TIK-ING BOXES
HOW TIKTOK CAN CHANGE MUSIC MARKETING
Sandbox Summit 2019
New York City

In association with linkfire
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Sandbox Summit 2019 NYC
After the huge success of last year’s inaugural Sandbox Summit in the US, Music Ally returns to NYC again next month with the only dedicated marketing conference for the music industry on May 23. Sandbox Summit is an essential forum for cutting edge and creative thinking in music marketing: a day full of practical tips, refreshing discussions and interviews, insightful presentations, and of course, lots of networking. Brought to you in association with Linkfire, we are delighted to also announce our supporting sponsors, The Orchard and Vevo.

Some of the program we have in store for you includes:

• Flighthouse TikTok channel founder Jacob Pace on marketing to Gen Z, and Sony Music’s Jose Abreu discussing how to target Superfans.
• Secretly Group’s Robby Morris and Laura Sykes explain the secrets behind the Khruangbin campaign which included a Spotify playlist that tapped into Flight APIs
• ‘Dry Streams Paradox’ panel with Pandora’s Heather Ellis, Island Records’ Cindy James, Artist Manager Naveed Hassan (MDDN) and The Orchard’s Amanda Suriani
• Panel on how to bring together the various data silos around an artist hosted by Linkfire’s Jeppe Faurfelt
• International marketing panel focused on India, China and the African markets
• Podcasting and music panel chaired by Cherie Hu, featuring Atlantic Records’ podcast guru Tom Mullen and Kevin Wortis, founder of music podcast label Signal Co No 1

Taking place at the Helen Mills Event Space & Theater, lunch and refreshments are included in the ticket price, not to mention networking drinks at the end of the day! As a Music Ally subscriber you have access to tickets for a reduced price. Please be sure to secure your tickets here asap, early bird tickets have already sold out and the event has a highly limited capacity. For group discounted rates and sponsorship opportunities please contact Anthony.

#MarketMusicBetter
When Lil Nas X’s country-trap hit ‘Old Town Road’ became the #1 song in the US, it marked not just a moment in crossover history but also another milestone for TikTok, the short-form video platform once known to Western users as musical.ly and which passed 1bn app installs in February 2019. (See box for more on musical.ly and TikTok.)

‘Old Town Road’ was released independently as a single in December 2018 – but it started to build later on TikTok, with Lil Nas X himself creating memes to promote the song. "I promoted the song as a meme for months until it..."
caught on to TikTok and it became way bigger,” X told Time. “When TikTok hit it, almost every day since that, the streams have been up.”

In many ways, ‘Old Town Road’ was perfect for TikTok, its slyly witty juxtaposition of country and hip-hop encouraging the kind of tongue-in-cheek humour that thrives on a platform that was once best known for its lip-sync videos but is now home to all sorts of ludicrous and comical memes. “At the time of musical.ly, three or four years ago, they were trying to get away from the idea that it was just a lip-syncing platform, talking up all the other kind of content they had,” says music ally SVP of digital strategy Patrick Ross. “There is a lot of jokey stuff and dancing there.”

music ally digital marketing coordinator Isabelle Ljungqvist adds, “On TikTok, the more bizarre it is the better. TikTok is all about people having fun.”

Sure enough, have a look at the thousands of TikTok videos for ‘Old Town Road’ – many of which have been compiled on YouTube for the older user – and you will find all kinds of bizarre, cowboy-aping behaviour playing out to X’s contagious hit. But the fact that the song has since climbed the Billboard Hot 100, breaking Drake’s one-week streaming record in the process, indicates that ‘Old Town Road’’s rise is not just predicated on its inert silliness and that TikTok success can cross over into the mainstream charts.

The TikTok gold rush

It is little wonder, then, that music industry marketers are increasingly setting their sights on TikTok as a marketing platform, while TikTok itself recently launched Spotlight, an initiative designed to help break new acts from South Korea and Japan. “A short video on TikTok can become a valuable promotional tool for artists to grow their fan bases and build awareness for new work,” Todd Schefflin, head of global music business development at TikTok’s parent company ByteDance, told Bloomberg.

