

Imagi-Notes Newsletter

Issue 2 - February 2001

The official Newsletter for the **imaginotionsongs** Yahoo! Group

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Hi there everyone!

I hope you all enjoyed the first issue of the Imagi-Notes last month. In one of his emails to me, Graeme Jaye, group member and article contributor extraordinaire wrote to me; "The first issue seemed to strike the right balance...if no one complains you probably have got it right!"

Well, no one complained (not to me anyway!) so I guess that's a good sign!

The Site has certainly been through some changes this month with the first phase of the eGroups/Yahoo Clubs merger being undertaken. So far not a lot has changed at the site itself. This is because we haven't actually gone anywhere. Rather than move the eGroups, Yahoo have simply given us the new name and a few extra facilities, mainly for the moderators, with the notable exception of the Yahoo ID's which has taken a little getting used to. I must say though, that's its great to be able to talk with so many of you now rather than just type. There will be further changes over the coming months, but hopefully they will take place with the same minimum of fuss and problems.

There are some great articles for you to enjoy in this issue. My trusty collaborator, Chris Headford, has pitched in with this month's CD Review. Graeme Jaye continues his tech talk

in Graeme's Gab with an interesting article on headphones and monitoring. Also this month, I've included an article about press kits which will hopefully be helpful to those of you who aren't quite sure what they are or what goes into them. In Site-Seeing, we take a look at one of the best online contact resource sites I've come across, and Steve Veloudos of Zebra Music takes The Guest Spot with his article about that one thing that joins us all together no matter our age, genre, knowledge or experience - Creativity.

I hope you enjoy this issue and I look forward to your feedback. See you in the Group!

Regards,
Lisa Butler
Editor

SITE SEEING

by Lisa Butler

This month: Hit Quarters

© 2001 Lisa Butler

So, you have a great song and you want to pitch it to your favourite artist. Or maybe you are an artist looking for a successful manager who'll get you that mega-deal and send your career into orbit. Do you write to the A&R section at the Record Company where other successful artists can be found? Do you approach the big time Management firms with big name artists on their roster? Do you need a list of all the Publishers that have top writers in their stable?

Up until recently I would have said 'Yes' to all the above – that was until I discovered the excellent contact information at the Hit Quarters website.

Did you know that many of today's acts eg; Britney Spears, Nsync, BSB and others were actually discovered and made famous by A&R and Managers in Europe, not in the USA? I didn't, until I read through this site and realised that just because an artist is signed to a particular company, doesn't mean they got their start with that company, and even if they did, the actual person who promoted and pushed the act to stardom may not be with the company or the act any longer. Music industry professionals are like nomads, constantly moving from one position to the next, one company after another and frankly, its almost impossible to keep up with them.

So how do you know who the stars of A&R, management, publishing and producing really are, and how do you find them?

The Hit Quarters website is unique in that it boasts the 'Hit Tracker', a listing of all the artists plus the names of the actual A&R people, managers, labels and publishers who gave them their break. Not only that, Hit Quarters tells you where those same 'star makers' are now and includes their contact details.

Set up in the style of a search engine, the Hit Tracker has four main categories; Artist - reference; Type of company; Genre (there are not enough to choose from but the basic genres are listed) and, Territory (an A-Z listing of countries).

There is also a free text field. The idea is simple. Find out who the genius behind an act is/was by selecting the artist's name, then selecting the type of company eg Record

Company/A&R. Hit 'Search' and the new page will display details of the people involved with that artist's rise plus any other artists those people have represented.

What about that song you've sweated over and finally finished? Select Publishers or Record Companies/A&R from the Type of Company category, select the genre and hit Search. There are lots of different combinations to play with and don't forget the free text field is very handy for adding specific words to narrow the search.

The Hit Tracker does even more. It actually makes recommendations with regards to who's really hot, who has had past successes but not recently, who's worth approaching for their expertise in a particular country only, and who has still to prove themselves. Hit Quarters explains their recommendations as follows:

Hit-recommended: A person with a Hit-recommendation is undoubtedly one of the leading players in the industry on a worldwide basis. If you work with such a person, it can't get any better.

Recommended: A person who is likely to give you success in several territories, but is not among the hottest.

Locally recommended: A person who has very good skills, but only applicable in one territory.

