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Download This: Artist Development and Interconnectivity in the Internet Age

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Download This: Artist Development and Interconnectivity in the Internet Age

Prior to the launch of the World Wide Web, the dissemination of recorded music was limited to technologies such as radio, vinyl records, cassette tapes, and compact discs (CDs). Because of their physical nature, each of these media was easily controlled by record companies that used their influence to establish a monopoly on the sale and distribution of recorded music. As such, before the advent of internet media distribution, artists had very few alternatives to signing with a record company when looking to market and distribute their music to audiences larger than their local music communities.

The advent of efficient internet media catalyzed a cultural revolution which has undermined this traditional system of music distribution. Innovations ranging from peer-to-peer file sharing websites¹, video outlets such as YouTube², and social networking platforms³, the most popular of which are MySpace and Facebook, have challenged and weakened the record industry's preeminence in a variety of ways. Each of these new developments functions as a distribution channel for recorded music. As such, by facilitating the creation of additional avenues of dissemination and allowing for instant and on-demand access to artists, the internet profoundly changed the way most people consume music. Also, in contrast to tangible music distribution technologies, the internet promotes the selling and sharing of songs and music-related videos in an intangible environment, obliterating physical barriers that once barred audiences from being exposed to certain artists. Moreover, social media outlets empower artists

¹ Peer-to-peer file sharing – the sharing of media files between two or more computers via the internet.

² YouTube – a video sharing website through which users view and share videos.

³ Social networking – the construction of social groups of people who have common interests on the internet.

with the ability to circumvent music industry oversight into their creative process by providing them with the tools of self-promotion and self-distribution to autonomously construct a fan-base. As such, in terms of its effects on music distribution, internet technologies have ushered in an era where record companies are no longer able to exercise almost exclusive control over recorded music.

This project aims to analyze the current state of “artist development” for musicians from the music genres of rock and pop in the internet era. Two steps must be undertaken to complete the analysis of this question. First, I will examine the origins, and history, of the two main notions of artist development. I have designated these the *industry oversight model* and the *artistic freedom model*. The *industry oversight model* can be defined as the imposition of external record company forces on an artist’s songwriting process and image in order to achieve wide commercial success. In contrast, artists who ascribe to the *artistic freedom model* value the ability to write their own songs and autonomously construct their image, free from industry control. These models are not mutually exclusive. As such, it cannot be said that there are artists who are completely controlled by record company forces or who entirely circumvent industry influence. Instead, these two models of artist development should be considered along a continuum. However, for the purposes of this project, artists will be classified according to which model they aligned with the most at certain points during their career.

Second, I will investigate how modern musicians view new internet media distribution technologies in relation to their status as developing artists. A study of how internet music media have broadened music communities will contextualize the creative environment that modern artists inhabit. This expansionary trend will be defined as a shift from *regional interconnectivity* to *global interconnectivity*. *Regional interconnectivity* is inherently limited by

geographic boundaries. For example, *regional interconnectivity* can be described by the limited signal reach of a market's FM/AM radio stations or the recording contracts artists sign with record labels, which often confine the distribution of their music to particular regions. In contrast, internet media facilitate *global interconnectivity*, which knows no geographical boundaries. One possible criticism of this claim is that some locales lack sufficient infrastructure to facilitate internet communication due to adverse economic conditions or oppressive political regimes, thus denying them participation in the *global interconnectivity* system. However, this project only aims to discuss *global interconnectivity's* potential to reach wide audiences, not the makeup of the participating audiences. As such, *global interconnectivity* will be discussed through its ability to provide myriad ways of gaining access to music and artists that would not have been available previously under *regional interconnectivity*.

For the purposes of this thesis, artist development is being studied from the rock revolution of the 1950s to the present day. In rock and roll's infancy, and before he ever encountered Elvis Presley, Sun Record Company founder Sam Phillips declared "if I had a white man who had a Negro sound and the Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars!"⁴ When Presley, who fit the description of Phillips' desired performer, walked through the doors of Sun Records in 1953 to record a demo tape, Phillips capitalized on what he perceived as music's next commercial sensation. Phillips' sentiment underscores the essence of the *industry oversight model*, specifically how record executives try to forecast musical hybrids that might prove commercially viable by engineering the success of a particular artist. Concerned with image and commercial appeal, record companies frequently exert extensive influence on an artist's clothing, on-stage demeanor, song structure, and lyrics.

⁴ Ian Inglis, "Ideology, Trajectory, and Stardom: Elvis Presley and The Beatles," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (June 1996), 60.

An analysis of the early career of The Beatles demonstrates the operations of the *industry oversight model*. Brian Epstein was the manager of The Beatles from 1962 to 1967. Frequently referred to as “the man who made The Beatles,” Epstein managed the band “to conform to the routines and expectations prevalent within” the music industry in order to “create favorable impressions” with record executives.⁵ Seeing the group’s image as inherently tied to their commercial success, Epstein “forbade certain forms of behavior – smoking, eating, drinking, swearing – on stage,” made them trade in “their leather jackets and jeans [for] suits, shirts, and ties,” and insisted they always perform according to a “set routine.”⁶ Epstein even exercised some control over The Beatles’ songwriting process. Beatles member John Lennon admitted that the band complicity let Epstein “put [them] into uniforms” in order to make the band more commercially successful.⁷ However, Epstein’s strategy of “conform[ing]...to the demands of the popular music industry” worked and Beatlemania ensued.⁸ By ascribing to the *industry oversight model* and conforming to Epstein’s paternalistic managerial approach, The Beatles became global superstars of song and film.

