

# **Managerial Creativity**

## **A Study of Artist Management Practices in the Australian Popular Music Industry**

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## Summary

Artist managers 'create' careers for musicians, yet little has been written about their creativity in the academic domain. Thus this thesis develops the notion of managerial creativity. Artist managers build and maintain 'brands', and this is a creative industry function. The thesis begins with a description of what artist management is, then it reviews the way in which various Australian musicians' and artist managers' careers are created and maintained. A musical idea or product arises from the synergy of many sources and not only from the mind of a single person (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Therefore it is easier to enhance creativity by changing conditions in the environment the artist is located in than by trying to make artists think more creatively. Managerial creativity involves the creation and maintenance of the system, context or environment from which artistic creativity emerges and is therefore the facet of the music industry that can most effectively enhance musical creativity.

## Declarations

I certify that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. The work herein is entirely my own, except where acknowledged. Ethics committee approval has been obtained for this research: HE28OCT2005-D04335



Guy Morrow  
May 2006

## Publications

The following publications have emanated from this study:

Morrow, G (2003) 'Catherine Britt: Launching the 'Hillbilly Pickin' Ramblin' Girl' in P Hayward (ed), *Outback and Urban: Australian Country Music*, Gympie, QLD: AICM Press.

——— (2004) 'Sufficiency and Sustainability: Audry Auld's Career in the Australian Country Music Industry' in P Hayward and G Walden (eds), *Outback and Urban: Australian Country Music*, Gympie, QLD: AICM Press.

——— (2005) 'Lee Kernaghan: Marketing the Boy from the Bush' in M Evans and G Walden (eds), *Markets and Margins: Australian Country Music*, Gympie, QLD: AICM Press.

——— (2006) 'Selling Out or Buying In?' in S Homan (ed) *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

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# Introduction

In the music industry, commercially and artistically creative practitioners are often divided by mutual suspicion, defensiveness and culturally embedded assumptions and values. The commerce versus creativity dichotomy is problematic in this context because it privileges artistic creativity over other forms of creativity. This prioritisation restricts the extent to which musicians are willing to learn how to 'create' their own careers through accumulating knowledge about artist management. Therefore the way in which artist management is internally and externally theorised needs to be reconfigured. Artistic creativity and managerial creativity are interdependent. Australian musicians often lack institutional protection; for this reason the argument will be made in this thesis that they have to be just as creative in the development of their career as in the creation of their music. As will be explained, the majority of Australian musicians are self-managed (McMartin, Eliezer and Quintrell, 2002) and therefore artistic creativity and managerial creativity are often processes that artists engage with simultaneously themselves. If a separate artist manager is involved, then this manager must necessarily straddle a culturally constructed divide between 'commerce' and 'creativity'. The 'creativity' of the deals artist managers broker, and the plans they generate for their clients' careers, has not been acknowledged in the academic domain. This is a problem because this form of creativity is necessary for artistic creativity to flourish. This thesis therefore seeks to deconstruct the commerce versus creativity dichotomy through illuminating the cultural practices of a number of Australian artists and artist managers.

This thesis focuses on the role of the artist manager because “the manager is the only other individual, besides the artist, who gets to see and touch all the jigsaw puzzle pieces that fit together to create the artist’s career” (Frascona and Hetherington, 1997: 6). An analysis of the artist/manager relationship is therefore useful for a broad understanding of the many facets of the music industry’s complex system. The Australian music industry is driven by the artistic creativity of the musicians/songwriters who constitute this field. It is therefore more important to understand how their careers are built and managed than to focus on how the recordings they (may or may not) make are managed.

This thesis addresses an industrial issue; while there are hundreds of thousands of aspiring musicians who would like to obtain a contract with a record company, only a small percentage sign one. McMartin, Eliezer and Quintrell (2002) observe that in Australia: “about 345,700 people are involved in music across the industry. Of this number, 276,100 work as live performers and 96,450 are musicians who are paid for their work.” (8) They also note that in Australia “major labels claim that Australian acts only make up about 20% of their sales. Only one in ten signings make money.” (ibid: 9-2) Failure is the norm for artists who are trying to obtain recording contracts, and for the majority of artists who do actually sign recording deals. According to Frascogna and Hetherington (2004): “You have a better statistical chance of being struck by lightning than of having a number-one hit record or a top ten grossing concert tour.” (4). Although major record companies recover from a success rate that is less than 10% because of the overwhelming success of a minority of their artists (Frith, 2001: 35), the majority of Australian musicians operate outside the high-budget, high-risk star system that major record companies depend upon. Despite

