ALTERNATIVE MUSIC IN NEW ZEALAND, 1981-2001

Definitions, Comparisons and History.

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the University of Canterbury

by

Wade Churton

University of Canterbury

2003
ABSTRACT

Alternative music was a cultural practice, which became a significant feature of New Zealand’s local and national history over the last two decades of the twentieth century. Features of technology, economics and music culture influenced the creation and course of local independent music scenes, along with factors such as cultural remoteness.

This thesis isolates and collates key factors and time periods of international music industry history, and refracts the information through alternative music in general, providing a coherent definition of the term. The history and definitions of New Zealand’s alternative music history are then assessed for the period 1981-2001, with especial reference to the Flying Nun label and ‘Dunedin Sound’.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to my supervisors Graeme Dunstall and Dr. Greg Ryan for essential guidance and patience during the researching and writing of this thesis. Thanks also to the staff of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, and of the History Department of the University of Canterbury. Also to friends and family for much discussion and clarification of aims and concepts.
INTRODUCTION

9) CHAPTER ONE: THE MAINSTREAM MUSIC INDUSTRY
12) TECHNOLOGY AND THE MAINSTREAM MUSIC INDUSTRY
16) ECONOMICS AND THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

- The Product Life Cycle
- The Star System
- Back Catalogue Product
- Copyright
- Publishing
- Sampling, 1980s-1990s
- The Internet and Napster
- Mainstream Music Industry Economy and the Media
- Software Sales

41) MUSIC CULTURE AND THE MAINSTREAM MUSIC INDUSTRY

- Music Culture and the Media

52) CONCLUSION

54) CHAPTER TWO: ALTERNATIVE MUSIC, 1981-2001

DEFINITIONS
- The rock era
- Punk rock
- The post-punk era
- ‘Alternative’ music scenes

76) EVOLUTIONARY PHASES OF ALTERNATIVE MUSIC, 1981-2001

- The first phase, 1981-1987
- The second phase, 1988-1994
- The third phase, 1994-2001

78) TECHNOLOGY AND ALTERNATIVE MUSIC

82) ALTERNATIVE MUSIC ECONOMICS

- Alternative music and the media

92) ALTERNATIVE MUSIC CULTURE

101) CONCLUSION

102) CHAPTER THREE: ALTERNATIVE MUSIC IN NEW ZEALAND, 1981-2001

THE NEW ZEALAND MUSIC INDUSTRY

- Copyright and publishing
- Mainstream media
- The ‘split’ mainstream
- The ‘lag’

- Music culture and the media

113) ALTERNATIVE MUSIC

- The rock era
- Punk rock

- Alternative music media:
  - Print
  - Radio
  - Television

126) ALTERNATIVE MUSIC: TECHNOLOGY

- Independent record labels

134) ALTERNATIVE MUSIC: ECONOMICS

136) ALTERNATIVE MUSIC CULTURE

145) CONCLUSION

147) BIBLIOGRAPHY
INTRODUCTION

This thesis will assess and compare the history of this country's alternative music movements with that of overseas for the period 1981 to 2001. In doing so, it will provide a historical perspective of a global cultural and commercial practice from a local point of view. For some time, New Zealand's own rock musicians, audiences and music industry largely generated in relative isolation from overseas main centres. This isolation affected both the formation and course of mainstream and alternative music in New Zealand, with key local events developing in a comparatively unique and often distinctive fashion.

A growing body of related critical and historical literature has examined the course of New Zealand's rock and alternative music, including John Dix's extensive historical work 'Stranded In Paradise' (1988) and Craig Robertson's landmark 'Dunedin Sound?' thesis (1991). However, essentially musicological studies such as these are inherently narrow and dated in their focus. Therefore, an updated, comparative examination of key local events with those of overseas is necessary, to provide a greater historical perspective on a cultural practice which both linked New Zealand to international developments, and distinguished this country as a distinct presence in its own right.

In order to provide a context for New Zealand, an intensive synthesis and evaluation of the available material is necessary. Relevant overseas material will mainly include secondary studies. To both define and establish the New Zealand’s mainstream and alternative music contexts, a larger percentage of primary material will be utilised, including local magazines, newspaper reports, fanzines (amateur magazines) and television documentaries. An interpretive synthesis of such resources, collected from over a thirty-year period, will provide a long term history of New Zealand’s alternative music.

In addition to these resources, my own experience with New Zealand’s alternative music movements has been long-term and relatively extensive. As a musician and writer, I have actively participated in the production of alternative music for over two decades. Personal
experiences included recording and distributing original music in an economically independent capacity, and touring the country to promote this music. In addition, I have commented on developments via several published reviews, essays and large-scale studies of specific areas.

Issues of definition are crucial to this thesis. As a concept, 'alternative' music is less a single rigid musical genre or industry marketing concept than it is a steadily-evolving set of cultural and commercial ideals and practices. Since the creation and consumption of music is a cultural activity, to define both 'mainstream' and 'alternative' spheres begs a cultural-historical approach. This thesis will therefore address the definition of both spheres as cultural history, beginning with a study of the mainstream music industry.

Producing and consuming music is a universal cultural practice. Inevitably, some forms have become more popular than others. Broadly speaking, if 'popular' means widely-used or commonplace, then every day we are constantly surrounded by widely varying forms of 'popular music'. These we both create ourselves and experience as environmentally appropriate background sound.¹ From early morning kindergarten sing-alongs, late-night karaoke bar amateurs, and environment-enhancing incidental music for live sports events, to the lone individual’s street-whistling or humming, music has been a constant and inseparable part of human existence.

This near-random daily background mix of music ancient and modern, common and obscure is 'popular music' only in the broadest sense, however. By 'popular music', this thesis means 'commercial music'. That is, music which is traded for profit whether by sales of recordings, publishing royalties or performance fees. Taken as a whole, the mainstream music industry is a commercially driven, mutually supportive collective of technological, economic and cultural activities. The mainstream music industry is, at base level, a purely commercial operation which thrives on the production and consumption of music, a culturally-derived product.

The historical ‘rock era’, during which the term ‘alternative music’ was first coined and later held its strongest relevance, is relatively straightforward to define. Basically, the rock era had its beginnings in the 1950s, went through a radical period of experimentation during the 1960s and became an established mainstream form in the 1970s. Rock persisted as the highest-selling commercial genre throughout the period 1981-2001.

However, ‘alternative music’ itself is much less easy to outline satisfactorily. Serious attempts by scholars and writers to define the term ‘alternative music’ as a musical genre, a set canon, or an agreed, definitive list of artists and their work, have inevitably failed. This was partially due to the sheer range of musical variation which was available beyond the mainstream.

The music industry brings only the most popular forms of music to the consumer public at large, while a plethora of other genres remain part of the constant undertow of ‘alternative’ music provided by local musicians. The definitions of ‘alternative music’ grew to include both mainstream, non-, and even anti-mainstream applications.

The first chapter of this thesis seeks to define the mainstream music industry and other key concepts used throughout the thesis. To provide an overall context for alternative music, the structure and history of the international music industry will be discussed, along with an outline of the relationships between its essentially three-fold balance of culture, technology and economics. During the period 1981-2001 the global music industry was overwhelmingly dominated by companies and artists from the USA, and that country’s music industry will be used as the comparison model for New Zealand’s.

In chapter two, this cultural and historical context is used to illuminate a study of ‘alternative’ music theory and practice. A general discussion on the encompassing rock music era will establish a general context for alternative music during the period 1981-2001. Concepts such as ‘independent’ record labels and distinctly ‘alternative’ music genres and culture will be discussed. In chapter three, New Zealand’s history of alternative music will be
defined and assessed in the light of the contexts established in the first two chapters. Issues including the country's changing degree of 'isolation' and key music culture developments are discussed.

2 Around 50% of the world market.
CHAPTER ONE

The mainstream music industry

In this chapter, the international mainstream music industry is defined as a commercial enterprise which utilises popular culture to ensure its successful continuation. It is essentially a three-sphere process which seeks to balance technological, economic and cultural developments. When these spheres fall out of alignment, as in the late 1970s and 1990s, the effects have significant consequences for the industry and its consumers alike.

The music industry is essentially a competitive, commercial, global enterprise which trades in pre-recorded music. In short, it is a purely commercial exercise which deals with culture and cultural product, and profit is its ultimate driving force. To effectively achieve maximum results, this industry has needed to utilise new technology with which to record and present its products to the public. It also requires complex economic strategies and decisions to continue its existence and a constant stream of raw material from which to derive its products.

From the mid-1970s until the late 1980s, six ‘major’ companies had effectively controlled the global recording industry: BMG (based in Germany), MCA (Canada), Sony (Japan), Thorn/EMI (the UK), Time Warner (US), and Philips (Holland).3 Between them, these multi-national companies owned the industry’s major record labels and eventually acquired a myriad of much smaller labels, which had begun as independents and become highly prominent during the 1960s and 1970s, among them Atlantic, Motown, Stax and Virgin.4

By the 1990s, the ‘big six’ had been reduced to five; BMG, EMI, Sony, Time Warner and Universal (formerly MCA, renamed in 1996). In 2000, Time Warner merged with America On Line and then with Thorn/EMI to form Warner/EMI, which left only a ‘big four’ by 2001.5 These companies were multi-national corporations, which also dealt in the larger fields of

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5 Murray Cammick ‘What’s The Merger Got To Do With The Music?’ in Real Groove no. 80 (03/00), pp. 26-8.
entertainment, media, electronics and industrial manufacturing, and controlled music industry mass-manufacturing and distribution.

Together, the ‘big four’ were eventually responsible for issuing up to 70% of the world’s recorded popular music.⁶ A further 12-15% of the market was the province of ‘medium-range’ companies,⁷ which regularly used the majors’ manufacturing and distribution machinery. The rest of the music market was taken up by independent companies, which (depending on the size of the operation) either manufactured and distributed their own product, or else negotiated individual contracts for the use of the majors’ machinery.⁸

The effective industrialisation of a culturally-generated product like music as a commercial commodity might therefore best be viewed as the constantly shifting dynamics between the three main spheres of technology, economics and music culture.⁹ The often-problematic alignment of these spheres towards the production of monetary profit is the primary concern of the multinational companies which control the mainstream music industry.

Technology and the mainstream music industry

Technology provides the means by which the music industry is able to record, store and sell music to its consumers. Over the course of the two decades 1981-2001, the range of available formats increased, and the consumer was given greater control over where, when and how they acquired and replayed music. The increase in consumer options and control led to a loss of industry profits, and efforts to curb this situation were fruitless.

In the era before recording technology the most popular musicians (whether travelling itinerant or orchestra members) would essentially perform ‘live’ to a paying audience. Mass market commercialisation eventually led to the establishment of a music industry, with highly specialised tasks such as professional managers, booking agencies and so on. However, the

⁷ Ibid., p. 2
⁸ Ibid., p. 17
industrialisation of music for a true mass market only became possible when technology allowed music to be stored, sold and replayed.

Soon after music was first ‘recorded’ on a paper score, a mass market for popular musical forms was generated, one far wider than artists could possibly have reached by making ‘live’ appearances alone. These initial evolutionary stages of the music industry produced a ‘mainstream’ mass-market industry, with professional music publishers, non-composing performers and non-performing composers.10

The actual recording of sound and the mass-marketing of radio in the early twentieth century brought pre-recorded music into the average middle-class household. In the post-Second World War era, magnetic tape made possible technically ‘perfect’ recorded performances, in which the final commercial product was produced from the editing down of multiple recordings of the same piece. In fact, with technological development, the studio itself became less a place where a musicians might record a fair representation of their ‘live’ sound than a sound-shaping process in itself.11

By the 1950s, the music consumer was served by two main formats, both vinyl discs. The 12-inch, 33 1/3 ‘album’ carried up to forty-five minutes of music. The industry eventually utilised the album as an ‘adult-oriented’ format, ideal for thematic collections and extended or long-form music genres such as jazz and classical music. The 7-inch 45 RPM format generally carried between two and four sub-three minute ‘pop’ songs, and became the youth-oriented ‘single’.12

Radio and electronic technology also became miniaturised in the decades following World War Two, and this effectively liberated consumers from the usual ‘static’ listening environments, such as the home, concert-hall or schoolroom. A significant technological development in music industry formats was the compact cassette, which was launched in the

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10 ibid, p. 29
11 ibid, p. 22
mid-1960s. Essentially a miniature ‘reel-to-reel’ magnetic tape housed in a hard plastic shell, the compact cassette allowed the consumer complete self-programmed listening, with the portability of a radio. A highly versatile format, the compact cassette could be produced with running-times of up to two hours, was still in core industry use in 2001.

Concurrently with the advancement of radio technology, during the 1940s and 1950s, the mass-market television era began in the US and UK, opening another medium up for popular music and artists. While phenomenally popular, television was for its first few decades much less amenable than purely audio music to consumer self-programming technology. However, the Sony corporation marketed the first ‘open reel’ consumer video recorder in 1963, and six years later introduced the industry standard ¾ inch magnetic tape ‘video cassette’ format. By the end of the 1970s, home video recorders had become popular consumer items, available in most Western markets.

During the late 1960s, when rock music had amassed widespread popularity, the genre spurred several technological advances in instruments, recording facilities and amplification systems. The popularity of the Beatles led them to become the first rock ‘stadium band’. Industry promoters found that the usual large, music-specific concert halls proved inadequate to contain the Beatles’ potential audience, so sports stadiums were the only logical alternative. The technology available in 1965 meant that the band’s sound was simply relayed through the stadium’s in-built announcer’s speakers. 14

The Beatles retired from live performance in 1966, but the popularity of rock artists led to the organisation of large-scale outdoor rock music festivals, such as those held at Monterey

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13 The compact cassette had rapidly displaced the similar ‘eight-track cartridge’ format, which had been introduced in the early 1960s. The eight-track cartridge was larger in size and ran in a loop, which repeated the recorded program until manually stopped. Like the compact cassette, the format’s players also came in both in-home or car-stereo variations. See the Recording Technology History website at: http://history.acausd.edu/gen/recording/notes.html
(1967) and Woodstock (1969). The vast profits involved in such ventures \(^{15}\) prompted the industry to spur several technological advances in specialised PA (public address) amplification systems, designed to deliver maximum musical fidelity over vast distances.

During the 1970s, audiences for large-scale performances by the most popular rock artists had grown so large that the actual musical performance alone was not enough to hold attention. The attendees at the rear of a Pink Floyd or Rolling Stones concert of the late 1960s may have been able to hear the music, but often could not see the performers. Many innovations were conceived in order to provide the vast stadium crowds with extra-musical visual focus. By the mid-1970s, rock audiences could see spectacular computer-programmed laser light-shows, massive inflatable stage-props and sets, and (in the 1980s) giant live-feed video-screens showed the stage action in close-up.

The digital revolution of the early 1980s produced further key technological innovations for the music industry. Drum machines and programmable synthesisers aided songwriters, and often replaced human musicians, while the MIDI (musical instrument digital interface) system effectively linked collections of digital instruments together into virtual ‘bands’, under the control of one central keyboard.\(^{16}\) With the MIDI system, several digital instrument-sounds could also be blended to create still newer effects, and the whole could be repeatedly programmed by a single artist.

Industry recording of music also changed considerably with the new digital technology. Programs was written which turned computers into recording devices. Instead of multiple reels of magnetic tape, the computer’s hard drive was used as an endlessly-reusable medium for recorded sound, capable of being repeatedly erased, recorded over, and mixed down to create multiple versions of the same item. Moreover, a digital recording system could be programmed to accommodate as many individual recording-tracks as needed.

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\(^{15}\) The organisers of the 1969 Woodstock festival had initially lost money in the short term, but more than made up for it through movie and record album profits.

With digitisation and miniaturisation, the traditional need for the ambient ‘acoustic space’ of a recording studio was greatly lessened. Banks of rack-mounted digital instruments could be plugged directly into adjacent digital technology, without need for any external amplification. Neither digital instruments nor recording technology took up as much physical space as had conventional recording equipment.\textsuperscript{17}

Later, Internet technology decentralised further the concept of the recording studio itself. With digital recording and encoding, it became possible for bands or artists to record material on the same day, with members situated in different parts of the world.\textsuperscript{18} Musical backing-tracks could be recorded in a US studio, sent by telephone fibre-optic cable to be downloaded in Germany, where vocal tracks could be added in a local studio.

In 1983 the music industry formally introduced the CD, or Compact Disc to the consumer public. A 120mm aluminium-coated plastic disc read by a laser beam which tracked a digitally-encoded spiral path, the new format provided up to 80 minutes of playing time in an unbroken stretch, with greater fidelity possible than any other music format to date. The same 120mm plastic disc format was later utilised for the DVD, or Digital Video Disc, which became an industry standard from 1995. By this time the aural CDs could also carry music videos as part of their encoded information. These could be accessed and viewed on the consumer’s home computer.

Following a considerable amalgamation of mainstream music industry companies in the 1970s, the owners of the largest record labels sought to implement more integration between their entertainment, electronics and manufacturing facets. To this end, the industry evolved a policy of monopolising new music technology and releasing it to the public in carefully-planned ‘waves’, designed to maximise profit.\textsuperscript{19} In general, this policy worked for the industry. However, when events occurred outside of industry control, the result was a serious imbalance in the music industry’s three-sphere alignment of technology, economics and music culture.

\textsuperscript{17} Negus, pp. 25-6
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 26
New consumer technology introduced by the industry itself could have unforeseen applications. The compact cassette, for example, not only carried the industry’s pre-recorded music, it could also be recorded over with new information by consumers. The introduction in 1981 of the US music-only television channel MTV occurred outside the mainstream music industry’s direct sphere of influence, and its success quickly generated a situation which also presented the industry with new economic and cultural challenges. MTV had capitalised on both the popularity of music and the increasing use of home technology, in this case the video recorder. 20

The emergence of the microprocessor and subsequent development of digital technology during the 1970s and 1980s had spurred the commercial availability of the in-home PC (or Personal Computer). Coupled with this was the increasing availability to the public of the Internet, which had initially begun in the early 1960s, as a US military-industrial concept for interlinking computers. 21 With the invention of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s, the Internet became commercialised and available to the general public via home computer connections to existing telephone lines. 22

A groundswell of public Internet and PC use encouraged the development of the music-specific MP3 encoding file in 1992. Since most commercial music was being recorded using digital recording, the resultant encoded files were ideally suited to a computer based ‘online’ distribution. 23 Previously, when music was stored on computers, it had made for large, bulky electronic files which took-up massive amounts of computer memory, and were extremely slow

19 Ibid., p. 152
20 The first home video recorders became available in New Zealand in 1980, and a year or two earlier overseas.
Also Netlingo Dictionary of Internet Words: A Glossary of Online Jargon with Definitions of Terminology http://www.netlingo.com
22 The Internet was a collection of linked computers. The World Wide Web (WWW) was a ‘common information space’ which was made available to the individual computer user via ‘browsers’ such as Netscape or Microsoft. The WWW was where websites were created and set up for consumer interaction. See the Internet Society website, (footnote no. 21).
to send or ‘download’ over the Internet. The MP3 file was a smaller, faster and more secure way of encoding music, which could then be rapidly sent from PC to PC (‘peer to peer’) over the Internet.

Like MTV in the 1980s, the Internet was made available in the 1990s to the consumer public, outside of mainstream music industry control. In this case, the mainstream music industry had not foreseen the public popularity of the Internet, and had stubbornly ignored it as a technological development. When consumers began to trade music using the World Wide Web and several websites appeared which better facilitated the situation, the industry made several aggressive attempts to gain legal control.

In the late 1990s, at the same time as the Internet was becoming a common household service, home CD burners appeared on the domestic market. Again using the home PC, exact copies of amateur or commercial CDs could now be made (or ‘burned’), with all the advantages of the industry-standard format, including the pristine digital sound and the discs’ inherent physical and aural durability. The benefits to the domestic user also included rapid copying-times (up to four times the actual duration-time of the recording) and an extremely low production-cost for their ‘home-burned’ CDs.

Economics and the music industry

Though catering for popular consumer taste and utilising the latest technological advances to record, store and distribute music, the mainstream music industry was a purely commercial entity. In order for the music industry to profit from high-volume sales, it had to make economic decisions based on commercial realities. These decisions, in turn, directly governed the industry’s own investments in technology, product and output.

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24 Ibid, pp. 62-3
25 Ibid., pp. 84-6
26 In 2001, a single recordable CD retailed for between NZ$2 and $5. They were also packaged in ‘silos’ of between ten and fifty, with a much lower cost per unit.
These economic factors have exerted a strong influence over which genre material or artists were made available to a mass audience, how that work was made available, and even the very form and content of an artists’ work. It was in the marketplace where a mainstream music company succeeded or failed. There was a standard 9-stage ‘product life cycle’ central to the economic theory and practice of the music industry.

(1) Conception (the idea for a new venture with a viable artist);
(2) Development (the preproduction work, such as recording);
(3) Introduction (when the product was actually launched upon the consumer market);
(4) Nurturing (running adjustments made to marketing campaigns and further promotion);
(5) Expansion (with an artist’s popularity achieved, full-scale marketing began in earnest);
(6) Maturity (when the product repaid initial production costs and became a profitable venture);
(7) Saturation (the product’s consumer popularity had achieved its commercial peak, and no further company investment was useful);
(8) Decline (the product became a ‘back catalogue’ item); and
(9) Abandonment (when the product was finally deleted).\(^{27}\)

The mainstream music industry’s component companies competed for a lucrative share of the consumer market. Once they were ready to do so, they were able to utilise vast technological and financial resources for the necessary promotion to launch new product. There was, however, a commercial time limit beyond which any given product, such as a new single, album or even artist, would not be viable as a commodity. Even with the massive promotional power of music industry publications, along with commercial radio and television music video exposure, a recorded product released between 1981 and 2001 had a finite ‘market life’, which

spanned between 60 and 120 days. If a product had not achieved commercial popularity and returned a company's investment during that time, it was abandoned.

Since unpredictable and potentially volatile governing factors such as consumer taste were involved, the marketing strategy employed by the mainstream industry was best described as that of 'hit and miss'. In practice, this meant that the industry had to continually release a huge volume of product on the market, in the full expectation that up to 90% of it would fail to return investment. To offset this inherently wasteful economic reality, the industry had evolved a set of sustaining operative practices, one of which was known as the 'star system'.

The 'Star System'

To achieve maximum financial returns, commercially viable stars and musical styles were marketed. The artists involved in such ventures were usually young, so as to foster an identification with youthful consumers: In comparison with solo artists, fewer bands appeared on industry records as best sellers. This was in large part because bands had generally formed amidst a local music scene, and become popular over time, amassing a significant live following, albeit local. A band was almost invariably a self-sufficient unit, capable of playing their own music if not also writing it, but of less use to the mainstream industry than 'manufactured' units which could be controlled from conception to saturation and abandonment.

This was in sharp contrast to the long-standing 'manufactured' 'boy-' and 'girl band' concept, which cast vocalists in a non-instrumental, vocal and image-only role. Despite any

29 Frith, 'The popular music industry' in The Cambridge Companion to Rock and Pop, p. 33
30 Dean Scapolo New Zealand Music Charts 1966 to 1996: Singles (IPL Books, Wellington, 1997), 'Top Artists' section. Of 150 artists, 68 were groups. Of the top 10, only 3 were groups. The figures in the same author's New Zealand Music Charts 1975-2000: Albums (IPL Publishing, Wellington, 2001) 'Top (150) Artists' were 4 groups in the top 10, 61 overall.
31 The concept of non-instrumentalist, vocal-only units experienced a revival in the second half of the 1990s, with artists like the Spice Girls, Boyzone, Destiny's Child and others. A similar wave of popularity was apparent in the early 1960s, with the form utilised mainly by and for black American artists. The 'girl groups' associated with producer/writer Phil Spector (the Ronettes, Crystals and others) and Motown Records (the Supremes, Martha and the Vandellas and others) proved immensely popular, as did Motown's all-male units such as the Temptations.
songwriting or production talent possessed by such artists, vocalists were often expressly forbidden by contract from writing and releasing their own material. Most such ventures were composed of a group of disparate vocalists usually brought together through a process of auditioning, and launched commercially as new artists.

The 'star' was the media image which helped sell the music. For the purely 'manufactured' artist, career self-sufficiency was absent, and they were totally reliant upon their supporting companies. A company-assembled group or a solo artist was easier to manage for a mainstream company than a pre-existing band who may have held contrary opinions on their career to that of their record company. Even so, many bands had also handed over major career decisions to their labels, in the course of seeking mainstream success.

As a mainstream commercial exercise, the star system was a method of ensuring continuing volume sales. In practice, the career of a 'manufactured' star adhered closely to the industry 'product life cycle'. A typical such enterprise began when a suitable performer or act was selected, and through a process of 'grooming' was launched in the mainstream media as a 'new' artist. The resultant mix of image and sound was intended to appeal to the widest possible group of consumers and, with the globalisation of the industry in the late 1980s, the most popular were chosen by companies for their appeal across geographical and cultural lines.34

This process might best be described as 'branding', in which a distinctive 'brand' (the artist) was established, and from which an equally distinctive 'product' (the recorded material, including music, videos, and so on) was thereafter issued. Distilled into a highly-commercial image and sound, the product was then elevated to a high level of public prominence through a series of aggressive company media campaigns. Through 'hit' records, the successful 'star' in turn guaranteed the continued volume sales which sustained all of the company's operations.

32 Mike Pattenden 'Carry On Again, Doctor' in Q no. 193 (03/02), p. 88
33 Dependably large sales which continue to finance both star and company.
34 Negus, p. 1
In practice, the establishment of a successful industry 'pop star' was akin to a company embarking on raising a large-scale but potentially unstable building, such as a 'super-dam'. The standard evolution of a pop star began with the 'discovery' of a potential new artist. The parent record company then assembled a 'project team', which discussed marketing possibilities and made decisions on how a new artist was to be 'sold' to the public.

The project team's main decisions included key promotional tactics, the artist's musical direction, and the composition of the star's media 'identity', or 'brand'. With the music as a soundtrack, industry promotion built extra-musical concepts into the visual 'star package'. With the correct visual reference points in place, an artist's mainstream profile was established.

Unlike a local neighbourhood rock band or club duo who may have utilised some of the same musical forms as industry-created pop stars, the latter were not 'self-contained' units. They were borne to cultural prominence by massive industry business structures. While it was true that many 'self-contained' artists wrote and played their own material before and after becoming popular mainstream artists (U2 and REM during the 1980s, for instance), at the other extreme the mainstream industries have 'manufactured' their own pop stars, with the aid of professional song writers, musicians and image-consultants.

Until they proved to be successful, self-sufficient commercial ventures, pop stars could only exist at a mass-media prominence whilst being buoyed by the monetary flow from the parent company. In effect, pop stars had been merely the public faces of what were essentially complex commercial business ventures. All question of musical talent aside, popular chart stars such as Madonna, Britney Spears or Mariah Carey were not so much artists as entertainment corporations. There was, for example, Mariah Carey the person and 'Mariah Carey' the pop star business venture, which employed many people and relied on record sales to sustain it.36

The music industry has therefore relied on a small but ever-changing cadre of popular 'volume sellers' to ensure a constant cash-flow. By the late twentieth century, volume artists

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35 Ibid., p. 64
36 Ibid., pp. 135-40
included extremely popular or long-established successful artists (Madonna, Eminem, and U2 for example), whose popularity with consumers guaranteed enough product sales to stoke the company’s activities, including covering the loss-making 90% of failed ventures. From the outset of the industrialisation of music, the creation, maintaining and trading of these dependable volume sellers has been the music industry’s core activity.37

A typical industry-launched pop star’s career-sustaining business structures would likely encompass managers (both business and personal), backing musicians (both for live appearances and for studio recording), record producers, concert promoters, live and studio sound technicians, video directors and so on. The more popular an artist became, the larger these supporting structures became.

Along with live appearances, high-volume record sales were necessary to support both the star’s career and their parent companies. A set of hit singles issued from a full-length album was the norm. Given the level of promotion necessary, the situation quickly occurred when the live tours of an artist actually became ‘loss leaders’ for their records or merchandise. Tours were utilised almost wholly as a promotional tool for the sales of recorded product.38 To off-set the cost of touring for mainstream acts, the touring show itself might be filmed and sold as product itself, as a music video or DVD, or else the rights to broadcast part or all of the event might be sold to local networks.39

Despite any genuine musical talent involved, these artists were inherently industry ‘creations’ which were invariably subject to the dictates of the product life cycle. Some relatively low-selling ‘prestige artists’ were retained, for commercial purposes.40 Most often

37 Frith ‘The Popular Music Industry’, p. 35
38 U2’s 1993 ‘Zoo TV’ tour of New Zealand, for example.
39 This happened on Michael Jackson’s Australasian tour in November 1996.
40 A ‘prestige artist’ was one who was famous, but did not necessarily constitute a volume seller. A company which signed artists such as McCartney, David Bowie, Bruce Springsteen and many others could count each star’s loyal, long-term consumer-base to purchase any work they released, though their days of major volume-selling were over. Moreover, the continuing fame surrounding such artists automatically meant a higher industry profile for the company which signed them. Anthony DeCurtis ‘The Eighties’ in Decurtis, ed. Present Tense (Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1992), pp. 04-5
however, the star system produced new commercial artists as fleeting cultural ephemera designed to capitalise on a particular consumer preference. Accordingly, their often short-lived careers were strictly governed by commercial concerns. Given the ‘hit and miss’ nature of the industry, many pop stars were lucky if one single became a hit, let alone two, three, or even a second album.

Stylistically, the pop star’s musical material was intentionally derivative, owing its very saleability to carefully-analysed market dictates and pressures. The most lucrative audience demographic for pop music has been the young (pre-teenagers to early teenagers) and mostly female. This was a consumer-group which spent no outlay on living costs, and whose leisure money came almost entirely from their parents or from part-time employment.