The Beatles were also among the pioneers of the *artistic freedom model*, a competing conception of artist development which emphasizes artists’ self-control over their musical output and image, in the realm of major-label music. Tired of conforming to industry expectations and Epstein’s extensive control over their career decisions, The Beatles rebelled against the industry forces that helped them attain superstar status. During 1966, toward the end of Epstein’s contract as the band’s manager, The Beatles’ band members began “to make their own daily [business] decisions and engagements.”⁹ Their appropriation of their career direction signified a

⁵ Ibid, 67.

⁶ Ibid, 67.

⁷ Ibid, 68.

⁸ Ibid, 68.

⁹ Ray Coleman, *The Man Who Made The Beatles* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1980), 322.

shift from being seen as “publicity seeking pop stars” to “serious studio musicians.”¹⁰ Beginning with the 1967 album, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, this transition brought a “fundamental shift in the nature of their music.”¹¹ The album was much more musically adventurous than then the “archetypal love songs” the band had traditionally produced.¹² Moreover, they underwent a significant image transformation, moving away from their trademark clean-cut look and toward a disheveled style heavily influenced by the “psychedelic and flower-power movement.”¹³ However, despite transitioning away from significant industry oversight into the creation of their music and appearance, the album was hugely successful, spawning a series of hit singles such as “A Day in the Life” and “All You Need Is Love.” Having proved that the *artistic freedom model* could be profitable, the band continued to receive significant major-label support and flexibility to engage in the notion of artist development they had embraced. The success of The Beatles’ turn toward the *artistic freedom model* of artist development, coupled with the ascendancy of like-minded artists such as folk-singers Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, paved the way for future artists who prioritized self-control over their musical vision on the major-label level.

The *artistic freedom model* existed alongside the *industry oversight model* on the major-label level well into the 1990s. Some artists continued to surrender a significant amount of control over their sound and image to major label producers and marketing gurus, while others worked to maintain more control over their creative output and overall presentation. However, major record companies would frequently fund both the *industry oversight* and *artistic freedom* models of artist development. The circumstances surrounding Mariah Carey’s transformation

¹⁰ Ibid, 322.

¹¹ Inglis, 71.

¹² Ibid, 71.

¹³ Coleman, 335.

into a global megastar in 1990 underscores how the *industry oversight model* continued to function on the major-label level. Columbia Records executive Tommy Mottola hand picked Carey to be his label's next superstar act. Denying Carey the right to self-produce her own album, Mottola enlisted a slew of popular producers such as Rhett Lawrence, Ric Wake, and Narada Michael Walden to polish her sound and make it more commercially viable.¹⁴ Moreover, discarding or reworking many of the songs that Carey had already written for the album, Mottola instead instructed her to instead collaborate with hit-making songwriter Walter Afanasieff. Mottola also utilized Columbia's "publicity, marketing, and promotion machines" to ensure that the album was a global success.¹⁵ Mottola's strategy worked. After spending "\$800,000 to produce Carey's debut album, \$500,000 to redo her first video, and another \$1 million on general promotion," her first five singles went to the top of the Billboard charts and the album sold an astounding fifteen million copies worldwide.¹⁶

However, artists who ascribed to the *artistic freedom model* of artist development were still able to exist on major labels alongside artists such as Carey who deferred to industry forces. Island Records' nurturing relationship with Irish rock band, U2, underscores this fact. When describing U2's relationship with Island Records, U2 manager Paul McGuinness stated the label gave the band the freedom to "make their own plans."¹⁷ Back in 1980 with the release of their debut album, *Boy*, U2 "put out an album that was very expensive," and "their first single 'I Will Follow' was not a big enough hit for them to recoup" the money that Island records had given them to make the album.¹⁸ U2's second album release, *October*, also performed poorly on the

¹⁴ Mariah Carey, *Mariah Carey* (1990; Columbia, CD).

¹⁵ Steve Knopper, *Appetite for Self-Destruction: The Spectacular Crash of the Record Industry in the Digital Age* (California: Soft Skull Press, 2009), 54

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 53

¹⁷ Neil McCormick, *U2 By U2* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 2007), 121.

¹⁸ Richard Patrick, interview with Geoff Johnson, 9 Apr. 2009, *Fordham Music Show* (EIC-TV).

charts, failing “to make [Island Records] any money.”¹⁹ However, Island Records believed in their artistic vision and instead of releasing the band from their recording contract, it financed the production of their third album, *War*, which debuted at number one and has sold over four million copies since its release. In the pre-internet era, Island Records’ benevolence toward U2 was the rule, not the exception. Lesser-known rock acts have also maintained that the period up until the late-1990s provided “thousands of opportunities for bands [who ascribed to the *artistic freedom model* of artist development] to get started.”²⁰ Richard Patrick, lead singer and musical mastermind for the alternative rock band Filter, believes that his label, Reprise Records, a subsidiary of Warner Brothers Records, enabled the *artistic freedom model* to exist well into the late-1990s, thus facilitating and financing his band’s ability to reach a mainstream audience without compromising their musical goals.²¹

However, declining profits from illegal downloading and the introduction of other new internet media that allow consumers to listen to music for free have made it economically infeasible for record companies to make these types of long-term investments in artists who cannot guarantee them an immediate hit song and the return on investment that corporate interests require.²² Regardless of one’s view on the moral or economic implications of illegal downloading, it is well established that diminished revenue streams leave less money to finance projects. This disintermediation incited an extreme shift on the major label level toward the *industry oversight model* of artist development, at the expense of the *artistic freedom model*.

