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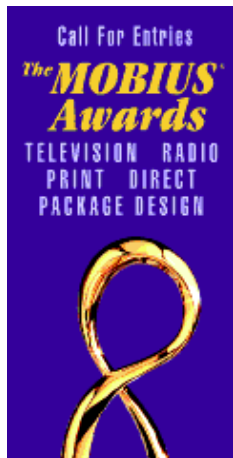
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Them Changes [7.25.03]

Not so long ago, the record industry couldn't have cared less about Madison Avenue. Freelance music producer Rob Kaplan remembers being on staff at Messner five years ago and getting nothing but the cold shoulder when he approached record companies about licensing original tunes. "Virtually no major label gave me support," he recalls. "I got a lot of, 'Here's a choice of one artist, and you can pay a lot of money and maybe we'll let you use him, maybe we won't.'" Now the labels and publishers have changed their tune — which comes as no surprise, of course, since the record industry is in a sales freefall and many are already predicting the demise of the Big Five labels in the not too distant future.



VW deejay J. Ralph

At the same time, commercials have by and large shed their sellout stigma, having proven to be launching pads for artists both established and on the rise. Kaplan himself helped to lay some of the foundation for the new order, when a Philips campaign he worked on brought little-known band Gomez to Top 40 radio via a cover of the Beatles' "Getting Better," which deftly punctuated the spots. A double-whammy: pimping a tune from rock's Golden Age and hiring an up-and-coming band to redo it. "There's no question that the landscape has shifted," says Y&R/New York music producer Peter Greco. "We're seeing a different approach to the way we interface with the recording industry and the way it interfaces with us. We're like kids in a candy store." FCB/New York producer Gregory Grene says, "There are a couple of major labels who have offered to do things simply for a chyron in the lower left hand corner of the screen, literally not charging us anything."

Unfortunately, the windfall for agencies is not so sweet for commercials music houses, which are now engaged in a celebrity deathmatch with the likes of Sting, Moby and Dirty Vegas. "It's killing us," says Spank composer Greg Allan. "Licensing has become more and more popular, and it takes away from the opportunities to write our own songs." Not only do the music houses report that requests for original tunes are down, but if they're not losing out to licensed tracks they're more likely to be getting requests for covers of familiar hits. "It used to be that all we competed with were music companies," says Joel Simon, president of JSM. "Now we're competing with everybody out there." But he, and a host of others, have learned to work with the shifting tides, adding services and even attempting to shed their traditional skins as end-of-the-line jingles shops in the hopes of breaking new ground as creative collaborators.



Play ▶

Coors mixes DMC, The Byrds, P.O.D. and The Scorpions into one big rock anthem.

Independent licensing boutiques have emerged as well, including Ten Music, run by Sara Gavigan, who brought Madonna to Microsoft and tapped the unknown Convoy to cover the Rolling Stones for Deutsch and Sheraton. Besides licensing and music supervision, Gavigan has also positioned her Ten as the connection for agencies and indie bands like Thievery Corporation and Ursula 1000. Nicole Dionne of Primal Scream is taking a similar tack, relaunching her shop as rubber-band entertainment, where she'll bring talent from recording, television and film to the expanded arena of spots, trailers, and videogames. "I don't find that agency creatives are as drawn to traditional composers anymore," she says. "People are tapped-in enough to demand something genuine. They don't want leftovers, they want the entree."



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Garage band Convoy covers the Stones.

music I can do for any given spot, thereby introducing to the subconscious of the viewing public a different soundscape than they're ordinarily used to hearing," he says. "Then, by the time we get the records out, the sounds are slightly more familiar to the audience." His success inspired him last year to open The Rumor Mill. Joined by cohorts Jay Israelson and Arthur Pingrey, he's hoping to hook up fellow musicians with commercials gigs, the most recent of which was Pingrey's track for one of Fallon's latest Lee spots.

ONDA, a collective of record execs-turned-turntablists, transferred their catwalk skills, producing fierce remixes for Ralph Lauren and

Gucci, to the spots showcase. Formerly signed to JSM, ONDA's Rene Arsenault, Michaelangelo L'Acqua and Gregg Fine while there brought a sexy facelift to "The Touch, the Feel" ditty that complements the music video-like dynamism on recent spots for Cotton Inc. Now, joined by former JSM producer Marc Morris and creative director Craig DeLeon, they're continuing work on spots for Old Navy, Joe Boxer/Kmart and on shows for top-name fashionistas. Among ONDA's recording projects is an Isley Brothers remix album, which will feature producers like the Roots' Questlove and Sade's Stewart Matthewman. The company has decidedly ad-minded aspirations for the album; they're already approaching commercials partners to offer each track for spots. Ultimately, instead of fitting music to picture, they're hoping to strike up a creative dialogue with willing collaborators, promoting music as the muse for commercials concepts. "It goes back to what we did in the fashion industry, where the designers got inspired to create their collections listening to music," says Arsenault. "The ideas actually came out of music. Now, we're vibing with agency creatives."

