

Sheree O'Brien - A Real Mastermind In The Music Biz

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Well known as the Head of Artist Development and Distribution at top dance music label Soul Candi Sheree O'Brien has undoubtedly made her mark in the local music industry.

The Joburg-based, East London native has spent the past decade managing, promoting and developing some of South Africa's hottest performers. In addition to her Soul Candi job, O'Brien runs Splakavellis Management, an artist management and marketing company that was established nine years ago as an event management company.

MIO had the opportunity to sit down with O'Brien to find out what Splakavellis Management is offering to the local music sector.

Can you briefly introduce yourself to our readers?

Sheree: Sheree O'Brien is a strong willed, ambitious woman who is foremost a child of God, daughter, sibling, fiancé and mother-to-be. Apart from that I am the MD of Splakavellis Management, as well as Head of Artist Development & Distribution of Soul Candi Music Group.

What type of artists do you work with at Splakavellis?

Sheree: The type that does not think that they are God's only gift to the music industry. Humility, talent, hard work, ambition and potential are key. My current stable consists of House DJ Giggs Superstar, Soul & House Singer RJ Benjamin, Deep House DJ Brett Jackson, House Vocalist Genevive, Soul Singer Pebbles, and, Afro Soul star in the making, Noxolo Hlatshwayo.

How do you scout for artists?

Sheree: Splakavellis Management no longer scouts for artists. What we do is passion based and long term, so we cannot take on hundreds of artists for the sake of having a big stable like other management companies do. We keep the stable small and manageable so that each artist can get the attention they deserve. Soul Candi Music is always looking for new talent in the forms of producers and vocalists. We are also moving more and more into the direction of artist development where we can build the future stars of South African music.

Do you take demos, and if so, how?

Sheree: Splakavellis does not – again due to the fact that we have a pretty full house to focus on right now. Soul Candi takes Demos via the web (demos@soulcandi.co.za) as well as drop-offs at headquarters in Eloff Street Extension.

From a business standpoint, what do you think is lacking in the local music sector?

Sheree: Professionalism from music promoters, especially the young, up-and-coming ones. Also, support from government, arts and culture and corporates. We find the same companies and artists being hosted and booked at all the big events.

Who do you think is the hottest house artist at the moment and why?

Sheree: In terms of production, I think Black Coffee is definitely on another level. In terms of vocals, RJ Benjamin is undoubtedly the best male vocalist! I'm yet to meet another artist with such perfect pitch every single time!

How does an artist benefit from being part of Splakavellis Management?

Sheree: Our artists join us and stay with us because we all share the same passion for what we do. We have an open-book policy where nothing is hidden from them, they definitely don't get sold any upfront dreams and promises and there is certainly no internal fighting. We all work together to assist each other reach the next level. It is very much a family atmosphere.

What fees do you normally charge for your services?

Sheree: We don't have set fees owing to the fact that our work is long term and can take years to see any results. We work on variable deals with our artists and we all sacrifice together when it comes to fees. We invest our time, passion, skills and resources into the artist with a view to eventually reaping the rewards together in the future.

How can artists contact Splakavellis Management?

Sheree: They can contact info@splakavellis.co.za

Are you open to all genres?

Sheree: Yes we are, however, as mentioned, we aren't really looking at taking on many more artists right now.

What would you say is the biggest challenge to musicians at the moment?

Sheree: The downward spiral of CD Sales is causing artists and record companies alike to suffer. The development of the industry is not helped by the fact that the media does not give up-and-coming artists enough exposure.

How has your company tackled this challenge?

Sheree: Splakavellis Management's success does not depend on CD sales. In fact what we do is develop an artist into a big enough brand, that in future, if they never release a CD again, they can still make a living and have other opportunities available to them, just from being an established, positive, brand.

How have you been celebrating Women's Month?

Sheree: Working hard! Free time is a luxury as I am always working.