This young pop music audience was always one of the industry’s most immediately lucrative demographic targets, but as a loyal consumer group, its attention-span was notoriously short. The younger the target demographic, the less ‘artist loyalty’ was shown. Audiences, even young ones, were not mere ‘sheep’ to be dependably ‘fleeced’; they could make distinctions between artists, construct shared tastes and preferences, and otherwise display a considerable degree of autonomy to industry product.\(^\text{41}\) When a young audience became bored with a new musical product, they stopped buying it. Adult music buyers by contrast have tended to loyally follow a favourite artists’ work, purchasing successive albums over the artist’s career.\(^\text{42}\)

Older rock music buyers remained a considerable consumer-group for the music industry. Buying music was a habit which this consumer group formed during their youth, and continued over their lifetime.\(^\text{43}\) Rock’s older consumers had socially ‘settled down’ to some degree, and generally desired ‘finished results’ rather than radical new experimentation.\(^\text{44}\) Compilations of old chart hits sold well, as did individual artists’ career ‘best of’ collections. According to

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\(^{42}\) Kier Keightly ‘Reconsidering Rock’ in The Cambridge Companion To Rock And Pop, p. 130.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 43

\(^{44}\) Ibid, p. 43
RIAA figures, during the 1990s, consumers 45 years and over doubled their share of the market, constituting 23% of the annual survey conducted for the year 2000.\textsuperscript{45}

As indicated by the notion of a ‘product life cycle’, the relationship between a mainstream record company and a newly-signed artist was essentially one of investment and return. When artists signed with a large-scale label, he or she may have been entitled to a monetary advance against future royalties earned, to assist with recording and promotional costs of new material for release. This advance usually came with a determined contractual period (three years, for instance) by which time an artist was expected to have generated enough income to pay it back.

Given the 90% failure-rate of new industry material, much of this advance money was written off when hits failed to eventuate. However, if artists were able to return the investment within the specified time-frame, they might be eligible for a ‘rollover advance’, another monetary advance given against the next specified time-period.\textsuperscript{46}

There have been exceptions to this model of a typically short-lived career of industry pop stars. There were artists whose image and/or sound were often subject to radical periodic revision. For instance, Madonna’s remarkable twenty-year career as a consistently-charting mainstream volume artist was largely due to such revisions, each image-change attracting a certain number of newer consumers who perceived her as a ‘new’ star.

Generally, however, the industry-created pop star proved quickly productive in the marketplace, after which came a period of rapidly lessening commercial viability. At this juncture, the parent company might decide to take up the contractual option of terminating or ‘dropping’ the now financially burdensome artist from the label.

With the achievement of dependable success in the field, long-term volume artists have usually sought to re-negotiate their initial company contracts. When the dynamics of the star-company relationship were reversed, and the company had become financially dependent upon a very successful artist, the artist was then often able to exercise considerable leverage. As a

\textsuperscript{45} See the RIAA website.
\textsuperscript{46} The Dictionary of Music Business Terms, p. 209
result, previously restrictive contractual obligations and artistic compromises could be greatly relaxed or removed entirely.  

As with any high-volume consumer product, the selling of music and pop stars involved complex marketing strategies. A popular artist was made ‘available’ to a mass audience through sound recordings, concert tours, music videos and printed information. Information was mediated through magazine articles and interviews, company press releases, posters and CD art, while audio/visual material appeared as CDs, radio playlisting and music videos. ‘In person’ manifestations meant live performances, tours, press conferences, personal promotional appearances and so on.

In addition to the star’s availability via actual sound and images, there may also have been a raft of product-related items launched, which could include T-shirts, posters, school lunchboxes, bubble gum and a plethora of other merchandise. While seemingly trivial, this material was often key volume-selling material in itself.

‘Globalisation’ became a key industry aim because of the potential of profits. As the digital technology revolution of the 1980s gained pace with consumers later in the decade, the effective exploitation simultaneously of several world markets became possible. To further alleviate the possibility of wastage, market research was constantly carried out to provide some means by which consumers could be targeted. Consumers were then divided into sub-groups and targeted with product through media and promotional campaigns specific to these groups. By the 1990s, youth sub-groups were declining in buying-power, and new artists were being aimed at wider age groupings, with a view towards possible long-term commercial careers.

‘Back Catalogue’ Product

An ever-replete pool of new artists was only one source from which music industry profits could be generated. Previously deleted material could be reissued from company ‘back

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47 Negus, p. 152
49 Negus, p. 6
potential consumers of new technological formats was eased or avoided. For instance, beginning in the late 1940s, material from 78rpm discs was collected and reissued on the 33 1/3 rpm album format. In turn, during the 1980s the CD format was used to collect and reissue material previously available on vinyl and cassette. When initially introduced, the relatively expensive CDs and their format-specific players sold best to the ‘adult’ 25-40 age group. This consumer group was relatively settled, held jobs, and had certain ‘favourites’ among industry artists by whom they would loyally continue to purchase music. The CD’s success as a popular medium for pre-recorded music was not an instant phenomenon, however. Over the course of the 1980s, widespread public acceptance of the CD format took both crucially-aimed industry promotion and a lowering of the price of the format’s players to increase sales to a satisfactory volume.

With the exception of a distinctive range of then current volume artists in the ‘adult contemporary pop’ vein (Dire Straits, Billy Joel, Phil Collins, for example) much of what this largely middle-aged, middle-class CD market actually wanted to buy was ‘old’ music (pre-1980s ‘classic’ rock and pop). So great was the demand for this material, by 1988 90% of CDs available were either reissues or compilations of previously released material.

Copyright

In order for a record company to profit from artists’ work, copies of it had to be processed into various formats for marketing. However, besides the sales of cassettes, CDs and videos, the commercial value of the actual music they contained was dependent upon the establishment of copyright ownership.

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54 Will Straw ‘Consumption’ in The Cambridge Companion to Rock and Pop, p. 58
55 Ibid.
57 Theberge, p. 18
58 Frith, ‘Video Pop. ’, p. 103
‘Copyright’ was the legally protected right to copy, sell or create new works based on a musical composition.\textsuperscript{59} In order to attain this legal copyright status, the work had first to exist in a tangible form, usually as an aural recording or as sheet music. Once copyright ownership was established, the work was legally protected from unauthorised use for a period of 50 years after the author’s death.\textsuperscript{60} The holder of a copyrighted piece of music was entitled to charge others for its use, or else, legally prevent unauthorised use.

The illegal copying of commercially-available material had been a constant irritant to the music industry since the early sheet music era. When a consumer made a cassette or CD copy of a copyrighted item, such as a commercially available album, it was an illegal act. In practice, however, widespread illegal copying by consumers passed largely unprosecuted, since it would have been a vast drain on law-enforcement resources to police effectively.

Along with illegal home copying, industrial-scale ‘piracy’ of mainstream material also persisted, wherein works by popular artists were counterfeited in large amounts, and retailed though stores as authentic releases. Finally, there was ‘bootlegging’. This was the unauthorised commercial release of otherwise unissued material by an artist. Bootleg items were most often drawn from private recordings of live concerts, or material recorded alongside, but surplus to, subsequent official releases.

Although many rock artists were popular in the illegal vinyl record trade, individuals could generally only make copies of music on compact cassettes. Further options for consumers interested in venturing beyond the ‘official’ industry-released records included purchasing vinyl or cassette bootleg items. Several of rock’s most popular artists appeared on the lists of bootleg record companies.\textsuperscript{61}

Highly specialised equipment was needed to produce illegal copies on vinyl discs. Record-stampers, large-scale purchases of ‘raw’ vinyl for manufacture and complex mail-order

\textsuperscript{59} Brad Templeton A Brief Intro To Copyright website at: www.templetons.com/brad/copyright.html
\textsuperscript{60} For all works created after 01/01/78. See The Dictionary of Music Business Terms, p. 54
operations were necessary for serious bootleg industries. The compact cassette format made this possible in any suburban lounge, by anyone. One single album legally bought may be repeatedly copied and eventually be ‘owned’ illegally by many others. Piracy and large-scale non-profit copying, such as that conducted over the Internet, could have significantly affected the commercial value of the original.62

Audio-visual material featuring rock artists was mainly limited to concert movies, and experienced at the cinema. Aside from some mimed chart show spots, there were relatively few official rock music videos produced until the early 1980s.63 Even if there were, the consumer could not copy audio-visual material from the television medium until home video systems came on the market in the late 1970s.

When the amount of music industry profit ‘leakage’ caused by home cassette copying began to increase towards the end of the 1970s, the industry fought back with a series of ‘home taping is killing music’ advertisements, placed in key rock music magazines.64 When relying on the goodwill of consumers proved impractical, the next step by the industry was to lobby for an extra tax to be put on blank compact cassettes, to offset any estimated profits lost through home taping. This legal campaign proved costly and again impractical.

If a work was deemed to be clearly derivative of another, previously copyrighted one, this was termed plagiarism, and was legally punishable.65 If an individual or organisation merely

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61 The advertisement for ‘Toad Hall’s Rare Records’ on page 14 of Rip It Up no. 21 (04/79) listed bootleg albums available by the Beatles, David Bowie, Bob Dylan, Queen, the Rolling Stones and the Sex Pistols, among many others. The address was a P.O. box number in Victoria, Australia.
62 Brad Templeton 10 Big Myths about copyright explained website at: www.templettons.com/brad/copymyths.html
63 There were feature-length encapsulations of large-scale 1960s festivals such as Monterey (1967), Woodstock and Altamont (both 1969). In the 1970s, many rock artists, including David Bowie, Alice Cooper, Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd made concert movies which made their live shows available to otherwise-remote consumers. Specifically, these were ‘Ziggy Stardust’ (1973), ‘The Alice Cooper Show’ (1976), ‘The Song Remains The Same’ (1975), and ‘Live At Pompeii’ (1970).
64 See copies of the NME etc., early 1980-2. Also Rip It Up.
65 A well-known example of plagiarism was George Harrison’s 1971 hit ‘My Sweet Lord’, which in 1976 was proven legally to have been plagiarised from the Chiffons’ 1963 hit ‘He’s So Fine’. A more unusual plagiarism case came in 1994 when John Fogerty was accused of basing a new composition, ‘The Old Man Down The Road’, on his earlier band Creedence Clearwater Revival’s 1970s hit ‘Run Through The Jungle’. Fogerty had written both songs, so he was, in effect, being accused of
copied legally-protected work and distributed it, without charging, this was still a violation. Some unauthorised use of copyrighted material was permitted for public criticism and reviews (on radio or television, in the case of music), although this was usually restricted to an extract from the whole.

Though legally activated once a work existed in tangible form, copyright did not necessarily mean that the author of a work had full ownership. The author could have shared copyright with, or assigned ownership to, a publisher, producer or corporation.66 For instance, the copyright for work produced expressly for a corporation, such as an advertising jingle or material commissioned for a non-composing artist, may have belonged primarily to the commissioning company. The author could even abandon ownership rights altogether, and declare a work to be in the ‘public domain’.67

**Publishing**

Authors further protected their legal rights to a composition by engaging the services of a professional music publisher. For a percentage payment drawn from the collected funds, the publishing house acted on behalf of copyright holders, as an administrator and a collection-agency.68 Publishing houses collected ‘royalties’ (payments due for use of a composition) and prevented ‘infringements’ (unauthorised use or copying) of copyrighted material.69

While publishing-houses could exist as part of a record company’s overall business structure (as was the case with Warners, BMG, EMI and Sony), they might also be entirely separate services.70 Major companies could insist upon a newly-signed artist being represented

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66 Templeton ‘A Brief Intro To Copyright’.
by its own in-house publisher. This streamlined matters of business, and allowed the company to maintain a greater degree of control over product.\textsuperscript{71}

\textit{Sampling, 1980s-1990s}

The issues of artistic copyright and plagiarism grew more complex during the 1980s and 1990s. When new digital music technology became widely available in the mid-1980s, the composition of newer forms of popular music benefited. In particular, the digital sampler was used to record or ‘sample’ a section of a pre-existing work, and play it back at any speed or pitch. New copyrighted compositions were being made up from parts of older ones. A drum beat could be sampled from a vinyl record originally released in the 1960s, then a bass-line from a 1970s record may be added, and so on.

Sampling’s most prominent era was during the mid-to-late 1980s, when records such as M/A/R/R/S’ ‘Pump Up The Volume’ (1987) and S’Express’ ‘Theme From S’Express’ (1988) were chart hits. They were essentially sound-collages, built up from a plethora of samples. Moreover, a vast number of hip-hop and rap artists, such as Public Enemy, built many new works on foundations sampled from key vinyl records by earlier artists.\textsuperscript{72}

In the early 1990s, sampling was challenged in court, when copyright confronted artistic licence and the forces of copyright won several legal concessions.\textsuperscript{73} After 1992, the legal use of samples was standardised at a process of permission, creditation and payment. If artists wished to use a sample of a copyrighted work, they had to seek official permission from the copyright holder, and pay a royalty if necessary. Some payment for samples was usual, but the actual amount was left up to the discretion of the copyright holder. Once the new work using the

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 117

\textsuperscript{72} James Brown’s 1968 track ‘Funky Drummer’ is reckoned to be one of the most-sampled drum patterns ever. It has powered countless rap and hip-hop works.

\textsuperscript{73} Hip-hop collective De La Soul were threatened in 1991 with legal action over their use of a segment of the Turtles’ 1969 hit ‘You Showed Me’ in their composition ‘Transmitting Live from Mars’. De La Soul settled out of court, but the landmark sampling case came in 1992, when rap artist Biz Markie was sued over his use of part of Gilbert O’Sullivan’s 1972 hit ‘Alone Again, Naturally’. Not only did Markie lose the case, but his record company was ordered to recall all copies of the Markie album which featured the illegal sample, a hugely costly exercise. See the Columbia Law Library Music Plagiarism Project website.
sample was released, the credits had to feature the additional compositional credits from the original sampled work.

This situation inevitably led to less sampled material being used in general, and especially so by smaller labels and alternative artists.

**The Internet and Napster**

In the late 1990s, the music industry economy was severely affected by technological and cultural developments, over which it could exert little direct control. In particular, the Internet was a significant technological development which posed a greater threat to the music industry than had counterfeiters, or home cassette copying. The Internet was first criticised by the music industry for the large number of lyric-sheets and music tabulatures for popular songs offered on several tribute websites.\(^{74}\) These freely-available ‘songbooks’ strongly affected sales of the industry’s officially sanctioned sheet music.

During 1996-7, there was a massive increase in the amount of public Internet use.\(^{75}\) The next few years were a ‘boom time’ for Internet-based commerce, when commercial business concerns took advantage of the new ‘cyberspace’ medium. Soon, a plethora of non-geographical ‘Internet communities’ built up. Individuals began by ‘meeting’ over the Internet and swapping information, which eventually included musical items. It was during this time that the music industry began to take effective legal action, seeking to curb the increasingly common illegal use of copyrighted musical material, ‘posted’ on private websites.

With the availability of easily-transferrable MP3 files, a plethora of ‘tribute sites’ dedicated to artists of all kinds had sprung up. Tribute websites consisted of information, photographs and copyrighted music. One of the industry’s first notable actions against tribute websites was the Sony Corporation’s aggressive attempts to police illegal copies of copyrighted material by UK rock band Oasis. As a result, several sites dedicated to Oasis were shut down.\(^{76}\)

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\(^{74}\) Alderman, pp. 105-6

\(^{75}\) See the Internet Society website.

\(^{76}\) Alderman, pp. 84-6
The industry's showcase legal action was against the Napster website, which was founded in May 1999. Napster held a massive index of music available on the WWW, and functioned as a highly efficient 'gateway' to the computers of other individuals. The Napster program scanned the user's computer hard drive and noted the names of any MP3 files. The names and addresses of musical items were then held at the website's server computer. Through Napster, any individual could find a chosen item of music, regardless of its copyright status, and download it.

In mid-2000, at its height of popularity, Napster was estimated to have played host to 500,000 users per night. While Napster neither copied nor distributed music, copyright infringement was nevertheless alleged by the music industry. Assailed by lawsuits from both the mainstream music industry and its artists (US heavy metal band Metallica launched their own legal action against Napster in 1999), the website was gradually required to comply with legally defined regulations regarding copying and distribution. Napster continued to function until mid-2002, but with a severely curtailed playlist.

The music industry's own attempts to utilise the Internet for profit had proved problematic. In the 1990s, Universal Group's Geffen label experimented with offering an otherwise-unreleased item by US band Aerosmith on the Internet as a promotional move. The results were encouraging, but Universal, who were concerned over illegal copying in general, decided against continuing the practice.

Attempts by the industry to launch 'pay for download' websites failed, in the wake of the illegal, free private downloading provided by Napster and many other music-specific sites. Official 'online music sales' appeared in the RIAA figures for 1997, but by 2000, the

77 Ibid., pp. 103-4
78 Ibid., p. 108
80 Alderman, p. 28
81 Ibid., pp. 92-3 & pp. 132-7
'legitimate online music marketplace' had risen to only a 3.2% share of the total range of music outlets.\(^2\)

MP3 file swapping aside, home CD burning made the economic situation much worse for the industry. Illegal copying using the compact cassette had always left a slight drop in sound-quality on the duplicate. Digital technology was encoded on a disc, and read with a non-contact laser beam. As surely as the original sound on a CD could be played back thousands of times with no deterioration (unlike the vinyl disc or magnetic tape), that same pristine sound was reproduced on every CD copy made from it.

Any combination of individual tracks were available for collection and burning, whether by serious collectors over the Internet, or more informally from local individuals' CD collections. As a result of widespread illegal copying, the value of any mainstream artist’s back catalogue recordings understandably dropped. Moreover, the potential value of any artists’ new material also slumped, in view of the ease by which exact copies might be made and distributed.

Even more alarming for the industry economy was the ‘digital’ bootlegging of an artist’s live or unreleased studio material, which was far easier for the individual to access. Industrial scale counterfeiting of material became much easier, and there was serious loss of profit when a popular artist’s intended release was ‘scooped’, or ‘leaked’ to the public via the Internet before it was officially released.

For instance, in 2002, rap star Eminem’s much-anticipated album ‘The Eminem Show’, scheduled for public release on 3 June, was ‘leaked’ in its 20-track entirety from 11 May.\(^3\) The entire as-yet-unreleased album had been offered for private, illegal downloading in return for a fee of US$5. In the UK, ‘Heathen Chemistry’, a similarly anticipated new album by Oasis, was also made available earlier in the year, a full three months before its scheduled release.\(^4\)

Despite successive and widespread advertising campaigns attacking the practice, the illegal swapping of music over the Internet and home CD burning, perpetrated by an increasing

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\(^2\) See the Recording Industry Association of America website at: RIAA website at: www.riaa.org/
\(^3\) 'Eminem Blasts Internet Pirates', NME 25/05/02, p. 03
number of private individuals, continued unabated. Moreover, legal action by the music industry had failed to prevent the introduction to the consumer market of portable ‘Walkman’ style MP3 players, which were introduced during the first years of the new century.

*Mainstream Music Industry Economy and the Media*

While mainstream promotional power lay in the hands of the most successful record companies, the uncertain nature of the music business meant that even lavish promotion could still not guarantee a hit record. Promotional work alone could alert a potential consumer to the existence of a new recording or artist, but not actually force them to buy. Even with millions of dollars paid out for billboard space, radio play, music videos and printed advertisements, some records nevertheless remained ‘turntable hits’. These were recordings which were duly promoted and playlisted by top 40 stations, but which nevertheless failed to become lucrative chart hits.85

The means by which the consumers accessed new music have changed over time, but from the 1920s until the 1980s, it was radio which had most effectively ‘advertised’ music industry product. The systematic compiling of record sales charts was first instituted by the US music industry, during the 1950s, intended as a possible aid to predicting future consumer tastes.86 Weekly radio shows began to feature popular chart ‘countdowns’, and the sales chart became less a tool for predicting consumer taste than a successful advertising device. The industry standard ‘top 40’ radio countdown was adopted by US stations in the late 1960s, and, apart from a small selection of new material, the sales chart dictated commercial radio playlists.

Although albums were the most lucrative format, most successful mainstream artists’ careers were created and sustained through a series of top 40 hit singles.87 During the 1980s, the value to the music industry of one top 40 radio hit was estimated to be one million attendent

87 Dannen, p. 4
album sales. During the second half of the twentieth century, an artist’s mainstream success was most readily displayed through chart-informed radio play and weekly television music shows. After 1981, music videos became another part of the industry’s promotional machinery. The medium quickly became a crucial industry tool for building and sustaining artists’ media images and public profiles.

Whilst indicating current sales numbers of popular recordings, the content of the record charts were no more indicative of an artistic meritocracy than the degree of promotion from music industry itself. For financial reasons (such as a tax write-off), a record might receive little or no promotion from its parent company. While expedient for the company, this could prevent a single becoming a hit, or an artist’s mainstream career from succeeding.

By 1972, the popularity of rock music had greatly increased music industry profits. The industry generated more gross income in the US than movies, professional sport, and the theatre, combined. In the mid-1970s, mainstream consumer taste shifted strongly from rock to dance music, and ‘disco’ became the music industry’s most popular genre.

The disco phenomenon gave the global recording industry an unprecedented four consecutive years of record-breaking profits, during 1975-1978. Unlike rock music, most of disco’s key artists were solo vocalists, and the music itself could often be created from older chart hits, which were re-worked in the disco style. Largely studio-created, and needing fewer promotional tours, disco music was a boon to the music industry. The genre’s popularity with

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88 Ibid., p. 9
89 Frith 'The Popular Music Industry', p. 44
90 Ibid., p. 47
92 For example, La Belle Epoque’s version of ‘Black Is Black’, Santa Esmeralda’s ‘Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood’ and Anita Baker’s ‘Knock On Wood’ were all 1960s hits. There were many other examples during the era.
consumers was such that several ‘older’ artists experienced a sudden late-career return to the charts with new ‘disco’ hits.\textsuperscript{93}

Along with rapid corporatisation in the music industry, there came greater degrees of corporate and media bribery, manipulation and corruption. The competitive nature of the music business had brought about a highly restrictive entry process for artists to the mass media. During the 1970s, the amount of money needed by a company to ensure a particular record had the necessary media access escalated rapidly.

With industry competition jostling for space on radio playlists, the pressure to place material on the national airwaves became intense. Companies resorted to offering radio program directors and individual DJs illegal ‘inducements’ or ‘payola’ to include material for playlisting. In the interests of obtaining an ever-greater market advantage on the key promotional medium of radio, the largest music business companies began employing independent promotion workers to ‘lobby’ station programme directors.\textsuperscript{94} By 1978, the major labels had edged out most of even the largest of the second-tier, semi-independent labels to obtain crucial space on US top 40 radio playlists.

Many successful promotional personnel soon realised the power of their position, and in 1978 formed an association which they called the Network.\textsuperscript{95} Network members covered promotion for virtually the entire US mainstream radio market. Their influence became a prerequisite for hit singles though, of course, not even the Network’s promotion could guarantee success. What was certain, was that without the increasingly-expensive help of the Network, no record could succeed. Before long, it was apparent that the group’s power lay not in ensuring hit singles, but in preventing records from becoming hits.\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{93} Including Cher, the Bee Gees, the Rolling Stones, Rod Stewart, Barbra Streisand and others. Brewster, Bill and Frank Broughton Last Night A DJ Saved My Life (Headline Book Publishing, London, 2000), pp. 182-4
\textsuperscript{94} Dannen, p. 8
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., p. 11
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., p. 16
With massive profits flowing into the music industry, organised crime syndicates became involved at many levels.\(^{97}\) Moreover, music company amalgamation and independent promotion had left a relatively few large major companies to contest the remaining opportunities in the music marketplace. With budgetary inflation, the major industry companies’ costs for independent promotion had risen from a few hundred dollars a week in the early 1970s, to an estimated US$300,000 a week by the early 1980s.\(^ {98}\)

The degree of change in Baby Boomer generation’s consumer tastes for disco and rock had suddenly slumped during the late 1970s and early 1980s.\(^ {99}\) In 1979, the consumer appetite for disco was sated, and there was an global music industry recession which lasted until 1983. Newer, younger consumer-groups had emerged, and were demanding that product reflected their own style preferences, which was then new wave rock and technologically-enhanced r’n’b music.

The recession deepened when industry promotional budgets soared with the sudden popularity of music videos. An acronym of Music Television, MTV, went to air in the US on the 1 August 1981, featuring virtually nothing but music videos, 24 hours a day.\(^ {100}\) With its sudden commercial success, MTV and its imitators popularised the ‘music video’ format.\(^ {101}\) Promotional music videos had existed hitherto, but had been considered a relatively minor promotional tool by the industry.

Before MTV, industry music videos had lacked a regular, wide-spread media outlet. Apart from local, niche-audience specialist rock or pop shows, the television medium had offered little exposure for what were always expensive presentations.\(^ {102}\) From relative under-use, the music video medium suddenly became a necessary industry standard, with artistic and financial

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\(^{97}\) Ibid., p. 16
\(^{98}\) Ibid., p. 14
\(^{100}\) At first. Eventually, in the 1990s MTV branched out into other areas of television fare including cartoons, drama and ‘reality TV’.
\(^{101}\) Music videos, as opposed to simple promotional items in which the artist simply mimed the song, were productions in themselves, often presenting impressional enactments of the lyrical content.
implications for artists, radio and aural recordings themselves. Artists could be made into profitable ‘stars’, through what was essentially a music video based television ‘radio station’. With a popular video, the artist did not need to make as many live appearances, and nor did radio hold such a sway over the music promotional world.

With the genre’s popularity, music videos became ever more elaborate and expensive productions. To be competitive, industry-standard music videos utilised state-of-the-art directing, technology and editing, and were thus extremely expensive to make. By 1983, the average industry music video had cost US$20-30,000 to produce, while items like Michael Jackson’s ‘Thriller’ from the same year considerably raised the level of competition by costing US$600,000.103

During the music industry recession of the early 1980s, considerably fewer new bands or artists were taken on by the major companies, and label rosters were trimmed of the less commercially viable artists.104 The prevalent industry business solution was to rely on the market’s proven volume sellers, and promote them heavily. ‘Thriller’’s massive album sales and seven additional hit singles (with their music videos), meant that the other industry companies were forced to produce their own platinum-selling artists to compete.

The promotional expenditures required to compete in the mainstream music industry soon became astronomical. Coupled with other expenditures, ‘breaking’105 a chart single in the mid-1980s could cost record companies as much as US$500,000.106 In the post-disco music industry slump, some major companies reacted by re-routing money from their near-becalmed

\[102\] Frith ‘The Popular Music Industry’, p. 42
\[103\] Darren Brooks Michael Jackson: An Exceptional Journey: The Unauthorised Biography in Words and Pictures (Chrome Dreams, New Malden, 2002), p. 103
\[104\] Dannen, p. 5.
\[105\] Industry argot for ensuring the item received media airplay and prominence. See A Dictionary of Music Business Terms
\[106\] Dannen, p. 14
record divisions to invest in emergent television-related home entertainment systems like VCRs and video games.107

By the mid-1980s, the popularity of music videos had also contributed to an increasing ‘internationalisation’ of the mainstream music industry. Not only was the content of early MTV in the USA made up mainly of videos from the UK and Australia,108 but many artists began to take advantage of MTV’s promotional aspect, and toured the US. During the 1980s, the US music industry instigated protectionist legal action. As a result, immigration, copyright and trade laws were changed significantly. The wording on the application for an artist’s A1 work permit was changed from the relatively subjective ‘distinguished merit’ to the star-specific ‘pre-eminence’.109

Software sales

In the 1980s, CDs gradually displaced sales of the vinyl disc format. Along with music videos, industry product became spread over several media. Different artists thrived in specific media, and only a few were suitable for representation in all categories. Between 1979 and 1990, US sales of vinyl singles declined 86% (from 195.5 million to 27.6).110 The seven-inch single had disappeared from all but independent labels by the late 1980s, then by the middle of the 1990s the twelve-inch album became virtually obsolete as a standard industry format.111

The major industry awards were overwhelmingly dominated by artists from the industry ‘boom years’ of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1998, the ‘diamond’ (10,000,000) sales category was added to the standard 500,000 ‘gold’ and 1,000,000 ‘platinum’ thresholds.112 Overall, US band the Eagles topped the five ‘double diamond’ artists, with 26,000,000 recorded sales of

108 Street, p. 179.
110 Negus, p. 105
111 In the early twenty-first century there were still a certain percentage of 30cm vinyl format releases by volume artists for major labels. The format was still in significant consumer use. Many dance music releases appear in this format for the purposes of turntable-manipulation by professional DJs.
112 See the RIAA website.
‘Greatest Hits, 1971-1975’.\textsuperscript{113} The all-time top-selling recording artists were the Beatles (whose actual recording career had ended in 1970), with US album sales of 106,000,000.\textsuperscript{114}

Assailed by the potentially crippling issue of illegal copying, the music industry was also gravely unsettled during the late 1990s by a fundamental shift in consumer tastes. A series of industry signing deals involving previously-dependable volume artists resulted in drastically reduced investment returns. From the mid 1990s, conspicuously large deals involving Metallica (US$60m), Janet Jackson (US$70m) and REM (US$80m) were made by industry companies, in the expectation of the artists’ continued volume sales.\textsuperscript{115} In fact, all sales of new material by these artists slumped in the marketplace.

The ‘collapse’ of a volume-selling ‘star’ could have serious economic consequences. Mariah Carey, for example, had once been a volume artist who reliably sold 10 million albums per new release. She was signed to EMI (through the EMI-owned label UK label Virgin) early in 2001 for a reputed US$100m. ‘Glitter’, the artists’ subsequent EMI album release of new material, reportedly sold a mere two million copies.\textsuperscript{116}

Less than a year after signing Carey, her collapse in sales, coupled with popular industry conjecture that EMI was to buy her out of their contract at a terrific loss, precipitated a stock devaluation of an estimated 85 million pounds for Virgin’s parent company.\textsuperscript{117} Whether she stayed with the company or not, Carey, suddenly no longer a useful industry volume seller, had cost EMI heavily for music production, media promotion, and on the stock market.

According to RIAA sales figures, rock music was still the most popular genre at the turn of the twenty-first century, regardless of Internet file swapping, CD burning and collapsing sales. However, the genre had slipped from 32.6% to 24% of the market over the period 1996-2001. The pop music genre came in at second place with 12.1%, while Rap/hip-hop held 11.4% of

\textsuperscript{113} The others were ‘Led Zeppelin 4’ (1971), Pink Floyd’s ‘The Wall’ (1979), Michael Jackson’s ‘Thriller’ (1983), and Billy Joel’s ‘Best Of’ (1986). See the RIAA website.
\textsuperscript{114} See the What Is A Gold Record? website at: http://md.essortment.com/whatisgoldrec_rixf.htm
\textsuperscript{115} ‘Mariah Carey Costs EMI 85 Million’ Q no. 187 (02/02), p. 18
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
the market, and the r’n’b/urban classification 10.6%. Country music charted at 10.5%, jazz at 3.4%, and classical 3.2%.\textsuperscript{118}

In August 2002, an RIAA news report stated that US CD sales were down seven percent in the first six months of 2002, a situation directly attributed to individuals illegally downloading music over the Internet.\textsuperscript{119} Also, in mid-2002, some mainstream music industry companies made a significant if belated move to incorporate the Internet into their own selling system via subscription services, whereby a user would pay a regular fee for access to a company’s back catalogue.\textsuperscript{120}

The applications of digital technology had affected both the mainstream music industry and artists alike. By the early years of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, touring had become increasingly important as a means of generating profit for the artist. Illegal copying had begun to seriously affect the income of industry artists, to the point where live performances had again become a crucial source of profits. As had been the case before the industrialisation of music production, extensive touring had again become a necessity for artists, as opposed to being loss-making ‘advertising’ for recorded works produced by the mainstream music industry.\textsuperscript{121}

By the end of the twenty-year period under examination, the atmosphere of a live performance was the only major act by an artist which could not be captured and distributed, neither by the industry nor the individual.

