

billboard

AUGUST 15, 2020 • BILLBOARD.COM



DOLLY'S
DRESSING ROOM

2020
Country
**POWER
PLAYERS**

DOLLY PARTON MEANS BUSINESS.
HOW SHE'S STEERING HER
EXPANDING EMPIRE
THROUGH THE PANDEMIC



BLACK IN NASHVILLE
Artists and Execs Open Up

EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR
Warner Chappell's Ben Vaughn

A NIGHT OF HEART AND HITS

LIVE FROM
NASHVILLE

HOSTED BY
KEITH URBAN





CBS PRESENTS

55TH

ACM AWARDS

SEPTEMBER 16 8/7c

 CBS

LIVE + ON DEMAND + STREAMING

Taylor Swift's *folklore* Makes History

"...Swift becomes the first artist ever to debut at No. 1 on both the Hot 100 and Billboard 200 in the same week"

billboard

8/3/2020

HOT 100™						
LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	Artist IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART	
	1	#1 CARDIGAN A. DESSNER (T. SWIFT, A. DESSNER)	Taylor Swift REPUBLIC	1	1	
	2	ROCKSTAR SETH IN THE KITCHEN (J. L. KIRK, R. W. MOORE, JR., R. J. PARTARD IV)	Dr. Babu Feat. Roddy Ricch SOUTHGATE/INTERSCOPE	1	15	
	3	WHATS POPPIN JACK HARLOW, DEE CAIN, JAY B, JAY ROSS, JAY WALKER, JAY YOUNG & BUCKLE UP, JAY Z, JAY-Z, JAY-Z & MONTE BEATZ	Jack Harlow Feat. DaBaby, Tory Lanez & Lil Wayne SOUTHGATE/INTERSCOPE	2	25	
	4	THE 1 A. DESSNER (T. SWIFT, A. DESSNER)	Taylor Swift REPUBLIC	4	1	
	5	BLINDING LIGHTS MAY MARQUEE	The Weeknd YOUNG ANIMAL/REPUBLIC	1	35	
	6	EXILE A. DESSNER (T. SWIFT, K. ROWE & J. HUNTER)	Taylor Swift Feat. Bon Iver REPUBLIC	6	1	
	7	AIR WATERMELON SUGAR KID HARPOON, T. JOHNSON (M. STYLES, T. MULL, M. ROWLAND, T. JOHNSON)	Harry Styles ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	7	19	
	8	ROSES F. ALLEN (C. ST. JOHN, L. STASHENKO)	SAINT JHN GOOD COMPLEXION/HITCO	4	19	
	9	SAVAGE J. WHITE (D. B. P. PETE, J. WHITE, B. S. COX, J. B. G. & NOW, LES CARTER, T. MASH, J. K. LAMER, THORP, B. THAZARD, DE. RICHMOND, S. C. CARPENTER, T. CE. RY. B. Q. 100)	Megan Thee Stallion Feat. Beyoncé REPUBLIC	1	20	
	12	SAL SAVAGE LOVE (LAXED - SIREN BEAT) JAWSH 685, JASON DERULO (J. NANA, J. J. DESROULEAU, J. K. HINDLIN, P. BREISS)	Jawsh 685 x Jason Derulo COLUMBIA	10	7	

BILLBOARD 200™						
LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART	
	1	#1 TAYLOR SWIFT REPUBLIC	Folklore	1	1	
	2	VISIONARY DEF. JAM	No Pressure	2	1	
	3	JUICE WRLD GRADE A/INTERSCOPE/ADA	Legends Never Die	1	3	
	4	POP SMOKE Shoot For The Stars Aim For The Moon WIDE WORLD/WIDEWORLD/REPUBLIC	Shoot For The Stars Aim For The Moon	1	4	
	5	ORIGINAL BROADWAY CAST HAMILTON UPTOWN/ATLANTIC/AD	Hamilton: An American Musical	2	253	
	6	GG GUNNA YOUNG STONE B LIFE/300/AR	Wunna	1	10	
	7	LIL BABY GRAPES/INTERSCOPE/ADA/REPUBLIC	My Turn	1	22	
	8	THE KID LAROI COLUMBIA	F*ck Love	8	1	
	9	POST MALONE REPUBLIC	Hollywood's Bleeding	1	47	
	10	HARRY STYLES ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	Fine Line	1	33	

billboard Hot 100®



Styles

'Watermelon Sugar' High: Harry Styles Hits No. 1

HARRY STYLES' "WATERMELON SUGAR" TAKES THE TOP seed on the Billboard Hot 100, becoming his first No. 1 on the chart as it blasts from No. 7.

The single surges by 614% to 63,000 downloads sold in the tracking week, according to Nielsen Music/MRC Data. It also drew 71.7 million in radio airplay audience and 14.2 million U.S. streams.

The song, from Styles' December 2019 album, *Fine Line*, was on sale at the artist's webstore in three physical/digital combinations and sale-priced at digital retailers during the tracking week. An official "behind the scenes" video for the song premiered July 31 and a "lost tour visual" clip arrived Aug. 3.

Styles becomes the second member of One Direction to lead the Hot 100 following Zayn, whose "Pillowtalk" reigned in its debut week in February 2016. (Zayn left the group, which is on hiatus, in 2015.)

One Direction is now among an elite listing of acts with multiple members that have topped the Hot 100 solo. The Beatles became the first such group, when, after landing a record 20 No. 1s in 1964-70, George Harrison and Paul McCartney earned their first leaders apart from the band in 1970 and 1971, respectively. By 1974, Ringo Starr and John Lennon also led solo.

—GARY TRUST

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	CERTIFICATION	PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	Artist	IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
7	7	1	#1 WATERMELON SUGAR ▲	SAL	KID HARPOON, T. JOHNSON (H. STYLES, T. HULL, M. ROWLAND, T. JOHNSON)	Harry Styles	ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	1	20
1	2	2	ROCKSTAR		SETH IN THE KITCHEN, J. L. KIRK, R. W. MOORE, JR., R. J. PARTAROVIV	DaBaby Feat. Roddy Ricch	SOUTHCOST/INTERSCOPE	1	16
2	3	3	WHATS POPPIN ▲		JETSON MADE, POOH BEATZ, LOST THE PRODUCER, J. HARLOW, T. MORGAN, D. CLEMONS, J. W. LUCAS, N. WARD, I. C. GOODWIN, J. L. KIRK, D. PETERSON, D. M. CARTER, JR.	Jack Harlow Feat. DaBaby, Tory Lanez & Lil Wayne	GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC	2	26
4	5	4	BLINDING LIGHTS ▲		MAX MARTIN, O. T. HOLTER, THE WEEKND (A. TEFAYE, A. BALSHE, J. QUENNEVILLE, MAX MARTIN, O. T. HOLTER)	The Weeknd	XD/REPUBLIC	1	36
5	8	5	ROSES ▲		F. A. L. L. E. N. (C. ST. JOHN, L. STASHENKO)	SAINT JHN	GODD COMPLEX/HITCO	4	20
HO! SMO! DEBUT		6	MY FUTURE		FINNEAS (F. B. O'CONNELL, B. E. O'CONNELL)	Billie Eilish	DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE	6	1
12	10	7	SAVAGE LOVE (LAXED - SIREN BEAT) ●		JAWSH 685, JASON DERULO (J. NANAI, J. J. DESROULEAUX, J. K. HINDLIN, P. GREISS)	Jawsh 685 x Jason Derulo	COLUMBIA	7	8
-	1	8	CARDIGAN		A. DESSNER (T. SWIFT, A. DESSNER)	Taylor Swift	REPUBLIC	1	2
10	12	9	GO CRAZY		SAZNOU, D. AZNOU, J. KELVINA, CASTANEDA, MURPHY, KID C, M. BROWN, J. L. WILLIAMS, S. AZNOU, A. AZNOU, J. KLEVIN, CASTANEDA, C. MURPHY, T. SAMUELS, T. SMPS, BENJELLOUN, W. SAAMUELS, O. ANINLOU, Z. KHARBOCH, P. PROLAPCOU, H.	Chris Brown & Young Thug	300/CBE/RCA	9	13
11	11	10	BLUEBERRY FAYGO ▲		CALLAN (L. ECHOLS, C. WONG, BABYFACE, LA REID, D. SIMMONS, J. GILL)	Lil Mosey	MOGUL VISION/INTERSCOPE	8	26

PHAM
THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CURRENT SONGS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY NIELSEN MUSIC/MRC DATA AND STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA BY ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY NIELSEN MUSIC/MRC DATA. SONGS ARE DEFINED AS CURRENT IF THEY ARE NEWLY RELEASED TITLES, OR SONGS RECEIVING WIDESPREAD AIRPLAY AND/OR SALES ACTIVITY FOR THE FIRST TIME. SEE CHARTS. LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM/BIZ FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2020, PROMETHEUS GLOBAL MEDIA, LLC AND NIELSEN MUSIC/MRC DATA, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
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★
UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP
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NASHVILLE POWER PLAYERS

★
UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP NASHVILLE
MIKE DUNGAN
CINDY MABE
ROYCE RISSER
BRIAN WRIGHT ★

UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING NASHVILLE
TROY TOMLINSON

★ **BIG MACHINE LABEL GROUP**
SCOTT BORCHETTA
JIMMY HARNEN
ALLISON JONES
ANDREW KAUTZ ★
MIKE MOLINAR



UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE CERTIFICATION PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	Artist IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
53	65	51	GOT WHAT I GOT M. KNOX (M. TYLER, A. PALMER, T. ARCHER)	Jason Aldean MACON/BROKEN BOW	51	10
44	60	52	SAID SUM DJ YC (D. D. WHITE, JR., C. PEARSON)	Moneybagg Yo BREAD GANG/IN-LESS/CMG/INTERSCOPE	44	5
66	73	53	TAP IN DR. LUKE (D. HARPER, L. S. GOTTFELD, G. LEWIS, T. THOMAS, L. JEFFERSON, C. LOVE, J. PHILLIPS, T. A. SHAW, J. H. SMITH)	Saweezie ICY/ARTISTRY WORLDWIDE/WARNER	53	4
54	69	54	I LOVE MY COUNTRY C. CROWDER, T. HUBBARD, B. KELLEY (K. BROWN, C. CROWDER, R. C. MCGILL, E. K. SMITH, CHARLIE HANDSOME, W. WEATHERLY)	Florida Georgia Line BMLB	48	16
41	64	55	RAGS2RICHES DAYSIX, ZYPITAND (R. GREEN, A. JANECEK, A. MAANI)	Rod Wave Feat. ATR Son Son ALAMO	41	6
8	55	56	GREECE OZ TIGGI (A. GRAHAM, K. M. KHALED, D. YILDRIM, C. TARVIN, E. MAYNARD, P. EDDINS)	DJ Khaled Feat. Drake OVO SOUND/WE THE BEST/REPUBLIC/EPIC	8	3
57	76	57	LIKE THAT TYSON TRAX (A. Z. DLAMINI, L. S. GOTTFELD, T. THOMAS, L. ASRAT, D. SPRECHER, R. D. DAVIS)	Doja Cat Feat. Gucci Mane KEMO SABE/RCA	51	10
71	81	58	WHY WE DRINK J. S. STOVER, S. BORCHETTA (J. MOORE, C. BEATHARD, D. L. MURPHY, J. S. STOVER)	Justin Moore VALORY	58	10
48	70	59	WALK EM DOWN CASHMONEYAP, L. OSHENDRIX (B. L. POTTS, C. D. MUNOZ, A. PETIT, R. W. MOORE, JR.)	NLE Choppa Feat. Roddy Ricch NLE CHOPPA/WARNER	38	20
72	79	60	LOVIN' ON YOU S. MOFFATT (L. COMBS, T. ARCHER, R. M. L. FULCHER, J. MCNAIR)	Luke Combs RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE	60	6
69	83	61	ONE OF THEM GIRLS B. GLOVER, K. JACOBS, L. BRICE (A. GORLEY, B. JOHNSON, D. DAVIDSON, L. BRICE)	Lee Brice CURB	61	10
59	80	62	BEALIGHT THOMAS RHETT Feat. Reba McEntire, Hillary Scott, Chris Tomlin & Keith Urban D. HUFF (THOMAS RHETT, T. M. DRAGSTREIM, J. MILLER, J. THOMPSON)	VALORY	58	18
50	53	63	ONE BIG COUNTRY SONG 770 PRODUCTIONS (J. FRASURE, A. GORLEY, M. W. HARDY)	LOCASH WHEELHOUSE	50	10
45	75	64	TOOSIE SLIDE OZ (A. GRAHAM, D. YILDRIM)	Drake OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	1	18
55	77	65	GOT IT ON ME YOUNG DEVANTE (B. B. JACKSON, D. LUCHKO, C. J. JACKSON, JR., D. BRANCH, F. J. PERREN, L. E. RESTO, K. ST. LEWIS)	Pop Smoke VICTOR VICTOR WORLDWIDE/REPUBLIC	31	5
-	13	66	THE LAST GREAT AMERICAN DYNASTY A. DESSNER (T. SWIFT, A. DESSNER)	Taylor Swift REPUBLIC	13	2
73	84	67	COOL AGAIN D. HUFF (K. BROWN, J. HODGES, M. MCGINN, L. RIMES)	Kane Brown RCA NASHVILLE	67	10
-	63	68	UN DIA (ONE DAY) J. BALVIN, DUA LIPA, BAD BUNNY & TAINY TAINY (D. LIPA, J. A. OSORIO BALVIN, B. A. MARTINEZ OCASIO, D. PETERSON, M. E. MARIAS FERNANDEZ, A. BORRERO, J. RODRIGUEZ, C. COFFEE, JR.)	J Balvin, Dua Lipa, Bad Bunny & Tainy SUENOS GLOBALES/UNIVERSAL MUSIC LATIN/ONE/UM/REPUBLIC	63	2
-	16	69	MY TEARS RICOCHET J. M. ANTONOFF, T. SWIFT (T. SWIFT)	Taylor Swift REPUBLIC	16	2
80	92	70	MORE THAN MY HOMETOWN J. MOI (M. W. HARDY, E. K. SMITH, CHARLIE HANDSOME, M. WALLEN)	Morgan Wallen BIG LOUD	61	8
38	74	71	CONVERSATIONS RONNY J. SCHEME (G. GUERRA, J. A. HIGGINS, R. SPENCE JR.)	Juice WRLD GRADE A/INTERSCOPE	7	4
67	89	72	GOD WHISPERED YOUR NAME K. URBAN, D. MCCARROLL (C. AUGUST, M. CARTER, SHY CARTER, J. T. SLATER)	Keith Urban HIT RED/CAPITOL NASHVILLE	60	16
-	23	73	AUGUST J. M. ANTONOFF, T. SWIFT (T. SWIFT, J. M. ANTONOFF)	Taylor Swift REPUBLIC	23	2
36	72	74	HATE THE OTHER SIDE JUICE WRLD & MARSHMELLO Feat. Polo G & The Kid LAROI MARSHMELLO (C. HOWARD, D. L. MOODY, J. A. HIGGINS, MARSHMELLO, N. HOLLOWELL, DHAR, T. T. BARTLETT)	Juice WRLD & Marshmello GRADE A/INTERSCOPE	10	4
63	85	75	MAMACITA WILL I AM, J. GOLDSTEIN (W. ADAMS, A. PINEA, J. GOMEZ, Y. GOLDSTEIN, J. C. OZUNA ROSADO, P. LEONARD, S. LEONARD, B. GAITSCH, M. CICCONE)	Black Eyed Peas, Ozuna + J. Rey Soul BEP/EPIC/SONY MUSIC LATIN	62	9
96	78	76	DOLLAZ ON MY HEAD MIKE WILL MADE IT (S. G. KITCHENS, M. L. WILLIAMS, J. L. WILLIAMS)	Gunna Feat. Young Thug YOUNG STONER LIFE/300	38	9
60	86	77	DON'T RUSH GRADES (R. TUCKER, A. ADEWUYI, I. ADJEI)	Young T & Bugsey Feat. Headie One BLACK BUTTER/EPIC	56	13
90	97	78	BANG! R. METZGER (A. METZGER, J. METZGER, R. METZGER)	AJR AJR/BMG/S-CURVE	78	5
58	88	79	STUCK WITH U G. M. STONE (A. GRANDE, J. D. BIBER, F. WEXLER, G. M. STONE, S. STONESTREET, W. PHILLIPS, S. BRAUN)	Ariana Grande & Justin Bieber SBPROJECTS/REPUBLIC/DEF JAM	1	13
75	93	80	SOMETHING SPECIAL KDI (B. B. JACKSON, L. RICHIE, R. LAPREAD, T. KELLEY, T. HILL, K. IFILL, E. SHAW, J. JACKSON)	Pop Smoke VICTOR VICTOR WORLDWIDE/REPUBLIC	41	5



6 | **BILLIE EILISH**
"My Future"

Released July 30, the song roars onto the Hot 100 at No. 6 with 20.9 million U.S. streams, 7.4 million in radio reach and 15,000 sold during its first full tracking week. Eilish notches her third top 10 and highest debut, topping the No. 7 start of "bad guy," which led for a week in August 2019. She returned to the tier last November with the No. 8-peaking "everything i wanted." "My Future" concurrently crowns the Hot Rock & Alternative Songs and Hot Alternative Songs charts, becoming Eilish's first No. 1 on each multimetric ranking. —G.T.

