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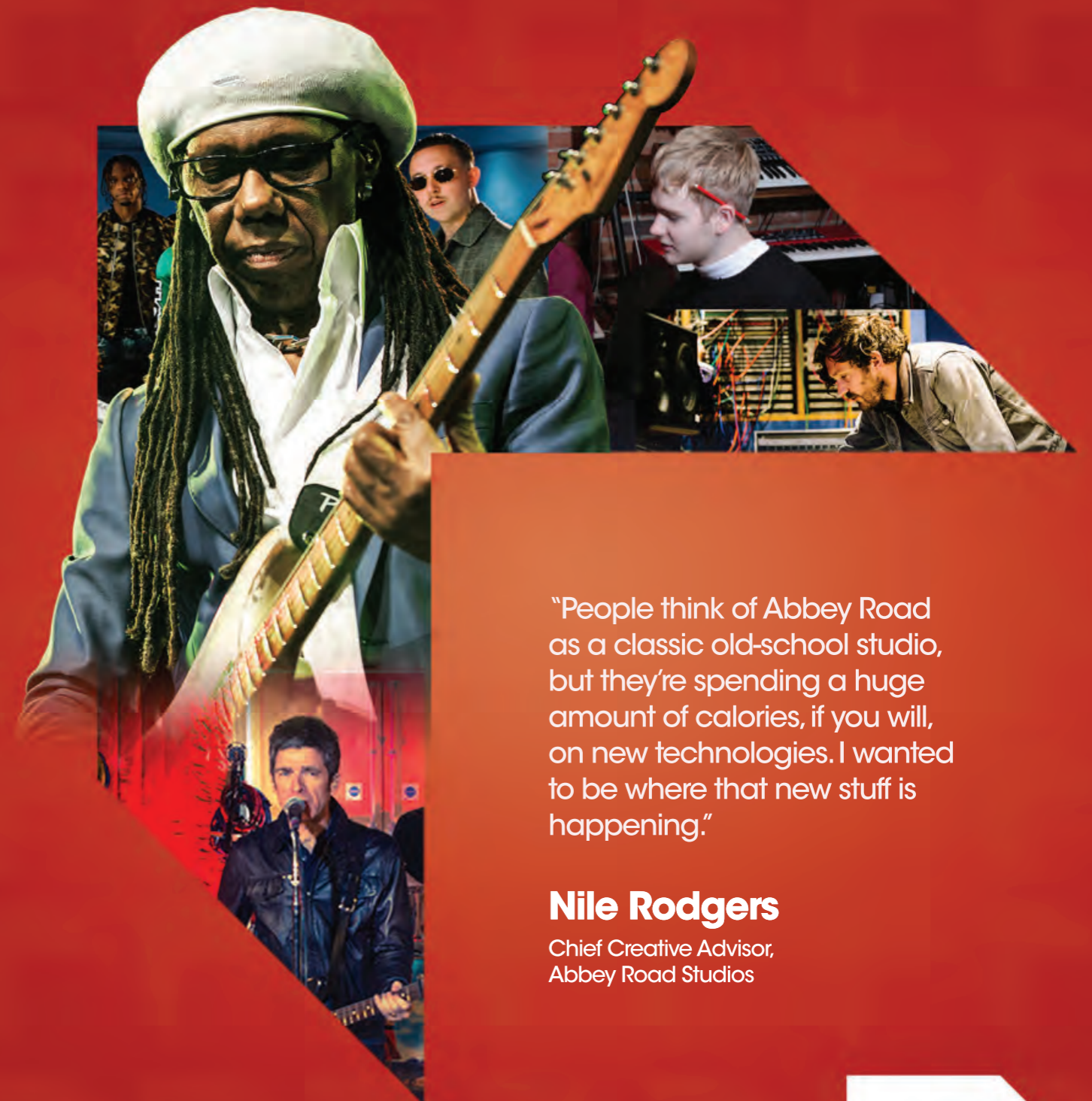
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Nile Rodgers

Chief Creative Advisor,
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EDITOR'S LETTER

Do you know why the seven-day week exists? I mean, beyond the fact global governments all agree that 'takeaway night' – a concept clearly keeping society from descending into barbarism – becomes dangerously redundant without it.

The Biblical seven-day week apparently came to be in the sixth century BC (or thereabouts). Many historians believe it was inspired by the Babylonian chronicling of the moon within the 12-month lunar calendar. So far, so Wikipedia.

But here are some other things you might not know about the 'week' – things which call into question the very fabric of modern civilization, aka the TV programming schedule of I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!.

First: the days of the week are outdated nonsense. They were named in tribute to the seven 'classical planets' from Babylonian astronomy: the Moon, the Sun, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Mercury and Mars. These were the only 'planets' believed to exist during this period, because they were the only ones we could see with our dumb eyes; humankind didn't get round to inventing the telescope until 1610.

As you'll have noticed, two of these 'classical planets' aren't even planets. Also, there are actually *eight* official planets in our solar system (Pluto doesn't qualify). Yep: we badly miscounted, then decided we were too set in our ways to adequately fix the problem. A story which certain collection societies will know all too well.

Second: a few countries throughout history have successfully experimented with non-seven-day weeks, with the most famous being the French. From 1793 to 1802, France officially adopted a 10-day week, the *décade*, to establish the pattern of its social stratification.

The French Republican Calendar organised itself into 12 months, each consisting of just three weeks. (Little known fact: many people employed in the music industry today still actually stick to these 10-day weeks. They just

Tim Ingham



“For the music industry to evolve, we must examine the concept of a weekly chart.”

silently cram them into seven days without complaining or getting a bloody pay rise since 2014 amiright? etc.)

So what's with the amateur history lecture? Because I'm starting to believe, for this industry to evolve into the best next version of itself, we must begin examining the concept of a week, too. More specifically, the concept that seven days is becoming an increasingly unhelpful and misleading unit of time on which artists and record labels judge themselves.

Important stuff in the modern music industry tends to happen in one of two ways: (i) Right Bloody Now; and (ii) Looking Back At The Past Few Months, We Probably Cocked That One Up A Bit.

Streaming has ushered in an era where momentary spikes in popularity are monitored so closely by record companies, they're actually paying for robots to seek them out (see Warner's acquisition of Sodatone). The closest-watched charts within these same labels are daily iTunes and Spotify rankings. And, when it comes to all-important financial performance, Universal, Sony and Warner's investors are patient enough to rely on quarterly and annual earnings.

Yet for a single or album campaign to earn its ritualistic 'crown', everyone continues to look, without question, at positions on a weekly chart. To a degree, this is understandable; records are still released, by and large, on a weekly basis.

But 2018 was a year where soundtrack albums caused 28 weekly disappointments for No.1-chasing UK labels, and where Drake claimed another 3.5 months at the top of the domestic singles chart. Despite such problems, the industry promulgates the idea that a seven day countdown is fit for today's era. It does so while accepting that this causes short-term thinking, as well as blazing rows about how non-stop modern consumption patterns are reflected.

Time for a rethink?

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Contributors

ALISON WENHAM



Alison Wenham is CEO and Chair of the Worldwide Independent Network (WIN). She is the founder of the UK's Association for Independent Music (AIM). Prior to starting AIM in 1999, she was MD at BMG Entertainment International (UK), having sold her Conifer Records to the company in 1994. Wenham was honoured with an OBE in 2010.

CLIFF FLUET



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

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 Simon Draper, Jonathan Shalit, Colin Barlow and Stuart Camp.

EAMONN FORDE



Eamonn Forde has been writing about all areas of the music business since 2001. He is Reports Editor at Music Ally and regularly writes for IQ, The Guardian, The Big Issue, Q and The Quietus among other titles. He completed his PhD at University of Westminster in 2001. His new book, *The Final Days of EMI: Selling The Pig*, is out in February 2019 via Omnibus Press.

RHIAN JONES



Rhian Jones is a respected freelance journalist who often focuses on the music industry. In addition to writing regularly for *Music Business UK*, she is a Contributing Editor for *Music Business Worldwide*. In this issue, Rhian interviews AEG's Toby Leighton-Pope and Steve Homer, as well as Glassnote's Liz Goodwin and 140dB's Ros Earls.

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, Noisy, i-D, Smash Hits, Q Magazine, Time Out, Attitude, Notion and The Telegraph, and runs his own must-read online publication over on Popjustice.

CONGRATULATIONS TO
MODEST! MANAGEMENT
ON FIFTEEN INCREDIBLE YEARS

FROM YOUR FRIENDS AT
CAPITOL RECORDS UK



LONDON, UK



Harry Magee, Richard Griffiths and Will Bloomfield

‘THE THRILL OF FINDING A NEW ACT, DEVELOPING IT, AND THEN REALLY BREAKING IT – IT’S STILL THE BIGGEST BUZZ’

With a roster that includes Little Mix, Niall Horan, MNEK, Five Seconds Of Summer and the Spice Girls, Modest! is enjoying a golden period – 15 years after it was founded...

You know what the exclamation mark’s for, right? The punctuational appendage in Modest!’s name is actually pretty crucial to understanding one of the most successful artist management companies in history.

It’s oxymoronic, of course; the most ‘look at me!’ tool in the English language plonked beside a word which is the very antithesis of showboating.

Modest! literally started life as a joke – a flippant suggestion from ex-Sony UK boss Ged Doherty for what the not-exactly-shrinking-violets duo of Richard Griffiths and Harry Magee should call their new company before it officially formed 15 years ago. Yet by luck or design, Modest! the brand, exclamation mark and all, perfectly captures the tricky balance required of today’s premier artist managers: ensuring that everyone within the epicentre of the global music business knows your name (and your reputation)... whilst never, ever pinching the oxygen of prominence away from the artists you represent.

This figurative high-wire act is on our mind when *MBUK* finds itself heading to the south-west London offices of Modest! on a brisk November morning.

The firm’s modern-day partners – Griffiths, Magee and Will Bloomfield – don’t really do lengthy interviews, let alone public self-congratulation. They’re usually far happier letting their artists, and their masses of sales, do the talking. (Across talents ranging from Little Mix to Alison Moyet, Niall Horan, Olly Murs, Five Seconds of Summer, MNEK and the Spice Girls – plus previous clients like JLS, Leona Lewis and One Direction – Modest!

acts have shifted no less than 19m tickets and 200m records globally to date.)

This, though, is a particularly rare occasion: not only is Modest! currently marking a decade-and-a-half in existence, having formed in 2003, but the company recently collected the prestigious Peter Grant Award in front of its peers at the 2018 Artist & Manager Awards.

This perhaps explains how we were able to convince Griffiths, Magee and Bloomfield to come together for an in-depth discussion – all about their company, their beliefs, the modern music industry, the historic music industry, their high

“For five years we couldn’t take a penny out of Modest! – we got pretty good at golf.”

points, their low points... and their desire to do things even bigger and better over the next 15 years.

A look-back question for Richard and Harry to start: you both rose to very senior roles in the record industry. What’s more fun: running a management company for which you’re entirely responsible, or working in those rarified positions at large corporations?

Richard: That’s a difficult one, because I got lucky, I ran Epic Records in America in the ‘90s. Can you imagine? Glory days. I always use the Spin Doctors as an example of how crazy it was: we sold eight million Spin Doctors albums, not to mention 20

million Pearl Jam records. Add in the thrill of being in America for that period. But overall, I would give up all those record company days to just have the chance to do the management thing. In a heartbeat, actually. For five years we couldn’t take a penny out of Modest! – only Lemar [whose first two albums went Platinum] kept the lights on. Harry and I used to play golf at Roehampton every Monday because there was no-one to talk to; we didn’t have anything going on and all the labels were busy in their Monday morning meetings. We got pretty good. We don’t play golf anymore!

Harry and I both started off as entrepreneurs, but then each of us spent a long period within record companies. Modest! has been a huge opportunity to think like entrepreneurs again, and we give great credit to Jeff Kwantinetz for enabling that to happen.

Harry: Obviously it’s more satisfying being in charge of your own destiny.

It’s also very satisfying developing young managers at Modest!; people that were quite junior and then develop into fully-fledged managers who you would trust with your life. We thought we knew the music business when we worked at record companies, but after starting Modest! we soon realised that we didn’t know it at all.

What do you mean?

Harry: We might have known the record business, but we didn’t really know the *music* business. I was having a conversation a year or so ago with Mike Greek at CAA about this; about how long it takes you to become good at something, and we agreed it’s probably 10 years.



After five years of running Modest! [Richard and I] kind of thought we knew what we were doing as managers but, really, I think it took 10 years to get there.

You don't ever stop learning in management, and that's what fuels the excitement here. The most satisfying thing is not only having hits with an artist, but actually breaking them properly so you can sell tickets – that's when you know that people really care.

When you say “people really care” enough to buy tickets; do you worry that in the track-led streaming age, with so many songs being played, artists are being forgotten a bit?

Harry: There isn't any shortcut to selling tickets. You have to go through a process of development and building an audience. Streaming services, as well as the way the artist builds their own socials, is all part of that puzzle. The main thing is, apart from needing a brilliant artist with a very good

sense of themselves, you need to have a good strategy. But it's so competitive and so fragmented out there today, getting to the holy grail of selling a substantial amount of tickets is, undoubtedly, more of a challenge than ever.

“There isn't any shortcut to selling tickets. You have to build an audience.”

Will: When the album was first deconstructed on the iTunes Store, the industry thought it was the end of the artist project as we traditionally knew it. The challenge now, of course, is that a [streaming playlist] is an entirely different ecosystem, a separate brand, essentially, to the artist's own. Broadly, the challenge

is far greater, but the potential prizes are far bigger. You have to look at the amount of time it used to take to properly break artists – that 'tipping point' moment – and then double it. We all have to slightly re-think the way we look at traditional artist development.

Richard: The thrill of finding a new act, signing it, developing it, and then really breaking it – it's still the biggest buzz in this industry. Part of that is being proven right; we get proven right occasionally and we get proven wrong occasionally.

Management companies are doing a lot more of the ‘heavy lifting’ in an artist's early career than they might once have been expected to. But Modest! has also had recent success working with major labels – not least Capitol with Five Seconds of Summer. When during an artist's trajectory do you tend to sign acts to record companies?



Richard: We [resist doing so] until that label route makes complete and utter sense. There is so much preparation and investment involved before we're ready to sign an artist to a label. We work with some very good record companies that we love, but we wouldn't just give them our acts right away, because we know the reality: whatever a label may say during the romancing period about how they're going to take their time with your act, the clock starts ticking as soon as you sign.

There are those quarterly finance meetings where [A&Rs/label Presidents] are asked, 'By the way, what's happening with Joe Bloggs?' 'Don't worry, we've just started with Joe Bloggs, it will take some time.' Then they get asked three months later again, and three months later again, and the fear is that those questions soon start to become, 'Shouldn't we be moving things along with this artist by now?'

Harry: We've all seen that scenario where an A&R person is being forced to take

shortcuts, or make decisions which, under normal circumstances, they wouldn't have done, because of those pressures. All of that depends on the label, of course, but it's a common observation.

Will: There are a few obvious exceptions to that though. Warner Bros., for example, has done an extremely good job with Dua Lipa. And we're all fans of the great job Relentless is doing with Tom Walker. It feels like those artist development stories within record labels are happening because senior people are ensuring that these acts are developing at the right pace. They are thinking long-term.

Harry: That early incubation process is happening more and more in management companies now, which is why we've had to [invest] in developing our artists' writing skills, recording skills and live skills. And now management companies can also create cheaper videos and [distribute] music themselves to keep that momentum

going. Sometimes the reason why labels come in really early, too early, on artists is just so they're front of the queue to be considered when an act is ready [to think about a record company deal].

What makes for a good record label relationship from your point of view?

Harry: The labels that we work with best understand all the areas where we add value. That creates a pattern where we can then understand where they add value. Our best results come from the labels where we have that mutual appreciation.

Richard: And it has to be a true partnership. I won't name names, but people in the past have given us very aggressive deals, but then sort of waited for us to get on and break the artist on our own – that situation doesn't work for anyone.

Modest! was quite a pioneer when it came to investing in your own digital marketing resource, correct?

Modest by name,
Modest by...?

Congratulations!

From John Giddings & Solo Agency



MNEK



Niall Horan



Richard: Yes. I'd take a bet that, today, we have a bigger digital department than any [frontline] label in the UK. The big moment for us on was One Direction, where we worked very closely with Syco; they had some really good people, and we were very much in partnership on that campaign. Sonny [Takhar], having been a very good marketing person before he became a very good A&R person, understood the need for [digital marketing] to be connected and consistent between us and Syco, and prevalent throughout everything. That was also huge with Five Seconds Of Summer – we worked that band [digitally] from day one. [Modest! signed 5SOS in early 2012 to a co-management deal with Matt Emsell. After a year-and-a-half of groundwork, the band announced they'd signed to Capitol Records in late 2013.]

Will: On 1D, that's a very interesting time

to look back on, because they were really the first act to harness the power of social media globally. It was a case of the right act, at the right time, working with a team across the board who were ultra-aware of the need to think globally and ambitiously.

As concerns 5SOS, it was a classic example of us being able to add value to what the artist was already doing. They had a very clear idea of what they wanted to achieve, and how they wanted to be perceived. But they needed help to strategize and grow [their brand]. They had tons of ideas, and we were able to help them to filter and facilitate them.

Once we signed them, when they were 15 and 16, they moved from the western suburbs of Sydney to Hanger Lane in Acton, and started honing their craft as songwriters, working with Steve Robson amongst others. Based on the band's ideas and vision, we were driving the digital

marketing strategy hand-in-hand with Matt [Emsell], creating a steady drumbeat of content and engagement.

Five Seconds Of Summer certainly seems to be an example of you signing an act to a record company at the right time and for the right reasons. Why did you make that decision?

Richard: Lots of people wanted to do business with us after what happened with One Direction, of course. Nick [Raphael] and Jo [Charrington] at Capitol were very engaged with [Five Seconds], and helped come up with the band's first smash [2014's She Looks So Perfect]. Obviously we know them well and we've had great success together in the past. And I must say that the London-based international team at Universal, [which on 5SOS] is led by Rob Fleming and Tom Burrow, have done an absolutely incredible job.

The Spice Girls (2018)



Harry: Plus, in America, where we were already getting traction, we needed radio promotion to break properly. To do that we needed a major's resource. We got that from Capitol in the US, and they've definitely delivered – right up to now with YoungBlood [which recently spent five weeks at No.1 on the US Top 40 chart].

US radio initially favored The Wanted over One Direction...

Richard: There are a lot of good stories from that time. What Makes You Beautiful comes out [in September 2011] and is a smash in the UK, causing excitement around the world. Then Simon [Cowell] insists that Gotta Be You is the second single, and it comes out and goes to No.3.

Suddenly, we're taken off the Sony priority list. Meanwhile, we've booked the first tour and Steve Barnett's niece bullies him into taking her to the London show. [Barnett, now CEO & Chairman of Capitol Music Group, was then COO & Chairman of Columbia in New York – 1D's Stateside label.] Steve sees what's going on, and he's all in. Rob [Stringer] came in strong on it as well, and they add 1D to the Big Time Rush tour in the USA, which had already sold out.

A couple of months later, we all went to Chicago to see the first US date [in February 2012], with One Direction supporting, in front of 4,500 people. The band come on, doing their thing for five or six songs, and the crowd are singing every

single word. 1D come off stage, and the hall empties – everyone goes to the merch stand. We sold out of all of our merch that night; I mean *all* of it, for the entire US tour. Steve and I looked at each other and it was like, 'Okay, we've really got something here.' Merch [spend] per-head on tour is still my No.1 criteria for how an artist is really doing with their fans.

Harry: [Before the Big Time Rush gigs] we booked a UK tour that started in December and ran through January, which was very unusual because normally you leave those two months completely free for a bit of promotion and a break. Sony and Syco thought we were nuts, but the reason we did it is because we could see what was

happening on socials, and we knew the band needed knocking into shape from a live point of view. We refused to put them straight into arenas because they needed to learn stagecraft, and we felt they needed more than one album's worth of material [to go to that level].

Will: I remember very clearly sitting in this room on the phone with [Sony], and things had started to go well in the UK. America was an unknown quantity, in terms of investing the band's time and Sony's resources. Richard and Harry were saying, 'We're going all in on the USA – if we're doing this, we're doing it properly.' That galvanised everyone's focus around the artist, and cemented the level of ambition.

Richard: We trusted the team of Rob and Steve [at Columbia]. There was some scepticism at Sony in Europe, with some notable exceptions, but the Americans understood what was going on really early.

Will: We had no way of analysing the numbers online at that time. It was all happening on Tumblr, really, and there was no comparative metric for the [volume of engagement]. That first show in Chicago was where it all became clear; I remember multiple people stuffing \$20 bills under the door of the merch area in the hope of [getting some clothing despite it being sold out]. I've never seen that before or since!

Richard: After that Chicago show in February [2012], Steve [Barnett] said to the band, 'You're going to be playing Madison Square Garden by Christmas.' The band were like, 'Who is that guy? He's a lunatic.' Yet lo and behold, they did it – with Ed Sheeran supporting, no less.

Goes to show what can happen when head honchos at record labels get behind your artist and start opening doors...

Richard: I think in America, that still applies. If you have the right leader, who is not interested in taking no for an answer, it can still make a massive difference in

the States. It's harder in other parts of the world. That said, if [Sony Aus/NZ boss] Denis Handlin tells me, 'This is going to be a hit over here,' I believe him. We don't ever question what Denis asks us to do, because he has delivered for us consistently over the past 15 years.

Will, how did you end up at Modest! and what was your interview like?

Will: Jeremy Marsh. I met him through a mutual friend and he said that these guys had just started their own company, and that I should go and speak to them. At the time I was at WEA, but I didn't want to work for a major record company. So I met Harry at a pub in Parsons Green, and then I came to this office, which now has 30 people in it but at the time had Richard and his PA Jane, and that was it. Richard looked up and said, 'You worked for Chris Blackwell?' I said, Yeah. And then he said: 'Good. I worked for Chris Blackwell too.' And that was pretty much that. He offered me a job on the spot!

“People were stuffing \$20 bills under the door of the merch area. I've never seen that since.”

Richard: One thing we're quite proud of is that about a quarter of the people that we employ today started with us as interns – including the [day-to-day] managers of Little Mix, and two of the people who look after Five Seconds Of Summer.

If I gave you a magic wand and you could change one thing about the music industry, what would it be and why?

Will: I'm gonna say it: secondary ticketing. I feel like it's the greatest challenge we have right now as an industry. It casts a shadow over the entire business. It's appalling, but one of the ways we will win the war is to educate the public. It's not just about legislation, although there have been great

moves in that direction. It's also about ticketing agencies and promoters changing their practices, as well as venues. The current situation reflects very poorly on the music business, and it's basically happening because of a bunch of crooks.

Richard: I agree with that completely. I would add that, in the world we're in now, there should be no need for record companies to be greedy and take money from '360' deals. I understand why they did it for a long time, because of the perilous state the business was in, but times have changed. It's unfair and it's not right.

What are your individual proudest moments of the past 15 years?

Will: 10 years managing MNEK, since he was 14. This year saw the release of his debut album, of which we are incredibly proud. Also, Five Seconds Of Summer claiming five weeks at No.1 on the [Billboard] Top 40 chart. Particularly when – how can I word this? – not everybody believed like we believed. The band have proven all of those people wrong.

Harry: All the people that have been at Modest! for many years and who are still incredibly committed to managing their artists. Management is not an easy job, because there's a lot of emotion attached to it; it needs a lot of creativity and a lot of strategy, and a lot of drive. Our people have helped constitute the fabric and the culture of Modest!. We have ambitions to broaden that culture even further. And I'm obviously very proud of the artists who have been with us for a long time; that's not always about commercial success, it's about a mutual respect and commitment.

Richard: I agree with all of that. I love the fact that Diana Vickers, Alison Moyet, Paul Potts, Scouting For Girls and many others are still with us and continue to trust in us to deliver. But I'm going to be more crass than these two: I'm a Kansas City Chiefs fan, and going to Arrowhead Stadium with One Direction, selling 80,000 tickets in Kansas, was pretty fucking incredible.

Harry, you mention your ambitions to broaden Modest!'s culture and operation. What does the future hold?

Harry: It's been a long time since One Direction, but we always had the intention of keeping the infrastructure that we built over those five years. We've done that, and we've brought in more artists.

Now we are going to be bold with Modest! and our [related] companies. It's not just about signing new acts and developing them – it's about making important strategic moves. That can be in master rights, publishing, or via partnerships with new or established managers. You can see that with the Spice Girls: we're co-managing them with Simon Fuller, and they've just sold out three Wembleys amongst 13 stadiums in total – 650,000 tickets. That was an incredibly exciting on-sale day. I was on the phone with David Zedeck, the agent from LA, at 2am his time, and Simon Moran, the promoter here. Every 15 to 20 mins we'd decide to either roll into the next held date or draw the line. The girls were on a WhatsApp group in real time inputting their thoughts. The excitement and energy created in the five days from announcement to on-sale exploded into this memorable moment, selling more tickets than anyone expected. Clearly, the mood of the nation for a new era of Girl Power fitted our timing.

We're definitely not standing still. We're still extremely ambitious, and we're going to grow Modest! with new people, and into new areas – we're already increasing our presence in the United States, for one thing. As ever, we're always thinking about how we can shake things up.

Richard, what are Harry's best qualities in business? Harry, what are Richard's?

Harry: Richard is one to seize the moment. His energy is driven by passion, but he's also very pragmatic. He has the courage to move something to the next level before anyone else has even thought about it – where others may feel risk, he sees opportunity.

Richard: Harry completely understands artists. He is patient, and he also has a great creative eye. We are Yin and Yang.

How Modest! became Modest!



To fully appreciate the Modest! story requires a short history lesson.

By the turn of the millennium, Richard Griffiths and Harry Magee were both thoroughbred record company execs. Griffiths, who started his career as a booking agent for the likes of AC/DC in the seventies, went on to run Virgin Music throughout the eighties, in both the UK and the US, before heading up Epic Records in New York (1994-1998) and BMG (1998-2001) in London.

Across this stellar three decade run, he worked with everyone from Ozzy Osbourne to Tears For Fears, Soul II Soul, Jane's Addiction, John Barry, Rage Against The Machine, Oasis and the Spin Doctors.

Harry Magee co-founded indie label Wire Records before joining Arista UK as Head of Marketing in 1989, and was then hired as MD at Jazz Summers' Big Life Records in the early nineties. Magee went on to become General Manager at A&M, working with Sheryl Crow, Soundgarden and Sting, before Richard Griffiths poached him, in 1998, to join BMG as MD of RCA.

Within three years of mutually joining BMG, however, the experiment hadn't quite worked out for the pair: they were both given their marching orders, having fallen out with the then heads of BMG owner Bertelsmann.

Griffiths and Magee weren't banished from the industry for long: they set up the UK/international office of Jeff Kwantinetz's The Firm in 2001, working with the likes of Korn, Snoop Dogg, Ice Cube, Lionel Richie and Linkin Park, while signing their own homegrown roster, such as Lemar.

By late 2002, Kwantinetz and the pair cordially agreed to part ways, allowing Griffiths and Magee to transfer their domestic artists to their new baby - Modest! - and a fresh, world-conquering chapter began.

Congratulations!
on 15 years of global success to
Richard, Harry, Will and all at
Modest!

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LIVE NATION



Ed Sheeran and Stuart Camp

KEY SONGS IN THE LIFE OF...

Stuart Camp

One of the most successful UK managers of all time tells us about the records that shaped his tastes and built his career...

In a previous interview with *MBW*, Stuart Camp, when asked to describe Ed Sheeran in three words, went for Talented, Energetic and Focused. Asked to describe their relationship, he chose Unorthodox, Close and Productive.

All, undoubtedly, are supremely apt and accurate. But, just as certainly, he would have been sorely tempted by six alternatives, far from the wheelhouse of professionalism and mutual respect.

Because this particular manager/artist relationship is defined, like a great many truly deep friendships, particularly male friendships,



by a burning, constant, almost pathological need to take the piss out of each other.

There will occasionally be hugs, there will inevitably be tears, and there will always be loyalty and love. But, mostly, there'll be wind-ups, insults and nicknames – all borne out of a never-ending (and never to be under-estimated) quest to make each other laugh. Or, failing that, to make whoever's listening laugh at the other one.

So, when Camp is asked if he was tempted to leave his main man out of this list of records that changed his life, the answer is obvious, and the answer is: obviously!

He didn't, though, and Sheeran's debut single, *The A Team*, is the most recent stopping off point in a musical journey that started with pooled resources in Woolworths and has led, when *MBUK* catches up with Camp, to the North American leg of the + tour, which, by late August 2019, will have seen one man and his guitar play over 250 shows.

1. Frankie Goes To Hollywood, *Relax*, 1983

This was the first record I ever bought; it was actually a joint purchase with my sister, we both put in 50p or whatever it would have been at that time.

We got it from Woolworths in Bishop Stortford, Hertfordshire, and I'd have been nine years-old. We played it on a shared record player that would only work with a two pence piece Sellotaped to the arm.

I honestly don't remember why we chose



this particular single, or where we'd have heard it, because it certainly wasn't being played on Wonderful Radio 1 [the single was banned by the station's breakfast DJ of the era, Mike Read, who found the lyrics offensive. Read would later release the in-no-way-offensive UKIP *Calypso* in 2014].

There were stories about *Relax* in the press, and we were sort of aware of the furore, but I obviously had no idea what the lyrics were about or why people were getting so worked up about it.

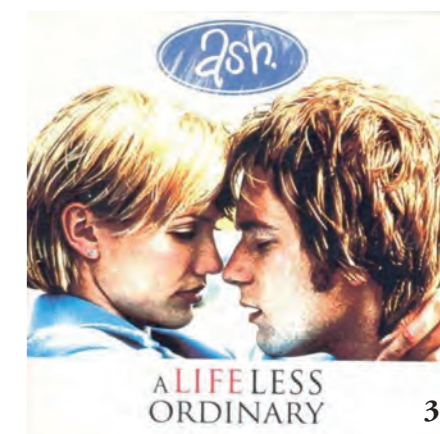
“When I got it home, I really did think the record player had finally broken.”

I actually only realised that they were a bit naughty when [second single] *Two Tribes* came out and my mum let me stay up until midnight to watch the video on Channel 4.

With *Relax*, I didn't know it was risqué; it was just exciting.

The other bands we liked were people like Wham, Spandau Ballet or Duran Duran, who were fine, but you could tell straight away, there was more energy here.

It was the first time I properly fell for a band, my first passion project – and the first time you wait three years for a second album [Liverpool] that turns out to be quite underwhelming.



2. Sonic Youth, *Teen Age Riot*, 1988

Quite a big leap, isn't it? I moved to Suffolk when I was 11, and the school I went to was slap bang in the middle of two US airbases, so there were lots of American kids in our classes.

That meant that from about the age of 13 I was being introduced to bands like Black Flag, Hüsker Dü and The Dead Kennedys by the older kids – really getting an education in that US alternative scene.

And then hearing Sonic Youth was the watershed moment. I was buying records constantly by then. I was getting dinner money, but not spending any of it on food – which is bizarre when you look at me now.

I'd just save it all and buy a new record every Monday, without hearing it. That was the case with Sonic Youth, certainly. I think maybe I'd read an interview with U2 in *Rolling Stone* who had said that

Daydream Nation [the album from which *Teen Age Riot* was taken] was the best record of the year.

When I got it home, I really did think the record player had finally broken.

It was so different, so discordant; I listened to it over and over and over again. For a while I think I probably only listened to U2, REM and this.

Push comes to shove, REM are probably my favourite band of all time, and they'd have been the other band closest to getting on this list, but I just couldn't pick one particular track. That period, with records like *Document*, *Green* and *Automatic* For

The People, they were untouchable.

I still listen to Daydream Nation now and I still love it. I only really get to listen to music in isolation now when I fly, and this is one that I'll still always go for on a long flight.

3. Ash, *A Life Less Ordinary*, 1997

This is the very first record I worked on professionally, when I joined Infectious/Mushroom in 1997. I joined in August and I think we started on this in September.

I was the office junior, so a lot of my earliest time in the business was spent putting promo stickers on this single. Ah, the glamour.

It's from the film of the same name, Danny Boyle's first film after *Trainspotting*, which was supposed to be the transition to Hollywood, an out-and-out blockbuster. It didn't really turn out that way, but, film aside, this is a bloody good record. And it never appeared on any album, much to the annoyance of [Infectious/Mushroom founder] Korda Marshall and Pat Carr, who ran Infectious.

I went on to work quite a bit with Ash and they were really great guys, even if it did take quite a while to understand the accent. We still see them around.

Korda was a great mentor. He was always amazingly calm. He has this passion and integrity and he really cares – and of course he has this tremendous A&R sense. He's also really good with staff. He can manage to forget everyone's name constantly, and yet still make a company feel like a real family unit.

Working at Infectious then was so exciting, just brilliant – and the very best place to learn about the business. I think that's true of a lot of independent labels, because you have to do everything.

You work all the hours in the world, you get involved in every aspect of every record, you get paid bugger all and you love every second of it.

You were just thrown in at the deep end. I didn't know what I was doing, but I found out that if you pretended you knew what you were doing for long enough, then sooner or later, without realising it, you would actually know what you're doing.



4.



5.

We obviously got merged with a major [Warner] a little later, and that was such a culture shock: wait, what, you don't even do your own post?!

4. James Blunt, *Goodbye My Lover*, 2005

I ended up as the marketing guy for the rock bands at East West, before it was rebranded as Atlantic. I was looking after Muse, Garbage, Funeral For A Friend.

But then there was this guy called James Blunt. He'd been signed in the US, and they didn't know what to do with him.

Me and the radio plugger, Jasper Burnham, were at a wedding in Wales one weekend, and he played me the demo in his car. No one was in a hurry to release it, trust me, but the two of us thought there was something there.

And I thought, in particular, that this track would be the one to change everything, the one to catapult James Blunt

into a new universe. You're Beautiful? Nah, not so much; *this* is the one. And I still think it's the most moving song on the album.

Monday after the wedding, I go into the office, stick my hand up and ask if I can work the record.

James had a lot going against him, and we certainly didn't expect the level of success he got. He was military, and that wasn't seen as a good thing then, it was a strike against you.

And of course he was very posh – again, not a good thing. The label was reluctant to put him on TV because of how that would all come across, even though we were saying, Honestly, he is the funniest guy, he can handle any criticism thrown at him, turn it round and make people like him.

Max [Lousada] was heading up Atlantic at that point, and he, like all of us, the whole team, would have taken a bullet for James, we just so wanted him to succeed. Which he did, and then some.

He's great fun to work with and to hang out with; there's never a dull moment, let's just say that.

And of course the whole thing segued into the next stage of my career and the next record, because it was James's managers, Todd Interland and Frank Pressland, who asked me to join them at Twenty First Artists.

5. Ed Sheeran, *The A Team*, 2011

It was tempting to not include one, of course it was! And then, when he asks, just say, It's not about my career, Ed, it's about the records I actually like [laughs].

But I do love this. It was the first Ed record I ever heard. Just Jack sent me it as a demo. He was looking for someone to support him on tour, sent me this CD and said, You have to hear this guy.

I heard it, loved it, went up to Leeds to see him live, loved that as well, met him afterwards and we got on straight away.

I don't think I'd be able to say whether it's my favourite song of Ed's or not, but it's the one I've chosen because of the context of hearing it – the first one I heard and the one that went on to become the first single



Stuart Camp having a delightful time (just look at his face) during a crew visit to the NASA space centre in Houston whilst on the US leg of Ed Sheeran's ongoing world tour.

[No. 3 in the UK charts].

I remember thinking that the level of maturity in that song is just staggering – and then you learn he was 16/17 when he wrote it and it becomes mind-blowing. You could tell from one listen what he was capable of and where he was going as a songwriter.

I'm not going to claim some crystal ball

level of genius and say that I could see the level of success coming, no one could have, but you knew he was going to be a brilliant artist and a great writer.

He still plays it live, it comes early in the set – song three, I think. And even now, playing it to 60,000 people in a stadium in America, there are still goosebumps.

And it doesn't feel old. Sometimes, if someone who's gone on to sell 35/40 million albums says they're going to drop in something from the first record – since before the first record in fact – it can be a bit jarring; might be time to go and get a drink. But this still sounds as brilliant as it did way back then.

‘WE WANT TO BE THE MOST RELIABLE GLOBAL MUSIC COMPANY OUT OF ANYONE THAT EXISTS’

The modern day BMG emerged from the ashes of the company’s previous guise a decade ago. Since then, under the management of CEO Hartwig Masuch, the firm has established itself as a real player in the global industry – but not without facing down some challenges...

When the ‘new’ BMG was announced in 2008, it arrived with a head-turning plan.

Scan the very first press release issued by the company – in October, ten years ago – and alongside its focus on the then-novel concepts of ‘service’ and ‘transparency’ you’ll notice that its strategy was largely two-fold: (i) A European-centric base of operations; (ii) A commercial approach largely predicated on broadcast licensing revenues from television and radio around the world.

This was a sensible blueprint at the time, considering that the old-world record industry was facing what appeared to be terminal decline at the hands of piracy – and that its biggest market, the USA, was the hardest hit.

Well. You know what they say about best laid plans? Barely two weeks into ‘new’ BMG’s life, the financial markets crashed – pulled under by the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the adhesive tentacles of the sub-prime mortgages scandal.

Overnight, BMG’s strategy changed – because it had to.

“Suddenly, music assets were being offered to us from every angle,” recalls Hartwig Masuch, who has remained CEO of the Bertelsmann-owned company since its 2008 rebirth. “We discussed things at length with Bertelsmann and said: ‘Wait, would it be a stupid idea to increase the ambition level here?’”

That ambition – and Bertelsmann’s investment into music – subsequently went into overdrive.

Over the course of the next nine years, BMG made more than 100 acquisition deals including, but certainly not limited to, Bug, Cherry Lane, Stage Three,

Chrysalis, Primary Wave, Virgin Music and Talpa.

