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Niche Is Good
In The Mainstream, You're Merely One Among Many

BY JAVIER ESCOBEDO

“We’d like to get out of this niche and become more mainstream.”

This is a comment that I have heard many times among multiple constituencies in the Latin music business during conversations about licensing songs to advertisers. And the comment is usually accompanied by a complaint about how advertisers do not recognize the growing popularity of certain genres.

My counterargument is that niche genres have economic barriers that prevent them from becoming mainstream and that a jump to the mainstream in the licensing realm requires more than a growing fan base and increased album sales. Moreover, I argue, being a strong player in a niche is good and can be more profitable than being yet one more player in the mainstream.

Let me explain this economic barrier with an example: Take the regional Mexican genre. As the population of Mexican-Americans and immigrants has boomed, the genre has grown in popularity more than any other, resulting in an increased interest among acts, managers and labels to seek national licensing deals. After all, if 65% of U.S. Hispanics are of Mexican origin, any advertiser wanting to reach a majority of Hispanics should be using regional Mexican, right?

Wrong. Economic barriers won’t allow it.

To understand these barriers, we need to understand the minds of marketers, which sometimes can be harder to understand than nuclear physics. Advertisers care mostly about the demographics and habits of the target consumer for their products. Marketers look at the demographics of the fan base of a genre and compare it with the demographics of their customers.

One way to understand the demographics of a genre’s fan base is by analyzing who listens to that radio format. Slightly less than one-quarter of Hispanic listeners have recently listened to regional Mexican radio. But about half of Hispanics have recently listened to contemporary pop radio. Yes, in English. The Hispanic listeners of contemporary pop radio is also younger and has more disposable income. How’s that for mainstream?

So, if you think like a marketer, you would never use a regional Mexican tune for a mainstream product aiming to reach a national Hispanic audience, no matter how fast the genre is growing. You would much rather use the pop song you have in your general marketing campaign or a crossover pop act that plays well against the mainstream demographics.

And in an environment that requires efficient marketing investments, advertisers won’t overlook this barrier.

However, if you are the marketer of a product catering to lower-income, slightly older Mexican Americans living in the Pacific, Mountain and/or South Central areas, you would immediately go for regional Mexican. No one reaches that niche with a level of engagement that even approaches regional Mexican. And that “niche” is roughly 50% of the Hispanic population in those areas.

There are such categories as calling cards or food staples that are a perfect match and would gladly go for an artist that connects strongly with their target. In the days of two-targeting, this connection is priceless. Advertisers would pay good licensing money for a regional Mexican tune in no time if someone could explain the genre’s power to them.

So, when I’m having those entertaining “take me to the mainstream” conversations, I conclude by saying that being niche is good. It is as good as long as you understand the economics and what constitutes the barriers that maintain that niche status. Remember that the barrier not letting you out is the same barrier that is not letting others in.

Javier Escobedo is managing partner of Hispanic ad agency OLE in New York.

DON’T FORGET THE ARTISTS

In “Singing a New Tune” (Billboard, Oct. 4), Anthony Bruno discusses the independent labels’ efforts to obtain equity in MySpace Music but is consciously silent on how recording artists will share in the equity stakes offered to the major labels. Most artist contracts require labels to share licensing revenue. This means that the value of the equity received by the major labels from MySpace Music should be shared with the creators whose work is being licensed.

Since 2000, the Future of Music Coalition has been tracking and sometimes facilitating the ongoing conversations about potentially rewarding new business models. We encourage such talks and experimentation. However, the needs of those who actually create the music—the performers and songwriters—cannot be overlooked in discussions between corporate content owners and those seeking to build businesses using artists’ works. Music will only survive if artists, and not just corporate stakeholders, are fairly compensated in all emerging business models.

Ann Chaitowitz/Executive Director
Future of Music Coalition

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Music Startups Raise Funds In Credit Crunch

A rock-solid business model, a strong management team— and perfect timing. Those are the prerequisites for music startups seeking financing as the credit crunch tightens, according to those who've just emerged from the process.

Paris-based digital distribution and marketing service Believe secured a second round of funding in early September from French venture capital (VC) firm Xange Private Equity and Ventech, raising €4 million ($5.4 million).

"We were ahead of all the major market movements of the past couple of weeks," founder/president Denis Ladegailière says. "Had we been in the [current] turmoil, the discussions would probably have been more difficult."

Yet Ladegailière, who managed the Internet and new media for Vivendi in the United States before launching Believe in 2005, believes the lessons learned in the 2002 dot-com crash about unprofitable business models and new Web companies in the present climate.

"That's why we're very careful about building a company from a financial standpoint for investors," he adds.

A number of other music-related Internet startups all recently closed Series B rounds of funding, including New York-based ReverbNation, which provides marketing solutions for independent artists. On Oct. 7, the company announced it had raised $3 million from three VC firms.

"This is the eighth life I've raised capital and the bar is much higher now," ReverbNation CEO Mike Doernberg says. "They look at us much more critically this time around, for sure."

According to data from the National Venture Capital Association and Thomson Reuters, the number of U.S. venture funds raising new cash in the third quarter—before the recent financial meltdown—dropped to 55, from 78 during the same period last year. The total amount raised in the quarter came to $8.6 billion, a 6% decline from $8.1 billion in the year-earlier period.

"Obtaining venture capital is always challenging," says Jason Caplan, a general partner at Raleigh, N.C.-based Southern Capitol Ventures, which invested in ReverbNation. "But outstanding entrepreneurs with a great idea in a big market always get funding. For first-time entrepreneurs, it can be a lot harder. They might consider getting traction with their company before approaching a VC."

"There are a lot of music startups out there without a real business model," he adds.

"Over the next 12-18 months, capital for those companies will continue to dry up."

Even companies with strong models might find themselves facing a tougher sell.

"It's really a question of burn rate," says Tony Bifano, a partner at Philadelphia-based ETF Venture Funds, which also invested in ReverbNation.

"The economic situation might have a larger impact on bigger companies, because they're usually seeking bigger investments. Growing companies and new players have an excellent opportunity in this marketplace, if they're strong and asking for a smaller investment."

Swedish startup Spotify, which announced licensing deals Oct. 7 with all four major labels, Merlin and the Orchard for its ad-funded digital music service, created confidence when its cash-rich founders invested in their own startup. Spotify raised $15 million ($20.4 million), with Oslo-based VC firm NorthZone investing 68 million ($109.9 million).

"It's easier today than just after the first dot-com bubble burst," Spotify founder/CEO Daniel Ek says. "There's more focus on getting a business model to be profitable than ever, and that's the key element that has changed for venture capitalists."
Touring Awards Finalists Revealed

Bon Jovi, Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band and the Police are among the finalists for the 2008 Billboard Touring Awards, set for Nov. 20 at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York.

All three of those tours are finalists for the top tour and top draw awards, which recognize the top-grossing and top ticket sellers, respectively. The awards are based on data reported to Billboard Boxscore from Oct. 1, 2007, through Sept. 30, 2008.

Other finalists include Kenny Chesney’s Poes & Pirates tour, Journey/Heart/Cheap Trick, and Mary J. Blige/Jay-Z with the-Dream for top package and Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus, Jonas Brothers and Michael Buble for breakthrough artist. The latter award acknowledges the top-grossing act that breaks into the top 25 tours for the first time.

Top festival finalists are Coachella in Indio, Calif.; Lollapalooza in Chicago; and Bonnaroo in Manchester, Tenn. The top boxscore finalists—for the top-grossing engagement—are Spice Girls at the O2 in London, Madonna at Stade de France in Paris and Celine Dion at the Bell Centre in Montreal.

On the industry side, Live Nation, AEG Live and 3A Entertainment are finalists for the top promoter award, and the William Morris Agency, Creative Artists Agency and Artists Group International are the three finalists for top agency. Top manager finalists are Jon Landau Management, Bon Jovi Management and Front Line Management. Venue finalists in various categories include Madison Square Garden, the WaMu Theater at MSG and Radio City Music Hall—all in New York—along with the Colosseum at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, the O2, Bell Centre, Auditorio Nacional in Mexico City, the Tampa Bay (Fla.) Performing Arts Center and the Fox Theatre in Atlanta. Top club and top amphitheater will also be awarded.

Special award winners this year include Wide-eyed Panic for the Road Warrior award, Bon Jovi and the Philadelphia Soul arena football team for the Humanitarian award, “Walking With Dinosaurs” for the Creative Content award and the Allman Brothers Band for the Legend of Live award. The awards wrap the Nov. 19-20 conference.

For a complete listing of finalists, go to billboard.biz.
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Humphrey Kadaner
President
HMV Canada
Turbulent Times

Nielsen/Dow Jones Media And Money Confab Surveys The Landscape

While financially turbulent times may present buying opportunities for intrepid companies with deep pockets, some executives speaking at the Nielsen/Dow Jones Media and Money conference in New York said they were proceeding with caution.

Viacom president/CEO Philippe Dauman said the parent of MTV Networks and Paramount Pictures expects to grow organically and limit itself to targeted strategic acquisitions. That's because Viacom executives still see plenty of growth opportunities by capitalizing on its existing brands, Dauman said.

Likewise, THL Partners co-president Scott Sperling said that it is better to be "overcautious in the current environment." He added that he'd rather miss the bottom of the market than risk making aggressive bets now.

The question of whether old-media companies can produce a new winning formula becomes even more crucial in these financially turbulent times, some panelists said.

Veronos Subler: Stevenson managing partner Jeffrey T. Stevenson said the way to make money is to pay for content once and use it two or more times. He cited textbook and reference book publishers, who are turning their data into databases that are sold on a subscription basis to libraries.

Weinstein Co. chairman Bob Weinstein said his company is betting that a DVD explosion can happen again in a new format, which is why it is building a film library and acquiring assets like a catalog consisting of 300-400 martial arts films. There isn't a market for those films on TV, but there will be online in five or 10 years, he said.

With advertising dollars shifting to the Internet, former Fox Interactive Media president Ross Levinsohn, now a partner at venture capital firm Velocity Interactive Group, said he believes traditional media outlets like radio stations and major newspapers could go out of business. Levinsohn also said that he sees the possibility of one of the major U.S. TV networks also going away as a "maybe."

But Richard Wolters, managing partner of VC firm Mail Room Fund, cautioned that "things happen slower than we would think," adding that "seven years ago, we would have thought that the music companies would be out of business by now."

Amid the continuing financial market turmoil, media and advertising companies face tough prospects in the months ahead, panelists warned.

Merrill Lynch media analyst Jessica Reif-Cohen observed that the past 18 months have been colored by a housing recession, while the past several quarters have seen a decline in businesses' spending. Up next, Reif-Cohen said, is a "long and deep" consumer recession, which is likely to hit the music and ad industries hard.

In past recessions, ad spending has been a "lagging indicator" that it typically doesn't take a hit until a quarter or two after a consumer recession starts and doesn't recover until a quarter or two after it ends, Reif-Cohen said.

That may explain why agencies and vendors have yet to experience severe cutbacks in spending. Instead what's happening is "a lot of just-in-time buying," Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia co-CEO Wenda Harris Millard said.

Agencies and clients have been waiting until the last minute to commit to media plans, leading to more uncertainty than usual, even in media segments like magazines where that sort of buying is not par for the course, Millard said. "We'll continue to see that in all the channels," she said.

Of course, there were plenty of back-and-forth exchanges on old-media companies. "We want to disrupt the hell out of existing media companies and then we want to help them as much as we can," Spark Capital general partner Santo Politi quipped.

NBC Universal chief digital officer George Klukoff responded: "This is what makes business exciting—people try to set us on fire, then sell us buckets of sand."
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Keep On Keepin' On
Branding Biz Stays The Course Amid Credit Crunch
Publishers, ad agencies and branded entertainment companies are cautiously optimistic that music branding initiatives will pull through the credit crisis relatively unscathed. In early October, ZenithOptimedia projected that North American ad spending will climb 1.8% this year and 0.9% in 2009, a sharp comedown from the firm's previous forecast in June of 3.5% growth in 2008 and 2.7% growth in 2009. What does all this mean for the music branding business? Some nervousness, perhaps, but so far not a whole lot else, says David Caruso, president of Acme Brand Content, which helped Procter & Gamble's TAG body spray and Island Def Jam start their joint-venture hip-hop label, TAG Records.
"There's fear and uncertainty and any time you're in that environment any expenditure, whether large or small, will be overly scrutinized," Caruso says. "Right now, there's lots of waiting and seeing." Primary Wave Music Publishing partner/GM Justin Shukat says he has yet to notice a decline in synch fees.
"TV's running at full steam and looking to find more music," Shukat says. "And we're not seeing films coming back looking for less music."
Agencies that license music for use in TV commercials say that their budgets are either holding steady or even, in some cases, going up. They also report that there hasn't been any letup in the ongoing trend of more top-level artists dropping their previous resistance to commercial licensing deals. Publishers are making clear that everything in their catalog can be bought, for the right price, they say.
"Different people I've spoken with on the publishing side are anxious for us to get into their libraries," says Vic Palumbo, director of production at Minneapolis-based advertising agency Fallon Worldwide. "They're saying that just because something was unobtainable before doesn't mean it isn't available now." Palumbo adds, "We've been in conversations with iconic talent, people for whom I would have guessed there wasn't enough money."
Who exactly? Palumbo isn't saying just yet.
"Once the economy turns around—probably around the Super Bowl—you'll see more spots with talent in that you wouldn't normally expect to see," he says.
While names of talent aren't yet forthcoming, that sentiment is backed up by publishers.
"Our business is as healthy as ever," Sony/ATV Music senior VP of global marketing Rob Kaplan says. "Brands still want music regardless of the economy. You can get within reason and price, whatever artist you want."
For some branding industry observers, the current state of the economy is reminiscent of previous periods of economic uncertainty.
"Conversations I'm having are tracking like 2001 and the early '90s," says Kevin Townsend, managing partner at branded entertainment company Science + Fiction.
"What I'm hearing from advertisers is usually that they'll stay the course, if not dial it up. That's because there's more competition and they need to be smarter competitors." Agencies are quick to stress that a shift in music strategy carries risks. For a brand that has established its identity as one that uses recognizable popular music, to shift to a lesser-known artist in a bid to save money would deviate from a carefully plotted strategy, agency executives say.
"I don't think client or agency points have changed based on economy," Leo Burnett Worldwide executive VP/director of production Chris Rossiter says. "Whether or not we do an original piece of music or use a big-name band is much more based on the idea of the spot and the budget parameters of that idea.
In the meantime, brands would perhaps do well to heed a fundamental message found in a Millward Brown report released in April titled, "Marketing During Recession: To Spend or Not to Spend." Brands should spend during a downturn in order to keep their products in front of consumers.
Rainy Day Song

Indies See Advantages As They Weather Credit Crisis

Most Indies need to be nimble and are used to having to turn on a dime.

—Megan Jasper, Sub Pop

While indie labels aren't exactly turning cartwheels over the state of the economy, many of them feel that they are relatively well-positioned to make it through the credit crisis largely intact.

Still, there's little doubt that the financial market fallout threatens to bruise even the most cost-conscious indie labels. A decline in consumer confidence would hurt. So would credit problems at retailers, wholesalers and distributors.

On the one hand, the majors have the advantage of sheer size and diversification, publishing, merch, 360-degree deals, etc. "Matador Records GM Patrick Armony says, "Against this, the indie labels are smaller, with lower overheads and probably less debt. Size still matters for creating hits and getting the best digital deals though. I'm not certain that the Indies are any better off than the majors in the long run. The biggest question for all of us is what happens to consumer confidence during the crisis... and whether paying for recorded music can be seen as a luxury now that there's a free (albeit illegal) option.

Sub Pop VP Megan Jasper says she's worried that a drop in consumer spending will have a negative impact on the label's business. "People want to spend money on things they can enjoy multiple times, like buying a DVD instead of going to the movies," she says. "We hope that people will buy recorded music, and we're also hoping that people will keep going to shows."

But as the music industry adapts to the reality of tighter credit and consumer budgets, indie labels have a few factors in their favor.

Unlike major labels, most Indies that Billboard spoke with don't rely on revolving lines of credit. Armony says Matador has never had a line of credit from a bank, a statement that was echoed by executives at Sub Pop, Dim Mak, Fool's Gold, Mad Decent and Broken Bow.

