonny Buckland, Will Champion and Guy Berryman

He has been part of the story pretty much since day one, a classic case of the friend who volunteered to help out. The scale of success, however, was so overwhelming that it led to Harvey walking out, traveling halfway across the world and carving out a brand new career, before reconnecting with the band, rediscovering their friendships and re-inventing his role.

Here, he talks about the build up to the split, the issues that brought things to a head, the pain of breaking up and how he found his way home.

Who was in the race to sign you and why did Parlophone win?
Gosh, I really couldn’t tell you who was in the running. There were a lot of offers. I remember we agonised over whether or not to stay with Fierce Panda, that was definitely an option.

They offered us their first ever album deal [they had previously only released singles] and we thought really long and hard about it, because we loved Simon [Williams, label founder] and we were so grateful to him.

But I think once Parlophone’s name came up… We had a great connection with Dan Keeling, who was the A&R man, and then once we met Miles Leonard and Keith Wozencroft, we could just instantly tell they were the right people for us.

What was it about the band and that debut record that connected with so many people so quickly do you think?
Actually, it felt like a slow burn to us, because after we signed we put out another EP, the Blue Room EP, which did absolutely nothing, wasn’t even a blip on the radar. And then we put out Shiver and that got some plays by Jo Whiley [Radio 1] and crept into the Top 40 at number 35. We were really happy with that, it was as much as we’d hoped for.

And then Chris wrote Yellow, while we were making the first album. The moment I got a call from the record company saying Yellow was number four in the midweeks, that was a genuine shock, to body and soul. That was a paradigm shift; we went from being a band that was thrilled to be on the C-list at Radio 1 to having a song in the top 5, next to all the pop giants.

> ***“I was massively intimidated. I desperately didn’t want to let the band down.”***

I kind of freaked out, I was massively intimidated by it and wasn’t sure I was comfortable operating at that level. I was all too conscious of my lack of experience and lack of knowledge and I desperately didn’t want to let the band down.

Then the album came out a few weeks later and went to No.1, by which time Yellow’s doing well all around the world and there comes this incredible pressure to cram as much into the band’s schedule as possible. It was taking off everywhere and it was a very chaotic time. For the first few months of the Parachutes craziness, it was just me in the management office until I finally got myself an assistant – the wonderful Estelle Wilkinson. Luckily for me and the band, she was phenomenal. In fact, she became so integral that, when I quit two years later, she stepped up to co-manage the band alongside Dave for Rush of Blood and X&Y.

How did you cope?
I’m not sure I did cope very well. I definitely should have had more support at an earlier stage.

How do you feel looking back at that?
I don’t really know, it all happened so quickly; it was like a spark hitting an oil spill. And then I did get support because, at Parlophone’s suggestion, we started working with Nettwerk in North America where, by great fortune, Dave Holmes was working, and he became, quite quickly, our trusted friend and then our American manager.

Signing the Parlophone deal, April 1999, from left: Miles Leonard, James Mullan, Guy, Jonny, Dan Keeling (A&R), Will, Chris, Phil

How did the lines of demarcation look in those early days?
For Parachutes, I was the manager and Dave was the North American manager, then we became co-managers. Then, when A Rush of Blood to the Head came out, I decided to leave.

What happened in the build-up to Rush of Blood that made you take the decision to leave in the week it came out?
To be honest with you, I think I was struggling to cope. The pressure, pretty much from when Yellow took off, was just… I’m not sure what was going on, really. I got sick, I had a very severe thyroid problem and was heading for a coma if it hadn’t been diagnosed. So I was in a pretty bad way and, for whatever reason, the relationship between Chris and I suffered as well.

It’s hard to explain why, but all I can say is that once we’d scrapped the relationship of singer/manager, the friendship came back again. And when I returned to the fold, after X&Y, we constructed it so that I was more of a band member and that dynamic has worked infinitely better for us.

Did you have to have a conversation with the band to tell them you were leaving?
[Laughs] Yeah, that was not a good conversation. It was pretty dramatic, and not just because I was the manager but because I was Chris’ best friend and I was buggering off to the other side of the world. I went traveling across South America and ended up going to university in Australia. So three years later, when they invited me back, I was on the verge of starting my training with the NHS as a clinical psychologist.

Did you keep much interest in what they did or did you try and block it out of your mind?
No, it was still very much part of me and I was still heavily invested. It was a weird time, to not be talking to Chris regularly, it was just odd. There was some contact, but it was much, much less. Of course, in the end, they were very kind and invited me back in. And Dave was very magnanimous as well, allowing me to find a role whereby he was still manager and I was participating in the management, but also helping the band with anything and everything that was musical or creative.

Was it difficult because they didn’t want you to leave? Presumably your argument was that it would be best for everyone if you left?
I don’t think I said it was best for everyone actually, I think I was being selfish, looking out for myself. My health was faltering and I wasn’t particularly happy. It’s hard to explain. Our relationship wasn’t a typical one between a manager and a band. I was their friend; I’d been sleeping on floors with them for four or five years. So it was traumatic and even talking about it now I just feel immensely grateful that we managed to get back together.

From left: Will, Dave, Guy, Jonny, Chris, Phil

Did they want you to stay?
They would have preferred me to stay, yes, that was made quite clear. I think to some extent they felt abandoned and let down – and to some extent they were right.

I guess the positives were that Dave was on the scene to take over completely and, most importantly, that you found a way to return to the fold. So does everyone in Team Coldplay now look back on it as the right move?
Oh my God it was definitely the right move. There's no way I'd be talking to you today if that hadn't happened. Alongside Estelle, Dave did an incredible, seamless job carrying things on without me. A Rush of Blood To The Head was a huge success and then X&Y, the follow-up, was also a massive success. I think if you talk to the band, though, they'd say that period wasn't their happiest, because, without over-egging my importance, there is a fundamental balance in the force when the six of us are together. If you take any one of us away it gets a bit wobbly, and that definitely happened, they had some difficult experiences between 2003 and 2005.

"They felt abandoned and let down – and to some extent they were right."

How did the reconciliation and reintegration come about?
Chris and I just started naturally hanging out again once I was back in North London. After a couple of walks in the park, Chris said, C'mon Phil, we've got to get you back in the band, how shall we do it? And like I say, Dave was just fantastic about it. He could have felt pretty put out, but he was so welcoming and we managed to vaguely work out a delineation of responsibilities. In truth the line's pretty blurred, we just kind of get on with it together.

What would your advice be for young managers today?
Hold on to the fact if your artist has that same belief in you that you have in them, that's qualification enough to take them to the highest heights. At the beginning, you find out that the music industry is filled with ever-changing jargon, and to a certain extent, absolutely everyone is blowing hot air and winging it. There's a simple reason for that: success in music is based on feelings and passion, it's not necessarily a very cerebral industry. Remember that, and know that if your artist believes in you and you believe in them, it'll probably be okay.

Meet the old boss

In the second of MBUK's regular series catching up with the execs who once ruled and ran the British music business, we talk to Paul Russell, MD and Chairman of CBS UK and then Sony UK during one of the most poptastic and turbulent periods in the company's history...

In most cases, the recording of an interview starts with some sort of formality: *Thanks for sparing the time today…* Or, *I'd like to kick off by asking…*

With Paul Russell, head of CBS UK and then Sony UK between 1982 and 1996, it's more of a 'fade up' kind of deal.

We press record in the middle of a conversation about how, when Michael Jackson toured Europe in the '80s and '90s, the company would forget about seeing former in-house comms boss Jonathan Morrish for the duration, as the King of Pop would expect the Pope of PR to greet him at Heathrow and then wave him off from wherever the last date happened to be – facilitating handshakes and photo calls with heads of state and other luminaries along the way.

It's the second barnstorming story since Russell greeted *MBUK* in a London hotel on one of his regular visits to his old stomping ground from his current residence in Barbados.

And it's the point where it becomes clear there's no point waiting for an official starting pistol – Russell is already up and running. So, just maintain eye contact and subtly reach for record on the iPhone, then try like hell to steer the conversation between the goalposts of the beginning and end of his reign at Sony UK.

"The music industry's too much like hard work now – a lot of the fun's gone out of it."

Like many record company heads, especially of a certain vintage, Russell is a lawyer, and the plan, originally, was for him to be just that: a lawyer, doing lawyery things, at a law firm. That plan was derailed by two things: the fact that he didn't especially enjoy doing lawyery things, not the highly detailed painstakingly precise things, anyway; and a chance meeting with rock'n'roll.

"I was working in private practice with a guy called Michael Balin," explains Russell. "He was in his early 60s and he had a great reputation in the music business through working with artists such as Vera Lynn, Tom Jones, Engelbert Humperdinck, but they were all MOR acts. Here I was, 27 or something, and I started getting the rock'n'rollers: Peter Grant/Led Zeppelin, The Pretty Things, The Moody Blues…

"And then there was this band called Arrival. They'd had some hits on Decca, but, for some reason, Decca had forgotten to pick up their option. They had a number three album in the charts and they were effectively unsigned.

"CBS were desperate for UK talent at the time. Clive Davis had sent Dick Asher over to run the company and specifically to sign local artists, because everybody had a piece of the British invasion except CBS, who didn't have one UK act that meant shit outside the UK.

"But [as the band's lawyer] I'd gone to Dick's predecessor, because I knew their [CBS's] position and Arrival were in such a strong place. Honestly, the deal we got was insane. It's the only deal I ever did where the advance wasn't an advance, it was just a flat payment, money in the pocket.

"Asher hated the fact that his predecessor had done the deal, especially as Arrival never really went on to do anything internationally. He was constantly on my case to get out of it. But what am I gonna do? CBS made the fucking deal, live with it!

"Anyway, one day he asks me out for lunch. I say, If this is about that bloody deal… He says no, it's something else – and he asks me to come and work for CBS.

"I really liked Dick and had great respect for him. Of all the then-heads of record companies in the UK, he was by far the best. I started there in December 1973 as the UK Director of Business Affairs."

In 1975 Russell moved to the company's New York office as VP of Administration, and from there to Australia as Managing Director.

In 1982 he returned to the UK, initially as Managing Director, with the legendary Maurice 'Obie' Oberstein as Chairman, but then very quickly assuming both roles.

His stewardship coincided with a golden age for UK pop, with homegrown artists peacocking it all over the world, many of them signed to CBS (and then Sony) labels.

It also coincided with one of the most famous (and ultimately pointless) legal disputes in music industry history, when George Michael sued his own record company.

After all of that, Russell was promoted to a pan-European role and then another stint in the US until, in 2003, approaching 60, he decided he'd had enough and, to all intents and purposes, retired from the frontline record business.

"Once [Tommy] Mottola had gone, there was a bit of a vacuum, there were no real music men left at the top. Then there were all these rumours about merging with BMG. I mean, Jesus Christ, BMG! When I look back on my time in the UK, there was Warner,

there was EMI, there was Virgin; I'd forgotten there was a BMG in town, somewhere up Tottenham Court Road; to me they were invisible. The idea of having that lot come in and have some say in what we were going to do… it just didn't appeal."

Asked how he'd fancy doing it all again, here in the UK, in today's business, Russell says, simply, "I wouldn't."

Why not? "I just think it's too much like hard work. A lot of the fun's gone out of it. [Rupert] Perry [head of EMI], [Rob] Dickins [head of Warner] and I would get together and swap stories now and again, and whoever told a story, the other two would be, like, 'You can't be serious!' You don't hear those stories anymore."

Well, maybe just *once* more…

What was the state of play at CBS UK when you became MD in 1982?

We were starting to do well with local repertoire, Shakin' Stevens was taking off, Adam Ant was doing well. We had Wham, then, through that, George, we had Terrence Trent D'Arby, we had Sade.

And what was it like working alongside Obie initially?

At the time, CBS had some major issues with the manufacturing and distribution centre in Aylesbury, so after a few months, when Obie was satisfied that I wasn't going to fuck it all up, he said, Right, Russell, you just run the record company, I'm off to Aylesbury to sort out the M&D operation.

"Obie was irascible, funny and could be brilliant."

After that we'd have lunch once a week and go over the issues – and he would always give solid, expert advice. He also got really busy with the BPI, so to be honest I didn't see him a lot. Occasionally he forced me to go to QPR on a Saturday, and in retaliation I'd force him to go with me to Chelsea.

He was irascible, funny, and could be brilliant. He gave great advice when I asked for it, pointed out things that I had clearly missed. It was a great working relationship based, I think, on a high degree of mutual respect.

Once he had sorted out the M&D at Aylesbury, he decided to take PolyGram's offer and moved over there. I was sad to see him leave but I think he figured that his time at CBS had peaked and it was the right time to move on. We remained friends, had dinner every couple of months, but suddenly we were rivals, so it was a different relationship.

We missed him, but there was such a great executive team at CBS – Richard Rowe, John Kennedy, Tim Bowen, Tony Woolcott, David Black and, of course, Muff Winwood – that we all just picked up the slack and motored on.

Of course, Obie being Obie, he tried to lure all of the above to PolyGram, including me!

Looking back on it I think he was a bit annoyed that he couldn't get any of us to budge – and I will be forever grateful that they all decided to stick with CBS and me.

Going back to that first flurry of signings, is it true that you nicked Sade from under the noses of Virgin?

Well, sort of and sort of not. It is true that Virgin had a party planned to announce Sade's signing on a Monday, but we signed her on the Sunday night.

We had this A&R woman, called Annie Roseberry. She was incredibly difficult to deal with and [head of A&R] Muff Winwood had completely given up with her, because I think she signed three acts in 11 years. (Roseberry is credited, funnily enough, with signing U2. U2 were signed to CBS in Ireland in the very early days – and for some reason the UK company weren't interested and they went to Island Records. If you speak to [U2 manager] Paul McGuiness, he'll tell you, Annie Roseberry was the first A&R executive to sign U2.)

So, every week we'd have an A&R meeting and she'd say, I'm looking at this act or that act. Okay, do you wanna sign them? I dunno, I'm still looking. It drove Muff crazy. So I said, Muff, to preserve your sanity, let's leave her on one side to do her own thing, and she can deal direct with me, no problem.

Next thing, she kept talking about this act called Sade. And it was the same old question: Annie, do you want to sign the fucking act or don't you? And the same old answer: I'm still looking.

Now, the one day I used to take off was Sunday, I used to play golf. So I've played golf, I'm in the shower and my wife at the time is trying to give me the phone in the shower. I said, 'What are you doing?!' She says, Annie Roseberry's on the phone and she has to speak to you. Tell her I'll call her when I get out of the fucking shower! Nope, she has to speak to you now. Fine, I abandon the shower: yes Annie?

'We've got to sign Sade.' Oh, you've finally made up your mind! And after waiting for you for months, can we not wait one more day? No, we have to sign her tonight, she's signing with Virgin tomorrow, there's a big launch and announcement party booked for midday.

Okay, how are we gonna do this? She says she'll pick the manager up, Lee Barrett, and we'll be at your house at 7:30 and you're going to persuade him to sign with us. So she turns up, and I said to Lee, 'Cards on the table, we know you're signing for Virgin tomorrow, we even know there's a party planned to announce it; forget all that, what would it take for us to sign Sade here tonight?'

He said Sade would prefer to be with you guys because you're much more worldwide blah-di-blah. But let's face it, it's always about money, so I cut to the chase: what's the advance? £30,000. Okay, so how about we take the contract, we cross out £30,000 and we put £40,000, and then we cross out Virgin and put CBS?

He said, I'll talk to her – and she'll make the decision for the group. But he didn't want to do it over the phone, he wanted to do it personally, so we sent a car for her and by 9:30 we're all at my house and we got it done, Sunday night in my living room.

1987, backstage at Wembley: Russell hands Bob Dylan a disc celebrating multi-million UK record sales. (A reluctant Dylan was convinced to pose for the snap by George Harrison and Ringo Starr)

At 11 in the morning, Richard Branson's on the phone. Hey Richard, how are you? Paul, you are a complete arsehole! How could you do that?! I said, Richard, Annie's been looking at this group for months, it's not like we heard of them because they were going to sign to you, honestly. If you don't believe me I'll send you the notes from our A&R meetings from months ago. The fact that they were going to sign to you just brought it to a head.

In the end Richard was actually very gracious about it. I did hear, though, that in a hotel somewhere, there was an ice sculpture saying WELCOME SADE, slowly melting…

You can't have known then just what a coup it would be...

Not until we started hearing some studio demos, as they were making the record, and then it was obvious that between these three guys and Sade, there were some very serious songwriters – plus, of course, she was absolutely gorgeous. It just clicked, it was very cool. Oh, and it got me out of a huge hole in America. And this goes back to George – and the fact that no one ever pays much attention to how much we bent over backwards to please George.

He goes solo and says he doesn't want to be on Epic in America, he wants to be on Columbia, the same label as Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen and Barbara Streisand. Can't do that, George, ain't gonna happen. Epic goes to Epic. Michael Jackson's on Epic in the States, he's on Epic over here. George stamps his foot: I have to be on Columbia, you've got to make it happen.

There was a lovely guy called Don Dempsey who was running Epic America and I said to him, Look, you've got to do me a huge favour here. He, quite rightly said, No way! Company policy etc. And then I played him the first Sade record, before anyone else had heard it, and I said, You're getting this instead, she's called Sade and here's a picture of her. He loved it: this is a number one record in America, tell George it's fine.

Were Wham on the roster when you came back from Australia?

At that time they were on Innervision, Mark Dean's label, and we had an exclusive licence with them. But then Wham wanted to get out of that contract and sign direct to us.

We were in the middle, because we'd signed a deal with Mark, who was a lovely guy, and we didn't want piss on him, but, equally, we knew we couldn't risk losing Wham.

Anyway, I thought there's only one way we're going to get this done. We went down the road to the Inn On The Park, we rented three connecting suites, we brought the girls down from the office and set the typewriters up: Wham and your lawyers, you're at that end; Mark Dean/Innervision and your lawyers, you're at that end; we're in the middle. It's Friday, it's 5pm, nobody leaves until we get the deal done. We finished on Sunday night, had a glass of Champagne and everyone was happy.

Later on, of course, Mark wasn't so happy, because he had no idea how big it was going to get.

With Mariah Carey (left); the boss meets The Boss (right)

Who else were amongst your earliest signings and successes?
We had Alison Moyet, we had Paul Young, which was one of Muff's. Paul had been around a while, he wasn't a kid, and I remember saying to Muff, You sure? He said, Trust me, I know how we're going to make this work. Then his next one was Bonnie Tyler. I said, Give me a break! But, again, Don't you worry, I know how we're going to do it. And he did it. Then there was Terrence Trent D'arby, of course. He was so successful with that first record [1987's Introducing The Hardline According to Terrence Trent D'Arby] that it sort of burned him.

Was his second record [1989's mega flop, Neither Fish Nor Flesh] a question of an artist being given too much freedom?
I think that might be the case, yes. At one point, [Walter] Yetnikoff [global head of CBS at the time] tells me I have to come to some awards thing in LA. I said, That's a fuck of a long flight for a night out Walter! He says, Next week you're going to have the top three albums in America, with Sade, Terrence and Wham – you're coming over to celebrate.

With Terrence, when people saw him, they just thought he was unbelievable. Yetnikoff was talking about him being the next Michael Jackson.

And then the problem was, the guy who found him was a guy called Lincoln Elias, who worked for Muff, lovely bloke, but so fucking secretive. He kept saying, You're gonna love me in six months, you wait till you see the act I'm bringing you. Why can't I see it now? No, no, you wait, you wait. And that was Terrence. At which point, Yeah, fair enough, we see what you mean Lincoln!

And then a year later Terrence is screaming at us, I'm not letting you fuckers release another single, this album's too big already, I can't keep working this bloody album.

I think if it had been Muff who'd brought Terrence in, there'd have been a lot more supervision of that second record. I think Lincoln was somewhat in awe of Terrence and what he'd achieved.

What were your thoughts and expectations when you heard the second record?
We were summoned to come and listen to the record. So we head off to the studio and as we're walking in, the guy from Virgin Music Publishing is coming out, Terrence was signed to them. He looked at us and said, Good fucking luck guys. I remember saying to Muff, Fuck it, they're publishers what do they know? And then we listened to it, and it was so self-indulgent.

What were your highlights in terms of records and artists?
In terms of records, Listen Without Prejudice, George's second album, was probably the best piece of work I ever dealt with. I said to George, If that's where you're going, if this is your direction, the person that you're going to frighten to death is Elton John. Of course after that, the shit hit the fan, but at the time, and still now, I rate that album as a work of genius. In terms of working with an artist, Sade was a lot of fun, Terrence was a lot of fun, he was always up and cheerful and funny, great sense of humour.

Who were the more difficult artists?
George wasn't easy to work with, he had very strong views on what he would and wouldn't do. It's not a question of 'difficult', it's more that artists fall into two camps: some of them like hanging out with their record company, and there are other artists who don't want, need or seek that relationship. It doesn't mean they're not pleasant to deal with on a personal basis, George was always lovely to deal with, but he would enter your life like a firestorm and then he'd leave when he thought that cycle was over and you'd go back to having dinner once every few months if you were lucky.

What would you pick out as a regret or disappointment?
Well I've made it pretty clear that in my view the whole George Michael lawsuit was a complete fucking waste of everyone's time and money.

Russell with Michael Jackson during the Dangerous Tour dates at Wembley, 1992

Did you think that at the time?
I did, but what could we do? We'd had George and Andrew fight with Mark Dean, and we'd sorted that one out. Now we've got Wham direct. A little while later, George calls me up and says I want to go to lunch with you at the White Elephant in Curzon Street. We go to lunch and he tells me he's going to go solo – will that be a problem for us? I said, No, no problem at all.

Next thing that happens is I get Tony [Russell, George's lawyer] on the phone saying, We need a new contract. In actual fact, the Wham contract had a proviso for them splitting up and going solo, so there was no need, but we said, okay, we'll give you better terms. What's interesting is that because George, Andrew and Mark were so young when they signed the deal which put Wham with CBS, it was felt that the contract should be approved by the court. They went to see a judge, everyone was represented: this is the settlement we've come to, is the court happy with it, including provisions for solo careers? And the court said, Yeah, we're fine with it.

So George's contract had already been approved by the court. For him to then go back to court and say, My contract isn't valid. What are the court gonna do? Say they fucked up five years ago? I mean there's always a chance, in any lawsuit, but with that background, and with the Sony lawyers – they're like Barcelona with briefcases, they never fucking lose – there just was no lawsuit there.

"Sony's lawyers are like Barcelona with briefcases. They never fucking lose."

But what could we do? We couldn't just say it's a perfectly valid contract, that you were happy with, and which the court approved, but don't worry about it, you can leave. That wasn't going to happen.

And also, remember, for every arsehole in London going, Heh heh, Sony and George have fallen out, I was also getting phone calls from the head of Warner, the head of everywhere else saying, You can't give in, because if you do, every fucking artist is just going to walk out of their contract; but at the same time going, George! Over here George!

Do you think if you could have sat down and talked on a more personal level, rather than through lawyers, you could have avoided the court case?
What you have to understand is that we *did* re-do George's contract, because that was our policy. If an artist came to us and said, I don't think I'm being paid what I should be being paid, we never said fuck off, you signed a contract; we sat down and looked at it – and if it was appropriate, we'd change it.

And then Faith came out. And Tony came in and said, George wants to be treated on exactly the same basis as the American superstars. He doesn't want to leave the UK label and be on the US label, but he does want an American superstar deal. So we said, Okay, this is very simple Tony – and we'll get it done in an hour: I'm going to give you the contracts for Artist A, Artist B, Artist C and Artist D. All I'm going to tell you is that none of them are Michael Jackson; Michael Jackson is over there. You sell 50 million copies of one album and we'll talk Michael Jackson deals, but for now, Michael's over there. But, they are all genuine American superstars. I'm not telling you who, but they're superstars.

I'm going to give you all the points in a line on royalties, advances, how the videos are paid for etc. They're all slightly different, because they were all negotiated at different times by different lawyers. So don't pick the best from each fucking line, think about what's important to you, balance things out, and everything you take can be from this menu; that will be your contract. And that's what happened. We literally did it in an hour. He said I want this, this and this, all within the parameters of A,B,C and D, and we signed it.

