

Snoop's 'Riders on the Storm

Written by Keith ID386

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Rapper Snoop Dogg's version of the 1971 song "Riders on the Storm" debuts tomorrow, but it will not premiere on MTV or on the radio. Instead, the song, which was recorded with the surviving members of The Doors and includes outtakes of Jim Morrison's vocals, will be heard on Need For Speed Underground 2, a video game from Electronic Arts.

The unusual collaboration was recorded at the behest of Steve Schnur, whose title at Electronic Arts is worldwide executive of music, according to [The New York Times](#) .

Snoop Dogg had long wanted to cover "Riders," and The Doors were looking for a way to reinvent their catalog for a new generation. But how did Mr. Schnur persuade them to record the song as the theme for a video game, and then include new lyrics like "Need for speed/I'm trying to take the lead?"

"I didn't have to do that part," said Mr. Schnur, 43, a former senior vice president of Capitol Records. "They get it."

That was not always the case. Just a few years ago, Mr. Schnur and other video game executives had to cajole record labels into licensing songs for video games. But this year, when he was creating the 21-song lineup for Madden NFL 2005, one of Electronic Arts' most popular titles, the labels sent Mr. Schnur 2,500 songs for his consideration.

The contrasting fortunes of the record business and the video game industry explain the change in attitudes. Bedeviled by file sharing and claims of overpricing its products, the record industry suffered through three consecutive years of sales declines before finally stemming the losses this year. Meanwhile, game play is on the increase, rising 26 percent a year for the last five years among men between the ages of 18 and 34, according to Nielsen Interactive Entertainment.

As a result, video games have become an important avenue for the marketing of both emerging and established artists. "The way that music is integrated into games, when it is done well, it does help build awareness for artists," says Courtney Holt, head of new media and strategic marketing at Interscope Geffen A&M, part of the Universal Music Group. That awareness also

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drives sales, she said.

Electronic Arts is further exploiting its musical prowess by moving into the music publishing business. Today the company is expected to announce a joint venture with Cherry Lane Music Publishing to create Next Level Music. The co-publishing deal will seek to sign established and emerging artists, create original works and mine Electronic Arts' 22-year-old library of theme music.

Cherry Lane, which holds about 100,000 copyrights and is one of the largest independent music publishers in the country, will administer the compositions created for Electronic Arts games and sell them for use on commercials, films, trailers, TV shows and other media, like ring tones.

The deal further cements Electronic Arts' reputation as a mainstream entertainment powerhouse. Electronic Arts, based in Redwood Shores, Calif., is the world's largest video game company. Its \$3 billion in revenues make it bigger than all of the other video game publishing companies put together, and bigger even than many entertainment companies, including Pixar Animation Studios and DreamWorks Animation.

Electronic Arts' dominance, helped in large part by its 15-year-old Madden license and an exclusive hold on Nascar-branded games, is so complete that it is becoming a problem. "E.A. cannot possibly maintain its market share," said Michael Pachter, an analyst with Wedbush Morgan Securities. Competitors are dropping prices, he said, and E.A. has shied away from titles for older players.

While the Cherry Lane partnership is expected to give Electronic Arts more influence within the recording industry, it does not yet represent a major source of revenue. "This move won't move the stock the first day," said Mr. Pachter.

The idea to reach beyond licensing the music composed for Electronic Arts' games was formulated in 2003 after Universal Pictures approached Mr. Schnur with a request to include the orchestral theme from Electronic Arts' Medal of Honor series in the trailer for the movie "Seabiscuit."