

Emma Banks

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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm here at the Creative Artists Agency in Hammersmith, London, with music executive Emma Banks. She co-founded their London office in 2006, and her client list includes Florence + The Machine, the Red Hot Chilli Peppers, and Katy Perry. During her 25-year career, she has won Pollstar UK Agent of the Year seven times, and is about to become the first female executive to receive a MITS Award, in recognition of her contribution to the music industry. She's also chair of the O2 Silver Clef committee, which delivers music therapy to vulnerable people across the UK.

Emma, thank you for joining me.

Thank you for having me.

Emma, congratulations on the MITS Award, an honour given to the likes of our mutual friend Rob Stringer. Tell us about how you heard you'd been chosen.

I was actually... this sounds just like I'm showing off, but I was in Brazil. I was in Brazil with the Red Hot Chilli Peppers – they were playing Lollapalooza Festival. And David Munns, who's the chair of the MITS committee, he and I had been playing phone tag. But as he's very involved with Nordoff Robbins, which is what I do the Silver Clef lunch for, I sort of thought, "Oh, well. We've got a minute." We kept ringing... he was in Canada, I was in Brazil, I was on a plane. And he finally got hold of me; I was in the production office, backstage. And he said, "Oh, we've had a meeting, and we'd like to honour you with the MITS Award. Are you okay?" And I am generally not stuck for words. And I think I looked probably like a fish out of water, going, "Um. Um. Are you sure? No, surely, there... No, there must be someone better than me. They'll be somebody... that's for big shots." And he's like, "No, no, no. We want you to receive it." So obviously, it's a huge honour. I can't quite believe that it's happening. But I'm very proud and privileged to be thought of in that way, and I hope that the event makes a lot of money for charity.

So what does your job involve? Because you said there that only big shots get it. But I think you are a bit of a big shot, if you don't mind me flattering you. It

certainly appears that you have quite a glamorous and exciting job. Is it as glamorous and exciting as it appears? Are you now going to tell us the reality is dealing with lots of problems?

I'm a backroom person. So I don't get my photo taken. I try not to get my photo taken! You know, what is glamour? I'm part of a team that works with hugely talented musicians, performers. And so I get a little bit of reflected glamour, I think. Reflected glory from what they do. They're the ones that actually are out there. They're the ones that are putting it on the stage, and that everybody wants to see. No one wants to see me, they want to see what they do. But I'm a little part of getting them to that point. So my job, a lot of the time, is in an office. It's sitting at a desk. It's on the phone, it's on email. In the old days, we used to send faxes and write letters, but we don't do that so much any more. And so I'm putting together touring proposals for artists, strategising about when they should tour, where they should tour, how big the venue is, what the ticket price should be, how are we going to advertise it... you know. If it's all going well, that's fabulous. Even when it's going well, we're doing our best to stop the tickets maybe going onto the secondary market. Because most artists want to sell their tickets at the ticket price they've designated. And that doesn't mean they couldn't make more for them, but they want a lot of people to be able to attend. So we're looking at that. If ticket sales aren't so strong, we're similarly looking at how can we promote the show better. How can we get to more people? So these are the kinds of things that I do. I go to the shows. I don't go to every show, because if I did, I wouldn't get any work done, frankly. And what's much more important for the clients that I work with, is that I'm head down, doing everything I can to help them get where they want to get to. And every artist is different. There are some acts that just want to be huge. And they want to play to more people, and have a bigger show than anyone else. And there's other artists that maybe don't want to be that big. They like something that's a little bit more intimate. You know, something that's a little bit more carefully crafted, I suppose, in a way. So that they're not having to put it out to everybody. And then there are people that have a mix of both. And you can get acts that headline massive festivals, and then another year will do something in a theatre. You look at Bruce Springsteen, he's on Broadway at the moment. I think that theatre holds 900 people. So he's playing every night, and I think he could play forever, if he wanted to. But similarly, he can play every stadium in the world. He can headline festivals. So sometimes, it's about helping clients to think about what opportunities there are beyond what's obvious. And then the other thing that we do a lot of is, across other areas of the entertainment business and media... so be it brand deals, endorsement deals... or if they want to go into TV, or if they want to go into the movies. You know, Creative Artists Agency, as a company, covers a huge range of different areas of the media business, and so we can help them with anything else they want to do.

And how do you balance the commercial and the creative with your relationships with your clients? Because as you've just said, they are creative people. But you're there to pay their mortgage as well, or help them do that. Is there ever a conflict between those two goals?

