



## **Coming To Your Own Party**

**by Ellyn Solis**

A recording artist is born every ten minutes. With the advent of PRO Tools, iLife Garage Band, M-Audio Session, MySpace, YouTube and all the rest available through the internet, it is easier than ever for a budding talent to call themselves a “recording artist”. You can write, rehearse, record, mix, master, burn and sell cd’s from your room, your basement, your garage or your deck chair. In essence, you can set up shop as a legitimate, career-minded recording artist all without ever really leaving the house.

If you believe that, then I have some swampland available for you! Here is the real truth of the situation. The more things change, the more they stay the same. For years and years, GREAT musical artists evolved through sweat and hard work. Career artists (as opposed to hobbyists) were passionately committed to their musical voice – they had something to say, a uniquely musical way to say it and they were willing to work hard to move their art forward. No one is really able to have the long-term career that dreams are made of without putting in some sweat equity.

Although popular websites such as CDBaby, Sonicbids, iTunes, Real Audio, Amazon, MySpace, and YouTube help artists get the word out about their music, the Internet is a one-dimensional tool. To get the three dimensional view that will truly catapult a musical career, I use this phrase over and over when I speak to artists that are just starting out: Come to Your Own Party!!

The phrase was born for me after countless hours spent counseling artists about development, publicity and other aspects of their careers. It seemed to me that so many new artists wanted everyone else to do the work for them. They seemed to think they could just sit back (or sit in front of the computer) and let it all happen.

This is an illusion and a delusion that means the certain end of a career before it ever begins.

Here is what I mean about Coming to Your Own party:

## **Understand The Phrase Music Business**

The Music is first (thank goodness, yes, the Music is still the most important noun here), but the phrase isn't complete without the Business end. It is essential for an artist to understand the basics of how it all works. What do all these buzz words mean; radio promotion, publicity, imaging, styling, marketing, media training, artist development, A&R, touring, publishing, royalties, commissions? Think of it as a homework assignment, do the research, make a list, write it out in your own words. Make certain you understand the concept behind each term – if you get stuck, reach out to someone already in the Music Business, ask them to explain. You'd be amazed at how savvy a new artist is once they've come to understand the basic concepts.

## **Look The Part**

In our line of work (that would be the Music Business: see above), we have the privilege of talking to genuine artists - gifted, talented musical prodigies. What continues to surprise me is many of these very talented musicians don't have the first clue as to how to image their personal art. They seem to have forgotten that in addition to their musical prowess, they have another asset worth exploiting – their human form!

It may seem that all successful artists in the music business are young and beautiful and have style, NOT TRUE. What is true is that everyone from the Red Hot Chili Peppers to John Mayer has paid attention to the style details. They are dialed in as to the best way to image themselves so their music is understood sonically and visually. John Mayer is a great example of this. He speaks openly of the initial misunderstanding the music-buying public had about him after the success of his first CD. He was perceived as yet another – in a long line of – less than outstanding singer/songwriters. Since that time, Mayer has done the work necessary to communicate publicly what was always his artistic self-image: that of a uniquely riveting (and self described) Guitar God. Mayer came to his own party on this one and understood clearly that he had to change his style in tandem with his repertoire selection to accomplish the goal of positioning himself as the type of artist he was at heart, and not another simple singer/songwriter. Case in point, the February 22, 2007, issue 1020 cover of Rolling Stone Magazine where Mayer is now referred to as "Slowhand Junior".

## **Be Committed To Your Vision But Be Open To A Smart Plan**

Many artists seem to think the more they fight the accepted norms of the business, the more 'non-sell-out' success they'll achieve. Unfortunately, this attitude is the opposite of what artists generally need to do to advance their career. If I had a dollar for every time I was told 'I want a major label deal but I don't my fans to call me a sell-out' I'd drive a much fancier car. I have had the privilege of working with gifted rock artists such as Eddie Vedder (Pearl Jam) and Zack De La Rocha (Rage Against The Machine) both of whom hold tight to their creative principles and at the same time embrace the strategy and advice of the professionals on their team. Fans have come to know these two artists as not only incredibly talented but also possessing complete credibility. The backstory of course, is that both Zack and Eddie came to the music business with a clear sense of their creative voice and message. They were able to blend their vision with the demands of building and marketing a successful business brand. Through dedication to their craft and day- to-day involvement in business decisions they were able to shape a career without compromising their sense of artistic integrity. You can have it both ways without offending the very people that are trying to help you. You can have it both ways without being labeled a difficult diva. Just remember to come to your own party with a clear head and an open heart.

## **About Ellyn Solis and Vermillion Media:**

Ellyn Solis is a veteran PR professional and the founder of PRLADY ([www.publicitylady.com](http://www.publicitylady.com)), an online pr consulting catering to independent artists. She is also the founder and president of Vermillion Media Group ([www.vermillionmediagroup.com](http://www.vermillionmediagroup.com)). She is a 21 year veteran Public Relations executive serving the music and entertainment industry. Her career began with the Howard Bloom Agency and continued at Rogers & Cowan before joining Atlantic Records and then Sony Music/Epic Records/550 Music. (In some industry circles, a tenure at Sony Music is referred to as the “Harvard” of the music industry) Throughout her years there, she handled publicity campaigns for such artists as Pearl Jam, Rage Against the Machine, Ben Folds Five, FUEL, Des’ree, Jack Bruce, Alice Cooper, Ozzy Osbourne, Celine Dion and Firehouse among others. Among her responsibilities at Sony was daily pitching to National Print and Television outlets such as The Today Show, Good Morning America, Conan, Leno, Letterman, etc. as well as planning and executing successful events such as the Annual Sony Music Grammy Parties. Since leaving Sony, Ellyn founded Vermillion Media where the company has handled the full scale campaigns for artists ranging from independent to nationally recognized such as Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, Denise Rich, Tommy Lee, Jess Klein, Maktub, The Clarks, EndEverAfter, Pitty Sing among others. Live touring experience includes Pink Floyd, Pearl Jam, Lollapalooza Festival, The Bridge Benefit, David Bowie’s Glass Spider Tour, Living Colour, and others where she toured the country organizing pre-event, on-site and post-event press as well as tour press for numerous other artists. The agency has relationships with local media across the United States that aid in the exposure level for all Vermillion Clients. Ellyn has also worked with a variety of organizations such as Amnesty International’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Human Rights, LifeBeat, The Music Industry Fights AIDS, Denise Rich’s Angel Ball and the annual QVC/FFNY Shoes on Sale Event at the Metropolitan Museum of Art among others.