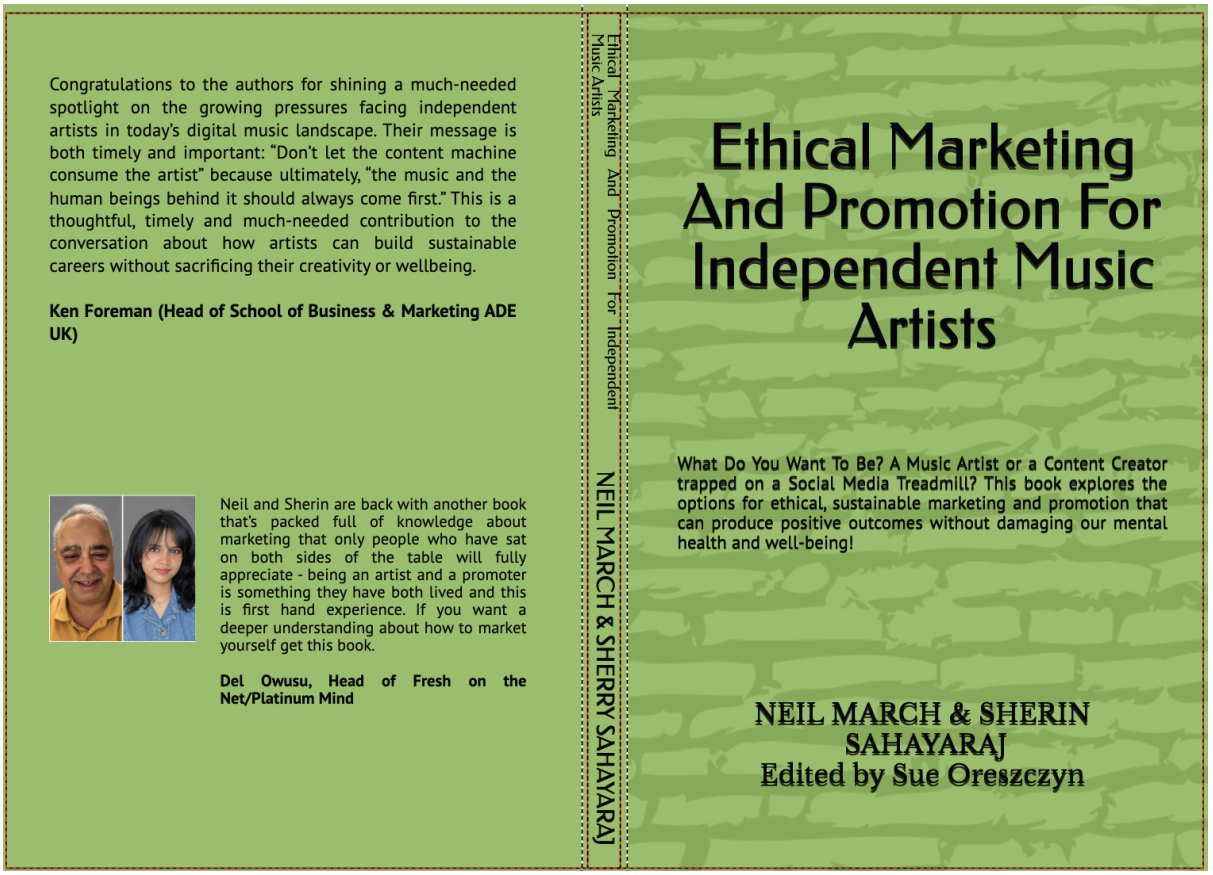
TRUST The DOC

TTD TRUSTTHEDOC MEDIA

Edition 121: 31st October 2026



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THE HOTTEST NEWS FROM THE GRASSROOTS SCENE:

- NEWS AND INFO FROM GRASSROOTS MUSIC
- OUR NEW BOOK SPARKS REAL-TIME DEBATE
- [THE] MUSIC OF SOUND: NEW SINGLE CAMPAIGN
- THE PORTSMOUTH HUB: NEW RELEASES ARE COMING
- OVER 60 REVIEWS OF NEW INDEPENDENT RELEASES
- AI: CAN WE DISTINGUISH BETWEEN GOOD AND BAD?
- WHY WE SHOULD BE WARY OF UNRESEARCHED ADVICE
- WHY THE MERCURY PRIZE HAS ZERO CREDIBILITY NOW!!!

INTRODUCTION:

'October and the trees are stripped bare' sang a fresh-faced upcoming U2 on the title track of their second album in 1981. Well, of course, that was 45 years ago when October was unequivocally autumnal. Four and a half decades of global warming later, it is not quite so cut and dried! But we have finally seen an end to the unbearable combination of heat and humidity that seemed to be never-ending from about May to September! Last weekend (25th October) we put the clocks back and got an additional hour's sleep in theory at least!

So what kind of month has October been here at Trust The Doc HQ (which, as we are sure you know, is a virtual place that invariably materialises in Lewisham, Redhill, New Cross, Kilburn, London's West End or anywhere else we decide to camp for the day!)? Busy has been one adjective we have used frequently! Our new book has caused a storm in a good way so we are busy marketing that too. ICMP's senior leadership has been incredibly supportive and you can see the link to the interview we gave to their journal in Part One.

Friday 9th October marked the release of the new single by **[The] Music Of Sound**. ***Danger Danger*** is easily our most explicit and direct attack on the far right, albeit set to one of our most accessible tracks. We have been buoyed by the response all round with great engagement on Spotify and social media and fantastic coverage by the indie music media. So we are grateful to the top-notch **Jade Perry** at Memphia, talented fellow artist and prince (in more ways than one!) of playlists **Serge Wenus**, tireless **Emiel Van Bruggen** at YouGrow, our lovely label **Monochrome Motif** (run by the amazing **Andrew Hartshorn**), to the awesome **Tony Hardy** (Fifty3.Net) and **Michelle Ward** (Eat My Brunch, Phoenix FM) and of course to **Del Owusu**, our unofficial 5th band member, for so many different and important reasons as well as everyone who has supported us in any way. Too many to mention in this introduction but see Part One for more details.

This edition sees another 60+ reviews of new independent music releases plus some articles we hope will be of interest. As ever, thanks so much for reading this and for supporting grassroots music.

NEIL MARCH & SHERRY SAHAYARAJ

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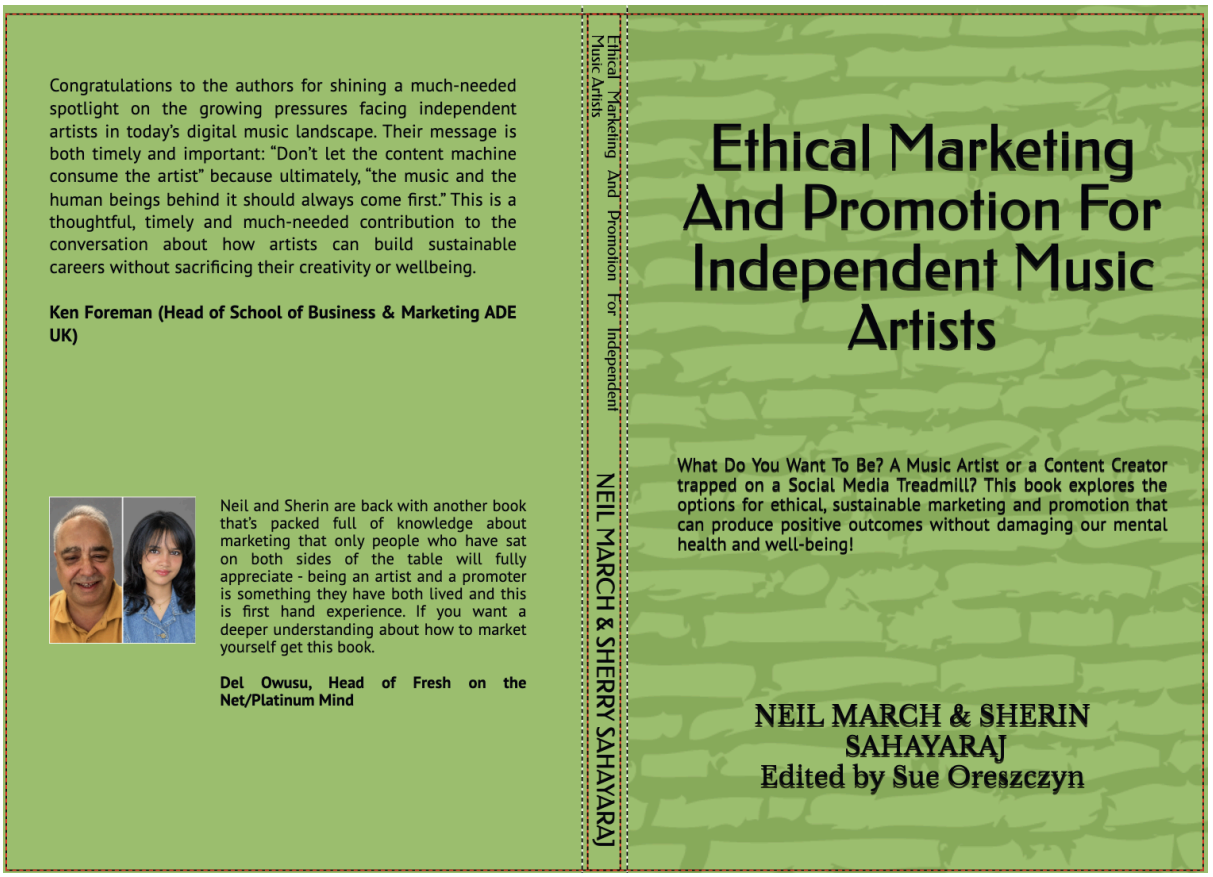
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Instagram; **BlueSky**; **Facebook**; **Threads**; **TikTok**; **X**; **YouTube**

PART ONE: NEWS AND INFORMATION: EDITION 120

OUR NEW BOOK SPARKS REAL-TIME DEBATE !!!!