I think that we strive for there to be no conflict. Most artists have a manager, so often the conversations are between myself and the management team – sometimes it's one person, sometimes it's several – so, often, the artist will speak most to their

manager. And the manager will then be able to sort of filter the ideas, decide what makes sense. We then have a discussion, figure out... you know, with all things, sometimes life isn't just about being commercial. Sometimes the artistry is more important than the commercial reality. So as long as you can afford to do something, maybe it doesn't matter if you're not making any money on one occasion, because you'll make it later. And I'm a big believer that if you do the right thing, the money will come. It may not come immediately, but it comes. And that, when you chase money, you never quite get there. It's that pot at the end of the rainbow that you never quite reach. So if you just concentrate on doing the right thing, and often the right thing is doing the right thing artistically, then the commerciality of it actually works out. Now, of course, if you have a grand idea that you're going to play a stadium, and you can only sell 2,000 tickets, that's tricky. You know, someone will get disappointed in that. But I think most people, most artists, have a reasonable degree of self-awareness. And if they have a good team around them, then we manage expectations all the time. But I also want to be one of those people that goes, "Okay, yes. Let's try that. It might sound crazy, but let's go for it." Because some of the best things maybe were a bit wacky when they were first discussed. You know, if you look, every festival started as somebody's idea. You know, "Let's put three bands together and put them in a field." And it starts small, and it grows, and it grows, and it grows. And I think with artists, often as well... we know what someone wants to do. Doesn't mean it has to happen immediately. What is it? All roads lead to Rome, or whatever the saying is. But it depends how you want to get there. You know, you could fly there, you could drive there, you could walk there. There's wiggly roads, there's straight roads. I've taken the analogy far enough. But yes, if somebody has an ultimate vision, and an ultimate dream, we'll figure out a way to hopefully get them there.

Do you enjoy your clients' music as a punter, sometimes? Do you ever just kick on Spotify on a Friday night and listen to Katy Perry's latest album as a normal person? Or are you always thinking about things that could be done differently, or ideas pop into your head? Has it changed the way that you enjoy music, personally?

I like the idea you think I can be a normal person on a Friday!

I can't!

Has it changed? I think, no, I still love listening to music. I think if you don't love the music, then it's quite hard to get enthused. Although often, as well, you love the people. You know, I think I get quite emotionally invested in my clients. So, you just want to do the best for them. You want to make it work. You want them to be happy. But no, I love... you know, you sit in a car, you sit on the train, you're at home... music is the soundtrack to all of our lives. And you notice it when it's not there. And yes, when someone's got a new album coming – and I'm very lucky, that often, I hear music before it's actually released, so I've had a little bit of a sneak preview on things – but there's nothing better than hearing your client's new work. And you can see where they've maybe moved on artistically. No, I still listen. And sometimes I even listen to acts that aren't my clients!

I'm sure you do. For those of our listeners that aren't experts in the music industry, could you give us an overview of what your job involves? What is a typical week, or a typical month for you?

My primary 95% of the time job, is organising live tours. And that might be headline shows, it might be festivals, it might be corporate or branded events. It's a mixture of all of those things. So I will have conversations with managers, where we discuss what the artist is doing, when we should tour. We sort of divvy up the year, or have an 18-month, or a two-year plan, and go, "Okay, we need to be..." You know, the album, or the single, and obviously... the business has changed. Because 10 years ago, everything was about album releases. And now, with streaming services, with Spotify, TIDAL, Apple, whatever... people don't necessarily listen to whole albums. They listen to tracks much more. And so, we're all adjusting the way that we look at the business, and that we look at how the timing works. Because almost, now, the album release is the end of the cycle, almost more than the beginning of it. You know, once the album's out, and it's on a streaming service, everyone can hear it. They can pick the bits they like, they maybe ignore the bits they don't. And some of the time, they don't even listen to any of those bits, so how do they know they don't like it? But what do I know about that? So, we'll figure out... when do we need to be playing headliner shows? When's the right time for festivals? When are we going to go to Australia? Are we going to go to Japan? South America? All of these things. If it's an act that plays festivals, where do the festivals fall in the year? Because you want to obviously make sense of where you're touring. You don't want to be flying across the world backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards. A, it's bad for the human being. B, it's bad for the planet. So, we want to try and group tours in a logical progression. Plus, giving enough time to the artist, so that they don't go mad, frankly. Because everybody needs time off. And particularly when you're in such a high-pressure industry. So that's part of the job, is figuring out when we should be touring, and where we should be touring. That's the sort of, artist-facing part of it. And then the other bit is talking to the promoters across the world. So, the promoters are the people that actually go and they rent the venue, they are putting their money down for the show. So they pay a guaranteed fee to the artist. They pay for the security. They place the advertising. In conjunction with what we are suggesting. We will provide them with the advertising material that they're going to use. They adjust it for their territory. And then we agree, we mutually agree, where it's going to be advertised. You know, and that's... a great promoter has fantastic ideas. And they understand the difference between a rock band and a folk act. And where you should be advertising them, how you should do it. And so, yes, we look at putting all of that together. Routing a tour so that... we have to keep in mind driving regulations, for instance. If you're in South America, there's probably no driving. Everything has to be flown, because of the distances. So we know about that. And we then present a tour to the artist, via their manager, who says yes or no. And after that point, it's about contracting it. It's about making sure that any tax mitigation that we can deal with on behalf of the artist is sorted out. Making sure that they've got the right visas and the right work permits. Putting together the support bill, you know, the act that plays before the headliner. For the baby artists that we represent, it's trying to get them to be the support act on a bigger tour. And looking at other opportunities, as well. So, that's pretty much day-to-day. And obviously, we're doing it over a wide range of clients.

