

"Lots of musicians talk about using the Internet to revolutionize the music industry. Scooter Scudieri is doing it."- Larry Katz, The Boston Herald

"If Scooter Scudieri didn't write the book on hustling, he's at least developed a lecture/workshop series focusing on it."- Jim Bessman, Billboard Magazine

Pro-Active Fans: Circumventing the *Musical Industrial Complex*

The Metamorphose from Listener to Fan to Advocate

Another evolving essay by Scooter Scudieri –*the Internet's First Rock Star*[™]

Recipient of the Songwriters Hall of Fame: Best of the New Writers Award; endorsed by MEIEA; member of ASCAP & NAPM.

www.firstrockstar.com scooter@firstrockstar.com © 2004

"You don't know what I'm capable of...but my fans do. The RIAA sues music lovers; I embrace them. They created my career."- Scooter Scudieri

The new music industry contains **two** elements: the **musician** and the **fan**.

It is that simple.

On June 12 - 13, 2004, I made my fourth appearance at the Global Entertainment and Media Summit (GEMS) in Los Angeles, California as a speaker, panelist, and performer. It is an honor to be a participant in one of the most comprehensive and forward thinking seminars about the future of music. Preparation met opportunity at GEMS 2002 - the contacts I made there were life altering. The spirit of change that energized the first Summit has only gained momentum. Two short years ago I was one of a handful of trailblazers forging the way for armies to follow. Now, we have become a conscious and collective movement. I am a soldier on the front lines of a music revolution. I'm not talking an US vs. THEM revolution; I'm talking a WE revolution- where we as **artists** and **fans** control our destiny. We cannot predict the future, but we can create it. Only music and the love of music are necessary to facilitate this symbiotic paradigm. We are on the cusp of business, social and artistic change in our society. The challenge is synchronizing them so they pay off big for both **artists** and **fans**. We are not fighting the musical industrial complex.*

We are creating a new system.

My own music lecture series, "**Capture Your Spirit, Keep Your Soul**" has had a tremendous impact on students in colleges and universities all over the country. I offer an inspirational dialogue that helps musicians realize that they can take control of their art AND their business without compromising their talent, their soul, or their integrity. It's designed to empower them with the knowledge that everything they need; they have, and everything they want is attainable. I am spearheading thinking on how we can use the best of the web and modern communication to provide greater opportunity, creativity, and diversity to all involved in music. This requires leading discussions, writing, and modeling the new

paradigm in the way I do business personally: **artist to fan**. In doing so, I am also working to bring a stronger sense of the human spirit back into music for new generations taking the brunt of the anonymity and meaninglessness of much of our commercial and rapidly changing society.

I play my music as if my very life depends on it...because it does. I spend every day creating, focusing, and channeling energy into my writing and music. It is my vision to help transform the industry by turning positive thought into action. The essence of my belief in self is powerful and contagious. I am known in many circles as the Internet's first "rock star." It's an arguable point, but one that I do not take lightly. My website, www.firstrockstar.com, has become a launch pad for my music, mission, and method. By merging online and offline techniques I have created a focal point not only for my message, but for the movement which is redefining the way music is created and distributed. There are fine lines between confidence, arrogance, and ignorance. I know who I am, and in as much as I have to offer; I have much to learn. I am grateful to be alive at a time of such great change. Fear prevents us from becoming our full possible selves. Our potential is unlimited if we only tap into the source.

The source is within.

I live in Shepherdstown, West Virginia; far, far away from the music hubs of the world. Utilizing high tech, high intensity, and a mobilized **pro-active fan base** I have forged an impressive music career **without** the help of an agent, manager, or record company. I am reinventing the "rock star." It's not about fame, fortune and excess. It's about music and the spirit to transcend all boundaries. Dedication meets resistance at every twist and angle, but I have never argued my limitations. I have managed to defy the odds and the obstacles by achieving the unthinkable for an independent artist: high profile tours, a media firestorm, and legions of die-hard fans. I have opened for more than 30 international acts including Nils Lofgren, Richie Havens, Dave Matthews, and Widespread Panic. In 2003, I was awarded Best of the New Writers by the Songwriters Hall of Fame and I completed a 19 date tour across the country opening for Jewel- our final date was in Central Park. I have done it all on my own terms, but I have not done it alone. My long list of credits and awards are of little significance when compared to the impact my **fans** have made on my career.

