

Chapter 4

Australian Pop Music Management: The Third Party

This chapter addresses the industrial issues surrounding the way in which ‘reality’ television shows lead to the generation of the ‘overnight success myth’, and to the perpetuation of unrealistic career expectations. Due to the wide appeal of reality television shows such as *Australian Idol*¹⁰⁶ and *Pop Stars*¹⁰⁷ (during the time of writing) Australian music industry discussion is often concerned with the positive and negative attributes of the ‘inorganic’ artist management featured in these shows. The primary need for a thesis section that features an outline of inorganic managerial strategies is that while persistence and determination are crucial character traits that artists must possess, instead of pushing on in their careers, many artists retreat from the industry defeated because they believe the overnight success myth. The argument here is that this myth goes against the belief that careers in music are like careers in other fields, in that, one starts out at the bottom, not making much money, and then they work their way up. There is therefore a need for artists and managers to learn how inorganic strategies and contracts work.

This issue will be addressed through drawing a comparison between the more organic artist development discussed so far and the inorganic way in which some mainstream pop artist’s careers come to fruition. The assumption that inorganic artist management

¹⁰⁶ This is the Australian version of the global franchise. It is a reality television show/program in which contestants audition live in front of a panel of three judges.

¹⁰⁷ This is the Australian version of the global franchise *Pop Stars*, a reality television show that features various cultural intermediaries deciding which contestants will be allowed to join a super group for whom they then produce a film clip, a record and a media campaign.

practices sacrifice artist development and longevity for short-term pop phenomenon is explored. While these arguments and their counter arguments are discussed in the first section, the second half of this chapter involves a closer analysis of an actual mainstream artist manager's career.

I. The Construction of Musical Identity

The theoretical perspectives that underpin this section emerged from a detailed reading of the works of Frascogna and Hetherington (1997), Klein (2000) and Quart (2003). Key to the works of these authors is the argument that the advertising industry's push for new spaces for their marketing efforts to appear within has generated a mutually enhancing synthesis between 'manufactured' pop music and the corporate world. This section will serve to highlight both the positive and negative impact that this synthesis is having on pop artists' careers.

The intention here is not to suggest that the managers of 'organically' developed and independent musical acts are virtuous because they uncover the supposedly 'pure' origins of organic homologies of sound, style and ritual; or to vilify the ways in which pop music managers manipulate a vague monolith called 'the media' through shrewd engagements with corporate endorsement. Instead, this section will draw a comparison between two of the key pathways available for musical career development in Australia. Both pathways involve manager's aiding the construction of identity to differing degrees. The main difference between the construction of identity in the realm of independent music and in the field of mainstream pop music is that in the former it is arguably implicit while in the latter it is explicit.

The different sectors of the Australian music industry are interrelated. Indeed, television shows such as *Australian Idol* are viewed positively by the publishing sector of the music industry. The catalogue of songs used on the show generates much needed revenue. Music publishers can sign artists from other sectors of the music industry because of the performance royalties generated when reality television shows use published artists songs. Therefore such television shows and managerial strategies can have a positive effect on the independent sector – the mainstream pop world's supposed antithesis. Artists and managers who are critical of the artist management practices highlighted by television shows such as *Australian Idol* may be undermining a future (indirect) source of funding.

a. Historical Context

Frascona and Hetherington (1997) argue that the most significant development over the last decade in the area of commercials and endorsements has been the increased involvement of corporations¹⁰⁸ in the careers of music artists. They note that:

In the late 80s, the appeal of recording artists to corporations to tap into expanding markets grew substantially. This paralleled skyrocketing costs affecting almost every aspect of an artist's professional life. Artists who once toured the country in station wagons and panel vans suddenly found it necessary to use jets and tractor-trailers. (189)

¹⁰⁸ The chartered corporation is under the law a legal person. Therefore, throughout this section the corporation is understood to be an entity that develops and manages artistic entities much like an individual 'flesh and blood' manager would.

Frascogna and Hetherington note that artist managers and corporate marketers entered a new era of corporate sponsorship that included packaged tours, multiyear corporate spokesmanship arrangements, television, radio and print advertisement combinations, and a host of other complex joint ventures. They cite the example of Michael Jackson's involvement with Pepsi in the early 1990s as being one of the most 'penetrating' arrangements.

Similarly, Klein (2000) argues that the marketing world is always reaching a new zenith by "breaking through last year's world record and planning to do it again next year with aggressive new formulae for reaching consumers" (9). She claims that the advertising industry's rate of growth was so steady that by the year 1998 the total expenditure in the US was set to reach US\$196.5 billion (up from \$50 billion in 1979). Global advertisement spending was estimated to be US\$435 billion and, according to the United Nations Human Development Report, the growth in global advertisement spending "now outpaces the growth of the world economy by one-third" (ibid. 9). Klein argues that this escalation in advertising expenditure has had a significant impact on the music industry. Not only are record companies and larger corporations teaming up to place:

... highly sophisticated cross-branding apparatus behind working musicians, but bands are increasingly being conceived – and test marketed – as brands first: the Spice Girls, the Backstreet Boys, N'Sync, All Saints and so on. Prefab bands aren't new to the music industry, and neither are bands with their own merchandising lines, but the

phenomenon has never dominated pop culture as it has at the end of the nineties, and musicians have never before competed so aggressively with consumer brands. (ibid. 54)

She argues that as a result, 'brands' and 'stars' have become one and the same and that pop musicians are therefore not just competing against other high-profile musicians but also against highly recognisable brands such as Coke, Nike, Sony and Microsoft.

b. The Culture Creation Business

Deconstructing the perceived differences between 'authentic' underground music subcultures and 'overexposed' commercial forms of popular music, Thornton (1995) argues against the idea that 'authentic' culture is somehow outside media and commerce. She asserts that, "in its full-blown romantic form, the belief suggests that grassroots cultures resist and struggle with a colonizing mass mediated corporate world" (116). Rather than adhering to such a belief, she instead argues that there is in fact no opposition between subcultures and the media except for a dogged ideological one.

Although Thornton's writing primarily concerns the micro local media's construction of various dance music subcultures and what happens to these subcultures once their 'fleeting capitals' disappear into the realm of mass production, her work is relevant to a study of manufactured pop music management. Thornton's work provides a viable entry point for an understanding of how the branding process of this paradigm affects the culture of the individual, the culture of the group and mass culture. What begins as

a subculture, or as anthropological or 'communal' culture, can be transformed into, and can construct, mass culture (and vice versa); the 'branding' of popular music aids this process. Indeed, while Thornton claims that "niche media like the music press construct subcultures as much as they document them" (117), corporate advertising efforts operate in a similar way. They do not just capitalise on trends in pop music; they in fact cause trends and in doing so they also construct 'culture' – be it individual, communal or mass.

c. The Manager's Vision

Discussing the construction of what she believes to be superficial teen identity, Quart (2003) argues:

Before, the producers of teen music shows and bands tried to be invisible for fear of appearing to be exploitative. It's a telling indication of the extent to which youth culture has been commercialised that grown up "judges" shaping and contorting musical youth into a brand are now a main draw: their presence and approval is now the necessary proof that these wannabe kids are becoming real, that is, becoming bona fide products. (xix)

Since the early 1950s a key characteristic of pop music management has involved a person or entity other than the artist or personal manager (henceforth the 'third party') shaping and explicitly constructing a performer's identity. Quart and Klein (2000) argue that a phenomenon that defines the contemporary era is that the 'third party' is

either the corporate brand sponsoring the artist, the franchise such as *Australian Idol*, or the judge making the managerial decision. Often the third party precedes the musical entity and has a higher profile than the actual pop artist. This trend is arguably leading to the exacerbation of an already existing power dynamic that exists between such music industry players and the mainstream pop music artists they develop.

Influential Australian artist manager Michael McMartin^{109 110} makes the following comment on manufactured pop artists:

With a manufactured entity, you usually find that there's a third party that precedes the entity – be it a manager, a promoter, an entrepreneur or a corporation,¹¹¹ some one has the vision and says "here's what I want to sell" – now I'll find the medium to sell it through and that's the band or the artist.

McMartin notes that this differs from an organic model of artist management in that:

The 'organic' situation usually involves the artist or the band starting through forming their own dream and their own goals first and then they bring in someone else to achieve these goals.

¹⁰⁹ All comments attributed to Michael McMartin in this chapter are, unless otherwise indicated, taken from personal correspondence with the author conducted in December 2004.

¹¹⁰ McMartin is the executive director of the International Music Manager's Forum and currently manages iconic Australian rock band the Hoodoo Gurus.

¹¹¹ McMartin states that The Sex Pistols founder and manager Malcolm McLaren and the Idol franchise are examples.

In the former arrangement, artist managers manage musical meaning and identity in a more explicit way. In their attempts to raise artists' profiles in our media-saturated world in order to reach the upper echelons of the record sales charts, pop music managers often attach their artist's brand image to that of a corporation so as to rise above the abundance of other high profile brand names. Through generating a 'brand essence' for their artists and then selling this 'essence' to the corporate world, contemporary pop music managers operate as storytellers on a large scale. Alternatively, a corporation itself may generate an artist's brand image in order to further a commercial goal of its own. This gives both the manager/entrepreneur and the corporation unique power within the music industry, power that often financially benefits them as the third party more than the pop artist.

Discussing such a manager and their stable of artists, Quart (2003) notes:

Of the eight S Club Junior Tweens, not one is over 14 years old. This gang sprang from the mind of Simon Fuller and his company, 19 Management. Given that Fuller was responsible for the Spice Girls, S Club 7 and Pop Idol, it's no surprise that he "discovered" a group of young children to construct into another super-group this time around. (xviii)

The manufactured pop management model necessarily involves the third party's capital, risk-taking entrepreneurial attitude, contacts, ambition, mission and goals. This means that the artist involved is often not able negotiate a contract that leads to

them being in a financial situation that matches the 'hype' or the 'perception of success' that surrounds their career/brand image. Of the five main income stream groups potentially available to musicians, pop artists often only receive income from live performances. As they often do not write the actual songs they record and perform, they are denied income from song publishing. Because they necessarily have to make an expensive recording and video clips, both of which are recouped against income from record sales, they are denied income from this stream. Moreover, the merchandising usually concerns the franchise to which they belong, such as *Pop Stars* or *Australian Idol*, rather than them as an individual and therefore they are often denied income from this stream as well.¹¹²

From the perspective of the third party manager, entrepreneur or corporation, this is an understandable situation as the pop artists themselves are not usually taking the large financial risk necessary by investing the economic capital needed to develop and produce the product. Indeed, the logic of investment and return forms a truism that underlies the operation. However, a problem with this method of artist management is that it leads to pop artists not being as well-positioned economically as their brand images suggest they are.

d. Overnight Success

In an interview John Safran conducted with manufactured New Zealand pop group True Bliss, a product of the *Pop Stars*¹¹³ franchise, Erika Takacs, a member of the group, answered a question concerning whether she was able to keep the clothing a

¹¹² They may receive token amounts from the other income stream groups so that they do not go to the press and outline their belief that they are being exploited.