It's all like a very complex set of variables to coordinate.

It is. I'd like to think I've got a hugely difficult and complicated job!

What's the balance of creative and kind of the logistics of it? Do you have a team that can do all of that, and you are just – I say "just" the person, when you are the person who's deciding the support act – whether they're going to do it, advising your clients...

I think you have to have an overview of all of it. You're not a very good agent if you don't know how far you can drive in Europe before you're going to have to get double or triple drivers into trucks and buses. So you need to be able to do all of it. You know, occasionally, and I suspect that this is now anybody that's alive that has a job feels, that you maybe don't have enough time to just sit and think. And you know, there's a lot of stress. There's a lot of pressure on people. And there's an expectation for a very high work rate. So occasionally you sit. Weekends are the time where you do all the work you didn't get done during the week. And that's often a time where you actually think about things. You go, "Okay, is this a good idea?" The other time when you can, which is great for that, is if you happen to be sitting with an artist. And often, particularly on longer tours, where you might be in a place where there's not many other English speakers. Or there isn't a big record company there, the manager isn't around. And you just sit. After the gig, before the gig, chatting to your client.

Quality time.

Yes. It's quality time where you get to know them better. And it's amazing, just in chit-chat, what you discover about somebody, that they maybe didn't think to tell you. You go, "Oh, right. You don't like that? Just tell us, and we'll sort it out." Bizarrely, Twitter is also a place where you sometimes find things out about your clients that you didn't know. You just go, "I never knew that you were a huge fan of that, or that you didn't like something else." But it's out there on Twitter. So, you know, 20 million people know, but you never got told yourself. So, you keep an eye on everything.

How did you get into this lark, then?

Well, I did a food science degree at Reading University, which clearly is the only way to get into the music business!

Absolutely.

And when I was there, I started working with the RAGs committee. Which is the charity fundraising side of things.

I remember them. They used to sell the RAG book, didn't they, every year?

Yes, the RAG mag.

50K RAG mag, that was it, 50p.

Yes. We used to do... we ran a beer festival once a year. The smell of rancid beer on a wooden floor, was just revolting. I can still smell it now. The end of the day... I hope it was only beer, frankly – but there were some very drunk people. And we did pretty much all of the concerts as well. The late 80s, which was when I was at university, was a time when student unions were, most of them were bankrupt. Everybody was very busy marching against Mrs Thatcher, who was probably not the friendliest person to students. And so, our student union at Reading didn't do a lot of shows, because they had no money. And they hadn't worked out that you could actually maybe make a business out of it. So myself and a guy called Neil Richards, who was the year above me, got very, very involved in RAGs, and we put on pretty much every show that happened at Reading Uni. And we promoted some amazing artists. We promoted New Order, we promoted The Pogues... bunch of others, you know, long, long list. And I loved it. You know, I was doing my degree, which was, as a science degree, was pretty much nine to six every day, lectures, and then being in the lab. And then I'd come out, and I'd sell tickets at lunch time. And if we had a gig, I'd make the sandwiches for the rider, and then at the end of the night, I'd be sweeping the hall, because it was used first thing the next morning for something else at the uni. And it was really fun, but it was really interesting. The sort of the mix of art and commerce, that you got from it. Because this was before the internet, a long time before the internet.

They were good times, as far as I'm concerned.

You know what? There were parts of it that were great. Now, everything is very dictated. I mean, the business is much more detail-oriented. And that's fair enough, as it should be. The artists control much more. Back then, frankly, you would just be told, "You're promoting The Pogues," and then you could make the poster. You could do whatever you want. Because it was so difficult for anybody to actually check it, that you just accepted that it would be okay. So, it was fun to be able to do that. And on a big show like The Pogues, we would have professionally printed posters. But on some of the things we did, I was there with the Letraset and the photocopier and some photos, and it was real DIY punk rock stuff. And that was fun. And then just meeting musicians. They're not like us, they're not. You've got to be a very special kind of person to be able to write a song, write music. It's not easy. I mean, if you've ever tried, you just sit and you stare at a piece of paper. I don't know how people start it, I really don't. But then to be able to bare your heart and soul on a stage, in front of people who might love you, and be interested. But who might, frankly, be chatting with their mates or having a fight. It takes a specific kind of person. And I've met those people and I thought, "You're really good. I'd like to help you."

And things took off from there then? Did you start your own business then? How did it work?

No. So the people I knew most in the music business were agents because that's who I was booking acts off for the shows that I was doing. And I didn't want to be one of them, they were terrible. So I wrote a lot of letters to record companies and publishing companies, I had quite a lot of interviews and pretty much got nowhere. I think back then it was harder for a woman to get into the business, for sure. And I

don't think I ever looked at it that way, but for sure it was. And, I mean, one person said to me, "Well, you're overqualified. You've got a degree and we're not going to be able to help you. You need to be from the mean streets of wherever." And I was from the not quite so mean streets of Bedfordshire. So I then wrote letters to agents, because I was getting to the point, you know, I had a decent food science degree but when you're doing an applied science it becomes out-of-date pretty quickly. So it was either get a move on and get a job in the music business or you probably need to think about getting the food science job. So I wrote to a lot of agents, and I wrote to a guy called Ian Flooks, who had a company called Wasted Talent. And he rang me two days after receiving my CV – and it probably took three months between that phone call and him offering me a job and starting – but I started at Wasted Talent in the early 90s and went straight in as a booker, not as an assistant to anybody particularly. So I didn't know what I was doing, but I turned up and got given a book of venues, and told to book a tour for this act. And I did.

