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RASCAL FLATTS RISES TO THE TOP →P.31

REVOLVING DOORS
MARKETING THEIR 40TH →P.24

TUNING INTO THE MOUSE HOUSE →P.26

POWTER POWER
DANIEL DELIVERS CHART SUCCESS →P.51

Take It To The Bank
8 NEW WAYS TO MAKE MONEY ON MUSIC →P.28

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"Taking a page from D'Angelo, songstress Hil St. Soul follows up 2004's critically acclaimed Copasetik & Cool with a more sensual effort that bubbles over with warm bass lines, crisp drums and an overall boho sensibility."

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includes the hot singles "It's OK" and "Goodbye" plus the sensuous duet "Baby Come Over" featuring Dwele.
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Heineken

ABOVE:
Dido and other acts under the Nettwerk roster are being set up as their own record label. See page 7.
Photo: Steve Granitz/WireImage.com
Roy Orbison photo: Paul Natkin/WireImage.com
Dido photos: Gloria Stavros/Courtesy of Doors Music Company

COVER:
Photo: Paul Natkin/Courtesy of Doors Music Company
Mickey Mouse photo: Jim Smeal/WireImage.com
Powder photo: Andy Stubbins/WireImage.com
Despite the oft-repeated notion that this is a business of dinosaurs, music companies are sitting in a competitive landscape that is anything but extinct.

Even as the majors undergo this transformation, at least one industry maverick says it’s time to toss out the label paradigm. Terry McBride, CEO of Vancouver-based Network Music Group, is advising his management clients to forget about label deals, keep control of their repertoire and partner with a capable marketer—like Network—for distribution (see story, next page). That sounds great for a brand-name artist like Nettwerk’s Sarah McLachlan. But will it work for developing acts? Stay tuned.

Of course, no one ever said this transformation would be easy. Consider the Yahoo! case, a valued industry partner that has worked hard to create a legitimate digital music business. In its pioneering zeal, Yahoo! recently has been stung by affiliations with Web platforms linking to unauthorized downloads (see story, next page).

The message to all is clear: Be careful where you step when entering the new frontier. ...
**FIFTH BEATLE HEADERS TO HALL**
George Martin will be inducted into the U.K. Music Hall of Fame at the third annual ceremony, which will be held later this year in London. The "Fifth Beatle" will receive this year's honorary member trophy for his contribution to British music. Martin will also join past honorary members John Peel (2005) and Chris Blackwell (2004).

**BILLBOARD TO UNVEIL NEW CHART**
Billboard this summer will unveil a new Hot MasterTones chart, ranking the best-selling master ringtones in the United States. The tally will track ringtones that play a segment of an original recording, rather than a synthesized instrumental version of a hit song. According to the website, the overall U.S. ringtones market (master and polyphonic ringtones) accounted for $300 million in 2005 and will grow to $600 million this year.

**SANCTUARY CEO TO EXIT**
Tom Lipsky, president/CEO of Sanctuary Records Group in North America, will leave the company, effective June 30, to pursue other opportunities. The move is part of the global restructuring of the Sanctuary Group has undergone in the past six months. Lipsky will continue with Sanctuary through June 30 to assist with the transition.

**CLEAR CHANNEL, GOOGLE PARTNER**
On April 5, Clear Channel Radio chose Google as the search partner for its new Netwerk station.

---

**Nettwerk Making Each Act A Label**

**TORONTO—Nettwerk Music Group CEO Terry McBride has a simple message for his management clients: You no longer need to sign with a record label.**

"We're focused on setting up our artists as their own record label," says the Vancouver-based McBride, whose operation also includes a label (Nettwerk Productions) and a publishing company. "I'm advocating for artists who manage not to sign—or re-sign—with a label unless it's a pressing-and-distribution deal to work back catalog with new projects."

Nettwerk Management's 42-act roster includes stars Avril Lavigne (Sony BMG) and Dido (Sony BMG), as well as lesser-known acts. McBride says that within three years, "probably 80%" of releases from his management clients will be through their own labels. That includes cornerstone artist Sarah McLachlan, who is signed to Nettwerk's label as well as its management company.

During the past three years Nettwerk has developed an infrastructure to support projects in North America by its management clients, including three eight-person management teams spread across Nettwerk's North American offices in Vancouver, Los Angeles, Nashville, Boston and New York. McBride says a team will be installed later this year in Europe, where Nettwerk has offices in London and Hamburg.

Nettwerk first tested the waters for McBride's approach in 2004 with the Bare Naked Ladies' "Barenaked for the Holidays" album on the act's Desperation Records label, distributed in North America by Warner Music. According to Nielsen SoundScan, the album has sold 275,000 units in the United States and 78,000 units in Canada. McBride claims the Barenaked Ladies—formerly a Warner Music act—continue to grow.

**Webjay Creates New Copyright Woes For Yahoo**

Yahoo acquired playlist-sharing site webjay.com in January. But it seems it may have bought itself a problem. Webjay makes downloading the Beatles' music or Kanye West's full-length videos easy as a keyword search and a click of a mouse.

Webjay enables users to build their own playlists of audio and video that is available elsewhere—anywhere—on the Internet. The site hosts the playlists, which have links that automatically stream or download most files for free.

Webjay founder Lucas Gonze, who began working for Yahoo in California after the acquisition, reportedly developed the site as a way to let users create the Internet equivalent of mix tapes from free music in cyberspace.

Users can then share their playlists with others, include them on their Web sites, browse other users' playlists and play the files. An April 2004 Wired article, written when about 100 people had contributed playlists to the site, quotes Gonze as saying, "What you can't point to is hit songs. There's no Eminem, there's no Britney [Spears]." The article noted that "the site does not support links to pirated or unauthorized music. Links to such songs will be taken down."

If that was true, then it is no longer the case. Webjay now appears to host tens of thousands of playlists, including hundreds with links to such A-list stars as Spears and Eminem. While some links to hit music were disabled, many were not.
NETTWERK

network of more than 1,100 radio station Web sites. Users will be able to run Google searches without leaving the station sites, and Clear Channel's local advertisers will benefit from the deal—they will have additional ads showcased first in search results. According to Clear Channel, its sites have nearly 7 million unique visitors per month.

>> DBM EMBRACES ITUNES

Dave Matthews Band's entire catalog was made available on Apple's iTunes Music Store April 4. The move marks the first time fans can purchase individual songs from the band's catalog online. DBM has sold more than 27.4 million albums in the United States, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

>> WMG BOLSTERS INDIE EFFORT

Warner Music Group has created the independent Label Group—which comprises Asylum Records, East West Records and Cordless Recordings—to oversee the company's indie-label endeavors. Todd Moscowitz, currently president of Asylum, has been named ILM president.

>> IRAadio SIGNS THIRD MAJOR

Sony BMG Music has joined Warner Music Group and Universal Music Group to provide content for Motorola's burgeoning iRadio, a service that gives subscribers access to more than 400 channels of commercial-free music and talk programming from their cell phone. In addition to licensing music for iRadio, Sony BMG will distribute original programming that will debut exclusively on iRadio.

>> CLARK LEAVES MERCURY

Longtime Mercury Records artist Terri Clark has exited the label's roster after 11 years. Clark released seven albums on Mercury, including a 2004 greatest-hits set. All but her self-titled first album continued on >>p10

YAHOO FROM >>p7

Billboard downloaded or streamed free audio tracks ranking from the Beatles and Beyoncé to 50 Cent and Gorillaz. One playlist linked to 50 videos, including full-length music videos of Madonna, Kelly Clarkson, Norah Jones and Usher. One click automatically downloaded the West/Jamie Fox full-length music video “Gold Digger” to the computer desktop.

Yahoo executives declined to comment, but Charlene Fitzgbob, a Yahoo spokeswoman, said: “Yahoo is currently transitioning some of the features of web-page hosting to Yahoo's Music products and services. Yahoo aims to respect intellectual property rights and will remove any content when notified of material that infringes copyrights.”

Yahoo is emerging as something of a poster child for the challenge of creating interactive communities while honoring the copyrights of other major media companies—particularly the music business. Webjay's playlists make clear the extent to which the Internet is still—perhaps increasingly—swimming in unlicensed content.

Yahoo has worked closely with the music industry to build a legitimate digital music market. In September 2004, it bought MusicMatch for about $160 million to sell music downloads. Yahoo (and other such Web destinations as AOL and MySpace) have emerged as crucial players in the promotion of music. Yahoo's online radio network attracted 2.6 million listeners for January, the most recent numbers available from Arbitron, according to New Media Metrics. And the company streams several hundred million videos per month.

But this is not the first time Yahoo has been tied to a site that fails to honor music copyrights. One month before Yahoo acquired Webjay, music copyright holders warned the Internet giant to stop making unlicensed music available through Yahoo China (Billboard, March 11). Yahoo pumped $1 billion into Internet auction site Alibaba.com last October, which operates Yahoo's China portal. That site links deep into other sites so users can easily download music—much of it unlicensed—for free. Executives from the four major labels and the RIAA declined to comment on the legal issues with the music industry executives, who did not want to speak on the record, wondered why Yahoo acquired Webjay without immediately implementing some sort of filtering system.

"When you look at services like that, functionally they are no different than the old Napster," says a veteran digital music attorney who asked not to be identified. "It makes you wonder why anyone would bother to do a legitimate music service—just to get licenses—when they have to compete with this kind of thing."
THE WARNER MUSIC GROUP AND CURB RECORDS.
CELEBRATING OUR BILLION-DOLLAR RELATIONSHIP.
LOOKING FORWARD TO A BILLION MORE.
Hollywood Hits The Net

Six major movie studios began offering their releases for digital download on April 3 through online services Movielink and Cinema Now. While this marks the first time consumers can legally download films, the achievement is marred by limitations and high prices.

Movielink, which is owned by Warner Bros., Sony Pictures, Universal, MGM and Paramount, began by offering more than 300 titles from the five studios and Twentieth Century Fox. The titles are a mix of classics, blockbusters and Academy Award-winning films including "Brokeback Mountain," "King Kong," "Office Space" and "Breakfast at Tiffany's." Prices range from $10 to $30.

Cinema Now, which signed deals with Sony, MGM and Lionsgate (which has a stake in the company), began with 85 titles, with prices ranging from $9.95 to $19.95.

In other words, customers pay as much—or in some cases more—as they would for a DVD. But because of digital rights management restrictions, they get less for their money.

Movielink customers download a Windows Media, DRM-protected file to their PC. The download can be played on two other computers and a backup can be burned to a DVD, but it cannot be played on a DVD player. Streaming via home networking is the only way to view a download on a TV. Cinema Now users are able to download one copy to one computer.

The new offerings are being trumpeted by the film industry as groundbreaking. "This is the milestone we've been waiting for," CinemaNow CEO Curt Marvis said in a statement. At a press conference, Universal Pictures president/COO Rick Finkelstein called it "a very new and exciting way of delivering our film product to consumers."

Kevin Tsujihara, president of Warner Bros. Home Entertainment Group, added during a press conference: "Movielink is an important first step in the creation of a digital distribution business."

For now, industry analysts think that’s all it may be. "Consumers are aware of pricing and portability options," says Russ Crumnick of NPD Group. "Restricting them puts a cloud over the potential [of the appeal] for mainstream people."

GMA Awards Worship Tomlin

NASHVILLE—Chris Tomlin took top honors at the 37th annual Gospel Music Assn. Music Awards, netting five Dove trophies, including artist of the year and male vocalist. Tomlin went into the evening the most nominated artist with nine nods. Hosted by Rebecca St. James and Kirk Franklin, the show was held at Nashville's Grand Ole Opry House April 5.

"This is amazing," Tomlin says. "I know it’s God’s favor. It’s nothing I’m doing. It’s quite humbling and quite an honor."

Tomlin’s wins were indicative of the worship movement’s continued strength in the Christian music industry. Tomlin was not the only praise and worship leader to garner a flock of Dove. His sixstep labelmate the David Crowder Band was a three-time winner, garnering Doves for its participation in the "Chronicles of Narnia" project, along with trophies for rock/contemporary album for "A Collision" and rock/contemporary recorded song for "Here Is Our King." Steven Curtis Chapman made history by receiving his 50th Dove Award. The perennial favorite is the most awarded artist in Dove history. He picked up a Dove for special event album of the year for his participation in the "Chronicles of Narnia" project. Other winners included "American Idol" Carrie Underwood for country song of the year; Backstreet Boy Brian Littrell, inspirational song; Alison Krauss + Union Station, bluegrass song; Natalie Grant, female vocalist; and Christa Wells, songwriter. Casting Crowns won its second consecutive group of the year accolade, while Simple/Ino Records band the Afters won the new artist award. The Texas-based rockers recently performed their hit "Beautiful Love" on MTV’s "TRL" and look to be the next Christian band mainstream radio and TV will embrace.

The Dove wins cap an especially successful year for Tomlin, whose album "Arriving" is certified gold. "God continues to expand our platform and just give us voice to a bigger audience," Tomlin says. "When you come to the Dove Awards, you don’t win anything, you just receive. God has given you something, and you just receive it."

The GMA Music Awards will air in national syndication April 15-May 21. For more from Tomlin and a complete list of winners, visit billboard.biz.

A World Of Numbers

International labels body IFPI’s just-released annual report mostly confirmed expectations: For 2005, Coldplay’s “Speed of Sound” was the world’s best seller, and digital sales are growing rapidly, but still not fast enough to offset drops in physical sales.

Globally, digital sales nearly doubled last year, but are still worth 3% less of music revenue in all but two markets, the world’s two largest: the United States and Japan. As the two territories prove, platforms can emerge in different forms.

In the States, two-thirds of digital sales came online, while in Japan, more than 90% were mobile.

Here’s a quick snapshot of the top five markets:

Digital Sales By Channel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Mobile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2005 Trade Revenues (In Billions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Digital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**LUCKY 13!** Now in its 13th year, the Billboard Dance Music Summit is moving to VEGAS and will be part of a city-wide Dance Music Festival – Life by Night! Summit badgeholders will be admitted to the hottest exclusive parties in town! Stay tuned for more details...

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- Consumer Branding & Artist Relations
- Anatomy of An Independent Label
- Art of the Deal: International Dance Music
- Marketing, Promotion & Distribution of Digital Dance/Electronic Music
- The Billboard Q&A With An Influential Artist
- Ins and Outs of Cable, Satellite, Internet & Terrestrial Radio
- Get Your Music Heard: Ringtones, Video Games, Film & TV
- DJ Tell All: Transition From Vinyl 12-inch Singles to Laptop Simplicity

"The Billboard music conference is a seminal event in dance music. It is a fantastic place for our community to socialize and network. I have made and maintained many important friendships there. — BT, Binary Acoustics

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LAS VEGAS—A consensus appeared to emerge from Billboard’s MECCA mobile entertainment conference held during CTIA’s wireless industry conference April 4. Technological and operational issues are being resolved. Now it’s time to clear the final hurdle: attracting customers.

According to a recent study by Valista, only 18% of respondents downloaded mobile content in the past week. Paul Redick, VP of business development and product innovation at Sprint, says an average of 15% of subscribers actively download ringtones in a given month.

The figures point to a lack of awareness beyond the early-adopter crowd of what wireless devices can do and what kind of content can be acquired.

The big media brands coming to the table should help drive this effort. Walt Disney Internet Group finally unveiled its anticipated mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) service, Disney Mobile, during CTIA’s opening keynote. Fox Mobile Entertainment just launched a direct-to-consumer mobile content Web site called Mobizzo. Rio Caraeff, VP/GM of Universal Music Mobile, said the company is directing buyers to request mobile content via a short message code inserted in CDs.

Mobile social networking is also coming of age. Companies like Buznet, Juicecast and Interscanning will soon enable users to capture video and photos from their phones and post them to online and mobile blogs. MySpace has a mobile deal with soon-to-launch operator Helio. Even Cingular’s Jim Ryan, VP of consumer data products, hinted at pending social networking play.

“If you want to give customers what they want, you don’t start with access to your stuff,” he said. “You start with access to their stuff.”

For many attendees, developing a mobile mass-market means content providers and wireless carriers need to take a more hands-off approach to deliver content. The sentiment was heard again and again at MECCA: Enable what customers want, and you’ll make money. Force customers into doing things your way, and you won’t.

OVERHEARD AT MECCA

Hip-hop was front-and-center at MECCA and CTIA events—T.I., Busta Rhymes, LL Cool J and Chuck D were all featured artists in presentations and/or party performances. But this may mark the year when the mobile market expands beyond urban music. Caraeff noted that urban music accounted for 85% of mobile sales in 2005, but 70% so far this year. Bryan Biniak, senior VP/GM of American Greetings Mobile, said retail partners like Univesion are diversifying by making genres like regional Mexican music and Spanish rock available. “Concerns are growing about the Stingbox, a TiVo-like device that just began to allow users access to TV programming with their cell phones. Carriers and TV networks expressed fears that technology would cannibalize new premium video initiatives.”

MobTV announced it has more than 1 million TV service subscribers worldwide. “People who say, ‘Why do you want to watch something on a cell phone?’ don’t understand what’s happening,” Network Live CEO Kevin Wall said during his MECCA keynote. “Video programming is entering the wireless world. It’s the next killer application.”

Music and mobile executives say that if Apple is going to enter the mobile space, the MVNO route makes the most sense. “Cingular claims $2.68 billion in data revenue last year.” That makes it third worldwide, behind only China Mobile and Japan’s NTT DoCoMo, Ryan said.

“Following the lead of videogames, EM! has launched the first ad-supported mobile music service EM! is working with Rhythm New Media, a Silicon Valley mobile advertising company, to test ad-supported demand and preprogrammed mobile video in the United States.”

MTV, perhaps the world’s best-known youth brand, is finally making a serious bid for the U.S. Latin market.

MTV’s Tres3s, the network’s newest niche channel, will debut in fourth-quarter 2006, revamping MTV’s current U.S. Latin offering, MTV Espanol. But the new MTV Tres3s comes with new executive leadership, improved distribution, its own DJs (which MTV Espanol never had) and unique programming.

MTV Tres3s will target 12- to 34-year-old bicultural Latinos and is described as the “validation, voz and vida of young U.S. Latinos,” according to GM Lucia Ballas-Traynor. Music programming will center on rock, pop and urban.

MTV Espanol reaches only 3.1 million Hispanic TV homes and 13 million total homes via cable and satellite, but MTV Tres3s expects to have a hybrid distribution platform in place by launch, incorporating cable, broadcast and satellite networks. The MTV announcement comes on the heels of the launch of Latin youth network mun2, owned by Telemundo. Media companies are keen to tap into the quickly growing Hispanic youth population.

MTV’s lag in making a similar move, MTV president Christina Norman says, was due to personnel moves. That included getting a GM who knew the marketplace (Ballas-Traynor comes from Spanish-language cable network Galavision). Programming will be headed by José Tillan, head of programming at MTV Latin America, and MTV vet Lily Neumeyer. Tillan will continue to head programming and talent relations at MTV Latin America as well.

“MTVs in Latin America are not the same as the U.K. MTVs,” Tillan says. “It just took us a while to figure out what the right approach is. Everyone sees the big numbers. But, what does it mean, and how do you do it in a meaningful way?”

MTV has had programming in Spanish for 15 years via MTV International, and later MTV Latin America. But neither can be seen in the United States. Here, MTV S (“for Spanish”), launched in 1999, and was renamed MTV Espanol. MTV Unino was added to the lineup the same year and will continue to operate as usual for now.

In the past two years, however, MTV has become more interested in Latin acts, Spanish-language performances—one by Shakira, and another featuring reggaeton stars Daddy Yankee, Tego Calderon and Don Omar—were included in its Video Music Awards for the first time last year.

While the new MTV Tres3s will broadcast these supersstars, Norman says it will also be a platform to develop new talent for other MTV channels.

T.I. MELINE OF A HIT

The King of the South’s platinum-selling title “King” didn’t arrive overnight. Here’s what happened on the road to success. COMPILED BY HILLARY CROSLEY

2003

AUGUST: Establishes publishing deal with Warner/Chappell for Grand Hustle Music to sign artists to publishing deals.

SEPTEMBER: Performs on VH1’s “Hip-Hop Honors” during a Big Daddy Kane tribute. Wins Vibe magazine’s Street Anthem award for single “U Don’t Know Me.”

2004

SEPTEMBER: Performs on VH1’s “Hip-Hop Honors” during a Big Daddy Kane concert. Wins Vibe magazine’s Street Anthem award for single “U Don’t Know Me.”

2005

OCTOBER: Performs his own set at Jay-Z’s sold-out “Declare War” concert, where Jay reunites with longtime foe Nas. Headlines Boost Mobile’s RockCrops concert at Radio City Music Hall.

DECember: Early recordings for “King” are leaked onto Internet, developing an instant buzz among fans. T.I. refuses to include any unauthorized songs on album and records all new material.

2006

JANUARY: Releases DJ Drama’s “Gangsta Grillz Mixtape: The Leak” to whet the appetite of fans and to combat piracy.

MARCH: Releases fourth album “King” on Atlantic and first feature film “ATL” the same week. Album hits No. 1 on Billboard’s Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart and “ATL” charts No.3 at the box office.

2007

Releases “Trap Music,” sells 1 million copies. Releases “Down With the King” mix tape.

2008

2009

2010

2011

2012

Releases “Trap Music,” sells 1 million copies. Releases “Down With the King” mix tape.

2008

2009

2010

2011

2012
Cherry Lane/EA Sell Music At Next Level

Cherry Lane Music Publishing is testing new waters. Its joint venture with Electronic Arts is licensing digital phone-record delivery (DPD) rights to Netwerk Records for permanent and temporary downloads on a percentage basis rather than the statutory 9-cent per-download rate.

The venture, Next Level Music, owns certain music composed for EA’s games under work-for-hire agreements with composers, similar to those that composers enter for motion pictures and other audiovisual works. Next Level entered a deal with Netwerk to release the music on CDs and to distribute it through online services.

Richard Stumpf, Cherry Lane VP of creative services and marketing, believes the deal is an “innovative and aggressive plan to fight peer-to-peer file sharing by making music more accessible to consumers in the ‘anywhere, anyhow’ model they demand.” (Stumpf described the underlying philosophy in a guest editorial in the March 25 issue.)

The deal permits Netwerk to pay for all digital reproduction rights at a rate equal to a percentage of the label’s receipts. Although the parties will not reveal the exact percentage, Stumpf says it is a rate that “mirrors” the mechanical rate for CDs less certain deductions. Mechanical royalties for CDs will be at the statutory rate.

Several publishers contacted by Billboard were not aware of any other U.S. publisher offering DPD licenses on a percentage basis. The NMPA has been negotiating with the Digital Media Assn. to find a way to streamline licensing for subscription services, which offer temporary downloads at rates that will fairly compensate publishers and songwriters.

In general, percentage rate discussions have been based on revenue generated by the online services, not on revenue received from labels. As for DPD rates, a Copyright Royalty Board proceeding is under way that offering so many tracks for a low monthly fee could severely undercut publishers’ and songwriters’ income.

Stumpf does not believe that letting the label control ultimate rates through its negotiations will have a negative impact. “I think labels are in the business to make money and so are we,” he says. “I don’t think labels will be giving these away.” Stumpf says the deal, which is short-term and may be renegotiated, does not extend to Cherry Lane’s songwriters who are not part of the EA venture.

**NO STOP SIGN FOR BMG:**

The last time a major music publisher was part of a corporate sell-off, new deals apparently screeched to a halt. That was 2003, when Time Warner’s decision to sell Warner Music Group reportedly put the brakes on any new signings or acquisitions by Warner/Chappell Music.

Now that Bertelsmann is exploring the option to spin off BMG Music Publishing and/or its interests in Sony BMG, some are wondering if BMG’s pub arm is also slowing down.

