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NOVEMBER 19, 2022 • BILLBOARD.COM

2022

**R&B //
HIP-HOP
POWER
PLAYERS**



SZA

**Back in control
and ready to
release that album
(yes, really!)**



EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR
Amazon Music's
Tim Hinshaw

billboard

NOVEMBER 19, 2022 • BILLBOARD.COM

2022

R&B //
HIP-HOP
POWER
PLAYERS



FUTURE

How one of rap's most prolific hit-makers became "one of none"

EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR Amazon Music's Tim Hinshaw

Red Bull Records Congratulates

BLVYST



Billboard R&B / Hip Hop

**ROOKIE OF
THE YEAR**



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NOV. 19, 2022

VOLUME 134

NO. 15

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Future photographed by David Needleman on Oct. 4 at Ace Studios in Miami.

TO OUR READERS
Billboard will publish its next issue on Dec. 10. For 24/7 music coverage, go to billboard.com.

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BACK IN CONTROL

Five years ago, **SZA** put out her culture-changing debut and became alternative R&B's great new hope. As she prepares to finally release its follow-up, she's more confident than ever — even if she's still not sure pop stardom is sustainable.

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With the steady guidance of manager Ebonie Ward, **Future** has become one of the most successful, and prolific, rappers in chart history — and has now turned to even loftier ambitions.

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SZA photographed by AB + DM
on Oct. 11 at Quixote Studios
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Kirsnick Khari Ball

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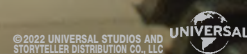
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THE FABELMANS

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THE LATIN RECORDING ACADEMY®

2022

SPECIAL AWARDS



MYRIAM HERNÁNDEZ

PREMIO A LA EXCELENCIA MUSICAL

charts

DATA FOR WEEK OF 11.19.2022



21 Savage (left) and Drake

Her Loss Is Drake And 21 Savage's Win On The Billboard 200

BILLBOARD 200

1

Her Loss

Drake & 21 Savage

LAST WEEK	PEAK POSITION	WEEKS ON CHART
—	1	1

DRAKE AND 21 SAVAGE'S collaborative album, *Her Loss*, debuts at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 (dated Nov. 19) with the year's biggest week for an R&B/hip-hop set and

the fourth-largest streaming week ever for any album. It starts with 404,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending Nov. 10, according to Luminate. Streaming drove the bulk of the numbers, compiling 513.6 million on-demand official streams of its 16 tracks.

Her Loss boasts the biggest week for an R&B/hip-hop release since Drake's own *Certified Lover Boy* bounded in with 613,000 units atop the chart dated Sept. 18, 2021.

The new album is Drake's 12th Billboard 200 No. 1 and 21 Savage's third. Drake now has the

third-most leaders, after The Beatles (19) and Jay-Z (14).

On the Billboard Hot 100, Drake and 21 Savage roar in with seven collective debuts in the top 10 (from No. 2 to No. 8), with the former adding an eighth at No. 9, thanks to the *Her Loss* solo credit "BackOutsideBoyz." The tracks line up in the same order on the Streaming Songs chart, filling Nos. 1-8, led by "Rich Flex" with 58.9 million streams. The total is the highest for an R&B/hip-hop song this year and second overall to the 59.7 million that Taylor Swift's "Anti-Hero" drew in its first week (Nov. 5).

Drake ups his career count to 67 Hot 100 top 10s, extending his record total. He becomes the first artist to log at least eight songs in the top 10 in one week twice, following his haul of nine on the chart dated Sept. 18, 2021.

—KEITH CAULFIELD AND GARY TRUST

Hot 100

2 WKS AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS ON CHART
			PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL		
1	1	1	#1 for 3 WEEKS SAL Anti-Hero	Taylor Swift	1	3
			J.M.ANTONOFF,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,J.M.ANTONOFF)	REPUBLIC		
HOT SHOT DEBUT		2	Rich Flex	Drake & 21 Savage	2	1
			VINY LZ,TAY KEITH,FNZ,BOOGZ2DABEAST (C.J.HARRIS, JR.,A.GRAHAM,S.B.A.JOSEPH,A.HERNANDEZ,B.L.CHAMBERS,M.J.MULE,I.J.DEBONI,J.GWIN,C.BERNSTEIN,M.J.PETE,B.D.SESSION JR,A.GENEEN WHITE,G.HAYES,A.DAVIS)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
NEW		3	Major Distribution	Drake & 21 Savage	3	1
			SKIPONDABEAT (A.GRAHAM,S.B.A.JOSEPH,E.FERRERA,T.THOMPSON,LIL YACHTY,E.FOX-PECK)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
NEW		4	On BS	Drake & 21 Savage	4	1
			OZ,ELYAS (A.GRAHAM,S.B.A.JOSEPH,O.YILDRIM,ESTICKEN,S.GEBRELUL)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
NEW		5	Spin Bout U	Drake & 21 Savage	5	1
			BANBWOI (A.GRAHAM,S.B.A.JOSEPH,M.U.JONES,N.J.SHEBIB,T.SANDERS,D.ARMSTRONG)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
NEW		6	Pussy & Millions	Drake & 21 Savage Featuring Travis Scott	6	1
			CHEEZE BEATZ,GO GRIZZLY,SQUAT BEATS,B100,LIL YACHTY (A.GRAHAM,S.B.A.JOSEPH,TRAVIS SCOTT,D.MCCORKELL,GO GRIZZLY,J.RIVERA III,T.MCKIBBINS,M.U.JONES,J.N.MUHAMMADI,WHITLOW,LIL YACHTY)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
NEW		7	Privileged Rappers	Drake & 21 Savage	7	1
			EARL ON THE BEAT,GENT,LIL YACHTY (A.GRAHAM,S.B.A.JOSEPH,E.I.BYNUM,G.MEMISHI,N.J.SHEBIB,C.H.JASPER,E.J.ISLEY,M.ISLEY,O.ISLEY,R.ISLEY)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
NEW		8	Circo Loco	Drake & 21 Savage	8	1
			BOI-IDA,TAY KEITH (A.GRAHAM,S.B.A.JOSEPH,M.J.SAMUELS,B.L.CHAMBERS,N.J.SHEBIB,LIL YACHTY,T.BANGALTER,G.DE HOME-CHRISTO,A.MOORE)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
NEW		9	BackOutsideBoyz	Drake	9	1
			R.LEYVA,DEZ WASHINGTON,TAZ TAYLOR,LIL YACHTY (A.GRAHAM,R.F.LEYVA,D.CLEARY-KRELL,TAZ TAYLOR,LIL YACHTY)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
11	3	10	AIR Unholy	Sam Smith & Kim Petras	1	7
			ILYA,CIRKUT,B.SLATKIN,O.FEDI,JIMMY NAPES,S.SMITH (S.SMITH,J.J.NAPIER,I.SALMANZADEH,H.R.WALTER,B.SLATKIN,O.FEDI,K.PETRAS)	EMI/CAPITOL		
NEW		11	Hours In Silence	Drake & 21 Savage	11	1
			NYAN,MCEVOY,40,NOEL,DANIEL EAST (A.GRAHAM,S.B.A.JOSEPH,N.LIEBERTHAL,C.MCEVOY-MORIE,N.J.SHEBIB,NOEL,A.D.GUERRERO,P.D.BEAUREGARD)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
NEW		12	Broke Boys	Drake & 21 Savage	12	1
			WHEEZY,TAY KEITH (A.GRAHAM,S.B.A.JOSEPH,W.T.GLASS,B.L.CHAMBERS,A.A.HERRERA,R.X.BROWN)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
12	4	13	Bad Habit	Steve Lacy	1	19
			STEVE LACY (S.T.L.MOYA,B.FOUSHEE,D.GORDON,M.CASTELLANOS,J.C.KIRBY)	L-M/RCA		
NEW		14	Treacherous Twins	Drake & 21 Savage	14	1
			NOEL,OZ (A.GRAHAM,S.B.A.JOSEPH,NOEL,T.R.BELL,L.D.CREED,T.Z.MOSLEY,M.L.BARCLIFF,E.B.LUMPKIN,M.J.SAMUELS)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
NEW		15	Middle Of The Ocean	Drake	15	1
			OZ,NOEL,NIK D,SUCUKILOOF (A.GRAHAM,O.YILDRIM,NOEL,N.FRASCONA,T.FRIEDRICH,L.LEIBFRIED,K.GAMBLE,L.A.HUFF,C.GILES,LL.JAMES,J.JONES,D.PITTMAN)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
NEW		16	Jumbotron Shit Poppin	Drake	16	1
			FILTHY,CUBEATZ,SAD PONY,ODDIE MANE,LIL YACHTY (A.GRAHAM,R.ORTIZ,T.GOMRINGER,J.RAISEN,J.T.ORTIZ,LIL YACHTY,N.J.SHEBIB,S.GAUDES,D.GAGLIARDI,G.B.DILARA SINCER)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
16	5	17	As It Was	Harry Styles	1	32
			KID HARPOON,T.JOHNSON (H.STYLES,T.E.PHULL,T.JOHNSON)	ERSKINE/COLUMBIA		
NEW		18	More M's	Drake & 21 Savage	18	1
			METRO BOOMIN,DAVID & ELI (A.GRAHAM,S.B.A.JOSEPH,L.T.WAYNE,E.KLUGHAMMER,D.RUOFF)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
NEW		19	I Guess It's Fuck Me	Drake	19	1
			THE LOUD PACK (A.GRAHAM,P.ROSARIO,S.BAROT,D.FORD)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		
24	15	20	I'm Good (Blue)	David Guetta & Bebe Rexha	14	11
			D.GUETTA,TIMOFEY (B.REXHA,P.D.GUETTA,G.RANDONE,KAMILLE,M.GABUTTI,M.LOBINA,P.J.PLESTED)	WHAT A DJ/WARNER		

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

The 28-year-old Nantucket, Mass., native's 11th Hot 100 entry also debuts at No. 31 on Mainstream Top 40.



HOT 100

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"Made You Look"
Meghan Trainor

Where did the inspiration for "Made You Look" come from?

It was one of the last songs I wrote for [*Takin' It Back*, released Oct. 21]. I knew I needed my self-confident banger that I always do on my albums, and I was

really studying "All About That Bass." Especially after having a baby, I was already struggling to love my body: I was covered in a C-section scar crossing over all my stretch marks. My therapist had me stand in front of the mirror naked every day, and the first day, I was shaking and hated it. By the third day, I noticed things that I liked about my body, and I was like, "Wow, this is so powerful."

How is making music different for you since having your son?

It's more important now. I'm also more mature because I'm older and [have] been through more. Now I'm at an age and point in my life where I'm like, "Here's what actually matters and here's what doesn't. I'm not going to stress anymore." I really had to work with my therapist on what I can and can't control. These stretch marks are here — [I have to] get used to them and learn to love them because I can't control whether they go away or not. In my songwriting, I try to put in that "let it go" vibe.

How have you seen trends shift on the Hot 100 throughout your career?

Obviously, TikTok rules the world. For the last album, I was like, "I'll do every piece of promo you want me to do," but it didn't work. For this album, I made it a priority to do "TikTok days" and make content. I get to be at home and make videos that go viral, and it still helps my music and me connect with strangers all over the world. I've been more real and open than ever. I even talk about my love for Mira-LAX online — they like me being myself. That's easy to do for me. For the first time in a long time, I really, really love my job again.

—RANIA ANIFTOS

HOT 100 FIRST-TIMERS

Artists who have recently made their initial appearances on the chart

ARTIST	SONG	DEBUT POSITION	DEBUT DATE
JIN	"The Astronaut"	51	Nov. 12

"'ON MY WAY (Marry Me)' IS JENNIFER LOPEZ'S
MOST GRIPPING SONG TO DATE,
AND IT PLUCKS AT THE HEARTSTRINGS RIGHT AWAY."

GSCM

Marry Me

BEST ORIGINAL SONG
"ON MY WAY (Marry Me)"

WRITTEN BY
IVY ADARA
LEROY CLAMPITT
MICHAEL POLLACK

BILLBOARD 200

42



Soundtrack *Stranger Things, Season 4*

The musical accompaniment to the latest chapter of the Netflix sci-fi series arrived on vinyl on Nov. 4 (13,000 sold week ending Nov. 10 in the United States, according to Luminate; No. 2 debut on Vinyl Albums), prompting its reentry and new peak on the Billboard 200.

150



Barbra Streisand *Live at the Bon Soir*

The archival live album, recorded in 1962, is Streisand's 64th entry on the Billboard 200, extending her record for the most on the list among women. It's her ninth live set to chart.

177



Prince *The Hits 2*

The compilation returns to the chart for the first time since 1994 after its vinyl reissue (4,000 sold). It debuts at No. 10 on Vinyl Albums, along with its companion release, *The Hits 1*, at No. 12.

5

JOJI

Smithereens

Joji tallies his third straight top five-charting set on the Billboard 200 as his latest, *Smithereens*, starts at No. 5 with 57,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending Nov. 10, according to Luminate. Streaming-equivalent album units comprise 39,500 of that sum (equaling 53 million on-demand official streams of the set's nine tracks), album sales comprise 17,500 (bolstered by a Target-exclusive edition of the CD and assorted deluxe box sets sold on Joji's web store), and track-equivalent album units are negligible. *Smithereens* was preceded by Joji's first top 10 hit on the Billboard Hot 100, "Glimpse of Us," — the album's lead single — which peaked at No. 8 (July 2-dated chart).

Also in the top 10 of the Billboard 200, Steve Lacy's *Gemini Rights* returns to the region for the first time since its No. 7 debut in July following its Nov. 4 release on vinyl (8,000 sold; No. 3 debut on Vinyl Albums). The album lifts 17-10 on the chart.

—KEITH CAULFIELD

Billboard 200

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
			IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL			
		1	#1 for 1 WEEK Drake & 21 Savage	Her Loss	1	1
			OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC			
①	1	2	Taylor Swift	Midnights	1	3
			REPUBLIC			
2	2	3	Lil Baby	It's Only Me	1	4
			QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN			
3	3	4	Bad Bunny	Un Verano Sin Ti	1	27
			RIMAS			
	NEW	5	Joji	Smithereens	5	1
			88RISING/WARNER			
4	5	6	Morgan Wallen	Dangerous: The Double Album	1	96
			BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC			
5	⑥	7	The Weeknd	The Highlights	2	91
			XO/REPUBLIC			
8	9	8	Harry Styles	Harry's House	1	25
			ERSKINE/COLUMBIA			
12	11	9	Zach Bryan	American Heartbreak	5	25
			BELTING BRONCO/WARNER			
15	17	10	GG Steve Lacy	Gemini Rights	7	17
			L-M/RCA			
84	⑫	11	Quavo & Takeoff	Only Built For Infinity Links	7	5
			QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN			
10	10	12	Beyoncé	Renaissance	1	15
			PARKWOOD/COLUMBIA			
13	14	13	Bailey Zimmerman	Leave The Light On	9	4
			ELEKTRA/WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/SEE/WMN			
⑰	16	14	Drake	Certified Lover Boy	1	62
			OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC			
-	⑧	15	Kodak Black	Kutthroat Bill: Vol. 1	8	2
			SNIPER GANG/ATLANTIC/AG			
⑱	⑮	16	Future	I Never Liked You	1	28
			FREEBANDZ/EPIC			
20	18	17	Rod Wave	Beautiful Mind	1	13
			ALAMO			
-	④	18	The Beatles	Revolver	1	87
			APPLE/CAPITOL/UME			
21	27	19	Taylor Swift	Folklore	1	120
			REPUBLIC			
22	23	20	Olivia Rodrigo	Sour	1	77
			GEFFEN/IGA			

CONGRATULATIONS JASON ISBELL AND THE 400 UNIT ON EIGHT SOLD-OUT NIGHTS!



2022 RESIDENCY

<p>JASON ISBELL AND THE 400 UNIT</p> <p>Fig. 1</p> <p>with Peter One</p> <p>date: 10.14.22 Venue: Ryman Auditorium Location: Nashville, TN</p>	<p>JASON ISBELL AND THE 400 UNIT</p> <p>Fig. 2</p> <p>with Grace Group Gospel Choir</p> <p>date: 10.15.22 Venue: Ryman Auditorium Location: Nashville, TN</p>	<p>JASON ISBELL AND THE 400 UNIT</p> <p>Fig. 3</p> <p>with Vagabon</p> <p>date: 10.16.22 Venue: Ryman Auditorium Location: Nashville, TN</p>	<p>JASON ISBELL AND THE 400 UNIT</p> <p>Fig. 4</p> <p>with Ruby Amanfu</p> <p>date: 10.18.22 Venue: Ryman Auditorium Location: Nashville, TN</p>	<p>JASON ISBELL AND THE 400 UNIT</p> <p>Fig. 5</p> <p>with Leyla McCalla</p> <p>date: 10.19.22 Venue: Ryman Auditorium Location: Nashville, TN</p>	<p>JASON ISBELL AND THE 400 UNIT</p> <p>Fig. 6</p> <p>with Amanda Shires</p> <p>date: 10.21.22 Venue: Ryman Auditorium Location: Nashville, TN</p>	<p>JASON ISBELL AND THE 400 UNIT</p> <p>Fig. 7</p> <p>with Hermanos Gutiérrez</p> <p>date: 10.22.22 Venue: Ryman Auditorium Location: Nashville, TN</p>	<p>JASON ISBELL AND THE 400 UNIT</p> <p>Fig. 8</p> <p>with CimaFunk</p> <p>date: 10.23.22 Venue: Ryman Auditorium Location: Nashville, TN</p>
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ARTIST 100

10

STEVE LACY

WEEKS ON CHART

18

Steve Lacy returns to his No. 10 Artist 100 high as his hit single “Bad Habit” tops two airplay charts: the all-format Radio Songs ranking (up 18% to 67.9 million in audience) and

Mainstream Top 40. His first leader on both lists also led the Billboard Hot 100 for three weeks in October and spent one week atop the Rhythmic Airplay chart (Nov. 5).

—GARY TRUST

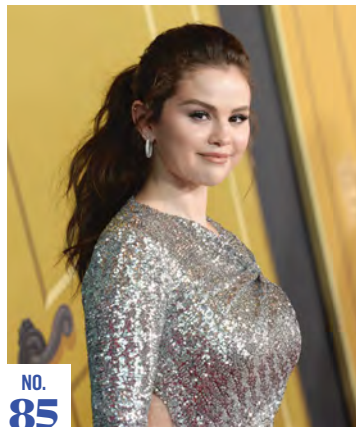


NO. 1

Swift's Sales Soar

Taylor Swift scores her record-extending 25th Digital Song Sales No. 1 with “Anti-Hero,” sparked by seven remixes made available for purchase Nov. 7-10. The track, which leads the Billboard Hot 100 for a third week, surged 1,793% to 327,000 downloads sold Nov. 4-10, according to Luminate, marking the biggest sales week for a song since her own “Look What You Made Me Do” launched with 353,000 (Sept. 16, 2017). “Anti-Hero,” which debuted with 13,000 sold and moved 17,000 in its second week, logs the largest third-week sales total for a song since Adele’s “Hello” (480,000; Nov. 28, 2015).

—G. T.



NO. 85

Gomez Makes Return

Selena Gomez reenters the Artist 100 at No. 85 as her new single, “My Mind & Me,” jumps 37-30 on the Mainstream Top 40 chart and debuts on the Billboard Hot 100 at No. 83. The ballad accompanies the documentary of the same name, which, released Nov. 4 on Apple TV+, chronicles the singer-songwriter-actress since the mid-2010s, with a focus on her physical and mental health. The song is one of her two current hits: “Calm Down,” originally by Rema and remixed with Gomez in August, rises to No. 6 on the Billboard Global Excl. U.S. chart and holds at its No. 33 best on Mainstream Top 40.

—G. T.

Artist 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist	IMPRINT/LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART	
1	1	1	#1 for 53 WEEKS Taylor Swift	REPUBLIC	1	433	
9	15	2	Drake	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	1	437	
76	67	3	21 Savage	SLAUGHTER GANG/EPIC	3	115	
4	4	4	Harry Styles	ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	1	176	
3	5	5	Morgan Wallen	BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	1	192	
		RE-ENTRY	6	Joji	8BRISING/WARNER	4	24
2	2	7	Lil Baby	QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/CAPITOL	1	235	
6	8	8	The Weeknd	XO/REPUBLIC	1	383	
8	9	9	Luke Combs	RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	1	297	
10	16	10	Steve Lacy	L-M/RCA	10	18	
5	7	11	Bad Bunny	RIMAS	1	241	
-	3	12	The Beatles	APPLE/CAPITOL/UME	2	259	
7	12	13	Doja Cat	KEMOSABE/RCA	1	147	
15	24	14	Kendrick Lamar	TOP DAWG/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/IGA	1	358	
11	17	15	Post Malone	REPUBLIC	1	333	
12	18	16	Ed Sheeran	ATLANTIC/AG	1	430	
18	19	17	Beyonce	PARKWOOD/COLUMBIA	1	228	
13	20	18	Bailey Zimmerman	ELEKTRA/WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/EMG/WMN	9	24	
-	6	19	Rihanna	WESTBURY ROAD/ROC NATION	2	236	
31	22	20	Fleetwood Mac	UNSIGNED	3	188	

BILLBOARD ARTIST 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ARTISTS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY ALBUM AND TRACK SALES AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE. RADIO AIRPLAY SALES AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE. STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA FROM ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS. LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND ABBREVIATIONS. © 2022 BILLBOARD MEDIA, LLC AND LUMINATE, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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TOP HOLIDAY ALBUMS

19

Santa Baby
Alicia Keys

ALICIA KEYS' first seasonal release, *Santa Baby*, steps in at No. 19 on Top Holiday Albums as the chart's highest debut of the week. It starts with 3,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending Nov. 10, according to Luminate, with traditional album sales powering 74% of that sum. The 11-track set is also Keys' first independently released album after a career

in the major-label system, first with J Records and then RCA. AMPED is distributing physical for *Santa Baby*, while EMPIRE is handling digital duties. The download and streaming editions of the album are exclusive to the iTunes Store and Apple Music, respectively, while the physical album is widely available to all retailers.

Keys' cover of "Please Come Home for Christmas" enters at No. 27 on the Adult Contemporary airplay chart, her seventh visit to the list.

Meanwhile, a second debut joins *Santa Baby* on Top Holiday Albums as Switchfoot's first Christmas release, *This Is Our Christmas Album*, arrives at No. 44 (1,000 units). Coincidentally, both sets include covers of a pair of classics: "Christmas Time Is Here" and "The Christmas Song." Plus, Michael Bubl 's *Christmas* rules the chart for a 37th nonconsecutive week, while the various-artists compilation *A Christmas Gift for You From Phil Spector* jumps 10-2 (a new peak) as holiday streaming kicked into gear post-Halloween during the chart's tracking week of Nov. 4-10.

On the all-genre Billboard 200, it's starting to get festive as five holiday albums reenter the list. Bubl 's *Christmas* (No. 48), the Spector album (No. 77), Mariah Carey's *Merry Christmas* (No. 85), Vince Guaraldi Trio's *A Charlie Brown Christmas* soundtrack (No. 90) and Nat "King" Cole's *The Christmas Song* (No. 182) return to the chart. All five reached the top 10 last season.

—KEITH CAULFIELD

Top Holiday Albums

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist	Title	WKS. ON CHART
		IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL		
2	1	#1 for 37 WEEKS Michael Bubl�	Christmas	143
		143/REPRISE/WARNER		
(10)	2	GG Various Artists	A Christmas Gift For You From Phil Spector	54
		PHIL SPECTOR/EMI BLACKWOOD/LEGACY		
(4)	3	Mariah Carey	Merry Christmas	300
		COLUMBIA/LEGACY		
3	4	Vince Guaraldi Trio	A Charlie Brown Christmas (Soundtrack)	309
		FANTASY/CONCORD		
9	5	Nat King Cole	The Christmas Song	254
		CAPITOL/UME		
7	6	Pentatonix	The Best Of Pentatonix Christmas	43
		RCA		
25	7	Bing Crosby	Christmas Classics	75
		CAPITOL/UME		
14	8	Andy Williams	The Andy Williams Christmas Album	45
		COLUMBIA/LEGACY		
16	9	Burl Ives	Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer	226
		MCA SPECIAL PRODUCTS/GEFFEN/UME		
8	10	Backstreet Boys	A Very Backstreet Christmas	4
		K-BAHN/BMG		
RE-ENTRY	11	Brenda Lee	Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree: The Decca Christmas Recordings	41
		DECCA/MCA NASHVILLE/UME		
RE-ENTRY	12	Frank Sinatra	Christmas With Frank Sinatra	4
		COLUMBIA/LEGACY		
17	13	Gene Autry	Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer And Other Christmas Classics	61
		COLUMBIA/LEGACY		
21	14	Elvis Presley	The Classic Christmas Album	72
		RCA/LEGACY		
(19)	15	Kelly Clarkson	Wrapped In Red	98
		19/RCA		
5	16	Matteo, Andrea & Virginia Bocelli	A Family Christmas	3
		DECCA/CAPITOL		
(1)	17	Soundtrack	Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas	45
		WALT DISNEY		
22	18	Dean Martin	The Dean Martin Christmas Album	63
		THE DEAN MARTIN FAMILY TRUST/SONY COMMERCIAL MUSIC GROUP/LEGACY		
HOT SHOT DEBUT	19	Alicia Keys	Santa Baby	1
		ALICIA KEYS		
23	20	Bing Crosby	White Christmas	274
		MCA SPECIAL PRODUCTS/GEFFEN/UME		

TOP HOLIDAY ALBUMS: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR HOLIDAY ALBUMS AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. BASED ON MULTIMEDIA CONSUMPTION BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, TRACK-EQUIVALENT ALBUM SALES AND STREAMING-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS. SEE CHARTS. LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2022 BILLBOARD MEDIA, LLC AND LUMINATE, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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ART ON TRIAL: PROTECT BLACK ART

In courtrooms across America, the trend of prosecutors using artists' creative expression against them is happening with troubling frequency. Regardless of the medium – music, the visual arts, writing, television, film – fans implicitly understand that creative expression is rooted in what artists see and hear; it's a reflection of the times we live in. The final work is a product of the artist's vision and imagination.

Rappers are storytellers, creating entire worlds populated with complex characters who can play both hero and villain. But more than any other art form, rap lyrics are essentially being used as confessions in an attempt to criminalize Black creativity and artistry.

For example, currently in Georgia's Fulton County, numerous members of the Young Stoner Life record label, led by Grammy-winning artist Jeffery Lamar Williams (aka Young Thug), are facing more than 50 allegations, including RICO charges that the label is a criminal gang. The allegations rely heavily on the artists' lyrics, which prosecutors claim are "overt evidence of conspiracy." In the indictment, Fulton County prosecutors argue that lyrics like "I get all type of cash, I'm a general" are a confession of criminal intent.

The use of lyrics against artists in this way is un-American and simply wrong. Beyond the obvious disregard for free speech and creative expression protected by the First Amendment, this racially targeted practice punishes already marginalized communities and their stories of family, struggle, survival, and triumph.

We urge prosecutors to voluntarily end this practice in their jurisdictions. In the meantime, we encourage legislators at the state and federal level to explicitly limit how creative expression can be used against defendants on trial. There are already signs of hope across America. We applaud Governor Newsom for recently signing a bill into law in California, and we urge action on bills currently under consideration in New York and New Jersey, as well as the RAP (Restoring Artistic Protection) Act legislation introduced by Rep. Hank Johnson and Rep. Jamaal Bowman in the U.S. Congress. The work is far from done, and we must all join together to defend creative freedom and expression.



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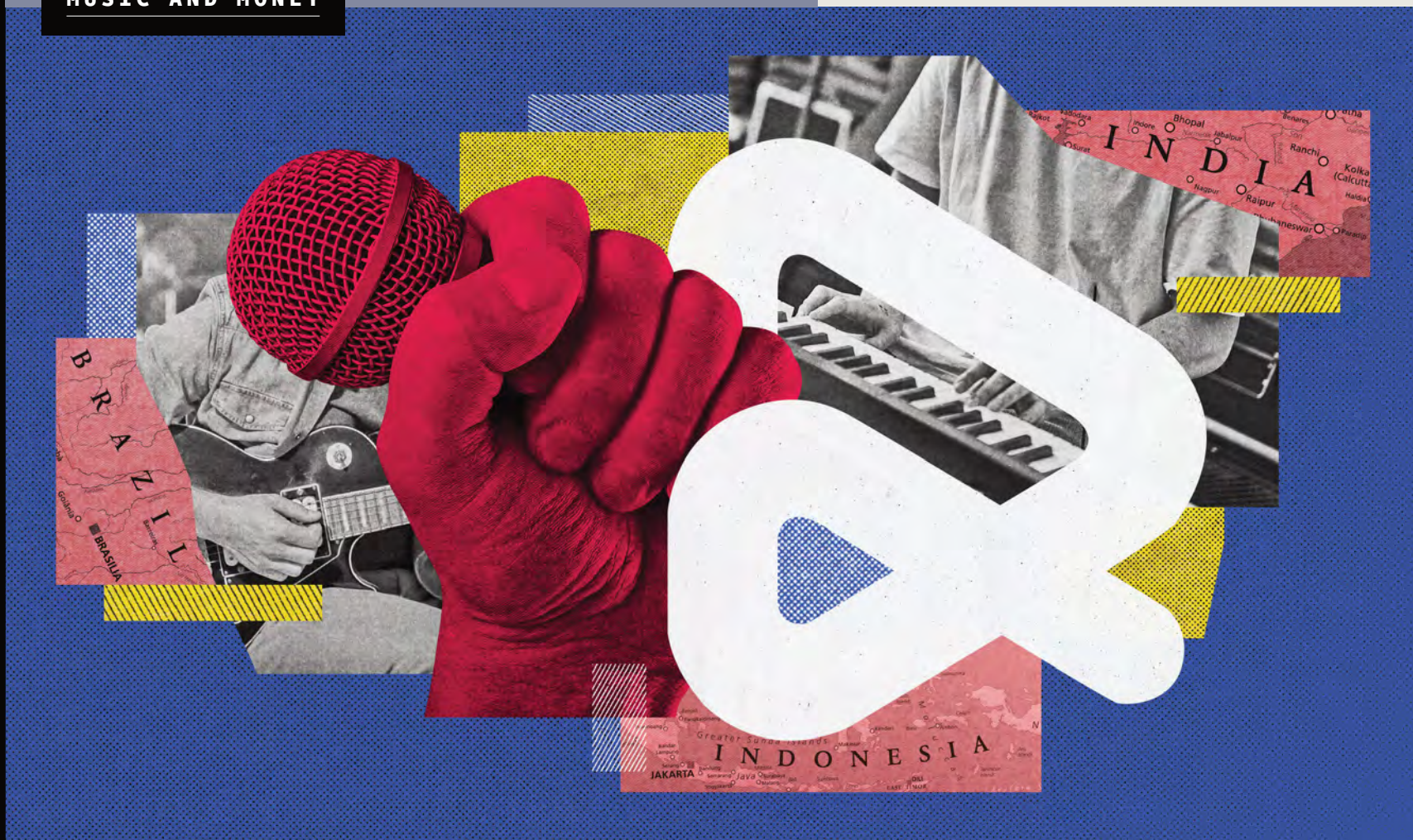
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MUSIC AND MONEY

PG. 26 SONGS ARE GETTING SHORTER

PG. 28 PUBLISHERS QUARTERLY

PG. 32 BANDLAB'S CEO ON EMPOWERING CREATORS



TikTok's Next Stream

As ByteDance explores expanding the reach of its Resso music streaming service, the industry is mixed over whether it will be good for business

BY DAN RYS // ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREI COJOCARU

ASK MUSIC BUSINESS EXECUTIVES TO characterize their relationship with TikTok and the response is typically a variation of, "It's complicated," as one major-label executive puts it.

