

# The independent, alternative music scene as the world knows it today is fake!

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## 1. "underground" part 1

In 1969 Columbia/CBS launched a big advertisement campaign entitled "That's Underground" which immediately defined the end of the mid/late 1960s underground movement. Bands that had created thought provoking "alternative" versions of music soon turned into mega selling superstars - their "after the campaign" releases were nothing but mass audience pleasin' soft muzak (compare very early Chicago/Blood Sweat & Tears to the early 1970s hits).

For the first time a whole complex ideology/attitude was raped/killed/sold within no time to raise profit for a few selected artists and companies. "Underground" before the campaign was a very complex way of living/thinking/acting - very political - had a real impact on the culture - a real alternative in living and behaving. After the campaign it was an expression which enabled the companies to sell products. In fact it was leading the artists very far away from their people/audience, which once was the inspiration to create this new thought provoking music/culture. The result was big pomp rock with absolutely no relation to reality.

The reaction from the people came in the mid/late 1970s under the Punk banner - within "seconds" this was again turned into easy to consume products. At this point it should have been very obvious that there is absolutely no way to create something really "alternative" if you cooperate with the old known structures in any way.

Sure the beginning of all this dates back to the times when RCA bought Elvis... when big british companies devastated the Merseybeat scene...and kept on with 1980s underground Metal then Grunge/Hip Hop etc etc. ...

Today we have "indie/alternative" products released by major companies. Here we often find new companies owned by the old major scene. Often with new "philosophies" stating that it's "all about music" - experience and structures now used to spread real good/new music. One should know that capitalistic structured companies just have one real aim: raising profit. This raising of profit has always been based on the exploitation of resources. This

basic rule has taken planet earth close to colapse. Within the development of capitalism the only "positive" aspects happened when it was realised that the process of exploitation has to be slowed down to .. yes .. make more profit. This is why workers received the right to go on holidays. They worked better after the holidays - as simple as that.

Then we have smaller companies under the "indie/alternative" banner often concentrating on a specific kind of music, Blues, Metal, Hip Hop. They basidy work exactly like their big brothers, often cooperating with them when it comes to distribution etc. Yes - probably even most of them started because of the music, but all their actions are very much capitalistic/raising profit orrientated - very seldom they really release "daring/different" music. It' s sure mostly "good/professional" music but the general structure of their work/offering is anything but a real "alternative" - it' s just another product to sell.

Last but sure not \*least\* , we have all kind of smaller moneymakers that use the "indie/alternative" banner to create capitalistic micro structures. No details here because this is all very difficult to define - however, a certain kind of so called "radio promotion samplers", some books published under the "Indie banner" etc. are anything but "alternative"- just new ways to make money.

This whole "scene" has built their structures in a perfect way - even if they mourn that the profit goes down recently - this is a mega selling international money making machine. After the internet-download-diseaster they quickly came up with new ways of making controled profit, like the casting shows. A perfect way to calculate controled profit. Even before the product is released they know how many people will buy it.

All this will never change and everyone who is willing to cooperate in any way just has to realise that if you' re with it you have an active part in the destruction of planet earth (bit drastic but true) - times for "negotiations" are definitely over - "hard core truth" is what the world needs now.

To the general public the products of these companies represent "alternative/independent" music. To the regular Jane/Joe bands like Limp Bizkit are "independent" bands. A very dangerous exploitation of the expressions "independent" and "alternative" - a crime in langugage. The "independent/alternative culture" in the shops, ready to be spoon fed. The independent, alternative music scene as the world knows it today is fake!

## 2. "underground" part 2

On the other hand we now also have a worldwide chaotic structured level of people doing something really different. From individuals producing in their bedroom to very small companies cooperating with live bands, small studios etc. We have radiostations broadcasting/webcasting these releases. We have on-offline magazines presenting it all and we have new ways of distribution, often worldwide via the internet.