That does not seem to be the case. A source close to the publisher says BMG Music Publishing is currently negotiating about $30 million in potential acquisitions that still have the green light. One expert says this is actually a great time to sell to BMG because the publisher may pay a bit more than it otherwise would to increase its value.

**BUG ADDS 'BLACKBIRD':**

Bug Music has signed a worldwide administration deal for the Fred Ahlert music catalog. Among the 21 No. 1 hits from the 1920s and the 1930s are “Stormy Weather” and “Bye Bye Blackbird.” The catalog was the subject of a landmark copyright case in 1998 against Warner/Chappell Music.

**ROYALTY REVIEWERS:***

The members of ASCAP have elected a new Board of Review slate. The independent panel of writers and publishers hears claims by ASCAP members when they have a complaint about their royalty distributions.

Beginning four-year terms April 1 in the popular production division are composer Charles Bernstein; lyricists Arthur Hamilton and John Bettis; and publishers Helene Blue (Helene Blue Music), Maxyne Lang (Williamson Music) and Keith Mardak (Hal Leonard). In the symphonic and concert-division are composer Melinda Wagner and publisher Jennifer Bilfield (Boosey & Hawkes).
Aussie Biz Has Golden Hopes After Commonwealth Games

MELBOURNE—Australian sportsmen and women dominated the 18th Commonwealth Games March 15-26 here, collecting 84 gold medals. Now, Aussie labels aim to mine more precious metal, using local music talent featured during the event.

A dozen Australian acts performed during the opening or closing ceremonies, each held before a sold-out 80,000-strong crowd at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The free-to-air Nine Network claims the opening ceremony drew 3.8 million TV viewers nationally, while the closing ceremony attracted 3 million.

Nine estimates both telecasts reached more than 1 billion viewers globally.

The strongest performance came from EMI Music Australia alternative act the Cat Empire. Its hour-and-40-minute slot during the opening ceremony included specially written music to accompany athletes from 71 countries entering the arena. The studio recording of that new music appears on a limited edition (20,000 copies), 13-track album “Gites: The Cat Empire Project” (Virgin) released domestically April 1.

The band’s Melbourne-based manager Correne Willie reports immediate global interest in the Cat Empire as a result of the Games exposure, with 1,500 new overseas visitors logging onto its Web site (theatecertemple.com) within 15 minutes of the telecast ending.

The band is signed to Virgin/EMI for Australasia only. Willie says negotiations with labels in the United States and European territories “certainly sped up with the publicity leading up to the Games.”

The Melbourne band’s April 2005 sophomore album “Two Ships” has shipped 130,000 units domestically to date, according to EMI. “Their performance will continue to build the band’s international story and profile, which is already well-developed via constant overseas touring and recording,” EMI Music Australia managing director John O’Donnell says.

The Cat Empire begins a 15-date North American trek June 7 in Los Angeles before heading to Europe in July for shows booked through the Agency Group.

Other opening ceremony performers included Sony BMG Australia’s multi-platinum-selling singer/songwriter Delta Goodrem with her specially penned theme song “Together We Are One.” It was intended for inclusion on the label’s “M2006 Commonwealth Games Opening Ceremony” album, released March 15, but public demand encouraged Sony BMG to rush its release as a single April 1.

“There is every likelihood we are looking at a platinum [70,000 shipments] single,” Sony BMG chairman/CEO Denis Handlin says.

The other key featured act on March 15 was veteran alternative rock band the Church, performing its 1988 Billboard Hot 100 hit “Under the Milky Way” with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

Church guitarist Marty Wilson-Piper says the performance set the April 17 global release of the band’s new album, “Uninvited Like The Clouds”, on Cooking Vinyl, for the world outside Australia where it appears on independent Liberation Music.

“The telecast didn’t mean anything in the U.S., which is our biggest market,” Wilson-Piper admits, “but as a result of it, we’re looking at possible touring interest from Asia.”


The band’s newly recorded version of “Under the Milky Way” with the MSG is featured on the “Opening Ceremony” album, which was certified gold (35,000 shipments) by the Australian Recording Industry Assn. in its release week.

Sony BMG released a second album, “M2006 Commonwealth Games Closing Ceremony,” March 26, including material by Grinspoon (Universal), Paul Kelly (EMI), Ben Lee (Inertia), Sarah Blasko (Universal) and John Farnham (Sony BMG). A DVD of sporting highlights is also April 23. Handlin predicts CD and DVD sales of 150,000 units.

Blasko performed the Crowded House song “Dream’s Don’t Die It’s Over” at the closing ceremony, which began with rock act Grinspoon and ended with veteran vocalist Farnham.

“The Games brought Grinspoon and Sarah Blasko to the attention of people who hadn’t heard of them before,” Universal Music Australia managing director George Ash says.

Globally, the Cat Empire is one group that hopes to ride out the success from its appearance at the Commonwealth Games.
MADRID—Alarm over ongoing live music venue closures has spurred 18 local concert organizers to form the Assn. of Independent Promoters (Uniprom) to lobby local and regional government.

Uniprom fears that many midsize international acts may entirely pass by Spain on European tours if a lack of suitable venues causes Madrid to disappear from the circuit.

The permanent closure of Madrid’s 2,000-capacity venue Aqualung in February due to site redevelopment has left the Spanish capital desperately short of midsize venues.

It is a situation that particularly concerns promoters of genres like hip-hop, indie rock, world and even Latin music. Without a decent-sized Madrid gig to hang a tour on, the entire Spanish touring market looks less appealing to international acts.

Many such artists, including Latin American and U.S. Latin artists, say it is not worthwhile to tour Spain if they cannot play Madrid, says Rubén Caravaca, director of world music promoter La Fábrica de Ideas.

Caravaca cites California-based Mexican band Los Tigres del Norte as an example. “Last year, they played five Spanish summer festivals, but only after I got them a Madrid gig,” Caravaca says.

“Not all international acts of all origins, but especially from Latin America, coming to Spain and not performing in Madrid is like not doing London when touring the United Kingdom,” says EMI Music Spain and Portugal’s president Manolo Diaz, a former chairman of the Latin Recording Academy.

“It is not just about money,” Diaz explains, “but understanding that Madrid is well-communicated with the rest of Spain and houses the headquarters of all the media, labels and music associations. If Uniprom can become a strong entity, it could have a major effect on international tours and on the music business here.

Caravaca insists no serious Latin act would tour Spain without a Madrid gig. “We’re talking about midsize acts for mid-sized venues,” he says. “Now Aqualung has gone, the only such venue in Madrid is the 2,800-capacity La Riviera. Otherwise, the landscape is completely barren.”

Uniprom president Alex de Graniere is director of Madrid-based promoter La Noia. He says Uniprom intends to lobby city and regional councils to “draw up specific legislation for the staging of concerts” and pressure the point that Madrid cannot be taken seriously as the capital of Europe’s fifth-largest music market unless it has a decent venue circuit.

Caravaca says Uniprom will identify alternative venues in the Madrid region, which has a population of 6 million. “All we have to do is somehow supply them with the usual concert facilities.”

Caravaca notes that a slump in the number of international gigs would have a ripple effect on Spanish workers who make up the sound, lighting, backstage and catering crews. Madrid’s live music revenue in 2004 (the last year details are available) totaled €21.5 million ($26.1 million), according to authors’ and publishers’ society SGAE.

Uniprom member Bancary Harrod owns Madrid-based independent promoter Mercury Wheels, which in recent years has booked such international acts as Oasis, Iggy Pop, the Strokes, Marianne Faithfull and Primal Scream.

“All of these artists have played in mid-sized venues of 1,000-3,000,” Harrod says. “And at the present rate Madrid won’t have a single venue of this size. All bands from the Rolling Stones and U2 down have to play in venues of this size at some point in their careers, and many do so throughout their careers. Moby and Beck, for example, recently played La Riviera.”

Harrod adds that Uniprom must stop “Madrid authorities from depriving the public from seeing many of the great bands of our age through their negligent policy on live music—it’s an absolutely ridiculous state of affairs. Uniprom must make them aware of the precarious state of live music in the Spanish capital.”

April 25-26, 2006 | New York City

The 5th Annual Games & Mobile Forum has been expanded to 2 days. The 2-day event is set for April 25-26, 2006 at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City, and includes 4 keynotes and 6 panels.

Over 1,200 senior executives have attended the event over the past four years, including senior participants from Electronic Arts, JAMDAT, Glu Mobile, Nintendo, Sony, Play.com, Informa, Sprint, Ericsson, QUALCOMM, Virgin Mobile, PlayFirst, Atari, Playboy, MTV, Wired, GameSpot, Ziff Davis, Digital Chocolate, Turbine, Microsoft, Gameloft, Yahoo!, AOL, AIB, Warburg, Deloitte, the UK Government, the Irish Government, Coca-Cola, and PepsiCo, among others. This is a "must attend" event for senior decision-makers from online and mobile game companies.

This year’s speakers include:

**KEYNOTES & FEATURED INTERVIEWS**

- Greg Ballard, CEO, Glu Mobile
- Chris Early, Senior Manager, Microsoft Casual Games Group
- David Gosen, Chief Executive Officer, 1-Play
- Tammy Robinson, Manager, Games Content & Programming, Verizon Wireless
- Robert Terekh, CEO & Co-Founder, Multimedia Networks
- Major (R) Chris Chambers, Deputy Project Director, Army Game Project
- Alex St. John, CEO, WildTangent

**PANELISTS**

- Michael Dowling, SVP, Interpret
- Jonathan Epstein, Agent, Games & Interactive, Talent Agency
- Sam Huxley, CEO, Bounce Interactive Gaming / VGR Brands
- Mike Vorhaus, Management Director, Frank N. Magid Associates
- Gabe Zichermann, Chief Marketing & Strategy Officer, Booyt
- Larry Tanzi, CEO, LivePlanet
- Alex Campbell, Co-Founder and CEO, Vobile Media
- Stephen Davis, President of Mobile & Online Media, InfoSpace
- Eric Albert, Director of North American Operations, GameCity
- John Cashill, General Manager, Mobile Games, Yahoo!
- Paul Condolera, SVP & GM, Ciriko Network, New Media
- Shaul Olmert, Senior Director, Digital Games, nickelodeon Networks
- Chris Baker, Associate Editor, Wired Magazine
- Alex Campbell, Co-Founder & CEO, Vobile Media
- Ned Sherman, CEO & Publisher, Digital Media Wire
- Matthew Bellows, GM & VP of Marketing, Flopduck Entertainment
- Matt Golden, SVP of Sales & Co-Founder, TiBi Wireless
- Scott Jussani, VP, Licensing & Brand Partnerships, MORMA
- Ken Ruck, Head of Wireless, nickelodeon Networks
- Mike Yuen, Senior Director, Gaming Group, QUALCOMM
- George Borkowski, Head of IP & Tech Practice, MSAK
- Greg Costikyan, Co-Founder, GameDev
- Daniel Hart, Vice President, Quintant Games, MTV Networks
- Aedo Rossi, CEO & Founder, Gametel Ltd
- Michael Schurder, SVP, Gameloft, Realties
- Margaret Wallace, CEO & Co-Founder, Skunk Studios
- Suzie Reider, SVP, Sales/Mktg, Games & Entertainment, G2E Networks
- Teemu Huhtanen, EVP, Sales & Revenue Development, Mail.RU
- Leo Jun, Manager, Gameloft Division, HELD (formerly Sony Ericsson)
- Gunnar Larsen, European Director of Mobile Games, Realties
- Sean Malatesta, VP, Americas, Bussas Development, Indigames Ltd, India & China
- Emily Della Maggiore, Vice President, Nielsen Interactive Entertainment
- Wade Tinney, Planner & Game Designer, Large Animal Games
- Eric Zimmerman, CEO, GameLab

**INTERVIEWS**

- Matthew Bellows, GM & VP of Marketing, Flopduck Entertainment
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To register, please visit www.gamesandmobile.com or call 323-822-0936.
Web Adoption Slows, Broadband Grows

By all accounts, the pace of Internet penetration is slowing. After years of double-digit growth, the rate of worldwide Internet adoption—new users coming to the medium—dropped to only 3% in 2005, according to a recent study by Ipsos Insight. In the United States, that number was even smaller.

Indeed, another firm, Parks Associates, estimates about 64% of U.S. households have Internet access today. It expects U.S. adoption will grow only 1% this year and will not reach 67% until 2009. Early projections had U.S. Internet penetration at 75% by now, a bar that has been missed even though computer costs and Internet fees have dropped dramatically.

Alarmists may see these figures and fret over the possible implications for the much-lauded Internet economy—or the ability to buy and sell physical and digital goods over the Internet. The Internet economy is particularly important to the music industry, which is placing some heavy bets that digital music distribution will turn around still-declining CD sales and usher in a new age of profitability.

Still, it’s not time to run into the streets screaming. The slowing Internet growth rates do not mean that the Internet is stalling, or that all our assumptions about the consumer adoption of digital media are false.

While overall Internet growth is not as robust as in years past, broadband Internet adoption is skyrocketing. A recent Nielsen/NetRatings report found that the number of active U.S. broadband Internet users increased 28% from February 2005 to February 2006 to 95.5 million. That’s 68% of active Internet users today—a all-time high.

With the rise of broadband comes a parallel increase in the amount of time spent on the Web and the amount of content accessed while doing so. Since February 2003, the average time spent online has increased five hours per month to 30.5, according to Nielsen.

Online video is particularly benefitting from this trend. MSN Video traffic grew 44% in the last year, while YouTube and Google Video now draw 9 million and 6.2 million unique visitors monthly, respectively. Video search requests on iFilm and Yahoo have tripled.

Music consumption is also on the rise. In-Stat reports that the online music market will experience “healthy growth” for the remainder of the decade, with sales worldwide expected to jump from $1.5 billion in 2005 to $10.7 billion by 2010. Jupiter Research predicts digital music will account for 16% of total recorded-music revenue by 2011.

Going further, Parks Associates says revenue from on-demand Internet content of all forms will grow 260% during the next five years to reach $9 billion in the United States alone by 2010—driven largely by the increase of broadband Internet usage and innovations in digital entertainment services.

The Internet market has matured, not stalled. Usage is reaching the point of critical mass needed to make it a stable distribution platform. The media industry would do better to focus on the changing Internet habits of those consumers actively using the Internet today than concern themselves with whether others are logging on.

Many people will just never use the Internet. Some live in rural areas where it is not available. Some are just too old to incorporate it into their lifestyle. And some are well-paid, college-educated people put off by privacy concerns or who prefer more intimate forms of communication.

According to Parks Associates, 18% of those without Internet access today remain so not because of high costs or lack of availability, but because they are simply not interested.

“Most people have heard about the Internet and have the opportunity to access it,” Ipsos researcher Adam Wright says. “So what you’re seeing is that those who have not yet jumped on board aren’t going to. That group of the market is not even a factor in the Internet world.”

While the bad news is that these people will never buy music on the Internet, the good news is that they will not illegally download it, either. They will buy it the old-fashioned way, or not at all.

Meanwhile, those who have driven the Internet to this stage of maturity and who are upgrading to broadband are increasingly re-evaluating how they acquire media in the digital and physical worlds.

“Consumers are starting to figure out how to utilize this channel versus the offline channel,” Wright says. “When do I go to a movie theater, and when do I download movies online? It signifies that if you don’t have your act together or a strategy to utilize the Internet, you have to do it pretty quickly. It’s a sign that you have to really start leveraging this channel, because it is mature.”

### Worldwide Online Music Market Value

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### Bits & Briefs

**ACID REMIXES**

Sony Media Software—the company behind Sound Forge, Acid Pro and other professional-quality audio software—announced in October it is offering up to $10,000 in prizes to amateur music remixers interested in testing their skills through contests listed at its acidplanet.com site.

Through April 12, contest winners can download the track "Welcome to the New 'Evo Devo'" by the Terms and Conditions remix it as they like. Judges include producer/engineers Elliott Scheiner and Greg Ladanyi, along with the editors of Remix magazine.

For a separate contest, legendary trumpet player Herb Alpert is contributing the track "Butterball" through April 28.

**KEEPING IT CLEAN**

File-sharing site LimeWire has taken its first steps to go legitimate by introducing an optional filtering system that attempts to block copyrighted content sharing. Upon user request, LimeWire will scan all files and block any copyrighted content as identified by content owners.

**RIGHTeous Sounds**

Mobile content publisher/aggregator Airborne Entertainment is getting socially conscious with a new line of activist-themed ringtones, ringback tones and wallpaper images called Just Cause. The company will donate 100% of proceeds from the sale of the Just Cause content to different organizations each month. Sample "proteststone" ringtones include "Hell No, We Won't Go" and "Viva La Revolution!"

**YAHOO! MUSIC**

### APRIL 15 2006

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**TAKING MP3s ON THE ROAD**

Morning radio got you down? Roadmaster USA has introduced a line of FM transmitters designed to let you stream your MP3 player through your car stereo.

Such transmitters—which convert audio to FM signals and send them to the car stereo over unused frequencies—have become common. But the Roadmaster series adds a few bells and whistles. Designed to plug directly into a cigarette lighter as a power source, the VRFM devices work with not only MP3 devices, but also CD players, USB drives and even a SD memory card slot to stream your music.

The four models in the series feature a range of capabilities—from an entry-level basic device to one with random play and display screen. They are available at most major superstores, car dealerships and at roadmasterusa.com for between $20 and $70, depending on the model. —Antony Bruno
Roberts Turns 20
Nashville Booking Agency Celebrates Anniversary

One of Nashville's most successful boutique booking agencies, the Bobby Roberts Co., celebrates a rare 20th anniversary this year.

CEO Bobby Roberts opened BRC in 1986 after a stint managing Leon Russell. He set about building a roster from scratch.

Roberts notes that he booked a lot of $5,000-to-$10,000-per-night acts in those days, and still does, along with much higher-priced talent. "These artists were all looking to work as much as they could," he says. "We were their answer in some of them have a very large body of work, like Merle Haggard, John Anderson and Ray Price.

"Of course I'm proud of all of the artists we represent, but as far as highlights for me, it would have to be representing icons like Waylon Jennings, Eddie Rabbitt and Tammy Wynette who are no longer with us, along with legends like Merle Haggard, John Anderson, Mark Farner, Don Williams and Ray Price."

Roberts says booking Haggard on tours with Bob Dylan this year and last, and nailing the Hag a recent opening slot with the Rolling Stones they may be in reference to money, to routed dates, the quality of the dates. It's been fun, because I have seen some artists where the quality of the jobs and the money has risen exponentially in our association with them."

Roberts regards the smaller size of his operation as a plus. "We're very efficient as an agency, we're quick with our answers," he says. "We keep a small enough roster that every one of the acts knows that we care about them, and we're doing everything we can to increase their tour income and the amount of dates they have."

BRC continues to grow, seeking an agency that would really focus on their career, and they were our answer in giving us another act so we could build the roster."

One of Roberts' early clients and best friends is country music's John Anderson, who Roberts not only books but manages. Anderson, like other BRC clients, likes to work and can deliver the goods on stage.

"Everybody we work with today are artists that enjoy going out and working the road, and are artists that deliver great shows," he says. "The majority of them have a good string of hits, and were also highlights. Current BRC staff includes Roberts' sons Lance (senior VP) and Travis James (VP), as well as his wife of 35 years, Diana (CFO). Among the other staffers are senior VP Brian Jones, agents Tim Bowers and Coby Futch, marketing/information systems manager Tara Shore and administrative assistant Marcia Goins.

"We want to see the talent buyer have successful shows," Roberts says. "And we want to get the artists out there achieving their goals. Whatever Roberts says. "2005 was the largest volume year we've ever had in the history of the company, from a sales standpoint, the amount of dates and financially," he says.

"I believe what has led to our longevity is, philosophically, we have always strived to treat people the way we want to be treated," he adds. "Anybody can make mistakes now and then, but if we do we always try to correct them."

In marking BRC's 20th anniversary, the company recently built a new, 7,000-square-foot office in Goodlettsville, Tenn. It will house the agency and BRC publishing concerns Red Owl Music and Swingin' Mad Monkey Music in partnership with Anderson.
 Stones, U2 Tours Shine Light On Latin Markets

The Rolling Stones and U2 had not been to Latin America in nearly eight years. And as the massive success of both tours confirm, the region's touring market has matured a lot in that time.

Between February and March, U2, with Franz Ferdinand opening, played nine sold-out shows at arenas in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. On average, each show grossed more than $5 million with attendance at more than 70,000 every night.

During the same months, the Rolling Stones played six massive concerts in Mexico, Argentina and Puerto Rico, as well as a stop at Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro that the Stones' Web site claims drew 2 million fans.

Promoters agree that better infrastructure, new arenas—including the José Miguel Agrelot Coliseum in San Juan, Puerto Rico—and healthier economics are contributing to a particularly busy concert season in Latin America.

"More and more people are realizing, "We can't just play America, we can't just play Europe," says Jerry Barad, senior VP of touring for the Next Adventure, which booked the U2 tour. "Today in Latin America, he says, "there are more promoters, there are more venues and more options."

Historically, touring in Latin America has never been a simple proposal. Unlike Europe, distances between countries are vast. With the exception of Mexico, all travel and transportation of equipment must be done via air. Typically, live shows are more heavily taxed in Latin America than in the United States. And with even-shifting politics and economics, security can be an issue as well.

"Our business is unpredictable," says Phil Rodriguez, president of Eyework/Water Brothers International, which has offices in Miami, Colombia, Venezuela, Panama and Costa Rica. Rodriguez has been producing shows in Latin America for more than 20 years, looking everything from Rock in Rio to Jimmy Buffett, who recently performed in Bogotá, Colombia, for the first time.

That stop is an example of artists' willingness to sample new territories that were off-limits just a year ago.

Colombia "has made a quantum leap in terms of improvement with President [Alvaro] Uribe," says Rodriguez, who opened up offices in Bogotá last year and has already brought down Good Charlotte, Ricky Martin, Pitbull and the Black Eyed Peas.

"By the same token, with our efforts and investment, we're slowly showing people that the stereotypes that applied to Colombia—kidnappings, drug lords, they're going to kill me—were completely fictitious. Drop by drop, step by step, you have more and more artists coming down.

While Colombia is a relatively new market for international acts, Argentina could be termed a "renewed" market. The country, always a popular stop for touring acts, virtually shut down its concert activity after the economic and political crisis of 2001. When the local currency crashed, making it prohibitively expensive to bring in outside talent.

Today, the Argentine peso is still devalued, but the economy is stronger and audiences are willing to pay the ticket prices necessary to lure big acts.

The region is an important steppingstone to other Latin American territories.

"The distances are too far to play any one country in South America in isolation," says Bruce Moran, president of CIE USA Entertainment, which has offices in Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, Sao Paulo and New York.

Although last year Moran took Pearl Jam, U2, Paul McCartney, and Dream Theater among others, to South America, the continent "is still not a necessity" for major acts as part of a tour, he says.

But Mexico is.

The country is not only rich in venues, it is also a hop and skip away from the United States.

"Every major artist today feels it is necessary to play Mexico City. And the beauty is, it can be included as part of a U.S. tour or it can be part of a Latin American run," Moran adds.

With a population of 84 million, Mexico City has a variety of venues and, certainly, the breadth of audience to attract virtually any kind of act. Mexico has also benefited from new arenas in smaller cities like Monterrey, Guadalajara and Acapulco.

According to Moran, business in Mexico has seen brisk growth, particularly since 2002. Last year his company did 105 shows in Mexico, drawing more than 1 million people and a box office of nearly $30 million.

Even as promoters are booking more international acts, Latin artists are also benefiting from a better touring structure and new venues.

