



Hello Muse's Muse readers:

Most people know me as the producer of the *Muse's Muse Awards*, and the Senior Music Reviewer here on the *Muse's Muse*, a role that I thoroughly enjoy and have occupied for over 6 years now. When I'm not reviewing music from all over the world, I'm consulting with artists on developing and transforming their creative interests into paid endeavors, and teaching and mentoring students as a dedicated teacher at San Francisco State University.

It's through my work (also my life's calling) which I realized that knowledge of who you are, what you want, and what you have to offer of value to others, is the most valuable knowledge to possess. To that end, in an effort to further contribute to the fountain of knowledge that freely flows from *The Muse's Muse*, I have assembled a compilation of useful articles that I have written over the years which have proven to be very beneficial to the music community.

I hope that these articles, individually and collectively, offer you the insight, direction, and inspiration to pursue your music industry endeavors with sharper focus and greater intensity.

For my most recent business related articles please visit my complete catalogue:

http://ezinearticles.com/?expert=Gian_Fiero.

To subscribe to ***the Muse's News*** newsletter and receive more information that will help you with your songwriting and music career visit: <http://www.musesmuse.com/musenews.html>

Enjoy!



Gian Fiero, Senior Music Reviewer
The Muse's Muse

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How To Get Better Reviews

By Gian Fiero

In this day and age of independence it's only logical to question the importance of getting your music reviewed. After all, since fewer artists are getting record deals - forcing them to become entrepreneurs - why would you need a "critic" to validate the artistic or commercial merit of your music?

Well, since I am one of those critics, I decided to write an article on how important it is to continue to get your music reviewed - even though you may be enjoying popularity achieved through word of mouth and consistent CD sales.

It's true that websites enable music artists to create communities for their existing fans, but good reviews can be used to introduce your talent and product to new audiences and persuade them to buy your CD or pay to attend your shows. Please note that I said a *good* review.

How can you accomplish that? That's the real question, and one that I will answer in this article, but first, a little statistical data from my own personal history as a critic for Muse's Muse.

Since I started writing reviews for Muse's Muse in 2002, I have received about 1,200 CDs, which averages out to 50 per month, and 600 per year. As of this writing, I have only reviewed about 50 CDs, for an average of 12 CDs per year, or 1 CD per month.

Question: Do you know the average number of artists that get signed per year by major labels? Answer: 4. The competition is fierce at the top; thus the criteria for my reviews and my position that if you make music with professional or commercial intentions, it should meet certain standards.

What artists should ask themselves before distributing their projects



to anyone in the industry (or sending it to me for a review) is this: "Does the quality of my CD compare to the songs that my friends like and buy?" In essence, can it compete? If you can't answer those questions honestly, a negative review should be your wake-up call.

My policy is not to review CDs that are lacking in quality (talent, songwriting, technical, commercial, etc.) because a bad review is of no use to you, and a waste of time for me. I keep it positive and I keep it real. I know what music the industry (music, radio, television, and film) embraces and it's my objective to help them find it through my work as a music critic.

The following helpful hints will help you increase your chances for getting good

reviews by any music critic with any publication.

1. Have good songs.

Much easier said than done, but isn't this the goal? Collaborate with people that are more experienced than you. If you are a singer, set your ego aside and get (or cover) songs that allow you to showcase the strength of your vocal talents.

2. Send your CD with a cover letter.

The cover letter should contain some personal info about you, your musical history, and your objectives. You get bonus points if you state the reason why you chose the particular reviewer to critique your project. It shows that you have done research. Fact: 99% of the CDs I have reviewed were accompanied by a cover letter. Advice: DO NOT make excuses about your songs or your recordings in your cover letter. Your project should speak for itself.

3. Pay attention to your packaging.

You can't judge a book by its cover, but the cover does give you an indication of what's inside. Usually, a poorly packaged CD is poorly produced. Take pride in all aspects of your work! Don't limit your creativity to your music.

4. Don't send reviews that you have already received.

What's up with that? I don't care what other critics had to say about a project that I'm about to review! Keep those reviews to yourself and compare notes. Once you've gotten multiple reviews, choose the best one(s) to use in your press kit or on your website.

5. Distinguish yourself.

Send a t-shirt of your band, a calendar, a key chain, etc. These are not freebies or payola; they are promotional items and I use every one that gets sent to me.

Good luck!

The 6 Rules of Commercial Music Success

by Gian Fiero

Over the years I have had many conversations with music artists about commercial music, which usually leads to them disclosing their disdain and hatred of it. Some refer to pop music (pop, as in what's popular now) as commercial music. Others think of anything that is receiving heavy rotation on radio as commercial music. Whatever their definition, one thing is often overlooked: commercial music is the heart of the music industry which pumps the blood that keeps it alive.

