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A portrait of Ed Sheeran, a young man with reddish-brown hair and a goatee, wearing a grey t-shirt. He is holding a pair of glasses in his mouth. He has tattoos on his arms, including one that says 'RED GO'.

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Tim Ingham



“It’s a word which, every time I come to write it, makes me hesitate.”

It’s rarely clever to use a platform like this to prattle on about a subject over which you have zero authority. Then again, Piers Morgan has made a good living off doing just that – and his jowly brand of provocation is inescapable right now. So this is me risking a certain degree of public oafishness, and cautiously giving it a go.

Here are some things to know about me: I am a white man who grew up in Bury St. Edmunds, which may well be the least street-sounding locale in the entire Northern Hemisphere.

As much as the fearsome reputation of the Nowton Estate struck terror into our teenage hearts (apocryphal tales of savage post-school beatings; speed sold behind bins), this was a far cry from true inner-city pressure.

In my head, I was a Scarface sniffin’ cocaine. In reality, I was a provincial nerdlinger sniffin’ a rural pollen count.

But here are some other things to know about me: I’m fascinated by the power of words, and I’ve become intimate with a few of them. I’m naturally and professionally enthralled by how people choose words to do subtle harm, or subtle good – or, more curiously, choose words to do subtle good, and end up doing harm.

Let’s get it out of the way, then. Here’s a word which, every time I’m about to write it in an article about this beautiful business, makes me hesitate: urban.

I should first make an already apparent fact crystal clear: some of the most talented music execs on either side of the Atlantic have had this word in their job title at some point – from Wendy Goldstein (Republic) to Alex Boateng (Island), Joie Manda (Interscope), Tuma Basa (YouTube) and Nicole Wyskoarko (IGA).

Yet I have some personal, semantic reservations about it – about its obvious substitutional intentions, its inherent ‘otherness’ and the way it linguistically ghettoises the biggest and most exciting music on the planet today.

I’m not alone. Some of the industry’s leading power players aren’t happy about the continued prevalence of ‘urban’ in music’s corporate dictionary. I’m told that Warner/Chappell’s global Chairman and CEO, Jon Platt, dislikes it – and has been vocal about why he wants to see it eradicated from the record business lexicon on a number of occasions.

Over in Blighty, we have our own set of senior executives questioning ‘urban’ and its usage.

DJ Semtex, 1Xtra presenter, Spotify podcaster, hip-hop authority and – in the business world – Sony’s rap talisman, tells me: “I despise the word ‘urban’. I know artists that do hip-hop, grime, or UK rap. I don’t know anyone that does ‘urban’ music. ‘Urban’ is a lazy, inaccurate generalisation of several culturally rich art forms.”

You’ll find a few of his harsh words echoed in this issue of *MBUK*.

Newly-promoted Virgin EMI GM Rob Pascoe tells us: “I [was] always happy to be known as a promotions guy, because, to my core, that’s what I am. What I didn’t want was to be ‘urban’. I hate that word. I had it in my title for a while and I hated it, because there’s no such thing as ‘urban’... at what point can we get you to give up and just describe Drake’s God’s Plan as a massive pop record rather than ‘urban’?”

When he says ‘you’, he means us. All of us.

Finally, Sonia Diwan – lawyer to some of British hip-hop’s finest emerging talents – says: “[This music is now] pop, popular, music as far as I’m concerned. Labelling it ‘urban’ is a complete misnomer; why is it ‘urban’ music, exactly? Because it’s non-white?”

Sensibly, I’m not going to go Full Piers and take the final word here. I’m going to leave it to UK rap pioneer, and very smart cookie, Akala, who – in 2010’s Find No Enemy – picked apart the deep-rooted contradictions in the term.

“We can call it ‘urban’ – to me, that’s cool. But if urban means street, that includes jazz too.”

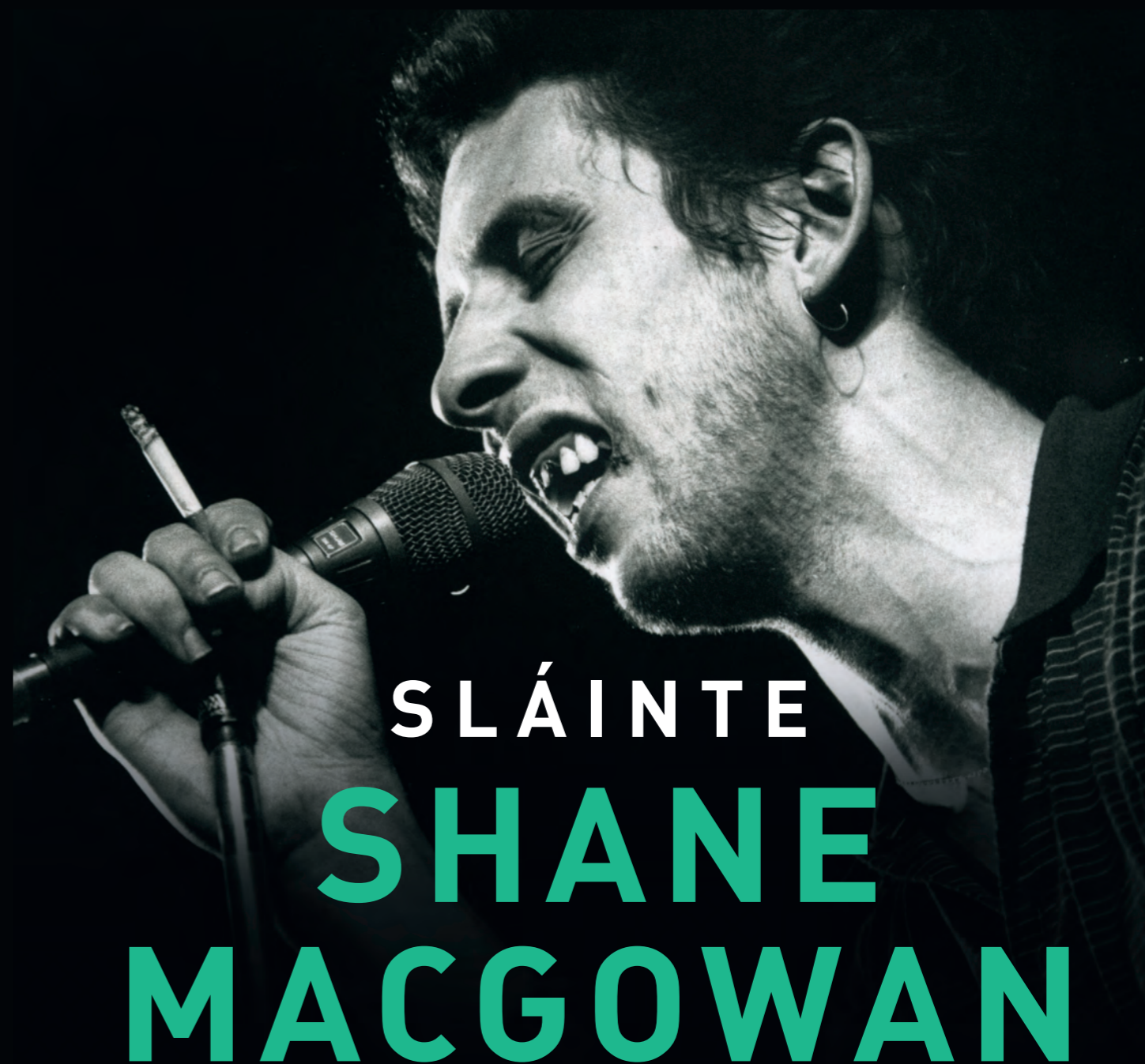
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Achal Dhillon is the Managing Director of Killing Moon – a record label, artist management company, live concert promoter and influential music blog. He's also a board member for the Association Of Independent Music (AIM). In this issue, Ach writes about the music industry's mental health crisis, and the treatment of its artists.

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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 makes the case why networks are so important during one's career.

CLIFF FLUET



Cliff Fluét 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.

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Chris Frazer Smith is an award-winning photographer who, in this issue, shoots producer Mark Ralph. A former Lucie International Photographer of The Year, his commercial clients have included: HSBC, Ian McEwan, Bayer, Sebastian Faulks, Jo Nesbo, American Airlines, Shell, Toyota, Grayson Perry, Ford, Mercedes, Cathay Pacific and Microsoft.

JACKIE HYDE



Jackie Hyde has worked closely with every superstar artist at Sony Music Entertainment for nearly 40 years – and literally every one seems to have a nice word to say about her. Officially VP of Artist & Company Relations at Sony Music UK, she won the Women In Music Award for Outstanding Achievement in 2014.

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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 music supervisor Abi Leland in addition to Kobalt's Alison Donald.

IAIN MCNAY



Iain McNay is the founder of Cherry Red Records - the British independent label which is this year celebrating its 40th anniversary. Cherry Red has worked with the likes of Everything But The Girl, The Dead Kennedys and many more down the years, while forging a stellar reputation as one of the world's finest catalogue reissue companies.

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Steve Redmond is the Berlin-based SVP of Global Corporate Communications for BMG. A former Editor of trade paper *Music Week*, Redmond is also a long-time consultant to the UK's Entertainment Retailers Association, which represents everyone from Spotify to Amazon, Google and the majority of physical music retailers in this country.

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 its transformation. In this issue, Dave interviews the likes of Rob Dickins, Rob Pascoe, Angie Somerside, Isabel Garvey and Team Craig David.

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.

ADRIAN SYKES



Adrian Sykes is a widely-respected UK music industry veteran, having made key contributions to the history of Island and MCA over the past four decades. He is also a successful entrepreneur and manager, having founded Decisive Management – which looked after Emeli Sandé before, and throughout, her multi-platinum debut album campaign.

SIMON WILLIAMS



Simon Williams is the founder of Fierce Panda Records – the British label which signed and released early records from artists including Coldplay, Keane, Ash and many more. Williams, a former *NME* journalist, writes in this issue about how the current lack of interest in guitar bands from the major labels is giving birth to a new wave of great music.



CAN KOBALT'S AWAL REWRITE THE RULES OF A&R?

Willard Abdriz's latest venture is trying to reduce the risk of music industry artist development, while creating more stars than ever before. He might just be on to something...

It's a truism as old – and as bankable – as the pop business itself: getting signed to a record company does not mean you've 'made it'. In fact, the odds of doing so after you ink that contract are greatly stacked against you.

In the annals of labels around the globe, you'll find plenty of statistics that prove, when it comes to frontline signings, there are many, many more commercial disappointments than there are commercial Despacitos.

The hoary old statistic we've all been told: out of every 20 or so new artists signed to a major label, only one will go on to become a business-benefitting star.

Indeed, you'll find this apocryphal calculation mentioned at least twice in this very issue of *Music Business UK*. There's our interview with British super-producer Mark Ralph (page 112), who recalls that his lawyer casually warned him that "you have a 95% chance of failure" when he first signed to a label.

And then there's this: our profile of Kobalt and its CEO, Willard Ahdriz – a man not typically known for enamouring himself to the blockbuster music rights-holders with his public comments.

In this case, however, Ahdriz is simply nailing a well-worn fact, with a pinch of customary dramatic flair: "Record labels were always like The Hunger Games: 20 artists go in but only one star comes out."

Although certain elements of the music business may wince at the idea of Ahdriz once again wagging his finger in their direction, his fiery observation is actually at the heart of a pretty pragmatic idea – one which could genuinely turn the recorded music business on its head.

You won't meet many people who deny that the traditional way of discovering, signing and breaking new artists is wildly inefficient. One superstar, as the old adage goes, has to pay for 19 flops. Ergo: The Hunger Games.

For Ahdriz, this calculation isn't simply unsatisfactory – it's personally depressing. There are countless great artists down the

years, he reasons, who have been screened out of the music business because a single gatekeeper decided they weren't worth the risk. Countless artists who could have built healthy audiences and healthy small businesses who never got their chance.

This is the philosophy behind Kobalt's reborn AWAL – essentially a distribution and services company for artists, which offers every function one might expect from a record label partner, while boasting premier-league streaming analytics.

When it comes to A&R and artist discovery, however, AWAL does things slightly differently. It's a model which could eventually force major labels to adapt their game – in the same way that Kobalt's tech-led publishing revolution

“Talking about ‘signed’ and ‘unsigned’ artists is yesterday’s language.”

coerced the major publishers into getting with the times.

Here's how it works: the first rung of AWAL offers a fairly standard online distribution deal, for which artists sacrifice about 15% of their royalties, while keeping ownership of their copyrights. The untypical part of this equation? Only artists selected by AWAL's A&R team are invited to use the service.

MBUK understands that thousands of artists are welcomed onto the platform each year, all of which have shown some level of commercial potential. AWAL backs them with global distribution and music data analytics – and then closely monitors their performance.

As artists gain further traction, hundreds each year receive funding from AWAL to further boost their growth.

And, amongst the highly-talented or fast-risers, a selection get bumped up to AWAL Recordings, the full-service, label-esque tier of AWAL, offering artists everything from streaming playlist promotion to

radio plugging, capital funding, targeted marketing and sync pitching. Crucially, it's here that advance cheques based on the streaming trajectory of an act's music start to be paid out.

In turn, these 'AWAL-plus' artists pay a commission which can rise to somewhere around 30%, but once again, they entirely keep hold of their copyrights.

By casting its net wide, then taking calculated bets on paying advances to artists whose careers show signs of acceleration, Kobalt believes it is creating the perfect antidote to the high-risk A&R on which much of the music business has been built.

Something about AWAL is clearly working: the service counts the likes of US artist Lauv on its books, who now boasts over 1bn-plus streams and whose recent hit, *I Like Me Better*, crashed onto 50-plus major-market terrestrial radio stations. In addition, AWAL works with on-the-rise successes like Tom Misch (225m+ streams), R3HAB (400m+ streams), VÉRITÉ (200m+ streams) and the white-hot Rex Orange County (215m+ streams).

All of these artists are confidently building their career via AWAL, while (so far) resisting big cheques from Kensington High Street or Santa Monica. (As this magazine goes to press, Rex OC's *Loving Is Easy*, for example, is blaring out of British TVs as the soundtrack to Nestlé's *Milky Bar Wowsomes* ad.)

Ahdriz says: "The old-world economics of labels were terrible for most developing artists. It cost \$1 to press a CD and the labels got a \$10 gross profit on every sale. That gave them huge operational leverage, and meant that any new hit act gave them a massively profitable 'heroin kick'.

"So, even if you won the 'Hunger Games' and became a star, your label could still get distracted and have their head turned by the hot new thing. That is, and has always been, the wrong approach."

He adds: "Today, it is a very different situation: artists don't have to hand over the keys to their career in the same way. They are learning that there is a viable alternative to the Hunger Games; AWAL's mission is



Lauv



Bruno Major shows the love to AWAL at the Great Escape in Brighton, May 2018



Nick Cave



VÉRITÉ

no more complicated than making every one of our artists as successful as they can be. That's why we believe we're going to build a very big company."

Do you see the potential weakness in AWAL's gameplan yet? It believes that, by investing sensibly in an artist's career at each stage, it can slowly ratchet up their status until they are global superstars who maintain their own rights.

The problem it will inevitably face: major labels don't always invest sensibly. When they see an act starting to fly – buoyed by record, streaming-powered company revenues – they throw eye-watering cheques down in order to tempt artists to what Ahdritz calls "the other side".

Couldn't AWAL, which guarantees its artists the ability to walk away with 30 days of giving notice, end up becoming a 'feeder' hub for the A&R departments of the world's richest labels?

Lonny Olinick, CEO of AWAL, is not worried. Olinick, very much the economically astute, level-headed foil to

Ahdritz's shock and awe, believes the future will be determined by results. And he says the odds are in AWAL's favour.

"Often, when people talk about a big advance cheque [from a major label], I like to have a detailed conversation with them about it," says Olinick. "Let's say you're talking about a million dollars. People say, it's irrational and it's a huge number, so we have to take it.

"But when you look at the trajectory of the assets you already have, and you look at the assets that are likely to come into your label deal, that 'irrational, huge' cheque actually starts to look quite rational, and pretty small.

"When we're confident in the breakdown economics like that, we as AWAL can write very big cheques, too. It's about reading the data – and when we have vision and passion, going beyond the data, too."

AWAL certainly has money at its disposal: in March, the firm announced that parent, Kobalt, was making a \$150m investment in the business, which would

be used to pay artist advances, as well as recruiting a further 100 people to form a 200-strong global team.

If artists wish to leave AWAL to join major labels, Olinick reasons, let them go. But, he argues, it will happen less and less – and deserters may look back in envy at their peers who remained on the platform.

Some AWAL artists, though, have already jumped ship. Take, for example, Ray BLK, who was named as the BBC's Sound Of winner in January last year, before signing a big-money deal with Island Records UK.

Olinick realises that AWAL, like any company, isn't ever going to enjoy a 100% retention rate with its artists, and that the major label world will occasionally become a lucrative option for certain acts.

However, he argues, this will be a statistical rarity – and, to prove the point, he says there are already a handful of artists who have left AWAL to sign with a major who haven't ended up better off.

"There are four artists that come to mind, who were on a trajectory and it flattened

out [after they left]," comments Olinick. "The managers of these artists have clout, and they matter in the industry, so these stories are becoming powerful for us.

"Managers are realising that it's not like the other side has a magic button. If AWAL can match the advance cheque, and you can keep your rights, plus we can show successful stories from the past, it becomes a much easier conversation to have."

He adds: "Every major manager's been through the scenario where they do a big money label deal, then the first marketing campaign doesn't work and, all of a sudden, no-one within the label owns the project anymore. It's the step-child of everyone. The possibility of having a viable alternative to that structure is really powerful."

AWAL's alternative became all-the-more viable in recent weeks with the acquisition of New York-based in2tune Music, the independent radio promotions company which has serviced the likes of Diplo, Major Lazer, Marshmello and Lauv.

Industry cynics will, naturally, point to Kobalt's loss-making commercial performance in the recorded music world over the past few years.

In 2012, Kobalt announced Kobalt Label Services – specifically to work with high-profile, so-called heritage acts in a

in France and Germany). Today, KLS is no more, but AWAL still services a handful of established acts globally – Nick Cave, The Wombats and The Kooks amongst them.

The company believes more big acts are on the way as AWAL continues to prove itself in the market.



"If AWAL can match [the majors'] cheques, it becomes an easier conversation."

Lonny Olinick, AWAL

clear challenge to the model relied upon successfully by companies like BMG.

Despite some big successes with the likes of Nick Cave, there were also questionable investments. Some say a hefty cheque was spent on marketing for a 2014 Lenny Kravitz album, Strut, which didn't make the UK Top 20 (although it went to No.2

"I believe that the more artists become educated, the more they will understand the game on the other side," says Ahdritz. "I expect going forward that people are going to stay in our system nine or 10 times out of 10. When you have the full support of AWAL, there is no major that can do anything bigger to break you."

He adds: “We let people judge what the best decision is with the facts on the table. There will always be temptations, especially from those around you, who might think: I can take 15% of this cheque today, and I don’t know if I’m going to be here tomorrow. That’s why it’s so important that an artist has a team which is focused on building their career, and building a great business, in the long-term. It’s then when AWAL makes the most sense.”

Olinick says: “Obviously every advance we pay is a risk, and when you take risks there’s an opportunity to lose money. But we see consistently that the money we invest, based on the streaming trajectory of those artists, means they end up in recouped positions quickly.

“There’s a fundamental difference between playing the lottery versus making smart and rational decisions based on what the artist is capable of.”

Regardless of whether AWAL holds on to relationships with superstars, Ahdritz is greatly enthused about what the firm’s model means for the ‘middle class’ of artists – especially those who would have never made it in the old world music business.

Earlier this year, Daniel Ek boldly proclaimed that, at the end of 2017, Spotify counted 22,000 artists within what the platform’s founder termed the “top tier” of earners on the platform, and that he wanted this figure to rise and rise.

Ahdritz, Ek’s fellow Swede, shares in this optimism. The Kobalt boss wants to see 100,000 artists earning a good living from their recorded music in the coming years.

He argues: “This is fundamental economics: the more people come to a market, the more money will be spent in that market. When you open the market, the interest comes in, and there’s democratisation. It’s induced demand: if there’s more, you’re going to consume more.

“In my opinion, this matured [recorded] music market will be three or four times bigger in the future, largely because of these dynamics.”

The globe’s brightest financial minds are on his side. Goldman Sachs forecasts that, by 2030, there will be 847m paying streaming music subscribers around the



Rex Orange County

world, a 381% rise on the 176m the IFPI counted in 2017.

Meanwhile, PricewaterhouseCoopers has just projected that the UK streaming music market will generate £1.4bn by 2022, nearly double what it’s likely to be worth this year.

Importantly, this £1.4bn figure will be significantly higher, suggests PWC, than the amount of cash generated by concert ticket sales in the same year.

“In our system, on average, we’re already hearing that artists are making two times more money on their recorded royalties than their touring,” says Ahdritz. “This fundamentally changes the economics of being an artist.

“We have hundreds of artists already in our system who are earning a living – and you’ve not heard the names of most of them. For me, that’s a huge victory.”

AWAL’s current marketing campaign ‘I Am My Own Label’, fronted by the artists releasing through the platform, says it all.

Take, for example, Bruno Major; the British artist, who recently supported Sam Smith at the O2 Arena, thought his career was over when he was dropped by Capitol/Virgin Records (USA) a few years back.

He taught himself production, recorded his own album at home, and – working closely with manager Sam Bailey – started releasing his records via AWAL.

To date, Major’s debut album, *A Song For Every Moon*, has attracted more than 90m streams on Spotify alone.

“[AWAL] is a controlled risk for artists,” comments Ahdritz. “But my whole career at Kobalt has been about taking controlled risks; that’s how we’ve grown so rapidly. I would never encourage any artist to hand over the control of their career to someone else, because your vision will simply not happen without you remaining in the driving seat.

“Artists are becoming educated; they are no longer fooling themselves that they have succeeded when they sign a record contract. So much of that thought pattern has been influenced by music industry propaganda.

“Even the idea of talking about ‘unsigned’ and ‘signed’ artists is yesterday’s language, because it suggests that artists are missing out on something by not signing a traditional record deal.

“It’s up to us, and AWAL, to shatter that illusion.”

‘A HEALTHY MARKETPLACE SHOULD OFFER CHOICE AND COMPETITION’

Alison Donald left behind the major label world last year before joining Kobalt, as an A&R force across both the firm’s publishing and recorded music divisions...

In her previous professional life, as Co-President of Columbia Records UK, Alison Donald came across a hot new artist she was extremely keen to sign.

She courted young London singer and songwriter Tom Misch for months, only for him to turn around and eschew a major label deal in favour of a more flexible agreement with Kobalt’s AWAL. He’s now racked up over 225m streams.

The knock-back turned Donald’s head and she started wondering what it was about Kobalt that had artists shunning the kind of offers they’d once dreamed about.

In 2017, sufficiently intrigued, she left the major label world behind and joined Kobalt as Head of Creative, UK, where she leads A&R activities in London across AWAL and Kobalt Publishing, while driving business growth across all divisions. The role has seen her reunited with Kobalt’s Chief Creative Officer Sas Metcalfe, who gave Donald her first job in publishing at Warner/Chappell in ‘96.

Donald’s career so far has spanned four decades. Before she got her professional break, the exec had a knack for spotting talent and spotting talent’s limitations — arguably two of the most important qualities for A&R — early on. While at school she was an aspiring opera singer who was pretty good (she proudly passed her Grade 8 singing exam with top marks), but not as good as the competition. “I wasn’t going to do it unless I was the best,” Donald recalls.

After leaving opera behind, Donald decided that a life as a performer wasn’t for her. Eager to earn money and get out into the world of work, she got her first job as A&R Administrator at Arista Records. A stint in advertising followed, but the artist world again beckoned and Donald joined



“Stiff taught me: if you just think about it, anything is possible.”

Chrysalis, working with acts like Blondie, The Specials and Billy Idol.

Her next job at Stiff Records saw Donald working closely with founder Dave Robinson, who she attributes with forming some of the basic principles of her career.

“I sat with Dave in his office and he had this whole thing of, ‘You need to know what I know.’ He really taught me that anything was possible and to not take no for an answer by all means necessary.

“He had this theory that if you really thought about it, within three phone calls you could get to the President of the United States. You probably couldn’t do that now,

but he really didn’t take no for an answer!

“Stiff was a very important part of my career in that working in such a small label, where you had to do everything, from packing up boxes, shipping records, to calling The Old Grey Whistle Test to make sure that our new band’s video or performance won the competition that night.

Every single play or sale counted. That was a really important building block for me. Stiff still beats in my heart with that attitude of: if you just think about it, anything is possible.”

After Stiff, Donald joined major label land (much to the chagrin of staunchly independent Robinson) and worked for EMI Capitol in the UK, and then at the Capitol Tower in Los Angeles as an A&R.

That time proved another pivotal learning point in Donald’s career.

“That absolutely changed me, I think due to the vastness of America,” she says. “It made me appreciate England as well, and how lucky we are that we are a small country that punches above its weight creatively, and we are exposed to such a melting pot of music.”

After coming back to the UK, a hunger to work in publishing led to a job as Head of A&R for Warner/Chappell, where Donald truly learned the importance of the song.

She then returned to Chrysalis Publishing as Managing Director for a decade, signing and working with Fraser T Smith, Danger Mouse, Laura Marling, Thom Yorke, Pendulum, Fleet Foxes, Damon Albarn and Yeah Yeah Yeahs.

When BMG bought the publisher, Donald was hired by Nick Gatfield to run Columbia as Co-President alongside Mark Terry, where her successes included George

Ezra, The Civil Wars, Tom Odell, Declan McKenna and Rag’N’Bone Man.

Over the last year in her new job at Kobalt, Donald has helped secure publishing deals with Swedish duo First Aid Kit, Australian artist Tash Sultana, Atlantic signing Mahalia, British hip-hop artist Scarlxrd, singer/songwriter Sam Fender, neo-soul singer Mullally, rising star Jade Bird, rapper AJ Tracey and Sam Gellaitry, who scored a Super Bowl sync in February.

Donald says: “When I joined, the publishing side was already up and going but just needed a little refocus. I’ve been able to come in with a fresh set of eyes to look at the roster as a whole and go, Okay where are the gaps?”

Here, *MBUK* is granted a rare sit down chat with the charismatic Donald, who gives her take on the ever-evolving music business, her A&R strategy and predicts where Kobalt is heading...

Aside from the evolution of technology, what are the biggest differences in today’s music business to the one you started in?

When I first started, and for most of the years I’ve been doing this, so much of the aspiration for artists has been to have a big record deal. Now we are in this time where the aspiration has changed and Chance the Rapper is their God. Artists want to be in charge of their own careers and there is a whole kudos that goes with doing it yourself. Technology has completely enabled that and I think it’s amazing — the democratisation of music!

What I’m also very excited about is what [Kobalt CEO] Willard [Ahdriz] calls ‘the middle class of artists’ and the niche; not everything has to be mainstream – that can get a little dull. As a music fan, some of the most interesting music is over there [outside of the mainstream] and I love that those people now have a path to their fans and are able to exist and live, run their careers and be empowered by the insight that technology gives them.

You’ve worked extensively in both the major and independent worlds. What’s

the future relationship between the two?

I think that in a good and healthy marketplace there should be choice and competition. Artists should have a choice in how they want to run their careers. In the future, who knows who else will exist in these spaces, but I do think there is room for everyone to work together.

What’s your A&R strategy and the biggest lessons you’ve learned during your career about working with artists?

First off, it’s all about the song — publishing really drums that into you. In the great documentary [The War Room] about the Bill Clinton presidential campaign, when [campaign strategist] James Carville was brought in he changed everything and wrote all over the walls, ‘It’s the economy, stupid!’ I’ve often wanted to write, ‘It’s the song, stupid!’ That is what it all comes from.

“Not everything has to be mainstream – that [approach] can get a little dull.”

My approach to A&R has always been a light touch. When you sign somebody it’s about making sure your visions are aligned and helping them to get to theirs. The more you push somebody and demand that they write a hit, the less likely they are going to do it. It’s about creating environments where artists are able to thrive, feel safe and do their best work.

You need to present artists with the right opportunities but never force them into doing something they don’t want to do. There is compromise in life, but when you are working with artists they should never feel like they are compromising their true artistic integrity.

Giving people time is one of the biggest things of all. Everybody expects instant gratification but artist development takes time. And always listen to the artist.

How does Kobalt compete when trying to sign the same acts/writers as the more

established major music companies?

I realised when I came in here that while Kobalt has changed the marketplace of publishing, actually it’s not apples and oranges anymore, it’s apple and apples, because a lot of the other publishers have had to change and be more like us. I still like to think that from the transparency and technology point of view, we do have the jump, but we can’t afford to stay still and get complacent.

We also have a global roster, so whether you are in LA, Stockholm, Hong Kong or Sydney, you are on Kobalt’s roster. I love that and think it’s really powerful. There is one global budget, so what is good for one is actually genuinely good for all.

I think the fact that acts have a choice, are not signed to long-term deals and can leave, is fair. That means we have to provide good service, because otherwise they will leave, although I believe our retention rate is 98%. That’s one of the reasons why, while we have big reach, we don’t control an enormous amount of copyrights.

When I first went into publishing, having spent the early part of my career in records, I remember being shocked at the size of my roster at Warner/Chappell. I’d gotten used to having a roster of five, max, it was like, ‘Oh my God I’ve got a roster of 70 people, how am I supposed to serve them all?’

Then you realise that you can’t and [those you do are the ones] who shout the loudest or have the hit. There is that element of, well, you don’t drop them so you might as well just hang on and see what happens, and that is soul destroying.

I don’t think it’s something that’s done on purpose, it’s just due to a lack of man hours and capabilities.

Some people say it’s tricky to break new acts in the UK right now. Do you agree?

It’s always been tricky, right? I do think that for all of the great things about technology, it’s terrifying when you hear that Spotify uploads 20,000 tracks a day. How do you punch through that white noise? In many ways I think that goes back to a lot of the old principles of the importance of the song

and being good live. It’s as important now, if not more so, that you exist in real time as well as up there on the DSPs and that people can go and see you. And you better be great when they do because they have lots of choice and new things to discover. It’s all about how you define ‘break’ really.

What is the definition of a ‘breaking’ artist in your mind?

To be able to have a sustainable career. The most powerful thing about being in A&R is that when you sign somebody to a publishing or recording deal, you validate them to give up their day job and tell them, ‘You are now a musician, you can put that on your passport.’ So it’s fantastic when you sign something, but it’s horrific when you have to let somebody go. It’s their lives, their dreams and everything that you promised them didn’t work out. That is the element of A&R that I’ve never, and will never, be comfortable with.

But if you have the ability to build foundations, you can build long-term sustainable careers, which is what AWAL is all about. Artists are able to run their business, go through all the information, analytics and insight that they get. We were having breakfast with [AWAL signing] Bruno Major recently and [his manager] Sam was saying how he’s just booked his American tour through the information [Kobalt provides] of where his fans are.

Bruno is a fantastic example of what we do here. I remember meeting him at Columbia three or four years ago and thinking he had great songs and loving what he did, but being at a frontline major label it was like... Where does this fit? Where is the hit?

He signed a big deal over in America, and in some terrible old Game of Thrones corporate thing that happens all the time, but is completely outside of your control, his A&R person goes and he gets dropped. Nightmare! But, holed up in his bedroom, he learnt Logic and how to produce his own music and we are just about to pass 100 million streams. So the Bruno Major ecosystem is growing and growing and he now has a sustainable career ahead of him, selling out shows in America.




Tom Misch

Kobalt disrupted publishing in a big way. Can it do the same for records globally with AWAL while working on a different economic model to the majors? Yes, absolutely, and Lauv – who is just about to cross 1 billion streams with a genuine hit – is a perfect example of that. We are paving the road as we go, but it’s a pathway that’s becoming clearer and clearer. With us there to help, and more people coming in to push marketing, digital and A&R, yes we can give artists important, successful and commercial careers.

Where will Kobalt be in five years’ time?

If I knew that...! It’s a super exciting time and I’m finding music so amazing again. I love that it’s different here and it’s not all about the hit, it’s about building long-term careers, doing artist development and making them self sufficient.

It’s really exciting to be part of the revolution and at the forefront of these dramatic changes that are taking place. When I was younger I used to dream of a global jukebox and now we have it. There are so many possibilities for artists to have sustainable successful careers, to be able to make important music and to help change the world.



‘That’s what’s exciting about the music business: no-one’s in control’

Rob Pascoe, a superstar in Universal’s promo team for 17 years, was recently promoted to the position of General Manager at Virgin EMI. He reflects on a career making hits happen, and looks ahead to a new chapter...

There’s an awful lot more to success in the business bit of the music business than the ability to be liked – but it’s undoubtedly a major asset.

It’s also probably not an asset. That sounds like a thing, like a tangible. Something you might be able to keep in a drawer, lock in a safe. Or something you acquired. Maybe something you worked hard to develop. And, at its best, it’s not that.

Whatever it is, Rob Pascoe has it. He has plenty else, of course: huge experience, strategic smarts, ninja-level networking skills, great ears and potent powers of persuasion. But what comes across so consistently is that he really is damn well-liked – by colleagues, by rivals, by tastemakers and, most prolifically and perhaps most importantly, by artists.

Working on this feature, or just chatting about it to interested parties, one of the common themes was: when a big name artist comes over from the US (think Rihanna, Kanye or Jay Z – that sort of big), they’ll walk into an ‘industry’ room, be perfectly polite, super sociable, and then they’ll see Rob... at which point it goes from handshakes and chit-chat to something that looks like, and kind of is, old friends catching up.

He’s been at Universal Music for 17 years, and a couple of months ago, in a move which all parties describe as overdue, was promoted to general manager (from director of radio promotions).

Pascoe himself says, confidently but not belligerently: “I wanted to do more and Ted [Cockle, president of Virgin EMI] realised I could do more.

“It’s also, I think, a reflection of the culture here – not specific to me or my promotion, but something that runs throughout the company from David [Joseph, Chairman & CEO, Universal Music UK & Ireland] down. No one is put in a box, job titles aren’t tramlines; everyone’s encouraged to think big and speak up.”

Born, raised (and still residing) in South London, Pascoe puts his musical awakening and education down to his party-hosting parents and pioneering big brother.

He says: “My parents are Jamaican, so reggae was quite prominent in our house. My mum’s from St Mary and my dad’s from St. Ann, which is the countryside of Jamaica, so there are a lot of Jimmy Cliff/Harder They Come stories in my parents’ upbringing.

“My older brother, Richard, was a massive influence, because he was always into music. He had the decks in his room. He ended up being a DJ and forming this sound system called Rampage, which is still going to this day.

“I grew up hearing him practicing and mixing, with the old Electro series of compilations, putting two pence pieces on the stylus to keep the needle from jumping, because no one could afford Technics 1200s then. Seeing that growing up, seeing what he could do on the decks, in a pre-laptop era, was really inspiring

and a catalyst.”

Pascoe’s first job was in Starsky’s Barber Shop, in Tooting Broadway, a position that is a far more likely stepping stone to a career in music than it might first appear. “When you’re a barber, you know everything and you know what’s going on – plus you get in to all the clubs and all the shows.” Today we’d probably call them tastemakers.

More importantly, certainly more prosaically, as Pascoe concedes, for four years, between 1990-1994, “it gave me the money to rave and buy records”.

He was never going to just be a face in the crowd, however, and he started doing club promo, for Jackie Davidson’s Hard Zone Promotions.

He built up an enviable network of contacts, and was soon mailing pre-releases to club DJs who would go on to make their name on national radio and beyond, including Semtex, MistaJam, Tim Westwood, David Rodigan and Trevor Nelson.

He stood out not only by being ahead of the game musically, but also by mixing a little marketing nous into the cocktail.

“I needed to create a database of all the top DJs in the UK, and I had a couple of tricks up my sleeve. UK DJs in the ‘90s were obsessed with import US vinyl rather than UK promos.

“There was always a desire to have a record box full of plastic shrink-wrapped 12-inch vinyl to give the

impression you had the US hook up or connect.

“I decided to shrink-wrap my UK pressed 12-inch promos, and they flew out the door on every release.

“Another trick was to do limited edition promo coloured vinyl of the hip-hop releases; I Got 5 On It by [US hip-hop duo] Luniz was made in luminous green, heavy-pressed vinyl. It became a ‘must have’ for any top DJ. Every DJ wanted one; my database quadrupled in three months.”

Eventually, inevitably, his specialist skills were recognised and coveted by a more mainstream source and he joined Virgin Records as Club Promotions manager in 1996 – still aged just 23.

After being promoted to National Radio Promotions, he got a call – and an offer – from Universal.

“A couple of things broke just before that,” he remembers, “and one of them was David Guetta. I think that was quite a key thing and something that interested Universal [about me]. Like, who is this guy? He does all the hip-hop stuff, and now he’s breaking big dance records.”

As part of the transition, Pascoe told his new employees that he wanted a broad remit. “I wanted to do pop, I wanted to do guitar bands. You can pigeonhole people really quickly, but you can’t pigeonhole Nile Rodgers, you can’t pigeonhole Quincy Jones. I wanted to be that for promo, I wanted to be that guy.”

The label he joined was Mercury, which, over the years, would

‘You can’t pigeonhole Nile Rodgers or Quincy Jones. I wanted to be that guy for promo.’



be enveloped in a series of corporate splits, captures, closures and alliances that would ultimately bring Pascoe back to Virgin.

“At the time we had Roc-A-Fella, which was this whole movement, a label, a clothing line, just huge. The first record I got given to work was a track by [Roc-A-Fella’s] Cam’ron, called Hey Ma. The boss at the time, who I still love to this day, Bruno Morelli, came back from Christmas and I had it A-listed at Radio 1, Kiss, Capital, everywhere, and it ended up being a massive radio record. He came back and said, How the hell did you do that?!”

“Damon Dash [Roc-A-Fella co-founder] would bring everyone over to the UK, Jay-Z, Cam’ron, Young Gunz... He had a house on the Kings Road and it was mad; the parties there were legendary.”

Not exactly along for the ride, but certainly not in the driving seat on those trips, was a young man called Kanye West. “He was almost like the in-house producer at the time,” says Pascoe. “I remember on their first trip over, there was about 35 of them. We rocked up to Radio 1 to do Westwood’s show.”

“Zane [Lowe] was quite new at the time, having just come over from XFM. I said to him, There’s this guy I want to introduce you to, I think you’ll like him, do you want to have a chat while everyone else is next door with Westwood? That was one of the first interviews Kanye ever did, and of course you saw what happened with that relationship.”

Pascoe talks to *MBUK* just before Kanye upped his pro-Trump rhetoric, posited the theory that slavery might have been partially through choice and generally baffled and infuriated the watching world with next level crazy via Twitter and other platforms.