Virgin EMI, for example, recently advertised HRVY’s new single, ‘Told You So’, on the platform, the first Universal Music single to take this route. “For us we knew that HRVY’s core audience were on TikTok,” says Virgin’s senior marketing manager Liberty Wilson. “Even before when was it musically, it was such a captive audience for him and when we saw that he had over 2.4m followers on the platform we knew it would be integral to our campaign moving forward.”

She adds, “We had always envisaged running a hashtag campaign; but when the opportunity came to be the first music advertisers on the platform, we had to act upon it. For comparable spend on other platforms, we saw a much higher and incredibly receptive audience, including over 360,000 impressions and over 17,000 swipe ups with an almost 5% CTR. We then played this into the plan ahead of having the TikTok campaign and during the time of advertising we had over 25,000 users use the track to create their own TikToks.”

Other artists who have recently promoted their work via TikTok include: Alan Walker, who was pushing an environmentally themed Different World challenge; Sigrid, for her ‘Sucker Punch’ track; Russian pop act Little Big, whose ‘Skibidi’ dance challenge made a global impact after Warner targeted TikTok; RuthAnne with her recent ‘Love Again’ single; and Los Angeles-based artist and songwriter Patrick Martin for his ‘Cinema Love’ track.

The latter two campaigns were the work of Fanbytes, a promotions company that specialises in TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat. Fanbytes CEO Timothy Armoo says that the RuthAnne campaign “went completely viral on the platform”, while the Patrick Martin campaign
doubled his streams on Spotify using only a small budget.

Armoo believes that engagement is key to making a successful TikTok campaign. “I think likes and hearts [that posts receive on TikTok] are somewhat interesting metrics, but don’t strike at the core of what makes for a successful campaign,” he says. “It’s the level of interactivity that really wins.”

Key to creating this engagement is making sure that your TikTok campaign fits with song, artist and platform. Alan Walker’s environmental-themed challenge ties in with the themes of his debut album, Different World, while Fanbytes’ campaign for Patrick Martin used the name of his single, ‘Cinema Love’, as inspiration. “There was a TikTok filter available on the app that placed the user inside a film reel, taking snaps along the way,” the company writes on its website. “It fit [sic] perfectly with the cinema theme of the song, so we incorporated it into the challenge.”

TikTok top tips

Naturally, it helps if the artist embraces the platform. A spokesperson for Same Plate/The Orchard explains how Ro Ransom helped to boost the fortunes of a two-year-old song on TikTok by actively engaging with the service.

“This single [‘See Me Fall – Y2K Remix’] was released over two years ago and we saw it was trending on TikTok with over 156,000 videos created,” they say. “In order to capitalise on this moment, we encouraged Ro Ransom to create a user profile to push momentum on his end. It really helps when the artist is supporting and continuing to drive traffic into the service in order to raise awareness and increase user engagement.

Ro Ransom was actively supporting on his end by creating a TikTok account, creating Instagram stories tagging TikTok and by sharing other users’ TikTok videos on his socials.”

In this instance, it also helped that the title of Ransom’s track – ‘See Me Fall’ – was close to that of the well-established Trust Fall Challenge on TikTok. Users started creating their own #seemefall challenge similar to the well-known Trust Fall that took off and helped reach an even wider audience,” the Same Plate/The Orchard spokesperson explains. “There was also an influencer campaign that had a reach of over 12m users.

Brian Vinikoor, VP of marketing at Arista Records, has his own three key objectives when thinking about a successful TikTok campaign. “One: develop an organic trend that spreads through the TikTok community,” he explains. “Two: translate success on TikTok to build momentum on both Instagram and YouTube. I don’t see TikTok having a direct impact on streaming numbers. Instead, I believe TikTok success leads to additional activity and exposure on YouTube and Instagram, which then feeds into streaming platforms. And three: broaden regional TikTok activity to develop global campaigns and take advantage of their massive international user base.”

Going global

TikTok’s global appeal, with the platform available in more than 150 markets and 75 languages, is a massive part of its appeal. Vinikoor explains that, while all TikTok offices have their own priorities and promotions, “you tend to see one market raise its hand first, and our job is then to connect the dots so that fans in other territories take ownership of the song as well”.

