

The Grassroots Music Revolution ©

By Connie J. Schlosberg

The pending death of the compact disc (CD) will be arriving shortly. The recording industry is at a major crossroad. Record companies used to partake in the majority of an artist's career. It was commonplace for record companies to fund recording sessions, tours and videos; manufacture, distribute and market the product; and advise artists on their recordings along with handling the accounting and financial side of the trade. However, in the 21st century, the business of producing music has dwindled down to selling CDs and pressurizing artists to produce top ten hits. The top ten albums of 2007 were filled with all-encompassing songs sung by eye pleasing people. Rolling Stone magazine reported in its February 7, 2008 issue that CD sales are down 15 percent and major labels are dismissing employees. Even big box stores such as Walmart and Best Buy are downsizing their floor space dedicated to CDs.

Before recording technology existed, music was connected to social functions. Music could not be taken home, copied or bought and sold. Music was simply an experience. Once the social function was over, the music remained in one's memory. There was not any means of listening to it again. When the technology arrived to record music, music became a commodity. Music could be heard over and over again, but still could be played and enjoyed in live performances.

Soon, music will be having a grassroots movement if it has not started already. Once upon a time, artists needed the big record labels to help pay for the cost of recording music, including renting a professional studio and hiring an engineer and producer. With new technology, musicians can record an album from their laptops. They now can have control over their music distribution with little cost. Distributing digital music costs virtually nothing. Manufacturing and distributing CDs is expensive when one factors in all of the costs such as printing and shipping. More than half the money from the sale of a CD goes to overhead and marketing. That is why it is necessary to sell CDs in volume. With digital music, it does not matter.

Many musicians are looking at releasing their material for digital downloads only. As Stephane Vigeant from the Montreal-based rock band Karmadoza stated, "I've weighed several options and at the present time, I can't justify putting out a CD, whether it is with one of the couple of labels that offered to do it, or just ourselves [Karmadoza]. So I'm putting my money where my mouth is and going for a digital download only release. For now. We will probably do a later vinyl release and might consider releasing it in CD format if for some strange reason there's demand for it."

Vigeant is not alone. Just recently, English alternative rock band Radiohead debuted their latest album, *In Rainbows*, online allowing fans to download their songs at a name-your-price rate. Lead vocalist, Thom Yorke, credited their manager Chris Hufford with the idea. Fans' responses were interesting. Approximately one million

fans downloaded the album with about 40 percent of them paying for it. They averaged about \$6 each for the downloads, which netted the band \$3 million.

Many musicians are starting to tend to the business side of their craft. They can make more per units sold and keep their artistic licenses. This independence will provide the music business with innovative pieces of music. Styles can run the gamut with more opportunities for musicians to explore and for fans to uncover. Musicians are learning that now is actually a great moment in music - chock full of possibilities and options. The future is bright for a career in music if the person is willing to work at being self-produced, self-written, self-played and self-marketed. MySpace has been and will continue to be a great place for self-promotion without needing a large budget. Websites like www.reverbnation.com provides a home for musicians to promote and market their songs digitally. Music lovers can spend time there discovering new talent and joining their street teams and getting involved with the bands. This crusade will bring a global response to musicians because the world becomes a lot smaller when communicating via the internet. Artists can buy or lease a server to handle download sales, giving bands and solo artists' creative control of their work. A freedom they may not have had with a big record label especially when they are just starting out.

Digital downloading is not only just a convenient platform for musicians. Most music fans now prefer the ease of using mp3 players for listening to their favorite music. With newer models of portable media players about the size of chewing gum and no physical media and packaging to be bothered with, music lovers can focus on the music and not the "pretty products" that the recording industry tries to market. CDs just carry the music in much the way that a shopping cart carries groceries. Downloading music is not only environmentally friendly, but it frees the art to show for itself as opposed to deflecting from its quality by promoting all those accoutrements. One day the world will no longer see music as packaged, labeled and shelved products. The recording industry may die but music alone never will.