

## Making it in music

### CE reporter investigates what it takes to be a music star

*Do you think you've got what it takes to make it in the music business and become a "star"? Children's Express journalist Aoife White decided to find out what it takes to make a success of a career in the music industry.*

Despite its relatively small population Northern Ireland has developed a strong reputation for producing bands of some stature and prominence. In the past the flag was flown by acts such as the Undertones and Stiff Little Fingers, but in more recent times bands such as Ash and Snow Patrol have emerged to receive both critical and popular acclaim.

After these recent success stories, the industry in the region is buzzing, with a number of bands being snapped up by UK record labels. But it wasn't as easy for them as you'd think, a number of these acts have had to go about things the hard way.

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One such act is Leya, a Belfast based four-piece who have been together over six years. As singer Ciaran Gribben explains, it has been a long road to even minor success. "Trying to get noticed at the start was very hard. We were out there doing all the usual toilet circuit gigs around Belfast and further a field."

"We eventually recorded a demo and sent it away to management companies. After about three years we got management in London with a company called Terra Firma who still manage us now. They helped us sign a record deal last November, to a label called Ruby Works."

It's been a long time coming but Leya are finally set to release their debut album, 'Watch You Don't Take off', in February. Ciaran has the following advice for anyone who wants to get ahead in the music industry. "I would say do as much of it you possibly can yourself, don't rely on anyone else. Get yourself a good band together, rehearse like mad and record a great demo."

"Once you've got something you're 100% happy with, try sending your CDs to management companies. I wouldn't even bother sending them to record companies, they'll come looking for you when the time is right."

This is a sentiment shared by the Senior A&R Manager at BMG Publishing, Johnny Davis. "I think that bands need to be realistic about the time scale and realise that you will not find success very quickly. You have to make sure you have people around you who can give you good honest advice."

Johnny also reveals what he looks for in a potential signing. "You are looking for originality, hard work, creativity and an understanding of what a band are trying to achieve. Personally I like to work with artists I like and I think most of the artists I work with would say the same as well."

Recognition came a little more quickly to The Mascara Story, a 3-piece from Londonderry who signed a UK record deal after less than a year playing together. Singer and guitar player Daveit Ferris explains, "we recorded a four track EP, which we thought was really good. I entered it into a competition called Snickers Unsigned, where the prize was to play at the Download Festival and other such events."

We were one of ten bands out of 2000 to be shortlisted for the final at the Barfly in London where we went on to win the competition. From the resulting press coverage including an article in Kerrang magazine we got noticed by a record label and they signed us."

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Daveit feels the band have a long way to go, however, before they will be satisfied with what they have achieved. "Luck gets you in the door, but hard work keeps you there. We have worked even harder since we got our record deal because there is so much pressure. Above all else, I just really want to write a great album, which is what I place above everything else."

Miriam Crozier works with the Northern Ireland Music Industry Commission, an organisation who offer help and support to people who want a career in the music industry. "The single biggest mistake that people make is not being professional about what they do. That goes for everything from turning up to a gig and not having drum sticks with you to being offered a contract and not getting someone to look through it before signing."

She also has a few words of warning for young people thinking about entering the industry. "Sadly there are very few who are able to go ahead and make a career in the music industry. If you think about how many bands there at any one time trying to get signed it is very competitive and can't work out for everyone. It does happen though and in order for it to happen you need to work very hard at it and be really committed."

From everyone I have talked to it seems that what is needed above all else is talent, determination to succeed and hard work. It can be tough but if you're willing to stick it out then the next Snow Patrol could well be you.

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### About the team

This story was produced by Aoife White, 15. It was published by Reach for the Sky website.

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