Music culture and the mainstream music industry

The mainstream music industry owed its continued existence by observing and taking note of existing or emergent music cultures and consumer preferences, signing the artists concerned, and mass-marketing their products. Local music related sub-cultures produced all but the most

\textsuperscript{118} Official RIAA website figures.
\textsuperscript{119} Christchurch Press, 29/08/02 ‘Web blamed for drop in music sales’ (Reuters/Washington Post), C6
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} Kirsty Wynn ‘Hot tours after CD burning’, Sunday News (19/01/03), p. 09. Overall, the article concerned several world tours (which included New Zealand in the itinerary) by relatively major
‘manufactured’ of industry music product. Sub-cultures themselves, and the music and artists they favoured, were never a direct product of the music industry. While the industry catered to mass consumer tastes, it could not actually create consumer preferences. The artists and sub-cultural audiences which initially forged new musical forms and consumer-groups generated beyond the sphere of direct industry influence.\textsuperscript{122}

The industry marketed music to the consumer through the media, and delivered it through technology. The generation of music itself was mainly the province of the artist. Local artists continued to produce music regardless of whether mainstream success came or not. Amateur local artists wrote countless original songs, which may not ever have been performed for an audience. Local bands formed and split; solo artists prospered and retired. A very few artists carved out long careers by constantly providing culturally popular music.

Musician and theorist Brian Eno once put forward a vivid analogy of music culture as resembling a vast wild ‘garden’, where countless different species sprang up constantly, cross-pollinating with others, decaying and eventually providing ‘compost’ for newer species.\textsuperscript{123} In music culture, popularity and popular usage helped spread music, providing useful component elements for artists to utilise.\textsuperscript{124} In the case of music culture, musicians themselves performed the ‘cross pollination’ process, by combining and extrapolating new forms of music, from a vast ‘garden’ of past styles.\textsuperscript{125}

The mainstream music industry existed by marketing popular music, but therein lay one of its most serious operational conundrums. In order to market popular music, the industry had to provide, in bulk, material which consumers currently desired. At the same time, the industry sought to ensure continued profits through attempts to anticipate what consumers might desire

\textsuperscript{122} Wicke, p. 78
\textsuperscript{123} As summarised in Frith, ed. \textit{Facing The Music}, pp. 173-4. Also see the Enonet website at: http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
in the near future. To successfully market music with the minimum of promotional wastage, a consumers must ideally be sold plenty of what they presently desired.¹²⁶

While some artists enjoyed careers which lasted for decades, the music industry constantly required new, potentially popular artists and styles. A major challenge was to constantly monitor consumer preference, and to note significant trends when they appeared. Once a popular trend was confirmed, the competition was on for mainstream companies to sign artists and promote music, quickly capitalising on the trend. For a company to improperly introduce a radically new style or artist onto the mass market was to confront consumers with an unknown, and often unwanted quantity.

However, consumers inevitably grew tired of even the most popular genres, and simply turned away from consuming them. The popularity of disco music led to the available market eventually becoming swamped.¹²⁷ Disco rapidly lost popularity, and was eventually held by adherents of rock music and consumers of the emergent popular new wave and r'n'b genres to be the provincial music of societal fringe groups.¹²⁸ Disco had been an internationally-popular genre, which had appealed to an extremely wide market. In the 1980s, an era of greatly increased global communications, popular culture was spread much more effectively.

In music business practice, the ultimate goal was to cultivate products which could be marketed internationally, so as to enlarge the possible consumer ‘catchment areas’. The ‘globalisation’ business concept aimed at ‘tapping into’ the world’s music markets, and music which appealed across cultural lines was the ideal. To maximise the possibility of success, regional stylistic peculiarities were generally avoided (except perhaps as novelty ‘colour’), in place of forms with proven international consumer appeal.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Dannen, p.07
¹²⁸ Ibid.
¹²⁹ For example the nasal vocal twang in southern American country music or the slow, deep bass grooves of Jamaican ‘dub’ reggae.
‘Global oriented’ pop became the most lucrative. For example, in the 1970s and early 1980s, the highly commercial ‘Europop’ strand of popular music was best summed up by Abba, Swedes who wrote and performed in English.\textsuperscript{130} Later examples of internationally successful Europop artists included Norwegian band Aha in the early 1980s, and the Spice Girls from the UK in the late 1990s.

Abba aside, the majority of international chart hits were professionally written, and thereafter ‘customised’ for use by individual artists.\textsuperscript{131} Freelance songwriting and production partnerships provided mainstream companies with much of this brand of popular music. By the late 1990s, such teams often used computer ‘songwriting’ programs to generate chart material.\textsuperscript{132} These programs provided a basic song framework, which the writer used as a template, adding chords, melody and lyrics.\textsuperscript{133}

While commercial pop music may have encompassed many visual and aural styles, the most extreme form of industry-created music was termed ‘bubblegum’. The actual public image of the bubblegum artists was most often of a non-instrumentalist solo vocalist or set of vocalists, as in the case of the Spice Girls, Westlife or the Backstreet Boys, in the 1990s. Bubblegum music’s initial heyday as popular music came during the late 1960s and early 1970s, but the genre entered a second period of massive popularity in the late 1990s.\textsuperscript{134}

As with the majority of artists elevated to mainstream prominence by the ‘star system’, the careers of such industry-created bubblegum pop stars were most often very short. With little or no pre-existing following, and very little control over his or her own career, few such stars have managed to transcend typical ‘product life cycle’ of mainstream music. The necessarily extensive media promotion needed in order to launch such stars has often led to media over-

\textsuperscript{130} Though only briefly on the US market. ‘Dancing Queen’ in 1977 was their only major hit single there, while the European and Australasian markets provided Abba with several chart hits over a nine-year period.
\textsuperscript{131} Pattenden, p. 89
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Kim Cooper and David Smay, eds. Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth (Feral House, Los Angeles, 2001), pp. 01-5
exposure. After an initially major chart success, many pop artists had fallen into a pattern of rapid commercial decline.

As well as 'manufacturing' them, the industry also utilised artists with considerable pre-existing fan-bases. In fact, most mainstream record companies sought artists who had already shown some success at a local level. In this way, the company was given some indication that the artist had commercial potential. The initial outlet for a local artist who amassed some local success was usually a local independent label, since their initial style may have been too radical for a major company to risk taking up.

Independent labels had often been a first step for most popular artists who emerged during the rock era. When faced with the Beatles in 1963-4, for instance, major US company Capitol decided against mass-releasing their early records in that country, even though the label itself was owned by the band's UK record company EMI, and the songs themselves had been major UK chart hits. The first Beatles releases in the US instead appeared on two relatively small independent labels, Vee Jay and Swan.\(^{135}\)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a commercial rise of independent labels and their music culture were eventually solved by simply building the 'independent' period of a commercially-viable artist into the mainstream's own talent-spotting machine.\(^{136}\) That is, the mainstream industry allowed smaller local labels to find and, to a degree, develop a new artist before stepping in itself and making an offer to both artist and label.

The early career of US 'alternative' band Nirvana illustrated this method at work. In the late 1980s, when consumer tastes shifted towards harder-sounding music, industry-owned label Geffen began to cast around in the realm of the independents for possible genre signings. When Nirvana began to amass considerable popularity, their contract with local Seattle independent label Sub Pop was bought out by Geffen and the band were promoted into the industry.

\(^{135}\) Peter Brown and Steven Gaines The Love You Make (Pan, London, 1982), p. 95
\(^{136}\) Wicke, p. 124
mainstream. Meanwhile, the rights to re-release certain previously-released Nirvana material were retained by Sub Pop.\textsuperscript{137}

\textit{Music Culture and the Media}

Without a means to promote their products on a mass scale, the music industry could not reach the attention of consumers. Widespread audiences needed to be contacted if large-volume sales were to be continued, and the media was a necessary tool of the mainstream industry. In the US and UK, from the late 1940s, television presented a plethora of musical items and music-based variety shows. Along with local ‘do it yourself’ talent shows, television musical items were popular, and relatively inexpensive to produce. Television exposure proved extremely influential during the rock era, effectively publicising new trends in music. The careers of Elvis Presley (1950s), the Beatles (1960s) and the Sex Pistols (1970s), for instance, owed their initial mass-culture impact to crucial image-building television appearances.\textsuperscript{138}

Before MTV in 1981, the television medium had proven useful for aiding the creation of an artist’s public image. Television exposure usually came in the form of promotional guest appearances on shows, or as news reports, but was far outweighed in importance by conventional ventures such as published interviews, live tours and in-store personal appearances. However, once the music video format became a standard promotional prerequisite for ‘breaking’ an artist or a song, these other conventions became less important.

Music videos created the crucial widespread media image much more quickly, without the problem of arranging an appearance or a newsworthy event. For many companies, the video music era of the 1980s meant that many newer artists replaced older ones. In a development similar to that of silent film moving suddenly to sound, some previously popular musical artists failed to take advantage of, or were not compatible with, the music video medium.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{137} Gina Arnold \textit{Route 666: On The Road To Nirvana} (St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1993), pp. 414-150

\textsuperscript{138} Presley’s and the Sex Pistols’ appearances on US and UK TV respectively were provocative and controversial, the much-publicised Beatles’ 1964 ‘Ed Sullivan Show’ appearance commanded a phenomenal watching audience.

\textsuperscript{139} In large part, this often meant that they were not photogenic enough.
Through the rock genre's large-scale mainstream popularity, live shows had become unashamedly extravagant and theatrical by the mid-1970s. A live show from the era by David Bowie, Alice Cooper or Pink Floyd was part musical performance, part theatrical experience. Theatrical specialists were brought in to design elaborate sets and costumes, complex choreography, and lighting effects. Backing musicians were often visually de-emphasised, in favour of the show's theatrical element.

The content and form of rock music offered for sale by the industry changed along with the preferences of its most lucrative consumers. In the 1950s, rock music and lyrics were composed mainly by professional songwriters, using a relatively narrow set of song forms and content.\textsuperscript{140} Lyrics were similarly direct and simple. They could have been overtly humorous, or guardedly carnal, but there was otherwise little 'poetic' satire or metaphor involved.\textsuperscript{141}

During the 1960s, widespread countercultural ideas, exploring social and personal identity and experimentation, were caught up in the production and commercialisation of popular music. Bob Dylan's and the Beatles' 'abberant readings'\textsuperscript{142} of rock and folk music produced richer, more widely-ranging hybrids for consumers. For instance, the 'British blues boom' of the early 1960s produced the popular consumer cult of the rock musician as star instrumentalist.\textsuperscript{143}

Musicians such as Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and others became star instrumentalists during the 1960s just as earlier musicians such as Charlie Parker or Louis Armstrong had during jazz music's long-held popular hegemony. 'Virtuoso' rock musicians became commercially viable, and began new sub-genres, which were widely imitated and approximated.

From a fifteen-year period of steadily-rising popularity, and with some initial industry reticence, the early 1970s were a time for rock's own commercial and cultural hegemony. The

\textsuperscript{140} Harris, p. 05
\textsuperscript{141} Idem, pp. 03-7
\textsuperscript{142} Frith, Facing The Music, p. 178
commercialisation of rock music and its culture became something of a two-edged sword for consumers and performers alike. On the one hand, culturally formed notions of artistic ‘freedom’ (the right to make music without the dictates of commercial concerns) clashed ideologically with the realities of the music business.

While rock music and culture still held something of the patina of countercultural ‘outsiderdom’ it had gained during the 1960s, the form’s eventual commercial popularity in the early 1970s made it the ‘show business’ success story of its time. Generally speaking, when a new genre became popular, the music industry moved quickly to supply consumers with product. As a result, there was soon a surfeit of ‘rock music’ available, and the individual consumer could pick and choose among artists. In this way, popularity encouraged rock music culture to divide into a myriad of sub-genres.

With time and mainstream popularity, rock became a cultural reference to social ‘rebellion’, rather than being closely linked with genuine social turbulence itself. After reflecting radical social developments in youth culture during the 1960s, rock’s mainstream popularity thereafter eventually made producing it less of an act of cultural ‘rebellion’, and more of a realistic career option. Long careers became possible in rock music, if not as an artist, then as a sound engineer, driver or equipment specialist. Rock’s popularity (the ‘availability’ of material through media formats) gave artists further inspiration to split the form and content of rock music, generating a myriad of sub-genres.

Culturally, rock music had by the 1980s become a familiar, ‘everyday’ form of music. The era 1981-2001 produced no over-arching social dilemmas to engage nor solidify popular youth opinion in the same way as had the 1960s. The original consumers of the genre had grown up, and changed their purchasing habits. New consumers had arisen, and had chosen to continue buying rock music.

143 Charles Shaar Murray Crosstown Traffic: Jimi Hendrix and the Post-War Rock'n'Roll Revolution (Faber and Faber, London, 1989), p. 43
144 One might have build up a large collection over time, and have bought less music in middle age. One might simply lose interest, or re-prioritise one’s consumer habits.
After appearing during a turbulent, youth-centred era, time inevitably affected rock’s consumers. With all its permutations, rock became a genre one could listen to all one’s life. The rock record-buying audience of the 1980s and 1990s was a wider and generally older one than during the 1960s or 1970s. In contrast to younger consumers, older consumers tended not to patronise rock venues nor attend concerts as regularly, nor did they purchase as much material by newer artists.

While reducing costs by replacing musicians, the technological changes in the music industry during the 1980s and 1990s had an adverse effect on the economic sphere of music culture. These same events also had a considerable effect on the music culture of rock. On a cultural level, the cult of the virtuoso ‘master musician’ was severely eroded during the early 1980s, when programmable digital instruments became available.145

In the post-disco era, newer forms of popular music emerged which required neither traditional instrumentation nor musicians. Music video brought attention to ‘synth pop’ in the early 1980s, which often required just a duo of vocalist and instrumentalist to produce the music.146 Similarly, rap and hip-hop from the same era utilised stand-alone vocalists with the backing music provided by ‘turntablists’, who manually manipulated vinyl records on a player. From the 1980s and during the 1990s, much popular computer-composed dance music required only a single composer to write, program and record the work.

As a result of changes in technology, rock music culture in the early-to-mid 1980s shifted from being a primarily ‘live band’ experience, to include elements of technologically-driven dance music culture. Other developments which helped move consumer focus from live performances were the introduction of multi-format releases, and of technology capable of copying it.

Prior to the 1980s, mainstream rock artists made an album which they then ‘toured’, featuring the new material in live performance, as a promotional exercise. Volume-selling rock

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146 Yazoo, Soft Cell, the Associates etc.
bands such as Deep Purple or Led Zeppelin issued a full-length album of new material around every eighteen months, and usually made at least a major US tour (if not a world one) for promotion.

Technological changes produced necessarily different strategies by companies and artists for the preservation of artistic and commercial careers. Led Zeppelin, for example, produced a relatively prolific nine albums, during the eleven years between 1968 and 1979. This body of work comprised eight studio-recorded items composed of new material, and one live collection. By contrast, popular 1990s band Metallica produced five albums, and two shorter-length EPs, in the nine years from 1983 until 1991. ‘Rap-metal’ band Rage Against The Machine released only five albums from 1992 until 2000.

It was not only artists working in mainstream ‘heavy metal’ music who were slowing their output. By contrast with later pop artists, Abba had been extremely prolific. During 1974-81, the band released seven albums of new material, along with two ‘greatest hits’ compilations. In the 1990s, similar chart pop groups like the Spice Girls made a five-year career (1996-2000) from just three albums of new material. The difference between the decades was the formats in which their material was made available to the consumer. Both Led Zeppelin and Abba’s material was available only as vinyl records or compact cassettes.

Music culture was directly affected by technological developments. By the mid-1990s, new music industry product was available to the consumer as tape cassettes, CDs, music videos, DVDs, or a series of MP3 files. All of these later formats were easily stored, exchanged and copied by the consumer of the 1990s. The 80-minute CD format extended the length of the average release, so that even without illegal copying, the rock consumer effectively received more new music, less often. The end result of this process of technological change was that volume selling rock artists lost previously possible revenue, over-exposed through the variety of formats.
Potentially, everything ever recorded was available to the Internet-connected PC owner, from pre-release music by current mainstream artists, to unauthorised bootleg recordings of long-dead musicians, right down to the muffled ‘bedroom’ recordings of extremely obscure amateur musicians.

By the end of the 1990s, with widespread illegal home copying and trading of music over the Internet, mainstream artists themselves were caught between rigid company contract demands for material and illegal consumer cost-cutting activity by consumers. In 2001, a pressure group named the Recording Artists Coalition was formed by ex-Eagle Don Henley and solo artist Sheryl Crow, in order to address artists’ rights in the Internet era.¹⁴⁷

In February 2001, this group (the RAC) organised four ‘Concerts For Artists Rights’ in California and New York, to raise public awareness of the organisation’s grievances.¹⁴⁸ These concerns included firmly-policed legal Internet rights for artists’ intellectual property, and a relationship with the industry which would be more a ‘partnership’ than the current ‘employer-employee’.

Further RAC demands included an official crackdown on payola, and the industry standardisation of seven-year work contracts similar to most other US employees. This last concern was crucial, in that most volume artists had signed the usual long-serving industry standard seven-album contract, which could easily stretch into a binding period of fifteen or even twenty years, and provide a very real threat of media over-exposure.¹⁴⁹

Unfortunately for the RAC, theirs was a losing battle. Many of the artists involved were ‘older’ ones, who were well-known names but no longer productive volume sellers. What little leverage they did possess was inevitably undermined by industry profit concerns. There were new contracts drawn up, but they went mainly to new artists. Moreover, these newer contracts

¹⁴⁷ "These Artists Are Revolting..." in Q no. 189 (04/02)
¹⁴⁸ Ibid.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid.
invariably included clauses containing specified ‘option’ periods during which the parent company could decide to continue with the artist or drop them from the roster.\textsuperscript{150}

By the 1990s, consumer tastes for popular music’s many styles ranged over several ‘sub-audiences’. In the opening years of the 21st century, there was a popular move back to ‘garage’ rock, played by ‘traditional’ rock bands.\textsuperscript{151} Since the late 1960s, ‘popular music’ had included various sub-genres of ‘hard’ rock music. In the 1970s, Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple and others were popular, as were several hard rock/metal US bands in the 1980s. In the early 1990s, ‘alternative music’ became a mainstream genre, with the market success of Nirvana, Soundgarden, Oasis, Suede and others.

\textit{Conclusion}: The mainstream music industry was a mass-market, cultural and economic enterprise which relied on popular culture to produce its products. It required popular artists and a resonant culture to provide profits, technology to make and distribute recordings, and a constantly-evolving economic system to ensure its continued survival. Cultural factors which significantly influenced the mainstream included the growth of rock, the rise and sudden cessation of disco and the ageing of target consumer groups.

In spite of attempts to control the illegal copying of copyrighted material, it would seem that the mainstream music industry gradually lost significant control over the sphere of technology, since recordable formats were first marketed. The situation intensified from the late 1990s, when public Internet access allowed consumers to illegally copy and distribute industry material on a vast scale. Eventually, the live concert experience remained the only non-recordable, non-reproducible musical event.

The in-home ability to record and replay musical events via new technology eventually afforded a listener access to the entire history of the recorded sound. These developments in recording technology in turn influenced the culture of music, for artists and consumers alike.

\textsuperscript{150} Negus, pp. 135-8
\textsuperscript{151} The Datsuns (NZ), White Stripes (US), Vines (Australian), Hives (Scand), and others.
Consumers were presented with as much music as they could assimilate, while the mainstream music industry struggled to staunch a slump in profits caused by illegal copying and the possibility of artist over-exposure.

With key technological developments such as home computers and CD writers, by 2001 the mainstream music industry had lost much of its market control over copyrighted material, save for an item's initial sale. Whilst this was an alarming situation for the industry, it was a boon for consumers. The trials of the mainstream music industry amounted to concern over a loss of profits. However, in the vast music culture 'garden', beyond the concerns of corporate globalisation and volume sales, local music cultures produced a plethora of 'alternative' artists and styles, some of which stood in ideological defiance of music industry business and practice.

Definitions:

The chronological context for this thesis were the years 1981-2001, but both alternative and mainstream music were both grounded in the ‘rock music era’, which had its beginnings in the 1950s. Discussion will then begin by providing an alternate context to the ‘rock era’ than that of the mainstream, within which the fundamental concepts which defined alternative music will be firmly fixed. Alternative music itself will then be discussed and defined as a key feature of the time period.

Since it was first employed, by rock journalists in the late 1960s, a series of cultural and economic developments within the music industry changed the possible definitions and meanings for the term ‘alternative’. Arguably at its most specific in the early and mid 1980s, by the 1990s, the term had encompassed a range of styles ‘as variegated as a UN conference.’

According to sociologist Roy Shuker, ‘alternative music’ as a musical genre term was first used in the late 1960s, describing a more ‘grass-roots’ and therefore ‘authentic’ genre of rock music than that of the mainstream. Common alternative ‘attitudes’ included ‘an attention to internal, personal demons rather than public sphere political concerns.’ However, it was not until the early 1980s that a widespread groundswell of local artists and labels emerged and formed networks which acted as a genuinely alternative system to the mainstream music industry.

152 The term ‘alternative’, as applied to rock music of the late 1960s, first surfaced in rock music/lifestyle related magazines e.g. New Musical Express (UK), Creem, Rolling Stone (US).
153 The possible definitions of ‘alternative music’ came to include past mainstream music. For instance, the Spin Alternative Record Guide, ed. Eric Weisbard and Craig Marks (Vintage books, New York 1995) an American reference volume published in 1995, includes in its listings such puzzling inclusions as quintessential 1970s mainstream pop act Abba, 1970s-1980s pop-metal acts Cheap Trick, Kiss and 1980s pop-rock avatar Prince. This particular selection of ‘alternative music’ would not have been made in the mid-1980s, when Prince was a regularly-charting mainstream act, and the massive success of Abba et al were still fresh in consumers’ memories.
On a fundamental level, alternative music was less a single identifiable musical form, a 'non-commercial' mindset among musicians, or an umbrella collective/marketing term, than a shifting alignment of all three. Different eras in music culture have provided changing perspectives on the term. During the years 1981-2001, the borders of alternative music were often ill-defined. On the one hand, highly experimental rock and 'free noise' artists with minimal commercial potential in the 1980s and 1990s were certainly 'alternative' choices to popular mainstream material. On the other hand, the term was also applied to some volume selling mainstream artists of the same period, such as REM, Soundgarden or Nirvana.

The mainstream music industry was an inherently conservative entity, in that it aimed to provide forms, genres and content which were proven to be popular. The mass-production and 'manufacturing' of popular music might best be considered as less an art than a lucrative craft. Until the early 1990s, alternative music commanded a fraction of the consumers which mainstream artists attracted.

If music culture is indeed a kind of uncontrolled, natural 'garden', then the mainstream music industry reaps only that which grows best and rears the highest. Of necessity, the industry also grows its own, carefully tended stock, as in the case of pop stars in the 'star system'. This left a vast amount of 'other' growth which remained unreaped, growing 'wild'. Occasionally, a 'wild' hybrid became substantial enough for the mainstream industry to consider cultivating and eventually 'reaping'.

The shifting meanings of 'alternative' music made accurate definitions problematic to track and define. Throughout the two decades 1981 to 2001, certain musical genres fitted the term better than others. First and foremost, if a genre was actually formulated within the mainstream, as in the case of the bubblegum chart-pop stars, then it could not have been considered 'alternative'. It was a product of the purely commercial music industry, with its

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156 Such as those whose work was released on South Island independent label Xpressway during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Artists included Bruce Russell (Dead C), Alistair Galbraith (Plagal Grind), Peter Gutteridge, the Terminals and others.

157 Frith, 'Pop music' in *The Cambridge Companion To Popular Music*, p. 96
high-pressure pop-charts, volume sellers, and mass marketing. By contrast, alternative music was a part of that great wilderness garden which flourished beyond the control of the industry.\textsuperscript{158}

Along with this ‘natural’ system of music production, there was also an ‘alternative attitude’ among local artists and consumers which lies at the core of any attempt at definition. The vast bulk of local performing and recording artists were participating in a cultural practice as much as plying a trade. They did not have the benefit of mainstream industry hype, professional management or multi-media access to begin or sustain their careers, yet they continued to write, perform and record music, regardless. At its most ‘militant’ during the early to mid 1980s, much of the alternative music produced was part of an ‘independence ideology’, which held ‘playing to one’s own rules’ as a paramount tenet.

This artistic attitude flourished amongst some local musicians. It was also present in the attendant independent record labels which marketed non-mainstream music, and the audiences which consumed it. Outside of mainstream considerations, alternative artists succeeded or failed on terms dictated by their own aesthetic and commercial values, along with those of their consumers. These values were in many cases diametrically opposed to the expectations of a mainstream music industry concerned purely with commercial success.

The establishment of independent, local alternative music scenes often gave the participants the feeling of ‘championing a cause’. Every time they bought a locally-recorded item or saw an artist perform, it was a more ‘political’ act than consuming mainstream products, which were available to all consumers, throughout the country.\textsuperscript{159}

Occasionally, ‘alternative’ artists or labels achieved a degree of national and even international success within the over-arching mainstream, as in the case of REM, Nirvana or

\textsuperscript{158} For a condensed history of ‘indie’ (i.e. alternative) music, see the Indierock webpage at http://www.soyouwanna.com/site/syws/indierock/indierock2.html.

New Zealand’s Chills or Datsuns. Most often, however, they did not. The vast majority of local alternative bands simply formed, ran their course and eventually split up. The musicians retired to take up more dependable means of income, while alternative music consumers moved on to other available product.

When alternative artists signed to major labels and became volume sellers for mainstream music industry companies (as was the case with REM for the Warners label in the late 1980s), the term ‘alternative music’ had fundamentally changed its meaning. While a defining ‘alternative attitude’ could well have still been present within the artists’ work (depending upon the level of artistic control allowed by their contract with the company), their material had become ‘alternative music’ as defined by the mainstream.

By the early 1990s, ‘alternative music’ had become simply another industry genre classification, an industry concept for a commodity which could be marketed for a specific consumer group. Artists had become ‘alternative music’ in a commercial sense, and not a genuine alternative to mainstream industry product or practice.

Simply put, for an artist or genre to be considered ‘alternative’ in the definition offered by this thesis, the music in question must be a genuine ‘alternative’ to the industry-produced, popular mainstream material. Alternative music is here best described not as a specific musical genre, local scene, nor set of artists, but a culturally and economically independent system of artists and music culture. Alternative music, then, was not merely a commercial nor an occupational pastime, it is in fact a cultural activity. As such, it was one which was influenced by, but independent of, the mainstream music industry.

While on the surface there would seem to be clear distinctions of popularity and form between mainstream and alternative music, to accurately define the nature of the mainstream and its practices is far easier than trying to do the same for ‘alternative’ music. As such, the

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160 The Chills achieved a major critical profile in the UK and US during the 1980s and 1990s, while the Datsuns became popular in the UK during the early years of the 21st Century.
nature of alternative music remains best defined in comparison with that of the mainstream music industry, at specific, key moments in time.

With this 'backdrop' in place, it is apparent that the various socio-economic and technological forces which influenced the mainstream also had an effect on the world of alternative music beyond it. In a non-mainstream system, which did not necessarily hold economic factors as primary concerns, the effects of changing technology, economic factors and music culture often differed significantly from the mainstream experience.

The Rock Era

Even before the rock era began, a distinction could be drawn between 'alternative' and 'mainstream' music. In 1914, the ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) organisation was formed in the USA. ASCAP was a private organisation, formed by a circle of key copyright holders in order to collect due royalties and enforce copyright law. ASCAP created a catalogue of its works, which was made available to the public for a fee, under license.\(^{161}\) With the most popular copyright holders represented together, ASCAP's hold over the then-dominant radio media grew so dominant in the media marketplace that BMI (Broadcast Music International), a rival organisation was formed in 1939.

When compiling a rival catalogue of copyrighted material, BMI sought out popular but non-mainstream music, which ASCAP had traditionally ignored. Composer/performers in idioms such as 'hillbilly' (country) and 'race' (black) music had found achieving membership in the ASCAP organisation difficult.\(^{162}\) When the radio industry boycotted the ASCAP catalogue during 1940-1, BMI and its 'alternative' artists were the beneficiaries. A vastly wider range of music was heard over US airwaves during this time, and the situation contributed immeasurably to the post-war popularity of formerly non-mainstream genres.\(^{163}\)

\(^{162}\) These included such notable figures as Gene Autry (country) and Jelly Roll Morton (Jazz). See *Ibid.*, pp. 61-70
\(^{163}\) *Ibid.*, p. 115
Both country music and r’n’b became crucial raw material for the early rock music era. From its beginnings in the early 1950s, rock music went through many permutations, until stylistic diversification had largely dissolved the term’s once-specific meanings. From its outset, the rock music genre had found its most provocative social resonance in referencing society’s ‘rebels’.

The first identifiable ‘rebel rockers’ were teenagers during the 1950s. Many of the first mass group of rock music consumers were in fact ‘pre-Baby Boomers’, born before or during the Second World War. The distinctive music consumed during the 1950s by this mainly teenage group was produced almost entirely by adults, born during the 1930s and even beforehand.\(^{164}\) Large-scale youth-oriented sub-cultures, inextricably associated with forms of rock music, had also emerged during the 1950s.

The associated young consumers of rock also favoured distinct entertainment, fashions and attitudes which often challenged established societal norms and values. The 1950s ‘rocker’ culture favoured motorcycles (and an attendant identification with the ‘outlaw biker’ stereotype), along with the most basic, simple and raucous rock’n’roll music. The norms and values of new teenage sub-cultures were conceived and reinforced both from ‘without’ by media depiction and popular opinion, and ‘within’ by the sub-culture itself engaged in the simultaneous act of self-creation and reaction to ‘outside’ perceptions\(^{165}\).

