Tale of a 21st Century Hero: The Making of a Music Empire
The Story and the Glory of Costa Giorgio Roussos
By Molly Lavik
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Caption: Costa Giorgio Roussos
Photo By: M.L. Lavik

Legends of Today Poem
The waves that wash upon the shore
Are too insistent to ignore
A line of soldiers marching to glory
Behold the 21st Century Hero's Story

M.A. Lavik, 1984

Introduction

The dawning of the 21st Century began on January 1, 2001 according to the Gregorian calendar. The digital revolution and the emergence of the Internet toward the end of the 20th Century are the technology advancements that set the stage for the rise of a new breed of modern-day hero. Costa Giorgio Roussos is a 21st Century hero embracing all things digital at the nexus of the digital music revolution and the concept that the independent musician now has a powerful tool to produce and be heard without the previous filter of the almost impenetrable music corporate machine.

In Joseph Campbell's classical literature master piece, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the story traces the hero's journey through many mythologies of the world. The book was originally published in 1949 and in many ways set the foundation for ideals characteristic of today's 21st Century Hero. Joseph Campbell was visionary in his backward look through time and as an author had an uncanny ability to be able to take the metaphor of a hero in multi-faceted situations and develop a type of formulaic understanding of the archetypical story-arc of the quintessential hero.

The story of the archetype of the successful entrepreneur who is also a hero for his or her cause has been told throughout time. This story can continue to be told by examining the life and times of Costa Giorgio Roussos. Costa has gone forth into the world to become a success. Starting from his native roots in Cyprus, Costa traveled to the United States to Hollywood and the greater Los Angeles area to be at the epicenter of the music industry.

"The World Navel
"The effect of the successful adventure of the hero is the unlocking and release again of the flow of life into the body of the world."[i]

Costa embodies the metaphor of "The World Navel." He has found every success yet also has known what it is like to live in the "The Belly of the Whale." Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* refers to, "The Belly of the Whale" as a metaphor to describe, "The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died."[ii]

Joseph Campbell's "The Belly of the Whale" metaphor can be utilized to interpret certain portions of the following interview that describe the time that an entrepreneur would spend dealing with adversity. Metaphorically, the times an entrepreneur dwells in the dark, dank under-belly that entraps temporarily even the most brilliant and agile of modern day heroes until the hero can conquer the fiend posing an obstacle to success. To go forth into the world and have success also means experiencing defeat to your very core and rebounding from that experience. Costa knows how to transform adversity into opportunity. He knows how to march on, how to embody the true meaning of duty, and how to banish fears. Costa also knows above all else how to survive the night, "The Belly of the Whale," and a current that is strong enough to take one under during the flow of life.

An in-depth Mentorography®[iii]-style interview with Costa regarding his adventures as a true 21st Century Hero enables one to understand the entrepreneurial mindset behind such a modern-day legend. Such an interview has the promise of delivering great insights regarding the driving philosophies behind Costa's plans to build a music empire.[iv]

As the author of this Mentorography-style piece, I had the unique opportunity on May 30, 2007 to conduct such an interview. The following is a transcription of the interview.[v] The interview transcription is followed by the conclusion which discusses the characteristics of a 21st Century Hero's Journey.

Interview with Costa Giorgio Roussos, Founder, Music.us
Conducted by Molly Lavik

Caption: Costa Giorgio Roussos at Work
Photo By: M.L. Lavik

Author's Opening Note About Interview
The interview with Costa Giorgio Roussos was conducted specifically to tell the story of his 21st Century Hero's Journey. Costa's words offer insights and inspiration to anyone embarking on their own hero's journey.

Interview Key
ML = Molly Lavik
C = Costa Giorgio Roussos

ML: Costa, thank you for giving me this rare opportunity to share your hero's journey with the world. This is of particular importance to me Costa because you know I have dedicated my career and my corporation, Mentorography, Inc., toward inspiring young adults to start socially-responsible new ventures in order to invent a better world today. I'm excited to share this interview about your remarkable life and times because this will shed light on the true mindset of a 21st Century Hero.

Costa, who are you?

Costa: I'm Costa, and I'm from Cyprus. My company is Music.us - We are Music.

