

Figure 10: Domestic and imported record sales: Selected countries: 2000

Country	Proportion of record sales (%)		
	Domestic	International	Classical
United States	92	5	3
Canada	12	82	6
Brazil	75	24	1
Mexico	46	52	2
France	51	42	7
Germany	40	52	8
UK	51	41	8
China	47	53	-
Japan	78	22	-
Indonesia	53	47	-
Australia	28	68	4
South Africa	23	74	3
World	68	28	4

Source: Calculated from International Federation of Phonographic Industries (IFPI) data.

This figure highlights the (albeit obvious) point that artist managers and artists from smaller, developed – and, significantly, Anglophone – countries such as Canada and Australia are going against the flow when trying to access key markets, particularly in the US, but also in the UK and Europe.

When considering a macro/global perspective, each artist's trajectory needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis as there are many other factors that can come into play. The Australian born Chief Marketing Officer for Sony/BMG, Tim Prescott, who is based in New York City, firmly maintains that ideally artist managers need the leverage of a major label to break worldwide. According to Prescott, if you do not have a deal with a major label it is not going to work/break because the entities involved will not have the marketing muscle required. Although this is indeed a truism, Prescott personally signed Australian band Powderfinger to Polygram/A&M

in Australia and he was involved in the release of the Cruel Sea's material in foreign territories and this methodology failed to work for either of these bands. Despite this failure, he felt this was still the best methodology to employ. He cites the band silverchair as being an example of this deal structure working well for an Australian band. Prescott claims that, in light of the digital revolution making the world smaller, signing a worldwide deal is crucial.

Of the three methods for releasing Australian recordings in foreign territories being considered here, Prescott discusses the following three examples: firstly, the signing of Australian rock band Jet directly to a label in the US and the UK; secondly, the signing of Australian rock bands Powderfinger and silverchair for the world out of Australia with a multinational label; and finally licensing Australian pop act Savage Garden and Australian rock band the Vines.

Synthesising these methodologies into one definitive strategy would be wrong; each individual career trajectory needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis. For example, in relation to Savage Garden's global success, Prescott notes:

Savage Garden had a lot of elements going for them. In many ways it came down to the strength of their manager, John Woodruff. He had experience in key foreign territories and he had built up solid relationships over a long period of time and he could therefore leverage deals for pre-existing recordings there. A band that is managed by an inexperienced friend is not going to be able to follow such a trajectory.

The experience and profile of the manager is one variable that needs to be considered, while the perceived longevity of a particular artist within a specific genre is another. From her perspective as a music business scholar based in New York City, Catherine Moore⁷⁹ (2005) points out that:

It depends on the longevity of the artist. If you are talking about an artist whose time-span in the marketplace is only going to be one year then the artist really does need to work with a major label because this is the only label that is going to be able to have the marketing power and the distribution networks that are needed to realise their short-term potential.

In some instances, signing for the world with a multinational company out of Australia and signing directly to a major label may enable the manager to access 'marketing power'. Signing directly to a major label in a foreign territory can allow foreign practitioners to have involvement in, and ownership of, the creative process. However, a definitive reading of these strategies would be to falsely simplify the process as there are other key points that need to be considered here. The following section will outline some of the pitfalls that can hinder an Australian manager's global strategy for an artist.

⁷⁹ Catherine Moore is the director of the music business program at New York University.

b. Flexibility

Access to marketing power/capital and the psychological involvement of foreign A&R staff were flagged by some of the interviewees as being key arguments for signing directly to major labels in foreign territories and sourcing deals with multinationals from Australia. However, signing such deals and actually accessing the marketing power and receiving the support during the creative process are two different steps. Moore states that while access to the marketing power of the majors is desirable, the “majors have their lists of priorities and if you are not one of them then you can be blocked”. Differentiation within, placement within, and especially luck⁸⁰ within the foreign market and within the major record company’s stable, can dramatically affect the accessibility of this capital. Indeed, there are no guarantees for success with regard to any of the methods being discussed here.

A point upon which multiple interviewees agreed concerned the desire to have flexibility with regard to whom Australian artists work with in key foreign territories. Sourcing a worldwide deal with a multinational record company from Australia limits this flexibility. Hennessey (2005) states: “most Australian managers are shrewd enough to insist upon having a ‘use it or lose it’ clause written into their artist’s contract, if it isn’t there already”. This suggests that this method gives the artist and manager a degree of flexibility like the other two methods being discussed. In response to this point however, New York City based attorney and artist manager Reid Hunter⁸¹ points out that:

⁸⁰ ‘Luck’ is being discussed here as a contextual phenomenon, in that in line with Bourdieu’s work, it is dependent on the amount of social, economic and cultural capital that is present and, in line with Csikszentmihalyi’s work, it is dependent on the motivation of the individual and the extent to which they have access to the field and the domain they wish to work in.

⁸¹ Reid Hunter is most well-known for his management of the North American artist John Mayer.

Most contracts that are signed with a major out of Australia for the world have a clause in them that states that if the US branch of the company doesn't want to release the album in the US then the artist's management are free to shop the record around to other labels. However, this clause is quite redundant because if another company in the States picks up the record and breaks it in that marketplace then the company with the original contract will have the right to release the artist's second or next album in that market. Therefore why is a US company going to spend the capital to market the album when the first company the artist signed their worldwide deal with is potentially going to see the return from the investment through the release of the next album?

Thus sourcing a deal with a multinational company from Australia can be disadvantageous on two fronts: if the Australian artist is not prioritised by the foreign branch of the record company, they may be blocked from the much needed marketing muscle; and although this lack of prioritisation may mean they want to shop around for other deals in the territory, they may also be blocked from doing this as the alternative label may not want to invest in a one off project that will enable the original label to see the return on the artist's next project because the originating contract will usually cover multiple albums.

Keith Welsh (2005) notes that signing for the world from Australia is challenging because if you are successful within Australia and you then try to break into another territory, the record company gives you an additional advance:

The money that would be recouping the company's expenditure in Australia, and then potentially forming income for the artist, is spent trying to break another territory. The record company doesn't have a problem doing this because they are spending money that is in the pipeline to the artist anyway.

He continues by claiming that in most other businesses the revenue generated in one territory is reinvested in that territory, and it is kept fairly separate from the operations that are set up in other territories. In this way multiple revenue streams can be created from different territories, and if the business is successful in one territory this cannot be undermined by failure in other territories. Therefore, rather than signing with a multinational record company for the world, signing an artist different deals in separate territories can be advantageous. However, if the artist and manager work territory, by territory much more pressure is placed on the manager's abilities rather than a multinational record company's ability.

c. Go Where the Love Is

With regard to the three methods for Australian artist's international career trajectories that are being discussed, it is clear that there are organisational and cultural differences between territories. Pitfalls that block an artist and manager in one

territory may not in another. Hennessey notes that in this regard, the difference between the US and Europe is that if you are on a major label in Australia, and you go to Europe, the gatekeeper there is the product manager or the marketing manager – not the A&R representative. This means that there is a completely different set of criteria against which they judge the record:

They look at the record as a completed record and they see whether there is a market for the record. They think about it really in terms of marketing – from a marketing point of view. They're not listening to it from an A&R point of view ... So there is a completely different set of criteria to getting a record released in Europe as there is to getting a record released in America.

In Hennessey's experience, the most viable ways of seeing a release in this territory involve either the process of signing directly to a US independent or major label or sourcing a deal with a multinational out of Australia and having it released in the US through an inter-company license agreement. Licensing or assigning the right to exploit the copyright in a pre-existing record to a label and releasing an existing product through an inter-company license agreement are more viable strategies for Europe than for the US.

Although it is difficult to glean much from such a generalisation as there are so many variables and each artist and manager goes about it a different way, one notable point Hennessey makes is that he and his artists:

probably spent way too much time chasing a market that didn't want us and not enough time in a market that did want us – which was Germany. With hindsight we should have moved to Berlin, not LA. If we'd spent a year in Germany we probably would have sold more records but then again who knows. I'd like to think that we could have sold a couple of tens of thousands of records and then we could have used that to leverage into the UK and then from there we could have leveraged into the US. But then we spent all our time and money in LA.

The main lesson Hennessey learnt from his experience of releasing the Superjesus's material in foreign territories was that the manager and the artist should go to the territory that wants them:

If you're getting interest out of a territory, go there because that's the hardest thing to get – find your champions, whether that be a publisher or an A & R guy or a booking agent or a promoter or whatever – you find your champion and you give them something to work with.

Sydney-based artist manager and studio owner Marshall Cullen (2005) has had extensive experience working abroad. He too noted that the level of interest an artist

is receiving from various parts of the world should govern where the manager focuses their energies, and that this supersedes the most 'obvious' option discussed above:

Early on the manager should go to things like South by South West, CMJ and the other trade fairs and meet other people at the same level or at a higher level and learn more about that territory and how it all works ... that sort of thing is invaluable. Rather than just sitting in your home territory and saying let's do a deal for America – I mean you wouldn't do that with any other business either. You'd do your research into the market and the music trade fairs are a fantastic way to do it. By giving out 10 or 20 CDs to people in these territories and seeing what comes back then you can apply that theory of "go where the love is". There may be one guy who happens to love the CD but he is in the back end of Eastern Europe but, whatever, you go there.

The role of the manager is therefore to find mentors who will champion the artist, wherever such people may be. There is an opportunity where there is a mentor/champion in that he or she will have a network and then this network will link through to other networks. Cullen notes: "that's the art of management in many ways – it's all about the networks and plugging into someone else's and then linking through to more networks from theirs."

Artist management is all about connections between people. Managerial creativity therefore lies in the effective development of relationships.

d. Flip Tours

UK-based artist manager Peter Jenner⁸² (2005) advises that a manager should start building networks outside of his/her home territory as soon as possible. He argues that a single territory such as Australia or the UK is not large enough for an artist to be able to sustain a career. For the majority of artist managers, smaller independent companies around the globe present the only opportunity to do this. According to Catherine Moore (2005), working with independent companies can be advantageous:

The majors will only give their big marketing budget to their big artists and this can block the artists who are not prioritised by the major label. Therefore an artist is potentially better off going with an independent label and finding another independent label in a targeted territory with which they can form a reciprocal relationship.

By forming reciprocal relationships with practitioners who are operating at similar industry levels within foreign territories, Australian artist managers who are working with independent bands can navigate around conventional industry channels. The term 'flip tour' is used to describe the way in which managers in different territories can tap into each other's networks. The simplest version involves a band being helped

⁸² Jenner is most well-known for his previous management of Pink Floyd and the Clash and his current management of Billy Bragg. However, Jenner also co-manages the Australian flagship independent band the John Butler Trio in the UK.

and even managed in a foreign territory by the manager of the independent band they are supporting there; when the foreign band visits Australia this favour is returned.

Michael McMartin (2005) notes that this idea can be taken further in that three bands that are all operating at similar industry levels in three different territories can all work together to build a tour of the three territories. Each band headlines in their home territory and then plays a support rôle in foreign territories. Through this process the management can share the workload and costs, and the artists are exposed to the fan bases of the other bands. Also, there is access to the art worlds that each manager has built in their home territory. McMartin states that through this process the tour can build and it can be taken to a fourth territory that is foreign to all three bands. Through employing this methodology, managers are more likely to be able to license the right to exploit the copyright in their artists' pre-existing recordings to independent labels that are operating in the foreign territories. This is because the practitioners involved with these labels do not need creative involvement to satisfy their egos as the incentive here lies in the reciprocity of the relationship.

Michelle Margherita (2005) is a member of the British bands Farrah and the Bad Machines and her perspective is in line with McMartin and Moore's. She notes that the independent route is not necessarily the most desired, or the most advantageous. However signing directly to a major label in a foreign territory, sourcing a deal with a multinational out of Australia, or licensing the right to exploit the copyright in a pre-existing record to a major label in any territory are often options that are unavailable to the majority of bands. She states that:

It's a difficult time for licensing right now; there are literally thousands of brilliant English bands who are looking for record/license deals (and who aren't getting them) and a lot of labels just don't have any money to spend on new, unknown acts. It's all about getting in with a small indie who will work hard for the band and get the groundwork done, letting it build to something bigger.

