

IGUP

One vision: (L-R) Cre8ing Vision's Nicola Charles, Kwame Kwaten and Andrea Euell



"Everybody was focused on being an artist, but there are lots of other jobs you can get involved in, and that's what we want to talk about"

**KWAME KWATEN
CRE8ING VISION**

whatever – the musical landscape had changed. Grime had started to shake things up,” reflects Kwaten. “Also, whereas before we were talking about ‘urban’ music, this time we were very much like, ‘We’ll lose the urban tag because we are always ahead, and form a new thing’ called Cre8ing Vision – that was the mother company. And then we started The Ultimate Seminar.”

First held in 2010, the new and improved gathering quickly established itself as a fixture of the music industry calendar.

“UK Black music, as a force, had started to happen,” says Kwaten. “Many of the sons and daughters that had come to the Urban Music Seminar were now flourishing as managers and A&R people, all of that was happening. The hard bit was that we had to go to labels, organisations and companies and say, ‘Please can you sponsor this event that you might not see a reward from for three years...’”

Euell, who started out in PR, is grateful to those who believed in the concept from the off.

“I can’t thank them enough for opening their doors to music surgeries, focus groups and mentoring programmes, and just keeping the lines of communication open,” she says. “All of the labels have continued to support us.”

The overwhelmingly positive reaction to The Ultimate Seminar led to the expansion of the Cre8ing Vision portfolio, which now includes Ultimate Live, Ultimate Pathway Programme, Ultimate Surgery, The A&R Initiative Focus Groups and The MBOL Show, to name but a few.

“We realised we wanted to be a company that could deliver throughout the year, rather than just once a year,” says Charles. “Along with The Ultimate Seminar, we started doing music surgeries, which could then lead to an internship or an employment role. We also still do school programmes and mentoring, so we’ve gone from doing one major event a year to now



Seminar superstars: (From top) Stormzy, interviewed by Remel London at the 2014 Ultimate Seminar, and Kwaten with Kanye West and Damon Dash in 2004

working literally every day, in some capacity.”

“The craziest thing of all is that we all have other jobs,” she laughs. “This is done out of working hours and on weekends to make it all happen. But we do it because of what comes back.”

Last September, the social enterprise launched youth mentoring and employment project, The Ultimate Music Circle. Industry heavyweights such as RCA president David Dollimore, Warner Records boss Joe Kentish, MPA board director Paulette Long OBE, AWAL A&R director Eve Fairley-Chickwe and Pollen’s Zeon Richards agreed to become mentors.

“It is a one-to-one mentoring programme,” elaborates Euell. “We have about 40 key influencers in the business already mentoring, from songwriters to legal and

publishers, so that has taken off really well and we have already had some amazing feedback. It is about breaking down those barriers and fast-tracking young creatives into the music business. And it’s not London-centric, we’ve got mentees across the UK.”

Cre8ing Vision has partnered with Warner Music UK’s Atlantic Records, Parlophone Records and Warner Records, and Liverpool International Music Festival (LIMF) Academy on the 2021 Ultimate Seminar on September 25.

In a twist to the traditional format, the day will feature two seminars, including a five regional event hosted at Liverpool’s Philharmonic Hall. It is sponsored by Live Nation, PPI, BMI, PRS, Spitfire Audio and Sentic Music.

Confirmed speakers include Warner Music UK chief Tony Harlow, Atlantic Records FVP Austin Dahoh, Atlantic Records GM Liz Goodwin, Warner Records boss Joe Kentish and The Go 2 Agency’s Shauni Caballero. Details of a second, virtual event are still to be confirmed.

“Young creatives in Liverpool will become our runners at the event and we’re also building our own A&R focus group,” says Euell. “For us, it’s not turning up in Liverpool, having an event and then leaving, it’s continuing our community and outreach work.”

“The biggest thing is that we’re still evolving to the point that this year, we’re now going to Liverpool and the intention is that we eventually grow to other areas,” adds Charles. “The response we’ve had so far has been enormous.”

Last year’s seminar went ahead virtually due to the pandemic, which has proved something of a blessing.

“That was a resounding success, to the point that it allowed us to break down the barriers to entry – it allowed us to go global,” smiles Charles. “We had people on panels from LA to England and anywhere in the middle. It shows that we’re not finished yet. We’re still finding new ways to increase our targets.”

Cre8ing Vision has earmarked recruitment as a key area of growth, as the company bids to solidify itself as a “one-stop shop” for the industry.

“Over the years, we have helped companies recruit people and it’s now becoming a thing where they come to us and say, ‘We love what you have done before, can you help us?’” Charles says. “Everything we do is almost a feeder for recruitment,” adds Euell.

“Because we work with such a vast range of young creatives, people come to us, which is really important. All of our staff – whether it’s our social media team, runners at the events, or A&R scouts that help with Ultimate Live – come through our network. So when it comes to recruitment, we already have a Top 20 that we’ve worked with for a few years and have helped develop them and their skill sets. So it was natural to go into recruitment.

“It’s truly solidifying ourselves as a one-stop shop,” she concludes. “We’re still here, we’ll keep building our products and breaking down barriers.”