Others: Persons who have yet to prove themselves. They could be anyone from A to Z. You could find good people here, since, of course, everyone that is recommended has once been just like any "other" person, but they are generally not to be recommended.

Amazingly, there's more to this site than the Hit Tracker. At first glance, this resource site for artists, musicians and songwriters appears deceptively basic, but a good read through uncovers a wide array of other excellent information and useful tips. I took the time to read right through the entire Advisory text and found the information to be well informed and easy to understand. Not only does it explain how to find the right people and how to search for them using the Hit Tracker, it also details how these organizations function, how to approach them and much more.

Find contacts by searching through the Music Business Cards - or Hit Quarters Classified Ad section. Again set up in the style of a search engine with categories to choose from, you can find just about any service, anywhere. There is also a link on the home page that takes you to the Music Business Cards plus buy/sell ads and job offers etc. Anyone can post their details in the Business Card facility - and best of all, it's free.

The site features all the major chart information from the USA, UK, France, Germany, Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Australia and Canada and includes MP3 charts too. There's a newsletter as well as a links page, plus articles and interviews with successful industry players.

The design of the Hit Quarters site really appeals to my sense of order with its alphabetical listings and neatly set out pages. There are no flashy pictures that take forever to download and the information isn't squeezed onto the pages as if in fear of running out of space. The facility is completely free to users and financed by the use of unobtrusive, tasteful banner ads. All in all, this site is really worth a look. You'll be adding it to your Bookmarks - guaranteed.

Website: <http://www.hitquarters.com>

Email: info@hitquarters.com

Quotable Quotes: "Don't worry about people stealing your ideas. If your ideas are any good, you'll have to ram them down people's throats." -Howard Aiken

<http://www.famous-quotations.com>

GRAEME'S GAB

HEADPHONES

© 2001 Graeme Jaye

I am often asked which headphones I would recommend for monitoring. I always answer this question with another one, "How often have you seen a studio engineer using headphones to monitor his mix?" The answer is, they haven't. Guess there has to be a reason for that.

However, I do appreciate that it is necessary to use headphones some of the time - so let's talk about these things for a while.

There are a couple of advantages to using headphones (or 'cans' as they are usually called in the studio). If you are working on top of your computer, they can help cut down the racket it makes. Then again, it cuts down the racket you make - which others in the house might think was a good thing.

But only a very experienced engineer would ever contemplate doing his final mix using headphones and even then, only reluctantly. The reasons are many, but basically, it boils down to this - they give a false impression of the sound stage and effects levels and they can't compete, in terms of frequency response and flatness, with a half-decent pair of monitor loudspeakers. Unless you are specifically making binaural recordings, do not use headphones for mixing.

Headphones come as two distinct types - open and closed back. Generally, you will get a better balanced sound from open-back headphones, but they let in the sound from outside as well. Closed-back headphones are usually more suspect in the frequency response department, but are more useful in a studio environment as they attenuate the external noise. For this reason, most of the headphones used in studios are of this type (and the Beyer DT100 is just about the de-facto standard unit in studios for foldback to musicians).

You can spend very little or a great deal of money on headphones - but none of them will be as good as your speakers ought to be. You also need to be very wary of the promotional literature for headphones. I have seen impossible frequency responses claimed for some units, only to discover when reading further, that the \pm dB limits are 15 or 20dB - this is hardly what I would call a flat response.

Someone once told me that they bought a pair of cheap headphones in preference to a much more expensive pair "because they sounded better to me". I don't doubt it but, if you read my remarks last month about computer speaker systems, you will realise that they fell into exactly the same trap. Just because it sounds better to you, doesn't mean it will sound better to everyone and it certainly doesn't mean they have a flat response. In fact, I happen to know the expensive pair really were worth the extra cost.

Let's just consider a simple thing - bass level. Headphones are notorious for lacking a decent bass response. It even varies each time you use them. Try this little experiment, listen to a fairly bass-heavy track and get a good feel for the bass level. Take the headphones off and put them on again - you might be surprised to find the level has changed slightly. All this has to do with the acoustics of the small chamber, formed within the ear cavity, when you clamp a pair of headphones to your head. The size changes slightly as you re-position the headphones and the frequency response of the chamber changes with it. How can you mix under these circumstances?