"Compared to our experience of 15 years ago, today there are better venues, better technical facilities and better travel conditions," says Chaf's Enterprises Patricia Bolivar, who handles Chayanne.

The Puerto Rican star has increased his ticket prices along with his fame. But he's also upped his number of arenas. In the past 12 months, Bolivar, he played 100 concerts in Latin America alone. Chayanne played 32 shows in Mexico, including one for 145,000 fans at the Zócalo in Mexico City.

Indeed, local talent—best able to adapt to Latin America's constant market fluctuations—continues to be the driver of the regional concert industry.

"We take it a year at a time and we have short progressions," Rodriguez says. "You have to adapt to changing situations, for better or for worse. And if you do that, you can be in the game for a long time."
Thanks For A Record Breaking March

The Rolling Stones
Kid Rock
Rascal Flatts
R. Kelly
Cirque du Soleil
Tyler Perry's Madea Goes To Jail
Nine Inch Nails

www.americanradiohistory.com
**Tower Turns A New Retail Page: Books**

Tower Records is more fully embracing the multimedia concept. The West Sacramento, Calif.-based chain has beefed up its presence in books, adding the product category to its online store and expanding its representation in brick-and-mortar stores.

On March 20, the chain soft-launched its online bookstore, e-mailing the site's top 20,000 customers to notify them about the expanded offering. Tower VP of marketing Mike Jansta says. The book section's home page says the site has 631,358 titles available.

Selling books online is a logical progression, Jansta says, since Tower has always had a book offering, either through dedicated bookstores or through book sections in its music and video stores. Indeed, at one time Tower had a 17-store book chain, but that was truncated to four stores during a restructuring between 2000 and 2004.

Online, the addition of books makes for one-stop shopping since the store already offers music video, videogames, and posters. Although Tower doesn't break out revenue, Billboard estimates that the online store accounts for about $20 million-$25 million of the chain's estimated $450 million-$500 million in revenue.

Billboard recently reported that the Tower board has voted to shop the chain. Sources say the investment bank hired to conduct the sale. Houlihan Lokey Howard & Zukin, is still redacting a book with the chain's financial.

Meanwhile, establishing a books category could allow the chain to be positioned as a multimedia merchant, a more desirable trait than being labeled a music specialist while the chain is being shopped.

But Tower VP of books, magazines and ancillary products John Fraser says the company is boosting the area for a simple economic reason: "Books has been a growth area for Tower for the last two years," he says. The chain carries books in all 89 of its brick-and-mortar stores, including its four dedicated bookstores in California—two in Sacramento and one each in Brea and Mountain view. Fraser reports that the company will expand its book presence in 44, or half, of the chain's music and video outlets.

The chain has four grades of books presence. In stores where book sales are strongest, Tower carries 1,200 titles. Other outlets, depending on the category's performance, have 750, 500 or 250 titles. Those stores mainly carry music and pop culture books, but the occasional hit fiction title also finds its way in. "Of the 44 stores affected by the expansion, 25 will be doubling the title base they currently have," Fraser says.

Tower is already beating its projection in the first week of operation, according to Jansta.

**Hastings up:** While music-oriented chains continue to have problems, evidence keeps piling up that a multimedia offering is the way to go. Hastings Entertainment—which pioneered the multimedia format in 1972, by combining music, books and magazines in one specialty store, and then adding video rental when that format was introduced—just reported a 44% increase in earnings, posting $7 million in net income, or 9% per diluted share, on sales of $171.5 million for the three-month period ended Jan. 31.

That is up from the $4.8 million in net income, or 40 cents per share, the company made in the prior fiscal fourth quarter when sales were $173.1 million.

The increase in profitability was attributed to improved cost controls in the company's store and distribution operations as well as more efficient returns operation. Selling, general and administrative costs actually increased during the quarter, but chain CFO Dan Crow says that is because costs from store closings and relocations are included in the SG&A expenses.

Meanwhile, overall sales were down due to a 0.6% drop in comparable store sales as well as a 5.7% drop in video rental revenue to $25.7 million from $27.3 million.

Breaking out comparable-store sales by other product lines, music sales were down 2.4%. Video sell-through showed a 5% increase while book sales were up 3.1%. The company attributed that in part to testing used book sales in 14 of the chain's 153 stores; it now plans to sell used books in another 23 stores in the current fiscal year, Crow says.

While Hastings has outperformed most other U.S. chains in music sales for the quarter (most chains reported compa-

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**EG/Billboard Tour Sponsorship**

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<td>Spin Media Spin Magazine</td>
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**Retail Track**

ED CHRISTMAN echristman@billboard.com

Tower is running an online promotion allowing consumers to download a song written for the liquor brand by LENNY KRAVITZ.

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**44%** Hastings Entertainment's reported earnings increase for quarter ended Jan. 31.
NEW YORK—The music biz is looking to get in the game—or, at least, in with the gamers. GameTunes, a sister company of the Sherman Oaks, Calif.-based Musica marketing firm, is putting together a new music sampler that will be played in roughly 100 gaming centers affiliated with Games, an organization that provides services to independent and franchised game centers. In addition to listening parties and in-store play at the gaming centers, gamers will be offered coupons that could result in as much as $4 off at the Virgin Megastore chain.

The initial sampler, put together by Bernard Ross, director of GameTunes, features 10 tracks including Bulletboys and Octane’s “Save Me Sorrow” (Sony BMG), Disturbed’s “Just Stop” (Warner), the Vines’ “Don’t Listen to the Radio” (Capitol) and Wolfmother’s “Woman” (Interscope). The GameTunes organization puts on more than 200 events a year at gaming centers, a retail format that has grown over the last five years or so. Gaming centers, almost completely dominated by independent operators, allow gamers to play popular videogames against one another. Games says it caters to 500 centers and 1.2 million gamers in North America.

The songs on the sampler lean toward hard rock, which is just right, according to Bruce Haring, the editor of Global Gaming League and a longtime music industry reporter. So far, gamers tend to like hard music, Haring says. That the music industry is targeting gamers is no surprise to Haring. “Everyone is sniffing around the game space, music-wise, because they sense a new market emerging,” he says.

The listening parties will take place between April 4 and May 7. Participating game centers also agree to play the sampler on a daily basis.

“We offer a direct link to a viral community of young people who are equally passionate about music and interactive entertainment,” Games executive director Mark Nielsen said in a statement.

While some record label executives see the sampler as just another “lifestyle mailing,” others say the GameTunes collection reaches a key audience.

“It’s tough to get the attention of teenage kids,” says J Scavo, product manager at Hollywood, whose act Evans Blue is featured on the sampler. “Kids that age, especially the boys, they tune everything out. So you have to put a lot of speed bumps into their normal day to hope that you finally get their attention.”

In addition to reaching the desired audience, GameTunes will provide feedback on the music from gaming fans to artist management and their labels, Ross says.

In turn, gamers will get a chance to participate in contests to win complimentary copies of the individual artist’s albums as well as discount coupons at the Virgin Megastore.

The distribution of samplers customized to different retailing concepts is nothing new. Musica itself puts together samplers, with the appropriate music, that is distributed to “art” movie houses across the United States, while other marketing firms put together samplers for coffee houses, wine galleries, clothing stores and restaurants.

In this case, GameTunes is starting off distributing samplers on a bimonthly basis. Card rates for track placements are $2,500 per song, Ross reports. He hopes to up the frequency to monthly next year.

Labels Hope New Sampler Plays Well In Gaming Network

By Ed Christian

Making The Brand

MICHAEL PAOLETTA mpaoletta@billboard.com

Allergy Campaign Nothing To Sneezle At

Alt-Country Couple Kelly Willis And Bruce Robison ID’ed In National Claritin Ad

If you’re like us, you did a double take upon seeing the new Claritin TV spot for the first time. We’re referring to the ad that features alt-country solo artists/married couple Kelly Willis and Bruce Robison.

Sure, we’re mightily pleased to see such under-the-radar musicians in a national campaign. Still, we can’t help but wonder what the folks at Claritin, parent company Schering-Plough and ad agency Euro RSCG Worldwide were thinking. Why these two for this campaign?

For the Claritin execs, Robison and Willis are the real deal—and that’s ideal for the campaign, which soon expands to radio and print.

“Bruce and Kelly are real allergy sufferers who have a genuine need for long-lasting Claritin-D in order for them to perform,” the Claritin brand team explains by e-mail. “Using real people in everyday situations in our advertising allows many of our prospective users to see how Claritin can help them.”

Still, Robison believes he and Willis owe a big thanks to someone on the production side at the agency. “It seems like we have some fans over there,” he says. Fortunately, he adds, “the concept fit us and our situation.”

In other words, the spot shows the two artists—who both use Claritin, Robison notes—in their musical elements, singing and playing guitar. Robison penned the ad’s single, which he says is “just a chorus for a song that’s not fully formed yet.”

For those that may not recognize Robison and Willis, fear not. Unlike most campaigns, both are identified. Robison says this is because “we’re not household names. They probably felt they needed to identify us.”

Euro Tonic creative directors Rich Roth and Phil Silvestri, who helmed the campaign, see it differently. “We ID’d them to drive home the fact that they are real people with real allergies,” Silvestri says.

“The Claritin campaign coincides with the release of Robison’s new album, “Eleven Stories,” on independent label Sustain Records. Referring to the timing, Jimmy Perkins, president/CEO of the Universal Music & Video Distribution-distributed label, says “we couldn’t have scripted it better.”

Other than that, Perkins says he hasn’t reached out to Claritin or Euro Tonic yet regarding cross-promotional opportunities. Which is unfortunate because the possibilities are very much there. Robison is touring after all.

Robison admits that he, too, was surprised by the offer from Claritin. “I find it interesting that they picked us—at least when you think about all the other artists out there,” he says.

“Maybe I’m a moron,” Robison says. “But I had no qualms accepting their invitation. I mean, it’s so hard to get face time with anyone these days. For me and Kelly, this is like a free marketing and promotion plan. If there’s a drawback, maybe I’ll see it later on.”

FLOWER POWER: Staying with TV spots that initially had us scratching our heads, has anyone else seen the new one from Fidelity Investments? It features “In-a-Gadda-Da-Vida” by Iron Butterfly. The nearly 40-year-old, ultimate stoner song is now being used to hawk Fidelity’s retirement accounts.

When asked about this odd pairing, Fidelity spokeswoman Jenny Engle chuckles and calls the song “a classic for many”—particularly the investment firm’s target audience: baby boomers.

“We wanted a song that would appeal to that audience,” she says. Well-known, vintage classics like “In-a-Gadda-Da-Vida” make an emotional connection with Fidelity’s core audience, Engle maintains.

Between the music and flowery visual imagery, the spot—created by Arnold Worldwide in Boston—for better or worse, leaves a lasting impression.

“The key is to catch people’s attention,” Engle says. Mission accomplished.
Indie the Spinners and Curtis used its own been focusing the first joined Mammoth Records for president marks inked, nonexclusive tures scoring Tom still talking hier the. They once did, "He's already saying," "We're going to go, I will wait to see them. Or, seeing "Rocky" at the movies. Everybody screaming. It was cool. I know: What we need is "Rocky VI!" Oh, well, I guess that's as likely as Bon Jovi getting a hit on the country charts. See you next week, baby! For more of this column, go to billboard.com.

COOLEST GARAGE SONGS

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<td>V2</td>
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<td>THE RACONTEURS</td>
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<td>WALK OF FAME</td>
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<td>ALL SHE WROTE</td>
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<td>HAPPY</td>
<td>SOUTHSIDE JOHNNY &amp; THE ASBURY JUKES</td>
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LITTLE STEVEN'S UNDERGROUND GARAGE

REDEYE NEVER SLEEPS: Redeye Distribution in Haw River, N.C., which also includes labelsYep Roc and Eleven Thirty, has made a number of staff changes. Stephen Judge has stepped into the controller role, replacing Chris Shull, who is no longer with the company. Judge has been with Redeye for about four years and was recently the company's A&R director. Joining the A&R team is new hire Simon Harper. A co-owner of Repo Management, Harper has managed such acts as the Comas and the Standard and has also worked as a GM of 4AD Records.

The company has also hired Josh Wittman to head its marketing department. Wittman was a founding partner in the Splinter Group, which he started with former Mammoth VP Steve Balcon. Wittman steps into a newly created role and will work with Redeye's existing marketing department.

Additionally, two Chicago-based indie rock labels have switched to Redeye: File 13 and Flameshovel. The latter was previously with Southern Records, and File 13 had its releases handled by the Lumberjack Mordam Music Group. Redeye will begin distributing both labels this month.

Also new to its distro roster is A-F Records. Run by punk act Anti-Flag and previously with LMMG, A-F has worked with such acts as the Methadones and the Vacancy, among others. A-F switches to Redeye May 30.

COOLEST GARAGE ALBUMS

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<td>A BEAT MISSING OR A SILENCE ADDED</td>
<td>THE VACANCIES</td>
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Lionsgate's New Tracks

Indie Film Distributor Inks Deal With Sony BMG's Red

If "Akeelah and the Bee" doesn't replicate Lionsgate's success with "Crash" next award season, the inspirational movie will still mark a new milestone for the independent film and video distributor, albeit a significantly smaller one. The film's soundtrack is the first to be brought in-house and released via Lionsgate as part of a recently signed, nonexclusive deal with Sony BMG's Red Distribution.

Lionsgate's launch of a music division also marks a return to the independent world for its president Jay Faires, who founded and ran Mammoth Records for much of the '90s. He joined Lionsgate in June, and "Akeelah" marks the first soundtrack: the film company will release on its own.

Just prior to joining Lionsgate, Faires had been focusing on his publishing firm, Baby New Year, and he will also help Lionsgate build its own publishing firm. His relationship with RED goes back to his Mammoth days, which used RED before linking with Atlantic in 1993.

The "Akeelah" soundtrack features a number of R&B greats, such as the Staple Singers, the Spinners and Curtis Mayfield, but is primarily a showcase for newcomers Keke Palmer, who recently signed to Atlantic, and Oprah Winfrey favorite Heather Small (Billboard, Jan. 7).

Soundtracks may not hold the sales power they once did, but "Akeelah" should benefit from a distribution and marketing partnership Lionsgate struck with Starbuck's for the film. The album, released April 4, will ship about 100,000 to start, Faires says.

"We're not out laying a million dollars for a soundtrack," Faires says. "If we can help labels and indie labels fulfill their objectives, and it helps us open our films, that's what this is about.

Indeed, the pairing with RED could give the distributor's third-party indie labels easier access to films and TV. Faires says he's constantly talking to RED VP of artist development Danny Buch.

"He's already saying, 'Here's our priority singles for the next six months. Can you help me find a film or a TV show they might work for?' There's nothing more I want to do.

While not every Lionsgate soundtrack will go through RED, Faires expects at least 10 albums to go the indie route in 2006. He's working on a soundtrack for Showtime's "Weeds," which will include Death Cab for Cutie and Tom Jones, among others, as well as the soundtrack to William Friedkin's "Bug," which stars Ashley Judd and features scoring work from System of a Down's Serj Tankian.

Newcomer KEKE PALMER appears on the "Akeelah and the Bee" soundtrack, released by Lionsgate.
March 8 was a special night in the cramped confines of the historic RCA Studio B on Nashville's Music Row. A small audience was assembled to watch musicians Billy Burnette, Rodney Crowell, Tommy Lee James and Raul Malo pay tribute to Roy Orbison by performing songs written, popularized or inspired by the late Rock and Roll Hall of Famer.

During the show, recorded for an XM Satellite Radio "Heroes Behind the Hits" program set to air April 17, Malo related how he and his fellow band members in the Mavericks like to fill the downtime on the tour bus by naming songs they wish Orbison would have recorded, then performing them as Orbison might have. So distinctive was Orbison's voice, that when Malo suddenly launched into "Put Your Dreams in That Quarry," everyone knew he was up to some joke. "It's the affection behind it."

For Barbara Orbison, Roy's widow and former manager, lovingly exploiting his music and his legacy is a full-time job. But that is just one part of her considerable business ventures, all based in a large white tower known as the Orbison Building near Music Row. That building also houses a vault containing Orbison's instruments, stage costumes, handwritten lyrics, rare recordings and other artifacts and memorabilia from his incredible career.

Since her husband's death in 1988, Orbison has built up a diverse portfolio of music interests, including publishing company Still Working Music Group, Orbison Myers Management, Orbison Records and Orby Records, and Barbara Orbison Productions. Still Working's writers include Burnette, James, Terry McBride, Clay Mills, Danielle Peck, Stephanie Lewis, Jedd Hughes and Nathan Barlowe, lead singer for Warner Bros.-based group Luna Halo, plus the catalog of Interscope artist Kaci Brown. Big Machine Records artist Peck is a client of the management company.

For the last three years of Roy's life, Orbison served as her husband's manager, a job that was not always easy for the young wife and mother. In 1987, she executive-produced Roy's "Black & White Night," an HBO/Cinemax special now available as a CD and DVD featuring the artist performing with Elvis Costello, Bruce Springsteen, Bonnie Raitt, Jackson Browne, k.d. lang and others. In 1992, she produced a Roy Orbison tribute concert to benefit the homeless and create Orbison House, a home for mentally impaired homeless people in Los Angeles. This year, she has kept busy executive-producing a series of Sony Legacy reissue projects including the recently released "The Essential Roy Orbison." She also helped coordinate a new Orbison exhibit titled "Haunting & Yearning: The Life and Music of Roy Orbison." It will open April 18 at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland and remain through Oct. 29.

Her latest project is petitioning the U.S. Postal Service to place her husband on a postage stamp in honor of what would have been his 70th birthday this month. Bono, Brad Pitt, Dan Aykroyd and Pamela Anderson are among the celebrities who have signed the online petition.

Q: With the 70th anniversary of his birth coming up April 23, how much of your time is devoted to Roy-related projects?
A: From the day he died, [the job] hasn't changed except he doesn't tour. We have record releases, we are gearing up to do the [reissues]. I just came back from Europe where we did some press, and I was in India doing press. When it's a big release, I have to promote a little more.

Q: What's the secret of running a successful publishing company and all those other businesses in an era where it's hard to be independent?
A: You have to have a certain vision, and the most important part in running any business is having just incredible people around you.

Q: Yet you actually manage to run all these businesses with a very small staff.
A: Right. I like a small staff, because the bigger the staff the more it pulls on me. I like working with [people] who have a direction for the company that coincides with mine. I think that's when you succeed.

Q: Is there something in particular that you look for in someone you want to sign?
A: I have to like them. [Still Working executive Clay Myers] has to like them. This life is really short and we are all going to be out of here pretty soon, and we all have to surround ourselves with people we can respect. When it comes to Danielle Peck, I have never agreed to manage anybody after Roy. [But] I agreed to manage her with Clay. She's just an outstanding young woman and... somebody I like to have in my life.

Q: If you had anything changed about the management end of the business since you worked with Roy?
A: It's the same, to get an artist into a bigger world and have the bigger world respond to the artist. It's about cross-marketing. Each day you want to get a little slice of the bigger world. You build a foundation.

Q: How did you get involved in managing Roy's career?
A: Roy and I were married 20 years, and we did everything together anyway. It was just like the next step, Roy needed a manager, and the record company felt [I could do it].

Roy would always say we have five different relationships. We always talked as lover to lover, friend to friend, husband to wife, then mother to father [of our children]. And then when we added the fifth one to it, the manager to the artist, [it was difficult].

I would be in the kitchen doing homework with the boys, and it would be one of those nights where they were misbehaving and the artist would call thinking he got the manager on the telephone to discuss something that really went wrong on the road, but he got the wife instead. We learned by getting bloody a couple of times, that's what we called it. We learned to make appointments sometimes. I would sometimes visually put on another hat.

Q: What will visitors see at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame exhibit?
A: Everything from his convertibles—Roy collected cars, when I married him, he had 43 cars—[to] his guitars and lyrics. It's a real serious exhibition. [The curators] spent days in our vault.

Q: Why do you think there is still nearly as much interest in Roy and his music as there was when he was alive?
A: I just think that Roy at all times gave his very best. The songs that he wrote were his personal truth and totally connected to his heart. Roy wasn't always the flavor of the month, but then when you hear that voice again, it's like, "Oh, wow, I'd forgotten how good it is."
Reopening the Doors
CDs, T-shirts And Vegas Bring Back Morrison & Co. BY MELINDA NEWMAN

In his book “Riders on the Storm,” Doors drummer John Densmore writes, “As long as there’s young people, they can look to Jim to help them cut the umbilical chord.” But even Densmore is surprised that the Los Angeles band and its iconic leader, Jim Morrison, who died in 1971, have such potent appeal to recent generations. After all, it has been 40 years since Elektra released the quartet’s first album in January 1967. “I’m astounded,” he says. “There must be some magic that was captured in a garage in Venice [Calif].

“We’ve had our disputes,” Densmore says of his well-publicized differences with fellow surviving Doors Ray Manzarek and Robby Krieger, “but I’m honored that whatever came through us, that was bigger than us. If each generation seems to glean some inspiration from that, I’m available.”

Densmore and his bandmates will have many demands on their time over the next few years as their management team rolls out a 40th anniversary campaign—exclusive unveiled here—with the intention to appeal to fans old and new.

“We’re not trying to remake them or spin the Doors, just expose them to the next generation,” Doors manager Jeff Jampol says.

He has partnered with the Firm, which represents the Doors for licensing and assists in other management issues.

The Doors’ appeal to younger generations could be due to the band being frozen in its prime. “[The Doors] were not able to grow old in front of the eyes of the world like the Stones or the Who. The Doors that people knew are forever young, and the image of Morrison in that of young rock god,” the Firm’s Jeff Rabhan says. “With that image in mind, and the legacy being what it is, our entire outreach is simple exposure and basic education as the history will sell itself.”

That means spreading word to the younger market through remixes, videogames, high-end clothing and online and mobile platforms. Meanwhile, the older, existing audience will be targeted through coffee-table books, boxed sets featuring 5.1 surround-sound versions of the group’s first six studio albums and more.

An interactive experience in Las Vegas, a touring memorabilia attraction and a filmed documentary are intended to appeal to all fans. “Our approach is simple: Is it a good product?” Rabhan says. “Does it represent the legacy of the band? Will it grow their appeal? If so, we are interested in creating that product and serving our audience.”

In fact, the group’s surviving members are considering licensing their music to advertisements for the first time. However, their standards for usage promise to be high (see story, below).

THE VOICE YOU HEAR

Naturally, a rollout of the Doors’ studio albums also plays into the birthday plans. By September, Rhino/Elektra will delete the existing Doors catalog to make way for a 12-disc boxed set, priced at $149.98. The fall release will include the Doors’ first six studio albums remastered with bonus tracks and paired with six DVDs featuring 5.1 remixes of the studio albums and bonus material. There will also be a vinyl boxed set of the first six albums.

In January 2007, the studio albums will individually come out as double discs with the remastered original and the 5.1 DVD version.

As early as May, a deal with merchandise companies Music Today will allow Doors fans to go to the band’s Web site and create their own virtual boxed sets, selecting from previously unreleased live tunes.

The Doors’ catalog has already been licensed for mobile downloads, ringtones and ringbacks.

THE SHIRT OFF THEIR BACKS

The Doors’ merchandise business is already soaring. Dell Furano, CEO of merchandise company Signature Networks, says sales have boomed since the introduction of new lines over the last few years. “In 2005, we probably sold close to $8 million in Doors shirts and apparel at retail. It was $2 million in 2003.”

Furano says the Doors are at the top of the merchandise heap alongside such acts as the Beatles and Led Zeppelin. It has not hurt that celebrities like Paris Hilton and Jessica Simpson have been photographed wearing Doors merchandise. “The amount of slants we’re selling to preteens and teenagers is staggering,” Furano says.

