

FEATURES

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Old rocker teaches industry new tricks

After decades as a top-selling artist, Peter Gabriel is carving out a second career as a powerful player in the emerging online music business

BY FRED GOODMAN
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

When Charles Grimsdale, a British investor, started the Internet music venture OD2 in 1999, he had a hard time persuading large record companies to license their music. But when he approached the rock musician Peter Gabriel about putting his music catalog online, he got a very different response: Gabriel was not only willing, he also wanted to take a stake in the company.

While major record companies have spent heavily on the Internet with relatively little to show, Gabriel and his partners started OD2 on a tight budget, built it into a digital delivery platform that retailers like Virgin used on their Web sites, and sold it in 2004 for US\$40.5 million.

"When most labels were banging their heads, he got it and saw the liberating value of Internet distribution to artists, and that's what excited him," says Grimsdale, a partner at Eden Ventures, of Gabriel. "He has a very good sense technologically of what's going to work."

OD2's success also catapulted Gabriel, 58, after decades as a top-selling artist, into a second career as a powerful player in the emerging online music industry, a move that once seemed more outlandish than the costumes he wore in the early 1970s as a singer for the rock group Genesis.

But Gabriel, the son of an inventor, keeps devising new ways for musicians and record labels to use the Web to control their work and to make — not lose — money.

His two newest Internet ventures — We7, an advertising-driven music site, and TheFilter.com, which offers personally tailored multimedia recommendations — have received strong financial backing and positive user reviews in early tests.

As an artist, Gabriel was quick to embrace new technologies like music videos, interactive CDs and high-definition television. His 1982 release featuring the popular single *Shock the Monkey* was among the first completely



Peter Gabriel performs during the Moon and Stars music festival in Locarno, Switzerland, last summer. Gabriel is devising new ways for musicians to use the Internet to control their work.

Since the advent of Napster in 1999 made music file-sharing ubiquitous, the recording industry has been in a downward spiral: In the US, from 1999 to 2007, annual CD sales plummeted from US\$13 billion to US\$7.5 billion, according to the Recording Industry Association of America, or RIAA.

But encouraged by the growth of the commercial digital marketplace — and worried about the success a handful of established artists like Radiohead and Trent Reznor have had selling music online directly to consumers — the big labels are cautiously expanding the kinds of deals they're willing to make. And they are trying a wider variety of new online models.

We7, which lets users choose between buying recordings and downloading a free version with a 10-second ad (which expires after a month), is one of the startups trying to ride that evolution to a position of prominence.

Twenty years ago, Gabriel says, the idea of tying a recording to an ad would have felt sacrilegious. "Today I have a different view: It's a way to hold onto income for creators," he says.

Royalties from downloads on We7 are paid to the record companies, which then pay a portion to the artists.

Not all of Gabriel's Web efforts have succeeded. In 2004, he and the musician Brian Eno proposed a cooperative, Mudda (for Magnificent Union of Digitally Downloading Artists), aimed at creating a Web site for artists to deal directly with listeners. The idea found few takers. "People were shy of upsetting the record companies," he says.

If Mudda proved a failure, it still enhanced Gabriel's reputation with other musicians.

"Peter approaches business the way he approaches his music: it's not digital, it's organic," says Thomas Dolby, a musician who has enjoyed his own business success as the co-designer of the Beatnik ring-tone synthesizer, a utility included in more than a billion Nokia mobile phones. "I am impressed that he's achieved so much in the business world."

digital recordings.

"He's very technically savvy," says Tom Teichman, chairman of Spark Ventures, which is a partner with Gabriel on We7. "He carries all the latest gadgets, understands what the artistic involvement can be and is very clued up on the business model. That's an extremely unusual combination, and he does it in a chummy way."

Those attributes set Gabriel apart from most musicians and, indeed, from most record executives. "Technology

has always shaped music," he says, "be it 78s, 45s, LPs or CDs, it changes the shape of the music. With downloading, the artistic change hasn't really hit yet. But it's turned the economic model on its head. The major record companies have some smart people looking at digital models. But the question is, will the people at the top be willing to turn the business upside down?"