failure being the norm in the recording industry, many Australian artists do survive and a substantial amount of Australian music is produced and consumed. Although, to date, music industry studies within the field of contemporary music research have tended to focus on the role of record companies, this thesis highlights the need for a more holistic view of the music industry that considers all five income stream groups (see below, pp. 67-68) in relation to artists', and artist managers' careers. This holistic view of the Australian music industry does not currently exist in the academic domain.

### ***a. Definitions of Artist Management***

This introduction provides definitions of artist management that will be employed throughout. Before proceeding however, it is important to note the manner in which this thesis approaches the issue of artist management. This thesis is not a neutral, disengaged reflection; the approach taken herein will analyse the subject in order to illuminate cultural practice and inform both internal and external theorisation of the cultural space in which artist management occurs. In other words, it is important to note at the outset that the author is an artist manager.

Artist management within the context of the Australian music industry is unique because quite often managers work *for* their artists. While in other fields managers are employed by capitalists to efficiently run their interests for them, artists employ managers to build and guide their own careers. Artists are both the capitalists and the product and generally speaking, musicians both own and sell the products of their labour. A brand image is what an artist's signs signify. This forms a major component of the artist's product and it both generates, and is generated by, an artist's career.

Artist managers for the most part do not employ artists the way managers in other fields employ staff who sell their labour to capitalists who subsequently own and sell the products of this labour.

The balance of power in the relationship between artist and manager is unique as the artist manager works for the artist while at the same time the artist works for the artist manager. Throughout an artist's career trajectory, this balance of power tends to shift as success<sup>1</sup> accumulates. A rise in the level of success will see the power balance shift in the artist's favour. However, in the period before success and after a decline in success the power balance will be in the artist manager's favour. This power balance is constantly evolving, and differs across genres; it must therefore be considered on a case-by-case basis. As Frith (1983) states, "if in the 1950s, it was obvious that Elvis Presley worked for Colonel Tom Parker, his manager, by the end of the 1970s rock's superstars were, equally obviously, employing managers (or management companies) to work for them" (109). Although within the field of Australian mainstream pop music, for example, some artists still work for their managers,<sup>2</sup> it is also clear that within genres such as Australian contemporary rock music and contemporary country music, many managers work for their artists.

Watson (2002) offers this definition of artist management: "A manager is a person who earns a living from helping artists build and maximise their musical careers" (2), while Woodruff (2002) states: "A manager's job is to create the perception that the

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'success' is being used here to refer to both a musician's creative and commercial success.

<sup>2</sup> This highlights the fact that artist management is a multifaceted industry practice. Examples of artists working for their managers include Il Divo which is a group that Simon Fuller constructed and manages, and Bardot which is an Australian group that is managed by employees of the Pop Stars franchise.

band is successful” (1). It is also evident that there is no such thing as *a* manager (Watson, 2002; Rogan, 1988). In order to illustrate this point, Watson notes that managers wear many different ‘hats’ in order to build and maximise the careers of their artists. Managers can be organisers, negotiators, motivators, counsellors, editors, designers, manipulators, strategists and much more. Watson’s argument is that every manager combines these different ‘hats’ in different combinations, thus creating their own unique and complex style (Watson, 2002: 2).

Rogan (1988) argues that since management is more a question of personality than policy (or anything else), what defines a perfect management candidate inevitably remains elusive and ambivalent. The ideal candidate must be cautious yet innovative, intuitive yet empirical, forceful but sensitive to artists’ feelings, aggressive in battle and reflective in victory, and wise but not intellectually intimidating. They must also be a sympathetic listener. Rogan claims that the mythical ‘perfect’ artist manager lies somewhere between the hard businessperson, the medical doctor and the dedicated schoolteacher (ibid. 382). The notion of a perfect model for artist management is problematic because the various ways in which managers operate are not only dependent on the individual manager’s personality. The methodologies artist managers employ need to be analysed within specific contexts. The distinct sections of the music industry in which individual managers operate constitute these contexts.

