

# MUSICPRENEUR – AN REVISITED THE INDIE MUSIC

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## Abstract

The music industry is no longer very young and generations of musicians have already succeeded one another. Since the beginning of the previous century, many have been the changes that the music industry has undergone: the cassette, the radio, the vinyl, the television, the CD, and more recently the internet, the mp3, the streaming or even the social networks. Indeed, rapid technological advances, particularly related to web 2.0 and 3.0, have destroyed the barriers potentially separating the artist from his fans. Today the accomplished Musicpreneur no longer needs traditional media or a contract with a label to ensure its promotion. He can take it all in his own hands, on his own scale. Today signing with a record company is still extremely interesting, but should not be an end in itself. Especially since record companies now only sign with well-established artists who already have a certain financial potential. This study tries to attempt to make clear that why more and more musicians decide to become real entrepreneurs in order to independently develop their musical project.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term “Musicpreneur” is the contraction of the words “Musician” and “Entrepreneur”. It designates a versatile and independent musician who manages both the artistic and entrepreneurial dimensions of his musical career. This, therefore, includes all creative’s who have decided to proactively take control of their careers and no longer remain spectators of the music industry or the cultural policy of their country. Indeed, the Musicpreneur considers his musical project to be a real business, without neglecting the artistic aspect.

## 2. THE EVOLUTION OF INDIE MUSIC

Our day begins with the melody of different sounds. Be it the singing of the birds or ringing of our alarms. As we grab that first cup of coffee, we unknowingly start singing along with the song on the radio. Music has been breaking the language barrier for years. Right from Mozart and Beethoven in the 18th century, Michael Jackson in the 90s to Eminem in recent times, the music industry witnessed many iconic artists and bands. Over time a lot of new genres gained popularity. All the genres resemble their local culture and ethnicity. The evolution of society is also reflected in its music. We might as well say that music has become a culture of its own.

## 3. MUSIC HAS BEEN A PART OF EVERY CULTURE

Records show that music existed in the pre-literate era as well. Even today music is not confined by the language barrier, be it Asian, African, or European. The roots of Indie music go back to the 60s and that’s where music found it one of the most authentic genres. Indie Music, the word in itself means Independent Music which implies independence of the art, the artist, and the ethnicity of the culture. The music created under the Indie genre gives absolute freedom to the artist’s choice of expression. The connectivity with the audience gets strengthened.

## 4. HOW HAS THE INDIE MUSIC SCENE EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS IN INDIA

a. Demonic Resurrection exploded into the indie space at a time when blackened metal was an untouched genre. Starting out as a bunch of seventeen-year-olds in March 2000, the band thought of giving India a taste of extreme metal with their debut album, Demon stealer which was compiled within nine months of their formation. Following a couple of fall-outs and initial setbacks, Demonic Resurrection was officially formed in 2003. After two years of writing as per each member's distinctive taste, the band released their second album, A Darkness Descends in 2005, setting new benchmarks in the history of Indian metal. Being the only Indian band to make it to the soundtrack of Global Metal along with the likes of Lamb of God, Sepultura and In Flames, the band also picked up the Metal Hammer Golden God Award for Global Metal in June 2010.

b. Formed in 1996, Motherjane hails from Kochi in Kerala. Since their formation, genres like progressive rock and Carnatic music have influenced their music. From jamming sessions at Kochi restaurants till they debuted with Insane Biography in 2002, the band had its fair share of entries and exits. But Maktub, their second album in 2008 marked a revolution in the indie music scene. The band's style has evolved since then with Carnatic music prominently used in the guitar, vocals, and percussion renditions. In 2009, Rolling Stone India named Maktub as the album of the year followed by Motherjane being ranked No. 1 in

Rock Street Journal's Bands of the Decade in 2010. This year, Motherjane will mark two successful decades in the indie music space. Guess the party has just started.

c. Formed in 2007, Papon and The East India Company is an electric folk-fusion band from New Delhi. The band has performed at major festivals like Oktoberfest in Bangalore, NH7 Weekender, SAARC Music Festival in New Delhi, Eastwind Festival, MADFestOoty, Windsong, Goa Storm Fest, etc. They've also performed with Sutasi in Singapore. Owing to its immense popularity, Papon, lead vocalist of the band ended up rendering playback singing for leading Hindi films like Barfi!, Soundtrack, Dum Maro Dum, and Madras Cafe. Papon, both as a solo artist and with his band, is fast scaling the ranks within the Indian music community.