Music Background
ML: Tell me about your music background.

C: When I was in high school, I had a band with a bunch of friends and we played at local clubs in Limassol. I sang and I played guitar, so that's where it all started in regards to being involved in an indie band. And then I came to the U.S. and went to USC [University of Southern California] where I minored in Music Recording and Industry. After that I went to the Musician's Institute to become a certified recording engineer. I studied sound engineering, mixing and production. Since then I have produced, recorded and mixed 5 albums with numerous artists as well as performed in them. So that's a bit of my background.

ML: That's great. And did you self-teach yourself how to play? How did you develop your style of playing?

C: I am self-taught. I learned by reading instructional guitar and music books. In terms of developing my style of playing, I always tried to learn as much as possible using all my music influences as benchmarks to my playing and of course practiced.

ML: So when did you discover this passion that you have for music and the music industry?

C: Well basically, since I was young, I've loved music and my dad was a professional jazz musician before he turned into an entrepreneur. My dad would always play jazz records at home. I remember I wanted to get an electric guitar and he wouldn't let me get one because it was too loud. In the end I got a drum kit. So the drums were my first musical instrument. So I drove everyone crazy - my sisters, my parents. And then I did the guitar thing. And then I started writing. First time I started writing was in high school, and then when I went to the military I wrote some songs. Yes, self-taught, playing with other musicians, learning, watching others play and getting tips, and just basically practicing. So that was the beginning.

Future Predictions

ML: What are your future predictions for independent musicians?

C: The future looks very bright. It's very easy nowadays to produce an album. You can get ProTools, GarageBand, whatever software, and you can just plug in your guitar, the drums, and you have your record. So the future looks promising, because for starters, the internet has become the new distribution model that does not require physical means of distribution. You can connect with fans and send your songs to any person globally with a touch of a button. You can get into iTunes, Napster, Rhapsody, without even being signed to any of the major labels and attract a new audience. It's low cost, and not only that, I think in a few years, you won't even have the CD. It's just going to be a digital download via a computer or a mobile device. This will make the traditional distribution model obsolete.

And distribution is a key difference, and obviously technology is helping bands do this. And that's why nowadays we have a lot more music than before. It's really exciting for the independent musicians to be heard. They won't sell a zillion records, but, you know, at least they can generate some revenue independently by directly interacting with their fan base. They can license their music catalog, sell their merchandise and sell tickets online using the do-it-yourself musician model. So, it's very exciting.

ML: Great! I know you go to a lot of conferences. Have you seen anything really interesting that you think points to the future that you maybe didn't mention yet?

C: A lot of question marks from the companies that have been in the business of selling records and nothing else. But the music business as a whole is doing very well, but the record business, which is like a physical business, is kind of deteriorating. You are seeing consolidation of the major labels because their old record-based model is not generating the profits it used to. So now they are changing the way they approach new artists. They want a piece of their merchandising, their publishing, they might even ask for some of their touring. They are trying to figure out a business model that works. So it's a big question mark for all those traditional big players right now. Again, it's all about the music and finding the right artist. And getting them out there is easier now than before, because you have so many options: internet radio, video, and all the new means of distributing content. I mean, it's kind of like the next music digital revolution, where a guy from his apartment can be selling his music by just sitting at home.

Driving Philosophies

ML: Cool, OK. What are your driving philosophies about digital music and online content business models?

C: Digital media? I think the biggest problem that we've seen with digital media is one of standardization. Many thought that protecting intellectual capital and stopping piracy would only be accomplished by using DRM, digital rights management, which is a problem from a consumer's point of view.

Let's say you are using Real[Networks]® Rhapsody, or the Yahoo!® [Music] Unlimited, or Napster® subscription models, or let's say the iTunes pay-per-download model. You are limited to specific players that are compatible with that DRM and that specific format. There's some other indie companies like eMusic that do strictly MP3, so I think that the biggest problem has been the format. Everyone wants MP3, but the record labels and copyright holders who want to protect their stuff, implement DRM, and it causes compatibility problems.