And you can’t put a price on that.



Visionaries: (L-R) Kwame Kwaten, Andrea Euell and Nicola Charles

DAVID DOLLIMORE

PRESIDENT, RCA

RCA president **David Dollimore** is a proud supporter of **Cre8ing Vision**. Here, he expands on how its work is helping to mould the future of the UK music business...

Can you sum up what Cre8ing Vision has done for the industry?

"Cre8ing Vision has been the music industry's best kept secret for years. Their seminars have become a regular industry go-to event. They find and unearth new, exciting, and creative future industry executive talent. We have someone in RCA doing an A&R internship [Mel Ijeh, below] and showing real promise, who came from Cre8ing Vision and Ultimate Seminar."

How useful would you have found Cre8ing Vision when you were starting out in the business?

"These types of initiatives are invaluable. There is nothing that compares to hearing first-hand experience from someone in the business. I wish I'd had something like this when I started out in the industry. It's almost like having an intensive music course that works

alongside whatever you are doing, whether that's working or studying at university or college."

What defines the art of A&R in 2021?

"Listening to and understanding the artist are crucial. It sounds like such a simple task, but it's vital to have that musical understanding of what your artist does or doesn't want. It's important to never stop being a fan of new music. Keep looking at what's in the charts and breaking globally and learn the rights and wrongs of campaigns. A&Rs amplify what artists want while allowing them to have complete artistic freedom."

"I wish I'd had something like this when I started out in the industry"

DAVID DOLLIMORE
RCA



MEL IJIEH

A&R SCOUT, RCA

Mel Ijeh was taken on as a mentor by **RCA UK** through **Cre8ing Vision**, and is now working in the major's A&R department. She shares her story so far with *Music Week*...

What is Cre8ing Vision's biggest successes so far?

"It has brought accessibility to the music industry. Too many times, it feels like you must be a specific person from a specific place to succeed, but Cre8ing Vision demolishes those ideas, creates opportunity and gives support to everyone. Its biggest success so far is the A&R focus groups – they not only allow people to gain experience, but they also allow aspiring executives to connect. I've met some integral people from these groups and have been able to soak up tons of knowledge."

Is there one piece of advice you would give to those starting out?

"If you can't find an opportunity, create one. The industry is tough and isn't always super-transparent – it is hard to get your foot in the door and it may seem like there are never any roles or

opportunities. But my advice is, don't get disheartened – not for long, anyway – and just do something yourself. It could be something like helping to manage a friend who is an artist or starting your own blog or YouTube channel – literally anything to get experience in the industry. Also, don't think that you have to be cold-hearted and stern to navigate this industry. It pays to be kind and you'll learn a lot more and build meaningful connections that way."

What made you apply for the scheme?

"Honestly, it was probably the lack of knowledge I had. I was around 17, 18, so I thought that I didn't know anything about anything, but Cre8ing Vision could teach me something. It turns out it taught me loads! It was the magnitude of resources available that appealed to me... There was so much that I thought, 'Something will hit home here.'"

"It can feel like you need to be a specific person from a specific place to succeed, but Cre8ing Vision demolishes those ideas"

MEL IJIEH
RCA

musicweek.com



PHOTO: Louise Heywood-Schuler

NEGLA ABDELA

GM, MINISTRY OF SOUND

Ministry Of Sound general manager **Negla Abdela** used to attend **Cre8ing Vision** events and is now an expert panellist. Here, the digital specialist explains why it plays a key role in the UK industry...

From your perspective, what is Cre8ing Vision's impact on the music industry?

"Cre8ing Vision has been fundamental in consistently providing an insightful platform to give young people access to information and education and opportunities to build a network that will help them get started. Its Ultimate Seminar is the longest-standing seminar of its kind in the UK, but has still managed to adapt and grow. It has allowed people from under-represented backgrounds to see people who look like them in senior positions and shown what is attainable no matter where you're from. This is evident from how many senior executives credit the Ultimate Seminars as being pivotal in kick-starting their careers."

How did the programme boost your career when you were starting out, and how has your relationship continued?

"I started my career as an Ultimate Seminar attendee years ago and almost all of my early understanding of the music industry was from hearing people's stories on the panels. The seminars gave me the opportunity to connect with people like me, but also the chance to network with people I admired already working at record labels and in promotions. It helped to open doors for me and a lot of the relationships I built then were with people who are still friends and colleagues doing amazing things now."

My support of Kwame [Kwaten] and the team has continued to grow and I was asked to be a panel member in 2018, which was a proud moment. That's proof of how effective Cre8ing Vision are at really delivering on their goals to help create the next generation of execs. I am also committed to the mentorship scheme that started in the last couple of years and have recently been working with an amazing young woman who has recently got a job at a label."

What can mentors bring to aspiring executives at the beginning of their careers?

"Being a mentor, to me, is about sharing information and demystifying the industry. I try to be as transparent as possible about all the different roles available and the different routes to getting your foot in the door. Some people only know about marketing and A&R, so often limit themselves and what they can do due to a lack of knowledge. Networking is also such an important part of what we do, so I help to connect my mentees with people relevant to the roles they want to go into who can give them more tangible advice."