Just as the music industry exists because of the songwriters and musicians, it survives because of the fans. Survives? OK, in the new music industry the strong will survive, but the innovators will prosper. Any fan will tell you, with a smile on their face, who their favorite band is and why you should check them out. In the age of independent Internet musicians, the **pro active fan** will not only take pride in turning you on to new music, but they will also engage you in the process of creating a band's career. The music lover empowered with the knowledge that they truly create success stories, will set into motion the new music paradigm.

There is a learning curve.

In the tumultuous music arena, we as **musicians** and **fans** find ourselves in a unique position to work together in a way that has never been seen in the history of music. Our cooperation and mutual respect will establish a ground breaking model for music business. Business tends to present a zero sum game most of the time. That is to say, someone is always on the losing side. I propose a win-win situation that is remedied to reflect positive change within the digital world. It is a shift in the dynamics and economics of the business. It will be our solution to the consolidation of the record industry and the new FCC rulings on corporate radio ownership.

Or, we can just call it free will.

There will be sub industries for booking agents, engineers, producers, public relations, etc. In this new model the artists choose who they wish to employ. The artists create their own team. Until it becomes necessary to facilitate a “work for hire” method to book, market, or publicize – the independent musician **must** take the Do It Yourself approach. The Internet has effectively eliminated the middle man. (ie the record company- which for all intent and purpose- is just a bank) With the amazing low-cost recording technology of today, and some serious effort, musicians can deliver gorgeous music directly to their fans. Enhanced multimedia presentations through video, DVD, and websites have transformed the look, feel, and sound of independent music. Innovative musicians can create and evolve at their own pace and surpass in many ways the mass market production of corporate music. Encoded P2P file sharing will give millions of music fans a legal, inexpensive, and safe way to download new music. The excitement of the changing tides has reached a fevered pitch. At this critical junction in the flux of the music industry, musicians must connect and communicate with the most powerful resource they have- **their fans**. The fan **must** come to understand their pivotal role in the music revolution. They are out there in the streets.

They are the front line.

Unfortunately, shows like American Idol perpetuate the "rock star" myth. Thousands of people are willing to be humiliated on national television in the hopes of scoring a record deal in an industry running on an antiquated business model that has a 95% failure rate. How can this be? Where is the television show that puts teams together? Where is the show that empowers the artist and gives them hope and belief in self? Where is the show that reveals the lies, exposes the truth and explains where the future of music is heading?

Of the 30,000 music titles released this year, only 250 will sell more than 10,000 copies. Why would anyone want to give up their rights, their creative control, and their future to a business that has a 95% failure rate? It's the false promise and pretext of easy money. Record companies have bombarded music lovers with incomprehensible sparkle and flash marketing, force feeding them regurgitated power chords with neo-retro hairstyles. They create their own circuitous magazines and music awards which have convincingly altered our perception of the “rock star” life. In reality, even many of the high profile “rock stars” are financially raped through contractual loop holes. Ah, famous and broke. Music for the masses has become nothing more than a vehicle to sell advertising. Pay-to-play has taken over the airwaves. Kick backs and big money rule the FM dial. Control rests with a few giant multinational corporations. It is a brutal and competitive market with limited choices. The business is a contrived, money driven industry that has disrespected the artist from the beginning and now has no regard for the fan. The only thing that counts is the bottom line.

There are options.