So presumably then, that's working out the dates, offering them, looking for gaps, just putting the whole thing together basically. That's a huge responsibility, to say the least.

Yes, it was a huge responsibility. I think I probably would have been helped had I been given a map as well, because I look back at a couple of the tours, the early tours, and go, "Seriously, I should have known where some of these places were!" It looked like the Star of David that I was trying to design there. But anyway, the artists did them. And, you know, it's not just me. I'll do a tour but it then goes to a manager and a tour manager will look over it. So they weren't that bad, but they were just not quite as good as I would've liked them to be. And, of course, many of these tours live, to this day, on the back of tour t-shirts. And I still now I go to gigs and I'll be standing behind someone in a tour t-shirt looking, going...

"I did that."

Either I did that or, goodness, who did that? That's the worst routed tour I've ever seen. And, of course, at the time when you route them and you can only get, I don't know, the Royal Albert Hall on this one particular day because it's so busy, you explain to the artist why they're going to have to drive all the way across Europe for London and then go all the way back to Vienna or something. But by the time the tour happens, we've all forgotten why we did this ridiculous thing. And so I'm staring, going, "What on earth did I do there?" They're wondering why they've driven through Dusseldorf seven times. And there were more of those tours early on. Now, fewer. I'm pretty good on the geography now.

It sounds like it's quite an adventure though, because as you said earlier you get to join a lot of your clients on these things.

Yes. I mean, you know what? When I started, I hadn't been to most places. I'd been on family holidays to Spain and Portugal and apart from that... oh, and I'd been to Florida once. But apart from that, I'd never been really out of the UK, because who does? You know, you do your family holiday and that's it. So you start off and you need to go and see your core places. I mean, for a start you need to go and see the

core places in the UK. And then I'd go to Amsterdam to see the Paradiso. And if I went abroad, I'd ask the promoter that was doing the show if they could show me all the other venues in that city. I'd get there a couple of hours early and then we'd have a whizz round. Because once you've been somewhere and you know what it looks like, it's much easier to go, "This is the right venue for you to play." So obviously, over the huge amount of years I've been doing this, I've seen a lot of venues. And there are some new ones that you go and see, but apart from that, a lot of the time I'm like, "Okay, where can I go that I haven't been to?" And that's always interesting and fun. I've been to a lot of countries, I've been to a lot of cities. I've seen a lot of airports. But, yes, you get a feel for the right venue by going in it. There's a world of difference between the kind of show you get at the Albert Hall, or at Brixton Academy, or at the O2, or at the Shepherd's Bush Empire – and that's just in London. So every major city has those choices to make. And some of them are made dependent on how many tickets you're going to sell, and others are made on, "Do we want to play seated, do we want to play standing?" "Does everyone need to be close up or can you have something that's a little bit bigger?" So it's fun. You go, you see the show, you see the venue and you also get to spend some time with the artist. By the time the show happens, it doesn't actually make any difference if I'm at the gig or not. Because if it goes wrong at the gig, it probably isn't something that was in my control anyway. And there are probably other people that can deal with it. But it's a little bit about showing support and wanting to see the reaction at gigs as well. You know, certain places in the world have a reputation for having very enthusiastic crowds. Others, maybe the crowd are a little bit more subdued. And so it's always interesting to see that. And to see occasionally that actually where you think you're going to have a huge reaction it maybe isn't so big, but a place that historically are a little bit more reserved go absolutely bonkers.

Is it a bit of a nightmare commercially to find the right size venue for the town? So, for example, you want it to sell out. You don't want there to be empty seats, but you don't want to have to force the artist to put on a second night because they could have played a bigger venue and just on the one date. How does that work in terms of it's quite a delicate balance to strike, isn't it?

It is! That's what makes a good agent.

So tell us all the secrets then, so I can set up in competition.

I've got to keep something back. Do you know what? It's interesting. I was talking to someone the other day about analytics, which obviously is a huge buzz topic, and there's so much data around. I think it's still quite hard to really use analytics in a way that you can really take what analytically looks like it should sell tickets for you, and make it sell tickets for you.

The price of everything and the value of nothing. That's the problem with data sometimes.

