

billboard

AUGUST 27, 2022 • BILLBOARD.COM

ROMEO

RULES

HOW BETTING BIG
ON BACHATA MADE
SANTOS KING

+

HOW TO ROCK
A RESIDENCY

THE SECRET WEAPON
STARS LIKE USHER NEED

—

MONEY MAKERS
MUSIC'S BEST
COMPENSATED EXECS

FALL
Music
PREVIEW

LEGEND

OUT 9/9



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ON THE COVER

Romeo Santos photographed by Grace Rivera on July 8 at the Panorama Room in the Graduate Roosevelt Island in New York.

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Joe Keery photographed by Guido Gazzilli on Aug. 13 at The Hoxton, Rome in Rome.

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Hannah Karp

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charts

DATA FOR WEEK OF 8.27.2022



'Super' Star: Nicki Minaj Scores Her First Solo No. 1

BILLBOARD HOT 100

1

"Super Freaky Girl"
Nicki Minaj

LAST WEEK

-

PEAK POSITION

1

WEEKS ON CHART

1

NICKI MINAJ'S "Super Freaky Girl" debuts on the Billboard Hot 100 at No. 1, marking her first leader on the all-format songs chart as an unaccompanied artist. It's her third time reaching the list's summit following "Trollz" (with 6ix9ine) and her featured turn on Doja Cat's "Say So," both in 2020.

Notably, Minaj scores the first Hot 100 No. 1 debut for a hip-hop song by a female artist without any accompanying acts since Lauryn Hill's "Doo Wop (That Thing)" in 1998.

"Super Freaky Girl" tallied 21.1 million streams, 4.6 million radio airplay audience impressions and 89,000 downloads sold in its first week (Aug. 12-18), according to Luminate, and launches atop both the Digital Song Sales and Streaming Songs charts. Minaj adds her

12th No. 1 on the former, as well as her second on the latter, after "Anaconda" led for three weeks in September 2014. "Super" was available for purchase during its release week with explicit and clean versions of its original mix (released Aug. 12), an extended "Roman Remix" (midnight ET, Aug. 18) and a cappella versions of both (10:30 p.m. ET, Aug. 18). All versions were discounted to 69 cents on Aug. 18.

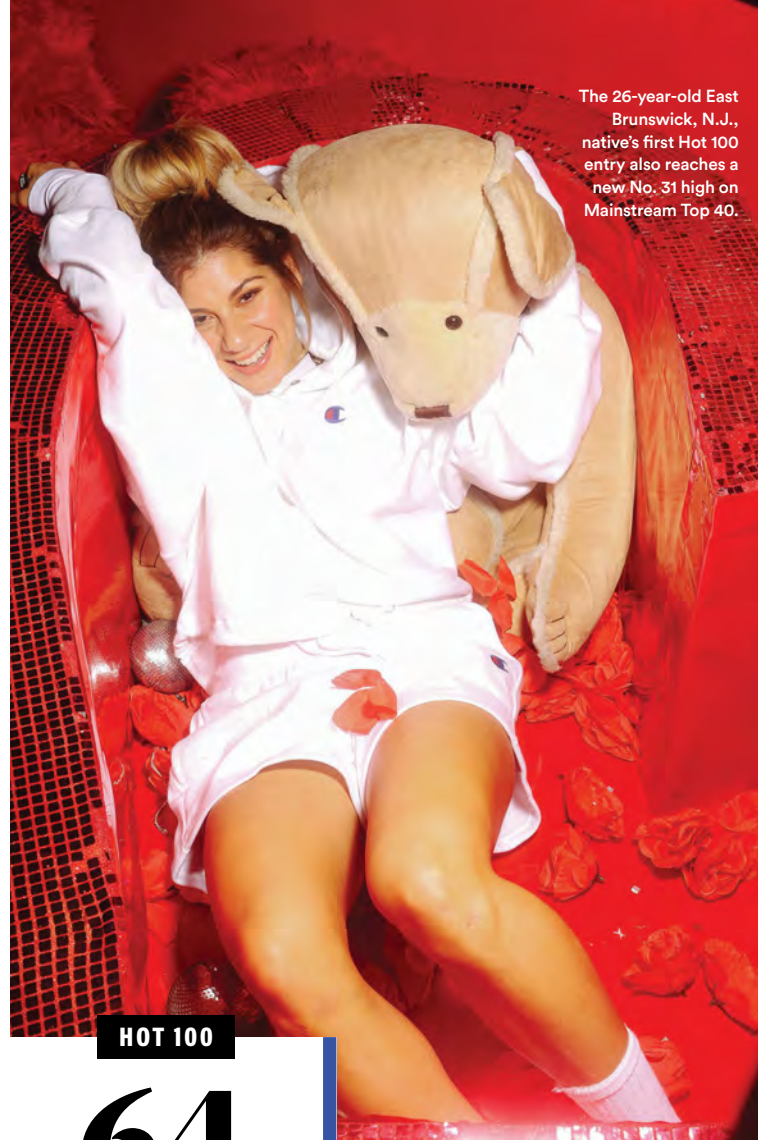
Meanwhile, "Super," which also debuts as Minaj's eighth No. 1 on the multimetric Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart, expands the legacy of its sample, Rick James' "Super Freak." The original hit No. 3 on Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs and No. 16 on the Hot 100 in 1981. Plus, M.C. Hammer's "U Can't Touch This," which also samples James' classic, spent one week at No. 1 on Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs and rose to No. 8 on the Hot 100 in 1990.

—GARY TRUST

Hot 100

2 WKS. AGO		LAST WEEK		THIS WEEK		Title	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
						PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL		
HOT SHOT DEBUT		1		#1 for 1 WEEK		Super Freaky Girl	Nicki Minaj	1	1
						DR. LUKE A. JOSEPH, V. OLIVER, MALIBU BABIE (O.T. MARA, J. PETTY, L.S. GOTTFELD, A. JOSEPH, G. LEWIS, L. MILLER, V. OLIVER, R. JAMES, A.H. MILLER)	YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC		
3	2	2				As It Was	Harry Styles	1	20
						KID HARPOON, T. JOHNSON (H. STYLES, T.E. PHULL, T. JOHNSON)	ERSKINE/COLUMBIA		
2	3	3				About Damn Time	Lizzo	1	18
						RICKY REED, B. SLATKIN (B. SLATKIN, E.B. FREDERIC, L. PRICE, M. MCLAREN, M. JEFFERSON, R. LARKINS, S. HAGUE, T.M. THOMAS)	NICE LIFE/ATLANTIC		
1	1	4				Break My Soul	Beyonce	1	9
						B. KNOWLES CARTER, T.Y. NASH, TRICKY, J.C. ISAKEN (B.G. KNOWLES CARTER, T.Y. NASH, C.A. STEWART, S.C. CARTER, A. GEORGE, F.C. MCFARLANE, A.J. PIGOTT, F. ROSS)	PARKWOOD/COLUMBIA		
4	4	5				Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)	Kate Bush	3	32
						K. BUSH (K. BUSH)	FISH PEOPLE/NOBLE AND BRITTE/RHINO/WARNER		
7	6	6				Bad Habit	Steve Lacy	6	7
						STEVE LACY (S.T.L. MOYA, B. FOUSHEE, D. GORDON, M. CASTELLANOS, J.C. KIRBY)	L-M/RCA		
9	8	7		STM/AIR		Sunroof	Nicky Youre & dazy	7	12
						DAZY (N.S. URE)	THIRTY KNOTS/COLUMBIA		
5	7	8				Wait For U	Future Featuring Drake & Tems	1	16
						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)	FREEBANDZ/EPIC		
8	11	9				Me Porto Bonito	Bad Bunny & Chencho Corleone	6	15
						LENEY, 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)	RIMAS		
11	13	10				I Like You (A Happier Song)	Post Malone Featuring Doja Cat	9	11
						L. BELL, J.L. HARRIS (A.R. POST, A.Z. DLAMINI, L. BELL, J.L. HARRIS, B. WALSH)	MERCURY/REPUBLIC		
10	12	11				Late Night Talking	Harry Styles	4	13
						KID HARPOON, T. JOHNSON (H. STYLES, T.E. PHULL)	ERSKINE/COLUMBIA		
6	9	12				First Class	Jack Harlow	1	19
						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)	GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC		
12	14	13				Heat Waves	Glass Animals	1	83
						D. BAYLEY (D. BAYLEY)	WOLF TONE/POLYDOR/REPUBLIC		
14	15	14				The Kind Of Love We Make	Luke Combs	13	9
						CHIP MATTHEWS, J.D. SINGLETON, L. COMBS (L. COMBS, J. DAVIS, D. ISBELL, R. ISBELL)	RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE		
21	18	15				You Proof	Morgan Wallen	6	14
						J. MOI, CHARLIE HANDSOME (M. WALLEN, A.G. GORLEY, E.K. SMITH, CHARLIE HANDSOME)	MERCURY/BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC		
16	16	16				Titi Me Pregunto	Bad Bunny	5	15
						MAG (B.A. MARTINEZ OCASIO, M.D. BORRERO, R. ROSARDO)	RIMAS		
23	19	17				I Ain't Worried	OneRepublic	17	10
						R.B. TEDDER, B. KUTZLE, S. OSCROFT, T. SPRY, J. NATHANIEL (R.B. TEDDER, B. KUTZLE, T. SPRY, J. ERIKSSON, P. MOREN, B. YTTLING)	MOSLEY/INTERSCOPE		
25	22	18				She Had Me At Heads Carolina	Cole Swindell	18	12
						Z. CROWELL (A.G. GORLEY, C. SWINDELL, J. FRASURE, M.D. SANDERS, THOMAS RHETT, T. NICHOLS)	WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WMN		
15	17	19				Wasted On You	Morgan Wallen	9	40
						J. MOI, J. DURRETT (M. WALLEN, E.K. SMITH, J. THOMPSON, CHARLIE HANDSOME)	REPUBLIC/BIG LOUD		
17	20	20				Stay	The Kid LAROI & Justin Bieber	1	58
						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. RAHMAN)	RAYMOND BRAUN/COLUMBIA/DEF JAM		

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



The 26-year-old East Brunswick, N.J., native's first Hot 100 entry also reaches a new No. 31 high on Mainstream Top 40.

HOT 100

64

"Victoria's Secret"
Jax

How did you come up with the idea for this song?

I had "Victoria's Secret" as a concept in my notes for a long time, but I never found the right words. I always felt like it was coming from an inauthentic place because, even to this day, I'm not this

female protagonist that's healed, confident and full of body positivity. But when it came from a young girl [I was babysitting], I felt like I had a responsibility with this new platform to try my very best to prevent the next generation of young girls from going through what I went through.

How did you react to Victoria's Secret's CEO responding to its message?

When I read the letter, my first instinct was, "Mom! Dad! Look at this thing. This is so badass." But nothing I said was a new concept, and it really is silly that it should take a song breaking into the Billboard Hot 100 or a viral TikTok to be able to demand change. The sad truth is that if real change is going to happen, it's going to be through actually listening to your customers and understanding the pain.

What is your biggest takeaway from the song's success?

I learned that there should be more of an incentive to put out music, even if you don't feel comfortable talking about something. I never talked about [the content in "Victoria's Secret"] because I felt like it was too much about me. But it helped a lot of people, so moving forward, the things I was never comfortable talking about — even if it's breakups and traumatic things I've gone through — maybe I will start talking about, because other people could use it.

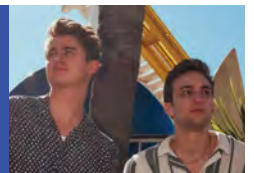
-RANIA ANIFTOS

Biggest Streaming/Airplay Gain

7

"Sunroof"

Nicky Youre & dazy

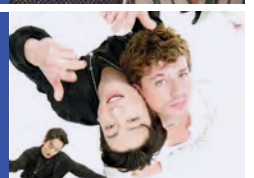


Biggest Sales Gain

40

"Left and Right"

Charlie Puth featuring Jungkook



BILLBOARD 200

4



Megan Thee Stallion *Traumazine*

The rapper earns her fifth consecutive top 10 entry on the Billboard 200 as her latest release arrives with 63,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending Aug. 18, according to Luminate.

43



Danger Mouse & Black Thought *Cheat Codes*

The new collaboration also debuts at No. 1 on Tastemaker Albums, which ranks the top sellers at independent and small-chain record stores. It sold 4,000 copies in the sector, 28% of its total first-week units (nearly 15,000).

145

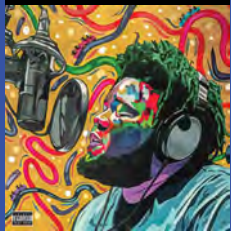


Brockhampton *Roadrunner: New Light, New Machine*

The 2021 album returns to the chart just over 16 months after it debuted at No. 11 following its delayed vinyl release (8,000 sold; No. 1 on Vinyl Albums). The vinyl was due to arrive in April.

1

Rod Wave *Beautiful Mind*



Rod Wave's *Beautiful Mind* debuts atop the Billboard 200, marking his second No. 1 entry and fourth top 10 on the chart. It enters with 115,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending Aug. 18, according to Luminate. He likewise debuted at No. 1 with his last release, *SoulFly*, on the chart dated April 10, 2021.

Of *Beautiful Mind*'s 115,000 equivalent album units earned, streaming-equivalent album units make up 113,000 (equaling 157.73 million on-demand official streams of the album's 24 tracks) and album sales 2,000, while track-equivalent album units tally a negligible sum.

Beautiful Mind was led by the single "Cold December," which arrived in January and reached the top 40 of the Billboard Hot 100 in February. The album, which was initially slated for a June 3 release, was ultimately pushed back to Aug. 12. —KEITH CAULFIELD

Billboard 200

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
		1	#1 for 1 WEEK Rod Wave ALAMO	Beautiful Mind	1	1
	1	2	Bad Bunny RIMAS	Un Verano Sin Ti	1	15
1	3	3	Beyonce PARKWOOD/COLUMBIA	Renaissance	1	3
		NEW 4	Megan Thee Stallion 1501 CERTIFIED/300/3EE	Traumazine	4	1
	2	5	YoungBoy Never Broke Again NEVER BROKE AGAIN/ATLANTIC/AG	The Last Slimeto	2	2
4	4	6	Morgan Wallen BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	Dangerous: The Double Album	1	84
5	5	7	Harry Styles ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	Harry's House	1	13
36	36	8	GG The Weeknd XO/REPUBLIC	The Highlights	2	79
9	7	9	Future FREEBANDZ/EPIC	I Never Liked You	1	16
14	9	10	Olivia Rodrigo Geffen/IGA	Sour	1	65
16	11	11	Steve Lacy L-M/RCA	Gemini Rights	7	5
		NEW 12	The Game NUMINATI/100	Drillmatic Heart Vs. Mind	12	1
10	8	13	Drake OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	Honestly, Nevermind	1	9
	6	14	Eminem SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Curtain Call 2	6	2
17	12	15	Zach Bryan BELTING BRONCO/WARNER	American Heartbreak	5	13
13	10	16	Lil Durk ALAMO	7220	1	23
15	13	17	Post Malone MERCURY/REPUBLIC	Twelve Carat Toothache	2	11
20	15	18	Drake OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	Certified Lover Boy	1	50
19	16	19	Kendrick Lamar PGLANG/TOP DAWG/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Mr. Morale & The Big Steppers	1	14
21	19	20	Luke Combs RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	Growin' Up	2	8

BILLBOARD 200: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ALBUMS, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION, BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, STREAMING AND TRACK EQUIVALENT ALBUM UNITS. SEE BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. ©2022 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



GLOBAL 200

15

“La Bachata”
Manuel Turizo

IN ADDITION TO ITS NO. 1 DEBUT on the Billboard Hot 100 (see page 4), Nicki Minaj’s “Super Freaky Girl” ranks as one of four songs new to the top 10 of the Billboard Global 200 and Billboard Global Excl. U.S. charts for the week of Aug. 27.

The track opens at No. 5 on the Global 200, led by 35.9 million streams

worldwide in its first week, according to Luminate. It marks her second top 10 on the chart this year after “Do We Have a Problem?” with Lil Baby debuted and peaked at No. 7 in February. Elsewhere on the list, Steve Lacy’s “Bad Habit” rises 12-10, up 3% to 34.7 million streams globally, becoming his first top 10 on the ranking.

On Global Excl. U.S., “La Bachata” by Manuel Turizo (above) leaps 12-7, fueled by its 18% gain to 35.4 million streams outside the United States. It also rises 20-15 on the Global 200. Among four prior Global Excl. U.S. entries, the Colombian singer hit a No. 40 best with “La Nota” (with Myke Towers and Rauw Alejandro) in November 2020. He has scored two top 10s on the U.S.-based Hot Latin Songs chart as part of his 20 total entries starting in 2017.

Ado’s “New Genesis” likewise enters the Global Excl. U.S. top 10, surging 18-8 with 21.8 million streams (up 31%) and 19,000 sold (up 17%). The track by the Japanese singer — also up 40-20 on the Global 200 — gets a lift following the Aug. 6 premiere of the anime movie *One Piece Film: Red*, for which it serves as the theme. Ado reached a previous No. 16 high with “Ussewa,” her first entry on the chart among seven total, in February 2021.

—GARY TRUST

Global 200

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART	
1	2	1	#1 for 4 WEEKS Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 52	Bizarrap & Quevedo	1	6	
2	1	2	As It Was	Harry Styles	1	20	
3	3	3	Me Porto Bonito	Bad Bunny & Chencho Corleone	2	15	
4	4	4	Titi Me Pregunto	Bad Bunny	4	15	
		HOT SHOT DEBUT	5	Super Freaky Girl	Nicki Minaj	5	1
8	8	6	Despecha	Rosalia	6	3	
5	5	7	Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)	Kate Bush	1	12	
7	9	8	Efecto	Bad Bunny	7	15	
11	11	9	I Ain't Worried	OneRepublic	9	11	
12	12	10	Bad Habit	Steve Lacy	10	6	
10	13	11	Ojitos Lindos	Bad Bunny & Bomba Estereo	4	15	
14	14	12	Heat Waves	Glass Animals	1	85	
6	7	13	Break My Soul	Beyonce	6	9	
16	16	14	Moscow Mule	Bad Bunny	2	15	
40	20	15	La Bachata	Manuel Turizo	15	6	
9	15	16	Glimpse Of Us	Joji	2	10	
18	17	17	Provenza	Karol G	6	17	
17	18	18	About Damn Time	Lizzo	6	18	
21	19	19	Cold Heart (PNAU Remix)	Elton John & Dua Lipa	3	53	
-	40	20	GG New Genesis	Ado	20	3	

LA INDUSTRIA

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 FROM OVER 200 TERRITORIES. SEE CHARTS. LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2022 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



Martin of Coldplay onstage in London in August.

COLDPLAY'S UNIVERSE

EUROPEAN STADIUM RUNS CONTINUE TO YIELD HUGE RESULTS, WITH THE CHRIS MARTIN-FRONTED BAND LEADING IN JULY

COLDPLAY HAS BEEN hovering in the upper reaches of *Billboard's* monthly Top Tours chart for most of the year. It was No. 5 in March and April, powered by 11 shows in Latin America, and hit Nos. 3 and 7, respectively, in May and June during a 12-date trek through North America. But once it arrived in Europe, the band struck gold, with the first 11 continental dates of the

Music of the Spheres tour making it the highest-grossing touring act of July.

According to figures reported to *Billboard* Boxscore, Coldplay's stops in Berlin; Paris; Frankfurt, Germany; and Warsaw, Poland, earned a combined \$66.7 million and sold 731,000 tickets, averaging \$6.1 million and 66,000 tickets per night.

Coldplay succeeds fellow U.K.-originating artist Ed Sheeran atop the chart, who similarly led thanks to a streak of European stadium shows (he ranks at No. 3 in July). Joined by Iron Maiden, Guns N' Roses and Lady Gaga at Nos. 7, 9 and 10, respectively, European stadium runs make up half of the month's top 10 tours, plus Elton John and Red Hot Chili Peppers, who split July between Europe and North America.

