Country Power Players

Luke Bryan

‘I know that there is more to country than a pickup truck and fishing’

Masters of Music City
Sandbox Entertainment’s Jason Owen leads the new guard

Florida Georgia Line
The trailblazing duo on one of the year’s biggest crossover hits

Politics in Nashville
Blue voters are speaking up
The only true First Class.

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**Flagship® First Dining**
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FGL IS A TRAILBLAZER!
CONGRATS T.HUBB & B.K.
ON RECEIVING
THE FIRST EVER
BILLBOARD COUNTRY TRAILBLAZER AWARD

12 #1 SINGLES
on the Billboard
Country Airplay chart

3,618, 901
TICKETS SOLD
Including 3 SOLD OUT STADIUMS:
Target Field [Minneapolis]
Fenway Park [Boston]
Wrigley Field [Chicago]

3 OF THE TOP 5
LONGEST RUNNING #1’s
on the Billboard
Hot Country Songs chart

HEADLIENED OVER
50 FESTIVALS

10x PLATINUM-DIAMOND
“CRUISE”

4x PLATINUM
“H.O.I.Y.”
“This How We Roll”

2x PLATINUM
“H.O.I.Y.”
“This How We Roll”

PLATINUM
“DIG YOUR ROOTS
ANYTHING GOES
“GOD, YOUR MAMA, AND ME”
“LET ME GO”
“MAY WE ALL”
“SIPPIN’ ON FIRE”
“SUN DAZE”

GOLD
“SMOOTH”
“HERE’S TO THE GOOD TIMES”
“TELL ME HOW YOU LIKE IT”
“DAYUM BABY”

FROM YOUR
BIG MACHINE FAMILY
LABEL GROUP
Artist
Storyteller
Humanitarian
Legend
John Mellencamp
Drake Dominates And BTS Blasts In With No. 1s

As Drake returns to familiar territory atop the Billboard Hot 100, three acts make their first visits to the top 10 — one with the assistance of Drizzy.

Drake’s “Nice for What,” which ruled the Hot 100 for its first four weeks, rebounds, helped by its 2 percent lift to 78.9 million in airplay audience, according to Nielsen Music.

Meanwhile, Atlanta rapper Lil Baby and Drake soar to the top 10 with “Yes Indeed,” which flies 49-6 following its first full week of tracking as it vaults 30-2 on the Streaming Songs chart with 39.5 million U.S. streams. Lil Baby lands his first Hot 100 top 10, while Drake tallies his 26th, the fourth-best sum among solo males, passing Elvis Presley.

British singer-songwriter Ella Mai likewise earns her first Hot 100 top 10 as “Boo’d Up” rises 11-8. It also climbs 7-6 on Streaming Songs (28.6 million) and tops Hot R&B Songs for a second week.

Plus, star Korean boy band BTS’ “Fake Love” launches at No. 10 on the Hot 100, marking the first top 10 for a K-pop group. It arrives as BTS’ first No. 1 on the Digital Song Sales chart (29,000 sold) and starts at No. 7 on the Streaming Songs tally (27.4 million). Parent album Love Yourself: Tear debuts as the act’s first No. 1 — and the first K-pop chart-topper — on the Billboard 200 (see page 116).

— Gary Trust
How did “Lucid Dreams” come about?
I wrote that in less than an hour. Now, I just freestyle everything — it really doesn’t even take me that long. (But “Lucid Dreams”) was about putting my feelings into a song in the most relatable way. Everybody goes through similar shit; people are just scared to talk about it. Helping people through their own situations is why I make music.

You signed with Interscope in March, and are teasing a remix with Lil Yachty and Lil Uzi Vert. Do you feel like you’ve made it? I’m not past [checking my SoundCloud stats]. I can’t forget where I came from. But there’s so much stuff going on now, I don’t have time to check. Success is making sure my family is straight for a couple of generations.

—MICHAEL SAPONARA

---

The 19-year-old’s other single, “All Girls Are The Same,” reaches No. 53 on the Hot 100, a new peak.

How did “Lucid Dreams” come about?
I wrote that in less than an hour. Now, I just freestyle everything — it really doesn’t even take me that long. (But “Lucid Dreams”) was about putting my feelings into a song in the most relatable way. Everybody goes through similar shit; people are just scared to talk about it. Helping people through their own situations is why I make music.

Growing up outside Chicago, who were some of your early inspirations?
I’ve always looked up to rappers. At a point, freestyle everything — it really doesn’t even matter who you have around.

How did “Lucid Dreams” come about?
I wrote that in less than an hour. Now, I just freestyle everything — it really doesn’t even take me that long. (But “Lucid Dreams”) was about putting my feelings into a song in the most relatable way. Everybody goes through similar shit; people are just scared to talk about it. Helping people through their own situations is why I make music.

You signed with Interscope in March, and are teasing a remix with Lil Yachty and Lil Uzi Vert. Do you feel like you’ve made it? I’m not past [checking my SoundCloud stats]. I can’t forget where I came from. But there’s so much stuff going on now, I don’t have time to check. Success is making sure my family is straight for a couple of generations.

—MICHAEL SAPONARA

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The song breaks the record for the most weeks (39) on the Mainstream Top 40 chart by a female, passing Akon’s “I - U - Luv Hand” (38 frames in 2006 and 2007). Both tracks led the airplay list for four weeks.
FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE

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TWO INCREDIBLE ARTISTS - ONE GREAT TEAM
HONORED TO HAVE BEEN WITH YOU SINCE DAY ONE!
- BOC AND LIVE NATION COUNTRY
**Billboard Hot 100**

**/data for week of 06.02.2018**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Title (Performance/Producer</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Sales</th>
<th>Airplay</th>
<th>Streaming</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Peak</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>Backstreet Boys Don’t Go Breaking My Heart</td>
<td>Backstreet Boys</td>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>6.1M</td>
<td>0.7M</td>
<td>16.8M</td>
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<td>Luke Bryan</td>
<td>Capitol/Neverland</td>
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<td>3.1M</td>
<td>2.9M</td>
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<td>Let It Sing</td>
<td>Kevin Gates</td>
<td>J Cole/Capitol</td>
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<td>Sangria Wine</td>
<td>Pharell Williams &amp; Camila Cabello</td>
<td>Republic</td>
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<td>2.5M</td>
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<td>5.3M</td>
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<td>84</td>
<td>Welcome To The Party</td>
<td>Diplo, French Montana &amp; Lil Pump</td>
<td>Epic/Live Nation/Al Copeland</td>
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<td>0.2M</td>
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<td>NAV feat. Travis Scott</td>
<td>Republic</td>
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<td>2.1M</td>
<td>0.1M</td>
<td>4.5M</td>
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<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Red Roses</td>
<td>Lil Skies feat. London Plane</td>
<td>Minch Beats/Atlanta, NY; Columbia</td>
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<td>XXXTentacion</td>
<td>Cinematic</td>
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<td>0.1M</td>
<td>2.6M</td>
<td>88</td>
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<td>Lil Skies</td>
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<td>0.1M</td>
<td>2.6M</td>
<td>88</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Bhad Bhabie feat. Lil Yachty</td>
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<td>YoungBoy Never Broke Again</td>
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<td>79</td>
<td>Downtown’s Dead</td>
<td>Sam Hunt</td>
<td>MCA Nashville</td>
<td>1.3M</td>
<td>1.2M</td>
<td>0.1M</td>
<td>2.6M</td>
<td>74</td>
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<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Don’t Go Breaking My Heart</td>
<td>Backstreet Boys</td>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>1.3M</td>
<td>1.2M</td>
<td>0.1M</td>
<td>2.6M</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**New Entries**

- Backstreet’s back — this time, on the Billboard Hot 100 with its first entry as a lead act in over a decade as “Don’t Go Breaking My Heart” debuts at No. 99. Backstreet Boys last appeared in a lead role when “Insoluable” reached No. 86 in 2007. In between, the group peaked at No. 46 — and at No. 1 on the Country Airplay chart — when it was featured on Florida Georgia Line’s “God, Your Mama, and Me” in 2017. BSB boasts six top 10s on the Hot 100, led by its first, “Quit Playing Games (With My Heart),” which peaked at No. 2 in 1997.

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**Notes:**

- Billboard Hot 100 (March 2023) provides weekly charts and other information about the music industry. The charts are based on a combination of airplay, sales, and streaming data collected by Nielsen Music.

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**Backstreet Boys’ New Entry:**

Backstreet Boys' new entry, "Don't Go Breaking My Heart," debuts at No. 99 on the Billboard Hot 100. The group last appeared in a lead role in 2007 with "Insoluable," which reached No. 86. Since then, they have peaked at No. 46 and No. 1 on the Country Airplay chart. BSB boasts six top 10s on the Hot 100, including "Quit Playing Games (With My Heart)," which peaked at No. 2 in 1997.

**Additional Charts:**

- The chart for the week of June 2, 2018, includes songs by Travis Scott, Backstreet Boys, Camila Cabello, and more. Notable entries include "Don't Go Breaking My Heart," "Like That," and "Champion."
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SATURDAY, MAY 19, 2018

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POWER PLAYER 2018

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FROM YOUR
BIG MACHINE
LABEL GROUP
FAMILY
Luke Bryan may have pioneered bro country, but with his tragic family history, he knows heartbreak as intimately as any of the genre’s greats. Now — coming off his first season on American Idol and embarking on a stadium tour — he’s wondering if it’s finally time to give up songs about “hunting and fishing.”

As Nashville continues to evolve, the 100 movers, shakers and influencers on Billboard’s fourth annual Country Power Players list drove a $1.3 billion business in 2017, thanks in part to fans (finally) embracing streaming.

Drake’s “Nice for What” returns to No. 1, and Lil Baby, Ella Mai and BTS all earn their first top 10s.

The Recording Academy has faced nonstop turmoil since Grammy night, with a former employee now accusing the organization of a misappropriation of funds and a hostile work environment.

Encouraged by early spins of Ella Mai’s “Boo’d Up” by San Francisco’s Pirate DJs crew, major labels monitor club DJs’ playlists for regional hits that could travel.
LIVE NATION PROUDLY CONGRATULATES

BRIAN O’CONNELL
BRIAN TRAEGER

ON BEING OUR COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS

To succeed is to give back—to honor the passion of these recipients, Live Nation has made a donation to Milestones/The OnSite foundation.
Refusing to fall in line with today's R&B stars, unsigned English singer Jorja Smith isn't just her own biggest fan — she's got co-signs from Drake and Kendrick Lamar.

Kanye West's G.O.O.D. Music imprint readies for a string of releases.
Congratulations to our COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS
creating another solid year for country music

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from your family at
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Howie Richmond Hitmaker Award

Neil Diamond
Johnny Mercer Award

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THANK YOU FOR BRINGING THE POWER OF COUNTRY MUSIC TO THE WORLD.
Grammys: Help Wanted

Recording Academy chairman/CEO Neil Portnow says he’ll step down in 2019 following controversy over MusiCares’ annual fundraiser and the dismissal of the charity’s leader

BY DAVE BROOKS

IN APRIL 2017, JOEL FISHER, a vice president at Madison Square Garden in New York, sent an email to a Recording Academy executive with whom he was hashing out the contract for the 60th annual Grammy Awards, which were returning to New York after over a decade in Los Angeles. “When we went into this, we said no events could be at Barclays,” wrote Fisher in an email to Branden Chapman, Recording Academy production and chief business development officer, threatening that it would “kill the entire deal” for MSG to host the ceremony if the Barclays Center, MSG’s Brooklyn competitor, hosted the academy’s annual MusiCares Person of the Year charity event two nights before the awards. Fisher signed off on the email, which was reviewed by Billboard: “Please confirm no Barclays. Thanks.” Meanwhile, across the East River, Brooklyn Sports & Entertainment vice president Keith Sheldon was aggressively pitching MusiCares/ Grammy Foundation then-vice president Dana Tomarken on having the MusiCares fundraiser at Barclays, offering to waive the rent for the night, and rendering plans to create a platform on top of the lower seating bowl that would provide enough floor space for 250-300 banquet tables that could be sold to corporate partners, as well as multiple stages and a large silent-auction space. Sheldon also had offered to cut in MusiCares on suite revenue and connect the charity’s sponsorship team with BSE’s own sponsor network for its concerts, events and Brooklyn Nets divisions.

Neil Portnow announced on May 31 that he would step down from his post when his contract expired in July 2019, though he made no mention of the controversy in his announcement. Though the email exchange between Fisher and Chapman suggests that Portnow’s venue selection had more to do with MSG’s priorities than with MusiCares’, an academy spokesman says there’s no reason to conclude that Barclays would have been a better or more profitable choice. The academy was flying high as recently as January, with one of the most diverse slates of Grammy nominees to date, but the mood was muted as only one woman accepted an award on TV, and hip-hop’s top stars lost in the big categories. Petitioners began calling for Portnow’s resignation in February after his ill-worded comment following the male-dominated Grammy telecast: that women needed to “step up” in order to be better represented. The academy slowly assembled a task force led by Michelle Obama’s former chief of staff, Tina Tchen, to improve
inclusion both at the Grammys and within its own governance, but Tchen told Billboard in an earlier interview that she didn’t see any quick fixes.

The drama around the MusiCares event’s location that has more recently ensnared Portnow, meanwhile, highlights the intensifying competition playing out in one of the country’s top concert markets. MSG “was proud to be a part” of the Grammys, usually held on AEG’s Los Angeles campus, and wasn’t involved in allocation of money to MusiCares, says a spokeswoman. Its securing of both inclusion both at the Grammys and on May 21 wrote a letter to MusiCares in April after 25 years, after the next hockey season.

Islanders, who are leaving Barclays Center, which is an open building but separate battle with the Barclays who denies. MSG is also locked in a row with AEG. Since it shares some ties with AEG. It has battled AEG over lagship Grammy events this year

spokeswoman. It's securing of both block-booking policy for the rivalries. It has battled AEG over

was wrongfully terminated because she was late in paying $2,500 for a MusiCares auction item that she purchased. The academy said in a statement that Tomarken didn’t lodge the hostile-workplace claims while she was employed, and that it was now investigating them.

Tomarken’s departure has sparked concern about the future of the charitable foundation that provides financial and medical assistance to music professionals. In February, Charity Navigator gave MusiCares

inclusion both at the Grammys and

wasn’t involved in allocation of money to MusiCares, says a spokeswoman. Its securing of both

was still its latest coup in its own ongoing rivalries. It has battled AEG over the block-booking policy for the Staples Center in Los Angeles and the O2 Arena in London, a policy that AEG COO Jay Marciano says was in reaction to alleged block-booking between MSG and The Forum in Inglewood, Calif., which MSG denies. MSG is also locked in a separate battle with the Barclays Center, which is an open building but shares some ties with AEG. Since it opened in 2012, Barclays has been a fierce competitor with MSG in one of the top concert markets. MSG and Tim Leiweke’s Oak View Group are now partnering to build a new arena on Long Island for the New York Islanders, who are leaving Barclays after the next hockey season.

Tomarken was let go from MusiCares in April after 25 years, and on May 21 wrote a letter to

as expensive ... and that does not factor in any additional support we might have been able to secure from Barclays sponsors.” A representative for Irving Azoff — who manages Fleetwood Mac, the 2018 MusiCares honoree — says the event was always slated to happen at Radio City Music Hall, which Portnow had booked, and if Portnow’s “head of MusiCares disagreed, that is an internal issue.” But Tomarken said that she had only learned the Barclays deal was a no-go last June, two months after the email exchange between Fisher and Chapman.

Tomarken also claimed in her letter, obtained by Billboard, that she experienced a hostile work environment at the academy and was wrongfully terminated because she was late in paying $2,500 for a MusiCares auction item that she purchased. The academy said in a statement that Tomarken didn’t lodge the hostile-workplace claims while she was employed, and that it was now investigating them.

Tomarken’s departure has sparked concern about the future of the charitable foundation that provides financial and medical assistance to music professionals. In February, Charity Navigator gave MusiCares

“Moving forward, there needs to be total transparency.”

—Scott Rodger, artist manager

four stars, the independent charity watchdog’s highest rating, but Scott Rodger, who manages 2012 MusiCares Person of the Year Paul McCartney, says the organization’s finances should be more transparent. “Moving forward, for the benefit of everyone in the industry there needs to be total transparency, and the full accounts need to be published after each event so that we can all see exactly what was raised against the costs to stage the event, and more specifically the salaries paid and the operational costs. That part is a mystery to all of us,” says Rodger. An academy rep says, “MusiCares will continue to provide the highest level of service and support to people in need,” planning to distribute $6.3 million this fiscal year.

The lack of a succession plan at the academy has long irked some trustees, sources say, though the academy says 1.4 months is plenty of time to devise one. WEA’s international repertoire development Ruby Marchand, who is the board’s vice chairman, is one possibility, while a former trustee says “it’s time for a black female to move the academy forward,” suggesting former academy president of member services Angelia Bibbs-Sanders. Portnow says he’ll help the board to “ensure transparency, best practices and the academy’s ability to find the very best, brightest and qualified leadership to take us into our seventh decade of operation.”

Additional reporting by Gail Mitchell and Melinda Newman.

THE ACADEMY’S ROCKY ROAD

After music’s biggest night, the organization’s troubles mounted

JAN. 28

In an interview following the Grammy Awards, Neil Portnow says that women need to “step up” in order to be better represented in the music industry, in response to a question about the male-dominated telecast in which only one woman accepted a televised award on stage.

FEB. 1

Portnow issues an apology, noting that he “wasn’t as articulate as I should have been,” and announces a task force to address the gender-diversity issues plaguing the Grammys.

FEB. 8

Within the space of a week, three open letters signed by dozens of high-profile executives in the music industry urge transparency, accountability and diversity in the academy’s attempts to address these issues, with one calling Portnow “part of the problem.”

MARCH 6

Former Michelle Obama chief of staff Tina Tchen, who also leads the Time’s Up Legal Defense Fund, is announced as chairman of the academy’s new task force. The 16-member team is revealed two months later.

MAY 21

Former MusiCares vice president Dano Tomarken pens a letter to the academy’s board alleging that Portnow steered money away from the charity in order to fund a deficit created by the Grammys’ shift from Los Angeles to New York, allegations that he denies.

MAY 31

The academy announces that Portnow, who took the helm in 2002, will not seek an extension to his current contract, which is up in July 2019.
WE CONGRATULATE OUR CLIENT

FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
COUNTRY POWER TRAILBLAZER AWARD

AND PROUDLY SALUTE

BILLBOARD’S COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS, THE ARTISTS THEY WORK WITH AND THE TEAMS WHO SUPPORT THEM.
The Biz’s Big Bilingual Bet
Following the success of “Despacito,” labels are now bullish on once-risky tracks that swing evenly between English and Spanish — but crafting them is far from easy

BY LEILA COBO

 Barely one minute into “Sangria Wine,” her new single with Pharrell Williams, Cuban-American Camila Cabello launches into a verse in Spanish. And in “I Like It,” Cardi B’s reimagining of the classic 1967 boogaloo track, J Balvin spits his rhymes en español, while Bad Bunny mixes a little English into his mostly Spanish bit.

Both songs are on the Billboard Hot 100 — “I Like It,” featuring Jennifer Lopez; Cabello and Cardi B; and “Sangria Wine,” her new single with J Balvin and Bad Bunny, both by different audiences, and still do. But mixing languages on the same track has always risked alienating one fan base or the other, and until streaming came along, radio programmers were hesitant about playing such songs for fear that listeners would switch the dial as soon as the lyrics sounded foreign. “But the world is smaller with streaming,” says Gaby Martinez, GM of Warner Music Latin and senior vp at Warner Music Latin America. “Now it’s a no-brainer.”

Hurdles remain, though. “It’s the post-‘Despacito’ dilemma,” says “Despacito” and “Échame” co-producer Andres Torres. “How to make songs in Spanish and English that don’t sound like a marketing ploy. Writing a song in English and inserting words like amor or corazón is tough.”

Jorge Fonseca, A&R director for Sony Music Latin, says that “the process has to be natural,” as it was for Maluma’s “La Ex,” featuring Derulo singing in English. To date, all of the successful bilingual tracks have been collaborations. Balvin, who prefers to sing in Spanish, says although there are “a lot of bilingual songs” out currently, he’s proud of his own. “I Like It” is the one that’s killing it,” he says. “It’s a balance, but it’s also the right collab. Me and Bad Bunny are really looking for the culture. I’m not saying the other ones aren’t, but we have the same concept and aesthetics.”

Tickerfly Hack Takes All Company Systems Offline
The incident is the latest cyber blow to the music industry

BY DAVE BROOKS

Shortly after midnight EST on May 31, some social media users began noticing something wrong with Ticketfly, the independent ticket-seller that was purchased by former rival Eventbrite for $200 million in 2017. Specifically, its normal homepage was replaced by a black background, a Guy Fawkes image, the ominous warning “Your Security Down In Not Sorry” and a threat: “Next time I will publish database ‘backstage.’”

The hacked page was quickly removed from the internet, as was Ticketfly itself. “Following a series of recent issues with Ticketfly properties, we’ve determined that Ticketfly has been the target of a cyber incident,” read a message posted on the company’s homepage. “Out of an abundance of caution, we have taken all Ticketfly systems temporarily offline as we continue to look into the issue.”

Engineers with Ticketfly, including founder Andrew Dreskin, were up all night trying to contain the intrusion, which was still unresolved over 16 hours later. The company had reason to be concerned. The “Backstage” database stores client information for the thousands of venues, promoters and festivals that use Ticketfly, according to a source, including credit card information, though the source adds the database is generally “cordoned off and encrypted.”

“We realize the gravity of this decision [to take the systems offline], but the security of client and customer data is our top priority,” a representative told Billboard in a statement. “We are working tirelessly to get our clients back up and running.”

As of press time the extent of the hack was unclear, but tickets to just-announced events such as Celebrate Brooklyn! and Riot Fest were still unavailable. When Eventbrite’s acquisition of Ticketfly closed last September, the combined company projected it would do $4 billion in global ticket sales annually, selling 2 to 3 million tickets per week in 180 countries. Eventbrite’s systems appeared to still be functioning.

For a digital-first ticketer, the hack has hit particularly hard. Over 12 hours after taking its site offline, the Ticketfly homepage message was updated to read, “In many cases, shows are still happening, and tickets may be available at the door.”
congratulates our own

Billboard’s 2018 Country Power Players

and salutes all of our Music colleagues in Nashville

Katie Anderson  Shannon Casey  Meredith Jones  Brett Saliba
Stan Barnett    Kevin Castleman  Lucy Kozak     Kylen Sharpe
Bennett Beckner Bobby Cory    Jeff Krones     Megan Sykes
Tim Beeding     Sam Forbert    Madison Lee    Aaron Tannenbaum
Brad Bissell    Katie Germano  Brian Manning   Elisa Vazzana
Michael Bryan   Jeff Gregg     Joseph Martin  Brian Waymire
Sabrina Butera  Logan Handelsman Blake McDaniel Hunter Williams
Justin Cahill   Brian Hill     Bryan Myers    Emily Wright
Tony Johnsen    Lindsey Myers

Creative Artists Agency
Cris Lacy
Music Row’s biggest Kenny Chesney fan on breaking new acts and diversity and competition in Nashville

BY MELINDA NEWMAN
PHOTOGRAPHED BY EMILY B. HALL

CRIS LACY WAS AN A&R EXEC long before she knew such a job existed. Growing up in Chesapeake, Va., she would sit on the front porch of her grandfather’s house and sing country music with her family. “I found a tape a few months back, and I was correcting my grandfather on his diction on ‘You Are My Sunshine.’ That was probably foreshadowing,” says Lacy with a laugh. She was 4 years old at the time.

Flash forward 41 years and Lacy is still telling singers what to do. But now it’s as senior vp A&R at Warner Music Nashville, a role to which she was promoted last September after over a decade at WMN. Currently she works with artists like Ashley McBryde, Blake Shelton, Devin Dawson, Chris Janson, Dan + Shay and Warner Bros.’ latest signing, Kenny Chesney. The lattermost artist is a dream come true for Lacy, who has known Chesney since she was a young receptionist at Tom Collins Publishing and he was a developing writer-artist signed to Tree Publishing. Over two decades into his career, much of it spent at Sony Music Nashville, Chesney signed with Warner in January, due in part to his relationship with Lacy. His first Warner Bros. Records single, “Get Along,” is No. 8 on Billboard’s Hot Country Songs and No. 59 on the Hot 100 dated June 2, while his new album, Songs for the Saints, is due July 27.

Lacy, who sources say is being groomed to succeed current president/CEO John “Espo” Esposito, is held in high regard at the label. “When I joined the Warner Nashville family in 2009, I told [executive vp A&R] Scott Hendricks and Cris Lacy that A&R would lead the company,” says Esposito. “In those nearly nine years, I have been nothing but amazed and inspired by Cris’ unique musical sensibilities,” he says, calling her “as artist-sensitive as anyone I have ever met.”

Sitting on the floor and sipping water in the Warner Bros. offices on Nashville’s Music Row, Lacy spoke to Billboard about Chesney, country’s current competitive A&R landscape and the lack of diversity both in A&R and country-radio airplay for women executives and artists.

“We want to get people interested and also to build a story for radio,” says Lacy, photographed May 15 at Warner Music Group Nashville, about the label’s new rollout strategies. “As long as the artist has the same expectation that you have, that you’re working together to build a career.”
UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP CELEBRATES OUR NASHVILLE POWER PLAYERS

MIKE DUNGAN

CINDY MABE

SCOTT BORCHETTA

KENT EARLS

JIMMY HARNEN

ROYCE RISSER

UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP
You spent many years as a publisher. How did that help when you switched to label A&R?

