

Steven Jobs, The Entrepreneurial Spirit, And The Music Industry

We join with millions of others worldwide in paying tribute to the late Steven Jobs. In a life cut short, he popularized the concept of a personal computer; he transformed the recorded music industry with the now ubiquitous iPod; he made telephones fun with the iPhone; invented the tablet computer; and built a large and immensely successful business in the process. While redefining how people and technology interact, he also managed to find time to revolutionize the entertainment world with his Pixar animated films. This outsized list of accomplishments made him the epitome of the successful entrepreneur. Launching Apple in a garage with little more than an inspired vision and unshakable confidence (some might call it arrogance), he was undeterred by naysayers, overcame seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and ultimately delivered products that enhanced the lives of millions. Although he was a once-in-a-generation talent, the entrepreneurial spirit that animated him is thankfully evident in every segment of the economy, and it has found particularly fertile ground in the music products industry.

Early music industry entrepreneurs included violin maker Antonio Stradivari and Bartolomeo Cristofori, the inventor of the piano. Today, both are venerated for their contributions to the world of music, and in the case of Stradivari, his instruments continue to command stratospheric prices. Three hundred years ago, however, they were simply anonymous craftsmen toiling away in their workshops. What set them on the path to immortality was dissatisfaction with the status quo and an unshakeable conviction that they could do better. Whether they were motivated by ego, dreams of glory, potential monetary gain, or the love of a woman is lost to history. What we do know is that they put their concepts into practice, and that the world is a better place for their efforts.

In the 121 years since the first issue of *Music Trades* was released, much of our content has been devoted to celebrating the efforts of entrepreneurs. Some of the great talents chronicled in our columns are household names, like William Steinway, the man who developed the modern piano; Thomas Edison, who invented recorded music; Laurens Hammond, the father of electronic musical instruments; and electric guitar pioneer Leo Fender. However, we also have had the privilege of shining a spotlight on thousands of lesser known individuals, who by dint of their creativity and drive, contributed to the industry's progress. Space precludes even a partial list, but suffice it to say that these individuals were behind just about every improvement in product design, distribution, or marketing methods over the past 12 decades. And, absent their efforts, life would be a bit less interesting.

Some of these entrepreneurial advances involved breakthrough technology, like Bob Moog's work in developing the first synthesizer. Others had more mundane contributions, like D.H. Baldwin, who in the 1880s developed a consumer cred-

it program that made the piano more accessible to the middle class. However, none of these new insights was any more inevitable than a work of art like Beethoven's Fifth. They all required an individual with a unique worldview and the willingness to take on risk and make personal sacrifice.

The successful entrepreneurs, from Steve Jobs on down to those in the music industry, are the ones who rightfully get the accolades. However, the unsung failures also made contributions, by lighting the way for those who followed. Everyone has heard of the Hammond Organ, but how many people know of Thaddeus Cahill, the inventor of the Telharmonium? Cahill's machine, which was designed to deliver music to millions over the telephone line, was a failure and exist only as a footnote to electronic music history. However, he created a tone wheel that later provided the inspiration for Laurens Hammond's organ.

In the endless discussions about "the economy" that have dominated the national conversation in the aftermath of the 2008 financial meltdown, it is usually described as an inanimate machine in need of a tune-up, like a car that's running badly. We think it's more instructive to view what we call the "economy" as the activities of 300 million U.S. citizens randomly pursuing their hopes and aspirations. It's messy and hard to understand, like a complex eco-system, but fortunately, with some regularity, this chaotic mass of humanity manages to generate people like Steve Jobs, whose genius creates opportunity, wealth, and economic activity. On a smaller scale, the Steve Jobs story is mirrored by the entrepreneurs who drive the music industry. And because this tiny industry is such a magnet for creative types, we suspect that lurking in a basement somewhere is someone hatching a transformative idea. Here's a salute to all the entrepreneurs, from Steve Jobs down to a small local retailer who had the confidence and courage to put an idea into practice. We all owe them a debt of gratitude.



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