

It's been a long, hard slog for rising star Nerina Pallot. Dropped by Polydor at the turn of the millennium after a dream contract that turned out to be a total nightmare, she pulled in favours from friends and industry contacts to independently record her second album, *Fires*. Since we last spoke to Nerina in December 2005, her new contract with Warner Bros. subsidiary 14th Floor Records and a slightly tweaked re-release of *Fires* have seen her fortunes take on the kind of trajectory usually reserved for lesser talents, the kind of people who barely have to don a skimpy outfit and mime to a backing track to score a big hit.

Nerina's victorious and vindicating reissue of the *Everybody's Gone To War* single saw her catapulted into the top ten for the first time in conjunction with huge amounts of radio play, TV advertising and entertaining interviews. It's not hard to see how this self-effacing funny girl has managed to build herself an ever-

expanding army of admirers over the years, and one of her biggest allies in this was her use of the internet to keep up the interest, even through the wilderness years. TREVOR RAGGATT got chatting to Nerina one night about this very topic just prior to the relaunch of *Fires* and she kindly obliged our good-natured nosiness by sending us the following discourse on the wonders of modern technology from a tin with wings flying somewhere over the Atlantic, by the wonders of modern technology of course!

How important is the internet for up-and-coming and established artists? Hmm, I was going to say it's possibly the third most important tool for any artist, after TV and radio, but judging from the web-propelled success of the Arctic Monkeys, I would say it is just as important – and may well become a superior form of media in the not too distant future.

Having my own website is great as a primary source of information, but it

was minimally funded when I wasn't on a major label. I couldn't afford a lot of the more expensive features like a message board or a more interactive site. Enter MySpace, which is an absolute godsend for independent artists, or anybody who desires a presence on the net for a non-existent outlay. I have never had the budget for any kind of online advertising, but I have been fortunate to be favourably reviewed on webzines and things like AOL etc.

Just how much all this effort really reaps in terms of concrete benefits beyond a general vibe, i.e. more record sales, better gig attendances, I can't really know. Other than the feedback I get from people on the main site and MySpace... I would say it has to help both. Legal download sites like iTunes have really stimulated record sales because it's so immediate. As I'm typing this we're at the billionth download this week on iTunes, already! How amazing is it that people can hear my song on Radio 2 and I could see within an hour the album jump up on iTunes and Amazon?! I think *Fires* has also has some good word of mouth about it and people post about it on other sites etc., so these things all fuel each other. It's also so much easier for people to find out where and when I am playing a show, and for me to inform them about latest news.

Of course, it's going to become more difficult to separate spam from real recommendations, I think, although everyone is becoming a lot more savvy about marketing people who post once or twice on music fan message boards and then start hyping stuff. I think blogs might be where real word of mouth will happen, because it's hard to fake a blog, or a real person. Their likes and dislikes will be far more compelling than someone posting rubbish on an artist's message board. So too profiles on MySpace etc.; while the net is smothered in banner ads, it is still a place where individuals can be heard.

I think the trick is to know your market, as with any kind of promotion. Oh, and DO NOT BE AFRAID OF FREE DOWNLOADS. They only stimulate awareness of a band or artist. Look at the US band OK Go – their video for *A Million Ways* is the most downloaded free video ever – three million downloads!! That means three million people now know who the band are and a percentage of those will probably buy their records. It can't hurt. The internet is the new radio, and once upon a time people taped songs off the radio but still went and bought the physical formats.

With the new deal and everything, I have self-enforced a moratorium on MySpace promotion for the time being. I think the level of organic growth on my page is happening at a really healthy rate right now and I am content for things to tick along nicely. I also think that one person 'discovering' me on the site and then telling all their mates about it is far more productive than my bothering people now that I am no longer a strictly independent artist. I may think up a new way of nicely informing 'non-friends' about upcoming releases, but unless I am satisfied that it is a method that I would find interesting and charming enough to investigate myself, I won't do it.

Right now, I would say MySpace is MORE important than my own website in some ways. Because of the immediacy of contact, the way of condensing info into one page, and the sheer volume of passing traffic/captive audience. I could of course have had a blog on one site, photos on another etc., but no site has ever consolidated all those things and offered what MySpace does, and to such a vast and varied demographic. In the few months before *Fires* originally came out as an independent release, I used it as a means of directly informing people who I thought might like my music from their profile information that I had a record due for release. Because I had more time a year ago, I

