

# FOLLOW THE MONEY

The past decade has seen the global record business decimated and its local market shrink by over 50 per cent. But during this period **NZ On Air** has instituted few substantive changes and many within the local industry are asking why. By Duncan Greive.



NZ On Air's Brendan Smyth

“Last month Avondale’s biggest selling boy band, Home Brew, had their hopes of a music video grant for their song ‘Underneath The Shade’ crushed into tiny little pieces by the harsh hands of New Zealand On Air. However like the brave soldiers they are they decided to swallow their Boh Runga bitterness and began on a mission to independently raise the funds themselves.”

So begins *A Little Boy Waits*, a nine-minute quasi-documentary covering the local rap crew’s quest to scrape together enough money to make a clip. Just a few short weeks before they had been dutifully playing the system, hoping that their undeniable momentum would result in one of the 170 video grants issued each year heading their way.

**“I WAS LIKE, ‘FUCKING OPSHOP AND BOH RUNGA AGAIN! BUT I WAS WRONG, IT WAS LAST YEAR’S FUNDING DECISION. THEN SOMEONE TOLD ME ‘NAH, ACTUALLY BRO, IT DOESN’T COME OUT TILL 5PM’... I WAITED’ TILL 5PM AND IT WAS EVEN WORSE. DANE RUMBLE GOT THE FUNDING.” – HOME BREW’S TOM SCOTT**

The band are one of the hottest in the country, and have reportedly received label overtures from a rejuvenated EMI and Kirk Harding’s Move The Crowd, along with an offer from *Sione’s Wedding* director Chris Graham to shoot a clip for them gratis. March 15 was the date NZ On Air released its most recent round of funding decisions, and their rapper Tom Scott laughs at the memory of how it all fell apart.

“I was like, ‘Fucking OpShop and Boh Runga again!’” he jokes. “But I was wrong, it was last year’s funding decision. Then someone told me ‘Nah, actually bro, it doesn’t come out till 5pm.’ By then my hopes were crushed and I wasn’t too worried. I waited’ till 5pm and it was even worse. Dane Rumble got the funding.”

It’s a scene which plays out around the country five times a year, with artists across the nation learning whether they’ve found favour with the mercurial funding body, whose relative importance to the local industry increases with every year that the nation’s album sales total shrinks (that’s eight in a row now). NZ On Air spends \$5.4m per annum on the local music industry, in four main areas: the distribution of ‘hit discs’ to radio; funding of broadcasters; direct funding for artists to make albums, singles and videos; and the funding of Phase Five projects to ‘take New Zealand music to the world’ – a programme the agency has backed away from in the past few weeks after a comprehensive review questioned large parts of the scheme’s function.

That review, the Caddick Report, asked a number of salient questions about the way New Zealand music had been marketed overseas by NZ On Air. Phase Five is in the process of being wound up, after five largely inconsequential years. But the main thrust of NZ On Air’s approach, the funding of videos and the recording of music, remains largely unchanged since its inception. NZ On Air was founded in 1989 following the deregulation of broadcasting in 1988, and a couple

of years later they felt ready to turn their hand to music funding, which initially involved the funding of radio programming and music videos. Of the latter, they approved 21, at a total cost of \$105,000, from the timeless (David Kilgour and Upper Hutt Posse) to the swiftly forgotten (Emulsifier and James Gaylin) – an abstract, seemingly arbitrary pattern that continues to the present day.

In the intervening years, NZ On Air has evolved in five distinct steps, which they dub ‘phases’. After videos and radio programmes came ‘hit discs’, CD compilations of local artists for radio in 1993. The addition of a radio plugger came in 1997 and in 2000 the organisation began funding recordings and music television, with the

recordings (like music videos before them) supposed to be matched dollar-for-dollar by the supporting record companies. These are funded two ways: firstly via a new recordings grant of up to \$10,000 to get a pre-approved song ready for radio; secondly via a grant of up to \$50,000 to make an album – though in practice you could count those who claimed less than the full amount on your hands with fingers to spare. The final phase was the aforementioned fifth, the only one that has been repealed.