Koch, on the other hand, does have a line of credit. "But as executive VP of finance and operations Michael Healy says, "Our parent company closed on a $150 million credit facility the day after Lehman Brothers crashed, so we feel secure that we'll be set for the time being."

Indies' ability to survive the global financial crisis will also be helped by their low overhead and the constant pressure they feel to scrutinize costs even when times are good, which can leave them better-positioned when times are bad.

"Most Indies need to be nimble and are used to having to turn on a dime," Sub Pop's Jasper says. "We are ready to deal with anything. Sub Pop runs its business like a family runs a household—we have to scrimp and save sometimes to make ends meet, and we always know where the money is."

Likewise, Broken Bow VP of legal affairs Paul Brown says that the higher-ups at his label keep a close eye on spending. "To label founder Benny Brown, "even though he has done very well, $100 is still a lot of money," he says. "There is no tolerance for waste at Broken Bow. Our artists and employees know that when they spend money, they are spending real person's money, not just cash from some nameless, faceless investor."

Another factor that could help Indies retain consumer loyalty is that they often cater to market niches where fans view music as part of an overall lifestyle, rather than as an expendable consumer purchase.

"I used to own [DJ emporium] Turntable Lab and every time there was a downturn, we’d prepare for the worst and then not see any drop," Mad Decent label manager Jasper Goggins says. "People in the DJ community cater to are addicted to records."

DJ A-Trak, who owns Fool's Gold Records, says that being part of the DJ culture has protected his label this far. Still, he's a bit apprehensive as the label prepares to release a Kid Sister album via its joint venture with Downtown Records.

"It will be more mainstream and less boutique than our other releases," he says, "so I feel like that will be a better gauge."

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Credit Crisis Will Touch All Aspects of Touring Biz

If a rising tide lifts all boats, can the opposite be said for a receding tide? How about a reverse tsunami? No doubt about it—the global financial crisis has everyone, including those in the touring business, wondering what’s next. That goes for players big and small.

Let’s start with the biggest—Live Nation, which spent much of the past year locking up long-term, multiright mega-deals with Madonna, Jay-Z, U2, Shakira and Nickelback.

Those who believe the deals were savvy, innovative bets on superstar acts probably see their timing as rather fortuitous, as such pacts would likely be considered reckless in current economic conditions. Fan of CEO Michael Rapino can also point to Live Nation’s prudence in shedding noncore assets during the past two years, raising $465 million since 2006. The most recent deal was the sale in September of Live Nation’s rotors sports division to Feld Entertainment for $305 million, which the company said would be used to pay down its revolving credit facility, to permanently reduce a portion of its term loan and to invest in its core music business.

But the credit crisis also provides skepticism of Live Nation’s ambitious multiright deals with additional ammunition for their convention that the concept partnering giant paid far too much to sign the Material Girl and her fellow Live Nation roster mates. While the touring future of Madonna, U2, and a lesser degree Shakira and Nickelback, as it seems as it gets in this volatile market, all of these deals—particularly Jay-Z’s—have significant merchandising and branding components. Many expect spending on these to decline in a weak economy.

Moreover, while the ongoing financial commitment to these deals is largely performance-based, Live Nation has already committed to millions of dollars in advance that were based on assumptions about the economy and the touring market that couldn’t have anticipated the severity of the recent financial turmoil.

Live Nation spokesman John Vlautin says the slowing economy hasn’t hurt sales of tickets and ancillaries. He points out that Madonna’s current tour is poised to break her own record for the top-grossing tour by a female artist. At the other end of the touring spectrum are far smaller businesses that are grappling with the credit crunch from a very different vantage point. Consider the case of Nashville-based Pioneer Coach and its entertainment coach outfitting division, Precision Coach.

In general, tour bus leasing has been strong late, as more artists tour and air travel becomes more unappealing, to a stifled credit market will hurt.

“I’ve seen no impact yet, but I do see where that could happen,” Pioneer president Doug Rountree says. “My business very much requires a consistent flow of credit, and not just my business. I’ve been working hard at making sure we keep our credit lines open, but either way we’ll continue to operate.”

Outfitting a tour bus can cost between $650,000 and $1 million, depending on “star” the artist is playing. That kind of cash outlay for an independent business that manufactures multiple coaches per year would be a tall order; even with a fleet of buses on the road bringing in revenue. “We need the credit to continue to grow, and hopefully with this bailout package that’s what will happen,” Rountree says. “That’s the whole concept of this emergency bailout, because if you cut credit off, you effectively shut this country down.”

The outlook could also present other, broader challenges for the touring business. For instance, some industry observers warn that tour sponsorships could suffer as media budgets shrink, particularly among financial institutions and automakers (Billboard, Oct. 18). Still, even as sponsorships have solidified their appeal among consumer businesses in recent years, which could help them weather the storm.

“When budgets do tighten, companies seek advertising opportunities that offer an intrinsically higher return on investment,” says Marcie Allen Cardwell, president of our sponsorship facilitator M&L. “And nothing is more effective than actually reaching out to the customer, which is the type of experiential marketing that sponsorships allow.”

Meanwhile, the venue naming rights sector is also facing increased uncertainty (Billboard, Oct. 11). “Given the current times we’re in right now, if you were going to ask me if this is the best time to go out and sell naming rights, I’d probably say no, it’s not,” says Bob Cavaliere, senior VP of business development for Philadelphia-based venue management firm SMG. “But I will add this caveat: I really think you’re going to sponsor something, a naming rights deal is one of the most effective and efficient buys somebody could make. They’re dynamic deals, they refocus attention over and over again with changing events, and to me it’s a very good sponsorship buy for a company.”
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ECHOES OF THE PAST

Taking Another Swing at Label-Run Music Services

Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

So are today's major labels learning from or duplicating the folly that previously led to their ill-fated attempts at offering digital music services of their own?

Remember Pressplay? Sony Connect? The original MusicMatch? Memories of those doomed services were revived when news broke in recent weeks that EMI Music and Universal Music Group were preparing direct-to-consumer digital music services—EMI with some kind of music discovery portal and UMG with a music video syndication platform.

So long as these planned initiatives don't limit the availability of their content on other services—like iTunes or YouTube—a repeat of those sad days is unlikely. Instead, sources close to both efforts say they are in fact trying not to repeat an entirely different mistake also committed in the early days of digital music history: doing nothing.

"We're looking at all the different models in the business right now—ways of enhancing those models and ways of enhancing our involvement in that area of the business," one source says.

Let's start with UMG. The ad-supported music and video streaming model has certainly captured the music industry's attention, but it has also frustrated labels that have no control over how their content is priced or how the ads around them are sold.

Sources close to UMG's plan to launch its own music video Web site say the label's plans have been inspired by the success of Hulu, the online streaming-video service co-owned by NBC Universal and Fox parent News Corp. These sources note that advertisers are more interested in buying ads around professionally produced, high-definition content rather than on the generally lower-quality fare featured on user-generated sites, and they are willing to pay higher rates to do so.

So far, the Hulu case study bears this out. YouTube—a repeat of those sad days is unlikely. Instead, sources close to both efforts say they are in fact trying not to repeat an entirely different mistake also committed in the early days of digital music history: doing nothing.

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Standing On The Edge

As Circuit City Wobbles, Alliance Faces Test

Amid the continuing financial crisis, there are two prominent names in music retailing to keep an eye on: Circuit City and the troubled retailer’s music supplier, Alliance Entertainment.

In early October, retail industry credit ratings agency Bernard Sands pulled its recommendation that manufacturers ship goods to Circuit City because of concerns that the chain may not be able to pay its vendors. That prompted Circuit City to assure media outlets that the move hasn’t caused any problems in securing product for the holiday shopping season. A music industry wholesaler familiar with the situation says he agrees with the company’s assessment, noting, “I don’t believe the electronics manufacturers will stop shipping to Circuit City, because it would leave them with just one national chain, Best Buy.”

Meanwhile, despite its widening losses and a stock price that’s sunk below $1 per share, Circuit City has only $42.6 million in long-term debt on its balance sheet and about $795.4 million still available from its $1.3 billion revolving credit facility.

But a Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing remains a possibility. One possible task facing acting president/CEO James Marcum (who replaced ousted chairman/CEO/president Philip Schoonover in September) is to start closing unprofitable stores. Some worry that if landlords won’t let the chain out of leases, Marcum might file for bankruptcy protection to shed the unwanted stores. If Circuit City does head to Chapter 11, record labels are in the clear because the chain switched in June 2007 from being directly supplied by the labels to being supplied by Alliance Entertainment.

So the next question label executives are asking themselves is: If Circuit City goes down, can Alliance Entertainment handle the hit?

Alliance’s exposure to Circuit City isn’t as large as some think. True, it sells music products to the Richmond, Va.-based chain. But when it comes to DVDs and videogames, it only acts as an agent for the chain. Vendors ship that product to Alliance, which acts as the chain’s warehouse for entertainment software, but Circuit City owns the merchandise.

Consequently, Alliance would be on the hook only for Circuit City’s music, which Billboard estimates at $75 million annually and falling. That means the most that could get caught up in a Chapter 11 is about $10 million, if it should happen during the holiday selling season, or about $7 million at another time of the year, Retail Track estimates. So here again, we see that things aren’t as bad as they look, if the worst-case scenario of a Circuit City Chapter 11 filing comes to pass. Representatives at Alliance and Circuit City didn’t respond to requests for comment by press time. That’s not to say that concerns about Alliance’s exposure are wholly unwarranted. During the six months ended July 31, Alliance’s parent company Source Interlink posted a loss from continuing operations of $296.7 million, which included a $271 million noncash impairment charge related to its publishing division. That marked a sharp deterioration from the same period a year earlier, when the company reported income from continuing operations of $5.7 million.

Red ink isn’t Source Interlink’s only problem. It carries $1.4 billion in debt, thanks to its acquisition of Prime Media’s consumer magazine division. When the acquisition was made, Source Interlink projected $110 million—$15 million in annual debt service (Billboard, July 28, 2007), and at the midyear point, the company locked to be on the high end of the target with $58 million in interest payments. But that was when interest rates were lower, before the shit hit the fan on Wall Street.

Source Interlink’s debt—from a consortium of banks led by Citicorp—in the form of an $871.2 million term loan that carries a variable interest rate based on Citicorp’s prime lending rate plus a margin of 2.25% or LIBOR plus a margin of 3.25% ($665 million in notes that carry an 11.25% fixed rate; and a $300 million revolver, with $49.6 million drawn down and $189.5 million in outstanding letters of credit.

For the variable-rate component, the company said interest rates averaged 5.71% in the first half of the year. Since governments around the world have moved to keep interest rates low, if LIBOR stays in its current range for the remainder of the company’s fiscal year, Source Interlink’s debt service payments will meet the high end of its projections.

While Source Interlink has accumulated plenty of red ink, it has produced $81 million in earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization during the six months ended July 31, a sharp improvement from the $29.4 million in EBITDA that the company reported during the same period last year. That would seem to suggest that Source Interlink can handle its debt load, which should provide Alliance’s music accounts a modicum of comfort.

$42.6M

Amount of long-term debt Circuit City has on its balance sheet

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Winds Of Change

Talk Of New Biz Models Dominates Popkomm

BERLIN—Desperate times call for desperate measures. That seemed to be the message from a Popkomm trade fair overshadowed by the global financial meltdown.

Certainly, the economic woes of finance giants served to put the problems of the music business in perspective, with barely a panel passing without a wary reference along the lines of, “At least we’re not working in a bank.” But it also seemed to help cut through the usual conference inertia when addressing the challenges and opportunities of the digital age.

So secondary ticketers and piracy-heavy markets received prominent platforms while, most significantly, organizers dedicated a whole day’s programming to the P2P & Music Conference hosted by the Chester, Md.-based Distributed Computing Industry Asia.

“It was a great idea to bring the [peer-to-peer (P2P)] developers together with the music industry and have a candid discussion about issues still to be overcome,” said DCIA CEO Marty Lafferty, whose organization presented panels analyzing whether authorized file-sharing services could be used for everything from monetizing user-generated content to combating piracy in China.

“When you have 60 million users at sites like LimeWire and your only method of addressing them is to sue them out of existence, then that might be a bit of a problem,” said Scott Cohen, co-founder/VP of international for digital aggregator the Orchard.

Qtrax chairman/CFO Allan Klepfisz acknowledged that P2P is still a “dirty word” in some quarters. But despite its disastrous launch at MIDEM in January (billboard.biz, Jan. 27), even Qtrax seemed to have regained some credibility at Popkomm, helped by post-MIDEM licensing deals with Universal Music Group and EMI Music and its recent appointment of former RIAA and IFPI chief Jay Berman as co-chairman of its advisory board.

Not everyone is convinced of P2P’s legitimacy. German composer/musician Erwin Schmidt likened the presence of P2P companies at the conference to “apeassement,” while, ironically, some file sharers seem less enthused at the overtures to legitimize their business.

Tom Gunther, head of legal and business affairs at German aggregator Finetunes, described his thwarted efforts to license music for LimeWire’s download store before concluding: “They are not really willing to embrace the music industry.”

Even so, the sense of a change was unmistakable. RightsFlow president/CEO Patrick Sullivan once worked on legal cases against Napster and Grokster for the National Music Publishers’ Assn. and the Harry Fox Agency. “I’ve very much had a change of heart,” Sullivan said. “From a copyright perspective you have to go out and license these services.”

Popkomm Bites

■ The credit crunch also took a bite out of Popkomm itself, with delegate numbers dropping 9% year-on-year to around 14,000. German visitors were also gloomy about the amount of business being done on the floor, while notable absentees from the trade fair included Sony BMG, BPI and German indie Edel.

■ Digital media platform Kyte—which already counts such acts as 50 Cent and the Pussycat Dolls among its users—received a timely boost to its European business by scoring the Billboard-sponsored Popkomm Innovation in Music Entertainment Award.

Bollywood Looks West

Indian Film Musicals Make Inroads In Europe

LONDON—After years of domestic domination, the stars of India’s Bollywood musical film business are making their mark on Europe. Major Bollywood names on multi-artist tours have been selling out arenas in Europe’s biggest music markets: the United Kingdom and Germany. Now insiders are hoping for further growth in international markets, driven by Bollywood movies’ ever-increasing global profile.

In the United Kingdom, Bollywood package tours began in the mid-’90s, according to Awtar Panesar, London-based VP of international operations for the Bollywood Entertainment Society. "We are seeing a Renaissance in the Indian film industry," he says. "Now there has been change of ownership, whether it be EMI or Virgin Radio (which recently bought the company Bauer). We are seeing a Renaissance in radio in terms of investment and branding. With several serious players coming in, there will be no fatigue in building new brands."}

GLOBAL NEWSLINE

>>>ABSOlUTE OWNER PLEDGES U.K. RADIO RENAISSANCE

The new owner of Absolute Radio (formerly Virgin Radio) says the rash of changes in British radio ownership can help usher in a new golden age for U.K. commercial radio. A.P. Parigi, CEO of Mumbai, India-based Times Infotainment Media Ltd—a division of media giant Times of India Group—says that acquisitions like TIM’s £53.2 million (US$83.3 million) purchase of Virgin will help reinvigorate the market. "Some kind of intellectual fatigue had set in, not just at Virgin, but in the whole radio industry," he says. "Now there has been change of ownership, whether it be EMI or Virgin Radio (which recently bought the company Bauer). We are seeing a Renaissance in radio in terms of investment and branding. With several serious players coming in, there will be no fatigue in building new brands." Parigi doesn’t rule out international expansion of the Absolute brand, nor further European radio acquisitions, but adds that he doesn’t expect movement on either front before mid-2009.

—Mark Sutherland
AEG Partners with NBA China

Entertainment/sports promoter AEG has formed a joint venture with NBA China to design, market, program and operate multipurpose, NBA-style sports and entertainment arenas in Greater China’s major cities. The partnership will also include the booking and marketing of events held at the venues, including concerts, trade shows and live entertainment. The Sino-U.S. joint venture will oversee all decisions, including arena design, identifying target cities and project sites, and procuring naming rights and other sponsorships. The companies will strive to develop the venues in conjunction with surrounding cultural and entertainment districts.

