

# billboard

AUGUST 6, 2022 • BILLBOARD.COM



## WILLOW'S LONG GAME

From Child Star  
To Rock Star

---

## TAKING BACK TOURING

Black Promoters  
Collective Booms

# Road To Joy

HOW SAM SMITH FOUND LIBERATION  
— AND THEIR TRUEST SELF —  
WITH A MUSICAL LEFT TURN



# GLORIA TREVI



YOUR LIVE NATION FAMILY CELEBRATES YOU FOR  
**35 YEARS OF SUCCESS**  
AND MANY MORE TO COME!



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COLISEO
- FRI AUG 19 — LAREDO, TX  
SAMES AUTO ARENA
- SAT AUG 20 — HIDALGO, TX  
PAYNE ARENA
- SUN AUG 21 — SAN ANTONIO, TX  
FREEMAN COLISEUM
- THU AUG 25 — IRVING, TX  
THE PAVILION AT  
TOYOTA MUSIC FACTORY
- FRI AUG 26 — SUGAR LAND, TX  
SMART FINANCIAL CENTRE
- SAT AUG 27 — AUSTIN, TX  
MOODY AMPHITHEATER
- SUN AUG 28 — MIDLAND, TX  
LA HACIENDA EVENT CENTER
- FRI SEP 02 — EL PASO, TX  
EL PASO COUNTY COLISEUM
- SAT SEP 03 — PHOENIX, AZ  
ARIZONA FINANCIAL THEATRE
- SUN SEP 04 — TUCSON, AZ  
CENTENNIAL HALL
- WED SEP 07 — NASHVILLE, TN  
ANDREW JACKSON HALL TPAC
- FRI SEP 09 — MILWAUKEE, WI  
MILLER HIGH LIFE THEATRE
- SAT SEP 10 — ROSEMONT, IL  
ALLSTATE ARENA
- SUN SEP 11 — INDIANAPOLIS, IN  
MURAT THEATRE AT  
OLD NATION CENTRE
- FRI SEP 16 — LAS VEGAS, NV  
MICHELOB ULTRA ARENA
- SAT SEP 17 — INGLEWOOD, CA  
YOUTUBE THEATER
- SUN SEP 18 — ONTARIO, CA  
TOYOTA ARENA
- THU SEP 22 — COACHELLA, CA  
SPOTLIGHT 29 CASINO
- FRI SEP 23 — ANAHEIM, CA  
HONDA CENTER
- SAT SEP 24 — SACRAMENTO, CA  
HARD ROCK LIVE
- FRI SEP 30 — SAN DIEGO, CA  
VIEJAS ARENA
- SAT OCT 01 — FRESNO, CA  
SAVE MART CENTER
- THU OCT 06 — STOCKTON, CA  
STOCKTON ARENA
- FRI OCT 07 — RENO, NV  
GRAND THEATER AT  
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MECHANICS BANK ARENA
- FRI OCT 14 — PORTLAND, OR  
VETERANS MEMORIAL  
COLISEUM
- SAT OCT 15 — KENT, WA  
ACCESSO SHOWARE CENTER
- THU OCT 20 — ALBUQUERQUE, NM  
KIVA AUDITORIUM
- SAT OCT 22 — DENVER, CO  
BELLCO THEATRE
- SUN OCT 23 — SALT LAKE CITY, UT  
ABRAVANEL HALL
- SUN OCT 30 — SAN JOSE, CA  
SAP CENTER
- FRI NOV 04 — ST. LOUIS, MO  
STIFEL THEATRE
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T-MOBILE ARENA
- SUN NOV 06 — DODGE CITY, KS  
UNITED WIRELESS ARENA
- THU NOV 10 — PHILADELPHIA, PA  
FILLMORE PHILADELPHIA
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HULU THEATRE AT  
MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
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ORPHEUM THEATRE
- FRI NOV 18 — WASHINGTON, DC  
THE THEATER AT  
MGM NATIONAL HARBOR
- SAT NOV 19 — CHARLOTTE, NC  
OVENS AUDITORIUM
- SUN NOV 20 — ATLANTA, GA  
COCA-COLA ROXY
- WED NOV 23 — RALEIGH, NC  
RALEIGH MEMORIAL  
AUDITORIUM
- FRI NOV 25 — HOLLYWOOD, FL  
HARD ROCK LIVE

LIVE NATION

ticketmaster

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LATINO LIVE



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AUG. 6, 2022

VOLUME 134

NO. 10

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#### ON THE COVER

Sam Smith photographed by Charlotte Hadden on June 23 outside of London.

#### THIS PAGE

Willow photographed by Obidi Constantine Nzeribe on July 18 at The Neon Warehouse in Los Angeles.

#### TO OUR READERS

*Billboard* will publish its next issue on Aug. 27. For 24/7 music coverage, go to [billboard.com](http://billboard.com).

#### CORRECTION

In the July 30 issue of *Billboard*, a chart in the midyear market-share story was mislabeled as "overall" market share rather than "current" market share.





**LATIN MUSIC GLOBAL ICON**  
**GLORIA TREVI**  
**35TH ANNIVERSARY**



**"PROUD TO BE TOGETHER FROM DAY 1"**

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**& IBERIAN PENINSULA**



UNIVERSAL MUSIC LATINO



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en felicitar  
a la artista latina  
que ha roto  
todos los récords  
de asistencia  
en los recintos  
más importantes  
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**6 Auditorio Citibanamex**

**22 Palenque Domo Care**

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**¡Enhorabuena,  
que sigan  
los éxitos!**



**SERCA**



# charts

DATA FOR WEEK OF 8.06.2022



Bizarrap (left) and Quevedo

## Bizarrap & Quevedo's '52' Is No. 1

**BILLBOARD  
GLOBAL 200**

**1**

**"Bzrp Music Sessions,  
Vol. 52"**

Bizarrap & Quevedo

LAST WEEK

**1**

PEAK POSITION

**1**

WEEKS ON CHART

**3**

**B**IZARRAP, FROM ARGENTINA, and Quevedo, from Spain, boast the biggest song in the world for a second consecutive week as "Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 52" leads the Billboard Global 200 and Billboard Global Excl. U.S. charts.

The collaboration — which marks each artist's first No. 1 on both lists — drew 92 million streams (up 4%) and sold 1,000 downloads (up 34%) worldwide the July 22-28 tracking week, according to Luminate. While 94% of its streams and 79% of its sales were from outside the United States during that span, the song enters the U.S.-based Billboard Hot 100 at No. 98 on the Aug. 6-dated chart.

Bizarrap's collaborative "Sessions" series began in 2018, and the following year, Dale Play Records president Federico "Fede" Lauria signed

him to the label. "For me, he was the perfect bridge between the Argentine urban movement and the world," Lauria says. "You could already see his impact in Argentina. His sessions were already having an effect."

For "Vol. 52," Bizarrap reached out to Quevedo through Instagram. "He told me he liked what I was doing and was hoping we could do music together," Quevedo remembers. "The timing was perfect because I was in Argentina recording, so we decided to do the session then. We recorded the song [and] then just spent the day laughing and watching videos on YouTube.

"Whatever Bizarrap touches turns to gold," he continues. "Also, the song is perfect for summer and festivals, and people can sing along and dance to it. Plus, I'm a new artist, so I think people are intrigued about what I'm doing."

—GARY TRUST, LEILA COBO AND GRISELDA FLORES

**HOT 100 FIRST-TIMERS** Bizarrap & Quevedo "Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 52" at **No. 98**

ARTISTS WHO HAVE RECENTLY MADE THEIR INITIAL APPEARANCES ON THE CHART



# Hot 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title <small>PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)</small>	Artist <small>IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL</small>	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
		<b>1</b>	<b>#1 for 2 WEEKS</b> <b>About Damn Time</b> RICKY REED, B. SLATKIN (B. SLATKIN, E. B. FREDERIC, L. PRICE, M. MCLAREN, M. JEFFERSON, R. LARKINS, S. HAGUE, T. M. THOMAS)	<b>Lizzo</b> NICE LIFE/ATLANTIC	1	15
1	2	<b>2</b>	<b>As It Was</b> KID HARPOON, T. JOHNSON (H. STYLES, T. E. PHULL, T. JOHNSON)	<b>Harry Styles</b> ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	1	17
4	3	<b>AIR</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)</b> K. BUSH (K. BUSH)	<b>Kate Bush</b> FISH PEOPLE/NOBLE AND BRITTE/RHINO/WARNERY	3	29
3	4	<b>4</b>	<b>First Class</b> CHARLIE HANDSOME, J. T. HARLOW, J. L. HARRIS, BABETRUTH, R. CHAHAYED (J. T. HARLOW, D. FORD, J. VELAZQUEZ, R. CHAHAYED, CHARLIE HANDSOME, J. L. HARRIS, N. J. PABON, C. B. BRIDGES, J. JONES, M. RAHEEM, E. WILLIAMS, S. DUHAMEL, W. ADAMS)	<b>Jack Harlow</b> GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC	1	16
5	5	<b>5</b>	<b>Wait For U</b> ATL JACOB, FNZ, T. AKPOJHENE, ISRAEL, SONIC MAJOR (N. D. WILBURN, A. GRAHAM, T. OPENIYI, T. AKPOGHENE, J. D. CANADY, M. J. MULE, I. J. DEBONI, F. E. BENTLEY III, O. OKE, I. A. FOWOBAJE)	<b>Future Featuring Drake &amp; Tems</b> FREEBANDZ/EPIC	1	13
9	7	<b>6</b>	<b>Break My Soul</b> B. KNOWLES CARTER, T. NASH, TRICKY, J. C. ISAKEN (B. G. KNOWLES CARTER, T. NASH, C. A. STEWART, S. C. CARTER, A. GEORGE, F. C. MCFARLANE, A. PIGOTT, F. ROSS)	<b>Beyonce</b> PARKWOOD/COLUMBIA	6	6
11	9	<b>7</b>	<b>Late Night Talking</b> KID HARPOON, T. JOHNSON (H. STYLES, T. E. PHULL)	<b>Harry Styles</b> ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	4	10
6	6	<b>8</b>	<b>Me Porto Bonito</b> LENEX, SUBELO NEO, MAG (B. A. MARTINEZ OCASIO, O. J. DEL VALLE VEGA, J. A. MOLINA PRATO, F. MONTALVO ALICEA, J. C. CRUZ, J. HERNANDEZ RODRIGUEZ, M. D. BORRERO, R. ROSARDO)	<b>Bad Bunny &amp; Chencho Corleone</b> RIMAS	6	12
14	12	<b>9</b>	<b>I Like You (A Happier Song)</b> L. BELL, J. L. HARRIS (A. R. POST, A. Z. DLAMINI, L. B. BELL, J. L. HARRIS, B. WALSH)	<b>Post Malone Featuring Doja Cat</b> MERCURY/REPUBLIC	9	8
7	8	<b>10</b>	<b>Heat Waves</b> D. BAYLEY (D. BAYLEY)	<b>Glass Animals</b> WOLF TONE/POLYDOR/REPUBLIC	1	80
50	14	<b>11</b>	<b>Bad Habit</b> STEVE LACY (S. T. L. MOYA, B. FOUSHEE, D. GORDON, M. CASTELLANOS, J. C. KIRBY)	<b>Steve Lacy</b> L-M/RCA	11	4
17	16	<b>12</b>	<b>Sunroof</b> DAZY (N. S. URE)	<b>Nicky Youre &amp; dazy</b> THIRTY KNOTS/COLUMBIA	12	9
10	11	<b>13</b>	<b>Big Energy</b> DR. LUKE, V. OLIVER (A. M. STEPHENS, L. S. GOTTWALD, V. OLIVER, A. T. R. SMITH, T. M. THOMAS, K. AINE, J. LOWE, A. BELEW, C. FRANTZ, S. STANLEY, T. WEYMOUTH)	<b>Latto</b> STREAMCUT/RCA	3	40
12	13	<b>14</b>	<b>Wasted On You</b> J. MOI, J. DURRETT (M. WALLLEN, E. K. SMITH, J. THOMPSON, CHARLIE HANDSOME)	<b>Morgan Wallen</b> REPUBLIC/BIG LOUD	9	37
8	10	<b>15</b>	<b>Jimmy Cooks</b> VINYLZ, TAY KEITH (A. GRAHAM, S. B. A. JOSEPH, A. HERNANDEZ, B. L. CHAMBERS, T. GOMRINGER, K. GOMRINGER, D. FORD, W. MORRIS, A. GOODMAN, H. RAY, I. YOUNG)	<b>Drake Featuring 21 Savage</b> OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	1	6
13	15	<b>16</b>	<b>Titi Me Pregunto</b> MAG (B. A. MARTINEZ OCASIO, M. D. BORRERO, R. ROSARDO)	<b>Bad Bunny</b> RIMAS	5	12
19	17	<b>17</b>	<b>The Kind Of Love We Make</b> CHIP MATTHEWS, J. D. SINGLETON, L. COMBS (L. COMBS, J. DAVIS, D. ISBELL, R. ISBELL)	<b>Luke Combs</b> RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE	13	6
15	18	<b>18</b>	<b>Stay</b> CASHMERE CAT, O. FEDI, B. SLATKIN, C. PUTH (C. K. J. HOWARD, J. D. BIEBER, M. A. HOIBERG, O. FEDI, B. SLATKIN, C. PUTH, M. J. MULE, I. J. DEBONI, S. RAHMANY)	<b>The Kid LAROI &amp; Justin Bieber</b> RAYMOND BRAUN/COLUMBIA/DEF JAM	1	55
18	20	<b>19</b>	<b>Numb Little Bug</b> D. CATON, FALCONRY, E. HILL (E. BEHOLD, N. M. LOPEZ, A. DECARO)	<b>Em Beihold</b> MOON PROJECTS/REPUBLIC	18	26
21	21	<b>20</b>	<b>Ghost</b> THE MONSTERS & STRANGERZ, J. BELLION (J. D. BIEBER, J. D. BELLION, J. K. JOHNSON, S. A. JOHNSON, M. R. POLLACK)	<b>Justin Bieber</b> RAYMOND BRAUN/DEF JAM	5	44

Go to the Chart Beat section of [billboard.com](http://billboard.com) for complete charts coverage.



The 26-year-old Rochester, Minn., native's first Hot 100 entry also reaches a new No. 5 high on Rap Streaming Songs.

HOT 100

59

**"Betty (Get Money)"**  
Yung Gravy

### How did "Betty (Get Money)" come together?

I always thought [Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up"] would be sick to do something with, I just never figured it was clearable. Somebody who had part-ownership of the rights to the sample hit me up like, "You should try it

out." At first, two of the three writers approved it, and one guy wanted us to make it cleaner — there's a raunchier version, but the chant section at the end that's the most popping got added at the last minute [as a result]. I love how it turned out.

### You've said before that you don't want to reach a "Post Malone-level" of recognizability. Why not?

Obviously, I want my music to succeed and I love seeing the numbers, but it would be nice if not everybody knew your face and you were [still] that popping. Anywhere I've gone recently, I get recognized immediately — it's stressful sometimes. I just got invited to a birthday party, but they ran up on me with the cameras and the flash. They asked me how "Alley Oop" with Lil Baby came together. I made up a story that we decided to go on a boys' trip to Tibet.

### What can we expect from your new album?

[I'm] dropping it in September. It's bigger than any other project I've done. There are not a lot of features — it's pure Gravy. We did a lot of it from scratch with instruments to make our own samples and tried a lot of new styles. This time, I've gotten close to the right people where I got a good set of producers and engineers to work with. Between the beat, instruments and intricacies of the lyrics, I really got better.

—MICHAEL SAPONARA

**Biggest Airplay Gain**

3

**"Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)"**

Kate Bush



**Biggest Streaming Gain**

40

**"Last Night Lonely"**

Jon Pardi



**Biggest Sales Gain**

47

**"Left and Right"**

Charlie Puth featuring Jung Kook





## BILLBOARD 200

# 11



### ODESZA *The Last Goodbye*

The duo's second top 15-charting release (25,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States during the week ending July 28, according to Luminate) also debuts at No. 2 on Top Dance/Electronic Albums.

# 16



### Nardo Wick *Who Is Nardo Wick?*

The album hits a new peak following its deluxe reissue on July 22 with 12 additional tracks, bringing its total count to 30. *Who Is Nardo Wick?* debuted at No. 19 (its previous high) on the chart dated Dec. 18, 2021.

# 58

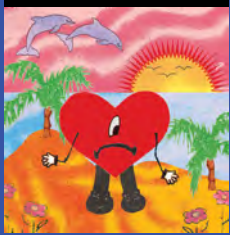


### Creedence Clearwater Revival Featuring John Fogerty *Chronicle: The 20 Greatest Hits*

It's just the fifth album to reach 600 total weeks on the chart, though it still remains a sizable distance from the all-time leader, Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* (962).

# 1

### BAD BUNNY *Un Verano Sin Ti*



With a seventh nonconsecutive week atop the Billboard 200, Bad Bunny's *Un Verano Sin Ti* surpasses Adele's *30* for the third-most weeks at No. 1 since the start of last year. Only Morgan Wallen's *Dangerous: The Double Album* (with 10 weeks at No. 1) and the *Encanto* soundtrack (nine) have led the chart for longer total periods during that span. In the tracking week ending July 28, *Un Verano Sin Ti* earned 98,000 equivalent album units in the United States (down 5%), according to Luminate — the first time that its weekly total dipped below 100,000.

