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Q2 2019

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WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC.
WHERE SONGWRITERS ARE HEARD.

EDITOR'S LETTER

Tim Ingham

You hear it everywhere you go in the UK business: whatever happened to the days of new superstar British acts breaking with regularity in the United States? That golden run of Mumford & Sons, Amy Winehouse, Adele, Ed Sheeran, Sam Smith – why did it seem to dry up?

The most sensible answer, of course, is the shift to streaming. All of the above acts benefited greatly from being considered 'album' artists, with recognition amongst the public – at home and abroad – that they were musicians of lasting value, i.e. their work was worth monetarily gambling on, in the form of an LP purchase.

That era is now rapidly disappearing, especially in the United States, where, according to RIAA data, sales of albums (across CD, download and vinyl) fell by $497m last year, to a cumulative value of $1.62bn. To really put things into perspective, consider this: Adele's *21* stormed the US charts after its release in February 2011. That same year, the US album purchases market (again, across CD, download and vinyl) was worth $2.7bn more (!) than it was last year. That's not a typo: in 2011, album sales in the United States, according to RIAA data, were worth $4.31bn vs. $1.62bn in 2018. The US albums market, in just seven years, has seen almost two thirds of its value collapse.

Into this commercial vacuum have risen the streaming services, which last year – in all their forms – took care of 74.8% of the US recorded music market. (Streaming, including digital SoundExchange collections, generated $7.37bn in 2018; the total US market, meanwhile, was worth $9.85bn.)

There is a fair argument, then, that this commercial transition has left British breakthrough acts a little screwed. If UK-signed artists are competing in the track-dominated US landscape of 2019, goes the logic, they will inevitably lose out to the priority new acts of the American music industry, where so much more consumption takes place – and so much more industry value is derived. (Spot check: last year, the UK generated £829m in retail revenues from subscription music streaming, according to ERA. That works out at $1.1bn, which makes the UK subscription streaming market worth around a fifth of the USA's ($5.4bn). Population wise, the UK is about a fifth of the size of the States, so this all makes logical sense.)

"Spot check: the UK music streaming market was worth around a fifth of the USA's last year."

Other numbers specifically bear out the struggle British artists are facing. According to the BPI's annual *All About The Music* handbook, UK artists claimed 9.0% of 'all music consumption' (across sales and streams) in North America last year, with just 7.6% of on-demand streams in the marketplace. That streaming figure was down on the 7.9% registered in 2017, and the 8.4% registered in 2016. Evidently, the situation for UK acts in the US is getting harder, not easier.

And then, just as all hope is draining away, a game-changer. Having firmly conquered the UK, Lewis Capaldi is starting to make a real name for himself in the States as a priority act for Capitol Music Group – without sanding down the subversive Scottish persona which has won him so many domestic plaudits.

Meanwhile, Sam Smith has ignored the mainstream US trend for hip-hop-leaning sonics, instead going all-out pop with Normani for *Dancing With A Stranger* – now a US Radio chart-topper. And Koffee, a reggae act from Jamaica signed via Columbia in the UK, is, in this very issue, named as a key concern for Sony by RCA's New York-based boss Peter Edge.

Perhaps all of this tells us something. Perhaps a new wave of British-fuelled success in the US is beginning. And perhaps it's got little to do with album sales, or streaming figures, or market data. Perhaps, instead, it's got everything to do with a growing refusal to deliver more of the same.

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Alex Robbins is an illustrator whose work has previously appeared on the likes of the *New Yorker, Time Out, Wired, TIME* and *i-D*. Oh, and *Music Business UK*. He has once again created our cover image based on a quote from our lead feature. This time, those words come from the British Chairman and CEO of RCA in New York, Peter Edge.

ANNABELLA COLDRICK

As CEO of the Music Managers Forum, Annabella runs the world's largest community of music managers, with over 500 global business members in the UK and a network of over 2,500 in the US and elsewhere. The MMF aims to educate, innovate and advocate for a fairer, more transparent music industry that operates in the interest of artists and their fans.

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‘I MARRY BUSINESS TO MY PASSION FOR MUSIC – NOT THE OTHER WAY ROUND’

Peter Edge is one of the highest-flying Brits in the global industry, running RCA Records at Sony in New York. At heart, he says, he’s still the fastidious A&R setting a high bar for the artists his company signs...

Peter Edge’s journey into the music business is cooler than yours.

The RCA Records CEO and Chairman was studying at Coventry Polytechnic in the early ‘80s – DJ’ing on local radio and in nightclubs in his spare time – when he struck up a friendship with Jerry Dammers from The Specials (and, later, The Special AKA). As a result, A&R maven Edge’s earliest exposure to the music-making side of the business was a front-row seat for one of the most creatively daring periods of one of the great British groups. (*Ghost Town*, released in 1981, remains one of the UK’s most bizarre, harrowing and brilliant No.1 records ever.)

From there, Edge moved down to London, nabbing a job as a music producer on a show called *Switch* on Channel 4, while continuing to DJ. It was through *Switch* that Edge met Simon Fuller – who was then working at Chrysalis Music Publishing. Edge told the *Idol*-founding magnate about a new track he’d discovered, *Holiday* by Madonna, and the duo managed to lock down the publishing. Smart move.

How did Edge then become one of the most powerful British executives in the modern-day global business, and the head of RCA? By paying his dues.

Fuller recommended Edge (understandably) to Chrysalis President Doug D’arcy, who hired the A&R specialist to start a new label, Cooltempo. The imprint went on to play an influential role in ‘80s UK electronic music – signing the likes of Adeva (*Respect*) and Paul Hardcastle (*19*) – as well as inking deals with

pioneering hip-hop acts from overseas like Eric B. & Rakim, Monie Love and Doug E. Fresh.

Edge's talent was then spotted by Benny Medina and Lenny Waronker, and he was hired by Warner Bros. Records, moving to Los Angeles in 1991. More success followed, including working with The Jungle Brothers, before he was poached by Clive Davis at Arista in the mid-'90s. This started a career for Edge at Sony/BMG that has now lasted 23 years.

At Arista, and then J Records, Edge's biggest signings included Dido, Faithless, Angie Stone, Jamie Foxx and Alicia Keys, whose talent he first spotted and admired when she was just 14 years old. It was during this period of his career where Edge enjoyed many of his early multi-Platinum successes, including Dido's *White Flag* and *Life For Rent* albums, as well as Alicia Keys' groundbreaking debut LP, *Songs in A Minor*. In 2007, he became a fully-fledged RCA'er, as he was named President of A&R.

These days, the roster at RCA is very different – but Edge's A&R principles remain. This year alone, the New York-based company has released No.1 albums from Khalid and P!nk, while banking five Grammy nominations for priority new artist H.E.R. The Sony label also counts both Miley Cyrus and Mark Ronson on its roster – who jointly had a major global hit at the end of last year with *Nothing Breaks Like A Heart*.

"We're a creative-first label. We do different things – sometimes obtuse things."

MBUK caught up with Edge to ask him all about RCA's philosophy, his thoughts on modern British music and his path from Coventry boy to worldwide music business influencer...

Where is RCA is right now and what defines it as a company in 2019?
I'm pleased to say we're becoming known for being a destination label for artists, with great artist development stories in the last three years. People are impressed, for example, with how we took Khalid from a high school senior at 17 years old to being the No.1 artist on Spotify globally [a title the artist secured in April]; that's a feat achieved in a relatively short period of time.

We've also managed to have such a lot of success with SZA and the TDE team. She's become a big critical favorite with a multi-Platinum album and is definitely now on the world stage. We also got those great [Grammy] nominations for H.E.R., who's emerging as one of the next era of important artists. And then you look at Childish Gambino, who chose to come work with us [signing with RCA last year after an extended period with Glassnote Records]; we did *This is America* and it became Record and Song Of The Year at the Grammys. RCA is known for quality and artistry and a certain level of taste.

Looking at Childish Gambino, when you sign a deal with an existing big artist like that – rather than a development act – what's the 'sell' for RCA? Other than the advance cheque!
The big thing is that we're a creative-first label. That really speaks to who I am and who we are as a company. We like to do different and innovative kind of things – sometimes obtuse things. We like to do the unusual.

You spent your formative years in Coventry, as a friend of Jerry Dammers. What did that period teach you that you still find useful today?
It's actually connected to what we're talking about in regards to RCA today. I was in art school and college in Coventry. Jerry was a little older than me but we definitely spent a lot of time as friends, hanging out at the time. He truly believed in artistry. I was always amazed by the lengths he would go to to make sure something really 'spoke' to the listener. Artistically, he was on a really high level. When he really took it to that [next level] he could do something transformative; something really incredible. *Ghost Town* is perhaps the best example of that – one of the all-time great records, in my humble opinion.

It was the same thing with *Free Nelson Mandela* [by The Special AKA]. We had both moved to London at that point, and my flat was right next to the studio where he was making that track in North London. I heard many iterations of that song; he just kept perfecting it and perfecting it and perfecting it. And in the end, again, he delivered a piece of genius.

How do you marry that love of thinking big, those creative aspirations, to the realities of 'feeding the machine' at a large major record company?
Well, we try and find something that's got a touch of magic to begin with, [but which] we really believe can translate to a wider audience. I often joke that we're a bit like HBO these days; we're making quality programming to fit a subscription model. It's very different to the model we all grew up on over the years; the transactional model.

Once you understand that, you can start thinking about things in a different way. I have to try and keep a high bar and at the same time run a lot of projects here. That said, we don't just try to do everything that comes along. We have to focus.

What was the biggest career lesson you learned at Cooltempo when you glance back at that period?
It's funny, looking back I realise that I've always been doing a version of the same thing – just morphing it into different eras and iterations. At Cooltempo I signed hip-hop records when hip-hop was pretty much brand new – Doug E. Fresh and Slick Rick and Eric B. & Rakim.

They didn't really have any [global] major record deals in America so I signed them for Europe. We managed to have success in the


H.E.R.


Koffee


P!nk


Khalid

UK with records that were really underground records in America. I loved the hip-hop scene, and still do. And, similarly, with house and dance – we had a lot of big records in those [genres], when I worked with Danny D. The whole thing was about finding music that was new and exciting and that I was passionate about, and where I felt like I could help nurture or support an artist who wasn't necessary being appreciated fully.

You started out in your career DJ'ing, both on the radio and at club nights. Do you think that having a musical sensibility is an important factor in your success as a leading A&R executive over the years?
I would like to think so. Certainly having an understanding of what it is you are listening to, what the musical inspirations might be, what the influences and connections are – that's very important. My prime interest in life is music. It's completely been my life, and always has; it's in me. I come from that place. So I marry business to my passion for music – not the other way round.

Where did your passion for music come from?
My sister had a hell of a record collection. She was a big fan of Motown, Atlantic Records and soul music. She's nine years older than me so, when I was a little kid, she would be playing these really cool records. That was the soundtrack to my childhood; I often think if that hadn't been the case, I would have had to find music in a different way.

We're used to seeing high-flying British executives in the US music industry now – of which you're very much a part. But when you joined Warner Bros. it was much rarer. Which qualities do you think the British industry instilled in you that helped?
I always feel that the level of interest in music from people in the UK is really intense. It's part of the national conversation, part of the language of the country, and that really prepared me to work in some of the areas that I have in America.

Even growing up, people knew who was No.1 on the charts. Perhaps being a smaller [market] than the US is a factor in that. Music has a similar kind of role within communities in the States – in the African American community, especially – but, nationwide, the passion is not quite as focused as it is in the UK.

You had an important run of your career under Clive Davis, first at Arista and then J Records. What are the most important things that he taught you?
Clive taught me an enormous amount. People often joke that working for Clive is like going to Harvard for the music business, and that's kind of true. Working with Clive was a steep learning curve. He has a very specific approach, a very successful approach, to how he conducts business and initiates things. That was really inspiring. We worked on things in the late '90s – on Whitney Houston, Santana and all of that. At the same time, I was also able to bring my level of taste to Arista and then to J Records, [with acts like] Faceless, Dido, Alicia Keys and Angie Stone. Those artists were my 'thing', stylistically, and we had great success with them. I learned a lot from Clive but that was also a time of a lot of [professional] growth for me, when I had to get my own thing together.

"There's a new kind of R&B or soul-influenced music taking off, and we're at the forefront."

Khalid is becoming one of the world's biggest artists, out of a US industry that's been so hip-hop dominated in recent years. Is there a feeling that R&B is making a comeback?
There absolutely is something happening, although I don't know if I'd call it 'R&B' exactly, because I feel like the hybridization of where music is today makes it different. Many people say [this new trend] started when we signed Bryson Tiller and had huge success with his *Trapsoul* album, which was multi-Platinum and was a shape-shifting record. Before that album, it was wall to wall hip-hop – there was hardly any R&B on US radio, for instance. Bryson changed the landscape, helping create a situation where we were able to subsequently break other artists.

I'm a big R&B proponent; I've always loved R&B music. I don't know whether Khalid should be [classified] as R&B, just because his musical aspirations move in so many different directions. After his [initial] success with *Location*, the duet he did with Billie Eilish [*Lovely*] was a turning point in her career; he also [collaborated on] the first major hit for Marshmello with *Silence*, neither of which were really R&B. But there is an R&B influence that's strong in his music, and it's the same with other artists like H.E.R. I definitely feel there's a new kind of R&B-influenced, or soul-influenced, music really taking off now. It's reviving a type of music that needed some reinvention, and I'm excited [RCA] is at the forefront of it.

Do you sometimes feel that songs are being broken more often than artists? Is your challenge to get the new generation to appreciate and understand the personality and character behind the music?

Mark Ronson and Miley Cyrus

That's part of a dynamic we're all working with on the streaming services. I've been a fan of Spotify and the other DSPs from the beginning, because I'm such a music head – to have all of that amazing music so accessible is a revelation. But it is a shame that sometimes when you play a song, you can be immediately diverted to another artist. Just the other day, I played a song from [Coldplay's] *A Rush Of Blood To The Head* and thought, 'This is such a great album.' I was ready for the next track on the album but it totally shifted the playlist to a completely different artist. The discovery factor is really important, but I'm not sure we've cracked how we encourage listeners to dig deeper on artists.

Do you have any thoughts on the huge rise in the influence of social media? Artists with millions of Instagram followers seem to be dominating the charts – and it sometimes feels like a chicken-and-egg thing.

As a fan of music, I'm interested in musicians, so I don't particularly enjoy that [social media] aspect of where things have gone. But you can't ignore it – we spend a lot of time here talking about context and narrative around an artist. That's really a big part of today's world. Everything now needs some sort of story, to help people understand how it relates to them: 'Why am I listening to this? Who is this and what is their connection to whatever it is I know?' Context is everything and social media is a big component to that. Hip-hop has [accelerated] that factor – hip-hop is so context-orientated. It's very much about the story that's being told lyrically, who the artists are and how they relate to each other: 'Where are you from? What is your background? Why are you telling this story? Are you legit about the story you're telling?'

"We're moving into a whole different era at Sony Music now."

How does someone who works closely with artists, particularly in A&R, reach a point where they can have truly creative discussions – where they can offer their opinion or challenge ideas and be heard by the talent?

I don't know, exactly. But I do think this job requires a certain sense of empathy, which allows you to understand what artists see from their side of the situation; to understand what it is that they're trying to do, and what their artistic process might be. Rather than just presenting a [record company] agenda of 'I need this and I need that', it's important to try and understand what artists are going through [and] what they want to get expressed.

UK music has had a tough time in the States over the past few years. That golden period of Amy Winehouse, Mumford & Sons, Adele, Ed Sheeran and Sam Smith seems quite distant. What's most exciting you about British music right now?

To be honest, it's probably the connection between British music and the African diaspora, and the connection with Jamaican music too; Koffee, in particular – who's actually from Kingston but signed by Ferdy [Unger-Hamilton] in the UK – is getting huge support and we're very excited about her.

With African music, there's such a big African community in the UK, and you can hear the influence of that music everywhere – in Ed Sheeran, for instance, and many others; the Afrobeat influence abounds. We're having breakout success with Davido, and Wizkid – that music all definitely feels fresh, and it's music that has a special relationship with the UK.

How's Rob Stringer doing as a CEO of Sony Music?

One of the things I like most about Rob is that he really appreciates artistry and the importance of maintaining a level of taste, and that definitely aligns with how I feel about things. I love the fact that I can sit with him and talk about music: 'What's the level of artistry here? Is there something great going on with this artist?' I love having a guy like that in the boss's seat.

We're moving into a whole different era at Sony now and there are lots of new initiatives going on. There's expansion in terms of A&R, but also expansion in terms of different relationships that are being built with artists.

How have things changed at RCA for you since the departure of your former President and COO, Tom Corson, to Warner Bros.?

We feel really great about where we are and what we've accomplished. One of the things that I'm very grateful for is the fact that there are a lot of talented people who have worked together for a long time here. It's a very strong team with people like John Fleckenstein, Joe Riccitelli, Carolyn Williams, Keith Naftaly, Mark Pitts and Mika El-Baz, to name a few. That's made things really cohesive. And, in addition, one of the things that I'm most excited about is the arrival of young talents, people like Tunji Balogun; he's made a huge difference to the company. We're ambitious and heading in an incredible direction.

What is getting you excited about the potential future of the record business?

I'm really a big fan of visual art and I like the fact that things are starting to hybridize – that contemporary art and music are collaborating now. Art and music interest me but many other things do too; architecture, film etc. When there's collaboration, when disciplines interact, that to me is very exciting.

The recorded music business is just one aspect of what artists are up to today. It used to be one of the main events, along with performing live. Now there are many things that artists can create, to the point I was just making. And we want to be involved in that – we're trying to broaden what the relationship is between RCA and its artists within our partnerships. ■

THE TROUBLE WITH SERIOUSNESS

Peter Robinson thinks Lewis Capaldi is very funny. But, he asks, what kind of jokes do we want popstars to be making a decade into their career?

If you'll allow me to lower the tone of this fine publication, I invite you to pause, observe the runaway success of Lewis Capaldi, then consider this question: has any No.1 recording artist in living memory been quite so preoccupied by their own bumhole?

If Capaldi's not tweeting about haemorrhoids, he's offering toilet roll with his own face on it with deluxe album pre-orders. In 2018, ahead of a Radio 1 Live Lounge appearance, he announced that he was "experiencing a spot of leaky bum syndrome". When one sceptic tweeted that he wished everyone on Twitter would "get out of Lewis Capaldi's arsehole" – a reference to how well the singer's funnier tweets performed, even among those who were ambivalent towards the music – Capaldi replied: "You should come join them mate, I can fit loads up there."

In February, an Instagram Story saw Lewis describing, in questionable detail, how mistimed flatulence during a Bastille support slot almost left him with "an arse caked in shite". Then, on the day his album hit No.1, the video content Capaldi created for the Official Charts Company was a surrealist masterpiece, with Lewis issuing a 'fuck you' to every artist below him in the chart, inevitably returning to his specialist subject: by the end he'd suggested that he owned a large gold vibrator.

Scatology aside, there's something incredibly refreshing about the quiet anarchy of Capaldi reinventing the well-worn Sensitive UK Singer-Songwriter trope. From the jaw-dropping quote in his album press release ("I hope people don't think it's shit, I mean don't get me wrong there will be one or two stinkers on there") to titling the album itself *Divinely Uninspired To A Hellish Extent*, it's been fascinating to observe Capaldi's willing self-memeification. He's an intoxicating proposition to print, online and broadcast media, who've long been starved of artists who have personalities (or are happy to express them).

As a journalist I too have fallen for Capaldi's charm: earlier this year I came tantalisingly close to persuading a national publication to run my idea for a high-concept article in which Lewis, down in Sussex for The Great Escape, would be interviewed visiting the Lewes branch of Aldi, wearing a cape.

"There's something incredibly refreshing about the quiet anarchy of Lewis Capaldi."

Along with the question of whether a female act would be 'allowed' to promote herself in this way, there's a serious point at the heart of this: many performers talk about their school days and how, when they didn't fit in, they'd find some sort of acceptance by being the class joker. Most of them found a way to leave that behind, but I wonder if there's a certain sadness in the way Capaldi's gross-out humour, or ironic positioning as a hapless sex symbol, might operate as a pre-emptive defence mechanism that's necessary for him to feel comfortable with front-facing cameras and the aesthetic demands of social media.

(Actually, the really sad thing is that his instincts may not be far off. Those old re-runs of *Top Of The Pops* offer clear evidence that popstars tend to be conventionally beautiful now, in a way they once weren't.)

In any case, just as the result of the next election could easily be swayed by the politician who best understands meme culture, so the next victor of the troubawars will be one who, like Capaldi, gets the fact that people engage with more than just an artist's music.

That said: what happens next? What does the end game look like? Let's flash forward to the release of Lewis Capaldi's fifth album. By 2028 (or given the way pop currently works, summer 2021) will he still want to be trumpeting his wares via bon-mots relating to his ringpiece? Unlikely. It's often hard to take seriously the artist who demands too much be taken seriously, but it's fair to suppose that at some point in the next decade Lewis Capaldi will want to move on from discussing his nether regions.

This may become a more pressing question than we realise, as Capaldi's profile explodes in America, a market that gave notoriously short shrift to Robbie Williams' Frank Spencer routine or album titles like *The Ego Has Landed*.

Before Calvin Harris moved to LA and discovered egg white omelettes, we knew him in the UK as the winningly gawky former M&S shelf-stacker who was funny in interviews and outrageous on social media. (Like Capaldi, Harris was known to tweet about bowel movements). In December 2009, not long after he'd disrupted Jedward on *X Factor* with a pineapple on his head, I asked Calvin if he'd record a video advent calendar for my Popjustice website. I sent him 24 terrible jokes and a week later 24 separate video files appeared; each included a title sequence, a theme tune, a voiceover and footage of Calvin delivering a joke while wearing a Santa hat. Within a couple of years the jokes had stopped. I asked him a while later about the shift in his online persona – he explained that Tiesto had basically taken him to one side and said, "Don't do that." Global domination ensued.

More recently I spoke with George Ezra, who, until Capaldigeddon, seemed to have cornered the market in up-for-a-laugh singer-songwriter joviality: there were those awkwardly self aware lyric videos featuring George in a karaoke joint, for instance, and a series of merch vids so strange that they earned him a booking on *Vic & Bob's Big Night Out*. "If you've already taken the piss out of yourself, nobody can do it for you," he reasoned. "But it's not something you can force or re-create to order. The other day, I had someone from the label on the phone saying, 'How do you feel about live-tweeting *Love Island*?' I was like, 'Er, I've got quite a bit on'."

George Ezra: "If you've already taken the piss out of yourself, nobody can do it for you."

Manufacturing spontaneity is tricky, and from a label perspective it must take nerves of steel to accept the point when an endless supply of free marketing becomes counter-productive, when it stops being natural, goes beyond being deliberate, and enters the realm of feeling laboured. The challenge for Capaldi's label will be to recognise that point when it comes.

Much as I'm looking forward to Lewis' BRITs 2020 acceptance speeches – to such an extent that I wonder if he should simply host the entire show – I also wonder if we might look back in a few years and see that the crunch point came in the week of Capaldi's album release, with the widely shared London Underground poster campaign whose anti-design design advertised 'the debut Capalbum', used a huge, coarsely cut out amateur photo of Lewis with a towel on his head, and included a quote from Capaldi calling himself 'the Scottish Beyoncé'. Even the album artwork was slapped on at a jaunty angle.

The only elements of the poster played totally straight? Two logos: for his record label, and Apple Music.

MY MANIFESTO

In a new MBUK series, we ask some of the brightest execs in the business to outline their five point plan for change. First up on the stump is Island Records' President of Urban, Alex Boateng...

Alex Boateng has been part of the Island family for pretty much 10 years – but the unconventional nature of his joining means there's no fixed anniversary and no cake with candles.

In fact, his entry into the business is highly relevant to one of the points in his manifesto for change.

Boateng had to more or less hustle his way in, as part of the team that launched Tinchy Stryder at the label in 2009. He didn't apply for a job, bag an internship, or tap up a contact. Instead, hired as a digital consultant by Sarah Boorman, he brought something to the table, started on two days a week consultancy, and went on to make himself indispensable.

It's a story that he believes will be familiar to a lot of young BAME execs now rising through the ranks in the UK music industry – but a story that he says should be just one option available, alongside much more traditional routes.

More on that in the manifesto.

What is absolutely certain is that Boateng has gone on to become a key exec within Island UK. He was promoted to President of Urban just over a year ago, as part of a flurry of changes prompted by long-term UK boss Darcus Beese decamping to New York, from where he operates as the label's US President.

Louis Bloom subsequently became President of the UK label, with Natasha Mann and Olivia Nunn also being named Co-Managing Directors in the reshuffle.

"It's meant more responsibility, more focus, more planning, more thinking and, most importantly, more listening – more of everything really," says Boateng. "There's definitely an increased workload, but that's good, because it means we're amplifying more amazing artists.

"We had a great period with Darcus, and now we're into a new era. There's enough of the team who delivered success in the past who are still around for there to be a sense of continuity, but with a new vision and new ideas on top of that; I think it's the best of both worlds.

"The most important thing is that Louis is a music man – we still work closely together A&R'ing JP Cooper – which is what we've always had as the leadership of this label. I can still play him a tune and get his opinion, and that is priceless. There are plenty of other companies where you can't do that."

Boateng says that in terms of the remainder of 2019 "we're just pulling back the elastic ready to let go on a few new things".

As well as continuing to drive existing campaigns with the likes of Giggs, Drake, Sean Paul, Ray BLK and others, Boateng flags up new work from Tekno, M Huncho, Unknown T and Sneakbo, as well as some new internationally-based acts such as Lil Tecca, Kiana Ledé, Col3trane, Emotional Oranges and Masego. One act he has great expectations for is North London's Miraa May, predicting that "she's going to be a very important artist over the next decade".

He's also excited about a new partnership with Amplify Dot's label, Trakhouse, particularly Jada Kingdom and Shakka, as well as an entrepreneurial partnership with street brand, Lizzy.

Perhaps most importantly, though, the move to Universal's new Kings Cross HQ "has not only made my journey home easier, it's also nearer my barbers, which means I'm looking better at the office – which is good news for everyone".

After a year of major changes for Boateng, then, here he presents five more for the industry at large.

1. Fewer Meetings, Shorter Meetings

So much stuff that needs to happen happens outside meetings – and talking about things achieves a lot less than doing things. I think, at times, meetings slow things down. I'm getting away from that with my guys, but I'm pretty sure in other places it's still an issue.

I know people have to touch base and communicate, that's super important, but we're in the age of *doing* – and of making things happen rather than talking about it. The world's so fast now, sometimes things are happening outside our door while the meeting's going on, things that we need to know about and react to. Sometimes there's no point in being locked in a room for an hour.

"I hope we can be braver as an industry and present artists in their purest form."

It's a people business, I get it, and sometimes you have to see, hear, feel, experience – all of that – but the main place that should happen is in the studio; that's the most important place for connections to happen.

2. Fewer Features, More Distinctive Artistry

Collaboration is great, whether it's between writers or artists, but I think it's starting to dilute the distinctiveness that's required for really exciting and ground-breaking artistry.

There's a temptation to chuck as much as possible at a track to make sure it works in certain places, but I'm hoping that we can be braver as an industry and go back to presenting artists for who they are, presenting their art in its purest form. It would also avoid the nightmare of having to constantly move records and projects around, because a certain feature means it clashes with someone else's schedule and agenda etc.

You look at artists like Dave, Billie Eilish, Giggs and Stormzy and there's a real purity to their bodies of work. They take you into their world, firstly with the music, and build the creative around it.

As a fan, that's what I look for: genre-defining artists like Nas and Dizzee, new school ones like Miraa, Col3trane, Easy Life, J Hus and Tekno, there's a singular vision and a distinctive voice; they're not relying on guest features so that they can get on a certain playlists; even collabs have to make 100% sense.

Miraa May

I think it will happen. Artists are realising that they need to offer something different – and, luckily, every single person on the planet is made different. The key is recognising and emphasising that, not diluting it.

Record labels have a role to play; they need to be patient and they need to give artists confidence. Plus, going back to the A&R side of things, it's about finding people who do have those unique voices and who want to be themselves.

People are getting signed and putting records out because of their relationships and the audiences they can bring, which might be great commercially, but I'm a fan first and I want to hear someone's full story, without someone doing a rap in the middle about something else that they recorded in another country.

The DNA of Island, from Bob Marley through Grace Jones, Amy Winehouse, and now people like Giggs, M Huncho and Drake, these people are leaders and scene-changers, and that's the sort of art I want to see and hear.

3. Quality Control

Making, distributing and sharing music is very, very easy now, meaning that, at times, things are rushed through without the desire to ensure that it actually deserves attention and is good enough to be on the radio, on Spotify, or wherever; it just gets shoved out there.

We're in a loud world and a loud industry, and I think what we want to hear above all that noise is quality. That means taking responsibility and taking time and care when music is being made.

I think the industry needs to be collectively responsible, but it starts with the people at the coalface, making the music, including A&Rs and producers. We need to make sure everything is as good as it can be – not 90%, because that isn't good enough. We have to strive for excellence.

The best artists in Island's history have done that, but we also see it in the new artists, like Unknown T and Miraa May. We signed them and we're excited about them because they strive for excellence. Even at this end of their journey, they're not going to rush something out for the sake of it.

As annoying as it is sometimes, I love it when artists aren't scared to say no, even when something could make them money. It can be frustrating, because at times we want them to make certain moves, but the most important thing is that they want people to be blown away by what they do, and we'll always side with that.

4. More Female A&Rs

We have great female A&Rs at Island, lead by the amazing Annie Christensen. In the Urban team, Adele White and Jade Richardson are different in their skillsets and talents, but together they bring a great energy and great perspective to what we do.

Also, A-Dot, one of our label partners, the way she manages her label, the vision and instinct she brings, alongside her radio ear, is a unique and invaluable addition.

M Huncho

We have two young guys in David and Kola who are really in the streets, who operate as scouts as well as running their own events, so it's a really healthy mix in the Urban team, and that means our discussions and meetings around music and culture feel really balanced and informative.

But when I talk to people in other buildings, I feel that's missing, particularly in records – although I do like the way my twin [Alec Boateng] and Briony Turner work together at Atlantic. There are a lot of great female A&Rs in publishing, but records needs to up its game.

It is changing. I can only personally do what is in my power to do – and I'm grateful I've been given that opportunity. Hopefully it's changing at a wider level, and I think it is, because great people are great people and you shouldn't ignore them.

The bottom line is, having more diverse A&R across the industry will make sure that great music is discovered and heard, and that's really what it's all about.

5. Diversity at a Higher Level

This has been a problem for a while and not just in the UK, but it's still true that the higher up you go in a record company, the more everybody looks the same.

I think it starts with access to the industry. Just going by my own experience, my way into the building was quite unorthodox, whereas other people had quite a clear path – via their relationships, via their background, via their education.

And the people that had the more difficult path are just as good as those who had it easier, if not better, because of the edge that their journey gave them; they sharpened up just to get in the door.

They're also usually a lot closer to the audience that we're trying to reach, because in many cases that's where they came from.

It's also important that the people at the start of their career can look up and see that they're represented.

The same is true of artists, of course; our roster is extremely diverse, and they want to see diversity at the top of the company they're working with. When young artists and managers come in, they should see people who understand where they come from, how they grew up – and who know how to tell their story and handle their talent.

That's why there needs to be diversity at every level, with the very top being the main problem. Companies are getting flatter now, because we have to get closer to the talent; you can't have that distance between the people running the company and what's going on on the street and on social media.

I think there is a will to make this happen now, and I have to give it to David [Joseph, Chairman and CEO, Universal Music UK]; whenever I sit with him and talk to him, it's clear that this is a priority, and also when I talk about people who move this company, it does feel more and more diverse – that's hugely encouraging.

There's still more to do, but I know this company wants to do it. ■

WHERE ARE THE MISSING SONG ROYALTIES?

Annabella Coldrick, the CEO of the Music Managers' Forum, has had enough. She wants to know where her members' missing money is – and now…

If there's been one constant in the music business over the past decade, it's been recurring complaints from songwriters that they are not receiving fair compensation for use of their work online. In 2019, such views have become even more pronounced with ferocious debates around Article 13 (now 17) and the proposed changes to European copyright law, as well as the controversies stirred in the US following appeals by Amazon, Google, Pandora and Spotify to royalty rates set by the Copyright Royalty Board (CRB).

However you look at it, and whoever you talk to, everyone comes to the same conclusion: songwriters are getting a raw deal.

Yet proportionately, the percentage of publishing revenue collected on a stream is considerably greater than the ratio collected on physical sales. With CD consumption stalling and audiences embracing streaming and subscription services *en masse*, songwriters should be in clover. Something, it seems, is going very, very awry.

While there are clear failings in the digital economy for songwriters, it has also become clear that the industry itself, and its arcane licensing practices, should also assume a significant portion of responsibility. Quite frankly, if the global music publishing business were a house, its plumbing would be the leakiest, most bizarre, inefficient and complicated imaginable. The research indicates that it's here, within the structures of the industry, that a huge proportion of value is leaking away.

How much value? That's still unclear. But we estimate that British writers are potentially left unpaid tens of millions of pounds each year, with the situation particularly pronounced for upcoming and non-mainstream writers.

From personal experience, I can see the dilemma close at hand: my husband, as a sideline, writes and records his own music, and self-releases through a distributor to Spotify, Apple, Deezer and other DSPs.

"We estimate that British writers are potentially left unpaid tens of millions each year."

For a DIY artist, this kind of setup is empowering. However, if his record royalties were hitched to a speeding Bullet Train, his songwriting revenues appear to be stuck on an ancient handcar, trundling slowly down the track. After two years of releasing music, his digital music publishing is still seemingly stuck between stations, yet to arrive home.

My husband's digital song royalties are a microcosm of a much wider problem, which is why the MMF board commissioned *CMU's* Chris Cooke to research the music publishing ecosystem – to map out how publishing revenues flow from streaming services to publishers and CMOs, to understand where value is being lost or deducted, and to establish why it can take several years for a songwriter to receive payment. [This research is included in the MMF's new *$ong Royalties Guide*, part of its *Dissecting The Digital Dollar* series.]

What Chris uncovered was a mess of complexities – what he defines as 'royalty chains' – with the performing and mechanical rights of songwriters frequently flowing through a succession of collecting societies, hubs, publishers and sub-publishers. Even under a relatively straightforward scenario, where a track is composed by a single UK writer and streamed only in their home territory, the result will be three different royalty payments over differing time periods – triggering a statement from PRS for the composer's performing rights, and then separate reports from their publisher for performing rights and mechanical rights.

Throw in the involvement of local overseas collection societies and sub-publishers, plus a multitude of writer splits, and the royalty chains get ever more complex.

That's before we get to data disputes – which might stop the royalty flow completely – and deductions (many international societies extract a fee to fund 'cultural diversity') and unmatched or unattributable distributions. The latter end up in the notorious 'Black Box'. If unclaimed, this money is typically distributed on the basis of publisher market share. It's therefore no wonder that payments can be delayed by 2-3 years, and no wonder that songwriters are up in arms. Incredibly, it is estimated that more than 20% of song streaming royalties globally may go missing, unmatched or severely delayed through this system.

PRS for Music recently announced that UK songwriters and composers generated a record £746m in music royalties in 2018. However, after costs increased by 8.8%, the overall revenues paid to songwriter and composer members actually decreased by 0.2% to £603.6m. At the end of 2019, PRS have also announced that admin fees will be increasing significantly.

It must be acknowledged that PRS now processes over 11 trillion uses of music per year. But the question still burns: how much more could songwriters have been paid if global royalty chains were overhauled and revenues were allocated more efficiently? How can we reduce admin payments to intermediaries?

At the very least, it is imperative that songwriters (and their managers and accountants) can have easy access to the data and information that can help them understand their own royalty chains.

Also, it should be mentioned that there are many initiatives currently attempting to make the system fit for purpose. Through their joint venture, ICE, PRS for Music, STIM and GEMA have built what they describe as 'the world's first integrated music copyright, licensing and processing hub', looking to bring efficiencies to data processing and issue more direct licences at a regional level. Elsewhere, SongTrust is helping DIY songwriters collect royalties at source, while AMRA (owned by Kobalt) is moving towards global licensing for leading songwriters as a new society.