Virgin’s Wilson agrees. “It would be great for the UK campaign to grow and be emulated globally and help develop a UK artist into a global artist,” Wilson says. Warner’s campaign for Little Big, for example, was aimed at the US, France, Germany, Switzerland and other European countries, as well as Southeast Asia, many of these unlikely territories for a Russia pop act normally.

Also of huge importance, as Vinikoor notes, is the way that TikTok success can spread to other platforms. Armoo points to the success of the Patrick Martin TikTok campaign in doubling his streams on Spotify, while Wilson says that TikTok “helps to grow the artists outside of the platform driving to other socials too”.

“Looking at our data we saw growth over the three days of advertising to streaming over the previous days,” she adds. Perhaps the most obvious evidence of this cross-channel spread, however, is on YouTube, where there are hundreds of thousands of unofficial TikTok compilation
videos, which put together themed TikTok clips, resulting in hundreds of thousands (and occasionally millions) of views. For example, the most popular ‘Old Town Road’ TikTok compilation video on YouTube has, at the time of writing, over 4.4m views.

Where's the money?

For all this, though, two major concerns remain among the music industry about the worth of TikTok. Firstly, there are some lingering doubts about whether TikTok is anything more than a novelty – albeit a hugely popular one at the moment.

Fanbytes CEO Timothy Armoo disagrees with this view, arguing that having a song go viral on TikTok, or using TikTok to reach that audience, is like having an always-on radio playing your song. "Not only that, but it's just not the same song being played over again but rather different expressions of the song through people creating their own versions of the song," he adds. "That audio-visual experience is unrivalled on other platforms on such scale."

The more serious complaint is about monetisation, with TikTok either paying out very little or none at all to artists. A recent Pitchfork report, which blamed TikTok for paying out pennies to artists, claimed that punk band Falling In Reverse had received $750 from TikTok by December 2018 for the use of their ‘Good Girls Bad Guys’ track, which went viral on the platform, with their distributor Epitaph received another $750.

Interestingly, the Pitchfork report revealed a strong difference of opinion between band and distributor. Brett Gurewitz, the founder of Epitaph, likened TikTok deals to "Chuck Berry getting a Cadillac instead of royalties."

"It doesn't really matter if it's vinyl or an app, every time there's a new way of doing music, the creators always get screwed," he added. Falling In Reverse’s lead singer Ronnie Radke, however, felt very differently about the experience. "I loved it – sales and streams skyrocketed off that song," he said.

Lil Nas X was similarly enthusiastic. When asked by Time if he felt he should be paid per stream on TikTok, he suggested – perhaps with tongue slightly in cheek – that he should really be paying them for playing it. "They really boosted the song," he said. "It was getting to the point that it was almost stagnant. When TikTok hit it, almost every day since that, the streams have been up. I credit them a lot."

Music Ally’s Patrick Ross believes that TikTok's limited monetisation is acceptable, as the platform doesn't compete with other forms of music consumption. "People don't really go there just to listen to music and so it is sort of OK," he says. "At the time when I was working with them with Lauv, when I was at Kobalt, a company that never put anything out un-monetised normally, we just got this ridiculous amount of engagement."

And that, in the end, may be the key to this debate: so long as TikTok continues to attract a vast, youthful audience, the music industry will continue to flock to it in droves – whatever its concerns about monetisation.

"For us it is about having parity on all platforms and why would you not service a huge growing platform with an attentive audience if you could?" Virgin's Liberty Wilson concludes. "We want to give all platforms the best content for their demographics and for us success on TikTok looks like a fanbase you can call upon and who are receptive to new music – much like other social networks that allow posting of photo and video content direct from the artist."

MUSICAL.ly AND TIKTOK: JUST WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

While musical.ly and TikTok are often considered to be one and the same, the reality is a touch more convoluted. musical.ly was first launched by developers in Shanghai in April 2014, while TikTok was first introduced as Douyin by Chinese tech company ByteDance in September 2016, hitting global markets as TikTok one year later.