In 2002, I was quoted in quite a few newspapers and online websites, with the following line: “Free downloads didn't begin the dismantle of the record companies. Greed did. Free downloads just allow music lovers the ability to preview the crap record labels have been forking out for years, and say; ‘Hey, I don't want this garbage for \$20!’” Interestingly enough, the NYTimes reports on a study out of Harvard Business School and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill that: “...spikes in downloading had no discernable effects on sales.” **and** “The most popular albums bought are also the most popular downloads...” (NYTimes Monday, April 5, 2004)

That's right, there are billions of downloads each year. Wow! Just look at the energy fans will spend to find good music. Seems they aren't as complacent and apathetic as the media might lead us to believe. In fact it's just the opposite. They crave new music and will exert great effort to find it. As Ken Kesey said, "Cream rises, shit floats." Music lovers have become the filters. Ask your friends who their favorite bands are and where they heard about them. Take notice that very few will tell you they heard about a band on the radio. Independents are effectively merging online and offline marketing techniques. Email, websites, blogs, postcards, word of mouth, file sharing, and live shows are spreading the music. The demand for fresh music and more choices has led to the creation of new delivery systems through cable and satellite. By offering huge commercial free content for a low monthly subscription FM radio has been heavily impacted. People are listening- they are finding new avenues. They can discern the "good" from the "bad." It is all subjective and relevant in relation to the listener. Listeners become fans who then become advocates of the very music that turns them on.

While I do respect and understand copyright law, I personally cannot concern myself with the issues of the Recording Industry Association of America. They do not represent me. They represent the corporate giants entrenched in a battle to stop the rampant spread of illegally downloaded music. Instead of finding solutions (i.e. legal and affordable ways to file share) the mega-corps choose to sue the fan. These are the very giants that own the rights to a musician's songs. They *own* them. Ah, but the fans are not only listening to each other, they are educating each other. They are reading the articles in the Times and the Post. The listener does not believe he is stealing from the musician. The word is out that their record company has already fucked them. The RIAA sues music lovers; I embrace them.

They created my career.

My fans help me in every conceivable way. In the year 2000, when I wanted to record my debut solo album in NYC – it was my fans that came up with \$50,000 to pay for it. Yeah, you read it right- fifty thousand dollars. In 2002, my fans raised \$8,000 in two weeks to help defray some of the cost of going on tour with Jewel. My fans have supported me with rehearsal space and studios to work in- free of charge. They have given me guitars, computers, and even a van. They have been roadies, techs, photographers, printers, and designers. They create web pages, host my sites and even write editorial letters about my Internet exploits. They inform me of new trends in the business. They buy my singles, my albums, and tickets to my performances. They offer me emotional support when the times get tough. They are my life line and I let them know that I could not do it without them.

They complete the circle.

What is the elusive quality that connects a listener with a musician to the point that the listener becomes an advocate for the musician? Charisma? Presentation? Songwriting? Spirit? It is impossible to know. It is a matter of opinion and of taste. I am so blessed. The bond my fans and I have created is directly linked to how much we are willing to give of our selves. We motivate each other. I hand out a lot of music for free- not out of desperation, but out of communication. In my lectures, I tell stories about what I have done- not what I think someone should do. We must choose our own paths. During my workshops I listen, learn, and share thoughts with students. We are re-thinking the business. Like many others in this movement, we are re-defining success. On stage, I deliver my songs with passion and sincerity. The audience response is directly related to how much I am willing to *give* of myself.

The strength of my music comes from within. The strength of my career comes from the powerful presence of my ever expanding fan base. They are mobilized and pro-active beyond the call of duty. They have come to understand their position in the realm of the emerging music business model. This

group began as a handful of supportive friends and family. The ripple effect created by just a few people can travel and exist further than we will ever know. I have found my following and I respect their loyalty. My die hard fans are part of an organization I call **S.O.U.L.™** (an acronym for **Special Operations Unit Limited™**). This elite assembly of fans is ready and willing to promote my music and vision to unprecedented heights. They are the soul of my music- for they make it thrive.

Implementation of the artist-to-fan music business model is imperative. It is time to channel our energy into promoting the wonderful music we find. As fans, we **must** take the initiative and support the independent artist. We must buy their music, go to their shows, wear their T-shirts and recruit others to help spread their art. It's word of mouth minus the million dollar marketing blitz. Once again, it is a shift in the economics and dynamics of the industry. The artist and the fan both come out on top.

