

To succeed, embrace risk (and peace, order and good government)

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THE erotic aural ambush by intense young women has been going on for years now, usually on the car radio driving from work at the office to work at home. In her 1990 hit, *All I Want to Do is Make Love to You*, Ann Wilson of the female rock band Heart tells a typically frank tale of one night's rec-sex from a woman's point of view. We've come a long way since radio stations banned Frank Sinatra's *Strangers in the Night*.

In *All I Want to Do*, the night is rainy and the woman picks up a fetching hitchhiker in her car. She takes him to a hotel "she knows well," where they spend a night of fabulous physical fun. But she's "in love with another man," and has to leave this hot guy behind at morning's light. A year or two later, she picks him up again, and he can't help but see himself in the eyes of her new baby. He gave her "the only thing her man could not." It's another bad-girl/bad-boy classic.

Alanis Morissette has the same arresting presence on the radio, inciting a hike in the volume at first hearing of her rude and irresistible *Hand in my Pocket*. It takes but five seconds to understand that this Ottawa-bred young woman has nothing to do with the pap pop nostalgia and formless fresh fudge that clogs FM radio channels hoping to catch baby boomer flower-children-gone-to-seed.

Ms. Morissette was among three Canadian women who dominated the Grammy awards in Los Angeles Wednesday night. In an entertainment industry where production values swamp performance values, the Canadians came through with a modest, brilliant authenticity that simply must have something to do with peace, order and good government.

Compare Ms. Morissette or **Joni Mitchell** with the grotesquely overwrought ensemble of Mariah Carey and Boyz II Men in the Grammy's opening number, *Some Sweet Day*. Carey/Boyz was like riding in a 1959

Cadillac with softened springs, sloshing down the freeway with the windows up. It's music by marketing, and profitable to be sure, but it doesn't matter a whit or endure except as sentimentality — not like Joni Mitchell's *Blue* or Alanis Morissette's *Jagged Little Pill*.

Ms. Morissette said what everybody with any creativity says when they get an award: Thanks to so-and-so for taking a risk. This, of course, is the real secret of successful marketing — embracing risks based on the creativity of special persons. Goethe said "the condition of freedom is risk," just as any shrewd capitalist knows that risk is related to reward. "Passive marketing" — taking orders from consumers through multiple-questions research — can carry you along for a while, but without creative risk it will serve only to enlist your customers in your own decline.

What teen-ager would ever have been able to tell a market researcher in 1967 that he desperately wanted the cross-cultural, iron-

ny-laden *mélange* that was the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*? It was utterly strange on first hearing and defined the new territory for popular music within a week. It could have come from nowhere but within.

What laid-back fan of Joni Mitchell would have proposed the sparse, dissonant *Ladies of the Canyon* in 1970, which dated all the folk music that had preceded it within a month?

Who but an inspired individual could have come up with the brilliant opening sequence of the current weekly TV series *New York Underground*?

If market surveys led to customer delight and profit growth, there wouldn't be a firm anywhere in any kind of trouble whatsoever.

People are not drawn to slightly improved versions of Tennessee Williams's plays or even knock-offs of Alanis Morissette (whose next album must move on). Younger generations, certainly, are always on the lookout

for the next step into the new. This is not because they are easily bored; it is because they are not easily satisfied. They are not the grateful dead.

The excellent, dangerous requirement for artists, corporations and entrepreneurs is to constantly define new territory. Joni Mitchell won another Grammy this week for *Turbulent Indigo*, an album that would have been incomprehensible to her fans in 1970. She has relentlessly kept exploring, stumbling along the way but succeeding hugely in her journey.

It is women who have really shown this capacity in recent years, perhaps because they are escaping from such drab and lengthy confinements. The male establishment has so much to protect that it tends to seek security asking other people what to do — except, ironically, the women and other aliens in their midst.

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