>> AUSSIE RATTER EYES GROWTH

Australian chain JB Hi-Fi is defying the retail slump by expanding on its biggest store-opening program. At the company’s annual general meeting, held Oct. 14 in Melbourne, chief executive Richard Uechtritz told shareholders that the chain remains on course to deliver revenue of $2.4 billion Australian ($1.7 billion) in its 2009 fiscal year, a 28% increase from fiscal 2008. Liechtritz said that by Christmas the group will have opened 14 new outlets—11 JB stores and three new additions to its electronics/apparel retailing chain Clive Anthony’s—taking the total store network to 319. Chairman Patrick Els- tadt added that JB continues to expand from its core state markets of Victoria and New South Wales.

—John Ferguson

GLOBAL BY JULIANA KORANTENG

Rebuilding Trust

U.K. Secondary Ticket Market Moves To Repair Shaken Credibility

LONDON—The United Kingdom’s secondary ticketing business is ramping up its efforts to regain public trust after a summer of negative publicity.

In sector generated national headlines in August when online firm SOS Master Ticket failed to deliver an estimated £2,000 paid-for tickets for the Leeds, Reading and V festivals, as well as shows by George Michael and Madonna. SOS Master swiftly closed its site and disappeared.

In the same month, another 4,000 people lost tickets they had purchased when online secondary-ticket vendor Xclusive Tickets went into liquidation.

“What happened was a black eye for the entire ticketing industry, not just the secondary business,” says Joe Cohen, CEO of online ticket exchange service Seatwave.

However, the secondary ticketing sector has been buoyed by the brunt of press criticism. Remarkably, secondary ticket seller Trackd says there wasn’t any immediate drop in secondary sales following the bad publicity. It was “business as usual” for the sector, Trackd executive VP of commercial strategy Steve Machin says.

Still, legitimate secondary tickets have been moving quickly to protect an already substantial market. According to Trackd, legitimate secondary ticket sales totalled £250 million ($440 million) in 2007, in an overall secondary ticketing market worth £800 million—£1 billion ($1.4 billion—$1.8 billion).

A representative for the government’s Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform says that “a small minority of unscrupulous businesses and individuals... give the rest of the sector a bad name.”

Recently, the department’s Companies Investigations Branch shut down three companies trading as secondary ticket agents and “in other investigations ongoing,” the representative adds.

But some in the industry believe these measures don’t go far enough. Melvin Benn, managing director of promoter Festival Republic, suggests authorities need to do more, by “constantly monitoring activities in the secondary way (track) pornography.” Festival Republic organizes the Reading and Leeds festivals.

In effort to bolster public confidence, Seatwave and rivals Viagogo and Ticketmaster subsidiary Get Me In have launched ticket protection and refund schemes. Viagogo, for example, guarantees that customers will receive their tickets on time and will provide “similar or better tickets” or a full refund if problems arise. “Everyone who’s paid through us gets their tickets,” Viagogo’s CEO Eric Baker says.

Meanwhile, the Assn. of Secondary Ticketing Agencies is appointing a Lloyd’s of London underwriter to offer guarantee schemes through its members.

Not all secondary ticketing agents are members of ASTA, which formed three years ago. SOS Master and Xclusive weren’t members, nor are Viagogo. Seatwave and Get Me In. Still, Benn describes the guarantee schemes as “a great step forward” toward boosting public confidence in the sector.

U.K. consumer-rights group Which, however, is skeptical of recent moves by the secondary sector to reassure consumers. “You have fewer rights if you buy from a secondary agent,” a Which representative says. “There is no guarantee that secondary sellers actually have any tickets.”

The Resale Rights Society, which formed in December 2007 to ensure that artists are compensated for secondary ticket sales, warns online ticketers, promoters and artists to establish a certification system through the British Standards Institution for secondary ticketing sites that agree to meet certain criteria.

Society chairman Marc Maror says consumers need to be educated about the sector. “At the moment, people are unaware of where to go for legitimate tickets,” he says.

Despite the efforts of legal operators, Nick Blackburn, managing director of primary ticket seller See Tickets, cautions that the situation is unlikely to improve for desperate music fans. In fact, he says, “It is going to get worse, because it’s a very easy way to make money—and the Internet is impossible to police.”

>> AEG PARTNERS WITH NBA CHINA

Entertainment/sports promoter AEG has formed a joint venture with NBA China to design, market, program and operate multipurpose, NBA-style sports and entertainment arenas in Greater China’s major cities. The partnership will also include the booking and marketing of events held at the venues, including concerts, trade shows and live entertainment. The Sino-U.S. joint venture will oversee all decisions, including arena design, identifying target cities and project sites, and procuring naming rights and other sponsorships. The companies will strive to develop the venues in conjunction with surrounding cultural and entertainment districts.

—Jennifer Wilson

>> BAKER (top) and MACHIN

SECONDARY TICKET VENDOR SOS MASTER TICKET CLOSED AFTER FAILING TO DELIVER TICKETS PURCHASED FOR THE READING FESTIVAL AND OTHER EVENTS.
King Of The Road

Ranchera Star Vicente Fernández Cleans Up On Tour

At a time when an ailing economy is hurting everyone's pocketbook, tour promoters are experimenting with new marketing approaches and pricing options to rev up ticket sales. The challenge is particularly acute in Latin concert promotion, where only a handful of acts have the clout to fill arenas in this country.

Attendence this particularly acute in Latin concert promotion, where only a handful of acts have the clout to fill arenas in this country.

All of which makes the recent success of Vicente Fernández all the more striking. The 68-year-old ranchera veteran is in the midst of a 25-date U.S. tour that is already the most successful Latin tour of 2008.

Fernández's U.S. trek, which will include nine shows at Los Angeles' Gibson Amphitheater in November, has broken attendance records in at least three venues. They include the Cow Palace in San Francisco, where on May 10 he drew a sellout crowd of 12,055, according to Billboard.

According to Billboard Boxscore, Fernández has grossed more than $10 million from just 12 shows, with total attendance of 313,210 and 10 sellouts. Compare that with the $9.2 million that RED grossed from 32 shows or the $5.2 million that Miguel Bosé grossed from 12 shows.

"Vicente really stands above," says promoter Ivan Fernandez (no relation), CEO of Viva Entertainment. "His rules don't apply to anyone else."

However, the way his tour has been handled does allow us to reflect on many concerns voiced by promoters and agents in recent months.

One of them is pricing. When rock act Mana toured the United States last year, for example, the group asked that ticket prices be capped at $100. The group's 48-show U.S. trek was the top Latin tour of the year — No. 16 overall — grossed more than $33 million and had 24 sellouts, according to Boxscore.

But promoters say many other acts, particularly emerging artists, price themselves out of the market.

"The end result is half-empty arenas and losses for us — losses that the artist doesn't see because they get a guarantee," one promoter says.

Fernández, pundits say, gets away with charging high ticket prices — on average from $50 for the cheapest seat to $200 — because his show is nearly four hours long, packed full of hits and appeals to multiple generations. "The economy is bad and tickets are expensive, but when you give people something worthwhile, they pay," says Fred Godinez, a partner in MCNs productions who promotes many of Fernández's shows. "And yes, I have people complaining about $180 tickets, if a show lasts 70 minutes."

Of course, playing for a long time in itself doesn't guarantee success, as few artists can hold an audience's attention for that long. But Fernández has also been savvy in other ways when it comes to maximizing his financial returns. In Chicago, he sold 19,000 seats at the Allstate Arena, a record for the venue, by performing on a smaller, circular 360-degree stage that allows for all-around seating.

Given his cross-generational popularity, Fernández's tickets tend to be purchased in big numbers, with entire families attending his shows. Godinez's average buy is eight tickets per person, compared with four per person for most other acts. As a result, when selling a Fernández show, Godinez removes the 10-ticket per-buy cap that Ticketmaster normally puts in place.

It's worth noting that Fernández doesn't play double bills. That option, as Enrique Iglesias and Aventura recently proved, not only increases attendance by expanding the pool of fans but also makes a show longer and therefore, more psychologically appealing to ticket buyers. But then, record-breaking attendance at Fernández's shows indicates that fans think they're already getting their money's worth.

Proceed With Caution

Violence Hinders Already Fragile Mexican Touring Market

According to the bread and butter of the Mexican touring circuit — has taken a hit in the United States due to fear of immigration raids, a downturn in construction jobs and high gas prices, promoters have said. But in Mexico, another factor has prevented fans from showing up to concerts: an escalation of violence from drug cartels battling each other and the government.

A grenade attack during a Mexican Independence Day celebration on Sept. 15 in Morelia, Michoacan, killed eight people and wounded more than 100 others including children. An alleged gang member accused of participating in the attack on civilians was meant to "provoke" the government, according to published reports. Families have been reluctant to bring their children to large festivals, and parents in some cases are forbidding their teenagers to buy tickets to such events, promoters say. "People are afraid," Conjunto Primavera lead singer Tony Melendez said Oct. 7 at Billboard's Regional Mexican Music Summit.

Economic factors — a slumping U.S. economy has led to smaller remittances sent home to Mexico — have also created a reduction between 30% and 50% in turnout, promoters estimate. Some acts are canceling shows in places like Michoacan, Guerrero and Jalisco, either due to low ticket sales or because they're spooked — or they're simply not returning to the same venues they used to play.

Because ticket prices are much lower in Mexico, "you do need a lot of people to make an event break even or successful," Apodaca Promotions national director of marketing and promotions Lee Vargas says. That hasn't been a problem historically; shows in Mexico typically draw at least twice what they get stateside. But now, "we're trying our best to make the safest venues possible," says Arturo Torres Flores, who represents such acts as Exterminador and El Tono de Mexico.

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EN BREVE

TORRES INKS WITH UMG

Argentine singer/songwriter Diego Torres has signed a long-term recording deal with Universal Music Group. Torres, who had long been signed to BMG, and later Sony BMG, recorded his last album for that company in 2006. Now he is working on a new set that is slated for release in mid-2009 under Universal. Torres is one of Argentina's best-known pop artists in the Latin music realm and gained world-wide notoriety with 2002 hit "Color Esperanza," which became an anthem for Argentina during the country's economic crisis. Already a star throughout Latin America, Torres expanded his reach with a subsequent "MVT Unplugged" special that aired throughout the region. His last album for Sony BMG was 2006's "Anando." Although Torres' new pact with Universal is not a 360 deal, it does give Universal a percentage of some of his ancillary business in limited territories.

NEW CHRISTIAN COMPILATIONS

Universal Music Latin Entertainment and Latin Christian label Mucho Fruto are releasing "Vive," the first in a new series of Christian compilations, Oct. 21. The contemporary artists on the album include Latin Grammy Award-nominated Pablo Oli- vares and Mucho Fruto co-founder Paulina Aguire. Billboard Latin Pop charting act Tercer Cielo and Billboard Latin Music Award finalist Julissa. The compilation is the result of a licensing deal between Mucho Fruto and Universal. The labels are promoting the compilation with showcases Oct. 20 in Los Angeles and Oct. 28 in Miami. BMI, Gibson and Red Bull are sponsoring the showcases.

RUBIO TUNE IN NISSAN AD

Japanese carmaker Nissan will feature Paulina Rubio's "Yo Sigo Aqui" in TV ads during the next year for the U.S. Hispanic market. The song from Rubio's "Border Girl" album was written by Estefan and garnered a BMI Award in 2002. It is published by World Deep Music Publishing and Sony/ATV.
Fuse, the cable music network division of Cablevision’s Madison Square Garden, has long operated in the shadow of MTV and its affiliates.

MTV reached an average prime-time audience of 730,000 U.S. households this year through mid-October, while Fuse’s prime-time audience averaged only about 34,000 households during the same period, according to Nielsen Media Research.

Fuse is hoping to expand its reach. As part of those efforts, the company hired MTV Networks veteran Eric Sherman last year as president of the network. Since Sherman’s arrival, Fuse has also hired new heads of marketing, programming and development, ad sales and strategy and operations.

Sherman, who had previously served as senior GM of VH1 Classic, VH1 Soul, VH1 Classic Records and MVD (MTV’s HD channel), has supplemented Fuse’s steady diet of music video programming with concerts, movies and music-themed reality shows.

The channel has launched a slew of new programming this year, including “Rock Bottom,” a reality show that follows the tribulations of bands that have to contend with out-of-control bandmates; “Redemption Song,” a reality show/competition in which 11 women vie for the chance to record a song for the new Fuse/Geffen Records label; and “Fuse Rocks the Garden,” a live concert series that showcases performances at the venue.

Sherman talks to Billboard about Fuse’s makeover, the network’s international strategy and why the canceled show “Pants Off, Dance Off” still lives on as an online video site.

Music videos remain an important part of your programming schedule, at a time when MTV has largely moved away from them and fans can stream them online on demand. Is there still a significant TV audience for videos?

Absolutely. We believe in the music video as a meaningful form of entertainment. In order to succeed, you need to take an editorial voice and help curate it. For example, we have the shows “No. 1 Countdown,” “Video Yearbook” and “Loaded.” [All of which have a host showing videos.] While I don’t think there’s much of a market for general video rotation, well-curated music videos will be an important part of Fuse.

You’ve done several live events, including “Where Music Meets Film Live From the ZonePerfect Bar” and “Fuse Live From Bonnaroo.” What are your success metrics, and will we see more live events?

You will absolutely see more live music on Fuse. In addition, the sponsorships of those shows not only live on-air but also off-site. At Bonnaroo, we built a 5,000-square-foot barn that allowed consumers to experience Fuse. We had sponsor integration with product sampling and technology demonstrations. Being at events like Bonnaroo and...Voodoo in New Orleans builds buzz, builds the Fuse brand and obviously builds relations with the artists and their management.

How does Fuse fit into Madison Square Garden when it comes to content and promotion?

The relationship with Madison Square Garden [which officially began Jan. 1], which also includes Radio City Music Hall, the Chicago Theatre and the Beacon Theatre, gives us access to the talent, because they’re coming into our venues on a daily basis. From a marketing perspective, there is extensive promotion of Fuse at all of the venues.

Does that mean there will be a “Fuse Rocks Radio City”?

This collection of venues offers so many different opportunities to work with artists. We’ll be doing things later this year from the Chicago Theatre, although I can’t talk about which artists it will be.

How do you sell acts on the added value of a Fuse broadcast of an Madison Square Garden Entertainment event?

When [MSGE president] Jay Marciano and his people are booking these venues, they have Fuse as a tool in their arsenal to get acts to play our venues in a competitive marketplace. They can add the power of a national network; whether they do a lot or a little with us, that association helps our exposure with the artist community. It takes us up a notch in terms of awareness and being seen as a strong brand in the world of music.

We worked with Weezer when they played Madison Square Garden for the first time in September and we were heavily involved in the negotiations. We ended up putting together a comprehensive plan together that helped them sell out the venue. We had them in the studio, did a national sweeps tour, drove awareness and partnered with local radio. We pulled out all the stops because we wanted Weezer’s first performance at Madison Square Garden to be a huge success and show the value of the Fuse brand.

Will you create any specific events to provide Fuse with content?

Next year we will step up the amount of performances in our studio on Seventh Avenue. We plan to have major artists come in on a monthly basis to do live performances. If there’s an opportunity to partner with someone or create the key events, we think these live events are the key to our future. In addition, advertisers love to be associated with live music.

In June, Madison Square Garden took a minority interest in Fuse. What can we expect from the partnership?

Front Line’s roster of artists make themselves available for interviews and appearances on our programs. We’re discussing a number of things for the future but nothing specific right now. “Pants Off, Dance Off” is still on Fuse’s Web site after being yanked from the air earlier this year. What happened?

It’s no longer a property on Fuse television. It’s a Web property. Surprisingly enough, content where people get naked drives traffic. While it’s a great concept it does not belong on a credible music channel. But we didn’t want to give up the traffic.

Grace Potter at the Peach Music Festival
With the release of 'Fearless,' Swift unveil a plan to introduce the world to country music.

by Ken Tucker

photograph by Anthony Baker
It's a steamy summer night on the banks of the Ohio River and Taylor Swift, dressed in a green sundress and worn cowboy boots, is backstage for a meet-and-greet with her Cincinnati fans. The aging Riverbend Music Center has seen better days, but it's sold out for Swift's appearance there with country trio Rascal Flatts. She's immediately swarmed by an army of mini-Taylors, young girls dressed similarly to their idol, and all of whom emitted high-pitched screams of glee at the sight of the singer. "She's so gorgeous," one teen says, as her friend stands on her tippy toes and squeals, "I'm so excited!" Eighteen-year-old Swift chats easily with her fans, giving each a personal moment: "You're tall, like me," she says to one. "I just noticed your necklace—it's cute," she tells another. For her preteen fans—and there are plenty—she drops to one knee and converses at eye level. Those who asked for hugs didn't receive an awkward, half-hearted embrace: Even the girl holding an "Ohio Loves Taylor" sign who nearly tackled Swift got a warm response.

