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Jake Schneider: Bassnectar's Booking Agent on Management, Identity, and Hustle

It's not every day that you get to talk to Bassnectar's booking agent. We sat down with Jake Schneider, an employee-gone-executive at the artist management and booking agency, Madison House. In an industry where some people seem to be a single-sided sheet of paper, Jake is a multifaceted gem of knowledge and intrigue. We go all over the place in this interview, and cover areas like:

- Why "sleep when I'm dead" is a lie
- The book Jake recommends to top-tier artist clients
- Successful (and unsuccessful) artist self-management habits
- What dance music can learn from its rock-and-roll forerunners

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Introducing Jake Schneider

Pariah Reign: In one sentence, describe who you are and what you do.

Jake Schneider (*"JS"*): The name is Jake Schneider, and I am a Partner, Booking Agent, and the Director of Agency Development at Madison House, a full service music booking agency and artist management company.

PR: Place us where you were when you first started at Madison House. What were you doing? What's the story of you climbing the ranks from employee to partner?

JS: I actually didn't start the company by any means. Nadia Prescher and Mike Luba (two people I consider mentors and inspirations) birthed Madison House in Athens, Georgia in 1996. After some formative time in the South they headed West to Colorado, as many do these days. Mike Luba is actually no longer involved with Madison House proper but is one of the directors and an integral part of Madison House Presents, a company that was sort of spun off of our business to produce events and produce shows independently (prior to their partnership with AEG Live).



Around 2005, when I started with Madison House, Mike Luba had gone to work with Live Nation and Michael Coni on their new “360 degree” management model, but prior to his departure, him and Nadia had taken on some new partners. Two of those gentlemen, Jeremy Stein and Jesse Aratow (also role models and mentors to me), are part of the business with Nadia and I today.

Anyways, back in the late 90’s and early 00’s, Madison House was a company working by its own set of rules and rocking a ton of different hats. Under the umbrella of Madison House, we were both booking and managing artists. We ran one of the first true independent fan club ticketing companies that allowed for artists all over the globe to sell a certain amount of tickets to their fans without some of the larger fees that came along with purchasing from companies like Ticketmaster.

At the same time running a travel agency, releasing music via The String Cheese Incident’s record label (SCI-Fidelity), as well as maintaining an artist merchandising company. We were probably doing more than that, but I think you get the gist here.

While all of this was starting out, I was just a little punk rock kid growing up in Minneapolis, MN frequenting shows at places like the legendary club, First Avenue. I went on to attend the University of Iowa, and as my music tastes changed, I started digging more and more into hip-hop (all types), jam bands, electronic music, etc.

I had heard about this nationally known student organization that was in charge of producing concerts for the University and helped in preparing people to work in the concert industry. I was a live show kid since age 13 and loved the “live” experience more than anything and I knew this was what I wanted to do.

I joined S.C.O.P.E. Productions and eventually became the Talent Buyer and Director of the Organization, booking 30-50 shows a year for the University as well as DJ’ing four to five nights a week at a couple of clubs. I booked some of my own hip-hop shows at smaller



city, and worked a bunch of other odd jobs to
and the ends meet. Five years of that in Iowa City
graduating, I ended up on a "trial" run at
Madison House as an agent.

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It wasn't normal to get thrown into an agent role right away. Most agencies had some sort of hierarchy or structure that began in the "mail room", or the contract administration department, and then from there you'd become an assistant to an agent, and then maybe switch to a difference agent's office, and then finally if you had what it takes you'd get the promotion to a full-time agent.

It could be months, or it could be five years!

That "agent" role at different companies meant various things. Some of the larger companies would sign acts and then make you book them with little ability to go out and find your own talent. Some would make you take a *territory* and you were the representative agent of all of their clients in let's say the "Upper Midwest", selling all kinds of bands to promoters that you may or may not be passionate about.