These current record industry trends are inhibiting artists signed to labels whose notion of artist development is rooted in the ability to write and record their own songs. Record

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Megan McArdle, “The Freeloaders: How a Generation of File-Sharers is Ruining the Future of Entertainment,” *The Atlantic*, May 2010, 34.

companies have largely stopped making the long-term investments that allowed artists, such as U2 and Filter, to develop their craft over an extended period. Patrick echoes these sentiments when he maintained that there will not be “the [*artistic freedom model*] of artist development [on the major-label level]” because those types of “bands cannot get financed anymore by labels.”²³ Moreover, U2 guitarist, The Edge, claims that Island Records’ flexible approach to U2’s development “certainly would not happen today.”²⁴ Instead, record executives have begun to stifle their artist roster’s creative development. One way this happens is the practice by which record executives bring in outside songwriters to write songs for some of rock’s most popular acts. These songwriters, or “song-doctors,” are “a small group of hired songwriting hands who have been indispensable to some of rock’s most popular acts, including Daughtry, Hinder, and Pink.”²⁵ Record companies rely on their ability to produce “penetrating and saturating [radio] hit,” albeit generic, songs as to maximize the few investments they choose to still make in younger bands.²⁶ The circumstances surrounding the 2009 major-label debut of album of pop-punk band, Mayday Parade, underscore this practice. Atlantic Records “asked the bands to work with outside songwriters” in order to replicate the successful sound “of other modern pop-rock bands.”²⁷ The band agreed, sacrificing self-control over their musical output for a chance to gain widespread commercial success on the major-label level. While the jury is still out on Mayday Parade, this standard has produced significant success for major-labels. In 2007, two albums that “were assisted by a slew of heavy-hitting songwriting pros,” Daughtry’s self-titled debut album

²³ Patrick interview.

²⁴ McCormick, 155.

²⁵ David Sprague, “Band Aides: The Secrets of Rock’s Song Doctors,” *Spin*, Aug. 2007, 37.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁷ Alan Sculley, “Mayday Parade: Rising Rockers Find that Major Label Success Requires Compromise,” *Lubbock Online Journal*, 7 May 2010, http://lubbockonline.com/stories/050710/fea_635473261.shtml (accessed 15 Oct 2010).

and Hinder's *Extreme Behavior*, sold 2.7 and 2.9 million units respectively.²⁸ However, many see this trend as "homogenizing" the musical output of major-label artists.²⁹

Artists who ascribe to the *artistic freedom model* of artist development are among the most vocal critics of the lack of long-term nurturing of artists at most record labels. Richard Patrick, a former major-label artist, maintains that he "is glad Filter made it when they did [the 1990s], because he is not sure they would have been able to achieve [the same level of success] in today's music environment" without compromising themselves musically.³⁰ Moreover, T.S.I. (The Situationist International), an independent New York-based punk rock band, asserts that circumventing major-labels entirely is the only way to protect their musical vision from pervasive oversight. T.S.I.'s lead singer Geoff Lenox contends that his band prioritizes their songwriting process over an eagerness to replicate current "hot sounds" that are commercially successful.³¹ Lenox sees the majority of younger, major-label, artists as the "manufactured product of businessmen" who are forced to "follow a stale formula" if they want to succeed.³² Lenox, however, refuses to wear "a uniform."³³ He aims to return to the rebellious spirit and authentic songwriting of the bands he grew up listening to, such as the Sex Pistols, who interestingly enough were a major-label artist back when labels actually financed artists who ascribed to the *artistic freedom model*.³⁴ Lenox's sentiments reflect the popular belief among artists who value the ability to autonomously construct their sound and image that signing with a major-label during this shift toward extreme industry oversight would inhibit their artistic freedom.

²⁸ Sprague, 35.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Patrick interview.

³¹ T.S.I. (The Situationist International), interview with Geoff Johnson, 20 Feb. 2010, *Fordham Music Show* (EIC-TV)

³² "Bio," *T.S.I.'s Official Website*, T.S.I., <http://www.tsiband.com/bio.htm> (10 Sept. 2010).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

Due to the lack of opportunities on the major-label level, an increasing amount of artists who align with the *artistic freedom model* of artist development, such as T.S.I., are choosing to be independent. Interfacing with the same technological advancements that led to the diminished profits, and therefore influence, of record companies, artists have begun to utilize internet media such as social networking sites, peer-to-peer downloading networks, and YouTube to market themselves and distribute their music. This allows artists, if they so choose, to circumvent the trend toward extensive industry oversight that has consumed major record labels, while still facilitating the dissemination of their music to wide audiences.

