

Excerpt of “The Need to be Heard” by Audrey Ryan

RANTS & RAVES

The Saturation of the Saturated Market

A friend of mine whose been in this business a lot longer than me said it well when he said the biggest change of the past ten years is that technology has made it possible for any hack off the street to record directly onto his computer (on built in software like Garage Band) and post it on a myspace page that is aesthetically the same as the one for “Death Cab for Cutie”. Hence in this day in age anyone and everyone can be a musician, and most people off the street think they are musicians, and therefore make songs, put them online, and dilute the market. Home studios are the new “office”. Some would argue that that’s a good thing because there’s more music out there and as a bi-product more variety and more good music. Some would say that amateurs making music could actually turn out to be more fresh and interesting than a trained ear. But it also contrasts amateurs spontaneously making and posting music with professionals who have put years of thought and training and writing and heart and soul into their art all starting on the same playing field of the internet medium. (It must be similar to how serious actors feel about reality television...)

And then there’s the stardom seekers. The people who are dying to be famous and find their picture in People Magazine and have lunch with Bono someday. The people that are doing music with the incentive of great social benefits, like having friends and fans admiring their band, and more importantly...getting laid... These people may or may not really be musicians, or rather they may or may not really give a shit about music itself. But they are using it as a front to attain attention. They’re usually the people trying to get the major label deals and be the next big pop adult contemporary act that turns into a cash cow. There’s quite a bit of them out there that are trying to be the next Sheryl Crow, John Mayer, Shania Twain, whatever...Only problem is they sound like a watered down version of the music they are “influenced” by or more accurately ripping off.

I guess another argument for why the market is so saturated now would just be that there are simply more people on the planet than there were ten, twenty, thirty, forty...years ago. More people, more people trying to do the same things. The biggest issue with the saturation of the market: there are less opportunities to go around. Or rather there are the same amount of opportunities to go around to a larger and larger amount of people. Hence, not a lot of real opportunities for just any musician. Yes, you can get a gig. But will it be any good? Will you get a record deal? Odds are, probably not. A lot of smaller indie labels are going under. The only labels still afloat are mid and larger indies and the majors are rumored to be in deep shit as well. So there are more musicians trying to get signed to less labels.

What is a manageable goal anyway?

“we all wanna be big stars but we don’t know how and we don’t know why...”



“We all wanna be big big stars yeah but we all got different reasons for that...”

-The Counting Crows

So what is a good reason for wanting to be famous anyway? Do the Counting Crows have a good reason? Or the lead singer with his dreadlocks? Mr. Jones? Because being famous, if you think about it, is really a very selfish desire. No matter how you look at it.

“I don’t want to be a famous rockstar, I just want to make a living at music.”

-A lot of musicians I know

It’s almost cliché I’ve heard it so many times. And they always say it like it’s such a small and humble wish. But quite frankly, making a living off of your music is no small demand at all. Especially if you want to make a living off of original music by playing shows and selling CDs of *your* music. The truth is that “just” making a living off of music, no matter how you look at it, is in fact quite difficult. Unless you are in fact famous...hmmm...problem.

Well that's not really true. Of course you can always be in a GB band (I think it stands for "general band" as in they play all kinds of generally popular music for functions). You could play weddings and make three to five hundred bucks a pop. You could play on a cruise ship for the dried up old folks who would go on those damn things only to be trapped onboard for an entire vacation. I hear they do anything from covering old foggie music, to magic acts, and disco. And you get paid decent money that you can pocket and get to live in a cabin the size of a closet and eat buffet food free. I hear drinks are like a buck a piece and a good way to become an alcoholic. But yeah, you can make a decent living off of playing cover music a lot easier than original music if you're a good instrumentalist or can sing like Neil Diamond.

But hmm...original music, you want to make money off of your original music? Well that means people have to listen to it on a regular basis and pay you good money. It means you have to play shows five days a week the way normal people go to work five days a week. But getting five shows a week isn't that easy unless you like hustling all the time to get gigs or you have an agent. And then back to that same old problem we keep having in this dumb book where you need to sell CDs, which are about as obsolete as coasters and actually make good coasters when they contain lots of shitty music.

OK, so now you "make a living" at music....

So you have quit your day job and you just play music for a living. How's that going? Well, I quit my job teaching music almost a year ago now. Since then I've been on tour twice in Europe and twice in the US. I've played tons of regional gigs at all kinds of venues. I play an average of fifteen shows a month, probably upwards of twenty or twenty-five on tour months. I get paid anything from nothing to five hundred bucks a night. I usually aim to make at least a hundred bucks if I leave the house, but of course that doesn't always happen playing original music.

Sometimes I play a show at a club with a good crowd and they are attentive and it's a fun night and I sell at least five to ten CDs. I also play three sets, which is about two and half hours worth of music, and about thirty odd songs. It's a work out and a job. You earn that hundred and fifty bucks or whatever it is you take home at the end of a long night.

Sometimes I play a show at a club that pays you a hundred and fifty bucks to do a dinner set but absolutely no one is paying attention. They don't even clap between your songs. They eat, drink, and talk over you loudly. They act as though you aren't even there. And you in turn ignore them back and just go about playing your music in the corner knowing that it's only background music for them even though you intended it to be something they would engage in. And of course you kind of feel like a loser. At the end of the night you're lucky if you sell any CDs at all because only the drunk guy at the bar looked like he was having fun. And you leave quite discouraged and feeling like a bit of a whore for playing to such a shitty group of people just for the money. Because of course, you need

that hundred and fifty bucks when you're "making a living" off of your music. And you dread the day when this shitty pub asks you back because you will have to decide whether or not you need the money enough to put yourself through that again.

My friend Siwat said it best in his interview; "I'd rather play to ten people who are listening than to two hundred people that don't give a shit."

The truth is you can "make a living" as a DIY musician but you will ultimately have very little money. It depends on your level of comfort you intend for your lifestyle. If you don't mind living simply and scampily you can do it. It also helps if you know people and have been around long enough to get things you need to survive cheaply. Two of the people I know in New England who don't have day jobs and "make a living" off of their music also happen to not pay rent. How do they manage that you ask? Well one of them lives with his Dad rent free and the other one happens to be me, and well, I don't know how to explain this, but I'm just very industrious and I have a loft (live/work space) in Boston that I rent out to other bands in such a way that they cover a large part of my rent thus my part is practically negligible. Especially considering how much my other friends pay for rent in the city. Yes, I have a very good situation indeed. But it's something I created so that I *could* make a living off of my music. If I did have high city rent I don't think I could swing it.

So yeah, if you can minimize your living expenses and gig your butt off, you can probably make some form of a meager living off your art. Of course that's hard to do if you live in NYC or something. I don't think I know anyone with cheap rent there. Oh yeah...I do, but her father owns the building. You better be a trust fund baby, have a sugar daddy, or a benefactor.

The Duality of a career involving music and being a musician

One way you can maybe satisfy your need to make a living off of music is to get a day job in the music industry. Such as working as a booking agent or promoter for an established club. Working as a sound person. Working as an audio engineer. Working for a label. Or teaching music.

These careers all offer you the chance to be in the industry full time so to speak. Plus some of the contacts you make at your job might actually help you in making your music. I know countless DIY musicians who work day jobs that are music related and if anything they all seem much more satisfied than they did when they were working as a temp or a waitress.

My friend Nick runs a business mastering records and also plays in bands and makes his own music. His like is 100% music no matter how you look at it even if he doesn't make all his money from performing. Since he masters records from many of the bands in Boston

and around the country he is very well connected within the field and is fortunate to make a good living all around. Here is an interview with him about his dual life in music:

Nick Zampello– plays drums in Campaign for Real Time (C4RT), runs a mastering business @New Alliance East in Cambridge, MA. He has been in several bands over the years and continues to be a well known part of the Boston music scene. I lived with Nick for almost two years and we became good friends. He mastered my most recent record and I'm always interested to hear his opinions as he's a very experienced, intelligent, and interesting person and musician.

Q; Nick, you've played drums in several bands (Crack Torch, C4RT, Coke Dealer, Stu Walker) all of which are bands with a lot of intensity that put on a real performance. Is that your priority as a musician? To be in bands that entertain and at times challenge people by the amount of chaos going on onstage (and sometimes in the audience)?

Q: you've been in bands that have come close to being signed by major labels and working with famous producers with the idea of creating a "single", is this stuff important to you or do you just want to make music and have fun?

Q: you run an awesome business mastering records (New Alliance East), play in bands, and are pretty much surrounded, or maybe even inundated, by music constantly. I know you have your share of cynicism towards the sonic world of bands. Do you feel like being cynical, jaded, and overworked is just a bi-product of choosing this career or is it something you try and resist?

Q: You mentioned that you no longer want to go to your high school reunions where you see old people who constantly ask you how you make living in music. Care to elaborate?

What Else are you good at?

It's a question we all have to ask ourselves when our dreams of grandeur don't add up. What else could I do for a living besides music? Well, lots of things. It just depends on what else you're interested in and what else you're good at. And even if it seems like failure not to be making your bread off of music, it's really just a compromise of goals. I love making music and I love writing. I just don't want to be miserable trying to make money at it.

But of course if you were trying to make a living at music in the first place chances are you aren't very practical. It still amazes me that I was more practical in college than I am now. I studied premed/Chemistry because I was always a good student in school and was

interested in living abroad and working in medicine in Africa at the time. How I ended up in this career...God only knows. In some ways I wish I had stayed the course and finished all the grueling schooling. But somewhere along the way it became so forced and against my nature to be creative.

And hence my problem: six years after college having dumped all my time, money, and resources into music...The only other things I'm good at and like to do are about as impractical as music. I like to write. Stuff like this. And screenplays, I've written a few of those. I'm not really sure what the writing and movie-making business are really like but I suspect that are about as diluted and competitive as making music. Plus I'm in my late twenties which seems like a late start to dive into a new wacky industry...it's exhausting to even think about starting over again in a new field...

