FACING THE MUSIC
MIDYEAR NUMBERS ARE IN
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HOT ON THE CHARTS
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THE BILLBOARD Q&A
THE BROTHERS BEHIND 'GUITAR HERO'
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**KEYNOTE:**
BRANDON LUCAS, Sr. Director of Mobile Business Development, MySpace

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- MICHAEL MANZO, Chief Marketing Officer, Openet
- JOHN SMELZER, SVP & GM, Mobile, Fox Interactive Media
- LIZ JONES, VP, Entertainment & Media, The Hyperfactory
- PAUL KULTGEN, Dir. Mobile Advertising, Nielsen
- ROB LEWIS, CEO, Omnifone
- JOHN ORLANDO, VP of Marketing, LiveWire
- SEAN ROSENBERG, Director, Mobile Marketing, RCA Music Group
- RAJ RAY, Director, Qualcomm
- SCOTT WILLIAMS, VP Business Development, Time Inc. Interactive
- ROGER WOOD, SVP & GM, Amobee

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Events

MOBILE ENTERTAINMENT LIVE!
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ON THE COVER: Faith Hill photograph by Russell James

www.americanradiohistory.com
It is ironic that the quiet manager of one of the world's biggest rock bands is the one making the most noise about the increasingly deleterious effect the digital industries are having on the music industry by allowing consumers to use the companies' broadband Internet access to steal artists' recorded music that previously required payment. Call it cybertheft with a beat.

Longtime U2 manager Paul McGuinness, has emerged from the enormous shadow of his world-renowned band to put the digital industries on notice: Start taking responsibility for protecting the music you are distributing through your broadband access and share your enormous revenue with the content makers and owners through structured commercial agreements.

As a veteran entertainment industry attorney who has represented and helped launch the careers of such popular recording artists as the Fugees, Lauryn Hill, Rick Ross, R. Kelly, and others, I applaud McGuinness for speaking out so forcefully on this issue, which poses the single biggest threat to the future of the entertainment industry.

The Philadelphia law firm of Bochetto and Lenz, with whom I am employed as special counsel, is in discussions with a coalition of songwriters, music publishers, and independent labels to investigate and render an advisory opinion as to whether there may be a class action lawsuit against Internet service providers (ISPs), mobile phone makers, and phone companies for allowing other people's music and intellectual property to be obtained and traded illegally.

We have all heard the hollow argument about the online swapping and swapping of music files and other forms of digital entertainment being "victimless crimes." Nonsense. Not only are the recording artists, actors, writers, directors, and producers being robbed of income and royalties, but worldwide, online theivery of digital music, TV programs and feature films has resulted in the loss of corporate revenue and, accordingly, the loss of countless careers within the respective industries. I imagine a cable company would not take kindly to a technologically savvy neighbor hooking up his whole neighborhood with free cable. Imagine if this techno-savvy Robin Hood hooked up a whole city with free cable. Would the cable company stand idly by and say it's just a victimless crime? We know the answer.

What's particularly frustrating about the digital industries' unwillingness to curtail online theft of music, TV and film content is that there are at least six technologies in existence that make it easy to detect and stop the illegal trafficking of artist's creations. Yet not one single ISP is using this technology and will not use it until they are forced to through the courts.

The ISPs are the gatekeepers. They possess the technical ability to stop mass copyright violation, as they have recently proved by halting the online theft and swapping of pornography. Since 2003, record labels have filed more than 28,000 lawsuits and tens of thousands of cease-and-desist orders against individual file sharers—with little impact. It is estimated that 19% of Internet users download music for free, and every time they do, they help create a digital fingerprint that can be easily tracked. It rarely happens.

Although the ISPs must take responsibility, they also need to understand that there are commercial partnership opportunities that would benefit artists and ISPs alike. McGuinness envisions a future business model in which music is bundled into an ISP or other subscription service and the revenue is shared among the distributor and the content owners. His instincts are right, but we're not close to a solution to online piracy. To paraphrase McGuinness' favorite band, we still haven't found what we're looking for. But for the sake of the entertainment industry, we have to keep searching.

Kevin Glickman is special counsel to Bochetto and Lenz.

Classier Actions? Mulling A Lawsuit Against ISPs

BY KEVIN Glickman

**EDITORS’ COMMENTARY**

This is the opinion of the editors and reflects their personal views. It does not necessarily reflect the views of Billboard or its parent company, Nielsen Media. Nielsen Media's Editorial Policy prohibits the publication of reports that are promoting or advancing the interests of any one company or industry.

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**OPINION**

**BILLBOARD.BIZ POLL**

NARM is urging labels not to release digital versions of albums ahead of the physical street date, cautioning that this practice is "opening the door for chaos in the marketplace." Should the industry adopt strict parity to digital and physical album release dates?

**FEEDBACK**

Digital formats allow for more flexibility and enable artists to test new, creative campaigns. Lil Wayne released multiple digital tracks from "The Carter III" well in advance of the street date. And look how many albums Lil Wayne has now sold.

**ADVERTISING**


**EDITORS’ COMMENTARY**

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MOBILIZING SUBSCRIPTIONS

Rhapsody, Napster Seek Wireless Growth

Struggling music subscription services have opened a new front in their battle for legitimacy: the mobile phone.

But it's far from clear that the tactic will finally push them into the mainstream.

The unveiling of RealNetworks' partnership with Verizon Wireless to extend the Rhapsody service into the mobile realm (billboard.biz, June 30) follows a still-evolving alliance between rival Napster and AT&T.

Both partnerships are designed to reverse years of sluggish subscriber growth, skyrocketing customer acquisition costs and the inability of most MP3 players that are compatible with their services to make significant inroads against the market-dominating Apple iPod, which doesn't work with either service.

Yet while the benefits that the wireless operators bring certainly look good on paper, they have yet to show any significant impact.

Consider the case of Napster, which joined forces with AT&T in November 2006 when the two introduced a line of phones that allowed Napster users to sideload their subscription tracks. At the time, Verizon said he would double their base in the next 12 months, but it has yet to show any significant impact.

The Napster-AT&T partnership did not expand to support over-the-air (OTA) song downloads until nearly a year later, and it still does not include a co-branded online service, the ability to bill the monthly music subscription tab to the wireless phone bill or any joint marketing practices.

Rhapsody is the default music service for the entire Verizon network, both online and on mobile phones. Verizon subscribers can also add the cost of their Rhapsody monthly subscription to their Verizon phone bill—which Verizon will promote exclusively online and in stores, that's something Napster can't yet do with AT&T.

In addition, the Verizon deal immediately makes Rhapsody-acquired tracks compatible with 10 kinds of phones, millions of which are already in consumer hands, such as the LG VX8700 and the new LG Dare. The Napster OTA service is available on only one AT&T phone, Samsung's Sync, while several devices support the sideloading feature.

This certainly expands the number of compatible devices available to both services. But mobile phones to date have not proved themselves robust content-acquisition platforms.

"There's not a whole lot of action on paying for content on the phone so far," Jupiter Research analyst David Card says. "But that's probably because the content on the phone is not that interesting. Rhapsody's a great product if you're a sophisticated music fan, but it has not proven to have mass-market appeal yet. Putting it on a phone may not make that much difference."

Still, Verizon is far ahead of its rivals in establishing music as a core feature. According to mobile content tracking firm M:Metrics, almost 10% of Verizon subscribers use their phones as music devices, 23% above the market average of 8%, and almost 5% use their phones to buy and download music, more than double the market average of 1.3%.

"We've seen Verizon do pretty well in terms of the consumption of music," M:Metrics analyst Mark Donovan says. "If you want to talk about the home experience, the PC experience and the mobile experience, this is the first deal that is actually launching with a consumer-friendly price tag that checks off all those boxes. Verizon's strategy... is potentially transformative to the Rhapsody business."

The key word here, however, is "potentially." Music subscription services have always had more potential than they have had success, leaving many to speculate that perhaps they will remain a niche service for the foreseeable future. All the benefits concerning device support, billing integration and marketing that wireless operators bring may not be enough to turn on an indifferent consumer base.

According to Forrester Research, U.S. music fans purchased $1.7 billion worth of music downloads in 2007 (singles and albums combined) but spent only $249 million on subscription services. While the firm projects download revenue to surge 65% this year to $2.8 billion, it expects subscription revenue to climb a far more modest 13% to $287 million.

"They haven't figured out as an industry what it is about their services that appeal beyond a pretty sophisticated music aficionado," Card says. "Maybe they're never going to be mainstream products."
Silver Lining
Sales Fall Again, But Digital Narrows Shortfall

Growth in digital music sales is finally coming within striking distance of making up for the decline in physical sales. During the six months ended June 29, sales of albums and tracks through album-oriented radio (AOR), where 10 digital tracks equal an album, totaled 258.9 million units, down 4.7% from 271.6 million during the six months ended July 1, 2007, according to Nielsen SoundScan. That's about half the rate of decline posted during the first half of 2007, when album and TEA sales sank 9.1% from 298.7 million a year earlier, suggesting that growth in digital music sales is beginning to approach equilibrium with the slide in physical sales. Still, the industry isn't quite there yet, and another sharp drop in the sales of current album releases highlighted the severity of the challenges it still faces.

Combined sales of physical and digital albums tumbled 11% in the first half of 2008, to 204.6 million units from 229.8 million a year earlier, fueled by a 16.3% plunge in CD sales to 172.2 million. Digital album sales soared 34.4% to 31.6 million units and now account for 15.4% of total album sales, up from 10.2% a year earlier. Sales of vinyl albums jumped 77% to 803,000 units from 454,000.

Meanwhile, sales of digital tracks (which exclude downloads of songs purchased as part of an album) surged 30% to 542.7 million units during the first half, from 417.3 million a year earlier, slowing from growth of 46.5% during the first half of 2007. Using the TEA formula, first-half digital track sales equaled about 54.3 million albums. When added to sales of wholly downloaded digital albums, the resulting total digital sales tally equaled 13.2% of combined album and TEA sales, up from 23.6% a year earlier.

In a continued sign of weakness, sales of current albums sagged 16.1% to 115.4 million units from a year earlier, barely an improvement on the 17.1% drop during the first half of 2007. The current album category counts sales of albums within the first 18 months of their release as well as sales of older titles that stay in the top half of The Billboard 200 and are active at radio.

At midyear, only three current albums had broken through the million-unit mark. At the top of the heap was Lil Wayne's "Tha Carter III" with 1.5 million scans, followed by the two other 2008 releases — Jack Johnson's "Sleep Through the Static," at 1.2 million, and Mariah Carey's "E-MC2" at 1.1 million. Last year, six albums had reached the million-unit mark by midyear, including three albums that arrived in 2006. The top 10 best-selling albums at midyear had sold 9.9 million units, down 14.8% from 11.0 million for last year's midyear top 10.

Sales of older titles performed much better. Catalog album sales (sales that occur 18 months after a title's release, excluding titles still in the top half of The Billboard 200) saw sales fall a relatively modest 3.3% to 89.2 million units. The deep catalog subset of albums tracks were led by Leona Lewis' "Bleeding Love," at 2.6 million units; followed by Flo Rida's "Low" featuring T-Pain, with 2.4 million units; and Jordan Sparks' "No Air" duet with Chris Brown, at 2.1 million units. Besides three tracks breaking the 2 million mark, 19 tracks in total reached the million-unit milestone in the first half of 2008, a sharp improvement from the 11 tracks that accomplished the feat during the first half of last year. The top 20 digital track sellers in the first half sold 30.6 million units, a 44% increase from the 21.3 million units sold by the top 20 tracks at last year's midyear point.

Among genre, Latin suffered the biggest drop in sales with a 17.1% slide to 13.4 million units, followed by rap with a 16.0% decline to 16.5 million units. Soundtracks and electronic music were the only categories that managed to post gains. Soundtracks saw sales rise 10.4% to 9.9 million units during the first half, including 20 soundtracks that passed the 100,000-unit mark, led by "June," which sold 790,000 units. During the first half of last year, only 14 titles reached that milestone. Sales of electronic music rose 8% to 3.9 million units at midyear.

Soundtracks and electronic music also recorded the highest growth in digital album sales, climbing 73.6% to 2.4 million units and 60.7% to 1.03 million units, respectively. Rap notched the third-largest percentage sales gain in digital albums, up 52.9% to 1.9 million units.

During the first half, digital sales made their biggest inroads in electronic music, where they accounted for 26.1% of album sales, soundtracks (23.7%), alternative rock (23%) and new age (23%).

Among retail categories, nontraditional continues to show strength, growing 20.2% to 39.7 million units. Universal Music Group retained the largest U.S. market share among labels with 31.2%, down slightly from 31.5% a year earlier. Sony BMG and EMI also lost ground, while Warner Music Group's share climbed up to 20.8% from 20% a year earlier. Indie labels, excluding those distributed by major-owned indie distributors like Red and ADA, also gained market share, finishing collectively with 13.9%, up one percentage point from a year earlier. Additional reporting by Keith Caulfield and Michael Cusson.

HOW THE NUMBERS STACK UP
Sales And Store Trends For The First Six Months Of 2008 (Source: Nielsen SoundScan)

Market Share
Sales by Store Type
Sales by Genre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Store Type</th>
<th>Market Share</th>
<th>Units Sold (In Millions)</th>
<th>Sales by Store Type (In Millions)</th>
<th>Sales by Genre (In Millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Tracks vs. Albums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Top Tracks</th>
<th>Top Albums</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Photo: Courtesy of Nielsen SoundScan.
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- TWO TICKETS TO PARADISE - The Latest Ticketing Trends
- TURN THE PAGE - The Concert Industry Consolidation... Where are we Now?
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REMIXED

Mixmasters Adjust To A New Business Climate

When Chicago band Walter Meego approached DJ/producers Todd Edwards and sunshine to remix "Girls"—a bit of catchy, foppish new wave off its 2008 debut "Voyager" (Almost Gold), it was nearly empty-handed. "For a developing artist like Walter Meego, they can't provide incentives for a top-class remixer like Tommie on an upfront basis," the band's manager Davis Jones says. Sunshine includes Fall Out Boy and Panic at the Disco as indie rock remix credits in the past year or so. At one time, the conversation might have ended there. But Sunshine really liked the Walter Meego record. So his manager, Randy Reed of Red Light, tried a different approach. "We go for ownership of the remix," says Reed, who had done several similar deals. "When you register for copyright purposes, we want part of the publishing on the song—only the remix, not the original, almost like a joint-venture approach." Meego's camp agreed.

While back-end deals on remixes are nothing new, they were always rare. A concession saved for the biggest names in dance production. But these days they're "on the tongues" of remixers at all levels, Jones says. "I don't think it's overly aggressive. It's kind of a no-brainer. [The track will] reach an audience that the band is not reaching yet, and frankly from where I'm sitting it's not like the 'Girls' copyright is going to carry much of an equity value until it develops a profile around the world. In that case we'd rather have 70%-80% of a pie rather than 100% of nothing." Almost as quickly as the bells tolled for the big-ticket, $25,000 flat fee remix, the paradigm has started to shift. New deals—involving points, copyright, swaps and gos licensing—are offsetting the reduction of flat-fee remix payments and resulting in richer collaborations between remixer and remixer. But for now, they're happening almost exclusively at the indie level. At the majors, it's business as usual, only for the majors.

"The deals are definitely less money, a lot less," Warner Bros. director of dance and lifestyle marketing Orlando Puerta says. "Unless you're a superstar, you don't get points. I don't know too many artists who want to give up a point to a remixer. I haven't given too many points." Remixers employed by majors who got accustomed to fees upwards of $5,000 in the '90s golden age have seen them fall as low as $500. And blind spec deals—where the remix is delivered without the guarantee of being accepted or of how much the fee will be if it is—have become the norm for mid-level producers, as well as upstarts.

"Until a couple of years ago I hadn't done a spec mix," says Matthias Heilbronn, a 30-year remixing veten with artists like Chaka Khan and Angie Stone in his repertoire. "I thought I had established myself, and either someone wanted me to do something or they didn't. It's very tough for me."

"People used to think of remixing as a marketing function, and it's changed to become something, you know, earning and making, or at least to be able to pay itself back, or it was just going to go away," says Puerta, who still does flat-fee remixes for such big-name acts as Tiësto and Kaskade. "We were just getting remixes done, and people weren't buying them."

With the mainstream industry in the state that it's in, some find it hopeful that work for guys like Heilbronn—quality producers without name recognition—"still exists at all. "Majors are still doing remixes on artists that aren't dance artists," says Bill Coleman, an artist manager and remixer consultant for independent firm Pece Bisquit, which represents Heilbronn. "Yeah, they're not spending as much. But dance has always been the black sheep of the industry, and they're still inviting the sheep to sit down to dinner. If you read between the lines, that means someone's making money somewhere."

For innovators like Reed, who also manages electronic rock auteur UKLE and progressive DJ-producer Sasha, majors might be the final frontier. For Sasha's second installment of "Innovor" (due out this year), a mixed compilation series on which he remixes each track, rather than simply blending them into each other, Reed was able to negotiate some sort of back-end deal with every artist in exchange for Sasha's work: even acts like Ladytron (Network) and M83 (Mute). "Sasha is a real big artist, and I'm happy to say that we were able to get other big artists, and they all said, 'Cool,'" Reed says. "We're looking at the long term of this, how much money we could all potentially make. For the most part, with rare exception, the days of high upfront fees are over. Labels just don't have the capital anymore."

"We can sit here and say, 'It's not like the '90s,'" Coleman says. "It's not, so get over it. If you want to remain viable, you have to figure out how to make it work."

Performance Pay

Battle For Radio Royalties Gains Momentum

Chances appear slim that Congress will vote this year on legislation requiring terrestrial radio stations to pay artists and labels performance royalties to play their recordings. Nonetheless, signs are emerging that the recording industry is making some headway in its precedent-breaking fight to extract new royalty payments from broadcasters. A resounding voice vote June 27 by the House Subcommittee on Courts, the Internet and Intellectual Property in favor of the legislation sent the Performance Rights Act to the full House Judiciary Committee. A vote by the Senate Judiciary Committee on a similar bill is also possible. But the legislation doesn't seem poised to get much further in this election year, as Congress is scheduled to adjourn for a summer recess after the first week of August and faces a full agenda after it reconvenes following the Labor Day weekend.

The National Assn. of Broad- casters (NAB) has rallied opposition to what it deems as a performance "tax," releasing in late June a list of 219 House members [out of 435] who signed a non-binding resolution denouncing that such fees wouls impose on "severe economic hardship" on radio stations.

Still, supporters of performance royalties can point to bipartisanship, with Laura Lee Boynton, Mitchell Peters, Aymeric Pichenin, Ray Waddell and Chris M. Walsh. "We need to do something to support Drive-By Truckers."

**BOXSCORE** Concert Grosses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross/ Attendance</th>
<th>Artist(s)</th>
<th>Venue, Date</th>
<th>Promoter</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>$8,916,055</td>
<td>BON JOVI, BIFFY CLYRO, THE FEELING</td>
<td>Twickenham Stadium, London, June 27-28</td>
<td>AEG Live</td>
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<td>O2 Arena, London, June 12, 21-22</td>
<td>Live Nation</td>
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<td>THE EAGLES</td>
<td>Madison Square Garden, New York, May 28-30</td>
<td>Live Nation</td>
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<tr>
<td>$4,728,571</td>
<td>BON JOVI, KD ROWE, RAZORLIGHT</td>
<td>E lascrath Skyline, Dublin, June 14</td>
<td>AEG Live, Denis Desmond</td>
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<td>AEG Live, Nova Music</td>
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<td>AEG Live, Marshall Arts</td>
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<td>Odyssey Arena, Glasgow, Scotland, June 21</td>
<td>Aiken Promotions</td>
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<td>AEG Live, ICO Concert Promotion, Atomic Agency</td>
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Kai & Charles Huang

The RedOctane founders riff on the future of ‘Guitar Hero,’ the thinking behind the game’s new Aerosmith edition and those recent Beatles rumors.

Why a whole expansion of the game dedicated to Aerosmith rather than just featuring the band as a downloadable content special or something?

Kai Huang: Because we really wanted to showcase Aerosmith the band. Downloadable content will allow you to just get the music, but we’ve gone much, much further than that. We’ve actually brought them into the studio to do full-motion capture of them in performance, and we put all of that into the game. We had the band consult on the actual songs that they wanted, including about 20 of the songs that they had over their 30-year career. And then they provided input on songs that were from bands that they’d either toured with in the past or that have influenced them over the course of their career. So the game is a lot more than just about Aerosmith music, it really is about the history and the rise of Aerosmith.

Charles Huang: Even the venues have changed, so the venues are the actual places where they played. We actually have Nipmuc High School [in Massachusetts], where they did their first gig, Max’s Kansas City, and all of [those] are authentic through the history of Aerosmith, so it was a lot more than just making their music playable with ‘Guitar Hero III.’ That’s why we had to put it on disc to get all of that into the game.