d. Soulmate is a blues band from Shillong. Formed in February 2003, guitarist Rudy Wallang and vocalist TipritiKharbangar are joined by various session musicians while playing live. They released their first record, Shillong in 2005, and their second album Moving On was released in 2009 with Blue Frog Records. Having gigged extensively in India and around the world, the band has also played at the Mahindra Blues Festival and at the Bacardi NH7 Weekender. The band is currently working on the release of their third record.

e. Indus Creed is India's frontrunner in the indie music scene as one of the most successful rock bands ever. Originally formed in 1985 by UdayBenegal, Mahesh Tinaikar, ZubinBalaporia, Mark Selwyn, Jayesh Gandhi and Mark Menezes, the band disbanded in 1997. Unexpectedly Uday, Mahesh and Zubin reunited in 2010 and are now joined by Jai Row Kavi, Krishna Jhaveri and Gaurav Gupta. A recipient of the Jack Daniels Rock Awards in 2012 and Vh1 India's Hall of Fame award in 2014, the band had collaborated with the Grammy-nominated engineer Tim Palmer in their last album, Evolve. 2016 awaits a brand-new offering from Indus Creed.

f. TAAQ is a path-breaking band from Bangalore that was started in 1996. Through their journey of fifteen years, the band has been credited with having played all over India. They have also successfully toured the United Kingdom, West Asia, and South-East Asia. A recipient of prestigious music awards, TAAQ delivers an unforgettable, immersive musical experience with influences of Rock, Blues, Jazz, Funk, Progressive, and Indian Classical

g. Starting out as Superfuzz in 2004, Indigo Children has been making music and entertaining audiences since the members stepped out of school. Winners of the Campus Rock Idols in 2005, The Great India Rock Festival in 2006, and the Channel [V] Launchpad in 2007, the band opened for Bryan Adams and Backstreet Boys in 2008 and won the Hornbill Rock Contest in 2011. Influenced by Wolf-mother and Oasis initially, the band tunes into more experimental rock like The Babs Johnson Gang and Jon Spencer Blues Explosion.

h. Having started as Medusa, a progressive metal outfit in 2005, Sky Rabbit evolved as an electro-rock act. Based in Mumbai, the band was selected as one of the four Indian acts to record with British producer John Leckie as part of the British Councils Soundpad project. The debut album is also known as Sky Rabbit was released in 2012 and since then there has been no looking back for the band that has been the recipient of the prestigious Jack Daniel Rock Awards and VH1 Sound Nation Awards.

i. Agnee was formed in May 2007 led by Mohan Kannan and KaustubhDhavale, better known as Mohan and Koko. The songs are inclusive of Folk Rock, Pop, with elements of Funk, Jazz, and Carnatic music incorporated as well. While Mohan has found his Bollywood calling having lent vocals in Cocktail, Lootera, Queen, and 2 States, the band is likely to debut in Deepak Tijoris's film, Rockin Love.

j. The journey of the Indian Ocean can be divided into pre and post-AsheemChakravarthy eras. The Indian Ocean was a dream conceived and nurtured by Asheem, the star percussionist of the band, in the late 80s when he was playing for his own band Niharika. Sushmita Sen, the co-founder, and guitarist of the band was a fan of Niharika and approached Asheem who was taken to his fine-tunes. Rahul Ram, bassist, and vocalist was a schoolmate of Sen and came together to form the Indian Ocean in 1993. Since then, the rise of the Indian Ocean has been meteoric. From composing their first studio album, 16/330 Khajoor Road following the death of Asheem in 2009 to a cardiac arrest, to enthraling audiences with their music in the 2015s highly-acclaimed film, Masaan, Indian Ocean has stood the test of time in the indie music scene.

k. Before the inception of the Raghu Dixit Project, frontman Raghu Dixit had founded Antaragni with his bassist, Gaurav Vaz in 1998. After the band had disbanded in 2004, did Dixit and Vaz continue their musical journey with the Raghu Dixit Project, joined by NiteshNataraj, Bryden Lewis, ParthChandiramani, and AchyuthJaigopal. The band has come a long way from Bangalore to Bollywood.