Hilton and friends are likely buying from a high-end Doors line developed two years ago by Trunk Ltd. in partnership with Signatures. The line is sold through stores like Fred Segal, Barney’s, Kitson and Nordstrom.

“The first piece, the Jim Morrison Lizarral King image on one of our classic shirts, became one of our top sellers overnight,” Trunk Ltd. founder and creative director Brad Beckerman says. He says teens respond to Morrison’s “irreverence.”

Signatures will launch another high-end line, 5.1, this fall. Last year, Signatures introduced a mainstream line, Love Street, which is carried in stores like Target, Wal-Mart and Hot Topic.

Furano expects the 40th anniversary activities to lift merchandise sales at least another 25% and has several new items planned.

For the 40th, Trunk designed a limited edition T-shirt featuring Blondie’s Deborah Harry and Morrison, touring the new Blondie vs. The Doors mash-up “Rapture/Riders.” The tune is featured on Blondie’s new EMi greatest hits set.

ALL THIS AND VEGAS, TOO

But wait, there’s more.

The Doors are planning an interactive attraction that will open in Las Vegas in 2008. Jampol says, video director Jake Nava, who is working on the project, describes it as “a one-hour acid trip, but you don’t come down.”

“You won’t see the Rockets kicking their legs up in this show, I can assure you,” Rabhan adds, noting management is in talks with several casinos to house the show. Sponsors, who “understand the deep-rooted, philosophical beliefs of this band toward the world” are being targeted.

There will also be a traveling Doors memorabilia museum and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum will feature the Doors in a major, year-long exhibit starting April 2007 (The group was inducted into the Hall in 1993.)

A slate of coffee-table books will accompany the 40th anniversary, including “The Doors by the Doors with Ben Fong-Torres,” out in November, and “Jim Morrison: Treasures,” by Rock Hall curator Jim Henke, due in 2007.

A Doors documentary directed by two-time Academy Award winner Bill Guttentag will hit theaters by year’s end. The film includes interviews with the band and Morrison’s family.

There are also plans to develop a multi-night TV special for summer 2007 called “Six Nights, Six Years, Six Records.” Each night will highlight a Doors studio album.

While the remaining members have had their spats—Densmore and the Morrison estate won a 2003 lawsuit that prohibits Manzarek and Krieger from using the Doors name while touring (“The Doors are Ray, Robbie, Jim and John”)—Densmore says—they all plan to promote the new projects, although it remains to be seen if they will do so together. “The three of them are bonded brothers,” Jampol says. “They’ve had disagreements over a side issue, they’re trying to sort that out. [but] they’ve never let it stand in the way of letting the legacy move forward.”

DOORS SONGS IN ADS? WELL, MAYBE...

As the Doors’ surviving members gear up for the band’s 40th anniversary, there is a possibility that their music may be used in commercials for the first time.

It almost happened in 1969, when drummer John Densmore, that lead Robby Krieger and keyboardist Ray Manzarek agreed to license “Light My Fire” to Buick to advertise its German-made Opel. Singer Jim Morrison, who was out of town for the meeting, vehemently disagreed, and the deal never came to pass. From that point, Densmore has opposed commercial usage, although Krieger and Manzarek have opened up to the possibility.

(All deals, licensing and otherwise, must be approved by all partners in the Doors’ assets: The three surviving members have a 75% share, and Morrison’s families and his late girlfriend, Pamela Courson, share the other 25%.)

Why the consideration now?

With older music no longer getting played on the radio and listenerhip fragmented, how do we penetrate a whole new generation?” manager Jeff Jampol asks. “Selling out the Doors is not an option, on the other hand, certain commercials can be effective at reaching listeners.”

That said, Jampol adds, “We will never license a Doors song for a mundane product like toothpaste or deodorant.”

Densmore says, “There’s a possibility something came along that’s very ‘green’ that agreed with where we’re at, then maybe” the band would consider commercial usage.

But Densmore puts the emphasis on “maybe.” In addition to environmentally friendly products, Jampol says cutting-edge Internet or mobile platforms could be contenders. For example, Densmore says the SBC Internet commercial featuring Eric Clapton is “very cool.”

Densmore hates that there has been industry confusion about the Doors’ position on licensing and stresses that the group has allowed numerous movie placements (“Apocalypse Now,” “Forest Gump,” “ Jarhead”) and TV usages (“Alias,” “Entourage” and “The Simpsons”).

“People think I veto everything,” Densmore says, “but we are open and excited by an artistic film.”
Ten years in, Radio Disney has gone from under the radar to power player

By Chuck Taylor

Robin Jones still recalls the reaction she got requesting product service from record labels in Radio Disney's fledgling days.

"I was told, 'A kids network, yeah, OK, I'm hanging up now,'" says Jones, PD since day one. "We actually had to buy our first record library."

Ten years in, nobody is questioning the channel's relevance, impact or ability to attract an audience—12-and-under kids, often accompanied by their moms and other family members—whose mighty buying power was once underestimated, if not wholly ignored.

Today, Dallas-based Radio Disney boasts 54 affiliate stations, most on AM, five on FM.

But that's not the half of it. Radio Disney is also available via satellite broadcasters XM and Sirius, on Music Choice and DirecTV and at radiodisney.com. Recently, a Radio Disney Now! podcast was launched on iTunes and yahoo.com, along with RDTV, a video-on-demand service available via Verizon mobile phones.

Radio Disney's reach is also key to the success of the "Radio Disney Jams" CD series; the latest title in the series, "Volume 8," debuted at No. 2 on the Top Kid Audio chart in late February.

In all, Radio Disney signals reach 97% of the nation, with 7.2 million listeners tuning in weekly. On one recent Saturday, the network logged 232,000 request calls.

"Taking advantage of all available technologies is how you build a brand that stands the test of time," says Jean-Paul Colaco, president/GM of Radio Disney Worldwide. "If you maximize the ways that people spend time and interact, it allows us to continue to drive the brand to new levels."

Jones adds, "All of these outlets are extensions of the brand, not a replacement. We build it and then add on another wing and another."

Programming Mandate

Among Radio Disney's primary drivers is a simple programming mandate: Play what listeners want to hear.

"That explains why you're still hearing Axel F's 'Crazy Frog,' and 'The Hamster Dance,'" Jones says. "There's certainly no lack of research. The kids have no hesitation to tell you exactly what they want to hear."

Over the years, the network has endured dry spells from the label side (the early part of this decade) as well as times when the floodgates were opened wide: think Backstreet Boys, Britney Spears and 'N Sync. While the flow of younger artists is beginning to pick up again, Jones says that Disney has learned where to look for its hits.

"We look at music in the context of what's going on in a kid's world, with songs in movies, in a favorite videogame or in a viral e-mail they're sending back and forth. It's all about what they're latching onto with their friends," Jones says.

How well do the Disney properties read their audience's pulse? Consider the surprise smash "High School Musical," a Disney Channel cable TV movie whose soundtrack sideswiped the entertainment industry this year, topping The Billboard 200, first in the March 11 issue, then again in the April 1 edition. Three songs from the film are in Radio Disney's top 10, including the No. 1 "Breaking Free."

"High School Musical" illustrates the potential of synergies among Disney properties. However, the radio network stresses that it in no way forced the music from "High School" on its audience.

"It's the same organic process that happens with any piece of music: The kids have spoken," says Sarah Stone, VP of marketing for Radio Disney. "Robin doesn't spin the record unless the kids like it. The phenomenon of 'High School Musical' is the result of the convergence of a lot of factors. We support everything going on in the company, but the fact remains, if kids didn't like the music, we wouldn't be playing it."

Back-seat Programming

"High School Musical" is also a prime example of Radio Disney's unique ability to target and appeal to the overall family.

"We like to say that we're programming from the back seat," Jones says. "We're still programming straight at the heart of kids, with other family members' participation. What we have seen is that parents enjoy the connection they get listening with their kids, so it's often a joint experience. When they see their kids having fun, they want to participate." 

Radio Disney typically adds one new record a week, and it maintains a new song catalog of seven titles, which listeners are encouraged to rate by phone or online.
But there is no cut-off for a song that remains popular, because—as anyone who has ever spent time with a youngster knows—repetition rules. As a result, songs by C-C Music Factory, Axel F and Avril Lavigne are permanent fixtures in Radio Disney’s top 30, along with newer hits from such artists as Ashlee Simpson and Rihanna.

Among the acts Radio Disney “has taken an early path with,” according to Jones, are Backstreet Boys, ‘N Sync, Aaron Carter, Jesse McCartney, Christina Milian, 98 Degrees, Hilary Duff and Baha Men.

She also points to acts the network is exposing that have yet to impact at other radio outlets, but whose sales demonstrate Radio Disney’s might: Aly & AJ on Hollywood, who have sold 422,000 albums, according to Nielsen SoundScan; and Cheetah Girls on Walt Disney Records, who have moved 1.6 million units.

“It is not a criteria that [a song is] played somewhere else,” Jones says. “We look at the song from the standpoint of its style and lyrics being relevant, the artist being aspirational and its profile in the marketplace—whether it comes from e-mails that all the kids are sending each other to a television show they’re watching or other radio.”

Columbia Records president Steve Greenberg is especially happy with Radio Disney’s “Incubator” initiative to expose new artists. “Radio Disney is open to taking a chance on unknown artists that they think will appeal to their listeners. A program like Incubator will allow the audience to get to know a little about the artists themselves through features and interviews at a very early stage,” Greenberg says that connection helps promote album sales, as opposed to single-song downloads.

As a Disney franchise, fastidious standards apply to the music played on the station (a lyric sheet must accompany all pitched records; other songs are either edited or rerecorded with exclusive Disney versions). This, again, supports an important element of the network’s success: parental trust.

“You once you cross into the landscape of heavy, negative rock or extremely sexual rap or hip-hop, then parents become uncomfortable listening with their kids,” Jones explains. “A lot of families want more positive music that sends you off into the world with a good vibe, that empowers you to have a great day. At concerts we sponsor, parents will stop and thank us for bringing acts to the marketplace that they can take their kids to see together.”

That does not mean that rap and rock are off-limits on Radio Disney, but Jones says a song’s popularity with kids relates to the network’s “sweet spot,” Disney. “That relates more than the fact that it’s Disney, but the fact that it’s Disney that has evolved. We’re not just about kids, but about anytime music that sends us into the landscape as Ashlee Simpson and Rihanna. It takes all genres of music to be marketable to kids,” he adds.

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But, he adds, nothing is more important than the network’s focus on its audience.

Jones relishes the pivotal role that Radio Disney plays for its young ones, in many cases serving as the first time they are exposed to the wonderful world of music, a gift that will certainly serve them for the rest of their lives.

“The age we’re targeting is right about that time when music becomes important, right as you’re defining who you are, trying out new roles, and you are able to learn through songs you sing and participate in with friends,” she says. “I’m happy that we’re able to provide music that’s happy and relevant.”
NEW

REVENUE

ON TAP

CD SALES MAY SLUMP, BUT THERE'S REASON FOR HOPE

BY BRIAN GARRITY
ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN WEBSTER
universal Music Group in April will quietly mark the one-year anniversary of the launch of its music TV network, International Music Feed. Nevermind that most people have never heard of the Dish Network-distributed channel, or that record companies don't have expertise in running pay TV operations. Executives at the major labels are recognizing that the implosion of the CD business requires diversification—and quick. Efforts like IMF are by no means the norm of how labels are branching out, but they illustrate this movement's ambitions. UMG gains a whole new way of making money that is not reliant on an album or single sale. The channel is now featured in just under 10 million satellite TV homes in the United States, and UMG is collecting 10 cents a subscriber per month. 

For a global record conglomerate that reported $4.89 billion ($5.8 billion) in revenue in 2005, an additional $12 million in annual subscriber fees plus advertising revenue is a drop in the bucket. But in the world of the "new" music business the name of the game is capturing revenue anywhere and everywhere. Four years ago the average music company made money from two sources: CD sales, and film and TV licensing. Today the major labels are more than half a dozen revenue sources, and the list is growing. As the latest figures from the RIAA show, most of these are related to digital music: downloads, subscription services, music videos, mobile, kiosks and more. While the size of the overall U.S. business is smaller than it was four years ago—$13.7 billion in 2001 versus $12.3 billion in 2005—new revenue streams are offsetting declines in physical goods. "Music publishers for years have been living with multiple revenue streams," says Thomas Hesse, president of global digital business for Sony BMG. "To them, nothing is ancillary. Everything is revenue. That's how record companies are increasingly thinking about their projects. Marketing and licensing and sales are completely intertwined." Beyond digital growth, labels are further diversifying by investing in a number of more speculative music-related ventures, including bets on film and TV operations, mobile virtual network operators and even artists themselves, via revenue-sharing deals. "It's imperative that music companies look to as many sources of revenue as possible so we're not subject to the degree of the market on one distribution method," says Larry Kensch, president of UMG's eLabs division. "When CDs fall off, there weren't other things to focus on immediately to increase revenue." The following are some of the leading areas of expansion labels are pursuing:

**SNAPSHOT:**

**DOWNLOADS**

**MARKET SIZE:** $499 million

**SNAPSHOT:** Driven by the success of the iPod, the music download business now ranks second to the CD as a source of revenue for recorded music companies. Individual track downloads in the United States topped $361 million in 2005, according to newly released figures from the RIAA. Digital album downloads totaled another $136 million last year.

**GROWTH PROSPECTS:** Strong. Digital track sales are running 89% ahead of last year at 144 million, Nielsen SoundScan reports. Credit that in large part to a big jump in iPod sales in 2005, when Apple shipped around 32 million iPods, almost quadruple the previous year's total. Analysts estimate total MP3 player shipments will grow to 78 million by 2008.

**MOBILE**

**MARKET SIZE:** $422 million

**SNAPSHOT:** Here's why record labels are drooling over the mobile industry: Music-related products sold via cell phones managed to almost match the industry's download business—on less than half the volume. The RIAA reports sales of 170 million units for mobile versus more than 380 million units combined sold online as tracks and album bundles.

**SUBSCRIPTION**

**MARKET SIZE:** $149.2 million

**SNAPSHOT:** The tortoise business running in a field of hares, digital subscription is growing... slowly. By the end of last year, 1.3 million consumers were paying for monthly access to digital music, the RIAA says—a strikingly small market relative to the
number and profile of companies pushing it. Napster, RealNetworks, Yahoo, AOL, Virgin, iMesh, Trans World Entertainment, HMV and Cigals are already marketing services. But there are encouraging signs. UMG reports that between August 2004 and July 2005, its subscription revenue grew at an average monthly rate of 8%, topping $1.6 million in July. And the field of players selling subscriptions is only going to get bigger. Amazon, MTV and Target are among the big brands with new services reported to be on the horizon.

**GROWTH PROSPECTS: Mixed**. Labels and digital music executives like the margins on a $10-$15 per month subscriber fee much better than the razor-thin returns of a la carte downloads. But so far retailers see a bigger value in the business model than consumers, who remain squeamish—if they understand the concept at all. Portability is another problem. None of these services work with the iPod, and none of the devices that work with Microsoft’s portable subscription technology have connected with consumers. Then there’s the publishing problem. The Harry Fox Agency isn’t granting licenses for new services until a rate is set for publishing fees connected to subscriptions. That could throw a wrench into the speed with which new retailers enter the market.

HFA now wants new subscription services to pay the greater of 12% of gross revenue, a pay-per-penny rate; or 25% of the total amount paid by the services for all content, according to a source who has seen a proposal from HFA to a digital music company.

**VIDEO DOWNLOADS**

**MARKET SIZE:** $3.7 million

**SNAPSHOT:** The business is in its infancy, but music video downloading is emerging as an area of rapid expansion for labels and retailers. Leading the charge is Apple Computer, which began selling downloadable videos and iPods capable of video playback in October. Music videos from iTunes cost $1.99 apiece. Early response has been encouraging, label executives say. The industry sold just under 2 million videos in 2005. Prior to last year, videos were considered a promotional item with limited commercial value.

**GROWTH PROSPECTS: Good**. Music videos have been steadily selling for $1.99 a pop at the iTunes Music Store since late last year. But Apple is just now moving into higher margin packages. As part of its video bundling push, iTunes is selling “video albums” (offers of six to seven videos from an artist that have not been released as physical collections) and “singles” (a bundled offer of a video and its corresponding single). It’s also selling physical video collections originally licensed for DVD in complete sets or à la carte downloads. Meanwhile, the number of companies selling downloadable video figures to grow quickly. Google introduced a video store featuring content from Sony BMG in January, albeit to mixed reaction. Once again Apple’s competitors will have to struggle with portability problems. Only iTunes files are compatible with the iPod. But the Windows market has a number of alternative video playback devices set to hit the market later this year.

**E-MERGING STREAMS**

The U.S. music biz of 2001 was worth $13.7 billion, but its idea of comfort meant selling an album on cassette, vinyl or CD. This year’s just-released RIAA numbers place 2005’s biz at $12.3 billion. It is telling, though, that digital products such as video, kiosk tracks and subscription services were included for the first time. As the chart at right shows, new businesses may be incremental—but they’re adding up.

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**KIOSKS**

**MARKET SIZE:** $1 million

**SNAPSHOT:** The floundering kiosk concept—a retail dream since the late 1990s—received a major shot in the arm when the 6,000-unit Starbucks chain jumped into the market in 2004. The coffee giant is testing HP kiosks in dozens of stores in Austin, Los Angeles, San Francisco and its company base, Seattle. And in Starbucks’ wake, other kiosk initiatives have picked up steam. Mix & Burn, a unit of New Hope, Minn.-based distributor Navarre, is running tests for its own kiosk solution in about a dozen stores around the United States, including Best Buy, Borders Books & Music, Newbury Comics, Tower, HFS (part of entertainment, Electric Fetus and Nordstrom). A handful of other kiosk firms are targeting the market as well. Consumer response has been limited. The RIAA reports 700,000 combined singles and albums were sold via kiosks last year.

**GROWTH PROSPECTS: Mixed**. The idea seems great: Place CD-burning kiosks that can manufacture out-of-stock albums and customized compilations in retail stores. But after numerous false starts, retailers, hardware suppliers and major labels say a quagmire of issues threatens to overwhelm the initiative. Retailers say in-store CD manufacturing remains unprofitable because the hardware and related software systems cost too much. What’s more, the labels remain divided on standards, usage rules and pricing for kiosks.

**RADIO**

**MARKET SIZE:** $40 million

**SNAPSHOT:** Emerging forms of radio are growing, but contentious opportunities. Labels remain at odds with webcasters and satellite radio companies over royalty rates. Terrestrial radio does not pay a sound-recording performance royalty, but the Digital Performance Right in Sound Recordings Act and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act in the mid-1990s established such a payment for digital transmissions. SoundExchange, the organization the RIAA created to collect and negotiate digital radio royalties, and webcasters are still ironing out a new deal for sound recording use in digital performances for 2006-2010. The Digital Media Assn., which represents the webcasting divisions of companies such as Microsoft, RealNetworks, Apple and AOL, wants Internet radio broadcasters to pay recording companies and artists 5.5% of revenue, about half the current royalty rate of 10.9%. SoundExchange wants the rate to almost triple to 16%. A case of revenue equity is just as thorny with satellite companies. Sirius and XM inked a reported $80 million deal with the recording industry in 2002. That pact expires this year, and the labels have their eyes on the big bucks that XM and Sirius have doled out for sports and entertainment brands. Tensions also run high over new satellite radio devices that can record programming and double as an MP3 player.

**GROWTH PROSPECTS: Mixed**. Just how much money the industry makes from radio likely hinges on the outcome of arbitration cases. The webcasting fight is being argued in front of the Copyright Royalty Board, and satellite negotiations are expected to end in arbitration, too. Some Wall Street analysts expect the music industry will seek a package in the range of $1 billion. Any agreement/settlement approaching that number could meaningfully affect the way labels divvy up the revenue pie. The industry also just finalized a promising settlement deal with Sirius over its S30 device, which allows users to record programming—the labels will receive a fee for each unit sold.

**AD-SUPPORTED ON-DEMAND**

**MARKET SIZE:** N/A

**SNAPSHOT** One big fish for music revenue expansion remains the global advertising market, which totals more than $300 billion. The labels are just now starting to participate in ad-based revenue through various avenues—from the likes of AOL, Yahoo and MSN. Efforts are afoot to launch ad-based, music-on-demand models in 2006 that tap into the enormous demand for free music and generate value from those who can’t or won’t pay.

**GROWTH PROSPECTS: Mixed**. VOD is expected to grow at healthy rates, but the majors may be leaving major cash on the table. For example, peer-to-peer monitoring service BigChampagne estimates that some 12 billion songs were downloaded through file-swapping networks last year by a worldwide audience of roughly 100 million; as of late 2005, more than 8.9 million users were on P2P networks at any given time, a 26% gain over 2004. But the devil will be in the details. Licensing, usage rights and royalty rates associated with ad-backed, audio-on-demand models still have to be worked out. It’s not until the cost estimate, ad-supported offering will be attractive enough to lure the P2P crowd.

**ADDITIONAL INVESTMENTS**

**MARKET SIZE: N/A**

**SNAPSHOT** The major labels’ mantra is transformation from “record companies” to “music entertainment companies.” The Big Four are investing in new businesses that stretch the traditional definition of the music business. The majors are looking to participate in their acts’ merch, touring and sponsorship dollars—once the artist’s exclusive domain. EMI’s revenue sharing pact with Korn and Robbie Williams are the most notable examples of the trend. Elsewhere, labels are focusing on film and TV. Sony BMG launched a film unit last August that just acquired the rights to “The Sasquatch Dumpling Gang,” and is expected to start production on “Reggaeton,” in conjunction with Jennifer Lopez’s Nuyorican Productions. UMG’s Interscope Records released the 50 Cent movie “Get Rich or Die Tryin’” through its film unit last fall. The label also released a 50 Cent videoclip in conjunction with VU Games. UMG is also targeting the mobile market. In August, the company announced plans to introduce its own mobile phone service, MoveU, in conjunction with Single Touch Interactive and Sprint.

**GROWTH PROSPECTS: Intriguing**. Execution will be key to all of these efforts. That will be no small task, given that labels must first and foremost be focused on developing hit songs—a process that has little to do with making films, providing cell phone service or selling merch. But label executives stress the need for thinking big when it comes to driving growth. Warner Music Group chairman Edgar Bronfman Jr. underscored the point at a Goldman Sachs investor conference in October, telling attendees that the health of the music business needs to be based on dollars, not units. “Twenty years ago we gave our music videos to MTV, and MTV has since created an outstanding business,” he noted. “Even more recently we have been selling our songs to iPods, but we don’t have a share of iPods’ revenue. We have to keep thinking how we are going to monetize for our shareholders the value we are creating for so many other streams.”

"Additional reporting by Susan Butler and Ed Christian."
WITH THE ARRIVAL OF 'ME AND MY GANG,' HIT-MAKING COUNTRY TRIO CONFIRMS ITS NASHVILLE 'CRED'
Rascal Flatts, a group some initially branded as a country "boy band," has proved its chops with amazing success. The trio that played for dozens is now entertaining thousands. Once dismissed by naysayers, the band may finally be getting just recognition.

With the April 4 release of the band's fourth album, "Me and My Gang," on Lyric Street Records, the Rascal Flatts lineup of Joe DeMarcus, Gary LeVox and Joe Don Rooney is on a roll. But back in the early days, it was a different story. Perhaps it was the tight harmonies. Perhaps it was the pop lean to their songs. Perhaps it was the group's arrival at a time when the Backstreet Boys and 'N Sync were still forces in the pop world.

Whatever the reason, Rascal Flatts was first viewed as country music's version of the boy-band phenomenon. But the trio has overcome that misconception, among other obstacles, with its enduring work ethic and competitive desire to succeed.