Is this the template for how you would like to do other expansion-type discs with other artists for “Guitar Hero”?

Kai: Yeah, I think definitely. If “Guitar Hero: Aerosmith” proves to be as successful as we think it will be, then we would love to continue doing this type of game with bands in the future because it’s a lot of fun to work with the bands. No. 1, but again it’s a great way to showcase the talents and the career and the histories of these bands.

So you want to see how well this Aerosmith “band pack” works before doing the same with other artists?

Charles: We would love to work with a lot of other artists. Now to fill up a whole game, you have to have an artist that has some longevity and history, they have to have a body of work that can span 25, 30 great “Guitar Hero” tracks, and so there’s a handful of bands that have that, and we’d love to work with them. But there’s a lot of great songs out there that we would love to compile in a genre pack as well, so definitely the commercial success of this game will dictate some of our strategy but some of it is just dictated by the music that’s available from some artists.

There’s been some news about how Metallica might be the next on deck. Can you guys comment at all about that?

Kai: We’re not ready to comment about Metallica yet, but what I will say is that we’d love to work with all of the top rock bands of all time, whether it’s Aerosmith or Metallica or AC/DC or Led Zeppelin. If we get an opportunity to work with those bands, we would love to do that.

In the space of just a few weeks there has been a lot of “Guitar Hero”-related news. How do you manage all this without the brand getting overexposed or diluted?

Charles: Even though they all have the “Guitar Hero” name, they are slightly different. “Guitar Hero: On Tour” is [for the Nintendo DS and it’s a] portable experience. It’s a lot different [in that we’re targeting the game at perhaps a little bit younger audience that plays the DS, so this is kind of like the game for all the people that have to walk around all day with an iPod because they love their music everywhere they go.” “Guitar Hero: Aerosmith” is the same experience as “Guitar Hero III!” it’s in your living room, you’re playing with friends at parties.

“World Tour” is quite a major evolution of the game and the bands from the last version. How will it be sufficiently different from “Rock Band,” other than just the songs included in the game?

Charles: First of all, we’ve got our instruments, which for the first time really in the history of the franchise has some significant innovations. So the guitar will have new features, the drums will have new features as well, they will play differently. The drums will have velocity censors that will sense how hard you’re hitting the drum and that plays a big role in the music studio, where you’ll be able to go in and record . . . guitars and drum tracks and upload it onto the Internet. Then people can go and download those songs and play them on their “Guitar Hero” game, so that’s the big innovation both on the hardware and software side.

Can you say anything about the Beatles rumors we’re hearing?

Kai: Unfortunately, those are rumors right now and we don’t have any comments yet.

Charles: Well, I don’t have to tell you how difficult it is. Everybody in the world has tried to get the Beatles to put their music on all kinds of different platforms, and it certainly would be exciting, but it’s also a difficult challenge.

To fill up a whole game, you have to have an artist that has some longevity and history, they have to have a body of work. —Charles Huang
IT'S SUMMER AND IT'S HOT, BUT EVEN SO, FAITH HILL IS QUICK TO WARM UP TO TALK ABOUT CHRISTMAS. WHICH IS MORE THAN APPROPRIATE AS SHE SETS UP THE FIRST—and, quite possibly, only—CHRISTMAS ALBUM OF HER CAREER, "JOY TO THE WORLD," DUE SEPT. 16 ON WARNER BROS. WHILE MANY NASHVILLE-BASED ARTISTS RECORD HOLIDAY RECORDS EARLY AND RELATIVELY OFTEN, HILL'S WAS SEVERAL YEARS IN THE MAKING AND INTENDED TO BE HER DEFINITIVE TAKE ON THE SEASON. "JOY TO THE WORLD" IS OVERWHELMLINGLY A COLLECTION OF STANDARDS, BE IT THE BIG, BOOMING ORCHESTRAL ARRANGEMENTS OF THE TITLE TRACK OR "OH, HOLY NIGHT" OR SWINGING, BIG-BAND, VINTAGE-SOUNDING VERSIONS OF MORE LIGHTHEARTED FARE SUCH AS "SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN" AND " HOLLY, JOLLY CHRISTMAS."

This is, obviously, all good for Hill, a self-professed "classic Christmas girl."

I love everything about Christmas, and I have wanted to record a Christmas album since the beginning of my career," Hill says while taking a break from shooting video at Henley Studios in Hollywood for potential TV spots promoting the record. The day before, Hill had been at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif., taping "Sunday Night Football" promo spots with a group of NFL stars. But for now, despite the summer heat, Hills and her team have visions of sugarplums dancing in their heads. "There's lots of holiday-themed thinking and discussion going on this summer," Hill's manager, Gary Broman says. "For us this is more than a holiday record. It is an opportunity to share values, sensibilities and emotion, and we're excited to be able to do this.


Work on "Joy" started three years ago, but the project was sidetracked by Hill's 2005 album "Fireflies" and last year's "Greatest Hits" album, not to mention the massive, record-breaking Soul2Soul II tour with her husband, Tim McGraw, in 2007-08.

When those projects wrapped, Hill returned to the Christmas album. "I love the season and the music so much that I wanted to make sure that I had the time to focus on it, that's the reason that took so long," she says.

Song selection was one of the 'toughest things' about putting the project together, Hill says. She wanted to ensure she had the perfect team in place in the studio: The album's producer is Hill, Dann Huff and Byron Gallimore, and the entire album was arranged and conducted by David Campbell and engineered by Allen Sides.

"It was absolutely crucial for David Campbell to be at the helm of this recording, and he did an amazing job arranging these songs that most of us know as standards," Hill says. "I explained to him what I wanted to convey in the music and he took it from there and just created this palette of beautiful arrangements."

Hill didn't take the easy road, instead choosing—and delivering in spades—on challenging vocals, complicated lyrics and ambitious melodic structure. The album plays to her strengths as an unmistakably Southern soulful chanteuse and also conjures a vintage feel that would work in any era.

"Fortunately, most of these songs I've known my entire life," she says, adding that she and Campbell took care to deliver the songs as written—even if they were written a century ago. "On some of them I was used to singing the lyric I grew up with, which was not really always the original lyric. I guess over time things just change, or people take their own interpretation of what the song was originally.

The more spiritual songs on the record, such as "Oh Come All Ye Faithful," "Joy" and "Silent Night," feature the Nashville String Machine with conductor Carl Gorodetzky and were recorded live in the studio with Hill's vocals. "I've performed with an orchestra but I've never recorded with an orchestra live," she says. "I don't read music, and certainly it was difficult for me to read the scores, I really couldn't. So David Campbell had quite a task put in front of him to direct the orchestra, as well as me. That was quite a challenge, but it worked out in the end."

After a long layoff, the album was completed early this year, and Hill says it was surprisingly easy to resurrect the "spirit."

"When we got into the studio this last time to complete it, it had been 18 months since we had heard the tracks. And all of us just sat there, turned off the vocal and just listened to the tracks of this Christmas music," she says. "We were all commenting on how fresh it was and how exciting it was to be back on the project. You would think it would be difficult with it not being the Christmas season, but when you record something that you're really proud of, it kind of stands the test of time, any time of the year."

While releasing a Christmas album provides an "opportunity for her to share some deep emotion and creative expressions without concern for familiarity," Borman says that there are challenges in a holiday release as well. "The challenges come from the short span of time when we listen to holiday music and the effort required to inform the audience it's available," he says.

Hill won't tour on this release, but a wide range of multimedia promotional initiatives are being lined up. "We're looking at every avenue available to reach the audience," Borman says. "We've got a plan to work with radio, a TV performance of the entire album, Internet campaigns."

Hill has scheduled a special-edition "Soundstage" performance of her Christmas album that will be broadcast on PBS and also air elsewhere, Borman says. He adds that Hill's team is in discussions with a network about Hill and her Christmas music "participating in a major way" in an existing primetime special.

The Warner Nashville team is driving this release, "as they do all Faith records for the last 15 years," Borman says. "We're also taking advantage of the resources and experience in Burbank (Calif.). Warner Bros. Records as a company has had a great deal of success marketing Christmas music over the years, particularly last year, and we are all learning and benefitting from their knowledge and insights."

While it's still early in the game, Borman says the Warner marketing plan is multifaceted. "We have aggressive radio and television campaign, along with print features scheduled to hit starting in October and key TV appearances in November and December," he says. "We are also exploring additional strategic partnerships to maximize delivery.
to the marketplace."

While acknowledging the limited window around the release date, Bennett points out that shelf life matters for holiday titles. "Since it is a seasonal album, the opportunities will not be limited to this season alone," he says.

In the United States, Hill has moved more than 19 million albums in her career, topped by the 6.5 million copies of "Breathe" in 1999, according to Nielsen SoundScan. While 2005's "Fireflies" has sold more than 2.2 million copies, 2007's greatest-hits package has "stalled" at 257,000 copies, according to SoundScan.

Borman admits he's "too happy" with sales of "Huss."

"However, my disappointment lies more in the fact that due to many factors and circumstances beyond the control of Warner and ourselves, we were unable to put this out when and where it would have been best," he says. "It's also no secret that greatest-hits packages are being severely cannibalized by the consumer's ability to obtain any track, any time."

And Borman says he's confident in how "The" will be brought to market, adding, "Changes in our business require managers to take a more active role in the marketing," he says. "I do not see it as adversarial, however. In fact, to me, it feels less that way than ever. We all recognize what is happening with the business of music and all share concern. I'm confident in this team and in the music Faith has given us, which, of course, is the most important element in our marketing and presentation."

Hill takes pride in the fact that Warner has been her only label through her 15-year career. "They have been nothing but great," she says. "They really educated me on the business of music. At the same time, they've been there to say, 'You're an artist, we see you as an artist, and we want you to always be an artist.' They've been my partner, not just clear mutually. "Faith Hill is special talent, the sort of artist that you're lucky to get to work with maybe once in your career as a music executive," Bennett says. "One advantage that I think Faith enjoys with her Warner Bros. music family is, unlike other major labels in Nashville, our division of the larger company is not sequestered away from the coastal offices."

Beyond Warner, Hill has enjoyed basically the same career team for the entire ride, including Borman and his staff, agents in Creative Artists Agency's John Huis (live) and Brian Loucks (film/TV), attorney Craig Hayes and business manager Al Hagaman.

When it is noted that such continuity be-speaks success and job performance, Hill quickly agrees, but adds, "We have a good time, you can't lose sight of that. There have been times in my career that I just sweated so much over the small details that I completely ignored the very essence of why we do this in the first place. I'm really having a great time right now."

Which, really, is the gift that keeps on giving, in Hill's eyes. "I'm doing what I want to do, I'm enjoying it, and when I'm onstage, or when I do interviews—which used to be the most dreaded thing in the world for me—to do it I enjoy it," she says. "I feel confident and in control of what's going on in my business and my life."

Hill has realized her goals and dreams "tenfold," she says. "I'm not done. I have so many more things I want to do. But I've been blessed beyond my wildest dreams, to say the least, on so many levels: in my career, with the relationships I have established because of my career, the fans I continue to see at shows and places I make appearances that were there from the very beginning. It's tremendous and I don't take it for granted."

Beyond all the marketing, setup and commercial opportunity, Hill is sincere in touting the record's higher purpose. "I want it to be spiritual, I don't want to forget why we even celebrate Christmas," she says. "To me these songs are powerful and meaningful, and I want this to be the only Christmas album I'll ever record. And hopefully in 50 years it will sound as good as it does now. That's the intent behind it."

--

'Hopefully in 50 years it will sound as good as it does now.'
—FAITH HILL

Gotta Have Faith
With a promotional campaign that includes several TV appearances and a book deal, Faith Hill's streak of stellar sellers could continue with Christmas collection "Joy to the World."

SOURCE: The Billboard 200 through the July 9 chart. Sales through the week ending June 28.

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Lone New Track On 'Joy' Took A Winding Road To Release

As the string of 10 Christmas standards on Faith Hill's "Joy to the World" comes to a close, the album springs its lone new cut, the Tim Nichols/Craig Wiseman powerhouse "A Baby Changes Everything."

Inspired by Wiseman's minister wife KK, who has a writer credit on the song, "Baby" is in many ways the centerpiece of the new record. It will be released as a single, and a companion book from Thomas Nelson Publishing will be published in coordination with the Warner Bros. album. The inspirational book, written by the Wisemans and Hill, puts the concept of the song into narrative form.

But delivering "Baby" to the world was anything but an immaculate conception. Hill originally cut the song within months of it being written for her 2005 "Fireflies" album but soon felt it could find a better presentation.

"I called Craig Wiseman and said, 'Craig, I am pleading with you to hold this song and let me put it on my Christmas album,'" Hill recalls. "I felt that this song was just too important, that it simply did not fit on the "Fireflies" album, it would get lost. I told him it needs to be on the Christmas album, and I promised it would be the only new song on there. And he held it."

Wiseman admits he didn't know he would be holding "Baby" quite so long as tours and other commitments took Hill off the Christmas album project. "We know and love Faith and Dann Huff, her producer, so we just kept communicating, it just seemed meant to be," Wiseman says. "Our instincts were always right that this was the way to go, and Faith always had a great idea on how to cut it."

Wiseman says the final results bore that out. "Six weeks ago she pulled me and Tim over to Ocean Way [recording studio] and played this amazing twelve minutes of music," he says. "Even Dann Huff said this was the longest and most arduous and twisting, winding road we've ever had happen with one song. It pretty much takes the cake for everybody when it comes down to it, ironically, having some faith in a song."

Lyrical, the song contemplates the biblical story of the birth of Jesus, "revealing cards as it goes," Wiseman says. The Nashville String Machine orchestra and Hill's soaring vocals add serious punch, and the record fits in well with the overall tone of "Joy to the World."

"It is such an amazing song, I was blown away the first time I heard it," Hill says. "What an incredible way to tell the story that all of us know and remember. In my opinion it is a real human way to understand the birth of Jesus."

Now, Wiseman's glad he stayed the course. "Several times we could've taken the song elsewhere, and I sure both Faith and Dann would've totally understood, but that never even crossed our minds," Wiseman says. "And when you hear it, it's very vindicating and validating and all that stuff."

Nichols and Wiseman also co-wrote a major hit for Hill's husband Tim McGraw, "Live Like You Were Dying," also published as a book by Thomas Nelson. Wiseman says "Baby" was a "harder book to write because it's the Christ birth story. You can't just rewrite that." He adds that KK was far more instrumental in writing the book than she was the song. "We threw out a few things and helped in a few areas, but she pretty much wrote the book," Wiseman says. "Tim and I were really thrilled she was involved."

Given its emotional impact and status as a new gem among classics, "Baby" should add juice to the album in a crowded holiday market. "Faith recorded it because of its gorgeous and inspirational message and not for marketing purposes," Hill's manager Gary Borman says. "However, it is clearly something very rare and special and it can't help but be a focus for us. A great deal of discussion is taking place on how best to present it."

—Ray Waddell

CHRISTMAS IN JULY

BRINGING UP 'BABY'

Lone New Track On 'Joy' Took A Winding Road To Release

14 BILLBOARD JULY 12, 2008

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What sent you in a Christmas direction? I had been wanting to do this for awhile, so when the opportunity came up I just kind of jumped at it. I love Christmas music, every year we have this ritual after the Christmas Eve service, 40 or 50 people come over the house and we play Christmas music. We pretty much rely on the same Christmas music every year, and every year I've said, "I'm gonna make some Christmas music of my own." There's been lots of amazing Christmas records that have come out, but where Christmas music is concerned there's always room for everyone.

Given your friends and associates, Christmas Eve at Sheryl Crow's sounds pretty intriguing. Does someone get taken to task if he or she hits a bad note? No, no, no—that's to be expected. That's what we call art, interpretation. [laughs]

What kind of approach are you taking with the release? The album is just gorgeous. It's kind of a humbling record; it's very sweet and innocent and a little bit of a throwback to maybe the '60s or '70s in production. It's definitely a departure from any Christmas record I've ever heard.

And the repertoire? There's just a beautifully lush, kind of soulful version of "Oh Holy Night." And "All Through the Night," which is a traditional carol, actually; [Bottrell] put together a beautiful suite arrangement, which is a little bit of a departure from the usual hymn version. But the lyrics for it are fantastic. And then there are just a few songs that are fun and everybody loves them—"Merry Christmas, Baby" and "White Christmas" and stuff like that.

Do these selections reflect your own favorites for the season? They do. But also a lot of them we picked for the appropriateness of the time we're going through. We've got a lot of young kids who are overseas and away from their families. So we're doing "I'll Be Home for Christmas" and "The Bells of St. Mary," because they're about somebody being away. And I also penned a song called "Hello, Friend," which is about people coming back together at Christmas, which I think is really poignant.

How odd is it to be recording these songs in June? It's weird, but any Christmas season I've had out here has been very similar. It's never been chilly when I've been here or rainy. It's mostly been sunny, the Christmas season that I've been here. That's just Christmas in L.A. Good luck with the release!
GOODIES GALORE
Digital Entertainment Choices
Abound In Q4
By Antony Bruno

The digital entertainment industry generally likes to end the year with a bang. Downloads at iTunes Skyrockets. Game sales explode. Consumer electronics become the hip gifts. And all manner of new services and products are introduced.

Listing all the digital music initiatives expected for the fourth quarter could fill a phone book, so Billboard has selected those that either have the most impact or represent trends the industry may not have caught on to just yet. So open your early Christmas presents here:

DIGITAL MUSIC
Barring some kind of apocalypse, iTunes will post all-time-high digital download sales for the week after Christmas and remain the dominant digital music retailer. Meanwhile, all eyes will be on Amazon to see if it has any success at expanding the market.

However, the more telling development to look for is not the number of downloads, but rather their price. By the end of this year, the major labels will complete their digital rights management-free licensing agreements with all the premier online retailers, and an important concession they're demanding from each is a willingness to experiment with variable pricing.

Seeing as the fourth quarter is the biggest music sales period of the year, expect the labels to start cashing in those chips while demand is at its highest. Watch for the cost of albums released earlier this year to fall, while fourth-quarter releases get a short-term price hike. Look for bundled products that combine a new release with the artist's back catalog.

But most important, watch how fans respond. Some promotions will work and some won't, but the winners will set the pace for how the labels implement variable pricing for the year ahead—and that's just as important as setting the new bar for overall downloads.

VIDEOGAMES
The videogame industry enters virtual hibernation during the summer, only to explode into an orgy of new releases and stratospheric sales come holiday season. The most anticipated games—"Halo 3," "Grand Theft Auto IV," "Metal Gear Solid IV"—have already been released with massive sales results. But there are a few major titles still scheduled for the fourth quarter. They include "Call of Duty: World at War," "Gears of War 2" and "Saints Row 2."

But with the success of "Rock Band" and "Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock," the real story this holiday season will be the sequels and copies of those successful music-themed games. Scheduled for a fourth-quarter release is the "Guitar Hero" expansion pack dedicated to Metallica, as well as the much-anticipated expansion of the franchise in "Guitar Hero: World Tour," which follows in the footsteps of "Rock Band" and expands game play to drums, vocals and bass, among other new features.

Now to the space will be Konami's "Rock Revolution." And still up in the air is the fate of "Brutal Legend," the heavy metal Austin Powers fantasy project featuring the voices of Jack Black, Motorhead's Lemmy Kilmister, vocalist Ronnie James Dio and others. (See Bits & Briefs, right.)

GADGETS
The iPod will again wipe the floor with the few competitors out there still scrambling for whatever scraps of market share Apple co-founder/CEO Steve Jobs lets fall from his chin. But at least the choices this holiday season will be a bit newer and more interesting, thanks to the arrival of Wi-Fi.

The wireless Internet standard was previously included in a few novelty MP3 players, but Jobs and company have elevated it to a potentially mainstream fixture with the introduction of the iPod Touch. Expect SanDisk to make a play here. The No. 2 portable music device manufacturer recently acquired MusicGremlin, which makes a Wi-Fi-enabled device bundled with its own over-the-air download service. SanDisk tested the Wi-Fi waters last year with Yahoo Music, developing a device that offered dedicated wireless access to the now-defunct Yahoo Music Unlimited service. It could very easily relaunch MusicGremlin as a similar product customized for any one of the iPods competitors out there.

MOBILE
Forget about the digital music services that wireless operators have fumbled out of the gate. The truly interesting mobile music applications are being created by small developers taking advantage of the new "open" mobile phone operating systems. Just look at what they've created for the iPhone after Apple released a developer's kit to encourage third-party programs. SeeQPod: Some labels are suiting this music search engine for linking to unauthorized full-song streams.

iRadio: Application aggregates various Internet radio stations into a common player.
iLyricPlayer: More of a hack from TuneWiki than an official app, iLyricPlayer displays song lyrics as the iPhone streams music and also enables viewing of location of other users, what they're listening to and even hearing their songs that are currently playing.