Madison House was different. It was much more of a *manifest destiny* vibe. I was lucky that they believed in my ability, and allowed me to switch over to the opposite side of the industry at 22-years-old and work as an agent right off-the-bat. I had dealt with Madison House as a promoter in Iowa City for S.C.O.P.E., booking their acts like Keller Williams, The String Cheese Incident, Michael Franti, etc, so I had some sort of pre-existing relationship with them and I appreciated their kind-hearted, yet very professional tone, as well as their roster.



with everything I could fit in it and headed to
extremely fortunate that the company had signed an
for US and allowed for me to work on the project with
Jesse Aratow in our office. I immediately began to learn the ropes of
being an agent working with Jesse and the band's manager, Mike
Sanders, who had previously been a booking agent.

Those were some crazy years and I owe so much to those guys for allowing LOTUS to be a sort of guinea pig for me as an agent. Crazy enough I was able to see LOTUS headline Red Rocks this past weekend, and the bands continues to grow to this day.

Madison House allowed me freely to go out, sign new clients, route tours for them, and do what I needed to do in order to drum up some business, especially in some genres that weren't exactly prevalent at the company at that time.

That trial run was probably pretty lenient, but at the end of the day they gave me the freedom to develop my musical tastes and my talents as a booking agent to the point where I had a very successful roster of artists that I had signed, developed and had grown with to a point that some of them were playing major theatres or arenas.

I've been at "The Mad House" now going on twelve years now and a few years back Nadia, Jesse and Jeremy, decided that I shared a similar vision for the company and graciously decided that they would make me a partner in it. It was an incredible gesture and proved to me that loyalty with a company really meant something in an industry that seems so cut-throat from the outside.

PR: You've mentioned before that artists, managers, and promoters have unreal expectations, and will skip steps in the artist journey without letting the fans grow with the music. You said that, "chasing what your gut is telling you and what the paycheck looks like can be two opposite things. They can also coexist." What are the mindsets or strategies required to make the financial and visionary sides of artistry coexist?

JS: There's no universal formula for any specific artist or genre when it comes to touring in the music industry, but there are definitely



We have a ton of factors to take into consideration that lead to

decisions being made about when, where and how often to tour – in
no certain order: the genre/s that the touring artist is living in, the
fanbase that they're attracting or hoping to attract, the cyclical
nature of what types of music are "cool" at the time, whether or not
that artist is more known for their live performances or for their
ability to make and sell their records, the amount of press (both local
and national) the artist is able to garner, the egos of the artists OR
their managers, and also at times the financial needs of the act.

When an act needs to tour for the sake of touring, in order to keep
steady paychecks coming in, that artist may or may not be over-
saturating certain markets/cities despite the fact that there is no
new record, reason or what we like to call it, no new *narrative* for
being on the road.

We'd prefer not to book tours due to an artist's need for immediate
financial gain. It happens though. Touring or booking artists
strategically doesn't always equal the largest pay day right now, but
it will typically lead to a more sustainable career and finances in the
long run.

We've seen artists sell out a 600-person-capacity venue and then all
of a sudden a single hits at radio. Then one of, or a combination of,
the agent, artist, manager or even promoter decides that this hype
around the single and that quick sell-out show they just had in the
600-capacity room means that they think the growth will be
exponential and they roll the dice, making an unusual jump to the
5,000 capacity room for a big paycheck, sixth months later.

If your gut was correct, then great for everyone; the artist, their
team, the fans, etc.

Now if your gut wasn't correct and you could have gone into the
1,500 person room, but went with the 5,000 person venue, and that
buzz around the single didn't last as long as you thought it would, or
the market just changes any which way, you could have 2,000 people
in a 5,000 capacity room.

of the world obviously (nothing that we're
—de— let's be honest), but it leaves the fans with an
a cavernous venue that's less than half full. It
tells the fans that there's no need to buy tickets quickly in the future
because the show didn't sell out. The promoter loses money, and we
all need these promoters to stay afloat in this risky business of
concert promoting.

