

The modern music era thrives on independence

The "Do-It-Yourself" movement is as relevant now as it was in the 1980s, when bands learned they could earn their own money without the aid of major record labels, publicity people or booking agents. Artistic control, personal integrity and financial risk are the three main reasons bands should remain independent in the music industry.

Never mind the few bands that go major and succeed artistically and financially, because those bands are few and far between and probably did everything themselves first.

Except now, instead of playing to hundreds of extremely appreciative fans, those bands are playing to thousands, maybe millions of people, whose money mostly goes straight to big record companies.

Their albums are almost guaranteed to suck after a few years of playing ball, having been tainted by high-dollar production and input from "producers" who know nothing about the band's personal voice.

MySpace, MP3 files and the growing number of record labels have not changed the fundamentals of the music industry. In 2005, Nielsen SoundScan reported that the "big four" record companies (Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, Warner Music Group and EMI Group) accounted for 81.9 percent of the U.S. music market. Independent labels accounted for the remaining 18.1 percent.

The one significant change in the music business model, according to MOJO magazine in "The MOJO Collection," is: "The digital download revolution has opened up further avenues that allow for the greater discovery of music."

Yet the music business remains set up like most other U.S. marketplaces because a few people control the overall wealth. Today, there are simply more outlets that fuel the potential of the D.I.Y. ethos.

According to Michael Azerrad in his book, *Our Band Could Be Your Life*, there were six corporate labels that generated the vast majority of music sales when D.I.Y. began in the early 1980s: Capitol, CBS, MCA, Polygram, RCA and WEA.

While media and business tactics are always changing, major labels still account for most of the data.

Producer Steve Albini outlined exactly how major-label contracts take advantage of bands in his essay, "The Problem with Music," which includes statistics that show how these contracts are risky and not profitable.

"The system exists to support itself. It does not exist to support bands. The number one mistake that bands make is thinking they can outsmart a self-sufficient system," Albini said in an interview for *D.I.Y. or Die*.



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Publicity people, producers and label owners do not "earn" any money from bands. They tax bands for doing mindless work, while the musicians end up earning far less.

Bands ought to do as much of these tasks as possible by themselves. It is not only stupid to rely on someone else's self-interest, but once a band is far enough into the game, they will compromise their artistic control whether they realize it or not.

Major labels hire "artist & repertoire" representatives to serve as spokespeople for the label. They are the link between the corporate office and the band, tracking down artists with high sales potential and explaining contracts.

They are not friends of bands, even though record labels select them based on legitimate underground music credentials and their "hipness," which automatically appeals to naive young talent.

Maybe the band gets a big break and a major label A&R rep brings them a fancy contract. The contract offers a more comfortable touring lifestyle and outlines a bunch of jargon that the average musician accepts because the A&R person seems like he's on the band's side.

According to Albini's estimations, the best a band will get out of this deal is a \$14,000 debt and some more listeners, if they are lucky. Albini's figures are a little outdated, but the fundamental nature of the music business will never deviate much.

There will always be a manager's cut, legal fees, a recording budget, a producer's advance, a studio fee, equipment fees, transportation, lodging, catering, mastering, a video budget, partying, fuel and dozens of other expenses that inevitably outweigh a band's percentage of record royalties, tour incomes and advances.

Kerry L. Smith wrote in the preface of *The Encyclopedia of Indie Rock*, "The D.I.Y. movement is an ideal that indie rock and punk bands have upheld in order to retain more control over their lives, their careers and their music."

Like all capitalist citizens, artists should maximize their profits and personal happiness. The only way musicians can do that without supporting a sea of trivial muck is to stay independent and give a 100-percent effort on their own terms.

Grossology

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Kiser said the economy changes the way some hospitals run, but Mission is continuing its dedication to community outreach.

"Just speaking for Mission Hospital, I can tell you that we have not scaled back our attempts to help the community," she said. "What we're seeing is more people with need."

Advanced Animations LLC, a company with offices out of both Vermont and Michigan, approached Branzei a few years after her first books came out.

"(Branzei) was involved from the very beginning. What we were looking at was bringing the book to life," Shoener said. "We took the book and brought it to life, using her book, her characters."

Shoener said that the tours include four human Grossology exhibits and two animal Grossology exhibits in North America, with one general exhibit traveling internationally.

Economic problems aren't just affecting the pricing on exhibits, Shoener said.

"Well, just in the museum industry in general, there isn't the funding that was there a year ago," she said, "So for them to rent an exhibit, it's more difficult."

Branzei's big concern isn't the mon-

ey. "Our other goal besides creating a positive experience is to show people that science is everywhere," she said.

Branzei said that students are far more receptive to exhibits that they can feel with their hands and sometimes, yes,, smell.

"The number one question children had asked was, 'What is a fart?'" Branzei said.

There were big concerns about addressing the topic, but Branzei wanted to talk about it, so it went in the book, she said.

"It's something my publisher worried about, but I didn't worry about it. I do recall having a major conversation with him when I wanted to have a section on farts. He wanted to cut it."

Strangely enough, that might be part of why Branzei has had such success.

"What I've learned through the years is that they end up walking away with tons of information. It's almost mind-blowing."

Branzei said that's what she wants with her exhibit. It's why she wrote the books.

"I think part of it is because they're having such a good time," she said.

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