

MUSIC \ As far as music success stories go, Woody Pitney has a pretty good one, writes JO DAVY

Couples frolicking on a beach, a father building a sandcastle with his children. There's virtually nothing remarkable about the 30-second television advertisement for German travel portal [weg.de](#), which has made it into most of Germany's living rooms over the past six months.

Except that these scenes of holiday bliss are being played out to an upbeat folksy tune recorded in the unlikelyst of places – the bedroom of a largely unknown 23-year-old singer/songwriter from Kew.

As far as musical success stories go, Woody Pitney has a pretty good one: Young musician records an EP in his bedroom and releases it on YouTube, hoping for some airtime on Triple J and perhaps a gig at a pub on the shrinking list of Melbourne's live music venues.

Somewhere in the rabbit holes of the internet, his song catches the ear of a German ad executive who contacts the young musician and asks how much it would cost to use it for a small television commercial.

The commercial happens to be for a travel portal recently acquired by Germany's largest TV network, which splashes advertising across its commercial and cable TV stations.

The popularity of the song leads to a record deal with the German arm of Universal Music, and a No. 1 on the iTunes charts in Germany, the third largest music market in the world.

Six months later, everybody in Germany knows Woody Pitney's name, or at least the catchy lyrics to his song *You Can Stay*.

"The Germans have this word for it, 'ohrwurm', which is like a catchy tune you can't get out of your head – an earworm," Pitney says.

Pitney describes the commercial's prevalence as akin to the advertising campaigns for Bunnings Warehouse in Australia.

I caution him that he better come up with an example with a bit more street cred among music fans, but it's clear this young man hasn't quite got his head around his own success story.

"It's been absolutely crazy," Pitney admits. "I really can't believe any of this is happening."

Pitney first picked up a guitar less than a decade ago, using it primarily as a distraction from his studies at Xavier College in Kew. The school's Battle of the Bands event was one of his earliest public performances.

After graduation he struck up a Friday-night residency at Hawthorn East's Tower Hotel, a venue, he admits, not known for its live music.

"I'd have the TAB screening the footy on the TVs about my head so I never knew whether people were watching me or the game ... halfway through a song they'd just start cheering and I'd have my answer."

Next up was making the transition from singing covers to writing his own material, a shift he said evolved naturally, although his only basis for music theory came from his junior school violin lessons.

"I don't think it was any kind of landmark occasion where I was like, 'OK, here I go, my first song' ... there was a lot of, 'I don't know what the hell I'm doing', but the more I did it, the more I enjoyed it."

Buoyed by the success of one of his first singles, *Colours*, on Triple J's independent music portal Unearthed, Pitney continued writing and producing music with friends until he struck gold with the release of *You Can Stay* in September last year.

He negotiated a fee of about \$5000 for the advertising company to use the song in a year-long campaign for [weg.de](#).



FAME IN S Y N C

"I was stoked, I was thinking that was enough money to organise a couple of shows and some flights to Europe ... I didn't think it would be a big campaign or anything."

In an era of declining record sales and concert attendance, music synchronisation – sync deals – for television shows or commercials is one of the few growing sources of revenue in the music industry.

Companies such as Brisbane-based Hook, Line and Sync are devoted to negotiating song placement in films, TV shows and commercials for little-known artists.

The agency has a catalogue of more than 7000 independent tracks, which they shop out to music supervisors of television shows such as *True Blood*, *Breaking Bad* and *Shameless*, and commercial productions for Swisse, Contiki and Qantas.

HOOKED UP

JAPANESE WALLPAPER \ Gab Strum's song *Breathe In* appeared in Zach Braff's indie film *Wish I Was Here* and the season final of *Offspring*.

TAME IMPALA \ The Perth band's song *Elephant* was used in a 2012 Blackberry commercial.

YVES KLEIN BLUE \ In 2009, Mitsubishi used *Polka* for a nation-wide campaign for its new Lancer.

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"In the old days, the music budget on a production used to be about 10 per cent of the overall budget; nowadays, it's down to 1 or 2 per cent," Hook, Line and Sync's managing director Jamie Brammah says.

"We've done a lot of shows like *Shameless* and *True Blood* and they'll have a music budget of \$50,000 per episode and the producer might want a track by The Black Keys, which will cost them \$40,000."

"After that, they're looking at independent tracks that might cost them \$200."

Brammah says sync licensing is now a saturated market, but one that seems to welcome Australian talent.

"I tend to get my foot in the door because we're waving the Aussie flag in places like the US and the UK."

Brammah estimates a sync deal on a 12-month commercial campaign in Australia can fetch the artist anywhere between \$20,000 and \$50,000. In the UK, he's seen artists making up to \$116,000.

As for television shows, independent artists can get anywhere between \$1000 and \$5000 if their song appears in a US series. Australian networks are difficult to crack because of their relationships with major record labels.

In the US, some artists aren't paid for their song to appear in a film or TV show, as producers argue the exposure is reward enough. Hook, Line and Sync negotiates only paid sync deals for their artists, but Brammah admits the exposure can often be more valuable for unknown artists.

"I think every artist wants that goldmine sync, where you're going out to 30 territories ... and everybody is singing your song and they don't know where they heard it. "Yes, there's money involved, but I always say TV is the new radio, so when you get a high frequency (advertising) campaign, you're really making an impact ... a lot of those can be timing and luck."

The latter is something with which Pitney is familiar. "Looking back, \$5000 was an absolute bargain for ([weg.de](#)), but it was also the best career move I've ever made. From January 1 (the date the ad aired) I'd wake up in the morning and have all these new Facebook fans, all these people saying, 'We love your song, we see it every day on TV, come over here and do a tour!'"

Pitney has spent three of the past six months in Germany doing publicity for his single, released by Universal in June. The song shot to No. 1 on the charts in Germany, Austria, Luxembourg and Switzerland, and the clip has notched up 358,000 YouTube views.

Radio and television appearances have included a live performance on one of Germany's highest rating morning television shows with 4.8 million viewers.

"I'd get home and look up these stations and their two interviews would be Woody Pitney and Ed Sheeran, which was pretty cool," he says.

Opening for German act Wise Guys in front of a crowd of 10,000 and playing at Wanderland music festival in the Philippines, alongside Architecture in Helsinki and The Drums, were two more highlights.

Pitney is now recording his second single, scheduled for release this summer. After that there's talk of a spot on a tour with a major artist overseas, and he is deciding whether to record an album with Universal Germany.

But back in Melbourne, he still has relative anonymity – a twist of fate he's not all that concerned about.

"I'm looking forward to things getting bigger here in Australia – if that time comes – but after all the intense action in Europe, it's nice to be able to just come back here, do my own thing, and hang with my friends."

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» www.woody-pitney.com/