If you mix on headphones, you'll most likely be pushing the bass to compensate for the poor response. Finally, it sounds perfect. Put it up on a decent pair of loudspeakers and cringe - where did all that bass come from!! Back to the drawing board. Of course the reverse situation is also true. If the headphones produce too much bass (because their frequency response has been artificially tailored to make them sound better) you'll find the track bass-light when you play it back on loudspeakers.

This brings me back to what I was saying in the last issue. The one thing your monitor system should not have is any colouration of its own. You'll be busy adjusting it out of your final mix. Which, in turn, means your final mix is not going to sound as you wanted it when others play it.

Of course, their own systems will introduce some colouration, you can't avoid that. But you can - and should - make certain that you don't add any of your own.

Next month: Any requests?

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Graeme Jaye runs a small business, which is associated with music - but nothing to do with making it. He has spent about 30 odd years in and around the music and film sound recording business. He's worked as a musician, recording engineer, dubbing mixer, producer, studio designer and owner - and says that he's probably spent as much time under consoles as he has running them. Graeme's also been involved with a number of big AV projects, where all these independent experiences have been pooled together. These days, his only involvement with making music is, in his words, seeing what he can squeeze out of his computer with a fairly minimal equipment list, an even more minimal budget and insufficient time.

Graeme has an enormous amount of experience and knowledge and his contributions to the Imagi-Notes Newsletter are greatly appreciated. Many Thanks, Graeme!

Quotable Quotes: "Any activity becomes creative when the doer cares about doing it right, or doing it better." -John Updike

<http://www.quoteland.com>

THE GUEST SPOT

Capturing Your Creativity

by Steve Veloudos of Zebra Music

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Creativity is a very interesting subject to think about if you are a songwriter trying to write the next big song that can launch a musical career.

Where does it come from?

There are a couple schools of thought as to where these creative ideas come from. Some say that there is a "pool" of creative ideas somewhere that each and every one of us can somehow tap into. Others claim that God is responsible for sending the ideas to us. Still others claim that the ideas are internal to us and get developed in our own subconscious mind. No matter how these ideas originate, the one thing that is certain is that they do exist and there are certain things that we can do to capture these ideas when they come to us.

Creative Time

I believe that we all have a specific time and or activities that these creative ideas seem to be associated with. I find for myself that I get more ideas in the morning than in the evening hours. I also noted that I get a lot of ideas when I am in my car driving somewhere. To discover what your creative times and activities are, you can do this test. Make sure that you have a pen and paper to write down your ideas or some type of tape recorder to record musical ideas. For the next few weeks, write down or record all the ideas that pop up in your mind. Also write down or record what you were doing when you got the idea and what time it was. What you will start to notice is that there are certain times and activities that give you more ideas than others. This is very important because you can make sure that you have the means to capture these ideas at these times or doing these activities. For instance, I put a small pad of paper with a pen in my car, and when I get an idea for something I write it down immediately.

Good / Bad Ideas

You should write down everything that comes to you and be very careful not to judge the idea at this point. Some of it may not be useful at all now, but you never know if this idea may be the answer to something you're working on down the road. For instance, you may think of a cool bridge to put in the new song you're working on, however when you get back to your instrument you find it just doesn't work. Six months down the road, you're working on another song and you need a bridge. You go over your ideas tape and there it is, this idea that didn't work 6 months ago that you completely forgot about.

Creativity is a very powerful tool for songwriters and paying attention and capturing these ideas that come to you can strengthen your songwriting skills. Remember that every song ever written was first just a thought in someone's mind.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The Zebra Music Web Site <http://www.zebramusic.com> is an information depot for musicians featuring hundreds of Industry Contacts, the Gig Sharing Network, archived issues of the Musicians Tip Sheet, Music FAQ's, Music Chat, The Musician Discussion List and many Cool Links to help your musical act. See advertisement in the Classified Ads section in this newsletter.

Quotable Quotes: “Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.”
- Will Rogers (1879-1935)

<http://www.famous-quotations.com>

TIME OUT

What is a Press Kit and what should it contain?

By Lisa Butler

© 2000 Lisa Butler

A Press Kit is one of your most important promotional tools. It is usually the first real impression that an A&R executive, agent, manager, club owner or talent scout will have of you, so it has to be professional.