Bad Bunny will likely cede the No. 1 slot on the Aug. 13 chart to Beyoncé, as her seventh solo studio album, *Renaissance*, is due to debut following its July 29 release. All of her previous six opened at No. 1, beginning in 2003 with *Dangerously in Love*. —KEITH CAULFIELD

# Billboard 200

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
			IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL			
		<b>1</b>	<b>#1 for 7 WEEKS</b> <b>Bad Bunny</b> RIMAS	<b>Un Verano Sin Ti</b>	1	12
5	4	<b>2</b>	<b>Morgan Wallen</b> BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	<b>Dangerous: The Double Album</b>	1	81
4	3	<b>3</b>	<b>Harry Styles</b> ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	<b>Harry's House</b>	1	10
		<b>HOT SHOT DEBUT</b>	<b>SEVENTEEN</b> PLEDIS/GEFFEN/IGA	<b>SEVENTEEN 4th Album Repackage: Sector 17</b>	4	1
7	6	<b>5</b>	<b>Future</b> FREEBANDZ/EPIC	<b>I Never Liked You</b>	1	13
6	5	<b>6</b>	<b>Drake</b> OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	<b>Honestly, Nevermind</b>	1	6
-	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Lizzo</b> NICE LIFE/ATLANTIC/JAG	<b>Special</b>	2	2
8	10	<b>8</b>	<b>Lil Durk</b> ALAMO	<b>7220</b>	1	20
		<b>NEW</b>	<b>Jack White</b> THIRD MAN	<b>Entering Heaven Alive</b>	9	1
<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Olivia Rodrigo</b> GEFFEN/IGA	<b>Sour</b>	1	62
		<b>NEW</b>	<b>ODESZA</b> FOREIGN FAMILY COLLECTIVE/NINJA TUNE	<b>The Last Goodbye</b>	11	1
11	14	<b>12</b>	<b>Post Malone</b> MERCURY/REPUBLIC	<b>Twelve Carat Toothache</b>	2	8
-	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Steve Lacy</b> L-M/RCA	<b>Gemini Rights</b>	7	2
13	15	<b>14</b>	<b>Zach Bryan</b> BELTING BRONCO/WARNER	<b>American Heartbreak</b>	5	10
16	19	<b>15</b>	<b>Kendrick Lamar</b> PGLANG/TOP DAWG/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/IGA	<b>Mr. Morale &amp; The Big Steppers</b>	1	11
137	<b>140</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>GG</b> <b>Nardo Wick</b> FLAWLESS ENT./RCA	<b>Who Is Nardo Wick?</b>	16	34
15	18	<b>17</b>	<b>Luke Combs</b> RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	<b>Growin' Up</b>	2	5
17	20	<b>18</b>	<b>Drake</b> OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	<b>Certified Lover Boy</b>	1	47
<b>2</b>	9	<b>19</b>	<b>Brent Faiyaz</b> LOST KIDS	<b>Wasteland</b>	2	3
10	16	<b>20</b>	<b>Chris Brown</b> CBE/RCA	<b>Breezy</b>	4	5

BILLBOARD 200: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ALBUMS, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION, BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, STREAMING AND COMPLEMENTS. CHART POSITIONING BASED ON THE WEEK ENDING JULY 28, 2022. BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.





GLOBAL 200

9

**OneRepublic**  
"I Ain't Worried"

OneRepublic's "I Ain't Worried" hits the top 10 of the Global 200, rising 12-9 with 31.3 million streams and 7,000 downloads sold worldwide in the July 22-28 tracking week, according to Luminate. It's the first time that the Ryan Tedder-fronted band breaks the threshold since the chart launched in September 2020. On the U.S.-based

Billboard Hot 100, the single likewise reaches a new No. 24 high, marking the group's highest-charting hit since 2014.

The song is the first from the *Top Gun: Maverick* soundtrack to fly into the Global 200's top 10, though Lady Gaga's "Hold My Hand" hit No. 37 in June, following the film's release in late May.

Meanwhile, four tracks debut in the chart's upper quarter, led by U.K. rapper Central Cee's "Doja" at No. 19 with 28.7 million streams worldwide. A viral TikTok hit, the song has drawn buzz for its titular reference to Doja Cat and its foundational sample of Eve's "Let Me Blow Ya Mind" (featuring Gwen Stefani). Central Cee's previous Global 200 history amounts to one week at No. 200 with "Obsessed With You" last September.

Billie Eilish enters at No. 25 on the Global 200 with "TV" and No. 50 with "The 30th." Both released July 21 — nearly a year after the arrival of her most recent album, *Happier Than Ever* — the stripped-down songs debut with 21.8 million and 14.8 million global streams, and 6,000 and 5,000 sold, respectively, in the tracking week.

Plus, Argentina's Duki scores his third career entry on the chart with "Givenchy," which debuts at No. 40 (27 million streams). His prior hits came alongside Bizarrap ("YaMeFui") and Quevedo ("Si Quieren Frontear") — who together hold No. 1 for a second week with "Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 52" (see story, page 6).

—GARY TRUST AND ERIC FRANKENBERG

# Global 200

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
(5)	(1)	(1)	<b>#1 for 2 WEEKS</b> Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 52	Bizarrap & Quevedo	1	3
2	2	2	As It Was	Harry Styles	1	17
3	4	3	Me Porto Bonito	Bad Bunny & Chencho Corleone	2	12
1	3	4	Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)	Kate Bush	1	9
4	5	5	Titi Me Pregunto	Bad Bunny	4	12
6	6	6	Glimpse Of Us	Joji	2	7
8	8	7	Efecto	Bad Bunny	7	12
9	9	8	Heat Waves	Glass Animals	1	82
(15)	(12)	(9)	I Ain't Worried	OneRepublic	9	8
7	10	10	Ojitos Lindos	Bad Bunny & Bomba Estereo	4	12
10	(7)	11	About Damn Time	Lizzo	6	15
11	11	12	Moscow Mule	Bad Bunny	2	12
(62)	(16)	(13)	Bad Habit	Steve Lacy	13	3
14	14	14	Provenza	Karol G	6	14
12	13	15	Jimmy Cooks	Drake Featuring 21 Savage	3	6
16	17	16	Cold Heart (PNAU Remix)	Elton John & Dua Lipa	3	50
13	15	17	Left And Right	Charlie Puth Featuring Jung Kook	5	5
24	20	18	Save Your Tears	The Weeknd & Ariana Grande	1	82
HOT SHOT DEBUT		(19)	Doja	Central Cee	19	1
22	18	20	Stay	The Kid LAROI & Justin Bieber	1	55

GARETH CATTERMOLE/MTV/GETTY IMAGES

BILLBOARD GLOBAL 200: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR SONGS BASED ON STREAMING AND SALES ACTIVITY FROM OVER 200 TERRITORIES AROUND THE WORLD — INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES — AS TRACKED BY LUMINATE. THE RANKING IS BASED ON A WEIGHTED FORMULA OF STREAMING AND SALES DATA. DOWNLOADS AND SALES FROM TOP MUSIC RE-TAILERS ACROSS THE GLOBE. SEE CHARTS. LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2022 BILLBOARD MEDIA, LLC AND LUMINATE, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.





ARTIST 100

4

Seventeen

WEEKS ON CHART

13

Seventeen reaches a new No. 4 high on the Billboard Artist 100 thanks to its *Seventeen 4th Album Repackage: Sector 17*.

The release, which expands upon the group's May album, *Face the Sun*, debuts at No. 4 — also a career-best for the act — on the Billboard 200 with 34,000 equivalent album units, according to Luminate. —XANDER ZELLNER



NO. 10

White 'Entering' Top 10 Again

Jack White visits the top 10 of the Artist 100 chart for a second time in 2022, fueled by the release of his second album of the year, *Entering Heaven Alive*. The set debuts at No. 1 on Top Rock & Alternative Albums, Top Rock Albums, Top Alternative Albums and Americana/Folk Albums with 27,000 equivalent album units, according to Luminate. It also enters at No. 2 on Top Album Sales (25,000 sold) and No. 9 on the all-genre Billboard 200. White spent a week at No. 2 on the Artist 100 in April concurrent with the chart arrival of his album *Fear of the Dawn*.

—KEVIN RUTHERFORD



NO. 18

Rich's Sales 'Progress'

John Rich scores his highest debut on the Hot Country Songs chart — including as part of the duo Big & Rich — as "Progress" enters at No. 14. With 41,000 first-week downloads sold, Rich also earns his biggest sales week for a song. The artist self-released the single on July 22 and performed it on *Fox & Friends* three days later. The track soars in atop both Country Digital Song Sales and the all-genre Digital Song Sales charts. Rich lands his fourth No. 1 on the former and his second on the latter, following his and Mike Rowe's "Santa's Gotta Dirty Job" this past December.

—JIM ASKER

# Artist 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist	IMPRINT/LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
1	3	1	<b>#1 for 4 WEEKS</b> <b>Bad Bunny</b>	RIMAS	1	226
2	2	2	<b>Harry Styles</b>	ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	1	161
4	4	3	<b>Morgan Wallen</b>	BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	1	177
74	71	4	<b>SEVENTEEN</b>	PLEDIS/GEFFEN/IGA	4	13
6	5	5	<b>Drake</b>	DVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	1	422
8	7	6	<b>Luke Combs</b>	RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	1	282
14	1	7	<b>Lizzo</b>	NICE LIFE/ATLANTIC/AG	1	104
7	6	8	<b>Doja Cat</b>	KEMOSABE/RCA	1	132
9	8	9	<b>The Weeknd</b>	XO/REPUBLIC	1	368
RE-ENTRY		10	<b>Jack White</b>	THIRD MAN	1	8
11	11	11	<b>Ed Sheeran</b>	ATLANTIC/AG	1	415
12	12	12	<b>Lil Baby</b>	QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/CAPITOL	1	220
15	13	13	<b>Post Malone</b>	REPUBLIC	1	318
17	15	14	<b>Kendrick Lamar</b>	TOP DAWG/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/IGA	1	343
13	16	15	<b>Taylor Swift</b>	REPUBLIC	1	418
10	14	16	<b>Metallica</b>	BLACKENED	2	349
35	32	17	<b>Billie Eilish</b>	DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/IGA	1	205
RE-ENTRY		18	<b>John Rich</b>	RICH RECORDS	18	2
23	19	19	<b>Future</b>	FREEBANDZ/EPIC	1	245
16	17	20	<b>Jack Harlow</b>	GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC/AG	1	103

SEVENTEEN: COURTESY OF PLEDIS ENTERTAINMENT; WHITE: PAIGE SARA; RICH: JASON DAVIS.

BILLBOARD ARTIST 100: THE WEEKS MOST POPULAR ARTISTS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY ALBUM AND TRACK SALES AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE. RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE. STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA FROM ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS. LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE DETAILS AND DEFINITIONS. © 2022 BILLBOARD MUSIC. PHOTO: LUMINATE. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

LUMINATE  
AIRPLAY, STREAMING AND SALES DATA COMPILED BY



HOT CHRISTIAN SONGS



NO. 1

For King & Country's Second No. 1

After scoring 16 top 10s between 2011 and 2021 on *Billboard's* multimetric Hot Christian Songs chart and hitting a No. 2 high three separate times, for King & Country — the duo of siblings Luke (above left) and Joel Smallbone — has reached the pinnacle twice in 2022. "For God Is With Us" takes over atop the Aug. 6-dated chart after "Relate" led for three weeks in February.

Both songs also topped Christian Airplay. The former held at No. 1 for three weeks in July — becoming the pair's 11th leader on the list — and the latter logged three weeks in the peak position on the chart beginning last December.

Elsewhere on *Billboard's* faith-based charts, Charles Jenkins & Fellowship Chicago and Stephanie Mills' "Never Knew Love" rises to No. 1 on Gospel Airplay. The sixth leader for Jenkins (and fifth with Fellowship Chicago) and first for Mills is an update of her classic "Never Knew Love Like This Before," which hit No. 6 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in 1980.

—JIM ASKER

		Hot Christian Songs			
LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title	Artist	WKS. ON CHART	
		IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL			
2	1	<b>#1 for 1 WEEK</b> <b>For God Is With Us</b>	for KING & COUNTRY	24	
		CURB-WORD			
1	2	<b>In Jesus Name (God Of Possible)</b>	Katy Nichole	26	
		CENTRICITY			
3	3	<b>Me On Your Mind</b>	Matthew West	21	
		STORY HOUSE COLLECTIVE/REUNION/PLG			
4	4	<b>See Me Through It</b>	Brandon Heath	28	
		CENTRICITY			
5	5	<b>Hymn Of Heaven</b>	Phil Wickham	28	
		FAIR TRADE			
6	6	<b>Fill My Cup</b>	Andrew Ripp	20	
		HOLLY STREET/BOXER POET			
9	7	<b>The Goodness</b>	tobyMac Featuring Blessing Offor	8	
		FOREFRONT/CAPITOL CMG			
8	8	<b>Sunday Sermons</b>	Anne Wilson	28	
		SPARROW/CAPITOL CMG			
7	9	<b>Brighter Days</b>	Blessing Offor	28	
		BOWYER & BOW/SPARROW/CAPITOL CMG			
12	10	<b>Getting Started</b>	Jeremy Camp	17	
		STOLEN PRIDE/SPARROW/CAPITOL CMG			

ADULT R&B AIRPLAY



From left: Hailey, Babyface, Wilson and Gill.

NO. 1

'No Stoppin' Charlie Wilson From No. 1

Charlie Wilson breaks a tie with Kem and Maxwell for the most No. 1s among male artists on Adult R&B Airplay thanks to his new leader, "No Stoppin' Us," featuring Babyface, K-Ci Hailey and Johnny Gill. The all-star collaboration — which also marks the chart's first No. 1 with four credited acts — rises from No. 3 following an 11% gain in plays at the U.S. radio format in the week ending July 31, according to Luminate. The legendary lineup brings a certified classic to the top in a new form, as "Stoppin'" interpolates McFadden & Whitehead's "Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now," a No. 1 hit on Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs in 1979.

"I had to do a double take, seeing our song on top with Bruno Mars, Beyoncé and Lizzo [on the chart], which made it that much more rewarding to share this achievement with my friends," Wilson tells *Billboard*. The R&B veteran notches his ninth leader, while Babyface logs his fifth No. 1 as an artist, Gill collects his third and Hailey earns his first as a solo act.

—TREVOR ANDERSON

		Adult R&B Airplay			
LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title	Artist	WKS. ON CHART	
		IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL			
3	1	<b>#1 for 1 WEEK</b> GG <b>No Stoppin' Us</b>	Charlie Wilson Featuring Babyface, K-Ci Hailey & Johnny Gill	19	
		PARADISE/P MUSIC			
1	2	<b>Love's Train</b>	Silk Sonic (Bruno Mars & Anderson .Paak)	23	
		AFTERMATH/ATLANTIC			
4	3	<b>Break My Soul</b>	Beyoncé	6	
		PARKWOOD/COLUMBIA			
5	4	<b>About Damn Time</b>	Lizzo	15	
		NICE LIFE/ATLANTIC			
6	5	<b>Essence</b>	Wizkid Featuring Tems	49	
		STARBOY/RCA			
2	6	<b>Scooch</b>	K. Michelle	22	
		NO COLOR NO SOUND/MNRK			
8	7	<b>Unloyal</b>	Summer Walker & Ari Lennox	16	
		LVRN/INTERSCOPE			
7	8	<b>Hrs And Hrs</b>	Muni Long	25	
		SUPERGIANT/DEF JAM			
10	9	<b>Don't Rush</b>	J. Brown Featuring Tank	18	
		MOCHA/SONO			
9	10	<b>Here With Me</b>	Mary J. Blige Featuring Anderson .Paak	12	
		MARY JANE/300/3EE			

KING: JEREMY COWART; WILSON: P. MUSIC GROUP.

HOT CHRISTIAN SONGS: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CURRENT CHRISTIAN SONGS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA BY ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES, TRACKED BY LUMINATE. RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE. ADULT R&B AIRPLAY: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR SONGS RANKED BY ADULT R&B RADIO AIRPLAY DETECTIONS, AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE. STATIONS ARE ELECTRONICALLY MONITORED 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK. SEE CHARTS. LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2022 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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# market

MUSIC AND MONEY

PG. 14 MO OSTIN: A PIONEER REMEMBERED

PG. 18 BLACK PROMOTERS FIND POWER IN COLLECTIVE

PG. 20 FCC COMMISSIONER ON HIS TIKTOK OPPOSITION



From left:  
Harlow,  
Latto, Styles,  
Lil Nas X and  
Doja Cat.

## Universal Shares No. 1 With Sony

The music publisher's 11 percentage-point market-share gain vaults it to the top of the Hot 100 ranking for the second quarter

BY ED CHRISTMAN // ILLUSTRATION BY ELEANOR SHAKESPEARE

**A** 11 PERCENTAGE-POINT surge by Universal Music Publishing Group resulted in a split decision for the top honors in *Billboard*'s second-quarter 2022 publisher rankings, while Atlanta rapper Latto's "Big Energy" and Harry Styles' "As It Was" took the No. 1 spots on the Top Radio Airplay and Hot 100 Songs publishers charts, respectively.

For the third time since *Billboard* began ranking the publishers of the top Hot 100 songs in 2019, UMPG finished first, with a whopping 31.25% market share, up from 20.40% in the first quarter of the year. That growth spurt was fueled by the publisher's song count ballooning quarter to quarter from 46 to 67 songs. UMPG last topped the Hot 100 publisher rankings in the first quarter of 2020 and, before that, in the second quarter of 2019. Since then, UMPG has also led the Radio Airplay ranking once, in the first quarter of 2021.

Universal's music-publishing division finished at No. 2 on the second-quarter Radio Airplay ranking,

boosting its market share from 21.74% in the first quarter to 22.39%, while its song count increased by one to 54.

Sony Music Publishing took No. 1 on Radio Airplay for its fifth consecutive quarter — and in 18 of the last 19 quarters — improving its market share to 25.62% from 24.67%, with a stake in 64 of the measurement period's top songs, up from 57. The music publisher's 2-plus percentage-point market-share gain, from 22.65% in the first quarter to 24.69%, and a song count boost from 58 to 62 tracks earned it second place in the Hot 100 category.

Sony, UMPG and Kobalt have stakes in Latto's "Big Energy," which powered its way to the peak of the Top Radio Airplay chart, and UMPG and Pulse are the publishers of Styles' "As It Was," which was No. 1 on the Hot 100 ranking.

For the second consecutive quarter, Glass Animals frontman Dave Bayley, whose catalog is administered by Hipgnosis, ranked as the No. 1

### The Restoring Artistic Protection Act

was introduced in Congress to restrict federal prosecutors' use of rap lyrics as evidence.

### Atlanta's Music Midtown

was canceled after changes to state gun laws prevented the festival from banning guns on the publicly owned site.

songwriter on both charts, based on the strength of one song: the band's long-charting hit, "Heat Waves," which was No. 3 on the Hot 100 song publishers ranking and No. 4 on Top Radio Airplay.

In addition to the Styles track, new entries that made the top 10 of both the Radio Airplay and Hot 100 charts are Jack Harlow's "First Class," Imagine Dragons X J.I.D.'s "Enemy," and Doja Cat's "Woman." Dove Cameron's "Boyfriend" makes its first appearance in the Radio Airplay top 10, while Future's "Wait for U" (featuring Drake and Tems) and Lizzo's "About Damn Time" debut in the Hot 100 top 10.

Beyond the battle for the top two spots, Warner Chappell Music extended its dominance of country music publishing to the five-and-a-half-year mark,

**31.25%**

UMPG's market share of the top Hot 100 songs for the second quarter.



# market

topping the ranking for a 22nd consecutive quarter. It reclaimed the No. 3 spot on Radio Airplay, up from fourth place last quarter, with a slight percentage gain from 15.51% to 15.58% and a song count that held steady at 54. The publisher's top track was "Enemy," which ranked at No. 3 on Radio Airplay. The song placed at No. 7 on the Hot 100 ranking, where Warner Chappell maintained its No. 3 standing among publishers, albeit with a small decrease in market share from 14.99% to 14.66%.