The consumer always wins, so I think in the end the format of choice will be a standardized MP3. CDs replaced cassettes and now CDs will be replaced by digital files and the digital file of choice will be the MP3 since it is compatible with any digital audio device. On iTunes, they use AAC [Advanced Audio Coding], and you can't play it on some players unless you take the AAC format song and convert it into MP3. This is highly ineffective which leads me to believe that in the end one model will be agreed upon, which I think will be the MP3 or some other model that everyone agrees to.

ML: I know that you are very big on SEO [Search Engine Optimization.] Can you tell me where you see that heading? Will that remain important?

C: Actually, Google™, Yahoo! and MSN®, all these big search engines, have been working on making it as hard as possible for a person to rank their website in their search engine for highly searched terms. So they have been tweaking their system. It is very difficult, especially for a small company, to be successful in it. And the only reason why it's very difficult for you to do it is because they want to pump their advertising revenues. That is how they make their money. So the harder it is for you to rank, then the easier it will be for you to go and pay advertising and to be a sponsor using pay-per-click which would earn them money.

Ranking in the search engines for competitive terms as a new entrant is nearly impossible: your domain must have a long history on the internet, it must have a lot of relevant links going to it, it must have a lot of pages which update every day. In other words, the sites that rank high now are the sites that are huge or already established. So basically other sites can't compete because if you are a small site, maybe your website has 30 pages, 50 pages, but if you look in big, generic terms, like music for example, it is usually older sites with a lot of content, which small business owners would never accomplish. So SEO, in the end, is all about having a great site that people will like, and you can no longer trick the search engine. So it's all about content and convergence when you talk about SEO.

In the end, a good site will rank. And it's all about quality, as opposed to trying to trick the search engines to get a top search ranking. Ranking is all about "natural" positioning without trying to trick the search engines. It is all about product and making people like your site. And most importantly, the way that they try to get you ranked is they ask for you to get as many links from other relevant sites as possible. And it's kind of a Catch-22. Who would link to you if they don't like your site? Why would they put a link on their website going to your website if they don't like your site? So it's as if Google and Yahoo! and MSN are asking for references from other websites to validate your ranking. So it's very difficult. And then you have to get more references from sites that are relevant to your website in order for you to rank better. So getting links from people that are not relevant to your subject matter doesn't really improve your rankings. That is some brief information about SEO.

Advice
ML: So what advice do you have for the small business owner who is trying to do something compelling that can't compete as you describe?

C: The biggest issue is how do you create enough content that someone comes on a daily basis to your website. So, if you're selling something and all the content on your site is the same for months then you are going to have problems. It's very difficult for a static website to survive today. I mean nowadays, things that you can do is maybe open up a forum where people talk about that specific product, update views on that product, and create an environment where you can invite possible buyers to talk to you about your product. Hopefully in the end your product will be compelling enough to be bought.

Customer acquisition is a full-time business. You can hire people just to update your website on a daily basis. So the static component can be solved by implementing RSS feeds or forums/discussion groups within your site. A website has to interact with the consumer as opposed to you go there as a consumer, look at it and buy it. Now they want interaction. They want to go there, they want to check it, they want to get opinions, they want to talk to the company and see if that product is what they want. So, interaction and better communication — the new Web 2.0, that is what a lot of people have been calling it.

ML: And what, for those who don't know, is Web 2.0?

C: Web 2.0 refers to the second generation of the web. This new era of the internet is about developing applications that help tailor the specific needs of users. Web 2.0 is about communication, interaction and networking with people. It's like you have a news channel on the Internet where people talk. If something comes on the news, someone would have already posted about it online. Blogs, social networking, and people find out about things just from other people talking. So Web 2.0, as I call it, is interaction, communication and mass appeal all under one umbrella. Everybody has a voice, as opposed to the past. As a company, you can no longer try to trick the consumer and be unaccountable for it as bad news spreads faster than good news virally via the net.

Consumers are more sophisticated now in their buying habits. The web has definitely become a resourceful place where any product imaginable can be researched and discussed. Most importantly, the net also offers transparency in pricing, that is why you can find the best deals on goods online as opposed to your traditional store.

Creating Music.us
ML: Great! What led you to want to create Music.us?