In my opinion, more often than not, the smart thing would be to go to
the 1,500 person room (although the the money you make is less
than the 5,000 capacity room, but remember it's still more than the
600 capacity room), sell the show out on the day that it goes on sale
(which creates demand for future "on sales"), maybe add a second
show if your team feels the demand is there, or simply leave the
1,500 capacity SOLD OUT and come back through on your next tour
and move into a new venue with a sellable capacity that would make
sense for everyone.

If you keep doing that and splatter it with some various festivals
where new fans can come check the artist out, you're setting
yourself up for healthy growth. It's pretty simple business, but not
everyone has the discipline to not cut corners and go "too big too
fast".

Again though, it's important to note that there are anomalies, all
types of different artists that sell tickets earlier or later in certain
cities, there are areas with different economic situations, etc. So
there is no STEADFAST system, but you can learn a lot by paying
attention to how different shows, genres, artists, and cities are
trending in the way that they are selling tickets.

PR: What is the book that you've recommended most to your clients?

The book that we give our clients is something that my business
partner, Nadia Prescher, has read and recommended to me, and
something we all try to remember. It's by Henry Rollins and called
"[Get in the Van: On the Road With Black Flag](#)". [\[Non-affiliate link\]](#)
Check it out. It's about hustling and what it takes to become a
successful touring act—the trials and tribulations of an artist on the
road.

passenger van, the book puts things in perspective for everyone.

What business concept do you think every artist should understand? Should the gap between entrepreneur knowledge and musician artist close?

It depends on the individual. Sometimes artists just need to be artists so that they can focus on their art. Sometimes artists can be artists and focus on the business aspect as well.

My suggestion is to find someone on the management end that you can trust and whose principles align with yours. At times you have to give up the power of micro-managing to others on your team, without compromising your artistic integrity obviously, to free yourself up to make more music and let the creative juices continue to flow.

Your music will speak for itself, but it needs to be delivered in a way that you personally as an artist might not be able to deal with, hence the need for a team of people around you spreading your music in creative ways, be it virally, on tour, music releases, or activism.

"As an artist just utilize whatever is the most efficient combination of creativity and business that you have available to you – that might mean you decide to do everything yourself, or it might mean that you make the music, but let others handle the rest."

One of our faster growing artists right now, Black Tiger Sex Machine, manage themselves and are the epitome of successful entrepreneurs, but at the same time we've had artists let go of their manager or agent and think that they can ascend further with themselves at the helm and it backfires and the machine stops abruptly.

As an artist, just utilize whatever is the most efficient combination of creativity and business that you have available to you – that might mean you decide to do everything yourself, or it might mean that you make the music, but let others handle the rest. And one last thing on

**You began your career at Madison House with booking rock and
electronica bands. What lessons has dance music forgotten from its
rock and metal roots?**

I think it ties into the other subject matter of “grinding it out” and “paying dues”. The dance and electronic world, like any genre, has some minor problems with egos and entitlement. I think it’s a bit worse in this dance sphere with the ability to spread music so rapidly, receive an amazing or overwhelming response, and expect an instant return on live touring level.

There are times when you release a record and people will want to immediately purchase tickets to your show without you having ANY history of really touring, but there are also times that despite your mega social media presence and your singles charting everywhere, you might not be able to sell a hard ticket to a live concert venue to save your life.

I’ve also seen newer dance acts hit it big with a release and then go out to execute it live with little to no practice, and the word spreads quickly that he/she is not ready. Everyone just needs to temper expectations, be patient, realize that it all comes in due time, and appreciate the positives of the career.

PR: You are part of very select number of dance music professionals who get asked to speak at music conferences. How would you recommend someone to break into that circle? The first step is obviously to do something worth speaking about, but what about the rest? What tips do you have for professionals to break into thought leadership?