—ERIC FRANKENBERG

Top Tours

	Artist	Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	Coldplay	\$66,747,697	730,722	11
2	Elton John	\$58,634,895	377,247	9
3	Ed Sheeran	\$48,898,418	677,596	10
4	Red Hot Chili Peppers	\$47,386,671	398,883	8
5	Def Leppard & Mötley Crüe	\$43,641,822	324,792	9
6	The Weeknd	\$40,177,196	284,853	6
7	Iron Maiden	\$30,398,944	414,006	12
8	Kenny Chesney	\$29,985,964	302,450	11
9	Guns N' Roses	\$29,041,699	288,305	6
10	Lady Gaga	\$28,293,827	276,297	6

Top Boxscores

	Artist(s) VENUE DATE	Gross TICKET PRICES	Total Attendance NO. OF SHOWS	Promoter(s)
1	Coldplay STADE DE FRANCE, PARIS JULY 16-17, 19-20	\$28,035,165 \$127.58/\$25.52	318,331 4	Live Nation
2	Coldplay OLYMPIASTADION, BERLIN JULY 10, 12-13	\$20,389,784 \$127.30/\$25.46	216,535 3	Live Nation
3	Elton John GILLETTE STADIUM, FOXBOROUGH, MASS. JULY 26-27	\$16,681,506 \$249.50/\$55	96,039 2	AEG Presents
4	Elton John METLIFE STADIUM, EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. JULY 22-23	\$14,876,417 \$249.50/\$55	99,827 2	AEG Presents
5	Coldplay DEUTSCHE BANK PARK, FRANKFURT, GERMANY JULY 2-3, 5	\$13,745,935 \$135.67/\$26.09	138,282 3	Live Nation
6	Ed Sheeran VELTINS-ARENA, GELSENKIRCHEN, GERMANY JULY 7-9	\$13,688,618 \$86.82/\$76.60/\$66.39	182,476 3	FKP Scorpio Konzertproduk- tionen
7	Red Hot Chili Peppers STADE DE FRANCE, PARIS JULY 8-9	\$12,851,604 \$94.14	136,512 2	Live Nation
8	André Rieu VRIJTHOF, MAASTRICHT, THE NETHERLANDS JULY 7-10, 14-17, 21-24, 29-31	\$11,886,256 \$143/\$117.46/\$97.03/ \$76.60/\$66.39	128,075 15	André Rieu Productions
9	Guns N' Roses TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR STADIUM, LONDON JULY 1-2	\$11,003,454 \$118.62	92,762 2	Live Nation
10	Ed Sheeran STADE DE FRANCE, PARIS JULY 29-30	\$10,781,407 \$81.45/\$61.09/\$56/ \$43.78/\$40.72	166,764 2	Olympia Productions

Top Venues

15,001 OR MORE CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	Scotiabank Arena TORONTO	\$11,553,850	102,946	7
2	Kia Forum INGLEWOOD, CALIF.	\$10,629,611	88,577	8
3	O2 Arena LONDON	\$9,462,533	97,302	13
4	American Airlines Center DALLAS	\$7,696,839	43,543	4
5	American Family Insurance Amphitheater MILWAUKEE	\$7,130,464	67,123	3
6	Madison Square Garden NEW YORK	\$6,845,528	46,863	3
7	Merriweather Post Pavilion COLUMBIA, MD.	\$6,554,081	97,842	8
8	TD Garden BOSTON	\$6,532,533	59,248	5
9	Prudential Center NEWARK, N.J.	\$6,429,149	54,344	6
10	United Center CHICAGO	\$5,185,901	38,959	3



John



Axl Rose
of Guns N'
Roses

10,001-15,000 CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	Hallenstadion ZURICH	\$5,352,743	56,332	7
2	Footprint Center PHOENIX	\$3,651,989	30,869	3
3	MGM Grand Garden LAS VEGAS	\$3,398,519	42,058	5
4	Van Andel Arena GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.	\$2,720,820	37,537	5
5	Dickies Arena DALLAS	\$2,715,062	31,979	3
6	OVO Arena Wembley LONDON	\$1,949,654	16,518	5
7	RAC Arena PERTH, AUSTRALIA	\$1,839,202	30,003	3
8	Northwell Health at Jones Beach Theater WANTAGH, N.Y.	\$1,798,065	19,869	2
9	FivePoint Amphitheater IRVINE, CALIF.	\$1,502,523	20,804	2
10	Giant Center HERSHEY, PA.	\$1,377,327	17,284	2



Gaga

5,001-10,000 CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	Red Rocks Amphitheatre MORRISON, COLO.	\$16,048,216	228,544	26
2	Vrijthof MAASTRICHT, THE NETHERLANDS	\$11,886,256	128,075	15
3	Dolby Live LAS VEGAS	\$7,599,986	39,476	8
4	Auditorio Nacional MEXICO CITY	\$6,167,078	162,141	45
5	Amphitheater at the Wharf ORANGE BEACH, ALA.	\$4,278,853	29,242	3
6	Mohegan Sun Arena UNCASVILLE, CONN.	\$3,145,158	47,298	8
7	Lake Tahoe Outdoor Arena at Harveys STATELINE, NEV.	\$2,998,746	29,576	4
8	Microsoft Theater LOS ANGELES	\$2,832,145	28,031	6
9	Radio City Music Hall NEW YORK	\$2,722,693	40,487	8
10	Greek Theatre LOS ANGELES	\$2,522,504	34,592	7

5,000 OR LESS CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	Orpheum Theatre MINNEAPOLIS	\$2,527,965	29,380	16
2	Santa Barbara Bowl SANTA BARBARA, CALIF.	\$2,263,294	26,889	7
3	Beacon Theatre NEW YORK	\$2,110,364	23,286	10
4	Encore Theater at Wynn Hotel LAS VEGAS	\$1,806,258	13,230	11
5	The Mountain Winery SARATOGA, CALIF.	\$1,740,818	22,234	13
6	Teatro Telcel MEXICO CITY	\$1,410,653	21,863	31
7	Fox Theatre ATLANTA	\$1,338,149	12,828	3
8	Resorts World Theatre LAS VEGAS	\$1,260,856	8,157	2
9	Jacobs Pavilion CLEVELAND	\$1,242,185	18,496	6
10	Deep Ellum Live DALLAS	\$1,072,678	21,210	8



PHOTO COURTESY OF WARNER RECORDS

MO OSTIN

We lost a giant.

There are some who walk among us who are immortal, and that certainly defines the life of the legendary Mo Ostin. His kindness and impact on the world and music are everlasting. We honor his life and are grateful to have known him.

THE ESTATE OF MICHAEL JACKSON, JOHN BRANCA AND JOHN MCCLAIN

market

PG. 13 THE CASE FOR WEB2.5

PG. 14 UMG'S DESI POP PUSH

PG. 16 THE NFL'S NEW MUSIC QB

MUSIC AND MONEY



From left: Schulenberg, Bang, Rapino, Grainge, Witz and Ek.

MONEY MAKERS

MUSIC'S MOST COMPENSATED

Universal, Spotify, HYBE and SiriusXM founders and executives lead *Billboard's* inaugural ranking of top earners and shareholders

BY GLENN PEOPLES // ILLUSTRATION BY JOAN WONG

KANG HYO-WON isn't a household name. The South Korean music producer is better known as Pdogg, the studio wizard behind hits by K-pop supergroup BTS and other acts on the roster of Korean entertainment company HYBE. Because Kang played a key role in HYBE's success, his employer gave him 128,000 stock options in 2016 that turned into about \$35 million when Kang exercised them. (All currency conversions to U.S. dollars in this story are based on the average 2021 exchange rate.) That made Kang the second-highest-paid music industry executive last year among those whose earnings are publicly disclosed.

Yoon Seok-jun and Kim Shin-gyu, co-CEO of HYBE America and chief artist management officer, respectively, also benefited from HYBE going public. Yoon netted nearly \$34 million and Kim gained \$24 million from the 2021 sale of stock options —

thanks to the common corporate practice of tying top employees' compensation to the valuation of its common stock.

"HYBE grants stock options to members who have contributed to the establishment and management of the company, overseas sales or innovation in accordance with the Commercial Act and the articles of incorporation," the company said in a statement to *Billboard*. "The members of HYBE, who are granted stock options, are diverse, including creators, management and key personnel." The practice also extends to key artists. HYBE chairman Bang Si-hyuk even gave the seven members of BTS shares equal to a 1.4% stake in the company.

HYBE may be an extreme example of equity-based wealth in the music business, but it's hardly unique. As the industry has grown since the mid-2010s, a few companies have tapped into investor

interest by going public. That has turned some founders into billionaires and enriched executives who helped build the biggest corporations.

Billboard's inaugural breakdown of stock ownership and executive compensation shows who is most handsomely rewarded for founding and leading the publicly traded companies that made the modern music business appealing to investors. They are not always the obvious music business names, either.

For the most part, 2021's top shareholders founded the companies behind the industry's renaissance. No. 1 and No. 2 are Spotify co-founders Daniel Ek (\$3.7 billion) and Martin Lorentzon (\$2.4 billion). The third, Klaus-Peter Schulenberg (\$2.2 billion), the CEO of German promoter and ticketing company CTS Eventim, acquired an early incarnation of the company in 1996 and took it public four years later. Next is Bang (\$1.8 billion), who founded Big Hit Entertainment, since renamed HYBE. No. 7, Denis Ladegaillier (\$116 million), is founder and CEO of French music company (and TuneCore owner) Believe, which he formed in 2005 and took public in 2020.

Other names on the list are executives who often spent over a decade building corporate giants. Universal Music Group chairman/CEO Lucian Grainge would have topped the compensation list with only his \$48.4 million standard salary and performance bonuses. But in 2021, Grainge earned

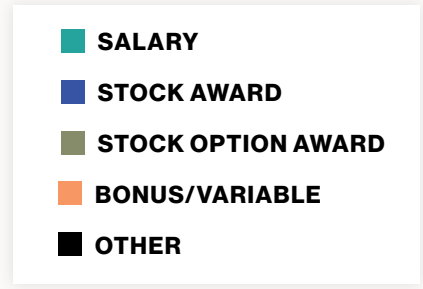
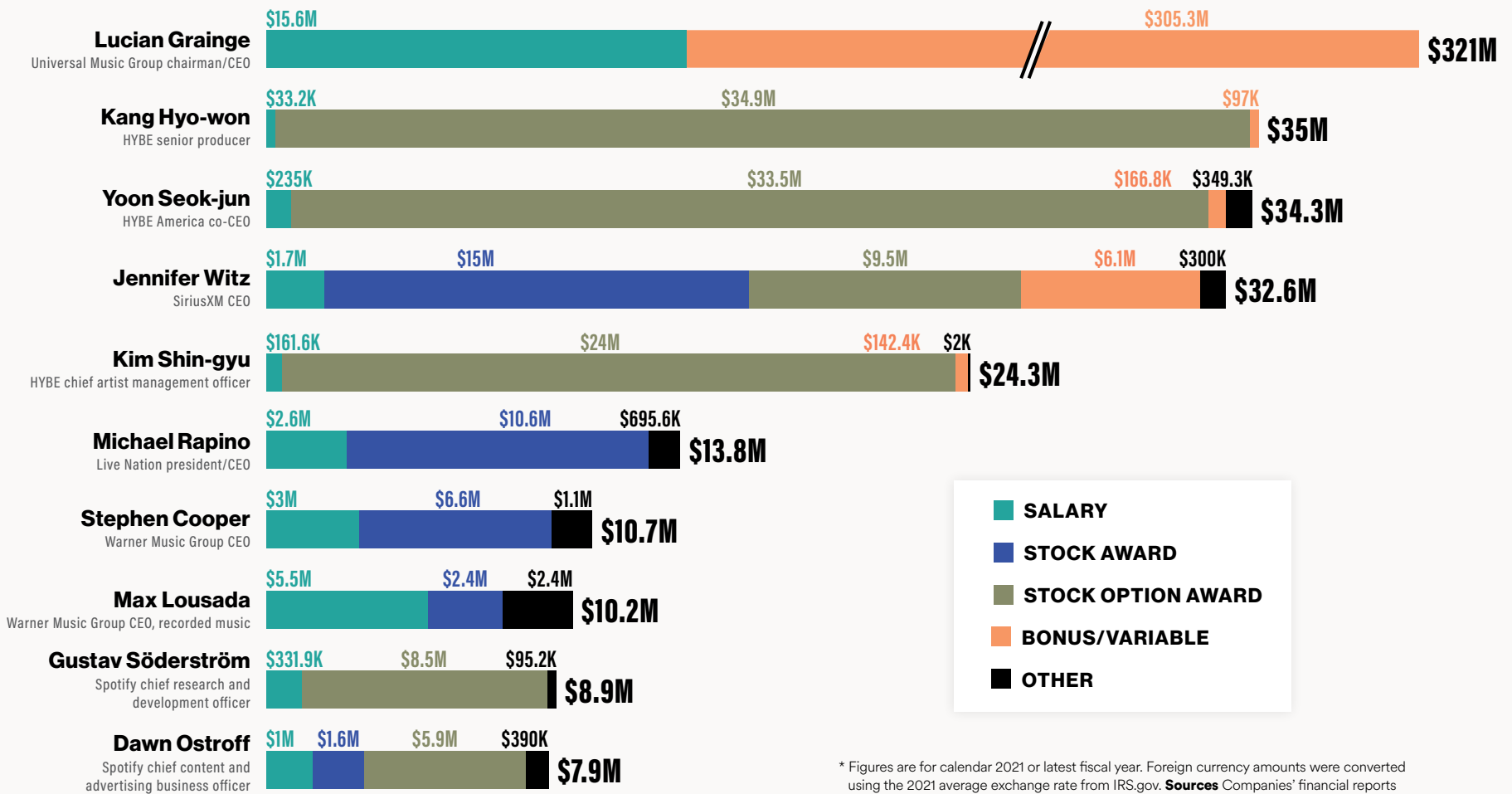
Timbaland and **Swizz Beatz** sued Triller for \$28 million they claim they're still owed for last year's *Verzuz* sale.

Beloved *Grease* actress and singer **Olivia Newton-John** died at the age of 73.

Concord acquired Antonio "L.A." Reid's HitCo record label.

Former T.J. Martell Foundation GM **Melissa Ann Goodwin** was sentenced to four years in prison after pleading guilty to embezzlement.

C-SUITE ELITE: TOP 10 EXECUTIVE PAYDAYS*



* Figures are for calendar 2021 or latest fiscal year. Foreign currency amounts were converted using the 2021 average exchange rate from IRS.gov. **Sources** Companies' financial reports

several one-off bonuses from UMG's former parent company, Vivendi: \$230.5 million for guiding the company to its September 2021 listing on the Euronext Amsterdam exchange and two bonuses worth a combined \$45.4 million related to investments from a consortium led by Tencent Holdings and Pershing Square Capital. Vivendi got a fantastic return on its investment under Grainge's leadership. It passed on an \$8.5 billion takeover bid in 2013 and entrusted Grainge to guide the company through the post-CD doldrums and into a streaming-focused golden age. UMG's valuation when it finally went public? \$55 billion. UMG didn't have a stock incentive plan at the time, so Vivendi paid Grainge in cash.

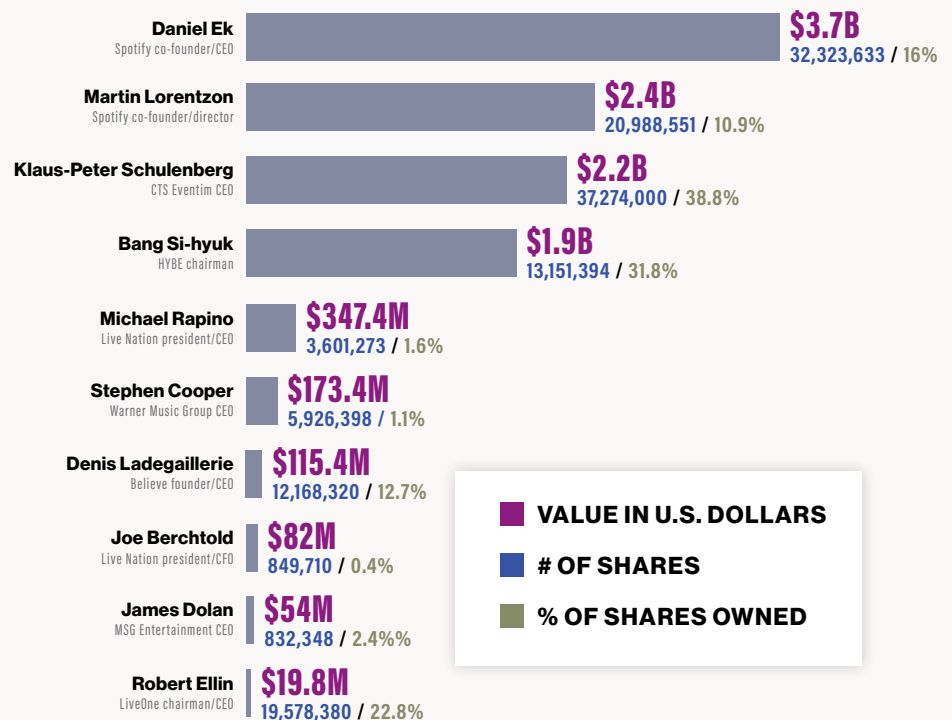
SiriusXM CEO Jennifer Witz, the top female on the best-compensated executives list, was promoted from president of sales, marketing and operations in January 2021 after Jim Meyer stepped down. Witz has held various senior finance and operations roles with the company since she joined in 2002.

Michael Rapino became Live Nation

president/CEO just before it went public in December 2005 and has led the company through its 2010 merger with Ticketmaster, as well as countless acquisitions of promoters, festivals, management firms and ticketing companies. In 2005, Live Nation traded at \$13 and had an annual revenue of \$3.7 billion. Now, with revenue on pace to easily surpass the \$11.6 billion reached in pre-pandemic 2019 and Live Nation shares trading at nearly \$100, he lands on both lists, along with Warner Music Group CEO Stephen Cooper, who led the major from an annual revenue of \$2.9 billion in 2011 to \$5.3 billion in its latest fiscal year.

The information for these charts came from publicly available company financial releases, such as proxy statements, annual reports and Form 4 filings that reveal executives' recent stock transactions. The executive compensation table contains only named executive officers. Conglomerates that own numerous companies — such as labels and music publishers — disclose compensation for corporate-level officers only, not, for example, well-paid label heads. **B**

THE LIONS' SHARES: TOP 10 STOCKHOLDERS*



* Ownership data has most recently disclosed information. Foreign currency amounts were converted using the current exchange rate. Stock worth based on share values as of Aug. 19. **Sources** Companies' financial reports

The **California State Senate** passed a bill that would sharply limit prosecutors' use of rap lyrics as evidence in criminal cases.

Sum 41's **Deryck Whibley** sold his publishing catalog to HarbourView Equity Partners.

Is Web2.5 Web3's Future?

Crypto pioneers say it's the key to scaling the music non-fungible token business

BY BENJAMIN JAMES

ROYAL IS ONE OF THE biggest music non-fungible token platforms, but one you wouldn't know it from the website. The company, which lets fans invest in songs and earn streaming royalties from The Chainsmokers, Diplo and Nas, doesn't mention NFTs on its homepage. "We kind of excluded that language from day one," says Royal's founder, dance music producer 3LAU.

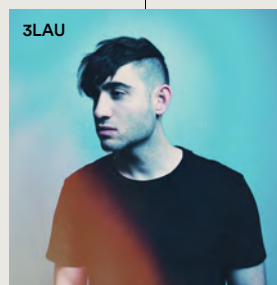
Even the checkout process hides the crypto technology that makes it work. Purchases can be made with a credit card, and Royal creates a digital wallet for customers. No need to buy ethereum or hold any cryptocurrency.

This is the essence of Web2.5, a term that 3LAU helped popularize, though he says, "I don't want to take too much credit." While Web3 presents game-changing potential for virtually every facet of the music industry, much of it remains hypothetical — and confusing. 3LAU believes a less abrupt transition is the best way to onboard the next wave of music fans and artists for crypto. "The idea was to make it simple," he says. "Inherently, you need to have some bridge. Otherwise, the barrier to entry is so high."

First experiences with crypto can be intimidating. Setting up a digital wallet, holding volatile cryptocurrencies, paying blockchain transaction costs (aka gas fees), sending internet money to an anonymous crypto address, all while avoiding scams and hacks? It's a lot to ask, and the data reflects this. Despite the hype, only 2 million people have ever interacted with an ethereum NFT on OpenSea — the world's biggest NFT marketplace. And music NFTs are just a small piece of the pie. If they are to go mainstream, platforms need to determine how to onboard tens of millions of users.

Web2.5 combines the familiar experience of traditional websites with crypto tech behind the scenes. In the same way that apps like Robinhood created slick user experiences to introduce millions to stock trading — akin to what index and no-load mutual funds accomplished in the 1970s — Web2.5 could do the same for crypto. "Most people don't even know what an NFT is. There needs to be that steppingstone," 3LAU explains.

Andre Benz, another entrepreneur in the space, is also embracing the Web2.5 model. He built one of the world's biggest YouTube music channels, The Nations, before pivoting to crypto. Now,



as the CEO of SoundMint — a music NFT platform that has generated \$1.8 million in revenue for artists in 2022 — he's focused on bridging Web2 and Web3. He doesn't believe that Web3 products or services "will ever scale outside the bubble we're in" if they aren't combined with better user experiences.

