

Musical Shares by Vicky Hamilton

In an era when most rock oriented labels seem to be struggling, Wind-up Records makes turning a profit look easy! What separates them from the pack of other rock labels? Let's take a magnified look... shall we?

Alan Meltzer, the CEO of the company started as a musician who in the 70's bought a secondhand vinyl records and opened up a used-music store. This concept evolved for two decades which became CD One Stop, which in turn became one of the most successful wholesalers of CD's to mom and pop record retailers. Meltzer then invested a couple of million dollars into a start up company called CD Now and then bought a small record label called Grass Records. He later partnered with Steve Lerner (Wind-up's President) in the days of CD Now. Lerner, who has an economics degree from Rutgers, an MBA in marketing and had a background in banking, was a huge fan of music. Lerner clicked with Meltzer immediately. The two music fans who are great business men laid a good ground floor for a new record label.

In 1996 the ambitious pair launched Wind-up Records out of the frame work of Grass Records. From the beginning, the label was considered to be "Artist Friendly." Wind-up offers its artist roster health insurance, will stick with artist through several releases in attempted to do artist development and offers the artist a better percentage on royalties than most other labels.

Wind-up keeps a very high visibility online and many of their artists are featured on-Soundtracks (currently Wind-up artist 12 Stones has the theme song to the Under Dog film entitled "Lie to Me.")

Perhaps Wind-ups biggest asset can be found in Alan Meltzer's wife, Diana Meltzer. Diana is Wind-ups eccentric head of A&R. She began her career as a fashion model. Later Diana owned a record store in Connecticut in the late 80's. She was always a music fan and found a life partner in this aesthetic medium in Alan Meltzer. The couple recently renewed their wedding vows in a Japanese type ceremony where she wore a traditional geisha girl red kimono.

I first heard of her in 2003, when Evanescence (whom I am a big fan of) won Best New Artist at the Grammy Awards. It seemed that Diana's name was on every music industry player's lips during 2003-2004 and rightly so! In 2003 she was named Hit Quarters #1 A&R person on the World Chart. This was the first time ever that any women had topped the Hit's A&R chart. She had signed Creed, Evanescence and Drowning Pool and had huge suc-



Diana Meltzer

Executive Vice President
A&R at Wind-Up Records

cess with all of them! I remember saying to myself at the time, I must meet this woman, she's has got it going on!

I didn't get my chance until I went to New York in 2005, but the meeting was worth the wait! I instantly liked her, and loved her spunk and her drive. She is still a very beautiful woman and has kept her model figure and sense of style. She loves bright red lipstick, fishnet stockings and hip clothes. Her office is a testimony to her love for music and entertainment with floor to ceiling photographs of her with her artists and platinum/gold records. There was even a picture with Diana and George Bush! The lady certainly is in the center of many celebrity circles! When she found out that I was an Aries woman like her, we started to bond and I shared with her that I too had started my career in music in a record store, this began a nice friendship and I am grateful to her for opening up her heart and office to me.

Unfortunately, I didn't get a chance to sit down and interview Diana for this piece as she was jet setting around the country looking at and signing bands when I began this article, so she answered my questions via email. She did send me a package of the new bands on

Wind-up and I very much enjoyed listening to Seether, Finger Eleven, 12 Stone and Stars of Track and Field. The lady still has the golden ears and is still following her rock and roll heart. Diana you Rock! Keep those hits coming!

I'd like to start by asking you about your background. Where did your career start? I know you were a fashion model in the beginning; do you think fashion and music always walk hand in hand?

Diana: I wasn't very active in Wind-up at the beginning until I first heard the Creed "My Own Prison" record and brought it to my husband Alan. I remember telling him "you want a hit rock record, here's a hit rock record!" As far as fashion goes, music surely helps drive style.

When did you know you wanted a career in the music business?

After "My Own Prison" came out Scott

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Stapp from Creed told me I was his A&R person. That was it. End of story.

I know you ran a record store in New York, do you think that this helped you become a good A&R person? How so?

Actually I owned a store in Connecticut and listening to thousands of records especially the used/rare records from the 70's were very influential.

You've signed 2 of the most successful rock acts of the last 10 years - Creed & Evanescence

- Would you talk about each one. How did you come to find them?

Creed was looking around for a major label deal for some time. After I heard them we went down in Tallahassee the next day and signed them a week later. They could see my passion and love of the band and their music and took a leap of faith signing with an unknown indie. I couldn't believe that so many labels initially passed on the band.

Evanescence came to Wind-up with little life experience. Ben and Amy were 18 years old so we sent them to LA to give them an opportunity to grow, both personally and professionally. We provided them with all the tools we thought they would benefit from ranging from rehearsal space to gym memberships, acting and movement classes and virtually anything else that might be beneficial to their development. After 2 years they thought they were parked. During that time they wrote "Bring Me to Life" and "Going Under" the first 2 singles from the first Evanescence album. Our strategy speaks for itself.

I would imagine after your incredible success with Creed and Evanescence, Wind-Up was looked upon in an entirely new light by those within the industry (Managers, Lawyers, etc). Did those successes change the industry's perception of Wind-Up and of you as an A&R Executive?

Wind-up began to be seen as a company that was able to successfully develop new artists. I began to get a lot more calls and visitors many of them I now proudly can call friends.

I remember Wind-up was first thought of as a new independent start up label in the beginning and then quickly there after as the cutting edge new major. Why do you think Wind-up had such an impact in the start?