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE CERTIFICATION PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	Artist IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
91	99	81	ONE NIGHT STANDARDS J. JOYCE (A. MCBRYDE, S. MCANALLY, N. HAYFORD)	Ashley McBryde ATLANTIC/WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WAR	81	9
76	94	82	NEED IT BUDDAHBLESS (Q. K. MARSHALL, K. CEPHUS, K. K. BALL, T. B. DOUGLAS, SR., K. D. GAULDEN, T. COTTRELL, C. J. JACKSON, JR.)	Migos Feat. YoungBoy Never Broke Again MOTOWN/CAPITOL	62	11
51	87	83	RIGHTEOUS N. MIRA, CHARLIE HANDSOME (N. MIRA, J. A. HIGGINS, CHARLIE HANDSOME)	Juice WRLD GRADE A/INTERSCOPE	11	14
42	82	84	LIFE'S A MESS CHARLIE HANDSOME, R. M. KUDD (A. FRANGIPANE, J. A. HIGGINS, R. M. KUDD, CHARLIE HANDSOME)	Juice WRLD X Halsey GRADE A/INTERSCOPE	9	5
-	37	85	INVISIBLE STRING A. DESSNER (T. SWIFT, A. DESSNER)	Taylor Swift REPUBLIC	37	2
85	100	86	GIRL OF MY DREAMS ACE LEX (R. GREEN, A. MAXWELL)	Rod Wave ALAMO	84	12
84	98	87	ILY SURF MESA (P. AGUIRRE, B. GAUDIO, B. CREWE)	surf mesa Feat. Emilee ASTRALWERKS/CAPITOL	72	11
61	96	88	BE KIND MARSHMELLO (MARSHMELLO, G. M. STONE, A. FRANGIPANE, A. R. ALLEN, F. WEXLER)	Marshmello & Halsey JOYTIME COLLECTIVE/ASTRALWERKS/CAPITOL	29	14
-	56	89	HAPPY ANYWHERE S. HENDRICKS (R. COPPERMAN, J. OSBORNE, M. JENKINS)	Blake Shelton Feat. Gwen Stefani WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WMN	56	2
RE-ENTRY	-	90	ONE BEER J. MOI, D. WELLS (M. W. HARDY, H. LINDSEY, J. MITCHELL)	HARDY Feat. Lauren Alaina & Devin Dawson BIG LOUD	86	9
-	42	91	BETTY A. DESSNER, J. M. ANTONOFF, T. SWIFT (T. SWIFT, T. W. BOWERY)	Taylor Swift REPUBLIC/MCA NASHVILLE	42	2
NEW	-	92	NO DRIBBLE RETRO FUTURE, SVNDS (J. L. KIRK, K. A. CALDWELL, T. PENNA, K. M. SANDS)	DaBaby x Stunna 4 Vegas SOUTHCOAST/INTERSCOPE	92	1
-	26	93	MIRRORBALL J. M. ANTONOFF, T. SWIFT (T. SWIFT, J. M. ANTONOFF)	Taylor Swift REPUBLIC	26	2
RE-ENTRY	-	94	PRETTY HEART JON RANDALL (P. MCCOLLUM, R. MONTANA)	Parker McCollum MCA NASHVILLE	94	4
RE-ENTRY	-	95	BREAKING ME TOPIC (M. IRVINE, A. TIDEBRINK, R. MILLER, T. TOPIC)	Topic & A7S ASTRALWERKS/CAPITOL	95	2
49	90	96	BLOOD ON MY JEANS GEZIN, M. LORD, STRAPA ZDOT (A. Z. VUICA, F. GEZIN, J. A. HIGGINS, M. LORD)	Juice WRLD GRADE A/INTERSCOPE	12	4
-	51	97	LION KING ON ICE J. L. COLE, JETSON MADE, T. MINUS (J. COLE)	J. Cole DREAMVILLE/RCA NATION/INTERSCOPE	51	2
-	35	98	SEVEN A. DESSNER (T. SWIFT, A. DESSNER)	Taylor Swift REPUBLIC	35	2
RE-ENTRY	-	99	3 HEADED GOAT CICERO, AVIATOR KEY YZ (D. BANKS, R. KYLES, K. K. GILMORE, D. JONES, T. T. BARTLETT)	Lil Durk Feat. Lil Baby & Polo G ALAMO/GEFFEN/INTERSCOPE	43	7
RE-ENTRY	-	100	AFTER PARTY SONNY DIGITAL, M. G. DEAN (C. Z. TOLIVER, S. C. UWAEZUOKE, TRAVIS SCOTT, M. G. DEAN)	Don Toliver CACTUS JACK/ATLANTIC	57	15



11 | **LEWIS CAPALDI**
"Before You Go"

The ballad becomes Capaldi's second No. 1 on Adult Top 40 following "Someone You Loved." He joins Daughtry, fun., Lorde and Maren Morris in having led in two initial appearances in lead roles.



19 | **A\$AP FERG FEAT. NICKI MINAJ & MADEINTYO**
"Move Ya Hips"

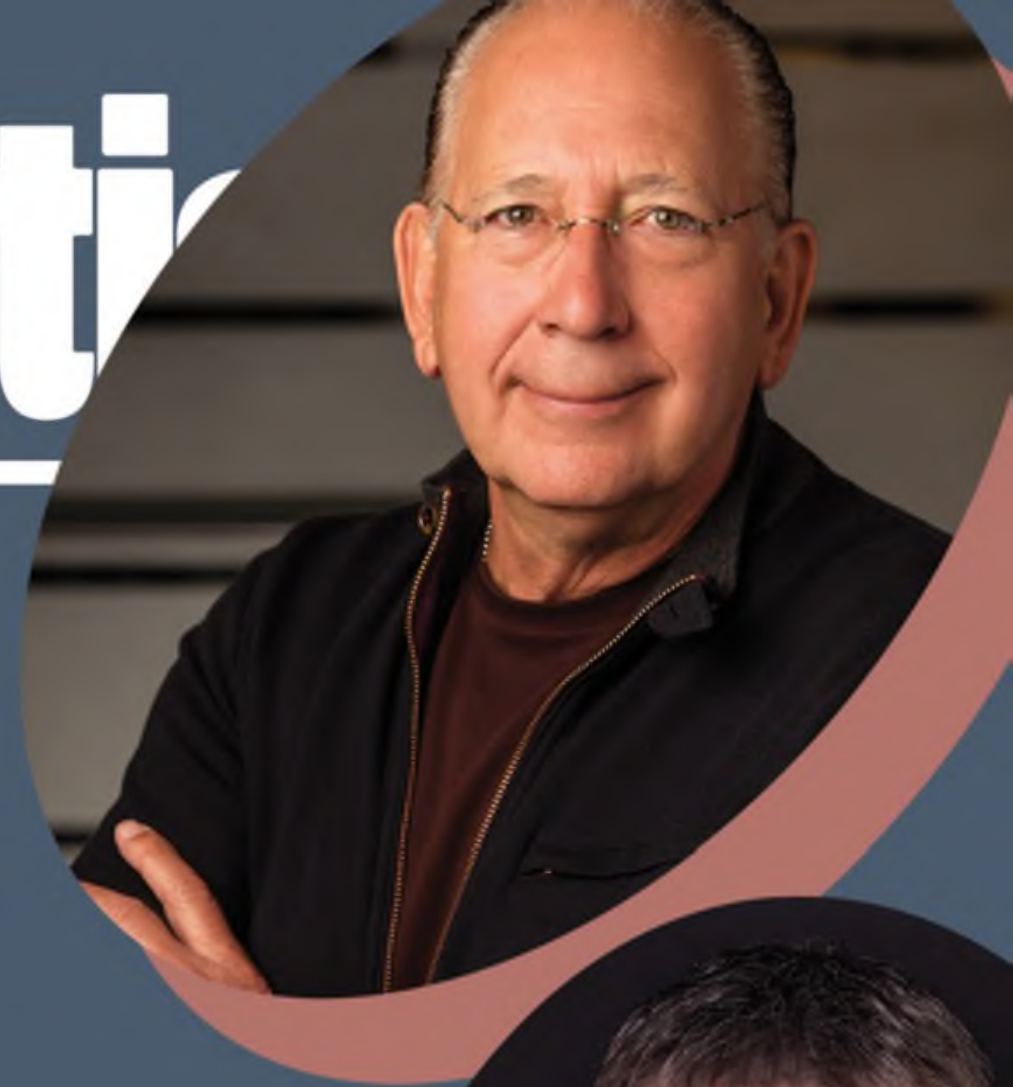
A\$AP Ferg (above) and MadeinTYO each reach a career-best rank as the song starts with 7.8 million streams and 38,000 sold. It also opens as each artist's first top 10 on Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs.

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to our

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YOUR
WARNER
MUSIC
GROUP
FAMILY



Country Power Players



**JOHN ESPOSITO
BEN KLINE
CRIS LACY
JAMES MARSH
BEN VAUGHN
& KRISTEN WILLIAMS**

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	CERTIFICATION	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
1	1	#1 TAYLOR SWIFT REPUBLIC	2 WKS	Folklore	1	2
4	2	POP SMOKE VICTOR VICTOR WORLDWIDE/REPUBLIC		Shoot For The Stars Aim For The Moon	1	5
3	3	JUICE WRLD GRADE A/INTERSCOPE/JGA		Legends Never Die	1	4
5	4	ORIGINAL BROADWAY CAST HAMILTON UPTOWN/ATLANTIC/AG	6	Hamilton: An American Musical	2	254
7	5	LIL BABY QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/CAPITOL		My Turn	1	23
11	6	GREATEST GAINER DABABY SOUTHCOST/INTERSCOPE/JGA		BLAME IT ON BABY	1	16
10	7	TOP SETTER HARRY STYLES ERSKINE/COLUMBIA		Fine Line	1	34
6	8	GUNNA YOUNG STONER LIFE/300/AG		Wunna	1	11
9	9	POST MALONE REPUBLIC		Hollywood's Bleeding	1	48
RE	10	BEYONCÉ & VARIOUS ARTISTS PARKWOOD/COLUMBIA		The Lion King: The Gift (Soundtrack)	2	8
13	11	THE WEEKND XO/REPUBLIC		After Hours	1	20
467	12	BRANDY BRAND NU/EONE		B7	12	1
14	13	POLO G COLUMBIA		The GOAT	2	12
29	14	BILLIE EILISH DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/JGA	3	When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?	1	71
15	15	LIL UZI VERT GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC/AG		Eternal Atake	1	22
NEW	16	ALANIS MORISSETTE EPIPHANY/CRUSH MUSIC/THIRTY TIGERS		Such Pretty Forks In The Road	16	1
16	17	LIL DURK ALAMO/GEFFEN/JGA		Just Cause Y'all Waited 2	2	13
21	18	MORGAN WALLEN BIG LOUD		If I Know Me	18	97
8	19	THE KID LAROI COLUMBIA		F*ck Love	8	2
12	20	JHENE AIKO 2 FISH/ART CLUB/ARTIUM/DEF JAM		Chilombo	2	22
19	21	LUKE COMBS RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN		What You See Is What You Get	1	39
20	22	FUTURE FREEBANDZ/EPIC		High Off Life	1	12
22	23	ROD WAVE ALAMO/JGA		Pray 4 Love	2	18
23	24	RODDY RICCH BIRD VISION/ATLANTIC/AG		Please Excuse Me For Being Antisocial	1	35
26	25	JUICE WRLD GRADE A/INTERSCOPE/JGA		Goodbye & Good Riddance	4	116
25	26	BAD BUNNY RIMAS		YHLQMDLG	2	23
NEW	27	SHORELINE MAFIA ATLANTIC/AG		Mafia Bidness	27	1
24	28	DRAKE OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC		Dark Lane Demo Tapes	2	14
28	29	LUKE COMBS RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	3	This One's For You	4	166
NEW	30	GRATEFUL DEAD GRATEFUL DEAD/RHINO		Dave's Picks Vol. 35: Philadelphia Civic Center, Philadelphia, PA - 4/20/84	30	1
2	31	LOGIC VISIONARY/DEF JAM		No Pressure	2	2
30	32	QUEEN HOLLYWOOD	8	Greatest Hits	11	398
27	33	JACK HARLOW GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC/AG		Sweet Action	20	21
33	34	TRAVIS SCOTT CACTUS JACK/GRAND HUSTLE/EPIC	3	ASTROWORLD	1	105
32	35	POST MALONE REPUBLIC	3	beerbongs & bentleys	1	119
31	36	LEWIS CAPALDI VERTIGO/CAPITOL		Divinely Uninspired To A Hellish Extent	20	64
18	37	TAYLOR SWIFT REPUBLIC	2	Lover	1	50
35	38	JUICE WRLD GRADE A/INTERSCOPE/JGA		Death Race For Love	1	74
36	39	SUMMER WALKER LVRN/INTERSCOPE/JGA		Over It	2	44
34	40	LADY GAGA STREAMLINE/INTERSCOPE/JGA		Chromatica	1	10
NEW	41	DOMINIC FIKE SANDY BOYS/COLUMBIA		What Could Possibly Go Wrong	41	1
37	42	DUA LIPA WARNER		Future Nostalgia	4	19
40	43	BOB MARLEY AND THE WAILERS TUFF GONG/ISLAND/UMG	15	Legend: The Best Of...	5	638
43	44	DRAKE YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC	5	Scorpion	1	110
41	45	ELTON JOHN ROCKET/ISLAND/UMG		Diamonds	7	143
46	46	POST MALONE REPUBLIC	3	Stoney	4	191
38	47	MONEYBAGG YO N-LESS/INTERSCOPE/JGA		Time Served	3	30
39	48	MEGAN THEE STALLION ISO1 CERTIFIED/300/AG		Suga	7	22
42	49	DOJA CAT KEMOSABE/RCA		Hot Pink	9	40
58	50	BILLIE EILISH DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/JGA		Dont Smile At Me	14	137