Undoubtedly there will be other potential solutions. However, fixing this issue feels increasingly like solving a Chinese Puzzle. Rather than searching for silver bullets, we need an urgent and wide-ranging plan of action – led by songwriters and their managers, alongside music publishers, PROs, DSPs and others in the industry.

What needs to happen now?

Laying down the gauntlet, Annabella and the MMF suggest the following areas as an immediate priority:

1) Shine a light on global royalty chains
Given the complexities of the global digital licensing landscape, it has become too onerous and expensive for all but the most successful songwriters to track and trace their royalty chains. This needs to change. Collecting societies and music publishers must embrace transparency and move towards making data freely available as standard practice.

2) Reveal the disputes
Music publishers and PROs currently control the flow of data and information, and therefore are the first to see data clashes or disputes. It is unacceptable that they sit on these issues.

3) Shorten the chains by embracing global licensing
If you were starting from scratch, no-one would invent the current territorial licensing framework for online streaming. It is the byproduct of default, not design – and built upon reciprocal partnerships from an analogue era. As well as efforts to disentangle current practices, there must also be a shift towards global licensing of songwriters' repertoire.

4) Speed up the flow of payments
It frequently takes writers years to receive song royalties. This is completely unacceptable. Even in the current environment, we should be setting goals that writers get paid, at an absolute minimum, within nine months of their compositions being played.

5) Reduce Black Box collections and distribute unattributed revenues fairly
In theory, unattributed digital revenues should not even exist. There should be no 'Black Box' for streaming. But, there is – and it is filled mostly with royalties owed to smaller writers and publishers towards the end of the long tail. The current 'reverse Robin Hood' system, whereby unclaimed 'Black Box' monies are distributed on the basis of market share is therefore untenable. We need greater incentives for these royalties to be identified – and for societies to take a more proactive approach to locating IP owners.

6) Campaign for change
Finally, we need songwriters, managers and accountants to push their publisher and collecting society partners to actively and urgently address these issues and spotlight those who are making positive changes to ensure that the growth of the industry is equitably shared by all. That conversation began at The Great Escape, but the clock is ticking. For the sake of our entire business, we need chains to be broken and songwriter revenues to be set free.

Jack Street and Sam Evitt

‘WE HAD ONE LAPTOP AND TWO BLACKBERRIES, AND WE BUILT THIS COMPANY OFF THAT’

Method Music is the management home of Sam Smith, Disclosure and others, with its very own record label recently christened by the celebrated debut LP from Slowthai...

Try Googling Method Music and you’ll find scant details of the British company online. A website has a holding page that’s been promising to ‘return soon’ for two years, and there aren’t any lengthy interviews with founders Sam Evitt and Jack Street to be seen.

In a ubiquitous online world, one might be forgiven for assuming the company is as dormant as its digital presence suggests. If it weren’t for its artists, who, on the other hand, are everywhere.

Thanks to a seven-year run of success – spanning millions of album and ticket sales, multiple hit singles, BRITs, Grammys, an Oscar and a Golden Globe – Sam Smith, Disclosure and Jimmy Napes have secured their place in the history books of British pop, while newcomers Dave, managed by Neighbourhood, and Slowthai are at the forefront of a growing UK rap scene.

Such a level of accolades would understandably tempt some company founders to place themselves clearly by the side of those in the limelight. So why have the people behind Method kept so quiet? When we finally get them to agree to a sit-down chat, Street gives a simple, but telling, answer.

“As far as we are concerned, our job is to publicise our acts and not to talk about ourselves. But, over time as things have grown and we’ve [launched] different areas of the business, people fill the gaps for you and all of a sudden you start hearing a million and one different stories about how things work here, or where artists are really signed, because we don’t say anything. So we thought maybe it’s time to at least have some conversation, no matter how awkward we find it!”

Well, we’re glad they did, because it’s a pretty interesting story which we’ll let Evitt and Street tell in their own words. (The lack of a Method website, by the way, is because they “never had one that looked good,” says Evitt.)

Firstly, some clarification. Method Music encompasses a management, record and publishing company, and the label has inked an exclusive distribution deal with Universal. Smith, Disclosure and Napes are all management clients, while Slowthai is a Method Records signing (he’s managed by cousin/creative director Lewis Boyce). The latter’s debut album, *Nothing Great About Britain*, was the first album on Method Music and hit No.9 on the UK charts at the end of May.

Dave, who hit No.1 with his debut LP, *Psychodrama*, in March, is developed, managed and released by Jack Foster and Benny Scarrs at Neighbourhood — a company in which Street and Evitt are partners [*see pages 35-37*].

Another company that’s linked with Method is merchandise firm Blanks Factory, co-founded by rapper Dion Hamilton and Jonny Grant. Dion manages Fredo, who hit No.1 last year with Dave collaboration *Funky Friday*, as well as Tiffany Calver and Jonny Grant. Songwriter/bassist Brendan Grieve is also a management client, while the Method publishing company reps Bruno Major, Tourist and Finlay Robson.

MBUK meets Evitt and Street in their new office on a quiet corner in Hampstead. We chat about Method’s founding by two cheeky upstarts at Virgin Records, who then “blagged” their way through Sam Smith’s meteoric rise. They also explain the modern master plan for their company...

First things first — how did you meet?

Sam: We’d met at a club called Yoyo in Notting Hill through a mutual friend. We got on and then the universe sits us next to each other in Virgin Records when it was run by Shabs [Jobanputra]. This must be over 10 years ago; we worked in marketing.

That was a weird time to be at EMI, which was in a difficult situation to say the least, but we had a wicked team around us – Manish Arora, Shabs, Sarah Sherry, Olly Rice, Fay Hoyte, Glyn Aikins and Jason Ellis, who have gone on to do great things in the music industry, and we had Parlophone next door as well. We were involved in Professor Green, Emeli Sandé, Jamie T, product manager stuff, and then we started managing producer duo Craze & Hoax, who did *Heaven* and *Next To Me* with Emeli, which was our first success as managers.

“Virgin Records was falling apart, like the last days of disco. But it was fun...”

Then we started managing Disclosure, an act called Alpines and Ria Ritchie. We signed [label] deals with Ria and Alpines and that gave us the money on the advances to leave [Virgin] and start our own business. We were at a point where we weren’t institutionalised enough; we were kind of in Virgin but [ahead of Universal’s EMI buyout] it was all weird; there were people leaving, coming and going, it was falling apart, it was like the last days of disco. But it was fun and we would never have been given that responsibility or opportunity in another label. Shabs was just like, ‘Do whatever you want, go and sign and manage, go and do everything.’

We built a little management roster that was enough for us to leave; [we] lived in the same flat in Shepherd's Bush, had one laptop, one car and two Blackberries, and built off that. Alpines and Ria weren't successful under our management, but Disclosure came up kind of unexpectedly, really. It all happened very naturally and easily, which is how we now know [something is working]. That led us to Jimmy Napes – Felix Howard introduced us to him, they started writing songs together and we moved to East London.

Jack: We got a flat in Dalston, and one night at around 11pm Jimmy sent us an attachment with no subject or anything, just a song, which was *Lay Me Down*. We played it through a laptop looked across [at each other like], 'Who the fuck is this? This is incredible.' We call [Jimmy] up immediately: 'What's going on? Who is this person and how can we meet him?' He told us a story about Sam and the first thing we did was play it to Disclosure, who by this time had started to pick up a head of steam — they had a few records on the Radio 1 playlist. *Tenderly* was really starting to move, and they were starting to do this little live show in small clubs around England and Europe. We got the four of them [Sam Smith, Jimmy Napes and Disclosure] in a room, they wrote *Latch* and that was the beginning of a real upward trajectory.

We released *Latch*, we did a deal for Sam [at Capitol UK], then dropped *Lay Me Down* and everything snowballed from there. Disclosure went on to do what they did, having amazing success around the world. Sam came so quickly after that and Jimmy at this point was writing everything with them. So every success Sam and Disclosure had, Jimmy was part of. It went on for two or three years of madness, culminating in Sam winning the Oscar. It was the greatest experience you can ever ask for, but at no point did we stop and think about it; we were just flying by the seat of our pants. We were blagging, no-one had ever told us how to do this!

At the time, we were working out of Capitol Records, [Nick Raphael and Jo Charrington] had given us a desk in there because we were working so closely on Sam, and it proved to be one of the best things we ever did; it meant we were [all] so reactive on that Sam project for the first album. Every decision was made immediately — we'd run up to [Nick and Jo] and have the conversation. They were so good to us.

Sam: We were just rolling with it as best we could through the process. It was the ultimate 'making it up as we went along'; we always had an intuition, but there was no strategy, really. I remember a mad moment of coming back from the Grammys and being on cloud nine, beyond anything I ever would have expected to happen, wheeling my wheely case through South Acton Estate, going up to my flat which was mice infested, with my flat mate smoking skunk on the sofa. Immediate leveller!

"I remember coming back from the Grammys to my mice-infested flat."

It was only in the aftermath of all of that that we started to take stock, figure out what had happened and learn from it. It was so chaotic, we were making decisions that were impacting the rest of our lives, but the actual lessons didn't really take root until we sat down afterwards and were like, 'What do we want to do now and how do we build a business?'

What lessons *did* you learn?

Sam: That the artist is of absolute paramount importance. The reason why we were successful was because our artists had amazing vision and dreamed really big; we were able to align ourselves with those visions and dreams and help them work. It's exactly the same thing with Slowthai for us, and Dave for the Neighbourhood guys – we are here to help facilitate their vision.

Before [Sam and Disclosure], we probably encroached onto other artists' visions, tried to project our own stuff onto them and that doesn't work in the long-term. When you have someone like Sam, Disclosure or Slowthai, we are literally there to go, 'Yeah that's a great idea, let's do that.' As you start to piece things together, you understand American radio or touring routes and then you learn from Simon Moran, Tom Schroeder, Alex Hardee, Summer Marshall, Mike Greek and Nick or Jo — people who have done it multiple times before and taken us under their wing.

Jack: David Joseph has been so good to us, and we will never forget the way [Capitol US boss] Steve Barnett looked after us during the first [Sam] campaign. He put so much time and effort into Sam and the project; he's incredible, that guy is so good at what he does and he was so helpful to us and supportive. It helped, massively.

As a manager, you have so much control if you want it and that is a great thing, but you can also end up thinking you control too much or you know too much. We are very aware that agents know more about live than us, promoters know more about putting on shows than us, the radio guy knows more about radio than us; it's about being aware of that, working with them, and hopefully just being a cog in the middle that makes the whole ship run smoothly.

[Beyond that, it's about] timing and working hard. We'd get up in the morning, do England, stay up until midnight speaking to the Americans and then do it all over again. If you want to break something globally you have to put the hours in, and the act has to work harder than anyone – and realise that their lives are going to be over for a few years. But if you do it and you've got the talent to back it up, that is when it works. Ninety-five percent of what we do is just hard work.

How has the Sam Smith experience had an impact on the way you run Method today?

Sam: The way we want to run our company is to empower people to do what they are good at and we can be the conduit for that

Sam Smith

Disclosure

knowledge. With this company now, a lot of people are feeding into us with amazing skill sets, and, as Jack says, our job is not to necessarily have that skill set, but to interpret it and impact it onto the campaign.

We are lucky because we landed on our feet, even from the Virgin days. People like Sarah and Manish would spend hours talking to us about stuff. We were lucky enough to work on Massive Attack; we were offered opportunities that not everyone gets offered. At the same time, we'd be going down the road to meet Universal, doing meetings with our competitor about remixing productions, writing, or acts we managed. Then we'd try to sneak back in; everyone [at Virgin] knew that we'd been out for like five hours!

Jack: A couple of weeks [into the Virgin job] we were sitting down with Jonathan Dickins talking about Jamie T remixes… I'd [previously] interned at Island for three months and saw how [that label] worked; it was great, they are amazing at what they do, but that would never have happened – we would not have had that free rein. My job [at Virgin] was Marketing Assistant, I was literally there to make cups of tea, and I'd go missing for hours in the middle of the day. Credit to all of those who saw that but didn't give a shit about it – our boss Sarah Sherry just allowed it to happen, which was amazing.

When we quit [Virgin] one week apart [from one another], we thought we were really clever. They said, 'You do realise we knew you were late every day?' We [arrived] in a different lift but obviously weren't anywhere near as subtle as we thought we were.

At some point you went from working in the Capitol building as a team of four, to having your own office in Soho — when did that happen?

Jack: We moved into Soho after the second Disclosure album and before Sam's second album. At the same time as getting the Soho office, we'd agreed with David Joseph to do this label, so we did a [distribution] deal with Universal and licensed our label to them. With that, we started employing people and building a team to help with management, but also the label side of things. That's when things started really growing. A rapper we managed called Dion Hamilton came to us with this idea about printing people's merchandise on this special T-shirt he'd designed; we thought it was amazing so we worked on that, they joined the building and then everything started growing from there. Then Jack and Benny started talking about this idea [for Neighbourhood].

I've known Jack since the day I was born, he was the reason I got into music in the first place. And Benny got me my internship at Island, so it came full circle. [Other] people were starting to talk to them and they were like, 'We're all friends; what if we just did this together?' For us that was the biggest no-brainer ever. So we worked out a deal that everyone was happy with and they came in too. This all happened over a two/three year period.

Sam: Personally, I would say that starting the label was the hardest thing in my memory. When I look back, that was a tough two years… from being a manager to running a label isn't a transferable skill. [Two years at Virgin] didn't really give us the full spectrum of how difficult [the wider business] is. Only now are we starting to even begin to see the little green shots of artists that have come out of that period. It was tough.

And you launched when the industry was transitioning from a download model to streaming…

Sam: Yeah, and since we started in music it just seems like it's been a constant state of change. It used to be Annie Mac, first play on SoundCloud, then you get all the blogs... Then [the industry launch model changed]. You stopped launching on SoundCloud, you had to launch with Spotify – so it was two years of trying to figure that out and not really fully understanding it.

> ***"We want to make the Method label a genuine success, a home for artists."***

Then this whole day-and-date thing [with radio] where everyone was like, 'We can't do it'; now even to think that there was a pre-order on a single is just bonkers. It changes so fast and I think it's going to continue to change; it doesn't feel like we are in any way a set template even now.

All we know is having to try and adapt – when we have a plan, all of a sudden you have to throw it out the window and try and think of another way of launching music.

Everyone is releasing so quickly now. The Americans in particular are releasing such a high volume of pop music, it's kind of daunting. So we are trying to adapt more to that time frame and keep singles coming, not having those big breaks and thinking, 'Oh we need to build to this big album release that's going to happen in two years' time.' It's like, No, get an album out in six months' time – how do we get to that point?

Jack: And if we can't, we are going to have to drop X amount of singles in between just to keep the momentum going because no-one is really waiting for an album, they just want to listen to what's out there and if you are not in the conversation, you are not really relevant.

Is your label there to facilitate early releases for management clients or is it something you'd like to grow into a standalone company in its own right?

Jack: Much more the latter. We held off on doing a label [distribution] deal for a long time because we felt it wasn't the right time — there was too much going on with Sam, Disclosure or Jimmy, and when we finally had a moment to breathe we had the conversation because we wanted to give it its best shot and we want it to be a success.

Ideally, we won't manage anything on the record label because there is too much of a conflict. We want to make the label a genuine success and something that can be a home for artists to consider alongside all the indies and all the majors – we want to be taken as seriously as everyone else. We are a long way off what the others have achieved, but we are only going into it with that as our goal.

Sam: With management we are kind of agnostic, we will do what's right for that client. What we've always wanted is the ability to do what we want – so when we meet someone, say they are already signed [to a label] but without a manager, we can manage them; or we meet someone who is managed but unpublished, we can publish them. We want the ability to have a conversation with everyone we are into and the only thing that changes between us is the contract or the structure of the relationship. With the way the market and everything is moving, opportunities arise and you need to be able to have the flexibility to adapt to those.

So you don't have an upstream deal with Universal…

Sam: No, that was one thing that we always wanted to avoid. There are amazing people who work within the Universal structure but we always wanted to be our own thing, we always wanted our own identity and thought that if we plugged into other labels, which may have helped us quicken our process a little bit, we would have lost our identity.

All the stuff we put out before has helped us learn a lot about what we want to do, and what we want to do now is the Slowthais and Daves and acts that everyone in the company is buzzing about. It's really important to us that we are not trying to do things that we are not necessarily good at, which is chasing the pop thing. Sam is an anomaly within our company a little bit because he embodies [pop] so readily.

Jack: We took a lot of inspiration from how Nick and Jo run their company; it's a small team, they only sign a few things and they do it so brilliantly. All of that is absolutely what we want to achieve, but they have a very clear vision about what they want to go for musically, they do it better that anyone, but it isn't us. We needed to work out our own model, which is the small teams and

not signing a load of things, but musically it has to be different. I don't think we are about needing every act we sign to go Platinum. We have every ambition to be successful, but we've got to sign music that we actually care about and love.

It's also relevant when talking about who we hire – are we really excited about that prospect? Sometimes we would do things in a strategic way and six months later you can't really understand why you made that decision. Now we've both got to be like, We get it, we're excited by it, and everyone else is really excited by it. We've had our success with Disclosure and Sam, and hopefully with these two now [Slowthai and Dave] we can do that again.

Sam Smith remains one of the best-selling artists in his field worldwide. What's the next step for him?

Sam: On this new incarnation of Sam it definitely feels like he's stepped into his comfort zone, with *Dancing With A Stranger* [recorded with Normani, which recently hit No.1 on Billboard's Radio Songs chart] and our forthcoming singles, he's going pop, because that is who he is.

He was [always] a pop fan and now he is a pop star – and we are not going to shy away from that. There have been times when we've been trying to keep him cool or do this, that and the other, but he's cool because he's Sam, he's not cool because we're going to get a remix off of it.

Jack: Also, he likes having fun. Obviously he has his own insecurities and sadness and he'll openly talk about that, but if you spend time with him he's the biggest joker out there, he's more fun on a night out than anyone else I've ever spent time with, and it's time for him to show that.

"If you've got enough heat and a good lawyer, you can get a good record deal."

Will there be a new album from him coming later this year?

Jack: We are working on the next album and there will be more singles coming. We don't know right now for definite when the album will be released, we're just going to keep putting out music. There won't be any more gaps from him, he won't be going on a break for a while.

Sam Smith was one of a number artists who broke out of the UK in the mid 2010s, and became a huge star in the United States, in addition to elsewhere. Do you have any idea as to why so few British acts have broken globally in recent years?

Jack: There are so many reasons. The global nature of what is going on now makes it really hard to cut through. I think there has been some potential for some acts and they haven't followed through with it for reasons that I couldn't tell you. There are a few coming through now — Dave is showing it, Lewis Capaldi looks like he's going to do real numbers. It's always cyclical, there will be good runs and not so good runs.

Sam: I think people are busy as well, there is a lot of chatter in the world and you are not only competing with other musicians, you are competing with a whole world of noise. That is really hard to cut through, and I think increasingly real life takes precedence over buying an album. It's not been the easiest few years [economically] for a lot of people and I feel like that has had an impact on how people spend money.

I think the American [record industry] is doing a very good job at the moment and we are competing on a global scale immediately – Slowthai is competing against Kendrick Lamar! What we've lost is a lot of the 'mid-tier' stuff, but when you're good enough I think you'll still succeed.

So perhaps there's a growing divide between local and global...

Jack: I think that's definitely a lot to do with the emergence of rap scenes within countries. A huge part of the German local market is now rap, the same in France, and there are language barriers. The American chart is dominated by hip-hop, but globally they don't do the numbers you'd perceive based on how big they are in America because the charts have localised.

UK stuff is competing now in its own market, it's got a long way to go internationally, but [UK artists] are competing in their own territory and they are winning. I know Jack and Benny have every intention of doing everything they can with Dave in America, and only time will tell how that will work, but you can keep striving for it and there is no reason why it can't happen.

Sam: When you listen to rap, you want to hear a story you can relate to, you want to hear rappers from your area. There are some wicked rappers coming out of Birmingham, like Jaykae and Mist, who create fanbases that build into London and the country, same with [Manchester rapper] Bugzy Malone. To have such a healthy rap scene in this country is amazing and now you've got superstars in that scene, like Stormzy, Skepta and hopefully Dave, J Hus and Slowthai. I feel that we've only just started to see what that genre of music can achieve, it's starting to become a healthy, sustainable market and there is no glass ceiling on what it can do.

How globally ambitious are you?

Jack: Always, but we are realistic. Having an act that is just successful in England is great, but it's so limiting. Sam breaking in every territory to the point where we did one million tickets around the world on the last tour; that's part of the thrill of what we do and we want to try and achieve that with every act we work with. Disclosure can tour in most places around the world and do decent tickets, too. The ambition is the same every single time.

How important is independence to you?

Jack: I think it's overly valued; it's very important in terms of us as a company but this whole 'not signing to a major label' debate I feel is over-emphasised. There is a big value to major labels and major companies; I don't feel like our label could work without having the infrastructure [that comes with] being able to distribute internationally with Universal.

The reality is that very few acts are broken globally as independents. You do come across people who have such a negative attitude towards major labels and think they don't need them, and I feel like there have been a lot of times recently that have proved you do need them, or that [a major's involvment] would have helped [a campaign].

Sam: In order to break globally and have global ambitions you need a global infrastructure. I think independence is great to build up a head of steam, to have your own identity and be your own boss, but [then you need to] expand on that. That doesn't have to encroach on what you've already done; if you've picked the right team it should only amplify it. I think [signing major label deals/partnerships] is why some acts are going to go global and be around for a long time and why other acts can stagnate.

We wouldn't have broken Sam anywhere near what we did if we didn't have Nick, Jo and Steve and the international [Universal] team. When it kicked off, Universal turned the lights on and knew what to do, and we didn't. Becoming part of the Universal machine with Sam benefited us hugely. With *Latch*, they were plugging at radio for 18 months or something and then it was a hit however long after we released it; that wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for [the label team].

There's nothing to be scared of and you can get good deals now. If you've got enough heat and a good lawyer – and there are plenty about – you can get a good record deal. You can get a deal today that would have made our eyes water a few years ago! Some of the deals people are getting at the moment are incredible.

Dave hit No.1 with his debut in March — what's special about him?

Sam: That record stands up as an important piece of music for this country; if you come back to it in 20/30 years time you'll get a real understanding of what life was like right now. The pictures he paints, the way that he has weaved that whole record together… I learn so much about him as a person, but also about what it means to be 20 years old coming from London and being British at this time. It's a confusing time and it's a difficult time and I haven't heard that articulated anywhere near as well as this record does. He's an artist that's not going to go anywhere, he really is something special. Dave and the Neighbourhood guys have done a truly incredible job.

And what is it about Slowthai that made you want to get involved?

Sam: Guy from Disclosure sent me *Jiggle* two years ago and he was like, 'This guy is sick.' It definitely got my attention but I forgot about it, plain and simple. Then I got sent *T n Biscuits* [a while later] and I was like, this guy is really exciting and really good, he just sounded fresh and different.

We had a meeting, it was me, Dion, Lewis and Thai, sat together for a couple of hours, and in that space of the time we'd agreed a deal, which was the first time we met them. We all got on incredibly well, it all felt very natural and we just wanted to help amplify what they were doing and building.

They had very clear ambitions for what they wanted to achieve, how they wanted it to look and sound, and we felt that we could add something to it to help guide them a little bit.

We did the deal, exactly as we said we would, they stuck to their word we stuck to ours, then got to work and in the space of 18

Sam Smith & Normani

Slowthai

months we released a lot of music videos and music; it's been fun. Having him and Lewis come in to the office, they injected a lot of energy that wasn't necessarily there before.

Tell us about Slowthai's album and your ambitions for him.

Sam: Nothing Great About Britain is incredible social commentary woven in with his story – and his story is really fascinating. If you spend any time with him, he's a very open guy and you start to really want him to succeed; he draws you into his world, he tells you about this stuff he's been through; he's had a pretty mad life.

He's poured his heart out in this record, but he's also quite political, as is Dave. They are both giving that social commentary; they're also not afraid to get into the debate that surrounds politics, social inequality or anything. They are more than capable of stepping into the wider debate, which I think is really exciting to be around, because it's great to have young people who are engaging in all of those things and have something to say. Hopefully that generation is going to provide a few more solutions than we have at the moment.

With Thai our ambition is to keep releasing music and do the best we can. We will put the album out and just keep it going and going, and hopefully he will be recognised as a big voice in this country. I think he's going to be an influential person on people who want to make music. When you are 15/16 and hear Thai, he's the kind of guy who makes you want to go and make stuff of your own. ■

WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Growing label and management company Neighbourhood was founded by award-winning duo Benny Scarrs and Jack Foster. It has enjoyed chart-topping success with acclaimed British act Dave – and takes inspiration from the greats of the rap music game...

Last October, *Funky Friday* by young British rapper Dave was the first independent single in three years to go straight in at No.1 on the UK's Official Singles Chart. In March, his debut album, *Psychodrama*, hit the top of the Official Albums Chart with multiple five star reviews, one of which hailed it as "the boldest and best British rap album in a generation".

In a market that has recently struggled to break new talent, Dave is proof that it's still possible for the cream to rise to the top. Abundant artistic talent is only part of the story, of course, and behind the rapper is a promising label and management company, Neighbourhood, helmed by Jack Foster and Benny Scarrs.

The ambitious duo, who were honoured with the A&R Of The Year: Hip-hop/Grime gong at the A&R Awards in November, formed Neighbourhood in 2016. Scarrs and Foster had spent 10 years in A&R and management respectively and met when Scarrs signed Tinchy Stryder (then a management client of Foster) to Island Records in 2008.

They decided to partner with Jack Street and Sam Evitt (who manage Sam Smith, Disclosure and Jimmy Napes) in 2017. Foster has known Street from the day he was born, quite literally, thanks to a friendship between their parents. He says: "I have not known a life without knowing him so I guess there was a good amount of trust there to partner up!"

Foster and Scarrs discovered a then 17-year-old Dave in 2015 while watching YouTube videos and coming across his poignant and personal SBTV freestyle. "We hadn't seen a rapper that good from the UK, ever," says Foster. "Some of the things he was saying really connected with you, there was meaning and emotion straight away and it was different."

Jack Foster and Benny Scarrs

The development plan has been influenced by Dave himself "who is very analytical, he had a sense of the steps and stages he needed to take," says Scarrs. That started with setting a strong foundation as a respected rapper by doing freestyles, before creating a buzz by consistently releasing music from 2016 onwards, including collaborations with AJ Tracey, J Hus, MoStack, and then Fredo.

The latter featured on *Funky Friday* which was the first new music Dave had released in seven months — a rare lengthy break — and demand peaked.

Scarrs explains: "Dave had created a pretty insane buzz from the records he'd had out previously, and then we didn't really release anything for the rest of the year and didn't play many shows either. There was an appetite and a demand that hit fever pitch when *Funky Friday* was released."

Fredo was steadily building his own career too, and the collaboration had been teased for months through Snapchat pictures in the studio together, resulting in a perfect storm.

When it came to the album, *Psychodrama*, the element of surprise was brought into

play. Scarrs explains: "Something we talked about a lot is that it's exciting when things are surprising, but so often nowadays we are given so much information so far upfront. Also, there is so much music coming out every week, and especially in the run that we were in, there were a lot of records that were going to be important. So what we tried to do is be as exciting as possible and make it as much of a moment for the audience as possible."

He continues: "People knew an album was coming at some point, Dave has mentioned it, but he'd never been specific, so we chose not to do a long pre-order or big announcement the other side of 2018. We chose to try and keep it quite condensed and announce the album with the first single, *Black*, and put the album out within two weeks of that record dropping." It's a strategy that worked — *Psychodrama* made it to the top on just over 26k combined sales, 79% of which came from streams, despite a fierce chart battle with the new album from Foals, and releases from Dido and Sigrid.

Foals finished just 279 copies behind, and benefited from pre-orders after announcing the album in January. Their label, Warner Bros./Transgressive pulled out all the stops to try and make it to No.1, including bundling tour tickets with the album, which is a strategy Dave steered clear of.

"I think a lot of options that are available to artists to really drive people to buy your album in week of release, especially when you're in a chart battle, are probably not that reflective of people thinking this is a good piece of music and then going and buying it," says Scarrs.

The same issue was raised in the US last year by Nicki Minaj, who criticised Travis Scott for bundling his album in with merchandise and pre-sale ticket access to his upcoming *Astroworld* tour – a tour which, to Minaj's fury, had yet to be officially announced.

Scarrs continues: "Those things are chart eligible, but it doesn't feel like the focus is on the music or the records at that point. It creates a strange dynamic. Dave's level of integrity is very high; he doesn't want to do things that are making him compromise who he is, what he stands for or how he wants to deliver his music to his audience. There were many things we could have done in that week that we didn't do because it wasn't sitting right with Dave, and we understood and respected that."

Instead, Dave was out on the streets and in stores meeting fans. "These were reactionary moves, so every time we saw a ticket bundle go up for however many thousand tickets, it's like okay, we've got to respond to this somehow," Scarrs explains. "I think that [the Official Charts Company] should probably have a look at all of that because if the chart isn't about people thinking, 'I'm going to go and buy this album because I love it and I love this artist.' It becomes about something else."

Neighbourhood's releases are exclusively distributed through Universal Music. Have they been tempted to sign Dave to a major label deal at any point? Scarrs says: "Why would you? I'm not saying any artist doesn't need something from a major label, major labels are incredible, obviously, but we'd done the first two EPs independently and we learned a lot from that and were able to block out a lot of noise.

"Dave's level of integrity is very high; he doesn't compromise who he is."

"It's a very small team, we are very focused, able to be very nimble and do things really cheaply as well. It just felt good being able to run the first couple of projects like that."

Foster continues: "And we had a team that we believed could deliver what we needed, which we've built slowly over the last three years. [Me and Benny had] both worked with a few different labels and realised it's more about the people you've got in there, it's not some magic where if you are signed to a major label you now get all this extra work. The people we had felt just as good as any people we've ever worked with across the last 10 years, so why change that?" Those people include the other members of the Neighbourhood team — operational/marketing exec James Walsh, and Ruby Atkin and Justin Scott who work across label and management.

The plan for Dave this year has already featured a sold out UK tour that closed with two dates at the 5k cap. Brixton Academy in early May. He recently announced further tours for 2019 in the US, Europe and Australia (territories he previously toured in 2017/18). Further live plans are yet to be announced.

The ultimate ambitions are global. Foster says: "I think Dave is the person who could push UK rap the furthest that it's been in the US; that is definitely the ambition."

Scarrs continues: "You've also got to look at Europe and Australia, streaming has opened them up massively. Ten years ago you could have a No.1 album as a rapper in the UK, but you couldn't get arrested in Europe. It's really interesting to see that you can build at a similar rate in the UK as you can in Europe and Australia.

"America is a big task, you've got to spend time there, it's a huge commitment and investment, both time-wise and financially, but I think on a technical level Dave is more than good enough. It then becomes about people being able to relate to [the music] in terms of the content and the subject matter that he is tackling."

Grime DJ and producer Sir Spyro, who has a grime show on BBC Radio 1Xtra and worked on Stormzy's debut album, is also managed by Neighbourhood. On the label side, Scarrs and Foster are actively looking for new signings; the ambition is to turn their company into a flagship British label dedicated to rap music – something the duo have noticed a distinct lack of across the course of their careers.

Scarrs explains: "We've always more or less worked in that genre – rap, call it grime, urban, whatever you want – and were really obsessed with looking at labels like Def Jam, Roc-A-Fella, Death Row and Bad Boy. The UK has such an amazing movement within black music, or music inspired by that, but there are no dedicated labels. I wouldn't want to limit us and say we wouldn't sign anything that's not rap, but the artists need to complement each other."


Dave

In terms of release strategy, Scarrs points to XL as a label whose attitude to quality over quantity he admires. "They don't put out a lot of records but they are hugely successful and have a history of signing non-conforming acts. They've taken a lot of chances on records or artists that they think are important, artists that might shift the culture, and who sit outside of the battles that happen within the major label landscape. I really respect that."

Prospective signings must "have something to talk about, something to say and a vision for themselves," he continues. "I think there are artists who can go and plug into a label and they give you your songs, your blueprint and say here we go, but that isn't what we are trying to do here. We want to work with artists who have a great vision and direction for themselves, and something that we can share and help them try to achieve."

When it comes to numbers on the management side, both agree that less is more; they aim to work on two or three acts a year per cycle.

Foster says: "When you've got a hot artist it can be very easy to go gather up a lot of other artists, which I think is probably a mistake I've made in the past. So less is more and attention to detail is the management strategy. It's all about time, focusing your belief and effort on fewer things. I don't think you can properly manage more than a few things at once, at a maximum. You need that attention to detail and when something is as good as Dave is, the artist deserves that." ■

‘LET’S NOT BURDEN OURSELVES WITH THE PRESSURE OF HAVING TO BE HUGE…’

Tough luck – too late. Lewis Capaldi is smashing records, selling out arenas – and giving new hope to the potential of British pop stars in the streaming age...

Where did Lewis Capaldi come from?

Alright, clever clogs, obviously he heralded from Scotland – specifically, Bathgate, equidistant between Edinburgh and Glasgow. Any mug with Wikipedia (hello!) could tell you that.

But, music industry-wise, as he leaves all other UK-born new artist projects in his commercial wake, where did Lewis Capaldi *come from*? How did he go from being ‘that guy nominated for the BRIT Critics Choice’ back in January, to unleashing the UK’s fastest-selling album of 2019 just four months later – an album which has now crashed through the one million global equivalent sales barrier?

One person who knows exactly how – having ridden sidesaddle with Capaldi during the British music industry story of the year – is the artist’s long-term manager, Ryan Walter. Walter, the founder of Interlude Artists, previously worked with Island-signed singer/songwriter Lauren Aquilina, before he signed Capaldi after discovering him on SoundCloud three years ago. After releasing his first track, *Bruises*, independently in March 2017, Capaldi went on to be named as one of Vevo’s ‘Artists To Watch’ later that year. In 2018, he won public plaudits from the likes of Niall Horan and James Bay, and supported Sam Smith on the latter’s *The Thrill Of It All* European tour across 19 dates. All the while, Capaldi’s fanbase kept building – accelerated by the release of fan favourite tunes like *Grace* and *Rush* (feat. Jessie Reyez).

In 2019, though, things have truly gone bananas. Capaldi has already claimed two Top 5 UK singles this year, with *Someone You Loved* hitting the top spot in March, before *Hold Me While You Wait* climbed to No.4 in May. Both tracks appear on his debut album, *Divinely Uninspired To A Hellish Extent*, which sold 90k album equivalents during its opening week on the Official Albums Chart.

Lewis Capaldi and Ryan Walter, pictured in 2017

With 46% of this sales figure physical, Capaldi’s effort easily outsold debut album No.1 first-weeks this year from the likes of Billie Eilish (48k), Tom Walker (37k) and Dave (26k). Perhaps even more impressively, Virgin EMI-signed Capaldi sold out a planned 2020 UK arena tour in April in just 10 minutes – with over 100k tickets now shifted in total.

Here, Ryan Walter talks us through his discovery of Capaldi, why he initially decided to sign with Universal in Germany – and the craziness of being the biggest new artist in the United Kingdom for years…

How did you get into management in the first place?

My background’s quite geeky. I’ve got a degree and a Masters in computer science. When I left uni I decided to do something that combined my love of music with the techy stuff, and started working at Sony,


Lewis Capaldi has now racked up over a billion global streams of his catalogue to date

Industry heads were turned when Capaldi was named a Vevo dscvr 'Artist To Watch' in late 2017

RCA, while Charlie Lycett was running it. I did digital [marketing] for a year-and-a-half there – my first job. I was 21, 22 and worked on a bunch of artists like Pink, Britney Spears and Beyoncé.