¹¹³ This is the New Zealand version of the global franchise *Pop Stars*.

sponsor provided by saying: “we never got to keep the clothes we wore”¹¹⁴. When asked whether she believes the general public assumed she made a lot of money because she was part of the *Pop Stars* success story, Takacs replies:

Of course – people still think that. I think that the public illusion is that if you are famous you are therefore rolling in it.

That’s a Hollywood perception. (ibid)

The group’s first single debuted at number 1 and stayed there for two weeks and their album repeated this success (while the rest of the group’s releases made it into the top 5). However, in response to a question about whether she made thousands of dollars from her involvement in the group, Takacs states “thousands of dollars, Lord no – we probably earned about as much as somebody who works in a supermarket – so there you go” (ibid.).

Michael McMartin (2004) argues that this situation is inevitable due to a balanced and viable working environment for both parties, the artist and the ‘third party’ manager, entrepreneur or corporation, being unrealisable:

There’s no bargaining involved. As part of any contractual negotiation there has to be both parties’ desire for it to happen and then there has to be something that you’re offering that no one else can provide. In this circumstance it is never going to work because the entrepreneur with the

¹¹⁴ This comment was made by Takacs on John Safran’s Music Jamboree documentary that aired on SBS on Monday the 13th of December 2004 at 9pm.

contract is saying "I have television, live, record deal, publishing deal, management deal – I'm offering all of those for you in one big package and you're going to get on television – take it or leave it. Here's what we're offering – there are 5,000 kids with equal talent to you lined up there ready to take this – do you want it or don't you?"

According to McMartin, this is a "mind-boggling" case of unequal positions in law and in negotiating a contract. He even goes so far as to say that this kind of contract negotiation is not a 'negotiation'. In order to provide a point of difference, he notes that such a mainstream pop negotiation differs from an 'organic' management situation; the latter often involves a negotiation in which the artist manager may say:

I can get you gigs and we'll try and get a record deal and we'll try and get a publishing deal and if it's not properly fulfilled and if there isn't sufficient income and if there's not the levels of achievement that we both agree should be there after six months, a year or two years then we rip it up and both go our own ways.

Such an organic model enables the artist and manager team to build a brand name slowly through developing their art and their contacts and this will usually lead to more negotiating power on behalf of the artist. According to McMartin, the challenge with an organic model involves maintaining the persistence and determination needed to find alternative paths for careers, paths that enable the artist/manager team to

navigate over and around obstacles. This is something the artist and manager do together, while:

With the manufactured model the bulldozer has already gone through. But it's one straight line. If it doesn't work it ain't going to work at all.

Manufactured pop artists are therefore restricted to one or two “big shots” at building a sustainable career. McMartin argues:

You're not going to make it as a pop artist with an independent label because you have to have the power at radio, you have to have the advertising – you have to have the money to tell people it's a hit before it is. So that then they will make it a hit.

This means that the manager, entrepreneur or corporation involved must take a huge risk by investing a large sum of money into the artist's career in order to have “the power at radio” that is necessary to break a pop artist. This genre of contemporary music is largely driven by video, by radio airplay and increasingly by major advertising campaigns that penetrate more “nooks and crannies of the culture than a video in heavy rotation on MTV or a cover article in Rolling Stone” (Klein, 2000: 50).

As the entities involved in constructing pop artists' identities and careers are taking the risks, these entities receive the return on the investment. However, this flow of money back to the investors rather than to the artists can lead to media critics such as John Safran (2004) stating that despite having a glamorous and successful 'appearance', there seem to be at least three major reasons why ultimately one is going to "starve to death" being a pop star:

Firstly, unlike every other band in Australia – who can choose to be prudent with their expenses – the Pop Stars are forced to produce a really expensive debut video so they look successful for the TV show and they're going to find it really difficult to ever earn enough royalties to be able to repay that debt. While acts like Kylie and Britney are allowed to write some lyrics so that they can get song-writing royalties, Pop Stars are not given this option – they have to sing what they are given. Thus from the starting block they are denied the only way you can really make any money as a recording artist. And thirdly, unlike any other band in Australia, who get to shop around and choose a manager to represent their interests, the pop stars are assigned one by the TV show. An independent manager would no doubt advise them to pen a few lyrics and maybe film a cheaper, crappier, debut video.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ This comment was made by Safran on his *Music Jamboree* documentary that aired on SBS on Monday the 13th of December 2004 at 9pm.

However, although the manufactured pop music management model will often lead to such discourse being emitted by members of the media, from the perspective of the manager or entrepreneur involved this 'side effect' is unavoidable. As McMartin notes:

One of the great obscenities of our business is that you appear to be successful if you are spending a lot of money – which may just be a superficial façade. So much money gets wasted because it is necessary for those reasons and sometimes this money is spent but the artist is not right – radio doesn't like it, the kids don't react – the artist can't fulfil or back up the promise.

The relatively fast generation of a 'perception' of success that this model of music management necessitates leads to pop managers working with individuals who have proven themselves to be hit songwriters; this association reduces their company's exposure to the risk they must take. McMartin claims that this situation will often enable the manager/entrepreneur or corporation to receive a percentage of the songwriter's income for commissioning them to provide a song. Speaking in the third person of a hypothetical scenario, he explains:

Now the way it works – and again I'm lumping the manager and entrepreneur together as the party setting it out – now – you're a songwriter and I'm an entrepreneur as Australian Idol and Jane here is the artist. Now we're saying that we

don't want her to write songs because we want songs that are going to be hit singles – nothing but, whether they are covers or whatever. So I would then go to you as the songwriter, a songwriter extraordinaire whose had 20 or 30 hits around the world – and I would say right now, "I love that song – we'll get them to do it," but I – who have nothing to do with you as your manager or anything else – I want 25% of the income for getting the artist to do it. Now what I'm doing here is offering ... 350,000 album sales – for your song. Now again – I can go and get songs anywhere, you want some on here – give me a percentage.

This managerial method increases the manager/entrepreneur or corporation's revenue stream from the deal and it also leads to the production of songs that are more likely to be 'hits'. Such managers/entrepreneurs or corporations must produce videos with high production values to convince consumers, and other members of the music industry, that the artist's single is going to be a hit so they will "make it a hit". In addition to this, the cost of producing a manufactured pop artist's record is considerable; the management team have to use session musicians and a 'name' producer. The entrepreneur/corporation will often also take a commission from the record company for taking the project to them rather than to their competition. According to McMartin, this results in the record costing upwards of around AUS\$350, 000 – an amount that needs to be entirely recouped:

There are just a lot more back doors in the manufactured model – there are more areas of exploitation for the entrepreneur to go in and say – you're the record company, I'm going to go and get this – the costs are going to be \$350,000 to record all of this. I know that within it we're going to give the artist 12% and let's give them 5% percent from record one and not recoup everything otherwise they'll go screaming to the press – now from you I want 10% straight off the top for bringing this to you – otherwise I'll take it to Universal, EMI or someone else.

The manager/entrepreneur or corporation's necessary power within the music industry and their ownership of the idea, or of the 'brand essence', leads to this power dynamic.

e. Heroes and Villains

The fact that pop artists are generally young and are often not knowledgeable about the inner workings of the music industry both aids and works against this power dynamic. When True Bliss member Erika Takacs was asked whether she knew much about the music industry before she became a member of the group, she replied by saying:

We had no idea what we were getting ourselves into and really we were told everything on a need to know basis, so long as

*we were unaware of what was going on, they could get away
with whatever the hell they wanted to.*¹¹⁶

Such discourse tends to taint this model of artist management through couching it in terms that are reminiscent of the way in which theorists such as Chapple and Garofalo (1977) argue that in the 1950s managers had been ‘sleazy’ businessmen who were aiming to make money quickly and who had little respect for their artists’ rights in law (131). With her limited knowledge of how the music industry operates, Takacs’ articulation of her situation is in line with a clichéd and almost cinematic (in the B-grade sense) belief that the music industry has heroes and villains and that these characters fall on the side of either creativity or commerce (respectively). The heroes are the musicians, producers and performers (the creative artists), while the villains are the record companies and entertainment corporations (the commercial corrupters and manipulators) (Negus, 1996: 46).

It is a problem that such a resolution avoids acknowledgement of the complex situations manufactured pop music managers find themselves within. The manager is the bridge between the art and the commerce and they are never going to get into a situation where they are keeping both sides happy – this is impossible (Welch, 2002: 236). From a managerial perspective and from the perspective of academic theory, commerce versus creativity is a clichéd, overly-simplistic argument that is impossible for a manager to win.

¹¹⁶ This comment was made by Takacs on John Safran’s Music Jamboree documentary that aired on SBS on Monday the 13th of December 2004 at 9pm.

However, manufactured pop music managers must keep in mind that, from the perspective of the participants of music scenes, these ideas are part of the way in which musicians make sense of what is happening to them (Negus, 1996: 48). In order to avoid having their artist's discourse taint their managerial profile and perceptions of the strategies they employ, pop managers should keep the channels of communication between themselves and their charges open so that their artists can make more accurate and educated sense of what is happening to them.