Indeed industry practitioners rarely help bands before the bands have built a foundation for their careers themselves. Artists need to build a groundswell beneath their own work. They also need to have money to spend so as to balance a relationship between them and a small independent label that will help them take their career to the next level. The relationship between the small independent label and the band then enables this process to be repeated until there is a sufficient groundswell beneath the band for them to become of interest to a major label that will help the band reach yet another level.

e. Conclusion

The industrial issue addressed in this section concerned the fact that if Australian artists and artist managers solely operate in Australia, they can only ever access 2% of the global market for popular music (Welsh, 2005). However, there is no magic button that such managers can press in order to succeed in foreign territories. As there is no definitive managerial 'method' for Australian artist managers to employ in order to achieve success in foreign territories, this section has primarily served to 'map out'

the issues surrounding the three methods for releasing Australian recorded product overseas that were discussed throughout.

This section does not contain a single/definitive line of argument concerning these methods as there are many variables relating to these options because every artist is different and is in a different situation. There has instead been an explicit attempt to analyse a selection of the many facets that constitute this complex topic. It is evident that Australian artists and artist managers should not become disillusioned because there is 'no answer', rather they should feel optimistic because there are 'multiple answers'.

Although there is no single definitive answer, this research has led to the following observations that do blanket this topic. Firstly, Australian artist managers need to make long-term plans and they need to build long-term relationships (if they see their acts as having long-term viability). Managerial creativity is related to psychology. There are many variables that constitute the context that an artist manager may desire to work in overseas. The creative manager must read the context correctly and act on it and therefore managerial creativity necessitates having the ability to build and use networks of people in order to access yet more networks. This is because part of reading the context involves understanding the psyche of each individual who is involved with an artist's career development. Furthermore managers need to be able to ascertain how to best utilise the dynamic of the relationships between the people within these networks. It is therefore crucial that Australian artist managers start the process of meeting practitioners in foreign territories as soon as possible in order to

build long-term relationships and understand the needs and perspectives of cultural intermediaries who influence musical taste in key foreign territories.

The various music trade fairs that take place in key foreign territories provide Australian managers with an opportunity to do this. A list is provided in Appendix 1. This list of music conferences and trade fairs is by no means complete but it does highlight the scope and diversity of such events. It is advisable that Australian artist managers formulate long lead up strategies before they actually attend these events. These strategies should involve the managers networking at such events at least a year in advance of taking their artists to showcase at them. Research needs to be encouraged as the artists who find success at such music trade fairs are the ones who do their own extensive research and who leverage pre-existing relationships.

Analogies between dating, seducing and forming a continuous relationship with a partner in one's personal life and the process of building relationships to further an artist's music in key foreign territories often form a part of the Australian music industry vernacular. By analogy, Australian artist managers need to go on multiple dates in foreign territories in order to get to the stage where there is a first kiss and then to the stage where this connection develops into a mutually enhancing long-term relationship. If a manager works territory by territory in order to build separate relationships and revenue streams, rather than working through one worldwide deal, he/she can be placed under more pressure as such promiscuity can lead to conflicting demands on the manager's time from the different partners. Juggling such conflicting demands is a major facet of the artist manager's role. Managers need to have the foresight to build their artist's career in other territories at the same time as the artist

is seeing success in their home territory. This is so that, as a team, they have a territory to go to once the artist's career invariably takes a downturn in the territory in which they have previously been successful.

There is a perception within the Australian industry that if an artist who has a career at the macro/national level of the industry stays and works only in Australia, their career will burn out. Therefore such an artist and their management need to have enough territories on their side so that at any one time at least one of the territories will still be receptive to the artist's music. However, it is also crucial that while Australian artist managers are trying to build their artists' careers overseas they do not neglect the relationships that they have built in their home territory; if they do they may well come back to nothing.

Chapter 3

Australian Country Music Management

This chapter addresses a scholarly issue; the genre of Australian country music has been allocated a low status within the Australian cultural and academic psyche. The following research serves to play an important role in raising the cultural and academic status of Australian country music through a detailed analysis of three unique career trajectories. In relation to this objective, Walden (2003) notes that:

As can be seen from the growing attendance figures at the National Country Music Muster as well as from the numerous Country Music Festivals held around Australia each year, country music plays an important cultural and commercial role in the lives of a significant number of Australians. Now is the time for the academy to acknowledge this and give it recognition by allocating some of the public funding which supports Australian university research programs to the genre. (iii)

This issue will be addressed through the study of independent country artist Audrey Auld, Australian country music icon Lee Kernaghan, and potential international star Catherine Britt. Within the context of this thesis, this chapter emerged to provide a contrast with the broad approach taken in the previous chapters. The previous chapters demonstrated that there are important common features to artist management practices and that general industry trends do directly impact on this profession. In

order to further understand what managerial creativity is, it is necessary now to consider the domain of Australian country music management separately and in a detailed way. At a more abstract level, artist management practices within the many genres that constitute Australian contemporary music share common traits; but such a level of abstraction misses many of the most interesting and vital aspects of managerial creativity.

I. Case Study 4: Sufficiency and Sustainability: Audrey Auld's Career in the Australian Country Music Industry

Audrey Auld is a self-managed Australian country music artist who was based on the Central Coast of New South Wales (NSW) during the 1990s and early 2000s. She is now based in California. In partnership with Bill Chambers,⁸³ Auld formed Reckless Records in 1998 and launched it with their duet album *Looking Back to See*. This album won the award for Best Duo Recording in the 1998 Victorian Country Music Awards, Best Album in the Australian Independent Country Music Awards, Best Band and Best Traditional Album in the Independent Country Music Awards of Germany and was favourably reviewed in the US trade magazine *Billboard*. Auld herself recorded and produced her first solo album *The Fallen* and released it in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. In 2001, *The Fallen* was nominated for the ARIA's Best Country Album, The Australian Independent Country Music Award's Best Album and Female Vocal and the Country Music Association of Australia (CMAA) Toyota Golden Guitar Awards Female

⁸³ Chambers is the founder of the Dead Ringer Band and father of Kasey Chambers, whose band he also leads.

Vocal and Best New Talent. She produced and released her second album, *Losing Faith*, in 2002. This album was also well received by critics.

Auld has toured Australia with visiting artists such as Fred Eaglesmith, Junior Brown and Dale Watson, and she performed at the Sydney 2002 Gay Games. Reckless Records has recently released Bill Chambers' latest ARIA-nominated album *Sleeping with the Blues*, albums by Fred Eaglesmith, Mary Gauthier and The Yearlings and a compilation CD entitled *Reckless Records Garage Sale: 1997-2003*. In 2003, Auld relocated to California for personal reasons. She also relocated her label Reckless Records to the US, and in 2006, added her married name to her own and released *Texas* by Audry Auld Mezera through the label. The album features many prominent US country musicians and it has received numerous positive reviews both in Australia and in the US. Auld Mezera is booked to play an independent tour of California during the first half of 2006.

This chapter firstly analyses the 'world' or 'field' within which Auld's music has been produced,⁸⁴ and then discusses the manner in which Auld's association with Bill Chambers and the Chambers family⁸⁵ has assisted her positioning for a successful independent musical career. In Auld's case, artistic creativity and managerial creativity are interdependent. Because she lacks institutional protection, Auld has had to be just as creative in the development of her career as in the creation of her music. As

⁸⁴ Here I am drawing on the work of McIntyre (2001), Ryan and Peterson (1982), Rosenberg (1986), Pierce (2000), Frith (1996) and Woodruff (2002).

⁸⁵ It will be argued that the Chambers' family name has become a powerful brand name within the alternative country music scene both nationally and internationally.

mentioned previously, the majority of Australian musicians are self-managed and therefore artistic creativity and managerial creativity are often processes that artists engage with simultaneously (and alone). Auld exemplifies this notion through the way in which in career commerce and creativity are interdependent due to the fact that she manages, finances, produces, writes and releases her own product. The idea that stars are 'made not born' will also be explored in relation to Auld's career and the fact that she does not have a marketing machine surrounding her. From a managerial perspective, the fact that certain avenues for additional income are not available to her (because she is self-managed) will also be analysed.

a. Country music community as 'field'

Analysing North American country music, Rosenberg (1986) argues that country music practice is a collaborative process. Traditionally, many country music artists have emerged from families and communities with strong folk music traditions (152). Auld's background differs from this characterisation in that she did not come into contact with a community that had a strong country/folk music tradition or that possessed the relevant country/folk related-cultural capital until relatively late in her life. However, Auld did have access to a domain of knowledge that enabled her to build music-related cultural capital. Auld grew up in Tasmania and started playing classical violin when she was six. For a short while she played in the Tasmanian Youth Orchestra. When asked whether she grew up within a musical community,

Auld⁸⁶ stated:

My dad's a jazz piano player, like trad jazz. He has a really good groove... He played piano a lot in the house and he played in a jazz band as well ... Mum re-married when I was about 12. Being the groupie that she was, she married a trumpet player. He played in a Dixieland jazz band and was a really good trumpet player. So yeah, they had lots of parties at home with jazz bands. They'd go to jazz society barbeques which were just an excuse for people to get ripped and have some music playing.

Rosenberg outlines the different career stages that follow on from some country artists' communal/folk beginnings. He identifies these 'status' stages as *apprentice*, *journeyman*, *craftsman* and *celebrity*. While Auld's career might, arguably, be aligned with the second and/or third of these – she has not followed these identifiable career 'stages' in an orthodox way. This is because Auld only became interested in traditional country music when she was in her twenties:

I moved to Sydney when I was 21, and right before I left, a friend had made me up this tape of John Prine, Bob Wills, Jimmy Dale Gilmore and Lyle Lovett – and I think I heard some Patsy because a friend of mine was in a band singing

⁸⁶ All comments attributed to Audrey Auld are, unless otherwise indicated, taken from an interview with the author in September 2003.

Patsy Cline songs. After that it became a private thing ... I didn't know anybody who liked country music. It wasn't something I shared with anybody.

Using Rosenberg's characterisation of country musicians' career trajectories in conjunction with theories of the 'worlds' or 'fields' in which culture is produced, one can identify that it was not until Auld started working within a network of other self-managed musicians that her musical career and song-writing ability materialised. McIntyre (2001) argues that:

It is the interplay between the person, the field, and the field of works that makes practice possible ... In this way songwriters have agency, but only within the limits of the system they work within. In short, they operate within a system that shapes and governs their creativity while they contribute to and alter the system. One of the vital components of this system is the 'field'. It is to the field that a songwriter must take a song in order to have its merits judged against all other songs existing in the domain. (141)

The 'field' Auld entered is illustrated by the following quotation that concerns her musical influences:

I don't know if you know who influences you. I mean I'm influenced by Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn and Tammy Wynette. I think Patsy's pretty ingrained in me. I also draw a lot from the

*Carter family, Steve Earle, Buddy Miller, Lucinda Williams,
Patty Griffin, Emmylou Harris, Kasey Chambers, Bill
Chambers, Fred Eaglesmith and Mary Gauthier.*

As discussed earlier in relation to the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1996), the contemporary western popular music industry has tended to structure itself around the concept of the 'artist'; however, the 'artist' is a problematic entity as a work of art is subject to a reliance upon a network of workers/players. Thus, it is significant that when asked whether she planned to be a self-managed artist and if she set out to run an independent label, Auld stated that:

It's not a choice that you make. It's about working with people who are the right people to work with. And I think they're really hard to find. I mean I'm lucky that I found Bill Chambers. He's my partner in this business and we help each other a lot. I've been approached by people about management and other people in really feeble ways but if it's meant to be it'll happen. It is a business and it's very hard to find somebody who is prepared to really take responsibility and understand that business. Unless you're willing to really hand something over. I'm very inspired by Fred Eaglesmith. I see how you can have a good life. It's not about always wanting more. It's about doing whatever it takes to create this lifestyle. Like taking on an agent. I think it's very hard to just work with one

agent because they don't make that equation that you're going to have to pay the rent and the food and the bills. That actually requires working a lot.

