

THE FUTURE PATHS OF MUSIC.....

In an ever changing world and in the midst of the worst economic depression the Globe has seen, how will musicians promote their musical talents in future years ? I remember one of the "old school" City Stockbrokers saying to me that computerisation of the Global Economies will lead to a total financial disaster, because all the crooks will be able to manipulate markets in an instant,



thus ruining millions of hard working people's lives for generations. It would seem his prophecy was absolutely correct and it's not Nero that fiddles while Rome

burns these days, but Bankers ably assisted by Politicians who are the modern culprits. Music, like a water leak, usually finds a way to survive and progress in hard times. In fact, it makes innovative and creative people examine new ways forward and that really isn't a bad thing if it means taking the power base away from major record companies and ditching the amoebic "Cult of Celebrity". The Internet is an obvious tool available to anyone to promote themselves and their talent. Sites like YouTube and MySpace allow you to create your own profiles, upload your music and video clips for free and establish networks to other interested parties who may be doing the same thing, thus having the capability to reach interested viewers across the world. The downside of this however is an over saturation of usage and absolutely no quality control. You can view the most amazing clips in juxtaposition with an inebriated, fifteen year old girl from a small town,

throwing up in the street. With the vast array of equipment available and in a depressed retail market, you can equip yourselves with the basic tools needed to run internet promotions of your own musical talents. A



camcorder, Zoom H4 and a cheap computer editing programme, coupled with a bit of talent and imagination, will enable you to put visual / audio clips on the internet at a relatively low cost. There are also some good deals to be had with professional recording studios at present as well as some of the smaller Video Production Companies and there are some contact numbers listed in Music Maker for these companies, as well as manufacturing outfits who will press up small or large amounts of CD's or DVD's. None of this however takes into consideration the promotion and ultimate sales of your finished article. This is always the most difficult area to get right. Downloads are the current popular trend but figures show that in



the UK, 95% of downloads from the internet are illegal. That is implying that only 5% of downloads are legal. So how does an act make money after spending out their hard earned pennies on making a CD or DVD? Is it from live gigs? Very few artistes make a living from live gigs unless accompanied by a fan following or a successful record. Have we come full circle back to the days of the wandering minstrel who played for his supper only? Is music now regarded as a completely disposable commodity in this modern world?

We have more equipment available that enables us to create without queuing up to be the latest reject in the pile of non answered letters from record companies. Butdo we expect our music to be sold? or do we give it free to the world in order for the world to recognise our talents. So many questions and so few answers.

I was curious to have a view from our cousins in America, so I asked a couple of well respected and long time musicians to air their opinions. Firstly, I asked John Ford, bass player with the Strawbs for a view (www.johnfordmusic.net).



John has been living in the States for many years now and is an independent artiste who is very much involved in recording and live shows. I was particularly interested in his opinion on US sites such as CDBaby and Sonicbid. CDBaby (www.cdbaby.com) offers artistes a worldwide outlet for CD and DVD sales and Sonicbid (<http://www.sonicbid.com>) helps bands to get gigs, and promoters to get the right bands in the US. We do much the same in Music Maker. By joining the Association, an artiste can self promote and sell their product via the Magaine and Websites, plus get tracks listed on our web Radio site and featured on promotional CD's.

Q: Do sites like CDBaby and Sonicbid work in the States for the independent musician who is unsigned?

JF: Yes, without a doubt. I personally use CDBABY because it's an easy way to get your product to mass market. In the old days, if you didn't have a Major deal there was no way of getting any product out at all.

The only downside to all this is that it saturates the music scene.

Q: Have the major labels seen better days?

JF: Yes, because you don't need a major label to be a success nowadays which has been proven. Any band - new or established - can create their own label.

Q: Have they mis-read the market?

JF: I think they did a few years ago when all this was coming about. Don't know what they could have done about it... you can't stop technology.

Q: Are they too narrow minded in what they sign?