In the case of the pop mainstream, music is not located at the starting point of the industrial process. It is located at the end of the industrial process. This is a notion that becomes evident when considering both manufactured pop management practices and 'organic' artist management practices. When considering the realm of manufactured pop music, Klein (2000) claims that bands are increasingly being conceived as brands first (54); while Quart (2003) argues that the industrialization of teen music is detrimental because of the layer of deceit and hype it places between youth music practitioners and their identity. Discussing the impact that branding processes have on the culture of young individuals, Quart points out that:

One of the most telling scenes on a Popstars compilation DVD has kids who were short-listed for Hear'Say attending a mock press conference. At this pseudo-press meeting, the teen and young adults are taught to falsify their identities: one girl is instructed by "the journalists" gathered to prevaricate about her experiences with marijuana. The audience is watching child contestants learn how to self-brand. There's no end to

*the cynicism of the discussion of 'role models' in this scene ...
while the judges in every episode of these youth fame reality
shows are a combination of critical parents and brand
managers who reward their kids for being smooth and well
packaged. (xix)*

Klein (2000) and Quart (2003) arguably reject this method of artist management and image creation as it does not fall into line with their subjectivist/romantic notion of creativity. It is reasonable to assume that an alternative to the above situation would involve an individual teen performer working in isolation from other influences to create an 'original' piece of art that reflects their 'true essence' and that this may then be colonised by commerce. However, in the case Quart discusses, the teen identity under discussion is not the starting point for the industrial process but rather this teen identity is the end point because managerial creativity has generated it. Similarly, the process of 'organic' artist management also involves an industrial mechanism providing a creative product at its end point. This industrial mechanism is the *creative* process of marketing/branding. When asked whether he engages with branding theory when formulating strategies for the artists he manages, McMartin replied:

*Yes – whether it's with rock, pop or another genre –
absolutely. If you are going to go and excite people and
enthuse people about your music ... for their own good, for
their own self-identity, they've got to know who they are, what
they are, and how they are going to be packaged, or a better
word is 'exploited' (in a positive sense). Where artists or*

bands fall down is where they haven't taken the time to work out where to go – where it isn't consistent.

According to Quart (2003), the process of branding a teen's individual culture in the hope that the resultant constructed identity will form a gateway to mass culture (and therefore the sale of commodities) is problematic and over-commercial. However, this process is not dissimilar to the way in which the managers of groups that are supposedly the nemesis of manufactured pop music operate. In both cases artist managers' opinions, visions and beliefs are more than just representations of a pre-existing artistic identity and the commodities this identity signifies. They are instead mediators, and as such they are integral participants in the formation of individual and group music culture.

McMartin's definition of an artist manager (that follows) could be applied in an attempt to define the role of a manufactured pop music manager *and* an 'organic' music manager:

The fan base that you build upon has to know who you are and you have to know it as well. I mean that defines a manager to me – it is the person who finds out who the band is and then who makes sure that the members all know who they are then they coordinate everyone else all the way along the line – the promoter, the publicist, the record company, the people involved with the merchandise, the crew – they let everyone know and they make sure that the timing is right – that all the

*parts work together and then as the band changes internally –
the manager's job is to make sure that they tell the band.*

McMartin's belief that the branding process can be applied to the managerial role in general suggests that the self-branding process a teen pop artist is encouraged to embark upon by their management is similar to the process McMartin encourages his bands to go through. Discussing the construction of a teenage artist's identity by participants in the worldwide *Pop Stars* franchise, Quart (2003) notes that the term 'role model' simply refers to a young artificial entity without a personality. (xix)

Quart is arguing here that such manufactured artists are devoid of personalities because their identities have been so explicitly 'fabricated' through the way their generation was reliant upon the input of others within a short time frame. However, viewed from another perspective, this is simply an example of a micro 'art world' in action. Furthermore, the artist's identity/brand image is also reliant upon such an art world. Indeed the role of manager's, whether they are working with an artist who has developed organically or they are manufacturing an artist, is to develop and nurture the art world or the context a particular artist is located within.

Quart's (2003) claim that the teenage pop musicians franchises such as *Pop Stars* produce are devoid of personality is a claim grounded in an overly simplistic concept of an 'artist', albeit one that the contemporary western popular music industry has tended to structure itself around. The conceptualisation of an artist's existence in terms of solitary creative agency is problematic as it places too much emphasis on an artist's 'gifted personality', while not placing enough emphasis on the role of situations,

contexts or art worlds. An artist's brand image, identity or 'personality' is not an 'absolute' and pre-existing entity that is colonised by commerce, rather, an artistic identity or brand image is relative to, and is derivative of, its context – and it is commerce and highly-sophisticated branding apparatuses which provide this context.

f. Conclusion

The main difference between the manufactured pop management model and the organic model is that with the former the construction of identity explicitly takes place within the realm of mass culture, while with the latter such construction takes place more explicitly within a group (or sub) culture. The former also involves a short timeframe and a large budget. Often the vision or the idea belongs to the third party entrepreneur, manager or corporation, an entity that is initially more visible than the artist. If the idea belongs to a specific manager they may potentially be a celebrity in their own right. In the cases outlined in this section, there is a perception that pop artists work for these modern day svengalis, whether they are an individual manager or a corporation (which has the rights of an 'individual'). These managers are 'brokers of meaning' not only due to their involvement in the artist's creative development, but also through the way they provide an instant context or 'art world' for the artist's brand image to emanate from.

In terms of televised reality shows such as *Australian Idol*, the members of the general public who vote via the telephone for particular artists also form a part of the art world. This form of market research further limits the corporation's risk. The power that such managers or corporations have to develop this context means the artist is in an unequal position when negotiating the contract between themselves and

the corporate entity. In contrast to this, in the organic model, managers are employed to help realise and to develop the pre-existing vision of the artist. The power dynamic between the artist and the manager is almost reversed in that there is a perception that the manager works for the artist. This model will often involve a longer timeframe and it can lead to both an increase in negotiating power on behalf of the artist and a more sustainable, though less high-profile, career.

The question of age also comes into view when considering the differences between these two models of artist management. The longer timeframe the organic model often requires means the artist is relatively old by the time they break through, while the manufactured pop model has youth as a pre-requisite for artists because of the age of the demographic that finds this music appealing. Concerning age, McMartin notes:

That's the way our industry is going, with the majors, it is totally a young man's game. Pretty male or female – I mean within the pop industry it's definitely like that.

McMartin claims that while this model is necessary for young artists if they wish to break through while they are still young, the manufactured pop management model can lead to a high-profile but short-term career for a pop artist because there is still the question of talent:

You have to get the brand out there but the substance has to be there more than anything else. I think it's harder to fool people in music over a period of time. You can get by with one

hit single – but if you’ve told people that this is what it is and if the artist isn’t that – if they are not that good – if there is not actually a real element of talent – be it the Australian Idol situation which is so manufactured – if they go off and yes they can perform on TV but there’s not anything more substantial than that then it’s going to drop. It’s going to go very high, very quickly but then it’s going to drop – and drop very far quickly as well.

The artist’s longevity does not necessarily matter to the corporation that produced the artist. A corporation is required by law to place the financial interests of its owners above competing interests. Therefore, the corporation is legally bound to put its financial interests above everything else including a manufactured pop artist’s career; thereby the artist can turn into a ‘competing interest’. The corporation, such as the television station involved, is the actual producer of the manufactured pop artists who have come through the ‘Pop Stars’ or ‘Idol’ global franchises. The music industry simply presents such a corporation with the ability to externalise costs that it incurs producing a television show. The chartered corporation is, under the law, a legal person and therefore in some instances the corporation can be considered to be the real manager. However, if the corporation is required to act in its owner’s interests, then the artist as an entity becomes an ‘externality’ – that is, this entity becomes a disposable third party that simply exists to satisfy a short-term profit motive. In this corporate context, the person who is given the title of ‘artist manager’ must be a ‘beast’. As individuals they may be caring benevolent people who truly wish to see

their artists' careers flourish, but in their institutional role they are 'monsters' because the institution is a monster.

II. Case Study 7: Glenn Wheatley

The final case study in this thesis will analyse the career of Australian artist manager Glenn Wheatley. Although this thesis has shed some light on the processes involved in building and developing the contexts within which Australian artists' careers can thrive, little has been said about the actual careers of artist managers, what drives them and how they survive. Artist managers do not only have to manage the careers of their artists, they have to manage their own careers. While an artist needs talent, training, effective management, location in an art world, good luck¹¹⁷, and the personality traits of persistence and determination, so too does an artist manager. Australian artists are often left to their own devices because they lack institutional protection; Australian artist managers are in the same position.

As previously stated, within the genre of mainstream pop music a third party usually precedes the manufactured entity, whether this is a manager, a promoter, an entrepreneur or a corporation. This type of artist management often involves an individual who has the overall vision of what they want to sell. They subsequently find the medium required to sell this, and this 'medium' is the band or the artist. In order to better understand artist management practices in the genre of pop music, it is

¹¹⁷ '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.

necessary to engage with, and understand, the motivations, drives and goals of the third party who precedes the musical entity.

Glenn Wheatley is a high-achieving Australian artist manager. In the late sixties and early seventies, he played bass guitar with the Masters Apprentices; this band had many hit records in Australia. In the seventies, Wheatley's overall vision for the Little River Band saw this act achieve international success. In the eighties, Wheatley played a significant role in establishing FM radio in Australia and in building the country's biggest radio network. As John Farnham's manager, Wheatley contributed in a major way to putting Farnham's career back on track (as it had declined since its initial peak in the sixties). In the nineties Wheatley lost everything he owned when the company (the Farrow Corporation) that held the mortgage to the title of his \$6,000,000 house, and that had loaned him the money to build and develop a high class Melbourne nightclub (the Ivy), collapsed. He has since bounced back from this and is currently a successful Australian artist manager.

a. The Apprentice

Wheatley was raised in Brisbane by working-class parents living in the middle class suburb of Stafford; he was the elder of two sons. In 1962, at age 15, he left school to become an apprentice photo-lithographer. He formed a band while at high school, the South-town Moods. While he was completing the first two years of the apprenticeship he continued to perform in the band. Because there was no work for this band he decided to 'create' work for them. Indeed, like the majority of Australian musicians who initially operate at the micro/local level of the Australian music industry, Wheatley started out independently and was initially reliant on live work.