So what this means is, not only does the judge see that the original contract was approved by the courts, he also sees that where it used to say $500,000 an album it now says $10m an album. So of course he goes, What is this guy's problem?!

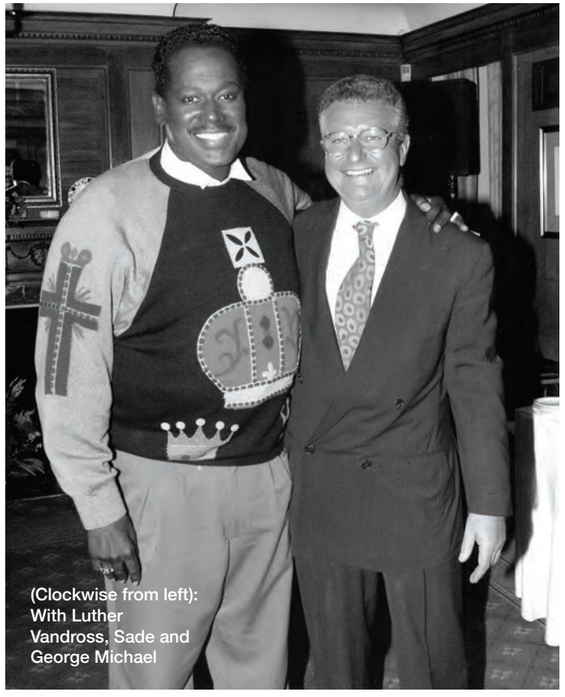
It was very frustrating. I said right up until the last minute, maybe there's something we can do here; you know you've got a superstar deal, so there are very few places to go on this, but maybe we can figure something out.

What I had in my mind was, I think the contract was for seven albums and we'd done two. I thought, maybe we lop two off so there's only three to go and see where that takes us. Maybe faces change, maybe attitudes change.

You have to bear in mind that Listen Without Prejudice was a lot more successful outside America than Faith. The issue was with America: they were confused! Here's a guy who gives them an album and says, I'm not going to be on the cover, I'm not going to be in the videos, you're basically not going to see me. They weren't even angry, they were just confused!

How close did you come to avoiding the case?
I think it became inevitable. I remember once over dinner we were having a discussion about Roger Waters and Pink Floyd and George was trying to equate that with him leaving Wham. CBS had Roger outside America and he wanted to get off EMI because he felt Pink Floyd were getting more attention than he was.

I said to his manager, Mark Fenwick, There's no point picking a fight with EMI, what you do is you get Roger to fly to LA and he sits down with the guy who was in charge of EMI, he pays for dinner and a nice bottle of wine and he says, Look, I sold millions of records for you as part of Pink Floyd and I also know, whether you admit it or not, that Pink Floyd is more important to you than I am, so I'd like you to release me so that I can be on CBS worldwide. And the guy said, Roger, you got it, I understand your problem, you're gone, don't worry about it, the last thing I want is an unhappy artist.



(Clockwise from left): With Luther Vandross, Sade and George Michael

A few months later, George says to me, I'd like to meet with Norio Ohga [president of Sony Corporation, at the time]. I said, Sure, I can do that – what are you going to say to him? He said I'm gonna say what Roger Waters said! You've got to be kidding me!

Anyway, we fix it up, for Sony HQ on 57th Street, overlooking Central Park, Ohga's got an office the size of a football pitch. Dick Leahy, George's publisher, is going as George's second and Ohga insists that me and Mottola are there.

I turn up about an hour before and have a chat with Norio. I said, George is going to give you the hard luck story, just hear him out, bat him off and say we'll see what we can work out. He'll feel he's been listened to and I think there's then something we can do on the number of albums. That was still my hope. Anyway, whilst we're talking, he says he wants to show me this piece of Sony kit. It's this tiny little camera and he goes, Smile! And he takes my picture, turns it round and shows me the photo. It's a prototype of one of the first digital cameras. I'd never seen anything like it.

We go into the meeting. Ohga's sitting opposite George and I'm on another sofa with Mottola. George starts his spiel – and I'm thinking, this is me telling George the Roger Waters story, word for word!

While all this is going on, Ohga is fiddling with something, this little gadget, in his lap. Leahy kicks me and mouths, 'He's recording it!' I said, No, no no, he's not. But I can't deny, he is definitely doing something…

George reaches his crescendo, he gets to his feet, he leans over the coffee table to make his final plea direct to Ohga's face: You've got to let me go! At which point Ohga whips out this little digital camera and says, Smile!

George is like, What the fuck just happened?! And Oga turns the camera round and shows him this picture of himself pleading for his freedom! It was so hysterical. But put it this way, I don't think it helped.

How would you describe the culture of the company under your stewardship?
Every quarter we'd send 10-15 people on a management training course. I'd go up on the Sunday night and give them a little talk. And every time I did, I'd take a big piece of paper and I'd draw a train going down a track, right in the middle. On one side was the finance guys, the legal guys the admin guys, HR, all the people who make the business tick. On the other side was A&R, marketing, promotions, press – whose main job was spending money, with the lot on the other side trying to save money.

The job is to keep the train on the track. These guys couldn't invade the creative side, because then the company would be fucked; and equally if the creative guys invaded the admin side, the company was fucked. To me, that balance was what it was all about. Never let the business people get the upper hand, because then you won't keep the creative: I'm going to work with Rob

Dickins at Warner because he understands me. Equally, you've got to have great lawyers and admin people, because otherwise nothing gets done and nothing gets fixed.

What about the culture of the industry in general back then?
It was a lot more fun, for a start. And things could happen a lot more quickly. I remember one day I was travelling from Heathrow, just before Christmas, and I ran into [Creation boss] Alan McGee in the airport. I'd known Alan for a while and had often said he should come and talk to us. He's sitting there with a face as long as a kite. I said, Hey Alan, how's it going? He says, Fucking terrible, I'm putting out all these records, they're doing nothing.

I said come and talk to us, let's see what we work out. He comes to the office after Christmas and says, What are you guys gonna do for me? I said, Keep the label, we'll fund it, you just bring us the acts, they go out on Creation in the UK and for the rest of the world they go out on Epic or Columbia, you decide. We do the deal and the first thing he comes in with is probably the best record Primal Scream ever made [1991's Screamadelica] and the next thing he rolls up with is Oasis. I look like a fucking genius! But it was all down to a chance meeting and a chat with Alan because I noticed he looked a bit glum.

What was he like to work with?
Oh he was a blast. I mean we all know he had some personal issues at the time, but he had a great sense of humour, such a funny guy and such great fun to work with. Part of the fun was that you knew he was never going to be happy. Whatever happened, he was always going to bitch about something. I used to tease him about it: Hey Alan, the record's No.1 everywhere in the world, what you gonna moan at me about today? Pause. Grunt.

I don't know, I was talking to [Rob] Stringer about this recently, there just seems to be a lot less characters around these days. It was so much more fun back then. If you had any success, the first thing you did was plan how you were going to celebrate it!

Who were your best and most trusted lieutenants?
Well Muff, obviously. He was just a delight to work with and so, so talented. Tony Woolcott was a guy who never wanted any limelight, but was really bright. As he often said, I would come up with some hare-brained scheme, chuck it over my shoulder and move on – his job was to catch it and make it work. There were the label guys, of course: Andy Stephens, when he was running Epic, was very important; Tim Bowen, when he was running Columbia, very important; Richard Rowe, who was running everything else, was a gem. And then of course Rob Stringer started to emerge.

We were saying the other day, it's interesting that Lucian [Grainge], who runs Universal Music and Rob who runs Sony Music, both worked for CBS UK. Lucian worked for April Music [part of CBS's publishing arm], when Stringer had just joined.

Who were your main rivals during your time there and how fierce was it?
Well it was very fierce on the surface, but below the surface it was pretty cool. When I was fighting in the trenches, in the '80s and '90s, Rupert Perry was at EMI and Rob Dickins was at Warner. Virgin, for some reason, I don't know, they seemed to have lost their momentum for a while there.

Perry, Dickins and I would fight tooth and nail over a lot of things, but we also did a lot of good things together. The BRIT School exists because Perry, Dickins and I got in a room with George Martin and Richard Branson, and we all said, Yep, we'll put up our dough – well, it was actually our companies' dough. We went to see [Education Secretary] Kenneth Baker who said, This is what Maggie's prepared to put up and that was the BRIT School. It was always fierce, but never personal.

And how does your record stand up during that period in terms of market share?
We were doing very well. What we also did that made us different was, we realised that if you analysed the top 30 albums in any given week, 25-30% would be on independent labels. So we set up a thing called the licensed repertoire division to specifically go out and licence independent records and put the power of Sony behind them internationally. It's very common now, but we were the first and on our own then.

"I ended up with 3.8 million air miles. I'm still spending them on my kids!"

How do you think Sony Music is doing in the UK at the moment?
Obviously they know what they are doing, with a solid number two market share in all areas – but Sony Commercial Group makes a big contribution overall. Going back over the last seven-eight years: One Direction, Ed Sheeran, Adele, Sam Smith, Mumford & Sons – all UK acts that became worldwide hits and none signed directly to Sony-owned labels. The goals have to be to reduce Universal's market share lead and directly sign a UK act that sells big worldwide. Maybe that will be Rag N Bone Man?

It doesn't matter whether it's Columbia, Epic etc. – having a directly-signed UK artist who is No.1 worldwide gives the whole company a lift and confidence boost going forward.

What made you good at your job?
Like I say, I think understanding that balance was important. I think a certain amount of compassion, for artists and for staff also helped. People fuck up, sure, but our people were in their late teens/early 20s in some cases, all making a valid contribution and giving it everything – but they are gonna fuck up.

I also have to tell you I was very, very lucky to work under and learn from two of the smartest music executives there's ever been: Dick Asher and Walter Yetnikoff. They really got it.

What did you learn from them?
CBS had been known as The Family of Music, and both of them tried to engender that it really was a family, and tried to continue that post-the Sony deal. And that meant you had to go places, you couldn't just sit in your office making the right noises, you had to get out there and be with the people who made it all happen.

I learned that getting out there on behalf of my artists and on behalf of everyone at the company was incredibly important. I ended up with 3.8 million fucking air miles for Christ's sake. I'm still spending them on my kids!

I also learned that the artist has earned the right to be wrong. If someone sells 20 million records, then they deliver a difficult one, you get on with it, and you look forward to the next one. You don't slag them off, you help them and work with them.

The final thing is: you've got to be fair. CBS always had a very generous bonus scheme, but it was never measurable – it was, by intention, always discretionary. And that was because you could put all sorts of gauges in place, but sometimes they didn't really reflect what you knew to be someone's true effort and contribution.

If you had a good person working for you, you'd give them a good bonus, you'd give them a good pay rise; let them know that you know how good they are. It's the same with the artists: better not to wait until they come and ask; better to go to them and say, Let's look at your deal, you deserve better.

Walter was true to that philosophy when the Sony deal came around; he did a fantastic deal for the executives, including myself – we benefited hugely.

Walter drove Larry Tisch [CBS Inc CEO] so fucking crazy, but Larry couldn't get rid of him because he believed that Yetnikoff had a 'main man' clause in all the big artists' contract, meaning that if he left, they could walk away. Total bullshit of course, the whole concept of a main man clause was completely prohibited, but Walter had people whispering in Tisch's ear. It drove him crazy! So he thought, Right, I'll sell the thing. Yetnikoff pipes up straight away, Don't you worry, I'll find a buyer. Tisch says fine, you buy it and then you sell it to them. Walter already knew he was going straight to Sony with it, he was two moves ahead. They had all the money and he was tight with them right at the top.

So, when Sony bought it, we were all very well taken care off and we were all very well compensated to sign new contracts. Because Walter, of course, is in their ears saying, You've got to take care of all the boys, the change of ownership means they could just walk away, and if they walk away all the artists can walk away. Same story!

Asher always used to say, This is the only business where the assets are either locked in the lawyer's drawer or they go home at night. Walter made sure Sony saw it that way and viewed us as their biggest assets – and what do you do for your biggest assets? You take damn good care of them, and they did!

'Paul said what he fucking thought, good or bad, for better or for worse, he gave you a straight answer'

Creation founder Alan McGee recalls working with Paul Russell on bringing the legendary label into the Sony family, and reflects on his rare qualities as a major label exec...

The first time I ever met Paul Russell was 1988 when I was doing the House of Love deal [as the band's manager].

Guy Chadwick had always wanted to sign to Columbia, where Gordon Charlton was the A&R man. I wanted to go with Dave Bates (A&R at Fontana) and I won the argument.

They were very similar deals. The Fontana deal was £400,000 plus recording costs and the Columbia deal was £1 million including recording costs, but I liked Dave's attitude best because it was more music-y.

Paul and I probably didn't get off to the best start back then, because having called me Alan throughout the meeting, he ended with, 'See you later Ian!'

Chadwick to this day thinks we signed with Fontana because he got my name wrong [laughs]. But the truth is, I liked Paul a lot, he just seemed too big time for us back then, he was a bit Terrence Trent D'arby for me!

Now then, I could tell you the real story of what happened next, because it's a brilliant story, but I'm not sure how much Paul would be down with that.

Ultimately, the truth is, when we did that Creation deal in 1992, we saved each other's arses. Here's the bit he might not remember the same way I do: he was on the way out the door at that point.

Like I say, I got on really well with Paul from the start, and he was always trying to get hold of me, trying to bring Creation to Sony.

At the time, we went through Pinnacle. We put out Primal Scream's Dixie-Narco EP and Teenage Fanclub's What You Do To Me single. I thought I was going to get my Stone Roses/Happy Mondays Top of the Pops moment, but it didn't happen; Primal Scream got it and Teenage Fanclub didn't. The truth was, neither did as well as I thought they should have done – and I was really, really fucking annoyed.

A few days later, I was at Heathrow and Paul spotted me: McGee! I was in a bad mood and I let my mouth run off, Fucking Pinnacle, fucking useless etc. He said, Well you should come and sign with me.

By May that year we were practically bankrupt. I think we owed a million-odd quid and had no way of paying it back, so I took a meeting with him and Jeremy Pearce and we did the deal. I was lucky, I got in the room with two really good guys and I get on with them to this day.

But, whilst he saved my arse by doing the deal, Oasis then happened, Creation became seven per cent of the British music market and we'd saved Paul Russell's arse! Nobody was getting rid of Paul Russell then! Is that too raw for this piece? [laughs] I'm not being arrogant, and I'm absolutely happy to credit him and thank him for saving me – but it worked the other way round as well!

Russell gives Liam his medicine

He's a fucking great guy and I had a great relationship with him through those years. Richard Branson was trying to get me to go and front V2 with Jeremy Pearce [who had left Sony to run the label]; he was offering me and Dick [Green, Creation co-founder] £5m each to sign on, but why would we have left?

Now, if I'd known there was a £300m signing fund as well, I might have done it, but nobody told me!

I love Paul. We were both fucking mental. And I think he liked me because I was pretty similar to him, I was ballsy and I liked getting my own way, just like him.

> ***"I love Paul. We were both fucking mental. Everybody on our side liked him."***

It was sparky at times, but he was never a bully, even when I was more cheeky than I probably should have been at the time.

I remember he came to the Some Might Say No.1 party and hung out with us all. He was very smartly dressed and the rest of us looked like toe rags who'd been to the football, which we were.

But Paul was genuine and everybody on our side always liked him, because he was a guy who said what he fucking thought, good or bad, for better or for worse, he gave you a straight answer.

If you ask him a question, he will answer it honestly, and I like that, I like working with people like that. Very few people tell you the truth, they tell you want you want to hear and then go and do the opposite.

I still love him now. I think he's always suspicious that I'll turn on him and call him a cunt, but honestly Paul, I've always loved you!

‘YOU’VE GOT TO HOLD YOUR NERVE ON STREAMING - BECAUSE ULTIMATELY, THE CONSUMER DECIDES’

[PIAS] is one of the most established companies in the independent music sector - but according to its UK MD, it’s constantly pushing itself to innovate in the streaming era...

Do independent labels really get a fair deal on leading streaming services?

It’s a debate which could rage for years - and you won’t find many people better qualified to answer the question than Jason Rackham. As Managing Director of [PIAS] UK, Rackham has a unique overview of the independent sector’s performance, working as he does across [PIAS]’s stellar list of distribution clients, in addition to the firm’s in-house record company, and its well-regarded label network venture, Co-Op.

Within these areas, Rackham closely monitors a wide range of repertoire from the likes of Beggars, Domino, Warp, Ninja Tune, Sub Pop and Secretly Canadian (distribution clients), in addition to Heavenly, Transgressive, Mute, Wichita and Bella Union (Co-Op) and [PIAS]’s own Play It Again Sam and Different labels.

Rackham also has a fair insight into the methods used by major record companies to exert their influence on key industry gatekeepers – having worked across the likes of Sony, Universal, Warner and EMI for the best part of 20 years before joining [PIAS] five years ago.

“There’s always a healthy paranoia in the independent sector over who’s getting in what playlists, and it’s only right we remain vigilant,” he says. “But there’s no doubt in my mind that, overall, the rise of the streaming services has had a really positive impact on the global industry.”

[PIAS] certainly saw significant progress in the area last year: a cursory glance through 2017’s Spotify New Music Friday lists shows that around 100 tracks worked by the company made the grade across the 12 months.

Adds Rackham: “The artists and labels suddenly all have a level playing field; it’s entirely about the quality of the tracks you make, and that brings a ‘survival of the fittest’ element to proceedings. That’s hugely positive for those of us who want to see artists realising that they can fulfill their potential in an independent label environment just as much, if not more, than they can in a major label environment.”

Rackham notes that, following his appointment as MD of [PIAS] in 2016, the company has reorganised its structure to better cater to the requirements of the leading global streaming services. (A sensible decision, when you consider that streaming contributed 48% of all UK recorded music revenues in 2017.)

This has meant building out a centralised radio promotions team which also houses the company’s streaming playlist expertise, led by experienced plugger Josh Nicoll.

Combining streaming playlist pitching and radio playlist pitching isn’t common in the music business, but [PIAS]’s strategy is simple: recommending tracks to streaming playlist arbiters is, essentially, radio promotions by another name. (It helps, of course, that the people making the big decisions on those streaming playlists often used to work for major radio networks.)

This blended streaming/radio promotions team works hand-in-hand with both [PIAS]’s sales and insights teams to deliver results.

“Everyone’s trying to work out if there’s a silver bullet you need to get the delivery you want from streaming services – and everyone’s trying to understand whether they really can have some influence, or if it’s only people at the streaming services who can make that difference,” says Rackham.

“We’ve learned this year that you definitely can influence that [playlist] process. We’ve seen scenarios where streaming services haven’t picked up on really important tracks at launch, and our promotions team have got in there under the bonnet and made a difference.

“If you’re a label not offering an additive creative relationship, you’re a bit lost.”

“Once you’ve made it into those ‘gatekeeper’ playlists, though, it really does come down to what’s in the grooves – at that point you’ve got to hold your nerve and your belief, because ultimately the consumer decides.”

Particular streaming successes for [PIAS] last year included standout tracks from the likes of Flume (via Transgressive), whose Never Be Like You and Say It (feat Tove Lo) have now racked up more than 600m Spotify streams between them. Rough estimates suggest that such success would have seen over $3m paid out to Flume and his music rights partners from Spotify for this pair of tracks alone.

Other successes in the streaming world for [PIAS] last year included smash breakout The Night We Met By Lord Huron. After featuring as a key sync in controversial Netflix drama 13 Reasons Why, the song became a viral hit, with over 150m Spotify streams to date. It was released via IamSound in the US market, but [PIAS] took care of the track internationally – capitalising on its early popularity to build its presence around the world.

Rackham says that [PIAS]’s own company network in multiple territories - across Europe, the US, Latin America, Asia-Pacific and beyond – ensures that it can work its artists at retail, radio and digital services across both a market-by-market and global spectrum.

“We have local relationships in every key established and emerging territory, and you really see the power of that when it comes to helping break tracks by the likes of Flume at Spotify in a co-ordinated way,” says Rackham.

“It’s not like we have a worldwide priority list of artists, and if your name’s not near the top, you don’t get the attention, which we all know is a regular criticism of majors. If a track starts to go here, we can quickly turn our global attention to it and ensure we’re getting behind it at the right time in each market.”

Interestingly, following their breakout moment with The Night We Met, Lord Huron have signed to a major record company – Republic Records in New York. Other long-time independent acts who have recently signed their first global deals with major labels include Arcade Fire, War On Drugs and LCD SoundSystem. What does this tell us about the current landscape?

Says Rackham: “It would be wrong to comment on any artist in particular, but it’s fair to say I haven’t seen any improvement in streaming or sales numbers for the well-known artists who’ve gone to majors from the independent world over the past couple of years.

“I’d be interested to know if those artists, in their heart of hearts, feel they’re getting the same attention, creative advice and support they once did.”

Talking of pinpoint creative advice, [PIAS] has itself made some major alterations to its A&R machinery following the retirement of long-time Play It Again Sam boss Peter Thompson last year.

The company brought in respected ex-Because Music exec Jane Third as Global Chief Creative Officer in October. Third had previously worked closely with the likes of Christine & The Queens and Metronomy.

Third’s arrival has dovetailed with other tweaks to [PIAS]’s creative staffing, which has been an essential part of Rackham’s focus since he took charge of the UK.

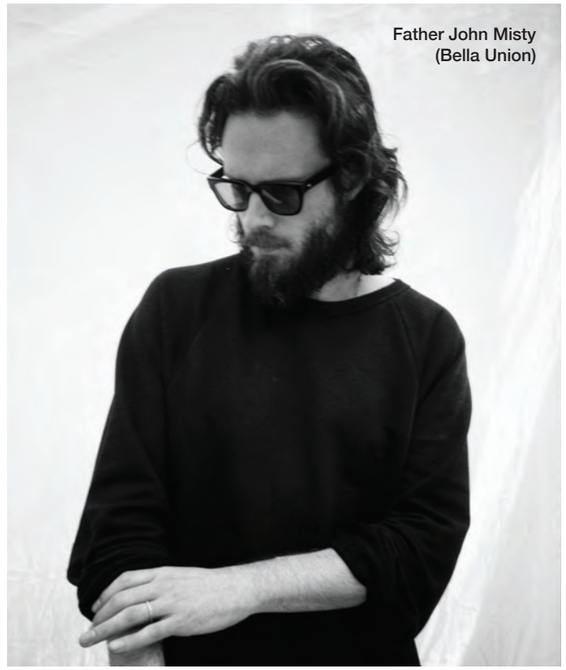
“We’ve not only zoomed in on the streaming promotion and marketing offering we give our artist and labels, but we’ve also looked hard at the creative relationship we have with artists,” says Rackham.

“We’re well aware that the artist community, as they should, are always going to question the validity and value of labels they sign to: what is it we all really add to somebody’s career?

“If you’re not offering a truly additive creative relationship with an artist today, I think you’re a bit lost as a label.

“Jane coming in has lit a fire under the creativity of this company. She’s an amazing asset for any of our labels, and that’s not just to do with music – it’s also about delivering state-of-the-art audio/visual assets for our campaigns.”

Flume
(Transgressive)



Father John Misty
(Bella Union)

Amongst all of this talk of streaming, it would be remiss not to mention the continued importance of physical product to the UK music business – especially to those in the independent sector who creare high-price-per-unit special releases to serve core fanbases willing to pay serious money.

It should be no surprise, then, that [PIAS] takes pride in its luxury physical offerings, from delivery of the items themselves, to the focus given to the formats by the firm's sales team. At the Grammys in January, Father John Misty – signed to [PIAS] Co-Op's label partner Bella Union – won the gong for Best Recording Packaging.

"The physical component of the global music market is a hugely important part of driving turnover, marketing catalogue, and developing new artists, and as such receives due care and attention from delivery to sale by our company," says Rackham.

Rackham is enthused by the rebirth of vinyl in recent years, calling the 25-year sales high of the format "pretty staggering".

He adds: "It feels that both the young and older ends of the market have the desire for a tangible music purchase.

"Music has always been intertwined with culture, fashion and identity; a vinyl collection says much more about a person than a bunch of MP3s.