I was a music teacher for about three years and could always go back to that. They say "those who can do, those who can't teach," but I've always resented that statement. It's insulting to all those amazing teachers out there who make it their life's duty to be good teachers because that *is* their passion. I really loved teaching but I also found it kind of boring, or rather the part where you begin to teach the same information over and over again. I couldn't teach another major scale without wanting to cringe and dropkick a little brat who couldn't get such a simple concept through their thick head. I needed to be more challenged. Which was evident by the fact that I really only enjoyed teaching my advanced students. The beginners were my dread. But to teach at a high level you need a PhD and that is way too serious for me, plus I don't really believe in intellectualizing music on that level. I still love everything that is un-teachable and organic about making music. So yeah, teaching is out as a career to return to for me, but I'd recommend it to any one else to at least try it on for size. A lot of musicians I know are music teachers to pay the bills and it seems to be one of the best ways to keep your life fully musical so to speak.

My only other practical idea of another career is to be a therapist...ok, go ahead and laugh. I have no doubt my friends joke behind my back about my dream to be a therapist. Maybe because I have a dirty mouth and am too sarcastic to seem like I could seriously listen to people's problems without cracking a joke. Or maybe they don't find me very empathetic all the time. But I'm obsessed with therapy. I've had about five therapists in my lifetime and find the whole thing to be fascinating. Plus I like trying to solve other people's problems. My own on the other hand, well, my life is nothing short of a mess, just look at my car. But other people's, yeah, I feel like I have a little insight of clarity when they present me with a problem. I'm a realist. I see the black and white, the pros and cons, probably because it isn't my life and there is no emotional weight clouding my view. But of course being a therapist requires graduate school, two years full-time or four years part-time, and oh, of course they want about thirty-six thousand bucks...ugggh...

But at least I have a back up plan. I've always said "I'll cross that bridge when I come to it." As in when I'm a dirt poor musician and I finally admit to myself that I'm too tired, old, and frustrated to do it any longer, I will then get another career... the only problem is that unlike my uncanny ability to see the pros and cons of other people's situations, I can

never quite see clearly when it is time to give up. It never seems to be a black and white situation. Sometimes when you even hit rock bottom in your music career you still pick yourself back up, dust off, and keep working your ass off at it anyway.

I Blame Them.

Well, not really. I just try not to blame myself. I try and not blame myself for following my dreams, for believing in myself, and my ability to make music. I try not to blame myself for having a leap of faith that lead me to follow my dreams instead of doing what is far more practical: getting a degree for a skill and getting a good job. Making some damn money. Consistently.

Man if I had a nickel for every time someone in my family said something discouraging about my decision to play music for a living I'd have the royalties for a Beatles song. Like my aunt saying to my mother "that's really too bad that she decided not to go to medical school and play music instead, she's going to have a rough life." And I can't even count the times my grandfather has said something along the lines of "are you still really doing this music thing? What do you think you're going to get out of it?" And my favorite is how he always says that "it's amazing how you've followed your bliss" as if it's a totally miraculous thing that anyone ever would.

And if that wasn't bad enough my little brother has recently become one of my largest critics. He's twenty-one now and just graduated from college and has a "practical" degree in civil engineering. He jokes with me about when I'm finally going to finally go back to graduate school. And when I sometimes get really annoyed with him I say, "why can't you just accept that I do this? That I decided to follow my passion?" he recently retorted with, "I wouldn't mind so much that you had this career if you were a famous musician." (Yes, he's a cruel little bastard, I know...)

And now for the grand finale (as if it could get any worse): A middle aged woman who I've known for years who is an art dealer at the gallery I sometimes work at in the summers recently said to me at a dinner party, "we're all quite surprised with your decision to pursue music. We all thought you were going to be a doctor and cure cancer." And she meant it in the most grim way possible; that she (and supposedly others) are disappointed in my decision to be a musician. That I didn't live up to my potential. That I could have cured cancer by now but instead I'm pushing thirty still playing in bars.

So yeah, I do blame them a little. Or rather I resent them sometimes. The ones that are constantly asking me why I was doing this. They just don't understand. They think I'm weird or crazy to do something as impractical as music. But in a way they are what has made me work harder, I want to prove them all wrong, I want to be successful at music so I can say, "hey, I told you so."

But I'm not famous. And for most everyday people that is what marks success in an industry like music. So I haven't had the kind of glory that would shut my critics up, or at least not on a large scale. But I have little victories. Like when I put out a CD that gets good reviews and when I open for someone bigger, like when I opened for Suzanne Vega. It's something concrete they can see, progress of some sort. But what they always retort is "why don't you just go on American Idol?" or "so like are you trying to be the next Sheryl Crow or what?" they just don't get it.

But music is based on misunderstanding, or a lot of it is. Punk music is based on rejecting all that conventional bullshit; it's what fuels the flame. Sometimes you have to go totally against the grain to make something worth listening to. You have to go out to left field to be understood by completely different people than the ones who brought you into this world. For some musicians music is what helps them deal with all their anger and hatred of what surrounds them (death metal?).

Sometimes what keeps me making music and touring is just looking around at America. Looking at the suburbs of identical houses and cookie cutter neighborhoods and towns. Looking at all the strip malls near the highway that have the same signs for McDonalds, Holiday Inns, Subway, Walmart. It's as though American towns no longer have their own identity, they've lost it to the chains and superstores. I just can't see myself living in those places. I can't see myself conforming. I can't see myself with a whatever job in a whatever apartment living a whatever life. And I suppose that is what keeps me going.

Only problem with all this is that the world doesn't feel the same. Sometimes the world doesn't want to pay you a salary for you to tell it you don't like it.

Prove it.

When I made the decision to pursue music I was trying to prove something to myself as well. Partly I was trying to prove to myself that I had it in me, that all that music in there that kept coming out wasn't just a fluke. But partly I was trying to prove to myself that this world had the space for the kind of art I wanted to make. Basically I wanted to believe that the world was a better place than it really is.

If you give people the opportunity they will bitch and moan to no end about how damn hard life is, how damn hard *their* life is. And when they say this it's as if they're trying to deny you any right for your own happiness and you certainly can't do something as frivolous as follow your dreams. What dreams? Life is hard. You have to work. Only trust fund babies get to be artists without day jobs.

It's this mentality that does make you want to prove it to yourself and the world that you CAN do what you love. That you don't HAVE to be practical and safe and stupid just to survive.

Most artists embody the rejection of the conventional life. Artists want to prove it to the “nine to five” world that there is much much more out there. There are other ways to live your life. But it’s a struggle because if you think about it those “nine to five” people are the ones that are paying artists to make their art. Someone has to make the money to pay for the art, right? It’s people with “real jobs” and disposable income that have the money to go to concerts, buy paintings, buy CDs, and support the “arts”. It’s kind of funny if you think about it; that artists are rejecting the conventional world but those are the folks paying for it.

The Saturn Return: where “Things fall apart”

My friend Jinsen is an astrologer and can tell you all about yourself and your moons and rising signs based on your birthday and exact time of birth. Some people would argue that it’s a bunch of bullshit but most everything he has said to me has somehow resonated with how I feel at that time in my life. And most notably the concept of “the Saturn return”, which has something to do with being in your late twenties and all the drastic changes that start to occur when you reach the golden age of 27.

In your early twenties the world is your oyster. You have been fed so much encouragement and education you could burst with expectations and anticipation for how great your life is going to be. You are young, ambitious, optimistic, and focused. And that usually lasts for the first half of your twenties and lingers until you approach the later third of your twenties (27), which of course implies...30.

27 is the age that many beloved rockstars died: Jimmy Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, Curt Cobain, Mama Cass... it’s the golden age. It’s dying right before reality starts to set in and the shit begins to hit the fan. It’s dying right before your “adult youth” is over. At 27 it occurs to you that you are starting to get older and that you can’t hold on to your twenties much longer. And by 28 your Saturn has returned and your life faces a major reality check.

According to Jinsen if you were on the right path to begin with in your late twenties you might be able to weather the Saturn return and get on with your life and not get too phased by getting older and needing to take on more adult responsibilities. But if you were living on the edge at 28 and not on the right path, so to speak, the Saturn return implies that your life will fall apart. Maybe you moved out to the west coast for a new life but you’ve struggled financially and have to move back in to your parent’s house with your tail between your legs. Maybe the band you put so much energy into for most of your twenties dissolves because a key member quits to raise a family. Maybe you’re at a dead end job you’ve been at since you got out of college but you’ve been so busy hanging out with your friends, dating, and hanging out at the bar that it didn’t occur to you until right then that your life is escaping you, that your bored as shit and you’re only 28 but no longer feel young and your supposed to work at a job like this for another forty years before you can retire. Fuck.

During the Saturn return doors close that were open in your early twenties. In some ways it's liberating because you can finally move on from all your expectations and see what new possibilities are open to you, if you happen to be an optimist. But usually it's a harsh reality check that you may not have achieved much of anything in your twenties that you set out to achieve. You've just attended your ten-year high school reunion and you realize that not only have you been out of high school for ten whole years but you've been out of college and in the "real world" for six years and are embarrassed to admit to your old classmates that you have so little to show for it.

As you might suspect when I turned 28 things started to fall apart. Within a few months my boyfriend and I broke up, I quit my teaching job, I went to Europe, I left the city, I moved to Maine, I went on tour to get away from my life only to be faced with the fact that I was miserable and felt ungrounded. Plus I was getting older and had no idea where my life was headed. I had chosen a career which had granted me no safety or security either financially or emotionally. And I had little to show for all my hard work. I didn't even have an apartment because I had given it up to go on tour. I felt like a floating vagabond with no home, and very little money. Oh, and no boyfriend. My Saturn return had kicked me in the ass.

The Party is Over

Sometime in your late 20's you start to realize the party is over. Not that you stop partying. In fact you might party more. Even harder. In denial of getting older and being unable to rise to adult responsibilities. But it's in small signs. Like friends and relatives who no longer have any interest in your music career, they won't buy your third CD because they're just uninterested even though they were very excited for you during your debut. Or when people around you talk about someone who is "old" but they're only thirty-one and you're already twenty-eight. Practically the same. It's all downhill from there. Or so it seems.