C: My Music.us concept began at USC. I remember I was a student attending the entrepreneur program and had to write a business plan as part of one of my assignments in class. My initial idea was to do something with real estate since that is what we are involved in Cyprus. I told the professor that I was going to write a business plan on real estate in Cyprus and he shook his head and said "No, this isn't your passion. You need to a business plan on something you really enjoy. What would you otherwise do for free?" And I said, "Ah, music!" So, that was when I knew the business plan was going to be something about music.

When I look back at the industry in 2001 I find it's totally different than today. There wasn't an iTunes and it was when the infamous P2P file-sharing Napster was in full throttle. All digital music was illegally free online. That was the beginning of the old traditional music business model falling apart. I knew though that digital was the way of the future and that other revenue streams could materialize with a site of mass appeal.

The biggest issue was the independent musician. 99.9% of musicians do not have record deals and their goal is nothing other than having their music heard while earning an income. So that was the challenge. My idea was to cater to these indie musicians and to use the internet as the distribution channel to spread their music. So my vision back then was to connect the world with music and be able to create some kind of ecommerce solution for the bands to sell their music through the Internet and communicate with their fans or the industry. So that was the basic premise of Music.us.

I hired a Ph.D. guy from UCLA in Computer Science, and some other friend of mine from Cyprus to design a website where artists can sign up and users can sign up, and people could start interacting. But it was a flop. It was a bit ahead of its time, because people didn't want to post profiles and put pictures on there, especially females.

Nowadays, you look at all these websites that pop up. If you don't have a profile and a picture then you would be considered abnormal. So we see a change of culture, a change of technology. After Friendster®, MySpace[.com]®, YouTube[TM] one could see a new direction in regards to online niche marketing given the community based Web 2.0 applications that were highly targeted to specific groups.

Figure 1: Music.us Logo

Music.us Logo is reprinted with permission from Music.us - A Roussos Group Company

Over the last few years, I've been trying to integrate as many technological tools and solutions as possible that would help bands and the industry, such as the opportunity to license their music, sell their downloads, their videos, sell tickets, their merchandise, communicate with their fans, have fan interaction, and also help them do business with the industry, such as sending their songs to get mastered via FTP. My goal was to connect all the gaps in the value chain- from the beginning stages of forming a band to the last stage of earning revenues and performing.

Hero's Journey

ML: Excellent! Looking at the company, Music.us, the product, how would you relate that to your own personal hero's journey?

C: My journey? Yeah, I mean, the journey is never easy. The issue that I've had with the journey was that technology, trends and attitudes change so fast online, that I am playing catch up. Since 2001, and I've gone through a lot of developers, and programmers.

Since Music.us is an independent company with limited funds for production, the choice was to find developers from abroad. This strategy was given the cost savings we would have since the United States is expensive in that regard. However, I've had issues finding the right team.

The most difficult part of my journey was finding the right developers that are expert in their own specific application. What I found out was that every developer had their strengths and weakness, so I decided to hire multiple developers utilizing only their strengths. However the disadvantage was the integration of all these pieces. I had cases where I was promised by developers that they could do everything I asked of them without having to hire different developers for different jobs. They over promised but they could not deliver. The problem becomes that you wasted time and money and have to start from scratch since you need to find a new team to complete the job or part of the job. So this journey has been difficult.

Not only do you have to align technology with the trends but you need to consistently be making your site compelling enough that it can compete with the existing superpowers online. So that's been a challenge of my journey. The inside joke is that Music.us is launching in two months. I've been saying that for about two years.

ML: What has sustained you on our journey? What has kept you going?

C: I'm really excited that this whole global phenomenon is happening. The world looks round, but it has become a world flatter since we can reach anyone across the globe. And that is what is really exciting. I've spoken to many artists and received a lot of positive feedback about Music.us. They love the fact that they can sell their music, tickets and connect with their fans and the industry. This is a new value proposition for artists since they can engage in full-scale commerce of their brand and music catalog. This is different from iTunes which only offers a la cart downloads. And then you look at MySpace whose primary business model was to sell advertising. It was never really about the independent artist. MySpace never engaged in any revenue-sharing in advertising with bands who promoted their site.

