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BUSINESS LIFE SEMINAR
Session N° 67: 6 October 1995

THE STRATEGY OF AUTHENTICITY
Starting a Record Company
in a World Dominated by Five Multinationals.

by Gilbert Castro
CEO of Mélodie

Report by Lucien Claes

Summary of the meeting

Gilbert Castro gives us a light-hearted explanation of how, starting from scratch, he has launched artists who have gone on to achieve world-recognition. He also shows us how he has helped develop new musical trends and how he has created the only complete (albeit small) marketing chain in the French record industry, and all this with a healthy balance sheet! We see how a combination of intuition and good management can allow a small business to boldly go where the big multinationals have failed: discovering, promoting and distributing authentic styles of music.

PRESENTATION BY GILBERT CASTRO

My experience has been in the world of travelling artists, where you have to make extremely subjective decisions concerning which work you should produce by which artists or which direction to take with new developments. I've started up several small music production companies in a sector that is dominated by five multinationals. I'm going to show you how I did this, the problems I've had to overcome and how much pleasure all this has given me. I'll end with some general conclusions.

I wanted to go into business after having spent about ten years in research and studying Economics. I was looking for a job in the private sector and ended up becoming the general secretary of a company that dealt in spare parts for cars. I thought seriously about starting my own company and planned to go into book publishing with some friends of mine. We gave it a serious go. In fact, two of these friends are now working at major publishing houses, one as a writer and the other an editor. However, one day a friend contacted me, offering to set me up in record production.

He was an adventurous fellow who'd already put several bankruptcies behind him despite undoubtedly having talent. A mutual friend had been telling him about my management skills and the next thing we knew he was inviting me to get involved in a business that seemed to be going downhill fast! He was convinced that I'd be able to put things right, but really there was no hope. I quickly put him off the idea. However, one thing that came out of it was that we decided to start a new record company¹.

The start of the adventure

We started very small, a SARL² with 20,000 F capital. We really needed 10 times this amount to produce a record in decent conditions, which meant that we had to be crafty. Licensing systems gave us the right to operate for three years in a restricted area concerning products that we didn't actually own. We were soon successful. My associate used his talents to find some interesting products and together we managed to make them work. Within a fairly short time we had formed a team of three or four people, which despite being small, enabled us to get noticed as talent scouts. We knew how to get small, inexpensive deals which were quite successful with the radio stations and we made some good record sales. Between 1980-82 we produced a number of hits that were distributed by a couple of well-established companies (Disc' Az, which was a subsidiary of the radio station Europe 1 at the time, and Vogue, an independent French label).

¹ The mainplayers in the record industry are the following:

- first there is the artist (or the composer or group, etc) who offers a piece of music;
 - the producer records the music in magnetic form and makes a master copy;
 - the record company reproduces this master in commercial format (vinyl records, compact discs, cassettes, etc);
 - the distributor approaches the points of sale that are in contact with the end consumer.
- Certain companies specialise in one part of the process, while others are polyvalent.

² Société A Responsabilité Limitée, similar to the British PLC, Public Limited Company.

The first setbacks

After three years we started to make the classic mistakes that are associated with companies expanding too quickly. We recruited a few too many people and expanded to a team of fourteen, the logic being that we could no longer work like amateurs. We signed contracts with distributors who were much more powerful than us and able to negotiate to their advantage. When we produced our biggest hit, I had to hand over most of our margin to my distributor, which meant that in 1982, we recorded a loss of 600,000 F despite a turnover of 6 million F. The following year we had no major hits and made a turnover of only 4 million, which led to an additional loss of 900,000 F. In other words, by the end of 1993 we had accumulated losses of 1.5 million francs on a turnover of 4 million!

This is not an unusual situation but it's still quite difficult when you're a small company with no capital and virtually in suspension of payment. We could have thrown the towel in if we'd listened to our accountant, our tax advisor and our lawyer, amongst others, but we just didn't want to! It would have been terrible to admit defeat so we decided to try to sort things out instead.