"The physical market is not just about sales: it is growing an international network of independent businesses run by music enthusiasts; it's people passionate about music, people who want to talk about it, people who want to engage others to experience and discover new artists and songs.

"Record stores are not just experts and enthusiasts, they are promoters – they put gigs on to bring an audience into their stores. They are curators, they support local artists in the early days of their development, whilst also supporting local independent labels. They are as important as the small local venues in that respect. The physical market and its retailers are a critical piece of the modern music landscape."

"[PIAS] is proud of being a music company first – one full of music fans."

That being said, Rackham is glad that Apple and Spotify in particular appear to have learned something from the likes of Rough Trade, Banquet Records and Sister Ray - by stuffing their companies with "real music people".

He says: "One of the reasons I think the [PIAS] team have had meetings that resonate with [Apple and Spotify] is precisely because they have people there who are equipped to talk passionately about something other than stats. [PIAS] is proud of being a music company first – full of music fans who primarily want to talk about artists they're excited by.

Kamasi Washington
(Young Turks)


The XX
(Young Turks)

"The tech companies have learned to keep a focus on the music – the music companies shouldn't get too distracted by conversations around tech."

The likes of Spotify have earned some criticism from the independent sector for putting a heavy focus on music which has traditionally been more of the preserve of major labels.

For example, two of the service's three top global playlists by volume of followers are the pop-driven Today's Top Hits (19m followers) and the hip-hop-driven Rap Caviar (9m followers). (The other, if you were wondering, is the more democratic Global Top 50 playlist, with 12m followers.)

"The conversation will differ when streaming services have 300m subscribers."

[PIAS] has, in recent years, embraced the world of classical and jazz music more than ever, having acquired historic French company Harmonia Mundi in 2015. And, naturally for a company whose first decade saw it build on the music of Soulwax and the Acid house movement – alongside the huge breakthrough moment for The Offspring – the firm also has a wealth of catalogue rooted in alternative and electronic music.

Rackham is patient and understanding of Spotify and Apple's focus on pop and hip-hop right now, but expects it to naturally change over time.

"If you're going to try and build a streaming platform today, and build it quickly, you'll go after hits in the biggest global genres to put swift numbers up on the board," he says.

"That goes double if you have a deadline to hit in order to list on the stock exchange. These services are doing their best to serve all genres, but there's a natural concentration on [pop and urban] because that's what the earliest adopters of these services want to hear.

"[PIAS] is lucky as it has a pretty established background in urban music, and it's never been afraid to diversify across different genres. But I think this whole conversation might be a different one in a few years when these streaming services share 300m, 400m or 500m paying streaming subscribers around the world."

Regardless of genre, Rackham is adamant that [PIAS] and its independent label parters have all the artillery they need to break global hits without the interference of the three major music companies.

And, he says, it's to the independents' benefits that some of the harder-edged culture of major labels isn't part of their mindset.

"You see the model at major music corporations where all of the in-house labels are encouraged to compete really fiercely with one another," he comments.

"That attitude just doesn't exist here in my experience. There's a mutual respect between companies in the independent sector – a code of honour – and if you ask me that code of honour extends to the way we treat our artists."

He adds: "I've lost count of the amount of times I've seen independent labels get super-excited about an act, then discover their [peer] is already in for them, and sit back.

"Don't get me wrong, if interest wanes elsewhere then they're straight at the table, but it's about respect, and always putting what's best for the artist first."

He adds: "Interestingly, now the majors arguably aren't as dominant in this marketplace anymore – thanks largely to the big digital players turning things upside down – they are more aggressive than ever. And perhaps even more interestingly, I read publications like [MBUK] and see the language of the major label chairmen and CEOs has changed.

"Their dialogue is like they're running enormous independent labels sometimes - which of course, they are not! Ultimately all of this is an indication of the power of artists growing in those relationships, and more choice in the market, which can only be a good thing for everyone."

Rackham spent two decades at major music companies, and became involved with independent labels in the mid-noughties.

He says that this blend of experience has taught him that "you can be hugely ambitious, and globally successful, with interesting music – and you can achieve all of that with an independent ethos".

"That ambition of taking an artist from the independent sector and selling a million units-plus is always on our minds," he says.

"Our international network makes that entirely possible, because artists know they're going to get a properly global, co-ordinated campaign with no external interferences. Plus our team is stable – there's none of that three-year-contract merry-go-round nonsense here."

He adds: "You hear a lot of A&R conversations around the business these days that are only focused on creating hits that suit streaming services. Of course you need to be cognizant of that – make clever edits, tailor music to the right outlet – but our focus will first and foremost will always be the quality of the music itself.

"If we start A&R'ing just based on streaming skip rates, or getting the chorus in the first 30 seconds of a song, we'll never have another Paranoid Android or Someone Like You. People sitting in rooms trying to jam as many hooks into the first 30 seconds of a song seems a completely artless approach.

"[PIAS]'s founders, Michel [Lambot] and Kenny [Gates], talk about music and get vocally passionate about artists in a way that I think is pretty rare for people in their position.

"It's a constant reminder to all of us here, if we ever needed it, that, 'Oh yes, *that's* why we're doing this for a living.'"

[PIAS]'s triple threat

Jason Rackham oversees three distinct divisions at [PIAS] UK: (i) Sales & Distribution; (ii) the Co-operative label group; and (iii) a Recordings Division encompassing the Play It Again Sam and Different labels.

Play It Again Sam is a record label that signs and develops artists, with a roster that includes the likes of Editors, Enter Shikari, Pixies, Dead Can Dance and Public Service Broadcasting (pictured below) – whose latest album, Every Valley, reached No.4 on the UK charts when it was released last summer.

The Cooperative labels are an associated group of partners – [PIAS] helps fund and develop their repertoire on an international basis. Labels who work with Cooperative include Transgressive, Bella Union Heavenly, Mute, Wichita, Acid Jazz, ATO, 37 Adventures and DFA.

[PIAS]'s Sales & Distribution division meanwhile, offers a menu of global digital and physical sales, distribution and marketing expertise to a range of independent labels. Its clients include the likes of XL, 4AD, Matador, Young Turks, Warp, Domino, Rough Trade, Ninja Tune, Secretly Canadian, Partisan Records, Dead Oceans & Jagjaguwar.

"Whether it's artists or label founders, we love working with people who are mavericks and who have a creative vision," says Rackham. "That's the fabric of [PIAS], really – we exist to help those people fulfil their maximum potential."

‘I REALISED NO-ONE IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS KNEW WHAT THEY WERE DOING’

High Time Entertainment, home of The Hunna, is causing ripples and winning fans in high places – including Lyor Cohen and Christian Tattersfield. The firm’s founder, Carl Hitchborn, tells MBUK the story of its rise, and his unending ambition for its future…

Just over two years ago, Carl Hitchborn was skint – having maxed out £15,000 on three credit cards in a high-risk attempt to get his business going.

Today, he’s the owner of one of the UK’s most talked-about and disruptive new music companies.

London-based High Time is an artist management house and record company, in addition to being a music publisher, merchandise and branding hub and, of late, even an independent concert promoter.

Hitchborn’s swift journey from potless chancer to successful entertainment entrepreneur is one rooted in a belief that the traditional music business – particularly, the traditional record business – is wrong-headed, unethical and a bad bet for artists.

He believed it when he started High Time in 2015, he believed it while tirelessly building his company across the next two years, and he believed it backstage at Brixton Academy and Manchester Apollo in January, where High Time’s star charges, The Hunna, played a run of nights to packed audiences.

The Watford band, signed to High Time across management, records, publishing and more, have an array of impressive stats in their industry armoury. These include over 80m streams on Spotify, 300,000-plus Facebook fans and more than 75,000 tickets sold to date.

Thanks to a licensing deal inked with now-Youtube music global chief Lyor Cohen, The Hunna are signed to 300 Entertainment in the US. The rise of High Time, and Hitchborn’s impact on the industry, have left Cohen deeply impressed.

“The Baker, as I call Carl, is someone who is not ‘stuck on stupid’ by legacy practices, but instead thinks in ways that work today,” says Cohen. “Direct-to-consumer is his passion; The Baker is undeterred in helping the Hunna find and cultivate their voice and fans.”

Carl Hitchborn grew up in Norwich, where he spent the early portion of adulthood working in his parent’s local bakery.

This might seem a pretty unlikely setting for someone to learn the fundementals of the music business – and, in a way, that’s exactly the point.

“I worked out that people at record labels were throwing mud against the wall.”

One day, in his mid-thirties, Hitchborn decided he was going to take everything he’d learnt in the world of breadmaking, and apply it to the music business. Just like that. In doing so, he had an inkling that he could create a new kind of global entertainment company.

There was just one problem, which Hitchborn says his wife laid out plainly for him at the time: “You don’t know anything *about* the music industry, and you don’t know anyone *in* the music industry.”

A fair argument. But Hitchborn was determined to learn. And then he discovered something: the more he learnt about the music business, the more flaws he found.

Hitchborn explains to *MBUK*: “I started to contact promoters in Norwich and Ipswich, then I started meeting studios and producers in London.

“I realised very quickly that literally nobody in the music business knew what they were doing. And I thought, ‘What even *is* this industry? This is the most insane thing I’ve ever seen in my life.”

The biggest cognitive challenge Hitchborn faced, compared with the certainty of selling buns and cakes, was the fundamental truism on which so much of the blockbuster music industry is based. You know, the one which reads: only a really small percentage of signed artists will ever end up with a happy result, and that’s the way it is.

“I worked out that people at labels were throwing mud at the wall and hoping something would stick,” says Hitchborn. “I said to my wife: ‘This is the equivalent of us making 25 different products in our shop, only one of them selling – and then us dumping the other 24 in the bin. We’d go out of business in a flash!’”

So Hitchborn decided, instead of singing from anyone else’s hymn sheet, he was going to do things his way – using the three rules he knew best.

Rule one of running a local bakery: make sure the product is better than anyone else’s. Rule two of running a local bakery: don’t scrimp on the deal you cut your suppliers, or it will impact their loyalty and motivation. And rule three of running a local bakery: target your marketing to your key captive clientele.

High Time’s first signing were Coasts, a band from Hitchborn’s home town of Norwich. Having inked a deal with Hitchborn in 2013, the five-piece soon discovered how serious he was about

Coasts

translating the take-no-prisoners quality control of running a bakery into the world of music.

"I got given Coasts' demos, which weren't great, but I really liked them as people," says Hitchborn. "In our first meeting, [Coasts guitarist] Liam said to me, 'I want us to be the biggest band in the world and I want to be the biggest songwriter in the world.' I loved that - but I told them the songs weren't good enough, and they needed to give me product that was worthy of me putting my own money in."

It was around this juncture that Hitchborn presented a contract to Coasts which still defines what he sees as one of High Time's key differences to traditional 'labels'. Those inverted commas are essential, by the way, because High Time believes that reducing itself – and its artists – to one revenue source is foolishly reductive, and only benefits third parties.

"In essence, our deals with our artists are 50/50 on all income streams," explains Hitchborn. "That's recorded music, publishing, live, merch, brands – everything. The artist gets 50% net profit off the top; for every pound that comes in we get half each.

"50/50 makes complete sense, and it's how it should be. It's a heck of a lot fairer than the royalties you see in major deals which can be like, 16%, with 25% packaging deductions on digital - what the hell is that about?

"Lawyers are going to hate us because what we offer artists is a very straightforward deal with no need for negotiation."

Ah, lawyers. Hitchborn has an interesting point to make about the industry's legal eagles – and it's not very complimentary.

To be blunt, he thinks they're screwing everything up for everyone else.

"The self-interest of lawyers has created this situation where artists apparently need separate parties as their label, their publisher, their merch provider, their publicity agent, their live promoter etc. The lawyers get paid off all of those deals. But the structure they have created is unnecessary and manufactured; I am 100% sure about that."

He adds: "When you have all these different people in an artist's life, you can't get anything done. I've seen it first-hand in the majors – certain decisions above a certain price need a certain number of approvals, and you finally get the green light six weeks after it was supposed to be done in the first place. That's bullshit, and it's damaging to artists' careers.

"It all feeds in to the industry's typical model - where the artist that wins pays for all of those that don't; and then even the one who does win is tied to a contract that's such a screw-over they're never going to make any real money. That setup is wrong, both ethically and as a point of principle, because we're talking about actual people's lives.

"Most of these artists are are young and naive, and they think signing to a record company is the realisation of a dream - that signing a deal means 'making it'.

"The sad fact is, if these people were put through the right processes and it was done in the right way, 'making it' is exactly what they would be doing."

As you can tell by now, Hitchborn isn't exactly scared to put forward opinions that challenge music business norms. Before he lets rip on a couple of other ways that he believes the music business needs to change in the modern era, let's go back to autumn 2015 - when Hitchborn maxed out fifteen grand on those credit cards.

"The Hunna were ready to launch, we made sure they had the songs and the work ethic," says Hitchborn. "We knew what we had and felt if we could get things moving we could leverage the opportunity. That was when I decided to go for broke."

He adds: "At that point, I literally had no spare money left, enough to feed my kids and just about pay the rent. So I went to Virgin, Lloyds and Barclays, got three new credit cards – £5,000 on each one. We made a 45-second sizzle video for no money, then in September/October 2014, we literally spent the entire £15,000 in seven days on social media marketing. And then it went boom."

"Carl is not 'stuck on stupid' by legacy practices; he thinks in ways that work today."

Lyor Cohen

Hitchborn's risky roll of the dice came two years after his first foray into the music business with Coasts. On that project, he used spare cash from his bakery business to invest in the Norwich-based band, up to the point of them writing and recording an EP – Paradise – which, after much quality control, was deemed up to scratch by Hitchborn and released in 2013.

Its standout track, Oceans, has ended up shifting over 100,000 units (including streaming equivalents), and has to date been played over 12m times on Spotify. The subsequent attention Coasts received led to a services and distribution agreement with Warner's ADA, which has since been scaled back to a pure distribution arrangement.

High Time is now widely regarded in the industry as having something of a 'secret sauce' when it comes to marketing on Facebook in particular. Across Coasts and The Hunna alone, the firm's roster has almost 500,000 Facebook followers, while Hitchborn says its mailing database has surpassed 100,000 fans.

"It's not really about any kind of special formula, it's about commitment – and thinking very carefully about what fans actually want," says Hitchborn of his firm's social media marketing strategy.

"People at major labels working on new acts just can't access the same level of money that we put into social media – there are too many barriers.

"Everything we've achieved at this company is thanks to the money we invested at the very beginning in social media, particularly Facebook. We can genuinely say we broke The Hunna, primarily, through our investment in that one platform."

He adds: "I went to a get-together in the entertainment industry last year [at] Facebook where there were a lot of heads of digital marketing from the major labels. The discussion was about the fact people don't listen very often to the sound on videos on Facebook - something like 85% of video is watched without the volume up.

"At the end [of the presentation] someone put their hand up and said to Facebook, I'm really not happy about this – you need to tell us how to get people to listen to our videos. The answer is actually simple: get over it.

"The consumer is on a platform where they have demonstrated they want to watch, not listen at that point. Your job is to then get them onto a platform where they do want to listen – Spotify, Apple Music, iTunes etc.

"People over-complicate Facebook and focus on the wrong thing – trying to change the habits of everyone in the world to fit into their view of how it should be. That's a road to insanity!"

It's not just spending power that has given High Time an edge in the digital world, however. Hitchborn has invested significant resources in full-time


The Hunna

photographers and videographers, which he says creates a constant feed of "real-time social media content".

He comments: "Go to most record labels and they'll get someone to take some tour photos for a new artist which they'll then use the whole year round. What they don't seem to understand is the value of context, the power of: 'Hey we're here right now – we just did this.'

"We invest in quality people and quality content, and then we invest in amplifying that content. If you amplify content that's rubbish, you will get rubbish results."

Interestingly, until recently, Hitchborn's 13-strong UK staff didn't include a single employee who previously worked in the music business. In fact, the third person he recruited was a software developer - and High Time now has two full-time coders.

"There's a certain way people in the music business do things, majors especially, where you get a traditional product manager's view of what marketing is," says Hitchborn. "That inevitably means you have to compromise on how things should be done today, and you lose the vision.

"Bringing in people with no preconceived ideas of how the music business should work is healthy. It has a honeypot effect – I get emails every day from creative people with portfolios who want to be part of what we do.

"In today's world, if you don't realise that to be globally successful you have to be a tech company at the core of your business then you've got an issue."

Hitchborn has continually re-invested High Time's profit to expand his operation. His company recently became an independent promoter of its own acts' shows, although it still part-relies on WME as its agent. This WME partnership has seen both The Hunna and Coasts start the year with tours in Australia, Europe and shortly the USA. Once you know what you're doing in the complex world of live, says Hitchborn, bringing promotion in-house makes a tonne of business sense.

"It's time-consuming, but there are a lot of advantages," he explains. "Take, for example, The Hunna at Brixton. Had we gone with the usual large promoters we would have been given a cookie-cutter package, 'This is what we'll spend on national ads, print, Radio X…' and before you know it they've spent the bulk of the marketing budget in the first week

"We were cleverer than that. Our methods of marketing allowed us to spend a fraction of what others would spend to sell out The Hunna shows, because we knew precisely who to target and how to target them. And now we can re-invest the money we saved by doing it our way in more sensible areas of the artist's career, such as building in new territories."

Hitchborn even has an aspiration for High Time to run its own branded UK festival in the next few years, featuring an exclusive roster of its own artists. You wouldn't bet against him.

"We're getting pools of data about fans and audiences we can access right now," he says. "We're building our own ticketing engine. The more we grow, the more power we'll have."

One person who certainly believes High Time's power will continue to grow is Christian Tattersfield, founder of Good Soldier Songs/Records and the former boss of Warner Music UK.

Good Soldier has partnered with Hitchborn's company on publishing for The Hunna, and the two firms enjoy a close working relationship.

"Carl is an original thinker and a force of nature," says Tattersfield. "It's been a great experience partnering with him on the incredible rise of the Hunna."

Despite his keenness to rubbish long-standing music biz strategies, Hitchborn concedes that certain A&R executives hold at least one principle with which he's in full agreement: quality is everything.

"Spending years as a baker made me so product-focused," he says. "Working in that environment teaches you that a great product is simply a product lots of people want to have. We've taken that approach to music."

As Hitchborn's company has grown and re-invested, so High Time has forged working relationships with top songwriters such as Jamie Scott and Jonny Coffer, who have both been working with emerging High Time artists.

"Every single project we do is a process," says Hitchborn. "We hammer down on getting the songs great first, because that's where everything begins. Then it's about going into the studio and making the demos as good as they can be, before recording the final cut.

"After that it's about putting into practice everything we've learned about blowing an act up. So much of that is in contrast to what the music business has always done, and it means we are investing heavily while minimising our risk.

"The things I hate about the music business will be there forever, which is great news for High Time.

"It means we're always going to be able to do things that others simply can't do."

The Hunna: 'The objective is to become as big as we possibly can'

Three years ago, The Hunna weren't The Hunna – they were Alaska Campus. Or at least, two of their members were: lead singer Ryan Potter and guitarist Dan Dorney.

Alaska Campus came to Carl Hitchborn's attention after supporting Coasts at The Square in Harlow in late 2013. Coasts guitarist Liam Willford texted his manager-cum-label-boss to tell him that the singer in the group had a great vocal, and a meeting was set up.

"I told Ryan and Dan that the songs I'd heard weren't good enough," says Hitchborn. "They told me the band spent most of their time rehearsing and not writing songs, so I advised them to reverse that. I didn't hear from them for three or four months, and then the next thing I was on Facebook and a Soundcloud demo popped up in my feed. I had a look: there was a new drummer, a new bass player, and this new song called Brother. They'd gone away and done everything I asked."

Hitchborn began to meet the group in Liverpool Street, continually rejecting new songs and advising them to "spend every hour of every day writing".

After that, The Hunna stepped in as last-minute support for a Coasts show at The Barfly in 2014, where they performed Bonfire – a track which would go on to become a flagship single with more than 14m Spotify streams.

"By May 2015 they'd written 60 songs," says Hitchborn. "I'd squeezed them as hard as I could! At that point they started co-writing with Liam from Coasts and Tim Larcombe, who we publish at High Time. Every day, they'd go down to Tim's studio in Brighton and, every day, a song would come out that sounded really great."

Since then, it's been a rollercoaster ride for the group, with a silver-certified debut album and close to 100,000 tickets sold worldwide.

Their rise has attracted established companies as licensing partners such as 300 (USA) and Warner (Germany, Switzerland and Austria).

"We officially launched The Hunna project two years ago but we were working with them before that," says Hitchborn. "The objective now is to become global – to become as big as we possibly can.

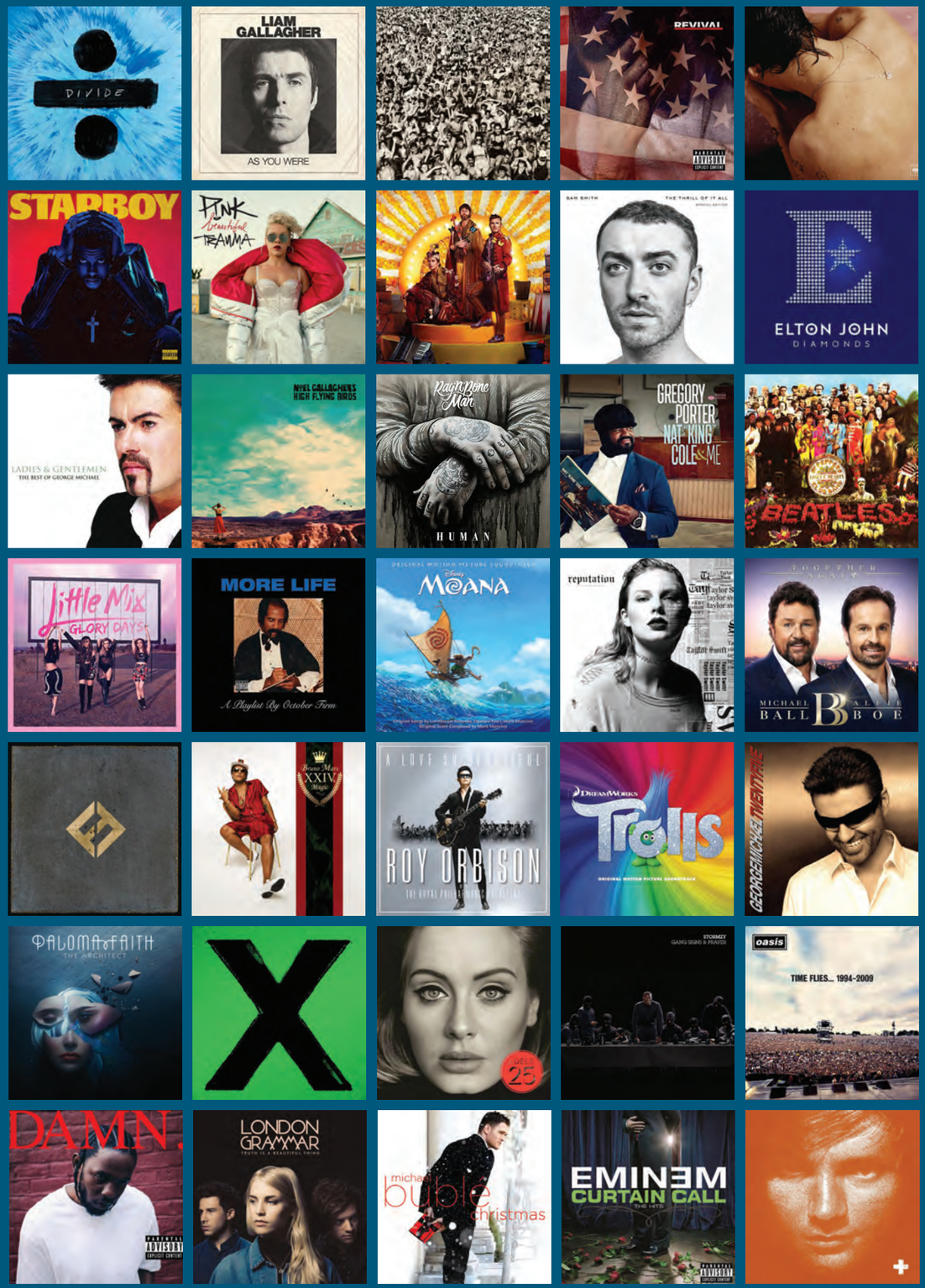
"There isn't a ceiling: we want to get to arenas, we want to headline festivals. There's no happy medium. It was drummed into The Hunna from our very first meeting that this is what we're aiming for, and it's been continually drummed in ever since."