Our new book ***Ethical Marketing And Promotion For Independent Music Artists*** certainly seems to be striking a chord! The book was officially released on Amazon on 30th September which happened to coincide with a significant leaving gathering at ICMP for our much-loved colleague and friend Yannis which we (Neil and Sherry) both attended. Most of the senior leadership team were present including Ken, whose quote is on the rear cover of the book, so it became the topic of discussion for some of the time we were there. Subsequently, we have given an interview to the ICMP Journal and they are organising a podcast with us too. It has also led to further invitations to give guest presentations to different groups of students and the ICMP Library has purchased six copies of the paperback so that it can be on the official reading lists for a number of modules.

In the wider arena, the book has sparked some interesting debates on social media; all positive. It has also clearly rattled the cages of one or two of the self-elected influencers whose narrative it

began by challenging. Although they have not referred to it by name, there have been some defensive comments from these people in videos we have seen them post where they plead with people to still listen to them and not be put off by others who are questioning their narrative.

In the final chapter of the book, we remind readers that we have set out our own thorough research data, which acknowledges views that are contrary to our own and demonstrates what objective research looks like. This is placed alongside analysis of the literary discourse on this subject. So we then challenge them to show us what research they can offer to bring any weight or credibility to the claims they are making. In other words, here is our research evidence. Where is theirs?

We will continue to post our own videos on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube Shorts. We will continue to challenge their narrative, calling them out as bullies who are monetising their rage-baiting but showing no concern for the impact on the mental health and well-being of the artists they are misleading.

Over the days following publication of our book, the most persistent of these bullies appeared about 20 times on our TikTok timeline. As usual he was spouting bullshit about how, if you are not creating daily content to boost your following, you should give up music; calling artists lazy for wanting to prioritise being artists over being content creators on social media!

These people are not going to change as long as they can continue to monetise the rubbish they spew out every day. Remember it takes them a couple of minutes to rant into their phone and upload it to TikTok. It takes far far longer for artists to create good quality audio-visual content. Read our book if you can but, if you don't want to do so, at least listen to people who have your best interests at heart. Close your eyes and ears to the TikTok bullies.

Finally, also remember that, as important as TikTok and other social media may be to marketing and promotion, they are not the only avenues. Live music, printed and online media, radio, blogging and network building are just as important. And, of course, by far the most important bit is the music itself. You can have the most relentless social media strategy in the world but it means nothing if the music doesn't match the hype!

[THE] MUSIC OF SOUND: SINGLE CAMPAIGN SO FAR





Pics by Del Owusu

The release campaign for our new single ***Danger Danger*** is building nicely. It is fair to say, however, that it got off to something of a stuttering start. The single was released on 9th October by the amazing **Monochrome Motif Records** label and the video, filmed by **Del Owusu** and edited by Sherry, was released onto YouTube at 11AM on 8th October when the single would be hitting Spotify in the first few countries around the world. So far so good.

Unfortunately though, despite the track being made available three weeks prior to release and YouGrow Promo having secured the support of some suitable playlist curators on Spotify, there was a delay of five days before the track landed on those playlists which left our awesome friend **Serge Wenus** carrying the torch for the single on his excellent playlist over that initial period. Accordingly, it took longer than we would have expected to reach the first 1000 streams.

Meanwhile though, our amazing friend and highly revered journalist (and FOTN mod), **Tony Hardy** wrote a beautiful, eloquent review published on release day in **Fifty3Fridays**.

Fortunately, the amazing **Jade Perry** of **Memphia Music Management & PR** was also straight in with securing media coverage and the reviews and invitations to do interviews began to pour in along with airplay (and rotation) on a bunch of radio stations and shows. Too many to mention here but they include second consecutive features in **Fame Magazine**; **Pop Journal** and our first ever reviews in **Plastic Magazine**; **The Indy Review**; **Frontview Magazine**; **FAB UK**; **Baby Step** and **Spiele Magazine**.

By the fifth day of the campaign, the single landed on playlists including two significant ones that, in terms of the other content, were the most suitable YouGrow have ever got us onto so, although the streams were a bit slow, we were happy that we were being heard by an audience that was much more likely to 'get' our music. Having built up a very pleasing figure of 17% engagement (people saving our tracks to personalised playlists and libraries) over the past year (including the rolling 12 month stats produced daily by Spotify), it is vital for us to keep the focus on that and not on high numbers of passive [and therefore meaningless] streams. By the end of day five, we were on 9 playlists generated by YouGrow's pitching efforts for which we have to thank Emiel Van Bruggen who has been our pitcher for nearly two years now. We are currently about to pass 5K streams with over 10% of listeners saving the single to personalised playlists or libraries.

As ever, we have had first class support from our close friend **Del Owusu**. He films all our videos with us, plays us on his **Songbird Sessions** show on **Exile FM**, features us on **Platinum Mind** and does so much to share our music on social media too. Del is the fifth member of [The] Music Of Sound as far as we are concerned. So it has also been great to see his own latest single (with another friend **NX Panther**), ***Tell Me***, doing so well and going down a storm on the Trust The Doc Radio Show. Del is, of course, a talented musician (keyboardist and composer) as well as all the other things he does so well.

THE PORTSMOUTH HUB: LINING UP NEW RELEASES



The work of **Dom Elton** and the amazing team at **Mayfield Records** in relation to the Arts Council England and The National Lottery UK supported **Portsmouth Hub** continued through October with the release of stunning singles by **Southerlies** and **The Mayfield Records House Band ft Mary Red**.

There is also a growing list of top quality singles gearing up for release between now and the end of 2026 including the likes of **Olu Rowe, Michelle Price, Elysia Jade, Mary Red. Daisy Vorakhanh, Neveah, SO Simple** and **Keira Kingsbury**.

In the meantime, the live gigs have also been continuing as the cohort is put on show for audiences on the South Coast to relish. More to follow soon.

The forthcoming single by **Daisy Vorakhanh** has been the subject of an Instagram story designed to whet our appetites. It has achieved just that; her stunning vocals and a gorgeous song about to be finished and released as part of this ongoing, amazing project.

Meanwhile, Neil and Sherry will be in Portsmouth on 29th November to run an educational workshop with the cohort focused on ethical marketing and promotion. This will be the first of a trilogy of workshops about the recorded and live music eco-systems.

TRUST THE DOC RADIO: UPDATE

The **Trust The Doc Radio** show goes out every Saturday evening at 5PM BST on **Exile FM**. It is presented by Neil and consists of two hours in which the primary content is current music, mostly by grassroots artists but always including some of the best current tracks by more well-known artists too.

In between, there is the popular ***What's The Word*** feature where listeners try to guess the title of the track Neil has chosen from the three clues (all also tracks) provided and additional hints that are given as the show develops. And there is a **Show Closer** Poll based on a theme which might be the anniversary of a classic album, the UK Top 5 albums or singles from 30, 40 or 50 years ago that week or a theme that song titles and artist names relate to. Sometimes just a selection of most well known tracks by a classic artist or band.

One highlight of October was being able to base the Show Closer poll on the 50th anniversary of Stevie Wonder's incredible ***Songs In The Key Of Life*** album.

You can always catch the podcast for 7 days from 7.20PM on the evening of the show here.



PART TWO: REVIEWS OF NEW MUSIC: ED 119

ALBUMS & EPs



MARZIHU - DIS (EP)

If you saw the recent review of their gig in Ladywell in this journal or in **Fresh on the Net**, you may already know that Marzihu is a duo consisting of The Bedlam Furnaces' **Ian Allison** (Guitar/Vocals/Tech/Percussion) and **Tim Ball** aka **Didge** (Bass Guitar/Vocals/Tech). ***DIS*** is their debut EP and is out on 13th November. And, of course, their approach is uniquely their own and refreshingly untraditional!

