



Opinion

Export essential to Canadian music publishers and songwriters

New report suggests government is on right track with push to open new markets for creative industries.



Jennifer Mitchell

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Canadian Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly will be in China next week on a trade mission that she says she hopes will expand trade relationships and open up a coveted market for creative industries. It couldn't come at a better time for my music publishing colleagues and their partners in the sector. As a new report shows, exports are the lifeblood of the music publishing business. Put simply, export is vital for Canadian songwriters and we can't count on one market alone to be successful.

In fact, it's how small businesses like mine, Red

Brick Songs and Casablanca Media Publishing, are able to flourish. I started Casablanca with Ed Glinert in 2001. We had a children's record label, produced TV shows for Discovery Channel and represented many independent publishers from around the world in Canada. Eventually we decided to focus on music publishing and continued to do what we do best: make relationships across the world work for our songwriters.

I created Red Brick Songs in 2011 to start representing songwriters on my own. Through perseverance and an entrepreneurial spirit (and many trips abroad to build even more relationships), I managed to succeed in a very male-dominated and fiercely competitive industry. Now, with seven employees, we are one of Canada's largest independent music publishing companies, investing in and representing almost

40 songwriters such as the Rural Alberta Advantage, Fast Romantics, Charlotte Cardin and Dan Davidson, emerging songwriters like Zanski and household Canadian favourites Sharon, Lois and Bram. At Red Brick and Casablanca, we also have the privilege of sub-publishing and representing international songwriters in Canada. For example, we work with Big Yellow Dog to represent Meghan Trainor and Maren Morris locally, Bucks Music Group, who publish Amy Wadge (the co-writer for Ed Sheeran), Pulse Music (whose songwriters have written hits songs like Despacito, Havana, What Lovers Do), and administer many other catalogues from all over the world including the estate of John Lennon.

A new report published by the Canadian Music Publishers Association, "Export Ready, Export Critical: Music Publishing in Canada," finds that, in 2016, more than two-thirds of revenues for Canadian music publishers came from foreign sources compared to just one-third in 2005. At the same time, many new small and medium companies have

emerged. In today's digital and globally connected age, songs, music, culture have no boundaries, allowing many Canadian songwriters to achieve international success because of the scale of opportunity outside our country. That's why music publishers use their relationships with publishers in other countries built over many, many years to create opportunities for songwriters to succeed. This means matching people like songwriter Jeen O'Brien with partners in lucrative markets like Japan to co-write singles that become hits or that are later used in TV, movies, video games, or translated into other languages or licensed to other artists. Long after that popular song you heard on Spotify is released, music publishers are working hard to help songwriters expand and grow into international markets.

Music publishing is about making an investment in songwriters, but it's not about being a bank or broker. Music publishing is about championing a songwriter and a song through the lifetime of their career and that song's copyright. We take a long-term perspective and work a lot behind the scenes to create value. We don't forget about a song after it's written. We are the songwriter's partner. We not only make financial investments in songwriters, we also invest time and leverage our relationships to ensure that we get the best licensing arrangements and deals to evolve a songwriter's career.

There are some challenges, however, and Canada cannot let these get in the way of its export opportunities and success.

Canada is at a disadvantage when it comes to copyright protection. A strong copyright regime is an incentive for business development and ensuring Canada remains a competitive market for entrepreneurs like me. We find market solutions but it's easier to take risks and make investments when there's an ability to enforce copyright with strong legislation. Additionally, government funding for creative industries needs to set aside some money that addresses the needs of music publishers. As the Export Ready, Export Critical report notes, current funding models are "not designed optimally for growing publisher export activities." These aspects need to be addressed to ensure a thriving and innovative music publishing industry and to truly showcase to the world that Canada supports our creators.

The music publishing sector is made up of small and medium-sized independent companies that are leading the growth in creative industries by taking risks and continually innovating in the face of an evolving landscape, and international competition. The potential to bring Canada's songs to the rest of the world is enormous. With the right support, the possibilities are endless.

Jennifer Mitchell is president of Red Brick Songs and Casablanca Media Publishing, a leading Canadian independent music publisher, and a member of the Canadian Music Publishers Association board of directors working in tandem with executive director Margaret McGuffin to ensure the voice of music publishers is considered in policy and program development.