Auld's independent record label, Reckless Records, is a manifestation of the music community, 'art world' or field to which she now belongs.

b. "Losing Faith"

The recording of Auld's second album *Losing Faith* involved a group of leading Australian and international country music figures; many are/were based in towns on the NSW central coast and in Nashville in the US. While Auld produced the album herself, it was engineered at various stages by Bill Chambers, Michael Carpenter, Stuart French, Philip Scoggins, Michael Rose and by Jeff McCormack (who also mixed the album). The studio band included Bill Chambers (guitars and vocals), Chris Haigh (bass and rhythm guitar), Glen Hannah (electric guitar), Michael Carpenter (drums), Mick Albeck (fiddle), George Bibicos (piano), Sunil De Silva (percussion) and many other prominent country musicians. Backing vocalists included leading alternative country singer-songwriters and performers Kasey Chambers, Crystal Bailey, Camille Te Nahu, Mary Gauthier, Kieran Kane and Fred Eaglesmith. As such a line up suggests, the album is a solid, professional production that fits smoothly into the late 1990s/early 2000s style of contemporary Australian country music that has achieved success in its generic niche (exemplified by Kasey Chambers' work).

The album includes 13 tracks that comprise 11 originals, a cover of Fred Eaglesmith's *You Did* and a cover of Kieran Kane and Claudia Scott's *Harmony*. The covers serve to locate Auld within a community of contemporary alternative country performers. The two covers are positioned towards the end of the album. Eaglesmith's *You Did* is sung in a laid-back manner to an acoustic guitar, rhythm section and Dobro backing in a style that recalls 1960s pop-folk. The final track, Auld's cover of Kane and Scott's *Harmony*, is also one of the brighter tracks on the record and is performed to a slow, sparse textural backing, in which Michel Rose's pedal steel guitar provides a plaintive melodic fill behind Auld and Kieran Kane's restrained, emotive vocals. The inclusion of this material by Eaglesmith, who is also a favourite writer of Kasey Chambers, and material by Kane and Scott, locates Auld's original songs within a raw and often acerbic vein of alternative country music.

Auld's publicist's press release for the album states that:

In Losing Faith Audrey has re-invented hillbilly rock, setting it with moments of acoustic sweetness, of innocence lost or regained. 13 tracks: novocain candy for your old aches, and an oxy torch for the new. Dusting them off or blowing the smoke away, Losing Faith is a chronicle, a crucible of personal agonies: the getting over the things we never get over, forgetting the unforgettable. Auld takes musical and emotional fragments to forge a new whole, charming the phoenix from the ashes. The relief in despair, the joy born of sorrow – these are

adult emotions, not Nashville sentimentality ...

As this colourfully-phrased press release suggests, Auld's original material concerns the darker side of the psyche. Auld has a roughly hewn tone to her voice that ironically gives a degree of innocence to her performance persona. The title track and the track *Denied* express anguish about the reality of falling in and out of love. The third track, *Our Lady of Sorrows*, and the twelfth track, *Ain't No Joy*, are the album's most sombre songs. The former has an edge of depression and resignation that is produced by Auld's vocals and Albeck's droning fiddle parts while a similar effect is produced in the latter track by the harmony created when Auld and Mary Gauthier's vocals work in conjunction with one another. Unlike these three, *Not Who I Am* involves broader subject matter; Auld makes reference to male promiscuity, sacred sites, honour and war. By contrast, the tracks *Doin' Well* and *Next Big Nothing* are irreverent, zestful hoedown style numbers in which Auld seemingly reflects on the status of her career through humourously expressing her attitude. In *Doin' Well*, Auld engages with popular discourse concerning country musicians' career trajectories:

You say go to Austin

It really happens there

The college kids are fresh and ripe

And there's music in the air

Well I say yeah

You can go to hell

I'm staying here

I'm doing well

You say New York City

That's the place to be

High-cotton country

And bagels in the streets

You tell me in Santa Cruz

They're putting on a show

Kpig on the radio

It's where I gotta go

Now I know about Nashville

Where everyone's a star

Even if you drive a cab

Or work behind a bar

And what about New Orleans

On the Gulf of Mexico

Lucinda's on the road map

And on every stereo

So don't tell me about LA

Or the House of Blues

It's got everything to die for

And everything to lose

And I say yeah

I'm doing well

I'm staying here

And you can go to hell

Similarly, *Next Big Nothing* concerns the issue of stardom in the country music industry:

I'm gonna be the next big nothing

You won't see my name on MTV

I'm gonna be the next big nothing

No one knows my name in Tennessee

Once I thought that I would be a big star

Making everybody look at me

Driving to the bank in my big car

And looking at myself on TV

Mama said that I was gonna make it

That I'd be on the Grand Ole Opry

Then I'd stick my hands in wet concrete

But no-one ever thought of asking me

Here Auld expresses an attitude to the glamour and industrial power of MTV and Nashville (and its depiction of a broader American dream) which mingles indifference and resignation, evoking various 'distances' from Nashville and the realities and implications of being a performer within the 'art world' of Australian country music. Indeed, although Auld's relocation to Texas in 2003 adds an element of irony to the lyrics above and her operation within the North American country music scene evokes the clichés mentioned in these lyrics, it was her marriage to an American that led to this change, rather than a career move designed to attain stardom. Although she is now a member of a North American art world, Auld is still operating as an independent artist in a way that suggests that the American dream is still unattainable for her.

c. Branded Community

Auld's talent and her association with Bill Chambers and the Chambers family have assisted her in securing a relatively high profile, self-managed and independent career. Within the alternative country music scene, the Chambers family identity has become a powerful brand name. Through the process of branding, the unique quality of a musical act becomes instantly recognisable and condensed into a specific image and through an association with it, an entire community of performers can become

effectively branded-by-association. This is due to the fact that popular music operates via a process of signification.

The musical community that Auld operated within is one that acquired a particular public profile as a result of the successful strategy that Kasey Chambers' management and label EMI employed to ensure that her album *The Captain* was perceived to be, and was in fact marketed as a mainstream (as opposed to a country) release. This was boosted by the groundwork laid by The Dead Ringer Band, the presentation of the Chambers family's biography in John Lomax III's book *Red Desert Sky* (2001), and Catherine Britt's successful signing to BMG USA for the North American market. As previously stated, Frith (1996) asserts that, "the familiarity of the piece is a surrogate for the quality ascribed to it. To like it is almost the same thing as to recognize it" (13). Through relentless touring, word-of-mouth support and via the substantial promotional budgets that have been put behind some members of this community, this music community (or 'art world') itself has high brand name recognition. This has, in turn, aided Auld's career as an independent artist because she belongs to this community and now – to some degree – flows on, through her, to the less known artists she works with and who appear on Reckless Records.

d. Independent Decision Chain

As discussed previously, Ryan and Peterson (1982) developed the notion of an 'art world' through conducting a case study of country music. They employed a familiar

mechanical metaphor in their discussion of the work of skilled professionals who have a part in shaping a musical work as it goes through a series of stages which they believed resembled an assembly line (superficially at least) (1982: 11). In Auld's case there has been no formal 'decision chain' because she manages, finances, produces, writes and releases her own products, and the brand image surrounding her products has effectively been created by 'default'.

This characterisation refers to the fact that Auld does not have a set strategy in place for her career nor does she consider a single product (or brand) image. Her informal decision chain involves a much smaller network of practitioners than Ryan and Peterson envisaged. When asked whether she had a long-term strategy for Reckless Records and her own career, she replied:

Ummm – oh Gawd... This is why I need a manager! I guess it's just to keep doing what I'm already doing. I have actually just started writing songs for my next album and well I guess that I don't have a strategy. I just want to keep playing gigs and writing songs and making records and putting them out. Just keep doing what I'm doing ... I don't have any long-term strategies at the moment because I've learnt that life doesn't really work that way. I used to be like that and when I started playing full-time I'd freak out because the months ahead didn't have a whole lot going on. I don't know if it is to do with being a musician or just because you're working in a normal

freelance situation you can't be planning too far ahead. Bill really taught me that. He just used to say that it's all cool – it will be OK and it always is. You just go with it a little bit more. You just start to plan a few months ahead rather than a year ahead or whatever. I mean I know that you should with some things like your albums. Bill's going to produce my next album. So I guess I'm just really focusing on that. I've also done a lot of solo acoustic stuff over the last year and I'm really looking forward to working with some new musicians.

Ryan and Peterson's 'decision chain' operates differently for an independent self-managed artist such as Auld. For her, commerce and creativity are interdependent. Popular music theorists have focused on the 'commerce versus creativity' dichotomy. As argued earlier, much discourse surrounding the concept of creativity in the popular music industry has revolved around the argument that artists are solitary creative agents who initially work outside any institutional constraints but whose work is then colonised through commerce. However, Auld's career to date highlights an opposing argument; for Auld, manufacturing a CD and putting it out on her label is also a creative process. When asked why she decided to start her own label, Auld stated that it was:

Probably because I wanted to approach the whole thing in a professional manner and I saw it as a long-term thing. I knew it was about having a catalogue. I'd come out of working in

animation for 6 years and live action before that and there's a whole process in animation. The film industry is much more professional than the music industry. It's a lot clearer and a lot more defined. People are respectful of other people's jobs. The whole level is just raised. So I tried to apply that approach to putting out a record but I don't know if I thought about it too much. I just thought that I want to put my records out. Putting a CD together and putting it out is a whole other creative thing. I learn something from putting out every album. Where you spend your money for example. I find it a lot easier to promote other people's albums than my own. I actually have a publicist who helps do that because you just can't do that yourself, you can't look at your own work objectively and you can't go "hey – have you listened to my album? It's fantastic!" Some people do but I'm just not like that.

e. Stars are Made not Born

Pierce's (2000) assessment of 'stars' within the country music industry in Nashville in the US is also in line with the production of culture perspective and with the idea of an 'art world'. Discussing a different section of the international country music industry to that Auld is involved in, she states:

With few exceptions, Nashville recording stars are made, not

born ... [the country music industry] is a high-powered, highly competitive, fast-paced world in which one will not become a star without the help of large amounts of well spent money, including promotional budgets ranging up to a million dollars per artist. Making a star in today's worldwide marketplace involves a team effort by some of the world's most highly skilled musicians, songwriters, audio and video producers, engineers, executives, managers and media specialists. (Pierce, 2000: xvii)

One reviewer has written of Auld that: "if there was much meritocracy in the country music world, Audrey Auld might be a star".⁸⁷ In line with Pierce's argument, without the promotional budget of a major record label it is almost impossible for Auld to become a 'star' – whatever her talents. When asked whether she would consider signing to a major label in order to make use of the promotional budget a large label could offer, Auld replied:

I honestly don't know. I used to think, "Yeah for sure!" but now I just don't know. I guess that I'm just more realistic in that I'm nearly 40 and you know I think that a major label has to spend a lot of money on someone. But then I think of people like Paul Kelly who were signed later in their life and he has a big catalogue and he is an artist who has got it all going on so

⁸⁷ According to her own press release, this quotation is attributed to an unnamed piece in *Sing Out* magazine.

he is easy for a label to sign and have it work. Because he has got it going on. Same as Kasey. Even though she was young they were lucky with her because she had it all going on. So they find her easy and she is doing it right. But I do think that they do go for younger acts because they need to get a return on their money. The longer that act's career is going on the longer they get a return. Maybe, but then they just drop artists. In America they just drop them if they don't get a gold record or get to somewhere on the chart. So it depends on what they want to do.