There are ten tracks but how Ian describes them is as five main tracks ('an essay in five chapters') interspersed with 'ceasefire' tracks! Not that Marzihu are at war with anyone specific but, in a sense, music is always involved in a war, both cultural and socio-political! Not to mention the battle for original ideas to be heard despite all the surrounding noise!

Alright, let's talk about the music! It opens with the first ***Ceasefire*** with a daunting male spoken voice talking about war while a filmic build-up of sound swirls menacingly, most unlike a ceasefire but very atmospheric. ***Prometheus*** continues with the spoken word about war while a quasi-military beat accompanies cinematic synth strings and a build-up of staccato notes. Then guitar doubles the synth while adding snarling bendiness and sustained playing over changing chords. This is so like music from a dramatic movie scene. ***Ceasefire 2*** uses the same 4-note theme but in a different context and more spoken word, the strings buzzing in an unstable manner before ***A Device*** follows with triplet-time semi-tribal percussion, the sound of voices on the wind and another configuration that develops similar chord and note patterns. This is now really feeling like it is in variation form. The spoken word statements continue to repeat as before.

Ceasefire 3 still retains the same spoken word but offers a haze of synths and almost helicopter-like buzz. ***The Book*** then takes us into the threat of AI as a spoken word theme while long chords and ghostly single tones follow. This develops into a full-on instrumental with some Todd Rundgen-esque guitar shooting up the scales and spacy chords popping up all around. ***Ceasefire 4*** begins almost in neo-romantic territory with rich strings and barely audible voices buried under ambience. ***Little Pigs*** duly creeps, bell-like, into audibility and an Eastern-sounding riff accompanies a 'three little pigs' spoken word reference. Octave-apart guitar and bass tones play descending scales. Again, there is some tasty sustained lead guitar play here, almost like Public Service Broadcasting jamming with Brian May while Mogwai bring spices. ***Ceasefire 5*** brings back earlier spoken word samples with more rich string chords briefly interrupted by Timpani-like hits. Then we are into the final track. ***For Crying Out Loud*** begins with drum echo and we get Ian's vocals setting out a melody that then becomes harmonised and takes on a semi-psych pop sensibility with a half-time punchy beat that has that 'live' drum sound that is so satisfying. There is still room for more spoken word and some open fifths interplay between Ian and Didge between the verses. Echoes of early Pink Floyd come to mind but that is not to suggest anything retro. The sounds and arrangement are contemporary and refreshingly unlike anything much that you will hear elsewhere. It is an unexpected but really enjoyable way to round off a thoroughly accomplished, inventive and daunting work.

This EP is cinematic in the true sense that much of it sounds like it belongs in a stirring action movie. Ian and Didge draw on a range of influences to create their own sound world, capable of conveying a scary anti-war message while also delivering some beautifully composed music, played with loving care and attention to detail by two fine musicians whose command of tech enhances their instinctive creativity and impressive precision.

POP NOODLES










[Dayla] returns with more epic synth-soaked cinematic Pop on ***TV - 90s Kid***. Dayla's dynamic, dexterous delivery floats and flutters above a mighty mix of reverberant synths and vibrant colour. The melody is strong throughout and, although there are clear retro references, the overall sense is of a highly contemporary, expertly produced slice of sophisticated pop, topped off with some great hooks.

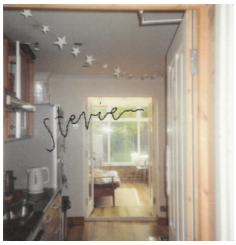
London quartet [Clamber]'s Soundcloud page is somewhat coy about location or links but we tracked them down on Instagram where we can see our friend and fellow FOTN mod Tony Hardy follows them. ***Collaborate*** is a truly lovely slice of soulful Pop with appealing upper (falsetto) register male vocals and matching synths bathed in rich chords, popping counter melodies (although sometimes doubling the vocal lines) and a hook that you cannot hide from. The fade out at the end is a bit odd but it does not detract from it being a top track.

Manchester's [Caulbearers] bring us ***Brothers At The Wheel***. This is a fascinating hybrid of lightly funky and soul-infused Pop with syncopated rhythms, an echoing percussion track and synth strings playing in couplets against a catchy vocal melody. Midway through, it slows into a semi-classical string instrumental before the beat becomes more direct and the final stretch has a rockier complexion. Great combinations of instruments and voices that contribute to a nuanced and quietly intense track that is 5 mins 20 secs in length but never outstays its welcome.

Palermo, Italy born London artist [Freddie Purple] can trace her roots back to the Italian composer Rossini and has lived a young life immersed in music and dance. On ***Atomic Habits***, she starts with some warm synth chords before the full instrumental track kicks in with punchy beat, choppy guitars and busy bass joining the synth colours to accompany her dexterous and dynamic vocal performance in what is essentially a kind of synthpop track with a

cool hook and plenty going on to keep our interest as it plays out.

Piri returns with ***Both Be Happier***. This has a snappy but also deep beat and stabbing filtered synth chords and other little scalic runs on a programmed sax all dancing and jumping around Piri's distinctive, dexterous vocals and a refreshingly unusual but no less catchy hook. A track that develops around you and keeps you hooked.

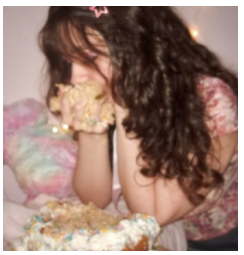


Funny but we were discussing Lexie Carroll just the other day. Partly because our bandmate Aniya went to see her live a few years back and partly because she represents one of those young artists who had a lot of attention from Fresh on the Net before seeming to have reached a level in her career where she might be too big to need that level of support. Then, lo and behold, she reappears in the FOTN in-box with ***Stevie***, a song that gets better as it develops with sweet seven chords, an attractive melody, later bolstered by lovely harmonies and a lyric that could be talking about one of the great Stevies (as in THE great Stevie or, if not him, maybe Nicks?) being in her kitchen. Lexie's soft but commanding and distinctive voice dominates a rich translucent mix and the hook is impossible to hide from. Great to have her back.

ALT ROCK & INDIE






London-based Alt Rock trio What Are We Now bring a refreshing originality with ***Downhill***. Sometimes it's the little nuances that make such a difference. In their case, that means using inversions in the bass to change the complexion of a chord, adding cool single line riffs between chunky fuzztone guitars, the drummer sometimes syncopating the beat or even dropping a snare

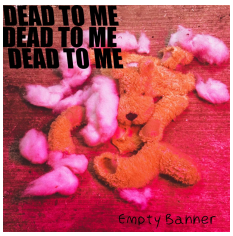
hit to retain a rhythmic fluidity. With the slight wail and bendy tones of the vocalist, this has echoes of early Pixies and Dinosaur Jr but then it also sounds essentially current and the punchy production and 'live' feel of the instruments emphasises its energy.

Talented Londoner **Tom OC Wilson** teams up with **Michael Hill** on ***Set Sail***. Built around onbeat bass and drums and imaginative chord play, this has an aura of early Peter Gabriel (post-Genesis) in a mash with Ben Folds and a smidgen of Donald Fagen. Everything about this is impressive from the build-up of chordplay, effortless and translucent instrumental interplay to the vocals and high standard of melodic writing that just carry us away.

From Neil's home town of Hemel Hempstead come **Loud Minds** with ***Burning Skies***. This is a track full of contrasting sections and dynamic instrumental build-ups that set the scene for talented vocalist and guitarist Joe Harding to stretch out over the final section. Imaginative, intense and invigorating, showing that Prog Rock can still be fresh and original.

Lidiachuu caught our ears with ***Not Another Word***. Getting detailed information about her from her website and Instagram is not easy although her posts are engaging and colourful and she is clearly a talented young artist. Her TikTok account shows impressive levels of engagement too. *Not Another Word* builds from relatively quiet beginnings into a joyous slice of indie pop-rock in which her vocals grow in intensity while the hook grabs our attention and the instrumental mix provides a punchy energetic backdrop to her refreshingly individual style.

Güdness have a track out called ***We're All Good*** which begins as a bouncy triplet time Alt Rock track with hints of Glam but then develops into a more trippy semi-Psych piece with reverberant guitars and dubby elements. In amongst the contrasting sections and imaginative instrumental interplay, it also has a strong melody and appealing male vocal lead. A lot of thought and creativity has gone into this and it has been worth the effort for how it lifts the track way beyond the ordinary.










Hull's [Empty Banner] are four young women who are blazing a trail with their energetic Alt Rock style. ***Dead To Me*** kicks off with a four-chord pattern that provides the foundation for this biting but joyously melodic slice of punky powerpop complete, as it develops, with excellent shouts behind the hook and a really appealing instrumental chemistry that is tight, hard-bitten and perfectly serves the song.

