



Why Chappell Roan's Grammys Speech Missed the Mark

Description

What would icons like Prince or Tom Petty articulate regarding the tumultuous intersection of artistic integrity and commercial compromise? Both luminaries contended fiercely for the sanctity of their musical creations, often placing their careers at considerable risk to uphold their beliefs — a testament to their greatness. With the passage of time, it becomes evident that substantial transformation is not merely birthed from rhetoric; true change materializes in the arena of action — where stakes are high and the potential for personal sacrifice looms large. Whether it's Prince reclaiming his master recordings during his zenith or Petty challenging his label over inflated LP prices, those who exhibit genuine commitment earn their rightful place at the negotiating table where resilience is a prerequisite.

It appears Roan envisions a paradigm where labels morph into landlords and insurers. Have you ever attempted to seek reimbursement from a major label? It's ludicrous to imagine those entities managing claims when they'd rather avoid the risk of being denounced as "slumlords" by the next breakout star. Berry Gordy, the visionary behind Motown, faced criticism despite the immense success of Hitsville, yet most artists were satisfied with their royalties and credits — correct? Precisely.

While Roan deserves recognition for her artistic tenacity, she appears too inexperienced and ill-informed to catalyze the changes she envisions. She may pave her path rapidly, perhaps even assemble a cadre of influential figures or pass the baton to an emerging leader, yet her Grammy address resembled a recycled, clichéd script from an artist reveling in industry accolades while exhibiting a naïve critique of the very machine that propelled her ascent. If labels bear the responsibility for artists' remuneration and well-being, where does individual accountability commence? Does Chris Blackwell also need to fluff her pillows each night? No ethical standard necessitates that labels allocate funds beyond what is stipulated in advances and royalties.

Roan's plea for labels to guarantee artists a sustainable wage and healthcare undoubtedly stems from an honorable intent but is also profoundly misguided. Her ascent, fueled by viral moments and heavy label backing, signifies she is no longer a struggling artist. It is imperative for her to take tangible action rather than merely vocalizing aspirations. Change fervently awaits a champion, rather than merely an announcement.

The Outsider Who Joined the Establishment

Born Kayleigh Rose Amstutz, Chappell Roan is not the first artist to portray themselves as an outsider challenging the system. However, upon her entrance to the Grammy stage, she transitioned from a tenacious indie artist on the margins to a participant in the very establishment she critiques. It is disingenuous to cash in on a lucrative label contract, enjoy substantial industry support, and still pose as the underdog overlooked on the playground.

Here's the reality: you are no longer the avant-garde figure resisting conformity, a timeworn trope in the music domain, yet you stand at a precipice to enact meaningful change for artists and songwriters. Indeed,



there remains space for both idealism and pragmatism in this narrative.

Roan is a product of the very system she critiques. Island Records, a part of Universal Music Group, invested substantial resources to cultivate her identity and sustain a viable business around her music. Record labels operate as businesses, not philanthropic entities; they assume financial risks in exchange for a share of potential profits.

Is there room for improvement within the system? Certainly. Should artists secure better contractual terms? Absolutely. Nevertheless, Roan's address lacks the depth and comprehension necessary to foster consensus or to articulate the multifaceted issues artists face. Her demands for labels to compensate artists as if they were salaried employees neglect the basic economic framework of the industry. No one is coerced into signing contracts; if artists find the terms unacceptable, they have the option to maintain their independence, retain ownership of their masters, and bear the financial burden themselves.

The Realities of Label Deals & Artist Compensation

Should labels be criticized for operating their businesses as such, while artists allocate advances toward personal expenses — perhaps engaging a multilingual toilet or a spiritual guide? The rationale appears convoluted.

Why isn't Roan motivating her artistic peers to contribute a portion of their advances to a fund that supports fellow artists? As she ascends into elite circles, she faces a limited timeframe to rally influential figures like Beyoncé and Taylor Swift since systemic changes often necessitate top-down funding. If there is genuine concern for sustainable wages, an examination of their advance structures may be a prudent first step.

