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What is Choruss and Should We Sing Along?

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Full disclosure: At my suggestion a co-worker in the University of Colorado system contacted Jim Griffin in the summer of 2008, expressing interest in the project he was working on which involved a proposed new model for the music industry. I attended an initial meeting and subsequently became more involved in an extensive series of presentations and conversations to explore the possibilities of testing the proposed model on the University of Colorado Denver campus. Through those many interactions I was able to learn a great deal about the proposed plan. Though discussions are still ongoing, at the time of this writing we have no formal agreement to participate in the test.

Introduction

One afternoon in March 2008, at the annual South by Southwest conference in Austin, Texas, several forward thinkers from the music business gathered to lead one of the conference's many discussion forums. The session's most vocal participant was Jim Griffin, an industry digital music expert whose ability to convincingly and eloquently put forth his expert prescription for the ailing music industry certainly earned him the extra speaking time that day.

Though there are numerous suspects in the case involving the current ills of the industry, any such discussion seems to always work its way to the reputed public enemy number one: unauthorized file sharing. This particular panel was no exception. Espousing the concept of "monetizing the madness" of music piracy, Griffin proposed that hunting down those who choose to acquire digital music without paying is an exercise in futility and won't move the business forward. The decision to pay for recorded music nowadays is comparable to a tip jar, he argued. In light of this, the industry's best option may be to simply try to monetize in some way the behavior of those who opt to not pay for music. Currently, such activity

generates no revenue to content owners and creators. If at least *some* payment, particularly an amount perceived by the consumer as almost negligible, could be collected from them, aggregated, and then distributed to copyright holders and artists, there would be a better incentive for them to continue their creative work. If enough of those consumers would pay a small fee (two to ten dollars, for example) per month, or some set period, for the ability to download or upload digital music content on an unlimited basis, it might be a sustainable model for the creation and monetization of recorded music. For that matter, perhaps many of those consumers accustomed to paying for music may also be attracted to such a value proposition.

Such a model would not necessarily require legal lenience for unauthorized file-sharers, a revision of the law to accommodate them, or even a “plea bargain” of sorts. Rather, this would be an attempt to reach a new common ground based on two principles that have never really changed: the consumers ultimately decide what products they want and how they want them; but the supplier has to be compensated in a manner that makes it beneficial to keep providing that product in the best way possible.

Mr. Griffin’s comments certainly resonated with at least some of the music industry professionals and artists in the audience that day who, in some way or another, were affected by the prevailing malaise in the industry. But the gist of his comments was amplified just a few days later when it was revealed by several major press outlets that Warner Music Group (WMG) had hired him as a consultant. Suddenly, his plan reached a tipping point. Reports that a major company in the music industry, by virtue of this new affiliation, was possibly positioning itself to support, or at least consider, a new direction were intriguing to say the least.

Immediately after Griffin’s hiring, forecasts by the media and various professionals as to just what this alliance meant for the music business were forthcoming. Some criticisms, though merely speculative, were quite pointed. One critic, David Barrett, said “This is just taxation of a basic, universal service that already exists, for the benefit [of] a distant power that actively harasses the people being taxed without offering them any meaningful representation...Jim will vehemently deny the ‘tax’ label... but it’s a tax nonetheless... Jim’s proposal does nothing but direct money to the very people that tried to prevent this future from coming to be.”¹ Mr. Barrett’s criticism was at one point far-reaching: “It’ll be a government-approved cartel that collects money from virtually everyone—often with-

out their knowledge—and failure to pay their tax will ultimately result in people with guns coming to your door.”²² TechCrunch writer Michael Arrington seemed to concur at least partially with Barrett after referencing his comments, writing, “I agree—the music tax is little more than a classic protection racket.”²³

Reaction to the news that Griffin’s prescription for artists, content owners, and the music industry in general might actually be put to the test certainly generated questions and fodder for debate that would continue in the months to follow as the larger questions—like whether the concept could even be tested—loomed. No one likely doubted that there would be innumerable challenges in establishing a legal and procedurally sound system in which such a model would operate.