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	CERTIFICATION	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
45	51	SOUNDTRACK WALT DISNEY		Frozen II	1	38
51	52	CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL FANTASY/CONCORD	10	Chronicle/The 20 Greatest Hits	22	483
44	53	SAM HUNT MCA NASHVILLE/UMGN		SOUTHSIDE	5	18
17	54	THE CHICKS COLUMBIA		Gaslighter	3	3
47	55	A BOOGIE WIT DA HOODIE HIGHBRIDGE THE LABEL/ATLANTIC/AG		Artist 2.0	2	25
52	56	FLEETWOOD MAC WARNER BROS./RHINO	20	Rumours	1	384
50	57	ROD WAVE ALAMO/JGA		Ghetto Gospel	10	40
48	58	POP SMOKE VICTOR VICTOR WORLDWIDE/REPUBLIC		Meet The Woo, V.2	7	26
49	59	CHRIS BROWN & YOUNG THUG 300/CBE/RCA		Slime & B	24	14
NEW	60	CHRIS TOMLIN SPARROW/CAPITOL CMG		Chris Tomlin & Friends	60	1
55	61	ANUEL AA REAL HASTA LA MUERTE/SONY MUSIC LATIN		Emmanuel	8	10
84	62	KENDRICK LAMAR TOP DAWG/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/JGA	3	good kid, m.A.A.d city	2	406
56	63	XXXTENTACION BAD VIBES FOREVER		?	1	125
63	64	BTS BIG HIT ENTERTAINMENT		MAP OF THE SOUL : 7	1	24
53	65	JUSTIN BIEBER SCHOOLBOY/RAYMOND BRAUN/DEF JAM		Changes	1	25
61	66	CHRIS STAPLETON MERCURY NASHVILLE/UMGN	4	Traveller	1	256
60	67	DABABY SOUTHCOST/INTERSCOPE/JGA		KIRK	1	45
54	68	SAINT JHN GODD COMPLEX/HITCO		Collection One	50	20
62	69	JOURNEY COLUMBIA/LEGACY	15	Journey's Greatest Hits	10	628
72	70	KHALID RIGHT HAND/RCA	3	American Teen	4	179
66	71	ED SHEERAN ATLANTIC/AG	4	÷ (Divide)	1	179
69	72	SOUNDTRACK WALT DISNEY	2	Moana	2	193
67	73	2PAC AMARU/DEATH ROW/INTERSCOPE/UMG	10	Greatest Hits	3	336
RE	74	PAUL MCCARTNEY MPL/CAPITOL/UMG		Flaming Pie	2	21
77	75	KHALID RIGHT HAND/RCA		Free Spirit	1	70
74	76	YOUNG THUG YOUNG STONER LIFE/300/ATLANTIC/AG		So Much Fun	1	51
79	77	TOM PETTY AND THE HEARTBREAKERS MCA/GEFFEN/UMG	12	Greatest Hits	2	369
70	78	GABBY BARRETT WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WMN		Goldmine	27	7
68	79	LIL MOSEY MOGUL VISION/INTERSCOPE/JGA		Certified Hitmaker	12	36
71	80	JACKBOYS CACTUS JACK/EPIC		JACKBOYS	1	32
76	81	HALSEY CAPITOL		Manic	2	29
73	82	CHRIS BROWN CBE/RCA		Indigo	1	58
80	83	YOUNGBOY NEVER BROKE AGAIN NEVER BROKE AGAIN/ATLANTIC/AG		AI YoungBoy 2	1	43
83	84	LIL UZI VERT GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC/AG		Luv Is Rage 2	1	154
81	85	LIZZO NICE LIFE/ATLANTIC/AG		Cuz I Love You	4	68
82	86	ARIANA GRANDE REPUBLIC	2	Thank U, Next	1	78
57	87	TAYLOR SWIFT BIG MACHINE/BMLG	9	1989	1	295
65	88	AC/DC COLUMBIA/LEGACY	25	Back In Black	4	423
86	89	THE BEATLES APPLE/CAPITOL/UMG	11	1	1	432
94	90	DRAKE YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC	6	Take Care	1	388
92	91	CARDI B THE KSR GROUP/ATLANTIC/AG	3	Invasion Of Privacy	1	122
88	92	KEHLANI TSUNAMI MOB/ATLANTIC/AG		It Was Good Until It Wasn't	2	13
96	93	THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G. BAD BOY/RHINO		Greatest Hits	1	234
93	94	EMINEM SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/JGA		Music To Be Murdered By	1	29
91	95	J. COLE DREAMVILLE/ROC NATION/COLUMBIA	3	2014 Forest Hills Drive	1	296
NEW	96	CITY MORGUE HIKARI-ULTRA/REPUBLIC		Toxic Boogaloo	96	1
100	97	KENDRICK LAMAR TOP DAWG/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/JGA	3	DAMN.	1	173
97	98	GUNS N' ROSES GEFFEN/UMG	5	Greatest Hits	3	502
102	99	MAREN MORRIS COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN		GIRL	4	74
95	100	SOUNDTRACK FOX/20TH CENTURY FOX/ATLANTIC/AG	3	The Greatest Showman	1	139



Gift That Keeps On Giving

After an absence of nearly a year, the Beyoncé-led *The Lion King: The Gift* reenters the Billboard 200 at No. 10 following the July 31 premiere of *Black Is King* on Disney+.

The set earned 27,000 equivalent album units in the United States during the week ending Aug. 6 (up 1,462%), according to Nielsen Music/MRC Data. The album originally debuted and peaked at No. 2 on the Aug. 3, 2019-dated chart and spent seven weeks on the tally, concluding its initial run on Sept. 28, 2019.

Black Is King, based on the music of *The Lion King: The Gift*, was written, directed and executive-produced by Beyoncé. The *Lion King: The Gift* album also benefits from its reissue on July 31 with three additional tracks.

The Lion King: The Gift was first released July 19, 2019, as a companion project to last year's film remake of *The Lion King*.

—KEITH CAULFIELD

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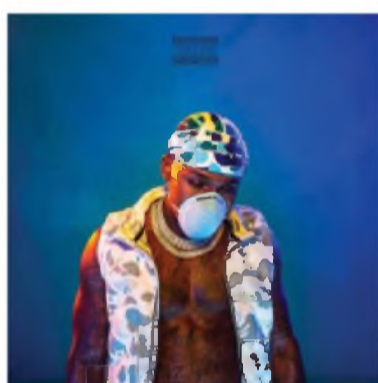
LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	CERTIFICATION	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART	
98	101	ZAC BROWN BAND ROAR/SOUTHERN GROUND/ATLANTIC/AG		Greatest Hits So Far...	20	269	
85	102	STAY SOLID ROCKY COLUMBIA		Fallin'	65	3	
105	103	LIL TJAY COLUMBIA		True 2 Myself	5	43	
112	104	SZA TOP DAWG/RCA	2	Ctrl	3	165	
113	105	THE BEATLES APPLE/CAPITOL/UME	12	Abbey Road	1	373	
104	106	LYNYRD SKYNYRD MCA/GEFFEN/UME		All Time Greatest Hits	56	92	
111	107	DRAKE YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC	6	Views	1	223	
107	108	TRIPPIE REDD TENTHOUSAND PROJECTS		A Love Letter To You 4	1	37	
108	109	NF NF REAL MUSIC/CAROLINE		The Search	1	54	
127	110	MAC MILLER WARNER		Circles	3	29	
89	111	BLAKE SHELTON WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WMN		Fully Loaded: God's Country	2	34	
99	112	VARIOUS ARTISTS DREAMVILLE/INTERSCOPE/JGA		Dreamville & J. Cole: Revenge Of The Dreamers III	1	57	
110	113	THE BEACH BOYS CAPITOL/UME	3	Sounds Of Summer: The Very Best Of The Beach Boys	16	222	
101	114	DON TOLIVER CACTUS JACK/ATLANTIC/AG		Heaven Or Hell	7	21	
117	115	THE WEEKND XO/REPUBLIC	4	Beauty Behind The Madness	1	257	
75	116	NOCAP ARTIST PARTNER GROUP/ATLANTIC/AG		Steel Human	31	3	
115	117	ED SHEERAN ATLANTIC/AG		No.6 Collaborations Project	1	56	
NEW	118	YANDEL Y/SONY MUSIC LATIN		Quien Contra Mi 2	118	1	
121	119	THE WEEKND XO/REPUBLIC	3	Starboy	1	193	
114	120	G HERBO EPIC/MACHINE ENTERTAINMENT GROUP		PTSD	7	23	
118	121	MICHAEL JACKSON EPIC/LEGACY	4	The Essential Michael Jackson	31	336	
120	122	EAGLES ASYLUM/ELEKTRA/RHINO	38	Their Greatest Hits 1971-1975	1	338	
106	123	KYGO KYGO AS/RCA		Golden Hour	18	10	
137	124	TYLER CHILDERS HICKMAN HOLLER/THIRTY TIGERS		Purgatory	120	12	
128	125	TRAVIS SCOTT GRAND HUSTLE/EPIC		Birds In The Trap Sing McKnight	1	204	
134	126	DAN + SHAY WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WMN		Dan + Shay	6	111	
103	127	DIPLO PRESENTS THOMAS WESLEY MADDECENT/COLUMBIA		Chapter I: Snake Oil	50	10	
126	128	POLO G COLUMBIA		Die A Legend	6	61	
129	129	JASON ALDEAN MACON/BROKEN BOW/BMG/BBMG			9	2	30
130	130	IMAGINE DRAGONS KIDINAKORNER/INTERSCOPE/JGA	2	Evolve	2	163	
123	131	LIL NAS X COLUMBIA		7 (EP)	2	59	
157	132	FRANK OCEAN BOYS DON'T CRY		Blonde	1	190	
116	133	MIRANDA LAMBERT VANNER/RCA NASHVILLE/SMN		Wildcard	4	24	
147	134	RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS WARNER	2	Greatest Hits	18	251	
133	135	MICHAEL JACKSON EPIC/LEGACY	33	Thriller	1	430	
124	136	GUCCI MANE & VARIOUS ARTISTS GUWOP/ATLANTIC/AG		Gucci Mane Presents: SoICY Summer	29	5	
135	137	XXXTENTACION BAD VIBES FOREVER/EMPIRE			17	2	154
132	138	EMINEM WEB/AF TERMATH/INTERSCOPE/UME	10	The Eminem Show	1	389	
148	139	DRAKE YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC		More Life	1	176	
143	140	A BOOGIE WIT DA HOODIE HIGHBRIDGE THE LABEL/ATLANTIC/AG		Hoodie SZN	1	85	
125	141	BAD BUNNY RIMAS		Las Que No Iban A Salir	7	13	
146	142	LAUREN DAIGLE CENTRICITY/12TONE		Look Up Child	3	100	
142	143	BAD BUNNY RIMAS		X100PRE	11	85	
139	144	SHAWN MENDES ISLAND/REPUBLIC		Shawn Mendes	1	115	
152	145	VARIOUS ARTISTS QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/CAPITOL		Quality Control: Control The Streets, Volume 2	3	51	
163	146	MAC MILLER WARNER		Swimming	3	102	
138	147	MUSTARD 10 SUMMERS/INTERSCOPE/JGA		Perfect Ten	8	58	
179	148	NIRVANA SUB POP/DGC/GEFFEN/UME	10	Nevermind	1	485	
59	149	OLIVER TREE ATLANTIC/AG		Ugly Is Beautiful	14	3	
151	150	KANE BROWN ZONE 4/RCA NASHVILLE/SMN		Experiment	1	91	



1

TAYLOR SWIFT
folklore

After debuting with 846,000 equivalent album units earned (the week ending July 30, according to Nielsen Music/MRC Data — the biggest week for any album in 2020), the set holds at No. 1 for a second frame with 135,000 (down 84%).



6

DaBAbY
Blame It on Baby

The set returns to the top 10 with 43,000 units (up 47%) after the title was reissued Aug. 4 with 10 additional tracks. It's one of at least 10 major R&B/hip-hop albums in 2020 to get a deluxe reissue with bonus tracks after its release.



12

BRANDY
B7

Brandy and Alanis Morissette (No. 16) debut on the Billboard 200 for the first time since 2012, with their eighth and seventh top 40-charting sets, respectively. They also start at Nos. 1 and 2 on Independent Albums.

