

HEADLINERS

Flop music

Children and teenagers say what they really think about the rise and fall of manufactured pop bands.

Hear'Say and Steps have split up and the BBC's Fame Academy is struggling to pull in the viewers. So is our love affair with manufactured pop over? Children's Express finds out what their peers think of the music industry and whether the death of plastic pop means a future for real music.

Tonight signals the beginning of the Smash Hits tour and thousands of young people will descend upon Sheffield Arena to see their favourite bands and singers. The band organisers probably know they will split after seven months and lose their so-called fame.

But, for many, the tour is just another example of the way that manufactured pop has taken over.

More and more TV talent shows are springing up, but are they really encouraging new talent or merely discovering new bands and singers whose popularity will have gone within a year?

Daniel Thompson, 15, of Shiregreen, is in no doubt. "The band organisers probably know they will split after seven months and lose their so-called fame," he said. Unfortunately, the past year, has plenty of examples of this.

Popstars was the first of recent programmes to launch a so-called manufactured band. A year-and-a-half ago, the winners, Hear'Say, launched their first single Pure and Simple. It sold 500,000 copies in the first week and became the fastest-selling single of all time. Now they are yesterday's news.

Even the finalists of perhaps the most popular show Pop Idol are feeling the effects of quick fame and just as rapid fade. In this year's final, watched by over 10 million viewers, of whom 8.7 million voted, Gareth Gates was the expected winner. Despite losing, he became a quick target for sponsorship - £750,000 to endorse Pepsi.

Two weeks ago Pepsi announced they were dropping him from their campaign. A spokesman said: "The partnership will come to a natural conclusion and we wish him all the best for the future."

But should we be surprised by the quick turnaround of today's pop stars? Joe Ashton, 15, of Longley, certainly isn't.

"The shows don't really give young hopefuls a break. Maybe for the first few weeks, yes, but then when a new TV talent show comes along everyone is like 'Hear'Say? Who?'"

Joe also points to another problem. "Young people enter these shows for fun and a bit of publicity, but mostly I think for their five minutes of fame."

The fact that winners are picked mainly for their image does not help. Rachel Walmsley, 15, of Firth Park, has her own theory for the short lifespan of popularity.

"They never last because people are just thrown together in a band and are made to get on with each other."

For some young people one of the best indicators of image over talent is the allegation of miming on stage. Hear'Say had to defend themselves against such accusations when recording Channel 5's Pepsi Chart Show at the start of their career.

Hear' Say singer Myleene Klass, in an interview with NME, admitted that, "If we have to mime, then at least we'll be miming to our own vocals." Her bandmate Kym Marsh defended rumours of Liza Minnelli not singing live at a recent London performance by commenting: "All the dance movements and everything can't be done without miming."

Why the shows are good entertainment

Leanne Thorpe, 13, Firth Park

Many people think that these shows are a load of rubbish and that people get through on their looks and not their talents. I disagree. TV talent shows are good entertainment and give other people the inspiration to follow their own dreams. They also give other people the chance to share their talents with the public. Most young people go into these shows for the experience and to show that they've achieved something in life.

There aren't too many manufactured bands because every band or singer has their own unique talent. As for miming on stage, I don't think it matters. It would

Holly Gillway, 13, of Beauchief, herself keen on dancing and singing, recognises the difficulty. "I think that miming is an essential part of music. I mean, it is physically impossible, no matter how much you get paid, to do energetic dance routines whilst singing."

For many people tomorrow night will be exciting, enjoyable, and money well spent. For others, the question will be 'What exactly are you getting for that money?'

About the team

This story was produced by Jasmine Stewart, Rachel Walmsley and Louise Hardy, all 15, Laura Smith, 14, and Holly Gillway, 13. It was published in the [Sheffield Star](#).

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be better if they didn't, but singing live takes a lot of vocal training and experience.

Tom Hutt, 15, Firth Park

In a way the Smash Hits tour and the number of TV talent shows is good because it gives us a slight insight into the music industry. But it doesn't give us a real idea of how hard it can be really to get recognition. In some ways that's because of the publicity created around these events. Fans follow the flock, drawn in by hype rather than the real talent on show.

New sounds come from those who work to find other artists interested in creating their own sounds, not those thrown into a band by the men with the money. As for singers and bands miming on stage, it shows that they're there not to perform to their fans, they're simply there to advertise their image.

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