I recently played a show with a band that just got signed to a reputable indie label. We all crashed in the living room of the local band. The next morning we were chatting and talking about the crappy music we grew up listening to: *New Kids on the Block*, *Vanilla Ice*, *MC Hammer*, *Millie Vanilli*, you get the idea. This girl was like, "yeah, I used to love *Ace of Base* but I'm a lot younger than you so you probably don't remember them". Little bitch, of course I do, in 1993 I was in eighth grade and she was a little kid at the time. She's 21 and I'm 28, yeah, I felt old. Especially considering her band just got signed to a label that I've been working for years to get signed to. It was kind of sad and frustrating. I felt like I had lost or something. I was so pissed that she had succeeded in making me feel old. I felt like retiring right then and there.

In a way it's as if you only have this short amount of time to really "do it" as in get your music career off the ground. And that short time span is your twenties, which can also be filled with going to college and relationships and jobs, so they can fly by pretty quickly. It seems like yesterday I was 21, well not quite yesterday, a lot has happened in my twenties so far but I was working really hard the whole time and it's only now that they're almost over that I'm like: what the fuck? I feel like I worked my ass off and came out short changed. It's like "nope, sorry, you didn't get the career you had worked for this entire decade of your life but congratulations, here are your 30's" (the decade where you're supposed to have a good job, buy a house, and start having kids...). Fuck.

Anxiety, fear, and depression

There is no such thing as an artist who doesn't suffer from some kind of the above. In fact some artists thrive off of it. There are some pretty good arguments out there that when artists are unknown, anxious, insecure, and struggling they make the best art of their life. Then when they get the attention they were seeking and no longer fear for the fate of their career and finances, they are likely to produce watered down art.

Unfortunately not all artists get their dues, so if they persevere in the fight for some poetic justice they might very well live in anxiety, fear, and depression indefinitely. I had a conversation with my friend yesterday. She's in a band and she works at it seriously and with intent: the intent to become established and well known. She says things like "I want to be famous" and "I want to change the world". And the truth is I sympathize because I went through stages in my life where I was somewhat hell-bent on becoming a famous musician. And maybe other stages where I was disillusioned enough to think I could really change the world. But when I think about it my entire musical career has been a fluctuating wave of being confident between large bouts of severe anxiety and fear that my efforts are futile. That I will never succeed. And that depresses me.

I get bummed out and cynical for entire weeks and months at a time. And then maybe the weather gets better and I become indifferent again. Or maybe I get asked to play a cool festival and I have a bout of confidence (I love those bouts even though they are becoming fewer and far between). Then I find out that I didn't get asked to play another festival that I should have that my friend of mine is playing. Depressed again. Then it's summer and I start to not give a shit all over again because the weather is nice and I'm going to just go to a BBQ and forget it...for now. Yes, it's a roller coaster. The low parts are riddled with insecurity, anxiety, fear, and depression. And the high parts are full of ecstasy where the opportunities seem boundless like the view from the top, but you hold on tight because you know it will only last so long before you have to go back down. Shit, this metaphor sucks. It just made me sad. Ok, life is not like a roller coaster. It's like a...um...a...ok, yeah, it's like a rollercoaster.

SXSW madness and narcissim

Do you ever wonder why your rocker friends are so cynical and jaded? Have you ever been to SXSW? It's full of ambitious douche bags diluting the market...oh, and a couple of really talented people mixed in too...but no matter what, if you're talented or just taking up space, you can't help but feel small there. It's overwhelming and at times nauseating but if anything it's a reality check that this business ain't so easy. Both years I've made the trip to Austin I've been faced with some harsh realities there.

In 2007 I ran into another singer-songwriter I knew from the Northeast down at SXSW. For the sake of some anonymity (although she will know who she is if she ever reads this..) we'll call her Beth. We had played a handful of shows together in the Northeast before and I had crashed on her couch after one so I guess I considered her to be a musician friend/ acquaintance. When I saw her in Texas she told me she didn't have any shows and was just going to the conference, which seemed to me a long way to go to not have any exposure. I had four shows, two at venues and two at houses, so I generously offered that she could come to one of the house shows and play a couple songs. She seemed excited and took down the details.

The day of the house show I had an earlier show in a parking lot outside a coffee shop so it turned out I was going directly from one show to the other. When I arrived at the house Beth was already there with the woman whose house it was. They had just met and were hand-making a large poster for the show, which had "Beth" in big letters and also one other artist who I had been touring with. My name was nowhere to be seen on the poster and Beth didn't even seem to realize it.

Then when it came show time we had about four or five acts to squish in for as long as people were willing to hang around and listen. Beth played first to the largest group of people and instead of playing the two songs I had suggested she played eight. All the other artists were anxious to play soon after her before the crowd fizzled out and my set kept getting pushed back almost to the end. By the time I played there was only time for two songs and I had half the audience that Beth had. But what really stirred the anger in me to a boil was that during my very short set she was in the kitchen talking to some of the people who had come trying to sell her CD. She then rudely left never saying thank you to me for offering her the show or anything else for that matter. During the thirty-odd hour drive from Texas back to Boston I was fuming with hurt and rage (ask my poor friend and drummer James who had to listen to me bitch the entire ride...). I had been duped by a narcissistic and overly ambitious singer-songwriter. Note: this is the second case of "no good deed goes unpunished."

Suddenly I realize why you're so Cynical

So you didn't get what you expected out of all the effort you put into being in a solid entity of musical bliss? Well it turns out there isn't enough opportunity in the market to facilitate that desire. There's just not enough to go around. SXSW proves that because there are upwards of 2,000 bands playing every waking hour for four odd days and only a very small fraction of them will ever "make it". Because of the level of competition of how little there is of opportunities to go around, most musicians never live out those dreams. And what happens when your dreams get squashed? You become cynical and jaded, and rightfully so.

Well, maybe not rightfully so. It's not as if you *have* to become all bitter, jaded, and cynical as a result of your unfulfilled dreams. It's just hard not to. But you could just create new dreams that are more attainable. Or you could just look on the bright side that you are alive and healthy and be the "glass is half full" kind of person. Optimistic. Positive. But as you may notice, most artists and rockers are not "half glass full" kind of people. So it's easy to slip into that mode of thinking about the negative aspects of the business and your career within it. Of course this book dwells on a lot of those topics. I suppose I could try and focus on all the good parts. But I guess it's just not my nature. What I will say is that making music is a beautiful thing. But the business kind of sucks. If you just made music and wanted nothing more than that, well then, you wouldn't have any reason to be cynical and jaded.

What's the difference between a puppy and a musician?

-A puppy stops whinning.

What's a musician without a girlfriend?

-homeless.

How come hipster's aren't any good at karate?

-they can never get past the white belt.

Defeated or De-obsessed?

When you start to reach the end of your emotional rope you have to ask yourself if you're defeated or just slowly falling out of love with your desire to be heard. Your obsession to conquer the masses with your killer tunes is fading. Either way: you will survive.

It's hard to give up your dreams. Especially if you've been dreaming and developing those dreams for a long time. But dreams can also change. They can shift from wanting to be a massive international star to just wanting to be established regionally and making a living. You can go from dreaming about having multiple houses in NYC, LA, Aspen, Bahamas, Europe, to just wanting to own one house. Basically you can evolve your dreams into more manageable goals. Regardless, it's all a matter of perspective, and instead of thinking you've been defeated you can think of it in terms of a shifting of priorities. Age does that. The older you get and the farther you get away from your youth the more you have to ask yourself how you can create a lifestyle worthwhile. One you can live with. So de-obsessing over those big dreams is the first step to coming to grips with everything else that is out there.

My new goals include owning a house and getting my masters in the next five years. That seems a lot more attainable than becoming the next big international star. But I also have goals to put out a new record each year and to continue playing regionally and returning to Europe once a year. I'll tour in the US once in a while as well as long as it's well promoted. Oh yeah, and also with age comes the need for a higher standard of living. I can no longer tour around for skimpy inconsistent sums of money, driving around in a rusty old car to Texas and back, and staying on people's couches and in flea bitten motels. I'd rather stay at home. I don't think there's anything wrong with realizing that. It's not defeat, it's just graduating.

Return to Innosence...(remember Enigma that new age band?)

The guy who mixed my second full-length record in Brooklyn laughed when I told him I'm originally from Maine. "So are you gonna be like every other girl I know from Maine and move back to your hometown when you've had enough of the city?" He had two exes, both from Maine, who had apparently done just that. I laughed back at the idea of it but maybe he was right. Maybe Maine is like a disease. My entire life I've traveled around the world and my own country only to always come back to Maine. Where life is relatively simple and the summers are bliss. Of course the winters suck and the economy is mostly seasonal, but it still represents innocence to me. Life

before living in big cities and foreign countries. Life before I had ambitions. Life before reality set in.

I remember watching the movie *Ghostbusters* when I was a kid and seeing New York City for the first time. I couldn't believe it. It looked like another planet with all those buildings, so tall, all so close together, I became determined to live there one day. And of course I did show up there in college with a backpack and guitar. And let me tell you, moving to New York when you're a small town kid from Maine with no money is no picnic.

I think my entire life has been both blessed and cursed by growing up in Maine on an island. Blessed because it's beautiful, utopian, "the way life should be" (or at least that's what the bumper sticker says...), and it's all I ever imagine to return to. Cursed by the fact that it didn't teach me about the "real world". I had no clue how big, mean, competitive, and cruel the rest of the world is. And even with all the exposure I've had to the world as an adult I still sometimes ask my inner Maine innocence:

"What the fuck? Are you for real?"

Is this really what it's like? Is it really this vast and competitive? Like I said before; New York City is a place where you can smell the desire. Everyone wants "it" so badly. And "it" is everything but simplicity. It's the opposite of Maine. It's the antithesis of Maine. And maybe that's why Maine can seem so attractive sometimes. Because sometimes you'd rather smell fresh air than desire.