So why then are so many music artists resistant to making commercial music? The answer that I'm often given is because they don't want to "sell-out" their creative integrity by conforming to some industry version of what's popular (i.e. what's selling). It becomes very obvious to me that the problem is not commercial music, but rather the perception and definition of it.

The misconception is that the music industry created this rigid definition of commercial music. That fallacy is often perpetuated by music artists who or either unwilling or incapable of creating commercially viable songs. The truth is, the public dictates what is commercial, and for decades they have gravitated towards, embraced, and purchased records that adhere to a commercial music format.

If commercial music is the rule for success and sales in the music industry, there are inevitably going to be some exceptions to it, but unfortunately, the tendency is for music artists to try and become the exception, instead of observing the rules and why they exist.

Simply put: the rules of commercial music success have not, and will not change. Not in your life time or your children's lifetime. They exist because it's human nature to reject the unfamiliar; in the music industry, similarity is the cornerstone of acceptance. This is why so many popular songs sound similar and contain familiar elements. It's a rule that is prevalent in every genre, and on every continent.

There are those artists who do a masterful job of observing their own artistic values while delicately balancing the demands for commercial music by

industry professionals. Artists such as Prince, Sting and Bjork, have pushed the envelope of creativity for years. But artists of their caliber who possess such sublime talent and vision are rare.

For the sake of clarification and argument, I will offer my explanation and industry definition of what commercial music is; based on 25 years of listening to recordings as a music lover, music industry professional, and music critic in what I will call, "The 6 Rules of Commercial Music Success." They are songs that have the following:

1.) A strong hook/memorable chorus. If no one knows what your song is called, they can't request it when they hear it on the radio. More importantly, they can't buy it at retail...or track it down on the Internet to illegally download a copy of it.

2.) Good melody. Commercial music is characterized by good melodies (i.e. verses, choruses, and sometimes bridges that get stuck in your head and make you want to sing-along). What can the top selling hip-hop acts of the last 10 years (Tupac, Notorious B.I.G., Jay-Z, Eminem, and 50 Cent) attribute their success to? Good melodies (not cool beats) that increase the commercial value of their music...thanks largely in part to the king of modern hip-hop melody, Dr. Dre.

3.) Well-Produced. Coming from an r&b background where producers are a pivotal part of commercial music success, I did not realize until I became a consultant that many rock bands don't utilize, nor value producers like r&b music acts. Perhaps they should since the record company often assigns producers to enhance the performance of songs (through their musical expertise) and enrich the records (through their experience and proficiency in the recording process), ultimately making them more enjoyable to listen to and, you guessed it...more commercial!

4.) Appealing lyrics. The lyrics don't have to be profound; people just have to be able to relate to them. If you have a way of saying common things in an uncommon way, your lyrics will have an edge over the songwriter whose song is about the same topic. Write about what's closest



to your heart for credibility and sincerity, and others will be able to relate to your songs – especially if it's on a subject matter that they know or will experience.

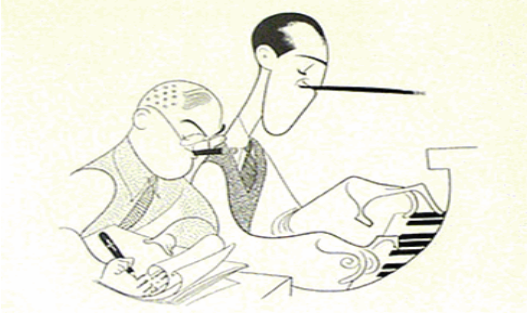
5.) Keep it short. Keep the length of your songs down to a maximum of four minutes. Jazz and World Music are exceptions. A song that is well written makes people want to hear it again, and

again, and again. The longer the song is, the less likely that will happen. Don't believe me? Check the length of your favorite songs.

6.) Well-Performed. Most outstanding vocalists are often surprised by how low this rule is on the list. The fact is that there are more mediocre songs performed by outstanding vocalists, than there are mediocre vocalists performing outstanding songs. A good song that is well-performed gives it an edge, but if the song is lacking, all of the yelling and vocal acrobatics that singers tend to use to compensate for it, will not make it a better song....though it may help the singer to attract better songwriters to work with.

Now that you know the 6 rules of commercial music success, hopefully you will be able to use this information to your advantage and create songs that will increase your chances of success in your professional music endeavors...or you can ignore them and continue to wonder why no one (other than your friends and family – all of which listen to commercial music) like your songs.

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Do You Write The Songs That Make The Whole World Sing?

If you are a beginning songwriter and you've ever wondered how A&R executives and publishers define, distinguish and categorize the songs you create, this article will provide you with insight into the industry thought process.

Filler: A song that is used to fill out the overall number of songs offered on a CD (also known in industry circles as "throw-away tracks"). These songs are not considered strong enough (i.e. "good enough") to be chosen as singles and often lack commercial value. No one aspires to write filler. Consider it a wake-up call when your songs are thought of in this way.

