

Millionaire rock stars launch performers' union

Millionaire rock stars are clubbing together to launch a union to protect their interests from the threats of illegal downloading and the flux of record labels.

By Aislinn Simpson

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Robbie Williams, Radiohead, the Kaiser Chiefs, Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour, Craig David, Iron Maiden, Billy Bragg and The Verve are said to be among the artists planning to join the Featured Artists' Coalition, which will be launched at the In The City music industry conference in Manchester.

It will have an independent chairman with six artists, three managers and representatives from the Musicians' Union and Equity, and a six-point manifesto which will include policies on fair compensation for musicians after deals between labels and technology companies, and a "use it or lose it" approach to copyright which prevents labels sitting on unreleased recordings.

The union will act as a single voice for all artists, dealing with the government as well as record labels and digital distributors.

Damon Gough, of Badly Drawn Boy, said that newcomers to the music industry would also be able to benefit from the experience of other members.

"I think with the digital age and record companies dispersing and disbanding, young bands need a governing voice that will support them and help protect their work," he said.

Brian Message, the co-manager of Radiohead, which left its record label EMI after wranglings over copyright and later

released *In Rainbows* as a "pay what you can" download, said new artists could also share their experience of building up online fanbases and promoting their own concerts on the internet.

The band's guitarist Ed O'Brien said joining the union was a "no brainer". "We believe all musicians and artists should be signing up," he said.

Jazz Summers, the manager of The Verve, said that record labels, managers, publishers and live promoters, all had groups representing their interests.

"This is not about bashing record labels," he said. "But it is about recognising that the interests of the record label and the artist are not always aligned."

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