SoundMint is looking to integrate credit card payments and improve the onboarding experience. The company is also exploring custodial solutions so new collectors don't have to set up their own wallets. Says Benz, "Right now, it's challenging and difficult for any individual that isn't native to this field to use a product or service in Web3."

Bridging this gap was also a priority for Universal Music Group's metaverse band Kingship. The next-gen label behind the venture, 10:22PM, partnered with MoonPay to allow credit card payments for its genesis drop. "We have people coming in through the Kingship door quite possibly for the first time," says 10:22PM founder and UMG vp of community innovation Celine Joshua. "I want to make sure we design it in a way that's inclusive for new people."

So far, the strategy seems to be working. 3LAU estimates that 30% of people who bought the Diplo drop on Royal had never used crypto. "We've seen pretty consistent acquisition of users that aren't crypto natives. We can see who has connected a Metamask wallet [the most common crypto wallet for interacting with NFTs] and who hasn't. There's a lot [of the latter]."

3LAU is also keen to point out that NFTs are an "enabling technology," not the product itself. In the same way that people don't check the source code for every website they visit, perhaps they don't need to know that they're interacting with crypto at all.

Plus, the Web2.5 model is essential for bringing more artists on board. EDM artist and crypto pioneer Daniel Allan has sold over 300 ethereum (approximately

\$562,000) of music NFTs in the last 18 months, but it took countless late nights asking questions on Twitter and Discord before he understood how to release one. "I think a lot of artists right now are just really intimidated," he says. Now that he has cracked the code, Allan says he's helping simplify the process for others, adding, "I want it to feel like you can explain it to a 5-year-old."

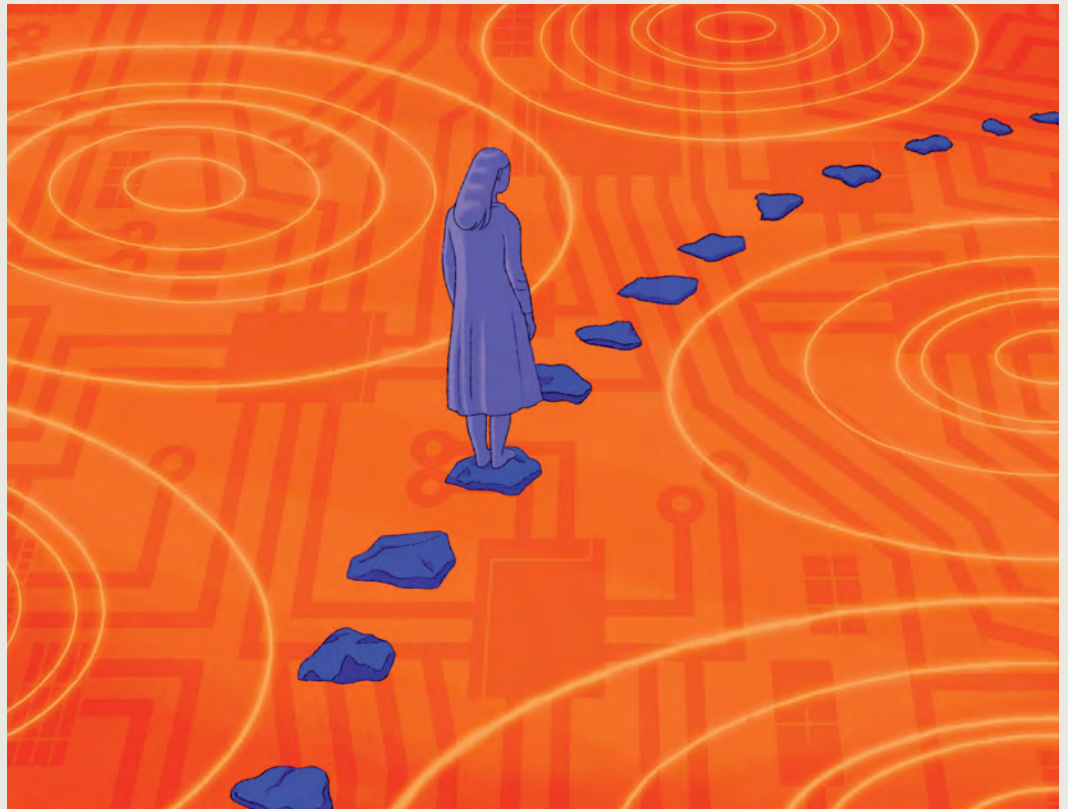
He hosted his latest NFT drop, Glass House, on his own website to make it feel more natural for his fans, and he hopes that other artists can replicate this. Allan says that a full-stack developer costs between \$10,000 and \$100,000 to build the blockchain platform needed to sell NFTs, which prices out most independent musicians. Instead, he found a Web2.5 service called Bonfire that enables artists to create a "drag-and-drop" NFT release on their own sites. "That's replicable," he says. "Now other artists don't have to pay \$100,000."

Executed at the biggest level, the Web2.5 model can be explosive. In late 2020, it was partly responsible for kick-starting the NFT craze. TopShots — NFT collectibles tied to the NBA — generated approximately \$700 million in total sales, according to market and consumer data company Statista.

Dozens of traditional tech companies are now trying to replicate this success. Instagram and Snapchat are rolling out NFT integration within its familiar Web2 interface, Spotify is testing NFT integration, and Limewire relaunched an NFT platform that will hide gas fees.

Crypto natives argue that Web2.5 is not "pure." The technology is supposed to be about taking control of one's assets, free from the influence of Big Tech and banks. Does it count if a centralized company does it all for someone and holds the private keys?

Founders in the space sympathize with this perspective, but 3LAU and Benz agree that without better onboarding, the crypto world won't grow. "We should all be honest about it," says 3LAU. "It has been mostly just a bubble of us selling to ourselves." **b**



Pollen Experiences' U.K.-based parent company, **Streetteam Software**, announced it will restructure in administration.

Spotify began testing direct-to-fan concert ticket sales.



UMG TESTS NEW RECIPE FOR A GLOBAL CROSSOVER

Indian rapper Badshah's collaboration with J Balvin reflects long-standing label goals

BY AMIT GURBAXANI

MUMBAI, INDIA — Rapper-singer Badshah is known in music circles outside India as the artist who claimed in 2019 to have broken BTS' record for the most YouTube views in 24 hours — a boast the video streaming service never verified. Three years later, with Universal Music Group in his corner, he has his sights set on becoming India's biggest global crossover artist.

UMG and Badshah want to popularize Indian music globally with a genre they're calling Desi pop. ("Desi" is a colloquial Hindi word, considered offensive by some, meaning "from the country.") They launched the quest in April with "Voodoo," a cross-continental collaboration between Badshah and Latin artists J Balvin and Tainy. Five months later, despite what the label called the most extensive marketing campaign for any of its Indian releases, "Voodoo" hasn't cracked *Billboard's* global charts or taken off as much as some involved had hoped. The experiment highlights just how hard it is to create a crossover success from a country of enormous commercial potential for the music business. Although it has 1.3 billion people, India was the 17th-ranked music

market in 2021, according to IFPI, with \$219 million in revenue.

UMG executives in India say the single is the beginning of a longer-term play to export Desi pop and the first in a series of collaborations between Badshah and other global artists. "We have opened the door, put our foot inside and gone to the first few rooms," says Devraj Sanyal, managing director/CEO of Universal Music in India and South Asia.

The major labels' interest in India has grown as streaming has broken barriers and allowed acts from Asia, Latin America and Africa to chart in the United States like never before. Labels are pouring resources into new local offices in developing countries. Now, as India's streaming infrastructure has matured, they are looking for that crossover effect to pay off, both locally and globally. The appeal of the U.S. market is obvious, given that the country's blended per-stream audio rate is \$0.0053, *Billboard* estimates, nearly four times the 10 paise (\$0.0014) rate in India.

Previous collaborations between Indian and international acts have generally struggled to gain traction outside of India. UMG tried before, in the mid-2010s, when

Interscope signed actress Priyanka Chopra to a record deal for her debut album. After Chopra's high-profile singles — including "In My City" (2012) with Will.i.am and "Exotic" (2013) with Pitbull — failed to crack the pop charts, the album was shelved. Indian streaming service JioSaavn engineered similar pairings in 2019: "BIBA" by Pritam and Marshmello, "NY Se Mumbai" by rappers Naezy and DIVINE with Nas and "Ahimsa" by A. R. Rahman and U2.

Labels often release special versions of international hits with additional verses from Indian music stars, like a remix of Ed Sheeran's "2Step" featuring Armaan Malik that Warner Music released in June. Though many of those singles were smashes in India, they didn't resonate much beyond the Indian diaspora. The exception was Rahman's Academy Award-winning "Jai Ho"; a remix with the Pussycat Dolls hit the top 15 of the *Billboard* Hot 100 in 2009 after the worldwide success of *Slumdog Millionaire*.

Unlike Chopra, Malik (who is signed to Arista) or Prateek Kuhad (who has inked a deal with Elektra), Badshah isn't attempting to be an English-language pop star. On "Voodoo," he raps and sings in Hinglish,

a mix of Hindi and English, and Balvin rhymes in Spanish over Tainy's eerie synth and reggaeton beats.

Sanyal conceptualized "Voodoo" as a way to brand Desi pop. For the April 22 release, Universal Music teams in every territory where the label is present made a "consolidated marketing effort to promote and push the song out as a priority," from playlisting to radio, says Sanyal.

In May, UMG chairman/CEO Lucian Grainge declared that "Voodoo" had "the biggest international audio streaming debut ever for an Indian artist" and touted the global debut of Desi pop. A remix by Tiësto followed that month, and in June, the label released a version featuring a verse by Lil Baby. EDM remixes and the addition of a hot rapper are familiar strategies; so, in fact, is using Balvin to reach a Spanish-speaking audience. (He appeared on Ariana Grande and Maroon 5 tracks almost a decade ago.) But if they are well-worn, they are also a sign that UMG is treating Badshah as a global priority.

"Voodoo" debuted and peaked at No. 95 on YouTube's Global Top Music Videos chart, with 4.73 million views. Through Aug. 4, all versions of the track combined have generated 33.2 million official on-demand streams globally (3.9 million were in the United States). But "Voodoo" has failed to rank among the top 10,000 year-to-date most streamed songs globally, by on-demand streams (inclusive of user-generated content), according to Luminate.

UMG views the experiment as a success, saying the song has streamed in 173 countries and that its real-time partner data shows "Voodoo" has over 100 million combined streams worldwide as of Aug. 4, including user-generated content. (More than half were video streams.) The record has started to flip the script for Badshah, a UMG representative tells *Billboard*, with 62% of his total consumption coming from outside India, compared with just 12% in 2021. "Solely looking at charts," the representative says, "does not reflect the deal we have and how we generate income for us or the artist from this project."

Sanyal believes that for a non-Western act to succeed outside their own market, "you need to be a leader in your own industry first, and you need to be singer, songwriter, composer and producer all rolled in one because then you can create not just a hook, but a sound, a vibe."

Whether Badshah can create that vibe and someday compete with K-pop's success — a goal of his — remains to be seen. "Lucian wants Badshah to succeed as much as he would have wanted a Drake, Maroon 5 or Rihanna to have succeeded back in the day," says Sanyal, "because each one of them was breaking some mold." **B**

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Valeisha Butterfield Jones stepped down as co-president of the Recording Academy to return to Google as vp of partnerships in October.

Monti Olson joined Litmus Music as president, following the venture's launch.



Dudowsky photographed July 31 at the NFL's Los Angeles-area headquarters in Inglewood, Calif."

From The Desk Of... **Seth Dudowsky**

**HEAD OF MUSIC,
NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE**

BY FRANK DIGIACOMO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY RYAN YOUNG

EVEN BEFORE THE NFL announced that Dr. Dre, Mary J. Blige, Snoop Dogg, Kendrick Lamar and Eminem would perform during the Pepsi-sponsored halftime show at Super Bowl LVI on Feb. 13, Seth Dudowsky knew he had a crucial sound issue to solve. One of his many responsibilities as the point person for the production at SoFi Stadium

in Inglewood, Calif., which would be seen by 103.4 million viewers, was keeping the set list under wraps. The problem, however, was the venue, which is next door to the NFL's Los Angeles-area headquarters where he works and is anything but soundproof. "It's technically an outdoor stadium with a roof," Dudowsky says. "So sound blows out the [open] sides of the stadium."

Knowing that media outfits would station reporters outside the stadium in the days leading up to the game — when halftime show rehearsals would be taking place — Dudowsky, 35, and his team turned SoFi into a 70,000-seat boombox, using its outdoor sound system and strategically placing speakers to blast music outward. "We tested it with Van Halen. We tested it with Parliament Funkadelic," Dudowsky says. Secrecy was maintained, although he adds, "There were news stories about how the neighborhood was sick of hearing Bon Jovi every night."

That kind of proactive problem-solving, along with a United Nations-level talent for diplomacy, led the NFL to appoint Dudowsky as its first head of music in April, making the South Orange, N.J., native the league's go-to executive for all music-related business and its liaison with Roc Nation, the NFL's official Live Music Entertainment Strategists since 2019.

Dudowsky, who came to the league in 2013 as a coordinator on the NFL Network's

programming team from ESPN, where he was associate manager of international programming, talked to *Billboard* about the scope of his responsibilities, the NFL's perspective on remunerating its Super Bowl halftime performers and the white-knuckle logistics involved in putting on the big show (which, by the way, will have new sponsorship next year).

You are the NFL's first head of music. Why was the job created?

For years, one of the prevailing feelings from the music community is that whenever they had an idea or wanted to pursue an opportunity with the NFL, they never quite knew who to reach out to. It was unwieldy, even internally, to know who the stakeholder was on what property. So, a number of people here thought it would be a lot easier if we had one stop for music, especially as music has grown in importance in terms of the league's overall strategy, and our broadcast and sponsor partners.

How many music-related activations do you handle?

I oversee all of the music performances at league-controlled events; mainly [the season] kickoff, international games, Super Bowl entertainment and the draft. And each one of those involves multiple music acts. For instance, J Balvin is headlining the season kickoff concert, and we'll do a private show the night before and have other music entertainment in the lead-up to it. And Super Bowl week is not just the halftime show. It's the national anthem, it's "America, The Beautiful," "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the tailgate before that, the commissioner's party on Friday night and any of the performances we're doing during the week. It could be anywhere from 20 to 50 music acts over the course of the year on league events. I also help support the individual teams and their bookings. Each team controls their own home-game experience. But I'm a resource for all 32 clubs if they want to get in touch with an artist, put together a package for an offer or strategizing.

Robert Gibbs joined UTA as partner and co-head of the agency's Atlanta office.

Noah Becker, AdRev's co-founder and former president and strategic adviser, left the company following a *Billboard* investigation about music royalties fraud.



"These are tickets to each of the Super Bowls that I have worked," says Dudowsky. "Each one holds special meaning for me." At his first, in 2014, Dudowsky made good on a promise to take his father five years after beginning his career. "It was a terrible game. The Seahawks destroyed the Broncos 48 to 6," he says. "And it was three of the greatest hours of my life."

What's the process of working with Roc Nation on the Super Bowl halftime show?

Jay-Z is as important a voice, if not the most important voice, along with the commissioner and the leaders at the NFL in terms of the decision-making process. [Roc Nation CEO] Desiree Perez guides us on strategy, especially around culture, music and the way the show is produced. And [Roc Nation executive vp of strategic marketing and business development/head of communications] Jana Fleishman is an essential voice in our strategic decision-making around any interviews or assets created in support of the show.

When the season begins, will you have decided who will perform next year?

I can't speak to where we are this year, but historically at that time, we are starting to solidify plans with an artist with the goal of announcing in-season who the artist is. We're already planning the production. I've been having meetings in Glendale [Ariz.] for months, and on the NFL event side, years in terms of planning, logistics and operations. Regardless of who the artist is, the production planning has to start before that's decided. We're looking at the different elements of the field and the tunnels; rigging; where we're putting trailers; how many people we can allow on the field. Each stadium is unique, starting with, is the field [artificial] turf or real grass? Does it have a retractable roof, a full roof or is it open-air? We have to think about protecting the show from an audio perspective. And from



In 2017, Gladys Knight brushed off criticism for singing the national anthem at the Super Bowl in the wake of controversy over players kneeling during games. "Her grace and leadership were an inspiration."

there we get into the weeds of the creative with artists — what their vision is and how we overlay that onto the building where the game is taking place.

Why does it matter whether it's turf or real grass?

The single most important thing about Super Bowl Sunday is that we can play a football game on it and that the halftime show does not impact the game in any way. The biggest challenge is the weight on the grass. If it's compressed too much, the ground becomes too hard, and it becomes unsafe. And there's really no way to reverse that other than to let the field sit without putting things on it. So, we have a constant discussion with our football operations team and our turf management team about how to limit weight on the field with the set pieces, the number of bodies out there,



"This sash is from one of Kendrick's dancers. And to me, it was Dre Day as much as it was Super Bowl LVI. Dr. Dre was the glue that brought those artists together. It's a reminder of a very special day."



Pepsi custom-made these coolers for the team that produced the 2021 Super Bowl halftime special during the pandemic. Despite working on Zoom, we all got very close," Dudowsky says. "There were less than 50 made, and I think The Weeknd has between five and 10 of them."

carts. Every night after we're done rehearsing, machines are used to scan the field and give us a printout of all the pressure points. It's essentially a heat map. And then we're told, "You guys are good to go." Or, for example, "How can you limit the weight load from the goal line to the 20-yard line?"

Aside from production costs and union scale, the NFL doesn't pay artists to perform on the halftime special. The NFL is making a lot of money. Why can't it put some toward the talent attracting viewers?

The most valuable currency that exists in our culture at this point is a captive audience — people's attention. It's the hard-

est thing to capture, no matter who you are. So, the real value that our platforms offer is the promotional value of being up on that stage. In the case of the Super Bowl halftime show, we're talking hundreds of millions of viewers, in addition to the marketing campaign, the assets that we build and the music that we license. So, when you look at Shakira's "Whenever, Wherever" becoming a No. 1 song [on the iTunes U.S. chart] almost 20 years after it was released [following her 2020 halftime performance], in terms of value, that's something that, for a lot of artists, isn't even quantifiable. Obviously, the Super Bowl halftime show is the most extreme version of that, but last year, 80

of the top 100 broadcasts on television were NFL games. So, when you talk about the unique opportunity for artists, or any content creator or brand, to have exposure, and to be a part of that megaphone of the NFL, to us, that is real value.

Are you working on any new initiatives?

From a music licensing standpoint, we are more focused on being culturally relevant for younger audiences. We know how important that is to keep growing our fan base, and that includes our players. Our network plays in every team facility in the league, so the teams are as much of a core viewer as we have. And it's important to me that players feel like their tastes and their cultures are being represented in the content we're creating. I want to know what the players are listening to in their headphones before they're warming up. I want to know if a bunch of players went to a J. Cole concert last night and if artists are bringing players to their shows. Then, are we licensing the music of those artists? Because if the players think an artist is cool, so do our fans, especially our younger fans.

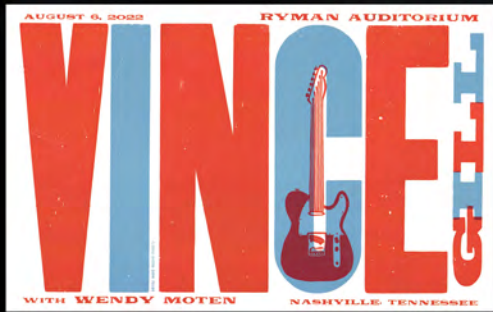
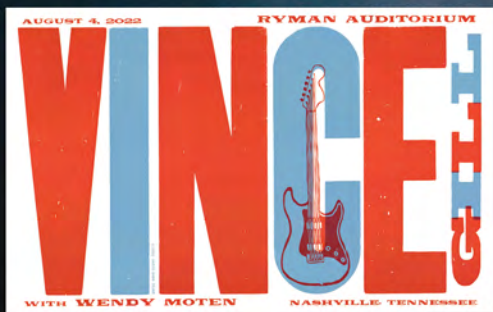
They want to know what the players are listening to.

Some of the most impactful content we have socially is the individual highlights that we cut for the players. We'll say to a player, "Here are a bunch of music options. You tell us what you want. We'll clear it and synch it with your highlights." And then when they post on their socials, it's authentic for the player to say, "Here are my highlights and also some songs that I like."

You've been to nine Super Bowls. Are you ever able to enjoy the game?

The second half. I can enjoy the second half. **B**

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+ FALL MUSIC PREVIEW

Hidden In Plain Sight

Performing as Djo, *Stranger Things* star Joe Keery is turning expectations for his music upside-down

BY JOSH GLICKSMAN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY GUIDO GAZZILLI



WHEN JOE KEERY performs as his musical solo

project, Djo, he looks nothing like the character that millions of TV watchers have come to know — and that’s the point.