Good Song: Everyone aspires to write good songs. Some even take private lessons, classes, and collaborate as a means to that end. But what exactly are *good* songs. These are songs that have memorable elements such as good structure, good performance, good production, and a good melody, but if they have weaknesses in any of the above areas - which they sometimes do - it prevents them from becoming great songs.

Great Song: These songs have the qualities that good songs have, but are *especially strong* in the areas in which good songs are weak. A great song has to be embraced by the masses; therefore, it can't be a song that is only heard by you and your friends - unless you have thousands of friends who share the same opinion about it.

Hit Song: As a songwriter, you don't make hit songs: heavy radio rotation makes a song a hit. If your song is not being played on the radio, it can still be a good song, in some cases a great song, but definitely *not* a hit. Most hits are characterized by a really catchy hook, high production values, mass market appeal that makes it fit into tight radio formats, and an emotional connection to its audiences. *Please note:* A song does not have to be a good or a great song to be a hit; however, when good and great songs find their way onto the airwaves, they tend to be embraced by the masses and qualify for Classic song status.

Classic Song: These are an elite group of great songs that have the potential to stand the test of time for decades. A random sampling of classic songs would be *Imagine* by John Lennon; *You're So Vain* by Carly Simon; *Always And Forever* by Heatwave; *My Girl* by The Temptations; *I Will Always Love You* by Whitney Houston; *(They Long to Be) Close to You* by The Carpenters; and *I Can't Get No Satisfaction* by The Rolling Stones. All of them are playing *right now* on some radio station in your area.

Hopefully this gives you a solid reference by which to gage your work and the inspiration to write the songs that make the whole world sing.



Gian Fiero is a seasoned educator, speaker and consultant with a focus on business development and music/entertainment industry operations. He currently teaches at San Francisco State University where he conducts courses on Music Industry Career Planning and Publicity/Public Relations. His affiliations include SBA (business advisor); National Association Of Record Industry Professionals (associate director); CLA (speaker); West Coast Songwriters (consultant); and The Muse's Muse (producer of the Muse's Muse Awards).

LESSONS LEARNED FROM AMERICAN IDOL

AN A&R PERSPECTIVE

Written by Gian Fiero

American Idol is unquestionably the machine in the history of the music promote, and transform obscure talent into release a single, is unparalleled and love it, but everyone has an opinion about 35.2 million dollars in only 59 dates and the season coming in at a whopping 37 million franchise *with* a show – and the show is a



greatest marketing (and money making) industry. Their uncanny ability to position, household names *before* they record or unprecedented. Some hate the show, others it. With the American Idol 5 tour grossing Nielsen ratings for the debut of the sixth viewers, it's more than just a show; it's a runaway hit with no signs of slowing down.

This article sheds light on five invaluable lessons that are imparted upon music artists who watch the show with dreams of one day becoming a commercial music success, or the next American Idol.

5.) MAINTAIN UNDERDOG STATUS. Taking tons of voice lessons, having a previous record deal, a famous family member, or great looks should be *downplayed*. America loves to root for the underdog in general - and on this show in particular. The show's viewers recognize that there's a thin line between confidence and cockiness. Chris Daughtry (season five contestant) crossed that line and walked into a brick wall of humility and exited from the show wearing a genuine expression of shock and dismay on his face that was perfectly captured by the cameras and replayed constantly by the media. Lesson learned: *The minute you display cockiness, people pick up on it and are less willing to help you.*

4.) USE THE FEEDBACK. Simon, Randy and Paula provide "constructive feedback" to contestants after every performance for the purpose of correcting flaws and improving future performances. Some use it. Some don't. Every American Idol winner does. This feedback (as entertaining or critical as it can be) often proves to be the tipping point for contestants on the edge like Elliott Yamin, who was advised to loosen up. Had he taken heed to that advice, the American Idol title would not have eluded the competition's best male vocalist of season five. Lesson learned: *Use the advice offered by those with experience to your advantage.*

3.) BE HUMBLE. Justin Guarini (a crowd favorite among the show's coveted female viewers) fell from grace and front-runner status in the first season during an egotistical exchange with Simon Cowell (while he was getting constructive feedback) in which he pronounced, "I don't care what you think...they like me," he said, pointing to the crowd and being rooted on by their cheers. "That's all that matters." He apologized the next week...but it was a mistake that would haunt him and inevitably cost him what appeared to be a certain victory. With one ill-timed (and ill-advised) exchange, he displayed cockiness *and* arrogance, which allowed Kelly Clarkson to surge from behind and clinch the victory. Lesson learned: *Don't cheer for yourself; let the voters do it for you.*

2.) BE LIKEABLE. Taylor Hicks (winner of season five), ingratiated himself with his animated personality and off-beat dancing. The light-hearted sassiness of Fantasia (winner of season three), the mild-mannered southern charm of Ruben Studdard (season two winner), and the wholesomeness of Carrie Underwood (winner of season four), exemplify the endearing qualities that American Idol viewers relate to and vote for. Lesson learned: *We are motivated to do things for those we like – voting is just one of them.*

