

**Irish Pop Music in a Global Context.**

**By**

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# *Introduction*

There are a number of reasons that motivate the undertaking of research on the topic of the music section of the culture industry in its present form. In Ireland today it is very hard for people not to have heard of some of the bands, which are going to be examined in this thesis because we hear so much about them in the media and because they are Irish we are expected to be proud of them. In a way its like supporting the national football team no one who knows anything about football likes their style of play but they feel that they are representing Ireland so it is their duty to support them. The same can be said about the treatment many of these bands receive in the Irish media people are afraid to question them because they are Irish and we should criticise our own. As this thesis will show, not only is there very little unique about these bands, also there is very little Irish about them unlike many of the other internationally successful Irish music groups before them who in some way drew creatively from their Irishness, the music examined here could have been produced by anyone, anywhere. Another reason motivating this research is the opportunity to look at an early neo-Marxist theory in an age when many believe that Marxism and Socialist theories are things that should be consigned to history along with the cold war. A further reason is that this early neo-Marxist theory on the culture industry has never been more relevant in attempting to explain the music section of the culture industry as it is today. As will be examined in this thesis, the Irish music industry is very much part of the Global culture industry. So this thesis in examining the music industry as part of the culture industry will try and show that the neo-Marxist theory that it uses in its theoretical framework is as relevant if not more relevant today.

This thesis will use as its theoretical framework the writings of the Frankfurt School especially those of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who wrote about the culture industry in their work entitled *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In this work Horkheimer and Adorno set out the case that the culture industry produces for mass consumption and not only does it do this, but it also makes a significant contribution to the determination of that consumption. They believe that both the consumer and the producer have no sovereignty because the culture industry has become fully integrated into capitalism. This means that the goals of the culture industry are the same as any other capitalist industry, to produce goods that are profitable and consumable and like any other capitalist industry it operates to ensure its own reproduction.

The theory of the culture industry as first elaborated in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, has often been interpreted as a deeply pessimistic intellectual response by two men who are seen as cultural elitists. Many see this work as a reaction to their forced move from a traditional European culture to one based entirely on commercial principles. As this thesis will show, this may have been the case in the 1930's and 1940's, but today the World's economy is set up around a global capitalist system and the culture industry is very much part of this system, making Adorno and Horkheimer's theory so relevant today. Other critics feel that Adorno and Horkheimer overemphasized the power of the culture industry and dominant ideology and in doing so ignored its weaknesses and the way people have resisted and obstructed such conditioning. This may have been true at the time in which the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was published but it is not the case today, as will be seen throughout this

thesis, the music industry section of the culture industry is very much tied into a global capitalist system, there exists only a few recording companies worldwide and they all form part of even larger multi-national companies.

Ireland has always had a very rich music tradition that it is quite rightly very proud of, and this music has also always been part of the capitalist system of production and distribution. The music industry in Ireland since the 1950's, when music all around the world changed with the advent of rock and popular music, has seen many changes and developments. During the 1950's and 1960's Irish popular musicians and bands were mainly involved in the show bands, which performed the popular songs of the day at dances in halls all over the country. During the 1970's Irish music again changed combining influences from both Ireland and abroad in their music, an example of such a band were the popular early 1970's group *Planxty* who's music was a combination of traditional Irish music and rock. The mid to late 1970's were to see the development of rock groups in Ireland, which were not in the production of their music overly influenced by traditional Irish music. Internationally successful groups such as *Thin Lizzy*, *The Boomtown Rats* and *U2* all were formed in this period. The Irish popular music scene of the 1980's was to be dominated by *U2* who were to become by the end of that decade one of the most commercially successful groups in the World.

The Irish popular music scene in the 1990's again was to take on board influences from abroad, this time in the form of the boy band. The boy band era started to take off in the late 1980's with the success of the American group *New Kids On The Block*, who were

soon followed by the English group *Take That*. The boy band has a very set formula for success they usually consist of five males in their late teens to early twenties who perform love songs and catchy dance tunes, as a rule they do not play any instruments and while on stage they perform carefully choreographed dances. The boy band also has a very fixed market for their product- teenage girls. The boy band era in Ireland started in the Autumn of 1993 when after auditioning 300 young hopefuls, the original line up of *Boyzone* was found and within six months they had their first hit on their hands. Louis Walsh a small time but very talented and ambitious music manager had observed the rise and fall of *New Kids On The Block*, followed by the success of *Take That*. Walsh carefully studied both groups, he learned how they were put together, the type of music they performed, and the image they portrayed, and he soon became convinced that a similar style band could be created here in Ireland. Walsh went on to form *Boyzone* one of the most successful boy bands to date. In the past year he has again formed another successful boy band in *Westlife*. The late 1990's have seen the formation of a number of boy bands in Ireland hoping to be as successful as *Boyzone*. The last few years have also seen girls getting in on the act in Ireland in the hope that they will have some of the success of the *Spice Girls* from England.

This thesis will first give a review of the literature. In this review we will see that a large amount of very interesting work has already been carried out on the structure of the music industry. Yet, little research has been done on the whole Boy/Girl band phenomenon and how it can be related to the culture industry as described by Adorno and Horkheimer in their work carried out in the 1940's. As already outlined, this thesis will



use, as it's theoretical framework the writings of the Frankfurt School concentrating mainly on Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The methodology of the thesis will set out the methods used to gather the data needed to resolve the research problem and will explain how this data is going to be presented. The data will be presented in the form of a case study into a number of different Irish Boy and Girl bands. In the case study we will see what it takes to be a successful boy or girl band. After the case studies have been presented the thesis will move on to an in-depth discussion on the findings of the case studies. The discussion chapter will also examine a number of reasons why these clearly manufactured bands are so popular today. The thesis will then conclude its argument that the work of Horkheimer and Adorno is just as relevant if not more so today than it was in the 1940's. The reason for this, as this thesis will try to outline is that the performers of this music have found themselves becoming fully integrated into the global capitalist system that the music industry is a part off.

# *Review of Literature*

Brian Longhurst's book *Popular Music and Society* contains a chapter entitled "The Pop Music Industry", which examines the structure of the pop music industry. He informs us that the popular music industry is dominated by six companies: EMI Music, Polygram, Sony Music Entertainment, Warner Music International, BMG Music Group and MCA, who produce over 70 per cent of recorded pop music. We are also informed that these companies are all part of other larger companies. "The picture which emerges clearly from this brief characterization is of the dominance of the music industry by six firms which are parts of larger, or parent, companies with a wide range of commercial interests. The music industry is therefore concentrated and dominated by conglomerates."

(Longhurst, 1995:30). Longhurst goes on to assert that these conglomerates have a wide range of interests but they mainly focus on the media field. He believes this process occurs for two reasons, first many of the conglomerates activities complement each other and secondly activities in one area can cushion less profitable activities in another area.

Keith Negus in his book *Popular Music in Theory: An Introduction* starts by examining the music industry. He writes about the work of Adorno and Horkheimer in which he says that they believed that "all products were made and distributed according to rationalized organizational procedures and for the purpose of profit maximization."

(Negus, 1996:37). He also examines the relationship between the independent record companies and the major ones, he tells us that there is much evidence to suggest that many of these independent companies have made a significant contribution to the production and distribution of many types of new music. Music he feels that may not

have broken through due to the conservatism of the major corporations. Negus also points out that there is a relationship between many of the independent companies and the major corporations. "Instead of a binary opposition between indies and majors, I have argued that it might be better to recast these distinctions in terms of a 'web of major and minor companies' within which majors are 'split into semi-autonomous working groups and label divisions, and minor companies connected to these by complex patterns of ownership, investment, licensing, formal and informal and sometimes deliberately obscured relationships.'" (Negus , 1996:44). He also discusses the problem faced by record companies in that the length of time between an artist signing a recording contract and the recording being released can be anything between six months and two years. The record companies also know that not only are the shareholders watching them but also the key opinion formers such as D.J.'s and journalists as well as successful artists who may be considering signing a new contract with that company.

" Faced with these dilemmas, companies strategically establish a series of aesthetic and commercial hierarchies. Potentially commercial music is ordered and certain categories of music are prioritized over others." ( Negus, 1996:49).

Negus considers how the print, radio and television media comes in between and influences the production and consumption of popular music he also looks at those in the record company who come between production and consumption. He believes that the concept of the gatekeeper is helpful for explaining how music business personnel control access to resources such as finance, recording facilities, tours and venues. Negus also considers the issue of " The domination of the image?" He tells us that as the video

became part of the day-to-day production and promotion of popular music during the 1980's many believed that the video trivialized music. For many "The construction of an image had become more important than the production of sound and the ability of the listener to imagine their own image had been colonized and replaced by the promotional mechanisms of the industry." (Negus, 1996:87). Negus goes on to examine another area where the music industry has behaved like any other industry in a capitalist society, that is the large entertainment megastores such as Virgin and HMV have expanded both the size and number of their stores. This has meant that they are now taking an ever-increasing share of the recorded music retail market, causing many of the small specialist record shops to go out of business. They also have had another effect; "Megastores retailers have influenced record company catalogues by restricting space for newer and less easily classifiable music. Together with the formatting strategies of radio station, this has contributed to a reduction in the risks record companies are prepared to take with new and unusual artists." (Negus, 1996: 96).