Band: Featured at a recent Apple developers conference, the application allows users to compose original songs using a combination of piano, guitar, bass, drums, sound effects and various mixers.

Soon, the iPhone won't be the only game in town. Mobile behemoth Nokia bought out the Symbian mobile operating system initiative with plans to re-brand as an open-source platform. And Google is pressing ahead with the development of its Android platform to do the same.

Sure, the major wireless carriers will continue to control the majority of mobile content distribution in the United States for some time to come. But these developments are the beginning of a more democratic system akin to today's Internet.

CHRISTMAS IN JULY

‘Band’ Brawl
"Guitar Hero" won't be the only music game to launch its sequel in time for the holidays. Just before press time, MTV and Harmonix took the wraps off "Rock Band 2," which will come out in September exclusively for the Xbox 360 and for other consoles before the end of the year. The developers are releasing few details at this time, but what's known so far is that the game will support all songs downloaded for the game to date and will also support the original game's instrument controllers. But it will also introduce new controllers for drums and guitar and will boost a soundtrack of more than 100 master recordings.

Exact release dates and pricing information aren't yet known. Further details will be revealed at the E3 Expo videogame conference taking place this month in Los Angeles. —AB
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A portion of the proceeds will benefit music education.
Merlin, the global rights body for independent music, is planning to use the fourth quarter to strike content deals with leading online music services and to ensure that indies have a place at the negotiating table. “For the short term, we want to focus on closing deals with some big targets,” says Bob Frank, president of Koch Records and chairman of the Merlin board. “Our goal is really to avoid getting to the point where we feel like we need to litigate. We are going in with the attitude that all the involved parties want to make agreements based on terms that are fair.”

According to Merlin president Charles Caldas, the organization is negotiating with MySpace Music, Last.fm, XM Satellite Radio and YouTube. Caldas says Merlin would like to have a few closed prior to Popkmom in October.

Indies have long railed against the barriers to entry that exist in the mobile and online spaces, but Frank says he can understand the views of large Web sites and carriers. “It’s really unrealistic to expect them to deal with thousands of indie labels on an individual basis,” he says. “The impetus for the creation of Merlin was to define one global body that would represent the rights and interests of indies in these conversations.”

Wind-up Records’ billing and licensing pact with Verizon Wireless is the only such deal among indies with a major U.S. wireless carrier (Billboard, June 28). “Of course we would do deals on our own if we could,” Tommy Boy Records head Tom Silverman says, but he adds that indies need to band together as a community. “We need to speak with one voice.”

In international markets where cell phones are the most common handheld music devices, it has been somewhat easier for indies to strike deals, according to Martin Mills, founder/chairman of U.K.-based Beggars Group and a member of Merlin’s board. Nonetheless, Mills adds that sites and providers in the vast majority of territories do not have direct deals with indies.

“The mobile space in the U.K. is focused on hits, and that’s not where most indies are,” Mills says. In order to deal with the fact that different territories have different service providers, Mills says that Merlin is willing to negotiate with regional providers. He stresses, however, that Merlin isn’t interested in competing with existing aggregators or entering the space. For their part, aggregators seem willing to be part of Merlin, as evidenced by Independent Online Distribution Alliance head Kevin Arnold’s presence on the board.

Merlin is banking on its expanding ranks to exert leverage in its talks with music services. The organization said recently that its membership of more than 12,000 labels represented 8% of the U.S. market, about equal to that of EMI, the smallest major.

“Merlin is ultimately about... being strong as a collective,” Mills says.

‘The organization is negotiating with MySpace Music, Last.fm, XM Satellite Radio and YouTube.’

—CHARLES CALDAS, MERLIN

Merlin Eyes Late-Year Deals With Online Services

Strength In Numbers

The Indies

CORTNEY HARDING

Merlin

Exclusive Billboard Gear, Plus Over 30,000 Artist Merchandise Items Available Now At www.Billboard.com/store
Gas Prices Affect The Planning Of Fourth-Quarter Events

Fuel For Thought

Depending on whom one talks to this summer, it's pretty tough out there in the touring world. Acts that aren't bulletproof—that aren't the Police, Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band, Jimmy Buffett, Bon Jovi, Radiohead, Coldplay or a handful of others—are finding selling tickets a challenge. And it's not all that easy for even the top acts. Bulletproof isn't always so bulletproof anymore, and home runs often aren't as towering as they once were.

The fact is, the wild cards of gas prices and an iffy economy are already hitting consumers, and things could get much worse. If people are opting for a "stay-cation" instead of that trip to Orlando, Fla., it could well be that a local concert is a viable entertainment/recreation choice. This is where price sensitivity becomes so critical. If potential concert fans pay $75 to fill up their car, $150 for a pair of concert tickets is certainly more appealing than a $500 road trip, but also more costs come straight out of the bottom line. Most, but not all, fall and winter tours are being routed and budgeted with these higher fuel costs in mind. Tour producers have an opportunity to price tickets so they don't get killed getting to the gig. But the temptation to pass all touring costs along to the consumer should be resisted. As ever, ticket prices are a direct reflection of how much the artist is paid. And, in my view, most headlining acts are much better positioned to absorb a financial hit than the fans. Agents and managers should advise their acts to take one for the team: make less money in the short term and rock their fans at a price they can afford, at a time they could probably use a good rockin'.

If not, it could be a very shitty Christmas, indeed.

Meanwhile, the overall holiday touring market is a lucrative niche. To support this, one need look no further than Trans-Siberian Orchestra. In the limited time frame of holiday touring, TSO grossed a remarkable $44.8 million from 112 dates and two units that moved more than 1 million tickets in 2007. That is one well-oiled machine, and William Morris Agency VP Marc Geiger, agent for TSO, says 130 dates are planned for this holiday season. Equal success is projected, Geiger says. TSO is an arena extravaganza and has had little competition in this field so far, other than Manhatten Steamroller and various local productions. That will change in 2008, however, with Madison Square Garden Entertainment's launch of a touring arena version of its Radio City Christmas Spectacular (Billboard, May 10).

If the Spectacular tour reaches projections of $30 million and attendance in the 650,000-700,000 range, it is likely MSGE will remain bullish in this market. In fact, a touring version of the MSGE/Cirque du Soleil production "Wintuk," which debuted in 2007 at the WaMu Theater at Madison Square Garden, will mount a national tour in 2010.

The Christmas Spectacular arena production will play 18 cities across the Midwest and South this year, with the plan being to hit more than 60 markets in the next three years and then repeat the cycle. It's a market that the braintrust at MSGE is familiar with. Last year, the 75th Christmas Spectacular at Radio City and "Wintuk" combined were attended by more than 2.4 million people and grossed more than $150 million in just a 10-week span.

The top ticket price for the arena Spectacular will be $65-$75. TSO tickets are in the $35-$50 range, and Geiger says they're holding the line. Smart.

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Labels Gird For Challenging Holiday Season

Tough Yule Tidings

Will it be Christmas this year?

Every year, the music industry looks forward to the holiday selling season to pull its fat out of the fire. But lately, Christmas hasn’t exactly been behaving like well, Christmas. Add to that the current environment where the music industry faces its second double-digit physical sales decline in a row and the slowing economy looms large in the minds of shoppers and it’s not surprising that music merchants are lowering their expectations for the year-end holidays.

With rising fuel prices, the continued decline in the real estate market, weak retail sales and an overall slumping economy, things don’t look bright for this year’s holiday season, particularly for conventional retail, which will likely see an accelerating shift in shopping dollars to online retailers, says Thomas Harpointner, CEO of AIS Media, an ad-business solutions company.

“Something has to give,” Harpointner says. Red Light Management partner John Grady agrees. “This business climate out there is making even the deepest pockets wince,” he says.

For the past three years, music has been losing out to video, videogames, portable electronics and TVs come the holiday selling season, and this year will be no different, retailers say. Indeed, home video releases have owned the high-profile A frames at the front of stores during those years.

Given the film studios’ holiday track record with home video, signs are emerging that music labels have finally realized that they have to step up to the plate if they want to gain back some market share.

“For the first time, the record labels have begun to listen, and they are already contacting us with interesting catalog programs that we can promote for their holiday selling season,” one high-level executive at a Top 10 account says. Indeed, the lead of distribution at one of the majors adds, “We have been out early in advance talking front-store space and have a few things locked up already.” But neither executive would provide details.

Still, not all of the labels are sure that they want to be back in the front of the store. “Maybe movie studios have a different cost structure than us, but we can’t make money at the $2.99 price point that some had out there last year,” a top distributor executive at another company says.

A senior executive in the catalog division of one of the majors argues that the film studios don’t out-manuever music labels for prime in-store real estate during the holiday selling season so much as “they out-margin us. I don’t think the studios are creative at all, except maybe with their P&R statements.”

Red Light’s Grady has a different reason why he doesn’t want to compete for front-of-the-store real estate. “I want to be alive and well into the Christmas season, but I don’t plot into it,” Grady says. “You could spend an enormous budget for P&R [price and position] and the holiday season used to be five or six weeks, but now the Christmas rush seems like it lasts a matter of hours. And to make matters worse, the competition has multiplied like a virus. Retailers are selling hardware, video, videogames and software all in the same store with music.”

In the face of tougher competition, weaker sales and a shorter selling season, P&R costs haven’t really come down.

“We are all looking at less volume and yet the cost of price and positioning never really alters that much,” the head of sales at a major label says. Although retail hasn’t released its P&R marketing plans for the fourth quarter, that executive has no doubt that “I will probably be looking at a very expensive menu versus reduced shipments.”

Given the high costs of marketing in the fourth quarter, Grady says he has moved up the release of the new album by Heidi Newfield, former lead singer for Trick Pony, to August. “I wouldn’t have minded having another six weeks to let the audience build and have [what Am I Waiting For] come out in October,” he says.

The cost of marketing a fourth quarter is more expensive on all fronts, including buying media, according to an independent executive who never puts out new music releases in the fourth quarter because they would get swamped by the hit titles that come out at that time. For similar reasons, the senior catalog executive at one of the majors says, “We don’t put out anything after October… We can’t compete with the A-pop record sales so we stay out of that lane.”

But Hastings Entertainment director of music purchasing Bryan Everitt warns that even big records have to worry about losing holiday-selling sales to DVDs and videogames. “Hinder is coming out in November, and we wish it was earlier,” he says.

Still, there are some records that he will take whenever he can get them, but especially during the fourth quarter. He says, “We are being teased about the possibility of an Eminem album coming out and a Dr. Dre record, which we have been waiting forever.”

As Arbitron prepares to resume the rollout this fall of its Portable People Meter audience measurement system, persistent complaints from some broadcasters suggest that it could be a noisy holiday season for radio.

But there’s considerably less hand-wringing about the PPM among record labels, where many promotion executives have adopted a more sanguine attitude toward the changeover.

The PPM rollout, delayed late last year due to concerns from broadcasters over data errors and demographic sampling accuracy, will continue with the release of the September PPM survey report in October. On that day, Arbitron will eliminate diary-based radio ratings in eight large markets—New York; Nassau-Suffolk, N.Y.; Middlesex-Somerset-Union, N.J.; Los Angeles; Riverside-San Bernardino, Calif.; Chicago; San Francisco; and San Jose, Calif. In December, Atlanta, Dallas-Fort Worth, Detroit and Washington, D.C., will begin using the PPM to set ad rates. They will join Houston and Philadelphia, which switched to the PPM last year.

After the transition, advertisers in those markets will negotiate ad buys with Arbitron-using subscribing stations based on ratings derived from pager-like sensors worn by survey panelists, rather than traditional paper diaries.

The stakes are high. If sampling problems lead to a decline in reported ratings, the effect on ad revenue and stations’ viability could be disastrous, some broadcasters say.

But by and large, the coming transition isn’t causing the same level of angst among the labels. While most label promotion executives contacted by Billboard declined to speak on the record, the PPM, in general they agreed with the sentiments of Lyric Street VP of promotion Kevin Herring.

“We have to have hit songs by hit artists no matter what Arbitron does to rate the radio stations,” he says. “There’s been nothing in the Houston and Philadelphia PPM ratings that have indicated that we need to change the way we do business.”

And while there were early fears that programmers would use minute-by-minute PPM data to determine whether certain songs caused tune-out, Herring says he hasn’t seen any indication that country stations in Philadelphia and Houston are using the PPM in that manner.

Chuck Morris, Roadrunner Records senior VP of pop promotion John Boulous says stations that benefit from improved ratings under the PPM may gain the confidence to “stop playing it safe and … play more songs. It can be very good for us.”

Meanwhile, Glass Note Records president Daniel Glass says the PPM will eventually result in more accurate audience data.

“With the Internet and text messaging, people’s attention span is less than what it used to be,” Glass says. “People will change radio stations quicker and if they are, I am not sure you are getting that when you trust people to fill out diaries.”

Not all label personnel are looking forward to the PPM changeover. For Spanish-language stations, the new system will provide “a fresh excuse” for programmers not to take chances on new artists, a major-label promotion director says.

But the promotion director acknowledges that she doesn’t expect the new measurement system to force changes in how she goes about promoting artists.

“I’m going to continue to do my job the way I’m doing it, with facts and sales and what I am doing with the artist,” she says. “I’m still going to go out and pitch what I have to.”

Even among broadcasters, criticism of the PPM is far from universal. CBS Radio and Emmis Communications, two of the largest U.S. radio companies, back the scheduled restart of the device.

But market leader Clear Channel and other radio groups continue to question the quality of listener survey samples and remain frustrated that the PPM hasn’t been accredited in most markets by the Media Rating Council. The lone exception is Houston, where Arbitron uses a more costly address-based recruitment system, instead of the phone-based recruitment used in other markets.

Arbitron chairman/CEO Steve Morris counters that the company continues to work “to improve on the delivery of our published sample targets” and that it remains committed to obtaining MRC accreditation.

Some of the strongest criticism has come from broadcasters that cater to urban and Hispanic listeners. Leading Hispanic radio groups have banded together to draw attention to what they see as flaws in the PPM system (Billboard June 11).

A major-market urban radio programmer says that patience is running thin. “Urban PDs and talent should be very concerned at this point,” he says. “We don’t have time to wait for Arbitron to get it right.”

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Additional reporting by Ed Christman, Leila Cobo, Gail Mitchell and Ken Tucker.
URBAN JUNGLE

Reggaetón Stars Expand Reach On New Albums

High-profile urban records will anchor the Latin release schedule at the end of 2008, and will test reggaetón's continued appeal and its ability to evolve in new directions.

The biggest names associated with the genre, such as Hector "El Father," R.K.M. & Ken-Y, Ivy Queen, Don Omar and merveick duo Calle 13, are all slated to deliver new albums.

Ivy Queen's upcoming set is a live album with two new studio tracks for radio. Universal Music Latin Entertainment A&R Pedro Guzman says, "R.K.M. & Ken-Y—the romantic reggaetón duo who were the top-selling new Latin act of 2006—are exploring a 'merengue mambo' on their pop-friendly new studio album, "The Royalty.

"It's kind of an urban merengue, very fast-paced," Guzman says, adding that the sound started as the Dominican response to reggaetón and has spread to Puerto Rico and New York.

Another potent sales force on the fourth-quarter horizon is urban bachata, with Aventura, Toby Love and Xtreme set to release new studio projects. The genre is finding its way onto more established artists' albums, with reggaetón standard-bearer Hector "El Father" including bachata as well as salsa on his "Jucito Final," manager Andy Martinez says.

Blending in styles that can appeal to wider audiences is crucial to the ability of reggaetón acts to continue selling. Many stations that used to play more reggaetón are increasing their use of pop in the mix; according to Nielsen SoundScan, rhythmic music (which includes reggaetón and other Latin urban sounds) accounted for more than 12.5% of all Latin music sold in 2006; in 2007, rhythm's share dropped to 9%.

Rounding out Latin's fourth-quarter offerings are new studio sets from Laura Pausini, Beto Cuevas, Franco de Vita, Luis Fonsi, Kalimba, the D.E.Y. and a re-formed Menudo. Aterciopelados will present "Fuego," an environmentally themed album inspired by the contaminated Bogota River, and banda diva Jenni Rivera will return with "Jenni."

—Ayala Ben-Yehuda

ABSOLUTELY FABULOSOS

Reunited Argentine Rockers In Line For Lucrative Tour

By Ayala Ben-Yehuda

If last year's reunion-mania is any indication, the highly anticipated return of Los Fabulosos Cadillacs this fall stands to be a major fourth-quarter bright spot. The band show is also able to take advantage of modern tools of promotion not available in its heyday.

The Argentine ska-rock legend, who never officially broke up but played their last show six years ago, are at work on a new album that Sony BMG will release in the fall. It's a combination of new material and new versions of old songs, produced by Robert Caranza (Los Dolos, Molotov, Jack Johnson). The album will be followed in November by an international tour featuring at least 50 shows in Latin America, Europe, and the United States.

The Cadillacs have sold about 50,000 tickets for their Nov. 5 show at Mexico City's Foro Sol, and tickets recently went on sale for a Nov. 12 show at the Estadio 3 de Marzo in Guadalajara.

"Obviously we're playing [stadiums] around the world, and in the States it's harder to do that," says Tomas Cookman, who co-manages the group with Anibal Rigozzi. For the States, "it's our plan to make it a coast-to-coast run, but for the first part of the tour we may just do some key major cities.

Producing the tour is Roberto Costa's company T4, a veteran of last year's successful Soda Stereo reunion. Soda Stereo grossed nearly $4 million from just three shows in the States, with tickets priced as high as $200 in Los Angeles, according to Billboard Boxscore.

Spain's Heroes del Silencio drew nearly 10,000 people to their one U.S. show in Los Angeles (gross: nearly $1.3 million), and a reunited Timbiriche was able to follow 26 dates in Mexico ($9.3 million) with a 12-city statewide club run this year.

The Cadillacs plan to keep ticket prices low through sponsorships and have already secured deals with Sony Ericsson and Argentine wireless carrier Personal. Personal customers will qualify for a 15% discount on tickets to the Cadillacs' Dec. 12 concert in Buenos Aires.

Costa adds, "The important thing in promoting and marketing the tour is being able to capture what the band has meant for the audience in all its different musical phases. It goes from 60,000-person stadiums to clubs, and that's a big challenge."

A New U.S. President, Digital Rights Pact May Lift Spirits

Season Of Hope

Two issues in the fourth quarter could have a positive impact on the Latin music market in the United States and in Latin America: the U.S. presidential election and a possible Latin American digital rights agreement between publishers and record labels.

To understand why the election of a new president would have any bearing on Latin music sales, one only has to speak with industry members, who in the past 12 months have consistently pointed to immigration crackdowns as one of the primary causes for the decline in Latin music sales and attendance at regional Mexican music shows. Concert promoters, retailers and label executives echo the same refrain time and again: Fear of deportation has been damping consumer spending.

In the absence of comprehensive immigration reform, stricter enforcement of federal immigration laws has resulted in a sharp increase in immigration raids, mostly affecting Latin.

While President George Bush has been a supporter of immigration reform, legislation has stalled in Congress. But the November election could help raise hopes for meaningful reform since Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama and Republican candidate John McCain have endorsed and voted for immigration reform during their terms in the U.S. Senate and have spoken out publicly about the issue.

The election itself won't suddenly lift the climate of fear and concern over immigration crackdowns — after all, we already know that one of these two reform-minded candidates will win. Still, a victory by either candidate would serve as a powerful symbol that better days could be ahead. And that could boost fourth-quarter sales of Latin music.

"It would definitely give confidence back to the Latin population, particularly immigrants who are in the midst of uncertainty with economic and deportation concerns," says Adolfo Valenzuela, partner in production company Twins Enterprises.

Meanwhile, hopes for imminent change of a different sort are brewing in Latin America, where publishers and labels have attempted for years to reach a region-wide digital rights agreement. Now many are hopeful that, at the very least, a tentative agreement or memorandum of understanding will be finalized by year's end. Thanks to increasing consumer adoption of broadband and wireless services, including cell phones with over-the-air download capability, a digital rights agreement would open the doors to earning by digital commerce in Latin America.

"The immediate result would be an increase in digital business, because labels would have the liberty to offer more products to music service providers," IFPI Latin America regional director Raul Vazquez says.

But there's no denying that the industry still faces challenges. Last Christmas was not a happy season for Latin music. In fact, all of 2007 was punishing for the genre, which registered its first drop in U.S. sales since 2001, according to Nielsen SoundScan. For the last, crucial quarter of 2007, Latin album sales fell from 10.6 million during the same period a year earlier to 8.7 million. It was a tough wake-up call for a genre that had consistently grown for nearly a decade, despite a slide in the overall music market.

A Latin American digital rights agreement and revived promise for immigration reform aren't the kinds of gifts you can fit in a box. But they could make the difference between whether Latin music will experience a decent Christmas season or one even unhappier than the last.

www.americanradiohistory.com
JOHANNESBURG—U.K.-based Virgin Group's V Festival brand will launch in December in South Africa, making it the first established overseas festival to hit the country. Billboard has learned.