And so begins the transition of Swift from rising country superstar—her 2006 self-titled debut album has sold 3.4 million units, in addition to 7.5 million single downloads, according to Nielsen SoundScan—to just plain ol' superstar. In tandem with the promotional push behind the release of new album "Fearless," out Nov. 11 on Big Machine Records, Swift landed partnerships for women's apparel and toys—and will attempt what to date has been almost impossible for a country artist: to make an impact overseas. It's an ambitious campaign for Swift—and for Big Machine—a fact the singer readily acknowledges. Swift wrote a track on "Fearless" titled "Change"—which has already hit the market as part of AT&T's Team USA Olympic Soundtrack promotion this past summer—to celebrate her label and its success.
"Being a little record label, you have to fight harder than being on a bigger record label to be on award shows, to be a performer and a presenter and to get big tours and support," Swift says. "My record label had 12 employees when I put out my album and my single and I just kept looking around and thinking, 'Some day we are going to grow and this is going to change and we are going to have a fighting chance.'"

Swift finished the song the day after she won the Country Music Ass'n.'s (CMA) Horizon Award in November 2007. "I looked over at Scott Borchetta, the president of my label, and saw him crying," she says. "For his part, Borchetta is just as appreciative of the talent he has in Swift. 'Her female appeal is this big,' Borchetta says, spreading his arms wide. 'She connects with women 8-38."

"15," one of the standouts on the record, reinforces Borchetta's point. The song—which includes the lyrics, "In your life you'll do greater things than dating a boy on the football team"—will connect with teens looking for hope and with adult women looking back.

"It's the most personal song I have ever written," Swift says. "My best friend and I met our freshman year of high school and our lives actually changed. I walked away from love and then I walked into a record label. I walked onto a tour and that is how my story ended. About my best friend, got her heart ripped out and I was there and went through it with her, but I am really glad that I was able to write it down."

"Taylor Swift" spawned five top 10 country airplay singles, including "Our Song" and "Should've Said No," which both reached No. 1, the former for six weeks. Country hit "Teardrops on My Guitar" also reached No. 3 on the Adult Contemporary chart and went top 10 at Top 40 and Adult Top 40. There were also limited-release EPs, including "Sounds of the Season" ($5,000 sold, according to Nielsen SoundScan), "Beautiful Eyes" with Wal-Mart ($69,000) and "iTunes Sold Out Sessions" ($12,000). Tracks "Teardrops on My Guitar" (1.9 million) and "Our Song" (1.8 million) led the digital download chart.

Big Machine has already laid the groundwork for using her appeal to women with sales; the "Beautiful Eyes" package was sold at one of Wal-Mart's "hot spots"—highly visible locations in the store—in the girls and junior apparel department; the display also tied into Swift's partnership with i.e. teen. "We're always challenged with shrinking space for music in any kind of store," Borchetta says. "This was our first experiment with Wal-Mart, and it was out of the box, just huge. We're already plotting and scheming for '09." In addition, JAKKS Pacific will launch a line of Swift dolls at Wal-Mart and Toys "R" Us in the fall.

All this builds up the anticipation to the release of "Fearless." First single "Love Story" was quickly accepted by radio, debuting at No. 25 on Hot Country Songs. It currently sits at No. 7. Country WTDW Detroit PD John Trapane says the reason is simple: "She is now an A list artist. As programmiers we are the gatekeepers, but there is a small list of artists that we don't get to make those decisions, the listener does," he says, citing Kenny Chesney, Sugarland, Toby Keith and Carrie Underwood as others who have earned immense fan loyalty.

"Love Story" "was actually written about a love that you got to hide because you know for whatever reason you know it wouldn't go over well," Swift says. "I spun it in the direction of Romeo and Juliet—our parents are fighting. I relate to it most as a love that you cannot really elaborate on, a love that maybe society wouldn't accept, a love that maybe your friends wouldn't accept."

The album's packaging will include photos by Anthony Baker specifically shot for key songs on the record. "We shot photos based on the energy of that song," Swift says. For instance, on "Breathe," which she wrote with Colbie Caillat and includes the lyrics, "I can't breathe without you, but I have to," Swift is shown underwater in a pool. For the un-filled "You're Not Sorry," the visual shows a brooding Swift seated on a bathroom floor surrounded by graffiti.

"Fearless," which like her first release was produced by Nathan Chapman—Swift co-produced this time out—will come in three versions. A standard album will carry a suggested retail price of $18.98 (physical) or $11.99 (digital). A $27 limited-edition boxed set will include a T-shirt, leather bracelet, photo album, sticker and—for the first 10,000 fans who pre-order it—their picture featured in a photo mosaic in the set, as well as a chance to win the "ultimate Taylor Swift Fan experience," which includes round-trip airfare and hotel accommodations for the winner and a guest to a Swift concert, an autographed guitar, a meet-and-greet with Swift and a tour of her bus. A $40 version, which includes the mosaic option and the CD, has already sold out.

Swift says she wanted to include fan's photos—once they're all collected, they will meld to create a picture of her fans. Hoping to find their picture on the six-panel fold-out mosaic will be able to visit theTaylorformation.com beginning street week and type in their name to find out where their photo is located.

Swift has been the poster child for Nashville's move into the digital era—she still updates her own MySpace page. An AOL Sessions performance will be cross-promoted on recently acquired social network Bebo, which has a strong presence in the United Kingdom, Swift's next target. CMT's "Studio 310" and AT&T's "Blue Room" will have content as well.

On the wireless side, a radio launch party, with contest-winners of Country Acts Have Ventured Overseas In The Last 10 Years, And Those That Made The Trip Have Had Middling Success

Clarence Spalding, who manages Brooks & Dunn, among others, says it takes a certain kind of artist and a certain approach to do well in the United Kingdom and Europe. "If you go over there and tour as a country act, it's very, very limited. You go from being an arena act over here to a club act—not a theater act, but a club act."

Such artists as Shania Twain and Keith Urban, for example, are able to make an important transition, Spalding says. "They're a country act leaving the United States, but once they cross that border they're a pop act. Taylor Swift and Brooks & Dunn aren't the same thing. We're a straight-ahead country act. She is probably being played on their pop radio stations, the same with Keith [Urban], the same with Shania [Twain]."

"For an act that's not receiving pop airplay here and won't receive pop airplay there, you might as well take your family on a vacation rather than take 30 people over there," Spalding continues. "The chances of you getting on TV over there are slim and none as a country act."

Spalding's comments jive with what Billboard Boxscore figures show: Don Williams—who has a long history of overseas success—notwithstanding, acts that sell tickets in the United Kingdom are acts that can make the transition.

Meanwhile, the cost of touring internationally—balanced with the potential benefit to one's career are factors that weigh heavily on artists' and managers' minds. "If your record company isn't subsidizing it, you're saying, 'OK, I'm going to fly across the world and lose money to sell how many records?"' Spalding says.

Australia is a different proposition, he says. "Country radio is there. They have a country video channel down there. TV is very accepting of the bigger country acts."

Brooks & Dunn toured the country for the first time in March and will return next year. "We made the commitment and I'm glad we did," Spalding says. "It was a big deal and were going back in May of '09."

"We had a body of music down there and we sold out shows in Brisbane and Sydney and Melbourne and my guys got to experience the country and buy relationship with the record label," he adds. "We did a round robin of radio. We did TV. Everything went better than planned."

Spalding says that if an act is interested in European touring, it's important to make the commitment in a timely manner. "If you don't get them over there early on, it's always tough to get them over there once they're making huge amounts of money here."

SOURCE: Billboard Boxscore. All figures are in U.S. dollars.

www.americanradiohistory.com
This is my life’s goal, to have a song on “Grey’s Anatomy.” My love of “Grey’s Anatomy” has never wavered.

It’s my longest relationship to date.

—TAYLOR SWIFT
Best Buy puts its money where its mouth is. Management at the consumer electronics giant believes that shoppers expect to pay $9.99 for a CD, a pricing strategy that most label executives are loath to embrace. So Best Buy is engaging in an expensive experiment to prove to labels that CDs priced at that level will produce enough incremental sales to justify lower wholesale pricing.

According to sources, Best Buy has picked three markets—Jacksonville, Fla.; a city in Arizona; and a third undisclosed city—and will charge $9.99 for every regularly priced single CD. What’s more, the chain is absorbing the losses on that pricing strategy.

“They are trying to show what happens if $9.99 CDs are presented as the normal price,” a senior distribution executive at one of the majors says. “But look, that’s the way they are and that’s why they are great partners.” (Best Buy did not provide an executive to answer questions for this story, and although a company spokesman responded to some questions via e-mail, a request to comment on the $9.99 pricing strategy was ignored.)

It’s a strategy that parlays the reputation that Best Buy has built over time. Most label executives have long held that Best Buy is by far the best account selling music for a number of reasons: The company has shown a willingness to use titles as loss leaders to generate first-week sales, it gambles on developing artists, it has a commitment to catalog, it provides micromarketing possibilities, its returns are generally low, and it’s willing to share information. These factors make Best Buy a beloved account to labels and distributors.

Underlying the $9.99 price point is some rocky history. Many music specialty executives and distribution executives once viewed Best Buy and other discounters like Wal-Mart, Target and Circuit City as predators pulling the industry down. In 1995, a story in Billboard observed that while music specialty retailers derided Best Buy and Circuit City as loss-leader merchants that were destroying the record store business, some competitors and label executives were beginning to acknowledge Best Buy as a force shaping the future of home entertainment retailing.

Best Buy, founded in 1966 by Richard Schulze, began carrying music in 1992, and around that time the company began its shoot out with Circuit City. It was a competition that stretched for decades, and the intense battle between the two wiped out other consumer electronics chains like Highland Superstores, Newmark & Lewis, McDuff, Silo’s, Nobody Beats the Wiz and Lechmere.

When the shootout began to spill over into the record store world and drew in Target and Wal-Mart, the majors initiated stringent minimum advertised-price policies. But by 2000, the Federal Trade Commission had the four majors and a number of music retailers under investigation for price fixing, which resulted in all parties signing consent decrees that ended MAP policies. During this decade thousands of independent stores and such chains as Musicland, Tower, National Record Mart, Compact Disk World, HMV, the Music Network and Peaches were liquidated, and others like Disk Jockey, Wherehouse Entertainment and Sound Shop were sold as part of the industry’s consolidation.

But now, with traditional record stores accounting for a meager 13% of the U.S. marketplace, distribution and label executives say these kinds of disputes are in the past and that they hardly think about the impact of retail discount pricing and do business where they can. For instance, the head of sales at a major label who used to denounce the practice of discounting says, “Best Buy has music-loving, music-knowledgeable buyers. They are hardworking, responsive and cooperative.” Universal Music Group Distribution (UMGD) president Jim Urie says that Best Buy’s buying staff is very analytical, and that he “loves that they are willing to try things.” Yet another senior distribution executive at a competing major says, “Best Buy is one of our most trusted accounts. They have a quality team and are transparent. They really value the label relationship and the distribution relationship and realize the difference between the two.” And Koch Entertainment Distribution senior VP of sales Rob Scarcello says he loves working with Best Buy. “They understand the business, and they understand what music and video will do for their business,” he says. “They may not see eye to eye with you, but they are reasonable, and if you have a valid marketing reason, they will listen.”

Best Buy can afford to listen. In the quarter ended May 31, the chain, which ran 971 stores, including 923 under its company name, reported net income of $179 million, or 43 cents per diluted share, on sales of $9 billion. For the year ended March 1, Best Buy generated $1.4 billion in net income, or $3.12 per share, on sales of $40 billion. That represents five straight years of growth in all counts, including revenue, profit and net income.

At the end of its fiscal 2004 year, the company had reported $704 million, or $1.42 per share, on sales of $24.6 billion. So sales are up 63% and profits have doubled in the past four years.

Best Buy is the third-largest account with about 15% market share and about $1.3 billion in music volume, Billboard estimates. For its part Best Buy doesn’t break out music sales, although in its 10-K filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, it said entertainment software sales—which include movies, videogames and gaming hardware—contribute 19%, or $7.6 billion, of its overall business for the year ended March 1.

As the company expands, economies of scale and a focus on reducing costs allow the company to seemingly extract more profit each year. In 1997, Best Buy had a gross profit margin of 13.6% while its selling, general and administrative expenses were 12.9%, leaving a slim 0.7% in net profit margin. Last year, gross profit margin was 23.9% of revenue while SG&A stood at 18.5%, leaving a 5.4% profitable swing. In between, Best Buy widened the distance between profit and expenses by about one
While Best Buy is great at rolling out developing artists on a national basis, it can be expensive, and consequently, most labels no longer sign up for that level of promotion. But beyond independent stores, Best Buy is the only game in town for micromarketing on a regional basis, thanks to its deal with Detroit-based Vision Information Services, which provides systems that allow vendors to co-manage inventory with Best Buy.

"The Vision system allowed Best Buy to go from central to local planning," a senior distribution executive says. Besides that access, Koch’s Scarcella adds, the other great thing about Best Buy is “they give you ongoing metrics and feedback regularly.”

While all give Best Buy high marks on micromarketing, some label and sales executives still find fault with the chain’s capabilities. “It used to be that they had regional promotional programs, but they eliminated them, which was not a great move,” the head of sales at one indie distribution company says. But the head of sales at a major label says, “They eliminated the bull shit and kept the real micromarketing opportunities.”

“No question, their regional people are lights-out great,” Hollywood Records VP of sales Curt Eddy says. Eddy praises Best Buy in another area: “There is nobody better in getting product to a store,” he says. “They read the tea leaves very quickly.” The chain is just plain good at getting new releases in stock at stores on street date, usually before 11 in the morning.

On the downside, Best Buy’s compliance with being in-stock on promotional titles has declined as of late.

“They seem to have a lot of empty slots in the middle of the weekend,” one major-label sales head says. That may be because the chain is wrestling with how its endcaps should be configured, a distribution executive says. The exec adds that Best Buy is experimenting to see if its endcaps should have 24 titles or maybe fewer, like six titles.

Another independent distribution company begs to differ on the assessment that Best Buy is losing a step on compliance.

“They are one of the best, they take it seriously, they own it, and they do their end of the partnership,” he says. Having said that, he adds that come the fourth-quarter crunch time, accounts like Best Buy and Target give warehousing preferential treatment to other product lines, unlike Wal-Mart, which can handle all trucking traffic year-round.

But for all its forward thinking, Best Buy gets mediocre marks for its online presence, something that may change now that it has acquired Napster. The Best Buy-Napster deal “is good for all concerned,” UMGD’s Urie says. “It’s good for Napster because it gives them corporate stability. It’s good for Best Buy because it allows them to determine their own digital destiny. It’s good for consumers because it will allow Best Buy to bundle a lot of unique and creative offers at attractive prices, and it’s good for the labels because it will drive sales in a lot of new ways on a lot of devices.”

On the physical side of its online store, Best Buy gets praise for its marketing efforts.

“We are doing more online marketing with them than practically anybody else, and it’s their people that keep coming at us with ideas for linking some sort of digital component to the physical product or some sort of value add,” the head of sales for a midsize indie distributor says. Again, like the retailer’s regional staff, Best Buy’s online marketing staff, Paula Ward and Sandy Dresser, get high marks from within. “They have a real knowledgeable, creative and aggressive person calling us with opportunities that we are not getting from anywhere else,” he adds. “They are looking under rocks. They know if they can get to discerning music people and offer them good shit, they will make new customers.”