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	CERTIFICATION	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART	
145	151	CAMILA CABELLO SYCO/EPIC		Romance	3	35	
191	152	HARRY STYLES ERSKINE/COLUMBIA		Harry Styles	1	48	
158	153	BOB SEGER & THE SILVER BULLET BAND HIDEOUT/CAPITOL/UME	10	Greatest Hits	8	341	
159	154	KANE BROWN ZONE 4/RCA NASHVILLE/SMN	2	Kane Brown	5	192	
119	155	TAYLOR SWIFT BIG MACHINE/BMLG	3	reputation	1	124	
150	156	CITY GIRLS QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/CAPITOL		City On Lock	29	7	
154	157	BILLY JOEL COLUMBIA/LEGACY	3	The Essential Billy Joel	15	203	
170	158	KID CUDI DREAM ON/G O O D/REPUBLIC		Man On The Moon: The End Of Day	4	136	
136	159	NIO GARCIA & CASPER MAGICO FLOW LA MOVIE/GLAD EMPIRE		Now Or Never	136	2	
162	160	NIPSEY HUSSLE ALL MONEY IN NO MONEY OUT/ATLANTIC/AG		Victory Lap	2	80	
144	161	YOUNGBOY NEVER BROKE AGAIN NEVER BROKE AGAIN/ATLANTIC/AG		38 Baby 2	1	15	
RE	162	IMAGINE DRAGONS KIDINAKORNER/INTERSCOPE/JGA	2	Night Visions	2	402	
155	163	LIL BABY & GUNNA YOUNG STONER LIFE/300/QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/AG/CAPITOL		Drip Harder	4	96	
171	164	BTS BIG HIT ENTERTAINMENT		Love Yourself: Answer	1	83	
167	165	CONAN GRAY REPUBLIC		Kid Krow	5	8	
165	166	BRUNO MARS ELEKTRA/EMG	5	Doo-Wops & Hooligans	3	482	
197	167	FRANK SINATRA FRANK SINATRA ENTERPRISES/CAPITOL/UME		Ultimate Sinatra	32	115	
140	168	MADDIE & TAE MERCURY NASHVILLE/UMGN		The Way It Feels	74	6	
122	169	TAYLOR SWIFT BIG MACHINE/BMLG	7	Red	1	159	
161	170	THE ROLLING STONES ABKCO	12	Hot Rocks 1964-1971	4	342	
175	171	ELVIS PRESLEY RCA/SONY STRATEGIC MARKETING GROUP/LEGACY		The Essential Elvis Presley	42	58	
180	172	FIVE FINGER DEATH PUNCH PROSPECT PARK		A Decade Of Destruction	29	127	
RE	173	SUBLIME GASOLINE ALLEY/MCA/GEFFEN/UME	5	Sublime	13	169	
153	174	BLACK EYED PEAS BEP/EPIC		Translation	52	7	
109	175	ESLABON ARMADO DEL		Vibras de Noche	18	3	
176	176	DARYL HALL JOHN OATES RCA/LEGACY		The Very Best Of Daryl Hall John Oates	34	97	
178	177	BON JOVI ISLAND/UME		Greatest Hits: The Ultimate Collection	5	176	
188	178	RIHANNA WESTBURY ROAD/ROC NATION	3	ANTI	1	231	
185	179	TIM MCGRAW CURB		Number One Hits	27	157	
186	180	FLEETWOOD MAC WARNER BROS	8	Greatest Hits	14	154	
192	181	DRAKE YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC	4	Nothing Was The Same	1	341	
181	182	DABABY SOUTH COAST/INTERSCOPE/JGA		Baby On Baby	7	75	
RE	183	LANA DEL REY POLYDOR/INTERSCOPE/JGA		Born To Die	2	361	
198	184	ADELE XL/COLUMBIA	14		21	1	477
173	185	MEEK MILL MAYBACH/ATLANTIC/AG		Championships	1	88	
177	186	LADY GAGA & BRADLEY COOPER INTERSCOPE/JGA	2	A Star Is Born (Soundtrack)	1	96	
160	187	IANN DIOR TENTHOUSAND PROJECTS		I'm Gone	45	8	
164	188	SOUNDTRACK VILLA 40/DREAMWORKS/RCA		TROLLS: World Tour	15	18	
187	189	GEORGE STRAIT MCA NASHVILLE/UMGN	7	50 Number Ones	1	151	
182	190	OLD DOMINION RCA NASHVILLE/SMN		Old Dominion	9	41	
190	191	LIL BABY QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/CAPITOL		Harder Than Ever	3	104	
189	192	SOUNDTRACK WALT DISNEY	4	Frozen	1	162	
172	193	TAYLOR SWIFT BIG MACHINE/BMLG	10	Fearless	1	257	
196	194	H.E.R. MBK/RCA		H.E.R.	23	144	
199	195	NF NF REAL MUSIC/CAPITOL/CAROLINE		Perception	1	148	
169	196	NAV XO/REPUBLIC		Good Intentions	1	13	
194	197	TWENTY ONE PILOTS FUELED BY RAMEN/EMG	4	Blurryface	1	273	
166	198	SURFACES SURFACES/TENTHOUSAND PROJECTS		Where The Light Is	104	24	
183	199	TONES AND I BAD BATCH/ELEKTRA/EMG		The Kids Are Coming (EP)	30	44	
RE	200	METALLICA BLACKENED/RHINO	16	Metallica	1	580	



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COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS 2020

Warner Chappell Nashville’s **Ben Vaughn** leads *Billboard’s* sixth annual Country Power Players list celebrating the genre’s wins in the past year, amid a pandemic and an industry reckoning with systemic racism. Plus: The *Urban Cowboy* soundtrack’s enduring influence, how Music City venues are weathering the pandemic, tributes to country’s Black pioneers and more.

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‘TIMES ARE CHANGING. WE HAVE TO CORRECT THIS’

Black artists and executives like Warner Music Nashville’s **James Marsh** and Big Loud Records’ **Candice Watkins** know the genre is becoming more inclusive — but is Music City taking enough action to help them thrive?

ON THE COVER

Dolly Parton photographed by Miller Mobley on July 6 in Nashville.

TO OUR READERS

Billboard will publish its next issue on Sept. 19. For 24/7 music coverage, go to billboard.com.

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ABOUT

*where
you are,*

IT'S
ABOUT

who

you are

AND

*you're
the best*

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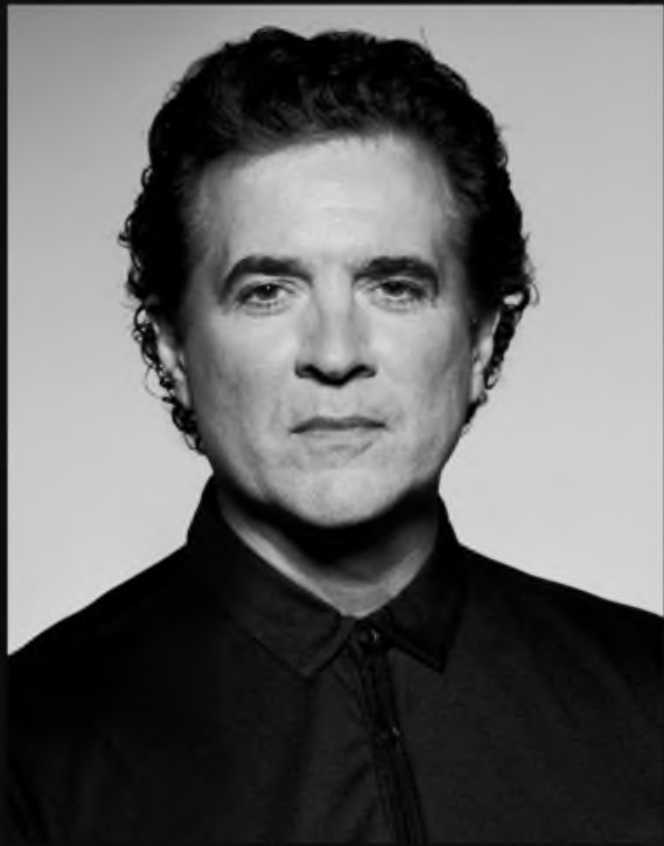
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The Market

PG. 20 EARNINGS REPORT REPORT ✕ PG. 22 PUBLISHERS QUARTERLY ✕ PG. 26 FTDO: MONIQUE BLAKE



Old Man, Take A Look At My Rights

Creators often object to the use of their songs at campaign events. But songwriters' disdain for Trump — and the online nature of this campaign — could lead to a new level of legal wrangling

BY STEVE KNOPPER

IT'S AS MUCH A PART OF presidential campaigns as reporters interviewing voters in swing-state diners: Candidate, usually Republican, plays song at rally; creator objects; creator's lawyer sends cease-and-desist letter. Traditionally, that's where the issue ends. Most candidates are reluctant to alienate songwriters, even though the public performance licenses they have — from ASCAP or BMI, for example — usually allow them to play their compositions.

Nothing about this presidential campaign is normal, though. The disdain of many creators for President Donald Trump, combined with the fact that the coronavirus pandemic is pushing most political events online, could lead to an amount and intensity of legal

wrangling over music never before seen in a U.S. election. Already, in addition to the usual letters, The Rolling Stones in late June credibly threatened Trump's campaign with a lawsuit for playing "You Can't Always Get What You Want" at rallies, while on Aug. 4, Neil Young sued the campaign for playing "Devil's Sidewalk" and "Rockin' in the Free World" at events.

The Stones and Young are taking advantage of the campaign licenses now used by ASCAP and BMI that allow songwriters to remove public performance rights for political campaigns. (No license is required to play a recording at a public event unless it's transmitted online.) And the issue will almost certainly intensify as campaigns head online, where using songs and recordings with video can require

an array of licenses — and creators will have more options to stop them.

"As there are more and more remote events, if people are looking to campaign over the internet, we are going to see more of this problem," says Eleanor Lackman, who handles music litigation at Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp. "If you're using music online, if you're not planning that out in advance or you're not removing it, you're living under a rock." That means people or organizations that post campaign videos on YouTube could receive takedown notices — which, in turn, can be challenged.

All of this could be complicated further by Trump's reputation for litigiousness. "Normally people would think, 'If I'm being criticized by this artist whose music I'm using, that's

bad,'" says Alex Weingarten, an entertainment attorney who has worked with Tom Petty's family, which in June demanded that the Trump campaign stop playing "I Won't Back Down." "Those conventions no longer apply to this candidate."

Online music licensing isn't exactly straightforward. To stream footage of a rally with music, for example, a campaign would usually need a public performance license and a synch license, plus permission to use a recording — unless the video is available on demand. In that case, it would also need a mechanical license, which it might need anyway, depending on whom you ask. Unless it's fair use, in which case no license is necessary. But that depends on context, so a campaign ad might need to license

● MADONNA IS A FREE AGENT: HER CONTRACT WITH INTERSCOPE RECORDS HAS ENDED. ● WARNER MUSIC GROUP NAMED DR. MAURICE STINNETT HEAD OF GLOBAL EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION.

music, while news coverage of a rally probably wouldn't. Got that?

Right now, each of the 11 rallies posted on Trump's official YouTube page end the same way: with 30 seconds of the Stones' recording of "You Can't Always Get What You Want." Theoretically, using these clips should require synch licenses from both the song's publisher and the owner of the master recording — in this case, ABKCO Music & Records, the company founded by late Stones manager Allen

**“IF PEOPLE ARE
LOOKING TO
CAMPAIGN OVER
THE INTERNET,
WE ARE GOING
TO SEE MORE OF
THIS PROBLEM.”**

—ELEANOR LACKMAN

Klein — which could issue a takedown notice. (Many YouTube videos use 30 seconds of music in the belief that such snippets qualify as fair use, but this isn't necessarily so.)

"It would be fairly straightforward for the Stones to get an injunction for the use of their songs as part of the audiovisual work," says attorney Larry Iser, who represented Jackson Browne when he sued presidential candidate John McCain after "Running on Empty" was used to poke fun at Barack Obama in 2008. "Open and shut."

Probably. But, says Lackman, "There is a lot of leeway in the law for fair use in the political context because of the importance of political speech." So

rights holders have been wary of issuing takedown notices that involve politics for fear of setting a precedent that could hurt them in the long run. If the Trump campaign were to prevail in court, it could potentially establish that music can be used without a license, under fair use, in a variety of political videos.

Already, some creators seem to have stopped Trump from using their music online. In July, when White House social media director Dan Scavino tweeted a two-minute campaign video that included a cover of Linkin Park's "In the End," the band announced what it called "a cease-and-desist order." Trump retweeted Scavino's post — then Twitter took it down.

Creators can also sue when their music is used without permission in a way that implies an endorsement, although that would presumably only apply if a campaign uses the same music regularly as a sort of theme song. That could potentially apply to Trump's repeated use of "You Can't Always Get What You Want" and "Rockin' in the Free World," although neither the Stones nor Young mentioned this. (Both acts declined to comment.)

Like so much in current politics, lawsuits over the use of music in a presidential campaign could enter new legal territory. Creators generally stick to writing letters because "it costs you 10 cents to make the claim — it costs you \$50,000 to sue," says music litigator Howard King, who sent a cease-and-desist letter to the Trump campaign on behalf of Pharrell Williams when his song "Happy" was played at a rally after the deadly 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue shooting. "What's unusual is you have someone who couldn't care less what the law is and is willing to litigate everything, especially knowing there's going to be no resolution before the election." ■



From left: Sony Music CEO Rob Stringer, Cooper and Universal Music Group CEO Lucian Grainge.

**Minor Issues,
Major Problems**

Recorded music is faring better than the concert business — but it's hardly immune to the pandemic

BY GLENN PEOPLES

OVER THE PAST few years, labels and music publishers have once again become a hot investment — see Warner Music Group's initial public offering in June or Tencent's purchase of 10% of Universal Music Group, which valued UMG at a dizzying 30 billion euros (\$35.2 billion at current exchange rates) — partly because streaming revenue is expected to continue soaring over the next decade as new markets embrace the format. Even amid the coronavirus pandemic, with the live business temporarily shuttered, Spotify revenue grew 13.3% to 1.9 billion euros (\$2.2 billion), according to second-quarter earnings that were released July 29.

The three major labels aren't faring as well. UMG, WMG and Sony Music each suffered second-quarter drops in revenue compared with the same period last year, according to their recent earnings reports: UMG was down 3.8%, WMG declined 4.5%, and Sony Music dropped 13.1%. And although their recorded-music revenue from streaming grew — Sony's rose 3.6% compared with the same time period in 2019, while WMG's and UMG's were up 9.1% and 9.2%, respectively — they didn't post the double-digit increases that investors have grown accustomed to. Consumers are streaming more music at home, on gaming consoles and smart speakers, and more of them are buying subscriptions even amid a bad economy — Spotify added 8 million subscribers in the second quarter, the most in a year. So why aren't music companies seeing those gains?

Part of the reason is that all streaming isn't created equal. Some of the considerable growth in subscription revenue was offset by declines in ad-supported revenue as online ad rates dropped across the board. Labels share in Spotify's ad revenue, which fell 20.6% compared with the same time last year, as well as that of YouTube, where ad rates are said to be dropping in general, although exact figures for music are difficult to come by. (Other music companies that depend on advertising suffered, too: Pandora's ad revenue dropped 31% in the second quarter, compared with the same period in 2019, while overall revenue at broadcast radio giant iHeartMedia fell 46.6%.)

And streaming isn't the entire business. Physical sales still account for 21.6% of the recorded-music business worldwide, largely because of Germany and Japan, and that revenue declined significantly — 38% for UMG, 42.2% for Sony and 46.3% for WMG. With the concert business on pause, merchandise sales also fell by over 20% at the two majors that itemize those results.

The upside is that streaming will continue to grow after the pandemic ends. So analysts expect revenue at the most widely covered company, WMG, to fall less than 2% this fiscal year, then start increasing again in 2021 and return to double-digit growth in 2022. Until then, labels are trying to make up for lost revenue with new businesses. "There's this old saying that nature abhors a vacuum," said WMG CEO Stephen Cooper during an earnings call on Aug. 4. This is "a situation where we'll do all that we can to fill it." ■

MARKET WATCH

19.87B

↓ 1.1%

**TOTAL ON-DEMAND
STREAMS WEEK
OVER WEEK**

Number of audio and video on-demand streams for the week ending Aug. 6.

14.82M

↓ 4.1%

**ALBUM CONSUMPTION
UNITS WEEK OVER WEEK**

Album sales plus track-equivalent albums plus streaming-equivalent albums for the week ending Aug. 6.

601B

↓ 9.4%

**TOTAL ON-DEMAND
STREAMS YEAR OVER
YEAR TO DATE**

Number of audio and video streams for 2020 so far over the same period in 2019.

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PUBLISHERS QUARTERLY

SONY/ATV TOPS HOT 100, RADIO RANKINGS

The Weeknd's "Blinding Lights" rules both charts, and Roddy gets Riccher

BY ED CHRISTMAN

IN THE SECOND quarter of 2020, Sony/ATV Music Publishing topped both the Top Radio Airplay songs and Hot 100 publisher charts with market shares of 20.11% and 20.18%, respectively. This marks the publisher's 11th consecutive No. 1 ranking on the radio tally — which it has led for 31 of the last 32 quarters — this time with shares in 58 of the list's 100 songs.

From April to July, The Weeknd's "Blinding Lights" was the No. 1 song on the two charts. Among writers, Rodrick Wayne Moore Jr., better known as Roddy Ricch, topped the Hot 100 with co-writes on five songs, including DaBaby's "Rockstar" (No. 5) and his own "The Box" (No. 6). He's represented by Kobalt. On the Top Radio Airplay songs chart, Billie Eilish O'Connell and her brother, Finneas Baird O'Connell, tied for first with the songs "everything i wanted" (No. 9) and "bad guy" (No. 64). Universal Music Publishing Group reps Eilish; Finneas is signed to Kobalt.