Most of these major deals focused on publishing which, in the eyes of Bertelsmann (and then-fellow BMG investor KKR) seemed the safer bet amid serious industry turbulence.

Around two years ago, however, BMG’s overarching strategy changed for a second time. Masuch and his team began to see publishing valuations spiralling upwards – epitomized last year with the near-billion dollars cumulatively spent on the buyouts of Imagem (by Concord), SONGS (by a Kobalt Capital-managed fund) and Carlin (by Round Hill).

“You can’t stick to a PowerPoint which says, This is our strategy for the next few years...”

At the same time, doubts at BMG over the predictability of publishing revenues began to emerge – not least the sector’s revenues from TV and radio.

That has now led to what is effectively BMG 3.0, the company we see today, which is primarily fixated on organic growth in recordings, with the occasional opportunistic acquisition.

This new era of BMG could be seen pretty clearly in the company’s results for the first six months of 2018: total revenues across recorded music and publishing at BMG grew 9.2% at constant currency, to \$292m. However, when it came to recorded music alone, revenues jumped 38% on a like-for-like basis.

BMG has long been committed to recorded music, with past acquisitions including those of the Sanctuary and Mute catalogues, plus Infectious, Vagrant, Union Square Music, Skint/Loaded, Rise Records, S-Curve and Atmospheriques.

At the top of last year, though, this commitment hit new heights, when Masuch and BMG US President Repertoire & Marketing Zach Katz led the \$100m-plus takeover of country specialist (and home to Jason Aldean) Broken Bow Music Group. Broken Bow’s HQ now forms the bulk of BMG’s Nashville operation, one corner of a global workforce which has risen above 800 people.

Aldean gave BMG a No.1 album in the US earlier this year with Rearview Town – the artist’s fourth consecutive chart-topper on the Billboard 200. BMG added to this success in 2018 with the likes of Kylie Minogue’s Golden and The Prodigy’s No Tourists (both UK No.1 albums). There was also the hit Lil Dicky single Freaky Friday,

which reached No.1 on iTunes in 38 countries and achieved BMG’s first No.1 on the Official UK Singles Chart.

In fact, BMG has developed a well-oiled recorded music machine in the second half of 2018, with a packed schedule of heavy-hitting releases from the likes of A Perfect Circle, Alice In Chains, Lenny Kravitz, Avril Lavigne and Richard Ashcroft – while the company recently reiterated its interest in Label Land via the multi-million dollar acquisition of World Circuit Records (home to Buena Vista Social Club).

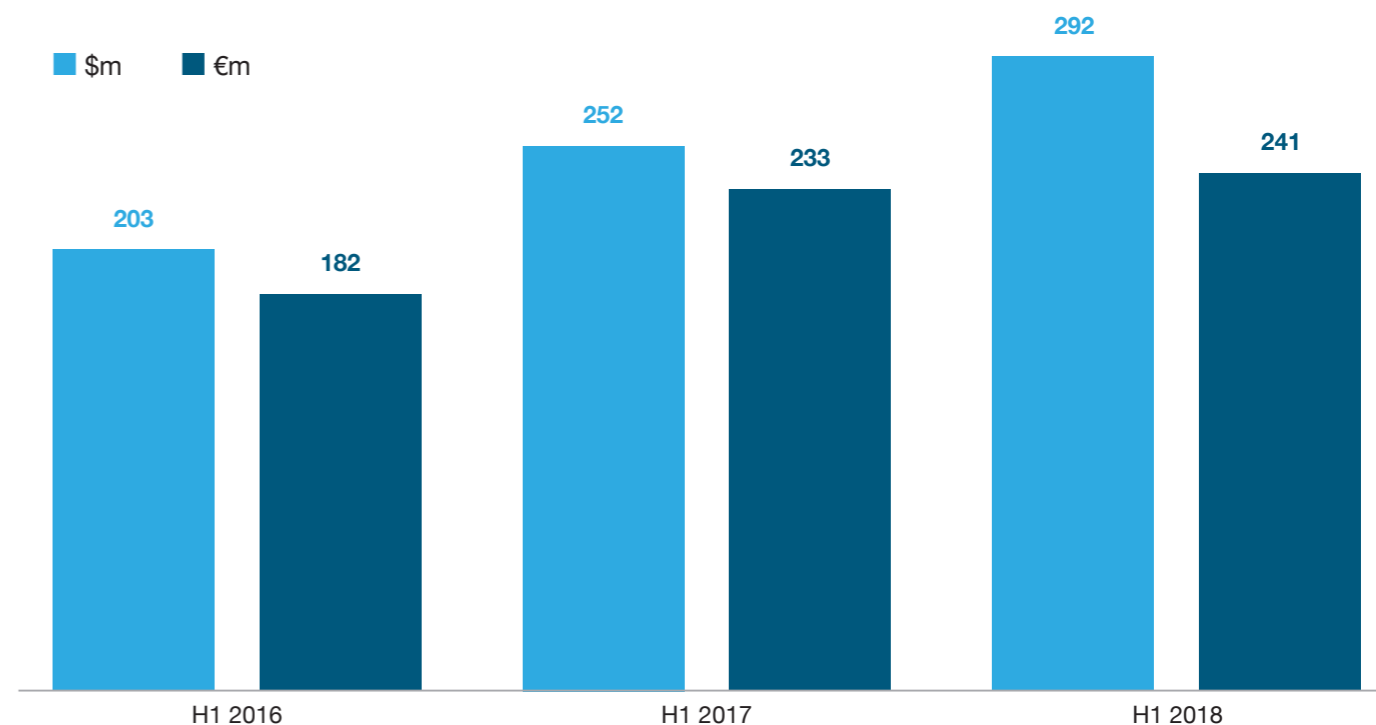
These releases typify BMG’s strategy in records, where it often works with artists who’ve previously enjoyed large-scale commercial success, but who have





Kylie Minogue

BMG half-year revenues (\$m / €m)



Source: Bertelsmann. EUR-USD conversions made at prevailing average rates in each period

arguably become lesser priorities at their previous record companies.

BMG prides itself on offering global support and focus to these acts, re-igniting their fanbases to have a surprising impact on the charts. (Other recent examples include Blink 182 and Janet Jackson, who have both enjoyed US No.1 albums over the past two years.)

These artists are no doubt attracted by BMG's typical deal structure, which sees the company split revenues 75/25% in the artist's favor.

This agreement covers essential fixed cost services such as royalty collection, product management and accounting, while further services (marketing support, A&R, sync pitching, PR, radio promotion etc.) are recoupable from the artist's 75%.

Music Business UK sat down with Masuch to chat through ten years at the helm of BMG, as well as other industry matters – including the future of Spotify, and the major labels...

In 2008, BMG becomes an independent business for the first time. How were the ambitions and strategy of that company different from BMG in 2018?

You have to understand the scenario back then: the music industry had been declining for around 10 years. Nobody knew what the solution was, so Bertelsmann said, 'Before we see more decline, let's reboot the discussion.' [Bertelsmann promptly sold 'old' BMG's music rights; recorded music went to Sony and publishing to Universal.]

Nobody knew what the parameters would be 10 years on, but we knew it would be different, and we knew we'd have to be flexible in our approach to the market. We took a low-risk starting point, based around TV and radio licensing – aligning with Bertelsmann's strong broadcasting position. But then we quickly had to revise our strategy when we were in the process of hiring employees three and four, when the financial crisis hit and turned everything upside down.

We changed path, and started spending tens of millions on acquiring and managing content. Suddenly, music assets were being thrown at us from every angle.

We discussed things at length with Bertelsmann and said, 'Wait, would it be a stupid idea to increase the ambition here?'

The financial crash meant the money you had in the bank was worth less. And your reaction to that was to spend on an industry at its lowest point?

Yes. That was based on the idea that, at the end of the day, the licensing of music rights remained protected.

Funnily enough, that paradigm is changing today – publishing is no longer in the safeguarded position we first thought, because there are underlying factors having a negative impact on the publishing sector.

The key lesson for BMG in our first decade was this: you can't have a PowerPoint slide which says, 'This is our strategy for the next few years,' and then rigidly stick

to it. A lot of corporate mindsets do not understand that, but to not understand it is to not understand today's music industry.

BMG feels comfortable in this business; we have a good understanding of the risk profile, and Bertelsmann, as a family-run company, is definitely committed to music.

Another company with a similar setup is Warner Music Group [BMG's distribution partners via ADA]. Warner was bought by someone [Len Blavatnik] who can absolutely control his decision-making; he entered into the music business at a time when people said, 'What the hell are you doing?!', and he has ended up looking like one of the smartest people in the entire entertainment industry.

Your revenues will once again top half a billion dollars this year. In terms of the growth opportunity for BMG, you definitely seem focused on recorded music.

We react to what we see in the market. The overall traction for all retailers with respect to recorded music will definitely, massively pick up in the years ahead.

A few years ago we said our ambition was to be split 50/50 between publishing and recorded music [in H1 2018, BMG's sales were made up of around 1/3rd recorded music and 2/3rds publishing]. Now, we've increased that ambition; we're targeting to eventually over-weight recorded music in our turnover, and our profit.

A big part of what defines the music industry is excitement, and that has definitely returned in a big way. No-one gets excited about a declining industry – they don't feel confident in it.

The moment that trajectory changes, people get more proud about working in and engaging with a business. Right now there is definitely an excitement about recorded music.

When you say 'the realities of the modern marketplace', I take it you're referring to the growth in the power of artists to better their terms. Some of the biggest superstars in the world –

including Drake and Taylor Swift - have recently ended long-term contracts at major labels, with Swift re-signing with UMG. Do you think it's inevitable that hit artists at that level are going to follow the path of certain heritage acts and sign BMG-type deals whereby they maintain some control over their copyrights?

It's absolutely on the horizon, and faster than many perhaps realize. The tools you need to distribute and market music effectively are readily available in the market today.

The artists you mention, and many more, will know exactly which tools are out there and the price they need to pay to achieve a very specific outcome with their music [commercially]. The next 12-

"Our owners don't care at all about market share. They care about growth."

15 months on superstar renewals will be a tough call for the major companies. A lot of money will get spent – there's no doubt about it.

You're a company which is very proud of its profitability, but also the percentage of money you pay out to your artist and songwriter clients in your 75/25 deals. But how does it work with catalogues you have acquired?

Inherited deals which we buy are never going to be the same as our frontline deals because the income is factored into the acquisition price, and switching all these to 75/25 would make those acquisitions unaffordable.

Our [moral] standpoint is to tell those artists or writers whose contracts we've acquired that we will not only honor the deal they originally signed, but we will also clean up all of the hidden things which have affected them to date.

We have done that for some very big

names, and found a lot of hidden or unclaimed money in the past. We will also commit to considering if we can get rid of previous [contractual] deductions which are not at all relevant today for digital marketplace – things like 'returns' which have no place in streaming. It all fits with our behaviour and our philosophy which is to offer artists transparency and fairness.

We cannot simply rewrite deals which artists and songwriters [once] freely entered, but we do commit to a reading of those contracts which is probably more favourable than they would get anywhere else.

What do you care about in your day-to-day job – how do you measure your performance?

I would be lying if I denied that the main metric we all watch is our shareholders. If you look how we're positioned within Bertelsmann, we care about being one of their more attractive media pillars, and that is a good thing for everyone we work with.

Bertelsmann, primarily, is a media company, and they want to be relevant in those areas of media that matter to the public. Music is a really important part of that. Growth is a top priority, but profitability is definitely connected to that too.

Our owners don't care at all about market share – they care about growth, profitability and the strategic outlook of the business. And we are delivering.

This is interesting: you are a fan of the idea of streaming services switching to a 'user-centric' licensing model, as opposed to the 'service-centric' licensing model we see today. That would effectively mean individual artists being guaranteed payment whenever you or I play their song on Spotify, as opposed to the entire 'pie' getting divided at the end of each month on a pro-rata basis. Why are you in favor of this model, and could it ever come to be?

For me, it is simply a question

of fairness. Some services may like to say it won't make too much difference, but that does not matter as much as being able to say to artists: 'This system is fair, and this is how it works.'

As for whether it will change? Right now maybe not all interests are aligned – everything is growing nicely.

But, one day, someone who has a weighting on catalog repertoire versus new repertoire might break out of this [current common view]. We have seen research which suggests that the current audience [make-up] listening to music on streaming services is going to change over time and will [skew] older and more towards catalog as time moves on.

I think the [user-centric licensing debate] should be a next very clear battlefield in the evolution of streaming. If enough big artists with a certain profile come to the conclusion that things must change, it will make for some very interesting [alterations] in industry fortunes.

Remember that the relevance of streaming for some of the big catalog artists last time they did their [recordings] deals was nothing to lose sleep over. But when they re-negotiate today, it is a much bigger focus: what's the best step forward on the digital rate?



Avril Lavigne

The Prodigy



In the next two or three years, earlier than it's assumed, lots of [major artist deals] that were signed before 2010 will come up for renewal, and it will be very interesting to watch what the catalog artists start to ask from those new agreements.

You think this will cause the majors, with their levels of expenditure, headaches? But, let me guess, that BMG has the right size and structure to deal with the change?

It's pretty clear that with the relevance of streaming growing, those major artists are going to start demanding [streaming royalty] rates above 50%. That will cause a big issue for companies whose blended royalty payout right now is around 15% - 20%.

[These labels] face another big pressure point from artists too: 'You have no choice

to say no [to this 50%-plus deal].' Because every single [major artist] can now do direct deals with services without feeling consequential blocks in the market. The question becomes: 'What resources do I

"In the next three years, lots of [major artist deals] will come up for renewal."

need to deal direct with Spotify or Apple Music?' These changes will definitely affect the profit pool of our biggest competitors.

You say "our biggest competitors". That reminds me – back at Midem in Q1, you said that you consider BMG to be a

"major" music company. Yet at last count your revenues were around a seventh of Warner Music Group, the smallest of the three majors. Is it realistic for anybody to one day suggest you could break into the top three companies by size?

For BMG to break into the top three is not unrealistic, but it would require massive movement in the market, including things happening that are beyond our control.

Ultimately the issue is not about size, but capabilities, specifically: can we execute globally on behalf of our artists? That's what's important,

and we are showing that we can.

How do you differentiate yourselves from other companies who are so-called 'artist services' firms - layering generous terms and services on top of a basic distribution deal?

We want to be the most reliable company on a global level out of anyone who exists. That already differentiates us from a lot of other companies.

Differentiation is key to who we are. We believe there is a better way. You hear [from others] that "our key differentiation is technology" but I don't believe in that at all; you can acquire the best technology through licensing or ownership – it's simply a matter of investment. Your core differentiation in this market has to be more than that.

We are differentiated in four key ways. We are driven by our values rather than by market share. We are integrated – publishing and records under one roof. We are international, one company with multiple offices rather than a series of national companies. And we have a different repertoire strategy. That is a lot of differentiation!

You've acquired a lot of independent publishers and labels. How do you keep the culture of these companies alive?

You have to go back to the initial DNA of these companies – Mute, Immediate, Chrysalis etc. All of them started with massive respect for artists. So the mission is always to try and capture some of that initial spirit, and spread it throughout BMG.

You're clearly financially astute person; are Spotify's long-term economic prospects solid?

Yes. But it's a question of the expectation versus reality. No company can always make all of its investors happy if they bought at a certain share price. But I think subscription streaming is in a sustainable position, and we will see that in the coming years.

You paid a nine-figure fee to buy Broken Bow – a deal which completed in January last year. How has that acquisition progressed since?

Our position is that Nashville-sourced repertoire is going to become increasingly important globally. If you see how AEG and other big [live] promoters are now

BMG's new artist strategy

BMG's core repertoire focus on proven artists is well-known, but this does not mean it is neglecting newer talent.

Through a canny mixture of JVs, opportunistic acquisitions and judicious signings, the company is determined to punch above its weight.

Its breakout smash of the year has undoubtedly been Lil Dicky's worldwide No.1, *Freaky Friday* (feat. Chris Brown), which came courtesy of its relationship with Commission Music, also home to Atlanta rapper Derez Deshon's US hit *Hardaway*.

Given its strong rock and established artist focus, BMG raised eyebrows in September 2018 when it acquired LA-based hip-hop artist services business RBC Records, instantly giving it access to a roster which includes Chicago drill pioneer Chief Keef, Skippa Da Flippa – creator of the 'dab' – and Waka Flocka Flame.

Over in Nashville, BBR Music Group is doing its bit for newer artists with Canadian singer-songwriter Lindsay Ell who scored a No.1 Country album with her debut, released in 2017. Also on the roster, Jimmie Allen became the first black artist to score a Country radio No.1 with his debut single in November 2018.

Other newer artist breakthroughs include the Q Award-nominated Nakhane (France), Max Giesinger and Lina (Germany), as well as DMA's and Rejjie Snow (UK).

Not bad for a company focused on established artists.

"We have never said we were not interested in newer acts," says Masuch. "But we take as our starting point the realities of a market in which newer artists are nowhere as popular with the public as they are with the industry. Our answer is simple – to do fewer, better."



Lil Dicky



Keith Richards

rolling out initiatives around ‘country’ artists, our timing was incredibly good on that deal.

We are now a major company in the Nashville marketplace, and our ambition is to broaden the footprint of those artists. There is an obvious sweet spot for us there too now that we’re established in Nashville: to approach mature artists who are feeling neglected in the sub-department of a major label. We will take your new record seriously because we know there are audiences to reach globally, and we’ve proven it in other genres.

BMG has the ability to team up expertise across publishing and recorded music. Do you anticipate the bigger companies will have to go that way to achieve efficiencies in the future?

Absolutely. The reason why artists and writers preferred to split their rights in the first place is because they didn’t trust any one company with both! It gave them a little bit of control over two different participants, providing them with a little bit more [security] – but often conflicting sets of data. That will change as the relationship between artists and companies is forced to evolve, and we as BMG are well-positioned.

You were early in recognising China’s potential with your Alibaba deal. These days we talk about Alibaba and Tencent more than ever. Will their presence be more felt globally in the coming years?

That’s absolutely on the horizon. You look at the incredible capitalization of Tencent and Alibaba, the idea of only restricting these companies to being ‘king of China’ is not doing them justice. Both of them have a market cap approaching US \$400bn – they won’t be limiting themselves to their current core territories. They will be looking at where the most dynamic areas in the global market are, like many of us with global ambitions today.

Why are you less acquisitive than you once were?

Most of the realistic acquisition opportunities today are on the recorded

side. We’re dealing with changing dynamics, and obviously your perspective of what makes a good deal depends on where you are sitting. Publishing valuations are very high – partly because the assumption of future performance is presumed to be very high. We’re not so sure.

What are your personal highlights from

the past decade of BMG?

I’m absolutely thrilled by the fact I get to work with artists who absolutely mean the world to me, and there are many of them. I’ve always worked in this industry and had great experience of commercial successes, but to be in partnership with some of the most important creatives in human history blows me away.

Books and film

As if creating an integrated global music publishing and recordings company in just 10 years wasn’t enough, BMG has made notable sideways moves into film and books. Plus, the company is making its first foray into theatre via a recently announced deal with production company Lively McCabe.

Masuch cheerfully admits the development of the BMG film business was the result of a failed bid for Eagle Rock Entertainment (ultimately bought by Universal). “The deal got so rich for us that it made sense to build our own,” he says.

The result has been a slew of well-received productions. BMG’s first full-length documentary, *Bad Reputation*, a biography of Joan Jett, made its debut at this year’s Sundance Festival and was followed by *Rudeboy: the Story of Trojan Records*, which has attracted news coverage on the BBC, Channel 4 and ITV (conveniently coinciding with a marketing push to celebrate Trojan’s 50th anniversary). It was named Best Music Documentary at the Doc ‘N Roll music festival this year.

In books, BMG has already published its first 10 titles, ranging from memoirs to photobooks to a series of record label profiles.

“These businesses require a relatively small investment but make a big impact in terms of reach and give us another calling card when we speak to artists,” says Masuch. “We want artists to know that we are here for them whatever path their creativity should take.”

What about publishing?

Masuch is candid about his ambitions in the record business, but what about music publishing, still around two-thirds of BMG’s business?

“Publishing is and will be the backbone of BMG,” he says. “Naturally when we announced our plans to grow in records, our music publisher competitors started whispering to our songwriter clients that we had lost interest in them. It’s the flipside of our label competitors saying we are a publishing company ‘playing’ at being a label. And it’s equally nonsense.”

BMG’s publishing business is currently riding high thanks to strong chart successes in the UK (Camille Purcell, George Ezra, Joel Pott, Jess Glynne) and the US (Jason Evigan, Bebe Rexha, Jessie Reyes) on top of its enormous catalogue with writers such as Roger Waters and Keith Richards and Mick Jagger.

In November, BMG’s UK operation was named Publisher Of The Year at MBUK’s 2018 A&R Awards.

The A&R Awards 2018

IN ASSOCIATION WITH ABBEY ROAD STUDIOS

What a night. MBW's annual A&R Awards returned to London in November, celebrating the UK industry's creative community like no other event does. It was an evening of high drama, intense competition, standing ovations – and lots and lots of smiles...




Nile Rodgers, Sam Eldridge and Alec Boateng all graced the A&R Awards stage




The Awards, which honoured the likes of Simon Cowell, were hosted by Doc Brown

MBW presents THE
A&R AWARDS
Major Label
Of The Year
2018
ATLANTIC RECORDS

In association with

Abbey
Road
Studios

MBW presents THE
A&R AWARDS
A&R Of The Year
2018:
Pop/R&B
**JOE KENTISH,
WARNER BROS**

In association with

Abbey
Road
Studios

Congratulations to everyone at Atlantic and Warner's Joe Kentish



Winners included Good Soldier, Mike Pickering, Julian Palmer, BMG and Dominic Fyfe



**The A&R Awards 2018:
All the winners**

A&R ICON
Simon Cowell

THE SIR GEORGE MARTIN AWARD
Jamie Osborne, Dirty Hit

THE ARTIST LOYALTY AWARD
Gary Blackburn & Norman Cook

A&R TRAILBLAZER
Lunick Bourges, Virgin EMI

PRODUCER OF THE YEAR – SUPPORTED BY ABBEY ROAD STUDIOS
Steve Mac

SONGWRITER OF THE YEAR – SUPPORTED BY DOWNTOWN
Camille Purcell

A&R OF THE YEAR: ADULT CONTEMPORARY
Dominic Fyfe, Decca

A&R OF THE YEAR: ELECTRONIC/DANCE
Mike Pickering & Julian Palmer, Columbia

A&R OF THE YEAR: HIP-HOP/GRIME
Benny Scars, Jack Foster & Dave, Neighbourhood

A&R OF THE YEAR: POP/R&B
Joe Kentish, Warner Bros

A&R OF THE YEAR: ALTERNATIVE/ROCK
Charlie Christie & Theo Lalic, September

A&R ADMINISTRATOR
Rebecca La Porta & Paul Walmsley, Polydor

PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR (1)
BMG

PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR (2)
Good Soldier Songs

INDEPENDENT LABEL OF THE YEAR
Domino

MANAGEMENT COMPANY (THE DAVID ENTHOVEN AWARD) – SUPPORTED BY CENTRIP MUSIC
UROK Management

MAJOR LABEL OF THE YEAR – SUPPORTED BY INSTRUMENTAL
Atlantic Records



Attendees included Lyor Cohen, Jonathan Dickins, Rob Stringer and many, many more



C O N G R
A T U L A
T I O N S
J A M I E

FROM ALL YOUR FRIENDS
AT POLYDOR & UNIVERSAL MUSIC





THE SIR GEORGE MARTIN AWARD

‘It’s easy to be nice, but it’s hard to be noble.’

Dirty Hit founder Jamie Osborne had no idea he was going to win the Sir George Martin Award at the close of the A&R Awards 2018. So much so that, shortly before collecting the gong, Osborne admitted to texting Matthew Healy, frontman of The 1975, to let him know “we haven’t won anything”.

Healy was, in fact, waiting in the wings to present Osborne with the night’s final award. Having been approved by the Sir George Martin Estate, the prize recognises somebody who has “fostered truly meaningful artist and songwriter relationships... and who has garnered widespread respect amongst the creative community”.

Here’s what Healy had to say about Osborne from the stage.

Hunter S Thompson is quoted as having said: “The music industry is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where pimps and thieves run free and good men die like dogs. There’s also a negative side.”

That always really stuck with me, like loads of other things that promote the idea, as a young artist from the outside looking in, that if you want to be involved in that part of the music industry – this part of the music industry – not only do you have to graduate to the dark side, you have to be incredibly tenacious and shrewd... a bit of a cunt, really! And that’s what you’d think, right?

But my experience in this industry, under the guidance and supervision of my manager and best friend, has been the opposite of all of that. It’s not just about being nice, because in any self-interested industry you’ve got to be nice to get what you want.

It’s easy to be nice, but it’s hard to be noble – and it’s rare to be noble. That may sound like a lofty word, but it’s the only word that summarises [Jamie’s] desire to be really truthful and really trustful, and to promote the idea of the facilitation of other peoples’ egos; in this case, artists. You don’t see that very often.

I’m very lucky to do what I do as an artist, but I also help run a record label with this person. So I can remove my artist-to-manager bias and confidently say: there’s nobody in the world doing – where are you? – [points at Jamie] what you are doing at this moment.

It fills me with immense pride to present the Sir George Martin Award 2018 to Mr Jamie Osborne.



SIMON COWELL

His A&R Awards 2018 speech in full

Thank you for giving me this, it means a lot. I was thinking on the way up in the car about what I was going to say. Looking around the room I owe a huge thank you to [many of you]. Let's start off with David Howells. At the right time in my life we found each other, thank God. Because if it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here.

The great Steve's Mac's on the same table [as David], who recently wrote the last [Syco] record for us. You're always going to miss people out on nights like this, so I just wanted to say, first off all, thank you to you David, to Pete [Waterman], to all the writers including you Steve, the artists we've been able to work with over the years, the people who work at my company.

I remember one point in my life when I lost my confidence and I [experienced] the worst A&R meeting I ever had – where the person at the time wrote 'zero' for my income that last quarter.

I was lucky then to find three people, Jeremy Marsh, Nick Raymonde and Mike McCormack.

Nick said to me, Only put a record out if it's a bit. Mike said to me that I was Gary Lineker, wait at the goal post, don't do too much work and just put it in the back of the net. And Jeremy said to me, when I was whining about not being able to sign the Power Rangers because I couldn't afford the plane ticket, 'Just get on the fucking plane!'

I mention those stories because they're about people giving me confidence.

What I want to say is I thank you guys for what happened in the past, but then tonight I also thank everyone sitting on my table and the surrounding tables because they are the ones actually making the hits [at Syco today] – whether it's Guy [Langley], Anya [Jones], Tyler [Brown] or Sonny [Takhar], who has decided to leave but he'll come back at some point... they always do!

All of us needed to be given confidence at some point and if you meet the Davids, the Jeremys, the Petes, the Nicks, the Mikes and the Robs, as in Rob Stringer – who has never asked me for a business plan in his life – then you're very lucky. And then if you're lucky, you can find the next generation.

So, hopefully this isn't going to be the last award of my life. Here's to the future – but I couldn't do it without them, and I couldn't do it without you. To the artists and the writers, and whoever else I've left off mentioning, I apologise, but I want to thank you all. This is a huge big deal for me – thank you very much.



TO THE MAN WHO NEVER FOLLOWS THE CROWD

SIMON COWELL

MORE THAN 500 MILLION RECORDS SOLD

CONGRATULATIONS



SONY MUSIC

SYCO

ENTERTAINMENT

'IT'S DIFFICULT TO BECOME FAMOUS. ARTISTS CAN SOMETIMES LOSE TOUCH WITH REALITY – A MANAGER'S JOB IS TO REIN THAT IN'

Garry Blackburn is one half of one of the most successful artist-manager duos in the modern UK music industry. For over 30 years he's steered Norman Cook, aka Fatboy Slim, to superstardom, while also representing the likes of Pete Tong and Madness – and building a business empire across publishing, recordings, management and promotion...

Garry Blackburn's only had a few "tricky moments" in the 30 years he's managed Norman Cook.

For example, remembers the Anglo Management founder: "I was once stuck in a venue in Harare, with a suitcase full of money, with a riot going on outside. I locked myself in a cupboard under the stairs."

Yet as Blackburn insists, such instances only ever amounted to "little problems that you get through somehow".

In spite of Blackburn and Cook jokingly maintaining a motto of, "We gotta get out of this business", the manager says he remains "committed to the music industry" – and to ensuring that Cook's music continues to be heard for as long as possible.

Blackburn made a name for himself as a successful radio pluggger in the late '80s and early '90s, before creating Anglo Management – which today counts Idris Elba, Madness, Pete Tong and others on its books, in addition to Norman Cook (aka Fatboy Slim).

Blackburn also co-owns Southern Fried Records with Cook, and founded music publishing company ASongs in 2005, with his marketing and strategy division Anglo Digital Management forming as a standalone company in 2014.

Blackburn's career in the music business actually began nearly 10 years before he started working with Cook, between 1978 and 1979, at a time when punk had exploded and a new generation were using music as a weapon against socio-economic inequality.

"We were all under Thatcher's heel and felt like we were inciting a revolution," says Blackburn. "We really felt like the world was changing and it was in our hands to change it."

He says that his first job in the business "was a baptism of fire." It was at Jonathan King's UK Records, which hired him when he was 18, and where he worked as an "office boy" for a year after school. He then went on to study a degree in International Relations at the London School of Economics (LSE).

"If you do a deal with someone, get it written down. I never got my piece of Duran Duran."

"I got a place at LSE which I didn't really appreciate until later, because I felt like a miserable failure not getting into Oxford," he says.

That gap year saw Blackburn – a ska, Trojan Records and David Bowie fan – thrown straight into "the heart of the music business", attending Top of the Pops with ABBA, who King published in the UK.

"Jonathan had a very unusual [style]," recalls Blackburn of his time at UK Records. "He wouldn't [ever] say sorry for his behaviour, but actually he was a fantastic boss and taught me the power of ambition in a nice way."

Blackburn says that King's brother, and his lead A&R exec, Andy, also made a big

impression on him. "We spent the year going around watching the Sex Pistols," he recalls. "Punk was breaking then. London was a complete melting pot. This is probably in 1978/79."

"Where I lived, the pubs shut at 10:30pm. A nightclub was some bejewelled mystical thing that happened in the West End in Soho. Discovering that scene, going to the Marquee and watching Generation X was incredible. It blew my head off."

Blackburn then very reluctantly started his course at LSE and even asked Jonathan King for his job back after the first term. "He said, 'you're joking, go and finish your degree,'" recalls Blackburn.

"I met loads of people [at LSE] who are now in the music business. Steve Dagger who managed Spandau Ballet was there. [Broadcaster] Robert Elms was also at LSE and they were all in my football team. Graham Ball, who went to Sony [was also there]."

After he graduated from LSE, Blackburn moved to West Berlin with his then girlfriend and now wife, Gillian. "I ran the football team at LSE and I organised a tour of West Berlin," he explains.

"We got hammered by every team we played and I decided to stay out there having finished my course. We were living in a squat in Kreuzberg, which is now the trendiest spot of Berlin. I think [it was] eight months we were out there, but it got so cold at Christmas we had to come home."

Blackburn says that when he got back to London from Germany he felt "a bit



Norman Cook aka Fatboy Slim presented the Artist Loyalty Award to Garry Blackburn at the 2018 A&R Awards

rudderless,” and not knowing what to do next, got a job as a van driver in the West End.

“I had kind of a network of friends and contacts on the music scene and started to try and get back in the business,” he says. “During my deliveries I would just stop off and see people and try and get back in the flow of things.”

One of the people he made friends with was up-and-coming A&R man Mark Dean, who was working for publisher and agent Bryan Morrison. Dean passed on a job offer at Carlin Music to Blackburn, where he was hired as a radio plugger but also helped to sign Duran Duran.

“I tried to sign Spandau Ballet, but Steve [Dagger] was too smart for that because he wanted to start their own publishing company. So I looked around for the next best thing and we signed Duran Duran.”

It was at Carlin that Blackburn says he learnt his “first heavy lesson about the music industry”. “I kind of fell out with Carlin because they promised me a commission,” he remembers. “If you do a deal with somebody, get it written down. I never got my piece of Duran Duran. I know it sounds terrible now, but it probably would have ruined me [as a person] if I’d have made a lot of money at that stage of my life.”

As a plugger at Carlin, Blackburn had made friends including BBC Radio 1’s Peter Powell. Because Blackburn was known for getting records played on air, he was hired by Roger Ames at Phonogram, where the Anglo man’s friend, Mark Dean, had also gone to work.

“It was really difficult to get new acts played [on radio], but Pete was very interested in new music. When the word began going round that I was a guy who could get Pete to play a record, I started getting offered a lot of jobs.”

Blackburn’s next big break came with a job offer to become the Head of Promotions at Island Records – after being in the business for about “six months”. “Island Records was the label that symbolised everything I loved about music,” he says.

“I spent the next three years working at Island, which was heavenly. I absolutely loved it there until the second big lesson came along. Chris Blackwell bought Stiff, [Stiff founder] ‘Robbo’ [Dave Robinson] got hired to run Island and he just fired us all and brought all the Stiff people in. I was so devastated.

“It was weird, because we had Bob Marley’s Legend [greatest hits] at No.1 and Robbo just turned the whole thing upside down, which was in the spirit of things those days I suppose.

“The irony is, the nice joined up dots of these stories is that I now manage Madness and I deal with Robbo an awful lot because he’s in some ways part of the band.”

As Blackburn recounts his career below to *Music Business UK* – just before he jointly received the Artist Loyalty Award

“Everybody fucks up and everybody makes mistakes. But shit happens. You have to learn from it.”

at the 2018 A&R Awards with Norman Cook – he tells us that if there’s one thing he’d like to ensure by telling his story, it’s that everyone who’s played a role in his career gets the credit they are due.

“In any career, you get a lot of help and a lot of mentoring. I’m at the other end of that now and I’m trying to do that for other people,” he says.

“I got a lot of help from a lot of people and had a lot of fun working with clever, energetic guys and girls that made a difference to me. I have a big team around me today, so I get a lot of support from the guys I work with – they’re all part of the story.”

How did you meet Norman Cook and start working together?

That began after I was fired by Island. Paul White, who was my assistant at Island, was also fired and we decided to try and

emulate Neil Ferris and Clive Banks and start an independent promotion company [Anglo-Irish Plugging and later Anglo Plugging when Paul White left].

One of our first clients was Andy MacDonald. Andy and Juliet MacDonald had a little label called Go! Discs and they were like us. They were very passionate about music and Andy was bright as a button and worked 24 hours a day. He brought us a band called The Housemartins and we had great success with them.

One of the things about being a plugger is that you spend a lot of time with your bands. You’re part of their team, going out there trying to convince people that they’re a great act and worthy of some airplay or a TV show, so you become quite close with them. I became quite close with Paul Heaton and Norman Cook.

Norman had been DJ’ing and dabbling with music and he asked me to come down and see the Norman Cook International Road Show in Brighton. He put this solo project together which was kind of the prototype of what he does now, where he would assemble all these different influences that he loved, from graffiti to African rhythms to hip-hop to UK soul and reggae.

There were 22 people on stage. He had a 13-piece Zimbabwean backing band called The Real Sounds of Africa. He had all these UK rappers [and] this graffiti artist doing live graffiti. I went to see this show in Brighton, and there were more people on stage than there were in the audience!

It was a big room, it held 1,500 I think and there were about 13 of us there, watching 22 people on stage, but it was fantastic. Afterwards we were talking and I said, ‘Norm, let me help you, I’ll help fill the room up’.

You started in radio plugging and that evolved into management and then later on publishing and recordings. Tell us about that evolution?

I never really had to manage Norman to earn money, because I had a successful plugging company. It was actually a bit of a problem, because we were very successful.

With my [new] partner Dylan White, we plugged a lot of the Britpop wave, so we did Portishead and The Chemical Brothers and Oasis, Primal Scream and Suede. We did all those acts and we had a fantastic business. At the time I was managing Norman, who transformed from Beats International to Pizzaman.

He had all these transitions and all these pseudonyms and all of them had No.1 records. While I was working with him on Freak Power, he sneaked off and made a Fatboy Slim album. That’s when I was drawn more across to the management side of the business, because the Norman thing went into a different gear.

We were getting album sales of 35,000 by midday. It was me, Norman and the lads in Brighton at Skint. None of us really knew what we were doing and it was massive. It just went stellar and then it started happening in America.

With the plugging, it was difficult to do both, so Dylan managed the plugging company and I spent more time doing the management thing. Then of course, one of the things that happens when you manage somebody successful is that everybody starts ringing you up wanting you to manage them. My world started to change quite drastically then. It’s very difficult not to overreact to your success.

Can you give us a glimpse into what your world was like at that time?

I’d like to do it again, but I can’t remember a lot of it; it all happened so quickly in so many different places. We started travelling a lot, doing gigs all over the world. That was really exciting.

Norman was just a fantastic guy to work with. The way he reacted to what was happening was really lovely. He kept very true to his ideals and he’s still the same guy that I first met, which is always a nice thing to be able to say about somebody. There were a lot of important people around in those days as well that made a big difference to things.

An old friend of mine had become quite a good lawyer, a guy called David Glick who played a big part in us beginning to carve out our own structure. David Levy,



the agent, hit me up when Norman had a No.1 with Beats International, and David’s still Norman’s agent. He and I have been doing this a long time together and we still love working out what we’re going to do each year.

You said you were selling 35,000 records by midday. What do you consider to be a successful campaign now, compared to then?

The metrics went from record sales to social media figures to tickets and now [it’s] turning around again to streaming figures. We still look at the data on all of those things but the financial significance of selling lots of tickets is vital, as is the importance of the volume of streaming that you get.

What was the most challenging period of your career or the most challenging decision that you’ve had to make?

I think learning to say no to things,

learning not to do everything you get offered. You work so hard to get to a place and then when you arrive, all these riches and opportunities present themselves. It’s very hard to realise that it’s not the best thing to do them all. So don’t overreact to your success.

