

Ruby Marchand

GLOBAL A&R REP

In her 25 years as Vice President of Global A&R at Warner Music International, Ruby Marchand has racked up some serious frequent-flyer miles. Just what is global A&R, you ask? Well, an A&R (“artist and repertoire”) rep is the creative person at a record company who helps artists find the best songs, or helps them become better songwriters themselves. The A&R person might suggest co-writers and, when the time comes to make an album, producers, engineers, and musicians. You might think of Ruby as a musical matchmaker.

And, as a global A&R rep, Ruby does this for hundreds of artists all over the world. So she not only speaks several languages but she is also well versed in music from such far-flung countries as Portugal, China, and Sweden. Here, she talks about her new global A&R company, her pursuit of perfect songs, and what it means to have “ears.”



By Chris O'Byrne

What do you focus on in global A&R?

I do A&R work in 50 to 60 countries, and I work in virtually every genre of music, from pop, R&B, and jazz to world music and classical. The more time you spend in each country, the more you understand its culture and the role that music plays there. You also get a sense of the different melodies and cadences that appeal to each region. If I'm asked to find a hit song for a superstar in China, I need to know what a Chinese hit song sounds like, as opposed to one in Brazil or Norway.

How do you find a hit song for a foreign artist?

I'll go to my songwriting contacts. I'll have a good sense of who the artist is, what kind of song would suit his or her voice, and what type of melody will suit the culture—what will be a hit there.

How do you know that a song is a potential hit?

It comes down to having what people call “ears”—an intuitive con-

nection with a song—so that you can instantly imagine it at its best. And I often advise writers as well as artists on how to make the songs stronger—like a song doctor. Maybe I'll feel the chorus is weak, or that the lyric loses its focus. Doing this creates better repertoire—and the better the songs are, the better the artist's music is. You can be a great singer, but if your songs are mediocre, you're not going to affect anybody's life. Meanwhile, there are songs that, no matter what country you're in, are so evocative they stop you in your tracks.

How did you get into the music business?

I went to college at Oberlin, a music conservatory in Ohio, and also studied abroad in France and Germany. After college, in 1979, I saw an ad in *The New York Times* that said, “If you have a knowledge of music, and you speak French and German, call Warner Communications.” I was hired as the secretary in their newly established global A&R department, and for 25 years I devoted my career to the globalization of music. Earlier

this year, I started Ruby Marchand Inc., my own global A&R consultancy company. Warner is my main client, and so far I also have clients in Japan, Australia, and New Orleans.

What have you learned from your work?

I've learned that you must earn trust from the artists and the writers, and in turn they must respect your judgment. There are lots of songs I'll discard because I don't think they have strength or impact. But I also encourage the creative people I work with. Whether you're a beginner or a Grammy-winner, I might say, “You have the kernel of an idea here—why don't you keep working on it and develop it?”

What's the most rewarding part of your career?

Feeling connected to music everywhere. When I fly to another country, I can hear music—at the airport or in a club, on the radio or on MTV—that I have participated in. I've been able to have, in my own small way, an impact on how music is heard and felt by people all over the world. 