

BEING HERE NOW

With help from BBH, rock band Oasis took their music to the streets, literally. By Ann Cooper

The new documentary *Dig out Your Soul in the Streets*, capturing the September 2008 launch of the Brit band Oasis' latest album, opens with the immortal words of lead singer Liam Gallagher: "When I first came here. I was fucking freaked out. New York's a challenge, innit? And once you've mastered that, you've mastered everything."

If so, Gallagher and his band, along with the combined resources of its record label Warner Bros, marketing and tourism organization NYC & Company, ad agency Bartle Bogle Hegarty and some 30 assorted street musicians, can congratulate themselves on having mastered that challenge.

In a first-of-its-kind promotion, the band eschewed traditional music marketing routes and promoted its *Dig out Your Soul* album by having street musicians perform songs from the album to an appreciative audience of fans and New York subway riders three weeks before its actual launch. This marketing initiative culminated six months later in the launch on MySpace of a documentary capturing the event, and thus giving the album a second lease of life.

Gallagher's often impenetrable Mancunian vowels pepper the 18-minute homage to a band, a city, its street musicians and a new album. Produced by BBH, New York, the gritty black and white film celebrates the vibrancy of New York by showing the mostly MTA musicians play their own versions of Oasis' songs on well-known subway station platforms including

Grand Central, Times Square, Penn Station and Astor Place. The MySpace launch was the first time an 18-minute Hi-Def documentary had ever been shown on the social networking site and it got close to two hundred thousand hits in just two days.

One of the delights of *Dig out Your Soul in the Streets*, lies in discovering the unexpected and original ways in which the many talented street musicians interpret Oasis songs. The documentary starts with them all arriving in the morning at a loft in Brooklyn to rehearse the songs, including the new single, "The Shock of the Lightning," to be performed publicly for the first time that afternoon. Part of the strategy was to have fans film the street musicians themselves, and post the resulting content on a YouTube channel dedicated to the album launch.

It all began months earlier when BBH Swedish co-creative directors and brothers, Calle and Pelle Sjoenell, were brainstorming over ways to promote Warner Bros' clients. WB, while not a client, had been bouncing ideas around with BBH for some time.

"Warner Bros was interested in collaborating on new ideas about how to release music nowadays," says Pelle. "Music today is still released in such a traditional way, whereas the distribution and everything else has become very untraditional."

Influenced by the unorthodox way in which the band Radiohead had released its album,

by allowing consumers to name their price, the brothers came up with the idea of street musicians performing songs from an unreleased album (so the music started, instead of ended up, in the streets). Warner Bros loved the idea. The stroke of genius came when the record company suggested Oasis, who to fans Pelle and Calle, was the perfect fit. "We needed very song-based music so that you could have interesting interpretations by the musicians," says Calle.

According to Kevin Roddy, chief creative officer of BBH, Oasis was on board from the beginning, but had questions over the quality of the talent, and whether street musicians could make Oasis' music sound good. "But once we got to Brooklyn and started working with individual musicians, Oasis was blown away by their talent."

It was at this point that NYC & Company, a BBH client, climbed on board. "We wanted it to be about street music and NYC is always charging us with how to remind the world of how vibrant, and artistic, even the streets of New York are," says Roddy.

The documentary was designed to prolong an album's typical sales curve and reinvigorate sales and excitement. "It was always a two-stage thing," says Calle. "That one day was aimed at getting as many people as possible to see it personally, instead of online. We made the documentary about the music, because we knew it would not live longer than that day."

NYC & Company provided access to the city, helped with distribution and with getting press. The NYC Website drove local people to where the musicians were playing, while Google maps showed the times. "It was interesting in a collaborative sense, because we all had different interests but everyone helped out with their own expertise," says Pelle. It was also posted

Director: The Malloys
Producers: Rebecca Skinner,
Dawn Rose, Julian Katz

Production Company: HSI
Creative Directors: Kevin Roddy,
Pelle Sjoenell, Calle Sjoenell

Client: NYC & Company,
Warner Brothers Records
Agency: BBH/New York

on the Oasis Website and distributed virally to core Oasis fans. "There was a lot of PR involved, and because it was an event that happened on September 12 all over New York, the musicians became the medium itself. Then the musicians, their friends, fans and tourists filmed it and put it up on YouTube so people outside New York could see it. It had so many layers. It was not just a one-off event."

On the day itself, Oasis didn't tell the musicians what to play, but walked around talking and listening. "They were more appreciative. There was some help, but it was musicians meeting musicians, which was really interesting," says Pelle.

After the morning session in Brooklyn, the musicians went to their allotted spots for which they had permits. "They are the best spots in the city, and they have schedules, like any ordinary street performer. They also rotated so people saw different musicians."

Nothing quite like it had been done before.

"Obviously, there are different ways of releasing albums, but this is a great opportunity to have music catch up with the times," says Calle.

The documentary was directed by the Malloy Brothers, known for their music videos and documentary background. "The Malloys had a deep connection to the music industry," says Calle. "And they've done lots of documentaries. They had exactly the style we wanted, which is to let the event speak for itself."

Coincidentally, days before the New York event, Oasis played in Canada, where Noel Gallagher, Liam's brother, was pushed off the stage and ended up in hospital, causing them to cancel their NYC gig. "Because it was a fans-only show, New York was filled with people who had traveled to see Oasis," says Pelle. "So now, they can hear their music played by street musicians instead. "We met people from all over the US who'd traveled to see Oasis and been disappointed, but now they got snippets from the first

album. It was a coincidence, but it was a great moment."

When the documentary was released, it too was promoted virally through the Warner Bros, Oasis and NYC Websites. "We sent it out to fans again," says Pelle. "There were so many hits on MySpace, it ranked amongst the most viewed after one day, yesterday, which made it rise even more. And on the day of the event, we got press from all over the world, including India, Thailand and the UK. And now, it seems like its happening again."

As for results, Oasis had its first top 10 album in 10 years. "Obviously, for Warner Bros, it's all about launching an album; for NYC & Company, it's all about New York, where things like this happen that wouldn't happen anywhere else," says Calle. "It's also to show their appreciation of the fantastic street musician community. It shows New York streets as a place where things like this can happen."

Adds Roddy: "People loved it. We interviewed people watching the artists and teased the event on Oasis' Websites. Fans are going, 'Oh my God, I can hear songs before the album launches?'"

He says, "NYC & Company wanted to get people outside the city to understand how exciting the street culture is. We chose Oasis because it's a UK band with a huge UK following, and the UK is a large market for NYC. Plus, more people will see it on MySpace than on TV. It's in over 20 countries, and the more people outside of NYC see it, the more will come visit. NYC loves that it was done very authentically. We didn't have to invent anything."

It remains only for Liam Gallagher to sum it all up: "Without sounding like a wanker, I was totally blown away. It's real people doing what they love and it puts a lot of people to shame. Yeah, you fuckers. Nice one."