Your Press Kit should contain the following:

1. A Letter of Introduction - Who you are, what you do and why you are sending the Kit.
2. A publicity photo - This should be a shot taken by a professional. That photo taken in the backyard last year just won't cut it. The photo needs to express who you are, what type of music you perform etc. The photo for a heavy metal artist is vastly different to that of a country singer. Take a look at the photos in music magazines and on star websites for ideas and then phone around for music photographers in your area. There are a lot out there. Try typing your country+music+photographer in your Internet search engine.
3. A couple of press reviews or published articles about your work as a singer/performer etc. This speaks for itself. If you've never had an article written about you phone your local newspaper, ask to speak to the music or entertainment writer and see if they would be interested in writing one. Send them a press kit!!
4. A Bio sheet of your performance history. This is like a résumé and should list your music accomplishments, performances, etc. Use your bio to convey what makes you unique as an artist and performer, what contests you have won, what instruments you play and other relevant information: vocal/dance coaching, ability to sight read/sing music, any industry positions you've held etc. Don't include anecdotal references to childhood dreams of stardom. This may seem obvious, but you'd be surprised how many young aspiring singers assume that the A&R guys at BMG will be interested to hear how Mum just knew they were musical when they started bashing away on their toy xylophone at the tender age of two.
5. A demo CD with 2-3 songs. It is now considered normal to send out CD's rather than cassette tapes. If you must send a cassette, put 60-90 second 'snippets' of you singing different songs rather than recording full songs onto it. There is nothing more frustrating to a record company exec than having to fast forward through a tape. Make sure that your CD/cassette is neatly labelled and includes your name and contact details, in case it becomes separated from your press kit. If you can get hold of the Sure Thing CD Labeler program, or a similar product, you can make up your own CD labels at home. Printable CD stickers are readily available from good stationary stockists.

6. Your business card. = Professional. This is such an obvious tool in the business world yet so few bands and artists actually carry them around. The music industry is a business too, and a business card is your portable publicity machine. If you don't have one, try designing your own in conjunction with the design of your letterhead. Take a look at some of the cards floating around in your desk drawer for ideas. Your word processing program probably has stationary templates that will be helpful too. Ready to print, perforated sheets of business card stock are also available at good stationary outlets.

Needless to say, your Introduction Letter and Bio should be printed on letterhead. Create your own letterhead if you don't have one. A simple professional design is best. Check out the different designs that have been sent to you recently. See what's being done. A little creativity is fine, after all you are an artist - but don't go overboard. If in doubt, keep it simple and business like, at least until you have a really good idea of what you want.

Make sure that photocopies of your press clippings are clear and the name of the publication(s) and the date of the article(s) are noted.

Always keep an original copy of everything that you include in your Press Kits so you will always have clear originals to copy. Make up a dozen or so kits at a time so you always have one ready to post and carry some in the car - just in case. Don't be swayed by friends and family who'll want a press kit as a keepsake. This is business. You will spend quite a bit of your precious time, effort and money to make up your professional looking kits. Don't waste them. Your family and friends will understand.

The biggest expense will be the CD demos and the photos. You'll need to have quite a few copies of these made. Forgo quantity for quality if you must. The sound quality and production of your demo is more important.

Be sure you are 100% happy with everything that goes into your Kit. Look at it critically as an industry executive would. Does it meet the high standards necessary to impress the right people in this competitive business? Ask some music professionals for their opinion even if it means sending a Kit out to a music reviewer and asking them for their feedback. Reviewers get Press Kits sent to them all the time so they will know what works and what doesn't.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Excerpt taken from the FAQ page at the Imagination Songs website: <http://www.imaginationongs.com> . There are more hints and tips available and new FAQ's are added regularly as queries are received.

Quotable Quotes: "Don't be afraid to take a big step. You can't cross a chasm in two small jumps." - David Lloyd George

<http://www.quoteland.com>

CD REVIEW

Moby: Play

Released: 1999 by Mute Records Limited

Review by Chris Headford

© 2001 Chris Headford

Although I wouldn't exactly call this a new release, when I was asked to write February's CD Review I knew this had to be the album, since it's my favourite at the moment.

The first Moby track I heard was "Why does my heart go on?", as well as the theme from Veronica's Closet (Body Rock). I love the smooth grooves and mix of Hip Hop, techno and other less definable qualities in his music.

Let me tell you this guy does it all. He plays all of the instruments, sings most of the songs (with a little help from guest vocalists) and writes some great tunes. Of course there is a bit of the "Hey, haven't I heard that somewhere before?" element owing to the use of samples from other songs, but using his unique mixing techniques, Moby seems to somehow make them his own without leaving one feel like he's cheated.