I’ve made a lot of mistakes in my career and I’ve made a lot of mistakes with Norman, but Norman’s a very trusting guy and he realises that everybody makes mistakes and the important thing is to learn from them.

Everybody fucks up. Everybody makes mistakes. Sometimes they’re horrendous and they cost a lot of money, but shit happens. You have to learn from it. You learn more from your mistakes than your successes. That’s for sure.

What was the most challenging part about managing Norman?

I think the most challenging part of it was keeping a balance between work and a life.



Madness

That's been the most difficult bit for me on a personal level, but in terms of developing his career, in that kind of context, I can't think of any insurmountable problems.

It's never been really tricky, but I suppose there are moments. When we did the big show on Brighton beach, the police officer who was in charge of policing the event wanted to cancel the event 15 minutes before Norman went on.

We were standing on the roof of the Brighton Centre and in front of us, you could see a mile of beach and every inch of it was covered with people and he knew something was going to go wrong. His cheek was actually twitching when he said to me, 'We're going to pull the event'. That was quite a difficult moment.

I reasoned with him, that if we didn't go ahead, it would probably be worse than going ahead and then I went a bit hippy and said, 'You've got to trust the audience here. This isn't mods and rockers, these are people from the summer of love generation and they're here to have a great time.' There have been tricky moments like that.

I define my job with my artists as pushing them to a point where they are just beyond

their comfort zone. Keeping them there is where the fun stuff happens, where the real creativity happens, but then when they go too far outside, I pull them back.

It's difficult to become successful and famous and when it happens to you, it does quite a lot of damage to your psyche. You start believing you're superman and you start believing you're special. Artists can lose perspective and lose touch with reality – a manager's job is to rein that in.

How do you choose who to work with as a manager?

It usually starts with actually liking somebody and having seen the potential of a friendship. Then it's about the music. Liking the work that's done and liking the person you're working with. If you've got those two things in place then it's easy. I never put it down to the potential of the artist. I suppose the other criteria are: how do I think I can help? How do we think we can make a difference? They're the criteria I think we apply to the artists we work with.

With Norman, we had a friendship and a good working relationship and it evolved

into management. So looking backwards I think yeah, I loved what he was doing musically and I really liked the person. I liked his frankness and candour and I liked his lateral thinking.

Is Norman as commercially aware as he is creative?

No. Not at all and deliberately so. Norman has never done anything for money, ever. His motivation is not money at all. The fact that he's done very well is a pure happenstance of everything else he's done. If you ask Norman how much he earned from playing Elrow in the summer, he wouldn't have a clue.

If you ask him how much the sample clearance for the strings on Right Here, Right Now [cost], or what percentage he had to give away for it on the publishing, he wouldn't know. He just deliberately doesn't want to be involved in that kind of stuff. He's very happy for me [to deal with it]. This is what I mean about him being very trusting. It's incredible. And he's very happy for me to get on with it and do the business for him on that side. It's kind of worked because he's in a very good place.

I think the commercial side [is] pretty simple. The beginning bit is how do you keep your artists alive while they're trying to get money coming in. Then when the money's coming in, the job is to make sure that a fair share of it ends up in the artist's pocket.

There are a lot of people who will take a piece of it in the food chain. The other part of my message is to apologise to all the people who I've been a bit brutal with when it comes to the deal making. It took me a while to learn that you need to make deals fair. They're not win/lose things. They've got to be win/win things.

What constitutes a bad deal then?

Management deals have always sat around 20%. Where does that come from? I don't really know. I think that 10% works for me with all my artists because I've made it work. I'm not saying we deserve more, but it'd be hard if we earned less.

Between artists and labels, those goalposts have moved and are moving all the time. We still have some old record deals that are atrocious that Norman has under his pseudonyms.

When I get the time, I will try and fix them, but it's very difficult to talk to a major record company and ask them to change a 30-year-old deal. It's very difficult unless you've got something new to barter with and even then, they're so stubborn and obtuse about it, it's very hard to move the dial.

Fortunately most of our relationships have been with intelligent independents who work on the relationships. The deal with the record company has changed a lot and I actually think there's all these different ways of releasing records, there's all these different ways of breaking an act now that the record companies really have to be very flexible and very inventive about how they participate in the process.

You've seen radio evolve into streaming and playlists. Is the process the same as for radio plugging?

Yeah it is. Essentially, it's similar. I can't remember exactly when but quite some time ago the penny dropped for me that playlists at streaming platforms are the new radio. Of course they aren't, but they also

kind of are – or could become so.

We really spend a lot of time trying to drive the volume of streams and, financially, you actually can see a result. Although it's a long tail, a micro-fraction of income, it's real and it's there.

For a long time we were in this space where we were worried about record sales disappearing. We can replace that income with streaming income. The important thing is for the artist to get paid

fairly on that and to also have their hands on the levers that control what music gets exposed on those platforms.

George Ergatoudis said an amazing thing to me when he was at Spotify. He said, 'It's like I'm in a Wright Brothers airplane, that's the stage we're at. We've just started this thing and very quickly we're going to be flying Concorde.' Inside the building, they knew they didn't have it fully worked out just yet.



'Garry does the clever stuff and I just faff about'

Norman Cook and Garry Blackburn jointly collected the Artist Loyalty Award at the A&R Awards 2018 in London on November 6. Cook, who presented Blackburn with his trophy, told the crowd:

"Something rather wonderful happened to me in 1985. I got to run away and join the circus – and one of the first people I met within the circus was one Garry Blackburn. While I'm here, I'd like to thank all my other crew here: Katy, Allan, Jamie, Jan, James, Tom, Rose, Jill. All part of the Anglo-Blackburn family. 33 years is an awful long time. [That's more] than you get for most murders! The reason that my relationship works with Garry is job sharing. He does the clever stuff and I just faff about. He does the business and I just faff about. And he does the speeches. I'm not one for speeches, but I'll introduce the man of the hour, my best friend in the music business, my surrogate father, my mentor: Garry Blackburn."

WHY NEW ARTISTS PROBABLY NEED A PLAN B

It's a harsh competitive landscape for emerging acts, says Peter Robinson. Maybe the music industry should start signing more interesting people...

One of my favourite interview tropes is The Careers Advisor Story. There are variations on the theme but generally you'll hear that during a popstar's schooldays they had a session with their careers advisor during which "I'm going to be a singer" was met with: "Have you considered butchery?"

And the gag, obviously, is that the careers advisor was inept for not realising they were in the presence of cultural greatness, because look where the popstar is now! And where they are now is often 'unrecouped to the tune of several hundred thousand pounds', but you get the idea. These anecdotes are usually accompanied by some sort of claim that there was "never a Plan B", which always seems like a slightly strange boast. How odd that having more than one passion is so frequently seen as a weakness, rather than evidence of a potential polymath or an enquiring mind.

The obvious problem with all this is that for every successful artist now laughing in the face of their former careers advisor, and for every Platinum act for whom there was never a Plan B, there are thousands who didn't make it, and didn't or couldn't face reality until they were in their thirties, if at all.

Those huge, sweeping shots of thousands of single-minded hopefuls you see on TV talent shows are supposed to be inspiring but all they really show is a car park full of future dismay.

It's not as if the 'no Plan B' mantra is anything to be celebrated even if an artist *does* somehow make it. The truth is that having no Plan B means being focused on music and nothing else, which makes for incredibly boring recording artists. They are not passionate about anything else, and they don't know about anything else. They don't exactly bring nothing to the table, but what they do bring is a chair. Exactly what you'd expect to be at the table.

When I'm doing media training sessions with



“Being focused on music and nothing else makes for boring recording artists.”

new artists – even, sometimes, more established ones – the part where we try to nail their artist proposition almost always boils down to the simple question: what else have you got? And by 'what else' I mean stuff that's beyond bringing a chair to the table. For instance, a strong voice is either genetic or taught, so either way it's nothing to shout about (unless, apparently, you're Jessie J). Co-signs from famous or credible collaborators are helpful for press releases, Beats 1 premieres and a few streams early on, but that momentum usually subsides. And when it does, the spotlight falls on the artist. It's a harsh light, too. Again, that question: what else have you got? "I've always dreamed of performing" is not a satisfactory answer, and hasn't been since Popstars: The Rivals.

It amazes me how close an artist can sometimes get to launch before a record label,

who've worked on the project for 18 months, or management, who've known the artist far longer, stops to wonder whether their financial and creative investment is going to be Ratnered into oblivion within 30 seconds of their act's first radio interview.

Sometimes in interviews I'll ask people what book they're reading at the moment, and there's never really a wrong answer except "nothing".

The last time I spoke with The 1975's Matty Healy, a man who by most accepted metrics is the best popstar in Britain today, he started banging on about a Japanese interior design book. His band's name, of course, was originally taken from a novel. Elsewhere, he has a passion for brutalism, which is a little faddy these days but then you listen to his music and you see the way he presents it and you do think, Now there's a man who knows his concrete.

I don't want to say all artists should be judged against Neil Tennant but, at the same time, why not? There's a chap whose debut single referenced To The Finland Station, a 1940s book on revolution. The harsh truth is that without all this sort of thing Pet Shop Boys would have been Erasure and The 1975 would be Razorlight.

Consider the United Kingdom's most imagination-free recording artist, and I don't want to point fingers here but let's just say for the sake of argument... a DJ-cum-producer who studied music at college, then music at university. We could be here all day debating the pros and cons of music-based further and higher education and whether or not true talents really need to spend several years and tens of thousands of pounds in order to learn about XLR cables, but imagine a world where this individual had an interest in something beyond music. Would their latest terrible hit song – and there has been a latest terrible hit song – have been better if they'd had a Plan B, or a Plan C? Absolutely. In summary: turn all music colleges into libraries overnight, don't tell the students, see if pop improves and if nothing's changed after three years turn the entire lot into soft play centres.

We used to talk about something called 'x factor', before Simon Cowell persuaded the country that 'x factor' meant great vocals and no personality, ie. the total opposite of what the term actually meant. These days, in this post-Jessie Ware media landscape, maybe it's all about podcastability: would someone be able to host a podcast about something other than music, and



would you actually want to listen?

And I know what you're thinking: none of this has stopped bland artists having No.1s. But why be happy with 'good enough to hit 120m streams as long as the song's alright'? Pop has of course been made great by plenty of people whose favourite book is the Argos catalogue – yet the question of 'what else have you got?' is becoming even more urgent in the streaming era.

The deluge of quite-good new artists becomes totally unmanageable as music fans become more demanding in terms of social media 'voice', attention to detail and the creation of narratives through (and between) album campaigns.

If we're really looking for the individuals who'll push pop forward through the sheer force of their own imagination, it's hard to think of many who've done so in the past without having taken an occasional step outside their own self-obsession.



‘ARTIST DEVELOPMENT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE DO’

Liz Goodwin, Glassnote UK Managing Director, on new acts, routes to market – and the power of independent labels in the modern business...

Glassnote has established itself as an exciting independent label in the UK with a number of buzzy developing artists like singer/songwriter Jade Bird, electronic pop duo IDER and alternative soloist Dylan Cartlidge.

This trio embody the diverse nature of a growing roster that is being shepherded by Liz Goodwin – now over two years in as Glassnote’s UK Managing Director – alongside Marketing Manager Scott Macrae and UK Head of Promo, Steve Stone.

Goodwin joined the US-born Glassnote after 14 years at Polydor, where she worked on campaigns for Lana Del Rey, Imagine Dragons, Elbow, Snow Patrol, Eminem and many more.

The Universal label was where Goodwin first learned the merits of variety, thanks to direction from her boss at the time, Karen Simmonds. “Karen knew what a fan I was of guitar music but made sure that my roster was really broad across different genres and artists so it didn’t seem like I had a niche,” Goodwin explains.

“In such a fast-moving industry, it’s important to be able to apply your skill set in lots of different areas.”

Goodwin grew up on the US rock music loved by her parents – The Eagles, Jackson Browne, Bob Dylan and Neil Young – before she fell in love with the ‘90s alternative music scene coming out of the States. She says: “I played music in a band with friends and got really into every element of it as a kid, obsessively collecting lots of indie, alternative and grunge records.

“We’d play Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Hole, Breeders, Pixies – anything signed to 4AD that was kind of left-field.”

It was the business side of music, however, that Goodwin was drawn to for a career. “I remember walking into what was Tower Records or HMV at one point, picking up a Hole album and thinking it must be someone’s job to put music in front of people, to promote it and bring audiences. I thought, God, I’d love to do that job. It was pre-internet so you couldn’t Google that stuff, you had to work out how to do it yourself.”



Dylan Cartlidge

During her marketing degree, Goodwin got a work experience placement at East West Records when the label was working on campaigns for Tori Amos and the D:Ream single Things Can Only Get Better – then a Blairite anthem following Labour’s landslide 1997 election victory. Others on the East West roster included BT, Simply Red, indie band Dawn of the Replicants and Missy Elliott. From there, Goodwin went to work for Jill Sinclair and Trevor Horn at ZTT before she joined Universal.

At Polydor, Goodwin was initially put in charge of developing UK campaigns for Interscope acts Marilyn Manson, Gwen Stefani, No Doubt, Jimmy Eat World, AFI and Weezer. Rufus Wainwright was one of the first artists whose career she worked on from the very beginning. Then came MySpace success story Kate Nash, the rise of Elbow and the launch of Lana Del Rey, amongst others. When Glassnote founder Daniel Glass offered Goodwin the keys to his UK business in 2016, she was ready for the challenge.

“It’s something that I felt would be an amazing step – I wanted to learn a lot more about the broader music business and get involved in other facets of a record company, so it was something I was really excited about,” she says.

“I like listening to artists. I want to hear about who they are, and what they want.”

“I’d done marketing for probably 17 years at that point and I was in a field that I loved, but I really wanted to work for Daniel and be part of this big, global indie.”

The vision for Glassnote in the UK is to “get bigger and more successful” while growing a roster that also includes four-piece band Mosa Wild and singer/songwriter Lawrence Taylor.

Goodwin adds: “We want to sign artists that all of us believe in around the world. I feed off passion and ambition and the way that artists think about music creatively.

“Knowing that they are phenomenal and that we can bring them to big audiences and help them grow a fanbase is the most exciting thing.”

How do you approach working with artists to get the best out of them creatively?

I like listening to them – I want to hear about who they are and what their music means to them, where they want to be and what they want to do. Knowing as much about them as possible helps us to help them amplify their audience and grow it with them.

At Glassnote, we are a family company so it’s all about putting really creative and dedicated family teams around all the artists to make sure that we can help them realise their journey. It feels like



Jade Bird

artist development is the most important thing that we do.

The last time you worked in the independent sector was before the internet changed the business. What are the challenges in that world you find yourself in today?

There is a lot of noise and you have to be able to find ways to cut through. People have shorter attention spans, but there are more platforms to get yourself heard on, so it’s a case of how you do that and make it effective. There are more advantages to it than disadvantages; with the right music, the right campaigns and the right strategies you can create more opportunities. It does take longer to cut through but there are so many more ways you can do it. It’s a lot easier to find who and where your audience is.

What are some of your strategies for cutting through the noise?

Artists being at the forefront of it is really important. So engaging with their fans on socials, talking back to them, encouraging them to comment, treating them to live shows online and just being upfront about who they are and what they are all about can really help. Touring and live has become all the more important for it as well, the number of people in the room is where you get a gauge of where and who your fanbase are, and it’s a really good measure of where you are with an artist and their build.

Making a lot of content and having regular opportunities for people to check in on artists and for us to be able to promote those things is important. As well as having big statement visual video pieces for focus tracks and albums, mixing it up with iPhone footage and having every type of visual content you can rolling in the right place at the right time. You never know where someone is going to find you.



What's the role of a record label in 2018?

It's about what we can offer across the world. It depends on the individual artists and that's what I like about what a record label is in 2018; we are more adaptable to what artists need from us rather than putting an artist into a set structure. Record labels in general are more flexible with what an artist needs, particularly the independents.

[At Glassnote], what we offer is a global view, and a strategy – you might be doing incredibly well in your own territory or the city in which you play the most, but bringing an amazing team that is sat across the world and can amplify everything to a much bigger audience is absolutely what a record label's role is.

Artists know everything about record labels – who is there and what everyone does – and I like the way that seems to have changed in the last 20 years. You get to the point where artists have done a lot of the lifting and the hard work themselves before they've reached the offices of record labels. Then, we are there to plug in and help make it all much bigger.

Many of your signings are what might be considered as 'album artists' – what's the future of the album?

It depends what kind of artist you are. A lot of the artists we work with are very passionate about delivering bodies of work and I think that's really important.

I personally love the stories that albums can tell, and the context they can give to the long-term development of an artist is really important. But if I was to work with an artist that wasn't passionate about albums, then we'd work with that as well.

“I love the stories that albums can tell, and the context they give to artists.”

It's just about music coming out and being presented in the way that artists are happy and passionate about and that they believe in. If you're a lot younger and you haven't really grown up on albums... I don't know what the answer is.

But what an album means to an artist and what it means to telling a story or a show or having a creative

body of work, I think is a really important thing.

And the arrival of something new doesn't necessarily have to mean the death of something else...

Exactly – the public kind of stopped buying vinyl 20 years ago and now look at it [2017's UK vinyl sales were up nearly 2,000% on 2007's]. It just comes again in a different form, that's what the essence of an album is, and that will absolutely carry through in a YouTube channel or a Spotify playlist.

Going back to the lack of attention in today's streaming age – does that pose challenges for the live careers of the artists you work with too? Are fans coming back to shows?

I think they are, and they're bringing their friends with them. There is that old school word of mouth thing, particularly with Jade Bird and IDER, that's really good to see. I love to see the spread of different types of people that come to see both artists, who are very different in terms of what they sound like musically. [At the gigs there are] young women, 30-year-old men, couples and groups of friends together, which makes me think that those artists in particular are reaching everybody. I don't think either of them are attracting an audience that is going to move away from them – the opposite is happening. I would put that down to them being so incredibly engaging, funny and personable and inclusive of an audience, so a gig feels like a party that you want to keep going back to.

Final question: after all of your experiences at Glassnote, Polydor and beyond, what advice would you give to someone starting their career in the music business today?

Find a mentor. Go and hang out with people, join a Facebook group – there are so many forums and groups and it's quite easy to reach out and find a contact for someone that can help you or give you advice. There is nothing wrong with asking for advice about how to do things or how to get into the business. I think it's a lot easier now than it was when I was starting out to find your crowd. And you are not bugging people, there's a lot of people out there who really want to help and would be very happy to give advice. Don't be frightened of asking someone out for a coffee or reaching out to someone who you haven't met before but you like the look of what they do – chances are they'll come back to you. I'd like everyone that is wanting or trying to get into the business to know that it's not a walled garden.

Ones to watch

Jade Bird

Singer, songwriter and guitar player Jade Bird is emerging as one of the hottest new British talents thanks to her writing skills, voice, charisma and impressive live skills. She's performed on Jools Holland, The Late Show and Jimmy Fallon in the US and counts fans at BBC Radio 1.

Managers Roy and Sam Eldridge at Urok signed Bird to Glassnote in January 2017. “The first thing that really struck me about her was how brilliant she was live and the story that had been built with her travels has been really interesting too,” says Goodwin. “She's super talented, very engaging, she's a lovely person, fun, ambitious, and really cares about what she's doing.”

Bird writes everything herself and is currently in New York finishing her debut album that will arrive next year. The ambition is “to break her across the world,” says Goodwin. “She is spending a lot of time touring, which she loves to do, in America, here and in wider Europe. She works so hard and I think she's going to be really successful in many, many territories.”

IDER

London pop duo IDER – Lily Somerville and Megan Markwick – were signed to Glassnote 18 months ago after Goodwin heard about them through friends. They've since been tipped by *The Guardian*, *NME* and *Noisey* and sold out the Village Underground in October. “That was a really big moment for us,” says Goodwin. “Every show they do just gets bigger and bigger and bigger.”

Goodwin describes IDER's music as “powerful, delicate, thoughtful and impactful” and says the quality of their live show is one of the main reasons why she wanted to get involved. “When you see them you sometimes can't tell who is singing what line – their voices are so in tune with each other and they are captivating to watch. They can play so many different instruments and are very inclusive of the audience, funny and personable. They've got the whole thing, really!”

Management is Georgia Strauss at Time Management. New songs are expected imminently and an album will be released next year.

Dylan Cartlidge

Dylan Cartlidge signed to Glassnote a few months ago after the label team came across him (and turned up at the front row of every show he was playing at the Great Escape, Live at Leeds, Annie Mac's AMP Collected and Reading & Leeds festival). He's currently working with Danger Mouse and James Dring, and his latest track, *Wishing Well*, has Radio 1 support from Annie Mac and Huw Stephens. An EP is planned for March, there will be a new single in January and he'll soon be on the road for his first headline tour after supporting Bad Sounds. Management is David Laub at Half Time.

Goodwin has high hopes. She says: “He is so different from other artists that I've seen out there. For me, the only artist I can really compare him to is early Beck with his versatility – how he uses beats and occasionally raps, sings and plays bass, it's such a great melting pot of lots of different things that he is influenced by. I honestly can't say he's got a lane, he's just a really special artist and I think we are going to do really well with him.”

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10 RULES FOR WRITING A GREAT (AND NOT WRITING A TERRIBLE) MUSIC BIZ BOOK

*Veteran industry journalist Eamonn Forde has read more music business books than most, and now he's written one – *The Final Days of EMI: Selling The Pig*, due out in February next year. Here he shares 10 lessons he's learned through both processes...*

1. The Great Man Theory is a lie

Too often the heads or founders of companies are taken as metonyms for the company itself. Yet there is too much genuflecting at the altar of the singular visionary.

The notion of the auteur was popularised by Cahiers du Cinéma in the 1960s to applaud the directors of the French new wave, and it continues to be the lens through which many business biographies and autobiographies are shot. So *David Geffen: A Biography Of New Hollywood* by Thomas R King, *Steve Jobs* by Walter Isaacson, *Howling At The Moon* by Walter Yetnikoff and *The Soundtrack Of My Life* by Clive Davis all perpetuate the notion of The Great Man, driven by something powerfully innate to argue that the success of their companies can only be explained through the sheer force of their personalities. It is a neat narrative trick but side-lines the many who helped them, or were trampled over by them, on their way to the top.

2. Fiction almost always struggles to capture the real story

John Niven's *Kill Your Friends* was an adequate pulp novel, priapically recounting the excesses of A&R during the Britpop gold rush. It was hyperbole and mostly worked.

Kill 'em All, the recent sequel, came unstuck by presuming – rather than understanding – how the modern music business works and covering over narrative holes with increasingly tedious scatology. *Lonely Planet Boy* by music journalist Barney Hoskyns told the tale of a music journalist becoming obsessed with a new pop star they discovered and read like the febrile diary of the type of person *Smash Hits* would call Uncle Disgusting.

But in different ways, Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* and Kevin Sampson's *Powder* nail the burning ambition of acts and managers to



“There is too much genuflecting at the altar of the singular visionary.”

succeed against the odds, the latter showing just how bitter the disillusionment with fame can be.

3. A new structural approach can only be done well once

No one expects a book about the music business to deconstruct the form like *Finnegans Wake*, but occasionally new ideas and new structures come through that give fresh perspectives on well-thumbed tales.

Ian MacDonald's *Revolution In The Head* had one very simple trick – a chronological analysis of every song The Beatles recorded – but did it so expertly that every subsequent attempt will always pale in comparison. *Please Kill Me*, Gillian McCain and Legs McNeil's oral history of punk, was an incredible jigsaw of a book and perhaps only Rob Tannenbaum's *I Want My MTV* pulled off the same trick with an equal amount of aplomb.

Elizabeth Goodman's recent *Meet Me In The Bathroom* tried to apply oral history to the post-Strokes New York scene, but ran out of juice as there were only so many tales of spoiled entitlement one can read. Finally, Stephen Witt's *How Music Got Free* presented the story of digital piracy not as a straight business book but rather as an Ira Levin-style thriller that was so good no one should even attempt anything similar.

4. The accountant's story trumps the owner's story

David Cavanagh's *The Creation Records Story: My Magpie Eyes Are Hungry For The Prize* remains a phenomenal book about business, art, culture, folly and ego.

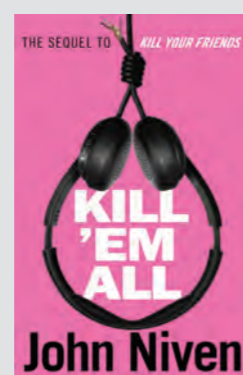
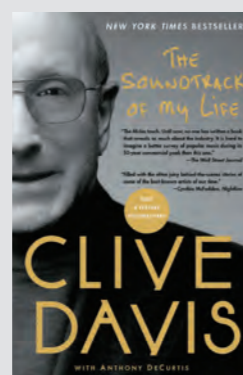
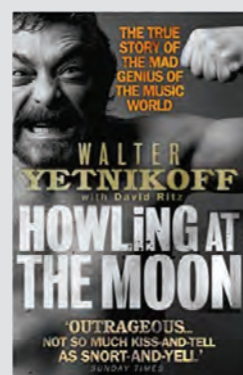
Creation founder Alan McGee hated it and dismissed it as "the accountant's story", yet neither Paolo Hewitt's officially approved *Alan McGee & The Story Of Creation Records* or McGee's own *Creation Stories: Riots, Raves & Running A Label* could touch it as they both fell into the Great Man Theory trap and were bloviation in all but name.

You Never Give Me Your Money: The Battle For The Soul Of The Beatles by Peter Doggett is a phenomenal forensic dissection of the band's ludicrously Byzantine business structures and how that pulled them apart more than creative differences ever did. *Michael Jackson, Inc.: The Rise, Fall, & Rebirth Of A Billion-Dollar Empire* by Zack O'Malley Greenburg is shorter but no less jaw-dropping in explaining both how good and how awful Jackson was with money. *The Big Payback* by Dan Charnas is a masterclass in revealing the complex symbiosis of the business of hip-hop and the culture of hip-hop. And of course Fredric Dannen's *Hit Men: Power Brokers & Fast Money Inside The Music Business* remains the cornerstone text here.

5. Academic books fear the illogical nature of the music business

Disclaimer: in the 1990s and early 2000s, my career path was that of the academic, teaching and researching in universities and ultimately completing a PhD. Then I left to become a music business writer.

I still have a huge amount of time for academics and academic writing on the music industry, but always felt that the need for a theoretical structure – political economy theories, the Frankfurt School, post-structuralism and beyond – was struggling to bring order to the disordered.



These frameworks offer a starting point for the writer but can quickly become cages. As with the Great Man Theory, everything is imbued with meaning and intent when, in reality, there is some busking, some bluffing and some fumbling that happens and that gets gingerly stepped over. Sure there are very smart people running music companies, but sometimes even they don't know what they are doing. And doubt is the enemy of academia.

6. Don't bother with official histories

If there is one word on a book cover that should cause you to throw it in the recycling it's 'authorised'.

What this means is that it has gone through too many people and they have all scraped the marrow out of it. People at the heart of a company or a story are almost always the worst people to tell that story. Politics, friendships, NDAs, a lack of objectivity, egomania, megalomania and more all crash against the rocks of the story, wearing down all the interesting kinks to a smooth and bland finish.

You need an outsider who can ask all the right questions (as uncomfortable as they are) to really get to the heart of what has gone on. Insiders might know where all the bodies are buried, but rarely will they point you to the shallow graves. If you are reading an 'authorised' account, chances are you're just reading a glorified press release.

7. Never presume knowledge; never patronise

The Americans have a term for it – 'inside baseball'. It refers to when commentators and fans go down deep mines of esoterica, wilfully tossing around terminology and making oblique references that outsiders would be bamboozled by.

What became very apparent when writing my book on EMI and Terra Firma was that I was writing for two very distinct audiences simultaneously. The first was those working in music, who knew the difference between recorded and publishing rights and who did not need it explained to them who IMPALA are. The second were those not steeped in terminology like A&R, sync and platinum sales but who were nonetheless interested in the overall story.

Footnotes are one way to get around this, but they break the reader's flow and can become something for writers to lazily lean on. Torn between dipping into arrogant presumption or firing out equally arrogant patronisation, the author must write with the weight of two very different sets of hands on their shoulders.

8. Have a clear ending because updated books only work with fresh sources

By design, my book had a very clear start and an equally clear end. Others, however, are based around an ongoing narrative and there is talk of an updated version of Steve Knopper's *Appetite For Self-Destruction* as the original book ended just as Spotify was being unfurled.

Without wishing to throw shade at Brian Southall's updated version of *The Rise & Fall Of EMI Records* in 2012 (as it was indispensable on the history of EMI when writing my book), it suffered from not having any detailed insider accounts of what happened when Terra Firma took over – relying instead on how the business press reported it at the time or gathering new quotes from outsiders who had no real understanding of what happened inside EMI in those years.

Of course, that meant I had a clear path for my book to go and speak to all the key players on all sides, many of whom were speaking for the first time.

9. Books on 'excess' are dreary and are only there at the publisher's insistence

Incredibly, some people in the music industry drink too much, take illegal drugs and have affairs. Just like every other business. Yet such tales of reckless hedonism are things publishers will never get bored of hearing trotted out again and again.

Every artist autobiography will have a 'my drug hell' chapter, but when told through the boardroom, it gets boring quickly and often adds little to the story. Walter Yetnikoff's *Howling At The Moon* is so full of cocaine that you almost expect the pages to automatically fold into wraps. *The Secret DJ* is the same, except there's also MDMA. And like other people's holiday snaps or their dreams, hearing drug stories gets very tiresome very quickly.

Publishers seem to adore these stories as they believe they give a book grit and a sense of joyous abandon; but often they are there to mask bad writing and a narrative struggling to get out of second gear (excuse the pun). By all means have drugs there if they are important to the story; but if drugs and carousing *are* the story then, as a writer, you've got a problem on your hands.

10. On the record gives you authority; off the record gives you depth

This is the conundrum facing all journalists.



“Howling at the Moon is so full of cocaine you expect the pages to fold into wraps.”

Getting someone to speak to you on the record gives you and your research a legitimacy; but you also need to be aware these sources are invariably holding something back for all manner of professional and personal reasons.

When it's a straightforward story, that is not so much of an issue. When it gets more complex and combustible, an on the record quote will only take you so far down the road. Or it may even deny that other roads exist. Other sources will only speak to you on the condition of it being off the record or as use as background. You might get plenty of gold this way, but you also need to listen carefully for the grinding of axes.

A duty to protect your sources is paramount but you need to make sure what they told you can stack up. Hence some anecdotes from my book being expunged at the transcription stage and others sending up red flags from the lawyers.

A book made up entirely of on the record quotes will be watertight but will lack a certain spark; equally one built entirely from off the record quotes will crackle with intrigue but also risks sacrificing the truth in favour of the scurrilous. To indulge me as I dig back into my academic past, either extreme is the enemy of epistemology.

The Final Days Of EMI: Selling The Pig (Omnibus Press) by Eamonn Forde is due to be published on 7th February 2019.

'MINISTRY STILL HAS THIS INDEPENDENT ETHOS... WE HAVE TO HUSTLE IF WE'RE GOING TO WIN'

Under Sony's ownership, Ministry Of Sound continues to set the agenda for dance and electronic music in the UK and beyond. MD Dipesh Parmar explains how...

In a parallel dimension, Dipesh Parmar is sunning himself in Ibiza. He's become a permanent citizen on the island, having proven himself as a stalwart club DJ over the past decade-plus. He's still not too sure what A&R really means.

This could very possibly have become Parmar's life, save for a smart career turn back in 2005. At the time, Parmar was working in Ministry Of Sound's compilations division, mixing together tracks, while moonlighting as the then-independent label's tour DJ – including a summer residency on the white isle.

It was now-Atlantic UK President Ben Cook, already a star Ministry A&R, who brought Parmar into the world of talent spotting. As it turns out, all these years later, Sony Music owes Cook a drink... and a whole lot more besides.

Working under Cook and David Dollimore at Ministry, Parmar quickly became a widely-respected A&R figure in dance circles, going on to launch the careers of, and achieving huge hits with, the likes of Duke Dumont, MK, Kid Cudi, Sidney Samson, DJ Fresh and Sigala – plus BRIT-nominated group London Grammar.

Two years ago Sony Music UK, via its CEO Jason Iley, swooped to acquire Ministry, after which Parmar was made MD of MoS within its new parent major. Parmar continues

to report into his friend Dollimore, who became head of Sony's RCA group.

Parmar has taken to his new major label life like a duck to water. His recent successes at Ministry have included a run of hit singles for Sigala, as well as the huge breakthrough track from Dynoro and GiGi D'Agostino, In My Mind.

Elsewhere, he's worked on Paloma Faith track Lullaby – which has sold over a million worldwide – plus another million-seller, Marshmello and Khalid's UK Top 3 hit, Silence.

Parmar joined Sony shortly after winning the MBW A&R Award for Dance/Electronic alongside Dollimore in 2016 – and he got off to a flying start, with London Grammar's second album on Ministry, Truth Is A Beautiful Thing, hitting No.1 in the UK in summer 2017.

Music Business UK recently caught up with Parmar to ask what Ministry means in the modern age, how his love for DJ culture began – and why he thinks dance music is due for a "huge wave" of resurgence in the year ahead...

What have the biggest progressions been at Ministry since the

Sony deal happened nearly two years ago?

We were riding a bit of a wave when we got told about the Sony deal: Riton's Rinse & Repeat had just been Grammy-nominated, Tiefs was on the Radio 1 A-list with a record called Sunshine, and Dave [Dollimore] and I had just been nominated for best Electronic/Dance A&R at the A&R Awards.

There wasn't really much time to contemplate or take stock of the deal, as it moved pretty quickly. We had to staff up fast, and I give great credit to Jason Iley who put me on to Amy Wheatley – she's GM for Ministry and quite honestly one of the best music executives working in the business. [She's also interviewed in this very magazine.]

Fast forward to now and, amongst many other achievements, I'm so happy that the second London Grammar album went to No.1. Despite all the naysayers in the music industry, we had absolute belief in them, Sony had absolutely belief in them, and we were able to mobilise their fanbase working very closely with [September Management's] Jonathan Dickins and Rose Moon.

That album has now sold just shy of 200,000 albums in the UK – for a band that's never had a Top 10 single, that's definitely no mean feat.

"I had to mix the compilations for Ministry. It was my dream job."

How did you end up at Ministry in the first place? What was your starting point?

When I was 13, the first cassette I remember owning, quite vividly, was Rave Generation – that really got me in touch with electronic music. My brother was DJ'ing happy hardcore so I was listening to what he was playing. I went to my first rave when I was 16, at the Sugar Shack in Middlesborough, watching DJ Sneak.

I grew up in the north-east of England, in a small town called Newton Aycliffe, where not a lot went on, but we had some local clubs – The Empire in Middlesborough and Tall Trees in Yarm – which were my learning homes for dance music.

I was growing up with electronic music – it fascinated me. I bought my first pair of decks, went to university in Luton, and started DJ'ing in the student union.

So, you're in Luton and you've got your decks. What happens from that point on?

I started entering DJ competitions, which then I started winning. I then got asked to judge DJ competitions. So I started to create a

bit of a name for myself in that area.

At university, everything I did was centered around dance music. I was [studying] media production, so I created a dance magazine, radio pieces and some video documentaries about it; my whole life was consumed by it.

But then university finished and I moved back to the northeast, working a mundane job that first summer. I don't know how or why but Ministry had a magazine, so I wrote off to them and asked for [a job]. I also wrote off to *DJ* and *MixMag*, but Ministry came back and offered me two weeks of work experience.

I literally left home that day, and I told my mum and dad that I wasn't coming back. I did the two weeks of work experience and, when they were up, I was told by Ministry's HR, Harriet Cadman, that there was a job going working with Nick Halkes at Incentive, which was a big trance label. I was a big trance head myself, I used to go to Gatecrasher when I was at university.

For six months, I got to work with Incentive's roster and with Nick Halkes, who is obviously a total legend, starting XL and Positiva etc. I was literally manning the phones and being a receptionist, but even then I knew that this was my way in.

At the end of that six months, Ministry told me they had a full-time position going in compilations working with Steve Canueto. I basically had to mix the album compilations for Ministry of Sound; it was a dream job.

What was your interview like?

It was with Steve, and it went terribly! He asked me to mix a load of records and he sat behind me. I literally butchered every mix that day; it was awful. It couldn't have gone worse!

I walked away with my head in my hands but, lo and behold, there was something Steve liked about me. On my first day, I was told to go to the studio to mix Trance Nation with Ferry Corsten. That was unbelievable and is still such an amazing memory for me.

Very quickly I started putting tracks together for the albums, going into the studio and mixing them across all of the huge Ministry brands, from The Annual to Clubber's Guide. I started DJ'ing for Ministry around the world; I became a tour DJ for them everywhere from Sri Lanka to Vegas to Brazil to Colombia – and I had a residency in Ibiza for a summer.

And you gave it all up for A&R!

Yes! During that time I was coming across a lot of records, and naturally I started telling Ben Cook and Dave Dollimore about certain tracks they should sign. I told Ben [Cook] about one particular track that [subsequently] got signed to someone else and became a hit – from that point onwards it was very clear that he wanted me in the A&R team.