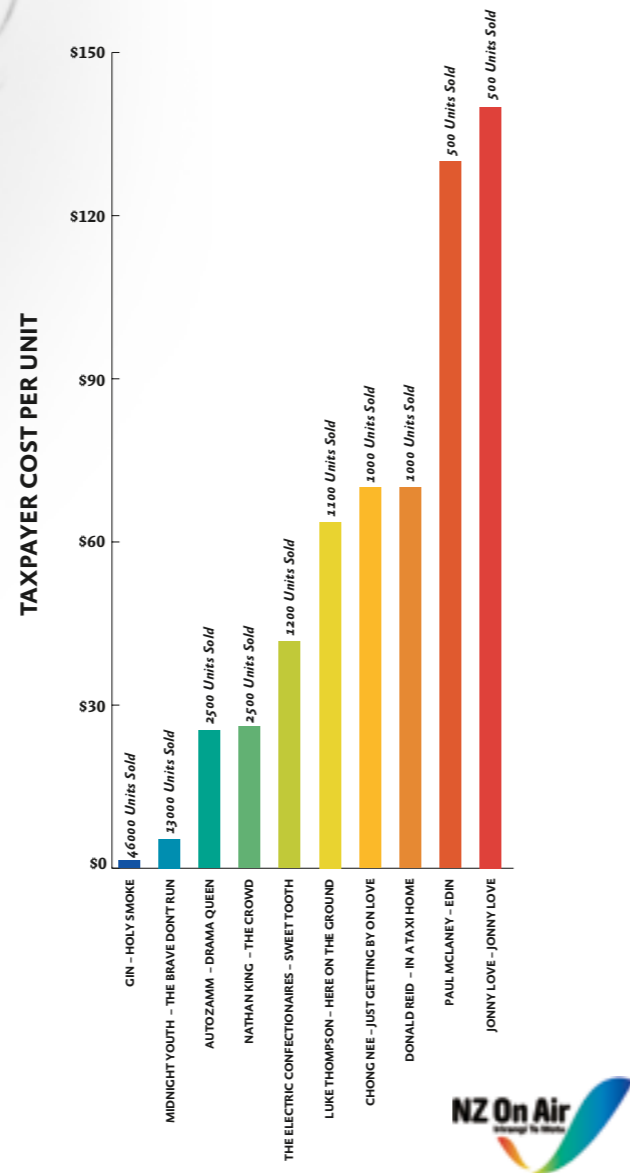
This means that there have been no meaningful alterations to the way NZ On Air operates since the year 2000. This despite the myriad changes which have impacted upon the music industry over the past decade, predominantly driven by the internet and file sharing. NZ On Air remains largely the same organisation, behaving in the same manner as it did when it first started funding music nearly 20 years ago.

Just how similar? They still fund more music videos than anything else (170 last year), and still pay the same rate (\$5,000 a pop) as they did in 1991. NZ On Air is still focused almost entirely on radio and television, despite surveys like the recent Bridge Ratings study showing that traditional radio lagged a distant fourth behind social media, online audio, even smart phones as a music discovery venue.

According to Mike Bradshaw, a music industry veteran who was until recently the head of Sony Music and currently manages Crowded House, NZ On Air’s approach to music is fundamentally flawed. “Look at the system. 170-odd videos at \$5,000 each. Is that a good use of taxpayer money? Let’s just look at it from a strictly business point of view. Let’s put every single act that’s had any NZ On Air funding and put a tick next to the ones that have succeeded outside of New Zealand or have succeeded in gold or better sales. I would suggest to you those ticks would be pretty minimal. Probably three to five per cent maybe? I did all this. I got the