So, maybe, his answer would be different today, but discussing pre-‘Dragon Energy’ Kanye, Pascoe says: “To me, he has stayed, at his core, the same. If you look at that picture [above, second from left], that’s Kanye on one of his very first trips, doing a playback in the Radio 1Xtra boardroom.”

“You can see the act right there. That guy I see on stage is in that picture. He was just so energetic, so passionate about his music

and his vision. There was no one like him.

“We started off with this mix tape called Get Well Soon and we serviced that at radio, using the same old school club promotion mentality. And I have to say that Semtex, who was with us at the time, was a massive part of this, and another colleague of mine called Mark Rankin: between us we knew exactly what to do with this roster and this movement.

“The journey of Kanye has been so exciting. I’ve done some incredible things with him. Late Orchestration at Abbey Road, that started off as a Radio 1 Live Lounge. But his creativity and ambition are so big: he wants five strings, now he wants 10, and rather than contain him, and say the BBC can’t accommodate it, we said okay, let’s move it to Maida Vale.

“Then it grew out of that and we had to go to Abbey Road. Radio 1 broadcast the audio and Channel 4 filmed it; those two have never worked together before, but we got them to do it.”

Held in equally high esteem by Pascoe is Jay-Z, another hip-hop

artist with whom he goes way back – all the way to 2001’s *The Blueprint*, in fact.

He cites the superstar’s Glastonbury appearance in 2008 as a landmark moment. “I remember all the press, all the fuss: *NME* made a fuss, Noel Gallagher made a fuss. I’ll never forget the feeling in the crowd that day, there was this sense of no one really knowing what was going to happen.

“And then Jay walks out and does Wonderwall. I honestly welled up with emotion, because I knew from that day, things were never going to be the same; culture was changed. This moment is not a normal moment.

“I saw it go from 100,000+ people being not entirely sure, to 100,000+ people going absolutely ape shit to 99 Problems. And when I saw that, when I saw one guy do that on his own, I don’t think I slept for 24 hours, I was so amped up.”

Whilst there was considerable awe, however, there wasn’t total shock, simply because Pascoe had come to expect anything from a

man he calls “the smartest person you’ll ever meet”.

He continues: “I hate that thing when people say the atmosphere changes when someone walks in the room, you know, like before you even see them the air itself changes? But with Jay, it’s true! He walks in the room and the molecules change, I’m telling you!”

“He’s got such a presence and such confidence – and this way of making everyone feel really great and positive.”

The third of a trio of superstars that were a big part of Pascoe’s straight-out-the-gate success at Mercury was a genuine unknown, Rihanna.

Pascoe says of her: “I think she’s one of the most important people, culturally, to come through in the last 10 years. She’s not from LA, she’s not from New York, she’s not from Atlanta, she’s from the Islands, with this ‘weird’, Bajan delivery and slang – and now everyone wants a part of that. She is the ultimate artist.”

He credits UK radio with playing a major role in her initial breakthrough. “There was a riddim called Diwali Riddim doing the rounds at the time, and there were a few big derivative tracks from it: No Letting Go by Wayne Wonder, Never Leave You by Lumidee and a few more. Then there was Pon de Replay. I heard it, I’ve still got the mock-up CD, and I just knew I’d find a way of starting Rihanna in the UK, without waiting on US radio, which is what you would usually have to do back then.

“The thing was, US radio would struggle with something like that [Pon de Replay], because, Is it rhythmic? Is it urban? Is it this? Is it that? We’re fortunate, we have the BBC and we have DJs who will play those records.”

Buzz started to build and Rihanna started to work the UK – to instant and impressive effect. “She must have come over here more times than any other act. We would take her round and she was so engaging, people just loved her.

“We got that first single away, and the second, but it was the third, SOS [2006] that was the first sign of, Shit, this girl makes biiiig pop records, she’s gonna make radio killers.

“Then Umbrella came along and, honestly, if I had a pound for every time someone said, Hmmm, not sure. It sounds mad now, but at the time it was that ‘ella, ‘ella, ‘ella bit that people were questioning. But that is called swagger and that is called Rihanna. I heard it and just went for it.”

From left: With Rihanna; Kanye at Radio 1Xtra on an early promo tour; with Justin Bieber and Ted Cockle; sourcing some posh wellies for Alessia Cara ahead of Radio 1’s Big Weekend; with Bieber at a disc presentation; Jay-Z and Zane Lowe outside Abbey Road as part of a promo tour run by Pascoe; backstage with Krept & Konan at the MOBOs; backstage with Jay and Kanye at the Late Orchestration show for Radio 1 and Channel 4, 2005

Pascoe brackets Rihanna within a long line of US artists, from a wide range of genres, who have been embraced by the UK (media and music fans) before finding an audience at home. “It’s always been that way and a large part of the reason is because we have the BBC. The BBC plays over 3,000 pieces of new music every year. It’s a public broadcaster with specialist DJs round the clock and a home for every type of artist. Whatever you produce, however out there you are, there will be a show on the BBC that will play you.

“So, when a producer from America, who is experimental, realises that, they think, I’m only an internet producer here, I’m never gonna get played on any radio station, Hot 97 are never gonna play me.

“But hang on, there’s a DJ on a national station in the UK who’s already played my track. That’s a big thing for them. Most American artists, they see that logo, the BBC, and it’s a badge of honour, a beacon of hope, we’re very lucky to have it.”

Other artists to have been part of Pascoe’s rise through Universal include Fall Out Boy, Pixie Lott and Justin Bieber. “When he first visited, hardly anyone in the building knew who he was – but there were about 1,000 kids outside, blocking the road, they who knew who he was!

“Island Def Jam just said, We’re bringing this young artist in to meet you. Justin brought his guitar, he played for us, he was great. And he was funny as fuck! He’d prank people, wind them up, non-stop.

“I think he’d sent one tweet saying where he was heading. We were thinking, Who is this kid? And when I say kid, I mean he was soooo young. That’s what made me realise: Scooter Braun is so smart: super, super smart, on another level smart. We started with him on his first record and have been with him ever since, through the good times and the bad.”



The ‘bad’ times, of course, were the tabloid-driven, troubled soul, pre-Purpose years. Bieber’s response to that is something that inspired Pascoe. And reminded him of another star who attracts reverence and ridicule in equal measure from the mainstream media.

“I’ve seen everything, but I tell you, there are two projects that have made me very careful not to write anyone off. Someone once told me that three-and-a-half minutes can change your life forever, and I believe that; it can change everything.

“First, when Def Jam played us The Emancipation of Mimi, by Mariah. One of the first tracks they played was We Belong Together. They played it to me and Bruno downstairs.

“You’ve got to remember, this was after Glitter, and all the madness that went with that. I’d been at Virgin in Harrow Road, with Paul Conroy, when that record came out. I’d left there, come over here, and they said, First project you’re going to be working is Mariah Carey.

“But Def Jam flew in to play us the first few tracks, and one

was We Belong Together, and we all looked at each other: Oh My God. That changed everything; she was a different proposition from that moment on.

“And then I remember when Scooter and Mike Alexander came in and played [Bieber’s] What Do You Mean? and Sorry. Again, we just lost our minds. He did the Where Are Ü Now track with Skrillex, which was a genius move, and it did a lot in terms of positioning. But when we heard What Do You Mean? and Sorry, that was it; it was unbelievable. We ended up 1,2 and 3 in the singles chart. What a comeback that was! And it reminded me: anything’s possible.

“I guess that’s what exciting about the music industry now: no one’s in control of it; three-and-a-half minutes could change the world more than ever now.”

One of the reasons behind the increasing (and increasingly global) impact of three-and-a-half minutes, of course, is the pervasiveness of streaming – not just as a technological progression, but as a cultural disruptor.

It is one of the main shifts of the last decade within Pascoe’s

“Someone told me three-and-half minutes can change your life, and I believe that.”

kanye West

I hate being Bi-Polar its awesome

the New Album Out now



home turf of promotions – the essential art of getting people to hear a record. He reflects: “Our job now is identifying the sweet spot. Someone downstairs used the analogy of it being almost like the perfect goal: from the keeper rolling it out to the defender, the midfield, everyone combining, then the cross and the perfectly timed run from the striker: goal. Then you rewind it and you see how everything came together. But you can’t repeat it every time, because every project’s different.

“There have been a multitude of campaigns recently where the single biggest factor has been me going. Wait, wait, it’s gonna be big, but just wait... and then you pull the trigger and the record explodes at radio, and that explodes the sales and the streams and the video.

“You have to marry up all the data you have, from every source, but there’s also an element of just opening the door and smelling the air. Is this record hot? Are people on the street talking about it? And that’s the same as it was when I was doing club promo and the same as when I was in the barbers: you just know.”

Connections last, instincts are preserved, but roles change and, as Pascoe concedes, his promotion is much more a confident acknowledgement of his and the industry’s evolution than it is a simple (and hopeful) upgrade.

“My job, back in the day, as a radio plugger, was Get This Record On The Radio. Now, I spend 30% of my week plugging, the rest is a multitude of things, be that seeking out new music, closing deals, strategising, working with A&R, working with international...

“It’s a long way from a box of CDs, down the pub, who wants to come over? There was a restaurant next to the old Radio 1 building called The Clipstone Café, we called it The Clippy, and we’d spend the day in there. The DJs and producers would pop in for their lunch, and we’d be like, Hey, you got five minutes, there’s the new CD from this artist or that artist, give it a listen. That’s not my working day anymore.

“That said, it’s still so important to sit down with DJs and producers and talk to them about what’s hot, what have you heard, what have you got in your show...”

“Looking at Spotify and Apple Music and SoundCloud and Complex and Pitchfork and all these other outlets to discover music, I do that, I do that on a daily basis, and it’s great. But sometimes, spending the afternoon talking to DJs, people you trust, you can’t beat it. Trust the DJ!”

A recent example of working it old school, and trusting the DJ in more ways than one, came with Pascoe’s championing of The Killers.

“I remember sitting down with Annie Mac’s team and playing them The Man last year. At that point Radio 1 hadn’t played The Killers in a while, and there was an air of scepticism.

“Radio 1 moves quickly, really quickly. But there’s such a

groove in that record, and knowing Annie, knowing her show and knowing her team... I thought, She’ll like this. And she said yeah, we’ll go with Hottest Record. From that we got an A-list and we did a Live Lounge and that track was voted Hottest Record of the Year on Radio 1.

“It’s still one of my favourite tracks of the last two years – what a record! And then they get a BRITs nomination, and then they perform it at Hyde Park; it’s nice to think it started from that decision, that it goes back to having that CD in my hand and thinking, Should I take this to Annie...?”

That score was just one in a string of wins that made up an undeniable argument for elevation above the single track of promotion and into the ranks of general management. An even stronger argument was the fact it had kind of already happened.

“I think over the last 18 months, as the radio role has become more blurred with other areas, I wanted to be stretched more, I wanted to help Ted close more deals, I wanted to work more with the next crop of artists coming through.

“When Ted joined us, I was doing the normal job, and I’ll always be hard wired as a promo guy, but straight away I enjoyed going into battle with Ted, I enjoyed going out with him to win a signing – and I wanted to do more of it.”

The two execs clearly complement each other. Pascoe says of Cockle: “Ted’s wicked, man. He’s one of the most liked label presidents around, because he’s always there.

“He goes to about 350 gigs a year, he’s there till the end, he’s got that one-on-one personal thing with artists to the max; he’s so artist friendly, I’ve never seen anything like it. Like, really, never seen anything like it. He’s absolutely fantastic in that regard.”

Pascoe’s promotion also has echoes of his earlier comments about Quincy Jones and Nile Rodgers. He says: “I’ll always be happy to be known as a promotions guy, because, to my core, that’s what I am. What I didn’t want, was to be ‘urban’. I hate that word. I had it in my title for a while and I hated it, because there’s no such thing as urban. It’s popular music, that’s what I’m working with. At what point can we get you to give up and just describe Drake’s God’s Plan as a massive pop record rather than ‘urban’? That whole thing, I reject it; I go from 70bpm to 150bpm.”

Chiefly, though, the promotion of one of the industry’s greatest promotion execs, is about more than genres or departments, it’s about well deserved recognition of a continuing story, from South London to everywhere.

“I remember going over to Def Jam last year and in the meeting were all these A&R and marketing execs. Everyone had to go round the room and say their title – and I was the only person from promo. I thought, this isn’t the first time this has happened. I’m the only promo guy in the room. The bottom line is, I’ve done my 10,000 hours.”

“I want to help Ted close more deals, I want to work with the next crop of artists.”

‘Some appointments are a leap of faith, but this is recognition of what Rob’s already been doing’

In his new role at Virgin EMI, Rob Pascoe will continue to report to the Universal label’s President, Ted Cockle. Here, Cockle gives his thoughts on Pascoe and his unique skillset...

First, a confession from me: this promotion is somewhat overdue.

You have a lot of conversations with people who tell you how amazing they would be in a certain role. But it’s actually far better, and this is what the best people do, to operate at that level even before you’re given the title. That’s certainly what Rob has done.

There was a gradual dawning for me in so much that in many of the signing meetings, we were bringing Rob in; in many of the overarching discussions about the strategy of a release, we were involving Rob; in many conversations with more and more people, he was a key contact and a valued team member for them, which meant he had great conversations with them. So, progressively, it was pretty much a case of, Rob’s doing a lot of this role anyway. Sometimes appointments are a leap of faith, but this is more of a recognition of what he’s been doing already.

Anecdotally, when I’m out at Madison Square Garden watching Kanye on his tour, and afterwards I go to the dressing room, which is full of the Kardashians and Chris Rock and goodness knows who else, the moment Kanye sees Rob he comes flying across, climbing over people to say hello.

Same with Rihanna, in Paris, on a crazy schedule around the fashion shows, if I’m there with Rob, he doesn’t go looking or chasing, but she’ll suddenly do this little darting run to seek him out and say hi – because he was there when she was 16, 17 and she first arrived in the UK, which means a lot.

And the same applies to the new generation, be that Alessia Cara, or



Krept and Konan.

The artist relationship remains pretty fundamental to the game we’re in and that’s something Rob is very good at, very naturally.

And on the other side, his relationships go from clubs, to radio DJs, to radio producers, to heads of stations, to key people at streaming platforms and on and on.

He’s always been fairly non-corporate in his manner with people, he’s always been a great sounding board and he’s always enabled them to have fun while they’re doing their promotional work.

The new role means that in some instances he’s the key man with some relationships, as he is with Quality Control and the whole Migos gang. He’ll now be front and centre, developing and steering those relationships.

Instead of coming in as the promo guy, we’re more than happy for him to be in charge of those relationships, the main man in terms of working with managers and dealing with complete campaigns.

He also has an incredibly upbeat vibe at all times and a demeanour that is great to be around.

THE MUSIC INDUSTRY OF 2018 IS WITNESSING THE END OF FAILURE

Today's business has no need for the bargain bin anymore. But, asks Peter Robinson, is that really such a good thing?

These days the name Alex Clare might generally only enter discussion in relation to one of the unfortunate warbler's songs being sung by Jorja Smith in a YouTube cover that propelled her to the precipice of stardom, but it's always worth remembering Clare's one-man hokey-cokey with Island Records: he was signed, then dropped, then signed again when one of his songs was unexpectedly picked up by Microsoft for a big ad. And then, when that boost proved mercilessly brief, Clare was unceremoniously dropped again. This all happened in the dim and distant past of about five years ago, but how would it have played out in 2018?

In the 1980s a sacred, holy text delivered in fortnightly instalments under the name *Smash Hits* spread word of the Dumper — a sort of retirement home into which popstars were unwillingly inserted when their appeal had become, as Spinal Tap had themselves once put it, more selective. Tickets to pop purgatory were inevitably one-way affairs. While the Dumper may have taken on a mythical status as the grotty netherworld of downsized abodes, overdue taxes and classic sports cars being flogged in Friday Ad, its more tangible real-world cousin was the record store bargain bin.

It seems somewhat ludicrous now that when a single reached the end of its natural chart life it would be taken off shelves, shoved in a crate or basket on the floor and marked down in price again and again until someone eventually bought it for 10p, but that's what happened: the song was no more, its usefulness had come to an end, and that was that. Regardless of whether it had been a hit, the single would be deleted and largely unpurchasable.

What has become of the Dumper, or the bargain bin, in 2018? Clearly the bargain bins we once knew simply don't exist, partly because physical singles don't exist and largely because physical shops don't exist, but mainly because



“How many of us are driven by the fear of failure?”

bargain bins simply have no place in the modern music world. Spotify doesn't need to make room in its stock cupboard; labels don't need to worry about the cost of unsold streams. The long tail is longer than any of us might have expected, the chart behaviour of The Killers' Mr Brightside being one notorious example. Thirty years ago it would have taken laser-guided marketing nous and a degree of advance warning to see a song selling after its initial chart run: in 1990 Berlin's Top Gun-soundtracking Moroderbanger Take My Breath Away went back into the Top 5 following Top Gun's first UK terrestrial TV screening, but it could only do that because the single had been repressed and restocked by Woolworths in time to be in shops the day after Top Gun had been on TV. Mr Brightside, which originally left the Top 40 after just four weeks, recently celebrated its 200th straight week in the Top 100 — there've been no tentpole moments,

like a Top Gun screening, that might have been deemed repress-worthy, but there it is, forever.

In 2018, we're witnessing the end of failure. The Dumper has been replaced by pop's answer to cryogenic suspension: songs that float around DSPs, poised for a comeback, or at least the chance to generate eight quid a month after being included on a popular acoustic chillout playlist. Artists signed to 360 deals turn a profit even when their sales, 30 years ago, would have positioned them firmly in the Dumper; anyone can be Alex Clare, or might be, with the wind behind them, the planets aligning and fate smiling kindly.

Focused analytics allow labels and managers to manage their own expectations, budget accordingly, and drop artists less frequently. On the surface this is excellent news for artists, especially when even 'failed' (in major label terms) acts like Nina Nesbitt, and a thousand others, can take themselves off to a label services company and enjoy certain aspects of success. Boardrooms once reverberated to people bellowing that failure was not an option, but in 2018 that's not just a figure of speech. Acts who might once have gone AWOL are now going with AWAL.

But for some artists, avoiding Dumperdom may simply be a stay of execution, and in many cases may not be ideal for mental health or longterm careers: it can't be easy checking streaming stats each week in the way some people check their Lottery numbers, forever hoping that there's a pot of \$0.004 streams at the rainbow's ungraspable end. Have we ushered in a generation who have something in common with Les McQueen, the League Of Gentlemen's hopeless Crème Brulee frontman who lived in a perpetual state of believing that this might finally be the year things turned around?

Just as significantly, what impact does it have on artistry? Musicians and creatives are often driven by the need to succeed but how many of them — how many of all of us — are equally driven by the fear of failure, and what, then, happens when we remove from the equation half the motivation to do well? From labels' point of view, little to no marginal cost in releasing multiple singles on the same day has opened up new ways of doing market research on the fly, throwing shit at the wall in full public view: A/B testing worked well for Camila Cabello, who released *OMG* and *Havana* on the



Jorja Smith

same day, with near identical artwork. *Havana* became the streaming success, got the video and launched her album; *OMG*, which fell by the wayside, didn't get the video and didn't even make it onto Cabello's album. It didn't matter, particularly, that *OMG* failed; the only real cost was to give the song its own artwork, which in that case appeared to have cost around \$8. And to bring us full circle I recently interviewed Alex Clare advocate Jorja Smith, and we talked about how none of her singles had been a hit, and how her relatively slow release schedule was at odds with current trends. She liked not being signed to a major label, she said, because there was no pressure. Could she be doing better with a little bit of pressure? Possibly. Maybe it's great that she hasn't been thinking about failure. But to put it another way, nobody enjoys being attacked by wild animals, and Usain Bolt's pretty good at running, but don't you think he'd run marginally faster if he were being chased by a lion?



KEY SONGS IN THE LIFE OF...

Angie Somerside

Five tracks from the life and career of one of the industry's most respected execs...

If Warner Music likes to view itself as a major with the soul of an independent, then Angie Somerside is a pretty good fit as a senior exec.

The bulk of her career has been spent within corporate structures, but she's always had an indie edge and a music-first mentality.

She started out as head of press at Mute, but really made her name during a 12 year run at Sony, initially as part of Rob



Stringer's team at Epic, then across various roles, including head of international followed – after a two year break as MD at Q Prime Management – by a spell as General Manager at Columbia.

She returned to the indie fold and, indeed, to Mute, as MD, before striking out on her own as a valued music industry consultant.

She was hired by #MERKY to work with Stormzy, which led to a relationship with Warner's ADA which, nearly two years ago, led to a return to the majors, this time as general manager East West/ADA and digital, where, just like everywhere else she has been, she allies a true passion for music with a finely tuned instinct for bullshit.

The musical journey she takes us on includes icons, mavericks, childhood memories, professional high points and, of course, losing a pair of trousers on a beach in Wales.

1. Michael Jackson, She's Out Of My Life (1980)

I grew up in Blackpool, but my Dad lived in London. And one day, when I was still in school, he said, I want you to come down, I've got something for you, something important. And when I came down, he had a copy of Off The Wall, which had just come out. He said, This is one of the best albums you'll ever hear, this will last the test of time, and I wanted to be the first person to play it to you, because you'll always remember when and where you first heard this record. And he was right!



When you think about growing up in the '70s, it was a very mixed time. I was too young for punk, but I pretended, there was a lot of Northern Soul in the air; I was becoming aware of the New York thing, with Lou Reed and the post-Velvets scene.

And then there was Michael Jackson, Quincy Jones and this album that just epitomised the whole disco movement. We found it so exciting. Plus, every track is a massive pop song. And whilst there's all these up-tempo tracks on it, this was the

“Factory was almost like a football thing, supporting a team.”

first song that made me think, Oh God, I'm gonna cry. It was just raw emotion.

2. The Jam, Going Underground (1980)

The Jam were the first band I properly got into; I bought all the singles, I was absolutely obsessed.

I was an angry teenager and when I heard In The City and This Is The Modern World... I know this sounds silly now, but I used to play This Is The Modern World every day before school, every single day, because I was an angry teenager and that was my angry teenage record. I thought Paul Weller was God.



Going Underground probably isn't their best track, I think that's In The City or When You're Young, but it was that moment in life when you tell everyone, relentlessly, that you love this band – and then all of a sudden, everyone else is into them. But you were the first, you had all the badges. I've still got all the badges!

I remember when it came out, someone brought a radio into school, it was Tuesday lunchtime, we huddled round and it was like backing a winning horse: that's the band I've been telling you about! [Going Underground went straight in at No.1]

I remember the first time I saw them live was on The Gift tour, when they came to Blackpool. Me and my friend told our parents we were staying at each other's houses and we slept outside the Winter Gardens to get tickets.

The gig was amazing and afterwards we asked their coach driver where they were staying. The next day we bunked off again and went to the hotel, walked in and had breakfast with them. Us, The Jam, the TKO Horns, Afrodisiac...

Then they said, We've got the day off today, do you know Blackpool? We said, Yeah, we live here, we can show you round if you want. So we got on the coach, Come on, let's go! Then Paul's dad [and band manager], John Weller, got on, took one look and said, Get the fucking schoolgirls off the bus right now! Which, of course, was a great call, but it was still a fantastic day as far as we were concerned.

3. Age of Consent, New Order (1983)

At that time, in Blackpool, all the bands I loved, The Clash, The Jam, they were all from down south. We had Section 25, who were from Blackpool, and they were on Factory, so we felt this kind of affinity with all things Factory. We'd go to Manchester to go to Affleck's Palace, that kind of thing.

Then we got into Joy Division, probably a bit late. Then of course Ian [Curtis] died and New Order emerged – and their first gig just happened to be in Blackpool, at a place called The Venue.

So I went to New Order's first gig, which was amazing. This was when they were still dark and moody and playing Ceremony etc. When Power, Corruption and Lies came out it was, again, that thing when you love something for ages and then suddenly everyone's into it.

Factory was almost like a football thing, like supporting a team, it made you really proud to be from the North. And when I moved to London, I went back every weekend to go to the Hacienda and I really felt part of that.

The other thing about this record is the artwork is incredible, and it's the first time I really thought about that aspect of making a record, that whole Peter Saville thing. It got me into how things were presented visually and probably started me down the path towards marketing.

4. If You Tolerate This Your Children Will Be Next, Manic Street Preachers (1998)

I started at Sony as a product manager and the Manics were my first real project.

They had just done The Holy Bible, which was a great art statement, but hadn't done as well commercially. And no one had any idea what was coming next; everything was up in the air, especially with Richey's disappearance, which was still fresh.

I was already really good friends with their manager [Martin Hall]. We shared a flat when he started managing them, so I'd seen them live in the early days, including one of their very first London gigs, at the Bull & Gate, so I was already a fan.



[1996 single] Design For Life came out, then [fourth album] Everything Must Go, and they were suddenly this massive band. They were the full package, all the things I've talked about, coming together: great artwork, quality control, saying the right things, doing the right things and having a vision, not just for the music, but for everything that went with it.

As a marketing person, you couldn't get a better band to work with, Nicky in particular knows exactly what he wants and what's right for the band. You have to help make it happen and execute it to the standard it deserves.

The track I've gone for, If You Tolerate This, is from the album after Everything Must Go, This Is My Truth Tell Me Yours, because when you have one successful album, part way through your career, it never happens again. So all the work people put in, especially the band, to make sure Everything Must Go wasn't a one-off, it was so great to be part of that.

I remember they were touring Ireland when If You Tolerate This came out and we were over there with them, in the bar of The Clarence Hotel on a Sunday morning, waiting to see if it was number one.

The whole team had watched them play in Dublin the night before, so we all had the worst hangovers ever. We had a good inkling it was going to be number one, but when it was officially confirmed, it was a really big moment; to have done it twice was so great and so rewarding. It was a real time and a place for me.

I also remember spending three days in North Wales shooting the album cover, on a beach. I did the styling and I didn't get the right trousers for James. He had to wear mine, well, my boyfriend's, some army trousers that I'd borrowed off him for the shoot. I never got them back!

5. By Your Side, Sade (2000)

I'd worked on the Manics for two albums, and then suddenly Sade was putting a new record out [Lovers Rock].

Not many people get to work on Sade records, because she doesn't put many records out. I was so excited about it.

She was so lovely, so professional. I love the less-is-more-ness about Sade. It's all about quality and class. It was, honestly, an honour to work on a Sade record, because she is one of the greatest and most iconic female artists of all time.

I actually got to commission the remix for By Your Side and I was asking Rob [Stringer], When we gonna hear it? When we gonna hear it? Eventually, Rob said, You can hear it, but you can't listen to it in the office. So I had to go to the basement of the old Sony building and play it on the CD in Rob's car. Obviously he had quite a nice sound system. It sounded amazing!

It did over five million worldwide, that album, four million in the US alone.

Craig Logan was managing her at the time and I'd put all these huge posters up everywhere. Craig phones me and says she's called him up and asked, Can you get those posters taken down, they're too near my house. He still says it's the first and only time any artist has asked for fewer posters, not more.



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Meet the old boss

In the third of MBUK's series set in the Land of the Giants, industry legend and Warner royalty Rob Dickins lifts the lid on his incredible career...

With a name like Dickins, you'd expect some great stories.

And Rob [Dickins, C.B.E.] doesn't disappoint: why Sign O' The Times is a double album (having been first a triple, then a single), what Madonna's really like, giving Rod Stewart singing lessons, getting stitched up by Doug Morris – he just keeps them coming.

He's honest throughout, but not in a salacious tell-all, full-story-and-pics kind of way, it's more a self-assured, nothing-left-to-prove kind of deal.

A significant moment comes early on. He's recalling how he was offered the role of MD at Warner Music Publishing, aged just 23.

"They asked me if I wanted it, I said yes; they asked me if I thought I could do it, I said yes."

This is the cue for many medal-strewn veterans to profess that inside, of course, they were hugely insecure, winging it, convinced they'd get 'found out' etc. Right, Rob? "No. I always believed in me."

Some people might blanch at that, but Dickins is simply being true to himself and his story. He always knew what he was doing, why he was doing it and where he was going – even if, as he discusses later, he never arrived at what he believed should have been his ultimate destination.

Ideas of destination and, indeed, destiny, could have been forgiven in Dickins from a young age. As has been regularly noted, his father, Percy, was a founder of both the *NME* and the UK charts.

What's perhaps less widely known is that it was the generation before Dickins' dad that first made its mark in the entertainment industry...

We won't cover the entire 100 years plus, promise, but can you start by confirming whether or not your grandad really did have a knife throwing act?

It's true, yes. When he died, my father and I went to clear his house, and I found all these business cards, photographs and playbills for a Wild West Show. They were called The Redskin



Rob Dickins, East Hampton, New York, May 2018

Gang and they were a knife-throwing act.

I always thought my granddad was a bit boring, so I said to my father, Why didn't he tell me about this? But he was just as surprised as I was: he never told him either!

He was the (quiet) black sheep of the family. We come from a series of upper-middle class doctors in Barnet, but granddad ran away, joined the Wild West Show, married an Irish girl and ended up in the East End of London; we all come from East Ham.

So there was some flamboyance and rebellion there, for sure, but if you're talking actual music business, that starts with my dad.

Remind us of his legacy...

He worked on *Melody Maker* in the late '40s, doing advertising and layout. And then, when Maurice Kinn bought the *Accordion Times* and *Musical Express* in 1952, he [Kinn] wanted to make it a bit more up to date, but he was mostly the money and connections, he didn't know how to put a paper together. So he hired Percy [Dickins] and Ray Sonin [as editor] and the three of them started the *New Musical Express*.

They used to publish the Cashbox Top 10, from America, and people used to advertise around that. So dad thought, If we do the English chart, I can get people to advertise around that as well. So he started charts in the *NME*, basically by ringing around 20 shops in the country and asking them what they'd sold that week.

Was there a real pang in your heart when the NME closed not so long ago?

There was, yes. And of course I thought of him. After he retired and I was at Warner, I was going to visit mum and dad and I had the issue

celebrating 30 years of the *NME*. I walked in and said, There's your paper dad. And suddenly there's this old man (although younger than I am now!) sitting there reading a 1982 *NME* (with BEF on the cover, I remember), the paper he started. I still have that picture in my head – I wish I had an actual picture.

So yes, when it closed, I did think back. Can you imagine, as a teenager, in the '60s, I had the *NME* a day before anyone else, every week.

And the other thing I remember from when I was growing up, he'd come back, empty a briefcase on the kitchen table, and there were all that week's review copies. I had Please Please Me before it came out. Then I met the Beatles in 1963.

Where did you meet them?

Well dad used to organise the NME Poll Winners concerts. We were in the corridors backstage and he just went, Boys, boys, come and meet my son. I was in my school uniform!

And not only did I have that, but my brother [Barry, co-founder of ITB] left school early, became an agent aged 16, signed a band called The High Numbers at 17, they changed their name to The

Who, and Barry did the Maximum R&B shows at the Marquee when he was 18. I used to go from school to his office, then to the gigs and backstage, with Roger Daltrey repairing his microphone with a screwdriver, Kit Lambert saying to Pete, Please don't break so many guitars, we can't afford it!

And we'd go to [Soho's] The Intrepid Fox and The Ship, I'd be outside because I was underage, but I was hanging out with those guys. He [Barry] worked at an agency where Chas Chandler brought in this guitar player called Jimi Hendrix. The agency mainly dealt with acts like Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett, but Barry was doing The Who, so they said, Give him to Barry. So when he was 19, he had Hendrix, and I saw pretty much all his London gigs; I was 16 the first time I saw him, at The Upper Cut in Forest Gate, the afternoon of Boxing Day in 1966.

That basically destroyed live music for me, because before I left school I'd seen The Who and Jimi Hendrix – and nothing has ever come up to the experience of seeing those two live. That's maybe why I kind of started towards records.

Although your first 'job' in the business was in the live sector, booking bands at Loughborough College, right?

I was social sec, yes. I had agents and managers calling me up. We had Pink Floyd, we had Yes, we had Rod Stewart, we had Elton John – but he didn't show up. We had a local band called Earth, who became Black Sabbath. We had them on a Wednesday, because that was the quiet night.

I had my own office and a red phone and I used to sit there and think, King of the World!

I remember, actually, my first day of work at Warners, it got to

lunchtime, and of course I didn't know anybody. So I end up in the Wimpey on Tottenham Court Road, feeling really lonely, looking out the window at all the people going past, and I think [with heavy sarcasm], King of the Fucking World... Look at you now, back at the bottom.

How did the Warner job come about?

I wrote to every film company, magazine publisher and record label and I got two letters back. One was from Polydor; they offered me a job in Birmingham as a sales rep, but even then, my brain was telling me, You wanna make it in the music business, it ain't gonna happen in Birmingham. So I turned that down.

The other letter was from WEA Records, which was Kinney Records at the time, saying, Thanks for your interest, nothing at the moment, but we'll keep you on file. I've still got that letter.

Then I got an interview with IPC and I got a job writing features for girls' magazines – *Honey*, *19* and *Petticoat*.

What sort of things were you writing?

I remember I did something on Rastafarianism; a piece on the



June 1983, being announced as Chairman of WEA Records UK with Head of Europe, Siggy Loch

pros and cons of owning a big dog. Honestly.

I remember being on the tube, seeing girls reading these magazines, and they were all looking at the fashion, the ads – but flicking through the features.

So I didn't know where I was going with that, but then I got a letter from Kinney Music Publishing. They said, We saw your letter to the record company, come in for an interview.

I asked my dad, What's music publishing? He explained the basics and I went for the interview. At the time, they'd just got the Bob Dylan catalogue. I'm doing the interview and at one point they mention that they've now got this huge catalogue, but they don't have titles, just first lines.

So I said, Throw me a few. They did, and I was going, This is that one, That's this one, and so on. They said, That's amazing, how do you know this? And I said, Well, because I love Bob Dylan, it seemed quite basic to me. Anyway, I got the job.

Where were they based at the time?

New Oxford Street, with the record company; four floors of records and publishing on the top.

On my first day, they said they were a bit short of promotions men down at the record company. I think one was ill and one was on holiday, so they asked me to pop down and help out.

I go into a promotion meeting, I'm 21 years old, I've not even done a full day up in publishing. Hi, I'm Rob, I'm from... Yes,

yes, sit down.

Anyway, they're talking about Riders on the Storm and how it's charted and they're going to bring The Doors over, they're going to do all these things.

I'm thinking, Rob, you've been working here for half an hour, just shut up.

They're going to arrange interviews with all these press... No, Rob, shut up. Eventually, the real Rob Dickins has to pipe up: Excuse me, it's a hit because Jim Morrison just died, so I don't know how you're going to get them on Top of the Pops.

The head of promotions went, Oh shit... and I thought, You know, I could do quite well in this business.

Did you enjoy the publishing side?

Well I really liked my boss, Tony Roberts. And I had a brain and I was interested. So I would go to the head of copyright and say, I've read this contract, but I don't understand this, this and this, and he'd explain it to me. I was learning different aspects of the business; whenever I had spare time I'd be asking and learning.

But, no, I didn't really want to be in publishing. All I really wanted to do was make records or be an A&R man. I wanted to be on the creative side of things.

When I was 23, Tony left to run Arista and I thought, Hmm, I really liked him, I don't want another boss, what am I going to do?

And then, a week before my 24th birthday, the American bosses rang and said, Would you like to be Managing Director? Yes. Second question: Do you think you can be Managing Director? Yes.

They said, Let's give you six months, and if you screw up, we don't want to bring someone in above you, I want you to just go. Fine by me.

How confident were you in reality?

Oh I've always believed in me. I mean there was some trepidation, but when I said, Yes, I can do this job, I meant it.

And then the first thing I signed was Hang On In There Baby by Johnny Bristol, which went to number two. I then signed Prince, before he'd had any success. Johnny Bristol's lawyer, Lee Philips, said, I want to play you this new kid, I think he's brilliant and I'm signing him to Warner Bros. Records over here [the US]. And he played me the first Prince demo. I loved it, of course, so I signed him to publishing.

Just to deviate from the timeline, a little bit, what was Prince like to work with?

When I ran the record company, his manager was one of my best friends, Steve Fagnoli, which was an advantage for me.

From the outside he seemed unknowable, what was he like if you were on the inside?

For me, as well, pretty unknowable, because he was very shy, quite mono-syllabic. When you had a conversation it was you doing all the talking, and then, 'Yes'. And then, 'I don't think so'. That was it, mainly.

It was quite difficult, there was no record success in the UK while I was in publishing and he was really unhappy with Warner in the UK and wanted to leave.

He couldn't leave records, but his contract was up with us in publishing, so he left us, because of how unhappy he was with records. It was one of the big losses of my life. It was like a wound that they'd inflicted on me.

So when I got to the record company, I thought, I'm gonna break Prince, because I'd loved him from the get-go and I couldn't believe that they couldn't sell his records. Things like 1999 and Little Red Corvette, it broke my heart that they weren't hits.

We did an amazing campaign for When Doves Cry. There was a huge TV show called The Tube Summer Special, or something like that, and we bought a one minute ad in the middle of it, spent all the marketing money, and it worked, it broke Prince over here.

And then the follow-up, only in the UK, was a double A-side, 1999 and Little Red Corvette, just to prove they were always hit records – and of course they were. The official follow-up everywhere else in the world was Let's Go Crazy or something, but Rob Dickins was proving a point.

And from there he went on that amazing run of success, did that lead to better interaction?

Not massively, but I did have one conversation with him of some depth. He said, Why do I sell less than Michael Jackson? No one can explain that to me. I said, I can, and here it is: for one Michael Jackson album, you make four.

You add those four up and you might not have sold quite as many, but it would be close. It's not four million vs 25 million, it's more like 16 million vs 25 million. And the fact is, if you made one record of your very best tracks every four years, I think that would sell 25 million.

He said, I'm never going to do that. I assured him that I was in no way asking him to do that; I was just explaining the disparity, because nobody else could – or would. If Michael Jackson made a record every 10 months, he wouldn't sell 25 million copies.

Did he see the record company as the enemy – with their main job being to leave him alone?

Oh yes, and he was left alone. There was one time, Steve Fagnoli got me in a room in LA and said, He's just delivered a triple album, I can't go to Warners with a triple album, but Prince is insisting, what do I do? He played it to me in his LA office, this was Sign O' The Times, by the way, and I got it down to a single album, a brilliant single album, and showed it to him. Steve said, He won't go for a single album, give me your next list. And eventually he (and we) compromised on a double album.

What's your view looking back? Do you still think a single album would have been the best option?

I always think a single album is the best option. There are hardly any double albums that wouldn't be better as a single.

I would love to know the track-listing of Sign O' The Times as a single album.

I don't remember, to be quite honest. I tell you what would have been on the third record though. You know his after shows?

Of course, legendary.

They were legendary, but compared to the shows themselves, they were actually just kind of 'jams'. Musically very impressive, but jams, workouts, musicians playing for musicians...that would have been the third record of the triple album, but I was all about songs: songs first.

