

Music, creativity and copyright: Sharkey gig at LSE

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Feargal Sharkey famously abandoned his reliable career as a television delivery man for what turned out to be a successful shot in the dark; an appearance leading pop-punk sensation, The Undertones on Top of the Pops. But last Tuesday he took an even more terrifying risk, and addressed students at Polis about his fight against piracy on behalf of musicians, composers, managers and record labels as the head of UK Music.

This report by Polis reporter Danielle Moran.

To illustrate the impact that music has on our daily lives, Sharkey asked the audience to raise their hand if they had not listened to a piece of music in the past 24 hours, and of course, there was not a hand in sight. From the Beatles to Dizzee Rascal to Depeche Mode and Lily Allen, Sharkey's point that music has a truly remarkable universal quality was not lost.

The Internet has transformed perspectives of what is possible, and has done this in just a single generation. Sharkey sees the web as full of potential for creative and driven artists yet he is reluctant to run away with hype. And why? Sharkey describes the delicate network of small pubs and clubs dotted around the country that serve as the first stomping ground for performers as vital for fledging artists but he is also aware of the technological challenges that are now testing the creative industries.

While the music industry may be grappling with online interactive media, Sharkey is adamant that what matters to UK Music is that new talent is consistently created and nurtured. He argues that the music industry has not become a canary in the technology coal mine, but rather that illegal file-sharing has tipped the equilibrium between music and technology away from balance, and most importantly, that there are ways to once again reach a balance.

Research conducted by UK Music suggests that although artists are competing for disposable income against television, DVDs and laptops, the majority of their 14-24 year old audience are willing to pay for good quality music. And so, UK Music are working to find ways for the artists to get that income in their back pocket.

Sharkey believes that the Digital Economy Act, introduced earlier this year, will steer people away from illegal file-sharing and in the direction of legal alternatives, supporting those who create and manage music. Music artists need their audience's financial investment in their music, Sharkey argues, as through that financial gain, record labels can fund new and upcoming talent, allowing their artists to be just that; artists, and allow them to work professionally in music instead of the frequently snuffed at status, 'I'm a waiter, but I'm really a musician'.

UK Music are continuing their research among music fans, and stronger government measures to counter file-sharing won't come into effect until the experimental phase of the new Digital Economy Act ends but Sharkey is confident that music is, after a long period, moving towards being paid its deserved dividends.

Yet the conversation is far from over. LSE's Dr Bart Cammaerts highlighted the 'democratisation of music' that the wide-spread Internet use has spawned and raised some interesting alternative funding routes for the industry. In particular, Dr Cammaerts suggested that the solution may be found in an internet levy charge which could be distributed among copyright holders and would secure a more certain income rather than the speculative approach being piloted now.

However, in the week that the [French government announced plans to subsidise online music purchases](#) and a [former record label boss declared that albums should be sold for £1](#) to increase sales, we can only agree that music needs to move in new direction. What that direction is however, lies in the creativity of those pulling the strings.

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