Stay at Home Muther Fucker

I'm starting a new genre. It's for the slightly over the hill, had enough, burnt out, jaded muther fuckers who want to live their lives. Succumb to their mammalian need to survive and not complicate things. I want to stop feeling so turbulent. Settle down. Own a home. Have a kid. Embrace my human instincts...

But I still want to make art. I still want to make music. I still want to live out of the "conventional" world. I still want to have fun. Am I allowed to be prolific or do I have to turn in my membership card from "the rock n roll club" in order to make that compromise?...That compromise of instinct verses ambition.. I kept telling myself: just another year and it will work out...you'll get a break...that was five years ago. What do I do now? I'm pushing 30. To help me come to grips with age and living the dual life of raising a family and still making music I bring you a mother and a father:

Interview with musician and mother Sara Cox

Q: Hey Sara, so I know you are living in the Portland, Maine area and playing lots of shows, I'm excited to play with you this summer up in our hometown. I'm just curious how having three children changed your music career?

You know, I actually started both careers at the same time. I joined a band with my husband, Nate Schrock and then we went on to put out 3 cds together in *the Coming Grass*, 3 solo cds of mine, and have 3 kids. It all felt like the same beast. Everyday I wake up and there's no question where my priorities are and what I'll be doing that day. I'll be filling the needs (groceries, cleaning, cooking, errands, bookkeeping, etc..) for a family of 5, physically taking care of a family of 5 (boo boos, backrubs, hard times, etc...) and hopefully in the midst of that a song will come racing at me so hard I'll put down what I'm doing to work it out with my guitar. I can't even imagine being a songwriter without the family that I now have, although songwriting is such a personal and intimate activity for me. Thus the title of my most recent CD; "Crowded is the New Lonely".

Q: I saw you play with your husband about four or five years ago. I remember he had opened for Iggy Pop or something like that and was in a band when he was younger that had some degree of success. Are you still playing together? How do you think having a family together as two musicians has been in evolving together and creating new goals together?

At this point, we divide and conquer. We just played a show together for the first time in a very long time the other night and it was great. Very fun, but just not practical with the ages of our kids (9, 7, 2). I'm hoping that will change as they get older but for now we take turns going out to our individual gigs and then it doesn't feel like we're deserting the kids so much. He still plays on pretty much everything I record, and in fact records most of it as well so we get to work together on projects, just not so much for live shows. I trust Nate implicitly for recording. He has great ideas for parts and a huge amount of experience and knowledge.

Q: A musician I know who toured for several years is now a mother and described having her son as a realization like “oh, I see now, this is it” as though she had an unknown need all along that was finally met. I guess because it was such a natural instinct and need she came off the road very willingly to raise her son. Music is still apart of her life but more on the back burner since then and she hasn't played a show in years. How do you feel about motherhood? Do you feel it's something that was necessary and you're happy to have embraced it?

I am very happy to embrace it. It feels very purposeful and sometimes so full of love you think you might explode. However, it is certainly the most taxing project on all levels that I've ever worked on. The result is truly priceless but you can't really ever take a vacation from your concerns and guidance as a parent so it feels a bit like being strapped into a crazy carnival ride that you just have to enjoy when you can cause either way you're not getting off. I think it lets you off the hook from pushing so much as a musician because the bottom line is that my measure for success is with my kids, not selling records, or national acclaim, or press admiration or radio airplay. All of those things are great and help me continue to do what I love but if I jumped off the whole musical circus that is the music business, I'd still be whole and valued and headed on my own path. Soundcheck, and booking, and all those pieces of performance that can create stress truly take the backseat when you have 3 humans that depend on you every day. It makes gigs more fun and relaxed, after all, it's only music.

Interview with musician and father Dana Coley

Q: So Dana did you start having children during or after *Morphine*? And how was your decision to have a family effected by where you music career was at that point?

My wife Kate and I had our first child, India, in 2001, two year after the end of *Morphine*. Our second child, Elias, was born in 2006. We began a family after weathering my extensive touring career, which kept me on the road for nine months of the year. It would of been difficult to have been an involved father prior to this time. It was hard enough to maintain a relationship. I have to credit Kate for being able to stick by me when I was absent and many times the imaginary husband for most of the 1990's. She maintained her own life and identity with her friends and career that established a mutual autonomy. I don't think I was ready to sacrifice the commitment needed to be in a touring band for the time that being a good father demands until after the end of *Morphine*. Now that I am home most of the time I can see how much being there for your children is the single most important thing about being a father.

Q: What do you think is a good balance as a musician to strike when it comes to making a living at music and raising a family or do you feel that raising a family as a musician doesn't create the stability necessary physically (as in being around) and/or financially?

Striving for balance has been a life long goal. The balance between a relationship/family and a career that takes you away from home is a daily commitment. Being a musician is financially unstable. I have to work a day job to make ends meet. But having said that I also believe that doing what makes you creatively satisfied is essential in living a life that is fulfilled. This is the lesson that I hope to impart upon my kids. I don't want my kids to feel like they are responsible for holding me back from pursuing my dreams. If they see their parents are happy in what they are doing in life they learn to live their lives accordingly.

Q: Both of my parents played music in the house when I was growing up. My father played guitar and started teaching me as early as the age of ten. My mother was an organist and I spent a lot of time singing at church. In other words, I feel my parents are directly responsible for a lot of the reason I had an early exposure and love for music. Is encouraging your kids to play instruments something you plan on doing? And I guess the flipside to this questions is, even if you want your kids to play music and love music would you really want them to pursue a career in it knowing what you know about this business?

We have instruments strewn all over the house. India got a set of drums for her first birthday. Elias got a toy sax. I leave guitars tuned to open chords so that when they are played the kids get used to the sound and the ease of making sound. Both kids where on the piano plunking away at four months. I want them to be exposed to music either from listening or playing themselves. Children are born to play and if left alone they find their own relationships with music. I don't think pushing them to learn traditional methods, scales, exercises, lessons are that productive and can sometimes have adverse effects and turn them off. There is no such thing as a mistake. Do I want them to pursue a career in music? I would want them to make their own decisions as to what they chose to pursue. I will support anything they decide is their passion. Knowing what I know about the music business I would hope that they get a well-rounded education and have something that they can make a living at as well as have music to enjoy for a lifetime.

What does this have to do with me? I'm young, I have no kids, and I'm living on the edge...I'm going on tour man!

Ok, whatever.

Wait...you're broke and you're a musician?!...no, I can't believe it...

Unless you play it safe and keep your nine to five while you develop your band in your free time, you're constantly facing financial ruin. Week to week and month to month the numbers are always up and down. You struggle to make rent some months. Others months you might think you're ahead but you spend too much at the bar. Oh yeah, and if you ever do make any money (at a normal job or at music) you inevitably dump it all back into the band.

Basically unless you are a trust fund baby, kiss any financial stability goodbye. Gigs pay with absolutely no consistency. Sometimes you make a guarantee, sometimes tips or donations, sometimes nothing at all. Back in the good old days, before the CD was nearly obsolete, you could count on merch sales (if you're any good...). But nowadays people are cheap and want free downloads. They ask for your myspace address when they come up to you after a show instead of inquiring to buy a CD. They first look for the free stuff, either on your website, or myspace if you are nice enough to give away free downloads. If they find nothing free there, then if you're lucky, they look you up on itunes and maybe buy one song for 99 cents to throw on their ipod for fun. Of which you get next to nothing.

CDs are the new business card

Yes, in the modern age CDs are the new business card. And in some cases you can't even give them away. They're given out for free to promote a new band and end up in the garbage without a listen most of the time.

Case and point; at SXSW this year there were people all over the place trying to hand out CDs or flyers to promote their bands. In one case I was at a show with Steve and a guy tried to hand him a CD. Steve said "no thanks man" politely. And the guy said, "oh, you must be a musician" clearly annoyed. So I piped in, "listen, I'm sorry, we just don't have any room in the car anymore and we'd rather not take it then take it and then throw it out at the

next gas station when we clean the car cause it's a mess...". He walked off to the next batch of people clearly put off.

Yup, even when I turned down most of the free ones I was still given CDs by bands I played shows with and have a stack in my car door jacket, and I wonder if I'll ever get around to listening to any of them. I'm more of a book on tape kind of person. My car is one of the few places where I get a break from music, well, sometimes. But think about it: if you can't even give away your CDs imagine how hard it is to sell them? You're better off trying to sell a cool t-shirt design. Or a beer cooler. Or bottle opener. Or a lighter with your logo. Something practical people can use. CDs make good coasters.

Debt 101

Lots of DIY musicians go into debt making and putting out their records or buying a tour van. That and any other number of things you can sink your money into in efforts to have your music heard. All I'm going to say is that be realistic before you dump money you don't have into something that you may never re-coop on. Here are a few pointers on how to avoid debt:

- *Records are hard to sell, so instead of paying five thousand bucks to record, mix, and master a record and then another grand or two to make a thousand copies, **consider self-recording a demo first** and burning copies to distribute.

- *Play a bunch of shows for a year and **save any money you make as a band** to pay for recording and manufacturing instead of taking out a loan.

- ***Don't buy an old vehicle** with problems so you can go on a tour, RENT a van that is new and has no problems if you only tour a few times a year. Owning and insuring a vehicle is a huge expense and only worthwhile if you have the money, tour consistently, and have a band mechanic (as in it helps to have someone who knows about vehicles if you own one in case you break down, which happens more than you might think).

We all invest insane amounts of time and money into our careers in order to get things off the ground. The saying "you have to spend money to make money" is in fact a true statement. However, don't dig yourself a huge financial hole in efforts to make a record, go on a tour, or get some publicity for your record. Several bands break up after they've made an investment together and someone gets stuck with the debt and that couldn't be fun. I myself have spent thousands and thousands of dollars (probably between twenty and thirty grand) on owning a tour van, making records, paying for publicity, and everything else to promote my music. Some of it was worthwhile but a lot of it was a huge

waste of money and I wonder what the hell I was thinking. I'm sure I'd have a lot more money in my savings account right now if I had made some better decisions. So invest wisely.