He must have been happy with the end result?

I never saw him happy-happy. I saw him smile a couple of times. And I do know people who knew him quite well who said he was very funny, which I never really saw.

Out of all of them, of all the really big stars I worked with –



Mid '80s: Dickins reads a book he would go on to, figuratively, re-write



Flamenco dancing in Madrid, early '90s, with head of WEA International, Ramon Lopez

Madonna, Cher, Rod Stewart – he was the one who continued to be enigmatic. You had to man-up when you went to see him.

What are your reflections on his later clashes with Warner and the whole Slave/Symbol period?

My take is that his rate of delivery of albums (and therefore advances!) was becoming so frequent that it became difficult to market and very uneconomic. Also, as I've said, we all believed such frequency was detrimental to him as an artist; he found such thinking from his record company untenable and tried to walk away, but was contractually bound. Hence 'slave' and the infamous graphic.

What were your thoughts when you heard the sad news?

Unbelievable, just too shocking. I remember speaking to his drummer once and I said how amazing it must be to play with Prince. He said, It's so difficult, he pays me more money than anyone else, I'm on a retainer, but you have to be ready for a 3am phone call saying, Studio A, 20 minutes, be there and bring your A-game. That wasn't once in a while, it was a regular thing. And that was part of why he was so amazing. But it must also have been so punishing...

Back to the timeline, and publishing, is it true you also signed The Pistols during that period?

I did, yes. I was trying to sign The Clash, who I'd got to know, firstly because I'd produced Deaf School. Deaf School signed to Warner for records and I signed them for publishing. They had recorded some tracks with a known producer, I heard them and said, They've missed the point. So Derek Taylor [former Beatles publicist and then Warner MD who signed the influential new wave band to Warner Bros., said, Okay, you produce them. So I did the first two Deaf School albums.

The more standard response would have been, But I'm not a producer...

But this is what I wanted to do. I knew every note on a Beach Boys album, every note on a Byrds album, every note on a Beatles album, I knew what Motown records sounded like. I wasn't sure how they did it, but I knew what records should sound like, and I knew what Deaf School records should sound like.

So this is 75/76 and I was around what was developing into the punk scene, we'd go and see all the bands. I failed to sign The Clash, after being with them, seeing them, driving around the country to see them. So that was a disappointment. And then The Sex Pistols made the Bill Grundy headlines, the whole thing went above ground, and at the same time Glen Matlock left – or was fired.

He rings me and says, I hear you're a good bloke and you might be able to help; I wrote most of the album, and they're now trying

to say I didn't. He came in, we chatted, we liked each other and I signed his publishing.

I then rang Malcolm McLaren, while he was with his lawyer, and said, Right, Glen wrote all of Pretty Vacant, at least half of this, most of that, etc. etc.

They came in for a meeting, and it got pretty heated, quite unpleasant. In the end I said, Look, why don't you just give Glen a quarter of everything on the record, except EMI, which was written after he left the band.

Malcolm decided that was fair and so I took the opportunity to say, While we're at it, why don't I publish all of them, keep it in one place?

He needed money to finish the The Great Rock n Roll Swindle, so he said, You give me £100,000 and the deal is done. And that was that.

So you signed The Pistols and he got to make The Swindle?

Which my arm is in, yes. They shot some of the scenes in my office and around Warner Music Publishing; they do the record company party bit there. I actually got very friendly with Malcolm after that initial bumping of heads. He was a strange character, because one-on-one, as far as I could tell, we really liked each other. But as soon as there was an audience, he became Malcolm McLaren.

We'd go to a gig, be chatting away, then Boy George would turn up and he'd say, Have you met Mr Greasy Industry Man? And we'd just been chatting about art or Phil Spector or something. It was a weird relationship. But he was extraordinary – in the same way as Bill Drummond, Alan McGee and Geoff Travis are extraordinary, all of whom I've worked with. I did a label, Elevation, with Alan McGee before Creation, we had Primal Scream, The Weather Prophets.

And you would have known Bill first as Echo and The Bunnymen's manager?

No, that goes back to Deaf School. In Liverpool, in those days, [club/venue] Eric's was just starting, a lot was happening, and I became the go-to guy for that scene, I'd be in Liverpool every couple of weeks. I produced the second single by Big In Japan [legendary band that contained Bill Drummond, Ian Broudie, Holly Johnson, Budgie, Jayne Casey and David Balfe] – The Society For Cutting Up Men/Suicide A-Go-Go. I got to know Ian, Bill, Dave etc.

Later, when Bill and Dave became managers, they knew me, so they came to me and I signed the Bunnymen for publishing, but I couldn't get them a record deal.

I really loved them, and one day I was having dinner with [Sire Records founder] Seymour Stein, and he said, Well why don't you form a label, you put it out here and I'll put it out in America. The next day, I'm sat in my office and I have a poster on my wall

from A Clockwork Orange, with the opening lines, something like, 'There was me, that is Alex, and my three droogs, that is Pete, Georgie, and Dim, and we sat in the Korova Milkbar trying to make up our rassoodocks what to do with the evening'.

And that was the record label, Korova, which I created because I couldn't get the Bunnymen a deal and we wanted to get [debut album] Crocodiles out. I then said, Let's do the same with the Teardrops, who I'd also signed for publishing. But Julian Cope said, No way, I'm not being on the same label as McCulloch. So that's how Korova started. And that was my first entry into labels.

Similarly, going back to when I produced Deaf School, I became great mates with [the band's guitarist] Clive Langer. He came to me with Madness and said he wanted to produce them, but they couldn't get a record deal.

I agreed to fund their initial sessions (£220!) in return for publishing the songs recorded. The results were three tracks: The Prince, Prince Buster's Madness and My Girl – and of course I loved them. The band told me that their mates, The Specials, were starting a new label, 2 Tone, and they would put it out for them.

I told them not to worry about that, I would be able to secure them a 'proper' record deal. I took the finished masters around every record company (including Warners and Stiff, who would later sign them), and they all passed. I couldn't believe it!

Anyway, with my ego punctured, I agreed that putting it out on 2 Tone was our only real option, which is what happened. The single was an immediate hit, and one of my fondest memories is this band of loud, unruly teenagers all coming

to my flat to watch their first ever Top of the Pops appearance, cheering and laughing throughout. I went on to sign their publishing on a long-term deal and their incredible run of hits were one of the main building blocks of my success

But you're still 'stuck' in publishing at this point?

Not 'stuck', as I loved working with songwriters, but yes, after making recordings with Madness, Teardrop Explodes [Dickins had paid for early single, Treason, released on Balfe and Drummond's Zoo label] and The Bunnymen, who all had difficulties getting signed, I believed even more that a record company was my destination. But when I told the corporate bosses they instead promoted me to vice president of the publishing company for the world outside the US. So, still a publisher!

When did you cross the great divide officially?

I took over publishing in 74, and after three years we were No.1 and we stayed No.1 continuously. Meanwhile, the record company was famously losing money. They had Madonna, they had Prince, they had ZZ Top, they had Foreigner's Cold as Ice, but they had no success with any of those American acts, and they had no UK acts to call their own either.

“Malcolm [McLaren] came in for a meeting; it got pretty heated.”



After-show party with Rod and Ronnie, 1984

We [publishing] were having hit after hit, signing everyone from Whitesnake to Madness, Vangelis to the Pistols, hits everywhere.

Eventually, Nesuhi Ertegun approached me and asked me if I wanted to be managing director of the record company. I said no. By this time I was running publishing for the whole world outside the US, so I said, No, I want to be chairman.

He said, You can't be, you've never run a record company. I said, Well I can't work for anybody, I haven't worked for anybody for years. He said, No, sorry, we just can't make you chairman. So I said, Fine, I'll stay where I am.

Two weeks later he came back and said okay; they'd obviously seen some more financial results...

What they actually did was, they flew me to Venice, Nesuhi and Siggie [Loch, then head of Warner Music Europe] were out there. They said, We're finishing up our meetings, we'll see you in about an hour. So I went and walked out on one of the piers, I'm looking across at Venice and I think, They're about to give me the job. And an hour later they did. It was very dramatic. We're in this beautiful and unique city, we're having dinner in Harry's Bar, and I've got the job I've always wanted.

What was on your 'to do' list when you got back?

Well, when I get back I can't do anything, because they haven't told Charles [Levison, Dickins' predecessor] he's leaving, that's why they took me out of the country to tell me.

At that time I'm signing Howard Jones for publishing and he's talking about signing to Stiff for records. I'm saying, Don't sign with them, please! Of course he wants to know why, but I can't tell him. I just say, Please don't sign – negotiate, fine, but don't sign anything. And he didn't.

I was good friends with Stiff's Paul Conroy. So as soon as I was released from my secrecy and had signed Howard, I rang Paul. I knew he loved Howard, so I said, I've signed him, come and work for me here and you get to work with him. So I hired Paul into marketing. Howard was our first signing and sold over two million of his debut album. This is 1982, and I'm 32 at this point.

When I took over, Warner hadn't had a number one record in the UK for years, literally years. I started on a Monday, and on Tuesday, which is when the charts were back then, Baby Jane by Rod Stewart went to No.1.

So it was just one of those serendipitous things, there was something in the air: new boss, first number one in forever. I started with Baby Jane by Rod and I ended with Believe by Cher. Bookended by number ones.

What did you think needed fixing first?

Well, they didn't break any American records, and so all those artists wanted off the label: Madonna wanted off the label, Foreigner wanted off the label, Prince wanted off the label. This is my inheritance as I walk in. I have nothing but artists wanting out.



With Madonna, 1992

We had to break the US acts, we had to sign a big UK act, and we had to put an end to the mood of negativity.

You've talked about how you broke Prince, how did you break Madonna?

Seymour Stein had signed her, he came to see me and said, I've got this act, Madonna, she's not selling anything, she wants off the label, so I'm going to give her to Roger Ames [at London Records]. She's disco, you don't like disco, so that's okay, right? This is before the first album.

I said, Hang on, what do you mean you're 'giving her' to Roger Ames?! That's not something for you to do! Give me the weekend, let me listen to the [at that stage unreleased] album – no one had really heard anything by her at this stage.

I went home and of course I fell in love with Holiday, Lucky Star, Borderline... Why would we give this away?! I rang Seymour and said, No way.

It's funny, she had no radio play for any of those early records. We brought her over and she did a club tour, in a Ford Transit with [Warner club promotions manager] Fred Dove doing three tracks in a disco.

Then Fred rang and said, Come up to Birmingham, I want to show you something. So we piled up, we go to the club, Fred says to the DJ, Play this. The DJ plays Holiday and the dance floor is suddenly packed. It was a 12-inch, club-led, medium size hit record and we built it from there.

The singles keep coming, the videos are coming, and then she has Like A Virgin, which Radio 1 also wouldn't play for its risqué lyric.

Then we heard Into The Groove, which was on the Desperately



Brian Wilson solo album launch, 1989

Seeking Susan soundtrack, and I said to [her manager] Freddie DeMann, this is her No.1 – because she hadn't had a No.1 in the UK at that time. He said, What do you mean?! It's an eight-track demo we did for the film. I said, No, it's a number one record.

So, again, I think for the rest of the world the official next single was Angel, but I said No, we're going with Into The Groove. And it was her first number one here.

Then, while that was still flying, we did a picture disc 12-inch of Holiday, and a week later we were one and two in the singles charts and both albums [Madonna and Like A Virgin] were just going crazy.

What was she like to work with?

Yeah, she and I had a love/hate relationship: I loved her, she hated me. No, I'm kidding, it was interesting. I've never been... whatever the opposite of a sycophant is, that's what I am. And whenever I see sycophancy, I become even more belligerent. And so when she got to

the stage where she had the entourage, and the Sean Penn thing, the absolute pinnacle, I would tell her the truth. And so we had this interesting relationship: she knew it was the truth, but she didn't always appreciate being told.

So it wasn't wholly negative, it was more 'difficult'?

It wasn't negative at all; as you know, we had phenomenal success together. And I've seen her since those days and she's been lovely. I remember she did a video message for all the managing directors at a worldwide conference around the time of True Blue, everyone was in the room, huge screen: 'This is me, Madonna, saying a big thank you to everyone, to absolutely everyone – except Rob Dickins', and she held up a fist.

“Madonna came over and did a club tour in a Ford Transit.”

Afterwards, people were coming up to me saying, How awful! You must feel so terrible! I said, What do you mean? Did you not watch? I was the only one she mentioned by name. It was definitely that thing where she loved to hate me.

But I got William Orbit to mix Justify My Love, when she and Freddie had never heard of William Orbit. I said, Trust me, he will make this work.

And that led to the whole Ray of Light record...

I had the Ray of Light album as a William Orbit Strange Cargo album, a lot of the embryos of the songs on Ray of Light are from there.

I remember, going back to the early days, when we brought her over to do these track dates etc, we said she had to be based here for a while, so she came to live in the UK for two months.

The first day we set ourselves up in an Italian restaurant, got all the press there, The Face, the Daily Mirror; Barbara Charone and the press department had done a brilliant job. And she didn't turn up. I do know the reason, but I can't say. But the fact was, she stiffed all the interviews – an unknown artist, with one failed record, blew everyone out.

We were having dinner that night and I said, Look, I have to call you out on this. We brought you over here, we set this up, we really want to break you, and you blow off all these interviews. And her reply was, Yes, but everybody does the interviews, every unknown is desperate to do interviews with these people. I didn't – and they'll remember I didn't. When I'm the biggest act in the world, they'll remember me not doing that interview with them.

I'm looking at this girl and thinking, What am I going to do with her? The biggest act in the world? She's barely sold a record! Even the name, Madonna, just saying it seemed ridiculous. Now it's the perfect name, it's a superstar's name, but back then, you'd be talking to her or about her, and you'd think to yourself, Did I really just say 'Madonna'?

I believe the thing about stars is that they know. I'm not sure they know consciously, but somewhere, in some way, they know. She was just more outward about it than everyone else.

Did a lot of it come down to undeniable ambition?

Yes, but she's also the street-smartest person I've ever met. And I've met a lot of people who are plenty smart in that respect, hustlers, but she was above all of them. She made every artistic decision, there was no corporate decision making, it was her instinct.

And I loved that about her, I loved the fact that she dumped songwriters and she dumped producers, because she knew what was right for her far better than anyone else did. The best instincts I've ever come across, of any artist.

I'm sad to say it doesn't go on forever, and those instincts are

now out of tune, but for that period of time, and we're talking about 20 years: the best. I was in awe of her.

That initial splurge of breaking Madonna and Prince, was it like you were proving a point?

Absolutely, it was a personal thing to break these records, because I knew they should have been hits, they were records I loved, and it almost upset me that they hadn't been.

US artists aside, how important was it to build your own roster?

That's what I wanted to do more than anything. There's so much more depth to breaking your own acts. I'd signed Howard Jones, Max [Hole] had signed Matt Bianco, they were our first two successes. But at the same time I got rid of most of the old UK roster.

Who was that?

Well the funny thing was, their only successful act was Modern Romance, and I dropped them. Their management was on the phone, But my boys are the only successful act on the label! I said, If Modern Romance are only successful act we have, we need to start again.

So who were the signings that made up for that?

I signed Enya, which was a very personal one for me. Peter Price from Atlantic America's UK office said to me, You like Clannad, don't you? Listen to this. And it was the music from a BBC2 series called The Celts. It was basically instrumental, with just these two vocal tracks. I played

it and played it and played it and fell in love with it.

By then, I ran Ireland as well, so I went to Ireland and said to the managing director, how come you sign all these acts and nothing happens, and then there's an artist like Enya and you don't sign her?

Anyway, that night was the Irish Music Awards and he said, You know that Enya you were talking about, that's her and her two managers over there by the door.

I said, Why are they by the door? Everyone's sat down, why are they by the door? He says he'll go and find out. He comes back and says, They're supposed to be on the EMI table, they're signing with them, only they got to the table and there were no seats for them, so they're going home.

My eyes light up. I go to the head waiter, get three more chairs round our table and sit them next to me.

These days, with U2's success and everything, it's a bit different, but then, the head of a UK record label in Ireland was quite an unusual thing. And not only am I the UK Chairman in Ireland, I know every minute of every track of this obscure TV soundtrack album that they'd made.

“It was a personal thing to break those records; I knew they should have been hits.”



With Enya... after 40m sales



With Enya on day of signing



Rob's dad, and legend in his own right, Percy Dickins

It came up that I'd worked with Vangelis and she said, That's what I want to be like. I said, No, you should sing, it's your voice that's magical. She says, Oh no, my sister's the singer... Anyway, I asked them what their plans are and they said, We're signing to EMI Ireland next week. I said, No you're not, you're flying to London and you're signing to WEA.

Most people thought I was mad. Why are you signing this Celtic, ethereal girl when we've had Nirvana and Pearl Jam and all this? I said, I don't care, I'm the chairman. So I signed it, I did the album sleeves, the videos, A&R, everything I could, changed bits of Orinoco Flow in the studio. And that was 13 million albums in the first year.

Another superstar you worked with, and A&R'd, was Rod Stewart, what was that relationship like?

When I first started, Rod had Baby Jane and a couple of other hits. And then he started making AOR records, records with no singles on them, and they weren't selling in the UK or Europe.

His manager invited me over to Rod's suite and did that thing of, Why's Rod not selling records any more? I said, One of the problems is, Paul Young has taken a lot of that market, with great song choices and big singles, while you're making AOR records. Rod, you're the greatest singer of great songs, but just a singer of mediocre songs.

So he said, sarcastically, Okay, you can find me a great song? I

said, Yeah, of course.

I ended up driving over to his house in Epping a few days later with a cassette containing Downtown Train by Tom Waits on it, three times in succession. Tracks 1, 2 and 3: all Downtown Train by Tom Waits, because Rod has very little concentration.

I put it in his teenage son's cassette player, the song finished. I said, Don't say anything, let it play; same song comes on again, don't say anything; it plays for a third time. What do you think?

He said, I love it, I absolutely love it.

His son, Sean, interestingly, said, Dad, why does he sing it so badly? Well that was perfect. Because of course some people love Tom Waits' voice, I love Tom Waits' voice, but some people just can't listen to him; they love the song, they hate the voice. And that was my point to Rod – with you singing this, it opens this amazing song up to everyone.

Rod was signed to Warners in America, not to me. I was working with Trevor Horn at the time and I said, Trevor, we're making Downtown Train with Rod Stewart, and off we go.

Then I get a call from Lenny Waronker, the president of Warner Bros: why are you making a record with our artist? I said, Lenny, I'm really sorry, I hadn't thought about it like that; they asked me, I had the song...

Yes, but he's our artist; how would you like it if we did that with one of your artists? I said, I wouldn't, I'd hate it, I'm sorry. He said, Okay, here's the deal, this is your cost. If we don't use it, it's all your

cost. He was as angry as Lenny can get – and rightfully so.

Literally five minutes later, Trevor Horn phones: I think it needs an orchestra. What? You mean strings? No, listen to me, it needs an orchestra. Oh fuck, I've just been told I'm footing the bill, and now he decides we need an orchestra.

Oh well, in for a penny... and let me tell you, Trevor's not cheap in the first place, there was no 'penny' about it.

But we go ahead, we make the record, Rod goes to LA to do the final vocal, Trevor rings and says, the track's in the wrong key, it's not working with Rod's voice – because when he did the guide vocal, his voice hadn't warmed up, and it's thrown the whole thing off.

Thankfully, with a bit of technology and by getting him to come down a semitone, we can make it work. So that's what we did and the happy ending was that it was the biggest record he'd had for a long time and he was back on the cover of Rolling Stone, who'd ignored him for years; he was credible again.

Later on, we were talking about what to do on the next album, and I said, We should do [another Tom Waits song] Tom Traubert's Blues. Rod said, That would be brave, wouldn't it? I said, Yep, very brave! And he said, Let's do it. He sang it back to me in my office, sitting as close to me then as you are now. And that voice... we all know it, but when you hear it like that, wow.

I actually ended up recording the lead vocal with Rod in LA, and there's a bit at the end where the melody changes, and Rod's not singing the change. So I'm now singing it through the talkback, I can't sing at all, but I'm going, No Rod, like this... He says that's what I'm singing! No, listen, you need to invert the phrase, like this... Ridiculous, I'm telling Rod how to sing!

I guess Tom Waits got a house out of that whole episode?

Well Rod always joked, Downtown Train bought Tom's house and Tom Traubert paid for the swimming pool.

Later on, I did a Best of Tom Waits and a second one, because I just wanted people to love Tom Waits. Someone called me and said, Tom's really pissed off with you, he doesn't want you doing this Best Of. He'd already gone to Island, so we can do what we want, but he wants me to call him.

He doesn't have a phone at home, he's at the bar at the end of the street, here's the number. So I call: Tom, it's Rob Dickins. He starts on, Why are you doing this? I explain we've already done one, this second one contains some great songs we couldn't get on the first record, I just want people to hear your music etc.

He said, How would you like it if I was to put together a photograph album of your life? I thought for a moment and said, You know what, it'd be better you did it than me, because I'd look at a picture and say, No we can't use that, my nose looks too big, but you'd know it's actually a great picture.

He went quiet for ages and then said, Okay, you win, put it out.

I put the phone down, I'm alone in my office, it's 8 o'clock now. And it just doesn't feel right. I love Tom Waits, I don't want to 'win'. So I called him back and said, Tom, I don't want to win, I just want to get your music out there. If you don't want me to do it, I won't do it. But I will ask you a favour, If you don't want me to do it, you put together an album. He got all choked up and said, I've never spoken to anyone from a record company like this. Did he ever put it together? No, but it was still a lovely moment.

In terms of signings, was there one that got away?

I don't think so. I heard the Pet Shop Boys very early on, and I passed. But what I heard was a club record, there was none of the real cleverness there, no pop songs. And I remember being pissed off when I heard West End Girls; where did that come from? There was no one that we lost to another label that comes to mind, a few minor ones maybe, Danny Wilson, who went to Virgin, but no one that sold millions of records.

In the middle of your tenure, you very nearly went to the US to take the hot seat, what happened?

My dream of dreams was to run Warner Bros. Records worldwide.

Mo [Austin] was being retired and they offered me the job. I said yes, of course. So I met with Doug Morris, who was the head of Warner Music Group, and he said to me, So, are you surprised we're talking about this? Now, Doug and I didn't really get on, so I said, A little bit Doug, I must say. But he said, You've earned

it, for now though, no announcements, let's sit on this. Okay, fine.

But it started to get out, as these things do, everyone was ringing me, I'm saying, I don't know, I haven't heard anything etc.

Then I got a call at about 10 at night, from corporate, saying they need me in New York in the morning.

So I get the first Concorde out of London the next day. I land and get to the hotel, there's a press conference planned. The phone rings and they say, A couple of things have come up, just stay in the hotel, we'll call you. An hour, two hours, three hours, I'm trying to ring in, can't get through. And then I get a phone call from somebody and they say, I hear they've hired someone else. I'm stranded in the Carlyle Hotel in New York having been told to fly directly out there for the announcement.

What had happened was that Doug Morris had said to the board, you can't tell me who to hire, which meant I was caught in that crossfire. I was given the top job for one day, spent it on a plane and in a hotel, and then it was taken away from me. I got the Concorde home the next morning.

Did you consider just walking out at that point?

I did, yeah. David Geffen rang me and said, You don't have to put up with this shit, I'm starting this company called Dreamworks



With Little Richard

and you've got a job with us. That one phone call got me through a very difficult time and I am forever grateful to David.

What made you stay?

Well, they were trying to persuade me.

Were they apologetic?

Oh yes – but not enough. And they ended up paying me a bit of money. The bottom line is, I looked at my artists and I looked at my staff and I thought, I love these people. I love who I work with and I love this company. These are my people, do I really want to leave all this behind and start again? And I didn't. A couple of months later, Doug Morris and all his people were fired, but it was too late for me.

Do you think Doug did that because he didn't want to appoint you or because he didn't want to be told by someone else to appoint you?

I think he'd say the latter. Because I did have a good meeting with him, but we had fallen out earlier. I'd given Enya to Atlantic and they kept calling her 'that new age girl'. Then Tom Zutaut, the Guns and Roses A&R guy from Geffen, came to see me in my office and asked me what I was working on, I played him Enya and he started sobbing.

He said, It's the most beautiful thing I've ever heard, I have to have it, I have to sign it for Geffen.

I rang up Atlantic and said, You keep calling her 'that new age girl', whereas Tom is crying in my office, I think I want to give the record to Geffen, but it's up to you.

They go to a meeting with Doug Morris: by the way, Dickins wants to give the new age girl to Geffen. Who? Fine, whatever.

Then it goes to No.1 in the UK and Doug says, Oh I see our record's No.1 in the UK. And he was told, No, we gave it back to Rob and he gave to Geffen. And that was why Doug was not a fan. I mean I'd done nothing wrong, but that's not the way he saw it.

Who was your favourite signing?

Enya was extraordinary, because she came out of nowhere, but my favourite moment was probably Believe getting to number one for Cher.

She was managed by someone I adored, Billy Sammeth, who had managed her for 20 years. He was someone who, when you meet him, you love him. He's funny, he's great company. We had Cher during the Geffen years, with Turn Back Time and all that.

Then he came to me and said, We're off Geffen now and I don't really know what to do with Cher, no one's interested. You've got good ideas, we all get on, why don't you sign her?

I thought yeah, we can sell some records here. And we made a really good record, It's a Man's World, she flipped the James Brown title track, she covered Walking To Memphis, it was fine,

but nothing special.

So I'm with Billy and Cher, and they asked me what we should do next. And I said, You know who loves you? You know who really loves you? Gay men. They love you unconditionally. And you make rock records or big power ballads that they don't care about. Let's make a record for them. She said, What do you mean, a dance record? I'm not making a dance record.

And we argued and we argued. She was in LA, I was in London and I kept saying, I really want to do this, come on. She said okay, I'll meet you half way, in New York. I get to the hotel in New York – I'm not coming, I don't want to make a dance record.

Her theory was, There's no songs, it's just beats and grooves, I'm a song person, there's no songs. All nonsense, of course.

So I started making a record, I had a couple of ideas, I had a few tracks. She rang me and said, I hear you're making a record. I said, Yes I am, I can't wait for you forever. Okay, let's meet in New York. I fly to New York, get to the hotel and once again: I'm not coming, I don't want to make a dance record. Strike two!

Whatever, I have a meeting with Junior Vasquez and Todd Terry's manager, I give them three Cher albums, some great songs and say, Listen to these, get her key and make a backing track.

So you're making a Cher album without Cher?

I am, yes; I just knew it was right!

My office was on its own on the top floor of Warners. My skiving was to go and hang out in the A&R department, but every time I'd head down the corridor, my phone would ring, or my assistant would say,

You've got to do so-and-so. I'd never actually get to A&R.

And then one day, I head down the corridor, the phone doesn't ring, Fiona doesn't call me back, and I finally get to see my friend in A&R, Steve Allen. And there was a rule: if you're in a meeting, don't take a call unless it's from an artist, because it's rude to whoever you've got in there.

I look in Steve's office, there's a guy in there, and Steve's on the phone. The guy who was in there was a pop writer, Brian [Higgins], so I thought I'd pop in and talk to him so he wouldn't be being ignored. We have a chat and I mention I'm doing a Cher record, something club orientated, a dance record with a hook.

He said, I've got loads! I said I don't want loads, I just want your two best ones. All these things come together, no phone call, the door's open, I walk in, speak to Brian, all these things that shouldn't have happened.

He comes in a week later with a DAT, and back then there weren't many places to play DATs. I had one in my office and one in my bedroom. When I'm in the office, I've got too much going on, so I have this DAT for about six weeks, getting on with things, arguing with Cher. Basically playing chess where she keeps sweeping all the pieces off the table.

One night I get home and Cherry, my wife, was out. I remember

"I said, You know who loves you? Really loves you? Gay men."

it was a hot sunny day, I went upstairs and lay on the bed and thought, What shall I play? I know, I'll listen to that DAT. It had 16 tracks on it, Oh for fuck sake Brian, I only asked for two songs maximum!

I put it on, and he'd actually only written a minute of each song, and the thing is, he'd pissed me off at this point, and I probably would have skipped, or turned it off after a couple, because you'd have thought they'd be the best two, right? But that's actually slightly harder to do with a DAT, plus I'm lying on the bed, so it plays through, and track nine is a track called Believe – and it's only the chorus: Do you believe in life after love? That's all it is. And then demos 10,11,12,13,14 etc. all rubbish.

I ring him up: Okay, Brian, I've played it. Now, next time I ask for two songs, give me two songs. That said, I really like track nine, but it's just a chorus, do you think you could concentrate on that one and finish it, because I think it could work for Cher; this could be the track we've been looking for.

A couple of weeks later, he's finished the song, he's really pleased with it, he plays me it, it's horrible. Horrible. Apart from, 'Do you believe in life after love...' which was already there.

I said, I thought I had something here and you've ruined it, I'm going to take it away from you. He said, But it's my song! Sorry, you've had your chance. I look back now and think, Was I really that tough?

Anyway, at the same time, I'm making another track with Brian Rawling, and he had two of his writers try to finish Believe...they write a really good bridge and a not so good verse. He said he'd have another go, I said, No, sorry, [other] Brian didn't get another go, neither do you. He said I've got another two writers I'm working with, I'll get them to have a go at it. And they write the verse. And now we've got a song that's a Frankenstein's monster, but I really like it.

I send it to Cher and say, Listen to this, how can you say there are no songs in dance music? And Cher, what I love about her, she said, You know what, you're right, I love it. Cher is from the heart, that's why I love her. She said, what do you want me to do now? I just said, Sing the fucking vocal!

You mentioned earlier that Believe turned out to be your last No.1 record. How did the end come about for your major label career?

I always got on with the Americans and the ultimate corporate bosses. And then they brought in two guys from the film company [Bob Daly and Terry Semel] who didn't know anything about the record business. They thought they did, but they didn't. A bit like Guy Hands at EMI more recently. People come in from another industry, but there's an alchemy to this business. I'm sure there is to films and TV, but I don't know it. I do know there's an alchemy to the record business.

They would say things, and I would think, Do I really have to work for these people? I was not politic. They made a few decisions and I was not politic about my reaction and my opinion. The ironic thing is, we were having an extraordinary year. I'd worked with The Corrs, Talk On Corners; I'd taken a record that had failed – or sold maybe 100,000 units – and we ended up selling three million in the UK. I just re-A&R'd it.

We had that, we had the Best of Enya, we had Cher's Believe, we had an REM album, we were having probably our best year ever...

And then you got a call?

No, my contract was up and they said, We've got something to tell you, the bosses don't want to renew it. They don't like your attitude and I thought of the old saying, 'My personality is who I am, my attitude is who you are'.

Did you already know that they didn't like your attitude?

I did, yes. Because all their predecessors had the thing of, He can be difficult, but he wins. So I was put up with, and then, when I got to know them, we always found we got on really well... I'm an acquired taste! These two were different. Then things happened that I'm not allowed to talk about, and about which I was over-ruled, and I was vociferous in my opposition. So when the contract was up, I was out.

What was your reaction?

A little bit of shock, I have to say. I'd been there 28 years and I'd always delivered. The head of Europe, Siggie Loch, told me ages ago, You know as soon as you don't deliver, I'm gonna come after you like a ton of bricks? I said Siggie, don't worry about it, it's never gonna happen. We had great

years and not so great years, but never bad years. So the end was never going to come through lack of success. And I thought, people aren't stupid enough...

I remember at one point, they were telling me something that simply wasn't right, not a question of opinion, it just wasn't right. And I made the mistake of saying, I'm sorry, but you're ignorant of the way this works. They snapped back, Are you calling us ignorant? No, I'm saying you're ignorant of the way this works, I'm using it in the proper sense, you are unaware of the facts: ignorant. That didn't help.

There was also the time they said, This is not your company, you're an employee. To which I said, And so are you. That didn't help either. I think maybe those four words were the final nail in my coffin. I can be political, of course I can, but in this instance, I completely played it wrong.

Do you regret that?

I don't know, I sometimes look back on it. But the thing is, if someone's telling you how to do your job who doesn't know how

“If someone's telling you how to do your job who doesn't know how to do your job, that's tough.”



Michael McDonald, Jonathan Dickins (aged 14) and Rob

to do your job, that's tough. I do think I could have played the game, I'd played the game before. But I'd been doing it for a long time, I'd been the chairman of the record company for 15 years, 28 Warner years all in, so there might have been an element of, This is enough.

So, what happened at that point, were you straight out?

Oh no, they asked me in June not to tell anyone until they'd found a replacement. That dragged on for months... I was finishing the Cher Believe album, and I'm saying, I have a life you know, I need to get on with stage two. So in September I went to *Music Week* and told them and they put it on the front page. I didn't want more and more people knowing, without it being announced, so I took it on myself to announce it.

And I left on 22 December, 1998, Cher had been number one for six weeks, I walked out the door and did a deal with Sony.

And what happened next?

I'd been talking to Sony about a JV, which was my Instant Karma Label, I was talking to Branson as well, but Sony was the only really serious player. And then Warners came back and said, We want to match the Sony deal. My reaction was, Why would you do that? I just couldn't do it. I mean maybe I should have gone for it, because I knew the machine, I used to run the machine, whereas Sony was alien to me.



Barry, Rob and Jonathan Dickins with JD's son, Sid

How do you look back on that post-Warner period?

It was fine, but we only did it for two years. In those two years, we had a Mercury Music Prize nomination, we had UK chart success and international success, but I'd done the deal with Paul Russell, who wasn't there anymore. Burger and Stringer had inherited this deal which was expensive and in two years I hadn't had a really big selling record. I totally understood, I would have done the same thing. And then I went independent for a while and had some big records, like Panjabi MC. Jonathan [Dickins, nephew] was working for me in A&R and a few years later he found Adele, so if we'd have let it run through... You can't rewrite history, but it's an interesting thought.

What would your advice be for someone starting out in label land now?

When I'm lecturing, which is what I mostly do now, something I tell my students is that sometimes the artist will ask you, What do you really think? Tell me what you really, truly, think. And I made the mistake of doing just that. Whereas, when they ask you what your honest opinion is, the only answer they want to hear is: I love it. But I have a certain sort of Asperger's about it. Listen, I can lie with the best of them, but when someone asks me about their music, I can't not tell them the truth; I just can't.

But do you think that was 'a mistake', or the right thing to do?

For me it was always the right thing to do. But that's because for me it was always about the work, not the politics. I'm not saying that stance is right, but I can't change me, so telling the truth was right for me. I see it in my nephew Jonathan, when he works with Adele: it's about the work, it's not about keeping everybody happy. Like in her live shows, she says, I wrote a whole album about my son, and then my manager told me, I don't think so, try again. Now, when you're as huge as Adele, people aren't supposed to say that. So, when I hear stories like that, I figure maybe there's something in the family. Plus he worked for me for 14 years, so maybe it's some nature and some nurture.

Any other advice for anyone starting out?

Knowledge, knowledge, knowledge: listen to music, analyse it, look at history, read books. There are so many brilliant ones available; my favourites are by Greil Marcus and Perer Guralnick. I have never stopped learning and never will.

I always say to my students, I can't give you the gift of A&R. If you've got it, I can help you make the most of it, and if you don't have it I can help you have a career in the industry, but I can't bestow the gift. And it truly is a gift, handed out like great voices. How do Van Morrison and Rod Stewart have those incredible voices? That's what it's like. It's funny, when I was 35 or something I was on Going Live. All these kids are around me, I'm on the

phone answering the viewers' questions, and one of them, aged eight or something, says, How do you know what a hit record is? And I said, Everybody knows what a hit record is, but some of us are right; it's sort of in you, some people have just got it. My 15 year-old nephew Jonathan has got it. I'm so pleased that's on record! Took him long enough, mind you.

How close an eye do you keep on Warner now? And how do you think they're doing under Max Lousada?

I think for a while they were a bit lost, but I think now, under Max, it's as strong as it could be.

Why do you think they were lost for a while?

I think maybe they lost their Warner identity. There was a certain artist-centric ethos that had run through the Warner labels for decades... more music than business affairs... music people not lawyers. It goes back to why I like what you're doing with this series: there was a time where everyone who sat round the BPI table was opinionated and very vocal, including me – maybe especially me – but there was an incredible amount of knowledge and personality and we all achieved so much. And no one told them what to do. I think there then came a time when a lot of labels became bureaucracies; they became corporate, as they were assimilated into larger and larger companies.

I think Max is aware of a Warner way of being and thinking, and I think he has that in him. I think heritage matters and I think Max feels that and is able to assume it.

What made you good at your job?

I think the accident for me was being a good executive. Being good at A&R wasn't an accident, I understood and loved music and I knew what a hit was. But I also just happened to be good at negotiation, management of people, five year plans, budgets, business decisions, I was good at that by accident.

Maybe it goes back to the kid who went to the head of copyright and asked him to explain this detailed part of a contract. Even if I wasn't inherently interested in something, I had to understand it – I hated to be ignorant, used in the correct sense.

How would you feel about doing it all over again?

I have a split answer. There was never a point I didn't love what I did; even on the bad days, I absolutely loved it. And I never once thought I could lose my job, it never came into my thinking. I was just going forward. I had no fear of failure. In my head I was going to be there forever. I don't see this in the new generation, I don't see that lack of fear. They're looking over their shoulders. I wouldn't want to be part of that culture.

But, equally, there's still a part of me that looks at it and thinks, I could do this.

'He's like a cranky pixie'

Cher – yes, Cher – tells her side of the Believe story, and offers her personal take on 'larger than life' Rob Dickins.

Warner Bros had dropped me and I couldn't get a record deal in America. So he just called me up and said he wanted to sign me to his label.

I said, Okay, great! I went to England and he was just unbelievably charming and absolutely larger than life.

He told me he had this idea for an album. We made it, and it wasn't a hit, it was nothing actually, and I thought that would be the only one I'd be doing.

But he called me not long after and said, I want you to make disco music. I said, Nah, I'm not doing that. He said, Okay Cher, let's do this – because we're both really strong willed people; forget the word disco, I'll just send you songs, and when you like one, just stick it in the 'I Like' pile.

Eventually I had five songs that I liked. I went back to England and started working with Mark [Taylor, producer] in the teeniest little recording studio I've ever seen. It was like a closet.

Rob would come, he would listen, he would make suggestions, the two of us would go round and round and... I think I won 50% of the time.

From the beginning he was really happy with the music and I think he felt vindicated, because it was everything he thought it would be and more.

Believe came right in the beginning, but it ended up a completely different song; it had to be re-written. Then, when we came



with the pitch machine, Rob wasn't really sure. He was saying, But people won't know it's your voice. And that's the first big argument that I won. I won't tell you what I said to win, but it was dramatic [laughs].

It was such a satisfying record, because we were able to get a sound that wasn't like most disco records; it didn't scream 'disco' – and not all of that album was disco, some of it was just great songs.