While labels warrant scrutiny, songwriters — the foundational elements of this industry — endure even harsher difficulties. The expectation that labels or publishers should shoulder the responsibility of ensuring artists function as autonomous adults reveals an unsettling sense of entitlement. Here's what Roan may overlook: recordings contracts are designed as investments rather than salaries. When an artist signs, the label provides an advance that functions similarly to a loan, covering production costs, marketing, distribution, and, if negotiated, tour support. Major labels shoulder considerable risks with each artist, cognizant that nearly 60% will not recuperate their investment, while 15% typically sustain the entire roster financially.

Should artists have improved healthcare options? Indubitably. This seems more aligned with a union initiative, as independent managers often lack insurance — a pervasive flaw across the industry. Artists retain the ability to negotiate their contracts and direct portions of their advance toward healthcare, much like they can for recording expenses. Some already do so.

And regarding a livable wage, that conversation must commence with understanding that advances are, in fact, designed to support living expenses. One could argue that the substantial advances given by labels upon signing are indeed livable and grant artists the time to create the requisite albums before financial resources dwindle.

Proclaiming "Let's be revolutionaries — once my direct deposit hits" comes off as disingenuous.

Bill Maher Had a Valid Concern

Recently, Bill Maher critiqued Roan for her performative activism, underscoring a broader issue among emerging stars who make bold declarations without grasping the nuances of the dilemmas they purport to address.

Maher argues that Roan's lack of industry experience hampers her understanding of its complexities — she, now dubbed best new artist, is merely at the onset of her mainstream trajectory and seems to believe she can mandate systemic adjustments without presenting concrete solutions.

This encapsulates the issue at hand: artists like Roan are not revolutionizing the landscape; they are simply emulating a familiar narrative — the young stars who rise, criticize the very machine that propelled them, yet continue to thrive within that same framework.

Less Rhetoric, More Action

To truly advocate for struggling musicians, leading by practical example is imperative. Actions resonate far more profoundly than viral Grammy narratives, and there exist actionable avenues for effecting change:

- Create a foundation dedicated to supporting independent artists with healthcare and equitable remuneration — and urge fellow Grammy winners to match your contributions.
- Establish mentorship initiatives for emerging artists negotiating label contracts.
- Invest in innovative compensation models for artists rather than merely anticipating labels to alter their practices.

This is the hallmark of true industry disruptors. Taylor Swift did not merely vocalize her concerns; she re-recorded her entire discography, amassing significant financial success in the process. Prince reinvented his business framework, and Petty undertook a creative strike, withholding one of his seminal albums.

That is how one instigates change—proposing solutions and enduring the necessary sacrifices to uplift the entire community.

Roan lamented, “Labels, we have your back, but do you have ours?” Yet her words seem to echo the sentiments of a contender unprepared for the championship bout. This is not a playful contest; it is high-stakes competition in an unforgiving arena. Artists and managers who approach this challenging landscape with maturity recognize the transient nature of commercial success — altruistic intentions pale in comparison to the harsh realities of the industry. Labels may support until artists cease to contribute value, just as artists benefit until other entities present more appealing offerings. This is not cynicism but rather a pragmatic understanding.

Stevie Nicks prophetically pondered, “Can I handle the seasons of my life?” encapsulating the uncertainty that time brings. Labels and publishers cannot be expected to remedy every ailment or bear the brunt of artists' faltering careers when opportunities evaporate. Acknowledging this dynamic simplifies the quest for solutions and emphasizes the inherent community of the industry.

If artists approach discussions proactively, armed with actionable proposals to safeguard their community



during these unprecedented times, industry veterans will undoubtedly lend an ear, as they did on that memorable Sunday.

The industry matrix is undeniably flawed, often resembling a chaotic spectacle. Yet Roan is not yet equipped to fulfill the role of a transformative figure. True change necessitates a collective effort, and it is vital for her to engage with knowledgeable partners to devise a viable framework. Leveraging her fame to advocate for change by fostering open dialogue with industry allies is essential. Without this, she risks becoming just another fleeting artist, squandering her momentary fame on superficial accolades. Timeless music endures, and the genuine challenges faced by our vibrant, creative community warrant far more than fleeting recognition.

Jeff Rabhan, the former Chair of the Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, is also the co-founder and CEO of bored-of-ed.com, an edutainment platform for both consumers and industry professionals.

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Author

aimeeyoung99

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