Sure there is some history behind that. It all came alive when priceworthy production tools were invented in the late 1970s/early 1980s. 4-track portastudios enabled musicians to produce in their bedrooms. Some clever musicians started to mix these recordings on normal cassettes and copied these with a second cassette machine. Soon a very lively scene came alive. Magazines, micro distributors, first "free" radiostations etc. etc. Sure there were also people releasing vinyl and even early CDs but the real impact came from the "cassette scene". Everybody could do it, even if you had "no" money. Vinyl and CD releases were extremely expensive, so the freedom to "just try/let it go/explore/do something completely different" definitely was with the "cassette people". You just copied as many tapes as you needed the very moment - a single release was never leading to a financial disaster, which often happened to bands that invested all their money in a vinyl release. Another main aspect of those days was that the people started building a worldwide network - snail mail based - the basic structure/idea was layed/created.

Twenty years later (now) many of these "cassette people" have given up, became normal citizens, did' nt develop etc etc but the tools, structures and ideas their work was based upon have developed and are alive and well. When the internet finally became worldwide in the late 1990s the last important aspect that "everybody was waiting for" was established. A "uncontrolable" worldwide network that slowly started to connect all the loose ends. The internet was quicker, offered much more possibilities and it was much more priceworthy. The structure/idea was spreading. Many more people/creators/producers joined (ex-major scene musicians who did' nt fit to the flavour of the month anymore for example).

### **Two more aspects define today's situation.**

**1. The quality of the releases/general work.** With knowledge/experience and some investement it' s no problem to create incredible highly unique professional productions in complete freedom these days. The best/unique/individual releases are actually created in basements, garages

and bedrooms. Whenever the musician feels like being creative all tools are easy to reach to keep working. The result is often a very spontaneous but highly complex/unique sound/music. Almost impossible to create that in a "paid deadline situation" - so, yes - a different quality came alive.

**2. Music biz rules and regulations became totally strict.** This excludes "millions" of artists that create art because "they have to" - not to make money but to "exist". The urge to "say something" that drives all real artists. The real meaning of culture - the real driving force - culture as part of an ongoing process .. development of the human race for no reason but for the development of the human race as part of nature. People started painting the walls of their caves because they wanted to say something - they did' nt want to make money .. this is culture!

There is no way that any of these artists can ever really cooperate with the "old structures". They need easy formulars to gain some quick profit. These artists have created the total oposite of easy formulars. Their art is meant to be thought provoking - new individual, unique thoughts. Any real thought provoking art is strictly forbidden in these old structures because this would threaten their empire. Pretentious thought provoking artists are easy to sell - does' nt hurt anyone. Safe the nature! Yeah sure but if one analyses who is destroying the nature, how and why, he/she simply has to analyse the role of the big cooperations of which the music industry is part of.

### **3. The difference between now and then**

There is one big difference between the situation now and then. In the "cassette scene" days spreading your attitude/ideology was normal. Most of the individuals/labels were spreading a sheet with "basics" with their releases. Why they do it, how they do it and what they want to reach. The spirit of a "new community" was always part of it all. This is no longer so. Today one often gets the impression that releases from "the new small scene" are micro-major products. Same looks - same sound quality - same langugage when it comes to "marketing" the releases etc. etc. - sometimes simply too much emphasis on selling a "product".

Just from the format the "cassette scene" was using (the cassette) it was very obvious that it was "different". Today - thanks to the development of the technical tools - a careful produced "underground" release looks very much like a "commercial" release. There is more or less no more difference in professionalism. Very much emphasis on creating highly unique and professional products, which was badly needed - a real professional "alternative" - this has to be in the foreground, not the aspect of selling a product.

#### 4. New values

What now has to be defined is a new context. It simply does not work anymore to compare these "new underground structures" to the system we all grew up with. It now is important to realise that each individual release is a very important part of a new level of culture. A highly individual worldwide culture where people can find exactly what they are looking for. This helps them to develop because what they find is really satisfying.

The before mentioned lack of "community feeling" leads to isolation and frustration. Incredible unique, professional releases that simply have to be defined as "art", come with infos that speak of frustration and a growing desire to give up.