I didn't really know too much about

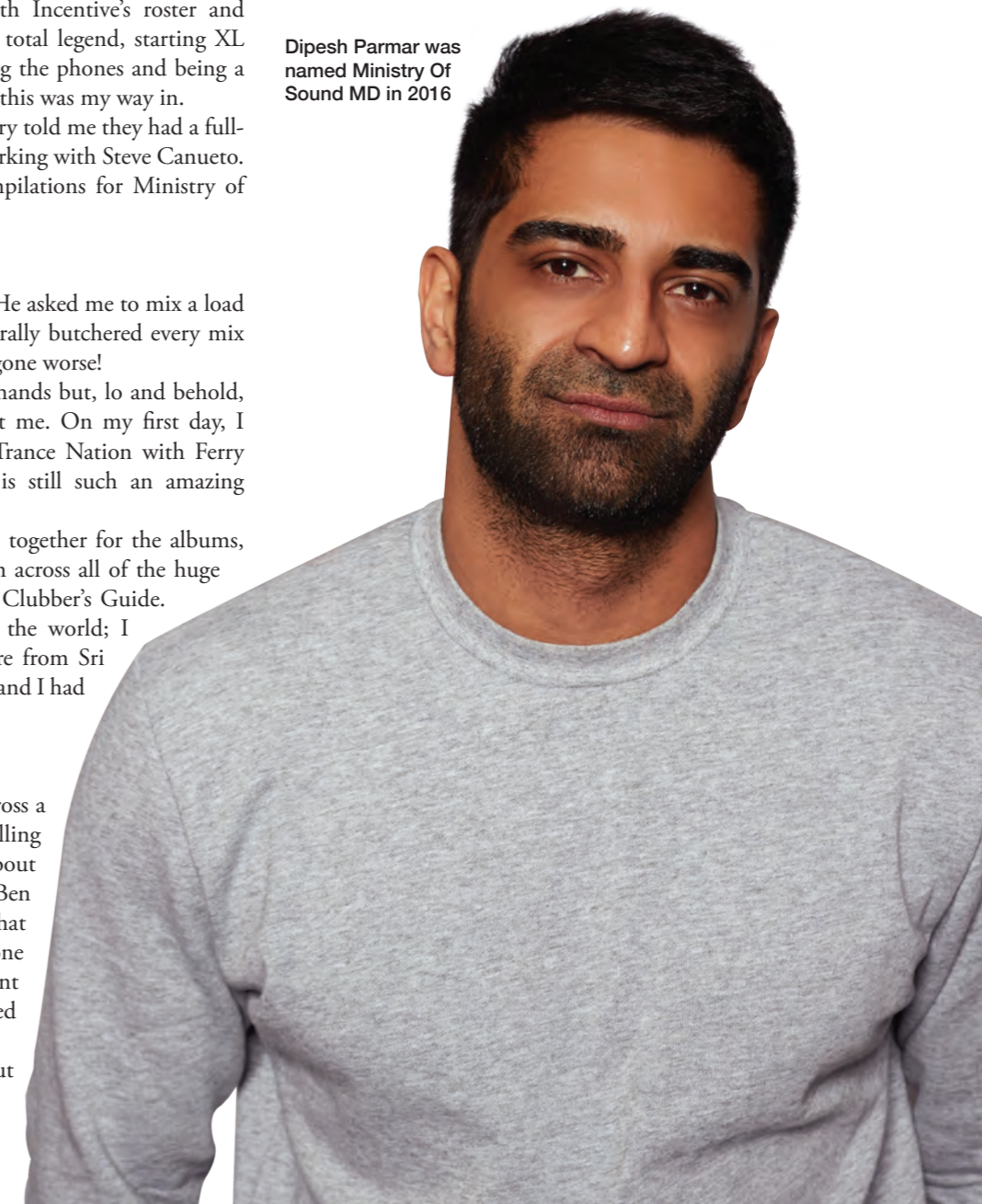
A&R, I was very happy with compilations, but it was a huge opportunity. I learnt so much from Ben and Dave about the process of A&R and how to make records, and those skills have stayed with me ever since.

Ben obviously left to go to Atlantic, but Dave and I have grown up together in this industry, really; he was at Ministry before I was, and already firmly in his stride. We became very close and we both wanted to grow the label.

We ended up signing Example, Wretch 32 and London Grammar – all artist development projects. That was different for Ministry, which at that point was best known for one-off dance singles. That experience gave us a taste of wanting to do things bigger and better.

We went on a bit of a hit streak from there, with nine No.1 singles, which was which was incredible. Then Sony came knocking... and here we are.

Dipesh Parmar was named Ministry Of Sound MD in 2016





One thing that strikes me about that: Ben Cook, David Dollimore and yourself have all risen to the top of the UK industry. What are your memories of them at Ministry?

When I came in to Ministry, I looked at them in awe – they were at the top of their game in the dance world. I just wanted to follow in their footsteps.

The one thing that really stuck with me from that time was that you've got to be across everything in this business; you can't leave any stone unturned. I'm still, to this day, making radio edits, looking at vocal additions to tracks, getting involved like that. My feeling is that you get one shot to get the music right – especially for new dance producers and those one-off singles. Adding value at that point is crucial, so those [acts] can become artist propositions in the long-term. I learnt a lot from Ben and David at that time, I respected them a lot and still do; they've both obviously gone on to do great things.

With regards to Ministry, we were independent and we really had to hustle for our successes – that stayed with me, that mentality of being the underdog and always trying to prove to the rest of the industry that you're a voice which deserves to be heard alongside the big, established major labels.

Is there something in the idea that the 'school' at Ministry taught you all to mix music, to edit tracks and – in your case – grow your DJ experience. Has that given you the ability to speak the language of music to artists, and is that important?

Yes, and I think that's hugely important. For me, growing up in the north-east as a punter of dance music, I developed a real understanding of the audience around me. Then as a DJ, I was working out what would trigger excitement in certain areas [of the UK and the world] and what wouldn't, and that grounding has helped me in a lot of ways.

Nowadays everyone talks about Spotify edits and making things work on a streaming platform, but you've still got to think about your appeal in those towns and cities that are playing these records on a daily basis. Understanding that breadth of how and why music travels on a domestic and global landscape has always been an important skill in my arsenal.

Do you think that the UK music business can be guilty of being a bit London-obsessed?

I do. We live in a London bubble sometimes. There's a whole world out there, and something that triggers a dance floor in Glasgow is not necessarily going to trigger a dance floor in London or Berlin. It's important to remember who it is you want to appeal to.

Pre-streaming, Ministry was very much in the pre-order business with how we'd break records. Now, we're always thinking globally, about what's going to get a [streaming] editor excited in the US as well as thinking about a kid going out to his first club night in Edinburgh or Newcastle.

Tell us about the moment you found out Ministry was selling



to Sony. The deal was widely rumored, but you still must have been thinking: Oh, shit...

It had an inevitability about it, to be honest with you. I always suspected that James [Palumbo] would sell at some point, and I always had the ambition – especially after Ben Cook went to Atlantic – to move to a major at some point.

It's very easy for me to say this now, but Sony was honestly at the top of the tree with regards to a label that I wanted to work [for]. I was actually already having meetings with Jason [Iley] about it! So when I found out we'd sold to Sony, it was a blessing in disguise.

Prior to the Sony thing, we'd signed London Grammar to Columbia in the US, we'd just signed Moss Kena ex-US – he's signed to RCA there – and we'd just done a worldwide deal with B1/Sony for Sigala outside the UK. So the stars aligned, really.

At the time, Ministry had been quite vocal about certain streaming platforms [especially the inability to get paid for curating playlists]. That was a challenge for the company's business model, but moving to Sony gave us the global infrastructure we needed to break records and focus on artists. We had one international person at Ministry – in total! There are a whole team here, who are second to none.



Has it been a challenge to transition Ministry from a compilations-led label to an artist-led one?

It's been very important for us to stay indie-minded. We're a small team, but we still all share that indie ethos, and a passion for music across the board. Obviously electronic music is in our DNA and we want that to continue as part of Sony – it's a culture I grew up with, it's part of my personal DNA, and it's not something you can just buy your way into.

But we also want to push the envelope of what Ministry means to a new streaming audience and for up-and-coming artists. We want to offer something different to the likes of Columbia, Syco, RCA, Relentless and Black Butter.

We don't want to over-stretch ourselves, either; it's important for us not to get caught up in fixating on market share and that side of things – we've got to keep our USP, keep our identity and keep wanting to win.

How does the recent tie-up between the Ministry brand and Apple affect you?

The Apple Music deal had very little to do with the record label [which Parmar runs]. That said, we're very supportive of the deal as Apple are a great partner for our singles and artists, as are Spotify, Deezer, Amazon, YouTube and many others.



London Grammar

You've proven with London Grammar and other artists that you're moving far beyond just being a 'dance label'. That said, how would you rank the current health of electronic music post-the EDM bubble in the United States?

I honestly think there's about to be a huge new wave for dance music, both in the UK and globally. Audiences want to experience something fresh from a live perspective – even hip-hop artists are wanting to lend themselves to dance music because it feels exciting.

Calvin Harris and Silk City feel like they're developing [chart music] back into true house music and that feel-good, emotive energy that it stands for. It's really exciting for [Ministry] to be positioned in the middle of [that scene].

I guess the challenging thing with dance music over the last couple of years has been that the data is all there to be seen on Spotify, and radio or bigger playlists will look at those numbers. So you [therefore] ask yourself: how do you continue to break underground dance music to the mainstream within that? But the bigger the dance music industry is, the better and more fluid that situation becomes.

There's a new Dance Editor just started at Spotify [Christie Driver-Snell], which is already proving to be a game changer, alongside Austin Daboh being promoted [to Head of UK Shows & Editorial].

George Ergatoudis and Ryan Newman going over to Apple is really exciting too, we had many hits together when they were at the BBC. Plus Radio 1 is still taking risks with dance music and they're less concerned about stats; that specialist output is still so key for everything that we do.

You mentioned the naysayers around London Grammar. Presumably you're talking about those who couldn't believe you could have a 'contemporary' album success without hit singles?

Yes. We saw it on album one, where we didn't have one particular big [single], but there was a huge fan base for the music. We could see that live too, people flocking to just experience that voice and their sound.

When it came to the [newer] record, we picked out the three tracks that most represented the new album and released [them] on New Year's Day. That was slightly against the mould, and we wanted to create a bit of noise.

None of those tracks flew up the iTunes chart or the Spotify Top 50, and there were some people that didn't understand where London Grammar sat in the modern streaming world. But we always had real belief, and we knew that if we mobilised their fan base and got as many ears on the music as possible, there'd be no denying Hannah's voice. You can hear a pin drop when Hannah sings live – you just don't get that at many gigs.

Radio One were instrumental with the first album, and they backed the new singles very quickly. Then we put the pre-order up and started seeing [the album] go into the top five and then stay at No.1; that built confidence that we were right in our convictions.

Spotify also helped us navigate their streaming ecosystem with some fantastic global playlisting across the singles and album, as the band didn't exist on the service with album one. There was an education process with their listeners as well as moving London Grammar's existing fans to the new forms of discovery for their music.

It was a learning curve we went through together with Jonathan [Dickins]; he was brilliant in terms of keeping the faith with the band, understanding who their audience were, and how we should deliver [the record]. Jonathan was also instrumental in how the live side evolved – he completely revamped the show, and completely revamped confidence within the band and Hannah in particular.

A word on Jason Iley: after trying to poach you from Ministry, he got you into the Sony building as part of the Ministry buy. What's he like as a Chairman?

Obviously he is well known as a brilliant music executive, but he is also a real music fan. He loves listening to the new music we bring in and we feel completely supported by him. Jason understands how to break artists and he understands the world that we live in as Ministry. He wants us to win – it's our job to continue to deliver.

If we could give you a magic wand to change something about the music business as it stands today, what would it be and why?

I would tweak it so that everyone worked together harmoniously, and we were all playing the same game – whether you're a streaming service or radio station. The dream scenario is when, globally, everyone's coming at it without agendas, focused on breaking new acts; I think we're slowly but surely turning that corner.

We as labels have to show real confidence in our artists; artist development now is taking a lot longer [in the streaming age], and there's a lot more pressure on labels and A&Rs to deliver from a creative and financial point of view as a result. We therefore need everything else in place to allow us to be able to continue breaking new acts to the best of our ability.

Where do you want Ministry to go over the next year or two? And what do you want to hear people in the industry saying about you?

A great indie within a major; that's something that I'm strongly pushing in terms of the team's mentality here, because I want us to think differently to other major labels. We know we've got to keep hustling and making better records than anyone else if we're going to win.

Ministry started out when trance was big, but then quickly moved into house and garage when that became popular. We transitioned to Dubstep and D&B where we had the first #1 singles in those genres from DJ Fresh with Louder and Hot Right Now feat Rita Ora. We signed Tim Berg's Seek Bromance at the turn of EDM, before anyone really knew him as Avicii, for example – so it's just about being early within certain scenes of dance music and pushing the envelope.

But it's also about signing and developing great talent from an artist point of view, whether that be London Grammar, or Moss Kena, or something within hip-hop we haven't announced yet – we have to make sure that we're at the forefront of new trends and pushing the boundaries.

Ministry's next generation of talent

Says Dipesh Parmar: "We've got huge dance singles on the runway from new artist Adelphi Music Factory with a track called Javelin (Calling Out Your Name), which has been played all summer by the likes of Annie Mac, Skream and The Black Madonna. We're also working with Eric Prydz's label Pryda on one of the biggest electronic dance tracks around at the moment by Camelphat and Cristoph feat Jem Cooke called Breathe which feels truly anthemic. Dynoro is fast becoming a very compelling artist proposition. We've got a big single lined up for him in early February. We're the UK home for RCA US-signed DJ/producer Oliver Heldens who we had a big hit with already back in 2015 with his re-edit of Cant Stop Playing.

"We're working with Ultra Music on one of the hottest UK DJ producers at the moment, Solardo, as well as Yogi, who's a hip-hop producer who's got an amazing project with the likes of Ray BLK, Maleek Berry, Kid Cudi and Anderson Paak. There's new music coming from DJ Fresh and we have huge belief in our developing artist Moss Kena, who was recently added to BBC Radio One's Introducing list and is currently on an arena tour supporting Jess Glynne alongside Not3s."

He adds: "We're truly excited to be working with the legendary Swizz Beats alongside [Epic Records President] Sylvia Rhone, the project has got features from the likes of Kendrick Lamar, Giggs, Lil Wayne and Nas. Elsewhere, we're working with New Zealand indie-pop artist Robinson, whose first single Nothing To Regret has been streamed over 50 million times on Spotify. And then London Grammar will be back in some shape or form in the New Year. Some of the producers they're working with are truly exciting, and the band are in a really good creative space."



Yogi

‘NO TWO DAYS HERE ARE THE SAME’

As General Manager of Ministry Of Sound, Amy Wheatley is a key figure at the label – and someone with prior experience of working in the Sony Music UK building...

Ministry Of Sound MD Dipesh Parmar calls Amy Wheatley “one of the best executives working in the music business”.

Wheatley has played a crucial role in Ministry’s performance since the company was acquired by Sony in 2016. She was appointed General Manager of Ministry Of Sound Recordings last year, moving over from her previous role as Head of UK Marketing at artist management house Three Six Zero – where she worked on acts including Calvin Harris, Travis Scott and Hurts.

Wheatley, who reports to Parmar and RCA President David Dollimore, is now tasked with working on campaigns for artists including London Grammar, Sigala, DJ Fresh, Louis Berry and recent MOSR signing Yogi.

This is her second stint at Sony. Wheatley started her career at the major as a Production Assistant nearly a decade ago, working across labels including RCA, Columbia and Syco Music.

As Label Co-ordination Manager for Columbia in 2010 she worked on Tom Odell, Daft Punk, Kasabian and Foo Fighters. After being promoted to Marketing Manager in 2013, she played an integral role in campaigns for Calvin Harris, MK, Hurts, Leon Bridges and LunchMoney Lewis.

What is the identity of Ministry Of Sound from your perspective in 2018?

Ministry to me has always been an iconic brand, rooted in the dance world whilst successfully developing artists’ long-term careers [across] wider genres. We are a dynamic, creative, passionate team, that give their all to every project.

What were the most important lessons you learnt working on artist campaigns at Three Six Zero that you’ve been able to apply at Ministry?

It was hugely insightful being on the management side. I believe that it has given me an understanding of what managers are up against daily. That appreciation really helps with relationships for both artists and management.

What are some of the fundamental differences in marketing an artist today versus five-plus years ago? Is it a longer marketing cycle for a ‘project’?

With there being a lot more data available, everyone can see in black and white how a track or artist is performing – this can work either way for a project. Creatively there are many more avenues open, allowing us to be more resourceful. As the cycle of a record can take longer to get up and running, then of course the marketing needs to reflect that.



DJ Fresh

What makes you most excited about working for a record label in 2018/2019?

How the music industry is evolving and changing. From the addition of videos to the chart, to the way deals can be done. No two days are the same here, and with that there are regularly new challenges.

What are Dipesh and David Dollimore like as bosses?

They both are incredibly supportive and knowledgeable. I work more with Dipesh on a day-to-day basis and his understanding of the process of a record – album or single – from inception to success is second to none. He is a great leader, negotiator and visionary.

What are the most effective channels for marketing an artist today, and which areas are losing influence?

I don’t think any area can be totally written off just yet. Marketing an artist is the sum of a mass; getting the foundation blocks right to build that overall picture and story is essential to all marketing campaigns.

You had an initial spell at Sony before leaving for Three Six Zero and then returning to a major record company. What’s changed at Sony in this time?

From my perspective a lot has changed in regards to my position and the label. Columbia is a very different label to Ministry, so it’s hard to compare. Ultimately, I returned to Sony because the people and ethos here are brilliant. That, paired with the opportunity to help shape and drive Ministry, made my decision a no-brainer.



My favourite things

This quarter we head to London's Charlotte Street to be given the memento-based office tour by Professor Jonathan Shalit OBE, Chairman of InterTalent Rights Group, a man with showbusiness in his veins and gold in his address book...

Jonathan Shalit's first office was above a sandwich shop in Covent Garden. It was, he remembers, "when I was trying to find my way in the music industry" – and, he admits, making more mistakes than money in the process.

These were not, however, the lean years. "This was the early '90s, pre-Pret and all those sort of chains. It was an old-fashioned sandwich shop where this old Italian guy would make whatever sandwich you wanted right in front of you and they were all delicious – which is part of the reason I was five stone heavier then than I am now.

"Those mistakes were actually invaluable, though – the business ones, not the dietary ones. People who start at a label, a publisher or a management company make mistakes at someone else's expense, I made mistakes at my own expense – and they really do focus the mind."

Eventually, perhaps picking up more than mere body mass from the client-first, made-to-order approach from downstairs, Shalit began to make his mark.

Or, as he puts it, "like a toddler, you can only fall over so many times, and then you learn to walk". Those baby steps led to quite a journey – and an ongoing success story.

Shalit built a music/theatre/film/comedy/etc. management company, ROAR Group, discovered and launched the career of Charlotte Church and managed N-Dubz and Big Brovaz, as well as the solo careers of Tulisa, Dappy, Jamelia, Mel B, Myleen Klass and Rebecca Ferguson. He's also worked with legends of the business including Elton John, Cher, Sting and Sir George Martin (more on him later).

Earlier this year, ROAR Global rebranded as InterTalent, and

expanded, making additional room for literary talent, variety performers and influencers.

The eclectic nature of Shalit's business and tastes means that choosing just five items for this feature was always going to be a challenge (you should see the superstar-related 'Thing' that narrowly missed the cut). In the end, he settles for a selection that represents his biggest breaks and successes – and the love of his life.

In the course of our conversation, however, he points out that all five are, in the end, merely objects*.

"My actual favourite thing in this office is something intangible – not something which can be photographed; it's the spirit and culture of the team ethos at InterTalent. Perhaps the thing I'm most proud of in business is having used all my experience to put together a truly diverse and multifaceted group of people to manage and drive everything we do

for our brilliant clients.

"In return I offer them access to all the contacts, knowledge and insights I have built up over decades in the music and entertainment world. It all makes for a great and forward-thinking team to serve, guide and advise those we work for. I have always made it a rule to hire people who offer skills that either I do not have or which will complement those I do. Naturally, I hope to remain irreplaceable to InterTalent for a while yet, but I am happy to, at the same time, be part of a team which is leading us together into the future."

** To be clear, and to ensure a happy Shalit home life, it is the pictures that are just objects; the things and people represented by the objects truly are his favourite things. Smiley face.*

"I made mistakes at my own expense – and they really do focus the mind."



GOLD DISC FOR GEORGE MARTIN TRIBUTE ALBUM

Perhaps the most important meeting of my professional life was with the late, great Sir George ‘Beatles’ Martin. George was one of these rare people who instinctively treated everybody equally. Whether you were a Johnny-come-lately like I was – I knew nobody then, I had no influence – or you were a global superstar, George treated you all exactly the same. That’s one of the things that set him apart as a wonderful human being.

I approached him because I wanted him to produce a record for me. With many people who were established and successful, I couldn’t get past the receptionist, but Sir George treated everyone with respect and courtesy, and so he invited me to meet him at Air Studios. Luckily, as soon as we started talking, he loved my idea of a Gershwin tribute album featuring artists like Elton John, Sting, Cher and Carly Simon.

As well as being the most generous of spirits, George was a man who made quick decisions and he said straight away that he was in – we would make the record.

This particular disc actually commemorates 100,000 sales of a George Martin tribute album which we made later. The background was that Echo Records, then part of Chrysalis, told George it was time to make a record starring him. And George did me the great honour of asking him to manage it for him.

Back to the Gershwin record, to illustrate my point about George’s kindness and decency: at one point while we were working on it, he was interrupted mid-conversation by a superstar (I won’t say who it was). Instead of responding instantly, he turned to them and said, ‘Please forgive me, I’ll be with you in a moment, I’m just finishing up a conversation with Gladys.’ Gladys was the cleaner.



MODEL OF CONCORDE MARKING THE SUPERSONIC AIRLINER’S LAST FLIGHT

In the mid/late ‘90s, those who could afford it flew Concorde, and I was lucky enough to be among those who had the great privilege and fun of doing business jetting around the world in the age of supersonic commercial air travel.

In fact, I went on Concorde’s final flight, when everyone was given this wonderful little silver model of Concorde. If you went to New York on Concorde, as I did many times, amazingly you’d arrive before you left. Take off at 11 in London, land in New York at 9:30. It was like *Back To The Future!* You were literally buying time, it was brilliant.

This is also indicative of a certain time for me and my company, a period of growth and global expansion. So far, I have managed to outlast Concorde!

The great thing about Concorde was that it hosted one of the best and most exclusive clubs in the world. I sat next to Rupert Murdoch; I sat next to Sir Paul McCartney; once I even sat across the aisle from an ex-president of the United States and Michael Jackson. Everyone travelling on Concorde was someone.

N-DUBZ ARENA TOUR POSTER (2011)

N-Dubz sold out the O2 in their third year managed by us. We did 15 arenas on this tour, they all sold out.

I was able to do for them – as I have done for others – things which other managers can’t. Because of the people I know and the experience I have, I can open doors which others find closed – if they even know where to find the doors in the first place!

I was able to make the impossible possible by using the best contacts book in London. This business is about relationships. It is crowded with so many people competing for the big break or that golden, career-changing opportunity.

The first advice I would give to ambitious young artists is to find a manager who can open doors. The world is full of creative people who can talk music, or people who can hang out with you and be your friend, but it’s very hard to find people who can open the doors that matter; that’s what we’ve always been able to do.

Maybe other managers can talk music better than I can, but it’s not my job to impose myself on the music. I want the artist to remain as true to themselves as they possibly can be. My job is to give that artist a platform to take their message to the world.



OBE MUG

I received an OBE from the Queen in 2014. My parents come from conventional backgrounds and they don't always quite understand what I do in music and entertainment. But they do understand receiving an honour from the Queen.

Going to Buckingham Palace to receive an OBE was something I never dreamt of. But while the amazing Jo Dipple was running UK Music, she was asked to recommend some luminaries from the industry for honours. She kindly included me among those she put forward.

I received it on the most fantastic day at Buckingham Palace. Then, when I came back here, my staff had got me this OBE mug, which was a very sweet thing to do and a wonderful memento of the day.

Weeks before the investiture, when the letter telling me about the honour arrived, my assistant came over with an envelope, which she had opened. I was on the phone, she took it out of my hand and said to the person on the line, 'I'm really sorry, but you'll eventually realise why I'm doing this and why I have to speak to Jonathan right now.' Then she showed me the letter. I called my wife and she burst into tears.

I couldn't tell my mother, because if it gets out before it's been made public, they reserve the right to rescind it. I love my mother to death, but she does like to share a secret.



PICTURE WITH WIFE, KATRINA

Last but definitely not least... I love everything I do, I love my job, my staff, my clients, but the most important thing in my life is the boss, my lovely wife, Katrina.

So I have a picture of her on my desk, I have a picture of her on my phone; she's the first thing I think about when I wake up in the morning, she's the last thing I think about when I go to sleep.

I didn't get married until I was 48, I didn't think I'd get married at all, and then one day I realised I was in love with my best friend.

We'd never been on a date, but it just hit me: oh my God, why am I dating girls all over the world, when I have this amazing lady right here? So, eight years ago we got married. And, whilst I'm proud of everything else, this takes pride of place because it represents what is truly the most important thing to me.

WHAT I WISH I'D KNOWN

Ros Earls started her career as a young and ambitious studio manager, before going on to found her own producer and artist management company, 140dB, which is today run in partnership with Big Life. Below you'll find her reflecting on lessons learnt across three eventful decades in music...

My first job in music was as a receptionist at Jill Sinclair and Trevor Horn's SARM Studios as the company was starting to explode – it was just before Frankie Goes To Hollywood signed to ZTT Records. I wasn't a great receptionist but I was really keen to learn and loved music. Within the first six months of me being there, Bob Geldof, Midge Ure and everyone came in to record Live Aid throughout the night, and George Michael was a regular fixture.

It was a real baptism of fire. Jill would sit upstairs in her office and watch how I would manage the switchboard. I was a 21-year-old English graduate and a bit dopey, and I didn't really excel at that part of the job. But I kept asking for things to do and that meant people noticed me and offered me more work. So I was in a position where I was doing things I didn't really understand, but I was doing them and making some terrible mistakes. One particular clanger that stands out is when I put the wrong number for the studio in the Showcase directory – which was the only way you'd find the contact details for a studio back then. That number happened to be my mum and dad's home number. They laughed their heads off and after a bit they recorded an answerphone message with the right number on it. So we worked it out but I thought I'd never live another day, it was so humiliating. My dad still dines out on the fact that they had Stevie Wonder call up – every time I'd speak to them they'd go, 'You'll never guess who called yesterday!'

Whenever I work with anyone new, I always say that although making a mistake might seem like the end of the world, and you might even risk getting sacked for it, when you're young and learning, it's going to happen.

Even as an older person in this business, you are evolving and you will find yourself in territories where you don't know what you're doing. So always ask, always be awake, listen



and try and learn what you need to, but don't be afraid of mistakes.

While working with Jill, I also learnt how I didn't want to be as a business person. She gave me an amazing opportunity, and promoted me really quickly to studio manager in spite of a mistake like that, but she was incredibly hard to be around and she put a lot of pressure on me. She was a very hard-nosed business woman in a way that I am not. I respect that, it was right for her and it made me up my game and progress quite quickly, but it also made me realise that I have a different way of dealing with people.

After a few years at SARM, I got poached by Trident Studios who brought me in to bring some higher standards into what was a more spit-and-sawdust kind of arrangement. I was trying to raise the bar for them in terms of



140dB clients have worked on music for everyone from Blur to Beyoncé

Photo: Linda Brownlee

their profile, so did a lot of taking people out for lunch and ‘selling’ without any skills in that department. That taught me something I still do now, which is to sit down and go, Who don’t I know? Where are the gaps in my relationships and who is doing something I think I should be part of? This business is about relationships so even though I am quite a shy person, I do really enjoy it, but have to force myself to do it.

It was a very different time back then, and I’m really glad of the whole #MeToo thing because there were a lot of men assuming that because you had blonde hair and might wear lipstick, you were easy prey. I established my uniform quite early doors which was DMs – feet on the ground – and all black. It’s my belief that if you wear heels, generally you are at a disadvantage and I learnt those lessons early on. Sometimes I had to put people in their place, sometimes I had no escape from awful situations, but I was fiercely independent and didn’t want to be curtailed in what I wanted to do. I had some armour on, both psychological and physical.

During my few years at Trident, it was an incredible burgeoning time for engineers like Flood, Alan Moulder, Mark Spike Stent, Tristan

“It’s my belief that if you wear heels, generally you are at a disadvantage.”

Townsend and Steve Osborne who, over the next decade, became the key people of their trade. Rather than wanting to book a particular studio, bands like Soft Cell, New Order and Depeche Mode started to want to work with Flood in whichever studio he worked in, and we got similar requests for most of the others.

Up until then nobody was representing that kind of talent at that level in their careers — with one or two exceptions, they’d just stayed at a studio for life. I saw a gap in the market for a business that would represent the technical creatives who needed help understanding the money, because some of them were already getting offered royalties. At Trident, I negotiated the fee for the engineer but that would go straight into the studio pot and I didn’t feel like that was right. So I told the people who owned the studio that we should start a management company and manage the engineers and producers as well as the studio, and I’d do both, but they weren’t interested in the management side.

We came to a point where there was a real conflict of culture and I left. Flood encouraged me to go and set up my own management company and that’s when 140dB was born.

As well as Flood, most of the other engineers who were making a name for themselves came with me too. If I’d had time to think about it, it would have been scary. But it was on my terms — when I was at Trident I didn’t feel like I was master of my own destiny, I felt a little bit like I was being squashed all the time and someone else’s view of the world wasn’t mine. So it was a relief and hugely exciting because I felt like I was able to be myself, which is really important. In being myself, and finding the other weirdos who felt like outsiders like me, I found my business.

An old buddy of mine called Martin Heath who ran Rhythm King as part of Mute used to call me ‘champion of the underdog’ and in a way that’s true, I do really respond to people who have got something going on but just can’t see it, or people who are special but can’t quite get there. Nadine Shah is an example of finding somebody who is a bit weird like me — she had to find her place. So if you can be authentic and be happy with that, good things come and like-minded people will find you.

There have been a few producers I’ve managed for a while and then walked away from. Paul Oakenfold and I worked together for eight years and we had an incredible era, but I felt at odds working with him because musically, we weren’t very well matched. Now, when I first meet with someone to talk about possibly working with them, I get them to write lists of music that they listen to and artists they crave to work with, even in a dream world. That really helps me get inside their heads and work out whether my instincts would be good for them.

These days, you need to work with someone who is willing to roll up their sleeves and make their own relationships, and the newer clients of mine that are doing well are those people. It used to be that a producer was like a mysterious being — who I’d accept approaches for and bring them the best offerings — but that’s just not how it is anymore. In terms of what it takes to be a good manager, while it’s important for me to connect with my artists and producers, I try and keep a little bit of a distance so that I can make the choices that need to be made or bring perspective into the equation. As a manager, you are the one who has to be there the next morning to be the voice of reason, have perspective and talk an artist down from the ledge.

You also have to be prepared to reinvent yourself if you want a long career and you’ve



Nadine Shah

“Flood encouraged me to set up my own company. 140dB was born.”

got to be at peace with that. When producer income and getting the work started to become challenging due to technology and the internet, I packed up the office I shared in Queen’s Park with Q Prime and went back home.

I remember being frozen with fear of the change. The implication of it was a bit shameful because I’d had great times and there were a couple of days I went to bed and just thought, Where am I now?

At the same time, my mum had died and I’d gotten ill so was off work for a while and felt awful for about a year. I was very lucky that quite a few of my clients were incredibly patient and loyal, there were a few who weren’t, but I think that was a natural culling process. The people that did stick around are really important and talented people. Then I got a call from Tim Parry at Big Life to say that Jazz Summers had died and there was some holes in his business, was I interested in coming in for a few days a week to plug into his system and work with him on Youth, who is an endless re-inventor.

So Youth was one of the first new projects that I worked on and it really reinvigorated me to work with somebody who was older than me and still up for it.

Lots of people are still whining about the lack of money that producers are making and how things have changed, but it’s a waste of time. You just have to get on with being excited about where we are at and cut your cloth accordingly.

IS THINKING UK-FIRST HELPING OR HARMING BRITISH STARS ABROAD?

In focusing on the health of the local market, asks Rhian Jones, are domestic record labels at risk of sacrificing global success?

Historically, what has the British music business been brilliant at? Producing culturally distinctive pop superstars whose talent and relatability has traversed borders. In recent years, that's Adele, Sam Smith, Ed Sheeran, One Direction, Florence + the Machine, Mumford & Sons and Coldplay, following in the footsteps of greats like George Michael, Elton John and the Beatles. In the last two years, however, that hit rate has slowed. In 2017, Sheeran was the only UK act in the IFPI's annual global recording artist top 10; will there be any British entries in that list for 2018?

At home it's a similar story – at the end of Q3, just two British acts appeared in the Official Albums Chart top 10 YTD list (George Ezra at No.2 and Arctic Monkeys at No.8).

There are a few explanations as to why this change in fortunes might have occurred.

Firstly, music is cyclical and British hip-hop, R&B and rap has been having a long-awaited moment in the spotlight – though one which hasn't yet set the US on fire.

Secondly, I've heard complaints about a lack of support within the British media for straight-forward pop acts, who either have to appear 'edgy', or gain success in wider Europe before gatekeepers back home roll out the red carpet. Despite a clearly receptive audience for mainstream pop, labels are being left with fewer promotional avenues.

This can be seen in the fact that Dua Lipa had chart success in continental Europe before her breakout hit, *Be the One*, was playlisted by radio stations in the UK. George Ezra broke through Italy with *Budapest*, and it was a similar story for Rag N Bone Man. He first won radio support in Germany, which is also where Tom Walker broke through after his song *Leave a Light On* was used in a Sony advert.

Thirdly, the global nature of streaming services, and Global Release Day, means that



“Global Release Day removed yet another point of difference for UK artists.”

competition for playlist positions – one of today's key routes to market – is truly worldwide, resulting in a very limited amount of space for British acts.

Global Release Day was widely supported by the industry back in 2015, when IFPI CEO Frances Moore said an aligned day for new music meant that fans in different countries wouldn't feel like they were missing out. The 'sell' was that Global Release Day would lower the risk of piracy, and re-awaken the sense of 'event' around the release of new music.

For all these upsides, Global Release Day removed yet another point of difference for UK artists. To borrow a phrase from YouTube champion Lyor Cohen, have there been 'unintended consequences' for British music?

By aligning so closely with a huge market like the US, new UK artists are at a higher risk of getting buried under the weight of their Stateside counterparts.



UK breakout star Dua Lipa

On a global platform, US releases will naturally rule the charts, thanks to a larger population and key relationships with the biggest playlists. In the words of a quote I recently heard attributed to Mo Ostin: “The key to a No.1 is to make something appear to be No.1 first... What is the world's favourite form of transport? The bandwagon, godammit!” More streams equals more and more streams, hence Drake spending a cumulative 29 weeks at No.1 on the UK's singles chart over the last two years.

All of this isn't to say that there aren't any British acts making waves overseas. Dua Lipa is a big breakout story with three million album sales globally, and she could make that IFPI top 10 this year (despite her album being released in 2017). Ella Mai is the new name on everyone's lips after hitting No.5 on the US Billboard 200 with her debut. Freya Ridings just secured a deal with Capitol, Rex Orange County sold out a North American tour in just one day earlier this year and Glassnote have high hopes for the hugely talented Jade Bird.

However, Dua Lipa aside, none of these acts are being developed by a British major label. Ella Mai is Interscope first, Polydor second; Freya Ridings is independent at home with Good Soldier; Rex Orange County, while managed

“On a global platform, US releases will naturally rule.”

by a British company, is independent (despite fierce interest from labels on both sides of the Atlantic); and Jade Bird was signed by Daniel Glass in New York.

One of the observations made by executives I spoke to for an article on this subject for the Guardian is that while the world is more global than ever, the UK music industry may actually be becoming more local. This can arguably be seen in the wealth of developing British talent hitting Top 40 in the UK, including Dave, Mabel, Not3s, B Young and Kojo Funds.

All are playing a big role in the strength of the local (and European) music market, but have a hard task attracting support on global stage when competing with superstars like Drake, Nicki Minaj and Post Malone. Are British record labels creating enough of a point of difference with their signings? And can these signings, given due time and patience, cut through in America?

One very successful artist manager spoke recently to MBW about the danger of the UK becoming an insular A&R fiefdom. “If we're not careful, the UK is going to become Belgium,” he said. “We're going to be giving out Gold records that mean nothing anywhere else. In my opinion, in the modern streaming industry, that approach puts you on a hiding to nothing.”

'I FEEL MORE ENTHUSED THAN EVER BEFORE. I STILL HAVE SO MUCH HUNGER AND LOVE FOR MUSIC'

After a hiatus during which he re-assessed his view of the record business and his role within it, Colin Barlow is back heading up a group of companies devoted to breaking new music...

Colin Barlow has worked for all three remaining majors, starting out at 17 when he was hired by Muff Winwood to work in A&R at CBS.

Not now though. As he builds the next chapter of his career he is no longer within the walled estates, but out in the wild: non-partisan, non-payroll – and as enthused as at any stage since those teenage years.

He's definitely not anti-major, however, and isn't joining in the 'Who Needs A Record Label' chorus currently ringing out across large swathes of the music industry. He just acknowledges that they have changed; that they have had to change, because the industry has changed; that the nature and ambition of artists has changed; and believes that his particular set of skills can, hopefully, be utilised to better effect in a more free-roaming role.

Under the umbrella name Merrystar, he has put together a network of companies across recorded music, publishing and management, working with artists, songwriters and producers.

Collectively, he says, it's about "going back to my A&R roots" and "being judged solely on the acts I find and sign" – a binary acid test that Barlow relishes, and one that echoes his entry into the business more than 30 years ago.

His big break came after he sent a copy of his fanzine, *Action!*, to every record label for which he could find an address. (Checking the transcript, Barlow doesn't actually confirm that *Action!* had an exclamation mark – but, come on, this was the early '80s, it's heavily implied.)

The DIY mag was, crucially, devoted to new music; its raison d'être was to allow Barlow to tell anyone who would listen (read): You have to hear this! No, honestly, you have to hear this.

"I was obsessed – by music, but specifically by new music," he says. "If John Peel played a record by an unsigned band from Liverpool called The Icicle Works, for instance, I'd track down the manager's number, I'd cold call him, I'd ask all sorts of questions, I'd get their demo tapes sent to me.

"Where are they playing next? Right I'll jump on a train and check them out... it used to drive my parents mad because I'd be using the home phone for this sort of stuff all the time.

"You'll cry in your beer a lot, but now and again there'll be a glass of Champagne."

