**Why Illegal Downloading Is Actually Good For The Music Industry**

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Downloading music for free is as easy as a quick Google search, a few pop ups and the inevitable risk of getting a virus. Much easier, some might say, than setting up an iTunes or Beatport account, entering your bank details and watching your hard earned pennies transform into four minutes of noise. Those who defend illegal downloading will say stuff like “one person doesn’t make a difference” or “I’m only taking away a quid from them, what’s the harm?” Well to those people I say this, how would you like it if out of your salary every month a small levy was charged because your customer decided to not pay every now and again? Not a lot? I thought so.

The fact of the matter is, Illegal downloading is soul destroying for artists, it takes away the incentive to work hard on music if it’s not going to make you money and more importantly it could discourage the people destined to be the next Daft Punk or Michael Jackson into working in Tesco instead.

So why am I defending illegal downloading? It’s simple, because it exists. Stopping illegal downloading would cost massive amounts of money. Firstly, ISPs are given the responsibility of blocking the websites that cater for it as ‘The Pirate Bay’ found out to the detriment recently when it was blocked across the UK by force of court order. There are probably millions if not more sites that you can rip music from and the time, effort and cost are enough to put anyone off.

Secondly, who would enforce this ban? The government or more specifically, the police. Quite frankly, the police have enough work to do trying to stop the population from eating each other in a bath salt induced haze and trying to stop themselves getting in trouble for racism and corruption to worry about kids sitting in their rooms listening to the latest Usher track for free.

Thirdly, and I think the most important part is, what is our incentive as a global community to stop illegal downloads? If anything the odds are stacked firmly against the record companies and artists in this respect. Think of record company and you think of P Diddy in ‘Get Him to the Greek’ in a huge office block beautifully decorated with enough money to sink a ship. Most artists fighting against the illegal market are extremely wealthy and influential. Who wants to create laws and systems so they can make more money?

The fact of the matter is, illegal downloading is here to stay. We should make it harder for people to do and that is happening, albeit slowly. Limewire is gone, the aforementioned Pirate Bay is blocked in the UK and many other sites are being closed down. I believe we have lived through the “golden age” of listening to free music and slowly things are beginning to adjust. Now I’ll admit I wasn’t really saying illegal downloads are good for the industry there, I was saying I think everyone should be lazier. I’ll correct this now.

Music used to be corporate; people with “the look” were found first, people who could actually sing or produce where left on the backburner. Money drove the industry and music suffered because of it. When your Dad complained when you were a kid that music was “bland these days” it’s because he was right. As time went on from the 60’s into the 90’s and early 00’s the distribution channels for music were slowly destroyed by the giant money making machines that are the large record companies. These people have no affection for music, only money. An example of this that really struck me was watching an episode of The Jonathan Ross show where Louis Walsh, the man who brought us such tripe as Westlife and Boyzone, basically admitting that he didn’t like the music he sold but he knew he could make money out of it. So as music has become readily available for free, the less of these companies exist, which is great news for the globe.

Music is more about expression now than it has been for a long time, people only become famous by chance, by talent or by gimmick (Ed Sheeran’s amazing looping work on YouTube made him famous). Yes, there are still people like JLS who walk round the place smiling like a 3 year old on Christmas morning but there are less of them. A quick look at the top 10 in the UK and a lot of the people on there are generally good artists who got there on merit. Disclosure who, at the time of writing, is at number 2 in the chart has had a meteoric rise to success built on nothing but raw talent. Emile Sandi, one of this generations greatest vocalists is at number 4. As always there’s some manufactured stuff in there; WILL.I.AM who can’t possibly exist in real life sits at number 6 with his pathetic excuse of a song ‘Scream & Shout’. But a common theme is that most of them didn’t have the backing of huge labels until after they had been recognised, not before.

The corporate side of music is dying and being replaced by people who actively search for the next big thing. Namely, you lot. The public now decides what music is fashionable or popular. Sometimes these choices are strange (Gangnam Style) but everyone needs a good laugh. Meanwhile the record company’s role has been reduced to delivery boy. They make sure that music is distributed well, marketed well but the days of control are coming to an end. Dad’s cry of blandness has also been quietened by the arrival of much more diverse music. Looking back at the UK top 40 again and we can see dance, hip-hop, folk and many more genres than before. So perhaps we can say that creativity and diversity have risen up from the proverbial ashes of BMG and co.

In the last 5-10 years something else has been happening, the rise and rise of live music. Last year in the UK there were more festivals than you could shake a stick at and more than at any other time in British history. This is no accident. When making records and sitting on their arses became boring, artists used to go on tour and play a few gigs just to fill the pockets a bit. Acts were often not up to their full standard, miming or just plain poor. When most of the income was coming from the records the need to work hard on the road wasn’t ther. However now, live music is one of the better ways to make money the quality of it has gone up a lot. An example of this being the recent “Watch the Throne” tour by Jay-Z and Kanye West. I didn’t go, but judging from what I’ve heard from friends and seen on the internet it was one of the greatest shows ever. Kanye has always been a showman; he appreciates the fact that live music is the key to longevity.

Look at Michael Jackson, Madonna and Kylie Minogue who have managed to last well past their sell by dates by putting on unforgettable events in music that people take with them forever. Jay Z however was always more of a studio man, and this live work shows that he has had to change his game to keep the money rolling in. Ever the chameleon, he eclipsed Kanye on stage. Festivals have had to compete with each other to get better, increasing the pay of acts and cutting ticket prices. Tommorowland this year sold out in minutes because of an excellent campaign video. And despite being in the same weekend as Global Gathering, they have managed to book a stellar line up. Any true musician would surely say that they would rather play a sell-out gig than make money from records. All fans would say, hopefully, that nothing compares to listening to your favourite act live.

So downloading music illegally on the face of it is wrong, it takes away money from the music industry and it reduces the incentive for artists to make money. BUT (yes, it’s a big one) without it we wouldn’t have Spotify, a summer full of packed out arenas and a reason for Louis Walsh to not buy another car. And anything that stops that idiot from having fun is awesome.

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