Starting two new companies

It all happened very quickly. One of my friends, now the head of the Novapress group, told me "*It would be crazy to give up at this point!*" He wasn't short of money and offered to put 900,000 F into the business. As is often the case in these situations, we had to make arrangements with the suppliers, the tax department, the social security people, etc. We brought our payroll down from 14 to just 3 people. Some of our employees were made redundant, but not all of them, because we started two other small businesses (we didn't want to put all our eggs into one basket.) One of these was a sheet music publishing company and the other was a small distribution company with 250,000 F capital, that we started with another associate who contributed 500,000 F. In fact, one of the reasons for our problems had been our lack of control over the distribution chain.

Well thought-out decisions

This didn't mean that we rushed into things. On the contrary, we made these decisions after analysing our previous failures. We realised that we had got into a really dangerous situation because we were dependent on an overly-restricted number of products for our turnover, as well as being dependent on our distributors. Funnily enough, what nearly ruined us was a hit, as I mentioned earlier. At around the same time, we released the début title of an African group through another distributor. This was a well-established label that sold millions of records by very well-known artists and was in a strong position to promote the records it distributed. We sold 600 copies! That was it: we said that we'd have to go into distribution so that we wouldn't have to beg a partner to distribute the records we wanted to produce.

The big labels have trouble working on anything considered to be at all alternative. They're well set up to work on a large scale but they don't really know how to scout talent and promote new artists. This is why small companies like ours have been able to boom. We kept this in mind when we decided to branch out into distribution.

In search of new products

We still needed a good selection of products to distribute. Some people offer fine products that are very interesting creatively but doomed to be labelled 'alternative' for evermore without any real hope of commercial success. On the other hand, other products can work if you handle them in the right way. We started to federate businesses that were going badly because like us they were having distribution problems.

We started with a mini-organisation made up of two sales assistants (who also sent out the parcels), two administrative assistants, a secretary, an accountant and a marketing director. We soon came up against an enormous problem. The major stores in particular don't want to deal with small suppliers. This means that you can be accepted initially only to hear them say shortly after, *"You're account is difficult to manage. It takes up too much time, too much space in our computer files, too much space in our stock and we don't earn a penny, so thanks, but..."* We therefore had to struggle for our turnover and survived thanks to favourable circumstances. There are always small companies who try to develop in niches left open when large groups are taken over or reengineered. Above all we were able to define our personality and find a line of products that soon allowed us to occupy a unique place in the French record industry. This is strongly linked to our record policy, our musical background, and particularly the trend for world music which we started, albeit completely by chance.

World music

One day, quite by chance, the producer responsible for the début album of the Senegalese group Touré Kunda met my then associate on a train. He had become interested in the group while on a trip in Africa. He had found the money to produce the record there and then but he was lacking both a record company and a distributor. He told my associate, *"I have an excellent product,"* (but then people always do in this trade!), *"You must listen to it, because it's going to be a big hit!"*

So we listened to his record, liked it a lot and decided to produce it. We were still dependent on other distributors at the time, so we signed agreements with two separate companies. The result isn't worth mentioning. Nobody except us was interested in the group. We persevered with a second record, which did a little bit better, then a third which did better still, but it was all a bit hit-and-miss. The big distributors didn't think it could ever work, either because they genuinely didn't believe in the music or because they admitted to being racist, *"We won't do it because we don't want to attract a black following at the retail outlets"*. To give an example, Vogue were still turning down Touré Kunda a year before their first gold disc.

In search of alternatives...

We got out of this deadlock by finding our own way round the problem. This whole experience came in very handy for our business later on. A deciding factor with Touré Kunda was their talent on stage. The band were excellent at working the audience up and getting them dancing, regardless of whether they were just a few dozen friends in a cramped room in one of the seedier areas of Paris, as was the case at the beginning, or a crowd of 10,000 people in prestigious venues three years later. It's true that we didn't risk organising these concerts ourselves, because it wasn't our job and what's more, you're not allowed to be a record producer at the same time as an events organiser, as this would mean

both representing and employing the same artist. However we were really counting on these concerts, so we sponsored them to make sure that they took place.