JS: I think everyone that works in the industry and has had some success will also have the knowledge to join a group of people and talk about a variety of topics. You don’t need to be reinventing the wheel, but if you’ve done stuff off the beaten path with your artists or company, then figure out how to explain to people why that is unique.

of abundance and that means that there is more than enough to go around and we have enough to share (in this case, with those around us. In my opinion there doesn't need to be any trade secrets when it comes to basic principles or strategies on all kinds of aspects of the business. I think early on in your career you want to talk about what you do nonstop. As those conversations happen with your colleagues and peers, you're basically creating your own mini-panel (albeit not in front of an audience). Take that principle, and apply it to conferences and you realize that chiming in about things that you know can educate those not in the know about a variety of topics.

Also, if you're looking at conferences and seeing the same types of content and panels time after time, look up the contact and suggest new topics that you might have quality input or feedback on. Believe me, these conference curators don't have an easy job coming up with new content after twenty years of the same event.

I was super fortunate in the sense that due to my involvement with S.C.O.P.E Productions. The University of Iowa actually sent me every year to Pollstar Live, one of the more definitive live music conferences, beginning when I was 19-years-old.

I enjoyed them immensely and soaked up a ridiculous amount of information as well as collected business card after business card. After things started ramping up for me as an agent though, and my career carried on and I continued to frequent various conferences, I felt like I was part of a different generation than that of the group that was speaking to me in those early years.

The music industry was changing, as it always has and as it always will, and at times I felt like we were listening to the same people over-and-over again talking as if they were "reinventing the wheel". I think that's when I started becoming more involved, along with many of my peers in the industry.

Who knows though, maybe I'm that turbo obnoxious-ass dude talking like they're changing the world and pontificating about nonsense that people are sick of hearing about over-and-over again. It's super possible – like really possible.

suggest that the subject gets its own panel and suggest that you be
part of that conversation. That's my personal take on it, although I'm
not necessarily a reserved person.

PR: You're definitely a well rounded person—from soccer, to charity work, fly-fishing, comic-book collecting. Many young people are beginning to associate their identities with what they do: whether be a producer, a promoter, or an agent like yourself. What do you have to say to them? Are there dangers in creating one image for yourself?

JS: This might sound like some sort of after-school TV special, but you being you is exactly what is going to make you both happy and successful. In this ultra-colorful business, personalities and unique identities are everything. Choosing one thing to hone in on as your image may or may not be dangerous for you or your brand.

I think if you're carving out an image that strictly promotes unhealthy or harmful behavior it could be influential on fans in a negative way, it could get old, or it could be fine, because the whole thing is ironic or in jest. I think the promoting of a partying identity and that party boy/girl image can be a dangerous route to go down at times, because you're setting an example for younger audiences, often need to maintain that persona, and sometimes life imitates art.

With that being said, being that party boy/girl could be funny as hell and be good spirited. It's a fine line. Just be ready to commit and note that at times your fanbase will resist a change in your identity, unless it's done in way that feels organic.

PR: Can you talk about your comic book collection? Do you have any comics that you're really proud of?

JS: I'm a Marvel Comics guy through-and-through. I read some indie comics and some DC Comics (mostly the Batman story arcs), but I just can't get down with the rest of the DC Universe. Cheesy cities names like Metropolis and generic superhero names with whack outfits like Superman. I'd read Marvel all day if I could. I mean The

The early nineties is when I really got into comics and the artwork was phenomenal and less cartoony. The stuff that came before that was obviously amazing and instrumental to comic book world, but what really caught my eye was when they rebooted the X-Men to look more modern, edgy, sexy, etc.

Good lord I'm a nerd.

My favorite comic book in the collection is X-Men #1. The artist is Jim Lee (probably my favorite comic book artist to this date) and the writer on it was Chris Claremont. To this day it is the top selling comic book of all time and had multiple variant covers that when combined made this super dope triptych piece of continuous art with Magneto and all of the X-Men getting wild. I have the 1st edition, sealed, certified and signed by Stan Lee (co-founder of Marvel), Jim Lee and Chris Claremont. She's worth a bit of money, but it's more about the sentiment.