"Well, it turned out that this was the same process behind signing a band [to a label]. I had no idea, of course, but Muff recognised that and gave me my chance. I couldn't believe my luck. But, also, I had found some pretty good stuff and written about it, so it wasn't all luck."

He describes Winwood as "an inspiration" and says: "I learnt so much from him: morals, attitude and exactly what it takes to be a great A&R person.

"I always remember him telling me, Never lose your enthusiasm, you'll cry in your beer a lot, but now and again there'll be a glass of Champagne. That's the music industry; don't expect success – and when you do get it, don't think it'll last forever."

Barlow moved from his home in Birmingham to join the big, bad music industry in the middle of the '80s, when the music industry was extremely big and occasionally quite bad.

"It was tough to start with, but I went out every night, to a gig or a club. Actually, I'd go to seven gigs a night, every night. I couldn't find seven gigs to go to in a week now! It was just a brilliant time. London in the '80s was an amazing place, especially for a young kid from the midlands.

"Plus, I was at the most exciting record label you could wish to join at that time: George Michael, Sade, The Clash, Psychedelic Furs, all these things were going on – along with plenty of colourful characters."

His first signing was a band called Picnic At The Whitehouse. They might not have made much of a mark, but the band's manager subsequently brought another act to CBS, Terence Trent D'Arby. "Terence was signed by Lincoln Elias – Lincoln and I were joined at the hip back then.

"It was one of those times when there was so much music about, and we brought in loads of good things. We got on a roll and I was promoted to A&R Manager. And then someone introduced me to Rob Dickins at Warners."

Looking back, Barlow concedes, "I probably left too early", and ruefully acknowledges that the grass on the Warner side of the fence didn't turn out to be as green as it had looked from the window of his CBS office.

"But I was fascinated by Rob, I thought he was an incredible character. He was one of the most interesting people I've ever worked with. And in Moira Bellas, Barbara Charone, Max Hole and Paul Conroy, he had a team who were so knowledgeable and focused; you couldn't help but be impressed by the way they ran Warners.

"I found my time there really difficult. There was a lot of politics that I wasn't



ready for. At Sony, I'd loved Paul [Russell] and Muff. I had a family there and I should never have left."

It wasn't to be the last time Barlow quit a company he considered home for a role that didn't pan out as advertised.

"I actually had two years of doing some really good stuff, working with The Associates and Aztec Camera, when it was properly old school Warners. And then when East West came, that's when I really struggled.

"Rob had moved on and I was left behind, with Max [Hole], who I have so much respect for, but I wasn't part of the new brigade who had moved in with East West and sadly it didn't work out. And then I met Lucian Grainge..."

Barlow had actually been out of work for a few months when the then head of PolyGram Music Publishing called and offered him the job that would eventually lead back to major label-land, a partnership with David Joseph and what he describes as "the most exciting time of my career".

He recalls: "Lucian, myself, Kate Thompson and Paul Adam turned PolyGram Music into a really exciting publishing company, and that led to Lucian setting up a record label, Wild Card, where I was lucky enough to sign The Lighthouse Family. Then Roger Ames took over at PolyGram and hired Lucian to run Polydor Records, at which point Lucian offered myself and Paul Adam the chance to join him there."

Assessing the qualities and character of the man who changed his life (and now, of course, runs the biggest record company in the world), Barlow says: "Lucian was amazing to watch. He's a great character: fearless, driven and his instinct on deals and records is like no other.

"With him heading up Polydor we had an amazing run. I made some of the best records of my career, with The Lighthouse Family, Boyzone, Samantha Mumba and Ronan Keating etc. Lucian was full of great quotes, and one of them that I think is especially apt was, 'You're never as hot as you think you are and you're never as cold as you think you are'. That's so true.

"He didn't let you take anything for granted, but he was always supportive.

"I always had that same opinion and attitude: I appreciated everything that was happening, but never took it for granted, so Lucian's way worked for me.

"Polydor was an amazing label with an amazing culture at that time. We were all of similar ages, all very enthusiastic and all wanting to win: David Joseph, James Radice, Geoff Harris, Selina Webb, Orla Lee, Neil Hughes, Jim Chancellor, Peter Lorraine and Karen Simmonds, there were so many great executives.

"Lucian had also brought in Interscope to join Polydor and it was fascinating to watch what an amazing company that was

"The Polydor team was like a family, the most brilliant time with the most brilliant people."

too, with Jimmy Iovine, Steve Berman, Brenda Romano and David Cohen. They had probably their most successful period at that time, including the emergence of Eminem as a global superstar."

Barlow himself made hit records with, amongst others, Girls Aloud, Snow Patrol, Scissor Sisters, The Yeah Yeah Yeahs, James Morrison, Take That, Kaiser Chiefs, Klaxons and Elbow.

Then, when Grainge became Chairman, Barlow and Joseph were made co-MDs of Polydor. It proved to be a winning partnership.

"I think fundamentally we both totally respected each other. David had such a great vision, such great calmness. He totally understood the brand, the marketing process, the selling of records, the strategy... he was an incredible executive and he still is.

"What he let me get on with was getting the music and building a great A&R department. It just all worked. The whole Polydor team was a family. For me, Polydor in Black Lion Lane was the most brilliant

time with the most brilliant people."

It came to an end when Joseph was made Chairman of Universal Music UK, and Barlow was offered the opportunity to run Geffen in London.

"I was quite daunted by it, but what I've learnt is that sometimes change is important and necessary. The offer was simple: to build my own label using the classic label name of Geffen Records.

"I went and met David Geffen, with Lucian, to get his approval. And once we'd got that, the plan was to build a brand new standalone label.

"The thing was, we didn't have a catalogue and I stupidly felt that I needed to start generating big turnover quicker than was realistic. I made myself stressed by trying to deliver things too quickly. I put that pressure on myself.

"But when I look back now, in the two years that Geffen [UK] existed, we did really well. We had The Wanted, we had The Yeah Yeah Yeahs, we had The Guillemots, we had The Saturdays – and we made a very special record with Shirley Bassey [The Performance, 2009]; we were a really good company and a great team."

And then Barlow circled back to Sony, for a gig that may well turn out to be his last in the corporate heart of the business.

"I got offered the chance to start a new venture with Ged Doherty at Sony. Sadly, by the time I got there, things had changed and I was asked to run the RCA label instead."

He says that, just as it had been leaving Sony 25 or so years earlier, re-joining was a huge move – and, in hindsight, again, possibly not the right one.

"It was the hardest decision I've ever made, because of the amazing history I had with Universal and the respect I have for Lucian and David.

"Plus, it ended up not being the job I left Universal to do. But, like I say, I think I put myself under too much pressure whilst at Geffen, and this new job, I felt, would give me more protection – plus the chance to work with Rob Stringer and Simon Cowell was an exciting opportunity."



Maeve

Barlow doesn't go into too much detail about the nature of the original offer, but it seems it was a new label, to be created and defined by him, and with at least one act (who would go on to achieve global success) earmarked as part of the start-up roster.

By the time it came to make the move, however, Doherty had gone (replaced by Nick Gatfield) as had the opportunity to start something from scratch, (replaced by the RCA hotseat, following the departure of Charlie Lyceff).

"I'd always seen RCA as a bit of a poisoned chalice, so my idea was to make it sexier and sell its culture – i.e. the home of Elvis, David Bowie, Nina Simone, etc.

"We signed Laura Mvula, whose debut album [Sing To The Moon, 2013] was critically acclaimed and sold well over Gold. We also signed Bring Me The Horizon, one of the most important rock bands of the last 10 years and now a global phenomenon.

"We had Everything Everything, Kodakone, Nao and Nothing But Thieves,

plus Mø. We had started to shed the 'too pop' tag and create a cooler roster.

"I was also very proud to make a fantastic record with Rebecca Ferguson, when she came out of *The X Factor*, which went on to sell nearly a million copies. And I loved working with and A&R-ing Paloma Faith – the records we worked on together sold over three million copies and she went on to win a very well deserved BRIT."

"And then my mission was to get David Bowie to come onto RCA in the UK,

which I did. As part of the wooing process, for his birthday, we had a rug designed as the middle of his Heroes 7-inch single.

“We sent it to him, selling the history of the label, along with a note saying please come home. He wrote to me and said, ‘That is one rug I will not be cutting.’

“I am so proud to have put his two final albums out over here, he was one of my all-time favourite artists.”

There was also success with US artists, most notably Beyoncé, Justin Timberlake, Pink and Pharrell.

In the end, Barlow spent five years in a role that was pretty much foisted on him. He recalls the time as “on the whole, fantastic”, but also admits that “we didn’t build on the fantastic start we made – and sometimes, in this business, it’s time for a change”.

And sometimes, it’s time for a rest, time to reflect, recharge and re-route.

“I had worked in a corporate structure my entire adult life when I parted ways with RCA in December 2016. So I took the decision that, for the first part of 2017, rather than plunge straight back in, I was going to meet people I respected, talk to them and learn from them.

“So much is changing right now: artists, streaming, independence, ownership, consumption, everything. I needed to define what I was going to become in my next chapter and see a broad range of people to help me work out what I wanted to do.

“At first, out on my own, I was fearful. But, as it transpired, I realised that my skill set could fit really well in the new environment we are moving towards. I’ve built some brilliant relationships over the years and I felt, that with the knowledge I had, I could create partnerships with some of the most talented people in our business.

“The first people I met and discussed the idea with were Jamie Scott and his manager Rick Wilson. I had signed Jamie as an artist to Polydor and he’s gone onto become one of the biggest songwriters in the world.

“We decided to form a production company together and within a few



Amongst others, Barlow worked with Laura Mvula at RCA. She has since signed with Atlantic Records UK

months I came across a remarkable young singer called Bow Anderson; think Dusty Springfield produced by Dr Dre. She’s 21-years-old, she’s from Edinburgh and we all just fell in love with her personality and voice.

“I ended up sitting down with her manager, saying, ‘Wouldn’t it be great to

“I realised my skill set could fit really well in the environment we’re heading towards.”

give Bow the time to develop her album without the pressure of a record deal; we can fund, develop and make an album without any pressure to get the best out of her.”

A debut album is already in the can, and will be released next year, by Interscope /

Universal Germany, and on Virgin EMI in the UK.

“Our second signing is Uri Sade, a young singer-songwriter who, again, we will take time to develop and give him space to grow with no pressure.

“As I was pulling this together, Brian Rawlings [Metrophonic] came to see me with Mark Taylor, who produced the majority of James Morrison records for me at Polydor. James had reached out to him as he was now out of his deal. Within a few weeks we were getting a deal together.

“I know James as an artist better than anyone, so when I sat with him, I realised he had some of the best songs of his career and we were ready to make an album. I’d also kept a demo of a song he wrote nine years ago, with Gary Barlow and Steve Mac.

“At the time, it got lost, I felt now was the time to cut it, for me it’s a potential



All Us In Love

classic. I honestly think this will be the best record of [Morrison’s] life – a very personal record and a record that also somehow seems more relevant now than ever.”

Due out next year, the album will be the first release on Rawlings and Barlow’s Stanley Park Music (the former’s an Everton fan, the latter a Red; Stanley Park is the open space that connects and divides the two clubs’ grounds). It will be released via a services deal with ADA.

“Another person whom I have the utmost respect for, and was one of the first people I spoke to about what I wanted to do, is [former Warner Music UK Chairman and Good Soldier founder] Christian Tattersfield.

“I was very lucky to get played some music by a band called All Us In Love by their young manager, Jonathan. I loved them, but right now rock is not seen as very fashionable. I said to Christian, ‘I’ve got something I love, what do you think?’ He felt the same as me and we signed them

almost there and then. They have swagger, big songs and ambition. At last, a band full of character with the ambition to compete on a global stage.”

The debut album has already been made, produced by Catherine Marks and Alan Moulder, and is out next year, via Kobalt.

A resurrected Merrystar Publishing is also part of this new suite of companies, via a deal with Universal Publishing, now led by Mike McCormack, who Barlow clearly sees as a kindred spirit. Two young writers, Greg West and Dan Ferrari, have already been signed, and two acts are in development.

“I’m also managing a young artist called Maeve, who is half Irish / Cayman Islands. We’ve signed her debut EP to Alison Donald at Kobalt, and I’m in the process of developing her. She’s a unique talent. Her debut EP came out last month and, again, 2019 is going to be an exciting year for her.

“And I’m really enjoying doing some A&R consultancy for Ted Cockle at Virgin

and there are two records there that I think could be very exciting for 2019 – from Alice Chater and the return of the mighty Emeli Sandé.

“I feel more enthused than ever before. I’ve got plenty of plans to grow and develop my business – with the ultimate dream to be open minded as to where this can take me. I still have so much hunger and love for music.

“We are going through huge changes within the business now and because of that, more than ever, we need experienced, great record makers that can help develop the next generation of artists and executives.”

After 30 years in the machine, Barlow’s not raging against it, he’s working with it – and making it work for him. And the “obsession” that gave the world [or at least a couple of hundred Brummies with challenging haircuts] *Action!* is very much back.

As Barlow himself puts it, “I’ve got the joy again.”



Remembering...

RICHARD ANTWI

Richard Antwi was a pioneering music business polymath. He played a key role in the evolution of the modern UK urban music scene and in the careers of artists such as Wretch 32, Tinchy Stryder, Knox Brown, Natty, Lethal Bizzle, Wiley, Daley, Popcaan, Jordan Max, O'Flynn, Ritual, Estelle, Mr Hudson, Gyptian, Jacob Banks, Yasmin and Jack Peñate.

Antwi graduated in law from Oxford University and always wanted to apply his skills in the area that mattered most to him: music.

After spells as an A&R scout at Sony, a trainee lawyer at Clintons and then an entertainment lawyer at Magrath & Co, he

launched Levels Entertainment, alongside Alec Boateng, now A&R director at Atlantic Records, in a JV with EMI Music Publishing. In 2013, he founded Full + Bless Management.

Two years after his death, the first recipient of the Richard Antwi Scholarship recently embarked on a fully-funded MA course in Music Business Management at Westminster University.

And, whilst the sadness inevitably lingers and his absence is still heavily felt in music's creative and business communities, it is also time for some of Antwi's closest friends and colleagues to remember and celebrate a hugely respected industry figure and a much-loved human being.



Darcus Beese
President,
Island Records

I first met Richard around 2004/5 when I was looking for a lawyer and someone told me that I should reach out to Richard. It was clear after our first meeting that I was more excited about all the acts he represented than talking about him becoming my lawyer!

One act in particular was Jack Peñate, I loved him but he went to XL.

Just over a decade later, August 2015 was our last project together; I thought we

would do many more.

Richard had all the qualities that you would want in a human being first and foremost, and those qualities carried over into how he did business. He cared.

It wasn't the deals we did, it was the stuff in between that I loved Richard for. He would call or come and see me, just to sit and talk, get advice and then say that he was leaving inspired. What he didn't know was that it was actually the other way round.



Guy Moot
UK MD & President,
Worldwide Creative,
Sony/ATV

I first met Richard when he was a young lawyer in this business and I was immediately – and equally – impressed by his musical taste and his intellect.

As we all know, you don't meet enough people in this industry who come equipped with the creative instincts and business smarts in the same package.

He was very ambitious, but he managed to combine that with an inherent modesty. He wanted to get places, he wanted to achieve things, but he always wanted to do it the right way; he was very respectful to everyone he met and everyone he worked with.

He certainly had a lot of respect for many of the artists that I'd worked with, and we had a lot of common ground based on our taste and passion for UK urban music, so I was immediately struck by him, which a lot of people were.

That said, his taste was very diverse, you could talk to him about any genre of music and he'd have plenty to contribute. He had a good ear for everything.

He was driven, he didn't come from a privileged background, he pulled himself up, got into Oxford. So he was very balanced in a cultural sense and became a pioneering black executive in a business that doesn't – and certainly didn't – produce as many Richard Antwis as we'd

like. He was an example, certainly.

I also recognised an entrepreneurial streak in him, so we met a few times, had many dinners together and the next stage was starting a joint-venture together, incorporating management, records, publishing, touring, you name it.

It was an investment in Richard, essentially, because I felt he was someone who should be in business in his own right. And of course we did very well with him, even though to some extent I felt we just scratched the surface.

He had the ability to spot talent and he always recognised great voices. His scouting and A&R abilities were great. I don't know where he got stuff from, but he would walk in, say 'Listen to this', and invariably the reaction was: wow.

He had a great feel for all aspects of the business. Obviously his training as a lawyer meant he was always on top of the business affairs side of things, but he also really understood the record-making game, the management game – he understood people, really.

I was very proud of our association with Richard for a number of reasons, certainly proud to be associated with him as a person and also for what he represented in this industry.

As a human being, he was just a really fun guy; he loved music, he made mix tapes.

“He was a man who wanted to stand for something, to be a force for positive change.”

He had a very diverse set of friends, some from Oxford University, some from the cutting edge of UK urban music. That was the great thing about Richard, you could put him in any situation, professional or social, and he could handle it; people just liked him.

Everybody certainly loved him at our company, he would walk around our office and everybody would know him,

everybody would be pleased to see him and everybody enjoyed working with him.

We need more entrepreneurs like Richard Antwi, who build companies and who build careers. I just wish he was still around to pass on his experiences, to talk to and inspire the next generation coming through.

There are loads of stories about Richard, but you know the one thing that comes to mind? He always had an incredibly distinctive aftershave! You always knew when Richard was in the building – in a good way.

I never bothered asking him what it was because I knew I could never wear it; he'd branded it as his own, and Richard was irreplaceable.



Alec Boateng
Co-Head of A&R,
Atlantic UK

I met Richard through a photographer called Tim at [cult online media brand] Just Jam in 2003.

I was in my first year of uni and was putting together a mixtape called Split Mics. Rich connected and helped us navigate through the industry as a few A&Rs were reaching out about some of the artists on the tape, and it was our first experience in dealing with major labels. Rich introduced me to a whole heap of people and became a vital early support system.

Rich was wise, he was a leader, always there to help and get involved. And he loved to negotiate. He loved a wrestle, and always wanted to find new ways of doing things.

More than anything though, he was someone who got super excited about new artists and new music. He loved being first!

Oh, and he was funny as hell. He always found something humorous in even the most serious situations.

At the same time, he was a man who wanted to stand for something; he wanted to make a mark and be a force for positive

change. He was very intelligent and never took no for an answer. Anything that was deemed impossible was something he saw as a challenge.

He was always there for me and always caring, be that for one of our artists, an A&R friend, a fellow exec, anybody. He had many friends; his phone was always ringing with someone after some advice, from relationships to how many points on a production contract.

He was very brave professionally. He wanted everyone to be treated fairly and wanted the same opportunities to be available to everyone, no matter who you were and where you came from. He was a special guy.

I could give tons of examples of how he has helped me personally, but I'll give a work example of his tenacity. We had signed the Gyptian record *Hold You*, which was a massive club record and was shaping up to be a potential hit. There was a bootleg version that made the record explode even more, that had a verse from Nicki Minaj. We reached out to her to get the verse cleared, but it looked like it'd be waaaaay too expensive for us.

I casually mentioned Foxy Brown as an alternative. Rich was in New York the following week and, super late one night, suddenly he was phoning me loads. To cut a long story short, Rich found himself at her [Foxy Brown's] house getting a verse recorded! A perfect example of his hustle, his skill at connecting dots and his 'get things done' mentality.



Peter Edge
CEO,
RCA Records

I got to know Richard in 2007, just through doing business with some of his producer and writer clients.

He was very plugged in to the burgeoning underground black music scene in the UK. And even though I've been based in the States for many years, I started in the UK and I've always maintained and valued that connection, so he was a great person for me

to get to know, personally and professionally.

Richard was one of the people I found to be most connected, most creative and most business savvy in the UK at that time.

He was also a forward thinker. In many ways he foretold the story of what is going on now, which is UK black music being such a force. I wish he was here to enjoy it and accept the credit which is rightfully his.

He was one of the people who laid the foundations for a business that is booming today and we all owe him for that. Everyone who's enjoying some of that success, it's a good bet that they would have benefited either from Richard's wisdom, guidance or practical support at some point.

He was well-liked by everyone I ever met in black music in the UK – and that is a lot of people.

He was extremely well-educated and very worldly-wise, but he was also very aware of where he came from. He grew up around DJs and artists, he grew up in that culture and that was part of who he was. In combination with that he had gone to Oxford and got himself a great education. In many ways, he parlayed the two together and that made him a very valuable character and someone who understood many different worlds.

He was extremely smart and also extremely funny. I've got many specific memories of Richard, but my overall memory is just of how many laughs and how much fun we had together.



Matt Ross
Friend

Richard was a pioneer – this was his character and a quality which manifested repeatedly in the many achievements of his short life.

When he passed, Richard was deep in the development of a tech venture which utilised complex analytics to augment the process of talent discovery.

The tech was up and running and Rich had already placed several deals with labels – similar ventures are now the targets of

acquisition by all of the majors.

Richard had a considered and quiet confidence (my friend Clive Black captured it best when he said, 'Richard always looked like he had more time on the ball') which, combined with an independent entrepreneurial state of mind, enabled him to navigate a winding ascent within the industry.

This quality meant Rich could interface and partner with chairmen and CEOs with the same comfort and vision as he would with an artist or creator he had just encountered in a shabby studio somewhere.

Above all, Rich was a passionate lover of music, with a whip-smart intellect and a curiosity about people and culture – he was that guy you always wanted on your team; you were always lifted by his presence and depleted by his absence.

From the outset Richard and I were always more friends than business partners – although we were both.

Rich was a cerebral guy and that thoughtfulness was the source of so much that was great about him as a human being; his diplomacy in resolving conflicts had a natural authority and his humour and warmth meant that he was always a pleasure to be around. I can't remember a time with him when we didn't laugh, as well as provoke thought on some substantial shit.

Rich was also a private person. He had his boundaries and an instinctive and reciprocal sensitivity to those of others. It wasn't until he passed that I realised how compartmentalised his life was. So many people who knew and loved him, but from a slightly different angle. So many others who had benefited from his support or appreciated his abilities, often in blissful ignorance of each other's connections.

A mutual friend, Carl Fysh, summed it up beautifully when he said: 'Rich was quietly at the centre of everything.'

Legacy is often a really subjective thing – the mark we leave on people is as individual as they are – but there is a remarkable consistency to the impression Richard left with a very disparate set of people.

It is one which is consistent with the legacy he left on the industry, a feeling of empowerment and inspiration; that



L-R: Paul Heard, Alec Boateng, Richard Antwi, Matt Ross

someone so akin could be so capable and quietly in your corner inspired you to feel that anything is possible.

Richard contributed enormously to the plethora of successful, confident and creative black executives shaping the industry today. He watered many of those seeds.

When Rich passed so suddenly, the outpouring of love was palpable. We knew we would be remiss not galvanise this goodwill into something tangible and which looked to the future.

With some of his many friends, we developed the idea of a scholarship in conjunction with the University of Westminster MA course in Music Business Management – a course to which Richard contributed as a guest speaker and sometime mentor.

Making the calls was incredibly easy; mention Rich and you're generally greeted by the response, 'How can we help?' (most of the illustrious under-achievers contributing to this *MBUK* article were my first calls). Still, I wasn't quite

prepared for the generosity and support we received.

It has been one of my most emotional and heart-warming experiences in this brilliant business. The inaugural recipient has a great story and is someone I know Rich would have been feeling.

Rich always possessed a wisdom beyond

“You were always lifted by his presence and depleted by his absence.”

his years and a way of leading by example that was touched with an uplifting lightness and practicality.

Early in our story, when he was an undergrad at Oxford interning at Sony and I was Head of Black Music at Columbia, we mused about the absence of black faces in the talent agencies running the live sector.

We plotted to capture the abundance

of talent coming from the US by getting him placed in an agency where he could work his magic and fill his phone book, while I bounced as many artists as possible into his orbit.

I arranged to meet with a leader in the sector, and pitched him the idea that employing such a smart and capable young black exec could help his agency secure the aforementioned US talent. But the wind was quickly taken out of my sails when I was met with disparaging generalisations about black artists and managers from this individual. I couldn't get out of his office quickly enough.

I remember the feeling of rage and embarrassment as I recounted the epic fail to Rich over lunch – he just let out a hearty laugh and flippantly said, 'We'll do our own.'

I miss his lightness, his wisdom and most of all his handsome smile.

Thanks to Danny D for behind the scenes coordination

‘In A&R, you need to be able to have open and honest conversations with artists’

Decca’s Vice President, A&R and Artist Strategy, Tom Lewis, on why the Universal label strives to find stardust where others aren’t looking..

There’s a sense of new beginnings at Decca.

Ahead of the storied label’s 90th anniversary next year, the Universal-owned firm has shaken up its A&R structure – bringing in BBC Introducing’s Rachel Homberg as Head of A&R, as well as Sam Mumford as A&R Manager.

As part of this reorganisation, Tom Lewis has been promoted to Vice President of Decca, overseeing all artist signing and development activities at the label, under President Rebecca Allen.

The MBW A&R Award-winning Lewis was an instrumental figure in pulling together one of the most successful UK artist album projects in recent years – Ball & Boe’s double-platinum *Together*, and its platinum-selling follow up, *Together Again*.

Decca, of course, is well known in the British industry as the master of exactly this kind of wide-appeal, crossover release. Yet, as Lewis explains in our interview, today’s Decca is far broader than this description. And, commercially speaking, it’s getting increasingly comfortable going toe-to-toe with its pop-leaning peers.

Take, for example, the fact that Decca was one of just two major labels to hit No.1 with a UK-signed album in the first 40 weeks of 2018 (Rod Stewart’s *Blood Red Shoes*). It followed up this achievement in early November with yet another No.1: Andrea Bocelli’s *Si*, licensed from Italy’s Sugar Music.

There have been more left-field surprises too, whether it be the signing of YouTube sensation Jacob Collier, its work with dramatic singer/songwriter Aurora (signed to Glassnote in the US), or other successful releases from the likes of Max Richter, Sheku Kanneh-Mason and actor/jazzier Jeff Goldblum.

Tom Lewis’s journey towards this home of diverse sounds began in the north of England – with a classical music-obsessed mum, and a natural early flair for musicality...

How, in the grand scheme of things, did you end up in music?

Like a lot of people in this industry, I started life surrounded by music. I grew up in Lancashire, and I’ve got very clear memories of driving to the swimming pool, talking constantly about the music that was on in the car. I quickly started learning piano and trumpet – I was crap at the piano but relatively good at the trumpet – and I played in loads of school bands.

I didn’t have parents who were listening to Dylan, The Stones and The Beatles. My dad was obsessed with Gilbert and Sullivan, while my mum loved classical music – she hosted classical concerts in Liverpool and was a really enthusiastic advocate for music. I was sent away to school and the first records I bought were Status Quo, AC/DC, Queen – great fodder for pre-teenage boys.

When I was about 13 or 14, suddenly I was surrounded by older blokes, these surrogate older brothers with amazing record collections who’d arrived in my life. I was exposed to loads of different music.

I started learning guitar and getting into acts like The Smiths, Talking Heads, Talk Talk and, because I was a trumpeter, I also started learning a lot about jazz – at which point Miles Davis became a very important hero. I can remember my dad giving me *Kind of Blue* on cassette, which he bought in Liverpool. That was a bit of a pivotal moment. And, there was a teacher at school, Chris Etherington – nicknamed ‘Pubes’ on account of his fabulous beard! – who ran the jazz band. His enthusiasm for jazz was totally infectious.

I then started getting into jazz-rock fusion – the trumpet plus the guitar, basically – and can still remember buying *Bitches Brew* in HMV Liverpool, listening to it, and not understanding a note of it. I thought, I just don’t get this.

What I found is that, instead of dismissing it, I wanted to understand why it was considered great. That attitude has informed my approach to music ever since. I ‘cracked’ *Bitches Brew* after a couple of years, and it has become one of my favourite records of all time.

Tell us about your school years.

I was at boarding school in the Midlands – John Peel had been in our house years before. For some reason ours was the only house where they postponed evening prep so we could watch *Top Of The Pops*, and that became a really important weekly ritual.

When you walked around that house you’d hear different music everywhere; you’d go into different rooms and learn about Echo and

the Bunnymen, or the Beastie Boys, or The Godfathers, or Pink Floyd, or David Bowie – all these things people there were playing.

I spent a long time playing music at school and then was accepted by the University of North Texas (UNT), in Denton, to study jazz. I didn’t quite realise it at the time, but UNT is up there with Berklee as one of *the* places in America to go and study jazz.

How old were you when you went there?

It was 1991, and I was 18. I started on the jazz fundamentals programme. I was probably the best trumpeter in my school, but the truth is that I turned out to be the worst trumpeter in Texas!

The other [musicians] there were playing for seven hours a day, and if I’d done an hour, I thought I’d done really well. So I soon realised I was never going to be good enough to cut it. Which meant that I immersed myself in listening again.

It was a really exciting time to be in America, the early ‘90s – I can still remember when Nirvana were first on the airwaves, and Pearl Jam coming through. I was getting completely thrown in with an equally excited peer group.

The hallmark of all of this experience of music is that, today, I

“I was the best trumpeter in my school – but the worst trumpeter in Texas...”

can be as enthusiastic about a piece of classical music, as I can a piece of esoteric jazz, a piece of super super commercial pop or some intense dance music.

Let's park that point in your life for a minute. Do you think your musicality plays a role in your approach as an A&R?

I use it every day and I love the fact that I can. It makes for easier communication with producers and mix engineers; I had it yesterday, in fact, when I was like, 'Verse one, bar two, beat four... you're late. It's not syncopated!'

[That background] helps with reference points as well. I'll be as quick to pull in a piece of Handel as a reference for an Aurora track as I would a piece of dance music. So that broad musical understanding helps inform conversations with the artists and the people around them. It hopefully lends me credibility in those conversations.

When you were in Texas, playing for one hour a day, watching people playing for seven hours a day, did it teach you some kind of deference for artists and the discipline needed to 'make it'?

If someone absolutely mystifies me or wows me with their music, that's partly to do with musicality, but actually more often it's about their level of artistic clarity. That can be absolutely mesmerising.

But I always want to be partners in that A&R equation, and that requires a delicate balance. In A&R, you need to be able to have an open and honest conversation with artists; if you're too meek or deferential, you're not best serving them.

I fully understand that [artists] are capable of doing things I could never think or dream of being able to do – I would never want to impose my limited imagination on someone with a greater imagination. But I also have a responsibility to respond in a way that, I hope, will make what they're creating even better.

The analogy I often use is that every publishing house has an editor; well-executed [A&R] is there to say, 'I'm not sure you need that sentence,' or, 'You haven't said that as clearly as I know you're capable of doing.'

How do you forge that trusted relationship with an artist in order to be able to have those difficult conversations?

That's something which has taken me a long time to work out. The absolute worst position to adopt is one of superiority, because that just breeds defensiveness. In fact, you want a relationship where you have your arms around each other, and you're forging ahead together.

You have to explain [to the artist] the position you're coming from – which is sometimes about artistry, and sometimes it's about contextualising something commercially. I like to think

I'm quite honest with our artists, but I never critique for the sake of critiquing – I tend to trust what they're doing, because they're the ones creating the language we've already bought into by signing them. I want us to amplify that language, not stymie it or dial it down.

Sometimes, this job is standing back and waiting. Patience is a very important thing. In the end, it's the artist whose work we're out there representing. If they know ultimately we're not going to stop them doing what they want to do, they're more open to the idea of working together.

Back to Texas: what happened next?

I left Texas after a year, as planned, but I can't say I did brilliantly in my exams. I wasn't good enough as a trumpeter, full stop. I went back to Bristol University to study psychology in the early '90s. And, out of luck rather than design, I arrived in Bristol at the best possible time.

The first Friday I was there, I went to the Thekla for a club night called Steppin' Out, which was a night built around Blue Note and rare groove, and I immediately knew I was in the right place. I would visit Revolver Records on almost a daily basis, and buy bagfuls of music. My best friend Justin – who later introduced me to my wife – and I built our collections together. He brought Bob Dylan and Tim Buckley into the equation and I brought Miles Davis and Leonard Cohen. And then there was Radiohead!

I was in three bands during that period, playing jazz and funk, and it was great, but when I left

university I thought, Right, time to get a proper job. So I went into recruitment.

That is a long way from A&R...

I've got a very clear memory of being on the Number 19 bus on the way back to South London where I lived at the time, thinking, If this is what my life is now going to be from now on, this is grim – I've got to follow the dream, I've got to get into music.

I did two years in recruitment but then, in my early 20s, I got three months work experience at BMG, within the Conifer [classical] label. Alison Wenham [now WIN CEO] ran it, and she and they were all lovely to me.

I was working in a pub in Highbury Corner, the Hen & Chickens, at night, and doing work experience at BMG during the day, and for the first time I felt completely in control of my own future; I was totally broke, of course, but totally liberated too.

Off the back of that, I got a job in marketing at EMI Classics, working for a really nice guy called Barry McCann. This was all new to me – I don't come from a music industry dynasty or anything, my father is an accountant and there are lots of other accountants in the family, so I had no frame of reference.

"I was on the number 19 bus thinking, If this is my life from now on, this is grim."

Decca-signed jazz wunderkind Jacob Collier



I did six years [at EMI], starting in domestic marketing and international marketing and towards the end of that period, I actually started working on Blue Note artists, which was a real privilege. I was there when Norah Jones came through – I can't pretend to have any real involvement, but I was there. She was a University of North Texas [alumni] too, so I had something to talk to her about!

I got a call from Dickon [Stainer], who was then General Manager of UCJ [Universal Classics & Jazz], and he was looking for someone to come and run the jazz division. So in 2003, I joined as label manager, working alongside Becky [Allen], Mark [Wilkinson] and the legendary Bill Holland. A few days before I

arrived, Dickon had signed Jamie Cullum.

'The million-pound jazz deal' as I remember it was referred to in the papers at the time...

Exactly – 'the David Beckham of jazz' was another good one [laughs]. Working with Jamie was an incredible experience for me – my entire focus for a while and a very intense learning curve. These other amazing artists began coming through [UCJ] too, like Diana Krall and George Benson; the whole thing was a total privilege.

I did jazz and then moved into what they called 'commercial marketing', looking after classics and jazz together, including artists



Ball & Boe



Imelda May

like Andrea Bocelli and Russell Watson, as well as Jamie Cullum.

Within UCJ, we didn't have an A&R department, and Dickon asked me to start one. We were good at telling stories and being able to engage with the media and the public in a different way to our pop counterparts – so the objective was to try and sign artists which would fit in to that [skill set]. The Puppini Sisters, All Angels, The Fron Choir and the Pipes & Drums of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards all came through that.

The Pipes & Drums of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards?

That's actually a favourite project of mine. They had a No.1 in the 1970s with *Amazing Grace* and my dad loved it – we had a cassette of it in our house which I can vividly remember. So when I went in and said, why don't we do another record with the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, it was like, why not? It became a personal project. Plus we got bagpipes high up in the charts, which was pretty fun.

Other artists who came through during that time included Imelda May, an incredibly important artist for me, as well as Melody Gardot.

And then UCJ and Decca merged. Dickon initially took the reins of that, and more recently Becky [Allen] was made Decca President and is doing an amazing job. It's meant we've been able to properly focus on Decca, which is such an amazing brand.

If you'd said to the 16-year-old me that one day you're going to work at Decca Records and you're going to be responsible for signing artists, curating the roster and going around the world to do so, I would have been totally thrilled.

What is Decca today? You go from Jeff Goldblum to Aurora to classical and crossover music. What's your identity?

We know what feels right within the DNA of this company. The real aim, strategically, is to try and operate in spaces where other people aren't – to find music in places other people aren't looking. That means we can keep surprising people, taking music from the niches into the mainstream.

Don't think we have low commercial aspirations for our artists because of that – we want to take our artists and spread them around the world; for them to become the biggest and best manifestation of themselves that they can be.

Sometimes there are physical retail-led artists who appeal to an older audience where people would say, 'Yep that's Decca.' But equally we're involved with artists who are really pushing boundaries, like Max Richter, Aurora, Olafur Arnalds or Sheku, who are telling stories in a different way, taking us beyond repertoire that appeals to the same mainstream, blockbuster audience.

If your back catalogue includes Leonard Bernstein or Alice Coltrane, as ours does via our work with Verve, it keeps you open

to some real esoteric repertoire. We can be broader and more adventurous than some people might think.

Aurora, for example, walked in here and she was so captivating, so compelling, a visionary, we knew we had to work with her. And then you look at Jacob Collier; he was billed as this jazz wunderkind, he was fiercely independent, with Quincy Jones as a manager. Jacob's done a global one man tour which integrates tech and music in the most mesmerising way.

I'd been pursuing him for some time, because I think he's an absolute, 100% genius. He makes you think, How on earth can you do that? We've got a partnership with [US-based UMG label] Geffen on him, and we're so excited. He's releasing four albums in the space of a year, from choral right through to soul/funk, with a host of incredible people involved.

Have you made mistakes in your signings? What have you learnt from them?

Where we come unstuck is whenever we've found ourselves at the back of a very long queue to sign things. We quickly realise that we're not using our muscle memory to sign and work with those acts, we're actually trying to learn from the muscle memory of our excellent pop counterparts. That's not the Decca way.

How is Decca repertoire being treated by the leading streaming platforms?

Bringing some of our audience onto the streaming platforms is our first challenge – there's a lot of our current audience that aren't on the streaming services just yet. We've also got to make increasingly compelling cases to our streaming partners about our music – showing them that there is a huge appetite for the repertoire that we're putting out there.

There are places in the streaming ecosystem, musically, that are fascinating, which we can go and explore. You can get yourself wrapped up in genre descriptions, but look at what's broadly called the neoclassical space; [Decca imprint] Mercury KX is going after that space. Jacob feels very 'streaming', as does Aurora, and our back catalogue has some of the best records ever recorded.

The real challenge is how we move our blockbuster artists into the streaming space, because that asks for different consumption behaviour. Andrea Bocelli has proven there's a real appetite for people to stream his music. You can also look at Einaudi, who's built a whole genre within streaming, or The Lumineers, who also do fantastically well.