As an independent artist, Auld has been able to utilise only two of the five main income stream groups available to contemporary country musicians; her business receives income from the sale of tickets for live shows and from the sale of CDs. The advance that a songwriter can receive from signing their songs to a publishing company, and the income that can be generated when the publisher finds other avenues for the songwriter's material in order to raise additional capital is income that can provide a songwriter with a valuable financial lifeline. Over time, the royalty payments that such a contract can provide often operate like a superannuation fund for the songwriter. However, Auld has yet to pursue this additional income stream since, as a busy, self-managed artist she has not had the time to pursue a publishing deal. Auld also claims that she has not had the time to gain sponsorship from a private entity or funding from one of the state or federal government's music related

initiatives. When asked whether she thought that she should pursue any of these avenues for additional income, Auld replied that:

I know that I should do but I actually don't have the time. I'm just too busy. I'm a member of AIR⁸⁸ and I have asked them about it but I just haven't got time. I should do it because I've seen people doing it and they get the money and I think that if they got it then I could get it but I guess that I'm just doing it. If AIR do it for you they get a percentage of what you get and I've read somewhere that you often have to pay it back. It's just time. I am just so busy – it's just about where you spend your time.

For Auld, these additional sources of income are difficult to access because no matter what level of the music industry an artist is situated within, the artist and their management have to work as hard as they can in order to stay in the same place – let alone progress. Due to the fact that Auld is a self-managed musician who releases her own records through her own independent label, she neither has the time nor the capital that she would need to establish herself as a high profile 'star' (who would be able to draw from all of the revenue streams discussed above). Indeed, she continues to fund her recordings through a standard independent route:

Originally and currently by credit card. For my very first CD a

⁸⁸ AIR - Association of Independent Record Labels.

friend lent me some money. So I produced my EP with an interest-free loan and I paid her back. Although she never put any pressure on me to pay it back I did. I still acknowledge her for that today because it really meant a lot. We just borrow money all the time. I think most businesses run that way don't they? We're just getting by. But it's good. Bill just got an ARIA nomination and that's our second one now because I got one for The Fallen a couple of years ago and he got one for Sleeping with the Blues and it's really like winning getting a nomination. That's really succeeding.

f. Audrey Auld Mezera

Auld Mezera's album *Texas* is her first release since becoming a US resident, adopting her married name and relocating Reckless Records to Texas. This independent release was recorded live in the studio with Texan musicians Carrie Rodriguez (fiddle), Gabe and Kimmie Rhodes (guitar), and Darcie Deaville, along with members of Jimmy La Fave's band and Bill Chambers (dobro and lap steel). The album was produced by Gabe Rhodes. The album is a solid, professional neo-traditionalist production that is stylistically in line with the alt.country/Americana brand image that Auld Mezera established with her Australian releases. A key point of difference between *Texas* and her previous releases is the album's reflection of her changed personal circumstance, her professed love for Texas and the US in general and her gratitude for the way that the people of Austin welcomed her.

Texas is dedicated to her North American musical heroes. Auld Mezera calls to Woody Guthrie her 'muse' through the track *Woody*, singing: "Woody, I never knew you but you are in my guitar when I play". She lauds the country songwriter Harlan Howard through *Song for Harlan* which is musically reminiscent of the ethereal sound of Emmylou Harris, while the song *Billy Joe* praises songwriter Billy Joe Shaver and is particularly neo-traditionalist in aesthetic. The track *My Father* involves Auld discussing the maturity that she is gaining both creatively and in her personal relationships. This song lyrically pleads with a patriarchal figure to "Never give up faith", to the musical accompaniment of Gabe Rhode's hauntingly spare harmonium. The track *Karla Faye* is a cover version of the Mary Gauthier (and Crit Harmon) song concerning the famed Texas woman's death by capital punishment. *Texas* has received many favourable reviews and at the time of writing, Auld Mezera is touring California extensively throughout March, April, June and July 2006.

g. Conclusion

While Auld may operate outside the high-budget, high-risk star system, she is one of a number of artists in the 'alternative country' scene who appears satisfied (and broadly comfortable) to operate in a less dynamic but more sustainable 'art world' environment (both in Australia and in North America). This involves both a particular philosophical approach and a degree of pragmatic realism:

I'm really happy with the way things are. I've learnt that it's

just really good to be happy with what you have. That's not to say that I'm not ambitious because I am ambitious. Even though I don't really know what that is I must be. So I don't think that if I had a manager it would make things better. I appreciate what a publicist does – I've seen the effect of that, I've seen the effect of a good distributor so I appreciate that a good manager would be good but you just can't make these people come along. Sometimes people talk a lot. I find that you meet people who just talk a lot and they're all talk. I'm prepared to listen to them talk just as long as something happens.

In this regard, Auld implicitly acknowledges that being a good manager is about understanding how to work within your means in order to achieve professional longevity through sustainable business operations. Canadian artist Fred Eaglesmith has offered her a particular model:

He's a very good businessman. He used to have a big wholesale florist company which had about 30 employees. He is really smart. I've learnt a lot from him. We talk about the whole business thing and about how he operates. They keep really small and manageable. That idea is attractive to me, just keeping it small and manageable. So he works a lot. He has an

agent (he'd have to because he's just working all the time) and his family and friends help out. He works with people who aren't necessarily experienced but who have just got the right approach and who have the right skills. It works well.

In terms of the analyses presented in this chapter, Auld does not run her label and her career as a small manageable business because she is *not* a good businessperson – she operates in this way because she *is* one. Like Eaglesmith, Auld does not buy into the myth that to be successful in the music industry one must necessarily become a star. She believes that lifestyle is more important. If she were to attempt to become a stereotypical music star, her life would become more stressful due to the fact that she would have to take a huge risk by borrowing a large amount of capital to invest in herself. Not only does Auld realise that this would put her massively in debt, she also realises that the odds of attaining star status are very much against her. It has been said that trying to become successful in the 'mainstream' music business is like running around a football field in a storm trying to get struck by lightning and it is evident that Auld is too clever to become caught up in such an attempt. Instead she keeps her business small and manageable and attempts to grow it organically. This approach may well be a prudent model for aspirant professional musicians to follow in the Australian country music business.

II. Case Study 5: Lee Kernaghan: Marketing the Boy from the Bush

Lee Kernaghan is an Australian country music icon. He is one of a limited number of country music stars whose career at the macro national level of the Australian music industry has spanned well over a decade. Like many professional country musicians, Kernaghan's profile is the result of his ongoing persistence and determination. Initial and continued success in the country music industry comes to those who are capable of rising above the different forms of adversity and rejection that occur at every stage of their careers. Indeed, although in 1982 Kernaghan won the prestigious Star Maker Quest Award, it was not until 1992 that Kernaghan's first breakthrough album, *The Outback Club*, was released. This breakthrough came after Kernaghan had left the music industry to start a career in real estate. Since 1992, Kernaghan has been at the forefront of country music in Australia, having at the time of writing released six gold, platinum or multi-platinum studio albums.⁸⁹ In 1993, along with his co-writer, producer and mentor Garth Porter, Kernaghan won the award for Song of the Year at the Golden Guitar awards in Tamworth for his now signature song *Boys from the Bush*. He also won awards for Male Vocalist of the Year and Album of the Year for his debut release. Since then he has received numerous Golden Guitar awards for each of his subsequent releases and he was also awarded Australian Achiever of the Year in 1999. A full list of Kernaghan's awards to date is included in Appendix 2. In late 1999, Kernaghan was awarded Country Music's 'Hit Maker of the Decade' in recognition of the fact that he has produced 14 number one hits from 20 top ten songs

⁸⁹ Kernaghan has released the following albums: *The Outback Club* (double platinum), *Three Chain Road* (double platinum), *1959* (platinum), *Hat Town* (platinum), *Rules Of The Road* (gold), and *Electric Rodeo* (platinum).

since 1992. In addition to this, Kernaghan's philanthropic deeds, such as the 'Pass around the Hat' tours, have raised over \$1.2 million for needy country communities.

Although Kernaghan's talent has been widely acknowledged, and he and his management have demonstrated the positive industry traits of vision, judgement, tenacity and a willingness to change, future success is not guaranteed. The numerous hit albums Kernaghan has produced to date only make it easier for him to receive a 'fair hearing' next time around, but that is all. Each artist is only as successful as their most recent accomplishment, and the competition for the limited number of slots on record-company artist rosters is fierce and getting fiercer (Franscogna and Hetherington, 1997: 106). Even for an artist the calibre of Kernaghan, it is a perilously short distance between having a high profile career and being pushed out of the market; Kernaghan does not have another market to go to if this were to happen. According to his manager, Steve White, Kernaghan has not released any records overseas nor spent the time and resources needed to establish himself on any live touring circuits in foreign territories; his music is culturally specific to Australia and therefore there is a perception that it would not be successful elsewhere. Overcoming the stress created by this reality is one of the greatest challenges Kernaghan faces at his advanced career stage – a stage at which the ability to constantly rejuvenate his profile and continually produce quality creative products is crucial.

a. Sponsorship

As Kernaghan has moved from the micro/local level of the Australian country music industry through to the macro/national level, he has moved from relying solely on income derived from live work to a reliance on numerous income sources.

Kernaghan's career to date illustrates the notion that there are, as previously mentioned, five income stream groups that enable revenue to be generated from contemporary music. This chapter will primarily focus on the use of sponsorship deals to aid the generation and perpetuation of Kernaghan's public profile. He is working at the macro/national level of the country music industry and sponsors are therefore interested in attaching their brand name to his. As will be explored later, however, this income stream can easily lead to overexposure, and a subsequent fall in other income sources.

Through linking semiotics to branding theory, this chapter will analyse how the Kernaghan brand name was built. It will then outline how sponsorship deals enhance this brand identity by constituting a facet of the managerial strategy employed to keep this brand name at the top of the Australian country music industry. A substantial amount of capital has to be continually invested in order to maintain the Kernaghan brand image. Although Kernaghan's manager, Steve White, claimed that income from tours, records, merchandise and publishing is kept separate from the income derived from sponsorship deals, the location of the Kernaghan brand image within a web of larger brands – such as McDonald's and Toyota – perpetuates Kernaghan's brand name recognition; this in turn helps to maintain his market share.

b. The Lee Kernaghan brand

As discussed above, a brand name is a 'sign' that represents the metaphorical link between the material aspect of the sign (in this case Kernaghan's music is the signifier) and the sign's abstract potential (in this case the meaning surrounding

Kernaghan's brand image is what is 'signified'). This abstract potential has to be constantly rejuvenated through various exercises as it necessarily changes over time.

As has been established, artist managers coordinate the discursive construction of the metaphorical link between a musical act's signifier and what their brand name signifies and some artist managers are therefore 'brokers of meaning' (Klein, 2000: 25). The emphasis in this chapter is that the connection between such a signifier and what is signified is discursively constructed and the mass marketing that corporate sponsorship deals enable set up points at which this identification or connection can be made on a large scale. A sense of the way in which a brand name comes to represent such a metaphorical link is discursively constructed or re-constructed in different ways by consumers or audience members when they engage with the discourse surrounding a given piece of music.

The Lee Kernaghan brand name/image was built through a combination of touring, corporate endorsement, an Akubra hat that he is rarely seen without, involvement with charity events, and through the circulation of various discourses of authenticity. Kernaghan was born in 1964, raised in Albury, New South Wales, and is the son of a country music singer. The discourses of authenticity surrounding his career are as follows: Kernaghan used to play the Bull Ring Bistro in Albury five nights a week; his grandfather was a stockman; two of his uncles are still stockmen. Kernaghan himself has been quoted as saying:

I've never ever thought of myself as a star. I'm just a bloke.

I'll have a go and sometimes I'll win and sometimes I won't.

*Stardom is a fleeting thing. This music industry is not always what it seems.*⁹⁰

These poietic⁹¹ (production) discourses of authenticity – that effectively form the departure point for the construction of Kernaghan’s brand essence – have an impact on the way in which members of the esthetic level (the set of meanings and perceptions of those who subsequently consume and/or criticise the text) of musical reception interpret Kernaghan’s music and identity. John Minson argues that:

Now that country is “cool” a lot of people have decided that they want to sing country and they think that singing a country song is just that, but the true fans can tell the difference between someone who is a country singer and someone who is singing a country song. It’s one of those indefinable things, it’s a feeling, and the reason for it, even though you can’t define it, is because of the background of the singer ... Lee Kernaghan has that certain indefinable something. (quoted in Minson, 2004: np)

When considering the evolution of Kernaghan’s brand name, poietic discourses of authenticity have played a crucial role in the generation of such a response at the

⁹⁰ *Lee Kernaghan: Access All Areas* (DVD), ABC Country/Universal (2004).