# \$140 FOR A CD?

Since 2000, NZ On Air has spent a shade over \$10,000,000 funding the recording of around 200 local albums. While their remit is to get New Zealand music played on radio and TV, it's useful to take a look at the sales of a random sampling of New Zealand albums which received album and video funding, and see what the taxpayer contribution was to each album sold. This isn't a metric the organisation uses to judge success or failure of a project, but it is useful in ascertaining the true popularity of a project, because it shows the number of times a consumer paid full price for an album. It seems sensible to question whether spending \$140 to convince a consumer to spend \$25 is the best use of public resources. This is not an attempt to discredit any of these artists specifically – they're intended to be illustrative, and to prompt debate about how we spend our money.\*



\* These figures were leaked to *Real Groove* by a source after specific requests, and are taken from widely available industry charts. They have all been rounded up to the nearest hundred. Bear in mind that this figure is just a guide, and doesn't include certain sales. All the same, it gives you a rough sense of how many full-price albums an artist has sold.

information from RIANZ from an internal point of view. In the last 12 months of any rolling year, there's something like maybe 10 or 15 albums that sold 7,000 or more. If you dig down into it, there's some pretty frightening numbers in there."

Some might scoff at using a 'business point of view' to quantify success in a nominally artistic field, but given that NZ On Air's mandate is governed very tightly by commercial radio play, and there is no critical component to their judgements, it has obvious merit. And the business of music is one Bradshaw is exceedingly well qualified to comment on, with nearly a quarter century in New Zealand's major labels.

He started working at EMI in the '80s, before heading to Sony/CBS during the period it was merged with BMG, moving through the ranks of promotions and marketing, ultimately taking over the MD's chair in the early part of this decade. He was there when New Zealand music reached its historic low of two per cent radio play, and watched it rise to its recent plateau of 20 per cent. There are few in the local industry who have been as intimately involved with NZ On Air from a record company perspective, and whose businesses have benefited so much from its largess.

Despite this, Bradshaw feels that the organisation has failed to take the opportunity to examine critically how it spends its money over the past decade, while the industry which relies so much on NZ On Air's support has been forced to do so on a daily basis. "Let's look at the last 10 years," says Bradshaw. "It's around six million a year. Nearly 60 million dollars. Sixty mill! Why have we not had the success we should have had?"

**"LET'S PUT EVERY SINGLE ACT THAT'S HAD ANY NZ ON AIR FUNDING AND PUT A TICK NEXT TO THE ONES THAT HAVE SUCCEEDED OUTSIDE OF NEW ZEALAND OR HAVE SUCCEEDED IN GOLD OR BETTER SALES. I WOULD SUGGEST TO YOU THOSE TICKS WOULD BE PRETTY MINIMAL." - CROWDED HOUSE MANAGER MIKE BRADSHAW**

Much of the criticism of NZ On Air boils down to radio's role in the process. As C4 and MTV have become more youth-oriented lifestyle channels and shied away from playing music in prime time, so the centrality of radio to NZ On Air's existence has risen. Ultimately, the organisation bases all its decisions on the remit woven into its fabric, which is to get New Zealand music played on TV and radio. There is no quality component, no critical judgment – it's just a numbers game, and one run by radio stations whose programmers would rather die than lose listeners and the advertising dollars they represent. Which means that NZ On Air's gaze is effectively trained by commercial radio to a very large extent.

And, as Mint Chicks' Ruban Nielson points out, New Zealand commercial radio is extremely risk-averse. "The thing that I find frustrating is when you hear the radio hits that come from America, for instance, they're quite radical things," says Nielson. "Pop music has got to be quite radical. The sounds can be quite atonal or quite distorted or quite edgy. 'SexyBack' – for instance,

Timbaland and Justin Timberlake – that wouldn't get on the radio if it was made by a New Zealand artist. It just wouldn't. It's quite aggressive, but it's on New Zealand radio because it's on American radio, and what New Zealand artists really need is the ability to make music as radical as what's happening overseas and still have a chance. Not to have to be Brooke Fraser."

