



Blog Commentary

The Waning Days Of 'Mere' Music Licensing

By Kevin McKiernan

From the early strains of "Revolution" by Nike, marketing has increasingly co-opted the soundtracks of popular culture to create emotional resonance. And, boy, has the dance between marketers and music changed.

No longer are brands and agencies willing to "crutch-up" their advertising with simply a popular song. In fact, the practice of slapping a song in at the last minute is moving into the Ice Age. What continues to thaw and thrive is the shared-values model, that fertile area where what the brands want us to experience and what the bands want us to experience is the same place.

So what does that look like? Well, imagine Band of Horses, All-American Rejects, Fall-out Boy, etc., in the studio working on their next release. Album tracks are still taking shape. The potential opportunity emerges to re-enforce a sound a brand is garnering and to mine this sound.

Beyond the obvious brand affiliation necessary for both parties to marry, what can be created? We're not talking about a band merely scoring a track. We're talking about a brand incorporating the components of a brief into their creative process and birthing a new track. Something the brand and the band can share in the success of. And thanks to the scope of most brand-supported media buys, those brands become a valued partner to the musicians.

What does the brand get beyond the great value they are part of and as a parcel of this new paradigm? They get to participate creatively, turn the console knobs, help shape and own and drive a campaign's emotional soul, its soundtrack.

Watch the CMO or creative director's eyes light up when giving Billy Joe Armstrong (Green Day) or Eric Clapton creative feedback; and the more they participate, the more savvy they become and the more integrated the campaign's soundtrack becomes.

Marketing managers are coming up the ranks and they are young, contemporary, thirsty to be savvy to new forms of media and are using music as one avenue through which to be relevant cross-platform. This means going far beyond broadcast, engaging the gamer with an interactive game, or the fashionista with style tips from their favorite artists.

It's a potentially perfect marriage (whatever that is ...). Brands want to play producer and bands want to play marketer. There's a collaboration instead of a deal ... song/commercial ... It's a strategy informed by new perspective and a fresh vision. After all, survival for both rely on selling their products/services and relating to popular culture... and if you are going to speak to (with is even better) a culture effectively, you have to reflect honestly, accurately... .

For example, the music world understanding the brand's agenda, (not merely forcing the latest band on a brand) and the brand understanding the labels values. (not merely looking to jack the creative with a cool sound). The result? Intertwined agendas. Instead of blue and yellow? You get green...So, while great classic tracks and contemporary releases will continue to be used for advertising, they fall prey to skin deep penetration that is transparent and will fall flat.

So, what's next? Bruce writing for GEICO? Neil Young changing his mind about Bud? Pink Floyd waxing philosophically for Ford? Whatever "next" big event happens, it will be collaboration with mutually beneficial touch points. It won't simply be a licensing deal.