⁹¹ The way in which a music manager builds and then guides a musical brand name is best understood through the employment of the concepts of semiology advanced by Nattiez (1990). The different levels of Nattiez’s framework, the ‘immanent’ (infra-textual), the ‘poietic’ (what the producers of the text understand it to mean), and the ‘esthetic’ (the set of meanings and perceptions of those who subsequently consume and/or criticise the text), are useful for an understanding of how music managers coordinate the ‘departure point’ for the constant construction and re-construction of the metaphorical link between a musical act’s sound structure and the identity, social structure or ideal that an act’s brand name symbolically represents.

esthetic level. It is also evident that an artist's background plays a fundamental role in the generation of this response. As previously mentioned, Rosenberg (1986: 151) argues that country music practice is a collaborative process since traditionally many country music artists have emerged from families and communities with strong folk traditions. Kernaghan's background is in line with this characterisation in that his grandfather was a drover who "liked those old western style songs of the bush" (Minson, 2004: np), and his immediate family was involved in commercial music. Thus from an early age he was exposed to folk traditions and learnt how to present music commercially.

Kernaghan's career has followed Rosenberg's (1986) career stages – *apprentice*, *journeyman*, *craftsman* and *celebrity* – in an orthodox way. The generation of Kernaghan's brand name was dependent on a network of country music practitioners – a network that his brand essence relies upon still.

While the discourses of authenticity concerning Kernaghan's communal/folk beginnings form a major facet of his brand identity, those discussing Kernaghan's 'art world' (Becker, 1982) during the 'apprentice' stage of his career are also important. Kernaghan explains that:

It was 1986 and I'd just come back from performing at Fan Fair in Nashville. I'd demoed quite a few songs when I was there and learnt a lot from some great songwriters whom I'd had the chance to work with; people like Charlie Craig, Wally Wilson and Bob Montgomery. They were like gods to me. I

was 22, wet behind the ears, direct from Albury and writing with some of American country music's best writers. When I got back to Australia my music publisher Peter Jansson introduced me to a hit songwriter by the name of Reece Kirk, who was working with Garth Porter at the time. Reece said to me you should come over and meet Garth. (quoted in Minson, 2004: np)

Although Kernaghan had the advantage of being born into a family that formed part of a wider 'art world', and was fortunate enough to have served a songwriting apprenticeship within an influential music community in Nashville, Kernaghan's artistic context alone did not guarantee that he would progress to the 'celebrity' stage of his career trajectory. The generation of Kernaghan's brand name was also dependent on his own persistence and determination. Franscogna and Hetherington (1997) point out that "the ability to keep going and accept disappointment and setbacks without giving up, marks the difference between stars and ordinary people with talent" (111). They also note that such drive is not only a necessary attribute that unknown artists need to employ, it is also a personality trait that established artists must exhibit.

Although in 1991 Kernaghan had lost his creative energy and his determination to progress through to the *celebrity* stage of his career trajectory, the groundwork he had laid during the *apprentice* stage resulted in the influential songwriter and producer Garth Porter approaching him to produce an album. Kernaghan notes:

It was the middle of 1991 when I got a phone call from Garth Porter. By then I was wearing a tie and jacket and I'd stopped listening to music. It was like my musical heart had been broken and I'd given up. Garth said, "I want you to come up to Sydney and do some songwriting with me." I said, "Well I've sort of given it away you know. I'm working in real estate now." Garth said, "Is there anyway you can get some time off work?" So I asked my boss Chris Stewart if I could do that and he said, "Garth Porter! Sherbet! Sure you can!" (quoted in Minson, 2004: np)

This phone call represented the previously elusive break that led to Kernaghan signing a record contract and a management contract, and to his gaining agency representation. Although Kernaghan claims that he had lost his drive at this stage, if he had not persisted and been determined to progress past all of the setbacks he inevitably faced in the early stages of his career, all of the smaller breaks that occurred at this time would not have led to his 'big break'.

c. When the work really started

Franscogna and Hetherington (1997) point out that:

To most people, getting a record deal with a major label would be the ultimate. But what happens after the public starts to say "yes" in a big way and keeps on saying it with every new record release and every new concert tour? That is when

the work really starts. While getting there presents familiar problems and obstacles, staying there presents a much more subtle range of pressures and challenges ... An artist has absolutely no idea of the work and pressures involved in stardom until it happens. (243)

Since his initial breakthrough to the macro/national level of the Australian country music industry in 1992, Kernaghan and his current manager Steve White⁹² have managed to achieve longevity despite the inevitable uncertainties of the music industry. Franscogna and Hetherington claim that earnings for successful artists tend to follow a pattern: low income in the developmental phase, followed by a substantial jump once success is achieved. They note that:

Earning will eventually rise to its highest point, followed by a gradual decline, to a point higher than where the artist began, but lower, obviously, than the peak. (ibid: 248)

Within this overall pattern, an artist's income cycle will also peak and fall several times during their career. Obviously, the objective of the manager and/or business manager is to achieve the highest possible income level for the artist and sustain this level for as long as possible.

⁹² All comments attributed to Steve White are, unless otherwise indicated, taken from an interview with the author in August 2004.

Kernaghan and White have managed to sustain a high level of income for over a decade through a combination of the consistent generation of music and continual investment of capital. Indeed, Kernaghan's brand essence is perpetuated through the way in which creativity and commerce are interwoven in this case. Although Kernaghan's brand name has in part been built slowly, the fact that various corporate entities have been interested in achieving brand/culture integration through aligning their products with his has certainly given his recognition factor a boost. In 1992, Kernaghan's first breakthrough single *Boys from the Bush* was released in conjunction with a McDonald's advertisement that featured Kernaghan, his hat and the song. Kernaghan's manager points out that:

McDonald's was a long time ago and that was only one ad.

But I'd have to say that 12 years on from his first single and that ad, that ad really helped his recognition factor – people still remember that ad (as you do with McDonald's ads).

Through his participation in one of McDonald's many advertising campaigns, Kernaghan's brand name recognition was given a major lift. The country music industry alone could not have matched the scope and broad market penetration that this campaign achieved because there is not as much economic capital in the country music industry compared to the fast food industry. As a result of the kick-start this campaign provided, Kernaghan has become a highly recognisable Australian celebrity. Steve White notes:

In the city markets where country music is not one of the first choices of entertainment and it has been a long haul to get people to take notice – even in those markets we have statistics that state that through Lee's television appearances and live concerts he has an incredible penetration into the market. This is proven through the polls that we have. His recognition factor is as high as many regular TV stars – people who are on television everyday.

The release of Kernaghan's first single was fortuitously timed in that James Blundell had made an impact on the mainstream pop charts in 1992 with *Way Out West* (his duet with James Reyne). This duet became one of the biggest selling singles of that year and in part provided the context that was needed for a connection to be made between Kernaghan's new profile within the mass media and his work as a touring musician. In May 1992, Kernaghan spent three weeks on the road as the opening act for the James Blundell show to promote the release of his debut album, *The Outback Club*. Kernaghan maintains that this positioned him within a new movement that was taking place in Australian country music. He states:

James [Blundell] was probably the first Australian country artist to take out the big rock 'n' roll style light show and full on production rig. It was almost like some kind of revolution was taking place in Australian country music. The crowds were getting younger and prettier, the hay bales were gone,

doors were being kicked open and country music was about to go mainstream. (Kernaghan quoted in Minson, 2004: np)

In terms of lyrical content and production values, Kernaghan's album *The Outback Club*, and the live shows he played to support its release sat comfortably alongside Blundell's music; in fact they formed part of a more commercial genre of contemporary Australian country music. Since this initial commercial breakthrough, Kernaghan and his management have been able to realise their objective of achieving the highest possible income level and sustaining this level for as long as possible. The successful fusion between creativity and commerce, between Kernaghan's art and sponsorship deals, is represented by the 2004 release of *Lee Kernaghan: The Big Ones: Greatest Hits Volume 1*.

d. Lee Kernaghan: The Big Ones: Greatest Hits Volume 1

By drawing a comparison between Kernaghan's first single and the title track of his latest studio album, this section will posit the argument that, in terms of creative output, Kernaghan has achieved a thematic consistency that continually reinforces his brand image/essence. Kernaghan's first greatest hits album is comprised of twenty songs drawn from the body of work he has accumulated over the last twelve years. It includes the following hits: *Hat Town*, *Boys from the Bush*, *Something in the Water*, *Goondiwindi Moon*, *The Way It Is*, *Leave Him in the Longyard*, *She's My Ute*, *When the Snow Falls on the Alice*, *High Country*, *Skinny Dippin'*, *1959*, *Getting' Gone*, *I'm from the Country*, *Three Chain Road*, *She Waits by the Sliprails*, *Texas Qld 4385*, *Electric Rodeo*, *The Outback Club*, *Missin' Slim*, and the bonus track *Down Under*.

In 1993, shortly after Kernaghan had won three Golden Guitar awards for his debut album, John Minson (country music broadcaster, writer and founding member of the Australian Country Music Awards) wrote a letter to Kernaghan that has been included in the liner notes for the greatest hits volume. The following is an excerpt:

I've been considering the implications of your win, assessing it as a musicologist, and it occurs to me that there is something epoch-making about your song, "Boys from the Bush". The more I think about it, the more I see it as a milestone in Australian bush balladry. Bush Balladry? You think that's a strange term for the song? Think about it. The song is about the bush, fellers who work there, lifestyle, problems, partying. All of the classic ingredients of the Aussie bush ballad. Yet most don't perceive it as a bush ballad. You may be the first of the new wave of bush balladeers who sing songs of Australia but not in the time honoured tradition.

(2004)

Through the circulation of such discourse, Kernaghan not only came to signify a new movement in commercial country music, according to some influential country music industry figures like Minson, his identity, music and brand image came to symbolise the link between traditional Australian bush balladry and its contemporary manifestations.

Boys from the Bush was co-written by Kernaghan and Garth Porter and has a typical arrangement for songs of its generic niche. It has an A,B,A,B,C,A structure, a key change for the last chorus/outro, and its instrumentation consists of drums, bass guitar, rhythm guitar, lead guitar, banjo, fiddle, backing vocals and lead vocals. The song is in a major key and has an up-tempo 2-feel rhythm that is characteristic of songs within this genre. In terms of effects, the lead vocal part is fairly dry throughout the song, while the backing vocals that enter in the last half of the versus and in the choruses sit further back in the mix. The whistling and cheers that enter towards the end of the track add to its jovial nature and successfully tie in with its subject matter, the masculine working culture of country life:

We've been shearing sheep

We've been mustering stock

We've been cullin' out roos

We've been sprayin' the crops

We've been drovin' cattle

Up an old stock route

Now it's Saturday night

And we pile in the ute

We're the boys from the bush

And we're back in town

Well the dog's in the back

And the foot goes down

We're life members of the outback club

We're the boys from the bush

And we've come in from the scrub

Kernaghan has achieved a thematic consistency in his work since the release of *Boys from the Bush*, a consistency that is also found in the production values, instrumentation and arrangements of the greatest hits volume. Like *Boys from the Bush* and its engagement with the iconic imagery and philosophical discourse of the bush, the Kernaghan/Porter song *Electric Rodeo* (the title track from Kernaghan's latest studio album) uses an analogy with bull-riding to philosophically discuss life in general:

Life is like a rodeo

That can throw you around

It can take you to the heavens

It can throw you to the ground

And it's not a dress rehearsal

It's learning as you go

And I'm just another rider in this electric rodeo

The thematic and creative consistency that Kernaghan's greatest hits volume represents, along with the notion that he is carrying the torch of traditional Australian bush balladry into the future, enables his work to be constantly lent to the meaning

creation conducted by corporations in their attempts to brand themselves and their products.

e. Brand/culture integration

It is evident from *Greatest Hits Volume 1* that the meaning surrounding Kernaghan's brand image or essence, or what is 'signified' by his music, is an abstract potential that has been constantly rejuvenated by each release of creative product. While this abstract potential changes over time, an artist's public profile also changes over time and needs to be constantly rejuvenated through various exercises. It has been necessary to maintain a balance between the creative and commercial aspects of Kernaghan's career; this allows the assignment of an appropriate amount of time to both the generation of consistent creative product and the maintenance of his cyclical public profile. This process is necessarily cyclical because there is a fine line between using sponsorship deals to raise profile, and having sponsorship deals overexpose the artist's brand image to the market. Therefore, the timing of brand/culture 'tie-ins' is crucial. Concerning this issue, Steve White states:

We disappear at times. We just disappear off the radar with regard to the media and to live shows. When we are on it's full blast. If a new record comes out we will go pretty much full blast for 18 months. Then we will just wind it down and disappear for 6 to 12 months. That period of time is a creative time for Lee to start thinking about the next record or DVD. With Lee, and any artist, we make sure there is a reason for doing anything; we don't just do things for the sake of doing

them. So if there's a product and you want to sell the product, you've got to be visible because you put all the work and investment into producing the product ... What we don't do is push it. Once we get around and see everybody on each release of product we don't go back there a second time on that same product.