I loved it, but working at a major label like that means you can see the pitfalls quite quickly in terms of the struggle they have breaking acts and certain things they're not able to do. I always had in the back of my head, 'What if I could do all of this myself?' I always believed you could break acts through digital, and I happened to make a good friend in Jamie Lillywhite, who managed Ellie Goulding. I became inspired by what he did – he found Ellie at the University just up the road to where I went in Canterbury. Another good friend was James Barnes, who at the time was managing Gabrielle Aplin, and I was inspired by his enthusiasm and his boldness: 'I'll [A&R] the music, I'll pay for the videos, I'll do the ads myself…' I loved that idea.

From there I signed Lauren [Aquilina]. Lauren then signed to Island with Darcus [Beese] and Louis [Bloom], which was a really good experience. She's now gone on to achieve some absolutely amazing things as both an artist and writer, post-major label. After that I went to America for a break for a couple of months, then spent five months just looking for a special musical talent online. And that's when I found Lewis.

What was that process like?

The bit I enjoy the least about [being a manager] is sitting, trawling through SoundCloud and YouTube for seven hours a day, but that's what I did. I would open – no joke – about 500 SoundCloud tabs at a time, listening to 10 seconds of each artist to get a read on it. About four and a half months into that search, I was in my mum's house, and I stumbled across a recording of Lewis on SoundCloud singing into his iPhone in his bedroom. Immediately I thought: this is amazing, I'm in.

Lewis had two songs up at the time, and they had less than 20 plays each. It hadn't been blogged about by anyone. One of them was called *Burning In The Back Of Your Mind*, which is still one of his best songs – that he wouldn't put on the album! I thought, 'Wow if this guy has this voice when he's 18 years old…' I messaged him on SoundCloud and was on a plane the next day to Dumfries, where he was playing an open mic night. There was, like, two other people in that bar.

Lewis did a 30-minute set and I recorded it all on my iPhone. I listened to it on repeat for two days non-stop after. I called him, told him he was incredible, and then for the next six months, while he was still at college in Glasgow, I'd pay for him to fly down [to London] and stay at my house so he could do writing sessions.

"Lewis is incredible to work with. He's driven, he's kind and he's humble."

What did you learn from your experience with Lauren and Island, in terms of the personal contribution you'd have to make to Lewis's career, and what you did and didn't want from a record label partner?

This is no way a disservice to major labels, because when they're good they can be incredible – I can't speak highly enough of what Ted [Cockle], David [Joseph], Frank [Briegmann] and Steve [Barnett] have brought to Lewis's career at Virgin/Universal, for example. But the [Lauren experience] taught me more than ever that, as a manager, you have to get stuck in to a bit of everything. Major labels will definitely give you time, but, as a manager, sitting around and just expecting things to happen isn't good enough.

Before Lewis signed with Universal we were selling 700-ish tickets up in Scotland, and I'd promoted his tour around the rest of the UK in small, 150-cap rooms. We knew we had to build a base ourselves, because you go on the website of any major record company and you'll find the artist you never hear spoken about [anymore]; you're always fearful of being one of those.

It helps that Lewis is incredible to work with. He's driven, he's kind and he's humble, but he's also willing to dig in when it comes to thanking people, spending time on social media; he totally understands the importance of that.

He really appreciates how hard the Virgin EMI team, Clive [Cawley] and the guys there, work for him, and he treats them all with respect. Both Lewis and I understand that these folks are working long hours, make lifestyle choices around working for you, going the extra mile for you – and we pride ourselves on showing our appreciation for that.

How did Lewis get signed initially – out of Germany, right?

Correct. I'd been friends with Daniel Lieberberg for years, and he remains one of my favourite people in music. [Lieberberg, who signed Capaldi to UMG, was head of Universal's domestic labels in Germany before jumping ship to Sony in October 2017]. Daniel's an incredible person to be around – he's one of the very few people in music at his level who takes such sensibility and pride in what he does. We were WhatsApp buddies.

When I spoke to Lewis initially, I was pretty against doing a major label deal. I felt I could build a team around us, speaking to Paul Hitchman [at AWAL] or whoever and do something outside the box. But I sat Lewis down and said, 'If [a major deal] is what you want then my job is to facilitate that.' I presented both sides of the argument. We brought in Berkley Edwards from Clintons on legal, who was incredible, and I explained who I would like to approach about Lewis's music.

At that point we hadn't played anyone any music – we didn't want to wind anyone up, and we didn't want anyone to get carried away with money and hype. I'd learnt from other experiences that, with Lewis, I wanted to sign a deal that was favorable in terms of excluding ancillary income, but put no pressure on the label at

Celebrating the Official Albums Chart No.1 in style

all – so they didn't feel on a timeframe with it. Daniel was the first person who came to mind.

I sent him some music at Christmas [2016], and he came back a few days later like, 'What the hell is this? When are you around? Come to Berlin!' Within a few more days we were over in Germany with Daniel and Frank [Briegmann]. Word got out and the crazy money offers started coming in – this is before we put the first song out! We wanted to put [Bruises] out through AWAL, which Daniel understood. And as soon as Lewis met Daniel and the [Universal Germany] team, it felt like a very natural fit.

Why sign Lewis to Germany rather than a UK label?

It wasn't a decision made in isolation: a tonne of UK male singer/songwriters have broken out of Europe in the past few years, whether that's Rag 'N' Bone Man, George Ezra, James Arthur. I wasn't writing the UK off. In my mind, I saw it as a great [plan] for Universal to do their thing in Germany while, within my remit, I could build the tickets in the UK – working with Alex Hardee at Coda – and [Lewis and I] could handle the socials.

After the switch to streaming five years or so ago, at first the UK took a while to find a way to properly break artists again. In Europe, the barriers to entry at radio were much lower; the gap between streaming and radio was smaller than the UK. At the UK [networks] it was like, 'You need crazy streaming numbers and your socials need to be on fire [before we playlist you].' We felt it was a helpful entry point to have Germany lead that.

I thought [Universal Germany] could open doors over there, and that some areas of the UK media might not be ready for an [artist making Capaldi's style of] music. I love sad pop music and so does Lewis, and we're very honest about it not trying to be anything else.

Some people ask you to do certain features, or to dabble in different worlds to try to get the angle right for UK specialist radio. That never felt right to us. Virgin EMI and Universal have never pushed us in that direction, to their great credit.

Lewis makes accessible pop music, and we knew we weren't going to get certain [UK] specialist [radio] looks on it. We didn't want to make it 'cooler' and compromise what it was Lewis does best. We had that conversation and our instinct was, 'We've just put out a really good ballad… now let's put out another really good ballad!'

And then Daniel Lieberberg leaves Universal for Sony...

To say I was gutted is an understatement. I wasn't angry with him at all. He's a brilliant man and a great friend in this business. You hear the story of numerous artists who struggle after a key A&R figure leaves the label, but I knew we were in a reasonably strong position – streaming was looking good, socials were starting to build. I was very honest with Lewis; I told him it might

[L-R] Capitol's Sam Breslin and Steve Barnett, Lewis, Virgin EMI's Ted Cockle and Ryan Walter mark a million albums sold globally in New York, June 2019

be a struggle for us that the guy leading [our campaign] was leaving. We had an open chat about it, and knew that, to weather it, we were going to have to dig in.

But I have to give complete credit to [UMG central Europe boss] Frank Briegmann: he was absolutely brilliant after Daniel left. I flew to Berlin straight away, sat with Frank, and he pretty much [agreed] to a list of [things we wanted], including personnel and A&R – [specifically], that Lewis and I would A&R the album, after Daniel was probably only involved in one song. Frank was incredible, he pretty much built the team around us exactly how we wanted it. Certain stuff is now run out of Germany, while other stuff, like international, is run out of the UK.

The other thing that was a huge help was having Ted and David so actively invested in the UK. That all came about after we put out the first song, *Bruises* [in March 2017]. We got a million emails when that landed; we met a few labels [in the Universal UK building] but I'd already worked with a few people in the Virgin system before who I knew were brilliant, like Andy [Knox], while Clive and Ted's reputations go before them.

It became immediately apparent that Virgin EMI would be the best partner for Lewis. We spoke about timelines, and that this wasn't going to be a quick burner. I can't rate Virgin highly enough – they gave us all the time we needed. Ted was like, 'Tell me what you need, tell me what you don't need.' And they have been on it the whole time ever since.

"We believe the album has a right and a purpose to exist in 2019."

When was the moment you went to Virgin EMI and said, 'Okay, let's press the button and go?'

Towards the end of last year, September/October time, I was sitting at home thinking, 'Is this ever going to happen how I believe it can?' We had great social numbers, great streaming numbers, amazing partners and all the rest – but we hadn't had a hit. Lewis and I kept believing that something would happen.

Then, one day, Lewis goes into the studio with TMS and writes two songs in a day; I heard a verse and chorus of [*Someone You Loved*] and just thought, Wow. When we put out that song, straight away, the early signs showed there was something in it. I'm a stat geek, and I could see the numbers.

As soon as we realised that, I called Frank, called Ted and we spoke to David Joseph. We saw [*Someone You Loved*] jump from 60 to 23 on the chart and I knew it

was happening. It went Top 10 on iTunes off the back off one radio play – Scott Mills on Radio 1 – and when something's that reactive it was like, 'Okay, let's get the video right, get the mixes sorted and scale this up.'

You mentioned major label 'pitfalls' before, but when you reach this moment – when an act's career starts to 'go' – is that where they can come into their own?
Absolutely. Ted was pulling us to one side and helping make big decisions, David [Joseph] was emailing, Lucian emailed too – we could feel the support. Everyone had been doing an incredible job up to that point, but it went up a level. They try not to tell you how much money they're spending, but you have an idea!

You feel like, when something's in that position, they know the exact buttons to push and the conversations to have around the world; the international President of Streaming at Universal was now getting involved every day. And then, on live, Alex Hardee has been incredible, as has Kirk Sommer in the US.

One thing Universal has been amazing at is taking care of me and Lewis throughout, helping take pressure off and share the load. They've been brilliant at that, and that's come from the top down. Ted literally said to me the other day, 'What are Lewis's days off this year?' And he wrote them down on a bit of paper. They know this is a crazy life change for a young guy, and have been really good at staying sensitive to that.

Has your determination to stay as independent as possible for as long as possible conversely led to the perfect major label relationship?
Definitely. Universal and Virgin EMI have been so respectful of me being a control freak – looking at everything from TV ad spot booking to Facebook ad profiling. Attention to detail across every area – digital, spend, A&R, mixes, everything – is super important. It's tiring, but I was with Lewis when we first picked up the vinyl together, and it was such a moment of pride.

Your determination to create an 'album' as an experience is obviously important to you.
Yes, and it comes back to me and Lewis having the belief that the album as a format should still be at the forefront of a campaign. We can brand the shows around the album, we can draw a line under it as a body of work. It helps with our branding, with our partnerships with DSPs and other things.

Maybe I'm old fashioned, but I don't believe releasing a 'playlist' as an album has the same weight. And I'd find it really hard to brand around that; how can you market a 'playlist' other than on-platform? How can you make that a tangible experience that leaks into other worlds? We believe the album has a right and a purpose to exist in 2019. Having a really good album that you can maximise [over a campaign] buys you more time. What worries me in the industry today is when you have artists – at all levels – who release albums and then quickly move on to new music. Some artists are releasing albums, and then three weeks later putting new music out.

"I can't rate Virgin EMI highly enough... they know the exact buttons to push."

We want to extend the life of the album as long as possible so it means something beyond a collection of songs. I feel you lose a bit of identity by just rattling through stuff. If you can hold your nerve and say, 'Look, we just spent a long time making an album and building an audience who will like it; what if we believe in it and push it enough that it hangs around for a bit?' I don't want to be asking Lewis, 'When's the next song coming?' I don't want to put that pressure on. If we can make this album count for something, we should only come with something else when we feel it's amazing, rather than just chasing the next New Music Friday.

It's interesting to hear you talk so much about the album being core to an artist's 'identity'.
It's making it all stand for something. It's harder to break artists when you take away any physicality… when it all becomes a song-based thing. I get philosophical in my discussions with Lewis, and we talk about never only wanting to be as good as the next song we put out. We want lots of people to like the music – of course we do – but there's still room to be that classic artist. Look at Adele; she can go away for three years, and she's earned it because she makes brilliant music with a timeless vocal. I'd 100% never dare put Lewis in Adele's category, but at the same time I like the idea of earning your space because people respect your craft.

Quite a lot, industry-wise, is on Lewis's shoulders as a potential UK star in the US. Can you temper your ambitions in the States, while remaining ambitious?
Absolutely. Capitol came on at the same time Virgin came on board. I had lunch with Ashley [Newton] and then picked things up with Steve and Michelle [Jubelirer]. It was the easiest decision to make. There were some lovely other offers, but Capitol was right. Having two British people at the label helped, as it felt like home. More than that, I'd heard lots of great stories about Capitol, how they will work – and are now working – an artist when there is very little story in the US. Sam [Breslin, Senior Marketing Manager] has been excellent, and the Head of Radio, Greg [Marella] has been phenomenal. We're starting to put in real time in the States; Steve and Lucian have been absolutely brilliant, and it's a genuine honour for us to have their attention at such an exciting time in the campaign.

Someone You Loved is already showing some very encouraging signs and is climbing the Billboard Hot 100 each week. I dare not dream it, but there's a feeling it could go all the way.

We know we're going to have to deliver [Capitol US] a massive story [out of the UK] to give them something to run with.

Over 100,000 tickets have now been sold for a 2020 UK arena tour

The industry hasn't had a huge British artist over there for a while, and Capitol can see a potential massive market for the right story [with Lewis].

In the UK, I definitely set me and Lewis targets – be that units, tickets, or stream counts etc. Over there, it's more, 'Let's just do everything Capitol ask of us and see how far it goes. Let's not burden ourselves with the pressure of having to be huge.' It's such a difficult thing to achieve, especially as we're in the middle of all this craziness in Europe, but we're going to give it our all.

What marks Lewis out for you?
I could speak for hours about what makes Lewis amazing as a person. He's genuinely humble. He's turned from the laziest person I've ever met to an absolute machine within two years – I didn't use to be able to get him out of bed! He wants to do well for himself, but also wants to do well so everyone around him can [succeed]. He's very self-aware; he hates falseness and pretentiousness, which obviously comes across in his social media. He's got a great family around him who keep him grounded and protect him.

More than anything, he's just incredibly talented – and because of that I really, really trust his view. The most rewarding thing for me is the honesty and trust I have with him. I can very openly say, 'I don't like this song' for [a given reason] and he never takes it to heart. Likewise, I can tell him other [tracks] that he hates are my favourites! Either way, if he loves a song, at the end of the day, that song goes on the album.

Musically, he's my favourite artist of all time. I know that probably sounds lame, but it's true. I love his songs, his voice is incredible, and I have no doubt that when he plays those arenas, he's going to more than hold his own. ■

‘WE’RE ALL WORKING IN THIS INDUSTRY BECAUSE OF OUR PASSION, SO LET’S RECOGNISE THAT’

Decade Management is the new London-based company launched by Amanda Playle and Jho Oakley. Here, Playle tells MBUK about her career, and why now was the right time to launch a venture which is looking to make an impact in the global industry…

“I think ‘blew me away’ is probably too weak a statement,” says Amanda Playle of the industry’s exuberant response to the news that she and Jho Oakley had launched their new company, Decade Management.

The pair previously worked together at JHO Management, with a mega-successful electronic-oriented roster featuring multi-platinum selling, seminal Australian band Pendulum and EDM pioneers Knife Party, as well as Chase & Status, Sub Focus, Zane Lowe and Netsky. Under JHO, Chase & Status’ 2011 album No More Idols went double platinum and were the second biggest-selling UK band that year. The firm also went on to manage Zane Lowe’s move from BBC Radio 1 to Apple Music in 2015.

In 2015, Oakley was struck down by a chronic illness and the pair were forced to close JHO and part ways. Yet in March this year the two executives, with their combined 25 years of experience in the music industry, reunited to launch Decade Management with a roster that already boasts Pendulum, Knife Party and emerging talent, Cameron Hayes.

“I don’t really know how to phrase it properly, because I don’t know how to give it the gravity that it deserves,” says Playle of the industry reaction to the new firm. “The support and the number of people that have been in touch and said such lovely things and wished us well is overwhelming.”

Decade Management’s inaugural year sees Pendulum set off on their Trinity World Tour this summer, which starts at London’s SW4 Festival and carries on into 2020, while Knife Party are set to release their new Lost Souls EP, which is out this summer.

Under the guidance of the team at JHO, Pendulum, the hard rock/drum’n’bass crossover band featuring Rob Swire and Gareth McGrillen scored a No.1 UK album in 2010 with Immersion. The following year saw the launch of Swire and McGrillen’s globally successful electronic house production duo project, Knife Party. “It was a bit of a curveball really,” remembers Playle.

“The boys were going, ‘You know what, we’ve actually been working in the studio on some music and we want to become this production duo called Knife Party.

Playle has spent the last two-and-half years far removed from the nightclubs, Vegas residencies and warehouse parties of Knife Party’s world, however, working with acts such as George Ezra and James Bay at Closer Artists – a part of her life and career that she says she looks back on very fondly.

“Paul [McDonald] and Ryan [Lofthouse] are absolutely superb managers and they have a fantastic ear for new talent,” says Playle. “It’s a team of people where everyone goes to every gig.”

In addition to Pendulum and Knife Party, the Decade Roster features newcomer Cameron Hayes, who released her debut single Chemical Love at the beginning of May.

“She just has this ridiculously powerful voice, from the moment I first heard her I was like, ‘We’ve got to work together,’” says Playle. “Thankfully, when I saw her at an open mic in the summer last year, she proved all my predictions correct.”

Looking to the future, Playle says that the plan is to keep Decade running as a “boutique” management firm, with the three above-mentioned artists plus one more production duo that the company is currently in talks with.

“It’s four artists in our first year of business,” explains Playle. “It’s still quite early days for us, but it’s about keeping that boutique feel to the company and building a fantastic staff of dedicated, passionate people who just love our artists [and] love the job.

“The reason we all get into music in any way, shape or form is because we were those kids who were at the gigs and couldn’t wait to go and get the vinyl, or the CDs, or the tapes. “If you can find artists who are coming up with really exciting new projects and music that just makes you have that reaction, you can’t go far wrong.”

“It might sound clichéd, but it’s just like coming home.”

What’s it like working with Pendulum and Knife Party?

It’s an absolute pleasure coming back into the fold with those guys. Obviously, the whole time Jho and I were working together at JHO Management, Pendulum was our first management baby. Being back on board with the guys, it might sound clichéd and so cheesy, but it’s just like coming home. It’s family.

We know everything about them. They know everything about us. It’s kind of working with your brothers and trying to go out and reignite the passion for the project. We came off the back of two sold-out arena tours in a year, and a No.1 album with Immersion, and all these huge moments for the band and as management.

What was the electronic music biz like at that point, and how much have you seen that change?
With all the inroads that Pendulum made and all the bridges that they created between the electronic world, the dance world, the rock world, the pop word, getting music onto Radio 1, that was all just a completely crazy ride. They were at the forefront of this kind of EDM wave. It was crazy to see how that popped off. One day they would be playing a show in Germany for example, as Pendulum, in a sold-out, huge show, and then the next minute they'd be on a jet off to America to play a ridiculous set in one of their Las Vegas residencies [as Knife Party].

It was just electric to see that, to see the atmosphere and the vibe you would get in those rooms, whether it was some crazy show in Vegas at a ridiculous club with bottle service, or a gig in a grotty warehouse somewhere in Europe playing to thousands of people. It was crazy and [it's] fantastic to see how they paved the way for a lot of today's acts to move into that space too.

The way it's changed is that we are in a very different world eight years on from when Knife Party was first conceived. Streaming has just taken us in a completely new direction. The challenge for everybody is to try to get those people who were buying CDs or who would want to pirate the tracks, [and] convert all of them to legitimate, loyal fans who are streaming or downloading things from iTunes.

You mentioned how it was an electric time, you touched briefly on how they were traveling around the world from show to show and from appearance to appearance. How hard is it to manage that level of fame and the pressures that come with that for artists at that level?
Obviously I'm not in their shoes, so I can't completely give you a first hand experience of that. With Rob and Gareth, as Pendulum, they had their faces on the front cover of *Rolling Stone*, or *Mixmag*, they had their pictures on billboards. But then, when it came to Knife Party, they made the very big decision that they wanted to be completely faceless. It wasn't going to be about those two guys from Pendulum. It was going to be Knife Party, this brand new project.

It was going to be about the music, obviously, and the logo would do the rest of the talking and that would be fine. You want an interview with Knife Party? Well, listen to the music instead. It was perhaps a bit of a nail-biting time, agreeing to go into all of that and going, 'Okay, cool, guys. We're on board with this.'

But, in terms of their enjoyment of that ride, I would say being part of that and seeing how they would go day to day dealing with all of that, in some ways it was a lot easier than having their faces blown up on billboards. I think they're two very distinct entities with the faceless Knife Party, and the fame of Rob Swire, the guy with the cool beard and the hair and the keytar in Pendulum. I think they [managed] that very well.


Cameron Hayes

You mentioned how you've been trying to build the best team around this as possible, can you tell us about the team?
With Knife Party, they are their own label at the moment [distributed] by ADA. We're working hand-in-hand with Howard [Corner] and with James McGuinness and the wonderful team at ADA. The rest of the team is obviously us as management, so that's myself, that's Jho [Oakley], and there's Harriet [Salva], our assistant. We're working with Listen Up, who are covering radio, so that's Luke Neville and James [Paterson]. And then we have Jo [Joanna] Gardener. Luke and Jo have been across Knife Party since day one, really. So Jo is our press person for them and obviously I know I have just said, 'Oh, the guys don't do interviews', but obviously there's online press, whenever the guys go on and do any kind of [Reddit] AMAs or anything like that.

> ***"It's fantastic to see how Pendulum have paved the way for a lot of today's acts."***

And then we're working with Your Army and Infectious across club promotion as well. It's a really strong, really great team.

You've been working at Closer Artists for the last few years. What has it been like working with the team there, and what has it been like working with the artists there?


Pendulum

It was a brilliant period of my life. I've known Paul McDonald and Ryan Lofthouse for quite a few years. We actually worked in the same office space in Covent Garden in around 2009-2011, before we then moved JHO up to Tileyard. When we were forced to close JHO, it was obviously a terribly emotional time. When I got in touch with Paul and Ryan, I just knew that they were good people, friends. They were working with such wonderful talent, and to join their team was something that was really exciting.

The two managers working with Paul and Ryan are Josh Sanger and Chris Fuller. They manage the incredibly talented Lily Moore amongst others. Josh owns Barn On The Farm Festival which is seeing its tenth year this summer, an incredible feat for someone so young. I've known Chris for years through our shared love of the Drum and Bass scene, and he's such a dedicated, hard working guy who just lives for it. Abigail Marrow, Matt Walker, Michael Jarman - everyone in that company just radiates talent, it's a real testament to Paul and Ryan's ability to recognise good people. Closer has recording and publishing arms now as well as management, but despite their growing size I don't think I ever saw Paul and Ryan give any an artist attached to Closer anything less than their full support and attention. It was a truly lovely two-and-a-half years there, I'm always going to look back on that time so fondly.

How did you get into working in artist management in the first place. Is it something you always wanted to do or did you fall into it?

I was 11 years old and I was listening to bands like Led Zeppelin, and looking to the great managers and I just thought, 'That's what I want to do'. I wanted to be part of the artists' world where you help them and be part of the team that brings their creativity to fruition and gets it out to the audience that needs to hear it.

So, from the age of 11 I decided that that's what I wanted to do. I did a degree in music, I went to Cardiff University for my degree, but during my sixth form I spent every Saturday at Trinity College of Music junior department where I was studying practical musicianship, from morning until the sun went down.

I played loads and loads of instruments, and I think I saw that being my management education. So I play five different instruments to quite a high level and I think I saw me doing my diploma in saxophone as being something that was going to make me understand what went into the performance side of what an artist does.

But it was always with the end goal of working in management. When I graduated, I did what everybody does and tried to get experience, worked for free, and I ended up meeting Jho quite soon after I graduated, who was looking for an assistant, and the rest is history.

Knife Party

Have you found that being a musician yourself makes it easier to have conversations with musicians and artists? Whether it's in a studio or just speaking to them when you're at the point of potentially wanting to work with them.
I think so. Given the breadth and the depth of amazing, incredible managers out there who perhaps don't play music, don't understand theory, or all of that, I definitely wouldn't say it was a necessity by any means. But I do think it has helped me, 100%.

Your ear kind of goes, 'Oh, well that was a very interesting chord', or you know, I'm talking to Cameron Hayes about some of the music that she's working on and one of the things she said that she quite likes is the fact that I can sit down and I understand the theory.

I understand the chord progressions, I understand why you would do X, Y, and Z, and why she might be going A, B, C, instead of X, Y, Z. It definitely does help. And it's something that I love doing.

What is it like working with Jho Oakley again?
Well, he's just phenomenal. I have so much respect and admiration for him. Sometimes I kind of pinch myself when I wake up and think, 'Oh my God, Jho Oakley's my business partner.'

He's an inspiration, and he and his wife have always been so kind to me and so welcoming. It's all looking very positive. I don't want to jinx anything. But no, it's wonderful to be working with them again. I definitely want to draw attention and to celebrate Jho and everything that's he's gone through.

"Jho is phenomenal. I have so much respect and admiration for him."

I know obviously when he did have to bow out of the industry for that time, it was heartbreaking to see, heartbreaking to be a part of and heartbreaking to see how many people have so many lovely things to say about him.

Why did you decide to launch Decade at this time?
There were a couple of different contributing factors. It's something that I'd always wanted to do. Like I said, it's been my dream since I was very young. [I had] lots of conversations with Jho. We never stopped speaking after we had to close things down at JHO in October 2015. There was never a period of time longer than two weeks that we wouldn't either be in touch on the phone or by text or whatever.

When it became apparent that there could be some way of him coming back, in any way shape or form, I think it was just inevitable that it was going to be something that we would do together.

And it was just the right time, I think. I've had an absolutely fantastic two-and-a-half years working at Closer, and it was definitely the right time for me to branch out on my own and do my own thing. So when Jho said, 'Well actually I kind of feel like I want to do this too.' It was a no-brainer.

Then the stars aligned and Knife Party phoned me up saying, 'What are you up to at the moment?', and then finding Cameron Hayes. Everything just seemed to fortuitously align so well. It's kind of unbelievable really. I have to kind of pinch myself every day going 'What? How is this happening?' Things have changed so much in the last six months. But it's something that I'm so, so grateful for.

What are your hopes for the next few years of Decade?
We always want to keep Decade as a boutique management company. [That's what we were when we were at] JHO, we had this wonderful roster, Pendulum, Knife Party, Chase & Status, Sub Focus, Zane Lowe and Netsky. Those six artists were everything and now we have Pendulum and Knife Party, who are two independent artists with two independent careers, plus Cameron Hayes and I'm currently speaking with a very talented production duo.

We've just taken on Harriet Salva, who is our assistant here at Decade. She came from Conchord Management and she's incredibly talented. She has so much love for this industry. I can't wait to see how we can support her career within the industry and within management. It's just [about] building those wonderful foundations so that everybody's that's involved can reap the benefits and just enjoy what the music industry has to hold.

What do you think is the biggest challenge for a manager in the industry in 2019?
We have got a lot of new challenges that we are facing, and some of them that aren't that new! But there are still many different new ways of dealing with them, such as reaching the right fan base.

How do you reach your fans? How do you interact your fans? How can you be on the front foot in terms of technology and where they're going to next? Is Instagram the best way of contacting fans for this artist, or is traditional print press going to target this artist's fan base better?

It's ensuring that we keep on the crest of the wave and the forefront of technology for all the artists on their behalf. Because if they're in the studio, locking themselves in, writing exciting new music, then it's our responsibility to be out there, knowing what's hot, knowing what's exciting and making sure that we make sure that the artists are involved in all of those aspects.

I think something [else] that we'd all want to get across is the fact that we work in such a crazy industry with our phones on us at all times and we're never not plugged into the matrix.

Take a moment for yourself, step back. Have lunch outside in the park. Switch your phone off for an hour, if you can bear to do that! Or put it on silent. Look at it later, when you get back to the office! I think that's a hugely valuable piece of human advice that we all want to [heed] out there because that's certainly one of the mantras of Decade moving forwards: it's making sure that you [make] time for your own lives so that we can then give more to our artists.

Also, I'm just very happy to be part of the industry as a woman. I definitely want to help champion other women in the industry who, on an almost daily basis, I hate to say, but I have meetings with other women in the industry who are saying that perhaps their male counterparts might be more recognised than them.

Obviously there are many different people in the industry who hate that, and don't want that to be something that we're living with in the latter half of 2019 looking at 2020.

Let's just all support each other. Let's just all help. It doesn't matter who you are, what you are, what level you are, let's all just really help the experience. Let's just help celebrate everybody. We're all working in this industry because of our passion, so let's recognise that. ■

KEY SONGS IN THE LIFE OF…

Alan McGee

The modern music biz legend selects his five favourite tracks – but reserves the right to change his mind on a daily basis...

MBUK's initial concern is that asking Creation founder and lifelong music addict Alan McGee to pick just five tracks that mean the most to him amounts to cruel and unusual punishment.

We can only imagine the agonies and anguish, the late nights, long lists and Sophie's Choice-style culling that has taken place.

In the event, when we meet the man who signed Oasis, Primal Scream, The Jesus and Mary Chain and My Bloody Valentine for a cup of tea in Franco's of Jermyn St, he is preternaturally unperturbed – and unprepared.

"Is this the one where I pick five tracks?"

It rather is, yes. Have you not got your list? Your notes? Your in-depth reasoning and sincere apologies for those who missed out?

"Nah, I'll do it now."

And so McGee calls up his playlist of tracks (he's a Spotify man) that he uses to programme his Boogaloo Radio show, he scrolls through and alights on five favourites.

There's a lot going on in McGee's world at the moment. Late last year he launched a new label, Creation23, dedicated to putting out 7-inch singles by new artists including Young Garbo and Chris Grant.

More recently it was announced that Danny Boyle and Irvine Welsh are making a film based on McGee's 2014 autobiography, *Creation Stories*.

He's also in the middle of a spoken word tour, telling audiences about his life in the music business.

"I'm loving it. It's helped me understand the essence of Creation, Oasis, Primal Scream, Factory, The Mondays, all those things, and it's dead simple, I don't know how I never thought of it: we romanticise the working class and that's why the working class love us. That's what we do.

"I go up North especially and I'm humbled by how much love comes at me. And I think it's because I'm an ordinary person. Even though I've lived down here for years, I don't think I've ever become a fucking music industry goon. That's why ordinary people like me, they see something in me. And not just me, but the bands that I've worked with and the bands that I like; there's a common theme.

"We romanticise the working class and that's why the working class love us."

"I think in recent times the working class bands have got shoved out because they can't afford to stay in the game anymore – and that's a fucking shame."

He tells us this with eyes occasionally flickering towards his phone, not to be rude, but rather to fulfill his brief and select the five tracks that he wants to share with us and talk about.

His on the spot/off the cuff approach doesn't belie any lack of enthusiasm, just an acknowledgment that "the five tracks that mean the most to me today will be five different tracks tomorrow – music's ephemeral, it grabs you in the moment".

On 7 May, at roughly 2:15pm, they were…

1. Little Feat, Spanish Moon (1974)

I love this, I would have been about 14 when I first heard it. I got into Lowell George really early.

When I DJ, I tend to do acid house sets, with some old Creation remixes thrown in, but I'll always play Spanish Moon by Little Feat, because it sounds like a totally modern track – absolutely fantastic drumming as well.

He died pretty early, after a lot of cocaine abuse, but he's a fucking genius: Lowell George forever.

2. Bauhaus, Bela Lugosi's Dead (1979)

It's a punk symphony and Pete Murphy's a fucking God. David J [bass], I love him; Daniel Ash [guitar], fucking rock star. Bauhaus are just a genius band.

I see them as a punk band rather than a goth band, and this was their best moment. It was their first single, the first thing they ever did in a studio, which is amazing.

They were the Mary Chain before the Mary Chain, it's Jim Reid before Jim Reid. People jumped on the bandwagon with the [legendary] Batcave club and the whole goth thing, but Bauhaus were different, they were before all that and better than all that.

3. Wire, Outdoor Miner (1979)

It's Pink Floyd. To me, this is channelling Syd Barrett and I'm obsessed with Syd Barrett.

I actually quite like the later Pink Floyd. I hated them when I was young, but I've come round as I've got older – took me 50 years, but I've come round.

But they were truly seminal when Syd was in the band, just genius, man. Sadly, if you ever want a window into why you shouldn't do drugs, Syd's your man. He's the original Lost Boy, he didn't come back. I hope he got his money.

I didn't apply Syd's lesson to myself, of course, and nor did anyone around me. But to be fair, when I nearly died in Los Angeles, overdosed and officially written off as dead, I didn't go back on the drugs. That was 1994 – 25 years ago.

It took Bobby [Gillespie] until 2008 to get clean. Everyone's on their own trip.

I know Syd's little nephew, Ian, who designs things for me. He's a good guy, but I've never really got into it with him about his uncle, because I think that would be a bit rude – it's his family, not a rock star.

"Sadly, if you want a window into why you shouldn't do drugs, Syd's your man."

4. Squeeze, Cool For Cats (1979)

I'm obsessed by Squeeze at the moment. They're so overlooked it's not funny. Glenn Tilbrook and Chris Difford are absolute pop geniuses, fucking amazing.

This is a classic. I could have chosen, plenty of others: Tempted is genius, Up The Junction is genius, Pulling Mussels (From The Shell) is a fucking classic.

Compared to most British bands that get praised to the skies, these guys shit on them. They're part of that tradition of partnership songwriters who document Britain and working class culture with just brilliant, brilliant songs.

5. The House of Love, PKR (2013)

It's a song Guy Chadwick wrote seven or eight years ago and it was on that Cherry Red album, She Paints Words in Red.

The best gig of last year was House of Love at the Roundhouse, it was absolute genius. I'm out seeing shows all the time, and that was the best of last year by a million miles.

You know people sometimes say bands are better now than they were in the '80s or '90s, and they're obviously kidding themselves – The House of Love actually are. That Roundhouse gig was the best I've ever seen them play [House of Love were on Creation for their first album in 1988 and McGee continued to manage the band for a while after they signed to Fontana].

I've become good friends with them again, I've started DJing for them, but I keep saying to Guy, 'You've got to tour,' because they were kind of big everywhere at one point, really influential, and the audience is there for them. But one of the band doesn't want to fly, so they're only doing about six shows a year.

To have Guy and Terry [Bickers, guitarist] in the one band, they're both absolutely at the top of what they do.

The sad thing is, that band should have become a stadium band – but Guy threw Terry out so it wasn't to be.

Now he knows that was a fucking stupid move, but we're all old so it doesn't matter anymore! ■

Anything but an imaginary story

Congratulations on
40 page-turning years
of Fiction

[Universal Music Logo]

‘IF YOU’RE REALLY STRUGGLING WITH THE B-SIDES, YOU PROBABLY SHOULDN’T BOTHER’

As home to The Cure for nearly two decades, Fiction Records had a profound influence on music around the world. Then the second incarnation of Fiction, born in 2003, became home to a new generation of alternative artists including Snow Patrol and Elbow. Today, as it celebrates its 40th birthday, the label continues to champion leading alternative artists…

The Fiction Records story reads like a three-part rock ‘n’ roll trilogy.

From the outside looking in, the label’s history can be broken up into three distinct eras across four decades – with the music that defines each period paying tribute to the last – and the fact that it was the launch pad for one of the most influential bands of all time, The Cure, is always at the back of contemporary Team Fiction’s minds.

Fiction was founded in 1978 by Chris Parry, a musician and Polydor Records A&R executive. Parry had signed The Jam, and produced their first recordings such as their 1977 debut album (and debut single of the same name), *In The City*, alongside renowned engineer Vic Smith (Vic Coppersmith-Heaven).

Robert Smith’s post-punk band, The Cure had formed in Crawley, West Sussex in 1976. By 1978, Parry had heard their music and decided to sign them to his very own Fiction Records, with distribution handled by Polydor.

Fiction’s first release, FICS001 was The Cure’s controversially-titled single *Killing An Arab* – supposedly inspired by the scene of a murder on a beach in the classic novel *The Stranger* by French-Algerian writer and Nobel Prize (for literature) winner Albert Camus.