All of that teaches us to think carefully about repertoire. Can we continue to record the same things that we perhaps have been recording the past, or do we need to be a bit more adventurous? When every single version of every single song is out on streaming services already, does another version need to be made? Or is it better to find a brand new song which can draw people? That's going to be an ongoing conversation as we move forward.

What is Rebecca Allen like as a boss?

I've known and worked with Becky for 15 years, ever since I started at this company – she was running the media team [at UCJ] when I was running jazz. She's incredibly smart, and incredibly passionate and enthusiastic. We always have a joke that our music tastes complement each other, which is really true. We've become really good friends and we work very closely together.

I love working with her and there are things I've learned from her, really recently, that have opened my eyes as to how one can operate. She's incredibly supportive of her team, she cares deeply about us – and you can tell that.

Plus she has this extraordinary instinct, which helps her make strong decisions. If I'm honest, I'm naturally a bit of an over-thinker, so it's really refreshing and fascinating to work with someone who has that approach.

Decca has sometimes over-performed in terms of UK market-share. Do you watch that closely, or is it just a nice boost when it happens?

I mean, we're very proud of it. I remember the first time that I saw the [UK] market share figures and Decca was inside the top 10 of all the labels. That was pretty amazing.

We are perhaps naturally self-deprecating here, but sometimes we shouldn't be; it's important to maintain our pride – especially when we think about our heritage and our 90th anniversary next year.

We absolutely have a determination

to stay the No.1 classical and jazz label. In addition, we must also look after those genres which sit outside the mainstream pop business – we've recently become the No.1 country label in the UK, for example. If we do that, the overall market share will take care of itself.

Decca turns 90 next year – which is one heck of an anniversary. Are big celebrations planned?

Absolutely. It's an incredible story. [Decca founder] Edward Lewis built Decca from virtually nothing to, at one point, the second biggest label in the world.

Think of the artists that have been signed through Decca – from The Stones to David Bowie, Cat Stevens, The Moody Blues, Procol Harum, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Luciano Pavarotti, Sir Georg Solti. Across the the board, it's an incredible roll call of excellence.

That lineage gives us an enormous amount of confidence about how adventurous we can be here. We're emboldened by it. It feels like we're in pioneer territory right now because of the changes the industry's going through. So we need to take risks, be brave, and remain confident.

We want to be very successful, but we also want to be the most interesting record label in the world.

‘THE INDUSTRY IS MORE BUOYANT... BUT THE COST OF PUTTING ON SHOWS IS GETTING BIGGER’

In 2016, Toby Leighton-Pope and Steve Homer exited Live Nation after fifteen years to take the helm at competitor AEG Presents in the UK, where they’ve steadily been growing the promoter’s business. What are they doing differently to the aggressive tactics of their former employer?

Toby Leighton-Pope and Steve Homer have achieved a lot since taking the helm of AEG Presents in the UK two years ago. During their short tenure as joint CEOs, they’ve grown the company into a major promoter in the UK by tripling yearly show count to 1,000, successfully launching 10-day London festival All Points East, while enjoying two years of sold out Hyde Park British Summer Time shows.

In addition, the duo have recruited boots on the ground in France after acquiring Paris festival Rock en Seine. Artists whose shows they’ve promoted range from Alice Cooper to Bananarama, Busted and Bryan Adams, as well as new talent like Bryson Tiller and Khalid. They are well versed in the business of growth, having previously spent 15 years at Live Nation as SVPs, but, as Leighton-Pope explains, their strategy at AEG is quality, not quantity.

He says: “We came from a volume business [background], which was tough with 10% growth every year or more, but Steve and I wanted to have some input, time and thought with the artists we work with.

“Although we’ve grown the business quite dramatically [at AEG], [that approach] is still sustainable at this level. We can put together intelligent, smart and unique marketing plans and have time to sit back and really promote the artist, not just facilitate a show. If you can do less, better, you are going to do better than the volume game.”

Both Homer and Leighton-Pope were destined for a career in music from the get-go. Homer started out as a musician and found his way into the live business through passion alone. “This is like a



Steve Homer



Toby Leighton-Pope

“Artists are being bullied or coerced into not making their own choices.”

your ears being completely screwed!”

Leighton-Pope grew up around the business with his dad, Carl, working as a manager and agent. He remembers: “I used to love talking to my dad about how deals worked when I was very young – I had no ambition about being on stage, front of house or even with the crowd; I liked being backstage and seeing the whole show being

busman’s holiday, it’s my ideal job – I never wanted to do anything else,” he says. “I enjoyed playing live when I was in a band but always loved going to shows. There is such a buzz that comes from it, apart from

built. In my teens I found albums and music that changed my life, but before that I was in awe of the people who promoted, booked or managed artists – for me, they were the real pop stars.”

AEG has the tender for Victoria Park for the next four years where the first edition of All Points East took place over the summer, selling nearly 200k tickets. It will return in 2019 with the Chemical Brothers recently announced as the first headline act. The idea: a community event that caters to different audiences across a three-day festival weekend, plus three standalone shows the following weekend, and a week of entertainment in-between.

“We believe in the inner-city festival but we think people may not be as committed as they used to be,” says Leighton-Pope. “Do people want to come to all three days or pick their favourite one or two days? The individual day works for us [at British



Green Day at AEG’s British Summer Time, 2017

Summer Time] in Hyde Park where we don’t get much repeat business across the different shows.

“In the past you’d have a cohesive festival where perhaps the headliner on the second night wasn’t your favourite act, but you’re going to go and watch the dance band instead, or maybe the rock tent. I think you have to be a bit more precise now.”

After Rock en Seine, does AEG have any other acquisitions on the cards? “We are looking at a couple of things that are quite exciting. Come back to us in three months’ time!” hints Leighton-Pope.

Here, we chat to the duo about the state of the live music business, the impact of changing consumption habits and why the aggressive growth of a certain competitor is, in their view, inhibiting artist development.

The headlines say the live business is booming. Do you feel the health of that?
Toby Leighton-Pope: I think more people are going to more shows, but the business

is getting tougher. Ticket prices are higher, artists are delivering productions the level of which have never been seen before, even for small shows, so the cost of putting on [gigs] is higher – and so is the level of risk.

We avoided most of them, but there were a few big shows this summer that were blood baths on really big scales, because the artist wanted to deliver a great show, they’ve got a market value, and there was a high ticket price accepted as the norm. As a promoter, there are some big land-mines out there to avoid – if you miss your target by a few thousand tickets, the [financial loss] can be huge.

I don’t believe the business is *booming* booming. I don’t think we have broken that many acts this year in the UK – there are some great artists out there like Rex Orange County and Sampha who are going to be around for a very long time – but we were breaking more acts five-ten years ago. Maybe that’s because streaming is so easy and disposable, so going to a

show sometimes feels like a bit of tick-box [exercise]: ‘I’ve seen that act, I don’t need to see them again’ or ‘I’ve seen the top 15 bands so I’ve seen them all, and therefore I need to get more pictures on my Instagram of different bands I haven’t seen’.

So people are going to more [shows], but are they growing with the artist?

Steve Homer: My take on it is the industry is more buoyant and there are far more live shows out there. Everyone has got a busy autumn, no one is saying, ‘Oh I haven’t got any shows’, but everyone is finding it a little bit tougher because more shows means there’s more choice for people to go to – and ticket prices are far more competitive now.

Some shows are not quite getting there – they still look full to the public but because the top 5/10% of the house is the important part for a promoter [to make profit], there are far more shows that are washing their face and breaking even

Stevie Wonder at BST, 2016



rather than making hundreds of thousands of pounds for everyone.

Artists are taking longer to break, but rising fast and playing big venues when they do. Is there a danger in that?

Toby: I don't think it's a problem that artists are getting up there quickly, it's about what the right next move is. You're seeing smarter acts go, 'Yeah, we could sell arenas out on the first album, but that doesn't mean we're that big on the next album.' Some artists will reset and go straight back down to theatre level, re-engage with the crowd and try to rebuild. Others will go straight back into arenas and fail massively! Once [an act's] done a bad arena tour, it's hard to come back from that.

Steve: It's tough [for artists] because when demand is outstripping availability, you'd be silly in some ways to hold it back. You go and see an act like Brockhampton, who have put out five albums so far, one every three months, streaming only, and hit

No.1 in the States. They've got more than enough material, play huge shows in the US and have sold out everything on sale here. It's a very different time, traditional rules don't seem to apply as much.

With streaming subscriptions you can say, 'I'll have this track by this artist, and this one by this,' so you get to listen to so much more music and are not necessarily

“Once an act's had a bad arena tour, it's hard to come back from that.”

as invested in each of them — you're just picking your playlist of what you like. You might go and see some of those things, but we see it at festivals all the time; people are almost running around festival sites at Coachella, hearing the track they want to hear and then on to the next one, having their own playlist lived out in a live form.

Toby: [On the plus side], I've been to see Rex Orange County a few times this year and it's amazing watching every kid in the room sing every single song for someone who has had very little airplay on traditional radio and zero TV.

It can make for a better gig to some extent because you don't have that point where you go, 'I don't know this song because the album isn't out yet.'

Day to day, what are the biggest challenges you face?

Toby: Really boring stuff like ticket allocation — the pre-sale world is tough for us, record labels are still obsessed with selling the album...

Steve: ...the album ticket bundle. That's a joy!

Toby: What [labels] do at the moment is [ask fans to] pre-order the album to get access to the ticket pre-sale to try and get more pre-orders in. For example, when you do a 10k cap. show, you get 25% of the tickets, so 2.5k is what the artist gets

Richard Ashcroft at BST, 2018



access to. Everything else is sold through the venue's box office. So if you want to give some to the fan club, the Amex pre-sale and to the record label for their pre-order, you don't have any tickets left. That's challenging but technology companies like DICE are doing really exciting things in London with ticketing and I think tech is only going to help us more. What [AEG ticketing partner] AXS is doing with its new anti-touting platform is amazing.

The secondary ticketing market has gone through some big developments over the last year. What do you make of the changes we've seen?

Steve: The developments seem to be positive — it seems to be coming to a head with Ticketmaster closing its secondary sites and AXS [changing their offering].

Toby: [Ticketmaster, in my opinion], are just calling it something else! They renamed their secondary sites as 'resale' sites. They are still doing it, just putting some caps on it before government legislation [is enacted].

Steve: Yes but I think people are getting a bit wise to it. When the biggest act in the world [Ed Sheeran] is very insistent on how they want to deal with the customers, that can only be a good thing because it does educate the public. I remember when Catfish & the Bottlemen played Wembley and had lots of drama on the night from people; [the band's team] were being quite insistent to their fans who had bought tickets on Viagogo that [they had to have] names on tickets and they couldn't do it.

It created a bit of ill feeling amongst their fans but in the light of day it was actually quite a brave stance because it was making a point about who they wanted to sell their tickets to — fans, not scalpers who were just going to sell it to their fans at an inflated price. It was a bit of a harsh lesson, but to be fair to Ed, he's in a great position. He's been offered loads of money to do all sorts of things but he stuck to his guns.

Toby: The main problem is there is still no legislation. Until you can get behind something and say 'this is illegal', you still

can't really control it. These companies might be breaking some terms and conditions, but they're not breaking the law. Yes, selling a ticket you don't own is illegal, but I don't think that happens often. Again, technology is going to come through and take this piece out. It will be so much easier once we can control the box office — our AXS system actually stops secondary straight away, it's just about getting other people to buy into it and use it on their service.

You have to remember as well, some artists still use secondary and make a lot of money from it. In America, [resale] is not a bad word, you'll see record labels and artists have meetings with StubHub, 'How do we use your data?'; you'll see people giving StubHub access to ticket on-sales. We've done quite a good job of self regulating compared to America where its like, 'Hey, you're buying something, selling something, great!' It's a different mentality.

Not all artists think like Ed, which makes it harder as well. 'Ah great, I can make more money? Cool.' You don't have



Roger Waters, BST 2018

to respect those artists, but we all work for artists so it's tricky.

How has the consolidation of the festival market impacted on what you do?

Toby: It impacts on the artist. If you are being told, 'You have to give us all of your touring to play our seven festivals,' or, 'If you want to play this festival you have to play these other three,' you lose your freedom of movement. That's a scary thing; even if you make every single right move in an artist's career, it's still hard to break them, and [those deals are] blockages in those steps. Artists are either bullied or coerced into not being able to make their own choices.

I come from a family of agents who have helped steer and develop an artist's live career their whole lives, which is a skill. To then say, 'Hey, you can only do this with one hand tied behind your back and three quarters of the world is not available to you anymore because you have to play this [run of festivals],' it makes it harder to break

acts and it makes it harder for people to do the best they can do.

Steve: Rather than being seen as something that you offer someone as an incentive to work with you, it's almost like a punishment if they don't: 'You won't get this if you don't do this.' That's a bit of a sad scenario because an artist will normally only have one career. Alongside managers and agents, we work with multiple artists, but to do that to a specific act is quite bullish and it's not a particularly friendly way of working with someone.

What are your ambitions for AEG and how closely do you work with the other local divisions?

Toby: We want to continue to be that company of excellence, which artists hopefully come to because of what we do. We want to grow steadily and have a few things that we're looking at for 2019/2020. Gary Gersh just launched a global touring team which we're part of and we're going

to look to buy more tours globally to have AEG artists for the world.

Steve: We know all the people that book all the festivals in the US – Bowery Presents on the East coast, Goldenvoice on the West – so we are pretty well joined-up. We have lots of conversations and lots of putting our heads together to think about how we can develop artists across the world.

Toby: AEG feels like a younger company as well, compared to where we were before. The promoters or festival bookers in America are not all sitting around going, 'Any day now, the next Guns N' Roses is going to break.'

Urban and pop is so big right now, the world isn't waiting for a new guitar band to come out. It's forward-thinking — you look at how Coachella has evolved into what it is now to what it was 15 years ago, it's had to evolve for the music taste. If you keep trying to book the same things over and over again you'll get caught out.

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WINTEL 2018 – THE SOUND OF SUCCESS FOR THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR

Alison Wenham, CEO of the Worldwide Independent Network (WIN) on the body's new report – and the combined strength of indie labels and artists...

On December 4, we published the third edition of our annual WINTEL market survey, one of the highlights of which was the confirmation that the independent recorded music industry now has a global market share of 39.9% based on figures from the previous 12 months.

To put this into context, we should take a look at this through the lens of history.

The independent sector was decimated in the nineties with many important companies – Island, Chrysalis, A&M and Virgin, to name just a few – acquired by the multi-national music companies, removing a significant chunk of market share and diluting it to just 20% in contrast to the near 40% of the eighties.

Add to that wholesale asset stripping – plus the immense turmoil that file-sharing and piracy visited on the industry as a whole – and it is a small miracle that the independent sector has re-invented itself at all, let alone on the admirably principled basis of music first, profit later.

What made the difference?

Independent operators exist in every industry – they are the pioneers, the risk-takers, the entrepreneurs whose belief drowns out doubt, often defies common sense and nearly always pushes at the margins of conventional thought.

But in isolation, they can sometimes be viewed as easy bait for bigger fish, picked off as their fortunes improve.

Over the last 20 years, through the formation of organisations such as AIM, IMPALA, A2IM and Merlin, the independent sector began to globalise and under the auspices of our umbrella organisation, Worldwide Independent Network (WIN), there is now a steadfast belief that although competition for the best artists and staff should always remain outside of the collective interest, the sector benefits from having a strong collective community.



“It is a small miracle that the independent sector has re-invented itself.”

We are proud of our many achievements. As we review the year just gone, we note with immense pride and satisfaction how independents now control a bigger chunk of global market share than any major record company. Yet it is equally important to note that this figure is only of interest as a collective achievement – as, unlike the majors, the independents don't really give much of a damn about such figures!

In sharp contrast to global corporate interests, most independents dream of different things.

Throughout their history and via a myriad of genres the indies have been the laboratories of the commercial musical world, and we are just beginning to see a whole new dynamic emerging from this role.

In this now globalised market, we are seeing the emergence of new sounds from all corners of the world. Enthusiasm for new music is driving discovery for the independents through a growing network of regional and global streaming platforms.

An indie hit in 2018: Arctic Monkeys



Far from a spent force, the independents have stayed true to their principles, and are very much back in the driving seat.

One of those principles was enshrined in the first Fair Digital Deals Declaration of 2014, which proved to be a seminal moment for our industry. It set the standard for fairness and transparency with artists, and has been referred to time and again by legislators as the 'gold standard' for equitable agreements.

A great example of this sense of fairness and shared goals is the fact that artists signed to independent labels tend to stay with them – in fact our WINTEL survey highlights that 76% re-sign at the end of their contract term.

A happy partnership is often defined by common goals and shared beliefs. When these are misaligned, disaster can strike as is so often the case with new signings to major labels who fail to make a sufficient dent in the market with

“The indies have stayed true to their principles, and are back in the driving seat.”

their first album or – these days – even their first track. What I love about a lot of independent labels in contrast is their enduring belief in the artists they work with and, perhaps more importantly, their patience.

This long-term philosophy has been a proven formula for success. Independent companies can be confident that while they continue to do what they do best – discovering, developing and breaking incredible music – there are motivated and experienced trade associations around the world ensuring that the commercial playing field is level, their copyrights are fiercely protected and that the price paid for their work (and that of their artists) is fair and equitable.

As I have already mentioned, market share is not the 'be all and end all' for us, but I think we can permit ourselves a moment to celebrate that almost 40% of the world's music is now coming from independent companies.

Meet the old boss

Our series of interviews with some of the UK music industry's most illustrious figures features a man who built a legendary UK label. Simon Draper was the true driving force behind 'Richard Branson's Virgin Records', creating a hugely influential culture and catalogue along the way...

Simon Draper was born in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, on 17 July, 1950. The next day, in Blackheath London, roughly 8,500 miles away, Richard Branson, his second cousin, was born.

The two would not meet for another 20 years. But when they did, one of them would go on to build Virgin Records into one of the most innovative, successful and exciting British labels of all time, and, in the process, become one of the music industry's most wily and respected executives, leaving a legacy that is still felt, culturally and commercially, today. The other was Richard Branson.

That's not to say, of course, that the partnership's more high profile half wasn't instrumental in the rise and styling of Virgin Records, it's just that, contrary to public perception, we're talking more tambourine than lead guitar.

Draper offers his view of the dynamic, and on his second cousin's strengths: "Richard had no fear and he was never intimidated. He never thought, Oh that can't be done, or, They're doing it so well, we can't possibly compete.

"And then, what I contributed to the mix was my knowledge of music. I think it was a good synergy, you know? And we were friends, really, I mean, not from day one, because we didn't have that much in common; I had more in common with [Virgin Records co-founder] Nik Powell, to start with.

"But, as we went along on the adventure, it just worked. Richard used to say it's a bit like being married, and it was. We used to go on holiday together, we had our kids at the same time; it was a family thing.

"I still see Richard; I saw him this year,

in fact. And of course the relationship isn't as close as it once was. But, when I do see him, I find that there's a guy underneath there, the same guy that I always knew."

In this case, 'always' means close to 50 years, going back to when Draper, feeling hemmed in by the cultural restrictions of apartheid, quit his homeland aged 20 to find more like-minded souls and, with a bit of luck – and a tug on a distant relative's sleeve – maybe a job.

"I walked in and said to Richard [then focused on selling rather than making records], I'm your second cousin, you don't know me, but I know a lot about music

"At 10:30 Tony gets a big piece of dope out and it's time for the first joint of the day."

– and I did, more than anyone there did, anyway. Luckily for me, the record buyer, Tony Mellor, was leaving, so that was the job I took.

"That day I went to see him, the first day I met him, before I started work, Richard took me for lunch in some greasy spoon in Praed Street and told me about all these big plans he had for a music company, including a label, a studio, publishing, management – an empire.

"I started properly the next day, and on the first morning Tony was showing me how to order the records, explaining who supplied what etc. And then at about 10:30, he gets his cigarette rolling machine out, gets a big piece of dope out, and it's time for the first joint of the day; we're off!"

It was, in fact, the first whiff of the sweet smell of success, as second cousin Ricky (as his mother, Eve, apparently calls him) made good on pretty much all his promises, most importantly the one about starting a record label and appointing Draper to shape it, define it and run it.

Initially, that shape, definition and dynamism came from Draper's love of leftfield music, sparked and nurtured back in South Africa, first from listening to the Rolling Stones under the blankets at public school, then through artists like Bob Dylan, Soft Machine and Captain Beefheart, alongside an enduring love of jazz.

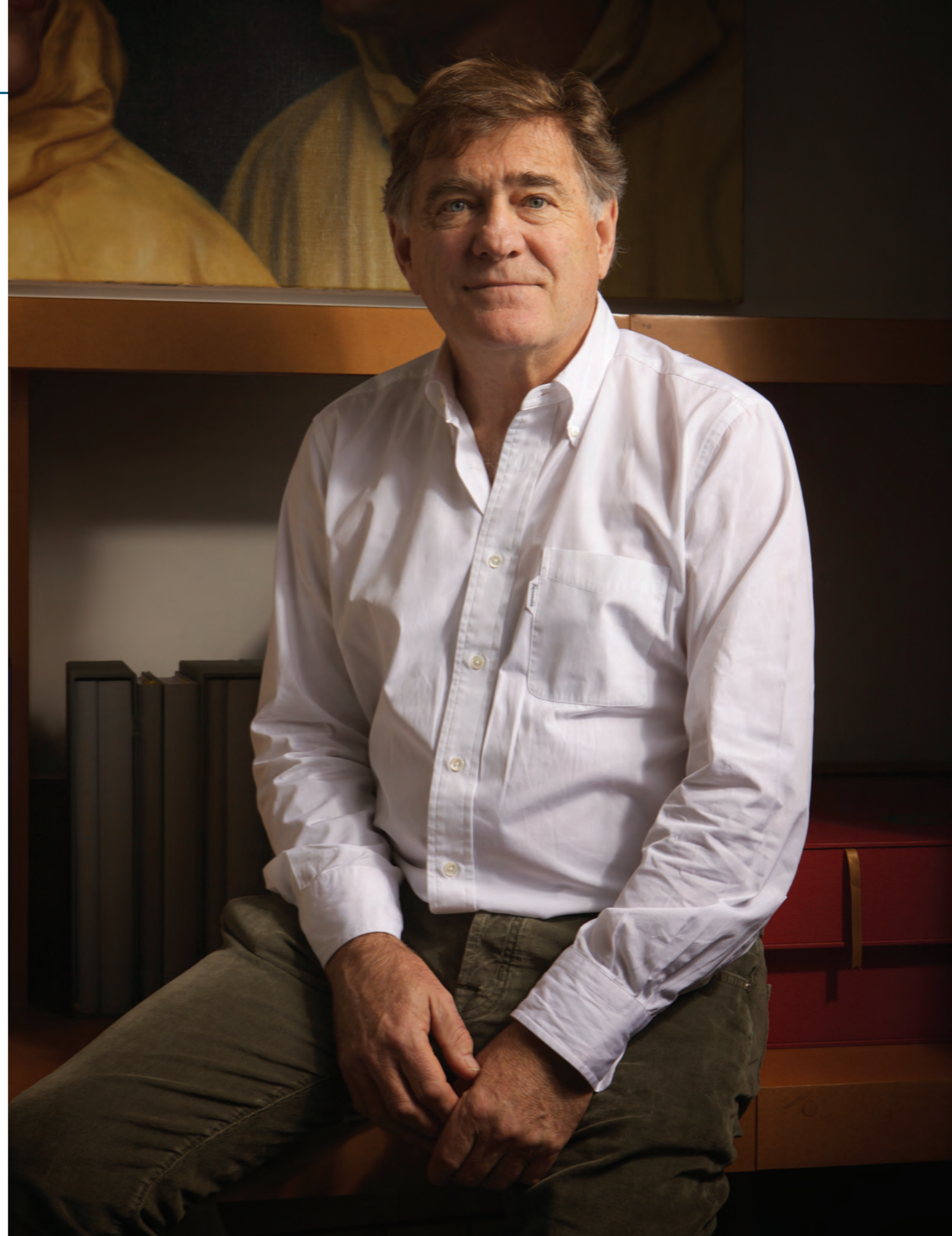
So, whilst Virgin went on to become a very shiny and successful pop label in the '80s and '90s, it famously started as a watchword for eclecticism and experimentalism, summed up by its first four releases, one of which, against all odds, became a huge hit – and the foundation on which a billion pound company would be built.

What are your memories of the earliest days of the label?

I think it was the end of '71, and Richard said, Okay, we're going to move the mail order [operation] to a big space above the Notting Hill Gate shop, but you've got to stay here and start the label.

It sounded great, but suddenly I'm sitting there all by myself. There's literally no one else in the building, because it's only me working on the label. I hated it. So I moved into Notting Hill Gate with everyone else. I had a funny little office. Nik Powell was at the bottom of the spiral stairs at the back, and I was at the top, on the landing, outside the loos.

I started looking for acts during '72,



and we launched the label in '73, but I'd been working hard the whole of that year, finding acts to launch with.

One of them, famously, was Mike Oldfield, tell us about that.

The first person I called was Mike Oldfield, because in '71 Manor Studios [owned by Virgin] opened. I used to go down there and on one visit someone played me Mike's demos [of what would become Tubular Bells].

No one else had ever heard of him, but I knew exactly who Mike Oldfield was, because I had bought Shooting at the Moon, Whatever She Brings, those [ex-Soft Machine] Kevin Ayers albums, and I knew that Mike was the bass player and sometime guitarist in Kevin Ayers' band.

So when the record label was up and running, we got in touch. Mike was really at the end of his tether when I called; he was playing relief guitar in the pit orchestra for Hair. I said, We'd like to sign you, he came to Notting Hill Gate, I drove him to the houseboat that Richard was living on and we did the deal.

I remember when it came to launch, we were distributed by Island, and I had to go up to Birmingham and present our first four releases to their sales force. I already knew Tubular Bells was going to be successful, but when I played it to these sales guys, the reaction was just incredible, it just wiped out the meeting. All these other companies they distributed, and Island's own stuff, nothing came close to the effect that Tubular Bells had.

What did you think of Tubular Bells when you first heard it?

I thought it was absolutely unbelievable; I mean it was an incredible thing. It reminded me of Terry Riley's minimalist classical compositions in C and Rainbow and Curved Air, but still totally original. He had done it at home, on a quarter track tape recorder, doing his own overdubs; he played every instrument on it.

We also tried as hard as we could to sign The Cockney Rebel, but EMI were in and we just couldn't compete. That was my

dilemma at the time: we could only sign acts who had no other option [laughs].

And I'd go and see all the pub rock bands, but I didn't like any of them. You know, Joe Strummer [in The 101ers], before The Clash; I didn't like it, and I didn't think that was what we should be doing. And the British prog stuff, I didn't really like that, either.

If I'd been given a free hand, and a limitless budget, I would have signed Captain Beefheart, Little Feat, things like that.

So Mike Oldfield was just manna from heaven. The other launch releases were albums by Gong, because of a Soft Machine connection and available back catalogue, Faust, an avant-garde group whose first Virgin album was priced as a single (49 pence) and a rather forgettable all-star jam

“What Richard prized back then was gut feeling and not revering the status quo.”

at the Manor called Manor Live, featuring Elkie Brooks.

In the next batch of releases were Kevin Coyne, Hatfield and the North, Link Wray and Tangerine Dream.

So who was the record company back then, in those early years?

Just me. When I moved into Vernon Yard, there was literally just me, then Sue Steward (Press) and Tony Cousins (Production) moved in. Ken Berry was designated to be the accountant, all had previously been working in the mail order company.

If it's not a rude, question, did you know what you were doing? I mean, you say you signed these artists, how did you know how to sign an artist? Because at this point you're still only, what, 22?

You just ask. Sandy Denny was recording at The Manor at the time, so we asked to borrow her contract with Island and we copied it to sign Mike Oldfield. Plus,

we knew that Harbottle and Lewis were the top music business lawyers, so we went to them.

I had to learn it all. And thing was, what Richard prized back then was intuition, gut feeling and not revering the status quo – he gave people a chance.

We never hired people who had worked at any other record company, almost on principle at the beginning; not until we were eventually forced into it, and even then we'd always prefer someone from Island. We would not want someone who had been sullied by CBS, EMI, Warners... [laughs].

After Tubular Bells, what drove the growth in the early/mid-'70s, up until punk hit?

Mike Oldfield of course, Tangerine Dream who were incredibly successful throughout Europe, Robert Wyatt. Yeah, so we were doing pretty well, then we started to think, that we were too dependent on Mike and a large part of our roster had no real future in America. So we started to try and change tack. Charles Levison had started to work for us in America and he was trying to get us to sign AOR/rock acts.

We actually had a crisis meeting in 1976, and I said, I'm sorry, but I think we have to drop people like Ivor Cutler, David Bedford, who we loved but didn't actually sell much; I said we had to prioritise.

I also said, Charles, these two bands you want to sign over there, we can't do that either. And of course one of them subsequently became Foreigner [laughs].

Instead, with Richard always thinking big, what we tried to do was sign The Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd and The Who. We didn't, of course, but that's what we aimed for. Pink Floyd I thought we might get, because we knew them, and I'd got Nick Mason to produce Robert Wyatt and Gong.

Pink Floyd liked us, but they didn't take us seriously – and they didn't think we'd come up with the money.

Anyway, we didn't get any of the big three, but we did get 10CC [who had been



Knob twiddling, circa 1972

on Jonathan King's UK Records label for their first two albums]. They fitted the bill perfectly for us. All the serious critics loved them, because they were so clever, and the lyrics were sophisticated, but they were also pop, really beautiful pop. We heard Life Is A Minestrone and I'm Not In Love, and we knew the third album [The Original Soundtrack, 1975] would be huge

The deal was that they would go through Atlantic in the US and through Virgin in the rest of the world. And then what happened was that Kevin [Godley] and Lol [Creme] got on really well with us, but the other two [Graham Gouldman and Eric Stewart], were very much in bed with Harvey Lisberg, he was an old school manager who had a lot going on with Phonogram.

So Lol and Kevin, believing they'd signed to Virgin, go on holiday to Barbados. At the airport they're on the phone talking about cutting the single, you know, technical details. And Harvey signed them to Phonogram as soon as they left the country. They landed and found they were with Phonogram, not us. That was a big loss, because that would have instantly transformed us.

But then, within a year or so, along came punk, and an opportunity to reinvent ourselves.

You mentioned a crisis meeting, was the company losing money at that point?

I don't remember that being a financial crisis, that came later, in the early '80s, it was more a question of direction. We were

too reliant on Mike Oldfield and Tangerine Dream. When you're waiting desperately for their next release, it's not good. I saw what happened to other labels, like Stiff; they always needed a Madness album! If you're too reliant on an artist, it becomes an unhealthy relationship.

So, Tangerine Dream released far too many records, but we could not tell Edgar [Froese] to slow down, because, actually, we wanted them as well. A sensible course of events would be to say, No, one Tangerine Dream album every two years is about right – and no solo albums, please. But we didn't, because we needed them.

And we'd be begging Mike [Oldfield]. We came up with things like Boxed [compilation/remix album, 1976], I mean we were making things up to try and get some product.



The Virgin cricket team, circa 1980. Back row, left to right: Henry Lascelles, Jeff (Duffo) Duffy, Simon Draper, Jeremy Lascelles, Paul Brown, Ian Gillan, Richard Griffiths, Laurie Dunn. Front row, left to right: Peter Price, Ross Stapleton, Richard Branson (topless), Steve Barron.

Then, that all backfired because Mike had been the centre of all our attention, but when XTC came along in 77-79, they were the darlings of the company. They were the ones everyone wanted to work with.

At one point we had to tell Mike that we'd only managed to get his latest album out in America because the company that were licensing XTC over there had had their arm twisted. It was a case of, You can have XTC, but you have to take this as well. Mike was really, really pissed off about that.

Just before we move on to punk, what was that sort of late '70s period like in and around London, in the scene. With people like Tony Stratton-Smith at Charisma, Dave Robinson at Stiff, Chrysalis and all those guys?

No, we didn't socialize or mix with other record companies. You'd see people at the gigs, but that was more a question of, What's he doing here? When we were signing XTC I'd go to every gig and see all the same people there. Island wanted them really badly. The manager actually called me up and told me they were signing with Island. I took a deep breath, remembered all the things that Richard believed in about not taking no for an answer and I said, You're not signing for Island, we're changing the deal and you're signing with us, and we got them.

How did you first discover punk, what did you think of it and how did affect you and Virgin?

It felt kind of shocking but only because of the attitudes. Plus there was this deep antagonism towards record companies.

What I found quite rapidly, though, was that John Lydon was into all the avant garde music we were putting out, Howard Devoto [Magazine] was into all this music – they all just pretended not to be. John Lydon loved Can, so did [PiL bass player] Jah Wobble.

I found the Sex Pistols difficult at times because of Malcolm McLaren's attitude, and because of the violence. That 100 Club gig I went to where Sid Vicious bottled someone, that was just nasty.

A whole bunch of us went from the company and I remember Milanka Comfort who was Head of International was bowled over by them and I was arguing with her in the car afterwards when I heard myself say, But he can't sing! I heard it coming out of my mouth! And I thought, hang on, when The Rolling Stones first came out everyone's parents

said Mick Jagger couldn't sing. It was time to re-examine some of my preconceptions. And then when I heard their records on the radio, I knew they would be huge.

Meantime, I had signed The Motors, who after a slow start, had some big hits for us, and The Records led by Will Birch and produced by Mutt Lange.

I was trying to sign The Boomtown Rats, but we were too tough on the deal and we lost out to Phonogram [in the shape of subsidiary label Ensign, run by Nigel Grainge]. Looking back, it wasn't the worst thing to have lost.

The worst was probably Dire Straits. We were so keen to sign them and I still don't really understand why we didn't. For a long time I thought it was because we'd taken them out to a Greek restaurant in Notting Hill Gate, and the staff would always bring us a joint at the end of the meal. I got a feeling that Dire Straits thought that this was some crass music business ploy, but it wasn't!

Plus, when Phonogram came courting you in the mid-70s, that was a tough fight. They were a worldwide company who could make a lot of promises.

Maybe we weren't sycophantic enough, who knows. There's a moment, you know, it's like a seduction.

What other artists did you sign in that scramble for punk acts?

The Skids, Magazine, Devo, The Flying Lizards, The Ruts, XTC.

With The Skids, I knew John Peel pretty well, because he liked what we put out, and every now and again he'd come round for dinner. One night he said there's a fantastic group playing at the Red Cow, Hammersmith, Friday night, they're called The Skids, get down there. So I did, and I signed them the next week.

It was Peel who also recommended The Ruts, who I think would have been huge if Malcolm Owen hadn't taken heroin and died early on. I mean they were really good.

And what's the story behind the Pistols signing?

Malcolm came to see me and he played me

the tracks. I went to see them twice, once at the Screen on the Green in Islington, with The Buzzcocks supporting. I was still put off by everything. Then I heard the first single [Anarchy In The UK, 1976], which was great. Then the Bill Grundy thing happened and Richard had to have them, because that's what he thrived on.

They were signed to EMI first, then A&M. But the band wanted to put out God Save The Queen, and A&M freaked out and wouldn't release it. So Richard stepped into the breach and said we'd put it out – and by the way, nothing you can do will faze us.

Do you think any part of him liked the music?

Yes, but mainly he was stimulated by the excitement and controversy.

“I started playing In The Air Tonight to people and they all flipped.”

Did you want to sign them?

When I heard the records on the radio I did, yes.

And what were they like to deal with?

Well, they liked to come into the office and create mayhem. Sid would come in and steal records to go feed his drug habit. I always got on quite well with John. I went on the boat trip [to launch the God Save The Queen single in the week of the Queen's Silver Jubilee, 1977], I remember the river police coming, everyone getting off the boat and Malcolm making damn sure he got arrested.

Malcolm was quite belligerent, I believe at that time? How much of that was an act and how much was his actual personality?

Quite a bit of both, I think. I mean I dealt with him later as an artist [on Fans, 1984] and he was much nicer. Back then

he was trying to provoke everybody. He loved the idea that we would get fed up and drop them as well. Then he could keep the money and do it all again. But there was no way that was going to happen; there was no way they were going to shock us, and they certainly weren't going to shock Richard.

The company had more problems with PiL, actually, because Jah Wobble was quite menacing; he didn't need to do anything, he just had a heavy presence. Keith Levine was really difficult – and had a big chip on his shoulder, because he was trying to live up to the Johnny Rotten standard.

Although, ironically, by this point I was getting on really well with John – now John Lydon, of course. He'd come into the office quite a lot and he loved my big Tannoy speakers. One day he asked if he could buy them, I said yes and the next time I saw him he was living in Mae West's old house in California and there they were. Ken Berry and I spent a wonderful day with him. He took us out to a Chinese restaurant and we were drinking beers with him. Both of us got so pissed that we had to go back to the hotel. John carried on, of course.

When the punk storm died down and it started to move into the more shiny pop era of the '80s, did you find yourself signing artists who you didn't actually like – musically speaking?

I did, yes. I became less idealistic. Someone like Ian Gillan, for instance, raised a lot of eyebrows at the company – Deep Purple?! But he was a joy to work with and it guaranteed us chart places because he was such a big name.

And, you know, in a different way, Phil Collins. Because I hadn't been a Genesis fan. But he was recording at The Town House [a London studio, owned by Virgin] and it was feeding back to me that this album he was doing was something different, so I went and listened to it and realised how commercial it was.

Then, rather like Tubular Bells, I started playing In The Air Tonight to a few people and they all flipped.



The Ian Gillan band celebrating success circa 1980. Back row, left to right: Steve Lewis, Ian Gillan, Tessa Watts, Peter Price, Bernie Torme, Simon Draper, John McCoy, Jeremy Lascelles, Phil Banfield (manager). Front row, left to right: Anne Kelly, Colin Towns, Mick Underwood

The deal we did was very pragmatic, because we were very short of money then. Nik Powell was in charge of the purse strings, and he was trying to cut back on everything. He put me through the wringer on the Phil Collins deal: solo albums don't work; solo drummer albums... not great; it's £80,000 pounds and a 19% royalty – we'd never paid anyone a 19% royalty, ever; and you're only getting the UK. This is a bad deal.