Artists are now able to cultivate fan-bases and engage in self-promotion independent of extensive industry oversight because of the *global interconnectivity* of internet media. During the era of older, tangible, music dissemination technologies, such as radio, CDs, cassette tapes, and vinyl records, it was exponentially more difficult for an artist to engage in the type of independent self-promotion and distribution that is now feasible in the internet age. These pre-internet media exemplify *regional interconnectivity*, or dispersion of music that is constrained by geographical boundaries. Formerly, local acts could often only be heard on radio stations, and in concert halls, that were located in their respective cities. As such, the ability to be exposed to those artists' music was largely confined to limited, territorial, venues. Furthermore, artists' recording contracts often restricted the distribution of their music to particular regions, denying music audiences the ability to hear artists who did not have distribution deals in certain areas. *Regional interconnectivity* was easily controlled by record companies, who used this power to exert significant influence over the ways that fan-bases were formed, people were exposed to music, and artists were marketed.

In contrast, *global interconnectivity* facilitates the instant sharing and distribution of songs and artist information. Radio stations can now be streamed on-line and artists' entire catalogs are available online through peer-to-peer downloading sites. Moreover, as Clay Shirky said in his book *Here Comes Everybody*, "new technology enables new kinds of group-forming."³⁵ In light of Shirky's commentary, perhaps the most significant contribution of internet media's global interconnectivity is that it has placed the power of organizing music communities back in the hands of musicians and fans. However, the increasing use of internet media by both artists and fans has produced a dichotomy of opinion about its effects on artist development. Some artists herald this new reliance on internet technologies as facilitating their artistic freedom and revolutionizing the role of the artist. In contrast, others see these recent trends as undermining the long-term success of young and developing artists. As such, in light of the aforementioned analysis, this project will now endeavor to analyze artists' perspectives on the influx of new internet media to better understand the current state of artist development in the age of *global interconnectivity*. The research for this aspect of the project is informed by interviews I have conducted with musicians as the host of the *Fordham Music Show*, as well as other articles from music magazines Rolling Stone and Spin, which detail the ways that artists have utilized these internet media.³⁶

For artists who ascribe to the *artistic freedom model* of artist development, one of the most frequently cited positive consequences of the emergence of internet media is that these tools simplify and/or enhance their creative process. As such, they see these media as facilitating the creation of art. There are three main ways that artists see internet media as assisting their creative development. First, many artists maintain that new internet media challenge them to be

³⁵ Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 17.

³⁶ Methodological Footnote - I had a diverse interview archive to analyze (e.g. major-label, independent, developing, established, and former major-label artists).

more creative in order to differentiate their music and online presence from the multitude of other artists who are also using these media platforms. Attesting to this trend, Frah, the lead singer of French funk band Shaka Ponk, believes that in an era where many bands are relying largely on social media and peer-to-peer networks to cultivate a fan-base, “musicians must have some way of selling themselves with images.”³⁷ In addition to their unique blend of musical genres, Shaka Ponk creates innovative music videos and motion graphic work to accompany their music, especially on social media websites and their online distribution channel, Monkey TV. Frah sees this as an essential practice for artists who are looking to succeed in exposing their music to new fans through the internet. As such, Frah asserts that these new media have “changed what an artist is, [by] creating a new artist” that must delve further into his or her creative process to produce more than just songs, but also additional online content.³⁸

Second, artists maintain that internet media and downloadable computer content make their creative process easier. T.S.I.’s lead guitarist, Dirty Migz, maintains that the band’s debut album, *Hanging by a Thread*, which was produced for “ten-thousand [dollars],” would have cost “one-hundred thousand dollars [to produce] ten years ago.”³⁹ He attributes this relatively cheap production price to T.S.I.’s use of authentic sounding digital instrumentation and downloadable computer production programs the band had access to through the internet. Migz compares T.S.I.’s creative process to the expensive production methods of Motown Records, which often required that all of the musicians who would be appearing on a song play in the same room, at the same time, until they produced the perfect take. Instead of having to engage in this costly practice, Migz is able to use his computer programs to “demo [songs] in his living room” and

³⁷ Shaka Ponk, interview with Geoff Johnson, 15. Oct 2009, *Fordham Music Show* (EIC-TV).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ T.S.I. interview.

“clip-in and clip-out” parts of songs that he wishes to alter.⁴⁰ While Migz speaks with hyperbole, as recording studio practice has strayed away from the Motown method of production and allowed for musicians to be recorded separately, studio time is still expensive for young artists. Such high costs could potentially hinder the career of a developing artist. As such, the influx of new computer production technologies allow artists to make music in a cheap and efficient manner, providing more access to people who want to make their own music.

The third way that internet media promote the creation of art is by providing artists with the option to engage in the autonomous production of their own music. This is especially important for artists who ascribe to the *artistic freedom model* of artist development. These artists are increasingly and confidently using these media as independent artists to assume control over their career direction and circumvent record industry oversight into their creative process. In an interview I conducted with Richie Kotzen, an independent guitar virtuoso and singer-songwriter, he contended that “in the old days” before the advent of efficient means of internet distribution, “he could not even [be on tour or making music] without a record label.”⁴¹ In contrast to other bands that have to sacrifice some of their artistic freedom to survive on the major-label level, he “does not do anything other than play [his] music that [he] loves in front of people that want to hear it.”⁴² Kotzen asserts that his ability to autonomously control the direction of his career is entirely attributable to his internet presence. In a separate interview, Jamie Scott, the lead singer of British pop-rock group Graffiti6, echoed Kotzen’s sentiments when he declared that the emergence of new internet media encouraged the band to feel comfortable as independent artists, more so than they would have in the era of solely tangible media. Scott maintains that the “only reason [Graffiti6’s album *Colours*] sounds as diverse as it

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Richie Kotzen, interview with Geoff Johnson, 19 May 2010, *Fordham Music Show* (EIC-TV).