Harlow placed at Nos. 2 and 5 on the Hot 100 and Top Radio Airplay charts, respectively, with "First Class," but Kobalt's stake in the superstar rapper did not translate to a boost in the rankings. Quarter to quarter, the publisher held on to No. 4 on the Hot 100 ranking but fell from third to fourth place on the Radio Airplay chart, and in both cases, its market share fell from 14.93% to 11.97% and from 16.77% to 14.94%, respectively. That is most likely due to Kobalt sharing publishing on "First Class" with Sony, Warner Chappell, BMG and Concord.

Round Hill's market-share increase from 1.27% to 1.89% lifted the publisher from No. 10 to No. 8 among its Top Radio Airplay competition, largely due to the viral TikTok hit "To the Moon" by JNR Choi and Sam Tompkins.

Country music singer-songwriter Cody Johnson's "Til You Can't" helped vault Anthem Entertainment to No. 9 on the chart, the first time it has finished in the top 10 since the second quarter of 2018. And at No. 10, Songtrust makes its first-ever appearance on the Publishers Quarterly charts thanks to Em Beihold's "Numb Little Bug." **b**

\* For the Top 10 Publishers Top Radio Airplay chart, percentage calculations were based upon the overall top 100 detecting songs from 2,007 U.S. radio stations electronically monitored by Luminate 24 hours a day, seven days a week during the period of April 1 to June 30. For Top 10 Publishers Hot 100 Songs, percentage calculations were based upon the top 100 songs as ranked by Billboard Hot 100 points calculated from digital sales, streaming and Luminate-tracked radio airplay detections also during the period of April 1 to June 30, reflecting the issue dates of April 16 through July 9. Publisher information for musical works on both charts has been identified by the Harry Fox Agency. A "publisher" is defined as an administrator, copyright owner and/or controlling party.

## Top Radio Airplay: Publishers\*

25.62% Sony Music Publishing

22.39% Universal Music Publishing Group

15.58% Warner Chappell Music

14.94% Kobalt

4.48% BMG

2.65% Hipgnosis Songs Group

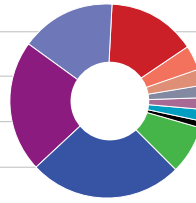
2% Pulse Music Group

1.89% Round Hill Music

1.58% Anthem Entertainment

1.25% Songtrust

7.62% Other



## Hot 100 Songs: Publishers\*

31.25% Universal Music Publishing Group

24.69% Sony Music Publishing

14.66% Warner Chappell Music

11.97% Kobalt

3.58% BMG

2.76% Hipgnosis Songs Group

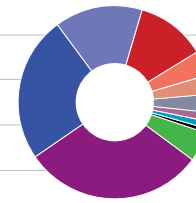
2.75% Pulse Music Group

1.64% Round Hill Music

1.12% Concord

0.66% Walt Disney Music Company

4.92% Other



Rank	Title	Artist	Label
1	Big Energy	Latto	STREAMCUT/RCA
2	As It Was	Harry Styles	ERSKINE/COLUMBIA
3	Enemy	Imagine Dragons X J.I.D	KIDINAKORNER/INTERSCOPE
4	Heat Waves	Glass Animals	WOLF TONE/POLYDOR/REPUBLIC
5	First Class	Jack Harlow	GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC
6	Thats What I Want	Lil Nas X	COLUMBIA
7	Stay	The Kid LAROI & Justin Bieber	RAYMOND BRAUN/DEF JAM/COLUMBIA
8	Woman	Doja Cat	KEMOSABE/RCA
9	Ghost	Justin Bieber	RAYMOND BRAUN/DEF JAM
10	Boyfriend	Dove Cameron	DISRUPTOR/COLUMBIA

Rank	Title	Artist	Label
1	As It Was	Harry Styles	ERSKINE/COLUMBIA
2	First Class	Jack Harlow	GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC
3	Heat Waves	Glass Animals	WOLF TONE/POLYDOR/REPUBLIC
4	Wait for U	Future Featuring Drake & Tems	FREEBANDZ/EPIC
5	Big Energy	Latto	STREAMCUT/RCA
6	Stay	The Kid LAROI & Justin Bieber	RAYMOND BRAUN/COLUMBIA/DEF JAM
7	Enemy	Imagine Dragons X J.I.D	KIDINAKORNER/INTERSCOPE
8	About Damn Time	Lizzo	NICE LIFE/ATLANTIC
9	Ghost	Justin Bieber	RAYMOND BRAUN/DEF JAM
10	Woman	Doja Cat	KEMOSABE/RCA



## MO OSTIN

1927-2022

The pioneering Warner Bros. chairman nurtured the careers of both artists and executives

BY MELINDA NEWMAN

IN A 2016 INTERVIEW WITH *Billboard* following the death of Prince, Mo Ostin recalled the first time he heard the artist's music and how Prince came to sign with Warner Bros., where

Ostin was president, then chairman/chief executive for nearly a quarter-century, from 1970 to 1995.

Ostin — who died in his sleep on July 31 at the age of 95 — remembered that the label's head of promotion, Russ Thyret, got a demo from Owen Husney, Prince's manager: "We were absolutely blown away and wanted to sign him immediately. There was a lot of competition because other people knew about him — A&M and Columbia were trying to sign him, and it became very competitive. But A&M wanted his publishing and he wouldn't give it up, so he passed on them. Columbia would only give him a two-LP deal, so we decided that we would give him a three-LP deal because we believed in him so strongly. And also, because we valued artists, he signed with us."

Valuing artists — and giving them time and support to grow into not just hitmakers but also culturally defining presences —

was the hallmark of Warner Bros. under Ostin and the executive team he assembled around him, which included over the years Lenny Waronker, Joe Smith, Russ Titelman and Ted Templeman. The artists they signed and nurtured were a diverse bunch — The Kinks, Fleetwood Mac, Joni Mitchell, Jimi Hendrix, R.E.M., Randy Newman and Van Halen. Little linked those names, or the world-changing music they made, except the label at the center of their recordings and the faith that label had in their work.

After starting his career at Verve Records, Ostin was recruited by Frank Sinatra to run his Reprise Records in 1960. Three years later, Warner Bros. Records bought Reprise and Ostin quickly captured the pop zeitgeist, signing The Kinks. Quickly thereafter, he brought Hendrix, Mitchell and Neil Young to the label.

In a business often defined by ego and excess, Ostin was known for his low-key style. "Mo

was brilliant," said former Warner Brothers executive Stan Cornyn when he inducted Ostin into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2003. "So brilliant, he never told any of us how to do our job." Ostin ran Warner Bros. from a storied multilevel, brown wood building, nicknamed the Ski Lodge, in Burbank, Calif. He made it a haven for creativity, with artists frequently dropping by to visit and play new music. "Rickie Lee Jones came in with a guitar and played about two-and-a-half songs, which was all it took to realize she was great," recalled Warner Bros. vp of A&R Waronker in a 2019 *Billboard* oral history on the building before Warner Bros. moved to downtown Los Angeles. "I think it was just Ted Templeman and myself. That was a no-brainer. Van Dyke Parks came into my office before his first record, when he was working with Brian Wilson. He had his stuff, and for me, it was amazing, him sitting at the piano ... though

that may have been at the old building. One time, when Russ Titelman and I were releasing Rickie Lee Jones' first record [in 1979], we had a meeting with her in Russ' office, which was adjacent to mine, and she had a new idea for an arrangement for 'Chuck E.'s in Love,' which was basically to slow it down. It gave it real attitude."

After his retirement from Warner Bros., Ostin stayed busy, including co-founding and running the music division of DreamWorks SKG from 1996 to 2004. Later, he served as a consultant and board member for the music schools at his alma mater, UCLA, as well as the University of Southern California. In 2011, he donated \$10 million to UCLA for a new facility called the Evelyn and Mo Ostin Music Center.

Ostin's wife, Evelyn, and two of his sons, Randy and Kenny, preceded him in death. He is survived by his son Michael. **b**





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# TOP Q2 PUBLISHERS

## HOT 100

SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING  
 UMPG  
 WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC  
 KOBALT  
 BMG  
 HIPGNOSIS  
 PULSE MUSIC  
 ROUND HILL MUSIC  
 ANTHEM MUSIC PUBLISHING  
 SONGTRUST

## RADIO

UMPG  
 SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING  
 WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC  
 KOBALT  
 BMG  
 HIPGNOSIS  
 PULSE MUSIC  
 ROUND HILL MUSIC  
 CONCORD  
 WALT DISNEY MUSIC COMPANY



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A Minnesota judge signed off on a deal that will finally end the long court battle over **Prince's** \$156 million estate.

An unnamed woman who claimed **Bob Dylan** sexually abused her as a child in 1965 withdrew her lawsuit permanently.



Prusikin (left) and Tayurskaya of Little Big

# RUSSIA'S MUSIC REFUGEES

With the Russian music industry in collapse after the invasion of Ukraine, artists have been forced to flee the country to restart their careers

BY RICHARD SMIRKE AND VLADIMIR KOZLOV

**O**N THE DAY that Russia invaded Ukraine, Feb. 24, Russian pop-punk dance group Little Big posted the message "No war" on its social media. A few hours later, the act received an unsettling phone call from an anonymous person ordering the band to take it down. "We don't know if it was a prankster or someone from the government," says Little Big founder/singer Ilya Prusikin. "Right after those calls, we decided it was better to leave."

Less than a week later, Prusikin and co-vocalist Sonya Tayurskaya made the 6,000-mile trek from their home in Moscow to Los Angeles, where they have been living ever since. "We love our country. We have our families there. My kid is there," says Prusikin, who formed the four-piece band in St. Petersburg in 2013 and has released four studio albums. "But under the current conditions and the Kremlin government it was just impossible to stay."

The couple's decision to flee Russia and go into self-imposed exile is a journey dozens of Russian artists have

undertaken since President Vladimir Putin sent troops into battle and passed draconian laws threatening those criticizing the war with up to 15 years in prison. The past five months have also seen an exodus of global music companies from Russia, which have mostly abided by Western sanctions — though it hasn't stopped some labels in Russia from continuing to release music.

In March, all three major labels announced they were suspending operations in Russia. The same month, Spotify, Amazon, Deezer and TikTok all either closed their Russian offices or stopped trading in the increasingly isolated nation. With Western credit card companies and money-transferring services like PayPal also ceasing operations, the world's 13th-largest music market has virtually collapsed.

Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment and Warner Music Group say they have continued to pay salaries to their Russian staff. But one source in the Russian music industry predicts they will soon stop, possibly as early as the fall, given the ongoing war and this source's

projection that the Russian streaming market will decrease by 30% to 50% this year.

Until the war, Russia's music industry had been growing rapidly. The country was the fastest-growing market among the top 20 both in 2019 and last year, when it generated \$328 million in recorded-music revenue, a 58% jump over 2020, according to IFPI. WMG has bet biggest on its potential, buying two Russian independent labels — Gala Records Group in 2013 and Zhara Music last year — and in 2020, Spotify began operating in Russia and 12 other countries in the region.

The Western pullout has left local acts like Little Big, which were distributed by Warner Music Russia before the war, cut off from their fans and effectively forced to restart their careers. The band had built a sizable following in its homeland and was picked to represent Russia at the 2020 Eurovision Song Contest before the event was canceled due to the pandemic.

Little Big's best-known song, "Skibidi," released by Warner Music Russia in 2018, has generated over 620 million YouTube views. In June, the group released

"Generation Cancellation," its first single since leaving Russia. Prusikin says it was important that the song's video have an anti-war message, as YouTube and Apple Music are among the few music distribution channels still accessible in Russia. Little Big's fans there can also consume their music on Russian streaming platforms VK Music, Zvuk and market leader Yandex Music — all of which have ties to the Putin regime — or through illegal pirate sites. The band says its music is still generating royalties from Russian streaming services, but it cannot access them due to Western banking sanctions.

To distribute "Generation Cancellation," the group partnered with L.A.-based Create Music Group and French company Believe, a distributor that has pursued more of a partial exit from Russia than the major labels. In March, Believe stopped new hiring and investment in the country, but it continues to fulfill its "agreed-upon obligations to our people, our artists and labels," including paying Russian labels. Unlike the majors, Believe is still releasing new music in Russia, from both local and international artists, including Placebo's album *Never Let Me Go*, Instasamka's single "Shake" and DJ Paul van Dyk's single "But Not Tonight." (In a statement to *Billboard*, the company says it continues to operate in Russia "in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.")

As the Russian music industry falls into disarray, acts that are still based there are facing major hurdles to keep their careers afloat, and many have turned to local independents to put out new music. In March, rapper LOVV66 released his latest album, *Internet Love*, on CPLUS; he was signed to Sony Music Russia before the war. Egor Kreed, who previously released music on Warner Music Russia and remains listed among its artists on the label website, recently delivered a track on ONErpm.

Local executives say that it is common practice in Russia for labels to partner with artists for one-offs rather than multiple album deals, meaning it's unlikely any artist label contracts have been broken. Even if they have, the collapse of Russia's record industry effectively renders such agreements moot and unenforceable, one industry insider tells *Billboard*. The same issues are also preventing rights holders from pulling their already uploaded catalogs from Russian streaming services such as Yandex and VK, executives say.

Given the uncertainties, Little Big says that for now, it will stay away. "It's a new country, a fresh start in a new market," says Prusikin. "We hope that we will be able to return someday to a Russia where you can be who you are and not be scared of speaking out." **B**



A man with short dark hair, wearing large black headphones and a light-colored polo shirt, is looking down at a laptop. He is sitting at a desk with a microphone on a stand to his right. In the background, there is a potted plant and a window with blinds. A yellow diagonal line runs across the image, separating the top photo from the blue text area below.

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**Adele** announced rescheduled dates for her Las Vegas residency, giving customers priority through Ticketmaster's Verified Fan program.

Universal Music's Bored Ape supergroup, **KINGSHIP**, sold out its first NFT collection, earning 950 ETH (\$1.28 million) in primary sales.

# The Collective Power Of Black Promoters

"It's time for us, as the culture, to buy back the culture"

BY TAYLOR MIMS AND GAIL MITCHELL

**I**N 2020 the Black Promoters Collective came together, beginning with weekly phone calls to discuss COVID-19's impact on touring, especially for Black and independent promoters. After the killing of George Floyd that May, the BPC's mission took on even more urgency as the group sought to prove that its more than 100 years of collective experience and success should not be disregarded and ignored by agents, artists and venues.

Two years later, the BPC is making good on its pledge. During the first quarter of 2022, the collective helmed New Edition's 30-city The Culture Tour with Charlie Wilson and Jodeci, Maxwell's 25-city The Night Tour with Anthony Hamilton and Joe, as well as six dates for Patti LaBelle. According to Billboard Boxscore figures, together those three runs grossed over \$60 million.

Now, the BPC is promoting Mary J. Blige's 23-city *Good Morning Gorgeous* arena tour, which kicks off this fall featuring support from Ella Mai and Queen Naija. "We're now getting pitched by the big-box agencies on tours," says BPC CEO Gary Guidry. "Any time someone is putting up \$50 million to \$60 million in a quarter, there are commissions and artist fees to be made. So the agencies have two choices: 'Hey, can we be a part of this business model?' Or, 'Can we keep doing what we've been doing and miss market share?' No one who's looking for growth wants to be left out of market share."

Operating as a company for more than a year now, the BPC is working together to collectively buy tours. According to Guidry, each member brings expertise in its respective market: New York/New Jersey; Philadelphia; Detroit; Atlanta; Houston; Raleigh, N.C.; and Oakland, Calif. In turn, the BPC's combined economic weight gives it the ability to compete for entire tours instead of select local dates — to promote on a level much like giant rivals Live Nation and AEG.

This isn't the first time that Black promoters have united to confront systemic bias in the predominantly white live industry. In 1998, four Black promoters calling themselves the Black Promoters Association filed a \$700 million lawsuit against numerous booking agencies and promoters, alleging antitrust and civil rights violations. That case was subsequently lost in 2005.

But the eight members of the BPC are making progress. "The [BPC's] mindset pivoted to 'Hey, we need to take advantage of our collective economics and business know-how across the board,'" says BPC chief marketing officer Troy Brown. "It's time for us, as the culture, to buy back the culture. We need to go to these artists and say, 'Here's what we can do for you that some of these other big corporate entities can't.'"

BPC president Shelby Joyner agrees, noting: "It's strange that [artists and their teams] are so surprised at how professional we are."

Of his own experience working with BPC on its first major tour — New Edition's *The Culture* — P Music Group president/CEO Michael Paran, manager of the tour's featured acts Charlie Wilson and Jodeci, says that he and his clients "saw the big picture. There was incentive for everyone to make this an epic win for the culture."

Paran already had a successful working relationship with several members of the BPC, having booked Wilson's tours with them over the last 20 years. That camaraderie was an advantage in pulling off *The Culture* Tour, planning for which began last December with routing launched in mid-February.

"This tour literally could have imploded at any moment because of the speed in putting it together and the logistics of dealing with COVID-19," says Paran. "And while the BPC may not own the venues like others do, they make up for it in other ways. They know their territories very well in addition to understanding the music, the culture and how to promote to its fans. That's why I like working with them. It wasn't about being greedy; there were compromises that were made financially to make this work, trying to help everybody and their brands. And the grosses that were made ... that tells you something."

As it did to Maxwell, whose team at his label, Musze/BMG, collaborated with the BPC on the first leg of his *The Night Tour*, which launched March 2 and ended May 8. "They put on an amazing, well-produced arena show and experience in one of the first tours back on this level that really energized venues across the country," says Tim Reid, senior vp of repertoire and marketing at BMG Recorded Music.

The BPC's successes opened the doors to its latest coup: Blige's *Good Morning Gorgeous* tour. "None of their competitors could see what Team Mary and BPC knew to be true," says Keith Naisbitt, a member of Blige's agent team at APA Agency. "That Mary could sell arenas at a commensurate ticket price. They make assumptions that certain genres have a built-in price resistance."

The BPC's inclusion mission encompasses working with artists in other genres and bringing more Black-owned businesses and people of color into the live industry mix from caterers, bus drivers and lighting/stage techs to vendor partners. "That doesn't happen in other, bigger corporate outfits," says BPC's Brown.

Naisbitt believes the BPC is on the right trajectory to continue branching out and achieving those goals. "There's absolutely no reason why they can't work in different genres. At the end of the day, there's an artist and artists have fans. Then it's understanding how to reach the fans. The live industry needs more than just Live Nation and AEG. They fulfill a role, but strong independent promoters are vital to the touring sector's ecosystem. As agents, we need to support them." **B**

**\$60M+**

Grosses of BPC tours in first-quarter 2022.



► From left: Maxwell, New Edition, LaBelle (foreground) and Blige.





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**Jacob Fowler** was promoted to executive vp/chief product officer at Sony Music Entertainment.