Another deciding factor was the positive attitude of the press. They have more freedom to talk about what's new than the television and radio, who are under commercial pressure and tend to stick to tried and tested formulae to avoid slipping down in the ratings.

This is how, bit by bit, we managed to make it work and very well too, since the group has made huge record sales. We worked together for five years, until the band became a huge commercial success and went onto bigger and better things. It goes without saying that the big companies can offer more money and especially the possibility of world-wide distribution, which was beyond our little outfit.

... to start a world trend

Our company's development was closely linked to this particular wave of music, which had of course existed well before we came onto the scene. Other record companies had exploited it, but in different ways. Some made quite popular music from African dance, aimed at Africans, while others went into ethnomusicology, making up lovely collections of traditional music from all over the world, from Pygmy through all sorts of percussion sounds to Tibetan music. In fact, we developed a wave of music that caught on world-wide. After our first success with Touré Kunda, a whole series of artists approached us, nearly all the Senegalese artists, as well as musicians from Mali, the Congo, Zaire and Guinea.

The Anglo-Saxons tried to get in on the scene since they dominate the music industry. Even though the main artists came from French-speaking Africa, the wave was called "world music" to distinguish it from other genres. This is quite a vague description, given for example that you can find accordion music in the world music section in London record stores. Each type of music has its own special appeal.

Careful talent scouting

We've had a few failures, but we've also made some really lucky finds and unearthed some major talent. The adventure we'd started quite by chance became a real passion. We pursued our talent scouting in South Africa, where we met Johnny Clegg. We released his first record outside South Africa. In the Cape Verde Islands in 1990 we discovered another artist, Césaria Evoria. We later made a name for her on our label, working with her for four years. She has had so much success that she's currently performing all over the world, selling records in Japan, the United States, Canada, etc. Some artists have stayed with us whilst others have gone on to the big companies who carry clout in forty countries.

It would have been pointless for a small company like ours to try to break into the big markets, by trying to find another Vanessa Paradis, for example. This would have cost a fortune and we wouldn't have had the right means to distribute on such a large scale. I've always preferred to look for artists in areas where nobody else dares go, either through ignorance or a lack of confidence. In any case, record companies are always started off this way, even the largest, by a couple of jazz-lovers, baroque-listeners or unrepentant rock fans! When you manage to combine a feeling for music with sales figures, a good choice of artists and the development of a profitable business, you can build a whole empire!

As we've scouted talent, we've tried and gradually succeeded in discovering niches where we could position ourselves away from the competition, if only for a while. This has become my guiding principal and we've slowly but surely built up a sizeable list of artists.

Making it long-term

Although we have had some hits, they've generally been followed by leaner periods and it's difficult to make the good times last. It's not enough simply to have a good list of artists. They still have to come up with records that work long-term. These "catalogue basics" are the key to lasting success.

Let me give you an example. We had gained a reputation for being very open, which meant that we were contacted to distribute in France an American catalogue of jazz that was very trendy in the eighties. We did this for two years until the producer was taken over by a multinational that did its own distribution. This is how we made a name for ourselves on the jazz scene.

And then one day at the end of 1989 someone approached me with a very simple but interesting idea. The idea was to rerelease all the jazz greats that were over fifty years old and therefore no longer under exclusive copyright. The only obligation was to pay mechanical rights to the composers and/or publishers, whose protection covers them longer than the record copyright laws. To do this, we had to make rerecordings on the original 78" masters or other formats that we needed to dig up. At the beginning I did have some qualms about whether this would be legal or not, but after looking into it in detail I found out that it was perfectly legal.