I learned how to articulate constructive criticism with songs. It’s really difficult, if you’re speaking with a writer, to tell them something doesn’t feel right but not be able to tell them what it is. The writers that I had the privilege to work with taught me the craft of songwriting through the way that they wrote, but also through conversations. So that’s something that I use every day when I listen to songs. [WB] is about 50-50 in terms of writer-artists who write their own material. If we don’t have [songs], we die. I listen to hundreds of songs a week, and it’s not lost on me that it’s really, really hard to write a great song.

Over the years, even after you got to Warner, you have sent Chesney songs. Did he ever cut any?

He cut “I Melt,” which ended up being a No. 1 record for Rascal Flatts, before they cut it. As a publisher, I would call him with one song maybe every six months to a year, and he would say, “Come over and meet me and play it for me in my truck.”

Any truth to the rumor that you had a shrine to Chesney in your office?

In the corner of my desk, when I thought there was a possibility someday that he might want to work with someone else [besides Sony]. I wanted that to happen so badly. And I always thought, “If I give a song to one of my newer artists, is this going to give them the platform that Kenny Chesney has?” I would use that as a litmus test. I finally gave up and took the shrine down. I thought, “It’s not going to happen. I need to stop with this pipe dream.” Two months later, he [was available].

You signed one of this year’s most critically acclaimed artists, Ashley McBryde. What did you see in her?

I just saw the truth. I’d seen her about a year-and-a-half before, at a showcase. She sang her ass off, she was funny, she was self-deprecating. She was so entertaining, but it felt like there was more to her than these songs that looked like maybe they were crafted to be on country radio. And I remember thinking, “Her personality is so great and she’s so truthful, I wish the music felt like that.” Then she came back with new music. I [listened to] “Girl Going Nowhere” on my front porch and I just broke down. I called Espo and said, “OK, we have to do this.”

It’s very competitive on Music Row right now for signing acts. Why is that?

Partially it’s that country is no longer as much of a niche [genre]. It’s folks with a folk background, some that used to be in the rock world, singer-songwriters and traditional core-country radio. It’s also because the internet is making it easy to see what songs are talking back, what artists are selling tickets and resonating. The artists coming to town are much more developed. I don’t think I’ve seen a bad artist in years. Finding a needle in a haystack, like going to a show and seeing something nobody else has, is really rare.

“*It’s not lost on me that it’s really, really hard to write a great song.*”

With Devin Dawson, you released several tracks and remixes before sending a single to radio. Are you moving more toward that?

We’re using these platforms to get people interested — now they’ve heard five songs that make them want to buy a ticket. And we’re funding that tour. We’re doing that with all our artists now. [New Warner Music Group CEO] Max Lousada has this “more is more” theory: Give the fans more things they want. You have to keep re-engaging them. Terrestrial radio can be working one song, SiriusXM can be playing two, Spotify can be playing a different one. All these impressions give consumers a rounded picture of this artist.

Why are there so few female A&R executives?

I don’t know. I think women are very smart. Women are very empathetic and very nurturing, and those are things that you need in an A&R person. I don’t know if that’s a gender thing, but it took me a long time to trust myself to sit in that room and look at someone who had 72 No. 1 records and say, “My opinion is as valuable as yours.” I don’t know if as women it takes us longer to be confident in our opinions. I needed to have the confidence to step forward.

Country radio is still reluctant to play female acts. Does that affect signings? Not at all. I want to sign great female artists whether they fit on radio or don’t. If you sign an artist like Kacey Musgraves, she’s doing great, but there’s not an unrealistic expectation that every song is going to No. 1 at radio. But the music has to be great.

What happens when it isn’t great? It’s heartbreaking to me. It takes so long to get music recorded, and artists put every piece of themselves into it. I lose sleep over it. If the artist [still] says, “This is me. I’m willing to live or die by this music,” then I respect that. At that point we go after it. Let’s put a couple of things out at streaming or work on some alternative marketing. It’s their dream, and that’s what we’re here to support.

1. “Dolly is both my musical and professional inspiration,” says Lacy (left) about Parton. “She is a great songwriter, an incredible artist, a smart businesswoman and a charitable, spiritual soul.”
2. The metronome was given to the graduates of the Warner Music Nashville Topline executive training program. “Not only did I learn a lot about myself, but spending time with executives around the world truly gave me a perspective on the Warner culture, which I think is the best in the business,” she says. 3. “The book was given to me and made by Kenny,” she says. “He presented this to a few of us on his signing. It has pictures of that day and some kind words from him.”
Congratulations to our Country Music Power Players with special congrats to Executive of the Year Jason Owen from your Sony Music Family 2018.
NEW SCHOLARSHIP TO ‘KIXSTART’ CAREERS

Country Music Association hopes to ease new artists’ growing pains

BY MELINDA NEWMAN

Faced with tightening radio playlists and growing competition, developing country artists are looking for any way to stand out from a packed field. Now, the Country Music Association is launching the CMA KixStart Artist Scholarship as a way to provide emerging artists with expert guidance and support from industry leaders.

The yearlong program, named after long-serving board member and former chairman Kix Brooks, will connect up to three developing artists with industry professionals for advice and provide free opportunities to participate in CMA-related events. The CMA board’s artist-relations committee chairman, Marion Kraft, who manages Miranda Lambert, and vice chairman Mary Hilliard Harrington, who manages Blake Shelton, developed the idea in early 2017 and have been fine-tuning it with board members over the last 16 months.

“We looked at the wealth of professional leaders on our board and thought, ‘What if we could help younger artists get a leg up?’” says Kraft. “To be eligible, applicants must have a relationship with two CMA member companies in the publishing, record label, artist management, booking agency or publicity fields; have recorded music available; and have live performance experience. They must not have already charted a top 40 single on Billboard’s Country Airplay chart or Country Aircheck’s charts or released more than one full-length album.

Harrington came up with the name, a nod to Brooks, who helped drive the creation of the CMA board’s artist-relations committee in 2006. “Hopefully there’s someone out there who will be recognized by this program, and some nugget of wisdom will make the difference for them,” says Brooks. “The goal is for them to be better educated about the industry and business,” adds Kraft. “Young artists could build their own support system.”

Spotify settled a class action copyright infringement suit with songwriters for $112.5 million.

Licensing hub ICE signed a content deal with Mixcloud.

Gracenote launched music descriptor system Sonic Style.

Prince Royce signed a publishing deal with Kobalt Music.

Vevo announced plans to phase out its apps and website.

Merlin added Marta de la HoZ as head of reporting, Chaida Kaplun as head of technology and development, and Quentin Martins as member operations manager.

BET announced that longtime CEO Debra Lee will step down.

“Despacito” co-writer Erika Ender received SESAC Latina’s song of the year honor and Global Icon award in Beverly Hills.

Dave East signed with United Talent Agency for worldwide representation in all areas.

S-Curve signed a single deal for Eurovision winner Netta’s “Toy.”

NBC announced a live musical version of Hair for spring 2019.

Republic Records promoted Ben Adelson to executive vp A&R.

Creative Artists Agency London co-head Emma Banks was announced as the recipient of the 2018 Music Industry Trusts Award.

Country singer Jackie Lee signed with CAA in all areas.

Esteemed publicist Paul Bloch died at age 78.

Bon Iver’s manager, Kyle Frenette, withdrew his candidacy for Congress in Wisconsin.

Sting received an honorary degree from Brown University.

Russ Regan, the industry veteran who signed Elton John and Neil Diamond, died at age 89.

Sony/ATV extended its worldwide publishing deal with songwriter Ben Ash, aka Two Inch Punch.

Island Records U.K. elevated Ben Ash, aka Two Inch Punch.

Sony/ATV extended its worldwide publishing deal with songwriter Ben Ash, aka Two Inch Punch.

Island Records U.K. elevated Ben Ash, aka Two Inch Punch.

The Michael Jackson estate sued the Walt Disney Company over its ABC-TV special about the pop star’s last days.

Apple created a music-publisher relations office led by Elena Segal.

Live Nation acquired festival promoter ScoreMore Shows.
22 songs have been certified diamond by the RIAA. 10 have been released by Interscope.

That’s the Interscope Guarantee*

*There is no Interscope Guarantee. Individual results may vary. Please consult with a professional.
Khalid, who took home the award for top new artist, backstage at the Billboard Music Awards at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas on May 20. Normani performed “Love Lies” alongside Khalid during the show. Swift attended the event in between stops on her current Reputation Tour. She received two awards: top female artist and top selling album. Shawn Mendes delivered “Youth,” featuring Khalid, and welcomed onstage the show choir from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla. From left: Cindy Herron, Terry Ellis and Rhona Bennett of En Vogue, who performed a medley of hits with Salt-N-Pepa. Luis Fonsi, whose hit “Despacito” with Daddy Yankee featuring Justin Bieber won the awards for top Hot 100 song, top streaming song (video), top selling song, top collaboration and top Latin song. 21 Savage, who with Post Malone won best rap song for “rockstar.” Maren Morris won the award for top country female artist.
At the top of the Billboard Music Awards, Kelly Clarkson delivered a tearful cold open to address the school shooting in Santa Fe, Texas, that occurred on May 18 and instead of leading Las Vegas’ MGM Grand Garden Arena in a moment of silence, she demanded a moment of action. The host soon shifted gears and officially opened the show with a medley of hits from the night’s nominees, from Taylor Swift to Kendrick Lamar. Elsewhere, The Chainsmokers and Halsey honored Avicii and urged viewers to support those struggling with mental health; Christina Aguilera and Demi Lovato debuted their new song “Fall in Line,” a women’s empowerment anthem that addresses how society polices young girls; and Swift used her acceptance speech for top female artist to thank both the women who paved the way for her and the inspiring up-and-comers who are just picking up instruments and embarking on their careers. The most anticipated moment arrived when Icon Award recipient Janet Jackson powered through “Nasty” and “If” before delivering an impassioned speech: “For all our challenges, we live at a glorious moment in history,” said Jackson. “It’s a moment when, at long last, women have made it clear that we will no longer be controlled, manipulated or abused. I stand with those women, and with those men equally outraged by discrimination who support us in heart and mind.” —Nolan Feeney
Shawn Mendes performed “In My Blood” among a bed of neon-lit flowers at the Billboard Music Awards at the MGM Grand Garden Arena. Camila Cabello (center) delivered “Sangria Wine,” the singer’s new collaboration with Pharrell Williams, and 2017 smash “Havana.” John Legend and host Kelly Clarkson embraced onstage following his performance of “A Good Night.” Tyra Banks (center) met and posed with K-pop group BTS, which performed a choreography-heavy rendition of “Fake Love.” Ariana Grande opened the show lying across a trio of umbrellas to sing “No Tears Left To Cry.” Jennifer Lopez energized the crowd with a dazzling version of “Dinero” alongside DJ Khaled and Cardi B (who rapped her verse in a black-and-white video).
NEW ALBUM FROM DIERKS BENTLEY
THE MOUNTAIN
FEATURING THE HIT SINGLE, “WOMAN, AMEN” PLUS 12 NEW TRACKS
AVAILABLE JUNE 8TH

“Delivering rustic romps even as he allows himself room for artistic exploration.”

“Filled with gratitude for life and what lies ahead. Sonically, it’s a compelling marriage of contemporary and bluegrass sounds.”

“The best representation of all his skills, from being a true fan of acoustic instruments like the mandolin and banjo, to raising a glass to his partying crowds and delivering arena-sized anthems.”

“Both earthen and majestic.”
Boston Calling
BOSTON, MAY 25-27

1 Hayley Williams of Paramore sang through a megaphone during the first day of the Boston Calling Music Festival.
2 Day-one headliner Jack White lit the stage with his signature blue hue.
3 Cousin Stizz delivered part of his performance among the crowd during day three of the fest.
4 Brandon Flowers of The Killers covered Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers during the band’s headlining slot.
5 Maggie Rogers (center) performed a solo set and later joined The National for a live collaboration of “I Need My Girl.”

BottleRock Festival
NAPA VALLEY, CALIF., MAY 25-27

1 Bruno Mars closed out BottleRock on May 27.
2 Halsey played the Culinary Stage.
3 Snoop Dogg broke the Guinness World Record for largest glass of gin and juice.
HOW TO QUIT TOURING

BY

George Strait

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Thank you -

Louis Messina
CONGRATULATIONS MAVERICKS!

SETH ENGLAND  CLARENCE SPALDING  CHIEF ZARUK
BILLBOARD 2018 COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS

FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
BILLBOARD 2018 COUNTRY POWER TRAILBLAZER AWARD
Smith photographed May 10 at Christ Church Neighborhood House in Philadelphia.

Refusing to fall in line with today’s R&B stars, unsigned English singer Jorja Smith isn’t just her own biggest fan — she’s got co-signs from Drake and Kendrick Lamar.

BY LYDSEY HAVENS
PHOTOGRAPHED BY JACQUELINE HARRIET
Jorja Smith is thinking about changing her only tattoo, on the middle finger of her left hand, from a number 11 to the astrological sign for Gemini. “Kendrick [Lamar] is also a Gemini,” she says. “We clicked.”

Lamar confirms as much when he tells Billboard that “Jorja is a constant reminder that true artistry, writing and creativity will forever be alive and well. She is the future and present.”

Right now, the soft-spoken Smith is sipping green tea at a quaint coffee shop in Philadelphia, where she’s set to perform the next night on the latest stop of her sold-out 17-date North American tour. Matching sun signs aside, the number 11 has been significant to the 20-year-old Walsall, England, native since she recorded her first song at that age. She even titled her debut EP, independently released in November 2016, Project 11. Soon after, Drake slid into her direct messages to enlist her to sing on two More Life tracks; one of them, “Get It Together,” peaked at No. 45 on the Billboard Hot 100, earning Smith her first entry on the chart. Since then, she has picked up features on the Insecure and Dear White People soundtracks and contributed “I Am” to 2018’s Black Panther: The Album, overseen by Lamar. The song has become her most-streamed track, with 32.2 million audio and video streams, according to Nielsen Music.

On June 8, she will release her debut full-length, Lost & Found — independently. “People think I’m signed because of how successful I’ve been so far,” says Smith, who’s wearing leggings and a black hoodie with her name across the front and “Crew” on the back. “But I’m not successful yet,” she’s quick to add. “I’ve got far to go.

There’s always more to be done.”

On the soulful Lost & Found, Smith croons over hazy instrumentals that call to mind Amy Winehouse’s 2003 debut, Frank. Smith loves Winehouse and that album in particular, but says she hates to hear “anyone being compared to her.” She also bristles at getting lumped in with the new wave of R&B — think Daniel Caesar and Kali Uchis. (Though she did collaborate with Uchis on her 2018 song “Tyrant.”) “People say I’m pop, soul, neo-soul, new R&B, future R&B — fuck knows. I just make my music. It’s not too complicated. I say what I’m feeling, and a lot of people feel the same way. My songs,” she adds, “are classics.”

Growing up, Smith would have pretend songwriting sessions with her father, a neo-soul artist who performed in a band called 2nd Naicha, but she didn’t want to sing in public. Her mother, who makes jewelry, would encourage her to perform at craft fairs, and her “auntie,” who ran a cake shop, would have her serenade customers a cappella. The practice paid off. Now, she says, “I like my album and everything — but I’m better live.

Still, as recently as three years ago, Smith was nowhere near a stage. She was behind the counter working as a barista at Starbucks in Central London. I’d get off [the bus] and have two minutes to stand on the bridge, look at Big Ben, then get on another bus to go to work. It was lovely, because it was so still. I miss those times, just thinking about it now.” In between tour dates with Bruno Mars last fall and her own U.S. tour this year, Smith, who still lives in London, has found far fewer such pockets of time, and much of them she has spent with her boyfriend, 25-year-old Joel Compass, a singer, writer and producer whom she has been dating since last September. “A lot of people are like, ‘Maybe you shouldn’t have a boyfriend at this [crucial] time,’ ” she says, “but I’m like, ‘I think I’m good. I’m writing good songs.’ ”

Together, the two wrote “The One,” a passionate Lost & Found ballad about meeting the right person at the wrong time, which Smith relates to as she tries to balance her work and personal lives. “I love anything about love. I think it’s because I’m in love,” she says, smiling brightly. The night before they laid down the song, Smith and Compass decided not to date since she was about to tour the United States, though they later gave in. “It was a sad session, because I was writing about not wanting to be with him but really liking him. It’s such an honest song — we were talking to each other through the session. When we played it back, I swear a tear came down my face.”

And while Smith can see that her rise appears smooth and swift, she’s not going easy on herself. “I don’t like setting goals,” she admits. “I don’t like to be disappointed.” In business decisions, she trusts her instincts. But she’s putting a little more work, she says, in getting to know herself. “I’ll get there, or maybe I won’t,” says Smith. “I’m growing up, and I put it in my music. I’ve got a good platform — I don’t want to mess up.”
THE ROOFTOP AT
PIER 17
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Mr. President

Despite serving as the president of G.O.O.D. Music since November 2015, Pusha T still craves perfection as an artist: “I want uncompromised music,” he says. After scrapping his long-awaited effort King Push “three times,” changing the album title to Daytona and switching the cover art to a photo of Whitney Houston’s messy bathroom — per G.O.O.D. Music founder Kanye West’s last-minute request, and at a reported cost of $85,000 for the rights — the 41-year-old won widespread acclaim when he finally released the seven-song album on May 25. Executive-produced by West, Daytona highlights Pusha’s steely lyricism, harrowing tales of survival on the street and taste for the high-end lifestyle. Given “the luxury of time,” Pusha sees his three-year hiatus from music as well worth the wait.

You worked with Kanye right after he was released from the UCLA Medical Center for stress and exhaustion in 2016. What was that like? He [tells me now], “Yo, after the hospital, working on your album was my dive back into just music. That shit like a therapy session.” [When we got to Utah to record], he goes to the record store, buys thousands of records. [We stayed at] some ill-ass resort, 10-bedroom mansion, middle of nowhere. Eight to 10 grand a night. Same type of style in Wyoming. And he’s just listening to music. Then he’ll come up like, “Yo, man, do me a favor. Can you make me 25 joints that you just love? What do you want to be on?” I sent him [Raekwon’s] “Glaciers of Ice” and “Rainy Dayz” and D’Angelo’s “Devil’s Pie.” We were searching for feeling. See, music ain’t making you feel no more. That’s what I’m trying to do. It’s about being confident that I’m bringing what I need to bring to the table. People are going to see that there’s an elevated level of musicality on this album that you ain’t getting nowhere else. You can tell it’s heavier.

With all the projects coming out on G.O.O.D., there are rumors of a tour. We trying to figure it out. We’ve spoken about it, all the artists involved in all five projects — me, Nas, Kanye, Kid Cudi, Teyana Taylor — going on a run. Man, that would be fire. I hope it happens. If not, me and Nas talked — like, “Bro, if that would be fire. I hope it happens. If you planning on touring, you know I’d go out with you.” Y’all definitely going to see me on the road. I got to get to it.

Do bars still matter in 2018? I don’t think intellectual hip-hop goes out of style. There’s still an art form. People love the puzzle aspect of rap, just trying to put it all together. To take that away, hip-hop would be nonexistent to me. I don’t think you can have hip-hop without having the fundamental rap game. —Carl Lamarre

Kanye and Company

West reportedly decreed that these splashy June releases should, like Daytona, each be seven tracks.

Kanye West, June 1

Whether you respect him or abandoned Twitter because of him, no artist in recent memory has shown the ability to reinvent himself album to album like West has over the past decade. Donald Trump references may abound, but his new “free-thinking” approach could offer fresh ideas.

Kid Cudi & Kanye West, June 8

No two artists have had more influence on the last decade of rap — but their personal and professional inconsistencies have made those days fewer and farther between. If they make more “Gorgeous” than “Guilty Trip,” they could be mining old gold.

Nas, June 15

It has been six years — his longest career gap — since Nas’ last album, Life Is Good, skillfully balanced urgency and well-executed dad rap, like JAY-Z did with 2017’s 4:44. Though he’s not on G.O.O.D. Music, the lyrical master is undoubtedly one of West’s key collaborators.

Teyana Taylor, June 22

Taylor has earned clout as a reality TV star and with an internet-crashing performance in West’s “Fade” video. And with him serving as executive producer, only her impossibly busy schedule and rust from a four-year musical break could keep her down. —DAN RYS

The Next Wave

Kanye West may keep accomplished company, but a glance at his G.O.O.D. Music roster shows a keen interest in new talent. Case in point: Chicago rapper Valee, who, following breakthrough 2016 hit “Shell” and a Pitchfork Festival afterparty set last July, found himself on the line with West after being connected by his manager, noted hip-hop tastemaker Andrew Barber. “[Kanye] is telling me how much he enjoyed my music,” explains Valee, 29. “He said everyone at G.O.O.D. was a fan of my music and was excited to work with me.”

It wasn’t until last October, though, that Valee’s carefree, off-kilter flow got him officially signed with G.O.O.D. Music. In March, he made his debut with the six-track mixtape GOOD Job. You Found Me, executive-produced by West and featuring Pusha T as the sole guest.

What attracted Valee to G.O.O.D. wasn’t the star-studded roster (Big Sean, Desiigner), but that the imprint let him create without restrictions. “There were a few labels scouting me, but I felt like G.O.O.D. had my best interest at heart,” says the Chicago native. “They gave me the freedom to really do whatever I want, which is to expand my brand, make great music and find ways to elevate my sound.”

He now says that he sees West exploring this same freedom himself. “He’s misunderstood because he’s asking a lot of questions that some people are afraid to ask and some are offended by, but I’ve actually had the chance to sit down and hear him speak. Either you love him or you hate him — I love him.”

Adds Valee: “I’m proud I picked a good team to grow with — pun intended.”

—Neeshia Penrose

G.O.O.D. Music’s Summer Takeover

His label just minted a new star. Now, Kanye West is personally producing a batch of high-profile releases
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**INSIDE LOOK**

**Best You Ever Had**

A family business aims to offer the most exclusive — and costly — dinner-and-a-show in Toronto, with help from Drake

**BY KAREN BLISS**

In Toronto, the Parentela family, owner of the 74,000-square-foot Chateau Le Jardin event space, has secured top music talent like Drake, Robin Thicke and Jennifer Hudson for something they believe is the first high-end option in an increasingly VIP-centric music “experience” business: a yearlong, monthly members-only “epicurean event” series called Après Noir.

The creators — Canadian hospitality vets Carlo Parentela, 58; daughter Natasha, 25; and son Julian, 27 — are offering attendees, limited to 940 people per event, a night out that marries concert performances with a six-course meal from a top chef, wines and champagne, a fashion show and on-the-spot live visual art. The top package for all 12 events — which costs $197,000 — adds a personal butler and other perks like caviar.

After the soft opening on May 17 with host Bob Saget, a menu by chef Bobby Flay and sets by Thicke and Arianna Bergamaschi, Après Noir continues on July 26 with Hudson, while on Nov. 29, Drake will headline with support from Mariah Carey, Bruno Mars and the help of two friends in the nightclub business, Massimo Grisafi and Nick Regina. Now they’re already eyeing an expansion to other North American cities and beyond. Says Julian: “We believe in our model.”

Giada de Laurentis serves up risotto sprinkled with 24-karat gold flakes.

Carlo came up with the Après Noir concept last October as an alternative to New York and Las Vegas business junkets, targeting all industries but especially real estate developers, lawyers and the financial sector. “It’s an evening to get people to network,” he says. Quarterly memberships are intended for executives with bottomless bank accounts or the need to truly wow clients; the cheap seats go for $975 per person (which includes dinner, but no fancy alcohol). When they first started booking, says Julian Parentela, “agents were not returning our calls.” That changed when the family landed Drake with the help of two friends in the nightclub business, Massimo Grisafi and Nick Regina. Now they’re already eyeing an expansion to other North American cities and beyond. Says Julian: “We believe in our model.”

**THE HOT 100 CROSS-CHECK**

Collaboration is more important than ever in pop, and it’s thanks to hip-hop dominating streaming and the charts, plus the surge of post-“Despacito” Latin crossovers. Which is clear from the list of five artists with the most equally credited collaborations (not features) to chart on the Billboard Hot 100 so far in 2018: There are two leading rappers, two hot Latin vocalists — and one singer fluent in seemingly every major genre

**CARDI B**

5 Collaborations
Cardi hooked up with Bruno Mars on the remixed “Finesse,” Ozuna on “La Modelo” and Nicki Minaj on “Motorbass,” then sprinkled some on “Motorsport,” “I Like It” and “I Like It” (again) Ozuna (“I Like It”).

**KENDRICK LAMAR**

4 Collaborations
The Compton, Calif., rapper spread the wealth while curating Black Panther: The Album, jumping on tracks with SZA (“All the Stars”), Travis Scott (“Pray for Me”), Future and James Blake (“King’s Dead”).

**KHALID**

4 Collaborations

**OZUNA**

4 Collaborations
Ozuna teamed up with fellow Latin hitmakers Natti Natasha (“Criminal”) and Romeo Santos (“Farsante”), was the featured artist on Bad Bunny’s “Te Bote” and also scoring the aforementioned hip-hop crossover “La Modelo” alongside Cardi B.