Since Wheatley was self-managed, his education in artist management began at the same time as his career as a performer. As a manager he began learning his trade through finding work for his band. When things did not work out for this band he joined another, building his managerial knowledge along the way. He did everything from acting as a booking agent, a promoter, a public relations officer, a manager, a caterer, as well as playing in the band. Through promoting local shows, Wheatley made a name for himself and eventually he was asked to join the Purple Hearts (the hottest band in Brisbane at the time) as rhythm guitarist. Soon afterwards the Purple Hearts headed south to Melbourne in an attempt to make a name for themselves Australia-wide; Wheatley stayed behind in order to continue his apprenticeship as a photo-lithographer. Virtually on the rebound, he joined a band called the Bay City Union; eventually he migrated to Melbourne with this band.

b. Management Black Hole of Time: Micro/Local Level

While in Melbourne with the Bay City Union, Wheatley survived the micro/local 'subsistence' level of the music industry for 18 months. He notes that "the bottom end of this business is very depressing, and most of the acts don't make enough to even exist on, earning way below the basic wage" (Wheatley, 1999: 98). During this time, in addition to playing in the band and stealing bread from a bakery at 4am so that the band could eat (ibid), Wheatley liaised with booking agents in order to hustle club dates for the band to play in order to survive. Like many self-managed artists who operate at this level, Wheatley's time at this stage was wholly consumed by his attempts to maintain the band's position within the live music scene. Wheatley and the band found that they were 'running as fast as they could' in order to stay in

exactly the same place and not lose ground and they increasingly felt that amphetamines ('speed') helped them to do this. He states that after awhile:

We were doing the same old gigs and just managing to survive, with the addition of one extra cost – speed, and lots of it: Methedrine, Dexedrine ... speed became a ritual ... despite the come downs, the highs seemed enough compensation. I was convinced that we were learning a lot from our all night jam sessions, and it got to the point where I couldn't go on stage without being high. I was slowly becoming more dependent on speed and I didn't care. Another thing I was aware of was my failing health.

Wheatley eventually climbed back to normality after too many bad sleepless experiences on speed. After eleven months of dedication to the live scene in Melbourne, Bay City Union was offered a recording contract by Festival Records producer Pat Aulton. The deal was for one single only, with options,¹¹⁸ but they were nevertheless ecstatic. The band recorded at Festival's recording studio in Sydney, and, after a three-month wait, their single *Mo'reen* was released. To help promote the single, Wheatley helped organise a performance on a television pop show and two weeks after the single was released to radio it debuted on the 3UZ chart in Melbourne at number 40.

¹¹⁸ Recording contracts often have a clause in them that states that the recording company has the 'option' to release additional material recorded by the band if the first release is deemed to have been sufficiently successful.

US attorney and artist manager George Stein (2005) coined the term “management black hole of time” to refer to the labour intensive nature of artist management and the fact that there is no guarantee that the time invested in a project, at any level, will lead to outcomes that meet the artist’s and manager’s criteria for success. The Bay City Union did one more television performance and then a major theatre promotion for Melbourne radio station 3XY in return for the station pushing the single in their promotional campaign. However, despite these breaks and their soaring hopes:

Just as quickly as it had started, it all came to a grinding halt.

The next week the record dropped from the Melbourne charts

... All the excitement had gone now. We knew it would take a

miracle to get Mo’reen back into the charts. The days dragged

on, each of us clinging on to the faint hope of another chance.

But Mo’reen didn’t come back to life ... sixteen months it had

taken to achieve ‘Mo’reen’s’ release. One week in the charts

in Melbourne and two in Brisbane was all the reward we saw

for it. (Wheatley, 1999: 23)

Persistence and determination are two character traits that artists and managers need in order to combat the depression that follows when the “management black hole of time” consumes all of their energy and resources but does not produce the results they desire. In the case of the Bay City Union, Wheatley was not able to bounce back from the rejection:

We were all bitterly disappointed and I found myself growing more depressed. I woke up each morning wishing that I could go back to sleep, so that I would not have to face the day ahead. I drifted through the weeks in a constant daze. In the past I had always been able to pick myself up, but now, no matter how hard I tried, I could not muster any enthusiasm at all. The thrill and the enjoyment I once had playing music was fading. Rejection was taking its toll. (ibid: 24)

Although in this case Wheatley did not realise the results he desired in return for the large amount of work he had put into the project, with the benefit of being able to glean a long-term perspective on his career, this time period was the 'apprentice' stage of his career as an artist manager. Despite the fact that Wheatley initially fell into artist management out of necessity, his passion for it and his skill, knowledge and determination in this area grew out of his experience in these early bands.

c. Macro/National Level

After his initial attempts to break into the macro/national level of the Australian music industry from the micro/local level were unsuccessful, Wheatley was fortunate enough to be asked to join a band that already had a profile at the macro/national level. Wheatley joined the already successful Masters Apprentices as bass player and soon afterwards they toured the country on a regular basis and sometimes played to audiences of 5000 in venues such as the Festival Hall in Melbourne. At this point Wheatley was no longer involved in self-management as this band had Neil McCabe as a tour manager and Darryl Sambell as the overall manager. Sambell was also

Johnny Farnham's manager at the time. Wheatley's time was now consumed with rehearsals, shows, touring and 'coping' with success:

I began to realise what success meant and what a different world I now had to cope with ... rehearsals and fittings for costumes ... finding a new apartment, adjusting to life as celebrities. It was May 1968, I was 20 years old and it was school holidays in Melbourne. Everywhere we went we were followed by hordes of school girls. (ibid:28)

Before Wheatley had joined the band, the Masters Apprentices had a recording contract with Astor. When this contract was up for renewal, Sambell convinced the band to sign a new contract with EMI. The band recorded a single and waited for its release. It was at this point in time that Wheatley and the other band members became frustrated with the band's management. Artist management is indeed a black hole of time and, because it is so labour intensive, managers who sign more than one successful act can eventually harm all of the artists in their charge as their time is spread too thinly. In the case of the Masters Apprentices, Johnny Farnham was Darryl Sambell's priority:

In the first week of December 1968, there was still no sign of our record being released. Darryl was away with Johnny again so I rang EMI to find out what was happening. Our record, it turned out, had not been scheduled for release until sometime in the New Year. It was a frustrating and depressing situation ... We seemed to be marking time. I didn't want the

Masters Apprentices to fall into the same predicament as the Bay City Union had done. This group had proved itself. We had a new record coming out soon and a trip to England up our sleeves. All we had to do was keep ourselves together. But what we really needed was some sort of plan; what we needed was better management. (ibid: 37)

Due to the band's inactivity in December 1968, their financial status hit rock bottom – as did their morale. They had a backlog of unpaid bills, went into debt and Wheatley once again began to feel what it was like to wake up and worry about his survival. It was at this point that the band decided to sack their manager, Darryl Sambell, and manage themselves. Wheatley took on the day-to-day role of bookings and promotion. He noted that by bringing everything out in the open in this way, the camaraderie between the band members returned and they were able to continue. Through sheer hard work touring all over Australia and looking after their own affairs, the band maintained its profile. After being runners up in numerous competitions, Wheatley had ambivalent feelings towards the success that they were striving for; he came to realise that their longevity in the marketplace could potentially be compromised if they actually reached the top. He notes: “perhaps in a way we were better off not winning. If we did get to the top, there was only one other way we could go ... down.” (ibid: 44)

As Wheatley became more involved in the day-to-day management of the band he came to better understand what strategies are needed to stay afloat at a macro/national level of the Australian music industry. He states:

I began to choose our venues with more care. With Australia's small population bands quickly suffer from overexposure. It is not wise to stay in one place for too long, so we had to keep touring. Our itinerary had to be planned well in advance. Even then we didn't know how long we could maintain our popularity. We had seen so many artists come and go, and we were perhaps the most longstanding Australian rock band at the time. The obvious way to safeguard against being overexposed was to cut down on appearances and increase our fee to compensate for less gigs. This would mean that a lot of dances and clubs couldn't afford us any more. Were there enough bigger ones to support us? It was worth a gamble.

(ibid: 52)

As mentioned previously, there is a perception within the Australian field that if an artist who has a career at the macro level of the Australian music industry stays and works only in one city, or only in Australia for that matter, their career will burn out. Therefore, artists 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. Wheatley attempted to sustain the band's longevity by holding back from the market; the aim was to make sure demand for the band's performance remained unsatisfied so they could maintain it and therefore raise their performance fees. In January 1970 Wheatley set up his first booking and management agency, the Drum Organisation, with Adrian Barker. The agency provided a supplementary

income for the band and it enabled Wheatley to take care of the band's own affairs entirely. The band as an entity received a booking agent's commission. They were now able to more effectively control the supply and demand of their live product. However, Wheatley began to yearn for bigger things and so he formulated a plan to take the band to the UK.

d. Macro/International Level

In order to help their artists sustain viable musical careers, Australian artist managers often look to export their products. As previously stated, if they stay and operate solely in Australia they can only ever access 2% of the global market for popular music (Welsh, 2005). In May 1970, Wheatley secured the band a working passage on the *Fairsky*, a cruise liner ship bound for England. In the weeks before the band left they recorded and rush-released a new single because they wanted to leave with a record in the charts. It is crucial that while Australian artist managers are trying to build their artist's careers overseas they do not neglect the relationships they have built in their home territory. If they do, they may well come back to nothing.

Of the many different methods used to release Australian music in foreign territories, the following three methods have been compared in this thesis:

- Signing directly to a foreign independent or major label.
- Sourcing a deal with a multinational out of Australia and having it released in a foreign territory through an inter-company license agreement.
- Licensing or assigning the right to exploit the copyright in a pre-existing record to a label a foreign territory.

In order to see the Masters Apprentices' music released in the UK, Wheatley networked with the staff at the EMI office in London; he was trying to find a champion for the band within the ranks of this company. This is because the band had sourced their worldwide deal out of Australia with EMI, but EMI had no obligation to release the band's recordings anywhere other than in Australia. Wheatley notes:

I then began the arduous chore of walking the corridors of EMI in Manchester Square, trying to find somebody who might be interested in us. The Masters Apprentices were signed to EMI Australia. It was a worldwide agreement but EMI had no obligation to release us anywhere except Australia. In England we were unknown and, quite frankly, nobody in EMI London could 'give a damn', except for one. Her name was Trudy Green. She was then secretary to EMI record producer Jeff Jarrett. This diminutive 18 year old would go on to manage the likes of Janet Jackson, Heart and Mick Jagger. (ibid: 60)

Wheatley had found a champion for the band. Rather than releasing pre-existing material through an inter-company license agreement, Green's efforts led to the following:

I think she felt sorry for me. Whatever, she was responsible for keeping the Masters on top of the pile of records that Jeff

Jarrett had to listen to. In the end, Jeff was prepared to give us a chance. From there things started to move. EMI Australia agreed to fund the recording of an album. The unbelievable news was that it would be recorded at the famed Abbey Road Studios, the studios where the Beatles had recorded their albums. (ibid: 61)