## 5. RISE OF INDIE MUSIC

Indie music in itself has so many diverse genres be it Indie pop, rock, or even Indie classical music. Indie brought up Folk music from different parts of the world. Indie as a separate genre was largely recognized in the 80s and the 90s. It was commonly accepted as an "alternative music" genre. Indie as a term is derived from the word independent. The probable reason that indie became so well-known was the independence that artists got while creating music. The authenticity of an artist is portrayed here. In the mid-80s people recognized indie as bands like The Smiths in the UK and Sonic Youth in the USA started creating music. This was mostly an Indie rock, post-punk, and rock band era. Indie created space for upcoming authentic artists. The distinct feature that separates indie music from other genres is its authenticity and aesthetic direction of compositions. The wave of Indie music took a while to hit the Southeast Asian countries. Indie music began to gain recognition and forced the audience to reconsider their choices. This caught the attention of mainstream commercial labels and music producers. The "aesthetics" of indie music attracted lots of celebrated names from the music industry. Over time Indie artists who worked with these commercial labels have managed to negotiate and preserve the legitimacy of their music. On the contrary, some artists gave up Indie and went on to pursue a career in the commercial section. Indie music has given us some great bands, individual artists, and even some iconic duos. In the years of origin, Indie pop-rock bands were the ones who set a benchmark and diverted the attention of the people from mainstream music. Bands like The Smiths, Guided by Voices, Sonic Youth, and even The Replacements are some of

the most Iconic Indie bands of all time. R.E.M. catered to a young college-going audience. They set up the roots of their fan base by airing their music on college radios. Arctic Monkeys create some of the most trending songs in recent times. Every song by Mumford & Sons is a delight to our ears. Even if the popularity of Indie Bands has shot through the roof, the Solo and Duo artists have given us some of the best indie music of all time. A cult is again a duo that creates magic on stage and in their songs. The range of solo indie artists is just unreal. During his time Brendan Benson portrayed indie music in its most genuine form. Today as the whole world is embracing Indie music we have artists KishiBashi, PrateekKuhad, and many more Solo artists.

#### **6. FACTORS AFFECTING THE REACH:**

Back in the day, the availability of Indie music was sort of confined in geographical boundaries. Back in the day pre-booking records and getting our hands on the cassettes was a task. If we go back in time about 20 years or so, downloading music was an absolute task. Access to international music was very difficult, International Indie and regional music were out of the question. But now we probably have access to art and music from the remotest region all over the world. Just a few years ago 'Streaming music' was an alien concept to most of us. Today everyone with a smartphone can use streaming platforms and gets their hands on the latest music worldwide.

#### **7. WHAT MAKES AN AVERAGE MUSICIAN DIFFERENT FROM AN ENTREPRENEURIAL MUSICIAN?**

The Musicpreneur act instead of waiting: a) Knows how to find motivation within himself, b) Perceive obstacles as challenges, c) Is a businessman and understands the value of a solid business model, d) Train and acquire new skills, e) Don't ask permission, f) Accept the change and g) Listens and adapts.

And for good reason, the task (although very rewarding) is relatively *difficult*. The Musicpreneur have to manage both the economic aspect of the project (financing, planning, logistics, profitability, return on investment, etc.), its presence (branding, design, photography, videos, website, SEO, online platforms, etc.), its marketing (press, engagement, buzz, statistics, social networks, newsletter, etc.) and its music (composition, production, concerts, sound, lighting, tour, etc.). Although it may seem overwhelming, if not impossible, there are two things to remember:

- a) The Musicpreneur, even independent, is not necessarily alone. It is always important to surround with the right team and to delegate tasks in an optimal way.
- b) With a little organization, it becomes easier to prioritize the tasks to be accomplished according to the progress of the project and not to scatter.

#### **8. WHAT IS INDIE (INDEPENDENT) MUSIC?**

Indie music is music produced independently of commercial labels. an autonomous do-it-yourself approach to recording and publishing. In simplest words, indie musicians are those who write, compose, sing and produce music all by themselves. Though the term 'indie music' is not a new one, it has always been here. If music buff, may already have heard about artists like Lucky Ali, Euphoria, Indian Ocean, Silk route, Palash Sen, etc. these were some quite popular names of India's music scene of the late 1990s, and they were all indie artists.

#### **9. HOW DID WE GET HERE?**

Music has always been produced independently from the movie industry in most parts of the world, but that wasn't the case in India. However, Indie music was on rising during the 1990s and at one point it seemed that independent music would give tough competition to Bollywood but for some reason that never happened. Gradually Bollywood has completely overshadowed Independent music in the last 2 decades. And interestingly as a result of that a large chunk of Indians today believe that both are the same things and the music industry can't exist independently from the movie industry or music cannot be produced separately from movies. Over time, music became so commercialized that it even became rare to listen to original and good music. Remakes and remixes (destruction) of popular old songs, songs with pathetic lyrics, objectification of females in songs, etc made that scenario more vulnerable in recent years. A good portion of people eventually lost their faith and no longer considers Hindi movies a source of good music.