**BAD BUNNY**

3 Collaborations
A collaborator with so much heat that he’s reportedly getting Drake to sing in Spanish on a track with him. Bad Bunny has scored hits in 2018 with Cardi B (“1 Like It”) and Nicki Minaj (“Krippy Kush”), while also joining in on “Te Bote.” — ANDREW UNTERBERGER
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The Beat

Lykke Li’s ‘Whole New Fire’

After the death of her mother and nearly giving up on music, the singer returns with a new outlook — and a revamped, potentially controversial sound

By Nolan Feeney

A little over three years ago, Lykke Li almost walked away from music. The 32-year-old Swedish singer had finished touring after releasing her third album, 2014’s I Never Learned, and realized that spending most of her 20s on the road singing wounded indie-pop songs night after night had taken a toll. “I was pretty unhappy,” says Li today. “I was like, ‘Maybe I’m too introverted, too sensitive to be doing what I’m doing. I’m not able to enjoy it.’ So I threw it all away and concentrated on having a life.”

Li settled in Los Angeles with her partner, music producer Jeff Bhasker, and gave birth to their son, Dion, in 2016. That year, she and Bhasker also formed a side project, Lyv, with Miike Snow’s Andrew Wyatt and Pontus Winnberg, and Peter Bjorn and John’s Björn Yttiling, releasing a few tracks in a 60s-folk vein. But major life events, including the 2017 death of her mother, soon brought her back to her own songwriting. “I realized that it’s not something I can choose,” she says. “I really had the desire to write.”

But when her fourth album, So Sad So Sexy, arrives on June 8, Li won’t be picking up where she left off. The record introduces a trap-inspired, 808-heavy sound that Li — a lifelong hip-hop fan who grew up idolizing Lauryn Hill — attributes to driving around Los Angeles. “All my albums are [reflections of] what I’m listening to,” she says. “It’s the first time I actually like the type of music that’s played on the radio.”

Instead of keeping a tight circle of collaborators, Li embraced her L.A. network and logged time played on the radio.”

“I WAS PRETTY UNHAPPY... I THREW IT ALL AWAY.” —LI

To keep a tight circle of collaborators, Li embraced her L.A. network and logged time

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“I WAS PRETTY UNHAPPY... I THREW IT ALL AWAY.” —LI

So Sad So Sexy, Li’s fourth album, arrives June 8.

“T-Minus (

But when her fourth album, So Sad So Sexy, arrives on June 8, Li won’t be picking up where

“I WAS PRETTY UNHAPPY... I THREW IT ALL AWAY.” —LI

“You label yourself as indie,” she says, “it’s very much about what you don’t like, what you don’t do: ‘No, I won’t ever Auto-Tune my voice.’ Here, I was like, ‘Fuck it. I want to try something new.’

With debates over cultural appropriation roiling, Li knows that a white woman making hip-hop-influenced music might raise eyebrows. “It’s definitely something that I am hyper aware of and very sensitive toward,” she says, careful to note that the album was developed collaboratively and without a specific agenda. The booming “Deep End,” for instance, was originally a slow acoustic track until T-Minus pushed it in a different direction. “He was like, ‘What if you did that twice as fast and let me drop this [beat] on it?’” recalls Li. “It was purely accidents happening.”

That go-with-the-flow approach has since “sparked a whole new fire” for Li. She’s eager to put out more music, including mixtapes. “Success doesn’t matter,” she says. “What matters to me most is the passion and lust I have for creating. The fact that I still feel like I have something to say and want to do it? That, I’m really grateful for.”

It’s a good example, because they’re timeless.”

—Melinda Newman

Dad-Rock Hero

In the touching indie drama Hearts Beat Loud, opening in New York and Los Angeles theaters on June 8, beloved comic actor Nick Offerman plays a Brooklyn record store owner and guitar-strumming single dad who connects with his college-bound daughter (Kiersey Clemons) through their weekly “jam sesh.” Offerman, 47, who in the film sings and plays original songs written by Keegan DeWitt, talks finger cramps, buying a Les Paul from Wilco’s Jeff Tweedy and why he’s forever trying to be cool.

Crate-Digger

“There was a record store in Urbana-Champaign when I was there in the late ’80s/early ’90s [at the University of Illinois] called Record Service. In my head, it’s the coolest record store of my life. Everyone there seemed like they were Joan Jett or Nick Cave. And I just found another groovy record store when I was working in Cape Town [South Africa]. It had five amazing Bob Newhart comedy albums from the ’60s.”

Strike Up the Band

“I play guitar, but I’d never played electric before. That took me three months of sweat and cramping fingers just to be able to play these easy little parts. But it was thrilling for me. I felt like Eddie Van Halen. The Les Paul custom in the movie I bought from Jeff Tweedy. We’re buddies.”

Fatherly Figure

“As soon as Kiersey showed up, I started trying to get her to think I was cool, like a dad would. I’ll never succeed, but that was immediately our dynamic. I was like, ‘Hey, I’m cool like you! I use the Insta-Twitter and all that stuff. Check this out: Kool & The Gang, you’re in for quite a surprise.’ “That’s not a good example, because they’re timeless.” —Melinda Newman

Offerman (right) and Clemons in Hearts Beat Loud.
CONGRATULATIONS JODY
on your third consecutive
Billboard Country Power Players
honor.

The dedication of you and
your team inspires us all.
MALLRAT

Grace Shaw, who performs as Mallrat, decided to start making music at age 16 after seeing Australian rapper Allday live. Soon after, in July 2016, the Brisbane native released her debut EP, ‘Unlimited,’ landing her an opening slot forPost Malone on a handful of his Australian tour dates earlier in 2018 and securing her first-ever U.S. gig, at South Australian tour dates earlier in 2018 and EP , the Brisbane native released her debut Allday 16 after seeing Australian rapper decided to start making music at age It was just after I had finished school What were your expectations after releasing your debut EP? It was just after I had finished school and I didn’t want to go to university, so I was like, “I hope this goes well so I don’t feel obligated to [attend].” I knew it wouldn’t be for me. Everyone wanted me to go. So I was really hoping my EP would go well, but I didn’t know how any of this worked, so I didn’t have any expectations. I was just crossing my fingers.

How do you keep your music authentic with the pressure to grow up faster? Even before I started making music, I felt a lot older than I was. The most important thing for me when I’m songwriting is creating a feeling and being very honest and vulnerable, which I’ve pushed myself to do. But it’s scary. My favorite songs are where the artist isn’t trying to pretend to be something. 

Kanye West is a hero of yours. What about him inspires you? I know it’s a funny thing to be a Kanye fan, but what I like about him is the way that he says exactly what he feels and thinks. He doesn’t care that it’s going to be taken out of context. He just says it anyway. He’s not afraid to take risks. In terms of women in hip-hop that I love, Nicki Minaj is lit. [I like] Cordi B, Azealia Banks. I know it’s cool to hate on Iggy Azalea, but when she started out I was just starting to make music, and she was someone I looked up to. I still look up to her a little bit. And I love Cupcake, how unapologetic she is, it’s super inspiring. That’s also something I really like about Kanye. In certain situations, I think, “I should try and be more like them.” —LYNDSEY HAVENS

BRAND NEW FACE

CALI’S NEW COUNTRY CROP

BY TAYLOR WEATHERBY

In May, Tyler Rich landed his first hit on Billboard’s Country Airplay chart with debut single “The Difference,” making him the fourth California country singer — along with Brett Young, Jon Pardi and Devin Dawson, the lattermost of which co-wrote Rich’s song — to appear on the tally in 2018. It’s not the first time a Cali wave has hit country radio: Genre greats Merle Haggard, Buck Owens and Dwight Yoakam all hailed from the Golden State. “People tend to forget that other than the big cities, California is just as country as Georgia,” says Dawson. “Country is a lifestyle; it’s not just a genre. Everything has its moment, and it’s just another time for us to spread awareness about Cali country.”

DEAN RICH

Hometown Orangevale, Sacramento County Age 29 Recent hit “Asking for a Friend” My style “When I was in middle and high school, there was a huge culture of heavy metal. Instead of going to college, I toured in a metal band, and that greatly influenced my sound and the way I push boundaries — whether it’s lyrically or with chords. Growing up as a metalhead has completely informed my live shows — I like to have energy be dynamic — and the way I look at creating and writing. I have my own voice in this genre.”

JON PARDE

Hometown Dixon, Solano County Age 33 Recent hit “She Ain’t in It” My style “I was so influenced by what I heard on the radio, from Merle to Dwight, and George Strait. But going to college in Chico, Calif., I learned more about bluegrass, and had a bluegrass and country band. I used to think, ‘How do you also get the attention of college kids who maybe have only listened to pop or rap?’ I knew I needed to write songs that were upbeat enough to interest and entertain them, too.”

TYLER RICH

Hometown Yuba City, Sutter County Age 32 Recent hit “The Difference” My style “I grew up 80 minutes from the Bay Area, and Bay Area hip-hop is massive. Rap was a huge part of my childhood, as well as country and ‘80s alternative rock. [You can hear] the hip-hop influence in my vocal melodies or my phrasing, similar to the phrasing of Dr. Dre, but with my voice and style you can tell I’m a fan of Keith Urban and Garth Brooks. It collectively turns into the artist I am today.”

BRETT YOUNG

Hometown Huntington Beach, Orange County Age 37 Recent hit “Mercy” My style “I grew up listening to country music but was the minority. Now, [acts like] Florida Georgia Line and Sam Hunt have given California listeners and artists more room to find their own sweet spot within the genre. For me, growing up in California was very laid-back, and I’ve noticed this all over my songwriting. Though I’ve found a home in Nashville, there will always be a West Coast flavor to my music.”

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT HERRING

The singer hits the road with Maggie Rogers in the fall.
CONGRATS KHALID ON WINNING BBMA’S TOP NEW ARTIST!
Dear Jason,

You always told me you were the greatest...

Congratulations,

Shane
Jason,

THANK YOU AND CONGRATS.
You are the best of the best.

With love,
Faith Hill, Little Big Town, Kacey Musgraves, Dan + Shay, Midland, Kelsea Ballerini, Devin Dawson, Seth Ennis, The Brummies, Blackberry Farm, Anna Moon, The John R Cash Revocable Trust

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, do more, learn more and become more, you are a leader.”
- John Quincy Adams
CONGRATS TO MY EXECUTIVES OF THE YEAR.
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JASON OWEN & SHANE MCANALLY
Luke Bryan may have pioneered bro country, but with his tragic family history, he knows heartbreak as intimately as any of the genre’s greats. And now — coming off his first season on American Idol and about to embark on his latest stadium tour — he’s wondering if it’s finally time to give up songs about “hunting and fishing.”

BY ROB TANNENBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERIC RAY DAVIDSON
Also, a YouTube supercut of him grinding and wiggling his butt onstage has over 4 million views.

That last number starts to get at the reasons Bryan was the frequent target of a subreddit called “Punchable Country Faces.” Comments on the supercut video include “I don’t even like country music but I like dat ass,” “Basically porn for the country girls,” and “This video made my ovaries explode.” Country is a music of traditions, and its traditions do not include making ovaries explode. Hank Williams didn’t make ovaries explode! Waylon Jennings didn’t make ovaries explode! George Strait never — well, hold on, maybe he did.

“You know what Motel 6 and Luke’s jeans have in common?” Blake Shelton once wisecracked. “There’s no ballroom.”

When he isn’t shaking his tushy onstage, Bryan’s recording songs that are about the good life in the South. He’s one of many male singers doing the same thing, and you could make a Country Music Bingo card with the words that appear, over and over, in bro-country hits for the past few years: boots, truck, fishing, tractor, back road, party, cutoff jeans, tan legs, tank tops and girl.

Writing in the Dallas Observer, critic Amy McCarthy called Bryan “the father of bro-country” and said his music degrades and infantilizes women. “The women who love Bryan just don’t give a shit that his music is sexist and enjoy listening to twangy hip-hop-infused music whilst drinking Coors Light on a riverbed, and that’s fine,” wrote McCarthy.

And although neither country singer mentioned Bryan by name — making critical comments about peers is not one of country’s traditions — Brad Paisley was surely thinking of him at least a little when he said songs about tan legs and trucks were pandering and “totally cliché,” as, surely, was Kenny Chesney when he said songs about cutoff jeans and drinking “objectify the hell out of” women and lobided for a more nuanced, less handsy view of women in country songs.

In 2013, so aggrieved that he broke with tradition, Zac Brown called Bryan’s big hit “That’s My Kind of Night” “the worst song I’ve ever heard” and added that some songs “make me be ashamed” to be a country singer. The two, who were friends, reconciled a month later at the CMA Awards. When Bryan won entertainer of the year, he cried onstage as the crowd yelled “Luuuuuke.” Bryan is very well-liked in the country industry. But that year, a dam broke: Country singers Gary Allan, Alan Jackson and Kacey Musgraves — and even Tom Petty — all criticized the incessant back road, Friday-night partying of country hits.

You know who else is a little tired of it? Luke Bryan.

It’s almost 3 p.m., and Bryan is in a dressing room at the Hollywood theater where Jimmy Kimmel Live! is taped. He is a guest on tonight’s show, where he’ll cross-promote Idol — both programs are on the ABC network. Even though he said a few hours earlier he needed a night off from drinking, he’s got a Guinness in a clear cup. And he’s talking, with mixed feelings, about his best-selling song, 2011’s “Country Girl (Shake It For Me).”

“When I put that song out, I knew what it was. It was lighthearted fun. If you can’t appreciate the fun of that song, then I’m not your artist. Pick. Another. Artist,” he pronounces with a laugh.

As Bryan sees it, his success brought on imitators, whose Bryan-esque songs created the current glut. “When I started singing about stuff like that, a lot of people saw that it worked, so they incorporated it. Then sometimes things get beat to death, and then it’s time to move on.

“I know that there are more layers to describing the country way of life than a pickup truck and fishing,” he continues. “When I’m in a songwriting session with one of my songwriter buddies who’s going down the back-road path, can I sing a song about hunting and fishing ever again?”

Is it time for him to move on? Bryan pauses. He answers the question — there are
two answers, actually — but first, you need to understand the role of calamity in his life.

WHEN HE WAS 20 YEARS OLD, BRYAN decided to move to Nashville. The youngest of three kids, he was at Georgia Southern University, singing with a band and gaining confidence from his local popularity. In November 1996, five days before he planned to move, his brother Chris, 26, was killed in a car accident.

Bryan decided not to go to Nashville, largely to comfort his mother. As a kid, he’d had asthma and “terrible allergies,” he says. “I had to sleep in the bed with her, and she’d be feeling my breathing all night. One time, I got rushed to the hospital because of an asthma attack.”

“I couldn’t bear the thought of Luke being away,” his mother, LeClaire, later said. Instead of going to Nashville, he finished college and went to work for his father Tommy’s fertilizer company while playing clubs with a band on weekends. The fertilizer job stunk (sorry), and although he was unhappy there, Bryan was content to stay in his small Georgia town, Leesburg: “It was just the path of least resistance for me.”

To force a resolution of this impasse, his dad vowed he would fire Luke if he didn’t move to Nashville. “He was like, ‘Our fertilizer company will always be here, but you’ll never get your youth again. You’ll never have this time in your life where you don’t have a wife and kids, and chasing your dreams is not that complicated right now.’ Once I got his blessing, it made the decision easier.”

He arrived in Nashville on Sept. 1, 2001, and by November was signed to a publishing deal. The Nashville philosophy is not to stroke your chin until inspiration strikes, but to make co-writing appointments and be productive. “I was writing two, three songs a day from Monday to Thursday. It didn’t pay a lot of money, so I’d rent a van, and the band and I would drive eight or nine hours to play college bars and frat parties in Georgia. On Sunday, we’d head back to Nashville.”

At home, Bryan’s parents listened mostly to country and Motown, but he had more modern tastes. As a kid, “my brother and sister and I were sneaking Beastie Boys albums, LL Cool J, Run-D.M.C. and even N.W.A. I would have gotten in so much trouble if I’d been caught with that stuff. I had one buddy who had a big farm and an old Army jeep with a tape player. We’d ride around on his plantation listening to N.W.A, and we thought we were little gangsters.”

Bryan burned CDs of the songs he had been writing, and rather than selling them at shows, gave them away, which was a smart strategy. “If I had a hundred people, I gave a hundred CDs out. That got me a good little following in Georgia, which really paid off.”
I’m a pretty happy person. The loss we’ve dealt with has given me an appreciation of how precious and fragile life is.”

Bryan wears a Brunello Cucinelli shirt, John Varvatos T-shirt, Hudson jeans, Lucchese boots and Audemars Piguet Royal Oak watch.
During these years, Bryan was going to college bars and playing Charlie Daniels, George Strait and Merle Haggard songs. “And when I got onstage, the biggest hip-hop songs would blast in these clubs. I started to realize there’s a way for some of this stuff to work together. You take your influences and create your own lane with it.”

He’d had some success writing songs for other acts, and Capitol Records signed him as an artist in 2004 partly because he already had an intense local following. His first single, “All My Friends Say,” came out in January 2007 and reached No. 5 on the Hot Country Songs chart. In April, Bryan made his debut at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, a rite of passage for all young country stars; his sister Kelly, a middle-school teacher, brought 120 people up from Georgia for the occasion. Then, four-and-a-half weeks later, while she was at home with her 3-year-old son, she died suddenly, of unknown causes.

For LeClaire, two of her three children were now dead. “It forever altered my mother’s belief systems. I’ll get random calls from her when she’s having bad days. One day, she’s missing my brother, and one day, she wants to be around me more, because I’m all she’s got left. We give Mama the benefit of the doubt on stuff. She has suffered a lot of pain as a mother, losing two children.”

A third tragedy would follow in November 2014, when Kelly’s husband, Ben Cheshire, died at the age of 46, orphaning their three children. Bryan and his wife, college sweetheart Caroline Boyer, already had two young boys, Bo and Tate, and decided to raise their nephew Til and their college-age nieces Kris and Jordan.

After “All My Friends Say,” it seemed like Bryan was on a straight path to stardom. Then came his second single, “We Rode in Trucks,” which, despite its title and the fact that it matches multiple squares on the Country Music Bingo card (farming, hunting, fishing, tailgates), is a subtle and lovely song about small-town life. It peaked on the Hot Country Songs chart in 2008 at a dismal 53.

“That was probably my lowest moment as an artist. It was awful. When I saw what the live version of ‘Back Where I Come From’ did for Kenny Chesney, I thought ‘We Rode in Trucks’ was going to do that for me. I’d played it for my college crowds, and people loved it.”

It could be that the failure of a song he co-wrote and loved drove Bryan toward a more conventional type of sound and themes. “You have to have a nucleus of your image. Singing about trucks and back roads and fishing, that was a nucleus, because that’s what I knew. ‘Keep it simple, stupid’ — that’s a thing me and my producer [Jeff Stevens] say a lot. I’m wired to write simple stuff that people can understand and relate to.”

When Bryan hears criticism of his music, he invokes the populist argument, aka the Jon Bon Jovi Defense: The fans love my music, who cares what anyone else thinks? It’s not actually a defense, though, because it doesn’t argue for the quality of the music, but is instead a red herring that changes the subject from quality to popularity. He knows “Country Girl (Shake It for Me)” isn’t his best song, but if it’s the song his crowds love best, he reasons, then maybe it is his best song.

But it’s not that simple, because Bryan is of two minds about how he’s perceived. People mock him for “Country Girl (Shake It for Me)” and “That’s My Kind of Night,” but he’d like to also be respected for his more serious songs, like “Drink a Beer” or “Most People Are Good.” This is true for sure: Bryan’s albums are better than his singles. “Do I think I put albums together that should be up for album of the year awards? And have I put out songs that I feel like ought to garner more acclaim? I wouldn’t be a competitive spirit if I didn’t want to get recognized.

“Certainly, I’ve caught flack for my styles of country. When I read something negative about myself, it kind of gets me down. But the true traditionalists, they’ll always bark. I mean, everybody wants hair metal back. Everybody wants the ‘70s back, and it just doesn’t work that way. It’s not coming back.”

At least as far back as Elvis Presley, who was denounced by a bishop from Rhode Island for leading white fans “back to the jungle and animalism,” music has transgressed racial restrictions. Traditionalists, who want Nashville to reject the growing influence of hip-hop, glorify an era when country was more pure and less citified. But nothing short of a time machine can restore an era when rural and urban music were segregated.

To many young music fans, there’s no functional distinction between country and rap. “My nephew is 16,” muses Bryan, “and when he hears a country song he loves, it’s in his playlist. When he hears a Drake song he loves, it’s right in the same playlist.” This sense of casual musical integration is at least as pervasive in the South as it is in other regions, or else country fans would’ve wholesale rejected Bryan’s music.

Still, Bryan realizes that he has been repeating a few themes right to the brink of extinction. “I have enough intelligence to know I have to move the needle from singing about trucks and back roads and fishing.” He mentions “Pick It Up,” a song he co-wrote about setting a good example for his kids, from his most recent album, What Makes You Country. “Eight years ago, I would’ve never dreamed to put a song on my album that talks about fatherhood.”

But that album also includes “She’s a Hot One,” about a drunk girl at a club, wearing “little jeans and white tee,” as well as songs about fishing, tractors, boots, etc. Those Country Music Bingo songs are his security — his financial security, sure, if we’re being cynical, but also his emotional security, his reassurance that God is good, joy exists, and misfortune will not prevail. His boisterous demeanor, he acknowledges, rises directly from the deaths of his siblings. “I have a really clear idea on ‘Don’t take a second for granted,’ ” he says with a sigh. “You think about it every day. I mean, I don’t go a day where I don’t think about ‘What if my brother and sister were here?’ But you just have to understand, that wasn’t the plan.

‘I’m a pretty happy person. The loss we’ve dealt with has given me an appreciation of how precious and fragile life is. And yeah, I carry that mentality into my performances, and even into how I deal with people every day. When I meet people, I want them to leave going, ‘That guy doesn’t have a bad day.’ ”

Luke Bryan knows it’s time to leave hunting and fishing songs to other artists. He also knows his fans love those songs, and it’s his instinct to make crowds happy. How can he resolve the conflict? And, as he phrased it earlier, can he ever sing another song about hunting and fishing?

“Probably not,” he declares pensively, then breaks into a smile. “But once you say it for your kids, from his most recent album, What Makes You Country. “Eight years ago, I would’ve never dreamed to put a song on my album that talks about fatherhood.”

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As Nashville continues to evolve, the 100 movers, shakers and influencers on Billboard’s fourth annual Country Power Players list drove a $1.3 billion business in 2017, thanks in part to fans (finally) embracing streaming
YOU KNOW HOW WE got Jason to sign us?” Midland’s Mark Wystrach, riding an endorphin high after his band’s set at the Stagecoach Festival in Indio, Calif., saunters up to a backstage picnic table where Jason Owen sits, midinterview, sipping on a beer.

Without another word, Wystrach drops his Wranglers below his knees, lashing his blue-and-green boxer briefs.

It’s the kind of prank that could prompt glares of disapproval, but Owen, who co-manages the trio with Brand Management’s Matt Graham, doubles over with laughter. His pants back in place, Wystrach explains in all seriousness that Midland, which took home the Academy of Country Music Award for best new vocal duo or group in April, signed with Owen because “you have to be surrounded by people that you can trust and with whom you share the same vision. You’re literally putting your life in their hands.”

It’s a responsibility that the 41-year-old president/CEO of Sandbox Entertainment, which manages or co-manages a roster that includes Faith Hill, Little Big Town, Kacey Musgraves, Kelsea Ballerini, Dan + Shay and Devin Dawson, takes seriously. “I’m really close with my artists,” says Owen. “I vacation with them sometimes; I’ve been through [their] divorces. I need to get a full picture so I know how to navigate things.”

In the nearly eight years since he founded Sandbox, Owen’s personalized, creative approach to his artists and the example he has set as a powerful, openly gay talent manager in a traditionally conservative town has made him the effective leader of country’s progressive new guard. He thinks globally, respects but is not bound by the traditional methods of breaking artists, sees the genre’s potential as limitless and advocates for what he believes is right, as he did in March when he protested the Country Music Association’s appointment of Mike Huckabee to the board of its philanthropic foundation. In a respectful but impassioned letter to CMA CEO Sarah Trahern and its foundation’s director of community outreach, Tiffany Kerns, Owen — who has a 3-year-old son and 1-month-old twin daughters with his husband and partner of 12 years, Sam Easley — wrote that the former Arkansas governor’s anti-LGBTQ rhetoric “would suggest my family is morally beneath his and uses language that has a profoundly negative impact upon young people all across this country.” A day after the media revealed the letter, Huckabee huffily resigned from the board.

Owen prefers to keep the spotlight on his clients, and over the past year has negotiated a number of innovative opportunities for them from his offices in Nashville’s Green Hills neighborhood, where he employs a staff of 17 and shares a floor with former Vice President Al Gore. He arranged for Musgraves — who, like many female country acts, gets little radio airplay — to expand her fan base by opening for Harry Styles on his summer tour. He established the first residency at the historic Ryman Auditorium with Little Big Town and co-produces with Faith Hill Pickler & Ben, a syndicated talk show co-hosted by Kellie Pickler in which items featured on the set are available to buy through Home Shopping Network.

“Jason is a forward thinker,” says Scooter Braun, who co-manages Dan + Shay with Owen and is also an investment partner in Sandbox. “I learned from him to give an artist their time. I’m someone [who thinks] we’ve got to tell the story right away. Jason really allows the artist to be themselves and grow an incredible fan base over time.”

“I am never not blown away by the things that come off the top of his head,” says Grammy-winning songwriter Shane McAnally, co-president with Owen at the reactivated, Sony-distributed Monument Records imprint. “He is so good at coming up with creative ways to present artists.”