While many youth sub-cultures were associated with the rock music genre, not all teenagers who consumed it were fully-committed ‘rebel rockers’. The rock genre appealed strongly to the general young consumer, because it was new, vital and audience-specific with regard to its content.\(^{166}\) Rock music became commercially popular, but for some time held the position of an alternative to the jazz music, movie soundtracks and show tunes which the mainstream music industry marketed to older consumers.

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\(^{164}\) Principally Elvis Presley (b. 1935), Chuck Berry (1926), Little Richard (1932), Buddy Holly (1936).

\(^{165}\) Frith, Simon 'The Framing of Rock' in Rock and Popular Music. p. 203

\(^{166}\) Many lyrics followed the basic ‘sex and drugs and rock and roll’ concerns of the young.
The ‘Baby Boom’ birth era ended around 1964, giving a distinct twenty-year demographic ‘bulge’, which defined a distinct generational period. As earner-consumers, the Boomers had begun to come of age during the late 1950s and early 1960s. The youth consumer audience for rock music were mostly gainfully employed or university students in the 1960s, and their distinctive tastes became the mainstream music industry’s primary focus. This was the first generational group which both formulated and consumed its own popular music. From the 1960s onward, key rock avatars were increasingly of a similar age as their audience, and their work spoke to peers as much as consumers.\(^{167}\)

The ‘first wave’ of rock’s teenage consumers were those born before or during World War Two, and though a significant market force, they were relatively few in number and essentially non-political in nature. The Boomers’ eventual music market dominance from the 1960s onwards begat massive cultural changes as the decades progressed. During the 1960s, rock’n’roll evolved into ‘rock’, via the crucial syntheses with previously-existing forms such as blues and folk provided by the Beach Boys, Beatles, Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones and others.

As the genre’s consumer quotient grew in numbers and influence, so did the range of rock music and its related youth sub-cultures. By the mid 1960s, a significant degree of commonly-held values amounted to a near-politicisation of youth in general. By the late 1960s, newer cultural references had emerged for rock to both use and reinforce to its identifying consumer group: the gypsy, the cowboy, the biker and others.\(^ {168}\) The Boomers were beginning to dictate music industry policy regarding popular music, but sourcing and marketing required newer strategies.

Compared with easily-accessible chart pop, rock was ‘alternative’ music. The genre was available mainly on albums, rock music was not generally heard on the top 40 singles chart format. As the youth music consumer audience aged beyond adolescence, so did their popular artists, and the pop charts no longer held the lyrical depth nor musical challenges needed to

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\(^{167}\) The Beatles, Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix and others.

\(^{168}\) Kier Keightly ‘Reconsidering Rock’ in The Cambridge Companion To Rock And Pop, p. 125.
engage the older listener. Rock music was a ‘serious’ alternative to chart pop, containing key consumer-specific sub-cultural ‘texts’, which continued to challenge established societal codes.

In an era when concepts such as ‘culture break’ and ‘generation gap’ had gained a weighty resonance, rock music was held to be an integral part of an apparent ‘youth revolution’. 169 Rock music’s popularity with the young and its initial marginality as a commercial and cultural genre in mainstream industry terms gave it a further connotation of ‘struggle’ in the 1960s, inextricably entwined with the ‘youth issues’ of the day. 170 Compared to pop, rock was a more ‘political’ cultural form. It was generated by and for the young.

The 1960s were, of course, an era of unique social-political conditions which could not re-occur. Protest against domestic social conditions, the war in Vietnam, issues of racial and sexual freedoms were articulated by rock music as a youth-specific art-form which reflected their changing culture and voiced their opinions. 171 By the closing years of the 1960s the Baby Boomers numbered amongst them an unprecedented number of college students, and by the mid-1970s it was typically a well-educated or wage-earning under 25 year old who consumed the vast quantity of rock music 172.

However, as much as the late 1960s had appeared to generate an internationally vast youth-oriented ‘counterculture’, which ostensibly amounted to a social ‘revolution’ against older forms and ideals, both the social ‘revolution’ itself and rock music’s rise to mainstream popularity was a continuation of general economic and societal norms. 173 Popular musical forms, economic transactions and artists’ public careers continued, and while Western society gained some colourful new subcultures, it was not fundamentally transformed by the Boomers.

169 Wicke, p. 81
170 Keightly, Ibid.
171 John Strasbaugh Rock 'Till You Drop: The Decline From Rebellious to Nostalgia (Verso, New York, 2001), p. 81
172 Dannen, p. 74
Even when scathingly critical, the most radical sub-cultures of the era were still inextricably tied to mainstream society.\textsuperscript{174}

Sub-cultures were neither entirely self-contained groups, nor entirely opposed to mainstream culture. They were, in fact, dependent upon mainstream culture itself for their very existence. For example, a university may have played host to societies with avowedly socialist agendas, but these groups were seldom ever in a position to actually effect fundamental societal change, and their members had to eventually find some position within society.

While they might have attracted the attention of the law and been suppressed, most radical groups’ very existence was dependent upon a stable society, for providing the environment in which a relatively large degree of social radicalism could appear and prosper.\textsuperscript{175} Rock bands, venues, specialist clothing and record stores, and ‘underground’ newspapers were still essentially capitalist ventures, and even radical sub-cultures such as the Hell’s Angels or Weathermen were tied to mainstream society by chains of culture, technology and commerce.\textsuperscript{176}

The most prevalent ‘alternative’ amongst youth sub-cultures in the 1960s were the largely middle-class ‘hippies’ who had emerged mid-decade on both sides of the Atlantic. The hippies held provocative attitudes and led non-mainstream lifestyles, which could include ‘dropping out’ of university or organised society, blurred gender-roles and the concept of non-binding ‘free love’.

While relatively prevalent, hippies were not the only music-related sub-culture of the 1960s, and nor were their attitudes and ideas followed universally. By the late 1960s, the hippies’ own youthful antithesis had appeared, in the form of the largely working-class ‘skinhead’ sub-culture in the UK. This original skinhead movement favoured short hair, drab, functional clothing and West Indian reggae music.\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid, pp. 11-12
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid, p. 12
Eventually, members of the many semi-radical youth sub-cultures which constituted the loosely-defined counterculture left their radicalism behind to become part of the economic and cultural mainstream themselves. Meanwhile, by the early 1970s, rock consumers had become a crucial market for mainstream companies. With the ageing of a consistently loyal consumer audience, as well as a constantly regenerating younger one, rock had risen to a sudden widespread popularity. In order to cater for this major trend, mainstream companies were pressed to sign rock artists, but were left at something of a loss when trying to ‘read’ the mass youth culture.

At first, the major companies experienced great difficulty in discerning which of a plethora of artists would prove the most lucrative in the marketplace. In response, industry companies could only employ the ‘hit and miss’ approach which had consistently characterised the music business. Over the late 1960s and early 1970s, major companies in the industry signed up several artists, produced and distribute many subsequent recordings, and observed the consumer response in the marketplace, taking note of any significant points of comparison between those who proved successful, and others less so.174

As a popular mainstream genre distinction, rock music rose to prominence in the late 1960s, with the Beatles’ ‘Sgt. Pepper’ (1967) generally regarded as the first of rock’s album-oriented ‘serious’ works. In 1969, sales of rock albums in the UK outgrew those of pop singles for the first time,179 and in the same year, Premier Talent Agency, the first booking agency formed especially to ‘break’ rock acts was established in New York.180 Pop music continued to be consumed in the main by the very young, who were catered for by a rapid-fire series of industry-‘manufactured’ artists, whilst rock bands like Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin and Yes sold consecutive albums to an older age group.

As it had been for past adult genres like classical and jazz music, the lucrative 40-minute vinyl album format better suited rock music’s sometimes lengthy extemporisations and

178 Macan, p. 18
179 Stump, p. 75
compositions. Rock's popularity as a consumer genre led to companies allowing much leeway to artists to regarding production and content of their music and artwork. The album became rock music's primary medium, wherein musicians were free to create long-form compositions or build a complex narrative from song-cycles. However, having found a likely 'hybrid' growing wildly in the great music culture 'garden', the industry was set several problems with how best to utilise it.

While rock had appeared as a popular youth-oriented music, there had been some problems for the mainstream music industry with effective marketing of the genre. Rock was a 'countercultural' music, with a constituent market which generally distrusted the aims and designs of the 'older order'. Nevertheless, by the early 1970s, many mainstream record labels had signed several artists in the rock music genre.

As an artistic practice, the 'outsider' dimension and cultural position of rock music could never be fully regained, once it became a volume-selling mainstream genre in the 1970s. The popularity of large-scale 'festivals' over the late 1960s and early 1970s had increased rock's mainstream commercial standing, with successful spin-off in film and recording projects. Individual artists who performed at popular festivals often benefited from generating interest in their own material, including 'back catalogue' recordings. Given its strong connotations of youth, rebellion and freedom, and a general sound and aesthetic, rock music soon spread into other, more 'traditional' media, appearing in theatre scores and on film and television soundtracks.

As early as the late 1960s, mainstream culture had begun to produce items which tapped into rock's vital 'countercultural' semiotics. Popular, genre-splicing 'rock operas' appeared, including 'Hair', 'Godspell' and 'Jesus Christ, Superstar'. Several rock-referencing, youth-

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180 Ibid., p. 201
181 Rick Kennedy and Randy McNutt Little Labels, Big Sound (Indiana University Press, Indiana, 1999) p. xxi
182 Principally Woodstock (1969), but there were others.
183 Stump p. 59
oriented TV shows include ‘The Monkees’ (effectively an ersatz Beatles, running from 1966 to 1968), ‘The Partridge Family’ (1970s), ‘S Club 7 In Miami’ (1990s), and many others.

In addition to providing ‘ready made’ soundtrack material for movies, rock music was also eventually utilised as themes for mainstream television shows, even those intended for children. Rock also accompanied commercial advertisements and sports show footage, and was utilised in supermarket/office foyer/workplace as ambient ‘muzak’. Other applications included video game accompaniment.

By the mid-1970s, rock’s rise into mainstream popularity eventually resulted in the establishment of a ‘rock aristocracy’, comprising the genre’s major volume-selling artists. In a climate of corporate mergers within the mainstream music industry, lesser-earning rock artists began to be dropped from major labels as unproductive. Rock’s cultural and economic popularity during the 1970s were revealed in the mainstream music industry’s sales, and certain key sub-genres, including heavy metal and singer-songwriter acoustic music, proved the most profitable.

The music industry benefited from shedding the non-productive artists and being able to concentrate full support on fewer, more profitable cases. For those remaining mainstream rock artists, the artistic freedom from major record company expectations, which had existed during the early years of the mass signings, began to diminish. In a strategy to ensure that volume sales continued, less leeway was given by the company to their rock artists with regard to producers, artwork, and, ultimately, their musical output.

Rock had been an ‘alternative’ music. When the term was coined, the reviewer was referring to rock music itself, since there was as yet no widespread, coherent alternative to the business system nor the material marketed by the mainstream music industry. Even the bootleg manufacturers were a reflection of the mainstream industry, in that only the material by the

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184 A term which basically means ‘background music’, the aural equivalent of wallpaper. The form was intended as an enhancement to a given environment.
185 Stump, pp. 109-10
186 Macan, pp. 190-1
most popular artists was pressed. Independent labels existed, but these merely provided more rock music for consumers, who also purchased mainstream material. There was a specific audience for rock, but it was a dominant commercial form, and, besides bootleg operations, there were no ‘alternative’ industry systems, nor a viable audience for non-mainstream material.

In the early 1970s, despite rock music’s commercial popularity, the genre still held enough of the ‘outsider’ element to provoke and even alarm mainstream society, while proving a success in the marketplace. Rock had risen to prominence through being an alternative to mainstream material, but by the mid-1970s it was in danger of losing that distinction. Sub-genres such as glam-rock were a relative commercial success, yet still attracted controversy, by referencing homosexuality and transvestism. Likewise, followers and practitioners of heavy metal music found a resonant taboo in the ‘occult’ imagery offered by artists such as Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin.

Rock continued to reference the ‘outsider’, but successful artists were working within a system which owed allegiance to profits alone. David Bowie, Black Sabbath, AC/DC and a host of others had all used provocative imagery and musical ideas, but all were ultimately aiming at a conventional success within the mainstream music industry. Along with acoustic ‘soft rock’ and the purest pop music, the rock stars’ work was one strand among many commercially-viable forms which had been signed by mainstream companies as part of the usual music industry operation.

Rock music was still close to the forefront of youth sub-cultural organisation as both a common cultural ‘glue’ and as a medium for provocation and articulation. The popularity of rock music brought further sub-cultural and stylistic diversification throughout the 1970s. Rock was no longer a new genre, and some of its forms had become fixed as mainstream material, while others were becoming more extreme and non-commercial.
During rock’s early eras, in the 1950s and 1960s, a relatively small cadre of artists were recognised by millions of adherents as key figures in a rock ‘pantheon’. Subsequent decades saw a gradual diversification in consumer tastes for rock, and several artists became acknowledged as the avatars of specific sub-genres. With the genre’s digressions into many different commercial forms, no one ‘Elvis’, nor ‘Beatles’ could arise to singly command popular taste and rock culture.

During the 1980s and 1990s, there were many types of popular rock music available, and so consumers and critics alike could erect several smaller pantheons of artists, with each grouping representing a specific sub-genre. Several artists over many rock sub-genres catered to their own band of consumers. A rough analogy to this might be the decline of the large movie theatre ‘palace’, which constantly showed one film, and the subsequent rise of the ‘multiplex’, which housed several smaller cinemas, each playing a different film. Individuals in the 1980s and 1990s could theoretically group rock artists according to age, style, or content in a way which earlier rock audiences could not.

One of the few genuinely startling images of rock in the 1990s were the ‘classic’ rock bands who had decided to reform and trade on swelling generational nostalgia.\(^{187}\) The Rolling Stones typified this situation. Once considered ‘rebel’ artists in the 1960s and 1970s, the band had eventually come to typify the ‘mainstreaming’ of rock music. Even after fundamental line-up changes, mediocre media reviews and an apparent lack of inspiration, they continued to command vast live audiences for their tours, with generally respectable record sales for their new material. In mid-2002, the band began a major US tour, a full 40 years after its inception.

**Punk rock**

Musically unsophisticated, and vocally critical of mainstream music and practice, punk rock was undoubtedly the last widespread musical movement which held a genuinely

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\(^{187}\) Glam rock was a success with consumers outside of the USA; it was not a universally popular form. Heavy metal, however, became a staple commercial genre there and elsewhere, and remained so throughout 1981-2001.
‘rebellious’ cultural resonance. The lifestyle of punk’s consumers was linked with music. While the Baby Boomers had first produced and consumed rock in the 1960s, it was the last of their generation who were largely responsible for punk rock’s key initial audience and musicians.

After it had become a commercially popular form, rock music had gradually become disengaged from its 1960s beginnings as a socio-cultural form. Originally an alternative to mainstream music, rock had had the power to shock and confuse mainstream society and simultaneously define and articulate a countercultural view. By the late 1970s, rock had become the mainstream.

As with ‘alternative music’, ‘punk rock’ was a term which first surfaced in the 1960s.\(^{189}\) In the case of punk, it was used to describe the popular groundswell of US ‘garage bands’ which emerged following the early 1960s success of UK ‘beat bands’ the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Kinks, Who and others.\(^{190}\) Also like the term ‘alternative’, punk rock’s definitive era as a music genre and culture came some time afterward.

Emerging from large cities in the US and UK during 1976-77, the punk rock sub-genre was in many ways a reactive culmination of all that was ever anti-social in rock music. Early punks utilised many societal taboos for their shock value, including Nazi and paedophile imagery, drug abuse, and racism. Moreover, although it was itself a distinct sub-genre of rock music, punk also sought to outrage the world of commercial music itself. Punk rock was inherently critical of, and therefore an intentional alternative to, the conventional rock culture.\(^{191}\)

\(^{189}\) ‘Classic’ bands from the 1970s which reformed for the 1990s (mostly for the consumer nostalgia wave) included the Eagles, Fleetwood Mac, Kiss, and Deep Purple amongst others.


\(^{190}\) Major punk rock bands of the 1960s included the Count Five, Electric Prunes, Shadows of Knight, Sonics, Strangeloves, Thirteenth Floor Elevators and a great many others. In the 1970s and 1980s, much of their work was compiled and re-released for consumers of the ‘second’ punk era.

With simply-constructed music, raucous sound and often-pungent lyrical content, punk rock set itself in opposition to a then complexity-obsessed rock music culture. Rock critics were forced into a two-way polarisation when confronted with punk. In media interviews, the key figures of the punk rock movement controversially criticised the prominent rock music icons of the day, often appearing disarmingly blunt in dismissing the work and relevance of Mick Jagger, Elvis Presley and others.192

Because of its intent to outrage and the artists’ non-mainstream music, punk rock was received by established rock music commentators with an almost universally negative critical reaction. The sub-genre and sub-culture alike was at first ridiculed, parodied and dismissed by such rock music industry publications as the US Rolling Stone, itself once a provocative, opinionated champion of ‘alternative’ rock music. In the UK, the musician-oriented Melody Maker magazine was extremely critical of punk, and was dismissive of the genre when it first appeared.193

To many of its consumers, mainstream rock and its key artists were by the late 1970s very much held as ‘sacred cows’. Part of the prevalent ‘rock orthodoxy’ which punk inherently criticised was the ‘careerist’ attitudes of many formerly countercultural artists. Pink Floyd, for example, had been the acknowledged ‘UK hippy/freak house band’ during the mid-1960s, before becoming an industry volume selling band over the next decade.194 Their work was criticised by many early punks for its irrelevance to ‘everyday’ life.195

Rock’s mainstream success was still widely seen by many of its older consumers as an ostensible example of ‘youth’ having taken on the powers-that-be and able to force some key concessions from the industry. One of the most uncomfortable things which the punk sub-genre pointed out was that the concessions, seemingly ‘won’ in the mainstream by the followers and practitioners of rock music, were in fact granted simply because it had become a marketable

193 Ibid, pp. 216-219
194 Stump, pp. 25-6
commodity, and not because rock was seen as an intrinsically artistic, political or cultural phenomenon.

Retrospectively, much influential weight was given in historical studies to the punk rock phenomenon of 1976-77, largely for its role in engendering genuinely ‘alternative’ music.¹⁹⁶ Like rock, punk was a complex symbiosis of music culture and anti-social ciphers, and it represented the most anti-social ‘rebels’ sub-culture to appear thus far. Moreover, compared with most mainstream material, punk music was inherently uncomplicated, and even amateur musicians were able to play it.

However, while punk had a galvanising effect on some consumers and artists, it was not a mainstream success in its early years. Punk rock caused widespread media outrage, and risen to a position of public prominence by reason of its very notoriety. In the purely commercial world of the mainstream music industry however, punk rock was no real threat. Despite major companies signing many punk artists as a potentially marketable rock sub-genre, the form proved extremely unpalatable to the vast majority of mainstream rock music consumers. Whilst briefly successful on the music charts in the UK, the Sex Pistols and punk rock in general were a mainstream commercial failure in the US. For the music industry, punk was a mere ripple in commercial music culture. While punk rapidly bloomed and faded, the music industry continued to cater for the massive consumer appetites for conventional rock artists and disco music.

The Sex Pistols were early punk rock’s most publicised artists, but the band had split up in February 1978, after only twenty-two months of public existence. In their wake, many other punk artists, who had also become prominent, changed their styles and widened their consumer base. Several, such as the Clash and the Jam, signed with major companies and willingly became part of the commercial music industry. Over succeeding decades, punk rock continued

¹⁹⁵ See for example Savage England’s Dreaming.
to be a distinct socio-musical rock sub-genre, albeit purged eventually of much of its early anti-social connotations.197

Negligible in its overall impact upon the mainstream music industry, the original punk rock sub-genre’s major achievement was unarguably to act as a spur for what became known as ‘independent’ or ‘alternative’ music and attitudes. The genre’s essential ‘do it yourself’ ethic was followed by many artists, and in the ensuing years, a vast number of sub-forms were generated.

After punk’s brief but pungent critique of the mainstream, the relevance of rock music itself began to fade from prominence, as a ‘traditional’ cultural archetype for conveying themes of youth rebellion. In the turmoil of the music industry recession of the early 1980s, there was no alternative for the major companies but to be cautious and conservative. This they did by cultivating new stars, and providing an ‘adult oriented’ rock genre.

The Post-Punk Era

The post-punk period of 1978-80 was essentially the preamble to a new, more clearly defined era of alternative music, which arose during the early-to-mid 1980s. Punk had not been commercially viable for mainstream marketing, but it had been influential on music culture. Whenever a once-alternative music sub-genre became a popular mainstream form, it inevitably lost some of its key ‘alternative’ characteristics. Punk rock’s originally pungent, harsh music culture was rapidly ‘composted’ by artists and industry promotion into more commercially viable sub-genres. Artists generated the music, while the industry named it and created promotional strategies to market it.

The original punk genre combined with elements of disco music, to form ‘new wave’, a far more marketable new form. New wave music was a punk-influenced, dance-based genre which united elements of two previously disparate sub-genres. Certain salient points of punk rock, including the radical look and the simplistic, high-energy music were found to be marketable

197 By the late 1980s, for example, many evangelising Christian bands emerged, which played ‘hardcore’ punk rock. The only generally discernable difference between their work and secular punk
'rebel' semiotics. Disco music's infectious bass-dominant, rhythm-oriented sound made for popular dance music. New wave, a combination of punk and disco, proved commercially viable in a post-disco, punk-resistant market.\textsuperscript{198}

For all of their provocative 'anti-rock, anti-Establishment' rhetoric, the artists and managers of the original 1976-77 punk rock era had generally dealt with the machinery of the music business on the industry's own territory and terms. Few of the most crucial UK and US artists involved in the early punk rock era, during the years up to and including 1976, dealt with 'independent' labels.\textsuperscript{199} It was largely the 'second wave' of punk and post-punk artists, appearing after 1976, who heavily utilised independent record labels.

Meanwhile, as surely as certain aspects of the genre had proven marketable, some of punk's other key facets, including the introspective, personal lyrics; fiercely independent attitudes in music and recording; and relaxed 'rules' of writing and production, were utilised extensively by local artists during the 'post-punk' era.\textsuperscript{200} The post-punk era begat many of alternative music's early innovators and key artists. Principally, these were bands such as the Fall, Joy Division and Public Image Ltd from the UK; Husker Du, the Replacements, and Sonic Youth from the USA.

Most of the important alternative artists of the post-punk era took rock as their primary 'text' for innovation, favouring a direct, 'hands on' approach to music and business, in light of the commercialisation of new wave music. However, dance music also went through a similar period, when mainstream forms were re-interpreted by local artists into new alternative sub-genres.

\textsuperscript{198} The effect was amply illustrated by the fortunes of certain contemporary exponents of both. Despite springing from the same small mid-1970s New York scene, punk rockers the Ramones had been a commercial write-off in the mainstream, whilst their contemporaries Blondie and Talking Heads enjoyed international hits as two of the most definitive of 'new wave' artists.

\textsuperscript{199} The Sex Pistols went through major labels EMI and A & M before settling for large-scale semi-major Virgin; the Clash signed to CBS, the Stranglers to United Artists and so on. The main exceptions were the Ramones from the USA and the Damned from the UK, who signed with the large-scale independent Sire and Stiff labels respectively.
Rap/Hip-Hop

Like rock, disco music had itself once been an alternative music before becoming a mainstream form. From a 1967-69 heyday as a live-performance dance music, rock music of the 1970s had entered a less dance-oriented phase. Perhaps reflecting the lifestyle habits of its older consumers, popular rock taste had steadily demanded more of a ‘listening’ experience. Large scale live concerts aside, rock became for the consumer a contemplative, even passive, personal music experience.\(^{201}\) Albums like Pink Floyd’s ‘Dark Side Of The Moon’ and Led Zeppelin’s ‘Houses Of The Holy’ typified popular rock’s non-dance orientation during the 1970s.

In the early 1970s, disco music had been patronised most strongly in New York establishments, by black and gay patrons, who met and danced in environments which eschewed the ‘macho’ rock music venues.\(^{202}\) The city clubs of the UK and US were where dance music evolved, in relative isolation.

Initially an individual who merely played a selection of dance music records for club patrons, the DJ (‘disc jockey’) rapidly evolved into an artist. In order to enhance the evening’s musical experience, DJs sought out obscure vinyl records, with the intentional effect of individualising their ‘repertoire’. In addition, various methods of playing and sequencing records were developed.\(^{203}\) The disco record ‘deck’ usually sported two turntables, which enabled the DJ to begin a second record slightly before the first had ended, thus producing a seamless, continuous soundtrack.

By the mid-1970s, the music industry had introduced a disco-specific twelve-inch single format, which gave a considerably louder, deeper sound response than the seven-inch, and made turntable manipulation much easier for the DJ. Hip-hop had begun as a ‘hands on’ local

\(^{200}\) Around 1978-80; basically starting after punk rock’s novelty/shock value had worn off and lasting up until the more defined, coherent ‘indie’ era took over.


\(^{202}\) Ibid., pp. 138-9

\(^{203}\) Ibid., pp. 14-18
music culture movement, like punk rock, and had developed over roughly the late mid-to-late 1970s time period. Originating from New York, the music was originally only one facet of an urban culture. The overall title of ‘hip-hop’ referred to a group of activities, including dance and graffiti art. The music element’s original title was ‘rap’. As the music became popular outside local cultures, the overall title devolved to that facet. For some time afterward, both ‘rap’ and ‘hip-hop’ were interchangeable terms.

Because it was both dance music and melodic at the same time, hip-hop became an successful mainstream genre relatively rapidly by comparison with punk. Both were genres with a structural simplicity which made them popular with amateur musicians. To perform punk music, artists needed only a basic lineup of three or four personnel to play instruments and vocalise. To perform rap, one needed only a vocalist and a DJ. While other genres eventually influenced alternative music (country, jazz, folk), the two most crucial sub-genres in the idiom were punk and hip-hop.

‘Alternative’ Music Scenes

Punk rock’s reactive outburst late in the 1970s briefly made rock culture seem to be something dangerous and countercultural, but the sub-genre was a failure in commercial terms. For one thing, punk had, from its outset, conspicuously set itself outside of rock’s commercial and cultural orthodoxy. This wilful distancing from the mainstream was continued and strengthened by alternative artists, whose work thrived in the space beyond the large-scale commercial music industry. The post-punk era was a fertile time in which alternative sub-genres, business practices and individual attitudes were formed, with little expectation by artists or labels of ever attaining mainstream success.

Vibrant, productive local scenes were crucial to the rise of alternative music. Local music scenes consisted of artists, consumers, venues and entrepreneurial activity such as independent record labels. The industrial process by which music was generated and consumed was

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204 See website: www.hiphop.com/
205 Macan, p. 326
replicated on a local scale, though the relationship between alternative artists, their record companies and consumers was much closer than those within the mainstream. These scenes were often generated in ‘college towns’, with a university as a focus, or else in large cities which were ‘secondary’ to other cities nearby.\textsuperscript{206}

In these slightly ‘out-of-the-way’ places, distinct local alternative music scenes were generated, within a slightly ‘removed’ cultural climate. In such places, artists were able to take up a new sub-cultural genre some time after its initial urban appearance, combine it with local ideas, and take the time and space to develop something distinctly different from the norm. As a result of relative isolation from the mainstream, artistic communities became stronger and local do-it-yourself entrepreneurial attitudes thrived.\textsuperscript{207}

Before the destabilising effects of technology, which began to emerge in earnest from the mid-1990s, alternative music scenes invariably originated spontaneously in specific population centres out in the cultural ‘garden’. Any new alternative music sub-genres were thereafter loosely tied to a local scene, which gave a sub-cultural locale and often a name to the scene. Significant examples of key local alternative music scenes which thrived throughout the 1980s and 1990s included those which generated in Athens, Georgia (1980s), Bristol (1990s), Dunedin (1980s), Minneapolis (1980s) and Seattle (1980s-90s).\textsuperscript{208}

While pointedly eschewing many ‘mainstream’ forms, alternative music scenes were also affected by many of the same fundamental processes as the organised music industry. Local scenes were also largely economic ventures which marketed popular cultural products, and utilised technology to deliver it to consumers. Frith’s three-sphere mainstream music industry model of technology, economics and music culture also applied to the world of alternative music, although the precise alignment of the model’s elements differed significantly.

During the years 1981 to 2001, a great many of these essentially local scenes had formed, operating in spaces beyond the influence of the mainstream music industry. Ignored by a

\textsuperscript{206} Bristol, Dunedin, Minneapolis, Seattle, etc. See Shuker, p. 8
\textsuperscript{207} Stump, p. 10
conservative mainstream music industry in a severe recession during the early 1980s, local independent labels and artists appeared in force. Eventually, ‘alternative’ scenes’ labels and their consumers became a loosely-knit ‘community’, which effectively produced and distributed alternative music. This ‘cottage industry’ approach was essentially locally-organised commerce.

Throughout the early 1980s, the mainstream music industry had maintained a conservative, exclusive star system, which was seen as an essential ‘survival tactic’, necessary for dealing with the recession of the early 1980s. The mainstream music industry was wholly concerned with profits made in marketing music, and, as long as it was not financially affected, it was not inherently ‘hostile’ towards alternative music. The mainstream had consistently derived much of its profit from genres which at one stage had been considered ‘alternative’.

During the years 1981-2001, punk rock, hip-hop and heavy metal music were all popular styles within the mainstream, which had at one stage been forms of local ‘alternative music’. These forms and others were all eventually to be found on the international music charts. When they first appeared, none of these genres were considered useful to the mainstream as lucrative commodities. With time, however, much of this ‘alternative’ music was adopted by the mainstream, as their commercial viability had been proved by local consumers.


By 1981, punk rock had become passe in terms of popular alternative music culture, in favour of newer, less cliched forms. Local music scenes, which had been initially energised by punk, had grown into larger, more complex post-punk music communities. Over the post-punk era, several bands had formed, played, split and reformed into newer combinations. Some, such as the Cure and the Fall from the UK, had become popular, and were touring well beyond their

208 *ibid*, p. 9
own home areas.\textsuperscript{209} The 'wild' music produced by these technology-literate, 'do it yourself' local scenes was captured and distributed locally by independent labels.

The alternative music scenes were subject to the same technological, economic and cultural forces which affected the mainstream music industry. The small size and insularity of local alternative scenes was at once a strength and a weakness in areas of marketing and distribution. Three broad phases can be seen in the development of alternative music between 1981 and 2001. Each phase was characterised by a substantial shift in the equilibrium of alternative music technology, economics and music culture.