#### **10. THE SECOND WAVE OF INDEPENDENT MUSIC IN INDIA**

On the one side when Bollywood music was losing its value, the second wave of independent music had already started. Independent Hindi artists like DarshanRaval, Arjun kanugo, Sanam were able to make it big in the industry without any record label (later they sang for Bollywood as well). Still, it wasn't easy for a middle-class artist from a small town of the country to make it big, just on the basis of his/her talent. After the 4G revolution by Jio in 2016, the internet has become more accessible to the majority of our People. Lots of different technologies and platforms have gone mainstream. Everything has become so easy compared to just 2 years back. For example, now you've music streaming platforms like Spotify, Gaana to publish your music without any record label, Instagram, and other social media sites to promote music for almost free. One may argue that all these platforms were there in the past decade as well. Definitely but neither were as powerful as they're today nor accessible to the majority of our folks. So This is the best time to jump in if ever had the dream of making original music.

#### **11. WHAT WERE THE CONSTRAINTS EARLIER?**

1. **Lack of funds** is one of the major barriers for indie artists. Streaming platforms like Spotify don't pay them much. Some other ways to monetize their content are YouTube, live shows, freelance gigs, and official merchandise but again, these sources won't generate enough money unless not already somewhat popular.
2. **Lack of a genuine audience** is also one such factor holding indie music back. We often tend to notice that a lot of crap songs make the trend while quality music often goes underrated (even unnoticed sometimes). Actually, the genuine audience who craves quality music forms only a small percentage of music consumers in our country. The rest would consume whatever mainstream artist serves them. Although with the constant increase in living standards and increase in education, the gap is becoming smaller day by day and quality music is getting its due attention.

3. **Technical constraint** was also a factor just a while ago. UX (user experience) of music publishing was pretty messed up. No one knew where to publish their music, how much it would cost, what equipment they needed to record the music, how would it reach the right people, how they would monetize it. In short, there was no clear trail for people to follow.

4. But despite all these odds, the scenario has changed very rapidly. All these problems no longer bother the artists, and that's the reason we've got here today.

## 12. THE CURRENT SCENE OF INDIE MUSIC IN THE COUNTRY:

1. Independent musicians are reaching new heights. The most popular indie artists on Spotify are, singer-songwriter Ritviz (who is about to cross the mark of 2m monthly listeners on Spotify). He had recently collaborated with the LGBTQ community of India in celebration of pride month in its recent release 'Raahi'. Raahi also has a very beautiful music video, do check it out. Kerala based Band 'When chai met Toast' has started releasing all new songs from its upcoming album 'When we feel young' and people are already loving it.

2. Singer-songwriter Raghav Meattle has garnered quite a good popularity with his melodic voice and distinct songwriting skills. His recent release 'City life' has got over 5 lakh streams on Spotify. It has been placed in various Popular playlists among globally renowned artists. Arunachalese Singer-songwriter Tabachake is still going strong with his 2019 album 'Bombay dreams'. He has over 1,30,000 monthly listeners on Spotify right now.

3. New Delhi-based Rock band 'The local train' is also one of the most popular artists on our list (they have some crazy collections). Nucleya, DEVINE and YouTube famous rapper Emiway Bantai are also among other popular indie artists right now. Prateek is planning for a global debut and as a part of it, soon he'll Re-release his popular hit album 'Cold/Mess' for the international audience. His recent release, the Hindi song Kasoor has also become a major hit.

Looking at all this it certainly seems that indie musicians are finally getting their due recognition. While Mainstream adaptation is yet to come and would take some time, this can be described as a perfect start. And as these artists get wider recognition, it would further inspire many more folks to come forward and publish their music which would ultimately create a community and an industry of its own.

## 13. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Business and creativity are not mutually exclusive. Too many musicians do not yet realize this and let their careers die off slowly. However, it is within everyone's reach to break these limiting thoughts, learn about the subject of music marketing and develop their own career as an artist. Multiple attempts have been made to establish an independent music industry in our country before but somehow, they have always failed to get enough traction from audiences. However, as we discussed above, some problems are gone with time, while others like Lack of funding still tends to exist. New sources like crowdfunding will do some help but cannot sustain a whole new industry on its own. Others like gig incomes, Streaming platform's payouts are not sufficient for artists to scale. Actually, the problem of funds will get solved automatically once the industry matures and the industry will probably only mature if it will have enough funds. The same old classic chicken and egg problem! Lack of collaboration and collective voice were also reasons behind previous failures. Today have great platforms to facilitate effective collaboration which wasn't the case earlier. But, of course, platforms alone wouldn't help. Musicians, Music publishers, Streaming platforms, Artist managers, Event organizers, and various other stakeholders would have to work together putting small differences aside for the collective interest of all to make this long-standing dream a reality. Finally, there're definitely some challenges ahead but there's also far more hope and confidence this time.

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