Which qualities do you look for in new talent?

"Hard work, passion and an eagerness to learn are the three most important qualities, you must love what you want to do, and you need to be able to put in the work to get it. They also need to be a people person, relationship management is so important in building a long-term career, you never know who you might meet today that you end up working with later on, so it pays off to be collaborative, nice and treat people with respect."

When you've spoken at previous seminars, what were you aiming to get across?

"I wanted to be honest about what it takes to start out in the music industry, but also break down what career progression looks like, step-by-step. Sometimes, you may admire or look up to people at the peak of their careers but forget that one day they were an intern or an assistant too and they probably started out facing the same struggles you're facing now so focus more on the journey rather than just the end goal."

So, has Cre8ing Vision changed the industry?

"Yes, and it continues to do so. They have consistently been working to make access and education more attainable, especially for those from under-represented or disadvantaged backgrounds. You can already see the fruits of their work in the number of current execs who have passed through their doors and I hope we continue to see it for many future generations."

"To me, being a mentor is about sharing information and demystifying the industry"

NEGLA ABDELA
MINISTRY OF SOUND



JESSICA AGOMBAR

SONGWRITER

Jessica Agombar has made hits for **BTS**, **Jonas Brothers** and more, and wants to pass on her expertise to the next generation. Here, she discusses life as a **Cre8ing Vision** mentor...

Why did you choose to become a mentor?

"I am constantly working with younger individuals in music and felt compelled to impart the knowledge I have gained over the last 15 years. My manager Lucy [Francis] thought it would be a great idea and I have gained so much from being a mentor. Danielle [below] has taught me so much and given me so much inspiration."

Tell us what the role entails in your eyes...

"To assist, guide, advise and connect. I tell Danielle to use me as an address book, to let me know what she needs. I can be an intro to all of the integral team members you need."

We work in a creative industry that is in fact a battlefield of politics, statistics and heavily packed legal deals that, respectfully, don't always suit the artist, writer or producer just starting out. I want to put Danielle in the best position for her to be the boss of her career and learn from the mistakes I made."

What do you hope the project can achieve?

"Success is totally relative to the individual. If

my mentee takes away a better understanding of the industry, of the business, then success would be her having a lawyer, knowing my manager and my whole team of writers and artists she can collaborate with. Danielle has a support system and team that want her to win. I hope the project as a whole breaks down all barriers and it makes it very easy to be able to connect, reach out and, most importantly, help one another."

How should we be developing new talent in 2021?

"I don't believe there is an art to A&R in 2021. The world stopped, there is no formula. We were forced to strip back and re-learn. A&R is now a role that managers also take on, as labels expect artists to come with a package, sound and project. Gone are the days you go to meet a label as an artist, to sing a song from which you get signed and are moulded into the artist they want you to be. The label expect you to be 75% baked before signing, therefore much of the development A&R is done in-house [pre-signing] now."

"I want to put my mentee in the best position to be the boss of her career"

JESSICA AGOMBAR

Do you have a message to aspiring creatives?

"You will get a lot of nos before getting a yes. You have to be resilient in your vision and remind yourself when things seem like they aren't working out that you do this for your love of music. Nothing more and nothing less. Always act respectfully, keep honest relationships and reach out to everyone. Also, share music, meet managers and, most importantly, always return to the love of music."

DANIELLE JOHNSON

CRE8ING VISION MENTEE

Aspiring songwriter **Danielle Johnson** secured a placement with star hitmaker **Jessica Agombar** through **Cre8ing Vision**. Here, she reveals her music business aspirations and plots a bright future...

Why does working in music appeal to you?

"It has always been a dream of mine. Everything about it excites me and makes me feel alive. It's a business that never really sleeps and that offers multiple roles and opportunities to be successful. You don't need to be an artist to make a difference, there are multiple positions that are just as important and keep the business going. I have studied and worked or interned at multiple music companies, so I have experienced the business and the creative sides of the industry. Like every industry it has its good, bad and ugly sides, but the good makes up for the most of it. To be in a business that impacts people's lives in a positive way is something I will always be proud to be part of."

What has your time with Jessica been like?

"I feel over the moon that I got Jessica. She has so much knowledge and, most importantly, she is willing to share it. She is completely invested in my journey and wants me to win. Having her as my mentor has given me a real insight into what it really takes to

become a successful songwriter. What I hope to learn from Jessica is the blueprint of the songwriting world and how to be successful in it. I'm so grateful to have her be part of my journey. She has taught me so much and showed me that one song can change everything."

"I want to be an example to others, for my journey to spark the future minds of the music business"

DANIELLE JOHNSON

How do you want to make a difference?

"My goal is to become a songwriter that writes all your favourite songs for your favourite artists. I want to create hit songs in the UK as well as internationally, that impact people in a positive way for years to come. I also want to create a platform that will help showcase myself as an artist, similar to other songwriters such as Camille Purcell. I would like to be an example to others."

I would love to give back and even become a mentor one day. I want my journey to spark the future minds of the music business. I will not stop until I have world domination, so remember my name: Danielle Johnson."