If not for an all-caps sign in the Lollapalooza crowd that read “Listening To Djo All Day Keeps Vecna Away,” for instance, festivalgoers likely wouldn’t have been quick to associate the artist with a shaggy wig, glasses and stark-white painter’s jumpsuit onstage with Steve Harrington, the bully turned beloved chaperone from Netflix’s *Stranger Things*.

In addition to his prominent role in the worldwide phenomenon, Keery, 30, has recently starred in *Free Guy* and *Spree* as he has simultaneously reached new heights in his acting career. Currently, he’s working on a project in Italy, ahead of a few others coming in the fall. But that’s Joe Keery, the actor. Joe Keery, the musician — Djo — is its own separate entity. There’s hardly a trace of the everyday Keery, and no mention of characters associated with a film career, on Djo’s social media accounts or digital service provider profiles.

“There’s a level of comfort being in this alternate look, where I feel more free to do what I want,” he says. “I think about David Bowie or Marc Bolan dressing up. Devo is another great example. Something that started off with that intention has opened this door to make me realize that it can be more than just that.”

Being able to take the stage at festivals like Lollapalooza, in any attire, is a culmination for Keery, who spent part of his 20s living in Chicago and cutting his teeth in its indie scene as part of psych-rock band Post Animal. (He departed toward the end of the last decade as *Stranger Things* took off, citing time constraints and, again, not wanting his character to overshadow the group.) Such gigs are also important opportunities for him to put in face time with Djo’s growing fan base, says his manager, Nick Stern.

“Of course we wish Joe had more time for touring and recording, but the roles he has been getting will only benefit the music side of things,” says Stern. “Our goal is for the team to demonstrate that he is a uniquely talented musician, not just an actor with a side project, in a way that will

lead to Djo and Joe’s acting roles getting equal billing.”

At the moment, Keery is gearing up for the release of his synth-drenched new album, *Decide*, out Sept. 16, which Stern thinks will take a “giant leap” toward such aims. He started demoing the project with producer Adam Thein in 2019 while playing live shows in support of his solo debut, *Twenty Twenty*, and the two frequently screen-shared Ableton sessions throughout the pandemic. With 75% of the record done, a pair of 10-day recording stints at Los Angeles’ Sound Factory in late 2021 polished off the project. “It shifted my entire idea of how I want to go about making music in the future,” says Keery. “It’s leading me down this road of getting back to how recording used to be done. The songs and albums that we grew up loving were done in a way where they were capturing things live.”

The result is a “grander, bolder” record than his last, one that takes full-throttle swings in its mid-song production changes and leans into inspirations aplenty. Its

sprawling opener, “Runner,” could fit in seamlessly with Tame Impala’s *Currents*; Chicago nostalgia ode “End of Beginning” channels new wave groups like INXS and Crowded House; and introductory synths on “Go for It” could easily be mistaken for those on Kanye West’s “Hell of a Life.” Thein notes the two imposed a rule at Sound Factory to spurn no ideas, which led to unexpected gems such as the outro of “Slither,” where Keery tracked drums from the studio’s bathroom to achieve a desired echo effect. “Joe has so many ideas, and it’s me frantically trying to keep up and execute them quickly. He’s not afraid to try 10 things to get the right thing.”

But as far-ranging as *Decide* can be sonically, its lyrics run an even wider gamut, with Keery using his voice “as a pocketknife multitool” from song to song. He grapples with fame in “Half Life” (“You think these people really care for you?/ You really think they will be there for you?”) and confronts what’s to come in “Climax” (“It terrifies me there is no plan/The future

breaking right on top of me”), but just as quickly, he softens the mood in “Gloom” with a mention of needing to let his dog outside. “That is my life,” he says with a laugh. “I do need to go walk my dog.”

The deeply personal lyrics and pet owner musings alike that run throughout *Decide* are perhaps the greatest point of overlap between the different trades of the multi-hyphenate. He’s fully aware that the disguise shtick won’t obscure his identity forever, if even for the length of a set. But if he can surprise listeners long enough to immerse them in his show, then that’s the goal. And even when he’s winking at them with a bit of humor, it’s intentional — he’s interested in being succinct, citing Charli XCX’s newest album, *Crash*, as a shining example. “She does this smart thing where there’s a very clear message of each song,” he says. “She wrote this song ‘Yuck,’ and it’s interesting, catchy, simple and packaged up really nice. Those are the things that stick with people the most. Moving forward, I’d like to try to get to what the core of the idea is.”

He has no plans to retire the getup anytime soon, either: While upcoming roles preclude him from locking in an official tour just yet

— he adds that when “writing all of this music, the intent was to play it live” — he’s already kicking around the idea for a “Barney purple”-themed outfit and a more distinguished racer look, à la Formula 1.

Fortunately for Keery, the musician, the career of Keery, the actor, affords him the luxury to steer Djo in whatever direction he wants, whenever he wants. He self-releases all of his music under exclusive license to AWAL, noting that “coming from the indie music scene, ownership is the biggest thing.” Still, he remains demure about Djo’s next step, despite Thein mentioning that Keery has already reached out about finding time to work on new music. Plus, Stern has hopes of Keery pulling double duty as host and musical guest on *Saturday Night Live*.

“I say that [music] is a hobby because it’s a freeing way to think about it,” says Keery. “The second I start to get too precious with something, I inhibit myself. If you’re less worried about making mistakes, you might make something crazy or exciting. That’s what I’m focused on doing.” **B**

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LEGENDS OF THE FALL

A HANDFUL OF R&B GREATS WANT TO SOUNDTRACK AUTUMN



From left: Brandy, Babyface, Ciara and Combs.

Following a summer of synchs powering veteran acts back up the charts — especially the *Stranger Things* boosts that benefitted Kate Bush (“Running Up That Hill [A Deal With God]”) and Metallica (“Master of Puppets”) — flagship names in R&B are looking to score chart resurgences of their own. After a flurry of new major-label deals with heritage R&B/hip-hop acts, the coming months will be packed with releases heralding their long-awaited returns. Shawna Spears, who oversees artist partnerships for the genre at TikTok, says of the “old school is the new school” paradigm: “Great music will always live on.” —GAIL MITCHELL

Kenneth “Babyface” Edmonds

Girls Night Out

Oct. 21, Capitol Records

After a nearly seven-year hiatus, the 12-time Grammy Award winner will resurface with a new album whose themes mirror his 1995 multiplatinum achievement, *Waiting To Exhale*. This time, he collaborated with next-generation R&B/hip-hop stars such as Ari Lennox, Doechii and Queen Naija. The project’s first two singles, “Keeps On Fallin’” with Ella Mai (No. 11 on *Billboard*’s Adult R&B Airplay chart, No. 28 on R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay so far) and the newly released “Seamless” with Kehlani, preview Babyface’s forward-looking return. “There’s a clear difference in how women write and what they sing about today,” he told *Billboard* after his Capitol signing was announced in June. “There’s far more independence and confidence. That aspect has been great to see and fun to work with.”

Sean “Diddy” Combs

Title TBA

TBA, Love Records/Motown Records

After announcing he’ll formally launch his Love Records in a one-album deal with Motown, Combs (aka Love) also declared his latest imprint will focus solely on R&B through singles and collaborative projects with various artists, songwriters and producers. “Love Records is the next chapter about getting back to the love and making the best music of my life,” he told *Billboard* in May, when news of the deal was revealed. “For the label, I’m focused on creating timeless R&B music with the next generation.” The first move for the three-time Grammy winner: teaming with Bryson Tiller on “Gotta Move On.” The lead single from his as-yet-untitled album reached No. 7 on Hot R&B Songs in August.

Ciara

Title TBA

Fall, Beauty Marks Entertainment/Uptown Records/Republic Records

Ciara ignited her imprint’s major-label partnership in July with the adrenaline-fueled anthem “Jump” (featuring Coast Contra). It debuted at No. 4 on the R&B Digital Songs chart, while Ciara and her crew’s booty-shaking moves in the music video have racked up over 4.5 million YouTube views. Reportedly complete, the upcoming album follows her 2019 independent release, *Beauty Marks*, that spun off the upbeat viral single “Level Up” (No. 4 on Hot R&B Songs). Since 2004, the singer-songwriter has charted eight top 10 singles on the *Billboard* Hot 100, including No. 1 hit “Goodies” with Petey Pablo, and four top five albums on the *Billboard* 200. Of joining Republic, Ciara said, “I’m grateful to be able to continue my mission of making the world dance with a team I admire, who are at the forefront of empowering artists.”

Brandy

Title TBA

TBA, Motown Records

The R&B superstar notched her debut entry and first No. 1 on the Independent Albums chart with *B7* under her own Brand Nu imprint through eOne Music (now MNRK Music Group) in 2020. Yet, for her eighth album, she returned to her major-label roots after signing with Motown earlier this year — her first such deal in over a decade. “I feel like I’m re-born,” Brandy said in June when the signing was announced. “I have a whole new energy, a whole new spark, to keep going, to keep moving and to keep doing what I love to do.”

To The Max

How the producers of *& Juliet* are preparing to take Max Martin's hits-filled catalog to Broadway

WHILE searching for the perfect narrative to stage a musical around the catalog of Swedish superproducer Max Martin, producer Theresa Steele Page had two off-limits storylines: “No boy bands and no little girl from a tiny town who becomes a pop star.”

After all, Steele Page and her production partner Tim Headington already had front-row seats to those real-life success stories: As part of Johnny Wright's Wright Entertainment Group in the 1990s, they worked closely with pre-fame Britney Spears, Backstreet Boys and *NSYNC as they started scaling the *Billboard* charts with Martin-helmed smashes. This time around, the duo was much more interested in a narrative jukebox musical akin to the ABBA-soundtracked *Mamma Mia!* versus a *Jersey Boys*-style biopic.

As it turned out, the famously private Martin and his wife, Jenny, had also been contemplating the idea of a musical around his songs. “It

was almost like we collided,” says Steele Page, adding that then-rookie writer David West Read (*Schitt's Creek*) won over the production duo and the Martins almost immediately by pitching a story from the 1590s instead of the 1990s: *Romeo & Juliet*.

“I basically made a playlist of Max's music and just listened to it on repeat and tried to let the music drive the story,” says West Read. “There are so many songs about heartbreak and young love,” a realization that got West Read thinking about “the ultimate story of heartbreak and young love.”

The result was *& Juliet*, a musical that opened on London's West End in 2019 and will begin Broadway previews on Oct. 28 at the Stephen Sondheim Theatre, with direction from Luke Sheppard and orchestration by Bill Sherman. The project reinvents both Martin's pop oeuvre (with six Backstreet Boys songs, five Spears tracks and music that runs the generational gamut from Céline Dion to Ariana Grande) and Shakespeare's star-crossed



Courtney in *& Juliet* and (right) with Martin.

tale, imagining what would happen if Juliet (played by Lorna Courtney) hadn't taken her own life in the name of teen love.

While Martin was hands-on through the nearly decadelong process, he wasn't precious about how his music could be used. Says West Read: “I wanted every song to feel like it was written for this musical,” and he notes that he didn't change any lyrics beyond a character name or pronoun. “We have to make it feel like even if you had never heard a Max Martin song and you came to this musical cold, you would still completely follow everything, and he was so understanding of that.” That intention has already been put to the test: “We had an older woman go up to Max in London and say, ‘You wrote

the music? You wrote all of these songs just for this musical?’” West Read recalls. “She had no idea that any of them were pop songs.”

Since its 2019 debut, the show has been praised by some of the marquee artists whose music is used in the musical, including Katy Perry (“Roar,” “I Kissed a Girl”), Adam Lambert (“Whataya Want From Me”), Robyn (“Show Me Love”) and *NSYNC's Lance Bass and JC Chasez (“It's Gonna Be Me”), who have all seen *& Juliet* in London. That praise extended to helping clear dozens of hit songs for the show, since Martin wasn't always the sole stakeholder. “Not one person called and said, ‘I refuse to let you use my music,’” says Steele Page.

She is hoping its Broadway home will make it even



easier for more pop stars to drop by — and set the stage for a growing fan base. “I'm not really looking for anyone to say, ‘This is so smart!’ or ‘The way you put this together, you're such a genius!’” West Read says of his story. “It's so much nicer to hear people say, ‘The show made me happier, and I left feeling better than when I went in’ — and that's pop music. It's not a guilty pleasure. It's just a pleasure.”

—KATIE ATKINSON

STRANGE ROADS AHEAD

In the last two years, Barteas Strange has opened for Phoebe Bridgers, Courtney Barnett and Car Seat Headrest, among others, but this November, the 33-year-old Washington, D.C.-based indie rocker will embark upon his first North American headlining tour, which begins Nov. 3 in Pittsburgh. “I've been opening for so many people and getting a feel for what all of these different bands' crowds are like, and I'm curious what my crowd is like,” he says. On a day off from touring with The National, Strange shared his plans for the trek in support of his second album and 4AD debut, *Farm to Table*.

SET THE STAGE

I'm seeing a floral kind of vibe, this farm vibe. I have a huge table right in the middle of the stage that I have all my vocal effects and crazy kinds of toys on, and [the band is] dressed between the worlds of agrarian farmers to businesspeople. Kind of playing it up, like farm to table.

MAKE SPACE

[My tourmates] Spring Silver, Pom Pom Squad and They Hate Change are all Black people, and I'm Black, and I

make music in a world that's mostly white. I'm trying to force a deeper conversation about, “We're good enough to do this too. We deserve the same space and the same shows and the same fans.” It [was my] mission for the lineup.

BE KIND

Hanging out with The National, they were [thoughtful] with every aspect of the tour, from the drives to how much we got paid to the soundcheck times to the set lengths to them watching the shows

Strange onstage in May.



and talking to us and being really interested in my journey and giving advice. With Car Seat Headrest, when we had to cancel a bunch of shows for that tour [due to illness],

they still paid us for all the shows. They didn't have to do that at all, but they've been in our position before, so they're like, “Yeah, we got it now.”

—CHRISTINE WERTHMAN



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&
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In Full Bloom

Why Jessie Reyez had to start saying “no” more to arrive at second album *YESSIE*

JESSIE REYEZ NEVER quite got to celebrate the release of *Before Love Came To Kill Us*, her long-awaited 2020 debut album. “It came out the same fucking month that everything happened, everything paused,” she recalls. “No one could really point me in any direction or give me any sort of advice, because we were the guinea pigs doing it in the middle of the pandemic.”

Although there have been a series of highs in the interim (a No. 4 debut on *Billboard*’s Top R&B Albums chart, an opening slot on Billie Eilish’s tour), the Grammy Award-nominated singer is eager to experience a proper album launch with the release of her second album, *YESSIE*, out Sept. 16 on FMLY/Island Records, noting that this project “almost feels like the *real* first one.” Filled with vengeful ballads (“Mutual Friends”) and intimate collaborations, the album, says Reyez, is a blend of “bullshit I’ve gone through and the bullshit I anticipate going through.”

The artist will hit the road in support of *YESSIE*, for which she’s preparing with a vocal coach, practicing guitar and working out, showing off her chin-

up progress on Instagram. She already knows what song she’s most excited to perform live (“Break Me Down”) and can’t wait for fans to create new memories to her music. “Hopefully, this time around, people will actually have the chance to just live life and sit with [my album],” she says. “I’ve always made music for myself, and the fact that people resonate with it is just this beautiful, unintended byproduct. It has changed my life that people give a fuck.”

You announced *YESSIE* just over a month before its release. Why the relatively short rollout?

Delayed gratification is one thing, but we live in a world where there’s billboards everywhere, screens everywhere, and everything pulling our attention. So I figure if I’m going to have a stop sign for you, I’d rather the intersection be damn near close, not fucking miles away.

Does the title indicate that you have been saying “yes” more lately?

If anything, I feel like I’ve been saying “no” more, which I kind of love. It took

me a long time to realize that “no” is a full sentence. I was originally thinking I was going to name the project *Self*, because I feel like I’ve made such an emphasis on self-discovering, self-healing. I’ve been way more selfish than I’ve ever been in my life. You need balance, but I needed that extra push to get close to myself again and treat myself with kindness. I’m so nice to everybody else, but when I’m alone I’m criticizing myself or being too hard on myself and not being kind, not showing myself grace. I finally realized, “How you going to be cool to everybody but not cool to you?”

On lead single “Mutual Friend,” you sing about your real-life experience of a mutual friend of your ex wanting to talk. How did that mutual friend react when they heard it?

They were like, “Fuck, Jessie, come on.” I’ve done it before, where I’ve written songs an hour after a fight: got out the car, slammed the door, went to the studio. [Debut EP] *Kiddo* was made that way. So it wasn’t really new to me, but I guess it was new for them to have a song that came from a convo that hap-

pened literally within the day. So they were just like, “How? When?” It was funny — for me.

When you’re working on music, how much are you thinking about how it will translate to the stage?

For me, that comes after. I don’t do that because if I do, then I’m out of the moment and I’m not present and I’m focusing on the future. The thing I love most about being in the studio and creating is the magic of the moment. It’s not tainted. The industry is fucking tainted. When you’re in the moment in the studio, you are creating something from nothing and literally being a conduit for alchemy. It’s beautiful.

How does having your own Island imprint, FMLY, help you to stay in that moment?

It’s having my own imprint and also having a team that respects and supports and sets the precedent so that people know what they’re getting into. If [someone wants to] collaborate with me on something for my project, then people should know I’m fucking driving. —LYNDSEY HAVENS



GEKKING OUT WITH...

Kelsea Ballerini

When Kelsea Ballerini launched her career, she made a promise to herself:

include one solo write on every album. As she readies her fourth full-length, *Subject to Change*, out Sept. 23 on Black River Entertainment, she assures she has kept her word. “It keeps me accountable to not always rely on a co-writer,” says Ballerini, who won her first Country Music Association Awards, published a book of poetry and scored her fifth No. 1 on *Billboard*’s Country Airplay chart in the past year. While she’s always writing between projects, she says that there comes a time “to gather all the demos and figure out the theme. When I was listening through the first 80 songs I had, there was a lot of juxtaposition and change captured.” Another recurring concept? The little things in life. “I have a Jeep. I drive every day. I like cooking and making pasta for my friends. I zoomed in what makes me happy and human.” —JESSICA NICHOLSON

Poetry

Ballerini’s poetry book, *Feel Your Way Through*, released last November, included poems about struggling with an eating disorder and her ongoing healing from witnessing a high school shooting. The writing process for the book had a profound impact on *Subject to Change*. “I credit a lot of the openness and the more poetic side of the songwriting to the book,” she says. “I feel like that opened my mind creatively and helped me work outside of the [standard song] structure. That creative freedom unlocked a part of me I hope to keep pushing in any kind of project that I do.”

Turn-Of-The-Century Tunes

In 2020, as Ballerini was spending more time at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, she found herself listening to music from The Corrs (the band’s “Breathless” inspired Ballerini’s own “Heartfirst”), Sheryl Crow, Sixpence None the Richer, Shania Twain and Trisha Yearwood. “Instead of listening to new releases, I listened to the music I grew up on, and that’s the influence for this record,” she says. “Really organic-sounding records.”

Deconstructing Songs

The ballad “Love Is a Cowboy,” which Ballerini wrote with Jesse Frasure and Parker Welling, underwent the biggest change from demo to final. “It was originally an up-tempo, live banger,” she says. Producers Julian Bunetta and Shane McAnally “listened to it and were like, ‘This song is special, but we are not able to really hear it.’ We stripped it and felt every instrument needed to add something to the story. It’s one of my favorite production moments.”

Marilyn Monroe

Ballerini’s solo write on *Subject to Change* turned out to be “Marilyn,” a musing on the late icon. The vulnerable track concludes with audio from a Monroe interview (her estate approved its usage) where the actress is asked if she’s happy. “That was the twist of the knife at the end of the song, where I’m acknowledging that everyone wanted to be like her — but did *she*?” questions Ballerini. “Having her voice solidify that to me was a goose bump moment.”



Clockwise from top left: Daddy Yankee, T1419, Manu Manzo, Super Junior and Momoland.

LONG-DISTANCE CALL


WHEN MOMOLAND AND T1419 visited Puerto Rico for the first time in July, the K-pop groups networked with Latin artists, engaged with Spanish-language press and walked the red carpet at the 2022 Premios Juventud. During the awards show, Momoland presented a televised award to CNCO alongside Puerto Rican artist Guaynaa.

The blitz was a natural next step for the two Korean acts: Months prior, they not only visited Mexico for a promo tour but also began exploring the Latin music space with collaborations and covers. In January, Momoland (formed by MLD Entertainment through a reality show in 2016) kicked off the year with its bilingual Natti Natasha team-up, “Yummy Yummy Love.” Soon after, T1419, which debuted at the 2020 installment of the annual Korean game exhibition G-Star, surprised fans with a cover of Daddy Yankee’s “Campeón” that showcased the members’ impeccable Spanish-language singing and rapping skills. The nine-member boy band later released a Latin urban song, “When the Sun Goes Down,” co-written with Latin composers Daniel González Sobrino and Manu Manzo.