In six short years, Rascal Flatts has made as quick an impact on Billboard's Hot Country Songs chart as any new act in recent memory. Consider this: Everyone of its 13 singles has gone top 10—five to No. 1—and each of its three previous albums sold better than its predecessor.

Rascal Flatts' story begins in Columbus, Ohio, where DeMarcus and second cousin LeVox grew up playing in family jam sessions. In the early '90s, DeMarcus moved to Nashville as part of Christian group East to West. In 1997, he convinced LeVox to give up his day job and follow his music dreams.

The two began to perform with a guitarist at the Fiddle and Steel Guitar Bar in Nashville's famous Printer's Alley. DeMarcus had a gig as a touring bandleader for Chely Wright, but he performed with LeVox whenever he was not on the road.

When their guitarist could not make it to the club one night, DeMarcus invited Wright's guitarist player, Joe Don Rooney, to fill in.

The trio discovered it had a natural three-part harmony, the kind normally found among family members, helped, of course, by the fact that DeMarcus and LeVox are kin. Doug Nichols, who co-manages Rascal Flatts with Trey Turner, says that harmony cannot be manufactured.

"I've seen labels try to create acts like [Rascal Flatts], which is the ultimate compliment," he says. "But Gary is such a great singer, and Joe Don naturally sings the high part over Gary. It's naturally where his voice is. Jay sings the fifth below, which is naturally where his voice is. You can't go find three people like that."

Working with producers Mark Bright and Marty Williams, who also served as the band's first managers, Rascal Flatts put together a three-song demo that it pitched to Lyric Street Records. Senior VP of A&R Doug Howard was impressed with the demo and had a copy sent overnight to label president Randy Goodman, who was on vacation at the time.

The next step was to find out if the band could pull off live what it had done on the demo, so Howard invited the threesome for a meeting. "They sang a song, and, really in the first 30 seconds, it was like, 'Thank you, God,' " Howard remembers thinking. "But, as I've been told, I keep my cards really close to the chest."

After the song, Howard thanked the band and said he needed to call Goodman. "They [said], 'Don't you want us to sing another one?' and I'm like, 'Yeah, if you want to.' " Howard says. "I was thinking, 'I need to call, Randy, and they're thinking, 'God, what have we done wrong?' "

After conferring with Goodman, Howard got continued on >>p36
To America's Biggest Band,
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By Nashville standards, RASCAL FLATTS received a quick launch in 2000 after delivering market-ready music.

from p32

the go-ahead to sign the band.

“When I called Mark Bright 30 minutes later, I said, ‘I just got with Randy, and we’re on,’” Howard recalls. “Mark said, ‘God, we thought you hated us.’”

Signed in the summer of 1999, the band experienced a quick launch—by Nashville standards—and was visiting radio by early 2000 to promote its self-titled debut album.

The quick launch was partially because of the ability of the band and its producers to deliver market-ready music and Lyric Street’s well-placed paranoia that there would be copycat bands.

The label’s fear was born out of its experience with female trio SheDaisy, which was accused early on of being a Dixie Chicks clone.

“When the Rascal guys got signed, we had heard rumblings” about other male trios, VP of marketing Greg McCarn recalls. “We wanted to get them out as quickly as possible. I remember how proud I was that we were able to pull off what we did in the amount of time that we did.”

Nichols, the band’s road manager at the time, remembers watching the group work its magic on the radio tour for sometimes less-than-receptive audiences, and that made him a believer.

“You never could put them in a situation that they didn’t win,” he says. “Even in the worst situation, they would find some way.”

When the band visited country KATM Modesto, Calif., for example, PD Randy Black decided to take it to a local eatery, Bub’s Burgers, to perform.

“We went into the middle of this little burger place . . . and literally stood in the middle of all these tables of this little fast food restaurant while everybody ate and ignored us,” DeMarcus remembers. “I finally started walking around to the tables and stood right in front of the people who were eating and sang to them. That’s my fondest memory of the whole radio tour.”

Nichols remembers that day. “There were a couple of [construction] guys in there . . . they only had 30 minutes for lunch . . . they just wanted to come in and get a burger,” he recalls. “They didn’t want a bunch of slick-looking guys playing songs. The guys found a way to engage them.”

The road work paid off, and country radio embraced the band. “Prayin’ for Daylight,” which was on that initial demo, peaked at No. 3 on Hot Country Songs. The next two singles, “This Everyday Love”—another demo—and “While You Loved Me,” were also top 10 hits.

If you talk to the band and those around it, you quickly learn that there are a number of “moments” that helped define Rascal Flatts’ future.

Among those was the risky decision to release “I’m Movin’ On” as the fourth single from the debut album. The song was something of a departure from the previous singles. Lyrically, it was more substantial, and it was a slow-moving ballad.

But the band’s inner circle agreed that it was a chance worth taking. “We all sat on the bus and said, ‘You’ve got one more song to pick off this album,’” Nichols recalls. “What do you think would make the most impact out there and would say something that you want to say?” We all said, ‘I’m Movin’ On’.”

So, despite perceived challenges at radio, the band and the label moved forward. “The guys stood behind it,” Nichols says. “It was a pivotal moment in their career.”

It was the right decision. The single peaked at No. 4 on Hot Country Songs and made the impact all had hoped for.

“We got letters and still receive e-mails on that song, how it’s changed people’s lives and [helped them] get over alcohol and depression,” Rooney says. “It’s wonderful to know that your music can be a healer like that.”

Meanwhile, the trio was still battling the boy-band image problem. Taking the bull by the horns, Lyric Street approached CMT with a proposal to fund a Rascal Flatts special.

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“They wanted to do more longform programming, but didn’t have the budget for it, so we provided the programming,” Goodman says.

The resulting show, “Rascal Flatts: Live From the Sunset Strip,” had the desired effect—it spotlighted the band’s musicianship, which McCarn says, “we wanted to make the rest of the world aware of.”

The move provided an added bonus: The video for “I’m Movin’ On” came out of the special.

Video exposure in general, and CMT in particular, continues to be an important avenue for Rascal Flatts. After the success of the first special, the band did a spring break special with the network.

“We continued hammering it home that they are a live band, they are fun and they’ve got a youthful audience,” McCarn says, noting that the band did another special for the “Peels Like Today” album. “We have finally driven a stake in the heart of them being a boy band at this point.”

Touring and live shows were an important part of the band’s early success. The trio capitalized on its quick start at radio and on music video channels by opening for superstars Brooks & Dunn, Toby Keith and Kenny Chesney, among others.

“One of the smartest things they’ve ever done was to keep the touring going,” McCarn says. “These guys have never been off the road.”

Howard agrees. “From the get go, they were going to play their hardest,” he says. “They were competitive, so if they were your opening act, their idea was, ‘You’d better be on tonight, because it’s our goal to go out there and kick it.’”

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FLATTS’ BEST TRACKS

As Rascal Flatts releases its fourth album, “Me and My Gang,” April 4 on Lyric Street Records, the act’s business colleagues paused to look back and pick their favorite song to date from the group’s repertoire.

“I’m Movin’ On’ was a career-changing song. We’ve had uptempo songs that worked great on radio and showed that side of the band to the world, but I think ‘I’m Movin’ On’ took them to a level where people took their live performances more seriously. The song just changed a lot of people’s lives.”

—DOUG NICHOLS, CO-MANAGER
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Success continued with Rascal Flatts’ second release, “Melt.” In addition to achieving a three-week run at No. 1 with “These Days,” the band headlined a CMT-sponsored tour. Radio was firmly behind it, and so was its growing legion of fans.

While the third single from the album, “I Melt,” peaked at No. 2 on Hot Country Songs, the accompanying video and the resulting controversy propelled the group into the public spotlight.

The brief—or rather, “no brief”—appearance of Rooney’s behind and revealing shots of a female extra in a bedroom-scene clip caused fallout at video channels. CMT dayparted the video, playing a censored version with Rooney’s offending cheeks blurred out, while a flowing the bare buttocks at night. Video channel GAC declined to play the clip at all. And coast-to-coast headlines made hay of the video.

“We weren’t trying to squash their creativity,” CMT VP of music and talent Chris Parr says now, “because every day we challenge people to do something a little different and try to reinvent the wheel. They just pushed the envelope, and we weren’t quite comfortable with that.”

“But we worked on some pretty creative solutions, and it seemed to work for everybody,” Parr says. “And they got a ton of press out of it, which is what I think they were trying to do. Looking back on it, that seems like such a clip on the screen.”

Indeed, a string of hits that includes “Bless the Broken Road,” “Fast Cars and Freedom” and the powerful “Skin (Sarabeth)” has helped the band move well beyond the brief uproar.

And Rascal Flatts’ members share a common bond when it comes to song selection.

“There’s a connection between them when it comes to music, they know what they want to do,” Nichols says. “There’s not a song on the record that all three didn’t say, ‘100%, this is the song.’ When they get pitched on a song, it and the right song, they all know immediately.”

Lyric Street VP of promotion Kevin Herring says that instinct is part of the band’s consistent radio success.

“We’ve had sales stories, we’ve had request stories, we’ve had research stories,” he says. “We’ve always had an element that has worked with them.”

Radio programmers agree. “Point blank, period, no negotiation, no questions asked, they have established themselves as one of our core artists,” says Mike Peterson, PD of country WUSN (US 99.5) Chicago.

And while songwriting is important for Rascal Flatts—every one of its albums has included songs written by one or more band members—it has avoided the mistake made by countless other singer/songwriters.

“They aren’t caught up in recording their own songs,” Nichols says. “They realize that they are fortunate to get pitched just phenomenal songs.”

The band’s video appeal led Lyric Street to take an interesting approach to keep Rascal Flatts in front of fans, even when the label did not have a single to work at radio. Lyric Street has twice shot videos for songs that were not radio singles—“My Worst Fear” from its second album and “Here’s to You” from its third.

Because CMT and GAC reach an estimated 75 million and 38 million households, respectively, McCarn says having a video on those channels—and the multiple impressions they generate—helps keep album sales steady between projects.

Despite airplay success and millions of record sales, the band sensed a gap between the live shows and its records to date.

So it made a bold move and turned to a new producer for “Me and My Gang.” Rascal Flatts enlisted Dann Huff, who has produced records for acts as diverse as Faith Hill, Megadeth, Rebecca St. James and Lonestar.

Huff is also a guitar virtuoso whose playing can be heard on records by Whitesnake, Reba McEntire, Michael Jackson and Phil Keaggy. But it was Huff’s experience as a member of such bands as White Heart and Giant that sealed the deal with Rascal Flatts, whose members already were fans of his work.

“It was just time for a change,” LeVox says. “It’s just time for some new life to be spread into what we were doing, and we really thought Dann could really capture it.”

“Dann came from a very band-oriented point of view, being a musician himself and playing in several bands,” DeMarcus says. “He knew exactly what we needed and what we wanted to do and the direction to take us,” Rooney says. “It was basically just encompassing what we do live and in the studio all in one. He was able to bring more of us individually, from Jay’s bass and keyboard playing and my guitar playing and Gary’s singing. It was just like Gary’s on steroids all of a sudden. Dann has really been the magical missing piece.”

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"Some Say," from the first album. I just love the groove of that record. It sounds to me like some cool Todd Rundgren song. It's a little bit different from anything else they've ever done. That one just kicked my ass from the first time I heard it.”

—GREG McCARN, VP OF MARKETING, LYRIC STREET RECORDS

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At least initially, the gambit appears to have paid off. The first single from the new album, "What Hurts the Most," already has hit No. 1 on the Hot Country Songs chart ahead of the album's release.

While the band has captured the hearts of fans and the respect of radio and other media outlets, some observers still feel that Rascal Flatts has not garnered the recognition it deserves from the country music community.

Although the band has picked up numerous awards, including multiple top vocal group nods from the Country Music Assn. and the Academy of Country Music (ACM), those close to the group believe that Rascal Flatts has not been fully recognized.

If you ask label president Goodman whether it has gotten the respect it deserves, you will get a quick "No, I don't" before you even finish asking the question. "It's frustrating," he says.

While the lack of respect has been a sticking point for Goodman, he has tried to put it behind him. "I'll take the commercial success," he says, "and the tickets these guys are selling on the road."

Likewise, Nichols says Rascal Flatts has realized that "you can only control what you can control."

The band that prides itself on its live show has yet to be tapped as entertainer of the year at any awards show, but perhaps this is its year.

Rascal Flatts is one of the finalists for the top honor: May 23 at the ACM Awards along with three other nominations—a first.

Industry recognition aside, insiders agree the band has just begun to scratch the surface.

"We're not even close to their potential yet," Nichols says. "As great as it's been, I really feel that we still have a long way to go."
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* through the 2006 touring season
Rascal Flatts has achieved in six short years what many acts can only hope for in the length of a career.

In addition to numerous awards, the band has sold more than 8.8 million records, according to Nielsen SoundScan; scored 13 top 10 hits, including five No. 1 singles; and is one of the top touring acts on the road, country or otherwise.

In February, the band’s hit “Bless the Broken Road,” which spent five weeks at No. 1 on Billboard’s Hot Country Songs chart, was named best country song at the 48th annual Grammy Awards.

Although the honor goes to the writers of the song—Bobby Boyd, Jeff Hanna and Marcus Hummon—the award gave the band cause to celebrate as well.

On the eve of the release of its highly anticipated fourth album, “Me and My Gang,” on Lyric Street Records, Jay DeMarcus, Gary LeVox and Joe Don Rooney talked with Billboard about their past, their future, their music and working with a new producer.

Who were some of your early influences?
LeVox: Alabama was huge for us—the songs that they chose and the harmonies. Shenandoah—[lead singer] Marty Raybon, to this day, is the finest country singer on the planet. Shenandoah had a huge impact on me. Of course, George Jones and Earl Thomas Conley—just the tone of their voices and songs they’ve recorded. Keith Whitley and Stevie Wonder, too. [Stevie] is one of the best singers on the planet.

Rooney: Being a guitar player . . . people like Eric Clapton. I love Jeff Beck’s playing and Chet Atkins and Vince Gill, those styles. I love technical players like Steve Vai and Larry Carlton. [I am a] huge Brent Mason fan. Dann Huff is one of my heroes, too. He always has been. He can do it all, the rock stuff, he can blues it up, too, and he can do some country chicken pickin’, which I think is incredible.

DeMarcus: My mother and father are big musical heroes of mine. I think it was because it was the first memories that I have of actually hearing music and falling in love with it and wanting to be a part of it in some way. Both my father and mother made their living as musicians in Columbus, Ohio, and that was a big part of my early life growing up.

Some of my biggest commercial musical influences would be people like Merle Haggard, George Jones, of course, Johnny Cash. People that wrote and sang their own stuff, I really admired. I was an ’80s child, so I grew up . . .

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Gary, Jay, Joe Don
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592 PAGES OF TAX RETURNS
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27 FILING CABINETS
86 BOXES IN STORAGE
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‘I always had my sights set on Nashville, never anywhere like New York or L.A.’
—JOE DON ROONEY

When did you first realize that performing was what you wanted to do for a living?
LeVox: The first thing that I recorded was when I was 7 years old. My granddad and I would play on the weekend. We had a little old recorder, and we’d just sit there and play music. I knew I loved it. As I grew up, sports became a big part of my life, but I always sang. We had all the concert choirs in school, (and) I did all the musicals and all that stuff. Being from Columbus, Ohio, you didn’t have all the outlets like being in Music City on Broadway. I knew I wanted to [be a singer] in high school, but I just didn’t know where to start.

DeMarcus: I was at a Dolly Parton concert when I was about 9 years old. I saw her at the Ohio State Fair, and it was my first real concert that I’d been to. I saw that crowd and how they reacted and how great of a performer she was and the band. Just the energy of the whole thing collectively really captured me. I remember specifically that night telling my mom that that’s exactly what I want to do someday.

Rooney: By the time I was 15 or 16 years old, I’d get little gigs here and there. A light bulb went off, and it was like, “Damn, I could play guitar and make money from this. Wow, what a concept.” I started taking it serious around that time. That’s when I knew that was what I wanted to do. I always had my sights set on Nashville, never anywhere like New York or L.A. I always knew that Nashville was where I needed to be.

How did you get signed to Lyric Street Records?
LeVox: We were playing the Fiddle and Steel Guitar Bar [in Nashville] every Monday and Tuesday night, so we had kind of built a fan base already. We were starting to get a buzz around town, and so we had other [label] meetings set up. But Lyric Street was our first step. We really liked the whole Disney connection. After we left Lyric Street, we really didn’t think they liked us, so we thought, “Well, maybe we should take some of these other meetings.” We went home, and about an hour later they called back and said, “Hey, we love you guys.” That was in ’99.

Rooney: We [had] just cut a three-song demo, which really was a little LP because we completely mastered them everything, and they sounded great. They were ready to be sent out. We did that with [producers] Mark Bright and Marty Williams. Dann [Huff] at the time was producing SheDaisy on Lyric Street, and Mark Bright and Dann were also good friends. He played it for Dann, and Dann was like, “Hey, I’ll call Lyric Street right now,” so we never went anywhere else.

That just happened to be the first label we got a hold of, and they just jumped all over it. Hais off to Dann for licking it off for us, and now here we are working with him. It’s funny how things work out.

What were some of the band’s early goals?
LeVox: It was a miracle in the first place to get signed. We wanted a record deal real bad, and we were just going to keep doing it until somebody said stop. After we got signed, the thing was to get played on radio, to have a gold record and have platinum and to have a No. 1 song. All the basic things that any other artist would want, just to be successful at something you love to do.

DeMarcus: We were kind of young and naïve and didn’t realize how hard it really is to compete for a spot a radio. [Lyric Street] took us on a bus, and they schlepped us around all over the country for months. We would go singing in these conference rooms and doing these interviews with these program directors and music directors for radio stations and do our best to sell ourselves. Our main goal was to get our first
single played on the radio and, hopefully, it would start a groundswell of excitement.

What are your goals now as a band?
DeMarcus: Our goal now is to be better than we were yesterday. There’s a danger in becoming complacent and sort of settling with what you have. The thing that I try to preach all the time is, “Don’t ever think that you’ve arrived. You can do better than you were yesterday.” And I think that’s where we try to do with each record, each concert, each show that we put out on the road. Just try to be better than we were before.

You changed producers for the new album, from Mark Bright and Marty Williams, who produced your first three records, to Dann Huff. What is the story behind that?
Rooney: Sometimes in this business you can sit idle for too long, and we kind of felt like we were sitting idle. We were having success and were in a good place, but still felt like something needed to give or be inspired, really. It was nothing against them, it was just that we wanted to go in a different direction.
DeMarcus: Not to diminish the things those guys have done for us—they were very, very much a big part of where we are right now—but I felt like it was time to change, and I know the other guys did, too.

We’d known Dann for a long, long time and respected his work. Dann came from a very band-oriented point of view—being a musician himself and playing in several bands. He got what we were trying to communicate live. He’d come out and watch the shows.
LeVox: Looking at Dann’s record, we absolutely knew that he was the man for where we were trying to go. He pushed us into different areas that we hadn’t been pushed before. All producers have a standard thing: They get session players to come in, and they kind of do things the same way. But Dann said, “I think we should cut this record like a band.” We love that band aspect, so we went in and cut it like a band. Joe Don played guitar on everything. Jay played bass on every song on the album. It was a lot of fun. It was a nice change.

Have the types of songs you have recorded changed as you have gotten older and matured?
DeMarcus: As time has gone on, we’ve definitely cut different types of things. When your youth starts to fade, different things are important to you than they were even six years ago.
LeVox: But the foundation for it is still the same no matter if we wrote it or whoever wrote it. At the end of the day, it all starts from a great song. We spend all of our time trying to write those songs and trying to find those songs. Once you get to a certain point in your career, all the songs that are getting pitched to you are good, so it’s just finding the great gems.
Rooney: Yes, we’ve probably gotten a little older now and grown a little more as artists and probably are gravitating towards songs that speak more to our age maybe. All I know is when we listen to a song, we know if we love it or not usually by the end of the first chorus. [If] it’s got us hooked and we have that little thing we call the “goose bump factor”... that’s usually a song we’ll take in and try to cut and see what we can do with it.
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Jon Small
PICTURE VISION PICTURES

from >>p45

As writers, band members have contributed songs to each of your previous albums. Did you end up with something on the new album?

LeVox: Yes, absolutely. There’s one on this album that the three of us wrote together, and Jay has one on here that he co-wrote and Joe Don has one that he co-wrote. You start getting into trouble as an artist when you say, “We’re only going to record things that we’ve written,” especially if you live in a town where some of the greatest songwriters in the world live. Our egos aren’t the ones speaking, it’s our hearts. We just want to have longevity in what we’re doing, [so when songwriters] Jeffrey Steele and Neil Thrasher and Wendell Mobley and Danny O’Conor and [our] kind of cars pitch you a song, you listen to them.

Is there a story behind “Pieces,” the song you three wrote together?

DeMarcus: We brought a writer out named Monte Powell, and he spent the weekend with us. We churned out about five songs that weekend, and that was one of the first ones we wrote together. I think Joe Don had the title “Rest in Pieces,” and I started playing this groove on a chorus and we had the first couple of lines. Then we came back to the bus after the show and finished the song in about 40 minutes.

What is next for you? Are there solo projects in the future? Do you want to produce other acts?

LeVox: Rascal Flatts is always first and foremost. Joe Don, on the side, is working with a band in L.A., and Jay just produced Chicago’s latest record. Producing is a real big thing for Joe. His creativity as an artist really fuels his fire, producing. As long as none of that stuff gets in the way of Rascal Flatts, it’s all good. That really pushes Jay, which carries over and brings new light into our projects and what we do.

We’re excited for Jay. He’s a really, really good producer and has a great ear. Of course, we co-produced [our] last three albums. That’s a really cool thing and a nice asset to have, but Rascal Flatts will, hopefully, be around for a long time. As long as the fans want us, we’ll be here.

DeMarcus: My main focus has been and always will be Rascal Flatts, and I wouldn’t do anything detrimental to what we’re trying to do. Our focus right now is this new record and trying to promote it as much as possible, and really honing in on this new show that we’ve got out this year, which is one of the things that I’m most proud of. It’s a great show and a great set, and I’m really excited about this year.

Over the next few months I’m going to be looking for something else to do now that the Chicago thing is behind me. I’m sort of getting the bug again to produce something else, and there are a few irons that I have in the fire.

Rooney: We want to be involved in every part of the industry. I would love to be able to one day in the future—hopefully short future—have our own publishing company. I don’t want to say “have our own label,” but if that would pop up, I don’t think we’d ever turn it down—but at one point, one day. We’re extremely excited about being on Lyric Street Records right now. [We could] maybe have that on the side and bring new artists in that [we believe in. I would love to do that, to give people a chance to make it in this business like people gave us a chance. Not only that, I would love to work with artists and produce them. I’m producing some things on the side right now, just little things, but not with anyone with a record deal yet.

To help launch this new record you visited radio stations, and you continue to do what you can with radio as far as phoners, station visits, etc., are concerned. Why is that important to you?

DeMarcus: They are our biggest allies. It just makes sense, because they are our voice and they got us to where we are. Along with the fans, they allow us to do what we do every day for a living. I don’t feel like [we] could ever forget that. I don’t think [we] could ever stop remembering the one that brought [us] to the dance.

What has been the band’s biggest success to date? Is there an award that stands out, a No. 1 record, a show?

Rooney: I think it just happened, that Grammy.

‘Radio got us to where we are, along with the fans. I don’t think we could ever stop remembering the one that brought us to the dance.’