\textit{The First Phase, 1981-1987}

In this period, there were considerable commercial and ideological spurs for intense activity in local music culture. The first two-thirds of the 1980s was a time during which the mainstream music industry was in recession, and extremely cautious in 'experimenting' with new artists and styles. Local artists could not compete with the mainstream industry's volume sellers in promotion and distribution, and so an 'anti-mainstream' attitude emerged. Local labels flourished within their own territory, and many linked up to cover much larger areas. Eventually, labels and artists gained international prominence.

\textit{The Second Phase, 1988-1994}

A second phase can be located in the late 1980s, after alternative music had become a loosely-knit 'secondary system' to the mainstream industry. There was a move by consumers away from highly-produced dance-pop, toward more 'alternative' sub-genres of music, which were marketed by mainstream industry. Musically-themed youth sub-cultures had continued to multiply and proliferated during the 1980s, with Goths, B-boys, and so on. This era was typified by the mainstream success of previously 'alternative' music, when artists like Guns'n'Roses, Soundgarden and Nirvana became to appear on sales charts. This was alternative music's commercial 'day in the sun'.

\textsuperscript{209} Both bands had toured Europe, the USA and Austrasia over 1979-82.
The Third Phase, 1994-2001

A third phase for alternative music came in the late 1990s, when technology and music culture helped the individual consumer gain a remarkable degree of control over the consumption of their chosen music. In the late 1990s, many music critics and cultural commentators made pointed attacks on the state of music culture, arguing that there was a current lack of musical innovation (compared to earlier decades), and that punk-style negation of mainstream values was no longer of artistic value.²¹⁰

Alternative music had by this time passed into near-orthodoxy, and virtually no significant new sub-cultures emerged during the phase. Due to considerable advances in technological communications, local music scenes no longer developed in such geo-cultural isolation as during the 1980s and before. At the close of the period, ‘alternative’ rock music again became a popular mainstream form with a generation of consumers who had generally been born during the 1980s, well after the punk era or even the early phases of alternative music.

Technology and Alternative Music

During the 1981-7 phase, local alternative music scenes could call on little of the ‘state of the art’ technology for music production and distribution which characterised the mainstream ‘star system’. Although constantly echoing and inspiring popular mainstream genres and music techniques, locally-produced alternative music differed substantially in key areas from highly-commercial mainstream pop and rock music. When compared with the production techniques of mainstream material, early alternative music often tended to sound inferior, or simply ‘rough’. This was often partly due to the kind of recording and sound-production technology available to the local alternative musician or label.

Ingenuity often substituted for funds, producing new musical forms and production techniques. To take the case of the DJ, vinyl records, a non recordable format, were used to

²¹⁰ Irwin Chusid Songs in the Key of Z, Songs in the Key of Z (A Capella Books, Chicago, Ill., 2000), p. XIV
produce new and novel genres. Through a DJ’s skill, judgement and manual dexterity, vinyl records and players became unlikely (though extremely popular) musical instruments.

The alternative artist of the early 1980s was generally in their late teens or early 20s, and played at parties and hotel venues. They were often amateur musicians who usually did not possess better than adequate-to-good musical equipment. Without expensive equipment or production specialists, the live sound and recordings of local alternative musicians inevitably differed from the accepted industry standard.

When it was first introduced, new music technology was often prohibitively expensive for local artists. It had traditionally been the more affluent middle class consumer who could initially afford items such as radios, television sets, video recorders, computers, CD and DVD players and other household technology which had been prohibitively expensive to the average consumer. As with the majority of general consumers, local artists had to wait until less expensive musical equipment became available.

Inherent patterns of mainstream commercial practice meant that the widespread availability of new technology came about in two ways. Firstly, commercial competition produced lower-costing (and therefore potentially larger-selling) devices. Secondly, besides lowering prices due to competition, increased production resulted in the device becoming widely available for a greatly reduced price on the second-hand market. In this way, previously-unattainable technology ‘trickled down’ to the widest consumer markets.

In the absence of access to state-of-the-art recording and production facilities, alternative artists usually made some of their initial recordings at local studios. Many local recording studios catered as much for the production of radio and television advertisements as they did for bands. Even if the studio had indeed been built primarily for bands, economic restrictions often meant that time available for the artist could also have been a crucial factor in how the finished product sounded.

211 See Azzerad, Our Band Could Be Your Life, introduction, pp. 3-11.
Recording had its hidden hurdles for the local alternative artist to produce their own recorded music, with no advance funding available from a mainstream company. In a recording studio, the actual time spent making the initial sound recording might take several hours longer than anticipated. The process may have included several costly unproductive false starts, or required extra recording –‘overdubbing’– of vocals or instruments. Then there remained the painstaking task of ‘mixing’. This involved a long-winded, careful adjusting of volumes and timbres, for all of the various recorded instruments and voices. Inherently repetitive, mixing an item could easily take up as much time as had the initial recording process.

Owing to a combination of largely inadequate local recording facilities, and rushed performances or mixing, the finished sound of many alternative recordings made over the early 1980s often compared poorly with those of then-current commercial mainstream productions. If issuing a recording commercially was not the goal, most alternative bands initially used local facilities to record demonstration material, or ‘demo’ work. Such demonstration tapes were generally plain, unadorned recordings produced for prospective labels or employers. However, the ‘alternative attitude’ of artists and labels often made something of a virtue of the ‘non-mainstream’ available from home recording or local studios.  

By the early to mid-1980s, home recording was an option which many local alternative artists had turned to. Home recording was mostly achieved by setting up a four-track reel-to-reel recorder with microphones in one’s house, garage or local hall, and making the recordings at one’s own pace. Limited overdubbing was possible on four-track machines, which allowed for relatively complex home recording. Over the early 1980s, the rigid ‘studio’ concept had been deconstructed for many local alternative artists.

The advantages of home recording included unlimited time for recording and mixing. The ‘cons’ were mainly that, without the sophisticated technology of the high-level mainstream studios, even the best four-track technology inevitably produced a relatively ‘plain’ finished

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\[212\] For example, the Fall’s early work often sounded ‘under-produced’ by industry standards, but this fitted with the band’s aesthetic, which was resolutely ‘non-mainstream’.

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sound. In the right hands, a four-track machine could produce a good local demonstration recording, but generally neither a mainstream hit single nor acceptable-sounding albums.²¹³

Cassette tape technology had proven crucial for disseminating music since its introduction. Informal recordings became much more prevalent when the Sony corporation introduced a range of compact cassette recorder/players in the late 1970s. The abundance and portability of the new recorder/players meant that much more locally-generated material found consumers, even if the artist concerned made only one or two actual records.

During the mid-1980s, highly-portable four-track recording machines appeared on the market, initially targeted at professional music/songwriters as compositional aids. These machines used the commonly-available compact cassette tape instead of expensive industry-standard ‘reel-to-reel’ magnetic tape. Whilst technically superior to the usual live or practice recording produced by a common two-track cassette recorder, these new four-track cassette recording machines were still no match in clarity and sophistication for the industry-standard 24-track production-sound. A professional studio could use up to 10-12 tracks to record and mix the drums alone.

Recording and distributing material became easier for the local artist or company, during alternative music's second phase, during 1988-94. By the late 1980s, advances in computer technology had made the 'virtual studio' a reality. Highlighting the technology's myriad of applications, one's home PC could be turned into a sophisticated recording system with the introduction of a specific computer program.

As computers themselves became more widely available, traditionally 'lower socio-economic group' (though perennially popular) genres such as rap and heavy metal music thrived on the input. For most of the 1980s, computer recording and sound technology which hitherto only the largest of music industry organisations could have afforded, became available to

²¹³ There was the Clean's 'Boodle Boodle Boodle' EP, which remained in the New Zealand singles charts for six months over summer 1981-2, but while the material was initially recorded on a four-track 'reel-to-reel' machine, the resultant tapes were mastered (processed further sound-wise for release) at a professional facility; Mandrill studios, Auckland.
individuals for use within their own households. The digital sampler was one such
development, which alternative music artists working in the field of dance and hip-hop used
extensively.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the prevalence of digital technology meant that an
individual could record a live band or sound-collage in one’s lounge into one’s computer
‘virtual studio’ program. The various instruments or sounds could then be mixed together while
still on the computer hard drive, and the finished recording ‘written’ on an industry-standard
blank CD. Once stored, any number of exact duplicates could be made from the one original
digital ‘master copy’.

Home recording and CD writing technology was used by a vast number of alternative music
artists, to the point where consumers were confronted by more music, in their favourite genres,
than they could ever hope to listen to. With the amount of music released and available,
keeping track of new labels and artists became a near-impossible task.

While not replacing or significantly marginalising other retail outlets for music, the Internet
became a useful place for consumers and artists to exchange views and engage in commerce.
Matters of geographic distance, a problem for alternative artists and labels with a low financial
margin, were alleviated somewhat by utilising websites and Internet ‘chat rooms’. Alternative
artists, consumers and labels used new technology when it was available, but the results
essentially remained ‘alternative’.

One of the most significant ways in which local alternative scenes differed from the
mainstream was in economics. Unlike the mainstream industry, profits mattered less to
alternative artists than the production of music itself.

Alternative Music Economics

The rising popularity of rock music in the late 1960s had set the mainstream music industry
a problem: how to successfully sell an anti-establishment, ‘rebel’ genre to its mass market,
without appearing to be merely ‘cashing in’.\textsuperscript{214} After all, while many consumers saw an extra-musical ‘rebel’ element in the genre, the industry saw rock as simply a newer strain of the same commodity, and not as an integral part of any extra-musical, countercultural ‘revolution’.

Within a short time, however, companies such as CBS had rapidly adjusted their marketing strategies, and began to sell rock music to its maximum consumer group, in massive amounts. Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Jethro Tull and others became volume sellers for their companies, and rock became the primary foundation for industry profits.

Regardless of what some of alternative music’s prime movers had publicly professed as career politics (for example, the Sex Pistols’ claim not to have been into music but ‘chaos’),\textsuperscript{215} alternative pop and rock artists were essentially entertainers, not social revolutionaries. Sub-cultural references abounded, but all rock artists who became financially successful did so as a functional, contributing part of a mainstream economic enterprise. Even the most liberal of bands, artists and labels were of necessity commercial ventures, and this was as true of the alternative world as it was of the mainstream.

During their first flowerings, local alternative music scenes were most often centred on a regular venue, where the various consumers met and witnessed the artists. These venues ran on money spent by the alternative music consumer, as did the alternative record labels later. The economic dynamics of alternative music began and remained for the most part independent and outside music industry control. The technological innovations of the 1990s both revolutionised and marginalised alternative music. Over the whole two decades under examination, the very meaning of ‘alternative music’ changed with the context of music scenes.

Running a local band was on many levels like running a small business. There were key personnel to be found, instruments to purchase and maintain, rehearsal-space to be located (most often in rented ‘practice rooms’), and time to be allotted for regular practice. Once ready to perform, suitable venues had to be sought out, which consisted mainly of local hotels or self-
hired halls. Advertising and promotional work had to be worked on, and specialised equipment (lights, PA systems and so on) remained to be hired.

To off-set all these basic 'hidden' costs of playing live, a paying audience was needed which, with skilful management, could be maintained and increased. Therefore, with alternative music as with mainstream industry music, a level of responsibility and something of a professional attitude had to be held to.

As for payment, when playing at a hotel, the normal situation for up-and-coming alternative artists was that they most often received all or a large percentage of the 'door take', the cover charge paid by an audience upon entry to the music bar. Less common were situations where a 'guarantee' was given (a hotel’s set payment per evening or for a weekend 'block-booking') or a percentage of the evening’s 'bar take' (the monetary total of alcohol purchased by patrons).

Owing to availability, alternative bands could become extremely popular within their local scenes. In order to increase their scope in touring, sound production and so on, a band's career support-systems had to become larger and more complex. Touring involved further financial expense, which included petrol money, food, accommodation and so on.

Local artists’ careers and independent labels were based on marketing a product to consumers. With commercial success, needs dictated that rigid systems be organised for promotion, record production, distribution and touring; a network which eventually might include professional touring-crews, label-friendly venues, secure accommodation, radio support (mostly student stations) and so on. While methods of recording and distribution might have changed by the close of the 20th Century, geographical realities had not. For all but the most sedentary of artists, touring was still a necessary requirement.

One of the most fundamental requirements for a music scene to be a genuine alternative from the mainstream was the independent record label. In the first phase of alternative music, during the early 1980s, independent labels were crucial for gelling, spreading and maintaining local scenes. Artists toured, but with a record available, the effort became more of a
promotional venture. In this, as in many other ways, alternative music culture displayed some of the same necessities of operation as the companies in the mainstream industry. Even so, alternative music, produced in part with an ideology, was not merely a commercial concern to either its artists or consumers.

In the 1970s, volume selling rock artists were sometimes given a semblance of 'independence', when some major labels created divisions for the genre. These labels featured different label artwork from the company's usual imprints, as in the case of the Rolling Stones ('Rolling Stones Records') and Led Zeppelin ('Swansong').

These measures had the effect of 'disguising' a major company, so as to help foster a 'non mainstream' impression for the artist and their material. Though these bands were given the leeway to 'sign' other artists to appear on 'their' labels, the label 'divisions' actually remained firmly part of the parent industry company. To the casual observer, however, it appeared as if both bands ran their own independent labels, distinct from the music industry 'powers that be'.

Following punk's baldly stated alternative/independent philosophy in the late 1970s, many independent record labels were set up in the US and UK, catering mainly for immediate, local post-punk scenes and consumers. While a small local market may have been satisfied with short runs of records, spreading any further afield was problematic for independent labels.

For some time, the dominant technology used by alternative labels and consumers remained, cassette tapes and vinyl records. Alternative record labels appeared when local scenes reached a level of activity which demanded attention. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, hundreds of independent labels were formed, to process local music. Cassettes were used by artists as an inexpensive, though small-scale, method to 'release' original music.

The early years of the CD era had little impact upon local alternative music activity. Alternative music artists and consumers were in general less affluent than their middle-class counterparts, and could not afford CDs as they could records. Moreover, the music industry had initially used only material by proven mainstream volume-selling artists as a means to
introduce the new format, so that the consumer of alternative music was even less inclined to purchase CDs.

Since local independent labels did not necessarily aim at achieving mainstream chart hits, they were free to press as little as 100 copies of a record. Low-volume, localised activity invariably created sought-after 'collector's items'. For instance, New Zealand independent label Flying Nun's second release in August 1981 was the Pin Group's 'Ambivalence'/ 'Columbia' single. Originally appearing in a single run of 300, the record cost consumers NZ$2.50. Twenty years later, in 2001, records from the original pressing fetched upwards of US$100 (NZ $250), on the international collector's market.

Independent labels catered for tastes other than those more general ones which informed the mainstream music industry. Owing to their position as a mass-market entity, mainstream record companies were too large and slow-moving to react as quickly to current, local consumer-trends as could a local independent label. In the USA since the 1920s, small-scale, locally-owned labels had often provided the necessary 'springboard' for acts, which later became international major-label stars.

To a degree, independent labels competed with the mainstream system, which was set up for bulk orders and mass-marketing. Independent labels were often severely hampered by problems with manufacturing and distribution. Moreover, a not-uncommon manufacturing problem was a defective pressing run of vinyl records. For a large mainstream company, the run could be repressed quickly, and with no harm done. However, such an occurrence presented a major problem for a low-volume, small-scale independent label. With no insurance against defective

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216 For example, EMI created Harvest, Philips started Vertigo, and so on. See Stump, pp. 72-3
217 *ibid*, p. 49
218 The vinyl article itself and not the same *recording*. It was the original vinyl artefact itself which commanded the collector's price. The recordings were re-released on CD in 1993, but the readily-recordable digital CD format was not considered as collectable as an original vinyl pressing.
219 Gormack, Nick 'Pinning It Down' in *The Press* (23/03/02)
220 After Elvis Presley had proved to be a commercial success, his early local contract with the local independent Sun label was purchased in 1955 for US$40,000. See Dannen, p. 45
manufacturing, and dependence upon steady low volume sales, independent labels could easily have been financially ruined.

In time, however, previously unconnected labels and scenes were gradually linked up for sales, manufacture and distribution. This process was the basis of the alternative music-fuelled ‘indie era’ of the early-to-mid 1980s. The reciprocal arrangements and licencing deals made during this era helped consolidate alternative music as a marketable commodity. Eventually, some of the state-of-the-art technology which became available to the mainstream music industry made its way into the hands of local alternative artists, consumers and producers.

Given the mainstream music industry’s many economic trials during the period 1979-84, far fewer financial gambles than usual were taken by the major labels in tapping into the realm of ‘alternative’ music. Punk rock had been exciting, but proved to have an extremely limited commercial potential, and both rock and especially disco had alarmingly deflated as lucrative mainstream genres from the late 1970s. Along with its UK cousin ‘synth-pop’, production-dominant ‘new wave’ music had filled the industry’s profit-gaps. Neither genre was indicative of the stylistic length and breadth of alternative music, which was forced to organise, record, and promote itself, despite a significant degree of local popularity.

The ‘wilderness’ of alternative music was affected by the moves of the mainstream music industry during the early 1980s. When visa applications for work in the US were revised in the wake of MTV’s success, smaller mainstream and independent record labels were both adversely affected by the resultant US import restrictions.221 Both domestic and foreign independent labels were affected, since there were several international inter-label licencing and import deals among them in effect by the mid-1980s.

During the 1990s, many of the larger alternative labels were bought out by industry companies.222 With the mainstream popularity of alternative music in the early 1990s, some independent labels became large enough to become a part of the mainstream themselves,

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221 Ibid., p. 93
although when this happened, there were repercussions for artists. With commercial success, a label was forced to conform more closely to mainstream industry business and practice.

*Alternative Music and the Media*

Because alternative music was most often not useful to the mainstream in its ‘raw’ form, both local entrepreneurs and artists had difficulties in securing useful media outlets. In the 1960s, when rock was an alternative music, established music media (television, movies, mainstream magazines and publications) proved inadequate to the task of effectively tracking and commenting on the new genre and its attendant culture. Genre-specific magazines appeared to fill the vacuum (including *Oz* and *International Times* in the UK, the *Berkeley Free Press* and early *Rolling Stone* in the US, to name the most salient), featuring radical counterculture viewpoints and opinions.

In the early 1980s, grass-roots local alternative music scenes were unable to compete on an economic level with the mainstream music industry in virtually all available media. Local independent labels lacked the funds and business acumen to place material on radio playlists, nor could they afford to advertise widely in the established music media. As a promotional tool, music video was also overwhelmingly the province of the mainstream recording industry. With music video as with recorded sound, quality of production was paramount. Independent labels could not hope to compete with professional film crews, animation experts, editors and so on.

Even if an alternative band succeeded in making a music video, there still remained the problem of where to have it publicly shown. The television chart shows had begun to show many of the industry’s expensively-produced videos as a part of the chart ‘countdown’. High-level consumer exposure to the format via MTV and other contemporary music shows had raised music video production to an unattainable cost threshold for local alternative scenes.

Once made, the music video had then to be offered to whichever television outlets would take it, without asking a fee. Owing to a significant but still relatively small pool of regular

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227 For example, the Flying Nun label (NZ) was bought out by Australian label Mushroom, and the Sire label (USA) was bought out by Time Warner.
home video users, the format could not yet be sold in the same mass market way as aural music. Lacking the funds to create music videos, local alternative musicians were mostly absent from national television music shows during the alternative music era's first phase.

In the early 1980s, then, there was on one hand a great upsurge in local musical activity. However, the mainstream music industry was in recession, and cutting back rosters to its most lucrative volume sellers. With fewer choices for the mainstream consumer, there was less urgency for the press to cover other scenes beyond. Access to the mainstream media was effectively rendered unattainable for artists from local alternative scenes, and so the answer was for the scenes themselves to generate and organise an alternative large-scale media.

While word of mouth may have sufficed for a local, venue-specific city music scene, some kind of mass media access was needed for the activity to spread further afield. Local television was one way to increase coverage, though access to this branch of the media was often limited to news reports or interviews with musicians. Some of the more regional rock shows presented low-budget videos of local alternative artists, but there was no room on the chart shows for something which, in all probability, would not be a hit. Print and radio were the two key media which local alternative scenes could exploit effectively.

In the early era, print was the medium most successfully utilised by local alternative music scenes. While they may or may not have printed a story, national magazines or newspapers specifically devoted to rock music could be contacted for the dissemination of local news reports, reviews, and notice of live appearances. On the one hand, local city newspapers might also run regular interviews or reviews of local live appearances and any recordings which were available. However, the coverage available in local newspapers was often limited to the amount of interest displayed by the individual newspaper or magazine, which could be the province of one reporter, with limited tastes.
One major way in which print was effectively utilised by local alternative scenes was through the publication of amateur magazines, or ‘fanzines’. Fanzines began as such in the US during the 1930s, at first produced by amateur science fiction writers. Often university-based publications, fanzines devoted explicitly to rock music appeared in the USA as it developed into mass culture, during the late 1960s. During the 1970s many had petered out, some had continued on to chart music, while others had largely moved into reflecting the burgeoning record-collecting trade.

The often negative reaction to punk rock by mainstream publications prompted the resurgence of the fanzine. New York’s local scene produced Punk in 1976, while the London scene produced Sniffin’ Glue, which were followed by a host of other amateur publications which documented both local punk/alternative music and culture. Fanzines continued to be a vital medium for local alternative scenes throughout the 1980s, and with the aid of networking began to be read internationally.

In the age of the Internet, the website and the ‘ezine’ appeared, allowing both multi-media content (such as free music samples on MP3 files) and instant global coverage. The first websites with music available to download were dedicated to ‘local’ alternative artists. From 1993, IUMA (Internet Underground Music Archive) connected consumer with artist via the Internet. Alternative music became widely available in this way, with thousands of local artist sites rapidly available.

Without the funds to record and produce an industry-standard product, access to national radio, as with television, was usually out of reach for local alternative music scenes. However, there remained student radio stations, which most often supported such local cultural activity.

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223 So termed because they were put together by ‘fans’ of the art form or genre in question.
224 The first such fanzine was the Comet, which appeared in May 1930. See Phil Stoneman The Fanzine Dissertation: The Development of Fanzines and the Establishment of a Fanzine Culture (Website) http://www.lundwood.u-net.com/fandissey/fdhist.html
225 Including the Los Angeles Free Press, the East Village Other, the Berkeley Barb and so on. See R. Seth Friedman A Brief History Of Zines (Website) http://www.factsheet5.com/History.html
226 This included literature, graphics (such as cartoons and photo-collages) and fiction.
227 For example Garage (NZ, 6 issues, 1984-6).
as alternative music. Such were the politics of all but the most professional student stations that a local artist may well have been played on such a station as part of a policy of pointedly ignoring mainstream product.

Not only might many local recordings be played (which may well have included ‘rough’ two track practice-room cassette tapes), but news and notices of tours or appearances were also regularly broadcast as part of a station ‘gig guide’ service. During the ‘orientation’ season, many alternative artists in the USA played lucrative tours of universities, which also led to further radio and print coverage with reviews, recordings and interviews.

The economic downturn which affected the mainstream music industry in the late 1990s and early 21st Century also affected the alternative music economy. This was not because the larger industry had ‘crowded out’ the net of alternative labels from some lucrative media, but because the same consumer copying technology threatened both. A CD of an alternative artist on an independent label was copied just as easily as one from a mainstream company. Sales of music video and even DVDs issued by an independent label were prone to the same illegal duplication as those of the music mainstream.

Most small alternative labels operated within a local territory, with regular consumers and artists who were much less ‘remote’ than those of the mainstream. Moreover, the volume of sales required to continue running such a label was considerably less, so that illegal copying was perhaps not such a crippling development. Many independent labels had loyal consumers, who would purchase new material rather than cast about over the Internet to find the same items for free. At higher levels, labels which were closer to mainstream businesses suffered worse from home copying.

As a medium, the Internet proved beneficial for small-scale local labels and music organisations, but while the widespread copying and sharing of music inevitably affected profits, it did challenge and stimulate alternative music culture. The first ‘online’ Internet music website was IUMA (Internet Underground Music Archive), set up in the USA expressly

228 Alderman, p. 14
for local, alternative artists to showcase their work on the World Wide Web. For an annual subscription of US$240, the artist was given a small individual website with which to display photographs, text, and one song.\textsuperscript{229}

Before long, website-building software became available to the wider public, and many local bands set up their own sites. By the later years of the 1990s, the World Wide Web had become so commercial that free website-space (including room for MP3 files) was offered by host sites as part of an advertising promotion.\textsuperscript{230}

\textbf{Alternative Music Culture}

From the genre’s outset in the 1950s and 1960s, rock’s semiotics had referenced the ‘outsiders’ of society, and it was the rock musician’s position to utilise these semiotics.\textsuperscript{231} With punk rock, mainstream rock was met with a genuinely alternative music culture. At the same time as punk rock, another key form of alternative music appeared in the USA, originating from the realm of dance music. While punk initially proved impossible to sell by mainstream companies, rap/hip-hop were the most successful new genres of the decade.

Local artists of the post-punk era dismantled and re-assembled rock into a myriad of sub-genres. In the early 1980s, local alternative music flourished, in an atmosphere of virtual indifference from the mainstream music industry. With a limited range of music available from the industry, rock music had again become a ‘local’ phenomenon. When an artist had little or no expectation of entering into the mainstream music industry ‘star system’, he or she had no need to impress anyone but themselves and their consumers. Consequently, alternative music artists and audiences developed something of an ‘alternative attitude’, which held self sufficiency and non-mainstream aesthetic values to be paramount.

During the early 1980s, the term ‘alternative’ meant music which deliberately set itself apart from the mainstream music industry. There was no one style common to the concept.

\textsuperscript{229} Alderman, p. 14
\textsuperscript{230} Tripod.com, for instance.
since alternative music was generated by thousands of artists in hundreds of local scenes, and supported by many thousands of consumers. The scenes involved had no available mass media to assist in the development of a homogeneity of styles, nor did they initially have a great deal of contact with other local music cultures.

The immediate focus for local alternative music was on the local venues, while independent labels covered a wider geographical area. Assuming they meant to generate an audience by performing live, every new alternative artist had to first collect and ready enough material (whether self-written or selected from other artists’ work) to form a set before playing live. This set could vary in length, depending on venue-hours or other governing situations.  

Over the period 1988-94, ‘alternative music’ became an industry term and a mainstream marketing success. A groundswell in popularity encouraged by the networking of several alternative labels and scenes had been noticed by the mainstream industry, and moves were made to tap into it. The appearance of hard rock band Guns’n’Roses in the album and singles charts during the late 1980s heralded the growing marketability of harder, more ‘alternative’ music.

As with the hippies of the 1960s and the move from rock being an alternative music a mainstream form, the alternative music of the 1980s went through a similar commercial evolution. This time, the period was a much longer one, spanning the late 1970s until the success of Nirvana’s ‘Nevermind’ album in 1991-2. The groundswell of popularity which elevated 1960s rock into the mainstream took all of the 1980s to build, requiring the formation of an international alternative ‘network’ which stood as a genuinely alternative system to the music industry. The annual touring ‘Lollapalooza’ rock shows which ran for most of the

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231 Frith, ed. Facing The Music, p. 125
232 While venues and hours continued to evolve, generally becoming later over the 1990s, a band’s live sets were usually built around the 45-minutes-per-hour mark, in order to secure some refreshment break time.
233 Azzerad, p. 493.
234 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
1990s began early in that decade, and provided a blueprint for the successful Australasian 'Big Day Out' events.

During the late 1990s, the Internet and other home technology had not only changed economic contexts for alternative artists and companies, it had also affected music culture itself. From the 1950s through to the early 1980s, when fewer record labels had made fewer records, the resulting ‘gene pool’ of ideas and genres contributing to rock was relatively small and direct.

By the end of the 20th century, ‘alternative music’ had become a largely meaningless term. Even the sub-genres which the mainstream industry had marketed together under the classification had diversified. With cultural and technological developments, artists and consumers had moved beyond the effective influence of industry or commercial structures.

The availability of new or even deleted rock material was inextricably bound up with factors of technology. With the rapidly increasing availability to the individual of music from any era (through home cassette taping, CD back catalogue reissues, the Internet and CD burning), the various eras over which rock music had evolved now ‘existed’ all at once, within a concurrent, non-linear ‘flux’. This postmodern non-linear flux rendered concepts of chronologic context largely unimportant to consumers.

This meant, for instance, that Elvis Presley’s pre-1956 recordings, a Doors’ live show from 1968, the Sex Pistols’ 1977 debut album and the NWA ‘best of’ were all available for purchase, at any given time, from any one of a number of local music stores. Once bought, the consumer was free to make a compilation CD, in any combination of items, of those four diverse retail CDs. If one preferred, alternate material by all of these artists might easily be found and downloaded from sources over the Internet.

For the local rock musician of the early 21st Century, making a living from playing music was still possible, although the establishment of one’s audience could require a considerable amount of computer-time. An artist or label website became the norm in the late 1990s. With
it, one might attract a potentially massive international audience. Without a website, none could be reached through what had become a major medium. By 2002, there were literally countless band websites available on the Internet, and the problem became one of attracting attention to the site.

What the introduction and private use of new technology did to music culture was to split all but the youthful consumers of mainstream pop material into a myriad of smaller ‘sub-groupings’, which favoured any one (or more) of a number of musical sub-genres. The primary reason for this classification was the sheer amount of material available from the past, the present, the legal and the illegal, the extremely obscure and the widely popular, to which consumers had access. Alternative music consumers of the early 1980s had experienced some difficulty in seeking out new artists and sounds from many relatively isolated artists and independent labels. By the year 2001, the consumer was met with a surfeit of material which could not be effectively assessed without a great deal of effort by the individual.

The ceaseless information-sharing of the Internet age resulted in the ‘unearthing’ and dissemination of much extremely obscure, even unclassifiable music and in the establishment of contact between aficionados. ‘Outsider music’ described this new sub-genre of alternative music which was ‘discovered’ during the early 1990s. ‘Outsider music’ included often bizarre sounds and artists, and the sub-genre had at first become popular among record collectors, and then spread to the wider public.236 Radio shows, compilation albums and MP3 file-swapping revealed obscure historical oddities such as the Shaggs’ debut album (1969),237 and

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236 Chusid, p. XI.
237 Three US sisters, whose largely self-taught band’s astoundingly twisted, uncoordinated (but utterly sincere) version of ‘folk-rock’ was captured on their near-unlistenable 1969 debut album ‘Philosophy of The World’. It was re-released several times on independent labels (including CD editions), and was considered a key landmark of alternative music.
contemporary material by artists whose politics\textsuperscript{238} or even sanity prevented them from being able to achieve success in the mainstream music industry.\textsuperscript{239}

Another interesting development was the illegal ‘remix’, which surfaced from the technologically-enhanced music culture of the 1990s. Ordinarily, a remix was a different version of a previously-released musical item in which the various component instrument-sounds were set at different levels, recombined, or otherwise manipulated into what was essentially a new perspective on a familiar track. Such items were usually made part of an artist’s official releases as bonus tracks.