**Sean Stevenson** was promoted to COO of MNRK Music Group.

# From The Desk Of... Brendan Carr

COMMISSIONER, FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

BY STEVE KNOPPER

**F**CC COMMISSIONER Brendan Carr says he's not "attempting to do a remake of *Footloose*" in his crusade to get Apple and Google to remove Chinese media giant ByteDance's immensely popular TikTok platform from their app stores. A product of the 1980s and '90s, Carr grew up on a steady diet of MTV and is well-acquainted with the 1984 movie, starring Kevin Bacon, about a small town that banned dancing and rock music. "The primary concern is not the videos and the content and the dancing," says Carr, who's about to mark his fifth year as commissioner. "TikTok has disclosed that it's getting biometrics, face prints, voice prints, location data, search and growing history, and keystroke patterns. It's all that sensitive information that I'm very concerned about being accessed in China."

Although the FCC has no jurisdiction over TikTok and other streaming platforms, Carr is using his clout as commissioner to make a federal case of his concerns, and he says the issue has gained bipartisan support in Congress.

For Carr, 43, national security trumps commerce, which may come as a major disappointment to some in the recorded-music industry who have increasingly come to rely on TikTok as a valuable marketing tool.

But Carr sees himself as part of a new generation of Republicans who don't quite fit the "fundamentalist libertarian" label established by their predecessors — at least when it

comes to business. "Sometimes we need to impose beneficial regulations to promote the public interest," he says. This more hands-on approach has implications for the music business beyond TikTok. Carr wants the FCC to consider geotargeting technology that would allow terrestrial radio stations to split signals and aim programming and content to users based on their location. In general, he favors "leveling the playing field" for stations so they can compete more effectively against streaming services.

Carr, who grew up in Northern Virginia listening to Vanilla Ice — "Maybe I've come to regret that a little bit," he says — and Bon Jovi on WRQX (then Mix 107.3) in Washington, D.C. (and still lives in the area with his wife and three young boys), characterizes his rise over 15 years from a member of the FCC's "intern pen" to the commission's top job as a "*Forrest Gump*-style career."

In 2017, President Donald Trump appointed the graduate of Catholic University of America's Columbus School of Law to the FCC, where Carr promptly followed GOP doctrine and voted to kill net neutrality, which prevents internet service providers from slowing down or shutting out online content.

Appearing through Zoom, Carr elaborated on his TikTok stance and discussed Google and Apple's reactions to his request to remove the app. He also shared his perspective on payola, as it applies to both radio and streaming, as well as the complexities involved in enabling



Carr testified before the House Energy and Commerce Committee's Communications and Technology Subcommittee on Capitol Hill in 2019.

terrestrial radio to better compete in a market where digital platforms now dominate.

**In June, you asked Apple and Google to remove TikTok from their app stores based on a report that TikTok's Chinese parent company, ByteDance, had access to U.S. users' data. Have they responded?**

TikTok had been asked for years: "Is U.S. user data — nonpublic, sensitive data — being accessed from inside China?" And for years, they've offered a bunch of assurances, ranging from "this data does not exist inside China" to "it's only shared with protections in place." The *BuzzFeed* news story [revealed] internal communications that

said "everything is seen inside of China." TikTok has disclosed that it's getting biometrics, face prints, voice prints, location data, search and browsing history, keystroke patterns. It's all that sensitive information that I'm very concerned about being accessed in China. There are serious national security concerns there. Google did respond —



credit to them — with a largely indecipherable word salad. The bottom line is that they are not removing TikTok from the Google Play store. As of the date of this discussion, Apple has not provided a substantive response, other than indicating they anticipate having a response at some point. And I expect that they will do that.

The issue has really taken off on a bipartisan basis. Democratic Sen. Mark Warner [Virginia] has said publicly that TikTok “scares the dickens” out of him and has asked the Federal Trade Commission to launch an immediate investigation. The primary concern is not the videos and the content and the dancing — I’m not attempting to do a sort of remake of *Footloose*.

**The FCC has no authority over internet platforms like TikTok. If Apple and Google ignore you, what are your next real options?**

If they choose not to apply their app store policies to TikTok, then it becomes even more important for the government to take action — whether that is through the Federal Trade Commission proceeding that Sens. Mark Warner [D-Va.] and Marco Rubio [R-Fla.] have called for, or through the Biden administration’s pending Treasury and Commerce Department-led inquiries into TikTok and similar apps. The ball will be squarely in the federal government’s court to take swift and appropriate action to promote our national security.

**Why go after TikTok and not Google and Facebook, which have larger and more heavily documented issues of sharing users’ private information?**

I have expressed concern about the baseline level of data that’s being pulled from every single application. Smartphones now have barometric pressure sensors. They know when your car door closes and what floor you’re going to in an elevator. Congress is looking at some privacy bills, which would measure some of those baseline privacy concerns from any app. TikTok is unique in that it has all those problems plus misrepresentation about data be-

ing accessed from inside China, which is a problem.

**The music industry has become reliant on TikTok as a marketing tool. How much does that concern you?**

A handful of people are saying, “Look, I make my living on TikTok. Please don’t suggest that this thing should be banned.” And I feel for that consequence. But once we reach the decision that this is a serious national security threat, we have to take action, [despite] the short-term economic consequences that could result.

**Terrestrial radio faces intense competition from streaming and SiriusXM, among other platforms. Advertising has dropped. How healthy is the industry?**

There’s no question that radio has a very bright future, but there are business-model and technical challenges. On the FM side, there has never been more competition in the audio space. The older your technology, the heavier the FCC regulates it. With heavy regulation come compliance costs and a cost on your freedom to innovate. As radio stations are competing with digital, in many cases, they’re doing so with one hand tied behind their back. I was in a small town — Powell, Wyo., — and I went to the local radio station. It was basically a Dell laptop that was spinning music piped in from some big city. The reason, in part, is the economic challenges of investing in live and local talent there. But just a short ways away, in Cody, Wyo., there was a thriving broadcaster that wanted to invest in that Powell station and bring [in] the live, local talent. So, the Dell laptop would lose its job.

**But that can’t happen, right?**

FCC has regulations that say, [in order] to promote diversity of use, the owner of the Cody station can’t also own the Powell station. [FCC rules prevent the same broadcast company from owning more than 50% of the radio stations in a small broadcast market.] To me, that’s backward and one example of how we



have these regulations that may have made sense decades ago, but now are holding back terrestrial radio. A streaming platform can get a nationwide footprint virtually overnight, while it is illegal to do the equivalent of that on the terrestrial side. The FCC’s role is to make sure they compete in something approaching a much more level playing field.

**What’s one way the FCC can make that happen?**

Over the past decade or so, there has been a big swing of local ad dollars from radio to the big tech platforms. One reason for that is those platforms can target their advertising by geography. The FCC is considering allowing radio stations to engage in that geotargeting of ads. I’m not going to say it will move the needle drastically, but it could be one way of addressing that movement of ad dollars. Some in the radio industry have pushed back very strongly against the idea. They like the current model. But there are dozens of stations, particularly the smaller ones, that say they’d love the chance to give it a shot.

**The music business pays influencers on TikTok, Instagram and other social media to promote artists and songs. That’s legal for a streaming service, but not for radio. Is there inequity there?**

Absolutely. [Equity] has to be the touchstone of a regulatory framework. If we are singling

out radio for less freedom, less economic opportunities than other competitive platforms, that’s a bad thing. The problem with a lot of regulations in D.C. is that some are from the Federal Trade Commission, some are from the Department of Justice and some are FCC. Everything tends to be siloed, as opposed to understanding the competition that’s taking place [as a whole]. And advertising rules in those different silos are skewing the field in a way they shouldn’t. It may be difficult to fix, however, because an FCC law applies only to X industry, FTC law applies only to Y industry and so on.

**Does the FCC consider radio payola, which still exists in various forms, a problem?**

I’m getting flashbacks to that line from *Star Wars*: “That’s a name I’ve not heard in a long time.” Payola is obviously an area where we still have rules in the books, but it’s not an area that has been active at the FCC in quite a while.

**Radio hasn’t paid musical performers royalties since 1909, despite aggressive lobbying by the recording industry. The broadcasters’ lobby is just too strong. Will that ever change?**

We certainly have to strike the right balance here between those competing interests. We have to have a regimen that makes sense so radio stations can be successful and the artists

SoundCloud hired **Jessica Rivera** and **Maurice Slade** to lead its artist partnerships team.

**Chris Welz** was promoted to COO at Secretly Distribution.

can be successful. But this is predominantly an issue driven out of Congress rather than at the FCC.

**What has been the effect of the FCC’s decision to eliminate net neutrality?**

It has been very positive. I remember the sturm und drang and the protesters who said it was going to be the end of the internet as we know it. It ended up being the biggest Y2K-type moment we’ve ever had. Speeds have tripled since that decision; we broke new records for bringing people across the digital divide; competition increased. Someone could make an argument that was going to happen regardless, and I would say, “OK, but that wasn’t what we were told in 2017.” I’m pretty confident it was not a mistake.

**President Biden’s nominee for the FCC, Gigi Sohn, is an outspoken net neutrality supporter. Her nomination has been pending in the Senate since December. Could net neutrality eventually come back?**

The Obama-era version of net neutrality is all over but the yelling and the fundraising. The recent Supreme Court Environment Protection Agency decision [which limited the EPA’s ability to make regulations about greenhouse gases] means agencies like the FCC may be getting less leeway from courts when it comes to deciding if we have the authority to do things that were not very clearly directed for us to do by Congress.

**You were President Trump’s nominee. Given his general divisiveness and the recent scrutiny of his actions on Jan. 6, 2021, how concerned are you about how this association will affect your career?**

It doesn’t concern me at all. One of the things that’s beneficial about these jobs as an appointee confirmed by the Senate is I’m not an elected official. I don’t have to fundraise or have donors or financial backers in any way. There’s a lot of freedom that comes from that. **B**

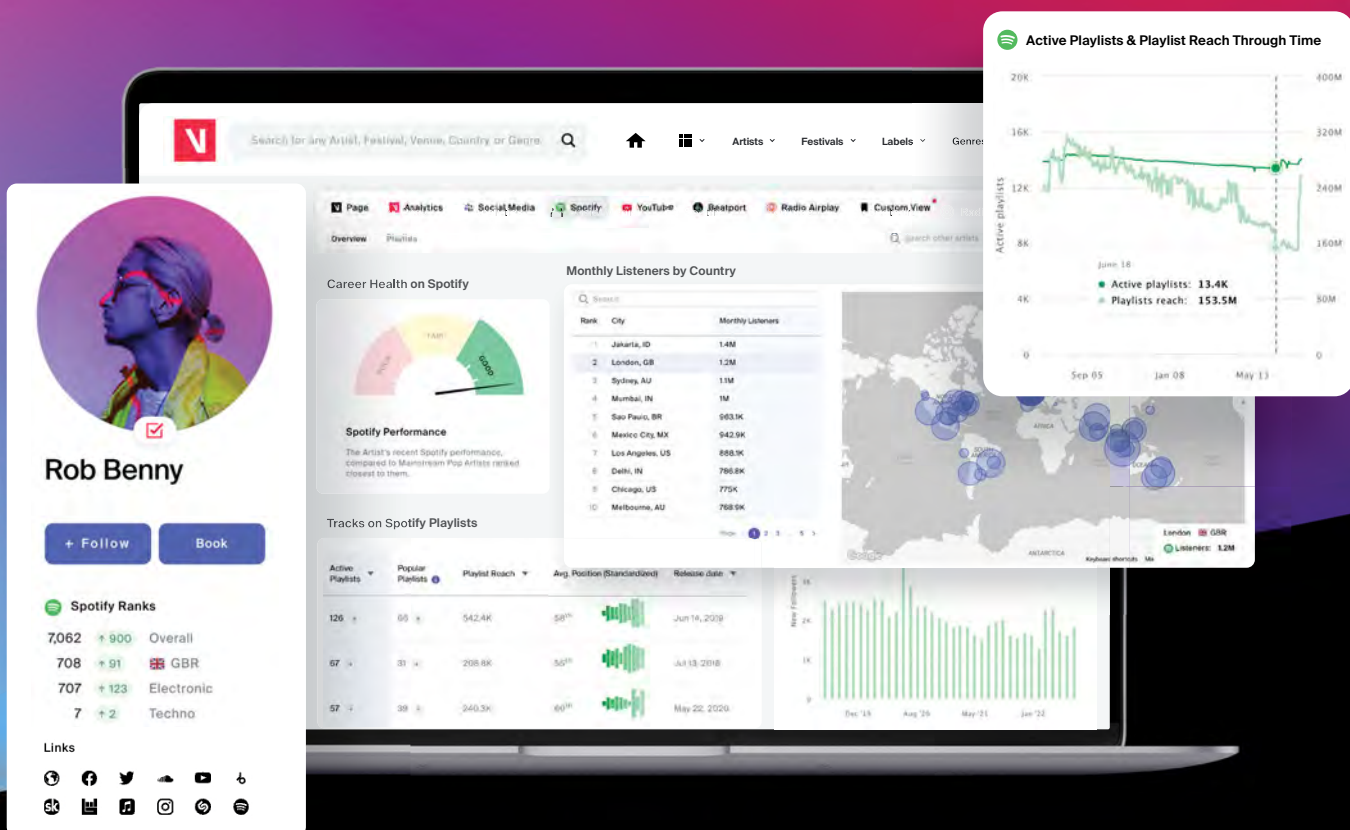
MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES



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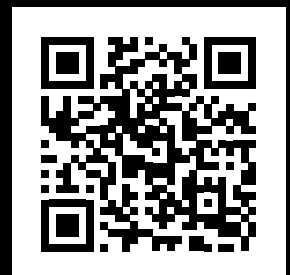
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NIKI photographed  
July 22 at ASH Staging  
Concept House  
in Los Angeles.

## Fearless (NIKI's Version)

Inspired by Taylor Swift's rerecordings, the 88rising star is proving it's never too soon to own your past

BY LYNDSEY HAVENS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ALEX HARPER





**N**IKI VIVIDLY recalls coming home from school when she was 9 or 10 and turning on the TV to an episode of *E! True Hollywood Story* on Taylor Swift. “Upon seeing that I was like, ‘Mother, I must,’” she says with a laugh, knowing then she wanted to follow a similar path. “I was like, ‘Oh, people can write songs,’ and I wanted to try that.”

Soon after, she got her first guitar. By the eighth grade she wrote her first song. And by 15, she won a contest (arranged by Swift and ice cream brand Walls called Ride to Fame) to open for the icon in her hometown of Jakarta, Indonesia, which inspired her to launch a YouTube channel where she started posting covers and originals.

Growing up, NIKI (born Nicole Zefanya) says her Saturdays were for jam sessions at home, during which “nonblood aunts and uncles” would come to rehearse with her mother, a church singer, for Sunday service. “That’s where I learned how to harmonize,” she says. It was in that same house, sitting in her childhood room, that she first met with 88rising, her future label home. While joking one day with a producer friend and fellow Indonesian artist Rich Brian about landing one of her songs on the then-fast-rising label’s YouTube channel, she thought, “Yeah, right. That’s never going to happen.” Yet she couldn’t shake the idea, and the next week, Rich Brian — already signed to the label — called founder Sean Miyashiro to set up a Skype meeting. 88rising agreed to distribute NIKI’s first few singles and the following year, in 2018, officially signed her to a record deal.

By then, she was attending college in Nashville and gigging at local coffee shops with the same songs she had shared on her channel, before eventually scrubbing them from the internet. “It was this weird transitional phase, where I was about to debut as NIKI and I was figuring out, ‘Well,



what do I like?’” says the singer. While she ultimately carved a lane for herself in pop-leaning R&B, she recalls “core memories” of her songwriter friends gently questioning the pivot, often asking, “Are you sure you don’t want to put out your other stuff?”

NIKI sat with that question through the pandemic in Los Angeles, where she moved after college. She started combing through the same pink journal she has had since 2013 and listening to her bank of songs on Evernote. Then, she began reproducing a handful of them, and, feeling particularly inspired by the 2021 release of *Fearless (Taylor’s Version)*, debated embracing her folksier singer-songwriter roots. “I remember talking to my friend,

[pop singer-songwriter] Maisie Peters, and I was confused about, ‘Who am I in music? What is my sound?’” says NIKI. “I was talking about all these old songs and she was like, ‘That was you, though. You liked those songs at one point.’ It was this ‘aha’ moment for me. Even though I’m like, ‘I would never write that line now,’ shifting the perspective of, ‘Well, that was authentically where you were when you were 17,’ is very freeing.”

The result is *Nicole*, NIKI’s second full-length, out Aug. 12 on 88rising. After releasing back-to-back EPs in 2018 and 2019, NIKI launched her debut album, *Moonchild*, a genre-blending project that proved her interests and talents extend beyond R&B, in 2020. *Nicole* now comes amid a hot streak for 88rising, arriving

soon after its artists performed on the Coachella main stage in April as part of the festival’s first label-curated set. NIKI, who along with Rich Brian became the first Indonesian artists to play the festival, says the rehearsals felt like *High School Musical*. And in June, labelmate Joji scored a surprise top 10 hit with his ballad “Glimpse of Us.” Ollie Zhang, NIKI’s co-manager (alongside Miyashiro) and 88rising’s head of artist development, wouldn’t be surprised if ballads make a comeback: “People want to feel those feelings and not pretend like everything is OK right now. I think that kind of songwriting, that type of emotional depth in music, is timeless.”

*Nicole* is filled with such aching ballads and reflective odes to her teenage years — her friends have called the album’s accompanying music videos “weirdly triggering.” As a whole, it’s a stunning time capsule that NIKI believes she only could have made, and have had the confidence to release, now. She says reworking songs she wrote as a teenager taught her the power of production, calling the process “the saving grace of this record, because I wouldn’t really have the guts to put [this music] out as just a guitar and vocal demo.”

It’s why she tapped an intimate team of collaborators, including Jacob Ray, Tim Anderson, Jacob Reske and Ethan Gruska, to help mold the album’s warm and inviting sound. “I’ve been listening to a lot of other artists and looking through song credits,” she says. “If I like something, I’m like, ‘Who worked on this?’ Ethan, for example, works a lot on Phoebe Bridgers’ stuff, and [her album *Punisher*] was so life-changing for me. It’s comparable to when I was listening to Taylor [Swift] in the sixth grade.”

Zhang sees *Nicole* as striking a similar chord. “The thread that connects all of [NIKI’s] music together, and is why people who know her love her, is the songwriting — and this album has that in spades.” **B**

## BEHIND THE HIT

### “I Ain’t Worried”



Tedder in the music video for OneRepublic’s “I Ain’t Worried.”

**TWO YEARS AGO**, Tom Cruise asked Ryan Tedder a simple question over Zoom: “What do you hear?” Having been connected through a mutual collaborator at Paramount, the actor was showing the veteran producer and OneRepublic frontman a rough cut of the dogfight football scene from *Top Gun: Maverick*, and Tedder could imagine quite the sonic blend. “I said, ‘I hear a little Beach Boys... Gorillaz... and this kind of whistle thing,’” Tedder recalls.