BMWRECORDS.COM?

Elsewhere, David Grow, a former Tomandandy composer who now runs Howling Music, is currently working on deals to establish labels within advertising agencies themselves. JSM's Simon is even more enthusiastic: "I'm finding that we are the new record industry." Although his shop's main business is still original tunes, Simon has positioned JSM as a "media company," to accommodate agencies' growing eagerness to participate in collaborative branding opportunities with recording artists, equally eager to ride the promotional advertising wave. His shop is home to Stanley Brown and JK, who have produced and written for Salt N' Pepa, Dru Hill, Herbie Hancock and John Forte — the latter's well-received album was produced by JSM. As Brown and JK continue to work on albums in association with his shop, Simon is hoping to attract interest from agency partners looking to capitalize on a breakout act, a plan that record publishers have been pushing as well. Moreover, he says his shop is the first commercials outfit to land a label on Apple's iTunes, another avenue by which he will offer agencies multiplatform connections to recording talents.

Hum Music founder/composer Jeff Koz's diversification plans include recording projects like a Grammy-nominated lullaby album in a collaboration with his brother, the smooth-jazz saxophonist Dave Koz. In addition, Hum's Tricia Halloran recently brought Ruben Postaer and the Grammy-nominated Mexican rock outfit Kinky together to create original tracks for the launch campaign of the Honda Element. Yet another angle features videogames, including music supervision of tracks for a game based on the *The Fast and the Furious*.

Elias Arts president Scott Elias says his company's evolution is more about broader changes within the media landscape; he's less concerned about licensed tracks than he is about bringing music to bear beyond the 30-second sphere. Beyond the traditional composers, his shop has an Artists in Residence arm, featuring Tricky and sound-environment specialist Louis Danchrel.



Play ▶

A dead emu kicks off a chain of coincidences.

At bicoastal Face the Music, executive producers Adam Joseph and Joe Sicurella say evolving means continuing the course upon which the company first set foot, aligning with musicians who've honed their skills beyond the commercials realm. They founded the shop in 2000 with composer Paul Robb, who fronted the 80s electronica outfit Information Society. Today they continue to bring eclectic talents to their stable, like Ed Ma, an L.A. club DJ who has composed music for Lee Jeans "Emu," *The Mothman Prophecies*, and *The Rules of Attraction*. "We're not just trying to jump on the bandwagon by saying, 'We now have a new tastemaker,'" notes Joseph. "We've always had tastemakers and don't need to put that out there because that's always been a given at our company."

REAL MUSIC OR AD MUSIC?

As "legitimate" artists flood the fray via licensing, the notion of "authenticity" becomes a key selling point. Whether they're promoting licensed tunes, hookups with stars, or their own roster of original composers, the music houses are eager to back their goods with the idea of the "genuine," almost as if musicians who honed their skills on '30s weren't the real thing. But great original commercials music lives on, as traditional spots composers at shops like Amber, Human, Ripe, Crushing and Elias consistently turn out memorable tracks. Bang Music's Lyle Greenfield and Brian Jones recently crafted a catchy tune for Mini's "Breeze" that arguably would give any Top 40 tune a run for its money. Genuine Music composer John Ferreira drummed up a minor pop phenomenon of his own with Coors Light's "Love Song."

On the licensing upside, the changing landscape likely means that work all around is destined to get better, "There's been a challenge to companies to come up with really good music, and in our experience over the last few years, the level has gone up," says Y&R/New York producer Josh Rabinowitz. Moreover, agency producers insist there will always be a need for original music, and that buying a licensed track or bringing established artists in won't always be the best solution. "Signing an independent artist doesn't necessarily make me jump," insists FCB's Grene. "Just because somebody has the seal of approval from a record label doesn't mean they're the best thing. I listen for a music house that's going to blow me away with the music they've done, as an entity."

But the ongoing pilfering of the classic rock catalog and the increasing trend toward indie band buyouts are a reality that the commercials music houses have no choice but to accept. "I know I'm supposed to be indignant about it because we write music for commercials, but I'm also a realist," says Bang's Greenfield. "If someone licenses a song like Nick Drake's 'Pink Moon' for VW's 'Milky Way,' of course I understand it and I appreciate the emotional depth, because that commercial's working — the music fits like a glove. When these things work, they resonate. When they don't, it's starfucking." ■

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