He showcased that creativity with the rollout of Musgraves’ latest album, Golden Hour. Instead of the typical country campaign of sending a single to radio, then releasing the album months later as the song peaks, MCA Nashville and Owen chose to release two songs simultaneously that conveyed the album’s story arc — about finding new love after a bad breakup — and opted for a shorter album-release window. Owen describes the strategy as “Bam! Here’s the new imaging, here’s

Executive Of The Year
JASON OWEN
The president/CEO of Sandbox Entertainment and manager of Faith Hill, Kacey Musgraves, Kelsea Ballerini and Little Big Town has emerged as the leader of country’s progressive new guard, which has no tolerance for homophobic politicians like Mike Huckabee.
Too many times we worry about repercussions. It was important for me to stand up for my family.

we’re going to go on tour. ‘But it’s all the other pieces that make real careers,’ he adds. The relationships Owen made producing Pickler & Ben, for example, led to a cookware line for Little Big Town’s Kimberly Schlapman.

From an early age, Owen was infatuated with country music, but even more so with the behind-the-scenes machinations. Growing up in Monticello, Ark. (population: 9,000), where his father ran a large chemical distribution company, Owen’s first show was The Judds when he was 10 or 11. “I was blown away,” he says, not only by the show was The Judds when he was 10 or 11. “I was blown away,” he says, not only by the show, but also by the way the band members were able to connect with the audience. “I saw the potential of global markets while at Sandbox Entertainment in 2011 with Twain as his first client. Then came Little Big Town, who, under Owen’s guidance, grew from a beloved but underperforming act to a bona fide headliner with its fifth album, 2012’s Tornado. Musgraves and the others followed, all operating on handshake deals.

While most country acts seldom stray outside of North America, Owen — who saw the potential of global markets while at Sandbox and with Columbia TriStar — works with his team to develop an international plan for all of his artists. Musgraves’ tour, for instance, will take her to Sweden, Germany and Holland before playing 11 U.K. dates in July. She’s slated to be the only country act on the bill at the Fuji Rock Festival in Naeba, Japan.

“Since I’ve been a manager, you can literally see the growth” of international demand for country music, he says, citing AEG’s annual C2C: Country to Country Festival in the United Kingdom as an example. “These fans know every word to every song.” He adds that growing a global fan base contributes to career longevity. Owen acquired some admirers of his own when he wrote to the CMA protesting Huckabee’s appointment due to his anti-gay-marriage stance. He was not alone in opposing the move, but his voice rang loudest. “I don’t regret it,” he says. “Too many times we worry about the repercussions. It was important for me to stand up for my family.”

With the controversy behind him, Owen is relieved to once again be focused on his roster. With the exception of Little Big Town and Hill, whose Soul2Soul outing with husband Tim McGraw was Billboard’s top country tour of 2017 (a new arena leg started May 31), most of Sandbox’s clients are still developing, which suits Owen just fine. “Do I want a full stadium tour for one of my acts or a couple of my acts? Of course I do,” he says. “But I think it comes when it’s meant to come.”

—MELINDA NEWMAN
AND WE PROUDLY RECOGNIZE ALL OF OUR NASHVILLE PLAYERS

ANDREA AMBROSIA
AMANDA ANCES
JOE ATAMIAN
SETH BAUGHER
MAX BRAUN
MARGARET BUSHART
Haley Conrad
CONNOR CRAWFORD
JENNY DELOACH
RYAN DENIS
KYLIE DOYLE
REBECCA DUKE
NADIA ELALIGHE
LYDIA GEORGE
CHARLIE GRAY
ZACH HARTLEY

JEFFREY HASSON
LINDSEY HASTINGS
NATE HERWEYER
TINA HILL
GREG HOFFMAN
BRITTANY JOHNSTON
MATT KORN
TODD LAPPIN
MARY LARIMER
KEITH LEVY
ALEXANDRA LIOUTAS
CHELSEY MAHONEY
PAIGE MALONEY
MITCH MANNING
SAM PARKER

YITZI PEETLUK
KEITH RICHARDS
MATT RUNNER
PAIGE RYAN
PAIGE SCRIBNER
HAMMOND SEAY
KEITH SHACKLEFORD
JEREMY SHPIZNER
CHARLA SMITH
JOSH SWANN
TIM WHITLINGER
MAX WIEBRECHT
CLINT WILEY
KRISTIN WINGARD
MIKE ZAK

PARADIGM PROUDLY WELCOMES
JACKIE NALPANT AND LENORE KINDER TO OUR NASHVILLE FAMILY!
Mike Dungan, 64  
Chairman/CEO, Universal Music Group Nashville

Cindy Mabe, 45  
President, Universal Music Group Nashville

A very platinum year

Led by Dungan and Mabe, UMGN has amassed some impressive stats over the past year-and-a-half. Chris Stapleton became the first artist since 1992 to hold the top three spots on Top Country Albums with 2015’s Traveller riding the jetstream of 2017’s From A Room: Volume 1 and Volume 2. And Sam Hunt’s “Body Like a Back Road” spent a record 34 weeks at No. 1 on Hot Country Songs. It was also the top-selling country track of 2017.

Fardi Timi New signee Carrie Underwood wasted no time in putting points on the board for Universal. Her music video for “The Champion” opened the Super Bowl Lil broadcast, served as the Winter Olympics theme and amassed 55.5 million total streams in the process. Meanwhile, rising star Jon Pardi’s 2016 album, California Sunrise, which Dungan likes to call “Buck Owens for a frat house,” yielded two top-three singles on Country Airplay in 2017.

Surprising Celebrity Country Fan Mabe “President Obama named Chris Stapleton’s ‘Millionaire’ No. 1 on Hot Country Songs. It was also the Volume 2 CHAIRMAN/CEO, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP NASHVILLE

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Seh T England, 32  
Partner/A&R Rep, Big Loud Records

Clay Hunnicutt, 50  
President, Big Loud Records

Craig Wiseman, 54  
Partner, Big Loud Records

Records success

While Big Loud’s operations include a successful publishing arm, run by veteran songwriter Craig Wiseman and producer Joey Moi, and a management division (which recently partnered with Maverick) overseen by Kevin “Chief” Zanuk, the company’s 3-year-old Big Loud Records label has caught fire in the past year. Among the four songs it has landed in the top 15 of the Country Airplay chart: Morgan Wallen’s “Up Down” (featuring Florida Georgia Line), Chris Lane’s “For Her” and Jake Owen’s “I Was Jack (You Were Dianne).”

Big Viral Yodeler In April, the Big Loud label partnered with Atlantic to sign 11-year-old “Walmart yodeling kid” Mason Ramsey. “This is the kind of artist who usually would go pop, but he wants to be in country,” says England.

He’s Over... Hunnicutt “Nashville traffic. It’s so terrible that I’m telling [everyone] in hopes that it will stop others from moving here.”

John Esposito, 62  
Chairman/CEO, Warner Music Nashville

A Nashville hat trick

After bonding with Kenny Chesney over a shared love of red wine and Bruce Springsteen, “Espo,” as he is known, signed the No Shoes Nation founder to Warner Nashville at the beginning of 2018. “What I saw in him was somebody who believes he’s got 30 or 40 more years of creating new music, and I was excited to be part of that,” he says. Esposito also helped Blake Shelton maintain momentum with his sixth No. 1 on the Top Country Albums chart, Texoma Shore, and introduced newcomer Devin Dawson with a No. 2 on the Country Airplay list for his debut single, “All on Me,” that has generated 122.2 million streams, and a No. 5 LP on the Top Country Albums tally, Dark Horse. “I’m fucking proud of being 62 and relevant in the music business,” says Esposito.

Recent Broadway Show That Inspired Him “Springsteen on Broadway. I’ve seen more than 50 concerts, but this show explores his story in a way that I had not yet experienced.”

Randy Goodman, 62  
Chairman/CEO, Sony Music Nashville

See page 66.

Gordon Kerr, 51  
CEO, Black River Entertainment

No. 1 status for “Legends” Kerr says that Kelsea Ballerini’s “Legends” hitting No. 1 on the Feb. 24 Country Airplay chart over seven months after its release “was a great moment for Kelsea and for anybody who’s involved with Kelsea.”

Musical Multitasking In addition to the label, Black River Entertainment operates a publishing division with a roster that includes Josh Osborne, who co-wrote Midland’s “Drinkin’ Problem.”

Keeping His Artists Country Strong “We just started MX Fitness with my son Mike Kerr. It’s available to Black River staff, songwriters and our artists. Mike will develop personalized wellness programs for their use at home and on the road.”

Jonathan Loba*  
Executive VP, BBR Music Group

Rebuiding from Route 91 Loba — and BBR Music Group’s marquee artist, Jason Aldean — found themselves in uncharted territory after the Route 91 Harvest festival shooting in Las Vegas on Oct. 1, 2017. “We had staff members who were in the middle of it,” says Loba, adding that his priorities became “making sure that BBR and I personally were giving them the resources they needed.” He also praises Aldean, who was onstage when the shooting began, and tour manager Jake LaGrone for taking care of their team. “Jason became a voice for the victims and, within his organization, a comforter, leader and therapist,” says Loba.

Moving Forward with Rearview In April, Aldean released Rearview Town, which debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200, becoming his fourth consecutive album to top the chart and the first country LP to do so in 2018. Promoting the set, however, meant that “everywhere Jason turned, questions about Las Vegas would resurface,” says Loba. “He had to keep reliving it, and he did it with class and grace. I’ve never been more proud of anybody I’ve worked with.”

David Macias, 53  
President, Thirty Tigers

A Sound No. 1 for Jason Isbell Under Macias’ direction, Thirty Tigers racked up $18.7 million in sales in 2017 and finished the year as the No. 4 indie label.

The ‘In’ Place for Outlaws During its 16 years in business, Thirty Tigers has expanded the parameters of both the country and singer-songwriter genres beyond what is in fashion commercially. “If we love the music and there is a vision as to how we can build it out [an artist], then we’re inclined to do it,” says Macias. Among the label’s successes: Jason Isbell & The 400 Unit’s The Nashville Sound, which was distributed and marketed by Thirty Tigers, debuted at No. 1 on the Top Country Albums chart and No. 4 on the all-genre Billboard 200 in July 2017. And so far this year, John Prine’s The Tree of Forgiveness and Blackberry Smoke’s Find a Light respectively reached Nos. 2 and 3.

Country Trend He’d Like to See Accelerated “The kind of music that Chris Stapleton and Midland make on the radio. Country is best when listeners are presented a broader spectrum of choices, and they clearly responded to those more traditional sounds. More, please.”

* Declined to reveal age

FOREVER CHANGED

“The tragedy at the Route 91 festival was country music and Nashville’s 9/11. It will forever be a part of us.”  — Jonathan Loba, BBR Music Group
To one of the best managers, star-makers, and friends we have the pleasure and honor to work with.

JASON OWEN

Thank you for your vision and leadership. Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition!

We love you,
Ali
and all your friends at AEG presents
The Renaissance Man

On the eve of his third anniversary leading Sony Music Nashville, Randy Goodman has remade the country music label group into a hothouse for new talent that has successfully harnessed streaming: "There is no playbook. We're figuring it out in real time."
On a bright Nashville morning, Randy Goodman fits a talk with Billboard between breakfast with Live Nation and a meeting with Apple Music. The following day, he leaves town for an off-site convocation with his executive team that marks almost three years since he took over as chairman/CEO at Sony Music Nashville. During that time, his new-artist evangelism on behalf of Maren Morris, Old Dominion, LANCO and streaming-social powerhouse houses Kane Brown and Luke Combs — all of whom delivered No. 1s on the Top Country Albums chart — have turned the label’s fortunes around. Brown even made history of sorts when he simultaneously topped all five of Billboard’s main country charts last October. The successes have helped make Sony Nashville the only label in town to post market-share growth in 2018 (through April 19), up almost one percentage point to 21.9 percent.

**LEANING INTO STREAMING** “If you look at our revenue at Sony Music Nashville, streaming is now No. 1 for us. It is probably 40 to 45 percent of our revenue, and our acts have had close to 40 percent market share in the streaming top 20 since the beginning of 2018. It allows me to talk to the people that put on these big awards shows and say, ‘You want to see what really is hot? Don’t look at the album chart. Look at the consumption chart. That’s where people are.’”

**WHY HE’S TALKING TO LIVE NATION** “Ticket bundles. We’ve got Kane Brown and Luke Combs, who are both doing exceptionally well. Historically, you would get maybe five, six, seven hits under your belt before you’d even begin to think about testing the waters with a headlining tour. But because there’s so much of a pull now from social media and streaming — particularly on acts like Kane and Luke — they’re sitting there with management and their agency, going, ‘Maybe we should go into some country C and D markets that people haven’t been in in 10 years and see if we can headline.’ Which is not different from when I was at RCA in the ’90s and Dave Matthews Band did a similar thing.”

**MAKING FEATURES WORK FOR THE FEATURED ARTIST** “It’s hard sometimes to connect the dots back. ‘The Middle’ has performed incredibly well for Zedd, but it’s difficult to use that feature to drive people back to Maren [Morris]. It did put Maren on the Billboard Music Awards with Zedd, and ideally some people are going to see her and say, ‘Wow, who is that? Does she have her own music?’”

**OLD DOMINION’S MATTHEW RAMEY ON WORKING WITH GOODMAN** “The thing I appreciate most about Randy is his collaborative spirit. The best leaders know the strengths of those around them. On the creative side, we collaborate with writers, musicians and producers. It’s nice to be able to carry that same mindset over to the business side.”

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**SHANE McANALLY, 43**
CEO, SMACK; CO-PRESIDENT, MONUMENT RECORDS

> Walker Hayes triple play

McAnally says that the sweetest victory of the current year was scoring a top 10 Country Airplay hit with Walker Hayes’ “You Broke Up With Me” in January. “We published it at SMACK, I produce him, he is on Monument, and my husband manages him,” says the outgoing McAnally, who only 10 years ago was constructing tents at the Stagecoach Festival. “That definitely felt like a big win.”

> AND HE’S A SUPERSTAR SONGWRITER

McAnally garnered song of the year nominations for Sam Hunt’s “Body Like a Back Road” from the Country Music Association (CMA) Awards, the Grammy Awards and the Academy of Country Music (ACM) Awards.

> HE’S OVER... “The assumption by people who do not live here that Nashville is homophobic and racist. It’s just not true.”

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**NORBERT NIX, 60**
GM/PARTNER, TRIPLE TIGERS RECORDS

> Winning from the beginning

Under Nix’s direction, Triple Tigers, which was established in late 2016, found success from the start. The first two singles released through the joint venture of Thirty Tigers, Triple 8 Management and Sony Music — Russell Dickerson’s “Yours” and Scotty McCreery’s “Five More Minutes” — topped the Country Airplay chart in the first quarter of 2018. And McCreery’s Seasons Change debuted at No. 1 on the Top Country Albums chart in March.

> ON THE SAME PAGE

Nix, a former Columbia Nashville vice president, says the early wins have a lot to do with “all three partners agreeing on what we’re signing and putting out. Now we just have to be able to say, ‘We’ve got more.’”

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**LESLY SIMON, 46**
GM, PEARL RECORDS

> Running Garth Brooks’ record label

Simon helped propel Garth Brooks to the top of the Country Airplay chart — for the first time in almost 10 years — with “Ask Me How I Know” on the artist’s own Pearl label. Brooks, the top-selling album artist of the Nielsen Music era with 72 million sold, was

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**KEN ROBOLD, 53**
EXECUTIVE VP/CIO, SONY MUSIC NASHVILLE

> JOHN ZARLING, 39
EXECUTIVE VP MARKETING AND NEW BUSINESS, SONY MUSIC NASHVILLE

> A year of firsts

Robold put Sony Nashville’s muscle behind recasting the country superstar mold with Kane Brown. “It’s a genre that’s pretty white,” says Robold. “Our challenge was, ‘Can we break through with a biracial background?’” Brown did just that, becoming the first artist to simultaneously hit No. 1 on all five of Billboard’s main country charts: Top Country Albums, Hot Country Songs, Country Airplay, Country Digital Song Sales and Country Streaming Songs. Meanwhile, Zarling, who moved to Sony Nashville from Big Machine in 2017, helmed last summer’s successful Dive Bar show partnership between Bud Light and Old Dominion, which helped propel the band’s Happy Endings album to No. 7 on the Billboard 200, its highest chart position to date.

> MARKETING 2.0

Zarling says he’s in the process of creating a cohesive marketing team at Sony Nashville “that can function like a modern-day agency.” He’s also seeking more partnerships and programs that “enhance the marketing of our artists so that we’re not always directly marketing from the label.”

> BIGGEST COUNTRY MUSIC STORY OF THE PAST YEAR

Robold

> It’s the first full year that the country music industry has been utilizing the consumption chart, so really it’s the first year that streaming became vital and all of the data became part of our lifeblood.”

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**RANDY GOODMAN, 62**
CHAIRMAN/CEO, SONY MUSIC NASHVILLE

> GROOMING BY LIBBY BARNES AT JANDYWORKS. ON-SITE PRODUCER: ASHLEY HORNE HERRING.

Music City is as inclusive an experience as it has been in its history, but we still have a ways to go. That Nashville isn’t a home to commercial black music is a failure of will and civic imagination.”

— David Macias, *Thirty Tigers*

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**JUNE 2, 2018 | WWW.BILLBOARD.COM**
also named entertainer of the year for the sixth time at the 2017 CMA Awards — a record there as well.

MORE TO COME: “Right now, [Brooks] is in the studio making new music and finishing the live album,” says Simon, who oversees Brooks’ Platinum catalog.

BIGGEST CHANGE IN NASHVILLE OVER THE LAST DECADE

“The number of women running companies, departments and leading the industry has risen exponentially in the last decade and is so important to the continued health and growth of this industry.”

JIMMY HARNEN, 55
EXECUTIVE VP, BIG MACHINE LABEL GROUP

Moving the Line forward

Harnen and his team helped make Florida Georgia Line’s collaboration with Bebe Rexha, “Meant to Be,” which was dually promoted to pop and country radio, a massive hit. The track has ruled Hot Country Songs for 26 weeks and is the top-selling country track of 2018 so far, with 746,000 copies sold. Along with its 2012 hit “Cruise,” FGL now owns two of the three longest-running No. 1s in the history of the 59-year-old chart. On the all-genre Billboard Hot 100, “Meant to Be” has reached No. 2, surpassing the No. 4 peak of “Cruise” in 2013.

IT’S GOOD TO BE YOUNG

Harnen also points to the breakthrough of Brett Young as a big win. Young, who took home the new male vocalist of the year trophy at the 2018 ACM Awards, has scored two No. 1s on Country Airplay: “In Case You Didn’t Know” (2017) and “Like I Loved You” (2018).

WHAT HE MISSES ABOUT THE NASHVILLE OF OLD

“There was a real quaintness and charm to the original Music Row and having all the offices in close proximity.”

STEVE HODGES, 53
EXECUTIVE VP PROMOTION AND ARTIST DEVELOPMENT,
SONY MUSIC NASHVILLE

Cultivating a new generation of No. 1 artists

Hodges and his promotion team notched No. 1s on the Hot Country Songs chart with all three of Sony’s country imprints: Luke Combs’ “When It Rains It Pours” for Columbia, Kane Brown’s “What Ifs” for RCA and LANCO’s “Greatest Love Story” for Arista.

RAISING KANE, AND PROUD OF IT

Hodges says the record-setting chart success (see Chart MVP, right) of Brown’s self-titled studio album, which has earned 971,000 equivalent album units and counting, and his single “What Ifs,” featuring Lauren Alaina, is a sign of country’s crossover potential in the years to come. “Kane has such an adoring and multi-genre fan base, the unpredictable and at times chaotic nature of the business, as well as the highs and lows that come with creative careers.

“You’re either living life at 10 or one. There’s no middle ground,” says Martha Earls, owner of efg Management and manager of rising star Kane Brown. She is married to Kent Earls, vp/GM of Brown’s music publisher, Universal Music Publishing Group Nashville.

There’s no misconception that there won’t be late-night phone calls and [working] weekends,” says Amazon Music senior label relations manager Kelly Rich, who’s married to BMLG COO Andrew Kautz. The personal and professional often blur in the music industry, and SESAC vp creative services Shannan Hatch says that having a spouse in the business makes it easier for her to navigate that fuzzy boundary. She and her husband, songwriter (and SESAC affiliate) Rob Hatch, are used to attending industry events together and working the room separately without worrying about the other feeling neglected. It also means that when Rob gets a last-minute call to go on the road with an artist who wants to collaborate, the couple doesn’t squabble over fitting the gig into Shannan and their kids’ schedules.

Spouses Nicolle Galyon and Rodney Clawson are among Nashville’s top songwriters, and Galyon says it actually makes life easier, even when one’s work directly affects the other. “I don’t want to have to explain how it feels when a song doesn’t make the record, because he knows,” says Galyon. She recalls the time Clawson’s “American Kids” became the lead single on Kenny Chesney’s The Big Revival, while a song of Galyon’s was cut from the album. On Chesney’s next LP, Cosmic Hallelujah, Galyon’s “All the Pretty Girls” was chosen, while Clawson came up empty. Galyon adds that people who don’t know them will sometimes assume she and Clawson are competitive. “We’re really competitive with everyone but each other,” she says. “If it’s not going to happen for me, who else in the whole world would I want it to happen for? It’s really cool to have somebody else to be excited about.” —PHYLLIS STARK

Illustrations by Joe Mckendry
We proudly congratulate our colleagues

NICK MEINEMA
and
CURT MOTLEY

on being named to the

billboard
Country Power Players list
he says. “He represents a lot of what country music has to offer the rest of the world.”

SURPRISING COUNTRY MUSIC FAN “You see Alice Cooper around town now and again, which is odd.”

CARSON JAMES, 61
SENIOR VP PROMOTION, BBR MUSIC GROUP
*Delivering on BMG’s bet*
James admits there was some internal hand-wringing when BBR went from being founder Benny Brown’s indie label to a division of the BMG empire in early 2017. But after successes by Dustin Lynch (“Small Town Boy” became his fifth consecutive No. 1 Country Airplay single last September, moving 544,000 downloads and 232.5 million streams) and Jason Aldean (Rearview Town topped Top Country Albums and the Billboard 200 in April), James reports the transition has been quite productive, and BMG’s considerable resources have given him more muscle to do his job. “Information is power,” he says.

OUT-OF-THE-BOX WORK CULTURE “We’re already seeing it: A more traditional country sound is making its way back onto the airwaves. No one is selling more albums than Chris Stapleton.”

COUNTRY MUSIC TREND HE’D LIKE TO SEE ACCELERATED “His influences and [create] music that is uniquely his,” says Borman. "It’s something I preach every day." But that story means nothing without context. "Every artist has a story, partners understand their listeners' behavior," says Williams, adding: "Every artist has a story, but that story means nothing without context. It’s something I preach every day."

BIGGEST COUNTRY MUSIC STORY OF THE PAST YEAR "Route 91. Our industry was changed forever with stories of unrest and fear, but [also] stories of heroism and an industry united in the face of senseless violence."

NASHVILLE ★ REMASTERED ★

COMFORT FOOD, WITH A SIDE OF HISTORY
WOOLWORTH ON 5TH RE-CREATES THE FORMER NASHVILLE FIVE-AND-DIME STORE’S SEGREGATED LUNCH COUNTER THAT SPARKED CIVIL RIGHTS PROTESTS AND, EVENTUALLY, CHANGE

"History lends legitimacy to any endeavor," says Tom Morales, CEO of Nashville restaurant group TomKats Hospitality, which opened Woolworth on 5th in February. Dating from the 1890s, the downtown Nashville building — most recently a Dollar General store — opened as a Woolworth five-and-dime in 1913. In 1960, the civil rights protests against the store’s refusal to serve blacks at its lunch counter eventually led to its desegregation.

"It is not just a historic building," says Morales. "It’s emotional experience. Some people remember their mothers working here; others remember pain." Woolworth on 5th is not meant to appropriate hardships, Morales points out, but to illuminate a chapter in Nashville history. Through the painstaking efforts of local firm Tuck-Hinton Architects, original terrazzo floors and cast-iron railings preserve Woolworth’s art deco roots. And the new lunch counter faithfully mimics the ’60s version.

This time around, however, all patrons are welcome to savor updated comfort food. If they are wise, they will time their visits to coincide with the semimonthly Big Idea series. Hosted by actor Barry Scott, these interactive performances examine historic moments and personalities, such as Rosa Parks, on the country’s future.

— RUA AKKAM

ROYCE RISSE, 48
SENIOR VP PROMOTION, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP NASHVILLE
*Helped Stapleton land his first No. 1 radio hit*
In March, Risser and his team celebrated Chris Stapleton’s first No. 1 single on Country Airplay, “Broken Halos.” Other big wins include the record-setting success of Sam Hunt’s “Body Like a Back Road,” the third-best-selling song of 2017 across all genres with 2 million downloads.

OUT-OF-THE-BOX WORK CULTURE Staffers in Risser’s promotion department are as likely to jump out of boxes to prank each other as they are to work a record to the top of the Country Airplay chart, which they have done in the past year with Jordan Davis, Luke Bryan, Darius Rucker and Billy Currington. “There’s enough stress built into the job that humor and fun, and people that you love and trust, makes you actually enjoy coming to work,” he says.

WHAT HE MISSES ABOUT THE NASHVILLE OF OLD “Opryland [theme park]. I loved that place. It was so unique to Nashville. I really wish I could’ve taken my kids there. Bums me out.”

KRISTEN WILLIAMS, 38
SENIOR VP RADIO AND STREAMING, WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE
*Developed Devin Dawson*
Williams puts the chart success of Devin Dawson’s debut LP, Dark Horse, which hit No. 5 on Top Country Albums, and first single “All on Me,” which surged to No. 2 on Country Airplay, at the top of her wins column. “Devin is arguably the most inspiring artist-development story of the year,” she says. “He’s defying the norm and defining the future.”