As the short-form video streaming platform continues to dominate pop culture — last September, it claimed 1 billion monthly active users globally, a figure that has surely ballooned in the 13 months since — it has continued to draw the ire of the music industry for its low

payouts to rights holders, even as labels, managers and publishers increasingly rely on the platform to market singles and break artists.

That relationship will almost certainly become more convoluted now that TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, has signaled, rather cryptically, an intention to dive headfirst into the music streaming world that is currently dominated by Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music and YouTube through the expansion of its fledgling music

streaming service, Resso — which is available only in India, Indonesia and Brazil — into new territories, likely under a brand name associated with its most famous product. A TikTok representative declined to comment.

This past spring, the company registered the handles @TikTokMusic on both Twitter and Instagram; in May, it filed a trademark application with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for a service under that name. And in October, *The Wall Street Journal* reported, and *Billboard* has confirmed, that ByteDance is in conversations with all the major music rights holders to launch its music streaming service in additional countries in Latin America, Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand. According to industry sources, at least one of those deals is close to being finalized.

The possibility of TikTok going all-in on music streaming has already caught the attention of some of music's biggest power players. "It has been formidable to watch [TikTok's] growth and how well they've been executing throughout the years," said Spotify CEO Daniel Ek, during a third-quarter earnings call in October. Later that month, during Universal Music Group's earnings call, chairman/CEO

YouTube announced it now has more than 80 million Music and Premium subscribers globally.

Wasserman Media Group received an investment from **Providence Equity Partners**.

Paramount Global moved **VH1** to **BET Media Group**, uncoupling it from **MTV** for the first time.

Snoop Dogg signed with **WME** in all areas.

Lucian Grainge expressed a determination to get more from the company's use of music: "When you look at the funnel that TikTok has, when you look at the billions of views, the rate at which the company has grown..." he said. "We will fight and determine how our artists get paid and when they get paid in the same way that we have done throughout the industry for many years."

One of the biggest pain points for major rights holders — and a potential barrier to ByteDance's entry into music streaming — is the flat-fee licensing agreements that TikTok has with major rights holders. Negotiations are ongoing to get TikTok to return more value for the music it uses — including a cut of the advertising it generates. "No one right now wants to help ByteDance expand into significant

"No one right now wants to help ByteDance expand into significant material marketplaces without them fixing the TikTok situation."

material marketplaces without them fixing the TikTok situation," says an executive from the indie sector.

Other executives pointed to YouTube as a potential model for the relationship with TikTok moving forward. In that same October earnings call, Grainge noted that "YouTube recently announced that they were paying out to rights holders \$6 billion over a yearlong period... [and] have stated they want to be the No. 1 contributor of revenue to the music industry by 2025."

Were those licensing issues resolved, a new major player in the streaming ecosystem could bring in enormous value with such a user-friendly funnel. There's also the possibility that a TikTok music streaming service could shake up what has become a fairly staid, predictable marketplace. "TikTok is where the actual cultural fandom is happening," says Tatiana Cirisano, music industry analyst/consultant at MIDiA Research. "Spotify and [other streamers] still benefit from this because people hear songs on TikTok and go stream them on those platforms.

But if those people can just stay within the ByteDance ecosystem to do that and have their music delivered to them alongside the cultural context, I think that they will. That should really start to make Spotify and Apple Music and the other platforms a lot more nervous."

Music industry sources say that a TikTok music streaming play could be welcome, provided it follow its predecessors by pushing for paying subscribers as opposed to an ad-supported model. But several of those sources also point out that TikTok has no record of converting users to subscribers — it doesn't even offer a subscription tier — and if it employs the same business model with a music streaming service, artists and the recorded-music industry will not see much of a financial benefit. "TikTok has obviously been focused on scale for a very long time and not necessarily on ads or subscription or [average revenue per unit] in any real way," says one major-label executive. "That concerns me."

There are additional issues looming over TikTok's streaming plans. Most notably, Sony Music's contract with Resso, which expired in September. The two sides have yet to reach a new agreement, and that means Sony's catalog — including songs by global superstars Beyoncé, Adele, Harry Styles, Doja Cat and Shakira — is no longer available on the service. (A Sony representative declined to comment.)

Others say another hurdle is the perception that ByteDance's music strategy, including its music distribution business SoundOn, lacks coherence. There is also the threat of U.S. government intervention for the Chinese-owned company, which has come under fire in recent years over data-privacy issues that nearly got the service banned by the Trump administration in 2020. That issue has popped up again in recent weeks, with Brandon Carr, one of the five commissioners at the Federal Communications Commission, telling *Axios* in November that he doesn't "believe there is a path forward for anything other than a ban" over TikTok's handling of user data. China's potential invasion of U.S.-allied Taiwan could be an additional catalyst in this debate. (TikTok has said it is negotiating with the U.S. government to satisfy any national security concerns.)

Those are not insignificant concerns. But if TikTok can get it right, the upside for the music business is potentially massive, given TikTok's appeal to Gen Z and its penetration in global territories where streaming saturation remains low. One major-label executive who is rooting for them says, "We know the difference between hard and impossible, and we think this is in the category of hard." **E**

Additional reporting by Elias Leight.

Testing Resso

Like TikTok, the music streaming app uses social interactivity; unlike Spotify, it falls short in discovery

BILLBOARD ASKED CORRESPONDENTS in the three countries where Resso already operates — Brazil, India and Indonesia — to test-drive the app. The platform's biggest difference from Spotify and other major music streaming services is its level of interactivity. Users can comment on a song and share it on social media including "lyric quotes" (with the ability to choose specific lines). They can also discover other people's profiles through the comment section or from the list of those who liked the songs. User profiles have a picture, an "about me" and a cover image that can be personalized. It also displays a user's music preferences, playlists, following and followers, and on Resso, users can follow and send messages to one another.

LYRIC INTEGRATION

By clicking "lyric feedback," users can flag unsynchronized or wrong lyrics and add translations. When it debuted in 2019, Resso resembled TikTok in its ability to create and share "vibes" — a GIF, image or videoclip that automatically runs in the background when you stream a song — but the feature has since been removed.

DISAPPOINTING DISCOVERY

Resso is intuitive. Similar to TikTok, users swipe up and down to navigate between songs, which feels like the user is scrolling through a web article or navigating an endless stream of music content. Instead of the preview, next, shuffle and repeat buttons that music players usually have, Resso displays time-synced lyrics. But its recommendation engine lacks consistency, and it falls short in music discovery compared with Spotify and YouTube. In India, streaming the latest Taylor Swift single produced a prompt of "similar to 'Anti-Hero,'" but clicking on it took a user to a playlist of the most-played English-language hits in India. In Brazil, a "Classic Samba" playlist consisted of only 12 songs, some of which were not classics, while a "This Is Bahia" list generated 50 tracks. In Indonesia, initial recommendations turned up random Indonesian songs, some Japanese anime soundtracks, a lot of pop titles and remixes or covers by lesser-known artists.

NO IMPORT RESTRICTIONS

Resso can import playlists from over 10 other streaming services — including Spotify, Amazon Music, Apple Music and YouTube — through a partnership with the app TuneMyMusic. When users allow Resso access to their phone's microphone, they unlock the function to identify songs based on surrounding sounds or other phone applications — a bit like having a built-in Shazam app.

NO SONY ARTISTS

The absence of the Sony Music catalog was noticeable in all three countries. In addition to zero catalog by Harry Styles (Columbia) and Meghan Trainor (Epic), Resso's Top 50 playlist in India was missing the hit "Kesariya," which was released by the label group; in Brazil, the Som Livre/Sony catalogs of several top *sertanejo* artists, including Marília Mendonça, are not available; and in Indonesia, P!nk's "Just Give Me a Reason" (partly controlled by Sony Music Publishing) and The Neighbourhood's "Sweater Weather" (Columbia) were unavailable, with covers from lesser-known artists featured instead.

LOTS OF ADS

Resso's monthly subscription tier is priced at about \$1.45 in India, \$3.19 in Brazil and \$3.46 in Indonesia for the individual plan — about the same level as Spotify in India and slightly lower in Brazil and Indonesia. (Apple Music, at about \$1.20 for an individual plan, is priced less in India.) The ad-supported free service in India is less user-friendly than Spotify's version in all three countries. The number of ads per hour on Resso is higher than on Spotify, and users need to manually close ads in order for the next tune to stream. Free users are limited to 60 minutes of music per day, though watching a 15- to 20-second-long video ad unlocks an additional hour.

—AMIT GURBAXANI, INES IRAWAN AND BEATRIZ MIRANDA

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PLAYERS



UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

The major labels won \$46 million in damages from **Grande Communications** over illegal downloads by the internet service provider's subscribers.

California Proposition 28, which proposed new funding for arts and music education, enjoyed a landslide victory with help from the music business.

A NEW WAY FOR ARTISTS TO TRACK THEIR PAY

▶ **LAST YEAR, MILANA RABKIN LEWIS**, co-founder and CEO of distribution company and payment platform Stem, was among those who read a series of frustrated tweets from rapper Meek Mill. "I haven't got paid from music, and I don't know how much labels make off of me!" Mill wrote. "How much have you spent on me as an artist? How much have you made off me as an artist?"

"Why can't he know that?" Rabkin Lewis asks. The problem has frustrated her since she was an agent at UTA and saw "just how messy the whole process" of royalty accounting was. "We were working with major artists who realized they had no visibility into when they were going to get paid and how unrecouped they were," she recalls.



Rabkin Lewis

Part of the reason she started Stem in 2015 was to provide artists with more transparency. Now Stem is debuting Royalty Services, which aims to distill labyrinthine Excel spreadsheets into digestible dashboards and will be available to labels outside of Stem's distribution network. (The major labels also have their own versions of a dashboard, as does distributor DistroKid; sources say Stem's is easier to use.) Users can view summaries of overall costs, earnings and recoupment status. They can drill down into more granular data — to determine which streaming platform or song is generating the most money, for example — with a click. And the process of linking bank accounts and sending money to partners is straightforward.

"It's easy to see which song is doing the most each month on which platform, how much you're making, when you will recoup," says Rabkin Lewis. Stem chief product officer Brendan Kao calls the new dashboard "the next step in our mission to improve financial clarity for the entire music industry," including labels and artists.

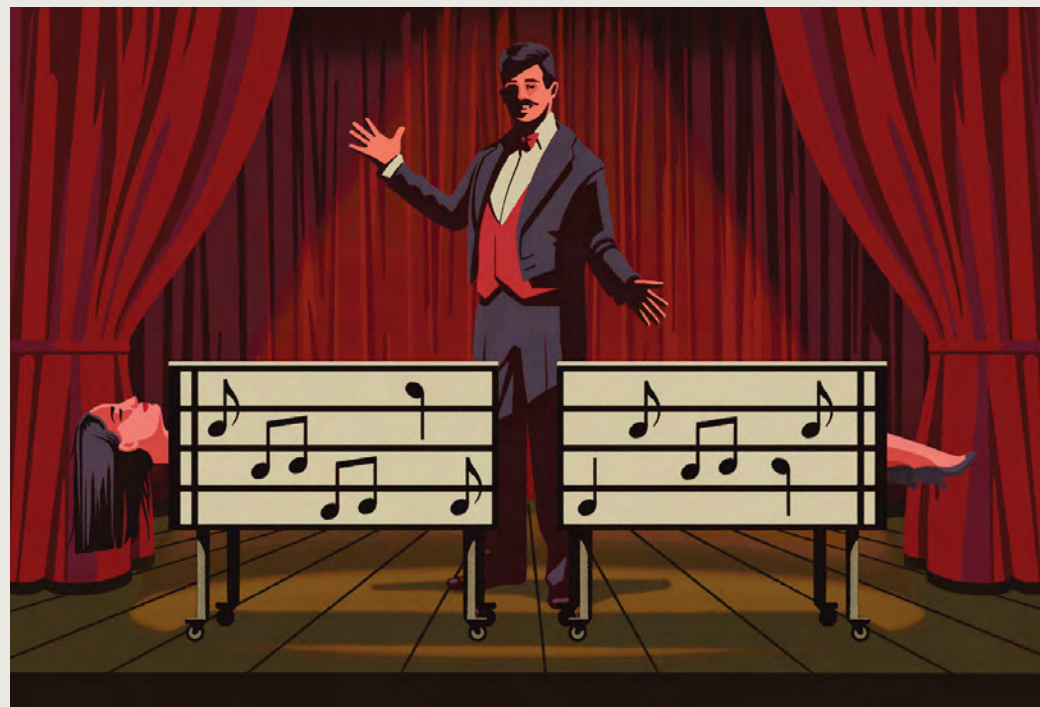
Another company hoping to inject more transparency into an industry known for opacity is CreateSafe, which made a Record Deal Simulator freely available online so artists can input their advance, recording and marketing costs to get a rough estimate of how many streams they need to generate to recoup their deal.

If anything, royalty accounting has only become more complicated in today's digital environment. Artists often release more music with more partners than in the past and work with more producers. And revenue comes from multiple streaming services, as well as platforms like TikTok and Twitch. "We're also seeing this trend of the admin and the responsibility of paying people out going more downstream," Rabkin Lewis adds. "Motown pays out Quality Control, for example, but there are so many layers of people that need to get paid after that," from artists to producers to engineers, and "often the people downstream from the major have no software."

Quality Control has started using Stem's technology, as has Foo's Gold. Rabkin Lewis says she hopes to have 50 clients by the middle of 2023.

Justin Blau, best known as DJ-producer 3LAU, is the founder of Blume Music, one of the first labels that signed on to use Royalty Services. "We used to hire an accounting firm," Blau says. "We'd send them everything, they'd send paperwork back, and then we'd send payments manually to each rights holder." This system was "inefficient," he continues, to the point that it was "just obnoxious." He was quick to sign up for Stem's new product. Adds Blau: "A lot of artists have been waiting for this."

—ELIAS LEIGHT



Shorter Songs Surge

On TikTok and streaming, fragmentary moments rule

I **N EARLY OCTOBER**, Lil Yachty uploaded the 83-second track "Poland" to SoundCloud along with a grumpy message: "STOP LEAKING MY SHIT." "Poland" consists of two keening hooks and some slack rhymes; a veteran publishing executive calls it "almost a tweet" more than a song.

Either way, it's a hit — it reached No. 40 on the Billboard Hot 100 — and it's indicative of a larger trend: The average length of popular songs has been shrinking steadily for years. "Everyone's aware of it; it's a reaction to the culture of sound bites that we moved toward," says Vincent "Tuff" Morgan, vp of A&R at independent publisher peermusic. "I have producers in the studio this week just going through and making songs shorter."

"Poland" isn't the shortest Hot 100 hit; that honor goes to Piko-Taro's 45-second-long "PPAP (Pen Pineapple Apple Pen)" from 2016. The following year, XXXTentacion's *17* — which featured 11 songs in 21 minutes — became a streaming sensation. In 2018, Travis Scott mashed three 90-second-ish songs into the massively successful "Sicko Mode."

Short songs are by no means a new development. The Chiffons' "He's So Fine" (1:52) topped the Hot 100 in 1963, and the following year, The Beatles conquered the world two minutes at a time. But if song length was driven then by the pace of AM radio, songwriters and A&R executives attribute today's concision to streaming services, where short songs

are less likely to be skipped and more likely to spur repeat listens, and to short-form video, which has gained a new level of commercial resonance thanks to TikTok. "Generally, a song that pops off on TikTok is based around a little moment," says songwriter-producer Elie Rizk (Mazie, Remi Wolf). "Subconsciously, you think about that: 'Let's pack a track with moments.' I don't feel the need to repeat a section."

Singer Capella Grey used similar language in 2021 to describe "Gyalis," another viral TikTok hit: "It's just a series of moments." Writer-producer David Harris (H.E.R., Snoh Aalegra) was among those who took note of that song's success. "That one was really interesting — just catchy fragments," he says.

As singles get shorter, so does the gap between a "catchy fragment" and a song. Streaming platforms like Spotify count 30 seconds of listening as a full play that triggers a royalty payout. But a generation native to TikTok may not require that a piece of music be 30 seconds to engage with it. With that in mind, it's easy to imagine that the length of singles will keep shrinking.

When a short verse goes viral on TikTok, "if that's what the artist wrote and that's what's being used [on the platform], who's to say that's not the song?" asks Daniel Sander, chief commercial officer for music technology company Feature.FM. "The question is: How do you monetize that differently?"

—E. L.



/// CHANGE ROADMAP MUSIC

#ChangeMusic empowers music industry leaders by providing a roadmap with five steps and industry-specific commitments.



1

INVEST IN BLACK TALENT AND CAREERS

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2

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3

INVEST IN CONTENT THAT ADVANCES RACIAL JUSTICE

Developing systems to bring in diverse voices and analyze content before release can make our world less hostile for Black people.

4

INVEST IN THE GROWTH AND PROSPERITY OF BLACK COMMUNITIES

As the music industry diversifies, safety practices—both physical and mental—must evolve to fully protect and serve a workforce that is not always kept safe by police.

5

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The **U.S. Copyright Office** proposed a new rule to ensure songwriters who invoke termination rights receive streaming royalties.

Universal Music Publishing Group signed an expanded deal with **Irving Berlin's** estate to represent his catalog globally.

SONY, UMPG SCORE TOP Q3 PUBLISHING SPOTS

Lizzo and Harry Styles buoy the Big Three, while Kate Bush keeps running up that hill **BY ED CHRISTMAN**

FOR THE SECOND CONSECUTIVE QUARTER, Sony Music Publishing and Universal Music Publishing Group split the top honors on the publisher rankings. Sony topped the Top Radio Airplay chart in the third quarter with a lead over No. 2 UMPG of more than seven percentage points, while the reverse occurred on the Hot 100 Songs chart: UMPG squeaked to a No. 1 finish, surpassing Sony by close to one percentage point. This is each publisher's second quarter in a row atop those brackets.

Harry Styles' "As It Was" came in at No. 1 on Hot 100 Songs for the second quarter in a row and held steady at No. 2 on Top Radio Airplay for the same period. Lizzo's "About Damn Time" finished first on Top Radio Airplay and second on Hot 100 Songs and was the top song for each of the Big Three publishers in all but one category. Third-quarter top 10 publishers with a stake in "As It Was" are UMPG and Pulse, while UMPG, Sony and Warner Chappell Music each have a share in "About Damn Time."



Bush

Kate Bush's *Stranger Things*-fueled resurgence continued as her Sony-published "Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)" finished at No. 3 on Hot 100 Songs and No. 7 on Top Radio Airplay. Because she is the track's sole songwriter, it established her as the top Hot 100 songwriter of the quarter.

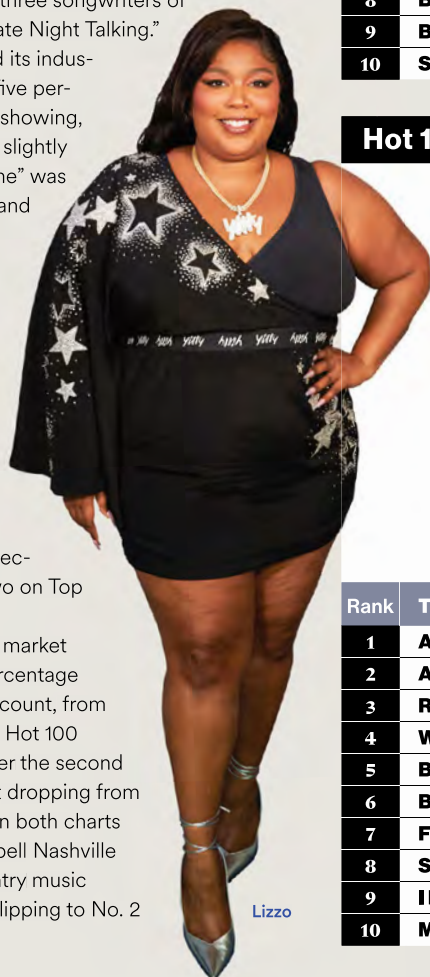
Styles and his main co-writer, Thomas "Kid Harpoon" Edward Percy Hull, took the top songwriter honors on Top Radio Airplay for "As It Was" and for their credits as two of the three songwriters of another Top Radio Airplay top 10 hit, "Late Night Talking."

On Top Radio Airplay, Sony improved its industry-leading market share by more than five percentage points over its second-quarter showing, 25.62%, even though its song count fell slightly from 64 to 63. Lizzo's "About Damn Time" was Sony's top title on both Hot 100 Songs and Top Radio Airplay.

UMPG held on to its No. 1 Hot 100 Songs ranking for a second quarter, though its market share was down half a percentage point from its second-quarter share, 31.25%, and its song count fell from 67 to 60.

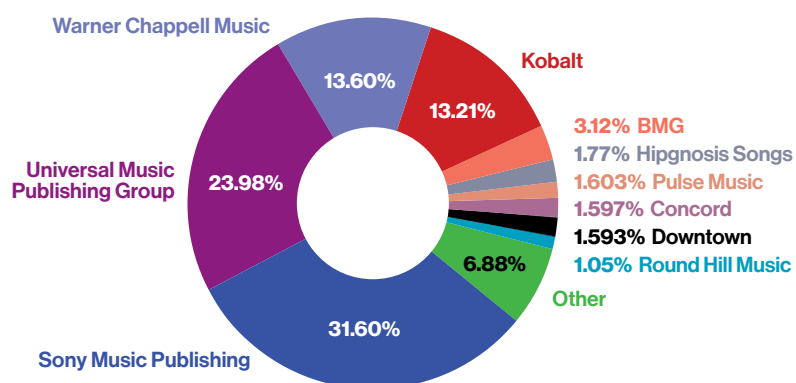
Warner Chappell, Kobalt and BMG finished at Nos. 3, 4 and 5, respectively, on both Top Radio Airplay and Hot 100 Songs — a pecking order that has remained consistent for seven consecutive quarters on Hot 100 Songs and two on Top Radio Airplay.

Warner Chappell's Top Radio Airplay market share dropped slightly less than two percentage points from last quarter, as did its song count, from 54 to 48. But the publisher improved its Hot 100 Songs share by more than one point over the second quarter's 14.66%, despite its song count dropping from 53 to 49. Warner Chappell's top song on both charts was "About Damn Time." Warner Chappell Nashville also gave up its status as the No. 1 country music publisher for 22 consecutive quarters, slipping to No. 2 behind Sony. **B**



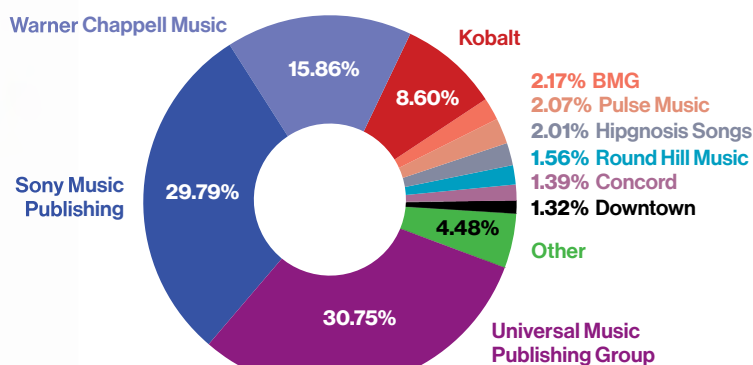
Lizzo

Top Radio Airplay: Publishers*



Rank	Title	Artist	Label
1	About Damn Time	Lizzo	Atlantic
2	As It Was	Harry Styles	Erskine/Columbia
3	Sunroof	Nicky Youre & dazy	Thirty Knots/Columbia
4	First Class	Jack Harlow	Generation Now/Atlantic
5	Late Night Talking	Harry Styles	Erskine/Columbia
6	I Like You (A Happier Song)	Post Malone Featuring Doja Cat	Mercury/Republic
7	Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)	Kate Bush	Fish People/Noble and Brite/Rhino/Warner
8	Break My Soul	Beyoncé	Parkwood/Columbia
9	Big Energy	Latto	StreamCut/RCA
10	Stay	The Kid LAROI & Justin Bieber	Raymond Braun/Def Jam/Columbia

Hot 100 Songs: Publishers*



Rank	Title	Artist	Label
1	As It Was	Harry Styles	Erskine/Columbia
2	About Damn Time	Lizzo	Nice Life/Atlantic
3	Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)	Kate Bush	Fish People/Noble and Brite/Rhino/Warner
4	Wait for U	Future Featuring Drake & Tems	Freebandz/Epic
5	Bad Habit	Steve Lacy	L-M/RCA
6	Break My Soul	Beyoncé	Parkwood/Columbia
7	First Class	Jack Harlow	Generation Now/Atlantic
8	Sunroof	Nicky Youre & dazy	Thirty Knots/Columbia
9	I Like You (A Happier Song)	Post Malone Featuring Doja Cat	Mercury/Republic
10	Me Porto Bonito	Bad Bunny & Chenchó Corleone	Rimas

* For the Top 10 Publishers Top Radio Airplay chart, percentage calculations were based upon the overall top 100 detecting songs from 1,994 U.S. radio stations electronically monitored by Luminate 24 hours a day, seven days a week during the period of July 1 to Sept. 29. For Top 10 Publishers Hot 100 Songs, percentage calculations were based upon the top 100 songs as ranked by Billboard Hot 100 points calculated from digital sales, streaming and Luminate-tracked radio airplay detections during the period of July 1 to Sept. 29, reflecting the issue dates of July 16 through Oct. 8. Publisher information for musical works on both charts has been identified by the Harry Fox Agency. A "publisher" is defined as an administrator, copyright owner and/or controlling party.

NMPA CONGRATULATES THE TOP Q3 MUSIC PUBLISHERS

HOT 100

UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP

SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

WARNER CHAPPELL

KOBALT

BMG

PULSE MUSIC

HIPGNOSIS

ROUND HILL MUSIC

CONCORD

DOWNTOWN

RADIO AIRPLAY

SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP

WARNER CHAPPELL

KOBALT

BMG

HIPGNOSIS

PULSE MUSIC

CONCORD

DOWNTOWN

ROUND HILL MUSIC

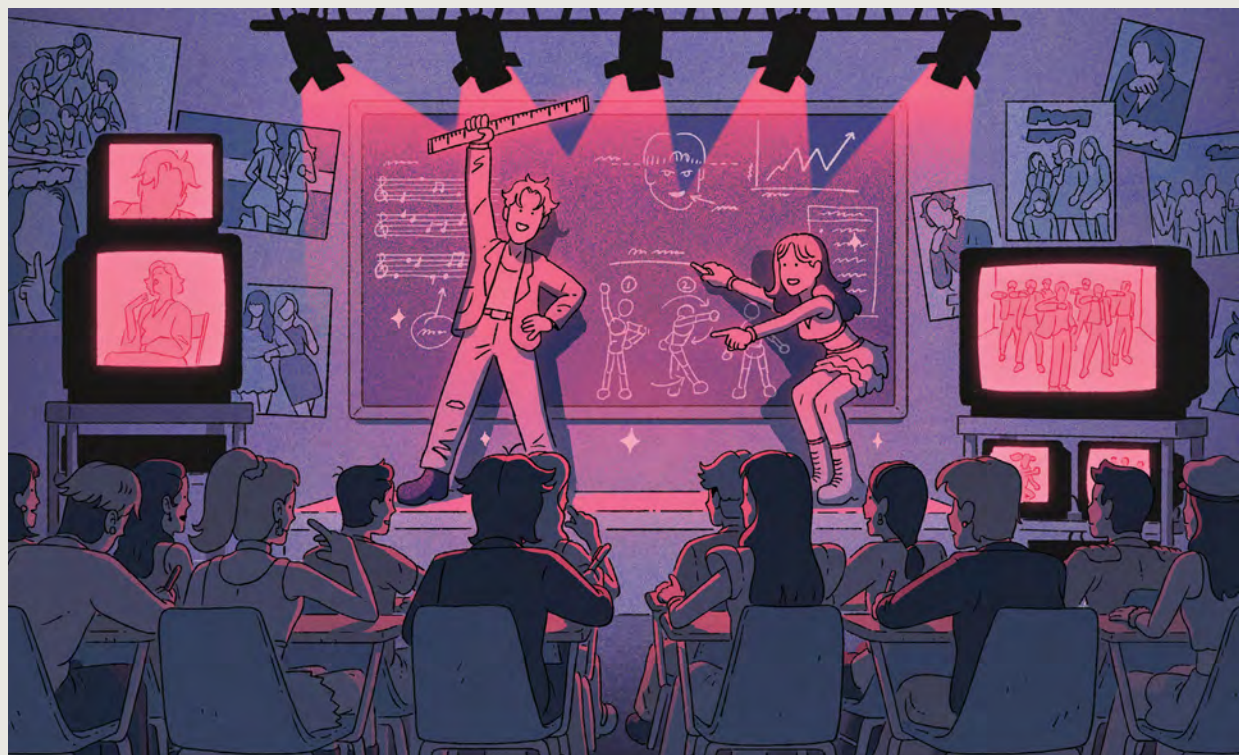


NMPA IS THE LEADING VOICE FOR PROMOTING AND ADVANCING THE INTERESTS OF MUSIC PUBLISHERS AND THEIR SONGWRITING PARTNERS.

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Universal Music Publishing China signed a global administration agreement with **RYCE Publishing**.

A U.K. inquiry found “significant failures” in the emergency response to the deadly 2017 bombing at an **Ariana Grande** concert in Manchester, England.



K-POP ACADEMY'S OPEN ENROLLMENT

Groups from Japan and elsewhere are hoping to find global success by training and marketing themselves through South Korea, not their home countries

BY JEYUP S. KWAAK

TOKYO — This summer, the Japanese entertainment company Avex launched the seven-member girl group XG on a weekly music TV show — in South Korea, instead of Japan. The move was strategic. Rather than promote the group, which was five years in the making, at home, Avex leveraged Korea's K-pop-rich media market to make an international splash.