Roy Shuker in his work *Understanding Popular Music* also examines the music industry. He starts by informing us that the music industry is big business, an international multi-billion dollar enterprise. He then goes on to list "telephone numbers" for worldwide music industry sale to prove his point. Shuker tells us that the music industry is made up of the activities of a group of major international companies below, which are the lower tiers of independents. He tells us that the independents are in fact, in many cases, dependent on the major companies for distribution and that quite often they act as what he calls "form teams", finding and developing new talent for them. Shuker also tells us

that the international record industry is dominated by the six “majors”. He also tells us that each is part of a larger communications or electronics conglomerate.

Shuker work also looks at the nature of music making, and the relative status of those who make music, the musicians. He tells us that according to most biographies, the career trajectory of rock musicians still involves skill and hard work along with a certain amount of luck. We are also informed that there are very few formal study or apprenticeships programmes for the aspiring rock musician. Learning the skills needed to be a musician takes time and perseverance along with having inclination and talent. “There is also the need for financial investment, particularly with genres like heavy metal, which emphasise amplification and visual high-tech. In 1988 the leader of a still struggling and unsigned band mentioned to Weinstein that the band was financed by the \$30,000 that his parents had saved for his college education!” (Shuker, 1994: 103).

Shuker also examines the music video; we are told that there is an interaction of context and consumption, which must be seen as the determinant of the cultural meaning of the music video. He sees the music video as both an industrial, commercial product and a cultural form. In the late 1980’s so we are told, the music video became an essential aspect of the music industry promotional strategy. Just about every single released, by both majors and independent record companies alike used a video. He goes on to quote some commentators who believe that a record companies commitment to a band could quite often be measured by the quality of the video. Shuker also considers who views the video; “While the audience for music video is predominantly a youth audience, it is a

segmented one. The largest group of MTV viewers are 18-34 years old; the viewers of broadcast TV's MV shows are divided roughly between a teenage audience for top 20 based programmes, and an older group (16-17 plus) watching programmes tied to 'alternative' and less 'mainstream pop' genres, such as heavy metal." ( Shuker, 1994:194). Shuker also examines the fact that violent, sexist and sexual imagery evident in many videos is a source of concern for many commentators.

Robert Burnett's *The Global Jukebox: The international music industry* examines the global entertainment industry he starts by pointing out the fact that all the major recording companies are all global organizations, which have taken on board the whole globalisation concept. He tells us that the music industry is a very important link in the globalisation process of these firms as nothing crosses borders and cultural boundaries easier than music. Burnett also writes about how the music industry is now part of the highly concentrated structure of different media sectors. One of the main reasons behind this process of concentration according to Burnett is the desire to hold control over the market in its present formation as well as to be in a position to exploit its future possibilities. He also outlines the fact that it reduces risk by spreading it across a broad range of areas. He also has another interesting argument; " It can also facilitate highly profitable production strategies in that an organization that controls, or has access to, a range of different types of media and forms of cultural production and distribution, can cross markets or at least negotiate a portion of a single media product." ( Burnett, 1996:17). He uses the example that both films and music have "spin off" effects on each

other to illustrate his point; he says that audiences who have seen a film may then go and buy the soundtrack.

Burnett also discusses the synergy that can be achieved by these media companies.

Synergy he tells us, is when the coordination of all the parts of a company actually turns out to be worth more than the sum of these parts working alone. “Hence we have witnessed the tremendous growth of the ‘blockbuster’ where a book becomes a movie with the obligatory soundtrack album featuring music videos by major artists where glimpses of the film are prominently exposed (Whitney Houston’s song and video, ‘I Will Always Love You’, from the soundtrack album of the movie, *The Bodyguard*, is a prime example).” (Burnett 1996:23). Burnett also discusses the fact that the music industry has found its average investment in a recording by a new or non-established artists has risen significantly, this is a major reason why record companies will not take too many risks on signing artists.

Burnett also discusses the problems that may arise between record companies and their artists. He writes about the court case of George Michael (aka Giorgios Ponayiotou) against Sony Music entertainment. “The suit complains that under Michael’s eight-album, fifteen-year deal, Sony not only lacks any obligation to release recordings it concludes are artistically or commercially unacceptable, it can also stop him from recording for anyone else.” (Burnett, 1996:27). Burnett goes on to quote Michael as saying that Sony had treated him as “Little more than software”. Burnett also gives another example of an artist having trouble with his record company; “The latest



superstar to challenge the transnationals is the Symbol, formerly known as Prince. The Symbol wants out of his recording contract with Warner Music and has recently been seen performing live and on video with the word 'slave' written on his face, slave referring to the Symbol's position in his relationship to his master, Warner Music." (Burnett, 1996:28).

Burnett also examines how popular music presents itself. He tells us that for many people the most important aspect of popular music is commercialization, the goal of business is to achieve the most profits and the music business is no different. So when we talk about popular music, we speak of music that is commercially oriented. "In order to maximize one's profit one must achieve the greatest possible number of consumers. Record companies, musicians and radio stations are painfully aware of this fact and subsequently often try to orient their product so as to please as many as possible and thus maximize profit." (Burnett, 1996:35). So for the music industry popular music is made up of whatever musical styles sell sufficient numbers to be deemed successful.

Burnett's work also informs us that popular music consumption in itself comprises an entire system that includes consumers and gatekeepers. Gatekeepers we are told, are the people who make the key decisions about whether or not to select certain materials for production and distribution. Among the gatekeepers are radio stations, television, films, advertising, newspapers and the music press. Burnett also tells us that the efforts of the producer firms are mediated by these various gatekeepers, as they have a major influence over the market. "The market refers to the audience as it is identified and conceptualized

by financial decision makers within the popular culture industry. The market is what is considered when firms decide if the profit margin realized will justify the production, distribution and promotion of a record. The ways in which the transnationals view the audience directly influence what will be produced.” (Burnett, 1996:82).

Eamon Shackleton in a presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Culture, Heritage and Irish Language on 24 March 1998 on behalf of the Irish Music Royalties Organisation (IMRO) puts the structure of the international music industry in an Irish context. IMRO’s core function is the collection and distribution of royalties to its composer, songwriter and publisher members. Shackleton sets out some of the difficulties for musicians in the Irish music industry. “This lack of investment in new artists is regarded by many as a significant handicap to future development of the indigenous Irish music industry. It is argued that, with a small number of exceptions, potential internationally successful Irish acts will continue to have to look to either the UK or the US for record contracts. It should be added that the dominance of world markets by Anglo-American music and artists is reinforced by the way in which the American and British sales charts largely determine the local policies of record companies.” (Shackleton, 1998). He also informs us that the arrival of multinational retailers has had a mixed impact on the indigenous music industry but new acts are finding it hard to get shelf space in these large retail stores. Shackleton points out another impact of the commercial strategies built around synergy used by the multinationals; “The process of driving European music consumption towards the level of lowest common denominator has the effect of reducing the diversity of cultural goods in circulation by virtue of the

multifaceted interests of those organizations involved in the music industry.”

(Shackleton, 1998). He believes that in order to counter this globalisation of music, it is essential to provide indigenous record companies and publishers with opportunities to bring local music to the attention of the population in general. This he feels can only be done by giving support and encouragement in the areas of education and training and through the provision of grants. This would provide the skills and capital needed to develop creatively.

*The Irish Times* of 21 August 1998 carries an article written by Brian Boyd entitled “Accountants cut off music power supply”. In this article he argues that the “money men” as he calls them, have edged out “the creatives”. He sees this happening, as the record industry becomes part of a larger media industry in general. He believes the new management in these record companies have stopped taking risks. He goes on to argue that it is debatable if a band like *U2* would be signed in today’s climate of caution, he bases this claim on the fact that *U2*’s record company had to invest in them for a number of years even though they weren’t showing signs of a major breakthrough. Boyd feels that for the recording industry to survive they must stop investing in identical sounding music and become more adventurous and invest over the long term. As he says today’s uncommercial music is tomorrow’s mainstream music.

*The Irish Times* of 24 January 2000 carries an article from the Reuters news agency entitled “EMI, Warner make \$20bn beautiful merger together”. In this article we are informed that Britain’s EMI and Time Warner’s music arm are set to merge, creating the

world's biggest record company. The article tells us that EMI confirmed the plan, saying it opened up the possibility of creating the world's leading music group and enhancing shareholder value. We are also told in the article that the deal will create sales of over \$8 billion a year as well as bringing together a number of well-known record labels, including Virgin, Atlantic, WEA and HMV.

*The Guardian* of 28 January 2000 carries an article written by Adam Sweeting entitled "Riding the gravy train". In this article he examines some of the implications for the artists signed to all the labels affected by the above merger. Quoting one insider as saying that the marketing departments have become far more important than the A&R departments. Sweeting also points out that many top executives in the recording industry are over estimating the internet as the future of the industry, forgetting that it is built on music and musicians. The article goes on to quote Tony Bennett as saying that artists are no longer allowed to "get bad before they get good". Sweeting goes on to say, "While mega-mergers may be good for the handful of global super-acts, such as your Mariah Careys, Celine Dions and Alanis Morrissettes, who are probably major shareholders, they offer only a shortcut back to the supermarket checkout for bands who would once have been given the luxury of a few years and several albums to find their creative bearings." (Sweeting:2000).