The Cure released their and Fiction’s debut album, *Three Imaginary Boys*, in 1979, with its iconic pink artwork featuring a lamp, fridge and Hoover. The grooves contained a cover of Jimi Hendrix’s *Foxy Lady*, as well as early pop-punk bangers like *Grinding Halt* and the seminal post-punk title track. The band went on to release 10 more albums through Fiction between 1980 and 2000 (before signing with Geffen), and scored their first No.1 album in 1992 with *Wish*, which featured the hit single, *Friday I’m In Love*.

From the early ‘80s to early ‘90s, Fiction also released albums by British guitar bands, like The Passions’ debut *Michael & Miranda* (1980), Eat’s *Sell Me A God* (1989) and The God Machine’s *Scenes From The Second Storey*. The label was then sold to PolyGram (now Universal) in the mid-to late ‘90s and became a dormant record collection on a shelf in Polydor’s basement.

“I’ve always wanted to work with artists that I really give a shit about.”

The second part of the Fiction Story started in 2003 when current MD (and co-head of Caroline International) Jim Chancellor “was plucked out of obscurity” and offered a job at Polydor as an A&R. But, true to the claim at the start of this being a rock ‘n’ roll tale, Chancellor’s first job in the music business was actually as a bouncer at CBGBs for six months in 1989.

“It was the worst paid job I’ve ever had in my entire life, and probably the best fun,” he tells *Music Business UK*, from the other side of a meeting room at Fiction’s HQ in West London, staring at the ceiling for a brief moment, before continuing to reminisce.

“They had this record shop next door, and I would just go through the records and discover bands like The Misfits and Soundgarden and The Sick Fucks, just crazy, weird shit, and buy all these records.

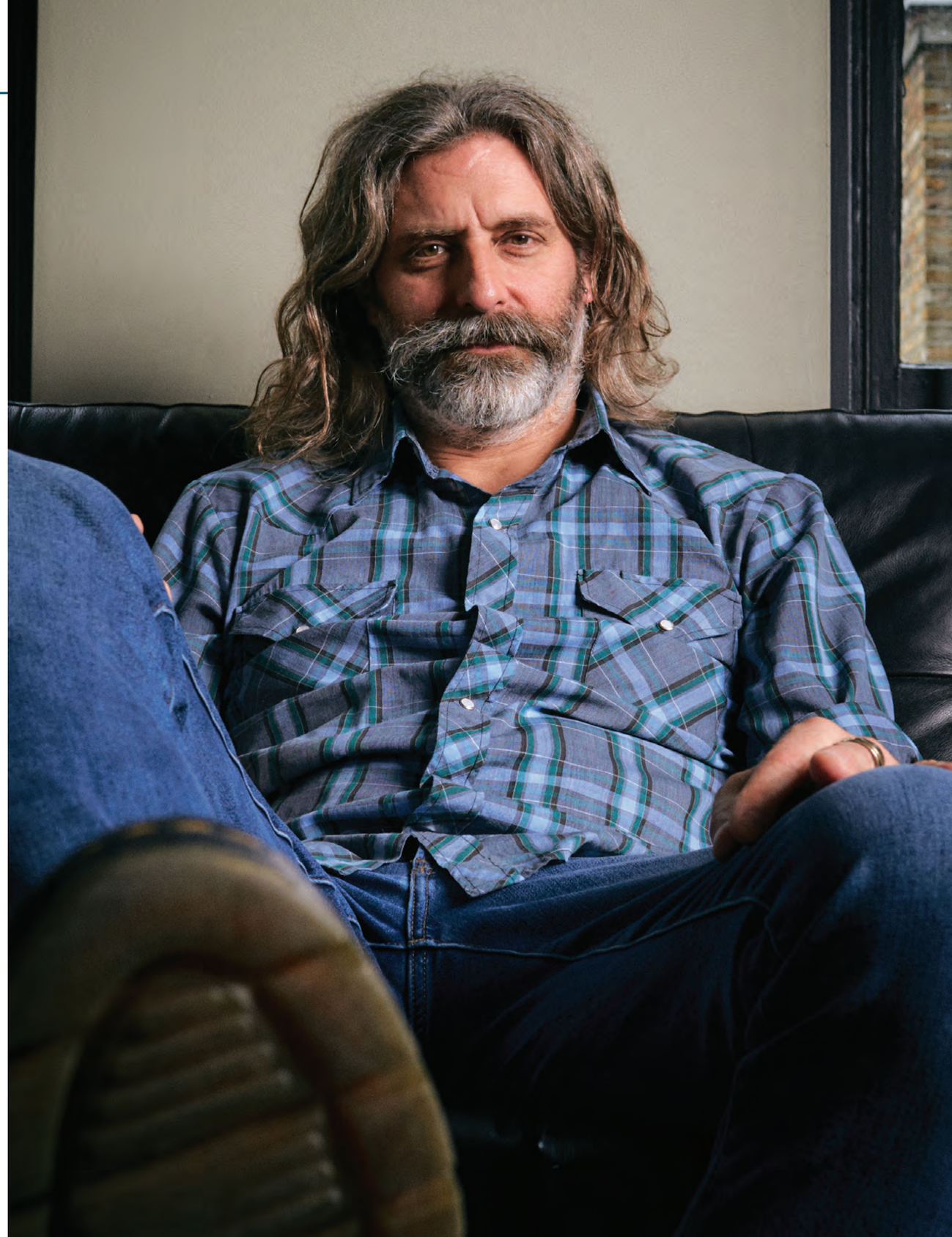
“Then I ran out of money and ended up coming back to England. I worked for an insurance company and I drove a white van. I worked for Pegasus Couriers for a bit.”

After that, Chancellor’s “white van became a beige van”. He was driving bands around the UK, having started his own label called Mad Minute Records, which was run out of his bedroom with Ben Durling (now an A&R Manager at Warner Records). This was then followed by a stint as a record producer manager.

“It was great experience, because you were putting recording budgets together and all that kind of stuff,” he explains. “The problem is, you’d be part of that process, and then the record would just disappear into the label and you had absolutely no involvement in it. When I got offered the [Polydor] job, I bit Colin Barlow’s hand off, poor man.”

The first band Chancellor signed was Snow Patrol, “literally within two months” of joining the company. “The demos were floating around in the building already, but they didn’t really have anybody on the staff who actually knew anything about that world, so it just fell in my lap,” he remembers. “I fell in love with the band and the demos. The rest is history.”

Snow Patrol’s first album for Fiction, *Final Straw*, hit No.3 in the UK Album Charts and ushered in a new era of guitar heroes for the then-predominantly pop focused-Polydor, with signings such as




Self Esteem

Photo: Charlotte Palmore

Elbow, the Maccabees and Kate Nash following suit in the coming years.

The third and current era, or "Fiction 3.0," according to Chancellor, started in 2014, when it was restructured as a standalone label, distributed by Caroline International. The current roster includes artists like The Amazons who released their second album, *Future Dust*, on May 24, Kate Tempest and The Big Moon (both of which received Mercury Prize nominations in 2017). Other acts on Fiction's roster today include Self Esteem, Palace, Mini Mansions and Tame Impala, who recently headlined the O2 Arena in support of their fourth album.

Fiction Records in 2019 occupies a unique position in the UK music business. It's a Universal-owned label, largely distributed by a major owned artist and label services company in Caroline, with a 40-year musical heritage of predominantly British-signed guitar acts.

"I've always wanted to work with artists that I really give a shit about," says Chancellor, commenting on the signing decisions Fiction has made, and thinking about the future of the label. "I just can't imagine going to the wheel on something that I'm not emotionally involved in.

"It would just be such hard work. I've always said to my A&Rs, 'If you're really struggling with the B-sides, you probably shouldn't bother.' Because that's the ultimate test, isn't it?"

Tell us about when you joined Polydor…
Polydor at that time was a very pop [oriented] label. They had Hear'Say, which I think was the fastest-selling debut album in the history of the charts or something [at the time]. So [Polydor] was very successful, but it was really mainly pop, with artists like Lolly. Polydor had [previously] had a slump, and then they brought it back; Sir Lucian Grainge had taken charge [of the label] and did what he does – which was to drive it back to success.

But the heritage of [Polydor and Fiction] was The Who and The Jam and Jimi Hendrix and all that in the basement, and The Cure, obviously. They decided they wanted to try and bring some guitars back into the building, so for some unknown reason, I got plucked out of obscurity. I was managing record producers at the time, and [then-Polydor joint MD] Colin Barlow was like, 'Do you want to work here?' I was like, 'Fuck yeah'.

The year of 2003 was obviously just getting in the chair and signing a few things. We signed another guy called Stephen Fretwell and a couple of other bits and pieces like, Yourcodenameis:milo.

I didn't sit still, but not much happened. They put me together with Joe Munns, who's very well known, and Paul Smernicki, who was one of the PR guys for Polydor.


The Maccabees

Photo: Pooneh Ghana

We were all alternative guitar-minded, and so they stuck us together, and we called ourselves Black Lion Records, because that's where Polydor was, on Black Lion Lane.

Snow Patrol was taking a minute. They had to go and tour, and we had to make a record, so there was a lot to do. Towards the end of 2003, the Snow Patrol thing really started coming together. I think Jo Whiley had heard *Run*, and played it in its entirety in the [Radio 1] Evening Session. I remember exactly where I was. We ran out to some cab and asked them to switch the radio on. It just started to resonate and the gigs started getting busier and busier.

Snow Patrol actually released two albums before signing with you, didn't they?
They did. There were two Snow Patrol albums, and there were two Reindeer Section albums. Gary Lightbody was technically driving the bus on four albums before that. They'd had a record deal with a company called Jeepster and they'd had a publishing deal, but it had all just fallen apart. It's a classic example of a band that weren't going to do anything other than make music. It was just a question of time, but nobody was giving them that, I guess, but they'd obviously learnt a lot and they just wanted it. The fact that the [breakthrough] album is called *Final Straw* says it all, really.

Towards the end of that year, it was starting to feel really good, and yet because we were still part of Polydor, there were a few naysayers out there in the music business who were going, 'Polydor? Why would we sign a band to Polydor?' Snow Patrol still hadn't blown up. It was a weird time.

It was David Joseph who said, 'Why don't you ditch the Black Lion name, because nobody knows what that means, and use Fiction?' I was like, 'Oh my God, that's amazing.' I was a big fan of The Cure. I've actually got a poster of Robert Smith in my bedroom in my mum's house, still.

When you look at bands that were signed to Fiction early on, like The God Machine or Eat or The Passions, do you feel like there's a through line connecting those bands to the artists signed to the label now? Is that something that the modern-day label team think about when signing acts?
Yeah, definitely. That's why I was so blown away to get offered the opportunity to be part of the new look of Fiction. I didn't want to ruin it! I just thought, 'Let's try and do what they were doing.'

Because you see that all the time, these label names just reappear, and to me, they never lose their flavour. But if you don't invest in that name, what was invested into it to create what it was, is meaningless.

"I feel a responsibility to what the Fiction name represents and has represented."

Do you feel a responsibility to live up to the music that's been released on the label in the past?
I feel a responsibility to what the name represents and has represented, definitely. But the label has to survive, and it has to exist and flourish, and that's what we're trying to do – give it a new lease of life. And do it in the uncompromising way that it was always run. The Cure, not the most obvious band to become one of the biggest bands in the world ever, but they did, because they were so brilliant. I think I've always subscribed to that.

It felt [like they were] a bit of an underdog that quietly conquered the world and I love that idea. Snow Patrol were [underdogs] when we signed them, and you look at how successful they've been.

We've had a few artists that have come through like that, whether it was a Kate Nash, where people were like, 'She's not [going to succeed]', and then just smashed it. Elbow, as well, they were all quietly doing their thing brilliantly, and nobody was really paying much attention. The Maccabees are probably the most shining example of a band that's done that.

Could you tell us about the signing stories for The Maccabees and Elbow?
I was a massive fan of all [Elbow's] previous three records and I just felt that they were getting better and better. It seemed like it wasn't growing, or they weren't growing as a band, despite the music. We tried to help them on *Leaders Of The Free World* with their then-label V2, to do a joint venture where we threw some money in and just helped them sell some records. The record was fabulous. But, for boring logistic reasons, it didn't happen.

Then I was just like, 'Well let's try and sign them for the next record'. Then we entered into that process. It was long and painful and a lot of 'legal schmegal'. The deal in the end was a bit like *Lord Of The Rings*, because it was like a deal with them, a deal with the label, and then there was a deal to tie all the deals together. But we finally got it over the line, and they delivered *The Seldom Seen Kid*, and had gone like, 'Fuck you!' It was all well worth it. They're just a magnificent band, that lot: brilliant words, brilliant music and brilliant people.

Then, with The Maccabees, it was a friend of the manager, a guy called John Turner, who's a radio plugger. I'd become friendly with him and we'd been mucking about doing little bits and pieces, and he gave me a seven-inch of *X-Ray* and said, 'I think you'll like this. They're playing at The Water Rats in a couple of weeks'.

I listened to *X-Ray* and I thought it was fabulous. I went to The Water Rats and I just remember being right at the back, and by the end, I was stood right at the front going, 'Hello. My name's Jim and I work for Fiction!' Then we were just like, 'Right, we've got to sign them'.

That's how it went. It was quite pure. [With] Yourcodenameis:milo, that first EP, all the demos came in and I just remember listening to it and going, 'I've never heard anything like this. We've got to sign it'. But it was so weird and alternative


The Big Moon

Photo: Charlotte Patmore

and different, and it didn't quite work. But, for a moment, we felt like we were right at the centre of the musical universe, like something really important was going to happen.

Were there other A&R people at the Maccabees show?
I've got no idea. I don't remember. I just remember when we started working with them, there were very few [industry] people who believed in them. And in the world of the media really, we struggled. We tried to get them on the radio and we lost out to bands like The Pigeon Detectives. The press didn't seem that interested.

We were just blindly in love with them and believed in the music and in them as a live band. It was really the live thing where people started coming. When they sold out the Astoria – RIP – I remember dragging a few people along and going, 'Look, I told you so'.

How do you break a band like that now? How has it changed since then?
There's so little guitar music out there right at this particular moment and there are various theories for that. One of which is maybe it hasn't been good enough. In that period we had in the Noughties, you had The Killers, and all these bands were coming through and succeeding. Maybe it was because it was really amazing music. I was very lucky to get to work with some of that. Songs like *One Day Like This*, *Chasing Cars* and *Run*, and *Mr Brightside* were almost ten-a-penny, in some respects.

But the charts are always awash with pop music. That's just the nature of the beast. It's pop, popular, but to make rock or guitar music popular is much harder. That's because they've got to be really, really good. It gets harder and harder as time goes on, because it's quite a well-worn format. Guitar, bass, drums and vocals; where do you go from there? It's getting harder, but it's getting harder because there's so much music out there already, and the artists are challenged with trying to better that. That's all I'm looking for in a band or an artist these days, someone that can challenge the format, or be brilliant at it – a band like The Amazons.

We knew them as a band called Peers, which was a long time ago. They were very much an indie band. They had some half-decent songs, but it just wasn't exciting to me until they turned themselves into The Amazons and just pulled it all together, [with] some power chords in there. All of a sudden, you heard these alternative songs, but with this rock approach, and I thought that was really exciting. Then you go and see a live show and it blows you away. That's what's allowing that band to win.

In 2014 Fiction was restructured as a standalone label and, after that, you

Pumarosa

Photo: Marko Righo

signed bands like The Amazons and Palace and The Big Moon. Tell us about that transition?
It coincided with me being asked to start Caroline International, which obviously is a whole different kettle of fish. It's label services for Universal, which it didn't have, and it was quite a job. They put me together with the incredible Michael Roe. I knew very little about it, he knew everything about it.

At that point, it made sense for Fiction to sit next to Caroline, rather than within Polydor, because Caroline was in an office down the road, and I had a year where I was running from one to the other, just to try and keep a handle on everything. That was the main reasoning for that really.

It coincided with the end of The Maccabees and a couple of the bigger artists; The Snow Patrols and the Elbows needing to stay within the Polydor system for obvious reasons. It felt like a fresh, new approach, and I suppose we got lucky with bands like The Big Moon and The Amazons and Pumarosa and Kate Tempest. Tame Impala arrived about the same time. So yeah, it feels like Fiction 3.0.

How does a band get signed to Fiction in 2019?
Just be brilliant. It's such an impossible question to answer. It always starts with a song. There's been situations where I've heard a name and I've gone to a show, and gone, 'Oh my God, that was good.'

So, yeah, normally the live thing's pretty imperative, mainly because 99% of the artists that we work with, that's really their lifeblood. The live business has got to drive it all. But yeah, the songs, we've always been big on good songs, good songwriting and interesting sonics, or interesting takes on what they're trying to do.

As I just described with The Amazons, I felt they were doing something that I hadn't quite heard before. Not [everyone might consider it] groundbreaking, necessarily, but it feels like they're twisting it slightly. There's a uniqueness to them. There are definitely influences that you can hear, but I feel the way they present themselves is pretty unique.

There is only one Kate Tempest. There will only ever be one Kate Tempest. And we've been lucky enough to work with a lot of artists like that – Ian Brown and the like. That's what I'm looking for. Something that's unique and brilliant.

How big a role do managers play in the signing decisions that Fiction makes?
Absolutely huge. Having a good manager is key. It's such a tough world to succeed in, it's a huge collaboration. That's how I feel. If we have great managers and a great band, you know you've got a much better shot of it happening.

Have you ever had a band that you really liked, but you weren't that keen on the manager for whatever reason?
Yeah. Look, as I said, great band, great manager, hopefully a great label, you can do it. I think if one of those pieces isn't stepping up to the plate, everything could fall down.

Just going back to 2003, 2004, when Fiction was first revived, what was the music business climate like at that point, from an A&R person's perspective? Were guitar bands seen as being potentially very lucrative?
No, I don't think so. There'd been a bit of a slump, then there came the glut of big bands, the Kaiser Chiefs and Keane, but, at that particular time, it felt a bit thin on the ground. I was actually managing a band called Athlete then; they're still my friends.

"We've never tried to sign a pop act; to make things work in our lane is hard enough."

That was taking off, and that was in that indie, alternative world, but there wasn't a huge amount of it around. But then, there never really is.

That was back when there'd be 100 Gold-selling [albums] a year, and maybe 30 Platinum. Looking at it today, it's changed so massively. [In terms of guitar bands at that time], it didn't feel like there was a huge amount.

The Stereophonics were doing quite well, and would continue to, but outside of that it was the American bands [that] were doing great, like Queens Of The Stone Age. They were pretty much ruling the roost. In the UK it was thin on the ground. But then came this golden period.

Could you tell us about some of the key personnel at Fiction now, in terms of who's finding new acts? Who's doing what?
Fiction's fairly small as a unit, and we use Caroline International's resources. When I was at Polydor, we used Polydor's resources, and Fiction was still a very small, little label. We started with three or four people, and we're about the same today.

A&R's one of the key things. We have an A&R guy who consults for us, and that's it really. I've always kept my ears open.

I like to be quite involved in that, because it's the lifeblood of any label, really. We're in a lane and I think we need to stick in that lane. We've never tried to sign a pop act. To make it work in our lane is hard enough as it is, so we just concentrate on it and try and get it right.

From the outside looking in, in terms of the bands that are signed, in terms of the way you talk about the label and talk about music, it seems very much like an indie sort of approach to running a record label – but within a major label system. That's a very unique, and fortunate, position to be in, from your perspective….
Very fortunate, yeah. David Joseph has been a very good man to me. He's just allowed me to try and do what we think is the right thing to do. We're trying to deliver acts to be the biggest in the world, and my experience is that labels like Polydor and Island are really good at that.

I've always looked at XL and Domino as being best in class, because they're delivering artists to be the biggest artists in the world. Whether it's the Arctic Monkeys or Adele or what have you.

So you don't have to be a major to do that. It's just about doing a great job really, and I got offered a job by Polydor and life was good. We actually sold some records and did quite well, and I've just tried to keep it going.

I aspire to be a cool label that people look at and go, 'Oh, that's a Fiction record. I'm going to have a listen to it,' which they might not do with certain other labels. Definitely, if it's an XL signing, you go, 'Oh, I wonder what that is?' Whether we've got there as Fiction or not? God knows. I don't get to answer that question. ■

HOW DINA LAPOLT RULED MIDEM

She's widely respected as a key legal voice for artists and executives alike – but Dina LaPolt is also known for being outspoken. She didn't disappoint in Cannes this June...

Dina LaPolt, the hugely successful and fêted US-based artist lawyer, brought three things to Midem this year which were rapturously received: knowledge, controversy and passion.

Los Angeles-based LaPolt flew in to Cannes, France for the annual event in June expecting to deliver a keynote conversation with Epic Records boss, Sylvia Rhone. In the end, Rhone couldn't make the afternoon engagement, an interview with *Billboard's* Hannah Karp, but no-one watching was complaining by the end – LaPolt's energetic, vehement delivery on a number of industry topics kept everyone plenty entertained.

Los Angeles-based LaPolt is the found of LaPolt Law, whose clients have recently included global superstars like Steven Tyler, Deadmau5, Britney Spears, Fifth Harmony and Tinashe, amongst many others. The company, which specialises in Intellectual Property and entertainment matters, employs nine attorneys in all.

Separately, LaPolt was a hugely important figure in the lobbying campaign in Washington DC for the Music Modernization Act, which was passed last year and promises to completely change the way royalties are delivered to musicians in the States forever more.

In addition, LaPolt is also the co-founder of advocacy group Songwriters of North America (SONA), which counts over 500 members within its ranks, and has given a vocal reaction to a number of streaming-related issues that harm the pay received by creators in the music business. Talking of which, LaPolt used her Midem discussion to fire some shots in the direction of Spotify – which recently lodged a legal appeal against a Copyright Royalty Board-sanctioned pay rise for songwriters in the United States.

"Here comes Spotify, with its Secret Genius Awards. Bullshit!"

Here, you'll be able to enjoy some of LaPolt's spirited words on that matter, as well as some of the other highlights of a Midem Q&A which is still being talked about from Cannes to Culver City...

On her beginnings – and how she's free to be an artist advocate...

"I went to work for a small firm out of law school – nobody would hire me because I didn't have any experience. I tell everybody [studying law today], get an internship! Don't do what I did, because all I did was play in bands and teach guitar lessons to kids during law school so I had zero experience. I [eventually] had to wait tables part-time at night while I interned for a music lawyer in Century City, picking up his dry cleaning and blowing up his kids' basketballs... but I digress.

"Long story short, advocacy is in my blood. When I finally became a music lawyer, I founded my firm on three principles: (i) Be available 24/7, because it's a global business; (ii) Always get the contract signed, which in my business is very non-traditional; (iii) Never have any conflicts of interest. We still have those three ideologies at our firm. We only represent people [as opposed] to companies – I don't represent record companies or publishers. We'll represent executives who go to work [at those firms], because it's the same thing; they're getting a contract from the company, just like an artist would. That gives me a big platform to start advocating for artists and creative people in another way, in addition to just [being] their music lawyer."

On her role in the Music Modernization Act – and how much it cost her...

"I was the bully [for the MMA lobby], okay? I would do my best Claire Underwood, fly into Washington and talk to both sides of the aisle [Republican and Democrat]. And because I was 'free' I had a lot of influence with the politicians. They would always say, 'Get Dina on the phone and check that – let's figure out if [this person is] telling the truth.' All of my efforts were pro bono, it was a personal hardship, and I spent over $200,000 of my own money over the past few years doing this, much to my wife's dismay. [But that meant] Congressmen that were important would call me and ask my opinion on stuff, and listen to me. [And] when I would go to DC, I'd bring artists to speak to the Republicans or the Democrats and I started to get both sides on our team.

"One of the major music publishers actually [recently] said, we want to help you and give you money for your travel - you're going back and forth to Washington DC all the time, we know you're paying for yourself, and you're like [the industry's] most effective person there [despite] all these lobbyists on [our] staff. We want to help you. I said, 'I can't take your money, but thank you for offering.'"

On hopes for harmony with digital services...

"The bigger issue is that we all have to work together. It doesn't matter if you're YouTube, Spotify or the record companies – everybody values music, and the bottom line is they've all built their companies on the backs of music creators; let's be real about it. Nobody wants the music creators to be run out of existence.

"But at the end of the day, everybody has to work together to come up with solutions to be able to pay creators a fair wage in today's digital marketplace. All of the music business now is governed by metadata and algorithms, so it's even more important that we work together to achieve common goals."

On the dismay caused by Spotify's appeal against those CRB rates...

"[As for the CRB appeal], it's terrible. Let's be honest – look at the timeline. We were in the middle of getting the MMA passed – it passed the House Judiciary in February 2018; then it passed the entire House of Representatives by unanimous vote in April 2018; then it passed the Senate in October, unanimously; then it was signed into law by the President on October 11, 2018. And in February 2018, during this [period], we get the news that the mechanical [streaming] royalty rates are going to go up over the next five years, through the Copyright Royalty Board. All of this is happening at the same time.

"Then, three or four months after the [MMA] is passed, Spotify files an appeal against the CRB hearing. This was absolutely a strategy by [Spotify agreed] during the time that we're all working together to get the Music Modernization Act passed. Everybody asks me, 'Why aren't the songwriters upset with Amazon or Pandora? [Why are they] only upset with Spotify?' Well, Pandora has very little skin in the game – their interactive service is shit, and their non-interactive service only pays public performance.

"Apple is amazing, because they accept the [CRB] decision; they say, 'Yep, songwriters deserve more money, we're going to pay it and we're not going to appeal it.' Love Apple. Amazon is kind of new [to streaming music]... they're not a big player in the game.

"But here comes Spotify, with its Secret Genius Awards, and putting [songwriter] credits on their service, making this big [effort] in recognising songwriters for how amazing they are. Bullshit! All this time they're behind closed doors scheming and strategising: 'Yeah, let's get the MMA passed, and then these dumbasses [won't know we'll subsequently] appeal the [CRB] ruling after, so we don't really have to pay."

On what Spotify should do now...

"I think there's a way out for Spotify, if they withdraw their [CRB] appeal. I know that big executives who ran the songwriting departments [connected to Spotify] have resigned their positions, the big Secret Genius [songwriters] wrote a letter saying they're very upset. But at the end of the day we all need Spotify too... so it's kind of this conundrum. All relationships can be fixed, it just takes communication."

On her advice for new artists...

"I love good music. At the heart of the matter I am a songwriter and a recording artist, and that's like being an alcoholic – it never ends. If someone [I work with] – a manager, a business manager, an agent – is referring [a new artist] to me, I mostly always take a meeting and listen to the music. For the artists in the room [here], the most important thing is to be true to yourself. Look at Billie Eilish, she is true to herself! Has this girl compromised one thing? Hell no! Did Lady Gaga compromise anything when she started? No way! Did Steven Tyler? No way!

"We are about the music – it changes the world, and it makes people think. If Tupac came up here and started talking about things that were irrelevant, rap music never would have crossed over; he came up and started talking about underage pregnancy, and [if] we [would] ever see a black President, and people started listening to what he had to say, and guess what? It created a movement! If anything is going to change the word, it's music." ■

A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

Jeremy Marsh plays a pivotal role in creating global opportunities for Warner Music's entire roster. Here he reflects on the modern way for UK artists to make an international impact – and breaks down some recent success stories...

Jeremy Marsh's first taste of international success with a UK artist was simultaneously old school and new rules.

Old school because Soul II Soul's early singles (most notably *Keep Moving On* and *Back To Life*) and first album (*Club Classics Vol 1*, 1989) were rolled out territory by territory, with their label, 10 Records [a Virgin affiliate], knocking down the dominoes according to its own timetable and governed by its own bandwidth.

New rules because, as Marsh points out, "it was a cultural moment, it wasn't just music; it was an underground movement and it represented a geographically specific community – it was a black British thing, it was a London thing, and they were true to themselves, that's what made people want to find out more and made it resonate".

In that sense, it shares DNA with more modern phenomena, with the rumbles and explosions out of LATAM, Africa and Asia, with global audiences seizing on artists from anywhere and everywhere, because they are different and distinct, not because they are echoes or copies.

Since those days at Virgin, Marsh has enjoyed successful stints with a variety of record labels and companies including RCA, BMG and Telstar.

Most recently he was Vice President of Warner Bros. Records UK, before taking up his current role as Chief Global Marketing Officer, Recorded Music at Warner Music Group.

It means that Marsh plays an absolutely key role in breaking artists outside their own territories, and is better placed than most to talk about how the borderless world of streaming – and the endless rain of data – has changed both the method and likelihood of UK artists making a global impact.


JC Stewart

Let's look at some of the UK artists your team has helped break recently at Warner, and how that differs from your early days.
I'd like to talk about two artists in particular, one out of Atlantic UK, Anne-Marie, and one out of Warner Bros UK [now Warner Records UK], Dua Lipa.

Anne-Marie's now sold over two million Album Equivalents on her first record [*Speak Your Mind*, 2018 – No. 3 in UK; No. 31 in US]. She grew up as part of Rudimental, of course, transforming into a solo artist, then performing with Marshmello, and is now starting her second album cycle.

Dua had amazing success with her eponymous debut album [2017 – No. 3 in the UK; No. 27 in the US] and [sixth single] *New Rules* was a hit all over the world [including No. 1 in the UK and No. 6 in the US].

Both artists signed around five years ago, just as I was transitioning into global marketing.

Both have got great stories, but neither of them exploded out of the gates, they both had highs and lows in the campaigns, but most importantly we got everybody's focus from day one, globally. I think if there's one material change from the story of Soul II Soul to modern pop, it's that you can go global from day one. Once you put artists' music up on digital services it's available to a worldwide audience, so it's great that we can activate all our global markets at the same time.

I guess what that necessitates is a more joined-up record company than ever before; no one can work in silos anymore.
I think that's right. There's also massive demand for local music in every territory, so even though there's instant information and communication around the world, you've got to be cognisant of the strength of each affiliate's local repertoire and what they're pushing overall. And in order to prepare a UK act for international work, you've got to over-communicate, you need to pre-prepare the world for what's coming.

"We pay attention to two elements, equally and carefully: the data and how people feel."

It's the same for any release from any corner of our company. That's why we've quarterly global marketing gatherings, we've weekly communications and we've daily conversations.

The other point that should be made is that our UK label heads are now much more focused on international. The pecking order of the planning meeting could, historically, have seen international


Hamzaa

somewhere near the bottom. Now you'll have the A&R deliver the songs, and you'll have the UK and international plans running in parallel, because there's absolutely no way to separate them; as soon as you press 'Go', it's everywhere.

Does the record company still decide who gets to benefit from an international push, based on its own preferences, or is it now more guided by early 'warning' signs from data?
We're very pragmatic. Every artist – apart from those in the Ed Sheeran, Coldplay, Michael Bublé and Bruno Mars bracket – start at the same place. What we do is present the music to everybody and then pay great attention, equally and very carefully, to two elements: the data and how people feel.

Because the data tells you so much, but if you get a phenomenal reaction from local media, if they're prepared to get behind an artist, then you can still take what one might call the old-fashioned route of 'showcase and set-up'.

What you can react to in all cases, as soon as the music is out there, is what the data's showing you. Streaming gives you a very clear, early indication.

And the wonderful thing with streaming is that you've got multiple platforms, it's not just Spotify and Apple; you've all the local DSPs. You go to territories and you see huge billboards promoting your artists from companies that fans from other territories wouldn't have heard of, but which are hugely significant on their own turf.

This all comes back to the regional flavours of the world; not only do you have incredibly strong local repertoire, you also have incredibly powerful local gatekeepers.

Does 'breaking internationally' mean something different now for a UK artist? As in it used to mean, 'breaking the US and anything else is a bonus'?
I can give you a great example of that with a band called Honne. Honne signed to Atlantic UK, and in the early stages of development here we got traction with a record in Asia and had the opportunity to take them there. After a two year cycle in Asia, they can now sell 250,000 Album Equivalents there.

Some of that's because they were still developing in the UK, so we were able to take them to Asia. From a UK perspective, going international now can work from the outside in rather than the inside out.

Who were the most important gatekeepers for breaking an artist internationally in the past, and how has that changed?
I think at this point we have to talk genres, because one of the puzzles to solve at the moment is how to break alternative and rock acts.

Let's take Royal Blood as an example, one of Warner Bros. UK's great breakthrough artists who won [a 2015 BRIT for] Best British Band on the strength of their [eponymous, 2014] debut, which was extraordinary.

They performed on the MTV Awards, the EMAs, and at this stage they hadn't broken America. That performance was seen by Howard Stern, who, on his radio show the next morning said, I have seen the new Led Zeppelin. Everything went crazy, straight away. And *Figure It Out* became the breakthrough track on US radio – it sold just under a million copies.

That's a recent example of quite an analogue activation, because you were probably expecting me to say it's all now down to streaming, it's all about Today's Top Hits, etc. But I'm talking about the rock and alternative genre, and Royal Blood are a very important part of the Warner Bros. UK artist development process internationally.

Going back to pop artists, you'd have to say that when you launch, as we do, our pop tracks through our Global Priority System 'Track of the Week', our absolute top target is editorial – which means best position on New Music Friday on Spotify, on Best of the Week on Apple, and the equivalent on all the other DSPs.

If you then escalate into the local flagships – Top Hits Deutschland, Hot Hits UK, and then onto Today's Top Hits – those would be the equivalent of the early radio playlists. From that, we convert what we call a 'Surging' track into radio play and those big television performances.

'Today's artists are as keen to break China as they are the States'

General Manager, International Marketing, WMUK, Victor Aroldoss on the enduring global appeal of UK artists – and how to maximise that appeal in the modern world

There's always been a global audience for British music and at Warner we've always had a strong track record of breaking UK acts internationally. We're continuing to enjoy great success with our superstar artists such as Coldplay, Dua Lipa and Ed Sheeran.

But we never rest on our laurels and are always looking for the next generation of artists that can step-up to that level. At the moment, we're excited about the likes of Hamzaa, JC Stewart and Maisie Peters. I was in Berlin recently for our Class of 2019 showcase featuring all three artists. It's really important for us as a company to start the international story at the same time as the home market and that's our aim with these three acts.

Global success doesn't come overnight. It took a solid 18 month campaign to break the likes of Anne-Marie and Dua Lipa internationally and we're making that similar commitment with our Class of 2019 acts, showing the same ambition and belief.

The music market has become more borderless than ever before. It's not a case of breaking acts at home and then building their profile abroad. From the moment their music is uploaded to digital services, it's available to a worldwide audience, and you have to be ready to go global from day one.

And it's global in the true sense of the word. Today's artists are as keen to break China as they are the States. Dua's been to Asia three times on her current cycle, as well as covering Australia, Europe and, of course, the US where she finished the campaign with two Grammys. Such a heavy emphasis on Asia wouldn't have figured on her predecessors' schedules a decade ago.

There's more competition than ever. Across the world, local music is driving spins on streaming services. But charismatic artists can connect with fans anywhere given the right support. Things are more unpredictable than ever, but that makes it all the more exhilarating when our artists succeed – and keeps us on our toes.

Maisie Peters

What we notice about TV performances are that the ones that really move the needle are still the big award shows in all the major countries, plus things like *The Voice* Germany and *X-Factor* Italy. So that target has shrunk. There used to be five or six big TV opportunities in all territories of a certain size, but a lot of them have now gone – rather like the UK's *Top of the Pops*.

So, yes, it depends on genre: playlisting on streaming services is absolutely a major way for pop and urban acts, but there's another way for rock and alternative acts, which could be a combination of tour support, TV appearances and local radio.

> ***"We ask our marketing teams to prepare the runway as far up as possible."***

How much difference is there between the amount of influence – and the way you try to influence – getting a song on playlists compared to traditional 'plugging' a song on radio?
I think a lot of the upstreaming on playlists comes through data, as much as we would like to think there's a plugging element.

But if you prepare your runway properly, if you talk to your editorial partners weeks rather than days in advance, there's a good chance that they're going to take your release more seriously than the ones that just land on the day. So what we ask our marketing teams to do on a global basis is to prepare the runway as far up as possible, because that seems to give you the best chance of at least being in the shop window.