V Festival's local partner Big Concerts would not divulge details and Virgin Group did not return calls. Virgin founder Richard Branson is expected to announce the event July 14 in Johannesburg.

The festival would take place mid-December outside Johannesburg and Cape Town. South Africa will become Virgin's fifth international festival market following the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and, most recently, Australia.

Andy Lenthall, GM of London-based trade body the European Live Music Forum, says South Africa "is a classic emerging market—and there is an audience for festivals."

Lenthall recently visited the country as a government consultant on health and safety issues ahead of it hosting the 2010 FIFA World Cup soccer tournament. "They've realized that the World Cup is an opportunity to develop the sector—they want a legacy for a better live-events industry."

At present, however, major overseas promoters like Festival Republic—operator of U.K. feasts Glastonbury and Leeds/Reading—and Live Nation say they don't have any South African expansion plans. And locally, some live scene insiders suggest all may not be smooth sailing for the V Festival.

The festival will arrive in mid-summer, a time of year that is traditionally challenging for existing local operators, who compete during the holiday season with free events for audiences, sponsors and media exposure, according to Carol Hoffmann, owner of Pretoria-based Oppikoppi Productions. The 14-year-old Northrand-based flagship Oppikoppi festival attracts around 15,000 fans each August with a bill of mainly domestic acts.

"With South Africa's summers being over the festive period, you really have to fight for support from the different media platforms," he says. "And many sponsors prefer dates outside summer."

Other promoters warn of December's unpredictable weather. "The only portion of summer that's good for [outdoor shows] is from February until April, when we've moved into the more stable months," says Nancy Hillery of Johannesburg-based promoter Authentic Ideas Productions. The word from Australia, which staged its first V Festival shows in 2007, is that the new brand's entry had little impact on local festivals. The 2008 Australian V Festival shows in four cities had a bill that included the Smashing Pumpkins, Duran Duran and Queens of the Stone Age and drew 100,000. While its March timing avoided a clash with January's leading Aussie festival Big Day Out, it was held the same month as the East Coast: Blues & Roots Festival in Byron Bay, New South Wales.

Although East Coast co-promoter Peter Noble warns that the Australian festival scene is "getting saturated," he insists that V did not affect his event, which this year featured such names as Keith Urban, John Fogerty and KT Tunstall.

"The festivals draw two different markets, looking for different kinds of experiences," Noble says.

While a major-league festival scene in South Africa could help establish a Southern Hemisphere fest circuit, most Australian promoters remain more concerned with building closer ties with Asian markets (Billboard, June 14). Noble previously investigated the possibility of extending the event to Johannesburg, but says his interest waned. "The value of the rand is low," he says, "and that element of the population that would pay for such events is not that high."

Additional reporting by Juliana Koranteng in London and Christie Eliezer in Melbourne.

Virgin Territories

AUSTRALIA (V Festival)
Locations: Sydney Centennial Park, Gold Coast Avica Resort, Melbourne Showgrounds, Perth Esplanade
Local partners: 50/50 partnership between Virgin Group (Virgin Mobile is presenting sponsor) and Melbourne-based Michael Coppel Presents. Televised on delay on MTV and VH1.

History: Launched in 2007 with two dates in Sydney and the Gold Coast. The additional Best of V Festival featured indoor shows in Melbourne and Adelaide. In March, Richard Branson told the Sydney Morning Herald that the festival lost money, but that he would continue to inject funds until it became one of the biggest music fests in Australia.

UNITED KINGDOM (V Festival)
Locations: Hylands Park, Chelmsford, Weston Park, Staffordshire
Local partners: Promoters SJM Concerts, Metropolis Music and MCD are behind this, the original V Festival, with Virgin Group as the regular sponsor. Festival director Bob Angus of Metropolis Music says it has signed a new three-year deal with Virgin, although it is waiting to confirm whether the sponsor will again be Virgin Mobile or Virgin Media. TV partner Channel 4 sponsors the 4 Music stage, with sports retailer JJB backing the third stage. Virgin Radio is the official radio partner.

History: Launched in 1996 after Jarvis Cocker from Britpop band Pulp said he would like to play two outdoor events in two days. Pulp headlined V96 in Chelmsford and Victoria Park, Warrington. The northern leg then moved to Leeds in 1997 and its current home in Staffordshire in 1999. Compared with other U.K. festivals, the event is well-known for its heavy use of sponsorship and eclectic bills, with such mainstream artists as Dido and David Gray often on the lineup alongside alt-rock bands.

UNITED STATES (Virgin Mobile Festival)
Locations: Pimlico Race Course, Baltimore
Local partners: Bethesda, Maryland-based promoter I.M.P. produces the festival. Virgin Mobile is the title sponsor. XM broadcasts from the dance tent.

History: Launched in 1996 after Jarvis Cocker from Britpop band Pulp said he would like to play two outdoor events in two days. Pulp headlined V96 in Chelmsford and Victoria Park, Warrington. The northern leg then moved to Leeds in 1997 and its current home in Staffordshire in 1999. Compared with other U.K. festivals, the event is well-known for its heavy use of sponsorship and eclectic bills, with such mainstream artists as Dido and David Gray often on the lineup alongside alt-rock bands.

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Additional reporting by Juliana Koranteng in London and Christie Eliezer in Melbourne.
Dance Brand Clubland Pumps Up For Winter Tour By Lars Brandle


Berg says combined sales are approaching 4 million units and Cadman adds that individual editions' sales vary between 220,000 and 440,000.

Despite their success, Cadman says neither he nor Nuttall are "big 'club' guys." He adds: "We work well on the premise that we use what we like. The music has to work at every level."

AATW has avoided the downturn in dance sales seen in recent years, and Moran suggests that the Clubland brand in particular appeals to a younger and more mainstream crowd in the north than the more specialist London scene.

"The geography has been brilliant for us," Cadman says, "because we get to see an entirely different side to the industry than anyone in London. We can take day trips to see [Northern English cities] Leeds or Manchester and get a better understanding of what the kids are listening to."

Nuttall's and Cadman's ears for a hit have led to a hot streak for AATW artist album releases, including combined sales approaching 1 million for Cascada's two albums, a surprise U.K. No. 1 album in May with "Jumping All Over the World" by veteran techno act Scooter in May and a U.K. No. 4 bow for DJ/artist Darren Styles' "Sky Divin'" for the chart week ended June 28.

"AATV records are always associated with the north but equally well around the country," says Gary Williamson, head of music at music/entertainment chain Zavvi, adding, "what 'Clubland' does is the newest, biggest tunes, so it should appeal to pretty much everybody."
WHITE CHRISTMAS, RED PLANET

WHAT’S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

While film studios hope high-definition Blu-ray discs will boost sales of movie DVDs, they probably won’t reap significant benefits from the new format by the fourth quarter. But they should count their blessings—the outlook appears far gloomier for sales of music DVDs.

Year-to-date U.S. music DVD sales through June totaled 6.97 million units, down 18.5% from 8.55 million during the same period last year, even as overall DVD sales (minus music DVDs) remained flat at about 171 million units, according to figures compiled by Nielsen SoundScan and Nielsen VideoScan, respectively (the latter excludes some retailers including Wal-Mart).

Similarly, over-the-counter unit sales of music DVDs in the United Kingdom plunged 31.5% in 2007, even as overall DVD sales climbed 9.3%, according to the British Video Assn. On a global basis, things don’t look quite as dire, but the trend still points downward for music video releases, with global unit sales totaling 110 million in 2007, down 8.3% from the previous year and down 28.6% from a peak of 154 million units in 2003, according to the IFPI.

Music DVD Sales Take A Dive
By Tom Ferguson and Jennifer Netherby

Declining music DVD sales have prompted U.S. retailers like Borders and Target to cut shelf space devoted to music video releases, which have hit catalog sales the hardest, according to Eagle Rock Entertainment president of operations Mike Carden.

Not all retailers are cutting back. After a round of store closures, Trans World Entertainment is expanding its music DVD footprint in its remaining stores. Best Buy has told suppliers that it will begin cross-merchandising music DVDs with CDs. And Amazon spokeswoman Tammy Hovey says the retailer expects demand for Blu-ray to increase sales. “As more artists release their DVDs in Blu-ray format, like U2, which recently released ‘Rattle and Hum’ on Blu-ray, customer interest will grow,” she says.

However, Carden warns that the lengthy format war between Sony and Philips’ Blu-ray and Toshiba’s rival HD DVD “really put customers off. It’ll take time to get them back.”

One bright spot for music DVDs has been Japan. During the first six months of 2008, unit sales of Tower Records Japan’s top 300 music DVD titles climbed 24% from the same period a year earlier, thanks to a strong pop release schedule, according to Tower Japan merchandise operation manager Takeshi Imaizumi. That gain came amid a slide in movie DVD sales at the retailer. Imaizumi says, noting that while many Japanese retailers are counting on increased DVD sales from Blu-ray after the Beijing Olympics, “unfortunately, it’s still unclear.”

What accounts for the disconnect between overall DVD sales and sales of music DVDs in other leading markets?

The increasing availability of streaming music and concert video on the Internet is one factor. In addition, less “classic rock” material available for new physical releases. Sony BMG U.K. video marketing manager Sergio Kojne says. That genre, he says, “has always been the top seller on DVD.”

Moreover, he argues, the record labels’ increasingly common practice of packaging full-length concert videos with CD releases cannibalizes sales of music DVDs. CD/video bundles are “great on the one hand, but it does also mean the well of new music video product is diminished,” Kojne says. “A much better way of doing it is to add a DVD ‘teaser’ with a few tracks to the CD, [then] release the full concert on DVD separately,” he says, adding that a robust concert market and the spread of Blu-Ray will help keep the music DVD alive.

A relative dearth of new titles with blockbuster potential, such as Genesis “When in Rome” and others, has also hurt sales, says Rudy Osorio, head of music at HMV, the United Kingdom’s biggest music-video retailer.

In the long term, Osorio says, labels need to decide whether music video “can offer a viable Blu-ray experience, not just high-def but interactivity—which would offer some relief from short-term devaluation.”

Additional reporting by Steve McClure.

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It took the Flaming Lips seven years to finish their film “Christmas on Mars,” so it stood to reason that frontman Wayne Coyne is a perfectionist. But all he really wants to do is give his fans something cool to watch.

That’s why, in advance of a DVD release before year’s end via Warner Bros., he and the Lips are rolling out “Christmas on Mars” at the U.S. rock festivals they’ve been booked to play this spring and summer.

“We play it kind of like a midnight movie at these festivals,” Coyne says. “We’ve played it well into the night quite a few times, maybe six times now. That group of people that comes in from two or three in the morning, they’re usually the most insane. They’ve taken their acid or their mushrooms, drank three or four Red Bulls, and they’re really in it for the long haul.”

But because a large percentage of the audience has no idea what they’re in for, Coyne began making introductions to help set the scene.

“At first I didn’t know if they felt they needed to be more respectful, like it’s an art movie,” he says. “So I’ve been doing these introductions, like, ‘Cheer, laugh and smoke pot!’ I don’t think people have any idea what the film is. ‘Is this funny? Is this serious? Is this weird?’ Once people understand it’s all that, it’s a great relief.”

“Christmas on Mars,” which stars Coyne and his Lips bandmates Steven Drozd and Michael Iwans, was shot on the cheap in and around the band’s native Oklahoma City. It revolves around the first holiday season on the freshly colonized Red Planet; Drozd is Major Sytris, who aims to marshall Christmas cheer with a big pageant, but a series of events threaten the survival of the colonists, much less their holiday plans. Coyne plays a friendly Martian who offers his assistance.

“I try to watch a David Lynch movie with someone you’d experience these moments where music, story and abstract bullshit come together,” Coyne says by way of comparison. “You’d understand it, but you couldn’t explain it to somebody else. It’s like an unspeakable language.”

The Lips also created an original score for the film, which will be included on the DVD but may or may not be released on its own.

Elements of it sound very much like Bernard Herrmann in a room with Igor Stravinsky, and they hashed out, “You take this scene, I’ll take this scene,” Coyne says.

“Christmas on Mars” officially premiered in May at the Sasquatch festival in Washington state, and festival founder Adam Zack saw firsthand how Coyne’s connection with the audience enhanced the viewing experience.

“Originally it was going to be shown on an outdoor inflatable screen, but then we started getting bits of information like, ‘Wayne just bought a circus tent to show the movie,’ ‘Wayne is making custom popcorn containers,’ and ‘Wayne will be showing up a day early to supervise the setup of the movie and hand out custom tickets to the crowd,’” he says. “It just kept getting better and better. Instead of asking, ‘Why?’ which is where most people would stop, Wayne asks ‘Why not!’”
LEGENDS OF THE FALL

WHO SAID THE BLOCKBUSTER album was a thing of the past? In recent weeks, Lil Wayne has cracked a million copies, while Coldplay has cleared 700,000. Those lofty numbers have given hope to those who sell music for a living, in advance of a fourth quarter stocked with high-profile albums from U2, Beyoncé, Jessica Simpson, Buckcherry, T.I. and John Legend. There are some real wild cards in the bunch (Interscope, we're looking in your direction), particularly albums from Dr. Dre, Guns N' Roses and Eminem. If all three see the light of day this year, they'll be unexpected gifts for an increasingly impatient marketplace. Following is Billboard's guide to the best and biggest that the fourth quarter has to offer. By Jonathan Cohen
AUGUST 26

Slipknot

“All Hope Is Gone” (Roadrunner)
Frontman Corey Taylor has already assured Slipknot’s loyal fans (the Maggots) that the Iowa-based metal band’s fourth studio album is going to “rip your face off.” And judging by heavy pounding singles “Psychosocial” and “All Hope Is Gone,” fans will have plenty to headbang to during Slipknot’s co-headlining slot on this summer’s Rockstar Energy Drink Mayhem tour. Lyrically, Taylor screams his frustration with the state of world politics on “Where in Lies Continue,” while expressing a surprisingly softer side of Slipknot on the melodic “Snuff” (“My love was punished long ago/If you still care don’t ever let me know”).

Luis Fonsi

“Palabras De Sutilencia” (Universal)
Pop star Luis Fonsi pulled out all the stops for “Palabras”. For the first time, he wrote or co-wrote all the tracks on this latest release, which he also co-produced with top producers Armando Avila, Sebastian Kys and Jacobo Calderon. First single “No Me Doy Por Vencido” is a midtempo, guitar-driven ballad co-written with hitmaker Claudia Brant that will be used for a campaign tied to the Olympics. The video, filmed in Fonsi’s native Puerto Rico, was shot by Gabriel Cos and Israel Lugo, the team responsible for Calle 13’s attention-grabbing clips.

DragonForce

“Ultra Bestdown” (Roadrunner)
The eight-track follow-up to 2006’s international breakthrough “Inhuman Rampage” features plenty of DragonForce’s “extreme power metal,” at the band’s call its music. As first single/album opener “Heroes of Our Time” shows, the act has gained some polish and smoothed the transitions between the breakneck passages in its music, delivering songs that guitarist Herman Li describes as “almost midtempo, and mixed quite differently.” The set also includes such appropriately named tracks as “Heartbreak Armageddon,” “Inside the Winter Storm” and “The Warrior Inside.”

Solangé Knowles

“Sol-Angel and the Hadley St. Dreams” (Music World/Geffen)
Solangé Knowles definitely attempts to stray from her sister Beyoncé’s staple sound on her second solo disc. With the help of producers the Neptunes, Jack Splash, Q-Tip and Mark Ronson, “Sol-Angel” is less pop, and more of a modern twist on hip-hop and R&B flecked with tinges of blues and jazz. And, unlike her sister—which who has yet to go public about her recent marriage to rapper Jay-Z—Solangé has no reservations about sharing personal experiences. Tracks like breakup song “Valentine’s Day,” the re-greatful “T.O.N.Y.” and the Pharrell-produced lead single “I Decided” all demonstrate her storytelling abilities.

SEPTEMBER

Metallica

“Death Magnetic” (Warner Bros.)
“These are long songs ... we’re talking seven-minute, eight-minute, nine-minute nutty-ass songs,” Lars Ulrich says of Metallica’s long-gestating first album in five years, which was produced by Rick Rubin. Ulrich describes the tracks, none of which have official names yet beyond the title cut, as “definitely pretty all over the place. There’s a lot of variation, a lot of fast, slow, melodic ... kind of hardcore, nutty super-fast stuff stuff. It’s a little more like how some of the earlier records were a little more dynamic within the songs.” Bassist Rob Trujillo, who replaced Jason Newsted in 2003, makes his recorded debut with the band on the new album.

Ludacris

“Theater of the Mind” (DTF/Def Jam)
For an artist who began as a comical MC, Ludacris gave his fans a helping of serious material on his last offering, “Release Therapy.” He describes its follow-up as “fun” and “serious,” promising “a mixture of all five albums thus far, just showing the evolution of everything I’ve been through.” Dre and Vidal, Three 6 Mafia’s DJ Paul, 9th Wonder, Ice Drake and Don Cannon have contributed tracks, while guest turns are expected from Lil Wayne, the Game and Good Charlotte.

The Cure

TBA (Suretone/Geffen)
Most groups wait until their new album is on shelves before going on tour, but the Cure has always done things a little differently. Last spring, the band spent four months road-testing tunes from its 13th studio album, and if they’re anything to go by, fans can prepare for the strongest Cure album in years. Early singles “Freakshow” and “The Only One” bounce with the effervescent energy of the band’s pop hits, while more menacing tracks like “Sleep When I’m Dead” and “Baby Rag Dog Gusto” wield a rawer, guitar-driven gusto. Now, frontman Robert Smith just has to piece it all together. “I’ve gone through so many revisions, probably more than all of the other records put together,” he says.

John Legend

TBA (G.O.O.D. Music/Columbia)
“The last record was mellower. The production this time is a little more uptempo and more pop-sounding than the last one,” Legend says of his latest work, which is led by ace single “Green Light” featuring OutKast’s André 3000. On several songs, Legend eschews the live instrumentation of his two prior albums in favor of sampled drums and futuristic synthesizers. Beyond the Pharrell-produced “It’s Over” featuring Kanye West, the album will also include “Satisfaction,” “Everybody Knows,” “No Other Love,” “Cross the Line,” “This Time,” “Good Morning” and “Ain’t High.”

R.K.M. & Ken-Y

“The Royalty” (Universal)
The romantic reggaeton duo was the top-selling new Latin act of 2006. Fans of the group’s breakout album, “Masterpiece: Nuestra Obra Maestra” (Ptra/Universal Latin), have cooled off with a commemorative edition of that record and, most recently, new singles “Te Amaré” and “Mis Dias Sin Ti.” The returning creative team here includes Wise, co-author of the pair’s mega-hit “Down,” as well as Los Magnificos, the Mambo Kings and Urbaya Monserrate. Expect a romantic, pop-friendly sound in Spanish designed to appeal well beyond the original reggaeton fan base.

SEPTEMBER 2

T.I.

“Paper Trail” (Grand Hustle/Atlantic)
The good: T.I. may very well wind up with another hit album once “Paper Trail” hits stores. The bad: Afterward, the superstar rapper is headed to jail for a year on felony gun charges. T.I. has recorded with DJ Toomp, Drumma Boy, Keith Mack, J.R. Rotem and in-house Grand Hustle producer Lil C; and says “Top of the World” featuring rapper BOB and Kanye West may be the official first single. “It’s a reflective song about our humble beginnings and how far we’ve come,” he says. The gospel-tinged “No Matter What,” produced by Danja, introduced the project when it leeked in May, and Danja’s “What’s Up, What’s Happening” is a contender for the second single.

New Kids On The Block

TBA (Interscope)
Led by the single “Summertime,” which has sold 202,000 digital copies despite topping out at No. 42 on the Billboard Hot 100, the first New Kids On the Block album since 1994 has a “great ‘80s vibe that can be enjoyed by everyone,” group member Jordan Knight says. Making a new album was spurred on by bandmate Donnie Wahlberg, “who was the loudest and pushed the hardest in terms of getting going on the music. His excitement was really infectious,” fellow NKOTB Joey McIntyre says. Among the collaborators here are Bryan-Michael Cox, Emanuel Kirakou, Red-One, Fernando and Nazaree, who produced “Click, Click, Click.”

Brian Wilson

“That Lucky Old Sun” (Capitol)
After his issuing recent work on Rhino and Nonesuch, the Beach Boys principal returns to Capitol for this new song cycle. “That Lucky Old Sun,” which centers on the Southern California of Wilson’s youth, premiered last September at London’s Royal Festival Hall. The work comprises 11 new songs plus four spoken narratives written by longtime collaborator Van Dyke Parks and a vocal excerpt. It’s Wilson’s first new studio album since 2004’s “Gettin’ In Over My Head.” Also that year, he completed work on the long-unfinished album “Smile,” originally intended for release by the Beach Boys in the mid-’60s.