It's a prime example of the newest chapter in K-pop's globalization: non-Korean acts tapping into the training, promotion, styles and strategies that made the genre an international success.

Korean networks' many music programs showcase dozens of bands and live performances, which are readily available on YouTube — a key factor in K-pop's international expansion, according to industry experts. In stark contrast, Japanese TV networks have been slow to embrace YouTube because sharing original content there often leads to unauthorized reuse. “Japanese TV shows are really inside — we can't really reach to the global fans,” says Reina Aiguchi, a manager in Avex's digital marketing group who works with XG. “In order to gain the global fans, we had to go on Korean TV shows.”

XG — like JO1 from Japan and boy

band SB19 from the Philippines — followed the K-pop star incubation model, drawing their members from thousands of auditioning hopefuls and undergoing yearslong training regimens. Thanks to instruction from K-pop vocal coaches and choreographers, they appear to be gaining traction, accumulating millions of audio streams and YouTube views. What remains unclear, though, is whether they will lure non-Korean listeners away from Korean bands or grow the genre's fan base by having lesser-known artists attract more listeners.

Either way, experts say the development could help boost K-pop's long-term viability worldwide. Non-Korean K-pop bands may displease some existing fans, but this expansion evolves the genre beyond Korean pop. “If globalizing Korean acts was the model in the past, now the mindset is to create global-level groups around the world,” says Kim Young-dae, a Seoul-based music critic. “It didn't happen overnight. This has been the goal [the industry] has been working on for the last two decades.”

K-pop acts with members from outside Korea aren't a new phenomenon. Starting in the 1990s, agencies recruited from the Korean diaspora and later expanded the

talent pool to such key target markets as Japan and China. From Super Junior to TWICE to Aespa, bands have benefited from members who communicate with fans and media in relevant markets in their own languages.

But this latest wave of K-pop groups has no Korean members. Instead, they are working within Korea to take advantage of the know-how, distribution channels and global attention K-pop has established. They were often exposed to K-pop from childhood and see Korea as a platform for international stardom.

XG, for example, is produced by an agency led by Simon Jakops, a former K-pop idol who was born in the United States to Korean and Japanese parents. Avex selected XG's members from a pool of 15,000 Japanese girls in 2017 and put them through five years of training — starting when they were ages 10 to 15 — to master hip-hop and R&B music, as well as English and Korean. They lived together in a dormitory in Tokyo and moved to Seoul during the pandemic. Singing and rapping in English — with the occasional Japanese word thrown in — the group made 14 appearances on six different Korean TV shows in June and July to promote its first two singles, “Tippy Toes”

and “Mascara,” Aiguchi says. The group is marketed by XGALX, an agency overseen in Tokyo by Avex, which, in recent years, has struggled to repeat its J-pop idol successes from the 1990s and 2000s.

“We wanted to refer to K-pop and have those methods for XG,” says Yudai Hasegawa, manager for XGALX, speaking through Aiguchi's translation. “Second is, we wanted to shoot those music videos in Korea, where they have good music video directors.” Such strategies appear to be making a difference: XG has about 700,000 subscribers on YouTube and around 600,000 on TikTok, while “Mascara” reached No. 14 on the Billboard Japan Hot 100, spending 11 weeks on the chart. In addition, the group won the Rising Star award at the MTV Video Music Awards Japan in November. Comments below the group's videoclips contain English, Bahasa (Indonesia) and Spanish, alongside Japanese.

JO1, a Japanese boy band formed from the 11 winners of the 2019 reality TV contest *Produce 101 Japan*, also received training in South Korea. Its music, often a collaboration between Japanese and Korean producers, is sung in Japanese with English words peppered into the mix, a K-pop formula for upping the songs' global appeal. The members have appeared on Korean variety shows and K-pop-focused YouTube channels. (Their latest single, “SuperCali,” borrows the famous compound word from *Mary Poppins*.) JO1 has racked up several No. 1s on the Billboard Japan Hot 100, including “Bokura no Kisetsumi” (“Our Season”), which topped the chart last December and has nearly 420 million combined views on YouTube.

Korean agencies in recent years have also launched non-Korean bands that perform K-pop-like music — notably SM Entertainment's China-gearred boy band WayV, as well as NiziU, an all-Japanese girl group from JYP Entertainment and Sony Music Entertainment Japan. “We can't deny the K-pop influence [on JO1],” says Choi Shin-hwa, CEO of Lapone Entertainment, a joint venture between entertainment conglomerates CJ ENM of South Korea and Yoshimoto Kogyo of Japan that produces JO1. He doesn't describe Lapone artists as K-pop, but rather envisions “a new genre that is a hybrid of K-pop and Japanese culture.”

In Tokyo, some members of JO1 told *Billboard* they grew up listening to K-pop CDs from boy band TVXQ and pop rock band CNBLUE, which their respective mothers, as fans, had played around the house. “We keep on working with the hopes of catching up with all the awesome K-pop artists who are active today,” says member Issei Mamehara. **B**

Additional reporting by Alexei Barrionuevo.

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Veteran agency and label executive **Adam Wright** was appointed CFO of Merlin.

A yet-to-be-named fintech platform that sells fractional shares in song catalogs hired The Orchard co-founder **Scott Cohen** as CEO.

From The Desk Of... Meng Ru Kuok

CO-FOUNDER/CEO, BANDLAB

BY LARS BRANDLE

LAST JULY, A 17-YEAR-old artist from Houston named d4vd released “Romantic Homicide,” a track he had made using BandLab, the Singapore-based social music creation platform. “He recorded a song in his sister’s closet on his mobile phone with Apple earbuds, using a stock preset,” says CEO Meng Ru Kuok — stock presets being one of many things aspiring musicians can find on BandLab, which wants to make it possible for anyone with an idea, no matter their skill set, to create music. “Romantic Homicide” became an example of that ideal: The brooding, guitar-hooked track caught fire on TikTok, and d4vd (pronounced “David”) signed to Interscope, with the song peaking at No. 45 on the Billboard Hot 100.

“I was cheering him on,” Meng says of d4vd. “We’re so excited and rewarded when people move on to other places, whether they stay independent or get signed by major labels.”

BandLab, which was founded in 2015, doesn’t receive royalties from music made on its platform. Instead, the company makes money on artist services (which include distribution, livestreaming and BandLab Boost) that allow acts to turn their profiles or postings into ads on the platform to better reach the 50 million registered users BandLab has.

Meng, 34, has aggressively expanded BandLab’s assets,

which are grouped under the holding company of Caldecott Music Group. Along with instrument manufacturing and sales (including Michigan-based Heritage Guitars and Asia’s largest musical instrument retailer, Swee Lee), Caldecott has editorial properties like Guitar.com, *Uncut* and *NME*. (BandLab acquired 49% of *Rolling Stone* in 2016 before selling it in 2019 to Penske Media, *Billboard*’s parent company.) In September, *Billboard* and BandLab launched the Bringing BandLab to *Billboard* portal to expose emerging artists to a global audience.

“On a day-to-day basis, it is not just geographically split, but also mentally in terms of all those areas,” Meng says.

In November 2021, BandLab announced the acquisition of independent artist platform ReverbNation from its parent company, eMinor. And in April, it announced it had raised \$65 million in series B funding, bringing the valuation of the platform upwards of \$300 million. BandLab envisions a different sort of future — shorter songs made by anyone, using presets or even artificial intelligence (AI) — with the idea that the more music that exists, the more need there is for its range of offerings, from equipment cases to advertising. Business, says Meng, is “gangbusters, in terms of focusing on product and improving the experiences that we bring out.”



Meng

Amazon laid off a reported 150 employees at its live-radio app Amp, saying it has chosen "to consolidate a few teams" at the division.

Outgoing AIM CEO **Paul Pacifico** will succeed Mohammed Al Mulhem as head of the Saudi Music Commission.

Do you feel that d4vd's success validated your business model?

Yeah, it's extremely rewarding. We've seen stories like that happening thick and fast. Earlier this year, we had an amazing viral success with an incredibly talented young rapper. He was 13 when he started making music on BandLab. He's 14 now. His name is Cl4pers. He has 1.2 billion views on his hashtag on TikTok alone. It's not just the viral success but the incredible talent — like d4vd, like Cl4pers — that, prior to BandLab, wasn't making music with the capabilities that their creativity would have afforded them.

D4vd is now signed to Interscope Records and [its artist development/management joint venture] Darkroom and has changed his personal career and

on BandLab. I still feel like we're a small platform getting started. We have 80 full-time staff, 140 if you include all team members around the world. That has grown relatively quickly, and we have a lot of hiring plans in place to expand even further in the next six to 12 months.

Do the creators get royalties?

Yeah, that goes to the artists. We don't take a position on artists' rights. There's a big movement, obviously, toward independent creators being fully in control of what they own. That's really important to us. We're focused on empowering the artists. The music is their content. So they are generating their own royalties if they're distributed by BandLab or ReverbNation or via TuneCore, CD Baby, DistroKid — that's one way they can be

100%. We don't take a commission from the artists' earnings after processing fees; Stripe and PayPal are involved in that transaction. We as a platform don't take a cut of the creator economy. We believe it's very important the artists are able to monetize. Especially in the United States, you guys get taxed enough. They don't need more taxes on top from a platform.

How do you make your cut?

We're focused on empowering artists in creating, making that accessible and free, and truly democratizing music. What Apple did with GarageBand was obviously an incredible progression in democratizing music creation, but 80% of the world uses Android. To be able to afford an iPhone is already out of reach for many people around the world.

announced. There's our BandLab Boost membership. We also have ReverbNation services that come through membership and various a la carte services.

Your business also supplies royalty-free music packages?

We do provide royalty-free samples. One of our features is BandLab Sounds: We collaborate with artists, commission our own sample packs for people to use in their music-making. And those are provided royalty-free — loop samples, one shots, which are utilized by musicians all around the world to make music. We also have an AI feature called SongStarter, which helps people generate royalty-free song ideas to start off their songwriting process.

All the music on BandLab is original music and original content. We're very strict and pro-rights owners because we're trying to protect the creators and all rights holders. This is something that we take very seriously with regard to licensing. It's about protecting rights holders both on platform and off platform.

Do you train your AI to mimic popular human artists?

No, we don't.

In the United States, the presumption, based on the Copyright Office, is that only works by human authors can be copyrighted. Who will own the copyright to AI-created portions of songs?

Ownership of content that is developed further from our AI SongStarter tool is owned by the user.

Do you offer marketing services?

We provide a variety of services through BandLab but also through our ancillary services. We acquired ReverbNation last year, which allows you to run third-party advertising campaigns on sites like *Billboard*, *NME* and *Rolling Stone*. They can buy campaigns and centralize their music for promotion on Instagram, Facebook and to promote videos they release on YouTube, for example. We recently announced the beginning of the

rollout of BandLab Boost, which allows users to promote, for a fee, their posts and their profile on the BandLab network.

Do you have relationships with the streaming services?

Absolutely. We're not a [digital service provider]. We believe there are platforms out there that do their job incredibly well. We're here to empower the music that has been created that ends up on these platforms. We obviously have commercial relationships, like our distribution relationships, but also where we can funnel exciting talent that blows up on their platform.

Whom do you see as a rival?

I've been asked that question a bunch. BandLab is creating a whole new category of platform. There are certain services out there that do similar things, but our whole perspective on the ecosystem is that music is collaborative. By nature, it's not just about the tools — it's about collaboration, it's about different influences when people get together. Services need to collaborate as well. That's where we work closely with other platforms that people outside may see as competitors. There are lots of ways a platform like BandLab can have relationships as a funnel to other services through affiliate partnerships. There are many businesses that have the full suite of tools that we have as BandLab, and it's our core objective to work closely with all of them. If the music market grows and the creator market grows, everyone benefits.

How has the democratization of music creation that BandLab and other companies and applications have enabled changed music?

The barrier to making a hit is now fundamentally more accessible to anyone. You don't have to have had a long education or engineering degree to do so. So much of this is being empowered by short-form video and changes in the music industry where a hit song is no longer three minutes long but 10 to 30 seconds — which is really scary and meaningful at the same time. **Q**

"We don't believe that people's creativity or their ability to make music or express themselves should be limited by their spending power or their knowledge of how to write a song."

— MENG

the life of his family. Millions of people around the world have listened to his song and have really connected with it. It's truly special, and it just reminds us of what we're doing every day, beyond just creating a great business that we're excited about.

What are the numbers behind that growth at BandLab?

Our last public figure that we shared, we have over 50 million registered users around the world. More than 16, 17 million songs are being made a month

generating money off their music. The artist gets 100%. That's what we do.

You don't take commission?

We don't. Actually, we have a lot of creator economy features on BandLab. For example, someone can tip users on BandLab in their profiles. We allow users to subscribe to other users, similar to Patreon or OnlyFans. We have features where artists can sell their tracks and albums, similar to the iTunes Store or Bandcamp, for example, and the artist keeps

We don't believe that people's creativity or their ability to make music or to express themselves should be limited by their spending power or their knowledge of how to write a song.

Where we make our money is actually in artist services. If you are spending to distribute your music to Spotify, Apple Music, if you are running a promotional campaign — things to help promote your music or develop your career as an artist — that's where we charge. We have a subscription service that we've just

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RANGE

MUSIC



PRIMARY WAVE
MUSIC

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Kelela photographed Nov. 3 at
Rein Studios in Brooklyn.

The Quest For Kelela

After a five-year hiatus, the acclaimed electro-R&B artist found clarity on her purpose — and her new album, *Raven*, will celebrate those who have always known

BY HERAN MAMO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JAI LENNARD



I **N EARLY** September, a 23-second clip posted to Twitter teased that Kelela's five-year break from music was soon coming to an end — and sent fans into a frenzy. The clip comprised several fan tweets begging for her comeback; one, plucked from the opening sequence of the animated series *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, characterized it best: "When the world needed her most... she vanished."

After debuting in 2013 with her mixtape *Cut 4 Me*, the elusive, genre-bending singer upped the ante every two years, releasing her *Hallucinogen* EP in 2015 and then her critically acclaimed debut album, *Take Me Apart*, in 2017. Yet as the concurrent crises of the coronavirus pandemic and the resurgent Black Lives Matter movement took hold in 2020, Kelela says, "I think the uprising kind of led me into a place of wanting to rethink this whole fucking thing and, quite frankly, wanting to create a more liberatory model for myself."

The 39-year-old Ethiopian-American artist born Kelela Mizanekristos has always been openly critical of the music business, calling out colorism and other issues in interviews. But what was happening in the world helped her feel more galvanized to free herself from business relationships that didn't advocate for her artistry. In 2020, she wrote letters to the various people and companies she had business with explaining her needs, and based upon their responses — or lack thereof, from some — she cut ties, including with Sony Music Publishing. (The company responded the same day, a source says.) "Because we had an uprising, Black people now have more permission to be like, 'I don't like that,'" she says. "I am a darker-skinned, Black femme who makes left-of-center R&B/electronic music. I need to work with people who get it."



Kelela's music is uniquely situated between electronic dance and alternative R&B, with the music of her childhood in Washington, D.C. — '90s R&B, soul, jazz and world, like Ethiopia's Mahmoud Ahmed and South Africa's Miriam Makeba — serving as key influences. She became a fixture within the rave community for the way in which she paired retro R&B vocals with futuristic club beats — and kicked it up a notch when she recruited Black queer musicians like Kaytranada and Ahya Simone to warp her lead vocals on a *Take Me Apart* remix album in 2018.

Throughout her career, Kelela has felt she has had to straddle two audiences: Black fans who are mesmerized by her lush R&B vocals and white fans who are entranced by her club production, thus becoming "a point of discovery for both,"

she says. "That's how I was always thinking about it." With her long-awaited second full-length, *Raven* — due Feb. 10, 2023, on her longtime independent label home, Warp Records — she plans to "service the people who are there in the front row and have always been there," says Kelela. "Queer Black people."

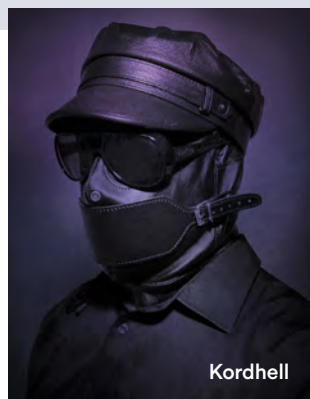
On *Raven*, Kelela offers poignant reflections about not allowing herself to be swallowed up in her sorrow but rather celebrating her self-renewal and relishing in her resilience. "As a person who has always felt outside, there's a deep catharsis in finding an entire social network of people who are also on the outside and making a group based off that marginalization," she says. "When I service my immediate community, I service myself. Before, I was taking that for granted. I would be like, 'Those people

are going to always be there no matter what I do.' And I think that's anti-Black, or there's some internalized shit there that I don't like, and that's not serving me, that doesn't help me."

She explains, while reading aloud from Wikipedia, that ravens "often act as psychopomps" known to mediate between two worlds, an idea she feels speaks to her own music. On *Raven* — made of self-recorded demos she later engineered herself along with different producers around the world — the moments where her vocals aren't present can be the most powerful. In their absence, a specific blend of sensual pop-R&B balladry with atmospheric drum'n'bass beats comes into focus. Being Black is not a monolithic experience, and Kelela's music cannot be consumed that way either. "My pursuit is to get you introduced to club music and then be able to enjoy it when there's not a vocal guiding you every time," she says. "You can see that I let go more."

Beyoncé shared in that mission with her latest album, *Renaissance*, a dance collection with a diva house lead single, "Break My Soul," which became the artist's first solo No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 14 years. The release ushered legions of Black people worldwide onto the dancefloor; Kelela believes it also provided newcomers a "reference point" to her music, which they might have overlooked even just a few years ago. "I'm so happy someone like B would help Black people own this music that has been obscured and not perceived as Black," she says.

Ahead, Kelela confirms she'll release a *Raven* remix set because, like last time, it allows her to not stress about the album version of each track. And she knows her community will always be ready for more. "Queer Black people have the range — and no one else has been having the range." **B**



Kordhell

Play That Phonky Music

KORDHELL STUMBLED upon the YouTube channel Evil Aesthetic while digitally crate-digging in 2020. The U.K.-born, Los Angeles-based producer

had a background in black metal; Evil Aesthetic specializes in phonk — a style indebted to '90s Memphis hip-hop. Kordhell heard a kinship. "Phonk sounded similar to what I was already doing," he says. "It was super dark, with almost a horror vibe, but in a hip-hop way."

The producer decided to try his hand at phonk, and since then, the genre's profile and Kordhell's have risen together. Phonk fandom had primarily been underground, but starting in 2020, it became increasingly popular on TikTok, soundtracking clips of car racing, weight lifting and more. That same year, Kordhell scored a record deal with independent

label and music incubator Black 17 Media. He now has two of the most commercially successful singles associated with the genre and has landed a spot on the upcoming mixtape to the 10th *Fast and Furious* movie — much of which is phonk-based.

While phonk encompasses a slew of subgenres, one macho variant known as drift phonk has become most popular. Drift phonk hits like Pharmacist's "North Memphis" and Kaito Shoma's "Scary Garry" are icy, volatile songs that incorporate samples from Memphis rappers like DJ Paul, founder of Three 6 Mafia. Tyler Blatchley, who founded Black 17

in 2015, first discovered "Scary Garry" on TikTok, where it was soundtracking adrenalized automotive videos. His label had previously distributed some of DJ Paul's solo releases, making Blatchley ideally positioned to clear the sample and officially release the track, which started to gain attention on Spotify. After that, he says, "I found more of these phonk songs and just started playing middleman, clearing the samples and putting them on Spotify." Black 17 now works with more than 300 phonk acts.

Now, the biggest threat to drift phonk's growth is geopolitical: Many of its most popular artists are from Russia

and Ukraine, two countries at war. A number of acts on Black 17's roster have tried to flee their homes since fighting broke out in February. But this tumultuous backdrop hasn't slowed phonk's rise. There's the Artist Partner Group-commissioned *Fast and Furious* mixtape and the launch of Spotify's official phonk playlist in May. By the end of 2022, Black 17's roster of phonk signings alone is on track to earn over 4 billion Spotify streams. As for Kordhell, he recently became one of the 500 most popular artists on the platform, a first for a phonk producer. "I want to ride the wave," he says. —ELIAS LEIGHT

2022

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TINA DAVIS
SVP OF A&R

**CHRISTIAN "HITMAKA"
WARD**
VP OF A&R



BEST BETS

THE 94TH ANNUAL Academy Awards telecast in March got off to a strong start, with Beyoncé singing her best original song contender, “Be Alive,” from *King Richard* on the tennis courts where Venus and Serena Williams practiced as children. Depending on how the 2023 Oscar nominations shake out, the producers of next year’s telecast just might be able to book an opening number with comparable star power. When the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences reveals its shortlists of 15 contenders for best original song and best original score (as well as 10 other categories) on Dec. 21, Rihanna is a strong contender for “Lift Me Up,” which she co-wrote for *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. So are Doja Cat for “Vegas” (*Elvis*), Taylor Swift for “Carolina” (*Where the Crawdads Sing*) and Lady Gaga for “Hold My Hand” — the last of which could be in contention along with fellow *Top Gun: Maverick* song “I Ain’t Worried” by OneRepublic. If Gaga’s power ballad and OneRepublic’s joy bomb both make the shortlist, it will mark the first time that two songs from the same film have done so since 2019, when two tracks from the reboot of *The Lion King* made the cut. Nominations-round voting is open Jan. 12-17, 2023. Nominations will be announced Jan. 24. Final-round voting is open March 2-7. The awards will air March 12 on ABC. Expect the shortlists for best original song and best original score to look something like this.

—PAUL GREIN



Clockwise: Mitski, Gomez, Eilish, O’Connell, Swift and Sullivan; Center: Rihanna

SONGS

“Lift Me Up”

Ryan Coogler, Ludwig Göransson, Rihanna, Tems

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever
Marvel

“All the Stars” from the original *Black Panther* was nominated in this category four years ago. Coogler directed and co-wrote both *Black Panther* and this sequel. The four co-writers could hardly be more international: Coogler was born in the United States, Göransson in Sweden, Rihanna in Barbados and Tems in Nigeria.

“Vegas”

Rogét Chahayed, Doja Cat, David Sprecher

Elvis Warner Bros.

The academy’s music committee will determine whether this song, which borrows heavily from the 1950s classic “Hound Dog” is eligible. (Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, who wrote the Elvis Presley hit, would not be.) Incredibly, no song from a movie Presley starred in was ever nominated for best original song.

“This Is a Life”

David Byrne, Ryan Lott, Mitski

Everything Everywhere All at Once A24

Byrne won an Oscar 35 years ago for best original score for *The Last Emperor*. Lott is a member of the trio Son Lux, which performs this song, with backing by Byrne and Mitski. This would be the first Oscar nod for both Lott and Mitski.

“Turn Up the Sunshine”

Jack Antonoff, Patrik Berger, Sam Dew, Kevin Parker

Minions: The Rise of Gru
Illumination/Universal Pictures

This would be the first Oscar nomination for all four songwriters. The Antonoff-produced soundtrack consists mostly of contemporary artists covering ’60s and ’70s songs. It also includes new tunes such as this one, recorded by Diana Ross and featuring the Parker-led Tame Impala.

“Naatu Naatu”

M. M. Keeravani

RRR Variance Films

This Indian Telugu-language song would be the first foreign-language track to win this category since “Jai Ho,” the festive Hindi song from *Slumdog Millionaire* that took the prize 14 years ago. The scene in which it appears was filmed at the Ukraine Presidential Palace in Kyiv a few months before the Russian invasion.

“My Mind & Me”

Amy Allen, Jonathan Bellion, Selena Gomez, Jordan K. Johnson, Stefan Johnson, Michael Pollack

Selena Gomez: My Mind & Me
Apple Original Films

This documentary was directed by Alek Keshishian, who also directed *Madonna: Truth or Dare*, as well as such music videos as Gomez’s “Hands to Myself.” The film follows Gomez on a six-year journey that has included both health challenges and professional successes, among them her first Emmy and Grammy nods.

“Do a Little Good”

Benj Pasek, Justin Paul

Spirited Apple Original Films

Pasek and Paul have been nominated three times in this category, with two songs from *La La Land* and one from *The Greatest Showman*. They have no shortage of contenders this year — this song and “Good Afternoon” from *Spirited*, as well as two others from *Lyle, Lyle Crocodile*.

“Applause”

Diane Warren

Tell It Like a Woman

Samuel Goldwyn Films

With this song, Warren vies for her 14th nomination in this category. She would be the first songwriter or songwriting team to be nominated six years running since Marilyn and Alan Bergman’s 1968-73 streak. Warren will receive a Governors Award from the academy on Nov. 19.

“Stand Up”

Dernst “D’Mile” Emile II, Jazmine Sullivan

Till Orion/United Artists Releasing

D’Mile won in this category two years ago with “Fight for You” from *Judas and the Black Messiah*. If he triumphs again, he would become the first Black songwriter to win this award twice. Sullivan won her first two Grammys in April, for best R&B album and best R&B performance.

“Hold My Hand”

BloodPop (Michael Tucker), Lady Gaga

Top Gun: Maverick Paramount Pictures

This would be Gaga’s third nod in this category following “Til It Happens to You” from *The Hunting Ground* (2015) and “Shallow” from *A Star Is Born* (2018), which took the award. “Take My Breath Away” from the original *Top Gun* won the 1986 award in this category.

“I Ain’t Worried”

Ryan Tedder, Brent Kutzle, Tyler Spry, John Eriksson

Top Gun: Maverick Paramount Pictures

The Oscars’ music committee will determine whether this is eligible. “I Ain’t



Clockwise: Michelle Yeoh in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, Pattinson and Kravitz (left) in *The Batman*, Pinocchio (voiced by Gregory Mann) and Geppetto (voiced by David Bradley) in *Pinocchio* and Letitia Wright in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*.

Worried” borrows elements from “Young Folks” by Peter Bjorn and John. The writers of that 2006 song (Björn Yttling and Peter Morén) would not be eligible.

“Nobody Like U”

Billie Eilish, Finneas O’Connell
Turning Red Pixar

The siblings are the reigning champs in this category for the title song from *No Time To Die*. “Nobody Like U” is performed in the animated *Turning Red* by the fictional boy band 4*Town, which O’Connell helped voice. The film was written, directed and produced entirely by women.

“Dust & Ash”

J. Ralph
The Voice of Dust and Ash
Matilda Productions

This would be Ralph’s fourth nod in this category following “Before My Time” from *Chasing Ice* (2012), “Manta Ray” from *Racing Extinction* (2015) and “The Empty Chair” from *Jim: The James Foley Story* (2016). Ralph and Norah Jones sing this song on the soundtrack to the documentary.

“Carolina”

Taylor Swift
Where the Crawdads Sing Sony Pictures
This Appalachian folk-style ballad could result in Swift’s first Oscar nomination. She has received three Golden Globe nods (for “Safe & Sound” from *The Hunger Games*, “Sweeter Than Fiction” from *One Chance* and “Beautiful Ghosts” from *Cats*).

“New Body Rhumba”

Pat Mahoney, James Murphy, Nancy Whang
White Noise Netflix

LCD Soundsystem recorded this song for the soundtrack of the Noah Baumbach film. Mahoney, Murphy and Whang all belong to the Brooklyn-based band, which won the best dance recording Grammy five years ago for “Tonight.” The film stars Adam Driver, Greta Gerwig and Don Cheadle.

SCORES

Babylon Paramount Pictures
Justin Hurwitz

Babylon is the fifth film directed by Oscar winner Damien Chazelle. Hurwitz has scored all five, including most famously *La La Land*, for which he won in this category six years ago. *Babylon*’s cast includes Brad Pitt, Margot Robbie and Jean Smart.

The Banshees of Inisherin
Searchlight Pictures
Carter Burwell

This would be Burwell’s third nomination in this category following *Carol* (2015) and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017). *The Banshees of Inisherin* is a black comedy-drama written and directed by Martin McDonagh, who also did the honors on *Three Billboards*. It stars Colin Farrell and Brendan Gleeson.

The Batman Warner Bros.

Michael Giacchino
This would be Giacchino’s third nomination in this category following *Ratatouille* (2007) and *Up* (2009, for which he won). *The Batman*, a reboot of the Batman film franchise, stars Robert Pattinson as Bruce Wayne/Batman alongside Zoë Kravitz.

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever
Marvel

Ludwig Göransson
Göransson won this honor four years ago for the original *Black Panther*. Should he do so for this sequel, he’ll become the second composer to win for two installments of the same franchise. Howard Shore did the same for two films in the *Lord of the Rings* franchise.

Empire of Light Searchlight Pictures
Trent Reznor, Atticus Ross

Reznor and Ross are two-time category winners for *The Social Network* (2010) and *Soul* (2020, which they won in tandem with Jon Batiste). Should they win again, they’ll become the first composer or composing team to win three scoring Oscars in this century.

Everything Everywhere All at Once
A24

Son Lux
The band, consisting of Rafiq Bhatia, Ian Chang and Ryan Lott, composed the music for the science fiction/action film that was written and directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert. They produced it with siblings Anthony and Joseph Russo.

The Fabelmans Universal Pictures
John Williams

This would be Williams’ record-extending 48th nomination in a scoring category. Moreover, it would give him scoring nods in seven consecutive decades. If he wins, Williams, 90, would surpass James Ivory as the oldest Oscar honoree — Ivory was 89 when he won best adapted screenplay for *Call Me by Your Name*.

Guillermo del Toro’s Pinocchio
Netflix

Alexandre Desplat
Desplat won for *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) and *The Shape of Water* (2017). Should he win again, he’ll tie the late Maurice Jarre as the Frenchman with the most scoring Oscars. Jarre won for *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Doctor Zhivago* and *A Passage to India*.

A Man Named Otto Sony Pictures
Thomas Newman

Newman is vying for his 15th nomination in a scoring category. He’s tied with the

late Alex North for the most nods in this category without a competitive win. If Newman is nominated again and loses, he’ll hold the record outright.

The Son Sony Pictures Classics
Hans Zimmer

Zimmer is the reigning category champ, having won in March for *Dune*. Should he win for *The Son*, he’ll become the first composer to take home back-to-back scoring awards since Gustavo Santaolalla, who won with *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Babel* (2006). Hugh Jackman and Laura Dern star.

Strange World Walt Disney Animation
Henry Jackman

This film marked Jackman’s third collaboration with director Don Hall, following *Winnie the Pooh* and *Big Hero 6*, and his fifth feature-length score for Walt Disney Animation. The film features the voices of Jake Gyllenhaal, Dennis Quaid, Gabrielle Union and Lucy Liu.

