

[Independents Day: The Rise And Rise Of Independent Music](#)

The Association of Independent Music (AIM) is holding a special event to celebrate 50 years of successful independent music which will include a gig, a five part television series, a one off auction on ebay and the release of a double CD full of "independent" covers. Artists including The Prodigy, The Charlatans and Maximo Park have all given their backing to the cause and plan to donate songs for the album. Songs to be covered include Joy Division's Love Will Tear Us Apart, PIL's Public Image and Ghost Town by The Specials.

Independents Day marks the anniversary of Chris Blackwell and Graeme Goodall's indie label, Island Records. The Jamaican-born label signed giants U2 before selling to Polygram in 1989, a trend which many independent labels followed. Creation and Factory records disappeared in the 1990's whilst others folded through a calamity of errors from over expansion to cashflow problems.

Independent music is responsible for more than 25% of the UK's music scene and is claimed to have pioneered the music industry for many years. Alison Wenham, Chairman for AIM stated that [independents] had been "at the forefront of every single new musical movement over the years."

For proof of this, just take a look at every popular music scene over the last 50 years: There was the DIY punk scene in the seventies, the indie guitar sounds from New Order in the eighties and the massive dance music boom in the nineties.

Today, we are seeing the independent label make a comeback. Domino Records have given us two recent chart toppers; Scottish band, Franz Ferdinand and northerners, Arctic Monkeys. The internet has provided a new platform with which to promote this music. Sites such as Myspace, Youtube and Facebook all promote bands young and old, signed and unsigned for general consumption. These social networking sites have allowed users to access new music much easier than ever before with some 40% of users embedding music within their pages.

Russell Hart, chief executive of Entertainment Media Research added "Social networks are fundamentally changing the way we discover music... the dynamics of democratisation, word of mouth recommendation and instant purchase challenge the established order and offer huge opportunities to forward thinking business."

Local label, Signature Tune is making the most of these sites and one of their bands, Lakes is reaping the benefits of using an independent label. Scott Byatt, the band's drummer said "As a band on an independent label, advances in communication and technology mean we can communicate with bands and promoters the world over helping us network and get shows with ease... Our CDs can be bought in many high street stores and our tracks can be downloaded from iTunes, once again without the help of a major."

Radiohead were perhaps the first big band to see the change in direction and act upon it. After the end of their contract with music giants EMI, the band went solo with the release of their latest album, In Rainbows. The album was released as a digital download in October 2007, allowing customers to pay as much, or as little as they liked for it. The group took ownership of their own songs and released ten tracks online more than one month before the tangible album was released in the shops.

Front man for the band, Thom Yorke noted the growing number of pirate copies of their music being appearing online and in an interview with Wired he said, "every record for the last four - including my solo record - has been leaked. So the idea was like, we'll leak it then." Yorke's attempt to beat the pirates seem to have worked. On average, the electronic download sold for 4 GBP. Not bad considering you could download it for free if you were feeling too tight to pay.

The return to indie worked wonders for Radiohead. Although the downloads from the website, inrainbows were not counted in the album charts, the band did manage to create enough hype and speculation around the release of their album that when the CD actually hit the shops, it reached number one in the UK album chart, the United World Chart and the US Billboard 200.

Other groups may do well to take note of this action when considering future releases. Of the music industry, and in particular their ex record label, Yorke added "What we would like is the old EMI back again, the nice genteel arms manufacturers who treated music [as] a nice side project who weren't too bothered about the shareholders. Ah well, not much chance of that."

Au contraire, EMI boss, Guy Hands is keen to seize upon the opportunities presented by smaller, independent labels. These labels have always maintained a stronger working relationship with their artists and are much more keen to try their hands at new promotional techniques. With the renaissance of DIY music and bands creating music for music's sake, independent labels cannot be ignored. EMI declared that they are planning on working like a larger version of the indie label, with many smaller labels working under their umbrella.

So they may be more willing to try new techniques, but the problem of shareholders still remains. Wenham continues, "If you have shareholders to please, inevitably it becomes about making music from the music." Indie music is very much about the music and as long as the shareholders give the smaller labels a wide berth, we should continue to see more impressive acts pushing the scene forward.

About the Author

Samantha is an expert Research and Theatre consultant. Her current interests are UK shortbreaks including [LEGOLAND Windsor](#) and [Drayton Manor](#).

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