The only place you will find the new single by [Luke Branch] is on his website where you can download it for free. And what a track ***Guttermouth*** is. Based around a great fuzztone guitar riff and a really imaginative chord arrangement backed by punchy bass and beat and screaming keys, his vocals recall early Tom Petty but grittier. The chorus is irresistible and the whole energy along with such a nuanced arrangement full of twists and turns adds up to an absolute belter of a track. Not surprisingly, this went down a storm on our radio show.

Los Angeles-based female-male duo [Magic Wands] have a track called ***Guardians***. This is based on a repeating descending four chord pattern bathed in ever-increasing psychedelic swirl and echo while the song builds in dynamics and retains an intensity and melodic appeal as events circle around the mix.

Brighton trio [PROJECTOR] are another band signed to the excellent Alcopop! Records label and ***I Need A Lie Down*** is a blast of punky positive energy with gruff male vocals, bendy bristling guitars, thudding full throttle bass and power-driven drums. It crashes into our lives like a much-needed breath of fresh air, venting its collective spleen in the most appealing manner.

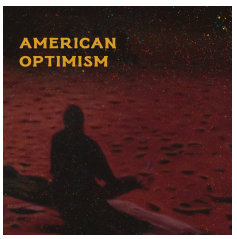
Sticking with Alcopop! Records, Scottish band [The Spook School] bring us ***Corporate Caring***. As you can probably guess from the title, this mixes a sardonic lyric with a driving melodic Alt Rock style that has elements of a long lineage of influences stretching back to Post-Punk days but sprinkled with plenty of contemporary elements. Male vocals are bolstered by harmonies and the guitars take the lead in providing colour and counter melody while the band has

a great chemistry and infectious invigorating energy.







Nicky aka [Third Girl From The Left] returns with ***Breathe***. This is in a slowish triplet time with shimmering guitar lines, spooky synths and a dark daunting atmosphere that suits the intense mood of the track. Her distinctive vocal dominates as she weaves this sophisticated musical web around a commanding melody. Then there is an unexpected switch late on into a cool driving groove with ghostly vocals and loud ringing synths and ambience carrying the track off into a daunting finale.

It seems fitting that TTD royalty and super talented artist **Nick Woodgate** aka [The Jojo Man Band] should have a new single out called ***Zombie*** so close to Halloween! This is very Ska-influenced with echoes of his brother's band Madness, especially *Night Boat To Cairo*. But Nick makes the genre his own with clever chromaticism, psychedelic guitar effects and his filtered vocal delivering several cool melodies as the song switches between contrasting sub-sections. Catchy, punchy and fun.

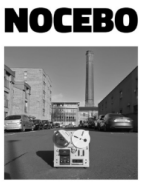
TTD friend [Nadia Sheikh] roars back onto our radars with ***Fade Away*** which, despite its title, is full on fuzztone guitar-driven energetic Alt Pop. Nadia's vocals are passionate and bolstered by cool harmonies while the guitar brings some simple but impactful counter figures and the power-driven pop and hooky melodies will chase you down and give you the musical equivalent of a sustained sugar rush.

Regular readers will know that we love some mind-spinning trippiness and that is what we are confronted with courtesy of [Shortout Kid] (the clue is surely in the name!) and ***Lamb.*** Reverse-recorded fuzztone guitars in layers, wall of noise production, stressed male vocals and a general tendency towards the unusual and experimental all mark this track out and make for compelling listening. Clever, intense and thoroughly invigorating.

Glasgow's [Junior VP] continue their prolific release series with ***American Optimism***. This is

trademark Junior VP with clean but punchily produced guitar leading us into a melodic Alt Rock track with echoes of 90s US Indie both in the harmonised and tuneful vocal and the lovely guitar figures that mix with live-sound drum and busy bass. But this is also thoroughly contemporary as well as being full of instinctive and invigorating inventiveness. JVP have been putting out some fine music in 2026 and this is arguably their best yet.









The latest offering from **Will Owen** aka **Blokeacola** is ***Don't Set Me Up (For A Fall)***. This represents quite a shift in direction away from his trademark psychedelic pop and towards a mixture of bluesy slide guitar, sparse arrangement and a vocal delivery that is almost Old School London (and yes I do know Will is from the Welsh Valleys!). It is very effective though and makes our ears prick up from the outset with its bluesy undercurrent but punky vocals and insanely catchy hook. Great to see and hear Will experimenting and nailing it 100%.

Davy King records as **Home time**. ***Nocebo*** is unmistakably, perhaps even unequivocally inspired by early 90s Grunge. A highly appealing wall of fuzztone guitars playing chords on a I - III# riff immediately grab attention and then a vocal that has echoes of Pixies, Smashing Pumpkins and a smattering of Nirvana (minus the high notes!) ensues. It is laced with more modern sounds and contemporary production values that add to its freshness. And it is melodic, punchy and uplifting.

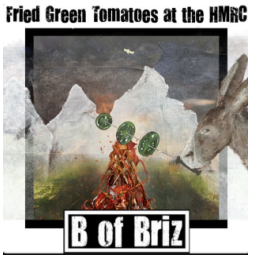
Based in Glasgow for some time now, TTD regular **Jonni Slater** brings his first new track for a little while with ***Forgiven***. This is what Jonni does so well, mixing sophisticated and extended chord sequences with an array of well-chosen timbres and enigmatic sounds that float around the guitar and keys while his slightly gritty, soulful and expressive vocals take the lead, setting out a slightly mystical verse melody that leads into a chorus that soon lodges itself in our brains. High quality as always.

The new single from **Gurry Wurry** is ***I Doubt We Survived***. This is a slow-burning, slow-tempo slice of imaginative, inventive and sophisticated Pop. Dave is in strong voice with a rueful air to the way

he hangs on the notes as ambient noises increase in profile, almost threatening to overpower the rich piano chords and colourful string synth while the beat is crunching and ricochets around the edges of the mix. Stirring and striking stuff.

BEATS, RHYTHMS & RHYMES








Our favourite Edinburgh-based London rapper, producer and entrepreneur **Rolain Williams** aka Conscious Route teams up once again with regular collaborator and Glaswegian Wends on ***Swaggin***. This has a nineties vibe going on and the noodling sax lends it an extra layer of suaveness. Wends's vocal is in a rich alto range and her soulful melodic style chimes perfectly with Rolain's thoughtful, reflective rap. Another cool track from their ever-expanding catalogue.

Bristol's unique B Of Briz delivers another cleverly configured communication, this time raging articulately against the utter hypocrisy of how rules serve the rich and hit the poor. ***Green Fried Tomatoes At The HMRC*** spares no wrong-doers as she warns of an impending reckoning. This is set to a sparse backdrop dominated by jerky, disarming synth and ametrical pizzicato, the ideal atmosphere for the calm but dark and daunting delivery of her stark message. Also check out the excellent and superbly sparse ***Not That Deep***.

We appreciate he is not a grassroots artist but, as our friends at Plugged In PR bring us so much high quality material by rising stars for this journal and the radio show, we have included the collaboration between Fireboy DML and Lojay. ***Goddess*** is an uplifting and dreamy piece of Afrobeat mixing with elements of Hip Hop and Pop. Their voices combine beautifully and the hook sits perfectly atop the rich, buoyant production.

From Nigeria, Naomi Rogue brings us ***Nature*** which is a visceral but dreamy slice of Afropop with an infectiously catchy hook and lush arrangement. Naomi's voice is like pure honey and her dynamic dexterity enables her vocals to dance across the front of the rich

instrumental mix, echoing in your head long after the track has ended.

SOULFUL SENSIBILITIES










Londoners **We Built A Place** continue their impressive output with ***Rok Step***. This has a subtly funk-gilted feel and mixes some intelligent rap with soulful melodies and great use of the upper register for octave-apart vocals. Their ability to come up with several memorable hooks within a single track is once again evident and they use the instrumental elements to create space and translucence so that the vocals always take pride of place. They have an infectiously fresh sound and a notable sense of fun. *Lose My Pride* captured our attention last time out. *Rock Step* is, in our opinion, even better.

Ella Crow is in R'n'B/Pop territory with ***You Can't Have It***. In a slow to mid tempo groove with a mainly two-chord foundation, she sets out her stall with a gritty but agile vocal performance that is emotionally charged and instinctively melodic. The harmonies add to the richness of her tone. Punchy and powerful.

Cardiff's **Sad Cypress** returns with ***Sirens***. This is a slow soulful ballad that showcases her expressive and dexterous voice via rich chords and a rueful melody. Oddly it only lasts 55 seconds though, inevitably leaving us wanting more. Perhaps that is the intention. It is certainly lovely while it lasts.

Manchester's **Emily Mercer** returns with ***Do You Get It Now?*** This is a sophisticated soulful Pop track in a slowish tempo with extended chords, lovely piano mixing with some spine-tingling synth sounds. Emily's platinum alto voice sits at the centre of all this, her yearning, dexterous delivery bringing a real emotional power to a lush arrangement. The little piano figure at the end is a nice touch and a total contrast to the full-on production. This just oozes quality.