Throughout its history the music industry has entertained ideas for new products, models, and technologies with the potential to improve its fortunes. Many have proved worthwhile and lucrative (the compact disc and performing rights organizations, for example); many have proved problematic (the dual disc and digital rights management). Like other seemingly good ideas for the music business, Griffin’s began with dialogue among many stakeholders. In the following months it would be given a name, Choruss, and would gain its share of critics and proponents, and a plan would develop to test such a model. But would it be worthy of such consideration? Would a proper test be in order or would the obstacles and challenges to such an experiment be insurmountable?

Establishing Choruss

However revolutionary Mr. Griffin’s plan may have appeared, the Austin conference was not the first time something like it had been discussed. In fact, if one were to look back, the roots of the idea originated more than a century ago. “This isn’t my idea,” Griffin has said, adding, “While I would gladly take the credit, blanket licensing has over 150 years of history behind it.”²⁴ But in more recent times, as early as 2001 (during the time battles were waged with Napster, the service that infamously added P2P file sharing to the music industry’s lexicon), the idea of collective licensing was being tossed around in music business circles by Griffin, an early leader in digital music in his former role as chief technology officer at Geffen Records, and others. The idea of music as a service—another aspect of the approach—is a concept that has also been proposed by others, including media futurist Gerd Leonhard and author David Kusek, whose

2004 book collaboration, *The Future of Music and the Music Business*, described the concept of “music like water.”⁵ Payment for consumption of music on an essentially “all you can eat” basis would be a monthly fee so low that it was hardly a budgetary concern, much like one’s water bill (generally).

In early 2008, in a paper published through the Electronic Frontier Foundation, senior staff attorney Fred Von Lohmann also proposed a voluntary collective licensing system to address the practice of file sharing and widespread use of P2P (peer-to-peer) services. The proposal was based on four premises (from the paper):⁶

- 1) Artists and copyright holders deserve to be fairly compensated.
- 2) File sharing is here to stay and copying digital music is going to become easier and cheaper every year.
- 3) Fans/consumers will always do a better job of making music available than the music industry.
- 4) Market-driven solutions are likely to work faster and more efficiently than government/legal intervention.

Similar points were made by Mr. Griffin at the 2008 South by Southwest conference. In the months that followed his hiring by WMG, though, conference presentations and media updates were more scarce as he and a small team began work in earnest, exploring the possibility of testing the ideas on college campuses rather than with internet service providers (as many following the developments might have assumed). Discussions with academic faculty and administrators began taking place at several universities around the United States.

Little information regarding campus testing was available until December 4, 2008, when online blog Techdirt posted a PowerPoint presentation apparently referencing it. The presentation (complete with informational bullet points) appeared to be intended for someone exploring the possibility of participating in a test of the program. Techdirt writer Mike Masnick attacked the plan. Reporting that WMG was officially pitching, “...basically a music tax—allowing the record industry to be lazy,” Masnick suggested that “someone else gets to go out and collect all this money and hand it over to the music industry to distribute (or, actually, not distribute).”⁷ He added that the plan would harm “better, more innovative busi-

ness models by inserting the recording industry (and not the musicians) into a role where they don't belong.”⁸

Complicating Mr. Masnick's initial opinions drawn from the text of the slides were extrapolations of particular bullet points. Claims that participation was not voluntary and that all internet service providers (ISP) and universities would be required to pay a huge “tax” were actually incorrect. However, at the time of Masnick's posting, WMG had not released any details about the plan. WMG responded with a statement summarizing the plan's intent, and pointed out that the presentation, “belongs to someone outside our company and represents that individual's interpretation of issues discussed at meetings held several months ago,” and concluded, “At this early stage, many ideas may be discussed and discarded, but efforts to prematurely label or criticize the process only hinder achievement of constructive solutions.”⁹