He adds: "People in the industry tell me they're surprised by how quickly The Hunna has found success. Of course they're surprised! How many projects have gone from zero to a sold-out Brixton Academy in two years?

"They had no heat before we became involved together – they'd just done a few local shows in Hertfordshire. What we've done is pretty unheard of."

HOW LONG HAS THE ALBUM GOT LEFT?

Over the past seven years, album sales in the UK market have been slashed in half – down from 120m in 2010 to under 60m in 2017 – and yet the industry continues to use the format as its lynchpin. In a special analysis, MBUK predicts what the future holds for the humble LP...



Last year was a good year for the UK recorded music business. Revenues grew by more than £100m at retail, according to preliminary figures from the Entertainment Retailers Association.

Thanks to subscription streaming becoming a half-billion-pound concern in 2017 (**+42%**), declines in the amount of money taken by physical sales (**-3.4%**) and digital downloads (**-23.1%**) were more than offset in the 12 months.

Positive news all round – and further grist to the mill for the idea that physical album sales in the British market are showing more resilience than many expected in the age of Spotify and Apple Music.

However, the British industry should not fool itself that these figures don't mean its world isn't still steadily being turned upside down.

Further analysis by *MBUK* shows how the domestic albums market is losing its power to the track-dominated world of streaming. And it begs a difficult question: is the UK record industry *really* prepared for the complete decimation of album sales over the next decade?

CD Albums

The CD album is still very much a power player for the UK record business.

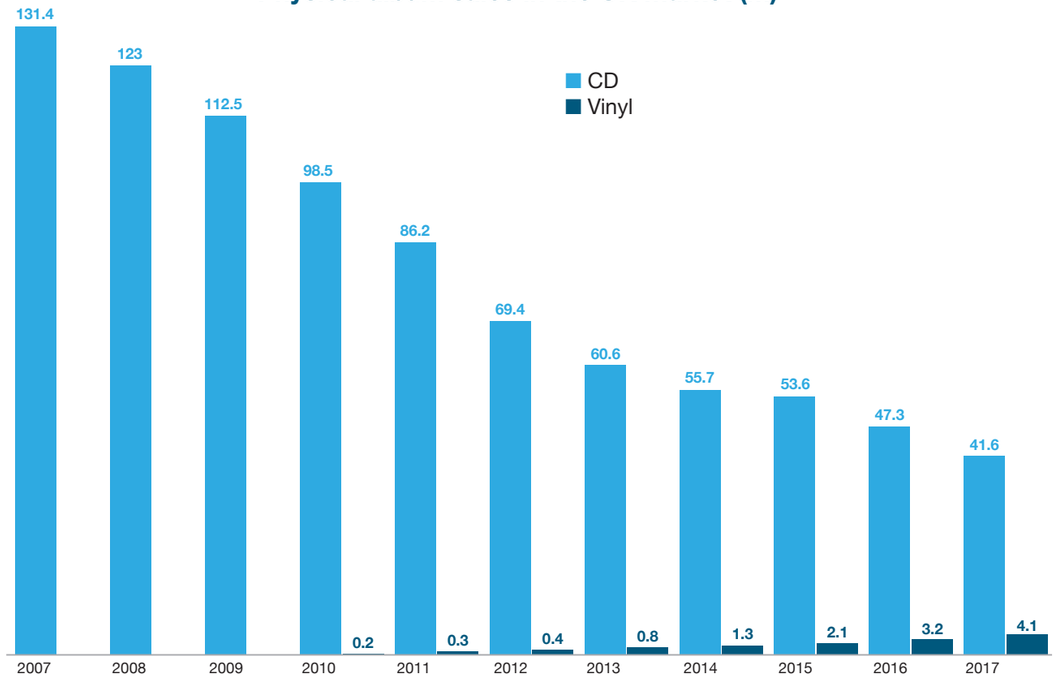
In 2017, according to BPI data, the CD was responsible for **70%** of all albums units sold in the market.

Despite the decline in revenue generated from physical formats slowing in recent years, the annual *percentage* fall in CD album sales has broadly been surprisingly consistent.

Last year, according to BPI statistics, 41.6m CD albums were shifted in the UK. That was down **12.1%** on the 47.3m sold in the prior year.

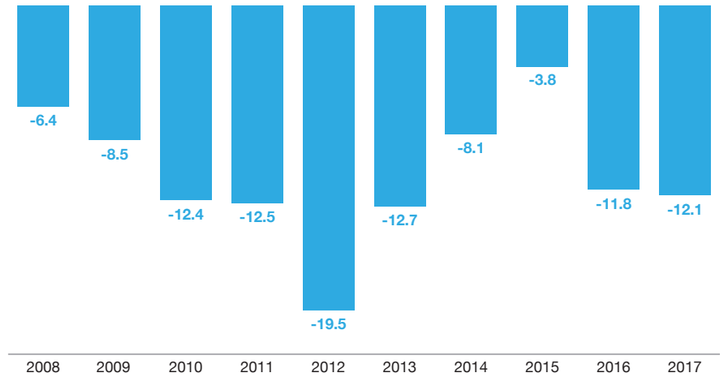
Contrary to the idea that the CD market is resolute, this was the highest percentage decline in sales seen for four years. It was a statistical increase on the percentage drop seen in 2016 (**-11.8%**) – challenging the widely-held notion that the CD album's fortunes are plateauing at retail. In fact, the CD has seen annual unit sales cut by more than two-thirds (**-68.3%**) over the past decade.

Physical album sales in the UK market (m)



Source: BPI / Official Charts Company

CD album sales in the UK market (YoY % rate of decline)



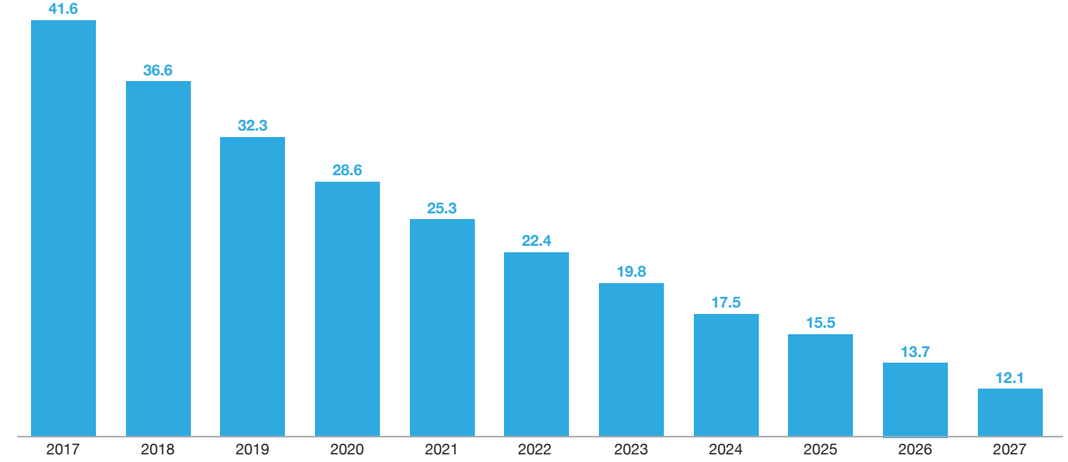
Source: BPI / Official Charts Company

Here's where things get interesting/trepidatious. Across the past eight years, the annual decline in UK CD album sales has stood broadly at around **12%** on no less than five occasions: 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016 and 2017.

The mean average across these eight years? **11.6%.** (2015 is the biggest anomaly, with just a **3.8%** decline. Thanks Adele!)

Below, we take a look at what will happen if this **11.6%** rate of decline – smaller than the **12.1%** drop we saw in 2017, remember – stays consistent over the next ten years. Physical account managers may wish to look away now...

CD album sales in the UK market forecast at an 11.6% rate of decline (m)



Source: MBUK analysis

By 2027, at a consistent **11.6%** rate of annual decline, we would end up with a UK CD album market in which just 12.1m units were sold.

This, it is probably fair to say, is a conservative estimate; the numerical sales loss between 2017 and 2027 in this forecast (-29.5m) is actually far less steep than the decline seen in the six years between 2011 and 2017.

As the CD album market becomes less feasible for large-scale retailers, you might expect the decline to accelerate. In the US, Best Buy will pull out of CD sales altogether this summer, while giant chain Target is reportedly refusing to take in CD stock on credit. In the UK, Tesco runs around 880 stores which permanently stock physical music, Sainsbury's runs around 600 and Asda around 550. Similar action from one or more of these chains could have a disastrous impact.

Digital Albums

It will be no surprise to anybody that annual digital album sales have been decreasing at breakneck speed in the UK over the past few years.

The consumer journey from iTunes to Spotify, Apple Music *et al* is a notoriously seamless one – inviting the controversial question amongst consumers: Why do I keep paying for something that I can get elsewhere for free?

Plus, as opposed to physical formats, there is arguably little perceived value in a download. Switching over to streaming formats from iTunes often doesn't quite feel like giving something up as much as ridding oneself of inconvenience.

We all have such short memories in this business, however.

The peak for digital album unit sales in the UK wasn't actually in the Dark Ages; it came as recently as 2013, five years after the launch of Spotify.

Since then, the download format has suffered from a continued precipitous plummet year-in, year-out.

(Anyone else remember when Spotify used to pretend that streaming really, honest-to-God, wouldn't 'cannibalise' downloads? The good old days!)

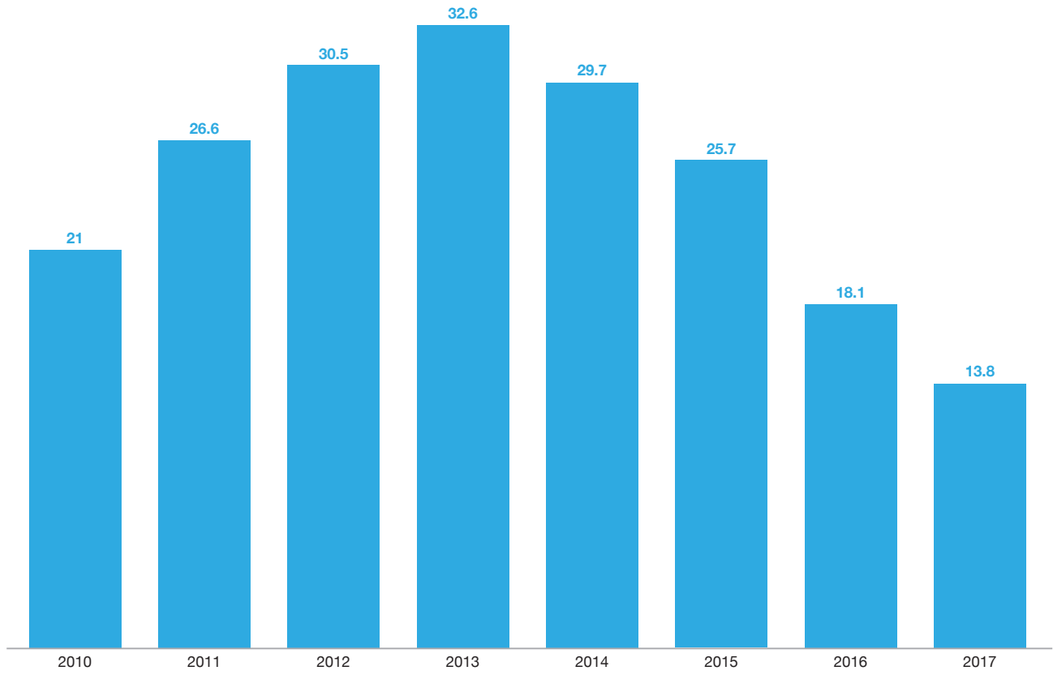
2017 saw just 13.8m digital albums sold in the UK. (To be clear, these figures refer exclusively to entire albums being bought on digital platforms – not collections of individual tracks.)

That 13.8m was less than half the total number sold just three years prior (29.7m) and was down 4.3m – or **23.8%** - on the total sales volume in 2016.

Again, as we saw with CD albums earlier in this analysis, the level of this percentage decline was actually nothing out of the ordinary as far as recent history is concerned.

The past three years have seen double-digit percentage drops in digital download album sales in the UK – with nearly a third of 2015's market sum entirely wiped out in 2016 alone (**-29.6%**).

Digital album sales in the UK market (m)

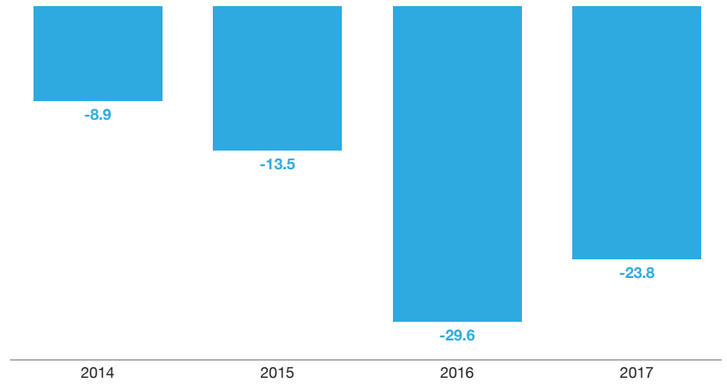


Source: BPI / Official Charts Company

Across the past three years, the digital album has seen an average annual unit sales decline of **22.3%** in the British market, which – despite a shorter history of sales for us to look back on vs. CD – seems like a reasonable basis for a compound projection.

Just like our CD sales decline forecast, this **22.3%** figure could be said to be conservative; digital download's performance is likely to remain volatile as streaming's dominance increases. Regardless, below we follow the **-22.3%** pattern – and gaze out over the coming decade in the British music market...

Digital album sales in the UK market (YoY % rate of decline)



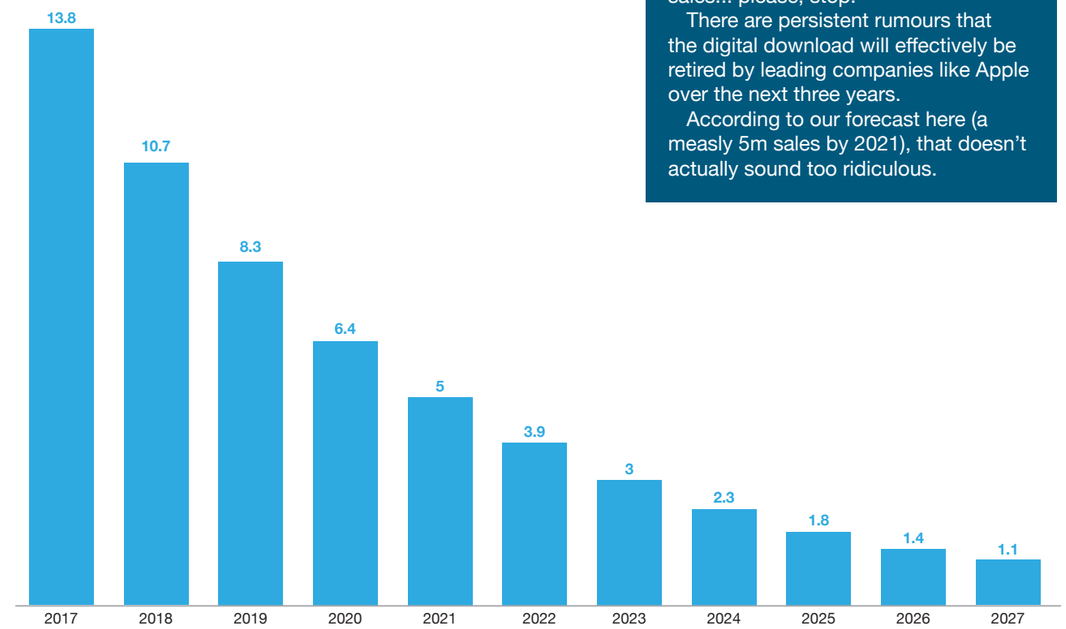
Source: BPI / Official Charts Company

Digital album sales in the UK market forecast at a 22.3% rate of decline (m)

This obviously won't be news to anyone, but if you are betting all your chips on the future of digital albums sales... please, stop.

There are persistent rumours that the digital download will effectively be retired by leading companies like Apple over the next three years.

According to our forecast here (a measly 5m sales by 2021), that doesn't actually sound too ridiculous.



Source: MBUK analysis

Total Albums

But, we hear you say – a loud, crackling, cool-as-you-like, slightly hipster-ish 'but' – what about vinyl?

A good and fair question for a format which seems to leap into the national newspaper headlines each year when the annual industry figures emerge.

Vinyl is certainly a continuing good news story for the domestic music business, with 4.1m units sold in the British market last year, up from (ready for this?) just 0.2m back in 2010. And vinyl's monetary contribution to the total revenue taken by albums sales in the UK is not to be sniffed at, either: vinyl sales grew 33.7% to £87.7m in 2017, according to the Entertainment Retailers Association – making up **19%** of total UK physical format retail revenue across the 12 months.

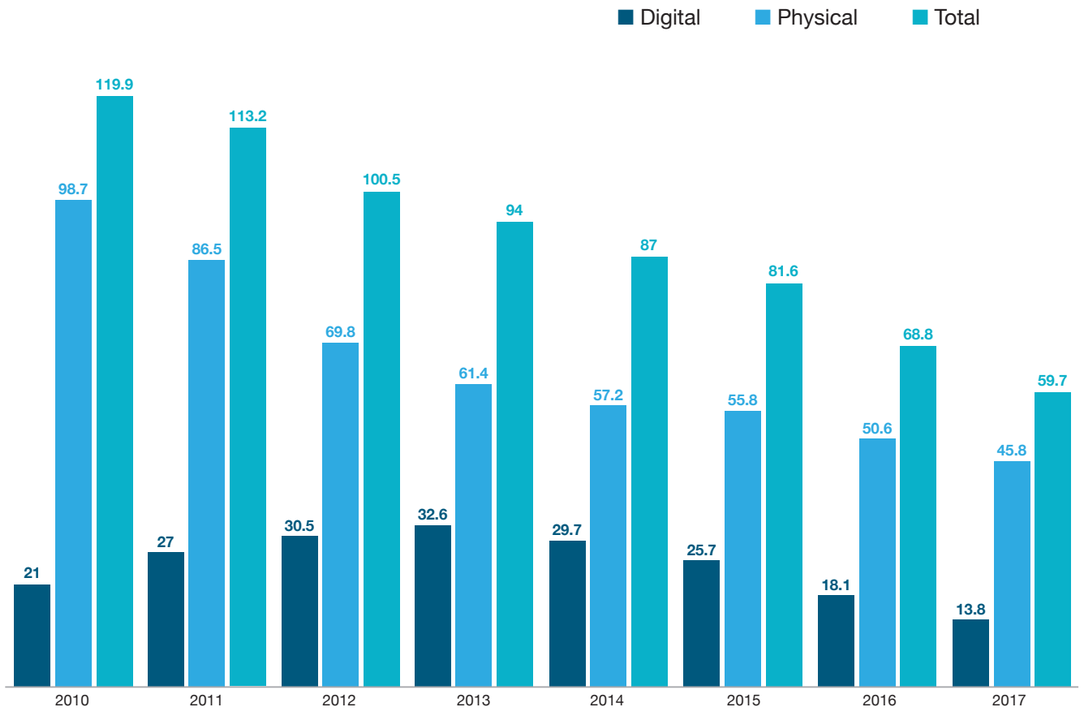
However, in terms of LP units shifted, vinyl's still a relative minnow, contributing **6.9%** of annual total album sales in the UK last year.

What, then, can we derive about the future of the album when *all* formats are factored into the equation – across download, CD, vinyl and more?

According to the BPI, 59.7m albums were sold in Britain across digital and physical last year, also taking into account the likes of MiniDisc and other minority formats.

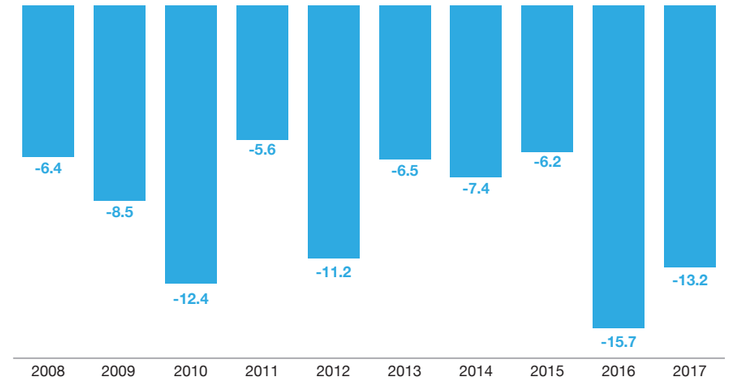
That was down **13.2%** year-on-year compared to 2016. Once again, this **13.2%** tumble was not particularly atypical: the UK's total albums market has witnessed four double-digit percentage declines over the past eight years.

Annual UK album sales (m)



Source: BPI - 'Total' includes CD, vinyl and 'other' (cassette, minidisc, DVD Audio)

Total album sales in the UK market (YoY % rate of decline)



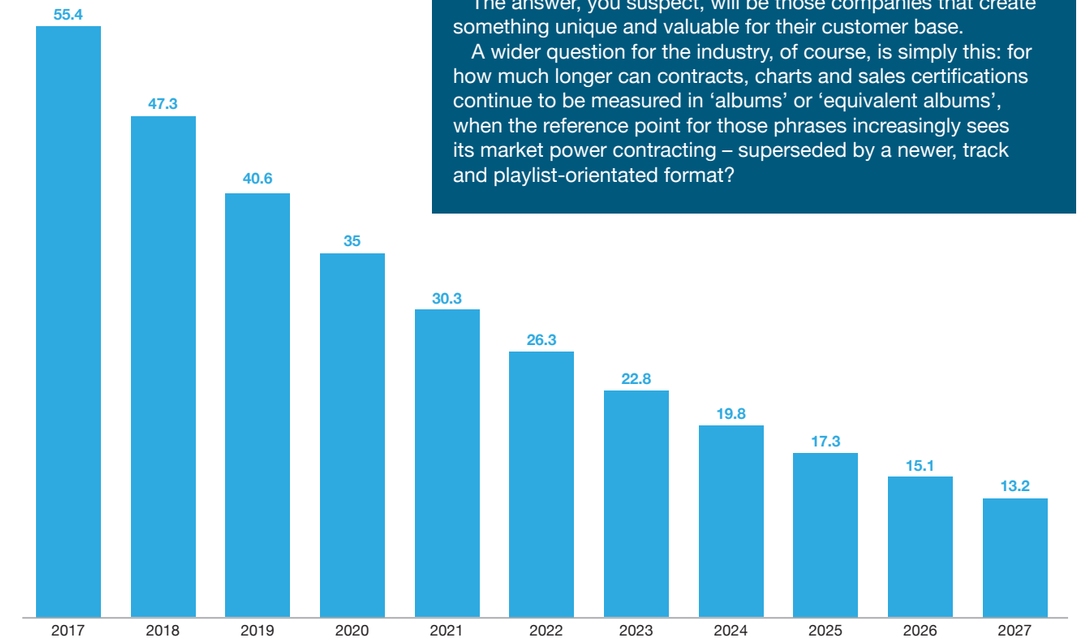
Source: BPI / Official Charts Company

The ever-changing mix of formats within the numbers on the opposite page make any forecast based on their composite percentage declines (ie. across all album format types) troublesome – thus this lumpy graph (left).

However, we *can* take a look at what our digital album and CD album forecasts look like *combined* – giving us an idea of how the majority of the UK albums market will behave in future.

In the graph below, we add together our previous forecasts for future UK CD and digital album sales declines to give a broader overall picture...