Great to see the return of TTD friend and super talented Londoner James Numbere with ***Plaything***. James has adopted a throwback style with the Drifters-style rhythms and chord arrangement. But, of course, he brings this into 2026 with modern sounds, expanding backing vocal arrangement and punchy beat. At the centre of the mix is James's effortlessly graceful and agile voice, setting out his stall with a great melody, clever lyric and plenty of flourishes.

CLUB CULTURE



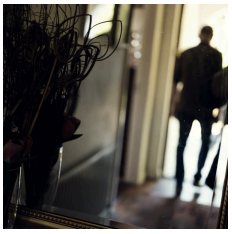



It has been a little while since we have had a new track from Shauna McArdle but she returns with ***DontWriteASongAboutThis***. It is characteristically uptempo with a driving Techno beat at its core and a catchy synth melody that feels familiar and anthemic. This should get some dancefloors pumping for sure.

US artist Tyler Remix's track ***Cheer Champ*** is listed on his Soundcloud page as Dubstep but it actually contains such a range of flavours with Dubstep, Trance and tuneful Electronica among them. The trippy stuttering vocal works really well and the growling synths playing off against striking textures and tunes all contribute to a rich mix of ideas that takes us off in a host of directions. This will work in the right club setting but it is also just an eminently listenable track in any scenario.

TTD royalty and prolific artist and producer Pimlican teams up with Bye Bye B on ***You Know***. This is more driving Electro House than some of Pimlican's work; more synth and ambient sounds and less of his trademark piano but it has a great energy and BBB's alto range vocals and dub elements add a great contrast, bringing a poppier vibe to the party. Another banger.

SINGER-SONGWRITERS










From County Meath in Ireland comes **James J Clarke** who teams up with **Aoife DeMille** on ***Half Of The Time***. This slow-burning slab of slightly Folky Pop is built around big pub-style piano chords a bar at a time (ha, no pun intended!) while their contrasting and beautiful voices weave around each other and set out a thoroughly heartwarming song, surrounded by swooning flugel horn and lush chord extensions. This went down a storm on our radio show and rightly so because it's a real gem.

From my (Neil's) home town of Hemel Hempstead (making it two from Hemel in this edition) comes **Abbie Gathard** with ***Losing My Way***. This is bright, buoyant Alt Folk or maybe Folk Pop with shades of Katie Melua jamming with Olivia Rodrigo while Phoebe Bridgers adds flavours although this is very much at the organic end of that acoustic pop spectrum. Abbie's vocals are yearning and agile and the melody gets hold of your ears before you know it as it dances around the strumming triplet time chordplay and shimmering arrangement. Great to hear this and another artist to watch.

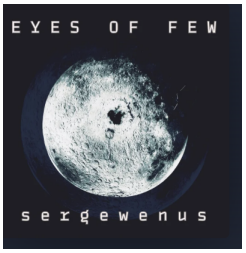
East England-based US artist **Annie Dressner** has been a regular in this journal and Fresh on the Net for a good few years and her latest material has taken on a slightly rockier, electric direction. This continues with ***Hate Being By Myself***, recalling some of the classic early 90s US Indie music but laced with contemporary sounds and, most importantly, a great tune delivered in Annie's distinctive and expressive voice. This will have you hooked from the outset.

TTD regular from Newcastle Upon Tyne **Simon Taylor** has been moving in a notably jazzier direction lately and this continues with ***Shitshow***. Funky, deep bass punctuates the track while horns stab and swoop over the mix. Simon mixes spoken word with hooky melodies and a lyric that sets out a wide observation of everything that's wrong with politics, the media and their impact on everyday life. This is a must-listen track and the writing and musicianship is first class.

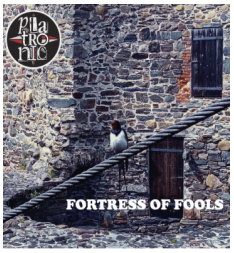
Zofia declares herself a big fan of Carole King (and aren't we all!) but, while there are elements of that raw, organic piano-accompanied songwriting style in ***Love Me Less***, this has a rich arrangement of piano and orchestral strings and the style of the writing is very contemporary and fresh. Zofia's voice is yearning and emotionally charged and her delivery is agile and stretches and bends the melody to milk as much as possible from it, resulting in a lovely track that presents her as an exciting new talent. Well, new to us anyway.

SYNTHEMATIC









Continuing with the theme of originality, it is hard to decide where to place Love, Dallas with ***Movie Star***. In a joyous triplet time, this mixes guitars with synths and sounds that could almost be metal cutlery dancing a modern jig with its own harmonic overtones. All the while a laid back but distinctive female vocal leads the line and rich synths thicken the texture and take it up another notch in quality.

They're back!! TTD regulars PECQ bring us ***Freer***. There's a Trip Hop undercurrent to this slice of dreamy electro pop. Hannah's (Jakes) voice is soft but commanding and agile, floating around the mix with her rich synth layers contrasting Nikò's bubbling beat.

Our amazing Polish friend Serge Wenus keeps the tracks coming with ***Eyes Of Few***. Built around an appealing popping synth bassline and long rich chords, Serge's unique voice mixes melancholy with a yearning expressiveness while the little melodies and counter melodies in the keyboard parts are really effective and the key change at the end is a great touch.

Legendary German artist Rotersand has a 25th anniversary remix and master of a 2001 track called ***Merging Oceans*** (coupled with a new mix of ***Train***). This is dark, ambient electro-synthpop with frantic staccato synth patterns, windy and ghostly sounds in the background and a tough

programmed beat. On top of this rich backdrop sits a melody that is classic synthpop accompanied by a corresponding synth melody that really adds a layer of colour to a very satisfying track.

German-Finnish duo [Platronic] have a new single out. ***The Fortress Of Fools (The Emperor's New Clothes)*** has a dark minor key aura with **Kay** mixing spoken word with her trademark rich alto vocals over **Sami**'s big cinematic instrumental arrangement. This is calling out the insanity that has engulfed the political world over recent years and wraps this important message in a dreamy powerful slice of melodic synthwave, superbly produced and carried along by the momentum of its many ideas.



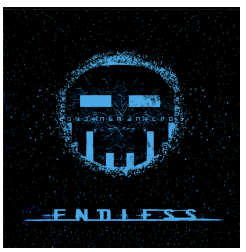
LA based artist [Yana] has teamed up with the Berlin-based Norwegian-Irish artist [Tara Nome Doyle] on a track called ***Your Name Is A River*** in which they manage to use the same twin set of four-note ascending synth figures throughout the track. Around this simple but striking foundation, the pair construct a track that grows in layers of synths and vocal dynamics, upping the intensity and never losing its (or our) focus until it finally drops down and disappears dreamily at the end. It takes skill and talent to pull something like this off. Yana and Tara do so with effortless emotional power, musicianship and distinctiveness. Superb track.

It is difficult to decide where to review the latest collaboration between TTD regular and friend **Matt Couchman** aka Norwich's [Lost Signal] and TTD royalty from the Nottinghamshire - Derbyshire borders [The Happy Somethings]. ***Stairs From The Moon*** is such a perfect hybrid of Electronic Ambient, Indie Alt Rock/Pop and Synthwave. More important than which category we place it in is the fact that this is a much more mystical and dark track than its rather tranquil sounding title suggests. It has an electro-synthpop undercurrent but, as it develops, sounds and auras drift across the mix, bringing an eerie fog from which the harmonised vocals of the Happys sometimes seem almost to emerge

as if immersed in the darkness of a winter evening. Their voices are as distinctive as ever though and the interplay between Matt's experimental urges and their innate melodic sensibilities is what weaves the magic throughout this refreshingly individual but dark and disarming track.

ELECTRONIC & AMBIENT





Something I never would have imagined I would be doing is having the opportunity to review a newly released single recorded by Buzzcocks legend **Pete Shelley** in his teenage years as an electronics student. But, thanks to the amazing Gary Levermore of Red Sand PR, that is precisely what we have with ***Sky Yen Extracts (Parts 1 & 2)***, released by Shelley himself in 1980 on his own Groovy Records but now reissued as a CD by Cold Spring Records. Shelley was 19 at the time of the recording in 1974, using a self-made oscillator, two-track tape recorder and additional effects (echo, drones, electronic bleeps etc.). These versions are a mere [approximately] four and a half minutes each but, if you go to his Spotify page, you can hear the full length versions which are nearly 21 minutes each in length.