Survival of the Fittest? or just competition and resentment...

Success breeds contempt. But even unsuccessful bands competing against other unsuccessful bands to be successful can breed shitloads of contempt. But since art is subjective and there is no way to really rate or grade it, you can compete on all kinds of fucked up levels. Who has the most shows. Who has the most "fans" (many bands cheat by just having more friends who disguise themselves as fans...). Who has the most "friends" on Myspace (most of which are just other wannabe bands...or you can use a "robot"). Who sells the most merch. Who tours the most. Who has the best gear. Whose drummer hits that hardest. Who rips the best guitar solos. Who has the best frontman...

There are all kinds of ways of competing that are so strange and twisted. It's kind of ridiculous. And quite frankly I'd like to say I'm above it all but I know that I'm not. In the singer-songwriter world it's about who writes the best songs, who has the best lyrics, who has the best voice, who has the best banter between songs. A whole other list of qualities that make you stand out the most.

My two experiences that mark my own contempt for other musicians would be the fact that in the last year or so I have toured on two different occasions with other singer-songwriters. No need to mention names. And heavens knows if they read this they will know who they are. But I have to be honest, on both occasions part of me kind of hated them. And for a very simple reason...because deep down I'm pretty fucking competitive.

When you're a solo artist touring with another solo artist playing to the same audience it is kind of like the last round of American Idol. There are two of you performing your heart out but most people at a show will only go home with one of your CDs, some who are thoughtful and generous will buy both CDs to support you both, but most of the time people choose who they liked the most and buy their CD. And that breeds some serious contempt.

But here's the weird part; I liked both of those other artists a lot as people. As friends. As other human beings to talk to on long rides from show to show. I really do consider them both to be close friends. But oddly I still harbor resentment towards them as other artists. And in a way I wonder if it would be the same no matter who it was and whether I liked them as people or not. It could be your best friend in the world but if they are doing the same thing as you and you are both doing that thing in public to garnish attention from the same audience, well, you are essentially competing with each other for the affection of strangers.

I'd play shows with those artists where at the end I was fuming because one person actually bought a CD from them and not from me. Why? Is that person fucking blind? I'm a much better songwriter and performer. Their shit is generic and boring. My material is more original. I'm a better guitar player. My banter is better...

In the end you get defensive and upset over something that feels so personal. That someone is ultimately choosing someone else's music over yours right in your face. A mature, evolved person wouldn't let that bother them. But the truth is most artists are anything but mature and evolved. In most cases we're quite selfish and narcissistic and think the world revolves around us when everyone else isn't looking.

The lesson I learned from touring with one other artist on a co-bill: don't do it. And I never will again unless of course the other person is huge and I'm only reaping the benefits of their established fanbase. But if you are a relative nobody touring with another relative nobody it's like two nobodys trying to find somebody in random towns that gives a shit. Not the best situation. It makes you feel kind of stupid in fact.

Human's are by nature competitive. I guess in a way we've already "won" because we're the dominant animal on this planet. But it doesn't take a history buff to know we'd all kill each other in the spirit of competition. Ever heard of Darwinism? Some would argue it's what makes the world go round. I would argue that artists are some of the most competitive people out there that hide their desire and need to be beloved under layers and layers of their work. But if paintings could talk they would be saying "look at me". And if songs actually had their own mind and not the lyrics you ascribe to them with metaphors and clichés and inside jokes, essentially they would all say "listen to me"...("and not them".)

Unnecessary Ambition and Human Instinct

After a recent show I had two guys approach me and say something that really stuck with me. First they came up and said that they loved the song "People" that I wrote and play on accordion. It's a very simple stripped down song and it's the lyrics that everyone seems to respond to. Here's the chorus:

And there are people on medication all over this town.

For depression anxiety trying to turn it around.

What did they do in the old days when they were feeling obscure?

Did they drink themselves silly? Or did they have their own cure?

People...Paxil, Zoloft, Prozac, Lithium...

One of the guys told me he had taken three of the four meds mentioned in the song (more specifically Paxil, Zoloft, Prozac). He wanted to know if I still took meds. Truth is I never have but I've always been affected by depression amongst my friends and ex-boyfriends. I said I was more on the self-medicating end of things, that I have a couple beers to chill out and that I suffer from anxiety more than depression. The other guy admitted he had an alcohol problem based on his depression and anxiety. I said I wasn't quite at that point and am trying to be careful to moderate. Then he said something that kind of blew my mind:

"You know they've done studies in tribes in Africa and around the world and found there is no depression in those communities. Meanwhile here in the US there's a rising level of depression and people on meds. So don't you think it's just our unnecessary ambition in Western culture that goes against our human instinct to just survive?"

I was dumbfounded. He had just solved the problem of the modern age. Or at least the problem of being an "artist". My response stumbled a bit: Actually, um, yes, I do think it's our unnecessary ambition that is a direct cause of depression. And now that you mention it, maybe that's why all my friends are depressed: because they're all over-ambitious artists. They put too much value in their self worth with public approval for their art. They want large audiences and record sales to make them feel like their existence is worthwhile. But really, what does any of that crap mean? If we were born in some poor part of Africa we'd never sit around stewing about why our band hasn't broken through yet. It wouldn't be an issue. Our lives would have never given us the idle time to start things such as bands in the first place, not to mention go public with them seeking fame and fortune.

I wish so much that I wasn't ambitious and that I wasn't born with the need to be heard like a disease. Ambition is a disease in it's own weird way. It makes you into the kind of person that looks at every situation opportunistically. My friend in London said it best. He said it's the kind of city where everyone there is like: "what can you do for me?". It's the desire you find in places like London, LA, or NYC that is essentially the same. Everyone is ambitious and wants something. Artists are just one kind of people thrown in that urban mix. But we're no less competitive than your typical stoke broker or lawyer trying to win a case. It's a war of who can get what they want. Everyone out there playing music looks at the band who plays before them at a show and says, "I'm better than them."

Why are you doing this anyway?

During the course of writing this book I've interviewed a lot of people. They all had very different things to say. But I've prodded them with questions that most artists never want to hear, questions that ask them to explain their motives and justify their desires for

why they are doing this in the first place. Essentially I'm asking them why they are trying to have their music heard.

But the responses that I got from two separate artists that really stuck with me is something that made me have second thoughts about all my cynasicism. I can get so discouraged and negative about this business that I practically feel like telling people to just give up when they ask for my advice. It's a sad thing I realize. But the two responses I received of the roundabout question of "why are you doing this?" that made me lighten up a bit were:

"Because it's what I do. What else would I do?"

AND

"For the experience. I don't do it for the exposure or the promotion, I do it to relate to people, to meet new people, and to have new experiences. It's what I do."

The guy who made the later statement also went on to tell me that music was "the way I know how to be social." All of his friends are musicians as well and that is what they do when they are together, they play music and they record music. It's the social glue that bonds them as friends. While some friends watch sports games and drink beer; musicians jam and make funny songs on protocols and drink beer. That's a good answer to the question.

A bad answer? If you just want attention. If you don't know why you are doing it, if it isn't your passion, if it isn't something that you love to do. Then why are you doing it?

Wallpaper...and Redudancies...

"A lot of artists are good at what they do but not unique in what they do."

-my friend Reva

Every time I ask my rocker veteran on-again-off-again boyfriend, Steve, what he thinks of a band he usually answers in one of three categories:

*They're awesome. They play well together. They have an original sound... (this one is really rare...)

*They're good. Great guitar and vocals. They play well together, but it's not that original, it reminds me of another band I've heard. (pretty common response).

*It's just wallpaper man. (even more common).

Wallpaper is his metaphor for music that you'd never notice in room, just like wallpaper. It's just for show. In the background. And usually there's very little difference in variety of wallpaper. It always has lines or floral designs. It's as if all the patterns are trying to be a different version of another one. It's boring. And maybe most notably: it's unnecessary.

And this brings me to my biggest pet peeve when I see bands: bands that are just trying to sound like other popular bands. It's as though music is a formula they're trying to follow that they learned in some "how to be a star" for dummies book they bought at Barnes & Nobles, or something they saw on VH1 or MTV. If I had a nickel for every wannabe-the-next-big-thing-by-repeating-what-has-already-happened kind of band I'd be richer than Paul McCartney pre-divorce.

Living Rooms and Basements

When my Dad told me there are a million and one bands on Myspace and that the market is too saturated, and it's impossible to stand out nowadays, I rebutted by stating that 90% of those bands are just living room and basement "bands". People who play for fun and never gig. Or play once a year in their buddies backyard at a BBQ. Hobbieists. Amateurs.

But regardless of people's true musician involvement, whether they tour full time or never play out of their living room, one thing they do succeed in each time they create a new "artist page" is to dilute the market. They make the sea of shit we all swim in to be recognized bigger and bigger.

And for some damn reason it seems like all those hobbieist and amateur bands up and decided one day that they want to gig out. So you see them from time to time. Bands who are really sloppy and look like they should just stick to jamming in their basement. And you

ask yourself: why do these people have the need to bring this shit public? Why do they have the need to be heard? Can't they just stick to doing it as a hobby?

Being Bad but not knowing it

The truth is most people don't even know when they're bad. This has been proven on American Idol when lots of horrendous singers audition who have awful pitch, make people cringe when they open their mouths, but still try out and then wonder why they get eliminated. Similarly there are tons of bands out there that suck but don't have a clue (that they suck...). Maybe because their friends are the only ones who go to their gigs and they're too afraid to inform them. And strangely there are lots of bands out there that suck but they're friends will continue to show up to their gigs and support them forever (maybe it's what that guy meant when he wrote that cheesy song "that's what friends are for").