When you look at the revenue models, it is exciting just because you can offer a solution to the artist to not only sell their products and brand, but also to communicate with their fans and find new fans. In addition, Music.us would facilitate any interaction with the music industry or any professional service the band might be seeking such as mastering or hiring a producer. It's like an eBay® for music but with the additional benefit of selling services. So I'll give you an example. Like *Thriller*, an album by Michael Jackson, there was a solo by Eddie Van Halen that was done using this "mail-order" concept. So Eddie Van Halen recorded the solo himself in his studio, and sent it to be mixed in with the "Beat It" song.

My concept was exactly this: to connect service sellers with buyers but relative to music using the internet as the distribution medium. Using an FTP account this can be accomplished. For example, a band finishes recording and mixing their album but needs the album to be mastered. They choose a company that is based in another country as their preferred choice and they upload the album to their Music.us account and send it to the Mastering house's account digitally. The Mastering house masters the album and the next day they upload it back to their account and push the album back to the buyer's i.e the musician's account. Most musicians nowadays have home recording studios so they can certainly record everything in house and then have it released online at any time they choose. So yes, it's very exciting and there will be a lot of opportunities for both indie bands and the industry.

ML: O.K., good! Can you give us a sneak preview of one of the unique features of Music.us?

C: One of the unique features that Music.us has is the media player. You can actually take this media player and you can copy and paste it on any website.

Figure 2: Music.us Media Player Screen Capture

Music.us Media Player screen capture is reprinted with
permission from Music.us - A Roussos Group Company

The player interacts with the user's Music.us profile and feeds all the content on its multimedia screen. The player becomes a multimedia and commercial application that others can interact with. People can read about the band, listen to the band's music, watch videos, look at photos, as well as buy the artist's products including merchandise, tickets and downloads. So basically this is like a little website that represents the band but it is all fed by a media player.

ML: Do you want to talk about any other features?

C: Well, the widget is the most important in my mind, because it creates traffic, and people can actually view it from other websites. So you can embed it in another website, and it actually becomes your shopping cart and your media solution. So, anyway you look at it, it's like your marketing viral machine and revenue generation tool. And the other thing I'm working on is the browser-based audio-video editor. You can edit videos with it as well as mix sounds and music to it. Once you are done creating your personal videos on the Internet you can then post them. Other features to Music.us include a word rhymer, song lyrics, tabs, video aggregation, radio and IPTV.

ML: What's IPTV?

It is a technical word used to describe online television. So instead of the content being distributed via traditional cable or TV broadcast networks, the signal is transmitted via computer networks. In this case, TV stations would broadcast their content on the Internet and it would be free for Music.us members to view. Music.us attempts to aggregate global TV stations that are online under one roof. This way users can search and find the appropriate channel they are looking for whether it is country-based, language-based, genre-based or a combination of all.

ML: And you do this all yourself, with just the help of others?

C: Basically, I come up with the idea and the interface needed to accomplish the goal I am trying to reach. Then I hire the developers that specialize in putting together that specific job. The problem I would run into is that some developers claim to be specialists in some fields when they are not. I try to eliminate this issue by asking for a working demo that relates to what I want accomplished. If they show me a working demo that is similar to what I am looking for then I proceed with hiring them for the project. This strategy saves me time because what I do not want is having a developer start a project from scratch, which in fact will not only cost more money, it will also take more time to develop. It is always more efficient to work with a company that already has a working demo and has prior experience on the job you are seeking a solution for.

ML: You've been busy!

C: It's been very busy!

Characteristics of the Entrepreneurial Mindset
ML: What are the characteristics, in your opinion, of a worthwhile entrepreneurial mindset?

C: I would say an entrepreneur should be very passionate about what they do and believe in what they do. The key is for you to understand that perfection is unattainable. You will experience problems so be patient and try to overcome them by looking at new possible solutions.

Perseverance is significant because the path to success will have its ups and downs.

Luck plays a role in your entrepreneurial journey but I am a firm believer that an entrepreneur can improve their luck by being patient and focusing on finding opportunities to benefit their business.

One must take risks, but it is important that those risks are calculated, taking into consideration the opportunity gain, the opportunity loss, and the overall value proposition to the end customer.