“It’s an honor that fans in Latin America listen to our music in our language, but I feel that we need to get closer to them by tapping into their local music and the language,” says Tim Kim, manager of Momoland and T1419. “I tell my clients to focus on Latin America because it’s such an important market that has sometimes been overlooked by K-pop.” Kim says much of that has to do with the distance spanning Latin America and Korea — it often requires over 24 hours to travel between them — but technology is helping to quickly bridge that gap. And now, he wants his artists to take full advantage.

In 2020, Kim — a Korean American who founded the 360-immersive K-pop entertainment company KAMP Global — began working with Miami-based public relations firm Nevarez Communications (Daddy Yankee, Natti Natasha, Carlos Vives) to build an expansion strategy for his clients in Latin America. The next, and arguably biggest, step for his company is producing a two-day K-pop festival in Los Angeles in October, with a lineup including Monsta X and Super Junior. Kim’s goal, he says, is to build the “Coachella of K-pop” and grow the event globally.

“The Latin market is huge, reggaeton is huge, and obviously K-pop has been popular in Latin America, but this is only the start,” says Kim. “We want to continue releasing music in Spanish — more covers, more Latin collaborations. Post-COVID-19, a lot of doors have opened, and we value this market for giving us love.” —JESSICA ROIZ



The Once And Future King

WITH HIS UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO BACHATA,
ROMEO SANTOS HAS BUILT A SINGULAR CAREER IN
LATIN MUSIC – AND HIS BUSINESS IS STILL GROWING

BY LEILA COBO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY GRACE RIVERA



Santos photographed July 8
at The Panorama Room at the
Graduate Roosevelt Island
in New York.

Styling by Norma Castro
Dolce & Gabbana shirt,
Glamour Hippy sunglasses.



McQ sweater, Burberry pants, Dior shoes, Palm Angels necklace and ring.

O

A MUGGY FLORIDA afternoon, a summer storm pelts the pristine white Rolls-Royce SUV that pulls up to an empty street corner just outside downtown Miami. The window rolls down, and an immediately recognizable voice, soft and sultry, calls from the driver's seat: "Come on in," he says, leaning over to push open the passenger door. I clamber into the front seat, mortified as water splatters on the red leather.

The car may be flashy, but the man inside looks much less so. Romeo Santos — the artist who took *bachata* global and became one of Latin music's biggest stars — is wearing plaid pants, an oversized yellow T-shirt and a baseball cap. His only jewelry is his Rolex and a small gold chain. The car is empty except for his 22-year-old nephew, who doubles as his assistant and is sprawled across the back seat.

Santos drove from his new home north of Miami all the way to my Key Biscayne neighborhood to play me music from his upcoming album, *Formula, Vol. 3*, his first since 2019's *Utopia* and the first in his *Formula* series since 2014's record-breaking *Vol. 2*, which is still on *Billboard's* Top Latin Albums chart after 386 consecutive weeks — the most for any Latin album in history.

Notoriously secretive about his creative process and production, Santos has played *Vol. 3* for only a handful of people. Other than the single "Sus Huellas" (Her Prints) — released, no coincidence, on Valentine's Day — he intends to keep it away from outside ears until its Sept. 1 release, another symbolically charged date: It coincides with his eldest son's birthday. (Santos, who is equally secretive about his personal life, also has two young children with his longtime partner.)

"This is what we're going to do," he informs me as he connects his phone to the car speakers. His SUV is his preferred listening studio. "I'll play songs in groups of three, and you tell me, honestly, what you think of each one, in order of what you like best."

Santos presses Play, and just like that, as the rain gently patters outside, I'm immersed in *las palabras de Romeo*, as Santos is fond of putting it at his concerts and on his recordings: a world of passion where sex is so urgent it happens with your clothes on, where women cheat as much as men, where love is clung to even

in the face of insurmountable odds, where past transgressions are forgiven for the promise of redemption. After all, as he croons in his plaintive, high-pitched tenor on new track "Solo Conmigo" (Only With Me): "I can't erase your story, nor who came before I did/The pillow may have witnessed so much sex on your mattress, but true love? Only with me."

Santos is the first to admit that spoken words don't come easily to him, his Bronx cadence and slang etched into his vocabulary as he searches in Spanish and English for the right terms. But when he writes songs, it's another thing entirely: an overflowing cornucopia of vocabulary, woven into a tale that unfolds like a novel and that fans memorize with ferocity and precision.

Vol. 3 has Santos' intricate lyrics in spades, along with the unexpected collaborations — here, with Rosalía and Justin Timberlake — that have become the backbone of the album series. (The previous two entries included linkups with Santana, Usher, Nicki Minaj and Drake.)

What's noticeably absent is any semblance of urban music — be it reggaetón, trap or rap — or even any urbano artists. This is unapologetically an album of bachata, the traditional, guitar-based

Santos started out, the only bachata superstar was Juan Luis Guerra, the iconic Dominican singer-songwriter who mainstreamed the genre among Latin music fans with sophisticated arrangements that crossed over to Latin pop radio. But beyond Guerra (and unlike other tropical genres), bachata never really took off on U.S. radio or internationally until *Aventura* spawned a new generation of *bachateros*. With 20 No. 1s on *Billboard's* Latin Airplay chart, Santos is far and away the leader of that pack.

Now he's releasing *Vol. 3* on Sept. 1 in full, without any further singles on the market — a potentially risky move for an artist of his stature, but a nod to Santos' confidence in his music and the responsibility he feels for his genre. "I've taken this 'King of Bachata' title very personally," says Santos, who named his home studio outside Manhattan "The Castle" and decorated it with suits of armor. The "king" moniker has stuck since *Aventura* released *Kings of Bachata* in 2006. "It's a huge responsibility. It was very risky, very *descarado* to say, 'We're the kings of bachata!' But you can say anything you want as long as you back it up, and I take pride in that. I want to make sure that all my albums, whether people like them or not,

"I very much like that he remains faithful to himself and that instead of adapting to what's trending, he *is* the trend," says Afo Verde, chairman/CEO of Sony Music Latin Iberia. "He feels he's an ambassador. And I love that instead of saying, 'I'm going to make a reggaetón album,' the man does a bachata album. You can obsess [over] streams, but today, the best way to be successful is to make an extraordinary album."

For friend and collaborator Rosalía — herself no stranger to making albums that defy commercial odds — Santos' approach to music makes sense. "A singer-songwriter who touches on themes that excite people will never be out of style because he goes beyond styles, beyond trends, moments and algorithms," she says. "If on top of that it sounds different to anything you've heard before, it's a done deal. Romeo has always done his own thing and defended his sound. That's why he has always been relevant."

THE NEXT TIME I meet Santos, it's in a different car — in the back seat of a black Escalade slowly cruising along Boston Road in the Bronx, where he was born and raised. Playing tour guide in the old neighborhood is not the norm for the very private Santos. But to understand how he went from Anthony to Romeo, one has to see these streets.

"This is my family home, which my mom refuses to leave under any circumstances," he says, pointing to a modest, four-story brick building abutting a nondescript park. One of Santos' first major purchases was a big house in the suburbs for her, but she has never left this Bronx corner. "You have no idea the shit I've tried to get her out of there," he continues, "but she will tell you that she feels comfortable here, and I have to respect that."

There's his old elementary school, where he had a crush on his kindergarten teacher, Ms. Bisbano; the barber shop where he got haircuts; the site of El Internacional, the Dominican restaurant that gave *Aventura* its first gigs, paying the group with meals; the street corner where Santos walked away unscathed after an oncoming firetruck smashed his car; Morris High School, where he first started to sing.

"I was very certain that I wanted to be an artist. I just never processed that I could make a living from it," he says. Being born in the Bronx means "you're exposed to so much *cultura* and different genres that you're either going to be a rapper, a bachata singer, a *salsero* or something illegal," he says with a laugh. "I became an artist."

As the lead singer of *Aventura*, Santos

"I wanted to make a difference and speak for my genre.

Bachata needs me. I needed to put on my Superman cape

for my culture." —SANTOS

Dominican heartbreak music that Santos made cool with his attitude, contemporary arrangements and star presence.

"If I do an urban song, it could be massive. I don't want it to be a distraction," he says without conceit. "You have these amazing artists who right now are in their prime offering urban music. I wanted to make a difference and speak for my genre. Bachata needs me. I needed to put on my Superman cape for my culture."

At 41 years old, the artist born Anthony Santos has worn that cape for a steady two decades. As "Romeo" — the sexier alter ego he first adopted as lead singer of boy band *Aventura* — he revolutionized the genre, infusing it with traces of R&B, graphic lyrics (some in English) and, of course, his high tenor. When

they can listen to and realize there was some production, there was work put in. I'm very *meticuloso* when it comes to my music. When I do anything, even a salsa, it sounds like Romeo Santos."

Vol. 3 very much sounds like Romeo Santos, from the fast-clip merengue of "15,500 Horas" (15,500 Hours) with Toño Rosario, Fernando Villalona and Rubby Pérez to the pop/bachata fusion of "Sin Fin" (Endless) with Timberlake. He and Rosalía shot videos with Santos in August, and if the example of "Sus Huellas" is any indication — the track debuted at No. 1 on the Latin Airplay chart and in multiple countries thanks in part to "takeover" radio campaigns that had multiple stations playing it several times a day — they're also likely to become hits.

was already an established star when he went solo in 2012. After the group's breakout 2002 single, "Obsession," became a surprise No. 1 hit in Europe before crossing back to the United States, Aventura's star rose. *Kings of Bachata* became the second top-selling Latin album of 2007, according to Luminate; *The Last* was the top-selling Latin album in 2009; and Aventura had the top Latin tour on *Billboard's* 2010 year-end charts, including four sold-out dates at New York's Madison Square Garden. When the group disbanded in 2011, Santos signed to Sony Music Latin and launched his solo career with *Formula, Vol. 1*. It made him the top-selling Latin act in the country for two straight years.

"Sometimes there are artists who are able to carry music further than its genre," says Desiree Pérez, CEO of Roc Nation (where Santos was briefly CEO of the now-shuttered Latin division; more on that later). "The doors that he has opened for bachata artists around the world are tremendous. You don't have to change your music to introduce it to the world, and that's special."

The success of Aventura and Santos, as U.S.-raised bachateros who infused their music with an American sensibility, gave rise to a new generation of bachata singers, most notably Prince Royce, who in June placed his 15th No. 1 on the Latin Airplay chart alongside Argentine urban artist María Becerra. Others, like Leslie Grace and Monchy & Alexandra, have seen their impact plateau in the past decade as urban music has taken over the Latin charts.

But, arguably thanks to Santos and his *Formula* series, bachata has remained a tantalizing menu item that artists from many genres — tropical, pop, urban — like to sample in their music from time to time. And in the past 12 months, a variety of non-bachata acts, from Manuel Turizo to Rosalía (in a duet with The Weeknd) to Ivy Queen, have had bachata-infused hits. By the same token, Santos, who has long brought urban acts onto his own bachata tracks, in 2020 lent his voice to a handful of remixes for Nicky Jam, Anuel AA and Arcángel.

For *Vol. 3*, he made a conscious choice to step back from that. "To be completely transparent, at this point in my career, there's a couple million people who respect and love what I do," says Santos. "I'm not competing against anyone. I'm really competing against myself when it comes to this bachata vibe. If I were trying to *conquistar* a new crowd, maybe I'd have those concerns. But this is music for people who will appreciate it. If you're a new fan and you become a *Romeísta*, that's also a blessing."

While Dominican influence pervades *Vol. 3*, ambitious collaborations with

artists outside of bachata define Santos' *Formula* series. In that regard, working with Rosalía wasn't totally surprising; she's an avowed Santos fan, and her single with The Weeknd, "La Fama," is a bachata. The work itself, however, was complex because Santos wanted to actually create a song with Rosalía rather than give her a finished product. He had been trying to record with her for years — "She has superstar DNA; as big as she is, she will only

get bigger," he says — but their schedules never meshed. When they did, Santos had to take into consideration the fact that, as a producer, Rosalía could go toe-to-toe with him. "I presented her with something she could take to another level," he says.

"Even with the video, I put that in her hands. I said, 'I love your visuals, I love the way you create, I want it to look like that.'"

Timberlake was another story. Santos revered him much as he had previous

Formula guests Usher and Drake, but the two had never met and had few connections; simply gauging his interest took almost a year. But Santos considered it a particularly personal mission and was bent on making it happen.

"Ninety-nine percent of my records are written and produced by me," he says. "But on Aventura's first album, I took 'Gone' by *NSYNC and rewrote and translated it to Spanish," he says,





Pierre-Blanc shirt and pants,
Raf Simons shoes.

“Romeo has always done his own thing and defended his sound. That’s why he has always been relevant.” –ROSALÍA

SexLoveSounds) to come up with “Sin Fin.”

“He said, ‘I dig this.’ What I respect about JT is he not only recorded his vocals but he turned that song that now I feel was at 30% into something completely different for the better,” says Santos. “He changed the melody, the lyrics; he wrote, he produced. There was a moment where I was at the studio and he was directing my guitarist. To me, that was surreal: JT is producing a bachata.”

WHEN SANTOS BEGAN working on *Vol. 3* pre-pandemic, he hadn’t intended it to be a *Formula* — locking in Timberlake, that unexpected collaboration, steered him in that direction. Likewise, plans for the production shifted with collaborator schedules, and video shoots got delayed. (The video for “Sin Fin,” for example, was shot in August.)

But Santos was adamant about keeping the Sept. 1 release date. Instead of putting out a new single, he opted to simply announce on Aug. 15 that *Vol. 3* was coming in two weeks and focus all promotion efforts post-release. (On social media, the announcement was limited to posts of a king’s crown spinning to the tune of a bachata riff, with the release date.) While details were still scarce at press time, Sony is planning a global rollout that also includes heavy promotion in Spain and Latin America and videos for every track.

“It’s the first time we do something like this [no singles] with a full album, but it will be huge,” says consultant Artie Pabón, Santos’ business partner who is a fellow Bronx native and the closest thing the singer has to a manager. “I don’t like labels like ‘manager,’” says Santos. “I’ve always kind of managed myself, but I have a great team that I trust.” Ostensibly, he was long managed by Johnny Marines, his former head of security who remains a friend. Like Marines, Pabón and Santos go way back: Pabón booked Aventura to open for Don Omar in 2006, when the group was independent and, says Pabón, considered “unstructured” by many in the industry. “I bet on them,” says Pabón. “It really

comes down to the music and the artist’s behavior. You can have great music and horrible habits. I’ve never seen anybody in my 33 years in business who works as hard as Romeo on his brand, his music and himself.”

Before the pandemic hit, Santos was actually in the process of making some adjustments to his business. In 2017, he signed an exclusive deal for U.S. touring with Live Nation, which promoted two legs of his Golden arena tour (including three sellouts at Madison Square Garden; the deal has since expired, though Santos and his team are in ongoing conversations with the promoter). Live Nation also promoted the 2020-21 Aventura reunion tour that, despite being truncated by the pandemic, grossed \$46.6 million and sold 350,000 tickets from 19 reported shows, according to Billboard Boxscore.

All told, Aventura has grossed \$75.6 million and sold 769,000 tickets across its career. As a soloist, Santos has grossed \$95.9 million and sold 1.1 million tickets in the United States, including his 2019 show at New Jersey’s MetLife Stadium, which grossed \$9 million and sold 60,000 tickets. (The concert was subsequently turned into a live album and film.) That followed his back-to-back shows at New York’s Yankee Stadium in 2014, which made him the first Latin artist to ever sell out the venue.

Today, of course, Bad Bunny is in the midst of a stadium tour (where he just headlined Yankee Stadium twice), singing in Spanish, and Grupo Firme is playing regional Mexican music in sold-out stadiums. But the potential for shows of that magnitude to even happen for a Latin act was arguably first realized by Santos, who raised the bar for what others could achieve.

“He broke down every barrier any bachata and tropical artist had ever done,” says Hans Schafer, senior vp of Latin touring for Live Nation. “He is one of the first who began this movement of sticking to your guns, and by that I mean [changing] the crossover strategy of releasing [music] in English. He was one of the first who said, ‘These [non-Latin] artists will jump on my sound.’ I think that was the precursor of the Latin boom we’re seeing now.”

While he plans a 2023 outing, which Pabón says will again include arenas and stadiums, Santos is also focusing on growing other areas of his business, specifically in film and TV as an actor and producer. In 2019, he signed a new agency deal with Nigel Meiojas at UTA. In their first project, Santos will executive-produce an original Amazon film, *Never Look Back*, with a narrative based in the Bronx, in partnership with Mexican actor-director Eugenio Derbez’s production company. Filming is slated to begin next year, and Santos will executive-produce the soundtrack. There’s also a partnership with Audible in development for an eight-episode scripted serial inspired by the lyrics of his songs, for which production should start this year.

Santos has always had good instincts for what works best for his brand — and also for what just isn’t the right fit. In 2016, he was appointed CEO of Roc Nation Latino, a full-service division of Roc Nation dedicated to Latin music. He left a few years later — it simply wasn’t his thing — but he still says the lessons he learned informed how he thinks about his business today. “I’m so grateful for the opportunity, but it wasn’t the right time for me,” he says. “Being in Roc Nation showed me that you have to be a multitasker and know how to divide your time correctly. I’ve always been too hands-on in my career, and I realize how difficult it is to divide yourself.”

And in the end, making albums is what still excites Santos the most. “Risk,” “responsibility,” “challenge” — they’re all words that he repeats constantly when referring to his music, including his new album. Being at a major label, and specifically at Sony, suits his will-not-be-rushed creative style. He likes the stability and the regionwide support it offers, allowing him to focus on making the music he likes, the way he likes, with unwavering focus on a genre that may have slipped but Santos refuses to let fall.

“If these new bachateros do not find a unique sound or music identity that makes them special, bachata may not disappear, but you’ll just end up listening to the classics,” he says when asked about the genre’s future. “While there is a lot of potential, they’re either re-creating what has already been invented or they’re reutilizing the narrative so that there’s no unity. I agree we should collaborate, but that’s not the main reason bachata is stuck. I didn’t collaborate with Royce and he did fine. Where I would like to see bachata is the way I see urban music: They collaborate, but more than that, the big ones are all hungry and they all sound different.

“I’m never insecure about my music,” he adds with a smile. “In other ways, I’m not as confident. But onstage and when it comes to my music, I think I’m the greatest.” **B**

referring to an all-acoustic cover from the group’s 2002 album, *We Broke the Rules*. “It’s crazy how things line up. That was history in the making without realizing it.”

Once Timberlake did come on board, then came the “easy” task: presenting him “with a record that at least makes sense with my story.” Santos recruited longtime collaborator Rico Love and producer Danja (who with Timbaland co-produced all of Timberlake’s 2006 album, *Future-*

From left: Aakomon Jones,
Simon Hammerstein and Usher
photographed July 16 at Park MGM's
Dolby Live in Las Vegas.





FOR ARTISTS LIKE **USHER**, SUCCESS FROM A LAS VEGAS RESIDENCY DOESN'T STAY IN VEGAS. BUT IT TAKES A CREATIVE DIRECTOR TO SHAPE THEIR SONGS INTO AN ONSTAGE SPECTACLE — AND RUN THE SHOW

BY REBECCA MILZOFF

PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHRISTOPHER PATEY



It was two days before

THE OPENING OF MY WAY, USHER'S NEW, REBOOTED LAS VEGAS RESIDENCY, AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR SIMON HAMMERSTEIN STILL HAD AN IMPORTANT PUZZLE TO SOLVE.

Like any artist who does a residency, Usher has a big catalog of hits to choose from — the trouble was choosing which one would end the show. In the afternoon, Hammerstein settled into an empty row of VIP seats toward the front of the Park MGM's Dolby Live theater, next to production designer Paul Tate dePoo, who quietly argued for "Love in This Club." "I feel like Vanna White trying to sell this pitch," he said drolly, pulling the track up on his phone. "Can you just let go of that song?" Hammerstein said with mock desperation. Still, Hammerstein asked DJ Mars — a longtime Usher collaborator who would perform in a booth set up in the middle of the first floor — to try it out.

Hammerstein wasn't sold, though. So Mars suggested "Good Love," Usher's recent summer collaboration with City

Girls. "Mars just solved it!" Hammerstein exclaimed. Twenty minutes later, though, his enthusiasm had dimmed, and he returned to an earlier choice: Usher's dancefloor hit "Yeah!"

Aakomon Jones, Usher's personal overall creative director, slid onto a stool next to Hammerstein. "Aakomon, perfect timing!" said Hammerstein. "We're having a fight." He explained what he wanted: a song that would effectively take advantage of the 23 dancers, roller skaters and pole dancers onstage and feel like "the choreographic version of a high-five ... and then end with lasers and walk out to more lasers."