1.) CHOOSE THE RIGHT SONGS. Ruben Studdard did a masterful job of choosing songs that not only showcased his vocal talents and strengths, but also his versatility. His rendition of Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama" distanced him from the pack and assured his victory. Fantasia's rendition of "Summertime" assured her of a record deal, and Kelly Clarkson's courageous cover of Aretha Franklin's "Natural Woman," helped to position her as a *true* vocalist. In each scenario, the *consistent* selection of the right song and its perfect marriage with the singers' voice, vocal range, *and* performance skill, proved to be the winning formula for American Idol winners, and it's also the formula for a successful career as a commercial recording artist.

The X Factor: What is it, and do YOU have "IT?"

by Gian Fiero

What exactly is the "X factor?" You hear professionals in the entertainment industry referring to it. You hear artists alluding to it, but you rarely hear anyone defining "it." If you are an aspiring music artist or an entertainer, it's important that you know what "it" is because in the mind of the most seasoned and powerful industry professionals, having "it" is what determines if you are worth the investment of endless amounts of time and money.

In order to properly and accurately define what "it" is, we will approach the subject from two perspectives: emotional and visual.

Visually, it goes beyond good looks. Good looks are often confused with the "X factor." This can be traced back to the advent and popularity of music videos in the 80's, which created a greater emphasis and need for artists that could give "good face" or in laymen's terms, were photogenic.

But good looks only get attention. People who have "it" can maintain attention beyond a quick glance, or even a double take. They have something called magnetism. Magnetism is a combination of personal qualities such as: a sociable personality; self-confidence; charm; inner peace; comfort with one's sexuality; rebelliousness; obvious intellect; a unique viewpoint; intensity or focus; authority; or sense of humor. In some instances, it is truly indescribable, but very recognizable to those who have seen "it" before.

Emotionally, those with the "X factor" have a way of pushing our buttons psychologically. They make us feel good or inspired. Pissed off or aggravated. Challenged or validated. Regardless of how they affect us, they engage us emotionally and the "X factor" that lives within them, speaks to something inside of us, often times, something that we are not even in touch with.

Those who are talented and would like to pursue a professional career in the music

industry as a commercial music artist must understand that for many of you, no matter how hard you work, your success and destiny have already been pre-determined by the natural presence, or tangible amount, of "X factor" that you were born with.

If you have "it," then it's a matter of harnessing and directing the power of "it" to make "it" more easily recognizable to others. For many however, there is nothing to tap into. It's nearly impossible to get "it" as you get older if you didn't have "it" when you were younger. Maturity is a nice quality to have, but it will never be mistaken for magnetism.

In my opinion, and in accordance with the laws of the "X factor," it is only appropriate that Michael Jackson is the top selling music artist of all time. As a child, he didn't just have "it," he had a whole lot of "it." He had so much of "it" that he was able to infect his four brothers with "it."

Throughout his teen years and well into adulthood, the immensity of his talent was intensified by the high abundance of "X factor" that his father identified and helped him to develop. We have yet to see the level of intensity and focus that he displayed as a young star. He was truly destined to become the King of Pop.

Other star music artists who have "it" are: Prince, Madonna, Usher, Justin Timberlake, Cher, Christina Aguilera, Beyonce, Bonjovi, Bono, Bruce Springsteen, Barbara Streisand, Faith Hill, Tim McGraw, Garth Brooks, Eminem, Jay-Z, Ludacris, Missy Elliott, Bow Wow, Bebe & Ce Ce Winans, and Yolanda Adams to name a few.

Of course there are many music artists who have achieved success without having "it." Often times these individuals are

driven and committed and are able to achieve their success as a result of hard work, determination, sacrifice, good timing, great marketing, or exceptional talent. These fine attributes may ignite attention, but without the "X factor" working for them, public interest and attention tends to diminish over time.

Compare Prince to Whitney Houston.

Both entered the music industry around the same age (18) and both have a tremendous amount of talent (albeit in different ways). While the world was hypnotized by Whitney's talented gospel like voice that was stored in a model's body (a phenomenon that she helped to usher in), Prince's magnetism garnered interest and attention from many of those who didn't know quite what to make of him.

People tried to define him: Is he black or white? Is he straight or gay? Is he a rocker or an r&b artist? Is he a Christian or a freak? It really didn't matter. What mattered is that he had "it," and "it" is what kept us intrigued. He, like Michael Jackson, has so much of "it," that "it" tends to overshadow the immensity of his talents.

Whitney Houston on the other hand, with all of the grace and charm that she learned to fabricate while at the Wilhelmina Talent Agency, did a fine job of creating the illusion of having "it." She did however, have a high abundance of all the other qualities that are often mistaken for the "X factor."