HELPING RADIO BENEFIT FROM STREAMING Williams says that since Warner Nashville’s radio and streaming promotion teams were combined, “everyone on my team is fluent in how to pull streaming and consumption data, then contextualize it for individual radio markets.” That data is “critical in helping our radio partners understand their listeners’ behavior,” says Williams, adding: “Every artist has a story, but that story means nothing without context. It’s something I preach every day.”

BRANDON BLACKSTOCK, 41
FOUNDER/CEO, BORMAN ENTERTAINMENT
*Urban’s on fire*
Borman says it was a “banner year” for his firm, due in large part to marquee client Keith Urban, who began 2017 with “Blue Ain’t Your Color” atop Hot Country Songs. It held that position for 12 straight weeks, then followed up that success with “The Fighter,” which peaked at No. 2 on the chart, and “Female,” which reached No. 11. And 2018 looks like another winner. Urban’s latest release, Graffiti U, debuted at No. 1 on Top Country Albums in May, earning 145,000 equivalent album units in its first week. “It always amazes me how Keith is able to assimilate his influences and [create] music that is uniquely his,” says Borman.

The artists are coaches on the 14th season of The Voice, and both had fall 2017 releases high on the charts: Shelton’s Texoma Shore hit No. 1 on Top Country Albums in November and became his 11th album to reach the top 10 on the Billboard 200. It has also generated 336,000 album consumption units. Clarkson’s Meaning of Life became her eighth consecutive top-three release on the Billboard 200.

The father-and-son team had a great year with Blake Shelton and Kelly Clarkson, who has been married to Brandon since 2013.
WHAT A WEEK AT THE OPRY!

HERE'S TO ALL THE ARTISTS APPEARING JUNE 2–9 ON THE SHOW THAT MADE COUNTRY MUSIC FAMOUS.

PLUS, THE OPRY CELEBRATES ITS HISTORIC FIRST PERFORMANCE AT BONNAROO MUSIC & ARTS FESTIVAL
SUNDAY, JUNE 10

FEATURING PERFORMANCES BY
OLD CROW MEDICINE SHOW • BOBBY BARE
DEL MCCOURY BAND • JOSHUA HEDLEY
LANCO • MAGGIE ROSE • NIKKI LANE
OPRY SQUARE DANCERS • RIDERS IN THE SKY

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMMITMENT TO THE OPRY THIS WEEK AND ALL YEAR.

GRAND OLE OPRY
From left: Opry members Janson, Joe Don Rooney and LeVox of Rascal Flatts; Williams and Jay DeMarcus of Rascal Flatts (also a member) photographed by Cameron Powell on May 8 at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville.
As guardian of the Grand Ole Opry’s illustrious 93-year-old legacy, Williams points to 2018 Opry membership invitations extended to Chris Janson, 32, and Bobby Bare, 83, as a reflection of the institution’s scope. “It’s important to us to represent the full range of country artists,” says Williams, who notes that Ashley McBryde’s bluesy Southern rock, Lukas Nelson’s cowboy surf and Devin Dawson’s soulful country have all recently made Opry stage debuts. “We’ve got an amazing past,” adds Williams, “but our eye is also on the future.”

Williams is also working to impart the Opry’s sensibility beyond Nashville. Since last October, Opry Entertainment has opened three offshoot locations: Ole Red Nashville and Oklahoma’s Ole Red Tishomingo, a pair of upscale honky-tonks with Opry member and partner Blake Shelton, and Opry City Stage, a Times Square satellite in New York. As Williams explains, “I want to tie all this together in a way that engages more with the artistic community.”

**BIGGEST COUNTRY MUSIC STORY OF THE PAST YEAR**

“Sadly, it was the Route 91 tragedy, but there were positive stories as well. Vince Gill became an Eagle. Garth Brooks concluded the biggest tour ever by a solo artist. The Mother Church of Country Music — the Ryman Auditorium — celebrated its 125th anniversary, including the first yearlong residency featuring Little Big Town.”

**WHY COUNTRY ARTISTS AVOID POLITICS TODAY**

“There has never been a time when all country music was political. Hank Williams’ music wasn’t overtly political, nor was the music of Patsy Cline. On the other hand, Johnny Cash and Loretta Lynn tackled social and political issues, alienating radio stations and potential fans in the process. These days, sped and amplified by the immediacy of the internet, reactions to differing opinions can be ferocious. Tolerance and respect for other views are easily lost. Kudos to artists who are compelled to speak their minds on controversial issues. But who can blame any artist who doesn’t?”

**RASCAL FLATTS FRONTMAN GARY LEVOX ON WILLIAMS**

“Sally has always been a powerhouse within our industry. It has been a privilege to work with her over the years and to see such a strong woman leading the charge at the Opry now, which has always been a special place for us. It’s exciting to see her continue to excel.”

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**The Legacy Builder**

Protective of the Grand Ole Opry’s 93-year-old history but dedicated to ensuring its future, Sally Williams welcomes both veterans and country’s cutting edge — like Devin Dawson and Ashley McBryde — to the Nashville landmark’s storied stage.
**POLITICS AND POLARIZATION**

“Country music is about community, and in today’s environment, politics is just simply not part of that scenario.”

— Mary Hilliard Harrington, Red Light Management

entertainer of the year for the sixth time at the 2017 CMA Awards — a record as well.

NO TIME TO REST After finishing a three-year tour that sold a reported 6.4 million tickets, Brooks is in the studio readying a new album.

**MARTHA EARLS, 40**

OWNER/CREATIVITY PRINCIPAL, EFG MGMT

★ Kane Brown is EFG’s BFD

Earls says that the achievement of the last year was seeing Kane Brown, who was living with his grandmother when she began managing him less than three years ago, become the first artist to simultaneously top all five of Billboard’s main country charts.

#SQUADGOAL: CROSSOVER SUCCESS The coming year is about raising awareness of Brown beyond the country genre. “Breaking through to country radio was truly something that two years ago I would have said, ‘I hope this happens. I don’t know,’” says Earls, whose husband, Kent, also appears on this list. “Topping all five charts was a turning point for Kane. I think achieving that gave him a lot more respect in Nashville, which is something I feel like we’re constantly fighting for.”

RECENT BOOK THAT INSPIRED HER “Magdalene” by Marie Howe. It’s written from the perspective of Mary Magdalene, if she was living right now. It’s the story of her life and shows the complexity of being a female.”

**ANN EDELBLUTE**

OWNER, THE HQ

★ No one champions Underwood like her

The Milwaukee-born Edelblute flies beneath the radar while steering every aspect of Carrie Underwood’s recording, touring and lifestyle empire. During the past year she oversaw negotiations with NBC Sports for Underwood’s No. 3 Digital Song Sales hit “The Champion” (featuring Ludacris) to open the Super Bowl and also appear during NBC’s coverage of the 2018 Winter Olympics.

BOUNCING BACK Underwood’s serious fall while walking her dogs in late 2017 — which necessitated surgery on her wrist and over 40 stitches on her face — hasn’t slowed her. The singer-songwriter recently hosted a fitness event on behalf of her CALIA workout line and unveiled her new single, “Cry Pretty,” during a dramatic performance at the ACM Awards in April. The track has since become her sixth No. 1 on Country Digital Song Sales, moving over 127,000 downloads. Underwood — who teased a new album that is due in September — also nabbed her 14th ACM trophy for “The Fighter,” a collaboration with pal Keith Urban.

**CORAN CAPSHAW, 60**

FOUNDER, RED LIGHT MANAGEMENT

**BRAD BELANGER, 43**

MANAGER, RED LIGHT MANAGEMENT; OWNER, HOMESTEAD MANAGEMENT

**MARY HILLIARD HARRINGTON, 41**

MANAGER, RED LIGHT MANAGEMENT

**TOM LORD, 42**

MARKETING, RED LIGHT MANAGEMENT

**JANET WEIR, 43**

MANAGER, RED LIGHT MANAGEMENT; OWNER, 42 ENT

★ Repping the top country stars of today Capshaw personally manages Lady Antebellum and crossover phenom Chris Stapleton, whose Traveller went triple-platinum in May. Belanger paved the way for Sam Hunt to drive “Body Like a Back Road” to a record 34 weeks atop Hot Country Songs, while Weir helped Maren Morris earn her first two No. 1s (“I Could Use a Love Song” on Country Airplay and “The Middle” on Mainstream Top 40). Harrington has worked with Dierks Bentley to prep his latest, The Mountain, for a June 8 release and to organize his hot-ticket Seven Peaks Music Festival. And with duties spanning the entire RLM roster, Lord worked magic at the ACM Awards, where Stapleton received the most noms — eight — and won two.

GROOMING NEW TALENT Red Light's roster is star-packed — “[Universal Nashville] has the largest market share in town, and Red Light reps about 17 of their acts,” says Davis. “We invest in a larger team of people so we can solve more problems and create more success,” says Couri of Triple 8’s team of 38, which manages a roster that includes Joe Nichols, Chase Rice, Eli Young Band and McCreery.

**VIRGINIA DAVIS, 37**

MANAGING PARTNER/FOUNDER, G MAJOR MGMT

★ An “Unforgettable” year with Thomas Rhett Kicking off his first arena-headlining tour in 2017, Davis’ longtime client Thomas Rhett advanced from support act to main attraction, selling out 27 of 34 U.S. shows. The 28-year-old singer’s third LP, Life Changes, added to his momentum, yielding Rhett’s eighth, ninth and 10th No. 1s on Country Airplay (“Craving You,” featuring Maren Morris; “Unforgettable”; and “Marry Me,” respectively) and his first No. 1s on the Billboard 200, Top Album Sales and Top Country Albums charts. “I don’t look at last year as a breakthrough, but as a culmination of all the work that led up to it,” says Davis.

**BOB DOYLE, 70**

OWNER/PRESIDENT, MAJOR BOB MUSIC/BOB DOYLE & ASSOCIATES

★ Garth’s co-pilot Doyle’s superstar artist Garth Brooks topped the Country Airplay chart for the first time in nearly 10 years last October with “Ask Me How I Know,” his 19th time atop the tally. The song, released on his own Pearl label, was the second single from his Gunslinger album, which was released in 2016. It’s the latest chapter in an epic career that Doyle has managed since its beginning. Brooks is the top-selling artist of the Nielsen Music era, with 72 million albums sold. He was also named
SONY MUSIC NASHVILLE...
CHANGING THE 2018 STORYLINE...

YTD 93% OF #1 COUNTRY ON-DEMAND STREAMING SONGS

52% OF TOP 10 COUNTRY ON-DEMAND STREAMING SONGS

67% OF #1 TOP COUNTRY ALBUMS

*Data through April 12, 2018*
KERRI EDWARDS*
FOUNDER/PRESIDENT, KP ENTERTAINMENT

Making Luke Bryan an American Idol
Luke Bryan, who Edwards co-manages with Red Light, notched his 19th No. 1 Country Airplay hit in 10 years with “Most People Are Good”; sold 290,000 copies of his 2017 No. 1 Top Country Albums release, What Makes You Country; and got a seat at the judges’ table on American Idol. He’s also about to headline a tour that will have him playing Major League Baseball’s Wrigley and Ford fields.

TEACHING UNDERDOGS NEW TRICKS Bryan was an unknown songwriter when Edwards left music publishing to manage him 15 years ago. She partnered with Coran Capshaw and Red Light for extra clout and now puts that leverage to use for KP clients Cole Swindell, who scored his fifth platinum single, and Jon Pardi, who scored his third consecutive Top 10 hit. “We leverage to use for KP clients Cole Swindell, leverage to use for KP clients Cole Swindell, leverage to use for KP clients Cole Swindell, leverage to use for KP clients Cole Swindell.”

ALEXIS SOLER rebubbed the galleries and restaurants, We-Ho’s No. 308 and Old Glory, fell owner of Nashville bars
In 2010, Alexis Soler, the quality cafe Cubano and upbringing. Between the Cocktail Club in the spring, Samaritan Missionary Baptist Church to unveil Falcon and isn’t a corporate chain,” Edwards says. Adorned with cosmopolitan community.

MARION KRAFT, 53
CEO, SHOPKEEPER MANAGEMENT

Ushered in the Lambert generation
With Kraft’s guidance, client Miranda Lambert has become the ACM’s winningest artist of all time. In April, she was named female vocalist of the year for the ninth consecutive time.

WOMEN GUIDING WOMEN Kraft, who leads an all-female executive team, says ShopKeeper’s artists — which also include Tenille Townes, Ashley Monroe and her supergroup with Lambert, Pistol Annies — “are our bosses. We all figure out what the music says and we take it where it belongs.” Says Kraft: “That means knocking on lots of doors. We continue to raise the flag for female voices.”

D ALE MORRIS, 81
PRESIDENT, D ALE MORRIS & ASSOCIATES/MORRIS HIGHAM MANAGEMENT

CLINT HIGHAM, 46
PRESIDENT/PARTNER, MORRIS HIGHAM MANAGEMENT

Sunny days for Chesney and Old Dominion Key client Kenny Chesney’s current Trip Around the Sun Tour is on target to gross “north of $100 million” from 43 shows, and has already sold over 1 million tickets, says Higham. Old Dominion has had a breakthrough year as well. The five-piece band crested the Top Country Albums chart for the first time last September with Happy Endings, earned its fourth and fifth top five hits on Hot Country Songs and, in April, beat out Little Big Town and Lady Antebellum for the vocal group of the year honor at the ACM Awards.

PAYING IT FORWARD For Higham, artist development is a favorite part of the job, one that he says has largely shifted from labels to managers in recent years. “I don’t want to leave a certain moment in time with an artist. I want the whole career,” he says. Mentoring others, as Morris mentored Higham when he hired him 25 years ago, is also a priority. “Nothing thrills me more than to see somebody else be successful and knowing you had something to do with it,” says Higham.

BIGGEST COUNTRY MUSIC STORY OF THE PAST YEAR Higham “There really wasn’t one. You look back at the Outlaw days, and those guys lived their music and truth. I’m ready for someone to shake it up.”

JOHN PEETS, 51
FOUNDER, D PRIME SOUTH

Building Eric Church’s flock
Peets is a guru for Nashville mavericks. He counsels his artists to “look more inward than outward” — to be themselves and color outside the boundaries of the country radio and publishing ecosystems. In 2017, that meant 896,620 tickets sold for country-rock titan Eric Church (Billboard Boxscore’s No. 2 country tour of 2017, with a total gross of almost $55 million from 65 shows). It also led to vocal duo of the year wins for Brothers Osborne at both the 2017 CMA Awards and 2018 ACM Awards. And rising star Ashley McBryde’s hard-living songs drove her Warner Bros. Nashville debut, Girl Going Nowhere, to a No. 7 debut on the Top Country Albums list.

SCOTT SIMAN, 63
PRESIDENT, EM.CO

CEO of Tim McGraw Inc.
As head of Tim McGraw’s management company, Siman was instrumental in putting together Soul2Soul. McGraw and wife Faith Hill’s first co-headlining tour in nearly two decades. The country superstars hit the road in April 2017 and grossed $71.3 million in the first six months, earning them the Legend of Live honor at the 2017 Billboard Touring Awards. They’ve just embarked on another run of shows.

FILM AND FITNESS Siman reps McGraw in all pursuits, which led to his involvement in the production of Showtime’s 2017 documentary about the Soul2Soul tour and the upcoming launch of a line of McGraw-branded gyms. “It is easier to tell people we manage Tim,” says Siman, “but I like to tell people it’s like we’re the CEO of his businesses.”

BIGGEST CHANGE OF THE LAST DECADE IN NASHVILLE
“‘You’ve got to love the Predators’ run at the Stanley Cup.”

In 2010, Alexis Soler, the owner of Nashville bars No. 308 and Old Glory, fell in love with Wedgewood-Houston, the space-declic industrial neighborhood just south of downtown Nashville.

Now booming with art galleries and restaurants, We-Ho, as locals call it, is the site of Soler’s new two-concept project with partners Andy Knepshield, Angela Laino and Freddy Schwenk: the Falcon and Flamingo.

Soler rehabbed the rundown, two-story Good Samaritan Missionary Baptist Church to unveil Falcon Coffee, followed by Flamingo Cocktail Club in the spring, both inspired by her Miami upbringing. Between the quality cafe Cubano and plant-based food menu that includes guava empanadas and seitan BLTs, Falcon aims to appeal to the artsy, cosmopolitan community.

“People here need a coffee spot that isn’t pretentious and isn’t a corporate chain,” she says. Adorned with a wood- clad ceiling and salvaged light fixtures, Falcon is a homely contrast to Flamingo’s dramatic hues of burnt orange, gold and dark blue, which were inspired by ‘70s nightclubs from Soler’s hometown.

“When I visited Nashville I didn’t want to leave,” says Soler of her impromptu relocation. “Miami isn’t real life.” Yet in Wedgewood-Houston, for an evening it certainly can be.

— K.K.
CONGRATULATIONS!

We join in celebrating our colleagues, Joel Katz and Jess Rosen, for being named to the Billboard Country Power Players list for the fourth consecutive year.

We salute your shared passion for music and entertainment.

From Your GT Family

Joel A. Katz
Atlanta Founding Shareholder; Atlanta Co-Managing Shareholder Emeritus; Chair, Global Entertainment and Media Practice

Jess L. Rosen
Shareholder; Co-Chair, Atlanta Entertainment and Media Practice
IS THE RESISTANCE COMING TO NASHVILLE?

Opposition to the CMA’s Mike Huckabee appointment and chagrin over Shania Twain’s pro-Trump comment suggest the country music industry may be ready for a political makeover.

By Marissa R. Moss  Illustration by Alex Williamson

Not long after the Dixie Chicks were exiled from the country universe in 2003 following Natalie Maines’ declaration, onstage in London, that they were “ashamed the president of the United States [George W. Bush] is from Texas,” a group that dubbed itself Music Row Democrats formed in Nashville. At first comprising 20 executives and songwriters, it soon blossomed into the thousands.

The goal of the organization was to help the town, known for its conservative base, elect left-leaning candidates and reveal Nashville for what it really is: a place where a surprising number of progressive liberals work in a musical genre that caters to a core conservative audience.

Fifteen years later, this contrast has never been more apparent. The past year in Nashville — a city that consistently votes blue — has transformed the town from comfortably silent to one vociferously at odds with the conservative political agenda.

Last October, the shooting at the Route 91 Harvest festival in Las Vegas rocked the country music community and its pro-gun culture. Five months later, the Country Music Association (CMA) — the symbolic brain trust of Nashville’s music business — ran afoul of Music Row’s increasingly liberal power base when it announced that it was installing gay-marriage opponents, National Rifle Association (NRA) proponent and former governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee on its foundation board. (He resigned days later.)

In the wake of those developments — and the local music industry’s reaction to them — many are wondering if Nashville is finally ready for a political transformation.

“In my time working in music, I’ve witnessed what has felt like a shift from conservative Music Row-slash-country music to seeing artists speak out more on issues that resonate with the left side,” says one industry insider, who, along with several other sources interviewed for this story, requested anonymity given the sensitive nature of the topic.

“Artists and the industry realize things have changed,” says the source, adding, “it’s less of a country music thing than it is a generational shift.”

The Music Row Democrats have since disbanded, but in May, a new group formed with the goal of empowering artists and industry workers to speak out where they can, including supplying them with information and support to deal with Nashville’s political dissonance. Twenty-six members of the city’s music industry met at Creative Artists Agency’s downtown office to discuss next steps and form an as-yet-unnamed consortium similar to Music Row Democrats, with Tennessee Democratic party chief Mary Mancini present.

“A lot of immediate focus will be on getting folks registered,” says a publicist who attended the meeting. “The topic of voter registration is so completely nonpartisan, the hope is that stars on every level would agree to do a PSA.”

Chances are, some will. Kacey Musgraves, Brothers Osborne, Maren Morris, Charlie Worsham, Margo Price and Kip Moore are among the artists who have put their beliefs on display, as has country institution Tim McGraw, who supports same-sex marriage and gun control. Likewise, some of the town’s top executives have contributed to liberal causes: For example, according to Federal Election Commission records, Universal Music Group Nashville chairman/CEO Mike Dungan has contributed at least $12,300 to Democratic organizations and candidates between 2004 and 2017, and Big Machine Label Group president/CEO Scott Borchetta gave nearly $3,000 to Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign.

That said, local music-industry workers maintain that real change won’t happen until more executives voice their progressive views. “If one label head would talk, the floodgates would open,” says a longtime insider.

Few in Nashville’s music circles have piped up over the past two years, but when they have, the results have been telling. In 2017, weeks after the Route 91 shooting, the CMA Awards attempted to rein in political questions on the red carpet by imposing media restrictions. When met with resistance by local reporters and even awards host Brad Paisley on Twitter, it reversed the decision.

And sources say Huckabee’s resignation from the CMA’s foundation board was prompted in part by artists who privately complained to the association.

The loudest voice of opposition, however, came from talent manager Jason Owen, the openly gay owner of Sandbox Entertainment and co-president of Monument Records, who sent a letter of protest to the CMA that leaked to the media.

NRA Country, the organization’s link to country-music gun enthusiasts, ran into similar problems after the Route 91 shooting when the genre’s tradition of gun culture felt grossly out of step with...
nationwide calls for sensible firearm laws. Though NRA Country was previously supported by Florida Georgia Line and Luke Combs, artists began cutting ties in the wake of the Las Vegas massacre and the Parkland, Fla., high school shooting in February. This prompted a redesign of NRA Country’s website that carries no mention of country music acts.

Most recently, in the days following Shania Twain’s comment in April to U.K. newspaper The Guardian that were she not Canadian she would have voted for Donald Trump “because, even though he was offensive, he seemed honest,” the country superstar wound up apologizing on Twitter. Twain got a bit of the blowback that the Dixie Chicks had experienced in 2003, but this time it was opponents of the Republican president who vowed to never listen to her again.

These developments indicate that Nashville’s political climate is indeed changing, but the long-time industry insider notes there’s still one major obstacle when it comes to artists speaking their minds. “They’re scared of radio,” says the source.

Radio remains country’s top tastemaker, and the genre is dominated by the Cumulus and Cox broadcast groups with ownership and listener demographics that lean heavily conservative. (In 2014, for example, Cumulus gave tens of thousands of dollars to Ben Carson’s presidential campaign.)

In 2007, when the Dixie Chicks won five Grammy Awards, two for their unapologetic take on the Bush controversy, “Not Ready to Make Nice,” country radio still kept them off the airwaves despite Bush’s falling popularity. In an interview with the Associated Press at the time, KXNP-FM North Platte, Neb., program director Tony Lama predicted his listeners were “outraged” by the Grammy wins. “This is rural, conservative America,” he said.

Pitfalls also exist in the live sector, such as at the Rock the South country music festival in Cullman, Ala., which is sponsored in part by Vans Sporting Goods, a retailer of AR-15s. The title sponsor of the Bi-Mart Willamette Country Music Festival in Brownsville, Ore., also sells firearms (although it does support limited restrictions). Artists who publicly support gun reform could look hypocritical if they play festivals supported by firearms dealers.

It’s the kind of Catch-22 that makes some skeptical that Nashville will ever truly escape its conservative cage. Political strategist David “Mudcat” Saunders, known for his work to elect Virginia Democrats Gov. Mark Warner and Sen. Jim Webb, has tried for years to galvanize the city’s left-leaning members, but, he says, “Nashville embodies the soul of rural America.”

“I don’t fault artists for choosing to stay out of politics publicly. It can be career suicide,” says Abe Stoklasa, one of few Music Row songwriters who has been vocally anti-Trump.

For those who can’t resist, how best to express one’s liberal views in Nashville is also a quandary. Country singer-songwriter Charlie Worsham, who supports gun control, says that instead of taking to Twitter, which he likens to “lobbing a hand grenade and running,” correcting fans who use racial slurs or putting time into a nonprofit carries more weight. A Nashville publicist also notes there’s a lot of below-the-radar “inner-industry bonding in the wake of these optically mishandled situations.”

Time will reveal whether real change has come to Nashville. If it does, Worsham predicts it will be gradual. “Maybe it’s not a big op-ed,” he says. “Maybe it’s a thousand small gestures.”
**Artists from the ’90s and early aughts are seeing a resurgence in popularity. For some, their best years are around the corner.**

— Nick Meinen, United Talent Agency

**CLARENCE SPALDING, 61**
PARTNER, MAVERICK

**Steering the Aldean machine**
In April, *Rearview Town* became Jason Aldean’s fourth consecutive album to debut at No. 1 on the Billboard 200. It earned 183,000 equivalent album units in its first week — the biggest haul for a country studio album since Chris Stapleton’s *From A Room: Volume I* in 2017. Two days after *Rearview Town*’s release, Aldean scored his third consecutive entertainer of the year ACM Award. His victory was all the more meaningful following the horror of the Route 91 shooting, which began while the singer-guitarist was onstage. “Our artists use their music and performances to show that evil won’t win,” says Spalding.

**REBA’S RENAISSANCE**
Spalding points to client Reba McEntire’s Grammy win for best roots gospel album and her ACM Awards hosting gig as the beginning of a new chapter in her career.

**ALI HARNELL, 50**
SENIOR VP GLOBAL TOURING, AEG PRESENTS

**Bragging rights**
Harnell promoted tours with Little Big Town, Kacey Musgraves and Midland.

**COUNTRY’S U.K. AMBASSADOR**
Promoted to her current title in May, Harnell continues to program and grow AEG Presents’ successful C2C festival at the O2 Arena in London, Dublin and Glasgow, which in 2018 was headlined by Tim McGraw and Faith Hill. And country is not her only game: Harnell also manages pop group The Shadowboxers, who are opening for Justin Timberlake on his Man of the Woods Tour.