I gave Rob so much shit in the beginning, I was just like, I'm not doing that. But he was so smart, he stopped talking about a disco record, he was just sending me songs and working away, he totally outsmarted me, but that was fine.

I have to say, Rob always gave me so much encouragement, more encouragement than I'd seen in a long time, because the Warner Bros [US] people just weren't interested. It shocked me. I was shocked that he even called in the first place, it just didn't make any sense to me.

And then after a while, after we got to know each other, it still didn't make any sense, but I liked him so much that it didn't matter. And I

was just so thrilled to make music again, especially to make music with someone who thought I was so talented.

That album and that time was a highlight of my life. I've had many, but this was so significant because at that time he was the only one who wanted me as an artist. I thought my recording career was over.

And then we got to be friends. It was fun just hanging out with him – and [Rob's wife] Cherry, who I also love. He is an exceptional person. Cherry's the sweet side of him, and he's the crazy, sometimes cranky, always funny one. He has the best sense of humour ever.

He's like a pixie, a cranky pixie.

He goes out of his way not to show this, but he's also very sweet and very caring and he doesn't want his artists to feel anything but totally supported, and that was the thing I think I loved about him first: he made me feel that he really wanted me.

He comes to visit me still, I just saw him when I was making Mamma Mia 2. He and Cherry both came to the set to hang.

I still love seeing him.

‘Rob would tell us if something was shit...’

Pop star, artist manager, record label founder and A&R man Bill Drummond talks, as only he can, about Rob Dickins.

The idea was to get someone a bit different to talk about Rob Dickins; to get a slightly askance and completely unfiltered view of him professionally and personally.

So we asked Bill Drummond. Having first met when Dickins produced Big In Japan in the mid-70s, their paths would continue to cross for more than a decade, as Dickins signed and nurtured Echo and The Bunnymen, and eventually brought Drummond in as an A&R consultant at Warner.

In response to our request, Drummond sent a PDF of (entirely reasonable) terms and conditions [see *opposite page*] which not only set the parameters for the interview, but also revealed that the interview would be part of a book to be published after his death.

You don’t get this sort of thing with Robert Ashcroft.

We were, of course, delighted to comply, and here is the result:

How would you describe Rob Dickins’ strengths and characteristics as a record company chairman (how did he differ from other execs you may have dealt with)?

The only other boss of a major record company that I ever had to deal with was Clive Davis at Arista in New York. Clive Davis understood what made artists tick. So did Rob Dickins. It was Clive Davis that was able to get Tammy Wynette on the phone and convince her to work with Jimmy Cauty and myself, but...

Clive Davis used something on his head to try and cover up the fact that his hair was thinning. Not a



Bill Drummond floating on an inflatable dinghy clutching two bunches of Michaelmas Daisies, Mancentral Trading Estate, Salford, England

Photo: Tracey Moberly

comb over or a wig, but it was if he had used boot polish on it. Although Clive Davis had an innate wisdom, this need of his to use boot polish on his head revealed a deep flaw in his

“I fucked up and wasted WEA’s money, but Rob never stopped encouraging me.”

character, which meant one did not heed his more sage advice.

Rob Dickins did not have such flaws in his character.

He had other ones.

We all have other ones.

How would you describe your relationship with Rob (I believe he tried to get you into the belly of the corporate beast at one point but, understandably, it wasn’t a great fit)?

At the age of 26, Rob Dickins had become boss of the UK arm of Warner Brothers Music, this was the publishing company before they teamed up with Chappell Music. This was in the mid ‘70s. I was 23. The world was young.

One of Rob’s first signings was the Liverpool band Deaf School.

I was then working in Liverpool as a stage set designer. I was friends with Clive Langer from Deaf School.

Clive encouraged myself and couple of other friends to form a

band. We were called Big In Japan. Clive told Rob Dickins about us. Rob Dickins then invited us down to London to record a couple of tracks in a studio. Rob acted as the producer. I thought they sounded brilliant. Nothing happened to those tracks.

I don’t know if Rob played them to anyone or what his intentions were.

But I warmed to his easy charm.

And on that one day in the autumn of 1977, I learnt what being a record producer could be. And what it didn’t have to be.

A year or so later, after we had knocked Big In Japan on the head and Dave Balfe and I had started Zoo Records, Rob Dickins was the first person in the mainstream London music industry to make contact with us. He wanted us to set up something called Zoo Music. At the time I had no real idea what a music publishing company was, or why they existed.

But Rob Dickins taught us. And continued to teach us.

Between then (1978) and 1983, the small advances Zoo Music received from Warner Brothers Music and the tutelage that we received from Rob Dickins enabled Dave Balfe and I to get going, get Echo & The Bunnymen and The Teardrop Explodes off the dole, record both their first albums and start to make an impact on the then-music world.

We could phone Rob at anytime day or night. He would tell us if he thought something was shit, but he was always encouraging and never tried to stop us taking risks. And making mistakes. You have to make mistakes to learn.

Things changed when he became the boss of WEA Records (now Warner Music UK) and he offered me a position as an A&R consultant.

I moved south, had an office in their Soho HQ. I lost my focus and drive and sense of purpose. Whatever I had in Liverpool was totally destroyed in Soho.

NOTICE

BILL DRUMMOND AND INTERVIEWS

Occasionally publications request an interview with Bill Drummond

As of 1 January 2010 Drummond structured his approach to interviews as follows:

Between 1 January & 31 December 2010 Bill Drummond undertook twenty five interviews in twenty five different publications

Each publication was permitted to ask him four questions - four questions not asked in the preceding interviews

Bill Drummond answered each of the 100 questions as fully as he could

All 100 of these of these questions and answers were compiled and published as a book entitled *100* (2012)

Between 1 January 2012 and until his death Bill Drummond will undertake twenty five further interviews in twenty five different publications

Each publication is permitted to ask him four questions - four questions not asked in the preceding interviews

Bill Drummond will answer each of the 100 questions as fully as he can

All 100 of these questions and answers will be compiled and published as a book entitled *100 #2* after his death

Bonfire of the Vanities.

That said, over those three years (1983-1986), working in ‘the belly of the beast’, I learnt more than I ever realised at the time.

I learnt all those things that go on in a major company – marketing, sales, press, radio, legal, television, international – all of it. I watched how Madonna, ZZ Top and Prince were all made to happen: stuff you could

never learn running an indie record label in Liverpool.

And although I totally fucked up and wasted several hundred thousand pounds of WEA’s money, Rob Dickins never stopped encouraging me. That was until the very end. And I was a spent force. And the world was no longer young.

And I was 33 and a third. Time for a revolution in my life.

How did artists and creative-minded/non-conformist managers/mavericks view Rob and how did he get along with that side of the business?

Rob Dickins had a way of getting on with anyone, whatever their background or station in life. He had that easy charm, as already stated, and it came from a real place within him. It always felt he had the artist's interests at heart, even when they were being dropped by the label.

For those three years as an A&R consultant at WEA, none of the other senior members of staff had a genuine understanding of what made artists work and in turn how to motivate them. And I don't think any of those staff had a real understanding of why people bought records, whereas Rob Dickins did.

It also felt that the other senior members of the staff, had a very London-centric view of things, whereas Rob Dickins, even though he was London through-and-through, seemed to be able to engage with the different outlooks on life people had, whether they came from Glasgow, Liverpool or Birmingham. Not that the other senior members of staff didn't have other qualities, but not in the same way as Rob Dickins.

This also stretched to his understanding of what made 'creative-minded/non-conformist managers/mavericks' work. In that same period (83-86), he was also able to get Geoff Travis of Rough Trade and Alan McGee of Creation Records on board.

With each of them he inspired them to create new record labels to work within WEA: Travis with his Blanco Y Negro records and McGee with his Elevation Records.

He was smart enough to not try and get either of these two to sign their whole thing, thus allowing them to have the freedom to



continue working within the independent sector.

But there was a flaw. And it was hard to see what the flaw was at the

“Whatever shit was going on in my life, Rob was always there.”

time. It did not matter how much money might have been thrown at individual projects, neither Geoff Travis, Alan McGee or myself were able to really develop within the structure of WEA Records. That said, my guess was that those two learnt as much as me during that time.

Even though it did not work out with Geoff Travis, Alan McGee or myself within Rob Dickins' set up, I don't think any of us regret it or fell out with him or particularly blamed him.

Can you tell us an anecdote that you think best illustrates Rob's qualities and your relationship?

Whatever shit was going on in my personal life, he was always there. When Echo &

The Bunnymen were playing the Albert Hall in 1983 and my parents were invited, he took them aside, made them feel welcome, and explained to them what I did and how I was doing it good. Up until then, my parents felt I had just been wasting my life.

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'BEING A GOOD MUSIC LAWYER IS ABOUT MORE THAN JUST CONTRACTS, CLAUSES AND PROVISIONS'

Sonia Diwan is one of the UK industry's most revered and popular artist lawyers. Ten years on from founding Sound Advice with Robert Horsfall, she answers our questions...

When Sonia Diwan left her role as a partner in law firm Lee & Thompson a decade ago, Daniel Ek was just getting Spotify off the ground.

Diwan made that bold move to establish a new kind of music industry law practice in the UK – Sound Advice – alongside Robert Horsfall.

Sound Advice, with Diwan and Horsfall at its helm, is currently celebrating its tenth year of successful operation in the music business. Largely thanks to that little startup kicked off by Mr Ek and his friends, it's been 10 years of fresh challenges, fresh horizons and – in the past couple of years, at least – fresh optimism for Diwan.

A Cambridge graduate, she started her legal career working in film and TV at Marriot Harrison, before making the move to big city firm, Herbert Smith, where her priority client was Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB.

In 1998, she jumped to Lee & Thompson, working closely with Horsfall, where she stayed for the following 10 years – being named a partner in 2000.

Over the past two decades, Diwan has worked very closely with standout clients such as songwriting/production powerhouse Stargate, British pop supremo Naughty Boy and floor-filling royalty Paul Oakenfold, plus Jonas Blue, Chase & Status and Netsky.

These days, Diwan is also having great success in the world of UK hip-hop and grime, representing up-and-comers such as Drake producer Nana Rogues, Ill Blu and ZieZie, to name a few.

Her clients – and her non-clients, for that matter – obviously think a lot of her.

Naughty Boy says that Diwan's "exceptional" approach to law and business

affairs has enabled him to focus on "being the best that I can be" as a musician.

Daniel Lloyd-Jones, Head of A&R at Downtown Music Publishing UK, considers Diwan "one of the most respected figures we have in the UK music industry" – while Chase & Status's Saul Milton simply says she's "the best in the business".

Diwan's certainly come a long way from the young girl growing up in a mining village in South Glamorgan, as part of "the only Asian family in 100 miles"...

"I became a music lawyer and never looked back; I'd found my calling."

Why did you want to be a lawyer?

Asian! There were only three professions I was allowed to pursue: be a doctor, an accountant or a lawyer. I did my first degree in medicine at Cambridge. But I hated it, so I had two choices left.

Hang on. You completed a medical degree at Cambridge then went back and trained as a lawyer?

Yes – I only did [the medical degree] to annoy my dad, who's a doctor. He said, Darling, as an Asian female you're going to struggle to become a consultant in a hospital; it's a really hard slog. So I thought: I'll prove you wrong!

I finished the degree and had to make a decision, so I started again. I was lucky that I was at Cambridge – I could make the switch relatively simply and complete another degree. Medicine and law aren't so dissimilar skillsets, both involve the

assimilation of a lot of information, fact-finding and problem-solving.

It's been 20 years since you got your first job as a music lawyer at Lee & Thompson. You previously worked in film and TV. How did that change come about?

Before Lee & Thompson, I worked in the commercial film and TV departments at Marriot Harrison and then went to work at Herbert Smith, a big city firm which I thought would be a great experience,

on the first floor of an exciting new entertainment practice. But in reality, it meant doing licensing work for BSkyB. It was an impressive company, one of the Top 5 firms, but there was very little action; I was rocking in at 10am and leaving at 5pm. I thought, if I don't make a big change now, I'm going to

have to leave law; this isn't the challenge I thought it would be. I thought I'd go in-house somewhere – but, just to be safe, I applied for one private practice job as well. I made it through three interviews at Lee & Thompson, and they took me on, even though they had already filled the position. I never looked back; I'd found my calling. I went in as a music lawyer, and although I had no experience, Robert was extremely encouraging and made me believe I could be good at this.

What was your first big challenge in that role?

For a while, I was on the periphery, observing what Robert was doing. For example, when I first joined, he was handling a major record and publishing deal for a solo act he was representing at the time. I thought all deals were going to be like that – half a million here, quarter

of a million there. It was an eye-opener; it was so much more immediate [than film], with a personal relationship with a client in a way I'd never seen before. I was used to dealing with corporations or TV/film production companies.

I could see Robert had a real say in what was going on, guiding the client through the process. I now realise that, for an artist, the process, whilst exciting, is also very scary; they don't know what's a great deal or not, they just see what they're being offered. Then they talk to their friends – who may exaggerate their own deals – so it's hard to have a clear idea of what's the norm and what isn't. It also made me appreciate the importance of a good manager.

Robert looked after Jonathan Shalit at the time, who famously managed Charlotte Church. Watching that entire process unfold was fascinating – I was in every single meeting Jonathan had at Sony with [then-Sony Music boss] Paul Burger and his legal / business affairs team. I was taking notes through every single meeting, relying on some shorthand I'd learnt when I was 17. I would literally go home and transcribe every single word.

Jonathan, bless him, has said that those notes helped him get the settlement. [Shalit settled for a reported £2m in 2000 after suing Church when the singer dropped him as her manager.] That case went to the wire and was an incredibly instructive experience for me.

Do you feel quite protective of your artist and manager clients?

Yes, it's natural. The more experienced I've got, the more you take that on board. You forget how much information you've absorbed over time, and you have to remember there's no reason it will come naturally to artists. I couldn't do what they do; I constantly remind myself of that.

Given the way the industry has changed so much – and maybe a byproduct of me getting older! – artist managers have got younger and younger, representing even younger artists, in an ever more fast-moving industry. There doesn't seem to be that sense of mentorship in the same

way [that a young artist might get from an experienced manager], so they often look to us, as lawyers, to guide them through the process and the industry. More so, I think, than ever before.

When an artist first comes to a lawyer, how would they know whether that lawyer is brilliant or not? Of course your legal skills are key but it's that in combination with the knowledge you have of the industry that matters; your ability to deal with the other side, the ability to make the process as smooth as possible, and to inspire trust in your clients. I think we're part therapist, part lawyer! If you're good at your job, the artist will be left to get on with what they do best. A big part of it is

“If an artist doesn't understand what they're signing, I've failed.”

explaining things; if I haven't got an artist to fully understand what they're about to sign, then I've failed.

How did your decision to leave Lee & Thompson come about?

When I got to L&T I'd discovered something I really enjoyed doing. I thought, Okay I'm going to work as hard as I possibly can to progress. I knew I wanted to become a Partner, and fast. When I made the decision to leave, I was 10 years in at L&T, I'd been offered equity partnership, so it was not an easy decision to make. But I also thought, I either make this decision now or I may not have the courage in the future to leave a familiar environment that was working for me.

I'm not saying that staying wasn't appealing; two of my contemporaries there stayed and have both got a great work life. But the whole idea of helping to set something up that was different to a traditional law firm, being involved in client careers in a more holistic way, was hugely appealing. Thankfully, I haven't

regretted that decision.

You left to team up with Robert to launch Sound Advice. Why do you have such faith in him?

I will always credit him with helping to instill the passion I have for what I do today. We're quite similar people – we both work really hard, enjoy what we do and we both really care about the clients we look after. I am always aware of the fine line between the client/lawyer relationship and the friendships that can develop – there is a danger of losing objectivity. But I genuinely look at all of our clients as being part of the Sound Advice family, and you look after your own, don't you?

What was the big cultural change you wanted to make in artist law at Sound Advice?

Traditionally, lawyers have just been seen as lawyers: you get a contract in, you mark it up, you go through various forms of negotiation and you end up with an agreement. But for me, being a good music lawyer is

about more than just looking at contracts, clauses and provisions, it's about offering commercial advice – working hand-in-hand with a manager and saying, 'I know we can push it this far.' Or, 'We need to close this now.' We see ourselves as there to advise across the entirety of an artist's career, helping them choose the right team and hopefully helping them achieve the best possible outcome.

What makes a good manager?

Fundamentally, they need to believe in the artist. They need to be able to go around town and 'sell' them in the way the artist deserves. Experience helps, of course, but that comes with time and, in the mean time, they may need to lean on the lawyer more.

I have a manager we're working with now who is 16 years-old. I get emails from him late at night because he's finished his homework and is headed out to the studio. For the young, urban artists I work with, it's definitely not uncommon to see [teenagers] pulling the strings.



L-R: Sonia Diwan, Danny D (Stellar Songs), Boris Daenen (aka Netsky), manager Luke Mitzman (100 Management) and Tim Blacksmith (Stellar Songs)

Managers have to do so much more than they ever did; they have to be across so many things. Ever-changing technology has had an impact, especially on the way music is consumed, but also because major labels – I feel – don't have the manpower to develop or A&R the early stages of the artists' career anymore. The managers – and producers – have taken up that slack, so the manager's job is more all-encompassing than ever before.

What needs to change about the music business today from a legal standpoint?

That's a big question – there's a whole variety of things! What's clear to me is that there's certainly more money in the system now, with streaming revenues, at least on the master side, beginning to trickle down.

Personally I am seeing more deals being done; there's an excitement and enthusiasm about signing new talent which I haven't felt for some time. But there still needs to be some sort of readjustment in revenue share with the publishers and the songwriters.

The last decade has probably been the most challenging and testing time for all of the various businesses within the music industry. But I still love what I do and I am still full of optimism.

In the period since you've started this company, have you seen more power shift towards the artists?

Yes, but again that might be because so many of the clients I look after are in that 'urban' space. What's been going on with Skepta and Stormzy has almost sanctified the validity of urban music in the UK from a mainstream point of view; it's pop, popular, music as far as I'm concerned.

Labelling it 'urban' music now is a complete misnomer; why is it 'urban' music, exactly? Because it's non-white?

Why are British executives now running the global label system?

Maybe they look at things in a slightly different way. Maybe they will be able to bring a more global perspective to the US

market – the US has always been a market in itself that hasn't really needed the rest of the world to validate what they do.

You've been quite involved in Women In Music initiatives. Have you encountered obstacles in your career based on the fact you're not a white male?

Not being a white male hasn't held me back, I don't think, but being an Asian female has probably meant I've felt I have had to work harder to prove myself. Any obstacles I may have encountered have been overcome by that hard work. It's in my DNA. It's what my parents did and still do.

Are you optimistic that female executives will land more prominent positions in the industry?

Of course – I've got to be positive about it! Attitudes are changing. I would like to think there is less prejudice towards females. There are so many amazing women working in this industry today. But I still find it a little bit exasperating

that we only have one female President of a major frontline pop label in the UK – Jo Charrington, who is Co-President at Capitol. It's so well deserved for her, but probably as a result of the recession in the industry a lot of talented women were 'allowed' to leave the business. But things are changing, slowly; the younger generation are way more astute and focused on – as well as vocal about – what's acceptable and what's not for women.

Were you shocked by the gender pay gap stats that came out of the major labels and Live Nation earlier this year?

Not really. It's saddening – there's no reason for it. Although those statistics are open to manipulation – e.g. they don't differentiate between departments – there is a gender pay gap, for which there is no excuse.

Who inspires you?

Robert, for sure. But I'm also inspired by what managers like Jho Oakley have built, or Tim Blacksmith and Danny D, who manage Stargate – the empire they've created is so inspiring. It is a privilege to be treated as part of their family. And Riki Bleau, in looking after Naughty Boy, Kyla and a host of other young urban acts.

These days I'm also working with some fantastic young managers, like Aaron Ross, Aaron Mensah and Dani Stephenson, to name a few – a new generation of managers who have this fresh enthusiasm, energy and passion about what they do. That's inspiring to me on a daily basis. Then there's my girl friends – people like [Concord's] Kim Frankiewicz, [CAA's] Emma Banks and [Hart Media's] Jo Hart, who have all achieved incredible things and are all still so enthusiastic about and inclusive in what they do and the creatives they work with. Nothing has held them back.

What were your memories of school and growing up in South Glamorgan?

Growing up in Wales was idyllic. We had fields and horses next door. It was the '70s so mum and dad didn't worry about my brother and I being out by ourselves in the Brecons, picking blackberries.

But the one thing I've since realised,



which didn't occur to me then, was that we were the only Asian family within at least a 100-mile radius, so we stood out. I guess we 'got away with it' because my dad was the local doctor; everyone had to come and see him.

When I was 10, we moved to Birmingham. Yes, there was a strong Indian community, but during my entire time at secondary school I was one of only a handful of non-white girls there for the entire seven years. I did notice that.

What ambitions do you have left personally and for Sound Advice?

We're both very proud of what we've done with Sound Advice over the last 10 years

– we're a relatively small practice that is only music and talent-based. We feel that we punch above our weight, and we're growing; we've taken on three new lawyers this year.

We aspire to be in the magic circle of music law firms: Russell's, Lee & Thompson and Clinton's. But, as a music-only practice, to some extent – at least from the outside – we're only as good as the talent we look after.

We have been very blessed with our clients, who are all very loyal to us, and who all talk about us to their friends and people in the industry. So much of this business is based on word of mouth, and we're the lucky beneficiaries of that.

WHY THE LONG-TERM VIEW SUGGESTS THE STREAMING 'BOOM' IS WAY OVERBLOWN

The recorded music business is headed for amazing times ahead thanks to the uplift of streaming. Or is it? Steve Redmond checks the history books...

When former Chairman of the Federal Reserve System Alan Greenspan coined the phrase 'irrational exuberance' in the mid-'90s it was at the beginning of the first dotcom bubble.

It was a phrase which came to haunt the markets in the Stock Market crash 10 years ago.

Amid 2018's M&A fever in music, could music be in the midst of its own period of irrational exuberance?

When most music industry careers can be counted in single digit years, it's not surprising that few bother to take a long-term view. Even the longest-serving executives tend to be bonused on short-term performance, so you can hardly blame them for not taking a longer-term perspective.

But, amid the breathless enthusiasm for music's growth prospects from Goldman Sachs – memorably taken apart by the ever-sharp Mark Mulligan – amid the Spotify sharelisting, the Sony bid for an enlarged stake in EMI Music Publishing and speculation about a potential Universal IPO or share sale, I'd argue a long-term perspective is exactly what we need.

The fact is that after music's 15-year-long slump following its 2001 peak, we are all in danger of over-estimating what is, in fact, a modest rebound.

It was a point brought into sharp relief for me while reviewing historical BPI sales figures as part of a project about the formation, in 1988, of the British Association of Record Dealers, the original name for ERA.

What is striking in retrospect is the economic background to retailers banding together and asserting their voice for the first time 30 years ago. The run-up to 1988 was a boom-time in music, with seven consecutive years of growth in sales.

1988 was the first year in history in which UK retail revenues from music exceeded £1bn. Most striking of all, thanks mainly to booming



“Amid the breathless enthusiasm from Goldman Sachs, we need a long-term perspective.”

sales of CDs, in the five years from 1983-1988 the value of the UK music market more than doubled.

Doubled: let that sink in. And then compare it with the market of 2018.

In 2017 UK music retail revenues – including, of course, streaming – were £1.2bn. Go back five years to 2012 and they were £1.01bn, an increase over the five years of a modest 18.6%.

Streaming revenues themselves grew much faster – from £77.1m in 2012 to £577.1m in 2017 – by a factor of eight. That's nice, but still significantly less than the growth of CD in its glory period of 1983-1988, when it went from just £2.6m to an astonishing £287.7m. In other words, it grew more than a hundredfold!

The great strength of the CD boom for the music industry was that the format grew rapidly while other formats and sectors – singles, vinyl LPs, cassettes – were all still growing too.

Our great misfortune in 2018 is that

streaming has to shoulder the burden of growth alone. Apart from the niche vinyl format both downloads and CD are in sharp decline. The net result is that modest 18.6% market growth over five years.

The fact is that if the UK market had grown as quickly over the past five years as it did between 1983 and 1988, it would now be worth nearly £2.3bn annually, enough to finally exceed its 2001 peak of £2.1bn – at least in nominal terms, if not after adjusting for inflation.

But if that were to have happened, assuming the declines in downloads and CD sales could not be reversed, subscription streaming would have had to grow over the period not to the £577.1m it achieved in 2017, but to £1.7bn. That's a feat which is hard to square with present-day reality.

So what to make of all this – apart from a slight feeling of unease and suspicion that someone is trying to spoil your day?

It is, first and foremost, to put the current atmosphere of feverish excitement about the growth of streaming into perspective. Streaming is doing well, but it is doing nowhere near as well as did CD in its dramatic growth period. What is more, streaming is growing in a very different market to the 1980s, when four significant formats were all growing simultaneously.

From a historical perspective, streaming is just about holding its own against the decline of other formats. Music remains well off its historical peak of 2001 (when Dido's No Angel was the UK's biggest-selling album of the year). To exceed that peak, adjusted for inflation, the UK market would have to grow to more than £3.2bn, two-and-a-half times what it is now.

To achieve £3.2bn revenues on streaming alone would require the equivalent of 26.6m £120-a-year streaming subscribers in the UK, which feels ambitious to say the least.

This should all serve as a reality check on the current level of celebration around music's return to growth. On the supply side of the industry there is a growing sense that 'the good times are back'. Stock market valuations, the cost of artist and songwriter contracts and even executive remuneration are increasingly predicated on a perception of market growth which simply isn't realistic.

The fact is, neither the '80s nor the '90s are coming back any time soon.



Dido's No Angel: 2001's biggest album with 1.92m UK sales in the year

Those who insist on 'partying like it's 1999' are likely to wake up with a hangover

For those planning to stay in this business a while longer, it's worth remembering that overblown valuations benefit no-one but sellers.

Naturally, investors and shareholders are entitled to do whatever they want with their money and their assets. But let's not pretend that any of this is particularly good news for music, or for artists.

One final sobering thought: as outlined opposite, BPI figures indicate that in 1988 the UK recorded music market generated £1.12bn in sales revenue.

Thirty years later, in 2017, the total was £1.2bn. That means that despite the passage of three decades, the UK market is just 8.5% bigger than it was then. In real terms it is barely a third the size it was.

No valuation based on current market performance in the UK at least can justify the effective doubling in the price of music assets.

As Alan Greenspan, now 92, might say, such valuations evidence an exuberance which is irrational. And, as even my seven-year-old knows, the one thing which is certain about a bubble is that it will burst.

What a difference five years make...

1983-1988: Growth by Sector and Growth Each Year (£m)

	Singles	Vinyl LPs	Cassette	CD	Total	Year on Year % Change
1983	£97.6	£233.4	£147.2	£2.6	£480.8	N/A
1984	£123.9	£228.8	£189.4	£7.2	£549.3	+14.2
1985	£137.6	£250.9	£243.3	£33.5	£665.3	+21.1
1986	£127.9	£239.5	£277.9	£97.1	£742.4	+11.6
1987	£126.9	£256.9	£335.5	£195.2	£914.5	+23.2
1988	£137.1	£287.2	£395.8	£287.7	£1,107.8	+21.1
% difference 1988 versus 1983	+40.5	+23.1	+168.9	+10,965.4	+130.4	

2012-2017: Streaming's Progress Dragged Down By The Rest (£m)

	Singles	Vinyl LPs	Album Downloads	CD	Subscription Streaming	Total	Year on Year % Change
2012	£170.5	£7.3	£181.2	£577.3	£77.1	£1,013.4	N/A
2013	£167.8	£14.7	£232.7	£526.1	£106.0	£1,047.3	+3.3
2014	£142.1	£25.9	£199.3	£488.1	£175.0	£1,030.4	-1.6
2015	£120.8	£42.5	£175.3	£467.6	£253.5	£1,059.7	+2.8
2016	£89.4	£65.6	£127.7	£407.3	£406.6	£1,096.6	+3.5
2017	£69.4	£87.7	£98.8	£368.5	£577.1	£1,201.5	+9.6
% difference 2012 versus 2017	-59.3	+1101.4	-45.5	-36.2	+648.5	+18.6	

Source ERA

Berlin-based SVP Global Corporate Communications for BMG, Steve Redmond is also a long-time consultant to the UK's Entertainment Retailers Association which represents everyone from Spotify to Amazon and Google and the majority of the UK's physical music retailers. He is currently preparing an update to ERA's 2015 'manifesto' – Shaping The Future of Entertainment.

WHAT I WISH I'D KNOWN

Adrian Sykes started out in club promotions at Island before forming his own company and then heading to MCA. He pretty much quit the business aged 40 and then was tempted back to manage a young Scottish singer called Emeli Sandé. Here's what he would tell himself way back when...

Your first musical influences come from what's played at home, and for us, as a black family in London in the '60s and '70s, that was a lot of ska and a lot of blue beat, the forerunner of reggae.

But then on Sunday morning, before we went to church, it was Jim Reeves, or it was Ace Cannon, this very countrified, melodic/soulful thing.

The first music that I considered more my own, was things like The Jackson Five and the Philly soul sound – Gamble & Huff, things like that.

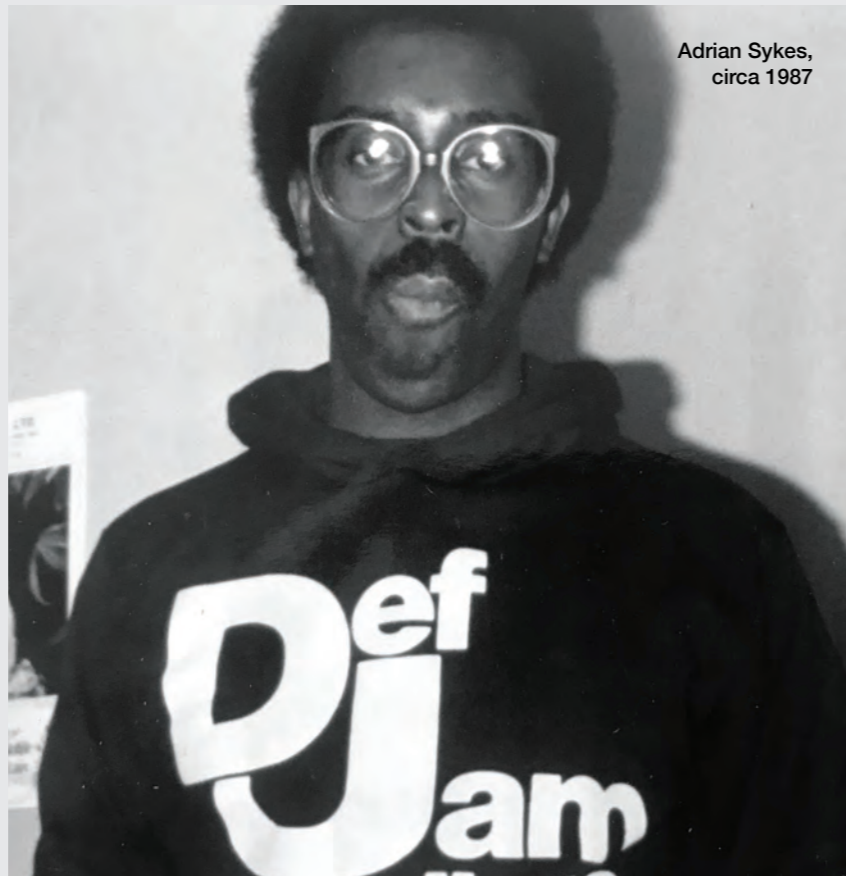
But then at the same time I was also, and still am, a big fan of Elton John. We went to see him loads of times as kids. I also loved Queen, I loved Pink Floyd, I loved Emerson Lake and Palmer; in fact I just loved the majority of things that I heard from schoolmates. I went to a grammar school in Islington where I was one of two black kids in our year, so I was exposed to a lot of different stuff and for me all those styles just co-existed.

One of my great loves at that time was Steely Dan, still is. We appreciated the playing, because a lot of the people who played on Steely Dan records played on other records we loved.

Around 16, punk happened and that was an influence. Being a black kid into punk was always interesting, I never quite had the trousers, but I was a big fan.

I also got into the more underground soul and jazz funk scene in the mid-late '70s and that became a passion. We were listening to DJs like Jeff Young, and of course Pete Tong was just coming on the scene, that allowed us to listen to music that was only accessible in bite size chunks.

There were two things we loved: we had to look great and we had to have the right records, so we'd go and spend what little money we had on the best clothes we could afford and



Adrian Sykes, circa 1987

“Don't take yourself too seriously.”

the best US imports available.

At 18 I went to university and the plan was to become a lawyer. Then one night I was out at a club and I saw this guy talking in a very animated fashion to the DJ, giving him records. I thought, What's he doing?

Luckily, I knew the DJ, so I went and asked him. He said, Oh he's a club promotions guy. That didn't really help! So I asked him, What's that? Well, he gets all the new records, he brings them to us, he takes them round the country, he makes sure we hear the best new music.

Right, that's me. I didn't know the job existed

10 minutes ago, and now I know it's exactly what I want to do with my life.

I left university pretty much straight away. It didn't go down especially well at home, but I got a job in a bank so that I could pay my own way; I could balance earning a living with giving it a go.

I then got a real shock – and some serious motivation – when I was told that, if I put my head down, I was good enough to become a bank manager.

At that point I really had to make the promo thing work, because being a bank manager was not part of the plan!

So I'm going to club nights, I'm helping out, I'm talking to people, getting to know people, building a network, so that if something ever came up, I'd be the person to talk to.

What did come up was a job in club promotions at Island Records, advertised in *Record Mirror*, which we all read for the club charts. By this time, I knew all the players and I knew at the very least I could get through the door, get past the first round.

And that's what happened. I got to the last two, and the other guy was a chap called Tim Westwood. Anyway, I don't know what ever happened to him, but I got the job. That was 1983.

It turned out to be everything I dreamt it would be. Walking into a record company for the first time was like falling down a rabbit hole, it was a completely different world. The only thing you say to yourself for the first few days is, What the...

But it was incredible, I was a young black kid from Tottenham, I never thought I'd get into a position like that, let alone find myself in an environment where I was listened to and treated as an equal.

That was Island: it was interesting, it was eclectic, they were forward-thinking, they were brave, they were adventurous, they were mavericks. Everything you'd want a record company to be, that's what Island was.

Not just in terms of the catalogue that Chris [Blackwell, label founder] had built, but also in the way everyone was emboldened and encouraged. Chris' view was: if you want to have a go, have a go. It was a great place to have a first job.

There was a triumvirate on the club side of things: myself, Julian Palmer and Ashley

“Walking into a record label for the first time was like falling down a rabbit hole.”

Newton, who headed up 4th and B'way. Again, I do worry about whatever happened to those guys, but I'm sure they'll have survived somewhere!

Our first big hit was Jocelyn Brown's *Somebody Else's Guy*, which Julian and I did. I can remember Julian and Ashley sitting me down and playing Run-DMC's *The King Of Rock*. And me, being a soul boy, saying, I don't get it – it's got guitars in it! Then, six plays later, I was in!

In terms of what I'd go back tell myself, the main thing would be: don't take yourself too seriously.

I think when you're young in this business, you're doing stuff that's fast-paced, exciting, different to what your mates are doing, or what your family have done, you can think you are absolutely something you're not.

Ultimately, it's a job. It's a very exciting job, it's a great job, but it's a job and you're lucky to have it. So, have a bit more humility and a bit less ego.

That kind of thing only lasted a few months with me – for some people, it becomes permanent! – but when I first started I really thought I was something special. And of course I wasn't.

Thankfully, my girlfriend at the time, now my wife, said to me, Er, who do you think you are? Seriously, who are you right now?

That was a bit of a light bulb moment. You love and care passionately about what you do, you have to give everything, but, ultimately, whilst music can heal and music can save lives, that's the art and that's the artist.

We, in the business, we're not surgeons or doctors or nurses. Perspective is everything.

Do it with love, do it with humility and do it without trying to kill the person standing next to you.

I'm incredibly competitive, I'm incredibly ambitious, but I'd like to think that I'm fundamentally moralistic. And whilst I'm not going to tell anybody else how to operate, or whether they're right or wrong, there's most definitely a way that I want to do business, and I don't think I've left anybody behind, or trodden on anyone on the way up.

And you know what? If I lost a few things because of that, so be it, I can live with that. I have a code, and if I hadn't lived by it and stuck by it, my mother would have killed me!

‘THE ART OF COMMUNICATION IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING’

It's been seven years since James Sandom set up Red Light Management's UK office. How does he rate the business today – and where does he want his team to take it?

Many music industry success stories have much to thank their spouse for. Typically, that might involve some long-standing emotional support, or perhaps lonely solo nights taking care of the kids – not to mention a reciprocal, undying belief in their partner's talent.

James Sandom, however, has more reason for inter-marital gratitude than most.

The respected UK artist manager was a bassist in what he deems “a few failed bands” in the ‘90s, before he started to earn his stripes on the industry side of the fence. And then, serendipity struck: Sandom's now-missus mentioned that her college friends, Junior Senior, were having a bit of a hit in their native Denmark.

That hit was 2002's *Move Your Feet*, whose stuttering power-pop would become a UK Top 5 smash. Sandom got on a plane, bagged his first notable management client after a few years in the trenches learning his trade, and began his music biz ascent.

Sixteen years later, Sandom is in his seventh year in charge of the UK chapter of Red Light Management, where his innate understanding of what makes artists tick has helped engender long-term loyalty from star clients such as Bastille, The Vaccines, Kaiser Chiefs, Belle & Sebastian and Interpol.

“The aim is to always think creatively, building multi-faceted, long-lasting careers for our artists,” Sandom tells *MBUK*.

He adds: “If great music and ideas combine with stimulating presentation and creative routes to market, we stand a better chance at poking through the pack and sticking in the modern age – where attention is the key – and the path for intelligent, tasteful monetisation becomes easier.”

Red Light, of course, is seen as something of a management powerhouse in the US where its legendary founder, Coran Capshaw, continues to imbue the company with his unique artist-first philosophy.



Nilüfer Yanya



Photo: Molly Daniels

It was Capshaw who tempted Sandom over from his Supervision management company to launch Red Light UK back in 2011, and the British exec continues to view his American CEO with obvious reverence.

“Coran’s entrepreneurial approach very much encourages thinking outside the box, continually,” says Sandom. “Out of that has come a lot of collaborative work within Red Light. You broaden your horizons when you learn from others and one of the truly invaluable benefits in the last seven years has been working alongside some hugely experienced managers, marketeers and creative minds within our business.”

A good example of this internal collaboration can currently be seen with the comeback of Bastille, co-managed between Sandom and Red Light US president Will Botwin, which is being boosted by a streaming-friendly collaborative single with rising global dance star (and fellow Red Light client) Marshmello.

