

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF MUSIC

MUZIKMAFIA: COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, AND CHANGE FROM THE  
NASHVILLE SCENE TO THE POPULAR MAINSTREAM

BY

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“Love Everybody...”

Kenny Alphin – at least once in most  
conversations that we have shared  
since June 2004

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## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I examine the MuzikMafia, a *distinct musical community that developed from a stylistically diverse Nashville scene into a social collective and commercial enterprise, both of which emphasize musical excellence and promote musical and artistic diversity*. In order to understand the MuzikMafia more deeply, I explore three of its defining structures: community, identity, and change. Analysis of each aspect provides insight into what the MuzikMafia actually is, the role of music in the lives of its members, and the reasons behind the MuzikMafia's period of commercial growth and development from 2001 through 2005. I observe how a shared musical and social ideology created a bond between several marginalized Nashville artists and how that bond, or rather its commodification, transformed the MuzikMafia into a significant part of the commercial mainstream.

The dispossessed interact with the dominant structures of capitalist society in a variety of ways. Music serves as a medium of expression and often as an agent of social change through individual and group action. The MuzikMafia is an example of one such dispossessed group that eventually gained national and international popularity. I argue that, despite its numerous anti-establishment sentiments, the MuzikMafia confirms if not supports the existing hegemony of Nashville's commercial music industry. Based upon participant observation, oral history fieldwork, and behind the scenes experiences among several platinum-selling artists, this research provides new insight into the study of popular music, presenting evidence that, not only is ethnomusicological fieldwork in the popular mainstream possible, but such research contributes much to the ongoing development of ethnomusicology and popular music studies.