Are relationships – and lunches! – less important these days than they were in decades gone by?
I think maybe we're looking at the 80/20 rule: so maybe in those [earlier] days 80% was bluster and 20% was content; now I think you're looking at comfortably 80% content, 20% bluster.

There'll always be a relationship factor, it's a relationship business. For example, television shows are rarely booked on data, they're booked on whether it fits with the programming, and if you can make a compelling argument with someone who trusts you, and who you've worked with before, that'll always count.

The great thing about streaming services is that there are genre lists. So, whilst it's highly unlikely we're going to get a blazing heavy metal track on to a top pop flagship, we will get it on a slew of 'Best of Rock' lists that have significant numbers of followers. There are many more targets to aim at.

You mentioned Warner's Global Priority System. How new is that and can you talk us through it?
It was launched in January, 2018, and it's something we put together under Max [Lousada]'s guidance. Any artist from around the world can become a global priority for us, because the beauty of streaming is that hits can come from anywhere.

The idea is that we help focus our affiliates on a certain number of tracks and artists. At the same time, we acknowledge that they've got their own local priorities, and we're absolutely not saying you can't work these, we're just asking them to create space and allow for the GPS artists and tracks.

It's a good way of making sure that when we jump [as a global company], we all jump together.

And that is 18 months old?
Yes, and we're now going from version two to version three, because this is something that is constantly revised. There's a phrase you hear a lot in this business now, which is 'always on'; to that I think you can add 'always evolving', because you have to be, because the landscape is always changing. There's no constantly right answer anymore.

Do UK artists and managers of UK artists view this borderless environment as wholly positive? Or is there also an element of missing the old days when US and UK repertoire could almost be imposed on other territories?
I think they view it as a really exciting challenge and a really exciting opportunity. And I think one of the smart things that we do is customise repertoire for local territories. So, Dua partners up with Pablo Alborán to perform *Homesick* on a big Spanish awards show and her socials go through the roof.

It's about collaboration, about local language translation and about paying respect. We don't just ship it and expect it to work.

On that note, it's worth mentioning that we've a global A&R function in New York, headed by Josh Sarubin. His job, working with our team, is to respond to the challenge of customising our music for local markets.

It's fascinating, it's almost like there's a key to every lock, but it takes time, ingenuity and perseverance to find the right combination.

How much more joined up are record companies these days?
I think historically there was much more pressure from the centre to do what the centre wanted, now there's an enormous feedback loop; every country has its own opinion, and may have its own best practice.

So, part of the Global Marketing function that I run is to work with each individual affiliate and their marketing teams to feed back not only what works well, but what doesn't work.

Because I think there used to be a lot of 'Into Battle We Go' – and if it all flops at least we had a good try. Now the ability to read data and regroup quickly means that part of what we do is have to act and react quickly.

I would say the biggest single shift has been the collaborative nature of how artists are broken globally; it's not one-way traffic.

Who are the next UK artists we should be looking out for in terms of possible international success?
We've identified some incredible artists, who we're calling The Class of 2019. There were criteria: there had to be an artist bible that explained why they were signed, how they were signed and where they are going to be positioned in the marketplace; they had to have enough music ready; there had to be visual content; and they had to be able to do a showcase on every continent.

Look out for Hamzaa on Parlophone, JC Stewart on Warner Records UK and Maisie Peters on Atlantic UK. And there's a plan for the whole of 2019, with the aim of having them ready to go big time, internationally, in 2020. And we do the same with other territories.

How do managers of artists not selected view that? Do they feel they're down the pecking order?

"The most important change for me is where international sits in the pecking order."

No, I think the way one would explain it is that it's to do with when an artist is ready. I think there's definitely room for all artists to be developed at the right stage. That's something that speaks to Warner being the independent major. We don't have a roster that's too big; we don't sit there with 30 acts on the runway at any one time. So I think it's comfortable to say that the right ones get the right backing at the right time.

Is it easier or harder to break a UK artist internationally now or back in the days of Soul II Soul? It certainly seems more complicated today, right?
Actually, I'd say the complexity, in terms of co-ordination, has diminished. It's much easier now to communicate and share simultaneously, to rally the troops and get everyone onside much more quickly.

The level of data, meanwhile, has gone through the roof and good data mining is critical, so that we're not over-gorging on information, but we're getting and using and benefitting from the right information.

And things happen much quicker. We used to talk about a 'roll-out', and that's a word from the old school, because it literally meant you would roll a release out across country after country. Now it's a shoot out [laughs].

The most important change for me regarding international isn't detail, it's simply a matter of where it's moved in the pecking order. It's now alongside and simultaneous with the UK, whereas it used to be, 'What's going on in those foreign climes?'

Also, the tastemakers from all the territories are all looking at each other. As I say, there used to be a pecking order, and some snobbery, but now everyone knows that fantastic new artists can come from anywhere.

How is the UK doing generally when it comes to breaking artists internationally?
Well I think it goes back to how we're doing breaking artists here in the UK. Because, in general, with the odd exception, you can't push something overseas without having traction here.

We're lucky enough that we have artists like Jess Glynne, Anne-Marie, Dua Lipa, Clean Bandit – and obviously Ed – and there's more to come, who have given us a steady flow. But it's tough, and the rise of hip-hop has meant there's been a huge wave of American hits coming into the UK. Everything is cyclical.

You look at Royal Blood, and they sat there in absolute isolation, two guys, guitar and drums, making this amazing music, but it took some exceptional moments for them to come through.

To me, A&R is the one remaining dark art; everything else has an explanation. Publicity, marketing, promotion: there is a degree of learnability. But A&R is an extraordinary skill, and something that gives us belief that we don't know where the next superstar is coming from or what they'll sound like. Look at Billie Eilish: the record that confounded all the odds.

And that's what continues to make this business so exciting.

Is it a good time to be working in international, whereas before it was a bit of a poisoned chalice?
Definitely, for two reasons.

First, the industry's back in good health. We remember the 15-year mudslide. It was the most shocking time to be in the business; every week, all you tried to do was reduce cost. Now it's a very positive outlook.

And second, you've got Max running the company the way he is, as Chairman and CEO of Warner Music UK and global recorded music CEO; you've got this transformative period where he's encouraging everyone to try everything and everyone to pull together.

It's a great time to be in this business, a great time to be at Warner and it's definitely a great time to be thinking and working internationally. ■

'What innovation and best practice means in one market, is completely different in another'

SVP, Global Digital Marketing, Recorded Music, Jess Keeley-Carter on how Warner connects and collaborates across the globe...

While I always knew that Warner Music had a global footprint, what became apparent upon joining the company earlier in the year is the truly global spirit of collaboration amongst our world-wide labels and affiliates.

Across the company, people are quick to jump to support artists and tracks that are starting to make significant noise in one market, to ensure they maximise success within their own territories.

This isn't just limited to supporting on an artist or track basis, it extends into the sharing and subsequent scaling of best practice, or openness to partner in testing smart ideas or innovations. This overarching spirit of collaboration means that, as a company, we're able to stay nimble and continue to redefine the ways we work, so we can continue to deliver the best possible results for our artists, both in and out of their home markets.

This speed to adapt and desire to consistently innovate in line with the huge market shifts that continue to happen around us is essential to ensuring that we and our artists stay relevant and continue to push cultural and social evolution.

One thing that often gets overlooked, however, is what innovation and best practice means in one market, is completely different to another territory. While our music world looks to be getting more and more global, the fundamental cultures, economies and politics of each country or region, the things that underpin societies, are – and always will be – wildly varied. The need of in-market expertise that can work to support, adapt and evolve campaign plans or ideas, is as important as it ever was.

It's this 'think global, act local' approach that delivers for our artists. There are people going into bat for them with local editors, radio stations, influencers and retailers, who truly understand the market.

To make the most of this, we also encourage our artists to take this approach, be willing to adapt, travel, evolve their thinking, while still staying true to themselves and their art, to ensure that they have the best possible chance for global success.

Sophie Bloggs (left) and Martha Kinn

‘NEW ARTISTS MUST BUILD SOMETHING AUTHENTIC THAT WILL CARRY THEM THROUGH THEIR CAREER’

Martha Kinn is the manager behind synth-pop band Years & Years and emerging Hackney-born pop act Bree Runway, while Sophie Bloggs heads up the YM&U electronic music roster in the UK, which includes the likes of DJ, producer and Nothing Else Matters label boss Danny Howard plus rising house DJ, Hannah Wants…

“As a manager, you’re the driving force for your artist,” says Years & Years manager, Martha Kinn. “You’ve always got to stick to what you know is the right thing for their longevity.”

Kinn and fellow senior YM&U management colleague Sophie Bloggs could write a book about the art of artist management.

Spending an hour with the two executives gives *MBUK* a crash course in how best to manage a record label’s expectations, an artist’s expectations – and their own expectations, when it comes to the reality of being an artist manager in 2019.

“The role of the manager has changed,” says Bloggs. “Essentially, you can be the live agent for the beginning part [of an artist career], you can be the label – which implies A&R, marketing, promo – too, as well as being the manager. It’s demanding.”

Electronic music expert Bloggs joined YM&U – previously Machine Management – in 2015 from her previous position at Three Six Zero, where worked for a couple of years after a successful stint managing DJs independently.

Bloggs got started in the music business putting events on at university and did an internship at Fabric Records. From there, she worked at an independent dance label for two-and-a-half years doing PR and then touring.

“Then I was approached by Yolanda B. Cool at the point where they had their hit single, *We Don’t Speak No Americano*,” explains Bloggs. “I basically just made a decision at the age of 23 that I wanted to move into management as opposed to being at a record label. It felt like it was the right thing to do.”

Kinn joined Machine in 2013 and subsequently helped guide Years & Years to a No.1 album and single in 2015, with *Communion* and *King*, respectively. Kinn’s career actually started in music journalism however, before she worked as a management and major label scout.

“I started off writing and just being out and about on the London scene,” she says. “I met someone who ended up being my first boss; he happened to work in management and also at labels.

“Being an A&R scout just totally threw me into the deep end,” she continues. “I discovered Rizzle Kicks, who I ended up managing for a few years. I learned a lot of lessons [from that experience] and I think I really put [those learnings] into the way I approached management going forward.”

The A&R Award-winning Machine Management was founded by Iain Watt in 2002 and was fully acquired by talent management company James Grant Group (JGG) in September 2018, with Watt subsequently being made MD of JGG’s UK music division. Later that month, James Grant Group sold a majority stake to private equity firm Trilantic, rebranding the entire company as YM&U as of January 1, 2019.

As Chief Talent Director of YM&U’s music division in the UK, Kinn is tasked with helping build an entity that is diverse, creatively ambitious, and which helps a new breed of artists find success. (Alongside working with her own roster of acts, Kinn supports the company’s other managers with their projects, and collaborates closely with Watt to grow the music business.)

> ***“It’s really important for an artist to know they’ve got support here and in America.”***

YM&U also houses Deckstar Management (acquired in 2017), home of Blink 182 and Steve Aoki, and Hall Or Nothing (acquired in 2012), which brought the likes of The Script and the Manic Street Preachers to its roster.

YM&U has offices in Los Angeles, London, Washington, New York and Manchester, and says that its mission is to “create the world’s leading management company for clients in Sport, Music, Drama and Entertainment”. The firm’s UK music clients also include the likes of Take That, James Arthur, Kurupt FM, Friendly Fires and Clean Bandit.

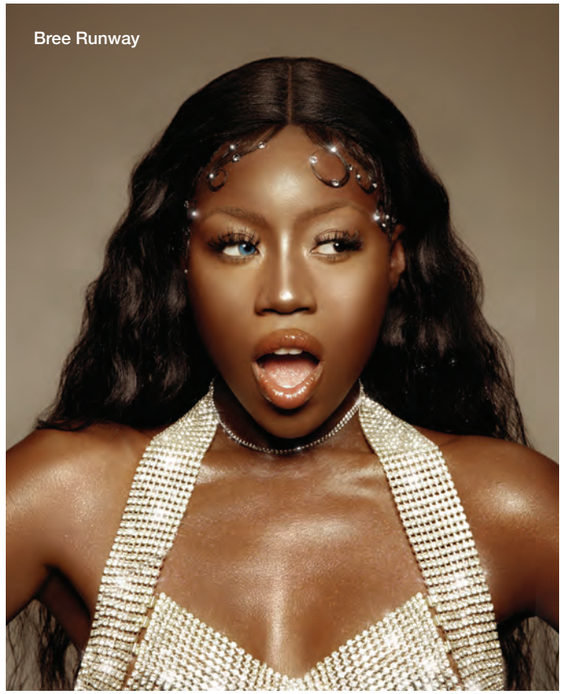
“Music is such a global thing now; it’s really important for an artist to know that they’ve got support both here and in America, and [that] there’s synergy between the teams working on that,” explains Bloggs.

“This is basically the perfect place for any kind of crazy idea you might have,” adds Kinn. “If you want to go and do a cameo in a film or if you want to make a podcast, [YM&U] is really well resourced for you to go and do those things.”

Music Business UK met with Bloggs and Kinn at the Great Portland Street offices of YM&U to interview the duo about working at Machine, and how to approach artist management in 2019...


YM&U client Kurupt FM


Danny Howard


Bree Runway

What do you know about management now that you wish you knew when you first started?

Sophie Bloggs: That it's okay to make mistakes. Or more to the point, that everybody makes mistakes and they learn.

Martha Kinn: Not to take it too seriously, to be okay when things don't go to plan.

SB: With management, it is essentially about planning and strategising and doing the things that the creative, aka the artist, isn't necessarily built to do. When something doesn't go to plan, you might feel like you haven't done your job properly, but that's not actually the case. The times that I have been most successful in management is when you're able to *adapt* to the plan and not allow it to stress you.

MK: Totally. It's such a fluid situation and you have to be reactive. Management is so all-consuming, and you can really get stuck in your own head.

Martha, there was a quote from you in a story on *MBW* about the YouTube Music-funded management programme where you said that you can only really expect to make real income from an artist's business two to three years into their career. Could you tell us about that?

MK: Yeah; I stand by that. That's never [been] truer than it is today. It can take even longer than that.

SB: We talk about this consistently in the office and it actually influences our choices when it comes to working with clients, because Martha is totally right. The landscape has changed over the past five years and to build a business for artists doesn't happen quickly anymore.

There are so many different platforms which you have to engage with, which just means that the process is a lot longer than it used to be. Having said that, when you do reach a certain point, I think the fan base is far more engaged. So it means there's more artist career longevity.

MK: To try and skip that or work around it or try and look for short-term success is where you'll fall down as a manager, especially if you're trying to build something that's really long term. That's the beauty of the artist-manager relationship. It's the only relationship where you're just as invested as the artist [in] their success, for as long as possible.

That's why as managers we maybe [occasionally] come up against the label who are keen for more short-term results. That development part leads on throughout an artist's career. It's just going to be so considered and you have to be patient, if you want to build something that is going to last.

How do you manage an artist's expectations of what the manager can help them to achieve?

SB: It's difficult. Everybody approaches it individually, but I think myself and Martha come from the same standpoint on this, which is just being totally upfront; honesty is always the best policy. If you over-promise, you're the only person who's going to fail.

Obviously when you're pitching to new artists or you're proposing a plan, you want to aim for the highest possible achievement. But you just need to have really honest conversations.

MK: Whenever I take a new artist on, which doesn't happen too often right now, I'm always like, 'I'm going to challenge you. If you don't want a manager that's going to challenge you, I'm not the right person for you.'

I make it really clear that it's not going to be easy. There's no quick route to get there. It's going to be a long process. Every artist is keen to get their music out – and now!

From my own experience with Years and Years, I [can] talk about how long it actually takes to get something [created and recorded] that is really good enough.

I talk a lot about the development process [giving artists] the luxury of time. Once you are on the runway, so to speak, there's no going back. New artists need to use that development time to really build something authentic and amazing that's going to carry them through the rest of their career.

What things do you take into consideration about what clients you take on?

SB: I think the music has to be the starting point for every conversation. Obviously we are approached for management from seven different ways. But first and foremost, it's the music. I have to love the music to be engaged with it, otherwise I just can't put 100% of myself into a project and that's what's needed to make anything successful these days.

MK: I set the bar very high. For me to take something on, they've got to be really globally ambitious – if they're not, then I don't want to waste my time. And I will say that in the first meeting. They've also got to exist in their own lane.

Maybe I'm asking for a lot, but I'm quite lucky that I have acts that [fulfill] those things, that take me beyond just the music, with so much cultural significance. I know not every artist can have that, but that's definitely something that I look for, because I want to be managing icons, really, not just a flash in the pan.

It's difficult to know when you're dealing with creative endeavors if you're going to get a return on your investment…

SB: You're not going to know. It's a risk. But if you believe in something that much, then all you can do is give it 100% and hope that it works out. And if it doesn't, then you know that you've tried your best.

MK: You just go with your gut. If your gut is telling you to do something and put your all into it, then do it. They might fire you a few months later – but I don't have any regrets when it comes to stuff like that. Because when one does really happen, when it becomes successful, that's just the best feeling ever.

How do you manage the pressures that come with success and fame for an artist and for yourself?

SB: It's difficult. We're lucky that we have a group of people to lean on within our company; it's important to vent, and have someone that can relate to a situation, who offers advice and guidance.

MK: I come from a background where my family work in mental health. What I did with Years & Years, and with the new artists I'm managing like Bree Runway, as soon as I can, I try and get them into therapy, just to prepare them as much as possible. And to help them understand that the life that they're going to be leading, if it all goes well, is going to be so trying of them and their mental health. I just try and be tuned in and sensitive about what they could be going through. [It's] important that you seek support like within your peers. That's why I love being part of the company. But it's not easy.

You really want to protect your artists. But then on the other side, you can sort of create a monster with your artist too, if you put [a] bubble around them, and you fan the flames of fame. I try my best to keep my artists grounded, always have a joke with them, bring them down a peg or two, crack the whip. And I have to say, I see it very often; a lot of artists, you can tell are quite indulged, but I don't stand for that.

"A lot of artists are quite indulged. But I don't stand for that..."

SB: Martha is better at being hard than I am! But I agree. I don't know whether this is quite a sweeping statement, but I think being a female does change or does influence how you approach these things. That can be really beneficial for the early stages of an artist's career because, as Martha mentioned, there's a lot of hand-holding, really guiding them through the process, that's needed. And that takes a lot of patience.

Creating art and putting yourself out there can be emotionally taxing because you're in the public eye and your art is being critiqued and scrutinized. How do you help artists deal with that?

SB: It's [about] protecting them to a certain degree and managing expectations from the beginning, or having reasonable expectations from the beginning to be able to protect them from any downfalls.

MK: I can really relate to this when it comes to Olly [Alexander] and Years & Years, because I think a lot of what Olly puts out is so personal. He's so open and a lot of the issues he talks about are incredibly meaningful and important. And there have been many times, especially on the last album where a lot of people, I won't name any names, tried to push me to get Olly [Alexander] to do something different. To be basically less gay, is what I was [hearing]. Things like, 'Oh, you'll turn people off if you do things like that.' We had to weather a lot of that criticism.

The only thing that I could do in that situation was to 100% back Olly. I can't make him be something that he's not and I wouldn't want to. For me it was just so clear that I was going to support him and support his creative [idea], which was basically part of his identity and it's an identity that's important, that we need to see out there. Any other sort of commercial argument that I was getting from anyone else, just took a backseat.

SB: I've had situations in the past with some of my acts. You do get questioned by people who ask to push things in a different direction. You have to support your act because you are there as their protection and their support system. And it just goes back to having that same vision and knowing that you're a partnership.

How much did things change after the James Grant Group acquisition in terms of day-to-day operations and opportunities opening up for the clients that you work with?

SB: It's opened up a lot of opportunities for our clients. It's allowed us the flexibility to bring in other members of staff to head up divisions that we were [previously] trying to do ourselves. In terms of a global footprint, we've never been quite successful in achieving that before – and we have tried! – but it's very different now.

MK: Yeah, it's one thing to *tell* an artist that you have an American company. A lot of companies try putting one or two managers out in America, but for us, having an inbuilt company [in Los Angeles] who have a really big and successful, incredible roster; having them available to us, their expertise; having an office we can go to, and that knowledge that we can share – that is actually what presenting a global management offering looks like.

That side of things has been really good. And then the other thing that really excites me about being here is, especially for the kind of artist that I have, like with Olly and with Bree, is they do things beyond music.

What has it been like working with Machine Management specifically from the start?

SB: It's really interesting and I guess it's important that we both speak quite candidly on this because myself and Martha had a very similar journey coming into Machine Management independently.

We both came from companies previously that we had some difficult situations with. I met with Iain [Watt] and felt that we had a bit of a unified approach in how he and the company look for artists, want to work with artists long term, and also how he

Years & Years frontman, Olly Alexander

builds his staff and team. That's why I decided to take the job. Also, I've never worked with female managers before anywhere I've been previously. The female role has always been as a junior whereas [here] it's been incredible to see another female manager, and have the support of another female managers as well. Iain's been an incredible mentor to me. Iain and Machine have always taken the approach of empowering staff, and particularly women.

MK: I joined Machine over six years ago. I was also coming out of a very difficult situation. I had lost a lot of trust for people in the music business and wasn't feeling very secure.

I really wanted to be part of a company that made me feel secure, appreciated me, valued me, and when I met with Iain, it just seemed to click – I felt like he had my back. I'd spent quite a lot of years having men take credit for things that I had done. I've definitely found with Iain, he was one of the few men I'd met that just did not have that in him whatsoever. He was just so happy to see me succeed and be part of that in a supportive way.

Iain gave me a lot of freedom, as well. Even though I was coming in with all this experience behind me, I still had a lot to prove. He really supported me and I [have] really grown within Machine and been a really big part of the company. I've really enjoyed that side of it.

I felt really empowered and when Sophie joined as well, I was like, 'Oh my God, there's another senior female manager in this business!' I was so happy about it. There's not enough of us, really, right across the industry.

"Prior to joining YM&U, I've been the only female in the room 99% of the time."

Have there ever been difficult times in the wider music business in the way you are treated as women generally?

SB: I head up the electronic division within YM&U and that's something that I'm building long term with some of the team. Every scenario prior to being at Machine, aka YM&U, I would say 99% of the time I've been the only female in a room, whether it be a boardroom, a planning meeting or a gig.

That is quite challenging sometimes because you do feel a level of insecurity or not being taken seriously. Like particularly with the technical side of the electronic setup. My opinion has previously been disregarded because, 'You're a girl. You don't know what you're talking about'. That kind of thing.

MK: It's still such a boys' club.

SB: Yeah, it is. But I'm really seeing a change now, like the past year. I worked as part of the Duke Dumont team during its pivotal success. The experience that I [gained] through that meant that my contact database was at a certain level when I arrived here, even though I didn't necessarily have a roster.

The attitude towards [dance music] being a boys' club is changing. It's not [gone] by any means. But there are a lot of female DJs and producers coming through, which I think naturally means they look to work with female peers, which is great.

Also I've found a lot of men, male DJs and producers, have been drawn to me because they don't like the way that the boys' club operates, which you know, is a lot of drinking and not necessarily organization.

Would you say the gender balance out there in general industry terms is getting better?

SB: I feel it's getting better in that there are a lot more females coming through that you can work with; on a few of my acts, I have all-female teams. So in that respect it's changing, yes. But of course there are still moments where you just feel like nothing's changed.

MK: When it comes to the more overt sexual harassment and abuse, we seem to have moved forward [as an industry] with the whole #metoo movement. Now what we need to be wary of is the more insidious [less overt] sexism; it can be really difficult to vocalise what those things are, but they can be just as damaging.

Can I also just say, I don't want to make this all about women. There's also an issue with there not [being] enough people of color as well. *Especially* when it comes to women. It's fine for us to fight the fight as white women. But we're not at a place where we have any kind of real diversity in the industry. And it's on all of us to change things.

Why do you think there aren't as many senior female executives as there should be?

SB: If you really look at it, women don't ask for as much as men do. It's not a very female approach to ask for a role or ask for a pay rise or know that they can get that senior position. That's probably where it starts.

I know that there are initiatives within record labels and publishers that are trying to balance out the gender difference now, and I think you're starting to see [the results] of that, definitely. We actually both get approached by a lot of senior A&Rs, and heads of music labels to ask for advice on females that we can put forward for roles. I guess that's a good starting point.

MK: It's hard, because it's so deep-rooted in our society, the sort of behavioural differences. So much of this industry is about confidence and self-belief, especially as a manager. It's a very entrepreneurial role. You've really got to motivate yourself and spend a lot of time alone.

There are a lot of aspects [to management] that don't always complement the way that women have been brought up or the way that society expects women to act. It's a social issue that is not always easily corrected. ■

WHAT I WISH I'D KNOWN

Manager and consultant Kwame Kwaten looks back on a career of ups and downs, on stage and behind the scenes, and highlights the lessons he's learned along the way…

I was born in Hackney, but I grew up in Thornton Heath.

I listened to a lot of pop, a lot of Quincy Jones productions, a lot of Chic, a lot of Stevie Wonder, Parliament/Funkadelic, that kind of thing. Punk as well, because this was the late '70s, and then the new romantic thing.

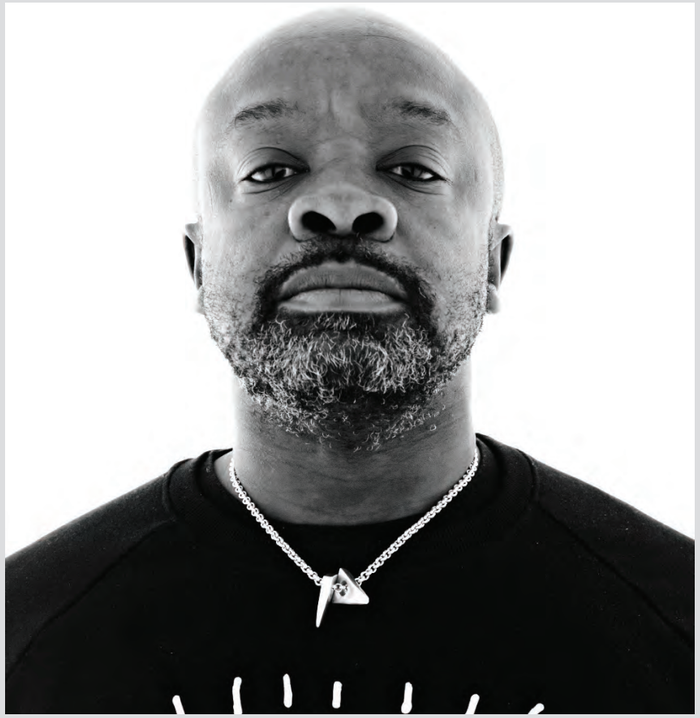
My dad had died when I was seven, and after that I ended up getting in quite a lot of trouble in school; I went off the rails a bit. And my mum, who was a nurse, decided that the way to fix things was to send me to private school. So she ended up holding down three jobs to pay the fees for my first few terms – and then I ended up getting some bursaries and some council grants that mean I could stay.

It was definitely a bit *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*! But it's meant that I've never been intimidated by the upper classes, and that I can be comfortable in all types of company

When I was about 15 or 16 years we were all sent to see a careers advisor. He asked me what I wanted to do and I told him I wanted to be in the music business. He said, "No, you need to choose a proper job, something you can still be doing when you're 50."

I kept telling him that I was going to be in the music business, and that that would be my life, but he kept saying no, choose something else. In the end I remember I saw a book behind him and it said 'Legal Executive' somewhere on the cover, so I said, I want to be a Legal Executive. He said, "Now you're talking," and I just got out of there.

When school finished, I still knew I wanted to be in music, but I didn't really know how to go about it, so I went to as many open mic nights as I could; I even start hosting one. I'm rehearsing with bands, I'm going to lots of jam sessions, thinking, if I keep being in the right places, something will click, something will happen. And at one session, in Shepherd's Bush, it turns out that there were the makings of what became D'Influence.



> "I had a couple of years in the wilderness. I needed a win."

We pressed up our own white label, sent it to record shops, but also gave it to a lot of DJs, one of whom was this lanky guy called Tim Westwood – and he played it on Capital that night. The phones started ringing straight away.

One of the calls was from the Acid Jazz label, and we ended up doing a singles deal with them.

The next thing, we get a call from Sylvia Rhone (then head of East West) and they come over for a meeting. It was actually Merlin [Bobb] who comes in, sits behind the desk and starts talking to us. Then this lady comes in and starts serving tea. At the same time, Merlin is playing our tunes, we're all listening, but none of us want to be rude to the lady serving the tea, so we smile, say thank you etc.

Merlin finishes, says they're really interested, at which point the tea lady comes back in swaps places with Merlin and introduces herself as Sylvia Rhone. First thing she says: "Just testing." Thank goodness we were courteous to the person pouring tea. Lesson one: always be nice!

We sign. It begins.

Our thing from the start was that we wanted to play live. We were a street soul band, and that wasn't getting played on the radio, so we had to go out and win people room by room. We got really good – and we had a great reputation.

We ended up supporting Michael Jackson, Prince, James Brown… It was mind-blowing. Even now, sometimes you wake up and think, Was that us?!

Meanwhile, the albums are doing okay, not amazing, just okay. But we're producing ourselves, and we're learning about the studio, and how to remix, and we're getting asked to do more and more of that kind of thing for other artists.

Warner had just signed this guy from Leicester and they asked us to mix a couple of his tunes. He was Mark Morrison and the second one we did was *Return of the Mack*.

After that we hit a real hot streak, working with big artists, on big records.

Along the way, I'd always had lots of people saying I should get into management and, eventually, one day, I found this girl, Louise Setara, and we decided to give it a go. I got her a deal with Sony BMG, then they dropped her. I got her a deal with Blue Note, they put the album out, but it just didn't set the world alight.

I ended up having a couple years in the wilderness: broke, really skint. Like they say, when you're hot, you're hot – and when you're not, you're not. I'd been hot. And now I really was not.

I needed a win. So I throw out this post on Facebook: 'Who's the most underrated artist you know?' Two replies from people I really trusted had links to this same girl – Sarah Joyce, who was performing under the name Rumer.

I have a meeting with her, she's very quiet, but when she sings… I mean hearts just melt.

I end up doing 26 showcases with her. Loads of A&R people come along, and they all say the same thing: great, but how are you going to get her on Radio 1?

> "It worked because, honestly, Laura can reduce people to tears."

At one of the very last showcases, Max Lousada walks in, he's heading up Atlantic Records at the time. He walks over and I say, "Max, if you're going to ask me how we're going to get her on Radio 1, I swear I'll…" And he says, "No, I get it, let's do it."

And we did it! The first single, Slow, blew up on Radio 2 (I told you we didn't need Radio 1!) and the album [*Seasons Of My Soul*] did over a million [No. 3 in the UK, Top 50 in the US].

My neck is out of the noose. I did two-and-a-half years with Rumer and I also managed her producer, Steve Brown, who ended up giving me a CD of this group and telling me to check them out. I played it and thought, "Not sure about the group, but, wow, the singer…"

He tells me it's a girl called Laura Mvula. I call her up and say: "I know how to do this, I've just spent a couple of years selling a million records; I know how to do this. I want to manage you." I wasn't messing about!

I took her round all the labels. My whole thing was, they'll never understand until they see her perform. So we would literally carry her keyboard into the MD's office and away we'd go. And it worked because, honestly, Laura can reduce people to tears.

We got close with Decca, I think they're probably still pissed off with me, but the deal seemed low, and I just wasn't sure. Laura wanted me to bite their hand off! But I said I had a feeling something better was going to come along. And, sure enough, Colin Barlow at RCA showed up, and I knew he got it.

We signed, we put the record [*Sing To The Moon*, 2013] out and it did the business [Top 10 and nominated for the Mercury prize].

Then, we did the next album, which was *The Dreaming Room*, but by now, the MD at Sony had changed and Colin Barlow was no longer at RCA.

We put the record out and… I think it was just one of those things; it just didn't work. It was a good record, and it got great reviews – which led to this weird situation of a very acclaimed artist being dropped.

Before then, I had done a lot of thinking myself and I knew I'd taken this as far as I could take it. There's something else round the corner for me, I just don't know what it is yet. And in that frame of mind, I knew the best thing for me to do was walk away – this is before there was even a whiff of being dropped. I just felt it was something I had to do.

Laura Mvula

It must have been tough for Laura, because she lost her manager and then her deal in the space of a couple of months. But she's an artist of substance and I knew she'd rise back to the top, and now she's at Atlantic, with Briony Turner, who's a great A&R person.

The thing that was round the corner for me turned out to be Ferocious, the consultancy company I founded which helps artists get good teams and good plans together.

We started two-and-a-half years ago and it's just exploded. We can't take on any more [artists] until September – and then only one or two.

And what have I learned from all that?

I think one of the things I wish I'd known from the start is that you should always have a trial period with someone. And at the end of that trial period, go with your gut. You'll know if it feels right, and if it doesn't, don't be afraid to walk away.

Also, be patient. Sometimes you're going to be ahead of the game. And when you are, you're going to have to wait for people to catch up. Don't stamp your feet and start shouting about how no-one else gets it. It just might not be the right time – but have some faith that the right time will come. The comet will come back round.

"Don't be afraid of stepping outside of whatever the rules are at the time."

Someone very senior at Universal said recently they should call me Halley's Comet – because every few years you come up with a big one. Whoosh!

Another thing is, don't be afraid of stepping outside of whatever the rules are at the time. Many of my biggest successes have come from just saying no to people. I was told again and again that Rumer would never amount to anything, by lots of people that are high up in the industry now. No, Kwame, she's been looking for a deal for 10 years, it'll never work.

I knew they were wrong; I knew the rules didn't apply to her.

And a very basic one is: start. Just start. You've thought of this thing, now do it. It won't be completely right straight out of the blocks – but please don't just stay in the blocks! The rules will have changed tomorrow anyway, so just get started.

And the final thing I'd say to the younger me is, You can go and tell that careers advisor he's wrong. You are going to make it in the music industry – and you'll still be going strong in your 50s.

‘WHEN YOU SIGN AN ARTIST, YOU’RE TAKING THEIR LIFE IN YOUR HANDS. YOU HAVE TO COMMIT 100%’

London-based Trinifold Managament was set up by Bill Curbishley in 1974, and has steered the careers of The Who, Judas Priest, Jimmy Page and Robert Plant. Here, as Trinifold celebrates its 45th anniversary, Curbishley and Who co-manager Robert Rosenberg reflect on their lives in music…

Bill Curbishley might be one of the greatest artist managers of all time, sure. But he’s also one of the greatest storytellers, with an endless supply of anecdotes from a life in – and love of – music from when he was a mod in 1960s East London up until the present day.

His company, Trinifold Management, turns 45 this year, having guided the careers of The Who for over four decades, Judas Priest since 1982, and, at one stage, Led Zeppelin’s Robert Plant for 26 years and Jimmy Page for 13.

In addition, Trinifold is home to UK reggae legends UB40 plus two recent Finland-based signings: The Holy and Lake Jons. He hasn’t ‘just’ managed rock stars either, having successfully branched out into TV and film to produce the likes of 1979 cult classic mod tragedy *Quadrophenia* and 1980’s *McVicar*, which tells the story of John McVicar and his life in and out of Durham Prison.

Curbishley is also a passionate supporter of the Teenage Cancer Trust, founded by Myrna Whiteson MBE 28 years ago, and which also counts the Who’s Roger Daltrey as a patron. “I’m really proud of it,” says Curbishley. “Teenagers are our next generation. They’re our future, and they shouldn’t be left in this lonely world just because they’re unfortunate enough to have a shitty disease like cancer.”

The notion of music institution is made clear as *Music Business UK* visits Curbishley at Trinifold HQ in North London. As the lift doors open directly into the reception area of the office, it’s hard not to stare in awe at the decades worth of photographs, sales awards and music memorabilia covering almost every inch of the walls, which have as many stories to tell as their high-profile occupants.

“Milestones are a bit frightening when you think about it,” says Curbishley as we take a seat across the room on a leather sofa in his large sun-lit corner office, also dripping in over four decades of prime music history, with a photo of him when he was a mod stuck on the front of his office door by a Trinifold team member, “just for a laugh”.