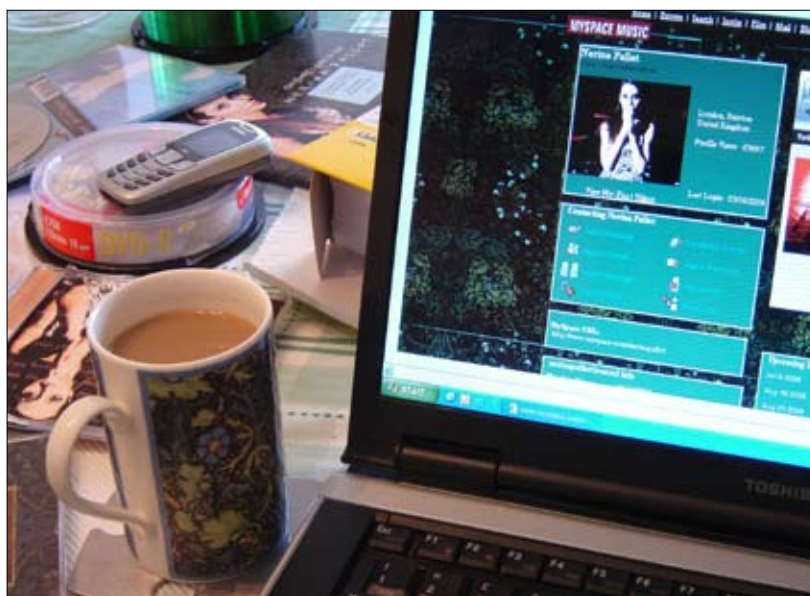
wrote to each person individually and was really honest about feeling uncomfortable about essentially trying to flog them something, but also expressing that, being on a near zero budget for marketing and advertising, it was my only option. You would be amazed by the positive uptake.

Of course, it's really time consuming, and it has to come from me and me only, but I love that level of interaction. I am so emotional about the music I love and the artists who make it, that I will always be someone who needs to make a personal connection with fans, because I dunno, I have to know a real person makes the things I like and I figure other people must feel the same.

However, it doesn't mean anything to have 30,000 friends really, and everybody is on it in 2006 so if you're looking for a record deal, there isn't any point in sending

out 20,000 friend requests and hoping for a deal. Tila Tequila is testament to that [*an unsigned American urban/rap artist who is currently among the most 'popular' independent act on MySpace in terms of page views and 'friends'*]. Plus, it's on the wane. Maybe it's already over – a lot of the people who have been using it for a long time are leaving because of the new Murdoch ownership. Everybody now knows that the MySpace 'band of the week' is not on the front page because they're good, but because they have a big label that can afford the \$50,000 for that ad.

It's a remarkable invention, but don't be fooled – we all have a great time using it to post music, silly pictures of our cats, blogs about how much of an idiot George Dubya is – while what we are in fact creating is one of the world's most sophisticated and extensive databases



which our little friend Mr Murdoch will exploit religiously. Once upon a time, when you clicked on the 'Is MySpace free?' question on the FAQs page, it said 'ABSOLUTELY'. Now it informs you that for the time being it is, but there may be the introduction of some paying premium services in the near future. I absolutely love the place, Tom [*Anderson, MySpace creator*] is actually a very friendly and nice chap, good to luck to him, but unless it stays completely free, people will leave and go to a new site which will be much the same, even better, and totally free.

Also, when will folks learn that wallpapers that obscure everything of interest are just a complete waste of time? HTML is not everything, people!

Of course, MySpace is a fairly recent development. All through the unsigned years the level of support I got on my Yahoo!

Groups page was a real encouragement. But that page wasn't my creation – it was a number of my very early fans that set it up – although for the time being it serves as my main message board. While it's horrible to use and other fans have set up far, far superior boards, for some reason, everyone stays put! In terms of making a comparison with MySpace, they both serve very different purposes for me, so I guess I can't really compare them.

It would be no exaggeration to say that, were it not for the lovely messages on the Yahoo! Group hoping I would make another record when I myself thought that would never happen, *Fires* would be a bunch of demos on my hard drive. Until recently, I could honestly say I had met nearly everyone in the Group, which I guess was because we were tiny! But, more interestingly, a lot of people in the

Group have gotten to know each other too and become friends over the years. I've seen members' kids grow up over the last few years (OK, in photos!), we had the sudden loss at a very young age of an early group member, the loss of loved ones has been shared on the board too... graduations, members suddenly being allowed to practise medicine on unsuspecting members of the public who might not even be huge Mariah Carey fans [*paging WTT writer Michael Banna!*]. All this points to a

community. Is that unusual?

I think it's because I've been a marginal artist, and that creates a real bond between people – liking something practically nobody else knows about. I'm like that about Lewis Taylor – I could never dislike anyone who likes his music, because if they recognise that it's special, then they must be top people. It takes courage to like anything just because you like it, in a world where we're being told what we ought to like because a majority does, and when being 'different' is now much like being the same as everyone else.

Yes, Goth people, I love you all very much, but why are you bothering??!

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And with that, an airliner melts into the pink horizon and disappears from view. Nerina's new single Sophia is released in the UK on October 2nd.