**RECENT TV SERIES CHARACTER THAT INSPIRED HER**
“*The Chi.*”

**DARIN MURPHY, 51**
CO-HEADS, CAA MUSIC NASHVILLE

**ROD ESSIG, 69**
FOUNDOERS, CAA MUSIC NASHVILLE

**Booking bonanza**
CAA’s Nashville quartet has orchestrated some of the hottest country tours of the past year, including an 80-date sold-out North American tour for Tim McGraw and Faith Hill that grossed close to $79 million (another 25-date leg began in May); a run of Zac Brown Band stadium/ amphitheater shows in 2017 as well as 2018 plays with the Eagles; Keith Urban’s *Graffiti U* summer tour with Kelsea Ballerin, which is on track to gross over $30 million, according to the agency; and the extension of Luke Combs’ first headlining run with 25 new North American dates.

**SHANIA’S ON TYA**
CAA reports that a 70-city Shania Twain world tour routed by Dennis is on track to generate over $75 million in revenue.

**JOHN HUIE, 62**
SENIOR VP PROGRAMMING AND ARTIST RELATIONS, OPRY ENTERTAINMENT; GM, GRAND OLE OPRY

**See page 72.**

**SALLY WILLIAMS, 46**
SENIOR VP PROGRAMMING AND ARTIST RELATIONS, OPRY

**BRIAN TRAEGER, 37**
PRESIDENT OF NASHVILLE OFFICE, PARADIGM TALENT AGENCY

**Nonconformists wanted**
Levine says he’s most proud of working with artists who don’t conform to the “Nashville formula,” including Sturgill Simpson, Margo Price and Anderson East. “We continue to be a home for music that reeks of authenticity and credibility,” he says.

**KACEY IN THE HOUSE**
Levine signed Kacey Musgraves in 2018 and brought over her longtime promoter, Lenore Kinder from AEG Presents, to represent the “Space Cowboy” singer. Meanwhile, Paradigm continues to build careers for Tyler Childers, Colter Wall, Brent Cobb and The Lone Bellow — acts that don’t get much mainstream country radio play but have built strong fan bases through live performances.

**TAYLOR SWIFT’S REPUTATION TOUR**
“*Kissing Roses.*”

**He’s Over...**
O’Connell “Talking about Route 91.”

**RICK STARR, 53**
HEAD OF NASHVILLE OFFICE, PARADIGM TALENT AGENCY

**See page 72.**

**AEG PRESENTS: $968.8 million — on a sold-out stadium tour**
Kenny Chesney — career box-office gross, $968.8 million — on a sold-out stadium tour, while promoting red-hot runs for Blake Shelton and Eric Church. He’s also handling one-off shows for George Strait, including a headlining slot at Bayou Country Superfest in New Orleans. “We’re going to gross $30,000 people and gross $7 million,” says Messina. “His legacy keeps growing.”

**HE’S OVER...**
“All these loser writers talking about Taylor Swift’s tour. We’re going to gross $7 million a show — how can you say that’s not a huge success?”

**BRUCE LEE, 52**
HEAD OF NASHVILLE, U.S. CONCERTS DIVISION; LIVE NATION

**Career honor**
In January, O’Connell received the CMA Award for lifetime achievement in touring during his 25-plus years in the business, a game-changing career that’s responsible for six successful country music festivals and the Country Megaticket season pass. Traeger, meanwhile, oversaw a record number of 2017 Country Megaticket season pass. Traeger, meanwhile, saw a record number of 2017 shows booked at both Memphis’ FedExForum and Nashville’s Bridgestone Arena, and Kid Rock’s third annual Fish Fry at Fontanel.
CONGRATS

JIMMY HARNEN

BILLBOARD’S 2018
COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS

FROM YOUR
BIG MACHINE
LABEL GROUP
FAMILY
Memphis is for Outlaws

As Austin’s grit gives way to glossy real estate, country music’s nonconformists are seeking out the old-school studios — and next-gen producers — of Tennessee’s other music city.

Beginning in the 1970s, Austin reigned as the hotbed of Outlaw Country — the place where Willie Nelson, The Flatlanders and other nonconformists turned their backs on Nashville’s slick production and set down roots. But with a real estate boom bringing more glitz to Texas’ capital much as it has in Music City, the outlaw spirit may find itself on the road again with Memphis as its next destination.

In addition to recording there, Texas troubadour Dale Watson bought property in Memphis’ Whitehaven neighborhood and moved his annual Ameripolitan Music Awards show there. “Quite frankly, the atmosphere in Memphis now amounts to what Austin was in the early ‘80s,” he says. “It still has a maverick style. All the independent labels are still going, but there’s also a rebirth happening.”

For Margo Price, who says she had felt like “an outcast in Nashville for years,” a 2015 trip through Bluff City proved career-changing. After touring Sun Studio, where visitors can pay to cut their own singles, Price booked time on a whim — a move that would ultimately connect her with Ross-Spang, the Grammy-winning producer, engineer and mixer whose credits include work with Jason Isbell and Chris Isaak.

“I hadn’t felt that encouraged by an engineer or a producer in Nashville in so long,” she says of Ross-Spang, who produced Price’s critically acclaimed debut, The Midwest Farmer’s Daughter, at storied Ardent Studios.

When Price was ready to work on a follow-up, she returned to Memphis, where Ross-Spang now runs Southern Grooves Productions out of the beautifully renovated Studio B inside Sam Phillips Recordings.

Alt-country artists Brent Cobb, Valerie June and Charley Crockett have also recently logged studio time in Memphis, and Ross-Spang says that part of the city’s appeal is its lack of distraction. “Down here we don’t have the labels, we don’t have the publicists, we don’t have the management,” he notes. “We still talk and move slow. It’s not as crazy as Nashville is right now.”

But mostly, there’s an intangible, old-school magic that up-and-coming producers like Ross-Spang and Lawrence “Boo” Mitchell, son of Royal Studio founder Willie Mitchell, are intent on preserving as the city undergoes a quieter renaissance.

Royal Studios, where Bruno Mars and Mark Ronson tracked “Uptown Funk,” is virtually unaltered from the days when Al Green recorded there; ditto for Ardent, where Memphis native Julien Baker recorded her latest LP. Ross-Spang’s Studio B, equipped with a 1960 custom-built Spectra Sonic console and echo chambers, is down the hall from Sam Phillips’ completely intact office. “These places pull something out of you,” says Ross-Spang.

“Memphis is not the place where they tear down something just to put up something new and cool — the old thing,” adds Watson. “I don’t call what’s going on in Nashville construction. I call it destruction.”

Which isn’t to say there’s nothing new happening in Memphis. Paula Raiford has reopened her dad Robert’s ’70s disco as Paula & Raiford’s (a_price fave, and James Beard Award-nominated chefs Michael Human and Andy Ticer are lighting up the culinary scene with their new restaurant, The Gray Canary.

“We’re experiencing growth and innovation but without Nashville’s population increase,” says Gebre Waddell, CEO of Memphis audio-technology startup Soundwires and a Recording Academy member. “We’re observing what’s going on there and learning how it might be best managed when it happens here.”

—BROOKE MAZUREK
City National Congratulates

BILLBOARD’S 2018 COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS HONOREES

SUPPORTING THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY FOR MORE THAN 60 YEARS
Now in 92 million homes, the Viacom-owned CMT finished fiscal 2017 up 13 percent among adults 18-49, notching its highest-rated year since 2014. That’s largely thanks to Leslie Fram’s savvy programming and talent choices for the cable channel’s musical fare, which includes *Crossroads*, a series that pairs country artists with musicians from other genres; the CMT Music Awards; and the CMT Next Women of Country campaign, a cross-platform initiative that Fram, who grew up in Fairhope, Ala., created to provide tour support and on-air opportunities for rising female stars. “Among our success stories are Brandy Clark, Cassadee Pope, RaeLynn and Maren Morris,” says Fram.

**THE BIGGEST ISSUE COUNTRY MUSIC FACES** “Lack of support for female artists. In the past few years, only two to three women have appeared on radio’s ‘most played’ year-end lists. This is also true for streaming services. Female artists and songwriters are making some of the best music available but are not given the support and exposure. The issue won’t be resolved until women are elevated in all aspects of the business.”

**WHAT CMT IS DOING TO COUNTER THAT TREND** “Our team selects a mixture of signed and unsigned female artists, and we highlight their material across our shows and platforms. We’ll film them in our studio doing acoustic sets and create videos around them to give them extra content. That has been going on for five years. Four years ago, we added a tour. It’s usually anchored by a more established artist, and they take out up-and-comers that otherwise might not get a stage to play on. Each November, the Tuesday before the CMA Awards, we host an event at the City Winery to introduce the new class. There are about 10 performances, and it’s a big industry celebration.”

**CARLY PEARCE ON FRAM** “When I think about my nine-year journey in Nashville, meeting Leslie Fram and becoming a member of the Next Women of Country stands out. Leslie has become an unwavering champion of the kind of artist I am, and continues to be high on my list of ‘go-tos’ when I need guidance regarding difficult decisions in my career. Her drive and passion to create a safe place for female artists not only fostered opportunities for me early on, but also helped me to regain my confidence as a woman in the industry when for quite some time it was shattered.”

—PAULA PARISI

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**COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS 2018**

**LESLEY FRAM**
SENIOR VP MUSIC AND TALENT, CMT
The Champion

Frustrated by the country music industry’s lack of support for female artists, Leslie Fram founded the CMT Next Women of Country campaign to level the playing field — and it’s working.
Lower Broadway is clogged with feel-good honky-tongs, but it isn’t the only place in Nashville to experience live music. Hutton Hotel, in Nashville’s West End neighborhood, was arguably the city’s first elegant lifestyle hotel when it debuted in 2009. After a full renovation courtesy of Dallas-based Studio 11 Design in late 2017, that sophistication was elevated with the arrival of Analog. The intimate venue concept, designed and managed by Greenlight Media & Marketing, fits 300 people and features a state-of-the-art Bose sound system and modular staging. “We are located a few blocks from Music Row, but we became the go-to place for the creative scene as much as the music one,” says Hutton Hotel GM Jonathan Bartlett. Although country talents like Maren Morris have played there, and the venue has become popular for label showcases, Analog also books artists from other genres, like soul singer Allen Stone. The performances unfold nightly in what is essentially a cozy living room with couches and playful cocktails like the Trans Am, made with Old Grand-Dad bourbon, illegal mezcal, Bénédictine and banana.

To honor the tradition of big-time stars first making moves on small stages, Analog, adds Bartlett, “is not just for artists who made it but artists looking to be found.”

— A.A.
CONGRATULATES

BRAD BELANGER
BOBBY BONES
CORAN CAPSHAW
KERRI EDWARDS
MARY HILLIARD HARRINGTON
TOM LORD
JANET WEIR

ON BEING NAMED AMONG BILLBOARD’S COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS
J.R. SCHUMANN, 36
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING, SIRIUSXM
Making fans in Margaritaville
Schumann has overseen the growth of 12 country channels on the satellite radio service, which has over 33.1 million total subscribers.

COUNTRY AMBASSADOR
The Tyler, Texas-born executive has raised country’s global profile through his oversight of artist-branded channels such as Kenny Chesney’s No Shoes Radio and The Garth Channel, as well as live events like The Highway’s Music Row Happy Hour every Friday at the Margaritaville restaurant in Nashville. “We see probably on average 1,000 people,” says Schumann. “Trip Advisor lists it as a ‘must-do.’”

HE’S OVER... “Pedal taverns! It’s basically a bar on wheels — with people pedaling the thing down the road at two-and-a-half miles per hour.”

JAY LIEPIS, 44
GLOBAL HEAD OF COUNTRY MUSIC, APPLE MUSIC
Nashville’s new kid in town
As country blooms at Apple Music — the genre is up 84 percent worldwide among the service’s 40 million subscribers in 115 countries — the streaming behemoth has staked a physical claim to Nashville by building a physical office in the city before it opens a Southern office there in the fall.

SUMMER IN THE CITY
With 13 years at the tech giant, Liepis calls a recent Apple Music collaboration with Jason Aldean “definitely a career highlight,” adding, “He really understands the power of streaming.” Coordinated exclusives like a Beats 1 interview and a “Drowns the Whiskey (Live)” premiere helped catapult the April release of Aldean’s Rearview Town to No. 1 on the service’s country albums chart and smash the platform’s all-time record for most-streamed country album in its first week.

SPRINGING COUNTRY FAN BASE
“The United Kingdom. Twenty years ago, it was all about the local Brit rock scene there.”

JOHN MARKS, 64
GLOBAL SENIOR EDITOR/MUSIC PROGRAMMER, COUNTRY; SPOTIFY
Bringing country to more countries
Spotify’s Hot Country playlist, curated by Marks, reaches over 4.7 million followers worldwide — it recently expanded to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Spain, in addition to the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Latin America. In April, an ‘enhanced’ playlist premiered that includes original interviews and music videos.

EMBRACING POP
“I’m loving the cross-genre collaborations of late. Pop artists offer a gateway to country artists for global markets.”

— John Marks, Spotify
The Torchbearer

Emboldened by a ratings increase for the 2018 ACM Awards, Los Angeles-based Academy of Country Music CEO Pete Fisher intends to increase country’s presence in Hollywood and Silicon Valley.
The 53rd annual ACM Awards were a testament to country music’s resilience. Buoyed by two comeback stories — the industry’s first Las Vegas event since the Route 91 mass shooting in October 2017 and Carrie Underwood’s first public performance since the star sustained injuries in a November fall — the 2018 telecast averaged 12.1 million viewers, an overall audience growth of 11 percent over 2017’s 10.9 million. It even beat former FBI director James Comey’s first TV interview (airing the same night on ABC) after being fired by President Donald Trump. “Many awards shows have seen a downward trend in ratings, so we were thrilled to reverse that,” says Fisher, who’s in his second year as CEO of the Los Angeles-based trade association (and prior to that served as GM of the Grand Ole Opry). “We look to build upon that next year.”

HOW THE ACM AWARDS TRUMPED COMEY  “I think we were fortunate to attract people who wanted a little relief from politics with some good, old-fashioned country music. Country music’s triumphant return to Las Vegas was one narrative of interest to people, and the other was Carrie Underwood’s return. Everyone loves the all-American girl. Those were moments you can’t program toward, but our motivation to return to Vegas wasn’t about ratings, it was about healing.”

EXPANSION PLANS  “Since moving to Los Angeles, I’ve been surprised by two things: first, how many country fans there are in this massive metropolitan area. Second, what incredible potential there is out here to expand our genre. Moving forward, one of the academy’s key initiatives is to elevate our West Coast profile: Whether it’s Hollywood, Silicon Valley or Silicon Beach, we believe there are untapped opportunities for country music in film, TV and technology.”

BRETT YOUNG ON FISHER  “I’ve known Pete for several years now. He is really the first person I met in the Nashville music industry. I got connected with him through his son, whom I met when I was playing music in Los Angeles. Pete met with me the week that I moved to Nashville and took the time to listen to some of my music and give me advice and direction. He has been such a huge champion of mine from the start, and his support has meant the world to me.”

—CAMILLE DODERO
PETE FISHER, 55
CEO, ACADEMY OF COUNTRY MUSIC
BEN VAUGHN, 42  
PRESIDENT, WARNER/CHAPPELL MUSIC NASHVILLE  
☆ Five-time ASCAP publisher of the year  
Under Vaughn’s leadership, Warner/Chappell Nashville has been the No. 1 publisher of the top 100 country radio songs for the past five consecutive quarters, including the first quarter of 2018, in which the division captured a 26.2 percent share.  

ACM DOMINATION  
Vaughn says that 2017 was “one of the best years in the history of the company.” Warner/Chappell took home its fifth consecutive ASCAP publisher of the year honor and represented 67 percent of the acts who performed on the 2018 ACM Awards.  

SURPRISING CELEBRITY COUNTRY FAN  
“The Rock.”  

CARLA WALLACE*  
CO-OWNER, BIG YELLOW DOG MUSIC  
☆ Next-gen nurturer  
Wallace cultivates young talent. The native Nashvillian signed Meghan Trainor at 17, helped Maren Morris transition from songwriter to performer and has a new label partnership with Atlantic to release recent Harvard grad Brynn Elliott. Internally, there is 25-year-old Alex Stefano, whose three-woman-strong synch department scored key placements with Apple and Old Navy.  

NOT JUST PUBLISHING  
The 19-year-old company that Wallace owns with Kerry O’Neil is a multisector powerhouse, handling synchs, label services and marketing for its writers — almost everything but management. “Not everybody can do what we do,” she says. “I can’t do what a manager does.”  

KOS WEAVER, 49  
EXECUTIVE VP, BMG NASHVILLE  
☆ $119 million in added revenue in 2017  
Over the past 18 months, Weaver has played a critical role in BMG’s acquisition of BBR Music Group, which included publishing arm Magic Mustang Music. The deal, for which BMG paid approximately $103 million upfront, established the company as a major presence in Nashville, where staff has already grown from 20 to almost 100 people.  

BMG + BBR = GROWTH  
The BBR purchase helped BMG grow annual revenue to $619 million from about $500 million in 2016. Publishing revenue accounted for about 80 percent of that, with BMG claiming 7.7 percent of the top 100 country radio songs in the first quarter of 2018.  

Michael Martin, 56  
VP MEMBERSHIP, NASHVILLE; ASCAP  
☆ Repping 47 percent of the country market  
Martin says ASCAP holds 47 percent of the country-music songwriting market that it shares with BMI, SESAC and Global Music Rights. That’s up from 30 percent when Martin joined the performing rights organization in 2010.  

ROOM WITH A “VROOM”  
After citing the success of member Chris Stapleton’s Traveller and From A Room: Volume 1 and Volume 2 — which have collectively generated 1.7 billion streams since 2015 — Martin says he’s scouting for the Stapletons of tomorrow, citing newcomers Jillian Jacqueline, Tenille Townes and Jordan Davis, who scored his first Country Airplay No. 1 with “Singles You Up.” “Since the labels have cut back,” he says, “it has put more pressure on the PROs to develop [artists].”  

KELLI TURNER, 47  
EXECUTIVE VP OPERATIONS AND CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT/ CFO, SESAC  
☆ Blackstone power surge  
SESAC management has spent the last year positioning the company for future growth under its new owner, Blackstone. “We’ve really been focused on building our team and hiring the right people in the right seats that can help take SESAC forward for the next 10 years,” says Turner. The PRO has more than doubled revenue collections from $206 million in 2015 to $400 million-$500 million in 2017.  

JODY WILLIAMS, 62  
VP WRITER PUBLISHER RELATIONS, NASHVILLE; BMI  
☆ Showcased 800 artists and songwriters  
BML’s 3-year-old partnerships and events department, which Williams oversees, has yielded 800 paid annual performance slots to promote artists and writers including Luke Combs, Ashley McBryde and RaeLynn.  

BRAND AID  
Jason Aldean, Maren Morris, Keith Urban and Kane Brown keep the BMI A-list sizzling, but Williams is most engaged when spotting new talent. “We were the only PRO with a curated stage at Hangout, Austin City Limits, LouFest and Lollapalooza,” he says. And with sponsors Anheuser-Busch, Delta and AT&T, BMI events are “funded without taking dollars from distribution.”  

RUSSELL A. JONES, 67  
PRINCIPAL, THE LAW OFFICES OF RUSSELL A. JONES JR. & ANJEE KHURANA  
☆ Garth Brooks’ pact man  
Jones negotiated Garth Brooks’ contracts for his record-breaking tour, which in 2017 became the most successful outing in North America with a reported 6.4 million tickets sold. The attorney — who has worked on Music Row for 40 years, and also represents Toby Keith and Trisha Yearwood — takes pride in his “small contribution” to Brooks landing a sixth CMA entertainer of the year
CONGRATULATIONS

TO DAVID KELLS AND ALL THE OTHER 2018 BILLBOARD COUNTRY POWER PLAYER HONOREES.
awards. The country star’s rarefied level of success “means a lot of people do their jobs really well,” says Jones of Team Garth.

JOEL KATZ, 74
CHAIRMAN, GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA GROUP;
GREENBERG TRAURIG

JESS L. ROSEN, 63
CO-CHAIRMAN, ATLANTA ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA
PRACTICE; GREENBERG TRAURIG

★ Nashville’s power lawyers

Katz clients Faith Hill and Tim McGraw’s Soul2Soul World Tour grossed $79 million in 2017 alone. “For the first time we are really seeing progress in terms of country becoming a global brand,” says the well-connected Katz. Meanwhile, longtime legal partner Rosen, whose clients include Florida Georgia Line, Miranda Lambert and Thomas Rhett, oversaw Kenny Chesney’s surprise defection to Warner Nashville.

GOOD DEEDS INDEED
Rosen helped Chesney earmark profits from his first Warner single, “Get Along,” for his Love for Love City Foundation to aid hurricane relief efforts in the U.S. and British Virgin Islands. Katz worked with Berklee College of Music to establish the African Music Institute, a nonprofit to aid hurricane relief efforts in the U.S. and British Virgin Islands.

MIKE MILOM, 75
PARTNER, MILOM HORSESSL CROW ROSE KELLEY
★ Transactional titan

Milom and his firm have negotiated more than a dozen “impact deals” over the past year, including placing Luke Bryan on the American Idol judges’ panel and nailing down credits for his client Keith Urban’s new Graffiti U album and its 18 producers.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY... Verizon, Marriott, Hilton and Can-Am/Bombardier are among the brands Milom has negotiated with this past year for tour sponsorships and endorsements.

HIS TAKE ON THE MUSIC MODERNIZATION ACT
“It will significantly increase the value of existing and future music assets.”

BUSINESS & BRANDING

PETE FISHER, 55
CEO, ACADEMY OF COUNTRY MUSIC
See page 90.

JEREMY HOLLEY, 40
LAURA HUTFLESS, 36
FOUNDERS, FLYTEVU

★ Billion-dollar Bumble

Under Holley and Hutfless’ leadership, the Nashville-based marketing agency more than doubled revenue and staff in the last year and opened a second office in Austin in April. The two also helped grow social-connection app Bumble into a billion-dollar brand through promotions with Keith Urban and Lady Antebellum. “We understand talent and what will be a win for them,” says Hutfless.

WINNING FOR DOLLY, KEITH AND KELESA
In addition to spearheading brand campaigns for Urban, Dolly Parton and Kelsea Ballerini, former Warner Music Group executive Holley and Creative Artists Agency alum Hutfless have used country music and artists to engineer high-stakes rebrands for Cracker Barrel and the American Red Cross.

MARY ANN McCREADY* BUSINESS MANAGER/CO-OWNER, FLOOD BUMSTEAD McCREADY & McCARTHY
★ Finding profits off-road

McCready says that her business management firm is driving clients’ non-touring income — which averaged 10 to 15 percent of an artist’s pay five years ago — to as high as 40 percent thanks to merch, endorsements, licensing, TV appearances and synchs. Off-road revenue has “much lower overhead,” she says, “so it’s more profitable to the bottom line.”

SIGH... McCready won’t divulge or discuss her firm’s clients, but insiders say they include such country stars as Eric Church, Keith Urban and Dierks Bentley.

WHAT SHE MISSES ABOUT THE NASHVILLE OF OLD
“Watching Billy Sherrill in Columbia’s Studio B producing Charlie Rich, Tammy Wynette and Johnny Paycheck; watching Lynn Anderson’s husband, Glen Sutton, stew down Music Row in hospitality; Bob Beckham’s 16th Avenue deck parties; the Peddler (restaurant); and how everything that mattered was congregated on Music Row.”

KERRY O’NEIL, 66
CO-FOUNDER, O’NEIL HAGAMAN
★ Bottom-line builders

O’Neil’s business management firm doesn’t advertise itself or its clients — don’t even look for a website — but sources say they include Garth Brooks, Tim McGraw and Little Big Town. As O’Neil puts it, if he and partners Al Hagaman Jr. and Cheryl Harris have another year where “[our]artists take their bows and nobody senses our presence except the key people who need to know, that’s a fantastic year for us.”

AND THAT’S NOT ALL
O’Neil also works in music publishing as a co-owner (with Carla Wallace) of Big Yellow Dog Music, where the roster includes Maren Morris and Meghan Trainor.

JENNIE SMYTHE, 41
CEO, GIRILLA MARKETING
★ Country’s social media savant

This all-women digital marketing agency led Taylor’s firm reps a roster that includes Reba McEntire and Jessie James Decker.

HER TAKE ON THE MUSIC MODERNIZATION ACT
“Why did it take so long to [advance] the thought that writers should be fairly compensated? You pay more for a bottle of water than someone’s created intellectual property.”

SARAH TRAHERN, 53
CEO, COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION
★ The TV ratings whisperer

The 51st annual CMA Awards wrangled 14.3 million viewers in November 2017, up 14 percent from 2016; the Reba McEntire-hosted CMA Country Christmas drew 8.2 million, up 19 percent from 6.9 million; and a televised CMA Fest special in August attracted 5.7 million, its largest audience in three years.

INTERNATIONAL HARVESTER
In her fifth year as CEO, Trahern continues to expand the CMA’s global reach with a multiyear distribution deal in Latin America and an award presentation at U.K. and Australian festivals. “The fans there know the music and lyrics just as well as the fans here,” says the C-SPAN alumna.