In the ongoing back-and-forth battle for Hot 100 publisher rankings, Sony/ATV edged out UMPG, last quarter's leader, with 20.18% to 20.03% shares, respectively. This is Sony/ATV's fourth win in the ranking since it debuted in the first quarter of 2019, this time with a stake in 54 songs, including Megan Thee Stallion's "Savage" featuring Beyoncé (No. 2).

UMPG had a share of more Hot 100 songs than any other publisher, with 58, including "Blinding Lights." (That's up from 54 songs the prior quarter.) But the company fell from second to third place on the radio airplay rankings with a 17.85% share,

down from 18.58% last quarter, even though it was up in total tracks, from 52 to 55.

On the Top Radio Airplay publishers list, Kobalt's market share rose three percentage points from last quarter, to 19.04%, with 45 songs charting, including "Blinding Lights." That was enough to overtake UMPG for No. 2 — its ninth time in the spot since 2012. On the Hot 100 publisher ranking, Kobalt's market share fell to 17.09%, from 17.94% the previous quarter, for third place.



Ricch

Warner Chappell Music — which also had a stake in "Blinding Lights" — ranked fourth in the Top Radio Airplay (14.70%) and Hot 100 rankings (15.09%). Once again, the company topped the Country Airplay publisher rankings with a 21.44% share, its 14th straight quarter ruling that tally.

BMG ranked fifth on both charts with an 8.38% share on Top Airplay Songs and 7.53% on Hot 100, where it has improved market share for the fourth consecutive quarter. Its top song was Dua Lipa's "Don't Start Now" (No. 3, Top Airplay Songs; No. 7, Hot 100).

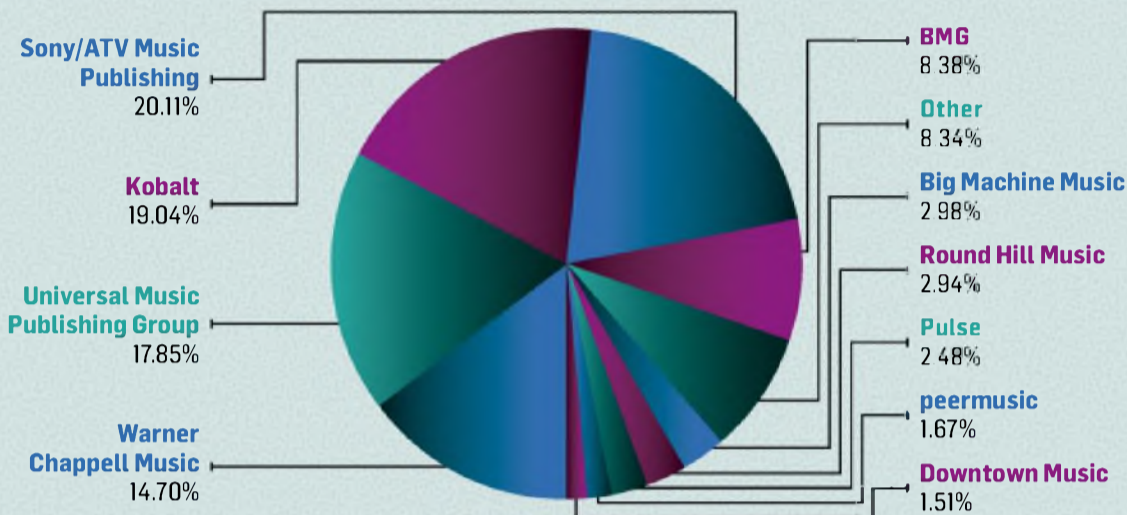
On the rest of the airplay chart, Big Machine Music ranked sixth (with a 2.98% share), Round Hill Music seventh (2.94%), Pulse Music eighth (2.48%), peermusic ninth (1.67%) and Downtown Music 10th (1.51%).

Rounding out the Hot 100 publisher rankings were Pulse (No. 6, with a 3.03% share), Round Hill (No. 7, 2.63%), Big Machine (No. 8, 2.28%) and peermusic (No. 9, 1.25%). Deundraeus Portis — aka producer Twysted Genius — was No. 10 with a 0.72% share based on co-writes for Lil Baby's "Emotionally Scarred" (No. 45) and "Sum 2 Prove" (No. 67). **E**



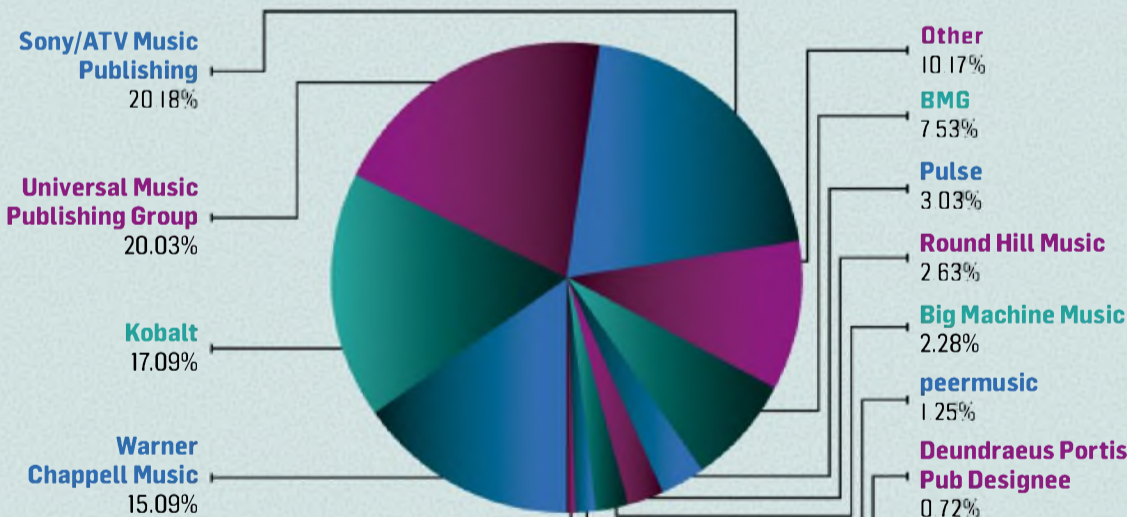
Megan Thee Stallion

TOP RADIO AIRPLAY: PUBLISHERS*



RANK	TITLE	ARTIST	LABEL
1	"Blinding Lights"	The Weeknd	XO/Republic
2	"Say So"	Doja Cat	Kemosabe/RCA
3	"Don't Start Now"	Dua Lipa	Warner Records
4	"Adore You"	Harry Styles	Erskine/Columbia
5	"Intentions"	Justin Bieber Feat. Quavo	Quality Control/SchoolBoy/Motown/Raymond Braun/Capitol/Def Jam
6	"Circles"	Post Malone	Republic
7	"The Bones"	Maren Morris	Columbia Nashville
8	"My Oh My"	Camila Cabello Feat. DaBaby	SYCO/Epic
9	"everything i wanted"	Billie Eilish	Darkroom/Interscope
10	"The Box"	Roddy Ricch	Bird Vision/Atlantic

HOT 100 SONGS: PUBLISHERS*



RANK	TITLE	ARTIST	LABEL
1	"Blinding Lights"	The Weeknd	XO/Republic
2	"Savage"	Megan Thee Stallion Feat. Beyoncé	1501 Certified/300
3	"Say So"	Doja Cat Feat. Nicki Minaj	Kemosabe/RCA
4	"Toosie Slide"	Drake	OVO Sound/Republic
5	"Rockstar"	DaBaby Feat. Roddy Ricch	SouthCoast/Interscope
6	"The Box"	Roddy Ricch	Bird Vision/Atlantic
7	"Don't Start Now"	Dua Lipa	Warner Records
8	"Intentions"	Justin Bieber Feat. Quavo	Quality Control/SchoolBoy/Motown/Raymond Braun/Capitol/Def Jam
9	"Circles"	Post Malone	Republic
10	"Adore You"	Harry Styles	Erskine/Columbia

● HIPGNOSIS SONGS BOUGHT THE MUSIC CATALOGS OF BARRY MANILOW AND BLONDIE. ● SONY/ATV MUSIC PUBLISHING SIGNED "OLD TOWN ROAD" CO-WRITER JOZZY TO A GLOBAL ADMINISTRATION DEAL.

*For the Top 10 Publishers (Radio Airplay) chart, percentage calculations were based upon the overall top 100 detecting songs from 1,969 U.S. radio stations electronically monitored by Nielsen Music/MRC Data 24 hours a day, seven days a week during the period of April 1 to June 30, 2020. For Top 10 Publishers (Hot 100 Songs), percentage calculations were based upon the top 100 songs based on Billboard Hot 100 chart "points" calculated from digital sales, streaming and Nielsen Music/MRC Data-tracked radio airplay detections during the period of April 3 to July 2, 2020, reflecting the issue dates of April 18 to July 11, 2020. 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.

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The 2018 EXIT Festival at the Petrovaradin Fortress in Novi Sad, Serbia.



Europe's Last Stand For Summer Shows

As the pandemic continues, some promoters are experimenting with seated concerts, restrictions on alcohol and other safety measures — and still bracing for losses

BY RICHARD SMIRKE and ALEXEI BARRIONUEVO

LONDON — In May, as the coronavirus spread through Europe, Serbian prime minister Ana Brnabić tried to stop her country's summer EXIT Festival from becoming another casualty of the pandemic. Started in 2000, after the end of a series of bloody regional conflicts, the four-day event — held at the Petrovaradin Fortress on the Danube River — has served as a symbol of the country's openness. So Brnabić urged organizers to move the festival from July to August rather than cancel it.

The Serbian promoters slashed the event's daily 55,000 capacity by half and instituted safety measures including mandatory COVID-19 tests and isolation facilities for attendees who show symptoms of the virus. Since Serbia had relatively few cases, hopes were high that EXIT could happen. Then in July, when Serbia's infection rate spiked, Dušan Kovačević, the event's co-founder, told *Billboard* that artists might perform for just a few hundred people at the site, and that the festival would focus on its pay-per-view livestream broadcast. "We are determined to at least symbolically do it,"

said Kovačević. When those concessions didn't seem sufficient, Kovačević finally canceled in mid-July.

Not all hope is lost for live shows this summer — but it's fading fast. In Europe, where countries have had more success than the United States in controlling the virus, a handful of promoters are still battling to salvage some of the season. On Aug. 7, Live Nation announced a concert for 12,000 fans at a stadium in Düsseldorf, Germany, featuring Bryan Adams. The country's Reeperbahn Festival is moving forward in September with shows at 20 venues in Hamburg, as are festivals in Croatia (Awake Croatia, Dropzone) and southern France.

The situation is tenuous, though. As recently as July, with EXIT shut down in Serbia — and clubs in Ibiza and Mallorca mostly shuttered — Croatia and Malta seemed poised to become Europe's summer-tourist party spots. Malta had five major events scheduled for August and September, including the bass festival Rhythm + Waves and BPM Festival, with a lineup that included Fatboy Slim. But in late July, when infections

there ticked up, the Maltese government pushed organizers to cancel.

"There is the feeling that any second [French authorities] could say it cannot happen, no matter what we do," says Eric Schönemeier, the co-founder of Monticule Festival in southern France, which rescheduled its five-day event from June to Sept. 9-13.

Some of Europe's biggest events already chose a different path. Tomorrowland, the electronic music festival in Belgium, made history in July with a virtual-reality livestream featuring stars like Tiësto and Katy Perry, who recorded their sets in green-screen studios. Rather than invest in health measures, the Tomorrowland founders bet \$10 million on artist fees and technology to create a virtual raving island. Creamfields in the United Kingdom also announced that its August festival would be a livestream of past performances.

Most promoters of shows still on the calendar expect to lose money even if they take place, but also say that more than profits are at stake. Serbia credits EXIT with adding

nearly 20 million euros a year to its tourism economy. Up to 95% of the people attending the dance music festivals Awake Croatia and Dropzone will be international tourists, says Joško Perković, the festivals' promoter. Croatia is among the few European countries that is allowing foreigners from outside the European Union to visit with a valid coronavirus test taken within 48 hours. Before arriving in Croatia, one man from Oregon, says Perković, plans to travel to Los Angeles Airport, then to Istanbul, where he'll take a COVID-19 test at the airport. And for elite globe-trotters, with a scarcity of open clubbing spots this summer, "we're seeing customers ask for 7,000- to 8,000-euro villas, full concierge treatment, the best tables in the club," says Perković.

As of Aug. 5, according to Perković, tickets for Awake Croatia, where Paul van Dyk is booked to spin, were about 85% sold out. The festival, which takes place Aug. 20-23 on Pag Island's Zrće Beach, is capping attendance at under 1,000 people, less than half of its intended capacity.

Complicating matters for European concert promoters has been a confusing array of travel restrictions, some of which include 14-day quarantines. Three countries — Ireland, Norway and the Netherlands — currently recommend against travel to Croatia, for example.

In spite of the challenges, the remaining festivals have adopted a whatever-it-takes attitude. Promoters say they negotiated up to 30% discounts on artist fees, but are spending more on hygiene measures. Live Nation's Düsseldorf concert, a seated show, will prohibit alcohol and require attendees to wear masks.

In Hamburg, the Reeperbahn Festival, which takes place Sept. 16-19, will cap concerts at 850 people and disinfect venues for two hours between shows. Because attendees need to be seated and socially distanced, performances will take place in 20 venues — five of them outdoors — rather than the usual 90, with visitors restricted to about 2,300 a day, down from about six times that.

"One should not think that just because we are doing this it is an economic case," says Reeperbahn CEO Alexander Schulz. "What we are doing here is keeping just a little bit of the live-music culture alive in the minds and the hearts and the ears of people — the audience, but also the music economy." **B**



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BY GAIL MITCHELL

PHOTOGRAPHED BY SAGE EAST

Blake photographed Aug. 5 in Brooklyn.

WHEN THE PANDEMIC HIT, TALENT manager Monique Blake first thought working from home would be a “nice and quiet” change of pace after 15 years spent crisscrossing the globe. Then her biggest client, producer Swizz Beatz, teamed up with Timbaland to launch *Verzuz*, which quickly became the most influential livestream in music, and “literally everybody” — broadcasters, streaming services, even gaming platforms — wanted to get in on the action. “Our audience was so locked into Instagram,” where the series had started, Blake recalled recently from her home in Brooklyn, and she knew they had to keep their Instagram presence, even though most of their suitors were not “really into that.”

But Blake and her team eventually made a deal with Apple Music global creative director Larry Jackson that would let *Verzuz* live on both platforms, and Jackson then integrated the show with Twitter to get more exposure.

The deal was one of the many Blake has helped make since she started working with Swizz Beatz 15 years ago. She began as his assistant, and then — six years in — worked to close a branding deal with

Reebok that shifted his business from one built on recorded music to one driven more by partnerships. Realizing that Blake was “doing more than assistant work,” she says, he made her his manager and business partner.