Since his participation in one of McDonalds early 1990s campaigns, Kernaghan's public profile and brand image have been perpetuated over the last ten years through car manufacturer Toyota's desire to link its brand image to his. Additionally, Kernaghan has participated in various charity events such as the 'Toyota Paths Around Australia' tour. Steve White notes that: "Lee had the idea for a fundraiser that is based on the principle of 'passing the hat around'." He also states:

If you take the regional country markets which are the heartland of Australian country music, there's a very solid and honest relationship between Lee and those folks which has been built through a variety of different things. One is clearly the music and entertainment that he gives these people. The other is his care for the bush and for the people of the bush. This is about more than just the spoken word, it's also about action through the 'Path around Australia' tour and the other charity events that he throws himself into whenever he can.

As though in an attempt to harden this 'caring' and 'charitable' brand image, Kernaghan himself has pointed out that he was banned from playing in Ballarat for a period of time because at one of his concerts there the audience 'disturbed the peace'. Although Kernaghan was not directly to blame given that he was simply playing a concert there, the audience became too rowdy and destructive, and in Ballarat, at least, Kernaghan's brand image came to signify these negative attributes instead of the caring and charitable ones carefully nurtured by his management. This is an example of the polysemantic nature of brand images.

Through their sponsorship of key events on the Australian country music touring circuit, such as the annual 'Toyota Muster' in Gympie Queensland, Toyota's brand/culture integration with the wider country music industry in Australia is significant, and their 4WD products are firmly embedded within the Australian culture. Through having Toyota as a sponsor, Kernaghan's brand image is able to fit neatly within – and also signify – key country music events that are larger than any individual artist. Kernaghan's manager was quite defensive when discussing the sponsorship deals he has brokered because such deals could easily lead to critics promoting the cliché that through signing them Kernaghan has 'sold out'. He notes that:

We get offered a lot of corporate sponsorship deals but we are very selective about who we actually sign up with. The only other corporate sponsor Lee has at the moment is Toyota and that situation is definitely working both ways. Toyota is the number one car company in Australia, they have very few

celebrity endorsements and we hope that Lee is very valuable to them in the bush through the fact that people recognise Toyota and Lee as being [connected] in a very good way.

The relationship between Kernaghan and Toyota clearly does work both ways in that Toyota uses their marketing muscle to get Kernaghan to play high-profile tours and to place him on television on a regular basis. Through this process, Kernaghan's high-profile brand image is constantly rejuvenated. On the other hand, Toyota is able to integrate *their* brand image with the culture of the country, a culture that is signified by Kernaghan's music. An example of this process in action involves a section of Channel 9's life-style program *Getaway* featuring Kernaghan and containing the following voice-over:

He has won a string of Golden Guitar awards, he has a barrage of hit albums and he is one of Australia's country music kings. But Lee Kernaghan is still a humble boy from the Bush who loves a good road trip and today he is keen to show me his favourite travelling companion. His "You beaut, Toyota ute".⁹³

Kernaghan follows this voice-over, saying:

I do a lot of miles in the deep outback and this vehicle certainly helps me get to places that you just can't get to in an

⁹³ Lee Kernaghan: *Access All Areas* (DVD), ABC Country/Universal (2004).

ordinary vehicle, and I've had some great songs come from the inspiration I get from the people I meet out there. (ibid)

The voice-over concluded with:

I reckon Lee's passion for bush driving must come pretty close to his passion for music. (ibid)

Kernaghan's sponsorship deal with Toyota forms a major part of the overall managerial strategy employed to keep his brand image at the top of the country music industry, and it is a deal his manager hopes to use in order to penetrate the larger urban music markets. Steve White states:

If there is any market that can be grown it is the capital city market and we just keep plugging away ... there's absolutely no support from radio which makes it even harder ... but you know it's the biggest market and we just keep working towards converting people to the music ... In the city we would certainly like to be a bit more visible with Toyota and we are actually working towards that now.

Kernaghan's participation in David Atkin's production of the *Man from Snowy River* (a musical based on the legendary Banjo Patterson poem of the same name) that toured Australian capital cities in 2002, was also in line with this attempt to penetrate the metropolitan/urban markets. Indeed, Kernaghan and his management constantly

need to think of new ways to expand their operation because the cost of producing records and tours is relative to the status of the artist. Therefore, as the Toyota sponsorship deals continue to raise his profile, Kernaghan increasingly needs to produce product that matches his profile and he needs money to do this. For example, Kernaghan's recent *Electric Rodeo* tour that was produced in order to support his album of the same name, began on March 4 2003, involved two years of planning and a crew of over 32 including musicians, audio, lighting and visual specialists, personal assistants, drivers, merchandising personnel, managers and support staff. This entourage set out in six Toyota Taragos, a Toyota Camry and a huge semitrailer. A mini TV station followed the show and they had cameras covering every part of the event. There were two cameras for the keyboard, one camera for drums, one for guitar and one for bass guitar. There was also a floor camera and many cameras on the edge of the stage and in front of it. The lighting was controlled by computer and effectively set the mood for every scene of the show. The combination of these elements made it the biggest country music show ever to tour Australia; it is a good example of the level of celebrity Kernaghan has reached, and which he now needs to sustain.

f. Conclusion

Kernaghan's profile is the result of his ongoing persistence and determination. While the apprentice stage of his career was marked by disillusionment caused by familiar problems and obstacles, the celebrity stage of his career has presented a much more subtle range of pressures and challenges that he has, and will perpetually have to overcome. These challenges include the need to continually produce quality creative product that is going to be relevant to the market, a market that is constantly bombarded with product from fresh new artists/competitors. There exists the threat of

overexposure through sponsors overusing his brand image to sell their own products; this could lead to the erosion of his carefully managed identity. There is also the challenge of producing expensive tours that match his profile as a market leader.

Although Kernaghan and his management have sustained consistent record sales over the last decade, his first two double platinum (140,000 copies) studio albums (*The Outback Club* and *Three Chain Road*) represent the peak of this income stream, given that his subsequent albums have only reached platinum (70,000 copies) or gold status (35,000 copies). The 2004 release of Kernaghan's *Access All Areas* DVD, and his first greatest hits compilation, as well as the continual location of his brand image within a web of larger brands such as Toyota, are all managerial manoeuvres that seem set to sustain his brand name recognition in the future.

Kernaghan has reached his peak in terms of the revenue stream the sale of studio albums provides. However, Kernaghan and his management have been able to achieve longevity in the high-budget, high-risk star system that is the macro/national level of the Australian country music industry. They have done this through the employment of a long-term cyclical management strategy that takes maximum advantage of the five income streams available to an artist operating at Kernaghan's level. This approach may well be a prudent model for aspirant professional bush balladeers to follow if they too make it to the macro/national level of the Australian country music industry and wish to achieve longevity there.

III. Case Study 6: Catherine Britt: Launching the 'Hillbilly Pickin' Ramblin' Girl'

Catherine Britt⁹⁴ is an Australian country music artist from Newcastle, in New South Wales. Her first recording was *In the Pines*, an independently released EP produced by Bill Chambers (Dead Ringer Band) in 1999. Her debut album, *Dusty Smiles and Heartbreak Cures* (henceforth referred to as *DS&HC*), also produced by Chambers, was recorded in 2001, when Britt was sixteen. Made as a family-financed recording, the album was released in Australia independently and then re-released on ABC Country/Universal. Britt's first three singles from the album, *That Don't Bother Me*, *Easy Living* and *46 Miles from Alice*, all reached the top five on the Australian country charts. Her fourth single, *Hillbilly Pickin' Ramblin' Girl* (for which a promotional video was made) consolidated this success. By late 2002 she had sold over 30,000 copies of *DS&HC* in the Australian market, and continuing publicity combined with a support slot on Chris Isaak's 2002 Australian tour, pushed the album to gold sales status (35,000 copies) by early 2003.

At the age of seventeen, Britt had already attracted the attention of three prominent US country music industry figures, Tony Brown (Universal South), Joe Galante (RCA) and James Stroud (Dreamworks).⁹⁵ This level of interest in an Australian country artist who had not invested substantial energy in establishing a US profile was unprecedented. Britt signed to BMG's (now Sony/BMG) RCA label for the North American market in late 2002; this realisation of interest gave Britt the chance to

⁹⁴ All comments attributed to Catherine Britt, Steve Britt, Stephan White, Todd Wagstaff and John Lomax III in this chapter are, unless otherwise indicated, taken from personal correspondence with the author conducted in mid 2002.

⁹⁵ According to an ABC/Universal press release (Marking, 2000), these three men were on the phone to Australia wanting to know more about Britt shortly after hearing about her album.

develop an international profile. The development of her profile in the US was greatly aided by Sir Elton John's championing of her. After obtaining a copy of *DS&HC* when he was touring Australia, John has spread the word internationally and he sang a duet with Britt for her latest album. Britt's first album for RCA contains songs that were co-written by herself and fellow newcomer Brice Long, as well as songs written by the veteran writers Paul Overstreet, Jerry Salley and Guy Clark. Keith Stegall (Alan Jackson, George Jones) was chosen to produce the album while Bill Chambers co-produced it. Elton John, Kenny Chesney and Hank Williams' legendary steel player Don Helms all joined Britt in the studio.

This section traces the development of Britt's career as a young recording artist working in a niche music genre – Australian/US roots/country – and analyses the circumstances and socio-industrial apparatus through which Britt and her management were able to secure significant support and promotion for her debut recording. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the challenges Britt faced in the early stages of her career, those she may face in the future, the manner in which her national and generic contexts positioned her for these, and finally the repositioning that her major label signing precipitated.

a. Starting Young

Except in extremely rare cases, everyone starts their musical career by working independently. Britt was no exception. The stereotypical discourse usually articulates the assumption that if a young artist makes a demo, and the right person hears it, a manager will take over and develop their career for them. However, as a general rule artists themselves need to be able to build a groundswell beneath them and a 'buzz'

around them before anyone with experience in the field will help them take their career to the next level. With few exceptions, the paradox is that nobody with experience will help you until you can effectively do everything yourself. Although Britt was fortunate enough to receive advice and help from experienced members of the Australian country music community very early in her career, it is no surprise that she began her career as an independent artist who was managed by her parents.

Britt's father, Steven, has described the development of his daughter's involvement with country music in the following terms:

I don't know that we actually got her started, I mean, she started herself. If we go right back to her early teens, basically – as with our older children – we were looking at getting her interested in some sort of activity that she liked – outside of just going to school. The thing that seemed to fit with her most was music, as she enjoyed singing. We decided to take her along to a club that was having a talent quest when she was 12. She just got up and sang. We kept going back each week ... Over the next year or so she started to develop to a level where people started saying positive things.