Those who have "it" carry "it" with them from the cradle to the grave. Bad career decisions; a bad marriage; life's mishaps; lack of fame; lack of money - none of those things can affect or eradicate "it." "It" should not be confused with attitude, which is often projected. "It" is not forceful and temporary. "It" is subtle and consistent. "It" is a serious advantage that is afforded to only a small minority.

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Everywhere I go there seems to be some sophisticated discussion or debate about what's wrong with the music industry and what needs to be done to fix it. The conversation takes place in offices among professionals who have been around long enough to know that things are indeed different, and at industry conferences among music artists who revel in new found optimism that the changes will "level" the playing field and make economic opportunities more accessible to them.

As tempting as it may be, I am not enamored with or preoccupied by the current problems that face the music industry. Issues such as declining record sales; the consolidation of radio stations; the constant merging of record labels; the lack of longevity in the "careers" of music artists; the boom in retail sales of used CDs; or any myriad of issues regarding the illegal downloading of music on the Internet.

Why? Because while so many in the music industry (professionals and artists alike) spend countless hours lamenting over things that they can't control, I only focus on the things that are within my control; like my professional choices, income generating activities, and building valued relationships. Most importantly, my business model is based on my passions because while I know that the economy will always fluctuate up or down, and industry trends will turn hot and cold in the blink of an eye, my love for what I do is a constant and remains unaffected.

In 1999 I had the pleasure of meeting and briefly talking to Barry White at a party for the release of "Love Unlimited," his semi-autobiographical book on his adventures in life, love and the music industry. When he asked me what I did for a living, I told

him I was a music business consultant. Barry, who was much darker in person than he is on television and in his videos, flashed some of the whitest teeth you could ever imagine and said, "I don't know what that is, but as long as you believe in what you do, that's all that counts."

I went on to enthusiastically explain to him what I did as a music business consultant, asking him for advice and hogging up his limited time in the process. He stopped me before I could really dive



deep into it and interjected in his sincere, rich baritone voice, the advice that I still follow to this very day, "Constantly re-commit yourself to what you do and the money will follow..."

We all need to re-commit from time to time. We all lose sight of what we actually do for a living and the reasons why we do it, but the long roots of true passion run deep...and even when the tree is cut down by unfair business practices, a glutony of superficial encounters, busted deals, a never ending parade of fakes and flakes, and rampant un-professionalism that plagues the industry, you endure because you know that at the end of the day you are truly passionate about what you do and it all becomes a mere occupational hazard that you learn how to deal with.

While many aspiring industry professionals have fashionably set their sights on the greener pastures of the music business, prostituting their values for the sake and pursuit of money, the vast majority will not obtain the riches they so desperately seek, nor will they be in it for the long haul. Why? Because they lack vision, focus, commitment, and above all else, passion for what they do – which

brings us to the question: what's love got to do with it?

When it comes to art, you would think everything, but the sad truth is that there are many in the music industry that are more passionate about self-expression and self-serving interests, than they are about music as an art form (unless, of course, the music we are speaking of is their own). But you don't have to be passionate about music to be in the music industry, you just need to be passionate about your *motivations* and respect the *process* that allows you to make your money. Show me an act or professional who has failed, and I will show you how that statement applies.

And what about all the "changes" that people are talking about so adamantly? History shows that this industry is *always* changing. The industry never stops changing; technologically; structurally; logistically; and creatively. Adaptability is a requirement of success in every industry because change, to an entrepreneur, is readily accepted, embraced and capitalized upon.

So for those who are distracted by the changes that are taking place in the industry, my free, but valuable advice to all of you is to focus on what you love to do. Your passion is the intangible that will increase the value of your product or service. Your business needs and opportunities will announce themselves at the appropriate time. Until then, rekindle your love affair with your business or art, because in the end, love has everything to do with the reason you do it in the first place.

Who's Managing Your Manager?

by Gian Fiero

If you are a music artist that has a need for someone to: filter communications between you and third parties that have expressed a professional interest in your services as an artist, or the use of your music; negotiate contracts and offers of employment; schedule and coordinate your professional activities; direct and interface with the various members of your support team; and provide counsel pertaining to the most advantageous or strategic career moves to make, then you need a competent professional manager.

Needless to say (but I will say it anyway for the sake of clarification) that if you don't have such business affairs pending, then you don't need a manager. Many music artists cling to the false perception that their manager will help them get gigs or a record deal. While those notions are not entirely true, they are not entirely untrue either. Some managers will (illegally and unknowingly) book gigs for their acts in an effort to become immediately and actively involved.

Some ambitious managers may even take on music artists before they have any real business affairs to manage, and pursue a record deal for them with the intent of generating activities and income that warrant their involvement. This is not the norm, so consider yourself very lucky if it does happen to you. Managers get paid a commission on the income that you make, so if you are making nothing, then what do you think they will be paid? This is what managers refer to as a "non-commissionable" client, which makes you

susceptible and vulnerable to the inexperienced managers.