—JAY DeMARCUS

Of course, it goes to the songwriters for “Bless the Broken Road” [but] proves what Rascal Flatts can do. I think it shows what true artists we are. For the industry or for maybe the naysayers out there that don’t really believe that just less them know that we are here and we are for real. We can make music that anybody can be proud of and that anybody can like. It kind of puts a more serious label on us, and I like that. That Grammy is a step in the right direction for us and a big moment for us.

LeVox: It is the culmination of everything at this point. A No. 1 record is amazing, but it is the total of all the great things that have happened. Perhaps it’s the freedom to make the kind of music we want to.

Do you feel like you get the industry recognition you deserve?

Rooney: Not necessarily. It’s that old cliché of the boy-band thing we fought so long. Luckily we’ve been able to sustain our career and have been successful with each project, and we finally got to the place where the Grammy nods are happening. That’s the ultimate as an artist. [For] some artists it happens with their first album, and some artists I guess it takes a lot longer if it even happens. The industry now is looking at us a little more seriously. I think they can’t help but do that. We’ve had a little longevity now, and I think our success climb has been like a stair step, it’s been rising. They are seeing that, and I’m proud that they are seeing that. I think there’s a lot on the horizon for Rascal Flatts.
Producer Aims to Bring Live Energy to Rascal Flatts' New Album

By Phyllis Stark

Before he took on the task of co-producing Rascal Flatts' latest album, Dann Huff spent some time on tour with the country supergroup.

What he saw— and wanted to fix with this project— was a gap between the energy of the band's live shows and the slick sound on the group's many radio hits.

On "Me and My Gang," released April 4 on Lyric Street Records, Huff helped the band record the best album of its career.

The 13-song set is the group's most diverse collection to date, ranging from the poignant "Ellsworth" to the spiritual "He Ain't the Leavin' Kind" with a reggae-flavored song thrown in as a pleasant surprise ("Yes I Do").

Huff has been a longtime fan of the band, and even made a phone call that helped it land its deal on Lyric Street Records in 1999. And he respects the work the group's previous producers, Mark Bright and Marty Williams, did on the act's first three albums.

Huff describes taking over as co-producer (the group members share production credits with him) as "bittersweet" because Bright and Williams are his friends. "There was some loss with my gain," he says. "But musically, I was elated."

While Huff knows Rascal Flatts is likely to receive critical acclaim and industry awards for this album, he modestly says the momentum the band already had was pushing it in that direction anyway.

"I'm not the savior of anything," Huff says. "I have absolute respect for their past recordings. I'll probably receive a little too much credit for things that happen."

After watching the band's live performances, Huff decided on an approach to the project. "Obviously, they have no problem getting hits, so that wasn't necessarily a thing I needed" to help them with, Huff says. But he saw "a little disconnect between the raw power of the live concerts and the sound sometimes on radio. I was hoping to bring in what I felt in some of those arena performances."

What he was going for in the studio, Huff says, was "a bit more of what they are as a band. Their presentation live is so powerful, so [my job was] just trying to straddle that fence and still make songs that have the same commercial viability... and tighten the gap between that and their powerhouse performances live."

In concert, he says, "they really go at it hard, with Rascal, the intensity is the thing."

One of the new album's biggest strengths is the quality of the songs. Huff credits the group for its savvy in the song-picking process.

"The guys very intelligently reduce their listening to the way we all really listen to music, as fans, not as the industry," Huff says.

While it was not a top-of-mind goal, Huff was aware going into this project that the music industry's perception of Rascal Flatts has never quite equaled its impressive sales and hit-making track records.

Part of the reason, he says, is the band's pop sound. "The industry never tends to favor pop-esque things," he says. But he sees Music Row coming around to give the band the kudos it has earned.

"It's a matter of being in the game for a long enough time," Huff says. "Ultimately, critics are silenced by consistency over a period of time."

"The main thing about them is they are continuing a growth spurt," Huff adds. "They are growing as musicians and as artists. They always want to be better, and that is as big a statement as you can make about someone."
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The ‘Gang’ Becomes A Bonafide Headliner on Latest Tour

n the road, Rascal Flatts is anything but flat.

The country trio has taken headliner status on and off since 2002, but it saw its ticket-selling clout dramatically rise last year. The band cracked Billboard’s year-end roundup of the top 25 tours for the first time in 2005, grossing $26.3 million and drawing 777,384 people, according to Billboard Boxscore.

Those numbers were strong enough to name the group breakthrough act at the 2005 Billboard Touring Awards, besting runner-up Coldplay.

The members of Rascal Flatts—Gary LeVox, Jay DeMarcus and Joe Don Rooney—released their first album in June 2000 and took key opening tour slots before headlining a CMT tour in fall 2002.

“We sold that tour out, and that opened up opportunities to go to the next level,” says Rob Beckham, agent for Rascal Flatts at the William Morris Agency.

Although the band proved it was capable of topping marques, the trio continued to open for bigger country acts, notably Brooks & Dunn in 2002, Toby Keith in 2003 and Kenny Chesney in 2004.

The Chesney tour, which also featured Uncle Kracker on the bill, was named top package at the Billboard Touring Awards in 2004.

Those supporting roles helped the band build its chops. “It got us in front of a lot of people early, early on in our career, and I think we were very, very fortunate to get those slots,” DeMarcus says.

Again, when you are competing with so many other acts that are at the same level as you are, trying to get into those slots, we were very blessed to have gotten them, and I think we could never put a price tag on how valuable those slots were to us, given the magnitude of the crowds that Toby and Kenny draw.”

Now Rascal Flatts has become a sizable draw on its own.

“We’ve still got a long way to go, that’s the exciting part,” says Flatts promoter Brian O’Connell, president of Live Nation’s country music division. “We’re not close to being done.”

The band is set to prove once again on its current Me and My Gang tour, which launched Jan. 27 at the Mohegan Sun in Uncasville, Conn. Live Nation is promoting the tour nationally.

Blake Shelton is the supporting artist on the first leg of the tour, with Jason Aldean and Keith Anderson alternating on the opening slot.

Gary Allan will support on the summer leg, with an opening act to be announced. Rascal Flatts will play about 80 dates this year.

The band has invested heavily in its production to make the 2006 tour a bigger and better show. “The Feels Like” Tour was a big show, but they were never afraid to take a step and be bigger,” Beckham says.

“This year’s show is a much larger, more fan-interactive show,” he continues. “I would equate it as being along the same lines as if you went to see the Rolling Stones or U2, it’s that big a show. U2 and Rascal Flatts are the only two bands that have this certain video technology that’s out there right now. It’s mesmerizing.”

An aggressive projection for Rascal Flatts in 2006 calls for the band to hit 1 million tickets sold and a $50 million gross. Much of the group’s ability to scale those heights will hinge on large amphitheater dates, beginning May 26 in Holmdel, N.J., on a tour that will run until the middle of September.

If the first leg of the tour is any indication, those lofty goals are within reach. Twenty-one of the 24 shows on that leg have been sellouts, moving somewhere around 200,000 tickets and grossing about $10 million, according to Beckham.

Rascal Flatts will have to hold its own in a particularly busy summer for country music touring, with such major stars as the Dixie Chicks and Tim McGraw / Faith Hill playing indoors and perennials like Keith, Chesney and Brooks...
& Dunn playing outdoors. Up-and-comers like Keith Urban, Brad Paisley and Gretchen Wilson will also be vying for country fans’ dollars.

"There is ample competition, but there's an opportunity for [Rascal Flatts] to really set their sights up this year," Beckham says. "And we're still looking to grow and build new fans. We're still breaking new markets."

O'Connell points out that the Rascal Flatts touring plan is part of a well-laid overall strategy. "This isn't a one-year plan," he says. "We've always looked at Rascal Flatts as a long term. The goal here is to make them a dominant touring act for as long as they want to do it."

From the first days of touring, Rascal Flatts has played a mixed bag of venues. "Just depends on the time of year," Rooney says. "We're really arena guys. There's something about the energy that's captured in an arena setting. To have 10,000 people out there going crazy, it's so loud. You have to crank your ear pack back up really loud."

LeVox likes performing indoors and out. "We'd play in someone's backyard if they'd have us," he says. "I think now that this has grown to the level that it has grown, the sound is always better indoors. Outside is kind of like a party, inside is a party, but a little more tame than some of those amphitheaters and fairs and things."

But DeMarcus is an outdoor guy. "There are different things about sheds that you just don't get indoors," he says. "There's an energy outside that you can't capture indoors, and I think it's because of the people on the lawn, the party atmosphere, summertime. It's just a feeling that's unparalleled to anything else. So, I think if I had my choice, I'd play outdoors amphitheaters all the time."

Rascal Flatts manages to keep the large fairs on its route as well. "Because of their fan base, they love the idea of playing some of these big fairs that can handle a show of this size, like the Minnesota State Fair, the Indiana State Fair and the Ohio State Fair," Beckham says.

"The guys in the band agree that fan feedback makes for a more intense show. "The energy is what carries you through the show," Rooney says. "The crowd is really what runs the show. The fans, I don't know if they realize that or not, but that's how we perceive it, so the more they give us, the more we can give them."

O'Connell is seeing a higher energy level than ever on the 2006 shows. "The difference this year, in my opinion, is how exhausted the guys are after the show, he observes. "They come off the stage, and they're just spent."

No city gets shortchanged. O'Connell stresses, "This show is just so big and so elaborate, and they try as hard as they can to make it special each night, incorporating some localization in there beyond just yelling out the name of the city," he says. "They talk during the day about different things that are germane to that town and work it into the show. It's not just, 'Hello, Cleveland.' "

Live performance ranks very high among Rascal Flatts' priorities. "I think that's one of the biggest parts that makes Rascal Flatts," LeVox says. "It's so important to us. It's just all about (us trying) to put on a show that we'd want to go see. The best thing for us is to perform, and there's no better promotion than word-of-mouth. It's just all about having fun."

Asked what is the key to Rascal Flatts' touring success, O'Connell says, "Attention to the fans, first and foremost. From their first days, they started paying attention to the fans, listening to the fans, talking to the fans through their street teams and fan club. They haven't wavered from that. The guys sit and talk about it, which is something that's fun to be privy to, to see how they sit there and are brought up to speed with what issues the fans may or may not have."

Beckham adds, "There's nobody that works harder out there. They take it all very personally, and they're really enjoying what they're doing."

A strategy of opening for key acts has paid off for RASCAL FLATTS at the box office.

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Bad Day? No Way As Charts Take A Powter

Daniel Powter is having anything but a bad day. A few hours ago, he learned that his debut single, "Bad Day," reached the summit of The Billboard Hot 100 and Pop 100—as well as the Adult Top 40 tally. Its accompanying Marc Webb-lensed video (featuring Samaire Armstrong of "The OC"), meanwhile, was recently put into heavy rotation on VH1.

And in what has perhaps become the highest-profile promo spot a song could ask for, Powter’s tune has become one of several de facto theme songs for contestant booting on Fox’s smash TV show, "American Idol."

Indeed, on the eve of his self-titled album’s U.S. release, due April 11 from Warner Bros., Powter is having a good day.

While Powter acknowledges that topping the Hot 100 is an ego boost, it is more importantly, "a validation for all of us who write our own music."

Pausing for a few seconds, he adds, "There’s just something very special about making it in America."

The Canadian singer/songwriter (he is not French-Canadian, as has been widely reported) can’t help but stress that "American Idol" is only one piece of the puzzle—albeit an important piece.

 Warner Bros. Records chairman/CEO Tom Whalley, who signed Powter in 2001, agrees. "In today’s world, it’s about impressions," Whalley says. "Radio is an important part of the puzzle and research plays into that. But you need stuff happening around that."

 Warner Bros. VP of marketing Eric Fritschi adds that the label began building a "big base" for Powter via radio, online initiatives (the video is nearing 3 million streams on Yahoo) and sync licenses (Showtime and AMC spots). Last year, "American Idol" helped "pop the song into the mainstream," he says.

The song was first heard on the Feb. 7 episode of "American Idol." For the week ending Feb. 26, "Bad Day" registered 27,000 digital downloads, according to Nielsen SoundScan. This number jumped to 113,000 for the week ending March 26.

continued on >>p52
2005. He says that was the first, real indication that something was brewing in America with Powter.

From day one, Tom [Whalley] gave us his unconditional support on Daniel,” Margo says. “We ran with the artist internationally without a release schedule.”

“Bad Day” was the No. 1 radio airplay song of 2005 in Europe. It repeated this feat in several countries throughout Europe, including France, where it all began for Powter. Coca-Cola in France needed a song to accompany its 2004 holiday TV campaign. Enter “Bad Day.” The commercial was picked up in Canada, has sold 467,000 digital downloads, and the single, sales picked up in March. This is poised to continue, with Powter confirmed to perform April 6 on MTV’s “TRL.”

Those in the weeks following the album’s physical release, Powter will perform on Today, Late Night With Conan O’Brien, Live With Regis and Kelly and The Tonight Show With Jay Leno.

Surrounding this activity are 15- and 30-second TV spots promoting “Daniel Powter.” Rick Krim, executive VP of music and talent programming at VH1, likens Powter’s success to that of James Blunt. “In both cases, you have a song with universal appeal that connected on all levels,” he says. “Now, we’re trying to connect the dots between Powter and his music so that we break an artist—and not just one song.”

Those who have been following Powter’s career know that his U.S. chart success is a repeat of what has happened elsewhere. Powter first broke overseas, where he has sold more than 1 million albums, according to Warner Bros. senior VP of international Steve Margo.

Internationally, Powter is on his fourth single, “Lie To Me.” (Yahoo will premiere the video April 12.) All four of Powter’s videos have been championed by Yahoo!-Fritsch notes that, at Yahoo, the “Bad Day” video received 1 million streams by August.

LONDON—British alternative act Placebo’s fifth studio album, “Meds,” has already topped Billboard’s European charts. Now the band is keen to make it in America where it has never sold more than 100,000 copies of an album. Released April 4 in the United States on EMI’s Astralwerks imprint, “Meds” displays a more straightforward rock sound than the act’s last release, 2003’s “Sleeping With Ghosts,” which indulged in heavy electronic experimentation.

“We had become conscious for some time that the unfashionable racket we made in 1996 was gradually becoming part of the language of alternative rock, which pushed us to walk against the wave and embrace electronics,” frontman Brian Molko says. “We simply couldn’t take this any further, so under the expert direction of our producer Dimitri Tikovoi, we decided to make an album that was as analog as possible.”

“Meds” is “a return to the guitar-driven sound of our first album,” Molko says, “but with the added value of 10 years’ experience in the studio. “Meds” is the sound of three guys in a room hitting things hard and falling in love with loud, distorted guitars again.”

Molko, bassist/keyboardist Stefan Olsdal and drummer Steve Hewitt wrote the album’s 13 songs in the south of France during the summer of 2004 and recorded it over four months in 2005. It was mixed by Flood of U2 and Smashing Pumpkins’ fame.

“Meds” also features a collaboration with R.E.M.‘s Michael Stipe on the track “Broken Promise”; Alison (aka VV) from the Kills sings with Molko on the title track.

Alex Weston, Placebo’s manager for the past 10 years and co-director of London-based Riverman Management, says a lot of emphasis was put into trying “to make the band a little more accessible to the fans than we have in the past.”

In Europe, the effort paid off as “Meds” came in at No. 1 on Billboard’s European Top 100 Albums chart March 22, and stayed on top the following week. In the United Kingdom, the first single, “Because I Want You,” reached No. 13 on the Official U.K. Charts Co’s singles chart. In the rest of Europe, “Song to Say Goodbye” was serviced to radio stations.

The first single in the States is “Infra Red.”

Pete Selby, senior music buyer at 36-store books and entertainment chain Borders U.K., says the band “is now a massive turn in Continental Europe.” He notes that Placebo managed to shift 29,000 units in the United Kingdom in its first week, which is almost identical to the opening tally on “Sleeping With Ghosts,” suggesting the band has “a very healthy and dedicated” U.K. fan base.

“Sleeping With Ghosts”
shipped more than 1.4 million units worldwide, according to EMI. Overall, Placebo has sold more than 6 million albums during its 10-year career.

EMI Music’s London-based senior VP of global marketing Matthieu Lauriot-Prevost says the band and the label initially concentrated on its key territories—the United Kingdom, continental Europe, Australia and Japan. Mexico and Brazil have also received a fair share of the band’s attention.

France has a particular affinity for the band. “The Bitter End” achieved crossover success. Capitol managing director Benjamin Chulvan says Placebo has toured “a lot” in France, “but the band really exploded the day Brian started speaking French on TV and radio, and then when Placebo recorded the song “Protege Moi” [in French in 2004].” Placebo sold 200,000-300,000 copies per album before that song, but it boosted sales to 800,000 units after. “Meds” debuted atop the French SNNEP/IFOP/Tite Live sales charts at No. 1, selling 52,000 units.

A world tour started in February at the Bangkok 100 Rock Festival in Thailand and will include performances throughout the summer at some of Europe’s largest festivals.

In the United States, Astralwerks is committed to a long-term campaign for the record. The New York-based label’s general manager Errol Kолосine says the initial task will be to play to the band’s fanbase. “They have an extremely passionate fan base in this country,” he says. “We’ll reach for the fans first, and because we have a terrific record, it has the potential to go as far as reaching the rock audience.”

Kолосine says he’ll service all relevant radio formats with an emphasis on alternative and rock stations. Breaking the American market is a band goal, Weston says. She concedes that radio and TV outlets for rock bands like Placebo are increasingly difficult to find, but adds that a strong digital campaign planned for the album should help reach out to the fans.

“We don’t have to rely on success in the U.S. [as] we have a successful career in pretty much the rest of the world,” she says. “That said, if things start moving in America, we will be right there to follow it up.”

Additional reporting by Aymeric Pichevin in Paris.
**6 QUESTIONS with EDDIE FERNÁNDEZ**

by LEILA COBO

Last month, at the El Premio ASCAP Latin Music Awards, Sony ATV was named publisher of the year for the seventh consecutive occasion. On hand to pick up the trophy was Eddie Fernández, who for the past two years has been VP for the company’s Latin America and U.S. Latin operations. Fernández, who was previously VP of A&R for Universal Music Latin America, is also a professional musician, whose career as a pianist and arranger define his work as an executive. He answered six questions for Billboard.

**Q:** What has been your focus these past two years?  
**A:** We changed things around. We are more focused in synchonizations and are far more aggressive in the digital and mobile arenas. And we have taken a very creative approach, hiring people with strong A&R backgrounds. In Mexico, I changed the entire structure of the office and brought in Simón Medina as managing director. He is a very creative guy who used to work in peermusic and had signed [Mexican pop band] Elefanté. In Brazil, I brought in Alosio Reis, the former [managing director] of EMI. And in Argentina, I brought Jorge Naiman, who was instrumental in Warner/Chappell’s success in that country.

**Q:** What exactly are you doing with synchs?  
**A:** We’re increasing sales of the A&R arena, we’re looking at singer/songwriters where Sony ATV can produce their album and then license it to a label. We’re looking at very select, cost-effective projects, and we will do part of the marketing.

**Q:** What does this have to do with being a publishing company?  
**A:** We’re looking for other sources of income. Publishers have to diversify. The industry is in crisis, and if we wait for the 8 cents from the mechanicals—it’s not that it will disappear, but it is limited. We need to grow in as many areas as possible.

**Q:** What has been the major driver in getting the ASCAP award?  
**A:** Great writers, like Ricardo Arjona, Sin Bandera, Amaury Gutierrez, Mario Domm. We are perhaps one of the smallest companies, as far as majors are concerned, and that is why we try to be very aggressive in pitching songs. I try to directly contact the artist and give them conceptual ideas, as was the case with Manny Manuel (who recently recorded an album of bolero standards). I also try to get our composer/producers produce giga. Just last week we got our writer Gene Evaro a gig writing and producing for Ha’Ash. Andrés Castro will write and produce for Manny Manuel. Our platform can accommodate these composer/producers.

**Q:** How important is Latin America to your business?  
**A:** Extremely important. You have places like Mexico and Brazil, where, because of the sheer population, sales of local repertoire far outpace imported repertoire. That’s why it’s so important to sign local repertoire. We recently signed Leon Gieco in Argentina, for example. Roughly 50% of our income comes from the Latin region, meaning outside the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

**Q:** You recently signed Mafer, the publishing arm of Puerto Rican reggaetón powerhouse Pina Records. What is your opinion on reggaetón?  
**A:** I think reggaetón is a hype and it will turn into a music genre like salsa, bachata, merengue, etc. Hip-hop in the U.S., forró in Brazil and bachata in the Dominican Republic were born in the streets; that’s exactly what happened with reggaetón.

**Q:** We’re looking for other sources of income. Publishers have to diversify.’”  
—EDDIE FERNÁNDEZ

**Drive-By’s Unagenda**

After six albums full of Dixie-fried themes and musical mayhem, Alabama’s Drive-By Truckers entered the studio for their seventh release with a different agenda. DBT frontman Patterson Hood calls it the “un-agenda.”

“We wanted to make a record that was strictly song-oriented and wasn’t attached to a bigger narrative,” Hood says. “We almost had more of a list of what we didn’t want than what we did want.”

“A Blessing and a Curse,” produced by David Barbe and primarily recorded at the Fidelitorium in Kennesaw, Ga., streets April 15 on New West Records.

Known for its triple-guitar/triple-songwriter attack in Hood, Mike Cooley and Jason Isbell (bassist Shonna Tucker and drummer Brad Morgan round out the lineup), DBT wanted to be as "current" as possible this time.

As such, the band set aside a "pretty big backlog" of songs and went with all new material. "Most of it was written either while we were in the studio or in the weeks leading up to it opposed to years leading up to it," Hood explains.

For the most part, the songs are more economic than those on previous DBT records, with the majority clocking in the three- to four-minute range. "We’re all big Big Star fans and fans of pop and power pop, and we wanted to experiment with those influences a little more than we have in the past," Hood says.

A year spent listening to the Faces boxed set influenced such songs as the fatalistic “Aftermath USA.” "I felt oddly in love with the Faces boxed set and kept it in heavy, heavy rotation," he says.

Recorded in about two weeks, “Blessing” is a tightly crafted, less raw work that mostly abandons the Southern themes that dominated early material.

“I write a lot of songs [about the South] and will continue to, but we wanted to do a record that wasn’t so specific in the geography," Hood says. “We’re from the South, but that’s not all we can do.”

What “Blessing” does have in common with previous albums is a running theme of loss and coming to terms with it on songs like the tragic death of a child in “Little Bonnie,” a lost mate in the sparse “Space City” or an ex-friend in the bluesy “Goodbye.”

The biggest thing this has in common with almost all of our records is the dualities are still there," Hood says. “We kinda stripped down the other things we were writing about, and that’s what was left. A lot of good things have happened to us in the last couple of years both as a band and in our personal lives. But something as wonderful as having children also brings along these new fears and terrors and responsibilities."  

Hood calls “Aftermath USA” a “sort of thinly veiled political song about our collective national hangover. I think we’re all starting to wake up to. Some of us didn’t buy into all that shit in the first place, but we’re all having to experience together the downside of these years and years of neglect from the federal government. I kind of likened that to our crany [crystal meth] problem, and the irony is of being the biggest epidemic in the more Red- State-type places didn’t escape me.”

Drive-By Truckers are booked by Frank Riley at High Road Touring and managed by Mike Luba at Madison House. A fierce live band that is drawing increasing numbers on the road, DBT will predictably tour hard to support “Blessing.” And Hood also hopes to get a little help from airplay, something that has largely eluded the band in the past.

New West president Cameron Strang says the label has already gone to college radio with the record to strong reception. “We’re going to AAA with ‘Don’t Be So Easy on Yourself’, and we’re also going to alternative and rock radio with ‘Aftermath USA’, Strang says. “We’re going after a bunch of different formats.”