A major-label distribution executive says that Best Buy may eventually have an edge over other online sellers. “Best Buy is the 800-pound gorilla in the consumer electronic space,” he says. “They are trying to leverage their relationship with consumer electronic manufacturers to benefit their Web stores.” For its part, Best Buy says in a statement: “We offer choice to our customers to access music in many different ways. Whether it’s through iTunes, the Best Buy Digital Music Store, eMusic, satellite radio or HD radio, we can provide our customers with the right solutions for their needs.”
SOUL SURVIVOR

Tom Jones Gets Back To Basics With S-Curve Debut

As is customary these days, Tom Jones is running his comeback on a platform of experience, coupled with a bit of change. Jones’ new “24 Hours,” due Nov. 25 on S-Curve Records, is the 66-year-old’s first U.S. album in 15 years and, practically speaking, his American comeback (in the studio, anyway—he still performs more than 200 shows a year).

“I’ve been thinking about this album for a long time now,” he says. “I’ve had success worldwide, but with albums that were never released in America.” (His last album, 2000’s rock-covers collection “Reload,” moved 5 million copies in Europe, but labels found its roster of Brit-pop-leaning duet partners off-putting, so it never came out stateside.)

Unlike artists like Johnny Cash and Neil Diamond, Jones isn’t using the comeback pedestal to deliver a stark, acoustic, depth-of-the-soul thing; this is a characteristically splashy, bombastic, large-sounding platter of future-retro swagger in the vein of the Amy Winehouse-led throwback soul movement. (It was produced by British-duo Future Cut, which has been behind recent tracks by Kate Nash, Lily Allen and Estelle.)

Witness these couplets from “Sugar Daddy,” a vaguely dirty come-on at the record’s center: “I been singing this song before you were born”; “I’ve got male intuition/I’ve got sexual ambition”; “You don’t send a boy to do a man’s job.” (The best part: He got Bonobo and the Edge to write that for him after a night of drinking in a Dublin pub.)

Jones will spend release week all over TV, including stops on “Good Morning America,” “CBS Sunday Morning,” “The Rachael Ray Show” and “Live With Regis and Kelly,” as well as tastemaker venues like Nic Harcourt’s “Morning Becomes Eclectic” radio show on non-commercial KCRW Santa Monica, Calif., and “Sessions @ AOL.” The idea, according to S-Curve Records founder/CEO Steve Greenberg, is to appeal to longtime fans and “hipsters of all ages.”

To support “24 Hours” internationally, Parlophone’s campaign centers on TV and AC radio. Jones will appear on “Later . . . With Jools Holland” (BBC2), “Strictly Come Dancing” (BBC1) and “The National Lottery” (BBC1). The single “If He Should Ever Leave You” is B-listed at BBC Radio 2, with Jones also scheduled to appear on the network’s tastemakers show Jonathan Ross show.

In Jones’ mind, the key to the recording was keeping sharp watch on the balance among his progressive ambitions, the music’s retro feel and the substantial weight of his reputation, and he says records like Winehouse’s gave him confidence that his plan was solid. “It was reassuring,” he says. “When [back to Black] came out, I thought, ‘It can be done. People do want it.’ It confirmed what we were doing.”

What he was doing was setting a series of ground rules, first ensuring the record wouldn’t be a simple nostalgia trip, and then by having a greater hand in the sound and, for the first time in decades, the songwriting.

A series of meetings with Future Cut followed (“They wanted to do a Tom Jones record,” which I was thrilled about,” Jones says with a chuckle, as did the process of piecing through many volumes of songs. One producer, in fact, wanted Jones to do a classic-soul covers record. “I said, ‘Yeah, but that’s been done.’ And it seemed when people are out of ideas, they revert to songs that were hits once and could be hits again. Which is alright, but you need to move forward.”

In order to do that, Jones needed to be around from day one. “I’ve been lazy sometimes in that respect, because things have just happened, and I’ve had hits with things that have been sent my way,” he says. “But now if you want it to be the way you want it, you have to be in there from the ground.”

To that end, he set out to discount more obvious tracks, including one early pitch with the salacious hook of “You look good with my T-shirt on, you’d look even better with it off.” “That’s completely what I’m not looking for,” he says. “I said, ‘I’m trying to make a statement. That’s too easy.’ So things got more serious. It’s not like it’s all very, very serious, but all songs say something. You can picture something when you’re listening to them.”

There are 13 songs to picture on “24 Hours”: (joyful) major-chord dance machines (“Give a Little Love”); a cover of a Bruce Springsteen song you probably don’t know (“The Hitter”); an icy story-song set on death row (“24 Hours”); and ready-made openers for Jones’ live set (“I’m Alive,” an old Tom Jones & the Shondells B-side). But the marquee attractions are probably the Springsteen track and “Sugar Daddy.”

He recalls, “[Bono] said, ‘You’re the only man who can get away with this. It’s right in your face. It’s a bragging song—your take on entertaining. If you like.’ ”

Meanwhile, “The Hitter,” Jones says, was Greenberg’s idea. Springsteen’s “Devils & Dust” version is delivered in a husked, acoustic setting; Jones adds horns and a couple of vocal take-offs that leave the song’s ending a little less melancholy. “It’s a pretty obscure one,” Greenberg says. “But [Jones] really relates to this story of this older loser who’s been through it all. That’s the theme of a lot of the record: somebody looking back while still continuing to lead life to the fullest.”

Additional reporting by Jen Wilson in London.
MUSIC

LATEST BUZZ

>> GREEN MACHINE
Confirming news that Garbage frontwoman Shirley Manson let slip recently on "The Carson Daly Show," Green Day is in the studio with veteran producer Butch Vig working on the follow-up to 2004’s "American Idiot." In a video posted on YouTube, the band is seen in the control room as the camera pans over to Vig, who smiles and extends his middle finger. Instrumental bits of two new songs are heard in the background.

>> SOUND AND VISION
50 Cent’s new album will boast production and guest turns from mentors Dr. Dre and Eminem. "Before I Self Destruct" is due Dec. 9 via Shady/Aftermath/Interscope. Produced by Scott Storch, helmed first single "Get Up." The package will also include a 90-minute, feature-length movie about an inner-city boy named Clarence who sets out to avenge his mother’s death. 50 Cent wrote, directed and starred in the film.

>> GIRLS GONE INDIE
After a lone album for Hollywood, the Indigo Girls will independently release their next set, due in February. "We recorded two records, one with the band and then we went back and did the whole record again as a duet live in the studio straight to tape," group member Amy Ray says. "It gives everybody both sides of the equation."

>> KAT CALLING
Kat DeLuna, best-known for her 2007 hit single "Whine Up" featuring Elephant Man, has split with Epic Records, according to the label. The 20-year-old artist’s debut album, "10 Lives," sold just 63,000 copies in the United States, according to Nielsen SoundScan, but tracks from the set have sold more than 866,000 digital copies. DeLuna is working on her sophomore album with such producers as Akon, Jim Jonsin, Red One and J. Bynum.

Reporting by Jonathan Cohen and Mariel Conception.

ROCK BY HAZEL DAVIS

CHASING HITS

Management Powerhouse Aims To Snow Patrol Skyward

You know you’ve made it whenMetallica’s management returns your call and asks to sign you. "Meeting QPrime is like meeting a rock star," Snow Patrol drummer Jonny Quinn says with a laugh. "We never thought for a second they’d be interested.

In 2007, the Scottish-Northern Irish rock band split with its London-based manager Jazz Summers of Big Life Management and signed with heavy-duty U.S.-based QPrime—home of Metallica, Jimmy Page and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. The management firm is now charged with taking Snow Patrol’s multimillion-selling star and slotting it to the next level with new album "A Hundred Million Suns," due Oct. 27 on Fiction/Polydor internationally and a day later on Polydor/EMI in the United States.

To take the band from U.K. and U.S. million-sellers to worldwide superstardom, QPrime co-founder Peter Mensch says, requires merely the album selling itself. "We made a good record and you have to hope that will be received as well as you think it should be," he says.

That means no gimmicks on the marketing front. Mensch says, although a free Snow Patrol application is available to download in all regions for iPhone and iPod Touch users, featuring artwork, images and lyrics. Mensch says that’s "just a cool thing. It’s not going to affect record sales; it’s free."

He adds, "My take on special formats is ‘no.’ You’re listening to the best 58 minutes of music we could write. I refuse to say there’s a 12th song that a physical consumer can’t buy."

The album’s anthemic lead single, "Take Back the City," went to radio globally Sept. 1 and is No. 32 this week on Billboard’s Modern Rock chart. Stateside, Interscope has partnered with MySpace for a contest that will send U.S. fans to an Oct. 27 show in London, and the band will cross the Atlantic the other way in early December for two weeks of live shows and promotion.

Snow Patrol will then return for an extensive North American tour in 2009.

The band kicks off a U.K. tour Oct. 26, breaking off to visit France to appear on prime-time music TV show "Taratata" two days later. Mensch says, "Hopefully this will lead to airplay in France, where the band hasn’t been so successful before."

In taking the band to the next stage in such markets, London-based Universal Music Group International senior VP of marketing Tony Harlow says, "It’s now about putting awareness around them and making sure TV performances happen. It’s probably about lots of touring until an awareness has been developed that will put them at a level to come in and do the show properly."

"We don’t really sell a lot in Japan and Europe, and those are the places we’d like to improve on," Quinn says.

"We don’t want to have another: ‘Chasing Cars’ or ‘Run.’ We’ve made a good record that we’re proud of, and we’re hoping that should do it."

After two commercially unsuccessful albums on Scottish indie Jeepter, Snow Patrol broke big with a move to Fiction/Polydor in 2003. That came with U.K. hit single "Run," taken from third album "Final Straw," which has amassed global sales of 2.7 million, according to the label. Nielsen SoundScan has logged 618,000

GLOBAL PULSE
EDITED BY TOM FERGUSON

>> TAKING FLIGHT
Spanish singer/songwriter Melendi’s debut album, "Sin Noticias de Holanda" (Carlito Records/EMI Music Spain), took a year to reach No. 1 in 2003, but fourth set "Curiosa La Cara De Tu Padre" wasted no time in returning the artist to the top of Spain’s Media Control chart. "Curiosa" (Carlito Records/EMI Music Spain) hit No. 1 one week after its Sept. 16 release, picking up gold certification (400,000 copies). EMI Spain says Melendi’s domestic sales to date have passed 1 million albums.

Melendi’s sharp, street-wise lyrics, combined with his mix of basic rock and classic rumba styles, have helped build a large fan base, and earlier this year he was signed by leading artist management/concert booking firm RLM Productions—joining major Spanish names like Miguel Bosé and Alejandro Sanz.

Melendi, whose publishing is handled by Carlito/EMI Music Publishing, was due to make his Latin America debut last year, but an appearance in Mexico was canceled after his plane turned back to Madrid following a mid-flight incident between the singer and cabin crew.

Now, Madrid-based RLM international booking and product manager Sebastian Dacamp says, "For the first time, there will be an international work agenda for Melendi." He adds that a 2009 promo schedule for Latin America—"and, hopefully, the U.S. Latin market"—will be confirmed in the next few weeks. —HOWELL LOWEJNY

>> SLIME IS RIGHT
The global economic slowdown may well find numerous acts complaining about recording budgets being slashed, but for British rapper Roots Manuva, switching to a basic, intimate studio setting for fourth album "Slime & Reason" (Big Dada) proved highly beneficial.

Released Sept. 1 in the United Kingdom, the critically acclaimed album entered at No. 22 on the Official Charts Co’s listing one week later and made it U.S. bow Sept. 30 via Ninja Tune. "For [2005 album] ‘Awfully Deep,’ I had loads more resources available to me and I kind of messed about in the studio," says

MELENDI

www.americanradiohistory.com
Manuva (real name Rodney Smith). "This one is a bit rawer. There were less resources available to me, so I didn't have as much time to piss about."

Featuring collaborations with hot young British producers Toddla T and Metronomy, the album has been hailed as a return to the rapper's dancefloor/dub reggae roots after its predecessor's somber "live band" sound. "There's more of an emphasis on the lighter stuff," says London-based Big Dada label manager Jamie Collinson, who cites Manuva's crossover appeal as key to his decade-long popularity.

The Chrysalis Music-published artist is midway through a U.K. tour, booked through Primary Talent. A November European tour follows, with U.S. dates through Windish Agency planned for early 2009. —Richard Smirk

DOUBLE FIRST

Welsh rock quintet Funeral for a Friend is on a 40-plus-date European tour promoting its fourth album, "Memory and Humanity." It marks a significant stage for the band—the shows are the first to feature new bassist Gavin Burrough and the album is the first on its own label, Join Us. Following its departure from Atlantic, the band set up the label in June in partnership with media investment firm Ingenious and Pan-European distributor PIAS. "Being in control of everything is an absolute bonus," singer Matt Davies-Kreye says. "We don't have anyone trying to direct us, bend us or mold us.

The Oct. 13 European release is the follow-up to 2007's "Tales Don't Tell Themselves," which peaked at No. 3 in the United Kingdom and hit No. 2 on Billboard's Top Heatseekers chart. The band recorded the album in Cardiff, Wales, with Welsh producer Romesh Dodangoda. "I'm stoked about fans hearing this album," Davies-Kreye says. "We've progressed as a band, and things are the best they've been in a long time."

Funeral for a Friend's U.K./U.S. bookings are through the Agency Group. Victory Records will release the album Oct. 28 in the United States, with tour dates planned for early 2009. —Nichola Browne

U.S. sales of the album, and 2006 follow-up "Eyes Open" raised the band's profile substantially, thanks to the success of "Chasing Cars. "The album has sold 4.6 million globally, Polydor says, including 1.2 million in the States. "Chasing Cars" (Polydor/Atlantic) broke down the doors of U.S. top 40 radio for Snow Patrol and has sold 2.3 million downloads. It hit No. 5 on the Billboard Hot 100 in October 2006, boosted by its use in the second-season finale of TV show "Grey's Anatomy."

"Chasing Cars" was a big phenomenon song," interscope head of marketing Robbie Snow says. "The synch catapulted it into a multiple-format record. That was wonderful, but we're marketing Snow Patrol as a great album band."

Whereas Snow Patrol's early releases owed a lot to rock debt to bands like Seabed, "A Hundred Million Suns" offers a blend of sleek, arena-ready tracks and heartfelt, stripped-down love songs, all produced by longtime collaborator Garrett "Jacknife" Lee. Highlights include the strident rockers "Please Just Take These Photos From My Hands" and "Disaster Button," and the contemplative, acoustic-led "Lifeboats."

The set closes with 16-minute "The Lightning Strike," a suite of three unique songs.

"In the case of "Eyes Open," some individual tracks like 'Chasing Cars' jumped out and hijacked the record," Harlow says. "This time, you're going to love the album."

Additional reporting by Jonathan Cohen in New York.
DJ TIMBO

In Billboard’s Aug. 30 issue, DJ Timbo’s “Go Go Girl” peaked at No. 10 on the Hot Dance Club Play chart and remained on the tally throughout September. He’s been picked up as a resident DJ for Hollywood club promoter Red Carpet Events, and he christened Hush at its Oct. 2 opening. Timbo (aka Tim Scarne) has also begun filming a reality TV show pilot with director/executive producer Breck Eisner, ripped by Creative Artists Agency.

But it took a lot of work to get to this point. Scarne has been running his own DJ and entertainment service, Enterprise Entertainment, since he was 19 and has spun at private parties consistently since the mid-’90s. Last year, the house DJ soft-released his first original single, “Go Go Girl” (which consisted of 13 remixed versions of that track plus the catchy “The Olsen Twins Song”), and set off on a self-titled tour.

He’s since busted out of his Los Angeles origins, selling out clubs like Hawaiian Tropic Zone in Las Vegas, Lush in St. Louis, Bamboo Bar in Philadelphia and Harrah’s Pool Party in Atlantic City, N.J. (all 2,500 people).

“Most people have probably never seen a DJ in a club like me. It’s more like a rock show,” says Scarne, who sometimes brings his own dancers to the gigs. “I’ll jump on the crowd or some guy’s shoulders and bring my video camera with me. I wear costumes. I get to be the biggest clown so people don’t have to feel like they’re me.” And most any YouTube video of DJ Timbo will attest to it.

He’s sold more than 5,000 copies of “Go Go Girl” as a result—not direct to consumers but to club promoters and sponsors like Guitar Center and Scion. “They use the CDs as invitations to parties, so even if fans aren’t paying upfront, the promoters are able to get something out of buying the CDs from me,” he says.