Methodology: a committee of Billboard editors and reporters weighed a variety of factors in determining the 2018 Country Power List, including, but not limited to: Billboard’s 2017 Top Artists and Top Tours rankings; nominations by peers, colleagues and superiors; impact on consumer behavior as measured by such metrics as chart sales, streaming and viewing performance; social media impressions; and radio and TV audience reach. Career trajectory and overall impact in the industry. Where available, financial results are taken into consideration. Where required, U.S. record-label market share was calculated using Nielsen/IMDb’s market share for albums plus track- and streaming-equivalent album consumption units, and Billboard’s quarterly top 10 publisher ratings. Unless otherwise noted, Billboard’s discography and Nielsen’s are the source for tour grosses and sales/streaming data, respectively. Nielsen is also the source for radio audience metrics, unless otherwise noted. Streaming figures (in millions) represent combined on-demand audio and video streaming.
trail·blaz·er

/noun/
a person(s) who makes a new track through wild country

Tyler and BK: Congratulations on receiving Billboard’s Country Power Trailblazer Award! We have mad respect for your talent, your vision and all that you have accomplished in our industry and beyond. We are filled with anticipation and excitement for all the new territories yet to be conquered. Thank you for allowing us to serve you!

Love, Lou and the Tri Star Team
Since the release of their first hit, 2012’s “Cruise,” Florida Georgia Line’s Brian Kelley and Tyler Hubbard have built a legacy that extends far beyond country radio, and broken records in the process.

“Cruise,” boosted by early airplay from Sirius XM’s The Highway, landed the duo, which met at a Belmont University campus worship group in 2008, a deal with Republic Nashville before topping Billboard’s Hot Country Songs chart for a then-record 24 weeks. More recently, the pair set a different record with its current hit, the collaboration with Bebe Rexha, “Meant to Be.” The song has spent 26 weeks and counting at No. 1 as of the June 2 chart, the longest run for a song by a duo or group in the chart’s 59-year history.

“Meant to Be” is also the sixth FGL single to top Hot Country Songs chart for a then-record 24 weeks. More recently, the pair set a different record with its current hit, the collaboration with Bebe Rexha, “Meant to Be.” The song has spent 26 weeks and counting at No. 1 as of the June 2 chart, the longest run for a song by a duo or group in the chart’s 59-year history.

On the eve of receiving the honor, the duo spoke to Billboard about its multifaceted approach to music, its critics and the international success of “Meant to Be.”

When you started, some critics said you weren’t country enough. Has that criticism lessenened?

KELLEY We rode that stigma right out of the arena. (Laughs.)

HUBBARD The first few months, all they knew about BK and I was that we were the “Cruise” dudes and that we were “bro country” — all about girls, beer and trucks. It didn’t take too many more songs for people to realize that we had a little more depth to us. We had a lot of fun showing people the different sides of who we were, from “Dirt” to “H.O.L.Y.” to “God, Your Mama, and Me.” With each single, we strategize and say, “Well, do we want to let the world in on this side of who we are?”

What do you see as the most significant aspect of the success of “Meant to Be”?

HUBBARD It’s a special song because of the route it took [to No. 1]. It came from Bebe Rexha’s EP [All Your Fault: Pt. 2], it’s not on any of our projects and it was a single. And it crossed over from pop to country radio. In country radio, it’s pretty rare for that to happen.

What other country artists do you see as pushing the boundaries of the genre?

HUBBARD Garth Brooks and Tim McGraw inspire us. It’s hard to put our music into a box. We have always taken pride in doing things differently. Any time Music Row wants to do something a certain way, we are drawn to doing [it] the opposite way.

You’ve just expanded your business holdings with a new creative complex in Nashville.
How would you describe the FGL brand?

HUBBARD It stands for good friends, good people and a good time.

KELLEY These businesses bring freshness and a bigger vision to FGL. They remind us to continue to dream large. Anything’s possible, and we’ve seen that with our careers.

How do you guard against diluting your brand?

KELLEY By turning down some collaborations. At the end of the day, it’s not so much about who we want to collaborate with. It always comes down to, “Is the song good enough?”

You’re headlining CMA Fest. What’s the weirdest thing you’ve seen at a show?

KELLEY When people get so drunk that they fall asleep right in the front row. They party so hard that they don’t even make it halfway.
TRAILBLAZING
SINCE 2011

FIRST ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: TYLER HUBBARD, BRIAN KELLEY
SECOND ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: SETH ENGLAND, JOEY MOI, KEVIN "CHIEF" ZARUK, CRAIG WISEMAN

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BRIAN KELLEY & TYLER HUBBARD of FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE

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"Neil Diamond has set a standard that remains untouched, and this recognition only amplifies the impact he’s made on America and around the globe. We celebrate him for his incomparable career and his many contributions to the world of entertainment.” — John Josephson, Chairman and CEO, SESAC Inc.
On The Day I Wrote That Hit Song

BY CATHY APPLEFELD OLSON and THOM DUFFY

W ITH A MIX OF INTIMACY, CELEBRITY, HEARTFELT SPEECHES and one-of-a-kind performances, the annual Songwriters Hall of Fame gala in New York has become a must-attend event for the biggest artists, composers and executives in the music business.

While celebrations like the Grammy Awards and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony now are televised from arenas, the 49th class of the Songwriters Hall of Fame will be feted during a private dinner at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in New York on June 14.

It’s an event that draws headlines even when honorees can’t make it. JAY-Z, the first hip-hop songwriter recognized by the hall in June 2017, was unable to attend as his wife, Beyoncé, awaited the birth of their twins. But he was inducted via video — by former President Barack Obama.

This year, Neil Diamond will be the 2018 recipient of the Johnny Mercer Award, named for the “Moon River” tunesmith who co-founded the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1969 with music publishers Abe Olman and Howie Richmond. Sara Bareilles will receive the Hal David Starlight Award, which is given to a rising young songwriter.

Lucian Grainge, chairman/CEO of Universal Music Group, who began his career helping to pitch songs for a music publisher in London nearly 40 years ago, will receive the Howie Richmond Hitmaker Award.

Songwriters and writer-artists Bill Anderson, Steve Dorff, Jermaine Dupri, Alan Jackson, Robert “Kool” Bell, Ronald Bell, George Brown & James “JT” Taylor, John Mellencamp and Allee Willis also are among this year’s honorees.

Linda Moran, president/CEO of the hall of fame, will open the evening. Among the performers and presenters will be Leon Bridges, Jason Mraz, actor Stephen Dorff, Nora Guthrie, songwriter-producer Chad Elliott, Four Seasons co-founder Bob Gaudio and country producer Keith Stegall.

Ahead of this year’s event, nine of the hall’s honorees reflected on the craft of songwriting.

BILL ANDERSON

“City Lights”

RECORDED BY Ray Price

CHART PEAK No. 1 [13 weeks], Hot Country Songs; Oct. 20, 1958 [the week the chart debuted in Billboard]

“I was on the top of the Hotel Andrew Jackson in the ‘big’ city of Commerce, Ga., 19 years old and working as a disc jockey at the local radio station there. I wrote the lyrics on — Aug. 27, 1957. It was a clear night, and I was looking up at a sky full of stars and down at what lights there were in Commerce. And it just came to me. I wrote the entire song that night. When I went to record it myself, it was the B-side. I had a little rockabilly song called ‘No Song to Sing’ on the A-side, and I had a lot more faith in that than ‘City Lights.’ But it turned out a little different. I recorded it for a little label out of San Antonio called TMT Records, and I sent my record to Nashville. There was a man named Charlie Lamb, and he had a music publication called The Music Reporter. I was hoping he would review ‘No Song to Sing.’ And Charlie Lamb, bless his heart, listened to both sides of the record, and he took it to Chet Atkins, who was producing artists at RCA.
recorded ‘City Lights’ with a young artist named Dave Rich. Ray Price heard Dave Rich’s record of it on the local radio station in Nashville, and that’s how it fell into his hands. Some stars had to align for all these things to happen like they did.”

SARA BAREILLES
“Love Song”
RECORDED BY Sara Bareilles
CHART PEAK No. 4, Billboard Hot 100, No. 1 [three weeks], Mainstream Top 40; April 12, 2008

“I was trying to make my first record for Epic Records and had been vaguely told to keep writing and waiting for the green light to go into the studio. It was increasingly frustrating. I was listening to the radio, and I sort of caught myself red-handed trying to bite of the ideas that were already existing there. And I was really furious with myself that I had fallen into the trap of trying to re-create something instead of following my own intuition. I said, ‘Don’t even try’ — [song] what my songwriter self needed to say and [not worry] what the label would like.

And, truly, it was like a magic moment when the song tumbled out. The song wrote itself as quickly as I’d ever written anything. My A&R rep called and said, ‘This is incredible.’ I thought he was joking. It turned out to be this wonderful return to myself but also ticking the box of what they needed. Then I got the green light to move on and make the record.”

NEIL DIAMOND
“Sweet Caroline (Good Times Never Seemed So Good)”
RECORDED BY Neil Diamond
CHART PEAK No. 4, Billboard Hot 100; Aug. 16, 1969

“That song was like a lucky gift. I needed it desperately in my career. I was about to go hungry. I had a new baby. There were all kinds of things that were counting on this record, and I just had an hour to do it. It was in Memphis, Tenn. We had rented space, and in those days, you used to record three songs in three hours, and I only had two songs. I had to write one more song. It was the day before the session, and that beautiful girl came to me and I was a happy guy. You never know with a song; I never knew with ‘Sweet Caroline’ it would become such a beloved song. So much of creativity is filling in empty space, and that’s what I was doing. I had a space on my dance card, and that sweet girl came in and she saved me from a fate worse than death — which would’ve been working as a civilian somewhere.”

STEVE DORFF [Co-Writer]
“I Cross My Heart”
RECORDED BY George Strait
CHART PEAK No. 1 [two weeks], Hot Country Songs; Dec. 5, 1992

“I played that song for everyone I knew for eight years, and everyone looked at me and went, ‘Eh, not one of your best.’ And then George finally [sang] it, and we had this monster hit. So you just never know. You have to have a great song, but more important, it has to be the right marriage between the artist and the song. I’ve had songs recorded by many artists that weren’t hits, and then all of a sudden, the right artist does it. We did this song for the movie Pure Country. There were people who didn’t like the song or didn’t think it was country enough or was George Strait enough. For an artist like George, who is this incredible country singer, ‘I Cross My Heart’ had some pretty different chord structures and didn’t really fit that genre; it was a stretch for him. But because it was so outside the box at the time for him, that’s what made it such a big hit. It has become this wedding song. I can’t tell you how many people write me and say, ‘We got married with this song.’”

UMG’S LUCIAN GRAINGE: A SONG-PLUGGER FIRST
Universal chairman/CEO honored as a songwriters’ advocate in a career that began in music publishing

Lucian Grainge, as chairman/CEO of Universal Music Group, oversees all divisions of the world’s largest music company, including Universal Music Publishing Group. In 2015, Grainge appointed Jody Gerson chairman/CEO of UMPG, which claimed 48 of the top 100 radio songs in the United States during the first quarter of 2018. So Grainge’s support of Universal’s songwriters and writer-artists is reason enough for the Songwriters Hall of Fame to present him with the Howie Richmond Hitmaker Award, bestowed on an individual who has been responsible for a substantial number of hit songs for an extended period.

But the honor also recognizes Grainge’s career roots in music publishing. His first job was as a song-plugger, promoting the work of songwriters signed to April Blackwood Music in the United Kingdom. He later launched PolyGram Music Publishing U.K. before moving to run record labels and UMG. “I was a publisher for the first 10 years of my career,” Grainge once told an interviewer. “I understand songs. It’s very, very difficult to define. I can definitely smell it. I can feel it in my fingertips.”

Songwriters Hall of Fame president/CEO Linda Moran acknowledges that history in announcing Grainge’s award. She said: “Throughout his rise to the top of the music industry, from song-plugger to a mega power player and starmaker, Sir Lucian has always recognized that it all truly begins with a song and has never ceased championing songwriters.”

— T.D.

JERMAINE DUPRI [Co-Writer]
“Confessions Part II”
RECORDED BY Usher
CHART PEAK No. 1 [two weeks], Billboard Hot 100; July 24, 2004

“When we did [the album title track], ‘Confessions,’ it’s a guy feeling bad about himself, about what he had been doing to the girl, so he just came out and told her. Then Usher was like, ‘You can’t stop right there. There’s a part two to this story.’ And as soon as Usher said, ‘There’s a part two,’ my brain clicked, and every word of ‘Confessions Part II’ flew out of my mouth. I just had to put it in the right words that would make it Usher’s story. It took about an hour, and the process was me saying the lyrics to him. I stopped writing lyrics down on paper after me and JAY-Z did ‘Money Ain’t a Thang.’ He didn’t write one thing down in the studio. He said, ‘I wrote it, I just didn’t write it on paper.’ I had never seen this done before, and then I started realizing … it might be easier that way than writing it down because we all memorize the songs that we really love.”

ALAN JACKSON
“Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)”
RECORDED BY Alan Jackson
CHART PEAK No. 1 [five weeks], Hot Country Songs; Dec. 29, 2001

“After 9/11, I didn’t think I would want to write a song about it. But it was the middle of October [2001], and I agreed to play for a concert in my hometown, a fundraiser for a home for underprivileged children. We flew back to Nashville and I went to bed, and somewhere in the middle of the night, I woke up and that song was lying there. The chorus came out, then the melody, and the lyrics started pouring out. And the next morning, I started writing all the verses. All the things I wrote about were from footage on television and interviews with people about how they were dealing with it. We debuted it on the [Country Music Association] Awards in late October. I am still amazed about how that song has held on. It’s a song about faith and hope and love.”
CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR
SONGWRITERS HALL OF FAME
2018 INDUCTEES AND HONOREES

Ronald Bell
of Kool & The Gang

John Mellencamp

Jermaine Dupri

Sara Bareilles
Hal David Starlight Award

Alan Jackson

Robert “Kool” Bell, George Brown & James “JT” Taylor of Kool & The Gang

Neil Diamond

Bill Anderson | Steve Dorff | Allee Willis

Johnny Mercer Award | Sir Lucian Grainge Howie Richmond Hitmaker Award

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THANKS FOR INSPIRING THE WORLD WITH YOUR SONGS
**MELLENCAMP: ‘SONGS PICK ME’**

As a songwriter, John Mellencamp is credited with 22 top 40 hits on the Billboard Hot 100. As an inspiration, he recently can take credit for one more — Jake Owen’s “I Was Jack (And You Were Diane),” which reached No. 11 on the May 26 Country Airplay chart. Owen’s hit is an homage to Mellencamp’s tale of small-town romance, “Jack and Diane,” which topped the Hot 100 for four weeks in the fall of 1982.

Mellencamp, who will be inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame by Nora Guthrie, the daughter of Woody Guthrie, tells Billboard: “If you write about the smallest common denominators of life, they will always be relevant.”

Still living in his native Indiana, Mellencamp has often focused on economic, racial and social injustice in his music. But he says his songs emerge more from deliberation than inspiration. “I am open and do not try to direct the topic or the spirit of any song I write. I do not pick what I write about,” he says. “It picks me. I’ve never sat down to write a song about struggle or happiness or love. I only write what is sent to me.”

—C.A.O.

**JAMES “JT” TAYLOR [Co-Writer]**

“Celebration”

**RECORDED BY** Kool & The Gang

**CHART PEAK** No. 1 [two weeks], Billboard Hot 100; Feb. 7, 1981

“First of all, we have to go back to ‘Ladies Night’ [the 1979 Kool & The Gang single co-written by George Brown with the lyric], ‘Come on, let’s all celebrate.’ A year after is when we came up with ‘Celebration.’ We were celebrating the resurrection of the band [after a commercial lull], and Ronald [Bell] came up with these really cool keyboard parts. Working with [Eumir] Deodato, the producer, the song came together. We would get home after tour dates, and we’d go right back to the studio. And we did this ‘Yahoo!’ thing, just in the moment. I mean, how many black guys do you hear saying ‘Yahoo!’ But it ended up becoming one of the signatures of the song. If you think about that song, it has so many hooks. The horn line is a hook, the piano, and of course the vocal hooks. But we had no idea it was going to become a world anthem.”

**ALLEE WILLIS [Co-Writer]**

“September”

**RECORDED BY** Earth, Wind & Fire

**CHART PEAK** No. 1, Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs; Jan. 13, 1979; No. 8, Billboard Hot 100; Feb. 10, 1979

“Earth, Wind & Fire was my favorite group in the world, and [I was approached about] writing for a couple of groups [EWF’s] Verdine [White] was producing. He said, ‘I’m going to tell my brother about you.’ A couple of nights later, the phone rang, and it was Maurice White and it was an amazing conversation. He said, ‘Do you want to write the next Earth, Wind & Fire album with me?’ I went to the studio, and we started working on ‘September’ the very first day. What rhymes with ‘September’? ‘Remember!’

Every day, someone comes up to me and says, ‘My birthday is the 21st of September,’ ‘My wedding’s the 21st of September.’ I have to break everyone’s heart and tell them it had no significance at all. We just sang every single date of the month, and the 21st just felt the best.”

—M.W.
The National Music Publishers' Association congratulates our NMPA SONGWRITER ICON

Congratulations to our 2018 Annual Meeting Honorees:
- NMPA Lifetime Service Award Caroline Bienstock
- NMPA Industry Legacy Award Bart Herbison
- NMPA President’s Award Senator Sheldon Whitehouse

NMPA is the leading voice for promoting and advancing the interests of music publishers and their songwriting partners.
Congratulations to Neil Diamond on receiving the Johnny Mercer Award at the Songwriters Hall of Fame from all at Live Nation Entertainment.
SESAC LATINA MUSIC AWARDS

SONGWRITER OF THE YEAR  EDÉN MUÑOZ
SONG OF THE YEAR  DESPACITO
SESAC GLOBAL ICON AWARD  ERIKA ENDER
PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR  SONY/ATV

RADIO PERFORMANCE AWARD WINNERS

“SI TÚ LA VES”
Written by: JOEL - Johnatan Ballesteros Juan Diego Medina, Nicky Jam, Saga WhiteBlack - Published by: La Industria Music Publishing, SONYATV Sounds LLC - Recorded by Nicky Jam feat. Wisin

“DURE DURE”
Written by: Byram “OZP” Zayas, JenCarlos Caneda - Published: Bia Publishing, JenC Music Publishing - Recorded by Jencarlos & Don Omar

“ESTA NOCHE SE ME OLVIDA”
Written by: Edén Muñoz, Guayz Liu Published by: Dulce Maria Music LLC, Kalaka Publishing - Recorded by Julián Alvarrez

“ME ENAMORE”
Written by: Antonio Rayo Gibo Published by: Rayito Music-EMI Foray Music - Recorded by Shakira

“A POCO”
Written by: Luciana Luna - Published: WBM Music Corp, Sinaloa Music, Latinos On Air - Recorded by Raúl Casillas

“HEY DJ”
Written by: Joey Montaña - Published: Flow Con Class Publishing, EMI Foray Music - Recorded by CNCO & Yandel

“PROBABILMENTE”
Written by: Christian Nodal - Published by: Editora de Ideas, Novo Tunes - Recorded by Christian Nodal feat. David Bisbal

“MI TESORO”
Written by: Nicky Jam - Published by: La Industria Music Publishing, SONYATV Sounds LLC - Recorded by Zion & Lennox feat. Nicky Jam

“EL AMANTE”
Written by: Alejandro Saer - Published: Shine A Light Music, Peertunes Ltd - Recorded by Prince Royce feat. Gerardo Ortíz

“COMO SI FUERA REAL”
Written by: César Valdivia - Published by: Editora de Ideas, Novo Tunes - Recorded by La Maquinaria Nortea

“MONEDA”
Written by: Alejandro Saer - Published: Shine A Light Music, Peertunes Ltd - Recorded by Prince Royce feat. Gerardo Ortíz

“LAS ULTRAS”
Written by: Edén Muñoz - Published by: Dulce Maria Music LLC - Recorded by Calibre 50

“SUELT LA SOPA”
Written by: Fernando Corona Published by: Musikas TeleBrand Published by: Musikas TeleBrand - Recorded by: Fernand Corona

“UN CAMINO HACIA EL DESTINO”
Written by: Mauricio Arriaga Published by: Dulce Maria Music LLC - Recorded by Calibre 50

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MURALS AND MOTORBIKES: VENUES TAKE MARKETING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

The 2018 Event & Arena Marketing Conference taking place in Las Vegas salutes venues across North America devising promotions with inventive, original twists.

BY NICK WILLIAMS

WHICH NORTH AMERICAN VENUES MADE THE SMARTEST UNCONVENTIONAL PROMOTIONAL MOVES THIS PAST YEAR? The annual Event & Arena Marketing Conference, held at the Hard Rock Hotel in Las Vegas from June 13 to 16, will honor the standout initiatives in marketing, publicity and other campaigns during its awards luncheon. From DIY, low-cost efforts that introduced the impact of celebrity-assisted “viral moments” to return-to-form strategies, philanthropic efforts and even a daredevil cross-water motorbike stunt, venues will be recognized for their unique spins on promotions. These initiatives are among the finalists.

MARKETING CAMPAIGN FINALISTS

DOWNTOWN DARK NIGHTS

L.A. LIVE, LOS ANGELES

Beginning as a way to capitalize on off-nights for L.A. LIVE’s trifecta of venues — Staples Center, Microsoft Theatre and The Novo — “Downtown Dark Nights” has evolved into a street party meets “giant happy hour.” Re-energizing the DTLA campus with a budget of $11,000, AEG and L.A. LIVE executed three soirees last summer, featuring an eclectic mix of stilts walkers, breakdancers, hula-hoopers, muralists and graffiti artists — all paired with local vendors, live bands and DJs. “We thought it would be a fun play on words to use our industry term for these types of non-event dates and create a community brand with it,” says AEG/L.A. LIVE senior director of marketing Natalie Y. Matsumoto.

The plan aimed to bolster patronage to on-site restaurants, with minimal congestion for its local clientele. The team leveraged the venue’s target audience across platforms, and also tapped local influencers, swapping VIP lounge access for additional grassroots promotions. Each evening had over 10,000 attendees, with restaurant revenue averaging 31 percent higher than typical nights (the revenue earned on May 19 was among the top four for the month). “Amazingly, the restaurant revenue generated during Dark Nights events rivaled or beat the revenue generated during a sold-out [Los Angeles] Lakers or [Sacramento] Kings game night,” says Matsumoto of the 31 percent increase.

GIVING TUESDAY — VETERANS AT THE BASIE COUNT BASIE THEATRE, RED BANK, N.J. CAPACITY 1,568

In May, this Red Bank arts landmark announced a rebranding as the Count Basie Center for the Arts. The move keeps its position as not just a performing arts organization, but also a nonprofit, which draws upon its visibility and resources as a historic site to give back to the community. Its philanthropic mission is highlighted by events like “Giving Tuesday” on Nov. 28, the venue’s take on the International Day of Giving founded in 2012 by New York’s 92nd Street YMCA and the United Nations Foundation. The organization — in partnership with radio station WJLK (94.3 The Point) Asbury Park, N.J., and the Jay and Linda Grunin Foundation — coordinated a live broadcast fundraiser for the Veterans Tickets Foundation called Vet Tix, which provides access to arts events for local veterans who suffer from PTSD. “Veterans are a crucial and often overlooked segment of the population,” says Jon Vena, vp marketing and public relations, who was introduced to Vet Tix through Creative Artists Agency. “New Jersey has a high armed-services population, both enrolled and retired. They sacrifice themselves, they sacrifice time with their families. It’s our responsibility to get some of that back for them.” Budgeted at only $2,000, the 2017 fundraiser raised over $30,000 for Vet Tix. The evening peaked with an intimate set from Melissa Etheridge, who reflected on her own family’s military history with listeners during the broadcast.

SANTANDER ARENA & SANTANDER PERFORMING ARTS CENTER MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

SMG/SANTANDER ARENA & SANTANDER PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, READING, PA. CAPACITY 1,800

After acknowledging previous setbacks, the SMG team retooled its season offerings into one cohesive membership program that “revived the arts in Downtown Reading,” says SMG/Santander Arena & Santander Performing Arts Center sales and client services manager Tammy Dahms. It began with a back-to-basics marketing approach, budgeted at $26,500, with the team opting to snail mail a full-season brochure to over 55,000 homes in the
county, highlighting 40 shows in the coming season and three centerpiece Broadway shows: _The Wizard of Oz_, _Rent_ and _Jersey Boys_. “We picked up phones and called past buyers and subscribers and made personal connections,” says Dahms. “We operate in a highly saturated area with several competitive venues nearby. We needed to differentiate ourselves by not just being the best in entertainment options but the best in customer service in a very community-oriented market.” The program has re-energized the Broadway audience in our community and led us to the most successful year in 17 years,” says Dahms. Heading into year two, the team is hosting a “Renewal Party” as a thank you to current members.

**PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN FINALISTS**

**LADY GAGA MURAL ART**

_AMALIE ARENA, TAMPA, FLA. CAPACITY 21,500_

Ahead of Lady Gaga’s sold-out Joanne World Tour stop at Tampa’s Amalie Arena (Dec. 1), local visual artist Cam Parker — a “Little Monster” himself — painted a mural of the pop star (see below) to help build buzz for the show. The artwork provided an opportunity for a one-of-a-kind gift from the venue to the “Million Reasons” singer. “Our Amalie Arena photographer, Scott Audette, did an amazing photo shoot where we were able to bring in Mari Magazzu, our Live Nation artist to create something different to the “Million Reasons” singer. The gesture showed the power of a celebrity “viral moment” with zero cost to the venue or promoters.