Born in Toronto and raised in Brooklyn, Blake studied finance and computer science at Pace University, worked as a receptionist at Soundtrack Studios and interned at Elektra Records and J Records, where Swizz Beatz had an imprint. Now, in addition to her work for him, she manages two other artists — British singer Cosima and Queens-based singer-songwriter Jhanya — while parenting her 11-year-old daughter, often stopping to work on her laptop from the front seat of her Mercedes-Benz G-Class SUV as she shuttles between meetings and school pickups. In her free time, Blake has been shopping for castles, looking at historic properties in Ireland, England and Italy, with the idea of renovating the interior and keeping the structure intact. “I intend to own a castle somewhere in the world,” she says, and someday “I’d love to run a label.”

What does Swizz Beatz Productions look like?

We have four producers in-house, a legal team,

accountant, A&R for film and TV projects, and a team focused on our art initiative. Travel is our No. 1 expense.

How has the industry changed for producers?

Technology allows more people interested in producing to get in the game — you can literally make tracks from your computer — and social media is giving people more ways to connect. Before, you were kind of just going through A&R at a label, but now you can reach out to an artist directly. So now the game is wide open.

Rodney Jerkins sold his catalog to Hipgnosis in July, and Timbaland, Swizz Beatz’s partner in *Verzuz*, sold the income stream from his royalties as a producer to Hipgnosis in 2019. Do you and Swizz think about selling his rights?

Maybe, for the right price. But that’s his equity for his children — so it would have to be a really, really, really good price for him to consider it. That’s the gems right there.

Do you see the trend in catalog sales continuing?

It’s going to happen more now. Some of the

● **TIM REID** WAS PROMOTED TO SENIOR VP REPERTOIRE AND MARKETING AT BMG RECORDED MUSIC. ● **CAPITOL RECORDS** UPPED **ARJUN PULIJAL** TO SENIOR VP MARKETING.

[producers] who used to be consistently getting called might not get called as much. So if you're sitting on a catalog, you could liquidate it and think about other businesses to invest in.

The economics of the industry have changed so much since you started working for Swizz. How has he adapted?

He's forever thinking about what's next. Music is still his baby, but he spends a lot of time lending his creative and his [intellectual property] to brands. We've been doing a lot of brand business, from our partnerships with Bacardi and Amex and Reebok to Aston Martin. Lots of brands see value in what he thinks and how he moves the needle. That's kind of how we've been driving our business.

But his catalog is so deep that I'm also constantly licensing and approving licenses for records to be used in film and TV — it's an income stream we don't even have to think about. With so much content being requested now and everyone at home, I'm licensing, to be honest, twice as much as I did before, just from people looking for new music for different programming.

Which song do you get the most requests for?

The song that I refer to as “the gift that keeps on giving” is “Party Up (Up in Here)” by DMX. That record, and the way it gets licensed, is unbelievable. I get licensing requests for that record two to three times a week, minimum. It's insane.

Is radio airplay still a steady revenue stream for Swizz?

Very much so. DMX's catalog is probably one of the strongest within our catalog — and those are records that will never go away. With us having a lot of those popular records and — especially with *Verzuz* and Swizz's records showing up on a lot of those battles — we're also seeing an increase in *his* catalog, because he's the producer or sometimes the featured artist. The songs [played on *Verzuz*] go up [in streams] 200 to 300% in the weeks following the battles as well as leading up to the battle. So it has been really good for him.

Before Apple started simulcasting the *Verzuz* battles, how were you clearing the rights to the music that artists performed? Did you run into any licensing issues?

We had full support from labels and publishers. This has been a really great catalog boost for what was kind of just sitting there, and not necessarily a focus at streaming or any radio format. We've been getting a lot of love from labels and publishers on each and every one of these [battles] as they happen. Now licensing goes through our Apple deal.

Which artists — alive or dead — would you most like to see battle on *Verzuz*?

I'm a Caribbean girl, so Beres Hammond and Sanchez. My mom's always giving me [suggestions] — I'm like, “Mom!” She's so cute: She wants to see Yolanda Adams and CeCe Winans. I would love to see Dr. Dre and Rick Rubin. Janet vs. Mariah. And even some of the writers. I think a lot of people don't know how many female writers contribute to music, and I'd love to see more of them be involved.



Swizz has become known as an art collector. What do you think about the state of the art market right now?

It's so unfortunate it's just quiet. With our art initiative, The Dean Collection, we were doing a lot of experiential events, but we haven't been able to activate that this year. What we've always tried to do with The Dean Collection is open it up so that everyone can experience it, and not make it about price. That's one of the biggest things we think about when we do our fairs — we can have pieces hanging that cost a quarter of a million dollars, but let's make some things attainable for people who might be walking in with \$100.

Do you still see art as a good investment?

I do. Art is one of the few purchases that when you take it out of the gallery, the value goes up. When you drive a car off the lot, the value goes down. There are pieces I've seen Swizz purchase that start at one price, and two to three years later you're seeing the same artist at auction at seven or eight times the value he purchased his piece for. [Sometimes] our accountant will go, “Oh, you had a good time at the art fair, didn't you?” We see Swizz walk into shows, fall in love with the artist as a person, walk out and go, “I'm going to buy the whole show.” He really does connect with artists on a different level, and however he can support, he does.

Do you collect art yourself?

Not as much as I probably should. Swizz bought me my first piece — a Bertho. But I'm going to get more into it.

Why do you like to work from your car?

When I drop my daughter off at school in the mornings, I have that eight-hour window, so I turn on my hotspot and get on my laptop. You get so easily distracted with your phone. Then I might do a lunch or shoot to the next meeting. It allows me to be mobile.

Your mother is from Guyana and your father is from Jamaica. What advice do you give to other women of color in the music business?

Don't quit. Anything is possible. Just trust that where you are is where you are supposed to be. Don't talk yourself out of where you worked so hard to get. **B**



1. Artist Philippe Bertho's “I Fly” is Blake's first painting, given to her as a gift by Swizz Beatz. 2. The book *More Than Enough* “taught me how to quiet all the noise and to trust that where I am is where I'm supposed to be,” says Blake. 3. “I have a globe in all of my homes. They remind me that there's so much world to explore.” 4. “My motivation: my daughter, Meaghan. She's my why!”

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The Sound

PG. 32 FLO MILLI * PG. 34 SONG OF THE SUMMER * PG. 36 COUNTRY'S HIT SONGWRITER

TURN AROUND, BRIGHT EYES

Why after nearly a decade away, Conor Oberst came back to his comfort zone — with help from a new label

BY LINDSEY HAVENS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY
HEATHER AND JAMESON

Bright Eyes frontman
Conor Oberst photographed
July 31 in Omaha, Neb.

IN THE LATE 1990s, A THEN-newly formed Bright Eyes sent cassette-tape demos of what became its second album, *Letting Off the Happiness*, to Merge, Matador and several other independent labels. Secretly Canadian founder Ben Swanson was the only person who called back; he expressed interest, but never made a firm offer.

Instead, Bright Eyes — frontman Conor Oberst, multi-instrumentalist/producer Mike Mogis and arranger-composer Nate Walcott — released the project on Omaha, Neb.-based indie Saddle Creek, founded by Mogis and Oberst’s brother Justin years prior as a college project. And now, after a decade of critical acclaim followed by a near-decadelong unofficial hiatus, Bright Eyes is, in a sense, back to where it all began. At the top of the year, the group signed a deal with Dead Oceans (part of Secretly Group, along with Secretly Canadian) and on Aug. 21 will release its 10th studio album, *Down in the Weeds, Where the World Once Was*. “It’s kind of nice to be at an indie label and put out a record in 2020 and it’s *that* one,” says Mogis of the full-circle moment. “It’s the [label] that approached us about signing us in [the late ’90s].”

Mogis says that working with a label he has no attachment to was “refreshing” and that the enthusiasm from Dead Oceans was warmly welcomed. “To be honest, it felt like when we would turn in records for Saddle Creek, it was never met with that much excitement and positive feedback,” he says with a sigh. “And not that we really need that, but it felt kind of good. I had never had that before.”

Another first for Mogis, 46, was sitting in on a Bright Eyes marketing meeting; he recalls how a week or two before the pandemic-caused lockdown in March, everyone gathered to discuss video treatments and the band’s upcoming tour, saying that “they wanted our opinions, and I think we all like that spirit.” The band agrees that *Down in the Weeds, Where the World Once Was* is its most collaborative release. The writing process continued for over a year while the members pushed one another to create everything fresh and with intention — in other words, no “voice-memo diving,” says Walcott, 42.

“[This album] is three parts equal, and to me the proof is in the pudding,” says Oberst, 40. “There’s no way I could re-create this sound with other

people, and more than anything it was that desire that was a big motivator to make another [Bright Eyes] record. At that time, the idea of doing something in a comfortable and safe place with two of the people who I trust the most in the world seemed really appealing.”

The idea of a new Bright Eyes album had come up from time to time since the band’s last release in 2011, *The People’s Key*. (Since, Oberst released solo music as well as with his punk band, Desaparecidos, and through his

they now recall with laughter due to how “festive” they were.

They all followed up with each other a few days later to make sure everyone was serious, and soon afterward blocked out two weeks for their first low-stakes get-together. Walcott recalls how, for the first time ever, “we went in not knowing exactly 100% what was going to come of it, and we left with several demos.” They continued to write and record in spurts between Omaha and L.A.

cuts through on the brooding lead single, “Persona Non Grata,” while on the almost upbeat delivery of “Forced Convalescence” he declares matter-of-factly, “I’m not afraid of the future.”

He says that when it comes to considering the band’s legacy, and whether that added pressure to the recording of the new album, “it’s a bit of a tight-rope walk.” “On one hand, we wanted it to fit in with the catalog and feel like a Bright Eyes record — and there are a lot of things that that means. Mostly it’s just a feeling, but obviously all the pretentious intros.” The band members also discussed using past records as touchstones, like the orchestral aspects of *LIFTED* or *The Story Is in the Soil, Keep Your Ear to the Ground* and *Cassadaga*, or the hyperproduction and delays of *Digital Ash in a Digital Urn* and *The People’s Key*, and even the blown-out acoustic guitar and screamed vocals on *Letting Off the Happiness* and *Fevers and Mirrors*.

“We were trying to swirl it all together, but at the same time, we didn’t want it to just be a complete throwback,” says Oberst. “We’re not trying to pull one over and pretend like we’re 25. We wanted it to reflect where we are.” As Dead Oceans founder Phil Waldorf says: “The record is very much the record we would have hoped they would make.”

But now, with the album a week away from release and live shows still very much on hold — Bright Eyes had an extensive tour planned — Oberst can’t help but feel a bit despondent. He hasn’t touched his guitar in months. “It feels like we were just picking up speed and getting ready to get on the fast highway, then someone just pumped the brakes and it was over before it started,” he says. “It feels incomplete to me.”

Fortunately, Bright Eyes doesn’t plan to take another unofficial hiatus; instead, Oberst, Mogis and Walcott believe the extra time at home could actually encourage more new music — but they’re in no rush. “We always joked about it, but every time we’ve put out a Bright Eyes record, with maybe the exception of *I’m Wide Awake, It’s Morning*, it felt like it took our fan base a couple of years to actually like it,” says Oberst. “Then later, we’d play the songs and they’re screaming along.”

To which Mogis quips: “Maybe this pandemic thing is going to work out for us. By the time we’re in 2022, they’re going to love these.”



A Bright Eyes recording session last December at Arc Studios in Omaha.



“There’s something special to this,” says Mogis, “the three of us and our dynamics.”

Phoebe Bridgers collaboration, Better Oblivion Community Center, while Mogis and Walcott scored *The Fault in Our Stars*, among other projects.) By 2017 — while Oberst was still reeling from personal traumas, including the death of his brother Matt — he spontaneously expressed his urge to reunite to Walcott during a Christmas party. They immediately huddled in a bathroom to FaceTime Mogis, which

As a whole, *Down in the Weeds, Where the World Once Was* unintentionally — though perhaps not surprisingly, for those familiar — soundtracks the current climate with lush and orchestral arrangements that teeter on the edge of gloom and doom. On “Dance and Sing,” the first track Oberst wrote, he opens with a line all too true: “Gotta keep on going like it ain’t the end.” Elsewhere, his beautiful waver

From left: Mogis, Oberst and Walcott.



NEW LIFE AT DEAD OCEANS

HOW LABEL FOUNDER PHIL WALDORF BROUGHT BRIGHT EYES INTO ITS FUTURE

How and when did conversations start about signing Bright Eyes?

We had been working with Phoebe Bridgers, and Phoebe and Conor [Oberst] were making the *Better Oblivion Community Center* record with us. We knew there was a Bright Eyes record being imagined, and when they were ready to talk to labels, a bit after the *Better Oblivion* record had come out, they said, “Would you guys be interested?”

Mike Mogis said he had never attended a marketing meeting prior

to joining Dead Oceans. Why is it important to include your artists in business conversations?

I wouldn't say Saddle Creek *not* having done that decades ago surprises me; the music business is just a lot different now. Back then, it was very traditional. Critics' lists would drive sales, there wasn't as much room to have that direct fan connection that there is now with social media and streaming, and the fact that music videos aren't just for MTV. It's so important for all the people working on an album campaign to feel invested, and there's

no better way to feel invested than to know who you're fighting for.

How will you promote the album without the band touring?

One thing I'm excited about is these virtual in-store performances. In a world where you can't do it at Rough Trade or Amoeba, it incentivizes multiple retailers worldwide — and indie retail is so important to Bright Eyes. I like the idea that, hopefully, people are buying the record either way, but the value add is they get access to a virtual performance. That's a win for us if

it drives extra sales, and a win for the stores that can really use it right now.

What is Bright Eyes' future with Dead Oceans?

The intention has always been for it not to be a one-record moment. I assumed [the band would get back in the studio] after a year of touring. It may just move and some of the work goes in now and it changes the long-term timeline, but it always felt like this was more than just the dozen-plus songs on the new album, and that was exciting for both sides. —L.H.

Q&A

The Rhythm Returns

Gloria Estefan's first studio album in seven years is an ode to Brazil, where samba is "very political music" in a socially charged time

BY LEILA COBO

LAST YEAR, GLORIA ESTEFAN went to Brazil to take care of some unfinished business. Back in 2016, at the urging of Sony Music Latin Iberia chairman Afo Verde, she had embarked on an ambitious journey to rerecord some of her biggest hits with more Brazilian beats incorporated. "I was super excited at the prospect of, 'What would these songs sound like in these legit rhythms?'" says Estefan.

With the repertoire selected and arranged, she had studio sessions booked for 2017, "and then my mom suddenly took ill and passed, and I just couldn't sing," says Estefan, 62. "Brazilian rhythms are full of joy, but I was not feeling anything of the sort. It took me a year to get into the studio again." The result is *Brazil305*, Estefan's first studio album since 2013. Although Estefan has sung and performed Brazilian standards since she was a child, here the vibrant arrangements accompany her own hits, from "Rhythm Is Gonna Get You" to "Cuts Both Ways."

In spite of Estefan's significant loss, as well as a series of delays — the album was first slated for release in 2019, then pushed back again due to the coronavirus pandemic and Black Lives Matter

protests — she believes the upbeat messaging of *Brazil305* will resonate. "I realize everything has an ebb and flow," she says. "I'm just happy to be still making music and be relevant."

What's the biggest lesson you learned while recording *Brazil305*?