Then there was the movie. Combining forces with brother (and actor) Thomas Ian Nicholson, Timbo co-wrote and starred in the 2004 semi-autobiographical film “L.A. DJ,” which acted as promotional tool for his music and business. The pair raised capital through private equity and premiered it at Colorado’s Vail Film Festival. It is available through outlets like CinemaNow.com, Blockbuster and Netflix.

The plan next is to “release old-school 45s and pop out singles” through the end of the year, all of which may be gathered up for a full-length release some time next year.

—Katie Hasty
Contact: Brandon Koppel, manager, 800-895-2170, brandonpml@aol.com

SY SMITH

Sy Smith offers sage advice to fellow indie artists pursuing the never-ending quest to be seen and heard: Create your own venue.

After talking to the proprietors of a coffee shop in urban Los Angeles’ Leimert Park neighborhood, Smith established Bitchcraft in 2001. The monthly showcase—which ran for almost two years—featured three or four female acts, unsigned and signed singers and comedians. DJs spun records between acts.

“Then I’d perform for 45 minutes,” Smith says with a laugh. “It wound up becoming a loving environment for people to see chicks do their thing.” Smith is still doing her thing. The singer/songwriter/producer/arranger released her third independent album, “Conflict” (Psyko Records via MDD Distribution), in April; collaborators included producers Ant Bell (Jill Scott) and Ty Macklin (Erykah Badu).

Like its predecessors, “Conflict” finds Smith skilfully fusing R&B/soul and jazz into spacey concoctions accented by tempo shifts and insightful metaphors. Gliding over, under and around the tracks are Smith’s captivatingly sultry vocals.

Smith moved to L.A. in 1997 and signed with Hollywood Records in 1999 but was later dropped. She has since written for Santana, sung backup for Whitney Houston and with Vonda Shepard on “Ally McBeal,” and contributed vocals to commercials for Proctor & Gamble and Nissan.

A backing vocalist for the “American Idol” house band, Smith has also performed with trumpeter Chris Botti at the Hollywood Bowl and Boston Pops.

“I’d like to eat so I keep my hands in a lot of pots,” Smith says. “Anywhere I can use my voice or make music, I try to do it.” —Gail Mitchell
Contact: Tom Estey, publicist, 508-451-5246, tl@6464a@aol.com

KILL THE ALARM

Kill the Alarm has already assembled a small army of fans in New York, enough to sell out the Bowery Ballroom twice this year. Now the band, headed by impressive vocalist/songwriter Garen Gueyikian, has its sights set out-of-state in an attempt to disseminate its radio-ready rock.

The group recently remastered its February 2007 release, “Fire Away,” and made it available as a free download for fans who sign up for the band’s e-mail list. In the past two weeks, more than 1,000 new fans have signed up. According to the act’s management, “Fire Away,” has sold between 3,000 and 4,000 copies. The group also has experienced a steady flow of merch sales.

With the help of agent Alex Ross at Supreme Entertainment, the group hopes to tackle the live circuit in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., next; fans in Chicago might be treated to a couple of Kill the Alarm signature covers, like Usher’s “U Got It Bad” or K’Dee’s “Not an Addict” Nov. 1 at the Beat Kitchen.

The band has toured with and opened for such mainstream rock acts as Pat McGee, Eve 6, Cowboy Mouth and Pete Francis of Dispatch. Kill the Alarm is writing and recording new material and also contributing a song to fund-raising organization Make A Wish Foundation’s Christmas CD “In a year, playing Irving Plaza would be an amazing next step,” Gueyikian says. “We’ll keep on writing as much as possible because the more you put out, the more of a chance that someone will pick it up.”

—Laura O’Connor
Contact: Veken Gueyikian, manager, veken@kisstartmusic.com, Justin Seidenberg, manager, justin@kisstartmusic.com

CATCHING UP WITH UNDERGROUND ALUMNI:

Company of Thieves (July 5, 2008) has signed with Wind-up Records . . . Ark Recordings’ Albert Cross (March 8, 2008) is recording with Jamie Cannizaro and will open for Oasis this month on four U.K. dates . . . Cold War Kids (Sept. 2, 2006) debuted at No. 21 on the Billboard 200 in the Oct. 11 issue . . . Tom Svang picked up managing duties for Apes & Androids (June 7, 2008).
ALBUMS

ROCK

OF MONTREAL

Skeletal Lamping
Producer: Kevin Barnes
Polyvinyl
Release Date: Oct. 21

To say “Skeletal Lamping” finds Of Montreal mastermind Kevin Barnes at his most indulgent is putting it lightly. Barnes isn’t so much indulgent as he is overly ambitious and seemingly out of his mind, making “Skeletal Lamping” as wonder-fully-ambitious as it is weird. From the album’s title down to the moods of songs like “Nonpareil of Favor” and “Triphalus, to Punctuate!” to Barnes’ “black shemalie” alter ego Georgie Fruit (who sings, “We can do it software if you want/But you should know I take it both ways” in a Prince falsetto on “For Our Elegant Caste”), there’s a new twist and turn around every corner. Those looking for the pop stylings of 2007’s “Hissing Fauna Are You the Destroyer” are in for a bit of a surprise (though the horn-led “An Eluardian Instance” and “Id Engager” are more classic Of Montreal), but “Lamping” is a complex, strange trip you won’t soon forget.—JM

DEERHOOF

Offend Magpie
Producer: Deerhoof
Kill Rock Stars
Release Date: Oct. 7

Last year’s infectious “Friend Opportunity” presented Deerhoof in Technicolor, the band distorting pop to create a musical Candyland dotty with explosively vivid experimental landmines. “Offend Maggie” takes a more grounded, monochromatic approach. The addition of second guitarist Ed Rodriguez shifts the focus from synth-manufactured atmospheres to stripped-down primal rock, with power chords wracked in cranking tracks. Vocalist Satomi Matsuzaki turns her attention to philosophical matters, with songs tackling body, God and the afterlife. That’s not to say Deerhoof has stripped off all its quirky, futuristic dop-ery. Rather, there’s a certain stark gravitas that permeates the affair, and instead of giddy euphoria, “Offend Maggie” aims for Zen-like deliberation. Turns out, along with everything else, Deerhoof can strike deep, too.—SV

THE SEA & CAKE

Car Alarm
Producer: The Sea & Cake
Thrill Jockey
Release Date: Oct. 21

The Sea & Cake has dabbled in electronic grooves and Brazilian lift throughout its seven slack albums, but the band has never quite let it rip like it does on “Car Alarm!” Tracks like the title cut and opener “Aerial,” which practically blast out of the speakers. Indeed, there’s a sense of urgency here not seen since the Chicago institution’s earliest work. But the added pop is still refracted through the band’s unique loosely- limbed vibe and Sam Prekop’s soft, soulful vocals. Although one can rarely discern what Prekop is saying, his cadence and phrasing undulates in perfect sympathy with the gently shifting tempos. Prekop and guitarist Archer Prewitt are also more locked in than ever, check the lightly distorted jam on “New Schools” for proof. And on “Weekend” and “Down in the City,” the group shimmers with the best of its indie rock peers.—JC

LABELLE

Back to How
Producers: various
Verve
Release Date: Oct. 21

The 32 years since Labelle’s last studio LP seem to evaporate within the first few measures of “Candleight,” the opener of this reunion album. One factor could be that Nona Hendryx started writing the sultry and explosive song before the group disbanded in 1976—enabling the unique soul/gospel/glам rock style of Patti LaBelle, Sarah Dash and Hendryx to carry forward through the decades, with the production help of master era-melder Kenny Krawitz. Dance track “Rollout,” with vocals and production by Wyclef Jean, is decidedly more modern but maintains the Labelle signature as a female independence anthem. Somewhat schmaltzy but easily “Earn the World,” along with Rosa Parks’ tribute “Dear Rosa,” prove that Patti LaBelle still makes lyin’ to the top starvation and strong. A powerful 1970 live Labelle recording of Cole Porter’s “Miss Otis Regrets” closes the set, underscoring just how much of its original horsepower Labelle has retained.—EN

LEE ANN WOMACK

Call Me Crazy
Producer: Tony Brown
MCA Nashville
Release Date: Oct. 21

Just when you thought she couldn’t get any better, Lee Ann Womack surprises in a big way. “Call Me Crazy,” the follow-up to her highly lauded “There’s More Where That Came From,” is Womack’s best album yet. While the set includes a pure country duet with hero George Strait and a cover of his “The King of Broken Hearts,” Womack doesn’t need Strait’s formidable shoulders to lift her up. Haunting single “Last Call” is song-of-the-year material on a level of songs like “Skeletal Lamping,” a vocal performance as tenuous as it is beautiful. Indeed, the first-time combination of Womack and producer Tony Brown is overdue and magical. “Either Way,” about a loveless marriage, is brilliant, and “Solitary Thinkin’” proves Womack has more soul than just about any other country female vocalist out there. All hail the queen of country.—KT

COUNTRY

HANK WILLIAMS III

Darn Right Rebel Proud
Producer: Hank Williams III
Wildwood Records
Release Date: Oct. 21

Hank Williams III has always respected his lineage, but he gives it even more love at the outset of his polgiant and pugnacious sixth album. “The Grand Ole Opry Ain’t So Grand” not only forwards a vehement argument for reinstating his grandfather, the late Hank Williams, but also shouts out some props for Bob Dylan—father Hank Williams Jr.—despite their admittedly difficult relationship. The rest of the aptly named “Darn Right Rebel Proud” mines a rootsy kind of country and digs even deeper into his father’s life and psyche, mixing the darkness of the confessional “Candidate for Suicide,” the weepy “Stoned and Alone” and the twangy, galloping “3 Shades of Black” with the high-speed go-for-broke of the almost bluegrass “6 Pack of Beer.” Hank III has his punk and metal sidelines, but he’s country to every core and has every damn right to be rebel- proud of it here.—GG

JOHN MICHAEL MONTGOMERY

Time Flies
Producers: Byron Gallimore, John Michael Montgomery
Silverado
Release Date: Oct. 14

There’s a duality about John Michael Mont- gomery’s first album in four years and the first on his own label. While single “Forever” has an 80s rock feel and “Loving and Letting Go” could be a Michael McDonald staple, “What Did I Do” and “Funny” “With My Shirt On” (“Can I make love with J . . .”) follow a well-worn country path. Meanwhile, alcohol is celebrated (“Mad Cowboy Disease”) and derided (“Drunkard’s Prayer”). And only on a country record can an artist thank Jim Beam and a substance abuse facility in close succession. That said, there’s plenty to like here. “Fly On” is an updated and impressive take on the if-you-love-something-let-it-go theme, and “All in a Day,” from which the album’s title is derived, is a great example of the story-telling for which country music is known.—KT

WORLD

OMBAY DUB ORCHESTRA

3 Cities
Producers: Garry Hughes, Andrew T. Mackay
Six Degrees
Release Date: Oct. 21

Garry Hughes and Andrew T. Mackay, the endlessly inventive duo that animates Bombay Dub Or- chestra, tracked their new album in Mumbai and Chennai in India and London. It was an ambitious undertaking that has yielded an entrancingly brilliant follow-up to their 2006 self-titled debut. The Hughes/ Mackay vibe is South Asian dub executed with pristine sweep. Their music, as heard on “Junoon,” “Strange Constellations” and “Map of Dusk,” is often extremely unique sort of chill that’s equally befitting to Indian traditional forms, South Asian underground and a Western symphonic sensibility. On “Spiral,” however, the insistent beat and a dynamic, swooping string arrangement lays on something a little more earthy. The dub exoticism of “Monsoon Malabar” is underwritten by a throbbing electronic groove beneath Pradeep Pandit’s multilayered vocalis, which is somewhat reminiscent of late-80s Sheila Chandra.—PPV

AC/DC

Black Ice
Producer: Brendan O’Brien
Columbia
Release Date: Oct. 20

AC/DC’s move to release this album exclusively through Wal-Mart and Sam’s Club may be untraditional, but the seemingly ageless Australian rock combo mostly employs its same tried-and-true formula on the audio side of the “Black Ice” equation. A number of songs unabashedly reference iconic 1980 album “Back in Black.” “Wheels” echoes that set’s “Givin’ the Dog a Bone,” while first single “Rock’s Roll Train,” with its gang chorus vocal, nods to “What You Do for Money Honey,” “Big Jack” offers major-key thrills, and “ Anything Goes” sought to sound great blazing at an arena near you. But at 15 tracks (four of which extoll the base virtues of rock music), the album overlays its welcome, making it difficult to sink your talons into like the old-school blues of the title cut, the slide guitar licks on “Stormy May Day” and the sparse “Decibel” all the more entertaining.—JC
JEM

Down to Earth
Producers: various
ATO
Release Date: Sept. 16

On her sophomore ATO effort, Wolf-singer Jem doesn't veer far off the course from 2004's "Finally Woken." The album plays fairly safe, dabbling primarily in subtext electronica supported by trip-hop beats. The "Sex and the City" movie-featured "It's Amazing" and the moody, cracking "Keep On Walking," backed by a gospel chorus at the end, are the best of this variety. Elsewhere, a funny banjo drives "Crazy," and the Japanese-sung "Acidic" is made for the dancefloor. The Latin-sped "I Want You To..." is likely but grows repetitive, and the 9/11-influenced ballad "You Will Make It" doesn't succeed in stirring emotions quite like it should. Jem's Dido-like vocals are consistently a soothing treat, but on the whole there's a tininess and spark missing from the material.—JM

DEITRICK HADDON

Revealed
Producers: various
Ventry
Release Date: Sept. 2

The nine-album oeuvre of Deitrick Haddon could almost be cross-marketed as an over-the-counter antidepressant. After a decade-plus of pushing the edges of gospel, his imagination and invention remain as engaging as ever. Haddon's interviewing of R&B, rock and pop—with a side of retro-funk, thank you—continues to use tradition more as a point of departure than reference. "Where You Are" is soulful, techno-tangled rock, while "I'm Alive" is a hook-heavy gift of hope, and "Love Him Like I Do"—with guest turns from Ruben Studdard and Mary J. Blige by adding top-40 R&B offering of thanks to God. It's a testimony of Haddon's commitment—to his faith and his artistry—that he continues to use both as mandates for excellence and change. He's the best reason in the world to throw a party.—GE

GANG GANG DANCE

Saint Dymphna
Producer: Gang Gang
Social Registry
Release Date: Oct. 21

Much has been made of the fact that Gang Gang Dance named this record after the patron saint of outcasts and rebels, but this effort shows more crossover potential than anything the act has ever done. Given the band's outsider reputation, "Saint Dymphna" is refreshingly easy to consume. Listeners who saw the group lead the New York R&Boadrum show got a taste of what the disc offers—a heavy emphasis on beats and rhythm, with a few surprises thrown in. Lizzig Bougasots wails like a banshee on many tracks, but the band tweaks the formula for a more accessible, London-based MC Tinchy Stryder as a guest rapper on "Princes." Elsewhere, the band samples South American guitar sounds on "First Communion" and "Hounds," coming close to living up to its name, offering us a vision of a club banger might sound like in a hundred years.—CH

CRITICS’ CHOICE:

A new release, regardless of chart potential, highly recommended for musical merit.

All albums commercially available in the United States are eligible. Send album review copies to Jonathan Cohen and single review copies to Chuck Taylor (both at Billboard, 770 Broadway, Seventh Floor, New York, NY 10003) or to the writers in the appropriate bureau.

