

Johnny Lappin: Secretary of the Music Publishers' Association of Ireland

Interview conducted by Caroline Daly

Music Business Journal: Dublin Correspondent

Date : 16 July 2001

The Music Publishers' Association of Ireland (MPAI) has been active in various forms since 1976. The Association took a great leap forward in 2001 when it acquired control of the mechanical rights collection body in the Republic of Ireland (MCPS Ireland). Caroline Daly, our Dublin correspondent, caught up with Johnny Lappin, the Secretary of MPAI, to discuss the work of the association and music publishing in the Republic of Ireland.

Can you tell us about your background, and how you came to be involved in music publishing? Like a lot of people in the industry, I started off as a performer. I became involved in music publishing in 1975. Publishing is about managing songs - which is easier than managing people!

How was the Music Publishers' Association of Ireland (MPAI) established?

MPAI was previously known as the Republic of Ireland's Music Publishers' Association (RIMPA). It was first formed in 1976, and later became MPAI in the mid-1990's. RIMPA was made up of purely indigenous Irish publishers.

Ireland is a relatively small market. We realised that 85% of the material performed in this country was actually owned by the multi-nationals and overseas publishers and we wanted our association to represent as many copyrights as possible, so we changed our rules and regulations, formed the Music Publishers' Association of Ireland, and invited all the major UK publishers to join, which indeed they did.

This year we acquired the shareholding in MCPS Ireland (the mechanical rights collection society for songwriters and music publishers). So, the situation now mirrors that in the UK - where the Music Publishers' Association own the MCPS.

How has the acquisition of MCPS Ireland been significant? As the major shareholders in MCPS Ireland, we now have a say in how that company is controlled. We can negotiate alliances with IMRO (the Irish Music Rights Organisation), which collects broadcasting and performance income for songwriters and music publishers. It also gives us more 'clout' in negotiations with other organisations such as IFPI, and Irish national broadcaster RTE. MCPS Ireland Ltd is now a de facto independent company, so we can structure deals which are more relevant to the Republic of Ireland.

Do MPAI charge a membership fee? MPAI membership currently costs a music publishing company IR£50 per annum. The fee is set annually by the MPAI Board.

Does the MPAI differ then from the UK's Music Publishers' Association? No, not really. This is a different market here, though, and a different cultural market. It is an English speaking territory, but we have a distinctive type of music. There are sections of the market which clearly differ - we have a lot of traditional music, for example.

What kind of working relationship does the MPAI have with IMRO and MCPS Ireland on a day-to-day basis? We have a very good relationship with both associations. Some of our members are Directors of one or both of those companies, which allows us the opportunity to assist with the ongoing development of the industry in Ireland. Although we are a small organisation - with 60 or so members, these members represent approximately 90% of the music copyrights exploited in this country.

We have an ongoing relationship with IMRO and MCPS Ireland on many matters. For example, I serve on the IBEC Music Industry Group (IBEC is the Irish equivalent of the UK's CBI - Confederation of British Industry). IMRO and MCPS Ireland are also represented on this. So, we regularly take part in these kinds of forums to discuss common issues.

What are the main concerns of your membership at the moment? In Ireland we have just had a new copyright act passed into legislation (The Copyright Act 2001). We have been lobbying for this for about a decade. The previous Act dated back to 1963 - long before the Internet, the invention of CD's or DVD. We're very happy with the new Copyright Act 2001. Our other concerns mirror those of our UK and international colleagues. Issues such as copyright harmonisation in Europe (the new European Directive) and piracy are all important.

What has been the impact of the new copyright legislation in the Republic of Ireland? Ireland is a major software manufacturer. Some of the top companies such as Microsoft, Dell and Gateway have large plants here, so copyright protection is of vital importance to the country's economy.

From the IMRO/ MCPS point of view, one important impact is that the onus of proof is now on the infringer - whereas previously it was on the copyright owner, who had to prove that they actually owned the copyright in question. That's a huge step forward for us and will allow us help stamp out all copyright infringers and piracy in general, as this was a major problem.

Have there been any test cases on this issue yet? No, not yet. The Act only came into law in January this year.

Do you think that performing rights and mechanical rights are adequately protected in the Republic of Ireland? Yes. The new Copyright Act has been helpful in this regard.