Taking cues from those

references, as well as other acts like Foster the People, Tedder and his bandmate Brent Kutzle turned the whistling melody in his head into OneRepublic’s latest single, “I Ain’t Worried.” The shuffling groove — which appears halfway through the blockbuster sequel that was 36 years in the making and premiered in May — has since scored the band its biggest hit in nearly a decade.

With the track gaining traction on TikTok following its May release, “I Ain’t Worried”

has climbed to No. 27 on the Billboard Hot 100 (chart dated July 30), partially thanks to fans creating and sharing their own edits of Miles Teller’s shirtless — and now-viral — “Rooster wiggle” from the scene during which the song plays. While the “Rooster wiggle” tag has been viewed over 1.5 billion times on TikTok, “I Ain’t Worried” has garnered over 65.5 million on-demand official U.S. streams, according to Luminate.

Much like Kenny Loggins’ “Playing With the Boys” did

during the classic beach-volleyball scene in the 1986 original film, “I Ain’t Worried” offers viewers a much-needed exhale amid the life-or-death stakes and high-flying action central to the plot. “The beauty of it was that I wasn’t trying to write some huge global record — it’s not following any pop math,” says Tedder. “It wasn’t written to sound obvious.” To Cruise, however, the song’s potential was always clear. His one piece of feedback when Tedder turned it in: “I think it’s a bull’s-eye.” —GLENN ROWLEY





GEEKING OUT WITH...

## TobyMac

On Oct. 23, 2019, Christian singer TobyMac's life changed forever when his 21-year-old son, Truett, died of an accidental drug overdose. Processing grief following the tragedy inspired *Life After Death*, the artist's seventh studio album, out Aug. 19 on Forefront/Capitol Christian Music Group. The urgent, rock-leaning single "Help Is on the Way (Maybe Midnight)" topped *Billboard's* Christian Airplay chart for five weeks last June, while "Everything About You," featuring his daughter Marlee McKeehan, is an emotional ballad with the potential to become a mainstream hit. "[This is] literally my journey from the saddest of saddest all the way to recognizing that help is on the way, to recognizing that God is still the goodness in my life," says the seven-time Grammy Award winner. In the aftermath of the tragedy, TobyMac leaned into his craft, finding inspiration in a variety of people and ideas. —DEBORAH EVANS PRICE

### Songwriting

TobyMac says he immediately started writing following his loss. "That's what I know to do when I'm in so much pain," he says. "You go to what you know, what you love and what brings you peace." He never thought he would write another uptempo song, but that changed when he stumbled upon a particular scripture about God "rolling up his sleeves on our behalf." After reading it, TobyMac said aloud, "Help is on the way," and he was inspired to write "Help Is on the Way (Maybe Midnight)."

### Faith

In the song "Faithfully," TobyMac says that there is a particular line he loves the most: "I may never be the same man, but I'm a man who still believes." As he says, "That's who I am. I might not walk in a room with as much swagger. I might be a little more meek, maybe even a little more sad at times, but I still believe."

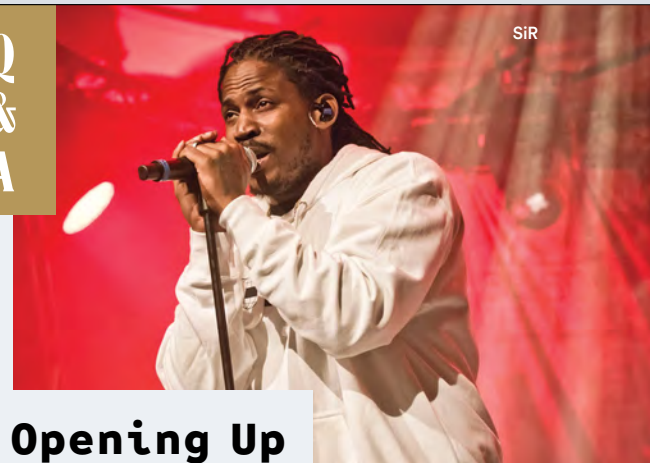
### Old Friends

TobyMac rose to prominence in the 1980s with Kevin Max and Michael Tait in the Christian rap/rock trio dc Talk, known for hits like "Jesus Freak." For *Life After Death*, they reunited on the poignant "Space." "I didn't know whether or not they would want to [contribute], because it delves into relationships and it feels very personal, because it is," TobyMac says. "I wrote it about friends that struggle, friends that feel warm toward each other but don't know what to do with the space that has come between them."

### Sheryl Crow

"We were just two parents at our kids' elementary school when we met," TobyMac recalls of meeting the icon in Franklin, Tenn., adding that Crow is one of his favorite artists. "She delivers a vocal every time that just feels raw and absolutely real. I love the character of her voice." He asked if she would sing on "Promised Land," believing its "Americana vibe" to be a good fit for her, to which she agreed — and is still in shock that she did: "I can't believe I have a literal legend on a song of mine."

Q  
&  
A



## Opening Up

**SiR NEVER INTENDED** on becoming an R&B star: Although the 35-year-old singer was born in Inglewood, Calif., into a musical family (his brothers are artists D Smoke and Davion), he worked full-time at LA Fitness, only taking a chance on music after getting married at 22. "I started to test the waters, and the shit went crazy," he says. Since his last album, *Chasing Summer*, arrived in 2019, life has provided its fair share of tests — from the birth of his first child to relationship struggles with his longtime partner and battling drug addiction — all experiences that the Top Dawg Entertainment (TDE) signee unpacks on his fourth, as-yet-untitled full-length, out this fall. As he puts it: "During a lot of what was the worst for me, I was creating."

### What was life like between *Chasing Summer* and your new album?

We were going through the pandemic, so a lot of ups and downs, a lot of anxiety. I definitely had a lot of time to reflect on some poor choices and learn from my mistakes. The best thing that happened through all of this was that I was being creative. I was using my pain as fuel for this album ... The weight I feel being a husband, a father, being SiR and how much those things contradict each other.

### Since signing with TDE in 2016 and RCA in 2019, how has your experience with each label been?

We're still a full roster. TDE is doing fine. You got artists like Doechii coming up — I love her music and her hustle. Then there's Ray Vaughn, a rapping machine. Throughout the whole pandemic we were all working. There's a new sense of team camaraderie since the beginning of 2022. [With RCA], I was a [label president] Peter Edge fan before any of this; nobody really knows that. The first time I got introduced to his work was when I was digging into that "Stan" sample from Dido. He was already president of RCA when I found this out. Seeing how humble he is and how much he's still connected to the music made my decision really easy.

### There are thematic similarities between your album and TDE superstar Kendrick Lamar's *Mr. Morale & The Big Steppers*. Did you know that before his album came out?

I'm used to hearing some of the records before they come out, but I hadn't heard any of that music. The first listen was dense. The second time, I noticed on ["Mirror"] he says, "I choose me, I'm sorry." That's how I feel sometimes when I'm pulled between being this [other] person or being myself. A whole bunch of those songs hit home for me. I'm honored the universe allowed our albums to be so similar, because it means that it's time for the world to hear that kind of stuff.

—NEENA ROUHANI

TOBYMAC: ROBBIE KLEIN; SiR: FRANK HOENSCHE/REDFERNS



Smith photographed June 23  
outside of London.







# Radical Joy

Embracing their identity, **SAM SMITH** has found a revitalized creative spirit — and is ready to show the world that soulful songs can be happy, too

BY STEPHEN DAW

PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHARLOTTE HADDEN



# At

## SAM SMITH'S COUNTRY HOME

in Buckinghamshire, England, there's a little barnhouse tucked to the side of the sprawling property. A small faux menagerie — turtles, flamingos, even a sloth named Keith — overlooks a patio where Smith's year-old Bernadoodle, Velma (named for the merry murderess in *Chicago*), suns herself. Inside, there's a billiards table, a sparkling crystal chandelier and a full bar; feathered, palm tree-shaped lamps and a 2-foot-tall, stuffed Ewok round out the cozily jumbled decor. It might be the perfect facsimile of the pub in town — well, except for the neon sign hanging in the rafters that reads “Fist Me.”

“I was like, ‘What do we call the pub?’ — I know it's not really a pub, it's a little barn,” Smith says, taking in the scene. “My sister actually wanted to call it The Tadpole, which I think is a fabulous name for a bar. But I just think The Fat Fairy beat that.”

A custom-designed spill mat on the bar bears that name, and Smith excitedly rattles off a to-do list for further furnishing: getting a working beer tap, installing wood flooring matching the rustic walls, as a “proper pub” would. After working in London through the week, this is where Smith spends weekends — so it's nice to have, as they put it, “my own, private queer club in the middle of the countryside.”

Steps away from The Fat Fairy, there's a building dedicated to a different sort of celebration: a shed-turned-studio space, where Smith has spent the last two years making new music that, as they put it, finally reflects their truest self. Sitting on a turquoise couch inside of it, sporting a Balenciaga T-shirt with two gender-neutral stick figures holding hands, Smith — who came out publicly as nonbinary in late 2019 — radiates a newfound sense of comfort: no more hiding, no more questioning, just living life on their terms. “I can't express how incredible I feel every day,” they say with a wide grin.

This Sam Smith, who laughs easily and jokes about balancing exercise with their love of fast food (“It helps a little bit to move, but so does McDonald's”), seems a world away from the Smith of a decade ago, who shot to international superstardom with one of the most singular voices in modern pop music — one most often compared to Adele's.

But along the way, Sam Smith, Actual Person got a little overshadowed by Sam Smith, The Voice. Smith remembers a “crazy journey of trial and error, bad advice and good advice” that forced them to constantly reconfigure their life around their skyrocketing career. Of their last world tour (120 dates that ended in April 2019), they say, “I don't think I've ever felt burnout like that before.” Amid that fatigue, falling in and out of love — and constantly channeling that into their music — took an emotional toll.

“My 20s were my heartbreak years, they were my drama years, I really went through it,” Smith says, chuckling. “I didn't have a lot of boundaries in place, not just in relationships necessarily, but in life in general.” They pause for a moment, then look up: “Though, you're not meant to, right? You're meant to learn what your boundaries are.”

During the pandemic, Smith finally had the time to consider that, as well as find a brighter outlook on their career — one that had remained elusive even amid their years of huge commercial success (7.86 billion catalog streams, according to Luminate), monster radio hits and prestigious awards. “It was really a coming-of-age moment for me,” Smith says. “I was turning 30, we went through COVID-19, and I got the opportunity to sit down and really ask myself what it is I want to do, the type of music I want to make, and also ask myself how involved I want to be [in it].”

In April, Smith released a song hinting at the answers they found. “Love Me More,” with its lyrics tracing a journey from “trying not to hate myself” to finding the “self-worth I had to earn,” feels like the start of a new era for Smith. Melding the soul of their early ballads with the dance beats they've occasionally dipped into over the years, the track still foregrounds their impressive voice, but places it atop slick drums and a grooving bassline. In the video, Smith fully inhabits their nonbinary identity, wearing looser, more affirming clothes and joyfully communing with their found family in a club. “People sometimes come out the gate in such a big way,” Smith says. “I really wanted to start things off in a kind way.”

Jack Street, co-founder of Method Music, has managed Smith since the outset of their career in 2012, so he knows when he's seeing something new from the artist. “They've been so creatively free this time around, in a way they weren't before,” he says. “They have really explored every area they could have.”

Since the release of their third studio album, *Love Goes*, in October 2020, Smith has been working with a close-knit team of producers (in-

cluding longtime collaborator Jimmy Napes and pop auteur Ilya Salmanzadeh) to craft their next full album. “For the first time I think in my career, I really just stepped into the room and said, ‘I want to learn how to produce more. I want to vocal arrange more than I have. I want to be more involved in everything.’” Smith recalls. “Obviously, I've been involved in everything since the beginning, but now I've just grown up a bit.”

That album is a work-in-progress, with no title or release date yet announced, and when asked about other songs on it, Smith smiles and simply says, “I'm not going to say any names of them yet.” But the few songs they play for *Billboard* all share the same spirit that suffuses their country home: joy. Gone are the heartbroken torch songs that defined so much of their early career; in their place are jubilant sounds ranging from dance-pop kiss-offs to choral expressions of elation. And for Smith, leaning into happiness may be the greatest risk of all.

“I think joy for me, and for a lot of queer people, is quite a dangerous place,” Smith says, their gaze becoming downcast. “We're all masters of pain, and I think it's actually a very courageous act to step into the queer joy of it all.”



**S**TREET DISTINCTLY RECALLS the day, 10 years ago, when Napes (also his client) sent him an email with no subject or text, just an attached MP3 file. When Street and Method Music co-founder Sam

Evitt heard Smith's voice singing the aching “Lay Me Down,” “You can kind of imagine [our reaction],” he says. “We were just blown away by the voice. We were calling Jimmy pretty immediately going, ‘Who is this, what's going on, how can we meet them?’”

The pair quickly signed Smith and introduced them to another act they managed, British dance duo Disclosure. Within a matter of months, Smith's debut feature on Disclosure's “Latch” came out, kicking off a meteoric rise: signing with Capitol Records in 2013, then releasing “Stay With Me” and their debut album, *In the Lonely Hour*, which would win four Grammy Awards, an RIAA diamond certification and an over six-year stay on the *Billboard* 200 after a No. 2 debut.

Almost immediately, Smith's voice was incapable stateside, because they were omnipresent on American radio. “The love for me in America still baffles me,” Smith says. “It was always a dream of mine — American music was a huge percentage of the music I listened to as a kid.” To date, Smith has charted 16 songs on *Billboard's* Pop Airplay chart, with seven in the top 10 (“Stay With Me” remains their sole No. 1 hit). A strong radio presence was simply a necessity: “Streaming hadn't quite kicked in when I released my first album — it was halfway through my first album that it started to take over,” Smith says.

Even after streaming became dominant, radio remained a cornerstone of Smith's strategy. “You have to be everywhere to truly be at the top, especially if you're someone like Sam,” says Greg

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—SMITH











Marella, Capitol's executive vp and president of promotion, who joined the label in 2016. "It's not something, both in 2016 and now, that you look at and go, 'OK, we're going to run an influencer campaign, which will lead us to the next cycle with Sam.' That's just not realistic for the type of artist Sam is and for the type of music they make."

The relationship between Smith and radio, Marella explains, was mutually beneficial: "Once you get to that level where [the general population] knows who that artist is by the very first note of the song, that artist and their music becomes important to the platform," he says. "It is better for radio's business to have superstars with music that is connecting and resonating. Radio wants to have superstars and recognizable voices and names on their stations all of the time."

The airplay Smith received led to a near-instant international breakthrough, cementing them as a global household name within a year. And nearly as quickly, Smith was thrown into a global touring schedule.

"From the get-go, we wanted to do shows as quickly as possible, because Sam's voice is such a weapon," Street recalls. "As soon as we had booked headline shows in England, we immediately made sure we were booking them in New York and Los Angeles, and stuck with that mentality all the way through — we knew that we were handling their career in both countries in tandem." To this day, Smith says, that mindset informs their team's strategy. "When it comes to releasing songs and singles, I try to hold in my mind everyone and try to be everywhere at once," they say. "It comes down to putting in the work, honestly, and making sure I *am* everywhere at once."

Those early years of commercial success weren't entirely smooth. In 2015, Smith underwent surgery for a hemorrhage on their vocal cords. (They fully recovered, but it brought their world tour to a standstill for months.) That same year, Smith amicably reached a copyright settlement with Tom Petty and Jeff Lynne on "Stay With Me," acknowledging its melodic similarity to "I Won't Back Down." Months later, Smith and Napes shared an Academy Award win for "Writing's on the Wall" from the James Bond film *Spectre*, and Smith (who had not yet come out as nonbinary) mistakenly claimed in their acceptance speech that "no openly gay men" had won an Oscar, drawing the ire of openly gay, Oscar-winning filmmaker Dustin Lance Black — as well as much of the internet.

"I think people need to get used to being wrong and making mistakes," Smith now reflects. "That's the biggest thing, getting comfortable with that uncomfortable feeling. That's a hard thing to do, because I think we just strive for perfection."

That Smith has weathered those missteps with their brand intact is, they say, a credit to the largely unchanged team they've maintained since the outset of their career. Throughout the

day at their country home, Smith regularly kicks back and chats with Street and co-manager Kara Tinson, as well as creative director Ben Reardon and a few makeup artists.

"It's such an intense relationship, being a manager — you have to go through everything together, and that naturally creates bonds that are very close," Street says. "It's a tricky industry, and I think having that tight-knit team around you keeps that continuity."

Smith has always kept a cocoon around them in the studio as well, working almost exclusively with Napes and a handful of other producers like Steve Fitzmaurice and StarGate, only occasionally reaching outside that inner circle for assists. "I can't do that with everyone," they say. "It's only a few special people that know how to trigger me and create that safe space."

Even with that streamlined group of creatives around them, a kind of dichotomy has always ex-

**"When something sells,  
people want you to do  
the same thing again.  
'Dancing With a Stranger'...  
was my way of saying,  
Look, I'm not  
good with boxes."**

—SMITH

isted in Smith's output, between the moody ballads that dependably became hits and the more dancefloor-friendly tracks — like "La La La," "Promises" and "Diamonds" — that show Smith's emotional range. And for Smith, sadness has often been what sells. *Love Goes* leaned further in a dance direction, yet didn't approach the sales heights of predecessors *In the Lonely Hour* or *The Thrill of It All*, peaking on the Billboard 200 with its No. 5 debut.

But in 2019, those two sides of Smith did find a vehicle for coexistence. The rhythmic, R&B-infused "Dancing With a Stranger," featuring Normani, felt like a stylistic bridge between Smith's preferred soundscapes; it also proved the slow road to radio success could be fruitful, rising to the top of the Radio Songs and Adult Top 40 charts after 15 and 17 weeks, respectively, ultimately becoming Smith's sixth top 10 hit on the Billboard Hot 100 and their longest-running song on Pop Airplay.

Now, "Love Me More" seems to also be benefiting from a slow-burn: It made a brief appearance on the Hot 100 at No. 94 in May before falling off the chart, but has lately gained traction thanks to steadily increasing radio play, climbing to No. 73 in the tracking week of July 30 and hitting No. 14 on Adult Pop Airplay one month prior. "Radio is driving it," Marella says. "Even if the song isn't a smash hit, there is still tremendous value in having a good Sam Smith record on the radio station because of the brand of Sam Smith."

Smith acknowledges "Dancing With a Stranger" as something of a turning point, though they say it shouldn't have come as a surprise. "My first song was 'Latch,' which was in and of itself a very joyful song. But I think that *In the Lonely Hour* ultimately did so well that it sort of dwarfed any of those happier songs," they say. "When something sells, people want you to do the same thing again. 'Dancing With a Stranger'

ended up being a release for me — it was my way of saying, 'Look, I'm not good with boxes.'" (Smith is currently named in a lawsuit alleging that "Stranger" was not an original song; their lawyers have called these claims "rambling" and "nonsensical.")