We still needed the talent and networks to make the project work. The person who'd suggested the idea was a walking encyclopaedia of music and owned over 100,000 records from every era. He also had access to a network of collectors which was essential for a project like ours since record companies don't generally keep archives themselves. In any case, nobody has complete archives and the last thing on earth that the big labels wanted to do was reproduce records that had once belonged to a rival company. This left the way clear for us to make a wonderful collection that we've called "Chronological Jazz Classics". Each month we released five CDs in the collection. We're currently up to number 350 and the thing that's surprised me the most, knowing how fussy collectors tend to be, is that we haven't received any complaints, apart from one letter pointing out that we'd missed one track off the Louis Armstrong 37/38 collection!

This is a collection that is now firmly established with world-wide sales, although they're certainly not enormous given that the collection is aimed at collectors, specialists and jazz-lovers. We've had no competition because we had such a head start that no one has since dared copy us. In fact, an interesting legality is that nobody is allowed to reproduce the collection by straightforward copying since the re recording work we've done to freshen up the old recordings is our property and therefore under copyright.

The critics have given us unanimous praise, especially in the United States, which has become our biggest market. In a rather pompous article on the collection, the New York Times recently remarked that it's funny all the same how it took the French to do this, given that the music is 95% American!

This is one example of how we make a turnover even when we don't have hits. This gives us the time we need to develop new musical trends, promote new artists, and so on.

The necessary innovation

I set myself one management rule: never rest on your laurels! In the niche I'm in people are forced to innovate constantly and this means taking risks all the time. Very often, people in this sort of industry tend to think "double or quits" and gamble like poker players. There's a fairly well-known cycle, especially in the cinema, where after one low-budget success won

through either talent or chance or both, people go on to spend more than they earn on a project that gets out of hand, reaches Hollywood proportions, and fails. This is often the end for many people. On the other hand, whenever I commit myself to a new musical trend or I want to produce an interesting artist, I'm well aware that it's going to be a long haul. I try to spend only the extra cash that we can survive without so that I don't have to worry too much and can get to sleep at night! This is why we go about things casually and with a certain detachment, giving ourselves the time to increase our chances of success.

From the recording studio to the retail outlets

At first we weren't taken seriously by the banks and other serious investors. The banks aren't keen on artists and we had to really crawl to them. Towards the ends of the eighties we made it thanks to a portfolio of activities that was stable enough to inspire confidence, and I felt that it was time to move on again.

In 1989 I received an offer to take over a store that specialised in music similar to ours owned by some friends who were in trouble. It wasn't really a good deal, but I didn't have a retail outlet, so I went for it! We put the shop back on its feet and it's still around today.

Shortly after, the professional union asked me to carry out a mission in the Congolese record industry that was going to rack and ruin. In fact, the Congolese authorities secretly wanted to privatise the sector and had appealed to people that might be interested in investing in it. When I sent my recommendations to the ministry in charge, I was asked, "Why don't you do it yourself?" I agreed in a moment of weakness and found myself landed with a company that was and still is in great difficulty, due to the local economic and political climate.

A year later I was asked to take over a cassette-duplication company based in the Paris suburbs. The company had already been taken over once after going bankrupt by a specialist in video game reproduction. This is a different sort of business altogether and the buyer quickly messed up the machines. The factory had the capacity for 3-4 million cassettes per year, but it only served the market for games cassettes and production was a mere 17,000 per year. The buyer and his family threw in the towel and we took over the factory with some friends.

In 1993 we opened a second record shop. Since then we've been able to say that we own a mini chain of stores.

In 1994 the Davout studios went bankrupt. These are undoubtedly the best and oldest studios in Paris. They were set up in 1965, with 300 m² and superb acoustics, and all the great musicians like to record there. I was offered the business and I took it over. It's the jewel in our crown!

I admit that we've diversified in a rather higgledy-piggeldy manner, but I find our originality rather amusing. Although we operate on a microscopic scale, we're the **only** label in France to own a complete chain, from the recording studio to the record store. The group makes an annual turnover of approximately 80 million francs and all our operations break even. The only exception is the Congo company that I continue to support for sentimental reasons, our history being closely linked to the success of African music.

