

Keeping music alive

Bob Mould's Circle Of Friends:
available on DVD from MVD

THE LIVE MUSIC BOOM CONTINUES APACE, WITH ESCALATING CONCERT ATTENDANCE AND EVER MORE ACTS ON THE ROAD. AND, GARY SMITH REPORTS, SIGNS ARE THAT THE LIVE SCENE IS ABOUT TO GET LIVELIER STILL

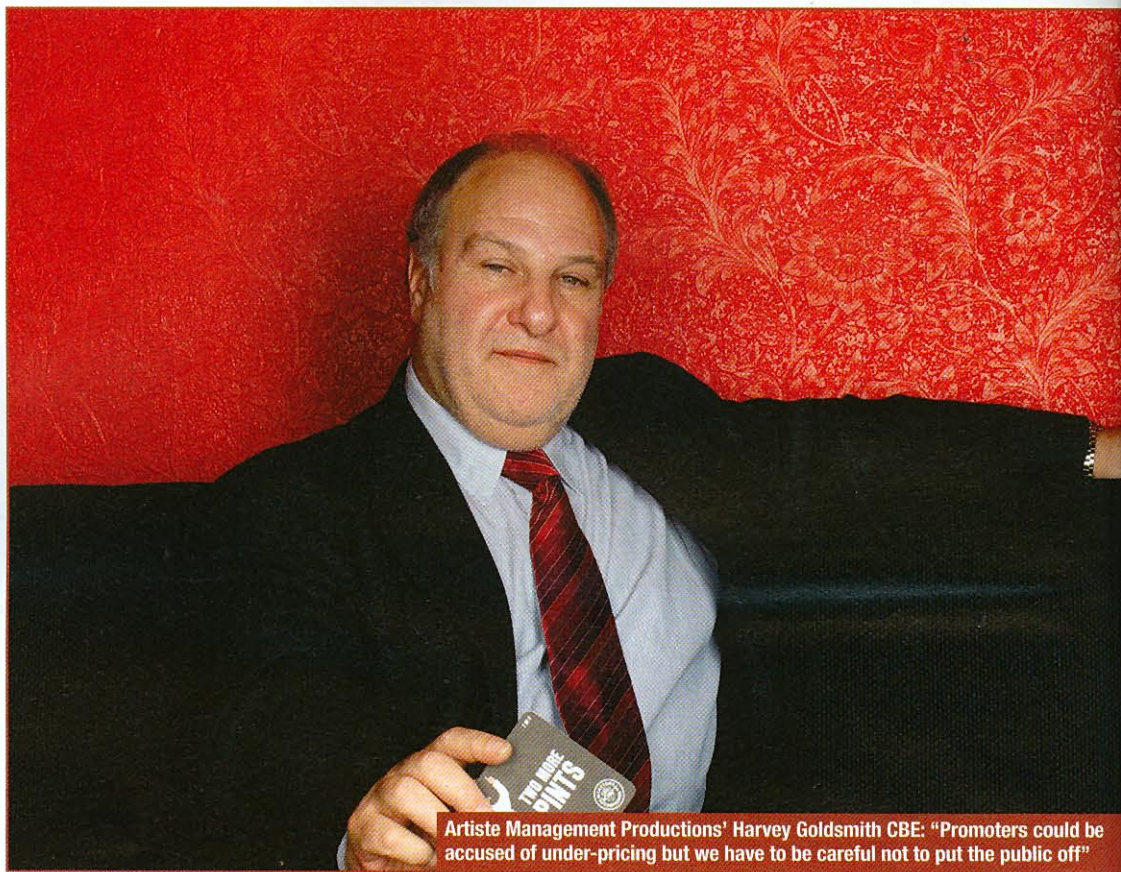
THE DEFINITIVE numbers for global ticket sales in 2007 are not yet available, but it is expected to be yet another very good year for live music.

While record sales continue to tumble, the number of people willing to pay from €25 to see a package of relative unknowns to €300 for a prime seat on the latest Madonna tour is still on the up. The 2006 global gross was €2.3bn, up 30% from 2005. In the same year, total concert atten-

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dance rose to over 61 million, a year-on-year hike of 13%. And the fact that the number of bands on tour only rose by around 4% means that those figures represent real growth in the number of people attending concerts.