Gabriel is betting that they will have to make that leap, and recent record industry history seems to be on his side.



For *Six Legends of Lanting*, Lanting Kun Opera Troupe used traditional sets and sparse props to focus the audience's attention on the performers.

[THE WEEKENDER]

'Six Legends' and four dances

BY DIANE BAKER AND IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTERS

Outstanding *kun* opera productions are far from unusual these days, but there was a good turnout, if somewhat short of a full house, for the opening night of Lanting Kun Opera Troupe's (蘭庭崑劇團) *Six Legends of Lan Ting* (蘭庭六記) on Friday at Novel Hall for Performing Arts (新舞臺).

Six Legends was a showcase of the *sheng* (生), or young male lead role, featuring US-based *kun* star Wen Yuhang (溫宇航), formerly a leading performer with The Northern Kunqu Opera Theater (北方昆曲劇院) in China.

Ably supporting him was a lineup drawn largely from Taiwan's National Guoguang Opera Company (國立國光劇團). The production's director, Zhang Shizheng (張世聲), a leading performer with the Zhejiang Kun Opera Company (浙江崑劇團), put in an especially adept performance in an excerpt from *The Tale of the Embroidered Jacket* (繡襦記), the second of three opera excerpts that made up the opening night's program.

Zhang, who played the role of a father who is torn between joy at discovering his long-lost son and anger that this son was now a pauper frequenting the town's red light district, was a model of the nuances that can be injected into even the heavily stylized forms of Chinese opera.

One highlight was the *Tale of the White Rabbit* (白兔記), two scenes from which made up the second half of the program. This opera from the Yuan Dynasty is rarely staged, and the moral attitudes it embraces can seem alien and even unpalatable to a modern audience. Nevertheless, Chen Ching-he (陳清河) was delightfully humorous as the evil mother-in-law.

Unfortunately technical problems bedeviled the latter half of *White Rabbit*, with mic hiss and pops all but drowning out the performers, who soldiered bravely through nevertheless.

One of the best aspects of the show was the costumes, which had a very elegant cut, made bold use of color and included a number of clever design flourishes. Given that the Lanting Kun Opera Troupe had opted to be very traditional with the sets — nothing more than a chair and table and a red rug covering the stage — all attention could focus on the characters themselves.

The fact that elaborate props were dispensed with and the only multimedia element was the projection of scans from the original opera libretti onto the background (a device used to highlight the literary roots of *kun* opera), was very gratifying, as it put attention back where it belongs.

At the Experimental Theater on Saturday afternoon, the first half of the New Productions of Emerging Taiwanese Choreographers program provided a new look for some favorite choreographers and tantalizing taste of a relative newcomer.

The show opened with Lien Ho's (饒運華) solo *Coming Home*, an interesting juxtaposition of Aboriginal and Spanish cultures. Lien used her flamenco training to express her longing for a lost world as Aboriginal singers Panai and Nabu stood stage center to sing Panai's *Perhaps One Day*. While the music was powerful and Lien's performance was heartfelt, the piece was the weakest on the program.

Chen Wu-kang (陳武康) and girlfriend Yeh Ming-hwa's (葉名嫻) *Dimmer* was a more light-hearted romp, as Wang and his three Kewpie doll-looking colleagues scuttled around to four songs by Leon Redbone, often in a full plie position, which made my knees hurt just to watch.

Having never seen the work of Sun Chuo-tai (孫樞泰), his *Sho-ying* left me eager to see what he has in store with his 8213 Physical Dance Theater performances next month. Shirtless, clad in wide-bodied tie-dyed skirt and white body power, Shu was mesmerizing — and sometimes spooky — as he moved within a video-projected circle while scenes of temple roofs, kaleidoscope images and a bulldozer at work were projected on the back wall, all part of his modern take on the ancient ritual of purifying the souls of scared children.

Lin Hsiang-hsiu's (林向秀) *Shouting*, set on five women and one man, was an interesting departure from the work I have seen with her Lin HH Dance Company (林向秀舞團), starting from the pounding rock 'n' roll beat of the opening segment. While Lin was upset that sound problems led to Lo Si-rong's (羅思容) songs being almost unintelligible, the technical glitches didn't detract from the strength of the piece, especially the lengthy pas de trois in the second part.