You say "samba," and I bet you hands-down people think of girls half-naked in feathers in Carnival. But I learned samba was a sociopolitical movement. After slaves were freed in Brazil in 1888, the government was afraid that they would organize so they outlawed samba instrumentation, thinking this would silence them. Of course, they couldn't silence it. You can't silence music.

Do Latin artists have an increased responsibility to speak out against racial injustice?

When I [studied] the Holocaust in college, because I was keenly interested in how these things happen, the primary lesson is silence is a dangerous animal. But now we have the other extreme: Everyone is writing, everyone has an opinion, every bit of hate is out there and gets stirred up. We're really in a quandary with social media. Politics, I try to stay out of. I have friends, family and fans who think



differently from me, but I don't think if you like my music you should particularly care who I support. As far as social commentary, you hear it in songs like "Oye Mi Canto," which is an ode to free speech, but I've never used my music as a political platform because my music was an escape from politics. I think there's room for it, but I don't think anyone should be pressured into it.

What current artists could have a career as long-standing as yours?

Rosalía is fantastic. She's got the package: She's young, she's edgy, the chops on that girl and her cultural significance... her music is super interesting to me.

What have you been listening to?

I listen to Cachao's original records, P!nk and a lot of Brazilian stuff, like Wilson Simonal. My mother also had [Antônio Carlos] Jobim and Stan Getz albums, which inspired me to have Miami Sound Machine learn these songs when I joined the band. And I have a '70s playlist with songs like Seals & Crofts' "Summer Breeze," which brings me so many memories: I was driving to my math tutor's house, I was taking the exam to get into Lourdes High School, and I had the window down when the song came on, and I was so excited about new beginnings and the future. All that is wrapped in that song. **B**

ONE TO WATCH

Flo Milli

FROM Mobile, Ala.

AGE 20

LABEL RCA

FOUNDATION Growing up in Mobile, Ala., Flo Milli (born Tamia Carter) spent her childhood and teenage years taking a crash course to stardom. She showed an early flair as a performer through dancing and acting in school plays and wrote her first song at 9 years old. By 14, she had already formed, rebranded

and dissolved an all-girl rap group, Real & Beautiful. Driven by a goal to "always be the best at what I do," she developed a social media strategy for herself in middle school and set benchmarks for followers, determined to have her music dreams realized by 18.

DISCOVERY Flo Milli had been professionally recording in studios since 2017 but a creative lull after high school caused a rare crisis of confidence. Her 2019 rework of an Ethereal and Playboi Carti collaboration, "Beef," which went viral on Instagram before

crossing over to TikTok, helped her regain momentum — and land a manager in Vonsin Faniyi, who quickly helped orchestrate a viral dance challenge for the song. By the end of the year, Flo Milli had signed a recording contract with RCA, saying the label was "very much invested in my brand and me as a person." And though on breakout track "Beef FloMix" she proudly proclaims, "At least I could say I did it with no help," she now takes comfort in having a team led by RCA A&R executive Shareen Taylor.

FUTURE Thanks to a burst of

productivity during the coronavirus pandemic, Flo Milli completed her debut mixtape, *Ho, Why is you here?*, and shot and released a slew of music videos. She says her mixtape rounds out her own "phase one" and has already laid out what's next: one or two more albums before expanding to "bigger, better things" to elevate her brand outside of music. She teases "more singing" on her next project, and for now is spending time between Atlanta and Alabama, "exploring my voice, because I know that it can do so many things." —BRYAN KRESS



ESTEFAN: FORNITO & FORNITO; MILLI: MUNACH/DESEBU

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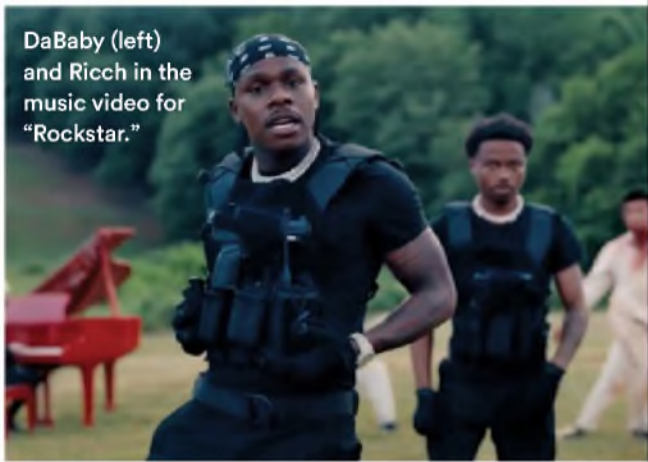
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DaBaby (left) and Ricch in the music video for "Rockstar."



BEHIND THE HIT: SONG OF THE SUMMER EDITION

"ROCKSTAR"

When the annual *Billboard* Song of the Summer chart launched after Memorial Day, the 2020 race featured competitors like Doja Cat's "Say So," Megan Thee Stallion and Beyoncé's "Savage Remix" and the Lady Gaga-Ariana Grande duet "Rain on Me." Since then, DaBaby's "Rockstar," featuring Roddy Ricch, has sprinted ahead to what may be an insurmountable lead, notching seven nonconsecutive weeks at No. 1 as both a streaming juggernaut (529.9 million U.S. on-demand streams, according to Nielsen Music/MRC Data) and radio smash. "The song is a perfect storm," says Dion Summers, vp urban programming at SiriusXM, citing strong internal research and steady consumption that's "through the roof."

Chalk up part of the appeal of "Rockstar" to its star power: Roddy Ricch spent 11 weeks atop the *Billboard* Hot 100 earlier this year with his single "The Box," and since DaBaby's breakthrough with "Suge" in 2019, the Charlotte, N.C., MC has been one of hip-hop's most prolific stars, scoring recent top 10 hits with Jack Harlow and Pop Smoke. And after eschewing pop refrains on earlier tracks, "Rockstar" finds DaBaby warbling a traditional, radio-friendly chorus. "Before 'Rockstar,' he hadn't really used melody that much," says Carl Chery, head of urban music at Spotify. "Maybe that speaks to why it had a wider reach than anything he put out before."

Plus, "Rockstar" has fittingly ruled a summer of nationwide protests against systemic racism; even before DaBaby gave the single a "Black Lives Matter remix" in mid-June, the song made a statement against police brutality with "fuck a cop car" included in the first line of the chorus. During DaBaby and Roddy Ricch's virtual performance at the 2020 BET Awards in June, the rappers were surrounded by protestors wearing black shirts that read "I Am George Floyd" and "I Am Breonna Taylor."

While DaBaby and Roddy Ricch were not previously known for their social activism, "I think it's noteworthy," says Summers, "the idea that both of these artists are meeting the moment." —JASON LIPSHUTZ

Guy (left) and Howard Lawrence onstage in 2016.



GEEKING OUT WITH...

Disclosure

While writing and recording the third Disclosure album, *Energy*, out Aug. 28 on Capitol, brothers Guy and Howard Lawrence (29 and 26, respectively) made over 200 tracks during sessions split between London and Los Angeles. The duo ultimately pared down the list to the 11 on the album, which features vocals from Kelis, Common and Kehlani, among others. The pair selected collaborators who not only can rap and sing but also write, with friendliness being a strong consideration given the amount of in-person studio time spent together. "You can't just email stuff back and forth," says Guy of the pre-pandemic luxury. "You don't get the magic in the room." Howard calls *Energy* Disclosure's first concept album, selecting only the tracks that "came out really quickly and easily." Adds Guy: "The more you mess with and tweak them, you ruin the idea." —KATIE BAIN

2015 MACBOOK PRO

The brothers have always purchased a new laptop for each album, starting with the old-school white plastic MacBook for 2013's *Settle* then graduating to a pair of MacBook Pros for 2015's *Caracal* and *Energy*. "We couldn't do anything we do without tech," says Guy. "It's how we were born as a band. All of the music goes through the laptop to the internet — first to Myspace, then to Facebook and so on." This time around, they say essentials included Logic Pro X and Ableton Live, along with plug-ins like Universal Audio and Valhalla for reverb.

PSYCHEDELIC 'SHROOMS

An interest in physics, sacred geometry and the patterns of nature — explored through books including Ian Stewart's *The Beauty of Numbers in Nature* and David Byrne's *How Music Works*, and films like *Fantastic Fungi* — along with listening to music while consuming mushrooms, made the brothers consider the visual representation of their work, even reconfiguring their own process. "All of that stuff really changed the way I produce and place instruments in the mix," says Guy, who gave a particularly breezy, lightly trippy sound to the album track "Fractal."

LOS ANGELES

Disclosure's first two albums were made largely with artists from their native United Kingdom. But for *Energy*, the duo composed a list of dream collaborators only to discover that many of them — including Compton, Calif.-raised Channel Tres and former Odd Future member Syd — were based in Los Angeles. The brothers posted up in a Capitol Records Building studio where The Beach Boys, Nat "King" Cole and Frank Sinatra all recorded. "Being in L.A. was a new one for us," says Guy, who also owns a house in the city. "We're very London."

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HARDY
SONGWRITER

When Michael Hardy was 17, he wrote his first song “to impress a girl,” he recalls. He continued to craft “John Mayer-sounding” originals until his older sister, who was attending Belmont University in Nashville, suggested he move to Music City and try to land a publishing deal. “If it wasn’t for her, I would’ve never known there was a whole industry behind [songwriting],” he says. “I learned there were more songwriters than there were artists on the radio.” Hardy signed his first publishing deal in 2014 thanks to Dennis Matkosky, his cousin who had reached out on Facebook (in 2017, Hardy signed his current deal with Relative Music Publishing) — and soon after, his career took off. The 29-year-old (who releases music as HARDY) reconnected with Florida Georgia Line, whom he met at a party years prior, and started writing with the hit-making duo. Soon, FGL’s Tyler Hubbard was asking Hardy to sing the group’s demos while pushing him to record his own music. Six months later, the singer-songwriter had an offer from Big Loud for a record deal. In September 2019, the go-to country songwriter called on his connections for the star-studded *Hixtape Vol. 1*, and come Sept. 4, HARDY will release his solo debut, *A Rock*, which translates the writing ability he has used to score other hits. “We knew exactly what direction this record was going,” he says, “and didn’t second-guess ourselves at all.” —LYNDESEY HAVENS



**BLAKE SHELTON,
“GOD’S COUNTRY”**



At the top of 2019, HARDY had “just come off of a week of deer hunting and hanging on property that has been in my family for 100 years” when he went into a session with the idea for a song called “God’s Country.” Within

days, Matkosky sent the track to Blake Shelton’s longtime producer, Scott Hendricks, while HARDY texted Big Loud co-founder Seth England: “If Blake doesn’t cut this next week, I will. LOL.” Six days later, Shelton recorded the track, which reached No. 1 on *Billboard*’s Country Airplay chart. Shelton later invited HARDY to his Oklahoma ranch to film the “Hell Right” music video. “We kicked it with him and Gwen [Stefani] for three days. It was crazy.”

**MORGAN WALLEN FEAT.
FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE, “UP DOWN”**



In 2014, HARDY, Brad Clawson and CJ Solar wrapped a songwriting session with just a verse and a chorus, “then never got back together to finish it,” he says. “The second verse got written over a text thread.”

HARDY says he and Clawson tweaked the track for nearly three years until several demos of what eventually became “Up Down” were floating around. It wasn’t until Clawson performed it acoustically at the Key West Songwriters Festival that England wanted it for the label’s then-emerging artist, Morgan Wallen. “After all that,” says HARDY, “the only thing that struck [anyone’s] attention was hearing the raw version.”

**CHRIS LANE,
“I DON’T KNOW ABOUT YOU”**



One day, HARDY, Hunter Phelps and Ashley Gorley left a session with just a chorus; months later, while working with Jameson Rodgers (a friend of HARDY’s who lived in the apartment below him) and struggling to come up with an idea, Rodgers asked: “What happened to that ‘I Don’t Know About You’ song? It’s badass.” HARDY scrambled to find the work tape from that day, used his at-home track rig to build up the beat and lent his vocals to the demo. “We wrote the verses, and that was that — it was done,” he says of the track later recorded by Chris Lane, which became the artist’s first top 40 hit on the *Billboard* Hot 100.

**BIG IN...
Argentina**



NICKI NICOLE

GROWING UP IN ROSARIO, Argentina, Nicki Nicole would pay special attention to people’s cellphone ringtones “because that’s how you knew back then what type of music was popular.” She says she was a musical “sponge,” and by the time she was 17, the artist (born Nicole Cucco) started experimenting with hip-hop after meeting friends who would freestyle in the streets. Her open-minded musical upbringing informs the R&B and trap fusions that she both sings and raps on — and has helped her stand out in an increasingly crowded field of

emerging Argentine trap artists. In 2019, at age 18, Nicki Nicole released her debut single, “Wapo Traketero,” a slower R&B track marked by her tender vocals. She continued to share a small handful of singles, all of which raked in millions of views on YouTube while her one-off, “Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 13,” hit No. 3 on the *Billboard* Argentina Hot 100 last August. Then, in November, she released her debut album, *Recuerdos*, featuring fellow rising trap artists Cazzu and Duki, on Argentine trap label DALE PLAY Records. To date, Nicki Nicole has collected nearly 7 million on-demand U.S. audio streams, according to Nielsen Music/MRC

Data, and boasts nearly 5 million followers on Instagram.

So far this year, she’s maintaining her momentum: At the inaugural Spotify Awards, held in Mexico City in March, Nicki Nicole won the Radar trap in Spanish artist and most-streamed female artist in gaming consoles awards; in May, she released her Sony Music Latin (she signed with the label in 2019) debut single, the uptempo “Colocao,” in which she shouts out Drake; and she says her next single, due in September, “is my most complete — the music video, lyrics, my voice and the beat are at 100%.”

—GRISELDA FLORES

INNOVATOR
VISIONARY
LEADER
MENTOR
FRIEND
BUSINESSWOMAN
PHILANTHROPIST
TIMELESS TREASURE

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR
BRILLIANT CAREER

DOUG, STEVE
AND YOUR 12TONE FAMILY





Parton photographed
July 6 in Nashville.

Styling and wardrobe
design by Steve Summers.

DREAMER-IN-CHIEF

THAT'S **DOLLY PARTON**'S OFFICIAL TITLE AT HER DOLLYWOOD THEME PARK — AND IT'S THAT WAY OF LOOKING AT THE WORLD THAT HAS MADE HER GROWING BUSINESS EMPIRE AS ICONIC AS HER MUSIC

BY MELINDA NEWMAN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MILLER MOBLEY



ON THE MORNING of March 13, Dolly Parton arrived at her Dollywood theme park, the crown jewel in her multimillion-dollar empire, for an annual preview day for season-pass holders. Located in the town of Pigeon Forge in eastern Tennessee, not far from where Parton grew up, the park had introduced a number of changes in reaction to the coronavirus pandemic, including the installation of over 300 hand-sanitizer stations. The event was also supposed to show visitors how prepared Dollywood was to open the next day.

Parton stayed all day to monitor the park and meet with Dollywood staff to talk about the latest news of the pandemic. By the time she left that night though, she was no longer convinced opening was a good idea. “We came to the conclusion that COVID trends were getting too extreme,” says Craig Ross, president of the Dollywood Company, which co-owns the Splash Country water park, the DreamMore Resort & Spa and Dollywood’s Smoky Mountain Cabins, as well as eight dinner theaters and restaurants in Tennessee, Missouri and South Carolina.