Our absolute basic premise, unlike other record companies, and this comes from Richard, was we only signed long-term deals. I never signed X-Ray Spex because they wanted a one-album deal. I said I'm not doing that; I'm not wasting my time on a group, any group, where we don't have eight albums

And we want the world. We're not going to sign an act where we break them in the

UK and then somebody else gets the rest of the world.

So then this Phil Collins deal comes along and it's the UK only. Warner Brothers and Atlantic had the rest of the world wrapped

“I'm not wasting my time on any group where we don't have eight albums.”

up. But I said to Nik, We need a hit so bad, and we're going to get the advance back, there's no question about that.

At the end of 1980 there were no salary rises. I held a staff meeting and said, If we get a Platinum album, everything will be fine, the salary rise will come through. And that album [Face Value, February 1981] did it.

And then luckily all these other things, Japan, Simple Minds and the Human League with Dare [1981], they all started coming through.

The Human League's first two albums, *Reproduction* [1979] and *Travelogue* [1980] hadn't broken through, but they hadn't stopped selling, and I could see it, I could see something starting to happen.

They were, though, an experimental electronic collective from Sheffield, so presumably you didn't sign them thinking they'd make one of the greatest pop albums of perhaps pop's greatest era?

No, but even right at the very beginning, when you saw them live doing *You've Lost That Loving Feeling*, you could see the commercial potential. But he [Phil Oakey] was so doctrinaire in terms of what was



Back row (seated): Andy McMaster, Nick Garvey, Simon Draper (back right); Front row: Charles Levison (seated, right), Richard Ogden (manager, seated, glasses), Carol Wilson (seated) and Richard Branson (seated, front left).

acceptable; he absolutely would not make a record where there were real drums on it.

So it's all luck, you know; Martin Rushent comes along and plays me this Pete Shelley album he's done with a LinnDrum [*Homosapien*, January 1981] and I said to Phil, If you want to work with Martin Rushent, he's got this LinnDrum, no need for real drums, but they sound real.

And was that a step change for Virgin culturally, as it morphed into this big pop label?

Yes, because the staff had also changed. Laurie Dunn, who had been head of international, went off to start Virgin Australia; Lisa Anderson moved on; Al Clarke [publicity director] got into film. All of that '70s generation moved on mostly, and the new guys came in: Webbo [John Webster], Jeremy Lascelles, Richard

Griffiths in publishing, people like that.

Culture Club were another big part of Virgin's 80s success, how did that come about?

That came from publishing. Danny Goodwin, who worked with Richard in publishing, brought the demos in and played them for me. I thought, Nah, too superficial, too poppy. I'll be the first to admit, I was negative initially, but everyone else persevered.

[Manager] Tony Gordon was under the cosh to get them a deal or he was out, and the only company interested other than us was Polydor – not the favourite choice for anybody. So Tony got a limo to take some of us down, with Steve Lewis and Jeremy Lascelles in the party, to a rehearsal studio to see them play. At that point we had only heard them, hadn't seen them, and I didn't even know what George looked like. So

that was a big turning point. Meet George, see what he looks like, hear a few more songs, easy decision.

Was it his look or his personality?

Everything. And it was embarrassing; he was so keen to sign to Virgin, his manager might as well just give up any thought of negotiating. 'Get out the way and give me that pen!'

The first two singles came and went; they were pretty lightweight. And then we said, We've got to release *Do You Really Want To Hurt Me*, which we'd heard in the rehearsal studio. George didn't want to release it. He said, They're gonna think we're a reggae band. I said, Honestly, George, I don't think anyone's ever going to think you're a reggae band.

It was getting played on Radio 2, not Radio 1, and it got in the top 75. At that time they would sometimes give you a



Virgin Records, Vernon Yard, circa 1974. The gang's all here, including Simon Draper (fifth from right in back row), Nik Powell (sprawled on floor, right) and Richard Branson (topless, again, back row, second from left).

break if you were in the top 75, but not top 40, and let you do *Top of the Pops*.

Going back to your earlier question, I wasn't a huge fan of the music Culture Club made, but boy did I like their success. [Second album] *Colour By Numbers* [1983] did about 20 million.

So what's the culture of the company at this time? Does it feel more like a proper record company now?

There was a very good spirit. I think we knew we were really good at that time. We had learned a lot. By 1983, our market share was way up there and we were selling records all over the world. There was a good spirit and we could sell ourselves pretty well.

How did Virgin change through the '80s, once you'd started having that really big success?

Well the really big change was in the mid-

80s when Richard decided to go public. To build up to that we did a bit of window dressing.

We looked at the story so far and thought, it's actually really hard work to get a band like The Human League to sell millions of records – and it involves a lot of luck. But if you sign Bryan Ferry, to get him to sell millions of albums from his current level, which is at about a million, that's not so difficult.

So we had a program to try and sign people at that level; artists where we thought we could make a lot of profit but without too much effort and without too much risk.

Signing The Cure was very much on that list. We thought we'd signed them. Then the manager [Chris Parry] went away to New Zealand, came back and said no. I didn't enjoy that.

The band kept themselves very distant. I went to see them in Berlin, and they were a

bit sort of giggly. I think maybe they were playing a game. Maybe they were playing us off against the existing company.

We had a very similar thing happen to us with Duran Duran in the mid '80s. I knew they weren't serious; they were playing a game with us. They were re-signing with EMI, and they just wanted to have somebody dangerous in the background. I didn't like them at all anyway, so I really didn't care!

You did sign Bryan Ferry though, what was he like?

I was a big fan of Roxy Music but Bryan was rather hard work. He had got so used to being mollycoddled by his previous record company, EG. I also signed Pete Townshend at about that time. We put out his Iron Man album and that was awe-inspiring for me as I had been a fan since 1965. But it was then quite difficult when I had to turn down his next offering.

What did you think of Richard's decision to go public?

I had mixed feelings about it, because what had happened was that Virgin was now Virgin America, Virgin France, Virgin Germany, Virgin Italy, Virgin Australia, Virgin New Zealand, and all these companies had their own agendas. We also had a significant affiliated label programme, with things like 10 Records, Siren Records, etc.

It was a deliberate decision, we wanted more and more product – and we ended up being flooded with it. I just wasn't really enjoying it that much.

The big difference though, between myself and some of the other people you've spoken to [as part of this series], apart from Chris Blackwell, is that I had shares in Virgin from 1972 – 20% in Virgin Records and music publishing.

And then I swapped that for 15% of the whole group in the early '80s. And it's a selfish thing, but I knew that the best possible result for me would be as a public company. And yes, when we went public my shares were worth a great deal. Then we went private again, and then we sold. So going public was the beginning of the end – for me.

I couldn't contemplate not being Virgin; Virgin was something I created. It was quite tough; I came to terms with it, but it was tough.

When we went private again in 1989, there was a lot of debt, because Richard had invested in a lot of things, supposedly big assets, but we found they weren't worth much, actually.

To fund going private we ended up selling 25% of Virgin Music to Fujisankei, in Japan. Even that didn't completely solve the problem – and, of course, they wanted a payout. So, in the end, selling the music company in '92 was to get Richard off the hook.

I could have chosen to stay, but I elected to sell my shares in the airline to Richard, at a very bad price [laughs].

Ken [Berry] was carrying on running the whole thing and he worked out a deal that he knew I wanted, which was to be a kind

of consultant on a very handsome annual salary.

When did you know you were going to be sold to EMI – the most 'establishment' name in the history of British music?

Well I was involved every step, as part of the board, and Richard wouldn't have done it without my agreement. I remember he called up Peter Gabriel, who was telling him not to do it. Then he was thinking about doing a deal where he would take EMI stock and stay in the business. But other people said, No, get out of it completely – which was the right advice.

Certainly I didn't want any stock. By then I was absolutely happy about realising my stake. There was no reason for me to stay at Virgin, I was uncomfortable there. Because suddenly, Ken was my oldest and one of my best friends, and here I was, in the way, really. There were a lot of people who Richard and

“I did feel like we shafted a few people, because they had believed in us.”

I had hired who Ken didn't really need, and they were out quite quickly.

What do you remember about the day you announced the sale internally?

We called a meeting for everyone and Richard couldn't say anything, he was quite upset. Ken was his normal phlegmatic self. I said something like, I'm really upset about this, but I don't expect you to feel sorry for me, because I'm really rather rich. And that got ascribed to Ken!

I did feel like we'd shafted a few people, because they had believed in us. There were some people who had been there a long time and expected to get their reward, and they didn't. I gave a few people money personally.

Was there huge sadness walking away from something you'd spent nearly 20 years building and defining?

Yes, of course. Most of my friends were working or had worked at Virgin. There were a lot of romances, a lot of marriages and an endless amount of very deep friendships.

On the upside, I really I enjoyed being able to listen to music for fun again; not making a judgment as to whether it's going to be successful or not. And the joy of not having to go to gigs! It's become pathological. My family are all into music and they love going to concerts, but I just can't, because I had to go to so many when I didn't want to!

How long did that consultancy period last?

Six months. The crux came when Jim Fifield asked me to attend an A&R meeting in New York with all the EMI people. I thought, Do I really want to do this? And the answer was no. So, I went to Ken and said, I'm leaving, that's it. And to be honest I think they had only really wanted me to stay on so there weren't big headlines in the financial press, and by this time the dust had settled so it could be done quietly.

Were you tempted by another big gig in the music industry?

No. Been there, done that. I wanted to do something else; I wanted a new life.

Was there also an element of you not wanting to work for a company that wasn't Virgin?

Well, yes, I always said I wouldn't, and I didn't. Ken said the same, and he didn't – he went into EMI, but when that finished he had no interest in going anywhere else.

Were you offered other jobs while you were at Virgin or were you seen as too much part of the family?

Maurice Oberstein made some overtures when he was at CBS. And the funny story is when Dick Asher was at Phonogram in New York, this was in the '80s, before we had our own company over there, Richard and I would fly over there with a pile of tapes, go and see the record companies and license our product.

I also sometimes did them with Jeremy Lascelles, sometimes on my own. One time, I go to Phonogram, who I didn't really have much interest in or respect for. But I did the pitch, played the music, and just as I was finishing up he asked me to stay behind and he offered me a job. I was so taken aback, I just said, Dick, I don't think you can afford me, my shares in Virgin are worth £25m!

How much interest did you take in Virgin as part of EMI after you left?

None whatsoever. I still saw Ken and a few people, and they would be raving about the new Simple Minds album, or George Michael's record, or Nine Inch Nails, or Lenny Kravitz, and the truth is I didn't like much of it. We'd loved Simple Minds, but I didn't like them when they tried to emulate U2. I was back to listening to jazz by then.

Would you have any idea who's on Virgin EMI now?

No

And you don't particularly care?

I don't I'm afraid, no [laughs].

What was the high point of your time at Virgin?

There were many. Tubular Bells was obviously very important to the establishment and growth of the label. When people ask which acts were most enjoyable to work with, XTC stand out, Peter Gabriel also, who remains a good friend.

The whole Human League cycle was great, dealing with Bob Last, the manager, and because I saw everything, going from this avant-garde band, very hardcore and unusual, moving into mainstream pop but still making great records; listening to Dare as it was being made, that was incredibly satisfying.

I also enjoyed working with a number of other managers: Andy Ferguson, (Fergal Sharkey and That Petrol Emotion), Bruce Findlay, (Simple Minds), Rob Warr (Scritti Politti), Richard Ogden, (The Motors), Tony Smith (Phil Collins, Genesis) and Steve O'Rourke (Pink Floyd and The Explorers).



The cover of The Ruts' debut album takes a Pepperesque approach with an image featuring not only some heroes and contemporaries (including Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, John Lydon, Captain Sensible, Patrick Moore and Jimi Hendrix), but also a few selected individuals who had played a part in their success, including John Peel (seated, far left) and Simon Draper (leaning against mantelpiece, left)

And what was the low point?

You know, to be honest with you, apart from time to time having to fire close friends, I don't think there were that many low points. I really enjoyed the whole thing; it was like a dream. I mean some people in the '70s got a chance to start their own label. I got a chance to start my own label with some real muscle behind it. We weren't folding the sleeves sat on the floor of someone's flat.

Most difficult artist to work with?

Scott Walker.

Care to elaborate?

He was just a nightmare to deal with;

he's a very pretentious guy. He wouldn't let anyone hear the vocals on Climate of Hunter [1984], not even the engineer or the producer. He hired a theatre in Islington to rehearse the vocals separately, so no one heard the melody lines; as it turned out there weren't any, really.

What was the most important lesson you learned and would pass on?

I trusted my own taste and my own judgment; I believed in that philosophy from start to finish. You know, if you like it, then some other people are going to like it, for sure. If I had started to second-guess the public, I wouldn't have made good decisions.

'He's a class act'

Dave Betteridge, co-head of Island Records with Chris Blackwell in the '60s and '70s, reflects on the qualities that helped Simon Draper build a label influenced by Island but with a personality all its own.



I was the Managing Director of Island Records and we used to supply Richard Branson with records which he sold through his student newspaper [the imaginatively

titled, *Student*, launched 1968] and subsequently for his mail order outfit and his shops.

Then, one day, Richard rang me and said, We're starting a record label. In those days, Island had its own distribution arm, so I went round to see him to discuss handling their records. He played me Tubular Bells, which I thought was a load of shit – which says something about my judgement – and that's when I met Simon.

The thing about Simon is, he really was the ears of Virgin all along. Richard will quite happily admit he hasn't got a pair of ears. He's a great supporter of his people, but he didn't really know the music side of things at all, where Simon did.

So we started distributing Virgin. Tubular Bells did reasonably well, then when it was in the film [*The Exorcist*, 1973], it really broke and set Virgin on the way.

I got to know Simon very well during that time. We definitely recognised Virgin, and people like Simon and Ken Berry, as kindred spirits, along with Chrysalis. And of them all, Simon was the man, completely.

After 15 years, I left Island and went to CBS for three years as Managing Director, then started my own label at RCA. At that point Richard approached me to ask if I'd like to start my own label at Virgin – and I said yes.



Dave Betteridge and Richard Branson, 1984

“Simon was calm and collected in every circumstance. Everything was always very considered, he was a solid citizen.”

I started Siren Records through a deal where they invested the money in it and we repaid it through sales, standard stuff. They were into us for about three million pounds at one point, but they held their nerve, stood by us, and we broke through, thankfully, with bands like T'Pau and Cutting Crew.

I reported to Simon through that period and got to know him even

better. I grew to respect him, found him very straightforward and down to earth; he always said it as it was.

He was calm and collected under every circumstance. Everything was always very considered, he was a solid citizen.

And perhaps most importantly, you could trust him completely – and you can't say that about many people in the music business. He's a class act.

‘THE CONFIGURATION OF THE GLOBAL MUSIC BUSINESS IS RE-ADJUSTING BEFORE OUR EYES’

Beggars Music Chairman Andy Heath has seen it all in music publishing during a career which has spanned over half a century. Now, he’s leading IMPEL into the future...

Having entered the trade at the tender age of 19, working for none other than the notorious Morris Levy, Andy Heath’s career began in the ruthless music business of the 1960s.

As General Manager of Planetary Nom Music – a division of Levy’s Roulette Records – Heath admits that he had no idea what he was doing, but quickly became uncomfortable with some of the company he was forced to keep.

Particularly during trips to the States, he realised that far too much of the business was tainted by the underworld – and, in a lot of cases, music executives and gangsters were one and the same.

He jumped ship to join the Robert Stigwood Organisation in 1969 and, in a role that would probably be termed ‘publishing A&R’ today, began to develop the skills that would serve him for the rest of his career, working with now iconic acts such as Cream and the Bee Gees.

In 1971, Billy Gaff and a number of his RSO colleagues split to form Gaff Management, and Heath was tapped up to handle the company’s publishing business. With names like Rod Stewart, Rory Gallagher and Status Quo on its books, Gaff saw undeniable success.

“We had more hits than any other management company,” remembers Heath. “We made tonnes of money but we spent more than we made!”

“Back then, the length of your limo was a big deal. If someone flew first class, it was a case of, ‘Ok, we’ll fly Concorde’. It was all unbelievable fun. We had an office over The Marquee in London and, to be honest, I don’t know how we survived – not only financially but physically. I suppose, sadly, not all of us did survive.”

Deciding to go it alone in the late ‘70s, Heath founded Andy Heath Music and, in 1978, began to administer the publishing



interests connected to Martin Mills and Nick Austin’s newly formed Beggars Banquet record company.

Today, Heath is a Director of Beggars Group and Chairman of Beggars Music, having handed over the role of MD to Amy Morgan in February this year.

Yet Heath’s concerns as a music industry exec have frequently stretched beyond any one company for some time now. He has served on the Council of the Music Publishers Association since 1989, spent nearly 20 years on the Boards of PRS and MCPS, and was one of the driving forces

in the foundation of UK Music in 2008, for which he currently acts as Chairman.

Now, Heath is part of a new project aimed at serving the wider independent publishing community as much as anything else. At the start of 2018, it was announced that IMPEL, which represents the digital rights of indie publishers in multiple ex-US territories, would leave the MPA and become a new, fully autonomous organisation. Self-funded by a handful of founder members – including Beggars Music, Bucks Music Group, Reservoir Music, Kassner Music and Truelove Music



Beggars Music client Glass Animals

– the organisation already has a queue of companies waiting to join its ranks.

While the new IMPEL management team is mindful of growing the operation slowly and carefully, Heath tells MBUK that the already significant amount of repertoire that the new organisation represents looks like it could double annually for the next five years at least. In time, Heath is confident that IMPEL will reach the same level of representation as has been achieved by its equivalent in the label world, Merlin.

How did the opportunity to evolve IMPEL independently of the MPA come about?

It goes back to before the original IMPEL in 2010. Merlin had recently been formed and there was a group of us that thought we should do something similar – an independent organisation that would look after the rights of indie publishers. However, the instinct to work within a

society was too strong for most people to think about going it alone completely. It was decided by the majority that it should be part of the whole MCPS/PRS structure and, to be fair, they helped fund it.

Roll forward six or seven years and the, in my view, predictable separate between MCPS and PRS occurred, and it became

“A few of us decided that there was no other option but to fund it ourselves.”

pretty apparent to a lot of indie publishers that IMPEL needed to be independent of societies. It’s not that societies are bad, it’s just that, while they’re needed in terms of their processing capabilities and their international architecture, they’re not

needed in terms of governance, strategic licensing and so forth. There is also no doubt that, in order to be completely transparent, IMPEL will have to be independent of society control.

Last year, one or two of the key players approached me asking if I would get involved and be a spokesperson for the organisation.

Then we actually had to do it. A few of us sat down and decided that there was no other option but to fund it ourselves. If we went to any other source of revenue, even conventional lenders, it would compromise the independence of the organisation, which simply cannot happen.

There were enough of us who agreed to provide initial funds to get the show on the road – it wasn’t a fortune but it wasn’t insignificant.

You’ve inked a deal with SACEM...

We had to find a partner to work with

Beggars Music client
Sampha



because we were an organisation with finite resources. We had discussions with pretty much all the obvious players capable of handling the processing, copyright and royalty issues on our behalf – in other words, a society acting as a service company.

It was quickly apparent that SACEM was the most developed in its thinking when it comes to providing services for organisations outside of its own realm.

We were able to reach an agreement that allowed IMPEL to become self-funded on an ongoing basis, and we felt that SACEM was very efficient in its collective distribution and that its numbers were very impressive.

Having gotten to the position where we could actually function, we needed to give notice to the existing IMPEL [company] – the MCPS organisation – so that our rights could come out of that.

There was an initial bunch of around 18 members including the founders. We gave

our notice early this year and, as of July 1 2018, those rights have been administered by the new IMPEL, managed by SACEM.

We're only a few months into the process, which in publishing is a very short amount of time, but the ingestion process and liaison with SACEM is going well. I know, for instance, that my own administration staff at Beggars Music are very happy.

I think we're at the stage of proving the model, and it's very exciting to see the model prove itself on a daily basis. There's a substantial queue of significant independent publishers that have been observing to see if this will work.

I don't want the organisation to run before it can walk. It would be a huge mistake for us to go around the world hoovering up members until it is confirmed that everything works silky smooth.

Nothing is more frustrating to a music publisher than mistakes and, over the past four or five years, we've experienced too many mistakes in too many parts of

the world. Our message with this is: let's get it right.

When we talk about the revenue that's coming from DSP to songwriters and publishers, it's often mentioned in comparison to record labels. Do you think that publishers and songwriters are still thought of as secondary in those terms? Do you think they're still not getting the same level of attention as their recording counterparts?

Yes, I do and it hasn't served the publishing community well. I think that we can definitely say that the digital pie was not shared out properly or fairly in terms of rights. Obviously, I'm an officer of a record company as well and there are two sides to this argument. There's no question that record companies spend more in promoting music and have a bigger infrastructure but, even given those caveats, I think the balance between the two sides wasn't correct and still isn't correct. But it's improving.

I think, even now, if you talk to the major DSPs, their primary concern is getting the labels done and they assume publishers will fit in. I'm sure DSPs would deny it, but that's my observation and you simply can't make that assumption anymore. If you look around today, there have been several big records that have been pretty much self-released but they aren't self-published.

It has been very pleasing to find that the DSPs have welcomed the opportunity to not only deal directly with publishers but also to explore wider commercial opportunities that will be beneficial to all stakeholders going forward. Overall, we've been very pleased with how openly the big online players have accepted our emergence and establishment.

When IMPEL left the MPA, there were a number of high-profile publishers that didn't make the jump with you.

How do you feel about that?

We have got IMPEL repertoire on something like 150 of the Top 200 biggest records of the last year. We might not have a big piece in each case, but it is a piece nonetheless that needs a license. So, we have an opportunity to compete here.

In some cases, potential members have the very understandable position of, 'Let's see how this develops.' However, I think some of those have been shocked at how quickly IMPEL has become a player in this market. I am very confident that most of the big indies will affiliate with IMPEL in the near future. We're on track to double the size of our repertoire and I think that could happen on an annual basis for the next five years.

Let's talk a bit about you and your journey. What was your musical experience growing up and when did you realise it could be a career?

My dad was a guitar player and a music publisher, so I grew up with it.

I left school in 1964 and, let me tell you, if you were 17 in 1964 and you *weren't* attracted to the music business, there was something wrong.

It was an astonishing environment. I

started at a company called Strike Records but I hardly had a role, I was basically just a boy standing around looking for something to do. My first proper job really was running Planetary Nom for Morris Levy, who was a gangster, although I didn't know it. He made me manager of the London company and I was renting offices at 19-years-old. It's hard to believe now.

I went to the US in 1966 to see how they were doing it and it was like going to the moon. It was so much more cavalier, so much more ruthless, so much more thrilling in some ways. The music was probably more thrilling in the UK, but everything else was more so in the US – how to tour acts, how to sell records... America was miles ahead. Of course, all the gig money was cash, which meant very bad people got involved and I tried to avoid them when I could. It was a year or two

“Over the past five years, we've witnessed too many mistakes in too many markets.”

before I realised that what was going on wasn't very nice, actually, so I left and went to The Robert Stigwood Organisation, which was a purely publishing role.

That was a more professional set-up, it's safe to assume?

Well, yes but that wasn't a very high bar to jump over!

The Stigwood period was bonkers, with the likes of Cream, Bee Gees, John Mayall... Mama Cass would come around, it was great. I was still only 21 at that point.

I was what was then called Professional Manager, which I guess today would be called A&R. It was my job to go and get cuts and look for talent but, frankly, when there was so much talent in the building, you didn't need to go and look for it. When you've got Cream and Bee Gees on your books, that's a lot of material.

I went out and got people covers, that was what a publisher did in the '60s. Stigwood

had a TV company, a management company and an agency as well, which made it a very interesting place to be.

Then a guy who had been associated with Stigwood called Billy Gaff formed a management company called Gaff Management and started off with The Faces, a couple of jazz bands and a few others. They partnered up with a guy that brought Rory Gallagher on board and they decided they needed someone to run publishing. I went in as a junior partner and ended up as MD of the whole organisation. We had more hits than any other management company, we made tonnes of money but we spent more than we made! We probably flew on Concorde too often.

What were the publishing contracts like back then?

Brilliant. Life of copyright, 50/50. No, they were awful! They were inequitable and the Schroeder/Macaulay case [Macaulay v Schroeder Music Publishing Co Ltd (1974)] – which I actually helped Tony Macaulay gather evidence for – was an absolute breakthrough for songwriters. Publishers had

been double dipping and that case was a threshold moment because, from then on, you couldn't risk doing a deal without the writer having decent legal representation. The deals got progressively better. The historical animosity that has existed between some composer organisations and some publisher organisations was very real and not unwarranted for a fair period of time. But times did change and I think for the last 25 years publishing companies have been very conscious of protecting the writer or composer and optimising their revenues. At the same time, of course, to continue to invest in new talent and to run a business, there has to be a margin!

You set up your own company, Andrew Heath Music, in the late '70s.

Yeah, I was working out of Carnaby Street in partnership with a guy called Ronnie Bond. We had a jingle business together, and I also published Chaz Jankel.



I had a writer called John Spencer – not *the* Jon Spencer – and his manager said to me one day, ‘I need to take you to meet these two guys in Earls Court who I think are doing something really interesting.’

Those two guys were Martin Mills and Nick Austin, who had a record shop. I met them and they were in the process of launching this label called Beggars Banquet. They had a very good lawyer called James Wyllie, who still represents Martin today and is a good friend of mine. He had advised them to form a publishing company and I managed it.

There had been an initial wave of really great independent record companies like Island, A&M, Chrysalis and the rest. But, at the time, around the late ‘70s, there was a new wave with Stiff Records and Beggars Banque leading the charge – kind of post-punk, alternative labels. It was very exciting.

The first song on BEG 1 is The Lurkers and the publisher is Beggars Banquet

Music/Andrew Heath Music.

I managed their company for a commission for a while and it was all going very well. I said to them, ‘Look, this is ridiculous. You shouldn’t be paying me to do this, you just need to do it yourselves. It’s not difficult. Hire somebody who can do copyright royalties and off you go.’ And they did.

“From a standing start and modest investment, we’ve done the whole thing through A&R.”

However, after a couple of years, Nick gave me a call and said, ‘We’re not very good at this, it’s not going well. We’re very happy running a record company but we don’t have the instinct to run a publishing company. Can we do something with you again?’

We decided this time that we’d go into

partnership on the publishing. That’s how it stayed until 2000 when we sold it.

What prompted that sale to PolyGram, and the revival of Beggars Music in 2010?

With the emergence of new media, it seemed completely obvious to both me and Martin that Beggars needed to be a part of that. We couldn’t just watch it, we needed to be on the inside, otherwise we were going to lose our place in terms of knowledge, deal-making expertise and so on. Because we felt that the internet was this big licensing cobweb, it was closer to publishing than records, so I dealt with it.

We did make some investments, but I got to the point where I thought, ‘I can’t actually carry on doing this stuff and running the publishing at the same time.’

We decided to sell the publishing business. We didn’t sell everything, we sold Momentum, which was the main catalogue. PolyGram bought it and ultimately ended up at Universal.



Heath speaking at the IMPEL AGM in London this October. Left: Ed Sheeran and Camila Cabello, who have both recorded repertoire owned by IMPEL member publishers

We kept our infrastructure, we didn’t actually stop being a music publisher, but we were just ticking over on some very tiny catalogues.

Then, in 2005, Matador – one of Beggars’ labels in the US – had an associate company that had been managed by a major publisher over the years and it had all gotten into a bit of a mess. They asked us if we could sort it out and so we formed Mattitude as a publishing partnership with Matador.

We didn’t get fully back into the swing of it all until Martin, Richard Russell and I were discussing The XX. It became fairly obvious that the smart thing to have done [after they signed to Young Turks for records] would be to publish them.

The opportunity had gone by that point, but we decided to start a publishing company again because things had changed: the digital revolution had become more mature and the imperative to be inside digital initiatives was less because it was far more in the open by that point,

15 years later. Plus, the whole publishing environment was more creative. We got back into it and it’s been great.

I think one of the reasons it’s been going so well is because we hired Amy Morgan to be Head of Creative and she went on to become CEO and has been amazing. She’s moving on at the end of the year to focus on management. They’ll be big shoes to fill, but we’re in a very strong position and have a great team.

From a standing start and very modest investment, we’ve done the whole thing through A&R. We’ve only signed new writers. We haven’t signed established songwriters or gone out there with massive deals, but we’re a player. I think people want to be with us, which is nice.

We had two Mercury nominations last year, as well as an Oscar nomination. We won an Ivor Novello this year, Glass Animals are over a million albums, Sampha’s doing great. Getting those kinds of results after signing only new talent over seven or eight years is really good.

How is the music industry evolving?

I think the configuration of the global business is re-adjusting before our eyes. You’ve got label services and the equivalent of publishing services – for the administration side – plus lots of new entrants, and it seems to me that a lot of big bands are not keen to sign new record deals at the moment. The record industry has to find ways of attracting new talent. I think they’re going to have to be very creative, and it’s the same for publishers, frankly.

Where do you see the music business in the next 10-15 years?

I don’t know, but I think it’s going to a good place. I think the expertise in the industry and the consciousness of the responsibility to monetise cultural IP is now at a very high level. We are all – managers, publishers, labels – far better at respecting musical rights and monetising them properly, and I think the revenue from the digital space will continue to grow at a very decent pace.

LIES, DAMNED LIES... AND ROYALTY ACCOUNTING

Cliff Fluet explores one of the music industry's biggest recent talking points – Taylor Swift, and key elements of her new deal with Universal...

In response to Taylor Swift's recent efforts to have her fellow Universal artists paid an unconfirmed share of the record giant's equity windfall from Spotify's listing, there was plenty of tortured prose from reporters trying to understand the notion of 'recoupment' and 'unrecouped balances'.

Some called it an "unpaid debt" (spoiler: it isn't) or a demonstration of how unprofitable most artists are (another spoiler: it often has little to do with profit). In the main, it highlighted how few, both in and outside the industry, really understand the nuances of the wonderful world of label accounting.

A few years ago, a client of mine who was (and is) a highly-successful self-made YouTube star with millions of followers said he was interested in setting up a record label. I said that before he did, I'd need to give him a crash course in how artist contracts work, and how the economics were calculated.

In a matter of minutes after our first session he said, "So let me get this straight. As well as my personal advance, all of the recording costs, at least half of the marketing and video costs and the producer advances are debited from my account – not from the label's share.

"I don't get paid any royalties until that balance recoups, yet I don't recoup against revenues or profits; I recoup against my royalties, which are paid minus featured artist and producer royalties, other deductions and retailer discounts.

"Plus, the royalty base price isn't constant like it was before. I don't have to pay that balance back but even if I do recoup or they make a massive profit, I don't get any ownership.

"On YouTube I own all my videos and receive 60% of revenues. This is some gangster shit."

Obviously, I made it clear that any imputation of criminal practice and/or sharp practice was not only potentially defamatory (*coughs*) but that the label was taking the upfront risk



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"A client of mine once said to me, This is some gangster shit."
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without any guarantee of success and that both sides were sufficiently lawyered up to negotiate and agree those terms. However, since that meeting I was struck by the fact that so few artists ever said what my client said to me when I was on the label side of the desk.

My early training in the City as a property lawyer, focused on turnover leases, was excellent preparation for life in label business affairs when I started in the mid-'90s.

Where most artist representatives remained focused on the headline royalty rate and, of course, the advances, the real magic was in the almost impenetrable royalty schedules – where small shifts in deductions, accounting dates or liquidation periods could have an even greater impact for the artist's unrecouped balance.

I also learned that recoupment had nothing to do with whether an artist was profitable or not. As long as an artist was unrecouped, no royalties were payable, so income could stay safely in the label's bank account.

A growing artist would inevitably need further advertising, tour support or clothing contributions, and the label would be happy to



Taylor Swift

cover those costs – on the basis that they were recoupable and the unrecouped balance would increase, whilst the label was still making a healthy margin on CD sales. (Those working at labels could point out that a recouped artist was not only due the full extent of their royalties, but they could actually trigger escalated royalty rates, or even an increased advance calculated in reference to pipeline royalties. They might, in the case of US producers, also incur further payouts from the label, given that producers tended not to be paid any royalties until the artist's account was fully recouped.)

To be fair, there was little to no competition or room for negotiation in those days at major labels, especially for new artists who needed

access to radio and record stores, which only the labels could deliver.

Some smaller labels still paid artists on a 'net profits' or 'net revenue' deal. But these independents would need to pay higher distribution fees through a third party, receive a royalty themselves through foreign affiliates and didn't have the economies of scale to make above-the-line advertising as efficient as the majors. This meant that these indie deals could end up even more opaque and less profitable than major label contracts.

So, all these years on, why am I banging on about ancient history when we live in a world of streaming and digital income? Because things are changing so rapidly that more needs to be

done in order to ensure there's clarity and equity in accounting to artists. Whilst the labels had an awful time in the transition from CDs, through piracy to mass legalised streaming between 2005 and 2015, the major record companies are now earning millions of pounds per day in revenues and there's an important choice to be made.

Some of the elements of those past contracts still live on even though they were clearly meant for a world of CDs and cassettes, not streaming.

In those old contracts, any income that was received as a fee, rather than royalties on physical product, such as synch income, was split with the artists on a 50/50 basis.

Now, many artists are receiving a share of streaming comparable to the royalty paid on a physical product, whereas streaming payouts from the likes of Spotify are calculated in a wholly different way, based upon a share of all pooled revenues, not each stream.

Many of the audio-visual platforms are even more opaque as to how they share income such as advertising revenues; often, without any verification or right of audit, the label has a significant challenge to account to artists in a way that engenders trust.

As my Social Influencer client observed, record company deals haven't compared favourably to direct YouTube deals, and artists (or, in Glassnote's case, labels) are increasingly tempted by the likes of Kobalt's AWAL or by signing direct to distributors such as FUGA.

These are companies that don't acquire rights but offer more open and flexible deals, sharing in net revenues and charging fees for optional services.

Spotify has been reported to have been paying management companies advances against Spotify revenues for artists signing direct but, unlike a label, Spotify does not demand any control, restriction or claim over third party distribution and/or revenues.

Whilst they continually reassure the majors that they have no desire to acquire rights or demand an exclusive relationship (like a label would), Spotify For Artists will be highly compelling for new acts wanting access to the platform's 180m+ listeners plus a 50% royalty rate, direct accounting, no recoupment and access to the same tools as labels.

Right now, the only players paying significant advances to new talent are record companies.

Yet new players are coming to the market



Chicago rapper NoName, who has been directly distributing her music via Spotify For Artists

“Spotify For Artists is highly compelling for new acts.”

that will do the same, while offering clients unprecedented clarity in accounting and a deal that feels more like a partnership than “an offer they can't refuse”.

To be clear, I am pleased that the major labels and Merlin have made excellent returns from their Spotify (and other) equity interests, and I'm delighted they've agreed to share some of the Spotify net receipts with artists.

However, as majestic a PR coup it is for Ms. Swift and the announcement of her new deal, you can probably tell I'm personally not so fussed as to whether or not these Spotify profits should be paid subject to recoupment or not.

As ever when it comes to music industry accounting, the devil is in the detail: the exact share of the sums that are being paid, how this is calculated across the roster and how this compares to the treatment of other equity windfalls or non-royalty-bearing income – such as legal settlements and digital breakage – might feel drab subject matter, but it is really important.

Without more clarity, openness and generosity in future, artists may be tempted to ‘shake off’ their label deals in exchange for greater control, ownership and transparency.



‘AS WE ACQUIRE AND WE PARTNER, WE CONTINUE TO BOLSTER SENTRIC AS A BUSINESS’

For years, Sentric Music was known as ‘the indie publisher up north that works with bands who sound like other bands’. A huge amount has changed since then – including the funds and appetite the company has to buy up impressive, evergreen copyrights...

In 2016, Liverpool-based indie publisher Sentric Music was celebrating its 10th anniversary. Chatting with *MBW*, founder Chris Meehan reminisced about how his company began as a university project – an experimental tech platform with a no-nonsense publishing model: a 28-day non-exclusive contract, an 80/20 royalty split, with writers keeping 100% of their copyright.

It's safe to say that the company has come a long way since then. After raising multiple millions in 2017 via venture capital funding from VGF, Sentric now represents more than a million works across offices in London, Hamburg, Amsterdam, New York and Los Angeles. This international infrastructure offers direct royalty collection in over 100 global territories.

In 2018, Sentric has made the bold move of sharing its technology with the world, launching RightsApp – a platform that allows rights-holders to manage their catalogue and collect

earnings worldwide from one centralised hub. Crucially, it's a white label platform meaning it can be integrated into other companies so that they can offer their clients Sentric tech under the banner of their own brand. TuneCore was named as first to take up the offer.

This year has also seen the company establish a greater presence in the US by inking a strategic partnership with Riptide Music Group that will see both companies share creative, sync, and administration and technology infrastructure on a global basis.

But Sentric's biggest signal of intent perhaps comes from two other recent deals: a quietly signed strategic partnership with IQ – an agreement that brings access to evergreen copyrights including Young Hearts Run Free, The Message and White Lines – plus the acquisition of a stake in Mark Lawrence's boutique electronic publisher Black Rock.

Sentric client
Nick Waterhouse

Sentric, then, has had a carefully considered but rapid growth spurt. And Meehan (pictured) says there's plenty more to come from what is now referred to as Sentric Music Group.

First thing's first, Sentric Music Group – what does it represent that 'Sentric Music' didn't previously?

Our first model was the core, direct to artist publishing service. While we're still hugely invested in that and excited by what we're doing there, we've become much more. SentricMusic.com is where artists and songwriters go to manage their publishing, but there's a whole other side to the business now that includes a technology arm and our B2B service where we look after labels, management companies, distributors, other publishers. The evolution into Sentric Music Group allows us to present ourselves on a business level as well as directly to artists.