Nielson's band has hit the ever-elusive sweet spot of critical and commercial success more potently than anyone else this decade, yet they have never applied for album funding, despite NZ On Air's certainty that they would have been granted it. The money simply wasn't necessary for them to create their music, and the guitarist and songwriter is deeply skeptical about whether *anyone* needs \$50,000 of taxpayer's money to make an album in 2010.

His sentiments are echoed by the acclaimed Auckland rapper Tourettes. "My last record cost \$3k. If you need more than \$10k, you're wasting money – especially with the way technology is nowadays. You just don't need to spend that." That record, *Who Says You Can't Dance To Misery?* was rated the 12th best of 2009 by *The New Zealand Herald*, received a five-star review in *Real Groove*, sold out its initial pressing in weeks and had a single which was the third most-played on alternative radio in 2009 – yet still couldn't meet the bar for NZ On Air video funding.

It's a situation Nielson believes is emblematic of New Zealand's musical culture, and an example of how NZ On Air might better fund music from this country. "I think that if you give \$10,000 to 10 bands then you'll get a healthier and more vibrant culture rather

than giving \$100,000 [a grant plus the record company contribution] to one. It's the same amount of money. You only need one hit album out of those 10 bands. The likelihood is that you'll get a grading – one band might do really well, and then three or four might not do so well, but they'll still go on tour and do their bit and people will still enjoy their albums. And then there will be a few others with middle-rated success. To me that's more useful than just leaving some people completely to their own devices and then giving a huge amount of money to one artist. I feel like if something works, just do the same thing again," he says. "If you ratchet it up every time, it's just a fallacy. They think that pouring in twice as much money is going to squeeze twice as much profit out of it."

A glance at recent funding decisions would seem to bear out Nielson's criticisms, as well as suggesting a few more. The most recent recipients of NZ On Air album funding included Nathan King, Fur Patrol, Aaradhna, Motocade and Nesian Mystik, whose projects have cumulatively received over \$1,000,000 in public money



over their lifespan. While all have achieved NZ On Air's benchmark test for success (a reasonable amount of airplay on radio and at least one play on TV), only Nesian Mystik have yet broken out of the one-hit-album straitjacket. Motocade have yet to have a bonafide hit of any description, and none of the artists concerned has had meaningful success overseas. Yet all were given \$50,000 each to make a new album, a strategy Nielson is hardly alone in finding singularly unlikely to succeed.

## IN CONVERSATION IT'S HARD NOT TO WARM TO BRENDAN SMYTH BECAUSE OF HIS VOLUBLE PASSION. BUT ULTIMATELY HE HAS BEEN IN CHARGE OF FUNDING MUSIC IN THIS COUNTRY FOR 10 YEARS, AND HIS ONLY MAJOR ALTERATION TO THE PROGRAMME HAS JUST BEEN ROLLED BACK AFTER A FAIRLY UNCOMPLIMENTARY REVIEW.

It's a resonant theme, and one pop music history bears out very well; that prior success in music doesn't guarantee or accurately predict future success. But there is the strong sense that New Zealand artists, once they have their hooks into NZ On Air, were able to return to the trough again and again without having to provide evidence that there was a market for their services. Because NZ On Air's focus is entirely on airplay, a band which has a sound that appeals to certain radio formats is able to sustain a career without ever having to even have an album or single go gold and prove that there is an audience for their work outside of commercial radio music directors.

Auckland rockers Autozamm, for example, have received three \$50,000 album grants without any EP or LP charting to date. Bradshaw sees merit in the argument that a more complex analysis, perhaps including a sales component, would help NZ On Air be more accountable for their decisions, and be more keenly aware of when strategies are succeeding or failing for their audience. "I think it's just systemic," he says, with a hint of resignation in his voice. "Every business has to review the way it operates when you consider market conditions. If people spent the same as they always did in a recession, there would be a lot of pain. You cut your cloth to the way it should be. That's been one of the things that's passed over – is our tax money being used effectively? That's the question that anybody should be asked. Not to be forgotten, all record labels – major or independent, are business ventures based on profit. If people don't make profit then how do they stay in business?"