With the kind of sound-manipulation equipment available to the interested consumer, however, illegal home sampling, remixing and recombining was not only possible, in the early years of the twenty-first century, it actually became something of an electronic folk-art genre.\textsuperscript{240} Any number of songs, sounds, voices and instrumental passages were seamlessly combined by inventive consumers on their home computers to bizarre, ironic, informative or just plain humorous effect. Such items were of course highly illegal infringements of copyright and were not sold officially, but traded amongst the interested on the Internet ‘black market’.\textsuperscript{241}

The large-scale re-releasing of music in new formats contributed to a steadily-widening consumer sense of post-modernistic, non-linear musical ‘progression’. Before the 1990s, music culture had gone through several ‘progressions’, affected by elements such as new technology, and the artistic ‘updating’ of forms. In the 1990s, it was as if the all of the myriad musical genres and sub-genres which had ever been formulated were suddenly at hand. The music charts over the last years of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century showed a remarkable, if fluctuating, range of rock and pop sub-genres.\textsuperscript{242} Such was the state of musical culture amongst consumers that by the

\textsuperscript{238} There were, for instance, several websites dedicated to racially-insensitive ‘White Power’ music and artists.

\textsuperscript{239} Some of the more prominent ‘outsider’ artists who had been diagnosed with severe psychiatric disorders included Syd Barrett from the UK (1960s-70s), and Americans Roky Erikson (1960s-90s) and Daniel Johnson (1980s-90s).

\textsuperscript{240} See The Wire, # 202 (10/01/02), p. 72

\textsuperscript{241} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{242} Everything from punk to funk, to metal, hip-hop and country music. See the RIAA charts.
21st century, official releases by the mainstream music industry had become raw material for the consumer to use thereafter as they saw fit.

As a formerly ‘alternative’ genre, rock music in virtually all its forms had become ubiquitous in everyday life by the 21st century. The radicalism and politicisation of rock music and its audience had been much more acute in the 1960s, when the genre’s very marginality had engendered a defensive ‘cultural divide’ from the mainstream.243 By the late 1960s, various mainstream media had already begun to ‘siphon off’ some of rock music’s connotations of energy, youth, and rebellion. The ‘composting bacteria’ had appeared and began the process of ‘decomposition’.

In 1976-77, the Sex Pistols and punk rock were a commercial failure because they were too pungent for the mainstream music industry to market. By contrast, in the late 1990s, the work of American artist Marilyn Manson presented a plethora of social taboos, including necrophilia, mass-murder, Satanism and Nazism. Although his material contained much more extreme ingredients than had the original punk movement, Manson became a mainstream success, with a young, chart-pop music audience. Likewise, rap star Eminem’s lyrics were condemned as homophobic, sadistic, misogynistic, oedipal, and misanthropic; yet, by 2001, he was one of the mainstream’s few dependable volume selling artists, and was presented with a number of industry awards.

Toward the end of the 20th Century, popular rock’s capacity to fuse with or absorb other genres of music had resulted in many sub-genres. This had the effect of splintering and dividing the mass consumer audience, to the point where no widespread, underlying ideological or aesthetic cohesion existed between artists and consumers, The generation of new youth sub-cultures, linked to forms of rock music, gradually dwindled.

The power of rock music as a social ‘glue’ had first commanded the attention of various official state authorities when perceived as an undesirable property. The history of the genre

243 Frith, ed. Facing The Music p. 174
was punctuated by several attempts to ‘control’ this power via legislation. By the mid-1980s, rock music’s power to shock had considerably dissipated, as the genre had become the dominant mainstream form. As a social ‘glue’, rock could bind a wider range of consumers, though festivals and large outdoor concerts took on more of a ‘family event’ feel than a ‘rebel youth’ one.

Staged in July 1985, ‘Live Aid’ was a global charity appeal for famine relief, which used only rock music (including Black Sabbath, David Bowie, Run-DMC and many others) for its pan-generational drawing power. Along with the initial star-studded charity recordings (‘Do They Know It’s Christmas?’ in the UK, ‘We Are The World’ in the USA) which beget the concerts, Live Aid became the blueprint for many subsequent events.

As a genre, rock music celebrated fifty years of existence in 2003. The career of the Rolling Stones had unfolded over a lifetime of forty years. By the late 1990s, the rock genre no longer embodied the degree of ‘anti-social’ shock value it had in the 1960s and 1970s, and nor did it represent a distinctly teenage ‘rebel’ nor an ‘outsider’ art form. Many of the genre’s most well-known practitioners from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were by then middle-aged or older. Rock had become a firmly conservative part of the mainstream of popular music.

In the 1990s, many of rock music’s main figures, once role models for all that society considered anti-social (illicit drug use, recreational sex, occult imagery), had become respectable pillars of Western culture. Even with a history of publicly-admitted drug use and even (brief) imprisonment for possession of marijuana, in 1997 ex-Beatle Paul McCartney was made a Knight of the Realm. In 2002, Rolling Stones vocalist Mick Jagger was also knighted, despite a similar drug-related history and the reputation as one of rock music’s significant rebel figures.

By the late 1990s, there was a long list of rock artists whose work and personas had previously been criticised and even reviled by mainstream media, but eventually accepted. Early in the decade, 1960s iconoclast Frank Zappa was accorded serious academic respect, and

244 See the website ‘A Brief History Of Banned Music’, ericmuzum.com/banned/
ex-heroin addict Eric Clapton had become a respected statesman-like figure, as had multi-
sexual, poly-drug abuser Lou Reed. One of rock’s most brutally extreme performers during the
1970s, Iggy Pop, had become a cosy, avuncular media figure.

Even the reputation of Ozzy Osbourne was radically revised. Osbourne, whose
quintessentially occult-themed heavy metal band Black Sabbath had been a favourite target for
anti-rock Christian Fundamentalist literature for decades, was heavily criticised throughout the
1970s and 1980s as a bat-biting, drug-crazed, devil-worshipping near-imbecile. However,
thanks to time, demographic shifts and ‘reality TV’, Osbourne improbably became better-
known in the early years of the 21st century as a hard-working, responsible and loving (if
unconventional) father and husband.245

By the 1990s, many rock music critics were wont to criticise modern forms as lacking the
general sense of radical exploration apparent in the 1960s, not to mention the motivational
iconoclasm of the late 1970s.246 Given the less radical generational times, and the fact that rock
music, even alternative music, was by the late 1990s a ubiquitous form (which had in the
recent past been co-opted politically by both the liberal Left and the conservative Right), the
genre had become considerably less central as a youth-oriented music.

Indeed, by the early 1990s, rock had become many things to many people, but one major
property it no longer held was the ability to ‘bind’ audiences to Left-wing attitudes or political
standpoints by virtue of its ‘rebel’ connotations. There was, for instance, very little sign of rock
musician’s opposition or otherwise to the Gulf War of early 1991 in the same way that the
genre was utilised in the late 1960s to articulate and draw together civilian protest against the
Vietnam conflict.247

Meanwhile, rock music’s connotations of youth and vitality had eventually been seized upon
by mainstream politicians, mainly to imbue their campaigns and tenures in office with just such

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245 See the ‘reality TV’ series ‘The Osbournes’ (USA, 2002-).
246 Chusid, p. X1V
247 Murray, Charles Shaar CROSSTOWN TRAFFIC: JIMI HENDRIX AND POST-WAR POP (Faber and Faber Ltd.,
London, 2001), , p. 14
properties. Ex-US President George Bush snr’s campaign manager Lee Atwater (also then-chairman of the inherently conservative Republican Party) conspicuously endorsed rock music during the run-up to the 1992 elections.\textsuperscript{248} Bush’s successor, US President Bill Clinton, became even further identified with rock music. A musician himself,\textsuperscript{249} his own campaign for the 1992 elections utilised startlingly modern musical material (Jesus Jones’ ‘Right Here, Right Now’ and Fleetwood Mac’s ‘Don’t Stop’) for his campaign themes.

Meanwhile, Clinton’s contemporary, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, was himself an ex-lead singer for an amateur college rock band named Ugly Rumours.\textsuperscript{250} Blair had made much promotional capital of a photo-opportunity when Liam and Noel Gallagher, the two brothers at the core of then-ascendent UK rock band Oasis, were invited to No. 10 Downing street in recognition of their success.

In a similar turn of events to the original ‘domestication’ of rock, alternative music’s success resulted in a loss of exclusivity to the alternative music’s original 1980s consumers. Punk rock bands were popular throughout the 1990s, and the Ramones’ ‘Blitzkrieg Bop’, originally released in 1976 and once held as too extreme for mainstream consumption, could often be heard twenty-five years later as incidental music for television shows,\textsuperscript{251} and as a stirring, crowd-rousing soundtrack for the US World Series baseball championships.\textsuperscript{252}

Rock music had articulated, and to a degree embodied, deeply-felt notions of its consumers, with regard to personal ‘freedom’ in matters of sex, drugs, and politics. The key cultural-demographic schism came in the 1960s, and thereafter there has been no such widespread reaction to mainstream society. In fact, it could be argued the cultural ‘generation gap’, which had seemingly separated parents from their rock music-loving children in the 1960s, no longer existed to the same degree by the 1990s.

\textsuperscript{248} Bennett, etc. eds. p. 197
\textsuperscript{249} Clinton played the saxophone, in a jazz/rock vein.
\textsuperscript{250} Murray, p. 34
\textsuperscript{251} ‘Above And Beyond’ (USA , 1997-8).
\textsuperscript{252} Michael Hill ‘Brat Pack’ in Mojo no. 87 (02/01), p. 81
By the early 1990s, alternative rock music had become a mainstream music industry volume-selling form, because of a continuing groundswell of consumer interest which could not be ignored by the major record labels. In the early-to-mid 1990s, new punk rock records sold millions of copies, and raw-sounding punk/metal music such as Nirvana’s ‘Nevermind’ album topped the sales charts in several countries.

Once ‘underground’ music had become popular in the mainstream, the ‘alternative attitude’, formulated in the early 1980s during a time of massive indifference (when alternative music meant little or nothing to the music industry) was diffused and no longer as relevant to artists or consumers.

Conclusion:

The meaning of the term ‘alternative music’ changed over 1981-2001. Initially a descriptive phrase referring to pointedly non-mainstream material which was produced by and for local scenes, in the 1990s ‘alternative music’ became a genre term used by the mainstream music industry, when many artists became popular and were signed to industry labels. During the later 1990s, the term had become all but meaningless, since communications technology and music culture had provided the consumer with access to a greater variety of recorded material than could be assimilated realistically. Moreover, this technology had bypassed the business structures of the mainstream industry, so that consumers were able to select their personal musical preferences with great expense or complex, lengthy mediation processes.

All of these events took place on a global scale, but while consumers and alternative music scenes in the USA or Europe were closer to key music culture developments during 1981-2001, the changes in technology, economics and music culture had a much more dramatic impact on relatively isolated places like New Zealand.
CHAPTER THREE

ALTERNATIVE MUSIC IN NEW ZEALAND, 1981-2001

In this chapter, the features unique to New Zealand’s mainstream music industry and attendant local alternative music scenes will be defined, along with discussions on independent record labels and other media. As a successful independent label dealing in alternative music, the Flying Nun label will be the focus of discussion. The effects of various local and overseas cultural-industrial developments upon both the local mainstream recording industry and local scenes will be detailed. There will also be discussion on the impact of New Zealand’s alternative music upon the international scene. In view of the singular aspects of the development of New Zealand’s alternative music scenes of 1981 to 2001, a review of the key features of the country’s mainstream music industry history is necessary to provide background information.

The New Zealand Mainstream Music Industry

Though virtually contemporary with American consumers in utilising new home music technology (save perhaps for television, which first began transmitting in Auckland, 1960), New Zealand remained for some time something of a global ‘frontier town’, in terms of fixed geographic location as well as a remoteness from overseas culture. From the 1940s, international record companies such as HMV and Phillips had set up branches in New Zealand. Generally, however, the establishment of a national music industry was a prime example of local entrepreneurial activity.

A federation of local record companies and distributors was formed in 1957.253 During the 1960s, many entrepreneurs set up organisations to create and distribute local music. From the outset, local record companies had sought to sign distribution deals for overseas material, as well as to sign popular local artists. There was no one ‘major’ local label which released the

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253 Bryan Staff and Sheran Ashley For The Record: A history of the recording industry in New Zealand (David Bateman Ltd., Auckland, 2002), p. 56.
bulk of locally-produced music. Consumer preferences from traditional Polynesian music to alternative rock were catered for several independent labels over five decades.\textsuperscript{254}

In the 1960s the New Zealand music industry began to recognise and encourage the achievement of local mainstream artists. The first local record industry award was the annual Loxene Golden Disc Award which was created by the NZBS (New Zealand Broadcasting Service) and Reckitt and Colman, and instituted in 1965.\textsuperscript{255} The sales of a record were the primary criteria for consideration, as was the stipulation that the artist be a New Zealander. The songs themselves were often cover versions of professionally-written items.\textsuperscript{256} The awards were televised, and three annual compilation albums of finalists were issued during 1970-72.

From 1973 until 1976 the event was renamed the Rata Awards and several categories were added, including best album, new artist, recording artist/group, producer, engineer, arranger and composer of the year. In 1978 the name was changed to the RIANZ Awards until 1999, when the event became the Tui Awards.\textsuperscript{257} Also inaugurated in 1965, and still current in 2001, was the APRA Silver Scroll award, which was awarded annually to the composer of a nominated song.

\textit{Copyright and Publishing}

The organisations which administered issues involving the copyright and publishing of music in New Zealand were APRA (Australasian Performing Rights Association), which also administered the rights of Australian artists. APRA was established in New Zealand in 1926, and by the year 2001 the organisation represented 30,000 artists, 4,000 of which were New Zealanders.\textsuperscript{258} RIANZ (record industry association of New Zealand) was started in 1953. An association of record companies, RIANZ’s associated body PPNZ (Phonographic Performances New Zealand, ltd.) collects royalties owing to the organisation’s constituent

\textsuperscript{254} Staff and Ashley, pp. 69-150.
\textsuperscript{255} Staff and Ashley, p. 97
\textsuperscript{256} For example, Shane’s 1969 Loxene Golden Disc winner ‘Saint Paul’ was a cover of a previously-released UK single.
\textsuperscript{257} Staff and Ashley, pp. 152-63.
\textsuperscript{258} See the APRA website at: www.apra.co.nz/welcome.htm
record companies. The funds were then annually re-distributed to the companies concerned, and then, through the companies, to the artists.\(^{259}\) The New Zealand Music Industry Commission was a Government funded charitable trust, set up in June 2000 to assist the growth of local music, by providing information and links to funding bodies and businesses. The NZMIC functioned as a hub of information directed towards artists and industry organisations alike.\(^{260}\)

**Mainstream Media**

New Zealand radio was state controlled and regulated at first, until the first private broadcasting licences were granted in 1970.\(^{261}\) By the mid-1970s, several independent commercial stations had appeared nationally. The first FM ('Frequency Modulated') broadcasts were made in 1982, and most of the country’s stations subsequently switched to the new bandwidth.\(^{262}\)

Television was an extremely effective advertising medium for most things, including music. Moreover, all four main centres were simultaneously accessible once the country was networked in 1969. While not able to match the production budgets of overseas music videos, New Zealand artists had the advantage of being able to appear in inexpensive but widely seen items, since most television music shows had national coverage. Music shows during the 1980s such as ‘Radio With Pictures’ often produced their own music videos.

Pop chart show ‘Ready To Roll’ appeared in 1974, and was still running (as ‘Coca-Cola RTR’) in 2001. In 1975, New Zealand had two VHF (‘Very High Frequency’) television channels. While New Zealand was relatively isolated from the Anglo-American music business

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\(^{259}\) All information taken from the RIANZ - What Is it? Website at: www.geocities.com/SoHo/Study/9077/rianz.html See also the RIANZ website: www.rianz.org.nz/

\(^{260}\) See the NZ Music Industry Commission website at www.nzmusic.org.nz/

\(^{261}\) ‘Radio Hauraki History’, TVRadioWorld website at: www.tvradioeworld.com/region2/nzl/nz1hist.asp

\(^{262}\) A radio bandwidth which, unlike the previous AM broadcasts, transmitted in stereo and produced no static.

\(^{263}\) Barry Mishkind ‘New Zealand Radio History’ in New Zealand Pirates website at: www.oldradio.com/archives/international/nzp.html

\(^{264}\) The same bandwidth, in fact, as FM radio.
during the 1960s and 1970s, in the 1980s satellite technology began to bridge the gaps in local coverage. By 1985, for instance, New Zealand received the global broadcast of the massive ‘Live Aid’ concerts simultaneously with the rest of the world.

The New Zealand broadcasting industry was deregulated in 1989, bringing competition into the field of local radio and television. By the mid-1990s, New Zealand had four ‘mainstream’ VHF stations, two of which were State Owned Enterprises, numerous private UHF (‘Ultra High Frequency’) stations, and other facilities available by cable. The UHF boom of the 1990s brought Sky TV and MTV from overseas to New Zealand. Originating from the European variation of the American company, MTV arrived in 1996, and lasted until low viewership caused the station to be discontinued locally in mid-1998.

In order to provide a counterbalance to overseas material, which increased once the broadcasting industry was deregulated, NZ On Air began operating in 1989. A Government organisation aimed at providing and encouraging locally-produced material, NZ On Air was at first funded by the broadcasting fee, and then directly through Government funding after the fee was abolished in July 2000.\textsuperscript{265} The organisation funded music videos, television shows and radio programmes for both commercial and Student stations.

From 1993, NZ On Air also regularly issued ‘Kiwi Hit Discs’ promotional compilation CDs intended to provide radio stations with new locally-produced music. By 2001, there were five variations of discs produced, covering mainstream, independent, ‘Kiwi Gold’ (compilations of hits from previous decades) and Maori language ‘Iwi Hit Discs’. Music videos were funded from 1991, at $5,000 per project. By the end of 2002, 900 projects had been funded. In addition, funding for recording singles and album projects was made available. The main criteria was that the material under consideration be commercially viable.\textsuperscript{266}

The ‘split’ mainstream

\textsuperscript{265} from the NZ On Air website at: www.nzonair.govt.nz/
\textsuperscript{266} \textit{Ibid.}
Music culture in New Zealand was the same as that elsewhere, in that the inhabitants constantly both consumed and produced music. However, the considerable geo-cultural distance from overseas meant that the dynamics under which this culture laboured were considerably different from that of overseas. As New Zealand's largest city, Auckland was the centre of the country's most lucrative consumer base. If provincial artists sought to further their careers within New Zealand, they generally moved their base of operations there. If they wished to travel overseas, Auckland was a necessary 'stepping stone'. With success in this city, increased funds and a higher national media profile were among the opportunities which awaited musicians.

As with most countries outside the USA, however, there were in fact two 'mainstreams' to be considered when discussing issues of New Zealand's popular culture. One was 'local' and the other 'global'. In drawing from a global cultural mainstream, New Zealand's consumers became a part of it. The international music industry's most popular products were the same ones available to consumers everywhere else in the world.

In New Zealand, popular mainstream culture had long been most strongly influenced by that of the US and Britain.\textsuperscript{267} Local pop and rock musicians abounded, but tended to take overseas mainstream examples as models. If the 'real thing' was not available in this part of the world, then local musicians produced an approximation. Until the 1960s, virtually all local pop/rock bands based their aesthetics and material on highly visible overseas archetypes.\textsuperscript{268}

In most countries, however, there was a significant local music culture and commercial activity besides that of the international mainstream. There was a local media, economy, artists and consumers. Some of the locally-popular bands, buyers and tastes, were so culturally distinctive as to make global mainstream appeal unlikely in some parts of the musical world.\textsuperscript{269}

\textsuperscript{267} John Dix \textit{Stranded In Paradise}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{268} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{269} Jamaican 'dub' reggae, for example. Distinctive local music might perhaps become popular elsewhere in a 'watered down' form, such as pop songs which use Brazilian rhythms or African chants, and so on. Such 'world music' elements are many times employed by pop writers as something in the nature of a 'novelty' however, and not as a secure, continuing mainstream form.
By contrast, a local mainstream which reflected overseas forms was slower to develop in New Zealand.

The 'Lag'

During the pre-television era, New Zealand’s music culture had tended to ‘lag’ in matters of accepting and producing local examples of received mainstream culture. By the time a new cultural trend or idea had ‘pulsed’ to New Zealand, the original idea was usually well past its initial period back at the cultural ‘epicentre’. During the years 1957-8, for example, Johnny Devlin was successfully promoted as a ‘Kiwi Elvis’, and most of his releases were indeed cover versions of previously-released, overseas material. Local artists and consumers often had time to watch new trends crest and peak overseas, before producing similar material. The ‘music culture lag’ between New Zealand and the rest of the world was at its most apparent in the decades before satellite and Internet technology arrived.

Global record release dates for most large record companies stabilised in 1967, but in practice this generally related to volume-selling items only. While there may have been a ‘lag’ in producing similar music to that of overseas, New Zealand’s charts generally approximated those overseas, with perhaps a few weeks’ interval between a record’s overseas success and its chart performance locally. Multi-national companies with outlets in New Zealand boasted rosters of internationally well-known artists, and had access to comparatively large amounts of promotional funding. Consequently, the country’s music charts overwhelmingly featured overseas acts, whilst locals made up a very small percentage.

For large overseas labels, the New Zealand music market was a relatively marginal one. For the international mainstream music industry, financing New Zealand tours for artists and even the release of some material were of a lower priority than for the more populated countries. In New Zealand, major chart hits were measured not in millions but in thousands or even

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270 Dix, pp. 19-29
hundreds. Even in the 1990s, a typical chart hit in New Zealand required the record label to produce around 1000 units for retail, usually split 40/60 between CD and cassette formats.\textsuperscript{271}

As established by the New Zealand music industry in 1978, a local ‘gold’ record sold 10,000 copies and ‘platinum’ 20,000. In the USA, gold status was achieved at 500,000 sales and platinum at 1 million. When record sales declined globally during the late 1980s and early 1990s, New Zealand’s industry sales threshold levels were lowered in 1992 so that ‘gold’ became 7,500 and platinum 15,000.\textsuperscript{272}

As with the overseas norm, the New Zealand singles charts generally tracked the tastes of a younger, higher-volume consumer-group. In contrast, the albums chart reflected the tastes of the more ‘adult’ consumer.\textsuperscript{273} For local mainstream artists and labels alike, albums were generally seen as the logical artistic and commercial progression from a debut single. In a small market like New Zealand, albums by local artists were often a financial risk, even for mainstream industry companies, and there were a relatively few examples produced during the 1970s.

Compared to singles, albums were expensive to produce and problematic to market. Albums by local artists made up a correspondingly small percentage of the entire music market spectrum. Of 1679 charting artists over the 25-year period from May 1975 (when the country’s album charts were standardised) until the end of 2000, 699 were from the US, 508 from the UK, 104 were Australian and 36 were Canadian or Irish, only 158 (or just under 10\%) were local.\textsuperscript{274}

As one reflection of the ‘split mainstream’ cultural syndrome in practice, New Zealand music industry sales charts show strong evidence of both global trends and distinctly local developments. Several local bands influenced by the Anglo-American ‘beat boom’ of the mid-

\textsuperscript{273} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{274} \textit{Ibid.}
1960s figure in the tallys. For instance, in the 1960s bands like the Fourmyula, the Simple Image and the La De Das scored highly with local consumers.\textsuperscript{275} By contrast, the 1970s were a time when bands were out of favour on the singles charts, while local pop-oriented ‘middle of the road’ solo acts like Craig Scott, Steve Allen and Mark Williams were consistently popular.

In establishing local careers, the would-be mainstream artists in New Zealand had several hurdles to overcome. In the decades before technology made touring less important in establishing a profile, the country’s local geography posed a considerable problem. Two main islands, with two main cities each and a relatively small, well-scattered population made touring arduous, time-consuming and expensive.

If local artists amassed the popularity to move beyond their fan-base in a local scene and mount a tour of the country, the venture could be prohibitively expensive. Besides the costs of food, fuel and accommodation, Cook Strait had to be crossed twice by band, equipment and at least one or two road crew. Moreover, extensive, repetitive touring was not viable for most artists due to the relatively small population. Over-exposure of an artist could rapidly slake consumers’ thirst for their performances or musical products, and the problem was intensified when applied to smaller communities.

In New Zealand, an audience saturation-point was often quickly reached with relatively low exposure from a few national tours, and local artists were then faced with two career choices. Either they could briefly ‘retire’ and put their career in limbo, so that consumer interest could build again, or if their career momentum was to be maintained, they could venture overseas.

Traditionally, when New Zealand’s most popular entertainers exhausted their consumer exposure here, the most logical next step was to advance to Australia, and seek to establish themselves again in a new market. Whilst some thrived in the new environment,\textsuperscript{276} the pressures involved could often prove too much for a band. For example, Split Enz was in effect a local

\textsuperscript{275} See Scapolo, \textit{New Zealand Music Charts}, appendices ‘Most popular songs/artists by year’.
\textsuperscript{276} There are many New Zealand bands and individuals who have had long or successful careers overseas, mostly in Australia; Johnny Devlin, Dragon, Split Enz, Neil Finn, Misex, Marc Williams, Shihad and so on.
variant of the overseas ‘progressive rock’ genre, a form which had its heyday in the early-to-mid 1970s. When the band became temporarily resident in Britain during 1976-77, their technologically efficient, highly elaborate stage show and music proved to be woefully out of step with the prevailing punk rock trend.\textsuperscript{277}

Given New Zealand’s geographical distance from overseas, examples of ‘crossover’ by local mainstream artists into the overseas (UK and USA) mainstream charts was extremely low. Dean Scapolō’s \textit{New Zealand Music Charts 1975-2000 (Albums)} listed a mere nine local artists to have featured on overseas album charts,\textsuperscript{278} and four of these were effectively overseas bands with just one New Zealand-born member.\textsuperscript{279} Even in New Zealand, many members of successful local bands were originally young immigrants from Britain. They had been brought over as children with their families during the succeeding waves of such immigrants over the 1950s until the mid-1970s.\textsuperscript{280}

An example of a local artist experiencing overseas success was OMC (an acronym of ‘Otara Millionaire’s Club’, which was basically composer-vocalist Pauly Fuegama). During 1996-97, OMC’s ‘How Bizarre’ single sold 30,000 copies in New Zealand, and spent five weeks on the chart. It was then ‘picked up’ by Australian radio, and was a number one hit in that country for six weeks. It then reached number four in Britain, and sold 350,000 copies in Europe.\textsuperscript{281}

The all-important American market proved too much of a hurdle for OMC, however. Promotional copies of ‘How Bizarre’ were promisingly popular in radio play, particularly in

\textsuperscript{277} Mike Chunn \textit{Stranger Than Fiction: the life and times of Split Enz} (GP Publications Ltd, Wellington, 1992), p. 109
\textsuperscript{278} See Scapolō \textit{Albums}, introduction.
\textsuperscript{279} Gale Garnett (1 album, 1950s), The Lemon Pipers (1 album, 1960s), John Rowles (1 album 1971), Manfred Mann’s Earth Band (5 albums, 1970s), the Thompson Twins (7 albums 1982–9), Kiri T Kanawa (1 album, 1985), Crowded House (4 albums, 1980–90s), and OMC (1 album, 1997). The Lemon Pipers were a US band, with a New Zealander bass player, Manfred Mann and the Thompson Twins were UK-based, with a New Zealand-born vocalist/guitarist and percussionist/vocalist, while Crowded House were essentially Australia-based. Neil Finn was the latter’s chief songwriter, guitarist and vocalist.
\textsuperscript{281} \textit{Staff and Ashley}, pp.135-6
New York, but OMC’s album was released instead of the single. The album appeared on the American market in March 1997. Sales momentum slowed drastically after Fuemana upset a record company executive while on a promotional tour of the USA.\(^{282}\)

Although Crowded House had a series of hits overseas during the 1980s and 1990s, including the massive US market, perhaps the most well-known internationally popular work by a long-term resident of New Zealand remained Richard O’Brien’s ‘Rocky Horror Show’. ‘Rocky Horror’ was written by O’Brien in London in 1973, and was perennially popular thereafter in both stage and movie incarnations.

Technological changes during the 1980s and 1990s brought a considerable narrowing of the cultural ‘lag’. New Zealand followed closely the various technological developments which changed considerably the products and methods of the global mainstream music industry. There was, however, something of a ‘technology gap’ in the recording industry from 1988, between the closing of the last vinyl pressing plant and 1998 when the country’s first CD manufacturing plant opened in Auckland.\(^{283}\)

**Music Culture and the Media**

One consequence of the technological revolutions over the last few decades of the 20\(^{th}\) century was that, to a degree, music became globally ‘homogenised’. In the early years of the 21\(^{st}\) century, hard rock/pop music based firmly in punk and metal came into vogue with mainstream consumers. Instead of appearing one step behind the rest of the global music mainstream, New Zealand bands such as the Datsuns and the D4 were able to succeed in the contemporary overseas environment in a way that Split Enz could not.

Moreover, with New Zealand closely linked with overseas cultural developments, by the late 1990s innovations here could influence those elsewhere. For example, in the late 1990s the ‘Popstars’ concept was formulated in New Zealand and made for an extremely successful

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\(^{282}\) Fuemana punched a record executive, and the album subsequently received a reduced amount of company promotion. Murray Cammick ‘Burning Up The Years Part 2: The Club Scene and the OMC scene’ in Rip It Up no. 87 (10/00), pp. 20-2.

\(^{283}\) Rip It Up no. 250 (06/98), p. 32
‘reality television’ series with spin-offs into the local music charts. Briefly, a five-member ‘girl band’ was eventually chosen from thousands of applicants, visually groomed and provided with professionally-written material to which they added their own vocal talents. Entitled Truebliss, the band was then launched in the media as a mainstream chart act and a national tour was arranged, all before the cameras and the watching public.