Is piracy a major issue here? Yes, piracy is a problem here - just as it is everywhere. Machinery is available for the copying of large quantities of music and video. It's also relatively easy to produce sleeves. So, it is a problem, but we are aware of this, as are our colleagues at the IFPI (International Federation of the Phonographic Industry) and MCPS Ireland Ltd. Also, the software people F.A.C.T. (Federation Against Copyright Theft) and very active in this territory.

How large an activity is music publishing in the Republic of Ireland? It's quite small. There are only about half a dozen full-time music publishers currently operating in the country. A lot of other publishing companies are Artist owned

companies such as Clannad Music (Clannad), Four Seasons Music (Phil Coulter), and Mother Music is U2's company etc.

Peermusic is the only international publisher to be located here. None of the major publishers have offices in this country - believing that they can control this market from London. This leaves a gap, which can and is being filled by the indigenous music publishers.

Apart from Peermusic, what other music publishers are significant here? As I mentioned, there are about half a dozen here which are full-time. Bardis Music is an important library publisher as is Watermill Music. Emma Music controls a lot of Daniel O'Donnell copyrights, and McGuinness Whelan are the publishers of *Riverdance* for example.

My own company, Foxrock Music Productions administers a number of catalogues - for example, Hazel O'Connor (Ad Hoc Music) and Sharon Shannon who is signed to my client's the Evolving Music Co Ltd.

I also help songwriters form their own publishing companies, which I then administer on their behalf. The market here isn't big enough to survive on domestic earnings alone - so, it's vital for a publisher here to have an international aspect to their business.

How is the market made up here in terms of genres of music? It's very difficult to quantify. MCPS Ireland may have that kind of breakdown of information.

Has the government in the Republic of Ireland been helpful in developing the music industry infrastructure? For years we have been calling for the establishment of a Music Board to oversee the development of the industry in Ireland. Thankfully, such a Board has recently been announced. We also feel there is a huge gap in the educational area which we hope the Government will help with in the future. The extension of the BES (Business Expansion Scheme) has also been a step forward for example. This allows Artists and/or investors to invest in music on a tax efficient basis.

Are there any tax-break advantages specific to music publishers? No, not for music publishers. However, under an Artist Exemption Act (a piece of 1969 legislation), artists/composers can claim tax-exemption on royalties. Some successful artists and authors choose to live here for that reason. [Note – this tax break is now virtually discontinued]. Although songwriters can benefit from this, it does not extend to music publishers.

How do you think the Internet generally has affected the music publishing industry? I think it has made it easier for people to communicate faster and cheaper, and hopefully it will bring in a new revenue stream for the industry. Although it's still very much at an infancy stage, when it's correctly licensed - and the societies are working toward this (for example, in Audio/Video streaming and Web casting) - then it will be good for the industry.

Do the MPAI have an online presence? We're working toward this at the moment (see <http://www.mpaiireland.com/>)

Are you considering an archive for specific publishing use in the Republic of Ireland? The overall plan is for a kind of archive. It's a massive undertaking and we're a small association, but our long-term plan is to have that in place. People will then be able to access Irish music worldwide.

Does MPAI liaise with other regulators with regard to issues such as secure digital distribution? Yes, we are monitoring developments very closely, and would be very supportive of these overall industry initiatives.

Are there more publishing firms now entering the market? Yes. People are becoming more aware of the music industry as a business activity, and are beginning to understand how it works.

Are there adequate courses for spreading knowledge of music publishing? No. It's something that needs to be addressed in the overall educational area previously mentioned. Several years ago, I wrote the *Need to Know Guide to Music Publishing* - due to the lack of knowledge of this activity. I did this because I'm very accessible as a music publisher - my mobile phone number is readily available - and a lot of people would call me up to discuss publishing. I would end up agreeing to a lot of meetings with bands and songwriters, which would result in me imparting a lot of free information and being left with a large coffee bill!!

In terms of music industry courses, the market is quite limited. There's the Ballyfermot Rock School, the Sound Training Centre, and the Pulse Recording College - all in Dublin, for example. I'm based in Wexford, and I'm now involved with the local vocational college, who have a music industry course.

I'm also just getting involved in a project called MIX - the Music Industry Xplained project, which will be a fourteen week (part time) course covering all aspects of the business and is due to commence in November this year.

Are you developing the curriculum and lecturing? Yes, I'll be involved in doing both.

Do you provide consultancy services? Yes, I also provide this service.

You recently ran the Heineken Green Energy *Careers In Music* seminars across the Republic of Ireland. Do you think that these were useful for disseminating knowledge and understanding of music publishing? Yes. This was the fourth year of these seminars, and they have always proved popular. We try to cover as many music industry careers as possible within these seminars - such as Business Management, Radio /TV production, Performing, Record Companies, A&R, Collection Societies as well as Music Publishing.