While EMI's budget only covered a paltry 40 hours in the studio, they were able to produce an album that they were proud of and that contained songs such as *Because I Love You*. EMI in the UK liked the album and released it; at the same time it became a hit in Australia. Wheatley and the Masters Apprentices were now competing at an international level. The band's first English single, *I'm Your Satisfier*, was released in England in February 1971. It received a positive review in Britain's then premier music magazine *Melody Maker*, and was picked up by EMI's affiliate in France where it made it into the top 10 airplay list. At this point the staff at EMI in London were sufficiently enthused about the band to prioritise them a little more. Wheatley states:

They felt we had a chance. At our expense, however, we employed an outside PR person, Jim Hawsell. He managed to get us a few more reviews – nothing like a feature story, but we were getting little paragraphs that suggested we were making progress. I couldn't find an agency that would agree to sign us though. (ibid: 63)

Despite these efforts, however, the flurry around the single died down and EMI stopped returning Wheatley's calls. The band's champion within EMI, Trudy Green, had left the company and Wheatley was unable to find a replacement. The album subsequently died in the UK (and in other foreign territories); it was only because EMI Australia had sufficient success with the album that EMI in England agreed to let them record another album, *A Toast to Panama Red*. However, Wheatley states:

I was very unhappy about this album ... the night before we started recording, I had dropped a tab of LSD. It was the dumbest thing I could ever have done ... I was unhappy with the songs, I was unhappy with everything. (ibid: 64)

Although the band were able to meet George Martin when they recorded at his studio in addition to recording at Abbey Road, Wheatley was embarrassed by the resulting album and he knew that unless it miraculously took off, it would be the end of the Masters Apprentices. The album was released in both Australia and the UK to little fanfare. As he felt the band was in demise and he wanted to protect his good memories of the project, he decided to leave while trying to convince the other members to 'call it a day'. Wheatley was now ready to leave bass playing behind in order to devote himself to building a career in artist management.

e. Education and Training

Wheatley wanted to stay in the music industry and he therefore decided to stay in London to learn as much as he could about the industry. Wheatley's first job was with the successful artist management company, the Gem Toby Organisation. Ex-patriot

Australian artist manager David Joseph asked him to join in order to set up a contemporary music division of this company. Joseph was a hard taskmaster and Wheatley was thrown into the deep end. Wheatley initially found it difficult to adapt to his new job and comments:

I went through withdrawal for a while – Saturdays in particular felt weird. If ever we worked, Saturday night would be the night. People used to pay to see me, now I was going out to see bands play. I had to try to get my mind away from it. My life was changing dramatically. (ibid: 65)

To get his mind away from the withdrawal he suffered, Wheatley channelled his energy into accumulating the knowledge he would require to become managerially creative. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) asserts that creativity does not happen inside people's heads but in the interaction between a person's thoughts and a sociocultural context and that therefore it is a systemic rather than an individual phenomenon (23). Wheatley's later contributions to Australian musical creativity would result from his hard-earned knowledge of how to build and nurture various sociocultural contexts for Australian musician's thoughts to circulate in. As Csikszentmihalyi notes:

It is easier to enhance creativity by changing conditions in the environment than by trying to make people think more creatively. And a genuine creative accomplishment is almost never the result of a sudden insight, a lightbulb flashing on in the dark, but comes after years of hard work. (ibid: 2)

While this is indeed true for the musical creativity of the artists he managed, Wheatley's own managerial creativity was also the result of years of hard work and dedication.

f. Being in the Right Place

Wheatley's location within London's music scene at a time when he was learning how to survive as an artist manager and be managerially creative was advantageous to his professional development. Discussing creativity in general, Csikszentmihalyi notes that the place where one lives is important for the following reasons: firstly, one must be in a position to access the domain in which one plans to work because information is not distributed evenly in space but is clumped in different geographical nodes (ibid: 128); and secondly, novel stimulation is not evenly distributed in that:

Certain environments have a greater density of interaction and provide more excitement and a greater effervescence of ideas; therefore they prompt the person who is already inclined to break away from conventions to experiment with novelty than if he or she had stayed in a more conservative, more repressive setting. (ibid: 129)

In the music business, location matters almost as much as when buying real estate. The closer an artist manager is to the head offices of major labels, agencies and press publications that set the taste for mainstream music across the world, the easier it is for their new artist to be heard and appreciated on a massive scale. At the same time,

however, there is a downside to being near the centres of power. Young artists and managers who are immersed too soon in a competitive, high pressure environment can quite often have their freedom to be creative reduced by the pressure for quickness, quantity of output and the need to conform.

Wheatley's location in London at the start of his career as an artist manager gave him specific knowledge about how to manage artists' careers in this territory. Of course it is not that knowledge is stored in the place, "rather it resides in an institution, a local tradition, or a particular person who happens to live in that place" (ibid: 129). While working for the Gem Toby Organisation in London, Wheatley became protégé to Lawrence Myers, the head of the Gem group, and he also worked extensively with Myer's business partner David Joseph.¹¹⁹ He states:

Arch conservative that Lawrence Myers was, he couldn't relate to people like David Bowie so he began to lean on me ... most importantly, Lawrence encouraged me to read and learn from him. I was in awe of this man, and he liked me. He liked the fact that I enjoyed attending meetings with him. I enjoyed it because I was working at a level way beyond any I had ever reached before ... He taught me how to make business deals fun. It was not something you could get out of the manual, not something you could study at Harvard. What he taught me will stay with me forever. (ibid: 69)

¹¹⁹ The Gem Group was affiliated with the Toby Organisation to form the Gem Toby Organisation. It was a partnership between Lawrence Myers and David Joseph.

While Wheatley was working for the Gem Toby Organisation, he signed a management contract with an Australian band called Khavas Jute and he was also, albeit briefly, the management representative for the highly successful band Sweet as well as being tour manager for the New Seekers in Europe. Through working with such bands, and having a mentor like Lawrence Myer, Wheatley was able to obtain knowledge of how to operate in these high-powered art worlds, knowledge he would need later in his career. He notes that:

Very early in my management life I realised the lesson to learn was to do for the artists what I would have liked to have done for me. It was that simple. Because I'd been a musician, I was good at my job as tour manager. I could relate to what the group was going through on the road. (ibid: 69)

Wheatley's earlier experience as a working musician enabled him to become an effective tour manager and then artist manager because he could relate to the musicians. They also respected him more because he had been a musician. In this early stage of his career in artist management, Wheatley was also fortunate enough to gain knowledge of, and make contacts within, the US music industry as well. He notes:

My big break came when David appointed me to run the office of Gem Toby in Los Angeles. I felt that this would be my chance to really get involved in the music business. Before I left the London office I collected every publishing agreement,

every management agreement, every recording agreement I could get my hands on and I studied them until I learnt it all, until I understood it. (ibid: 70)

While working in Los Angeles Wheatley formed “good relationships with the big agencies, and with people in the business generally” (ibid. 71). While he was there, Mike Curb, who was president of MGM Records at the time, asked Wheatley to help stage manage and coordinate three concerts that were planned for the JFK centre in Washington as part of the presidential inauguration ceremony. He notes that President Nixon had to be able to walk between the three venues at different stages of the night to hear the acts. Although Wheatley was congratulated by the then Vice President Spiro Agnew for his role in the event (a man who then facilitated the speeding up of the process for him and his wife to get their green cards), he soon fell out with his bad-tempered boss David Joseph; this combined with the fact that his young Australian wife was very depressed in LA away from family, Wheatley quit his job and went travelling around Europe for a year.

It was while he was travelling around Europe with his first wife that Wheatley formulated his plan for the future:

Once we were back in Australia there was something I was fired up to achieve. I was going to find a band that I could manage and take to the world while still being based in Australia – in contrast to what the Bee Gees had done, what Olivia Newton-John had done. I wanted to do it from

Australia. That mission was in my head the whole time we were travelling ... all this time I carried around a book entitled The Business of Music. It became my bible and continued my education in the music business. In it were copies of every conceivable contract. I read it over and over making sure that I understood it. This was all part of my preparation for my return to Australia. (ibid: 75)

Just before he left London to return to Australia, Wheatley saw Beeb Birtles, Derek Pellicci and Graham Goble performing in a band called Mississippi. Although he felt the band had some very good songs, he also perceived that they lacked a front man or 'star'. Wheatley thought Glenn Shorrock would be perfect for the role. Shorrock had also gone to London with another Australian band called Axiom, a band that was also on an unsuccessful mission to make a name for themselves there. Wheatley introduced Shorrock to the members of Mississippi while still in London and all present realised that they were musically well-suited. When he was back in Australia, Wheatley put his long-term plan into action.

g. Criteria for Success

Successful artist managers such as New York based attorney George Stein¹²⁰ have set 'checkpoints' concerning what they look for in artists. When a manager signs an artist, they look for many different talents in the one individual or band. According to Stein (2005), the odds are one in a million of finding an artist or a band that has all of

¹²⁰ All comments attributed to George Stein and Keith Welsh in this chapter are, unless otherwise indicated, taken from personal correspondence with the author conducted in June 2005. All comments attributed to Kim Thomas are taken from personal correspondence conducted with the author in October 2006.

the requisite talents: “if you look at all of the talents that are wrapped up in the success of one artist it is almost mind-boggling and it explains why so few people are very successful”. Stein’s checklist is as follows:

1/ The songs – the music is key.

According to Stein, this needs to be considered due to the sheer number of songwriters out there and how prolific these writers are. He comments: “I mean that is an unbelievably difficult talent, to be able to write a good song – and that is only one of the half dozen talents they have to have but that alone will knock millions of people off the starting blocks because they can’t write.”

2/ They have to be able to sing, which is another separate talent.

3/ They have to be able to perform, which is different to singing.

Stein elaborated on this third criterion, asserting that the artists he signs have to have stage presence and charisma and according to him this is a separate talent. He says: “I’ve seen people who have great songs and who can really sing but they get on stage and it is just dull, it just doesn’t happen and those people for the most part are not going to succeed.” He also believes that:

4/ A singer/songwriter needs to be able to play an instrument and be a good musician, which is another separate talent.

5/ They have to be focused, smart and ambitious. Those are separate attributes but nevertheless they all fold together.

An artist is not going to get by in this business if they have all of the aforementioned talents but they do not prime and pump themselves. They have to really work hard in order get to the point where a lawyer, a manager, an agent or a producer is going to notice them. They need to get themselves on the radar because there is so much noise out there and immense competition. Stein claims that: "They really need to prime themselves and be smart, not just focused. I mean there are people who are focused who are just real dumb. They have to 'get it' to actually devote themselves to it."

6/ They have to be good looking.