SEPTEMBER 9

Missy Elliott

“Block Party” (The Gold Mind/Atlantic)
Originally slated for May, Missy Elliott’s latest features production from Souldigga, Danjahanz, Pharrell, T-Pain, Pointguard and Timbaland. “This album is probably more musical and melodic than my previous ones,” she says. “A lot of my albums are really hip-hop-driven, with triges of other music genres. But this album is hip-hop, with a soul/funk/hip-hop sound to it.” Beyond the single “Best of Both Worlds” an album includes the sensual “Milk & Cookies,” on which Elliott lightheartedly harmonizes about her capabilities in the bedroom; the drum-heavy “Hip-Hop Don’t Die”; and “Like When You Play the Music,” showcasing newcomer Jazmine Sullivan.
Robin Thicke
“Something Else” (Star Trak/Interscope)
Robin Thicke describes his third album as “classic Philly, Motown and ‘70s black disco meets the creativity of the Beatles and Bob Dylan,” exemplified by the single “Magic,” which is currently the soundtrack to a Samsung TV ad. “I felt like a lot of stuff out there sounded the same,” the R&B vocalist says. “Plus, there are a lot of things going on in the world with the recession and the war. It made me feel like everybody really just needed something new, something else.” The guest appearance-free set also features the step track “Side Step” and the hopeful “Dream World,” both of which could be singles.

Gym Class Heroes
“The Quilt” (Decaydance/Fueled by Ramen)
On 2006’s breakout as “Cruel As School Children,” Gym Class Heroes frontman Travis McCoy’s voice of cocaine. Now, he’s resigned himself to simply loving the ladies, as evident on the single “Cookie Jar,” produced by the-Dream. On “Come Clean,” McCoy continues on about his unfaulty ways (“Been cheating and this isn’t easy for me because you’ve been so good to me”), but he leaves his playboy lifestyle behind on tracks like “Kissing Ears” and the Cool and Dre-produced lost track “Live Forever,” featuring Daryl Hall. Elsewhere, Busta Rhymes turns up on “Peace, Sign/Infelix Down.”

Michael Franti
“All Rebel Rockers” (Anti-)
It’s not possible for Michael Franti to put aside, even briefly, the stay-positive political messages in his music, but on “All Rebel Rockers,” he delivers them with a club-approved, dub-infused soul heavily dippin in the record’s birthplace of Kingston, Jamaica. “The door to the studio’s wide open, and people are comin in off the street, dancing and groovin. There was a guy in the corner I’d never seen before saying, ‘Hey, mon, you need another keyboard to come in right there,’ and I was like, ‘What the hell, are you producing the record?’” Franti says with a laugh. “But I listened, and I was like, ‘Damn, he’s right.’”

Joan Baez
“Day After Tomorrow” (Bobolink/Razor & Tie)
This 10-track album, recorded in Nashville, comes close to the 50th anniversary of Joan Baez’s first performances at Club 47 in Cambridge, Mass. Produced by Steve Earle, it features three songs he wrote (‘God Is God,’ ‘I Am a Wanderer,’ ‘Jericho Road’) as well as compositions by Elvis Costello (‘Scarlet Tide’), Tom Waits (‘Day After Tomorrow’) and Patty Griffin (‘Mary’), among others. “She’s one of the great interpreters of songs alive on the planet,” says Earle, who backs Baez in an acoustic quintet along with Tim O’Brien, Darrell Scott, Viktor Krauss and Kenny Malone.

Joan Osborne
“Little Wild One” (Womanly Hips/Plum)
Joan Osborne says reuniting with former Hooters Eric Bazilian and Rob Hyman, along with producer Rick Chertoff—the team that made her multiplatinum 1995 smash “Revels” — was a happy accident. “I think there’s a sound that happens when the four of us get together,” she says. “It’s more pop than other things that I’ve done, and just a real richness of sound.” “Little Wild One” has actually been in the can for about three years but Osborne felt its time would come. “The business is in such a weird flux right now, but I think what people want from music hasn’t changed,” she says. “I was pretty confident it would come out and find an audience.”

SEPTEMBER 16

Buckcherry
“Black Butterfly” (Atlantic)
Buckcherry frontman Josh Todd acknowledges that “the bar’s been raised” by the success of 2006’s ’15,” a platinum comeback smash that returned Buckcherry, dormant for nearly four years, to the charts with such hits as “Crazy Bitch” and “Sorry.” Produced by guitarists Keith Nelson and Marti Frederiksees (Aeromith, Def Leppard, “Almost Famous,” Fuel), “Black Butterfly” mixes rockers—including the first single “Too Drunk . . . .” “Never Say Never” and “Imminent Bailout”—with more pop-flavored and jaded fare.

Amanda Palmer
“Who Killed Amanda Palmer?” (Roadrunner)
Amanda Palmer, the prolific frontwoman of Boston cabaret-punk duo the Dresden Dolls, stirs up a bit of drama in different ways with her solo debut. String and horn arrangements augment many of the 12 cuts, which are anchored by her consistent knack for hanging away on the piano. “It’s the more evolved songwriter side of myself,” Palmer says of her new work. A companion photography book is slated for a simultaneous release.

SEPTEMBER 23

Jim Jones
TBA (Columbia)
Rapper Jim Jones’ first major-label solo release for Columbia is led by the single “Mr. Good Stuff,” and will feature production from Swizz Beatz, Chink Santana, No ID, Supa Dave, Ron Browz, Chris Styles and label honcho Rick Rubin. Former Roc-A-Fella owner Damon Dash is also moonlighting as Jones’ brand consultant. “I never had the opportunity to promote my music in a major way,” says Jones, formerly signed to Koch. “But nothing really makes me nervous but God and the dentist. It’s just a different and better hustle for me. There’s more opportunity. Lil Wayne just came out and I don’t see anybody in my way at all.”

Pretty Ricky
“90’s Babies” (Bluestar/Atlantic)
Don’t let the title of Pretty Ricky’s new single, “Cuddle-Up,” fool you. It pulses with the sexually charged feel of the quartet’s earlier R&B-pop hits like “Grind With Me” and “On the Hodie.” What has changed is the addition of a new member—the aptly monikered 4 Play. The revamped foursome makes its formal debut here on an album also featuring a cover of Hi-Town’s 1993 crossover hit, “Knockin’ Da Boots.” Member Diamond Blue says, “We’re still God-fearing children breaking down communication barriers among youth about marriage and sex. We just touch on it the way they want to hear it.”

LaBelle
TBA (Verve)
This R&B trio (Patti LaBelle, Nona Hendryx and Sarah Dash) throws its hat into the reunion ring with its first studio album since 1976’s “Chameleon.” The project is being produced by Lenny Kravitz along with longtime collaborators Benny Gamble and Leon Huff, who were instrumental in LaBelle’s early successes. Their touch is evident on tracks like “Living Without You,” while “Superlover” aims for the sexy pop of the group’s most enduring hit, “Lady Marmalade.” LaBelle says, “We just felt in our bones it was time to do this.” Hendryx, who brought Kravitz on the album, adds, “He showed up [one] day at 5:00 and we haven’t stopped working since.”

Kings Of Leon
“Only By The Night” (RCA)
On the Tennessee rock outfit’s fourth album in five years, a pinging keyboard sound introduces the spacey opener “Closer,” highlighted by a soulful vocal from Caleb Followill. Fuzzed-out bass
drives a great, funky groove on “Crawl,” while “Sex on Fire” is a strident rocker with a sultry undercurrent. Elsewhere, the material is more earnest than we’ve come to expect from the Kings, particularly tracks like “Manhattan,” with Followill urging his subjects to “dance all day” and pushing his voice to the top of its range. Perhaps this is the one that finally breaks them as big at home as they are internationally.

Cold War Kids

Cold War Kids are tackling their sophomore album with help again from producer Kevin Augunas, who nurtures the group’s blues influences, particularly with the live drum sounds. Opener “Against Privacy” is an introduction of sorts, warning, “We talk about sex.” Other standouts include the piano-led “Every Valley Is Not A Lake,” which vacillates between soul and a blues jam; rocker “I’ve Seen Enough”; and death march “On the Night My Love Broke Through.” With its big, broiling chorus, “Relief” is akin to the first album’s single “Hang Me Up to Dry,” but the mechanical, Radiodrome-like electronics is a stark departure from the rest of the set.

Keri Hilson

“In A Perfect World...” (Zone 4/Mosley Music Group/Interscope)

She’s co-written such smash hits as Brandy Spices’ “Gimme Moore” and Timbaland’s “The Way I Am,” but now the focus is finally on Keri Hilson’s own music. Timbaland and Polow Da Don produced the bulk of her self-delayed debut, “In A Perfect World...” with Danja contributing at least one track, Justin Timberlake turning up on “See You Again” and the Runaways handling first single “Enemy.” “It’s mostly love songs,” Hilson says. “There are also songs about having fun—but there’s a lot of heartbreak.”

SEPTEMBER 30

T-Pain

“The 35 Ringz” (Konvict Muzik/Zomba)

This R&B hitmaker and prolific featured artist puts the spotlight back on himself with his third album, led by the Lil Wayne featuring single “Snap Yo Fingers.” Wayne, with whom T-Pain plans to begin a collaborative album in the fall, also appears on “Can’t Believe It,” while Busta Rhymes guest on “Dance For Me.” Luda-dics joins the fun on “Chopped and Screwed.” Kanye West is also tipped to turn up on at least one track. Beyond future stripper anthems (“Long Lap Dance Song”) and diss tracks (“Karaoke”), there’s even a couple of songs without T-Pain’s trademark digital voice effects, including “Keep Going,” which boasts acoustic guitar.

Common

“Invincible Summer” (Geffen)

Common may be known for his stimulating lyrics, but for “Invincible Summer,” he shamelessly admits that “barbecues and strippers” were some of his main inspirations. “This album isn’t super thought-provoking... it’s just on some fun shit,” Common says of his eighth record. He teamed with Pharell and Mr. DJ (OutKast), concocting a hip-hop/techno/dance sound heavy with kazoos and double-speed drum patterns. Tracks like the Cre-Leo-assisted “Make My Day,” stripped-inspired “Sex Is Sugar” and first single “Universal Mind Control” are all included. Santogold is set to appear on a track titled “Runaway,” while Jeff B, Star Trak’s Chester French and Musina also make guest appearances.

OCTOBER

U2

“I’m the No. 1 fan of U2,” says producer Jack White. “I’ve done stuff with them three times. This is their best album.” White produced the entire band’s latest, “No Line on the Horizon,” which features nine songs, four of them collaborations with Jack White. “Every Valley” was inspired by Jack’s “Public Enemy.” The band’s sound has evolved to something more immediate and upbeat.

Lily Allen

“Smile” (Regal/Parlophone U.K.; Capitol, U.S.)

Read the British tabloids and you’d think that all Lily Allen’s done since her debut smash, “Alphabet City,” is fall out of nightclubs in a bit of a state. But the follow-up is all but complete, with the 10 tracks heard by Billboard finding her in confident, lyrically inspired form. Again produced by Greg Kurstin, songs like “Every One’s At It” and “I Don’t Know”—which wittily dissect her tabloid infamy—showcase a more electronic sound. “She always had it in her to move more magically,” Parlophone U.K. A&R executive Jamie Nelson says. Allen has already posted three demos on MySpace, racking up more than 1.2 million plays.

Dashboard Confessional

TBA (Vagrant)

This Chris Carrabba-led band’s latest won’t be out until fall, but the artist believes it has “a vibrance that is suited for summertime.” Part of the reason? Sympathetic production by Adam Schlesinger of power pop mainstays Fountains of Wayne. “Some producers do an amazing job of inventing new techniques. But Adam understands the palette of craftsmanship. He’s really good,” says Carrabba, who’s particularly enthused by tracks like “If This Is Chemical” and “No News Is Bad News.” “It’s a nice marriage of where I’ve come from and where I’ve gotten to. For me, it’s the track that ties all the ends together,” he says of the latter.

Xtreme

“Wait It Out” (MNR/Universal)

The British deep house duo’s break out, “Haciendo Historia,” has sold 125,000 copies in the United States and Puerto Rico, according to Nielsen SoundScan, and spawned hits “Shorty Shorty” and “No Me Digas Que No.” Steve Styles and Danny D. (the former won an ASCAP Latino Award this year for penning “Shorty Shorty”) are producing and writing their follow-up with producers Sergin Gregor, George Zant and manager Renn de Jesus. It’s “still within the urban bachata realm but a little more traditional,” de Jesus says. Referencing everything from salsa to classic Dominican bachata to hip-hop and Sean Kingston, “the fusion is going even deeper between modern and retro,” he says. And they’re doing the bilingual stuff because that is who they are.

OCTOBER 7

Oasis

“Dig Out Your Soul” (Big Brother)

The U.K. rock titans’ first album in three years finds guitarist Noel Gallagher writing in search of “a groove; not songs that followed that traditional pattern of verse, chorus and middle eight. I wanted a sound that was more hypnotic, more driving.” He accomplished his goal on first single “The Shock of the Lightning,” which was written quickly and should sound “instant and compelling,” according to Gallagher. “Soul” was produced by Dave Sardy and includes songs from the three other band members, including Noel’s vocalist brother Liam.

Of Montreal

“Skeletomorphic” (Polyvinyl)

Divorce and mental illness often result in hallmark of danceable indie rock, but the band played a big part on Of Montreal’s critically acclaimed 2007 release, “Hissing Fauna, Are You the Destroyer?” This time around, “I’ve tried to incorporate more tension and dissonance, while still maintaining a super poppy sound,” group leader Kevin Barnes says. “It’s the album more bipolar rather than schizophrenic, though I guess it represents its author more closely in that way.” Barnes says “Beware Our Nubile Miracles” “is the most wicked thing I’ve ever written,” while opener “Nonpareil of Favor” “definitely goes somewhere musically that is totally unlike anything I’ve ever done before.”

Crooked Fingers

“Second Piano Forte” (Constellation)

After stints on Merge and Saddle Creek, former Archers of Loaf frontman Eric Bachmann is going direct to indie retailers in two dozen markets with his fifth Crooked Fingers album. In contrast to 2006’s “To the Races,” which Bachmann wrote while voluntarily living in a van for two months, “this is a very arranged, louder rock record, with lots of strings, horns and saxes,” he says. Bachmann drafted tourmate Neko Case to duet with him on closer “Your Control,” which he describes as “really different than her style. It almost sounds like New Order.”

OCTOBER 21

Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

“High School Musical 3: Senior Year” (Walt Disney)

Disney’s mega-selling movie franchise rolls on this fall, with its soundtrack poised to follow in the footsteps of its platinum-plus predecessors. All the regulars are back for round three, including Zac Efron, Vanessa Hudgens, Ashley Tisdale and Corbin Bleu. This time, Troy (Efron) and Gabriella (Hudgens) must decide whether to separate after their impending graduation from East High School, and to help ease into the transition, they make one last blowout theatrical production. The film’s MySpace page is already streaming “Still There For Me,” which sets Troy and Gabriella’s dilemma to the tune of a shiny power ballad.
The Sea & Cake
"Car Alarm" (Thrill Jockey)
Frontman Sam Prekop concedes that the Chicago indie rock institution's eighth studio album "does feel much more upbeat and as much in your face as the Sea & Cake can be." He's proved correct on songs like "Aerial" and the title cut, which practically blast out of the speakers in comparison to the smooth, soulful pop of recent releases. There's still plenty of gnarly gritty listening to be had on "New Schools" and "Down in the City," as well as a strange acoustic/electro hybrid pop song in the form of "Weekend" and an album-closing instrumental built around steel drums.

NOVEMBER
Beyoncé
TBA (Columbia)
The pop superstar's last album, "B Day," is at 3.2 million copies stateside, according to Nielsen SoundScan, but the project's she's working on now in between shooting the film "Obsessed" is last on her Columbia contract. If she leaves, she might do so with a bang: Beyoncé has already collaborated with such heavy hitters as Timbaland, Stargate and Rodney Jerkins. Her role as Etta James in the upcoming movie "Cadillac Records" has reportedly had an influence on the material as well.

Ciara
"Fantasy Ride" (LaFace/Zomba)
Rather than one standard CD, the plan is for Ciara's third album to be spread across three separately packaged discs within one jewel case, each with five to six songs catering to a different theme. The first disc, called "Groove City," will contain sensual songs like "Promise," while second disc "Crunktown" includes tracks akin to Ciara's 2004 introductory single, "Goodies." Finally, the up-tempo "Kingdom of Dance" will showcase Ciara's house-leaning, freestyle-tinged cuts. Producer Christopher "Tricky" Stewart, who crafted Rihannas "Umbrella," is co-executive-producing the project along with Ciara. Danja is helming "Crunktown" and "Kingdom of Dance," while "Groove City" is led by Stewart and Jasper.

David Cook; David Archuleta
TBA (19 Recordings/Jive)
Although it's still too early to name collaborators or guests, this season's "American Idol" champ and runner-up will have records out in time for the holidays. Winner David Cook is just happy "to have the resources to put together a record that I'm going to be proud of, I hope, for the rest of my life," while David Archuleta plans to take the opportunity to further his songwriting. "Trying to figure out what songs work best with your voice and trying to arrange them has really helped, and I'd like to see if I can write some more stuff," he says.

Boxed Out
Pricing Emerges As Key Factor In Boxed-Set Sales
Have boxed sets lost their commercial luster, or can the configuration still shine when managed properly?

Opinion is divided among retailers as the fourth quarter approaches, with only a handful of enticing boxed sets looming on the horizon. Among them are Rhino's long-in-the-works four-disc Jesus and Mary Chain collection, "The Power of Negative Thinking: B-Sides & Rarities," the label's multidisc Jane's Addiction box, which is being supervised by drummer Stephen Perkins; and anthologies from Rob Zombie, Nina Simone, Roy Orbison, Dolly Parton and Hall & Oates.

One of the most in-demand items is Neil Young's "A Treasure," which will come out only on Blu-ray and not on standard CDs, but it remains unclear if it will finally see the light of day by year's end. "Boxed-set sales have fallen off the cliff; they went from something to nothing," says Hastings Entertainment director of music purchasing Bryan Everitt says. "This Christmas we will have a limited selection of boxed sets, the slimmest we have ever offered."

The boxed set is another area "where the digital future is creating a challenge for the music industry," Universal Music Enterprises (UME) executive VP/GM Mike Davis says. "Instead of spending $49 on a boxed set, customers now have the ability to sniff out and chemically-pick the rarities and unreleased stuff, which are big reasons why boxed sets sell. Customers can now do the value proposition very quickly and decide, 'I will buy those 12 tracks as downloads, which is much cheaper than buying the whole set.'"

Everitt adds that boxed-set pricing is also affecting sales in the current economy and marketplace, where music is perceived as a $9.99 price point. "It's an economic thing. I don't think people want to shell out $49.99 for music," he says. "Unless the majors seriously look at reducing the price of the boxed set—they still think they should cost $39.99 or $49.99—sales will continue to slide."

Davis says that in response to those very concerns, UME has launched a new series, Playlist Plus, that offers three discs at an affordable price, packaged in a Digipak inside a slipcase without any booklets. Retail sources say the series carries a list price of $29.99 and a boxlot of $19.58. Acts appearing in the series include the Temptations, Rod Stewart, Marvin Gaye, James Brown, the Allman Brothers Band, The Moody Blues, Kiss and the Velvet Underground.

Not everyone thinks boxed-set sales are off that dramatically. An executive with one of the majors who is not authorized to speak for his company says they're down just like CD sales are. "Everything is relative," he says. "In this environment, you move with the marketplace. So you change your expectations and watch cost much more closely."

The last big boxed-set hit was 2004's four-disc Nirvana collection "With the Lights Out," which has sold 504,000 units, according to Nielsen SoundScan. (Overall boxed-set sales can be measured: SoundScan doesn't collect data by that configuration.) "Boxed sets are alive and well as long as you're realistic about your expectations and who the ultimate consumer is," a sales executive who works in catalog for one of the majors says. "There are some artists where you can sell 50,000 units but there are others where you might reach the 15,000-20,000 range, so you have to plan your P&L accordingly."

While pricing is a concern, there are still certain circumstances when premium prices can still be charged. Newbury Comics head of purchasing Carl Mello cites the limited-edition box for Nine Inch Nails' "Ghosts I-IV," which sold 2,500 copies at $300 a pop, as an example of a project done right. Likewise, the major-label catalog sales executive points out that the high-end version of U2's "The Joshua Tree" reissue at $59.98 scanned 37,000 units, while the regular, limited-edition version at $29.98 scanned 133,000.

"There is still plenty of juice left in the high-end items," Mello says. "You just have to build them correctly."