Alan was always determined to build a label that could create career artists. Once we commit to a band it's rare that we don't see them through multiple records. Look at Finger Eleven who finally went gold on their fourth album and now their fifth album has reached #1 on both the active and modern rock charts and looks like it has multi-platinum potential. Wind-up tries to stay a couple of steps ahead of the competition and the major labels are Wind-up's biggest competitors.

As time moves on and tastes change we have stayed on the cutting edge with recent signings like Stars of Track and Field, People in Planes, Strata, and most recently Endless Hallway.

You are one of the VERY FEW women Executive who has run an A&R Dept. You're also one of the very few women A&R Executives whose successes have been with ROCK ACTS exclusively. Over the years, have you encountered resistance from male artists or with their managers because you're a woman? Or has your track record removed any of those Pre-conceived prejudices?

Wind-up is an alternative rock label, an active rock label, and a pop label with a broad diversity of artists. As far as being a woman in the industry, I've never experienced any prejudice. I'm a people person who simply loves music and loves my bands. I love lots of other bands as well and even if we wanted to sign a particular band and they wound up somewhere else it doesn't stop me from loving their music. Shiny Toy Guns is a good example of that. I wanted to sign them but they went to Motown. That doesn't stop me from turning people on to the band when I'm playing them new music.

Diana, how important is your personal relationship with an act? Is this something that is crucial for you to sign an artist?

It is important to click with an act when you decide to bring them aboard the label. You are going to have to "live" and work together for years after they join you. There are already enough hurdles in this business without dealing with bad relationships. The Wind-up artists are like my friends. I talk to them regularly and see all of them when they are touring, recording and I visit them at home or they visit me in New York.

How do you know, when an act has star potential?

That is something you feel from the moment the artist takes the stage, from the first note, from the audience but mostly from how the artist is able to affect me emotionally.

Diana, over the years, one of the most interesting things that I noticed in the launching of Creed as well as other acts on Wind-Up was the significant use of the internet in extensive on-line marketing to build a base of awareness and foundation for your artists. Would you talk about how the label came to use that as a marketing tool at a time when other labels were not doing so much on-line?

I am not the marketing person. My husband's background is in marketing and he believed the internet would change the world the first time he got on. He always tells me how when he wants to hire marketing people he looks for people for months, even years, for the

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most talented and creative people, especially involving the internet.

Does an act have to have management before you’d be willing to sign them?

No, but early on we will help them find a manager and give them a list of managers and management companies who have strength in their type of music. We also depend upon the artist’s attorney to get the artist good management. In the end an artist-manager relationship is like a marriage and it’s really up to the artist who he or she feels comfortable and safe with.

Has the increase in the volume of smaller independent labels made signings more competitive for Wind-Up?

The more strength among independents, the more open the system becomes, the better off we will all be. For most bands the goal is to get a major deal and have the opportunity to take their music worldwide. Wind-up is a hybrid – part indie and part major – but without the baggage that comes with being part of a huge machine.

Have you confronted artists that you’d like to sign that are not interested at all in signing with a label?

Most artists if not all have one dream and that is to be signed by a label and put out a record. I’ve never been in that situation.

At a small label like Wind-Up, do you feel it’s important to have your marketing and promotion depts. on board before signing an act to get everyone’s heart and soul into it or do you just go with your gut?

I always go with my gut. The marketing and promotion departments are part of a team. We all work as a team. There is no fighting between departments at Wind-up, EVER! They believe in me and I believe in them. It’s as simple as that. As far as being a small label Wind-up is just as big as any U.S. or Canadian major. We just don’t have all the catalog the major labels do. Also we focus on the rock and pop genres.

What qualities make a great A&R Person?

Love of the music. Love of the music. Love of the music.

I hear that Wind-up gives health insurance to the act that are signed to the label. Is this true? How does it work? Do you recoup this out of royalties?

We do have medical insurance for our artists and have often stepped in when tragedy strikes an artist or an artist’s family to help out. When Katrina hit Mississippi and Louisiana many of our artists living there were wiped out. We took care of them until they got back on their feet. As far as what is done on the money side of the business I stay far away from that. Money divides people. I could never be a business person in the industry. For me it’s about the relationships. I buy my bands, their wives and kids birthday presents not because of business but because I care about them, they are like my extended family.

Over the years, Wind-Up has been made some very attractive offers to sell. Why have you chosen to stay Independent?

Alan drives everyone crazy and over the years he has been approached by all the majors and each time he considered it and refused the deals, even as they grew to the point where the money offered became ridiculous. He is too independent and we enjoy Wind-up and our employees and bands too much to sell the company to the majors and become part of the machine.

Who distributes Wind-up Records? Can you tell me about how promotional decisions are made for the label and who are the principal players?

Sony/BMG distributes Wind-up worldwide except in Canada where we are distributed by Warner. My husband Alan is CEO and Chairman, Ed Vetri is President and behind them is a great team of professionals. Many of them came from the major label system and took refuge at Wind-up. When they

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get here they can’t believe the difference. There are other ways to successfully run a record label and develop new artists and earn enough money to remain profitable while providing security and comfortable incomes for our employees and our artists: We call it Wind-up.

Thank you Diana, do you have any parting words of advice for bands or young music business professionals? Any new signings you would like to plug?

Thank you and thanks to the great artists and musicians who have devoted their lives and energies to giving the world a gift that was born at the dawn of time – and will live forever – music.