Red Light UK has recently beefed up its own dance/electronic credentials, meanwhile, with the hire of Tony Garvey and Marc Thomas, whose roster of DJs and producers includes Shift K3Y.

Elsewhere, Belle & Sebastian have just announced their curation of The Boaty Weekender – the first cruise music festival in Europe

which will see a 3,000 capacity ship set sail from Barcelona on August 8, 2019, for five days. (Laura Taylor from Red Light’s London team has spearheaded the plans for the event with AEG & Sixthman, using her expertise producing and curating Mumford & Sons’ Gentleman of the Road Stopover events.)

“It’s a hugely exciting time to be working with a diverse roster and a forward thinking, very well resourced company,” says Sandom, whose Red Light UK now has more than 25 employees.

“It may be a romantic view, but what excites me most and keeps me fully motivated to work relentlessly on the path ahead is doing business the right way, with creativity and artistic quality at the core. I don’t think there’s another independent music company out there – let alone an artist management business – with current success across a roster as broad. And the list of new emerging talent and projects heading down the runway in 2018/19 is even broader.”

New signings to watch out for at Red Light UK include Nilüfer Yanya (ATO), Punctual (RCA), Lion (Fiction/Caroline), the debut record from Radiohead’s Ed O’Brien, and Delilah Montagu who recently signed with Ferdy Unger-Hamilton at Columbia.

Here, *MBUK* talks in-depth with Sandom about his plans for

“The music industry hasn’t always been PR’d in the best way.”

Bastille



Photo: Ewen Spencer

Red Light UK, the firm’s achievements so far – and the immense challenge of breaking a new artist in 2018...

Red Light has a wealth of knowledge in-house across the UK and US. What can you do yourselves that you don’t need a label partner to achieve?

What we can do and what we’d rather do are two different things! A good label partner can bring intelligence, resource, finance and hopefully a degree of additional creativity to how you take a product to market. We can directly manage relationships with DSPs, as well as our own A&R and content creation, plus we have the ability to access third-party money in terms of sponsorship, branding etc. There’s a whole menu of possibilities within Red Light without involving anyone from the outside, but often that is not the path we choose. Essentially, we’ve strengthened our resources to improve our own knowledge in conversations and actions – to become better partners.

What about the A&R process? How much A&R are you doing yourselves and how does that relationship work with labels?

Amongst the UK majors, there’s a drastic spectrum of belief between those that are basing their philosophy on A&R and those who don’t prioritise it anywhere near as much – those who operate as a service to take music to market. How much A&R we do ourselves varies depending on the partner involved and the artist.

We also see a different ethos with artists at different stages in their career. If we’re looking at the more experienced artists, they’re generally mindful that another creative opinion from someone [at a label] who may be younger than them, or completely tuned in to the modern business, is likely to be a voice that should be heard; not always agreed with, but always heard.

Quite a number of new artists we speak with arrive with a certain mentality which, partly, is a result of the music business not always being PR’d in the best way. The idea being: they don’t want to sign a [label] deal and if they do sign one, don’t let them change anything!

As ever, it’s about the right partner – there needs to be chemistry and creative trust. I’ll say this for labels: in a world where there’s a million things to do and the catalyst for what generates real success has never been harder to measure, you want guidance. If the manager, the artist, the A&R, the label president and marketing team all share in good ideas, that’s the perfect collaborative cocktail.

Kaiser Chiefs recently signed to Polydor after working on a services basis with Caroline. Are you finding that the frontline major labels are more open to different kind of deals than they would have been five or ten years ago?

Yes. The nature of this [Kaiser’s] deal is different to a standard [frontline label deal]. It’s tailored to suit Polydor’s approach in maximising the potential on the path ahead. The reasons for doing

Kaiser Chiefs



Photo: Darryl North

this are largely driven by twofold ambition: ambition of the band for more commercial success, and ambition of Polydor in their belief they can help deliver it for Kaiser Chiefs.

The band are quite unique amongst their peers in that they still don't feel they've achieved their peak coming into their seventh album, their hunger for more is infectious. In this age where you have a trusted [music] brand that resonates deep with the DNA of British culture, a lot can happen.

Liam Gallagher's a good case in point. The British public aren't naturally interested in 95% of music being released, but they're interested in a brand, a personality and identity they know and trust. You need to figure out (a) the record to do the business, and instill fresh belief and (b) how to reach those people.

The team Ben [Mortimer] and Tom [March] have built at Polydor are first class; young, enthusiastic, intelligent, modern thinkers. From the moment [the Kaisers signing] became a loose discussion, they were all over it – they were determined to make the most of the opportunity. There's a reason for everyone to believe in another chapter for the band.

Has the Liam Gallagher record been a bit transformational for the 'alternative rock' world?

It has undoubtedly turned heads. Warner Bros and the management team around Liam have done an exceptional job. From my perception, when you boil it down, they've played to Liam's strengths. They've made a record that he can deliver with passion, regardless of who co-wrote the songs. His personality has driven so much of it, his use of social media, him front and centre in the media, talking to people, being who he is. There are some of those elements that make us think, 'Do Kaisers have a shot in a similar manner?' And 100%, I believe they do.

Is there more openness these days to the idea of alternative rock acts working with outside songwriters? Is it an easier discussion with artists now compared to the earlier part of your career?

Yes. What has changed is the transient way in which we all consume music – the idea of thumbing through the small print on record or CD sleeves seems out of time now. The modern generation know whether they like a song or not within 30 seconds. They don't know who's written it, or frankly care. So long as the artist can deliver those songs with passion and integrity – as per the Liam example – and it makes a great master recording, really it's down to the artist's choice.

It's no different to the '50s and '60s – people would cut each other's records, work collaboratively on songs – no-one looked down on the big Motown hits if the artist didn't write them. There's a balance to it. Our LA office represents Portugal. The Man. There's some involved collaboration/production on the song that has single-handedly changed their 15-year career into a global

success story [Feel It Still].

It's magical for them, an artist of their ilk having that degree of blockbuster success, because no-one begrudges it. Everyone applauds them having a moment in the commercial spotlight.

Do you have concerns about how people consume music today? And about the idea of the album getting disintegrated?

There are pluses and negatives. The cons are the nature of a transient track-driven market generally means the emotional connection with an artist isn't the same as an emotional connection with a song. You can have any number of the frontline DJs in the world with a great featured artist vocal, the song can be massive – but the days where the featured artist would have had a guaranteed catapult forward in their profile have gone; now the public don't always remember him or her, they just remember the song. It's a difficult challenge for us all.

Red Light – probably more than any of our perceived peers – is in the business of building careers and artist longevity, while welcoming the big hits when they happen. Playing the difficult

attention game – getting something to stick when the natural path is for nothing to stick – is quite complex.

Then you think about the knock-on effect: 'I want you to buy arena show tickets', or 'I want you to see us at a festival, and I know you love the first record but we've released a couple since and you've not really

listened to them properly other than the one song on the radio'. The business is adapting to these challenges, and it's a transitional phase.

The two leading partners out there delivering music have differing models at the moment: one is very vocally trying to support the body of work, and the other has an algorithmic approach to propel the biggest tracks to become as massive as possible. Both philosophies are good for business, and to be encouraged in my opinion. But as a management company with a spread of career artists, we're in the trenches looking at the best ways to navigate the landscape.

It's an exciting time to be in this business because the different paths, if navigated correctly, can all lead somewhere. You can get your music heard, but making it stick and monetising it – that's a harder navigation. Aside from great music and artistry that turns heads, it requires intelligence, resource and people who know exactly how to create that footprint in a variety of areas.

How has your journey changed at Red Light in the past seven years?

When I stop and think about it, I'm pleased with the way it's going – I love the personalities we have here, the exceptional talent we have in our team, and the business we're building. When we first got going in 2011, I probably didn't quite envisage we'd have come this far, but I'm glad we have. I'm still learning every day

and hugely enjoy continuing to collaborate with so many great people within Red Light. Special mention should go to Will Botwin, Jessica Lord, Phil Costello, Cerne Canning, Lisa Ward, Peter McGaughrin and Laura Taylor, who have been especially influential on the path in recent years.

It's been a significant period of growth for the company globally, and the expansion has been healthy, particularly in certain areas – leading to an unparalleled market share in Nashville, and the strongest footprint in the electronic world.

I guess one of the characteristics I bought to the company, and that we as a team believe in, is a roster anchored with career artists – and I include those on record one or two with an ambition for this path.

Whether it's Belle & Sebastian, The Vaccines, Interpol, Franz Ferdinand.... they are all very healthy businesses with longevity, and artists with a desire for continued creative and commercial growth. They have something we enjoy fighting for, and which in the modern attention game is increasingly rare: fan loyalty.

You made the move to Red Light after building Supervision into a major success with Cerne Canning. Was there any trepidation about making the jump?

There were a few different thoughts about people we could have partnered with. One of the main attractions to Red Light was the free thinking, the entrepreneurial drive and the history – which needed no explanation or embellishment – of building careers. Fifty percent or more of the roster had long careers with a deep anchor to the [Red Light] business; that combined with a sense of really good people was very attractive. Coran and Bruce [Eskowitz] have been consistently smart, hiring great people with the right ethics and ideas to intelligently monetise their artists' careers. This is not a company that instinctively gets caught up in the glitz and the glamour informing its decisions.

Has the growing power of artists in negotiations affected label deals in recent years?

Everyone knows when we went through a low ebb of the masters business, the structure and nature of deals was, at times, quite challenging - on the basis labels were understandably looking at monetising the old sinking ship: 'What ballast can we stick outside the boat to make sure we float and still attract you to do business with us?'

Some of that extra stuff, given the growth in the masters business, over the past few years, is now being cut aside again, or at least you're able to negotiate it back to a sensible place. In the process of doing good business, you repeat the good experiences and you don't repeat the bad ones – there has never been a greater variety of choice in how you build a team around an Artist, but in contrast to the vast array of options to enter the market, the core

ethics have a stronger value than ever – good people and good music stand strong.

There's typically a high turnover of clients at management companies – we've seen First Access Entertainment in the headlines for that recently. You seem to have rare artist loyalty. What do you think the factors behind that are?

I'm pleased you've noticed it, and it's true within Red Light. I can only speak from my own perspective, but I believe we provide a balanced, measured approach, with a focus on building careers, not the instant hype or pressure of, 'If this next single doesn't work we're all doomed'. This is a very well resourced environment where no question goes unanswered, and where somewhere in the knowledge base of the company there's always a way to solve a problem.

Some of the high turnover of acts at other businesses has to do with instability; if we're all ships in the ocean and a storm comes along, some of those ships tip over. [Red Light] doesn't – we might rock for a minute, but we're pretty stable! It's very similar with staff; for a company with the scale we have, there's a very low turnover of people coming and going. It speaks volumes for the nature of the business Coran has built in America – which I'm doing my best to replicate in London.

Does the ownership of Red Light play into that stability?

The ownership and structure of Red Light is quite straightforward. It makes the process of actioning a good idea easy. If you have a creative thought and a path where there's a degree of sensible monetisation underneath it, there's generally a solution. We're low on red tape and complications. For a company with scale, Red Light has the energy and principles of a large family business. The drive and help from above is truly supportive, rather than dictatorial. Right through the spine of the company there are genuine music lovers, passionate and knowledgeable about music, a helpful force underpinning the stability and understanding of the business at large.

When you have such long-standing relationships with acts, it's inevitable they're going to have commercial ups and downs - especially in this track-obsessed age. Do you have to be frank with difficult news to earn the level of trust you have with certain artists?

It's a balance of being motivational and ambitious with an artist, but also being honest as to what's going right and what isn't. The art of communication is the most important thing in artist management, full stop. There's so much information out there, you're looking to sieve through it so the artist has all the components and information they need to focus on, to do the best job they can.



The Vaccines

One of the aspects that keeps me enjoying this business so much is managing that balance of commercial, critical and creative expectation. I still wake up every day and love what I do – the volume of questions that need answering and creative thoughts that need discussing has never been higher, this mix in the modern business is stimulating.

Alternative rock seems to be suffering a bit in the age of streaming. Do you think that there will be a diversification of genre on these services in the future, in terms of what gets the lion's share of focus?

I think so. For these DSPs to fulfil true commercial potential, it's in their interests that there's a level playing field for all genres.

The algorithmic approach makes big songs even bigger – which has been amazing for certain records we've worked with. But I also think there's a desire to try to improve the issue you're talking about.

Overall, as a company, we're doing good business in the current landscape. There are those acts that are readily supported to the highest level and those who are in more difficult terrain in the streaming age. But maybe as a result of how it's been for the past couple of years, other things are starting to happen. In consecutive weekends I recently watched Everything Everything and The Vaccines from our roster back-to-back at Ally Pally in London, and the level of fan dedication was almost cultish, for both – fans more passionate than ever.

It's like there's a counter-culture brewing. It reminds me of the mid-to-late '80s independent scene that evolved into Madchester and rave culture. There's a degree of, You normal people have your thing, with mainstream streaming playlists, and I've got my thing over here.

That's not necessarily a bad thing, kids certainly have something to kick against in modern global culture – history suggests that what happens next could potentially get very interesting.

NOW
THAT'S WHAT I CALL MUSIC!
1000

NOW
THAT'S WHAT
WE CALL A
TON OF HITS



NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL A SERIES OF COMPILATION ALBUMS THAT CHANGED THE FACE OF THE UK MUSIC MARKET

Next month sees the release of Now That's What I Call Music 100, bringing up a fine century for the most iconic and important compilation series in the history of the music business. MBUK celebrates a landmark moment.

In the '70s, compilations had connotations. Bad connotations. Crass artwork. Cost-saving cover versions. They were, largely, lazy. They were, in the public's mind (and in reality), naff. They were basically albums for people who didn't like (or certainly didn't care about) music.

But, they made the record companies money and required pretty much no effort. Well, maybe a few headaches for the legal department, but, screw 'em, it was essentially free cash.

And then, in 1983, thanks to a love struck label head and a meeting of minds (followed by a clash of memories) between a lawyer and a marketing man, a brand was born that would change everything, sell hundreds of millions of units and make compilations if not exactly cool, then at least professional, credible and very, very bankable.

That brand was Now That's What I Call Music and next month sees the release of collection number 100 in the core series (there are myriad spin-offs, the most successful and plentiful being themed around Christmas, Summer, Dance and Disney).

It has seen formats (and plenty of careers) come and go, it has been written off as endangered by downloads and obsolete in the age of streaming, but it has adapted and thrived and remains the most famous and successful compilation series not just in UK music history, but in the business today.

The two custodians of the brand are Steve Pritchard and Peter Duckworth, consultants to the Now That's What I Call Music company, jointly owned by



Steve Pritchard



Peter Duckworth

Universal and Sony since 2013.

The new equity split came about after Universal acquired previous co-owner EMI (gaining 100% control of Now in the process. Oops!) and was required to divest assets to get the overall deal past European

“Put it this way, I don't think they believed in market research.”

Commission regulators. Pritchard and Duckworth did try and lead a management buyout of the brand at the time, but instead were set-up in an autonomous company that sits between the two majors, ensuring fair play to all labels and a continuing boon to the business as a whole.

They have been working together on the brand in some capacity since Now 19, when Duckworth joined Pritchard in the Virgin catalogue and compilation division.

Recalling the shoddy state of pre-Now compilations, Pritchard relays bitter personal experience. “K-Tel and Ronco used to micro-groove the tracks. My first album was actually a K-Tel hits thing that I bought because it had Derek and The Dominoes on – and when I got home and played it the damn thing ended half way through the guitar solo.”

Jon ‘Webbo’ Webster tells his detailed story of how Now changed all that (or, more accurately, steamrolled all that, on page 81), but Pritchard's summary is. “They were looking at this sub-standard product and thought, quite rightly, We could do this a lot better. And that coincided with a period where everything



NOW AND THEN: From 1 to 100 via 44 - the biggest-seller in the Now series



they [Virgin] touched was turning to gold, not just domestically, but internationally. It was a great age for British pop generally, and Now was created in that perfect storm.”

Duckworth, meanwhile, recalls a romantic detail of the background to that rather odd name: “A lot of people know that it came from the poster [page 78], but it's actually quite interesting where the poster itself came from. Richard Branson basically fancied a woman who worked in an antique shop in Portobello Road and he used to find excuses to go in there.

“One day, just so he could go in, he bought that poster, with the pig saying, Now That's What I Call Music. It was just an excuse to go into the shop, really. But he gave it to Simon Draper, who was head of A&R, and it went up behind his desk.

“They were sat in the office, brainstorming for names, and there it was. To cap it all off he later married the woman in the antique shop [then Joan Templeman, they have been married for 42 years].”

Pritchard continues: “I suppose it is a slightly odd name, but it's like band names, you grown into them. The Beatles is quite a daft name for a group, when you think about it.

“They did make some interesting decisions, though. Those early TV ads were strange. The very first one had Tracey Ullman talking all the way through it in this very chatty sort of unscripted way.

Then they used Brian Glover as the voice of the pig [who appeared on the cover for some of the early releases]. Put it this way, I don't think they believed in market research... [every TV ad can be seen on the Now website].

“Actually, no, they did do some research, and that was to do with the numbering. They were very concerned that the

“There's so much data now, it's slightly more complicated than it was.”

numbers would start to make it seem old. I remember they said it shouldn't ever go to double figures. Then they were worried about 21, they were paranoid about it! What would the teenagers think of 21?! I think actually that was more a reflection of their own fear of aging.”

When EMI and Virgin were joined in the venture by Polygram in the mid/late '80s, Now became an unstoppable force and, eventually, the Sony/BMG/Warner-backed rival series, Hits, folded leaving Now as the irrefutable go-to pop package.

The compilation process has both stayed fundamentally the same and changed quite radically throughout the decades. From Now 3 it was overseen by Ashley Abram,

who was sheltered from label interference and left to focus solely (and agnostically) on gathering together the 30 biggest hits of the period, something he did perfectly up until Now 80.

Since Now 81, with Pritchard and Duckworth heading up an independent entity, they, as part of a wider team, are ultimately responsible for the track-listing.

But, as Pritchard points out, the truth is “it's always been compiled by the public, really, because it's very simply the biggest hits of the last four months. There is zero subjectivity.”

That's the constant. The variable is what defines a hit. Pritchard says: “There is so much data washing around now that it is slightly more complicated than it was. Where

once it was sales and only sales, now, for every album we have a huge spreadsheet containing every source of data for every track. And of course it's caught up in a wider debate about what constitutes a hit and what metrics (to what degree) should be represented in the chart; it's constantly evolving.

“But if you look back at the different eras of Now, there have always been issues. If you wind the clock back to the early '90s, the big talking point was formatting, you'd get records coming out on half a dozen formats and really spiking in week one.

“Now we're in the era of collaborations, I think. And there's quite a divide between regional radio playlist pop hits and UK

urban/grime hits making it through streaming, which is another part of that ‘What is a hit?’ debate.”

Does a fractured landscape make for more eclectic compilations? Duckworth doesn't think so: “No, because if you look back on some of the earlier ones, there's a huge amount of eclecticism. You'll find Radiohead, The Levellers, Iron Maiden. Some people definitely discover bands through Now, especially when they're young. Their parents might buy it for them for the pop, but then they hear Radiohead and think, Hello, what's this...”

Something else that has stayed relatively constant and remarkably strong are sales. Duckworth reflects: “The Q4 numbered Now is somewhere between one and two million. The two which come out earlier in the year usually sell somewhere between 600,000 and a million. Although looking back there are odd releases which sold fewer, times when the repertoire didn't quite hit.”

There was, for instance, a dip during Britpop when, as Pritchard says, “it was a great period for UK music, but fans were into the artists and their individual albums, not compilations”.

A bigger threat than even the Gallaghers arrived with the industry's transition to



Robbie Williams



“The series forms a fantastic record of the most successful songs of the past 35 years and the fact that it has reached its 100th edition is testament to its enduring appeal through a time of immense changes in the industry, which has seen it released on numerous formats from vinyl and cassette, through CD to downloads and streaming. Everyone remembers their first Now album and these collections of chart-topping songs remain a firm favourite with music fans of all ages. Long may they continue!”

Pete Leggatt, VP,
Sales and Business Development, Sony Music UK

digital, first via downloads and then into streaming, or so most people thought.

Suddenly, (pretty much) all catalogue was just a click away and everyone could create their own compilation. Pritchard admits that, at first, there were some bumps in the road: “iTunes were really resistant at the time, they felt that they were the brand. And there were licensing issues, because licensing tracks for digital albums was considered completely alien.

“Eventually, after negotiations with the majors, we convinced them to extend the licence from physical to cover digital bundles, which sounds like a simple thing now, but at the time was a lengthy process.

“And then, once compilations were in the iTunes store, they sold really well, people could see immediately they were great value.



The 10 Best-Selling Now Albums

NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL CHRISTMAS (4,300,000)

NOW 44 (2,000,000+)

NOW 83 (1,537,939)

NOW 77 (1,385,795)

NOW 47 (1,373,885)

NOW 50 (1,369,000)

NOW 80 (1,358,207)

NOW 56 (1,357,328)

NOW 86 (1,309,788)

NOW 68 (1,265,417)

Most Featured Artists

30 Robbie Williams, including five as part of Take That, and the charity projects Helping Haiti (NOW 75), Justice Collective (NOW 84), Artists for Grenfell (NOW 97) and World Music Project 1 Giant Leap (NOW 52)

26 Calvin Harris

25 Rihanna

24 David Guetta, Kylie

21 Girls Aloud

20 Coldplay, Katy Perry, U2

NOW FACT FRENZY

1. Now That's What I Call Music albums have clocked up over 120 million sales across 35 years.
2. Now That's What I Call Music compilations have been the most popular CDs every year since 2010 - except for 2015, when Adele's 25 beat it.
3. The first ever Now compilation sold 1.1 million copies in 1983.
4. Now 1 featured 28 artists. Kajagoogoo, UB40 and Culture Club had two songs each, while Peabo Bryson and Roberta Flack doubled up for the duet Tonight, I Celebrate My Love.
5. Eight artists on Now 1 have never made another appearance, including Mike Oldfield and Bonnie Tyler.
6. So far, the Now series has featured 2,069 artists.
7. 98 (out of 99) Now albums have reached No. 1 in the Official Charts (the exception was Now 4 in 1984, which was kept off the top spot by rival compilation brand, Hits).
8. Now 88 boasted the most No. 1 singles, with 15 chart-toppers.
9. By contrast, Now 16 and Now 94 are the only albums not to feature any No. 1 singles.
10. It would take over 250 hours to listen to 1-100 Now albums.
11. Over half of the population have bought (or been given) a Now numbered compilation album.
12. Now compilations have spent 654 weeks at No. 1
13. The first Now album to be released as a download was Now 62 in 2005.
14. The most successful volume to date is 1999's Now 44, which sold over two million copies and is the biggest selling compilation album ever.
15. Now 70 sold 383,002 units in its first week, the biggest ever sales of any Now album in a week.
16. With 4.3m sales, Now That's What I Call Christmas is the sixth biggest selling album of all time, accumulating more sales than Michael Jackson's Thriller and Pink Floyd's The Dark Side of the Moon.
17. Every UK home owns, on average, over four Now albums.
18. Now 85 is the best-selling digital album in the series.
19. UB40 appeared 13 times on the first 10 albums, more than any other artist.
20. Girls Aloud have achieved the highest number of consecutive appearances - 13 albums - with a track in every album from Now 54 to Now 66.

“Also, the compilation mentality went with the devices. Listening to early incarnations of what would become known as playlists as opposed to whole albums was quite natural in that emerging environment.”

Duckworth adds: “It had the side effect that for any track on the Now digital compilation, sales went up quite substantially. People would go onto iTunes, look at the listing, think, I don’t want all those, and they’d go and buy three or four of them.”

“That was the start of realising the power of Now, and that developed into streaming, as a trusted curator, but choose what you like, listen on shuffle or whatever you fancy.”

Alex McCloy, the firm’s head of digital, says: “The independence of Now and the impartiality of the compiling process is important there, because it isn’t Apple pushing their playlists, or Spotify pushing their playlists; we’re not pushing anything, we really are just giving you the biggest hits.”

“When you come to a [streaming] platform like that, with all that repertoire, one of the first responses is, I don’t know what to listen to! Well, here are all the latest massive chart hits, or here’s a really well curated genre playlist.”

“Now has never been defined by format and it continues to embrace everything. Wherever and however people want to listen to music, Now is there with a very recognisable brand and a very consistent and simple proposition.”

As well as a presence on all streaming platforms, Now has also launched its own app, through which, for a fiver a month, users can access Now playlists and all the numbered Now albums. McCloy reports that “at Christmas we were sitting in the top 10 in the App Store and at one point we were doing more installs per day than Facebook”.

Across all platforms, Now is generating hundreds of millions of streams per year and, whilst physical decline is running at 20+% per year and download decline is more like a plummet towards death, Duckworth believes that “the sum of our parts and the strength of the brand is as



“Now has enabled us to introduce new music to people for over 30 years and remains relevant and viable in the age of streaming because it is a trusted brand for music curation; be that for consumption via physical product purchase, download or Now playlist streams. Making it to 100 is a fantastic achievement, worthy of celebration, but the party continues, without a doubt.”

David Hawkes, MD,
Commercial Division, Universal Music UK



strong as ever”.

Recent demographic research by the team confirm that Now’s appeal is certainly as broad as ever. “We know people tend to get their first Now album at around eight-10,” says Duckworth. “It’s massive for 12-16 year-olds, then it dips as people formulate their distinct tastes and build their own musical world.”

“Then, at 24, it starts to go back up and gets more significant as people start using it to stay in touch with music or buy it as a family gift. Then where it used to cut off at the 40s, it now goes up to 60+. Not many brands cross the generations like that, maybe Star Wars in terms of such a wide demographic.”

Pritchard adds: “That opens up new vistas for us on the non-numbered Now albums. Five years ago, for instance, we’d

never have thought Now Country would be a best-seller, it would have been seen as way off the mark for our demographic, but there’s been that shift [and an increase in the genre’s popularity and credibility, of course] and it’s sold around 170,000 units.”

To herald next month’s Now That’s What I Call Music 100, there will be a fanfare as loud as anything since (and including) when the Now 1 TV ad interrupted Corrie for a full minute in 1983.

For a start, that original compilation will be re-issued on CD and vinyl, whilst 100 itself will be available on CD, vinyl and, oh yes, cassette – as well as all digital formats, of course. It will also come, for the first time in the series’ history, with a record that hasn’t charted, from an artist not signed to a record label. No, this isn’t the most mainstream signifier yet of a disrupted industry, and that artist is not Chance The Rapper. Instead, it will be the winner of a GMTV competition to record a cover version (at Abbey Road, no less) for inclusion in the track-listing.

In the autumn, post-100, there will be a five disc set called, brilliantly, Now That’s What I Call Now That’s What I Call Music, featuring one track from each of the 100 compilations.

And then, even whilst the Champagne still has a bit of fizz left, it will be time for Now 101. And then 102, and then 103...

‘There were two of us in that room, and one of us definitely thought of it’

John ‘Webbo’ Webster, the man widely credited with inventing Now That’s What I Call Music, tells the series’ origin story – and explains why he’s not claiming sole authorship.

When, where and how did Now That’s What I Call Music first emerge as an idea?

It was 1983, I was marketing manager at Virgin, and we were having what turned out to be our best ever year; we had hits coming out of our proverbials, starting with Phil Collins’ You Can’t Hurry Love at the beginning of the year, which was one of only two UK No.1s for him. Phil’s actually never had a number one that he’s written himself, because the other one was Groovy Kind Of Love.

Anyway, after that we had Heaven 17, we had Japan, Zoom by Fat Larry’s Band. Then, in Q4, we had three number one albums in three successive weeks: Labour of Love by UB40, Genesis by Genesis and Colour By Numbers by Culture Club [the run was actually interrupted for two weeks by Paul Young’s No Parlez on CBS]. And there were all the singles that went with those albums; we were flying.

Anyway, Stephen Navin was our lawyer and he was the one who got all the compilation requests, from the big three at the time: Ronco, K-Tel and Arcade, who were sending in their telexes (we didn’t even have fax yet) offering increasing amounts of money, increasingly good (but still not actually good) royalty rates, requests for exclusives, for which they’d pay more money, etc.

It was a nightmare for Stephen, he’s sitting there with all these parameters, multiple requests from multiple sources, all slightly different. He called me in one day and said, What are we going to do about this mess?

We looked at it, studied it, thought



about it and then one of us had the light bulb moment: why don’t we do it ourselves?

Would you like to disclose which one of you had that light bulb moment?

No, because I think it was me and he thinks it was him. So we’ve agreed a

“Getting the industry to do anything together is nigh on impossible.”

party line. All I know for sure is that there were two of us in that room and one of us definitely thought of it [laughs]. We then literally got a piece of paper out of the bin and started scribbling some numbers on it. After which: wow. Then we went to see Simon Draper, showed him the numbers, told him our idea, and he said, Oh, that’s interesting...

This was in September. And, whilst

we had a lot of hits, the next step was, thinking we might be better to do this with someone else – someone who also had a lot of hits.

Was the original idea to have a Virgin compilation?

Tentatively, yes. We were still operating out of Vernon Yard at the time though, and you would not believe we were operating a business like that out of somewhere so small. I think maybe we didn’t have the confidence to do it ourselves. We had the money and we had the hits, but we decided to do it in partnership. So we went to EMI, because at the time they had Duran Duran, Kajagoogoo, Queen, Paul McCartney...

Is that why you went to EMI?

I don’t know, I don’t think we were distributed by them at the time, I think we were distributed by CBS, so it wasn’t that. I don’t know, the other labels were much more... competitive? Aggressive, maybe?

Also, roll back some time and Peter Jamieson [EMI MD] definitely did have the idea of doing a pan-industry compilation that we would all own and control between us. He had floated that.

But, as I’ve often said to him and others since, that was never going to work because, as I’ve learnt, getting the industry to do anything together is nigh on impossible; someone has to just get on and do it and then the rest will join in.

What was EMI’s reaction?

I always described walking into EMI back then as going into a sponge. You would shout from reception and the noise would just die in the air...

but yes, they were positive. Then we had a meeting with all the top people, in Simon Draper's office, where we thrashed it out, a 50/50 deal.

Then we had to come up with the title, which of course came from the poster on the wall

Did you think it was a stupid title?

No, I think we'd been struggling, throwing a few ideas around that didn't stick, and this just seemed to work. I thought it was a bit long, maybe. But you see, looking back, no one was thinking about building a brand. We didn't even think of Virgin as a brand, Richard [Branson] did, he knew what he was building. But we weren't thinking in terms of brands at all, we were just selling records and we were putting out an album that needed a title. We certainly weren't planning on another 99!

The next thing to think about was logistics. We talked to the head of production, told him what the timeline was, and he said, Nope, can't be done – as heads of production do.

We asked him why not and his response was, Where do you want me to start? The cover, for instance, a double cover, the quickest we could do that is a week and you want them in a day. Can't be done.

Richard, as was his way, just kept on: Why? Why? Why?

And eventually he got on to the people who actually made the sleeves, phoned them up and asked them if they could do it in 24 hours – and they said yeah, sure, if that's what you need Richard.

The head of production actually said to me later on, when I was MD, Jon, I can get any record out, any time, in 24 hours. What I can't do is get every record out, all the time, in 24 hours...

What was the actual timeline?

Well we wanted to come out last week November/first week December, and by the time we'd decided we were definitely doing it, that gave us a three-week deadline. We had to do



the clearances, we had to talk to the artists, some of whom, of course, were not in favour of compilations and some of whom were swayed by the higher royalty rates we were offering them. They were on half-rate because they were on a compilation, but it was still a damn sight more than they were getting from third party compilations.

The most arm-twisting was done on Simple Minds for Waterfront, because

“We didn't test it. It went beserk. It went off like a rocket.”

it was just coming out. Bruce Findlay [manager] was very resistant. Of course, the single came out, went in at number 18 or something, then our album came out and it dropped the following week – it actually went back up again after that, but we still got a lot of I-told-you-so.

How did you compile that first one?

It was relatively easy, as I remember. We wanted to make sure it was quality, we wanted the tracks to all be

genuine hits. At one point, I'm sure, someone from EMI said, Can we put such-and-such on? No, no you can't, that's the point. And there were some third parties on there; there's an Island track on there, for instance, Will Powers' *Kissing With Confidence**. I think we were handling Island at the time through our sales force. So there were things like that, from companies we had a relationship with.

How much of a fanfare did it get at launch? Did you treat it like it was a landmark moment?

The first thing we did was go and see Smiths and Boots and Woolies and tell them, We're going to change the compilations market; we're going to put quality on the shelves and we're going to do it properly; it's going to be classy. Because, previously it was pretty cheap and nasty.

Of course they didn't like the 25% margin, but we'd gone down that road over the years, so people were begrudgingly accepting of it.

We also said, We're not test marketing this, we're going Bam: a 60 second ad in the middle of Coronation Street on the day of launch.

And then it went beserk. It went off like a rocket.

We'd set a target of 250,000, to make it worthwhile doing it ourselves, and we sold a million copies in four weeks. It was just insane.

And what was the rest of the industry's reaction to the success? Did the phone ring off the hook?

Well after the first album, Ashley [Abram] came in to head up the compiling and take a neutral position in terms of labels, and very soon after that we decided to open the doors. Everyone would pitch to him, and he was completely impartial, only interested in creating the best compilation. He'd been the singles buyer at Record Merchandisers (later Entertainment UK) so he'd been buying more singles than anyone in



Phil Collins' *You Can't Hurry Love* was track one on the first ever *Now That's What I Call Music!*

the country.

So *Now II* [the only *Now* to use a Roman numeral] came out in March 1984, and we were tentative, because maybe this had been a one-off. But it sold really well at a traditionally quiet time of the year.

Then for 3 we went to an advertising agency called McCormack's, and they put the pig on the cover. Ah, the pig. That divided people.

Where did you stand?

Um, well I think my line was people were at least talking about it.

And then *Now 4* was your second Christmas...

Yes, and at this point, CBS, Warners and BMG thought, Right, we can do this, and they launched *Hits*, which meant we didn't have any of their stuff on 4. And 4 is the only [numbered] *Now* album not to go to number one, because it was held off by the first *Hits*. They beat us.

The other story, which rankles to this day, is that at about that time, Chrysalis launched *Wow! That's What I Call Music*. They did one album. We took them to court for passing off and we lost!

You must have seen *Hits* as a

genuine rival and a real roadblock on what had looked like an easy path to long-term success?

We did, yes, but then some time around then Universal came in with us, and that tilted it back in our favour. *Hits* stuck around for a while, but I think they eventually realised that we were winning and that we'd built a better brand – and the amount of time and effort they were putting into being second wasn't worth it. You know you've only got to have one stiff to have 75,000 albums clogging up your warehouse. So they came to us and said, Let's do another deal, a slightly better deal, and we'll collapse *Hits*.

What's the secret behind getting to 100?

Well it's interesting, when digital came in everyone said, This is finished. And of course it went from strength to strength. My theories are that, first of all, the industry got rid of CD singles quicker than it should have done – because they were becoming economically difficult.

But that left a huge chunk of the market who hadn't embraced digital, and let's face it the vast majority hadn't, and if they wanted to buy hit singles on CD, they only had one choice: buy a *Now* album.

And where do you think it stands in the era of streaming?

Well what we actually have is a multi-faceted market that started in 2005 and which is still evolving. There are still lots of people who don't do digital. People are consuming music in lots of ways. Even if you just look at streaming, they are consuming in lots of different ways: sometimes label playlists, sometimes Spotify playlists, sometimes their own playlists, sometimes albums, sometimes individual tracks.

It's a very diverse world, and I can't see *Now* disappearing from it, not in the short term. They've developed, they've evolved, they've introduced the app, they've had challenges, but they've met those challenges. And that's partly because it's a trusted brand that still does what it promises on the tin: here are 30 of the biggest hits of the last few months – enjoy!

** A real curio of a track, Will Powers was a pseudonym for celebrity photographer Lynn Goldsmith who created a parody 'self-help' album called *Dancing For Mental Health*. This single was co-written by, among others, Nile Rodgers, Todd Rundgren and Steve Winwood. The un-credited lead vocal is by Carly Simon.*



'A LOT OF ARTISTS END UP FRUSTRATED IF THEY SIGN AWAY THEIR INDEPENDENCE'

Following a period of rapid global expansion, Ditto Music now has 19 offices around the world – and says it's investing to build the music industry model of the future...

If you got in touch with Ditto Music a decade ago, you might have ended up with a bouncy castle. If you get in touch with Ditto Music today, you might end up with a global hit.

The fast-growing music distribution and services company was founded in January 2007 by brothers Lee and Matt Parsons from a flat in Smethwick, Birmingham – accommodation, recalls Lee, which sat under a densely-populated apartment packed with people “smoking crack all day”.

Back then, Ditto wasn't just a music company: Lee and Matt ran a range of businesses from their humble abode, including a window cleaning operation, a computer repair service – and a bouncy castle hiring company. Anything, basically, to pay the rent.

“We had one mobile phone and when people called we didn't know if they'd want window cleaning, a bouncy castle or their computer fixed,” says Lee (*pictured*). “So when we eventually launched the music company, we just started saying, ‘Hello Ditto’ to anyone who called the phone. That covered all bases.”

Today, following a year of accelerated worldwide expansion, the Birmingham-born, Liverpool-HQ'd Ditto is a truly independent British success story – and it's still fully owned by the Parsons brothers. The firm was recently named the No.48 fastest-growing company in the UK by *The Sunday Times* – while the same newspaper placed Ditto at No.26 in its league table of British SMEs with the fastest-growing international sales. (None of these sales, you might have guessed, were of bouncy castles.)

With 19 offices around the world – in addition to an A&R presence in hip-hop hotbed Atlanta – Ditto is now truly one of the premier independent distribution/services companies worldwide.

The firm runs three offices in the US alone – in New York, Nashville and Los Angeles – where it recently pinched TuneCore's respected Senior Director of Entertainment Relations, Chris Mooney, to head up countrywide operations from NYC.

There have also been recent office openings in the Philippines, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, The Nordics, Mexico and India.

In its first five years, Ditto welcomed the early recordings from some huge names through its platform, including the likes of Ed Sheeran, Sam Smith and Royal Blood. All of these acts, however, then jumped to major label deals in order to take their careers to the next level.

Since then, Ditto has become more tenacious about encouraging artists to remain independent, and stay the course within its system. That's why the firm takes its expanding global presence quite so seriously – with an A&R force in every market in which it operates – and has recently bulked up the level of service it can offer artists.

It's should be no great surprise, then, that Ditto has become a go-to distribution partner for the UK's hottest urban music artists.

Stormzy released breakthrough Top 10 single Shut Up through the company in 2015, before signing with ADA, while other leading lights such as MoStack, Hardy Caprio and MIST have also turned to the firm to boost their careers.