The man charged with running the organisation at the centre of all these questions is NZ On Air music manager Brendan Smyth. He's a passionate and very visible face for NZ On Air, regularly called upon to champion its causes and defend its decisions in public, with the kind of relentless enthusiasm such a wearying task demands. When we meet up at a K' Road café on a sparkling late summer's morning, he's sporting a bNet variation on the New Zealand Music Month hoodie,

and displays an admirable recall of the facts and figures involved in his organisation's work. But it's clear he feels hamstrung to a large extent by NZ On Air's continued fealty to the Broadcasting Act of 1987, which defines his organisation's work in very specific terms – in a pre-internet world where local music's airplay was low-to-non-existent and avenues for exposure finite and few.

But despite the massive explosion in avenues for a song to reach its audience, Smyth remains a staunch

defender of the old campaigner, FM radio. "The situation is that in the old days radio was one of the major tools in the toolbox," he says of the birth of NZ On Air. "It's true, there were only two tools. What hasn't changed and has never changed and probably will never change is that there is a song and there is a band. And how to make the connection between song and band is what everybody is striving to do. And in the old days, one of the major tools for making that connection was the radio.

"These days in the toolbox, there's dozens of tools. Radio is still in there; music television is in there; live performance is in there. But also there's a bunch of other tools like the internet, YouTube, MySpace. There's a bunch of ways of reaching bands, and that made the world a more interesting and dynamic place because it's not as narrow as it used to be."

The problem, as Bradshaw perceives it, is that NZ On Air has been very slow to recognise and adapt to this changing world which Smyth speaks of so enthusiastically. In conversation it's hard not to warm to Smyth because of his voluble passion. But ultimately he has been in charge of funding music in this country for 10 years, and his only major alteration to the programme has just been rolled back after a fairly uncomplimentary review. So why, when so much has changed in the world around it, has NZ On Air not adapted its music funding?

Smyth says that NZ On Air has wanted to do a review of its operations for some time, but has been hamstrung by a case between performing rights organisation PPNZ and the radio stations which is currently before the courts. But as the Caddick Report points out, 2009 saw the New Zealand record industry's eighth straight year of declining revenues, to the extent that the market for recorded music is now 44 per cent of the size it was at its 2001 peak. For NZ On Air to point to a case which began in the last two years as its reason behind a delayed review of a situation visible on the horizon – if not on our front lawns – for at least a decade looks more than a little disingenuous.

That case was supposed to have come to its

conclusion in October last year, though the judgment, which has profound implications for the financial basis of the record industry here, has yet to come down as we go to print. In the meantime NZ On Air remains stuck in no man's land, doing its '90s work in a different world. The dismantling of Phase Five sees one of the few avenues for artists like Home Brew to get funding vanish into the ether. For all the scheme's faults it effectively gave NZ On Air an opportunity to fund overseas explorations by less commercial artists on the circuitous grounds that their overseas success would see them played on local radio – effectively re-importing our music (think The Datsuns, Flight Of The Conchords or Ladyhawke) because commercial radio was seen by NZ On Air as unwilling to take risks with certain kinds of artists. It's dichotomies like this which fuel their critic's ire.

Newfound NZ On Air enemies Home Brew are an interesting case study, because they have huge industry buzz around them – with its implied sales and airplay expectations – yet have been turned down for funding not long after choosing to self-release via local indie distributor Rhythmethod rather than sign with either of their two high profile suitors. This fuels the accusation

television in the corner. It's clear every cent Tourettes earns from his job working in fast food is poured straight back down the throat of his art. His music gets rave reviews everywhere it goes and draws large crowds up and down the country – even getting mainstream airplay on The Edge FM occasionally. Yet for whatever reason he doesn't fit the criteria for NZ On Air funding, while apparently being far too commercial for Creative New Zealand support.