Combined digital and CD album UK sales forecast at respective average rates of decline (m)



Source: MBUK analysis

These figures leave the industry with a very obvious conundrum to think about: what kind of businesses will continue to thrive by focusing on a UK albums sales market in such steep decline?

The answer, you suspect, will be those companies that create something unique and valuable for their customer base.

A wider question for the industry, of course, is simply this: for how much longer can contracts, charts and sales certifications continue to be measured in 'albums' or 'equivalent albums', when the reference point for those phrases increasingly sees its market power contracting – superseded by a newer, track and playlist-orientated format?

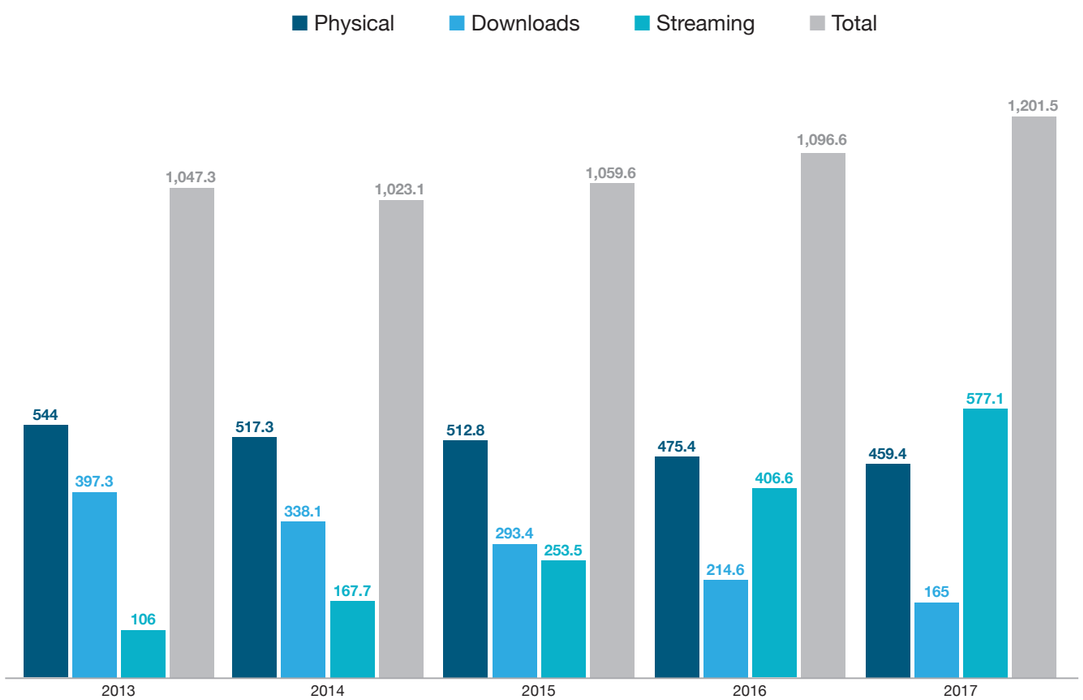
The good news

The point of this analysis, if you didn't work it out already, isn't actually doom and gloom – it's to spark a question about how the industry judges itself, and where its energies are invested.

It's particularly not doom and gloom because, remember, the British music market actually grew significantly in value terms last year, with streaming leaping up to turn over **£577.1m** at retail.

"This is about how the industry judges itself."

Music's annual retail value in the UK market (£m)



Source: ERA

Here's something fascinating about the above ERA numbers, when you cross reference them with unit sales figures from the BPI: the average unit price of CD albums and vinyl albums is actually going *up*.

That has to spell good news for those companies determined to stick with the album into the future.

The albums market itself is undoubtedly going to get tougher and macro demand, as we've shown, is going to soften – challenging conditions for any company, no matter how tuned in it might be to retail trends.

However, should you manage to carve out a decent share of the remaining album-buying consumer base, you could still be taking advantage of a lucrative business...

Is the album moving towards the stage?

By Dave Roberts

The recorded music sector has long noted/complained that the live market has sucked up some of its revenues.

But it might soon be bemoaning that it's stolen its cultural clothes, as well. Because, at the current rate of decline, the only place the 'album' will exist in a couple of decades is on stage.

That doesn't just mean the 'start to finish' renditions of classic records that have become increasingly popular on the circuit over the last couple of decades, but also in the sense that the live arena will be the only place where musicians take control, where they, in fact, retain control, with the old dynamic still dominant. Where fans pay their money and put themselves in the hands of the musicians, where they listen to the music of just one artist, uninterrupted, with the songs and even the running order of those songs decided *by* that artist.

It will be the only place where artists say, Hush now, much-loved lesser being, leave this to us, you think you know what you want, but we know what you *really* want: 1-2-3-4…

Obviously music fans at home will still be able to dedicate an hour, a day or even their whole listening lives to one artist. They can, if they wish, play 12 songs in a row exactly as an artist first released them on one collection.

"Will the live arena be the only place where musicians can take control?"

But everything detailed in the main feature here points to the fact that soon they will not, in any decent numbers, be inclined to. And they certainly will not have entered into a contract to do so: I give you my money, you give me what you consider to be the best you've got right now – and then I'll be the judge.

But that contract still exists in the live sector. It doesn't mean that Bruce Springsteen live at The O2 is the new Born To Run, but it does mean that it will be the closest future fans will get to Bruce 'talking to them': prescribing, preaching, testifying, to a mass audience who are all sharing the same experience, and can then talk about that experience, and then talk about it again to hundreds of thousands of people who have the (not exactly the same) experience the next night in Dublin, and Paris, and Berlin, and New York, and Sydney, etc.

It might not sound like what we previously thought of as an 'album' – but it could end up as the closest thing to feeling like one.

U2 performing The Joshua Tree at Twickenham, 2017 (pic: Danny North)

‘IT COMES DOWN TO THE MUSIC – YOU EITHER HAVE A GOOD ALBUM OR YOU DON’T’

Gorillaz just won their debut BRIT Award, being named best British Group at this year’s ceremony in London. MBUK catches up with the band’s management team at Eleven to ask all about how artists can stay fresh and fascinating in the streaming age…

When Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett presented the idea of Gorillaz back in 1998 – a virtual band who wouldn’t tour, do radio or press promotion – the project seemed likely to end up little more than a short-lived Britpop sideshow. That’s according to traditional music business rules, anyway.

Instead, the band have been repeatedly successful over two decades, with four Top 5 albums in the UK – and two that reached No.2 in the US. The group’s latest LP, Humanz, charted at No.2 on both sides of the Atlantic in 2017 following a six year break.

And in February, a new milestone: the Parlophone-signed outfit won their first ever BRIT Award for best British Group.

“It’s amazing for a band to have been signed 20 years ago to be so relevant that much later,” says Eleven Management co-founder Niamh Byrne, who has been working on the project as talent manager since its inception. “They’ve done that by constantly reinventing. Every time a record is produced and a new campaign arrives, musically there are new collaborations or a new sound – and with the characters having a strong narrative, the story continues. You never run out of things to say with Gorillaz.”

Humanz wasn’t just an album; it encompassed a record-breaking VR video that notched up three million YouTube views within 24 hours, and an app, created in partnership with Deutsche Telekom and developers B-Reel. Gorillaz’ own 15k-capacity festival, Demon Dayz, took place in Margate’s Dreamland last June, and is setting sail for the US this year.

In addition, Eleven forged brand partnerships with E.ON for a solar powered Kong Studios project, while Gorillaz band member Noodle became an ambassador for E-Racing at Jaguar Land Rover – which lead to a recruitment drive that gave fans

Damon Albarn took to the stage at the BRITs with collaborators such as Savages’ Jehnny Beth (far left)

real jobs in engineering. Red Bull, Hennessy and Chelsea FC (the football team beloved by Albarn – and virtual Gorillaz member 2D) sponsored Demon Dayz, while Sonos IRL Spirit Houses were created in New York, Berlin, Amsterdam and Beijing.

With a wealth of technology now at their fingertips, it could be argued that today’s music business is the perfect ecosystem for a proposition like Gorillaz to succeed.

“Back in the early days the technology didn’t exist for us to do everything we wanted with Gorillaz, but we had this concept and characters – so you had to do whatever you could in order to bring those to life,” says Byrne.

“We’re not pushing artists up a hill – they’re pushing us.”

“The rules were simple: it was all about the characters, imagery and music, and there could be no real people fronting it. We were forced to harness technology in whatever way we could to create a space for these characters to live and breathe, which has been the premise since day one.

“The concepts for Gorillaz have always been strong, but now tech has caught up, so we can do the things we once imagined. Thanks to AI and VR there are endless possibilities and that’s why Gorillaz stay so youthful and fresh, because it evolves with technology. And, of course, the music continues to be amazing.”

Byrne was previously manager of Blur at CMO Management, where she met the band’s publicist – now her business partner in Eleven – Régine Moylett. After leaving CMO, Byrne spent some time as a consultant while raising children, where she was brought in to help marry the then-divided digital and creative teams at Universal. Deciding the corporate life wasn’t for her, she returned to management and teamed up with Moylett.

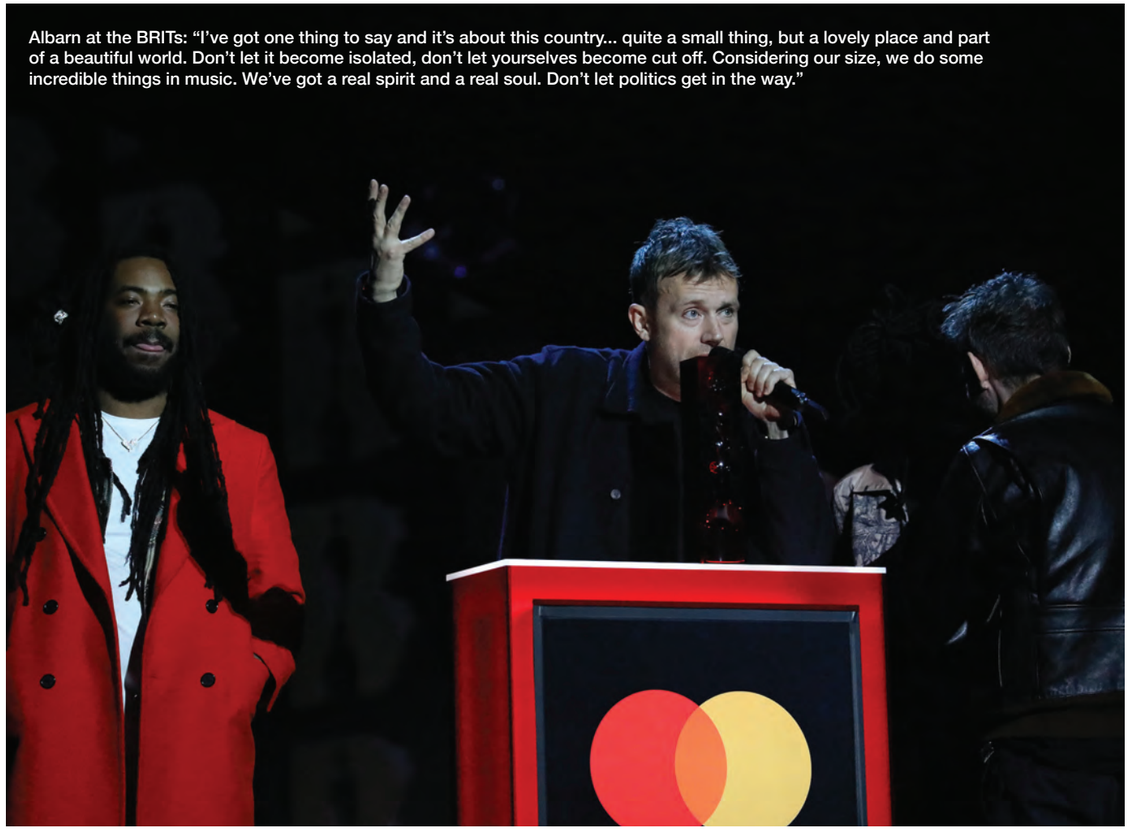
Albarn left CMO and signed with Eleven, bringing no less than three high profile projects with him as a solo artist, Blur member and Gorillaz mastermind.

Today, Eleven also has Róisín Murphy, The Clash and Graham Coxon on its roster.

Byrne says: “We had signed up a long list of clients before we had a structure to our business, so Eleven has evolved by putting everything in good working order and allowing our artists the space to be as creative as possible.

“We are set up to work with artists who are driven by creativity so everything can come from them. We are not pushing the artists up a hill – they are pushing us, and that’s the way we like it.”

Alongside Gorillaz, Eleven’s projects in the past few years have included a No.2 Damon Albarn solo album, in addition to Blur’s eighth studio release, The Magic Whip, which hit No.1 in 2015, plus Albarn’s Wonder.land musical.



Albarn at the BRITs: "I've got one thing to say and it's about this country... quite a small thing, but a lovely place and part of a beautiful world. Don't let it become isolated, don't let yourselves become cut off. Considering our size, we do some incredible things in music. We've got a real spirit and a real soul. Don't let politics get in the way."

Elsewhere, Graham Coxon recently composed the music for hit comedy drama series The End of the F***ing World, while Murphy – who first came to fame as one half of Moloko – has released two solo albums and received AIM's Outstanding Contribution to Music Award in 2016 for her constant reinvention.

Moylett says: "We get better rather than bigger. In terms of artists like The Clash, it's not an active entity in the same way, but their house is put in order. We remastered everything, released a box set with all their recorded works and made sure the work that's sold around the world is precisely as it was in its inception.

"This year we will be reintroducing The Clash to a younger audience, making sure they are present on all platforms, and that they are being represented fairly and in a true way to the band's original manifesto."

Fresh from Gorillaz' BRITs win, we sat down with Byrne and Moylett to discuss staying ahead of the curve, a hits-driven music business and the technology they're keeping a keen eye on...

Tech plays such a big part in what you do now – what was it like working in the business before Spotify and social media?

Regine Moylett: I remember Niamh telling me [pre-Amazon], 'I think there should be a shop on the internet where you buy anything you like. I think I'm going to do that and call it Wigwam!' I also recall an artist, related to Gorillaz, bringing out an album, and [Niamh] suggesting that [he or she] release an extra track a month for a year after the release, which would build up onto a second CD. EMI said no, you can't do that because that might encourage downloading and we're against downloading!

Niamh Byrne: [Laughs] I should have been born in the noughties. I've been massively inspired by the internet coming of age and the endless amount of possibilities that's created, especially when you've got something like Gorillaz. When I was consulting, there were some crazy concepts – back then you had a press team, and a digital team and everything was separate.

Regine: The digital people would sit in the big meetings with the publicity, promotions, marketing and sales staff. The digital people would say something nobody understood using jargon – and they would be proud of it. There was a real stand-off between both sides.

The latest Gorillaz album, Humanz, was a very ambitious project that was centered around a body of work. In today's hits-driven streaming world, what do you think of the notion that the album is dead?

Niamh: That's like saying to every artist that you have to be a hits-driven artist. I don't think that applies to everybody. There is a huge business in music and then there's everything else that you do around it. As long as you've got a really good music proposition, artist and idea and you're saying something, you can create whatever you want around that. There will alway be interesting, creative things to do that aren't necessarily the norm. I fear that sometimes labels look too much in one direction and then [afterwards] they realise it's too late. They get so focused on being one particular way and forget about the rest.

Regine: It's like saying to someone you can never eat a meal again, you're going to have to snack for the rest of your life. The album is a body of work. It's one way of presenting music that some artists like, and I think listeners appreciate listening in that way. There is a shift in how the majority of people consume music, but that doesn't mean that the various different options outside of the majority are not valid.

"Saying that the album is dead is like saying you can never eat a meal again."

In the streaming and internet age, our concentration spans are said to be lower than ever. How do you counter that and get fans to engage with a body of work?

Regine: Does [a body of work] really encourage you to do that? A lot of people binge on box sets…

Niamh: It comes down to the music, you either have a good album or you don't. A Gorillaz record is a very accomplished piece of work that has depth that people can relate to. As long as there's that it's always going to be appealing. With the single-track artists, I think some [of them] struggle to make something that brings out their personality; fans know the songs but they know nothing about the artist so they don't care, there's no real engagement. We're finding that brands are realising that fact more and more. They might have initially been attracted to streaming and YouTube numbers, but then they're realising that doesn't always represent engagement, because it's just about that moment.

You're a small independent company that doesn't work with artists who typically have big mainstream hits. How do you remain sustainable?

Niamh: Diversity and having something that is engaging. Working with brands and doing great work so that they are facilitating an idea but getting something out of it because our fans are engaged.

We do a lot of that in order to remain sustainable but also to ensure that we can execute creative ideas. We used to be able to do that with record label [funding] but their income streams have reduced so we need to be more outward-thinking about who else we can collaborate with in order to execute great things.

Where does that leave the major labels?

Niamh: There will always be a service industry and as long as they are providing a good level of service there will aways be a need to tap into them. If they are not providing the right service then I'm not sure if those old deals are reflective of how the [industry] now operates. If you're not happy with someone doing a service for you, you need to be able to stop and go somewhere else, but if you're locked into those [label] deals that's a pretty difficult situation to be in. I think contracts need to be updated to reflect the business today, and what labels are providing to artists.

The lack of women in senior roles in music has been a big topic recently. You're two women who've stayed the course in the business, albeit now independently. What's your take on the debate?

Regine: The music industry is like any other business where there is a glass ceiling because of how promotions happen and how decisions are made in terms of the mentoring of staff. In one job I was in, I remember someone saying to me, 'You're the only person who's had a baby and stayed [at the company].' Taking time out to have children is seen as a disadvantage and you're therefore handicapped by it.

It's a terrible waste of resource and assets to have people who are really well-trained and experienced disappear like that. I've always felt that part-time work is really valuable depending on the person – there are people who can work extremely efficiently on a part-time basis, but that's not necessarily appreciated by a corporate structure. I think employers should be now reflecting society, rather than their own small interest group in how staff are brought forward.

Final question, what new technologies are you most excited about today?

Niamh: Blockchain, but not from a financial point of view, purely creative. What is concerning me right now is we spend a long time trying to talk to fans directly. Pre-digital, we used to be limited to going through a record company to reach people, and then we built up communities on platforms like Facebook and Instagram. But now you can't reach fans [on those platforms] unless you pay. We had this nice dream about social media enabling us to reach everybody [for free] – but it's a business, like anything else.

I feel like Blockchain is a potentially interesting technology to bring people together and have pure democratic access to fans, where we can exchange content and music using the technology. It's all about who has power over distribution. The labels did and now social platforms do.

THE CHEMISTRY IN COLLABORATION

With a number of interesting artistic collaborations hitting the headlines and the charts in recent months, PPL's Matt Phipps-Taylor and Dave Goggin (pictured above) have used the chemistry in their collaboration to analyse some of the data PPL collects and explore what might be behind this trend…

PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

It was ten years ago that PPL reported that Umbrella, Rihanna's collaboration with Jay-Z, was top of the 2007 PPL 'most played' chart (compiled annually from UK radio and TV airplay data reported to PPL, along with some public performance data). The combination of solo vocalist and rapper was not a new one - and collaborations have long been commonplace in genres like hip-hop and R&B – but, in hindsight, that year signalled the beginning of a marked trend in mainstream music. Until then, tracks by a single group or a solo artist had typically dominated the UK sales charts, and commanded the majority of UK radio airplay reported to PPL.

It took six years before a collaboration was again PPL's most played track of the year (Get Lucky by Daft Punk ft. Pharrell Williams in 2013), but we have seen the share of UK radio airplay going to collaborations growing steadily throughout, and it is now more than four times what it was ten years ago.

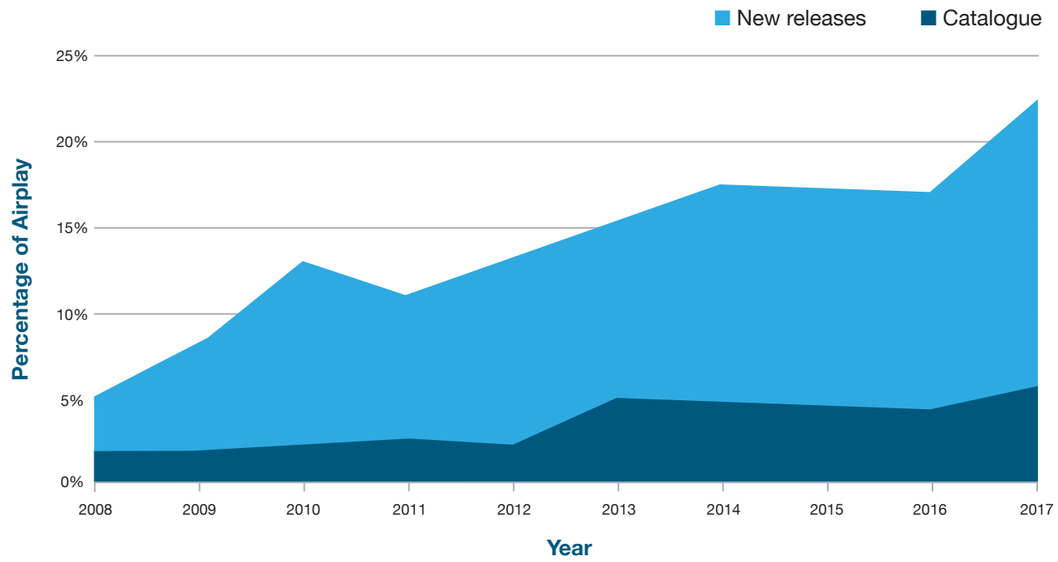
While 'catalogue' collaborations have increased in share of UK radio airplay, most of the trend is driven by new releases, and the impact of this can also be seen in the weekly Official UK Singles Chart: eight of the 14 tracks that topped the chart in 2017 were collaborations. And the first new track to reach No.1 in 2018? A collaboration (Eminem ft. Ed Sheeran).

Are data-savvy labels and management teams working with their artists to benefit from this apparent trend? On the face of it, it seems obvious that collaborating on a track will give it the potential to appeal to a broader fan base.

To investigate this, we analysed the UK radio airplay for the top 1,000 tracks (ranked by volume of airplay reported to PPL) released in each of the last five years. Sure enough, we found that, *on average,* the tracks on which an artist (whether solo or a


Jess Glynne

Collaborations: Increasing share of UK radio airplay



This chart shows the percentage of UK radio airplay reported to PPL that was received by tracks that were categorised as collaborations, out of the total airplay received for the top 1,000 most-played tracks each year (ranked based on the total volume of UK radio airplay reported to PPL). Tracks were categorised as "collaborations" when credited to more than one artist, whether the artist was solo or a group, and regardless of how the collaboration was specifically credited (e.g. whether 'featuring', 'versus', 'with', or otherwise). Within each year, the 1,000 tracks were further categorised to distinguish 'new releases', those that were first released in the year of airplay or in the year immediately prior, versus the remainder as 'catalogue'.

group) had collaborated received 2.8 times as much airplay in the first 12 months compared with those tracks where the same artist had not collaborated. Moreover, this 'airplay uplift' has been steadily increasing by around 10% each year.

This would lead some to suggest that collaborating is a sure-fire route to increased radio airplay. But there is a catch hidden behind the words '*on average*'. Looking closely, only half of the artists who had collaborated in this period received any airplay uplift on those tracks, and the other half actually had less airplay on the tracks they had collaborated on.

So, is it that not all collaborations have quite the right chemistry? We further crunched the UK radio airplay data for our five-year sample of top tracks to see what else we could learn.

The more the merrier

The majority of collaborations are between just two artists, but the average radio airplay increased with each additional artist: tracks where three artists worked together received 48% more airplay on average than those with two, and those with a fourth collaborator gained a further 22%.

There is a long history of collaboration amongst rappers and in R&B, and we found that Lil Wayne, Pharrell Williams, and Kanye West are some of the artists who received the most airplay as part of bigger collaborations.

There are some truly prolific collaborators

The ten most prolific collaborators collectively accounted for 20% of the airplay received by all artists across their 'collaboration' tracks.