Other bloggers and news outlets joined the feeding frenzy over the leaked PowerPoint document, with several focusing on the major record companies. Public relations nightmares involving the suing of customers, strong-armed negotiations over promising new business models, and apparent missed opportunities in the digital space had certainly not labeled the major record companies as forward-thinking. Karl Bode at DSLReports.com perhaps put it most succinctly: “After watching the industry for the last decade, who wouldn't be skeptical of Griffin and Warner's plan to craft an entire new pricing model behind closed doors?”¹⁰ Mere days after the Techdirt posting, Eliot Van Buskirk from Wired.com reported that other major distribution companies were now supporting the plan.¹¹ In addition, the independent non-profit organization that would collect and disburse funds in the proposed model, according to an industry source, would be called Chorus.¹²

Other music industry professionals also speculated about Chorus. Two of them, president of the Songwriters Guild of America Rick Carnes and entertainment attorney Chris Castle, initially felt that Chorus would, in effect, be legalizing P2P file sharing, a market in which accountability and measurability did not and could not exist. One of their largest concerns was that Chorus, “would have virtually no accountability... The program offers no solution to accounting to creators for file ‘sharing’ uses—campuses would merely ‘estimate’ usage.”¹³ They also shared a concern that others in the industry put forth—that such a model would stifle the progress already made in the legal, paid space. “Why would any user ever go

to iTunes again?” they asked.¹⁴ However, they were also assuming that Choruss representatives were asking universities to, “hide a music ‘tax’ in student tuition bills paid by all students—whether they download illegally or not.”¹⁵ Actually, this was not at all the type of conversation Griffin or his associates were having with our university, or any other institution to my knowledge. It was clearly communicated to us that the level of participation in the test, if any, as well as the various operations and processes involved, were to be determined by the university.

While there were critics of the concept, there were certainly some who supported the underlying theory, and others who were at least waiting to pass judgment. In his book *Appetite For Self-Destruction: The Spectacular Crash of the Recording Industry in the Digital Age*, released in January 2009, *Rolling Stone* writer Steve Knopper referred to Griffin and his plan: “Unless such a big-money idea actually comes to fruition, it looks like the record business is doomed. The *music* business, however, has a bright future.”¹⁶

While universities were being contacted about voluntarily participating in the Choruss experiment to whatever extent and methodology they preferred, the ultimate concept of ISP’s offering virtually unlimited access to music as part of their menu of services, much like a cable television operator offering a movie package for an extra fee, was a hot topic at the January 2009 MIDEM conference in Cannes. “2009 should be the year when the music industry stopped worrying and learned to love the bomb,” said Feargal Sharkey, head of the British music industry trade group UK Music, during his presentation at the conference entitled “How Can Music & ISP’s Work Together?”¹⁷ In fact, TDC, a Denmark internet provider, had been offering unrestricted downloads with its broadband subscriptions; and other broadband services in Europe were reportedly rolling out similar services.¹⁸ On January 25, 2009 the *New York Times* reported an even more fascinating experiment happening on a tiny island in the Irish Sea best known as the birthplace of the Bee Gees: the Isle of Man. Under a government proposal the 80,000 island residents would be able to download unlimited amounts of music by paying to their internet service provider a monthly fee equivalent to, US\$1.38. The ISP would send the collected monies to a special agency that would distribute payments to copyright owners.¹⁹

A few weeks later, in late February of 2009, Jim Griffin spoke at the Digital Music Forum East in New York City and took the opportunity to

discuss Choruss, directly addressing several “myths” regarding the program. At several points he reminded the audience that Choruss aimed to experiment, not so much to mandate:

“Let’s be clear at the outset: Choruss is a learning experiment, a test. The universities with whom we are working have two motivations: they want to do the right thing, and they are interested in research in this area—research into incentives, behavior, network analysis, music marketing, and more. We are working with professors and chancellors and provosts, university attorneys, IT departments, and their public policy advocates. We are learning about network music fee approaches, and so we will seek to implement different approaches at different campus networks.”²⁰

He also discussed how Choruss would be experimenting with various data technologies to develop state of the art data collection, the new entity’s interest in actuarial monetization and network fee approaches (and not necessarily *legalizing* P2P), and that his organization was seeking a voluntary market approach to compensation and not a change in copyright law or a compulsory license. More myths were addressed, and he closed by reiterating Choruss’ intent to experiment and learn. “We’re bringing open minds and open hands, not closed fists.”²¹

Griffin followed his presentation in New York with additional appearances in the following months, including participation on panels at South by Southwest and the MEIEA (Music and Entertainment Industry Educators Association) conference. He also took part in a March, 2009 web seminar in which he reviewed once again the major myths about Choruss.

In the meantime, discussions continued with various colleges to determine if, how, and when they would be willing to participate in testing and researching the proposed model. It was surely ironic that in early February, 2009, the Ruckus music service, originally intended to be a legal alternative to P2P file sharing on college campuses, was shut down abruptly. Though many would argue it was too restrictive (tracks could not be burned to CD and were not iPod compatible), and hardly compared to other options available to students, the ad-supported download service

had been available for free at two hundred universities with direct content deals (though anyone anywhere with a .edu email account could also reportedly sign up).²² With this sudden shutdown, no other similar service for student users remained.

By April, 2009, as discussions continued with universities (as well as major stakeholders in the music business), Jim Griffin's plan had a name, a great deal of press, and perhaps some good timing to boot. A Swedish study that month found that at least 86% of the respondents to a survey from the Swedish Performing Rights Society (STIM) said they'd consider paying a fee, voluntarily, for some form of legal P2P.²³ In June, British broadband provider Virgin Media announced it had reached agreement with the Universal Music Group to offer customers, for a monthly subscription fee, unlimited downloads free from copy protection, with Virgin agreeing to take steps to reduce piracy throughout its network.²⁴ The details of those anti-piracy measures, as well as the amount of the monthly fee, were not announced at the time.²⁵

An Academic Testing Ground?

The decision to pursue universities as a test environment for the Chorus program might make sense in many respects. College students are generally avid music users and many are versed in new technologies. They are certainly known to evaluate new trends and products—and to communicate those feelings with others. Additionally, universities are noted for learning and research, and as a breeding ground for the advancement of knowledge. However, the irony of approaching academic institutions to test a proposed solution to address music piracy was probably not lost on everyone. The controversial targeting of colleges (and individual infringers on their networks) by the RIAA in recent years on behalf of the major labels likely didn't endear college administrators, particularly network managers, to the music industry. To return now with a plan to *allow* such activity might seem ironic to some.

Having multiple universities involved in the study would also seem to offer an advantage in that the varying environments, sizes, locations, demographics, and other characteristics, could provide distinct test groups. Moreover, universities participating in the Chorus test could vary in approach and methodology, so the service would likely look different from campus to campus. Foremost among the decisions that would affect the service would be whether it would be an opt-in service (students simply

sign-up if they are interested enough to pay for it), an opt-out service (all students are enrolled in and charged for the service unless they indicate or request otherwise), or an all-in service in which all students are automatically enrolled. In that scenario the service is paid for by the university out of additional charges or certain existing fees (technology fees, student activity fees, etc.).

Discussions with representatives from Choruss have provided insight into how a test of the program might look. First of all, a third party would actually have to provide the file-sharing service, the online environment in which the music would be available to users. While active subscribers will know that their activity within the service is legally licensed and protected, the service will absolutely have to provide a user interface and experience that is better than any other digital music source, paid or otherwise. Whether the service and its components are compelling enough to attract and maintain subscriptions is part of the test.