Manager Luba agrees these songs are more suitable for radio than previous DBT cuts. But he adds that the game plan for promoting the record by necessity transcends radio.

“We work really hard to spread the word on the Web, and we hope that radio gets onboard for this record, but the best thing the band has going for it, is themselves and the shows that they play,” Luba says. “The word-of-mouth on the band is phenomenal. If you see the band live or get a chance to hear them on record then you become a fan. That’s how we do it.”

So far retail seems to be responding. “We’re going to slip about 60,000 units, which is great, probably more than twice whatever’s been done with them,” Strang says. “Everybody’s been really supportive to be able to ship those kind of numbers right out of the gate.”
Tri-City Goes Out With Double Bang
Carolina Gospel Group To Release Two ‘Finales’

With the April 4 release of “Donald Lawrence Presents Tri-City Singers Finale,” a creative chapter in gospel music history comes to a close. This project marks the ‘Tri-City Singers’ finale as the 35-voice group disbands.

Recorded live during two shows last November at the Tabernacle in Atlanta, “Finale” consists of two double-disc sets, “Finale: Act I” and “Finale: Act II,” that are sold separately, but can be folded together into an innovative package. EMI Gospel is also releasing the event on DVD as well as issuing “Finale: Limited Collector’s Edition,” a set that includes all four CDs plus a DVD, bonus tracks and 12-page booklet. The packaging looks impressive, and the content celebrates the artistry behind one of the gospel community’s most innovative choirs. Formed in 1981, the Tri-City Singers are so named because the members hail from the Carolina cities Charlotte and Gastonia (North) and Spartanburg (South).

Donald Lawrence took over the choir in 1991 after spending nearly a decade touring with and producing albums for Stephanie Mills. Lawrence brought a contemporary sensibility and fashion-forward flair to the choir’s music and stage presentation. He was the mastermind behind five highly successful albums, including “A Songwriter’s Point of View,” “Bible Stories” and “Go Get Your Life Back.”

“It’s time for us to transition,” Lawrence says of the group’s swan song. “There are a lot of acts inside the group that are getting ready to do things in the industry. Sometimes when you have something that is a comfort zone, the longer you hang onto it, you don’t move into the next phase.”

Lawrence, the most awarded artist at January’s Stellar Awards with six trophies, will continue to record for his own Quiet Water Entertainment, an imprint in partnership with Jive/Zomba. From the Tri-City ranks, he’s signed the Murritts to his label as well as Dewayne Woods. Both will release product this year. Other Tri-City standouts, including LeJuene Thompson and Erica McCullough, are also pursuing solo opportunities with McCullough setting her sights on Broadway.

“This hasn’t been a choir that’s had a big turnover, so it was either all of us or none of us,” Lawrence says of the group’s ending. “As I saw people ready to move on, rather than replacing them, I wanted us all to come together [to record the finale] then all retire and transition to the next phase. I would rather do it while we’re on top than when we’re declining. We want to do it with class.”

“Finale” is a mix of such Tri-City classics as “God’s Favor,” “When the Saints Go to Worship” and “I Walk With the King” along with new songs such as “Giants,” “You Are an Heir” and “The Blessings of Abraham.” The last of which is already a gospel radio hit; it is No. 5 on Billboard’s Hot Gospel Songs chart. “Finale” also includes guest appearances by Walter Hawkins, Vanessa Bell Armstrong and Karen Clark Sheard, among others.

Lawrence and the choir will promote the album with appearances in Chicago; Nashville; Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles; Baltimore; Greensboro, N.C.; and Gastonia.

“We have such a strong catalog that it was hard to pick songs,” Lawrence says of calling the choir’s catalog for “Finale,” but he’s pleased with the results. “It’s a collector’s item we can hold the rest of our lives. We can say: ‘This is who we were. This is what we did. This is what we accomplished.’”

ASCAP HONORS: One of Gospel Music Week’s highlights is always the ASCAP Christian Awards banquet, recognizing the organization’s top writers and publishers in contemporary Christian music. This year Jeremy Camp took home songwriter and song of the year honors at the April 3 event in Nashville.

Camp’s “Take You Back” was named song of the year, and he was also recognized for penning “This Man.”

EMI CMG Publishing was named publisher of the year. The company was recognized for numerous songs, including Nichole Nordeman’s “Brave” and Switchfoot’s “Meant to Live” and “Stars.”

Switchfoot frontman Jon Foreman received the Impact Award, which celebrates “the success and influence of his songs in mainstream rock music,” according to ASCAP.

The Crescendo Award recognized the late Keith Green, the pioneering singer/songwriter who lost his life in a plane crash. In honoring Green, ASCAP commended his “musical legacy [that] lives on and continues to inspire Christian artists and songwriters.”

Latin Notas
Leila Cobo I cobo@billboard.com

Selling ‘Rebelde’ American Style
Brands Planet To Market RBD’s Mexican TV Soap Opera In United States, Puerto Rico

Brands Planet Television and Film has signed a licensing agreement with the Televisa network to develop licensing and promotional opportunities in the United States and Puerto Rico for Televisa soap “Rebelde.”

Among other things, Brands Planet will market T-shirts, perfumes, calendars, notebooks, cellular accessories, toys and beauty products. Although the deal doesn’t encompass musical group RBD, the star of “Rebelde,” it indirectly benefits from it. For example, the “Rebelde” T-shirts, which will be sold in major retailers starting in May, will bear approved photos that include group members. The exclusive deal runs through mid-2007.

Although the TV show will finish airing in the United States in October, conversations are under way for a “Rebelde” movie.

Brands Planet, a licensing and promotional company specializing in film and TV properties, is owned by Andy Thomas and Marcia Olival, an independent sales contractor who represents Billboard, among other clients.

CONFERENCE TWIST: One constant in the history of the Billboard Latin Music Conference has been identifying new talents. Through the years, countless acts have made their industry debut at our conference showcases, including Jon Secada, Shakira, Marc Anthony, Elvis Crespo and Bacilos.

This year, we continue this tradition, with a twist.

The “We Hear the Future—Escuchamos El Futuro” showcase, sponsored by Heineken, will also serve as a competition for new signed and unsigned artists. Acts will get the opportunity to perform for a marquee panel of judges, with the winner to be profiled in Billboard magazine and on the “Billboard Latino” TV show, among other perks.

Why a competition and not merely a showcase? Because we want people to really “listen.” And we want our judges—all industry opinion makers—to make a difference.

Those interested in “We Hear the Future” can go to billboardevents.com for more information.

And, while on the subject of new talent, the Billboard Latin Music Conference has added a new panel to its lineup, “TV Stars” will officially open the conference at 10 a.m. April 25.

The panel will discuss the role of TV in identifying and developing new talent. Already confirmed is Arturo Velasco, head of Televisa Música, and Jack Alfandary of FremanMe-

dian, the company behind “Latin American Idol.”

Meanwhile, “We Hear the Future” celebrity judge Ricardo Montaner is fully utilizing the music/TV synergies available to him as an EMI/Televisa artist.

Montaner wrote the title song for the Televisa soap opera “Herida de Amor,” which began airing April 3 in Mexico. The song will be added as a bonus track on Montaner’s current album, “Todo y Nada,” which will be released in May.

“I’ve had some 22 songs in soap operas, so they’ve always been part of my career,” Montaner says. While album sales generally benefit from this kind of exposure, interest right now is even higher, he says, “because I have a contract that allows me to have television exposure I didn’t have before. That directly benefits sales.”

NOTEWORTHY: Spanish composer Rafael Perez Botija (who penned the classic “La Cafa Bajo La Llueva”), on the late Rocio Durcal: “She died young, but she would have died young had she lived to be 100. She flooded with freshness any stage and any song, even the most dramatic. She took the hardest jump: Going from being an icon of traditional Spanish song to an icon of traditional Mexican song. She had the deference to sing my songs, and the unconscious generosity of inspiring them.”

www.americanradiohistory.com
Downtown Goes Global
Record Label Inks Download Streaming Deals To Distribute Hot Acts Worldwide

Josh Deutsch’s Downtown Records couldn’t hope for a stronger launching pad than Gnarls Barkley’s debut, ‘‘Crazy.” The collaboration between Danger Mouse and Cee-lo is already causing an international ruckus, especially after first single “Crazy,” hit No. 1 on the U.K. singles chart based on download sales alone.

The pair’s album, “St. Elsewhere,” comes out May 9 in the United States as the first release in an upcoming deal between Downtown and Atlantic. Downtown inked the group for North America; the duo is signed to Warner Bros. elsewhere. “St. Elsewhere” will be distributed to North America and then helped negotiate a home for the rest of the world. There was already tremendous interest in the album, which jumped at it straight away,” says Deutsch, an A&R veteran who, through his various label stints, signed and worked with such acts as Jet, Jason Mraz, A Perfect Circle, Lenny Kravitz and Megadeth.

Deutsch owns Downtown with a group of private investors. Downtown has two deal structures: a number of releases such as April 11’s “Death by Sexy,” the new album from Eagles of Death Metal (which includes the Stone Age’s Josh Homme), and the upcoming album from U.K. rockers Art Brut, will go directly through a P&D deal with the Alternative Distribution Alliance, Warner Music/Atlantic. Others, such as Gnars Barkley and this summer’s “En- tourage” soundtrack, are part of a joint venture with Atlantic (Gnarls Barkley will go through ADA, not WEA).

Deutsch says he expects to release 10 albums this year, up to four of which will go through Atlantic. “We’re also signing some urban artists who likely will be upstreamed to the joint venture,” he says. “Our point of view is to have a broad mix of artists, we’re not genre-specific.”

New York-based Downtown has a staff of seven. In addition to the deal with Atlantic and ADA, Downtown has a partnership with Vice Records’ sales staff to push Downtown’s titles.

DON’T PANIC! If nothing else, Panick at the Disco has some of the best song titles in recent memory on its album “A Fever You Can’t Sweat Out”: “The Only Difference Between Martyrdom and Suicide Is Press Coverage,” “I Write Songs, Not Tragedies,” “Lying Is the Most Fun a Girl Can Have Without Taking Her Clothes Off” and my favorite, “I Constantly Thank God for Esteban.”

But the act has given us much more: an artist development story. In this age of Nielsen SoundScan, we’ve all grown used to an album, even from a new act, peaking its first week (think Ne-Yo). The band has sold 401,000 units since the album came out in September, according to Nielsen SoundScan, and continues to move up the Billboard 200, climbing to No. 24 this issue. The band is the first release on Decaydance, the imprint helmed by Fall Out Boy’s Pete Wentz that goes through Fueled by Ramen. Wentz signed the act after discovering the group online. “We signed them off of two songs,” FBR’s founder John Janick says. Although Lava Records’ promotion department is working “Suicide” to radio, and Atlantic is helping wherever FBR needs it, Janick is determined to keep it low key; the album will continue to be distributed through ADA.

“Lava is doing a great job, but we told them, ‘We don’t want you to go in and do what you do with some of your other records and beg them to play this track to their programmers.’”

HIP HOP MEETS THE SOUTHWEST

DEATH METAL MEETS THE SOUTHWEST

To expand their radio reach, Downtown’s VP of radio promotion Gator Michaels says, “If you think the South was the support base for country music, think again.

Most record promoters and label executives now rank the Southwest and the Southeast as the worst regions in the country when it comes to breaking a new act or getting airplay on a single. And the Northeast—long thought of as the region least attuned to country music—is, for many record promoters, now their second best area.

According to promoters, the SouthWest is the dead-last place they’re likely to break a new act or get airplay on a new single. And the Southeast, which includes such country-friendly states as Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi and the Carolinas, has become a difficult region for new music, according to label executives.

Meanwhile, the Western region has quietly ramped up, becoming the most fertile ground. The region that encompasses Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Arkansas has become the biggest trouble spot for labels.

“The Southwest, if you’re not George Strait, is absolutely the hardest place to start any record, whether it’s an established act or a new artist,” Warner Bros. Nashville senior VP of promotion Gator Michaels says.

When Bob Reeves recently joined Midas Records Nashville as national director of radio promotion, he redefined the traditional regions so that his Southwest rep could also work stations in Colorado and Kansas as well as the Southern states. Reeves, who didn’t go weeks without any airplay and get discouraged.

When Quarterback Records national promotion director Anne Weaver was a Southwest regional promoter in the early ’90s, “It was the region artists (and) songs broke from. Not anymore,” she says. “I think it’s because of consolidation and very conservative [radio] brand managers.”

Weaver is not alone in citing corporate consolidation as part of the Southwest’s problem. Off the record, many label reps specifically finger Clear Channel as the main culprit.

While different labels assign certain states and stations to their regional promotion staff in slightly different ways, generally speaking the Southwest comprises 18 Nielsen BDS-monitored county stations. Of those, Clear Channel owns eight.

One label promotion head says the conservative nature of Clear Channel stations in the Southwest “causes a huge void in that region.” Ten years ago, he says, “It was not uncommon to get half the region on a record in the first week.”

Curb/Asylum Records VP of promotion Adrian Michaels says he could get 60% of Southwest stations on a record in the first week 10 years ago. Now, he says, “you’re lucky to get two or three.”

Most of the good news seems to come from the West, which encompasses 11 states and 25 reporting stations. Lyric Street Records senior director of national promotion Renee Leymon says that region is just “a little more open to new music.”

The Beat

MELINDA NEWMAN mnewman@billboard.com

Country’s Regional Shift
The South Cools To Country—Is Clear Channel To Blame?

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LEFT IS ALL RIGHT
Socialist Principles Pay Off For Barcelona’s Ojos De Brujo

Barcelona-based eight-piece Ojos de Brujo’s mix of flamenco, hip-hop and “street rumba” has made the band a commercial success in Spain—a status achieved without its members having to compromise their socialist beliefs.

The act’s third album "Techiri" (Diqueloa) entered Spain’s Nielsen Media Control chart a week after its Feb. 20 release and shipments have already passed the 15,000 mark, manager Javi Zorro says.

Distributor PIAS issued “Techiri” across Europe March 20. Zorro says a Japanese release through Arora is imminent and talks are under way with labels in the United States and Latin America. —Howard LLevyn

FEELING BULLE-ISH: Female hip-hop vocalist Diam’s has been reaching beyond a rap audience with her third album “Dans ma Bulle” (Hostile/EMI). The self-penned set, released by BMG Music Publishing France, entered the IFOP/Tite Livechart at No. 1 one week after its Feb. 6 release. According to EMI, it shipped 50,000 copies in that first week. The album was released simultaneously in Belgium and Switzerland. EMI will issue it April 18 in Canada.

Hostile launched “Dans ma Bulle” through an online campaign with MSN France that the label says attracted 600,000 unique visitors to a temporary site. —Americk Pickens

TOOTS SUITE: Octogenarian jazz harmonica player Toots Thielemans joins a new generation of jazz-influenced performers in tribute to composer Harold Arlen on his latest album “One More for the Road” (Verve/Universal).

The album features Thielemans and guests—including Jamie Cullum, Madeleine Peyroux and Oleta Adams—interpreting such Arlen-composed standards as “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” “One for My Baby” and “It’s Only Paper Moon.” —Marc Marks
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— Jermaine Dupri, So So Def/Virgin

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Heavies New Again
Definitive British R&B Band Back With Singer N'Dea Davenport

There's more news to report from the British R&B/soul music front. Billboard has learned that soul/funk connoisseurs the Brand New Heavies are reuniting with lead singer N'Dea Davenport and former label Delicious Vinyl. "Get Used to It," due June 27, will be sold through Starbucks and traditional music retail outlets the same day. Delicious Vinyl has a production/distribution agreement with Universal Music & Video Distribution. The album—recorded in New York and London—is being mastered now. A lead single will drop the first week of May. Following the album's release, look for the Brand New Heavies to roll out a 25-city nationwide tour in July and August.

It has been 15 years since the band first invaded the United States with its energetic brand of live R&B/soul and funk. The self-titled debut album—powered by guitarist Simon Bartholomew, drummer/keyboardist Jan Kinkaid, bassist Andrew Love and Davenport—sparked a No. 5 R&B hit in 1991 with "Never Stop." Subsequent U.S.-issued singles "Stay This Way" (1991), "Dream On Dreamer" (1994) and "Sometimes" (1997) notched top 20 status.

So nearly 10 years later, can the group re-engage stateside attention?

Delicious Vinyl co-founder Michael Ross believes that is a moot point. "They have a definative sound, a creative dynamic that's timeless and universal," he says. "As far as their music hitting and connecting? No question."

As for his label's inaugural alliance with Starbucks, Ross says he approached the coffee chain when the group began working on the new album. "The retail world has changed so much more than anything else in the last 10 years," he says. "Starbucks presents an interesting alternative where there are open-minded people drinking coffee and chilling. I thought that would be cool for this project."

London school chums Bartholomew, Kinkaid and Levy founded the group in 1985. The trio parlayed its love of music by James Brown and the Meters into an instrumental unit that eventually fueled the city's acid jazz scene.

When the band signed with indie label Acid Jazz, Jay Ella Ruth was the featured vocalist. She was on the group's 1990 critically acclaimed self-titled debut, which netted a licensing deal with Delicious Vinyl.

For its U.S. introduction, Brand New Heavies rerecorded tracks from the debut album, this time with spicy Atlanta-to-Los Angeles import—and then-Delicious Vinyl solo artist—Davenport. Follow-up albums included the hip-hop-influenced "Heavy Rhytm Experience: Vol. 1" (1992) and "Brother Sister" (1994), Davenport's last recording with the group before pursuing a solo career. Siedah Garrett stepped in as vocalist for the 1997 album "Shelter."

British compilation "Trunk Funk: The Best of the Brand New Heavies" came out in 1999. An American version, "Trunk Funk Classics 1991-2000," was released the next year and sported a new track recorded with Davenport. In the interim, the band dabbled with other recording projects in Europe.

Delicious Vinyl's other acts include Mr. Vegas and former Pharcyde member Fatlip, who has a new album out and is touring with Blakaliacious.

FAST TAKE: Singer/songwriter AbenaA ("Tuesday's Child") is completing her sophomore Nkunim Entertainment release, titled "A." The set is pegged for July. Having wrapped an opening stint for the Fugees in Europe, AbenaA will get right back on the road April 15 when she joins Charlie Wilson on his national tour. Stops include Cleveland, Boston, New York and Los Angeles. ...
TOBY KEITH
White Trash With Money
Producer: Lari White
Show Dog Records
Release Date: April 11
When “White Trash With Money” is good, it’s very good. And when it’s not so good, it’s still OK. The exquisitely produced “It’s a Little Too Late” is among the best-selling tracks Keith has ever laid down, and the swampy “Can’t Buy You Money” those practically coze out of the speakers. Producer Lari White gets sound for days out of horns and guitars on “Grain of Salt,” and the remarked Keith charms brilliantly shines on the driving “I Ain’t Already There.” Elsewhere, “Crash Here Tonight” is a killer ballad, and “Heel No” is a hard-edged classic. On the other hand, the single “Get Drunk and Be Somebody” is a retread, if a good one, and “Ain’t No Right Way” is too preachy. Which leads to the twangy “Runnin’ Block.” It’s funny and well-played, but it’s also unnecessarily hurtful and wrongheaded. —RW

DANIEL POWTER
Daniel Powter
Producers: Mitchell From, Jeff Dawson, Warner Bros.
Release Date: April 11
Newcomer Daniel Powter dominated international charts in 2005 with this debut album and its lead single “Bad Day.” These days, he is on his way to repeating the process in the United States. In last week’s issue, “Bad Day” topped The Billboard Hot 100 and Pop 100 charts. With his self-titled full-length, Powter firmly establishes himself as a singer/songwriter who sits somewhere between James Blunt and early recordings by Elton John—albeit one who also knows the power of blue-eyed soul. While “Bad Day” has become an anthem for many, it is certainly not the only single here. The buoyant “Lie to Me” must be considered as a follow-up: it’s one of those first-listen songs that immediately grabs hold of the brain. The same is true of “Song 6” and “Free Loop,” too. —MP

LL COOL J
Todd Smith
Producers: various
Def Jam
Release Date: April 11
The first artist released on Def Jam, LL Cool J has minted his share of musical memories since 1985 and has become a hip-hop icon. On his 12th album, the artist hooks up with a diverse array of collaborators and such big-name producers as the Neptunes, Scott Storch, the Trackmasters and Jermaine Dupri. The better tracks, like “Favorite Flavor” featuring Mary J. Blige and “Freeze” featuring Lyfe, draw on LL’s penchant for melodic foundations. Also noteworthy are the Latin-infused “#1 Fan”—the only song here without a guest cameo—and bonus track “So Sick Remix” featuring labelmates Ne-Yo. Overall, though, the album doesn’t really push the creative envelope and relies too heavily on guests at the expense of the principal artist. It leaves you wondering what else LL might have up his musical sleeve without the added props. —GM

JAMES BLUNT
High (4:03)
Producer: Tom Rodrock
Writer: Blunt, Ross
Publisher: EMI Blackwood, BMG, Warner Bros./Chappell
Custard/Atlantic (album cut)
The No. 1 Billboard Hot 100 success of James Blunt’s “You’re Beautiful” restored much faith to those who feared that straying ahead pop melodies were a wistful memory on top 40 radio. Follow-up “High” is getting its trial run at triple-A radio. The ballad is similar in tempo and vocal intonation to his striking debut, though pleasingly seasoned with a more robust production imprint and resourceful instrumentation. Thankfully, it works perfectly as a forward step to cement platinum act’s career. Success is seldom guaranteed for even the most acclaimed new artist when it comes to act two, but Blunt has packed album “Back to Bedlam” with enough memorable songs to go the distance, from twinking star to lustrous consolation in the pop stratosphere. All systems go.—CT

ROCK
BUILT TO SPILL
You in Reverse
Producer: Built to Spill
Warner Bros.
Release Date: April 11
Built to Spill frontman Doug Martsch has a knack for anthemic melodies, epic song construction and the occasional godlike guitar solo. But he also seems more comfortable as a shy homebody. Built to Spill has probably disillusioned many fans with its glitchy release schedule (this is only its second studio album in seven years). Thankfully, “You in Reverse” is probably the best thing Built to Spill could have released in 2006, in that it can be seen as a return to form (epic songs, blistering guitar work) and a step in a new direction (rough-around-the-edges production, layered percussion). Creative efforts like “Goin’ Against Your Mind,” “Gone” and “The Wait” are particularly refreshing this late in the group’s career. Built to Spill still hasn’t taken over the world, but after hearing this album, most listeners will be happy that’s the case.—TC

LACUNA COIL
Karmacode
Producer: Waldemar Sorychta
Century Media
Release Date: April 4
The metal world has practically crowned Lacuna Coil the new ruler of the mainstream; the release of “Karmacode” will be the unofficial coronation. Here, the sweet tempos little with the sound that built its dynasty. Propulsive, immediately catchy guitar licks and percussion, simmers in keyboardist, electro accents, gothic atmospheres and vocalist Cristina Scabbia’s Josefina arias into the most effectively on “Fragile,” “Our Truth” and “What I See.” More variety is found in the Italian lyrics and concocting sample used in the mellower “Without Fear.” A cover of Depeche Mode’s “Enjoy the Silence” also smoothly translates into the band’s style. Century Media is making “Karmacode” a top priority, so don’t be surprised if Lacuna Coil becomes a crossover star by year’s end.—CLT

