Tanner Day

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*The Complications of Digital Music*

How has music piracy/file sharing affected the music industry? For the past few years, record sales revenue has been going down and many people believe it is because of file sharing on the internet. Some artists and other individuals involved in the music industry have spoken out saying they feel like they got cheated and stolen from. But, society seems to think there is no reason to buy their music if they can get it for free, and that it does not really make a difference how they get their music. Music is something that is a part of everyone’s life and it is changing every day. Downloading free music is something that has the potential to save somebody a lot of money, but, at the same time it could also destroy an artist’s passion. I seek to find out how artists, songwriters, and producers have been coping with this situation.

When searching through the web for documents containing information about my topic, a scholarly journal entitled *On-line Piracy and Record Music Sales* caught my eye. I am starting with this source because I feel that it is most relative to my topic. This journal written by David Blackburn, of Harvard University, in December of 2004 claims that the affect file sharing has on the music industry depends on the popularity of the music/artist. To put it differently, a popular music artist may be one to suffer losses due to file sharing while at the same time a ‘no-name’ or unpopular artist will benefit from file sharing. Blackburn writes, “Further inspection, however, reveals that it is unrealistic to believe that the effects of file sharing are constant across all artists and the benefits of file sharing differ with the ex-ante popularity of the artist” (29). This quote reaffirms the statement Blackburn made about the effects of file sharing and how popularity ties in. However, Blackburn’s final understanding of his research is that file sharing has a strong positive effect on music sales, but not the actual artists. The text reads, “And while the average effect across artists is essentially zero, the average effect on sales is not zero, as more popular artists not surprisingly tend to have higher sales” (47). I can clearly see Blackburn’s perspective, but, I fail to believe that there is essentially no effect on artists. Many artists depend on the revenue from their music sales to be their annual salary. The thought that artists are not affected by their music sales just does not sound right to me. This in depth journal has introduced the valuable popularity factor to me and made me realize that there are actually artists that benefit from music file sharing. While this writing is covering the impact that file sharing has on music sales, it is lacking information about the impact that it has on artists, producers, and other individuals in the music industry. Also, how will this affect the future of music? At this point, I will need to search for more information about the industry itself, rather than just the record sales.

In connection to my last source, I have stumbled upon an article labeled *Artists, Musicians and the Internet.* This article was written on December 5, 2004, by Mary Madden. I chose this source because I feel that it can be successful in providing information about the impact of file sharing on artists themselves. After reading through this article, I was surprised to find out that many artists actually utilize the internet as a viable source of marketing their material and communicating with their fans. Madden reports, “Artists and musicians believe that unauthorized peer-to-peer file-sharing of copyrighted works should be illegal. However, the vast majority do not see online file-sharing as a big threat to creative industries. Across the board, artists and musicians are more likely to say that the internet has made it possible for them to make more money from their art than they are to say it has made it harder to protect their work from piracy or unlawful use.” Later, she then states, “American artists have embraced the internet as a creative and inspiration-enhancing workspace where they can communicate, collaborate, and promote their work.” My first thought was that artists would discourage file sharing and find it as a negative threat to their career. Turns out I was wrong. I am beginning to accumulate a general understanding of the affects file sharing has on the music industry. Nevertheless, there are still things that I am unsure about. With music file sharing possessing good and bad qualities, what does the future hold for the music industry if this continues?

When researching the future of music, I came across a journal written by Ron Giambalvo discussing the book titled *The Future of Music: Manifesto for the Digital Music Revolution.* Contained in this book review is a section dedicated to the impact technology will have on the future of music. Giambalvo writes, “Such technologies have made artists and fans alike less dependent on the recording industry to create and distribute music.” In other words, Giambalvo is saying that artists and recording engineers can now record good quality material in their homemade studios because of technology. As a result, people aren’t spending a lot of money on CD’s; instead they are downloading even more music (legally or illegally) from the internet. Reading this source has contributed thoughts that hard copy music records might eventually be deliberately cast away from the music world. In my opinion, it is more beneficial to have hard copies of music in case something goes corrupt with the music files. I seem to think that the music industry is headed in the wrong direction by the eventual elimination of hard copy music and the risk taking involved in file sharing. The music industry appears to be making the best of file sharing and has used the internet to their best advantage. My only remaining question is if there are any artists who disapprove of file sharing? If so, what efforts are they making to put a stop to it?

At this point, I have led myself to an article on the web with the title *Music stars at war over file-sharing.* The author of this article is Ian Youngs, a BBC music reporter. The article dives into the conflicts between various artists concerning file sharing in the music industry. Youngs provides familiar names such as Lilly Allen, Tinchy Stryder, and James Blunt, claiming that they have all joined forces against music piracy. Youngs then gives some interesting information, “Forty billion music files were downloaded without payment in 2008, global music industry body the IFPI said, meaning 95% of all digital music was downloaded illegally.” With these statistics, it is clearly seen why these artists, in addition to others, have been outraged by this digital revolution of music. On the flipside, Youngs brings the Featured Artists' Coalition (FAC) into his report. The FAC is a pressure group set up to speak up for artists’ rights. Billy Brag, a FAC board member, said Lily Allen and her “disciples” had "slightly got the wrong end of the stick". I can come to an agreement with Brag because it seems like most artists don’t mind file sharing, or they benefit from it. I have now generated an appropriate understanding of both sides of this argument, and have acknowledged the fact that filing a case against file sharing would be a great challenge to anyone.

On the whole, interpreting information from sources related to music piracy has assisted me in forming a solid enough understanding to the point where I can now conclude my exploration. I have discovered how a number of artists benefit from file sharing, and how they use the internet to market and communicate. But, there are still artists out there who have a strong stance against music piracy because they have not been as fortunate with it. These artists are beginning to realize that changing the ways of digital music is merely impossible. I have also learned what the future of music might be like and what risks lie ahead in the path that the music industry is taking. Of course music will always be a strong demand in our world’s society; we just do not know exactly how it will evolve. What kind of effect will technology have on the music industry in the long run? Only time can tell.

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