In November 2017 ByteDance bought musical.ly for upwards of $1bn; in August 2018 it merged TikTok with musical.ly, with all existing accounts and data consolidated into one app. The app is currently available in more than 150 markets globally.
Personalyze.ai refers to itself as a big data people-analytics company and has categorised the entire social web across Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Google Ads (with more platforms coming soon) by using advanced machine learning methods. TopicDNA is the latest product in Personalyze’s toolkit and says marketers can devise swift customer acquisition strategies based on this data.

Founders Andrew Ko (CEO), David Ko (CTO) and Jason Binks (CCO) have a strong pedigree in tech and music startups—including Instatune, mobile contextual music app Moment.Us, DX3, Peoplesound and Vitaminc.

To get going on TopicDNA, users connect their Instagram and Twitter accounts in order to reveal analytics such as overall growth, top hashtags, top mentions, top categories and most successful posts in order to optimise accordingly and maximise engagement.

Using TopicDNA’s advanced visual recognition technology, it will show which categories contribute to your growth the most so that this can help inform your social media strategy in the future. Coming in handy here is the ability to compare your performance to other accounts – so by tracking a similar artist’s posting and engagement you can take further inspiration for your own strategy.

It has to be noted that this is just the entry point to TopicDNA’s offering, as the social media analytics scene is already crowded with platforms like Hootsuite and Sprout Social who offer analytics across more platforms; so it’s elsewhere that the company is really trying to differentiate itself from the competition.

Andrew Ko explains, “TopicDNA is different from the other platforms for two main reasons: depth of insights; and using those insights to pre-optimise social advertising campaigns before they’re run. The other social platforms out there will create a campaign for you but ask you to fill in the targeting criteria, which for most people is the hardest part of creating a campaign and one of the keys to a successful ad campaign.”

Once you have identified your most engaged content and have optimised your posts so that they are most likely to resonate with your current audience, TopicDNA’s audience report feature will provide you with deep insights into any social audience you might want to target.

You can create your ideal target audience based on either the social accounts they are following or the hashtags they’re interested in, plus their location. After putting in the desired audience characteristics, TopicDNA will generate a report within a few minutes covering demographics (gender, age, location, languages spoken), interests, favourite accounts, top content and top influencers/brands.

This detailed insight is incredibly helpful when drafting your social posts and ads so that you will be able to serve your audience the content they crave and are most likely to engage with. This, of course, will impact not only on your visibility on social platforms but will also help in growing an engaged fanbase that you can then drive to streaming, tickets and merchandise.

As part of the report, you’ll also be able to see who influences your ideal audience (still in beta) which will provide you with a list of macro- and micro-influencers so you won’t pay lots of money for a seemingly powerful influencer who your audience doesn’t really care about.

There’s also a fully influencer-focused report regarding its audience and content, helping you to validate if it’s the right fit. This is something that music ally sees becoming more and more important in the context of music marketing campaigns.
while influencer marketing has been top of mind for many years now, the practices and tools to deliver more effective and meaningful influencer partnerships continue to evolve. Looking at follower numbers only gets less important and values such as the amount of influence, quality of the audience, the right fit and the right execution have become crucial.

As a third option, you can also upload a CRM database or a list of at least 100 Twitter handles in order to get insight into an audience you’d like to target. With all of the insights gained from the social post analytics and the audience reports, you’ll then be able to create and launch a new social ad campaign targeting your ideal audience.

The optimal targeting criteria for your audience will be auto-populated from your report and, as an added bonus, you can launch this campaign across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and Google Ads (with LinkedIn and Pinterest coming soon) simultaneously on the platform. According to Andrew Ko, the team is updating the platform weekly. "We've just launched the platform so it's still in its infancy, but we have a comprehensive roadmap with new features and functionality that we're working to roll out as soon as possible," he says.

A free trial of the platform allows you to track one account across the supported social platforms, with analytics for the past month and the creation of one report. TopicDNA will charge 5% of your ad spend when you create a campaign through its platform. For £50/month and 5% of ad spend, you’ll be able to track three accounts, generate 10 reports, access analytics for all previous and forthcoming content – plus you’ll have access to the company’s teams. Spanning up to 10 tracked accounts and 50 reports will cost £250/month. And, of course, there’s also an enterprise version on request with unlimited uses and a reduced rate of 1-5% of ad spend.

