

CASE STUDY

Billie Eilish

'A four-year overnight sensation'

Billie Eilish is one of the most important and interesting pop stars of her generation. She is the winner of the 'big four' Grammys (the first time the quadruple has been achieved in nearly 40 years). She is the artist who wrote and recorded a zeitgeist defining, multi-Platinum album in her bedroom - with her brother, Finneas O'Connell.

John Janick, chairman and CEO of Universal's Interscope Geffen A&M Records, remembers the very start of Eilish's extraordinary journey. "It probably sounds crazy, but honestly, from the moment we met her, we knew she was special. Her music came to us via an A&R person here, but it also got to Justin Lubliner, who runs Darkroom Records, who we have a JV with. It happens very rarely, but sometimes, an artist comes in, and you just know.

"Nevertheless, everyone involved took their time, because she was only 13 when we first met her, and we wanted Billie, her mother and father, to be completely comfortable. All our conversations were about putting no pressure on her and no one being in a rush. This was going to happen at some point. You could see it growing almost week by week and that allowed us to plot 12-18 months out, confident about where her and Finneas' talent would take us."

One example of this considered approach was the decision to hold Billie back from the Grammys in 2019. Janick continues, "We knew we'd have *WHEN WE ALL FALL ASLEEP, WHERE DO WE GO?*, which was going to blow people away and properly announce this incredible new talent.

"With such an important body of work and after years of artist development we crafted a meticulous plan laying out the next 12 months. Billie had shown us that; she gave us confidence. We had our targets and implemented the plan which included a global arena tour, the Vogue cover, we knew we'd have announced the Bond song, and the Oscars performance. All of which we had in place prior to Grammys 2020."

All of these touch points were part of a global strategy to realise Billie's potential, explains Steve Berman, vice-chairman of Interscope Geffen A&M Records: "From the outset, everything was about Billie as a global artist. She had these incredibly rich, beautiful

Billie Eilish photo by Kenneth Cappello

pieces of art, crafted with her brother at home, and we knew this was music that could touch the world."

"We like to call it a four-year overnight sensation because when Billie emerged, it felt like she moved into pop culture very quickly but there were a lot of pieces that had come together over a longer period of time."

An important element to this were the high-profile brand partnerships forged by Interscope, in collaboration with Darkroom. Berman describes how each of these helped contribute elements to Billie as an artist: "We thought, let's be very flexible, but let's not for one second compromise the integrity of her as an artist for any opportunity."

"For example, Billie's collaboration with Netflix on the film *Roma* was such a critical and important piece of the journey as it showed her music in totally different light."

One essential element to this success story is the global marketing approach that utilised Universal Music's global network. Frank Briegmann, CEO & President, Universal Music Central Europe and Deutsche Grammophon, explains how this was managed in Europe: "The first aim was to introduce Billie to the local taste maker press and music business stakeholders, and we did this by organising her first-ever showcase in Germany."

"Fan engagement was another key to the success of the campaign. We constantly tried to embrace Billie's close connection with her fans in various fun ways. We created playlist-maker tools and a pop-up store in Berlin, to which Billie came to for a surprise visit. It created a hype amongst the communities, resulting in a fantastic fan happening."



Engaging Billie's fanbase was a key strategy in the UK, too, as Tom March, co-President of London-based Polydor Records explains. "Billie's always been so connected with her fans and she has put the work in to feel connected to the UK from her early trips, to her first headline show, through to the Brits.

"So, throughout the campaign, we ensured that content generated, and as much promo as possible, allowed for fan interaction. For example, we launched UK exclusive products direct to Billie's superfans - such as an UK exclusive Picture Disc vinyl release of her debut album launched via Spotify Fan First."

Ultimately though, says Janick, it is Billie's singular, creative vision driving her, and the teams involved: "Everything comes from Billie; no one is telling her what to do. There is a team of people living and breathing this every day, giving her the resources and support to execute her vision. She is CEO of brand Billie Eilish, we all work for her and we're very clear what our job is: to do whatever we can to help her execute her vision, because Billie and Finneas are geniuses."

