



# Noel Ramos

## Who's Laughing Now?!

It's rare to be able to call someone a champion. But that's what Noel Ramos is. Many, many years ago, we crossed paths at a music conference. The conference was trying to backpedal out of an agreement they'd made with Songwriter's Monthly and I was too busy trying to pick my jaw up off the tile floor to be able to fathom the extent to which I'd just been taken for

a ride after spending months working with the organizers to promote and support the event. Noel happened to be within earshot of the whole debacle and when it became clear I was not making any headway, he stepped in with a cool head and resolved the situation for no other reason than he believes in doing the right thing . . . and expects nothing less from others.

"I still see that kind of stuff going on to this day," Noel stated. "The way they treat people, that's not the way that this business should be run, that's not the way these conferences should be run. It's a group effort and people should be coming together as a group for the benefit of all."



## IMC Panel

I guess, you could also call Noel an idealist and a visionary. Maybe even an activist. Unfortunately, these words — much like music conferences — have been misused to the point of bringing up some less than favorable emotional associations. Fortunately, Noel represents the best, most noble aspects of these terms . . . much in the same way he represents the best, most noble aspects of the music business in general and music conferences in specific.

***"It was pretty hard in the beginning."***

Songwriter's Monthly caught up with Noel, just before IMC's crunch time.

"I'm not feeling it yet," he confessed, "but I definitely am in that phase where I have to start really buckling down and

getting all the stuff done that needs to get done . . . But the panic hasn't set in yet."

Long before the IMC, Ramos was still way ahead of his time. Back when major record labels ruled the market, and there was money in excess for everyone, Noel was insisting independence was the way to true success. At the time, it was an idea that was not taken very seriously because all everyone wanted was to sign that deal.

"It was pretty hard in the beginning," Noel recalled. "Literally, people in the industry used to laugh at me when I talked about independent music — I mean just saying those two words together made certain people smile or chuckle or giggle at me. It was kind of like 'Oh, here comes that Noel guy, that independent music dude!' It was a bit exasperating because I just knew in my heart of hearts that everything about

'independent music' made sense, the whole idea of it made sense. I could see

***"People in the industry used to laugh at me when I talked about independent music."***

it happening. I knew it was going to be the way things were going to play out.

But the bottom line with most of the people I was talking to was they didn't want to see what was clearly the handwriting on the wall, so they chose to continue on with blinders. To this day there are people in the industry who are like that, who don't want the old school major label method to go away. Those people are still living in denial."

As the music industry continues to merge with film and television in an effort to create new superstars [Disney, American Idol, Glee], success is becoming harder and harder for even major labels to achieve.

"That's the ultimate lie of the industry," Ramos interrupted. "It was never 'successful.' The biggest irony of the major label business model is that it was never a

successful business model! The only reason that the major label industry was in control for almost 50 years is because they had created a false business environment, in which they were the sole source, there was nobody else to go to. They were the guy in the desert with the only bottle of water, so they were able to control production, marketing, manufacturing, distribution, promotion, everything. I don't know if there's ever been an industry like that, where they've had complete and total control of every aspect of the market for so long. So that's why



## **IMC Songcamp**

they were able to do what they did for so long and why there was so much money out there. And the money was ridiculous."

"I'm amazed that people are surprised at the way things are progressing," Noel continued. "To me it was almost as clear as day that you were going to see this massive influx of musicians trying their hand at it. People wanted it so bad and there was just no way to get it before, but now it's a free for all,

look at some of the dreck that's out there you want to immediately say 'No, we don't need them.' But instead of rushing to the answer that seems obvious, I would probably want to think about it a bit more first."

## Help The IMC!

The Independent Music Conference has been chosen for a possible \$25,000 Pepsi Refresh Grant! You can help Noel obtain that grant simply by voting here: [www.refresheverything.com/imc](http://www.refresheverything.com/imc)

Ramos chewed the possibilities a little bit longer before concluding, "It's kind of like sharks. People say that sharks are deadly and they are dangerous and we should just kill them all off. But the fact is, if you kill all the sharks, you're basically dooming the ocean to a slow death. Do we want to kill all of the sharks? No, I don't think so. I think that we need those kinds of artists — the manufactured pop star, the

instead of the one guy with the one water bottle in the desert, there's suddenly this huge gushing geyser and everybody can have some, so they are all going to rush for it.

teen idol — because they drive a large market, they drive a huge machine and those machines give music in general a lot of clout. Those big corporate money makers that get global attention create a massive trickle-down effect that I believe is largely responsible for the independent musician's success. It's like this, 'How can you be a successful independent musician if there's nothing

"And it's working, it's definitely working, it's just that the definition of success has changed radically. You're not looking at these huge superstars who are the one name in a global market, now you're looking at lots of little stars who have their own market."

***"They didn't want to see what was clearly the handwriting on the wall."***

When asked if the market still needed superstars, Noel paused.