Fascinating job, ordinary company

It's quite a fun experience to start from scratch, with hardly two pennies to rub together, and build up a business that holds together. This is satisfying in itself. To make a more

general remark, even in a fascinating but risky job (the people involved think they're going to hit the jackpot, but in general they end up losing the shirt off their backs), you can find rules that apply to any other sector. This is borne out in the way the banks have treated us. At the beginning we didn't inspire their confidence, but once you can show them solid bottom lines for ten years running they treat you like any other company and give you credit. These days the banks even chase after me since we have the best quotation possible for companies of our size at the Banque de France.

Finally, business is much the same in any industry, if you leave aside the differences in the choice of products (which are made much more intuitively) and the people you work with (you meet more arty types than you do in metallurgy). Like all small and medium-sized businesses, we often come up against cash flow problems. We also have our share of legal problems, due to the numerous types of copyright fees that have to be paid, both contractual and negotiated, and the fact that some legal texts leave loopholes which create disputes and court cases. Finally, a lot of our time and energy is consumed by red tape: five inspections in 1993 is a lot for a small company without a legal department. First of all, one of our companies was given a fiscal inspection. The fact that we make a lot of exports meant that we also had a VAT inspection. The team that did the inspection found nothing out of order, despite having exorbitant powers at their fingertips. However, one part of their report worried the other departments, which meant that they all made a mad rush for another fiscal inspection. To cap it all, we received another unexpected visit from the factory inspectorate. Apparently, we were under suspicion because we had employed two girls on a government training scheme. This was something that the government was trying to encourage but the problem was that it gave us a small advantage!

We came out of it all in one piece because the record label is relatively well run and certainly isn't short of grey matter, which comes in very handy when inspections turn into theoretical debates! It's still a wonder how other people manage without the good fortune that we've had. This might explain why certain small and medium-sized businesses go under, stop employing people or adopt an extreme form of Poujadism.

Some questions to conclude

I sometimes wonder if I could have gone further. Perhaps I could have turned the respect we've earned into major commercial success and the company could have had a stronger growth. Can we put this down to personal failings or is it something concerning the whole of the French music industry? I've often wondered why there isn't even one French multinational in the music industry when they're successful in other sectors (e.g. luxury goods, communications, telephone and car sectors). It's a bit too easy to blame it on the domination of the Anglo-Saxon culture. I've even thought that we could become a major French company in the music business. I haven't succeeded and I'm not sure that I've really tried, because this would mean having to rely on some major industrial and financial groups. Perhaps I just haven't spent enough time on the management issues discussed here at the Ecole de Paris?

DEBATE

The explorer and the multinational

A participant: *Are we to imagine that a French company starting off in niches can hope for more, given the huge concentration of the media industry?*

Gilbert Castro (G.C.): It's true that the largest independents and the smallest major companies have been bought out by the big groups, but I still think it's possible to start a major company in France, since we do have some advantages in terms of the vast range of music you can find here.

I really believed in this a few years ago when the Ministry of Culture was taking an interest. But it's tiring talking to institutions who don't seem to understand the situation. They only think about the bottom line and want to see two-figure profitability and growth, which just isn't possible in this niche! There is potential for building not a monolithic structure but a successful medium-sized company based in France. This might be possible with the right strategy because there's a lot of unknown music waiting to be discovered and given a world audience. But this would take a lot of work and careful listening. It's thanks to keeping our ears open that we were able to start a musical revival and launch a wave of music that is now a world influence.

Participant: *What do you need if you want to be not just innovative but also able to make a profit from your innovations?*

G.C.: I'm not sure that's what I want. I'm lacking the things that attract artists once they've reached a certain stage in their careers: I'm talking about money and the prospect - real or otherwise - of success on a world scale. It's very difficult to compete with the multinationals in this respect.

Some artists become bitterly disillusioned. For every few that succeed, at least ten fail. The multinationals attract them with promises of fame and wealth but the whole thing soon gets to be rather anonymous. An artist becomes a number on a contract, a record whose sales are watched hawkishly. If sales aren't good then the label immediately 'frees' the artist. Some of them ask us to take them back, while others don't dare because they'd feel humiliated. I do sometimes take them back, depending on how interesting their music is.