Well, a little bit, yes. There's a huge amount of gut instinct and just knowing how things are going, and feeling it. Ten years ago, 15 years ago, it was very easy. There literally was a graph, and on one axis it was ticket sales and on the other axis was

album sales. And it was that nice, straight, diagonal line that went up. The more albums you sold, the more tickets you sold. That is no longer the case. And when I say albums, that could now be streaming numbers, it can be whatever, however people are consuming music. But now you have some artists that have massive streaming numbers that officially can become massive album numbers, but they don't sell hard tickets. They have huge reactions at festivals or events, but nobody will put their hand in their pocket and pay £35 to go and see them on their own. And on the flip side, you have artists that don't stream high, that don't sell a lot of albums, but sell huge amounts of tickets. You know, often that's the difference between a rock band or a guitar type of band and something that's more EDM, dancey, very poppy. It takes much longer for those pop artists to really establish themselves as live ticket sellers. So what do we do when we're looking for venues? Well, I'm one of the people that's having a discussion. The promoter obviously is somebody that's also part of that discussion. And if we're trying to maximise but still sell out, sometimes you're limited by the venues that are available as well. We're obviously sitting here in London. We've got a couple of great venues within almost walking distance. Your Hammersmith Apollo, which is between 3,000 and 5,000, depending on whether you seat or stand it. Shepherd's Bush Empire, 1,200 to 2,000 depending on seated or standing. There's a lot of other venues in London that are all the way up to 16,000-18,000 at the O2, and then obviously the stadia that we have, you can pretty much, within a thousand capacity, find a venue that's the right size venue for you. In Belgium, you are really struggling. There's a whole bunch of places up to about 1,800, 2,000. Then there's a venue that's six or seven thousand. And then the next one is 18,000. And that's tricky, so you do have to be a little bit smarter. You have to have good chats with your promoter. But, of course, what happens most of the time is we all have long-term relationships with the artists that we work with. And you start and you play the tiny club, and then you move to a slightly bigger club, and a slightly bigger club, and you put them on a festival. So you can see the incremental growth that you're getting. You can see where you sold out that club super, super fast. You might go a little bit bigger the next time than you would have done otherwise. And so I suppose, yes, it's a mixture of gut, of looking at how sales are going, how streaming numbers are, where they're at on social media. Just the amount of publicity they're getting as well. But always remembering that celebrity doesn't sell you tickets. And I think that's a hard lesson to learn for a lot of people. Because you do have some artists who are in the newspapers every day, mainly because of what they're wearing or who they were holding hands with. And that generally does not translate to ticket sales. But if you get a whole bunch of press and publicity about the album that you made, the song you've released, the show that you did, that will translate.

So it's in artists' commercial interest to be seen as a performing artist rather than as someone who just happens to go with a series of people and be photographed with them on dates?

Oh, yes, absolutely. Absolutely. You know, the music will always tell. And I think that the public, they're smart. Money is hard to earn and very easy to spend. And if you're going to spend however much it is, if it's £8 at a tiny club or £100 at an arena or a stadium, you want to know that you're going to get something great. And quite frankly, if you want to just see a celebrity, go to a nightclub and look at them in the VIP area. You know, I think pretty quickly you're probably quite bored of that. So,

yes, it's about the music, it's about the talent. It's about the charisma of people as well.

Do you get lobbied by the venues? Like if I was the marketing manager for Shepherd's Bush Empire, I'd want to make sure that I send you a Christmas card every year and a crate of champagne on your birthday because I want you to remember that I exist.

I want you to become the marketing manager of Shepherd's Bush Empire based on that! Do you get lobbied by them...

Because they need to be on your radar, big time.

They do, but they are. I mean, I think all of the venues are on our radar. There's a lot of acts out there touring, so sometimes you literally can't get a date within a three-month window when you want to play a show. So the music industry and live music, it's quite a young business still when you look at it. You look at sort of the godfathers, you know, the Bob Dylans and the Neil Youngs and those people, they're still going. It's not like premiership football where – and now I'm going to show I don't know that much about football because I don't know how many teams there are in the premiership, but what, are there, 20, 24, something like that? – and just because another team's really good, you don't add them in. When you add someone in, someone comes out so it's always the same size. With the live music pool, you just keep adding until somebody dies or they give up. And that doesn't necessarily mean that they're really old they give up. But, you know, young people go, "It's not working, we're going to go and get a different type of job." But as a pool of talent, it gets bigger and bigger and bigger.

Whilst the number of venues largely remains the same?

Well, the number of venues remains relatively static and the number of days in the year hasn't changed for ages, which is a problem sometimes. We're also looking for more weekend dates if we can, but I don't know how that's going to work.

Well, actually then, that made me think that maybe it needs to be flipped over. That you need to send the marketing manager at Shepherd's Bush Empire a crate of champagne on his or her birthday, and a Christmas card, because actually you might need to call in favours and say, "Oh, don't put Paul McCartney on that Wednesday. Put Katy Perry on."

Yes! I think we all have a very good synergistic relationship. A lot of the venue managers, the promoters, because we're all doing business all the time, everybody understands that once you've held a venue you need to have a level of loyalty. And, you know, a contract, even a verbal contract or a handshake, is a contract. It really should be. And so I wouldn't expect somebody to come along and go, "Sorry, we know you've got that venue but someone better has come along so you're going to have to scoot out the way." But, frankly, we're all in this business and we all understand that every venue, if they can get a superstar in there, it only does them good. So we'll always try and actually accommodate. And there's quite a lot of

straight talking that goes on, and honesty, to make sure that we can help people where we can. And occasionally, particularly at the quieter times of the year, venues might have somebody in that they know isn't going to sell out. And they may then, you know, before it's obviously on sale, if something comes along that's bigger and better, they may go, "You know what? This is not time-dependent. Can you move your date? Can you do this, can you do that?"