"To date we have mainly been working with enterprise-level clients, such as global media agencies and brands, including the major labels," says the company. "However, our platform has been designed for everyone: brands, artists and labels – both big and small. We want to democratise data so that anyone that wants to send out advertising will know it's hitting the right people with the right message." :)
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OH 'ME!', OH MY: TAYLOR SWIFT AND SELF-PROPPELLING MARKETING

If Taylor Swift releases a single and the media + social media don’t go into overdrive about it, has she even released a single at all?

The hype for new music from Swift has been growing since 12th April when her official site turned into a countdown clock, suggesting a major announcement was coming on 26th April. There was febrile decoding of her subsequent posts on Instagram – from heart-shaped brooches to cats on a sofa and even the repetition of pastel hues. There were no interviews or official statements ahead of this. Which only ramped up the speculation. This is a well-oiled machine that knows everything will be dissected and publicly discussed by fans keen to prove they cracked the code first and also put under the microscope by media sites thirsty for the clicks.

Why even bother promoting and explaining anything in advance when everyone else does it for you?

Then, as promised, on the morning of 26th April, the single ‘ME!’ was released and Swift did a live Q&A session on YouTube to coincide with this. Rather than give a media outlet the exclusive, she made it all about the fans (although the cynical would suggest they will all be obsequious in their questioning and not derail the campaign).

Within minutes of the track and video going live, think pieces and semiotic breakdowns of the single were appearing online – proof of the age of the instant hot take working in hyperdrive. “At long last Taylor Swift returns, but ‘ME!’’s message of self-acceptance can’t reach beyond the superficial” (NME); “All the references in Taylor Swift’s Me! video” (BBC); “What the Hell Do All These Taylor Swift Clues Mean? An Investigation” (Vulture); “Taylor Swift’s ME! is a musical-inspired return to her happily uncool brand” (The Guardian). You get the idea.

This is marketing that second-guesses the scale of fan and media analysis and, in doing so, exacerbates it. The song and video are packed with allusions and inter-textual references to her life, her celebrity and her musical evolution and, as such, shows an artist keenly aware of the scrutiny they are already under but also, with an eyebrow carefully arched, encouraging that scrutiny to continue.

It manages to be about the past, the present and the future of Taylor Swift as a pop star and “Taylor Swift” as a cultural phenomenon at the same time. And everyone with an interest in her (as a fan or as rolling media coverage) immediately combs through what is on offer in the quest for meaning.

To fan the fan flames, she claimed in the YouTube Q&A that the video for ‘ME!’ contains multiple Easter eggs. “Some you’ll find out right away and some will take a minute to reveal their meaning,” she said. Cue the inevitable frenzy among fans to find them, with Lover or (more likely) Kaleidoscope being their front runners for the title of the next album.

Then the publication of the record-breaking numbers give it all an extra boost. YouTube was first out of the gates here, reporting the video was watched 65m times in its first day – the biggest 24-hour debut by any solo act on the video platform. Others will inevitably follow when its first week is over.

The song and the video get multiple plays in the hunt to uncover every clue and the play numbers get analysed to understand the Taylor Swift effect – so even its rolling success becomes a news story.

And with the accelerating hype comes the opportunity to sell a range of merchandise items from her official site that plug the gap between the first single and the release of her seventh album – whenever that will be. Items for sale include: a “pink colour fade long sleeve crop tee” ($55); a “beige tote with floral design” ($20); a “lavender tote with multicolour text design” and featuring the word “AWESOME!” (a reference to the song’s lyrics) ($20); and a variety of “multicolor phone stand[s]” with images and colours from the ‘ME!’ video. Oh, and there’s a space at the end to buy a download version of the “7th studio album coming soon” ($11.99).

It’s obviously incredibly carefully plotted, but it aims to look effortless. Doing all the hard work up front means everyone else will do your promotion for you as soon as the first piece of content arrives. This is what we can call Advanced POOD (Pushing On Open Doors) Marketing.
CAMPAIGNS
The latest projects from the digital marketing arena

PH-AR-OS: CHILDISH GAMBINO GETS AUGMENTED – AGAIN

Last summer, for the release of his 'Summertime Magic' single, Childish Gambino and RCA Records worked with Snapchat to create a series of geofenced lenses that were rolled out across 23 cities around the world.