But sometimes you start out bad and you get better. That's sort of how things went for me. Or rather I went from being OK to really good over a period of time. I played half ass gigs for a few years before I really started to sound polished and had my sound together. I was in bands that were always half rehearsed those first couple years. And now I wonder if that was a mistake, to evolve in public. It probably was because you turn off people who sometimes have a hard time coming back once you've found your sound. But the only reason I mention all this is that I had no clue I was bad either. Just like those folks on American Idol. It's only now looking back that I realize I was kind of half ass in the beginning stages. And I know this because I'm good now and I know it. Because lots of people tell me I'm good and I believe them. I better be after playing shows for years and evolving as a writer and performer. But I worked really hard at improving over time. It's something to consider before you put yourself out there. As in take the time to hone in your craft. Make sure the presentation is good even if it means prolonging taking your show public for a few months (or years). Plus take stalk in people's response. You may start off a bit rocky with some shows but if you don't get some repeat people in your audience that ARE NOT in your group of friends after a while then maybe you should take that as a hint.

Road Side Records...is now signing.

Steve and his band "Cave In" started a record label called *Roadside Records* when they were touring all the time. After their shows all kinds of fans would come up to them and hand them demos of their bands. During their long drives from gig to gig they would listen

to quick cuts off the records, make fun of them, and then throw the CDs out the window, which is how you get signed to Roadside Records.

Anyone can be an A&R person for Roadside Records. They're always hiring.

Getting Signed for Real

Getting a real record deal with a major or indie label is not an easy thing to acquire. It takes quite a bit of hard work and of course some luck in the form of being at "the right place at the right time" such that A&R from a label would happen to see you perform. A lot of artists want record deals but they don't even know why they want it. They think fame and fortune comes with a record deal but in fact nowadays getting signed is just one little piece in a much larger picture. In a way getting signed is the easy part. The hard part is getting that label to then help you make a career for yourself that will last beyond the three-year contract you have with them.

Another thing to note is that some smaller indie labels are actually not particularly helpful to unknown bands because they don't have the resources it takes to give a band what it needs to break through in the music business. A good label will have a publicity budget and give you money to make a record, tour on that record, and get lots of press surrounding that record. You also need a manager and a booking agent, which may or may not come with a record deal.

When I first started touring as a sideman in a band we were on a label based in Nashville. This sounds quite fancy but the label was a husband and wife working out of their small house. They had about ten bands on the label but were really unable to do much for them. They didn't have a lot of money and they were the only two people doing the work and they both had day jobs to pay the rent. The best thing that ever came of being on that label was they got us a review in "No Depression" which is a reputable music magazine, but other than that they really didn't do much at all. There was no tour support or booking help. We also had to give them half of our CD sales such that instead of making \$10 a CD we were really making \$5 a CD, which doesn't help much when you're on the road. The label set up one show for us in Nashville that was at a cute intimate venue but was a sparsely attended show. I remember thinking that if that was all the label could come up with in their home base then what was the point?

And that's the question artists have to ask themselves nowadays: if you can't get a record label to sign you that is worthwhile than why not do it on your own? This is what being "DIY" means after all, even though some of us do it because we have to and other of us do it because we want to. Some artists I know start their own labels for their music so that they look as though they are on a label. It's true that being on a label has some sort of clout in the industry and a "signed" artist is certainly looked upon as being more established

over an independent artist. So there is one solution for the “DIY” artists: start your own label. I would argue that you’re better off starting your own label than being on someone else’s label that can’t ultimately help you. Because you can keep what is yours. If a label gets you publicity and helps you with shows and tour support than it is worth it for you to give them half of your CD sales. But if they can’t offer you those things then why would it makes sense to cut your merchandise profits in half?

Regardless of whether or not you get signed or you’re independent, one thing is clear: you need a team. And even if you are the sole team member doing most of the work, you can’t do it completely alone, you have to find other people to help you play the game.

The Importance of Having a “Team”

Even if you decide to have a DIY career and do everything yourself it’s still important to have people in your corner who support you and can help you along the way. Whether it’s just a fan whose willing to spread the word and tell their friends about your shows or a booking agent who continues to book you at a given venue; those relationships are key to your building a career that can sustain itself. Even if you book all your own shows, self-manage, do your own publicity, and everything else that needs to be done you still have several relationships that you need to maintain within the business.

In general artists cannot afford to not pay attention to business. They must develop a working understanding of the music business or have someone they trust in their team who understands it and can take care of it for them. Building your team so that it’s strong and functional is imperative. There are all sorts of vultures all over the music business so you have to be careful to find people that are genuinely interested in helping you and most importantly: in developing your career over an extended period of time. There are very few one shot deals, most careers take a lot of time and effort to get off the ground and you need people who you get along with, who believe in you, and are willing to invest the time and money to see it through.

I know a lot of people who have wasted their money trying to hire people to be on their team that really are just vultures who want to make money off of stary-eyed musicians. You can’t be too vulnerable or be so desperate for help you’ll take anyone’s “help”. Something is not always better than nothing. You are better off remaining “DIY” than having people on your team who will only hold you back in the long run.

I had a manager for a while who became really needy and was calling me all the time and demanding my attention. I found it annoying but wanted his help nonetheless. But then he started to cross more and more of my boundaries. He had no grasp on what was personal and what is professional. Eventually he pried into my personal life too much and accused me of having an affair with a musician friend who I went on tour with for a week. Not only was the accusation untrue but more importantly it was none of his business. I realized that not only did

he have his own twisted sexual desire for me (even though he was a middle aged married man) but he wanted to have some sort of control over my professional AND personal life that just enraged me. I eventually had to fire him because it was just too much to handle. Even though I knew he had lots of connections that could help with my career, in the end, it just wasn't worth it. There are cases of people who have "slept their way to the top" but that's no model of how to make it in the music business.

In general you will find nowadays that there are an increasing number of artists while the industry hasn't expanded at nearly the rate of aspiring bands. There are an ever-increasing amount of websites that sell mp3s and promotional companies where you can pay for services, but there are a limited amount of opportunities that come to you free of charge as an investment in your career. It's become too much of a risk for businesses and the chances of breaking a band is becoming less and less as there are more and more artists out there trying to be broken which clogs the market. Hence why it's hard to get "signed".

Ha! I told you all those "How to Make It in the Music Business" books were bullshit...

If there is one thing these interviews prove it's that almost all of these industry people testify that they work with artists who they either met through their **network** or **family of contacts** (like Asthmatic Kitty and their family of artists) or through **word of mouth**. One thing that you may have noticed is that very few of these industry people admitted to taking on any artists from unsolicited demos. The truth is that hardly anyone even listens to unsolicited demos or mp3s anymore. And even if they do give it a few seconds of a listen they rarely follow up with those artists because there is too much unknown about them. Even if they do have a good song or two on a demo they still have to ask themselves: What are they like live? Do they have a fanbase? Who else is working with them already?

Bottom Line: What agencies are looking for are artists that are either already are somewhat established through their own hard work or have a "buzz" out about them that inspires that agent to check out that act.

What does this mean? you ask. It means that you should stop pushing your music all over the place ruthlessly as if that will make people pay attention to it. If anything it turns people off. *How will I ever get established if no one listens to music that is unsolicited?* Well you can start by making really good and original music. Then if you record and play that music live and people hear it, if they like it they will tell other people. This is called a "buzz". You will build a fanbase from that buzz and if you can do that then industry folks will **COME TO YOU!** Seriously, they will.

Everyone always asks me how the hell I "found" my manager. The truth is he found me. He was at one of my gigs once and then got on my mailing list and kept coming back. After he'd been to a few shows he asked if we could talk and then said he was a concert promoter and also did some artist management. The whole time he had been coming to my shows I thought he was

just some attentive fan that asked too many questions. But that's how it happened. I didn't send a cold demo and I didn't go banging on someone's door.

What anyone needs to do in order to get opportunities is to get their act together and then play at places where you might be able to perform in front of folks who can offer you opportunities. Festivals. Showcases in NYC, LA, and Nashville. SXSW. Of course there is no guarantee that you will even get the attention you want at those places because of the amount of competition but there is a much better chance of getting hooked up with a label or management at something like that then by sending a demo to the office.

But to be honest what I really want to say here now that I have interviewed all these DIY artists and all these industry people is that **THERE IS NO FORMULA ON HOW TO MAKE IT IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS!!!** There is absolutely no rhyme or reason. We've all tried to approach the music business like it's some complicated algebra equation that we just have to keep plugging numbers into until we can solve it and find the right formula. But history has proven that no career is the same as the next. All success stories you hear about artists have completely different circumstances. One artist worked hard for years before they made it (like Lucinda Williams). Another had doors open immediately because they had famous parents or a trust fund to dump into publicity (like Norah Jones whose father is famous and her mother is a publicist). One band was somewhat unknown until they got a song in a hit movie (...The Shins).

Lots of major labels have tried to make "The Next Nora Jones" or "the Next Dave Matthews" only to completely fail. Why? Because the world only needs one Norah Jones and one Dave Matthews, that's plenty. You can't repeat the same formula that worked once to work again because it was never defined from the beginning, it just happened by chance to work that once. Most artists stumble across an opportunity when they least expect it. Others never even get that chance. And you can work your ass off tirelessly for years and maybe never get the break you think you deserve. But the reality is that you can't break the code because there is no code. You just have to do it and keep your fingers crossed. Or maybe better yet you have to just do it because you love it and know that it doesn't owe you anything. If you get a break, cool, if not, no big deal...But as we all know most artists are too ambitious and have too much desire to be that Zen about it.

I can't give you that answer to the "how to make it" question. I can just tell you this: **REALITY CHECK:** there is no book on this earth that could tell you what you need to do to "make it" in the music business.

You Can do it if you Want

One encouraging thing I can say is that even with all the changes that these industry people are talking about, in the end it only benefits artists. Decentralizing the "big four" and the corporate machine that makes popular music could only be a good thing. If we can sell our own

music and have it heard without help from the industry that's better anyway. Because we don't have to pay everyone along the way, we can keep what is ours.

You do not *need* a record deal in order to succeed in this industry anymore. It's a new proven fact.