If I look at the end of the tunnel where there is a consumer with an unsolved problem, I can see opportunity. What is of essence is following the light across the tunnel and reaching the consumer with a value proposition that would solve that problem.

An entrepreneur has a realistic vision about their business and must realize that the business landscape changes on a daily basis, so research about new technologies and the industry is a 24/7 job.

A business plan will change on a regular basic, given all the changes in the competitive and technological landscape. If the consumer is trend-prone, then the business plan becomes even more susceptible to updates.

I think the most successful entrepreneurs are the ones who personally feel the pain of their target audience and want to offer a solution to relieve it entirely, not just bandage the problem.

Socially-responsible Entrepreneur

ML: I really believe you have a major social mission to your venture because you are really trying to solve that pain for musicians. Can you talk a little bit more about that, what your Music.us will be doing to help with a social mission that plays a role with inventing a better world today?

C: I think there are a lot of things that I want to accomplish in regards to music. One is a health issue concerning ear damage resulting from listening to music in higher volumes. Many are playing their music too loud, which not only is detrimental to the ears but also it prevents the optimal sonic experience of listening to music as certain frequency ranges are harder to listen to as volume increases.

Another thing I feel strongly about is music education. Even though it's a proven fact that people that are musically inclined are better in math, physics, problem solving and overall have more creative skills. I think education is very powerful, and music is a universal language.

Another addition to the site is giving members the opportunity to announce their mission statement and their social message i.e what they stand for. When I go to a band's website, I just know their music, but I don't know what they are about.

Digital Media Advice

ML: What advice do you have for anyone interested in starting a digital media venture focused on music?

C: Be aware and respect copyrights. A lot of internet users today take copyrights for granted and do not take into consideration that a rights holder should be compensated if one decides to consume the music that the writer provides. The major challenge faced by rights holders is how to compete with the term "free" since most music is publicly available for download in P2P networks or on the internet via file sharing. So competing with free is a huge challenge. On one side of the equation is the rights holder who can not exploit their copyrights and on the other hand is the digital venture company that is trying to figure out a business model to compete with free.

As a digital business the major issue is creating a website that will be valuable enough to consumers that will entice them to pay to consume the services, goods or experience offered.

What can you do in order to beat the competition and compete with the "getting everything for free" dilemma? Just cloning a website will not get it done. What do you bring to the table that is different from everybody else? How do you protect people's music and how do you compensate the musician, or the writer? Those are the key questions that need addressing. The business model of revenue generation is the most challenging part that is for sure.

21st Century Hero's Journey Milestones

ML: What are the most memorable milestones of your entrepreneurial journey, your hero's journey? And what keeps you going through the obstacles that you encounter along the way?

C: Milestones? My biggest milestone is finding the right team. It's so difficult to find the right people that you can trust and who can get the job done without cheating you. Putting this site together has been a big challenge from an infrastructure perspective because I am trying to take different sides of programming code and integrate them together under one website.

Also the viral widget player was a big milestone. The embeddable player takes all the content from one's profile and integrates it on a customized player that can be displayed and shared by anyone on the internet. So basically, you embed the player on other sites and when one visits the player, it takes all the information from its Music.us profile and dynamically places it within the player. It's actually the first fully-commercial widget for music that is not limited to only digital downloads. It incorporates a shopping cart which can be used to sell physical and digital products, tickets, events, on-demand merchandising as well as on-demand music licensing.

Global Company

ML: What are the unique features of operating your venture out of Cyprus? And what did it take to incorporate in Cyprus? I know it is different than here in the United States.

C: All my family is based in Cyprus and so is all of our business division. Our companies have been established since the 1970s. A major advantage of starting a business in Cyprus is the tax advantages. Incorporating is easy in Cyprus. You just file to incorporate your business with the department of commerce in the same manner you incorporate in the U.S.

Mentors

ML: Great. Who are your mentors, and why?

C: My mentor is my Dad. He is not much of a technology guy but he is one of the most entrepreneurial individuals I have ever met. Given that he has launched literally dozens of companies in different areas of business, he is my number one source if I ever need advice on anything.