Participant: *Have any of the big companies ever tried to buy you out?*

G.C.: I had a serious proposal from the leading 'major' French company, Fnac. The company wanted to set up a record label, a distribution company, and so on, and planned to take over small independents to speed up the process. We didn't see eye to eye at all, and they wanted to buy 51% immediately. I thought that it was best not to go ahead and this was the right decision, since the project has gone downhill quite appallingly.

Participant: *Do you have to account to anyone for your actions?*

G.C.: I'm not a 100% shareholder but I may as well be! My associates are entitled to have their say but they leave me a free hand because everything's going well. So I don't have to report to anyone and that's a real advantage. As for the board of directors, we're meeting tonight between 1-2 am in a café near Bastille!

Participant: *I worked in the record industry for a long time. You've brought me back a few memories! You seem to successfully combine intuition and financial management without losing your passion for discovering new music.*

What's more, I felt a great deal of satisfaction when you talked about your jazz collection because I remember an editorial that appeared in 1972 in an American journal specialised in music publishing. It said that the Europeans didn't know how to take advantage of their rich and varied musical heritage. You could have read, "Will the Americans have to show Europe how to mix the different trends in their own repertoire?" You've given us a great answer to this question.

Finally, I can see a huge difference between the way the multinationals operate and your way of choosing music and the artists. For example, in the big company I used to belong to, twelve people from different countries (who were meant to 'represent' national roots) met up for two and a half hours every week to listen to demos from 150 bands and decide which tracks to go for. They obviously didn't have the time to go to the Cape Verde Islands, and they had to come to a consensus right away, which just stifled their originality.

Music from nowhere and authentic music

Participant: *This can easily lead to stereotyped music from here, there and everywhere. I see some common denominators between yourself, the people you work with and the reasons for your success, and they all come down to the value you place on ethnic roots. Your past, your independence and your tastes go together well and you're trying to make a name for strong ethnic music. This reminds me of Marcel Pagnol's stories about the port of Marseille that people from all around the world have read.*

G.C.: I agree with you, as long as we don't limit ourselves to fringe ethnic music, but to broaden the idea to include real music made by truly inventive people. I am thinking, for example, of some excellent classical musicians, all Conservatoire teachers, who have a sextet of double basses. You couldn't possibly imagine the sort of music that this unlikely group come out with. They've also written a manual on double bass playing that is going to be printed. You don't have to go to the ends of the world to find them: they're all here in Paris. I take an interest when I come across this sort of thing and I make a real effort to get the musicians known.

Participant: *How did the girl from the Cap Verde Islands become a star?*

G.C.: She hasn't changed the slightest thing about her singing since the days when she used to sing in a bar. She simply started off with a small following and gradually became more and more popular until she finally got to the point where she had some dedicated fans. Our promotions manager, who at the time was the longest-serving member of our company, actually left us to carry on working with her. This was how interesting the whole thing had become!

There are times when you feel that something's happening. I always pick up on the ripples at a concert, regardless of the size of the audience. There's no mistaking it when something special happens. You know that it's only going to get bigger and better!

Participant: *Music can also be a way for people to identify with a group. Isn't it comforting to listen to Zulu music when you feel a little bit Zulu yourself, when you live in a pretty run-down area of town, you're not really white and you haven't been to one of the top graduate schools?*

Someone once said, "A snob is someone who, when in a group, admires things that bore them when they're on their own", but if you listen to something while pretending to like it,

you do actually end up liking it. Our society has an extraordinary need for community spirit and love.

Participant: *Did you think about rap five years ago?*

G.C.: I wasn't interested in it musically. Whenever my children listened to it on the television I felt like turning over! But I was more reticent about the lyrics, which were promoting a lot of inverted racism and violence disguised as good intentions. It all too often sunk as low as stirring up common prejudices. When you're told not to mess with cocaine and yet you know that the people telling you that could well be dealers, it's best to steer well clear of the whole thing!