I buy stuff that I like and want to read. I can't keep up with heading to the comic book store every Wednesday, but I will let a couple months pass and then purchase the "trade paperback", which is basically a collection of six to eight comics or a story arc, also often referred to as a graphic novel.

I'm a huge fan of X-Force as well and Cable is one of my favorite X-characters. And despite being a villain I can really get down with Thanos. The Infinity Gauntlet was my first tattoo, and it just so happens they are weaving the stories of all these big blockbuster Marvel films (Avengers, Iron Man, Captain America, Guardians of the Galaxy, etc) into a big royal rumble with Thanos "The Mad Titan" and the Infinity Gauntlet that he wields!

I got that tattoo before these Marvel movies and the Thanos plot were announced, let it be known. #NerdShit



PR: How has working for a not-for-profit benefited your life? Is it worth it to give back while you're on the grind?

JS: It's great to be a part of something that gives back. I do as much as I can, with as much time as I can healthily break off. I definitely wish it was more though. I'm always trying to spread the word about Conscious Alliance and their most recent initiative. I'm on their advisory board and do what I can to connect artists and festivals with them. Their mantra is "Art That Feeds" and they have built an amazing non-profit that does a variety of things, but focuses on delivering food to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and in other places with help from fans and from companies like Whole Foods or Justin's Nut Butter.

They'll work with an artist to create a limited edition poster for a concert that a fan can get if he/she brings X amount of canned goods to donate. Those can be some of the coolest frameable posters out there! I think it's always worth it to give back, but then I tell myself that I could always be doing more of it.

PR: How do you balance work and pleasure? Is there a myth or danger in the millennial "no sleep, hustle 24/7 culture"?

JS: It's all about balance. Something that I work towards every day. Neverending.

"That "no sleep" shit's nonsense and will lead to burnout. The "I'll sleep when I'm dead" saying is



The “I’ll sleep when I’m dead” saying is garbage. You need sleep. We’ve seen too many people fall off, hurt themselves, and prioritize the wrong things in their lives. I’ve definitely been part of the problem.

I was going nonstop and it affected those around me negatively. Everyone needs to know that the world is not going to end if you decide to leave the club a few hours earlier than your peers. Everyone needs to know that the world is not going to end if you skip a big music festival that your colleagues are attending.

Don’t let the fear of missing out ruin your life. Do I short myself on sleep at times? Yes, but I’m trying to get better at it. At some point the partying or the crazy long work nights or the obsession with needing to finish that next track needs to be juxtaposed with other activities, and people need to learn to appreciate the other stuff around you: family, fitness, outdoors, etc..

Beware that when everything becomes about work and being out at shows, and networking at night, (every night) because you *have to* is not sustainable for living a healthy lifestyle.

One of my favorite authors and marketers alive, Seth Godin, has a daily emailer with various topics and things to mull over. I hate to paraphrase, but one of them said something like “you have to say ‘no’ at times so that you can say “yes” in the future”. I love that one.

With that being said, hustle—just hustle healthy.

PR: Lastly, you mentioned that you’re a connoisseur of good television. What shows would you recommend hustlers watch to unwind?

We’re in what many people are calling the Golden Age of Television. My suggestions are:

Orphan Black

Deadwood: (if you never saw it back in the day, it’s the best show of all time)





Hell on Wheels (AMC): Just like Deadwood, I love historical fiction.

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Mr. Robot (TBS)

Game of Thrones (HBO): Don't think that I [Jake] haven't read all of the books also...

Narcos (Netflix)

House of Cards (Netflix)

House of Lies (Showtime)

Da Vinci's Demons (Starz): Hang with me here, it's a little cheesy, but great historical fiction villainizing the Catholic church with conspiracies.

Vikings (History Channel)

Black Sails (Starz): Historical fiction again about a bunch of REAL LIFE badass pirates—it gets better and better.

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This interview has been edited for clarity and readability.