‘Popstars’ took a postmodernist take on the music industry’s construction of a pop group. The business-oriented machinations of the music industry were as much a part of this painstakingly transparent ‘anatomy of a hit band’ as the usually-visible ‘tip of the iceberg’ pop music and talent. The ‘open house’ twist on the traditional route to pop stardom taken by managers, producers and raw talent proved a hit with viewers and record-buyers alike.

However, when it came to international mainstream success, it was the actual concept and not the pop sound of Truebliss itself which was marketable. Once their weekly public profile came to the end of its planned run, Truebliss quickly folded after their television series ended. The show’s format was copyrighted and sold repeatedly to several countries. Eventually there were several global ‘popstars’, in Australia, the US, the UK and over Europe. New Zealand television screened several overseas series of ‘Popstars’, although the formula was by now over-familiar to many viewers. This local ‘reality television’ concept was a telling reversal, with other countries ‘lagging behind’ cultural developments here.

By the year 2001, New Zealand’s mainstream musical consumer tastes approximated those of overseas, in line with a general ‘homogenisation’ of worldwide mainstream taste. The situation was brought about by rapid, global communications. However, the country’s

284 Building on important precedents like ‘An American Family’ (1969-70) and a near-contemporary British effort, the basic ‘reality television’ concept was as follows. Several ‘ordinary people’ were filmed in situ or otherwise brought together for some common purpose and filmed. The key developments were edited together and screened to the television public as a regular series. The concept became easier to set up with the technological advancement of cameras and editing equipment, and several groundbreaking reality television shows (for example ‘Sylvania Waters’ from Australia, ‘The Real World’ and ‘Survivor’ in the US, ‘Big Brother’ in the UK and so on) became a television staple in the 1990s. The Reality TV concept played on inherently voyeuristic elements, and in this, ‘Popstars’ was no exception.
geographical distance from overseas centres still had an effect on local artists’ ‘crossover’ appeal, since it was one thing to instantaneously send music over a telephone fibre-optic cable, but quite another to arrange ‘in person’ promotion and touring overseas. Countries had grown no closer in geographic terms.

Alternative Music

By the standards of most Anglo-American alternative music scenes of the 1980s, New Zealand’s population was small and scattered. In the 1970s, rock music itself was an alternative music which had little mainstream media coverage. Nevertheless, a textbook example of an alternative music scene generated during 1978-1985 in Dunedin, the country’s smallest, most remote main centre. The technological, economic and cultural developments which influenced both mainstream and alternative music culture overseas were felt in New Zealand. However, once established, New Zealand’s own alternative music culture was able to influence that of overseas.

The rock era

While new mainstream trends in the high volume pop music market were relayed rapidly to New Zealand via various local and international media, new non-mainstream music-related sub-cultural movements were often of a much lower priority. During the 1970s, the country saw little in the way of tours by mainstream rock artists, let alone by punk or alternative musicians (although quintessential alternative rock artist Lou Reed toured twice during the decade). Even if mainstream rock artists did perform in the country, it was usually only Auckland which received the concert.

In the 1960s and 1970s, New Zealand often received notice of new rock music culture developments in the local media some time after their initial overseas appearance. Local media, however, responded slowly, if at all, to developments in rock music culture. For example,

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285 This was also the case in general with the many other ‘Popstars’ groups created in Australia, the US, Europe, the UK and elsewhere.
records which mainstream companies considered to be too marginal in appeal were held back from local release or not released at all. Even if a rock record gained a local release, there were often budgetary compromises made on its presentation. The original record’s cardboard ‘inner sleeve’ often became a two-sided paper insert or was left out altogether. An elaborate fold-out cover could be reduced down to a conventional one-sleeve design, and so on.

Hot Licks, New Zealand’s first rock magazine, ran an article on home record importing in its October 1975 issue.26 The piece walked the reader through the steps required for a local rock music fan to import albums from both the US and UK. Although the least expensive alternative involved an eleven week delay via surface mail, the article noted that the overseas album was usually superior to the domestic pressings both in cover and vinyl quality.27

The currency exchange left individual consumers with around $100 PA to spend on overseas records and postage, not to mention a 40% tax imposed on imported goods. This latter charge was often overlooked in the sheer number of general postage articles, but all imported records from the Northern Hemisphere suffered to some degree from ‘Equator warp’, which sometimes rendered much of the record unplayable.28 Albums recorded by local rock artists were few and far between during the 1960s and 1970s. None were listed in tallies of top selling albums from 1976 (when records began) until 1980.29

While this country regularly received overseas mainstream pop and rock music magazines, these were sent surface mail, and could take up to three months before sale in New Zealand. Nevertheless, it was the print media which provided the best coverage of key international events and developments in rock music. During the 1960s and 1970s, the consumer market for rock magazines was considerably smaller than that for pop magazines, which focused on the careers of singles chart pop music artists.

26 “Importing Your Albums?” by Graeme Leonard Hot Licks no. 20 (10/75), p 8 & 29.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Scapolo Albums appendices
Outside of sporadic, individual reviews and articles on rock music or its artists in the country’s newspapers and student magazines, there was no ‘rock press’ until the first specialist rock magazine appeared in February 1972. **Hot Licks** was a forty-page, A3 sized free monthly music newspaper, in the style of the UK’s **Melody Maker** and **NME**. The magazine was a give-away, paid for by advertising revenue, and was made available to the consumer through record stores.

**Hot Licks** had emerged near the rock music genre’s international commercial peak and was aimed at the serious rock music consumer. Though the magazine carried news and reviews of both local and overseas artists, editor Roger Jarrett had originally intended **Hot Licks** to resemble US music and lifestyle paper ‘Rolling Stone’, and include a considerable non-musical, ‘political’ content.\(^{290}\) The magazine was heavily reliant for content on paid freelance contributions, and rock music articles and reviews were by far the most numerous among material submitted by writers.

Through its policy of soliciting articles and letters from the consumer public **Hot Licks** was crucial in gathering the strands of local rock consumer thought. The mid-1970s were an era in which the local rock music scene was relatively sluggish, with low sales and few records. Jarrett’s editorial for the Christmas 1974 issue of **Hot Licks** made a notably prescient call for the use of the single as a way of stimulating the New Zealand music scene.\(^{291}\) This eventually happened, although it came six years later, and after a fundamental change in rock music culture. For its last ten issues, **Hot Licks** carried a cover charge of forty cents. It ceased publication after a four-year run in July 1976.

The sluggishness of the mid-1970s New Zealand rock music scene was also captured in the one-off publication **1976 New Zealand Rock’n’Soul Review**. This appeared in retail bookstores early in 1976, when **Hot Licks** was undergoing format changes in its last few months as a functioning publication. In a rather dispiriting article, the **1976 New Zealand Rock’n’Soul**

\(^{290}\) Editorial by Roger Jarrett in **Hot Licks** no. 6 (07/74), p. 3.
\(^{291}\) Editorial by Roger Jarrett in **Hot Licks** no. 11 (12/74-01/75), p. 3.
Review pointed out some of the key problems facing local, original rock artists. Writer David McLennan made the point that ‘the people don’t want to hear original material, all they want is the latest piece of boring funky soul off the hit parade.’\textsuperscript{292}

Another notable early local rock music-related magazine was Midnight Rider, a four-page A3 sized newspaper which began in Dunedin with a first issue in February 1973. Throughout its three-year run (until mid-1976), Midnight Rider featured a large rock record review section, along with a very few, sparsely-paced articles on the genre, mostly drawn from overseas publications. In 1975, Midnight Rider became ‘Southern Flyer’, a name which lasted until the last few issues, for which it was renamed Travellin’ Light.

Over the course of its run, Midnight Rider was as much an ‘alternative lifestyle’ fact-sheet as it was a music magazine. Many of its articles concerned environmental and political issues, and vegetarian recipes were regularly included in the content. Midnight Rider sporadically imposed a charge of ten cents per issue, but mostly it remained a free newspaper with expenses covered by advertising copy.

The country’s longest-running rock music magazine was Rip It Up, which began in June 1977. Like Hot Licks and Midnight Rider, Rip It Up was an A3 sized newspaper which was a give-away, mainly available from record stores. It remained a free magazine until a charge of $2 was placed on it in early 1994. Also in 1994, editor Murray Cammick sold Rip It Up to a mainstream magazine publishing company, and it subsequently underwent several changes. While always retaining a considerable focus on music, the new Rip It Up changed its content, layout and editors. In the late 1990s, Rip It Up strove to both cover both a wider range of music and other subjects, including stereo equipment. The charge increased to $7.95, and the magazine halved its production-rate, becoming a bi-monthly publication during 2001.

Although virtually all of New Zealand’s long-running locally-produced rock magazines began as free ‘give-away’ items, two short-lived magazines appeared in the late 1970s, which

also covered the local and international rock scenes. *Rocks Off* appeared in 1977 and ran until early 1978, and *Rock Express* ran for five issues during 1979–80. Both retailed for $1.50, and sought to relay news and reviews of a more ‘traditional’ line of rock music than the punk and new wave scenes covered in *Rip It Up*.

**Punk rock**

*Hot Licks* had carried some news and reviews of early American artists in the genre, but when punk rock began to attract media attention in London during 1976, few in New Zealand could have known about it, outside of those who regularly followed the international rock music scene or the British music media. A key moment in the popularisation of British punk rock came when the Sex Pistols swore during a live television interview in December 1976. The ensuing furor brought the band not only notoriety but massive media attention, thus ensuring crucial widespread publicity. Because local television did not carry the Sex Pistols item, New Zealanders did not witness the event.

However, in March 1977 a similarly polarising television event occurred when reporter Dylan Taite’s provocative report on the punk phenomenon aired on the *Eyewitness* current affairs show. Taite’s item dealt with London’s then thriving punk rock scene, and included an exclusive, extremely provocative interview with the Sex Pistols’ Johnny Rotten. The report painted a picture of the London scene as both art-scene and popular culture madness. Given such an impetus, punk rock bands generated spontaneously in New Zealand, or alternately, existing bands remodelled themselves into variations on the ‘punk’ archetypes shown in the report over the remainder of 1977.

Few mainstream rock records by New Zealand artists were produced during the 1970s, and considerably less local punk rock. Only one local punk band, the Suburban Reptiles, was

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51-4.

293 The early 1970s era, not to be confused with the American ‘punk rock’ of the 1960s. In *Hot Licks* there were reviews and articles on Patti Smith, and small pieces of news concerning other New York punk artists of the 1970s. See Tim Blaxn ‘Animal, Vegetable And Mineral -The Sound Of The 1970s’ in *Hot Licks* no. 22 (02/76).

signed for a short-term contract by the local branch of multi-national company Polygram. Despite the overseas notoriety (if not commercial success) of the punk movement, only two low-selling singles by the band were released, in February and August 1978. Polygram also expressed interest in the Scavengers, another of Auckland’s early punk rock bands, and two attempts were made to record a single. Neither attempt came to fruition, though the recorded results were eventually released some years later.295

Other indigenous punk rock releases were allegedly planned by local entrepreneurs for release late in 1978. The projects included a Christchurch compilation album based around the Mollet St. venue,296 and a similar Auckland punk compilation. Neither of these eventuated, and nor did a three-song single by Dunedin band the Enemy, which was also proposed at the same time.297

Punk rock had generated headlines but proved a comparatively low-selling genre in both the overseas and New Zealand market. Punk music had been released locally as a matter of course by a number of overseas labels, but the Sex Pistols were the only early punk rock band to have achieved a chart hit in New Zealand, and a relatively minor one at that.298 Over the ‘punk era’ of 1977-79, no local independent labels were generated by local entrepreneurs to record and market the genre.

The country’s post-punk era was the time for bands and independent labels to come to the fore. While there had been a highly active local independent label scene during the 1960s, they were mainly dealing in popular mainstream forms or music other than rock. Owing to the small number of consumers, labels specifically covering punk and post-punk music were a relatively late development in New Zealand in comparison with the UK and USA. The first of the local

298 ‘God Save The Queen’ reached no. 38 for one week, in early May 1977. This was near-contemporaneous with the record’s initial UK release.
'alternative' labels appeared early in 1980, whilst the first UK examples had appeared four years beforehand, in early 1977.

On the surface, New Zealand's first experience with locally-produced punk rock music was that of a rapidly subsiding craze. However, as with overseas developments, the punk era wrought a crucial defining moment in the formation of local alternative music. Non-mainstream rock artists and consumers found a welcome relaxation of the usual audience expectations of studio sound-production. Previously, local rock musicians had aimed to compete with mainstream production values such as 24-track recording facilities and pristine sound reproduction. This was near-impossible given the facilities available to local bands and producers.

Forming an 'alternative attitude', punk and post-punk musicians overwhelmingly rejected the kind of lengthy, complex recording processes which were the norm for mainstream rock artists. The emphasis for punk and post-punk music was on recording for the moment, and simple, unadorned recordings exemplified the ethos of rejecting mainstream values. For example, several eight-track 'demo' recordings\(^{299}\) were submitted to Auckland radio show host Bryan Staff by several local punk/new wave bands. These recordings were played on the show, and eventually became the pool of material used to compile the 'AK79' compilation. New Zealand's first collection of such material, 'AK79' appeared in early 1980 on Staff's semi-independent Ripper Records label.\(^{300}\)

In the years prior to punk, recorded 'demo' material by most rock artists was considered useful only as a rough guide to the potential of an artist or band's repertoire. They are generally used to apply for hotel work or to 'sketch out' a possible later, more detailed recording of the same material.

\(^{299}\) Short for 'demonstration'; these are low-budget recordings made for use as an aural indication of an artist or band's repertoire. They are generally used to apply for hotel work or to 'sketch out' a possible later, more detailed recording of the same material.

\(^{300}\) Staff, Bryan from 'AK79' CD liner notes (1993)
Such was the differential between New Zealand and the global centre of such genres as punk, that local artists could sometimes feel that they could use previously used, overseas-generated forms and ideas in the assumption that few if any other people had heard of them. For example, the first Dunedin punk rock band to play live was the London SS, a name which had been used by a genuine London band. Though Dunedin’s London SS had formed in 1977 and played live in August of that year,\(^{301}\) the name had been reported during 1976 in the first exposes of the punk genre in UK music papers such as *Melody Maker*, and was utilised as legitimate ‘scrapheap junk’ for appropriation.

*Alternative Music Media*

**Print:** At the outset of 1981, New Zealand had two monthly rock music magazines. In 1980, the *In Touch* magazine began in Wellington, first appearing as a give-away in record shops in March 1980. *In Touch* was a similar magazine to *Rip It Up*, though more dedicated to covering the country’s punk and alternative music scenes. *In Touch* ran until 1982. but like the new independent record labels, there were moves by individuals to broaden the available print coverage of local music scenes.

As with alternative record labels, the fanzine was also a relatively late local development, when compared with overseas. The first local music fanzine of the period 1981-2001 appeared in Auckland, late 1980. *Empty Heads* was advertised in the February 1981 issue of *Rip It Up*\(^{302}\). The advertisement listed the fanzine’s content, which cast an eye back to the recent local punk rock past (the Suburban Reptiles, Toy Love) as well as on contemporary post-punk artists including the Gordons and Shoes This High.

During the 1980s, a great many short lived music-based fanzines appeared, several issued by the adherents of punk rock. Most ran to only one or two issues, but two of the longest-running fanzines of the 1980s era were *Garage* and *Alley Oop*, which emanated from Dunedin.

\(^{301}\) Churton, p. 36.

\(^{302}\) Advertisement in *Rip It Up* no. 43 (02/81), p. 2
Both publications were linked by common writers and editors, and were prompted by the popularity of specific local scenes.

Garage magazine first appeared in late 1984 and sought to cover the peak years of the Dunedin alternative scene. Issue one featured articles on Tall Dwarfs, the Verlaines and the Doublehappys, with record reviews and a letter from an expatriate in London, describing the music scene there. The first three issues retailed for a dollar, and by the time the final issue appeared in June 1986, the magazine had grown from an eighteen pages to twenty-four, and cost $2.

In many ways the successor to Garage, Alley Oop appeared in August 1987. Again, the magazine primarily covered the Southern music scene, although by this time the Dunedin scene had run its course. Flying Nun, the local label which had first recorded and released music from the scene, had moved its office from Christchurch to Auckland, and the label’s new artists were more cosmopolitan in sound than those covered by Garage. Moreover, many of the more prominent bands which had been touring the country while Garage had been a going concern were defunct, or else had moved permanently from the South Island.

Alley Oop still concentrated on the work and movements of several Flying Nun artists, but the Dunedin based Xpressway label had risen to prominence, and many of its artists and releases were also covered. Meanwhile, the ‘Dunedin Sound’ and Flying Nun had attracted critics. In issue eight, two letters strongly criticised the amount of coverage and a perceived critical bias in favour of Southern bands. One questioned the need to cover Flying Nun releases at all, since the records ‘these days can usually be read about in daily newspapers etc.’ Alley Oop ran for three years and nine issues, until a final, belated edition appeared in late 1990, a year after the previous issue.

Another local, give-away magazine was Real Groove, which grew out of the success of the ‘Real Groovy Records’ store in Auckland. Initially a 16-page, A4 format newsprint item, the first issue appeared in October 1992. At first, Real Groove featured mainly reviews of records
available from the store, but grew to include all manner of releases, both mainstream and alternative. Reflecting a consumer interest in ‘harder’ forms of music evident during the early 1990s, heavy metal music gained its own local mainstream magazine in ‘Kreshendo’, which ran from 1993 until 1995.

In the 1990s, computer technology changed the look of fanzines, allowing more ‘professional’ appearances and layouts. Increased consumer availability of computer technology and the Internet also saw the website to become a crucial medium for alternative music, with music and interactive features such as ‘chat rooms’ and opinion columns as regular items. Moreover, the distribution of alternative music increased, though mostly on an individual-to-individual level rather than a mass-market scale. Artists with websites could make key wide-ranging communications necessary for tours, distribution of material, and global sales. The rapidity of communications aided such ventures, since near-instantaneous email bypassed ‘physical’ methods such as surface or even air mail.

Radio

After decades of being a state owned and regulated asset, in December 1966 New Zealand radio first gained a genuine alternative in Radio Hauraki. This ‘pirate’ radio station began broadcasting to the Auckland area from the Tiri, a yacht stationed in the Hauraki Gulf, outside the country’s three-mile limit. In 1970, the station was granted one of the country’s first private broadcasting licences, and became a legal, commercial station broadcasting non-mainstream material.304 As a rock mainstream channel in the 1970s, Hauraki played up to 15 per cent locally-produced music on its regular playlist.305

During the mid-1970s, amateur student radio stations were set up at campuses around the country. Technically, the first was Auckland’s ‘Radio Bosom’, which began in 1969 as a capping week student stunt, with illegal short-range broadcasts made from the back of a van.306

303 Letter by Geoff Knight in Alley Oop no. 8 (c. 12/89), p. 7.
304 From the New Zealand Pirates website.
305 Tubs Paradise ‘Cherry Pie’ in Hot Licks no. 14 (04/75), p. 9.
306 ‘Auckland – 95BFM’ by N. Rush in Dun no. 2 (06-07/93), pp. 16-17.
After five years of intermittent broadcasting, Radio Bosom (eventually BFM) turned legitimate in 1975, and thereafter became the official Auckland University student radio station.

Christchurch’s Radio UFM began in February 1976, Wellington’s Active 89FM also began broadcasting in 1976, Hamilton’s Contact 89FM in 1977. Like BFM, Palmerston North’s Radio Massey (Radmass 99.4fm) initially began as a series of intermittent, illegal broadcasts by students, in this case from a caravan. It became the official campus station a year later in 1982. Dunedin’s Radio One began in 1984, and instituted a compulsory playlist totalling one third of all material. 307

When they first appeared, the student stations’ broadcasting period was for only a few weeks a year, covering a relatively small geographic range. The playing of music, rock or otherwise, was in a number of cases not the primary focus for operation. 308 By the end of the 1970s, student radio was playing music, of which much was pointedly alternative. Economic expedience demanded that much of the music played on-air came from private collections, since a small station had little money to spend on record libraries. During the early 1980s, the stations all moved to the FM frequency band, and the improved sound attracted a wider audience than the university’s students.

Auckland’s BFM served the largest consumer audience, and boasted its own magazine. In 1986, the station collaborated with the Flying Nun label to produce ‘Outnumbered By Sheep, a vinyl compilation album of popular alternative artists from the Auckland area. Around the same time, all six student radio stations were represented by recordings from local artists on ‘Weird Culture, Weird Custom’, another compilation album, this time distributed by Wellington independent label Jayrem.

307 ‘Dunedin: Radio One’ by N. Griffiths in Dun no. 2, p. 18
308 Early student radio stations were generally intended for relaying information and to provide a ‘hands on’ environment in which students may learn about broadcasting. Auckland’s Radio B was granted permission to broadcast by the Minister of Broadcasting, but the content was to be aimed at students alone, with no music permitted and a ‘non commercial’ content. See the New Zealand Pirates website. In the case of Hamilton’s Contact 89FM, the station was originally granted its warrant on the condition that its primary function was to relay information, not play music. See ‘Hamilton - Contact 89 FM’ by A. Hyde in Dun no. 2 (06-7/93), p. 16.
Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there were sporadic calls by artists, journalists and politicians to invest in locally-produced music by introducing a compulsory radio quota system, in order to counteract 'media colonisation'. Arguments for the quota included issues of the viability of local music culture, and whether there was enough material available which suited mainstream radio playlists. Commercial radio was opposed to the idea, and, despite a bill actually appearing before Parliament in 1990, a binding quota did not eventuate.

After almost two decades of operation, representatives from the country's six student radio stations were interviewed in 1993, and all claimed a self-imposed quota figure of 30% local content. The artists which appeared at the universities for various events during the campus year (such as end-of-term 'steins' and Orientation Week) received considerable free promotion on these local stations. In turn, this advertising often improved attendance at the same bands' appearances at venues outside the University. Weekly listings of venues and artists were a staple service.

Upkeep of radio equipment was a major priority for the university stations, and there were often live 'benefits' held to raise funds, which featured mainly alternative music. The station could then take advantage of the local following for the bands, and in return, the bands received some exposure outside the hotel environment. This was crucial for younger bands who would otherwise lack access to a venue.

Television

There had been a run of almost consecutive local pop music shows throughout the 1960s, but it was some time before New Zealand television first produced a specialist rock music show. 'Grunt Machine' debuted in early 1975, and ran an hour's worth of music videos every week. The show covered a wide range of rock music, including local artists, and ceased its run

309 'Bruce Morley's Kiwi Music' column in NZ Musician vol. 1, no. 5 (04/89), pp. 04-5.
310 Chris Bourke 'Fighting To Be Heard: The NZ Music Quota' in Rip It Up no. 151 (02/90), pp. 2-4.
311 'Sweet Aural Sensations' by Natasha Griffiths in Dun no. 2, pp. 16-18.
312 The 'Radio U Radio Arts Lobster' benefit, at the Christchurch Polytechnic Great Hall on June 13th, 1981 was one such event. The evening featured six new bands, only one of which had played publicly
at the end of 1976. During 1976 'Grunt Machine' ran a competition in which viewers were asked to 'write a piece of rock music'. Not unlike the similarly-themed mainstream show 'Studio One', the four finalist compositions were performed for public scrutiny on the show by a selection of local rock bands.  

The successor to 'Grunt Machine' was 'Radio With Pictures', again a music video mix show, which ran from 1977 until 1991. Like the contemporaneous Rip It Up magazine, it soon began to reflect a distinctly punk and post-punk content, especially when it was fronted by radio DJ Barry Jenkin during 1978-9.  

With deregulation in the broadcasting industry, TV3, a third mainstream television channel, arrived in 1989, and with it came new music shows, including 'CV' in the late 1980s and 'TVSN' in the early 1990s.

In the 1990s, still more channels became available to the viewer with the arrival of cable television, another mainstream channel, and a host of short-range local stations which broadcast on the UHF (ultra-high frequency) bandwidth. UHF television became available for private enterprise in the early 1990s, and two key alternative music stations featured from the outset. Christchurch's predominantly flat landscape provided an ideal environment for such local UHF television ventures. The city's own UHF television station was Cry TV, an alternative music-based channel which ran in one form or another for most of the 1990s.

Late in 1993, Max TV began in Auckland and featured several specialist video music mix compilation shows including alternative rock, blues, dance and local music. The successful early years of the UHF alternative music channels were numbered, however. In 1996, Television New Zealand brought MTV to the country, a development which was widely blamed for the subsequent demise of the local UHF stations. Cry and Max had attracted a considerable viewing audience, and the mainstream television industry sought to capture some

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313 These were Think, Straight and Forever, with an acoustic composition performed by Carl Evanson of Rockinghorse.
314 Richard Langston 'Docked From The Radar Station' in Garage no. 6 (1986), p. 11.
of it. Neil Roberts, then Director of Television for TVNZ, signalled mainstream industry hostility when he commented on MTV's launch that, in his opinion, Max would not have a future.\textsuperscript{316}

In late 1997, Max TV came up for public sale. The station was bought by TVNZ and promptly closed down, effectively removing a considerable rival competitor for the mainstream industry.\textsuperscript{317} Cry TV endured beyond MTV, although the station's last years were of highly variable quality. Until its final closedown in 1999, Cry TV was forced by lack of funds to rely on a greatly reduced pool of both videos and employees. Specialist theme shows became repetitive, and many of the more popular hosts were offered employment in the mainstream media.\textsuperscript{318}

As a commercial venture, MTV had initially proved a far more popular operation than had the local channels. It had near-national UHF coverage, courtesy of the TVNZ network, and the station could call on a great deal more diverse and up-to-date overseas material for broadcast. However, MTV failed to amass a large enough audience for continued operation, and was taken off air in June 1998. The station had closed a few weeks after the resignation of Neil Roberts, although TVNZ's official comment on the reasons for closure was that the content of the European MTV mix had proved unfamiliar to the local consumer.\textsuperscript{319}

By 2001, there were several music-based shows available which featured a strongly local content, including 'Squeeze', 'Space', the annual heats of the Smokefree Rockquest, and M2, which ran from midnight on Saturdays until 6:00 AM on Sundays.

Alternative Music: Technology

\textsuperscript{316} Murray Cammick 'Missing Max' in Rip It Up no. 245 (01/98), p. 32
\textsuperscript{317} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{318} Ex-Cry presenters Petra Bagust and Jason Faulilafi became mainstream media personalities in the late 1990s.
\textsuperscript{319} Rip It Up 'TVNZ Closes MTV' in ‘Taking Care Of Business’ column, Rip It Up no. 250 (06/98), p. 32
As with developments in the mainstream music industry, the technology available for the production and distribution of alternative music changed with time. In the early years, during 1981-7, small studios and portable four-track recording machines were the norm for alternative music. One of the main lessons to come from Toy Love's stressful period in Australia was the disappointment the band felt over the near-mainstream conditions under which their last recordings were made. The band recorded in a large, well-appointed mainstream studio (EMI Studios 301 in Sydney), and the result was an unrepresentative, 'mainstream' sound.320

Largely as a reaction against the uncomfortable experiences with mainstream companies and methods, on their return to New Zealand ex-Toy Love members Chris Knox and Alec Bathgate began to make their own recordings with a portable four-track machine. The extensive recording experience gained by constant experimentation produced near-mainstream quality results when Knox and former Toy Love live sound engineer Doug Hood began to record other artists.

*Independent Record Labels*

During the early 1980s, several independent record labels emerged in New Zealand which almost invariably featured exclusively local alternative music. Many were extremely short lived, 'one-off' ventures existing to release material by an artist or band. Some, however, grew to include significant international sales, and entered the mainstream charts with popular product.

Compact cassette player/recorders had become relatively common appliances by the early 1980s, and they had not only allowed commercial music to be illegally copied and circulated 'underground', they also captured much more local music for collectors and consumers. As had been the experience overseas, when the 'ghetto blaster' cassette player/recorders became

available locally in the early 1980s, many local artists took the opportunity to make several informal ‘two track’ recordings from live appearances and from the practice room.

The cassette also offered alternative artists a quick, inexpensive format with which to release their music. In general, compact cassettes did not render as clear a recorded sound as did vinyl, but then most of the alternative records available had used plain, rapidly-completed ‘demo’ quality recordings for release.

A further advantage of using the cassette format for an independent release was the ease of copying, which could either be performed repetitively at home, or produced in bulk for an agreed fee by a local studio. This method was the more common solution for many artists during the early 1980s, since there were a great deal fewer ‘double deck’ copying machines in consumers’ possession than ‘single deck’ models. Moreover, studios could copy cassettes in runs up to any amount, though for commercial reasons, a minimum amount per run may have been imposed.

Many local alternative artists chose to make cassette collections their first releases. Preceding the band’s first available vinyl recordings by a year, the Clean’s actual first release had been a 1980 collection entitled ‘Left By Soft’, which appeared in an extremely small run in Holland. ‘Left By Soft’ was compiled from four-track recordings made by the band, which were then sanctioned for informal release, after prompting by a visiting Dutch acquaintance.\(^{322}\)

In 1981, the first major domestic cassette releases from local artists appeared. New Plymouth band Nocturnal Projections produced two album-length tapes, beginning with ‘Things That Go Bunt In The Night’, which was recorded in March 1981, and appeared mid-year. A second collection entitled ‘November 1981’ appeared in late 1981. Both were recorded at home on a four-track machine. In 1983, Rip It Up responded to a groundswell popular use

\(^{321}\) Each side of a cassette tape was further divided into two halves, which contained the information for the left and right stereo channels. Until the invention of the four-track cassette machine, these tapes were unable to be ‘mixed’ with other tracks on the same tape.

\(^{322}\) Hans Stuijbergen released the tape on the local Cliché Tapes label. It was advertised in local fanzines and a copy was sent to the UK music magazine NME. The actual number of copies produced
of the medium, by regularly featuring a ‘tape only’ column, which contained local cassette reviews and listings of new recordings. New cassette-only labels began including Rites and Industrial Tapes, both based Auckland.

While private record labels had catered for a plethora of consumer tastes since the 1940s,\textsuperscript{323} the beginnings of punk-era independent record releases in New Zealand have been traced to 1978. Theatre troupe and musicians Red Mole produced privately their debut album, and retailed copies at their performances.\textsuperscript{324} In 1980, the process of small scale independent releases continued, as some artists became popular live attractions. Wellington’s Mockers and Christchurch’s Gordons both made key independent releases in October 1980.