The show left me eagerly anticipating the second half of the Emerging Choreographers program next weekend, which will include works by Huang Huai-de (黃懷德), Wei Kuang-ching (魏光慶), Su Shih-jian (蘇詩堅), Lai Wei-chun (賴韋君) and Tien Hsiao-tzu (田孝慈).



PLANET POP

Millionaire socialite Paris Hilton has jumped into the US election campaign, calling Republican candidate John McCain a "wrinkly white-haired guy" and offering her own energy policy.

The blonde Hilton, dressed in a leopard print swim suit and gold pumps, jokingly declared her own candidacy in a video posted on the Web site Funny or Die, saying: "I want America to know that I'm, like, totally ready to lead."

She was responding to a television ad by McCain, 71, that used her image to attack Democratic rival Barack Obama.

The 27-year-old socialite said McCain's use of her in the ad, which sought to undermine Obama by likening his popularity to her celebrity, had effectively put her in the race for the top US office.

Pretending to take time off from reading a travel magazine as she leaned back on a lounge chair, Hilton

insinuated herself into the hot issue between Obama and McCain — how to solve the US energy crisis.

"We can do limited offshore drilling with strict environmental oversight while creating tax incentives to get Detroit making hybrid and electric cars," Hilton smirked, drawing on suggestions from both candidates.

Hilton, a tabloid favorite who gained fame from a notorious home-made sex tape, offered to paint the White House pink and threw down the gauntlet to McCain and Obama.

"I'll see you at the debates, bitches," she said.

Hilton's mother, a McCain donor, had lambasted as a complete waste of money the Republican candidate's advertisement using her daughter's image.

"It is a complete waste of the country's time and attention at the very moment when millions of people are losing their homes and their jobs. And it is a completely frivolous way to choose the next President of the United States," she wrote on the political Web site Huffington Post.

The daughter of the "King of Rock 'n' Roll" Elvis Presley is pregnant with twins, her spokeswoman said last week.



Above: Actor and comedian Bernie Mac has died after complications from pneumonia. Left: Paris Hilton is, like, totally ready to be the next US president.

Lisa Marie Presley, 40, angrily confirmed her pregnancy in March after the publication of paparazzi photos that showed her expanding waistline.

Presley married her fourth husband Michael Lockwood, a musician and her producer, in January 2006 in Japan. Her two children, age 19 and 15, are from her first marriage to Danny Keough.

Presley was also married to "King of Pop" Michael Jackson for a year-and-a-half, and was then married briefly to actor Nicolas Cage in 2002.

Elvis was also a twin; his brother Jesse Garon died at birth in 1935.

The world's biggest-selling heavy metal group Metallica will unveil their latest album next month, their Web site said last week, in what promises to be the biggest release this year for hard-rock fans.

Following up on

their last album *St Anger*, released in 2003 to largely disappointing reviews, the new record *Death Magnetic* is to be distributed worldwide on Sept. 12.

"Without doubt, the biggest metal event this year is going to be the release of Metallica's new album," said magazine *Metal Hammer* in June in a positive pre-release review of six tracks on the album.

On a sadder note, comedian and actor Bernie Mac, who had been hospitalized for pneumonia, died on Saturday at a Chicago area hospital, his spokeswoman said.

Publicist Danica Smith confirmed the death in a statement but gave no further details.

Mac, 50, was reported to have been in stable condition on Thursday and his release from the hospital was expected in weeks. Smith had said Mac's bout with pneumonia was unrelated to his previous diagnosis of a chronic tissue inflammation, called sarcoidosis, which has been in remission since 2005.

Mac was best known for his roles in the *Ocean's Eleven* trilogy and other films, including *Guess Who* and *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*.

His US television sitcom *The Bernie Mac Show*, which ran for five seasons until 2006 on the Fox network, earned Mac two Emmy and two Golden Globe nominations.

Mac first achieved national prominence after joining the Kings of Comedy stand-up tour in 1997 with Steve Harvey, D.L. Hughley and Cedric the Entertainer, tapping into an underserved market for middle-class blacks.



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