But to spend even a few minutes in conversation with him is to become convinced you're in the presence of a New Zealand original, whose spark remains undimmed despite countless rejections, and whose protestations about Smyth's body's decisions have the stench of truth around them. "It's fucking ridiculous. If you look at the bands that get big in this country, a lot that gets popular is a rip-off of something overseas. Obviously there are a few exceptions, like Mint Chicks. But generally, you can play The Feelers next to any number of big American rock bands and you wouldn't be able to tell the difference. I think that once something is successful in America, and we finally get it down here... even with the internet, it's still true that it's done its thing. How the fuck is that band going to get big offshore when they're

## “IT’S FUCKING RIDICULOUS.

IF YOU LOOK AT THE BANDS THAT GET BIG IN THIS COUNTRY, A LOT THAT GETS POPULAR IS A RIP-OFF OF SOMETHING OVERSEAS... YOU CAN PLAY THE FEELERS NEXT TO ANY NUMBER OF BIG AMERICAN ROCK BANDS AND YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE.” – TOURETTES

many artists level at NZ On Air that the organisation funds major label releases with no questions asked, effectively forcing artists to choose between their independence and a financially viable future.

This kind of approach, with its insinuations about personality and status trumping musical talent and potential, is one which Tourettes – who has been turned down for NZ On Air funding “over 20 times” by his own count – sees as having a depressing amount of merit. His own experiences with the organisation have a near Kafka-esque quality to them. “There was nothing,” he says of the endless denials. “You don't even get anything. You're just not on that list of names and that's sort of how I found out that there were bands getting funded. There are the big bands, and whether or not they deserve it is contentious, but there are bands that you've never heard of and you never hear of. It's not like they get the money and suddenly they're on TV. I don't watch music television anymore, but I used to, and when I did, I was like ‘Where are these bands? What are they doing with this money?’”

He sits drinking a beer I brought around to his Grey Lynn flat in a cardboard six-pack, on a '70s couch in a sparsely furnished room with a 15-year-old gaming system attached to a tiny



Tourettes

just doing something that the rest of the world already did and is sick of?

"It seems to be backwards. I don't know," he sighs. "I feel like I'm sounding quite bitter. I kind of am – it annoys me. But at the same time, I would rather be in my position than in Autozamm's at the end of the day."

His anger is palpable, and understandable, but his is not the only perspective. I spoke to video director Joel Kefali, whose NZ On Air-funded clips have drawn raves from no less an authority than hip hop star Kanye West. Kefali is cautiously positive about the body's role in funding his work, while at the same time pointing out that he shares with Chris Graham the propensity to work with unfunded artists if they appeal. "I'm not sure which artists get funding and which don't," says Kefali. "Sure there are artists I'd like to work with who don't have funding, but a lack of funding hasn't stopped us from working with bands in the past. But I wouldn't want to see the amount of music videos being commissioned cut dramatically. It'd make it difficult for young directors to have the opportunity to produce a video with some money behind them."

**"YOU CAN TAKE A CANVAS AND SOME PAINT AND TURN IT INTO A \$40,000 COMMODITY. THAT'S THE SAME THING WITH MUSIC... IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO BE THAT THE GOVERNMENT CREATES A PRODUCT THAT RETURNS LESS THAN WAS PUT INTO IT IN THE FIRST PLACE" - MINT CHICKS' RUBAN NIELSON**

In this way NZ On Air's funding strategy seems to foster fledgling film directors far better than it does underground musicians.

Mark Kneebone is the head of Isaac Promotions, which functions variously as a label, promotions company and much more besides. His company has also proven extremely adept at getting artists which might have looked too difficult for NZ On Air funding in a position to receive it. "I personally don't think we need to throw more stuff down the pipe," he says, in direct contradiction to Nielson's thoughts. "We need to do a better job with what's already there. Ironically, the one job that gets fucked by that is alternative. Ironically, we work that really, really heavily. As long as the paramater says the end result has got to be a commercial radio broadcast, then at the moment they're actually backing the right bands. It pains me to say it because I reckon Dear Time's Waste should get a music video. I think Surf City should be funded more. I think Street Chant are actually onto something, and that could work. But if the end result is radio broadcasts on commercial outlets, then no. Those bands should not be funded."