The participating institution would determine the cost per student subscriber. Intuitively, pricing would vary based on the type of enrollment plan, the opt-in fee likely being higher than the all-in cost. To accurately and fairly compensate rights holders, some sort of mechanism has to be established to track what music is downloaded by users. Sample size and just how such data is to be captured would need to be determined during the test planning. The provider of the service would most likely manage authentication, payments and billing, sign-up procedures, etc.

Students enrolled in the test would be able to download or upload music (not movie, game, or other) files within the test service. Downloading or uploading activity outside of that service would be considered unauthorized. Acquired content would be theirs to keep, even if they graduate, drop out, or discontinue their subscriptions for any reason. The rate of attrition will be monitored as part of the test as well.

A basic tenet in the Choruss agreement with the colleges and the students participating in the test is that only non-commercial uses are allowed. A user of the service who is downloading music and reselling it, or loading up iPods with music and selling them, will not be covered under the user license and will be subject to the prevailing laws regarding such actions. The program also does not cover the sharing of unauthorized pre-release music content, so called “leaked” material. On the other hand, Choruss intends to cover and allow sharing and downloading of mashups, live recordings, tracks no longer commercially available, etc.—if it can be

done. The service provider will likely be responsible for removing unlicensed and unauthorized content, and will be monitoring for such material.

Choruss will become an entity unto itself, separate from all record companies, including WMG. Its function as a rights organization will be to gather the funds and data collected from the participating services and ensure they are passed to the various rights holder organizations which would handle allocation and distribution. Therefore its independent operation is an absolute must.

From sign-up procedures to the allocation of payments, the various tests can help determine how the entire process might best be managed and measured. There are many questions still to be answered regarding procedural and methodological issues. Accurate verification that prevents subscribing students from sharing their account access with non-paying students, and proper licensing of content to ensure no risk to the student or university, are among the abundance of scenarios that will need to be addressed before or during any university testing.

The Concerns

Some concerns were addressed following the initial public discussion of the concept. But when it comes to the theoretical and practical issues of Choruss' proposal, there are still criticisms and unanswered questions. Other concerns may be addressed as the tests are negotiated and established, or not, with the various stakeholders and universities. And the relevance of such issues may not be determined until, for better or for worse, the test program is up and running. Many of the controversial points revolve around risk and transparency.

In terms of risk, an early concern involved the use of a "covenant not to sue" instrument to authorize users of the proposed service. One legal topics web site describes the covenant as, "an agreement entered into by a person who has a legal claim against another but agrees not to pursue the claim," which might have suggested a "pay us or get sued" scenario.²⁶ Choruss originally, for various reasons, discussed its use, but later shifted to the more common "license" as the legal instrument in granting rights to a participating user. Regardless, academic institutions will most likely insist upon the most airtight of protections for students, as will any participating service during the test period and beyond. If risk to the students has not been mitigated to the satisfaction of university attorneys, it's doubtful the test will move forward.

From the transparency perspective, reluctance to offer details regarding Choruss probably didn't help its cause (coupled with the lingering distrust, deserved or not, of record company practices and accounting). Moreover, the early involvement of a company from the much-maligned major label fold probably didn't help, either. So it's understandable that an insistence on more procedural specifics is warranted. Though Choruss hardly resembles the *status quo* in principle, some claim it would be so in practice.²⁷ As Choruss becomes the independent entity it must become, perhaps this perception will change. Up until the hiring by Warner, Mr. Griffin had for some time worked outside the label system, an area in which his company will have to operate. He and his team will have to clearly maintain non-preferential practices and, as much as is possible, transparent accounting. Historical charges of fuzzy math, hidden fees, questionable data utilization, and tenuous auditing policies have no doubt fueled suspicion where record labels are involved. It would be no surprise if pundits insist on openness (or at least independent accounting and audits) concerning the flow and methodologies of money and data through the Choruss system.