Kevin Courtney in an article for *The Irish Times* of 12 March 1999 entitled "Big music labels push independents off the stage", informs his readers that while the demand for Irish bands is great they will only succeed if they get financial backing from a major

label. The reasoning behind this statement comes from the takeover of Polygram by the Canadian drinks conglomerate, Seagram. He tells us that this move has seen the closure of A&M, one of the labels owned by Polygram. Courtney also writes about the effect this takeover will have on older labels in the Polygram group; "Polygram is now being merged with Seagram's other acquisition, Universal Music, and Universal is now the collective name under which labels such as Geffen, Motown, Mercury, Island and MCA will operate." (Courtney, 1999). Courtney goes on to talk about the role of independents in the music industry, he tells us that they, "are the spawning-ground of tomorrow's pop stars, but are finding it tough to stay afloat among the multinational leviathans. Many so-called "indie" labels are merely subsidiaries of majors, with little power to make their own decisions or control their artists' destinies." (Courtney, 1999). Many of the Irish labels will take on artists with a view to passing them on to the parent company abroad. Courtney cites the example of Louis Walsh bringing his new protégées, *Westlife* to BMG Ireland, Freddie Middleton; managing director of BMG Ireland brought them to the attention of his British counterparts.

In an article found in *The Irish Times* of 17 March 2000 entitled "Hitting the road", Ed Power wonders if the new label, Road Records can shake up the independent music scene. Power starts by looking at Dublin as a reason why there are so few independent labels in Ireland. "Contrast the unyielding obsession with chart rankings, bum-on-seat and unit-shifting potential exhibited by the capital's music industry *cognoscenti* (Can you imagine any other city being so *proud* of Boyzone?) with the bustling underground scenes that prosper in other supposedly peripheral population centers of similar size, such

as Glasgow-home to rock innovators *Chemikal Underground*.” (Power, 2000). The label’s owner Dave Kennedy, according to Power, hopes to provide a shop window for unsigned bands. Power goes on to tell us that the label will not produce any CD singles but will produce seven-inch vinyl single, which are much cheaper and should help people to experiment by buying these singles seeing as they will only cost £2.50 as compared to £4.50 for a CD single.

On 1 July 1999 *The Irish Times* had in it an article entitled “Peter Pan of pop” in which Eileen Battersby interviewed Louis Walsh. In this article Battersby tells us that “Walsh is not trying to influence mankind; he merely wants to have a say in the music bought by the discerning 16 to 25-years-old age group.” (Battersby, 1999). In this article Walsh tells Battersby that boy bands have a shelf life of about three to five years, he also tells her that it is about more than music or whether they can sing or not, looks to him are terribly important. He goes on to say that stylists play a huge part in the making of any boy band. For him his main role as manager is keeping the “product” as he describes *Boyzone*, in the public eye. This is done by talking to the press and ensuring that the radio stations provide airtime. He believes that you have to be constantly pushing because the market is so competitive. Walsh also talks about another role he has to play in the band that of keeping discipline and Battersby quotes him as saying; “The boys have always known, do drugs and you’re out. I think they are well behaved.” (Battersby, 1999). Battersby also discusses the fact that he is planning to repeat the *Boyzone* formula by recruiting a number of individuals and forming a band which to her seems so much more cynical than a band emerging from a group of young fellows getting together in a garage and trying to

make it big. “The observation returns Walsh to his earlier comment about the packaging of a group as a product and the importance placed on looks. His stance is simply that he is supplying a commodity for which the demand is limitless.” (Battersby, 1999).

Conor Lally writing an article entitled “Boy blues” for *The Sunday Times* of 18 April 1999 tells his readers that boy bands who were expected to follow in *Boyzone*'s wake found that nothing can be taken for granted in the music industry. He tells us of an act that did not make it *OTT*. They “are just one group that started well but were dropped by their record label and fell out with their management via mediocre chart success.” (Lally, 1999). Lally in this article also tells how they hit the headlines when they were called on to cancel their tour of East Timor. At the time their manager Michael O'Connor said, according to Lally, “ ‘I'm just trying to make a success out of *OTT* and don't want to jeopardize their career by getting into politics.’ He added that at a later stage, when the band was successful ‘we may be in a position to make a stand.’” (Lally, 1999). As Lally goes on to tell us the band never made it to that position, because “Sony Music and Epic Records, the labels who signed *OTT*, made their apologies and dropped the group after their indifferent chart showing made it painfully obvious that they were never going to make any real money.” (Lally, 1999).

Nick Webb in an article for *The Sunday Times* of 11 April 1999 entitled “ Making them sing for their money”, asks the question are the Irish pop bands that seem to be dominating the UK-charts these days, making money? He tells us that *Boyzone* may have sold 12 million albums worldwide along with a large number of hit singles but it has been

suggested that the band is only worth between £7 and £10 million. He goes on to tell the readers that many of these groups sign endorsement deals with companies such as *Boyzone* with Pepsi. Webb also states that “despite their record breaking four number ones singles it is considered extremely unlikely that *B\*Witched* are coining it in. Details of their contracts are a tightly held secret, and it is speculated that the four-piece group is paid a salary.” (Webb, 1999). He goes on to state that it has been suggested by industry sources that this salary may be as little as £50,000 per annum. Webb tells us that their manager and producer Roy Hedges is doing quite well out of their success, “The structure of the *B\*Witched* deal sees Hedges, who has been involved with a number of boy and girl bands, benefit from a number of income sources. As a manager he is entitled to a 20% cut of the band’s income, he also produces and writes most of their material. Hedges also runs Glow Worm records, the band’s intermediary record company. *B\*Witched* are licensed out to Sony music by Glow Worm management.” (Webb, 1999).

George Byrne in an article for the *Irish Independent* of 13 April 1999 called “you can’t sing, you can’t play, you’ll go a long way. Just don’t expect to get rich”, talks about how much is spent in launching an act. He quotes *Boyzone*’s manger Louis Walsh on all that has to be done “ ‘Everything has to be planned before the first record gets within an asses roar of the shops. Once you have your line-up, you’re straight into design consultants to sort out an image, then it’s voice coaches to improve technique, choreographers to sort out the stage act and top quality photographers to make the maximum impact’.” (Byrne, 1999) This is all done before the act enters the studio according to Walsh. According to him also, to break an act like *B\*Witched* costs up to £1 million.



Peter Murphy writing for the *Sunday Independent* on 5 May 1999 tells us in an article entitled “paddy pop plays on its fizz” that the celtic acts like *B\*Witched* and *Boyzone* owe more of their success to slick marketing and high cheekbones than the intrinsic charm of being Irish. According to Murphy many assert that with the advent of *B\*Witched*, *Westlife* and *Boyzone* our very nationality has become even more of a musical commodity than it was in the *U2* dominated eighties. Murphy sees it all in a different light, “if Irishness is an asset, it’s a perilously ephemeral one: the current Hiberno-hype relies largely on music that is culturally anonymous, sort of pop Esperanto. *Boyzone*, for instance, the frothy head on the Irish musical milkshake, have sustained their success not through material written by native songwriters, but covers of standards by the likes of Jim Steinman and *The Bee Gees*.” (Murphy, 1999).

Tony Clayton-Lea writing for *The Irish Times* of 12 November 1999 under the headline “Creativity the real victim of MTV’s market strategy” puts forward the argument that MTV might be big business, but it is killing real popular music. He bases this around the fact that he believes that MTV have introduced an ethic to the music industry that success is dependent upon how you look and how soulless your music is. He goes on to add that it employs a philosophy that has very little to do with genuine creativity and more to do with filling a market gap with as much “pap” as possible. “When Paul McCartney, arguably the best pop songwriter of the past 35 years, launched his new album on a stage in Cologne recently, he was asked by a member of the audience why his records weren’t played on radio or television. His succinct answer was that he was no longer 16 and

telegenic.” (Clayton-Lea, 1999). He concludes the article by stating that the future of pop music no longer belongs to the naïve hopeful with a vision. “It’s for an ever-growing band of back-slappers with stars in their eyes and dollar signs tattooed on the inside of their eyelids. When they sleep they don’t dream – they invest.” (Clayton-Lea, 1999).

Sara Cohen in a work entitled *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making* examines more “traditional” type of popular music bands involved in the music scene in Liverpool. In order to carry out her research Cohen lived in Liverpool for one year, from October 1985 to October 1986 her research focused upon cultural production in a local context, covering bands without record contracts that therefore functioned on the margins of the music industry. She starts by examining how the bands in her study were formed. She often found that many bands members were from the one area or had attended the same school or were in other bands, which came together. She points out that many of the bands existed because their members had left school early and with few qualifications, and Liverpool during the period of her study was quite economically depressed, so bands were seen as a way of passing the time and maybe, if they were lucky a way out of the poverty they lived in. The bands that did make it, did so because their members persisted at the music. “Unlike many young people living on the Wirral whose bands dissolved when they went to college or got married, members of *The Jactors* and *Crikey it's the Cromptons!* Progressed from band to band, gaining more experience with each and becoming gradually more committed and ambitious about their music-making, moving on to bands with fixed membership and name.” (Cohen, 1991; 27).

Cohen's work also looks at the different day-to-day aspects of keeping a band going. She first talks about how they have to hire rooms for rehearsing in, and how on the whole, these rooms were very run down. She then talks about instruments and equipment she tells us that bands generally spend a considerable amount of money on equipment. The amount they spent tended to vary according to the type of music played, which determined what instruments and equipment they needed. She also examines the issue of financial organization of the bands. Most of the bands in her study dealt with these matters in an informal manner trying to do so in a way, which would not effect how the band performed together.