BRITNEY SPEARS

Womanizer (3:43)
Producers: The Out siding
Writers: N. Briscoe.
A. R. regarded
Publisher: not listed

Everyone loves a good comeback, though it's ironic that commercially, Britney Spears never went anywhere. If anything, her personal troubles heightened interest in last year's "Blackout" album and top five smash "Gimme More." This year has seen less public Spears—certainly none of the bizarre behavior of the past couple years. "Womanizer" from new album "Circus" (Dec. 2), finds Brit in futuristic electronic mode (similar territory to peer Christina Aguilera). Credit producers/ writers the Outsid ing for injecting a bit of reality into her lyrics, in this case directed at a certain ex, in which Spears chastes, "You say I'm crazy! I got your crazy." While the repetitive hook might affect chart longevity, the best news here is Spears' engaged vocal, unlike last year's tracks, which focused more on production tricks to cover unfocused delivery. After triple-play wins at MTV's Video Music Awards, where a coherent Spears appeared grateful and surprised—and a creative (albeit gratuitous) video that's igniting blogs—could it be our Britney is truly back?—CW

ALANIS MORISSETTE

Not As We (4:12)
Producer: Guy Sigsworth
Writers: A. Morissette.
G. Sigsworth
Publishers: Szeretlej/MBG/ Sigsworth/Universal Poly-Gran International, ASCAP, Mavers

For a woman who's made the confessional song her art form, exposing her post-relationship vulnerability in new single "Not As We" is career-Alans Morisette has tread before. Nonetheless, the amount of rawness the singer/songwriter reveals in the wake of a breakup is startling. "Reborn and shivering, gun-shy and quivering . . . For now I'm making it till I'm pseudo making it." The radio edit is more uplifting than the album version, draped in saw piano instrumentation with instrument arrangement in careful accents a violin here, an oboe there, tinny percussive beats ticking underneath. It makes the ballad's sadness somewhat abate without diluting impact. Both genders can relate to Morissette's message of trying to move on, even if it's with tentative, shaky steps.—CLT

R&B/HIP-HOP

T.I.

Living the Life (5:38)
Producer: Just Blaze
Writers: C. Harris, J. Smith, Makeba, B. Mihai
Publishers: various

This has made stupendous chart history twice in the past month: Last week, latest single "Living Life" made the largest one-week move to the No. 1 spot, leaping from 80 to No. 1—in fact, replacing himself after top chart longevity, the best reason the album, which has been made to peer Christina Aguilera. Credit producers/ writers the Outsid ing for injecting a bit of reality into her lyrics, in this case directed at a certain ex, in which Spears chastes, "You say I'm crazy! I got your crazy." While the repetitive hook might affect chart longevity, the best news here is Spears' engaged vocal, unlike last year's tracks, which focused more on production tricks to cover unfocused delivery. After triple-play wins at MTV's Video Music Awards, where a coherent Spears appeared grateful and surprised—and a creative (albeit gratuitous) video that's igniting blogs—could it be our Britney is truly back?—CW

DAVID COOK

Light On (3:45)
Producer: Rob Cavallo
Writers: C. Cornell, B. Howes
Publishers: Disappearing One, ASCAP, High Buck/EMI Blackwood, BMI

David Cook's "The Time of My Life" was that rare "American Idol" victory anthem that forged past souvenirs into a bona fide career-breaking cross-format hit. The first "legit" single from his full-length debut (Nov. 18) makes it clear exactly the musical recipe Cook intends to make his signature: Collaborators are all name-brand rockers, from producer Rob Cavallo to writers Chris Cornell and Brian Howes. He certainly does his part, with the most aggressive, growing and howling vocal we've yet heard from the talented singer, offering a newfound machismo in his lower register. Melodically, there's no question that this bullet is heading right for the brain, where the only thing stickier than the chorus is Cook's appreciably sweetly performance. Like Chris Daughtry before him, here's an idol who is bound for true rock cred, while accessing the show's popularity to equally indulge a pop base. "Light On" is right on.—CT

BEYONCE

If I Were a Boy (4:11)
Producers: Toby Gad, Beyoncé Knowles
Writers: T. Gad, B. Jean
Publishers: Cherry Lane/Media/Gad, ASCAP, BC Jean, BMI

Columbia

For the past three years, Beyoncé's solo career has flared in and out of focus, with a series of oddball singles, off-covers collaborations and curious stickups. ("Ring the Alarm," anyone?) The 27-year-old is obviously now paying attention to dominant muse Rihanna—10 years her junior—who has effortlessly played dominoes with the charts during the same period by playing the melodic field: dance, pop, R&B and yes, even ballads. Two singles head to radio from Beyoncé's upcoming third album, "I Am." "Ladies First," impacting R&B and rhythmic, is standard screech-tumph fare—but "If I Were a Boy?" is Beyoncé's stab at affecting off-covers of her own. "Dreamgirls." Her vocal performance is breathtaking: exquisitely emotive, mournful and mature. Lyrically, the stunning ballad is a tone of torment, as she offers, "If I were a boy, I think I could understand how it feels to love a girl/i swear I'd be a better man." Boy, Beyoncé delivers. This is the kind of all-encompassing song that exudes the fragrance of a Grammy Award nod.—CT

SMASH

Shady Aftermath

Producer: not listed
Shady/Aftermath

50 Cent's harshest critics might say he got rich and stopped trying. After the low sales of G-Unit's latest album and the lukewarm reception of 2007's "Curtis," the announcement isn't without merit. However, 50's latest single, "Get Up," proves he's far from over. A top Scott Storch beat, he sounds as hungry as he did in his mixtape heyday at the beginning of the decade. 50's confident delivery complements commanding bass and his rhyme skills sound better than in recent times. Too. If the rest of the album "Before I Self Destruct" is as good, it will re-establish 50 just as "Mama Said Knock You Out" did for LL Cool J and "Stillmatic" for Nas.—SR
**Can You ‘Dig’ It?**

**New Oasis Deal Pays Out In Spades**

It may look like business as usual for Oasis, as its new album crashes in at No. 1 in the United Kingdom and achieves impressive chart debuts all around the world, including its best U.S. entry in a decade.

But in fact, the setup behind “Dig Out Your Soul” is notably different from the one that made the band the United Kingdom’s most successful rock group since the Beatles. “Soul” is the first release since Oasis’ prior international deal with Sony BMG expired. And while the band has long been self-released in the United Kingdom through its own Big Brother label, it is now free to negotiate individual deals for new releases and catalog around the world.

Under a worldwide profit-sharing joint venture with Sony, Big Brother GM Emma Greengrass and director Alec McKinlay, who is also a partner with Oasis’ management company Ignition, have set up a complex system of deals in individual territories. For example, in North America the band is distributed through Warner Bros. Records, while in Germany it has a sales/distribution deal with Indigo.

In Scandinavia the album is through Bonnier Amigo. The band has licensed to Sony in many territories, including Japan, Italy and Australia. “We’ve been planning this for a couple of years,” McKinlay says. “We took the opportunity to sweep out all the relationships.”

“Catalog is crucial,” Greengrass says. “With a major, catalog is just wheeled out twice a year. This way, we’re able to factor it into our plan every time we have a release.”

HMH head of music Rudy Osorio says that policy has paid off, with the market-leading U.K. retailer promoting catalog and merchandise alongside the new record. “All their previous albums were at campaign prices in store,” he says. “We saw good lifts on all the catalog—for example, sales of ‘What’s the Story? Morning Glory?’ were up 159% on two weeks previously.”

Osorio says the new album had “terrific day-one sales” on its way to a total weekly U.K. sale of 200,866, according to the Official Charts Co. “They’re one of the few bands left that can get fans into the record shop day one,” Osorio adds. “You don’t see as many.”

Oasis is No. 1 in Italy and went top 10 in Germany, Australia, France, Switzerland, Flanders, Wallonia, New Zealand and Ireland, but McKinlay is most pleased by the U.S. result. The album debuted at No. 5 on the Billboard 200—and at No. 2 on Top Digital Albums—shiftting 53,000 units. That’s the band’s first top 10 album since “Be Here Now” debuted and peaked at No. 2 in 1997—although sales were actually lower than the 65,000 racked up by its last record. “Don’t Believe the Truth,” in its first week in 2005.

“It’s a very encouraging sign,” McKinlay says. “The last couple of albums were very poor in terms of total sales, but we feel that was down to how they were marketed. Sony U.S. are very good at traditional pop marketing but Oasis don’t fit that.”

McKinlay praises Warner’s “ability to take rock acts and reinvigorate their careers in a way that doesn’t rely 100% on radio,” citing the major’s work with Green Day and Red Hot Chili Peppers.

The band will follow up with an 18-month touring schedule, including repeat visits to North America, festival dates and U.K. stadium shows in 2009.

“This campaign isn’t as front-loaded as previous campaigns,” McKinlay says. “We have a lot of promo and the strongest single [next release “I’m Outta Time”] still to come.”

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**ROOM FOR ‘STRAYS’**

Daniel Martin Moore was picking up some groceries in his hometown of Cold Spring, Ky., recently when a cashier noticed his shirt, which bore the name of the label that just released his new album, “Stray Age.”

“Sub Pop?” the clerk asked. “Are they still making records?”

At this point, Moore knows Sub Pop is alive and well, but he didn’t know much more about the iconic label when he sent it a demo tape last year. “I did a Google search and found a bunch of labels and sent the demos out,” he says. Sub Pop found the demo in a slush pile and signed Moore based on not much more than a few songs. “When we signed him, I think all of his MySpace friends were his actual friends,” says Stuart Meyer, Moore’s A&R rep at the label.

Marketing an album with almost no advance buzz or blog hysteria presented a challenge for Sub Pop, which is reaching back to the past in response. “He’s playing at some indie record stores, and we’re working it to college radio,” Meyer says. “He’s not the type of artist where we’d do a crazy online viral blog thing with a mobile component.”

The old-school approach fits perfectly with Moore’s sound, which is informed more by Fairport Convention-era folk music and old Bob Dylan than anything recent. “I came from a really small town, and I’m not really familiar with all the new indie stuff,” Moore says. “But Sub Pop are really strong in the folk scene now, so they trust me. A lot of the staff there has diverse musical tastes, but they seem to have a love for folk.”

Indeed, indie folk has sold strongly this year. Sub Pop labelmates Fleet Foxes have shifted more than 100,000 units of their self-titled debut, while Bon Iver’s “For Emma, Forever Ago” has sold 68,000 for Jagajuguwar, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

“This will be a slower record,” Meyer says. “This will either sell almost nothing or sell a ton. At this point, we’re getting him a booking agent and focusing on getting people to actually hear the record.” —Courtney Harding

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**‘FAME’ LIVES!**

Yes, it’s going to live forever. Lakeshore Entertainment and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s remake of 1980 movie musical “Fame” will feature new music from the Matrix, James Poyser and Damon Elliott.

While the storyline for the film remains the same as the original—following the competitive students at New York’s School of Performing Arts from their freshman to their senior years—the music in the film includes two songs from the original movie (“Fame” and “Out Here On My Own”) as well as the new tracks.

Gary Lucchesi, president of Lakeshore Entertainment and a producer on the film, says he anticipates the new singles will have a life beyond the movie and the soundtrack; they will be worked to radio and distributed to TV as music videos. “You wouldn’t hire these kind of producers if you weren’t paying to hit it out of the park,” he says.

For Lakeshore and MGM, the remake represents a smart bet that is currently attracting pop culture audiences. “American Idol,” about to start its eighth season, remains TV’s top-rated show and Disney’s theatrical release of “High School Musical 3” is expected to do banner business later this month.

The 1980 version of “Fame” won Academy Awards for best score for Michael Gore and best song for the title theme for Gore and Dean Pitchford—it’s a lot to live up to, says Lauren Christy, a member of songwriting/production trio the Matrix.

“The original version of the movie had such an impact that we didn’t want to do exactly the same thing,” she says. “We wanted to create something that was more ‘now,’ but still have the energy.”

“Fame” is scheduled to be released Sept. 25, 2009. The film’s soundtrack will be released through Lakeshore Records, which has previously handled the Grammy Award-nominated soundtracks to “Napoleon Dynamite” and “Little Miss Sunshine.”

The film’s cast includes Thomas Dekker, currently on Fox’s “The Sarah Connor Chronicles”, Kat Panabaker, a veteran of several TV shows, and Nato Green, formerly of group 3LW. “Fame” will be directed by Kevin Tancharoen, whose resume includes videos for Christina Aguilera and Jessica Simpson, as well as directing Britney Spears’ Onyx Hotel tour.

“We decided, if we’re going to do a musical, let’s try not to make it cheesy,” Christy says. “It was very important to us that it have a hip factor to it.” —Ann Donahue
Long Time Coming

Songwriter Souther Unveils First Album In Decades

It’s a warm autumn day and the leaves have begun turning outside JD Souther’s log home south of Nashville. Unfortunately, Souther isn’t home to enjoy the scenery—he’s in a blizzard in Livingston, Mont., where he and Raul Malo are slated to perform at Rock the Vote’s concert. However, even frigid weather and hazardous road conditions can’t curb the legendary songwriter’s enthusiasm for his first studio album in nearly 25 years, “If the World Was You,” which dropped Oct. 14.

“I didn’t want to put anything out that was sub-standard,” he says. “I couldn’t tell you exactly why it took that long. I can tell you why I stopped making records in the ’80s—I was just sort of bored and wanted to do some other things with my time.”

Well-known as one of the songwriters who shaped Southern California’s country rock sound, Souther has written or co-written such classics as Linda Ronstadt’s “Prisoner in Disguise” and “Faithless Love” as well as the Eagles’ hits “Heartache Tonight,” “Best of My Love” and “New Kid in Town.” And when the Eagles chose a song to be the lead single from 2007’s “Long Road out of Eden,” the band’s first new studio collection in 28 years, it released Souther’s “How Long,” which won a Grammy Award earlier this year for best country performance by a duo or group with vocals.

Souther says the initial inspiration for the new album came during a 1998 visit to Cuba. “It’s the most musical place I’ve ever been in my life. It was very inspiring,” he says, “and there was also a lot to think about, just the contrast between rich and poor, differences in the two societies.” He moved to Nashville in 2003 and met local jazz musicians who helped bring his vision to life.

To release the project, Souther opted to start his own label, Slow Curve Records, distributed by RED. He reunited with Ron Stone of Gold Mountain Entertainment, who was his manager 30 years ago, and he signed with Andy Summer of the Agency Group for bookings.

“We are reaching out to fans of the Eagles and Linda Ronstadt, basically tapping into JD’s musical history and targeting those databases,” Slow Curve’s marketing director says. “Jackson Browne is helping us promote the record via his Web site.”

To strengthen ties with independent retail, Slow Curve set up an in-store on street date at Stoney’s in Nashville. The company is outsourcing radio promotion, Internet marketing and public relations.

“We’re working noncommercial triple A stations and then we’re going to cross it over to the commercial triple A radio,” Scblia says of the single “I’ll Be Here at Closing Time.” “We’re sending out the entire record and performers can pick whatever song, but we are focusing on this song.”

Souther adds, “We’re already on about 30 NPR stations. We’re doing radio one format at a time, using every bit of steam we have to go after the next format.”

ZAC ATTACK

When Zac Brown was 18, he set out on the road in a van with his dog Pete, a drummer and a PA system. He played at clubs all over the Southeast, carefully assembling the hardworking pieces of what would become the Zac Brown Band. The group’s single “Chicken Fried” hits a new peak at No. 11 on Billboard’s Hot Country Songs chart this week.

The Zac Brown Band stands out on the chart for several reasons. Unlike the clean-cut country acts that resemble J. Crew models, the members are a scruffy-looking bunch. They write their own songs, along with Brown’s writing partner, Wyatt Durrette, who met Brown while tending bar at Marietta, Ga.’s Dixie Tavern, and now goes on the road with the band.

The act has played Bonnaroo and opened for ZZ Top, B.B. King, Willie Nelson and the Allman Brothers, but also for Sugarland and Alan Jackson. The band is about to go on tour with Los Lonely Boys this week.

The group was the first country act signed to Live Nation, but it was working on a new label deal as of press time for the release of “The Foundation.” (Brown wouldn’t go into detail about plans for the album’s release.) The album, produced by Keith Stegall and John Kelton, is a polished, accessible set full of soul and free-wheeling tales (including a cover of Ray LaMontagne’s “Jolene”).

“I love a great country song, and I’m authentically Southern,” says Brown, whose single is an ode to the simple pleasures of cold beer, favorite jeans and fried chicken. “A lot of what country music is [are] stories that are told by country people. We’re able to do a jam-band kind of thing, reggae-bluegrass — there’s a big part of that is mainstream country.”

The Zac Brown Band — whose current lineup consists of Brown, John Hopkins (bass), Jimmy De Martini (fiddle), Coy Bowles (guitar, organ) and Chris Fryar (drums) — will be on busy touring, with dates booked in the South and Midwest into next year.

The band is represented by Creative Artists Agency.

“One of the reasons our following keeps up. We’re always practicing, rehearsing, writing and arranging our songs,” Brown says. Even after 12 years, he’s still focused on playing live in front of people, seeking “every chance to win them over.” — Ayala Ben-Yehuda

IN THE ‘LIGHT’

A desire to get some new music to his fans quickly is what led Matisyahu to create the “Shattered” EP, which comes out Oct. 21, in advance of his third studio album, “Light,” which is due in early 2009 via Epic.