TÁR Focus Features
Hildur Guðnadóttir

This would be the second scoring nod for Hildur, who won three years ago for *Joker*. The Icelandic composer would become just the third woman to receive multiple nominations in this category following the late Angela Morley (who had two nods) and Rachel Portman (who has had three).

White Noise Netflix
Danny Elfman

This would be Elfman’s fifth nomination in a scoring category following *Good Will Hunting* and *Men in Black* (both in 1997), *Big Fish* (2003) and *Milk* (2008). *White Noise* is a black comedy written and directed by Noah Baumbach, adapted from the 1985 novel of the same name by Don DeLillo.

The Woman King Sony Pictures
Terence Blanchard

This would be Blanchard’s third nomination in this category, which would tie Quincy Jones for the most scoring nods ever by a Black composer. Jones was nominated for *In Cold Blood*, *The Wiz* and *The Color Purple* — he has yet to win.

Women Talking
MGM/United Artists Releasing
Hildur Guðnadóttir

Hildur is vying to become the sixth composer to have two films on the shortlist in this category since 2018, when the academy began making its shortlists public. She would follow Alan Silvestri (2018), Nicholas Britell (2018), Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross (2020), Hans Zimmer (2021) and Jonny Greenwood (2021).



More Statuettes, More Problems

Despite the number of songwriters per song exponentially increasing, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences still favors smaller circles — will it ever change?

BY MELINDA NEWMAN // ILLUSTRATION BY ROB DOBI

SINCE THE ACADEMY Awards handed out their first statuettes for best original song in 1935, almost two-thirds of the winners have been writing duos, including such legendary twosomes as Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, Burt Bacharach and Hal David, and Alan Menken and Howard Ashman.

Now, 87 years after composer Con Conrad and Herb Magidson won the inaugural trophies for penning “The Continental” from the 1934 film *The Gay Divorcee*, some observers say the Oscars need to update their rules to better reflect how songs are now created.

Current academy rules favor fewer songwriters at a time when the number of writers per song is increasing. So far this year, the average number of songwriters credited on a Billboard Hot 100 No. 1 is 6.4, compared with 4.77 over a decade ago in 2009.

Yet the academy considers any combination of more than two writers

for a best original song contender an exception. According to the rules, if there are three or four songwriters, “a third statuette may be awarded when there are essentially equal writers of a song. The Music Branch Executive Committee has the right, in what it alone determines to be a very rare and extraordinary circumstance, to award a fourth statuette.”

If there are five or more credited songwriters, only one statuette is awarded to the collective, and the rules state “each songwriter must agree to the single ‘group statuette’ option by signing and returning a Group Award form prior to the submission deadline.” (Though a handful of other categories limit the number of eligible nominees, only best original song and best original score have the group statuette option.)

To deny all eligible songwriters their own statuette, regardless of the number, is “antiquated thinking,” says a senior A&R executive at a major label who has worked on Oscar-nominated

songs. “The creation of art evolves over time. And as an organization that represents art — whether it’s visual media art or recorded art — you have to adapt and evolve.”

The academy (which declined to respond to the anonymous opinions in this piece) is clinging to a tradition “going back decades, that the way a song got written was essentially by two people, a composer and lyricist,” says the head of music at a movie studio. “They’re out of touch.”

Only two best original song winners have had four songwriters (“Arthur’s Theme” in 1982 and “Shallow” in 2019), and no Oscar has gone to five or more songwriters. Only once have more than five writers been nominated, when all seven members of Counting Crows earned a nod for “Accidentally in Love” from *Shrek 2* in 2004. The next year, the limitation on the number of statuettes was introduced.

As a result, when there are more than four songwriters, it’s often up

to them to make a hard decision. In January 2019, “All the Stars,” from *Black Panther*, received a best original song nod, but only four of the five songwriters — Kendrick Lamar, SZA, Sounwave and Anthony Tiffith — were credited. Fifth collaborator Alexander Shuckburgh (aka Al Shux) was not listed, even though a month earlier, when “All the Stars” received a Grammy nod for song of the year, his name was. (Shux did not respond for a request for comment.)

“Because of the constraints of the rules, we’ve had to have really uncomfortable conversations with songwriters to say, ‘Hey, you guys, go away and figure this out,’” says the movie studio executive, adding that in some cases, the writers have come back with participating songwriters left off to cull their total to four. “It’s hurtful and unfair.”

At least two tracks that could potentially make the shortlist of 15 songs to be announced Dec. 21 have five or more songwriters. “Lift Your Wings” from Netflix’s *My Father’s Dragon* has five credited songwriters. It was entered as a group submission so all writers would be recognized. The title track to *My Mind & Me*, Apple Original Films’ documentary about Selena Gomez, has six songwriters.

The group submission form requests a detailed explanation of the creative process, and songwriters may be deemed ineligible at the Music Branch committee’s discretion.

“I understand from the perspective of the academy that they want to keep it special and not be perceived as handing [awards] out like a participation prize,” says another label executive, “but some of the best songs of the past 20 years have been written by an army of collaborators, [and] we’ve seen an evolution of thought in terms of how those songs are regarded.”

The head of music at another movie studio sees the issue as more nuanced and, while not necessarily agreeing with the limitations on the hardware handed out, appreciates the seriousness of the academy’s deliberations when there are several songwriters.

“Each song can be a unique situation, and you have to be able to consider that,” the executive says. “You do have to look at who has done the majority of the work. It’s really important that you have music that was determinately created from scratch for that project. You have to put guardrails somewhere.”

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1



5



2



4

1 Jay-Z onstage during his Best of Both Worlds Tour at Madison Square Garden in New York in 2004.

2 From left: Ludacris, André 3000 (with son Seven on his back), Chevy P and Young Jeezy backstage at the Vibe Music Festival in Atlanta in 2005.

3 Nipsey Hussle's last performance at Irving Plaza in New York in 2018.

4 Questlove spun hip-hop classics at Brooklyn Bowl in 2013.

5 Nas celebrated his 40th birthday with a bottle of Hennessy in New York in 2013.



3



6



7



14



8



13

6 Jermaine Dupri (left) and Usher at the Versace Mansion in Miami in 2005. Dupri told everyone, "Y'all ain't got nothing to lose. Just jump in the pool."

7 From left: DJ Khaled, Fat Joe and Da Brat at Trina's Exotic Jungle Birthday Party in Miami in 2004.

8 From left: Russell Simmons, Steve Stoute, Jay-Z and Sean "Diddy" Combs at Combs' White Party at his home in East Hampton, N.Y., in 2007.

9 Beyoncé at the launch of the True Star fragrance in New York in 2004.

10 From left: Snoop Dogg, Dr. Dre and Quincy Jones at the Vibe Awards in Los Angeles in 2004.

11 Aretha Franklin and Combs at Combs' White Party in Bridgehampton, N.Y., in 2004.

12 From left: Patti LaBelle, DJ Clue, Mariah Carey and Antonio "L.A." Reid at Carey's Sweet 16th #1 party for "We Belong Together" in New York in 2005.

13 Childish Gambino backstage at Cipha Sounds' Hip Hop Improv Show at UCB Theatre in New York in 2013.

14 From left: M.J.G., Rihanna and 8Ball backstage at Miami's Spring Fest in 2005.



9



10



11



12

A portrait of Faith Newman, a woman with long brown hair and bangs, wearing a black top. She is standing in front of a wall covered in framed posters and artwork. The text is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

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BACK IN CONTROL

Five years ago, **SZA** put out her culture-changing debut and became alternative R&B's great new hope. As she prepares to finally release its follow-up, she's more confident than ever — even if she's still not sure pop stardom is sustainable

BY HERAN MAMO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY AB + DM



SZA photographed Oct. 11 at Quixote Studios in Los Angeles.

Styling by Alejandra Hernandez
Lillian Shalom hat and gloves, Christian Siriano skirt.

R&B ²⁰²² HIP-HOP

POWER PLAYERS



A **TRAMPOLINE PARK** in Austin isn't the first place you'd expect to see hundreds of SZA fans. Yet on a Friday night in October, there they were — lined up, excitedly chanting the lyrics to “The Weekend” from the singer-songwriter's 2017 debut album, *Ctrl*. And in fact, it wasn't a completely unexpected sight: SZA had just wrapped her headlining set at the Austin City Limits festival and sent an open invite on Twitter to “randomly jump w me” till 2 a.m. The former competitive gymnast flipped into the foam pit with the utmost joy, just like her fans.

Altitude Trampoline Park, which bills itself as the “world's best trampoline park,” also might not be where you'd expect to hear a preview of what RCA Records chairman/CEO Peter Edge calls “one of the most important albums of the year.” But on this particular evening, for any attendees listening closely, it was. Terrence “Punch” Henderson, SZA's manager and president of her label, Top Dawg Entertainment (TDE), played “at least 4 songs off the new album on the loud speakers,” she tweeted the following morning. Unlike this night in Austin, though, getting that album out has been far from all fun and games.

When SZA released *Ctrl* on June 9, 2017, on RCA and TDE, she immediately established herself as alternative R&B's girl next door and one of the most exciting new voices in music. Sonically, it was the kind of music SZA had always wanted to hear growing up but never quite found outside of herself — an abstract form of R&B influenced by indie and trap music and shaped by lo-fi beats. And lyrically, it was the kind of ultra-relatable songwriting that young people from all walks of life needed: SZA chronicled familiar coming-of-age quandaries, like wondering if your significant other believes you're enough, or debating if being normal would benefit your relationships, or, well, questioning everything else life throws at you in your 20s. On its cover, the album showed SZA just as she was (and still is): a charismatic, laid-back girl with big curly hair who dressed just as she pleased in a track jacket, bodysuit and tube socks. Not only did she give a legion of awkward Black girls like me a realistic role model — she also struck a chord with the Recording Academy, becoming the most nominated woman at the 2018 Grammy Awards with five nods, including for best new artist. Though she didn't win, she still shifted the culture: Since debuting at No. 3 on the Billboard 200, *Ctrl* hasn't left, spending 281 consecutive weeks on the chart (through the Nov. 5 edition).

With *Ctrl*, SZA set a new standard for what a “classic album” could look and sound like. But while plenty of buzzy new artists would've immediately capitalized on that acclaim with a follow-up, SZA seemed to do the opposite. As the next few years went by, she periodically put out music, but only as a guest on other stars' tracks — from “The Other Side” with Justin Timberlake to Kali Uchis' “fue mejor”





Balenciaga dress,
On Aura Tout Vu gloves.



remix to the pop smash “Kiss Me More” alongside Doja Cat, which earned both artists their first Grammy win earlier this year and reached No. 3 on the Billboard Hot 100, making it SZA’s highest-charting hit to date. Fans’ pent-up demand for her next project didn’t waver, but that enthusiasm was dampened by narratives still circulating on the internet that the album wouldn’t arrive for another five years — or maybe ever.

What fans perhaps didn’t realize was that SZA’s struggle to balance sudden fame and success

after surprise for her fans and team alike. She gave Henderson just four days’ warning that she’d be releasing “Good Days” — her first solo single in two years — on DSPs on Christmas Day 2020, as a subtle birthday tribute to her late grandmother Norma, whose voice appeared throughout *Ctrl*. In August 2021, she instructed Bisel to upload “I Hate U” and two other songs on an anonymous SoundCloud account the next day at 5 a.m. “She genuinely was excited about the stuff she’d been working on and wanted to share it right away,” Bisel says, rather than

into a boardroom and say, ‘What’s the next single?’” says Carolyn Williams, executive vp at RCA. “They told us what the song was, so for us, it’s great.” Thus, the label didn’t need to be “too heavy-handed” with single promotion and only came in to “amplify” the TikTok traction, servicing the tracks to radio while Brent Smith, SZA’s booking agent at Wasserman, secured headlining festival performances for her like Outside Lands, Global Citizen Festival: Accra and Austin City Limits.

Already, “Shirt” is following a similar trajectory as its predecessors, generating 10.4 million on-demand official streams in the United States in its first three days, according to initial reports to Luminate. Williams jokes that “it’s the longest-running teaser campaign I think we’ve ever had. She teased that record two years ago, and it has been working ever since.” But with another snippet thrown in the mix, a full album looks closer than ever.

It has a title, *S.O.S.*, and is set for a December release, though SZA admits she’s “currently stressed” about meeting it. Until now, she had taken near-total control of the album’s rollout, checking the necessary boxes on her own terms. Now that it’s crunch time, she must grapple with the industry “red tape” that she so despises, from a very different viewpoint than the one she had before *Ctrl*.

Her fans’ rabid devotion (and the long wait for the album itself) has placed her on a pedestal, one that doesn’t feel so steady for someone who, as she puts it, “stumbled into music” and sees herself as “emotionally [and] energetically unequipped” for the life of a major artist. When the album finally arrives, will she find some balance between the demands of the business and her own priorities — or will she eventually hang it all up?

“To be expected to do anything at a high level while life is life-ing is fucking crazy. This isn’t meant for a person; it’s meant for a machine.”

—SZA

with personal privacy and sorrow had made her wary of embarking on another personally and professionally demanding album cycle. “I could literally burst into tears and run through this wall at any moment. I am effectively falling apart,” she confesses today. “But it’s not like, the album pressure... It’s just, life is fucking hard. To be expected to do anything at a high level while life is life-ing is fucking crazy. This isn’t meant for a person; it’s meant for a machine.”

Yet amid all that pressure, her creative process never slowed. “Sometimes it feels like she has a divine antenna that funnels ideas to her,” says her engineer, Rob Bisel, of her studio work ethic. “I’ll be playing her beats and for a few minutes she’ll suddenly get really quiet, and then she’ll hop up to the mic and it’s like the ideas just magically flow out of her.” Case in point: In less than two hours, Bisel says, SZA took a groovy, yet grave keyboard loop he had concocted the day before, wrote over it and crafted “I Hate U,” which she released at the end of last year. “Everything about it felt supernatural, from start to finish,” Bisel marvels.

Ideally, SZA says, she’d just create and release music on her own timeline. “I hate the red tape analytics of dropping anything — it’s so stressful,” she grumbles. “I definitely have heard [the term ‘digital service provider’] more this week and last week than I have ever. I don’t like the way it sounds — it sounds stressful and like something that requires a lot of attention and maneuvering. I hate the word ‘single.’ It’s like, ‘What the fuck separates a single from other shit on my album that I like? Why does it have to be different?’”

Still, she has been working hard to ensure that fans finally get the album they’ve long-awaited this winter. So as a middle finger to that disconcerting system, SZA, who just turned 33, is approaching her new era of music the same way she always has: following her intuition, even if it means surprise

“waiting for a label to process it and upload it to streaming services.”

“I only do what I want to do,” SZA says, “and this makes me feel free and safe and unrestricted.” Lately, it seems to have worked in her favor. “Good Days” and “I Hate U” became her first and second solo top 10 hits on the Hot 100, peaking at No. 9 and No. 7, respectively. “Good Days” has since earned 587.3 million official on-demand U.S. streams, according to Luminate, while “I Hate U” also became SZA’s first No. 1 on Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs and peaked at No. 15 on Radio Songs — the highest she has reached as a lead artist on that chart so far.

She has greeted these milestones with a mix of gratitude and astonishment. “That was my first time like, genuinely streaming amongst pop artists, and I was like, ‘Oh, fuck!’ I just feel like I don’t even have a radio presence, [and] I’m just now having two songs that have been playing on the radio consistently,” she says.

But SZA’s way of promoting her new songs has been both savvy and intentional. Over time, she has developed a “signature,” as Henderson calls it, of teasing her next single at the end of her music videos. For example, SZA tacked half of “Good Days” onto the end of the visual for the Ty Dolla \$ign-assisted, Neptunes-produced “Hit Different,” three months before the full track was available. After teasing “Shirt” on her Instagram Story in October 2020, she delivered an official snippet at the end of the “Good Days” video in March 2021 before eventually releasing the full-length song in October 2022. “I always drop something that juxtaposes the song that’s attached to it,” she explains, adding that another forthcoming song is attached to the end of “Shirt.”

TikTok users have flocked to those snippets, helping transform them into Hot 100 smashes. “With ‘I Hate U’ and ‘Good Days,’ they told us what they wanted. It wasn’t something that we had to get

THINK I’M like a beautiful clown in this moment,” SZA says with a laugh. Two graphic brown lines contour the purple sparkles swept across her eyelids — a bold look for her photo shoot today that, she says, is a “new threshold” for her. She’s willing to try new things, but as usual, she won’t compromise her comfort to do so. Changing into a comfy Yankees jersey before our interview, it’s clear that, underneath her glamorous superstar exterior, SZA is still the girl next door she always wanted — but never felt encouraged — to be.

Growing up “around hella white people” in “very suburban” Maplewood, N.J., the artist born Solána Imani Rowe wished to remodel the archetype typically reserved for modest, ordinary and, well, white girls. By “looking dusty by choice” in baggy T-shirts and jeans — which explains why, even during this shoot, she still prefers comfort over couture — and being “crass” and “witty” in her lyrics, she “created the person I wanted to see in the world. That ‘girl next door’ energy, we don’t get to see in Black music. It’s always like ‘homegirl next door,’” she says. “I don’t have to fit a phenotype.”

Though she has always believed in following her gut, she still met resistance from loved ones. Her mother was upset she didn’t want to finish college at

Delaware State University to study marine biology, but SZA “could tell I should be doing something else,” she remembers. Even her boyfriend at the time warned she might turn into a “deadbeat” if she kept taking on odd jobs, like bartending at a strip club and selling clothes at streetwear brand 10.Deep, instead of finding a career — but as usual, SZA’s instincts didn’t lead her astray, and her gig at 10.Deep put her one step closer to having one.

When the brand sponsored a Kendrick Lamar concert in 2011, she was delivering clothes to her soon-to-be TDE labelmates prior to the show while her friend, who happened to be listening to SZA’s music, was talking her up to Henderson. After listening to her first two self-released EPs, *See. SZA.Run* and *S*, he found her “distinctive” voice and MC-like lyricism intriguing enough to sign her in 2013, making her the first lady (literally) of the label’s rap-heavy roster, which included Lamar (who recently left TDE for his own venture, pgLang), ScHoolboy Q, Jay Rock and Ab-Soul. And he didn’t have to deconstruct her image in order to help mold her into a superstar.

“People [were] telling Punch all the time, ‘Why does she dress like this? Why don’t you polish her up a little bit? She would do so well,’” SZA recalls, mocking her critics’ arrogant tone. “But he fucked with me the way I was and I fucked with me the way I was.”

Now, Henderson says SZA has already accomplished what he wanted her to when he signed her a decade ago. “My goal is always to make classic albums, and from there, everything else is

for me at TDE’s studios. Instrumentally, *S.O.S* is the most captivating music she has ever made, her beloved lo-fi beats sharing space with surf rock within the same track, a grunge record and an acoustic guitar-driven ballad coexisting without either sounding out of place. And while SZA says she was a “more carefree writer” during her *Ctrl* sessions, she has sharpened her writing since. *S.O.S* is an album that certainly justifies a five-year wait. But SZA still wonders if the hardships she endured to raise her profile between *Ctrl* and now were worth it.

N MAY 2019, SZA was rehearsing for DJ Khaled’s star-studded *Saturday Night Live* performance as her maternal grandmother, Norma, was dying. “I wish I went to spend time with her. She was catching a medical jet from St. Louis to New Jersey because she spent the rest of her days at my parents’ house; she passed at my mom’s house [in June],” she reflects. “That last week when she was really ill, I went to go perform with DJ Khaled, who I love, at *SNL*... And in hindsight, that was so dumb. I just wish I spent those last moments with her at home. That was a hard lesson. Like, ‘Great, I perform for a minute and 30 seconds on *SNL* and I lost my grandma for the rest of my life.’”

Any artist who’s placed on a pedestal — as SZA literally was in 2017 at the Brooklyn Museum, where

saying, “It’s 100% Punch and RCA on this one. I wanted the summer. They wanted more time. Atp [at this point] I’m jus tryna have a good time stress free lol.” That comment fueled fans’ frustration, and they made Henderson out to be public enemy No. 1, flooding his Instagram comments and Twitter mentions with incessant demands for the album.

“It’s funny to me because I get where it’s coming from — it’s coming out of love,” says Henderson. “She’s saying something on those records that touched somebody, so they feel so strongly connected to it that they want more and tend to get impatient.” If her impulsive reply suggested SZA was angry with him, he insists such feelings pass and, “a couple hours later, we’re onto something else.”

And anyway, he explains, plenty of unavoidable barriers made recording this album difficult: SZA’s crazy touring schedule, deaths in her family, COVID-19 and everything else life has thrown at SZA didn’t give her consistent time to record — until now. “Recently, she went on a run and did about maybe 10 records in a week-and-a-half to two weeks,” says Henderson. “It’s like a scorer in an NBA game. You may run off 15 points in a row. It has been a lot of starting and stopping and then we finally got into that rhythm.”

Productive as she has been lately, SZA admits that kind of rhythm may not be tenable for her long term. She sighs deeply. “I feel like music, in this capacity, I don’t see longevity,” she confesses. “I like to create, I like to write, I like to sing, and I like to share. But I don’t know if chasing after superstardom or whatever I’m supposed to be doing right now is sustainable for me or for anybody. I’mma take a good swing at it, and I’mma give ‘em my absolute best.”

For now, she’s just trying to focus on bettering her craft. Delivering scene-stealing verses on genre-spanning collaborations is one way SZA has worked to become more versatile. “Any opportunities that can get me to try something new, I would definitely try,” she says. She has also stepped up her performance game by working with “Fullout Cortland” Brown — Doja Cat’s go-to choreographer, who SZA first met on the “Kiss Me More” set — to overcome her insecurity onstage and bring a “wow” factor, spotlighting more than just her captivating vocals. “Right now, I’m in that stage where I can prove to myself that I can do choreography and design a stage and have a theme and be whoever I want — I don’t just have to be Miss Natural Raw Energy,” she says confidently. “I want to design myself the way I can be.”

And who knows how SZA will design the next stage of her life. “I could be a biologist and I’mma discover a creature that didn’t exist before. I could be a farmer tomorrow and create my own strain of asparagus,” she says assuredly, as we joke about “SZAsparagus” becoming the hottest new celebrity-branded item at luxury supermarket Erewhon. It might be her sun in Scorpio, but that certainty she’ll excel at whatever she sets her mind to seems to also give her the extra confidence boost she needs for her music career’s next phase — even if it doesn’t always feel as sustainable or organic as her potential produce brand.

“I know that I am that girl where I will figure it out,” she says proudly. “Just like before I was an artist.”

“That ‘girl next door’ energy, we don’t get to see in Black music. It’s always like ‘homegirl next door.’ I don’t have to fit a phenotype.”

— SZA

extra to me, personally,” he says. “And I think we did that with *Ctrl*.”

Her producer ThankGod4Cody believes her second album will have the same kind of cultural impact. He was working with TDE artist Isaiah Rashad before eventually linking with SZA and producing her 2014 track “Sobriety.” “From there,” he says, “it blossomed into a friendship and a working relationship” that has since spawned two Grammy-nominated hits, the Travis Scott-assisted “Love Galore” and “The Weekend.” And while he remembers SZA writing those songs “pretty fast,” he’s even more impressed with the speed and shrewdness of her pen game this time around. “The lyrics are so geniusly simple,” he says of “I Hate U.” “And she’ll write so fast that it scares her — like, ‘Is it actually this fire?’”

Their collective efforts have created SZA’s most daring body of work yet, which Henderson plays

a statue of her, alongside the likes of Metro Boomin and 21 Savage, was part of Spotify’s RapCaviar exhibit — is perceived more as a god than a human and subject to immense scrutiny, along with sometimes unreasonable expectations from their fans. All of which can make it tough to create anything, much less something of value. “I have an album to turn in at the end of the month, but will that actually matter by the time I get back to New Jersey and my grandma doesn’t remember me? I don’t know,” she wonders aloud about her paternal grandmother, who has Alzheimer’s, her voice trailing off. “And whose fault would that be? Mine. It’s not y’all fault for having me here — it’s my choice. And those are the things I’m grappling with.”

Sometimes, she just needs to let off some steam, like when she replied to a fan’s Instagram comment in July asking about the album’s whereabouts by

Haixi Ren dress, Mara
Paris earring, Lillian
Shalom pearl rings.





R&B ²⁰²² HIP-HOP

POWER PLAYERS

A LEAGUE OF HIS OWN

With the steady guidance of manager Ebonie Ward, **Future** has become one of the most successful, and prolific, rappers in chart history — and has now turned to even loftier ambitions

BY CARL LAMARRE

PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID NEEDLEMAN

Future photographed Oct. 4 at
Ace Studios in Miami.

Styling by Bobby Wesley
Polo Ralph Lauren T-shirt, Bottega Veneta
pants, Marni hat and eyewear.





BODE sweater, Bottega Veneta pants, Marni hat and eyewear.

N 2011, EBONIE WARD was preparing for the grand opening of her boutique, Fly Kix ATL, a men's clothing store in Atlanta's Castleberry Hill district that would soon become a stomping ground for high-fashion sneaker heads and up-and-coming rappers such as Kendrick Lamar and Nipsey Hussle. She knew she needed the perfect artist for the launch, so she reached out to a close friend of a rapper she had recently seen at a local showcase. The burgeoning artist, Future, had no Billboard Hot 100 hits to his name — just a commanding, charismatic presence that pierced her core the first time she saw him onstage.

Future accepted the offer and performed at the grand opening, where he also met Ward for the first time and was immediately intrigued by her determination. “She had a different kind of drive,” says Future, who hired her to be

directing her team as they help pick her star player's outfits, giving him tips on perfecting his next pose.

“She don't just manage my music; she manages *me*,” says Future, as Ward nods alongside him. “I might call her for some small shit, the biggest shit [or] some crazy shit. My whole life is in her hands. So it's different, but I trust her that much. I'm like, ‘Damn. I have somebody in my life I could trust [and] I feel safe with. I always wanted that.’”

Adds Ward: “When you work with somebody who's such a workhorse, it gives you a different drive and level of passion with what you do because if he's in the studio all night, how can I not be up at 5 o'clock [in the morning]? One of us has to pick up where the other person left off. I think that's what makes our connection so amazing.”

Ward's passion and dedication are tethered to an artist who has become one of music's most in-demand superstars. But Future's

“Wait for U,” featuring frequent collaborator Drake and rising Afrobeats star Tems, rocketed to No. 1. The love-drunk anthem, on which Future flexes his muscles as a smooth operator, remained in the Hot 100's top 10 for nearly six months after its release. And those high-profile chart successes only paint part of his career picture: After factoring in collaborative albums and mixtapes, Future has released 20 full-length projects in the last decade, a figure unparalleled among his peers.

“He's really a force of nature,” says Epic Records CEO Sylvia Rhone, who has worked with Future at the label since his 2012 debut, *Pluto*. “He works harder than anyone that I have worked with in the past. It's his 10th year in the business, and each year he just gets better and better. He hasn't aged out like some before him. After 10 years of incomparable influence on culture, he hasn't even scratched the surface of his creative impact. He still has such a career ahead of him. He's a special guy. And when you find those kinds of genius artists, you just have to let them do their thing.”

Future has also demonstrated savvy instincts when committing to features, favoring the new generation of rappers — particularly those with high energy and strong work ethic, regardless of star power. The admiration runs both ways: Future's longevity and cultural impact have inspired scores of artists, like rising Louisville, Ky., rookie EST Gee, who recently said, “He's like our Jay-Z.” And though Future bemoans the “role model” label, he understands his influence on the genre's youth and has helped to mentor them. His collaborative projects with Juice WRLD (2018's *Future & Juice WRLD Present... WRLD on Drugs*) and Lil Uzi Vert (2020's *Pluto x Baby Pluto*) both debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard 200, and in recent years, newcomers including Lil Baby, Lil Durk and Roddy Ricch have featured him on their tracks. In January, Future teamed with Gunna and Young Thug on the YSL stars' “Pushin' P,” which peaked at No. 7 on the Hot 100 and entered the cultural lexicon at the apex of Gunna's career, before he and Young Thug were arrested on racketeering charges in May. (The two are in jail awaiting a January trial date.)

Ward and Rhone also cite Future's talent for molding young producers into heavyweights. In the 2010s, Future was an early booster of Mike WiLL Made-It, and he leaned on the producers Metro Boomin and Southside to help craft *DS2* and *What a Time To Be Alive*, his 2015 collaborative mixtape with Drake. Future enlisted rising Atlanta producer ATL Jacob for six *I Never Liked You* songs, including “Wait for U.” “He has a very clear instinct with young producers who will grow to be major producers,” says Rhone. “And I can say that easily about Mike WiLL, ATL Jacob, Metro, Zay-toven; the list goes on and on. That gives you an understanding of where his skill set, where his ears are.”

“I don't feel like nobody needs to be like me... exactly how I am. I only can do this,” says Future. “I'm the only one that can do this shit, you know what I'm saying? That's from my personal life to musically. I'm really

“I think he is the most talented individual on the planet. When you see somebody who's so passionate, diligent and hardworking, it just ignites something inside of you that you don't even understand that you possess.”

—EBONIE WARD, MANAGER

his assistant shortly after. “[She] had a will just to get everything done by any means necessary. She always sees ahead of the curve.”

“I think he is the most talented individual on the planet,” says Ward, who began managing Future alongside his longtime manager, Anthony Saleh, in 2017. “When you see somebody who's so passionate, diligent and hardworking, it just ignites something inside of you that you don't even understand that you possess. You meet somebody who's constantly able to help you evolve on every level of your life, just with his level of dedication. It's really a beautiful thing.”

Today, Future, 38, and Ward are true partners. Having started as his assistant over 10 years ago, her elevation to manager (Saleh stepped down from his role last year) is a beacon of hope for Black women across the music industry striving upward. Not only has she helped fortify Future's legacy as one of the genre's most beloved acts, but under her tutelage, another client of hers, Gunna, scored his second Billboard 200 No. 1 album with *DS4Ever* in January and continues to notch musical successes.

At Future's *Billboard* cover shoot, his and Ward's playful rapport is on full display. Ward exudes the command of a sports coach,

mainstream success wasn't always a foregone conclusion. After receiving mixed reviews for his second album, 2014's *Honest*, Future returned to his underground roots. Determined to prove his doubters wrong, he released three mixtapes in five months (2014's *Monster* and 2015's *Beast Mode* and *56 Nights*), for one of the most storied runs in hip-hop — one that rejuvenated his career and set up the release of his magnum opus, *DS2*, in July 2015.

Those projects also catalyzed Future's unprecedented run on the *Billboard* charts, which has placed him on historic ground. Though his lecherous lyrics and lovelorn ballads have made some label him rap's “Toxic King,” Future has amassed eight No. 1 albums on the Billboard 200, 153 Hot 100 hits (fifth all-time and third among rappers, after Drake and Lil Wayne) and close to 100 million RIAA-certified units since he signed a joint-venture deal between his label, Freebandz, and Epic Records in 2012. In April, Future became the fifth artist to debut simultaneously at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 and Hot 100 after releasing his ninth studio album, *I Never Liked You*; with 222,000 equivalent album units, according to Luminate, it marked the biggest solo opening week of his career. All 16 songs from the set charted on the Hot 100, and project standout



Balenciaga shirt, pants
and sneakers, Bottega
Veneta eyewear.



one of none. I can live like this. People accept that because it's just me."