"That's actually a very good question and no one has ever asked me that before. To be honest with you, I don't know if I've ever considered that question in my own mind," he admitted. "Do we need the superstars? When you

to be independent from?' So the major label market actually defines the independent market, without those big moneymakers, without that huge

corporate machine, there's nothing to be alternative to. You're talking about a large market full of small fish and I don't think that any ecosystem can survive without the top of the food chain."

Noel Ramos had been heavily involved in music and other music conferences around the country for many years prior to the start of his own, but what was the defining moment, the catalyst that pushed him to finally create the IMC in 2003?

"Yes, I was active in quite a few conferences on various levels," he agreed, "even if it was just going to the conference and being a panelist or being a sponsor of some sort. I was really into it and at first I was kind of this bright-eyed, wide-eyed young guy who thought these things were just the bomb! Then after a few years of attending them, I started to become very disillusioned because I began to see the inner workings of these things and what was going on behind the scenes and it all started to look like a big excuse to exploit the musicians. I got really frustrated with the industry as a whole because when you compared it to other professions and their annual events, the 'music

conference' really started to look like a big scam — some were so bad that they needed to be exposed as such."

"My wide-eyed wonderment turned into . . . I don't know how to describe it, but



## IMC Immie Awards

I basically started to become, a 'mythbuster,' let's say, and I actually exposed quite a few events that were just complete and total rip-offs. Because of that experience, that disillusionment and that desire to change things, I really started to think: *This is a profession, it's not just a joke. These people are professionals and this is a huge market and they should be treated like professionals. There ought to be a true professional gathering for them.* People who were close to me started to get tired of hearing me complain and a bunch of them basically rose up in unison and said 'Noel, if you're so upset about it, why don't you start your own event?' And it was like a lightbulb went on."

## IMC Facts & Details

- The 2010 IMC is already a record-breaker boasting over 300 registrants at the time of this interview. IMC 2010 is already the largest IMC to date.
- The cost of the entire 4-day event is only \$45!
- There are 5 participating colleges in and around the Northampton area so Noel has focused a great deal of attention to make this the most educational AND appealing music conference for students. \*Students can register for free!
- Dates: , November 18-21, 2010
- Location: Clarion Hotel, 1 Atwood Drive, Northampton, MA
- Cost: \$45 [\*Students are free!]
- Website: [www.indiemusicon.com](http://www.indiemusicon.com)

So for the past 7 years, Noel has been doing just that, he's been running his own conference in a way that brings respect to the artists. He has worked hard to create a truly professional experience, an opportunity where people from the industry can go and learn how to become better at what they do. At the IMC, you're not going to find the typical "showcase" or any other vehicles which Noel believes were created simply to exploit artists. Instead, you are going to find a professional environment where real issues are tackled head on, where new ground is broken and where strategies for success are presented in real, obtainable steps.

Regarding "new ground," Noel expressed, "Yes, there's definitely some new ground this year! Because Northampton, Massachusetts has one of the most vibrant lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered communities in the United States, we plan to address gender issues at this conference on a greater scale than we ever have before. I'm planning a special panel to discuss the difficulties that women, minorities, and anybody who is a little bit left-of-center face. It's a much bigger problem in the industry than people would like to admit and it doesn't get talked about enough. I'm hoping that this panel will become one of the cornerstones of the Northampton event. We had a similar type of panel at a Los Angeles event which I believe we called "Women In Music." We focused on the gender inequities that women face. But

this is a bigger issue than just women, so it's one of the topics that I'd like to cover."

## \* Students Are Free!

In order for students to qualify for a free pass they need to email Noel at [IMC2010@InterMixx.com](mailto:IMC2010@InterMixx.com) with the following:

- Name and contact information.
- School name and contact information.
- Student ID number (if they have one).
- Name of their favorite music teacher.

"The sexuality of the artist was often a hot topic: Do we address this issue or do we try to ignore this issue when we're marketing this artist to the mainstream public?" Noel continued. "Back in the day, you didn't really have a choice, the people who were handling you, told you what they were going to do. But now the artists are making these choices for themselves and they face a tough question: Do I openly announce my sexuality or do I keep it private? If I openly announce it, how is it going to affect my career and how is it going to affect the way I present myself to my fan base?"

The panel actually came about when a young artist approached Noel and asked for advice. The artist hadn't even come out to his parents yet so he was really still trying to come to grips with far more than just his marketing.

"What do I do in terms of my public persona?" Noel recalled the artist asking. "That's a lot for a young person to handle. These are big questions. They really need a place to go for guidance, but I don't know that there is one. Other than looking at these crazy role models from the mainstream music

industry, who do you look to for answers? Who do you go to?"

As was noted at the beginning of this article, Noel Ramos has that rare quality of being the one man willing to step up to the situation. He doesn't flinch when it comes to assuming responsibility and championing those in need. Long before the IMC, Ramos was doing good work. Now, he has a vehicle to reach even more people, to provide help, guidance and support to both emerging and established independent artists. If this sounds like the kind of



**IMC Group Photo**

conference you'd like to attend, I urge you to look into the 2010 IMC.

For more information, visit:  
[www.indiemusicon.com](http://www.indiemusicon.com)