“I didn’t put out any new music in three years,” Matisyahu says. “It wasn’t easy to tour this fall and give fans some new music to listen to. We sort of decided to split it up and put the EP out first. This way at least people have something to listen to until the record comes out.”

The Hasidic artist says that at least three of the four songs on “Shattered” will also appear on “Light,” he’s on the fence about a track called “Two Child One Drop,” which he worked on with Sly & Robbie in Jamaica. Matisyahu spent the past year working on “Light” — the follow-up to 2006’s Grammy Award-nominated “Youth” — with producers David Kahane, crafting 16 songs with him and other collaborators such as Oshah from Los Angeles band Glitch Mob, Stephen McGregor (son of reggae great Freddie McGregor) and the Fishbone rhythm section of B-Fish and Ken Kありがとうございます.

On this record I just sort of got together the people I respect the most,” Matisyahu says, “not necessarily the biggest names in music but just the people I respect, no matter who they are, and just said, ‘Let’s make some songs together’ and not be concerned with ‘Is it reggae music? Is it hardcore enough?’ Is it this or that?’ but just focus on the integrity of the music.”

With Kahane’s encouragement, Matisyahu says that he also “floated back and forth” across a variety of vocal approaches throughout “Light,” expanding beyond that “sort of reggae swing” he’s used before.

Fans will get to hear the results on a fall tour that begins Oct. 18 in Milwaukee. And he’ll be playing “Light” for fans who want to stick around after the shows and will come out to meet them and talk about the new material. — Gary Graff
T.I. "Still Tops; Thoughts Turn To Christmas Cheer"

T.I.'s "Paper Trail" continues to hold court at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 this week, shifting 177,000 in its second frame. It's down 68.9%—the year's fourth-biggest second-week percentage drop for an album that debuted at No. 1.

Day26's self-titled effort owns the biggest sophomore-frame decline, with a 73% erosion back in April.

Jonas Brothers' "A Little Bit Longer" slipped 72% in week two while Lil Wayne's "Tha Carter III" fell 69.3%.

This will likely be T.I.'s last stand at No. 1, as Kenny Chesney's "Lucky Old Sun" looks good for a debut in the penthouse next week, as it led Nielsen SoundScan's Oct. 15 Building chart.

Chesney is taking a page from the Sugarland playbook, as "Lucky Old Sun" bowed Oct. 14 in a deluxe format, while on Oct. 21, a trimmed-down standard version will hit stores. The deluxe version boasts four live tracks and additional video content. Sales from both sets will be merged together, which will likely make the album's second week on the chart just as interesting as its first week.

Sugarland's "Love on the Inside" opened at No. 2 on the Billboard 200 with its deluxe edition, entering with 314,000, behind the debut of Miley Cyrus' "Breakout" (371,000). However, Sugarland was able to out-muscle Cyrus in its second week, after the standard version of "Love on the Inside" hit stores. Sugarland climbed 2-1 with 171,000 from the combined sales of the deluxe and standard editions, pushing Cyrus down to No. 2 (163,000).

TIDINGS: This week last year on the Billboard 200, Josh Groban's "Noel" arrived at No. 10 with 64,000.

The Christmas set would ultimately spend five weeks at No. 1 and earn four frames of half-million or more sales. To top it all off, "Noel" became the year's top selling album, with 3.7 million sold in 2007—and the set did it with only 12 weeks in stores.

Is there a 2008 version of "Noel?" Waiting in the wings? Not sure yet.

Faith Hill's seasonal offering "Joy to the World" made an OK bow at No. 51 last week with 11,000, but slips to No. 63 this week (down 29%). Two more holiday albums are charting this week: the various artists compilation "Nightmare Revisited" (No. 36 with 15,000) and "Casting Crowns" "Peace on Earth" (No. 36 with 9,000).

I'm betting that if there will be a monster Christmas album this year, it might come in the form of Enya's "And Winter Came" (due Nov. 11) or perhaps Sarah Brightman's "A Winter Symphony" (Nov. 4). Both artists likely have the same sort of demographic appeal as Groban and have voices seemingly perfect for holiday music.

CH-CH-CHANGES: Effective with this issue's charts, Billboard and Nielsen SoundScan have deployed new guidelines regarding the merging of deluxe or special edition albums with their parent releases.

Likely the most significant change is that there is now no limit to the number of additional audio tracks or songs a deluxe edition can sport—so long as the bonus content does not extend past one extra disc, or digital equivalent. Previously, an expanded album could not include more than six songs not found on the original release.

The new rule directly affects a top 20 album this week on the Billboard 200—Sarah McLachlan's "Closer," which enters at No. 11 with 40,000 units. The deluxe version of the album is a two-disc affair with seven bonus songs not on the single-disc version.

The full rundown of the new guidelines can be found on SoundScan's Web site.

ONE MORE THING: After 10 years at Billboard, I'm thrilled to be taking over this column from the departed Geoff Mayfield. You can e-mail me at kcaulfield@billboard.com.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>ARTIST</th>
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<th>WEEKS</th>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Weird&quot;</td>
<td>Chris Brown</td>
<td>Def Jam</td>
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<td>&quot;Teardrops Fall&quot;</td>
<td>Jason Mraz</td>
<td>Epic</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;What You Like&quot;</td>
<td>T.I. feat. Missy Elliott</td>
<td>Grand Hustle/Atlantic</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>&quot;Holy&quot;</td>
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<td>Jive/Zomba</td>
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<td>&quot;Somebody That I Used To Know&quot;</td>
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<td>Sony</td>
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<td>&quot;Can't Fight This Feeling&quot;</td>
<td>Robin Thicke</td>
<td>RCA/RCA</td>
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<td>&quot;Adore You&quot;</td>
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<td>Syco/Polystar</td>
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<td>&quot;All Summer Long&quot;</td>
<td>Kid Rock</td>
<td>Roadrunner</td>
<td>3</td>
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</table>

"All Summer Long" (No. 31 and 50) isn’t the only title to double up on the Pop 100. It’s "Whatever You Like" gets the "Word of the Week" nod again, this year a recent hit by a woman that was in the top 10 with her first name, and top 50 with her last year.
### HOT COUNTRY SONGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Peak Position</th>
<th>Label</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everybody Wants To Go To Heaven</td>
<td>Kenny Chesney With The Wasters</td>
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<td>RCA</td>
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<tr>
<td>She Never Cried In Front Of Me</td>
<td>終</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Rain Is A Good Time</td>
<td>Tracy Lawrence</td>
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<td>Don't Think About It</td>
<td>Eddie Riser</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Summer Long</td>
<td>Kid Rock</td>
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<td>Let It Go</td>
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<td>I'll Walk</td>
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<td>Ashton Shepherd</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greatest Hits</td>
<td>Willie Nelson</td>
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### TOP COUNTRY ALBUMS

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Data for week of OCTOBER 25, 2008 | For chart reprints call 646.654.4633 | Go to www.billboard.biz for complete chart data
### Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop

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### Rhythm

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### Hot Rap Songs

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For complete chart data, visit [www.billboard.biz](http://www.billboard.biz).
### Top Dance Club Play

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<tr>
<td>SUNSTONE</td>
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<tr>
<td>THE SPACE TRAVELERS</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHAT I WANT</td>
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<tr>
<td>I SHOULDN'T BE BLIND</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>LIFE</td>
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<td>I SHOULDN'T BE BLIND</td>
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<td>I LOVE TO MOVE IN HERE</td>
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<td>THE MIDDLE OF THE DANCEFLOOR</td>
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### Top Jazz Airplay

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### Top Contemporary Jazz Albums

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### Japan

#### Billboard Japan Hot 100

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### United Kingdom

#### Singles

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### Germany

#### Singles

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Tiziana Ferro notes his seventh top five single in the Italian Singles chart as "Alma Mia Da" enters at No. 2.
EXECUTIVE TURNTABLE
Send submissions to: exec@billboard.com

RECORD COMPANIES: Sony BMG Music Entertainment names Dennis Kooker executive VP of operations/GM of global digital business and U.S. sales. He was executive VP of operations for the global digital business and U.S. sales division. Warrior Records in Los Angeles elevates Rande Vulpert to VP. He was director of marketing. Sony BMG Nashville promotes Cary Ryan to senior director of production. He was director.

PUBLISHING: Ole appoints Gary Calderone VP of administration. He was VP of royalties and income tracking at Universal Music/BMG Music Publishing.

TOURING: Fleming-Artists appoints Jim Fleming chairman and promotes Adam Bauer to president and Susie Giang to VP. Fleming was president, Bauer was VP, and Giang was an agent.

MEDIA: Fuse names Ed Russo VP of network operations. He was VP of postproduction at Lifetime.

RADIO: Radio Disney taps Phil Guerini as VP of marketing. He was executive director of broadcast and strategic marketing at Walt Disney Records.

RELATED FIELDS: Marketing agency Momentum names Joe DiMuro executive VP of music and entertainment. He was executive VP/GM of Sony BMG Strategic Marketing Group.

Edited by Mitchell Peters

LANG LANG READIES NEW FOUNDATION
Lang Lang wants to provide the next generation of young classical musicians with the same opportunities he had growing up in China.

“Through the years, I’ve had so much support from my teachers,” the 26-year-old Chinese pianist says. “And they never asked me for a penny. So I’d like to do the same thing.”

As such, the musician will launch the Lang Lang International Music Foundation Oct. 20 during a free concert at Town Hall in New York. Along with Lang, the concert will feature three child musicians who were selected based on short YouTube performance videos.

As part of the event, hosted by the Recording Academy and sponsored by the Starkey Hearing Foundation, Lang will be named the academy’s Grammy cultural ambassador to China.

Lang’s desire to launch his own foundation came in 2004 after being appointed the international goodwill ambassador to the United Nations Children’s Fund. “I went to Africa for the first time to see the kids there, and it was an overwhelming eye-opener,” he says. “After that, I believed that music can change people.”

The foundation will aim to support and raise awareness for educational programs in schools and award young classical musicians with scholarships. Earlier this year, the pianist raised $3.4 million for earthquake victims in China’s Sichuan province.

GOODWORKS

THE BILLBOARD REGIONAL MEXICAN MUSIC SUMMIT
Billboard’s third annual Regional Mexican Music Summit ended with an exclusive interview with Marco Antonio Solis. The Q&A capped the three-day summit, held Oct. 6-8 at the Wiltern Grand Hotel in Los Angeles. Regional Mexican music is the top-selling Latin genre in the United States. Highlights included two nights of performance showcases. Sponsors for this year’s summit, attended by approximately 500 people, included SESAC Latina, BMI, ASCAP, the Recording Academy, the Latin Recording Academy, Pre vest, Grupo Latino de Radio and Latin Power Music.

Maximizing revenue was the topic of “Getting Your Money’s Worth.” From left: Fab Music/TBOPIC management president/CEO Alan R. Baxter; Latin Power Music president Pepe Serrano. Billboard executive director of content and programming for Latin music and entertainment Leila Cobo, and the Recording Academy's Latin Regional Director, Rolando Gracida, Was shown.

TOP RIGHT: From left, Apple CEO Steve Jobs, Doug Morris and Universal Music Group president/CEO Zach Horowitz. “The economy may be shrinking, but your heart are as big as ever,” Horowitz told attendees.

BOTTOM RIGHT: From left, interlopers: Giuffria, ABT chairwoman Jimmy Iovine. Doug Morris and Will.I.Am attend the fittingly-irresistible Morris, leading him for his stand against artist censorship. Doug do what he thought was the right thing to do, and he took it on the chin for it.”

THE BILLBOARD REGIONAL MEXICAN MUSIC SUMMIT


ASCAP sponsored the "Maquiso Penso Sensibilidad" panel with top regional Mexican acts. From left: Singer Tony Melendez, Billboard Latin correspondent Ayala Ben-Yehuda, Los Cuentos de Sinaloa’s Gabriel Berrellaza, Billboard executive director of content and programming for Latin music and entertainment Leila Cobo. Los Razos’ Reynaldo Sanabia. ASCAP senior VP of Latin membership Alexandra Lissiluffi, Los Inmigrantes del Norte’s Jose and Felipe Meza, and Los Cuentos de Sinaloa’s Nano Berrellaza.

“Do You Hear What They Hear?” That was the question asked of top Latin radio programmers during the session sponsored by Grupo Latino de Radio. From left: Moderator Rogelio Alpizar, Maximizing Opportunities for Latin Music and Entertainment, Roberto Carrillo, Los Cuentos de Sinaloa; Juan Pablo Lagarde, Los Inmigrantes del Norte; Jose and Felipe Meza, and Los Cuentos de Sinaloa’s Nano Berrellaza.

CITY OF HOPE

Universal Music Group chairman/CEO Doug Morris received City of Hope’s Spirit of Life Award Oct. 15 in Santa Monica, Calif. It was the culmination of a record-setting $10 million fund-raising campaign for the cancer research and treatment center. Morris was feted by a lineup of 15 acts including Mariah Carey, Rihanna, Michael McDonald and Lionel Richie.


LEFT: Rihanna performs “Where Did Our Love Gof” as part of the Doug Morris Motown Revue to tribute to Morris and the 50th anniversary of the founding of Motown.

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THE BILLBOARD REGIONAL MEXICAN MUSIC SUMMIT

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Songwriters spoke about their creative process and performed live during BMI’s “How I Wrote That Song” panel.

Building Buzz Through Social Networking Sites was a key panel at the conference.

Sponsorships and partners were discussed at the “How to Benefit From the Right Partnership” panel.


Veteran promoters took the stand at the “Talking It on the Road” panel, sponsored by Prevost. From left: Asapian Entertainment/Concert Promoters Unidos president Ivan Fernandez; AEG Live/Goldenvoice VP of Latin talent Rebeca Leon, who moderated; Concierto Promotora manager Jesus Guillen; Latin Event CEO Lasaro Megret; and David Chavez, LatinPointe CEO and executive producer of the ALMA Awards, Premios Deportes and Tejano Music National Convention.

Duranguense band Patrulla Af performed at a packed Promotora Unidos showcase that featured some of the best in the genre.

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Veteran promoters took the stand at the “Talking It on the Road” panel, sponsored by Prevost. From left: Asapian Entertainment/Concert Promoters Unidos president Ivan Fernandez; AEG Live/Goldenvoice VP of Latin talent Rebeca Leon, who moderated; Concierto Promotora manager Jesus Guillen; Latin Event CEO Lasaro Megret; and David Chavez, LatinPointe CEO and executive producer of the ALMA Awards, Premios Deportes and Tejano Music National Convention.

Duranguense band Patrulla Af performed at a packed Promotora Unidos showcase that featured some of the best in the genre.
Elliot Yamin, whose debut album on an independent label hit the biggest record in Sound Scan history, joined us to celebrate 1st anniversary of Billboard Live Japan. His breathtaking voice touched house full crowd’s soul.

August 28, 30, 31, 2008 - Billboard Live Tokyo

November-December 2008 Show Schedule

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Tokyo</th>
<th>Osaka</th>
<th>Fukuoka</th>
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<tr>
<td>An Evening with ‘Babyface’ Unplugged</td>
<td>Nov. 7-10</td>
<td>Nov. 10-12</td>
<td>Nov. 15-17</td>
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<td>Bernard Purdie &amp; Chuck Rainey All Stars</td>
<td>Nov. 10-11</td>
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<td>Nils Petter Molvaer</td>
<td>Nov. 12-13</td>
<td>Nov. 12-16</td>
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<td>Keiko Lee</td>
<td>Nov. 15-16</td>
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<td>Linda Lawrence</td>
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<td>David T. Walker</td>
<td>Nov. 21-23</td>
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<td>Shakatak</td>
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<td>Juana Molina</td>
<td>Nov. 27-28</td>
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<td>Priscilla Ahn</td>
<td>Nov. 28-30</td>
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<td>Lisa Loeb</td>
<td>Dec. 5-7</td>
<td>Dec. 1-3</td>
<td>Nov. 29-Dec. 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mario &amp; Priscilla Ahn</td>
<td>Dec. 6-7</td>
<td>Dec. 1-3</td>
<td>Nov. 29-Dec. 1</td>
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