“I turned 77 last month, and where has it gone?” he muses. “If I look back at some of the old diaries and touring books, of course it all comes back how much I actually did do. But it just seems vanished. I’ve gone from being a mod to an OAP! It’s just madness.”

Curbishley tells *MBUK* that when he left school he was earning £4.50 a week as an apprentice draftsman at an engineering company. His feelings about that job can be best understood by watching *Quadrophenia*, and specifically the scene in which lead character and mod culture devotee Jimmy Cooper (played by Phil Daniels) quits his steady office job in a no holds barred tirade.

“There’s so much in *Quadrophenia* that relates not only to my life but to the friends I was with and everything,” explains Curbishley. “I looked around me in this office – it was a very Dickensian-type office, with a big clock above me – and I thought, ‘Fuck this. I can’t be doing this.’ The guy who was running the office; I looked at him, he used to come in with his crash helmet on and be on his moped, and I thought, ‘God, is this my future?’”

> ***“I looked around this very Dickensian-type office and thought, Fuck this.”***

Having escaped his grey present and grim future, he joined the Merchant Navy to “try and see a bit of the world” and “ironically, hasn’t stopped travelling since”.

“I went with a mate of mine, Mike Shaw, who has sadly passed away since, and we were supposed to have gone away together on the same boat, but we didn’t in the end. We got separate boats.

“But we were mods in those days and mods were very industrious. They weren’t on the dole. Mods liked to work to get as much money as they could to buy clothes and to be out at dance halls, popping pills, the whole bit.

“Just as I was a mod, so many others were and the post war revolution was such that if someone said to me, ‘How would you sum up that movement.’ Basically, we said, ‘Fuck you’. We didn’t want to be following our parents. We wanted more. I think it was a post-war reaction.

“From 1958 to the early ‘60s, those war babies were then teenagers, and out to work and looking for something better.

L-R: Jayne Andrews, Bill Curbishley and Robert Rosenberg pictured at Trinifold’s London office, June 2019

The Who over the years. Clockwise from top left: 1966, 1966, 1967 and in 1978

The Who at the Universal Ampitheatre in 1989

With that came the whole cultural change and fashion. A lot of the explosion in the media and the art forms were really recognisable."

Curbishley's music business story starts in around 1970, when he started working with his old school mates Mike Shaw [with whom he'd joined the Merchant Navy] and Chris Stamp at Track Records with Kit Lambert.

Would-be filmmakers Lambert and Stamp had become The Who's accidental managers in the mid 1960s, having initially planned to make a movie about a rock n roll band, with The Who (known briefly as the High Numbers) being the central focus.

The movie was never made, but footage from that project can be seen in the 2014 documentary *Lambert and Stamp* by James D Cooper, which documents the infamous pair's involvement with the band.

"They were in film really, Stamp and Lambert, and Mike Shaw was the line director for Norman Wisdom, the comedian," explains Curbishley. "They were all in theatre and entertainment and they kept urging me to come with them, they said they were starting a record label. Eventually, they persuaded me and it was fantastic at that period in time because there was so much happening."

In addition to The Who, the label would sign the likes of Marc Bolan and Jimi Hendrix, with the latter introduced to the label by the Animals bassist Chas Chandler.

Track's first single was the Jimi Hendrix Experience's *Purple Haze* in 1967, followed in the same year by a string of singles by the Who (*Pictures of Lily, The Last Time, I Can See For Miles*), Marc Bolan's band John's Children (*Desdemona, Come And Play With Me In The Garden, Midsummer Night's Scene*), Tony Simon (*Gimme A Little Sign*), The Parliaments (*I Wanna Testify*) and many others.

"You know what drugs do in the end, they kill all of it; they kill all the fire, the flame."

The label's first album was Hendrix's timeless and iconic debut LP, *Are You Experienced*, followed by The Who's third album *The Who Sell Out*, both released in 1967.

Curbishley says that he looks back fondly on those early Track Records days because of the constant supply of exciting new music, but was forced to learn about the business side of things as quickly as possible under Lambert and Stamp.

"The music was in my blood, but I had to crash into it and learn the business side very quickly, because unfortunately Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp were heavily into drugs, so lots of stuff was getting left [undone]," he explains. "They were really creative in the beginning, but you know what drugs do in the end, they kill all of it; they kill all the fire, the flame."

He adds that, to start off with, he was effectively acting as tour manager and tour accountant. "We gradually became more and more successful, so I was able to delegate and get other people to do certain functions," he remembers. "But it was so exciting in the early days. Every week, it was almost like an amazing, huge competition with all the artists because every week, someone would come with a new song and we'd just sit back and go, 'Wow'.

"Apart from The Who, they started picking up artists like Marc Bolan. I'm finishing a documentary at the moment on Marc Bolan because I felt that he was one of the great, great artists. He had an early death, which was part of it, but he slipped through the net, really. He never achieved in America what I felt he should have. A lot of people fed off of him; Bowie, Freddie Mercury, Elton John."

Lambert and Stamp were an unlikely pair to have gone into the film and then music business together, with Oxford-educated Kit Lambert the son of classical composer and conductor Constant Lambert, and East London-born Chris Stamp's father a captain on a tugboat, although he did have actor for a brother, Terrence Stamp.

"Chris was my pal from school days but Lambert was a Barnum & Bailey-type character. Oxford accent, the whole bit," says Curbishley. "A lot of what he did was bluff. He had all the front in the world.

"I learned from him that if you go in with enough bravado, you can come out with something. When I used to go into the record companies and talk to them about deals and whatever, I just went in with the attitude that I need it more than them and I'm going to get it. And that was it."

"I just went in [to record companies] with the attitude that I need it more than them."

Curbishley reiterates that Lambert and Stamp's frequent absence and unpredictability meant that he was often left to do things on his own and had to seek advice elsewhere.

He recalls how they "started fighting with each other and warring with each other" in the middle of the making of the Ken Russell-directed *Tommy* film, which had not yet been properly negotiated with music impresario and movie producer, Robert Stigwood.

"I had to finalise that [deal] and I didn't know much about film, so I was going away and talking to people I knew in the film business, picking their brains, coming back, meeting with Stigwood, having a meeting, leaving, coming back the next day, changing it and finally we got there," he says.

Tommy, adapted from The Who's UK No.2 1969 rock opera album of the same name, featured an all-star cast of actors and musicians, from Jack Nicholson and Oliver Reed to Elton John, Eric Claption and Roger Daltrey as Tommy. The difficulties Curbishley had experienced working with Lambert and Stamp at Track during the making of *Tommy* led to his resignation and formation of his own business.

"Mike Shaw, the boy who'd brought me in, had a car crash on his way up to the Cavern and he was paralyzed from the chest down but he still used to come to work in a wheelchair. He had a really good sense of music, and a good mind," recalls Curbishley of his old friend.

"I was going to split my part of the commission from the *Tommy* film with [Shaw] and they never, ever paid me because of the feud between them and all the drugs. You could never get [Lambert and Stamp] to sign anything. It was just insanity."

"On the way back from the premiere of Tommy in New York, I said to them, 'I'm quitting.' They didn't think I was serious but I was, and I went and took a little office in Bond Street, above Pink Floyd."

One of the first projects Curbishley took on independently was a Rolling Stones tour in Europe after receiving a phone call from the band's then-manager Peter Rudge who had worked at Track with Curbishley at one point.

"He said, 'Look, I don't know much about Europe. Would you put together a Rolling Stones tour over there?' I said, 'I don't know Pete, I'm really busy.' I had nothing. He said, 'They'll pay well. Come on, would you do it?' I said, 'Okay.'

"I did the Stones tour, which basically got me enough income to run the office for a year or two. During that period, The Who came to me. They'd ended up in an absolutely ridiculous lawsuit with Lambert and Stamp in Track Records.

"They came to me and I said, 'The only way you're really going to survive this is to generate cashflow. The only way you're going to generate cashflow is to go and perform live, because everything else goes through Track.' They started touring for quite a period then. In the end, they resolved all the legal shit and that was it, we stayed together, and we've been together ever since."

Having parted ways with Lambert, Stamp and Track, and reinvigorated The Who's live business, Curbishley would later pursue his own film-making aspirations, which resulted in the aforementioned *Quadrophenia* (1979) based on the Who's 1973 album and *McVicar* (1980) which starred Daltrey, in addition to many other projects over the years, like 2013's *The Railway Man*.

"I always wanted to make films as well, so with the band looking at acquiring partnership of the studios, that's what I really wanted to do. Although, in order to keep us alive we had to continue with the music. But I really wanted to make films, and in '79, I made two back to back: *Quadrophenia* and *McVicar* – and they were both No.1 films. PolyGram funded those films for us, which was great support."

Curbishley was friends with PolyGram's then-Managing Director Fred Haayen, who was the ex MD of Polydor in Holland. "We were friends and he gave us this band, Golden Earring," he explains. "Then he got posted to run PolyGram from here. So he was very influential. When I said I wanted to make these films, he was totally behind it and he got them to give me the money."

The Who over the years. Clockwise from top left: 1982, 2006 and in 2019

Curbishley explains that in 1982, Pete Townshend told him that he was taking a break from The Who's relentless schedule so that he could spend more time with his family. "I thought, 'God, I'll have to do something different'. We were finishing the big tour," remembers Curbishley, "their farewell tour."

It was around this time that Curbishley was introduced to West Bromwich-born heavy metal band Judas Priest, who, by 1982, were massive stars on both sides of the Atlantic, having reached the Top 10 on the UK Albums Chart with their sixth studio album, British Steel, in 1980.

"Somebody came to me and said, 'Would you be interested in talking with the Judas Priest?' I was in New York so I said, 'Yeah, they're great live.' He said, 'They're down in Texas and they want to talk to you.' I said, 'Okay, I'll go down there.'

"I went down to Dallas, and that night Eric Clapton was playing, I think he had about 10,000 people in this venue. The next night was Judas Priest and they had 14,000. I said, 'I like them even more now.' I met with them and we got on like a house on fire. We're still great friends even today."

Curbishley explains that he took Judas Priest on after they had some "bad experiences with previous management, just as most of them had", including The Who and UB40. "There's a saga, that one," he says of the UK reggae band.

"What I tend to do is, I say to [artists], 'Look, in the end, if we don't get on well enough together, we're not going to want to be together," says Curbishley of his approach to management. "I don't want to go through all the litigation," he adds. "What we'll do is, we'll have an agreement that if we want to part company, we do, but we honour contracts up to that point. Whatever work's been done up to that point, people get paid for.

"And that's how I've always operated, very transparently, insisted that they have their own lawyers, their own accountants and try as much as possible not to actually handle the money. Let them and their people handle the money and they pay us. That's what I prefer to do and it's worked great and that's how it's been for all those years."

Working alongside Curbishley since the early '80s is The Who co-manager Robert Rosenberg, a songwriter and accountant by trade whose career in the entertainment industry started at William Morris Agency in London, having completed his articles in accounting aged 21.

"I have a sister who's 12 years older than me who had been in the film business, and she rang me one day and said, 'Oh, there's a job going for an accountant at a theatrical agency'," recalls Rosenberg. "I was like, 'What's that?' And she said, 'Oh, William Morris.'

"I went along for the interview and thought I'd probably be too young, but because the guy who'd just taken over there was 29, he wanted young people around him and I got the job. I found

myself going from a firm of accountants to working with all these movie stars and famous musicians."

Rosenberg says that he got to work with a lot of big American acts, because at that time William Morris didn't have a UK booking department and was solely US-focused.

"We would have an agent in the office who was usually American, and because I was the only other person in the office that was interested in music, I became very friendly with him," he says. "Also, when the artists came over from the US, I had to go to the gigs to make sure they get paid, quite often in cash.

"I got to meet all these people and get to know them, and I also had access to all the music that was going on in America, because we got sent everything on vinyl in those days. I was always more of a fan of American music, but I had a bizarre connection with The Who. When I was in school, it was boarding school, and in the holidays I lived with my other sister in Wembley. And her daily woman was Keith Moon's mother."

Rosenberg worked at William Morris for five years and was then offered a job by Jeff Wayne, producer of the hugely successful musical version of *War Of The Worlds*. After around three years, Rosenberg was offered a music publishing deal and decided to pack in the day job and try his luck at songwriting.

"I'd been in a band at school, and one of the guys I'd been in a band with started a recording studio called Sarm, which is still going today. He said, 'Do you still play guitar and do you still write songs?' I said, 'Well I do, but I don't tell anybody about it.' Long story short, I got offered a publishing deal, and I thought, 'Well, I'm only going to have the chance to do this once'."

Rosenberg was signed by Dizzy Heights; a company run by Nigel Grainge, older brother of Universal Music Group Chairman and CEO, Sir Lucian Grainge.

"I made lots of demos and had them recorded by different artists', says Rosenberg. "It was in the days when you actually got paid for writing songs, even though you hadn't had any success. If they thought you were good, they'd give you an advance. Which was enough money, not quite [enough] to live on, but a decent amount of money. That's virtually gone now, If you sign with a publisher, they've got to know there's money coming in before they give you any money."

He continued to do some part-time consultancy work one or two days a week alongside his songwriting including some work for Jeff Wayne. "This friend of mine, who was another accountant, said, 'There's this guy called Curbishley, who's looking for a part-time book-keeper'. That was how I came to work for Trinifold."

By 1983 Rosenberg was working for Trinifold full time and eventually became a director in the business, with his role as co-manager of The Who alongside Curbishley assumed in 1989, when the band started touring again after their near seven-year hiatus.

"I had a lot of knowledge of contracts in all aspects of the business through being in the entertainment business for a number of years," explains Rosenberg. "So I was sort of quasi-helping Bill on lots of other levels as well.

"Throughout the '80s, from '83 to probably early '90s, we were based in an apartment in Harley House, Marylebone Road. At that time we had Judas Priest, we got Robert Plant in '87, and we had Roger and Pete, and The Who, but they didn't do anything from '82 to '89. So it was mainly Priest, Plant and a few other odd people who we managed."

Looking back at the long associations between Trinifold and the artists on the roster, including The Who, Judas Priest and UB40, Rosenberg says that the longevity of the relationships all comes down to "trust".

"There's a trust that builds up, a relationship that builds up, a friendship that builds up with the artists," he says. "The Who relationship revolves around their relationship with Bill, which goes back to the early '70s. And that's a very, very strong relationship."

"It's because we became family, really," adds Curbishley. "It surpassed everything. It wasn't about having hit records or money or any of that. It was [about] holding the thing together because in those early days, Keith Moon was a real loose cannon."

"There's a trust that builds up, a relationship that builds up and a friendship that builds up."

Curbishley says that there was "antipathy and arguing" all the time on a creative level within The Who, and ultimately sees himself as "the glue" that kept them together. "Once they began to see that the way I worked was very, very transparent and that they could trust everything I did, I guess that was it," he says.

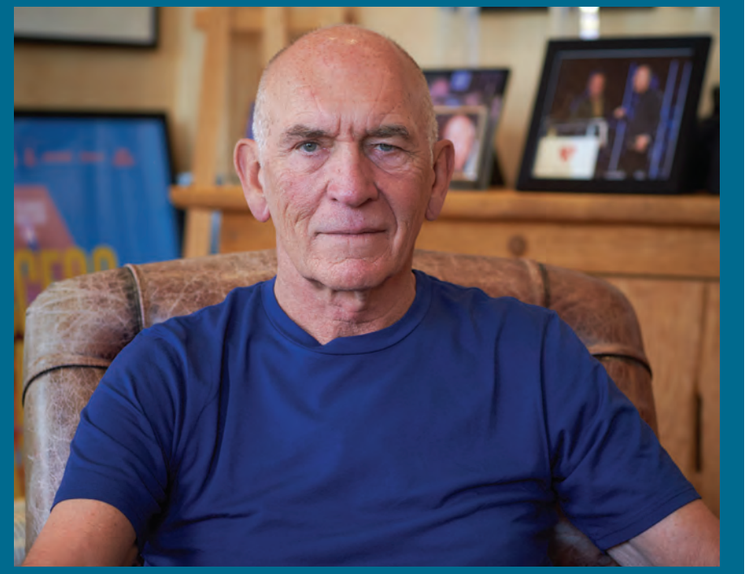
"So, over the years, I guess we got closer and closer as a family. Unfortunately, over those years, we lost two of them, [John] Entwistle and Moon, but it's about trust and that's what really was so baffling with Lambert and Stamp."

With our interview drawing to a close, Curbishley reflects on Trinifold's legacy in the British music business, on his life which he says "could have been boring" but hasn't been, and his long career in music, for which, he tells *MBUK*, ultimately he's just really grateful.

"People think it's really glamorous but the truth is, when you're touring, it's airport, hotel, venue," he says. "The only relief is when they're on the stage and you get a really good show out of it. And also, [The Who] have got some really fantastic, loyal fans around the world.

"I've got a lot to be grateful for. Townshend is always saying to me, 'You're really big on gratitude,' because I always tell him, they should be grateful to have had the gift of their talent and the luck that they've had along the way. There's a lot to be grateful for. And I'm still sitting here talking to you after all these years." ■

Bill Curbishley on...



Record Companies
It's totally changed now because it was always about physical product, achieving Gold or Platinum status. They had a function: promotion, marketing, shipping it out and so on. That was really, really important. But all of that's gone, and what I'm finding now is, it's pretty difficult to deal with them, because if you take a new artist into a record company now, they want you to have done half the job already. What are their social media figures? What's happening here? What's happening there? All without any real support.

I find them much more difficult to deal with, because I'm not sure what they do anymore. The areas that they're supposed to be with you on – creative, marketing, promotion and development – they're not there so much anymore; it's just not there. That's why you get some bands seemingly coming from nowhere. They've been building their own following for a couple of years and then suddenly it's an overnight success. Is it? No, it's not. Have a look and see what they've been doing outside of the record company.

The Balance of Power
I think the streaming companies have got the power and I think they'll keep it. When you look at the enormous size of some of the companies out there today, through the internet, Microsoft and Amazon. Look at Amazon. The demise of the High Street is really due to being able to get whatever you want on Amazon and have it the next day. I think that's what's really happening with the record labels. If we got the figures of how many redundancies they brought around, the majors, over the last five, 10 years, we'd be astonished. What they've done is they've cut down the manpower and they're achieving profits and it's all [from] streaming.

So, it's not great and I think in some ways, I may have experienced the best years of the music business. At least the exciting years of being able to break through and to get something on the radio was like, 'Wow, we've got our record on the radio.' But there's no radio now, really, is there? Now, I suppose, it's about getting playlisted.

Treating Artists Right
When you sign an artist, you're taking their life in your hands, you really are, and all of their hopes and aspirations and their art.

You're taking it in your hands and if you're going to commit, you have to commit 100% because you're playing with their lives. And that's why I haven't got 30 artists. I've got enough. I could handle another one, or another two, but the point is you have to be passionate about what they do otherwise you won't spend the extra hour or the extra two hours doing what's necessary. I mean, you're dealing with people here.

Sometimes you can't do much about it. People go past a certain point. I remember I got a phone call from an old friend, he's dead now. He was an agent in New York, Frank Barsalona. And he said to me, 'Would you put together a tour for Humble Pie?' I said, 'Sure.'

I did the tour for them around Europe and we got to the Christmas period when they finished and they came to me. They didn't have any money for Christmas. What happened to them? Thought they had houses in the Bahamas, all kinds of things. They didn't. And they didn't have money for Christmas. I gave them back half of the commission I got from the tour so they could actually have some money for Christmas. I mean, come on.

‘I’ll fight tooth and nail for my band’

Jayne Andrews is the long-time manager of British heavy metal legends Judas Priest. She tells *MBUK* about how she started working in music, the industry’s changing attitudes to powerful women and what it’s been like working with Trinifold for a third of a century…

Jayne Andrews says that the best business decision she ever made was joining Trinifold Management over 30 years ago.

“Right answer,” she jokes, and adds, on a more serious note, that she considers Judas Priest her “best friends as well as fabulous people to work with”.

She says: “Don’t get me wrong, we have our ups and downs. Of course we do, but then anybody does.

“But I would say that I’m very proud. I still stand there – I normally watch the show from out front by the desk – and I still just get that sense of pride that I’m part of this, which isn’t bad, after 33 years.”

Andrews has been a part of the Judas Priest machine since 1986, working behind the scenes to help perpetuate the West Bromwich-born, Rob Halford-fronted band’s status as heavy metal royalty. They’re one of the world’s most successful, influential and longest-running bands, having sold upwards of 50 million records across 18 studio albums since they formed in 1969.

The band’s upcoming 50th anniversary celebrations follow recent chart success with their last album, 2018’s Firepower (Epic), which reached No.5 both in the UK and in the US, a career best in the latter market.

“My hope is they’ll go on as long as they want to,” says Andrews of her own and the band’s future. “I don’t know how much longer that will be, but at the moment they’ve still got fantastic shows.

“They’ve [still] got songwriting ability. They haven’t gone dry on that. So, as long as they’re going, I’ll keep going.”

> *“I still get that sense of pride that I’m part of this, which isn’t bad after 33 years.”*

How did you end up working with Trinifold?

I started in the entertainment business in 1972 or 1973. I was a receptionist at London Management & Entertainment, which at the time was the biggest showbiz agency in England. We had [famed TV exec and one-time agent] Michael Grade and people like that there.

Through that I became a secretary. Then I ended up working at Emerson, Lake, and Palmer’s office. Then I went to Atlantic Records and, just through contacts, I got head-hunted and ended up working here.

I started off as sort of a management assistant and then just worked my way up. The more I got with the band the more I took over, and I basically deal with everything now.

Had you always planned to get into management, or just music generally?

No, but it’s a weird thing because even when I was much younger I always liked music. My father was in the Air Force and when we lived abroad, I used to listen to the Top 20 every week.

I used to write down all the songs and see which ones had moved, so I was always interested in it and if I was out anywhere, chances were, if I started chatting to somebody, they’d have some involvement with music.

I was drawn to it without thinking that was the direction I’m going to go in. And, as I said, when I got the job as a receptionist at London Management, they had all different kinds of entertainment. They had Morecambe and Wise. We had Norman Wisdom, Des O’Connor, I mean, all sorts of different people.

It just seemed to be something that I had a natural ability for. So, when I worked with ELP, I started off in the accounts department. But, [with] my natural abilities to organise things, I ended up being artist liaison for them and just dealing with everything and looking after that side of it. So, I suppose it’s just something [I was drawn to] naturally.

What metal bands do you see currently that you think will have as long a career as what Judas Priest has had?

That’s a hard one, it really is, because if you go back to their day, you have, obviously, Priest, you have Black Sabbath, Iron Maiden, AC/DC, Motörhead, you know, all those classic metal bands.

I don’t know if music in general seems to make those kind of artists anymore. Okay, you get an Adele or somebody like that. She, maybe, will have longevity because of her songs. But, overall, there are so many artists that come up and are great for a little while and then they seem to, not fade away totally, but not have that same sort of longevity that the old classic bands seem to have.

Why do you think that is?

It’s changed so much. In the old days, if a record company signed an artist, they would work on the artist, get the image right, get whatever it was right and develop them. It might be two or three years before something good started happening. Whereas now, it seems to be if you don’t have a hit or make quick buck then you’re out again. So, there isn’t that kind of development that there used to be.

As much as I love them, because I’m a sucker for *X Factor*, *The Voice* and everything else, I don’t know, [if it’s] because [the shows] make [an artist] an instant success, because you’ve got television and everything behind you.

But bands like Priest, they’re schlepping around in the old transit van, sleeping in the van and you know, sharing a sandwich between them all and whatever. So they really worked and they all paid their dues on the road.

It’s just the whole way the world is now. It’s very different but there is more of that because of all the reality shows and everything. There is more of that kind of instant thing now, which there didn’t use to be, so maybe schlepping around, paying your dues does pay off in the end, I don’t know.

What is it like being a successful woman in the music business and in metal, particularly?

It was tough to begin with, I’ll tell you. I had to prove myself, because I always say, if a woman’s tough, she’s a bitch. If a guy’s tough, he’s good. That happens a lot. I can be very, very tough. I may be blonde, but I can still be very tough and I’ll fight tooth and nail for my band to make sure things are done right. But it is hard. It’s not so bad now. It used to be much worse. It was very chauvinistic.

Before I was a manager, when I was just learning the trade and working for Atlantic Records and places like that, I don’t mean Atlantic was chauvinistic, I mean the business, in general, was so chauvinistic. A woman was, well, she must be a secretary or something.

It is hard sometimes, but in some ways, I think you have to be a bit tougher, just because you are a woman. So, I’m quite a tough cookie when I have to be.

Did that culture ever nearly put you off wanting to work in music?

Back in the day, when I was a lot younger, yes, of course. It was when the mini skirts were [in fashion] and we always did that and I used to think, ‘Maybe I should dress down, maybe I should wear knee length skirts and Hush Puppies’.

And then I suddenly thought, ‘Hang on, I’d still be me, I’d still be doing my job’. And I thought, ‘I’ve got to prove myself’, so I worked harder to prove myself to various people who thought you were just the minion, or whatever. And, in the end, I did prove myself. I’m still going, so I must be doing something right.

Can you think of any mentors or people that you particularly looked up to along the way?

Yes, I would say, definitely, when I worked for Atlantic Records, Phil Carson. He was my boss and Phil always had that way with any artist that came in. We looked after them. We took them out for dinner. If they wanted to go shopping and they didn’t know where to go, then we’d help them, or if they’re in a different country and they didn’t know what to do, we’d help.

He always had that way of dealing with people. I always think it’s giving as much attention to detail as you can and that was how he always worked and I feel I learned a lot from him in his way of doing things.

When I came here, there was Bill [Curbishley], of course. Bill still fascinates me when he talks in a meeting or whatever. He’s just so knowledgeable and obviously he’s been through so much with The Who and everything. So, yeah, Bill for sure.

45 years is a long time for a management company to be running. Do you ever think about that?

Yeah, I mean, March 3rd, that was 33 years for me, here, working with Priest.

I remember when I started, if somebody said in 30 years time, or in Bill’s case, in 45 years time, you’ll still be going, you think, ‘No, of course you won’t’. But it’s the same, in a different way, with the band. People say, ‘When you started, did you believe, that in 50 years time, you’d still be going?’ And, of course [they] think, ‘No, I’d be lucky if I got five years’.

It is quite incredible and the fact in Trinifold’s case, you know, having The Who, obviously, Judas Priest, now UB40, plus we did have Robert Plant, Jimmy Page, a few classic big acts. I just think it shows, again, that we must all be doing something right.

What do you think it is about Trinifold that all these artists work with the company for so long?

At the end of the day, it’s like at any company. If you’ve got somebody who is a good employee, you don’t want to lose them so you’re going to do the best to keep working together. And in my case, with Priest, we work as a team. It isn’t me saying, ‘You do this’, or, ‘I’ve done that for you’. If it’s a big thing, then we’ll sit and talk about it and decide how they want to move ahead. I’ll say what I think is right or not right and then we’ll just discuss it. We’ve always been like that. It’s always been very diplomatic with everybody.

‘THE GREAT THING ABOUT BEATS 1 IS THAT THERE ARE NO RULES’

Matt Wilkinson is one of the pillar presenters on Beats 1. He tells MBUK about the station’s commitment to new music and about his artists-first philosophy...

Apple Music describes Beats 1 DJ (is it still okay to say ‘DJ’?) Matt Wilkinson as ‘the UK’s foremost voice on new music and breaking bands’.

He’s more likely to describe himself as a kid from Cornwall who got (and engineered) some lucky breaks (and made the most of them), or the Saturday Boy who worked his way to the top of the shop (or close enough).

And there’s no reason why all of it can’t be at least partially true.

What’s absolutely true is that he’s a sharp operator with a great radar. And he was definitely born in Cornwall, but “by the time I was 20 I was desperate to get out.” He headed to London “with very little money and absolutely no contacts”, but plenty of determination to get into the music industry.

“Thankfully I managed to get my foot in the door at the *NME* and ended up spending eight years there. I started at the bottom and ended up as one of the editors.”

In those years he conducted hundreds of interviews, including one that changed his life.

“I did a phone interview with Zane [Lowe], when he was still at Radio 1. I guess in a way I was being kind of calculating about it, because I knew he was a great contact. So I went into it knowing I wanted to get his email address and to start something – which I did.

“I just said at the end of the interview, ‘Hey Zane, we’re in kind of similar worlds, give me your email address and I’ll send you some music.’ To my surprise, he said yes!” All Wilkinson had to do then was send something good... “There was a budding US soul artist called Shamir, I sent a track to Zane and he played him on the radio that night, with a shout out to me – it blew my mind!”

Soon afterwards, however, Lowe left Radio 1 “to start work on this secret Apple thing”, and Wilkinson presumed that was that.

“But it wasn’t. I started getting these emails: do you fancy meeting up for a coffee, do you wanna chat? The first time I met him was in a coffee shop in Soho and I remember going in thinking, I wonder if this is some sort of weird job interview? I mean, that really did only dawn on me as I was walking through the door.

“And then pretty much the first thing he said was, ‘Have you ever thought about working in radio?’ Oh, okay, it’s a job interview! And it just went on from there; truth be told I never really did have a proper interview in the end.”

“It’s not a conveyor belt: come in for your 15 minute interview then see you in six months.”

At the time, ‘this secret Apple thing’ which went on to become Beats 1 didn’t exist. “We started off with a blank board in front of us and started talking about what we could do. The great thing about Beats 1 then and now is that there are no rules. Being part of those conversations right at the start was really exciting – it’s going to make an amazing documentary one day!

“*NME* were very kind, they let me carry on working there while I did the Saturday show [for Beats 1], and then I naturally gravitated to full time.”

Wilkinson now broadcasts 11am-1pm every weekday, part of a quartet of main presenters alongside Julie Adenuga, Ebro Darden and, of course, Zane himself.

MBUK’s interview with Wilkinson is scheduled to start at 10am. Then gets pushed back a bit. When we do get underway, Wilkinson makes no mention of his impending appointment with the world.

A PR interrupts at one point to politely ask if he realises the time (it’s about 10:40 now). Yeah, says Wilkinson, let’s keep talking, this is fun. If anyone’s starting to rush and get a bit anxious, it’s not the guy who’s due on air in the time it takes to drink a cup of tea.

“It’s weird,” he reflects, “I am a nervous person. When I was growing up the thing I hated most was having to stand up and talk in front of the class or whatever. I was never great at that stuff, but I can just do this; I don’t know why.

“Maybe it’s because I love music so much and I’m so comfortable talking about it; maybe that just outweighs the nerves.”

And so we press on, covering the culture of Beats 1, the craziness of being name-checked by Elton John, the health of new music in the UK and, despite the fact that in 13 minutes time we might actually be part of it, the nature and ambition of Wilkinson’s own show.

Describe your show to someone who hasn’t heard it

It’s a non-stop trip around the world, with me hand-picking and playing my favourite new music, shining a light on emerging artists as much as possible; that’s my thing, it’s always been my thing, I’m kind of addicted to that.

What I hate is the idea of speaking to an artist and them thinking that I’m not sincere and into their music, or into them as people. I’ve always had that; I want to treat artists with the utmost respect.

How much do you think your background in journalism informs your show?
Massively. The way I approach interviews hasn't changed that much. And, you know, we play a lot of music on the show, we play about 30 songs a day, and I like to be comfortable with all of it. I'm not just pressing play.

We want to work with artists, and it's not like it's some sort of conveyor belt: come in for your 15-minute interview and then we'll see you in six months. We want to work with them and know them much more than that. Whether that's me forging a friendship through DM on Instagram, or going for a coffee or a beer with them when they're in town… as long it's not: come in, sell your product, see you later. It's about building something more authentic.

I love *NME* and they were very, very good for me. But what I noticed there, because of its build-em-up/knock-em-down reputation, was that whenever we spoke to artists we had to win them over. I often found myself having to work hard and say, 'Look, I'm not that bad! We can do some good stuff with you.'

The difference at Apple is we don't have that; we have a great reputation with artists. So seeing people come in, genuinely excited to be here and really want to work with us is a truly great thing.

Do you think that's because of people like Zane – and even Dre and Jimmy initially – are running the show and setting the culture?
Yeah, they're artist people. I know artists – some of my best friends are artists! – and I know there can be a real stigma about the music industry. They're scared of doing dodgy deals, of getting stitched up, so I know how important it is to be upfront with people and make them feel comfortable. That's something we've focused on so much at Apple and I think that's paying off.

What do you know about your audience in terms of its size and who they are – and, more importantly, how much of that can you share with us?
Well, we know they're incredibly engaged with music and they're very quick to pick up on something that's happening on Apple Music or Beats 1. You can see the connections through social stuff.

I did my own little test on it. When we had Kevin Parker from Tame Impala on the show in January, we couldn't really pre-announce it because it was a surprise on the Sleeve Notes section of my show.

So I just put a picture of Kevin up on Instagram saying 11am, Beats 1. I didn't tag anyone and so it didn't get reposted by anyone. But within less than five minutes, it was up on Reddit, it was on all the fan sites, and by the time we were on air, everyone in the Tame Impala superfan world knew about it.

Zane always says Beats 1 is like a feed, a music feed; there's always got to be something [new] happening and something coming.

"I know how important it is to be upfront with people and make them feel comfortable."

How does your show fit into and feed into the wider Apple Music universe?
We work closely with Apple Music all over the world, particularly with Jamie Connor over in the States and Camilla [Pia] here in London, who do a lot of playlisting for Apple Music; we're like musical triplets. It really does come down to the fan thing: 'Have you heard this? I think this is amazing, you have to hear it.'

The great thing is the amount of obsessive music fans who work for us all over the world, and who I've been introduced to. To have a network like that at your fingertips, that you can hit up and ask questions, take recommendations from, and just talk about new music with, it's so great.

There are also really strong lines of communication between the hosts, including the artist hosts. I've sent Elton John so much stuff – and he's sent loads to me. He is such a music fan. That's the common denominator with all of us.

It has to be said, though, that when you send Elton something, he plays it and says, 'That was a recommendation from Matt', that's still pretty mad! Absolutely brilliant, but definitely mad.

I think that's what marks us out as different, we do have those lines of communication and those levels of enthusiasm, no one's just coming in and doing these shows as a job.

Mike D is another great example. He actually hit Zane up and said, 'I like this guy Matt Wilkinson, can I do something with him?' That blew my mind as well.

Can you talk a bit about how you work with the industry – labels and managers in particular?
Yeah, I think what I'm really excited about is that Apple Music is still in its infancy, but there are certain managers out there who just get it. And generally they are really young managers.

There's a guy called Ben Wittkugel, he has a label in the States called Winspear, he's got really good ears. He's the guy who first turned me onto The Lemon Twigs, and he's just put that band Barrie out, who are doing really well. When we meet someone like him, who gets us, gets the industry and gets music, that's really exciting.

It goes back to what I said about artists not just coming in and doing their 15 minutes of promo and then leaving. Sometimes it can be just as beneficial if an artist and their team come in for pretty much no specific reason, just come in, have a coffee, sit down and find out what's going on in their world. How can we work together? There's a lot of that.

It's something I've always enjoyed doing. It's never [previously] been part of my job description, I've just done it. Whereas at Apple Music, it kind of is part of the job.

Do you think the mainstream UK music industry understands the power of Beats – and also understands how to utilise it?


Arlo Parks

Yeah, they 100% realise it. I think certainly when we opened our dedicated UK studios at Tileyard last year, that was a real show of strength. Nothing against The Church, Paul Epworth's studio, which is where we were before, but to have our own footprint, I think it made a real statement: this is us.

In terms of working with the industry, when we started, DSPs were in their infancy. There weren't many people whose job was to work with DSPs [at record labels etc.], whereas now those jobs and those people exist and we have really strong relationships with them. I'm really happy with how we work and how those two worlds are growing together; it's very cohesive and very happy.

Is there a wider Apple Music programme that an artist plugs into when you decide to champion them?
Yeah, there's a definite route. The playlist that I work closest with is UNTITLED, and there's another one called INDIY, those are the two most closely aligned with my show and we work with the teams behind those on a daily basis.

And all the hosts and all the teams recommend stuff to each other all the time.

What do you think is the future for traditional radio?
I think there's room for everybody and I think competition is really healthy, but I don't think there's anybody doing it quite like we are. Because we're truly global, we're really getting out there.