Nearly two thirds of the 130+ biggest hits these artists have released in the last five years have been collaborations. Working with any of these artists appears to have had a big impact on airplay – perhaps not surprising when you consider that this list includes the likes of Rudimental, Clean Bandit, Daft Punk and Rihanna.

Calvin Harris was a prolific collaborator on the UK airplay charts last year

Calvin Harris is another prolific collaborator, and when his track Feels (featuring Pharrell Williams, Katy Perry, and Big Sean) topped the Official UK Singles chart in August 2017, it became his seventh UK No.1 of this decade – leaving him with the joint-highest total of all chart-topping artists. But who does he share this honour with? None other than Tinie Tempah, himself a regular collaborator on his chart-toppers.

Collaboration might kick-start a career

The airplay history for some individual artists suggests that when the chemistry is right, the impact of a collaboration can be significant. Sam Smith launched his career working with the likes of Disclosure and Naughty Boy. And Craig David returned to the scene in 2016 releasing successful collaborations with Big Narstie and Blonde.

Jess Glynne's debut album was much-anticipated following the success of her earlier collaborations with Clean Bandit and Route 94. Will we see her repeat this pattern with a second album in 2018, following her successful collaboration with Rudimental on These Days?

"Collaborations can be a great way of helping to build an artist's career over multiple releases," says Sam Eldridge at UROK Management, which looks after Glynne's career.

"In the run-up to Jess' debut album, collaborations such as Rather Be helped to raise awareness, introduce Jess to the market, allow the media to trust her as a hit vocalist and let her be in the market whilst she developed and grew as an artist proposition.

"Now that we are approaching her second album, collaborations do still play a part in allowing Jess to engage with different segments of her audience, whilst providing her a longer runway for building anticipation for her own major solo release."

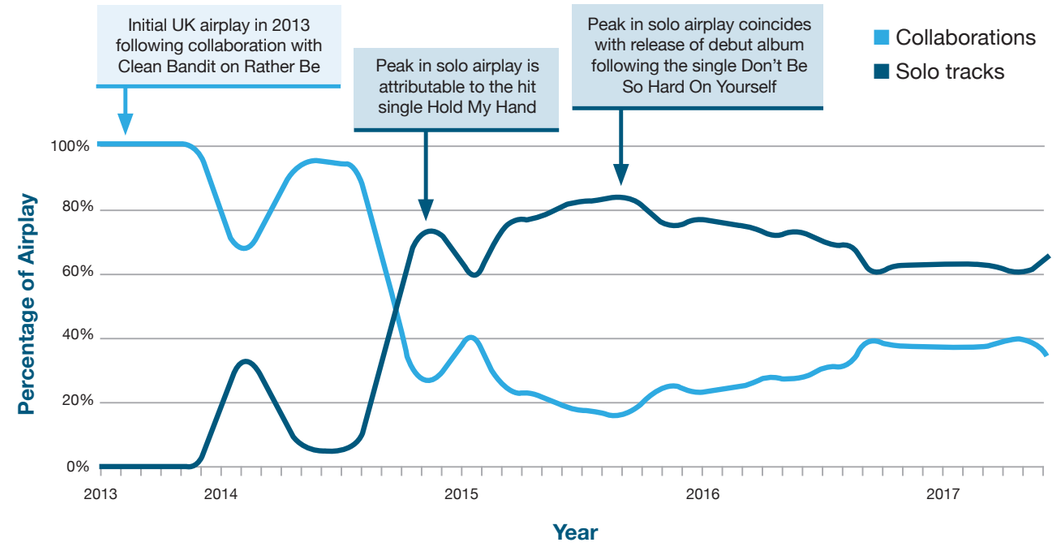
So, what else could we expect to see in 2018? Inspired by Ed Sheeran's genre-bridging collaboration with Andrea Bocelli on Perfect Symphony at the end of last year, and Sting and Shaggy's forthcoming joint album, PPL analysed some station-level UK radio airplay data to identify which combinations of artists could potentially generate the greatest coverage. Much like Heston Blumenthal's ice cream flavours, many of the suggested collaborations we came up with didn't seem instantly appealing. But some did. For example, we'd certainly be excited to hear that The Who were working with Bruno Mars. Or that Blondie were collaborating on a track with Coldplay. Likewise, a duet between Adele and Ludovico Einaudi.

But we'll leave you with our favourite: who wouldn't want to see Elton John performing with Katy Perry, perhaps on his Farewell tour?

"Collaborations can help to build an artist's career over multiple releases."

Sam Elridge, UROK

Jess Glynne: Split of UK radio airplay



This chart shows, out of the total volume of UK radio airplay reported to PPL that was received on tracks credited to Jess Glynne, the percentage of that airplay each month that was received on tracks categorised as 'collaborations', versus those credited solely to Jess Glynne. Tracks were counted as 'collaborations' regardless of whether Jess Glynne was credited as the primary artist, or a featured artist.

The analysis for this article was led by Joseph Sadowski, Calum Hartley, and Holly Hopwood at PPL.

‘MOSTACK WANTS TO BE A GLOBAL SUPERSTAR - AND I WANT TO RUN A GLOBAL COMPANY’

The UK urban music scene has already birthed a few major-league artists, and many believe that MoStack will be the next big breakthrough. His career has been looked after by MizerMillion Entertainment – a fast-rising company which is making waves of its own…

You occasionally hear it said that the UK industry today is lacking exciting, ambitious new music companies.

Try telling that to MizerMillion Entertainment.

The past year has seen the ambitious South London management-slash-label operation turn multiple heads in the British entertainment business – especially with star client MoStack, who gate-crashed the Top 20 of the Official Albums Chart in June last year with mixtape High Street Kid.

That compilation, featuring the likes of J Hus, Mist and Krept, was the second mixtape from the artist on MizerMillion Ent following the scene-setting Gangster With Banter in early 2016.

MizerMillion (pronounced Mizzer-million) has officially managed MoStack, and released his records, for three years, playing a key role in the artist’s astronomical commercial climb. As we stand today, the MC is on the cusp of something huge, with more than 35m streams on Spotify alone.

In February, MoStack featured on two tracks in the Official Singles Chart Top 40 at the same time – Dave’s No Words (peak: No.17) and Bad (No.29), which he co-recorded with Steel Banglez and Yungen. The stage is now clear for a big time breakthrough, with rumours of a major label deal now in the works.

MizerMillion is the vision of one man, Shane ‘MizerMilli’ Derozario, who has been operating in the UK urban music scene since 2010. Derozario proudly takes a hands-on approach to how he works with his roster, both in the studio and when holding meetings with key gatekeepers.

In addition to MoStack, MizerMillion Entertainment’s signings include the likes of rapper RAE and producers Sevaqk, Pinero Beats and Wildboyace.

Music Business UK caught up with Derozario (pictured left) to better understand how MizerMillion – and MoStack – became the talk of the industry…

How did MizerMillion Entertainment come to be?

I’ll be honest: in the beginning, I didn’t know what the hell I was doing. In 2010, I was approached by a producer called Pinero Beats, who was a local producer where I’m from in Brixton. I heard his stuff and thought he had crazy potential. I knew several artists who were up-and-coming at the time, so I spoke to them and said, I’ve got this kid, I think he’s making amazing music and you guys should hook up. That’s how it started, literally connecting the dots. And then I started managing him.

I’m a very ambitious person, so managing a producer alone wasn’t hugely fulfilling to me – we were always waiting in the hope that an artist would put him on a project. I was watching the Americans create these collective movements. Little Wayne had Drake, Nicki Minaj and Tyga – a Cash Money/Young Money movement. And Rick Ross had his movement [MMG] with Meek Mill and all those different artists. So I thought to myself, ‘I could actually start a collective here, and develop some artists.’

What was your first big step forward?

At that time, the likes of LinkUp TV and GRM Daily were just starting to really kick off, so there was an online buzz around UK urban music. I did my research and stumbled across a young artist called RAE – Rise Above Everything. The flow and lyrics this kid was coming out with just amazed me. Then I found out he was the younger brother of Krept, as in Krept & Konan, which made me think, ‘He’s not going to be interested in working with me, I’m no-one!’

> ***“I told him straight: I want to start a movement. I’ll do anything it takes.”***

But then a few months later, I noticed a relative of mine posted a track by RAE on social media, so I asked, ‘Do you know that kid?’ And he said, ‘Yeah - that’s my friend.’ So he set up a meeting, and in that meeting, I told RAE straight: I want to start a movement, I’m fully passionate about this music, and I have this producer.

We were sat down in a cafe and I made [RAE] to listen to Pinero Beats on the headphones. I said, ‘I’m not going to lie. I’ve just started and I don’t know everything – but what I can tell you is, I’m hungry, I’m determined and I’ll do anything it takes.’ After that, he shook my hand, and just said: ‘Let’s go.’

What doors did working with RAE open?

The first project we did was a mixtape, and I said to [RAE]: ‘What studio have you been using?’ So he took me to this studio in Streatham, and introduced me to this producer/engineer, DICE. At that studio, I met Stormzy, Yungen, Bonkaz, Krept & Konan - it was like, wow. All these artists were relatively unknown then - in

comparison to where they are now, anyway. DICE was a central figure for me, so I have a huge amount of respect and honour for him; if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have made connections that have been vital in the years that followed.

From there, I took on another artist [from the studio], Bonkaz, and just kept doing as much as I could myself, including making videos with a young guy called C-Star. I was always trying to contact Link-Up and SBTV, but I knew they'd be getting thousands of emails – and unfortunately, they weren't really getting back to me!

After we started making videos, it increased the buzz around the [MizerMillion] artists, and after a while we were getting shows. I used to burn CDs full of music, and while my artists were performing I'd give them out to people in the audience. I was also researching A&Rs; at the time I saw the likes of Benny Scarrs and Glyn Aikins. I looked up to those guys.

The big breakthrough came when Charlie Sloth [on 1Xtra] invited Bonkaz in for [freestyle showcase] Fire In The Booth. At that time, to get on Fire In The Booth you had to be a really credible artist.

Not long after that, I heard my artist's songs played on the radio for the first time. I'll be straight up with you, I had tears in my eyes when it happened. It was like the three, four years of grinding, with nobody giving a shit, had started to pay off. People were paying attention, and starting to enquire: What is this MizerMillion Entertainment?

"I had tears in my eyes when I first heard my artist on the radio."

You officially started managing MoStack in early 2015. How did that happen?
I've always known him, and his family would always ask me for advice. The more advice I gave, the closer we got, and then one day he asked me to manage him. He'd just started getting a little bit of a buzz online.

I brought a little bit more structure to his world, introducing him to better producers, helping him to flourish. Then that buzz started going crazy; he started getting millions of hits. Partly because of those relationships I'd formed over the years, things started happening – like Stormzy taking MoStack on tour [in 2015, on the Live In The Flesh tour]. And people were starting to get back to my emails!

What have you learned most from managing MoStack?
MoStack is autistic; it's not always easy to manage that. I had to study autism, and read books on the psychology of it so I can present things to him in a language he understands.

I feel like a great manager takes the time to get to know what's going on in their artist's mind. Every day, I'm willing to fight, and learn, and understand so I can develop my artists a little bit more.

It's my belief that every great artist gets their opportunity, eventually. Before and after that it's just about consistency – it's about showing up. I am heavily involved with my artists; I drive them everywhere, I pick them up, bring them to the studio. I believe they represent me and I represent them.

Going on tour with Stormzy must have felt like a real progression for MoStack.
It was an amazing opportunity, but, again, it meant doing a lot ourselves. You're not exactly 'going on tour' with Stormzy as such – you're supporting [the headliner], which is great, but there's some realities to that.

I had to rent a car; we'd keep driving up the motorway to do the [Stormzy] shows, then driving back home because I couldn't afford hotels. But I could see what was happening in the industry; that the scene was rising.

A lot of the artists were starting to support each other on social media. It was a turning point. And then the injection of Spotify and Apple music picked things up, bringing artists a residual income. It really fed into that 'maybe we don't need a label' feeling.

We'll come on to your current label setup in a bit, but for a long time, maybe two years, you resisted signing a deal. Why?
We released music on our own through our distributor, Ditto, and that was all we needed.

It got to a stage where I knew we needed to get bigger shows, so we had a meeting with Craig [D'Souza] from Primary Talent, and he set a really high standard. He taught me when to accept shows, and when not to. We started to do our own headline shows, and, for the first time, we got a little bit of interest from labels.

A couple of labels from Universal took an interest [in 2015/2016] including Island, and there was also interest from Columbia and Black Butter, who had the J Hus connection. I'm sure they thought having Mo and Hus would be a killer combination!

I would ask Mo what his view of labels was: did he want to get signed? And his first reaction was, 'No, I don't really want to get signed at the moment.' So we told everyone: we're not really interested in signing... but if you've got something amazing to offer, we're all ears. That scared a few of them away! But a couple of them kept pursuing.

There are rumours that you've recently signed a JV with a major label. What are your views on major deals generally?
There's pros and cons of being independent, and there's pros and cons of being with a label. MizerMillion Entertainment took Mo to where he is as a manager/label from the ground up. But Mo wants to be a global superstar, I want to run a global company – and we are both keen to push on with that mission.

Each individual artist is different. Some artists might need an extra A&R to help them develop. MoStack doesn't really work with a load of different people in the studio – he likes to keep close-knit relationships [including a long-term loyal relationship


MoStack

with producer Steel Banglez] and just crack on.

Also, working with someone with autism, from an A&R perspective, isn't always simple. Mo likes be in control of things, and in a label you sometimes have like 20 different people you have to discuss things with. We've got to have 200% control of what we're doing, and that is the key thing in any agreement we have from now on, really – to maintain full creative control. You've seen it with artists when their label starts moulding them and their sound to what they think it should be. That's not us.

Your involvement in the creative process was reflected when you were nominated for an A&R Award in the Hip-hop/Grime category last year – do you remember getting that news?
When I heard, I just froze. I was in a major label building with an A&R, and somebody texted me and said, 'You've been nominated!' I went on the *Music Business Worldwide* website and I saw my name. I couldn't believe it after all the years of the graft and hard work – all the sleepless nights, the days we had no money, the nights of burning CDs, the constant networking. I've had to overcome shyness for us to be successful – you can't afford to be shy in the music business!

I've never done it for outside recognition. But when that nomination happened, it was an amazing feeling. It changed my view on a lot of things, and I was honoured.

With your ambitions and the independent building of MoStack's career to this point, do you take inspiration from #Merky – Tobe Onwuka and Stormzy?


MoStack

Massively. I know where they've come from, and I've seen their struggle with my own eyes. The achievements they've made are hugely inspirational for us. The two of them have worked so hard together, and never stopped believing.

You have to rely on yourself a lot when you start out independently in the music business. Everyone claims that they want to be successful, but how many people are willing to do what it actually takes to get there? Are you willing to sacrifice your whole life – your social life, for starters?

There's music and there's the music business – the latter isn't always kind. Artists have got to have someone who they can trust and who's always got their back. That's me.

"Everyone wants to be successful. But are they really willing to do what it takes?"

How good is MoStack?

He's a creative genius, I really mean that. I've never seen him write any lyrics down on paper; everything is in his head. I don't know how he does it.

The way his brain works amazes me, I'm in awe. I'm proud to say that I'm actually a fan of my artists, and with Mo I fall in love with his music all the time.

He deserves to go international with his career. Maybe if MoStack and my ambition was to make a nice little living and just be known in this country, we wouldn't have teamed up with a label. But we want much more than that: we want to be global, to tour, to travel and experience life.

'Living the dream' goes way beyond just finance – that's just the bonus. We're already getting booked in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands – places we'd have never gone before. We don't ever want this to stop.

What advice would you give to a young manager and/or artist scrabbling around with little resource like you were in 2010, who hopes to build their business up to MizerMillion's level?

I would tell them: believe in what you're doing, because that's how you make the universe listen. If you don't believe it yourself, how is anybody else going to believe?

One other big thing is you've got to stay true to what you are. A lot of music, especially urban music, is about struggle, about overcoming tough times. But if your story isn't authentic, if it's not believable, it's not really marketable.

Also, it's obvious, but you really do have to work hard – to try and better yourself every single day. People in the music industry respond, eventually, to consistency, creativity and determination. You have to keep battling on.

‘WE’VE BEEN REALLY GOOD AT DIGGING IN, AND STAYING IN, UNTIL IT WORKS’

Paloma Faith looks set to make history this year. Lateral Management has been behind her – and a raft of other talented artists – every step of the way…

Paloma Faith is on track to make history as the first British female solo artist to see her first four studio albums go platinum in the UK.

The momentous achievement would be the icing on the cake of a 12 year career which has been expertly advised by her management team at Lateral.

Since signing up with the company's Jamie Binns in the mid-2000s, Faith has sold over two million albums in the UK alone. That's a particularly impressive achievement when you consider that, in a business obsessed with the youth market, Faith has successfully maintained the affections of a fanbase which leans towards the 28-40-year-old Radio 2 demographic.

Says Binns: "What we've been really good at – and what Paloma has been really good at – is not buying into the noise. We all live in the same world, we all watch the same programmes, listen to radio, read the papers and magazines, and it's really easy to get blown off course trying to be too competitive – getting dragged into what everyone else is doing. We've been able to identify Paloma's lane and stick to it.... if we'd tried to change her style too much to appease Radio 1 or the younger [radio] stations, we would have lost the plot."

Alongside Taio Cruz, Paloma Faith was one of the first artists to sign with Binns and fellow Lateral co-founders Christian Wåhlberg and Jan Carl Adelsward. Over the last ten years, the firm has established its publishing company in Sweden with John Martin, Michel Zitron, Arnthor Birgisson, Jocke Åhlund, Mans Wredenberg, Klas Åhlund and production duo Banx & Ranx, while its management arm in London also looks after Labrinth, Raye – managed in partnership with Will Harper – Blonde and Josef Salvat.

Binns (pictured) began his music career mailing out records at Island, before getting involved in the burgeoning UK garage scene, which led to an offer of his own JV imprint with V2. After signing Estelle, Lethal B and Jaimeson, Binns left V2 amidst leadership changes.

It was then he joined forces with Wåhlberg, who was having success with Swedish songwriter and production duo Bloodshy & Avant – who created standout hits with Britney Spears (Toxic and My Prerogative to name a few).

Binns brought in Taio Cruz as a management client, who signed to Island in the UK, and shortly after was introduced to Paloma Faith (whom Binns manages with Innis Ferguson at Lateral).

"This producer I was working with at the time called Peanut told me he had this girl that he thought was amazing but was a bit all over the place, didn't know what she wanted to do, and I should meet her," Binns remembers.

"I went down to Hackney High Street to meet her in this Turkish cafe, and I saw this girl walking down the street out of the window. I could immediately tell it was Paloma. She stuck out like a sore thumb, wearing bright colours and an enormous hat. We sat down for a few hours talking and I remember she stared at my face all the time, almost judging and analysing me. I was blown away by her personality, she was so blunt and direct.

"Paloma stared at my face, analysing me. I was blown away by her personality."

"I came out the meeting, called Christian, and said, 'I've just met this girl and she has a lot going on; acting, putting on gigs and she's a singer. I don't know which one of those careers is going to work but one of them will.'

"Christian flew over to London, and I remember Paloma saying, 'I hope you guys aren't going to turn me into some pop act. I want to be cool, I don't care if I sell one record or 10, I just want to be cool.' We loved her so we were like, yeah, whatever you want to do, we're in."

Faith made Lateral sweat for a year before signing a management contract – and then they spent the following year writing and trying to gain label interest.

A meeting with Nick Raphael and Jo Charrington, who were then running Epic at Sony, showed the most promise, before the star's natural bluntness almost scuppered the deal. The short story: Faith chastised Raphael for tapping away on his Blackberry during a showcase.

A row ensued, and it took another six months for the relationship to reconcile. (Raphael apologised and, via his and Charrington's Salli Isaak Music Publishing, still publishes Faith's music to this day.)

Paloma Faith's debut album was released in 2009 and hit No.8 on the UK charts. It arrived around the same time as Taio Cruz's second album – meaning Lateral had two artists showing real signs of promise. At the same time, new signings on the publishing side were in development, and Adelsward was brought in as Chairman to help structure the business.

A three year purple patch followed with a string of top charting singles in the US written and produced by Lateral's Swedish writers and Taio Cruz. These included Swedish House Mafia's Don't You Worry Child and Save The World, Red Lights by Tiesto and I Could Be The One by Avicii. After the income from those hits tailed off, a lean period arrived while the company was developing new talent.

Faith's latest album, The Architect, which last year delivered her first No.1, is the springboard for what Lateral hope to be another cycle of success from its roster.

More new music is on the way from Polydor priority act Raye, alongside a long-awaited second album from Labrinth (including a collaboration between himself, Sia and Diplo). Elsewhere, Josef Salvat's second album and the debut from house duo Blonde are also in the pipeline.

Meanwhile, Paloma Faith recently earned her second nomination for best British Female Solo Artist at the BRITs, and embarks on a 15-date UK arena tour in March, including a sold-out show at The O2 Arena.

Here we chat to Binns about managing an artist in the streaming age, the changing shape of Lateral and much more besides...


Paloma Faith

Paloma has had three different label presidents during her time at Sony: Nick and Jo, Colin Barlow at RCA and now David Dollimore. What's the difference in approach?

Nick and Jo were extremely hands on. The artists they had, like JLS and Another Level, were artists that needed a lot of help in the record making process and styling. But Paloma is a visionary – all the looks, artwork and videos come from her. It was a flip for them and it took a while for that to work. Nick used to get frustrated with Paloma because she didn't do whatever he wanted her to do! It wasn't that he was wrong in any way, just that they weren't used to that way of working. But without Nick and Jo's relentless belief in Paloma, she may not have survived the first album campaign as it took a while for the numbers to add up.

When they left and moved to Universal, Colin Barlow was the absolute opposite. He was like, Paloma, you do what you want, I'll come in and tweak it. [Lateral] do a certain element of A&R ourselves; we manage a lot of writer/producers and make records so we were [comfortable doing A&R] and just getting Colin to approve the songs. We were lucky to have that freedom – we weren't reliant on anyone at the label to go left or right.

"Spotify have a journey to expand out their demographic."

David has a much younger approach. He is focused on singles so he's quite happy to let Paloma make the record she wants to make, and then he comes in with his view on what the singles should be. Crybaby was a talking point for all of us because it wouldn't have been an obvious choice of Paloma's, but for David it was the record that was going to get us a look at Capital, Radio 1 and Kiss as a first release off her fourth album. That was something he definitely championed and it really worked for us. We've got a solid fanbase but we need to try and open up the new generation all the time.

There's also been changes at Chairman level at Sony since Paloma's been signed...

In the time we've been at Sony the culture and the philosophy of the company has completely changed and way for the better. When Ged was there it felt like a very big corporate machine, almost cold in a way. Paloma was a new artist then, so we didn't really get a chance to develop a direct relationship with him. When Nick Gatfield took over there was a shift in attitude, a new perspective of the industry; the company got a fresh feeling, lighter and more creative. Now Jason is on board the company feels stronger than ever. He has brought in a whole new generation of creatives paired with more energy and a whole new level of OCD-like attention to detail. Even though Sony is a warmer place and its team is tighter, it's got a much more aggressive feel to it – there is a hunger to be the best. Jason has been a huge supporter of Paloma, not only her career but on a very personal level, which has been great. You can't fault the team there. Internationally there is still work to be done but as streaming and accessibility to music reaches every corner of the earth, we are all working hard to break new boundaries. We absolutely love the fact that Rob [Stringer] is also fully engaged and we all feel like one big team.

Paloma has yet to really crack the US – is that on the cards?

Over the years we have spent plenty of time in the US – Paloma has performed for all major TV shows out there from SNL to Letterman. We have a core US fanbase but we have never really had the song that could take us the distance. Our mission is still to have a big international hit.

After Paloma's second album, we were with LA Reid at Epic but his style of A&R was in conflict with Paloma's [approach]. I think that created a bit of a breakdown in communication. So Paloma ended up parting company with Epic and moved this latest album over to Columbia [US] and we have a great relationship with the team there. I still think she is going to have a big international hit. We don't have any issues in the label backing her globally – we just haven't had a song with the petrol in it to take it all the way.