Cohen tells us why she believes so many people struggle with the existence of trying to produce commercial music; "The struggle and hardship at the grass roots of the recording industry were overshadowed by huge profits and glamour at the top which enticed thousands of bands and conditioned much of their music-making activities." (Cohen, 1991: 103). She then goes on to tell how they go about getting this illusive deal. One of the main ways of getting it is to get a talent scout from a record label to come hear you play live this is often more effective than handing them tapes because they get a better feel of the band and its music.

Simon Frith in his work *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music* tells us that most contemporary popular music takes the form of song, and for most of us when asked say that a song means the words. Coming from this, according to Frith, "in examining what the words do mean we can follow two obvious strategies, treating songs either as poems,

literary objects which can be analyzed entirely separately from music, or as speech acts, words to be analyzed in performance.” (Frith, 1996; 158). Frith tells us that content analysis has consistently revealed that the pop song formula is dominated by a particular sort of romantic ideology. The pop song is a love song, which sticks to a certain formula that expresses current social mores and in doing so they give useful evidence as to how people regard love. In doing so the popular song expresses commonly held values of the people who buy them. Frith goes on to tell us that these songs can alternatively be, “contrast between the standard pop account of love and something else, something more real and complex and individual.” (Frith, 1996;161).

# *Theoretical Framework*

The Frankfurt School of social theory emerged from the Institute of Social Research, which was established at Frankfurt University in 1923. The institute was sponsored by Felix Weil, a wealthy businessman, it was the first Marxist-orientated research center to be affiliated major university. Its founding took place within the conditions produced by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the defeat of the Central European revolutions. It can in many ways be seen as a response by left wing intellectuals to the need to reappraise Marxist theory in the light of new circumstances in advanced capitalist and socialist societies; the rise of Stalinism and fascism, the growth of monopoly capital and the power of the modern media.

Tom Bottomore (1984) has divided the development of the Frankfurt School into four distinct periods. 1923-33: Under its first director, Carl Grumberg, the institute embarked on a series of empirical rather than theoretical research projects. 1933-50: Under its second director, Max Horkheimer, and his associates, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse and T.W. Adorno, the institute was to take a highly theoretical and philosophical direction in an attempt to develop an interdisciplinary social theory that would not only explain and criticize modern society but also help to transform it. 1950-70: The Frankfurt School along with critical theory came in this period to increasingly dominate radical thinking in Western Europe. It became very much associated with the new left, neo-Marxism and was seen as a major influence on the radical student movement of the 1960's. The 1970's onwards; This period was to see the decline of the Frankfurt School in terms of both its membership and theoretical influence. The School became increasingly pessimistic about the possibility of social revolution and also the revolutionary potential of the working

classes, they were also coming under increasing criticism from new developments in Marxist thought. The deaths of Adorno in 1969 and Horkheimer in 1973 meant the Frankfurt School had died in all but name.

The second period of the Frankfurt School is the one in which the theories I have used were developed. During this period the institutes members' writings were very much influenced by World events, which had a great effect on them personally. The rise of Nazism in Germany caused most of the leading members of the School, being both Jewish and Marxist, to flee abroad. The majority immigrated to America and here from 1934 to 1949 the institute was affiliated to Columbia University in New York City. It was from here that Adorno and Horkheimer published their work on the culture industry. Many believe in developing their theories on mass culture, which they later called the culture industry they were influenced by many events happening at this time. At this time there was the emergence of an entertainment industry, the growth of the mass media, the blatant manipulation of culture by the Nazis and other totalitarian regimes. These events along with the shock of immigration to America where they discovered all the glamour of film and record industries, all were factors that most likely influenced their writings on culture.

In their work they portray a society, which has lost its capacity to nourish true freedom and individuality. "Adorno and Horkheimer believe this loss results from the fact that cultural production has moved from an artisanal stage, to an industrial stage. For them, the modern culture industry produces safe, standardized products geared to the larger

demands of the capitalist economy. It does so by representing 'average' life for purposes of pure entertainment or distraction as seductively and realistically as possible." (During, 1993: 29). In their work they use the phrase 'pseudo-individuality' to refer to how the culture industry disseminated products that made claims to 'originality'.

The expression 'culture industry' was first used by Adorno and Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The term 'culture industry' replaced the concept of mass culture, which they had used in drafts of the work. They changed the term because they felt it was necessary to dispense with the concept of mass, or popular culture because they did not want a term agreeable to its advocates. "The culture industry produces for mass consumption and significantly contributes to the determination of that consumption. For people are now being treated as objects, machines, outside as well as inside the workshop. The consumer, as the producer, has no sovereignty. The culture industry, integrated into capitalism, in turn integrates consumers from above. Its goal is the production of goods that are profitable and consumable. It operates to ensure its own reproduction. The culture forms it propagates must, therefore, be compatible with this aim." (Held, 1980: 91). The essay on the culture industry in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* summarizes the major themes of Horkheimer and Adorno's separate and joint reflections on the nature of the culture industry.

According to them the main characteristics of the culture industry reflect the problem it faces. It has to both at once sustain interest and also ensure that the attention it attracts is insufficient to bring its products into disrepute. This means that commercial



entertainment must be attentive but passive, relaxed and uncritical reception, which it induces through the production of familiar cultural entities. Popular works, or a successful new work is imitated at the behest of big business agencies anxious to cash in on their appeal. For them the individual in the culture industry is an illusion, not merely because of the standardization of the means of production, but because all that is demanded is that a product meets certain minimum requirements, a feature, which distinguishes it from others so that it still has the marks of mainstream that makes it suitable material for popular consumption.

So Adorno and Horkheimer's work on the culture industry provides a very firm theoretical base for my work to be carried out on. Their work is very relevant to the culture industry that exists today, just that they could not see how much the culture industry would integrate itself into the capitalism system as these types of societies developed in the late twentieth century. As we will see from the case study of the boy/girl band phenomenon in Ireland all of what Adorno and Horkheimer wrote about in the chapter on the culture industry in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is true when it is related to these new products of the culture industry.

# *Methodology*

In order to prove the relevance of Adorno and Horkheimer's work from the 1940's on the culture industry, it was necessary to carry out research into areas of the music industry today that best exhibit the characteristics of the culture industry. The best way I felt of examining such areas of the music industry was to carry out a case study of the boy/girl band phenomenon, which has developed in Ireland since the formation of *Boyzone* in 1993. The case study will look at what it takes to be a successful act in the commercial sense. We will be able to see from this case study that the boy/girl band genre best exhibits what Adorno and Horkheimer wrote in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

There are a number of reasons why a case study would best suit this type of research. These reasons would include the fact that a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context in which it is set are not clear. The case study as a method of research is best used when one wants to deliberately cover the contextual conditions believing that they might be an important factor in the phenomenon of study. According to Yin 1994; a case study inquiry copes with technically distinctive situations in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as a result it relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result it also benefits from the prior development of a theoretical proposition to guide data collection and analysis.

Before starting my case study I had to first ensure that I had the components of the research design for a case study. For a case study there are five important components of

its research design. They are 1) the study's question; 2) its propositions if any; 3) its unit of analysis; 4) the logic linking the data to the propositions; 5) the criteria for interpreting the findings. The case study strategy is seen as being most likely to be appropriate for "how" and "why" questions, so the first task I had were to clarify precisely the nature of my study in this regard. My main question was how does a boy/girl band become successful in the commercial sense? The study proposition in my case study was that if a band was packaged correctly like any other commercial product they could become successful. The case study unit of analysis is related to the fundamental problem of defining what the case is. In my research the unit of analysis was the bands themselves. Linking data to propositions and criteria for interpreting the findings are components that represent the data analysis steps in the case study, the research design should lay the foundations for this analysis, and this will be examined in detail later in the chapter.

"Data collection for case studies can rely on many sources of evidence. Six important ones are: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation and physical artifacts." (Yin, 1994:78). The main source of evidence, which I relied on in my case study, was documentation. One of the main types of documents, which I used, was newspaper clippings and other articles appearing in the mass media. I was also able to obtain some very useful administrative documents such as contracts offered to bands. According to Yin 1994; the usefulness of these and other types of documents is not based on their necessary or lack of bias. In fact, documents must be carefully used and should not be accepted as literal recordings of events that have taken place. This was very true of my research as it was to do with the music industry where

fact and fiction can become blurred very easily. A point that will be examined later in the analysis of the case studies in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

Another important source of case study information that was used in my research is the interview. The style of interview that I employed was one of an open-ended nature, in which I asked people involved in different aspects of the music industry for insights into how a successful boy/girl band is formed. In one particular case I asked the respondent to propose his own insights into certain occurrences and I used some of those propositions as the basis for carrying out further inquiries. In many ways this respondent became more of an informant than a respondent and his information and advice was to become critical to the success of the case study. Mainly because he was not only able to provide me with insights into the making of a successful boy/girl band but he was also able to suggest sources of corroboratory evidence and he also was very important in initiating the access to such sources.