⁴² Ibid.

does it because they made the record independently” without “having a record label breathing down [the band’s] neck saying ‘these songs [should] sound different.’”⁴³ Scott knew that the band’s catchy, hook-filled, first single “Stare Into the Sun” would have received “really good responses from record companies” if the band decided to pursue the major-label route.⁴⁴ However, having been recently signed to a major-label as part of a separate project, Scott was aware of current industry trends that stifle an artist’s creativity in order to appeal to “target demographics.” Scott’s assertion that “there is no way [Graffiti6] would have ended up the album they produced if they were signed to a major-label” underscores the effectiveness of internet media’s ability to foster creativity.⁴⁵ By providing independent artists who align with the artistic freedom model with an avenue to circumvent the current major-label shift toward industry oversight, artists themselves view these technologies as assisting in their creation of genuine music.

Another frequently cited benefit of internet media technologies is their ability to facilitate the formation of artist collectives. Artist collectives are groups of musicians. In contrast to taking ads out in a local newspaper, which is often confined to the newspaper’s circulation area, the *global interconnectivity* of the social networking sites MySpace, Facebook, and Reverb Nation, allow musicians to discover, and communicate with, artists from all over the world who share their musical vision, influences, and tastes. Bandmix, a website that serves as an online collection of classifieds of musicians from all across the United States, was created for the express purpose of fostering relationships between artistically compatible musicians. The potential for social media to put like-minded artists in touch with one another sometimes results in musical collaborations that would not have occurred were it not for these internet

⁴³ Jamie Scott, interview with Geoff Johnson, 15 Oct. 2010, *Fordham Music Show* (EIC-TV).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

technologies. The story of the band Sugar Red Drive's formation exemplifies this trend. Sugar Red Drive is an independent, up-and-coming rock band, operating out of upstate New York. As a senior at Vassar College, the band's lead vocalist, Archit Tripathi, was dissatisfied with his campus' music community.⁴⁶ Tripathi was influenced more by rock artists than the "coffee house" music that many Vassar co-eds listened to.⁴⁷ Hoping to find musicians who he could work with in a new group, Tripathi took out ads in both his local newspaper and on MySpace. The other eventual members of Sugar Red Drive, who were searching for a singer at the time, discovered Tripathi's MySpace ad and the band formed. Moreover, in 2007, when looking to replace lead vocalist Jeff Scott Soto, Journey guitarist Neil Schon found the band's new vocalist, Arnel Pineda, when looking at videos of Journey cover songs on YouTube.⁴⁸ Journey's partnership with Pineda arguably reinvigorated the band, as their first album featuring him on lead vocals, the independently released *Revelation*, debuted at Number 5 on the Billboard charts.⁴⁹ Both of these examples show how the *global interconnectivity* of internet media has redefined the traditional boundaries of music communities by creating more possibilities for artist interaction and collaboration.

Many artists not only view internet media as helping form artist collectives, but also as a means of building awareness of artist collectives who chose to establish a presence on these media platforms. Musicians, on both the major-label and independent levels, frequently cite internet media's ability to allow them to engage in self-promotion and self-distribution as a positive contribution to artist development. The marketing and distribution capabilities of internet media can bolster artists' fan-bases and expose new people to their music. However, the

⁴⁶ Sugar Red Drive, interview with Geoff Johnson, 9 Dec. 2008, *Fordham Music Show* (EIC-TV)

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Carlo Ople, "The Arnel Pineda Story," *New Media Philippines*, 15 Apr. 2009, <http://www.newmedia.com.ph/the-arnel-pineda-story> (accessed 10 Nov. 2010).

⁴⁹ Journey's previous album, *Generations*, peaked at Number 170 on the Billboard charts.

ultimate benefit to the artist is often called into question. Leaving that issue aside for now, a discussion of how the internet has helped artists to cultivate, and communicate with, fans will underscore the marketing potential of internet media. Lzzy [sic] Hale, the lead singer of Atlantic Records' band Halestorm, maintains that social media technologies "reach past the whole technology as a stale barrier" mentality.⁵⁰ Instead, Hale asserts that her band uses MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter, to "form relationships with [their fans]."⁵¹ Furthermore, Halestorm's drummer Arejay Hale believes that "it is important in this day and age to do more than just play music."⁵² Arejay Hale's attitude relays a new conception of artist development that prioritizes the need to hold "open conversations with fans" through social media technologies.⁵³

In addition, the far-reaching marketing capacities of internet media have redefined the term artist development to encompass an increased entrepreneurial role for independent musicians. This is evidenced by the increasing number of independent artists who ascribe to the *artistic freedom model* of artist development who are using these media to circumvent record industry oversight while still reaching a wide audience. To succeed as their own managers and promoters, artists must sensibly and skillfully use social media and internet technologies. Richie Kotzen, an artist who I previously classified as ascribing to the *artistic freedom model* of artist development, maintains that any independent artist "that wants to connect with people has no choice" but to have an extensive online presence through social media.⁵⁴ In order to create a line of communication with his established and potential fan-base, Kotzen began to distribute free music to anyone who joined his email list or Facebook fan page. This practice, which is performed by many artists, would not have been possible before the advent of internet media.