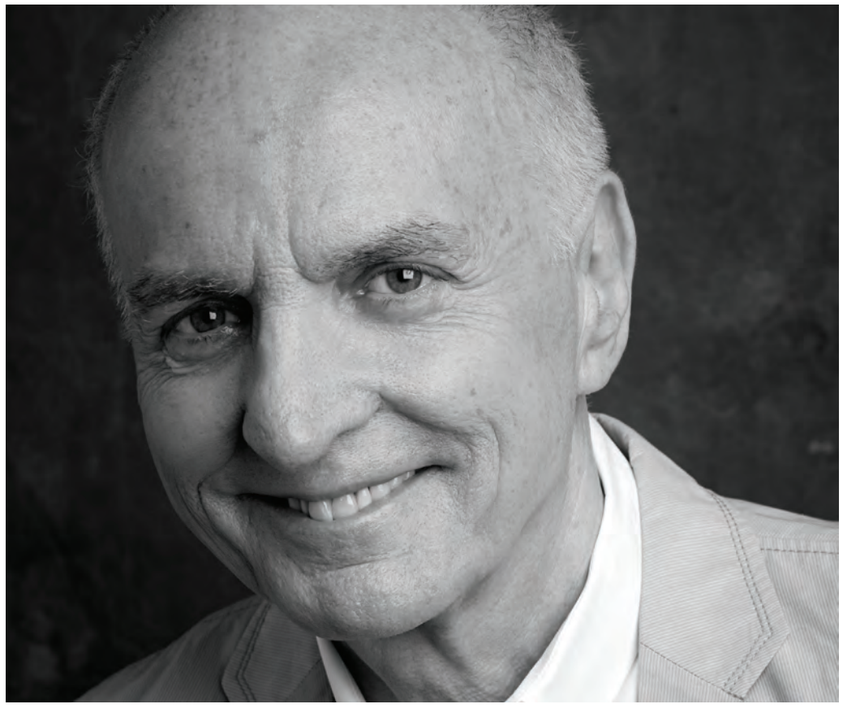
What's your health check on new music in the UK?
Really positive. I want to shout out Slowthai right now in particular. I think when people like him come along and re-spin the wheel a little bit, that's exactly what you need. It's been a little while since we've had someone as new as him do that. I think it's only 24 months since he put his first EP out.

But it's always good here [in the UK]. Sometimes you have to look a little bit harder, but there's always something and it's always good.

Who are some artists to look out for a little further down the line?
Arlo Parks did really well at The Great Escape, she was probably the buzziest artist I saw down there. I've had her on the show a couple of times and I really like her aesthetic, and her personality shines through.

I also really like this band called Jockstrap, they're these two really young kids. I played them on the show earlier in the year then saw them live a few weeks ago and there's something really interesting going on there. It's like Kamasi Washington meets PC Music with a bit of Brian Wilson thrown in. And a bit of punk rock as well.

They're really worth keeping an eye on because it sounds like they're going to do something special. ■



Remembering...

JAZZ SUMMERS

Jazz Summers led, famously, a Big Life. It was the name of his wildly, consistently and globally successful management company (sometime home to Lisa Stansfield, The Verve, Coldcut, La Roux, The Futureheads, Klaxons, Snow Patrol and others) and his rollicking 2013 autobiography.

He also led an uncompromising, unapologetic and unprecedented life, carving out a stellar career and fearsome reputation in the process.

His colourful and circuitous route to the toppermost of the poppermost included going to military school and then signing up for the army aged just 15, eventually serving in Hong Kong and Malaysia.

When he returned to London he made something close to a living as a session musician, whilst also working as a hospital radiographer.

At the same time (late '70s) he began managing some punk and post-punk bands part time, before giving up the 'proper' job and focusing full time on music.

His big break came in the early '90s when, in tandem with the wonderfully complementary Simon Napier-Bell, he co-managed Wham! to world stardom.

The group broke up in 1986, and in that same year Summers, along with Tim Parry, founded Big Life and continued to make history, some of which is recalled here by a few of his closest friends and colleagues.

David Joseph
Chairman & CEO, Universal Music UK & Ireland

We'd met before, but in terms of working together there was this fantastic run at Polydor [in the Noughties], when he was incredibly loyal to me, and we had Snow Patrol, The Klaxons, La Roux and Scissor Sisters.

We became very close during that period and completely trusted one another.

Jazz always got the global thing. He would always talk about America, how to get the teams over there passionate about his artists and how to break them in the US. He was never parochial; he always had a big vision.

I found him very open in terms of what artists were going through. I actually use Jazz as an example when I'm talking to young managers, because he would always give you a true understanding of an artist in terms of their headspace, their ambitions and what was going on their lives.

He would give you a clear picture of what success looked like for his artists, and that picture, as it should be, was always different, because he was dealing with people not commodities. That openness is incredibly helpful on the label side of things.

In terms of what he was like to work with, I have never felt an energy like it from anyone else. I hope to one day feel it again, but so far Jazz is a one-off in that regard.

He was extremely tough to negotiate with. Like I say, he was incredibly loyal, but he was also smart enough to play the market – which meant you always ended up paying more for that incredible loyalty [laughs]. I was fine with that though, because the artists he brought to us were so good.

Jazz is the only manager who ever made me walk out of my own meeting in my own office.

We were having an argument about Snow Patrol, Interscope and American touring. Jazz was of the mindset that we should double- or triple-down on everything. I was nervous about exposing the band to that amount of risk as regards their earnings. So, I'm saying, I'm very happy to invest, I love the band and I love the record, but a lot of this is coming out of their money, so are we doing the right thing?

It ended up with us having a blazing row, very heated, raised voices, and it frustrated me so much that I got up and walked out. And then I realised, Oh, where do I go? That's my office; I've kicked myself out of my own office.

I remember it was raining, so I couldn't even nip outside.

Jazz Summers at his wedding, pictured with Richard Ashcroft.

Photo: Bruce Flemming

Five minutes later, I'd calmed down, went back in, Jazz was still there – in my office! – and we just hugged each other.

So yes, it was tough; good was never good enough for Jazz when it came to his artists. But, honestly, every single time, and this is very rare, the next morning, after a ruck, you're golden together; all was good, straight away. I loved that and it was one of the reasons we became so close.

> **"There was never a boring meeting with Jazz – it just couldn't be done."**

He was always very open about himself, and very honest about himself. He would talk about that crazy balance between his army background and his very hedonistic period. I didn't see much of that, but he would talk very freely about his slightly off-compass years.

I actually knew him best during his homeopathic and macrobiotic years. Whatever he did he always did it to an extreme degree.

He was like that with climate change, 15-20 years ago, at a time when almost no-one else was talking about it. He was as passionate about that as he was about breaking acts.

He liked to push and provoke, but in a positive way; he did everything with a smile and a glint in his eye.

There was never a boring meeting with Jazz – it just couldn't be done. I will admit that I have been in plenty of boring meetings in my time, and Jazz was the much-needed antidote to anything boring or normal.

One thing I've never really discussed, but am happy to in this context, is the last time I saw him.

Jazz kept his diagnosis very private from everyone for a while, whilst he pursued


Snow Patrol


La Roux

various alternative therapies and spiritual routes. Then there came a point when conventional medicine came in and I went to see him in the London Clinic.

That's not a situation that is ever going to be comfortable. Everyone is nervous: what do I say, what do I do, what will we talk about, etc.

I was thinking all this as I stood outside the door. And then I went in and it was absolutely extraordinary.

He looked a little frail, but everything else was exactly the same. The glint in the eye was as bright as ever, the smile was as wide as ever and, thank goodness, he did exactly what he always did, which was take up 95% of the conversation. So I didn't have to worry at all about what I was going to say!

He talked about his life, he talked about his illness, he talked about his children, he talked about planning for the day he wasn't going to be around anymore, he talked about music – and I'm pretty sure he was trying, even then, to sell me a deal, something to do with a Richard Ashcroft solo record. Nothing had changed.

The energy he had on that day, I wish everybody else could have that energy when they're at their very best.

It's very important that Jazz's name is remembered and honoured. I would love to think that in 50 years time, people in this industry are still talking about Jazz Summers. He'd like that and he deserves that.

Jazz wasn't one for awards or self-aggrandisement, he doesn't need things named after him – but I do think he'd like the idea of stories being told about him. And let's face it, there are plenty of them.

Simon Napier-Bell
Artist manager, co-manager of Wham! with Jazz, author

Jazz and I were introduced by Neil Warnock [*see opposite*].

When we first met we were both surprised that Neil had thought we'd get on, we were so totally different. Jazz was deliberately rough in his speech and enjoyed confrontation; I was rather public school and preferred compromise. Surprisingly, though, we got on splendidly.

Jazz had just been managing Blue Zoo, who'd had success, then broken up; and I'd been managing Japan, who'd done the same. So we agreed to form a new management company together.

From the outset, Jazz and I decided we didn't want to start with a brand new act – the initial stage of getting them a first hit could be just too time-consuming. Instead we'd find a group that had already had a hit or two and needed help to become international stars. We drew up a list of possibles and settled on Wham!. Then set out to get them, which we did.

At our first management meeting with them, not only did they demand we get them out of their current record contract and into a new one, but that we make them the biggest act in the world, all within 12 months.

It was a tall order but we went at it full tilt. The plan was to tour the UK on the back of the three hits they'd already had and create Whamania, earning enough money to fight a court case with their record company. Simultaneously we'd negotiate with the Chinese government to have them play a gig in China – the first Western pop group ever to do so. From the resulting publicity we'd get them straight into America on a stadium tour.

Amazingly, we managed to do it all.

First we pulled off Whamania, then took on the record company. Once we'd signed the group to a new deal with CBS, I went to China to arrange their gig in Beijing while Jazz plunged head long into the various obstacles that stood between the group and success in America – lack of commitment from the group's label and indifference from booking agents.

It was a perfect partnership. I couldn't have done what Jazz did, nor vice versa. If he over-bullied someone, I could be bought in to ameliorate things. If my compromising manner turned out to be too soft, Jazz could be called on for a bit of intimidation. The way we fitted together was amazing. We loved working together and in the end we pulled off all we planned for Wham!, though admittedly it took two years, not one.

Jazz was a bulldozer; when he drove at something you could be sure it would eventually give way. In the USA, confronted with a clique of booking agents trying to keep Wham! out of the big venues in L.A, Jazz hit on the idea of using the racecourse.

And when Epic hesitated about giving the group their full promotion, Jazz fixed a meeting for us with Al Teller, then roared abuse at him and the gathered gang of CBS executives until they rolled over and gave us everything we were asking for.

But there was a wonderfully soft side to Jazz too. An aspiring singer, sending him a tape, might get an earful of dismissive disdain from Jazz, only for it to be followed by the kindest and most helpful advice.

In fact, when it came to helping the underdog, you could always rely on Jazz. It was him who pushed Wham! into doing a charity gig for the miners.

And one time, arriving for a meeting at EMI, he was greeted by a mid-level A&R man who grumbled, 'The music business is being taken over by blacks and queers.'

Jazz went berserk. He leapt across the room, grabbed the fellow by his lapels and smashed him against the wall.

'Well,' he yelled, 'my wife is black and my business partner is gay.'

He was about to throw the A&R man out the window, but, realising they were two floors up, he slung him in a cupboard instead, locked the door and threw the key into the street below. The poor chap was found by the cleaners eight hours later, very hungry and a bit smelly.

"Jazz was a bulldozer; when he drove at something you could be sure it would eventually give way."

Despite Jazz's ability to lose his cool, and his fearsome reputation for leaving ear-blasting messages on people's voicemail, in the whole time of working with him I don't remember a single instance of us having ever quarrelled.

But, talking to me a year or so before he died, he corrected me. 'It happened just once,' he told me. 'You threw a glass of water over me.'

I asked him why.

'Because I was behaving like a cunt.'

Jazz knew himself well. There were no pretences about him. He was forthright, loyal, a great friend, a perfect business partner and, if you were lucky enough to be signed to him, an incredible manager. He was one of the music industry's great characters and is much missed.

Neil Warnock
Founder, The Agency Group; Global Head of Touring, UTA

I first met Jazz when he was playing drums in a covers band on the Wheatley Tavern circuit in Essex.

He hassled me to see the band and eventually I saw them at a dismal pub in Hackney; they were nothing to write home about.

Thankfully, he moved on to management with [comic folkie] Richard Digance – a lovely man.

Jazz talked to me about a new artist he had signed called Lisa Stansfield. At that time she was only doing track dates; I told him I loved the music but she must go live – properly live.

She did and we had huge success together with her, selling out venues all over the world.

I also put Jazz together with Simon Napier-Bell to manage Wham!, which was wonderful, but sadly I never got to represent the band!

As a manager, Jazz had very fixed ideas. It was always his way or the highway. However, he was a very gifted manager and worked closely with his business partner, Tim Parry.

They could find producers to reflect the fashion of the day, making acts sound totally contemporary. They worked so hard for their artists.

On a personal level, Jazz was a total family man. The Jazz I knew was always supportive of his friends and also of me and my association to [music therapy charity] Nordoff Robbins – very generous and always there for me.

One of my favourite Jazz memories would have to be the time when he was in Italy, counting thousands of wet Lira which was coming in, in boxes.

I refused to let Lisa on stage until we had all the money. Jazz was saying sorry every three minutes for insisting on using this particular Italian promoter. That apology was an absolute first and never happened again!

Jazz was a one off. I guess he was something of an old-fashioned, tenacious manager, but with real commercial nous and a forward-thinking edge.

Big Life broke bands time and time again. Jazz was never a one-trick pony.

I miss him.

The Verve

Badly Drawn Boy

Sas Metcalfe
President, Global Creative (and employee No. 1), Kobalt

I first met Jazz when he was managing Wham! and I was working at my first job, as marketing assistant at CBS Records in 1982.

I didn't have any direct dealings with him at that point, but then I met him properly a couple of years later when he started managing Blue Zone – lead vocalist, one Lisa Stansfield. I was A&R at Arista and had signed them to a small record label called Rocking Horse, which was eventually bought by Arista.

The first few times I dealt with Jazz were quite tough and I knew I had to gain his respect. He was dedicated to his artists and would leave no stone unturned to get what he wanted to take them to the top.

I worked with him again during my time at EMI Records in the late '90s, while he was managing Eternal and Damage.

I started working on a new venture, Kobalt, in 2001, and Badly Drawn Boy was our first signing, managed by Jazz and Tim [Parry] at Big Life.

Over my years at Kobalt we also signed [publishing company] Big Life Music, Richard Ashcroft and Scissor Sisters. All of which he was managing.

I got to know Jazz quite well when I was at EMI and learned he was a believer, a risk taker and a very loyal person. He took a risk on signing BDB to such a new, young and unproven company; I thank him for that.

"I always felt respected by Jazz and that made all the difference to our relationship."

Jazz was truly a music lover, and most conversations we had were led by him enthusing about his artists and their music. He could be very challenging at times, but he always respected direct and honest feedback.

Socially, Jazz was generous, kind and funny. It was always great to have dinner with him and he was genuinely interested in my life and family outside work.

I always felt respected as a creative person by Jazz, and that made all the difference to our relationship.

One funny little personal memory I have is that I bought him a teapot for one of his birthdays once – and he loved it! He would call me sometimes years later and start the conversation with, 'I was just drinking tea from your tea pot…'

Looking back on Jazz's life and career, some will say he was hard to deal with, which he certainly could be. But Jazz was a successful manager and record executive through many decades; to lose was not an option and he fought hard for his artists.

I think he should be remembered as someone who believed in the future evolution of the music industry and who lived for music. He loved new talent and developing artists. He was never 'old school' and he stayed enthusiastic right until the end. He truly loved his job.

Tim Parry
Co-founder and partner in Big Life

I first met Jazz when he came to see my band, probably in The Pegasus in Stoke Newington, or maybe The Greyhound on Fulham Palace Road. It was 1977, I think. He ended up managing us.

After we formed Big Life together, the first band I brought in were The Soup Dragons in 1986. Breaking them in 1989 was a great buzz and it continued as we had two Gold albums in the US.

We worked together on Yazz, and had a No.1 record on our own label. Other highlights were working with Lisa Stansfield, The Verve, Badly Drawn Boy, The Futureheads, London Grammar and many more.

Doing our own festival at Haigh Hall in Wigan with the Verve was also a bit special.

I witnessed most periods of Jazz as a manager, partner and friend – and it's hard to separate all these aspects.

In the early days he could be quite shouty and a bit scary for people dealing with him (not me!), but when he chilled out, which was in the mid-80s, he'd use his reputation as a tool to help represent his artists.

He was definitely a great mentor and partner and his spirit and philosophy lives on here at Big Life to this day.

As a manager he would always put his artists first and worked so hard on their behalf.

Jazz was a one off: generous, caring, principled and always entertaining!

Despite his history in the business he was never 'old school'; he always employed and worked with young creative people.

He was innovative and would often predict trends in the industry. For example, he predicted the subscription model for music long before streaming became the reality.

He will be remembered for being a unique and passionate music man

The last thing he said to me was, 'We did well, didn't we.' ■

Jazz zingers

You could spend three years studying for a degree in the music business. Or you could spend five minutes reading these 10 Jazz Summers quotes...

"Ask yourself this: record sales have gone down over the years, but what's happened to executive salaries? You already know the answer."

"Don't they teach you English at Legal School? Deal breaker means deal breaker, not fucking 'send me another email'."

"The start of the '80s it was easier. You'd show up at the radio station with a bag of coke and a bag of money and give them the song. Sorted."

"Success leads to very serious partying – I've seen it many times. I've seen great artists burn their fucking brains out. I've never taken acid; I once saw a bloke jump out of a window into a fish pond. But I do like Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds."

"For me, success is simple: If I really love a piece of music, get it recorded, get it released and it sells one copy – that's a success. It means you've created something. You've added something to the world. You've contributed a piece of music to life."

"I went from being a wanker to being a genius, as you can in the music industry – though you're normally a wanker again by the following week."

"What kind of man trashes a hotel room post-1975?"

"Really, the creative process ain't that different from the process of becoming a human – becoming a good person: Integrity, authenticity, honesty; they're not easy things to be. If they were, the world would be full of authentic, honest people, and it's not, is it?"

"There wasn't one woman in the room. It was a pandemonium of penises – testosterone hell."

"I tried to persuade George Michael to go to India once – the real India, not the new one; the Himalayas. He needed to go somewhere where people wouldn't recognise him, to alter his perception of himself and the Universe. The energy would have flowed from the summit of Everest, through George Michael and down through the Ganges. But he didn't fancy it. I think he went to L.A."

My favourite things

Permission to snoop and snap this quarter is given by live music industry legend – and head honcho at the Isle of Wight Festival – John Giddings…

The offices of John Giddings' Solo offices are in Fulham, less than two miles from where his career as one of the UK's most successful ever live agents unofficially began.

'Unofficially' because, whilst his first place of actual work (having been hired by another live music legend, Barry Dickins) was at Barry Clayman's MAM agency in Conduit Street, it was in the famous Nashville pub, opposite his rented West London flat, where Giddings saw a host of big name punk bands on their way up, some of whom became his first significant clients, including The Adverts, X-Ray Spex and The Stranglers.

After a few years, Giddings decided, in partnership with fellow MAM agent Ian Wright, to form his own company, TBA International. "We called it TBA because we figured that way we'd at least get a slot in everyone's diaries and agendas, and we called it International because, well, why not?" he says.

"On the very first morning, Errol Brown from Hot Chocolate came in with two bottles of Champagne; by 11 o'clock we were pissed.

"A guy called Don Murfitt called, but neither of us wanted to talk to him because we were drunk. We kept telling our receptionist to say we were out, but he knew that was bollocks and he kept calling back.

"I finally picked up the phone and he said, 'I know you're pissed, but I've just become Adam and the Ants' new manager and you're their new agents, call me when you sober up.' They were a number one act at the time. It was a great first morning! And then the hard work began."

That work included representing acts such as Paul Young, Alison Moyet, Tears for Fears, Howard Jones, Big Country – plus US artists like Hall & Oates and Kid Creole and The Coconuts.

After five years, Giddings split with Wright, went Solo and powered on. "I met [legendary managers] Peter Rudge and Tony Smith, I got involved with Duran Duran, Genesis, Phil Collins, and I graduated to stadium rock, which was brilliant.

In 2002 Giddings made his biggest move to date. He recalls: "In 2001 the Isle of Wight council phoned up everyone in the music business and said, 'Who wants to re-start the Isle of Wight Festival?' Nobody was stupid enough to show any interest except us.

"I'd been there in 1970, with 600,000 people watching Jimi Hendrix, The Who and The Doors, so it was a big deal for me – but that didn't mean it was a good idea!

"I'd been there in 1970 with 600,000 others watching Hendrix, The Who and The Doors."

"Year one, the council lost half a million pounds; year two, *we* lost half a million pounds; year three, with David Bowie and The Who, we broke even. The rest is history."

Or, more accurately, an ongoing story, with the latest chapter being written – pretty much as this latest issue hits desks – by, amongst others, Noel Gallagher, George Ezra, Biffy Clyro and Fat Boy Slim.

When *MBUK* talks to Giddings, most of the hard graft, planning and plotting for the Isle Of Wight Festival's 2019 incarnation has been done; everything is in place. Or nearly everything.

There are some elements over which Giddings, the man who re-made and re-modelled one of the most famous live events in the world, has to defer to a higher power and just cross his fingers.

So if you're reading this between 13-16 June, and you're somewhere near the Isle of Wight, look out the window: if the sun is shining, John Giddings will be smiling; if it's slightly overcast, he'll be smiling; if it's cold and cloudy, he'll be smiling; if there's a light drizzle with an area of low pressure drifting in from the Atlantic... well, you get the picture.

THE RAGNOMES

I saw these guys on the internet and I had to buy them, because I was The Ramones' agent for their entire career. In all of my time in the business, the artists that people have been most interested in and most wanted to talk to me about have either been The Ramones or Iggy Pop. I've worked with U2 and The Rolling Stones… but there's something iconic about The Ramones. I mean imagine if they were alive now, they'd be headlining Glastonbury. They'd certainly be headlining Isle of Wight! They were brilliant; it was like being hit over the head with a sledgehammer – and that applies to working with them as well as seeing them live. They were a serious rock band and will go down in history as one of the best ever. Their songs lasted about two minutes each; they were exhilarating and exhausting. They only played for about 30 minutes, but by the end of it everyone was absolutely knackered. It was a phenomenal live experience. It's funny to see now how people are paying for ripped jeans and wearing Ramones T-shirts, because they have what has become one of the most iconic logos in rock n roll. Whether or not the people wearing the T-shirts know who The Ramones are is another matter…

IOW PINK FLOYD TRIBUTE POSTER

This is a picture that I have behind my desk and an idea that I stole from Pink Floyd. To promote their back catalogue [in 1997], they got six models to undress and sit on the side of a pool with the artwork for *Dark Side Of The Moon*, *Wish You Were Here*, etc. So I got five girls on the Isle of Wight to do the same and we body-painted them with the five logos of the festival up to that point. I'm very proud of it and very proud of the festival. Plus I'm a big Pink Floyd fan, so it's also a nice nod to them.

SEMI-ACOUSTIC GRETSCH WHITE FALCON

This is one of my favourite guitars. I was in a group when I was young. My friend at school said, 'Why don't you learn to play bass, we'll form a group and pull a few chicks.' I was in! A short while later, we were playing in Harpenden Youth Club when a skinhead walked in, stood in front of me and said, 'If you don't stop playing right now I'm going to fucking hit you.' That was the end of my musical career. Then, when you get to work with real musicians, it becomes painfully apparent that you're not one. But I remain obsessed with guitars and there are some that you just have to have: you have to have an SG; you have to have a Les Paul. They're like works of art, they're beautiful. What tends to happen is that certain musicians tour the world and they phone me up and say, 'There's a 1961 335 here, it costs X amount of money, are you interested?' And I almost always am, so they bring them home for me. I wouldn't say I 'play' them; I 'strum' them. But I did perform with my old school band at the Isle of Wight 50th anniversary, which was great fun. And thankfully the skinhead didn't turn up.

LE MANS 24 TROPHY

I didn't win it myself, sadly, but a racing driver I work with called Matt Howson won in the LMP2 class at Le Mans. Years ago, to promote the Isle of Wight Festival, I wanted to sponsor a racing car. I phoned up my friend and asked how to go about it, and he told me he had a mate who was racing in the World Touring Car Championship at Brands Hatch. It was actually the second date with my wife to be – and how I persuaded her to go to a wet and windy Brands Hatch I do not know. Anyway, I went up to Matt and said, 'You won't believe this, but I'm a really lucky bloke; wait and see.' He looked at me and clearly thought, 'Who is this tosser?' The race starts, he goes from third to first on lap one. Nine laps later they had to put the pace car out because someone had crashed and it was pouring with rain. Fifteen laps later he'd won the race, having not won once in the series so far that year. Afterwards, my friend's phone rang, he speaks to someone and then says, 'You really are a lucky sod, because it was raining so hard they cancelled the motorbikes at Donington and your race was broadcast live on Channel 4.' So, for £2K, not only did I win the race, I got our Isle of Wight car on national television. I've worked with Matt ever since. He won the second class at Le Mans a few years ago and gave me the trophy as a present. I used to race Formula Ford myself, but I rolled the car, broke my arm and severed the artery, so I was never going to become Lewis Hamilton.

LITTLE MIX PICTURE

This is a picture that a seven year-old fan of the band drew for me. Little Mix are one of my favourite bands; they work so hard for their success. People don't realise how hard pop groups work and I've seen them go from strength-to-strength, every album's got bigger. It's just a cute little picture; it shows how much their audience care about them and love them. They played the Big Top at the start of their career and it's still about as packed as that place has ever been; they nearly brought the blooming tent down. Afterwards, this little girl decided to send me this picture as a present and a thank you and it now takes pride of place in my office.

‘WE ARE NOT TRYING TO CHASE QUICK FIXES OR OVERNIGHT HITS. WE WANT TO BUILD LEGACIES’

British independent label Chess Club recently inked a forward-thinking deal with AWAL, while securing funding from Red Light’s Coran Capshaw. We find out what’s next...

Earlier this year, taste-making British label Chess Club entered into a significant new phase of its 12-year history by launching as a fully independent entity. Thanks to investment from Red Light Management founder Coran Capshaw, the label is now able to stand on its own two feet after coming to the end of a joint venture with Sony’s RCA.

The new agreement means that Chess Club artists and their managers will be able to access Red Light resources worldwide, while a distribution agreement with AWAL will allow them to tap into Kobalt’s team too. As they explain below, that setup will help Chess Club founders Will Street and Peter McGaughrin realise their ambition of turning the label they founded in 2007 into a truly independent global force to be reckoned with, developing artist careers from beginning to end.

Street and McGaughrin first worked together in A&R at Polydor, which is when they launched Chess Club as a vehicle to release singles and EPs of the artists they loved, but who weren’t yet ready to bring into Universal. Those artists included the likes of Mumford & Sons, Chet Faker, Easy Lie and Local Natives.

When the duo left Universal to join RCA in 2012, they took Chess Club to Sony, where it existed as a joint venture until Street left last year. During that time, Wolf Alice, Jungle and Swim Deep released early music through the label, alongside MØ, Sundara Karma and Billie Marten, who all went on to sign with RCA.

While Street remained in A&R, McGaughrin defected to management, and today he’s based out of Red Light’s offices where his roster includes Alfie Templeman, Django Django, Everything Everything, Frightened Rabbit, Nilüfer Yanya, Pumarosa and Sundara Karma. That’s how Capshaw got to know about Chess Club; he swooped in when the duo were deciding who to partner with next.

After unplugging from Sony, Street and McGaughrin have built their label roster anew, which now includes four-piece band Bloxx, young singer/songwriter Alfie Templeman, Swedish pop act Yaeger, and Manchester musician Phoebe Green.

You’ve recently agreed a distribution deal with AWAL – why did you decide to partner with Kobalt?

Will Street: We’ve been talking to AWAL for a long time. They were actually tapping us up over the last couple of years and asking us what the long term plan was. At that time we were with Sony so there was no way of us being able to work with them, but their enthusiasm for what we do has been apparent for quite a while and they were one of the first people to reach out when they heard the label was available. Alison Donald, who has been a big fan of ours, was really instrumental in bringing us in, and a couple of our friends from RCA have ended up there in marketing and digital roles. So when it came to choosing a distribution partner, AWAL was a really attractive place to us.

“When it came to choosing a distribution partner, AWAL was really attractive.”

Chess Club is a label with investment from a management company. How does that work in terms of the distinction between record label signings and Red Light management clients?

Will: There’s no rule, and there’s no first dibs. Our funding comes from Coran and that is essentially as far as it goes. We are not obliged to put out Red Light music and vice versa.

Peter: I really like working with other managers because they teach me a lot of other stuff. It’s definitely a completely open book on that front. A manager who is based in America or Australia or somewhere else can add a different flavour to what you’re doing and help build a picture worldwide.

The thing that I notice about Red Light is that I’ve worked within different buildings which are quite territorial, and I really don’t find that here. It feels like the worldwide team is quite collaborative and set up like entrepreneurs working under a structure, which enables them to do the best [for] their artists. You have access to a lot of help, support, infrastructure and contact.

It seems that more and more management companies are offering the services that a traditional label would, as exemplified by your setup. How do you see that dynamic evolving in future?

Peter: It probably began when labels started to become smaller because record sales were going down, and the bigger management companies realised they had to pick up the slack. Also, because of the way that it takes a lot longer [to develop artists] now, either a major label will sign you right at the beginning or they want to sign you after a lot of success. Somebody has got to be [working] it in that period in between. So I see the future being management companies or artists with

Peter McGaughrin and Will Street


Alfie Templeman


Phoebe Green

managers doing a lot of the leg work at the beginning, and labels like Chess Club fitting in very early on in that process to work with them long term, and then major labels sitting and waiting for really significant success. When that artist feels like they haven't got the resources [to get even bigger], the majors are writing a massive cheque and going on from there. The nice thing with Chess Club is that we can be involved right from the beginning to the end of that process, because we are going to have the resources to be able to provide that development, and if we don't we can partner up with a major label to take that next step.

What is your personal definition of success when working with artists?

Peter: Long term artist careers. That is always what appealed to me about working with whoever we work with, and I admire the people who've built long term artist careers probably more than anybody else.

Will: If you ask artists, that's how they would mark success for themselves – having a sustainable career, releasing records over a period of time rather than having a flash moment and then being gone a couple of years later. That is what we want to be able to do in this new setup, take our time, build things slowly and sustainably, and give people careers. We are not trying to chase quick fixes or overnight hits. We want to build legacies and a culture of artist development, which we've always done but we're taking that further now to be able to release records with artists over a long period of time.

So the goal is to hang on to artists, not to get them to a point where someone else sweeps in…

Peter: Yeah. I've learnt a bit about that tension between momentum and patience from being a manager for the last few years – someone like Coran developed the Dave Matthews Band and instead of signing to a label they invented their own label, ATO Records, and instead of partnering up with other people they built their own companies around it, which made them really successful.

So we are really happy to work with partners, but we are also really happy to build companies ourselves, depending on what's right for the artist at that time. That's always been quite an interesting way of having control and being able to ride the bumps that inevitably come up with artist careers. When you are not beholden to somebody else's decision-making or investment, you are a lot freer to make decisions that you think are better long term.

We admire people like Martin Mills, Laurence Bell and Richard Russell, who think long term about artist careers and their own companies. There are fabulous people in majors but often they are not there for as long as the people who founded [indie] record companies, and sometimes that short termism can be a detriment.

Will: It's not always a choice about who you get to sign, who has to be dropped, a lot of those decisions can be taken out of your hands [when you're working for a major] – and it's often the artist that gets left behind when their whole [label] team suddenly gets let go or all move on to different jobs. This way we are able to work with the people that we want to work with for as long as we want to work with them and all the decisions are in our own hands.

When it comes to new signings, what kind of artists are you looking for?

Will: We've always been quite eclectic in the spectrum of artists that we've released over the years and that's still our goal – to work with artists from all different genres, but who are the most exciting in their field. We've got an exciting new roster; a band called Bloxx who have been developing for the best part of 18 months now, we are continuing that relationship building towards an album with them hopefully next year. Then we've got Alfie Templeman who is a 16-year-old singer/songwriter/producer who makes everything in his bedroom. We released his debut EP last year which got off to an amazing start and had everyone that you want jumping on it. We've just signed a Swedish girl called Yaeger who is in the leftfield pop lane, and we've got a young girl from Manchester called Phoebe Green whose debut single got picked up on Pitchfork. She is on tour at the moment with Sundara Karma, and Alfie is going to be joining that tour for the second leg. Sonically, they are all different, but all of them are young and hungry and have a common thread of just being very good.

Peter: What we've always tried to do is sign people who are leftfield but with ambition. We want to work with people who want to be the best in their lane or who want to change culture. We always look for people who are trying to do something that's slightly different from everybody else. I don't think we would be able to have anybody on the label who is similar to another artist on the label, we like to work in different lanes if we can.

In terms of the strategy, we've always been able to work with artists on one off releases and then only if we really like working together do we do another one, so we try not to make it restrictive. We don't have options on one off releases, so if we don't get along as well as we thought we would, that's fine, they can go off elsewhere. But if we really enjoy working together we do the next one, the next one and the next one. For the artist it's great because they don't feel locked in, and for us it's great because we can just keep supporting them as the relationship develops, and only when everybody feels like we have really got the traction do we do something longer term and more investment comes.

"We've always tried to sign people who are leftfield, but with ambition."

Will: So we can develop things at a nice pace. We're not under pressure with release schedules to have music out in Q4 and all that stuff, we can just take our time and when it feels right make those bigger steps.

Peter: And without having a huge amount of money to make anyone feel like it's too locked in. In terms of the amount of things we want to sign, we won't sign much, we won't be looking to sign everything on the scene, we will look to work with people short term then build those relationships and over time build longer campaigns. Then, for a few key artists, we'll be releasing albums in the next year or two, but that whole process is getting longer as well.

With someone like Alfie, he has just turned 16 and it feels like we've got a lot of really big things coming for him. His first release was an EP in October last year and then quite quickly one of the leading streaming platforms got in touch and said they wanted to partner up for the next video. I can't say who yet as it's not public until the video comes out. They shot an amazing video for the next single and they are going to put it on their Instagram worldwide and expose Alfie to 15 - 20 million people across their social networks. That will be a really nice way of getting a lot of eyeballs on the video and the music that we are putting out there. But we are not going to rush an album off the back of that, we are going to slowly keep releasing music over the next year or two and keep building an audience.

What's your A&R strategy — how do you approach working with artists?

Will: The development stage at the beginning when we first work with an artist is really hands on, we are covering all bases beyond A&R – doing the marketing, social network plans, and being the video commissioner. We've got many hats on so we really get to understand an artist's ambition.

Peter: You learn more and more that artists need to get to know you; you have to be there, you have to be really present. We are always at the shows, always spending as much time as we can with them because only then you can really understand their motivation and they can understand yours. Without that you don't see eye to eye. We are quite flexible and will follow an artist's creative vision, we are there to guide, not to dictate, and that is the best way you get the most out of each other.

Will: It's all about building trust as well. A lot of the time we are the first people that some of these artists have met in the industry, and you have to build that trust and relationship with them so that as things develop there's a nice level of respect.

It's been arguably quite a quiet period in the UK in terms of breaking acts over the last few years. Do you have any opinion as to why that might be?

Will: It depends on what level you class

'breaking as being. Going back to your question' at the beginning about what we see as success, we've been working with artists that go on and play Brixton Academy on their first album; on paper, majors wouldn't call that breaking because they haven't sold a million records, but it's all relative.

As Pete says, it just takes longer now, there is so much noise out there, people have access to so much music that it takes a lot longer for things to cut through.

Peter: Yeah, an experienced manager said to me recently that you used to have to know 10 people and 10 things, and now you have to know 10,000 people and 10,000 things. The success is a lot more incremental now than it used to be, there are far less of those things that can make you skyrocket, but if you put in place a lot of those things then you have a greater chance of growing slowly.

