



↓ CASE STUDY

STEVE LACY

Steve Lacy's first project as a solo artist, Steve Lacy's *Demo*, was an un-assuming, no-frills debut – made predominantly on an iPhone and put into the world in February 2017 as an independent release.

This didn't prevent it being heard, and instantly loved, by **Peter Edge, Chairman and CEO of Sony Music's RCA**. He says, "I've been a fan of Steve Lacy since I heard *Demo* and *Dark Red*, which was one of my favourite songs in 2017.

"I was also a massive fan of The Internet, the group he started with. Through his manager, Dave Airaudi, I met Steve and we decided to partner to work together on new music."

Drawn in by the music rather than data, Edge continues the story, "Steve is a unique and extraordinarily talented musician, and a guitarist – which is highly unusual especially in the space that he works in.

"He's melding R&B and Rock and all these multi-genres in his sound. I thought he was a completely new prospect and an incredible talent.

"From day one, Steve had complete freedom to do whatever he wanted. It was and continues to be a total partnership and we are here to support Steve's artistic vision and genius in the best way we can."

Going back to day one, or somewhere near, **RCA COO John Fleckenstein**, says, "For us, this launch had to be elevated but also consistent and respectful of his journey and fans so far. Steve had already built enormous credibility in the creative and music communities and curated a super loyal set of fans who were willing to ride with him to any frontier.

"So, when it came to strategising on how to reach them, a major piece was consistency. We also brought scale. We helped elevate the world around his music, we sought to elevate everything – from how we introduced the music for the first time all the way to our drive to the top of the industry charts after release.

The game-changing track was *Bad Habit* [800 million+ streams to date]. Edge recalls its rise to prominence, "We always knew it was a key track, but nobody can ever predict the kind of success that it had or how explosive it would become.

"*Bad Habit* is an extraordinary success story; the kind that you only dream about which made it all the more thrilling. But Steve felt very strongly and so did we about *Mercury* being the opening single.

"It was something very different for him and he really felt it should be the first song that people heard from his new album, followed by *Bad Habit*.

Fleckenstein continues, acknowledging the part that short-form platforms played in *Bad Habit's* ability to reach his fans, "The song was a genre-defying breakout. If you dug into what was happening on short form – not just TikTok but on Reels, Shorts and all these platforms, you saw fans loving the song.

"The truth is, Steve has immense credibility with a young, short-form video-loving fanbase.

"Steve speaks to that audience fluently where they are hanging out. He gave them something fantastic and they created their own tributes – in droves."

With *Bad Habit* as an accelerator, RCA continued building Lacy as a long-term artist, knowing that the next album *Gemini Rights* was a pivotal career moment.

Fleckenstein discusses the process, "The plan started with complete creative freedom and time in the studio to make something truly great. Then, when he was ready, the cornerstone of the plan was exacting detail around his credibility matched with set up and strategy on the body of work.



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Chairman & CEO, RCA

"With partners, with international affiliates, with media – everyone who could help his vision be heard globally was included in that set up process. International coordination and providing a global platform in particular was a huge priority and critical in our set up."

The album went Top 10 in the US and won the Grammy for Best Progressive R&B Album in early 2023.

Fleckenstein continues, "In the social media sphere, it's about staying authentic to his audience and meeting them eye to eye where they live. Steve has a lot of friends in the creative community. These friends were loud with their followers and fans on socials. This shone a light on the path ahead.

"Steve himself uses social media to communicate his wit, creativity and personality and I think this clarity of voice is a major piece of his authenticity today with fans."

Edge concludes by reflecting on the album's international success, "Steve came to New York to connect with the entire Sony Music International team and spent time with him to build that network which undoubtedly helped propel his global presence. These opportunities are what you dream of in building a worldwide campaign.

"The Sony Music international team were big believers and fans from the start, which was crucial to the global success story."