Future's business moves have set him apart from his peers, too. Last September, *Billboard* reported that Future sold his publishing catalog for somewhere between \$65 million and \$75 million to music and entertainment company Influence Media Partners, an entity backed by BlackRock and Warner Music Group to invest in publishing high-profile songs that acquired Blake Shelton's catalog in October. IMP's Future deal includes over 600 songs dating from 2004 to 2020, including the massive 2017 Hot 100 hit "Mask Off" and several Drake collaborations, most notably *What a Time To Be Alive*'s "Jumpman" and 2020's RIAA diamond-certified "Life Is Good."

"Future is a cultural icon," IMP partner/founding adviser Rene McLean said in a statement when the deal was announced. "He continues to be a blueprint for impact and success in the music industry and has reinvented music in ways that no one has ever expected." (Both Ward and Future declined to comment on the deal.)

Now, Future has another goal in mind: to become one of the few hip-hop billionaires — and to use that status to empower himself and those around him. He has already turned his focus to Freebandz, signing Tallahassee, Fla., standout Boston Richey in August and Memphis upstart Lil Double O last year, boosting both with guest spots on their tracks. Outside of music, Future has entered the real estate market, where he's a partner in a development group based out of Austin, Los Angeles and Atlanta and buying properties in those areas.

"When you think of just the name 'Future,' it's prophetic," Ward says. "It's pure, genuine and ahead of the curve. He creates trends, he creates sound and synergy. He's a real leader. And I think musically, people often try to compare other people to him, but I think he has created a league of his own."

Your last solo album, *High Off Life*, came out in May 2020. Typically, you don't take breaks longer than a year. What did the extra time do for you?

Those two years, I was doing a lot. I was moving around, traveling. [The album process] probably started over four times — things happened, like me changing the title, me changing the direction of the album, or certain things happening in my life. That's why I never thought about [the gap] as two years. I still didn't have the *I Never Liked You* title. I still didn't have certain songs that were on that [album].

It geared me up to be able to go for another 10 years, where I don't have to take [time] off. Because during [the making of *I Never Liked You*], I still was recording a lot of music, a different kind of music. I was trying to find my hop, trying to find different melodies, different [everything]. I changed the title up so many times within those years that the music always switched up. I still have the music and I still have those titles, but I feel like that body of music might be connected to that title. That's

why I say I'm prepared for whatever happens next. [Whether I] drop new music or write songs for different artists, musically, man, I have it.

Those two years, it sounds like you were very critical of yourself. Is that accurate?

Yeah, I probably was hard on myself because when you're at that 10th year, you want to be able to still deliver at the high level because I know the music I could make. Songs like "Wait for U," I make those in my sleep. But I had to make a certain kind of music to go along with my career and everything that was going on at the time. I was capitalizing off different moments and creating from whatever was going on at the time in the world and my personal life. I was taking the energy from that and making music. But those melodic songs, I make those easy — easier than I can make a rap song, I feel.

You have eight No. 1 albums and 153 Hot 100 hits. Considering where you started back in 2012, how do you view your wins?

It's like I became a different person. I don't even think about it no more. Like, that's who I am. It's just all a part of the story. It's all a part of just being that artist. I can't think about the number, because I'm still doing it the best. I think I'm going to pass [my Hot 100 stat] faster than I did 155, [or] whatever it is. I think I can get to that number [in] less years. If it took me

So what does that say about how you've dominated hip-hop?

I wouldn't change this shit for nothing in the world. I been thinking about that. Talking about it in the interview is one thing, but living this shit is different. I love this shit, man.

This year, "Pushin' P" with Gunna and Young Thug was such a force. Have you spoken with them lately?

With everything that it takes to make hits, to be able to share those moments with other artists is just beautiful. Just being able to get there in the studio, gel with other artists well and be able to come up with songs is special. And not to share those moments now, it takes something away from you, because that's how you build. It's like, the level of competition between us, we always want to outdo ourselves. You can just imagine us, just the intensity or how we approach a studio session, it's like magic. We got a bunch of songs — major records that haven't even touched the surface yet. I feel like just taking it one day at a time. Everything is going to be alright.

Lots of young rappers cling to everything you say. Do you see yourself as a role model?

That shit's tough, bro. I think I need to be a vessel of what not to do. In some things, I need to be a lesson on what to do. So, I think you live and learn through me and if I have to be that sacrifice, I guess so. [I want] for somebody

"My main focus right now is just to do something I never done. One thing I never done is make a billion dollars. I ain't done that, so I'm focused on that."

—FUTURE

six years to do that, I can do that in two years now just because of the time [and] the streams on songs.

When I was doing those songs, it [was before *Billboard* changed its Hot 100 methodology for the streaming era]. So to get on the [Hot] 100 was way harder. I haven't put out nothing but one or two albums since [the methodology changed]. Before then, it was just all sales, so I had to really get on the charts. Now, it's so easy to get on the charts. I don't even look at them numbers the same, because now a new artist can pass that number quicker because it's so easy. Your whole album can chart now. [Back] then, you'd only have two songs make the [Hot] 100. Or three songs on the [Hot] 100 out of a whole album. To be on the [Hot] 100 with your whole entire album, it's a different time now. I feel like I'm going to be able to achieve everything that I've done so far [again] in less time.

to live better than me. I want another artist to come behind me to do [what I'm doing] even better than I'm doing it. [I would want to] change the bad things they might see in me and make it better for them. That's what I want more than anything.

If I was a role model, I wouldn't want them to do the same exact thing that I'm doing, because the shit that I do is one of none. You can take certain things about me, and you can use it to help you to maneuver in life, to help progress and elevate. But using everything that I do — or just following every step — is going to be hard because I think I'm one of none.

Does your own power scare you?

I need more power.

Why?

Because when you have more power, that means you can put other people in positions [of power]. If you have a little power, then the

people around you, what kind of power do they have? So you want people around you that are super powerful. You are your company. Progressing and elevating is the key.

You have several children with different mothers, but have yet to get married. What would fatherhood look like if you did get married?

If I was married, at home with my kids, man, it'd be way different. That's a life I never lived. It's something you dream about. That's one of my dreams. It's easy for other people, but for me, it's just like, man, this rock star lifestyle, it don't gel well. For even creating music, I just feel like I'm missing out on something if I don't make the music a certain kind of way. I really dedicated my entire life to my fans. I dedicated my entire life to my music. Everything that I love, everything that I got, I put it in music. And the outcome is yet to be determined, still to this day.

Do you think you can have fame and a successful marriage?

I feel like I can have both. When the time's right, it'll happen. It ain't nothing that I'm really chasing. But I do dream of it, and I do want it. I swear I'd probably pick the wrong girl or something, if I was just chasing it. You never know how certain things happen with relationships and with love and getting married and being under the same roof as your kids and you got other kids that are not living with you. That's just a whole 'nother lifestyle that I haven't even got a chance to live. But I understand that it's something I would love, and when the time presents itself, then I know I'm going to be prepared. I want to make sure I just live that to the fullest. But I don't really think about that shit, like having a wife and shit. But I want a wife. Everybody around me wants me to have a wife more than I want a wife.

Album 10 is on the horizon next. What does that look like for you?

A lot of money. That's a lot of damn money. My main focus right now is just to do something I never done. One thing I never done is make a billion dollars. I ain't done that, so I'm focused on that.

Do you seek advice on how to reach that billion?

Sometimes I ask questions, if I meet a billionaire, like, "How'd you get to where you got?" Or, "How'd you accomplish everything that you have?" I have those conversations with different people, successful people. But the way I get mines might be different. It just helps me to understand that I'm on the right path when I talk to people that have billions. When I hear them talk, I be like, "OK, I'm on the right path." They reassure me that I'm doing the right thing. No matter what my music career is, I want to just be able to have that friend, somebody that always has my back, [and] just priceless individuals getting me wherever I need to go. Even when it's going crazy for me, I know I have priceless people around me. I got unconditional love. ■



Craig Green vest, R13
hat, Jacquemus eyewear.

R&B ²⁰²² HIP-HOP

POWER PLAYERS



EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR

TIM HINSHAW

HEAD OF HIP-HOP & R&B, AMAZON MUSIC

His keen understanding of the artist community — and credibility within it — has transformed the streaming service into a global genre leader

BY KATIE BAIN // PHOTOGRAPHED BY KATHRYN BOYD BROLIN



Hinshaw (right) photographed with Tyler, The Creator on Oct. 27 at Harun Coffee in Los Angeles.

A

AS JOB APPLICATIONS go, Tim Hinshaw's wasn't quite traditional.

While angling for a position in the hip-hop & R&B division of Amazon Music in 2018, Hinshaw recruited a few old friends to record themselves hyping him up. "Oh, hey. This is Donald Glover/Childish Gambino saying you should probably hire Tim," the multihyphenate star says, winking at the camera. Cut to Anderson .Paak: "I'm telling you, he's the one. You need him on your squad." "Tim is a good dude, and he knows what he's doing!" Scarface adds before noting that he himself is an Amazon Prime member. The video closes with the late Mac Miller playing a white grand piano, then turning to the camera to implore: "Hire Tim. I know I would."

Hinshaw edited the clips together, then passed the supercut to Amazon — an effort, he says, "to show the breadth of my relationships, from the current generation to the legends." The promo worked: Within a few weeks, Hinshaw was hired as Amazon Music's senior manager of hip-hop artist relations and within a year, he was promoted to head of hip-hop & R&B. But it was also an apt advertisement for the talents that would help Hinshaw succeed long term at the company. The close relationships and credibility he has within the artist community — developed over the course of 13 years working in management and artist relations roles — along with a penchant for innovation and a personality that Amazon Music vp Steve Boom calls "super smart, genuine and incredibly humble" have all allowed Hinshaw and the team he has built to elevate Amazon Music's hip-hop & R&B division into a global leader in the genre.



Hinshaw

"Tim has put Amazon Music into the conversation in the hip-hop and R&B community in a massive way," says Boom, "and in a way, frankly speaking, we were not."

"When I thought about the landscape, it was like, 'Amazon is already in everybody's homes,'" says Hinshaw of his initial strategy. "I knew if I could authentically bridge the gap between company and artist and tell that story to consumers in an authentic way, I could help Amazon be a major player in this entertainment space."

Thanks to his efforts, in the past year hip-hop and R&B have become the leading genres for Amazon Music livestreams, with the platform's three most-viewed livestream events featuring Kanye "Ye" West, Drake and Tyler, The Creator. "Tim's trajectory is so amazing to watch," says Tyler. "I love him so much."

Last December, Drake and Ye's #FreeLarryHoover benefit concert at the L.A. Memorial Coliseum streamed in 240 countries on Amazon Music's Twitch channel and the Amazon Music app. Just weeks later, Amazon Music partnered with The Weeknd for a livestream event promoting his new album, *Dawn FM*, and the platform livestreamed J. Cole's Dreamville festival in April.

Hinshaw has also been instrumental in securing talent for the just-launched *Amazon Music Live*. Airing after Thursday Night Football, the weekly livestream program, which launched Oct. 27, is hosted by 2 Chainz and has already featured performances from Lil Baby, Megan Thee Stallion and Kane Brown. In late October, Hinshaw and his 12-person team — "a bunch of young, hungry Black and brown executives," as he describes them — touched down in Paris to produce a livestream of the second of Kendrick Lamar's two shows in the city on his current The Big Steppers Tour. That 65-date run is sponsored by Amazon Music's flagship hip-hop and R&B Rotation playlists — an idea Hinshaw originated and oversaw. (Hinshaw also led the 2019 development and launch of Rotation itself, which

"Tim has put Amazon Music into the conversation in the hip-hop and R&B community in a massive way, and in a way, frankly speaking, we were not."

—STEVE BOOM, AMAZON MUSIC

encompasses the R&B Rotation and Rap Rotation brands.)

"For me to be on a business-class flight to Paris with arguably the world's biggest hip-hop artist," says Hinshaw, "it was like, 'Wow, we've come a long way from Compton.'"

Like Lamar, Hinshaw, 32, was raised in the South Los Angeles neighborhood where so many of hip-hop's legends started out. With his father serving a 20-year prison sentence for nonviolent drug-trafficking charges while he was young, Hinshaw was raised by his mother. Once he was a teenager, she enrolled him 30 miles away at the tony Palisades High School, driving her son 60 miles round trip so he could experience life outside the three blocks in which he had grown up.

After graduation, Hinshaw nearly joined the U.S. Coast Guard, but was talked out of it

by his brother, the singer-songwriter Prince Charlez, who encouraged him to pursue music instead. Hinshaw co-managed his brother to a joint-venture label deal with Island Def Jam before landing management jobs in the artist relations and music marketing divisions at Fender and Vans, respectively, and through them forging the relationships that have proved invaluable in his current role.

"I can't tell you the number of meetings I've been to with Tim and an artist or manager where the level of respect and love they have for him is transparent," says Boom. "It leads to very different, more productive and more collaborative meetings that benefit the artist and Amazon Music."

In genres where authenticity is paramount, the trust Hinshaw has developed in the hip-hop and R&B community has also

helped bridge the gap between a massive corporation and the artists it hopes to work with. Most crucial are honest conversations about "getting what we want out of said deal without making the artist feel like they're a walking commercial," says Hinshaw. "You're not going to put a logo on Kendrick Lamar's forehead."

That straightforward approach has led to collaborations with A-list figures like H.E.R. and Kid Cudi; Summer Walker; Chance the Rapper; Tyler, The Creator; DJ Khaled; LeBron James and Mav Carter, co-founder/CEO of James' entertainment company, SpringHill. But Hinshaw's team's cred also extends to emerging acts, which it supports with Rap Rotation. Since its 2019 launch, streams on the playlist have doubled — just one indication of overall demand for the genre exploding on Amazon Music

since Hinshaw's arrival. Global customers asked Alexa to play hip-hop and R&B tracks over a billion times in 2021 alone.

The ripple effect of Hinshaw's work extends across Amazon Music. Boom calls his artist merchandise collaborations "instrumental" in the growth of fashion initiatives like The Showroom, a collection from Amazon Music and Hypebeast creative agency Hypemaker that paired rising artists like Flo Milli, Lucky Daye and Fousheé with rising streetwear designers. Philanthropy initiatives Hinshaw and his team have carried out — like sponsoring 21 Savage's 2021 and 2022 back-to-school drives in Atlanta — build different kinds of bridges, Hinshaw says, "open[ing] doors for kids in communities like the one I grew up in." And his team's work with Prime Video through livestreams has, Boom adds, "allowed us to expand our ambitions as a company."

Those successes are the product of 11-hour workdays that begin after Hinshaw and his wife drop off their two kids (Sadie, 5, and Tim Jr., 4) at school. If he's not in back-to-back meetings, he's cold-calling managers to follow leads about forthcoming projects he wants to get involved with — efforts Hinshaw says are still crucial in determining next steps for his already accomplished team.

As Hinshaw's sphere of influence keeps expanding, however, its core remains the same as when he wrangled his superstar pals to help him land the job. He's still in close and constant contact with artists and their teams (his email alert dings roughly 30 times during our interview), knowing that, as details can get lost in translation, the ability to get an artist or manager on the phone is essential to keep things in motion. And as always, he knows those relationships aren't just about business: Hanging with artist friends for birthday parties and casual dinners, or just sending a text to check in, could be the key to making the next big project happen.

"Continuing our artist-first vision," he says, "is always going to put us in the place we need to be." **B**



Hinshaw with Kendrick Lamar (left) in Paris in October.

LABELS & DISTRIBUTORS

Tunji Balogun

CHAIRMAN/CEO, DEF JAM RECORDINGS

LaTrice Burnette

EXECUTIVE VP, DEF JAM RECORDINGS; PRESIDENT, 4TH & BROADWAY

Archie Davis

EXECUTIVE VP/CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER, DEF JAM RECORDINGS

Natina Nimene

EXECUTIVE VP OF PROMOTION AND ARTIST RELATIONS, DEF JAM RECORDINGS

Naim McNair

Noah Preston

EXECUTIVE VPs OF A&R, DEF JAM RECORDINGS

A return to creative and cultural leadership has been the focus at Def Jam since Balogun began his tenure in January. This year's artist signings include Muni Long (partnering with her Supergiant Records) and Armani White, whose breakthrough single, "Billie Eilish," netted the rapper-singer-songwriter his first entry on the Billboard Hot 100. "Armani stands out as a real development story that has shown the whole team coming together to break an artist," says Burnette. "Artist development and breaking new artists continue to be our focus, and we're excited for the challenges ahead."

Cleopatra Bernard

PRESIDENT, BAD VIBES FOREVER

Bob Celestin

Alicia Ferriabough Taylor

HEADS OF BUSINESS/LEGAL AFFAIRS, BAD VIBES FOREVER

Solomon "Sounds" Sobande

MANAGER, BAD VIBES FOREVER

The team at Bad Vibes Forever has worked hard to keep the late XXXTentacion's legacy alive in the four years since his death. This past year, the team produced and released the Hulu documentary *Look at Me*, which unflinchingly details the life and career of the rapper born Jahseh Onfroy. While the film dives deep into the star's trials and tribulations, it also sheds light on his mental health issues in a way that will reinforce the connection between XXXTentacion and his devoted fan base.

Katina Bynum

EXECUTIVE VP OF EAST COAST LABELS FOR URBAN, UNIVERSAL MUSIC ENTERPRISES

For Bynum, watching Universal Music Group artists Dr. Dre, Eminem, Kendrick Lamar, Snoop Dogg, Mary J. Blige and others join forces for the 2022 Super Bowl halftime show was just one highlight from her banner year. Dr. Dre and Snoop's "The Next Episode," which

opened the show, had a 994% week-on-week U.S. sales gain from the event. Bynum also points to key anniversary projects, such as UMe's collaboration with Interscope Geffen A&M to celebrate Interscope's 30th anniversary, complete with an art exhibition and vinyl series, as well the 25th anniversary of Janet Jackson's *The Velvet Rope* — an "iconic release," she says.

Don Cannon

Leighton "Lake" Morrison Tyree "DJ Drama" Simmons

CO-FOUNDERS, GENERATION NOW

After molding Lil Uzi Vert into a rap heavyweight, Generation Now scored again with burgeoning superstar Jack Harlow. The Louisville, Ky., upstart earned his first solo Hot 100 No. 1 hit with "First Class" as the record enjoyed a three-week stay atop the chart. In May, Harlow released his second album, *Come Home the Kids Miss You*, which debuted at No. 3 on the Billboard 200 with 113,000 equivalent album units. DJ Drama also reignited his iconic *Gangsta Grillz* series after working with YoungBoy Never Broke Again, Snoop Dogg, Jeezy and Tyler, The Creator, with the lattermost winning best rap album (2021's *Call Me If You Get Lost*) at this year's Grammy Awards alongside the renowned DJ. "2022 was an incredibly blessed year," says Morrison.

Steve Carless

PRESIDENT OF A&R, WARNER RECORDS

Chris Atlas

EXECUTIVE VP OF URBAN MUSIC AND MARKETING, WARNER RECORDS

Brannon Scales

SENIOR VP OF RHYTHM PROMOTION, WARNER RECORDS

Shawnae Corbett-Rice

SENIOR VP OF MARKETING, WARNER RECORDS

While Warner Records artists like Saweetie continue to ascend the charts, the label is looking ahead to the next wave: "2022 has been all about making major contributions in signing artists in the cultural movements and the hyper-local scenes," says Carless, with Warner investing in such artists as rappers Sha EK, Bandmanrill, 2Rare,

Kenzo B and Nigerian producer-performer Pheez. "We've been successful in identifying and developing that new wave of young generational talent and using the power, resources and global reach of our label to bring that music to the masses."

Julius "J" Erving

CEO, HUMAN RE SOURCES; EXECUTIVE VP, THE ORCHARD; EXECUTIVE VP OF CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT, SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

Naji Grampus

VP OF STREAMING AND STRATEGY, THE ORCHARD

Mark Jackson

VP/HEAD OF ATLANTA, HUMAN RE SOURCES

Sammy Pisano

DIRECTOR OF ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT, THE ORCHARD

In the past year, Human Re Sources, the artist distribution and services company that Sony Music Entertainment acquired in 2020, gave British singer-songwriter Raye "a new home and the freedom to speak her truth," says Erving. Her most recent single, "Black Mascara," debuted on BBC Radio 1 as the "hottest record in the U.K." Human Re Sources also recently added Brooklyn rapper Kelz to its roster, whose first single, "Sinner," caught the attention of Pharrell Williams, Jack Harlow and Drake. After turning down numerous front-line label offers, says Erving, Kelz chose Human Re Sources to help make his musical debut.

Bill Evans

EXECUTIVE VP OF URBAN PROMOTION, CAPITOL MUSIC GROUP

Ray Alba

SENIOR VP OF MARKETING, CAPITOL RECORDS

Rebecca "Dimplez" Ijeoma

SENIOR VP FOR DIGITAL MARKETING AND CONTENT DEVELOPMENT, CAPITOL MUSIC GROUP

Chris Turner

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF A&R, CAPITOL RECORDS

As Capitol continues to build its R&B and hip-hop roster, newcomers and veterans alike scored over the last several months. Iconic crooner-producer Babyface took "Keeps On Fallin'" to No. 2 on Adult R&B Airplay, while Queen Naija and Big Sean topped that chart with "Hate Our Love." Capella Grey's "Gyalis" reached No. 3 on R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay, and fellow rapper DoeChii received an MTV Video Music Award for the track

"Persuasive" from her second EP (and first for the label), *She/Her/Black Bitch*.

Lanre Gaba

Michael Kyser

CO-PRESIDENTS OF BLACK MUSIC, ATLANTIC RECORDS

Dallas Martin

EXECUTIVE VP OF A&R, ATLANTIC RECORDS; PRESIDENT, ASYLUM RECORDS

Orlando Wharton

SENIOR VP OF A&R, ATLANTIC RECORDS

Veronica Howell

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, ATLANTIC RECORDS

Kathryn Kenealy

DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL MARKETING, ATLANTIC RECORDS

Appointed co-president of Black music in January alongside Kyser, Gaba says she's most proud of the label's "commitment to long-term artist development." She cites Jack Harlow's breakthrough with his first solo Hot 100 No. 1, "First Class" (released in partnership with Generation Now), Burna Boy's next-level career jump with the No. 1 Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay single "Last Last" and Kodak Black's chart-topping third album, *Back for Everything*, and its successful single "Super Gremlin," a 10-week No. 1 on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart. And that's not counting Atlantic's roster of rising acts. Adds Gaba: "I'm also so proud of the critical acclaim for our emerging artists like Ravyn Lenae and Symba... they're up next."

Ghazi

FOUNDER/CEO, EMPIRE

Nima Etninan

COO, EMPIRE

Tina Davis

SENIOR VP OF A&R, EMPIRE

Christian "Hitmaka" Ward

VP OF A&R, EMPIRE

Over the past 18 months, EMPIRE has seen tremendous growth from rapper-singer Yung Bleu, whose song "You're Mines Still" (featuring Drake) reached the top 10 on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart last year. "Not only has he put out multiple platinum records of his own, but he has really taken control of his career and narrative to write, produce and do features for a plethora of artists including H.E.R., Maroon 5

"Artist development and breaking new artists continue to be our focus, and we're excited for the challenges ahead."

—LATRICE BURNETTE,
DEF JAM RECORDINGS/4TH & BROADWAY

In June, Brandy signed with Motown Records, her first major-label deal in a decade.



and Nicki Minaj,” says Etninan, whose company also represents Eric Bellinger, Larry June and Tink.

Yo Gotti

FOUNDER/CEO, CMG

“I’m proud that me and my artists have built CMG into a powerhouse,” says Gotti, the multiplatinum musician and label executive. Gotti’s own 11th studio album, *CM10: Free Game*, entered the Billboard 200 at No. 3, while Detroit’s 42 Dugg and Louisville, Ky., native EST Gee’s *Last Ones Left* album entered at No. 7 and fellow Memphians Mon-eybagg Yo and Blac Youngsta remain popular. The additions of hometown “F.N.F. (Let’s Go)” rapper GloRilla, Sacramento, Calif., rap veteran Mozzy and R&B singer Leeha Samia take “CMG to new heights,” Gotti says, adding that there’s “no better feeling than watching your artists develop, reach their potential and put themselves in position to create generational wealth for their families.”

Elliot Grainge

FOUNDER/CEO, 10K PROJECTS

Zach Friedman Tony Talamo

CO-PRESIDENTS, 10K PROJECTS

Under Grainge, 10K Projects expanded its reach this year with the purchase of the label Homemade Projects, which led to the latter’s co-founders, Friedman and Talamo, joining as 10K’s co-presidents.

The label’s new management re-signed marquee artist Trippie Redd in 2022, and found further success with names like Internet Money and newcomer Jeelel. “Hip-hop is foundational at 10K, and nothing has been more important to building our legacy than the re-signing of Trippie Redd,” Friedman says. “We’re thrilled he will call 10K his home for years to come.”

Ethiopia Habtemariam

CHAIRWOMAN/CEO, MOTOWN RECORDS

Tramiel “Twin” Clark

SENIOR VP, MOTOWN RECORDS/QUALITY CONTROL MUSIC/ARMANI MUSIC

JD Anderson

SENIOR VP OF MARKETING, MOTOWN RECORDS

Britney Davis

SENIOR VP OF ARTIST RELATIONS, MARKETING AND SPECIAL PROJECTS, MOTOWN RECORDS

Kenoe Jordan

VP OF A&R, MOTOWN RECORDS

Jamila Thomas

VP OF MARKETING, MOTOWN RECORDS

After regaining stand-alone label status in 2021, Motown has been revving up its engines — first with star signings such as Sean “Diddy” Combs, Brandy and, most recently, YoungBoy Never Broke Again — then with releases of chart-topping albums from Quavo & Takeoff and Lil Baby, whose *It’s Only Me* marks his third No. 1 on the Billboard 200. Of a roster that also includes Lil Yachty, Vince Staples, City Girls,

Offset and Smino, Habtemariam says, “I’m so incredibly proud of our team and artists. Motown continues to create, define and influence popular culture around the world.”

Wayne Hampton

CO-FOUNDER/CHIEF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, CREATE MUSIC GROUP

Mark Hill

HEAD OF URBAN, CREATE MUSIC GROUP

Carl LeGrett

DIRECTOR OF A&R, CREATE MUSIC GROUP PUBLISHING

Create Music Group takes pride in its “ability to handle artists at all levels,” says Hampton. “We’ve built an amazing team at Create, one that can help an established artist like Tory Lanez attain the upper reaches of the albums charts.” Lanez has had five top five releases on the Billboard 200. “At the same time, [Create] can identify and help propel a newcomer like Ice Spice to stardom,” he says. The music tech company is also letting artists tap into their digital service provider income streams as soon as that money is earned with the 2021 launch of the Create Carbon Card.

Saint Harraway

EXECUTIVE VP OF A&R, REPUBLIC RECORDS; CO-PRESIDENT, UPTOWN RECORDS

Danielle Price

EXECUTIVE VP, REPUBLIC RECORDS

Roderick Scott

Xiarra Diamond Nimrod

VPS OF MARKETING STRATEGY, REPUBLIC RECORDS

Romel Lherisson

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF COMMERCE, REPUBLIC RECORDS

Between a star roster that includes Drake, The Weeknd, Nicki Minaj, Post Malone, Kid Cudi, John Legend and rising newcomer Coi Leray, and a new partnership with multiplatinum producer ATL Jacob, Republic garnered a host of success stories over the last year. Adds Price, who joined Republic from 10K Projects in April: “We’re very proud to be a company that launched as a small independent and has grown into one of the most competitive labels in the world. This year, we’re most proud of how our strategic label ventures are similarly following suit. We’ve seen this firsthand with the relaunch of Uptown Records and Mercury Records, as well as with the growth of Imperial Distribution.”

Juliette Jones

COO, ALAMO RECORDS

Dharmic Jain

VP OF MARKETING, ALAMO RECORDS

Tiara Hargrave

EXECUTIVE VP/GM, ALAMO RECORDS

A year after Sony Music Entertainment acquired a majority stake in Todd Moscovitz’s Alamo Records, the New

York-based label had a breakout year. Jones says it was “incredibly exciting” in 2022 to see rappers Lil Durk and Rod Wave score No. 1 albums on the Billboard 200 with *7220* and *Beautiful Mind*, respectively. “For our artists to score two certified gold albums in 2022 is a testament to their hard work and our dedication to positioning them for success in a competitive field,” says Jones, who also notes the rise of Chicago drill rapper PGF Nuk: His single “Waddup” has earned over 100 million U.S. streams in less than a year. “That,” she says, “reflects our commitment to artist development and breaking new artists.”

Kevin Liles

CHAIRMAN/CEO, 300 ENTERTAINMENT/ELEKTRA

Rayna Bass

Selim Bouab

CO-PRESIDENTS, 300 ENTERTAINMENT

Dee Sonaram

EXECUTIVE VP OF RHYTHMIC PROMOTIONS, 300 ENTERTAINMENT

Shadow Stokes

EXECUTIVE VP OF PROMOTIONS, 300 ENTERTAINMENT

Leesa Brunson-Boland

SENIOR VP/HEAD OF A&R OPERATIONS AND ADMINISTRATION, 300 ENTERTAINMENT

300 Entertainment/Elektra had a splashy start to the new year when Gunna released his Billboard 200 chart-topper, *DS4Ever*. Powered by his Hot 100 top 10 single “Pushin P” (featuring Young Thug and Future), Gunna had social media in an uproar over his newly coined phrase. The label’s female acts also scored big in 2022: Megan Thee Stallion flexed her prowess as host and performer on *Saturday Night Live* after the success of her Billboard 200 top five release, *Traumazine*, while Mary J. Blige and her fellow Super Bowl halftime show performers each received Emmy Awards for that event.

Mark Pitts

PRESIDENT, RCA RECORDS; CEO, BYSTORM ENTERTAINMENT

Carolyn Williams

EXECUTIVE VP, RCA RECORDS

Derrick Aroh

Rich “Skane Dolla” Ford

SENIOR VPS OF A&R, RCA RECORDS

Jonathan Master

SENIOR VP OF A&R AND MARKETING, RCA RECORDS

Sam Selolwane

HEAD OF PROMOTION (HIP-HOP, R&B, MIXSHOW), RCA RECORDS

Latto, Nardo Wick and Sleepy Hallow have been “leading the pack for RCA this year,” says Pitts. Latto became the first female rapper to top the Rhythmic Airplay, Rap Airplay and Pop Airplay charts with the same song, “Big Energy.” Wick’s “Who Want Smoke??” peaked

at No. 17 on the Hot 100, while Hallow's "2055" became his highest-charting hit, reaching No. 51 on the Hot 100, and was certified double-platinum. "We're still the home for artistic expression across all genres," says Pitts, "but particularly in the hip-hop space, we're leveling up."