We are circumventing the antiquated music business model.

In its place we are constructing new and dynamic models where the **fan** and **artist** meet, communicate, trade, exchange, buy and sell, collaborate, and learn the importance of their roles. The fan, as a consumer, **must** begin to understand the beauty of the power they wield. In the new music industry, the fan controls the market. The die hard fans will take their bands to places unknown. The gate keepers have truly lost control. The days of "getting signed" are long gone. That was a sad pre-occupation many of us spent years trying to comprehend. The antiquated music business model is dead.

You will never see it again.

"One conversation can change your life- a new perspective as clear as the day." As the musician evolves and the fan reaches a higher level of awareness, the key word becomes **responsibility**. The fans have the ability to take artists around the country and overseas. They can do this through house concerts, field concerts, and sponsored performances. By utilizing underground magazines, online chat rooms, email, blogs, and websites; entire tours can be organized. I'm not advocating the use of established music venues either. Create your own local epicenter. Connect your towns through technology and connect your art through community. The independent musicians can offer their music at extremely reasonable prices. In addition to CDs, T-shirts and merchandise, musicians can now offer "encoded singles" for download. As increasing numbers of fans and musicians unite we will see the growth of beautiful local and regional scenes. We will see the quality of music go up and the cost of online music go down. We will see more respect for true artistic expression. We will see far less stealing of music. Fans- it is your job to promote the bands you love if you wish to see them prosper. Musicians- you better be phenomenal- because your fans will make or break you.

The flood gates have opened on innovation. Yeah, it's a learning curve for everybody. A new breed of musician is rising to the challenge of delivering their musical expression directly to the fan. The fan must respond appropriately. The record companies are waging war on music lovers. Yet, we are the reason the industry survives at all. It is our numbers that have created multi-national corporations. It is our numbers that will take them down or force them to change for the better. Collectively, we are stronger than any corporation. As we stand in the light of massive retaliation, remember: they are desperate; and they have lost control; and they are scrambling to hold on to their crumbling infrastructure.

We don't need them.

So, get online. Enable your pop-up blocker and start spreading the word. Together, we are creating a new industry comprised of two elements: the **musician** and the **fan**. If you know a band that is incredible- let everyone on your email list know- encourage them to buy their music and merchandise. Inspire them to participate in the new music industry.

Explain to them their importance.

The dust will never settle. Ugh! How boring if it did. Just know that within this mess the greatest thing that can happen is a music lover will find a song or a band that makes them feel alive- and an artist will have gained a fan. It will be a glorious exchange.

This is no ordinary **fan**.

This **fan** understands the beauty and power of living in the age of the Internet.

I'll see you in Los Angeles at GEMS.

Peace, Scooter Scudieri scooter@firstrockstar.com

About the Author: In November of 2000, Harmony Central.com posted an article written by Scooter entitled "Capture Your Spirit, Keep Your Soul." The article took on a life of its own and introduced Scooter to many people with the same spirit of change. One of those people was Steve Zuckerman, who was putting together a forward thinking two day seminar called the 2002 Global Entertainment and Media Summit to be held in NYC. GEMS effectively became the turning point from which Scooter has launched an impressive and ever expanding Internet career. In 2003, Scooter was awarded Best of the New Writers by the Songwriters Hall of Fame. He was written up in Billboard and Music Connection, and appeared on the cover of Goldmine Magazine. Scooter was a keynote speaker at the 2003 Music Entertainment Industry Educators Association (MEIEA) and completed a 19 date tour opening for Jewel. He is currently shooting a video with EZTV for his provocative and controversial song "Mother of God." Scooter tours the country extensively with his music and lecture series. He has no agent, manager, or record company backing and lives in Shepherdstown, West Virginia with his wife Kelly and daughter Sophia, and their dog; Luka.

** Special thanks to Peter Spellman for coining the phrase Musical Industrial Complex. It's so right on!*