While he has the comparatively measured language of most who benefit from the current system, there's a clear subtext to his pronouncements on the issue, one that is common to almost everyone I spoke to: the system is not currently working, and hasn't been for some time. For Kneebone, it's preventing him from getting funding for some of the artists who have the most potential for overseas success, with the attendant export earnings and cultural benefits that implies.

The underlying sentiment from most artists I spoke to seems to be that NZ On Air, as it is currently conceived,

contains a deep, searing irony in that it funds most heavily the artists which are in the best position to exist as profitable, stand-alone business enterprises. If NZ On Air were to be shut down tomorrow, there's no doubt that Dane Rumble and The Feelers would still tour and release albums. Just as Tourettes and Home Brew would, two artists who have proven too left-of-centre for NZ On Air and too mainstream for Creative New Zealand.

The middle ground between those two agencies is where 95 per cent of the Flying Nun back catalogue sits, where most of Split Enz's albums make their home, where internationally adored artists like The Ruby Suns and Lawrence Arabia are found. In short, it's where much of what we treasure most deeply about New Zealand music exists, yet the funding body charged with fostering this music is unable to reach across to it. Or, to put it less charitably, NZ On Air has proven itself singularly incapable of trying.

Those I spoke to for this feature came from across the New Zealand record industry spectrum. They shared a few things while feeling very differently about most. But the sentiment came across loud and true that the

system as it stands – and has stood for some time – is far from adequate. Even Brendan Smyth – his organisation's best cheerleader and a consistently engaging speaker – often gave the impression that he would give anything to operate without a 22-year-old set of rules behind him. Whether that sentiment has come along too late, though, remains up for debate.

The thing which really matters, as tired as the cliché might be, is the music. More specifically, whether we're playing to our strengths and encouraging the right music, and the most engaged audience, with NZ On Air's current funding strategy. Or even having the right debate. Ruban Nielson's closing remarks ring loudly in my ears, and seem to speak to the heart of what's missing with our current approach and its strange, uncoordinated muddling through the mists that lie between art and commerce.

"The thing that makes art powerful in an economic sense is that artists are able to take raw materials and make so much more out of them," Nielson says forcefully. "You can take a canvas and some paint and turn it into a \$40,000 commodity. That's the same thing with music. When Chris Knox records The Clean and turns it into a hit single, that's how it should work. It's not supposed to be that the government creates a product that returns less than was put into it in the first place [see '\$140 For A CD?' sidebar on page 18]. That reminds me of Damien Hirst making a skull out of diamonds. It's like saying that art's not worth anything unless it's actually worth something, that a single's not going to be a hit unless you've spent \$100,000 on it, which is just a lie. The bottom line is people do pay those taxes and there is a responsibility to it."

For more, go to [realgroove.co.nz](http://realgroove.co.nz) to read the transcripts of Duncan Greive's interviews – Transcriptions by Ben Askelund.

# FREE WEEKLY NATION-WIDE GIG GUIDE

THE GROOVE GUIDE

## NEW MUSIC

**SOLOMON BURKE**  
**NOTHING'S IMPOSSIBLE**

**SOLOMON BURKE**  
**NOTHING'S IMPOSSIBLE**

The magnificent new album from Solomon Burke is destined to become an all-time essential in any classic soul collection. *Nothing's Impossible* is a bittersweet triumph from start to finish. On one hand, it marks the 70th birthday year of Solomon Burke and on the other, is the final full album produced by legendary Hi Records producer Willie Mitchell, who passed away on January 5, 2010. *Nothing's Impossible* delivers a dozen tracks of timeless soul magic in the purest Memphis style with the deepest Southern roots. Solomon Burke's voice is full-strength and Willie Mitchell's arrangements flourish in the renowned Hi-style with tight, right horns; rock solid kick drums and mellow bass; country guitar fills, and the sweetest, sparest string arrangements to enhance the romance and the heartbreak of these amazing songs.