**NITRO CIRCUS, SAN CLEMENTE, CALIF.**

When deciding how to best optimize its You Got This European Tour announcement, Nitro Circus chose to break a world record — a standard practice for a company whose unofficial motto is to “always go all in,” says Nitro Circus senior vp/global head of marketing Jolene Pellant. The location: London’s Thames River. The participant: renowned action-sports legend and Nitro’s “fearless leader” Travis Pastrana. The first-ever rider to land a double-backflip on a dirt bike, a feat he accomplished at the 2006 X Games, Pastrana was tasked with landing the first barge-to-barge backflip on a motorbike — via a 75-foot-wide gap between two floating barges, neither tied to the shore or each other. The risky stunt, held on Oct. 5, cost $150,000 and earned 2.7 billion impressions globally. “Travis is still around to tell about it, and we set another World Record, with Ripley’s Believe It or Not there to document,” says Pellant. “It did everything we needed it to do. I was hearing from people in Sydney seeing it on the evening news!”

**THANK YOU CARDS FOR THE TROOPS**

_SMG/VAN ANDEL ARENA, GRAND RAPIDS, MICH. CAPACITY 12,000_

Inspired by a charitable effort from country WLXX (NASH FM 92.9) Lexington, Ky., morning show Ty, Kelly & Chuck, the staff at SMG’s Van Andel Arena began collecting thank-you cards last November for service personnel overseas for the holidays. “West Michigan is known for its philanthropy, so we knew this would be something our community would get behind and support,” says director of marketing Hilarie Szarowicz. The Van Andel team encouraged patrons to drop off cards at the arena, with participants entered to win tickets to a Dec. 3 Trans-Siberian Orchestra show. The promotion also targeted visitors to the Grand Rapids Children’s Museum and civic theatre, while local elementary schools used the opportunity to teach students about the military. In total, the venue sent out 460 cards. “The holidays were the perfect time to spread a little cheer and appreciation,” says Szarowicz of the no-cost initiative. It caught the attention of Ty, Kelly & Chuck, which offered to kick off the on-sale of the venue’s upcoming Sugarland performance (Aug. 10), creating a Grand Rapids-centric video and giving away tickets to the concert on the morning show.
Congratulations Brian and Tyler
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- Projection

www.vision-visuals.com • scott@vision-visuals.com • 615-335-3146
### Billboard Artist 100

**June 2, 2018**

<table>
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<td>Cardi B</td>
<td>The Veer Group/L.A. Records</td>
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<td>Ed Sheeran</td>
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**Top 100**

**No. 1** BTS

BTS scores its first week at No. 1 on the Artist 100, bumping 4-1, as the K-pop kings’ ‘Love Yourself: Tear’ launches atop the Billboard 200 with 135,000 equivalent album units, according to Nielsen Music (see page 116). The group is the first K-pop act and the first that records primarily in a language other than English to lead the Artist 100 since the chart’s inception in 2014.
Congratulations to all Billboard Country Power Players.

You help show the world what a special genre this is!
**Voice, Idol Acts Shine**

As Prince Harry and Meghan Markle’s royal wedding cellist, Sheku Kanneh-Mason debuts at No. 1 on Emerging Artists, propelled by his re-entry atop Classical Albums (see page 122). The Voice and American Idol finalists dominate the Emerging Artists top five after each show’s latest season finale. Voice winner Brynn Cartelli (above) vaults 31-2 as “Walk My Way,” which she performed on the May 22 episode, bows at No. 8 on Digital Song Sales (23,000 sold, according to Nielsen Music). Runner-up Britton Buchanan leaps 28-3 as his “Where You Come From” debuts at No. 15 on Digital Song Sales (21,000).

Meanwhile, Maddie Poppe, announced as the newest Idol champ on May 21, arrives at No. 4 on Emerging Artists as her coronation single, “Going Going Gone,” launches at No. 13 on Digital Song Sales (21,000).

—Xander Zellner

**DRAGONS ON FIRE**

Imagine Dragons (above) become the first act with three shared No. 1s on the Adult Top 40 and Alternative airplay charts as “Whatever It Takes” ascends to the top of the former after ruling the latter for three weeks. The band first led both lists with the prior two singles from its 2017 album, Evolve: “Believer” and “Thunder.” The group passes two acts that have each sent two songs to No. 1 on both surveys: Goo Goo Dolls (“Iris” and “Slide”) and fun. (“We Are Young,” featuring Janelle Monáe, and “Some Nights”).

—Gary Trust

Go to Billboard.com for full Chart Beat coverage, including columns and podcasts.
Congratulations
Country Music’s Top 100 Power Players

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#YourVoiceInMusic
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<td>beerbongs &amp; bentleys</td>
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**Billboard 200 At No. 1**

It's a big week for K-pop as BTS debuts at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 with "Love Yourself: Tear," the first chart-topper for the group. The title leads with 135,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending May 24, according to Nielsen Music. It is the third-biggest week for an album by a group in 2018, trailing only the No. 1 debut of Migos Culture II (199,000 units) on the Feb. 10 chart. Further, of Teen's starting sum, 100,000 were in traditional album sales. Both the unit and sales totals are high-water marks for K-pop.
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A number of artists perk up on the chart thanks to continued sales generated from concert ticket/album sale redemption offers, including Smith, Robert Plant (No. 123) and Kenny Chesney (No. 169). Their father, Bob, owns a record 18 chart-toppers.

Ziggy Marley’s Rebellion Rises starts at No. 193 on the Billboard 200 and No. 1 on the Reggae Albums chart — the sixth leader on the latter tally for the artist. Overall, members of the Marley family have earned 33 No. 1s on the 24-year-old Reggae Albums list, which accounts for 15 percent of its 222 total leaders. Other Marleys with No. 1s: Ziggy’s brothers Stephen (four), Damian (three) and Ky-Mani (two). Their father, Bob, owns a record 18 chart-toppers. —K.C.

**DATA FOR WEEK OF 06.02.2018**

**SALES DATA COMPILED BY**

The Billboard 200 chart ranks the most popular albums of the week, as compiled by Nielsen Music, based on multi-metric consumption (blending traditional album sales, track equivalent albums, and streaming equivalent albums).
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Ryan Moss and the Apollo Team
rmoss@apollojets.com | 267-420-2311

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SWEET TALK
PUBLICITY

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JASON OWEN
BILLBOARD'S COUNTRY EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR
Stage & Screen Notes

The soundtracks to the superhero sequel Deadpool 2 and the second season of Netflix’s 13 Reasons Why arrive in the top 40 on Billboard 200 as the titles bow at Nos. 18 and 34, respectively. Both albums surpass the peaks of their initial soundtracks: The companion album to the first Deadpool film topped out at No. 30 in 2016, while the one for the first season of 13 Reasons Why peaked at No. 111 in 2017.

Deadpool 2 starts with 21,000 equivalent album units earned in the week ending May 24, according to Nielsen Music. Traditional album sales drove 13,000 of that sum. Meanwhile, streaming powers 13 Reasons Why as the set enters with 16,000 units (11,000 in streaming-equivalent album units). Seventy-four percent of the album’s on-demand audio streams came from two of its songs: Selena Gomez’s “Back To You” and Billie Eilish and Khalid’s “Lovely.”

Elsewhere on the Billboard 200, the original Broadway cast recording of Mean Girls takes a bow at No. 42 (14,000 units; 10,000 in album sales) — the highest-charting new cast album in over a year. The last to go higher was Dear Evan Hansen, which debuted and peaked at No. 8 on Feb. 26, 2017.

On the album sales-ranked Cast Albums chart, Mean Girls debuts at No. 1, displacing Hamilton: An American Musical after 48 straight weeks atop the chart. Since Hamilton debuted atop the chart 139 weeks ago (Oct. 17, 2015), it has earned 133 nonconsecutive weeks at No. 1, yelping the top slot for only six weeks (to six other recordings, each with just a week at No. 1). —Keith Caulfield
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BTS Selfies Aid Gains

John Legend (below) has had a busy few weeks, what with the birth of son Miles, his second child with Chrissy Teigen, on May 15 and performing at the Billboard Music Awards on May 20. The latter in particular helped score him a No. 14 peak in the week ending May 24, according to Next Big Sound, after not only performing new single “A Good Night” but also taking a backseat selfie with BTS, which garnered him a healthy amount of social media interaction. It is Legend’s second week in the top 20 (No. 18) of the chart in his career, both of which have occurred in the last month (the other: No. 15, May 12).

Insatiable appetites for Backstreet Boys’ newest single, “Don’t Go Breaking My Heart,” help the pop veterans debut on the Social 50 at No. 6, in addition to a 291 percent boost in Wikipedia views (150,000 to 500,000), 100,000 new YouTube subscribers (628 percent), 700,000 Twitter reactions and 344,000 mentions, celebrating 10 million streams of the “Heart” music video with a May 25 tweet and – Ha, Legend – sharing a May 19 selfie with BTS that drove some extra social activity. (The group added a hashtag, #BTSTBT, to commemorate the meeting of the two boy bands.)

Meanwhile, closets Shesu Kannish-Mason — who performed at the May 19 wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle — debuts at No. 7 on the Social 50 with significant boosts to his followers on Twitter (90,000 new followers), along with 45,000 Wikipedia views. (No BTS, though — yet.) — Kevin Rutherford

June 2, 2018
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### Pop/Rhythmic/Adult

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<td><strong>I'M IN MY BLOOD</strong></td>
<td>Shawn Mendes</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MINE</strong></td>
<td>Bazzi</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NEW RULES</strong></td>
<td>Dua Lipa</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOOKAlive</strong></td>
<td>Roddy Ricch Feat. Drake</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOR THE FIRST TIME</strong></td>
<td>Darius Rucker</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ONE NUMBER AWAY</strong></td>
<td>Luke Combs</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FRIENDS</strong></td>
<td>Marshmello &amp; Anne-Marie</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIERSE</strong></td>
<td>Bruno Mars &amp; Cardi B</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HEAVEN</strong></td>
<td>Kane Brown</td>
<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>HABANA</strong></td>
<td>Camila Cabello Feat. Young Thug</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WOMAN, AMEN</strong></td>
<td>Dierks Bentley</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALL THE STARS</strong></td>
<td>Kendrick Lamar &amp; SZA</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WALK IT TALK IT</strong></td>
<td>Migos Feat. Drake</td>
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<tr>
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### Digital Song Sales™

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<th>New Entry</th>
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<td><strong>FAKE LOVE</strong></td>
<td>BTS</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>IN MY BLOOD</strong></td>
<td>Shawn Mendes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE MIDDLE</strong></td>
<td>Zedd, Maren Morris &amp; Grey</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WHATSOEVER IT TAKES</strong></td>
<td>Imagine Dragons</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THANK YOU</strong></td>
<td>Bruno Mars &amp; Cardi B</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOOKAlive</strong></td>
<td>Roddy Ricch Feat. Drake</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOR THE FIRST TIME</strong></td>
<td>Darius Rucker</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ONE NUMBER AWAY</strong></td>
<td>Luke Combs</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FRIENDS</strong></td>
<td>Marshmello &amp; Anne-Marie</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIERSE</strong></td>
<td>Bruno Mars &amp; Cardi B</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>HEAVEN</strong></td>
<td>Kane Brown</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>HABANA</strong></td>
<td>Camila Cabello Feat. Young Thug</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WOMAN, AMEN</strong></td>
<td>Dierks Bentley</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ALL THE STARS</strong></td>
<td>Kendrick Lamar &amp; SZA</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WALK IT TALK IT</strong></td>
<td>Migos Feat. Drake</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td><strong>WALK IT TALK IT</strong></td>
<td>Taylor Swift</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WALK IT TALK IT</strong></td>
<td>Taylor Swift</td>
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### Adult Contemporary™

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Last Week</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PERFECT</strong></td>
<td>Ed Sheeran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LIGHTS DOWN LOW</strong></td>
<td>MAX Feat. gnash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FEEL IT STILL</strong></td>
<td>Portugal. The Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WHAT ABOUT US</strong></td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THANK YOU</strong></td>
<td>Bruno Mars &amp; Cardi B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HABANA</strong></td>
<td>Camila Cabello Feat. Young Thug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEANT TO BE</strong></td>
<td>Bebe Rexha &amp; Florida Georgia Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THUNDER</strong></td>
<td>Imagine Dragons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE MIDDLE</strong></td>
<td>Zedd, Maren Morris &amp; Grey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ATTENTION</strong></td>
<td>Charlie Puth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YOU ARE THE REASON</strong></td>
<td>Calum Scott &amp; Leona Lewis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HABANA</strong></td>
<td>Camila Cabello Feat. Young Thug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DELEGATE</strong></td>
<td>Taylor Swift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HOW LONG</strong></td>
<td>Charlie Puth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WAIT</strong></td>
<td>Maroon 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WHERE WE WERE</strong></td>
<td>Taylor Swift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NO EXCUSES</strong></td>
<td>Meghan Trainor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IN MY BLOOD</strong></td>
<td>Shawn Mendes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NEVER BE THE SAME</strong></td>
<td>Camila Cabello</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WHATSOEVER IT TAKES</strong></td>
<td>Imagine Dragons</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BEAUTIFUL TRAUMA</strong></td>
<td>Pink</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NEW RULES</strong></td>
<td>Dua Lipa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BAD BLOOD</strong></td>
<td>Zedd, Maren Morris &amp; Grey</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LIVE IN THE LIGHT</strong></td>
<td>Pentatonix</td>
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### Adult Top 40™

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last Week</th>
<th>This Week</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WHATEVER IT TAKES</strong></td>
<td>Imagine Dragons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NEVER BE THE SAME</strong></td>
<td>Camila Cabello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE MIDDLE</strong></td>
<td>Zedd, Maren Morris &amp; Grey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NEVER BE THE SAME</strong></td>
<td>Camila Cabello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GOD'S PLAN</strong></td>
<td>Drake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BE CAREFUL</strong></td>
<td>Cardi B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOOK ALIVE</strong></td>
<td>BlocBoy J &amp; Drake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EVERYBODY HURRY</strong></td>
<td>Logic &amp; Marshmello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRAY FOR ME</strong></td>
<td>The Weeknd &amp; Kendrick Lamar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NEVER BE THE SAME</strong></td>
<td>Camila Cabello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MINE</strong></td>
<td>Bazzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOVE LIES</strong></td>
<td>Khalid &amp; Normani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHUN-LI</strong></td>
<td>NICKI Minaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FRECKLE FACE</strong></td>
<td>Lil Dicky Feat. Chris Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WALK IT TALK IT</strong></td>
<td>Migos Feat. Drake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CALL OUT MY NAME</strong></td>
<td>The Weeknd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POWERWALK</strong></td>
<td>Rae Sremmurd &amp; Juicy J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BOO'D UP</strong></td>
<td>Ella Mai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BALL FOR ME</strong></td>
<td>Post Malone Feat. Nicki Minaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I LIKE IT</strong></td>
<td>Cardi B, Bad Bunny &amp; J Balvin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KOD</strong></td>
<td>J. Cole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALL NIGHT</strong></td>
<td>Big Boi</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>FRIENDS</strong></td>
<td>Marshmello &amp; Anne-Marie</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ICY GIRL</strong></td>
<td>Quinten Wilson &amp; Quavo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Billboard presents live music’s top gathering of industry insiders, power players and artists for a 360-degree look at the challenges and opportunities we share as an industry. This year’s summit will redefine and expand the boundaries of the live experience.

November 13 & 14
The Montage Beverly Hills
Rucker Finishes ‘First’

For the first time* by Darius Rucker (above) ascends 3-1 on Country Airplay, up 11 percent to 43.4 million audience impressions, according to Nielsen Music. Rucker, who co-wrote the song with Derek George and Scooter Carusoe, tells Billboard, “When I sat down to write it with Derek, it was based on an idea he had with Scooter, asking the question, ‘When was the last time you did something for the first time?’ and, for me, so many memories came flooding back. To this day, so many of the moments we name-check in this song, I know when and where I was.”

Rucker earns his eighth Country Airplay leader among 11 top 10s. The ballad is the second single from When Was the Last Time, which opened at No. 2 on Top Country Albums on the chart dated Nov. 11, 2017. Lead track “If I Told You” crowned the Country Airplay tally dated June 24, 2017, becoming Rucker’s first No. 1 since “Wagon Wheel” on April 13, 2013.

Brett Young banks his fourth Hot Country Songs top 10 as “Mercy” jumps 14-10. The ballad also becomes Young’s fourth top 10 on Country Digital Song Sales (13-9; 10,000 sold, up 9 percent). Plus Dan + Shay notch their fourth Country Airplay top 10 as “Tequila” pushes 12-10 (25.7 million, up 11 percent). The song is the lead single from the duo’s upcoming third studio album. — Jim Asker

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KREWELLA • LIIV • LIL XAN • LOGAN HENDERSON • LONDON RICHARDS
LOOTE • LOVELYTHEBAND • MACHINE GUN KELLY • MATOMA
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Five Finger Death Punch's "And Justice for None" lands its fifth total and consecutive No. 1 on Hard Rock Albums (all earned since 2013) as "And Justice for None" starts at No. 1 with 71,000 equivalent album units, according to Nielsen Music. Each of the metal band's quintet of chart-toppers have launched at No. 1, including 2017 greatest-hits set "A Decade of Destruction" (at No. 5). The new LP also becomes FFDP's fourth to rule Top Rock Albums and bows at No. 4 on the Billboard 200 as its fifth top-five title.

Shinedown returns to the top of the Mainstream Rock airplay chart, earning a No. 1 for a fourth consecutive year. "Devil," the lead single from "Attention Attention," rises 3-1 to become Shinedown's 12th chart-topper; the band is one No. 1 from the record on the ranking (which began in 1981): 13 each for Three Days Grace and Van Halen. The song ranks at No. 14 on the all-rock-format Rock Airplay chart with 5 million audience impressions.

Meanwhile, Queen occupies three of the top 20 spots on Hot Rock Songs thanks to streaming and sales gains for the iconic band's catalog after the May 18 arrival of the first trailer for upcoming biopic "Bohemian Rhapsody." The film's namesake song rises 10-8 with bumps of 19 and 17 percent in sales and streaming, respectively, followed by "Another One Bites the Dust" (No. 13) and "We Will Rock You" (No. 17); all three tunes appear in the trailer. "Bohemian Rhapsody" will premiere in the United States on Nov. 2.

—Kevin Rutherford
Lil Baby (above) scores the issue’s highest debut on Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums as his first studio effort, ‘Harder Than Ever,’ opens at No. 2. The set earned 71,000 equivalent album units in the week ending May 24, according to Nielsen Music. Harder includes current single “Yes Indeed,” a collaboration with Drake, which becomes Lil Baby’s first top 10 and Drake’s record-extending 63rd on Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs with a 26-5 rally after its first full week of tracking. Streaming fuels the ascent as “Indeed” records a 190% surge in U.S. streams to 39.5 million, prompting a 23-2 eruption on R&B/Hip-Hop Streaming Songs.

Plus, Nicki Minaj rewrites the record for most top 10 hits among women on R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay as “Chun-Li” moves 11-9. With the move, Minaj collects her 30th top 10 on the chart, pushing above Beyoncé and Mary J. Blige, each with 29. (Drake leads all artists with 60 top 10s.) “Chun-Li” gains with a 5% boost to 13 million in audience in the week ending May 27.

Also, Normani and Khalid bank a new top 10 on Rhythmic as “Love Lies” lifts 11-10. The duo gains with a 12% climb in plays for the week ending May 27. "Love" marks Khalid's fourth top 10; Normani, meanwhile, secures her first as a soloist after collecting two as a member of Fifth Harmony in 2016: "Work From Home" (featuring Ty Dolla $ign) ruled for a week, while the Fetty Wap-assisted "All in My Head (Flex)" reached No. 9. —Trevor Anderson
Maluma’s F.A.M.E. Debuts At No. 1

Maluma (above) notches his second consecutive No. 1 on the Top Latin Albums chart as F.A.M.E. launches atop the list. It earns the biggest week of 2018 for a Latin album by a solo artist in both units and traditional album sales, and the second-biggest week of the year overall.

F.A.M.E. starts with 15,000 equivalent album units earned in the week ending May 24 (with 7,000 of that sum in traditional album sales), according to Nielsen Music. In terms of the biggest weeks for Latin albums in 2018, F.A.M.E.’s opening trails only the No. 1 debut frame of CNCO’s self-titled album both in units and sales (16,000 units and 13,000 in sales on the April 21 chart). F.A.M.E. follows Maluma’s previous No. 1, Pretty Boy Dirty Boy, in 2015.

It’s a big week overall for Maluma on the charts, as F.A.M.E.’s third single, “El Prestamo,” lifts 6-1 on Latin Airplay. It’s his eighth No. 1 and tops the list with 20 million in audience impressions in the week ending May 27, up 74 percent.

Meanwhile, two other sets arrive in the top five of Top Latin Albums: Sebastian Yatra’s debut studio LP, Mantra, opens at No. 3 with 5,000 equivalent album units (2,000 in album sales), while Kany Garcia’s Soy Yo launches at No. 4 with 3,000 units (nearly all in album sales).

With Maluma, Yatra and Garcia all starting in the top five, it’s the first time the chart has had three bows in the region in nearly a year, (June 17, 2017). Lastly, Nicky Jam and J Balvin’s “X” crowns the Latin Pop Airplay chart as the song lifts 3-1. It’s the fourth No. 1 for Nicky Jam and fifth for Balvin.

—Pamela Bustios

Data for week of 06.02.2018

Go to BILLBOARD.COM/BIZ for complete chart data
The iconic "Stand by Me," originally a No. 4 Billboard Hot 100 hit for Ben E. King in 1961, returns, thanks to a cover unveiled at Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's royal wedding on May 19. Before the pair exchanged vows, Karen Gibson & The Kingdom Choir (above) turned in a stirring performance of the song. Their version sold 9,000 downloads in the week ending May 24, according to Nielsen Music. It sparks a No. 1 debut on Hot Gospel Songs (which blends sales, airplay and streaming data) and Gospel Digital Song Sales. The bows mark the first Billboard chart ink for Gibson, a renowned choir director in the United Kingdom.

Traditional hymn "Amen, This Little Light of Mine," which the group also performed at the wedding, enters Gospel Digital Song Sales at No. 2 (2,000 sold) and Hot Gospel Songs at No. 15. Jason Nelson's "Answer" arrives at No. 1 on Top Gospel Albums with 2,000 equivalent album units. Nelson notches his second total and consecutive No. 1 on the chart, as Jesus Revealed began on top on Feb. 7, 2015. He first reached the tally with Shifting the Atmosphere, which debuted and peaked at No. 3 in 2012. Plus, for KING & COUNTRY scores its highest Hot Christian Songs debut and rank as "Joy." launches at No. 2. The duo's ninth top 10 is fueled by sales of 15,000 as the track debuts as its first No. 1 on Christian Digital Song Sales. —Jim Asker
Swift Smashes Records

Taylor Swift (above) powers her way onto the Boxscore chart with the first five North American stadium dates from her Reputation World Tour. Earning the No. 1 ranking is a two-night stint at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif., which drew over 118,000 fans. With a total gross of $16.2 million, her tour-to-date (May 18-19) set a new gross record for a single headliner at the venue, surpassing U2’s 2017 record by over $467,000. The Irish band was tops for a year after racking up $15.7 million from two performances on the Joshua Tree Tour in May 2017.

During her first weekend on the road, Swift broke one of her own gross records with $14 million in sales at Levi’s Stadium in the San Francisco market (No. 3). She headlined at the 4-year-old venue for the first time in 2015 during her 1989 World Tour, earning $13 million from two sellouts.

She is also the top-grossing headliner on record at Seattle’s CenturyLink Field with $8.6 million in revenue (No. 4). Her performance on May 22 surpassed U2’s $6.1 million Tree Tour sales from a year ago by $2.4 million, as well as the band’s $6.1 million take in 2011 during its 360° Tour. Her first performance at the stadium — also during 2015’s 1989 trek — produced sales of just over $6 million.

At No. 5, her first headlining stint at Denver’s Sports Authority Field on May 25 scored $7.9 million at the box office and earned another venue gross record, surpassing U2’s 2017 touring earnings by $1.2 million. — Bob Allen
BRANDY AND MONICA HAD BOTH established themselves as R&B breakouts by 1998, but the two artists had yet to top the Billboard Hot 100. Each had come close: Monica’s “Don’t Take It Personal (Just One of Dem Days)” hit No. 2 in 1995, and Brandy’s “Sittin’ Up in My Room” did so in 1996. They would finally reach No. 1 together on “The Boy Is Mine,” a duet in which they sniped over the same love interest.

According to Monica, she and Brandy chose the song to make light of persistent media speculation that they were feuding. “People compared us and I never understood it,” Monica told Fred Bronson for his Billboard Book of Number One Hits. “They never did that ... with Brandy and Aaliyah. It was always Brandy and Monica,” she said. “That’s why we took the song.”

Co-written by Brandy, “The Boy Is Mine” was inspired by Michael Jackson and Paul McCartney’s 1982 No. 2 Hot 100 duet, “The Girl Is Mine,” as well as The Jerry Springer Show, where love triangles were frequently explored.

Brandy was 19 and Monica 17 when “Boy” topped the Hot 100 dated June 6, 1998, and remained there for 13 weeks. To this day, it is Atlantic Records’ longest-running No. 1.

Although both artists summited the Hot 100 again — Brandy with “Have You Ever?” and Monica with “The First Night” and “Angel of Mine” — “The Boy Is Mine” remains each artist’s biggest hit.

The two teamed up again in 2012 for “It All Belongs to Me,” which reached No. 23 on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart. In 2017, Monica was featured on tracks by Gucci Mane and 2 Chainz, while Brandy starred as Roxie Hart in the musical Chicago. In April, she earned her first Hot Gospel Songs hit, “Ohhh Lord,” with the Star cast, Queen Latifah and Patti Labelle.

—XANDER ZELLNER
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