The lens automatically popped up in the carousels of Snapchat where users could hear a clip of the track and see a 3D AR rendering of the word “Summertime” that could be added to the clips created by fans, with the goal being to get them to share it with their friends.

That obviously whetted Gambino’s appetite as he’s back with another AR-centric campaign – this time in collaboration with Google. He tested the water earlier in the year with a Playmoji version of himself in Playground (formerly AR Stickers), the augmented mode in Pixel cameras. And now they have created PHAROS AR, a multiplayer app.

"The experience begins with the opening of an AR portal," says the Google blog on the partnership. "Walk through it to explore an augmented cave where you can find and interact with hidden glyphs while still being able to see out into the real world."

By collecting the glyphs, users can progress through the imaginary world and they can play solo or collaboratively with friends. The PHAROS app was Android-only at launch, but an iOS version is in the pipeline.

This is as much a technical showcase for Google’s ARCore technology as it is promotion for Gambino’s music, but it is obviously only something a big act in combination with a big tech company could make happen. The tech company needs a famous name to attach it to and the famous name will happily let the tech company pick up the bill. One hand washes the other.

But to Gambino’s credit, if he’s jumped on the AR bandwagon, at least he has stayed on it and tried out different things using the technology. In an age of “disposable tech marketing” (i.e. acts flirting with the latest hype to make them appear forward-thinking), that has to count for something.

UK avant-soul artist Nao has been putting out music since 2014 and her second album, Saturn, was released last October.

Keeping with the celestial theme, the latest single from that album is ‘Orbit’ and it comes with a bespoke horoscope video for users. Nat is signed to RCA and the video is the latest showcase for Sony Music UK’s 4th Floor Creative division – built in partnership with Microsoft.

The bespoke site says, "Join me in Orbit: Enter your birthday to launch this interactive music video. Microsoft AI will find your star sign, along with other constellations in the night sky."

On entering your birthday, the track starts playing and your star sign is formed from a constellation of stars. For the purposes of this exercise, sandbox is a Gemini and so we got two figures made of light dancing together and thought the twin theme was well done. But then we entered a date for a Libra and got the same two figures – and so were a bit deflated.

You can also adjust the settings so that the background colour, the star colour and the colour of the human figures are to your liking, using the mouse to shift the camera angle.

Knowing nothing about horoscopes, sandbox was perhaps not attuned to the astrological references that were buried in the animation, but it all looked very nice and it was fun to play around with. We were invited to share the results on our social networks by either connecting to Facebook/Twitter or downloading a square or vertical video rendering of the animation as an MP4 to upload to our social platform of choice (but we politely declined).

It’s all a bells-and-whistles showcase for Microsoft Azure Custom Vision Service (i.e. Microsoft’s AI technology) and it is encouraging that they want to work with a musician to show what is possible here. Just as long as we don’t get targeted ads for tatty T-shirts with star signs on them we’ll be happy.
For their new album, British alternative rock band Foals decided to make... two albums instead, bookending 2019 with them. The first album, *Everything Not Saved Will Be Lost: Part 1*, came out in March and the second album, *Everything Not Saved Will Be Lost: Part 2*, is scheduled for the autumn, placing them alongside the likes of Ariana Grande and The 1975 in putting out multiple—but-connected albums.

Jennifer Ivory (GM, Warner Bros. Records) and Sebastian Simone (head of digital, Warner Bros. Records) talk through the logistics of having two album campaigns that are both linked and distinct, how the band were able to be spread across a variety of genre playlists, where underplay shows were the first steps in a live plot that will lead to arenas next year and why this is all extending the lifecycle of the "traditional" album in the streaming age.

Returning from a three-year break with two full albums

JL: Foals have been away for three years and they made a lot of really great music – but they didn’t want to whittle it down [to one album]. So we thought to put out two albums in a year rather than two albums in consecutive years.

We didn’t know there were going to be two albums when they were in the recording process, but once it was done and everyone had a chance to listen to the music then that was the conversation [to put out two albums] from the first meeting.