And is there a lot of jiggery-pokery like that then, in terms of shifting sands behind the scenes?

There can be. I mean, everything shifts. Until you've actually announced a tour, nothing is 100%. And you can have a tour that you think is all fine and it's all rooted and you're all ready to go, and then suddenly you get the call that the Graham Norton Show want you, or Taratata in France want you on their TV show. And, of course, a TV show gets you to millions of people. Whereas one live gig, however big it is, doesn't. So you then have to throw your hands in the air, swear a little bit under your breath, and reroute the tour. Or suddenly you hear... whatever it might be, you know, so we have to be flexible.

How does it work in terms of the economics of being a support act? For example, when you mentioned before about that you were involved in that sometimes, I was thinking of actually, you know, when Tesco sells baked beans, sometimes they'll actually charge Heinz a bit more to give them premium shelf space. I went to see Taylor Swift at Wembley Arena a couple of months ago, and there was a couple of artists on there. I took my nieces there. And I'd never heard of them, but I would imagine that if I was Taylor Swift there's a commercial value to being my support act because I'm going to get you in front of all of my fans. Does that ever happen where a support act will almost pay to be on, or work for minimum amounts, because of the exposure? There's obviously several variables that you need to take into consideration.

There are several ways that it happens. Most of the time, the support fee is not very high at all because it's so expensive to tour. You know, wages, trucking is really expensive, fuel is really expensive. So the majority of the money has to go to the headline artist, which by the very nature then means that the support gets paid often less than it will cost them to play the show. So they're relying on either a record label who give them what's called tour support, which means that the record label will supplement the money they need to do a tour – because it's marketing really, that's how they see it – or a manager might pay the money, or they may try and get a sponsor. There's more of that now, of brand partnerships where a brand will go, "Okay, we'll help you. We'll give you £5,000 but you need to be putting Instagram posts out about us." Or whatever it might be. When you get to the very big tours, most of the time artists are pretty good about understanding that now you're Taylor Swift, but at some point you were Swifty Taylor and nobody had heard of you, and you knew how much it cost to play a show. So if you're playing a stadium, if you're playing an arena and there is a bit more money, actually allocating a few thousand pounds in the big scheme of things doesn't impact on your bottom line very much, but makes a huge difference to the artist. So I always find it very disappointing. On a very big show, if you can't pay somebody £5,000, then it's quite disrespectful maybe

to the artist that you're asking to support you. And then you have another situation – and it's not so prevalent now, but certainly back in the 80s and 90s – you used to have what was called a buy-on, and literally the support act would give money to the headliner, per your Heinz baked bean analogy, to get that slot. Because there were so many people after those slots, that you had to make a point of difference. And potentially it would be putting that money into additional marketing, and your band name would be on there. But, yes, that has happened.

Is it more difficult to break into the music industry now, given that because of Spotify and blogging and Instagram and all of these various things, different ways to get yourself noticed, in one sense it's easy to get noticed because there's lots of opportunity. But in another sense, there's so many thousands of other people using that as well. How do you stand out nowadays? Is the way that you would deal with an emerging artist now different from, say, 20 years ago?

Ultimately, if you're really, really good, you'll probably still rise to the top. There are of course some people that don't, but there are some people that get a chance, it doesn't quite pay off, things go wrong, whatever. I think it's harder to get a second shot now. I think we live in a culture where everything needs to be new all the time, and sometimes new isn't what makes it work. There's a lot of artists that took quite a long time to develop into who they are. U2 were not huge overnight. REM were not huge overnight. Look at an artist like David Grey. He had several albums out before White Ladder. It was White Ladder that made him an enormous artist.

I loved White Ladder. I remember actually thinking, "Oh, he's had a few albums out before."

Yes. Yet, he was an overnight sensation. I think it's harder now if it doesn't happen quite quickly to make it happen. We have to be very aware of that because sometimes, everybody gets very excited about the new thing, and it gets pushed very, very hard and if it doesn't connect immediately, everyone is on to the next thing. Actually, we all as human beings develop, and we become better at what we do with practice. Sometimes, it's very upsetting when you see a truly talented individual, or a group of people who just haven't had enough time, and were pushed into the spotlight so early, and they're burnt out so quickly, and everyone has just moved on to the next thing. I think people have a huge amount of opportunities now because of the streaming services, because of social media. I think it's so much easier to get your music out. You don't have to pay for studio time now. You can make really top-level music in your bedroom, in your garage, wherever it might be, which can be released. There is nothing wrong with it. I think you need to be smart about when you do that and just think about, is now the time to do it or do you need to stockpile a few more songs? Be ready, have the look, have made a little video, whatever it might be, because everyone judges you as soon as you release something. If you suddenly are getting views and you can't back it up with anything else, or streams, then everyone forgets you.