This comment suggests that Britt was fortunate enough to have parents who were willing to support her interest in country music and take her along to various venues to perform. Britt's parents have identified that their initial motivation was cultural rather than industrial, emphasising that they "loved country music" themselves. In this

sense, Britt's exposure to the country music industry was a by-product of the family's interests (rather than a career-focusing facilitated by ambitious parents).

Time and place (and fortuity in both) were also significant factors in Britt's early career development. Her residence in Newcastle, just to the north of the New South Wales' Central Coast, and her entry into public performance in the late 1990s facilitated her contact with the network of country performers who settled on the Central Coast in the 1990s and early 2000s. The crucial connection was with the Chambers family (who had performed as the Dead Ringer Band in the early-late 1990s). Steve Britt explains the connection between the two families:

I was doing a radio program myself, playing country music on a local FM station, and I decided to focus each show on one artist, sometimes local artists and sometimes national artists. I would do an hour show with a fairly lengthy interview. Half the time I conducted these in person and so Catherine usually came along with me and she got to meet various people, just as an interested onlooker. She met people like Graeme Connors and Beccy Cole. The interview that really clicked was an interview I conducted with Kasey Chambers when she was with the Dead Ringer Band ... Catherine really liked their sort of music. About a month after that, Bill Chambers, who was recording with Audrey [Auld] at the time, came to the same festival that Catherine had actually sung at two years before at the talent quest (so she must have been about 13-14

by now), and she talked a bit to Bill and because she enjoyed their music, she asked for a couple of songs. He said that he'd sing them for her if she got up and sung them with him – which she did. Of course we were all really excited and when he heard her sing he immediately took an interest in her and invited her to the weekly jam session they [ie. Auld and Chambers] had in Sydney.

This contact led Bill Chambers to suggest to Britt that she was “probably ready to do some recording if you're interested”. Steve Britt explains his response to the invitation in the following terms:

She was 14. We looked at a budget and decided that we could do it and if she gave up singing at any stage this was something that she could look back on and she could think, 'I did this', and be proud of it.

The family arranged for Bill Chambers to produce four tracks chosen by Britt. As she explains:

I recorded [the US country standard] In the Pines because it is one of my all-time favourite songs, That don't bother me [written by Britt and Kasey Chambers] was recorded because we liked the song and because Kasey was a great supporter of

mine... It's all up to you and Slow and steady were recorded because I wanted some of my original material on the EP.

Steve Britt characterises the industrial advantages of having a recording out as almost an afterthought to the process:

It was just a four track and we weren't trying to sell it to people at that stage, but we did send it to a couple of record labels, EMI, ABC and a couple of others I think. We now know that they took note of it and decided to let her develop before expressing an interest. It did make a mark with them at that time.

With the production of the EP and Britt's increasing profile, Steve Britt began to take on a managerial role. The experience of the Chambers family was also useful here:

A lot of the things we did, we did on the advice of Bill Chambers. I mean we weren't making it up as we went along. We were getting a lot of advice from various people, but especially from Bill, as he had gone through a lot of it himself already. He had contacts.

The EP raised Britt's profile as an emerging talent. It was also regarded as sufficiently successful by the family and country music contacts that Bill Chambers agreed to produce an album, again privately financed by the family.

b. Dusty Smiles and Heartbreak Cures

The recording of *DS&HC* involved a group of Australia's leading country music figures, many of whom are based on the NSW Central Coast. Bill Chambers was the album's producer, and Jeff McCormack⁹⁶ engineered, mixed and mastered the album. The studio band included Bill Chambers (guitars and vocals), McCormack (bass), Michael Rose (pedal steel guitar), Glen Hannah (acoustic guitar), Mick Albeck (violin), and BJ Barker (drums). Backing vocalists included leading Australian country singer-songwriters Kasey Chambers, Audrey Auld and Sara Storer. As such a line-up suggests, the album is a solid, professional production that fits smoothly into the late 1990s/early 2000s style of contemporary Australian country music that has achieved success in its generic niche.

Philip Hayward describes the album as one:

that differs from many Australian country releases, especially those of young, debuting artists, by being linked into a wide range of country music traditions and referents. This breadth immediately signals aspirations to reach markets beyond the mainstream Australian country scene. Simultaneously, however, the range of traditionally-orientated material ensures a degree of connection with the domestic niche market that provides a foothold for future diversification. It's a clever package and an astute launching point for a personable and

⁹⁶ McCormack did this with the assistance of Nash Chambers and Herman Kovacs.

*photogenic performer that avoids exploiting her youth and precociousness as main points of appeal. (2003a: 1)*⁹⁷

The album includes 13 tracks⁹⁸ that comprise 7 originals (one of which is co-written), a cover of a contemporary Australian song and 5 covers of North American country songs. The latter serve to locate Britt within a particular tradition of country music performance. Two of the covers comprise warm, gleeful renditions of standards. Hank Williams' (much-covered) *Move It on Over* is present in a humorously zestful, 'retro' version (as suggested by the CD liner notes that refer to the chorus vocalists as a "pack of drunken idiots"). The final track, *Big Rock Candy Mountain*, popularised by Woody Guthrie, was described by Britt in live performances in 2001–2002 as one of her favourite songs and is sung in a light, perky manner to an acoustic guitar backing in a style that recalls 1960s pop-folk (rather than Guthrie's well-known version). In contrast to these, Britt's version of A. Riggs's *In the Pines* (recorded as the title track of her 1st EP) is a more sombre track, with an edge of depression and resignation produced by Britt's vocals and Albeck's droning fiddle parts. Her version of Cochran and Martin's *It's Not Love*, sung as a duet with Bill Chambers, is similarly resigned and plaintive, her vocal persona assuming a (convincingly) pragmatic approach to affairs of the heart that belies her youth.

The fifth cover of a North American song provides the album with its most distinct track, in terms of arrangement. Britt's version of Fred Eaglesmith's *Drive-in Movie* is performed to a slow, sparse textural backing, in which Bill Chambers' lap-steel guitar provides a plaintive melodic fill behind Britt's restrained, emotive vocals. The

⁹⁷ This section of the chapter draws on Hayward's analysis and characterisations (2003b), and Carriage and Hayward's more general discussions of modern country music.

⁹⁸ The final of which, *Big Rock Candy Mountain*, is an unlisted 'extra'.

inclusion of material by Eaglesmith, a favourite writer of Kasey Chambers and Audrey Auld, provides a link to a rawer and often more acerbic vein of country than Britt's other covers, giving the album a sense of generic breadth. The remaining cover is a version of Richard Porteous's song *Easy Living*. Porteous is an Australian radio DJ and occasional songwriter whose best-known previous composition was the title track of the Dead Ringer Band's 1997 CD *Living in the Circle*. His song is a light-hearted celebration of stress-free lifestyles, with Britt's relaxed vocals supported by Sara Storer on the choruses and accompanied by a jangling acoustic guitar part and mandolin lines.

Britt has stated that she sees her industrial niche as being that of a "traditional singer/songwriter" ("because that's what I do and love") and, appropriately, her songs fit seamlessly within mainstream international country styles in terms of lyrical themes and references, vocal style and melodic and chordal patterns. The title track, *Learning to Forgive My Heart* and *Help Me I'm Falling* concern love (both falling in, and anguish from). Unlike these three, *46 Miles from Alice* includes a reference to Australia – in that the subject matter involves the Central Australian town of Alice Springs – in its classic homesickness/yearning scenario.⁹⁹ *That don't bother me*, co-written with Kasey Chambers, is an irreverent, zestful hoedown style number similar in style to *We're All Gonna Die Someday* (on Chambers' 1999 debut album) in which the songwriters duet, declaring themselves "a hillbilly girl in a hillbilly world" (and flattening the pitch on the phrase "that don't bother me" to give a rough 'rootsy' edge to the delivery).

⁹⁹ As Hayward (2003a: 2) speculates, while this reference may work for Australian audiences it is more likely to be understood in North America as a reference to a missed loved one.

Hayward identifies the two remaining Britt originals, *Nashville Blues* and (especially) *Hillbilly Pickin' Ramblin' Girl*, as:

the album's central tracks, songs that reflect the persona that Britt chooses to adopt and project as an emerging performer. This persona, like any other, is not so much one that reflects her life (to date) as one that reflects the cultural references and locations that allow her to perform her songs 'in character' and access a bank of images and associations.

(2003: 2)

Here Hayward explores the gap between the claims in Britt's song's about its protagonist and the actual performer:

Yeh I'm a hillbilly pickin' ramblin' girl

And I'm hanging in bars

And I'm listening to Merle

Drinking whisky and beer

To wash this pain away

Singing good old country songs

Not the ones they play today

Hey hey

Colourful as this scenario is, as an under-age 'minor' at the time this album was released, Britt's experiences of the activities she discusses are likely to have been less extensive than the song suggests.¹⁰⁰

Hayward suggests that: "the imagined persona of *Hillbilly Pickin' Ramblin' Girl* is reinforced by an overt declaration of 'wannabe-ness' in *Nashville Blues*" (ibid). This is manifest in the song's declarations that:

Well, I wanna jump an old freight train

Ride it on to Nashville

(repeat both lines)

Well I wanna learn to play my guitar

The way the honkytonkers do

(repeat both lines)

Well I wanna buy me an old car

Drive it down the road

(repeat both lines)

And I will drive it until its engine

Is just about to explode

¹⁰⁰ Indeed, although Britt's youth may have been a competitive advantage in her career to date, it may be detrimental to her efforts to tour the US since she will not be of the legal age to enter some of the venues she will need to play (twenty-one in the US). Although Steve Britt states that she has only ever been refused entry into one of the many licensed venues she has played in Australia, issues surrounding her young age are likely to arise.

Here Britt expresses longings for archetypal US/country experiences, living the hobo life (as memorialised in Woody Guthrie's songs), learning country/roots guitar and experiencing what Clive James once described as "driving through mythical America".¹⁰¹ In a national music industry that remains entranced by the glamour and industrial power of Nashville (and its depiction of a broader American dream), Britt's lyrics are an acceptable expression of cultural yearning unlikely to alienate a core audience.

Despite being an independent release distributed from the family home, the album attracted sufficient exposure and praise to secure five Golden Guitar nominations at Tamworth Country Music Festival (NSW) in 2002. This succeeded in attracting industry attention. As Britt's Australian manager Steve White recalls:

There was this buzz going on within the industry and a couple of record labels were vying for her. One of these labels was ABC Country who handle Lee Kernaghan, my other artist, and they gave me the record to play. There was this little buzz happening and as soon as I heard it I saw a lot of potential, so I made approaches to Catherine and her family and had some meetings while they were looking for management... Luckily I've ended up signing her. She's one of the few Australian country music artists who have a lot of potential overseas.

¹⁰¹ In his lyrics for the title track of Pete Atkins' 1971 album.

c. Maintaining the Australian Market

White outlines the long-term strategy he has for Britt's career in the following terms:

The immediate plan is to work this album by having her work as much as possible, to do as much media as possible (because media is king), and to just build upon her success by putting out the radio singles every three months or so in order to keep building her presence within the market through working with the folks at Universal and the folks at ABC, making sure that we're maximising airplay and we're maximising every opportunity that comes our way. It's a slow build. She's a new young artist. It doesn't happen overnight generally. As talented as she is, we've got to work diligently and focus on taking her to the market and making sure that the market understands who Catherine Britt is and what she is all about

Unlike Kasey Chambers, it is unlikely that Britt can be marketed in Australia as a mainstream (pop/rock) artist. The bold strategy Chambers' management and label EMI employed to ensure that her album *The Captain* was perceived to be a mainstream (as opposed to country) release is unlikely to work in Britt's case, simply because she sounds more (orthodox) country. The option of working through both her record company's country and contemporary departments in order to attempt to expose her music to the broadest possible audience in Australia is not therefore an option for Britt. As White emphasises:

I think that if we need to talk about niches, Catherine is a bit more country. In fact I think Catherine's a lot more country. I think Kasey has proven by the fantastic success of the last two years, but particularly of this record (Barricades and Brickwalls) – which I think has sold around 270,000 copies, or somewhere near it – that she can exist as a mainstream artist in Australia. Her last record completely crossed over into mainstream radio, whereas Catherine won't (on this record). I think that their lyrical content is quite different. Some people think that they sound alike, I can see tinges of similarity, but I think Catherine will mature quite differently.