The case study as will be seen in the next chapter charts the history of some of the boy and girl bands which have been developed in Ireland during the 1990's. The case study will examine what it takes to be a commercially successful boy or girl band in Ireland, using the methods outlined in this chapter. The case study will then be analyzed in the discussion chapter. The case study will be analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework set out in this thesis in order to see how the boy/girl bands fit the work of Adorno and Horkheimer. The case study will borrow from a management and marketing concept for its presentation. This concept is the product life cycle, this is the cycle a

product follows after its launch, there are five stages to this cycle. First, product development, which begins when, the company finds and develops a new product idea. At this stage sales are zero and the company's investment costs are high. Second stage is introduction; this is a period of slow sales growth as the product is being introduced in the market. Profits are non-existent in this stage because of the heavy expenses of product introduction. The third stage is one of growth; this is a period of rapid market acceptance and increasing profits. The fourth stage is one of maturity, which sees a slowdown in sales growth because the product has achieved acceptance by most potential buyers. Profits at this stage level off or decline because of increased marketing outlays to defend the product against competition. The final stage is a period in which sales fall and profits drop. The case study will have a heavy emphasis on *Boyzone* because they are the most successful Irish boy band to date they are also the first group to go through all the stages of the product lifecycle. The case study will also concentrate on the first two stages of the product life cycle because they are the most important stages in relation to Adorno and Horkheimer's work on the culture industry.

As will be seen from both the case study and the analysis of the case study, it can, be presented in such a fashion because these bands are products and they exhibit many characteristics of the product life cycle. These bands are also treated as products by many of the people who work with them. "The observation returns Walsh to his earlier comment about the packaging of a group as a product and the importance placed on looks. His stance is simply that he is supplying a commodity for which the demand is limitless." (Battersby, 1999).

In the discussion chapter I will examine some of the reasons why these bands are accepted and their produce consumed. In order to do this I had to interview some of the fans of these groups in order to get some insight into the reasons why these groups appeal to so many. In doing this I bared in mind that the interview is a kind of conversation, a conversation with a purpose. The type of interview technique that I employed was the semi-structured interview. I had a number of questions I wanted to ask but this technique gave me the greater freedom in the sequencing of questions, in their exact wording, and in the amount of time and attention given to different topics. In this way I was able to get the most data from my respondents.

# *Case Study*



### Stage 1: Product Development.

*Boyzone* are very much the creation of their manager Louis Walsh. Walsh has been involved in the music business all his adult life starting his career working for the manager of show bands. As he branched out on his own a number of his performers entered the Eurovision Song Contest and two of his singers, Johnny Logan and Linda Martin won it, but the days of building a successful music career on the strength of a Eurovision win were long over. The music industry of the late 1980's was seeing a number of changes with a new surge of manufactured pop groups making their way to success in the music world. Many of these groups came from the Stock, Akin and Waterman group of managers, performers and songwriters who had a habit of taking former Australian soap opera stars and turning them into pop stars. At this time a number of boy bands were also been formed two of the most successful of these were *Bros* and *New Kids On The Block*. They were soon to be followed by the formation of *Take That* the UK boyband who were to provide the blue print for the success of many other manufactured bands.

Walsh had observed the rise and fall of *New Kids On The Block* followed by the success of *Take That* and his study of both groups convinced him that a similar style band could be formed in Ireland. The first step, which he took, was to organize open auditions to try and recruit members for his group. Walsh arranged a story about his quest to recruit members for a boy band to be broadcast on television and radio stations. Before this publicity spurge was finished, he had more than 300 applications for his five vacant

positions. Walsh chose the Ormond Centre in Dublin as the venue for the auditions, each applicant was asked to sing "Careless Whisper", the ballad that George Michael had taken to No.1 in August 1984. All the applications were videoed and judged on every aspect of their performance, from their singing, to their stage presence, character and of course, their looks.

The auditions were held in November 1993, just at the time *Take That* the group on which Walsh planned to model *Boyzone* on were going from strength to strength. The Manchester group were having a string of chart-topping hits that seemed to cement their position as the teen supergroup of the moment. Walsh himself was applying the product life cycle law to the boy band and he felt that *Take That* were at the top of this cycle and Walsh was keen to ensure that the new product that would enter this cycle would be *Boyzone*. After holding a number of rounds of auditions, Walsh was to come up with the original lineup of *Boyzone*; Ronan Keating, Stephen Gateley, Keith Duffy, Shane Lynch, Mark Walton and Richie Rock. All six of them were in their late teens and early twenties, none of them played a musical instrument, none of them were ever seriously involved in the music industry before, but yet in the next five years four out of six of these men were to be part of a group that would sell millions of singles worldwide.

The night after the six members of *Boyzone* were hired they were to become famous by appearing on Ireland's highest rating television show *The Late, Late Show*. This appearance was to be treated as a joke by many, but it also shocked many, as the newly formed group attempted to lip sync and dance to a backing tape on prime time national

television. Walsh and his band were to benefit from this appearance in two ways, first they got a huge amount of free exposure and second it helped Walsh teach his six young singers that they would have to work extremely hard for him if they wanted to be successful. The first thing Walsh had to do with his band in order to make them successful was to get vocal training and dance lessons for them. He instructed them to prepare a short and slick gig, which they could perform at small clubs in Dublin and in provincial theaters. This series of low profile appearances would be there on the job training.

At this stage Walsh's main concern was getting the record companies interested, so, in those early months, he set out to sell the idea of *Boyzone* to the men with the money and the power to make it all happen. He went armed with a photo of his group and a short demo tape, which is a standard requirement to promote a new band. Record companies are notoriously hard to deal with and Walsh wasn't the first manager to go knocking at the door with the promise that his band was the next *Take That*, so it was no surprise when his early approaches met with rejection.

In the mean time Walsh kept spending money on his band, he brought in top choreographer Vernal John, who had worked with Kylie Minogue and Madonna, to develop some quality dance routines; he secured the services of writer Ray Hedges and producer Ian Levine who had helped *New Kids On The Block*; Walsh also hired a London-based PR company headed by Liz Watson whose brief was to create some hype about *Boyzone* in the key teen magazines and tabloid newspapers in Ireland and the UK.

He then paid for the boys to have a full session with a stylist and a top photographer, so the band's image could be sharpened. On top of this, he rented an expensive studio for them to record another demo tape. They sang "Can You Feel It", the dance song *The Jacksons* took into the top-ten in 1981. Walsh felt the tape and the well-styled pictures would help him sell the band to a record label.

The pressure was mounting and none more so than on Walsh's finances. His personal resources had been drained by his investments in *Boyzone* and, around March 1994, he had to concede that he needed an injection of cash if he was to continue giving the band a fair shot at making it. He approached John Reynolds, the wealthy owner of the POD nightclub in Dublin, and convinced him to become the bands co-manager. They set up the WAR company (Walsh and Reynolds), which would manage *Boyzone*. They agreed that Walsh would be responsible for the running of the group, while John would focus on the business side. Reynolds handed over a five-figure sum to keep everything going.

Like all bands in the early days some members find the going hard and some of them leave, *Boyzone* was no exception to this rule. The first member of *Boyzone* to call it a day was Mark Walton; he left the band for purely personal reasons like many people leave bands. Walsh did not see this as huge problem as his thinking was that five was the traditional figure for a boy band. The second member to leave *Boyzone* was Richie Rock the son of the successful Irish entertainer Dickie Rock but he did not leave *Boyzone* he was fired after a very public argument with Walsh over his unreliability. It was later to emerge that Rock had a drug habit. Walsh now had a problem, he had to get someone to

replace Rock so he returned to his auditions where luckily he had several reserves from the final audition who could easily fill the vacancy and Mickey Graham was top of that list. So Richie Rock's hard luck was to become Mickey Graham's good fortune.

Walsh, who had invested heavily in the band, felt that he would have to restrict their activities in case any of them got injured so he had legally binding contracts drawn up. The agreement included a ban on them taking part in physical contact sports, such as football and hurling, as well as drinking and taking drugs. The agreement also made the members promise to keep any girlfriends secret.

*Westlife* began their existence as a six piece group from Sligo called *IOU* they actively sought out Louis Walsh to manage them as so many other boy bands did after seeing what he had done for *Boyzone*. The group had been performing in Sligo for a while but was reluctant to sign any management deal until they got in contact with Walsh. Walsh agreed to see them and when he did, he saw that there were three members of the group who had the all-important look for a boyband so he told the three successful members to get rid of the other three and that he would recruit two more members. Walsh used the open audition method for recruiting the other two members as he did for creating *Boyzone*. He let it be known to radio and television stations and newspapers that he was putting another boy band together, since his success with *Boyzone* he had become very respected in the pop music world. Just like with the *Boyzone* auditions hundreds of young hopefuls tried out for the two places when auditions were held in Dublin's red box nightclub. The auditions led to the recruitment of two Dubliners Nicky Byrne and Bryan

McFadden who were best suited to join the remaining members of *IOU* from Sligo Shane Filan, Kian Egan and Mark Feehily. The band was also given a new name *Westside* but this was changed to *Westlife* after it was discovered that a similar group already existed in America.

*Westlife* not only had Louis Walsh as their manager but also had *Boyzone*'s unofficial front man Ronan Keating as their co-manager. Ronan had learned from his days in a successful boy band and one piece of knowledge he has learned is that boys will sell more if they are seen to be available. "Ronan Keating is proving a fully qualified hard-nosed businessman in his dealings as manager of this week's number one band, *Westlife*. He has revealed that he has a 'gentleman's agreement' with the boys that they will not get married or have children for the next five years." ( dotmusic,1999).