Nowadays DIY bands can tour, get publicity, and sell CDs without a record label. Whereas 50 years ago that was probably out of the question. You can book your own tours, market your own music, sell your music at shows and online all without any label or management. But you just have to work your ass off. Because not only will you be an "artist" but you will also be your own booking agent, manager, publicist, tour manager, ect. And that can get exhausting. Sometimes you find as a DIY artist you are spending more time on a computer and on the phone trying to get gigs and publicity than actually playing music. That's the price to pay of "Doing It Yourself". But you can do it if you want.

Now that I've been in the music business for a while I've shifted my attention from wanting the industry to take notice of me from wanting my peers and people at my shows listening to take notice, support me, and tell their friends to come check out a show. If someone in the industry happens to be at a show, great, if not, no big deal. You can't sit around waiting for industry people to make your career, you have to get off your ass and do it yourself until someone sees your hard work and wants to help you. Of course having a manager, publicist, booking agent, label and all that couldn't hurt. But it's good to know that in this day and age we have the unique opportunity to make music and get it to people with or without any men in suits.

Memorable Phone Calls...ring...ring...

And it's true. I'm sure everyone can name a time in their life where a phone call changed something dramatically. Maybe they found out someone died. Maybe they won the lottery. In my case my most memorable phone calls, besides the ones learning of the death or birth of loved ones, are all career related (ok, excluding break ups...). Here's a few in chronological order:

- In college I remember the conversation I had with my father where I told him that I was having second thoughts. About medical school that is. I told him I was torn between being practical and doing what I love. I told him I wanted to be a musician. I was 20 years old in school full time for premed, Chemistry, and English. I was in a bluegrass band where I played fiddle and sang, I played in jazz ensemble, and I wrote songs on guitar. I had been playing music most of my life and my parents had taught and encouraged me but I was so afraid of my father's perception of me. That he would think I had failed by not fulfilling my academic potential in life. I was on the verge of tears while I told him this simple statement: "I want to make music professionally". But he was surprising unphased by the confession. His response was what was memorable: "I don't care what you do. Whatever makes you happy. I'll love you if you live in a trailer park with a bunch of kids."

- In the fall of 2003 I entered a “contest” (if you will) posted on craigslist. It was asking for demos from songwriters. The ad was from an “artist developer” who was going to offer a major publishing and recording contract to whomever he choose had the best song(s). I sent in a demo I made in some dudes home studio not long before. It was before my band had a record out so it was using a click track sort of drumbeat (fake shaker...) and I played guitar, bass, and sang. Pretty lo-fi demo quality but it got the song across. I received a phone call a month or two after I had submitted the demo with the guy telling me that my song “Passing Thru” was a hit. He told me to come out to LA to make a demo and he sent me the “artist development” contract and said I’d need a lawyer. I was enthralled to be chosen among so many other demos he had received. It was a moment of retribution I felt bonified. (Needless to say I flew to LA, on my own dime, hired a lawyer, Bette Middlers I might add, also on my own dime...made a demo...and the lawyer told me it was a bum contract, the numbers were all 33% and 66% instead of 50/50....so it went nowhere.... In the end I spent about a grand on the plane ticket and lawyer and never even got the rights to the recordings. But at least I didn’t have to move to LA...)
- Summer of 2004 I was back in Maine walking around the Blue Hill Fair with my family. I got a phone call from the A&R guy from Epic Records that he had heard my new record (“Passing Thru”) and that the song “Nostalgia” was a big hit. He wanted to get together when I was back in town. (Talked with Epic people for a few months after that, they came to a show or two and then one A&R guy started talking to me about the success of Ashley Simpson due to her reality show, he said it like it was a great thing because she had sold so many records, I decided then and there not to work with any major labels.)
- In 2005 and 2006 I received several phone calls from friends who heard my music on NPR, usually as clips between new pieces on “Marketplace”. (Actually those phone calls weren’t that memorable, but they were nice...)
- In 2007 I got a phone call that a indie European label had decided to release my music. (Ok, I lied, it was in an email, but it felt like a phone call...it was very exciting news...)
- Recently at SXSW 2008 my brother called to wish me a belated Happy Birthday. He also told me that my father had bitched about me to him recently. He said that I was 28 acting like I’m 18. That I was a mouche when I came home for Christmas expecting my father to buy all the groceries, I had become really cheap because I’m a broke artist and needed to grow up...My brother said not to worry about it. He said he hadn’t told me to upset me. But I cried quietly on the other end of the line so he wouldn’t hear.

Friends don’t let friends cry without a shoulder to cry on

I actually had another phone call today that was memorable. Or rather it’s a phone call I’ve had many times before from other musician friends, but this time I felt like it had come at an

interesting time considering I'm writing a book about the topic my friend Dan had called to discuss with me. He asked if I was actually making any money off of playing shows these days and how I made that happen. He said he had one hundred and eighty bucks left to his name and that later in the day he had to go meet up with his new landlord and hand that money over as a deposit. Yup, Dan is broke.

The thing about Dan is that he is thirty-seven years old and has pretty much just been doing art and music his whole life and scrounging some sort of living from it (I interviewed him earlier in the book in case this artwork/music person sounds familiar). He said to me today, "I know you can do what you love and make a living from it but I'm not sure I'm going to be able to afford my rent." Which had just gone up to about seven hundred bucks a month which is tough to pay when you do artwork for people who rarely want to pay what it's really worth and you play original music which people rarely want to pay any money for either. He talked about the gas prices and how he had just driven to Portland to play a show and made fifty bucks after they split the door money between four bands. Fifty bucks for original music isn't that bad when it's a gig in your own town but when you drive almost two hours to get there (four hours round trip) and gas is only going up and up, you can't really make a profit. Because Dan does these elaborate (and beautiful) posters for all his shows he ends up driving to each town he performs in twice. Once to put posters up all over that town a week or two before the show, and once to actually play that show. That's just the way he promotes his shows. Hence his gas expense is times two and at this point he's just losing money or maybe breaking even.

He asked me about the gigs I play that pay one to two hundred bucks a night. I told him about some of the ones in the area but there are rarely shows like that in the city because there are so many musicians the clubs pay squat because they can get away with it (another issue with saturation, and cities, try and get a guarantee at a venue in NYC, good luck...). Hence you have to drive an hour or more to small towns sometimes to get paid anything more than a few bucks for a gig. Dan said that it seems like the press favors you more if you play art spaces and listening rooms and cool alternative spaces like that which are usually the most attentive yet worst paying shows in town. Mainly because sometimes it's hard to get people to come out and be quiet and listen to you play original music, especially without alcohol. The shows that pay well and have a built in audience are at bars and restaurants that make enough money from alcohol and food sales to pay for entertainment. Only problem is you end up being background music for people's conversations. So Dan was trying to reason if it's worth it to play bad gigs for the money since the good gigs where people listen don't pay enough to live off of. Catch 22.

It was kind of a sad phone conversation because I told Dan that even though I could sympathize with his financial plight for making a living wage off of music, I have no real solution. My only solution for my own struggle to make a living off of my music is to just step back and write this book and let you people know about what we go through as musicians in this business. Or if you are a musician and have a similar plight you can cry on the shoulder of this book and it'll listen and sympathize (seriously it will...).

I told Dan that maybe he could get a part-time job doing artwork and graphic design for some local company or paper. Basically what I felt I had to tell him is that he needed to get a day

job. And I had to say this even though I know that Dan is one of the most talented people I know and it's a sad day when a guy who has been doing artwork and music for fifteen years in this area has to throw the towel in and get some mundane day job because the economy is just getting worse and worse.

And for some reason as the economy gets worse and worse it seems to effect self-employed people the most, and especially entertainers. Fuck the investment bankers who are loosing their jobs, if they were at all smart they would have at least saved something, musicians just continue to get broker and broker. When people don't have extra money to spare they don't hire musicians, they just turn on the radio. Meanwhile it's getting harder and harder to drive around to play the gigs that do pay well because gas is making the cost to get anywhere hefty. To top it off Dan said in the news today they spoke of summer hurricanes that could raise gas prices up to five dollars a galloon, and this is when people are already freaking out because it's four.

I think for DIY artists like Dan and me who have been around a while it's difficult to always see the light at the end of the tunnel and know if it's going to get any better for us in the future or just worse. We are both trying to "live the dream" but the dream is becoming harder and harder to actually live. Even with all the effort and heart wrenching work we've put into our careers. It sure has been a long journey from when I was back in college playing guitar in my bedroom dreaming of touring and sharing my music with the world to the present and my own reality. I'm sure the same can be said of Dan who is worried about how he's gonna pay his rent. But we all go through stages in this career of hope, opportunity, appreciation, failure, struggle, and despair. Our emotions and careers follow no pattern and can shift in mood and viability from day to day, hour to hour, minute to minute.

The Myths of "Fame"

Ever notice how Thom Yorke hates being famous? It's as if someone forced him into it and he resists it from all sides. But why? Radiohead fucking rules, they're one of my favorite bands ever. But I suspect that they never set out to achieve quite as much as they did. They just played music and happened to be really good at it and had a very original and unique sound for that time and became massively famous. And since then they've just been trying to get out of the spotlight. And then doing crazy awesome things like NOT being on a major label and letting people choose what they want to pay for their music. They are pretty much the coolest band in many senses. But yet they don't' like fame...hmmm...

I suspect the reason why is because fame kind of sucks. Don't get me wrong; I'm sure they are all happy to be making their money off of their passion. But I doubt they like everything else that goes along with it. The fact that when you are famous it's hard to go in public without people bugging you. The fact that people constantly only want to associate with you because of your fame. Your privacy is sort of invaded.

What is kind of disturbing is that some musicians set out to be famous as their ultimate goal while other musicians set out to just make music and fame might come to them as a bi-product of the fact that they are really talented (like let's say Elliot Smith although I really don't know...). But what is a true intention anyway? It's not a black and white situation at all. But I would argue that some of the most inspirational success stories I've heard were about really talented bands who were just out there making music just to make it and then people took notice and raised them up to a point where they had some fame without it being a conscious effort. I'd like to think the truest form of a musician is the one who does it purely to create and for no other reason, although we never know anyone's intention because there is so much we can hide from each other.