--Ed Christman

MSTRKRFT
TBA (Dim Mak/Downtown)
On the heels of 2006's "The Looks," Canadian dance duo MSTRKRFT became a festival staple thanks to a booming house sound that appeals to club kids and indie rockers alike. Its second album is led by the irresistible single "Bounce" featuring N.O.R.E. and Isis. "The 'Looks' was like a big experiment for us," member Jesse Keeler says. "That's why we called it 'The Looks' and not 'The Brains' or 'The Talent.'" This next record is more like us wearing our influences on our sleeves, although I don't know if anyone will notice that but us. We've made a record that is very us."

NOVEMBER 4
Hinder
TBA (Universal Republic)
This Oklahoma rock act exploded out of nowhere with 2005's "Extreme Behavior," which has gone on to sell 2.7 million U.S. copies, according to Nielsen SoundScan, and spawned the No. 3 Billboard Hot 100 hit "Lips of an Angel." There was plenty of sex and drugs laced through the debut album, and drummer Cody Hanson promises more of the same this time around. "We like to have a good time more than anything, so that definitely comes through a lot. Being in a rock band is all about having fun and enjoying life," he says of the inspiration for tracks like "Thing for You" and first single "Use Me," which is "about how guys are OK with a girl using them for whatever they want."

Keane
TBA (Interscope)
The U.K. piano-rock trio has been recording at home and in Paris and Berlin, with assistance from producer Jon Brion and new bassist/guitarist Jesse Quinn. Among the songs likely to make the cut for its third album are "Playing Along," "Black Burning Heart" and "Perfect Symmetry," as well as "a lovely song we're trying to do in a kind of Mercury Rev-type of way," pianist Tim Rice-Oxley says. Of that track, he says, "It's begging to burst into some kind of 'Only Living Boy in New York' style [background vocal] extravaganza at the end."
Andrea Bocelli

TBA (Universal)

Although neither title nor release date is yet set, leading Italian independent Sugar is working on a classical release by its “crossover tenor” and international star Andrea Bocelli for the fall. Available internationally through Universal, “it will be the biggest classical album in history,” Sugar president Filippo Sugar says. Bocelli’s last studio album, 2006’s “Amore,” has shifted 1.6 million copies in the United States, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

Queen + Paul Rodgers

The “Cosmos Rocks” (Hollywood)

The veteran U.K. rock act’s first album with new singer Paul Rodgers was introduced by power ballad “Say It’s Not True,” proceeds from which benefited the 4664 AIDS Foundation. Rodgers is still marveling at guitarist Brian May’s undiminished knack for vocal orchestration: “He knows exactly what he’s doing and we don’t know what it’s going to sound like, but when we go back in the studio and the engineer puts everything together we all go, ‘Holy smokes, listen to that!’” he says. Look for such tracks as “Call Me,” “Whole House Rocking,” “C-Lebrity” and “We Believe” to make the cut as well.

Michelle Branch

“Everything Comes and Goes” (Warner Nashville)

Michelle Branch is staying on the country path that she began with the Wreckers on her next solo album, produced by John Leventhal and John Shanks, who both worked on the Wreckers’ 2007 debut, “Stand Still, Look Pretty.” Dwight Yoakam duets with Branch on a track called “Long Goodbye,” while another on the album includes Stuart Duncan on fiddle, Larry Campbell on pedal steel/fiddle and Bob Dylan’s longtime bassist Tony Garnier. Co-writer Hillary Lindsey also sings harmonies. Song titles include “Texas in the Mirror,” “This Way” and “Crazy Ride,” the last of which is a “kind of terrifying lullaby” for her 2-year-old daughter, Owen Isabelle.

Mastodon

TBA (Warner Bros.)

So far, “everything sounds real creepy and spaced out and different,” drummer Brann Dailor says of the metal upstarts’ Brendan O’Brien-produced effort. There’s a 15-minute jam, “The Last Baron”: “Divinations,” which Dailor describes as “a mover and a shaker”; and “Olivia,” which he says is “real moody. It feels like the music got a little deeper somehow.” Dailor promises the set will have the conceptual feel of prior releases, “Leviathan” (based on “water”) and “Blood Mountain” (Earth), but he’s not ready to give specifics just yet. “I like to keep them speculating on our message board,” he says. “There’s no possible way they could guess this.”

Best Of The Rest

AUGUST 26

VALENCIA, “All We’re Asking To Believe” (Columbia)

SEPTEMBER 9

OKKERVIL RIVER, “The Seagulls” (Lapalux) • CHAD VANGAALEN, “Sugar Snap Drag” (Ink) • PEOPLE IN PLANES, “Between the Good and the Bad” (Rock-A-Hula) • HAL KETTCHUM, “Farmer Tongue” (Cable 9) • BOSTON SPACESHIPS, “Bite It Off” (Independent) • THE BROKEN WEST, “Now We Know” (Margo)

SEPTEMBER 16

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS, “Brotherhood” (Ultra) • TERRENCE HOWARD, “Shine Through It” (JEM) • NINA SIMONE, “Do It First” (The Nina Simone Story) (Rhino)

SEPTEMBER 23

RAFAEL SARIOLO, TBA (Epic) • ANNE LENNOX, TBA (Atlantic) • PAOLO NUTINI, TBA (Atlantic) • NIKKA COSTA, “Whole in My Heart” (Tom Tom Records) • OL D CHOW,“The Medicine Show” (Bare Bone) • LENKA, “Leaves” (Eli Young Band, TBA (Atlantic) • TRAPPER, “So” (Self/Universal) • BRIGHTBLACK MORNING LIGHT, “Robots” (Rebel) • MOGWAI, “The Chord” (Fat Mas) • STAR DE AZLAN, TBA (Car/Atlantic)

SEPTEMBER 30

TRIVIUM, TBA (Universal) • THE NIGHTWATCHMAN, “The Power’s Back” (Interscope) • SARAH MCLACHLAN, “the Life’s in Between” (Atlantic) • JAMES, “Hey Niki” (DGC)

OCTOBER 7

LAMBCHOP, “Du Du” (Merge) • RAY CHARLES MAGATATA, “Sugarman” (RKY) • STEPHANIE NICOLS, “The Charlie” (Curb) • RAY LAMONTAGNE, “Brother in the Rain” (Interscope) • MERCURY REV, “Soundhole” (Matador)

THE NUCLEAR SO & SO’S, “Wanted” (Matador) • MIAMI, “Yo Majesty” (Universal) • ANBERLIN, TBA (Universal)

OCTOBER 14

TONY BENNETT, TBA (Atlantic) • MISHON, “BBQ” (Independent) • STEVE HOLY, “Sold” (Rock-A-Hula)

OCTOBER 21

ANNE, “Don’t Stop” (Island/Epic) • NIKE SAWHNEY, “London Underground” (Cable 9) • RAE PELLEGRINO, TBA (Universal)

OCTOBER 28

KELSEY COLE, TBA (Universal) • THE CLIPS, “Till The Caged Birds” (Cable 9) • JAMIE CULLUM, TBA (Decca) • THE PRIESTS, TBA (Atlantic)

NOVEMBER 5

ANNIE, “Don’t Stop” (Island/Epic) • THE LIST, TBA (Atlantic) • KARYNWHITE, “London Underground” (Cable 9)

NOVEMBER 12

CLOCKPARLOR, “One on One” (Universal) • RANDY OWEN, TBA (Universal/South)

NOVEMBER 19

THE HOUSE, TBA (Universal) • ROD REAMON, TBA (Universal)

DECEMBER 3

CASSIE, TBA (Interscope) • DJ YOD, TBA (Interscope) • DJ ORATURA, TBA (Universal) • WALE, “I’m Here” (Interscope)

DECEMBER 23

KeSHIA COLE, TBA (Universal)

FALL

R. KELLY, TBA (Epic) • AVON, TBA (Epic) • DAVID BYRNE & BRIAN ENO, TBA (Epic) • BARRY MANILOW, TBA (Atlantic) • JEFFERSON AIRPLANE, TBA (Atlantic) • JOEY BURNETT, TBA (Atlantic) • THE STARS, TBA (Atlantic)

ADDITIONAL READING

www.americanradiohistory.com
When Delta Goodrem was cast in Australia’s long-running serial “Neighbours” in 2002, the teenager didn’t care for the “bad girl” character written for her—and had the audacity to remove the potentially career-making role.

Goodrem had already signed a development deal with Sony Records and felt the part didn’t suit the hopeful tone of her music.

“It’s hard now to believe I had the courage to do that,” she says. But as it turns out, show producers wanted to fly the Delta and rework the role of the coffee-shop staffie/bullying singer “Nina Tucker” to her liking—and she signed on.

Goodrem has certainly made good on not being bad—but her story has since played out with more real-life melodrama than any soap. When her latest album, “Delta,” arrives July 15, it will represent the culmination of five topsy-turvy years.

Her first single “Born to Try” (Columbia)—introduced on “Neighbours” in 2003—called to No. 1 at home in Oz, while her debut album “Innocent Eyes” spent 29 weeks at a chart-topper, selling 14-times platinum and winning seven Australian Recording Industry Association Awards. The record also made her a star in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Greece, Sweden and Japan.

And then her career came to a precipitous halt when late that year, at 18, she was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s lymphoma, a cancer that attacks the immune system. A U.S. launch on Columbia was cancelled, single “Lost Without You” reached No. 18 at AC, but too weak to promote it. Goodrem’s planned album was scrapped.

After chemotherapy and radiation, her 2004 sophomore CD “Missaken Identity” was released in established territories and, not surprisingly, displayed a starker, lyrical side. Goodrem says, “I was young, but never naive, and found strength as a woman. I knew it was intense, even tiring.” Fans stood alongside (even as she retired from “Neighbours”), with another No. 1. Then, “Delta” in 2007 became her third consecutive chart-topping disc. The title reflects that “I’m my own person now. I’ve learned a lot,” she says. “You can only control so much in life.”

Now, she returns to the States—all told with a string of eight No. 1s among 13 top-40 Australian singles to date. Signed to Mercury’s resurrected imprint Decca in the U.S., Goodrem has a mighty proponent in label president David Massey—a former global A&R exec for Sony who was integral in grooming her in 2002. “I took a trip to Australia and saw 12 artists in a three-day period. I kept seeing posters of this girl named Delta,” he recalls. “She played ‘Born to Try’ for me, this poignant, powerful ballad. Here’s this kid with total presence and charm. She spent three hours talking about her hopes and dreams. She blew me away.”

It’s a slightly reconfigured “Delta” arriving Stateside. The first single, the uptempo piano-forte “In This Life”—produced by Grammy Award winner John Shanks and co-written by Goodrem and fiancé Bryan McFadden (formerly of hit-making Irish boy band Westlife)—is bulleted at No. 35 at adult top 40.

Jeff “Hittman” DeWitt, PD of KHIZ (Hot Kiss 106.3) in McAllen, Texas, is convinced. After Goodrem played at a station event for 400 listeners, he added “In This Life.” “It’s one of the fastest-reacting songs we’ve ever played, and Delta is among the warmest people I’ve met in a long time,” he says. “She certainly doesn’t behave like the huge star she is. And the more songs I’ve heard, the bigger fan I’ve become.”

Another believer is Decca Label Group GM Paul Foley, who is convinced the timing is right in America for the pop singer/songwriter. “With Leona Lewis, Amy Winehouse and Adele, the marketplace has evolved,” he says. “Delta is a beautiful young lady, and then sits down at the piano and instantly woos people. She’s the real deal.”

Decca is in the midst of a nationwide radio tour at adult top 40 and AC. Goodrem has already appeared at the NARM conference and will perform on “The View” during release week. She’s partnered with ION Television for its fall launch, including on-air imaging and exposure of “In This Life” and “Believe Again” (a No. 2 single in Oz). She’ll appear at the American Cancer Society’s fall charity Dreamball and the Jorge Posada Foundation’s seventh annual Heroes of Hope Gala, hosted by Kelly Ripa, both in New York.

Discussions are also ongoing with potential brand alliances.

In addition, Goodrem recorded a duet, “Right Here With You,” with fellow Aussie and cancer survivor Olivia Newton-John for the July album release “Olivia Newton-John & Friends: A Celebration in Song,” with proceeds to benefit her Cancer and Wellness Centre.

Sony BMG Music Entertainment Australia chairman/CEO Denis Handlin—who initially signed Goodrem—says the focus on “Delta” will shift to the United Kingdom and Europe later in the year. The album has not yet been released there as, he says, “everyone wanted to focus completely on the U.S. market first.”

Goodrem remains signed to Sony BMG outside the States.

“It’s even more rewarding that I get to come back and start properly,” Goodrem says of her U.S. relaunch. “I’m hungry for this and committed to being a new artist. I feel like I was always meant to do this, like there’s a chip in my body that says, ‘OK, what’s next?’”

Additional reporting by Christie Eliezer in Melbourne and Andre Paine in London.

www.americanradiohistory.com
**LATEST BUZZ**

--- ZACK'S BACK --

Rage Against the Machine frontman Zack De La Rocha is finally releasing his first batch of solo material. In tandem with former Mars Volta drummer Jon Theodore, De La Rocha will on July 22 release the self-titled debut EP from One Day As a Lion. In the years since Rage’s original split in 2000, De La Rocha has recorded material with DJ Shadow, Nine Inch Nails’ Trent Reznor and the Roots’ Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson, but none of these tracks appear on the EP.

--- BAD TO THE BONE ---

Bad Company is reuniting for a one-off show Aug. 8 at the Seminole Hard Rock & Casino in Hollywood, Fla., the group’s first performance since a 1999 reunion tour. The show is dedicated to the memory of Steve Weiss, the longtime attorney for Bad Company, Led Zeppelin and Swan Song Records, who passed away recently in Florida. It will also be recorded for a DVD that will accompany a Bad Company compilation expected out later this year.

--- JEEZY ONSCREEN ---

Young Jeezy is making his feature-film debut in rapper-turned-filmmaker Ice Cube’s latest comedy, “Janky Promoters,” which is in production. The Dimension Films project revolves around a pair of shady concert promoters (played by Ice Cube and Mike Epps) in over their heads. Young Jeezy plays the hip-hop artist at the center of the action.

--- SHOW TIME ---

Old Crow Medicine Show will release its third album, “Tennessee Pusher,” Sept. 23 via Nettwerk. Produced by Don Was, the set follows “Big Iron World,” which reached No. 2 on Billboard’s Heatseekers chart. Core players Willie Watson, Ketcham Secor, Critter Fuzzu, Kevin Hayes and Morgan Jahnig were joined in the studio by fiddler/violinist Jerusalem’s Jim Keltner and Tom Petty keyboardist Benmont Tench.


--- POP ---

**LEWIS (left) and YOUNG**

**Idols, Their Own Way**

Ex-Contestants Young, Lewis Take Indie Route For New Albums

Arguably the biggest asset that "American Idol" grants is exposure. Contestants go from unknown hopefuls to household names in a matter of weeks, and with that comes pressure to remain in the spotlight by rushing to release an album immediately after the show airs. But for every Chris Daughtry there are several LaToya London and Paris Bennetts, whose quick turnaround debut post-"Idol" slip quietly under the radar.

This summer finds two more former contestants, season five’s Ace Young and season three’s Jon Peter Lewis, ready to step out with new releases. To their benefit or detriment, it’s been a couple of years or more since their time on the show, and both opted to go the independent route.

Young and songwriter-producer Desmond Child split the costs of making his self-titled debut, due July 15 via Pazzo Music through Fontana/Universal. Lewis hooked up with executive producer Don Grierson and will release “Break the Silence” July 22 via his own Cackaroo Records through Adrenaline Music Group.

“[Young and Lewis] took a huge step to be in control of their records,” says My Rocket Science director of digital media Alicia Yaffe, who is working with both artists. And while this allowed them creative control with little label interference, they face the challenge of getting that music heard as well as remaining relevant to fans.

Following Young’s run on the show, he says he separated himself from the "Idol" machine and declined initial offers that came his way. Having worked with Brian McKnight prior to the show, Young wanted to return to his R&B and urban roots and sought out Child’s help. “He wrote the [song] that I grew up with,” he says. “I thought in order to show who I am musically, it would be perfect to have Desmond bring that rock production aspect and I’m able to bring my urban influences.”

Together they split the finances and wrote more than 50 songs, 11 of which made the final cut. Young wrote on seven of the album’s tracks, including “The Letter,” about breaking up with a girl over fan mail, and “Fast Life,” a ’70s throwback with live horns. Songwriter Diane Warren contributed the ballad “You Redeem Me.”

Cappellini says they’re taking a grass-roots approach to Young’s campaign on a market-to-market basis. First single “Addicted” impacted CHR/top 40 radio April 26, but rather than focusing on charting and airplay, they’re working to “blow each market up” and “maximize [Young’s] exposure to the fullest” by making appearances at radio, local TV shows and playing station-sponsored events. “We take [Young] into a marketplace and he is his best salesman,” Cappellini says. “People warm up to him.”

For Lewis, known as JPL by his fans, "Silence" is technically his second full-length. His first, "Stories From Hollywood," was independently released in 2006 and sold a mere 1,000 units in the United States, according to Nielsen SoundScan. "I didn’t know who to trust," he says of post-"Idol" offers, so he bought his own equipment and quickly put together an album because he “just needed to have a record done...as a calling card.”

The lessons learned from that experience prepared him for how to handle its follow-up, and through networking he got connected with Grier- ton and producer Chris Garcia. The result is a more "focused" set of songs that finds Lewis taking a straightforward rock approach, with guitar-heavy, radio-ready choruses paired against sublimely sung/songwriter numbers.

There’s a big push at radio for first single “Break the Silence,” which impacted May 5 and has yet to chart, but has gained airplay at hot AC/adult top 40. My Rocket Science senior VP of radio promotion Bob Catania says the label has been presenting the song to radio on its own merits and downplaying Lewis’ ”Idol” ties, which has helped many stations take note. Catania says the recent add to Sirius Satellite Radio’s hot AC program "The Pulse" has been significant, giving the record national visibility. One week following the add, he says, digital sales of the single “basically quadrupled.”

Although the "Idol" connection is being kept low key to help gain airplay, it has opened the door at radio for interviews and performances. “[He’s] not afraid to talk about his "Idol" experience,” Catania says. “[He] isn’t a big touring act...I certainly think radio is going to be a key component in getting his music out there.”

On the online front, both camps are looking to tap into that core “Idol” fan base to raise awareness of the new releases. Yaffe says viral efforts and community building are integral among the online initiatives. To help target fans, Young hosted a live video chat July 1, and consumers who pre-ordered Lewis’ album will receive mention in the liner notes. A contest is also in the works where Lewis will pen a special song for the winner.

Successfully reaching an audience—be it primarily at radio, through live events or online—is the ultimate goal for both artists, but Young and Lewis still take pride in having recorded their albums on their own terms. “Being on an indie, I’m not concerned with things like first-week sales or where I hit on the radio charts,” Young says. “I just want more people to know about the album than they did the day before.”