NEW ORLEANS SOCIAL CLUB
Sing Me Back Home
Producer: Leo Sacks, Ray Bardani
Rungaloo/Honey Darling
Release Date: April 4
Never say die is the watchword for this collaboration, which takes its cue from the Buena Vista Social Club. An invigorating meeting of the New Orleans diaspora instilling a passionate faith in cultural revival, “Sing Me Back Home” is a heartfelt celebration/reunion of the scintillating group of prize discs that feature artists recording independently, “Sing Me Back Home” is a superb collection of songs with guest sessions supported by a core band featuring, among others, Merle Haggard, George Porter Jr. and guitarist Leo Nocentelli. All the Big Easy bases are covered: deep soul, high-flying funk, rumba, roots rock, zydeco, gospel, reggae and old-school rhythm and blues. High points include Cyril Neville’s soulful “This Is My Country,” Ivan Neville’s groovy take on “Fortunate Son” and the Mighty Charroits of Fire’s hope-raying “99 1/2 Won’t Do.” —DO

JAZZ
CHARLES LLOYD
Sangram
Producers: Charles Lloyd, Dorothy Darr
ECM
Release Date: April 4
Recorded in 2004 live in Santa Barbara, Calif., “Sangram” is Lloyd’s mesmerizing homage to late drummer/collaborator Billy Higgins. Lloyd delivers rapturous journey music with his trio mates, tabla master Zakir Hussain and fine young drummer Eric Harland. Lloyd’s signature probing lyrism embellished by high-note flights of passion (the exhilarating title track and the jog-paced “Tender Warriors”) certainly serve as the CD’s calling card. But the engine propelling the set is the double percussion drives, which showcases the unexposed talents of Hussain. Harrison’s rhythmic table flutters and gallops; “Tales of Rumi” and the “Lady in the Harbor” have some Indian hue and weave. Noteworthy tracks include “Nataraj,” Lloyd’s relatively short piano muse, “Little Peace,” fueled by his jaunty melodic flute lines, and “Dancing on One Foot,” the slowly simmering album opener.—DO

CASSANDRA WILSON
Thunderbird
Producer: T Bone Burnett
Blue Note
Release Date: April 4
Wilson produced by T Bone Burnett seemed like a great idea, and as a whole, “Thunderbird” is at best inconsistent. The Wilson-penned opener “Go to Mexico” has a seductive club groove out of the Dust Brothers’ playbook, but other originals (“Poet,” “I could be a Tarot”) aren’t listless. Usually a savvy interpreter, Wilson’s choices here fall short, the nadir continuing on >p60
**REVIEWS**

**SINGLES**

LILA DOWNS
La Cantina—Entre Copa y Copa

Producers: Aniero Tanto, Paul Cohen, Lila Downs, Naranjo

Release Date: April 4

Downs continues her fascinating exploration of Mexican music with this virtuoso effort. Many of the tunes on “La Cantina” are from the canton ranchera tradition, romantic songs one might hear in a cantina. One of the disc’s most powerful rancheras, “Pa’ Todo el Año,” is a piece by famed songwriter José Alfredo Jiménez. Downs sings this tune with an operatic grandeur befitting the heartfelt lyrics. When this spellbinding musical excursion strays from rancheras, it does so to satisfying effect. Opener “Cumbia del Miedo” offers the recipe for the classic mojave salsa via a tune that’s as good as the food it describes. Also note the vivid corrida “La Teléfono,” a girl who runs away from her husband and becomes a table dancer.—PVV

BLUES

GUY DAVIS
Skunkmell

Producers: John Platania

Red House

Release Date: April 4

Davis has been turning out extraordinary records for Red House since 1995, but “Skunkmell” is one of his most compelling to date. The album is loaded with originals, some inspired by family members. “Hooking Bull at the Landing” is based on an expression Davis’s late father, Ossie, was fond of repeating. Davis also lays down three covers, including an excellent, extended rendition of the classic “Going Down Slow” and a choice acoustic version of the Tommy Emmanuel song “Junkyard.” Davis does a fine job of mixing elemental country blues like “Blackberry Ramble” with more contemporary arrangements like “It Takes Love to Make a Home.”—PVV

GOSPEL

DONALD LAWRENCE PRESENTS THE TRI-CITY SINGERS

Finales: Act I and Act II

Producer: Donald Lawrence

EMI Gospel

Release Date: April 4

Lawrence concludes his 15-year, hit-filled collaboration with the 35-voice Tri-City Singers with this live collection, reprinting a formidable portion of the group’s classic repertoire (“Seasongs,” “Never Seen the Righteous,” “I Am God,” “When Sunday Comes”), and offering an equal helping of strong, shining new material by “The Blessing of Abraham,” which is No. 5 on the Hot Gospel Songs chart. Having had a significant hand in molding modern choral gospel, while maintaining a connection to the music’s roots, the choir bids farewell with vibrancy and exuberance. Big-name, powerful guest appearances abound with Walter Hawkins, Daryl Coley, LaShun Pace, Vanessa Bell Armstrong, Karen Clark Sheard and Darwin Hobbs. Deep in strong singles candidates (“Giants,” “Encourage Yourself,” “You Are an Heir’s “Finales” only expands what will remain one of gospel’s enduring legacies.—GE

ANDREA BOCELLI
Because We Believe (4:37)

Producers: David Foster, Humberto Gatica, Tony Renis

Writer: not listed

Publisher: not listed

Sugar/Decca/Universal (album track)

Andrea Bocelli has endeared himself to those with a penchant for elegant pop classical, but “Because We Believe” seems ambitious for a classical airplay, particularly given its bilingual English/Italian delivery. Fans of new album “Amore”, which pipped onto The Billboard 200 at No. 3 in February—are sure to find the melodic dramatic cut inspiring, but the slim odds of this grandiose operatic production fitting sonically alongside Train, Rob Thomas and Natasha Bedingfield on AC radio prompt a questionable use of promotional pull. Pretty on its own terms, but a curious bid for the airwaves.—CT

ROCK

STAIND
Everything Changes (4:00)

Producer: David Botzell

Writer: A. Lewis

Publisher: not listed

Flip/Atlantic (CD promo)

Musically, it’s hard to find fault with Staind, one of the few bands that survived the nu metal era, thanks to its considerable performance and songwriting talents. And there’s really nothing wrong with wistful new single “Everything Changes,” from gold-certified “Chapter V.” The song has an unplugged feel, but its spare arrangement carries weight. Singer Aaron Lewis gives another moving lyrical delivery and aptly handles the acoustic guitar with a watering down of the rock’s bite, thanks to the considerable performance and songwriting talents. And there’s really nothing wrong with wistful new single “Everything Changes,” from gold-certified “Chapter V.”

**LEGEND & CREDITS**

**EDITED BY JONATHAN COHEN (ALBUMS) AND CHUCK TAYLOR (SINGLES)**

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Troy Carpenter, Gordon Eliy, Gail Mitchell, Dan Ouellette, Michelle Peonette, Sue Phillips, Deborah Evans Price, Wayne Price, Chuck Taylor, Christa L. Titus, Philip Van Vlack, Ray Waddell

**ADDITIIONAL REVIEWS:**
- Eagles of Death Metal
  - Death by Sexy
  -todework

- Rye Coalition
  -Cures
  -(Gen Bunion)

- Aloha
  -Some Echoes
  -(Ponytail)

- Blessing of Abraham
  - triumphant

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- Listeners are encouraged to visit the site www.americanradiohistory.com for additional reviews and a full discography of the music discussed in this issue.

**CRITICS’ CHOICE:**
- A new release, regardless of chart potential, highly recommended for musical merit.

- All albums commercially available in the United States are eligible. Selections are overwhelmingly from new reviews and covers to Chuck Taylor. (both at Billboard.com/Billboard.com): Anstein.

- Editor picked by Jonathan Cohen and single review copies to Chuck Taylor. (both at Billboard.com/Billboard.com).

- Independent music, professional music, potential, best of the week.

- The critical perspective that reflects the record of the new music.
**T.I., Rascal Flatts Heat Up Sales Climate**

T.I. powers the biggest sales frame of this still young 2006, with 522,000 in the album's first full week at retail—but the rapper won't hold that title for long. Open ng-day numbers reported by chains suggest the new album from country trio Rascal Flatts, profiled elsewhere in this issue (see story, page 31), will record an even louder start on next issue's Billboard 200.

Buena Vista Music Group thinks Flatts' "Me and My Gang" will start in the range of 750,000-780,000, although number crunchers in other corners think it could start at 800,000. Even if it falls shy of the modest projection, it seems certain that Rascal Flatts—like T.I. this week—will enjoy a career-best week.

The country act's best prior Nielsen SoundScan frame was 201,000 for third album "Feels Like Today," which bowed atop The Billboard 200 in the Oct. 16, 2004, issue. T.I.'s prior high was 193,000, when third charting album "Urban Legend" started at No. 7 on The Billboard 200.

With his new set and Rascal Flatts rolling big numbers in consecutive weeks, album numbers are starting to see a spring-like thaw. Thanks to T.I.'s start, the 2006 deficit from last year narrowed by half of 1%, from 3.8% a week ago to 3.1%. Competing with the stanza when 50 Cent's "The Massacre" clocked its sixth and final week at No. 1 on 165,000 copies, Rascal Flatts' big start should shave that gap even closer.

Still, the 3.3% lag is smaller than one might suspect given that T.I.'s arrival marks just the second time in 2006 when sales beat those of the same 2005 week. The very first week of 2006, which ended Jan. 8, was this year's only other winner. And, yes, year-to-date album numbers include the booming growth of digital albums, up by 144%.

**MORE WITH LESS:** Somewhere between the 1991 launch of Nielsen SoundScan and the mid-90s, sales executives determined that a record company needed to ship twice as many copies as a big album's first-week total. That was conventional wisdom until recently and remains relevant in some cases. Rascal Flatts' new record, for example, brought an initial shipment of 1.5 million and seems certain to sell half of that lot in week one.

That said, T.I.'s chart-topping "King"—his second No. 1 on Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums—becomes the second set from that list in about three months' time to challenge that formula. Although total orders at press time had reached 1.25 million, T.I.'s album had an initial shipment of only 800,000 copies. Thus, starting above half a million represents an incredibly efficient yield when you consider that less than 2% of those sales are from digital downloads (10,000 units).

During Christmas week 2005, Jamie Foxx's "Unpredictable" virtually sold through its entire opening shipment of 600,000 when it bowed at No. 2 with 596,000 sold. Would either album have sold more with added units in the pipeline? Maybe, but in an environment where distributors discipline labels to avoid overexposure that leads to eventual returns, the risks of encouraging an account to increase its opening order are substantial.

Beefing up an album's shipment was once standard operating procedure. But were it even possible for a label VP to persuade a buyer to up the ante, only to excess stock at stores, that would lead to an unhappy customer, a cranky distributor, financial implications and a crest-fallen sales team. Or, have you forgotten Jerry Seinfeld's "I'm Telling You for the Last Time," the 1998 album that got arm-twisted up to a initial ship of 1 million? In case you don't recall, it's record's box score: A No. 59 peak during its 14-week stay on The Billboard 200 with just 23,000 sold in the first week, less than half a million copies sold to date... and at least one career change.

**ROYAL WELCOME:** Greatest-hits sets have already staged five Billboard 200 runs for Queen, so do we need another? Before you answer, know that "Stone Cold Classics" arrives in stores April 11, the same day the band's surviving members appear on "American Idol." That and a Wal-Mart sale price practically ensures the new one will outperform the first week by latest compilation "Greatest Hits: We Will Rock You," which started with 25,000 in 2004.
GHOSTFACE LANDS BIG BOW

Ghostsface Killah’s “FishScale” jumps into Hot Shot Debuts at No. 4 on Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums. T.I. (from Over The Counter, page 6), who rules No. 1, would have earned that distinction if street-date violations hadn’t caused an early debut.

This is Ghostface’s best opening in 10 years on that chart. It is also his biggest debut on The Billboard 200, where he starts at No. 4. All five of his solo albums have reached the R&B/Hip-Hop list’s top five.

His good fortune continues at radio as “Back Like That,” featuring Def Jam labelmate Ne-Yo, climbs 21-20. His prior peak, either solo or with Wu-Tang Clan, was No. 32 in 1994 for the group’s “C.R.E.A.M.”

—Raphael George
CONGRATULATIONS TO

LITTLE BIG TOWN

... For achieving GOLD Sales for
"The Road to Here" and a GOLD digital
download for their hit
single, "Boondocks"!

EQUITY MUSIC GROUP

NAVARRE
'SUMMERTIME' ARRIVES EARLY FOR CHESNEY

With spins detected at 62 monitored signals, the third single from Kenny Chesney's "The Road and the Radio" pleads Greatest Gainer and most new stations.

The song re-enters the chart, having spent one week on its lower end when the album hit programmers' in-boxes last fall. "Summertime" gathers 5.2 million audience impressions, up 4.8 million. It pulled in at least six plays from 33 stations on Billboard's Nielsen BDS-monitored panel that previously had the song in rotation.

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**HITSPREDICTOR**

**ARTIST/Title/Label (Score)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARTIST/Title/Label (Score)</th>
<th>Chart Rank</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COUNTRY</td>
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<td>RASCAL FLATTS</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;WHAT HURTS THE MOST&quot; (ARISTA NASHVILLE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;IT'S ONLY GONE&quot; (ARISTA NASHVILLE)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;WHO YOU LOVE&quot; (ARISTA NASHVILLE)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;HEART SONGS&quot; (ARISTA NASHVILLE)</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;THAT'S HOW YOU KNOW&quot; (ARISTA NASHVILLE)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;IF I EVER HEARD YOU CRY&quot; (ARISTA NASHVILLE)</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;DON'T LEAVE ME&quot; (ARISTA NASHVILLE)</td>
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<td>&quot;YOU&quot; (ARISTA NASHVILLE)</td>
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<td>&quot;THE ONLY WAY I KNOW&quot; (ARISTA NASHVILLE)</td>
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<td>&quot;AMORE SULLA MIA&quot; (ARISTA NASHVILLE)</td>
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<td>&quot;LET IT BE&quot; (ARISTA NASHVILLE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;DON'T LET ME BE ME (WHEN I'M DREAMING)&quot; (ARISTA NASHVILLE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I DON'T LIKE IT WHEN YOU LEAVE ME&quot; (ARISTA NASHVILLE)</td>
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**BETWEEN THE BULLETS**

"SUMMERTIME" ARRIVES EARLY FOR CHESNEY

Los Angeles, Seattle and Atlanta are the hottest markets for the single so far, with 793,000 impressions noted at KZLA Los Angeles, 463,000 at KMPS Seattle and 449,000 at WTKK Atlanta. More than 20 plays during the tracking week are counted at seven monitored stations, led by 31 spins at KTYY Dallas.

Chesney's current tour opened March 23 at Dayton, Ohio's Nutter Center and runs through early September.

---

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Samantha Shy
Senior Vice President
Strategic Marketing
Allied Media + Marketing

Dave Knox
Teen External Relations Manager
P&G Beauty

Greg Tseng
Chief Executive Officer
Tagged.com

HIGHLIGHTS

• Keynote: Explore how Virgin markets its brands to meet the ever-changing needs of today's savvy teens.

• Street Smarts: What's bubbling up from the streets into the mainstream, the latest emerging trends and the buzz of the moment.

• Style Wise: How to launch a new product using teens as marketers, how to mix media to let teen consumers navigate through retail environments, and what trends will make it through to the next season.

• Movie Madness: Get the inside story on how Hollywood uses nontraditional marketing strategies to attract teens.

• Tech Heads: Where is the wireless revolution taking teen products?

• Music to Their Ears: Music carries the momentum on every screen — case studies on using music as a successful marketing strategy.

• Teens call the shots: In a candid conversation of what turns them on and what turns them away.

We left What Teens Want with some fantastic marketing and partnership ideas that we're using today!

— Teri Matt, Marketing Manager, Dualstar Entertainment Group

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roritz@vnubuspubs.com

Sponsorship
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cmatz@vnubusmedia.com

Speakers
Rachel Williams: 646.654.4683
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# Hits of the Week: April 15, 2006

**Japan Singles**

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<td>NINGEN</td>
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<td>VARIOUS ARTISTS</td>
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*Data for week of April 15, 2006* | *CHARTS LEGEND on Page 78*
Sales data compiled from a comprehensive pool of U.S. music charts by Nielsen SoundScan. Sales data for R&B/Hip-Hop retail charts is compiled by Nielsen SoundScan from a national subset of core stores that specialize in those genres.

- Albums with the greatest sales gains this week.
- Where included, this award indicates the title with the chart's largest percentage increase.
- Indicates album entered top 10 of The Billboard 200 this week.
- Has been removed from Mainstream chart.

**ALBUM CHARTS**

Sales data compiled from a comprehensive pool of U.S. music charts by Nielsen SoundScan. Sales data for R&B/Hip-Hop retail charts is compiled by Nielsen SoundScan from a national subset of core stores that specialize in those genres.

- Albums with the greatest sales gains this week.
- Where included, this award indicates the title with the chart's largest percentage increase.
- Indicates album entered top 10 of The Billboard 200 this week.
- Has been removed from Mainstream chart.

**SINGLE CHARTS**

Compiled from a national sample of data supplied by Nielsen Broadcast Data Systems. Charts are ranked by number of gross audience impressions, compiled by core referencing each time of airing with audience interactivity data. The exceptions are the Rhythm & Top 40, Adult Top 40, Contemporary Modern, Rock and Adult R&B charts, which are ranked by total detections.

- Songs showing an increasing audience (or detections) over the previous week, regardless of chart movement.

**RECURRENT SINGLES**

Songs are removed from the Hot 100 if they have been on the Hot 100 for more than 20 weeks and rank below 50. Songs are removed from the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart if they have been on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart for more than 20 weeks and rank below 50. Songs are removed from the Hot Rap Songs chart if they have been on the Hot Rap Songs chart for more than 20 weeks and rank below 50. Titles are removed from Hot Country Songs if they have been on the chart for more than 20 weeks and rank below 15 in detections or audience, provided that they are not still garnering enough audience to be in the Top 150. Titles are removed from the Adult Top 40, Adult Contemporary, Adult R&B, and Hot Dance Airplay charts if they have been on the chart for more than 20 weeks and rank below 15 (for Modern Rock and Latino) or if they have been on the chart for more than 52 weeks and rank below 10.

**TOP INDEPENDENT ALBUMS**

Compiled from a national sample of reports from club DJs.

- Titles with the greatest club play increase over the previous week.

**TOP INDEPENDENT SINGLES**

Compiled from a national sample of reports from club DJs.

- Titles with the greatest club play increase over the previous week.

**MUSIC VIDEO SALES CHARTS**

- RIAA gold certification for net shipment of 25,000 units for video singles.
- RIAA gold certification for net shipment of 50,000 units for video singles.
- RIAA platinum certification for sales of 100,000 units for video singles.
- RIAA platinum certification for sales of 200,000 units for video singles.
- RIAA gold certification for net shipment of 10,000 units (Diamond).
- Numeral within Platinum or Diamond symbol indicates album’s greatest sales in that category.
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- In-depth knowledge of intellectual property law, with a focus on branding and protection of the brand; copyright and patent knowledge
- In-depth knowledge of privacy, data security, advertising and libel law
- Experience with labor union issues within the entertainment context
- Experience managing legal professionals and advising senior business leaders
- Familiarity with issues in connection with international commercial/entertainment related transactions, and related regulatory matters affecting entertainment initiatives
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Education
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Billboard and CTIA-The Wireless Assn. hosted MECCA, the official CTIA mobile entertainment conference, April 4 at the Las Vegas Hilton Center. Attendees were exposed to a full day of key insights from top decision-makers and creative visionaries from all corners of the mobile and entertainment fields. (Photos: Denise Truscello/WireImage.com)
SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE

Female employees of Billboard’s parent company, VNU, came out of the woodwork to gawk and gesticulate at actor-turned-musician John Corbett. Best known for his roles in TV shows “Northern Exposure” and “Sex and the City” and the movie “My Big Fat Greek Wedding,” Corbett stopped by Billboard’s New York office for a quick and gruff. With a huge grin on his face—prompted by huge sideburns—Corbett bounded into the packed room and immediately asked, “Do the many women really work at Billboard?” In a word, no!

Currently trekking across the United States in support of his just-released, self-titled debut album, Corbett shared stories about growing up in Washington, D.C., and how he first discovered his love for music at age 7. Although many may not know it, Corbett has been writing and performing songs for years. He even owned a live music venue in Seattle during its “Northern Exposure” days. When talk turned to his country-rock album, Corbett quipped, “There’s not a turd on it.”

Instead of signing with a major, Corbett released the disc on his own label. Fan Base. Though he named the Navarro-distributed label after his dog and said the labels on hand weren’t buying it. Which prompted Corbett to utter something about a “double-entendre.” Pearly whites were everywhere.

With the impromptu Q&A session over, Corbett spent nearly an hour signing autographs and doling out hugs and kisses to the glazed-over contingent. As each person wrapped her—on his (yes, there was a handful of hands)—arms around Corbett, he’d say, “Give me some love.” Insert squeals here.

UMPG RUNS WITH BROWN

Chris Brown has signed an exclusive, worldwide publishing deal with Universal Music Publishing Group. Brown’s “Run It,” produced by Scott Storch, was No. 1 on The Billboard Hot 100, Pop, R & B and Hot R&B/ Hip-Hop Songs charts. His self-titled debut on Jive/Zomba debuted at No. 1 on the Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart and No. 2 on The Billboard 200. He is managed by Tina Davis and Joyce Hawkins. UMPG’s R&B/hip-hop roster includes 50 Cent, Ciara, Prince, Ice Cube, Ludacris and Mary J. Blige. Ethiopia Habtemariam, UMPG’s East Coast director of urban music, brought Brown to the table.

50 CHECKS OUT DEATH ROW

Now that Marion “Suge” Knight Jr. and Death Row Records have filed for bankruptcy, a number of parties flush with cash are snapping up the masters and publishing catalogs. Everyone’s on the same quest to figure out what’s for sale. Are albums by Snoopy Dogg, Dr. Dre, 2Pac, Petey Pablo, Kurupi and others up for grabs? Who knows, but Track does hear that 50 Cent is sniffing around the catalogs.

HELP!


What makes this collection especially appealing to fans is that all tracks have been digitally remastered and are presented in stereo and mono. Of these, many appear in stereo for the very first time on CD.

Unfortunately, Capitol realized after manufacturing that the original mono masters from “Beatles VI” and “Rubber Soul” never made it onto the initial pressing of this collection.

According to a statement from Capitol, the third-party mastering facility incorrectly sent step-down masters instead of the masters ordered by the label to the manufacturing plant. When Capitol became aware of this, the correct masters were sent, and the adjustment was made in another manufacturing run.

Though Track is told there is no discernible difference in sound quality in the initial run, Capitol made the adjustment for historical accuracy. Consumers, with proof of purchase, will soon be able to have their “damaged goods” replaced.

HIGH ON CRYSTAL

For Fannypack’s Fancy and Matt Goias, being called into their label head’s office is scary enough. Add to that an intense fear of shattering the huge, priceless and fragile amethyst crystal Tommy Boy chief Tom Silverman keeps precariously perched near the edge of his desk, and even the most sedate employee might be alarmed. But the boys of Fannypack try to keep it all in check. In fact, Track hears they have a $5,000 bet on who will turn first and send the delicate gem tumbling to the floor.

Sources overhear them discussing their ill- wager with Tommy Boy labelmates Arthur Baker and Disco D at Fancy’s brand spanking new rock club, Studio A, in Miami.

BROWN’S NEW POST

Tanya Brown joins Zomba Music Publishing in the newly created post of VP of urban. She comes to the company following a seven-year stint with Famous Music, most recently as senior creative director of urban. While there, she signed Ivy Gotti, Busta Rhymes and others. Prior to that, Brown held A&R gigs at Def Jam and Universal Urban. Brown will be based in New York and report to Zomba Music Publishing president David Mantel.

SWEEP AWAY

Track hears that Windswept Holdings, one of Billboard’s top 10 producers last year, is looking for veterans with deep pockets who want to acquire publishing rights.
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