Not too many years ago the guys from *TV on the Radio* used to crash in my old apartment. I wasn't even living there at the time. But my old housemate saw them at the Middle East and thought they were awesome and offered our living room to them. The truth is I have no idea what that band is really about, I've only seen them live once and read some articles and listened to their music. But I like to believe that they are this band that is just really talented who was going along making awesome and original music and people took notice and raised them up. That it wasn't something they were forcing on people. I don't think of them as a band that wrote annoying Myspace messages to all sorts of strangers to solicit them as fans. I like to think that very talented artists are just above all that bullshit. But again I don't really know. But what I want to believe is that if bands like Radiohead and TV on the Radio (weird, I just noticed they both have "radio" in their names...) had never "made it" then they would still be out there right now playing music anyway to half empty bars and sleeping on the couch at my old apartment when they had a show in town.

Beauty & the Beast

Beauty: Beyond everything negative I have to say in this book there're lots of beautiful things I've seen only as a result of having made music and met so many new and interesting people and heard some of the most beautiful sounds an ear could hear. I've heard so much original and unique music that will forever exist in obscurity. There is good music everywhere. I don't care what the critics say. New and good music is flowing from the college and community airwaves and from the little divey clubs and art spaces where locals play. Don't let Clear Channel trick you. Don't let your parents say things like "good music stopped after the sixties". That's all bullshit. Art is everywhere. It's the only thing that saves us from the fact that some trust fund baby Texan shitbag has actually been president of this country for the past eight years and practically run our moral into the ground. The only thing that has saved me is art. Is making music. In some ways it's all we have as a defense against the rest of the world and the reality of how fucked up human beings really are.

Beast: An artist is only two things: one part ego and one part insecurity. And the ego and insecurity that makes an artist tick can work for and against it. It can fuel it's ability to make art so tortured and personal that it can only understand itself. And it therefore can alienate itself from the rest of the normal world by thinking that their art gives them license to be a cryptic asshole to all the people out there that just don't get it. Oh artist, please get over yourself. Or get on some meds. But heaven knows that if you did get over yourself or take some meds you'd just be like everyone else. And I suppose that is kind of boring...

The Musician's Narcissus: Ego & Bullshit

I heard a story recently where a musician's wife left him and took his four-year old son with her. When asked what happened he said, "I didn't know". As in he didn't know she was so unhappy and would actually leave him. And apparently it all spawned from the fact that he was so absorbed with his music that he wasn't doing such a great job being a father and husband. I also heard that he's fighting now to get her/them back. It's quite the reality check to have your family walk out on you. But somehow I wasn't surprised when I heard the story. I could just see him all consumed on his computer mixing songs in his home studio while his wife entertaining a small child in the other room. It's hard to be present sometimes when you're an "artist". In many ways the artist is the most self-absorbed person on the planet.

An extreme example would be the "too cool for school" musicians you meet from time to time. Ones who won't even give you the time of day when you see them after a show and try to have a simple conversation. The stories you hear of the ego can be unthinkable. The most recent one I heard was that some mildly successful singer-songwriter played a show with my friend and she put him and his girlfriend up after the show. That night and the next day the two of them only spoke to each other, even when my friend was in the room, they wouldn't even dignify her presence, it was as though she was invisible, in her own house. It sounded all so strange when she told me about it. I couldn't quite imagine it, but it was true and I knew it. This dude thought he was such hot shit that he didn't even want to be polite to the no-name musician who was kind enough to put him up. She was pretty put out by it. Which brings me to the definition of an artist that seems to most embody the narcissism they seem to possess.

The Enneagram of an "Artist" type

Here is the definition of an "artist" by way of the "Enneagram" a popular personality test. An artist is a number three:

Threes have their eyes on the goal. These are people who love success and inwardly fear failure. They do whatever it takes to succeed.

Healthy Threes are hard working, ambitious, highly successful, charismatic, fast learners, efficient, productive and they make the business world go round. They will do whatever they are asked, their work is exemplary, often extraordinary, and they are usually found on the fast track and in high places. They set and meet goals with a flourish and they energize any group or staff.

If they become unhealthy they slip from being a success to appearing to be successful. This may entail some cutting of corners, viewing failures merely as learning experiences, telling the story with a few adjustments. Threes may take credit for others' work, hog the spotlight and over identify with their roles. They may also see themselves as an efficient machine and take little time for emotional and spiritual realities.

Threes you may know: Tom Cruise, Ken Lay, Arnold Swarzenegger, Demi Moore, Truman Capote, Cindy Crawford, Johnnie Cochran, O. J. Simpson, The CEO's of half the corporations in America, Oliver North, Sharon Stone, Anne Coulter, Oprah Winfrey, Tiger Woods....and most musicians you know.

Recognizing Style Three

1. The central problem will often not be presented: they can be out of touch with their feelings. Their task is to remove appropriated (false) feelings and replace them with true ones, which they have but are unaware of them).

*2. **They may be playing to an invisible audience.***

3. They may often have really rough mid-life crises.

*4. **They may have a radical confusion between self and group.***

5. May have difficulty separating feelings and thoughts from roles. They may feel whatever role they play.

6. They may just appropriate a school of spirituality or therapy instead of doing the inner work.

7. They may conform too much to church or political party teachings. They think and feel with the community.

8. They may want and depend too much on external signs of spiritual success.

9. They may come after a devastating failure.

10. *They may have an image of God (or some absolute authority) as terribly demanding.*

How You Can Help

1. *Invite them to move back into feelings when they talk about their work.*
2. *Recommend bodywork in which there are no markers of success.*
3. *Help them pay attention to their body. Feelings are linked to body states.*
4. *Help them articulate feelings, especially of sexuality and anger.*
5. *Help them acknowledge vulnerability.*
6. *Help them notice their conflict between intimacy and achievement.*
7. *Direct some of their energy toward social reform.*
8. *Help them reframe their image of God or attitude toward authority.*
9. *Find a group in which they must remain anonymous (like choir).*
10. *Help them do things counter to image.*

Being Unhappy Doing Something You Love

At least a few people I spoke to during the course of writing this book admitted that they are very unhappy making music sometimes. Or rather they love making music but all the bullshit that surrounds making it (getting gigs, getting people to go to those gigs, dealing with the biz in general...) makes them really unhappy. And I can definitely say that for myself: that part of the reason I wrote this book was because I was starting to be miserable sometimes (usually when I'm on tour) because I was sick of the uphill battles you constantly face when trying to get your music heard.

Even people on the business side of music can have that sentiment. Paul Agnew who ran a label for years said in his interview "I did some soul searching and realized that I am not happy supposedly doing something that I love." He also resonated this in talking about artists, "My hope for the musicians I have worked with is that they all find fulfillment in what they do. For some that may be moving on to a bigger labels and for others it may be just playing locally while trying to raise families, buy homes, or do all the normal things that people want. Bigger is not always better and the need to constantly grow and outdo oneself with the next recording, the next group, the next tour can lead to a lot of unhappiness." I believe that is one of the most well put sentiments in this whole damn book.

My friend Sophie is a singer-songwriter, she has a full time job and plays out now and then and said, "I guess for me music isn't really a hobby because most of the time when I'm trying to do it in public I'm miserable and I think the point of a hobby is that your supposed to enjoy it." I think what she meant is that even if she loves writing songs and playing piano at home as soon as she leaves the house with her music it turns into a really taxing chore. Playing gigs can be tough; sometimes you promote it but no one is there, sometimes the sound sucks and there is nothing you can do about it, sometimes people just talk over you and you wish you were anywhere but in a loud club playing to people that don't give a shit.

Sometimes when making music in the pubic forum has made you miserable over and over again you have to ask yourself what you want out of it. Is playing in front of people that important? Sometimes you have to return to your innocence and try and find what it is you liked so much about music in the first place. For me it would be playing in my loft alone and working out some new songs and old ones, just for fun. It would be getting together with my old friend from college who now lives around here. We used to play at the Radio Bean together and he recently emailed and asked if I wanted to get together and jam some traditional tunes on banjo and fiddle. I haven't played bluegrass since college, I've been too sucked up in the indie rock world and in the life of being a singer-songwriter. But I think I'm ready to take a vacation from all my desires and just have fun all over again as if I have no agenda in the world.

I only say this to you in case you feel the same. In case you are discouraged and at times sad and miserable because of all the effort you've put into your music career because you didn't get out of it all that you put in. I recommend taking a step back and instead of trying to book some more shows today, just hole up in your bedroom and listen to your favorite records instead. Try and remember everything you love about music. Doodle around on your instrument for no reason other than to space out and have fun. Drop the ambition and the agenda for a minute and see if you can get back to a place that makes you feel good. Or if you enjoy feeling miserable I recommend you finish this book (which is almost over...horray!!) and start from the beginning and read it all over again and experience the pain, misery, joy, love, trials, and tribulations of other musicians all over again.

What is Success?

Do you ever feel that someone has to ask you a question before you really know how you feel about a given subject? That's why I like being interviewed because you are forced to respond to a question on the spot and formulate an opinion in the moment, which sometimes reveals your most honest opinion about something. I recently had an interview for a magazine and gave a response that even the interviewer seemed to be effected by (as yet another aspiring musician). But it was really quite simple:

What's your idea of success as an independent songwriter and performer?

My idea of success as an independent artist has changed a lot since I started out five odd years ago. I used to think you were only successful if you were famous and everyone knew your music. Then I resolved that vision and began to believe that you were successful if you could at least make a living at music. But now I think all of that is total bullshit. I think that making a living off of your music is not necessary for “success”, I know lots of really amazingly talented people that have day jobs and play music and I don't think any less of them because of that. It's an illusion that we put pressure on ourselves to make money off of our music as though that will then give it some inherent worth. I think success is when the people that do get exposure to your music genuinely enjoy it and keep coming back. And I've seen that happen in my own career and that's enough for me to know that I'm at least good at what I'm trying to do even if the masses all over the planet are not aware of my killer tunes. At least some people are.