

How I destroyed the music industry

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How I Destroyed The Music Industry.
by Jonathan King

Or, rather, how I could have saved the music industry by making different decisions. Many may consider that I ruined music with my appalling tunes.

But some feel my contribution was stellar - with some decent, even classic songs recorded by the likes of Nina Simone and Doris Day and performed by Frank Sinatra, Marlene Dietrich and Bette Midler amongst others. Some may feel the artistes I discovered, created, and named, like Genesis and 10cc, contributed to the creative heights of music even if others like The Bay City Rollers and The Rocky Horror Show did not hold such artistic merit.

And there are many who feel that my questioning who let the dogs out or whether we should get up again after being knocked down only contributed to the sports industry.

Whilst I was given the Man of the Year Award by the British music industry for winning the Eurovision Song Contest for the UK and saving the annual Brits after the disastrous year of 1989 by taking over as writer and producer (I still feel my creative high point was getting then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to croon How Much Is That Doggy In The Window on national television), there are some who feel I did not deserve such an august prize when fellow inductees included George Martin who produced The Beatles.

But I did form my own record label - UK Records - in 1972 - having had great success before that as a singer, writer and producer - distributed by my mentor's company, DECCA. Sir Edward Lewis was a dear friend and quite understood when, after our deal finished, I moved to PolyGram. He was aware, as I knew, of how much less the label was worth than the huge sum offered by the other corporation.

When he was dying Sir Edward offered to give me his record company. It was worth around 85 million pounds at the time (probably ten times that in today's money). His only condition was that I would run it for the rest of my life. I refused, gratefully and politely, as I hated running UK Records. Meetings with lawyers and accountants and tax people and - God forbid - human rights types. You could NEVER snap at a secretary, especially if they were female. I snap at everyone and do not care about their gender, skin colour or religious beliefs and praise them as well, likewise, if they do a good job. This was OK with UK Records and a staff of six (at one time we had three hits in the British top five). But I never enjoyed being a Boss. I liked music. Finding it, making it, breaking it. Money was of no interest at all, neither was political correctness. Still isn't.

So I declined Sir Edward's generous offer (he later said to his wife that I was the only person he'd ever met in his life who had never wanted anything from him. He was wrong; I wanted his friendship and he gave it to me).

First mistake. I should have taken Decca and hired people to do the day to day running and stuff I hated. If I had, it and London Records in the USA would still, today, have been independent global leaders in music.

I went on making hits and finding artistes. I started The Tip Sheet, based on my dear friend Bill Gavin's Report in the 1960s. But the century ended with three specific giant smashes by Chumbawamba, Baha Men and The Cuban Boys.

I think it was that Cuban Boys hit (Cognoscenti vs Intelligentsia better known as The Hamster Dance song), which I placed with EMI, that alerted the Boss of EMI, Eric Nicoli, to my potential as a future leader for his company. After several meetings in 2000, he offered me the global Chairmanship of EMI at the then reasonable sum of £5million a year. I

accepted, by then having realised that I could hire great deputies to run the corporate side. Rupert Perry, a dear friend who was superb at leading teams and dealing with share holders and was, at the time, Chairman of EMI Europe, and Paul Conroy, another dear friend who was the best marketing man I knew.

We were just about to announce my appointment when Surrey Police knocked on my door. Totally false charges had been made against me through the publicist Max Clifford. The deal collapsed; I was wrongly convicted (my appeal is ongoing) and, eventually, EMI broke up and was sold in pieces.

I have since been told, by reliable sources, that a certain EMI executive in America who was being fired (on my advice to Nicoli before he made the offer), had organised my demise (actually, it was said to me, it had been started by his wife, a friend of Max Clifford).

I have no idea whether or not this is true but would be interested if anyone has any evidence.

The resultant slow collapse of EMI, one of the great original record companies alongside Decca, was inevitable and the entire music industry has now reverted to providing luxury, specialist goods as opposed to necessities like food, water and air. Which I find sad.

Streaming is apposite. It passes by like a river, in and out of life, meaning very little at the time, fading in memory. Cheap, easy, unimportant.

So there you go. How I ruined the music industry. You may or may not believe that it is now shattered. That I'm a sad old man of 77 who whines "they don't make 'em like they used to". You are entitled to your opinion, as I am to mine. And I have just expressed mine.

Jonathan King
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