After "Dancing With a Stranger," Capitol A&R coordinator Charlie Knox pitched Ilya Salmanzadeh on working with Smith. The producer was immediately enamored by the idea. "I've been a huge fan of Sam since way back before I started working," says Salmanzadeh, a Max Martin protégé who had worked extensively with Ariana Grande as well as Demi Lovato, Ellie Goulding, Justin Bieber and Jennifer Lopez. "It just felt like, at that time, it was a right fit for what I wanted to do, what I felt was exciting."

Their first co-write was "How Do You Sleep?," Smith's follow-up to "Stranger" that leaned further into dance-pop. Approaching the song as a piece of "soulful pop with

hip-hop-leaning beats," Salmanzadeh was able to break into Smith's creative inner circle, and they later reunited for tracks that pushed Smith further stylistically, like "I'm Ready," an uplifting duet with Lovato, and "My Oasis," with Afrobeats superstar Burna Boy.

"You have that pressure when you come into a tight group like that, where you're the outsider for a second," Salmanzadeh says. "I never felt that pressure with Sam — I was really lucky that we got to hit it off with 'How Do You Sleep?,' because it just felt great from there."

For Smith, bringing in Salmanzadeh on *Love Goes* unlocked something new in their songwriting. "At that time I was probably the most heartbroken I'd ever been, but I wasn't finding comfort anymore in sitting there and writing about it," they say. "I wanted to cheer myself up and talk about things that were maybe a little bit lighter."

A look of genuine relief comes across Smith's face, as if they're realizing anew that it's possible



**“Sam is not of the moment; Sam is very much timeless. and when you’re timeless, you will always be a threat and will always have a shot.”**

—GREG MARELLA, CAPITOL

to just leave pain behind and not write it into music. “It’s just organically moved over into that realm,” they say, breaking into a small smile.



**A**T THE END OF 2019, Merriam-Webster announced its word of the year: “they.” Several months earlier, the dictionary had expanded its definition of the word to include it as a singular gender-neutral pronoun for individuals who identify as nonbinary, which in turn led to increased searches for the word online. In Merriam-Webster’s announcement, one name came up as a key reason for that spike in searches: Sam Smith.

Shortly before the dictionary’s change, Smith had come out publicly as nonbinary and changed their pronouns to “they/them,” writing on Instagram that “after a lifetime of being at war with my gender I’ve decided to embrace myself for who I am, inside and out.” Merriam-Webster wasn’t alone in noticing the power of Smith’s declaration: in November 2021, the BRIT Awards removed gendered categories from its lineup and replaced them with gender-neutral awards after Smith called on them to do so.

“I can speak on behalf of all of my queer friends and say that recognition like that, and just people talking and understanding us like that, is just the best feeling in the world,” Smith says. “Because there’s nothing bad happening here, it’s all love. No one’s taking anything from anyone; people are just trying to live in their own skin on this earth.”

Freely inhabiting their identity has, Smith says, made them appreciate the smaller changes life brings, too. In the few weeks after their 30th birthday in May, they haven’t experienced the dread of aging as so many do. “I think I always knew I was going to be like a fine wine or a blue cheese,” they say with a giggle. “I am not afraid of age. I love it.”

Another small but powerful realization came this year, at a performance of theirs during Pride Month. “I was singing the same songs that I’ve always done, but this time I was just wearing this

beautiful lace top,” Smith recalls. “I said to my manager, ‘It’s mad how just those little things completely change my mental health.’ It has been nothing but a positive for me and my body and my mind.”

Being nonbinary wasn’t a new concept — for Smith or the rest of the world — in 2019. But publicly acknowledging it made Smith the most famous nonbinary artist using gender-neutral pronouns, starting much needed conversations in the industry about inclusion for artists who identified similarly.

As Michelle Jubelirer, chair/CEO at Capitol, tells it, Smith’s second coming out didn’t require any label conversation. “We never needed or even had any sort of internal debate or discussion about Sam’s gender identity at the company,” she says. “The only question we asked Sam at the time was, ‘How can we support you?’” (Capitol has a growing number of LGBTQ+ artists on its roster, including Halsey, Troye Sivan and Christine and the Queens; Jubelirer ascribes that fact simply to the label being “a safe space for our artists to be exactly who they are.”)

Still, in the world outside their label, Smith’s announcement met its share of hate. “It takes a village,” Smith sighs as they remember the social media fallout. “It was so crucial to have people around me who told me to put my phone down and to concentrate on myself and my life.” Focusing on the larger impact of their actions — particularly on nonbinary kids who “do not have the luxuries and privileges that I have, who can’t necessarily do this, and who get chucked out of their family homes if they do” — helped. “Hopefully, I can push some doors down so that people can get through them easier than I did.”

For decades, coming out in the music industry was considered taboo, not only due to bigotry, but also to a fear that it would diminish an artist’s career prospects. But Marella says Smith’s haven’t suffered; in fact, radio programmers have gone out of their way to properly address Smith’s identity. “Radio has been so good and so supportive of referencing and acknowledging Sam as ‘they/them’ in promos and intros leading into the song, and talking about Sam,” Marella says. “I was, frankly, really pleased that there was so much thought going into it from so many people.”

Thus unencumbered by weighty expectations,

Smith was able to approach new music with a revitalized attitude, too. “This album, for me, marks the beginning of doing exactly what I want to do,” they say. That has included taking an increased role in production and vocal arrangement, even attempting to learn piano. “It feels like maths to me,” they admit, laughing at their struggle. “I think I truly just need to be by myself, go on YouTube and just start learning.”

Their piano skills may have a long way to go, but Smith’s production contributions are “very meticulous,” Salmandadeh says. “As a producer, sometimes when an artist or someone that hasn’t done that before comes with a lot of requests and opinions and advice on the sonics — it could be a little jarring. But with Sam, it’s not that experience at all. It has been very easy for me as a producer. I know exactly what they mean with their notes.”

Before, for instance, Smith says they had never focused much on their own backing vocals, instead doing “two or three takes” per song and letting their voice stay uninhibited. On “Love Me More,” however, Smith decided to “focus in on my voice and just kind of layer everything in different ways,” creating harmonies they had only dabbled in before. “I got a little bit obsessive,” they say with a laugh.

Smith and their team have high hopes for the upcoming release, which Smith triumphantly calls their “first nonheartbreak album.” If that sounds like a clean break from the sounds that have become Smith’s trademark, Street isn’t worried. “I think that is what’s sort of amazing about Sam’s ability as a songwriter and an artist — they can and always have been able to naturally flow between genres.”

Besides, if fans like what they hear, he adds, “everything else works itself out.” And Marella is quick to note that slower-burning hits, like “Dancing With a Stranger,” just make Smith more fascinating to follow. “When Harry Styles does something, it is Beatlesque. Sam is not that kind of artist, nor do I think they’ve ever been that kind of artist,” he says. “Sam is not of the moment; Sam is very much timeless. And when you’re timeless, you will always be a threat and will always have a shot.”

That doesn’t mean they’re not willing to try out some new tricks — like the rest of the world, Smith started using TikTok amid the pandemic. Though they blush and call their early days on the app “a minefield,” they say they’ve found a way to use it that feels right — to “stop taking yourself so seriously” and use it as “a performance space to share music,” especially the music they’re the most excited about. “I’m trying my best — I think I’m always going to try and embrace whatever apps and stuff that come and are going to help get the music to people.”

There’s a lightness to Smith as they sit in their home studio, imagining what the future might hold. “Maybe the music I make in the future won’t sit as well on the radio,” they say with a shrug. “It takes a bit of courage to maybe try something that maybe people aren’t going to like.”

A cheeky smile returns to their face, and their eyes light up. “But I like it,” they say, grinning. “And that’s all that matters.” ■







Willow photographed July 18 at  
The Neon Warehouse in Los Angeles.

Styling by Chloe & Chenelle Delgadillo.  
Bed On Water top, pants and gloves,  
Muerte Proforma belt, New Rock shoes,  
Georgina choker.





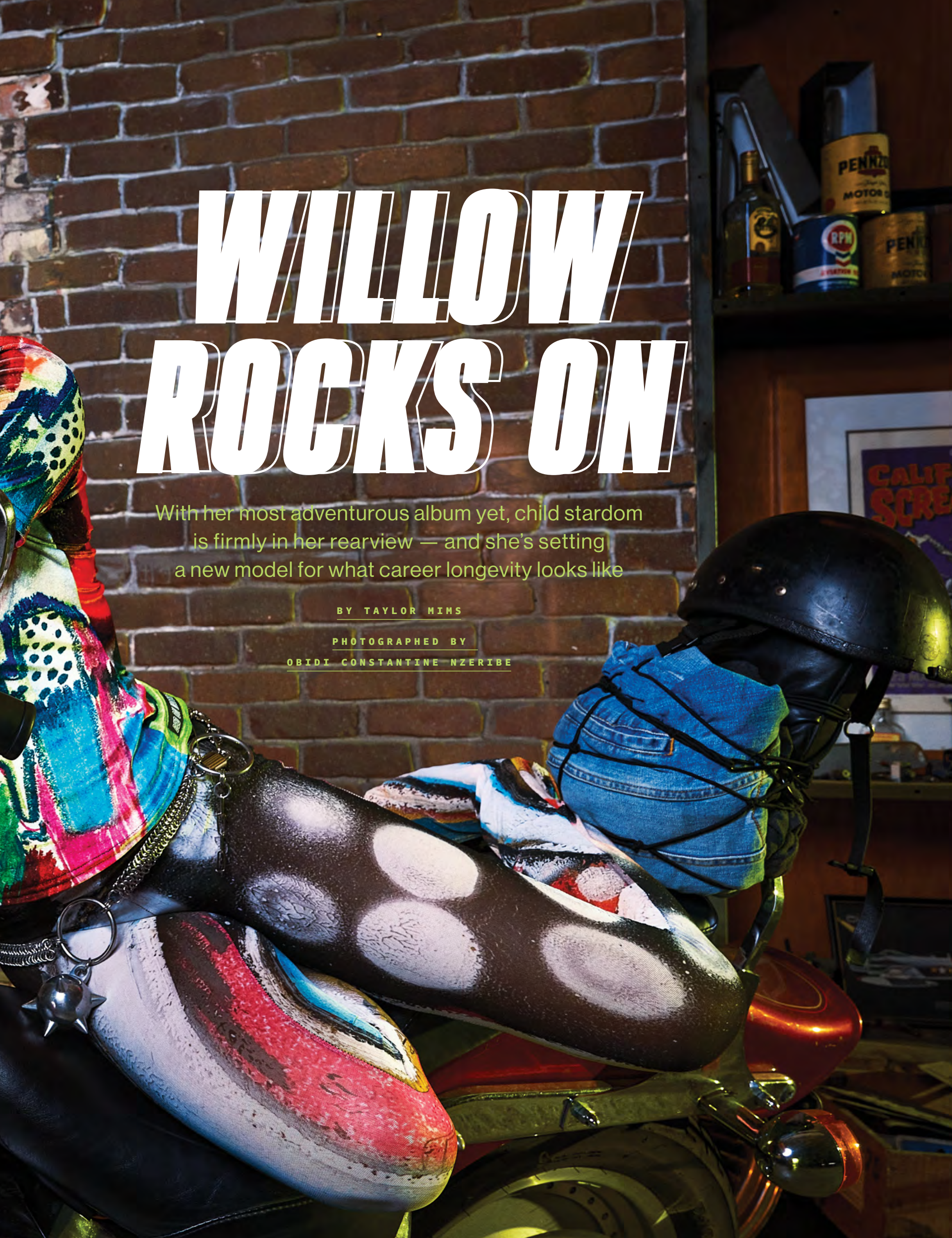
# WILLOW ROCKS ON

With her most adventurous album yet, child stardom is firmly in her rearview — and she's setting a new model for what career longevity looks like

BY TAYLOR MIMS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY

OBIDI CONSTANTINE NZERIBE







## WAS JUST THINKING TO MYSELF,

'Jesus Christ, oh my goodness. I need to retire soon,' says Willow. "This is crazy."

Very few artists could credibly declare that at the age of 21, but it's understandable why Willow would consider calling it a day. A handful of dates into her supporting role on Machine Gun Kelly's *Mainstream Sellout* tour, she's sprawled out on an old leather couch in Los Angeles, theorizing about when she'll get a break — sometime after the 20 dates with MGK end in August, she figures, and certainly not until after she has promoted *coping mechanism*, her next album, due this fall on Roc Nation.

The last four years have been nonstop for Willow. In 2019, she released a self-titled psychedelic R&B album, followed six months later by a 10-track project with frequent collaborator Tyler Cole as *The Anxiety* that included everything from dreamy pop (the anthemic viral hit "Meet Me at Our Spot") to rowdy punk ("Fight Club"). Then, amid the pandemic, Willow switched gears completely, releasing the devotional meditation EP *RISE*, and by spring 2021, she was promoting her first full-blown rock album, *Lately I Feel Everything*, and its Travis Barker-featuring lead single, "transparent soul."

And that's just her solo output. Lately, Willow's clear-eyed intensity has made her the artist to call when a track needs some added edge, which she lent to Camila Cabello's "psycho-freak" and PinkPantheress' "Where you are." Even artists who are already firmly working in rock know a feature from Willow — like on MGK's "emo girl" and Yungblud's "Memories" — can add a little something extra to take them over the top.

Roc Nation co-president Shari Bryant insists there's "not one particular reason" that these artists seek out Willow. For some, it might be the wide audience she reaches with 30 million weekly streams; others just "like her point of view. Her aura is something you can't get anywhere else."

Regardless of whether she's solo or on someone else's track, the demand for Willow is holding strong — and her dreams of early retirement will almost certainly have to wait. "From working with artists for more than 20 years," says Bryant, "when they have that level of excitement, they usually don't slow down anytime soon."

That momentum is leading up to what Willow enthusiastically calls "some of the best music I've ever made." Her upcoming album, which she co-produced with Chris Greatti, is an adventurous step forward for an already-versatile young artist, as well as her deepest dive yet into rock music. There are "Radiohead vibes in there, some Deftones vibes in there, a smidge of Queen with the major harmonies," she says.

"I wanted to go for rock. I didn't want to go for pop punk. I didn't want to go for what's necessarily popular right now," she continues. "I wanted to go for the heart of rock music, which to me is a deep outcry — maybe about pain, maybe about joy."

Though she may have first gained fame as a 9-year-old, Willow's current cavalcade of music firmly sets her apart from child stars who withered on the vine, burnt out by a demanding industry or left unable to nimbly evolve into compelling adult creators. She never resigned herself to becoming a novelty act or coasted on the credentials of her megastar parents, Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith.

And despite the constant scrutiny of her family, Willow has stayed above the fray — even, most recently, this past March, when her father slapped Academy Awards host Chris Rock following a joke he made about her mother's alopecia. The ensuing media firestorm, Willow says, didn't derail her creativity or "rock me as much as my own internal demons."

"I see my whole family as being human, and I love and accept them for all their humanness," she says. "Because of the position that we're in, our humanness sometimes isn't accepted, and we're expected to act in a way that isn't conducive to a healthy human life and isn't conducive to being honest."

Perhaps because she knew this early on, Willow learned the power in a judicious "no" and steered her career in a direction that always felt true to her, even as it changed. Today, she's in complete command of her musical fate. Perched on the couch, as she prepares for her *Billboard* photo shoot in a humid warehouse near her Los

Angeles hometown, she doesn't miss a beat discussing her art, speaking with her hands and disrupting her own train of thought to gush about her latest inspiration: "I think the monks have it right." Witnessing her independence and authoritativeness, it's easy to see why Willow's team follows her lead, even if it means working on a new marketing plan every few months to keep up with her steady output.

"We want to make sure that we are supporting and we're not manufacturing an artist," says Bryant. "If an artist is telling us, 'This is the state that I am in today, and this is where my passion lies,' from a label standpoint, it's up to us to support that." Willow has always "shown nothing but pure authenticity," Bryant continues. "She has been a self-starter. She has been involved in every project. Once that comes across, it's like, how could you deny it?"

According to Willow, the kind of deference she now receives wasn't always the default. After her debut single, "Whip My Hair," peaked at No. 11 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in November 2010, shortly after she turned 10, Willow released the songs "21st Century Girl" and "Fireball" the next year. She was slated to record a full album on Roc Nation and take on the titular role in a big-budget remake of *Annie*. Then she brought it all to a screeching halt.

First, Willow turned down *Annie*; then, once the adults in her life listened, she walked away from the debut album that she didn't believe in. "It took a lot of courage for me to say 'no' because everyone was rooting for me and trying to support me and expected me to do it," she says. "I was just going to dig myself a deeper and deeper hole if I didn't advocate for myself as early as I did."

Roc Nation co-president Omar Grant, who has worked with Willow since her debut single, says the label didn't press the young artist on her need for a break. "We're invested in the long-term career of artists," he says. "Giving her that space and knowing how young she was and how long of a runway she has... it's fine for her to take a break and to find herself."

Between 2011 and 2014, the teenage Willow slipped into a dark, insecure place thinking she "was inherently not good enough," which continues to leave her guarded over her creative output. When she returned in 2014 with the 3 EP, she was determined to make music on her terms. Now, "you see that she is in control of her cre-

ative, from writing to playing instruments to being part of the marketing," says Roc Nation marketing manager Naydeen Rodriguez.

It's no longer unusual for artists to take that kind of active role, but Rodriguez says Willow was ahead of the curve, presenting ideas on how to deliver her music to her audience through external platforms like TikTok, YouTube and Facebook that have been game-changers by increasing her reach while preserving a personal connection with fans.

"She certainly steers the ship, and we're there just to help her execute," says Carly Mann, who works on Willow's management team at Three Six Zero. "She knows exactly what she wants."

As the Roc Nation team pushed "transparent soul" to radio and digital service providers for playlisting when it started to promote *Lately I Feel Everything*, the version of "Meet Me at Our Spot" from Willow's July 2021 Facebook Live went viral on TikTok, soundtracking lip dub and dance trends. The song's surprise success garnered Willow her highest placement on the Hot 100 since "Whip My Hair"; the Facebook Live version of the song now has more than 102 million YouTube views and the track boasts over 415 million Spotify plays.

"Over the last three years, the growth in followership and loyalty levels has been amazing to watch," says Roc Nation senior vp of revenue Liberty Lucken, who adds that she has seen Willow's social media profile numbers triple and quadruple thanks to "a mixture of TikTok, touring, constant algorithmic play" and the "focus [Willow] puts into these projects."

It also helps that Willow's hits are representative of her catalog. Raised on streaming platforms, her generation is less shackled by the idea of genre, with artists' entire discographies at their fingertips — and Willow's features a smorgasbord of styles. "When fans move with you the way they do between different genres and record types, it's a true sign of belief in you as an artist," says Mann. "Wouldn't that give you the confidence to go and do what you are at your core?"