While every professional started out with no experience at one time or another, you must be aware of the exploitive and predatory nature of the music industry. Personal managers who do not fully understand the dynamics of the music business can not efficiently help navigate you through the illogical maze of industry operations that make success so elusive.

If you happen to find an inexperienced manager (or if one finds you) that you trust and feel will be dedicated to helping you achieve success, then work with them; but accept and understand the following: a) there is truly no substitute for experience, b) their experience may come at your expense and c) if they ever feel overwhelmed or unsure, they can - and should - consult with an entertainment attorney.



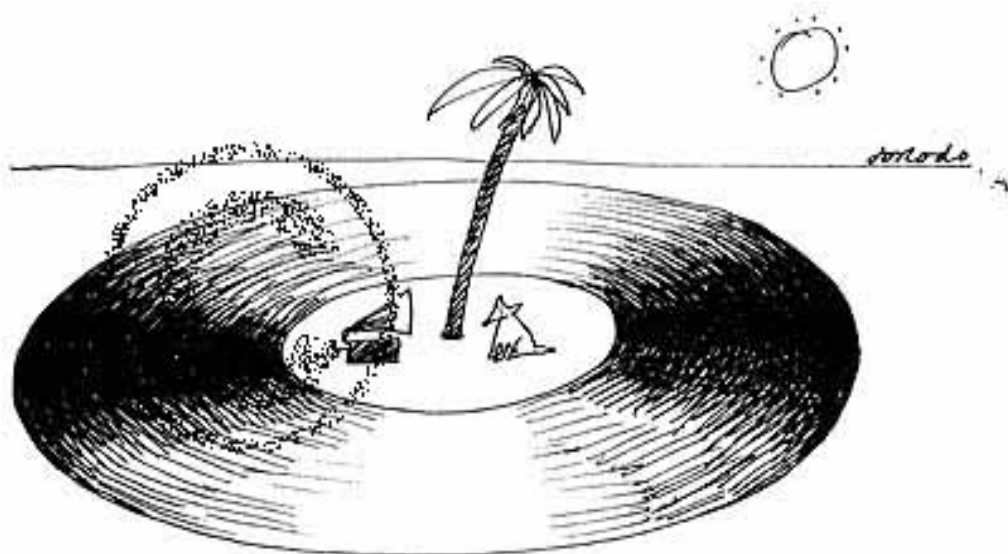
Before you get a record deal or have a myriad of activities to handle, your inexperienced manager will be very eager to execute whatever business related tasks you have for them. But if you do get a record deal and are suddenly thrust into the cryptic and methodical music business game where the players are savvy, seasoned veterans who know the finer points and strategies of deal making, you will find that your attorney will provide much needed guidance to your inexperienced manager, and a reason to relax a little more for you.

With a lack of experience, your personal manager will rely heavily on his/her communication, follow-through, and people skills. They should also do whatever they can to learn more about the music industry. If by chance you find that you are telling them what to say to people, or what to do and how to do it, then you have a problem that begets the question: Who's managing who?

If you harbor any doubts or suspicions about your manager's competence (or in this case motivation and potential), you should end the relationship as quickly as possible. In the end, you would much rather be an artist whose inexperienced manager is gaining confidence and experience as a result of being managed by an attorney, than an artist who is managing their manager.

Getting Real About Going Independent

by Gian Fiero



Once upon a time, not too long ago, most music artists wanted a record deal. Being an independent artist was more of an ambition than a phenomenon. While Ani DiFranco, a non-commercial music artist and the poster child of independence, garnered attention and respect from her peers, she didn't exactly serve as a catalyst to the independent movement.

Then a highly publicized feud between Prince and Warner Bros. erupted in which he likened his contractual obligations and restrictions to that of a "slave," caught the media's attention and truly galvanized the movement.

More recently acts such as Radiohead, Nine Inch Nails, and Madonna have left the homes of major labels and taken-up residency in the independent hotel. Will it be a permanent one? That remains to be seen, but one thing is for certain: rooms are filling up fast.

It's apparent that being independent has become a right of passage; a badge of honor and valor that's proudly displayed for other music artists to identify with and applaud...a blueprint for greater autonomy, creativity, and financial dividends. But what does being an independent artist *really* mean?

In short, it means being a business person and an entrepreneur. That's the one little (and often overlooked) aspect of "going independent" that I never hear artists discuss, and it's the one major issue I have with industry professionals who promote being independent as more of a lifestyle, than a career choice.

Most artists are creative, emotional, right-brained people. Those are the intrinsic qualities that make them what they are. Those are also the qualities that make it difficult for them to function and thrive as business people who are required to engage in left-brained activities. But at every conference I attend, and every panel discussion that I witness, there is no mention of the necessity to *think* and behave like an entrepreneur while being an independent artist. It *never* comes up.

Why is that?