Without mass-market radio airplay in Australia it is unlikely that Britt's first album will generate sufficient sales to gain a place on the mainstream charts, much less ascend to the upper levels that Chambers' second album reached. Part of Chambers' appeal is that she has finally crossed over onto mainstream radio in Australia after surviving for a long time solely on critical acclaim, relentless touring and word of mouth support. Ironically, she finally made this breakthrough with one of her most recent singles, *Not Pretty Enough* (2001), which was written as an ode to "all the radio stations who play Britney Spears and not me" (Pulvirenti, 2002: 25). An obvious element of Catherine Britt's appeal is that she is so young and, although they are not used as the primary marketing tool, her looks are not dissimilar to those of several female singers popular with a teenage audience.

Although her youth is one of her competitive advantages, obviously this advantage does not have longevity. When asked how careful he is not to manage Britt as a novelty youth act, White replied:

She was only fifteen when she recorded her album, that's the blow out. So wait till she's twenty-four... She is a very mature young artist and that's the difference between the people who have to work and work and work. I mean you can break through, but if the signs of something special don't show early in your career, if you're not getting interest from major players early in your career, it's probably going to be a long hard career. I mean if you examine the superstars, the superstars were noticed when they were young... In reality her album sales are still small, I mean they're healthy for a new young artist, but what she's got going for her is this credibility that completely negates any potential of being a novelty... We'd never put her in the situation of 'we've got a country Kylie Minogue here folks, let's have a look at this country Kylie'. The reason that everybody in Nashville and everybody here is so interested in Catherine is because a) her voice is just unique, it's a fantastic singing voice and it's only going to get better as she grows older and b) she writes. So already she's shining and people are talking about her, she's getting national television and we're getting calls from the biggest names in country music.

d. Talent and the US Market

Britt's Australian career launch has coincided with an international revival of interest in roots/country/Americana styles. This fortuity has added to the advantages that Britt has had in being conveniently geographically located, having supportive parents and receiving patronage from the Chambers family. When all of these factors are considered, it becomes evident that Britt's actual talent has played a smaller role in her rapid rise than her publicist's hyperbole would have you believe. This is not to say that Britt is not talented, but rather to identify that many other factors have also contributed to her success so far. When asked to consider whether Britt would be able to achieve a similar level of success in the US to Kasey Chambers, Chambers' former US representative John Lomax III (of Kinetic Management) first cautioned that the two situations are "apples and oranges", then replied:

I would point out that one reason for Kasey's success here is simply the sound of her voice... Kasey still sounds like no one else. I'm not sure the same can be said for Catherine's voice at this stage in her development... As for development, one key issue is whether or not Catherine will show the same stunning progress Kasey was able to achieve between age 16 and age 22 when The Captain was released. Kasey was able to improve dramatically during this time, partly because of doing hundreds of shows as lead singer for The Dead Ringer Band. Lacking a similar family band setup it's going to be much

harder for Catherine to achieve the same musical growth in her songwriting, singing and stage presence.

Although Britt had solid representation in Australia (through signing a management deal with Stephan White Entertainment), the fact that her manager perceived that her major opportunities existed in the US meant that she also needed solid US-based representation. Once again drawing on a parallel between the careers of Britt and Kasey Chambers, in terms of breaking into the US market, it is significant to note that Chambers had the benefit of a sustained build up of promotion and interest over several years prior to her debut album's release. Lomax III asserts that the problem for Britt might be that if Chambers has been deemed 'too rootsy' for Nashville-dominated radio, then Britt, who is arguably more traditional country in orientation, may have similar (or worse) problems in accessing a broad consumer base.

One advantage that Britt and Chambers share is that their Australian recording contracts have not tied them to particular North American/international deals. Britt is signed to the Australian ABC Country label,¹⁰² which is distributed and marketed through the international Universal Music company. Her contract is for the domestic market only, a factor that allows her to escape a perennial challenge for Australian artists attempting to break into overseas markets. The challenge in question arises from the fact that inter-company license agreements mean that if an act is signed to a complicated deal with a major label out of a small territory like Australia/New Zealand, they do not get prioritised. This is because the sister company overseas has

¹⁰² An offshoot of the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

to pay a higher royalty for a foreign artist through such as agreement than if they were to sign a local artist.

While White recognises this situation, and the need to avoid it through contractual arrangements such as Britt's with ABC Country, he also expresses a more optimistic viewpoint (and faith in his artist):

They're going to sign anything they think has got the talent that's going to sell – bottom line. All that other stuff doesn't even come into play. Everything in this world's negotiable and no matter what's written on a piece of paper, if you find yourself in the right position of being a young artist who has come up with the goods and people around the world think they can make money out of you, everything's up for negotiation.

Here White suggests that artist management is indeed a creative role. Although he has perhaps been fortunate in not having his perceptions of this situation tested – by virtue of not being caught in an inter-company license agreement with Britt – his point has much validity (since a number of Australian artists have been taken up for North American release through such licensing). This was not the only difficulty – even free of licensing shackles, the issue of what labels they should have targeted, cultivated and signed to are just as complex. In this regard, the Americana niche market is as limiting as it is attractive. As Steve Britt identified in mid-2002, in the early stages of negotiating with the North American BMG organisation and other companies:

In most cases an Americana/roots label is going to be a lot smaller than a country label. Both RCA and Arista are fairly big country labels. The reason they were looking at the different labels is that one of them [Arista] seems to be more of a 'singer-songwriter' type label whereas the RCA label tends to sign performers who are performing other people's songs. In terms of an American roots label, we did have some interest at some stage from Rounder I think. The trouble is that because of where she is and whatever, there'd be a fair amount of money involved in promoting her and starting her off, so only one of the big labels would be able to do it.

Steve Britt's comments point to a logistical problem; while an independent label may be a viable option for artists based in North America (and able to perform, promote and network themselves frequently there), an artist based overseas needs the support a major can (although not necessarily does) supply.

One factor that benefited the Britts and White in negotiating with US majors was Catherine Britt's endorsement by mainstream music performers, including, most notably, British pop celebrity, Elton John.¹⁰³ John has endorsed Britt in numerous press articles, on television and on stage, making such statements as:

¹⁰³ While Elton John has never received placement in the *Billboard* country charts, his early success with albums such as *Tumbleweed Connection* (1971) – was based around a rewriting of various country music themes and musical feels through the lens of south-eastern England and British pop music.

I picked up a copy of Catherine's album the other day – it blew me away! I just sent it to people in America saying, "listen, this girl's incredible." (Today Show [Australia] – 3/5/2002)

The kind of publicity afforded by Elton John's endorsement has been invaluable to White in his attempt to further Britt's career and has also offered a valuable lifeline (by association) with a mainstream pop field that Britt's own music operates distinctly outside. Following a sustained period of negotiation with the BMG organisation, Britt signed to its RCA label in late 2003. While this delivered a major company deal it was not on the singer-songwriter orientated label that her self-perception would suggest as most appropriate. This perhaps suggests that BMG – at least – have a slightly different perception of her market appeal, one (perhaps) influenced by John's championing of her as a potential mainstream artist.

e. *Too Far Gone*

Britt spent 2004 recording in Nashville, touring the US and working the media in order to pave the way for her first international album *Too Far Gone*. A highlight for the year 2004 involved recording a duet with Sir Elton John for this album. The track is called *Where We Both Say Goodbye* and it is a Britt co-write with Jerry Salley.¹⁰⁴ John later invited Britt and her mother to his Las Vegas show where he acknowledged her from the stage and dedicated *Tiny Dancer* to her.

¹⁰⁴ This duet does not appear in the Australian version of the album.

RCA/BMG Music licensed *Too Far Gone* to the ABC for its Australian release and in January 2006 the ABC worked with Warner Music who manufactured, distributed and marketed the album. At the time of writing, a US release date for the album is dependent on the success of her first single there, *The Upside of Being Down*. This single was released in 2005 and to date it has peaked at number 34 on the Billboard Chart in the US and it made it to number 1 the Australian Country Music Chart. Country Music Television (CMT) aired the world premier of the video for the song on December 2. Britt had the added distinction of being invited into the studio for the first airing (a privilege normally reserved for established stars). The video was filmed in the legendary Tootsies bar in Nashville.

To set up for her debut major label album release, Britt spent a copious amount of time visiting radio stations and media in 60 cities in the US where she would perform acoustic shows in a variety of formats. These included outdoor shows for listeners, performances in conference rooms for staff, and performances in her tour bus for key program directors. In late 2004 Britt also performed two showcases in Nashville and New York City to media and industry heavyweights with the assistance of Martina McBride's band. After the performance in Nashville, respected country music critic James Carter wrote:

RCA newcomer Catherine Britt is the real thing. Best new female country vocalist to come along in years. She is polished, pure and easy to look at. She's somewhere between Emmylou Harris and Dolly Parton, but actually she's her own girl. Original even if that's possible. Paul Overstreet and so

many of the best songwriters in town love her and now so do I

...¹⁰⁵

This is an important review for Britt by a powerful journalist. In early 2005 talks had also begun regarding a visit by Britt to England and Ireland to perform in 2006.

The album's Australian release helped her first two singles in this country reach number 1 and three of her videos have been on high rotation on the Country Music Channel (CMC). Her singles have received a substantial amount of radio airplay both in Australia and the US and RCA (in the US) spent \$30,000 on a photo shoot and made a radio documentary in order to maximise her exposure. She has also been media-trained and has worked with top vocal therapy doctors in Nashville.

Britt toured Australia in January and February 2006 and *Too Far Gone* has received some favourable reviews. She is currently managed by The Consortium in the US and is signed to The Roberts Network in Australia for management. Britt comments on her relationship with her first manager Steve White in the liner notes to her album: "To Steve White. I am mostly where I am because of your belief in me. Thanks for all the big things, and for the millions of little things you did for me over the years." Creative Artists Agency books her Australian shows.

At the time of writing it is impossible to gauge how her management will respond to the sales success (or otherwise) of her most recent recording project. It seems likely that short to medium term strategies will concentrate on the North American market

¹⁰⁵ Quotation taken from Britt's biography located at www.catherinebritt.com

and a broad international market, with Australia as an established niche (rather than focus).

f. Conclusion

The talented Catherine Britt has been fortunate in her career to date. She has also worked hard, developed her singing, writing, stage presentation and PR skills. Britt has overcome many of the biggest hurdles Australian artists and management face when trying to build careers in the North American market. These challenges have included the need for her to gain effective US-based representation, to continue developing as an artist, and her manager's need to ensure that the business entities with which she is involved receive a worthwhile return on their investment. Despite Keith Urban's success in US country album and singles charts in 2002, and Kasey Chambers' success with Americana audiences and critics, being a country artist from Australia trying to break into the US market is more problematic than it is beneficial. Britt's headway in the largest country music market in the world has enabled her to increase her presence in Australia. As an Australian-based and targeted country artist, without this headway Britt would – in all likelihood – struggle to receive mainstream commercial radio and music video play in Australia, limiting her ability to make it into the national mainstream charts. Indeed Britt's RCA deal has provided her with another angle on the domestic market, funding and directing career development and audio-visual products that are possibly going to allow her to bypass domestic market filters and insert herself in the mainstream charts as an international artist. In any case, the opportunities open to the 'hillbilly pickin' ramblin' girl' from Newcastle are considerable and her career trajectory is likely to prove illuminating for those seeking to emulate her career success.

This chapter raised the status of Australian country music within the Australian cultural and academic psyche. Through a detailed analysis of three unique career trajectories that have been built within this section of the industry, some of the more subtle aspects of managerial creativity were examined. These included an outline of the unique challenges that established artists such as Kernaghan face due to the fact that each artist is only as successful as their most recent accomplishment, and in addition the subtle differences between the organic approach taken by Auld and the inorganic approach taken by Britt were explored.