Many of these names have jumped into deals on Kensington High Street once their stock has climbed sufficiently high – but that pattern is becoming a tougher fight for the majors.

The likes of Dave and AJ Tracey, for example, have continued to put out music via Ditto far longer than many thought they would.

Ditto currently has around 150,000 artists on its standard distribution tier, which sees acts pay an annual subscription of £19 and keep 100% of their royalties. (Quick maths: That's nearly £3m a year in baseline revenue.)

In 2015, Ditto started layering on additional services for its banner artists, who typically still receive 80%-90% of their royalty pool despite Ditto's further investment in their career.

“The reason we expanded so much last year is so we can have teams in each territory going separately into the Spotifys, Apple Musics, Amazons etc. to build artists worldwide,” says Lee Parsons. “With Dave's last release he got on the front of the Brazil Rap playlist, the US ones, on the front of the Philippines... for the small percentage the artists pay, they get a truly global campaign.”

Ditto's recent expansion has been made possible by some smart business moves: in 2014, Ditto launched ‘Record Label In A Box’, providing independent artists with a one-stop package for grassroots labels that takes care of PPL and ISRC registration, in addition to other services. The product now turns over £2m a year.

MBUK sat down with Ditto CEO Lee Parsons to learn about his company's ascent, its global battle with the major labels, the growing power of independence, and why the blockchain is about to change everything, for everyone...

Is it true you and Matt started off in a band and got dropped?

Yeah. My brother and I actually auditioned for [Island Records boss] Darcus Beese, when I was a rapper. That was about 13 years ago. We went through the whole industry thing – we had

a management deal with Albert Samuel who had Blazin' Squad and So Solid Crew and we signed a publishing deal with EMI. But it's the classic story: we didn't get to put any music out.

Me and Matt went back home to where we lived, Smethwick, and we were frustrated by it all. The whole Ditto thing started from us trying to release our own songs. I went down to HMV that Christmas; I waited an hour to speak to a woman and asked if we could get our CD in the shop and she literally laughed at us and said there was no chance.

You literally went to your local HMV?

Yes, the one in Birmingham. We even made business cards in the library to make it seem like we had a proper record label, but she [the HMV manager] still said no. People don't understand now how hard it was back then [circa 2005]. There was one record label down the road from us, and I told them: ‘We'll give you £200 if you just put our CD into HMV.’ We had a decent fanbase, but they said no and laughed at us. One of the people from that record label applied for a job at Ditto a few years ago, actually...

What happened after you were rejected?

Six months later, we found out about this company called Wippet, who were like the first digital store – they were ahead of their time. We put our track on there and were really excited, only for it to get to, like, No.72 in the UK charts. We'd had enough, me and my brother. We'd been in bands for so long and we were physically

exhausted. We were living in Smethwick in this horrible flat with people smoking crack upstairs all day. I was doing window cleaning, and my brother was fixing people's computers. I had a bouncy castle as well so I was renting that out for kids' parties on the weekend. Anything to make a bit of money.

That was 2006, but by 2007 you'd had your first Top 40 single...

We'd found this band, Koopa, who'd built up a pretty good fanbase. We explained to them that we thought we could get them into the charts. This was around September [2006], and we put them on pre-order from then until the second week of January [2007] – because we'd learned that was the quietest release week in the industry, back when CDs were prevalent.

We'd also worked out something important: they allowed SIM card purchases [in the UK chart] back then, but they didn't actually check if the user downloads the track. So we bought a load of SIM cards off eBay – you could buy them for £2:50 each with £5 of credit on them. We'd buy the song three times on each SIM for £4:50 with the £5 credit, and we'd get three pounds back [from the sale as the record label]. So we get three chart sales, and earn 50p back each time.

Me and Matt were sitting in this little council flat downloading this track off these SIM cards, with our mum helping us. It was

Ditto's artists have included [L-R] Dave, Dodie, AJ Tracey and Stormzy



mad. And then, in the second week of January [2007], we had a phone call at 8 o'clock on the Monday morning. I assumed it was for a bouncy castle. But it was a guy saying, 'What's Ditto Music? You've got a song No.12 in the midweek charts.' It was unbelievable.

That track ended up at No.32 in the same week the OCC changed its rules so you didn't need a CD sale for chart inclusion, right?

Yes, it was crazy. Radio 1 came round to our flat, the BBC [news] came round. I remember a journalist in our flat holding up a USB stick on the 6 o'clock news and calling it an MP3 player – no-one seemed to understand what was happening [to the music industry]. We were thrust into quite a lot of industry attention, and we became known as 'the digital company', when the majors were still obsessed with the CD. The labels are all congratulating themselves on having the best year ever now, but it makes me laugh; if it was up to the labels, not Spotify and Apple etc., the industry would still be based on Compact Discs! Because we were in the press so much, all these artists started coming to us. We moved into an office, took on staff and started building Ditto into what we wanted it to be – a record

label that was fair to artists and which offered them all the tools we never had.

Why do you think the calibre of artists you've worked with in recent years – Dave, Stormzy etc. – came to Ditto?

What it really comes down to is that our staff are always at shows and doing real A&R work for artists. When Stormzy came through, we were there; we've had Dave since he released his first song and did his first freestyle – we're very active in that scene. People come to us because they trust us, they know we're real fans and they know we're going to do a good job. It sounds really easy, and in a way it is; in my experience, major labels don't want to do that [grass roots A&R] – they're more interested in short-term market share gain, and that means getting involved later in the cycle. When Stormzy blew up a bit, they came in with a bunch of money, but the hard work had already been done by Stormzy and his team.

How do you combat the ability of larger companies to come in and offer big cheques to artists you've helped build? Are you seeing that pattern changing?

"We got a call, and I assumed it was for a bouncy castle. We were at No.12 in the charts."

It's sometimes hard to compete because we haven't taken VC investment. We do give advances to artists – good, sustainable advances. But we're about the long-term. We're not going to go in and fight for market share if someone's going to give an artist a million pound deal which they know they're not going to get back, and that happens all the time, even amongst our distribution competitors. People at the majors sometimes prioritise market share over getting an actual return.

We've taken on radio staff and PR staff in London and we're building out that team – and we're entering into longer-term deals with artists with options on them. Major labels don't want to offer 80% [royalty] deals to artists! If they could, they'd be signing 20% deals every time. You find any artists from the '90s who still have any money left or are still getting cheques [after recouping] – they are very thin on the ground, and I have friends in that situation.

[The deals at majors] have got fairer because of companies like us; now they have to compete with us. The work we do speaks for itself. We always have about five or six tracks on New Music Friday in each territory. There definitely is still that very wrong idea that Universal or Warner or whoever can do things Ditto can't because we're smaller. But it's a long-term thing and eventually more and more people will realise what we can do for their career globally.

Is it particularly hard to compete when the majors are swimming in the cash they're currently earning from streaming?

I can't mention any artists' names, but if you take away Stormzy – and when he left us he was already a huge success thanks to the work he put in with his team – I'd say 50% to 60% of people who leave Ditto and go to labels come back to us. A lot of artists end up frustrated after they sign those major deals, because they sign away some or all of their independence. I've travelled around the world this year and taken on a lot of people from the majors, and I believe those frustrations will always exist.

Why haven't you taken on VC money?

I never even knew what a VC was until five years ago. When we started Ditto, we just wanted to make £50 a week to go to the studio, then when we started building it up we just wanted a business that was profitable.

As soon as you take on VC money everything changes. 90% of people in major labels are really smart people, but they have so much hassle from the people above them – which all feeds down from the shareholders – as to what they can and can't do. I don't want to be told what I can and can't do. I want to be able to sit with an artist and talk about what they want to achieve and how they want to achieve it, and I want that to be a creative discussion.

Whether we'll [take on VC money] at some point, I don't know. As I say, at the moment, literally two or three people a week will contact us about [potential investment] and that's been the case for three years now. We're very profitable so it's a short-term thing

to take on VC money; it gets you to a point a lot quicker than you would have done it without it. I've been doing this 12 years and it's been a long, long 12 years. But now we've slogged it out for all that time, and got through the painful periods, it would have to be a huge thing for me to [sell equity in Ditto] right now.

Have you had major label acquisition interest?

Yes. Of course our competitors have tried to buy us – that's no surprise. And labels have sniffed around, offering us money for [upstream deals].

Universal and Warner have built similar platforms as Ditto [Spinnup and Level Music], but they're not as successful because their primary reason for doing it is to get the data; it's not about music, it's about avoiding doing A&R work. We're doing it for the right reasons; people know how passionate we are about it.

Let's talk about the UK singles chart. Since Ministry Of Sound was bought by Sony, independent Top 40 singles are almost non-existent... except for Ditto.

What's going on there?

More people, especially in the hip-hop world, aren't signing deals. Young Bane goes through Disturbing London, who went through us [before a recently-signed Parlophone JV]. Dave's done really well; AJ Tracey's done really well.

Every country is very different.

When I go to the Philippines, artists aren't really allowed to say they're on a label, not being independent is very unfashionable. But in Australia, it's the opposite – being on a label is still a huge thing for artists.

In the UK, all the artists coming through now understand what's gone before them and that they don't need to sign a deal; you can keep your rights and get a similar level of service. There's a particularly big awareness about that amongst the grime and hip-hop artists here. They tend to be very business-savvy.

Do you like hearing Daniel Ek say he wants to break down the gatekeepers of the music business?

[Laughs] Funnily enough, maybe not – if he means us! I don't think Daniel Ek wants to do 3,000 support tickets every day because someone's metadata's wrong. I don't think anyone understands how hard distribution and services is – how labour-intensive it is to do it properly.

That's a big topic: when will Spotify, Apple or anyone 'do a SoundCloud' and allow artists to upload direct. Spotify talks a lot at the minute about a 'two-sided marketplace' and that sounds like SoundCloud to me. Is that a threat to you?

It is and it isn't. So long as you want to be on all the services and get a level of expertise across all of them, as well as things like radio and press, you will always need a [third-party] partner. We

manually listen to every single piece of music that comes through our door. Long-term, we feel like we're a record label moving with the times, and that means staying ahead of what's going on.

That includes blockchain, in which you've invested. what's happening there?

I was in the Philippines doing a launch in September last year, and obviously I'd read about blockchain a lot before then. Jonathan Ong, a really successful Filipino music producer who'd been investing in bitcoin in 2013 for \$80 and had bought a bunch of houses [with the proceeds], sat me down for two days and explained the whole thing to me. I called my brother and just said to him, 'Listen man, we have to do something about this otherwise we're absolutely screwed – it could take away what we do when everything becomes decentralised.' So then we started thinking, How can we add to what's going on - how can we make the landscape better by using blockchain?

In what way could blockchain change everything?

If Spotify wanted to do instant automated payments to artists via the blockchain, they could. I'm sure they're designing things using blockchain now.

Music will be completely decentralised. It will remove any middle-men, thereby benefitting

the artists by increasing their revenue share. This is exactly what Ditto aims to accomplish. Blockchain will revolutionise the music industry and we want to be a part of that innovation.

If you go to a country like Brazil today, it's a well-known fact that people don't really get paid via radio play. It's rather endemic – the money goes back to people who shouldn't get it. Even in the UK, there's an issue around the amount of [public performance] money which goes back to the majors because it doesn't get claimed by the rightful owners.

Due to the nature of the blockchain, tracking data and information becomes much easier. There is zero tolerance for human error. It's completely accurate.

With blockchain, every transaction a song goes through, from the time it gets uploaded will be recorded on an open ledger – it's completely transparent. It means no one can cook the books. Traditionally this is something major labels fear, but transparency is something we have always championed. We believe in artists' rights to fair compensation.

Also, I'm excited by the idea of token-ising artists. I think over the next year you'll see artists becoming their own tokens; and people directly investing into an artist as they would buy into an ICO (Initial Coin Offering). We want to help artists do that.

This will bring artists and their followers even closer together and that would not be possible without blockchain's smart contract capabilities.

"I called my brother: 'Listen man, we have to do something about blockchain.'"



Team Ditto 2018

What does that mean in real terms?

Imagine if Ed Sheeran was token-ised at the start of his career; you saw him at a gig and you bought his tokens like you would a CD. The value of that token would probably be up about 10,000% now. If you find an artist you like, and you put £100 in, then they get to an Ed Sheeran level, you're going to be rich. With that model comes the possibility that more people will be interested to go to gigs again, and more people will be interested in discovering new artists. It's a long-term play. We've partnered with EdenChain who do more of a permission-based blockchain. They're in South Korea and we really like the team. We've made quite a big investment in them and we're going to be working with them in the future.

It's going to democratise A&R investment for everyone?

Exactly.

What does good A&R mean to you?

Good A&R means being first on everything, spending 99% of your time in the studio or at gigs. It's not enough to follow data, you need to be there way before that. We listen to every single piece of music that comes through Ditto before it even gets on

Spotify. And if something sounds really good the rest of the office will listen to it and we'll discuss it. But most of our music still comes from managers and people who are recommending to us.

What's your ambition for the future of Ditto?

About 18 months ago, we thought, let's make a play to properly take on the major labels around the world. It sounded ridiculous because we only had three offices at that time. But over the last 12 months we've shown we can be a threat to what the major labels are doing with their ['indie'] distribution arms; in the Philippines, we have literally 90% of the biggest bands on our books with a brilliant A&R guy, Jinno Minna.

What we've done recently in the UK, building out the team with proper radio and PR support for artists, in addition to the streaming support – that's what we want to do now in the different territories. We're going to start going after the biggest artists in the world. All the majors fret about market share, but we're not interested in that game – we just want to know who's got the next Adele coming through. That's where we can compete. We want to be the best, not the biggest, music company in the world. And I really believe that's what we can become.

THE REUNION: CRAIG DAVID, BORN TO DO IT (2000)

For the third in MBUK's series revisiting the teams behind landmark releases, we rewind to the year 2000 and talk to some of the main players responsible for Craig David's astonishingly successful and game-changing debut, Born To Do It...



Colin Lester
Then: Co-founder/director
Wildstar Records
Now: Founder JEM Music
Group (Craig David's
manager of nearly 20 years)

I became aware of Craig via hearing him on a pirate station, a track called Rewind [by Artful Dodger featuring Craig David, 1999], which I immediately thought was fantastic.

What I thought was special about it was, typically, when a record gets to the chorus, it goes up, it notches up a gear; Rewind came down. It was part of that garage scene, but it had a pop awareness – without being a pop record. It was just brilliant and really exciting.

At the time [now-Wildlife Management boss] Ian McAndrew and I had a label called Wildstar Records, in conjunction with Telstar and Capital Radio. Craig's then manager, Paul Widger, came in and played me three tracks, one of which was a song called Walking Away.

I just remember thinking, Wow, anyone who can write that song, that lyric, aged 17; I've got to meet them and I've got to sign them.

We set up a meeting, he came in and we got on like a house on fire. I told him, I'd love to work with you, let's do a development deal.

Ours was a pretty scruffy office, desks and wires everywhere, nothing smart about it. He told us later that he signed with us because ours seemed like a real working environment, where people would graft for you, whereas the others just seemed a little bit plastic – years later, having realised how

OCD Craig is about tidiness, I'm not sure why he made that decision!

What I remember about those early meetings with Craig is that he was very respectful, but he was also so intelligent and passionate that it was impossible not to believe that this guy was going to be an absolute superstar.

He lived in a council estate at the time, the Holyrood estate in Southampton, and when I went to see him he said, I'd better come down and get you, you don't want to be walking through the estate on your own. And then, when he saw the BMW he said, I gotta warn you, that might not be there when you get back.

We went into his flat, and then into his bedroom, which was a shoebox – but it was stacked from floor to ceiling with vinyl. It

“I said, There's no need for a development deal, we can make a record right now.”

had two decks and it had a couch, which he obviously slept on. It was a shrine to music. This guy was the real deal.

The flat was spotless, and I got the feeling they'd done it for me, the big guy from the record company and all that, which wasn't how I saw it at all! It was actually quite humbling, and I remember saying to his mum, I cannot guarantee success for Craig, but what I can guarantee is that everyone who works on his behalf, including me – especially me – will work night and day to give him the best possible chance of success.

Whilst we were negotiating the deal, he

came in and played me some more songs, the first of which was Fill Me In, and then, a little further down the line, Seven Days.

At that point I said, There's no need for a development deal, we can make a record right now.

I remember Sony and BMG were very much in the frame, but I'd started to really get to know Craig, so, to my eternal gratitude, the deal got done and we set about making the record with Mark Hill [co-writer, co-producer and half of Artful Dodger], down in Southampton, in a sort of shack in a rundown place called Ocean Village. Although, not long after we finished recording, they redeveloped it and built luxury flats that started at about £1 million.

Had I decided to invest in the property I might have made more money in the long run, but I wouldn't have as much fun, that's for sure.

Early on we did a showcase for my label's marketing and promo people; Craig was going to sing some vocals over a DAT machine.

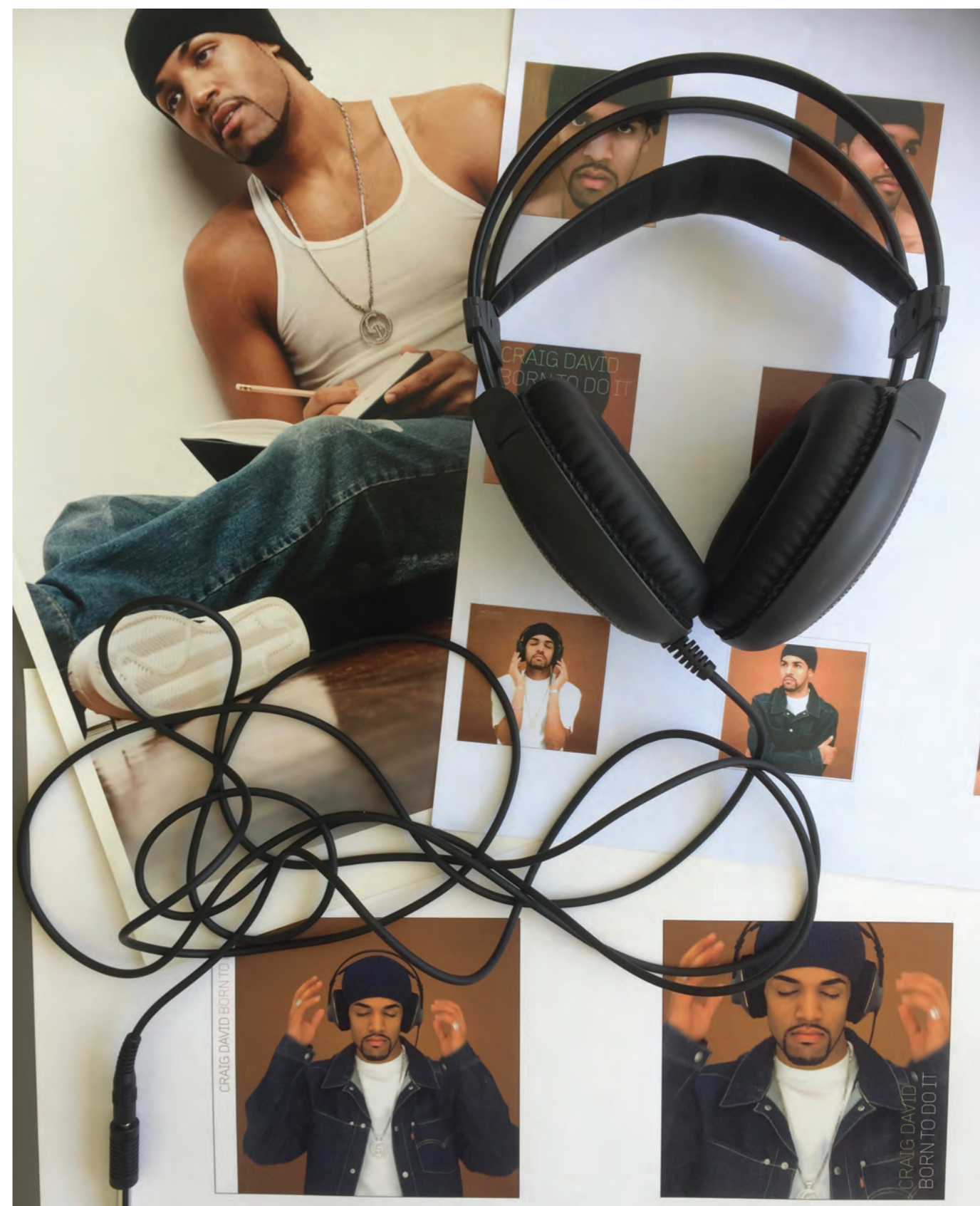
I wanted them all to be as excited about this young artist as I was. Of course, almost as soon as he starts, the DAT machine chews up the tape.

Now, here you have an 18 year-old in front of about 20 cynical record company people, all looking at him, thinking, What you gonna do now?

And what he did was go a cappella, freestyling, whilst the machine was repaired; he didn't drop a beat.

At that point I'd already have gone to the wall for him – after that I'd have run *through* the wall.

All those things told me he was the real deal. He had the talent, the songs and the attitude, for me he ticked every box.



Craig David and Colin Lester today



When it came to actually making the album, it was pretty much Craig and Mark, they recorded it and produced it between them.

It was made incredibly cheaply, the whole album for probably under £30K, in a run down studio, and it went on to sell 7 million copies. It does make you wonder, when people spend millions of pounds going to [Chris Blackwell's Bahamas-based] Compass Point... For me it proves the point: it's in the grooves.

When Craig and I were mastering the album, which we needed to deliver to the manufacturers the next day in order to make the release date, Craig pointed out three samples. I said, Craig, you never told me about these! I did two interpolations the next day and got one cleared.

There's a track on the album called *Booty Man* and he'd used a piece at the beginning of that from his favourite film,

Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory. He'd sampled the line from the beginning of the film, when the schoolchildren ask how Mr Wonka makes chocolate and the shopkeeper says, "You don't ask a fish how it swims, you don't ask a bird how it flies, they're just born to do it..." and then the track came in.

"The album cost £30k to make and sold 7 million copies."

I tried to get that cleared from Warners, that spoken part, but they weren't having it. Craig was really upset about that, he loved that film and that quote, but there was nothing we could do. So, in an effort to console a very depressed Craig, I suggested we call the album *Born To Do*

It. Little did I know how iconic that title would become.

When it came to the cover, we had a photo shoot booked, and at the time I had a friend who had the licence for AKG in Europe. I said, Listen I've just signed this kid, he's brilliant, we've just started working together, but he's skint. Can you send over some AKG headphones for him, because he loves them.

He said, Yeah, no problem, just do me a favour, could you send a picture of him wearing the headphones, so I can put it in the company's magazine.

A few days later, we're going through the contact sheets looking for the album sleeve and marking off the possibilities. We get to the end of the last sheet and there are three shots, completely different, because it was nothing to do with the album shoot; it was just Craig wearing the headphones. And I was like, Fucking hell, forget about AKG's in-house magazine, that's the cover!

Ahead of release, [lead single] *Fill Me In* goes to No. 1, it's a huge record, everyone's jumping up and down. *Seven Days* [released 24 July, 2000, three weeks before the album] was clearly the next choice, and that went to number one as well.

The album hit our release date of 14 August. I remember Craig coming into the office and I gave him the midweeks: Congratulations man, the album's going to be number one – now phone your mum.

That was literally the first thing I said to him. We left him alone to phone her up and tell her the news. That was probably the proudest moment for me of that whole campaign.

The success was being mirrored around the world, absolutely everywhere, distributed by BMG, except in North America where we hadn't yet done a deal.

The thing about a lot of the labels over there was that they wanted Craig to work with other writers and that was something I was totally against, as was Craig: this is the record, and this is the record you're going to sell.

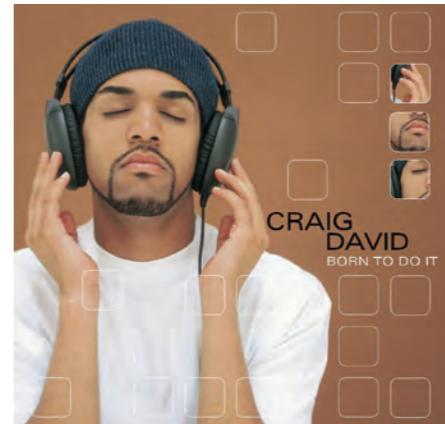
We talked to one or two industry legends who said, Nope, *Seven Days* will never sell over here, you can't take coals to Newcastle type of thing.

In the end, the person who made the best impression on all of us, including Craig, was Craig Kallman at Atlantic

He has a huge love of music, he was incredibly enthusiastic and he got on really well with Craig because of a shared love of dance music and vinyl. I think Craig [Kallman] has the biggest private vinyl collection in the world actually, so those two got on like a house on fire.

I also have to give huge credit to Atlantic's then head of promotions, Andrea Ganis. She absolutely loved the record and her line from day one was: I don't care what anyone's saying, this record is huge. And she just ran with it, she got *Fill Me In* on the radio, she got *Seven Days* on the radio and the album went on to do a million copies over there.

The most important thing to come out of the whole experience was that it created a friendship with someone who I'm still incredibly close to today; that's how it



BORN TO DO IT: FACTFILE

Release Date:
August 14, 2000

Label:
Wildstar

Highest UK Chart Position:
No.1

Revision Notes:

- Cumulative UK sales stand at just over 1.9m. Globally it has clocked up over 7.5m
- It spawned four singles, two of which – *Fill Me In* and *Seven Days* – went to No. 1 on the UK singles chart
- *Born To Do It* reached No. 11 in the US, where it was released by Atlantic.
- It is still the fastest selling debut album by a UK male solo artist of all time, with week one sales of 225,320 (last year, Rag N Bone Man notched up the fastest solo male debut of the decade with 117,000)
- David has subsequently release six more albums, but had to wait until 2016 for his second number one, *Following My Intuition*.

changed my life.

It's a cynical world, and people will say, Really? So the money wasn't very good? But the truth is, and you can ask any artist I've ever worked with, I always say: if you do the right thing, the money follows. If you do something for money, invariably the right thing doesn't follow.

So people can think and say whatever they want, but the honest truth is that the best thing to come out of *Born To Do It* for me was a lifelong friendship with Craig David.



Craig Kallman
Then: A&R executive on the rise, Atlantic
Now: CEO & Co-Chairman, Atlantic

When I first heard Craig back at the turn of the century, it was a real breakthrough moment. There were very few UK soul artists who had made a real impact on America, but he stood out because he transcended genre, culture, race and nationality.

Craig took off from his roots in two-step garage and brought R&B, rap, dancehall, and pop into a brilliantly eclectic mix, combined with his beautifully soulful voice and fantastic songwriting. He came out of the gate with a debut album that was so innovative and groundbreaking it made its mark as one of the albums of the decade.

All of us at Atlantic are very proud to have played a part in the amazing Craig David story."



Sarah Adams
Then: Head of TV, The Partnership
Now: Founder, Sassy Media

I was working for Billy Macleod and Matthew Austin at The Partnership at the time and one of the clients we were looking after was Telstar, as a label deal. Wildstar was part of that deal.

My earliest memory is driving down with Billy and Matthew to Southampton,



[L-R]: Sarah with Craig outside the Bellagio Hotel, Las Vegas, following a GMTV appearance during the Born To Do It Campaign; with Craig and Dan Smith from Bastille; Craig joins team Sassy Media - Sarah's company today.

to Craig's home, meeting Craig and his mum, and seeing a 16 year-old kid, with a pair of Adidas shell-toes and a tracksuit, who was clearly utterly obsessed by music and unbelievably talented.

At that point, he'd already written Fill Me In, Seven Days and Walking Away. I'm sorry: what?! That's just ridiculous for a 16 year-old to have churned those three out in his bedroom – with Mark Hill, of course.

On top of all that he was, and still is, the most charming and wonderful gentleman there is. He has been a joy. I've worked with Craig since that day. He's my longest-serving client.

There is this huge sense – which also comes from Colin – of loyalty and family. It really is a family. I feel quite motherly towards him, actually [laughs]. Hang on, that ages me – can I change it to him being like a younger brother?!

He's seen me change, he's seen me have a family; in fact his first question these days when we're doing something is usually, You are bringing the kids, aren't you?

You can see that in his relationship with his mum as well; family is incredibly important to him.

Going back to Born To Do It, because of [Global Radio executive director] Richard Park's involvement, the one thing we had in abundance was support from Capital. That was brilliant, but it caused a bit of an issue with Radio 1, who were subsequently quite slow to show support.

And we couldn't really get any telly either at that point. I don't think anyone in that world really got Craig back then.

There was an out-and-out pop route, but with Craig it was a bit, Ooh, we don't really know what to do with this.

In fact, I think our first ever telly for Fill Me In was Top of the Pops, and that was simply because of the chart position. That was our 'in'.

From there it got bigger and bigger; those records would not be denied. That run of early singles have absolutely stood the test of time and people still want to hear them now.

“The thing with Craig is, he's going to deliver whatever is needed. He can do it all.”

I then have a vivid memory, when we got to Walking Away, which was the third single, the fourth quarter, big ballad, of Colin saying to me, Get us on the Royal Variety Show. I think there was an element of kudos and acceptance attached. It was a thing.

So I went off, guns blazing. I took the producer, Jeff Thacker, off to see Craig perform, we worked every angle possible, because this was not a given booking at all. But we plugged it and we plugged it and we plugged it, and Colin kept saying, If you can get one thing for me, get me the Royal Variety.

And then Geoff phoned me up, I can still picture myself, I was standing outside [legendary, now defunct, eatery] The Stockpot in Chelsea, and he said, Go on

then, let's do it.

I was literally doing star jumps on The King's Road. I phoned Colin, and said, You'll never guess! We've got the Royal Variety Show! He said, You give me one fucking good reason why I should put my artist on the Royal Variety Show... [laughs]. He still doesn't remember telling me to go all out for it, but I swear he did!

We did four singles from that record and we were inundated, plus we were starting to manage requests from other territories.

It got manic, really crazy busy, but Craig was a superstar throughout.

That was a period when it became a question of simply managing how much we did and how we did it, because there were so many opportunities. Then, of course, there have been times when we've been desperate to get him on the telly and no one was interested.

This second time around, when people want Craig, the line is, Yeah, but we supported him in the beginning. Sure, but where were you for the six years when all we had was tumbleweed?!

The thing with Craig is, you know he can deliver whatever is needed, whatever the show wants, Craig can do it all. He works like a Trojan – but most importantly he works like a Trojan without a word of complaint.

He turns up, he rehearses, he's pitch perfect, he's gracious, he's patient, he's polite to everyone from the security guard to the producer, he's somebody that I've always been proud to walk into a studio with; I still am.



David Mather
Then: Sales and marketing director, Telstar Music Group
Now: Director, Intelligent Media

We were a very small label – or we were the very small artist function of a very big compilation business.

We'd entered into the JV with Wildstar and we had met Colin Lester and Ian MacAndrew. Colin was playing me lots of new music and in amongst it were a few tracks from an artist called Craig David which, we all agreed, were very different and very high quality.

Colin set-up a rehearsal down in Putney and he [Craig] was amazing. You'd never seen anyone who could rap like he did and sing like he did – and carry himself with a maturity that belied his years.

Paul Widger, who was his manager at the time, had touted him to all the labels. We were not the first (or the favourites) by any means.

I'd spent many years at Warner, and I also knew a lot of the guys at Sony and EMI and I remember asking them, just as friends, what were we not seeing? What were we missing? Because to us this looked like a great signing, but no one else was rushing to the front of the queue.

I think maybe that's why Craig was always going to end up at Wildstar, because he just didn't quite fit the pigeonholes they had elsewhere. We had a level of confidence in the music, which led to the confidence to invest more resource upfront, and that led to a higher quality in terms of visuals and videos etc.

We didn't ask Craig to wear anything in a photo shoot that he wouldn't normally wear, or to do anything in a video that he wouldn't normally do. There was trust on both sides.

In the run-up to launch, Fill Me In and Seven Days were omnipresent at radio and the stripped down acoustic TV performances with Fraser T Smith on guitar created a huge impact. It was the summer of Craig David.

We knew he was still as hot as anything in terms of club culture and his standing in that world, and it was important that he never fully transitioned out of that.

We picked August 14 for the launch date because it wasn't a massive week for new releases and retail were probably extra supportive because of that.

The biggest pressure we had internally was that the company was effectively owned by two guys who had made millions and millions of pounds selling compilation records via TV advertising and they were desperate to spend their money on TV, because that's what they knew and understood.

I was desperate not to do that, because we weren't ready to crossover at that point. We were still planning a long-term

“Craig's diet was Nando's, Nando's and Nando's. I can recite the menu to this day.”

campaign that was going to build and build. I wanted to hold it all back until we got to Walking Away, that was the real crossover moment leading into the traditional Christmas gifting market, that was when money would have been well spent on TV.

That view prevailed and in the end we did about 230,000 units week one and ended up at 1.9m in the UK. Funnily enough, no one interfered in the marketing after that.

Alongside the traditional above-the-line advertising, we engaged in a wide ranging online campaign, creating unique content across targeted websites, including entertainment and music sites, through to mainstream financial and news channels, which, then, was pretty much unheard of and spectacularly cost-effective.

We joined the dots to places where people were spending a lot of their time.

I'm not claiming we invented or re-invented anything, but what we did know was that, by taking that route, an enormous amount of people were becoming aware that these three tracks were by an artist

called Craig David, that they were going to be on an album called Born To Do It, and that album was out on August 14.

The most enjoyable part of the whole campaign was spending time on the road with Craig, Fraser and the band, just to hear the sheer musicality night after night. The success was great because it meant we could pay everyone, but in terms of personal ambitions, it was more to do with being involved in something that good.

Touring with Craig was always very interesting because he was pretty much half my age and he had a diet that consisted of Nando's, Nando's and Nando's. I can talk anybody through the menu to this day; I'm an expert!

Post-release, Walking Away took us through Christmas, retail were completely on board, radio couldn't get enough, the TV performances kept coming. The album retained its top 10 status throughout November and December.

We knew the BRITs were coming and we had this great opportunity. It was the fastest selling debut album by a UK male, we'd had the fastest-selling number one single; we had all these accolades under our belt.

And then, we get to the BRITs, and we know there's a problem. You're not supposed to know, but we knew.

On the night, Craig absolutely smashed the performance, it was one of the great BRITs performances. And then, out of six nominations, he won no awards. You had Bono dedicating his award to him, and calling out the fact that Craig hadn't won anything.

I think that made Craig very tough. There was talk of, Is that because they're an independent label? Is it controlled by the majors? But if you're a 19 year-old artist who's just done what you've done, that shouldn't matter.

We owned the BRITs media coverage the next day. If he'd just won one, you might have called it a snub, but to win nothing, having broken all those records in the past 12 months, that was ridiculous.

But the reality was, two days later we were across to New York and LA and starting all over again.

ROAD MAP

Abbey Road is changing more rapidly than at any time in its history, with the underlying aim being to make the studio more accessible.

MD Isabel Garvey provides an update...

Abbey Road was already pretty famous. But, on 8 August, 1969, when freelance photographer Iain Macmillan climbed a step ladder and took six quick pictures of four bored looking young men on a zebra crossing, it became iconic.

The crossing is at the south end of the street, a few yards from the entrance to what was then EMI Studios (it didn't officially become Abbey Road until 1985).

Opened in 1931, it built its reputation as a world-class facility for recording orchestras but, by the time of that sweltering summer's day at fag end of the '60s, it was known around the world as the place where The Beatles had recorded the vast majority of their world-changing output.

Indeed, album number 11 would not only feature the locale on the cover, it would be named Abbey Road.

Its release marked not only the beginning of the end for The Beatles, but also the start of a more or less uninterrupted procession of fans and tourists recreating the famous cover, a ritual that continues to this day. (Go to the studio's website, click Visit Us, you won't have to wait long)

MBUK assumes the studio's boss, Isabel Garvey, has walked the walk? "I haven't actually – it's overdone! I did get the picture outside the front door on day one though, obviously."

She's also made her mark throughout the building, arriving with an agenda for change and transforming the place more in four years than it had been in the previous 40.

She is, of course, hugely respectful of and thankful for Abbey Road's heritage and status – it's basically a rock star in its own right. But she's not about to hand the keys over to the National Trust...

Do you remember your first impressions of the place when you arrived?

The thing that probably struck me the quickest and had the most immediate impact was, from the outside looking in, you see the doors and the graffiti and it's a place of reverence, but you get in and the first thing you realise is that this place only ticks because of the amazing people here, the talent here, from our engineers to our technical team who keep microphones from the '50s going.





Nile Rodgers at Abbey Road, 2018

I think I maybe also had an idea that it was possibly a bit austere and unobtainable but, again, once you're through the doors and working here, or recording here, it's very approachable, very familial and, like I say, just full of amazingly talented and friendly people. It never ceases to impress me, even four years on.

During my tenure here that's something I've tried to show the outside world: we are approachable, we have quite a young team, all of whom are hugely passionate about music and hugely talented; it's important that artists and the general public know that.

And what did your To Do list look like?

I arrived with a huge agenda for change, which was fully supported by Universal. There was no problem attracting talent into the building, but my mantra, which applies to everything we do, is, How do we make this place future-proof and still relevant in another 86 years? And how do we make sure we have a broad appeal to all kinds of music makers?

Step one was to look after the core business of the studios. Everyone knows our main spaces are amazing, but they can also be quite expensive and generally unreachable for artists starting out in their career.

“I arrived with an agenda for change, supported by Universal.”

We recognised the need to build some studios that were more in the emerging artists' price range, so that we could have people come here early in their careers, understand the building, understand the vibrancy and talent here, and then hopefully grow through the rooms as their careers progress and have Abbey Road as their creative base.

The biggest step forward in that regard came last year when we opened two new pop studios.

How well have they performed?

Really, really well. We have a lot of demand, good utilisation rates. The bottom line is, we are attracting those new artists that we wanted to open the studio up to.

I need a better phrase for this, but it's also leading to what I call studio

tourism, where artists will come in and rent one of the smaller studios and then have one day of recording in Studio 2 or Studio 3, which is great, because they are very special spaces that artists want to get into and experience.

Being part of the wider Universal Music Group, and as part of the even wider music industry in general, is it as much to do with nurturing talent as much as building your business?



UK rapper Novelist at ARS

It's a bit of both. It's definitely about extending our pipeline, getting artists to come and have really positive but extremely affordable creative experiences at Abbey Road early in their careers, but also, yeah, it's about putting young artists in a room with very talented Abbey Road engineers and producers and seeing what comes out of it.

Let's be clear, it's not philanthropic, but there's definitely an element of encouraging young artists.

Earlier this year you appointed Nile Rodgers as Abbey Road's Chief Creative Advisor; how did that come about and what do you hope he will bring to the Studios?

You know what, it actually happened very organically. It probably came as a surprise in terms of the headlines, but Nile has been working here for about 18 months.