Ricky Reed

FOUNDER/CEO, NICE LIFE RECORDING COMPANY

Larry Wade

CO-OWNER/COO, NICE LIFE RECORDING COMPANY

Lizzo has been a dominant pop culture presence this year, from climbing the *Billboard* charts to playing a crystal flute that once belonged to President James Madison at the Library of Congress. On the charts, three years after scoring her first Hot 100 No. 1 with "Truth Hurts," Lizzo notched her second chart-topper with "About Damn Time," which ruled for two weeks. The Reed-produced track, released on Nice Life/Atlantic Records, also landed Lizzo her first top 10 on both the *Billboard* Global 200 and *Billboard* Global Excl. U.S. charts. "She was able to solidify her position as one of this generation's most important global superstars," says Reed, "while Nice Life was able to break new ground with global chart positions. Nobody outworks us."

Tim Reid

SENIOR VP OF REPERTOIRE AND MARKETING, BMG

Promoted to his current repertoire and marketing role at BMG in 2020, Reid

secured a new multi-album deal with Logic and a global recording partnership with Stefflon Don, while BMG labelmate Maxwell had a successful run with his *The Night Tour* and the No. 1 Adult R&B Airplay single "Off." Reid was also actively involved in making a deal with BMG UK for Danger Mouse and Black Thought's latest album, *Dangerous Thoughts*.

Sylvia Rhone

CHAIRMAN/CEO, EPIC RECORDS

Ezekiel Lewis

EXECUTIVE VP/HEAD OF A&R, EPIC RECORDS

The past year brought a number of wins for Epic under Rhone's leadership, including a combined 16.1 billion world-wide audio streams across the label's roster and 27 RIAA platinum singles, according to Epic. In 2022 alone, the label scored nine *Billboard* 200 debuts, including Yo Gotti's *CM10: Free Game* at No. 3 and Future's *I Never Liked You* at No. 1. Future's album also brought another career achievement with the Hot 100 No. 1 "Wait for U," featuring Drake and Tems. The track set the record for the most weeks at No. 1 (15) in the 30-year history of the *Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay* chart.

Jonnyshipes

FOUNDER, CINEMATIC MUSIC GROUP

Hovain Hylton

VP, CINEMATIC MUSIC GROUP

Adding comedy to the Cinematic Music

Group roster has been one of Jonnyshipes' biggest accomplishments of the past year. "When I was growing up, I always loved comedy — as much as I did music," says the label's founder, who is credited with discovering Nipsey Hussle, Joey Bada\$\$ and Smoke DZA. "I have been lucky enough to find great artist after great artist in my career. Those wins in music gave me the platform to work with Druski," the internet personality he co-manages, "and pursue my goals of fusing hip-hop and comedy."

Abou "Bu" Thiam

EXECUTIVE VP, COLUMBIA RECORDS

Luis "Lu" Mota

SENIOR VP OF A&R, COLUMBIA RECORDS

Shahendra Ohneswera

SENIOR VP OF CONTENT DEVELOPMENT,

COLUMBIA RECORDS

Wilt Wallace

SENIOR VP OF URBAN PROMOTION, COLUMBIA

RECORDS

John Vincent Salcedo

VP OF DIGITAL MARKETING, COLUMBIA RECORDS

Victoria White-Mason

VP OF MARKETING, COLUMBIA RECORDS

Over the past year, members of Columbia's hip-hop roster scored top 10 debuts on the *Billboard* 200, namely Lil Nas X with *Montero*, Fivio Foreign with *B.I.B.L.E.* and Polo G with *Hall of Fame* — his first No. 1 album. For the label's R&B/hip-hop team, however, the real reward goes beyond numbers and charts. Says Salcedo: "The ability to adapt

and move subgenres of hip-hop into the forefront of mainstream music is a testament to our team's focus on further developing artists' communities without ever steering away from the foundation they initially built."

Anthony "Top Dawg" Tiffith

FOUNDER/CEO, TOP DAWG ENTERTAINMENT

Terrence "Punch" Henderson

PRESIDENT, TOP DAWG ENTERTAINMENT

A highlight of Top Dawg Entertainment's year was the May release of Kendrick Lamar's *Mr. Morale & The Big Steppers* — what Tiffith calls the label's "victory lap album" — as well as the celebration of the 10th anniversary of Lamar's major-label debut, *good kid, m.A.A.d city*. TDE's year also included the emergence of newcomer Doechii and SZA's first Grammy win for her guest role on Doja Cat's "Kiss Me More" and the release of the deluxe version of SZA's 2017 breakthrough, *Ctrl*. Tiffith says TDE is "laying the red carpet out" for the upcoming release of SZA's second album: "We are very excited about that." (For more on SZA, see page 46.)

Andre Torres

SENIOR VP OF GLOBAL CATALOG DEVELOPMENT AND

MARKETING, WARNER RECORDED MUSIC

Torres, who joined Warner from Spotify last fall, had numerous successes over the past year while working with the music giant's front-line labels to spotlight its hip-hop catalog. Recently, a Kodak Black limited-edition figurine celebrating the fifth anniversary of the rapper's *Project Baby 2* album sold out "in a matter of hours" using Spotify's Fans First program. His team also worked with Atlantic, *HipHopDX* and Warner Music Group's WMX to create a 30-minute documentary about the 10th anniversary of Wiz Khalifa's *Rolling Papers* and managed to get Kehlani's *Cloud9* debut mixtape on streaming services for the first time.

Steven Victor

CEO, VICTOR VICTOR WORLDWIDE; SENIOR VP OF

A&R, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

In April, Victor tasted victory on the managerial front when longtime client Pusha T notched his first *Billboard* 200 No. 1 album in May with *It's Almost Dry*. The previous month, Victor enjoyed another win when Japanese fashion designer/record producer Nigo released his second album, *I Know Nigo!*, under Victor Victor Worldwide and Republic Records. The album debuted in the top 15 on the *Billboard* 200 and includes features from A\$AP Rocky, Lil Uzi Vert and Tyler, The Creator. "It's a thoughtful and impactful project," says Victor, "that's authentic to its art and artists."

Megan Thee Stallion both hosted and performed on *Saturday Night Live* in October.



RESPECT

ARTISTS

GARY GUIDRY

SHELBY JOYNER

BILL INGRAM

TROY BROWN

WALT REEDER JR

SHAHIDA MAUSI

JANICE COTTON

LIONEL BEA

SULAIMAN MAUSI

ARTISTS

ARTISTS



CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE POWER PLAYERS AT THE BLACK PROMOTERS COLLECTIVE WHO ARE DEDICATED TO THE CULTURE AND ITS REPRESENTATION DAY IN AND DAY OUT.

R&B/2022 HIP-HOP

POWER PLAYERS



Blxst photographed
Oct. 25 at GenQ
Studio in Los Angeles.

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

BLXST

The singer, rapper and producer has crafted hooks for some of hip-hop's biggest names, but he's fine taking the slow road to the top — and maintaining control over his narrative along the way

BY CYDNEY LEE // PHOTOGRAPHED BY SAGE EAST

THIS PAST FEBRUARY, the rising star Blxst got an unexpected text: Anthony Saleh, Kendrick Lamar's manager, wanted to connect him with his client — and soon enough, the two artists were on FaceTime.

"[Kendrick] was like, 'Yo, I respect what you got going on. I'm a fan of your last project. I want you to be a part of my album,'" Blxst recalls.

He had no idea if what he recorded would end up on the album — or when the album would even arrive. "This album is never finna come out. He ain't dropped a project in four years," Blxst remembers thinking at the time, with a laugh. Lamar sent him an instrumental and told Blxst to "do whatever you want to it," he says. "He came with a melody of his own for the bridge. I got voice memos of him singing and telling me what notes to hit." So Blxst did what he does best: He added an earworm of a hook.

Both the track and the album it landed on — Lamar's acclaimed 2022 project, *Mr. Morale & The Big Steppers* — came to fruition. "Die Hard," featuring singer Amanda Reifer, peaked at No. 5 on the Billboard Hot 100, and Lamar is just one of the high-profile co-signs Blxst has attracted lately. Since releasing his debut solo EP, *No Love Lost*, in 2020, Blxst (real name: Matthew Burdette) has become a go-to feature for artists like Rick Ross, Snoop Dogg and Nas, and something of a modern-day Nate Dogg in the process — a "king of hooks" in his own right who surprisingly never charges for his services.

"I'm more about the art," the 30-year-old explains. "If I'm a fan of the song or if it fits with the direction that I'm going in, I'mma jump on a song off the strength. If I don't like it, I'mma just not do it."

Growing up in South Central Los Angeles, and attending high school in safer Upland about 40 miles east, Blxst taught himself how to rap, sing and produce as a hobby. A self-described introvert who's still remarkably reserved and calm, he spent the rest of his free time at the local skate park, which Tyler, The Creator also happened to frequent. "I used to go up to him rapping lyrics [of his] that he would drop on his Myspace, before he was super big," Blxst recalls.

In 2018, he founded his own label, Evgle (pronounced "Eagle") Records, and started to release singles. The following year, Blxst's business partners — manager Vic Burnett and attorney Karl

Fowlkes — joined him as Evgle co-founders. "I wanted to create a platform where I could control my narrative. I think it's important for people to be able to control their intellectual property," says Blxst. "Especially with me being a producer as well, I'm doing most of the work."

Over the next couple of years, Blxst released his first collaborative EP (2019's *Sixtape*, with fellow South Central artist Bino Rideaux) and Evgle struck a partnership with Red Bull Records, under which Blxst maintains his independence as an artist. By the time *No Love Lost* came out in 2020 (and, a few months later, its deluxe version), the buzz around Blxst had grown, and his music — with its two-step rhythms evoking the comfort of a Black cookout — provided a sense of solace for fans post-quarantine. That year, both Evgle and Blxst individually signed publishing deals with Warner Chappell.

This past spring, his debut full-length album, *Before You Go*, arrived, acting as "a note to self, speaking on the transition I feel like I'm facing as an artist, as an executive," he told *Billboard* at the time. From slow jams to upbeat tracks oozing L.A. flair, *No Love Lost* yielded singles like "Hurt," "Got It All" and "Chosen" featuring Ty Dolla \$ign and Tyga, which recently went platinum.

Not that Blxst has had much time to celebrate. He has been too busy picking up accolades, including a spot in *XXL*'s Freshman Class of 2021, the first-ever Rising Star award at *Billboard*'s 2021 R&B/Hip-Hop Summit and now, *Billboard*'s Rookie of the Year honor. And when we talk, he's wrapping up his first headlining world tour — and clearly still wrapping his mind around his newfound fame.

"To travel and see people still singing [my songs] word-for-word, it's like, 'What is going on?'" he marvels. "I still be tripping off the position I'm in." And he's in no rush to "take an elevator" to the top. "I'm moving at a slow pace because that's what I want to do," he says. "I elevated a lot in just this one year but being in control of my deal and being in control of my narrative, it allows me to take a look at every step."

That means remaining a student of the game — and appreciating the little lessons along the way. "I remember I was in the studio with Snoop, just playing music for him and seeing him nod his head, and after I pushed 'stop,' him reciting certain lines I said," Blxst recalls. "It was just a reminder for me to believe in myself even more." **B**

STYLING BY JOY BRIDGES

**Bryan "Birdman" Williams
Ronald "Slim" Williams**

CO-FOUNDERS/CO-CEOs, CASH MONEY RECORDS
The Williams brothers have introduced some of the biggest names in hip-hop over the last 30 years, including Lil Wayne, Drake and Nicki Minaj. The Cash Money co-founders were honored with this year's lifetime achievement award at the Living Legends Foundation's 30th-anniversary gala in October. Other notable feats in 2022: Birdman collaborated with Quavo & Takeoff for their single "Big Stunna" and worked with YoungBoy Never Broke Again on his *From the Bayou* mixtape.

Nicole Wyskoarko

EXECUTIVE VP/CO-HEAD OF A&R,
INTERSCOPE GEFLEN A&M

Aaron "Dash" Sherrod

PRESIDENT OF A&R, GEFLEN

Tim Glover

EXECUTIVE VP OF A&R, INTERSCOPE

Ramon Alvarez-Smikle

SENIOR VP/HEAD OF URBAN DIGITAL MARKETING,
INTERSCOPE

Laura Carter

SENIOR VP OF URBAN MARKETING, INTERSCOPE

Keinon Johnson

SENIOR VP/HEAD OF URBAN PROMOTIONS,
INTERSCOPE

Kendrick Lamar's long-awaited return with his fifth studio album, *Mr. Morale & The Big Steppers*, and successful world tour played a key role in Interscope Geffen A&M's banner year. Among the other R&B/hip-hop artists and partnerships that flourished are LVRN's Summer Walker, Dreamville's J.I.D and Ari Lennox, and 10 Summers' Ella Mai. "These artists continued to grow and push the cultural envelope," says Wyskoarko. In addition, "newcomers like CMG's GloRilla and EST Gee, along with Geffen's partnership with Field Trip Recordings' Yeat, have broken new ground and found chart success."

Andre "Dr. Dre" Young

FOUNDER/CEO, AFTERMATH ENTERTAINMENT

Ashley Palmer-Gilkey

GM, AFTERMATH ENTERTAINMENT

"While there were many bold achievements this past year, it was most fulfilling for the team to bring the Super Bowl halftime show to life in our backyard of Inglewood [Calif.]," says Palmer-Gilkey. The 2022 event on NBC brought together Dr. Dre, Eminem, Mary J. Blige, Snoop Dogg, Kendrick Lamar and surprise guest 50 Cent for a power-packed performance. The event later scored a touchdown of its own, winning the Emmy Award for outstanding variety special (live), with the performers each receiving the statuette. "More than that," adds Palmer-Gilkey, "it was a celebratory full-circle home-

coming for Dre's musical family, whom I've worked alongside the last 14 years and hold in high regard."

MULTISECTOR

Tunde Balogun

CO-FOUNDER/PRESIDENT, LVRN

Junia Abaidoo

CO-FOUNDER/HEAD OF OPERATIONS AND TOURING,
LVRN

Justice Baiden

CO-FOUNDER/HEAD OF A&R, LVRN

Sean "Famoso" McNichol

CO-FOUNDER/HEAD OF MARKETING AND
BRAND PARTNERSHIPS, LVRN

Carlton Ramong

CO-FOUNDER/CREATIVE DIRECTOR, LVRN

Amber Grimes

EXECUTIVE VP/GM, LVRN

Early in 2022, LVRN bolstered its executive team by hiring respected music industry veteran Grimes as executive vp/GM. The R&B powerhouse label, which counts Summer Walker, 6LACK and DRAM) among its artists, also expanded on the management side, where Grimes serves as a partner, with the signing of Afrobeats stars Davido and SPINALL; the pair join management client dvsn. Along with these new additions, LVRN

DJ Kool Herc's historic South Bronx party on Aug. 11, 1973, widely considered the birthplace of hip-hop. Mass Appeal's #HipHop50 project honors the genre's key producers with live events, pop-up stores, merchandise and a star-studded EP series by producers from DJ Premier to Swizz Beatz. "It has grown into something much larger than we ever envisioned, our love letter to hip-hop," says Bittenbender, who took over the "hybrid entertainment company" a decade ago with Nas and writer Sacha Jenkins.

Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter

FOUNDER/CHAIRMAN, ROC NATION

Desiree Perez

CEO, ROC NATION

Jay Brown

VICE CHAIRMAN, ROC NATION

Roc Nation scored big time when NBC's February broadcast of the Super Bowl halftime show, starring Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Eminem, Mary J. Blige and Kendrick Lamar, won three Emmys including outstanding variety special (live). "The Emmy wins were announced the same weekend Roc Nation staged the official 10th anniversary of the Made in America festival featuring Tyler, The Creator and Bad Bunny," says Perez. The NFL and Roc Nation have since confirmed Rihanna as the headliner of the Apple Music Super

Candace Rodney

EXECUTIVE VP/STUDIOS PRESIDENT, DREAMVILLE

After two years of delays, J. Cole's pioneering label, Dreamville, finally got to flex its event production skills once more with its second Dreamville Festival in April, bringing in outside stars including Lil Baby, Ashanti, Ja Rule and Lil Wayne. Along with the event's return, Dreamville artists celebrated major firsts: J.I.D scored his first top 10 hit on the Hot 100 with an Imagine Dragons collaboration ("Enemy"), while Ari Lennox earned her first No. 1 on the Adult R&B Airplay chart with "Pressure." Says Roy: "I couldn't be more proud of the creativity, passion and talent displayed by our artist roster."

Sean "Diddy" Combs

CHAIRMAN/CEO, BAD BOY ENTERTAINMENT/
LOVE RECORDS/REVOLT MEDIA

"Launching Love Records and partnering with Motown has been about building on the legacy of Bad Boy and getting back to doing what I love," says Combs. "Also being able to get back onstage and perform at the Billboard Music Awards [and the] iHeart Music Festival, and being honored at the BET Awards for lifetime achievement. Most importantly, it's about restoring respect and appreciation for R&B as an art form, respecting the craft of making hit records and providing a platform for the next generation of artists, songwriters and producers moving the genre forward."

Brandon "Lil Bibby" Dickinson

George "G-Money" Dickinson
Peter "Pete" Jideonwo

PARTNERS, GRADE A PRODUCTIONS

Following rapper Juice WRLD's death in December 2019, the Grade A Productions team has been focused on preserving his legacy. In December 2021, the group cemented the star's status with the release of his second posthumous album, *Fighting Demons*, which debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard 200 and at No. 1 on Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums with 119,000 equivalent album units. The company also announced the first Juice WRLD Day (Dec. 9), selling out Chicago's United Center in 2021. Jideonwo calls the event "an amazing celebration of life. We look forward to this year's Juice WRLD Day and continuing Juice's message of hope and positivity."

Aubrey "Drake" Graham

CO-FOUNDER, OVO/OVO SOUND

Noah "40" Shebib

CO-FOUNDER, OVO/OVO SOUND; PRODUCER

Oliver El-Khatib

CO-FOUNDER, OVO/OVO SOUND

Mr. Morgan

PRESIDENT, OVO SOUND

"While there were many bold achievements this past year, it was most fulfilling for the team to bring the Super Bowl halftime show to life in our backyard of Inglewood."

—ASHLEY PALMER-GILKEY,
AFTERMATH ENTERTAINMENT

opened a global headquarters in Atlanta, complete with a recording studio that its artists can use.

Peter Bittenbender

CEO, MASS APPEAL

Annie Chen

VP OF MARKETING, MASS APPEAL

In addition to releasing last year's *King's Disease II* by Mass Appeal co-founder Nas, the indie label and film-content company spent the past year building awareness for the 50th anniversary of

Bowl LVIII Halftime Show — her first major performance in five years — and in October, Megan Thee Stallion hosted and performed on *Saturday Night Live*.

Jermaine "J. Cole" Cole

CO-FOUNDER/PARTNER, DREAMVILLE

Ibrahim "Ib" Hamad

CO-FOUNDER/PARTNER/RECORDS PRESIDENT,
DREAMVILLE

Adam Roy

CO-FOUNDER/PARTNER/FESTIVAL PRESIDENT/APPELL
PRESIDENT, DREAMVILLE

BMI

COUNTRY

AWARDS 2022

ICON AWARD

TOBY KEITH

SONG OF THE YEAR

FOREVER AFTER ALL

Luke Combs

Drew Parker

Rob Williford

50 EGG MUSIC / BIG MUSIC MACHINE

OAK TREE SWING PUBLISHING / ROWDY ROB MUSIC

SONY/ATV TREE / STRAIGHT DIMES PUBLISHING

SONGWRITER OF THE YEAR

MICHAEL HARDY

Beers on Me / Come Back as a Country Boy

Give Heaven Some Hell / Sand in My Boots

Single Saturday Night

PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR

SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

CELEBRATE WITH US

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MUSIC MOVES
OUR WORLD

7 SUMMERS

MORGAN WALLEN
Big Loud Mountain
Bo Wallace Publishing
Round Hill Works

BEERS ON ME

BRELAND
ROSS COPPERMAN
LUKE DICK
NICOLLE GALYON
MICHAEL HARDY
BEN JOHNSON
A Boy Named Ford / Artist 101 Publishing Group
Ben There Wrote That Publishing
EMI-Blackwood Music, Inc. / Emileon Songs
Hits From the Tape Room
Iris in the Sky with Diamonds
Little Louder Songs / Pen Point Guard Music
Redneck Music / Relative Music Group
Reservoir 416 / Round Hill Compositions
Songs of Kobalt Music Publishing / Sony/ATV Tree
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

BEST THING SINCE BACKROADS

BEN JOHNSON
JORDAN MINTON
GEOFF WARBURTON (SOCAN)
Artist 101 Publishing Group
Ben There Wrote That Publishing
First Cut Is the Deepest, Inc.
Here Comes The Boom Music
Hits From the Tape Room / Round Hill Compositions
Songs of Kobalt Music Publishing / Sony/ATV Ballad

BLAME IT ON YOU

JOHN EDWARDS
TULLY KENNEDY
BMG Platinum Songs US / IrishSonMusic
Lee 45 Music Publishing / Triple Play Music
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.
Zona Blue Music

BREAKING UP WAS EASY IN THE 90S

ERNEST KEITH SMITH
Big Loud Mountain / Ern Dog Music
Songs of Universal, Inc.

CHASING AFTER YOU

BRINLEY ADDINGTON
Adding Tone Music / Sixteen Stars Music

COLD AS YOU

LUKE COMBS
SHANE MINOR
RANDY MONTANA
Boottleg Lyrics / Cowboy Revival Music
No Man Can Eat 50 Eggs Music
Songs of Universal, Inc.
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

COLD BEER CALLING MY NAME

BRETT TYLER
Anthem Extremely Combustible Music
Anthem Music Publishing / Extremely Combustible Music
Sonofgroceries Music / Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

COME BACK AS A COUNTRY BOY

MICHAEL HARDY
JOSH THOMPSON
MV2 Music / Red Bandana Publishing
Redneck Music / Relative Music Group
Sony/ATV Tree

COUNTRY AGAIN

THOMAS RHETT
Cricket On The Line / EMI-Blackwood Music, Inc.
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

DRINKIN' BEER, TALKIN' GOD. AMEN.

CHASE RICE
Dack Janiels Publishing / Sony/ATV Countryside

DRUNK (AND I DON'T WANNA GO HOME)

ELLE KING
Elle King Music / EMI-Blackwood Music, Inc.

FAMOUS FRIENDS

CHRIS YOUNG
Songs of Universal, Inc.
They've Gone to Plaid Publishing LLC

FANCY LIKE

WALKER HAYES
SHANE STEVENS
Holy Graffiti Music / Me Gusta 30 Music
Music of MAM / Purplebeatz
Songs of Kobalt Music Publishing
Songs of SMACK / Spark In Your Pocket

FOREVER AFTER ALL

LUKE COMBS
DREW PARKER
ROB WILLIFORD
50 Egg Music / Big Music Machine
Oak Tree Swing Publishing / Rowdy Rob Music
Sony/ATV Tree / Straight Dimes Publishing

FREEDOM WAS A HIGHWAY

ASH BOWERS
Big Spaces Music / Sony/ATV Countryside

GIVE HEAVEN SOME HELL

MICHAEL HARDY
BEN JOHNSON
Redneck Music / Relative Music Group
Sony/ATV Tree

GLAD YOU EXIST

RYAN LEWIS
SHAY MOONEY
TAYLA PARX
Shay Mooney Music / Spokane Boy Music
Taylor Monet Music / Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

GONE

NICOLLE GALYON
BEN JOHNSON
Artist 101 Publishing Group
Ben There Wrote That Publishing
Hits From the Tape Room / Round Hill Compositions
Songs of Influence / Songs of Kobalt Music Publishing
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

HALF OF MY HOMETOWN

ROSS COPPERMAN
NICOLLE GALYON
EMI-Blackwood Music, Inc.
Iris in the Sky with Diamonds / Songs of Influence
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

HEART ON FIRE

ERIC CHURCH
Longer And Louder Music / Sony/ATV Tree

HELL OF A VIEW

CASEY BEATHARD
ERIC CHURCH
MONTY CRISWELL
Little Louder Songs / Longer And Louder Music
Rust and Chrome Music / Seven Ring Circus Songs
Songs of Kobalt Music Publishing / Sony/ATV Tree
Spirit of Nashville One Crescendo / Tunes of Fluid

HOME SWEET

RUSSELL DICKERSON
CHARLES KELLEY
BMG Platinum Songs US
Kailley's Dream / Music That Is Russell
RADIOBULLETPUBLISHING
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

IF I DIDN'T LOVE YOU

TULLY KENNEDY
JOHN MORGAN
LYDIA VAUGHAN
BMG Platinum Songs US / IrishSonMusic
Songs of Double Down Music / Triple Play Music
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.
Writersonthehorn Publishing

IF I WAS A COWBOY

JESSE FRASURE
MIRANDA LAMBERT
Pink Dog Publishing / Songs of Roc Nation Music
Sony/ATV Tree / Telemity Rhythm House Music
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

IT'S 'CAUSE I AM

CALLISTA CLARK
CAMERON JAYMES
LAURA VELTZ
Big Music Machine / Callista Clark Publishing
Hippnosis Beats / Never Veltz So Good Publishing
Smells Of Rich Mahogany

JUST ABOUT OVER YOU

PRISCILLA BLOCK
SARAH JONES
91 Dogs Publishing / Scillas Song Shop Publishing
Sony/ATV Tree / Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

KNOWING YOU

KAT HIGGINS (SOCAN)
ADAM JAMES
BMG Platinum Songs US / Pompano Run Music
Something To Be Proud Of Music / Songs For Ellie May
Songs of Kobalt Music Publishing

MADE FOR YOU

BENJY DAVIS
JOEY HYDE
Plaid Flag Music / Songs of Kobalt Music Publishing
Sony/ATV Tree

MEMORY I DON'T MESS WITH

BRIAN DAVIS
BILLY MONTANA
Anthem Music Publishing / Is That the Train Music
Mike Curb Music / Pump House Anthem
Songs About Jack / Twangville Music
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

MINIMUM WAGE

JESSE FRASURE
NICOLLE GALYON
Songs of Influence / Songs of Roc Nation Music
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

MY BOY

ELVIE SHANE
LEE STARR
RUSSELL SUTTON
Block of Marble Music / Lee Starr Publishing
Rome Phrey Publishing / Sony/ATV Tree
Sussy Rutts Publishing
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

NEVER WANTED TO BE THAT GIRL

ASHLEY MCBRYDE
Canned Biscuit Songs / Songs of Harpeth Valley
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

NOBODY

DALLAS WILSON
Songs of Riser House / Sony/ATV Countryside

ONE MISSISSIPPI

KANE BROWN
JESSE FRASURE
LEVON GRAY
ERNEST KEITH SMITH
Big Loud Mountain / Bridge 1 Music
Ern Dog Music / Songs of Family Publishing
Songs of Influence / Songs of Roc Nation Music
Songs of Universal, Inc. / Sony/ATV Tree
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

ONE TOO MANY

CUTFATHER
DANIEL DAVIDSEN
PETER WALLEVIK
Reservoir 416 / Songs of Kobalt Music Publishing

SAND IN MY BOOTS

MICHAEL HARDY
Relative Music Group / Sony/ATV Tree

SETTLING DOWN

LUKE DICK
NATALIE HEMBY
MIRANDA LAMBERT
Concord / Emileon Songs / Little Louder Songs
Music of CTM Outlander Music LP / Pink Dog Publishing
Songs of Kobalt Music Publishing / Songs of Universal, Inc.
Sony/ATV Tree / Wrucke For You Publishing

SINGLE SATURDAY NIGHT

MICHAEL HARDY
MARK HOLMAN
Art In The Fodder Music / BMG Platinum Songs US
Hark Molman Songs / Ju Jettsu Music
Redneck Music / Relative Music Group
Songs of Universal, Inc. / Sony/ATV Tree

TEQUILA LITTLE TIME

RHETT AKINS
JON PARDI
Cowboy and Gus Publishing / Happy Song Factory
Ritten By Rhettro / Sony/ATV Countryside
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

THINGS A MAN OUGHTA KNOW

JASON NIX
Sony/ATV Countryside

THINKING 'BOUT YOU

DUSTIN LYNCH
WILL WEATHERLY
Chillin Like Villain's Music
Magic Mustang Music, Inc. / Mandy's Favorite Songs
Track House Worldwide Entertainment
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

TIL YOU CAN'T

BEN STENNIS
Dead Aim Music / Songs of Kobalt Music Publishing
The Stennis Mightier Music

TO BE LOVED BY YOU

RHETT AKINS
PARKER MCCOLLUM
ParkerMac Publishing / Ritten By Rhettro
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

WASTED ON YOU

CHARLIE HANDSOME
ERNEST KEITH SMITH
JOSH THOMPSON
MORGAN WALLEN
Big Loud Mountain / Bo Wallace Publishing
Ern Dog Music / MV2 Music / Red Bandana Publishing
Round Hill Works / Songs of Universal, Inc.
Sony/ATV Songs LLC / Sony/ATV Tree

WAVES

RYAN HURD
CHASE MCGILL
Songs of Universal, Inc.

WE DIDN'T HAVE MUCH

RANDY MONTANA
Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

WHISKEY AND RAIN

JESSE FRASURE
JOSH THOMPSON
Big Music Machine / MV2 Music
Songs of Influence / Songs of Roc Nation Music
Sony/ATV Tree / Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp.

WILD HEARTS

ERIC PASLAY
KETH URBAN
Big Music Machine / Maroma Music
Pay The Nice Guy Publishing / Songs of Universal, Inc.

YOU TIME

SCOTTY MCCREERY
Dagum Music / Songs of Universal, Inc.

On Nov. 4, Drake and 21 Savage released their joint album, *Her Loss*, after a delay of a week when producer Noah “40” Shebib contracted COVID-19. The album entered the Billboard 200 at No. 1, the latest success Drake has achieved in his continued dominance of pop and R&B/hip-hop with the backing of his OVO crew. The Canadian rapper previously reached No. 1 on the Billboard 200 with *Honestly, Nevermind* in June. He is one of only six artists to land over 10 albums at the peak of that chart and claimed nine of the top 10 positions on the Hot 100 in September 2021 — a record surpassed only recently by Taylor Swift.