The Police’s global reunion tour was recently named by Billboard as the most profitable of 2007. The trio have so far grossed more than €117m and have been seen by more



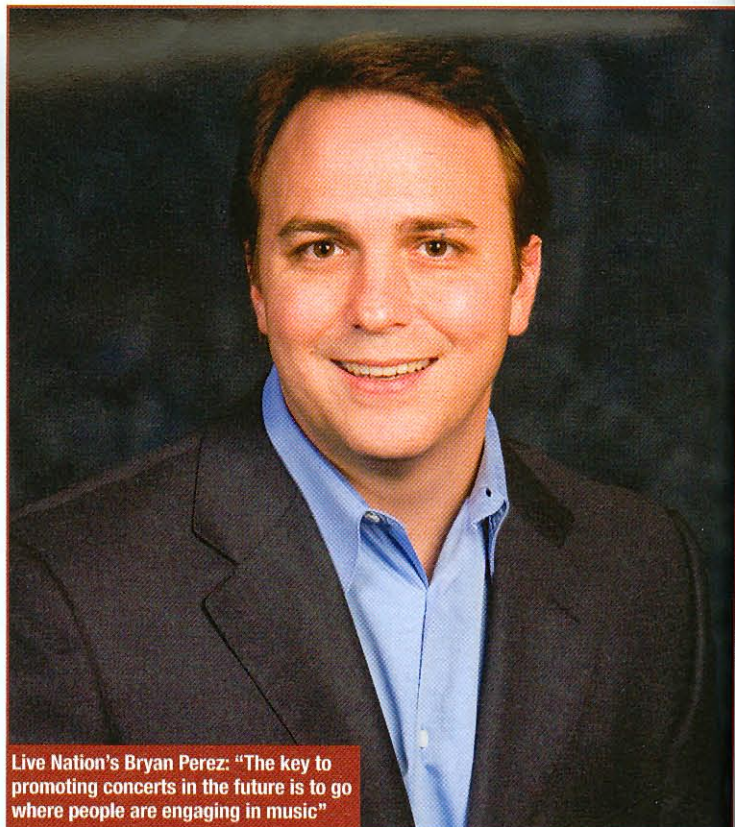
Artiste Management Productions’ Harvey Goldsmith CBE: “Promoters could be accused of under-pricing but we have to be careful not to put the public off”

than 1.5 million people. In the UK, several former concert halls that had been converted into nightclubs will be re-opening as live venues this year, including the Roxy in Sheffield and the Town & Country Club in Leeds. The Brighton Hippodrome, which was converted into a bingo hall in the 1970s, is also due to stage concerts later this year. Among the big venues, Wembley Stadium has re-opened and the Millennium Dome — until recently regarded as a building with no future — has successfully hosted 21 nights of Prince, along with a series of Spice Girls concerts, in its O2 arena.

The UK touring industry is estimated to have generated close to €1bn in 2007 — a rise of over 8%. While these figures are good news for agents and bands alike, the biggest shock of 2007 was hype surrounding the one-off concert in late November by a reformed Led Zeppelin, at the aforementioned O2 arena. The gig was billed as a

tribute to Ahmet Ertegun, the founder of Atlantic Records, who died last year. “We expected demand to be big,

but I was not prepared for the fact that the website we set up for people to apply for tickets got 25 million hits on the first day,” says



Live Nation’s Bryan Perez: “The key to promoting concerts in the future is to go where people are engaging in music”

Harvey Goldsmith CBE, managing director of Artiste Management Productions. "We had one million applications for tickets priced at €200 each — and the last two tickets were sold for charity for €116,000 each. It's clear there is huge demand for a full Led Zeppelin tour, but I have no idea if it will happen."

Ticket prices have been under-priced for years, Goldsmith adds, so it comes as no surprise that concert-goers do not seem to mind paying more for their seats. "Promoters could be accused of under-pricing, but we have to be careful not to put the public off," he says. "At the lower end of the scale, prices haven't changed much. But for middle- and upper-ranking acts, they have nearly doubled in the last three to five years."