Is the money now in touring in a way that it wasn't say 20 years ago? I remember reading about Live Nation and the growth of that, how they realised

that the majority of the money to be made with their artists is via touring. I'll pay £200 to see Madonna or someone maybe like Katy Perry, who you look after, but I'll pay nothing to watch her video on YouTube, and I imagine she'll get not 0.01p for me to listen to one of her tracks on Spotify.

I'm not an expert on the economics of streaming, but certainly if you have high streaming numbers, there's plenty of money there now, and no doubt the record companies and the trade associations are going to continue to negotiate those deals so that artists are properly recompensed for the money that is made. Because if enough of the world are paying £10 a month or whatever the number is to have a streaming service subscription, that adds up to a lot of money. Touring is a very immediate way of making money, because you literally play the show and the money is yours. Apart from the money that you've spent, you get accounted to very, very quickly. Live Nation obviously has been a huge growth story. Some of that growth is by just everyone working harder and doing more shows, but a large part of it is also because they've bought so many promoters. So when you make the company bigger and bigger and bigger, of course, you're going to generate more and more money. That would be the plan. I think touring, there's a little bit of... it's not 100 percent true that all the money is in touring because there's a lot of money spent in touring as well. I think the expectation at the top level is that you have to have a bigger and a bigger and a bigger show. Pink flies and does her amazing aerial stunts, and the circus tour and all of the stuff she does. You go, "Okay, well, so what are you going to do next?" And people turn up expecting to see some Cirque du Soleil kind of event – which, keep in mind, every day has to be packed up. You've got tours out there that have got 48 trucks on the road, and then you've got all of the buses full of the personnel. You're taking a small village on tour with you, and that costs a lot of money. Sometimes you can't just look at the growth. You've got to actually understand how much the show cost to put on. There are shows that cost £5 million just before they hit the road with the build of the stage set and the cost of the rehearsals. Those dance numbers take a long time to get right. If you've got 20 dancers, they've got to be rehearsed, and they've got to be rehearsed, and they've got to be rehearsed.

I am available at short notice if a few dancers don't turn up.

I'm excited to see you! I'll be there. The first gig for you, I'll be there! So I think touring definitely is a way of making money. Sometimes it's maybe not the way of making as much money as people think they should make, but how much money should you make? It's an interesting question, isn't it? We're very lucky that, when we work in media and entertainment, in the music business, there's a lot of people that make a lot of money. Sometimes a lot more than other people do, who arguably have more crucial jobs. Having said that, if you're pulling the people into the gig, you deserve to be paid. If everybody is listening to your music, you deserve to be paid.

Tell us about a journey that you go through with a client. For example, I know that you helped develop Florence + The Machine from bars to festival headliners. How does that work? How did you meet someone like Florence Welch, and is that a big part of your job, taking them through that journey and developing them?

Yes, there's nothing better than being involved with an artist from very early days and then seeing them headline Glastonbury or headline Hyde Park or headline Werchter or whatever the festival or event is. Frankly it's ... even when they headline their first London show to 300 people, it's still a buzz. It really is still a buzz. I suppose we're constantly looking for new talent, and we're very lucky as a company. We've worked very hard, and we have a great roster of clients already, so we can't take on everybody that approaches us. A lot of the time, we approach people. You know, we've heard them, you hear something on a streaming service. A lawyer says something to you. You hear it and you go, "This is really good. This is really interesting."

You're not scouring YouTube every day for what's up and coming.

Sometimes, but I would say not so much. There's not enough hours in the day, honestly. And the A&R guys at the labels and some of the managers are obviously getting involved very early. That's not to say... there are artists that we've signed before record labels and before management companies, but still, they're important to us. They really are. I think when we take on artists, you want to know who the team is that you're going to be working with. We can be really good at what we do, but if everyone else isn't quite as strong, it's much harder. It's much harder to get the end result. So you want to put your money on something that you think has got the best possible chance of winning, because it takes the same amount of effort to work on an act with a poor team around it as with a good. I have some horses in training, and it costs the same amount of money for me to train a bad horse as it does a good horse. It's the same kind of logic that you want to be able to invest your time and your effort into the best possible people that you can. Then it's a fantastic journey because you really get to know people. When you're starting out, there aren't security people around you. There might be a tour manager, but occasionally, I'll give someone a lift home in my car from a gig or whatever it might be, so those are the times where you really get to know them. You might get to know their parents or their siblings or their boyfriend or their girlfriend, and it becomes part of the family, which is fantastic. There is no greater buzz than seeing a person who started out when they're relatively young – or even if they're not relatively young, frankly – but they're starting, they're enthusiastic, they've got a dream, and to be part of the team that makes that dream a reality. That's a buzz you can't buy. You really can't.