The 2007 debacle involving SoundExchange, an independent non-profit performance rights organization, and its inability to locate thousands of artists due distributions, could come to mind when considering Choruss.²⁸ Where it would fit into, and its effect on, the inherent bureaucracy involved with a collective licensing situation remains to be seen, but that will undoubtedly be watched closely. Concerns abound that Choruss will become an additional middleman that inefficiently decrements the amount or accuracy of distributions. Whether or not it adds value (given that there are already societies set up to collect and allocate royalties) can only be determined when there are pools from which distributions will be generated. Until then, one can only speculate.

The Challenges

To say that Choruss' implementation, even as a test, would be challenging might be an understatement. As already exemplified in the blogosphere and by certain writers, perception can be a major obstacle. Although expected, it certainly could affect the acceptance of Choruss. But those perceptions could perhaps be changed, at least to some extent, if results indicate that Choruss and any service provider involved can deliver the right value proposition: an outstanding music experience. Moreover,

the subsequent processing and size of distributions to artists and copyright owners will markedly affect acceptance as well.

It might be too late for something like Choruss. Unauthorized file-sharers may be so accustomed to obtaining music at no cost that even the best P2P service will not convince them to try another service at any cost. Evaluation of the risk may figure into their decisions to some extent as well. Given the public's perception that RIAA lawsuits have all but ceased and have proven largely ineffective, that perception may be much less relevant. Moreover, given the increased ability to navigate "invisibly" on file sharing sites through darknets, etc., file sharers might explore that option instead. In fact, at this point the real problems facing the industry and artists may no longer relate as much to file sharing. Perhaps they are more affected by the shift to track (rather than full-album) downloads, poor artist development, an outdated business model, competition from other media, etc. In addition, the concept of downloading and actually owning music content may be giving way to simply streaming music in order to enjoy it, a suggestion that has been put forth by some prognosticators.²⁹ Spotify, for example, is a free, ad-supported music streaming service that maintains a database comparable to iTunes and has garnered a great deal of press based on its huge success in Europe.³⁰

Choruss will have to ensure the licensing of as much content as possible to the services that attempt to operate under such a model. Without licenses from even one of the major distribution companies the program will likely not work. The independent music community's grant of licenses will also be a must, especially given the supposedly long-tail nature of content available on unauthorized sites. Moreover, a procedure for independent artists to directly and efficiently license their music must be in place. The task of obtaining licenses from the thousands upon thousands of record labels and content owners will surely be daunting. Couple that with convincing those same parties to support and participate in the testing and there is clearly an immense amount of work ahead.

A great deal of progress has already been made in the paid download space, where iTunes has grown to be the largest retailer of recorded music. However, other à la carte (paying for tracks or albums each time they are downloaded) digital services continue to improve their offerings. Amazon.com has been especially creative with its promotions, including the low-price-driven "Deal of the Day" downloads. Existing digital subscription services are refining their services as well. Napster's service was

recently overhauled and the price lowered to only five dollars per month.³¹ Emusic.com, for a long time seen as a too-limited digital subscription service because it only carried independent music, recently added Sony catalog tracks to its offerings.³² Rumors have swirled for some time regarding an iTunes subscription service, a product many would consider a game-changer. Any service that develops under the Choruss program should simply complement, rather than compete directly with, the array of options a digital music consumer presently has. Existing services may even adopt the model if they find it economically viable.

Choruss' ability to find universities for the tests may have its speed bumps as well. IT administrators could have concerns regarding the increased campus network bandwidth usage that may occur as a result of an "all you can eat" download service's implementation. University counsel would surely want to be involved with all discussions regarding privacy and service agreements, among other matters. There will certainly exist a level of bureaucracy that will have to be traversed for programs of this projected magnitude. University IRB (Institutional Review Board) reviews and any number of meetings could take place in order to ensure proper coordination. Due diligence will have to be conducted in regard to data storage and security. Approvals and sign-offs likely won't happen overnight. All of these required actions at the university level might also come at a time when many institutions are facing serious budgetary challenges.