Management and genuine interest

Participant: *You said that when you have risky projects you only invest money that you can afford to lose so that you never have insomnia. I think that one of the vital conditions of lasting success is to make sure that nothing stops you from sleeping at night.*

I'd also like to know how much it costs to make a compact disc that sells at 150 F in the shops.

G.C.: When you buy a CD or a vinyl record, you are actually buying a piece of plastic that costs next to nothing to manufacture. The marginal cost of manufacturing and packaging a record is 6 F. There's obviously a huge difference between this and the retail price. This is explained by the copyright and royalty fees, which are shared out among the composer or songwriter, the artist and the producer. Don't forget the margins taken by the middlemen, the label and the retail outlet. Also, there's the VAT that goes to the State.

Participant: *When the company expands, don't you have to share the decisions, which means being less original?*

G.C.: I've made my decision on this matter, and that's not to delegate. It means that I sometimes miss out on musical trends that are potentially very profitable. For example, I rejected dance music and especially techno because this sort of music gets on my nerves! Having said this, I do now leave a free hand to one of my colleagues, knowing that he might make some real finds in the types of music I don't like. When he makes positive decisions I just let him get on with it. Obviously, if I get it wrong too often I'll have to change my approach!

Participant: *You may have the final say but you can't discover all the interesting trends by yourself. Have you got any informers?*

G.C.: Of course! One of them is the lady who runs one of our shops that sells world music. She listens carefully to what the customers say and observes people's reactions to the records she lets them listen to. This is practical marketing. But the best method is still to go travel yourself and discover music that might work.

Eight years ago, a journalist from Actuel brought me back some records by Johnny Clegg from South Africa. Clegg was hugely talented but he didn't interest anyone outside South Africa, and this encouraged me to go there myself and see what he was up to. Ever since then my label has been the largest there.

During my visit people desperately tried to sell me either things that worked well over there but didn't interest me or syrupy variety music sung by Californian-type blondes that was thought to appeal to whites. I surprised a lot of people when I decided to produce the Zulus in Paris. Their first hits dated from the sixties and their average age was about fifty,

which is considered to be very old over there! People thought I was mad, and yet this band was the biggest world success we've ever had.

Participant: *Do you only have contact with the artists when you select them?*

G.C.: I dream of an office on a desert island where no one can get hold of me! No, the link with the artists is quite intense in my job because there are no middlemen like there are at the big labels. The artists are in direct contact with me and want it to stay that way. This creates strong links which are nice because the artists are talented people, but it can sometimes get a bit in terms of the time and energy required.

Participant: *Do you get directly involved in the product development?*

G.C.: I've changed. At the beginning, I used to keep a bit of a distance and just give some general guidance. For example, if a record needed twelve songs to be chosen from fifteen or twenty, I'd give my opinion, the finishing touches would be given to the tracks in the studio, and then I'd call in from time to time to help with recording or listen to a mixing session. I've got much more involved since taking over the studios, which are a really nice place to be in. I now spend a lot of time with certain artists that like working with me. I'm not a musician and I don't know how to write music or make arrangements, but I need to have a certain number of ideas on the subject, and in some cases the artists like to hear my opinion and even like me to help guide their creative output.

Participant: *You seem to have had luck on your side. How do you hang on to it?*

G.C.: I think that chance has played a large part in it. I never considered music when I used to think about what to do with my life. Few of the people I work with know that I went to the Ecole des mines de Paris, but while I was there I met some really interesting artists that we worked with for a few years. But there comes a time when you find a system, despite all appearances! It's no longer just a question of chance when you start to think about what direction to take, make careful decisions and invest in the business.

Participant: *What's your schedule like?*

G.C.: It's a complete disaster! I'm often advised to attend a seminar on time management! I'm the part-time marketing director, but I only spend half a day per week on distribution. On the other hand, I take the phone off the hook and spend three days locked up in the studio because I enjoy it. Sometimes I go to bed late which means that I'm not very fresh in the morning during normal office hours. You can see that my schedule is as chaotic as they get. I still make beginner's mistakes and I don't think this will ever change!