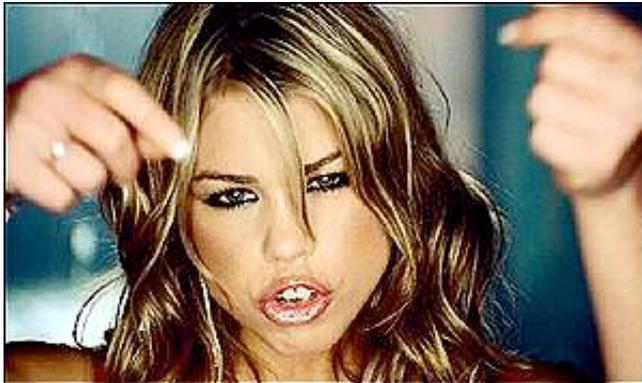




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Music 'at a price'



Billie: UK writer Pam Sheyne pens her hits

The director general of British Music Rights tells BBC News Online why she believes music-swapping sites threaten songwriters' livelihoods.

Every time a Britney Spears or Billie Piper hit is played on the radio someone somewhere is earning a living.

The stars' earnings are guaranteed by record companies, but behind them is the unheralded songwriter who relies on the royalties paid after each airplay for their livelihood.

Frances Lowe, director general of British Music Rights (BMR), feels free music services on the net such as Napster threaten their future as well as that of the stars, because without royalties composers simply do not earn a living.

The group has launched a campaign, Respect The Value Of Music, to highlight this issue.

"The songwriter has not really been heard in this debate," she said.

"New technology is going to provide fantastic opportunities for composers but at some point we need to ensure that the web sites pay for licences and ensure the music is available legally."

Free music web sites often do not pay a penny

“
These new technologies must give a value to music and reward the songwriters
”

Frances Lowe

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to the songwriters, said Ms Lowe.

She added: "The fact there are so many sites out there could mean a culture of free music develops that could be pernicious in the long term."

Websites such as Napster allow internet users to swap music files - stored in a format called MP3 - without owning the original CD.

Virtual record collection

Users are able to build up a virtual record collection of albums and songs without spending a penny on CDs.

But thousands of songwriters depend on royalties from the sales of CDs - as well as royalties from radio airplay and performance rights - to make their living.

"We want the general public to understand what it means to be a composer," said Ms Lowe.

"The message of our campaign is that these new technologies must give a value to music and reward the songwriters."

“
This is not a sweeping statement that all web sites are bad
”

Frances Lowe

"There are many writers who the public are not familiar with but they are writing songs for very well known performers," she explained.

For example, both Billie Piper and Christina Aguilera's hits are written by UK composer Pam Sheyne.

But Ms Lowe said BMR was not opposed to music websites in general.

"There are plenty of good sites who have made arrangements [with songwriters].

"This is not a sweeping statement that all web sites are bad.

"We are looking for responsibility - their success should be shared with the composers."

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