

Creators can make a difference

Pioneering electronic music icon and president of CISAC Jean-Michel Jarre spoke about both the threats and opportunities facing authors at the society's general assembly on June 4

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BY JEAN-MICHEL JARRE

A few months ago, I came across a report from Bloomberg about China. It caught my eye. The report was about the "World Internet Conference" which took place in Wuzhen.

What really got my attention was what the billionaire owner of Alibaba and the owner of Tencent, two of the biggest players in the Chinese online market, said about intellectual property. They said that there needs to be stronger protection for intellectual property in China if the nation wants to create more of its own online content. They also added that "improving copyright protection will help Chinese companies develop a mature business model for videos, music and animation".

Ever since I did my concerts in China in 1981, I've had a special link with this country. And reading this piece of news made me happy. They now really get it. In China, in 2015, they understand that in order to develop a competitive online environment and an online market that continues to develop for the benefit of everyone, you first need to protect creators. So simple, and yet so true.

If the internet giants in China get it, then why do we have such big challenges delivering this message and these notions in Europe, in the US, and in so many other countries?

These challenges need to unite us creators, and I have been immensely proud to carry this flag over the past year, on behalf of authors' societies regrouped within CISAC, and the four million creators that they represent.

The last year was an amazing ride. We took the message of creators to WIPO in Geneva and to the UN in New York. We brought it to the European Parliament in Brussels. And we took it to numerous places around the world where creators' voices needed to be heard.

Every day I am fascinated by the difference we can make as creators speaking up for ourselves and our livelihood. Creation is our full-time job. When other people go to work, we go to the colours and canvases; to the pen and paper; to the recording studio or to the film set. But the foundations that support creators, and help them earn a living from their work – and I mean, of course, authors' rights – are at risk.

Powerful forces and lobbies are trying to get rid of a system that was built over three centuries to rightly ensure that creators' works are protected and fairly remunerated. The exceptions to the rules of copyright that were supposed to be exactly that – "exceptions" – are now close to becoming the rule. When exceptions become the rule, it isn't fair anymore.



Jean-Michel Jarre

The notions of "free access" and "fair use" are spreading, and are promoted by those who commercially benefit from providing such free access. "Fair use" is not fair to us, the creators, if we are not compensated for this use.

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What concerns me is that the creators of tomorrow would be discouraged by what they are seeing today. If this situation persists, the future of creativity itself is in real danger. But we – creators, societies, people with goodwill and luckily, still some policy makers – can make a difference. We need to fight for that fairness, which unfortunately is almost lost today.

CISAC has been active more than ever before, in raising the issue of fairness, and putting the focus on what is amiss with the current agenda, that threatens to change the world of creativity as we know it. Our

groundwork has spread across all regions and all repertoires with the active participation of creators from all over the cultural and creative community. In the music field, we have recently seen the launch of the Fair Trade Music initiative, which promotes transparency and fair payment to creators online. We need more voices on board, we need more creators to join. We must also get digital services on board, to agree to "fair trade" conditions for creators. That is how we can make significant progress. And we also need to address the imbalance in existing legal systems that allow some online services to abuse outdated laws and ignore their obligations towards creators.

Today is the time for creators to make their voices heard. In Brussels, Washington, Ottawa, Beijing, London, Canberra, Mumbai or any capital in the world where policy-makers are making decisions that can affect us. This is the fight for a fair system that remunerates creators, that recognises the value of our works, that respects our moral and human rights. This is the fight for our future and for the future of the next generations of creators.