Case Study | Catherine Anne Davies

Catherine Anne Davies is an artist, songwriter, musician and producer. She is an Artist Ambassador for the Featured Artists Coalition (FAC), and is a member of the Ivors Academy and the Music Producers Guild (MPG). Here she tells us about her varied career.

“My creative process can differ quite dramatically, depending on whether I’m producing and co-writing for another artist, or working on my own project as The Anchoress. When I’m co-writing it’s all about being adaptable and filling in the gaps between the artist’s strengths. Sometimes you are brought in to help focus the lyrics, other times I have written complete backing tracks of music that the artist then writes a melody and lyric over. Every project is so different and I think the key to being a good co-writer is to leave your ego at the door: your role is to coax and encourage what the band or artist has to say.

This couldn’t be more different to how I work on my own solo project as The Anchoress. For my recently released second album (which scored a Top 40 chart placement as well as #1 on iTunes), I wrote and produced everything from scratch in my studio at home. I always have a running list of song title ideas and I’ll keep little voice memo ideas on my phone of piano ideas or bits I’ve come up with on guitar. I don’t believe in writer’s block. If you have enough different ways of working then it’s just a matter of changing up how you are approaching a song.

My productions for The Anchoress can be quite dense and complex but when working for other bands and artists often it is all about keeping a lot of space in the arrangement and sprinkling a few unexpected textures to keep it sounding fresh.

The song is key: at the end of the day the basic lyric and chords have to be good enough to stand alone if you played it on an acoustic guitar or piano. Without that you are adding Christmas decorations to a coat hanger! Production should complement the song, not be a substitute for one.

Recognising the power of fanbases is crucial. Joining the line-up of Simple Minds (from 2014-2018 on keys/vocals) was a tipping point for my career: it enabled me financially to create my own studio space but it also exposed me to their loyal fanbase, many of whom have gone on to become fans of The Anchoress. Equally, duetting with Manic Street Preachers has opened up touring opportunities and helped build my profile. So many artists now are recognising the power of sharing fans through collaboration and featuring on each others’ songs.

It can often be a huge wait before a song or album is actually released and any delays (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) can really affect cash-flow in terms of receiving mechanical and performance royalties from vinyl, CDs, streaming and live shows or radio plays. It’s been important for me to be able to keep working in my studio at home to keep creating new work that will provide future income. Not being able to play live shows for nearly two years has been a devastating loss of a major source of revenue, as well as denying a crucial means of promoting the success of my recent album, and cutting off a main way of my connecting with new and existing fans.”

The Anchoress | Ella Charlesworth ©
Case Study | Metropolis Studios

Metropolis Studios is an independent recording studio in west London. Richard Connell, CEO, tells us about the role of the studio and the impact of COVID-19.

“Our job is simple, to provide the professional structure and environment for an artist to maximise every second they spend with us. There are clearly differences to the level of support we provide on a technical level but we learn, adapt and improve with every client.

We are a full service studio. This includes recording, mixing, immersive mixing and mastering as well as engineer training and management and audiotechnology development. We also host live events for partner brands alongside some incredibly powerful ‘events’ like our highly successful “Live To Vinyl Sessions”.

We are fortunate to draw our clients from a very deep ocean. Studios traditionally work with labels and management teams from around the world as well as film and broadcast companies. Because we are a hugely successful mastering house, we also work across the globe directly with thousands of artists at every stage of their career. We try and anticipate our clients needs ahead of the event as much as we can.

We strive to earn our place in music too. I watched Leigh-Anne Pinnock’s powerful documentary, Race, Pop & Power, and I am determined for Metropolis to contribute to the diversity of the studio recording industries engineering talent which we have exciting plans for.

The impact of COVID-19 on the recording studio sector has been severe. We are fortunate that our mastering business has remained robust because it does not require clients to be onsite. Our studio business, however, has suffered from the lack of international artists. Prior to lockdown we welcomed some of the world’s most successful international artists to record at Metropolis. This disappeared overnight and is yet to come back.

A return to growth will require a number of elements. Firstly, enabling and encouraging artists to travel more freely will help bring back international clients. Secondly, the studio sector would benefit greatly from similar tax breaks available to the film and TV industries - breaks that have proven to be hugely successful in kick-starting investment in TV and film studios and skills in the UK. But it is vital that investment is directed firmly at UK-based studios, engineers and production talent to rebuild not only economic value in the UK, but professional skills that we are in danger of losing from this country forever.”

Richard Connell
Metropolis Studios CEO
Case Study | Festival Republic

Melvin Benn is Managing Director of Festival Republic. Since COVID-19 hit in 2020, Melvin has been at the forefront of trying to find solutions and a pathway to reopening, which he explains below.

“Festival Republic is the biggest festival promoter in the UK, we promote the Reading and Leeds festivals, Latitude Festival, Download Festival, BBC Proms in the Park amongst others. All of this was cancelled in 2020, but the entire live industry was in the same boat.

Although we are a competitive bunch, we also collaborate. As promoters, sometimes we promote one leg of an artist’s tour, with another promoter handling another leg of the same tour, or we share back-end resources at the same location or venue. Competition focuses on attracting talent to appear on stage and attracting audiences to attend events. Competition and collaboration have always coexisted in the live industry, but during the COVID-19 pandemic we all had to collaborate more closely than ever before.