In terms of mentors, I suggest everyone has as many mentors as possible who are equipped to offer you the right advice about your business. There is always something valuable to find out from someone, even if their experience was not a pleasant one. Those experiences I believe are the most valuable because they act as warnings and obstacles you should avoid at any cost. Another reason why one should have multiple mentors is the varying opinions on certain subject matters by different individuals. I think a lot of people have different opinions on the same subject matter at hand. My approach is to get all these opinions and then using them as a reference to form my own opinion. Networking and attending industry conferences are great ways of finding possible mentors or individuals who are open to discussing your business concepts.

21st Century Hero's Journey Goals

ML: Final question: Where do you hope your hero's journey will take you?

C: For this specific website, or in general?

ML: In general.

C: Well, I want to bring about change in the music industry to help the bands and compensate rights holders. I want to make an impact on people's lives, whether they are musicians, industry professionals or music lovers searching for new music. The success of my site is going to be based on the success of the artists and the industry professionals using my site. Their success is my success. I think that's a good premise for a website or a project, or any new business that is launching.

I think, in the end, it's all about being happy, doing what you love, and fulfilling some dreams, whether it's launching the biggest music website, or making an impact on someone's life. My plan is to enjoy the journey and hopefully in a few years I can look back and say that I had quite a learning experience and I had helped many in regard to their professional and personal goals.

ML: Thank you Costa for sharing your insights and predictions as well as your strategy and tactics about Music.us. You embody the attributes of a 21st Century Hero whose "star is rising!" Thank you for sharing your hero's story.

Caption: Costa Playing His Guitar
Photo By: M.L. Lavik

Conclusion

An in-depth interview with Costa yields some qualitative findings regarding what are the characteristics of a 21st Century Hero's Journey.

Characteristics of a 21st Century Hero's Journey	
Characteristic	Description
Demonstrates A Renaissance Person's Approach	A Renaissance person, traditionally referred to as a Renaissance man, is a person who is talented in both the arts and sciences and thought to possess a wide-body of knowledge. Costa is adept at both the arts and sciences and processes a high intelligence. Costa is a comfortable with each new situation because he processes skills in a number of diverse areas including being an accomplished student, musician, technologist, inventor, and entrepreneur. His creation of the venture Music.us allows him to meld all of his various talents into the creation of this new venture.
Crosses Borders and Boundaries	A hero's journey requires one to go forth into the unknown, to pioneer unchartered territories both geographically as well as philosophically. Costa traveled from Cyprus to the Hollywood/Greater Los Angeles area to begin his journey. As a person born in Cyprus who currently resides in California, Costa has also immersed himself in new cultures. He continues to cross into new borders and to explore new boundaries that exist within the digital divide by his in-depth understanding and application of digital media.

| Processes Ability to Adapt Digital Technology | From the early days of the internet to today's new media and digital platforms, Costa has been at the forefront of transforming what exists today online into tomorrow's services and products.

An expert in SEO, Costa figured out early how to maximize search engine optimization for his ventures. Today he is taking the digital media platform to a whole different level with his adaptation of the media player for Music.us which allows users to actually copy and paste his media player on any website. The player then interacts with the user's Music.us profile and goes on to feed all the content on its multimedia screen. This is just one example of how Costa is at the forefront of adapting digital technology along his hero's journey. |
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| Offers Innovative solutions to Challenges | When Costa was looking for a unique competitive advantage and differentiator that would set his Music.us venture apart from the competition he developed a Music.us widget. A web-based widget is a portion of computer code that is moveable to another website and allows the user of the new website to embed this computer code without having to have any additional computation or programming done.

So, in this case, Costa has created a widget that enables the recipient's website to have their own shopping cart and media solution. This is one example of an innovative solution that Costa is utilizing to overcome his challenges. |
| | |