Stein's sixth checkpoint is that they have to be good-looking, "and this is a God given gift. They have to be good-looking, maybe not beautiful, because when I say good-looking I mean interesting looking. They have to have 'a look'." Stein continues by noting:

An artist may have all of those other attributes but too bad because they weigh 350 pounds. Everyone is going to think of exceptions to this, but they are exceptions. What I tell my

class, and what I practice myself, is that if you are missing any one of these things you are really just swimming against the current. And your time and your investment is too valuable, you have to think about this. I don't want to be fighting the business. I could go against it but I want to win.

7/ They have to be young.¹²¹

Stein's seventh checkpoint is perhaps the saddest one, in that according to him, the artist has to be young (especially in rock and pop). Therefore artists and managers do not have time to put all of the requisite talents together: "With other professions the clock is not clicking to the same extent, though unfortunately it does not work like that for the artist."

In relation to his checklist overall, states:

I've walked into meetings with artists who had all of those things and I could just see the interest on behalf of the label executive, and their eyes light up, and they just want to like the music, they are just primed to like it. If you bring in an interesting, beautiful woman like Kristin Diable, who has all the talents, but because they see the charisma and the look, they just want to talk for about 10 to 15 minutes about her

¹²¹ Australian artist manager Kim Thomas notes that in addition to these he has an eighth 'check point': he has to like the artists he signs to management as people. He claims that they have to have the same politics as him because if he is going to play a large part in elevating their public status to the point where they may be bale to sway public opinion then he has to able to agree with what they have to say.

without even hearing a note, and they are all prepared to love the music when they hear it. Jeff Buckley had the same thing going on. I mean, I would walk into a room with Jeff and it was like magic, people just felt it. And it wasn't with smoke and mirrors, it was real. The real ones are not put together, they just have it.

On the other hand, Stein notes that when he was learning to follow his own checklist, but did not, he would bring an artist into a meeting and say that they have so much talent that he does not care if they are not interesting looking because people will see beyond this. However, he felt that he was wrong most of the time:

I walked into a meeting with somebody who just didn't have 'it' and you could see the executive just close down in the eyes. I mean they only half listened and basically they just sat there and checked their email and answered their phones, and you can just see that they are primed not to like it. So as a manager you can only do so much.

Stein notes that the music business is an art not a science and that this is why only 2–5% of people who are actually signed are successful; there is no formula that labels and managers can follow that is going to work every time. They just have to go by their gut instinct and both opportunities and raw talent comes into play, as does luck:

Luck comes into play because you meet a certain person who links to someone else, and you meet a co-writer or a certain agent or a certain tour opens up and things like that, so yeah you got lucky, but you didn't really get lucky, you were set up to be lucky. You were out there doing the right things, doing everything that you can, walking down the street so that when luck bumped into you, you thought, "that was lucky," but no, you were there on the street.

When Wheatley, the members of Mississippi, and Glenn Shorrock returned to Australia, they set themselves up to be lucky. As an artist manager, Wheatley's dedication to the acquisition of knowledge in this field enabled him to do "all of the right things". He had acquired knowledge about (a) generating revenue from live work, (b) management agreements (c) about recording agreements (d) song publishing agreements, and (d) merchandise. His experience in foreign territories gave him knowledge that would enable him to rely on his "gut instinct" when signing artists. Stein (2005) notes:

The great thing about management of course is that management encompasses all of that. The manager deals with everything, they are the hub of the wheel. When you start managing you are learning just like the artist is learning but you are also learning for the people who are around you.

In Wheatley's mind the new version of Mississippi, that was to become the Little River Band (LRB), and which included Glenn Shorrock and a new bass player Roger McLachlan and lead guitarist Rick Formosa, met his criteria for success. Wheatley used his own checkpoints. Firstly, there were three songwriters in the band. Secondly, half of the band could sing: "The band was sounding good, particularly in the vocal department. The addition of Glenn Shorrock's voice to the existing blend of Beeb and Graham was outstanding" (Wheatley, 1999: 79). The band was able to perform, and they were focused, smart and ambitious. They were good-looking and/or had a "look" and they were still young. Therefore Wheatley was not "fighting the business" and because he was not going against the industry it was more likely that he would "win".

h. Little River Band

Wheatley initially focused on signing recording and publishing deals for the band and he set up the band's partnership agreement. When meeting recording and publishing companies, his grand plan of producing an act capable of international success was treated with a fair amount of skepticism. With regard to song publishing, he states:

The best offer I could get was from Frank Donlevy at Castle, an advance of only \$2000 against a 75 percent share of all income received. Not enough. Desperate as we were, there was no point giving it away too cheaply. I decided I would not do a publishing deal but rather set up my own company and administer it personally. (ibid. 80)

Wheatley registered 'Tumble-weed Music' as the name of his production and music publishing company. The first three writers to sign with the company were the writers for LRB, Glenn Shorrock, Graham Goble, and Beeb Birtles. Wheatley believed the deal to be good for both sides in that he gave the writers a 75/25 split, and, because he was acting as their publisher, he did not commission their 75 percent. If he signed the deal he was offered by Frank Donlevy at Castle Music he would have had to take to a management commission as well as the publisher's share.

After approaching numerous companies, Wheatley decided to do a deal with EMI because he had a history with the company through the Masters Apprentices and he felt that EMI had the right enthusiasm and belief in the band. He also liked Stephen Shrimpton, EMI's managing director:

He was a no-nonsense guy who, I believed, had faith in me. I needed a lawyer to help me draft an agreement and was introduced to Phil Dwyer. At that stage he had no experience in the music industry, so I dumped all my US contracts on his desk, and welcomed him to the world of showbiz. Phil still represents me today. (ibid: 83)

With regard to the band's partnership agreement, Wheatley and the band decided that the fairest way for the partnership to work was to share all revenue evenly between the six members of the band and himself.

i. Extra Effort

I think that the only reason I ever succeeded was because of my passion. I always went beyond what anyone else was doing to get something I wanted. (Lee, Mars, Neil and Sixx, 2001: 81)

Little River Band's first single was released on August 18, 1975. To bring it to the attention of radio programmers, Wheatley packaged copies of the single entitled *Curiosity Killed the Cat* into packets of cat food. While driving from Melbourne to Sydney he stopped at every radio station to personally deliver the LRB package. It was not often that the manager of a band would actually deliver such a package personally and, after driving to all of the regional stations in New South Wales and Victoria, *Curiosity Killed the Cat* became a top 10 record nationally.

To secure an American recording deal for the band, Wheatley had to actually visit the US. He was determined not to leave a single stone unturned and thus met with no fewer than 11 record companies in the US. After each one knocked him back, Wheatley's confidence was waning; this was not aided by the fact that Artie Mogul, the legendary president of United Artist's records (the man who was responsible for signing Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul and Mary, and many others) said of the LRB album that Wheatley was approaching him with:

Kid, you ever run your fingernails down a blackboard? You know the feeling you get when you do that? That's what this

music does to me. Makes the hair stand up on my back, it's so bad. (ibid: 87)

Eventually, Capitol Records offered Wheatley and the band a deal. EMI is the umbrella company under which Capitol operates and therefore Capitol Records decided to pick up its option. Wheatley believes they were also genuinely enthusiastic about the band. LRB were on their way to success in the US:

Now that Little River Band was an act with a US recording contract, I was able to conduct serious meetings with the booking agencies. I also spent three full days meeting with everyone at Capitol Records, from the receptionists to the company's promotion, sales and marketing departments. (ibid: 87)

When choosing a booking agency to represent the band, Wheatley met with all the majors – CAA, ICM, William Morris, Premier, and ATI. He decided to sign with a company called Headquarters as they were representing only two other acts: the Average White Band and Wild Cherry. This shorter roster would enable LRB to get the personal attention necessary to help break into the US market. He did not want to get 'lost' in a big agency.

Although being away in America so often put major pressure on his marriage, Wheatley was driven and knew he would have to dig in:

No doubt, I was on a mission. There were 50 different territories around America. I got a map from Capitol Records and I stuck it to the wall of the apartment. I had every rep's name, every phone number, and methodically I went around and around, phoning these guys, keeping them informed about other markets, what we were doing and where we were going. I was obsessed with making LRB a success in America. I knew that this was my chance. (ibid: 93)

By 1976, LRB's first album had gone gold with sales of over 500 000 units. By 1977, LRB was starting to fill 2000 to 3000 capacity theatres and had their own bus on the road and their own crew. Their second album to be released in the US (the album produced by John Boylan) *Diamantina Cocktail* also achieved gold sales status in the US. Then:

In 1978, with two big hit singles under our belts, there was a lot of anticipation about the follow-up album. Again produced by John Boylan, 'Sleeper Catcher' shipped platinum in America, a remarkable feat even by today's standards. LRB was now the first Australian band to sell over a million albums in America. But even more unbelievable, we did it on the first day of release! (ibid: 95)

On August 9, 1978 the band's single *Reminiscing* leapt up to number 3 on the *Billboard* charts and Wheatley's company Tumble-Weed Music was the song's

publisher. Wheatley had come of age in the music industry. Wheatley's dreams had come true; however, they were not what he thought they would be: "at this stage of our career we should have been on top of the world, but emotionally we were falling apart" (ibid: 98). Wheatley was spending the majority of his time dealing with internal personality clashes within the band. Although they had arrived at a level in the music business the majority of artists aspire to but very few reach, they were unhappy. Despite this, record stores in America ordered one million copies of LRB's next album *First under the Wire* on its first day of release, and:

Headlining coliseums from Seattle to Minneapolis to Florida became the norm. We even created new house records in cities like St Louis. In Dallas/Forth Worth, in a huge venue called Billy Bobs, the promoter was so thrilled, he threw on seven limos at our disposal 24 hours a day. After the last of five sold-out shows, his enthusiasm got the better of him. In the back of each limo waited not unattractive high-class hookers.
(ibid: 101)

Although Wheatley had achieved everything he had set out to achieve in music, his success came at a personal toll. His marriage collapsed because his business had become his mistress: "I realised that I had paid the ultimate price for my single-minded approach to success" (ibid: 111). In addition, although Wheatley recruited the Beatles' producer George Martin to produce the band's next album, he had to draw on all his diplomacy to keep the band together during the sessions. The resulting album,

Time Exposure, was a top 10 album in both Australia and the US and became another gold album in America, selling over 600 000 copies.