Every artist is different and therefore individual managers differ from one another. Watson (2002) notes that to understand a manager you have to first understand the artist they are managing. The dynamics between the artist and the manager should form the basis of any study of artist management. Indeed, the managerial role is

intricately connected to the artist and their work. No manager can be fully understood out of the context in which he/she and their artist(s) operate.

In contrast to the common argument that a strong artist-manager relationship is analogous to a good marriage, or that the personal manager is the alter ego of the artist (ibid: 34), it is evident that the dynamic is in fact quite different to a stereotypical 'good marriage'. A strong artist-manager relationship is unbalanced as each personal manager is necessarily a function of their artist's unique combination of needs (and not necessarily vice versa) – therefore if the manager is the 'alter-ego', this alter ego is necessarily subservient. As Peter Jenner (2002) notes:

*Nothing is forever, it's just a business relationship and not a marriage, and you should see losing an act as part of your development as a manager. (1)*

Although it is just another business relationship the artist may form, Frascogna and Hetherington (1997) note that more than any other person, the full-service personal manager is the most influential force behind an artist's career. His or her efforts are often critical to the artist's ultimate level of success or failure. They assert that given the critical role the manager plays in planning, execution, and day-to-day career control, it is essential that the artist and manager be on the same wavelength both personally and professionally. (34)

## ***b. The Music Industry***

An important initial task is to provide a delineation of the extent and coverage of the term ‘music industry’. The following music industry stakeholders have been identified:

- Creative artists such as composers, songwriters and musical performers;
- Agents, managers and promoters who act on behalf of artists;
- Music publishers who publish original works in various forms;
- Record companies that make and distribute records (LPs, cassettes, CDs, music videos, DVDs and digital files);
- Copyright collecting societies that administer the rights of artists, publishers and record companies;
- A variety of other service providers, including studio owners, manufacturers, distributors, retailers, broadcasters, venue operators, ticket agents, etc.;
- Users of music such as film-makers, multi-media producers, advertisers, sponsors etc.;
- Individual consumers who purchase a musical good or service (buying a record, attending a live performance, subscribing to a “pay” diffusion service) or consume it for free (listening to broadcasts, background music, etc.).
- Music related merchandise manufacturers.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Adapted from D. Throsby (2002) ‘The Music Industry in the New Millennium: Global and Local Perspectives’, unpublished paper prepared for Division of Arts and Cultural Enterprise, UNESCO, Paris: October 2002.

An analysis of the artist/manager relationship is useful for understanding the music industry because the music industry is a multifaceted and complex system. This approach will not prioritise one section of the music industry, such as the 'recording industry', over others.

This thesis endorses Watson's (2002) argument that the unique relationship between artist and manager is the nucleus around which a successful musical career revolves. In order to develop this argument further, Watson uses a bicycle wheel analogy to describe the structure that evolves due to the fact that (if successful) eventually the manager and the artist will assemble a network of other relationships to try and further the artist's career.

Watson (2002) claims that the artist and manager might build a team that includes record company staff, booking agents, live crew, publicists, accountants, music publishers, record producers, merchandisers and many other specialists. His analogy involves the unique combination of the artist and manager constituting the hub in the middle of a wheel. The artist and manager together work out where they want to go and how they want to get there. They then start assembling the additional members of the team around the hub like the spokes of a wheel. While the individual spokes themselves are important, the artist/manager hub remains pivotal in every situation.

Even after the artist and manager have assembled all the right 'spokes', the career 'wheel' still needs to be persuaded to roll in the right direction (Watson, 2002: 2). Watson states that most of the responsibility for this persuasion usually falls on the shoulders of the manager as their main job is to coordinate and persuade. This is why

if an artist is to become creatively and/or commercially successful, their career demands at least as much management as there is talent and ambition (Frascogna and Hetherington, 1997: 7).

Watson's analogy is useful as it suggests that artist managers each face the same basic set of challenges when attempting to establish, develop and sustain the careers of their artists. This analogy can also be used to highlight and analyse different managerial styles and methodologies. Further, (a) it can be applied to specific contexts, (b) it highlights the importance of the dynamic between the artist and the manager, (c) and it acknowledges the fact that there is no perfect model for artist management.