⁵⁰ Halestorm, interview with Geoff Johnson, 30 Apr. 2010, *Fordham Music Show* (EIC-TV).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Kotzen interview.

Using the data he compiles, Kotzen sends out information about his tour dates and albums to his fans all around the world. Kotzen believes that by actively marketing himself using these media he has become “[his] own record company.”⁵⁵ As such, in addition to his job as a singer and a guitarist, Kotzen has also assumed the marketing and managerial roles related to his own career.

Through their promotional capabilities, social media technologies are capable of instantly catapulting relatively unknown independent artists to mainstream success. Because of this, many independent bands feel that they no longer need “industrial-strength marketing campaigns or heavy rotation” on the radio to expose their music to wide audiences.⁵⁶ Before he started using internet media as a means of self-promotion, Richie Kotzen’s popularity in the United States was largely confined to the Los Angeles area. However, now as a result of his increased online presence, he has earned guest appearances on nationally broadcast TV shows, such as VH1 Classic’s *That Metal Show*, and promoters across the United States have asked him to play their venues. Kotzen maintains that his internet presence fostered an increased awareness of his work, thus serving as the direct catalyst for his new popularity. It is not as if Kotzen became a significantly better musician overnight. Rather, these media are simply providing new outlets for people to discover his music. Similarly, less than a year later after the release of their first single, “Stare into the Sun,” Graffiti6 had their music featured in the popular television shows, *CSI: New York*, *Convert Affairs*, and *Grey’s Anatomy*. Furthermore, *The Sun*, a popular British tabloid newspaper, encountered the song and decided to use it in their new advertising campaign. Interestingly, Graffiti6 had no major-label marketing forces promoting “Stare into the Sun” to

⁵⁵ Kotzen interview.

⁵⁶ Jeff Howe, “The Hit Factory: Who Needs Major-Labels or Airplay?,” *Wired*, Nov. 2005, <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.11/myspace.html> (accessed 17. Nov. 2010).

these content providers. Instead, the band's vocalist Jamie Scott maintains that their ability to promote and distribute their music is entirely attributable to "the power of the internet."⁵⁷

However, some independent artists maintain a contrasting view. For example, the members of T.S.I. believe that while marketing through social media can be potentially helpful, the promotional benefits might be overstated and "misleading."⁵⁸ While giving credit to the revolutionary benefits of the internet, such as allowing them to "record a song, upload it, and get a hundred thousand [listens]," the band ultimately feels that social networking sites "are not really all that social."⁵⁹ Instead, they refer to social media as "anti-social networking sites" and believe that "don't really help at all for a band."⁶⁰ Speaking with exaggeration, Lenox takes exception to the fact that his band has "two bagillion [sic] MySpace fans, a hundred something plays a day" but the band still has relatively little to show for it as "[they] have sold like ten records and thirty people are at the show."⁶¹ Given his status as an independent artist who relies on these media to promote and distribute his music, Lenox is ultimately unsatisfied with the internet as his primary marketing tool because of a disconnect he sees between T.S.I.'s supposed extensive online fan-base and their lack of tangible success. Moreover, Lenox, in stark contrast to the opinions of fellow independent artists Kotzen and Scott, articulated concerns that the influx of new internet media has actually made it more difficult for younger artists to cultivate a fan-base. Lenox believes that "it is harder now to get noticed than ever, because everyone has their songs out now on these sites and they are bombarding everyone."⁶² Lenox's expresses fears which bring me to a new question in my analysis of the effects of these media on artist

⁵⁷ Scott interview.

⁵⁸ T.S.I. interview.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

development. Specifically, I will now inquire as to whether internet media actually undermine the success of young and developing artists.

Many record industry veterans who are currently or formerly associated with major-labels maintain similar views to Lenox on internet media. Paul McGuinness, the manager of major-label band U2, is one of the harshest critics of new internet media. McGuinness concedes that well-known artists with established fan-bases are not feeling the negative effects of internet media as much as developing artists. As such, McGuinness does not see his crusade against the current trends of internet music distribution as being “about fewer limos for rich rock stars.”⁶³ Instead, McGuinness believes that the multitude of websites that provide “free” access to music, such as MySpace and Facebook, as well as online piracy through peer-to-peer downloading sites, are causing “young and developing artists” to lose “control over their work.”⁶⁴ Essentially, McGuinness fears that the emerging practice among younger bands of giving away free music through the internet is actually “devalu[ing] their work.”⁶⁵

In my interview with Richard Patrick he reiterated many of McGuinness’ concerns for young and developing artists. Patrick, a former major-label artist, steadfastly maintains that the internet has “done nothing” positive for the music industry.⁶⁶ He makes two main claims to support his belief that internet media jeopardize the future of artistic development. First, he asserts that the emergence of peer-to-peer file-sharing websites have birthed a culture of music fans who believe that “records should never be paid for.”⁶⁷ Patrick sees a direct correlation between the numbers of people who download music illegally through peer-to-peer file-sharing