It's because for artists, the choice to "go independent" is often an emotional decision, not a business decision. It's not really a choice that they make, but rather one that is made for them when they are unsuccessful in landing the elusive and rarely obtained record deal. They are not responding to the scarcity of recording contracts, they are reacting to the frustrations that stem from not getting one. This frustration either becomes the fire that fuels their motivation to prove their worth, or the wet blanket that extinguishes their dreams, and validates someone else's opinion about their lack of commercial value.



They also don't mention that the most successful independent artists either came from, or have affiliation with, a major label.

By overemphasizing the creative freedoms and bigger paydays that await independent artists, focus is diverted from the *monumental* task of marketing and promoting music as a business person and entrepreneur. It's tantamount to telling people that they should just leave their jobs and work for themselves. That's unrealistic and downright ridiculous - especially without having the fundamental knowledge of what being self-employed entails. How many self-employed people do you know? Cut that number in half and that's how many successful independent artists there are.

Make no mistake about it; being an independent artist is the equivalent to being self-employed.

While everyone can recognize the fringe benefits such as freedom and flexibility that the self-employed enjoy, there are a myriad of challenges that they are constantly faced with in order to survive and succeed. Funding, legalities, taxes, overhead expenses, operational costs, accounting procedures, and attending to endless administrative details are functions of their everyday life. They also have marketing costs, but unlike music artists, they don't sell products that can be obtained for free.

So what does it take to succeed independently?

Ironically, operating like a major label. Go figure. The independent movement reminds me of teenagers who don't know what running a household requires, involves, or entails because their parents handle that responsibility. It's not until they have to run their own households that they are forced to learn how to do it on their own. The same holds true of the independent artists that attempt to run their own labels: they discover how expensive it is, and how much work it takes.

If you are going to get real about going independent and being successful at it (i.e. profitable), be aware that it can't be something that you just do on the weekends; it's a huge business decision that impacts your world both professionally and personally. It requires the same level of preparation, organization and commitment that being a prosperous business person entails. Establishing your success *and* maintaining it will be one of the hardest things you can do in your life, and one of the most rewarding.



Gian Fiero is a seasoned educator, speaker and consultant with a focus on business development and music/entertainment industry operations. He currently teaches at San Francisco State University where he conducts courses on Music Industry Career Planning and Publicity/Public Relations. His affiliations include National Association Of Record Industry Professionals (associate director); CLA (speaker); West Coast Songwriters (consultant); The Muse's Muse (producer of the Muse's Muse Awards); and SBA (business advisor).

T: 323.384.4488

E: mrgianfiero@yahoo.com

W: www.gianfiero.info

How Parents Can Help Their Minors Achieve Major Success in the Music Industry

by Gian Fiero



So you have a musically talented child or teenager? Chances are, one day, they will develop aspirations of being the next...(fill in the blank). While their talent may ignite attention from peers, friends and family members, parents should try to look at their child's talent objectively.

It's not easy to do. In fact, for many parents, it's *impossible* to do. Their lack of objectivity breeds delusion which ends up hurting them and their child in the long run.

This article can help you prevent that and provide you with a system of checks and balances that will enable you to offer logical guidance and direction to your child by using the following tips.

LET THEM EXPLORE. You watched them explore and learn how to navigate when they were babies, now you should let them do the same as a child with musical interests. If they want to be a drummer, buy them a drum set. If they want to be a guitarist, buy them a guitar. If they want to be a singer, buy them a karaoke machine. You get the point. By providing your child with the instruments they need, you will help them to strengthen their interests and to illustrate their seriousness.

INSTILL DISCIPLINE. Contrary to popular belief, discipline is the key to succeeding in the arts, not talent. Sure there are minors who are child prodigies, but in the music industry, the person who has the discipline to religiously practice their craft is the person who outshines those who do not - or have not - every time. If you can instill discipline early on, you will *greatly* increase your child's chances of success. Part of having discipline is initiative. After you've supplied your child with their instrument of choice, how much time does he/she spend with it? How quickly did he/she become competent in playing it? Discipline - or lack thereof - will be the determining factor.

SUPPORT THEM. You should be there - front and center - lending your support for every performance your child has. Not only does your encouragement mean a great deal to him/her, but it also gives you the opportunity to witness the impact that your child's talent has on people with an unbiased opinion. You can help them improve by offering a delicate mixture of praise *and* constructive feedback.

HAVE THEM COMPETE. Competition is what separates those who should be doing music as a hobby, and those who are most qualified to pursue it as a profession. Coincidentally, that gap is significantly narrowed with discipline, or widened by it. Competition also allows children to measure their talent against those of their talented peers and gives them a serious ego boost if they win; and incentive to get better. *American Idol* is essentially a talent show. The now defunct *Star Search* was also a talent show which was renowned for being used as a springboard for precocious music talents such as Usher, Britney Spears, Justin Timberlake, and Beyonce. Believe it or not, they *all* lost, but found motivation to work harder to increase their chances of winning the next time around...and they all did - in other ways.