While the live industry continues to boom — Goldsmith is currently staging UK concerts by Bruce Springsteen and Jools Holland — there is still plenty of potential in the beleaguered CD. "I don't believe the CD has come to the end of its natural life," Goldsmith says. "There are still plenty of artists who are capable of performing well and who have new music to promote, but the record industry doesn't know how to globalise its talent anymore. There's way too much short-term thinking and too many artists obsessed with grabbing as much they can as quickly as they can."



Method Man: Live From The Sunset Strip (MVD)

"But there's always new acts coming through," he continues. "What the industry as a whole needs is more meaningful dialogue about how we can all pitch in to help this business grow."

It is clear that, alongside the growing drawing and earning power of live entertainment, technology will play an increasingly important role in the future shape of both the live and recorded sides of the music industry. "Orange offers various ways of distributing entertainment content," says Laurence Le Ny, vice-president of music, partner-

ships and services at France Telecom's content division. "As a company, we are proud of our ability to innovate — and that's something that we can share with the music industry."

"In creating services such as Orange Music Store, we have had to develop various solutions to make music accessible to the maximum number of people across several platforms," Le Ny continues. "When, for example, we develop services such as Orange Music Cast or our VOD [video-on-demand] concert-highlight package, we work alongside rights-holders. Ultimately, our public offering gives the indus-

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Laurence Le Ny

try new ways of displaying and distributing content, as well as new revenue streams."

Live Nation, the live-music juggernaut that recently signed a groundbreaking \$1bn contract with Madonna, is using the social-networking format to connect its artists with their fans. "The key to promoting concerts in the future is to go where people are engaging in music," says Bryan Perez, Live Nation's president, global digital. "We have to know how to use the digital environment (on Livenation.com) to turn a three-hour experience at a (music) venue into a three-month dialogue with a fan."

The company is rolling out LiveNation.com to 15 countries in 12 different languages by the first half of 2008. Furthermore, Live Nation operates two music-community sub-sites linked to more than 400 major and indie artists. They are UltraStar, an online fan club co-founded by David Bowie, offers access to exclusive artist-related content; and Musictoday, an online merchandising and ticketing service.

According to Ed Seaman, chief operating officer of home entertainment distributor MVD Entertainment Group, the growth in live activity is having a knock-on affect in the home entertainment sector.

"It's clear that live music DVDs are much more widely accepted now," Seaman says. "And within each generation, there are more and more people who are comfortable with the idea of watching a concert at home, especially now that home-cinema systems offer a genuine sense of immersion. But the down side is that music retail has been clobbered, so finding shelf-

space for DVDs is challenging."

Seaman reports that MVD Entertainment's online operation is also starting to pick up momentum as bandwidth grows. "However, I don't think it will ever replace physical sales in the way that online offers are starting to do with CDs," he adds. "That's because, with a DVD, the quality of the packaging and the extras are much more important."

MVD Entertainment offers over 1,000 titles, including Donovan's Live From LA, Bob Mould's Circle Of Friends and Method Man: Live From The Sunset Strip (the latter is available on HD-DVD as well as on standard DVD).

"Heritage artists like Donovan are hugely important to us and to the industry as a whole," Seaman says. "And then there are artists like Bob Mould, who went out on a 15-date US tour to support the release of Circle Of Friends. The DVD is a recording of a live show that covers his whole career, from Husker Du to the various incarnations of Sugar."

The significantly lower price of filming and recording a concert is also expected to bolster the live DVD offer, Seaman says. "A lot of artists are now waking up to the fact that the price of producing a live DVD is a mere fraction of what it was as little as five years ago," he adds. "Then there are releases like The Beastie Boys Awesome: I Shot That, where the group paid 20 fans to film a concert and then edited the resulting footage. Clearly, there is a growing demand for user-generated content [UGC] in the live context and I think we'll soon start seeing more DVDs in the same vein as Awesome."

We can also, Seaman believes, expect to see more 'instant live



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recordings'. "The idea of buying a DVD souvenir of the concert you have just watched is catching on and it's something that we're interested in," he says. "We are also looking at expanding our range of collectibles, such as T-shirts sporting DVD covers. We recently made a T-shirt run featuring the cover of the last Syd Barrett DVD release, which proved to be very popular." ■