*B\*Witched* Ireland's most successful girl band to date also has a *Boyzone* connection with *Boyzone*'s Shane Lynch being the big Brother of Edele and Keavy Lynch from *B\*Witched*. *B\*Witched* was formed in 1996 and soon achieved their dream of singing to a record label. Their label Glow Worm is headed up by Ray Hedges who has also produced albums for *Boyzone* and *Bros* to name just two teen boybands and former *New Kids On The Block* manager Kim Glover. "Ray wasn't exactly looking for a girl group to place on his label, perhaps feeling that he had worked enough with the type of pop act that has a fickle fan base, and by extension a short life span. When *B\*Witched* came along, however, his commercial instincts told him not to be so high minded." (Clayton-Lea,1999). The band were signed in early 1997 and it took over twelve months for the

finished product to be created during this period the girls were moved to London where they lived in a house quite literally getting their act together.

In Ireland to day there are a number of other bands trying to reproduce the development formula used to make *Boyzone*, *Westlife* and *B\*Witched* stars. In researching this thesis I came across a number of these groups who are working really hard in the hope that someone from a record label will take some notice of them. Most of the members of these groups feel that the way they look on stage is more important than what they sing so they concentrate on their look, their stage dance routine and their vocals and put little into the creative side of the group. One member of a group who was recruited into the group after going to an audition he found out about through an add in *Hot Press* Ireland's largest music publication has also been told by the bands manager to keep the fact that he is gay a secret. From talking to two A&R men from two of the international labels in Ireland they are doing the right thing because their look and presence on stage is what is important to them in a boy/girl band.

### Stage2: Introduction

After months of trying to sell his band to a number of different record companies Walsh finally pulled off a deal with Polygram Ireland in may 1994. Polygram also felt that the time was right for another boy band to start out and be ready to succeed *Take That* once they had peaked. The contract they signed was for three singles with an option to release an album should the singles do well. Things now started to happen for *Boyzone* very fast

indeed and within a month of signing their record deal they had chosen their debut single, recorded it and even shot the promotional video. The song that was chosen was a cover of *The Detroit Spinners* '“Working My Way Back to You”, which had given the American group its only British No.1 in 1980. The group returned to appear on *The Late, Late Show* the scene of their shambolic and depressing first appearance. The audience and the viewers of the show this time were to see *Boyzone* the finished product as opposed to *Boyzone* the raw material as described earlier. “Working My Way Back to You” went to No.3 in the Irish charts and so was seen as a reasonable success by the record label.

The band at this stage were working full time at the publicity and promotion and to this end appeared on countless television programmes and radio road shows along with doing the summer music festivals and singing sessions in record shops. Once promoting their debut single in Ireland was over, the band went over to London for a series of public appearances and short gigs to build their fan base in the UK and to record their second single. While in London they recorded “Love Me For A Reason” which had been a No.1 hit for the American pop group *The Osmonds* in the 1970's. This single was to go to No.1 in Ireland and on the back of this success *Boyzone* secured a record deal in Britain. Part of the key to their success in Britain was the *Smash Hits* roadshow. *Smash Hits* is Britain's largest selling teen magazine and each year it hosts a series of live pop shows with established favourites and the best of the newcomers. *Boyzone* through being involved in the road show gained valuable exposure all over Britain and when “Love Me For A Reason” was released in December 1994 it reached the No.2 position in the English charts.



The next step for the band in their introduction stage was to record their debut album, which was recorded over the summer of 1995. This album entitled *Said And Done* contained seven of their own songs and six cover versions. During this period they also made their first major promotional trips to Germany and other countries in central Europe where their singles had enjoyed some success.

As with *Boyzone*, Walsh again spent a lot of time and money on creating *Westlife* the finished product. This time around it was going to be easier because Walsh was now known in the music business as the creator of one of the most successful boy bands to date so people were prepared to listen to him when he said he could do it all again. One of the first advantages *Westlife* got from being managed by Walsh and Keating was that they got on the support bill at *Boyzone* concerts, this was a great advantage especially when the fans found out that Ronan Keating was involved with them many loyal *Boyzone* fans were to become *Westlife* fans for this reason alone. As well as supporting *Boyzone* *Westlife* also did many of the different radio road shows in both Ireland and the UK. In fact they were the headline act on the Irish radio station *2FM*'s road show such was the excitement about this new group managed by Louis Walsh and Ronan Keating.

Not until Walsh made sure that *Westlife* had got plenty of experience doing the shows described above did he go out looking for a record deal for them. This time around it was a very different experience to the selling of *Boyzone* to the record companies. The different record companies were queuing up to see them, such was the respect that Walsh

had achieved in the business as the creator of these types of bands many also felt that the Ronan Keating connection to the band was also important. One leading record company executive told me that he was quite interested in signing them because he knew with Walsh being involved with them they would be organized in a professional manner, unlike so many other acts at his label. He also believed that the *Boyzone* relationship if worked right, would be very good for *Westlife*. His label did not get to sign *Westlife* he believes because they were not prepared to offer the right amount of advance money, even though they promised to spend plenty of money in order to give them the best look and good sounding albums. *Westlife* in fact were to sign a deal with RCA records, which forms part of the BMG group. It is not known how much of an advance the band got but the deal was for five albums and two greatest hits compilations, which is an excellent deal for a band starting off. RCA have big plans for *Westlife*, the first thing they did was to employ songwriters to compose songs for them. RCA also got Cheiron studios in Sweden involved in the production of *Westlife*'s material this was the studio where hits have been written and produced for two other boy bands *The Backstreet Boy* and *Five*.

*B\*Witched* as already stated were signed to one of the greats in the manufactured pop group market, Ray Hedges and after a year of living together working on their act in London they were ready to enter the studio to record *C'est La Vie* their debut single. The release of the single was accompanied by an all out marketing campaign, which saw *B\*Witched* appear in all the different teen magazines as well as appearing on the different children's television shows. All this publicity was to pay off when *C'est La Vie* entered

the UK charts in the No. 1 position. Their next single was also to meet with the same success.

### Stage 3: Growth

*Boyzone*'s debut album went straight to No. 1 in both the Irish and British charts. Their record company was so impressed with the success of the album that they decided to send them off to promote the album in markets where other boy bands had enjoyed success. Such as countries in the Far East like Thailand, Hong Kong, Korea and Japan where *Boyzone* over the next five years were to develop large markets. 1996 was to be the year in which *Boyzone*'s market was to grow the most, Walsh began planning concerts for them in the UK at first he thought he would only be able to fill 2,000 seat venues but as soon as the tickets went on sale he found that the demand was so great that the only way he could satisfy demand was to get them to play the arenas of the larger British cities. 1996 was also to see the end of the group that *Boyzone* were modeled on, *Take That* and with their rivals out of the scene the way ahead was clear for *Boyzone* to dominate the pop music market, all that Louis Walsh had predicted was coming true.

The concerts in the UK were also used to promote the band's second album, *A Different Beat*, these concerts were also very important for the selling of merchandising which is usually the biggest money spinner for bands out of tours. In October 1996 the band released the first single of their second album, which went to No. 1 in the charts in both Ireland and Britain, the single was *Words* a cover version of the *Bee Gees* 1967 hit. This

success was swiftly followed by the release of the album, which also went to the top of the charts. The band found themselves again traveling the world promoting the album and at this time as the band was starting to hit the height of their fame they were also employed to promote other products. “ The screamfest was in full swing long before the group arrived in cybersuits and helmets, as the video screens showed the latest *Boyzone* commercial placement, advertising a product aimed at their core market, Sugar Puffs. Even an advertisement for their next Wembley appearance, in November, elicited an eardrum-smashing response.” (Sexton,1997). Although all the products that *Boyzone* 's name became associated with were not all as wholesome as the breakfast cereal one such product was *Boyzone* cigarettes which were sold in Malaysia but this product did not stay long on the market owing to the band's outrage with been associated with such an unhealthy and discussing habit. Although they did not have any difficulties in including Indonesia in their tour itinerary.

*Boyzone* went on to release their third album in May 1998, which they gave the title *Where We Belong*. This album also went to number one in the charts in many different countries. This album also contains a song *Picture of You* that was used in the sound track to a film *Bean-The ultimate Disaster Movie!* The promotional video for this song also contained scenes from the film. This album was also to be promoted by the band going on tour to the many different countries where their albums have enjoyed such great success. “The music is, of course, almost a sideshow to the synchronized dance routines, the moving stage props, the on-stage video close-ups and so on. At times, it seems more pantomime than pop concert.”(Kelly, 1997).

*Westlife* are very much in the growth stage of their product life cycle and so far it has been a very successful period for them. The band has set a new record in the UK with all five of their singles released to date entering the chart in the No.1 position. At the moment the band are working hard trying to achieve something their predecessors *Boyzone* were unable to achieve success in the US market. Although the band has also hit a few bumps on the road to success such as the row that broke out over their involvement in the poppy appeal of 1999. "Record company managers yesterday distanced the chart-topping boy band *Westlife* from the decision to take part in this year's poppy appeal, following criticism from Sinn Fein. The Irish group helped to publicise the Royal British Legion's annual drive for funds on Sunday. Mr. Matt Carthy, national organizer of Sinn Fein Youth, said it was wrong for an Irish band to support the initiative, given the history of the British army's involvement in Ireland." (PA, 1999). RCA records at the time released a statement saying that they were responsible for getting *Westlife* involved in the appeal. *Westlife* also made the headlines for the wrong reasons later in November 1999, when it was reported that they got a ticking off from Louis Walsh before they appeared on *The Late, Late Show* " 'I gave them a huge lecture and they all started crying,' said Louis. 'They were late for the show and they were smoking being unprofessional. I received a fax from the record company about their behaviour ... it was the best thing I ever did. It brought home to them how being successful and famous brings with it certain responsibilities.'" (Dotmusic, 1999). Yet despite these problems *Westlife's* career is still in good shape and the group have already sold out shows in both Dublin and the UK for the spring of 2001, which will most likely be used to promote their second album.