Shawn Holiday

PRESIDENT/HEAD OF A&R, GIANT MUSIC; MANAGER, FULL STOP MANAGEMENT

At the helm of Giant Music, Holiday has achieved success for The Azoff Company with a roster that includes Tay B, Swa-Vay, Ayleen and Cash Cobain. Holiday is also responsible for bringing Cardi B, Roddy Ricch and Daniel Caesar to Full Stop Management. Caesar performed at Coachella earlier this year, and Ricch is on his first arena tour with Post Malone. Holiday notes that “it has been a long time” since Cardi released her debut album; both her and Caesar have new releases slated for early 2023. Regarding a collaboration between the rapper and crooner, Holiday says: “That’s the plan.”

**Matt MacFarlane
Eli Piccarreta**

VPs OF A&R, ARTIST PUBLISHING GROUP

With a roster that includes producers such as Earwolf and The Futuristics as well as songwriters 24KGoldn, Ava Max and Charlie Puth, Artist Publishing Group had what MacFarlane calls an “unprecedented” 18 months. “APG’s clients have touched 23 No. 1 songs at 10 different radio formats,” he says of tracks including The Kid LAROI and Justin Bieber’s “Stay,” co-written by Puth; Latto’s “Big Energy,” co-written by London Jae; and Burna Boy’s “Last Last,” co-written by MD\$. Also on APG’s hit list are YoungBoy Never Broke Again’s three No. 1s on Top Rap Albums,

including a Billboard 200 chart-topper with 2021’s *Sincerely, Kentrell* and this year’s *The Last Slimeto*, which also went to No. 1 on the rap albums chart.

Faith Newman

EXECUTIVE VP OF A&R AND CATALOG DEVELOPMENT, RESERVOIR

“My relationships with Tommy Boy [Music] talent date back to my early 20s at Def Jam,” says Newman about the integration of the iconic label. “It has been a real homecoming for me to ... evolve the roster’s catalog of artists and projects while preserving its rich history.” Reservoir celebrated milestone anniversaries for Naughty by Nature and House of Pain, and Newman plans to help bring De La Soul’s music to streaming platforms for the first time. “We continue to honor artists who helped shape the label, with homages to the late Shock G of Digital Underground and Coolio, while helping to expose more audiences to their music,” says Newman.

**Gee Roberson
Cortez “Tez” Bryant**

CO-CEOs, THE BLUEPRINT GROUP; PARTNERS, MAVERICK

Jean Nelson

CEO, BPG RECORDS; PARTNER, THE BLUEPRINT GROUP

Al Branch

PARTNER/CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, THE BLUEPRINT GROUP

In the past year, Blueprint and Maverick have logged a number of wins, including *Montero* from Lil Nas X (whom they co-manage with Adam Leber) and Kanye “Ye” West’s *Donda*. For *Donda*, Roberson produced four sold-out stadium listening events for the album’s release, and he executive-produced, with J Prince, the Amazon Prime concert special *#FreeLarryHoover* with Ye and Drake. (Roberson’s work with Ye preceded the rapper’s antisemitic remarks in October and subsequent controversy.) Bryant led the company’s civic engagement with Project Go Dark, a music-executive program launched to bolster the number of Black leaders. Additionally, Bryant worked with Pepsi’s Rockstar Energy Drink to launch Culture Lab ATL as an

incubator for students at historically Black colleges and universities.

Jeff Robinson

CEO, MBK ENTERTAINMENT

Jeanine McLean-Williams

PRESIDENT, MBK ENTERTAINMENT

MBK Entertainment has been riding high. H.E.R. and Tiara Thomas both winning Academy Awards — for 2021’s best original song, “Fight for You,” from *Judas and the Black Messiah* — and H.E.R.’s “I Can’t Breathe” capturing the song of the year Grammy were just two highlights, says Robinson. Another bright spot was the success of H.E.R.’s *Back of My Mind*, which peaked at No. 6 on the Billboard 200. But Robinson is even more thrilled for what’s to come: “I’m over the moon excited about future albums” next year from Thomas and Tone Stith, among others.

Austin Rosen

FOUNDER/CEO, ELECTRIC FEEL ENTERTAINMENT

“There were so many rewarding things that happened this year,” says Rosen of the entertainment and ventures company whose clients were in the Hot 100 top 10 for 100 straight weeks, according to Electric Feel. Among the most exciting, he says, were the success of “publishing client Vory’s *Lost Souls* album release” and rap/pop superstar Post Malone, whom he co-manages with Dre London. He adds that Post’s *Twelve Carat Toothache* has “multiple No. 1 radio singles crafted by all Electric Feel co-collaborators,” as well as “Hot 100 success with ‘I Like You (A Happier Song)’ with Doja Cat.” Post is now wrapping up a sold-out arena tour.

Wassim “Sal” Slaiby

FOUNDER/CEO, SALXCO/XO RECORDS

Abel “The Weeknd” Tesfaye

ARTIST/CO-FOUNDER, XO RECORDS

Amir “Cash” Esmailian

CO-FOUNDERS, XO RECORDS

LaMar Taylor

CO-FOUNDERS, XO RECORDS

Melissa Mahood

GM, XO RECORDS

The Weeknd grossed over \$131 million

with his long-awaited After Hours Til Dawn Tour — a first-ever global stadium trek showcasing his most recent albums, 2020’s *After Hours* and 2022’s *Dawn FM*. He also announced his forthcoming HBO Max series, *The Idol*, and launched the popular attraction The Weeknd: After Hours Nightmare at Universal Studios for its Horror Nights franchise. In addition, XO’s Belly returned to Coachella, Nav clocked his third No. 1 on the Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart, and the label introduced new female talent Chxrry22. Most notably, says Mahood, is that the success was accompanied by “several million dollars in fundraising” for World Food Programme through XO’s Humanitarian Fund.

Steve Stoute

FOUNDER/CEO, UNITEDMASTERS

UnitedMasters, a music distribution company that Stoute founded in 2017, has made two major moves for the 1.5 million independent artists on the platform. “We launched Split Pay, which enables select artists to automatically split royalties with their collaborators on any track they distribute,” he says, “and the Beat Exchange, a curated marketplace where producers and artists can buy and sell beats.” UnitedMasters also has gotten artists synch deals with brands such as the NBA, ESPN, Bose, Amazon and Coinbase. “The number of UnitedMasters artists who were paid for brand deals is on track to double in 2022,” says Stoute, “and our total revenue from brands has already more than doubled this year.”

MANAGEMENT

Ola Ali

MANAGER, LIL DURK

Ali had a good year developing the JD Sports and Adidas campaign, contributing to the Apple Beats and A-Cold-Wall partnership and helping orchestrate Lil Durk’s sold-out 7220 tour. He played a major role in community service efforts including implementing strategies for the Neighborhood Heroes Foundation. Ali is most proud of working with a career readiness program to take 20 young men from Chicago on a tour of historically Black colleges and universities in Atlanta. “I helped to create opportunities for the group to speak with leaders from major companies like Sony, Alamo Records and the New York Knicks,” Ali says. “Our foundation also brought students to the NASCAR Playoffs at Talladega Nights, YellaWood 500, where they met leadership.”

“Launching Love Records and partnering with Motown has been about building on the legacy of Bad Boy and getting back to doing what I love.”

—SEAN “DIDDY” COMBS,

BAD BOY ENTERTAINMENT/LOVE RECORDS/REVOLT MEDIA

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ASHLEY CALHOUN

FOR HER INCLUSION ON BILLBOARD'S

"HIP HOP POWER" LIST

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TY BAISDEN JAYNE ANDREW

CO-FOUNDERS, COLTURE

IN 2014, BRENT FAIYAZ was a sandwich maker in Charlotte, N.C., before he met his future manager and partner, Ty Baisden. Seven years later, Faiyaz is now an R&B powerhouse who went head-to-head with Bad Bunny on the Billboard 200 in July.

Though Faiyaz's debut album, *Wasteland*, finished at No. 2 with 88,000 album-equivalent units in the United States in a closely contested battle with the Latin heavyweight, his and Baisden's decision to spurn major labels for the independent route has proved successful.

"People are seeing how to develop their business from an independent perspective," says Baisden. "The goal is to have the option to do whatever you want while still maintaining ownership of your art. That's really the goal, if we're being honest."

Released on Faiyaz's Lost Kids label with distribution through indies Stem and Venice, *Wasteland* includes features from Drake, Alicia Keys and Tyler, The Creator. Packed with star power, the 18-track set debuted at No. 1 on the Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart and logged 15 tracks on Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs. "All Mine" was Faiyaz's crown jewel, reaching No. 4 on the Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart.

Faiyaz's rapid leap to stardom was a strategic one. After his 2020 EP, *Fuck the World*, debuted at No. 20 on the Billboard 200, Baisden and

Colture co-owner Jayne Andrew forecast a big album debut for their burgeoning artist. They started with a string of Hot 100 singles in 2021: The Neptunes-produced hit "Wasting Time" featuring Drake, "Gravity" with Tyler, The Creator and the solo songs "Mercedes" and "Price of Fame."

In 2022, Baisden closely monitored release dates for upcoming albums and sought to avoid possible conflicts. After talk of a potential Beyoncé release came to Baisden's attention, the Colture team settled on July 8, three weeks before Beyoncé's *Renaissance* came out. Though Faiyaz didn't quite topple Bad Bunny, whose album *Un Verano Sin Ti* topped the Billboard 200 for 13 nonconsecutive weeks, Baisden was proud that Faiyaz was able to "compete against a mammoth" like the Latin superstar.

"We're creating more producers and songwriters that are getting rich off art because of how our infrastructure is," says Baisden of Colture, an acronym for Can Our Leverage Teach Us Real Equity. "You start to see other people adopt that infrastructure through Stem, direct payments and breaking bread with producers in a real way. Being able to really do things that even major-label artists haven't been able to accomplish from an independent perspective is important."

Adds Andrew: "Colture is for the alternative thinker. It's founded on humility and understanding the unquestionable right to ownership of our ideas and work. We don't do things the normal way because we aren't normal, and we like that." —CARL LAMARRE



From left: Andrew, Spotify's Paris Kirk, Baisden and Faiyaz.



The Weeknd grossed over \$131 million on the After Hours Til Dawn Tour — his first global stadium run showcasing his albums *After Hours* and *Dawn FM*.

Ty Baisden
Jayne Andrew
CO-FOUNDERS, CULTURE
See story, page 76.

Fee Banks
CEO, GOOD MONEY GLOBAL
“A long time ago, I realized that I have an ear for music. I applied that ear in picking YoungBoy [Never Broke Again’s] very first platinum record, ‘Untouchable,’” Banks told *Billboard* in a 2020 interview that marked the success of *Top* when that album by his management client became the artist’s third No. 1 on the Billboard 200. In October, YoungBoy’s *Ma’ I Got a Family* became the prolific rapper’s 12th top 10-charting release and his fifth top 10 in 2022 — the most of any act this year. In all, he has charted 25 titles on the Billboard 200 since 2017.

Gordan Dillard
Camille Delaney
Ryan Ramsey
Dina Sahim
ARTIST MANAGERS, SALXCO
“The streak of achievements, growth

and excitement here at SALXCO has been remarkable this past year,” says Ramsey, citing highlights for the management firm like the continued chart success of Doja Cat’s *Planet Her* and The Weeknd’s “Blinding Lights” becoming *Billboard*’s No. 1 Hot 100 Song of All Time, as well as his After Hours Til Dawn stadium tour grossing over \$131 million. (SALXCO co-manages Doja Cat with Josh Kaplan at 10Q Management.) Meanwhile, Brandy signed a deal with Motown Records, Nancy Ajram and Marshmellow’s Arabic-language “Sah Sah” broke onto *Billboard*’s Dance/Electronic chart, and French Montana’s “Unforgettable” made him the first African-born artist to achieve RIAA diamond status. In September, Capitol Music Group named Dillard its new executive vp of A&R and artist development, but he will continue in his role as Doja Cat’s co-manager at SALXCO.

Neil Jacobson
CEO, HALLWOOD MEDIA
Cory Litwin
EXECUTIVE VP, HALLWOOD MEDIA

Brennen Bryant
MANAGER OF A&R, HALLWOOD MEDIA
Over the last year, Hallwood’s leaders have stayed true to their goal of supporting clients on a mission to make moneymaking music. Focusing on audio engineers, Hallwood has signed Jason “Cheese” Goldberg (YoungBoy Never Broke Again), Angie Randisi (Lil Baby), Nickie Jon Pabón (Jack Harlow) and Miyagi (Drake, Ty Dolla \$ign, Jeremih), among others, with the aim of securing fair, sizable deals atypical for engineers. Their signees have garnered multiple No. 1 Hot 100 hits, including Polo G’s “Rapstar” and Harlow’s “First Class,” as well as a number of Grammy nominations. Other clients have been supported in their evolution toward becoming artists and entrepreneurs through endeavors like Murda Beatz releasing his own music, performing at his first Las Vegas residency and DJ’ing on the red carpet at the MTV Video Music Awards.

Josh Kaplan
FOUNDER/MANAGER, 10Q MANAGEMENT
Kaplan has helped grow the career of one of the decade’s biggest stars in either hip-hop or pop: Doja Cat, who transitioned from viral rapper to global sensation with the blockbuster success of her *Planet Her* album. (10Q co-manages Doja Cat with SALXCO.) Since its June 2021 release, *Planet Her* has spawned five top five hits on the Pop Airplay chart — and Doja has since added two more with her *Elvis* soundtrack contribution, “Vegas,” and a feature on Post Malone’s “I Like You (A Happier Song).” “As a company, we are only as strong as our artists,” Kaplan says. “Luckily, we get to work with some extremely powerful artists like Doja Cat.”

Adam Leber
CEO, REBEL
Leber says the highlight of his year has been working with his management client Lil Nas X to launch his first-ever sold-out world tour. “It has been incredible to get out on the road and finally meet his fans,” Leber says of the face-to-face opportunities afforded by the Long Live Montero Tour. Leber launched his management and media company, Rebel (his last name spelled backward), less than two years ago in partnership with Live Nation.

Dre London
FOUNDER/CEO, LONDON ENTERTAINMENT
London’s client Post Malone continued his pop reign in June, when he released his fourth album, *Twelve Carat Toothache*. The 14-track set produced two top 10 Hot 100 hits, including his star-powered collaborations with The Weeknd (“One Right Now”) and Doja

Cat (“I Like You [A Happier Song]”). Earlier this year, London launched his premium tequila brand, Don Londrés, which has been the drink of choice at Post’s afterparties.

Paul Rosenberg
PRESIDENT/CEO, GOLIATH ARTISTS; PRESIDENT/CEO, SHADY RECORDS; PRESIDENT/CEO, GOLIATH RECORDS
This past year was a highlight reel of firsts for Rosenberg’s longtime client Eminem: He performed at the Super Bowl halftime show alongside Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Mary J. Blige and Kendrick Lamar; scored his first No. 1 on the Hot Christian Songs chart for his feature on DJ Khaled’s “Use This Gospel (Remix)” with Kanye West; and in March became the top-awarded singles artist in RIAA history. But the zenith arrived in November, when Eminem became the latest rapper inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility.

Chris Thomas
MANAGING PARTNER, RANGE MEDIA PARTNERS
Thomas cites Jack Harlow’s success as one of Range Media Partners’ biggest achievements this year. The rapper earned his first solo Hot 100 No. 1 with “First Class,” released a new album, co-hosted MTV’s Video Music Awards and performed at the Grammys and BET Awards. “My personal favorite achievement of this year is the sold-out, 30-date arena tour that Jack just completed,” Thomas says. “Seeing him live his dream, and the euphoric expressions on his fans’ faces as they watched him perform, was a great reminder of how important live music is and how excited the world is to have it back.”

Pierre “P” Thomas
CEO, QUALITY CONTROL
Kevin “Coach K” Lee
COO, QUALITY CONTROL
Simone Mitchell
PRESIDENT, QUALITY CONTROL MUSIC/SOLID FOUNDATION MANAGEMENT
Brandra Ringo
EXECUTIVE VP/CO-HEAD OF A&R, QUALITY CONTROL MUSIC
Wayno Clark
EXECUTIVE VP OF A&R, QUALITY CONTROL MUSIC
“Size” was the operative word for Quality Control in 2022, with growth across the company’s film and TV divisions through the Lil Baby documentary *Untrapped* on Amazon Prime and an executive producer credit on Issa Rae’s *Rap Sh!t* on HBO Max. Quality Control also launched the reality series *Impact ATL* and added a basketball division to QC Sports. Clients Lil Yachty, Quavo & Takeoff and Yung Miami’s podcast (*Caresha Please*) clocked hits and awards, while the Atlanta-based company also expanded with new hires and more office space.

“Embarking on building out our flagship HQ to open in 2023 feels appropriate with all the expansion of the past year-and-a-half,” says Mitchell.

Ebonie Ward

PARTNER, EMAGEN ENTERTAINMENT GROUP
Emagen’s past year has been largely defined by two superstar management clients. In January, Gunna scored his second No. 1 solo album on the Billboard 200 with *DS4Ever*, while Future dominated the spring with his chart-topping *I Never Liked You*. The project spawned the Hot 100 No. 1 “Wait for U” featuring Drake and Tems. Ward also points to rising clients like Flo Milli, the Alabama rapper who is headlining her biggest tour to date. “These achievements are not only impacting and shifting culture but are opening doors to new ways of creating moments.” (For more on Future, see page 54.)

Anthony “Ant” Wilson

FOUNDER, ANTHONY WILSON MANAGEMENT; FOUNDER, TYCOON MUSIC FESTIVAL
Anthony Wilson Management has expanded its entertainment reach to include executive-producing film, TV (Starz’s *BMF*) and festivals. As the manager of global superstar Chris Brown, Wilson assisted with the release of the artist’s 10th studio album, *Breezy*, in June as well as Brown’s tour with Lil Baby. The One of the Ones summer tour sold out 27 cities nationwide. Wilson also founded the Tycoon Music Festival, which debuted in Houston in August. The comedy/music event touted appearances by A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie, Flo Rida and DaBaby, among others.

STREAMING

Whitney-Gayle Benta

GLOBAL HEAD OF ARTISTS AND TALENT RELATIONS, SPOTIFY

Sydney Lopes

HEAD OF HIP-HOP AND R&B, ARTISTS AND LABEL PARTNERSHIPS, SPOTIFY

Safiya Lambie-Knight

HEAD OF MUSIC U.K. AND IRELAND, SPOTIFY

Carl Chery

CREATIVE DIRECTOR/HEAD OF URBAN MUSIC, SPOTIFY
“We teamed up with Kendrick Lamar to launch [mini-documentary] *A Day in Ghana*,” says Chery of Spotify’s “incredible year.” The doc, which followed Lamar during his first trip to the West African country, focuses on his album *Mr. Morale & The Big Steppers*. The platform also launched the *RapCaviar* podcast, hosted by Brandon “Jinx” Jenkins, and announced a *RapCaviar* documentary series featuring Pharrell Williams, Jack Harlow

and Tyler, The Creator, among others, for Hulu in 2023. “While the podcast is about settling long-standing debates and sparking new conversations,” says Chery, “the *RapCaviar* docuseries is a storytelling vehicle to touch on issues happening in hip-hop culture.”

Tim Hinshaw

HEAD OF HIP-HOP AND R&B, AMAZON MUSIC

Rochelle Balogun

SENIOR HIP-HOP MUSIC CURATOR, AMAZON MUSIC

Sierra Lever

SENIOR HIP-HOP, R&B AND AFROBEATS MUSIC CURATOR, AMAZON MUSIC

Josh Peas

ARTIST RELATIONS MANAGER, AMAZON MUSIC
See story, page 62.

Larry Jackson

GLOBAL CREATIVE DIRECTOR, APPLE MUSIC

Ebro Darden

HOST/GLOBAL EDITORIAL HEAD OF HIP-HOP AND R&B, APPLE MUSIC

Danielle McDowell

MARKETING LEAD, BLACK MUSIC AND CULTURE, APPLE MUSIC

Apple Music marked Juneteenth this past year with an expansive and inspiring musical collection. Streaming in Spatial Audio exclusively on Apple Music, Juneteenth 2022: Freedom Songs featured over 16 artists, commissioned by Apple Music’s curators, across genres including R&B, hip-hop, gospel, Latin,

jazz and country “to uncover the complexity of the Black experience against the backdrop of the historical touch point of Juneteenth — from joy to pain and hope to rumination,” the company said in a statement. Darden added: “As the awareness and mainstreaming of Juneteenth continues to rise, our team at Apple Music is committed to commemorating the holiday while ensuring that its historical significance is not lost. We continue our annual efforts with a new collection of Black music and stories from artists across an array of genres aimed to amplify the conversation, inspire reflection and celebrate freedom.” To complement the collection, Apple Music partnered with multiple Black visual artists who created original artwork and animations for the project. In September, Jackson confirmed his departure from Apple Music, following a seven-year tenure during which he was key in negotiating Apple Music exclusives with superstars including Drake, Frank Ocean and Kanye West.

Rachel Jackson

ARTIST RELATIONS MANAGER, YOUTUBE

Brittany Lewis

ARTIST PARTNERSHIPS LEAD, BLACK MUSIC AND CULTURE, YOUTUBE

Adam McFarland

PROGRAM MANAGER, BLACK MUSIC AND CULTURE, YOUTUBE

Noah Rakoski

HEAD OF WEST COAST LABEL RELATIONS, YOUTUBE
YouTube, which paid out \$6 billion in global music royalties from July 2021 to June 2022, strives for cultural influence to match its economic impact. YouTube Avenues, launched in July 2022, aims for equity and relevance in Black communities “that have been historically underrepresented and underserved on our platform,” says Lewis. In addition to educating creators about the platform, YouTube Avenues has hosted four events featuring guest speakers such as Troy Carter, Kevin Liles and Ethiopia Habtemariam, and attendees such as Wale, Armani White and Alex Vaughn.

Jason Kpana

SENIOR VP OF ARTIST AND LABEL RELATIONS, TIDAL

Melanie Mercedes

FORMER COMMUNITY AND INSIGHTS LEAD FOR SOCIAL, TIDAL

To celebrate hip-hop legend The Notorious B.I.G.’s 50th birthday, TIDAL created an opportunity for hip-hop fans “to come together by curating and hosting ‘A Toast to Biggie’ on Twitter Spaces,” says Kpana. Moderated by TIDAL chief content officer Elliott Wilson, the conversation featured surprise appearances by Jay-Z, Sean “Diddy” Combs and Fat Joe, who shared how influential Biggie was to their careers. “A Toast to Biggie” garnered over 8,300 listeners and was replayed over 22,000 times, according to the company. “Not only was this a way for TIDAL to pay tribute to a hip-hop icon, but the company was also able to celebrate his lasting legacy and contributions to music,” adds Kpana. Mercedes was a key member of the TIDAL social media team before recently joining Amazon Music.

Josh “J1” Raiford

VP OF MUSIC PROGRAMMING, PANDORA

Akim Bryant

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF MUSIC PROGRAMMING, PANDORA

“I’m super proud of our Pandora Playbacks, where we bring an artist in front of an audience — fans, influencers, DJs, college students and more — to share their music and story,” says Raiford. One of his favorites was held during Homecoming Week at Spelman/ Morehouse in Atlanta. Featuring rapper-singer Smino, the event attracted over 1,600 students. “This was very special to me because I graduated from Morehouse College and I am a big advocate of [historically Black colleges and universities] and giving back.”

**Swizz Beatz
Timbaland**



Doja Cat sampled Big Mama Thornton’s 1953 classic “Hound Dog” on “Vegas,” her sixth top 10 single on the Hot 100.

CO-FOUNDERS/CO-OWNERS, VERZUZ

Steve Pamon

PRESIDENT, VERZUZ

After Verzuz and Triller announced the appointment of Pamon as president earlier this year, the webcast franchise, co-founded and co-owned by Swizz Beatz and Timbaland, continued to push hip-hop and R&B as both “appointment viewing” and “mandatory discussion.” Ranging from battles between Stephanie Mills and Chaka Khan to Bone Thugs-N-Harmony and Three 6 Mafia to the first Latin pairing with DJ Nelson and Luny Tunes, “no other platform this past year has showcased such a broad scope and diversity,” says Pamon, “with more than 85 million views and more than 40 billion impressions since inception.”

PUBLISHING

Evan Bogart

CEO, SEEKER MUSIC

Bogart is a hit-making songwriter for everyone from Beyoncé (“Halo”) to Rihanna (“SOS”), and the company he founded in 2020 has grown to an 11,000-plus catalog of copyrights and master recordings by such acts as Jay-Z, Drake and 2Pac. “We view every catalog as a brand-new artist that we’re trying to break,” says Bogart, who looks at catalogs “that we want to celebrate.” He was “so weak” for classic R&B trio SWV that Seeker worked with the group’s songwriter-producer, Brian Alexander Morgan, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of its 1992 multiplatinum debut, *It’s About Time*. “SWV soundtracked my high school years, so I jumped at the opportunity,” he says. The campaign included an EP of the group’s hits reimagined by current artists, as well as 1990s club takeovers, TikTok cover and performance campaigns, and promo merchandise.

Robert Brown

VP OF BUSINESS AFFAIRS AND COMMERCIAL STRATEGY, KOBALT MUSIC

Cee Barrett

DIRECTOR OF CREATIVE, KOBALT MUSIC

Thanks to hits like Roddy Ricch’s “High Fashion” (featuring Mustard) and Chris Brown’s “Heat” (featuring Gunna), Kobalt was named BMI’s publisher of the year for R&B and hip-hop in September 2021. The publisher’s team has helped songwriting clients such as Ricch, Gunna, Moneybagg Yo and Yo Gotti “capitalize on their past successes and have proudly expanded the number of business partnerships with them,” Brown says. Barrett adds that the company’s longtime R&B/hip-hop writers,

“Seeing the euphoric expressions on his fans’ faces as they watched Jack Harlow perform was a great reminder of how important live music is and how excited the world is to have it back.”

—CHRIS THOMAS, RANGE MEDIA PARTNERS

as well as new signings such as Young Thug in late 2021, “have afforded us the privilege to create diverse opportunities for all.”

Ashley Calhoun

PRESIDENT/HEAD OF CREATIVE, PULSE MUSIC GROUP

Calhoun says it has been “pedal to the floor” ever since she met and first began working with Brent Faiyaz. In July, the R&B artist both renewed his publishing deal with Pulse and released his debut album, *Wasteland*, independently on his Lost Kids label through Venice and Stem. The album earned him chart success, debuting at No. 2 on the Billboard 200, No. 1 on Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums and No. 1 on Top R&B Albums, as well as logging a handful of songs on the Hot 100. “We’ve been involved with Brent since the beginning,” says Calhoun. “Pulse was the first publishing company that Ty Baisden [Faiyaz’s manager] sent Brent’s music to, and as soon as I heard Brent’s voice, I immediately knew that I had to work with him.” Faiyaz is also nominated for favorite male R&B artist at this year’s American Music Awards.

Cristina Chavez

VP OF A&R, UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP

Denzel Baptiste

David Biral

MEMBERS, TAKE A DAYTRIP; FOUNDERS, NO IDLE, A JOINT VENTURE PARTNERSHIP WITH UMPG

Tommy Brown

FOUNDER, CHAMPAGNE THERAPY MUSIC GROUP, A JOINT VENTURE PARTNERSHIP WITH UMPG

At UMPG, which signed new deals in the past year with Drake and The Weeknd, the R&B/hip-hop team has even more reason to celebrate, from Steve Lacy hitting No. 1 on the Hot 100 to the continued success of joint ventures like Take a Daytrip’s NO IDLE and Tommy Brown’s Champagne Therapy. Chavez says she is focused on building the culture’s future as well as its present. Within the past two years, through its joint ventures, UMPG also added “amazing new writers like Roy Lenzo, 18YOMan, Matt Cohn, Peter Lee

Johnson, Khaled Rohaim and Xavi, and [in December], we have the release of Metro Boomin’s anticipated album to look forward to.”

Sabrina Coghiatti

MUSIC MANAGER, PRIMARY WAVE MUSIC

Earlier this year, when Cee Lo Green performed at Brazil’s Rock in Rio, he included a James Brown tribute that he had brainstormed with Coghiatti months earlier. “That moment will always have a special place in my heart, being home doing what I love,” says Coghiatti, who is from São Paulo. “One thing I learned a long time ago is to always listen to the client regardless of what the industry is and/or what the current trend is. Something the entire team at Primary Wave takes seriously is to always support our artists no matter what. Our goals are to be aware and listen to our clients’ wishes.”

Ian Holder

SENIOR VP OF CREATIVE, SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

Ari Gelaw

VP OF CREATIVE, SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

Will Skalmoski

Jamin Whatley

DIRECTORS OF CREATIVE, SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

With the help of the powerful creative team of Holder, Gelaw, Skalmoski and Whatley, Sony Music Publishing launched some of 2022’s most defining R&B/hip-hop hits, including Jack Harlow’s Hot 100 No. 1, “First Class,” Nicki Minaj’s “Do We Have a Problem” with Lil Baby, Chloe’s “Have Mercy” and Giveon’s “For Tonight.” The team is also proud of its continued partnership with BeatStars Publishing to empower the next generation of songwriters and the inaugural SMP Hip-Hop Conference in Atlanta, which Holder says “symbolizes our dedication to finding new opportunities for the SMP roster. We are energized and excited for what’s to come next.”

Ryan Press

PRESIDENT OF NORTH AMERICA, WARNER

CHAPPELL MUSIC

Rich Christina

SENIOR VP OF A&R AND VENTURE PARTNERS, WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC

Wallace Joseph

VP OF A&R, WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC

Playing the long game paid off this year for Warner Chappell when talents like Muni Long, whom it signed in 2009, achieved breakthroughs after releasing her No. 1 R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay hit “Hrs and Hrs.” Press says, “We’re always focused on signing and developing emerging talent.” Other signees including Summer Walker, Anderson .Paak, Jhené Aiko, Ari Lennox, Fousheé and Chloe x Halle also achieved personal bests. “I’m really proud of our A&R team,” Press adds, “for playing a key role in ensuring our hip-hop and R&B roster remains culturally relevant and represents what Warner Chappell will look and feel like moving forward.”

MEDIA

Tolu Ayeni

Nicole Johnson

MUSIC ARTIST PARTNERSHIPS, META

The Meta team has used its partnerships in the hip-hop and R&B community to help stars like DJ Khaled and Megan Thee Stallion directly promote recent albums to fans on Facebook and Instagram, as well as give rising artists like DoeChii, Cordae and Latto platforms for exclusive content. Johnson has also made a lasting impact with initiatives like the Meta Elevate Mentorship Circles Program, for which she teamed with Ciara to spotlight Black-owned businesses. “It has been exciting working with the hip-hop and R&B community to leverage the full potential of their presence across Meta’s technologies,” says Ayeni. “We’ve done that this year by amplifying the cultural relevance of SZA, Chloe Bailey, Jack Harlow and Kid Cudi by hosting them at our table at the Met Gala” in New York and collaborating with artists from Burna Boy to Beyoncé.