He's working on an album that is full of collaborations at the moment, so he's been here with Bruno Mars, with Disclosure, with a variety of artists, and he started talking in interviews about how Abbey Road is his favourite place in the world – and by the way, he's always been in our new pop studio spaces during that time.

So we had this great relationship, we were looking for someone who could be an advocate for us in the artist world, and it gradually became clear that he was the perfect man for the job.

He's just an amazing fit, with his legacy coupled with the

fact that he's so relevant today and we're completely honoured. Essentially he's making Abbey Road his creative base in the UK, writing and recording, largely in the smaller studios.

Last year there was talk of 'Abbey Road China' as part of Universal's deal with Tencent: what's the situation there? What stage are you at with the rollout?

We're still in discussion with Tencent as to how we most meaningfully do that. From an Abbey Road perspective, we want to make sure we get into the market in the right way, a way that respects the brand, and also adds value to the current Chinese music market, so we're still massaging that with them at the moment. We're in constant dialogue, there are a few plans, but no bricks have been laid yet.

Is it about building something close to a replica of Abbey Road or something that carries the quality of Abbey Road but is designed for local market needs?

It's absolutely the latter. It's about utilising the know-how and brand of Abbey Road in China in a way that's meaningful to how they make music, because their market is different to the Western music-making model. We're not making Abbey Road Disneyland for China.

You joke, but Abbey Road could almost be a franchise business. Is that something that's ever been looked at, especially on a global scale?

No, I mean there's no strategy document put it that way. It's not something we would consider. The China opportunity is unique: the market is changing, how artists are remunerated and looked after is changing, and to be part of that story feels pretty compelling.

And who knows, if that goes well, we may look elsewhere – but for now we're going to stay a studio in North West London and see what happens in China.

Finally, the music industry as a whole has published its gender pay gap data recently and it wasn't great reading; what is the state of play in the studio/engineering/production sector and how is it changing?

Not as fast as I'd like, is the short answer. We have one female engineer in a team of 16, that's it – 24 if we include the mastering engineers – and that's terrible. And we don't see enough female producers coming in either.

One thing we haven't discussed, which speaks to this, is we've launched a business called the Abbey Road Institute, which is a diploma course in production and engineering, and what's refreshing is that the intake tends to be 60/40 male/female, so I'm hoping that with this generation, we're getting there.

One of the things I'd love to do this year is get out to schools and talk to pupils about the sexy side to STEM. You can be a music engineer! You can work in Abbey Road! I think it's important to give girls visibility of those opportunities.

My favourite things

Our office-based show and tell visits Outside Organisation founder Alan Edwards. In a career spanning over 40 years, Edwards' clients have included The Who, Amy Winehouse, The Spice Girls and, most famously, David Bowie.

Recalling the details of his first office is very easy for Outside Organisation boss Alan Edwards. Two years ago, you see, the PR guru not only had to remember it, he had to re-create it, for a V&A exhibition called Print The Myth.

"It was at 29 James Street, Covent Garden. This was 1976. It was kind of Dickensian back then, very deserted, almost gas-lit. My landlords were a guy called Andy Czezowski and his wife Susan, who are pretty legendary: they ran the [famous punk venue] Roxy Club; Andy managed The Damned and was Malcolm McLaren's mate. Anyway, he rented me this room, but unbeknownst to me it was also a squat. Wire were holed up there, the manager of the Vibrators was there; you have to laugh.

"Anyway, I painted the walls white and I bought a second hand desk which, for reasons I don't remember, I painted shiny brown. I put that in the middle of the room, with one phone and an ashtray, because at that time I'm smoking 20 Marlboro a day."

Edwards started out as a journalist, freelancing for publications such as Sounds and Record Mirror. Then, at a Who gig, he bumped into the PR legend's PR legend, Keith Altham.

"He offered me a job. I was struggling to pay my rent, which was four quid a week in Islington, so I thought, I'll do that for a month, purely for the money, but no longer than a month, because who wants to do PR, right?"

"Keith, of course, became a great mentor and was a brilliant guy, but in my spare time, I was looking after all these punk bands, starting with The Guildford Stranglers. My first piece of advice: cut your hair and drop 'Guildford'. In the end we agreed I should go off and do my own thing, which is when I moved to Covent Garden, shiny brown desk and all. After that, at one point, we owned a little building in Notting Hill, but unfortunately we ran into financial difficulty so we flogged it. I don't like to think about how much it would be worth today.

"I've been in and around Tottenham Court Road/Charlotte Street for 30 years or so now." Plenty of time to build up quite the collection...



BIG PHONE

In my keenness to communicate with the media I invested in one of the first 'mobile' phones. I say mobile, it was a massive great thing that looked like it had come out of a Second World War movie.

You had to have a strap to carry it around as it was so heavy. Still, it meant that there was no dead time when walking to meetings. I took it a step further by turning it into a car mobile phone, which hadn't really been invented then.

I used to have this cumbersome object next to me in the car and then hang a wire out and attach it to a coat hanger on top of the old Merc.

All went well for a while until I went into the car wash without thinking and came out with no aerial and a mangled wire! When I look at this alongside an iPhone that I can slip in my back pocket, it is incredible how technology has developed. I will probably end up using it for a music/media exhibition that I'm working on.



DAVID BOWIE PHOTOGRAPH

This is such a beautiful print of David Bowie, taken by Geoff MacCormack, who, as well as singing in the band at the time, was David's school friend, a lovely and kind man. He came to me after David had passed away and explained that he'd received this package of photographs in the post from David, without any real explanation, except saying to 'do what you want with these, love David.'

Of course six weeks later, David passed away and George realised it was his farewell. Anyway, we arranged a cancer charity auction and had a little party at the Groucho. I think the main photograph was bought by David's lawyer, Paddy Grafton Green. We raised a nice bit towards the cancer charity and George very kindly gave me this as a little thank you.

Obviously it has pride of place, but alongside this I've got a fantastic Black Star Disc, which was sent by Rob Stringer from Sony in New York. I can remember David calling me over to New York and playing it to me about four months before he left us. Obviously I had no idea of the circumstances under which it would be released. What would I have said? Hard to know...



TONY PARSONS BOOK – GIRL ON FIRE

Tony and I have known each other pretty much since we were teenagers. Punk was what brought us together and we spent many an hour in the back of a transit van going up and down the M1 to see the Buzzcocks or Johnny Thunders and The Heartbreakers, with just a line of speed to keep us going alongside the music.

We hit it off straight away and our friendship has grown ever since. I had breakfast with him a couple of weeks ago and he gave me a copy of his new book, *Girl on Fire*, a detective novel. After that, we reminisced about the time I introduced him to Jimmy Page. Of course the conversation always comes back to David Bowie. Quite honestly the time is never enough for Tony and myself, so I'm looking forward to our upcoming dinner at Wilton's.

I told him I'd put his book in my little collection of signed books that I treasure, alongside Graham Greene. And here it is, alongside a signed copy of *The Third Man*. Unfortunately I never met Greene, although the bookseller who sold this did. He told me how the great writer used to wander into the bookstore and say how he hated shops selling first editions and signed copies. He did however grumpily sign this one, so it's very special really.



PR WEEK AWARD

I have to say, when I got the phone call from Danny Rogers, the Editor-in-Chief at *PR Week*, asking if I'd like to be inducted into the PR Hall of Fame I nearly fell off my chair. Well not exactly as I was walking up the City Road on the way to a meeting with Neil Warnock at UTA.

There are only two other people in the Hall of Fame, Matthew Freud and Lord Tim Bell, so it's quite an honour as an entertainment PR to get in there. The night was very special as I had my family there with me – all my daughters, and there are a lot of them!

After that the highlight of the evening was Roger Daltrey presenting the award to me. I've known Roger a long time and hold him up to be not only one of the greatest rock singers of all time, but also an amazing man for what he's done with Teenage Cancer Trust. On top of all that, he's also a stand-up guy.



The young, ciggy-chaining Edwards plots his path in office No.1



FRAMED DOLCE & GABBANA T-SHIRT

I have had many adventures with Naomi [Campbell] over the years, most recently at a Fashion For Relief event in Cannes, where I was overseeing the PR. From the second I got off the plane to when I sat back down again on the EasyJet flight home, my feet hardly touched the ground; it really was vintage Naomi.

She arrived in the South of France on the Friday afternoon, dazzling all before her as usual, and settled down for lunch at the Cap D'Atibes. I was in the slightly less glamorous surroundings of the Martinez Beach Club, with about 20 media from all over the world anxiously awaiting the arrival of arguably the most powerful woman in fashion. Luckily, I wasn't on my own and was supported by the Karla Otto crew: Alex Werz, super Sonia and her team, Guilia and Emmanuelle.

We figured the problem was an unscheduled taxi strike which had brought traffic on the roadside to a standstill. I was busy pacing up and down peering in cars through blackened windows for the star of Fashion For Relief. And just when it seemed as if everything might fall apart, in strode Naomi looking resplendent in a white dress, glamorous and charming in equal measure.

YOUNG PEOPLE! BUILDING NETWORKS ISN'T BORING – IT'S LITERALLY LIFE-SAVING

Jane Dyball, head of the Music Publishers Association, gives thanks and praise to the people who've always been there since day one...

So the highlight of the past month for me has been attending the newly constituted MPA group for music publishers under the age of 30.

Before going any further I would like to point out: (i) I was 29 and $\frac{3}{4}$ for the purpose of the event; (ii) Calling it 'The YMPA' was an act of genius only in my eyes; (iii) The publishers attending didn't bat an eyelid when asked to 'speed date' and embraced the concept wholeheartedly. Phew! But also, who knew? I felt like David Attenborough being given rare access to an ancient ritual from the animal kingdom.

Joking aside, this group of young people was enthusiastic, engaged and opinionated in the best possible way. They came up with a list of issues they would like to tackle – with plenty of them volunteering to actually help (it being a universal truth that coming up with a good idea is relatively easy, but implementing it is often challenging).

Hopefully, this will help create a new network for the next generation of UK publishers. It made me think about how important my, perhaps less altruistic, network has been to me – largely based, as it has been, around cider.

As I may have mentioned previously, I managed to put off getting a job until I was 24, but among the people who I met on my very first day at work in the music industry were Steve Lewis, Mike McCormack and Maria Forte [Ed - all ex-Virgin industry bigwigs].

Now, we don't go on holiday together, we haven't even all been round each others' houses – at least not for a long time – but those were the beginnings of a network which has grown every day in the 32 years since my first day in the office.

Some I don't speak to for years at a time. Some I speak to daily. Some I only hear from when they need a favour. And some I only contact when I'm stuck (or need tickets to something...).

And yet, and yet, if I were stuck up a mountain



“I thought about how important my network has been to me. Largely based, as it has been, around cider.”

in a snowdrift, with one last bar of reception and 1% of battery on my phone, down to my last chunk of Kendal mintcake, I would have any number of people who could and would do their best to get me out of there.

In fact, over the course of my career in the music industry, I have come to know amazing people in just about every country in the world. Think how reassuring that is when your teenage kids go backpacking!

All of these people are as much part of my success as my own efforts and determination.

Some people in my network I will never see again and others I will be in an OAP home with. And the most bizarre thing is that I don't think I can really predict which is going to be which.

As Lionel Richie explained at the recent Ivor Novello Awards: “Eric Clapton and I had dinner in LA, and when we parted at the end of the night we said ‘See you soon’. That was 15 years ago! We're having dinner again tonight.” Networks survive across years, jobs and countries.

So, kids! Do yourself a favour. Help each other out. Develop your own networks. One day you may get stuck up a mountain and need assistance.

Or maybe, perhaps more likely – and I can attest to this – there will be times when an eye roll from across a crowded meeting room from someone in your trusted network is just about the only thing keeping you sane.

THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF THE PHYSICAL: ARE YOU IN OR OUT?

Cherry Red Chairman and Founder, Iain McNay, is getting a sinking feeling that the music business might be too busy looking in the wrong direction...

The history of recorded music is, when looked at in the bigger scheme of things, a very short story indeed. It has only really existed for around 130 years. Before that we had live music and printed music; and that was it.

Then we had a real revolution in making recorded music available via phonograph cylinders, shortly followed by radio; and then, 70 years ago last month (May 1948), the first vinyl release appeared; Mendelssohn Concerto in E minor. It was to be the start of something very popular which is fortunately still with us all these years later. It took another 34 years, until 1982, before the CD became a proper successor to vinyl. The first CD release being Billy Joel's 52nd State album.

Then, in 2003, Apple very cleverly managed, for the first time, to move the control of distribution of recorded music away from the record companies with the launch of iTunes. In a short period of time they had a virtual monopoly on downloads, including control of pricing and availability, although their appearance did help to start the decline of illegal downloads.

When Spotify launched in 2008 the industry further lost control of music distribution and today, in 2018, it's only the physical that we distribute ourselves. Somehow, we allowed ourselves to be beaten at our own game and let outsiders control the distribution, pricing and marketing of our music that we, as record labels, produce. Looking back, I wonder why we let this happen....

I find it rather sad that a major part of the industry seems to have got carried away with the God of streaming and has decided to write off the physical. All the streaming services are losing very large sums of money and it seems somewhat inevitable that our share of their income will decrease over time.

Fortunately, there are many labels, mostly independent, who still support the physical



“Streaming comes at a price: it reflects our increasingly disposable society.”

and have contributed to some rather surprising statistics. Income from sales of physical albums in 2017 was, according to the new BPI year book, 4.2% up (yes UP) on 2016; and was the highest for three years.

So, how did this happen when physical sales are supposed to be collapsing and the future for them is predicted to be grim? Aren't CD sales in irrevocable decline? Well, actually, probably not...

You see, the physical has been (rather quietly) transforming itself over time. It is fast becoming an artefact, something very collectable, and indeed to many people something quite special. When buying physical releases, especially catalogue, consumers now often expect a decent package. Which means, not just one CD but two, three or even more. Six or eight-CD boxsets are becoming increasingly common.

There are some releases that make an eight CD boxset seem like a rather slim volume such as the recent 30-CD Ian Hunter and Wishbone Ash packages. So, overall are there less physical transactions? Sure, but with these multi-CD packages I suspect that the actual number of CDs being bought by consumers may even be increasing. And this is without counting the many CDs sold at gigs by working bands and further DTC sales from many sources which don't make the official figures.

A recent report produced by ERA referred to 'Superfans', those who are happy to spend a decent percentage of their money on something that is tangible, that they can treasure. Remember those days when a new album release by a key artist would cause queues to form before record stores opened by those excited enough to want to hear it as soon as it hit the streets?

I may be somewhat nostalgic, but let's maybe start to look at encouraging fans to love the album again and start to realise that so much creative time (and sometimes real genius) goes into making the wonderful body of work we call



Cherry Red's recently released, eight-disc Procol Harum boxset, Still There'll Be More

the album.

Streaming may currently be giving a boost to the income that comes into the record business, but this comes at a price. It is unfortunately a reflection of our increasingly disposable society. One that encourages 'here today, gone tomorrow.' You don't actually own anything, you just consume. The album is so special, as is the physical format. It is not dying it is just changing, like other parts of our industry.

If only our album charts reflected the value of music purchased, i.e. what someone paid for a release (like the German album chart), rather than a chart that is rather confused by

“Let's maybe encourage fans to love the album again.”

combining unit sales with streamed plays, some of which are not even paid for. Then we would all have a much more accurate guide of what music lovers are really spending their money on.

The future can be in our own hands if we are brave enough to rise to the challenge. Let's not, as an industry, try and kill off the physical format. Let's not risk putting ourselves at the mercy of algorithms that voice-activated devices use to control what we listen to. We lost control of a major part of distribution of our music, let's not give away more. Music is wonderful. The album is such a great piece of art. It is up to us to champion the format that expresses it best.



‘The people who succeed in this business are the ones who keep going in the face of adversity’

Mark Ralph is a producer who crafts perfect pop hits in the streaming age – but his rise through the music business hasn't been without its setbacks...

“Screaming Lord Sutch getting out of a coffin in front of you with a toilet seat around his [neck] and a [prosthetic] head of Maggie Thatcher in one hand. Yeah, those are the pinch-yourself moments.”

Today, Mark Ralph is one of the UK's most successful and in-demand pop songwriter/producer/mixers – making a key contribution to recent hits from the likes of Years & Years, Clean Bandit, Jax Jones, Kygo and Rudimental.

But Ralph wasn't always such a prolific chart-topper.

The musician, who was born in Stoke-On-Trent, began his industry life as a session guitarist for a diverse array of artists including Sister Sledge, Sly & Robbie, Tom Jones and the aforementioned Lord Sutch, for whom Ralph joined the live backing band, The Savages. (In a particularly bizarre memory from this period, Ralph recalls being called upon to mime playing guitar on live British television with Ringo Starr.)

From there, he experienced the bitterest side of the industry first-hand, after signing to Telstar with his first band, and later to Fiction/Polydor with acclaimed electronic trio The Filthy Dukes – who remixed everyone from Bloc Party to Lady Gaga and Florence + The Machine.

In both cases, Ralph was dropped from a record label, experiences which he credits today with teaching him highly important lessons about the music business and life itself.

These lessons have helped Ralph become a go-to name for UK A&R teams looking to transform tracks into hit singles, which perhaps explains why he won the A&R Award as Producer Of The Year – voted for by his label and publishing peers – in 2016.

MBUK recently visited Ralph at his West London studio complex to quiz him on his rise through the industry, his thoughts on streaming's impact on pop A&R, and why he feels his ability to demonstrate authority in front of young artists is every bit as important as his musical aptitude...

When did you start 'officially' becoming a producer?

Officially it was at the end of my time with the Filthy Dukes, who were signed to Polydor/Fiction. Up until that point I was a musician, primarily – a session guitarist who dabbled with production and engineering. I really started focusing on production in 2010, not wanting in any way, shape or form to be an artist.

There are lots of things that happen which give you a certain life experience that enable you to do this job. The majority of them aren't anything to do with music; becoming a father has been a big way of giving me the authority and ability to be authoritative with other people. You have to do that with your own little people – you get used to bossing them around.

The term 'production' these days is generally used to describe people writing music in a computer environment. That, to me, isn't the whole picture; the whole picture includes the social skills

you need to persuade musicians and artists to come from your side of thinking – which is influenced by the record company, who employ you to almost do their bidding. You have to keep both sides happy, a chief negotiator!

How would you characterise your experiences of being in The Filthy Dukes. Clearly it didn't end with commercial triumph...

At the time, you're bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, full of expectation and ambition. The first thing the lawyer said to me when I signed my first deal – before the Filthy Dukes period – was, 'Let me just explain to you, you have a 95% chance of failure. Only 5% of artists who sign record deals have hits.' So I started off with a dose of realism that stuck with me. I went into every artist situation knowing it was a roll of the dice.

Out the other side of it, the point at which you get dropped is the lowest point in your career – everything you've worked for feels like it's come to nothing. It's not just the two years you're signed, it's the five years before that you've spent trying to get a record deal. People forget about that. You think, 'Wow, have I just wasted seven years?' But the people who seem to succeed in this business are the ones who keep going in the face of adversity. Now I'm in a different role, mentoring the people who are in a situation which I was in 10 years ago...

“Our manager called to tell us [we'd been dropped]. It's stood me in good stead.”

... and you're probably telling them 95% of artists don't make it!

Yeah, all of that stuff, and other bits of sound advice. I did Years & Years' first album with Polydor and I was able to say to them, 'Look I was signed to the same label as you not so long ago. If you do this, I can tell you with pretty good authority

what's going to happen as a result.'

Most of the best football managers have been footballers themselves, and that analogy is true for artists; as a producer, if you've had that experience you can offer artists not only well-informed musical advice, but also very important advice about other aspects of the industry. That comes down to social and personal skills.

For any producer, you want your record to be credible and cool but you also want it to reach as many people as possible. As far as working with bands goes, I get the skill of breaking up fights from having two sons at home!

Do you remember the moment you were dropped from Fiction? Do you still think about it?

Absolutely. [The Filthy Dukes] knew it was do or die on the last single. You always do; it's the last roll of the dice, you've put stuff out, it's not set the world on fire. It did decent numbers, but on a major label there's a bigger investment, so a bigger expectation.

We had Wiley on our fourth single and it got A-listed on Radio 1. There was a feeling that if it's A-listed and it doesn't become a



Photo: Chris Frazee Smith

hit single, you're finished. Where do you go from there? We kind of knew we had to the end of the week, and if it hadn't charted it was shaky coat-peg time. I was quite realistic about it.

On the Monday morning, our manager called us to say he'd been into the record company and that was it. It's a horrible feeling, but like all of these things, it's stood me in good stead in the long run.

What other experiences have stood you in good stead?

In my mid-twenties I had to get a job driving hire equipment around London, taking it to studios and fixing bits and bobs as I went around. It was a big shock to me at the time. I didn't go to university, but I'd just put six years into trying to break into music, first as a session musician and then in a band who got signed on a development deal with Telstar... and dropped. So I had to get a regular job. But in retrospect I learned so much in those two years of working for that hire company.

I installed a mixing desk on a James Bond film – Tomorrow Never Dies – and I had to learn how to break a mixing desk down, transport it, then build it again. The whole time, I thought it was a dead-end job and that my career had hit the skids. But another seven years later I bought Conny Plank's old mixing desk, and I had the skills to transport it from Cologne to England and set it up. Things you might think are useless to you along the way are actually forming part of your unique education. I have a

hybrid of old gear and new gear here, and I wouldn't know how to use half of it if I hadn't done that terrible job – which I hated.

What do you consider to be your specialism as a producer?

One of the things I've found a niche for is finishing records, which is quite a difficult skill. A lot of people have the ability to start great ideas, but the last 10% or 20% is difficult; I sometimes come in and do a little bit of extra production and make things sound like hit records, and sometimes I'm there for 100% of the [project].

There are those with unbelievable talent who can do all of it – Disclosure, Calvin Harris etc. But so many artists have great talent but are missing that bit which crosses the line into achieving their full potential.

If you set up in 2010 as a 'proper' producer, then your career has pretty much mapped Spotify's growth...

The shift that's really been evident in that time is that, even up to four years ago, you were making albums with artists. Now Spotify has shifted the focus hugely towards making single tracks as opposed to making albums.

Obviously there are fantastic albums that get made every year which do well, but I've noticed a change in the major labels' focus; they're now primarily concerned with getting the next single done, and the album getting a secondary consideration. That's not true

Clean Bandit



for everybody, and for the established artists it's not true at all, but at one time I was doing 10 or 12 albums a year; at the end the record company would choose two or three tracks as singles. Now it's, 'What's the next single? Okay. What's the *next* single?' Interestingly, the artists are, generally, primarily concerned with making an album, the body of work, while the record companies often have a slightly different viewpoint now that big hit singles are their primary source of income.

Does that take the risk out of projects? Chucking tracks up on Spotify to see if they sink or swim?

Yes. It could be viewed as a positive or a negative. Rag N Bone Man, for example, isn't a project that I think record companies at the beginning would say, 'It's an absolute no-brainer'; it's a risk. But if you've got a little bit longer to work on bringing an artist to the attention of the public, it changes things.

It used to be, let's roll the dice three times and hope someone likes it on a Wednesday afternoon in Radio 1's meeting. In my record deal days I'd think about the amount of work it took to

get to that point, and how it all rested on one meeting amongst the producers at Radio 1. If they didn't get behind you, it could mean bye-bye.

That's a positive, I think; a record doesn't need to instantly take off so long as there's a groundswell on streaming. Another example is Tom Walker's *Leave a Light On* – a brilliant song by Tom and Steve Mac – but I wasn't always sure it would see the light of day. It's become harder for artists to break and Spotify hasn't helped that. The advent of YouTube-contributed chart positions isn't going to help that either; the big numbers on YouTube are dominated by the big artists.

What are your thoughts on how the chart has changed in recent years?

It's an artificial construct at the end of the day. A bunch of people sit around and set the rules for what's eligible. And then they display what has been decided.

When it was a chart of buying, rather than listening/streaming, you didn't have the big names clogging up the higher places so

much. One way around that today might be the idea of genre charts, like in America, coming to the fore; that might help break the monopoly of the big artists and help bring through new talent.

It's really important; you can't have a prolonged situation where you only have the same established artists carrying on dominating.

What makes a really good A&R person? And, on the flip side, what are the flaws of a not-really-good A&R person?

I always imagine A&R on a line – the interference line! There are pros and cons at every point on the scale.

If you're signed to an indie label and you haven't had a lot of money spent on you, and you're not under huge pressure to sell massive quantities, you'll probably find that your A&R is interested in your creative credibility and you expressing yourself, rather than 'it's A-list or bust'. The indies will tend to take the record you deliver and say, 'Thanks very much.'

As you move along the scale, in the centre ground, there'll be a lot of respect for the artist but some more A&R comments – trying different mixes etc. That's not necessarily as pleasant for the artist but they'll still feel in control of their art.

And then you've got the extreme end, where every aspect is being micro-managed by a team of people. If they're good at doing it, what they'll be saying will be the perfectly correct things to be saying, and they will make the record ultimately successful, but the artist can have a rough time, because it feels like the music is being made for them.

Every artist wants to be cool and credible, and they want to be really successful. And somewhere along the 'interference line' is the right balance. Naming no names, I know the [A&Rs] who are, let's say, much more sympathetic to the artist, and those who will stamp their authority, but time and time again will get great results.

Some of the most invasive A&Rs can be much more flexible with artists who need a bit more freedom. So in answer to the question, the best A&Rs are the most flexible ones – who don't just apply the same formula to every artist and every producer.

Have you got any thoughts on the number of co-writers it takes to craft a pop record these days?

We're catching up with the Americans on this front. In America, if you look at the writing and production credits, you'll see a long list of people in recent times. That's not always the case – you still have people like Steve Mac who can do everything themselves, and that's great.

I've always been a collaborator because I've always been a member of a band, one of two or three people in a room writing a song together. It's interesting; my skillsets are writing, production and mixing, and those three skills are all practiced on the same media now. Your writing takes place in a DAW [Digital Audio

Workstation], as does your production and mixing – most of the biggest mixers in the world have now ditched their desk and work in the box. I work on a hybrid of old and new. I still have an attachment to the hands-on bit, the analogue desk, otherwise it feels like being a DJ who turns up to the club and just gets a laptop out.

Is that natural collaboration why we're seeing so many names on the credits of pop hits?

I always try to credit people where credit's due. And I feel like if I do that for people, it's nice to be able to ask for the same when [deserved].

For example, if I come to a project I'm just producing, but everyone decides the chorus isn't good enough and I end up helping them make a new chorus, I say, 'Look, you came to me with this, but now we've got new sections of the song that exist. 'But at the same time, I can say, 'You brought a lot of music to the session and a lot of it survived, so I'm going to credit you as a producer as well.'

It happened with Years & Years; I was happy to let the band take some production credit, but by the same token if I enhanced the song, changed lyrics or made new sections, I would want [a writing credit]. I think you'll start finding writers listed as producers and other people being credited in the mixing process too. I don't see anything

weird about that. There was a time when the three skills were completely separated.

What's also happening is that the producers are having to become slightly A&R-minded. Your responsibility isn't just to make some nice music everyone loves. You have to think in the back of your mind: Who's going to buy this? Who's going to stream this?

I sit here with all of the A&Rs I work with to discuss: Who shall we get to feature on this record? Who shall we get to mix it?

The top A&R in America was always credited as the 'Executive Producer' – the person who sat back and heard the 'overview'. And it's true that A&R [execs] are, in a lot of ways, responsible for some of the production. You may well find in the future that producers get credited with A&R and A&R gets credited with production. I'm sure that seems odd to some people, but to me it's quite a natural evolution.

What was your first session?

We Are Family by Sister Sledge, which wasn't, obviously, the '70s version. It got re-released in the '90s and I was part of it. I was still at college and got paid £50 to go along and replace Nile Rodgers.

It was that moment, aged 18, hearing my guitar at No.5 in the charts and on Radio 1 all the time, that made me go, Right I'm not going to university, I'm going to take my chances and break



Jax Jones



Ralph picks up his A&R Award in 2016

into music. So I have Nile Rodgers – or, more accurately, the lack of Nile Rodgers – to thank for that.

Weirdly enough, about three months ago I did a writing session with Nile in Abbey Road. He's a lovely bloke. I had to tell him that story – I've been waiting my entire life to let him know that, as well as being a hero of mine, he's the reason I got into music. He fist-bumped me and gave me a hug. Then we had a day writing together. It was a dream come true.

You're both people who were musicians first, and then became producers second...

Being able to play an instrument very well, which I did once – I'm a bit rusty now, but I studied jazz guitar and all sorts of things – is very important. Younger producers these days are so reliant on a computer that they sometimes forget that mastering an instrument and the ear-training that involves is a massive leap forward in terms of their capabilities. Jack [Patterson] in Clean Bandit is a virtuoso sax player; he doesn't make a big deal of it, but he's one of the most talented producers and writers I've ever come across.

What ambitions do you have left?

“I have Nile Rodgers – actually the lack of Nile Rodgers – to thank for my career.”

My way of planning my future has always been to imagine myself in a certain situation – usually one that's totally unfeasible at the time. But if I visualise it, I eventually do get there.

A while back, I did an album with Franz Ferdinand – engineering and mixing – and I spent a lot of time with Alex [Kapranos] on the train. I told him that my ambition was to get a building with a bunch of studios in it, rent them out to talented people I know and create a hub of musical activity. That was the dream.

Alex started laughing and said, ‘I think you'll need a few more Top 10 hits before that happens!’ I looked at him and thought, Yeah, you are right. But one way or another, I had to make it happen.

I spent every last penny on this place [Ralph's Studios in Queen's Park]. Now I have a whole bunch of rooms here which, one day, I'd like to fill with people working for me; I'd like to get a group of young producers who are helping, under my supervision, to make all the records I want to make. As I get to the point I where I want to be less hands-on, I could have the infrastructure, the right setup, to make that a reality.

You always have to have a vision of where you want to end up in life, otherwise you'll get nowhere. I really believe that.

THE ECONOMICS OF THE MUSIC INDUSTRY'S MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Killing Moon MD Achal Dhillon tackles a tricky subject: is the music industry doing enough, in the right way, to protect at-risk artists' wellbeing?

That's right. I am calling it a mental health crisis, because that's what it fucking is.

There's no real need, from where I am sitting right now, to 'sell' the importance of addressing the ever-presence of mental illnesses and lacklustre well-being in our music industry.

The fact of the matter – if you have a heart, that is – is that people are dying. People will continue to die if we do not deal with this sooner. And more of them, more frequently than ever before.

However, I recognise that we live in a country, indeed a world, that finds it perfectly acceptable to walk past the homeless, impoverished and (more often than not) the mentally ill in the streets whilst they are actively asking for their help, ignore them, and somehow still sleep at night. (Honestly, if you are one of those people, good for you. I really mean that. I just can't fucking do it, despite trying.)

So when it comes to a vehicle that was largely born out of selling a particular image of the perfection of human creativity – ie. the music business – you'll have to forgive me for assuming that many people, including those we all deal with on a regular professional basis, need a degree of poking and prodding on the subject in the headline above.

In music, mental health – and indeed the issues and ailments surrounding it – is fashionable. It is a hot topic. A buzz phrase.

On the odd occasion, I have even witnessed it become so pervasive that depression and anxiety seem more like marketing drivers, rather than illnesses and conditions to be identified and treated seriously.

Prima facie, it is very easy to take what I have written here out of context and do the now-typical thing of forming an online mob and getting angry about it. (A trend that itself obviously warrants getting angry about.)

However, I am not resentful about this



“There is a rather large barrier to orchestrating any meaningful form of change.”

situation (or, truthfully, as much as I have been in the recent past). Every art form, including music, must necessarily have a business element in order for it to get, well, anywhere. And anger isn't going to help a goddamn thing.

Fact: depression, anxiety and, ultimately, suicide, as far as the artist community is concerned, historically results in a surge of sales (or I guess streams) for the affected artist.

This, for the business enterprise concerned with these acts, deserves serious contemplation. As does the wider narrative which surrounds these situations. (Question: would anyone have given a shit about Nirvana if Kurt wasn't so visibly fucked up?)

It is therefore no surprise to me that there is a rather large barrier to orchestrating any meaningful form of change, given that we sensationalise illness to this point.

Our propensity to get all ‘Candle In The Wind’ about it as soon as a cultural tragedy befalls us, always beckons into view a lens of possibly profiting from it somehow.

And yet, the ongoing narrative today suggests that we may be warming to the gravity of the problem. I do not believe, however, that this warming is happening nearly as quickly as we need it to. I am writing this to make the argument for pan-industry (trade bodies, private companies, public companies, PROs, musicians, fans, and indeed any other stakeholder I currently can't think of) action on dealing with our mental health crisis.

This must inevitably be done in the context of money, which I have come to appreciate is generally the single language that the world can best understand. The music industry saw the threat of piracy as clear as crystal on that basis. So hopefully this will have a similar effect in terms of generating a similar degree of response – both in terms of volume, and indeed unity. The mental wellbeing of artists is a new threat, one which I believe carries more gravity than our historic realisation that we cannot control, nor indeed destroy, the internet.

So there you go: I'm after money. Not for me. For us. Specifically, for further research into the conditions that I believe either stimulate pre-existing and unmanageable addictions or behavioural tendencies, or, in worst case scenarios, create the nuances that lead us into depression or anxiety, or both.

We then also need some more money based on the outcome of this research – hopefully to tell us how the fuck to deal with this. Training. Experience. Awareness. Identification. Treatment. All of it.

From what I hear, the industry is now swimming in money again. So what is the largely-financial argument I need to make in order to render this cause something that pretty much anyone can get behind?

Here it is: we are fucking ourselves as a business by not adequately providing the knowledge base – or the degree of fiduciary responsibility to pretty much any stakeholder (i.e. those which I have referenced above) in the music industry – on how to correctly identify and deal with mental health-related issues.

We are losing money, rooted in consequential loss as opposed to just pure economic loss.

Bluntly put, what good to us is a dead artist? Or a dead product manager? Or a dead fan? Can you make money out of them, in the long-term?

Let's take one of the more abstract (as least as far as I am concerned) recent examples of

////////////////////////////////////

**“Bluntly put,
what good is
a dead artist?
Or a dead
product
manager? Or
a dead fan?”**

////////////////////////////////////

an incident occasioning mental health issues – Chester Bennington.

How many team members, such as a product manager, an A&R, a tour manager, will now not have a job as a result of that artist no longer being alive?

How much income from live outings or record sales are lost due to the festivals he will no longer play or songs he will no longer write?

How many people will now not start bands, or labels, or management companies as a result of not being inspired to do so by a person of such creative and fiscal importance?

I would otherwise talk about Scott Hutchison, which admittedly – even as a slight positive – has inspired me to put this column to writing at this time. Because the issue is too important now, isn't it? Because he was one of ours, wasn't he?

Hopefully you can understand why, at this time, basically I can't talk too much about Scott.

I'll concentrate on the guy I didn't know to get this across, otherwise I won't be able to concentrate at all.

It is very easy for me to sit here and preach about this. But it is something that we put into practice on a regular basis at Killing Moon, in respect of most if not all of our monetised businesses. And it isn't just coming from me either, given that my staff and I are quite unified in this quest to put a heart to the motherbrain of the re-ignited music industry.

I love picking on my management assistant Rob as an example most of the time (in the nicest possible way, of course). In this context, that's especially true – given that the following event took place on his very first day in the office, back in September 2017.

Whilst getting used to our systems and indeed my own nuances/cursing out loud, we rather abruptly received the offer for Annabel Allum, an artist I had been managing for around 2.5 years at that stage, to support Beth Ditto on her entire EU (still counting the UK in that y'all) live run in October 2017.

This was seemingly our moment that we had been waiting for and we had to act fast.

We had a grand total of about five seconds to say yes to the tour, and then I had about a week to find the money in order to make it happen.

Rob, utilising his rather extensive experience as a touring artist himself, was put to the task of organising the routing, hotel bookings and air/



ground transportation for the tour. I'll leave you to decide which task was more laborious, and which one was more stressful.

By the next day – and obviously at this point we had confirmed that this was all going ahead – Rob did a rather brave thing. He told me he thought Annabel shouldn't do the tour.

At this point, I am Mo Farah on the final run up to the finishing line at London 2012, and this guy is in my fucking way.

It begged the question, 'Why, Rob? Why would you try to fuck this up for us?' And so the question was asked. The response needed to be said: 'I am a touring artist with nearly 10 years' experience. The routing is far from a nice, coherent oval shape. It is a fucking spaghetti junction. If Annabel misses one connecting flight or bus, it will consequently fuck up the rest of the tour dates. It will take an immense toll on her physically and mentally, and that will really have a direct knock-on effect onto the quality of her performance.'

'I'm not sure I could do it, and right now, on paper, I'm really not sure it is in her best interests overall to do this in this manner.'

We also semantically debated the merits of sending a young woman, on her own, in these circumstances, into central Europe for the very first time. Not that we want to seem patronising

or anything.

The net effect here was that, on reflection, we needed to get more money to ensure that Annabel could eat, sleep and travel in a manner consistent with dealing with a venture of this magnitude.

Which basically means I had to get the credit card out. I also needed to go out with her to the first show, make sure she was acclimatised to Beth Ditto's crew and live environment, and that she could generally get into the swing of the touring routine. Which, to be honest, I can't even do myself having ended up as tour manager/merch boy on several tours back in the proverbial day myself – lasting about three days before I started crying, and wanting to go home.

Beth Ditto, on the first date of the tour, invited Annabel to travel with her on the tour bus. Why? "Because she used to be me," Beth told me as I said goodbye following the sold-out show at Copenhagen's Vega venue, whilst she was talking to a bunch of fans that had waited outside the stage door after curfew to just catch a glimpse of her. "No way in hell am I letting her travel alone out here by herself. And I wish someone did that for me when I was her."

So, that was £2,500 on PDs, travel and accommodation well-spent. And I really, really mean that.



‘ARTIST DEVELOPMENT IS ABOUT HAVING BELIEF IN TALENT – AND WORKING SYNC IN AS PART OF THAT’

Abi Leland, boss of Leland Music, is one of those most revered figures in the field of British music supervision. But to get her start in the field, she had to seriously blag it...

Most of us muddle along in the early days of our careers without having to think about impressing a global superstar. Not Abi Leland. The highly respected music supervisor got her first job in the field, aged 20, working with none other than Sir Elton John and his partner David Furnish.

The film was *Women Talking Dirty*, produced by Rocket Pictures and released in 2001. Leland had no experience, but went in armed with passion, chutzpah, and a hunger to learn.

“When I found out there was a job as a music supervisor, I knew that’s what I wanted to do,” she says. “I printed out business cards with ‘music supervisor’ as my job title, went off and found as many leads as I could, went to some quite strange seminars loosely based around the subject of sound and music for visual media, and met people working in labels and film producers to ask questions and find out about it.”