Mars cued up the track and the cast went through the motions of the number, grouping up to perform in unison the club moves Lil Jon calls out

at the song's end: the A-Town Stomp, the Muscle, the Rockaway. Everyone agreed. "All right," Hammerstein declared, "we've got an ending."

It would still be a long next 36 hours for Hammerstein, 44, who came up in the downtown New York theater scene and is best known for co-founding The Box, an intimate nightclub with vaudevillian, burlesque and other outré entertainments. (Yes, he is the grandson of Broadway lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II.) His current role required him to weigh in on a list of last-minute issues: fine-tuning the automated time codes that coordinate the action, cleaning up the staging for "this kind of skate ballet" and figuring out how to fit more "Ush Bucks" into Usher's shoes so the singer could make it rain during a strip-club sequence. For the creative director of

a pop star's Las Vegas residency, though, this is just another day at the office.

Over the past decade, the Vegas artist residency has gone from a career death knell to a transformative flex for established artists like Usher, who have catalogs so stacked they can easily sustain a 90-minute show. The era of the new-school residency arguably began in 2013 with Britney Spears' *Piece of Me*. "Britney coming in such a big way when she was still incredibly relevant — I knew at the time that she would open doors, that people would think: 'Shit, well, Britney did it ...'" recalls Baz Halpin, the show's creative director, who now runs the production and design agency Silent House. Organized into discrete acts with distinctive visual themes, *Piece of Me* used huge props, multiple glam costume changes and impeccably staged and executed choreography to reestablish Spears as a great entertainer.

For the right artist, residencies are a creative and logistical dream because they offer the rare chance to perform regularly for a consistent audience without travel. "I've been on the road since I was 17, so it'll be nice to be settled a little bit," says Miranda Lambert, whose *Velvet Rodeo* opens at Planet Hollywood's Zappos Theater in September. It allows artists to better connect with their fans because the theaters are smaller. (The



During a *My Way* performance, Usher channeled an abstract dramatic narrative (clockwise from left), making “Burn” an emotional soliloquy, skating with his cast in an ode to Atlanta roller rink culture and perhaps parting with some element of a past self before singing “Climax.”

biggest at a Vegas casino, the Dolby Live, is roughly 5,000 seats.) And it lets them reach a much wider audience than just superfans: According to Live Nation senior vp of Las Vegas residencies Amanda Moore-Saunders, most tourists come to Vegas for three nights, with just one entertainment ticket already booked and free evenings to fill.

Above all, a residency allows for a level of big-budget spectacle that arena tours can't sustain: Creating a Vegas residency show usually costs between \$2 million and \$10 million. Without trucks or sets that need to fit in them, Katy Perry can decide to put a 20-foot-tall talking toilet and a singing poop puppet in her ongoing *PLAY* at Resorts World. But pulling off that kind of thing every night gets complicated. It requires someone who can present star artists' wildest dreams within budgets funded partly by guarantees from promoters, while putting out logistical fires and



listening to everyone from the artist's mother to their manager.

It's a rare skill set — and without a creative director who has it, the show literally can't go on. “What everybody loves about it is you get to see the overall vision,” says Napoleon Dumo, who with his wife, Tabitha, makes up the veteran creative direction duo Nappytabs. (The pair oversaw Jennifer Lopez's 2016 *All I Am* residency.) “What they find out is it's about a lot more than having a vision — and that's the

hardest part of the job.” Or as Halpin, who executive-produces Perry's *PLAY*, puts it: “Ideas are like arseholes: Everybody's got them. But you've got to have a structure and a plan. This is show *business*, after all.”

Even in the small community of Vegas creative directors, Hammerstein stands out. He's not a choreographer (like Nappytabs) or a lighting designer (like Halpin) or an established longtime collaborator of an artist (like Rob English, creative director of John Legend's *Love in Las Vegas*, or Ashley Evans and Antony Ginandjar of *PLAY*).

“It was a bold choice to go with someone more theatrical in background,” says Live Nation Las Vegas president Kurt Melien. (The company promotes *My Way*.) But for Usher, it was an intentional one: He was a longtime fan of *The Box* and loved how its atmosphere blurred the line between audience and performer. “How do you take the best of immersive theater and make it work for an audience who may not have seen it before?” Usher says. “That was my fantasy.”

For his first residency, in 2021, at the Colosseum at Caesars Palace — Hammerstein's first, too — they devised a preshow immersive “experience” for 150 audience members, bringing them up close with performers as they enacted scenes representing different elements of Usher's career before leading them into the theater for the main show.

Soon after that residency ended, at the top of 2022, Usher decided to totally rei-

That's the ideal residency outcome, and Usher's manager, Ron Laffitte, knew that well: After his clients the Backstreet Boys staged a residency at the Colosseum from 2017 to 2019, they were able to launch an ongoing global tour and a new chapter of their career. “I just don't think there's another platform in the world [like Las Vegas] where you can go and illustrate an incredible career and showcase the fact that he's as relevant today as ever,” Laffitte says of Usher. “And I think this residency has done that.” Usher's first residency sold out 18 of 20 shows, grossing \$18.8 million, according to Billboard Boxscore, and *My Way* sold out its opening run of eight shows. As for catalog streams, says Laffitte, “All boats rise with the tide, and the tide has risen dramatically.”

Residencies are often called “the Broadway of pop music” for good reason: They let creative directors help artists tell stories about themselves, however abstractly, in a way that showcases both their hits and the fact that they are more than the sum of those hits. *PLAY* (which opened in late 2021) has an *Alice in Wonderland*-tinged narrative and over-size *Pee-wee's Playhouse*-esque sets, perfectly embodying Perry's knowing wit and cartoonish creativity. Legend's *Love in Las Vegas* spotlights his skills as a pianist-balladeer but takes him through nouveau *Soul Train*, church and urban street scenes to flesh out how his multifaceted talent developed. *An Evening With Silk Sonic*, with its thoughtfully constructed club staging, places Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak's musicianship front and center.

Those are best-case scenarios. A creative director who's perfect for one artist might not gel with another — and even a star can be stymied by partnerships that go sideways. No one interviewed for this story wanted to discuss the troubled history of Adele's much-awaited Colosseum residency, set to begin in November. (A representative for Adele declined to comment on creative direction for the residency, as did Caesars Entertainment and Live Nation.)

Originally intended to open in January 2022 — which is, oddly, why Usher moved to the bigger Dolby Live for *My Way* — Adele postponed her show at the last minute, apparently due to core creative issues. She has since hired a new production team, including creative director Kim Gavin and stage design firm Stuffish; her original main collaborator, set designer Es Devlin (who also declined to comment), is no longer involved. Adele recently told *Elle* that in the original production, there ultimately “was just no soul,” that “the stage setup wasn't right,” and it “lacked intimacy.” Which are exactly the kinds of problems the right creative director can help solve.



JUST AS ARTISTS rely on creative directors, those directors need their own support to succeed. “Very rarely in your life do you meet someone who can just take your mediocre ideas and make them better with an immediate shorthand,” says Hammerstein with a self-deprecating laugh. “And I have so many bad ideas. But Aakomon is a great filter for them.”

“He’s exaggerating when he says they’re bad,” Jones, 43, says with a smile. With his preternatural calm and warm demeanor, he’s the yin to Hammerstein’s impish, let’s-put-on-a-show yang. “But he’s not exaggerating when he says he has a *lot*. One of the most impressive things about Simon is he’s literally a conduit for creativity.”

Jones, who spent years dancing and choreographing for Usher before becoming his creative director, is someone who “understands my language, understands the history I’m attempting to tell and the importance of our culture out of Atlanta,” the artist says. He also understands big-picture stage thinking: Jones previously put together showcases for artists seeking recording contracts, and more recently, he has worked

extensively choreographing for film and TV. Considering that background, Jones says, Hammerstein was “a perfect blend of those two worlds. He’s a phenomenal storyteller and character writer. And given the club-owner aspect of what he does, he knows people, he knows experience, he knows personalities.”

It was those qualities that drew Usher to Hammerstein long before the residency. He wanted the man who had created the vibe at The Box, but also someone who understood the way he had felt at *Sleep No More*, a long-running immersive theater production in New York (which Hammerstein did not work on) loosely based on *Macbeth*. Masked attendees follow a sprawling ensemble through a multifloor space filled with mysterious scenes. They watch the performance as voyeurs who come to feel part of the scenes and piece together the story based on the path they take through the space.

Usher knew that, with Hammerstein and Jones’ combined insights, he could achieve something similar in *My Way*. “To me, this is a chance to find a narrative that makes you look at live performance in a little bit of a different way,” he says. “I understand theatrical thinking and how things come to life onstage. My songs have always told a story. So how do I

manage to encapsulate all the things I am in one night?”

For Hammerstein, like many creative directors, figuring out how that works in Las Vegas is the first step. “A tour is hardcore fans, people who have gone out of their way to see you — they’re paying for parking, merch; it’s an expensive night out,” says Halpin. However, a Vegas audience is just as likely to attract folks who make the show just one element of a night out. By the end of the event, everyone should be rushing to stream that artist’s catalog.

That means playing the hits — and even among those, the most streamed — is imperative. “We definitely looked through the catalog at what was the highest-rated, what got the most plays, and made sure those made the list,” says Tabitha Dumo of Nappytabs’ approach for Lopez’s residency. The setlist then draws an outline for the story the performance will tell, which the creative director can then execute with the tone and aesthetic the artist desires. “Smart creative directors aren’t necessarily there to impose their own vision — they’re there to help cultivate and refine and reimagine,” says Raj Kapoor, who creative-directed the Backstreet Boys’ residency and is now working with Lambert. Internalizing that idea has been central to Hammerstein’s success with Usher. “Simon has his own

sense of what he wants to accomplish,” Laffitte says, “but I’ve always felt he was listening to Usher. He has honored what Usher wanted to create.”

Concert promoters have been known to suggest creative directors to artists who ask, and Live Nation keeps a shortlist of names, but the company will rarely offer feedback on their vision. If they do, it usually amounts to encouraging them and the artist to go for everything a Vegas stage can offer — say, the ability to add a curved extension called a *passerelle* to the Dolby Live that can transform the venue midshow into a funky, Atlanta-style roller rink, as Usher does. “We just sort of say, ‘Look, it’s Vegas. Your palette can be bigger, bolder, more exciting than any other show you’ve done,’” says Live Nation’s Moore-Saunders. “Have fun with it.”

Going big still means staying within budget, though. “Ultimately, you still have to make money,” says Napoleon Dumo, who is still proud that he and Tabitha kept Lopez’s show within budget. “That’s the biggest thing we’ve learned as creative directors. There’s a zillion creative people in the world who could come in and say, ‘I would do *this!*’ And before you know it, you’re spending a million dollars a week, and you just don’t have that.” Judging when, what and to whom to say “no” may be the hardest part of the job. “You

could have this amazing vision — poetic, stagecrafty stuff — and if it's not serving the arc of the show, it's just you being self-indulgent and showing off," Hammerstein says.

On opening night, synthesizer blasts introduce "Yeah!" — and signal both the end of the show and the moment Hammerstein and his team agonized over. With the audience completely on its feet, the stage transforms into a giant party. The gravity-defying pole dancers, the skaters, the dancers and Usher himself all unite at the front of the passerelle, which brings them further into the audience. As the outro plays, a snowstorm of Ush Bucks float down from the ceiling, and a woman next to me maniacally screams: "That was better than Caesars!"

A MONTH AFTER *My Way* opens, Usher is back in Atlanta, getting his two older sons ready to return to school. When the show resumes — for August, September and October dates, and then for a just-announced additional slate of 25 shows starting in March 2023 — he will go back to Vegas and treat it as home. "My family is there with me," he says. "I enjoy being able to be active and not lose my normal everyday steps."

Speaking to Usher the dad — who, at 7 o'clock on the dot, is putting his babies to bed (not in his drop top cruising the streets, as he sings in "Nice & Slow") — feels like an appropriate coda for *My Way*. Hammerstein had described the show to me as "part musical, part concert, part opera, part Brechtian theater" and also as "a night of heartbreak and catharsis but also celebration and joy and fun." But one could more simply say that *My Way* traces Usher's existential journey, just as he has documented it for decades through his songs. Like a *Sleep No More* voyeur, he moves through scenes that capture the Ushers he has been before: the dancefloor superstar, the Atlanta strip-club denizen, the romantic, the man who gives in to temptation but eventually learns to overcome it.

"Simon has really helped architect that journey," says Laffitte. But the end product also works because of the team Hammerstein has had in place since the first residency, all of whom understand the show's theatrical underpinnings. Without that, plenty of first-time creative directors fail. "I see a ton of really talented new creative directors who could have a great future. The artist sees their Instagram, they want the new-new, they vibe, they come in all gung-ho," says Halpin. "But you don't know what you don't know, and there's no support system a lot of the time."



Midshow, Usher brought out a semi-improvised medley of hits atop DJ Mars' booth amid the audience.

night. "When you see it with a live audience for the first time, you really know what works and what doesn't," says Kapoor. "So the shows have to be a bit fluid — you see what you can do to continually improve it."

For Usher, that has meant rethinking assorted elements, including that much-discussed ending. "I've got this weird kind of divide between the artist I became and the artist I was, the artist I am," he says. "Finding that balance to make sure everyone's pleased, I listen to critiques." He has heard feedback from Antonio "L.A." Reid, Jimmy Iovine, Terry Lewis, his mom, fans at meet-and-greets. The immersive feel of the "Yeah!" party, Usher realized, backfired in one way: The audience didn't seem to totally grasp that the show was actually over.

Usher's team also noticed that, during the section of the show in which Usher performs from the audience on the DJ booth — cycling through years of his hits like hitting the Seek button on a live Usher radio station — the crowd responded overwhelmingly to his EDM-infused anthem "Without You." "It has an emotional gravity to it," Hammerstein admits. So they made it the new ending, after "Yeah!," a final moment of connection for Usher — and for the sea of phones in the audience to capture.

Phone screens are, as Usher puts it, the "fourth wall" for his show. "We're creating a new idea, bringing all these worlds together, and the final piece of it is literally the device in your hand," he says. He hopes *My Way* is captivating enough to make attendees put their phones down. But he also knows he's not the only show in town and that viral moments are powerful. During his recent NPR *Tiny Desk* concert (which took place, in a happy accident, right before *My Way* opened), he knowingly made a move while singing "Confessions Pt. II" that became the "Watch This" meme — and because, as Laffitte puts it, "momentum creates momentum," that no doubt directed plenty of new ticket buyers to *My Way*. So when clips of the world he has created with Hammerstein and Jones show up on Instagram Stories, he'll embrace it. "If you do manage to capture some of it, what it creates is FOMO," he says with a knowing grin. "The rest of the world sees it, and they feel like they're immersed, too." **b**

"How do you take the best of immersive theater and make it work for an audience who may not have seen it before?"

That was my fantasy.

— USHER

Hammerstein, on the other hand, had Jones, whom he calls "a real man of the theater," by his side, as well as an extended creative team including everyone from Paul Tate dePoo, a Broadway veteran, to Hammerstein's longtime business partner, Richard Kimmel, who has worked as an associate of New York's storied downtown theater troupe The Wooster Group and acts as his co-creative director for *My Way*. Their chemistry with Usher (who happens to have also done Broadway: *Chicago* in 2006) comes from a common understanding that "it's about what works best for the audience," says Usher. "It's not easy to find the English of this experience, the language that everyone understands. But I like to be challenged — I like that they've made me work to prove my point."

Residency creative direction is still a job for which there's no clear preparation

— or career path. Hammerstein and Kimmel's company, Outside the Box Amusements, has other projects on the immediate horizon — a new nightclub in London "reimagining what cabaret and drag and dinner theater mean today" and some "opportunities in Vegas that aren't concerts but are taking over large-scale spaces, programming and curating them." If the right artist comes along, though, they're eager to do another residency, and they now have a big promoter on their side. "I would love to have Simon and his team do another residency," says Live Nation's Moore-Saunders. "I can imagine artists who would be so cool with him."

For now, Hammerstein is back in London — but not entirely done with the world of *My Way*. Change is the norm for a residency like this, long after opening

The

BY GRISELDA FLORES

Ride

O



AS A TODDLER, **Pepe Aguilar** WATCHED HIS PARENTS POPULARIZE FOLK EQUESTRIAN SHOW FOR THE 21ST CENTURY WITH AMBITIOUS

Aguilar photographed Aug. 7
at Jaripeo Sin Fronteras at
Bridgestone Arena in Nashville.

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Their

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERIC RYAN ANDERSON

Lives

**RANCHERA MUSIC IN THE U.S. NOW, HE'S UPDATING THE MEXICAN
ARENA PRODUCTION — AND HE'S MAKING IT A FAMILY AFFAIR**

Leonardo (below) and Ángela (right) Aguilar during their performance at Jaripeo Sin Fronteras in Nashville.

PEPE AGUILAR LIKES to meditate. For nearly 15 years, time permitting, he has done it first thing in the morning for at least 15 minutes. He says it's part of his journey — along with working with a life coach — to become more present. It's also the time when, one day in 2017, Aguilar had one of his best ideas.

In the 1960s, Aguilar's revered musician parents — *ranchera* singer-songwriter, producer and actor Don Antonio Aguilar and singer-actress Flor Silvestre — pioneered Mexican folk equestrian shows that mixed concert-style sets and traditional *jaripeo* performances, which feature regal dancing horses and elaborate cowboy stunts. The events helped popularize *ranchera* in the United States, and in the midst of his meditation, Aguilar envisioned producing a modernized version of them.

After jotting down some thoughts, he excitedly called his mother to share his concept. “*Ay mijito*, just let me know when you’ve advanced on this idea of yours because, right now, you’ve got a long way to go,” she told him. It wasn’t quite the response he had hoped for. But Silvestre was right. Aguilar’s vision would require extraordinary effort, and he’d need the right people by his side. (Silvestre died in 2020, Don Antonio Aguilar in 2007.)

“All I wanted was to offer something different in my shows,” the 54-year-old pop, *ranchera* and *mariachi* star explains on Zoom from his Houston home. “I was touring in arenas, theaters, I was happy. But I wasn’t happy from a creative standpoint. After meditating that day, it was like a download of ideas that led to culture, *mexicanidad* [Mexican identity], *charrería* [rodeo] — all of that is what really makes me who I am. Why have I been trying to be like Madonna or some sort of rock star for 20 years? What I’m doing now feels natural.”

Aguilar has been performing since he was a toddler, when he joined his parents and brother, Antonio Aguilar Jr., on the road for family *jaripeos* and made his debut at New York’s Madison Square Garden at age 3. Early in his career, he left his comfort zone and began singing in rock bands before opting for more traditional sounds with pop influences. Eventually, he followed in his father’s footsteps, becoming a renowned singer-songwriter and producer of *ranchera* and *mariachi* music.

