

From mx.dk: "The US and UK are watching Scandinavia" [Interview with Junior A&R Manager at Decca]



Danny Roberts is Junior A&R Manager at [Decca Records](#), a sub-label to Universal Music Group in the UK. His career at Universal was launched over five years ago, when he first entered the company as an intern. Since then he's worked his way up, and now he has got the pleasure of working with artists such as **Aurora**, **The Lumineers**, **Gregory Porter** and **Rhys Lewis**.

As an A&R, Danny describes his job as scouting for bands and bringing in new acts to the label.

-We look at bands on a global scale. The bands that we bring in have to show global potential, so it's not just for the UK. However, the Decca label stands for diverse music that is slightly alternative and niche, so it's not straight-out pop either. We're looking for a balance between those two.

So what are the first things you look for when scouting for new acts?

-It starts with the songs. If there's a really good song that can somehow grab my attention

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and make me feel something, whether it be happiness, sadness, excitement - anything - then that's a great start. The more songs like that, the better - then I'll most likely start looking into it.

What Danny checks next is the history of the band and the team set-up behind it. Previous tours, releases, press and other activity all come into play, as well as the people who are already working with the band, such as promoters, agents, publishers and managers.

-It's like a small check-list like that. You don't need to have everything to be relevant. In fact, most bands who have all of those - manager, touring history, agents - are very likely to already have a label already. So it's almost inevitable that you lack something in the set-up. As a label, if need be, we'll also try to complete that set-up and find the right partners, if we think there's potential in the band.

Norway's Aurora has really blown up during the past six months - can you tell us a bit about the work regarding that and how you signed her?

-Aurora's great! So far she's the only Scandinavian act I've signed. It started with a good Norwegian friend of mine who came to me and said I should check out this young girl who had performed at a venue in Bergen. He said there was more people outside the venue than inside, and I thought "Yeah, I've heard that story before". Then a week later he came back to me and said it had happened again in another Norwegian town. I checked her out online and was blown away. 'Awakening' - the song - was great, and beneath that was an amazing artist.

Danny presented the artist to the A&R team at Decca and they started to reach out to people. By that time they weren't the only ones contacting Aurora's management.

-There was a lot of talk about Aurora in London at that point. In that sense we were a bit late to the party and we were aware of that, but when we met Aurora it just clicked. We were also really impressed by her performance (boardrooms are not among the most pleasant of venues) and the team behind her were hugely impressive.

'Awakening' was released in May 2013 and Aurora performed at Ja Ja Ja in London in September 2014. The record deal was announced at the end of September.

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So what do you think about the Scandinavian music scene in general?

-I've been to **SPOT** festival and I had a lovely time! Scandinavia is a really exciting part of the world and you should know that the industries in the UK and the US are watching it closely. Having said that, we are looking for sounds that can also work outside of the region - it has to have international potential. I've seen Scandinavian bands that sound great but at the same time I'm thinking that they might struggle on an international level because the sound and production etc won't connect with the rest of the world. As an A&R for a major label I don't want to be the guy to tell people they need to change their music - they need to have that from the beginning.