What other ambitions does Team Paloma have for her career?

She's got another two albums on the Sony deal, which includes a Greatest Hits – if you can count that these days. We always talk about Tina Turner and look at her career, and how old she was when she came out with Hero or What's Love Got to Do With It?. Paloma has as long a career as she wants. She's got her place in the committee at Sony now. She's a working mum, and she wants to show her child that her mum is a grafter so I can't see Paloma ever stopping. She might diversify into movies and TV, and that might be the angle that takes the brand to another level, and then we'll come back with another record.


Raye

What is the sales to streaming ratio for her music? Presumably it's heavily weighted towards the former?

Physical represents 80 - 90% of Paloma's album sales. We still do extremely well with iTunes, Amazon and physical through the stores. Streaming has definitely grown but Spotify have a journey to expand out their demographic. I think as technology improves and we get more streaming capabilities in cars, and Alexa arrives in every household in the world, that will open that up. We're going to see an [audience] expansion in the world of streaming, and Paloma will benefit from that.

Did the transition to streaming ever worry you income-wise?

It used to. Early last year I was worried – if the physical market diminished and streaming is a young person's game, what do you do with an artist who has an older demographic? But you've got to have faith


Labrinth

that radio still exists, which covers that older listener, and people are still buying records. The mission is always to take care of the core fanbase and try and cut through to the younger audience on streaming. I'll be amazed if in the next three years we're not in an even better place thanks to the accessibility of streaming to the older generation. It's about familiarity; it took me ages to get my parents to try and use iTunes and now it will be streaming, but I'm certain it will catch up.

How has streaming changed the goal and outcome for an album?
It's made it less urgent. You put a record out there and all marketing spend is thrown out in the first six months, and then you've got the tail which is so long that it just goes on forever. Every single time you put out a record it triggers the old catalogue which is amazing. Record companies must be so happy. They've got these huge assets they are just sitting on that they can continue to drive forever. If Paloma becomes a movie star, Sony are winning every time she's profiling. Record deals haven't changed to reflect it yet though!

Have conversations around contracts changed at all in the new environment?
If [as a management company] you're developing an act externally and you get it to a certain point, the kind of deal you could be looking at is way better than what you'd get in the past. But that means doing all the hard work and risking money yourself upfront. If you're going into [a label] early as a developing act, nothing changes. You're still going to get a traditional record deal. I think what you'll find is [managers] who can afford it and have contacts will do that first bit themselves and try and cut into a piece of the master rights going forward. That's the only way you can grow a sustainable business on the side, whether that's master rights or copyrights. It's all about ownership. Does a major label care if they are splitting ownership of rights, or paying you a huge advance if you've done all the hard work? I don't think so.

How can you finance that development phase yourself as a manager?
Scale: either a management company that has it, or one that buys up ten of them and takes their 50 [percent] off the top [of each, which gives them] money to invest. Or publishing; if you've got a catalogue to sell, you can reinvest that cash. Right now the multiples are really high [in publishing] because people are speculating on the future. If you're lucky enough to have a massive artist like Katy Perry you're going to make a fortune. You either retire to the Caribbean or you reinvest in master rights and copyrights.

What's the general strategy at Lateral for new acts?
We know that any acts we're developing from scratch are going to take at least two to three years and a substantial amount of money. So you find a bunch of artists that you really believe in and just dig in. We've been really good at digging in, and staying in, until it works. Paloma took us two to three years and Taio the same. Since then we've been able to use our brand and reputation in order to get involved with acts further down the line. When we got involved with Raye, Blonde and Labrinth, those careers were already happening.

We want to go in at stage one but hopefully we've got a piece of the master rights and copyrights so you're not just gambling on potential management income. When we sign acts to labels we don't know where the business is going to be [by the time they are launched]; we don't know if Google will own Universal by then. But what we always know is that if we believe in someone and believe that we can help them make great music, that's what we should do.

I don't see a world where you can put music out independently globally by yourself. You're always going to need a partner, it's just at what stage and what equity in the act [you give away] at that point. If you're going to put in two to three years of development and money, you should participate in the long journey. Management is too risky, income is fluctuating, and the only way to sustain and grow a proper business is to have regular income.

Secondary ticketing has been the subject of much debate over the last few years, especially amongst the artist management community. Where do you stand?
We work extremely closely with our artists agents – CAA, Coda, Paradigm – to make sure that our clients' tickets are priced correctly. It's sad when people are being overcharged to attend events [by ticket scalpers] and I really hope we can work out a process to eliminate that in the future.

I wonder if that's all going to change anyway when Spotify and other platforms get involved in ticketing. It's going to blast that whole world wide open. I think the whole industry has got to be flushed out and become more transparent. I think a lot of external investors will look at music and go, 'This is a massive mess, it's a labyrinth of mazes, we've got to clean this up.'

There are too many people engaged in the music business right now for it not to get simpler. It must look like a complete minefield to the tech companies. The more tech companies that get involved, the simpler it's going to get.

What's the role of a manager in 2017, and has that changed significantly in your career?
Hell yes it has. The job seemed way easier back when I joined the music industry than it is now. The labels did so much more. I feel like mangers have to oversee every single part of an artist's life, career and brand now. We have to be experts on sales, radio campaigns, styling, visuals, deals, health and welfare, brand alignments, finance, the list goes on and on.

There is nowhere else in the business that is that central and has to have that much knowledge over that many areas. That started changing six or seven years ago.

It's unfair to expect young managers to do and know all of that. And if they have to partner with someone [in a JV] that means they're on 10% net [as opposed to the standard 20%]. So if your artist is lucky enough to make a million pounds, you make £100k, minus tax, and if you charge those costs back to when you started working with that artist three years ago, you're probably walking away with £25k. You need an artist to be going into the tens of millions to really make money – or you need some form of [rights] ownership.

Final question, what are your personal ambitions?
We would love Lateral to be the best and most artist-friendly company in the world – that's always the ultimate goal.

Christian Wåhlberg on Lateral's evolution

Lateral co-Founder **Christian Wåhlberg** has spent the best part of his career managing writers and producers in Sweden.

Here, he gives his take on the future of Lateral and the music business at large:

"There are some really exciting opportunities coming our way in an industry that is in a constant state of change. That brings some challenges, but challenges are usually what force you to leave your comfort zone and create something good.

"It's been a tough time for songwriters, who I think now need to change their mindset a bit and let go of chasing all the opportunities that historically came from the labels. They should focus on writing for themselves – and, on the side of that, start developing artists.

"Majors are still the best at spreading the fire but you need to create the spark yourself. Spending your own money creates limitations, but out of that you become a bit more creative. When that happens without having to be over-A&Rd by a label, all of a sudden writers start doing things they usually wouldn't do. To me, that sounds way more interesting; I bet A&Rs would say the same thing.

"I think the industry needs to have a rethink about the way it's structured. At the moment it is making more money than it has in a long time, and when we look at the forecast that is only going to grow. The biggest problem is that all of the money is based within [the major companies]. They need to do what the movie industry did a few years ago when they started outsourcing the creative side and production. The movie industry become more about funding and distribution and I think the [major music] industry needs to outsource creativity and A&R. That will leave room for young entrepreneurs and more artists to come through, which is what we're going to be part of in 2018. As the industry is changing, we've started the process of slowly becoming a label. Rather than hire label staff, at some point we'll partner with another company."

NEVER MIND THE B*LLOCKCHAIN

Confused by Blockchain? Hearing a lot of people spouting a lot of bobbins about it? Fear not: Cliff Fluet is here to deliver a no-nonsense guide…

I've been deep in the Blockchain space for the last four years. So, for your pleasure and insight, here are my answers to the most common and actual questions I'm asked most days.

What the hell is this new Blockchain thing?
First up, it's not that new. The concept is just a bit younger than the iPhone and the same age as the App Store.

OK, so what is it then?
It's a technology that solves a long-standing theoretical problem: that a truly digital currency could not exist without solving the 'double spend' issue. In other words, how can a technology ensure that a digital transaction is unique, real and immutable without a centralised authority like a bank verifying it and confirming it? Blockchain distributes digital transactions across thousands of digital wallets over a ledger that is decentralised and highly resistant to fraud. Entries are distributed and sealed on cryptographic blocks of validated transactions, linked together in a chain. Thus... Blockchain.

So, how's that different from Bitcoin?
Bitcoin was the first (of hundreds) of digital currencies that use Blockchain as its underlying technology.

Isn't it all just a bubble?
Speculating on certain digital currencies could very well be. But you have to separate digital currencies that use Blockchain from Blockchain technologies themselves. You'll remember the dot.com bubble had people wildly speculating on 'businesses' that were no more than domain names. But the internet did, indeed, become a 'thing'. Many believe Blockchain to be the most powerful and impactful new digital platform since the worldwide web itself.

My mates in banking aren't sure it about it and are saying it's dodgy?

> "People who work in digital music will recognise the banks' reaction to Blockchain."

Yes, but you have to ask yourself – why do they say that? For anyone who's worked in digital music over the last 20 years, you'll recognise these reactions by the banks to Blockchain and Bitcoin. They're rather similar to the music industry's reaction to P2P and streaming: 'I don't get why young people are doing this?'; 'But it's all about crime!'; and 'Ummm, isn't my business model, where I controlled everything, flying out of the window?'

OK, I get what it might mean for digital money, but why's it so important?
Beyond digital money, companies around the world are embedding, tracking and transferring digital assets (and physical assets that can be expressed digitally) using Blockchain technology. The technology is being seen as the ultimate 'truth machine', as it can't be hacked, nor changed without consensus, so lots of the work that the creative industries put into due diligence, chain of title and demonstrating ownership can be automated.

My lawyer says that 'smart contracts' aren't real contracts?
It's just a term, in the same way your feet don't get wet when you're streaming. Ethereum is another Blockchain-based platform that allows the creation of 'smart contracts'. If you use the term 'smart code' or 'smart permissions' you start to understand the potential of these technologies as they allow you to program in certain rights, permissions and/or conditions before or after any digital transaction occurs. So, whilst Blockchain won't do away with lawyers yet (boo!), it will take away a lot of the processes and contracts speeding up digital transactions, especially when you can pre-program all of the rights information, due diligence and provenance into a transaction at the beginning. The sophistication of these smart permissions will supercharge new businesses just like apps did to the world of transactions as they got smarter. Make sure you find a lawyer that does understand them.

So, it's just businesses who used to be inefficient that don't get Blockchain?
Funnily enough, no. I was just talking to an online games client who was saying they didn't understand cryptocurrencies. When I pointed out they were selling unlimited virtual jewels in their game for the thick end of £50 a time to gamers, the digital penny dropped.

I hear governments are trying to shut it down?
If you ignore certain authoritarian states that can't even deal with social networks... much of the noise from governments is to ensure consumers aren't speculating wildly on dodgy tokens or end up being caught in token sales that are really equity offerings without the processes and diligence in place to protect ordinary investors. Beyond that, governments are really interested in the technology. It could enable online voting (as there's no double spend), secure databases of medical information, land registries, car registrations etc. The tax authorities are quite happy to collect in relation to digital currencies. I've some mates who will have a very painful tax bill this year due to their cryptocurrency gains.

Yeah, but I can't see the incumbents in the music industry rushing to adopt a technology that means more transparency?
Wow, when did you become so cynical?

Irrespective of the fact that it means everyone could get paid in a matter of minutes, there are a number of commercial and legislative reasons that could lead to a swift adoption of the technology. The EU Collective Rights Management Directive imposes obligations for greater efficiencies and transparency for PROs, while the proposed Music Modernisation Act in the US looks to the industry to put in place the ultimate song information database. Furthermore, many DSPs and platforms are working on their own solutions – last year, Spotify acquired Blockchain start-up Mediachain.

OK, so it's all about the data and the plumbing of the music industry… I can't see any real-world consumer-facing applications?
Goodness, where to even begin? Away from recorded music, Blockchain tech could secure digital ticketing and could even enable dynamic pricing or a secondary market as controlled by the artist, promoter or venue. It could unlock content based upon subject to preset conditions based upon where a fan was, what they're doing or the device or context where they're listening. It could enable truly digital merchandise and create unique digital fan experiences. Artists could create their own tokens for fans to use and adopt and to mint unique value for their biggest fans. The possibilities are endless.

So, it's not a load of old bollocks then?
No. But sadly it won't prevent a load of old bollocks being talked about it for a while yet…

‘THIS INDUSTRY SHOULD CHAMPION WHAT IT DOES FOR THE ARTIST COMMUNITY’

Steven Melrose has seen it all in his career so far – from the very top of major labels like Epic and Capitol to roles as an artist manager and independent record company head. These days he’s an LA-based publishing exec, at the fast-growing Big Deal Music Group...

“The tramps would piss outside late at night, and the piss would run under our corrugated steel door. So in the morning we would be sat there speaking to these big music industry players, with the smell of urine rising up under our desks. Happy days...”

When Steven Melrose told his hometown mates in Edinburgh that he was moving to Los Angeles back in the early ‘90s, they must have been dead jealous.

The reality, however, was far from the sun-drenched beaches’n’bodies daydream they probably conjured up.

Melrose arrived in LA in 1993 with a small-time job working for Nike, and a big-time dream of breaking into the music business.

In the preceding years, he’d been a DJ and club night operator at Edinburgh University, where he was studying a masters in human psychology (academic training he says has proven pretty useful across two decades in the unpredictable world of A&R).

After finding his feet in LA, Melrose started his first independent label – the dance-leaning City Of Angels – out of the loading bay of Moonshine Studios, in the not-exactly-music-biz central region of Glendale.

“Many Americans couldn’t get their heads around dance music...”

Melrose and the label’s co-founder, Justin King, had a theory: that the progressive house being created by an exciting new wave of British producers – led by the Dust Brothers (now Chemical Brothers) – would not only inspire kids in Blighty, but also make its way to the Logic and Reason save files of Americans, too.

“Americans couldn’t really get their heads around dance music at that point in time,” Melrose tells *Music Business UK*, looking back 24 years to the starting point of a US-based A&R career that’s taken him across Geffen, Island, Capitol and, today, fast-growing indie publisher Big Deal Music.

“That time often felt a bit like swimming upstream – a British guy running a US dance label committed to only signing American acts. Kind of makes me wonder what I was thinking...”

Whatever he *was* thinking, it started to work.

City Of Angels signed electronic duo The Crystal Method, whose debut album, Vegas, went on to sell a million copies worldwide. After a few years, Melrose attracted the attention of Geffen, who acquired his label and enlisted him as a free-roaming A&R presence in LA.

During City Of Angels’ piss-aroma early days, its big hope was rising act Uberzone, whose publishing happened to be signed to Warner/Chappell.

“I remember getting this email from a guy at Chappell, and being quite surprised that an American was into dance music in the early ‘90s,” says Melrose. “Then he turned out to be from Glasgow, and it all made sense.”

That email came from Kenny MacPherson, now head of Big Deal Music Group (and Melrose’s modern-day boss) who hired his fellow Scotsman as SVP of A&R in 2016.

Founded in September 2012, with offices in Los Angeles, New York and Nashville, Big Deal was recently named AIMP’s Indie Publisher Of The Year. Its roster includes My Morning Jacket, Ray LaMontagne, St. Vincent, Dan Wilson, Jim James and Sharon Van Etten, plus dedicated songwriters Brett Beavers, Teddy Geiger, Brad Tursi, John Ryan, Dave Sitek, Alex Goose, Danny Parker and Joe London.

The firm recently expanded into the UK market with the hiring of respected ex-BMG A&R Kate Sweetsur, and regularly finds itself among the Top 10 US publishers in Billboard’s quarterly countdown.

“Big Deal doesn’t have a huge catalogue, so everything we do has to work,” says Melrose. “If you’re a artist/songwriter who wants to sing about dolphins and sell 5,000 records that’s fine, but the deal has to be appropriate.

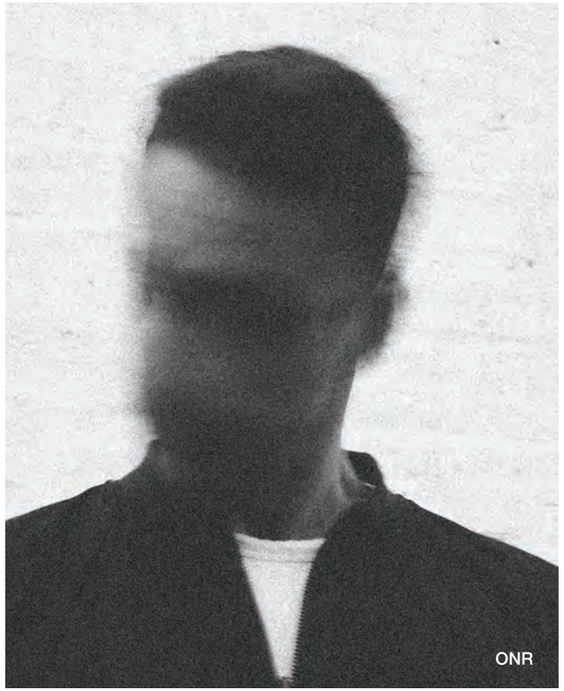
“It means we have to make sure that everything we sign succeeds to whatever level it needs to, but that flexibility also means we’re open to signing all sorts of things we love – whether it’s going to be a global smash or fairly niche. So when Kenny approached me to come in and be part of it, I jumped at the chance.”

Melrose’s remit at Big Deal is, amongst other things, to provide his time-honoured record-making advice to writer/artists. In short, he helps ensure that independent/emerging creators get the the most of their studio time, while giving more established acts a second opinion away from that of their label.

Melrose certainly sees the value in that second opinion – knowing, as he does, the ups and down of the blockbuster record industry better than most.

The exec is perhaps best known in UK circles as the former boss of Epic Records in London, which he ran alongside Dougie Bruce

Mondo Cozmo and Melrose on a video shoot


ONR


Marcus McCoan

from 2013-2016, working with acts like Mr Probz and Example. Before this, he spent a few years working for Island Records UK as its US talent head – signing the likes of Sam Sparro to the British label – before being named in a senior A&R role at Capitol Records in Hollywood.

"I'm a big fan of record labels, and many of them still do great work, but sometimes they can be their own worst enemy – and I include my own contribution in that," he says.

"People who work in labels are typically just big fans of music, and all they want to do is a good job so they can go for a couple of beers knowing they've really helped an artist get the best out of themselves. And, y'know, maybe stand side of stage at Glastonbury with a bit of a smug smile on their face."

He adds: "Where it gets a bit confused is when you look at the traditional deals versus how labels approach record-making today. This current climate seems to suit shorter deals, singles, EPs, with more options – rather than long-term major bets on album recoupment. Perhaps the answer for today's labels is more like a publishing-style deal that involves terms with a minimum delivery of songs."

"In a way, there's less risk for A&Rs than there used to be."

Melrose says that Big Deal, inspired by companies like Chrysalis in the past, positions itself as an alternative to the high-risk, fly or die mentality of blockbuster contract agreements.

"It's becoming less sustainable for a major label to go in and make lots of huge long-term deals," he says. "Often you're either going in so early, you've got no idea how long it might take for you to get anywhere, or you're coming in at such a late stage of development, the artist is already well-established and at the peak of the streaming marketplace.

"That's like buying a house in Knightsbridge and expecting to sell it at a big profit 12 months later – the real money would have been in buying that house years ago."

He adds: "I think labels need to stop focusing on each other quite so much and perhaps begin worrying about other people who could cause them headaches in the future.

"If I was Sony, Warner or Universal, I'd be looking at everything – from Amazon to Spotify, Netflix and elsewhere – and considering the impact these companies will be having on what we do in ten years' time.

"Labels are still the biggest investors in the development and careers of artists, by miles. I think the industry should completely champion that aspect of what it does for the artist community, because nobody else does it for them."

It's not lost on Melrose that his Big Deal role is his first publishing gig in all the years he's been working in A&R; before that, his own labels aside, he's spent a lot of money, and made a lot of money, for the major label system.

"In a way, there's actually less risk for an A&R force in the marketplace than there used to be," he says.

"For me, we're in a perfect situation now for an artist and label to just keep putting out music together – put up a song, if it doesn't work, put another one up. If something starts to go, you get behind it. And if it doesn't go, it doesn't matter. Worrying about how other labels might be judging you whenever one of your songs isn't quite working? That just isn't a smart approach anymore.

"I was somewhat involved in Katy Perry's early career when I was at Capitol, and [her] albums would only really start moving once we had three or four big singles released. That's kind of how it is for all artists today. Not getting to an album isn't a slur on an artist's career, it's just how the industry has evolved."

"I'm a big fan of labels, but they can be their own worst enemy."

In addition to his Big Deal responsibilities, Melrose is also an artist manager to the likes of Mondo Cozmo (aka Joshua Ostrander), whose acclaimed alternative indie album, Plastic Soul, arrived at the end of last summer via New York-based Republic records to warm reviews.

It will be no secret to *MBUK* readers that nurturing the career of a guitar-led, anthemic indie-rock artist in 2018 is no easy task – especially if they proudly stick to their guns by refusing to dilute their sound with a trendier, streaming-friendly production style.

"I've always been a big fan of the A&R idea that whatever everyone's doing, do the opposite – and Josh is certainly doing the opposite," says Melrose with a grin. "Mondo puts on a real rock'n'roll show, which is a very interesting place to be as an artist right now.

"It's crazy, actually: I've never seen more tickets sold [to rock'n'roll shows], with more rabid fans at festivals going crazy. And yet at the end of all that, with the very same artists, selling 10,000 records is difficult."

Melrose also manages hotly-tipped Scottish alternative act ONR, who is signed to Capitol US for records and Big Deal for publishing. With over a million streams to his name, ONR has been in the studio with the likes of Spike Stent, Mark Crew

Mondo Cozmo

and Doc McKinney, and recently released the New Order and Bowie-influenced single American Gods. Elsewhere, Melrose is developing Big Deal-signed OCN/SIDE and emerging alt-pop buzz act Marcus McCoan.

"The streaming thing is so tough; we all know that the favoured genres are currently very much hip-hop and, to a lesser extent, pop, and that's just the way it is," says Melrose. "Kids still seem to really want to go to shows, and bands provide that live experience better than anyone – but then those same fans walk away from the show, stick on a streaming radio station and listen to Drake."

Adds Melrose: "So what do you do? Do you go in with a hip producer and make a beatsy-guitar record? It's one option, but that can sometimes feel like a cop-out to me. Then again, it might mean Spotify playlists your record, which is a big boost.

"The concern is that the more homogeneous music becomes these days, the better it might do; the less it challenges the listener, in some ways, the more listeners it seems to attract.

"We're all beholden to the big playlists put together in America. If someone could figure out a way where someone at a show was like, 'This feeling is fucking great, I want to bottle it right now,' so somehow the live experience was coupled more immediately with the record, trust me, bands would be back, big time."

The modern record business has pressures that are difficult and unique to the streaming era. But at least its got money on its side.

Back when Melrose took a job heading up A&R at Capitol in 2007 – working with the likes of Sky Ferreira and Katy Perry – things were rather different.

"I jumped to EMI just after Terra Firma. Great timing!"

For one thing, industry panic over revenue decline was abundant – and cash at EMI was in particularly short supply.

"I jumped to EMI just after it had been bought by Terra Firma – great timing!" jokes Melrose. "We had some good results, but much of it was quite a miserable experience, to be honest.

"EMI were trying to put a lot of financial discipline in place, and I understood that. But it soon became quite apparent that Terra Firma wasn't interested in developing a culture of 'winning'.

"It was really sad because I loved EMI, the brand and the people, but towards the end it was full of lots of great people who looked like they'd been beaten down."

He adds: "EMI was always, historically, the "artists' label" and [Terra Firma] made sure it just wasn't like that anymore. Katy was doing pretty good, and there was 30 Seconds To Mars and other glimmers of hope, but we were just drowning under the weight of a debt that wasn't ours."

He adds: "Every three or four months I had to use this phrase 'cash conservation'. It was like, 'go go go... oh, actually, stop – and don't spend any money for two months'. Stopping and starting like that in A&R doesn't work. Word got out, and it became very hard for [Capitol] to sign competitive artists. I was the last one to be fired – I'm still proud of that at least!"