#### Stage4:Maturity

*Boyzone* like many other bands in this stage have recognized the fact that as they are no longer boys but grown men that their days in the boy band market are numbered. So in the maturity stage for a boy or girl band they start to think about splitting up, *Boyzone* have shown many signs that they may soon split up and many of these signs have come from their manager Louis Walsh. Walsh has been quoted in different publications as saying that the group will soon split up. Statements from *Boyzone*'s unofficial frontman Ronan Keating also shows that the band are nearing the end of the road, " 'I wouldn't say we've split up but I suppose you could describe *Boyzone* as dormant at the moment,' he says. 'We're all busy doing our own thing at the moment.' " (Dotmusic,2000). Although one member of *Boyzone* seems to be in denial about the fact that groups life may becoming to an end, Shane Lynch has at the end of 1999 stated on a number of occasions that the group had no plans to split but that Louis Walsh started the rumors in order to sell more concert tickets his most famous statement on the issue was at the MTV awards in Dublin in November 1999 when he used language unbecoming of a boy band member.

Despite all the rumors the band are showing one important sign of being a boy band in their mature stage of their product life cycle in the way that in May 1999 they released a greatest hits album *By Request*. This is the way their mentors *Take That* ended their bands career and many feel that despite what some members of *Boyzone* have to say they too are also going from the stage of maturity of the product life cycle into the stage of decline. The other major sign of this is *Westlife* the band that Louis Walsh and Ronan Keating put together and manage they like *Boyzone* in their product development stage

have been set up to take over from *Boyzone* just as *Boyzone* were manufactured to take over from *That That*. As one product's shelf life ends another product comes on the market to replace it, as Walsh himself has said a group such as *Boyzone* has a shelf life of about three to five years (Battersby, 1999) so they have done very well out of their careers as boy band members.

### Stage 5: Decline

The period of decline for a boy or girl band can be seen as the period where they go off and try and make a career for themselves after their involvement in a manufactured group. *Boyzone* again are in this stage and just like so many other key moments in their career they can learn from the group that went before them, *Take That*. One lesson they have learned is that any of them who want a solo career have started it from within *Boyzone*. Ronan Keating was the first to do this with his solo number *When You Say Nothing At All*, which was used on the soundtrack for the film *Notting Hill*; the promotional video was to get in trouble with the Independent Television Commission for actively promoting the film. "As well as footage from the film, thought bubble style captions pop up with phrases like 'I love Notting Hill', 'this film is for you' and 'film of the year, special price, I want it', as a character tries to sell video copies of the movie." (The Examiner, 1999). This problem is unlikely to worry Keating too much as the examiner also reports on 16 August 1999 that he has received £2.5 million advance on his first solo album. The size of the advance paid by his record label is seen by people that I interviewed in the record industry as a sign of their confidence in his solo career being successful.

Two other members of *Boyzone* as I write this thesis are just starting their solo careers they are Stephen Gately and Mickey Graham and both have learned from their days in the music industry that there is no such thing as bad publicity. First Stephen Gately was forced to admit in 1999 that he was gay something that could have seriously damaged a career built on teenage girls loving him but this has not happened and in the period leading up to the release of his first solo single *New Beginning* Gately has been quite willing to talk to the press about his sexuality. “ Now Stephen is going to be OK when it comes to publicity. If you may have missed all of his many ‘coming out’ in newspapers or on TV, then I should tell you that Stephen is gay, and practically making a living out of it.” (O Connor, 1999).

Mickey Graham is also coming out of the closet so to speak, Graham was quoted in the press as saying that “All I want is the chance to be myself now,”(The Examiner, 2000) and in the publicity generated in the run up to his first solo effort *You're My Angel* we found out a little about the real Mickey Graham. “And so, early last week Mikey Graham claimed in an interview that he liked to, in the words of *The Sun* ‘SMOKE, DRINK and GET HIGH after a concert.’ Mikey went on to say that as soon as the band were on their own they ‘all headed straight for the bar’. ‘We only kept it clean in public.’” (O’Connor, 2000). Graham also made comments supporting the legalisation of cannabis, but was forced to back down on the issue when “The backlash was immediate. Parents, the principal gatekeepers to Mikey’s market, certainly weren’t happy. The other major gatekeepers, the shops, weren’t happy either. Depressing low-cost supermarket chain Asda cancelled a planned string of appearances.” (O’Connor, 2000).



As for the other two remaining members of *Boyzone* Keith Duffy and Shane Lynch they are also planning careers after *Boyzone* but they feel that being members of *Boyzone* will be a help to them. "All three, however, know that what success they enjoy independently depends, at least in part, on their membership of *Boyzone*. 'I know I would never have got a driving deal if it wasn't for the band,' says Lynch. 'Like I could ever get a TV presenting gig if I wasn't already a pop star,' says Duffy." (The Examiner, 2000). Shane Lynch in that article is referring to the deal he has with the motor giants Ford to drive rally cars for them. So the two members of the group who were considered to have the weakest vocals are now using their fame to build careers outside the music industry. As for what happens a boy band manager after their group splits up, Louis Walsh is already planning for this with his work with *Westlife* as already described and he is also managing Ronan Keating's solo career and also has a new female solo act, Samantha Mumba who he promises will be the next Britney Spheres.

## *Discussion*

So as we have seen in the theoretical framework Adorno and Horkheimer believed that our society had lost its capacity to nourish true freedom and individuality. They believed that the culture industry developed as cultural production moved from an artisanal stage, to an industrial stage. The culture industry became integrated into capitalism and this determined many of its characteristics such as, they saw the modern culture industry as the producer of safe, standardized products, which were geared to the larger demands of the capitalist economy. One such characteristic that they describe using the phrase 'pseudo-individuality' to refer to how the culture industry produces and markets their products as originals. Another characteristic of the culture industry identified by Adorno and Horkheimer is that neither the consumer nor the producer has any sovereignty. The individual has gone out of the culture industry because of the standardization of production and all that remains for the producer to do is come up with a product that meets certain minimum requirements, which will distinguish it from other material. The one major problem faced by the culture industry is that it must sustain interest and also ensure that the attention it attracts is insufficient to bring its products into disrepute. As we will now see as we examine the case study of boy and girl bands in Ireland they fit into the culture industry as described by Adorno and Horkheimer and not only this they are the closest followers of the capitalist system of production that one is likely to find in the culture industry.

In the development stage of a boy or girl band we are able to see many of the characteristics of the culture industry as described by Adorno and Horkheimer in their essay in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. First of all we can see these bands as

standardized products, again and again as I research the case study I was reminded how important the look of these groups were in trying to promote them. Even the number of members in a band had to be the same, for boy bands the magic figure was five, when I inquired about this from people in the music industry most did not know why this figure was so important while some felt that stage dance routines worked best with five people. In setting up *Boyzone* we saw that Louis Walsh did not set out to create anything original but just to create a younger version of the successful group of the day *Take That* and he has done it again with *Westlife*. He did not go out and try and create something new and original instead he saw that there was a gap in an already existing market and he set about creating a product that would fit this gap. It is in a way like any other product being marketed in a capitalist society every so often “a new and improved” version of the product has to be launched on the market in order to freshen the products image and boost sales again and this what Walsh has done with his boy bands.

The way Walsh set about creating this product also helps to prove Adorno and Horkheimer’s argument about the culture industry becoming integrated into capitalism. First there was the recruitment process that he employed in this he was really only looking for one thing in potential members of his band and that is how they looked on stage he knew that the means of production existed to transform any good looking boys into a boy band for proof of this one only has to look at *Boyzone*’s first two appearances on the *Late, Late Show*. None of the people recruited for these bands are ever asked about their musical influences or their creative abilities because someone else who is experienced at producing this safe standardized music was going to look after the

manufacturing of the music for them even if tracks were wrote by band members when one checks the credits on the album they will see that they are co-wrote with someone that is experienced in turning out this type of music.

As already stated all the manager of a group such as *Boyzone* has to do is employ people who look good on stage this not only means that they are good looking they much also be comfortable on stage. After they have got their members they can set to work on transforming them into the band that the public will see, as shown in the case study this all costs a lot of money and these bands are now like any other means of production in a capitalist society the products they produce must give a return on investment and the quicker the better. If these products do not start to show signs of giving a return on the investment the capitalist who puts up the capital will be quick to stop investing in them as we have seen in the literature review. So the relationship between the people investing in the band and the members of the band of becomes like that between employer and employee in another capitalist enterprise this can be seen in Louis Walsh's relationship with his bands.