We're now a truly international rights company with excellent technology and an excellent creative ethos. The premise of it is, we are well equipped and positioned to work with a wide range of propositions now – whether that's artists, catalogues or companies. And, under the right circumstances, we've invested directly into other businesses or done strategic partnerships to bring them into the Sentric stable.

When did you feel you were in a position to look at strategic partnerships or acquiring stakes in companies?

We started thinking about it in 2014 but it took us couple of years to figure out what was right for us. We'd become very good in certain areas and so we highlighted the opportunities and things that we could make a real difference with. That might be, for example, finding great songs and plugging them into our sync team, who would be able to provide opportunities for copyrights that have been around for a while but might have been under-served.

The other thought was, if we made a strategic acquisition of a company that included some infrastructure, what impact could we have on the rest of the business in terms of making more money in territories for existing clients and ones we haven't met yet? It was very much about strengthening the position that we'd already put ourselves in and adding great opportunities to both the business and catalogues that we work with.

What situation was Sentric in at that point, that made you feel confident enough to go out and broaden your horizons?

I think it was when [ex-Tommy Boy Music SVP] Martin Davies joined the company as Chairman. We'd been looking for someone who could take a view of the business from the outside looking in and identify what was doable. He reinvigorated us all, in a way. We'd been going for eight years at that point and he really helped us think about where we wanted to be in the next 10 years. It was that kind of mindset that turned these ideas into things that

we could actually achieve. Then Martin and our Creative Director Peter McCamley acted as matchmakers with companies that they knew of and that would work well with the way Sentric do things.

The first major move was to forge a partnership with IQ Music, which gave us access to a well-respected brand and a prestigious catalogue full of evergreen titles.

Pete had known IQ's founder Iqbal for more than 25 years. They'd worked closely together and Pete had used IQ as a royalty administrator for his P&P Songs venture. Similarly, Martin used IQ for Tommy Boy's publishing company.

Iqbal and his team moved into our London office and continued to work in administering the catalogue but they were able to benefit from Sentric's young, vibrant creative and sync teams.

That deal bore fruit really quickly: we've managed to land a lot of great syncs – not just for the big names but right across the back catalogue. That's very much a part of Sentric's approach to sync – not just focusing on the big songs but finding opportunities for works that wouldn't ordinarily get pitched.

Are you actively looking to bring bigger copyrights and catalogues under the Sentric Music Group banner?

I think we have the financial resources to do that now. I'm not saying we're necessarily in the mindset of acquiring lots of companies or catalogues, but we're certainly looking for opportunities.

We'll only do it when it's right for the company – we're not looking at a land grab by any stretch of the imagination. Nor are we looking for bidding wars.

It's also important that we build on our resources as we grow. Because we brought on some big-name copyrights, we needed someone who was a similarly big name with experience of working with those kinds of songs. We brought in Rosie Hill from Iagem as well as increasing the administration team by five people, making a number of new hires from big indie publishers so that the new copyrights got the level of service that they deserve. So, as we acquire and partner, we continue to fund and bolster Sentric as a business. I think that was most evident with the investment we made in Black Rock.

Which was your next big move – Mark Lawrence's boutique electronic publisher.

I'd known Mark Lawrence for a number of years when he was at PRS and he started Black Rock with the same sort of ethos as Sentric, which is that there's a lot of value that goes uncollected because people don't engage with publishing. Black Rock went from zero songs to 25,000 songs very quickly by working with writers and getting people paid for things that they never had done previously – live performances, neighbouring rights and so on.

We saw a two plus two equals ten opportunity again in that Black Rock's service level and ambition could massively increase if we helped resource it. We've invested, become a part owner and brought it into Sentric so that we could build proper creative around it.

Following that, we launched Sentric Electronic, which is a

Sentric client
Ms. Banks

bespoke publishing service for the electronic genre based on the same core model that Sentric started with – a rolling 28-day contract with ownership staying with the writer.

We want to make sure that everyone can engage with publishing and have the option to collect money that's been generated. Sentric's core model allows that because it's scalable – but we have to remember that all the reference points are different for electronic music when it comes to collections, compared to bands and singer/songwriters, for example, where Sentric has made its name. In order to make sure our relationship with the electronic genre works, we have to use the right language. Spotify may not be as big a driver as Beatport, for example. Having a brand like Black Rock as a part of Sentric, along with the expertise they bring, helps with that.

Does electronic music present its own problems as far as publishing is concerned?

Everything's different with electronic music. You look at someone like Ed Sheeran, all his work is under his name. In the electronic genre, you have a lot of different songwriters going out under different guises with a phenomenal output. They might be releasing three different tracks a week under three different pseudonyms. So I think publishing has been complicated in that world. You have to be able to understand the world to do the publishing. It's a different level of repertoire and a different level of work. But it's the same with any genre – grime is different to electronic, which is different to indie and we've got to make sure that we consider that.

What kind of role will Mark Lawrence play at Black Rock under Sentric?

Mark is a highly experienced executive and will bring that to Sentric, helping to improve our service and organisation generally. Kirsty Lawrence has joined the Sentric team as well. She's been running Black Rock operations on a day-to-day basis and will continue to do so.

Is it important to you that the brands and the teams behind them are maintained in these kinds of deals?

Yeah because companies like Black Rock have their own unique proposition. They're very boutique, focussed on a particular genre and have their own sets of values. It has its own identity and that means something to the people it serves. It's important to Sentric as a company as well.

Tell us about RightsApp. How was it conceived and what's its purpose?

RightsApp is a software and service platform that allows rights-holders to register works, track royalties, manage their entire catalogue, collect earnings worldwide and ultimately boost revenue from one centralised hub. Crucially though, it's a white

label offering, meaning people can use it however they see fit. It's not all about Sentric.

It all started with an Innovate UK grant and working with data scientists at Imperial College. We were looking at our data, what's valuable to people and how it could be consumed. The original Sentric technology that we built in 2008 has served us very well to date but we wanted to be able to pass the benefit on to other companies as they see fit. Our clients or partners might want to work with someone else, somewhere else in the world and we wanted to be able to provide the technology and flexibility that allows them to do whatever they want – whether they want their own data portal or to provide clients or catalogue owners with a branded portal, whatever it might be.

It was born out of thinking about where publishing might go and what people might need rather than putting Sentric at the centre of everything. If people use Sentric as well, brilliant. I'm a little bit biased and I'd say Sentric plus RightsApp is the best combination, but it's there for people to use as they wish.

You recently moved your business from IMPEL to AMRA. What prompted that?

We've got such a big catalogue, the data and how it's processed is really important. We wanted one partner for the world that thinks about data in the same way that we do. The AMRA technology works with ours and their outlook is similar to ours. Being at IMPEL was great, there was a real sense of community there, but we wanted to see if we could expand and go global with a single partner.

You've also made further in-roads in the US by partnering with Riptide Music.

The US has been a big focus for us, again, not in terms of any kind of catalogue grab but in terms of resource and infrastructure that will be helpful to our catalogue owners and writers. We've got some great partners over there already and announced a strategic partnership with Riptide Music Group in December. Sync has obviously been a hugely successful sector for us for a long time, but we've never had a team working on our combined catalogue in North America to the extent that we have in Europe.

We were looking for a company that could represent Sentric in the US and that we could work with to establish a global sync team. We met Riptide a few years ago and have been working towards a deal that will make that happen, as well as seeing Sentric service all of our combined clients together as one.

Riptide have received investment from Mark Ross - who is the son of Time Warner founder Steve Ross, and who co-founded GrandMaster Music with Sir George Martin – and with that they've really bolstered their creative team.

It made sense for us to come together to offer a truly global offering to our combined clients.

'It's not up to a sync team to decide whether or not a placement is good enough for an artist.'

Simon Pursehouse was one of the first employees at Sentric Music after it was founded, and has revolutionised the company's standing in the British sync market...

We landed our first sync deal back in 2010 (a German mobile phone advert, thanks for asking). Back then, Sentric's sync team consisted of, well, just me. In a relatively short amount of time, we've managed to build an astonishingly deep sync network. We became known for easy to clear, high quality emerging music. I'll always remember a music supervisor from the States asking me for 'something that sounds like Bastille, because we don't have the budget for the real thing'. We were able to sort him out, of course, but I also forwarded an email I'd sent him three years previously, pitching him one of Bastille's first releases – he could have had it for proverbial buttons back then.

By regularly proving that we were syncing 'the next big thing' before they blossomed, and being able to deliver on our guarantee that "we will be the easiest publisher you'll ever do business with," our reputation flourished and, thanks to the growth in other areas of our business, so did the clout of our copyrights.

When our contacts see our name associated with the million selling, genre defining, worldwide hits we represent today, they're confident that a deal can be done comfortably and without stress - just as it was nearly a decade ago when they cleared that ditty by an experimental industrial quartet from Wrexham.

A lot has changed for Sentric and its sync department in our short history – but the fundamentals of the wider sync business have remained the same.

Still today, when a music supervisor is asked to clear a track, the first thing they'll do is find out who looks after the publishing – and their reaction will sit somewhere on a scale of "Oh



FFS!" to "Oh lovely!" As always, they're keeping their fingers crossed for a partner who can deliver exciting music, quickly and easily. The nuts and bolts of sync may not have changed but the music industry as a whole has changed dramatically. Within that, sync has become a highly respected strand in the tangle of new revenue streams that artists and rights-holders now hope to draw from. It has made the leap from auxiliary income to a serious earner for many. Opportunities have widened and the competition has become fiercer. As a result, publishers have had to double their efforts to maintain those qualities that are at the core of every successful sync deal.

And, if you ask me, publishers now have an even greater duty to work more closely with their artists.

Sentric saw a 178% increase in sync fee income in 2017 year-on-year. In 2018, January to June, that figure was ahead by 97% again. As sync becomes a bigger part of our artists' business (and, let's not forget, their livelihoods), it's more important than ever to work hand in hand with them rather than put up invisible barriers between the business bods and the creatives.

I'm always astonished when I hear how often potential sync deals don't make it back to the respective songwriters or estates, purely because some music exec has decided that the bottom line wasn't worth their time.

It is not the role of a sync team to decide whether or not a placement is good enough for an artist. They should be fighting for deals that are attractive to begin with, but it's the client's right to make the final decision, with the benefit of our expert guidance.

There have been times in the past when I've presented a sync opportunity to an artist along with the advice that the fee on offer is too low, wholeheartedly expecting them to turn it down. Instead they've jumped at the deal because personal circumstances meant it was worth something to them at that particular time. Perhaps they needed some cash, perhaps they liked the brand, perhaps they just wanted as many people as possible to hear their music.

We recently took on our first evergreen copyright at Sentric and within 12 months we'd managed to generate a six-figure sync deal for it. Since then, more six figure deals have followed for more evergreen copyrights and we're working hard to ensure this is a trend which will continue. But what I'll always be most proud of is the amount of budding musicians we've turned into career artists through the power of that first sync pay-out.

If anything's changed in sync since 2010, it's that it's value to artists has grown significantly. As publishers, we have to work harder, faster and smarter to make the most of the opportunity, but we also have to involve artists more in the process.



'PUBLISHERS THAT WORK HARD AND CREATE VALUE CAN REALLY ENHANCE A SONGWRITER'S CAREER'

Warner/Chappell's Creative Director Music UK, Paul Smith, on the value of hard-working publishers, being inspired by Jon Platt and what he looks for in a songwriter...

"I hate the notion that people think publishers don't do anything," says Paul Smith when *MBUK* asks him what he'd like to change about the publishing industry.

"I always approached publishing like I would a manager, when I was managing writers and producers. You hustle and you work – because when you're a manager you don't get paid until the writer, artist or producer gets paid, so you have to go and hustle."

Smith cut his teeth as a manager at London-based producer, songwriter and artist management company 365 Artists, where he worked for 12 years.

Starting as an assistant to 365's Adam Clough, he left the award-winning agency in 2016 to join Warner/Chappell. His formative years at 365 saw him exposed to a number of people who would have a profound influence on his professional development.

Based at The Matrix Studios, he'd regularly cross paths with the likes of Sarah Stennett, Modest! Management's Harry Magee and

Richard Griffiths, and songwriters like Fraser T. Smith.

"Our office was next door to [Sarah Stennett's] office when she was at SSB [Solicitors]," says Smith. "I learned a lot from her; how she did business. I found it absolutely fascinating.

"It was amazing being where we were. Modest! was also there and it was also the first time I met Will Bloomfield. He is someone I work with now. There are a lot of people I had the opportunity to meet, being in the Matrix and working at 365, that I work with on a day-to-day basis now."

Smith joined Warner/Chappell as Senior International Creative Manager in 2016, replacing Jane Bell, who moved to the publisher's New York office. He was then promoted to the new role of Creative Director Music UK in February 2018.

Smith may have only been at the publisher for just over two years so far, but he's made a huge impact on its roster and the pop songwriting landscape during this tenure.



He works closely with songwriters such as the Grammy-award-winning Ed Sheeran collaborator Amy Wadge, and Miranda Cooper who is a key team member of the Kent-based pop hit squad Xenomania with producer Brian Higgins.

Not to mention MNEK, whose writing and production credits span almost the entirety of the contemporary pop fraternity, from Dua Lipa to Naughty Boy, Little Mix to Beyoncé and many more.

Smith's constant 'hustle' over the last two years has also seen him taking a seat at the signing table with key producers and songwriters whose credits can be found in the liner notes of records by some of today's biggest artists.

For example, there's the Roc Nation-managed Norwegian songwriter and producer Fred Ball, who produced the track Nice Guy feat. Jessie Reyez on Eminem's recent No.1 LP *Kamikaze*, plus Josh Record who has credits on songs recorded by Paloma Faith, DNCE and Anne Marie.

"I came in and went about trying to build a roster of songwriters," Smith explains. "That's what the last two years have been about, really. We try to be competitive, but it's more about doing the right thing for the songwriter.

"We don't sign lots and lots of songwriters. We sign things that we know we can do an amazing job on and that we know we can add value to."

MBUK recently spent some time speaking with Smith, where, as you'll read below, he discussed his career to date, shared his views on the publishing industry, and told us about his professional influences and his vision for Warner/Chappell...

You studied a degree in music management and marketing. Why did you decide to take that route into the music business?

I knew I wanted to do something creative. I didn't know you could get a job in the music industry. I just thought that it was



something that [other] people did. People that weren't me – people in London.

I'm from a little town in the north [of England] and I was so far removed from daily life up there. I found a degree combining what I wanted to do and what [my parents] wanted me to do.

Then you went to work at 365 Artists – was that straight after graduating?

In the beginning I worked there while I was at university as work experience. I looked through a lot of CDs and studied who worked on them. Then I searched on the internet and saw who they were represented by, or [their] publishing companies or management companies and sent a lot of emails one summer holiday to people [asking] for an internship.

Three people came back out of like maybe 50 or 60 emails. One of them was Adam Clough's business partner at the time, Rebecca [Duncan].

She said to me, 'I'm actually leaving the company, but I'll pass your CV on to Adam.' I started my third year at uni and I hadn't heard

anything for a few weeks, so I just called Adam up.

He was like, 'I never got your CV'. So I asked if I could send it in and he said, 'We don't really do that here. But yeah, send it in and I'll have a look.'

I sent it to him and he called me back the next day and said, 'Do you want to come in and just do a week's work experience? I can't pay you, but I'll give you your expenses'. I finished my degree and graduated and Adam was like, 'Do you want to come in three days a week as a part-time assistant?' So that's what got me in the door.

What was it like working at 365 Artists and more generally in the music industry at the time?

I felt like I'd actually achieved [something], even if even if it was a tiny foot in the door. I was a part-time assistant. I was in. That's

how it felt for me. It was an interesting time for the business because all I ever heard [about] from sitting in meetings was the [impact] that illegal downloading was having on the business.

It was a weird time to join the music industry. Obviously in the previous decade, the industry's biggest boom was in earning money from CDs. A lot of people who were in senior exec roles in the record labels and publishing companies had been used to massive earnings from CD sales.

When I came into the industry there were lots of people losing their jobs, because [companies] couldn't afford to keep them. Artists were getting dropped as well because they weren't given the development time they would have had five, six years before that.

What executives were you working with in those first few years that you looked up to?

One of my first meetings with publishing companies, once I was promoted from Assistant to Creative Manager at 365 Artists, was with Amber Davis, who was at EMI at the time and Lisa Cullington at BMG.

They took the time to let me keep coming in, bothering them with asking questions and playing music from our burgeoning songwriter roster. They offered me a lot of advice and collaborative opportunities.

I learnt a lot about how to A&R writing sessions and how to song plug from them. Adam was [also] a big part of that.

When I left we were business partners, so I'd gone from being his one-day a week work experience boy to being his business partner.

I will always be grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to do that and for us to build businesses together.

Darcus Beese was my first [label contact] when it came to pitching songwriters for projects; Darcus would always take the time to take a call or a meeting or whatever.

I will always be massively grateful to Darcus for that, because a lot of [label bosses] probably don't need to do that for a young person trying to make his way into being a manager.

What makes a good or a bad A&R person in your opinion?

There are lots of things you can do to behave like a bad A&R person. Being a good one is about having an understanding of who you're working with and, to some extent, it's understanding that you work for the artist.

Sometimes the idea of an A&R person is that the artist works for you and that isn't the reality. You're there to help facilitate what the artist is doing.

It's a similar role to what a manager does; sometimes certain managers think that they are in charge and actually the artist is in charge – you're there to facilitate and make sure that they're getting what they want out of their careers.

I feel the same with A&R. It's about presenting opportunities and helping the artist get to where they want to be.

A lot of mistakes can be made in A&R if you're not careful, the wrong mistakes can ruin artist's careers. So it's being mindful of that and being mindful of the fact that you're there to facilitate what they want.

It's a business and you're there to help guide them through the business side of it and make them successful.

What songwriters have you learned the most from?

There are some songwriters that I've not worked with but I've learnt from, like Pete Waterman.

The way that those guys were making music as the Hit Factory was really what switched me on to how music was created and the effect that [it] had on people.

Pete wasn't writing ballads, he was writing high-energy disco. He was making music that a lot of people laughed out of town until it became successful. So that was really fascinating for me growing up to witness. In terms of people I've worked with that have taught me things, Richard 'Biff' Stannard was a huge part of that.

From Pete Waterman's style of music came Biff Stannard's style of music and Biffco. They did the Spice Girls, Kylie Minogue. They did all this amazing pop music that I grew up listening to in my early teens and that was fascinating.

Are music publishers still finding artists earlier than record labels?

Yeah, publishers and the management companies. They have been doing that for years, but publishing companies are doing it more now. There's a lot more development before it gets to the record labels. Nine times out of ten, most of the development is already happening up to that point.

Publishing companies are creative houses. We're supposed to be creative, so why wouldn't we try find things, artists or bands that have shown amazing promise and potential that we can help develop in-house? That's what we've been doing here.

How did you come to join Warner/Chappell in 2016 and could you sum up the last couple of years?

I wasn't really quite sure what I was going to do [when I left 365 Artists].

In my head I was going to do management, publishing and A&R consultancy and then sent that email out to everyone that you do, that [says], 'I'm moving on, here are my details'.

A few people reached out to me about coming in for a chat, but not a lot of that was about work. It was about gossip as to why I was leaving. Warner/Chappell reached out to me, who I had known for years. We had a couple of writers signed here and they said, 'You know, we're looking for someone to come in.'

“Sometimes, the idea of an A&R person is that the songwriter works for you – that isn't the reality.”



Pictured: (left to right) Sonia Diwan (lawyer at Sound Advice), Paul Smith, Fred Ball, Mike Smith (MD, Warner/Chappell Music UK)

At that point, Mike Smith's job announcement hadn't been confirmed, but when it was, he reached out and said, 'Did you want to come in for a chat?'

So I had breakfast with him and he laid it out, telling me about the company, what his vision was for it and what [now-outgoing Warner/Chappell boss] Jon Platt's vision was for it.

I had never really heard Jon Platt's name before, so I went home and did a load of research and was blown away by his take on what music publishing should be. Not what it was, but what it should be and what he wanted to do and how he wanted to change it. Everything he said really appealed to me from a management point of view.

Sometimes publishers can be known for not doing anything and Jon's mantra was, 'We super-serve our songwriters.' It's something that's really stayed with all of us at Warner/Chappell. It's a big part of how we do our daily work here. We've put the songwriter first.

As a manager, sometimes you're just out on your own trying to hustle work for songwriters. When you've got an amazing publisher on board [that thinks like a manager], they can really enhance how that artist or songwriter's career moves forward.

Do you ever consider those things yourself, like how you would like to change the publishing industry?

I'd love to change the idea that publishers don't do anything. Publishers that work hard and create value can really enhance a

songwriter's career. Not everyone [does that] unfortunately, but you know, a lot of people do.

It's like yes, we get a salary, but ultimately if you think [like a manager], you'll work ten times harder.

That's how we've been breaking writers and bringing writers through that we signed as developmental writers, that are now coming through and having hit records in the UK and internationally.

If you take that mentality of being an independent person that hasn't got the safety net of the salary, it will drive you forward to hustle more.

You want to work hard and you want to deliver for them, because you're in a partnership with them. You're not just acquiring people, or songs, or songwriters or artists, you're actually working with them and that's the beauty of what we do as A&R people.

Tell us about the songwriting camps that you put on. How do they work?

There's a lot of strategy behind it in terms of the pairings and who to invite on the camps and what we should be focusing on.

We more recently [have] been digging into themes, because sometimes you organize the camps for particular projects and the songs don't always hit home.

So you have to try find homes for them outside of the original target.

It's really interesting from a psychological perspective to see how camps work, because traditionally writing camps were frowned upon. They were a dirty word fifteen years ago. No one wanted to be part of a writing camp.

And now, every other day someone's doing a writing camp for a project to finish the record, or to start a record or to look for the next single. They are a way of life now for songwriters

Why were they seen in a negative light?

Back in the day, you would have a top-line writer, a producer and an artist and the idea of having more than three people in a room was weird.

That's just changed over time. People used to feel as though they might be a bit of a waste of time because you could write loads and loads of songs at one camp in a week and only one song would be taken from it and that would be it.

Now people are more likely to go back and look at changing songs that they've written in sessions and try and work them.

Sessions also now rarely have less than three or four people, particularly in pop.

Nothing gets wasted anymore for want of a better phrase and that's why the mentality about writing camps has changed a lot.

You've been in an interesting position to witness changes both creatively and in the business that have come as a result of streaming. How has streaming affected your job?

It's been really interesting to watch.

From my point of view it doesn't affect the way I work in so far as still hustling and getting songs.

What it has done, is that it's had an effect on the way our songwriters are writing music, because they want to be able to put that song in the top five of a playlist on Spotify or Apple Music or whatever.

They want to be able to write a song that's going to get the highest place on that playlist in order to generate income.

Of course, the way the income is paid has had a knock-on effect on the way they earn money because people aren't buying downloads anymore. The way it's monetized for them has affected them a lot.

What do you think about the associated data that you now have access to and how do you feel about data-led A&R?

Data-led A&R is very important. It's a big part of the business now.

It doesn't really affect what I do. I'm working traditionally with non-performing songwriters. For me it's about working with songwriters who are writing music that switches me on.

That's how I find talent, be it people that are just coming up or more established writers having hits, then even better.

For my colleagues who work more across artists, the data-led A&R tools are really interesting.

They are fascinating to look at because you can map when someone comes into the market versus two months later and see



Amber Davis and Paul Smith at the A&R Awards in 2017

what the growth is.

It's a big part of how people are looking at projects now, but ultimately you still have to have the love and the passion for the project.

It's all well and good looking at stats and seeing growth on Instagram or Spotify or whatever, but ultimately if you can't find the love then you're going to have a difficult time making a record

When you hear a new songwriter's songs for the first time, how do you know that it's going to be worth working with them?

I've been asked this a lot. There's no real fixed answer, apart from I just have to believe in it. I have to think that there's something genius there that switches me on.

It could even be as little as a chorus or a hook or a clever lyric in a song. If that's one song, then great, if there's more than one, that's when I'm thinking about if I can work with that person. I have to be excited about what I'm listening to.

From a business point of view, it's about, how can we roll that out and make it successful and make it profitable.

Harking back to your earlier question about publishers getting involved with things early - that's why things don't go near record labels so much anymore until they have to.

We get to hear stuff very early and we get to develop things in house. When you get to hear something that's great and it switches you on, but it's nowhere near ready, then you can spend some time developing it and getting it right.

But the very simple answer to your question is - I just have to be able to believe in it.

DSCVR

ARTISTS TO WATCH 2019



**AJ MITCHELL AMA LOU AMBER MARK ANGÈLE ASTRID S BRANDON LAY EASY LIFE
ELLEY DUHÉ FLOHIO GREEICY HEX JADE BIRD KELVYN COLT LAUREN SANDERSON
MATT HUNTER NEBU KINIZA ROBINSON SAM FENDER SLOWTHAI YBN CREW**



▶▶▶
Watch now:
youtube.com/vevodscvr

vevo

VEVO'S ARTISTS TO WATCH 2019

Far, far away from the back of an envelope, Vevo has unveiled a global list of 20 artists that it believes will make a massive impact in 2019...

Vevo has unveiled its 2019 Artists To Watch List, the culmination of another year of its DSCVR programme, aimed at providing a global platform for emerging artists.

The initiative differs from the plethora of other 'tip lists' argues Vevo's Head of Content, Programming and Marketing, JP Evangelista, in two ways: "I believe that Vevo's ATW brings a unique visual component to an artist's marketing campaign. It is a 'proof of talent' platform, it allows a sizeable global audience to see artists perform and impress.

"Also, what's really important is that we see DSCVR and ATW as starting points on a long-term relationship with these artists. We want to develop partnerships with all these artists and their teams, and we want to be with them every step of the way towards hopefully great things."

Carl Young, Senior Manager, Music & Talent, offers an insight into the A&R process that generates the list.

"This is the starting point for a long-term relationship with these artists."

"We received applications from over 400 artists and we gave ourselves two weeks to get that down to 20. It's an intense process, but it's super important to us that we do it thoroughly and, now more than ever, that we ensure it is a diverse and representative line-up, in terms of where acts come from and in terms of which genres are covered. We're definitely not blinkered by major territories of the most popular genres.

"The result is a list that not only goes across all genres and draws from around the world, but also has a good representation of artists signed to majors, artists signed to independents and artists that are unsigned and doing their own thing."

He also stresses that whilst the list is one based on musical merit, other factors do come

into play when deciding which artists make the cut at this particular time. "We work closely with management and label teams, looking at what's in place for the coming year, and how we can play a part in that, help amplify what they're doing. The goal is to highlight artists who are not only going to make great music in 2019, but also make a real impact."

David McTiernan, Director of Music & Talent, adds: "I run the DSCVR process year-round, with ATW as a sort of big brother project, and what we're really proud of is not just how they represent and reflect the wider artistic community right now, they actually provide practical support and a unique platform; we want to partner with these artists, with their managers and with their labels.

"We're not looking to attract views, we want to help build careers for artists we, as a company, really believe in."

He also stresses that it's absolutely not Game Over for the 400+ artists who didn't make

the list. "Absolutely not, there can be a many reasons why someone doesn't get in ATW in any given year, but they can still be part of DSCVR going forward. It's a very common conversation for us to say, We love you, we believe in you and we want to carry on working with you, let's stay in touch."

For the chosen 20, however, the opportunities are here and now and really rather significant. McTiernan continues: "We see DSCVR and ATW as just the start of an artist's relationship with Vevo, we want to still be working with them when they reach the next level, and the next, and the next.

"That's why we don't just come up with a list, we invest proper time and real resources in this, and I think that's appreciated by the wider industry year after year."



AJ Mitchell
Label: Epic
Management: Mike Spitz



Brandon Lay
Label: UMG Nashville
Management: Morris Higham



HEX
Label: Parlophone
Management: Circa 13



Nebu Kiniza
Label: RCA
Management: T3



Ama Lou
Label: Unsigned
Management: Things We've Made



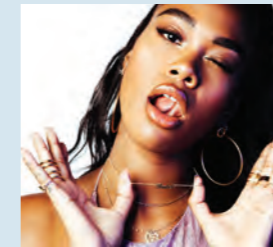
Easy Life
Label: Island
Management: Ollie Slaney



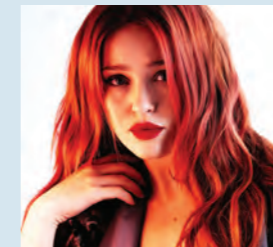
Jade Bird
Label: Glassnote
Management: UROK



Robinson
Label: Ministry of Sound
Management: Page 1 Management



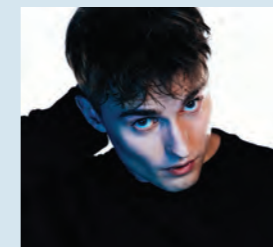
Amber Mark
Label: PMR/virgin EMI/
Interscope Records
Management: Monotone



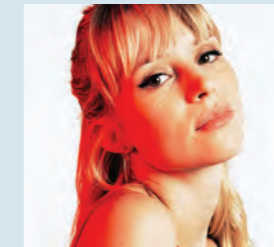
Elley Duhé
Label: RCA
Management: ACMG



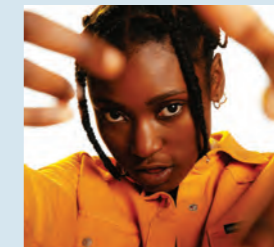
Kelvyn Colt
Label: Four Music/Sony
Management: Line Rindvig



Sam Fender
Label: Polydor
Management: OD Management



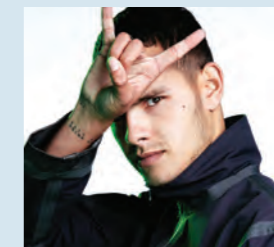
Angèle
Label: Initial
Management: Sylvie Farr



Flohio
Label: Unsigned
Management: Patrick Hanrahan & Giulia Ferrazzi



Lauren Sanderson
Label: Epic
Management: Mono Music



slowthai
Label: Method
Management: Toyi Toyi



Astrid S
Label: Virgin/Island
Management: Modest!



Greeicy
Label: UMLE
Management: Caroline Garcia

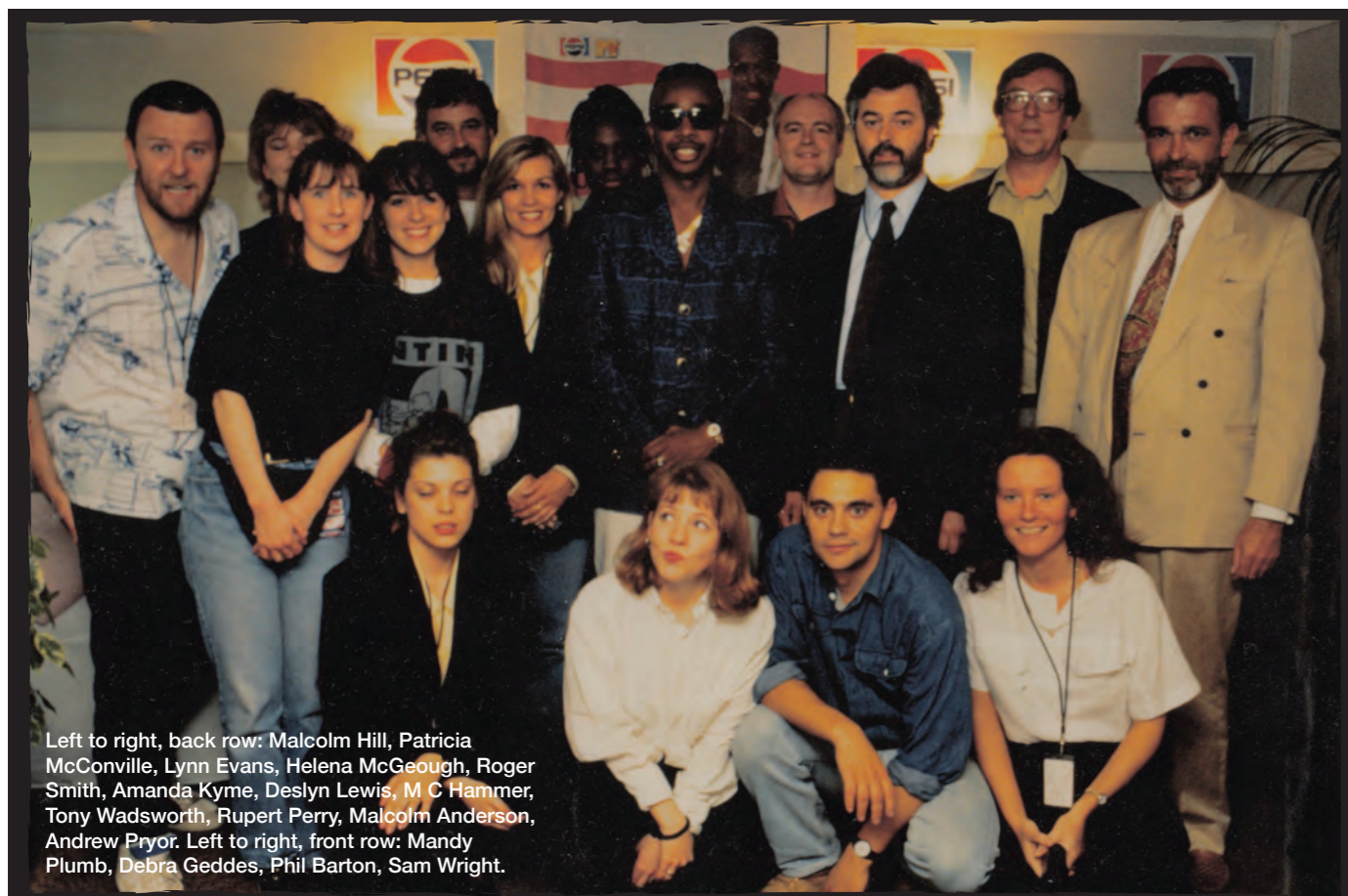


Matt Hunter
Label: UMLE
Management: Lionfish



YBN Crew
Label: Atlantic
Management: Stealth Management

Every Picture Tells A Story



Left to right, back row: Malcolm Hill, Patricia McConville, Lynn Evans, Helena McGeough, Roger Smith, Amanda Kyme, Deslyn Lewis, M C Hammer, Tony Wadsworth, Rupert Perry, Malcolm Anderson, Andrew Pryor. Left to right, front row: Mandy Plumb, Debra Geddes, Phil Barton, Sam Wright.

Date: 12 May, 1991
Location: Wembley Arena, London

This photo captures a moment in time perfectly.

I started at Parlophone in 1990 and was given a new Capitol artist called MC Hammer. I was just excited to be working on an album that featured samples from Rick James and The Chi-Lites.

It blew up really quickly and for the rest of the year I was taking writers out to the States to meet him – sometimes for a few minutes, lots of times not at all. There was lots of hanging around, often to be told, ‘Sorry, not today’. I’d then have to explain that everything was off, and did they fancy a pint here or at the airport, because we might as well leave.

When you did get to meet him, however, he was very charming, as was his security staff – and there were plenty of them. One particularly polite minder told me he was ex-Green Beret (US Special Forces) and that they were trained to kill people with their bare hands. This was just before he quietly but forcefully told the hotel staff they’d served Mr Hammer ‘the wrong type of granola’.

It took a minute to process both bits of info (at least partly because I didn’t know what granola was in 1990).

The big event this side of the water was in May 1991 when Hammer came to play a string of gigs at Wembley Arena. We’d been there all week watching the crew (and Hammer) strut around with silver topped canes, and have mass panic over there not being enough black socks (Malcolm Hill, at one point, offered his own), but this was a really big deal because Rupert (Perry) was coming and we just had to get a team photo done.

After some nery waiting around, the entourage – 100 people plus – parted and Hammer appeared. We got 30 seconds to do intros, smile for the camera (no lighting checks, no second takes) and – oof – he was gone. HAMMERTIME!

Debra Geddes joined EMI in 1990 as a Press Officer for the Parlophone label. She was made Senior Publicity Director for EMI Records in 2010. In 2014 she set up Great Northern PR, a London-based agency focussing on all things music. She is also the PR and Artist Development module leader at BIMM London.

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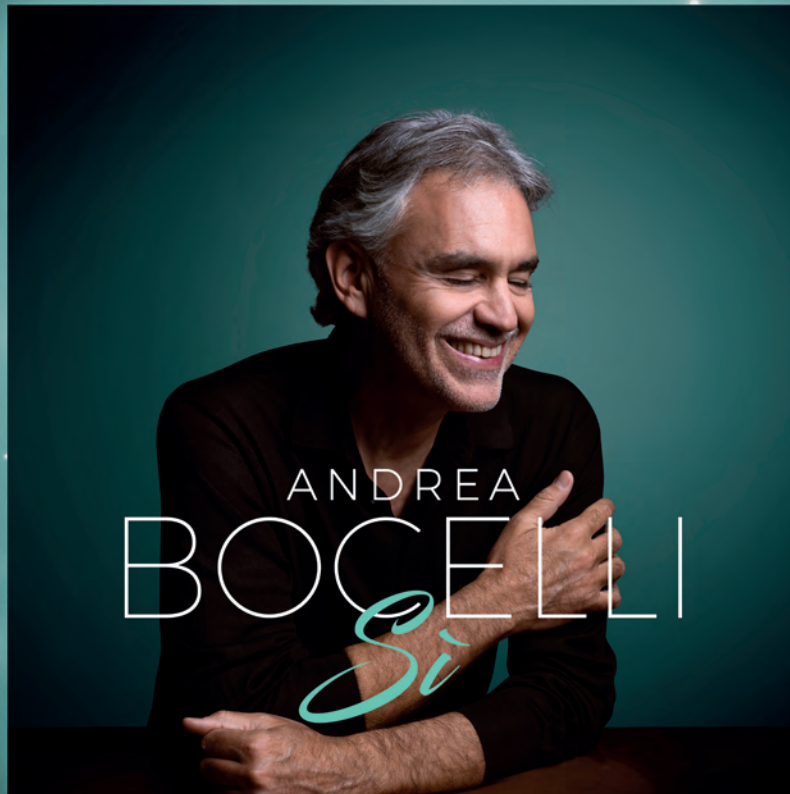
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