Experimentation has always come naturally for Willow, and she stands by all her work — old, new and whatever may come next. "Me being 9 and saying 'I whip my hair back and forth' as a symbol of internal freedom and self-love was so authentic for me," she says.





R13 blazer and shirt,  
Martine Ali necklace,  
New Rock boots.



**"IF YOU DON'T LIKE ME,  
I'M GRATEFUL FOR YOU, BECAUSE  
IT SHOWS I'M AUTHENTIC ENOUGH  
TO NOT BE FOR EVERYONE."**

—Willow

In 2021, she reintroduced the track into her live set as a punk song. Halfway through the rendition of the track in her Facebook Live performance, Cole shaved off all her hair onstage. "My message hasn't changed," Willow says. "I'm still saying in many ways, 'Live loud, live freely, and be your most creative and potent self.'"

**W**

#### WILLOW WAS JUST 3 YEARS OLD

when she was first exposed to the rock music scene — and the unique challenges it presents for the Black women in it. In 2002, her mom formed the nu-metal band Wicked Wisdom, which opened for Britney Spears' Onyx Hotel Tour and toured with Ozzfest, carving out a space for Black women in rock along the way. Willow remembers holding Pinkett Smith's hand as they walked backstage at Wicked Wisdom gigs, where the band was sometimes met by hostile audiences.

"There were a lot of racist and sexist people that she had to deal with who were very vocal about the fact that they were racist and sexist," Willow says matter-of-factly. "I got to see people get very rowdy and say some things that you should never hear somebody say to your own mother."

Those crowds of mainly white men even hurled objects at Pinkett Smith, Willow recalls, adding that her mom's lymph nodes got so inflamed from stress that a doctor encouraged her to take time off. "She was putting herself

in the crossfire of hate... and she put her heart on the stage for people who didn't deserve it."

Pinkett Smith's perseverance — and the way Wicked Wisdom won over skeptical crowds — only further fueled Willow's passion for rock music and its Black female lineage, which dates back to Sister Rosetta Tharpe, a queer Black woman who pioneered the genre in the 1940s. When she looks back on it now, the scarier moments are overshadowed by her mother's confidence: "She would just act like no one said a goddamn thing, and that's activism. She never let that shit faze her.

"I don't think I am ever going to experience anything as violent" as what Pinkett Smith experienced, Willow continues, though she adds she's reluctant to compare herself to anyone. But "for this generation and for where we're going, I definitely feel like my voice is an important voice."

And when it comes to delivering her message, Willow says that any oft-repeated clichés about her current musical medium are beside the point. "People only say rock is dead because rock was so influential in a political way," she says, punctuating her speech like a preacher on a pulpit. "Right now, it's not serving the same purpose as it did in the past." She sees a resurgence in people of color injecting it with purpose, like Kenny Hoopla and Nova Twins. And Willow's own credibility in rock is increasingly undeniable: *Lately I Feel Everything* landed in the top 10 of *Billboard's* Top Rock Albums chart, while her MGK collaboration "emo girl" did the same on Hot Rock Songs. She has worked with rock stalwarts Travis Barker and Avril Lavigne, the latter of whom says she was "blown away" by Willow and her "clear vision of who she is and where she wants to go."

Willow never imagined Lavigne would agree to collaborate ("I re-

ally didn't think she was going to say 'yes'"), but when they linked up in the studio, they bonded over the skepticism they both experienced as women in rock. "You'll kill yourself trying to be perfect for the masses. Bunk that. That's a losing game," Willow says, tossing her hands up with indifference as she thinks about the people who called Lavigne a poser in the early 2000s. "If you don't like me, I'm grateful for you, because it shows I'm authentic enough to not be for everyone."

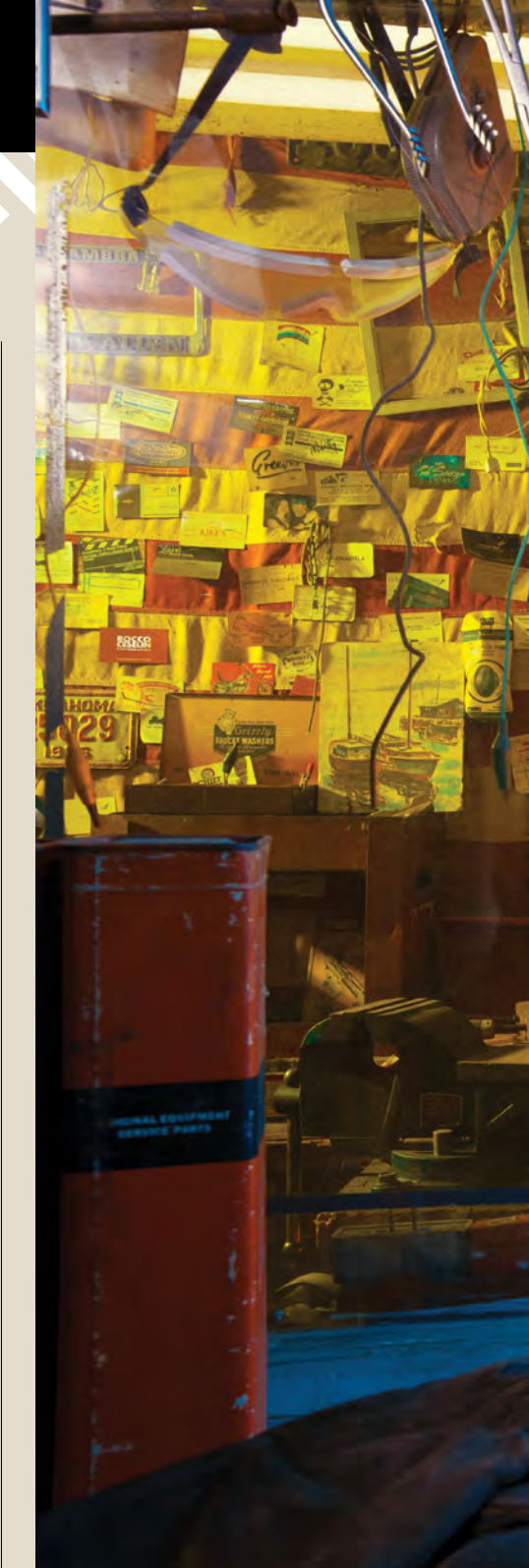
At any rate, she is interesting to plenty of musical contemporaries who matter much more than any passing naysayers — like, for instance, Camila Cabello, who met Willow when they meditated together with former Hindu monk and British author Jay Shetty. After, Cabello reached out to Willow to collaborate. "We had very beautiful spiritual experiences together and we had connected. That was the only reason I was down to do the song," Willow says. That, and the track "goes hard."

**O**

#### ON TOUR WITH MGK, WILLOW HAS

been closing her sets with "<maybe> it's my fault," the lead single off the forthcoming *coping mechanism*. On the track, Willow reckons again with feeling inadequate, musing about rewinding confusing moments in her head and unsuccessful attempts to assign blame. It's fans' first taste of her new album — which she didn't actually intend to be an album in the first place.

In January, Willow set up a studio session with co-producer Greatti, who she first connected with while working with Yungblud. For Willow, trusting others enough to bring them into her creative process is tough, but the two had an immediate rapport. She wrote her vocal part in the car on the way to meet Greatti, who says he completed their first track, "Why," within an hour. "We made three songs in four days, and they were easily some of the best music both of us



had ever made," says Greatti, "but we didn't stop after that."

The resulting 11-track collection is Willow's most cohesive and complex work to date. Atop crashing cymbals and sultry bass riffs, Willow belts each song — rife with therapy speak and confessional lyricism — with an angst that can't be authentically replicated past the age of 25.

"I'm going to use this [album] as a way to express myself and, hopefully, allow other people to feel the deepest parts of me," says Willow. "I want my life to be driven by love and where my heart wants to take me. Not where it's like, 'Oh, you're doing this well, this person does this, too. So, you guys should hook up.'"

That drive informs how Willow defines success. If success meant





Alexander Wang bodysuit and shorts, Chrishabana septum piece, Cyb3rw3nch ear cuff.

topping the *Billboard* charts, she would have doubled down on the pop sounds of her biggest hits, “Wait a Minute!” and “Whip My Hair.” If it looked like getting a *New York Times* bestseller, she would be writing a salacious tell-all memoir instead of *Black Shield Maiden*, the historical fiction novel about a young Ghanaian warrior that she has been working on for six years and arrives Oct. 4 through Penguin Random House. Instead, the star who walked away from unhealthy expectations of her childhood fame has found other ways to measure her achievements.

“Success is feeling like I have sufficiently done my best and I have raised to a different level of internal understanding,” she says. “Even just being able to play a riff that I couldn’t play

before or being able to sing a really high note that I couldn’t sing before.”

By that definition, *coping mechanism* is already a triumph. She describes it as her most vulnerable work yet, detailing her personal struggles after her first romantic heartbreak. The specifics of who, Willow insists, aren’t important; she instead focuses on the betrayal of someone she never thought could hurt her and how it consumed her.

“I used to think, ‘Why are all these songs about heartbreak, and why does everyone care so much about this?’” she says. “Then I realized, when it happens, it really makes you feel like something is wrong with you.”

On *coping mechanism*, “everything is very authentic,” Rodriguez says. “For her, that was just the most important [thing], was to get her

inner thoughts and her diary out.” And whatever musical aesthetic that diary takes on, Willow’s following — one that has organically grown alongside her — will no doubt listen. “It’s one thing for an artist to hop around because they’re chasing an audience,” Bryant says. “It’s another thing for an artist to hop around because that’s authentically where they are in their process.”

Moreover, Lucken predicts that as Willow’s sound gets heavier, her audience will expand even further, attracting more men to her predominantly young, female base. “She has had this continuous amount of content, in an age group that continues to evolve what they listen to,” says Lucken. The new project “is the next level from where she was just at.”

The proof of Willow’s growing profile stands shouting from pits across the country, as fans show up early to arenas to watch her set. With her shaved head tucked under a knit cap, she screams the lyrics to “<maybe> it’s my fault”: “I’m hurting inside/It’s your fault/Maybe it’s my fault/It’s all on my mind, it’s all on my mind.”

“It is such an experience. She’s ending with such emotion on that stage,” says Rodriguez. “Then just getting up and saying ‘thank you’ in this soft voice. All I could hear was the audience roar.”

It’s a bridge, Willow says, between the songs from her childhood that she still sings and what she has coming: “My mind and my heart are in this new world that people just haven’t heard yet.” **B**



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# players

CELEBRATING MUSIC'S MOVERS



Panel members at the 2019 Music Tectonics AI talent show.

## TECTONICS SHIFT

As Music Tectonics returns to an in-person model, the industry conference hopes to maintain the global appeal of its virtual events

BY CHRIS EGGERTSEN

**I**N ONLY ITS SECOND YEAR of existence, Music Tectonics — the annual industry conference that explores the convergence of music and technology — was forced to shift to a completely online event as the pandemic took hold in the United States. But it wasn't the first time that organizers' best laid plans had been undercut by an act of nature.

"You know, it's funny. By the time the pandemic had arrived, we already had to pivot because that first year [in 2019] was the year of the brush fires in [Los Angeles], where our conference was supposed to be held," says Music Tectonics founder/director Dmitri Vietze, who also serves as founder/CEO of music tech PR firm Rock Paper Scissors. "We had to move our conference within 24 hours. So, it only made sense that the

next year there was a pandemic."

After being held virtually in 2020 and as a hybrid event in 2021, Music Tectonics will return as a fully in-person conference in October — with an expanded global profile that grew out of the conference's two years online. "We had people from India and Australia who were staying up all night to participate in our live events," says Vietze. Now, he adds, "we're finding a lot of international contingents are having conversations with us from as far away as South Korea and Norway and Germany."

Slated to take place Oct. 25-27 in Santa Monica, Calif., with conference partners that include LANDR, LyricFind and Vibrate, Music Tectonics 2022 will feature a keynote address by Spotify head of innovation and market intelligence Máuhan Zonoozy as well as panels with industry insiders and entrepreneurs, including "The Catalog Gold Rush in

the Streaming Economy," "Collaborative Creation With Fans," "Copyright in the Age of Web3" and "Ultimate Live Music Tech Tools." In the lead-up to the event, *Billboard* spoke with Vietze and Music Tectonics marketing director Eleanor Rust about the origins of the conference, what attendees can expect this year and the most pressing issues facing the intersection of music and tech.



Rust



Vietze

**How did Music Tectonics evolve out of your work leading Rock Paper Scissors?**

**VIETZE** As an entrepreneur, I've always liked building community. At Rock Paper Scissors, we have been working with more and more music innovation and music technology companies and wanted to see the same creativity applied to that community-building. Obviously, there's the creativity of the music itself, but there's so much happening with how people are approaching business models that we wanted to put that into the form of an event where [the industry] could gather and we could learn about more of those ideas and see more people find each other and build great business practices together.

**What unserved need was Music Tectonics designed to address, and what sets it apart from other music and tech gatherings?**





Music Tectonics attendees on the Santa Monica Pier carousel in 2021.

**We felt there could be an independent conference that wasn't beholden to any particular contingent of the industry... but instead focused on this idea of innovation that would bring all those parties together.**

—VIETZE

**VIETZE** We're big fans of conferences like South by Southwest and Indie Week, Music Biz and Midem. Each of those have their own flavor, and we felt there could be an independent conference that wasn't beholden to any particular contingent of the industry — not focused on majors or indies, labels versus streaming services, but instead focused on this idea of innovation that would bring all those parties together.

**This is the first fully in-person Music Tectonics conference since the inaugural edition in 2019. What was it like having to pivot to an online format in only your second year?**

**VIETZE** Like everybody, at first, we faced a lot of fear and concern about what [COVID-19] means for the world, as well as our event and our businesses and our livelihoods. But again, we went back to that idea of community-building and decided to leverage the advantages of what we could do when everybody was remote. We leaned into things like online speed-networking. We also experimented with metaverse stuff because we want people to not just talk about this stuff but actually experience it. And we ended up having a global audience as a result.

**RUST** We pivoted to online really quickly for a series of lead-up events. Music Tectonics was set to do a South by Southwest party in March, and we pivoted immediately to turn that one in-person meetup into a series of three online meetups with our community and then just kept those going throughout 2020. We experimented with online platforms that way so that by the time the conference [happened], we had something that we knew people were going to love.

**Is there anything you took from the virtual editions that's carrying over to the in-person event this year?**

**RUST** One thing we really learned from online is that the event needs to match the platform and vice versa. You can only do what the platform is good at in an online event. In a sense, we've taken that to real life by having three conference days at three different venues that are going to offer very different experiences. We're not going to do all of that in a hotel basement anymore. Part of [the reason for] that is because our event had to change for online.

**In 2020 you had, what, 800 people online?**

**RUST** Yeah, and then 1,000 for 2021.

## ▶ 2022 Music Tectonics Panelists



**Darryl Ballantyne**  
LyricFind



**Ryan Leigh Seaton**  
Music Reports



**Máuhan Zonoozy**  
Spotify



**Tatiana Cirisano**  
MIDIa Research



**Jocelyn Seilles**  
Bridger



**Kriss Thakrar**  
MIDIa Research



**Vasja Veber**  
Viberate

A selection of panelists who will speak at the 2022 Music Tectonics conference Oct. 25-27 in Santa Monica, Calif.

**VIETZE** It's early so we're still working on [the] plans, but we're finding a lot of international contingents are having conversations with us right now from as far away as South Korea, Norway and Germany. We'll see if they make their trade missions, but it seems like that international market is also interested in connecting in-person with the American market.

**RUST** I definitely credit the online events with being able to include [international] people last year. Now they know us and are interested in coming along for the ride.

**Are you going to have an online component this year?**

**RUST** Not to the conference, although we do have some lead-up events [that will be online]. For



example, we're just about to launch our startup pitch competition. We started that in 2020, so this is our first time in-person. We're going to have a semifinalist event online on Sept. 7, so 10 semifinalists will pitch online to a jury and all conference badge holders will be invited to that. We're going to have some other [online] programming [that will be] the first time that conference badge holders will really be able to meet and mingle. That in a sense is stage-setting so that people can network and get to know each other before they get to the conference.

**Aside from the fact that it's completely in-person, are there any new elements people can expect this year?**

**VIETZE** Each day has a different flavor. The first day is at the carousel at the Santa Monica Pier, which is the venue we used last year for networking. This year, we're going to do a startup carousel where people can come and get demos of some of the startups that are participating in our competition. Then, the traditional conference is an exhibitor hall — it's a keynote, it's panels and the schmooze between the sessions — and we've got parties on various days as well. The third day we call the Music Tech Dojo. We've been to other conferences where people are like, "Oh, shoot, we met there, but we didn't actually get to sit down and have a meeting." So, we are taking over this coworking space, also in Santa Monica, where people can continue those one-on-one meetings and get the rest of the business done.

**What are the most pressing issues facing the intersection of music and tech right now?**

Attendees at the 2021 Music Tectonics conference.

**VIETZE** I don't think people are realizing that streaming is the new baseline for the [music] economy. Not everyone's happy with how the money is getting paid out, but it has totally brought the music industry to a viable place. By saying it's the new baseline, what I mean is, it's not the end of the road. Music has become digitized and licensable in a way that's not perfect, but it's actually working from a business perspective in a lot of ways. That digitization of music is now going to get exposed in a lot of other places. When we talk about video gaming and music or metaverse and music or user-generated video creators using music, or virtual reality and music, all of those things are these new layers. You can fight about streaming and fight about Spotify, but they created a pathway that [will build] a lot more revenue streams.

There's [also] this music creator category that is exploding. It's going to be as big as what Instagram did for photography and what YouTube and now TikTok's doing for video. I'm intrigued by those tools, whether it's artificial intelligence or other kinds of maturation of mobile apps, that people have an entire band and studio in their pocket. As a result, the people who are in the business of selling recorded music are going to be competing for attention with everybody, because everybody's going to be making music.

**Are there any trends that took off during the early parts of the pandemic in the music/tech space that you feel haven't really survived the transition back to in-person?**

**VIETZE** We have the Music Tectonics podcast, and one of the first things we did was ask the question: What is going to explode, or what's

exploding right now because of this remote isolation? And we focused on a few areas. We focused on remote music education, remote collaboration tools and livestreaming. Those were the three big categories. Though the demand was extremely high for all of that stuff during the pandemic, it may look like the demand has waned to the point where it's no longer even a thing right now, [but] I don't think that's the correct analysis. The demand was so damn high that it looked like this stuff was exploding, and then when it went to lower levels, it looked like it was dying. But I think the pandemic paved the way for a path to monetization and for the survival of those innovations and the way that people interact around music. Something like 400 livestreaming companies emerged in total from before and during the pandemic. Obviously, the majority of those are not going to survive. However, some of them will, and it'll be part of the overall music diet in terms of the fan experience and in terms of artists and artist teams' career experiences.