This is an album by **The Black Keys.** The name of this album is **Brothers.**

**THE BLACK KEYS**  
**BROTHERS**

On May 17th The Black Keys proudly release their sixth full-length album, *Brothers*, which finds band members Dan Auerbach and Patrick Carney back producing what they do best – dirty, blues based rock 'n' roll. Recorded at the legendary Muscle Shoals Studio in Alabama *Brothers* comes hot on the heels of three other critically acclaimed Black Keys affiliated projects that have hit shelves in the last year: Dan Auerbach's solo effort, *Keep It Hid*, the debut LP from Patrick Carney's band Drummer, and *Blakroc* (a collaboration between The Black Keys and renowned MCs including RZA, Mos Def, Q-Tip, and Raekwon). *Brothers* includes the Danger Mouse-produced first single 'Tighten Up' and a cover of the Jerry Butler classic 'Never Gonna Give You Up'. The remaining songs are written, performed and produced by The Black Keys.

**Bettye LaVette**  
**Interpretations**

**BETTYE LAVETTE**  
**INTERPRETATIONS**

Bettye LaVette brings the British Invasion home to its American R&B roots on *Interpretations: The British Rock Songbook*. Produced by Bettye, Rob Mathes and Michael Stevens, this stunning new album is a 13-song journey through compositions by The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd among others, concluding right where the very idea for *Interpretations* started: Bettye's visceral rendition of The Who's 'Love Reign O'er Me', recorded live at the 2008 Kennedy Center Honors, which appears as a bonus track here. Also featured is a wistful naïveté of The Moody Blues' 'Nights in White Satin' (which Bettye turns into a deep and unshakeable lament) and a funky workout of Ringo Starr's 'It Don't Come Easy'. Bettye inhabits these songs, revitalizes them and exposes the humanity that makes these 13 tracks not just pop songs, but enduring works of art.

**THE HOLD STEADY**  
**HEAVEN IS WHENEVER**

**THE HOLD STEADY**  
**HEAVEN IS WHENEVER**

Lauded for the scope, depth, truth and heart that they bring to chronicling the American rock myth, The Hold Steady present their brilliant, new, fifth album *Heaven Is Whenever*. Following the release of 2008's critically acclaimed *Stay Positive* (which gave the band it's highest *Billboard* album chart position to date) The Hold Steady toured relentlessly, giving them the opportunity to road test some of the songs on *Heaven Is Whenever* to "...see what was working and what wasn't" says singer Craig Finn. "I believe this record benefits from us working at a more deliberate pace. The album's lyrics speak a lot about struggle and reward. It's about embracing suffering and understanding its place in a joyful life." Piano and keys take a backseat to guitar on the new record, which also gets production help from guitarist Tad Kubler.

**AUDIO BULLIES**  
**HIGHER THAN THE EIFFEL**

**AUDIO BULLIES**  
**HIGHER THAN THE EIFFEL**

The new Audio Bullies album, *Higher Than The Eiffel* sees production duo Simon Franks and Tom Dinsdale recapture the energy and dancefloor instincts that made Audio Bullies one of the most successful UK dance acts of the previous decade. Mixing their love of house and breaks with an expansive cast list of musical collaborators, switching across dance music's myriad of genres and throwing away the rule book has led Audio Bullies to make their finest record to date, a worthy successor to breakthrough debut *Ego War* and follow up *Generation*. The new album *Higher Than The Eiffel* sees the pair return to top form producing an album with 14 tracks that range from the full on club stomp of the lead single 'Only Man' and rave anthemics of recent free download 'Kiss The Sky', to the psychedelic come down of 'Daisy Chains', the Chic guitar disco of 'Dynamite' and the ska stylings of closing track 'Goodbye'.