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Music Supervision for Television and Motion Pictures (Square Pegs, A Different World, Decline of Western Civilization III, Beverly Hillbillies Movie, But I'm a Cheerleader)
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“We see ourselves as being a part of the biggest sync team in the world” – Tom Stingemore talks Hipgnosis sync

by Emma Griffiths

Hipgnosis Songs Fund continues to make headlines with its multi-million-dollar catalog acquisitions and ability to attract investment from the finance community.

Here, Tom Stingemore, Global President Sync & Creative, takes us behind the scenes of Hipgnosis' sync operation and its unique song management approach.

How have you found your time at Hipgnosis so far?

It's everything that I wanted it to be – and more. Merck's vision to build an entirely new type of music company, focused on fixing the streaming economy on behalf of all songwriters, is something that I was determined to be a part of, and the work that's being done by the team is nothing short of awe-inspiring. The people we already have onboard are quite simply the best in the business, and their dedication to the mission is utterly contagious.

How does the Hipgnosis sync team differ from a traditional publishing sync team in its operations and song management approach?

Naturally there are similarities, but perhaps the most obvious way in which Hipgnosis' song management model is fundamentally different to that of a traditional / major publisher, is in our level of focus. At traditional big / 'major' publishers, sync teams are often expected to work

with some 5 million songs. At Hipgnosis we look after 1% of that number – and our catalogue is heavily weighted towards the most iconic pieces of music ever created.



TOM STINGEMORE - PRES. SYNC & CREATIVE [GLOBAL] - HIPGNOSIS SONG MANAGEMENT

“At traditional big / 'major' publishers, sync teams are often expected to work with some 5 million songs. At Hipgnosis we look after 1% of that number.”

This concentration of platinum-level hits is completely unique in today's music business and only represents an enormous opportunity for our songwriters, for our teams, and for the worlds of Film, TV, Advertising and Games. In terms of the team, all of our licensing and administration is handled by our various publishing partners, which means that Hipgnosis' own in-house sync team can be comprised solely of dedicated, pro-active, creative pitching executives – all of whom are focused entirely on identifying, pursuing – and landing, high profile opportunities for our songs.

How much potential sync revenue do you think is being left on the table at traditional publishers?

I wouldn't want to comment on that, but what I do know is that at many big music companies, sync executives are often required to spend the majority of their time trying to find placements for repertoire that simply isn't sync-able. This just isn't a smart use of time, energy, expertise – or resource. And moreover, it's demotivating for otherwise passionate executives. Merck's unwavering focus on acquiring only proven, timeless,

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      Air-Edel is an all encompassing music company. We provide representation for composers, music editors, music supervisors and key creative talent with our own studio facilities, music publishing and record company.

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globally iconic songs, is the exact opposite strategy: Hire the best people, and equip them only with the world's greatest ever songs.

You mentioned that with your network of partners you see yourself as being part of "the world's biggest sync team". Can you expand on that?

Thanks for asking that. Yes, let me clarify. While Hipgnosis owns songs by Fleetwood Mac, Ariana Grande, The Eurythmics, Olafur Arnalds, Justin Bieber, Neil Young, Rihanna, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Beyonce, Shakira, Lorde, Blondie, The B-52's, Nelly, Chic, Adele, Al Green, Ed Sheeran, Steve Winwood, Shawn Mendes, The Pretenders and more... in many cases, we're not necessarily the administrator of those songs. In those cases, our songs are administered by Kobalt, Sony, Universal, Warner Chappell or others.

As a result, our catalogue is plugged into all of these administrators' global sync teams – who are our invaluable and trusted partners on the songs that we share. In that sense, we really do see ourselves as being a part of the biggest sync team in the world. At Hipgnosis we're in the global songs business, and we're very proud to be partners with all of the great people right across the industry.

So, how does the clearance / approval process work in practice, then?

For the vast majority of our repertoire – regardless of who administers the song, Hipgnosis is the sole approval party for all sync requests. This has allowed us to comprehensively slash approval / response times on the world's most iconic songs. Music Supervisors / Studios / Agencies are no longer being made to wait weeks-on-end for a 'yes', 'no', or 'maybe' response. We can't promise you a 'yes', but what we can guarantee is that you'll have a decision in your inbox before you've even entertained the thought of needing to find a back-up track.

Music Ally highlighted some potential tensions associated with acquisitions and shared ownership of rights. Is this something you see as an ongoing challenge?

No, not at all. My experience has only been that all of our administration partners are overwhelmingly collaborative – and highly motivated, to help us do great things. To my mind, we're simply partners on the songs that we represent. For example, Hipgnosis, Sony and Universal are all in the Bon Jovi business... If good stuff's happening for Bon Jovi, we all benefit. It's win-win-win.

Hipgnosis sync income grew from 9% of total revenues to 15% of total revenues between 31 March 2019 and 31 March 2020. How much potential is there for this to become an even bigger portion of revenue?

I really don't think in terms of there being a ceiling. What continues to overwhelm me is actually just the level of opportunity on offer. We own the world's greatest songs, we're working

with the world's greatest partners – and the appetite for proven, globally iconic songs has never been greater. The only challenge will be to ensure that we continue to service our partners sufficiently, as we all strive to make even greater things happen. It's just such an exciting period in the history of the music business.

"We own the world's greatest songs, we're working with the world's greatest partners – and the appetite for proven, globally iconic songs has never been greater."

You are representing some of the most iconic copyrights of all time. What are the considerations that go into deciding whether a sync is the right fit?

Great question. Merck's extremely passionate on this subject, and it's something that he takes very seriously having done personal deals with our songwriters, all of whom are now part of the Hipgnosis family. We're in the business of Song Management, and that's not a short-term position. We take every opportunity on its merits, and it's a nuanced, yet holistic approach. We're in business with these songs for the long term, and that's a very positive space to be in, for both our teams and our songwriters.

How has the sync team expanded so far and are there any new hires on the horizon?

You're about to see more key hires being announced in the next few weeks. The first few months were about building out the operation, and we're now staffing up internationally, in a very big way. I'm not in a position to be able to announce anyone today I'm afraid, but what I can say is that we're currently hiring in the North America, we're currently hiring in the UK, and we're also building out a dedicated network right across Europe and beyond. ■



Emma Griffiths is editor of *Synchblog*, a blog created by *Synchtank* to provide insight into the management & monetization of music copyright. Subscribe to our weekly newsletter for the latest *Synchblog* posts & key industry news in your inbox each week.

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