Both tracks have the feel of someone who, in addition to what we know of his interest in the burgeoning German electronic music scene of the time, might also have been influenced by Music Concrète (Pierre Schaeffer), Gyorgy Ligeti and possibly spectral composers like Gerard Grisey and Horatių Radulescu. He sets the scene as he tries to draw the sounds together in an unstable unison but then allows the tones to drift outwards, mostly descending as layers are added and a compellingly disarming and thoroughly otherworldly aura takes over everything around it. Somehow, even within this highly niche avant-gardism, his tendency towards melodic invention still finds an outlet, making it all the more unique and extraordinary. It is no exaggeration to suggest that, had Pete Shelley pursued this compositional urge more rigorously, he might well now be a revered figure in contemporary art music and sound art. It has

certainly been an absolute revelation to discover these two fantastic tracks. Thank you Gary and Cold Spring for shining a light on what such a young Pete Shelley was already capable of producing.

Oliver Crawshaw aka **Olirics** has a track called ***Marshmellow*** which is not exactly mellow although it could be a little marsh-like in parts. Deep slightly buzzy electro bass, lots of bell-like sounds and a continuously fluid mix of synths and ambient noises create an agreeably messy mishmash (a marshmallow even!) of minor key dark atmospherics. It builds in dynamics and becomes less translucent in its latter stages but has enough going on to hold our interest as we allow it to twitch and twist its way around our fuzzy brains.

The enigmatic **AV Sunset** have a track called ***To Set The World On Six And Seven***. It starts off as a translucent ambient instrumental with warm synth chords and a fluttering of sounds floating around the mix but then develops into an appealing Post-Rock instrumental in triplet time with sustained guitars, running bass and unusual percussion track that builds around a repeating melody and then very suddenly stops dead. Interesting and invigorating in its own uniquely colourful and calming way.

US artist **Gary Zon** formed **Dismantled** in 2000 and continues to hone his art in 2026. ***Wired For War*** places growling, angsty vocals against a fierce forcefield of electronic and ambient sounds fizzing and firing off against crunching beat as he turns up the anger and intensity. It's a compelling listen. The energy and no-holds-barred sonic assault keep us hooked throughout.

Analogue Electronic Whatever return with ***Someone Saved My Life***. This begins with some echoing synth tones before the voices combine in harmony over a translucent backdrop of bass notes, long sweep tones and crisp beat. It has an unmistakably 80s synthwave feel but the sounds and nuanced arrangement bring it firmly into 2026.

CONTEMPORARY CLASSICAL & SOUND ART






Manchester-based 'Ethereal Pop Artist' **Norrisette** curiously lists ***Connieflower*** as Jazz & Blues. But while the growing prominence of ambient sound in the final passage may lean towards Electronic & Ambient, this is a classical track, dominated by cleverly pedalled piano that enables some rich dissonances to bring a degree of dark intrigue to the otherwise attractive tones. Her playing is delicate but expressive and the harmonic language is capable of taking some unusual turns. Enough to make this a compelling listen.

Yurii Sher is keeping the harmonic language simple and sparse on ***Away***. A lot of use of open fourths and fifths while the left hand plays slow arpeggios against a mix of striking chords and scalic melodies in the right. It is a piano piece that builds dynamically and keeps our interest with its slow-burning intensity.

Our super talented friend **Rosie Bergonzi** teams up with **Magnus Mehta** on ***Little Wings***. This is pure Handpan heaven, Rosie's trademark syncopated rhythms and clever melodies weaving in and out of strongly implied harmonic language as the pair play off each other with an otherworldly chemistry that is hypnotic and beautiful.

JAZZ & INTERNATIONAL JOURNEYS





The latest offering from London-based composer Antonio Val's **12 O'Clock Club** is ***Robot Ballerina***. With some beautifully understated piano bathed in harmonic extensions contrasted by open harmonics and interplay with the trumpet and other instruments, this has a contemplative feel that is slightly otherworldly and a little

dark and yet calming and alluring too. As ever, the musicianship is matched by the inventiveness. Also check out the dreamy ***Bittersweet***.

TTD regular **Richard Davies** returns with ***Bells Of Ascension***. This has a laid back and slightly ethereal, dreamy quality as his sax lines echo over tinkly tuned percussion and long synth chords. As ever, nicely done and highly musical. Also check out the beautifully ambient and ethereal ***Scrambled Paralysis*** with some sumptuous harmonic dissonances creeping in and a rich, unusual quality in which Richard's haunting sax wanders poetically through the mists. Lovely.

FOLK & COUNTRY FARE





West Country Queen of Folk, **Sharon Lazibyrd** returns with ***Shades Of Green***. This single is a first taste of her forthcoming album *Tides Keep Turning*. Built around a drone played by what may be a Viola, this finds Sharon in very traditional English Folk mode with a slightly hypnotic vocal in traditional style setting out an engaging melody and evocative lyric. As ever, her strong and instantly recognisable voice takes centre stage and delivers the goods.

Córas Trio have a track out called ***The Road To Tarbolton*** which mixes an organic folkiness with unusual, fluid jazz-like rhythms and ambient sounds to create something quite unique and compelling. The violinist takes the lead for much of the track while the drummer is inventive and atmospheric and the guitarist holds it all together with patient and technically adept chord play and picking. Somehow, with this sparse line-up, they cook up a casserole of sound and ideas that holds our attention for the full seven plus minutes of development.

PART THREE: OTHER COMMENTARIES

AI: Can We Distinguish Between Good And Bad? by Sherry

Chapter 5 of our book *Ethical Marketing And Promotion For Independent Music Artists* was researched and written by Sherry. Here are her words.

Artificial Intelligence is undeniably the biggest dilemma faced by the creative industries, particularly the music industry. According to a recent Youth Music (2024) survey, 47% of young people believed that artificial intelligence (AI) would create the majority of music in the future. Furthermore, according to an earlier study, 63% of young creatives claim to be using AI in their music-making (Youth Music, 2026).

In music marketing, AI-powered solutions are being utilised more and more to help with tasks like social media management, audience analysis, campaign planning, and content development (Cartmell, 2025). This can help independent musicians overcome time and money constraints related to music promotion. Artificial intelligence (AI) can be used by artists who cannot afford a professional marketing team to carry out tasks that would normally require outside expertise. But just because AI makes marketing more accessible, this does not imply that it is always more ethical. AI can make it easier for independent artists to access marketing resources, but if they rely too much on automated content, their promotion may come across as less genuine and personal (Wade, M , 2024).

AI can lower independent artists' marketing expenses by offering reasonably priced tools for developing and overseeing advertising campaigns. Artists can utilise AI to help with campaign planning, audience research, promotional ideas, and social media captions rather than hiring a marketing team. By assisting with tedious administrative and promotional duties, AI can help solo musicians save time (Startz, B. 2026).

AI can significantly reduce the time required to develop social media posts, promotional ideas, visuals and other marketing materials. This may initially appear to give artists greater freedom by allowing them to complete promotional work more efficiently and dedicate more time to their music. Yet, a heavy reliance on AI-generated marketing may result

in generic content that lessens the uniqueness of artists while simultaneously reducing the necessity for experienced creative and marketing personnel. Also, saving time may encourage artists to produce more content rather than giving them more time to focus on their music, potentially increasing pressure to remain constantly active online (Are C, Briggs P, Brown R, 2025). Therefore, by making professional assistance more accessible and affordable, AI can be a great opportunity for independent artists; yet, its advantages rely on how it is applied. Instead of taking the role of human judgement, professional knowledge, or the artist's own creative identity, AI should foster an artist's individuality and inventiveness.

Being authentic and genuine to themselves helps independent musicians create close bonds with their audience. This can be more difficult when using AI because the audience can perceive it as less authentic. When people believe that the music, communication, or creative process is no longer largely directed by the artist, AI might make an artist's work seem less genuine. Heavy dependence on AI may make it more difficult for listeners to sense a true connection with the artist because authenticity can be linked to an artist's own experiences, emotions, ideas, and creative objectives.

Of course, the use of AI does not automatically make an artist or their music less authentic. Authenticity can depend more on the artist's creative control and transparency than on the technology itself. If AI is used as an assistant while the artist remains responsible for the ideas, artistic direction and final decisions, the music can still reflect the artist's own identity and experiences (iMusician Digital AG, 2026). Thus, we should view AI as a complement to our ability to create an authentic experience for our audience. The effects of AI will depend on how we choose to utilize it. Artists who continue to have creative control over what they produce, and who are open about using AI, may find ways to use the technology to help build a strong connection with their audience (Mirisola, J, 2025).

A 2024 economic study commissioned by CISAC estimated that, under the conditions examined, 24% of music creators' revenues could be at risk by 2028 as a result of generative AI, representing a projected cumulative loss of around €10 billion over five years. These are projections, not guarantees, but they demonstrate the scale of the

potential economic disruption (CISAC, 2024). For an already financially precarious independent artist, the possibility that a machine could reproduce something very similar to their creative output at almost no marginal cost is understandably alarming. Therefore, even while AI can provide independent musicians with worthwhile chances, its capacity to produce music on a large scale raises serious questions about the future worth of human creation and artists' capacity to make a living.