The singles on this album are Body Rock, Porcelain, Why does my Heart Feel So Bad, Honey and Southside, but really, there are so many good songs on this album it's hard to pick any highlight tracks. That being the case, I thought I'd mention a couple that are good but aren't exactly single material for one reason or another.

#2 - Find My Baby

This song is built around a sample of Joe Lee's "Rock" which in itself is a good old bluesy sort of song but once given the Moby mixing treatment really shines.

#11 - Run On

Run On is a sort of gospel/Hip Hop fusion (???) song complete with gospel harmony vocals and a very smooth backbeat.

#13 - If Things Were Perfect

With a groovy bass line and strange vocal mix, all I can say about this track is that it's very odd. I like it!!!

The CD booklet includes just about everything you could ever want to know about Moby (and some things you probably don't), including his life story. Moby also has a very interesting web site well worth looking at: <http://www.moby.org>

I've yet to discover a downside to this album since the more I listen to it, the more it grows on me. Its bound to become a classic.

You'll either love this album or loathe it - but I love it, so on Lisa Clark's scale of 1 to 10, I'd give it a 9.

P.S: Listen out for Gwen Steffani (Lead singer of "No Doubt") doing backing vocals on track #5 - South Side.

'Play' is available at all good music stores :)

MEMBERS CLASSIFIED ADS

This section of the newsletter is for advertisements by members and article contributors. It's completely free. Advertise gigs, buy/sell musical instruments/equipment, advertise for band members, songwriters, musicians, pen-pals. Advertise your business or your latest CD - anything music related is welcome. Email your ads to lisa@imaginotionsongs.com.

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LEGENDARY ROCKERS PROMOTIONS is looking for original songs in the style of Elvis, Beatles, Stones, Abba, Bowie and many others that are on my site. This is for recording and off stage sales. My site is <http://www.cableregina.com/users/ccowan>
Please send demo CD or cassette to:

Curtis Cowan/Legendary Rockers Prom.
108 West 22nd Ave.
Vancouver, BC, Canada
V5Y 2G1

FEMALE VOCALIST IN SEARCH OF GROUP. Doesn't matter what part she sings. Preferably in North Carolina, but will relocate if necessary. Prefers Pop, R&B, or Country. Contact Marie at firebreather@poetic.com

THE ZEBRA MUSIC WEB SITE <http://www.zebramusic.com> is an information depot for musicians featuring hundreds of Industry Contacts, the Gig Sharing Network, archived issues of the Musicians Tip Sheet, Music FAQ's, Music Chat, The Musician Discussion List and many Cool Links to help your musical act.

Subscribe to the Musicians Tip Sheet. It's a free newsletter for musicians, which includes many industry contacts and informative information about the music industry. To subscribe please send an email to: <mailto:musicians-tipsheet-subscribe@yahoogroups.com>

Zebra Music - Helping Musicians Survive!

POP GROUP NEEDS MEMBERS. Called 'Envision', this pop group is in search of members to complete its line-up. Applicants should be aged between 13 and 17 years old, live in or near Pittsburgh PA, or be able to travel to the Pittsburgh area. Applicants can contact Jillian at: jillian225@hotmail.com for more information. Check out the cool Envision website at: <http://envision.kiwitown.com/envision/>

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If you wish to contribute to the newsletter please email the Editor with your article and include your name, contact details and permission to print the completed article. Article submissions and classified ads should be received no later than the 15th of each month for inclusion in that month's newsletter.

It is the right of the Editor to hold over articles for future issues. All articles appear at the discretion of the Editor but are not necessarily the views of the Editor or Imagination Songs. Imagination Songs accepts no responsibility for the accuracy of information contained in any part of the Imagi-Notes Newsletter publication.

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Back issues are available upon request via email to the Editor.

The next issue of the Imagi-Notes Newsletter will be on the 20th of March 2001.

Editor: Lisa Butler: lisa@imaginationsongs.com

Many thanks to the contributors in this month's issue: Graeme Jaye, Chris Headford, Steve Veloudos, Lisa Butler.

Imagination Songs
PO Box 6763
South Tweed Heads NSW 2486
Australia

TEL: +61-7-5524 4612

EMAIL: mail@imaginationsongs.com

WEBSITE: <http://www.imaginationsongs.com>