**What emerging technologies in music are you excited about?**

**VIETZE** At the first conference we did a session called "AI's Got Talent." The idea was, what's the role of artificial intelligence in musical creativity? The debate at the time was not that different from how different generations of musicians protested mechanical pianos, player pianos, turntables being used as musical instruments, synthesizers — all these things had a controversial moment. Eventually, a certain type of creativity and new forms emerged, new genres emerged and got adopted. The same thing is happening with artificial intelligence. So much to the point that the conversation isn't really happening anymore. There's not as much, "AI is a problem." Instead, you see this massive wave of musical creators who are using this stuff. As a result, we're going to see this massive creativity of new styles, new genres, new songs, but also new generations of people who wouldn't have had access to making music. As a social phenomenon, it is just going to continue to grow like a tidal wave.

**Non-fungible tokens have taken off in music in a way that few people anticipated, but it's a contentious issue. Now, you have a lot of people saying, "Oh, the bottom is going to fall out, or is falling out, and there's no real future in this." What are your thoughts on where that's going?**

**VIETZE** The crux of what's beneath the surface with the concept of NFTs and Web3 is solid innovation. Once the technology comes into place, it's just a matter of time before it's actually a day-to-day operational, useful tool. Right now, people are learning as they go, as they create, as they purchase. [In the future], we won't be calling anything an NFT, but you'll still have this experience of knowing that there's value, that you're unlocking new opportunities through a purchase and that there will be a chance to track things in a way that doesn't invade your privacy. Those are all great things, and I think they will happen. And it makes sense that there will be very large market corrections along the way. **b**



KYLE ESPELETA



# GLORIA TREVI'S 40-YEAR CAREER

The “Mexican Madonna” on how her career thrived in four decades despite the singer’s ban from TV and a stint in prison

BY JESSICA ROIZ

**I**N JANUARY 1990, Gloria Trevi recalls, she learned that her first single, “Dr. Psiquiatra,” was going to make its radio debut at the inconvenient hour of 3 a.m. So, “I drank a lot of coffee so that I could stay up, listen to my song and request it many times,” she says.

Trevi, 54, no longer needs to lose sleep to hear her music. The pop artist, whose untamed hair, ripped tights and leather vests established her as Latin’s first female rock star — the “Mexican Madonna” as she was dubbed then — went on to establish a 40-year career of hitmaking. Though “Dr. Psiquiatra” quickly grew in popularity in Mexico, it was “El Último Beso,” her cover of white-pompadoured, blue-eyed soul artist Wayne Cochran’s 1961 single, “Last Kiss,” that earned Trevi her first entry on *Billboard*’s Hot Latin Songs chart later in 1990. Since then, she has released a string of hits — most written or co-written by her — that have become Latin music staples, including 1991’s “Pelo Suelto” and “Con Los Ojos Cerrados” in 1992. Along the way, she scored roles in three ’90s Mexican films: *Pelo Suelto*, *Zapatos Viejos* and *Una Papa sin Catsup*.

But her burgeoning career came to a halt in 1999, when criminal complaints were filed against Trevi and her then-manager, Sergio Andrade, accusing her of the corruption of minors, rape and kidnapping. The following year, Trevi fled to Brazil, where she was captured and arrested, and then spent more than four-and-a-half years in Brazilian and Mexican prisons. In 2004, a Mexican court acquitted Trevi due to a lack of evidence.

“I felt that I lost my career,” Trevi says. “But I kept a positive attitude and believed in myself. You can lose a battle but not the war, and that mindset was very constant in me.”

Trevi put out new music that very same year, releasing *Cómo Nace el Universo*, an album that addressed her time in prison and featured material written behind bars. The record peaked at No. 2 on the Latin Pop Albums chart and No. 4 on Top



Latin Albums; then, in 2011, *Gloria* became her first No. 1 on the latter chart. “How did I envision my comeback? Well, I’m an Aquarius. I’m a dreamer, and I saw it as something huge,” she says.

There were other accolades, too. In 2009, Trevi won the *Billboard* Latin Music Award for female pop song of the year with “Cinco Minutos,” received the BMI President’s Award in 2016 and was honored with the 2021 Premio Lo Nuestro Special Trajectory Award. On *Billboard*’s Latin album charts, she has placed 24 entries, including four No. 1s on both Top Latin Albums and Latin Pop Albums (see chart).

In August, Trevi will kick off her *Isla Divina* tour (produced by Live Nation, Great Talent Entertainment and Latino Live) at San Juan’s Coliseo de Puerto Rico, then play 40-plus U.S. dates to celebrate her 13th studio album of the same name. A biographical series about her life, produced by Carla Estrada, is in preproduction.

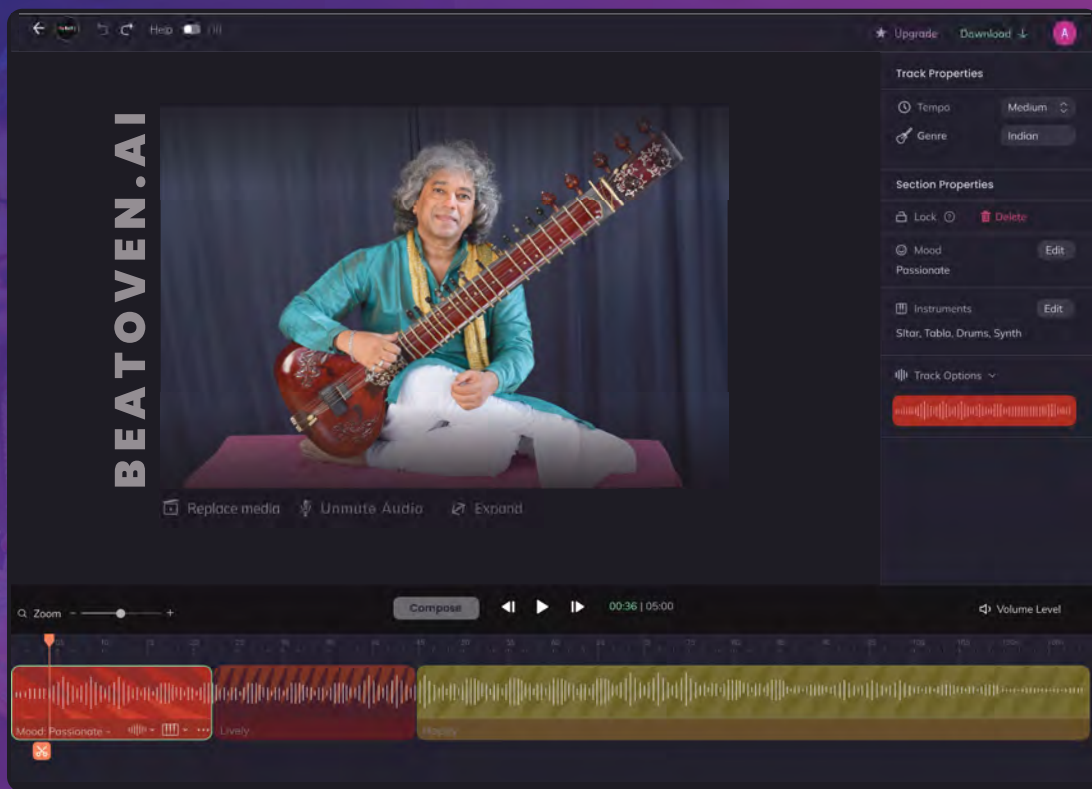
## How do you describe your almost 40 years in music?

*¡Que fuerte!* (How strong!) But if I think about it, it’s more than 40 years, because everything started when I took ballet lessons at my mom’s academy in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas. My mom always thought she was in Russia — she was very strict as a teacher. She was [involved with] a popular festival in the city, and I remember that the first time I was onstage I felt, at the very young age of 6, that this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.

## How has your songwriting process evolved since your earlier rebellious years?

I am inspired by classical music and poetry — you would never think that a 16-year-old teenager would write songs such as “Mañana.” I began using poetry and metaphors with real-life situations and street life, and it became something special.





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I like to use magic realism and combine it with colloquial language. I've come up with songs such as "Psicofonía," where I talk about the romance between a ghost and a crazy girl, symbolizing that men are like ghosts who come and go and we women are crazy in love.

Living through heartbreak, living in anguish and being deprived of my liberty taught me another type of language from jail. When I regained my freedom, I became very empathetic with people. From that experience came songs like "Doña Pudor." I also have songs that help you let off steam, scream and cry like "No Querías Lastimarme" and "Con Los Ojos Cerrados" to songs like "Todos Me Miran" and "Grande," to the songs on my new album, *Isla Divina*, which were born from the unity of a pandemic.

### What about your music has remained consistent over the years?

I like to learn from the present and I love the future, but I don't just follow what's trending. I have to believe in the song, in the beat and in the production. For me to get onstage and defend a song, I have to like it, and I have to transmit that to my fans so that they can like it too. If I have doubts or make music [just] so it'll go viral, fans will feel it and it won't connect.

### Do you recall a time when you had to defend your art?

A bit before "Dr. Psiquiatra" reached No. 1 [in Mexico], I was invited to perform on [the Mexican musical show] *Siempre en Domingo*, and at that time, I didn't want people to forget me, so I threw myself on the floor. I didn't think my underwear would show because I had on socks, ripped leggings and ballet tights, but [it did]. As you can imagine, because of Mexican [social customs], they told me to brush my hair and stop showing my underwear or I would never be able to perform there again. I refused to brush my hair, and I told them that I could fix the underwear situation by simply taking them off! I was banned from the show until ["Dr. Psiquiatra"] reached the top of the chart in the country. That's when they invited me back without any conditions.

### Is this how your timeless hit "Pelo Suelto" was born?

The main reason I wrote "Pelo Suelto" was that my maternal grandmother, Gloria — who was very religious and was well-known in Monterrey's conservative society — wrote an open letter to a newspaper where she publicly scolded me. That really bothered me, because she should've just called me privately to tell me how she felt. Her reason was that she didn't want to change me but rather wanted people to know that she didn't agree with my decisions. I went ahead and wrote an open letter back. Looking back, it was very immature of me, but I don't regret the girl that I was, because it's part of my story and shaped the woman I am today.



Trevi onstage in Miami in 2019.

### "Cinco Minutos" marked your first *Billboard* top 10 and has been your longest-charting track on Hot Latin Songs. Was that a turning point in your career?

I believe "Tu Ángel de la Guarda" opened the doors for me internationally, but the first song that helped me get back on my feet was "Todos Me Miran." Even if it didn't chart on the radio, it became one of my biggest hits and connected me in an impressive way with women and the LGBTQ community. After that, "Cinco Minutos" was born. The first time I heard that song [written by Erika Ender and Amerika Jimenez], I was preparing my album *Una Rosa Blu*, and I believed it was strong because of its message.

It's about a relationship that hurt you but you got up, and when your ex came back, you gave him five minutes to get their stuff, to beg you, but there's no turning back.

### After the hardships you went through in the early 2000s, how did you prepare for your comeback?

I was in the darkest hole of my entire life. I felt judged, punished, defamed, and my family was suffering because I was in the middle of a huge scandal. I would receive fan letters that moved me and reminded me that good people still existed. Everything that was said about me [in the press]

was horrible, but my fans still defended me. I'm very grateful to those brave and kind fans who encouraged me. It's because of them, and the family that I had to gain back, that I told myself I had to get back on my feet, to make everyone proud and not ashamed. They say you never know how strong you are until you have to do it, and it's because of them that I had to do it.

### What do you want your legacy to be?

My music. My story. I want my music to be studied and enjoyed for a million years. And that the dark moments that I lived and overcame also contribute to my legacy. I would like my life story to help change and transform people's lives. I think I'm already achieving that. **b**

## Gloria Trevi's Top Latin Pop Albums

RANK	TITLE	ARTIST	PEAK	PEAK DATE
1	El Amor	Gloria Trevi	1	9/12/15
2	Gloria	Gloria Trevi	1	4/9/11
3	Inmortal	Gloria Trevi	1	7/2/16
4	Versus	Gloria Trevi & Alejandra Guzman	1	7/22/17
5	De Pelicula	Gloria Trevi	2	10/12/13
6	Cómo Nace El Universo	Gloria Trevi	2	12/25/04
7	Tu Ángel De La Guarda	Gloria Trevi	4	2/22/92
8	Una Rosa Blu	Gloria Trevi	3	10/20/07
9	Gloria: En Vivo	Gloria Trevi	3	6/9/12
10	Versus: World Tour, En Vivo Desde Arena Ciudad Di México	Gloria Trevi & Alejandra Guzman	6	3/24/18

Gloria Trevi's Top Latin Pop Albums is based on peak ranks on *Billboard*'s Latin Pop Albums chart, where four of her albums debuted at No. 1: *Gloria* (2011), *El Amor* (2015), *Inmortal* (2016) and *Versus* (2017).





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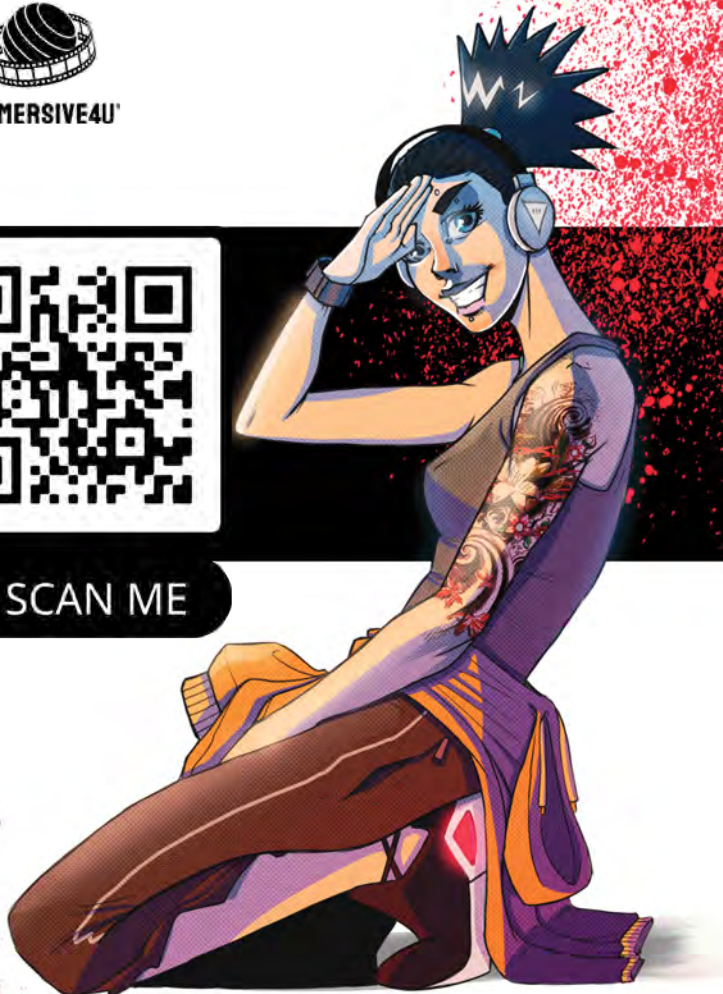
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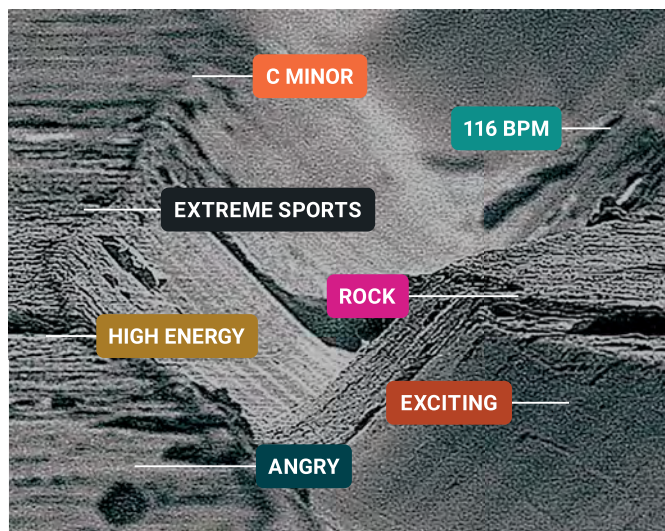


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PEAK ON BILLBOARD'S  
STREAMING SONGS CHART

Lacy photographed by  
Alex Harper on July 22  
at ASH Staging Concept  
House in Los Angeles.



## STEVE LACY

How the bandmate turned solo star found a wider audience — and breakout hit — with his major-label debut

▶ After a recording session in June 2021, alternative R&B artist Steve Lacy spent the last year tweaking what became his breakout hit, “Bad Habit,” off his recent major-label debut album, *Gemini Rights*. The guitar-driven pop-rock and R&B fusion earned Lacy his first Billboard Hot 100 entry in July — though previous work as a producer, songwriter and guitarist has scored him other *Billboard* chart nods. In 2015, he received his first credits as a co-executive producer of hip-hop collective The Internet’s third album, *Ego Death*, and soon after, he started working with acts including Tyler, The Creator; Frank Ocean; and Vampire Weekend. As his Internet bandmates, including Syd, Matt Martians and Chris Smith began working on their own solo projects, he, too, started honing in on his artistry.

In 2019, through his manager Dave Airaudi’s artist inno-

vation company, 3qtr, and AWAL Recordings, the Compton, Calif., native released his Grammy Award-nominated debut solo album, *Apollo XXI*. He followed it with *The Lo-Fis*, a hodgepodge of demos, leaks and throwaway tracks recorded on his iPhone, and clarifies, “I wasn’t doing that because I wanted to, I just didn’t have [money] like that.” His situation changed last year when Lacy signed with RCA Records after debating the decision for months on end. “I wanted a bigger team, more science on how things work, more access,” he says. “I respected RCA because they have the artists I love [including] SZA, Doja Cat and Lucky Daye, who own their narrative and do things their way.”

And while Airaudi continues to “help execute all the crazy ideas that float through my mind,” says Lacy, RCA helped the artist grow his audience ahead of *Gemini*

*Rights*’ arrival by having him create a TikTok account where his videos have accrued over 3 million likes. “[RCA] definitely told me to get on that shit,” he says with a laugh. “I was all grumpy, then I was like, ‘You know what? This shit low-key fun.’” To date, “Bad Habit” has soundtracked more than 210,000 videos on the platform.


A week after *Gemini Rights* debuted at No. 7 on the Billboard 200, the single surged to No. 14 on the Hot 100, thanks largely to its streaming dominance. It currently sits at a No. 11 high — and a No. 2 best on *Billboard*’s Streaming Songs chart — thanks in part to its rising airplay, debuting at No. 32 on Mainstream Top 40 this week. Come fall, Lacy will hit the road for a 27-date North American trek concluding with a hometown show at The Greek Theatre in Los Angeles on Nov. 11. “I’m just grateful,” he says. “It still doesn’t feel real yet.”

—CYDNEY LEE



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