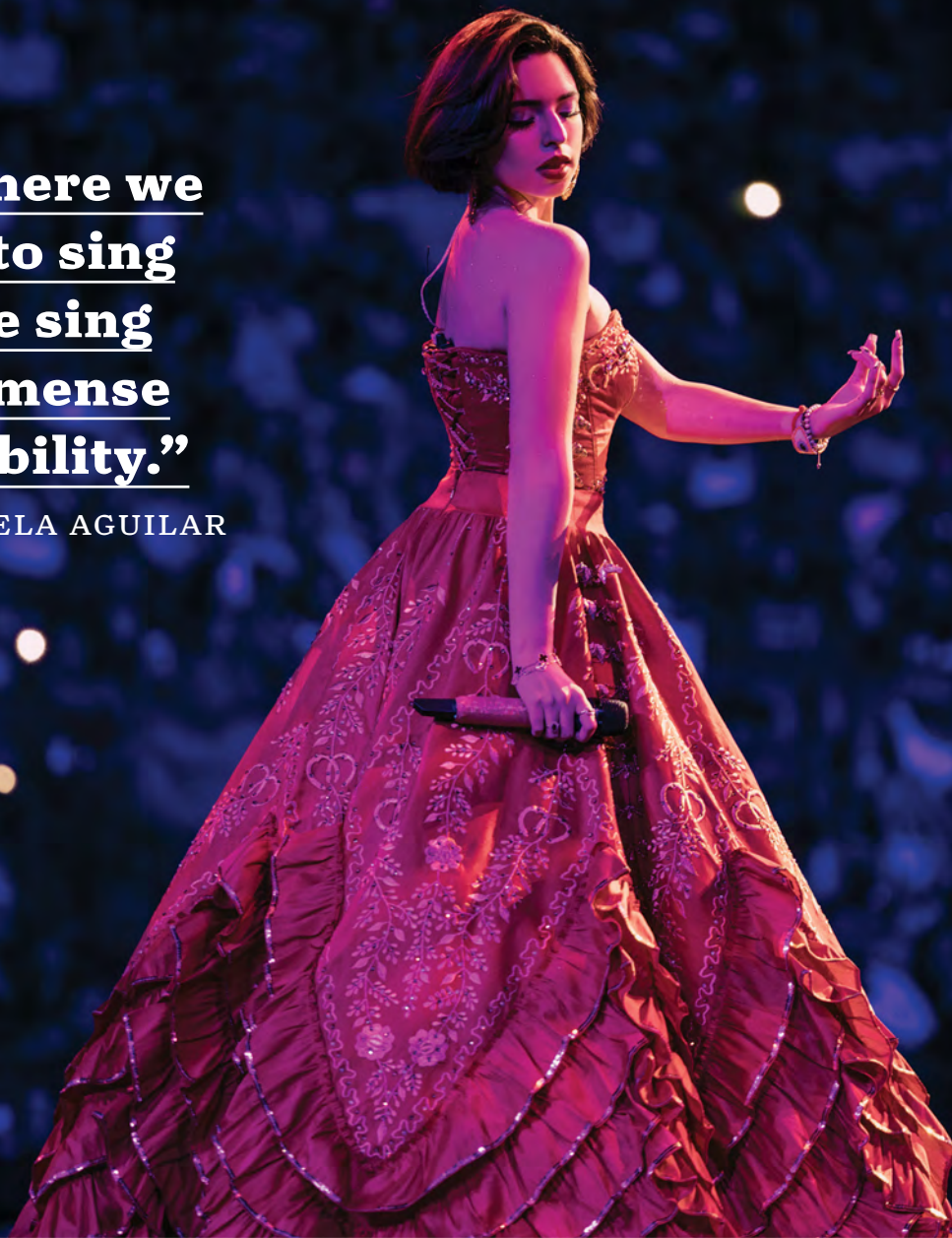
To execute such a complex tour, Aguilar had to start from scratch, searching for horses (Andalusian, Spanish, Quarter), special acts (acrobats, strongmen), bull riders and *charros* (skilled riders and ropers). But his background gave him a solid foundation. “I was literally born into this, but when I was part of my father and mother’s show, I wasn’t aware of the magnitude and the importance of what they were doing,” Aguilar says. He spent a year assembling a team of creative directors (including one producer from Cirque du Soleil and Formula 1) before officially launching the tour in January 2018.

The family tour that Aguilar created, Jaripeo Sin Fronteras (Jaripeo Without Borders), is a concept



**“To be where we
are and to sing
what we sing
is an immense
responsibility.”**

—ÁNGELA AGUILAR



he hopes his own children, artists Ángela and Leonardo Aguilar, will one day carry on. Now in its fourth year, the trek — which includes back-to-back sets by Pepe, Ángela and Leonardo, and brother Antonio Jr. (all singing on horses), circus-like acts during intermission, charrería competitions and bull-riding — continues to hit new markets and will wrap Nov. 19 in Zacatecas, Mexico.

A joint effort between producing partner Live Nation and Pepe's own promotion company, Pepe Aguilar Presents, the tour has traveled from coast to coast with a 120-person production team, eight horses and bulls, 40 musicians, a strongman from Mongolia nicknamed Pulga, performers dressed as Aztec warriors in \$50,000 costumes, professional charros who perform equestrian acrobatics and, of course, the Aguilars. “This isn't your typical concert,” Pepe says. “It's a very weird, different animal.”

A weird, different animal — but also a lucrative one. Since its 2018 debut, *Jarifeo Sin Fronteras* has grossed \$40.1 million from 409,000 sold tickets across 53 shows, including \$19 million from 21 shows since the tour restarted post-pandemic in September 2021, according to Billboard Boxscore. Not that it's inexpensive or without risks.

“It's more than any economics Ph.D. would tell you to invest in,” Pepe says with a smirk. “But I'm not doing this just for the money. The idea is to dignify our culture and make people feel proud of our mexicanidad. That can't be cheap. Being the promoter, the risk is very high. We're talking thousands

and thousands of dollars in expenses. And, for this thing to make sense, the shows need to be packed. But I trust in the concept, and I totally believe in my culture. For me, it's a safe bet; for everyone else, like my associates — they're dying [of stress] all the time.”

ON AUG. 7, Aguilar and his family were preparing to begin their 2022 touring in Nashville. Fans of all ages, including families decked out in cowboy hats and pointy boots, patiently waited outside Music City's Bridgestone Arena. When they got inside, they found one of the most ambitious arena productions around.

Jarifeo Sin Fronteras is the product of painstaking calculation. At its center is an oval-shaped stage, three-quarters full with 650 tons of dirt, laid approximately eight feet high so horses can gallop in. The production team loads in the 118-by-70-foot ring with the dirt (along with the chutes and railings lining it) at midnight day of show. By 8 a.m., they've installed the show's lighting, special effects and sound systems. Horses and bulls arrive around midday, and musicians get to the venue two hours later to rehearse. Those 40 musicians will occupy the platform on the remaining quarter of the stage, each playing their instruments for their respective genres (mariachi, *banda*, *norteño*) and remaining for the entire show, which runs nearly four hours.

“I had total faith in the production of this tour

because Pepe is so invested in the concept and he's very hands-on,” says Emily Simonitsch, senior vp of talent at Live Nation. “Probably one of the biggest challenges is describing to the venues' personnel that are not familiar with jarifeos what it all entails. They think we need two or three days to load in the dirt, but we don't. There are so many details, so we had to educate venues.”

By 6:15 p.m., soundcheck has ended. In the backstage hallway, a mariachi walks by while warming up on his trumpet. A man in clown costume and face paint waves hello and passes a group of charros dressed in traditional cropped embellished jackets, embroidered tight pants and wide-brimmed sombreros. In a makeshift barn area, eight horses with meticulously groomed manes, ranging from radiant white to shiny brown and gold-coated Palomino, wait for their turn in the spotlight. Meanwhile, Pepe remains in his dressing room, where he will monitor every second of the show — when he's not onstage, that is — to ensure it runs smoothly.

Not since Pepe's father has anyone produced an event of this magnitude and extravagance. Legacy acts such as Joan Sebastian and Vicente Fernández were also known for singing on horses, but today such artists are anomalies. Few people can sing on top of a dancing horse whose gait is perfectly in sync with the band's music; the discipline requires years of training for both horse and artist and a deep bond between the two. (I know that well: My uncle, Arturo “Toro” Reyes, has been working with the Aguilar

family for many years. He's the one, Pepe explained, who rides all the horses first to make sure they're ready to go and fully trained for the jaripeos.)

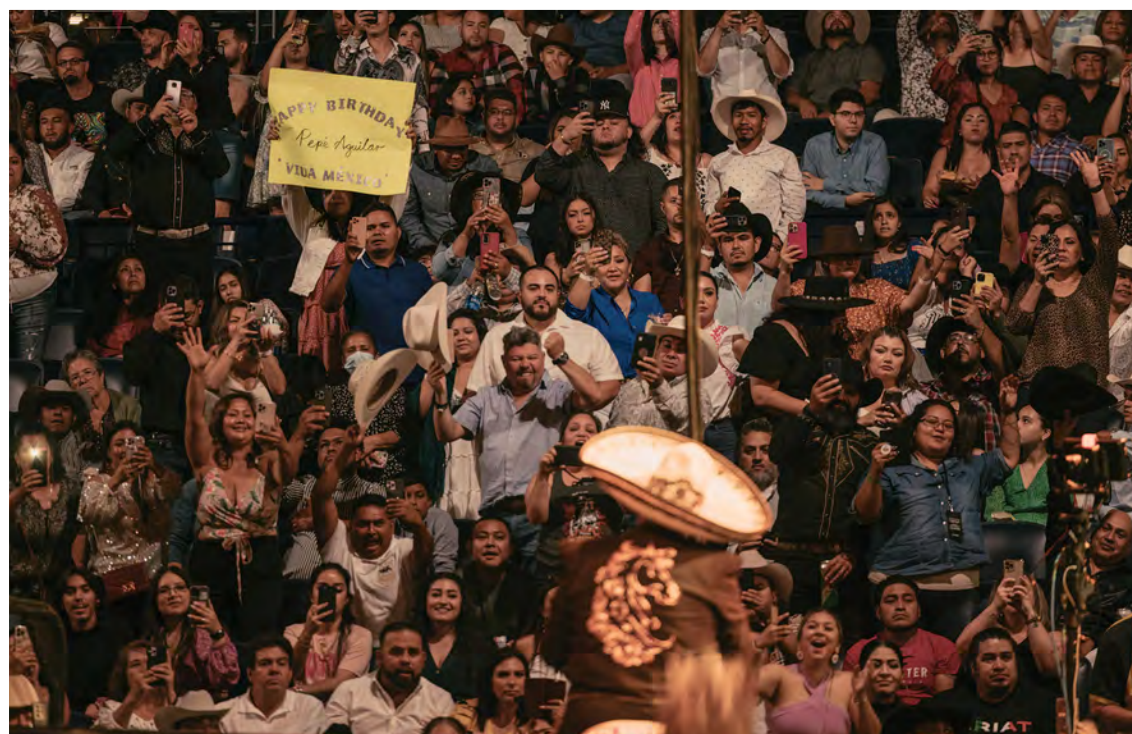
Before this tour, Pepe hadn't ridden onstage for 20 years and had been "totally disconnected" from the cowboy world — but he still makes horseback singing look effortless. He has years of experience riding horses for fun and professionally as a charro (he has won many championships at the national and state level in Mexico), and after all, he adds, he had the best teacher: His father, whose family hacienda in Tayahua — a small, humble central Mexican town of about 2,000 people — housed countless horses that were trained to perform in jaripeos.

"My father, without a doubt, was a horse whisperer. It's a connection that only a few people have with horses. Don't ask me. I have no clue because I don't have it. But my father did," says Pepe. "It consisted of being the alpha male when he needed to without use of force or violence but instead energy and grace. He was the one who taught my brother and I how to ride horses, and thank God because he was amazing. I owe everything I know to him."

Now, Pepe has passed on that knowledge to his own children, Ángela and Leonardo, who are carving their own lane in mariachi and ranchera. Leonardo is the first of four family members to take the stage during the shows. "It has been a long journey to get comfortable," the 23-year-old singer-songwriter says, recalling the tour's sold-out 2018 debut at Los Angeles' Staples Center (now

Crypto.com Arena). "I lost my voice because I was so nervous. I come out with my horse — but keep in mind, I had four years less of experience — and he's galloping at full speed. Then he sees these tiny confetti on the floor, and he stops [suddenly]. I hit myself on the saddle, but thankfully no one noticed, I don't think."

Leonardo has been riding since he was 13. After years of rigorous practice — involving singing songs on foot, then riding horses without singing, then dismounting, and *then* starting to sing and ride simultaneously — he's at a point where he can enjoy the experience. "I've been working with a



Clockwise from opposite page: the horses backstage; Pepe Aguilar and his dog Gordo; Antonio Jr. backstage; Pepe gives son Leonardo a hug after their performance together; audience members at Jaripeo Sin Fronteras.

“This tour is something that will never get old because it’s far bigger than me, my daughter and my son. We’re talking about culture here.”

—PEPE AGUILAR



life coach for the last two-and-a-half years as well. He has been instrumental in helping me change my mindset and enjoy the process and my career, writing songs and enjoying the ride,” Leonardo says.

Then there’s his relationship with Caporal: “He’s my friend, my *compa*.” Leonardo is referring to his beloved 14-year-old horse with whom he opens the show. He has had him for nine years. “I’ve been seeing him all my life and every time we go out onstage, I give him a kiss. I seriously enjoy spending time with him. He’s a blessing.”

Eighteen-year-old Ángela, on the other hand, didn’t start singing on horses until last year, when her father finally felt she was ready. “I knew how to ride perfectly and sing perfectly,” the Latin Grammy-nominated artist says. “I was a bit frustrated because I thought I was ready a long time ago, but I’m thank-

ful [Pepe] stopped me and made me practice more, because now I feel super comfortable.”

“Ángela was a natural. Leonardo was too but also way more *atravancado* [hasty], like me,” Pepe says of his kids. “Ángela from the beginning understood that your knees were key so that your voice wouldn’t shake while you’re riding and singing. If you don’t use your knees as shock absorbers, you’re going to be all over the place. The process eventually becomes automatic, like driving a car. At some point you’re able to drive the horse, position your knees and legs correctly, have and transmit confidence and sing very well.”

When Leonardo and Ángela learned about their father’s vision in 2017, it seemed unimaginable. “At this point, not even the sky is the limit for my dad,” says Ángela. Four years in, they now understand

not only Pepe’s vision, but his intentions.

“We literally won the genetic lottery,” says Ángela. “I think that to be where we are and to sing what we sing is an immense responsibility, and I hope one day we make it to be as big as my grandparents and as big as my dad. It’s very humbling to be part of this.”

For Pepe, expanding on his parents’ legacy is humbling, too — and validation.

“I’ve been an indie artist for 22 years and this was the last thing that I needed to really be completely independent,” he says. “This tour is something that will never get old because it’s far bigger than me, my daughter and my son. We’re talking about culture here. We’re just passing through, and culture stays for generations to come. Banda, rancheras, horses — that was here before my father and that’ll be here long after we’re gone.” **b**

FROM BREAKING BEATS TO BREAKING BOUNDARIES

ASCAP CONGRATULATES RIAA HONOREES
OUR MEMBERS & HIP-HOP LEGENDS GRANDMASTER FLASH and MC LYTE
and
JEFF HARLESTON and CONGRESSMAN HAKEEM JEFFRIES



GRANDMASTER FLASH **MC LYTE**
ARTISTS OF THE YEAR

JEFF HARLESTON
LABEL EXECUTIVE
OF THE YEAR

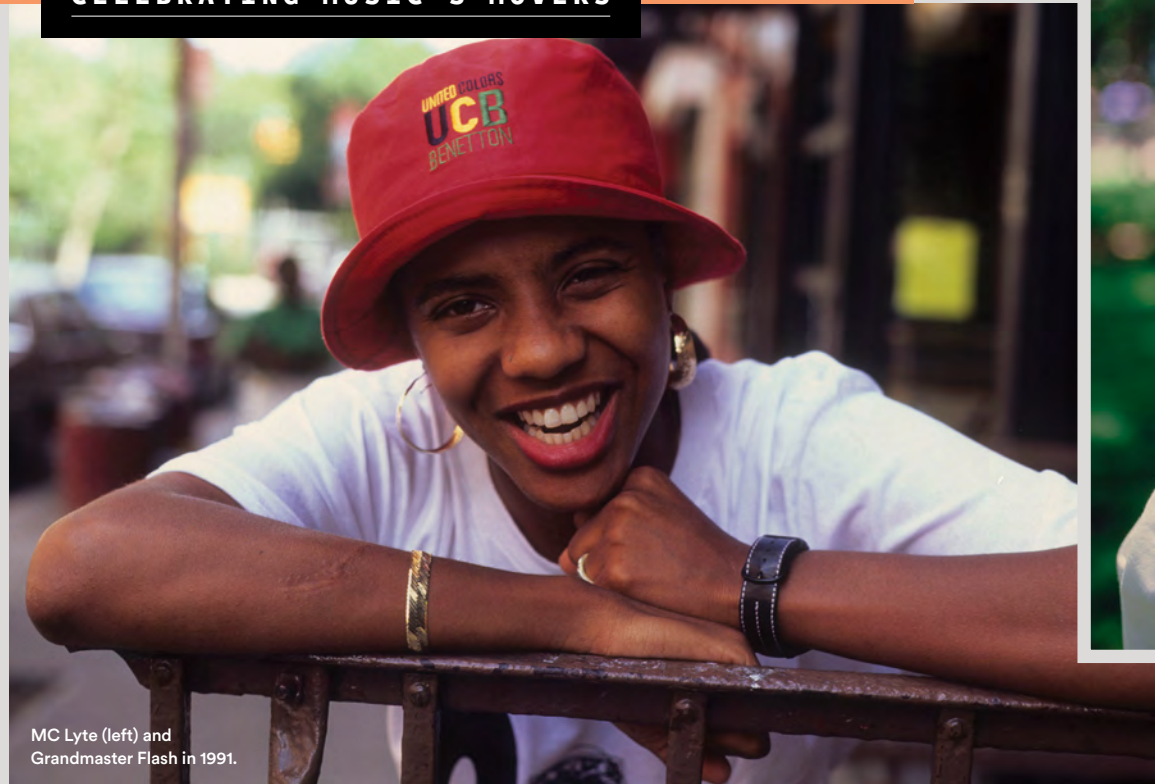
**CONGRESSMAN
HAKEEM JEFFRIES**
POLICYMAKER
OF THE YEAR

THANK YOU FOR BLAZING A PATH
FOR MUSIC TO EVOLVE AND FLOURISH



players

CELEBRATING MUSIC'S MOVERS



MC Lyte (left) and Grandmaster Flash in 1991.



HIP-HOP HOO-RIAA!

Rap pioneers Grandmaster Flash and MC Lyte are among those to be honored at the organization's new Washington, D.C., headquarters

BY CARL LAMARRE

I DON'T THINK THERE has ever been a time in music history when the influence of hip-hop has been more evident," says RIAA chairman/CEO Mitch Glazier. "Streaming is the biggest revenue generator for the industry, and hip-hop accounts for a huge percentage of those streams."

Given the genre's dominance, he adds, "now is exactly the right time to look back" to celebrate the pioneers who helped create rap. On Sept. 14, the RIAA will do so at RIAA Honors Pioneers of Hip-Hop, to be held at its new headquarters on F Street NW at the East End of Washington, D.C.

To properly commemorate the genre's legacy, the RIAA Honors will salute Grandmaster Flash; MC Lyte; Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y.; and Universal Music Group general counsel Jeffrey Harleston as their inaugural honorees.

Grandmaster Flash, who is considered one of the early innovators of DJ'ing, first earned recognition with his and The Furious Five's seminal 1982 debut album, *The Message*; the title track is one of rap's earliest hits. "Grandmaster Flash perfected the technique of scratching and mixing and brought it to a wider audience. He was an incredible innovator in technology and the art of hip-hop," says Glazier. He adds that "The Message" was the first hip-hop

song that was recognized by the Sound Recording Preservation Board and entered into the National Recording Registry by the Library of Congress in 2002.

In 2007, Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. "It's an honor to be recognized," says Grandmaster Flash. "But also to be in great company with artists that have touched millions of fans as I have in my career. We artists do this to touch our fans, and the RIAA makes sure it's counted."

MC Lyte "was an innovator in the art of singles and collaborations and made sure that collaboration in the hip-hop community was the key element of the art going forward," says Glazier. "She has also evolved into all aspects of hip-hop, not just being an MC but also in fashion, acting, art and other parts of the culture."

"It is an amazing honor to receive such an acknowledgment from the RIAA," says MC Lyte. "They've watched my maturation from adolescence into adulthood and witnessed every musical release. I'm excited and inspired to do more, and thank you to the RIAA for recognizing me and the body of work I've created with an amazing and talented group of music makers."

Longtime label executive Harleston will receive recognition for his three decades of work alongside



Glazier



Jeffries

acts such as Mary J. Blige, Public Enemy and Common. He also founded the Universal/Motown Fund, an endowment dedicated to providing financial assistance for artists from the '50s, '60s and '70s. Jeffries, who has served parts of Brooklyn and Queens in the House of Representatives since 2013, will be honored as a "champion of the music industry and creators" who helped push for the Music Modernization Act in 2018 and the CASE Act in 2020.

The RIAA Honors debuted in 2019, when country music star Miranda Lambert was celebrated along with Atlantic Records executive vp of Black music A&R Lanre Gaba, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy. The event, which recognizes artists, label executives and policymakers who have an impact on American music, culture and society, is meant to be held annually in D.C. but was postponed for two years due to the pandemic.

With the honorees chosen, the RIAA is working with D.C. health officials to ensure the safety of those who attend the event, the first to be held at the RIAA's new headquarters downtown.

"It's meant to showcase American music and history," Glazier says of the new offices. "When you come in, just through the gold and platinum plaques program, there's a tour of American music and its history. We have a wall of every diamond album [in the entryway] that has ever been certified. We have a wall chronologically going through the past several years of the Latin gold and platinum program. You can't help but feel music and music history when you walk in."