VIDEO: To watch an exclusive interview with Ace Young, go to billboard.com/aceyoun.
ALBUMS

ROCK

ALBERT HAMMOND JR.
Como To Llama
Producers: Albert Hammond Jr., Gus Oberg, Matt Romano
Release Date: July 8
Recorded in Albert Hammond Jr.'s native New York, "Como To Llama" is the solo Stroke's follow-up to the lauded 2006 debut, "Yours To Keep." The album is filled with big guitar noise and mildly incongruous but not unpleasant mixtures of modern riffs ("Rocket"), new wave basslines ("Victory at Monterey") and retro hooks and melodies ("Miss Myrtle"). Like any solo record by a member of a groundbreaking and unique band, it's easy to hear Hammond's influence on the Stokes' music. The set's two opening tracks, for instance, contain familiar trilling guitars and vocal reverb, and the guitar lines mimic the melody in a very recognizable style on "The Boss Americana." But "Llama" has a much poppier flavor than anything the Stokes have ever recorded, once again setting Hammond apart from his gritty rock bandmates—JW

RON SEXSMITH
Exit Strategy of the Soul

G-UNIT
T.O.S. (Terminate on Sight)
Producers: various
G-Unit/Interscope
Release Date: July 1
One of the best attributes of 50 Cent, Lloyd Banks and Tony Yayo's 2003 album "Beg for Mercy" was its balance of radio-friendly and comical tracks, but "T.O.S. (Terminate on Sight)" sounds like 16 cuts of the same murderous lyrics atop heavy bass. There are a few entertaining joints, like the infectious Rick Rock-produced "Rider Part 2" featuring a chorus ("whoa whoa") that's perfectly hard-edged for East Coast radio. "Party Ain't Over" features former G-Unit member Young Buck, who switches up his cadence alongside a fun guitar lick and hand claps. "You So Tough" is a thinly veiled attack on Atlanta MC T.I., where 50 essentially calls the rapper a snitch for emerging from stiff gun charges with a light jail sentence. Ultimately, G-Unit has returned to its aggressive roots, but it would've been wonderful to hear it rap over a more varied assortment of beats.—HC

BECK
Modern Gig
Producer: Danger Mouse
DGC
Release Date: July 8
Beck's latest, "Modern Gig," is his records so rarely sound like anyone's but his own, it's easy to forget how much Beck thrives on collaborating with name-brand producers like Nigel Godrich and the Dust Brothers. For the follow-up to 2006's "The Information" he teamed with Danger Mouse, and though the result doesn't quite match the work of our favorite midnite vulture, "Modern Gig!" also makes clear how much Beck must have loved "Crazy" by Gnaris Barkley. Nearly every tune here echoes that hit's spunky, reverb-soaked vibe. Built on shuffling beats and big basslines, the ghost-gospel arrangements provide a gauzy setting for Beck's vocals, which he new closer to the depressed mumbling of "Mutations" and "Sea Change" than to the whiteboy jive of "Guer" or "Odelay." Nothing makes as quick of an impact as "Crazy," but give the tunes time and you'll find they stick around.—MW

POP

ALISON MOYET
The Turn
Producers: Alison Moyet, Pete Glenister
Release Date: July 8
Decca
America may know Alison Moyet for her only Top 40 entry, 1985's "Love's Like a Child," but global music aficionados have celebrated her charms as part of '80s duo Yazoo with Erasure's Vince Clarke and a half-dozen lovingly crafted solo efforts during the two decades following. "The Turn," which launched at No. 21 in the United Kingdom last October, proffers all sides of the smoky, blues-soaked singer/songwriter's greatest-works: dramatic chanteuse ("Fire"), dance siren ("A Guy Like You"), pop master ("It's Not the Thing Henry") and smart sophisticate ("One More Time"). Meanwhile, Yazoo has reunited for a world tour. After all this time, this "Turn" joyously brings Moyet full circle.—CT

BLUEGRASS
DEL McCOURY BAND
Mandolyn
Producers: Rob McCoury, Ronnie McCoury, Stan Strickland
McCoury Music

LITTLE JACKIE
The Stoop
Producers: Imani Coppola, Michael Mangini
S-Curve
Release Date: July 8
On this excellent debut by her new duo with programer Adam Pallin, Imani Coppola sounds no more interested in sticking to a single style than she usually does. Fans of Coppola's splashy left-field 1997 hit "Legend of a Cowgirl" (and those who heard her underappreciated "The Black & White Album" from last year) will recognize much in this album's bubbly blend of swinging folk-pop rhythms, bright R&B horns and sassy soul-siren vocals. Thanks perhaps to her inability to duplicate the mainstream penetration of "Cowgirl," Coppola reveals a bit more lyrical streak that contrasts tartly with Pallin's summery sounds; attacks on brain-dead celebutantes and deadbeat boyfriends rarely feel like this much fun.—MW

BECK
MODERN GYNT

JAZZ

BRAZILIAN TRIO
Forests
Producers: Helio Alves, Duduka Da Fonseca, Nilson Matta
Zoho
Release Date: July 8
This trio is known for its samba jazz, and, indeed, "Forests" has an overarching vibe that's as chilled and elegant as a Jobim samba. In fact, Helio Alves (piano), Duduka Da Fonseca (drums) and Nilson Matta (bass) display a great deal more breadth in their performances than simply cruising in the samba groove. On "Montreux," they evoke a lovely, impressionistic feel in their measured playing, while "Bolivian Song" is a brightly acoustic rendering of "Turn Your Eyes to Heaven." —PVV

www.americanradiohistory.com
approach. Their take on Milton Nascimento's "Vera Cruz" has a grandness that's nearly cinematic, particularly Alves' busy, articulate opening solo. Again bringing its skills to bear on a Nascimento tune, "Tarde," Alves plays with a gravity and a stylistic flair that's truly impressive.—PVV

VITAL REISSUES

BILLY JOEL

The Stranger: 30th Anniversary Edition
Producer: Phil Ramone

Release Date: July 8

"The Stranger" may not be Billy Joel's best album, but it's certainly his most important, the musical moment that took him from cult favorite to pop superstar. Thirty years on, it's still a great record, and even better in this boxed anniversary incarnation. Like all career-defining works, "The Stranger" is a cohesive, loosely thematic piece whose individual highlights still stand out—the despairing characters of "Movin' Out (Anthony's Song)," the piano-playing heroes of the epic "Italian Restaurant," the unapologetic cheek of "Only the Good Die Young," the understated duality of "She's Always a Woman." The set's second CD, a previously unreleased 1977 concert at New York's Carnegie Hall, offers a slightly different incarnation of the breakthrough hit "Just the Way You Are" (more cha-cha than samba) and a look at the ensemble dynamic that producer Phil Ramone captured on "The Stranger," while the DVD accompanying the deluxe edition features Joel's 1978 performance on the BBC's "Old Grey Whistle Test" and new interviews. All the material manages to refreshen our long and familiar relationship with "The Stranger."—GG

DVD

NEIL DIAMOND

The Thank You Australia Concert
Producer: Terry Shand, Geoff Keimpin

Eagle Vision

Release Date: July 1

Neil Diamond was an established international superstar by 1976, but nothing prepared him quite for the reception he met when he arrived for concerts in Australia and New Zealand. There are crowds as far as the eye can see during this Sydney show, originally broadcast on nationwide TV, and they eat up Diamond's time-tested setlist from minute one of the faux-Afropop "So So Cool." The artist and his band are in full mid-'70s regalia here, with plenty of unbuttoned shirts, jewelry and feathered hair, but the sensitive pop/rock is a world away from the punk explosion about to occur back at home and in the United Kingdom. Diamond himself wrestled with being a man out of time, which is amply demonstrated in the fascinating TV interview included as a bonus here. Chain-smoking under hot studio lights and rarely resembling the confident pro he is onstage, Diamond reveals his struggles to understand his fame and why he took a two-year hiatus to put his life back in order. "Solitary Man," indeed.—JC

SINGLES

POP

KID ROCK

All Summer Long (4:56)
Producer: Mike Bradford

Writers: various

Publisher: not listed

Atlantic

Motor City hero Kid Rock reminisces about a memorable season spent at a northern Michigan lake on "All Summer Long," an ode to youth that'll ring true with fans his age (37, if you must know). He fondly praises the joy of sipping whiskey, lakeside hookups and singing "Meet Home Alabama" when he was somewhere between a boy and man—accompanied by a 17-year-old girl he'd love to see again someday. Rock rides down a shoegazer memory lane on the guitar chords of the Lynyrd Skynyrd classic and piano samples of Warren Zevon's "Werewolves of London." Joining by Bob Seger-style backing vocals and ladies singing "ooooh," lyrics about "trying different things and smoking funny things" will make listeners nod and smile knowingly as they recall their own glory days. With the song's climb on the Pop 100, Rock's latest is ready to blast from mainstream speakers... as it deserves, post-rock radio momentum at top 40, adult top 40 and country.—CT

R&B/HIP-HOP

BUSTA RHymes

Don't Touch Me (Throw Da Water on Me) (3:31)
Producer: Grind Music


Publishers: T'Ziah's Music/Sony/ATV/Walt That's Mine/Catalogue/BMI; For My Son/SONY

Flipmode/Aftermath/Interscope

Busta Rhymes remains among the most charismatic figures in hip-hop history. Since his long-ago debut with Leaders of the New School, his high-energy performances, both onstage and on wax, never fail to captivate. On the second single from upcoming album "Blessed," Busta remains true to form. With rapid-fire delivery over an uptempo beat courtesy of Grind Music, it's impossible to overlook his fun-loving and animated personality. One of Rhymes' strengths has always been his willingness to be true to himself, and in a creative industry often criticized for sticking to formula, it's inspiring to see a fearless 17-year veteran continue to achieve success. He proves again how originality outlasts the tried and true.—SR

MENUDO

Too Good for Me (3:50)

Producers: Eddie Galan, Mike Leslie

Writers: M. Leit, D. Quinones, E. Bogart, E. Nune

Publishers: various

Drum Entertainment

R&B crooner Rigo Luna scored a Spanish-language hit in 2006 with ballad "Nunca," but has opted for English for his latest slow jam. Lyrically, it seems like a good choice, with "Too Good for Me" eschewing the sapphiness of "Nunca" for a more plain-spoken vibe. Simple beats and lugh guitars are just enough to back Luna's vocals, and the lyrics sound like they were written in a school-yard during recess: "You're my Maria in this West Side Story," "I'm used to hustlin', you're used to shopping in Saks for designer bags, Me, I'm switchin' tags." The simple, catchy approach makes it radio-friendly enough for crossover potential, if fans of his Spanish hit follow, Luna will prove you can have it both ways.—ABY

ROCK

GAVIN ROSSDALE

Love Remains the Same (4:09)

Producer: Bob Rock

Writers: G. Rossdale, M. Frederiksen

Publisher: not listed

Interscope

It's been 14 years since Bush rose to post-grunge fame with "Sixteen Stone," whose third single, "Comedown," reached No. 1 at modern rock, paving the way for too 40 victory with "Glycerine." While success never quite matched those first few years, the band continued until 2001. Meanwhile, vocalist Gavin Rossdale's profile was maintained, thanks to marriage to Gwen Stefani. First single off debut solo CD, "Wanderlust" is an attempt to return to mainstream success, and given the quality of the track, it meets its ambition. "Love Remains the Same" is a personal tale of regret with R's trademark sandpaper vocal put to good effect. It's easy to hear the influence he's perhaps had on recent "American Idol" finalists (Chris Daughtry), while '08 winner David Cook should take note. It'll be interesting to see if Rossdale will spin beyond modern rock and hot AC, again scoring at top 40, alongside his 39-year-old wife.—CW

E.G. DAILY

Beautiful (4:02)

Producer: Rich Dickerson, Gigi Meroni

Writers: R. Dickerson, S. Sello, G. Meroni

Publishers: Blindboy Rich/Stack X; ASCAP

Remixers: Scootty K, Dena Cucci

EQ/PP!/Immortal Access

Among acts that enlightened the dance charts in the mid-'80s, singer/actressvoice-over vet E.G. Daily stands among giants, with "Say It, Say it," "Mind Over Matter" and arguably the greatest post-disco dancefloor hit of all time, 1986's "Love in the Shadows." She charts for the first time in 19 years with "Beautiful," a consummate high-energy twister that soars to the heavens via Scotty K's and Dena Cucci's mixes—alongside Daily's lovable sandpaper vocal grit, marvy knee-jigging tempo and a hook as timeless as E.G. What a pleasure to have her out of the shadows.—CT

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

CONTRIBUTORS: Ajay Bery, Yolanda Troy, Cricket Carpenter, Jonathan Cohen, Hillary Crossley, Gary Graff, Jill MANTS, Shad Reed, Chuck Taylor, Christi L. Titus, Ken Tucker, Philip Van Vleck, Chris Williams, Brian Will, Noon Wood, Larnina Jones Wright

PICK: A new release predicted to hit the top half of the chart in the corresponding format.

CRITICS' CHOICE: A #1 new release, regardless of chart potential, highly recommended for music lovers. All albums commercially available in the United States are eligible. Send album review copies to Chuck Cohen and singles review copies to Chuck Taylor (both at Box 700, Box 700, Seventh Floor, New York, N.Y. 10003) or to the writers in the appropriate bureau.
Barrel Of Bluegrass

Skaggs Puts A New Spin On Country Hits

Thelma's label may describe her as a typically “polite and humble” Japanese pop artist, but the 20-year-old singer is now officially a sales sensation and cultural phenomenon. With Universal Music Japan (UMJ) suggesting she may have broken mobile music sales records (Billboard.biz, July 2) with her second single “Sobanirimura,” the singer—full name Thelma Aoyama—has been catapulted to fashion icon status. In Japan, a legion of wannabes known as “Thelmans” imitate her look. She often wears large white headphones and carries a sizable tote bag.

Although there aren’t any plans to launch Thelma beyond Southeast Asia at present, London-based Universal Music Group International Asia-Pacific region president Max Hole says she’s succeeded because she’s the complete package.

“Thelma is a really good singer and she’s got a look that is just perfect for the Japanese pop audience,” he says. “It’s an answer-back record that’s really connected with the consumer.”

The track features Japanese rapper SoulJa, who sang the 2007 hit “Kokoninuru” that “Sobanirimura” is a response to. Thelma also appeared on the original track. UMJ says “Sobanirimura” has sold 3.4 million ringtone downloads, 2 million full-track downloads and 1.6 million ringback tones, putting it at No. 1 for three months on the Recording Industry Association of Japan’s RIAJ monthly digital download charts. UMJ says the CD single has sold 550,000 copies since its Jan. 23 release.

“Sobanirimura” has become a hit because it’s really easy to sing at karaoke and is very popular among young women,” says Hiroshi Yamazaki, executive officer at Tokyo-based mobile content aggregator/distributor Label Mobile. The use of the track in a TV commercial by NTT DoCoMo, Japan’s biggest mobile carrier, also boosted sales.

“It’s a landmark,” Hole says of the track. “The mobile market in Japan is one of the reasons to be cheerful in the music business today.”

Success for other domestic acts, including SoulJa, Greentea and Utada have led to continued strong growth in digital-music sales in Japan, which in first-quarter 2008 rose 6% year on year to 120.8 million units, according to the RIAJ.

Sales of digital and physical product totaled 466.6 billion yen (US$4.4 billion) in 2007, according to the RIAJ, making Japan the only major music market where the rise in digital sales is making up for the decline in sales of physical product.

—Andre Paine and Steve McClure

THRIVING BUSINESS

Sure, call it old-fashioned. But Thriving Ivory has gone above and beyond by buzz to support its self-titled debut album, which was released June 24.

Wind-up Records president Ed Vetri decided to focus on creating partnerships for the band with a number of big-ticket outlets, first and foremost VH1. The act is currently the featured artist in the cable network’s You Oughta Know campaign and its video for lead single “Angels on the Moon” premiered last week on VH1’s “Top 20 Video Countdown.”

“We had our eyes set on VH1, and we made the video with that audience in mind,” Vetri says. “We had them play a showcase in New York earlier this year for VH1, and they decided to commit to the band.”

Also in the room at the showcase, according to lead singer Clayton Stroope, were representatives from Best Buy and Rhapsody, both of which have since signed on to take a large role in the band’s development. Best Buy will sell the CD exclusively for the first two months it is available and feature the disc in circulars and end-caps. Additionally, when customers purchase the CD, they can sign on to Rhapsody and download an exclusive five-song EP. iTunes will carry the exclusive download of the digital version of the album, although Vetri says the label is rolling out the record to other digital partners during the next month.

“What we looked for with all these partnerships was a commitment to help the band grow and develop,” Vetri says. Since its release, it has sold more than 1,000 units, according to Nielsen SoundScan. The band has worked to build a strong fan base in its hometown of San Francisco and spent a year working toward the release of the album after signing with Wind-up.

At first, Stroope wasn’t thrilled about being patient. “It wasn’t our choice to wait at first, because we had just signed the deal and we were all excited,” he says. “But looking back, we did make the right decision.”

The band’s next steps include playing radio station festivals this summer and a tour in the fall. Thriving Ivory also appears in the new Lee Ann Womack video “Last Call,” in the role of a band playing in a nightclub.

—Courtney Harding

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Happy ‘Days’

Singer/Songwriter Amos Lee Reaps Debut-Week Rewards

Amos Lee is in high demand these days. The singer/songwriter’s third album for Blue Note, “Last Days at the Lodge,” debuts this week at a career-best No. 29 on the Billboard 200 after selling 16,000 copies in the United States, according to Nielsen SoundScan. His last record, “Supply and Demand” (2006), peaked at No. 76.

“It’s a good thing,” Lee says. “How to sell records is a mystery to anybody doing this today. If there’s a formula, I sure don’t know what it is.”

Lee says he’s not one to generally follow such stats. “I do it with football and baseball, so I try not to do it with music,” he says with a laugh. “It distracts me from the places I like to go.”

Blue Note product manager Perry Greenfield attributes part of the first-week figure to an online campaign that’s the culmination of what he calls “four or five years of setup.”

“It’s an effort to take our online base—which is out for as much as they can get—and transition to the tools at our fingertips now,” Greenfield says, citing success with blogs and social networking sites.

Born in Pennsylvania, Lee was an elementary school teacher in Philadelphia for two years before jumping ship for a career in music. A 2003 self-produced EP made its way into the hands of Noah Jones, who signed Lee an opening slot on her 2004 tour. And driven by assistants from Jones and her bassist Lee Alexander, Lee’s self-titled 2005 debut positioned him as a rising star. It wasn’t long before he found himself opening for the likes of Bob Dylan, Paul Simon and John Prine.

Lee continued to mine a similar sonic vein on “Supply and Demand,” but after wrapping up a tour with Dylan and Elvis Costello, he headed to Los Angeles to spend the winter in the sun. While there he hooked up with producer Don Was, and during a couple of hours of basketball-watching, decided to work together and started drawing up a list of potential collaborators.

“I wanted to get people who, if I never made another record for Blue Note, I would be happy that got to work with,” Lee says. “To that end, and to create the more robust, refined sound of ‘Lodge,’ Lee and I enlisted an all-star team of guitarist Doyle Bramhall II, keyboardist Spooner Oldham, bassist Pino Palladino and drummer James Gadson.

Greenfield says Lee faces an “uphill battle” at radio, but his song “Sweet Pea” from “Supply” received considerable exposure via an AT&T commercial that appeared during the American Idol premiere and last year’s Super Bowl pregame show.

Lee, who will tour in support of “Lodge” through late September, says the debut-week numbers are nice, but that perspective is important. “People I look up to and admire are able to use their success to start their own labels (and get musicians on them),” he says. “That being successful means feeding the chain of life of music.”

IN TRANSITION

Monchy & Alexandra’s 2004 album “Hasta el Final” has sold 164,000 copies in the United States, according to Nielsen SoundScan, solidifying the act’s standing as a purveyor of traditionalbachata—the Dominican music characterized by plucked guitar lines, crisp percussion and bittersweet lyrics—all with a contemporary look and feel.

Since then, the duo has been out of the studio thanks to a hectic touring schedule and the arrival of Alexandra’s first baby.

Now, as Monchy & Alexandra put finishing touches on an album due late this fall, their label, indie J&N, is working what it terms a transitional release aimed at paving the way for the studio set.

“En Vivo” was recorded last year at a concert at Puerto Rico’s Bellas Artes theater, but there weren’t any set plans for the album’s release.

When the new studio album, “Angeles Desnudos,” was delayed, J&N decided to release the live set to “warm up the market,” J&N sales coordinator Tony Birriel says.

“En Vivo” was promoted via a nationwide TV campaign on network Azteca America that runs through this week. It will be followed by another TV campaign in Puerto Rico that kicks off the second week of July and will run two to three months, according to Birriel. It consists of a four-minute video that will feature snippets from four tracks and air on Puerto Rico’s various video channels.

“En Vivo” is being sold in three formats—video, double CD and CD/DVD—and its retail price generally fluctuates between $11 and $18, with the combo and the double CD outselling the video.

As for “Angeles Desnudos,” it will feature 12 new tracks largely written and produced by Monchy & Alexandra’s longtime production team, including engineer Maríes De Leon and composers Frank Castillo and Alejandro Martinez.

—Leila Cobb

‘RIVER’ OF DREAMS

Prior to signing with Epic Records, Noel Gourdin was given props by no less a music authority than Dr. Dre. After meeting through a mutual acquaintance, the super producer invited the R&B newcomer into his studio to record several tracks.

“Walking down that hallway to where Dr. Dre was sitting at the board was the longest 40 feet in my life,” Gourdin recalls with a laugh. “But when we were done, he said the door is always open. That was major validation.”

As is the momentum behind his first single, “The River.” The soulful ballad, inspired by Gourdin’s deceased grandfather and family summers spent in Mississippi, has climbed to No. 3 on Billboard’s Adult R&B chart and No. 29 on Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs.

Produced by former Naughty by Nature DJ/producer Kay-Gee (Jaheim, Next), “The River” was also featured in the film “Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins” starring Martin Lawrence and Mo’Nique. The song, along with 12 other selections, constitutes Gourdin’s new album, “After My Time” (July 22).

“Kay-Gee is a hip-hop man and I’m a soul man,” Gourdin says. “We put the two together and created a base for the album: R&B/soul and hip-hop also give way to funk and alternative rock on such tracks as ‘Sorry! I Led You On’ and ‘P.Y.T.’.”

Gourdin, who co-wrote much of the album with production team Trakaddix, collaborated with several guest producers including Raphael Saadiq, Salaam Remi and Soundz.

Growing up just outside Boston in Brockton, Mass., Gourdin was influenced musically by Otis Redding, Marvin Gaye and Teddy Pendergrass. Working at a group home after completing high school, the 26-year-old got busy during off hours seasoning his vocals in local clubs, talent shows and summer festivals. Keeping tabs on Gourdin’s progress, family friend/manager Larry “Lucky” Fernandes of Stain Entertainment introduced him to producer/artist Tommy Olivera and songwriter Ballewa Muhammad of Trakaddix.