It feels like that 'breaking' thing is important to media and major record labels, but success is in different places these days, and you don't have to have the same targets as everybody else. For me, if you can have three albums to bring a band to the maximum audience that artist can make, everybody makes money and is really happy with the creative direction, and they feel that they'll look back on what they've done with pride, that is 'breaking'.

What's your view on the general state of the UK music market today? Is it healthy, challenging?

Peter: It's definitely challenging but maybe that is why it's healthy as well. You've got way more music being released every month in terms of what is getting uploaded to Apple and Spotify and every artist has a video, everybody is competing, and maybe the audience is bigger.

The challenge is how you keep cutting through and how you keep financially buoyant and that is always a challenge… where you get your investment from, and whether taking that investment means you have to compromise your creative vision. All those challenges are real, they probably always have been. The fact that anyone can release music through a company like TuneCore without any investment is fabulous, but you don't make money very quickly at all. So it's about working with people who can help you do that. That's where a label like Chess Club is in a really good place because we can invest, advise and open doors, and I think that is the challenge for artists — having those three things in a way that you don't feel like you've given away all your family heirlooms to make a short term decision.

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

Peter: It's probably the same things that anyone has ever used. You have to have a unique artist captured aesthetically, and especially with the music, in a way that tells their story really well. You've just got to be constantly making connections, and the connections are with artists themselves, we are always introducing our artists to each other so that there might be a moment they can collaborate, or where that person can go on tour with that other person. Then, for those artists to connect to the people that can help them make a career, whether that's DSPs or labels or festivals or promoters. It's about having something that is incredible and then knowing which doors to go through when they open up.

> ***"You've got to be laying the groundwork, chipping away at stuff."***

Will: It's about allowing yourself the time as well, just being patient. Trying to cut through all the noise that is out there might not necessarily happen at the first attempt, so you've got to be laying the groundwork, chipping away at stuff, and afford yourself the chance to keep shouting because you never know, if it doesn't happen the first time it could happen the second or third. You've got to stay in the lane for that long.

You mentioned earlier that a streaming service has invested in one of your artists – how supportive are digital services generally with talent development?

Peter: YouTube has given one of my artists money to make videos with no strings attached, Apple has done it twice with me. Spotify has been incredibly helpful, they've put artists on live shows and paid them well. So I think all those companies are quite focused on making sure the artist community and people that work with them, whether they are labels or managers, can see the additional benefit they bring.

Will: They always invite us in with the artist to present new music. We've got a really good working relationship with the editorial team at Spotify and they are keen to hear it from the artist's mouth which is nice. We get to take our artists in, they get to sit there, play the music and tell the story about how it was all made.

Peter: And you see the results quite quickly, with meetings I've had quite recently with Spotify and Apple, we've gone in with an artist, told the story and instantly you see the playlists happening off the back of that which are reflective of the story that the artist wants to tell. I think they are all quite cognisant of the fact they are all competing very hard with each other, they are all trying to steal a march, and they realise that without the artists buying into that, they are not going to succeed. They used to offer support but not necessarily money, but now they are offering money as well, which could be really crucial at that point where an artist needs to be able to do something but can't afford to do it themselves.

What are your biggest bugbears about the music industry right now?

Will: Hugh Jackman!

Here's another big one… what are the most important lessons learned over the course of your careers?


Bloxx


Yaeger

Peter: To know what you are good at. I was originally a lawyer and was able to pick the artists that I thought were great and could support long term. Then I worked within major labels, which was a fantastic experience, but you have to try to just work with the artists you think are going to be huge and that is a different skill. I don't think I was the best person to do that, even though I learnt a lot from it.

So what I've learned is what I'm good at, which is working with artists who I think are going to be brilliant long term, and knowing that that's its own form of success, rather than trying to juggle millions of plates and pick the one or two artists in that year who you think are going to be huge, which you aren't necessarily passionate about.

Will: Mine is not so much a lesson, but it's a rule that we try and follow, which is to always make the records that you and the artist want to make. Don't try and make records for other people or to fit a certain spec. I always want to be able to look back at every record that I've released and be proud of that record, and not think, Oh God I wish we hadn't tried to make that record sound like something it shouldn't do just for the sake of trying to chase radio, chase a hit or whatever.

My goal is to be able to look back on our catalogue and be proud of every single record, whether it sold X, Y or Z, and still feel proud of it.

Peter: That's very true. There's something I read the other day from John Janick, who was talking about Billie Eilish. He said what they were trying to do there is sign an artist who was alternative and then move culture towards her. I think a lot of people make the mistake of signing artists who have got something special about them and trying to move them towards culture, which is always a lot more middle of the road. Sometimes it's the right thing to do with a pop artist, but with somebody who wants to define their own genre like Billie has done, it's not the right way of doing it.

So another lesson I've learned is that you should try to make sure that artists know they can stay true to themselves, rather than having to dilute or dumb it down to go for something that's current at the moment. Because that thing that's current won't be when they are releasing their music.

Moving culture towards your artist is something that we've had a lot of fun doing, and we will definitely be very laser focused on doing that in future, rather than the other way around.

Final question. Now your new setup with AWAL is in place, what are your ambitions for Chess Club long term?

Will: As Pete alluded to earlier, when making this decision we were looking at people like your XLs and Dominos. We want Chess Club to sit alongside those great companies and build a legacy and a culture similar to what those guys have done. That's definitely the long term plan. ■

‘I’VE JUST BEEN SO LUCKY – I’VE HAD A FANTASTIC AND TRULY VARIED CAREER’

After 42 years working in the UK independent music scene, Mike Chadwick retires from his role at The Orchard in July. Here, he looks back over his time in the industry to date...

Mike Chadwick might joke that, at 66, he’s “getting close to my sell-by date” – but you’d struggle to find someone in the UK industry with more experience, knowledge and nous about the independent music sector.

The London-based exec started his career over four decades ago working on the desk of Bristol-based indie retailer Revolver. From there, he co-founded the shop’s distribution arm, Revolver Distribution, in 1981, before buying the latter company outright eight years later.

In 1990, Chadwick co-founded Heavenly Recordings with Jeff Barrett while still running Revolver Distribution – which had by then become a standout player in the UK indie distribution system.

It was Chadwick who decided to merge Revolver Distribution with rival UK distie APT in 1992, creating Vital Distribution and paving the way for the creation of a company which is now a large and important part of [PIAS].

At Vital Distribution, Chadwick steered a purple patch for the company during the Britpop boom years. One highlight was the rise and rise of Oasis – the band sold over four million albums via Vital, which struck up a valuable partnership with Alan McGee’s Creation Records.

In 2003, alongside Cooking Vinyl founder Martin Goldschmidt, Chadwick co-founded Essential Music & Marketing, which provided distribution and services to labels such as Napalm, Cherry Red, Thirty Tigers and Cooking Vinyl itself.

Essential was acquired by Sony Music in March 2016 and was subsequently merged with the major’s global distribution and services company, The Orchard.

And it’s at The Orchard that Chadwick, currently UK Chief Business Analyst, will hang up his boots in July. Having worked closely with Orchard UK MD Ian Dutt since the Essential deal, Chadwick has decided to spend a little less time toiling – and a little bit more time dining out on stories from his near-half-century in the record business…

> ***“Creating Vital, the UK’s biggest independent operation, was magic.”***

You’ve enjoyed plenty of success in your career, and still have much to offer. Why is now the right time to wave goodbye to full-time employment?

When we sold Essential to Sony/RED it was because our company had reached a certain level, a glass ceiling, effectively, and we couldn’t go any further – so the merger made total sense. It emphasized our strengths and the strengths of The Orchard together. I’ve loved my time with The Orchard which is a truly digital-focused, global company. But I’m an entrepreneur at heart, and I know I’m leaving The Orchard with a great MD in Ian [Dutt].

Why was the sale of Essential inevitable? Is it something you had to do because of the way that the independent artist and/or label services market was going – i.e. getting consolidated into those big global companies?

From our point of view at Essential, we reached a stagnant point in our growth. We were competing with people like [PIAS] who had more global resources than us. We needed to do something to break through that glass ceiling. Essential was a really great company that punched above its weight, and the core of that company still informs The Orchard today. But we were ambitious, and we wanted the best bits of Essential to work on a global level.

The Prodigy’s Invaders Must Die sold more than a million copies worldwide via Cooking Vinyl and Essential Music & Marketing

How does building up Essential rank in your career versus your other favourite achievements?

For me, there are two standout highlights from my career so far. One of them is definitely Essential, taking that with Martin and the team from absolutely nothing to a company where it’s actually attractive to The Orchard and Sony. But Vital was also just magnificent in its own way – putting two small companies together in the early ‘90s, and creating what became effectively the biggest UK independent operation. That was magic.

Do you take pleasure in the fact that ‘artist and label services’ companies, of which you were a pioneer, have become such big news in the industry?

It was an inevitability. As the industry becomes more global in its outlook, as digital takes over, it’s getting harder for the major labels to tie artists down to those old-style contracts. Artists and managers want freedom to be able to do deals with fast-moving independents or quasi-independents. Once the ‘artist services’ door was open, artists and managers were always going to walk through it. Why sign


Mike Chadwick and Ian Dutt

away your copyrights for life when you can sign a super-enhanced distribution agreement instead?

Walk us through the early part of your career and how you ended up at Revolver...
I worked at a record shop after school when I was 16; that was the height of my ambition at the time! After university, I pottered about a bit in Bristol, but my favorite local independent record shop was always Revolver. I started working there in August 1977. And that was it for me – the dream job.

At that time, The Cartel were looking for regional distributors, which were effectively local record stores, to service independent records in their area. As it happens, Revolver was the record store they chose for the south-west of England. That's how Revolver Distribution started, when it was run by a chap called Lloyd Harris; Lloyd and I ended up owning both Revolver and the distribution company together [after buying out the original owner].

Revolver Distribution was run out of the back room of the shop. But eventually, we decided the shop was too much hassle, so [we] sold it and we just concentrated on the distribution side.

From about '83 to '89 it was all pretty low key, but we grew slowly with a warehouse in Bristol.

In mid-'89 I bought Lloyd out and started looking at different options for the business; I joined us up with Pinnacle who became our UK physical warehouse. We got a lucky break because one of the companies we worked with was Tupelo Records in San Francisco. They had a deal with Sub Pop, which led to us releasing Nirvana's *Bleach*. That sold a quarter of a million copies, which was amazing, and then we had one of the largest-selling singles in [1991] with Oceanic's *Insanity*. It was a great period.

What happened then?
For two years or so, all went well, but then we heard rumours that there would be a merger between two of our big competitors – the new Rough Trade [Distribution company] and APT, which was owned by Play It Again Sam.

It was a bit scary to hear about that, so we started talking to them both, and in the end we did a [merger] deal with APT, which was when Revolver/APT/Vital was born.

Did you become more ambitious as your career went on? You went from thinking 'this'll do me' working in a record shop to owning a distribution company and striking a big merger...
Not really. I just took the opportunity in front of me. I was a bit of a hippy to begin with; all I wanted to do was work in music. It was a case of right place, right time. I've definitely developed more of an entrepreneurial spirit since then, but really in the late '70s, early '80s, it was just a case of taking the opportunities that presented themselves.

When did you meet Martin Goldschmidt for the first time, and when did you first become business partners?
I met him in 1987, when [Cooking Vinyl] was distributed by Nine Mile which was one of The Cartel companies. When Nine Mile closed down, Revolver took on Cooking Vinyl's distribution. One of the first records we released with Martin was Cowboy Junkies, *The Trinity Sessions* which went on to sell 60,000 units – even though Martin was on the phone after about a week saying, 'You haven't sold enough records. I think the presale was very low!' And I said, 'Don't worry. This [stock] will sell through.'

"I was a bit of a hippy to begin with; all I wanted to do was work in music."

Is that indicative of your business relationship for years to come – you were the calm head?
Yeah, I think I was probably the calming voice over the... hmm, what's the best word? The *enthusiasm* of the inspirational Martin Goldschmidt!

At what point did you and Martin get your heads together, thinking there was room for an independent services company, and launch Essential?
I left Vital at the end of '99. I did music publishing for a couple of years, which was a great learning process, but I can't say I was a great publisher – and I think the people that employed me at the time, my colleagues at Play It Again Sam, would agree. That finished at the end of 2001; Martin and I sat down probably in the middle of 2002 and went, 'Let's do something together. Why not?' And that was Essential. Martin made me rediscover skills that I'd lost, like talking to people on the phone. When you run a popular company like Vital, there's a lot of personal contact – people come to you.

When you're starting a new company, you have to cold call people and say, 'This is what we're doing, are you interested?' Essential was really low key for four or five years – ticking over – but when Pinnacle went bust in 2008, we took a quantum leap forward in terms of picking up new business. Between 2009 and 2016, when we did the merger with Sony/Red, it really took off.

You've witnessed the industry enter the streaming age. What do you think have been the upsides and the drawbacks of that transition?
The upside is the availability of music. We shouldn't forget that having millions of tracks and albums at your fingertips is absolutely astonishing and wonderful; it gives you a great ability to experiment and to discover new music. Some people moan about £9.99 subscriptions, but when you think about it, that's not really that expensive for the amount of the music that you can consume.

One of the downsides of streaming for me is the loss of the album, effectively. That even changed when we [moved to] CD; we went from 20 minutes a side for a vinyl record to 40 to 60 minutes of music without interruption [on CD], and that changed listening habits. But with streaming, it's all about tracks. It's much harder for artists to actually present an album now, especially to a younger generation.

What for you were the standouts from your time with Essential?
It's got to be The Prodigy, with a No.1 album [Invaders Must Die], and the same with Passenger – both through that Cooking Vinyl connection. But also it was such a thrill to work with labels like Cherry Red, real stalwart independent labels, like Silver Screen and Thirty Tigers, with such great catalogues. Great independent labels [marry] that ability to actually run a company successfully, with passion and great A&R.

What sort of company do you think you're leaving behind at The Orchard in the UK?
I'm leaving behind the best artist services company in the UK. Ian [Dutt] is a great Managing Director, perfect for the company – he has real vision, he loves music and he's put together a great team. The technology at The Orchard is unsurpassed – it's a truly global player, and in today's connected world, that's exactly what artists need.

If you could go all the way back to you starting your career at Revolver, what advice would you give yourself?
Take care of the bottom line. When we first started we weren't really looking at P&Ls. To run a business you've got to be very conscious of your profit and loss and the balance sheet. I mean, I know it's boring, but it's basic stuff. To run a business successfully, you need to know what your business is doing. That's really important. Boring, but really important!

Looking back on the entirety of your career to date, over four decades, what emotions come to mind?
I've just been so lucky, I really have, with a fantastic and truly varied career, meeting loads of great people. I'm retiring from my full-time job, but I expect to still be around in the industry helping out here and there. I'm very grateful for everything that's happened in my career. From working in a record shop to, 42 years later, having had such a varied and enjoyable life in independent music – who could ask for more? ■

Meet the old boss

MBUK's series of major interviews with history-making ex-execs continues with Tim Bowen, a man who played a major role in some of the modern music industry's most significant births and marriages…

One day, in the 1970s, when, Tim Bowen was heading up the Business Affairs department at CBS, the label's legendary US-born UK boss Maurice Oberstein said to him, "The trouble with you, Tim, is you have no arrogance; I want you to be more arrogant."

Anyone who has worked with – or even briefly met – Bowen will know that, despite the extremely high regard in which he held 'Obie', it was not a piece of advice that he ever took to heart.

"What I think he meant," Bowen reflects, a few decades on, "is that he wanted me to believe in myself more, to show more ambition."

And that he did, going on to hold senior positions at CBS, Universal, and, most significantly, at Sony BMG.

Unlike some storied execs of yore, Bowen does not see or portray himself as a man of destiny or Master of the Universe. He does not claim to have the business in his blood, or music in his soul.

He grew up on a healthy diet of Eddie Cochran and Buddy Holly, the Beatles and the Stones, sure, but, he admits, "if I ever did think of the music business back then, I would think of the business rather than the music – certainly in terms of what suited my talents."

Do not, however, doubt his resolve, his savvy – or his track record. He's been through difficult times and successful stints in key roles at big companies. He was pivotal in the development of Simon Cowell's career, and was one of the catalysts that helped create Syco and the *X Factor*.

He also has some strong views on the muddled present and possible future of major labels.

After gaining his law degree, Bowen joined major City firm Theodore Goddard (now Addleshaw Goddard), where his boss was legendary music business lawyer, Paddy Grafton Green.

"We acted for bands like the Rolling Stones, the Who, Genesis, and other major artists who needed tax and commercial advice. I worked on the Stones '73 tour of Europe, and, from that experience I became hooked on following a career in the music business."

He says that the first music client he considered to be his own was the Who's manager, Bill Curbishley – "as straight as an arrow and as nice a guy as you can meet."

> ***"Obie drove the company very hard; his insistence on 100% commitment was unrelenting."***

In fact, Bowen was involved in setting up Trinifold ("it was just an off-the-shelf company; the name sounded good so we never bothered to change it").

At this point, Bowen was still a salaried lawyer, but, having had more fun at one Trinifold Christmas party than a dozen Theodore Goddard wine and cheese evenings, he was even more determined to work within the music business...

How did you manage that transition into the business 'proper?
I applied for a job at CBS. Thankfully I got it, and from there I graduated upwards until I became Head of Business Affairs.

Who was running CBS in the UK then?
That was Obie [Maurice Oberstein].

What was he like to work for?
Brilliant. I was lucky, because he liked me – and that was very important. He made me realise that there was more in me than I was showing. He made me ambitious; he drove the company very hard and his insistence on 100% commitment was unrelenting.

Who were the big artists you signed and worked with during your time there?
Well this was in the days when you signed around two new artists a month, paid them an advance and sent them off to record an album.

One or two in 10 were successful and the rest fell by the wayside. We had artists like Paul Young, Alison Moyet, Terence Trent D'Arby, Deacon Blue and Wham. Not forgetting The Clash, who we signed in 1977, which was an interesting negotiation.

We were quite late to the party [on The Clash] and my first meeting with Bernard Rhodes lasted four hours. He never mentioned the deal once.

Right… what did he want to talk about?
Have you met Bernard? [laughs]. He'd talk about anything and everything, and I was happy to have that conversation, because, first of all, I knew nothing about punk, so that was useful. And secondly, I wanted Bernard to feel comfortable. When you do business with people, you've got to have a relationship. And this was the only way I could have a proper relationship with Bernard.

A few days later I had a meeting with the band's lawyer who told me that they

Bowen (third from left) with Westlife and Simon Cowell

were signing with Polydor the next day at 11 o'clock unless we did a deal that night. Whether that was true didn't matter; we wanted the band, and eventually, using the Polydor contract, we closed the deal at one o'clock in the morning.

What were they like to work with?
Joe [Strummer] was charming, they all were. They had a fierce reputation, but really they were very good to work with.

However, they consistently refused to do *Top of The Pops*, despite continual pressure from our promotion department and senior management. But it did them no harm in the long run and, privately, I always admired their resistance.

How would you describe the corporate culture at the time?
It really was like a family.

In the UK, everything revolved around Obie. He was a fantastic boss, huge personality, funny, scary – all of those things.

He drove everybody on; he just knew how to mange people. And, of course we were successful, that always makes a big difference.

The other thing is, we had an extremely powerful American company, run by Walter Yetnikoff. If Obie was a star

"When you're in a tiny business like ours, you'd better think before you fuck people [over]."

Walter was God with charisma, and a huge intellect.

Weirdly, all these people happened to be lawyers. This was a time when the company was run by Business Affairs people. Commercial discipline was the order of the day – a terrific education for me.

Walter was a lawyer turned rogue. He was actually a very cerebral and rigorous lawyer. Then he gets thrown into the maelstrom of the American music business, and realises he's got to have a personality. And so he turned into this lunatic!

As documented in *Howling At The Moon*…
Yeah, but by the time he wrote the book he'd been through quite a long period of excess. At his peak, he was wild, but also incredibly effective, really sharp.

And he knew all of the artists, of course – Barbra Streisand, Bob Dylan, Michael Jackson, Bruce Springsteen, Billy Joel and many, many others. He knew how to make them work, how to make them tick.

What was the next big development for you in your career?
In 1982 I went to New York to be VP

21 May, 1991: The Manic Street Preachers sign to Sony - with Bowen (standing, right) and Paul Russell (standing, left) officiating. Richey Edwards' (seated, second from left) arm is bandaged as the picture was taken just a few days after the notorious '4 Real' incident.

of Business Affairs for CBS Records International, and then, after about 18 months, I became Head of CBS Songs International, again based in New York, working for a wonderful man called Harvey Shapiro.

Harvey was the best people manager I have ever known, and he taught me a great deal about the essence of respect and honesty in business.

For example, we were doing a lot of international publishing deals at this time including one with Cyndi Lauper. *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun* wasn't out yet, but we had heard it and we wanted it, we wanted her.

We did a deal with the manager and, in the meantime, the track was beginning to bubble up in the US.

Almost inevitably the manger came back and asked for more money. I said, well we've done the deal, so… He said, 'I know, but I need more money.' So I said 'Yeah, okay, of course.' And I gave him, I don't know, maybe double the advance, just like that – and it worked, it was the right thing to do.

It was about being honest, or, if you like, making it about karma, not banging the table and making it about ego.

It was a similar story with Jim Steinman. I was talking to his manager about doing a substantial deal for International based on his huge previous success [including *Bat Out of Hell*] and the future anticipated success of a new album that he had produced and written.

We agreed a deal, for a very big advance. The new album came out and bombed.

Next thing I know, my Business Affairs guy came to me and said, Tim, we haven't signed the deal; we can get out.

I looked at him and said, 'No, we don't do that, we've done this deal, and we stick to this deal.' Of course, Steinman's next project after the flop was huge and proved very successful.

People don't forget things like that, and they pass on the word. This is a funny business: when you do good things, it's remembered; if you do bad things, it's really remembered.

When you're in a tiny business like ours, you'd better think before you fuck people.

How did you make your way back to the UK and to heading up Columbia here?
In 1985, CBS Songs was sold to SBK, so I came back, first as Head of Commercial and then as MD of Columbia UK.

That was the first time you'd run a label from top to bottom. How did you approach that challenge?
Well, Columbia has a massive history. Books have been written about the Columbia label. It is the home of great artists like Streisand, Dylan, Springsteen and others, so I felt that I had a real responsibility to honour that legacy.

In the UK we still had Paul Young, Alison Moyet, Terence Trent D'arby, Deacon Blue and The Clash, but that era was coming to an end and we were very reliant on American repertoire.


The Clash

And you wanted to turn that around, break more UK artists?
Yes, but mostly I wanted to make the label more profitable. You know, I very clearly saw that as my primary responsibility, but at the same time recognised that we had to grow the label's UK roster.

The first thing I did was to ask Rob Stringer, who was in the marketing department, to come in as my head of A&R.

What made you ask Rob?
Well, first up he's a very bright guy. Plus he was and always has been subsumed in youth culture and music. Plus I liked him – it was an easy decision.

However one of the first artists I had to deal with came from the US, Mariah Carey, and that was amusing because there was so much pressure.

Ha, yes, explain why there was so much pressure to break that particular artist…
[Laughs] Well quite. Tommy Mottola [the head of CBS who was squiring Carey at the time] came into town and brought Mariah with him. She did a small showcase for press and radio and was due to do further promotion over the next few days.

But she was jet lagged – and only 19 at the time – and just couldn't get up in the mornings, so work had to be scheduled for later in the day.

"Clive Calder is probably the brightest guy the industry has ever known."

However, she did work hard and everyone took turns in taking her shopping. The pressure from the top was clear, but really unnecessary as she was a born star and already successful in the US. To her credit, Mariah never played the Tommy card.

What took you away from Columbia?
I was headhunted to go to MCA [soon to be Universal] in a role covering Business Affairs and International Marketing. Under the stewardship of Jorgen Larsen [also a CBS alumni], we were tasked with developing MCA internationally, and during the next two years we opened about 22 standalone companies around the world.

At first we had very little product but survived on major releases from Nirvana with *Nevermind* and the Eagles' *Hell Freezes Over*. And then No Doubt happened with their first album, which was a worldwide hit.

And then Edgar Bronfman [then of Seagram] acquired PolyGram from Phillips, and we had the massive task of merging the PolyGram companies with newly-formed MCA.

It was a very exciting time as we spent the next 18 months travelling around the world ensuring that the best management team was selected to lead the new Universal Music Group.

How did you end up at BMG?
Again, I was headhunted. They were in a bad situation in Europe and wanted someone to come in, run it and sort things out.

What they didn't tell me was they already had a president of Europe. I had meetings with the Head of HR in the States and Rolf Schmidt-Holtz and they said, 'Great you're on board; you've now got to meet the head of Europe.' Oh, okay…

So I met this guy, with the Head of HR in the room, probably to make sure nothing went wrong. He just looked at me and I could immediately read his thoughts: 'What are you doing here? I don't want you, but I'm being forced into accepting you.' And that's putting it politely.

In fact, he turned out to be a really nice guy who had run BMG Germany very successfully over a number of years and who had been promoted into a job that I don't think he even wanted.

So, on my first day, after settling into my cupboard-size office, I thought I would meet the Head of Sales for Europe.

He comes into my office, he's halfway in and says, 'Your office is a bit small, is there a reason for that?' I laughed and said 'Yeah, I think there is, and I think we both know it.'

Anyway, we got on with it, and I said, 'So you must be incredibly bright; how's your German?'

'I don't speak German.'

'Italian?'

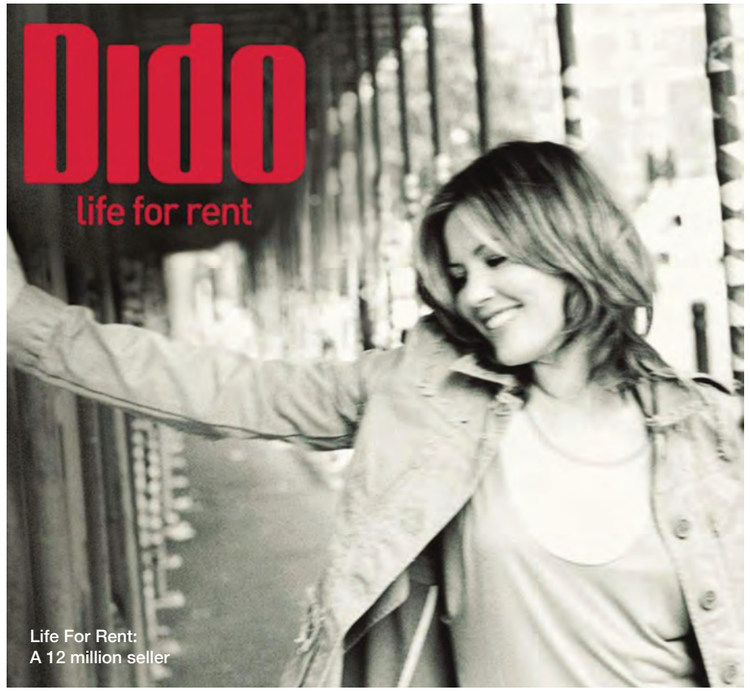
'No.'

'Spanish?'

'No. I don't speak any languages; this isn't going to work, is it?' He was right about that.

What happened was that the Head of Europe had hired consultants who told him exactly what he wanted to hear, which was to centralize all the operations in London, with potentially disastrous consequences. My next job was to fire the consultants.

From thereon I was running Europe and we were extremely successful with much of the success coming from Zomba, with Justin Timberlake, Britney Spears etc.



Life For Rent:
A 12 million seller

Zomba – which BMG bought, of course.
Yes, for over $2 billion I believe [$2.74bn in November 2002]. Clive Calder [Zomba co-founder] is probably the brightest guy the industry has ever known. Not only was he a consummate businessman, but he was the perfect A&R guy who understood music, artists and production.

Furthermore, he has a photographic memory, he could recall perfectly the content of meetings and conversations. Also he was totally focused – *totally* focused – on Clive.

Most importantly, and extraordinarily, his deal with BMG had both a call and a put option, so that he was able to manage the income and costs of the company to provide the most beneficial financial situation when he exercised his option to sell the company to BMG.

So did Clive Calder do the best deal in the history of the music industry?
Yes, absolutely. No question about it, by a long, long way.

And does that mean BMG did the worst deal in the history of the music industry?
[Laughs] Yes, probably. You ask yourself, how did this ever happen? How could BMG sanction such an option in the agreement?

But, on the positive side, maybe the deal doesn't look bad when you look at the record company valuations that are being bandied about today!

How did you end up running the UK company?
The incumbent Managing Director, a lovely Swede, Hasse Breitholtz, wanted to return home.

It was great getting back to an operating company and I had lots of plans to improve on our reputation of being the fifth major out of five in the UK.

Thankfully we got lucky quite quickly. The biggest and best album we had was from Dido [*Life for Rent*], which sold 12 million worldwide.

And we had Simon Cowell.

He was then a judge on *UK Idol* and had just started in *American Idol*.

What were your impressions of him?
I liked him immediately, and we got on extremely well. He was a great guy – polite, straightforward, enthusiastic. Full of himself, for sure, but in the best possible way.

And he liked me, because I was a 'suit' who supported him and his endeavors. I kept him honest and he treated me with a massive amount of respect. He didn't need to, we were just working together, but I always remember, whenever he would introduce me to people, he would say, 'This is my boss…'

He was also very ambitious and told me he wanted to be the most important person in the music television business around the world. And that's absolutely what I wanted to hear.

Soon after I arrived, he fell out with Simon Fuller and told me that he didn't want to do *Idol* any more. He wanted to set up a TV show of his own.

Naturally, I supported him and we set up a joint venture company, which, after a little discussion, we called Syco. At the beginning he was opposed to the name: we can't call it Syco, Tim, people will think I'm mad!

I said, Simon, that's the whole point!

So, Syco was born, followed by the *X Factor* and *Britain's Got Talent*.

At the time BMG was part of Bertelsmann who had their own production arm, Fremantle, and I was invited to lunch with them to discuss a deal.

When I arrived, I was met by their senior management team, who made it very clear that they didn't want Syco or Simon to get involved in TV production. They argued that Simon was a presenter and not a producer.

After a pleasant lunch, however, they accepted that Syco and Simon were to be the producers, and the rest is history.

How did you end up back in America?
BMG and Sony Music had merged, and although the process had gone relatively smoothly internationally, there were considerable political difficulties in the States. Eventually, Rolf Schmidt-Holtz [from BMG] was drafted in as CEO of Sony BMG and I was appointed worldwide COO. Having worked both for Sony and for BMG, I was considered to be a safe pair of hands and non-partisan.


Maurice Oberstein (left) and Walter Yetnikoff – "If Obie was a star, Walter was God with charisma."

"Simon [Cowell] was full of himself, for sure, but in the best possible way."

How was that second big stint over the States?
It was a very tough job. Nobody wanted to compromise and any label reorganisation was impossible.

Everything was highly political at the time and there was a great deal of animosity. The individual labels and their bosses became tribal and no-one was prepared to move an inch. Furthermore, they all had huge budgets, salaries and bonuses to protect.

How did you deal with the situation?
The Sony labels at the time were not doing very well, and both Donny Ienner and Michele Anthony [now Executive Vice President at Universal] left the company. We brought Rob Stringer in from the UK to inject new life into those labels.

But I wanted to go further, by rationalizing the labels even more, implementing some real cost cutting and encouraging the introduction of new businesses – basically to turn the company into a more rounded music entertainment business and less like a pure record company.

Was that the toughest challenge of your working life?
Oh, completely. And ultimately I felt that I had failed, but then again I didn't feel that I ever got the support that was required to be successful. In any event Sony went on to buy out BMG and I left the US in mid-2008.

What was your next move back in the UK?
I felt, wrongly, that I had to keep working and started a label [BPM] – bad decision!

But good did come out of it, though.

We had signed a boy band called the Kicks, which, given that *X Factor* was at its peak, was foolhardy. After a lot of hard work, the band broke up and I shut down the label soon after.

A couple of months later, two of the band members rang me and said, 'Look, we really like what you were doing; we're going to set up something ourselves along the same lines and we want you to be our partner in it.'

I didn't need asking twice and we set up a company called Artists & Company, which reflects how we see the future of the business.

Fundamentally, we focus all our attention on partnering with the artist. We manage, produce and publish. We provide all social media services and provide distribution services where appropriate.

At present we represent four artists, including a young artist, Etham, who is signed to Virgin EMI via Closer.

Do you miss being at the heart of Label Land?
Absolutely not. I love being in the heart of developing artists, which a major label can no longer do.

I have no desire to sit in meetings which have no relevance to what I am trying to achieve, which I'm sure label heads have to do all the time. I love working with young talent, both creative and executive, and that's why I'm with A&C.

How do you see the future for major labels generally?
Well, the traditional major label model has gone, simple as that. But the changes that are required have only just started. In my view it's not sufficient to rely on music sales and streaming and to take a share of an artist's 'other income'.

The relationship has to be a partnership with the artist, where the company is involved in the whole of the artist's career.

My ambition would be – and is – to create a music version of the William Morris Agency. Now that would be a label worth working for.

And I don't think it's right to rely on streaming. That's okay for catalogue, but that income will not be sufficient to cover the investment in new artists, let alone provide sufficient profits.

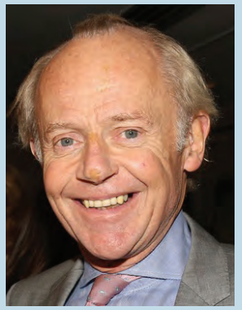
In excess of 95% of a major artist's income is derived from the direct exploitation of music. It's the music that creates the celebrity and fame, but it's the artist as a brand who generates the real income.

Record labels still have a tremendous amount to offer, not least global reach, but they have to fundamentally change their relationship with artists and managers so that they can, with genuine conviction, claim to be the future of the music industry.

I'm sure that they can and will do that. ■

'Easy going, patient, high on emotional intelligence'

CBS/Sony/Industry comms legend Jonathan Morrish pays tribute to a colleague and friend...



I am pretty certain that Tim and I joined CBS on exactly the same day back in 1976 – but the heady world of PR was somewhat removed from the discipline of 'business affairs'.

Not, of course, that PR wasn't disciplined, it was just that back then everyone had freedom to follow their own star and in their own way. Early on our paths didn't naturally cross; the fifth floor of Soho Square could be quite intimidating.

But a few years later, as I became increasingly intrigued as to the real working mechanics of the business and plucked up the courage, it was to Tim that I turned for instruction.

He was easy going, patient, high on emotional intelligence and would tolerate my stupid questions. More to the point, he could explain things in a very matter of fact, simple way.

He went abroad, we stayed in touch. He came back to the UK and as 'sarf' Londoners, with sons at the same school, we developed a deeper friendship.

At Alan Edwards' Outside Organisation, where I went after leaving Sony Music, we were Sony BMG's agency – so the business side of our relationship continued.

After that, for me, came 16 happy – and ongoing - years at PPL (he is a former Chairman) where Tim's tutorship to me in the world of copyright has consistently stood me in wonderful stead.

Every Picture Tells A Story

Date: October, 1996
Location: Lake House, Amesbury, Wiltshire

I was Press Director at A&M, with Sting as my principal charge. The label was re-issuing The Police catalogue in a rather lush boxset and *Q* Magazine wanted a chat and cover photo session around its release. Some complete idiot (yep, me) thought it might be a great idea to have Sting dress up in a PC's outfit and have *Q* shoot him at his Wiltshire house. Of course, like any self-respecting artist would, Sting hated the idea, and the only way of saving the day was for muggins to wear the outfit and 'arrest' Sting on his own property – which he agreed to! I think we made out his offence was smoking weed, and a few of his staff were actually momentarily taken in, thinking I was the real deal. Anyway, it ran in the mag and worked out okay, but like many a wizard wheeze/PR stunt at that time, it was a bit touch and go.

Andy Prevezer is a music business PR legend. In two stints, he spent over 20 years at Warner Music - managing 13 years at A&M/Universal in between times. Last year he relaunched his own agency, APPR.

LEWIS CAPALDI

#1 selling single for 7 weeks plus two sold out Wembley Arenas before releasing his debut #1 album

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Virgin EMI RECORDS