I think as a process this is going to become more frequent. Big pop stars like Ariana Grande can absorb it all [and put out two albums back-to-back]. One of the things we wanted to do here was to make sure that we set out from the get-go that it was going to be two albums; not that we were going to drop one album and then...
drop another one as a surprise. We wanted to tell people there was a part one and part two. We communicated that from day one.

SS: That "two albums in 2019" message was key and fans loved that. We had both release dates fixed at that point. [The second album release date is not being made public just yet.]

Setting up album #1

JL: [That long gap between the last album, 2015's What Went Down, and this one] wasn’t planned. They needed some time off and Walter [Gervers, bassist] left the band to pursue a different life. When they went back into the studio they were pretty prolific and they also decided it was going to be a self-produced album. That usually spells peril, but this is their best-received album so far. So it just goes to show they have made the right decision.

We wanted to make sure we got 2018 out of the way so 2019 would be a Foals year.

SS: We had three trailers from that and they said that part one was coming in March and that part two was coming in the autumn.

JL: The band describe the albums as two pieces of a locket. We created a deluxe vinyl edition which has the front cover of the first album on the front and the front cover of the second album on the back. It came out on release day for the first album. [It is a hardcover with a booklet in the middle.] The first half of the booklet is the artwork for the first album and the second half goes into part two with all the artwork for the second album.

In the booklet are lyrics from the second album that are written backwards – just to be a little bit cheeky. That shows the fans that part two is coming. There is a sleeve at the back that will hold a picture disc version of the second album when it is released. So that makes the two pieces of the locket.

SS: We had three trailers from that and they said that part one was coming in March and that part two was coming in the autumn.

JL: The first video was a high-concept one with CANADA who pretty much win every award when it comes to videos. We filmed the video for 'Exits' in Budapest and it was pretty conceptual.

SS: We intentionally put the unboxing video of this out before announcing and releasing the artwork for the second album. So fans were seeing that this was in there as the band were going through it. It was like a little Easter egg for them.

JL: We put the pre-order and 'Exits' out on 21st January. That was also part of a ticket bundle to announce the tour.

SS: Alongside those trailers that were painting a picture of part one and part two, it was pretty early on in Spotify's roll out of its Canvas functionality [its eight-second visual loop that can be added to any track's Now Playing view]. We were able to apply the Canvas feature to all of the Foals catalogue that warmed up the fans and pointed towards the launch date. That was a fun way to communicate with the fans in a non-social and direct way.

Tracks leading into the album and how streaming came into its own

JL: The album came out on 8th March so it was not a huge gap [from the announcement date in January]. We wanted to make 2019 about Foals and make it one of the first big records of the year.

With 'Exits', as they usually put out a song that is quite guitar-based first, this was quite different. The next song that we put out as an instant grat was 'On The Luna' that was more guitar-based and the track after that as an instant grat going into the album was 'Sunday' which was a six-minute opus. Those were the three pieces of music going into the album that showed the variety of it.

SS: That allowed us to corner off the rock, alternative and pop spaces in the Spotify and Apple Music playlist ecosystems. They were three very diverse pieces of music. Since album release, a few of the other album tracks have helped fill in even more gaps.

JL: Foals are an interesting act. They are not a traditional rock band and we have been able to populate a lot of different playlists with those tracks.

JL: Our streaming partners came on board with the album concept. We did a lot of marketing with them for the album leading into the release.
SS: There was a lot of reciprocal marketing across all of the major streaming partners. That was testament to the fact they had a 16% streaming share in week one, which is in the same league as artists like The 1975.

With Spotify we had the bespoke Canvas roll out for ‘Exits’. They were signposting the first track from the album. There was reciprocal marketing across traditional media – outdoor digital and TV tagging.

On Apple Music, we had its AAA package and again that was a reciprocal marketing approach with investment and access to the band. Similarly with Deezer and Amazon, they had a level of access to the band to do bits of promotion on the platforms. They did First & Last on Amazon and bespoke playlists.

The vinyl boxset as a statement

JL: It is limited-edition and high end. It was a very big driver and we found that this format does work for the vinyl buyer because it feels like it is a coffee table book and a piece of music product. You can house the second album in this package so it completes the edition.