Some figures: CDBaby.com has sold 538,652 CDs online to customers and has paid \$4,097,066.79 paid to artists. All in all 43,730 artists sell their CD at CD Baby. (info from the "about" page, august 2003 - <http://www.cdbaby.com/about>). This is "only" one online shop dealing with the "new true indie underground". The Indie Bible (<http://www.indiebible.com>) lists 8000 contacts that will help you to promote your music to the world. All this is still just a VERY small part of what is really going on.

This is the reality - each individual release is part of a new defined worldwide culture - a new kind of cottage industry, with millions of people taking part worldwide. Whatever you want to produce will find an audience, whatever you want to "consume" - you can find it. Just don' t think in THEIR old categories - THIS will lead to frustration. You can' t get rich or worldfamous on this "new level" - rich and worldfamous are "values" from structures based on exploitation....bigger, better, higher, richer, more, more, more ...' till there is no more.

As a "consumer" you have to be much more active to find your "kind of culture". You don' t find it on any "official" TV channel/Radio station/book store - so you first have to define what you are looking for. Then you have to "do some researchement" to find it. This is a process which may become a analysing process .. basidy a "learning situation". This is culture! Spoon fed consuming is "big brother-ism".

As an artist you have to be aware of the before mentioned - you have an actual effect on people - your "art" really talks to them - some kind of different "correspondence". The more you define and redefine your art, the more meaningful this correspondence becomes. So if you sell your release to lets say 100 people you gave them much more "real value" than a constructed product gives to a possible audience of millions. Constructed

products are planned to make the most profit within a short time, so they depend on the "flavour of the month/gimmiks/fashion" - after three months the "constructed effect is worn". Carefully worked out unique art "lasts forever".

## **5. The system of recommendation**

The effect of frustration can be avoided very easily. Frustration is often based upon a situation that does not develop anymore based on a lack of feedback. Looking at the amount of people taking part, it seems very strange to get no feedback (feedback which helps to develop). Imagine everyone that you correspond with sends just one recommendation, this recommended contact sends another recommendation and so on. Now if you cleverly explore these recommendations and cooperate with the ones that help you to develop your personal network - the process is endless and fruitful! Unfortunately it seems that too many cling to their personal "contacts" - like a treasure in a cave this will just gather dust. This just can't work .. it can't grow...it can't shine. Imagine everyone would send an address of a really reliable true indie shop - soon you would have your release in hundreds of shops. Same goes for radioshow and magazines if you correspond with musicians producing a similar sound like yours. But this sure just works if you share your own "treasure". There is still much greed, pain and jealousy around - not blaming anyone, this is part of the old system but if you want to go somewhere else, you need to get rid of that. Share your treasure - you will be rewarded! This is not some strange ideology just simple rules of a network.

## **6. The personal aspect**

A second aspect, that really helps to get rid of frustration and negative feelings, is to leave the isolation. Corresponding can be a very time consuming and exhausting process but it's THE well of inspiration and a very fruitful way to leave isolation. What a difference it makes to receive a package with music that includes a sign of the human being behind - a short handwritten note adds a total different dimension. More and more yours truly ignores pure promo packages. No need (and close to impossible these days) to write endless personal letters to each and everyone but a short comment .."a word" is ALWAYS possible if you feel as part of something else. It's also a very good way to find the "real" people. Not reacting at all to the personal flair defines a character - you can forget these people. Saves money and limits frustration. If you add this "personal aspect" to your work it is very logic that this will add like-minded people to your world. Again a very simple rule of a network.

## 7. Epilog

Yes, lots of the above is very idealistic and very much "hard core" - too often we have "negotiated and discussed" ... untill nothing of the truth was left. For a real alternative the basic work has been done in the last twenty years - now it's time to make it grow ... slow but sure it will make a difference. Many aspects still have to be defined .. some people taking part just want to use all this to find an entrance to the "old world" - all the best but you can forget that. A "parallel world" is already existing ... wanna be part of it? You're very welcome!



... more to come  
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**Suffice to say that he is one of the most important personalities in the underground scene this side of John Peel.** *(GetRhythm, U.K.)*

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