The RIAA has also partnered with the National Museum of African American Music to create content with the National Recording Registry that is tied to the RIAA Honors, including coverage on the museum's podcast *The State of Black Music*. In addition, the RIAA will conduct video interviews telling the story of the pioneers that will be given to the Library of Congress. **b**

BUILDING AN EMPIRE OF ECLECTICISM

Cleopatra Records founder reveals the key to three decades of indie success

BY BRYAN REESMAN

GOTH, INDUSTRIAL, PUNK and space-rock fans were the first to discover Los Angeles' Cleopatra Records in the 1990s. The independent upstart — formed in 1992 by Brian Perera — initially rode the second wave of goth music right into the bins of indie record stores and chains. During that decade, it presciently created electronic music label Hypnotic Records (in 1996) and hair metal imprint Deadline Music (1998) ahead of the EDM explosion and the hard rock revival. Perera noticed the electronic body music movement in Europe expanding into trance and big beat and licensed earlier releases by U.K. stars like Juno Reactor and The Future Sound of London. The business strategy of signing '80s hard-rock groups for moderate advances with low expectations and then watching the genre revive worked out well.

Perera's ability to foresee trends, build catalogs and cater to a wide variety of tastes has kept Cleopatra viable for three decades. In its first 10 years alone, Perera says it averaged 40 to 50 releases per year. Starting out with just himself and his wife, Yvonne, the label grew by selling releases from such bands as Christian Death, Motörhead, The Damned and Kraftwerk to major retailers including Tower Records and Hot Topic, but like other purveyors of physical product, scrambled to survive during the Napster years. "It was kind of a no-man's land," Perera recalls. "The record chains and independent stores weren't buying anything from us."

After dipping into its savings to stay afloat, the company took a chance on digital, sending pallets of music they owned or had license to on CDs to an aggregator in the early 2000s to digitize. Cleopatra started selling downloads through eMusic before the streaming revolution began. "It was like found money," Perera says. "We decided we should do more and make sure that all our contracts have a lot of digital rights. Or if somebody doesn't want to do physical, let's get their digital." Cleopatra distributes such content through digital service providers and uses YouTube's fingerprint system (Content ID).

Perera says that physical sales are also strong now that vinyl and CDs are rebounding.

Today, Cleopatra employs a staff of 14 and has expanded into jazz, hip-hop, country, punk (it bought the California labels Kung Fu Records and New Red Archives and part of Suburban Noise Records) and progressive rock, recently acquiring a long-term physical license for Magna Carta's catalog. Cleopatra has also recorded five albums with William Shatner. His 2020 release, *The Blues*, topped *Billboard's* Blues Albums chart. Despite its eclectic roster and plans to open a six-person office in Austin this fall, Cleopatra also remains true to its goth/industrial roots with recent releases by Not My God and Priest (featuring ex-members of Ghost).

How did you decide to launch Cleopatra?

It was just me really being a fan of music and wanting to be involved in the industry. In high school, I tried to get a regular job working at McDonald's, and they said, "You have to cut your hair off or we're not going to hire you." That was the first point in my life that I knew I had to get into a business where it was my business. There would be no discrimination in how you showed up or looked for work. I was fortunate to start off early enough where I could make it work and make a living for myself.

Cleopatra Records founder Perera

Was it tricky to broker initial deals for albums by Christian Death, Kraftwerk and Hawkwind?

Christian Death we recorded and signed in-house. We took a chance on [group founder] Rozz [Williams] to bring him back. Kraftwerk and Hawkwind were licensing deals under EMI terms. They basically said that you can only have them for a very short time, but I was creative about it. I made really cool packaging and put a lot of effort into doing the first 1,500 units in a cloth bag that came with a photo and a button, which no one else was doing at the time. That became the '90s version of a collector's item.

How much capital did you start with?

The initial startup came from making band T-shirts and clothing in my garage. I saved \$10,000 and I laid it all down on Motörhead's *On Parole* record, because they wanted money upfront. But I was fortunate because *On Parole* made a profit after four months of release, and the first licensing deals were successful. My wife, Yvonne, and I were running the company in a garage, so the overhead was low. She helped out with accounting and boxing up orders at the start. She now runs the accounting department full time.

There were trucks showing up. The neighbor



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called up the city and said, "Those guys are running a business." We were then forced to open up a real office space with a warehouse. We kept the overhead low even when we had the office, but I would have stayed in the garage as long as possible. I'm fortunate that I'm able to do what I'm doing, and even though it's on a larger scale, it still feels like 1994.

At what point did you start seeing success?

There was a goth magazine at the time called *Permission*. If you had an article in there or an advertisement, selling 3,000 to 5,000 units was no problem. There was already a curiosity base. Based on what the band looked like, and not even knowing about the music or what they thought the music sounded like, right off the bat, you would have sales. I would have college radio people call me up: "Hey, can you send me a promo of this?" So at the birth of Cleopatra, it was easy to get press. In the late '90s, things got a little bit challenging. The goth and industrial audience shifted, and CD sales really slowed down. That audience was the first wave to figure out how to get free music.

When did Deadline start?

At the end of '98. I saw a niche in those [hair] bands. There was one other label doing it at the time called CMC. They basically took every band that nobody wanted to be associated with. In the '90s, all these hip A&R guys had to bring in the new, cool band, and it was a good look for the label. In '99, if you worked at a major and you said, "Hey, I've got the new L.A. Guns record," you would probably get fired on the spot. We signed Bret Michaels to do a record, and his idea was to do a tribute to Poison. He's basically on every track, and he brought in a lot of his friends to play those songs. Those records have more value now to an audience than they did back then. A lot of those CDs we don't have available anymore. We're making them available on vinyl. That has really put a lot of fuel into the company.

What was the business strategy for Hypnotic?

We would do a lot of trance compilations, such as licensing *The Future Sound of London*. They had a big push from Virgin Records at the time, but we had their independent record. That helped us sell a lot of units. Then we licensed Paul Oakenfold, which charted with no effort whatsoever. The stars lined up. All of a sudden, we had a top 200 record in *Billboard*. That one, *A Voyage Into Trance*, sold close to 75,000.

How does digital compare with physical in terms of income now?

[Physical] doesn't beat having your whole catalog available on digital — it's always available, it never sells out, people get to discover it. Music supervisors find your music and place it in shows, and that

generates income. Physical is coming back, and digital just keeps going. It seems like it's good times for everyone.

It sounds like, based on Cleopatra, licensing deals can be very good in the short term.

They're good for short-term gains because, nowadays, a lot of artists don't want to sell their masters. If you can get an extensive term, more than three years, that's good. If the relationship works well, it continues for the next album and then you keep on extending the deal. A lot of those [early] short-term deals didn't get renewed, and at that point, I realized that I had to sign and record artists so that I would have stuff that I own. I knew that that was crucial to continue.

What would you say was the biggest mistake you made when you started Cleopatra?

I made a few mistakes by not signing some acts ... but I didn't have the financing at the time. People were getting shopped from big management firms, and it took me a while before I realized that coming from a manager's point of view, you're looking for the best money upfront. My strategy now is giving more upfront so we don't lose stuff just for a couple of bucks.

How did the deals with Lorrie Morgan, Judy Collins and Todd Rundgren come about?

[Around 2015,] we started signing some country artists like Sammy Kershaw, Joe Diffie, Collin Raye and Linda Gail Lewis, so Lorrie Morgan was a perfect choice to sign and build in this genre. Judy Collins came about from being friends with her longtime manager, Katherine DePaul, who also helped Judy run her label. The Todd Rundgren relationship started in 2000. We had an idea of remixing his hit songs in a different way with industrial acts. He liked the out-of-the-box concept.

Do you think the industry underestimates the genres that Cleopatra releases?

Because we do so many different genres, it confuses them, in a way. We hire people that are known more for acting. We did a deal with William Shatner. We brought in these great players on [2011's *Seeking Major Tom*] — Steve Hillage from Gong, Wayne Kramer from The MC5 and [Deep Purple/Rainbow guitarist] Ritchie Blackmore.



Clockwise: Rundgren in 2022 and Christian Death, Morgan and Collins in 2021.

Ritchie Blackmore doesn't want to play on people's records, but he's such a big fan of Shatner and *Star Trek*. Johnny Winter wanted to be a part of it because he said *Star Trek* was his favorite show. We're continuing those types of records. We're doing a record right now with Ann-Margret, and we've got Pete Townshend and Joe Perry — people that I don't think we would [otherwise] have had access to.

Has any of your music been licensed for TV?

We had one artist who was kind of obscure: Huw Lloyd-Langton. He was the guitar player for Hawkwind, and we got him in the new season of *Stranger Things*. The song, "Got Your Number" [by his band, The Lloyd-Langton Group], went from complete obscurity to a track that has [700,000] streams. We were selling his box set [2020's *Anthology*] because we bought his catalog.

How has Cleopatra's film division been doing since it launched about five years ago?

We would pick up and distribute finished movies and documentaries, and we would do our own productions as well. We did one on Lynyrd Skynyrd based on the plane crash, and then we did another one called *Verotika* with [Misfits'] Glenn Danzig that got some attention.

What advice would you give to someone who's looking to start a label?

You have to be a part of that culture, that lifestyle. When I was starting up, I was heavily into being a part of the club scene and the culture. At one point, I was even working a side job where I was backstage security at a club called *Scream*. This was the first major alternative club in L.A. that had Jane's Addiction, The Mission, Lords of the New Church, X. Guns N' Roses even played there. It was Friday and Saturday night in downtown, so I got to meet a lot of people through that as well. **b**

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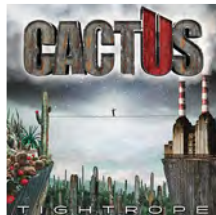


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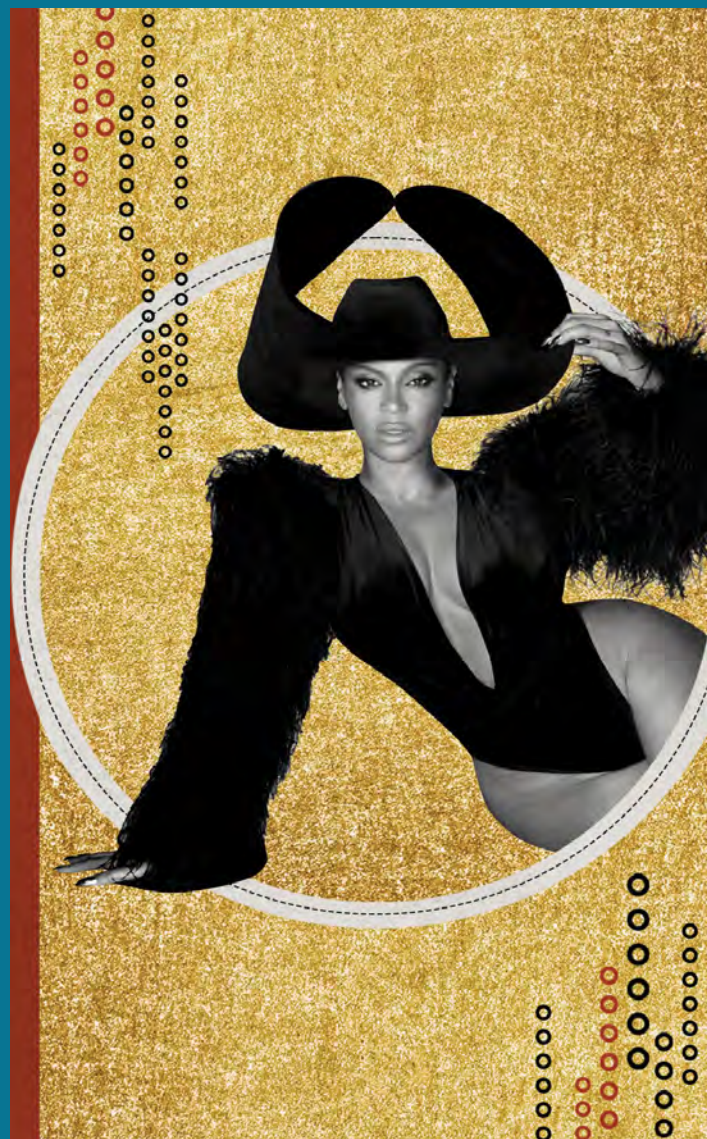
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Destiny's Child Expands Creative Role

Columbia Act Does More Songwriting, Producing On 'Wall'

BY GIL GRIFIN
LOS ANGELES—Armed with beauty, youth, and the ability to sing catchy jams in sweet, four-part harmony, Columbia Records quartet Destiny's Child would seem to have it made. After all, the Houston group's last album—the 1998 self-titled debut (which included the platinum single “No, No, No”—sold 437,000 copies, according to SoundScan). But Kevon “Kelly” Rowland, LeToya Luckett, Beyoncé Knowles, and LaTavia Roberson (whose ever-

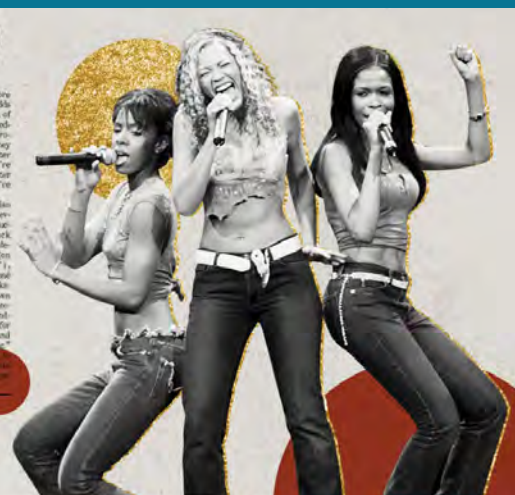
Triple Threat? Yes, Yes, Yes

age is 39 aren't satisfied with their early success. As they anxiously await the July 20 release of their sophomore Columbia album, “The Writing's On The Wall”—and even as their first single, “Bills, Bills, Bills” (released May 12, commercial single available Tuesday, 11/11), goes to No. 27 this issue on Hot R&B Singles & Tracks—the women of Destiny's Child believe they have a lot more to prove.

“I wish we've always wanted people to appreciate our vocals, we don't want people to say, ‘Oh, here's another pretty girl group,’” says Rowland. Adds Luckett, “We're taking another step up in the writing and producing. On the last album, we wrote and produced three or four songs. This time, we participated a lot more. From a creative standpoint, it's the writer and producer credits. It's four girls bringing their experi-

ences together.” Knowles believes being more assertive in the creative process adds to the group's credibility. “A lot of artists who improve told us we need to write and produce,” she says. “They said, ‘You'll feel better about what you're singing and feel better about what you're doing.’”

The quartet also collaborated with several hip-hop producers on the 16-track album. “Made-measure” Elliott (of “Confessing”) is a frequent collaborator of Tony Toni Toné (“Tribulation”) and Kevin “She She She” Briggs (“Bills”). The group even came up with the album's concept, integrating love relationships “inspired” by various tracks—for example, “These shall not leave me wondering.” A different and bold approach, to be sure, but just what the doctor ordered. (Continued on next page)



Billboard HOT R&B SINGLES

WEEK	ARTIST	TITLE	WEEKS ON CHART	PEAK POSITION
1	Destiny's Child	Bills, Bills, Bills	10	1
2	Destiny's Child	When Love Takes Over	10	1
3	Destiny's Child	When Love Takes Over	10	1
4	Destiny's Child	When Love Takes Over	10	1
5	Destiny's Child	When Love Takes Over	10	1
6	Destiny's Child	When Love Takes Over	10	1
7	Destiny's Child	When Love Takes Over	10	1
8	Destiny's Child	When Love Takes Over	10	1
9	Destiny's Child	When Love Takes Over	10	1
10	Destiny's Child	When Love Takes Over	10	1

IF YOU THOUGHT Abba was the king of repeating words in a title (see “Money, Money, Money,” “Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight),” “On and On and On,” and “Honey, Honey”), think again. Just 16 months after peaking at No. 3 with “No, No, No Part 2,” Destiny's Child has achieved a new personal best by jumping 11-2 on The Billboard Hot 100 with “Bills, Bills, Bills” (Columbia).

The latest single from the Houston quartet joins an elite list of triple-word hits. 10 titles, notes William Simpson of Los Angeles.



“The good news for Beyoncé is that she's not just as good as her last hit song. My admiration for everything she does is immense. Behind her inspiration is an incredible amount of creative energy and work ethic. My life would be so much easier if I had 10 of her.”
—ROB STRONGER, CHAIRMAN, SONY MUSIC LABEL GROUP

WOMEN IN MUSIC
Billboard

“I'm so proud of my big sister. She's more than woman of the year; she's an inspiration.”
—SOLANGE KNOWLES, SINGER/SONGWRITER

THE BILLBOARD Q&A Beyoncé Discusses Her Focused Performances, Frenzied Pace And ‘Fierce’ Alter Ego BY GAIL MITCHELL

Singer, Songwriter, Philanthropist, Entrepreneur, Actress, Producer: Beyoncé may be the hardest-working woman in show biz. Take the four days leading up to MTV's recent Video Music Awards. Beyoncé wraps a run-through of her Radio City Music Hall performance at midnight Thursday evening, Friday morning at 10 a.m., it's déjà vu as she returns to rehearsal mode. A dressing room break is anything but chats with MTV personnel about show logistics segue into an editing session for her next project—a DVD called from a summer stand at the Wynn Las Vegas. Later that evening, Beyoncé makes a surprise appearance at husband Jay-Z's Sept. 11 Madison Square Garden show. Then right after the VMAs, Beyoncé and her alter ego Sasha Fierce catch a flight to Australia to kick off the next leg of their I Am... world tour. As she ticks off her jam-packed schedule, an unfazed Beyoncé dismisses her multitasking with a laugh: “It's just one of those grind weeks. It will be less hectic when I'm in Australia.” A world tour is less hectic? As you exhale and ponder that irony, it becomes clear that this is someone who thrives on hard work and fierce-determination. Before slipping back into her signature shtetl, Billboard's 2009 Woman of the Year shares how she balances work and relaxation, feeds her philanthropic passions and envisions her future.

YONCÉ IN A LIFETIME

Beyoncé's first notable appearance in *Billboard* came in the March 21, 1998, issue, which identified her as one-quarter of “the female foursome” that ended “the eight-week run of the 18-year-old crooner” Usher at No. 1 on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart when “No, No, No” negated “Nice & Slow.” One-quarter of a century later, she's one of the biggest pop stars on the planet, with eight *Billboard* Hot 100 No. 1s and 19 million albums sold in the United States (according to Luminate) as solo act. In 2021, she became the most Grammy-awarded singer ever, with a career total of 28 trophies; this summer, she topped the *Billboard* 200 and Hot 100 simultaneously, with *Renaissance* and “Break My Soul,” respectively.

CHILD'S (AIR)PLAY

“Armed with beauty, youth and the ability to sing catchy jams in sweet, four-part

harmony, Columbia Records quartet Destiny's Child would seem to have it made,” predicted the June 19, 1999, *Billboard*. When “Bills, Bills, Bills” became the first of the act's four Hot 100 No. 1s, the July 10 issue reported on a potential Houston-Stockholm rivalry that thankfully never exploded into an international beef. “If you thought ABBA was the king of repeating words in a title,” *Billboard* pointed out, referencing “Money, Money, Money” for one, “think again.”

'CRAZY' REIGN

Beyoncé's breakout solo single, “Crazy in Love,” featuring Jay-Z, scored as the Hot Shot Debut in the May 24, 2003, issue. But *Billboard*'s reviewer didn't fall head over heels, however, saying that the track “could easily be mistaken for a group outing” from Destiny's Child. Bey knew best, though: The Hot 100 No. 1 became such a smash that the release date of her debut

album, *Dangerously in Love*, was moved up by two weeks. But the review did get one thing right: the “playful, romantic vibe” Bey had with Jay-Z, whom she married five years later. It was noted that “their chemistry is palpable.”

ESCAPING DESTINY

While Bey's solo career thrived, she got the band back together in 2004 for a last hurrah, *Destiny Fulfilled*. “It's not ‘the end,’ like we're never going to perform together or be on each other's records,” Beyoncé told *Billboard* for a Jan. 14, 2006, cover story; true to her word, the core trio of Bey, Kelly Rowland and Michelle Williams has reunited both onstage and in the studio. In the same issue, the act's manager, Mathew Knowles — Beyoncé's father — brushed off a question about the quartet-turned-trio's lineup changes. “I knew the vocal power of Beyoncé and Kelly,” he said. “I always

use the example of if you had Michael Jordan and Scotty Pippen — we shot an air ball on the spelling of Scottie Pippen's name — “would you be concerned if you had to make changes with a couple members of the team?”

ONE 'RING' TO RULE THEM ALL

Named *Billboard*'s 2009 Woman of the Year, Beyoncé revealed the artistic process that led to megahits like “Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It):” “I've always tried to pick songs and singles that were a part of pop culture, a part of things that people are passionate about and want to talk about and debate,” she explained in the Oct. 10, 2009, issue. When it came to her formidable work ethic, however, the multihyphenate was just as flabbergasted as anyone. “I don't realize all that I do until I do interviews like this,” she said. “And then I'm like, ‘Oh, my God, how is this possible?’” —JOE LYNCH

FROM LEFT: CARLIN JACOBS; FREDERICK M. BROWN; GETTY IMAGES; MIKE NELSON/AP; GETTY IMAGES

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