Another major concern surrounding AI in music is whether artists' creative work is being used to train AI systems without their knowledge, consent or fair compensation. AI tools are built using huge amounts of existing creative work, like songs and other copyrighted material. This worries artists because it feels like they are helping AI to grow without getting any credit or money for the value their work adds. CISAC says that if the rules don't change, creators could lose out when AI models use their work without asking or paying them (CISAC, (2026). On the other hand, AI companies say they need access to lots of creative work to build and improve their technology, and that this kind of innovation can open up new chances for artists. AI can also give musicians fresh creative and business tools, so the technology itself is not bad provided it is used in a fair and open way (Musicians Union, 2024). As AI becomes more common in music, there is a clear need to better protect artists' work, voices, and identities. AI should be able to grow and bring new opportunities to the music industry, but not by undermining artists' rights. With more openness, clear consent, proper credit, and fair pay, AI can remain a helpful tool for the industry instead of one that takes advantage of the creativity of the people who make it thrive (UK Music, 2024). But without properly effective regulation, the fear is that this will simply not happen.

AI-generated music could make an already overcrowded music industry even more competitive by allowing large amounts of music to be produced quickly and cheaply. Streaming platforms already contain millions of tracks competing for listeners' attention and are trying to root them out and delete them. If AI allows even more music to be produced at scale, it may become harder for independent artists to gain visibility and for genuine audience engagement to stand out (Crane B, 2026). The issue is not just how much music AI can produce, but also whether independent musicians can continue to establish

deep connections with listeners in a saturated market.

Traditional streaming figures may become less accurate as a gauge of true audience interest due to the rise of AI-generated music. Stream counts may increasingly indicate automated or low-value listening rather than true human fandom if a significant amount of AI-generated music is uploaded to streaming services. This increases the significance of meaningful involvement, such as concert attendance, music purchases, and artist recommendations (Gomez Sarmiento I, 2026).

Streaming platforms are developing systems to identify spam and improve transparency around AI-generated content, which could reduce some of these problems. Spotify, for example, has introduced a new impersonation policy that clarifies how we handle claims about AI voice clones (and other forms of unauthorized vocal impersonation), giving artists stronger protections and clearer recourse.
Vocal impersonation is only allowed in music on Spotify when the impersonated artist has authorized the usage (Peterson, Lauren 2025). Artists could choose to licence their voices or digital identities with clear agreements, allowing them to control how their likeness is used and receive financial compensation (L'Hommedieu R, 2026). So using AI to copy someone's style is not automatically wrong if the artist gives permission and stays in control.

The real ethical issue comes when someone's identity is copied or used for profit without their say-so. AI can also help create marketing materials, but it becomes an issue when fake or synthetic content is passed off as real. AI can quickly and cheaply make promo photos, videos, and other marketing content. But if an AI-made image or a made-up behind-the-scenes clip is shown as real, it can trick fans and give a false picture of the artist (Marsh S, 2026). But, as long as the audience is aware that the content is fictional or digitally produced, artists are free to use AI-generated images into their artistic identities. Therefore, whether or not artists employ AI-generated marketing materials is not the ethical question; rather, the question is whether or not they are open about what is genuine and what is fake.

The use of AI in the music industry, and the arts more generally, is an on-going concern and grappling with such issues is helping to develop potential solutions and ways forward that address the

need for a fair and equitable future. Despite these concerns, we have seen how AI can help independent artists by cutting down on repetitive tasks and making pro-level tools easier to access. This can save time and allow artists to focus more on songwriting, recording, performing and building relationships with their audiences.

In essence AI itself is neither good nor bad for the music industry. In fact it is both! It can help independent artists by cutting out repetitive work, giving them affordable tools, helping them connect with fans, and opening up new creative chances. But it also brings big challenges, like too much competition, streaming numbers losing value, voices being copied, fake content, copyright worries, and more pressure to keep putting out new material. In the end, it all comes down to how AI is used. When AI helps an artist's creativity, saves time, and makes it easier to share their work, it's a useful tool. But when it takes the place of real human creativity, copies an artist's identity without permission, tricks people, or uses other people's work unfairly, it becomes a serious problem.

The key is to keep human judgement, honesty, and responsibility at the centre. Artists should stay in charge of their own creative identity and be clear about how they are using AI including how this may impact on others. AI can help artists share their stories, but it can never replace the real human experiences, feelings, connections and creativity that make music meaningful.

WHY WE SHOULD BE WARY OF UNRESEARCHED ADVICE - Neil warns about advice based on half-truths

Our new book may have evolved from our desire to challenge the bullying narrative of the self-elected influencers and alleged industry insiders. But there is a very different trend we also need to be wary about. That is people, often well-meaning and sincere in their beliefs, making sweeping judgements and inadvertently encouraging others to adopt quite silly and self-destructive attitudes while satisfying themselves that they are being good rebels in a digital Capitalist world.

The problem is that the sweeping judgements and passionate opinions being expressed are often based on a fundamental lack of

understanding about how things work. This is combined with personal prejudices and a tendency to put their backs up against anything that seems too newfangled and difficult to analyse without actually being analytical!

There is also a common misconception about what constitutes *research* in the true sense. For example, asking 50 of your friends who already hold the same viewpoint as you, know even less than you do about the subject in question and are all in the same age group is not going to result in anything approaching meaningful or useful data in terms of the wider discourse. Neither is any form of research that only involves seeking evidence that reinforces an existing bias rather than subjecting the question(s) to an appropriate level of scrutiny. If research is not objective, it is not research.

We made it clear, in our book, that we not only considered the widest available spectrum of opinion when challenging the narrative of the TikTok Treadmill advocates but we also cited published opinion and statistics that, to a greater or lesser degree, supported the arguments we were challenging. Only by doing so could we be satisfied that we had critically evaluated *all* the evidence before presenting our findings.

In the past few weeks, I have seen people who I know and respect posting some extreme opinions against streaming. As ever, the starting point appears to be a completely unrealistic and illogical comparison between streams, which cost the customer nothing once they have paid a monthly subscription, and sales where the individual has had to commit a significant part of their physical budget to the purchase of one single or album over many others. That is not a like comparison and, given how much debate there has been over this issue in the past few years, you should be embarrassed not to have moved on from such simplistic comparisons.

It is a ludicrous expectation for artists to think they should be receiving significant payments from a few thousand streams. Have they even analysed the streaming data to see how many were *passive* streams (i.e. generated by being on a playlist surrounded by more popular music) and what the actual percentage was/is of people saving their music to personalised playlists and libraries?

If your argument is that the current ratio of remuneration is weighted too heavily against artists and rights owners compared to the streaming platforms, then I agree.

But the answer is not to tell artists to stop using streaming platforms and it will not aid their careers to do so. Better advice would be to guide them to pitch (or work with external services who can pitch) to playlists that are a good fit for their music and are more likely to lead to genuine engagement. Saves are far more important than pure streams. But don't throw the baby out with the bathwater when streaming offers one of the most effective means of reaching new audiences and can link to selling gig tickets and merchandise too.

I also recently saw a prominent presenter from BBC Introducing hypocritically advising artists not to use professional studios and to stick to recording their music at home using the DIY approach. Yet a glance at her playlist suggests she is not applying the same ethos to how she chooses who to play on the radio. So what exactly is achieved by giving artists advice that might lead to them submitting tracks that lack the requisite polish to achieve airtime from her? Perhaps the problem is that she is not an artist so she doesn't actually possess the expertise to advise on what recording techniques and conditions are best for independent artists in which contexts.

Again, there are many artists who have the necessary skills to make great sounding tracks without leaving their bedrooms. But, for some, especially bands who use a high degree of organic instrumentation, that approach can be highly problematic and restricting. Recording studios do not harness the power they once held in relation to aspiring artists but they are still the best environment for some artists and, if they have well-established set-ups that involve knowing exactly how to mic up the in-house drumkit and DI the amps etc, they can be capable of working the magic in ways you may still be blown away by.

Another piece of advice I heard being very confidently broadcast on social media recently was that plugging and PR are dead and there is, and I quote, *no value* in ever paying for PR. What absolute hogwash! Yes, it is true that artists can be guilty of thinking they can leapfrog others who are further forward on their journeys by throwing money at PR people when those PR people should be pointing out that they have insufficient traction for them to leverage any meaningful media coverage at such an embryonic stage of their career. But, by the same token, as we have come to realise in the past six months, there is also a point at which an artist's lack of direct relationships with key media

personnel may be holding them back in terms of getting their marketing and promotional efforts noticed. If so, paying for PR may be exactly what is needed at that point in order to up their game and their profile in terms of media coverage. So, once again, we see or hear someone thinking they are being clever and pro-indie by declaring that PR is dead. But actually they are talking out of their backsides because they lack the knowledge and experience to understand that things are much more nuanced and every case is unique. Sweeping judgements laced with personal prejudice are never the basis for a smart strategy!