j. WBE Records and Wheatley Sport

By 1981, Wheatley's Australian-based record label, Wheatley Brothers Entertainment (WBE) Records was involved with many different artists. John Farnham had broken through with his album on WBE Records *Uncovered* achieving gold sales status, Graham Goble's song from his solo album *Please Don't Ask Me* had been a huge hit. Wheatley was also managing Australian Crawl and their second album *Sirocco* had reached number 1. The band also had three hit singles that year: *Things Don't Seem*, *Errol* and *Oh No, Not You Again*. Moving Pictures' debut album on WBE Records, *Days of Innocence*, reached number 1 in October and the album went on to achieve triple platinum sales status, selling over 250000 copies. Their single, *What About Me* was also number 1. In 1983, Wheatley also set up Wheatley Sport with Steven Frazer and this company went on to successfully represent Australian golf and tennis players; eventually it merged with an American company called Advantage International:

The American company would own 50 percent, Steven Frazer would own 25 percent and I'd have 25 percent. The deal required Steven and me to look after all the Advantage golfers and tennis players when they were in Australia. Conversely, the American office of Advantage International would look after our Australian clients around the world. (ibid: 139)

Wheatley's workload in the 1980s had quadrupled and he was about to have success with yet another major client.

k. John Farnham

I had the ability, the contacts and the energy to make it happen for John. I knew how America worked and that was a big factor for him. (ibid: 143)

Although Wheatley was stretched all over the world managing LRB, Australian Crawl and Ross Wilson, as well as all the sportspeople, he also worked hard to convince Farnham that he could manage him as well. Farnham did have an established profile in the Australian music industry, a profile that had been growing since he was 18. However, by the early 1980s he was in a rut and it was looking as if he might have the fate of many pop stars from the 1960s in Australia – i.e. that he would end up playing small clubs for the rest of his life. Wheatley was determined to get him out of this predicament, but he knew it would be a challenge. Unlike LRB when he first started managing them, John Farnham did not entirely meet Stein's (2005) criteria for success in the music business. He was no longer young, he had been dropped by EMI (the record company that had signed him when he was 18 years old), he had not written many songs and his brand image was that of a leftover 1960s pop artist who initially had a hit with the song entitled *Sadie*. His major point of difference, and therefore his competitive advantage, was that, in Wheatley's words: "He was probably the greatest interpreter of songs Australia had ever produced. All I knew was that the man could sing" (ibid.). Wheatley also felt that he could perform

well and that he was driven, ambitious and smart; he therefore thought he had enough to work with.

Wheatley decided they would have to start his career all over again. They would need to find songs, a producer, and a band. To give Farnham a contemporary feel, Wheatley approached Graham Goble about writing and producing an album with him and “Graham agreed that John was Australia’s greatest singer” (ibid), and he said that he would love to get involved with him. The album was called *Undiscovered* and it achieved gold sales status. Farnham also replaced Glenn Shorrock as the lead singer of LRB and toured the US extensively. He recorded three albums with the band: *The Net*, *Playing to Win*, and *No Reins*. Through this period, Wheatley was spread thinly between this project and his other interests and this caused tension within LRB. In his mind though, this tension was unavoidable as he never wanted to rely on LRB’s survival. In 1983 *Billboard* magazine produced a statistic stating that the band was the only act to have had top 10 hits each year for the past consecutive eight years. The band’s name was strong enough for them to be able to continue touring even though their line-up had changed dramatically. However, the decline for LRB finally came during their thirteenth tour of America. Their accountant informed them that if they were going to continue the way they were, they would actually lose money. For the first time a tour was costing more than they were earning. Their album did not produce any hits and their touring expenses were too high. Although Wheatley and LRB had demonstrated that it is possible to take on the world from Australia, Wheatley decided that it was time to pursue other challenges.

Although Wheatley had promised Farnham another chance to produce a solo album, he could not secure a recording deal and this meant he could not find the producer he desired as 'name' producers then did not record artists who did not have recording deals. In addition to this, Wheatley had a difficult time approaching song publishers for material as Farnham was not a priority: "The Rod Stewarts of the world would be in front of us in the queue for the best songs" (ibid: 153). However, Wheatley did have some clout in the music publishing industry as he controlled the LRB copyrights; he was also representing Arista Music for Australia, as well as the Bob Seeger and John Lennon song catalogues. Thus he used whatever leverage he could to get some good songs for Farnham to record. Farnham and the album's inexperienced producer Ross Fraser spent months working through hundreds of songs; the outcomes were tracks such as *Pressure Down*, *Reasons* and *Touch of Paradise*. Wheatley notes:

The last song we found was 'You're the Voice'. It had John stamped all over it. That was it – we knew we had something then even though we still didn't have a record deal. I booked the studio, using my house as collateral and extending my mortgage to pay for the recording. It was a gamble but by now I was confident that we had something. (ibid: 154)

Although they were getting somewhere, it was a time-consuming and expensive process for Wheatley because he had to keep everybody working on the project on a retainer, and they still did not have a record deal. He states that:

In those days RCA Records was the absolute last resort when it came to record companies. Brian Smith was the managing director then. He listened to 'You're the Voice'. My record label WBE was up for renewal with EMI. As an inducement for RCA to pick up John I offered to bring the label with me. This would be a big deal for RCA, it had no Australian artists on its books. Here was a chance for them to change the perception of the company in one move. (ibid: 155)

Although they now had a record deal, it did not provide enough money to recoup the amount spent on the album. Over the 12 months it had taken them to put the album together, the total cost to Wheatley was \$150 000.

I. Re-branding

To launch the then contemporary sounding album *Whispering Jack*, Wheatley had to breathe new life into the visual elements of Farnham's brand image. The process of re-branding 'Johnny Farnham' (John Farnham) was nearly complete. In conjunction with RCA, Wheatley produced a relatively cheap \$10 000 video clip for the album that involved black and white imagery with flashes of colour:

The video wasn't great but it did the job. It was the first time people saw John Farnham in his soon to become famous Driza-Bone coat. Ross Fraser had a lot to do with that look. We had to make John different. When it came to creating an image, this was as far as we could go with John. The

Australian public knew him too well. The music would have to carry him through. (ibid: 156)

The next task was to get radio stations to play *You're the Voice*. Wheatley knew he would face resistance on this front, so he sent out white label copies with no name on the record. Although nobody was fooled, and the Triple M program manager initially said: "Glen, this station does not play 'Johnny' Farnham" (ibid), slowly but surely the tracks from *You're the Voice* were added to radio play-lists. When 2DAY FM played the record it began to get some real traction:

The phones began to ring at the stations, requesting to hear the song again. It actually made the top 10 before Triple M added it. They were forced into it – their phones were also ringing. (ibid)

You're the Voice became a number 1 record in November 1986. The *Whispering Jack* album went to number 1 and stayed there for 27 weeks. They had achieved this breakthrough even though Ross Fraser was an unknown producer and nobody wanted to sign John Farnham. Farnham went on to win seven ARIAs, including: Best Album, Best Single, Most Popular Male Artist, Highest Selling Single, Highest Selling Album, Best Adult Contemporary Album, and the Outstanding Achievement Award. Wheatley had helped Farnham 'come back from the dead'. Once again, Wheatley's persistence and determination had been demonstrated, as had Farnham's staying power and ability to persevere during the bleakest periods.

Farnham's single *You're the Voice* was also added to 55 radio stations in America and in some markets it reached the top 10. It similarly enjoyed success in Canada and Scandinavia, and reached number 5 in Germany. The single was also in the UK top 10 and Wheatley and Farnham flew to London for an appearance on 'Top of the Pops'. In addition to being John Farnham's manager, Wheatley went on to become the managing director of Australia's largest radio network:

I was enjoying my role as managing director of the top-rating FM stations in Australia and enjoying my involvement in managing the careers of some of the top sportspeople and entertainers in the country. But by far my greatest enjoyment came from watching John Farnham's career explode. 'Whispering Jack' had passed 800 000 units and was still selling. The 'Jack's Back' tour was the most successful ever by an Australian artist, playing to over a million people. Being in control of the biggest radio network in Australia was power, but managing John was rewarding. (ibid: 208)

Although Wheatley's phenomenally successful run in artist management was to continue, a premonition he had that dark storm clouds were brewing over his personal life and finances was soon to be realised.

m. Hard Times

In his role as Managing Director of Hoyts Media, the company that owned and controlled the most successful FM radio stations in Australia, Wheatley became a

victim of his own success. The magazine *Business Review Weekly* presented him with the Marketing Award for 1988. However, the positive publicity he was getting was starting to annoy Peter Ivany and the Fink family who owned Hoyts Media. When an article appeared in the *Weekend Australian* under the heading 'Radio's Renaissance Man, Glenn Wheatley, and the Making of a Multimillion Dollar Empire', Wheatley's relationship with the owners deteriorated. According to Wheatley the article appeared out of nowhere, but to the Fink family it looked like a plant. Wheatley notes: "They decided that they needed to take over more control and raise their profiles. They didn't want me to be in a position where I was making all the decisions and, worse, receiving so much publicity" (ibid: 243). The ensuing power struggle within the company led to Wheatley being 'pushed' to leave his position as Managing Director. Although he received a standing ovation from the staff at the company when he left, his departure received much negative press coverage and, because Hoyts Media had purchased Wheatley's other business interests under the umbrella name The Wheatley Organisation, his departure was also financially complicated.

At around the same time, Wheatley's brother-in-law came to him with a proposal for the two of them to buy a building in Flinder's Lane in the centre of Melbourne that was to be turned into an up-market nightclub. The price was \$4 million and the building would require massive refurbishing. He arranged the finance to pay for the building through the Farrow Corporation, the parent company and merchant bank side of the Pyramid Building Society. Wheatley and his brother-in-law then appointed a builder to take care of the refurbishments on a cost plus 20 percent contract. The project was much bigger than any of them imagined; many deadlines were broken and

overruns became common. The renovation was meant to cost \$2 million but it blew out to \$6.5 million.

The Farrow Corporation demanded that Wheatley and his wife sign a personal guarantee that would enable funding for the project to continue and Wheatley asserts:

I should never have signed that guarantee. If I hadn't signed, the worst that would have happened was that the Farrow Corporation would have taken the building back, put itself into the role of mortgagee in possession, and got back what it could at auction ... It was pride more than anything that made me sign the personal guarantee. I did not want to face my first public failure. Signing that guarantee meant I would still have a chance of finishing the building, making the club a success, and eventually being able to meet repayments. If I didn't sign, it would be an instant public humiliation because Farrow would have to repossess the building. The only thing I stood to lose was face. Signing that guarantee now meant I could lose everything. (ibid: 255)

The Ivy did eventually open but its turn over was only \$50 000 a week, and to be viable they needed to be turning over \$100 000 a week: "my problems with the Ivy were getting worse. The club was becoming delinquent on its accounts. Carlton United had stopped giving us credit ... On top of that our creditors were giving us wind up notices" (ibid: 273). The pressure became too much for Wheatley and his

family so they decided to sell their \$6 million house in order to retire some of the debt and move where the real estate was less expensive.