⁶³ Paul McGuinness, “How to Save the Music Business,” *Rolling Stone*, 30 Sept, 2010, 43.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶⁶ Patrick interview.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

websites and the financial “trouble that [younger] bands are having.”⁶⁸ Because bands are often forced to pursue other careers when they cannot earn enough money to fund their artistic endeavors, Patrick laments “how many geniuses have been left behind?”⁶⁹

Second, Patrick also claims that the internet has also had adverse consequences on artist development by “mak[ing] music distribution all spread out.”⁷⁰ Specifically, he feels that these media have created so many channels for promotion and distribution that any amateur artist can form a band and advertise on MySpace or Facebook. He believes that this overabundance of discoverable artists inundates the music landscape for consumers, making it incredibly difficult for any one particular band to be discovered. Patrick even declares that his band “Filter would have had a lot of trouble” if they were trying to emerge amidst this contentiousness.⁷¹ For Patrick, the novelty of being able to “instantly check out a band” using internet media is not worth these detrimental effects. Instead, echoing Lenox’ sentiments, he maintains that the “crazy and competitive” nature of the internet media music environment causes talented “young bands [to] get eaten up.”⁷²

Ultimately, both McGuinness and Patrick think artists must be able to reap financial compensation from their music and control the distribution of their creative product in order to be able to continue to produce music. This rationale is incompatible with the relatively unrestricted dissemination of music that internet media provide for. As such, McGuinness and Patrick paint a pessimistic picture of the effect that these media have, and will continue to have, on developing artists. However, if McGuinness and Patrick’s claims are true then how can the success of Arctic Monkeys and Vampire Weekend, two independent bands whose rapid rise in

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

popularity was propelled by the unrestrained, free, distribution of their music via internet media, be explained?

An exegesis of the circumstances underlying the ascension of Arctic Monkeys and Vampire Weekend will provide perhaps the most relevant example of the redefinition of artist development. Specifically, revisiting Shirky's assertion that "new technology enables new kinds of group-forming," I will now analyze the increased role that online fan communities play in artist development.⁷³ Arctic Monkeys are an English alternative rock band whose popularity skyrocketed through the use of MySpace. It is important to note that Arctic Monkeys can be grouped according to the *artistic freedom model* of artist development. The band was courted by record companies prior to their emergence in 2006. However, record executives would frequently tell them that they could only get a major-label deal if they changed their socially conscious lyrics and simple song structures.⁷⁴ Jamie Cook, Arctic Monkeys' lead guitarist, maintains that the band "never listened" to the labels' suggestions as they valued this aspect of their music.⁷⁵ As such, they remained independent artists. After their shows, the band members would distribute demo CDs to attendees, asking them to spread the word about their music among their friends. Excited by the band's sound and potential, many of these fans led the charge of promoting the band by creating Arctic Monkeys related MySpace pages and by posting the band's songs on peer-to-peer file sharing sites in order to bolster the band's popularity among the internet music community. Arctic Monkeys themselves were completely unaware of what MySpace was and "how to [put their] music on the internet."⁷⁶ Instead, their online fan

⁷³ Shirky, 17.

⁷⁴ Mike Smith, "The Music – Arctic Monkeys," *EMI Music Publishing*, http://web.archive.org/web/20060324210918/http://www.emimusicpub.com/worldwide/artist_profile/arctic-monkeys_profile.html (accessed 20 Oct. 2010).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Dave Park, "Aren't Fooling Around," *Prefix Magazine*, 21 Nov. 2005, <http://www.prefixmag.com/features/arctic-monkeys/arent-fooling-around-part-1-of-2/12565> (accessed 20 Oct. 2010).

community was entirely responsible for creating the Arctic Monkeys' internet presence which ultimately created a substantial buzz around the band. Their popularity grew to the point that the band undertook a sold-out tour across their native England. Moreover, their debut album, *Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not*, which was released on the independent label Domino, became the fastest selling debut album in UK chart history, moving an impressive 363,735 copies in its first week of release.

Vampire Weekend's rapid ascent on the Billboard charts in the United States paralleled the Arctic Monkeys' unorthodox path to success. Formed on the campus of Columbia University in 2006, Vampire Weekend knew their distinct brand of rock music was too artistically diverse for major-record labels. Because they ultimately aligned with the *artistic freedom model* of artist development, Vampire Weekend lead singer Ezra Koenig maintains that it "seemed ultimately fruitless" to "send [demo tapes] to actual record labels" because the record companies would not know how to market a band with their sound and image.⁷⁷ Instead, in a similar process to Arctic Monkeys, Vampire Weekend distributed demo-CDs to the "newly developed middle" of internet fan communities.⁷⁸ Specifically, they targeted "an incestuous network of fans, bloggers, and music-biz outsiders who seemingly can disseminate world-changing hype at the touch of their iPhones."⁷⁹ The buzz surrounding Vampire Weekend became palpable among internet music communities. Through the strength of their online support, the band's self-titled debut has sold 500,000 copies in the United States alone and their follow-up LP, *Contra*, debuted at Number 1 on the Billboard charts, with 124,000 copies sold in its first week of release.