During 2021 Festival Republic has promoted a series of test events at Sefton Park, Download and Latitude. First came Sefton Park on the May Bank holiday weekend in Liverpool. This was a Festival Republic event, but we collaborated with other promoters. SJM helped with booking the acts and working the protocols around that, DF Promotions helped share knowledge and my own team and the Solo team managed the testing regime. We also invited anyone else from the live industry who wanted to attend on a fact-finding basis.

We planned the Sefton Park show as a 6,000 capacity event with a ticket price of £29.50. Tickets could only be purchased by people aged 18 and over who lived in the Liverpool City Region. Ticket holders were required to take a rapid lateral flow test at a local testing centre within 48 hours of entry, and were required to take a test after the event to ensure any transmission of the virus is properly monitored.

The event sold out but it lost money, which we planned for under the exceptional circumstances. Tickets were priced low, acts would have been £75-100 to make it viable, but everyone involved worked with us to keep costs down. Acts worked for expenses, not a fee and we focused on booking acts that were local to the North West. Many contractors charged close to cost price and some went further. There was an acknowledgement amongst some, such as catering companies who had been able to trade during lockdown, that they were more fortunate than others and able to contribute more.

Download is usually an 85,000 capacity festival, but this year we planned it as a 10,000 pilot event, that means 10,000 people in space for 10,000, not a space for 85,000. There was no social distancing, which was part of the pilot. The ticket price was £120 and which ordinarily would have been £200, so, again, we all had to keep our costs down. We still made a loss even though it sold out, again, these were exceptional circumstances as part of the trial period. The line-up was entirely UK acts.

Latitude was a 40,000 capacity event with a £200 ticket price, the same as previous years, to move us back into business on a more sustainable basis. The event was part of the Government’s Event Research Programme, testing the NHS app. The line-up was entirely UK and Irish acts as it was not feasible to book US talent.

The live music industry has been incredibly supportive of one another during this time. We are a pretty decent bunch in the UK. We’ve always been fiercely competitive, but right now we’ve eased the dog eat dog and worked together. Government have stepped up too and we’ve been speaking regularly to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and they have been keen to engage with us.

In terms of what happens next, the new government-backed insurance scheme is critical and welcomed. We absolutely need that but there are still details to finalise. Extending VAT relief would be massively helpful to us. We also have to be able to bring international talent into the UK and UK talent must be able to tour internationally without quarantining. If artists have to quarantine, the tour doesn’t happen.

International touring is essential to the live industry because audiences demand the very best talent they can attend events. Competition and promoters are concerned about how we might overcome this problem. It will have to involve the World Health Organisation. Territories such as Belgium have issued clear advice if you have been vaccinated using a vaccine similar to the ones approved in the UK, you ought to be able to come in without quarantine.

Maybe every industry believes this, we are very passionate about what we do. We have huge pride in what we do and I hope, through this process, the government recognises the value of what we do: economically, culturally and emotionally.”

Melvin Benn | Festival Republic ©
Case Study | TaP Music

TaP Music is a music management company founded by Ed Millett and Ben Mawson, with offices in London, Los Angeles, Berlin and Sydney. Co-President Anna Neville explains how the company and its artists adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The biggest impact, obviously, was the lack of touring. Our clients Dua Lipa, Ellie Goulding, Lana Del Rey and Dermot Kennedy all had tours planned for 2020 that had to be cancelled. This impacts not only the artists, but backing musicians, road crews, support staff and management in addition to promoters, venues and so on.

Despite the challenges, we did have some successes. We decided to continue with our plans to release the Dua Lipa album 'Future Nostalgia' in the spring of 2020. We had concerns but releasing new music in the midst of lockdown lifted people's spirits. Obviously Dua was already a global name and not everyone was so fortunate. The biggest impact was on developing artists because you are trying to build up their fanbase. It is really difficult to get your name out there when traditional live routes are closed off.

We are a well-resourced company with our own in-house marketing and social media teams, but music discovery is a huge challenge unless you go viral, which is something you cannot plan. This is where playing smaller venues and the early slots on festival line-ups provide essential foundations on which to build campaigns. If you have not yet established your audience, this is particularly tough. A key element in launching an artist's career is being able to capture the moment, but if the world moves on, you miss your chance.

Brand partnerships also suffered during lockdown. A key element of a brand deal is delivering content and experiences, much of which could not happen. This meant some deals needed to be extended and that will have a knock-on economic impact. It is the same with music merchandise deals; the term will extend until the advance recoups and much of that income traditionally comes from selling merchandise at live shows.

On a more positive note, lockdown did give some artists the space to try new things, create, and connect with their audience in different ways. Dua, Ellie and Dermot did pioneering livestream shows that we were immensely proud of – we wanted to create a compelling alternative to simply streaming a gig, something special that could exist viably as a format outside lockdown and I think we achieved that. Ellie Goulding used lockdown to write a book about health, fitness and lifestyle and another client, Chelcee Grimes, started a podcast and sports TV presenting role because she has a career as a footballer alongside her music career. In both cases it was about knowing yourself as a creative person and playing to your strengths to find new ways of connecting with your audience.

Easing restrictions in the UK is a positive step, but artists must be able to travel internationally. Most of our artists work globally and remote recording sessions have not really worked on a creative level. So much magic happens when you bring people together and we need to be able to bring people together again.”