LL COOL J

FOUNDER, ROCK THE BELLS; CREATOR/CURATOR/HOST, ROCK THE BELLS RADIO, SIRIUSXM

JAMES CUTHBERT

PRESIDENT, ROCK THE BELLS

WHILE MUSIC FANS prepare to celebrate the 50th anniversary of hip-hop in 2023, one pioneer of the genre has already played a key role in keeping the legacy alive.

Since 1985, Queens-raised rapper LL Cool J has been a hip-hop hitmaker, and in 2018 he launched Rock the Bells Radio on SiriusXM as an artist-branded channel, which he curates with a wide range of classic hip-hop, interviews and specialty programs.

LL Cool J certainly has the hit-making credibility to carry the torch for hip-hop.

“I Can’t Live Without My Radio,” from his 1985 debut album, *Radio*, marked his arrival on *Billboard*’s Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart. The second charting single from *Radio*, “Rock the Bells,” later gave its name to the rapper’s SiriusXM channel.

His multiple hits on the Hot 100 have included the top 10s “Around the Way Girl” (1991), “Hey Lover” (1995), “Loungin” (1996), “Luv U Better” (1996) and “All I Have” (2003), his guest turn on the Jennifer Lopez single.

Now, says LL Cool J, “what I’m most proud of is that we transformed Rock the Bells, which started off solely as a SiriusXM channel, into a

content, commerce and experiential global platform that celebrates and elevates timeless hip-hop culture.”

In early 2021, Rock the Bells tapped Cuthbert, a former BET executive, to lead the company in that direction.

For the August 2021 We Love NYC: Homecoming Concert in Central Park, staged to cele-

brate the city’s resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, organizer Clive Davis reached out to Rock the Bells for an old-school hip-hop celebration. Before thunderstorms cut the concert short, LL Cool J was joined onstage by Busta Rhymes, A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie, French Montana, Melle Mel and Scorpio, and Rev. Run of Run-D.M.C.

In September 2021, when the producers of the 73rd Emmy Awards wanted to open with a tribute to Biz Markie, who died the previous July, with a takeoff on his hit “Just a Friend,” the Television Academy reached out to Rock the Bells, and LL Cool J performed a new, original rap for the opener.

The company has done partnerships with P&G, Coca-Cola and Toyota, among others.

And this past August, Forest Hills Stadium in LL Cool J’s home borough of Queens was the site of the first Rock the Bells festival. The day of interactive experiences, art exhibits, food, fashion and more was capped by performances: Joining LL Cool J were DJ Z-Trip, Ice Cube, Rick Ross, Lil’ Kim, The Diplomats featuring Cam’ron, Jim Jones and Juelz Santana, Fat Joe and Remy Ma, Jadakiss, Scarface, Trina, N.O.R.E and Digable Planets.

Says LL Cool J proudly: “We sold out.”

—GLENN PEOPLES AND THOM DUFFY



LL Cool J at the Rock the Bells festival in New York in August.

LL Cool J

FOUNDER, ROCK THE BELLS; CREATOR/CURATOR/HOST, ROCK THE BELLS RADIO, SIRIUSXM

James Cuthbert

PRESIDENT, ROCK THE BELLS

See story, page 80.

Thea Mitchem

EXECUTIVE VP OF PROGRAMMING, IHEARTMEDIA;
EXECUTIVE VP OF HIP-HOP AND R&B
PROGRAMMING STRATEGY/PROGRAM DIRECTOR,
WWPR (POWER 105.1) NEW YORK

Doc Wynter

PRESIDENT OF HIP-HOP AND R&B PROGRAMMING
STRATEGY, IHEARTMEDIA; PROGRAM DIRECTOR,
KRRL (REAL 92.3) LOS ANGELES

Charlamagne Tha God

Angela Yee

DJ Envy

CO-HOSTS OF *THE BREAKFAST CLUB*,
WWPR (POWER 105.1) NEW YORK

Mitchem and Wynter were again at the helm for iHeartMedia's second Living Black! event in February, which generated more than 30 million views and listens over 80 iHeart stations and livestreams. The event featured performances from Lizzo, H.E.R., Big Sean and Moneybagg Yo, along with appearances from Saweetie, John Legend and J. Cole, among others. Also part of the celebration of Black culture and Black-owned businesses were all three hosts of Premiere Networks' syndicated morning show *The Breakfast Club*. Yee will soon depart the morning program to host the syndicated *Way Up With Angela Yee* starting in January.

Connie Orlando

EXECUTIVE VP OF SPECIALS, MUSIC PROGRAMMING
AND MUSIC STRATEGY, BET NETWORKS

The 2022 BET Awards averaged 3.2 million viewers, according to Nielsen — a 34% increase over last year, bucking an industrywide trend of declining viewership for awards shows. Helping to accelerate BET's boost were riveting performances from Lizzo, Latto and Jack Harlow (with respective surprise guests Mariah Carey and Brandy) and a salute to Sean "Diddy" Combs that featured Mary J. Blige, Lil' Kim and others. "We take pride in authentically celebrating Black culture and artistry," says Orlando. "Our ratings underscore the fact that hip-hop and R&B are reactive drivers for music programming," adding that this year the BET Awards were seen across 10 ViacomCBS outlets.

Kashon Powell

VP OF PROGRAMMING, URBAN ONE

At Urban One, one of the largest distributors of urban content in the country, Powell says, "It's difficult to pinpoint a single achievement, as our R&B/hip-hop radio stations represent the culture daily through music, impactful events and



When Cee Lo Green performed at Brazil's Rock in Rio in September, he included a James Brown tribute that he had brainstormed with Primary Wave's Sabrina Coghiatti months earlier.

community engagement." The company began 2022 with its fourth annual Urban One Honors, titled "The Soundtrack of Black America," with Ne-Yo as host and Powell as executive producer. The show celebrated Jennifer Hudson, Timbaland, Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis and more. As Powell says, "Our brands are a direct reflection of the R&B/hip-hop lifestyle."

Isabel Quinteros Annous

GLOBAL LEAD, MUSIC PARTNERSHIPS, TIKTOK

Shawna Spears

SENIOR MANAGER OF ARTIST PARTNERSHIPS,
HIP-HOP AND R&B, TIKTOK

Hip-hop is the leading genre on the TikTok platform. And with more than half of the top 10 hip-hop tracks in the United States coming from female creators, the platform has become a home for rappers like Rico Nasty and Ice Spice. Quinteros Annous worked with Nicki Minaj to rally her fans around her presence on the platform, while Spears led its celebration of Black Music Month, which included TikTok LIVE events with Coco Jones, Lakeyah, Lu Kala and a listening party with Ciara. TikTok also recently brought Quincy Jones, Dru Hill and Jermaine Dupri onto TikTok, with Dupri using the platform to break down elements of his hit records.

Reggie Rouse

URBAN FORMAT VP, AUDACY; BRAND MANAGER,
WVEE (V-103) ATLANTA

Ahead of both the previous presidential elections and this year's midterms, Rouse's leadership in the R&B/hip-hop

format for Audacy and at V-103 Atlanta goes beyond music playlists. "The urban stations in Atlanta teamed up for Black Radio United for the Vote to help push voter awareness, voter education and help get out the vote in 2020 and again this year," says Rouse. "In the most competitive urban market in the country, we came together to push the importance of voting."

Kenny Smoov

VP OF URBAN FORMATS, CUMULUS MEDIA

To Smoov, his work is all about "balance" and "love." The veteran radio programming professional, who serves as a corporate programming resource for Cumulus' 37 R&B/hip-hop-formatted stations in 25 U.S. markets, says his company has made a "concerted effort to push the R&B side of hip-hop/R&B. There are so many great artists doing R&B and providing a balance to all the 'opps' [opposites] rap and drill music that dominates our current sound." He adds, "Anytime our group can support artists that make songs about love and life, we're here for it."

Dion Summers

VP OF MUSIC PROGRAMMING, SIRIUSXM

Ronnie Triana

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF HIP-HOP PROGRAMMING,
SIRIUSXM

Sway

HOST OF SIRIUSXM'S SWAY IN THE MORNING
WITH HEATHER B AND TRACY G

Known for its heritage rock star channels, as well as its news and talk stations,

SiriusXM (with 32 million subscribers) also produces exclusive R&B and hip-hop content with artist channel partners including Drake (the Sound 42 channel), LL Cool J (Rock the Bells Radio) and Eminem (the Shade 45 channel). With the help of Pandora's 50.5 million monthly active listeners, it has the power to nurture young talent. "SiriusXM/Pandora was the first to support Muni Long, SleazyWorld Go, Arin Ray and Armani White this year," says Summers. "We pride ourselves in leading the way in audio entertainment with regard to breaking new hip-hop and R&B acts."

AGENCIES

Ikenna Ezeh

PARTNER/AGENT OF BRAND PARTNERSHIPS, WME

Zach Iser

Caroline Yim

PARTNERS/CO-HEADS OF HIP-HOP/R&B, WME

Sarah Tehrani

AGENT, WME

"We build out global client strategies as a team, and that coordinated effort is a real driving force of our success," says Tehrani. For Kid Cudi this meant a global arena tour, his own Moon Man's Landing festival, the animated Netflix special *EnterGalactic* and brand deals with McDonald's, Louis Vuitton and Bose. The WME team also facilitated Summer Walker's return to the road, including her "A Hot Summer Night in LA" show at Crypto.com Arena. Tyler,

The Creator, meanwhile, sold out 32 North America arena dates, grossing over \$32 million from the biggest tour of his career.

Mike G
Cheryl Paglierani
PARTNERS/MUSIC AGENTS, UTA

Robert Gibbs
PARTNER/CO-HEAD OF ATLANTA, UTA
Chris Jordan
MUSIC AGENT, UTA

Paglierani says the last 18 months for UTA have been incredible, “from our emerging talents like Flo Milli, Dominic Fike, The Kid LAROI, Ari Lennox, J.I.D and Latto having breakout success to massive sold-out tours with our superstars like Post Malone, Lizzo, Lil Nas X and Wizkid.” She is also excited about expanding UTA’s activities with Gibbs, who was recently named head of the agency’s Atlanta office and will “make 2023 even bigger and better for the company,” adds Paglierani.

Joseph Harris
Ryan Thomson
Olivia Mirabella
Jasmin Nash

MUSIC TOURING AGENTS, CREATIVE ARTISTS AGENCY
“Our group has focused on building our overall roster across many emerging subgenres,” says Harris of expanding to underground hip-hop with Destroy Lonely, Ken Carson and Symba. The home of stadium and arena superstars Beyoncé, The Weeknd, A\$AP Rocky, Playboi Carti and Doja Cat, CAA is also working with Afrobeats artists Tems and Amaarae. Its roster also features several rising female R&B artists, including Muni Long and pianist-guitarist Mereba, whose new age singles fuse folk, hip-hop and other genres.

Ari Bernstein
Jacqueline Reynolds-Drumm
Yves Pierre

MUSIC TOURING AGENTS, CREATIVE ARTISTS AGENCY (FORMERLY AGENTS OF ICM PARTNERS)
Amid the merger with CAA, Reynolds-Drumm and her colleagues joining from ICM worked with clients Khalid, Little Simz, Fivio Foreign, Kehlani, Duckwrth, G-Herbo and others on tours, music, branding and TV deals. These ventures included City Girls opening for Jack Harlow’s *Come Home the Kids Miss You* tour and Kehlani nabbing a guest appearance on Showtime’s third season of *The L Word: Generation Q*. Lil Yachty, who has partnered with Sprite, Target and Nautica, inked a pandemic-era deal with the General Mills breakfast cereal Reese’s Puffs. He also sells his own brand of frozen pizza (Yachty’s Pizzeria) at Walmart and

recently joined Futuremood eyewear as an investor and partner.

Brent Smith
EXECUTIVE VP/MANAGING EXECUTIVE,
WASSERMAN MUSIC

Callender
Fred Zahedinia
VPs, WASSERMAN MUSIC

Anthony DiStasio
VP OF BRANDING, WASSERMAN MUSIC
Wasserman Music continues to build momentum following its April 2021 launch with the acquisition of Paradigm Talent Agency’s North American music business. Recent signings include Childish Gambino, Jaden, Daniel Caesar, FERG, Cat Burns and FLO. The agency booked \$uicideboy\$’ Grey Day summer amphitheater shows, as well as Jack Harlow’s sold-out *Come Home the Kids Miss You* dates. Smith hails Kendrick Lamar’s The Big Steppers Tour as “artistically genius and a commercial juggernaut on four continents,” while the agency secured a tour sponsorship from Cash App. Other brand partner-

has promoted Jazmine Sullivan, Snoh Aalegra and Blxst, among others. (For more on Blxst, see page 70.) Just over a year after joining Live Nation in October 2021, Byrd has booked Lil Durk’s first headlining tour, Wiz Khalifa and Logic’s co-headlining Vinyl Verse tour, the Lil Baby-Chris Brown One of Them Ones tour and Anita Baker’s Detroit concert, her first arena hometown show in nearly three decades. Scott’s recent achievements include booking the Made in America festival, alongside Ackles; booking and promoting Larry June’s and Isaiah Rashad’s tours with Sascha Gutfreund; booking Sullivan’s and Blxst’s tours alongside Agi; and working on Pi’erre Bourne’s fall tour.

Danny Bell
VP/TALENT BUYER, GOLDENVOICE
Dominick Prieto
TALENT BUYER, GOLDENVOICE

The Coachella headliners (this year’s were Harry Styles, Billie Eilish and The Weeknd) often garner all the headlines. However, it’s the rest of the lineup that

Lamar, Future and Travis Scott, while debut events in Portugal and Toronto took the brand to new places abroad. But the two founders are most excited about the year ahead, when they plan to relaunch their L.A. festival at Hollywood Park, launch their first Asian fest in Thailand and debut a new Rolling Loud-branded album.

Mari Davies
VP OF BOOKING AND TALENT, LIVE NATION URBAN
Brandon Pankey
VP OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATIONS,
LIVE NATION URBAN

The concert promotion company, which operates as a joint venture with Live Nation, acquired an equity stake in the Broccoli City festival this year and launched a new event for Mary J. Blige called Strength of a Woman in Atlanta. “The greatest achievement of Live Nation Urban is how we reflected the mosaic of Black culture through the dynamism of all of our live events,” says Pankey, citing further growth of the long-running Roots Picnic festival as evidence of the company’s success. “We perpetually want to continue to achieve and ascend to greater heights by furthering the connection with our audiences in deep and meaningful ways.”

Gary Guidry
CEO, BLACK PROMOTERS COLLECTIVE
Shelby Joyner
PRESIDENT, BLACK PROMOTERS COLLECTIVE
Bill Ingram
CFO, BLACK PROMOTERS COLLECTIVE
Shahida Mausi
CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER/SENIOR VP,
BLACK PROMOTERS COLLECTIVE
Troy Brown
CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER,
BLACK PROMOTERS COLLECTIVE

Lionel Bea
SENIOR VP, BLACK PROMOTERS COLLECTIVE
The Black Promoters Collective produces 200 to 250 tours annually, and this year, the coalition of several of the nation’s top independent concert promotion and event production companies promoted and produced tours for Maxwell, New Edition and “the highly successful tour with the queen of our culture, Mary J. Blige, on her *Good Morning Gorgeous* tour,” says Joyner. “We recognize our collective’s power and commitment to moving our culture forward ‘for us, by us, with us.’ However, the mission of the BPC is bigger than tours. It’s about our intellectual property, controlling what we create and ensuring we provide more significant opportunities and access to the community.”

Heather Lowery
PRESIDENT/CEO, FEMME IT FORWARD
See story, page 83.

“Anytime our group can support artists that make songs about love and life, we’re here for it.”
—KENNY SMOOV, CUMULUS MEDIA

ships include DJ Snake with PUMA Mirage Sport and Killer Mike with Monster Energy.

LIVE

Steve Ackles
Cindy Agi
Jay Byrd
GLOBAL TOUR PROMOTERS, LIVE NATION
Tyler Scott
TOUR PROMOTER, LIVE NATION

Ackles has worked closely with Roc Nation to oversee the worldwide touring strategy for global clients including Megan Thee Stallion, Lil Uzi Vert and Meek Mill — and played a key role in Megan Thee Stallion’s rise to the main stage at several top festivals. He’s also partnered with Rolling Loud to produce North American tours for stars including Rod Wave and \$uicideboy\$. Agi specializes in building relationships with artists and booking major international tours and

draws in many of the fans — and helps provide a springboard for younger or overseas acts looking to break through in the U.S. touring sector, a topic that’s important to Bell and Prieto. “After seeing breakout sets from [Baby] Keem and [British rapper] Dave at Coachella, promoting sold-out shows in San Francisco for each of them was definitely a highlight for me,” says Bell. “Watching Keem have the breakthrough year he had, in addition to seeing Dave make inroads here as a U.K. grime artist, reminds you just how powerful and universal hip-hop truly is.”

Tariq Cherif
Matt Zingler
CO-FOUNDERS/CO-CEOs, ROLLING LOUD
Cherif says that despite the challenging times for music festivals, Rolling Loud had “one of the most successful years in our history.” The original, flagship festival in Miami that he and Zingler launched in 2015 had its biggest turnout ever, drawing 85,000 fans to see Kendrick

HEATHER LOWERY

PRESIDENT/CEO, FEMME IT FORWARD

EARLIER IN NOVEMBER, Heather Lowery announced that Femme It Forward, the female-led music and entertainment platform that she founded, was holding its first Give Her FlowHERS Awards gala. The event, held Nov. 11 in Los Angeles, was conceived as a fundraiser for Femme It Forward's mentorship program, Next Gem Femme.

The gala "is a realization of the work we do year-round with Femme It Forward," Lowery says, "to champion, empower and celebrate the women who are pushing our culture forward every day."

First-time special awards honorees, announced before the gala, include breakthrough hip-hop star Latto (Big Femme Energy Award); actress, social media personality and entrepreneur Tabitha Brown (Self-Love Award); songwriter-artist Jozzy (Pen It Forward Award); R&B singer-songwriter Muni Long (Bloom Award); Lashon Jones, mother of rapper Lil Baby (Moms I'd Like To Follow, or M.I.L.F. Award); singer-songwriter Victoria Monet (Visionary Award); and high-profile couple Ciara and Russell Wilson (Black Love Award).

Executive mentors, who were chosen by vote by their Next Gem Femme mentees for their impact, include Baroline Diaz (Interscope), Dimplez Ijeoma (Capitol Music Group), Madeline Nelson (Amazon Music), Nicole Wyskoarko (Interscope Geffen A&M), Valeisha Butterfield

Jones (Google), Alex Maxwell (Live Nation) and Diana Dotel (MTW Agency).

Rising artists chosen to perform at the gala included Baby Tate; Mapy, The Violin Queen; Joyce Wrice; and Alex Vaughn, while Jasmine Solano was set to DJ at the afterparty.

Since 2019, Lowery has led Femme It

Forward, which was launched under the Live Nation Urban banner. Now, it is a joint venture with parent Live Nation Entertainment. Its mission is to celebrate, educate and empower the industry's "most creative and accomplished female visionaries through multiformat, multimarket consumer experiences," according to the organization.

"I'm so proud of the many achievements by our incredible Femme It Forward team," says Lowery.

"This year alone we presented four headlining female R&B tours featuring Sevyn Streeter, Alex Isley with Green Bunn, LAYA and Zyah Belle, Teyana Taylor and the Big Femme Energy Live Orchestra Experience featuring Ambre, Baby Rose and SayGRACE.

"We executed our Femme It Forward show series, which featured multiple lineups with emerging and established female R&B artists including Ari Lennox, Queen Naija, Ashanti, Mya, Muni Long, Tank and the Bangas, SWV, Faith Evans and 702.

"And finally, we produced the Serenade series featuring male R&B artists like Boyz II Men, Ty Dolla \$ign, dvsn, 112, Dru Hill and Omarion. It has been a huge year for Femme It Forward," says Lowery, "and we're only going to push this positive energy forward."

—LARS BRANDLE AND THOM DUFFY



Lowery (right) and singer Sinead Harnett at Femme It Forward's Big Femme Energy album release party in Venice, Calif., in 2021.

BUSINESS AND FINANCE

Sherrese Clarke Soares

FOUNDER/CEO, HARBOURVIEW EQUITY PARTNERS
Since launching HarbourView Equity Partners a year ago, Clarke Soares has invested in over 40 music catalogs, providing finance to a wide range of artists in exchange for the rights to collect royalties on their music. Her fast-growing portfolio spans genres from country to Latin but includes stakes in a swelling number of major hip-hop titles, such as Travis Scott's "5% TINT," Mobb Deep's "Shook Ones, Pt. II" and "Motorsport" from Migos, Nicki Minaj and Cardi B, as well as R&B hits including Usher's "Caught Up" and TLC's "Waterfalls."

Rene McLean

PARTNER/FOUNDING ADVISOR, INFLUENCE MEDIA PARTNERS
Influence Media Partners continues to confirm hip-hop and R&B's value in the marketplace with impressive catalog acquisitions. The company's latest: hip-hop superstar Future, whose eight-figure deal encompasses more than 600 songs from 2004 to 2020. Other

major acquisitions include copyrights by hitmaker Tainy (Cardi B's "I Like It" with Bad Bunny and J Balvin) and The Stereotypes (Bruno Mars' "24K Magic"). "Hip-hop and R&B finally have a real seat at the table in the increasingly robust music rights marketplace," says McLean. "We have every intention to double or triple our commitment over the next year."

Michelle Richburg

PRESIDENT/CEO, RICHBURG ENTERPRISES
"Every day I woke up to be the best," says Richburg. "I did not think about the challenges and the uphill battle. Every day I had to underpromise and overdeliver." A single Black mother who raised a son while building a company, Richburg has been a leader in the music industry's lean toward greater inclusion. Richburg Enterprises is the tax firm of record for the \$100 million Warner Music Group/Blavatnik Family Foundation Social Justice Fund. A member of the Recording Academy since 2021, she also is a faculty member at the WMG Global DEI Institute, which the music group described as "a hub of innovation, learning, growth and action to drive impactful change at WMG and beyond."



Sherrese Clarke Soares at HarbourView Equity Partners has invested in copyrights including Usher's hit "Caught Up."

RIGHTS GROUPS

Nicole George-Middleton

SENIOR VP OF MEMBERSHIP, ASCAP; EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ASCAP FOUNDATION
As senior vp of membership for ASCAP, George-Middleton is committed to "grow[ing] distributions and adding services" for members. Diversity and inclusion are also a key focus for ASCAP as it continues to "cultivate the next generation of R&B/hip-hop songwriters, artists and music executives." This year, under George-Middleton's leadership, the ASCAP Foundation launched its inaugural HBCU scholarship for students enrolled at a historically Black college or university and who are interested in a career in music. This is in addition to the ASCAP Aspire HBCU internship program, which is now in its third year.

Sean Glover

DIRECTOR OF INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT, SOUNDEXCHANGE
Glover has helped R&B/hip-hop performers track down and collect millions of dollars in royalties they might have missed because they didn't properly register, or file a claim, with SoundExchange. "I am most proud of the fact that over the last year SoundExchange has identified and distributed over \$2 million to the genre in unclaimed royalties due to concentrated outreach efforts in those communities," says Glover. That's just a drop in the bucket of the nearly \$465 million in digital royalties SoundExchange distributed to rights holders in the first half of 2022. But it's money that artists never would have made if not for the lists of unclaimed royalties SoundExchange maintains.

Mario Prins

VP OF CREATIVE, SESAC
With a 2020 SESAC performance rights deal in place, Nigerian singer-songwriter Burna Boy rose to stardom with prolific collaborations with Coldplay's Chris Martin ("The Monsters You Made") and Sam Smith ("My Oasis"). Two years later, he entered the Hot 100 and broke out on U.S. radio with his single "Last Last," which hit No. 1 on the Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart. "Burna has cemented himself as a global star," Prins says, "and we're excited to be a part of his continued radio success."

Byron Wright

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CREATIVE IN ATLANTA, BMI
Wright says BMI's retention of R&B/hip-hop songwriters and producers including ATL Jacob, Davido, DJ Khaled,

D'Mile, Future, Latto and Megan Thee Stallion was a highlight for the performing rights organization, while Los Angeles-based singer-songwriter Marley Bleu recently signed to BMI. "I'm really excited to have [Marley Bleu] at BMI with her blossoming career and all that she has forthcoming," says Wright. BMI's R&B/hip-hop creative team also assembled two major awards shows — BMI's Trailblazers of Gospel Music Awards and BMI R&B/Hip-Hop Awards — in person for the first time since 2019. "Both events celebrated the achievements of our top songwriters, producers and music publishers," Wright says, "while highlighting that everyone was more than ready to get back to live events."

CONTRIBUTORS

Trevor Anderson, Rania Aniftos, Rich Appel, Chuck Arnold, Nefertiti Austin, Katie Bain, Alexei Barrionuevo, Dave Brooks, Dean Budnick, Anna Chan, Mariel Concepcion, Stephen Daw, Elizabeth Dilts Marshall, Bill Donahue, Thom Duffy, Chris Eggertsen, Griselda Flores, Clayton Gutzmore, Raquelle Harris, Lyndsey Havens, Hannah Karp, Gil Kaufman, Steve Knopper, Carl Lamarre, Cydney Lee, Jason Lipshutz, Heran Mamo, Gail Mitchell, Melinda Newman, Jessica Nicholson, Ronda Racha Penrice, Glenn Peoples, Isabela Raygoza, Sigal Ratner-Arias, Bryan Reesman, Kristin Robinson, Jessica Roiz, Neena Rouhani, Dan Rys, Crystal Sheppard, Andrew Unterberger, Jewel Wicker, Deborah Wilker, Xander Zellner

METHODOLOGY

Billboard power lists are selective, with honorees chosen by *Billboard* editors. Nominations for each power list open no less than 120 days in advance of publication. (For a contact for our editorial calendar of publication dates, please email thom.duffy@billboard.com.) The online nomination link is sent to press representatives and/or honorees of companies previously featured on any *Billboard* power list, as well as those who send a request before the nomination period to thom.duffy@billboard.com. Nominations close and lists are locked not less than 90 days before publication. *Billboard's* 2022 R&B/Hip-Hop Power Players were chosen by editors based on factors including, but not limited to, nominations by peers, colleagues and superiors. In addition to nominations, editors weigh the success of each executive's company or affiliated artists as measured by chart, sales and streaming performance. Career trajectory and industry impact are also considered. Unless otherwise noted, *Billboard* Boxscore is the source for tour grosses. Luminate is the source for streaming, sales, and radio airplay and audience figures.



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THE NO. 1s ISSUE

**YEAR IN
MUSIC**

ISSUE DATE 12/10 | **AD CLOSE** 11/29

MATERIALS DUE 11/30

CONTACT

East Coast/Midwest: Joe Maimone | joe.maimone@billboard.com

Southeast: Lee Ann Photoglo | laphotoglo@gmail.com

Latin: Marcia Olival | marciaolival29@gmail.com

Touring & West Coast: Cynthia Mellow | cmellow615@gmail.com

International: Ryan O'Donnell | rodonnell@pmc.com

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CONTACT:

East Coast/Midwest: Joe Maimone | joe.maimone@billboard.com.

Southeast: Lee Ann Photoglo | laphotoglo@gmail.com

Latin: Marcia Olival | marciaolival29@gmail.com

West Coast: Cynthia Mellow | cmellow615@gmail.com

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JERRY LEE LEWIS

1935-2022

Sixty-six years ago, Jerry Lee Lewis, who died Oct. 28 at the age of 87, shook America's nerves and rattled its brains. The Dec. 22, 1956, issue of *Billboard* savored his debut single, "Crazy Arms," as a "flavor-packed disk," and the magazine went on to track the rise of "Whole Lot of Shakin' Going On" and "Great Balls of Fire," which scored on the country, R&B and pop charts all at once. And as Elvis Presley turned his attention to Hollywood and then to the U.S. Army, Lewis seemed poised to vie for The King's throne until a British journalist learned that the girl accompanying him on his U.K. tour was his third wife — as well as his 13-year-old cousin.

'BALLS'-OUT STYLE

Lewis raised hair as well as hell. The Oct. 28, 1957, *Billboard* noted that his EP *The Great Ball of Fire* sported "a photo of the cat with the wild hair flying in

the breeze" and predicted it would "sell fast." That fire didn't fizzle: The May 5, 1958, issue reported that "Shakin'" had remained a jukebox hit for months thanks to "current teenagers who still flip over the music with the big beat."

'AN OPEN LETTER'

In May 1958, after word had spread that he had married his 13-year-old cousin, Lewis, 22, was forced to cancel his U.K. tour. In the June 9, 1958, *Billboard*, the singer bought a full-page ad to pioneer a pop culture tradition: the half-apology. "I confess that my life has been stormy. I confess further that since I have become a public figure, I sincerely wanted to be worthy of the decent admiration of all the people, young and old, that admired or liked what talent (if any) I have," he wrote. "I can't control the press or the sensationalism that these people will go to get a scandal started to sell papers."

One big DJ backed him up. "Jerry's a Southern boy," Alan Freed said, "and Tennessee boys get married quite young."

SUN MAKES LIGHT

A week later, *Billboard* reviewed Lewis' New York club debut in less than glowing terms. "Showmanship is not simply a matter of banging a piano [and] stomping around stage," griped the June 16, 1958, issue. The following edition (June 23, 1958) reported that Sun Records head Sam Phillips was servicing DJs a "cute" promotional disc, "The Return of Jerry Lee." "It makes light of the whole British episode," Phillips explained, "which is the way we think the whole thing should be treated anyway."

THE KILLER BEATS DEATH

Lewis found a second life in Nashville, scoring four country No. 1s between 1968 and 1972. His hard living caught up with him, however, and in 1981, he was put in

intensive care and underwent stomach surgery in Memphis. Lewis pulled through and performed at the Grand Ole Opry on Dec. 3. Almost a quarter-century after *Billboard* panned his New York concert, the Dec. 25, 1981, issue called his return to action in Nashville "an occasion tinged with awe." The verdict: "He's nothing short of mesmerizing."

BIOPIC BLUES

A New York preview of the Dennis Quaid-starring biopic *Great Balls of Fire!* was followed by a midnight jam with punk purveyors John Doe and Mick Jones backing Lewis, according to the July 8, 1989, issue. Even as an elder statesman, though, Lewis stirred up trouble: In the June 24, 1989, *Billboard*, his own manager, Jerry Schilling, called him out for "negative and damaging" statements about Presley to another outlet.

—JOE LYNCH

2022
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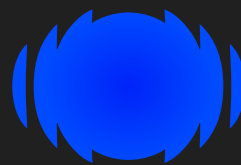
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