JF: I am not sure they are narrow minded, but you have to appreciate that when a label is run by 26 year olds - they're going to sign young acts, or whatever they think is trendy. Which doesn't help musician's in my age bracket - which is what we are talking about here. The whole internet "argument," can be helpful to established musicians, who can't get a "look-in" with a bigger label any more. Even Paul McCartney left EMI to go with Starbucks label. I personally feel the names of the big Majors still hold a magic of attaining the big record deal, more so than bringing it out on your own.

Q: Is the Internet, downloading, streaming etc. etc. the way forward?

JF: It's a way forward which the youngsters have grown up with, but they are missing out on physically going out to the store and buying CDs which seems to be eliminating all the small record stores.

Q: It appears that anyone can make and get their music on-line and downloaded, but how does an artiste earn money from this, or is it the future that an artiste gives away his music and talent for free, just to gain exposure ?

JF: This is already happening - FREE Down Loads - to get your music heard, even with big acts. It's the sign of the times. If we could have had this technology in the days of the Velvet Opera, we wouldn't have had to rely on Southern Music or CBS - who basically printed up our album and did nothing else for us!

Q: Over 95% of UK downloads are illegal, with no fees paid, do we make everything in music free and try to earn from gigs?

JF: I already get download royalties through PRS. Although, I am sure a lot of it goes unpaid due to illegal downloads. Unfortunately, in the music business, as we have both experienced - if it wasn't the record companies and management ripping you off then - now, we have to deal with illegal downloads which a lot of people don't think twice about. But, I am confident that this is all going to sort it self out, let's face it, when drum machines first arrived on the scene, everybody thought that would be the end of the drummer. But, they're still around and drum machines have become passé to some. Rock on! - John Ford

A second view is from Scott Frielich (<http://www.topshelfmusic.com>), inducted into Buffalo's Music Hall of Fame recently, Scott is a

AND ITS PROMOTION



world known vintage guitar expert, luthier and dealer as well as being a very fine bassist and associate of Ani di Franco. Here's what Scott says: "There are also different

degrees of success performers want to achieve. If playing local bar gigs 4 times a month for \$100.00 per guy is your goal, there isn't much you need to do. Make a song list consisting of all the songs you never want to play again and make that your set list, hand demos and photos to the clubs you want to play (make sure that they are large enough to support paying you), list all of your gigs in any free calendars you can, put up posters in the club letting everybody know you play Brown Eyed Girl and Mustang Sally, and you'll achieve that goal.

If you want to take it to the next level monetarily and you don't do originals, you need to do high end parties and corporate gatherings. You can probably use the same song list as above, but your presentation needs to be slicker. You need good band photos, probably a DVD, and a pretty girl singer in a nice gown. Most regions have agencies that book such acts, and once you get on that circuit and do a good job you get passed around from party to party. The rule of thumb here, as in the previous level of success, is you have to play the songs you never wanted to play again. I have a buddy who runs an agency that books bands for these types of functions. He rates bands with either 1 thumb up, 2 thumbs up or 3 thumbs up. One thumb means that you didn't offend anybody, but you might not get called back to do the event again. Two thumbs up means you got the crowd dancing and will probably get called back. Three thumbs up means that the crowd was singing along and you'll get passed around to do any function this crowd has.

If you do originals or a mix of covers and originals it's a different ball game. In most cities, bands that do originals are relegated to doing gigs with 3 other bands on a Tues. and get paid what's collected at the door or by passing the hat. If you're a serious songwriter who wants to get his songs heard and don't care about getting paid to stay out late and carry equipment, that might be good enough for you. Youtube is the first line of promotion you'd use. Some bands have achieved great success buy using Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter effectively. If you do a cool video on any of these and it grabs enough people, you can be a hit with very little effort. One good friend of mine, my former band mate Ani Di Franco

toured incessantly to promote her music, often playing for peanuts and sleeping in her car. She finally made it by controlling the media. She refused all offers to compromise her music and sign with a major label, and the media took the bait.