Music publishing is very important from a composer's point of view. It can be a songwriter's pension. It's important, then, that they understand how it actually works. When the publishing industry first started out in the UK and Ireland in the 1950's,

some songwriters were signed up to some pretty dodgy deals. Consequently, over the years, music publishing hasn't had the best of press. As a modern day publisher, I'd like to try to change that. So, I always include the subject area within any music industry lectures or seminars that I help to organise.

We get a great response to these seminars, and that's why I'm getting involved in this MIX project. Many musicians and songwriters just think about their music - but not the business side of the industry. They should really have a basic knowledge of music publishing and how it works - especially when signing contracts that will affect their future.

Can you tell us about some of your own experience of music publishing? I was involved with Clannad's publishing from the outset, and spent 10 years working on this. We basically built the company, Clannad Music, from nothing, and won a BAFTA Award for the Robin of Sherwood TV Theme in 1985. I was also involved in the sub-publishing deals we negotiated around the world.

The Robin of Sherwood TV series had 26 one-hour episodes. There is approximately 30 minutes of music in each of these episodes - that's 13 hours of music in total. The series has now been syndicated to 89 countries around the world. That's a substantial amount of income for the composers. It was also a great learning-curve experience for me.

New technology will make this kind of job easier - purely from a practical point of view. It's to do with communication, which is now made so much easier, quicker and cheaper. I'm working on several projects of that nature with some of my current clients.

Is the management of songs really easier than the management of people? Yes, that's true. Songs are great - they never phone you at 3am in the morning to complain about their lack of success! They never get lost in nightclubs or moan that they can't afford to pay their bills!!

On an international level, does the variance in copyright law complicate the work of a music publisher? Yes, and no. The key thing is to get the right people in the right territories. For example, I publish some of Aslan's works. They've just released product in Spain. I will, therefore, be looking to make an arrangement with a sub-publisher - at MIDEM 2002, for example. In the meantime, I will monitor the Spanish collection organisations via IMRO.

It can be a problem monitoring some overseas territories - especially when you don't live there or speak the language. You can build up international contacts, though, through international events such as MIDEM. I've been going there every year since 1979, so I now know music publishers from all over the world.

Selecting the right sub-publisher is a key part of the activity of most music publishers. That's why composers will want to sign to more experienced publishers, such as myself, for their contacts and knowledge.

Do you work with the same sub-publishers overseas, or build relationships on an ad hoc basis? Mostly on an ad hoc basis. It is my own personal view that, for example, a sub-publisher for Hazel O'Connor may not necessarily be the best sub-publisher for a different client say, from the traditional Irish music genre.

I believe that a sub-publisher should have a sympathetic ear for a particular kind of music. They must also have contacts in the specific genre to effectively promote that music in their territory. I work with some sub-publishers on a regular basis, but most are identified on an ad hoc basis.

Is there a significant market for sheet music in the Republic of Ireland? I'm not sure you could call it significant but there is a market, especially for traditional music and ballads. It may be, comparatively, rather small and it's hard to quantify because individual members administer their own Graphic Rights.

We don't have precise figures, but several outlets - such as Walton's World of Music Publishing in Dublin, and Ossian Publications in Cork, are active in this particular activity.

How do you hope MPAI will develop and progress in the future? Obviously, we would like to represent 100% - as opposed to 90% - of the music composed here. Secondly, we would like to see the establishment of a common Copyright House - where all the relevant associations (MPAI, IMRO and MCPS Ireland and where even our colleagues in the record business IRMA/PPI etc) would be based.

The Republic of Ireland is a very small market. We don't need three sets of staff, three different buildings, and three different Data Base charges when we are all effectively pursuing the same objectives. This convergence of the industry would be beneficial, and could save a lot of money in administration costs. After all, the members of MPAI, IMRO and MCPS Ireland are by and large the same people.

Johnny Lappin, thank you for your time.

Johnny Lappin is also the Irish representative on the International Confederation of Music Publishers (ICMP), and a Director of MCPS Ireland Ltd.

Article Source: <http://www.musicjournal.org/01johnnylappin.html>

*Music Publishers' Association of Ireland
Copyright House
Pembroke Row
Lower Baggot Street
Dublin 2.
Phone: 01-6766940
Secretary : 087-2513201
email : jtf@eircom.net*