

DAN BLAKE, A04, a jazz saxophonist and composer with a joint degree from the New England Conservatory, has drive and talent—he recently won both a grand prize in the John Lennon Songwriting Contest and ASCAP's Young Composer Award. What he doesn't have is the backing of a record label. Like many independent musicians these days, he's learning

How to Make It on the Internet

OVER THE 10 YEARS IN WHICH I have been part of the creative music scene in Boston and New York, I have observed the Internet's revolutionary impact on the production and dissemination of non-mainstream music. Large record labels have abandoned all but a small population of creative artists, forcing musicians to seek other paths to promoting and distributing their work. Now that most record companies belong to big conglomerates, the emphasis is on short-term financial gain. Unless you focus on producing "hits," the industry pays little attention to you.

This consolidation of power within the music business has not silenced the production of non-marketplace music (it took me more than six months to get a review in *Cadence Magazine*, thanks to their backlog of new and unknown recordings to review). Rather, the past decade has seen a growing movement of independently released—not to be confused with corporatized "indie"—creative music that is made possible by ever-improving Internet technology.

For musicians like me, who view the business of music as only a small part of a career as a creative artist, this new environment presents great opportunities. I see increased self-sufficiency and versatility in exploring the many facets of the Internet, and of digital media in general.

Internet technology empowers artists to develop their own musical communities. The most popular are MySpace and iTunes, which represent both a grassroots and corporate recognition of the growing autonomy of the online consumer. But there are also some lesser-known sites dedicated to the dissemination of creative music. *JazzBoston!* is reawakening a vital jazz scene by creating an online commu-

nity of local and national artists and listeners who call Boston home. Artistshare, among the first true alternatives to a record label, is an online interface where audiences can interact with their favorite artists—such as Danilo Perez, Trey Anastasio, and Maria Schneider—throughout the creative process. Listeners can actually help fund new projects and thus have a direct impact on the development of new music.

The common thread among all Internet-based musical efforts is the increased control artists have over their creative output and the immediacy with which consumers have access to the music they love. In place of the traditional two-dimensional approach to producing and listening to music, where a third party decides how music should be packaged, musicians can now present work in whatever way best

represents their artistic intentions. For instance, a MySpace page can be set up for free in 10 minutes, and includes sound clips, photos and videos, a calendar, bio, and a blog where reactions, questions, and links can be posted. This body of information would have taken many hours and dollars to compile into a press kit, which would have been useful only as a promotional tool, not for public consumption.

Although my efforts compete for attention with those of thousands of other musicians, music fans benefit from the many choices available to them, as well as the unprecedented ease and efficiency with which they can explore different offerings.

There are new efficiencies for musicians, too. When I entered the John Lennon Songwriting Contest last year, it took me all of 30 seconds to apply—by securely paying an entry fee and uploading my mp3 file through the competition's website. I was able to link my profile on the site to my own website (danielblake.net), and to MySpace (www.myspace.com/the_danblakeparty), where I am connected to many other like-minded musicians.

The new musical environment has changed my idea of a successful musical career. It is becoming increasingly simple to communicate my art with others, which to me remains the greatest privilege of a life in music. While it remains to be seen how this new power will generate more income, many musicians are rejecting the struggle to impress record companies and are joining artists working both separately and together to create new platforms for showcasing their talents.

Ultimately, this expanding network could provide a significant counterweight to the commercial hit machine. The future may well belong to music that record companies today deem unmarketable.



Dan Blake