Do you ever get a gut feeling as to how long a band is going to be in the limelight that you think, "Well, these guys are going to be massive for a few years and then they might fade out"? Because it seems to me as a punter that it is a bit random sometimes. You've got the very long-standing artists that have been around for ages and always will be, and then there's bands that I was into for a year or two and then I very rarely listen to now and they seem to have disappeared off the radar. Do you see that in terms of... because you've been in this game a long time. Do you see that, where you might book them Wembley Stadium one year, and then five years later it might be Wembley Arena, and you can see that they're starting to... even though they're selective and they've got dedicated funds, they're nowhere near as economically impactful as they used to be.

Absolutely. Yes, you can see. I think there are some artists that just... it's a little bit like fashion. If you can buy a classic trench coat or a classic black skirt or a dinner jacket or whatever it might be, and that you know you can keep that in your wardrobe forever, it's not going to go out of fashion. Yes, the lapel might get bigger, but actually if you've bought a good one, you've got no problems. And then you might have bought a neon pair of leg warmers that literally were great for three months and then you're like...

I still look great in them now, as you can see.

They do suit you, I've got to say, and the headband is nice too! But I think music can be like that as well. If you have a clue about it, then yes. There are certain artists that I would take a much more 'slowly, slowly' approach with. They are your classy, 'in your wardrobe forever' kind of artist that you know the road is never completely straight, and it's very, very rare that any artist is continually on an upward trajectory. It's just impossible. Sometimes you just hope that you can plateau out at a level that's acceptable to everybody and that makes money and is good for a lifetime of a career. There are other acts where you go, "This is..." Gimmicky would be too harsh, but, "This is a fashion thing, and it's hard to see it's going to last beyond two or three years. Therefore, let's try and maximise the revenues for these guys now." So if you get asked to headline the Reading Festival, take that opportunity now because it might not be there in two or three years' time. Whereas for another artist, you might go, "You know what? Just wait, because you'll have more material, it'll have more impact, if you do it in a little while." So yes, some of that again comes down I think to knowing your stuff, knowing when to push the button. It's hard telling people to say no to money. It really is.

Last couple of questions then. What's the best thing about your job and what's the worst thing?

Sometimes they're the same thing, aren't they?!

I agree.

The best thing about my job, there's lots of best things about it. Being part of a process with incredibly talented people who can do stuff that there's no chance I could ever do is an honour and a privilege. Putting together tours when it works and it works big, there's nothing like the buzz that you get off that. Getting a thank you from the stage occasionally is a really heartfelt thing, because when you're on that stage, there's a million things going through your mind, and the fact that they've remembered their booking agent or their sound man or whatever, is very special. Being involved from the conception of an idea to seeing it through is really special. I suppose the downside is modern technology and how it's taken over our world, I think. It's the fact that the little bleeping lights on your phone, your emails, it's the constant bombardment. It's everybody having no patience. It's people sending you an email at 11pm on a Friday night and then chasing you on it on a Sunday and you go, "Seriously?" It's disrespectful. It really is disrespectful, I think, to humans, and we all need to have a bit more human time. It's an interesting thing. I read lots about four-day weeks, finishing at 3pm, all this stuff. I don't see how I could do my job if I

did any of those things. I'd just have to give up some of my clients, because it just physically takes hours to do it. And I don't begrudge it for a minute because I love it, but occasionally I would like to be able to go, "Okay. Can we have an amnesty?" I've been talking to a few people about us having an August amnesty, where for a week everyone just stopped.

That's what happens in August anyway, basically, isn't it?

But it doesn't, you see? It does in Italy. In Italy, they just stop. We don't just stop. Because the American holiday time is different to the UK holiday time, their holidays are more June, early July generally, which is busy for us, that's a busy time. European holidays are primarily July and August. It means that by the time August comes, the Americans are freaking out that you haven't done something. You're like, "But France are on holiday. Italy are on holiday."

We're all caught up in it though because I'm as guilty as everyone else. I want an amnesty; people chase me all the time. But when I actually truly reflect on these things, I also expect people to get back to me quickly. I agree with you. It's rank hypocrisy on my part there. But anyway...

Oh, and mine, don't worry!

I do agree with you. Gandhi once famously said, "There's more to life than merely increasing its speed." And I think he's right there.

Good one.

Last question then. What advice would you give to someone starting out that wants to be the next you?

Oh, be available 24/7! What would I say? I think you have to be prepared to work really hard. You have to do whatever is asked of you. Don't think you're too good for something, because you're not. I still pick up litter off the floor. A couple of years ago, the shower in our office building flooded, and I was there getting that dealt with. It has nothing to do with my job really.

It's not all champagne and skittles.

It's not all champagne. It's not all caviar. It's about getting your hands dirty. It's about being honest. I think if you can be honest and have a vision, understand you're dealing with human beings, have empathy. When promoters lose money, that's painful. That's their bonus. Sometimes that's their house, depending on who it is. So I think you need to be empathetic in this business, because you can win big but you can lose really big as well. When it comes down to it, you have to just get a foot in the door. There's a huge amount of people that want to be in this business – some for the right reasons, some for the wrong reasons. Not everyone is going to get the job that they want. That's life. I think to be the next me, you have to be lucky, and then you have to make some of your own luck as well.

Emma, it's been a hugely enjoyable conversation. Thank you for your time.
Thank you for having me.