After his Capitol experience, and then "sitting in Palm Springs drinking margaritas in the sunshine for six months", Melrose moved to London, to work again with the man who hired him at Island and Capitol, Nick Gatfield.

This time, Melrose was using his skillset for Sony, in the first instance at Syco, before he was named co-President of a newly-launched Epic Records UK alongside Dougie Bruce.

"I think when Nick was Chairman of Sony he wanted to make Epic a third frontline label to better compete with Warner and Sony, and we had some good moments in the beginning of all of that, especially with Mr Probz," says Melrose. "But sadly building a label from the ground up takes time and we didn't get a lot of that; Nick went and Jason [Iley] came in and decided that Epic UK wasn't really needed in his plans.

"I have no sour grapes over that – people build a company in their own manner, and I get that. I've been on the other side of it, coming in to a company where others are leaving. It's like being at Heathrow – you're all excited and optimistic in departures, and they're tired and downbeat leaving arrivals!"

Today, at Big Deal, Melrose is enjoying a period of professional stability in stark contrast to his Capitol and Sony experiences.

The Kenny MacPherson-led company finished 2018 as Billboard's sixth biggest publisher of Q4 in the US, with a 1.7% market share of the market's Top 100 hits. It also recently signed the hotly-tipped Cigarettes After Sex as part of a JV with peermusic.

For Melrose, the approach at Big Deal suits his own attitude to discovering and nurturing artists, which is more about building trust than it is necessarily turning around a fly-by-night hit.

"The problem with moving from trusting your gut feeling to following data is that A&R people now find themselves chasing music a lot more than they do making music," he says. "The big issue with that, industry-wise, is the cat's already out of the bag – you're doing your deal at the most expensive point of a song.

"Artists need someone to turn to who they trust and respect, and know they're passionate about what they do. They need someone who they can ask: 'What do you think? Is this saxophone solo a good idea or not?'

"I'm not sure that a lot of the labels out there now have the time to do that – you see them calling round the same producers. They study Billboard for who produced the last five No.1s and then ask them to produce all their records, too.

"A&R is, to my mind, a more creative process than that. When you really develop and dig in with an artist, you sometimes create this gang mentality, where you're in the inner group and it becomes 'us against the world'.

"For me, that's always when brilliant things start to happen."

SPOTIFY'S OFFICIAL UK CHART:
Q4 2017

Rank	Artist	Track
1	**Post Malone** 	Rockstar
2	**Camila Cabello**	Havana
3	**Dua Lipa**	New Rules
4	**Marshmello, Khalid**	Silence
5	**Sam Smith**	Too Good At Goodbyes
6	**Big Shaq**	Man's Not Hot
7	**ZAYN, Sia**	Dusk Till Dawn - Radio Edit
8	**Post Malone**	I Fall Apart
9	**Ed Sheeran**	Perfect
10	**Mabel**	Finders Keepers
11	**Avicii**	Lonely Together (feat. Rita Ora)
12	**NF**	Let You Down
13	**Logic**	1-800-273-8255
14	**Rita Ora**	Anywhere
15	**Stefflon Don, French Montana**	Hurtin' Me
16	**Khalid**	Young Dumb & Broke
17	**Maroon 5**	What Lovers Do (feat. SZA)
18	**French Montana**	Unforgettable
19	**Mariah Carey**	All I Want for Christmas Is You
20	**Yungen**	Bestie
21	**Charlie Puth**	How Long
22	**MK**	17
23	**Selena Gomez, Marshmello**	Wolves
24	**Chris Brown**	Questions

Rank	Artist	Track
25	**Clean Bandit, Julia Michaels**	I Miss You (feat. Julia Michaels)
26	**Post Malone**	Congratulations
27	**Ed Sheeran**	Shape of You
28	**P!nk**	What About Us
29	**Lil Uzi Vert**	XO TOUR Llif3
30	**CNCO, Little Mix**	Reggaetón Lento (Remix) [CNCO & Little Mix]
31	**Lil Pump**	Gucci Gang
32	**The Pogues**	Fairytale of New York (feat. Kirsty MacColl)
33	**Dave**	No Words
34	**Justin Bieber, BloodPop®**	Friends (with BloodPop®)
35	**Demi Lovato**	Sorry Not Sorry
36	**Daddy Yankee, Luis Fonsi**	Despacito - Remix
37	**DJ Khaled**	Wild Thoughts
38	**Stormzy**	Blinded By Your Grace, Pt. 2 (feat. MNEK)
39	**Macklemore**	Glorious (feat. Skylar Grey)
40	**Willy William, J Balvin**	Mi Gente (feat. Beyoncé)
41	**21 Savage**	Bank Account
42	**CamelPhat, Elderbrook**	Cola
43	**Liam Payne**	Bedroom Floor
44	**Taylor Swift**	Look What You Made Me Do
45	**Beyoncé, Ed Sheeran**	Perfect Duet (Ed Sheeran & Beyoncé)
46	**J Balvin, Willy William**	Mi Gente
47	**Calvin Harris**	Feels
48	**Michael Bublé**	It's Beginning To Look A Lot Like Christmas
49	**Kygo**	Stargazing
50	**Portugal. The Man**	Feel It Still

SPOTIFY'S OFFICIAL UK CHART:
Calendar Year (Q1-Q4) 2017

Rank	Artist	Track
1	**Ed Sheeran** 	Shape of You
2	**Daddy Yankee, Luis Fonsi**	Despacito - Remix
3	**Ed Sheeran**	Castle on the Hill
4	**French Montana**	Unforgettable
5	**Ed Sheeran**	Galway Girl
6	**DJ Khaled**	I'm the One
7	**Clean Bandit**	Symphony (feat. Zara Larsson)
8	**Dua Lipa**	New Rules
9	**DJ Khaled**	Wild Thoughts
10	**Ed Sheeran**	Perfect
11	**The Chainsmokers, Coldplay**	Something Just Like This
12	**Post Malone**	rockstar
13	**Jonas Blue**	Mama
14	**Martin Jensen**	Solo Dance
15	**Ty Dolla $ign, Nicki Minaj, Jason Derulo**	Swalla (feat. Nicki Minaj & Ty Dolla $ign)
16	**Shawn Mendes**	There's Nothing Holdin' Me Back
17	**J HUS**	Did You See
18	**Drake**	Passionfruit
19	**Camila Cabello**	Havana
20	**Liam Payne**	Strip That Down
21	**Maggie Lindemann**	Pretty Girl - Cheat Codes X CADE Remix
22	**Charlie Puth**	Attention
23	**Calvin Harris**	Slide
24	**Little Mix**	Touch

Rank	Artist	Track
25	**Selena Gomez, Kygo**	It Ain't Me (with Selena Gomez)
26	**The Chainsmokers**	Paris
27	**Kendrick Lamar**	HUMBLE.
28	**Calvin Harris**	Feels
29	**Lil Uzi Vert**	XO TOUR Llif3
30	**Clean Bandit**	Rockabye (feat. Sean Paul & Anne-Marie)
31	**Bruno Mars**	That's What I Like
32	**Post Malone**	Congratulations
33	**Alessia Cara, Zedd**	Stay (with Alessia Cara)
34	**Future**	Mask Off
35	**Starley**	Call On Me - Ryan Riback Extended Remix
36	**Jax Jones**	You Don't Know Me
37	**Rag'n'Bone Man**	Human
38	**JP Cooper**	September Song
39	**Stormzy**	Big For Your Boots
40	**James Arthur**	Say You Won't Let Go
41	**Rita Ora**	Your Song
42	**Julia Michaels**	Issues
43	**Ed Sheeran**	What Do I Know?
44	**Ed Sheeran**	Happier
45	**Martin Solveig**	Places
46	**ZAYN, Taylor Swift**	I Don't Wanna Live Forever (Fifty Shades Darker) - From "Fifty Shades Darker (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)"
47	**Logic**	1-800-273-8255
48	**Niall Horan**	Slow Hands
49	**Ed Sheeran**	New Man
50	**David Guetta**	2U (feat. Justin Bieber)

SONGWRITERS CHART: UK MARKET

Q4 2017

These rankings are based on a simple methodology: each track on each weekly Official Singles Chart across the noted period is assigned a point value, with 1,000 points for a No.1 record, and down 10 points for each subsequent placing. These points are then split equally between all songwriters credited on each track, to create a cumulative total.

In association with Royalty Exchange

Rank	Artist	Song/ Performing Artist
1	**Ed Sheeran**	“A Different Way” DJ Snake [ft. Lauv] “Castle On The Hill” Ed Sheeran “Galway Girl” Ed Sheeran “Perfect” Ed Sheeran “Shape of You” Ed Sheeran “River” Eminem [ft. Ed Sheeran] “Boa Me” Fuse ODG, Ed Sheeran, & Mugeez “Strip That Down” Liam Payne [ft. Quavo] “When Christmas Comes Around” Matt Terry “Your Song” Rita Ora “End Game” Taylor Swift [ft. Ed Sheeran & Future]
2	**Michael Dapaah**	“Man’s Not Hot” Big Shaq
3	**Khalid Robinson**	“Young Dumb & Broke” Khalid “1-800-273-8255” Logic [ft. Alessia Cara & Khalid] “Silence” Marshmello [ft. Khalid]
4	**Shayaa Abraham-Joseph**	“Bank Account” 21 Savage “Rockstar” Post Malone [ft. 21 Savage]
5	**Dave**	“How I Met My Ex” Dave “My 19th Birthday” Dave “No Words” Dave [ft. Mostack] “Peligro” Giggs [ft. Dave]
6	**Steve Mac**	“A Different Way” DJ Snake [ft. Lauv] “Shape of You” Ed Sheeran “Strip That Down” Liam Payne [ft. Quavo] “Bedroom Floor” Liam Payne “What About Us” P!nk “Your Song” Rita Ora “Symphony” Clean Bandit
7	**Nathan Feuerstein**	“Let You Down” NF
8	**Yxng Bane**	“Bestie” Yungen [ft. Yxng Bane] “Rihanna” Yxng Bane
9	**Louis Bell**	“Havana” Camila Cabello [ft. Young Thug] “Candy Paint” Post Malone “Congratulations” Post Malone [ft. Quavo] “Rockstar” Post Malone [ft. 21 Savage] “Wolves” Selena Gomez & Marshmello
10	**Austin Post**	“Candy Paint” Post Malone “I Fall Apart” Post Malone “Congratulations” Post Malone [ft. Quavo] “Rockstar” Post Malone [ft. 21 Savage]
11	**Not3s**	“YRF” GRM Daily “Aladdin” Not3s “My Lover” Not3s “99 + 1” Not3s & Mostack
12	**Mike Di Scala & Dave Whelan**	“Cola” Camelphat & Elderbrook “17” MK
13	**Chris Comstock**	“Silence” Marshmello [ft. Khalid]
14	**Pharrell Williams**	“Havana” Camila Cabello [ft. Young Thug] “Feels” Calvin Harris, Pharrell Williams, Perry, & Big Sean “Lemon” NERD X Rihanna
15	**George Michael**	“Freedom” George Michael “Praying For Time” George Michael “Last Christmas” Wham
16	**Sam Smith**	“Burning” Sam Smith “One Last Song” Sam Smith “Pray” Sam Smith “Too Good At Goodbyes” Sam Smith
17	**Greg Kurstin**	“Underneath the Tree” Kelly Clarkson “Wall of Glass” Liam Gallagher “Santa’s Coming For Us” Sia “Dusk Till Dawn” Zayn [ft. Sia]
18	**Johnny Marks**	“Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree” Brenda Lee “Holly Jolly Christmas” Michael Buble
19	**Ali Tamposi**	“Lonely Together” Avicii [ft. Rita Ora] “Havana” Camila Cabello [ft. Young Thug] “Anywhere” Rita Ora
20	**Brian Lee**	“Lonely Together” Avicii [ft. Rita Ora] “Havana” Camila Cabello [ft. Young Thug] “Let Me Go” Hailee Steinfeld, Alesso & Watt “Wolves” Selena Gomez X Marshmello

SONGWRITERS CHART: UK MARKET

Calendar Year (Q1-Q4) 2017

Rank	Artist	Song/ Performing Artist	
1	**Ed Sheeran**	“A Different Way” DJ Snake [ft. Lauv] “Barcelona” Ed Sheeran “Bibia Be Ye Ye” Ed Sheeran “Castle On The Hill” Ed Sheeran “Dive” Ed Sheeran “Don’t” “Eraser” Ed Sheeran “Galway Girl” Ed Sheeran “Give Me Love” Ed Sheeran “Happier” Ed Sheeran “Hearts Don’t Break Around Here” Ed Sheeran “How Would You feel (Paean” Ed Sheeran “I See Fire” Ed Sheeran “Nancy Mulligan” Ed Sheeran “New Man” “Perfect” Ed Sheeran	“Photograph” Ed Sheeran “Save Myself” Ed Sheeran “Shape Of You” Ed Sheeran “Supermarket Flowers” Ed Sheeran “The A Team” Ed Sheeran “Thinking Out Loud” Ed Sheeran “ What Do I Know” Ed Sheeran “River” Eminem [ft. Ed Sheeran] “Boa Me” Fuse ODG, Ed Sheeran, & Mugeez “Love Yourself” Justin Bieber “Strip That Down” Liam Payne [ft. Quavo] “Cold Water” Major Lazer, Justin Bieber, & Mo “When Christmas Comes Around” Matt Terry “Your Song” Rita Ora “End Game” Taylor Swift [ft. Ed Sheeran & Future]
2	**Benjamin Levin**	“Lonely Together” Avicii [ft. Rita Ora] “Crying In The Clu” Camila Cabello “Barcelona” Ed Sheeran “Bibia Be Ye Ye” Ed Sheeran “Castle On The Hill” Ed Sheeran “Dive” Ed Sheeran “Don’t” Ed Sheeran “Happier” Ed Sheeran “Nancy Mulligan” Ed Sheeran “New Man” Ed Sheeran	“Supermarket Flowers” Ed Sheeran “Now Or Never” Halsey “Issues” Julia Michaels “Love Yourself” Justin Bieber “Love” Lana Del Rey “Know No Better” Major Lazer [ft. Travis Scott & Camila Cabello] “Cold Water” Major Lazer, Justin Bieber, & Mo “Run Up” Major Lazer, PARTYNEXTDOOR, & Nicki Minaj “Luve” Tory Lanez
3	**Steve Mac**	“Alarm” Anne-Marie “Rockabye” Clean Bandit “A Different Way” DJ Snake [ft. Lauv] “Shape Of You” Ed Sheeran “Bedroom Floor” Liam Payne “Strip That Down” Liam Payne [ft. Quavo]	“So Good” Louisa Johnson “Years & Years” Olly Murs “What About Us” P!nk “Your Song” Rita Ora “Symphony” Clean Bandit [ft. Zara Larsson]
4	**Johnny McDaid**	“A Different Way” DJ Snake [ft. Lauv] “Barcelona” Ed Sheeran “Eraser” Ed Sheeran “Galway Girl” Ed Sheeran “Hearts Don’t Break Around Here” Ed Sheeran “Nancy Mulligan” Ed Sheeran	“Photograph” Ed Sheeran “Shape Of You” Ed Sheeran “Supermarket Flowers” Ed Sheeran “What Do I Know” Ed Sheeran “What About Us” P!nk “Love My Life” Robbie Williams
5	**Momodou Jallow**	“Bouff Daddy” J Hus “Common Sense” J Hus “Did You See” J Hus “Like Your Style” J Hus “Plottin” J Hus	“Spirit” J Hus “Sweet Cheeks” J Hus “Good Time” J Hus [ft. Burna Boy] “Bad Boys” Stormzy [ft. Ghetts & J Hus]
6	**Aubrey Graham**	“To The Max” DJ Khaled [ft. Drake] “Blem” Drake “Can’t Have Everything” Drake “Controlla” Drake “Do Not Disturb” Drake “Fake Love” Drake “Free Smoke” Drake “Gyalchester” Drake “Jorja Interlude” Drake “Lose You” Drake “Madiba Riddim” Drake “Nothings Into Somethings” Drake “Passionfruit” Drake	“Signs” Drake “Teenage Fever” Drake “Sacrifices” Drake [ft. 2 Chainz & Young Thug] “KMT” Drake [ft. Giggs] “No Long Talk” Drake [ft. Giggs] “Glow” Drake [ft. Kanye West] “Since Way Back” Drake [ft. PARTYNEXTDOOR] “Portland” Drake [ft. Quavo & Travis Scott] “Too Good” Drake [ft. Rihanna] “Ice Melts” Drake [ft. Young Thug] “Get It Together] Drake, Black Coffee, & Jorja Smith “Work” Rihanna [ft. Drake]
7	**Michael Omari**	“Power” Little Mix “Big For Your Boots” Stormzy	“Blinded By Your Grace” Stormzy [ft. Mnek]

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In association with Royalty Exchange

Rank	Artist	Song/ Performing Artist	
8	**Ina Wroldsen**	“Alarm” Anne-Marie “Rockabye” Clean Bandit “Symphony” Clean Bandit [ft. Zara Larsson]	“Breathe” Jax “Places” Martin Solveig & Ina Wroldsen “Text From Your Ex” Tinie Tempah [ft. Tinashe]
9	**Greg Kurstin**	“Hello” Adele” Water Under Te Bridge” Adele “Piece By Piece” Kelly Clarkson “Underneath The Tree” Kelly Clarkson “Love.” Kendrick Lamar “Chinatown” Liam Gallagher “For What It’s Worth” Liam Gallagher	“Wall of Glass” Liam Gallagher “Cheap Thrills” Sia “Move Your Bod” Sia “Santa’s Coming For Us” Sia “The Greatest” Sia [ft. Kendrick Lamar] “Dusk Til Dawn” Zayn [ft. Sia]
10	**Sia Furler**	“Crying In The Club” Camila Cabello “Chained To The Rhythm” Katy Perry [ft. Skip Marley] “Chandelier” Sia “Cheap Thrills” Sia Helium” Sia	“Santa’s Coming For Us” Sia “The Greatest” Sia [ft. Kendrick Lamar] “Waterfall” Stargate [ft. P!nk & Sia] “Dusk Til Dawn” Zayn [ft. Sia]
11	**Jacob Kasher**	“I Got You” Bebe Rexha “Attention” Charlie Puth “How Long” Charlie Puth “Swalla” Jason Derulo, Nicki Minaj, & Ty	“Don’t Wanna Know” Maroon 5 [ft. Kendrick Lamar] “Would You Mind” Prettymuch “Shed A Light” Schulz, Guetta, & Cheat Codes
12	**Rory Graham**	“Human” Rag’N’Bone Man	“Skin” Rag’N’Bone Man
13	**Emily Warren**	“The One” The Chainsmokers “Don’t Let Me Down” The Chainsmokers [ft. Daya] “Boys” Charli XCX “New Rules” Dua Lipa	“No More Sad Songs” Little Mix “Should’ve Been Me” Naughty Boy, Kyla, & Popcaan “No Lie” Sean Paul [ft. Dua Lipa]
14	**Quavious Marshall**	“Slide” Calvin Harris, Ocean, & Migos “I’m The One” DJ Khaled, Justin Bieber, Quavo, & Chance the Rapper “Portland” Drake [ft. Quavo & Travis Scott] “Bom Appetit” Katy Perry [ft. Migos] “Strip That Down” Liam Payne [ft. Quavo]	“Know No Better” Major Lazer [ft. Travis Scott & Camila Cabello] “Bad and Boujee” Migos “T-Shirt” Migos “MotorSport” Migos, Nicki Minaj, & Cardi B “Congratulations” Post Malone [ft Quavo]
15	**Justin Tranter**	“Cake By The Ocean” DNCE “You Make It Feel Like Christmas” Gwen Stefani [ft. Blake Shelton] “Believer” Imagine Dragons “If I’m Lucky” Jason Derulo “Issues” Julia Michaels	“Sorry” Justin Bieber “Friends” Justin Bieber + BloodPop “Heavy” Linkin Park [ft. Kiiara] “Cold” Maroon 5 [ft. Future” “Bad Liar” Selena Gomez
16	**Yxng Bane**	“Bestie” Yungen [ft. Yxng Bane]	“Rihanna” Yxng Bane
17	**Khalid Robinson**	“Young, Dumb, & Broke” Khalid “1-800-273-8255” Logic, Alessia Cara, & Khalid	“Silence” Marshmello [ft. Khalid]
18	**Ammar Malik**	“Rockabye” Clean Bandit” Symphony” Clean Bandit [ft. Zara Larsso] “New Man” Ed Sheeran “Bedroom Floow” Liam Payne	“Wait” Maroon 5 “Don’t Wanna Know” Maroon 5 [ft. Kendrick Lamar] “Shed A Light” Schulz, David Guetta, & Cheat Codes
19	**Jamie Hartman**	“Passport Home” JP Cooper “Stargazing” Kygo [ft. Justin Jesso]	“Human” Rag’N’Bone Man
20	**Julia Michaels**	“I Miss You” Clean Bandit [ft. Julia Michaels] “Dive” Ed Sheeran “Issues” Julia Michaels “Sorry” Justin Bieber	“Friends” Justin Bieber + BloodPop “Heavy” Linkin Park [ft. Kiiara] “Bad Liar” Selena Gomez “Either Way” Snakehips, Anne-Marie, & Badass

Every Picture Tells A Story

Date: **June 22, 1984**
Location: **Newark International Airport, New Jersey, USA**

Spending hours at Newark International Airport is seldom anyone's idea of a good time. Spending hours waiting for Richard Branson there can be equally testing.

Every year, Billboard used to give out 'Trendsetter' awards, marking music industry achievements of one kind or another. In 1984, those of us on the magazine's editorial team decided that Branson should be honoured.

While we ruminated, Virgin's Culture Club were in the Top 10 of the album charts. (Several months earlier, Boy George had told one of our reporters, "Every record company in England seems to be signing drag queens and transvestites.")

We decided to recognise Richard for "meeting the challenge of today's new leisure markets," given that Virgin had recently expanded beyond its label and music retail business into nightclubs, film and television. And whenever possible, the Trendsetter – a solid block of mostly transparent plastic, with a star in the middle – was to be presented in person.

The 1984 awards event was set for June 21 at Manhattan's Ocean Club, but Richard was busy back in Britain, on the eve of Virgin Atlantic's inaugural transatlantic flight. In New York, I presented the award to Virgin Music's David Steel, but then learned that his boss would be happy to accept the accolade himself – if I could make it to Newark the following day. I duly schlepped out to New Jersey's international airport (not by limousine; Billboard didn't do limos) that Friday afternoon, waiting for the arrival from Gatwick Airport of what our gossip column had previously called "a low-cost pondhopper". And waiting. Branson's first – at that point, only – jumbo jet was late in leaving London.

Eventually, the so-called 'Maiden Voyager' touched down at Newark, carrying 450 souls: celebrities, musicians, journalists, even some fare-payers. After what seemed an eternity, I was introduced to Richard in a grey corner of the airport after immigration (he had forgotten his passport) and was able to hand him the Billboard trophy. He was preoccupied, to be sure; it also seemed as if the airline industry's newest contender had enjoyed some of that first star-studded flight's plentiful champagne.

I remember that Richard was gracious in acceptance and pleased to be honoured, but soon had other places to be, other people to see. When you're a Trendsetter, every minute counts.

During 25 years with Billboard between 1974 and 2002, Adam White (pictured right) served as International Editor, Managing Editor and Editor-in-Chief. He was VP of Corporate Communications at Universal Music from 2002-2012, when he retired to write Motown: The Sound of Young America (Thames & Hudson, 2016).

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR SONGWRITERS FOR A FANTASTIC NIGHT AT THE BRITS 2018!

STORMZY

MASTERCARD BRITISH ALBUM OF THE YEAR
'GANG SIGNS AND PRAYER'

BRITISH MALE SOLO ARTIST

RAG'N'BONE MAN

BRITISH SINGLE
'HUMAN'

KENDRICK LAMAR

INTERNATIONAL MALE SOLO ARTIST

GORILLAZ

BRITISH GROUP

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