⁷⁷ Andy Greenwald, "From the Ivy Leagues to the Big Leagues at the New Speed of Buzz," *Spin*, March 2008, 65.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

On the surface, the examples of both Arctic Monkeys and Vampire Weekend further underscore that independent bands that ascribe to the *artistic freedom model* of artist development are able to utilize internet media to market their music to wide audiences. However, these cases also exemplify how music fans have further altered the term artist development through their ability to effectively organize music communities by engaging with internet media. Returning to Shirky, this redefinition is attributable to the internet's facilitation of "a remarkable increase in our ability to share, to cooperate with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutions."⁸⁰ In place of the traditional system whereby major-labels would spoon-feed artists to fans, the *global interconnectivity* of the internet facilitates widespread and powerful group action on the part of fans. Specifically, internet media allow fans to partake in the marketing and distribution of musicians. As such, the same internet media that allow for the rapid digital transmission of an artist's work also empower fans to unite in support of an artist.

Paul McGuinness bemoans the ease with which music can be accessed through internet media which has caused "consumers to come to love 'free.'"⁸¹ McGuinness sees this trend toward "free" as the "worst nightmare" for "creators seeking reward for [their] work."⁸² However, Arctic Monkeys and Vampire Weekend experienced tremendous financial success upon giving their work away for free. To resolve this discrepancy, I must now analyze how the increased role that fan communities play in artist development has redefined the responsibilities of these fans as consumers. I propose that the shift toward free content and an artist's ability to receive enough compensation to continue to produce music are not mutually exclusive. Rather, artists' ability to continue to make music in the internet age is contingent upon the active support

⁸⁰ Shirky, 21.

⁸¹ McGuinness, 44.

⁸² Ibid.

of the fan-bases who are consuming their music for free. Recalling Geoff Lenox's dissatisfaction with internet media as a means of marketing and distributing T.S.I.'s music, his primary complaint was that people only voiced their support for T.S.I. within the confines of the band's online community. Admitting that the "band [was] running on credit cards that are pretty much maxed out," Lenox appealed to T.S.I.'s online community to "support" the band and "show [them] that [T.S.I.] means something" to their fans.⁸³ T.S.I. broke up in October of 2010 because it was not financially viable to be a band anymore. T.S.I.'s plight parallels the assertion of *The New Yorker's* Malcolm Gladwell that "the platforms of social media are built around weak ties" that "seldom lead to activism."⁸⁴ In contrast to the active online fan participation of Arctic Monkeys and Vampire Weekend's respective fan communities, T.S.I.'s passive internet fan-base ultimately undermined the band's ability to carry on.

Other artists have also stressed the need for active support from their fan-bases, especially in the era of free content via internet media. Jamie Scott maintains that "it is a given that the internet is going to take record sales down" and that "people downloading music for free" does hurt artists somewhat. However, he ultimately "would like to believe that if someone really likes a band enough, they will endorse them in some way by going to a show or something."⁸⁵ Moreover, Lzzy Hale maintains a positive attitude toward recent trends of fans "downloading a record or song for free," so long as those same fans will also "at least come to a show and support the band."⁸⁶ While both of these artists offer little further explanation, their appeal for some type of patronage or assistance from their fan-base is abundantly clear.

⁸³ T.S.I. interview.

⁸⁴ Malcolm Gladwell, "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not be Tweeted," *The New Yorker*, 4 Oct. 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell (accessed 8 Dec. 2010).

⁸⁵ Scott interview.

⁸⁶ Halestorm interview.

The contrasting perspectives on the effects of internet technologies reflect the confusion among artists within the music industry. However, after undertaking this research, I am now in a position to make observations about the ramifications of internet media on artist development. By introducing a multitude of unrestrained avenues through which listeners can access music, the influx of internet media upset the traditional balance between the *artistic freedom* and *industry oversight* models of artist development at the major-label level. When major labels shifted toward an extreme *industry oversight model* of artist development as a result of internet media, many bands who prioritized their creative process began utilizing internet media to cultivate a fan-base, circumventing record company oversight. However, internet media began to engender new possibilities for creativity. As I discussed, internet media have enabled the growth of musicians by challenging artists become more creative, making it cheaper to produce music, enabling musicians who ascribe to the *artistic freedom model* to autonomously produce their music, and assisting in the formation of artist collectives.

However, it is the effectiveness of internet media as a marketing tool that produces the largest dichotomy of opinions. While internet media have birthed new channels through which developing artists can emerge, the shift toward free content has ultimately empowered fan communities with the ability to make or break young and developing artists. As such, it is the manner in which fans are using the capabilities of new internet media that will ultimately dictate the long-term viability of this new creativity. To analyze the ways fan-bases can work to ensure that artists attain the proper compensation to continue to produce their work would go beyond the focus of this project. However, I will attempt to resolve the contrasting opinions regarding the efficacy of social media in cultivating active fan-collectives. Shirky contends that social media have ushered in a new generation of collective action where “groups of people will come

together to accomplish” their combined goals. In contrast, others such as Gladwell maintain that social media frequently foster illusory support and activism which lacks tangible and meaningful results. Interestingly, the artists studied in this paper show that both perspectives are right to a certain extent. However, a common belief can be culled from both Shirky and Gladwell’s approaches. Specifically, the transition toward music’s availability through intangible internet media does not detract from the need for the real world mobilization of fan-bases. As such, I maintain that the future of the *artistic freedom model* of artist development hinges on the active and participatory support of fan communities and social action using internet media. To paraphrase an old adage, there is no such thing as a free song.