Whether or not the Choruss team is aware of the challenges ahead, they appear to be maintaining a ceaseless effort in understanding and overcoming them. If Mr. Griffin's speaking schedule is any indication—he has appeared at just about every conference, seminar, university, and public forum possible—there is an openness to confronting and addressing the major questions and concerns regarding Choruss. He's even addressed issues one-on-one. A blogger in New York City attacked the model and Griffin personally reached out, meeting him minutes later in a coffee shop to respond in person the writer's concerns and to have a dialogue regarding the program.³³

It is true, however, that in the months following the WMG announcement the Choruss team was noticeably quiet, likely respecting the privacy of those with whom they were meeting. It might have simply been due to the exploratory status of the project at that time. Any new enterprise must be careful and methodical about sharing information, especially if its

model is still in the incubation stage. But industry commentator Bob Lefsetz probably echoed the sentiment of others in May, 2009 when he wrote that, “Choruss has done a bad job of telling its story, of getting the facts of its mission across.”³⁴ But there will likely be more information in due time, especially if and when testing begins. That will be perhaps the time of greatest challenge. One could imagine that critics, pundits, and naysayers will be armed and ready to take their shots. The expectations might be placed unreasonably high. The program will likely be held up against the “perfect” music service, a myth if there ever was one. The slightest flaw, not to mention a serious one, could be a major setback.

Conclusion

One factor making Choruss difficult for many to grasp is that there are so many possibilities for exploration of the idea, and therefore so many questions to be asked. The most obvious question, will it work, would be an oversimplification. So many metrics will need to be examined to make that determination. The longer-term expansion plan beyond the test universities, if such experimentation were to indicate potential, is surely of concern among stakeholders. Whether the next arena involves ISP’s or new network services, there will be much at stake if progress to that level is achieved. There may even be unintended consequences with the new model. If great numbers of avid music purchasers reduce their annual expenditures on music because they’ve joined a subscription service, the industry may simply be shifting revenue streams. Choruss potentially represents a shift in paradigm to music as a service rather than a product. Whether consumers will adopt that shift, even in a test environment, remains to be seen. Like just about every new business model, the consumer will ultimately answer the questions. Their votes, in a test environment or otherwise, will render a decision and either support or refute the critics.

The testing and implementation of Choruss will likely be a very complex undertaking. It could help save the music business or it could become a footnote, as they say. The music business, ultimately, should be about connecting people with the music they love in the fairest, most efficient, and frictionless way for all parties concerned in order for the business to sustain itself. Any model that is proposed to do just that, provided it meets necessary legal and ethical requirements, should be put to the test. While not by choice, artists, creators, and music industry professionals are still living in an industry in transition. Such testing may result in a new model

to effectively aid in that transition, or it may not.

Choruss attempts to establish another new business model for the digital age, rather than cancel or invalidate others. It might bring management, simplification, and fairness of rights and commerce to a space where there is currently chaos. Research may find Choruss to be inconsequential, inefficient, or maybe even harmful to the music business. On the other hand, if it is validated as a means of convincing enough consumers accustomed to paying nothing for music to actually support the creation and fair distribution of music, every effort should be made to advance it. Leaving well enough alone, without even experimenting, shouldn't be an option, for any gain is a step forward on the road to progress.

Choruss provides more questions than answers at this time. There should continue to be helpful and constructive public and private debate, discussion, and scrutiny of the theory and procedures behind the proposal to assure it can be carried out effectively. A college campus, given its emphasis on research, innovation, and critical thought, may be the best proving ground. In June of 1999, the Napster program was launched on a college campus; soon after, the fortunes of the recorded music business headed down a hazardous and problematic path. Ten years later, perhaps another experiment in the same academic environment may just help reverse that course.

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