There are web services that act as clearing houses for opportunities to promote your music. One that I like is Sonicbids. They have a wealth of offerings for promotion of any genre of music, house electronic press kits, and communicate potential opportunities to you via email on a daily basis. Over the past year I have submitted my press kit to opportunities offered on Sonicbids about once a month. So far we've gotten one song accepted for movie placement. From my overview, most of the market is looking for performers under 35 who do music that has a sound that reminds me of John Mayer, but there are exceptions. I've heard some commercials lately using Gypsy jazz and rockabilly, so hey, you never know.

Somehow there are still artists selling product. You still see gold and platinum albums.

In North America, and I'm sure elsewhere, concert prices for major artists have gone sky high. Good seats for the last Police tour were \$200.00 each in a depressed market like Buffalo. Same with acts like the reformed New Kids on the Block. Artists are making up for stolen music with high concert prices. They are also pushing merchandise sales. All in all, the days of anybody making \$\$ off of the sale of recorded music are probably over for ever. The

\$\$ to be made are in live shows and licensing. If you can get your song associated with Viagra, a good candy bar, a soup company, etc, you can make plenty of \$\$ on it. The other thing is film placement. Movie

theatres are still somehow doing well here.

Even with DVDs and home theatres, movies are still viable.

As for music promotion, I know of a couple of friends who have done well in the current environment.

They both went about it in different ways but it all boiled down to getting

control of the media. Every

band that I played with that had any level of success was successful because of the media. I tell people all the time that if it takes getting photos of my naked crotch while I'm getting out of a cab or doing a porn video where I look bored and take phone calls in the middle to make it in this world, than maybe I should go ahead and do that. Short of that, you've got to get the attention of the media somehow, and you can't usually buy the kind of attention you need. It could mean that you need to do something outrageous, but it doesn't have to.

One local band put an ad in the newspaper

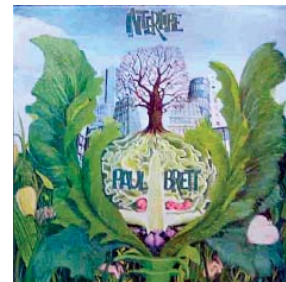


offering to play for free for any worthy cause. Play for enough Red Cross and American Cancer Society benefits that get media coverage and you can develop an audience if the demographics are correct for what you're

doing. Another guy I play with sometimes wrote some tunes for the Obama campaign, played at some of the events, and got some air-play and a loyal audience out of it. I send out CDs to anybody and everybody who might review them, but that's only the tip of the iceberg. You really need to do something that draws media attention to yourself."

Both John and Scott have offered some good honest opinions and practical advice, covering what in their opinion is happening in the States right now. In fact, it's very much the same as what's happening in the UK and the one overriding factor that crops up is Media support, which ever way you can get it. John highlights product saturation as a possible downside in the future and Scott's suggesting many different ways to promote music. They, like me, have seen music from the 60's through to today's trends, struggle, thrive, evolve, contract and change again. All of us are still heavily involved in recording, playing and writing music, albeit without the major record label support we had in the past. But then as John says, they didn't really support that much and it was all recoupable against royalties, which they certainly were not forthcoming with, even with statements of sales and that's one area that I'm sure many older musicians are glad to see the back of. We do have far more creative freedom to get our music to the world than ever before and we do not have to rely on some cloth eared record company executives to get such music heard, or a panel of BBC Radio producers whose collective opinions as to what goes on the playlist is influenced by whether you are released by a major label or not. I also feel it's a great pity that we lost the LP Sleeve, not so much the vinyl, but the amazing artwork that

appeared on the sleeves. I think that sleeve design was a major plus in an LP's sales potential, with many such sleeves now becoming icons. CD covers just



don't have the same impact. (pic of Interlife sleeve)

Finally, there is a new army of fans on the net that are setting up sites singing the praises of all musical genres across the ages. It may be worth tapping into such people as their dedication and enthusiasm could be a valuable way forward into a new way of promoting music. It's only through lateral thinking and dedication to that which you believe in and love, that the future paths of music and its promotion will evolve and flourish.

Paul Brett