On settlement day, the Farrow Corporation and its subsidiary, the Pyramid Building Society, collapsed. Farrow Corporation held the mortgage over the title to their house and they needed someone from the company to execute this complex deal; with the company's doors closed there would be no exchange that day. The house was eventually sold and the administrators of Farrow took the \$6.1 million to go towards the Wheatley family's debt to the failed corporation. Wheatley also forfeited the \$240 000 deposit he had paid for the apartment he and his family were going to move into. At age 42, after all he had achieved, Wheatley had to start from scratch: "not even a zero base – I was millions of dollars in debt" (ibid: 300). Wheatley chose to avoid bankruptcy and instead he entered into a deed of assignment with his creditors which did not end until 1996.

Throughout this difficult time, however, Wheatley maintained his profile as an artist manager as John Farnham's success continued with numerous sell-out tours and hit records. Wheatley was also involved in the highly successful Jesus Christ Superstar concert that took place in larger venues such as the Entertainment Centre in Sydney. In addition Wheatley worked for Polygram and IMG management. Wheatley continues to run his own companies such as Talentworks, his management entity that represents John Farnham, Glenn Shorrock, Julie Strickland, and The Sparrows¹²², and that was involved in the management of Delta Goodrem.

¹²² Wheatley's son Tim Wheatley plays bass in The Sparrows.

n. Conclusion: Glenn Wheatley and Cog Theory: A Stage-by-Stage Analysis

Cog theory is an attempt to pull back the curtain of the popular music business and examine the mechanics of success.

There is a machine which all musical artists are put through, hereafter referred to as “The Machine”. Artists’ success in navigating their way through the intricate cogs, gears, hammers, and grinders of The Machine determines the arc, scope, and course of their career. Such navigation requires talent, timing, luck, and a strong constitution. (Lee, Mars, Neil and Sixx, 2001: 241)

(i) Stage One: The Platform and Conveyor Belt

Lee, Mars, Neil and Sixx (2001) use the analogy of ‘The machine’ to explain the mechanics of the music business from their perspectives as members/ex-members of the iconic 1980s North American ‘hair band’ Motley Crue. According to them, at the bottom of The Machine, there is a platform and on that platform there is a long line of artists who all wait their turn to climb a ladder that leads to a conveyor belt. Wheatley’s time in the Melbourne music scene ‘starving’ while playing in the Bay City Union is an example of this. As the artists travel along the conveyor belt, they make and release a record. The Cog analogy suggests that at the end of the conveyor belt is the first of several interconnected cogs, each higher and larger than the previous cog: “If the artists time their jump at the end of the conveyor belt just right, they can land on the first cog” (ibid: 242). However, most artists miss the cog and

land on the platform again (at the rear of the line), or, in some cases, into the abyss below. Wheatley's band Bay City Union's single release *Mo'reen* did not make it onto the first cog.

(ii) Stage Two: The First Cog

Lee, Mars, Neil and Sixx argue that once artists reach the first cog and experience a degree of success, they become caught in the machinery. Through joining the already nationally successful Masters Apprentices, Wheatley jumped straight onto the first cog where the gear is moving, the cog is rolling and there is nothing that can be done to stop The Machine: "Soon, a second, larger cog looms ahead, the grinding of its bottom teeth adjoining and turning the first cog" (ibid: 242). There is a perception within the Australian industry that if an artist stays and works only in Australia their career will burn out. To help their artists sustain viable musical careers, Australian artist managers look to export their products; therefore, for Australian artists, the second, larger cog revolves in a foreign territory. When attempting to reach the second cog, artists must jump at the exactly right time, otherwise they will be crushed in the machinery between the cogs and either dropped back onto the platform or rolled around to begin anew on the cog. For Wheatley, the Masters Apprentices made it to the first cog; this tossed the band onto the second cog in London.

(iii) Stage Three: The Second Cog

Once artists move as high as the second cog, it is a long way down to the bottom ... they realise that the machinery is stronger than flesh, and that they are caught in it and there is

no way off. The Machine tears skin, grinds limbs, and slowly infects and possesses the brain. (ibid: 242).

Managers play a role in creating and monitoring the cogs; this is some of what managerial creativity involves. To successfully ride The Machine, artists and managers have to learn how The Machine works and they have to be where The Machine is. Wheatley's education and training in artist management was built upon his experience in bands such as the Masters Apprentices and the knowledge he acquired while he was working for the Gem Toby Organisation in London and Los Angeles. Later, on his return to the US, Wheatley was lucky to get the Little River Band onto the second cog; through the acquisition of knowledge and his own persistence, determination and ambition it can be said that he set himself up to be lucky. Also, he needed an effective plan and strategy to make it onto the second cog, and then the large cog with the Little River Band and John Farnham; he knew that it was a good idea to go with the motion of these cogs rather than against the motion through managing artists that do not adhere to strict checkpoints for (albeit financial) success. The Machine tends to crush artists who do not meet the strict criteria outlined by Stein (2005).

Wheatley's talent and ability as an artist manager stems in part from his own experience working in close quarters with fellow musicians in bands. Indeed artist managers often play the role of psychologist or counsellor and Wheatley often drew on his own experience in order to help his artists deal with the following:

If the act is a band, The Machine can easily rip the members apart from each other and crush them individually. On the second cog, a band experiences true popularity. But to reach the next cog – the big cog, the final cog, the cog reserved for true phenomena – it is not just a matter of timing a long arduous leap. Getting onto the big cog is something out of the band's control. That power is in the hands of the mighty cog god, a whimsical, wrathful, and unpredictable deity at the top of The Machine, turning the gears. (Lee, Mars, Neil and Sixx, 2001: 242)

Although hyperbolic and humorous, the notions expressed in this quotation do effectively account for the element of luck. However, Wheatley's continued success throughout his career in artist management suggests that more than purely luck was involved. The bands and artists he managed had to be motivated, dedicated and fit enough to be picked up by the cog, and they needed a manager (who was not also a musician in the band) but who was committed to them and who could stand back and monitor the revolution of the cog he/she helped to create. Extra effort is needed to make it onto the cog and, because everyone is trying to get there, competitors/enemies are always trying to push artists and bands off the various cogs.

(iv) Stage Four: The Big Cog

The big cog is the cog that Little River Band caught in America in the mid 1970s with their album *First under the Wire* and that John Farnham caught with his album *Whispering Jack* in the mid 1980s. Lee, Mars, Neil and Sixx (2001) note that the big

cog is a huge grinding gear, and there is nothing artists can do about it if it picks them up:

They can stand there and scream, "I hate everyone in the world and you all suck, and if you buy a single record of mine I'll kill you." And all that will happen is more people will run out and buy their records. Trying to get off the cog is futile: it only hurts more. (ibid: 243)

Relationships break down when artists and managers are on the cog – but especially when they come off the cog. Although Wheatley was so often away in America with Little River Band and this put considerable pressure on his first marriage, it was not until he returned to Australia that the relationship disintegrated.

According to Lee, Mars, Neil and Sixx (2001), the big cog is exciting but overwhelming: "where the second cog can dig under the skin of artists, this one can tear them apart limb by limb" (ibid). The Little River Band made it onto the big cog but this cog slowly ground them down. Although their dreams had come true, the reality of their dreams was not what they thought it would be: "The cog gives artists everything they ever dreamed of, everything they could ever want except for privacy, solitude, friendship, stability, love (both familial and romantic), and peace of mind" (ibid). With *Whispering Jack* on the big cog, Farnham and Wheatley could do no wrong: "Every single they released terrorised the radio, every show sold out, every blink of their eyes was reported in the papers" (ibid). When Wheatley caught multiple big cogs in his managerial career, was the managing director of the largest radio

network in Australia and opened a nightclub, he rolled along with the cog. People get tired, but The Machine never stops moving. When he could no longer keep pace the big cog tore him apart, destroyed his finances and for a while it wrecked any chance he had of leading a normal life.

It is the manager and record company's role to stand on the outside of The Machine, monitor its behaviour, and see who is on what cog so that they can decide which artists they should invest their time and money in (much like the stock market). However, as a manager himself, Wheatley did not have a manager to monitor the cog he was riding and he therefore fell into the crusher:

At the end of the big cog is a long, heavy rod with the circumference of a large tree trunk that shoots down from above at random intervals, crushing acts on their way off the big cog. Some acts have a lot of stamina, and can run in place on the big cog and avoid the crusher for years. But most get worn down by the big cog. They are knocked off by the crusher and either drop to a lower cog, to a platform where they wait to return to the conveyor belt, or into the abyss below ... When you win and make it to the big cog, you ultimately lose. There is no other way to go but down, and it's a painful drop no matter what. (ibid: 244)

Fortunately, Wheatley was able to juggle multiple artists and projects on multiple cogs and therefore his interests were diversified enough for him to be able to bounce

back from the crusher. Indeed, it is unwise for an artist manager to try and rely on just one cog for obvious, potentially debilitating reasons.

Lee, Mars, Neil and Sixx (2001) argue that there is no way to get off The Machine without dying:

Like sex, you want it over and over again, even when your organs don't work anymore. Success or the desire for success, is a hard habit to kick. On The Machine, an act can get second, third, and eighteenth chances. There is nothing keeping a band from reaching the first, second, or final cog again. (ibid: 244)

In his managerial career, Wheatley has been keeping pace with numerous cogs for years. Farnham has caught the big cog at least three times.

This chapter outlined the positive and negative attitudes various artists and artist managers have toward 'inorganic' artist management practices. The overnight success myth that this method of artist management generates can be problematic. It tends to undermine the contention that the two key character traits artists require are persistence and determination. However, in terms of inorganic management practices, the mainstream Australian music industry is heavily dependent on the 'overnight success' of a minority of artists. Therefore the mainstream pop industry involves larger risks and this leads to artistic career trajectories that have dramatic peaks and troughs. Mainstream pop artist managers careers can also follow similar trajectories.

Wheatley's career is an example of a turbulent career, one that he has endured and enjoyed.