

Lemmings

Tuesday, 17 February 2015

The news that ex prison officer and X Factor winner Sam Bailey has already been dropped by the label comes as no surprise at all. So have most of the winners and others. Even huge stars fade pretty quick. One Direction is still huge but whatever happened to Leona Lewis?

One reason is the new world. This century the human species has become so superficial that a career of 140 characters is more than enough. Government by tabloid slogan. Laws in three words. Complexity and depth take up too much time as our species rushes headlong towards the Lemming cliff edge.

But the main reason is because the music industry seems to have forgotten that there are a variety of talents in music and ALL of them should be nurtured and encouraged.

One Direction is a good example. The lads have one talent. Good looks. Though fading fast, they were each cute and attractive to young girls. A fan base, entirely and totally based on physical appeal, was assured. They do happen to be adequate singers too. At least they are able to hold a note, although with no individuality or charm whatsoever. Simon Cowell had the sense to provide them with great songs (written by others - songwriters; an art in its own right). To give them great producers (another art in its own right and, for me, the most important of all. As a producer I contributed to many young stars ranging from Genesis to The Rocky Horror Show).

But singers can be very different types and each talent is fine. An interpreter of songs. My tune Everyone's Gone To The Moon was a 4.9 million seller for me in 1965 but far and away the most interesting interpretations were done by Nina Simone, Frank Sinatra and others. Indeed, possibly the most effective was by someone who could not, technically, sing a note - actress Marlene Dietrich.

You don't find many great interpreters on TV talent shows. They need age and experience.

Then there is vocal skill. Most winners of talent shows have vocal ability in spades. That's what The Voice pretends to be all about. But how many Voice winners have gone on to be stars? None.

Performing ability is another, totally separate skill. Lighting up the stage or screen. Bruce Springsteen. Michael Jackson.

Stars have to have charisma. And that is very rare indeed. You can be ugly yet have charisma (Sammy Davis Junior? Jonathan King?). You can have a lousy technical voice yet have charisma (Bob Dylan?). You can be a bad performer yet have charisma (Robbie Williams?).

Every now and again - and I can't think of anyone since the 80s and Madonna or Prince - a performer combines all these talents.

But the music industry, in the desperate quest for profit, has allowed greed to motivate the way it works. Like industry in general, short term profits are the demand. And long term profits often require short term losses. While singers are trained, polished, taught - because many of the above qualities can be learned.

"Quick. Get a record out". So X Factor winners get a Number One and fade within seconds. Instead of concentrating on their (usually single) ability and growing them. Performers can have great careers if handled correctly. I'm proud that Genesis - and ex members - are still doing fine in their Sixties. As Charterhous pupils they were appalling stage performers. They either improved and developed (like Peter Gabriel) or relied on other talents to support them (like Mike Rutherford).

Why aren't there more executives in the music business these days who understand this?