Music Piracy
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For the last ten years or so, the music industry has encountered a problem unlike anything else it had ever seen before. With the rise of such computer programs as Limewire and Napster, users were able to upload and share their music collection over the Internet, and thus arose the issue of music piracy. Users now could download for free off the Internet music they otherwise would have had to go to a music store to purchase. This sparked a persistent, controversial debate. While some would say that music piracy is just a necessary evil that bands themselves are even starting to embrace as part of the ever-changing music industry (Humphries), others argue that piracy results in a huge financial loss for all parties involved with the production of the music being stolen (Kinsella). Now that music piracy looks like it is here to stay, it is time for all Americans to take a serious look at the issue and consider whether or not music piracy is not as bad for the music industry, especially the musicians themselves, as one might originally assume.

Information Surrounding Music Piracy
Piracy is something that started small but, when given the chance to spread, took the world by storm. The advent of the computer and the Internet played a large role in the spread of piracy, as modern technology provided pirates with ways to anonymously circumvent copyright laws and other legal limitations and restrictions in the sharing and acquisition of music (Fisher). Nowadays, piracy is widespread all across the globe. Zach Horowitz, president and COO of Universal Music Group, estimates that around the world, one third of all music CDs and only one in every twenty music downloads are done legally and sold legitimately, while another source estimates that piracy is such a huge problem in China that “99 percent of all digital music is pirated” and fears that the United States will soon see a piracy epidemic rival to that of China (Cieply; Humphries). In spite of all this, some music companies are taking measures to make piracy seemingly even easier. Apple, owner and operator of music service iTunes, has recently removed Digital Rights Management (DRM) from all music sold on the site, allowing the music to be played on any digital music player, unlimited copies of the songs to be produced, and products overall to be shared and easily pirated (Grossman). In short, piracy is a huge problem for the music industry all around the world, a problem that only stands to get bigger as no steps are seemingly being taken to curb it.

What the Journalists Are Saying
Journalists today are adopting many vastly different positions regarding music piracy, from those who strongly oppose it to those who view it as an important shift of focus in the music industry. One popular view among journalists today holds that piracy does not hurt the music industry and, in fact, can even help it. Lev Grossman, a columnist for Time Magazine who admits to illegally downloading music on his own, posits that while piracy is not necessarily a monetary
boost for the music industry, a downloaded song or two can spark a pirate's interest in a specific
musician which inspires them to make legal purchases of their work in the future (Grossman). Even
the film industry sees a similar effect. After a recent popular, highly-anticipated movie was leaked
on the Internet weeks before its theatrical release, a poll among those who saw the pirated version
showed that over 40 percent were still planning on seeing the theatrical version of the film, a figure
that would not prove to be economically damaging (Wortham). Other journalists, however, are not
so quick to approve of piracy. Warren Kinsella of Canada's National Post staunchly disapproves of
the act, saying that counterfeiters “cost our economy billions” (Kinsella). Lawrence Lessig of the
Wall Street Journal attempts to find some sort of middle ground, even proposing ways to prevent
music piracy or even legalize it to the point where artists would still be compensated for their work
(Lessig). Overall, journalists present a wide variety of opinions on music piracy, fitting for such a
controversial issue.

What the Musicians Are Saying

Musicians are as divided over the piracy issue as the journalists are, adopting many diverse
opinions regarding the issue. The artist Prince has a very strict anti-piracy policy with his music. In
fact, he is so strict about how others may use his music that when YouTube user Stephanie Lenz
posted a video of her son dancing to Prince's “Let's Go Crazy,” she was contacted by Prince's music
lawyers asking her to remove the video or else she would be sued for using the song without
Prince's permission (Lessig). Courtney Love, on the other hand, feels just the opposite. In her 2000
Love Manifesto, while she never explicitly promotes music piracy, she lashes out against the music
industry for their treatment of artists under contract. She first defines piracy as “the act of stealing
an artist's work without any intention of paying for it. I'm not talking about Napster-type
software...I'm talking about major label recording contracts,” and then goes on to say that artists
have to pay so many expenses to the record companies that the royalties they receive are not nearly
enough to cover the basic cost of living. As Love puts it, “The band may as well be working at a 7-
Eleven” (Yar). Other musicians, like Radiohead and Nine Inch Nails, have tried to bridge the gap
between the music industry and piracy, giving entire albums away for free or for whatever cost fans
are willing to pay for them. British band Marillion even leaked their album onto popular piracy
websites, embedded with a video of the band thanking their fans for interest in their music and
asking them to consider buying more of their music (Humphries). Arguably, musicians would like
to receive some sort of monetary compensation for their work, but some are finding a way to
incorporate piracy into the legitimate distribution of their music, while others are still staunchly
opposed to the idea.

Conclusion

The spread of piracy within the music industry in the past fifteen years or so has been great
cause for concern. The advent of greater technology has made piracy easier than ever (Fisher) as
fewer legitimate music purchases are being made all around the world (Cieply; Humphries). Both
journalists and the musicians themselves are divided over the issue, from those who view piracy as a necessary evil (Grossman; Wortham; Yar), to those who staunchly oppose piracy (Kinsella; Lessig), to those who are in the middle, trying to propose and inspire change within the music industry (Humphries; Lessig). Since it does not appear that piracy is going away anytime soon, musicians, pirates, and producers will have to come to some collective agreement that leaves all parties satisfied. Clearly, then, in order to reach such an agreement the economic as well as legal ramifications of this growing phenomenon should be analyzed with all the tools and technologies currently available to the forensic accountant.

**Works Cited**