In the introduction stage of these bands we can again see how integrated they are into the capitalized system. All the bands that become successful do so by working with other products in the same market group such as teen magazines in this way they become involved in a reciprocal system of promotion. This is also a stage of the bands life were an interesting type of 'pseudo-individuality' can be observed as already covered in the literature review many point to the fact that many of these groups launch their careers

with cover versions of successful songs this can be seen from the coverage given to *Boyzone* in the case study. Peter Murphy in an article for the *Sunday Independent* sums up what 'pseudo-individuality' means in relation to Irish boy and girl bands; In truth, if Irishness is an asset, it's a perilously ephemeral one: the current Hiberno-hype relies largely on music that is culturally anonymous, a sort of pop Esperanto." (Murphy, 1999). This article is wrote in reply to anyone who may thing with the advent of *Boyzone*, *Westlife* and *B\*Witched* that Irish nationality has become even more of a musical commodity than it was in the U2-dominated 1980's.

A number of other features can also be seen in these types of bands that make them the most capitalist style produced products of the culture industry to date, one such feature is Ronan Keating becoming co-manager of *Westlife*, over the existence of *Boyzone* he has become the most popular member of the band and as we have seen the one with the most promising solo career, his involvement with *Westlife* can be seen as a way of getting his fans to become fans of *Westlife* also an interesting way of creating a market share. In the literature review I highlighted how the music industry was just part of an even larger media industry and these bands form just a tiny part of it but as we have seen both *Boyzone* and Ronan Keating on his own have become examples of the synergy that can be achieved by these large media industries in the recording of songs for soundtracks one helps to promote the other but too much promotion can bring its own problems as Ronan Keating learned with his effort.

Another characteristic of the culture industry identified by Adorno and Horkheimer is that neither the consumer nor the producer has any sovereignty. Looking first at the producers of the music in this sector as already stated when the members of these bands are being recruited they are never asked about their musical influences or their creative abilities because they will not be involved in the creative process they are only being employed to perform the songs. Even when they are allowed to take part in the writing of the songs like some members of *Boyzone* were they will not have the final say about them getting released this is held by the record company. This fact is shown in the George Michael court case described in the literature review. From talking to members of boy and girl bands who are trying to get a recording contract they feel that they have to have a mixture of both original and cover versions in their set when they are performing as they are not sure what the record companies may be looking for. What they perform is very much influenced by what they believe a record company may like. So the producers of this type of music have lost their sovereignty because they have to conform to what the market wants such is the way in a capitalist society.

From the point of view of the consumer they have no sovereignty because the record labels and managers of these bands who hold a tight control over what they are allowed to release thus they are restricting the consumer's choice of music. Even if some of the original work of these bands is not very good the fans should have a chance to get a better insight into the abilities of the members of the band and hear what they are trying to express, in other areas of the music industry were the groups have more power this

sometimes happens, the work may not be commercially successful or even very good for that matter but at least it is available for the consumer if they want to listen to it.

As already stated in the methodology section of this work I carried out semi-structured interviews with a number of fans of these groups these fans were all teenaged girls picked because they were quite articulate in their descriptions of what it meant to be a fan of these groups. In the interviews I tried to find out what these girls saw in these groups especially in light of all that I had discovered in my research to date. None of the fans saw these groups; as being cynically manufactured products out to take their precious pocket money in fact many as fans of these groups felt that it was their duty to defend their artistic merit. The main reason they saw for being fans of the two major Irish boy bands were that they were all good looking and they appear as ordinary everyday men. All the fans agreed that they were proud of these pop group's successes because they were Irish. When asked what the fans liked about the material they produce most of the fans said they liked the songs because they were about love and relationships, as one fan stated, "their songs are easy on the ear and the words are easily learnt". All the fans had invested quite a considerable amount of money in purchasing these groups products, including some fans who had purchased tickets for *Westlife*'s first concert eleven months before it is due to take place the price of these tickets starting at £27 are at the top end of the scale charged by groups who perform at Dublin's Point Theater. The fans of these groups were also very proud that the group they "supported" were doing so well with the *Westlife* fans very eager to point to the fact that all their singles released to date had reached the No.1 position in both the Irish and British charts.



The interviews with the fans showed me that there are a number of reasons why they were so loyal to these groups and because of this why they purchased so many of their products. The most important reason why they support them is their look, something as we have already seen that many creators including Louis Walsh believe to be the most important factor in putting a group together. This is also a factor in the reasoning behind so many being asked to keep girlfriends or their sexuality a secret because the members of these groups must be seen as being available many of the fans of these groups don't dream of being like their idols but they dream of having a relationship with them. The groups' clean-cut image is also an important reason behind so many becoming fans of the group and a reason why so many parents don't mind giving money to their children to purchase their products. Many of these groups write tour diaries for magazines and in this they write about going shopping or sight seeing or resting between performances unlike so many rock groups who hit the headlines for getting arrested on tours for drugs offences or drink related offences or for the rock tradition of trashing the hotel room with the throwing of the television out the tenth floor window for a finally to find out more about this look at the many tour antics of the British rock group *Oasis* over the last six years. The fact that these groups have such a good image puts many parents minds at rest, they feel that their children's interest in them can only be healthy compared to the image of so many other music genres. As Mickey Graham has so recently learnt as described above a clean-cut image is very important in this type of music market.

In Ireland at least the nationality of these groups is also important as I stated in my introduction it is like supporting the national football team this is the feeling that I got of

a number of people I interviewed, they were very proud of the international successes enjoyed by these Irish groups. The fans were not very interested in the creative input of the groups just that the songs sounded good and stuck to the tried and tested format of love ballads and lively beats. When questioned about their knowledge of who wrote and produced the singles and albums all they seemed to know was that *Boyzone* wrote some of their own material. None of the fans I talked to had very much to say about *B\*Witched* except that they liked their material and they were quite pleased to see an Irish group doing so well some points out the fact that two members were the sisters of *Boyzone*'s Shane Lynch.

So from the interviews with the fans I found that they shared little of the concerns that Adorno and Horkheimer held sixty years ago and one has to wonder is this because of the society they were born into, for all the fans interviewed saw success as something commercial they were not interested in the artistic merits of the music. I did not expect to get a full critic of the music that these groups produced but I did expect that would talk more about the music but instead they seemed more interested in the group themselves and all the music was for was to sing along with the group it was the inter face between the group and the fans. The group themselves were seen as the product and not music. The fans of these groups are growing up in a society in which the capitalist system of production and distribution of resources is the only system there is and one has to wonder if this affects the way they view success and more importantly how they view culture?

*Conclusion*

As I have stated in the introduction to this thesis there is very little unique or Irish about these boy or girl bands and there is a very good reason for this because they are a product for a global economy. The music these groups produce is very much a product of our present society, one in which globalisation and the capitalist system of production and distribution dominate. A system that would horrify Adorno and Horkheimer if they were alive today this system is one in which global capitalism dominates. By global capitalism I mean that a small number of huge global conglomerates can control so many means of production and have such a huge influence on production and consumption on a worldwide scale.

Adorno and Horkheimer were writing about a different society and in many ways they were warning us about what could happen to culture if it was allowed to be dominated by the culture industry. The reason their writings are so relevant today is that cultural production is dominated by the culture industry which itself has become fully integrated into the capitalist system of production. The origins of this system could be seen by Adorno and Horkheimer but what they could not see is how technology especially communications technology would convert the advanced regions of the world into a global village. The music that is been produced today is just software for this technological hardware and as we saw in the review of literature there are only a small number of companies worldwide who record produce and distribute music and all these companies are part of much larger multi media organizations.

Irish boy and girl bands were used as an example of what Adorno and Horkheimer meant in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the reasons they were used is because they are one of the best examples of the types of products the culture industry can produce and also because they are a very recent phenomenon about which little has been written about by sociologists. I felt that the theory I used was the one to use because it worked best to explain how these bands and the music they produce is so cynically manufactured.

Adorno and Horkheimer believed that society had lost its capacity to nourish true freedom and individuality and they felt this loss had resulted from the fact that cultural production had moved from an artisanal stage, to an industrial stage. As I have attempted to make clear through out this work this is what happened in the case of the Irish boy and girl bands that I examined in this work and many young people interested in getting involved in the music industry feel this is what they have to do in order to succeed in the music business.

This does not mean that only this music genre can be accused of 'pseudo-individuality' in almost every genre of music the same can be said because the people making the music know that they have to follow a successful blue print if their music is ever to be recorded and released by a record label. It is too easy to say that musicians do not know how to be original anymore the real problem lies in the fact that the record companies are only interested in profit and they are all huge corporations with the values associated with such companies which scare people in these companies out of taking a gamble on something different. As we saw in the literature review bands signed to these labels only get one or two chances and as Brian Boyd pointed out that *U2* would find it had to get a record deal

if to days conditions existed in the late 1970's as their record label had to invest a lot of time and money in them.

So as I draw to the end of this thesis I have drawn a very gloomy picture of the society in which we live in especially in relation to the choice of music there is for us to consume but I would like to end with a few positive notes. First there are still some very small independent record labels out there so if one is really interested in discovering new and bold and original music they can look for these. Second as releasing music on the internet becomes more common one hopes that could provide an outlet for groups who cannot get a record deal to release their music and hopefully the internet will give artists more control over what they can release. Third as I discovered during my research for this work there are quite a number of people out there writing about these issues and helping to promote awareness about the fact that the culture interests has so much control over what we listen to. These are all very small grains of hope but one hopes that these can grow into something that will help get the balance right between culture and commerce. As the song goes " thing can only get better"!

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