Kay-Gee, who initially tapped Gourdin to record “Family Reunion” for the 2004 soundtrack to “The Cookout,” recalls the singer/songwriter the “new-age Sam Cooke.” While flattered, Gourdin is just trying to soak in all that’s happened since signing with Epic in 2005.

“After quitting my job, I would jog myself every day if I was doing the right thing with my life,” he says. “But I wouldn’t trade this now for anything.”

—Gail Mitchell
Billboard’s Charts Get Makeover; Price Matters

In a couple of minutes, serious chart devotees will see that a new design commences with this issue. Actually, our biggest chart fans probably already noticed, as they most likely skip to those pages before bothering to read my commentary.

With the music business settling through dynamic changes and album sales declining in six of the last seven years, Billboard must scrutinize the deployment of its print and online resources.

As album volume continues to dip in 2008, it makes sense that a few charts have been shortened, while others move from these pages to billboard.biz (billboard.biz/charts).

But this redesign is not simply an exercise of subscription, because we are also adding chart content to the magazine and our business-to-business site.

Five radio charts are joining our pages, including Mainstream R&B/ Hip-Hop, Christian AC Songs, Gospel Songs and Smooth Jazz, while Mainstream Top 40 comes back to billboard.biz for the first time since 2005.

Hot Airplay, Top Digital Albums and Top Internet Albums each run deeper than they did last issue.

The charts that have been shortened in print remain at their original depths on billboard.biz, while the Triple A chart, from sister magazine Radio & Records, also joins our site’s menu. This is also a good time to remind our readers that magazine subscribers are entitled to billboard.biz access at no extra fee.

Thanks to creative director Josh Kienert, you see a cleaner look on our callouts—those fact boxes that tell you the stories behind the ranks on some of our bigger charts. We’ve added more of those to our section, including the layouts of Hits of the World, Top R&B/ Hip-Hop Albums, Top Country Albums and Top Latin Albums.

We didn’t make these decisions in a vacuum, as we valued feedback from a sizable sample of billboard subscribers.

And, we will monitor feedback as readers get accustomed to the new chart menu. But don’t get too wedded to this section’s new look. It’s still a work in progress.

Our design team already has ideas on how we might present charts in a more space-efficient manner. Beyond the graphic elements, Billboard’s charts team and our data partners at Nielsen SoundScan always seek ways to craft meaningful charts from existing resources, while Billboard remains on the prow for new data sources from the realm of social networking.

Look for those efforts to bear fruit in the not-too-distant future.

HALFWAY THERE: A couple of bright people who work around but not in the music business asked me last week if the glorious back-to-back starts of 1 million copies for Lil Wayne and 721,000 by Coldplay mean that labels have solved their woes and found their way back to the glory of years gone by. As Nielsen SoundScan’s midterm numbers for 2008 suggest, the answer is no (see story, page 6).

Thanks to totals scored atop the Billboard 200 last issue and the week before that, the average at No. 1 this year is higher than it was at the halfway point of 2007, with 245,122 in 2008, compared with 216,499 during the first half of 2007.

The problem, generally, is the way the other 199 titles on the big chart are performing. At the risk of piling on after last issue’s opinion piece by Hastings Entertainment chairman John Marmaduke and a recent one by my colleague Ed Christian, I think the prevailing retail prices of CDs drives the album’s downward spiral.

Consider that with a less comprehensive store sample at Nielsen VideoScan than we enjoy at SoundScan, the average No. 1 on Top DVD Sales this year has been $26,652, more than double that of the top-selling album. And, that’s just one entertainment product that competes with CDs.

Since the 2003 launch of iTunes, digital merchants have taught the consumer that an album costs $9.99, which makes it harder to justify prices of $3-$10 higher for the same music on retail shelves.

MARKET WATCH
Weekly Unit Sales

A Weekly National Music Sales Report

This Week
8,299,000 1,517,000 20,080,000

Change -7.6% -16.0% 1.5%

This Week Last Year
8,630,000 953,000 15,664,000

Change -12.2% 33.6% 33.6%

Digital-album sales are also counted within album sales.

Weekly Album Sales (Million Units)

CD 205,666,000 172,666,000 -16.3%

Digital 23,501,000 31,595,000 34.4%

Cassette 178,000 50,000 -71.9%

Other 50,000 832,000 661.6%
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
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<td>Sketches Of A Man</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Evil Luges</td>
<td>MY MORNING JACKET</td>
<td>Indie</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Swinging Sounds</td>
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<td>Enjoy The Ride</td>
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<td>29</td>
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<td>Fight With Tools</td>
<td>Flobots</td>
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<td>ASHANTI</td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Alvin And The Chipmunks</td>
<td>SOUNDTRACK</td>
<td>Pop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
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<td>Coca</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<td>Nothing But The Best</td>
<td>Bruce Springsteen</td>
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<td>38</td>
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<td>Just Who I Am: Poets &amp; Pirates</td>
<td>Jimmy Chans</td>
<td>Pop</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**THE BILLBOARD 200 ARTIST INDEX**

- BAND TAKES ITS BEST SALES WEEK (50,000) AND HIGHEST-CHARTING ALBUM, WHILE CURRENT SINGLE "THEY SAID" RISES AT NO. 15 ON MODERN ROCK RADIO CHART.

- **THOUGH THE ALBUM WAS ANNOUNCED ONLY A MONTH BEFORE STREET DATE, IT BECAME THE BAND'S HIGHEST CHARTING SET YET.**

- **WILL SET INCLUDES ALL 12 OF ITS HOT 100 TOPS AND TWO NEW RECORDINGS WHILE THELD:2 VERSION BACKS ON 15 MUSIC VIDEOS.**

- **THANKS TO IT BEING A "MUSICAL JUMP FOR THE SUMMER" ON "CBS SUNDAY MORNING" (JUNE 22), THE ALBUM SALES WITH A 55% GAIN.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARTIST</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<th>Sales</th>
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<td>MICHAEL BUBLE</td>
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<td>55125</td>
<td>$13.98</td>
<td>REUNION 008903/UMGN</td>
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<td>CARRIE UNDERWOOD</td>
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<td>4588</td>
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<td>DIERKS BENTLEY</td>
<td>Greatest Hits /Every Mile A Memory 2003-2006</td>
<td>87</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>10224</td>
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<td>THE TING TINGS</td>
<td>We Started Nothing</td>
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<td>11530</td>
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<td>SARA BAREILLES</td>
<td>Little Voice</td>
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<td>FLO RIDA</td>
<td>Mail On Sunday</td>
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<td>11510</td>
<td>$14.98</td>
<td>COLUMBIA 16114/SONY MUSIC</td>
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<tr>
<td>TIM MCGRAW</td>
<td>الاجتماع</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>JOHN COLTRANE</td>
<td>Opus Collection: A Man Called Trane</td>
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<td>FLIGHT OF THE CONCHORDS</td>
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<td>WOLF PARADISE</td>
<td>At Mount Zoomer</td>
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<td>FLEET FOXES</td>
<td>Te Quiero</td>
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<td>15017</td>
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<td>LED ZEPPELIN</td>
<td>Motherbye</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>140</td>
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<td>Pretty.Old.</td>
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<td>THEORY OF A DEADMAN</td>
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<td>PAUL POTTS</td>
<td>One Chance</td>
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<td>KATHY GRIFFIN</td>
<td>For Your Consideration</td>
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<td>THE ROOTS</td>
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<td>SOUNDRACK</td>
<td>One Chance</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>$14.98</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Concept album with a cavalcade of artists, including "Wall-o." contributor Peter Gabriel, starts with nearly 6,000.**

**Soundtrack to hit film features score from Academy Award-nominated composer Thomas Newman and a new song from an artist at No. 129.**

**An April 25 reveal of an "Oprah Winfrey Show" episode highlighting the singer engineers a rating plus 50% gain for his album.**

**2C**

Go to www.billboard.biz for complete chart data.
### Top Music Videos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Artist(s)</th>
<th>Label &amp; Distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:14</td>
<td>Live From Texas</td>
<td>Universal Motown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>SCENES YOU KNOW BY HEART</td>
<td>Universal Motown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>PARIS</td>
<td>Epic Music Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>PSYCHO</td>
<td>SONY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>AFTER MIDNIGHT</td>
<td>Columbia Music Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>WHEN IT'S LOVE</td>
<td>Universal Motown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>BEFORE THE RAINBOW</td>
<td>Columbia Music Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>SCENES YOU KNOW BY HEART</td>
<td>Universal Motown</td>
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### Mainstream Top 40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Artist(s)</th>
<th>Label &amp; Distribution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BLEEDING LOVE</td>
<td>SONY BMG Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I'M NOT YOUR MAN</td>
<td>SONY BMG Video</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>FEELS LIKE TONIGHT</td>
<td>SONY BMG Video</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>IT'S NOT MY TIME</td>
<td>SONY BMG Video</td>
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### Adult Contemporary

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>HANGIN' ON TO YOU</td>
<td>JIVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>STOP AND STARE</td>
<td>INTERSCOPE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>FEELS LIKE TONIGHT</td>
<td>SONY BMG Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>IT'S NOT MY TIME</td>
<td>SONY BMG Video</td>
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### Adult Top 40

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BANANA TOWN</td>
<td>SONY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>DON'T BE SHY</td>
<td>SONY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>POCKETFUL OF SUNSHINE</td>
<td>SONY</td>
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### Hot Video Clips

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<td>WHAT IS IT (STRIKE A POSE)</td>
<td>INTERSCOPE</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>BREAK DOWN</td>
<td>SONY</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>BUST IT BABY PART 2</td>
<td>SONY</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>MUSIC</td>
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### Modern Rock

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<td>BANANA TOWN</td>
<td>SONY</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>DON'T BE SHY</td>
<td>SONY</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>POCKETFUL OF SUNSHINE</td>
<td>SONY</td>
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### HOT COUNTRY SONGS

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Back When I Knew It All</td>
<td>Montgomery Gentry</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Blake Shelton</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Better as a Memory</td>
<td>Kenny Chesney</td>
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<td>Good Time</td>
<td>Alton Jackson</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tryin' to Stop Your Leaving</td>
<td>Dierks Bentley</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Put a Girl in It</td>
<td>Brooks &amp; Dunn</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Last Name</td>
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<td>All I Want Is You</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>I Still Miss You</td>
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<td>Sunpowder &amp; Lead</td>
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<td>Should've Said No</td>
<td>Taylor Swift</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>We're Not Crazy</td>
<td>Josh Groban</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Another Try</td>
<td>Josh Turner featuring Trisha Yearwood</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Every Other Weekend</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>Learning How to Bend</td>
<td>Gary Allan</td>
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<td>Holler Back</td>
<td>The Eli Youngbloods</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Troubadour</td>
<td>George Strait</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>I Can Sleep When I'm Dead</td>
<td>Jason Michael Carroll</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Don't Think I Don't Think About It</td>
<td>Darius Rucker</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Country Man</td>
<td>Luke Bryan</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>I Believe I Can Make You Mine</td>
<td>Justin Moore</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>The Country Flip</td>
<td>Rascal Flatts</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Back When I Knew It All</td>
<td>Montgomery Gentry</td>
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### TOP COUNTRY ALBUMS

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Toby Keith</td>
<td>Taylor Swift</td>
<td>35 Biggest Hits</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Carrie Underwood</td>
<td>Carnival Ride</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Jewel</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Michael Ray</td>
<td>Enjoy The Ride</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Gary Allan</td>
<td>The Ultimate Hits</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Troubadour</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Emmylou Harris</td>
<td>All I Intended To Be</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Miranda Lambert</td>
<td>Crazy Ex- Girlfriend</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Montgomery Gentry</td>
<td>Back When I Knew It All</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>James Otto</td>
<td>Sunset Man</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Robert Plant &amp; Alison Krauss</td>
<td>Raisin Sand</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Brad Paisley</td>
<td>5th Gear</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Jann Arden</td>
<td>American Man: Greatest Hits Volume II</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Lady Antebellum</td>
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### GO ONLINE TO BILLBOARD.COM FOR THE COMPLETE CHART DATA

Go to www.billboard.biz for complete chart data.
**TOP R&B/HIP-HOP ALBUMS**

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On the Billboard 200, 20th album hits a new peak No. 5 and Lil Wayne (13/9) following Sappy's performance and rave on the June 24 2008 Billboard.

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**MAINSTREAM R&B/HIP-HOP**

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<td>Eminem, Rihanna</td>
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**ADULT R&B**

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<td>Keyshia Cole</td>
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**HOT RAP SONGS**

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Data for week of JULY 12, 2008 | CHARTS LEGEND on Page 43
### HOT DANCE CLUB PLAY

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### HOT DANCE AIRPLAY

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### HOT GOSPEL SONGS

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### HOT GOSPEL ALBUMS

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### CHRISTIAN GOSPEL

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**Note:** The table above contains the top songs and albums as listed in Billboard magazine. For more detailed information or specific dates, please refer to the source material or the Billboard website.
## Japan

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**Note:** The above table lists the top songs in Japan, United Kingdom, Germany, Wallonia, Switzerland, Finland, and Hungary as of July 12, 2008, based on sales and airplay data provided by Billboard. The table includes information about the song title, artist, and label. The data is used to analyze chart performance trends and is essential for music industry professionals and enthusiasts alike.
EXECUTIVE TURNTABLE
Send submissions to: exec@billboard.com

RECORD COMPANIES: Razor & Tie Entertainment promotes Iris Pagan-Frank to controller. She was assistant controller.


TOURING: Live Nation promotes Nathan Hubbard to CEO of its ticketing unit. He was president. Web entertainment marketing company Echo (formerly echomusic) names Jeannie Naujeck senior account manager. She was a music and entertainment business reporter at newspaper the Tennessean.

MEDIA: MTV appoints Brent Haynes senior VP of series development for the East Coast. He was VP at Canada’s sci-fi channel, Space.

The BBC names Tim Davie director of audio and music. He was director of BBC’s marketing, communications and audiences division.

VH1 ups Traci Terrill to VP of editorial for its creative and consumer marketing group. She was editorial director.

CMT taps Claire McCabe as VP of original programming and series development. She was executive producer of development and series programming at VH1.

RELATED FIELDS: The Los Angeles chapter of the Recording Academy elects new members to its 2008-09 board: Universal Music Publishing Group executive VP of creative affairs Tom Sturges, Fox Music senior VP of film music Mike Knobloch and entertainment attorney David Heffernan.

The IFPI elevates Jo Oliver to general counsel. She was head of the organization’s litigation department.

Dial Global promotes Frank DeSantis to senior VP of business development. He was VP of business development at Jones/Media America.

—Edited by Mitchell Peters

GOOD WORKS
REO SPEEDWAGON STEPS IN FOR IOWA FLOOD VICTIMS
As natives of the Midwest, members of REO Speedwagon are doing their part to help aid victims of the ongoing floods in Iowa. The veteran rock act will donate time between tour stops to headline the Ridin’ the Storm Out—Floods of 2008 Relief Concert, to be held July 16 at Prairie Meadows in Altoona, Iowa. “When a natural disaster happens in your backyard, you say, ‘Wait a minute, this is our responsibility,’” band frontman Kevin Cronin says. “We can’t sit back and wait for Bono to save everybody—he’s doing plenty as it is.”

Tickets are on sale for $20 via ticketmaster.com. To support the cause, Ticketmaster has agreed to waive convenience and handling charges. Additionally, the Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino will match money raised through ticket sales, according to Cronin. All proceeds from the benefit show, which also features the Little River Band and others, will be distributed to flood victims via the Greater Des Moines Community Foundation. “Unfortunately, we can’t be there filling sandbags, but we can play our music,” Cronin says, noting that additional benefit concerts are in the works.

WHAT TEENS WANT
The ninth edition of the What Teens Want conference, hosted by Adweek, Brandweek, Mediaweek, Billboard, the Hollywood Reporter and Nielsen Entertainment, was held June 23-25 at the Times Center in New York. Attendees were treated to a number of panel discussions, keynote interviews and networking opportunities as they learned more about the habits and opinions of teens. Topics included how to keep a brand cool in the eyes of teens, how to reach teens online and new ways to advertise products in the digital age. Branding strategies and identifying teen trends were also covered at the event, which featured an interview with and performance by Long Island teen-sensation Push Play, whose cover of Alicia Keys’ “No Air” has been a viral sensation on the Internet.

FreemantleMedia Enterprises VP of integrated marketing, sponsorships and live events Shannon Sweezy-Pruitz discusses how brand integration and media work for brands partnering with “American Idol.”

From left, Billboard group editorial director Tamara Conniff interviews Push Play members CJ Baran, Steve Scarola, Nick DeTurris and Derek Ries.

Panelists revealed that marketers are spending more than $1 billion on in-game advertising. From left are Activision senior director of business development David Anderson, Universal McCann senior VP New York director of digital communications Mike Racic, OMD group director/gaming leader Dario Racti and Future Sports Group publishing director Simon Whitcomb, who moderated.

Panelists look at the mental justia behind keeping a brand cool. From left are Boost Mobile senior director of business development Mark Ewell, Diablo executive VP president for North America Teemu Huhtanen, Publicis New York senior VP, strategy director and moderator David Gleason, Abercrombie & Fitch VP/corporate controller Brian Logan and EA Sports senior director of brand marketing Reginald Hamlett.

Push Play treats the crowd to an acoustic performance after the band’s keynote.

A panel of experts debated and discussed the future of social networks. From left are Splashcast CEO Michael Berkley, MyFirstPaycheck.com co-founder/CEO Austin Levin, MyYearbook.com CEO Geoff Cook, Alloy Media and Marketing director of interactive and social media Brian Liebler, Addicting Games VP/Kate Connolly and Brandweek executive editor/sports editor and moderator Barry Janoff.

Firehose Films president and “American Teen” director Nanette Burstein discussed what it means to be a teen today with the Hollywood Reporter senior writer Steve Jelitch. Academy Award nominee Burstein, along with film producer Jordan Roberts, presented a candid portrait of five teenagers in the Sundance Film Festival documentary.

Can you handle the truth? This panel of teen boys and girls shared their real feelings about specific brands, Web sites, TV shows, movies, games and more.

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FEEL THE LOVE

Country star Patty Loveless will release an album on recently launched Saguaro Road Records, Track has learned. Loveless, who has scored 20 top 10 singles, including five No. 1s on Billboard's Hot Country Songs chart since first debuting in 1985, will release "Sleepless Nights" Sept. 9. Produced by her husband and frequent collaborator Emory Gordy Jr., the set will include the Kentucky-born traditionalist's versions of 14 classic country hits, including "Why Baby Why," "He Thinks I Still Care," "Crazy Arms," "Don't Let Me Crossover," "Please Help Me I'm Falling," "There Goes My Everything" and "Cold Cold Heart.

Legendary Nashville musicians Harold Bradley and Hargus "Pig" Robbins guest on the set, as do country star Vince Gill and rising talent Jedd Hughes. Loveless, who has previously recorded for the Nashville divisions of MCA and Epic, has sold 5.4 million albums in the United States during the Nielsen SoundScan era, which began in 1991.

As previously reported (Billboard, April 5), Saguaro Road is an imprint of Direct Holdings Americas, which sells mainly oldies music and video directly to consumers under the Time Life brand. The label made its debut in June with a reissue from Nashville singer/songwriter Rebecca Lynn Howard, which also released a set from Edwin McCain, and future releases include Joan Osborne and Dion. The label, which expects to issue eight to 10 new titles each year, is distributed in the United States exclusively by WEA and by Alternative Distribution Global Internationally.

—Ken Tucker

BILLY KIRK WILDER

On June 15, Iron Maiden was presented commemorative plaque at Madison Square Garden to celebrate the RIAA-certified platinum sales of the band's Live After Death DVD. From left are Legacy Recording senior director of marketing Lisa Buckley, Iron Maiden manager Rod Smallwood, Sony BMG Commercial Music Group director of sales Devon Nowicki, Iron Maiden's Nicko McBrain and Janick Gers, Universal Music Enterprises executive vice president Mike Kovac, Sony BMG senior VP of marketing and product management Shanelle Brooks and senior VP of publicity JR Rich.

Al Green, who recently received a lifetime achievement honor at the BET Awards, posed backstage with Blue Note Records executives after his June 27 performance at Carnegie Hall in New York. From left are VP of marketing Heyg Harkins, VP of A&R Eli Wolf, Green, senior VP of jazz Saul Shapiro, director of marketing and product management Shanelle Brooks and senior VP of publicity JR Rich.

Warner Music Central & Eastern Europe chairman/CEO Bernd Dopp led a Warner party that met with Germany's Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel and members of her ruling Christian Democrat Union party in Berlin. Dopp introduced StarWatch Warner-signed German singer Jennifer Lee, who performed for the politicians that evening. From left are Warner Music director of corporate communications for Central Europe Benedict Libets, Nike, Merkel and Dopp, who addressed the audience.
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