The least expensive vinyl format for artists and labels was the seven-inch 45 RPM record. These were usually produced in Wellington, either by the EMI plant in a minimum run of 100, or by Polygram in runs of 300. The vinyl single format was only capable of containing around 5-6 minutes of sound per side, and lost fidelity when slowed down to 33 1/3 RPM (which was often specified by artists, in order to stretch the available duration out for a few extra minutes). In comparison with singles, the album format was expensive to produce and problematic to market effectively.

The popularity of alternative music spurred local businesses to begin catering to the needs of artists and labels. The first studio to cater almost exclusively for alternative music was Sausage Studios in Wellington. Inspired by local punk and post-punk activity, ex-musician Robbie Duncan set up the facility in January 1980, using four-track technology.\textsuperscript{325} Several records by local alternative artists were recorded and released on the studio’s own label, also named Sausage.\textsuperscript{326}

\textsuperscript{323} Staff and Ashley, pp. 40-114
\textsuperscript{324} Dix, p. 294
\textsuperscript{325} Chris Read ‘Sausage Studio’ in \textit{In Touch} no. 4 (07/80), p. 8.
\textsuperscript{326} These included ‘****’ (AKA ‘Four Stars’), the first wholly independent punk/post-punk compilation album, in November 1980.
One of the first local independent record labels to make an impact in the mainstream was Wellington’s Bunk Records, which was set up by journalist Mike Alexander late in 1980. For under $500, the label offered alternative artists two recorded items in a vinyl 7-inch format, and a national distribution deal with CBS for the finished product.\textsuperscript{327} The label’s first major success was a single entitled ‘Culture?’ by Dunedin band the Knobz, which became a chart hit in November 1980.

Mike Chunn set up the Auckland-based RTC semi-independent label (it was distributed by CBS) in 1979, which specialised in releasing overseas post-punk material. The reasoning behind releasing such material was, that while consumers of alternative music were comparatively fewer than those for mainstream product, they bought more records.\textsuperscript{328}

The key local independent label of the 1980s was Flying Nun, set up by record shop employee Roger Shepherd early in 1981.\textsuperscript{329} In 1981, both local artists and independent labels made a considerable commercial impact within the mainstream industry. In the sales chart data available on the twenty most popular chart artists for 1981, none of the four local bands listed had their hits issued on a major label. One of the bands was on the Ripper label, two were on Propeller, and one on Flying Nun.\textsuperscript{330}

Major record labels could provide an artist with large budgets to record and market music. They owned wide-ranging distribution and commanded attention from other associated media such as radio and television. However, with profit as the sole spur, they could be impersonal. Contracts could be near-rapacious, and loyalty to an artist non-existant.\textsuperscript{331} Independent labels offered loyalty, more personal relationships with artists, and simpler contracts.\textsuperscript{332}

\textsuperscript{327} Gary Steel ‘Bunk Records’ in In Touch no. 10 (06/81), p. 13.
\textsuperscript{328} Staff and Sheran, pp. 119-20
\textsuperscript{329} Although the label’s first release came in August 1981, correspondence between Sheperd and the Clean filed in “The Clean Book” dated back to May 1981, appearing on stationery printed with a Flying Nun letterhead and P.O. box address.
\textsuperscript{330} The Swingerters, Blam Blam Blam and Screaming Meemies, and the Clean respectively. See Scapolo, New Zealand Music Charts (both books).
\textsuperscript{331} Murray Cammick ‘What’s The Difference Between Indie and Major Labels?’ on the New Zealand Music Industry Commission website: www.nzmusic.org.nz/
\textsuperscript{332} Ibid.
Flying Nun typified this ‘low key’ approach to business matters, and during the 1980s the label strove to cut through the system of legal contracts and binding agreements which had characterised the mainstream music industry. For example, the ‘contract’ offered by Flying Nun to Auckland band the Able Tasmans consisted of a single telephone call from Roger Shepherd. The band went on to record several singles and albums for the label, yet nothing was ever put into writing.\[333\]

The problems inherent with independent labels included low production budgets, small or unreliable distribution, and the inability to provide large numbers of records quickly should the material prove popular enough to enter the mainstream sales charts.\[334\] With no over-arching ‘parent company’ to fall back on for ready funds, the problems in dealing with music in a mainstream capacity were serious ones for local independent labels.

Along with a large percentage of 7-inch singles and EPs, there were more albums available by local artists during the intense alternative/independent popular music activity over 1981-3. Despite the emergence of a strong consumer market for non-mainstream music, the album format still proved problematic for alternative labels to effectively market and sell. Flying Nun’s first album release was ‘Gordons’ by Christchurch band the Gordons, in November 1981.

The case of the Propeller label illustrated key problems when independent labels began dealing with the New Zealand’s mainstream market and its tastes. After four years of producing and distributing commercially successful low-budget records by alternative artists, Propeller was effectively bankrupted by a business gamble on the expensively-produced albums by Auckland bands Blam Blam Blam and the Screaming Meemees in 1983. The hit records from Propeller, Ripper and Flying Nun had not utilised an expensively-produced sound, but Propeller sought to maximise sales by appealing to the mainstream music consumer.

\[333\] Interview with Graeme Humphries (Able Tasmans) in Heavenly Pop Hits
\[334\] Ibid.
The Screaming Meemees and Blam Blam Blam had become nationally popular live attractions during 1981-82, and their initial records had included several hit chart singles. Propeller gave both the opportunity of recording debut albums, and provided extremely large budgets in the expectation of competing with the major labels in the sales mainstream. Almost immediately after the albums were completed, there were serious problems.

After four stable years, Blam Blam Blam had amicably decided on a fundamental lineup-change, which was set to follow the release of their album. This situation worked against mainstream-level sales, since the group which had built up a strong live reputation and recorded the album would not be the same one which would tour and promote it. The Screaming Meemees, meanwhile, had decided to use the album format to showcase new, unreleased material unfamiliar to consumers. Since it did not include their previously-released, well-known hit singles, the album failed to sell to all but the band’s most loyal consumers.  

When the albums failed to emulate the previous hit singles, the production-cost to Propeller was crippling. The Screaming Meemees’ ‘If This Is Paradise, I’ll Take The Bag’ cost $24,000 and Blam Blam Blam’s effort cost $27,000. Each would have to had sold a total of 12,000 copies in order to have merely returned Propeller’s initial investment, let alone generate any profits. Neither album sold close to break-even volume numbers in the marketplace, and the outcome was disastrous for Propeller.

In the later 1980s, alternative music had become much closer to the mainstream in terms of business practice and public visibility. Many local alternative musicians and consumers had begun to set up their own professional recording studios, including Strawberry Sound in Dunedin, Audio Access in Christchurch, Writhe in Wellington and Incubator in Auckland. In the second phase of alternative music, commerce had become increasingly important to artists and labels. Independent labels became more organised towards working within mainstream standards of product presentation and production.

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335 Staff and Ashley, pp 135-6
336 Ibid.
After New Zealand’s last vinyl record pressing plant closed down in 1988, local artists were faced with almost exactly the same options as those during the pre-punk era. They needed to make music-production a serious business decision and not a frivolity. Although no real barrier to the local mainstream industry, this situation ostensibly returned many of the country’s independent labels and musicians to an almost pre-industrial era.

In the 1990s, alternative music was recorded in many ways, from large, expensive studios to computer ‘virtual’ studios to compact cassette two-track machines. Local artists and labels had their CDs manufactured in Australia. In 1997, Pacific Mirror Image, a New Zealand company, offered the consumer 500 audio CDs with three-colour disc artwork, a standard case, two-page booklet and back cover inlay for NZ$1,650.338

In June 1998, the first local CD manufacturing plant was set up in Auckland by Software Images.339 In 2001, local artists could choose between two local CD manufacturers, after long-serving local recording studio and record label Stebbings had also opened a plant in Auckland. Software Images offered the customer CD runs as low as fifty copies, and both businesses were poised to begin manufacturing enhanced (video-capable) CDs and DVD discs.340

By this time, however, CD writers were becoming relatively common household equipment. Local studios also used CD writers to provide a small-time manufacturing service.341 The home-produced CDR cut out both the mainstream and independent label industry ‘middlemen’, which greatly reduced business overheads for the artist. Moreover, small labels dealing exclusively in CDR releases were free to produce as many or as few as possible. Despite some consumer feeling of ‘inauthenticity’ to CDR releases, due mainly to their low retail cost and inevitably ubiquity, the medium proved extremely popular with artists.342

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337 The debt was considerably lessened some years later when the material was re-released on CD.
338 Advertisement appearing in Rip It Up no. 233 (01/97), p. 17.
339 ‘Taking Care Of Business’ column in Rip It Up no. 250 (06/98), p. 32
341 Several examples; Nightshift Studios in Christchurch, for example.
342 Stinky Jim ‘The CD Revolution Is Here’ in Rip It Up no. 269 (03/00), p. 40-1.
In 2001, the self-released compact cassette format was still in use as an inexpensive, easily completed method for local artists to release their material, but by then CD burners had become almost as common as twin-deck cassette machines had been in 1981. Vinyl records were still being issued in 2001 by New Zealand labels and artists, including King Records (based in Geraldine), Portel Records (Wellington) and Crawlspace Records in Auckland. Much of the market for vinyl releases was found overseas. Crawlspace, a label which specialised in local punk rock, past and present, distributed 70% of their vinyl material in America.\textsuperscript{343}

\textbf{Alternative Music: Economics}

By ignoring attempts to produce commercial material which may or may not have appeared on mainstream sales charts, alternative artists and labels greatly lessened or avoided altogether many of the financial ‘overheads’ associated with the mainstream music industry operations. Excessive costs in national promotion, production and distribution were trimmed in favour of methods better suited to reaching a local audience.\textsuperscript{344}

In the 1970s, the latest volume selling rock records from overseas had been quickly released locally, but in spite of the standardisation of mainstream industry global release dates, much foreign ‘alternative’ music remained a rarity in local stores. Even if distribution deals did exist, alternative music could be extremely late arriving here, and often became ‘under-packaged’ in the process towards local release.\textsuperscript{345} The actual sound quality of overseas-produced rock records was also in many cases considerably superior to local pressings. Due to the relatively small local niche audience for rock music, the ‘stampers’ (pressing plates used in record manufacturing) used for such shorter runs were often over-used and not considered worth replacing.\textsuperscript{346}

\textsuperscript{343} Luke Walker ‘Vinyl Invasion’ in Rip It Up no. 275 (09/00), pp. 32-3.
\textsuperscript{344} Robertson, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{345} Graeme Leonard ‘Importing Your Own Albums?’ in Hot Licks no. 20 (10/75), p. 8 & 29.
In the 1980s, local alternative music became a commercial success, in line with overseas developments. The artists, labels and music were all more available to local consumers, and the expectations of their products’ sound and presentation had changed. However, while considerable commercial success had come for some alternative labels, only the largest were able to deal with the closing of the record pressing plants and the consumer shift to the CD format. While the situation left many artists and labels unable to issue vinyl, what New Zealand’s alternative music scene of the late 1980s possessed that previous local movements had previously lacked were, firstly, widespread high-standard home-recording facilities and a recording/playback format—the cassette—which was culturally ubiquitous. Secondly, there was by the late 1980s a non-mainstream independent network of communications and channels of commerce which had built up over most of the decade.

In the wake of the pressing plant closure, one logical recourse for local bands was to have records pressed overseas, whether by themselves or via a label. The closest available pressing plants were in Australia, and took orders of 300 units and over from New Zealand customers. However, the cost of freight to, and especially from, Australia was crippling for local artists, and the chance to personally supervise the mastering process was in effect lost, meaning that inferior pressing-runs could and did slip through. In any case, the last Australian pressing plant closed in 1992, leaving even more expensive European or American sources as the only alternative.

In keeping with a ‘total control at all costs’ ethos, many local alternative musicians were faced with few options with releasing recorded material. After a few years of extensive use, cassette releases had faded in popularity by mid-decade, but experienced something of an upswing in the wake of the pressing plant closures.

Another option was to turn to King Records in Geraldine for the manufacturing of vinyl releases. King Records was not a pressing-plant, it ‘cut’ records; that is, instead of pressing the malleable vinyl between metal plates, a continuous groove was cut directly into pre-pressed
blank vinyl discs. While state-of-the-art in its era, the disc-cutting method resulted in generally quieter-sounding records than did the pressing method, and much less fidelity was possible than the music industry standard.

Moreover, these acetate records tended to wear out relatively quickly and begin to skip or become fainter after several playings, not unlike the pre-pressing plant disc-cut records produced for the commercial market. While few hi-fi enthusiasts amongst labels or musicians would consider such releases except perhaps as a promotional item, King Records catered for the avant-garde, gothic, punk, and other sub-cultural fringe sectors, and was still functioning strongly in the early years of the 21st century. 348

Once home CD burning technology became available to individuals, alternative musicians were able to compete with the mainstream industry, albeit on a largely ‘underground’ basis. While the technology to home-record and produce CDs existed, the means by which to effectively market them did not. It was one thing to have one’s CD available, but quite another to mass-market and distribute it.

Alternative Music Culture

In the 1960s and 1970s rock music had been very much an alternative culture in New Zealand. While many artists performed regularly at hotels around the country, they were virtually all ‘covers bands’. 349 There were few opportunities for local ‘unsigned’ bands to be heard on radio or television, and fewer record labels which were interested in marketing them and their music.

Appearing locally in June 1977, punk rock was a definitively ‘alternative’ music. 350 One of the genre’s main points was that anyone who wanted to could be an artist. With the genre’s inherent ‘low ability/high energy’ ethic, local artists could now sound nearly identical to

347 Flint, p. 17
348 See the Lathe Cut Records website at http://home.attbi.com/~cassette/index.html
349 Tubes Paradise ‘Cherry Pie’ in Hot Licks no. 14 (04/75), p. 09.
350 Mike Chunn ‘Auckland punks!’ in Rip It Up no. 03 (08/77), p. 06.
overseas ones. The rejection of mainstream industry standards of presentation and production also meant that local alternative artists and label owners had maximum control over their work and its products, leading to a culture of ‘authenticity’.  

Until the early 1980s, the country’s rock bands had tended to follow an established, ‘traditional’ career path as commercial artists. The onus was upon the artists themselves to build up a considerable local live audience, increase their national visibility by successful touring, and eventually hope to impress either a local record company or better still, the local arm of a multi-national record label. In this way, most of the country’s rock band aimed their careers at eventually being ‘discovered’ by the industry and signed to a label. In the absence of an alternative system, this was the only way for local musicians to compete commercially with overseas artists’ records.

The situation changed with a near paradigm shift brought about by the alternative artists’ ‘do it yourself’, ‘no frills’ punk-inspired ideals. During 1981-82, Dunedin band the Clean had become nationally popular through a series of extensive tours and successful chart records inexpensively recorded for release by Christchurch independent label Flying Nun. In contrast to many mainstream rock artists of the time, the Clean held to a resolutely ‘low key’ aesthetic. In their publicity material for mid-1981, mention was made that the band ‘don’t mask their music with hype or light shows’.

With a population of around 125,000 in 1978, Dunedin was a sixth the size of Auckland. By contrast with Auckland’s larger consumer audience for alternative music, the ‘Dunedin Sound’ scene of the late 1970s and early 1980s consisted of between fifty and a hundred key people, including musicians, writers and sound engineers. The city had never been the scene of a thriving independent music culture beforehand, and this one had sprung directly from punk-inspired beginnings. As such, the scene was typically ‘alternative’ in that the participants

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351 Robertson, p. 140-1.
352 Publicity material dating from 06/81. From ‘The Clean Book’.
had produced both music and consumers by themselves, disregarding the mainstream industry for its commercially-minded indifference.

The number of local consumers for alternative music allowed some interesting record chart anomalies. Several records by definitive ‘alternative’ bands from overseas, including the Fall and Joy Division, were released locally mid-1981 and proved extremely successful. Within a few months, all three Joy Division singles released had reached the number one position in the national singles charts, whilst their debut album had amassed ‘gold’ status. Similarly, the Falls’ ‘Totally Wired’ single spent six weeks in the chart and reached no. 25, in August 1981.

With the popularity of local alternative music and the rise of independent labels, there was less need for local artists to approximate overseas styles in a bid for major label ‘discovery’. In the early 1980s, New Zealand’s rock music culture was considerably strengthened by a thriving national alternative music scene. Into this situation where the post-punk music consumer held a considerable sway over certain parts of the market, came the first successful local alternative singles. One of the largest-selling local ‘alternative’ hits was the Clean’s ‘Boodle Boodle Boodle’ EP, which appeared on Flying Nun in November 1981 and spent six months on the charts, peaking at number 5.

With the release on Flying Nun of other music from Dunedin’s alternative music scene, the ‘Dunedin Sound’ quickly became a useful descriptive genre term, first used primarily by consumers and journalists. While Flying Nun label originator Roger Shepherd claimed in 2002 that he had used the term first, it was musician David Kilgour who first used the phrase in the media.
Many of the artists involved in the Dunedin scene of the early 1980s were students or otherwise occupied, preferring to keep their participation in alternative music at a level of a 'hobby'. Given New Zealand's low population and geographical distance from overseas centres, it was all too obvious to the participants that very few artists made a viable income from performing and recording commercial rock, let alone alternative music. The notion that one's band could become part of the international mainstream was greatly affected by many past failures to do so by local commercial artists.

In *Positively George St.*, musician Matthew Bannister produced a memoir of life during the 1980s in Dunedin alternative band Sneaky Feelings. He made the comment that in local alternative culture, being on the unemployment benefit was regarded as 'a kind of artists' bursary'. The demands of a regular job could severely restrict an artist's freedom to tour, or even perform mid-week. There were problems with the 'artists' bursary', however. The Social Welfare department could and did suspend benefit payments for musicians when it found they were supplementing their income by playing music in hotels. This happened to David Kilgour of the Clean, and many others.

As early as 1982, there had been some 'backlash' by local artists and consumers alike to the popularity of Flying Nun's music and the term 'Dunedin Sound'. In the *Christchurch Star*, September 1982, Sneaky Feelings' David Pine commented that the 'Dunedin thing' had been overplayed, and that 'too much has been made of the regional thing'. Although later applied to other artists' material, the 'Dunedin Sound' described only a few bands who originated from that city. During the 1980s, the term was used in the media both domestically and overseas, but

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358 Robertson, p. 77.
360 Kilgour had his unemployment benefit suspended from 03/08/81 as a result of being 'discovered' playing in the Clean by the Department Of Social Welfare. He had to fill out declaration forms for any Clean earnings from then on, with a deduction from future benefit payments. Information from 'The Clean Book'.
361 *Christchurch Star*, 02/09/82.
was first disowned and then despised by the artists themselves. By the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, artists from Dunedin pointedly eschewed the description.\textsuperscript{362}

When independent labels began to ‘network’ and market their products internationally, the ‘Dunedin Sound’ was taken overseas in the mid-1980s, both through exported records and in person by the Chills who moved temporarily to the UK in 1985. They recorded and played extensively whilst there, and were followed by other bands from the Flying Nun label. Meanwhile, in New Zealand, the ‘Dunedin Sound’ had begun to influence new bands and artists. The Bird Nest Roys, from Auckland, were described by Matthew Banister as an ‘explicit homage’ to the description.\textsuperscript{363}

Despite success in New Zealand, artists who ventured overseas to further their career often found that they were back to ‘square one’, and had to establish themselves all over again.\textsuperscript{364} This could often cause musicians to experience a physical or emotional ‘bum out’, and their bands to split.\textsuperscript{365} The first move for many provincial local artists was the one to Auckland. Of the Dunedin bands, the Chills were the first to move their base there, in 1984. Sneaky Feelings followed in 1987, and Straitjacket Fits in 1988.\textsuperscript{366} With commercial success, Flying Nun also sought to move into other alternative music scenes outside the South Island. The sense of ‘betrayal’ felt by South Island artists and consumers in the wake of Flying Nun’s departure to Auckland was strongly articulated by editor Grant McDonagh in the Christchurch music fanzine Sunburn.\textsuperscript{367}

There was something of a ‘vacuum’ after Flying Nun left the South Island in 1988. There had for some time already been a change of focus by the label from South Island music to North Island material, Auckland in particular. Flying Nun’s ‘catchment area’ for music culture had been there for some years. There were not enough suitable artists to sustain the label as a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{362} Darryl Baser ‘Southern Sounds’ in Rip It Up no. 276 (10/00), pp. 40-1
  \item \textsuperscript{363} Bannister, p. 135.
  \item \textsuperscript{364} John Russell ‘Bands Across The Water’ in Rip It Up no. 218 (10/95), pp. 12-15.
  \item \textsuperscript{365} The Chills were a prime case in point. Over forty musicians had been ‘Chills’.
  \item \textsuperscript{366} Robertson, p. 79-81.
  \item \textsuperscript{367} Grant McDonagh ‘Proposal For A Coop’ in Sunburn no. 4 (c. 03/89), p. 04
\end{itemize}
purely South Island company. There were overseas signings, and licencing deals which allowed exchanges of consumer product between Flying Nun and other independent labels. Material from American alternative labels such as Homestead was released in New Zealand by Flying Nun’s ‘Flying In’ division.

Early in 1990, Roger Shepherd was interviewed by *New Zealand Musician* and sought to play up the mainstream commercial viability of Flying Nun. At the time, talks with large scale Australian semi-independent label Mushroom Records had been ongoing for nine months. At the time, Shepherd sought to distance Flying Nun from the ‘low budget’ connotations of alternative music when he commented that he did not see the label as being part of the ‘worldwide Indie getup’. In time, after Flying Nun had become part of Mushroom Records, this situation changed. ‘Older’ staff and artists the left company, and more orthodox business practices such as contracts and strict bookkeeping prevailed during the 1990s.

As with overseas developments, local consumers of alternative music had their tastes reflected in the sales charts. The period which saw alternative music ascend to the mainstream began in 1988, with the appearance of Guns’n’Roses on industry lists of New Zealand’s most popular recording artists. Nirvana first appeared on the singles list in 1992, and on the albums list in 1995.

A new generation of popular alternative bands emerged in Auckland, during 1988, embodying a punk-influenced ‘harder’ sound than that of the Flying Nun artists. Anigma, Bygone Era, the Honeys, the Psychodaisies, S.P.U.D. and others were generally ‘new’ musicians, with no ex-Flying Nun bandmembers amongst them. In 1989, the independent label Ima Hitt, based in New Plymouth, released ‘Celebrate The Sonic Arts’, a compilation album which showcased twelve of the newer alternative bands. Some of the bands had previously released their own material on cassette or vinyl.

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368 Richard Thorne ‘Flying Nun’ in *New Zealand Musician* no. 2 (04/90), pp. 18-19.
369 Scapolo ‘Singles’, p. 349.
370 Scapolo ‘Albums’, appendix.
To accommodate the growing consumer taste for ‘hard edged’ alternative music, Rip It Up added a ‘garage’ column in 1990. This reviewed the new alternative music from the USA, including some of the first local judgements passed on early Nirvana releases. A ‘hard’ music column was added in October 1991, which reviewed new releases in even ‘heavier’ music genres.

Because of their popularity and an inherently ‘no frills’ ethos, several of the key overseas alternative artists performed in New Zealand from the late 1980s onward. Among them were appearances by Dinosaur Jr. and Sonic Youth (1989), Henry Rollins and Mudhoney (1990), Nirvana and Public Enemy (1992), and so on. Local bands also appeared on the bills in support slots.

With the overseas success of artists and music from Flying Nun, albeit within alternative music circles, other opportunities opened for recording and distribution. Despite attempts by several Flying Nun bands to establish themselves there, it was not the UK which most avidly consumed New Zealand’s rock music culture, but the USA. Bailter Space, for example, was originally a Christchurch band which toured the US during the early 1990s, and signed a recording and distribution deal with large-scale American independent label Matador. Matador had a distribution deal with major US label Atlantic. Bailter Space’s contract was for five albums on Matador. Outside of the USA, the sales and distribution rights for the first two albums were held by Flying Nun. Matador also distributed the work of Flying Nun band the JPS Experience.

The Flying Nun label found the early 1990s a difficult time in terms of financial and artistic progression. After thirteen years of operation, both its artists and audience were ageing. By late 1994, only four musicians working for the label were under 30. By the mid-1990s, many of

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373 Rip It Up no. 171 (10/91), p. 31.
374 Nick Bollinger ‘Big Noise Bails To Big Deal’ in Real Groove no. 17 (04/94), p. 20.
376 Moreover, three of those four were in the one band. John Russell ‘State Of The Indies’ in Rip It Up no. 204 (08/94).
the label’s most high profile bands had split up or left the label. Through careful selection of artists, Flying Nun had evolved a distinctive label sound and aesthetic. During the 1990s, New Zealand’s alternative music had also evolved, refracting into many different aesthetics.

During alternative music’s move into the cultural mainstream, the practice of playing and recording such music also became more widely acceptable. In 1993 the annual ‘Smokefree Rockquest’ was set up as a competition for high school artists. The event was a nationwide one, with the finals televised. Strongly indicative of a growing mainstream encouragement of rock music as a cultural practice, the Rockquest continued throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, supported by a steadily increasing number of contestants. The Smokefree Rockquest showcased a variety of genres, but the most popular artists mainly played variations on traditional ‘youth’ music including heavy metal, hip-hop and punk.

During the 1990s, the ‘Big Day Out’ became an annual focus for alternative music. Originally an Australian event, the Big Day Out was a massive one-day rock show, held in Auckland, with many artists performing on several stages. The first event was held in early 1994 and drew an audience of 16,900. The Big Day Out was in many ways the successor to the three-day ‘Sweetwaters’ events, which had been held annually in Auckland during 1980-84. The Big Day Out became a popular attraction, and continued into the 21st Century.

In 1998, Daniel Keighley, the original organiser and promoter of Sweetwaters, attempted to revive the concept. ‘Sweetwaters 1998’ failed to attract enough of an audience to cover debts, and several artists were not paid according to their contracts. The consumption of music and the habits of alternative music consumers had changed. Audiences did not want to take three days out of their routine in order to attend a marathon rock show. Meanwhile, large-scale dance music events such as ‘The Gathering’ (held in Nelson) also became major fixtures on the alternative music consumer’s calendar. Large annual events such as these and others attracted

377 The Chills, JPSE, and Straitjacket Fits had split, while the Bats were taking a lengthy sabbatical. The Verlaines had left the label for large US independent Slash.
audiences adequate to their requirements, but the ‘traditional’ live rock venues had experienced a downturn by comparison.

Despite the mainstream popularity of alternative music, many of New Zealand’s rock music venues closed during the second half of the 1990s due to lack of patronage. One key reason given in Rip It Up was that New Zealand lacked a ‘circuit’ of medium-sized venues, through which new artists could tour and establish a viable nationwide audience. Other factors were the rise of popular dance music venues and the availability of other ‘distractions’, such as the Internet, video games, and satellite television. By the end of 2000, there were signs that the local live rock music scene was picking up, in line with a rise in popularity for ‘garage rock’ evident in the international mainstream music industry.

By contrast with other alternative labels and artists, during the 1990s Flying Nun’s products had begun to appear dated and irrelevant. Despite signing a number of newer, younger artists, the label had faded from prominence by the close of the 1990s. By 1997, the label’s consumer market had receded considerably, displaced by the availability of more alternative music, produced by aesthetically different artists, channelled through newer independent labels.

Flying Nun had never produced an artist who had ‘crossed over’ into the mainstream, neither locally nor internationally. The ‘low key’ sound and aesthetic favoured by the label (and most of its artists) had worked against it, producing few viable, stand-out ‘stars’. With the notable exception of the Headless Chickens, the Flying Nun bands tended to focus their attention elsewhere than Australia, a legacy of Toy Love’s unpleasant experience. Consequently, going overseas cost the label and its artists more, since it was the European and

379 Andrew Clifford ‘The Rise and Fall of Live Music’ parts 1-3 in Rip It Up no. 276-8.
382 A. Clifford ‘Why Are Foreign Shores Greener?’ in Rip It Up no. 278 (12/00), p. 20.
383 Betchadupa, Garageland, King Loser, Love’s Ugly Children, and others.
385 Andrew Schmidt ‘Independent Rock in the 80s: The Punk Revolution and its Aftermath’ (Lecture given to Waikato Polytechnic students, 10/98).
American markets which most received their attention.\textsuperscript{386} Since Flying Nun was based in New Zealand, support structures were severely stretched when the artists were overseas.

While 'Popstars' had been a successful concept, the lasting impact on the overseas music culture from New Zealand was not in the mainstream. Even given the distance-bridging technology of the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century, this country's mainstream artists still did not start the trends, they merely repeated them and any success on the 'world stage' was conservative and firmly within a given realm of music culture. For instance, Crowded House's melodic pop music contained hints of 'classic' 1960s pop music (principally the Beatles), while the Datsun's hard-edged pop-rock owed much to similar bands from the 1970s such as Australia's AC/DC.

However, while not as high profile as the mainstream artists' overseas success, New Zealand's alternative music culture produced a highly influential effect. The Clean and the Chills were the quintessential 'Dunedin Sound' bands, and were internationally entrenched as such by the 1990s. The music produced by the Datsuns and the D4 might be termed 'alternative' as a mainstream industry genre classification, but unlike the 'Dunedin Sound' artists, theirs was not seen as a uniquely 'New Zealand' sound.

Conclusion

During 1981-2001, the mainstream music industry at first ignored alternative music. During the late 1980s through to the mid-1990s, it took notice of alternative music's increased commercial potential, and successfully marketed many artists, creating a new mainstream genre classification in the process. In the late 1990s, the industry was severely affected by new home technology which allowed widespread illegal copying and distributing of copyrighted material.

Alternative music went through three distinct phases during the same time period. Firstly, the music was a cultural practice which stood as a genuine alternative to the mainstream in its

\textsuperscript{386} Schmidt.
economic and ethical territory. Secondly, it became a popular mainstream form and genre division for mass marketing. Thirdly, the term's meaning collapsed under the weight of the amount and variety of music available to the consumer through new technology.

New Zealand's remoteness had produced a 'lag', by which local artists produced music some time after it had initially appeared overseas. While geographic distance remained fixed, technology eventually narrowed the country's cultural remoteness until artists in New Zealand could participate in an international movement on virtually the same terms as those overseas.

While New Zealand artists could not generally influence the international music mainstream, in the 1980s, alternative musicians and the Flying Nun label contributed the 'Dunedin Sound' to the world's genres. By the 1990s, the label had become a part of the mainstream music industry, and the 'Dunedin Sound' had become dated. At the close of the century, creating and consuming rock music was a popular and time-honoured cultural practice, which had lost most of the 'rebel' element which had characterised its early years.
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