One of those people was film composer Simon Boswell, who was working on

Women Talking Dirty and recommended that she get involved.

Leland remembers: “I didn’t know how to do the job, but I was quite up for winging it and I’ve always been good at asking questions and learning on the go.”

With help from ex business partner Dan Rose, who brought the necessary licensing expertise, Leland was soon working out of Elton John’s office and doing the music for his first feature film. She was officially a self-ordained, professional music supervisor.

Aside from one surreal phone call with

Elton, Leland mostly worked alongside Furnish. “He was great and lovely,” she says. “Looking back on it now, he was really quite patient as well. I was 20 years old, it was my first job, but I’m sure that whatever knowledge I might have lacked I probably compensated in enthusiasm and dedication! It was a good experience.”

The blagging paid off big time – cut to 2018 and Leland is now head of one of the UK’s most respected music supervision agencies, Leland Music.

Since launching in 2005, the company, which works across film, advertising and TV, has helped create ad campaigns and music partnerships for brands including Nike, Honda, Sony, Hovis, Lloyds TSB and Three Mobile, and feature films such as Kevin Macdonald’s *Last King of Scotland* and *How I Live Now*.

It’s also a regular partner of retail firm John Lewis, and has helped choose and create the music for the brand’s highly-anticipated Christmas TV ads.

Thanks in part to the creative nous of Leland and team, those campaigns have spawned four UK Top 10 hits, including two No.1s, and helped launch the careers of Ellie Goulding, Tom Odell, Gabrielle Aplin and Aurora with emotive cover versions of notable songs.

While it took Leland a while to discover music supervision, a career in music and film was perhaps destined from the start.

Leland’s dad, David Leland, is a successful film director; she spent every summer at Glastonbury from the age of five where her mum ran the kids’ area. (Leland actually learnt

to drive on Worthy Farm, practicing sharp left turns by the Pyramid Stage weeks before she crowds descended).

As a free spirit who wasn’t keen on the institution of school, Leland dropped out of her A Levels to work as a runner for Sarah Radclyffe Productions, with the ambition of becoming a film producer.

After making lots of tea and coffee, and literally running around the streets of Soho delivering and receiving packages, Leland quit for a second time to spend a few years partying at techno festivals across Europe.



Leland has worked on John Lewis Christmas ads since 2009

Eventually, as we all do, she realised raving just wasn’t going to pay the bills. So she returned to London as a runner again, before joining dance music compilation label Millennium Records in ’97.

Starting as office manager, she was soon putting together compilations herself, which opened the door to the record label and licensing world.

“I’d worked in film, I was working in music. I joined the dots.”

A stint at vinyl collectors label Simply Vinyl followed, which was where Leland was introduced to film music.

She recalls: “They were releasing a lot of old classics, soundtracks for films like *Easy Rider* and *Taxi Driver*, and Lalo Schiffrin and John Barry scores.

“I’d worked in film, then I was working in music, so started to join the dots and wonder if there was a job in all of this. I asked around and eventually found the title music supervisor.”

Discussing the early years of her career

and learning on the job, Leland says: “On a creative level, I absolutely loved it and music research came quite naturally. Music researching at that time was quite different to today but I still try and approach it in a similar way.

“When I first started there wasn’t an online resource so I was heavily reliant on relationships with music publishers, labels, managers, record shops and books, and spent half my time going from label to publisher, listening to music and coming away with bags and bags of CDs.”

Women Talking Dirty opened more doors and Leland and Rose worked together for three years, becoming the *de facto* music supervisors for early 2000s independent and mid-budget UK films.

These included *Intermission*, *There is Only One Jimmy Grimble*, *Born Romantic* and *Enigma*. The biggest lesson Leland learned during this period was simply the importance of asking questions.

“I was never afraid to ask questions, put my hand up and say I don’t understand, who, what or how? I felt I was totally valid to do that,” she says.

“It’s almost harder to do that now, you feel that at a certain age and level of experience, you should know all the

Both Lily Allen (left) and Ellie Goulding (right) have seen sales boosts from Leland Music-supervised ads



answers to everything. But I think you have to really fight against that idea because otherwise you stop learning.”

Financial strains and a conflicting ethos led to Leland parting ways with Rose, but she continued to work alone on projects including *Touching the Void* with director Kevin MacDonald.

After again growing frustrated with the lack of money available in films for a music supervisor at the time, Leland started to look for opportunities in advertising. While knocking on doors, she met British composer Pete Raeburn who gave her a job at his own Soundtree Music company, which provided the education and entry into the ad industry she needed.

After working on high profile campaigns, including Levis and Playstation, Leland was ready to venture out alone again and that's when Leland Music was born.

Six years ago she decided to build a team and the company now has a staff of seven. The decision to grow beyond herself was

a tricky one to get her head around at the time, but Leland hasn't looked back. She explains: “Like an editor, a music supervisor is ‘that person who does that job’ and at first I couldn't understand how to allow other people to take on responsibility. I was turning down work that I wanted to do but couldn't on my

“You have to fight against the idea of knowing all the answers.”

own. Thankfully, I really took to being a business owner and managing people. It became very exciting that it wasn't just me; I was growing a business, and I still find that really exciting.”

Leland offers some advice for those wanting to take a similar entrepreneurial path: “For anyone looking to start a business, my main advice is that you've got

to want to have employees and care about their development and careers.

“You've got to want to think about how your business runs and functions internally, but also within the industry. If you just want to do your job, don't run a business, be a freelancer.”

One of Leland Music's most high profile jobs has been the John Lewis Christmas ad campaign, which the company has worked on every year since the first one in 2009, alongside agency Adam & EveDDB.

It wasn't Leland's intention to always choose a modern cover version of a well-known song at the beginning, but the initial idea has paid off for both John Lewis, whose sales have risen significantly, and the music industry.

After resulting in multiple chart hits for songs written by John Lennon, Keane, Elton John and Frankie Goes to Hollywood, the campaign is now a highly coveted promotional slot for artists.

Its most notable successes include covers

by Lily Allen, who hit No.1 in 2014, Ellie Goulding, who reached No.2 in 2010, and Gabrielle Aplin, who hit the top spot in 2012. Tom Odell peaked at No.7 in 2014.

“When Ellie Goulding went to No.2, the music industry went, Oh wow, this ad has created a massive hit for what was at that point an emerging artist, so everyone started to sit up and take notice,” says Leland. “We've just carried on approaching it in the same way as we do with everything, which is to deliver the best creative. Not to say we don't deliver the best strategy and commercial aspect, of course you do, but none of that is going to work if you don't have good creative in the first place. If that's your first and foremost, everything else will fall into place.”

The success of the slot must result in a lot of pitches... “John Lewis has become more challenging every year as there is more pressure and it's known as this commercial opportunity for artists, which has added a whole other dynamic,” Leland answers. “There are a lot of relationships to manage around it! But I'm very transparent and pretty direct, which I think is the best way to work with people.”

While the chart hits have come as a welcome surprise, Leland is keen to emphasise her company's priority on creative at the core and long-term thinking when matching music to picture.

“If an artist or a writer lands an ad it can make them a significant amount of money overnight and that is one the joys of sync. But at the same time, it's not about overnight hits,” she explains.

“I love that sync is open to everyone, you're not just looking for the big and the famous. I've licensed everything from the most obscure track from various territories that no-one has ever heard, to massive hits by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

“It's very varied and not exclusive so you have to approach it like that when you're looking. Sync is not about trends either. People ask, ‘What are the trends in music and sync at the moment?’ Lots of people will come up with answers but I really don't believe it works in that way.

“If labels and publishers suddenly

starting signing ‘sync friendly’ artists and writers, what does that mean? Artist development is just about having belief in the music, working long term and working sync in as part of that.”

While the music industry has been getting to grips with streaming and a subscription model, so has the film and TV worlds, and advertising is facing its own challenges in the digital era. That's resulted in a shift in where Leland Music gets most of its business, which is now leaning more towards film and TV as well as advertising.

“Streaming has been fantastic because creatively it's opening up so many more opportunities in the UK,” Leland says. “From a music aspect, the opportunities for music supervisors and composers are far greater.”

As with any change, there are some challenges to overcome in this new world order, most pertinently in the amount

“I love that sync is open to everyone; you're not just looking for the big or famous.”

of value being placed on music. Leland explains: “What I see happen quite a bit in the sync industry now is the value of music being driven down. While the approach of trying to hustle and drive everyone's fees down might make money for companies in the short term, it's not good for the health of the industry long term and is a really irresponsible position to take.

“The music budget needs to reflect the production budget of whatever you're working on, whether that's a film, Netflix series, online commercial or massive global TV commercial. Not everything can be the ideal scenario, but music budgets are shrinking across the board, and whilst there is always a solution for every budget restraint, it's not necessarily going to bring the greatest creative solution.”

Leland fights against the trend of dwindling budgets with transparency, communication and education. She adds:

“You have to have those conversations constantly, ‘You've got a budget of this but you've allocated this over here and you're restricting yourself.’ Everyone needs to do that. People have to be aware of the compromises that are made. We need to make sure that with all these greater creative opportunities, they still manage to be financially viable and sustainable for composers and the music industry.”

Developing composers is now part of Leland's business through sister agency Leland Originals, which launched in 2016; it represents Michael Russoff, Tom Hodge and Donna McKeivitt. It also focuses on new talent from diverse backgrounds. The idea was inspired by the potential of some of the lesser-known composers Leland has discovered during her career, who were lacking the representation they wanted.

“A lot of agents won't necessarily sign a composer until they've got a stream of credits, whereas we're working from the other way, finding people that we think are really interesting at whatever stage they are at and developing them,” she says. “We are constantly looking at what their goals and aspirations are and figuring out the best way to get there. We've got grand ideas and there are big challenges but I really do believe in it and I'm really enjoying it.”

Finally, after working with Elton John, launching and growing her own company, and securing work with some of the biggest brands around, does Leland have any other ambitions on her bucket list? “In terms of where I want to get to, it's just the cliché of being very good at what you do,” she concludes. “With the music supervision company and the composer management arm, if I was to compare where I want to get to within the music industry, I'd want to be like XL Records because they do things exactly how they want to, have complete belief in the artists they sign, and have a really good moral standpoint in terms of how they work with artists and industry. That is what I aim to do. I don't have ambitions to be the biggest but I want to be the best and most respected at doing things in a unique way.”

GET BUSY INNOVATING – OR GET BUSY DYING

Cliff Fluet is delighted to see the recorded music business bouncing back from a decade of gloom – but, he warns, standing still would be foolish...

Over the last few months, it's been fantastic to monitor the change in the fortunes of the record business.

There is very much a sense of 'happy days are here again' for an industry finally moving into growth, with many of the losses of the last 20 years soon to be wiped out between the significant growth in streaming, material advances in relation to new platforms and equity realisations from companies such as Spotify.

Whilst it is undeniably great that the industry I have worked in for over two decades it is feeling confident and happy again, I do feel I have to point to the grit in the oyster: as much as people would like to think that music industry disruption is 'over', I am very much of the view that we are not finally at the end of disruption, but only at the end of the beginning.

If one wanted to be unduly harsh, one could point out that the promise of Napster's technologies, to make all of the music in the world available by way of a 'celestial jukebox', has only been properly embraced by rights-holders and consumers in the last few years.

If one compares that to the rate of change in virtually every other sector of commerce or society in the last 20 years, my concern is that music may find itself behind the pace of change of its new customers, the giants of technology.

In that context, my view is that now is the time for the music industry to start tackling disruption and innovation head on, shifting from the back foot towards the front foot.

My concern is there are too many inherent instabilities, both inside and outside of the music industry, that mean this rate of change is only going to accelerate.

Some of the music industry's biggest new customers are looking to rapidly diversify their business models in the face of such change. Amazon is moving beyond retail, to services, subscriptions and original content. YouTube



“Voice will become a significant gatekeeper.”

is embracing a 'twin engine' strategy, offering content either for advertising or on an ad-free basis – a major shift in their business priorities. Apple is moving into payments, services, health and original content.

According to reports, Spotify is now starting to work with artists and managers direct and Facebook is understood to be mulling subscriptions for an ad-free service, whilst looking to innovate with new music products.

Each and every one of these companies is investing heavily in new technologies which, driven by their proprietary data, algorithms and new devices, will all ensure their long-term futures.

There are other major concerns that the music industry must look to tackle.

Voice will be a significant gatekeeper, with the rise of smart speakers and the control of ecosystems controlled by Alexa, Siri, Hey Google



and others meaning that the music industry is going to have significantly less impact on the levers of control for market share, or what it takes to break new artists.

Artificial intelligence represents a significant opportunity for major labels. But, at the moment, there is significantly more investment in this technology coming from the platforms and the technology giants versus the music rights-holders – despite the fact AI can clearly bring further value to fans and consumers.

Artificial intelligence will also drive the major value aspects of personalisation and content adaptation, a concept which appears to “feel rather unsettling to music industry incumbents rather than being embraced as an opportunity to increase the fiscal value of its assets and increase the levels of engagement with consumers.

Blockchain technologies could allow artists to bypass the existing forms of accounting and/or collection that lead to a more vertically integrated offering from platforms themselves, which will mean that artists of the future may simply chose to cut out all of the middle men.

So what is my point? Well, quite simply, whilst we have a window where revenues are

rising, equity stakes are being realised and new market entrants are looking to invest in music technology again, it's time to avoid the sins of the past, stop seeing innovation as something that gets in the way of the day job, and understand that it will be *the* job of tomorrow.

The music industry should no longer be timid about new technology or be upsetting the status quo (or, indeed, artists including Status Quo).

My clients in digital media that are outside of pureplay music are investing heavily in new technology, fully cognisant that the rate of change isn't going to slow, stop or stay the same. They know it is going to accelerate and are embracing the change.

Those companies appreciate that innovation comes from without and rarely from within, and understand that the only way to remain relevant is to 'run towards the sound of gunfire'. They understand that they must switch their reflexive response of 'we don't understand this' as the reason they must innovate, rather than the reason not to.

Relying on one or two current business models staying the same is rather like relying on 'hope': as a strategy, it's a very risky one.

‘SOMEHOW, A MAD, ROMANTIC FASCINATION STILL ENDURES’

Fierce Panda founder (and ex-NME journalist) Simon Williams rejoices as he looks back to 1999 as a nadir for British music and its mainstream standing – and then weeps as he realises things have been getting worse ever since...

The late ‘90s, it is generally considered, was a terrible, terrible time for leftfield guitar bands. The Britpop party had burnt out, leaving major labels lumbered with lumpen sub-Oasis wannabes. *NME* sales were tumbling. Gay Dad were hot property. One alternative Radio One DJ infamously decreed that 1999 was “the worst year for music ever”.

Funnily enough, these were great times for Fierce Panda records. In 1998 the label was barely four years old and, thanks to our manic turnover of one-off seven inch releases, split singles and compilation EPs with fearsomely lurid names like *Mortal Wombat* and *Songs About Plucking*, we had a small part in no fewer than 22 acts playing Reading Festival that year.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Reading’s headliners captured the mood of confusion in 1998, with Garbage, Beastie Boys and Page & Plant making a vividly wide-ranging trio of headliners. But our attention was diverted elsewhere by Panda graduates Ash, Symposium, Supergrass, Bis, The Bluetones, Super Furry Animals, Mogwai, Kenickie, The Unbelievable Truth, 60 Ft Dolls, Ultrasound, Six By Seven, Formula One, Dawn Of The Replicants, Laptop, The Pecadilloes and The Regular Fries.

To top it all off, on Saturday the *Melody Maker* stage opened with Seafood at midday, followed by The Llama Farmers, Snug, Campag Velocet and Idlewild – Panda proteges all.

In many ways the label was at its peak right then, spewing out indie vinyl nuggets and spilling our lager in the Reading rain. Of the Panda bands scattered across the bill who’d released singles with us, the bigger labels they moved on to included EMI, A&M, V2, Nude, Food, and [PIAS] – and

they’re just the ones I remember.

Someone wise once asked if we were at all bothered by ‘losing’ all these bands. It had actually never occurred to us, because it was just *The Way It Was* when we were growing up. The Cure, Orange Juice, Aztec Camera, The Farmer’s Boys, The Wonder Stuff, The Jesus & Mary Chain, The Wedding Present, The Primitives... virtually every band who churned out a half-decent indie single seemingly got a major label deal. So when Fierce Panda started out we merrily carried on doing *What Those People Did*. And Those People were about to do it A Lot More.

In the spring of the terrible, terrible year that was 1999 both Muse and Coldplay had pivotal releases. Elsewhere, Elbow were flexing their musical biceps. They were soon to be joined by a rejuvenated Snow Patrol and a remoulded Keane. A curious brand of MOR indie was about take over the world.

What do those bands have in common? Much like the aforementioned ‘80s acts, they were all broken by independent labels. They all struggled to be taken seriously. They all defied basic A&R logic, because they were too nerdy or too old or had too much baggage or, quite frankly, sounded too much like Radiohead. They all went on to do pretty well.

We worked closely with Coldplay for six months, up until the release of the *Brothers & Sisters* single in April ‘99. A couple of years later we upped the ante with Keane whose second Panda single (the presciently-titled *This Is The Last Time*) was on the Radio One A-list as they signed to Island. By some magical accident, small labels like us had developed a symbiotic relationship with the major labels. Much like the oxpecker on the

back of the hippo, we helped each other, even if we didn’t really like each other.

This pecking relationship continued, for us at least, until around 2006, pretty soon after Dead Disco, Gledhill, The Maccabees, Boy Kill Boy, Battle and The Revelations all moved on from the Panda to Larger Labels. At which point it all ended. We didn’t take it personally; after then it wasn’t so much they didn’t sign any of our bands, they didn’t want to sign *anyone’s* bands.

It’s fair to say that 1998 was a different musical world, of course. If you sold 1,000 7-inch singles, got played six times on the Evening Session and sold out the Camden Falcon, you’d have a pretty good shout at getting a record deal. The curious thing was, there was a perverse kind of logic to this process – over the course of those six months you could ascertain if you were looking at the new Coldplay or the next no-hopers.

It’s that perverse logic which has been lost in the chaos of the past 10 years, where the A&R process has accelerated at a manic pace. There are a load more bands going to the marketplace way too early and clogging up the system. Streaming encourages blandness, the algorithms driven by pallid facsimiles of more popular playlist tracks, so individuality lies condemned. Labels are figuring out that 10 million streams does not necessarily equate to 10 million fans.

Little wonder the majors should be so perplexed and perpetually poleaxed by kneejerk decisions: the mild wee A&R frenzy of a few years back when NGOD, Pretty Vicious, Clean Cut Kid, Vant and Neon Waltz were all signed (with nary a notable indie single release between them) was followed by several droppings and much mistrust – one label reportedly implemented a two-year ban on signing new guitar bands. It’s little wonder we’re running out of Gibson-gripping festival headliners.

In short: it used to be grim up north, now it’s grime all over the place.

So A&R is a thankless task. Yet, somehow, a mad, romantic fascination still endures. Now when we have conversations with fresh-faced money people, they tell us how they want the ‘glory’ and ‘credibility’ of discovering that next new sensation themselves. ‘We want to get back to grassroots,’ they enthuse, like mildly demented Alan Titchmarshes.

People! Rest assured there is no ‘credibility’ or ‘glory’ in trudging down to Dalston Victoria on a wet Wednesday night, or wasting another



“One label reportedly implemented a two-year ban on signing new guitar bands.”

Sunday evening at home weeping over the SoundCloud wastelands.

There are lights at the end of the tunnel: one great thing about majors not signing guitar bands on a regular basis is that we finally have a new generation of acts who’ve grown up not bothering to make music to get a record deal, because there are no record deals to be had.

I have fond memories of how the admirably shouty trio of Idles, Shame and Cabbage shook up a sun-splashed Latitude Festival last year. And while not being a giant fanboy of Fat White Family (I always preferred Dingus Khan when it came to alt rock anarchy), even I can appreciate their massive influence on the next feral generation from South London, with the likes of Sports Team, Milk Disco, Hotel Lux and Peeping Drexels creeping through the back door.

Consider that one of the most talked about bands today, The Talk Show, sound eerily like Wah! Heat! circa spring 1980 and it becomes apparent that these people are barely pandering to the majors. We have our own angsty posse with post-punkstas Desperate Journalist (pictured above), smartrockers 485C and indie romantics The Caress all ploughing their intellectual furrows. We think they’re brilliant. And yes, we think in 1998 they would have all walked into record deals.

So we’re still doing the same old same old: spewing out indie nuggets and spilling our pints in the rain. Remember us this way.

Murray and
MCPR MD,
Sarah Henderson



A CHALMED LIFE

Murray Chalmers PR is celebrating its 10th anniversary as an agency this year. To mark the occasion, founder and general music biz PR legend Murray Chalmers looks back on 10 highlights from the last decade...

Running a company is tough, especially doing it by yourself. Thirty years of working in a record company, where you are largely cosseted and protected, couldn't prepare me for the rigours of running my own business.

Over the 10 years of MCPR I have learned many things and I believe it's helped me understand people much more; I'm not a cynic, but I sure am a realist, and now I trust a lot less people in the industry than I did at the beginning.

But I never really wanted to be part of the gang anyway, and I think some of our success is maybe down to that. We don't really play the game, in terms of worrying about the power struggles, the ego and general wankiness that can pervade.

There are plenty of good people in the music industry who just want to do a great job and are still driven by the artistry and the music; we wanted to be counted amongst them.

KATE BUSH LIVE SHOWS

Firstly, I have to say that just working with Kate is such a joy and a personal thrill for me. I adore her.

When she told me that she was thinking of doing live shows again there was quite a long period when I had to keep it all to myself. I couldn't even tell the people who worked with me.

There was a lot of planning involved behind the scenes, and a lot of secret conversations. So few people knew that the news just never got out there.

On the day we were due to announce the shows, I couldn't sleep and was up so early. Listening to *The Sensual World* as I walked to the tube, I burst into tears, which is not something I do regularly. The excitement was just enormous.

As soon as we sent the email out the news was everywhere. I was shaking. We opened a bottle of champagne and just sat there as we got bombarded with calls and emails. It was such a buzz.

Then the shows sold out and I rang Kate to tell her and it hit me: this is really happening.

Of course the shows were amazing and the opening night was just beyond everything. I remember Caitlin Moran running up to me and grabbing me and shaking me and just screaming.

The Stone Roses reformation



Kate Bush



Yoko Ono



That feeling of euphoria, when there is so much joy in a room, is something I will never forget.

RADIOHEAD

Radiohead have been so instrumental in the perception of what we do as a company. In fact, it was because of them that I set up MCPR.

Because the way the band do things is so innovative, considered and yet often spontaneous, it couldn't help but impact on me. And they've been so loyal to me.

There was a strange, protracted period when their contract with Parlophone was up and it wasn't clear to the outside world (or to me) what they would do. Because I had a good relationship with the band I asked Parlophone if I could continue to work with them in that interim period and Tony Wadsworth agreed.

In those days technology wasn't too advanced and I remember I had a separate computer and ISDN line etc just for my new business, which was basically Radiohead! I would be doing Parlophone work on my main computer and Radiohead work on the other. It was odd but exciting, and gave me the idea of setting up by myself.

I had also been asked by my friend Siouxsie Sioux if I would look after the PR for her solo album, so I took that on and would do that from my office in Parlophone, a rival record company to the one she was signed to. Punk rock!

Anyway, Radiohead signed to XL and the first project was In Rainbows, which caused such a seismic shift in the industry.

It had also long become clear to me that I had to be independent – so I had my own seismic shift of leaving a really well paid job after 30 years and going it alone. Independence is the best!

FIRST DAY OF BUSINESS/COLDPLAY

I'd left Parlophone when they were taken over by Terra Firma and I hated it. Parlophone had been so good for me, especially Tony Wadsworth, who I admired so much, and still do. And of course the main thing was the artists.

The first to say she would come with me to my independent company was Yoko Ono. I remember telling her I was leaving and she instantly said she wanted to stay with me for her own work and for the John Lennon estate. I'd been a fan of Yoko's forever and am evangelical about her. So that was a major boost.

Then I just mentioned it to all my favourite Parlophone artists and they all said yes: Pet Shop Boys (who I'd worked with since 1985 and with whom I still have a close working relationship and friendship), Kylie and Lily Allen. Radiohead had already said they would stay with me.

I was too scared to ask Coldplay because I thought they might think my new setup was too small, so when they said they wanted to come with me it gave me a lot of confidence. They were the last

major artist to join what was already a hugely impressive list for a new company staffed by one person; it meant a lot to me. And of course I still work with them today; they've shown such loyalty.

I blagged a very posh office in New Bond St and MCPR was in business. It was me and a phone.

Then Brett Anderson got in touch and said he wanted to come in for a meeting. I'd been a huge Suede groupie, going to the early fan club shows etc., yet never worked with them. So Brett became my first new client, and of course I would eventually get to work on Suede, one of my favourite bands of all time. So 'we' were in business – although at this point, the 'we' was just me.

STONE ROSES GIGS

Simon Moran [SJM Concerts] said he wanted to meet. I didn't and still don't know a lot of the legendary music biz figures, although, of course, I knew his status.

I had no idea what the meeting was about and assumed it was a new band.

Our office is open plan so we had to sit in a space where everyone could hear what we were saying. And when Simon mentioned that he wanted us to work with him on the Roses reformation my legs started shaking.

It was hard to keep cool and I was aware that everyone in the office would be on tenterhooks. The meeting ended with Simon saying I should go to Manchester and meet

“When Simon wanted us to work on the Roses reformation my legs started shaking.”

the band. As soon as he left the office we all jumped up and started shouting. It went crazy!

And then of course the Heaton Park gigs were phenomenal. We had our own press area with a well stocked bar and it became like a mini festival, with people hanging out, filing copy, sharing stories. For three days it was all-encompassing and hugely energising and exciting. And we loved it when Ian gave a nod to Sarah [Henderson] from the stage. We were like fans who get spotted by the artist. Such a great time.

ROBBIE WILLIAMS' WEDDING

This was on another level. We were all in LA when news leaked about the wedding, although they had got the location wrong. So all this misinformation was out there about Catalina Island etc.

The pressure was monumental. All Rob's team were holed up in the Sunset Marquis and one day Josie (his then co-manager) and I were ringing from room to room and discussing details about the wedding when we thought we were being listened to and had to stop using the hotel phones.

The day of the wedding was nuts, with helicopters circling overhead and the tabloid circus in full flow. And yet in the house there was such an atmosphere of calm.

It was all hands on deck though, and I had to get one of Ayda's outfits from a clothes shop and drive it up to the house, as well



Radiohead tease their arrival at Glastonbury 2017

as dealing with all the PR. I remember, for once, thinking, This is glamorous. Because it was! I grew up in a council house in Dundee, so this was another world.

The nicest memory of the day is walking past the bedroom and seeing lovely David Enthoven fixing Rob's tie for the ceremony. It was so poignant and of course David, who was so kind to me, is no longer with us.

NOEL GALLAGHER

When I had to go and meet Noel I was really nervous. But we spoke about music mainly and, at the end, he said we were in.

I was amazed as I thought there would be some long consultation process. I felt pretty chuffed that I hadn't fucked up the meeting. We probably spoke about punk and Morrissey.

I'd asked him how he liked to do interviews and he said, Put me in the room with the journalist, you go, shut the door and leave the rest to me. That's my kind of rock star.

Getting Noel on our roster was a big deal for me. I think it came at a time when he was making a lot of changes and there was a spirit of gung-ho and adventure about the whole thing, which was proven by the direction the music has taken, and the way it's presented.

We try not to go in for all the usual bullshit around PR, and bring it back to the artist and the music – which can often get overlooked in terms of a marketing masterplan.

I think if you come from the punk generation it's hard to go along with bullshit and, although Noel is obviously younger than me, he's a punk.

CHRISIE HYNDE/SHIRLEY MANSON

Chrissie is very special to me. Her voice is so incredible and she's such an iconoclast. She's never being boring and she's never being bored!

For instance she suddenly started painting quite recently and her work is really good! There's a song on her first album called *Lovers of Today* and it was because of that song that I had to come out to my mum. My sister found me crying to it because of some teenage love affair that had gone wrong, and my mum went mad and basically put me out of the house.

So whenever I hear that song, I think back to leaving Dundee and seeking the bright lights. It took a while to find them, but I did!

Sometimes I look at our roster and can't believe who we represent. And Chrissie is definitely one of these people. Her voice still gives me goosebumps. I loved it when Garbage released *Special*, which was such an homage to Chrissie that Shirley even threw in a line from *Talk of the Town* at the end.

Garbage came about with us because I'd known Shirley since Edinburgh clubbing days and then one day, a few years ago, I saw her queuing to get on a flight to Edinburgh. I was too shy to go up



Kylie Minogue

to her, so I texted and I saw her looking round, probably thinking she had a stalker.

Then she told me Garbage were working on new material and asked if we would do it – all on a flight to Edinburgh. By the time we landed it was done! Shirley is an amazingly talented artist who just captivates everyone she meets, including me. I'm a little bit in love with her, if truth be told.

YOKO ONO MELTDOWN

I've worked with Yoko since her *Rising* album in 1996. I saw it on the schedule. I was a huge fan and was really pissed off at the way she was perceived, so I told Parlophone I had to work it.

It was the start of a long business relationship and friendship. I love Yoko. She's been like a mother to me at times, especially when my own mum died. And she's helped me with the business in so many ways.

I love everything she does because she's the original and she's the best. There are so many art shows I go to now and think, Oh yeah, Yoko did this 40 years ago; same with music.

Probably one of the highlights was working with Yoko on her *Meltdown* [festival on London's South Bank, 2015]. It was thrilling to me that she wanted to make it very female focussed. Siouxsie did her first live shows in years, Savages supported Iggy Pop, Patti Smith played, Peaches, Pussy Riot....all done with the support of the amazing Jane Beese, now at the Roundhouse. It's

hard to say it without sounding wanky but: WOMAN POWER!

PET SHOP BOYS

Pet Shop Boys are the artists I've had the longest relationship with – and we still work together and we're still friends. Their music has shaped my life. There have been so many highlights with them in a career built on doing things differently and doing things better. I'm still the fan that I always was and their attitude towards things has definitely helped shape my own.

I think punk and PSB shaped me – maybe in different ways, but actually probably quite similarly: not doing what's expected; questioning everything; being playful/disruptive; being outsiders; putting your foot down; saying no; having fun; making every decision count; not being boring...

KYLIE

I'm writing this two days after Kylie's 50th birthday party and am still on a high. So much love in the room for this woman!

I've worked with her for nearly 20 years and it's sped by. She's an amazing spirit who has the most incredible body of work that has changed people's lives – and yet who is constantly moving forward. Her live shows are groundbreaking, and the way she constantly reinterprets her past work is just great. I have never met anyone who has come away from meeting Kylie not feeling that the world is a better place. She's an amazing woman.

SPOTIFY'S OFFICIAL UK CHART: Top 50 tracks Q1 2018 - UK



Rank	Artist	Track
1	Drake	God's Plan
2	Ramz	Barking
3	Dua Lipa	IDGAF
4	Eminem	River (feat. Ed Sheeran)
5	SZA, Kendrick Lamar	All The Stars (with SZA)
6	Macklemore, Jess Glynne, Rudimental	These Days (feat. Jess Glynne, Macklemore & Dan Caplen)
7	The Greatest Showman Ensemble, Keala Settle	This Is Me
8	Post Malone	rockstar
9	Portugal. The Man	Feel It Still
10	Jax Jones	Breathe
11	Cardi B, Bruno Mars	Finesse (Remix) [feat. Cardi B]
12	Camila Cabello	Havana
13	Zendaya, Zac Efron	Rewrite The Stars
14	Jason Derulo, French Montana	Tip Toe (feat. French Montana)
15	Camila Cabello	Never Be the Same
16	Anne-Marie, Marshmello	FRIENDS
17	NF	Let You Down
18	Dua Lipa	New Rules
19	Clean Bandit, Julia Michaels	I Miss You (feat. Julia Michaels)
20	Rita Ora	Anywhere
21	MK	17
22	Zendaya, Hugh Jackman, Zac Efron, The Greatest Showman Ensemble, Keala Settle	The Greatest Show
23	Dave	No Words
24	Post Malone	I Fall Apart
25	Post Malone	Psycho (feat. Ty Dolla \$ign)

Rank	Artist	Track
26	Not3s, Mabel	Fine Line (with Not3s)
27	Not3s, Mabel	My Lover - Radio Edit
28	Craig David	I Know You
29	B Young	Jumanji
30	G-Eazy, Halsey	Him & I (with Halsey)
31	The Weeknd, Kendrick Lamar	Pray For Me (with Kendrick Lamar)
32	Michelle Williams, Hugh Jackman, Ziv Zaifman	A Million Dreams
33	Mr Eazi, RAYE	Decline
34	Rita Ora, Liam Payne	For You (Fifty Shades Freed) (& Rita Ora)
35	J Hus	Bouff Daddy
36	Drake, BlocBoy JB	Look Alive (feat. Drake)
37	Hugh Jackman, Zac Efron	The Other Side
38	Marshmello, Khalid	Silence
39	Selena Gomez, Marshmello	Wolves
40	Loren Allred	Never Enough
41	Ed Sheeran	Shape of You
42	Hailee Steinfeld, Alesso	Let Me Go (with Alesso, Florida Georgia Line & watt)
43	Sigrid	Strangers
44	Grey, Zedd, Maren Morris	The Middle
45	Steel Banglez, MoStack, Yungen	Bad (feat. Yungen, MoStack, Mr Eazi & Not3s)
46	Stormzy	Blinded By Your Grace, Pt. 2 (feat. MNEK)
47	Ed Sheeran	Perfect
48	Bazzi	Mine
49	Beyoncé, Ed Sheeran	Perfect Duet (Ed Sheeran & Beyoncé)
50	Sam Smith	Too Good At Goodbyes

SPOTIFY'S OFFICIAL UK CHART: Top 50 tracks Q1 2018 - Global



Rank	Artist	Track
1	Drake	God's Plan
2	Post Malone	rockstar
3	Camila Cabello	Havana
4	SZA, Kendrick Lamar	All The Stars (with SZA)
5	Dua Lipa	IDGAF
6	Eminem	River (feat. Ed Sheeran)
7	Cardi B, Bruno Mars	Finesse (Remix) [feat. Cardi B]
8	Demi Lovato, Luis Fonsi	Échame La Culpa
9	Dua Lipa	New Rules
10	Selena Gomez, Marshmello	Wolves
11	Bazzi	Mine
12	Camila Cabello	Never Be the Same
13	Post Malone	Psycho (feat. Ty Dolla \$ign)
14	Ed Sheeran	Perfect
15	NF	Let You Down
16	G-Eazy, Halsey	Him & I (with Halsey)
17	Bebe Rexha, Florida Georgia Line	Meant to Be (feat. Florida Georgia Line)
18	Grey, Zedd, Maren Morris	The Middle
19	Post Malone	I Fall Apart
20	Ed Sheeran	Shape of You
21	Macklemore, Jess Glynne, Rudimental	These Days (feat. Jess Glynne, Macklemore & Dan Caplen)
22	The Weeknd, Kendrick Lamar	Pray For Me (with Kendrick Lamar)
23	Anne-Marie, Marshmello	FRIENDS
24	Hailee Steinfeld, Alesso	Let Me Go (with Alesso, Florida Georgia Line & watt)
25	Drake, BlocBoy JB	Look Alive (feat. Drake)

Rank	Artist	Track
26	Daddy Yankee	Dura
27	Migos	Stir Fry
28	Maluma	Corazón
29	Anitta, J Balvin	Downtown
30	Marshmello, Khalid	Silence
31	Sam Smith	Too Good At Goodbyes
32	Maroon 5	What Lovers Do (feat. SZA)
33	The Chainsmokers	Sick Boy
34	Clean Bandit, Julia Michaels	I Miss You (feat. Julia Michaels)
35	Piso 21	Déjala Que Vuelva (feat. Manuel Turizo)
36	Wolfine	Bella
37	Ozuna, Natti Natasha	Criminal
38	Metro Boomin, Offset	Ric Flair Drip (& Metro Boomin)
39	Imagine Dragons	Thunder
40	Zendaya, Zac Efron	Rewrite The Stars
41	Portugal. The Man	Feel It Still
42	Beyoncé, Ed Sheeran	Perfect Duet (Ed Sheeran & Beyoncé)
43	Bad Bunny, Prince Royce, J Balvin	Sensualidad
44	The Greatest Showman Ensemble, Keala Settle	This Is Me
45	Lil Uzi Vert	XO TOUR Llif3
46	G-Eazy	No Limit
47	ZAYN, Sia	Dusk Till Dawn - Radio Edit
48	Liam Payne, Rita Ora	For You (Fifty Shades Freed) (& Rita Ora)
49	Khalid	Young Dumb & Broke
50	Post Malone	Congratulations

Every Picture Tells A Story



Date: August 22, 2001

Location: Hilton Hotel, Tel Aviv

From left to right, that's me, my then other half Gary Crowley, my friend Simon Halfon and the one-and-only George Michael.

It was taken at Simon's wedding and it's the closest pictorial representation of the story I want to tell. Because, on that night, there were no cameras. (Don't get too excited, it's not that kind of story; *MBUK* told me 'there are limits').

It started when Gary and I were invited to a soiree round at Simon's flat. Simon is a graphic artist who designed record sleeves for Paul Weller, Oasis and George Michael, among others.

I was informed there would be just six of us in total at the party, and when we arrived I saw that one of the other guests was George himself.

I had met George on several occasions working at Sony Music and he was always charming. We had some food and a few drinks, then Simon announced that we'd be playing his favourite game, Beat The Intro. You know the one, where you hear 10 seconds of a song and try to guess what it is. This news filled me with dread. I love music but this kind of competitive 'game' is not and never has been my idea of fun.

Everyone breezes through their songs, of course. And then it's my turn. Simon presses play and a very familiar song comes booming out of the speakers... and my mind goes completely blank.

Looking round the room I can see everyone is smiling at me, and it slowly, horrifyingly, dawns on me that it's a song by someone not a million miles from where I'm sitting – and, what's more, was a huge hit for Sony.

Yep, George Michael is sitting about three feet away from me and I can't for the life of me remember what the track he's about to start singing is. He stares at me incredulously (but eyes twinkling with amusement rather than anger), and says, 'Jackie, we were signed to you!'

In my panic, I shriek, Wham Rap!! A small cheer goes up and a I even get a high five from George. I can't even begin to explain my relief. And I immediately vowed never to play Beat The Bloody Intro ever again.

Jackie Hyde is VP, Artist and Company Relations at Sony Music UK, where she has worked for nearly 40 years – with every superstar artist and every would-be superstar exec. In 2014 she was given the Outstanding Achievement Award at Music Week's inaugural Women In Music Event. In her spare time she is a much-loved industry legend.

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