Creates Direct Access	Since its inception, Music.us has been about providing the 99.9% of musicians who don't have record deals with a method for these independent musicians to maximize their use of the internet as the distribution channel to spread their music. Costa's noble goal is to connect all the gaps in the value chain by trying to integrate as many technological tools and solutions as possible that would help bands and the industry, such as the opportunity to license their music, sell their downloads, sell their videos, sell tickets, sell their merchandise, communicate with their fans, have fan interaction, and also help musicians conduct business with the industry, such as send their songs to get mastered via FTP. What Costa has ultimately been accomplishing is giving musician's direct access to the music distribution chain. No longer is it necessary for musicians to give up when they can't break through the impenetrable grip of the large music corporations. The internet and Music.us are changing the access that musicians have to the value chain and a new paradigm shift is taking place coinciding with the dawning of the 21st Century.
Provides a Voice for the Individual Masses	Costa's development of Music.us is a website that is web 2.0. Everyone will have a voice at Music.us through the blogs and social networking aspects of the online music community that Costa is creating. You no longer have to be someone at a large company or someone with a record deal to have your voice heard by the masses.

Manifests Optimism in Oneself and Others	Costa is someone that is very visionary and believes deeply in what he is doing and what he is creating for musicians. His enthusiasm and passion for what he is doing is infectious and something people enjoy being around.
	Costa never loses his good humor and optimism no matter what challenge confronts him. This optimism spreads to others and inspires others.
	Music.us is a venture well positioned to spread optimism to many.
Dwells comfortably in "The Belly of the Whale"	Back at the very start of the 21st Century, Costa premiered the first iteration of Music.us but he was ahead of his time and this was initially a flop. The term, "The Belly of the Whale" refers to that time in any hero's journey when he or she is faced with adversity.
	Costa and other's on a hero's journey transform adversity into success. They essentially get knocked down and then know how to get back up. And that is Costa's story. He continued on despite the early adversity he faced.
	Costa has gone on to create what promises to be the making of a potential music empire. Costa is comfortable dwelling in "The Belly of the Whale" and he knows that ultimately it won't be long before he summits the pinnacle of success.

Responds to Failure as an Important Part of the Journey	Costa took his initial setback with the first iteration of Music.us and learned from his mistakes. He saw the entire experience as part of a bigger picture and part of his journey. Some people are faced with setbacks and adversity and find their way quickly to a corporate, highly structured job where they don't have to worry about closing the next deal in order to make pay roll and keep the lights on. Costa takes these setbacks in his stride and marches on toward his glory. He has setbacks all along the way as most heroes do. He has found himself compelled to work with many programmers and developers. Costa hasn't lost his stride and he takes these setbacks and learns from them to ultimately be stronger, smarter and savvier then he was before. Each setback manages to only strengthen his resolve to keep going. His perseverance wins the day.
Evolves with the Times Through Continuous Learning	Costa is a continuous learner. He has studied at the USC entrepreneurship program, studied at the Musician's Institute to become a certified recording engineer, obtained an MBA from Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management as well as become an accomplished musician and music producer. He is a talented computer and technology expert in regard to digital media platforms. Costa is not just a Renaissance person but also someone who continues to learn from and evolve with new emerging digital technologies. Costa has an enthusiasm about acquiring new skills in the arts and sciences. He applies and shares these skills in a mentoring fashion.

Author's Note

Costa Giorgio Roussos was a student of mine in 2005 at Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management where I'm a member of the faculty today as a practitioner faculty of marketing. Costa has gone on to be a frequent and very popular guest participant and mentor to my MBA students imparting his wisdom and knowledge to students. Having this in-depth interview with Costa was a personal as well as a professional milestone for me because I'm someone who is dedicated to inspiring and educating other people to find their authentic purpose. A purpose that will ultimately help my students navigate their own unique hero's journey.

Costa and I both attended the First Annual Hero's Journey Entrepreneurship Festival where the intersection of art and specifically story telling and entrepreneurship was celebrated.

I wish everyone who reads this Mentorograpy the best success on your hero's journey!

Molly Lavik, December 30, 2007

Endnotes

[i] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*, "The World Navel," (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press) 40.

[ii] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*, "Departure: The Belly of the Whale," (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press) 90.

[iii] Mentorography is the term Molly Lavik coined on June 12, 2002 to define a style of biographies that reveal the driving philosophies of entrepreneurs in order to impart valuable insights to others.

[iv] Interview with Costa Giorgio Roussos conducted on May 30, 2007 by the author.

[v] Interview transcription prepared by Michael Tanenbaum, MBA Candidate, Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management.