Vinyl is a big driver for Foals fans. If you are in the Foals ecosphere, vinyl is really important. On top of everything that we are doing on streaming platforms, we also cater to the fan who still wants to purchase the vinyl. This was D2C only. We also had a standard vinyl edition that was in all the shops and the CD was across all retailers, including supermarkets.

This Is Foals playlist ahead of release to warm up the fanbase. The underplays were the week going into the album release.

JL: For the full tour, they’re doing two shows at Alexandra Palace in London in June which are sold out. They didn’t want to go straight to arenas. They have two albums so they will be doing arenas later on. They wanted to make the first wave of shows standing room only and they will get to the arenas in the second part of the campaign. They are also doing shows in July where they will play this album in full. They will also be playing two new songs from the next album to set that up. Again this is tying everything together.

Maintaining momentum after release

JL: We put out a series of content. We put out a video for ‘Cafe D’Athens’, an album track, with a beautiful visual for that. We also put out visuals for ‘Moonlight’, which is just Yannis [Philippakis, frontman] in a pub singing. We are showing people that they are such quality artists and they have such quality visuals – just to draw people back into their world.

Leading into the second album in the autumn

JL: Our next single is ‘In Degrees’, which will be repositioned and promoted as a proper single at the end of April. They just shot the video in São Paulo. We have a vertical video for that which we
shot as well. We are still working on this campaign and ‘In Degrees’ is going to be, we think, the summer anthem for them.

They have loads of festivals [booked] and it is a live highlight. That will take us into the summer.

What we are doing between now and the next album is that we have a whole documentary film that was shot in the studio throughout the whole process and filmed by their longtime collaborator, Kit Monteith. We are doing episodic documentary rollouts from the middle of April. So in the summer when they are playing festivals this will be the glue that holds it together until we get to launching part two.

SS: Album campaigns are getting shorter. There are two bodies of work close to each other to build on the volume of tracks that are there. So that will exist for a similar amount of time as the Ed Sheeran campaign [planned by Atlantic to run for 18-24 months] and it comes to a close next summer.

For album campaigns it depends on how many tracks you are working over six, 12 or 18 months. It is genre specific, really. When you’re talking about Ed Sheeran, it’s going to be a two-year campaign; when you’re talking about alternative guitar music, you have got to think of ways of extending the life of what is considered to be one campaign.

JL: ‘In Degrees’ will have its moments over May, June and July. That is our track and our creative that will take us through the summer along with the documentary series. Then we will start talking about album #2 properly at the end of August.

SS: We have obviously done a lot of stuff with the streaming partners for this album, but we have purposefully kept a couple of major levers unused for the second album to keep that continuation of support happening through the rest of this year and into next year.

JL: There are some promotional opportunities that we are keeping to album #2. We didn’t have Later... With Jools Holland on this run, so Later... is coming back [in the autumn] and hopefully that will happen. There will hopefully be some other big promo opportunities.

JL: We have a great slot at Radio 1’s Big Weekend [in Middlesborough on 25th and 26th May]. That just goes to show that they’re also part of that [pop] world. There are loads of festival dates. They are doing a lot of smaller festivals across the summer to get as much presence as possible instead of just one festival.

Our big promotional opportunity on this first album was that Jane Arthy, head of radio here, sorted out an Annie Mac session [on Radio 1] in Kew Gardens which goes with the visual themes of the album.

SS: Also some of the festivals that didn’t happen this year are on the cards for next year.

JL: We have two albums coming out in the one year, but it is going to be a longer campaign. We will have all those other live scenarios next year.

SS: There is a cap on how long you can continue working a traditional album product in this music space. The two-album approach is key to continuing the theme of it.

JL: For bands with guitars working in rock and alternative, it has got to a point that, by the time the album comes out, it is almost the end of the campaign. That is just the nature of this music. We are trying to buck the trend and just continue to put music out, but in bodies of work as well – because Foals are a band that does put out bodies of work. This is our compromise.

**WANT TO FEATURE IN BEHIND THE CAMPAIGN?**

Marketing people: do you have a campaign you are working on that you would like to see featured in Behind The Campaign in a future edition of sandbox? If so, send a brief synopsis of it to Eamonn Forde for consideration and your work (and your words) could appear here.

Email: eamonn.forde@me.com
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