I could go on but the point is always the same. Think hard before you make sweeping judgements. And consider for a moment that you have now become the one postulating one-size-fits-all and dangerously un-nuanced solutions to complex issues. Also think before you try to heap your prejudices, often based on a creeping conservatism that you would rather be in denial about, onto others.

My strong suggestion is that, if you really want to develop informed opinions about all the avenues open to people in today's digital-led music industry, do your research. Not by asking your like-minded, similarly aged friends to say yes or no to a question they are not remotely qualified to answer! Research means gathering the widest possible range of data and opinion, analysing the current literary discourse among genuinely authoritative sources and looking into research others have already undertaken and published. After all, aren't you a bit old to be shooting from the hip and lashing out about things you clearly know so little about?!

WHY THE MERCURY PRIZE HAS ZERO CREDIBILITY NOW !!! - Neil laments how an award that once championed independent innovation has been turned into Brit Awards Light

The Mercury Prize, once revered for being the awards ceremony that celebrated independence and non-mainstream innovation, has been cynically turned into Brit Awards Light. The decision, in 2026, to award it to multiple Brits winner and ultra-commercial chart-topper Raye perfectly symbolises its demise as a credible antidote to the major label wankfest that the Brits has always been. The fact that the entire nomination list was dominated by mainstream major label acts, including nine former winners, further cements the case for the prosecution alongside financial rules that make it hard for many genuine independents to even qualify for consideration.

The early bookies' favourite to win was Olivia Dean! We have nothing against Olivia Dean. As global pop phenomena go, she is one of the most interesting in recent times and she is a stunning talent. But the very fact that she is one of three international artists singled out by the 2026 IFPI Annual Report on Global Recorded Music Sales as a future world leading artist underlines the problem. She is not remotely the kind of up and coming underground or alternative artist the Mercury Prize was set up to support. Sir Paul McCartney was also shortlisted! We love him to bits and really enjoyed his album *The Boys Of Dungeon Lane*, a nostalgic triumph for an 83 year old legend, but he is the last person who should be in the list. He is the UK's most successful artist and songwriter of all-time! How does that qualify him to be considered for a prize celebrating emerging talent?

Also on the list were the likes of Suede, Pulp, Arlo Parks, Wolf Alice, Dave, Florence & The Machine and Arctic Monkeys; all former winners and all originally from [in the broadest sense] 'indie' backgrounds but all now well established mainstream stars who could easily be competing for a Brit award and, in most cases, have already done so. The inclusion of Jade, formerly of *X Factor* winning girlband Little Mix, was another sign of major label influence.

It also included artists I was delighted to see winning the prize in recent years like Ezra Collective, Young Fathers and English Teacher but where were the new names? Two of these three won it in 2023 and 2024 respectively so it seemed

very soon for them to be back in the nominations list. Even Arlo Parks only won it 5 years ago. When Sam Fender got the nod last year for an album that sounded like the 1980s lovechild of Bruce Springsteen and Don Henley, the writing was on the wall for me.

The prize is for the best album of the past twelve months which means, for 2026, they could have nominated Ibibio Sound Machine for *Chopping Mountains*; White Flowers for *Dreams For Somebody Else*, Laura Misch for *Lithic* (a live version of which has also just been released), or Mary In the Junkyard for *Role Model Hermit*. They did, at least, include Nia Archives for *Emotional Junglist* and Kojey Radical who has been plugging away for over a decade and was included for *Don't Look Down* (although the pedant in me says that album came out 13 months ago so how can it be album of the year for 2026?). But they were probably never in the running.

Let's be honest. In the run-up to the award, no-one was even talking about Nia Archives or Kojey Radical as contenders. All industry and mainstream media eyes were on Olivia Dean, Raye and, to a lesser degree, Arlo Parks, Arctic Monkeys plus Suede and Pulp, the latter two more because of their veteran status than for any other, more tangible reasons. Even Beth Gibbons, from former winners Portishead, seemed like she was only there to make up the numbers.

Writing on the BBC website, Mark Savage obviously anticipated criticism (as the BBC administers and broadcasts the prize) and explained how '… many people think it is an award for debut albums' because of various iconic debuts that have won it but assured us this is not so. No Mark, *no-one* I have talked to thinks it is an award for debut albums! But they *do* think it should be an award for non-mainstream, innovative artists and not global pop superstars who already have an array of Brits and other awards in their cabinets! Nice try at deflecting the real arguments but you are not cutting it with that defence!

We were also fed the great emotional (or should I say obligatory) back story about how Raye's car was stolen and in it were her song sketches and demos, leaving her 'distraught', but 'thankfully' they were later recovered. The same story was used in a different context by Sheryl Crow a mere 32 years ago! But it is patronising nonsense. As if, in today's digital environment, she would not have had those songs and recordings on at least one hard

drive and probably several memory sticks, not to mention probably having also sent them to other people in her team. It might fool some of the fans but it is not going to fool anyone who is actually involved in music!

Perhaps the major factor we have overlooked is the increasing reliance on major label funding for the award. In theory, this is supposed to reflect their collective desire to support the search for exciting new talent. But it has just become Brit Awards Light; another excuse to shine the light on artists who make money for the industry. The days of, at the time, barely known artists like Roni Size, Talvin Singh, Speech Debelle, Alt J and Benjamin Clementine winning the prize appear to be dead and gone. Raye's victory means she can add the prize to her growing haul of Brits. That is what it has come to. A shame but sadly not a surprise.

AND FINALLY .....

So another month ends and we edge ever closer to the end of 2026. Soon we will be asking not how the month has been but what kind of *year* it has been. How we answer that question will depend upon the context. If we are talking about the world, it may be one of the most dismal, depressing years in living memory! If we are talking about independent music, that will be a whole different matter!

THE YEAR IN MUSIC SO FAR

At the more established level in the vast landscape of non-mainstream pop music, 2026 has been a fairly consistent year. We have had impressive albums by Ezra Collective, Ibibio Sound Machine, Alabama Shakes, Nia Archives, White Flowers, Mary In The Junkyard, Penelope Isles, Laura Misch and others. There have been many fine singles including but not limited to Father John Misty, Nia Archives, Little Simz, Working Mens Club, Michael Kiwanuka, Fontaines D.C and lots more including the aforementioned album artists.

[THE] MUSIC OF SOUND

October, for us, has been a mostly positive month. As a band, **[The] Music Of Sound** has had a fun few weeks. ***Danger Danger*** has achieved our best ever media coverage and has resulted in more people saving our music to personal playlists and libraries. The video has had amazing engagement and so many lovely comments from strangers. We are very happy that again deploying

the amazing Jade from Memphia has been the right move and we are always grateful to individuals like Serge Wenus and Del Owusu who do so much to keep our support going at all times.

TAKING ON THE BULLIES

Publishing our first jointly authored book has been a blast but it has also made us realise how important the conversation is that we are now at the heart of. We are passionate about people reading it, not so we can make money but because this is such a key issue in music and we have to stop the bullies from being the dominant voice on social media. Marketing the book is part of that process. So too is posting our own videos on TikTok and Instagram pointing out that our ideas are supported by thorough evidence whereas theirs are based solely on anecdotal evidence and personal prejudice, not to mention a desire to use rage-bait to monetise their activities.

The industry and media could do more to step up here. They should be discouraging the treadmill approach and telling artists it is okay to focus on creativity. There is enough important and hard work to be done with rehearsing and being match-fit for touring and live shows, ensuring all the promo materials are up to date for media people and on websites and social media, writing and recording new material and collaborating with others.

When we see and hear people like Stevie 'Red' McMinn ranting 4 times a day on our TikTok timelines about how artists are lazy and should 'give up' music if they are not prepared to pursue the daily treadmill approach he postulates, we ask ourselves how come he never uses his presence to promote any of his own artists? Also, why has his label, Akora Records, not released any new music since 2023? Maybe we could ask him directly and see what his excuse is! Maybe he is the one who is 'lazy' and should 'give up music'!

Of course, McMinn is not the only one spewing out this dangerous diatribe. They all need to be challenged. Their cages are rattled though. Even though they have not directly namechecked our book or its authors, some of them have been referring to its findings and trying to make excuses. So let's keep them on the backfoot!

AND REALLY FINALLY!!!

Last but most definitely not least then, a big big thank you to everyone who reads this journal and helps us to support grassroots music. We are proud and privileged to be part of such a vibrant, supportive and caring community

of people. It's the music and the people who either make it, listen to it, buy it, go and watch it, write about it or any combination of these that matter. Not algorithms, not big streaming numbers, not how long you spend every day making content for TikTok and Instagram. And, as we have been saying for longer than we can actually remember, New Music Never Sleeps. Until the next time then, folks.

NEIL & SHERRY xxxx