BE A PROTECTIVE PARENT. If your child has what we industry professionals call, *undeniable* talent, someone will approach them with a business opportunity; whether it's to perform or record. In rare instances it may be a contract. When such situations arise, don't pretend that you know the business (if you don't). Do acknowledge that you are a protective and concerned parent and that any such offers made or extended to them will be evaluated by an attorney or knowledgeable consultant. Handling business on this fundamental level will safeguard your child in ways that you can't even imagine.

INVEST IN YOUR CHILD. Most parents invest in their children prematurely (and no, buying instruments is not an investment - that's a purchase). Paying for lessons of any kind is an investment. It constitutes a larger long term payment that can yield greater dividends *down the road*. Like most investments, some can't afford them, which is why it's advisable to have your child clear the progress, discipline, and perhaps even the competition hurdles discussed in this article *before* you invest your hard earned money. As challenging as it may be, your decision to invest in your child's fledgling music career should be one that's driven by benchmarks, not emotions. In the absence of such benchmarks, I suggest (if they are teenagers) encouraging minors to invest in themselves, and having the parents make an equal investment to measure their seriousness and hold them accountable in the process.

FIND A BUSINESS ALLY. There's a thin line between being a *concerned* parent and being a *stage* parent. Stage moms (and dads) are notorious for being a pain in the rear because of their controlling ways and obvious distrust. Professionals don't like dealing with them and executives have little patience for them. And yes, you *can* jeopardize your child's career with such antics. Understand that if your child does end up in a situation that requires professional attention you are the one who will execute his/her business dealings, interactions, and negotiations. This is why it's so common for parents to confuse their *legal* obligations with their *professional* occupation; bypassing the experience of qualified managers or failing to enlist the services of a competent attorney as a result. Sure some parents *do* make a career of handling their child's business affairs (Jessica & Ashlee Simpson's dad, Beyonce's father, and Chris Brown's mom, to name a few), but it's generally a good idea to find a business ally (manager, attorney, consultant) who can help you achieve, or manage your minor's music success *before* you need them.



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T: 323.384.4488

W: www.gianfiero

E: mrgianfiero@yahoo.com

Dealing with Industry Professionals

by Gian Fiero

At some point every ambitious music artist will have to deal with an industry professional. It may be an agent who thinks that you have what it takes to sell out a venue, a manager who expresses interest in helping you achieve greater career success, or an attorney who will negotiate that long sought-after record deal for you. When the time does come for you to establish these crucial relationships, you will be able to navigate your way through them with greater results if you observe these fundamental dos and don'ts.

Dos

DO check into our backgrounds for credibility before dealing with us. With the ease and access of various search engines on the Internet such as Google, it literally takes just a couple of minutes to get information on someone. Your background check should also include past clients or associates that can vouch for them. Legitimate professionals love to have their backgrounds checked into. It gives you the opportunity to gain a deeper appreciation and value for the services we provide.

DO have a full and complete understanding of what our jobs are. Your knowledge of what various professionals do should not be limited to how our help relates to your success. There are many people and factors that will determine the extent (or limit) of your success in the music industry; know what they are before you assume that the professional you are working with has super powers to make you an overnight success.

DO know what we have to gain from our involvement with you. This is perhaps the most difficult step in this list for many music artists because it forces them to look at things from two perspectives that they are not very comfortable with: a business perspective and the perspective of someone else. Ask yourself when dealing with any industry professional, on any level, this one question: Why should they (or should they not) help you? If your answer has something to do with money, then you will always be partially correct.



Don'ts

DON'T assume that every industry professional wants to hear your music. When we have chance encounters with you on the street, at conventions, seminars, or parties, what we want is motivation for a *business reason* to listen to your music. You can accomplish this by telling us more about the music you do, rather than how great (you think) you are.

DON'T underestimate our creative sensibilities. The fact of the matter is that most industry professionals come from a creative background. We are intimately aware of what it takes to make a quality song, or give an outstanding performance because many of us have been involved in the creative process at some point in our lives. That coupled with the fact that we listen to roughly about three times as much music as you do because it's a necessity and a fringe benefit of our job.

DON'T let your mouth be your greatest sales tool – unless you are using it to sing. Your talent, songs, following, and promotional materials are the **ONLY** things that will provide us with business reasons that will inspire us to work with you. This is critically important because many industry professionals are merely performing a service for someone else, and we rely on these tools to build interest and support for you from the key allies and decision makers in the communities that we belong to.

In every case, remember that the effectiveness of any professional is going to be largely determined by how committed they are and the proficiency in which they do their job. If you don't need our help (or if you are unwilling to accept it) then we have no basis for a working relationship. Take the time to assess what your business needs are before approaching us, and be receptive to guidance when you do. After all, your success is our success, and we are in the business of helping you achieve that success.