Many people depend on the Dollywood Company, which is the largest employer in the rural, tourism-dependent Sevier County and whose main attractions — its flagship park and Splash Country — draw over 3 million visitors annually. Keeping people employed and paid is a particular priority for Parton, who continues to pay her band, even though she hasn’t toured since 2016, as well as her personal staffers, during the pandemic. But without money coming into the park, the Dollywood Company put all but a small team of the properties’ 4,000 full-time and seasonal workers on furlough.

By June, most of those furloughed full-time employees went back to work as Parton properties reopened with limited capacities, mandatory mask requirements and other social distancing measures; most of the dinner theaters and restaurants reopened in July as state laws allowed. But Parton is frank about the situation, even as she dispenses some of her trademark optimism. “We certainly are not going to have a great year this year,” she says over Skype from Nashville one morning in early July. “Hopefully by coming back, we’ll pick up some stuff that we’ve lost. All of the things that I’m involved in are on hold, even my production companies and the movies — everything [took] a big hit. But I still believe, still trust God, and

I’m still hoping for the best.”

Making tough calls — about her companies, her employees and her brand — is how Parton, 74, spends much of her time. She has a schedule resembling that of a tech CEO with a cult following: Often starting at 4 a.m., Parton and her longtime manager, Danny Nozell, review what her team calls the “Ask Dolly” list, a log of opportunities and decisions for Parton to weigh in on that Nozell keeps to no more than 50 items to present in one sitting. Before the pandemic, they would often discuss the list over breakfast at her Nashville home, trading off cooking duties to prepare the usual menu of cheesy grits, bacon, eggs and country ham. Now, Nozell faxes Parton the list to discuss by phone — the first of half a dozen phone conversations the two have on any given day.

In the 56 years since she took a bus to Nashville to pursue stardom the day after her high school graduation, Parton has shaped the history of country music. She has 25 No. 1 singles on *Billboard*’s Hot Country Songs chart — the most of any female artist — and is also the only artist to have a top 20 hit on that chart in every decade from the 1960s to 2010s. Since Nielsen Music/MRC Data began tracking U.S. sales electronically in 1991, she has sold over 11 million albums, and her songs have received over a billion on-demand streams.

Yet her legendary body of music is just the start of what makes her Dolly — it’s the bedrock for the business that has made her the atypical icon who never stops working or thinking of new ways to reach people. In addition to music and the Dollywood Company (at which her official title is “Dreamer-in-Chief”), she’s also the author of five books and the owner of Sandollar Productions, which co-produced the cult-hit *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* TV show and this year earned an Emmy Award nomination for an episode of *Dolly Parton’s Heartstrings*, a Netflix anthology series inspired by her songs that she also executive-produces.

And then there are her numerous branding and licensing deals, which span from the endearingly quaint to the eye-catchingly hip: In March, she reimagined “9 to 5” as a birthday song and spent two days recording 847 names for personalized e-cards as part of a

deal with American Greetings, which is also selling a line of Parton-themed cards at Walmart. This summer, she became the first female country artist to partner with Peloton for a series of workouts celebrating her life and music. Last year, she inked an unprecedented deal — at least for Parton’s career — with international licensing company IMG for a series of Parton-branded goods that kicks off this fall with a line of bakeware and specialty foods for Williams-Sonoma and could include everything from cosmetics and clothing to wines and wigs.

At the heart of her empire is, of course, music, and Parton has more of that on the way, too. On Oct. 2, she’ll release *A Holly Dolly Christmas*, which will include both holiday classics and originals — and duets with Michael Bublé, Willie Nelson and her god-daughter Miley Cyrus — and mark her first album for 12Tone Music Group (which licenses the music from Parton’s own Butterfly Recordings). “When [Nozell] told me she was putting together an album, I said, ‘I’d like to be first in on that,’” says 12Tone founder Doug Morris, who oversaw Parton’s previous joint venture with Sony Music Nashville. “Dolly is an authentic American treasure.”

The music leads to new business ventures, which lead to a greater appetite for more music, creating a chicken-or-the-egg cycle of opportunity: *A Holly Dolly Christmas* will accompany a Netflix Christmas movie called *Christmas on the Square* that shares its name with one of the album’s original songs. And while the laundry list of projects might suggest there’s nothing Parton will say no to — according to Nozell,

the only things that are automatically off limits are hard liquor and “anything sexual” — the team is very selective. Nozell turns down 90% of the opportunities she’s offered, he estimates, pursuing the ones that offer “minimal Dolly time and maximum exposure.”

The breadth of her offerings is staggering, but fitting: Parton’s cross-cultural, multi-generational fandom is unlike that of any other celebrity. (Nielsen ranked her the No. 1 most marketable country artist in the world in 2017, the last year of its N-Score survey.) “How can she appeal to so many different kinds

of people who we’re told should really hate each other, but they all agree on her? That’s really the big question that we tried to figure out,” says Jad Abumrad, host of WNYC Studios’ nine-part 2019 podcast *Dolly Parton’s America*. “We talked to these fervent Dolly fans, from Appalachian queer kids to Brooklyn hipsters to [conservative] people in the South. Everyone sees her as theirs.” His ultimate explanation? “I say this with humility and as someone who is not a believer: There’s something very Christ-like about her.”

That has never felt more true than in 2020. During the pandemic, Parton has also taken on the role of comforter-in-chief: She donated \$1 million to Vanderbilt University Medical Center’s COVID-19 research fund, recorded handwashing videos and bedtime stories for children, released a soothing new song called “When Life Is Good Again” and offered social media pep talks about standing together. Over Skype, she is warm and quick to crack a joke, decked out in full Dolly glam: a flowing blond wig with bangs and tendrils, a custom-made, high-collared black top with gold buttons running along the side. Yet she becomes gravely serious when she talks about her mission to make as many people as she can feel as good as possible. “As the scripture says, ‘To whom much is given, much is required.’ So I look at my life with that every day and think that God expects it of me,” she says. “I expect it of myself, and I think people expect it of me. If I can be an inspiration, then I want to be that. That makes *me* feel good.”

HER FIRST HIT MAY HAVE been “Dumb Blonde” in 1967, but Dolly Parton has never been anyone’s fool. Her financial savvy has been the stuff of country legend for decades. In the mid-1970s — nearly 20 years before Whitney Houston’s cover of Parton’s “I Will Always Love You” lit up the *Billboard* Hot 100 — Elvis Presley famously expressed interest in recording the song himself. Parton was thrilled. But when Presley’s manager, Colonel Tom Parker, insisted that Presley also get half of the publishing, a brokenhearted Parton said no.

“That was one of the hardest things I ever had to do because I loved Elvis,” says Parton. She credits her father, who was illiterate and scraped by to raise 12 children, with her business sense. “Even though my daddy didn’t get an education, my daddy was really smart in making deals and bargaining and how he raised a family like he did.” (He was also the inspiration behind

THE TEAM

MANAGEMENT

CTK MANAGEMENT

Danny Nozell,
owner/CEO

Kyle McClain,
senior vp

Steve Ross, vp

LABEL

12TONE MUSIC GROUP

Doug Morris

Steve Bartels

Pat Monaco

AGENT

WME NASHVILLE

Greg Oswald



her Imagination Library, which provides books monthly to children from birth to age 5 and has donated over 140 million books to date.)

But Parton had scored a No. 1 country hit with the song in 1974, so she knew its worth. “That was my most important copyright at the time,” says Parton, who was already a bona fide hitmaker with 15 previous solo top 10 country hits. “If it had been a new song, I might have considered it.” It was a smart bet: In July, BMI awarded Parton a plaque acknowledging 10 million radio and public performances of the song, which places it among the top 30 of BMI’s most-performed songs of all time. Still, all these years later, she almost swoons as she adds, “He would have sung it great. Can you imagine Elvis singing ‘I Will Always Love You?’ ”

This is Dolly Parton, Businesswoman, in a nutshell: Her sweetness and toughness coexist, never masking or diminishing the other. “[In meetings], she’s tactful in her approach, but she also will lay down what she will and won’t do,” says Nozell. “You’ll know immediately in a room that one thing you won’t be doing is taking advantage of Dolly Parton.”

In the early ’80s, as her acting career blossomed in movies such as *9 to 5* and *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, Parton became more serious about expanding her business empire, even as she continued to rack up No. 1s on the country charts. In 1986, eager to invest in her Smoky Mountains home county, she partnered with amusement park company Herschend Family Entertainment and rebranded Pigeon Forge’s existing park, Silver Dollar City, as Dollywood. “I had no notion of how to run a theme park,” says Parton, “but I knew that I would find the right people, as you always do.”

Last year, an April Fools’ Day headline claiming that Kanye West was buying Dollywood for \$130 million circulated online. The news was quickly debunked, but Parton questions why more entertainers haven’t similarly broadened their holdings. She has always known what the pandemic has forced many in the industry to realize: that diversifying your income streams is one of the smartest things an artist can do. “I often wonder why more artists don’t do more things like that to have something to fall back on if things don’t work out the way they’d hoped — or just to have something more,” she says. “I feel like even if I wasn’t popular anymore, I could always sing at Dollywood.”

It is hard to imagine a world where Parton is not music royalty. But when Nozell first began working with her

in 2004, her fame had outstripped her earning ability. She was coming off a trilogy of acclaimed but modest-selling bluegrass albums for Sugar Hill Records that had not been embraced by country radio. She had no website and little merchandise. She toured irregularly, and when she did, promoters were putting her in 18,000-seat venues they owned even when she was only selling around 2,000 hard tickets, says Nozell, adding, “I came in with a clean slate.”

To reestablish Parton, Nozell studied her touring history and album sales to completely restructure her live business, partnering with new promoters to put her in 3,000- to 5,000-seat theaters. After a 2006 tour sold out, Nozell convinced her to tour Europe, which Parton had neglected, other than sporadic dates, for almost 30 years. “She goes, ‘I’m telling you one thing, if you lose me millions of dollars, you’re fired,’” he recalls. Instead, thanks in part to a promotion with the *Daily Mail* newspaper that gave away 1.8 million copies of a best-of compilation, her 2007 arena tour sold out. By 2009, she was selling out stadiums. In 2014, she played before an estimated 180,000 attendees at England’s Glastonbury Festival.

This two-pronged approach — strategic touring and profile-boosting marketing efforts — helped put Parton back on the top of the charts, too. Ahead of 2016’s back-to-basics *Pure & Simple* album, released through a joint venture with Sony Music Nashville under the Dolly Records and RCA Nashville imprints, Nozell brought in a new marketing team to target her top global markets, lined up a week of performances on the Hallmark Channel and booked the biggest North American tour of her career. The LP became her first to debut at No. 1 on the Top Country Albums chart in 25 years.

She has also reached young fans through her social media accounts, which post throwback photos and Dollyisms (“If you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain”) while participating in the memes of the day. In January, when Parton posted a collage of fake profile pictures for LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and Tinder with the caption “Get you a woman who can do it all,” she launched what users dubbed “the Dolly Parton challenge” — mocking the way people curate different personas on different apps — and helped boost her Instagram following by 75% over the previous year, according to Marbaloo Marketing, which Nozell hired in 2019 to manage her accounts.

When it comes to dealmaking, Parton and Nozell have two priorities: ownership and flexibility. Parton has owned the masters of all the albums she has released since 1999. She also avoids long-term contracts: Her new deal with 12Tone is for one album only, and she has a similar one-at-a-time policy for film and TV projects as well. “We’re never tied in for these massive deals that we can’t get out of,” says Nozell. “That way, if something does happen, we can take off.”

Flexibility benefits Parton in other ways. In 2018 she renamed her Dixie Stampede dinner attraction Dolly Parton’s Stampede as she became more aware of how hurtful the term “Dixie” and its associations with the Confederacy could be — perhaps because of a 2017 Slate article that cast a critical eye on its rosy, family-friendly depictions of the Civil War. (At the time, the Dollywood Company said it was also eyeing an international expansion and noted that “Dixie” wouldn’t translate abroad.) “There’s such a thing as innocent ignorance, and so many of us are guilty of that,” she says now. “When they said ‘Dixie’ was an offensive word, I thought, ‘Well, I don’t want to offend anybody. This is a business. We’ll just call it The Stampede.’ As soon as you realize that [something] is a problem, you should fix it. Don’t be a dumbass. That’s where my heart is. I would never dream of hurting anybody on purpose.”

“Of course Black lives matter. Do we think our little white asses are the only ones that matter? No!”

—PARTON

The change came two years before the police killings of unarmed Black Americans like George Floyd sparked a reckoning with systemic racism in the United States — one that led country acts such as the Dixie Chicks and Lady Antebellum to change their names to similarly avoid glorifying dark chapters of history. Parton hasn’t attended any recent marches, but she is unequivocal in her support of protestors and the Black Lives Matter movement. “I understand people having to make themselves known and felt and seen,” she says. “And of course Black lives matter. Do we think our little white asses are the only ones that matter? No!”

This is perhaps one secret to Parton’s widespread appeal: Just because she wants to be for everyone doesn’t

mean she doesn’t stand for anything. Offending as few potential customers as possible is just good business. But when Parton explains the philosophies that drive her life and career, her answers are hardly corporate. “First of all, I’m not a judgmental person. I do believe we all have a right to be exactly who we are, and it is not my place to judge,” she says. “All these good Christian people that are supposed to be such good Christian people, the last thing we’re supposed to do is to judge one another. God is the judge, not us. I just try to be myself. I try to let everybody else be themselves.”

THOUGH THERE IS AN AIR of immortality to Parton, thanks to her immutable image and lyrics like “You’re never old unless you choose to be,” she and Nozell have spent the past few years preparing for a world without her. Unlike Prince or Aretha Franklin, who died without wills, Parton has worked to get her estate in order, and Nozell says that most decisions now are made with Parton’s legacy in mind. (Parton and Carl Thomas Dean, her husband of 54 years, have no children.) “I would not want to leave that mess to somebody else,” Parton says, before offering a little advice. “A word to all the other artists out there: If you haven’t made those provisions, do that. You don’t

want to leave that mess to your family for people to have to fight over. You need to take care of that yourself, even if it’s a pain in the ass — and it is.”

That mission — making sure Parton maintains the icon status she has now for decades to come — partly explains why, after striking only a few branding deals in her career, Parton is leaning in with IMG. “You spend your whole life building your brand, and so you decide at a certain point, maybe it is time,” Parton says of the decision. It also provides a kind of security that allows her to keep her options open: “If I didn’t work anymore, [with] these kinds of projects, you get your royalties if your stuff does well. Danny calls it ‘mailbox money.’”

The focus of the IMG deal is on

building Parton’s brand through her own lines, as opposed to having the superstar endorse existing products. That’s in keeping with Parton’s stated values — and it’s a particularly lucrative strategy, says Brian Feit, founding partner of We Are BMF, a New York-based music-marketing agency. “She doesn’t need a check to slap her face and name on something,” says Feit. This approach “allows her to make more money and be in more control of the product. This could be an extremely profitable endeavor worth hundreds of millions if done right.”

Beyond IMG, Parton’s next big deal could involve her voluminous publishing catalog — yes, even the woman who turned down Elvis says she might one day sell her catalog. With the exception of a few songs she’s in the process of reclaiming, Parton owns her entire roster of over 3,000 compositions. Nozell values Parton’s catalog, which is administered by Sony/ATV, in the “nine figures.” Publishing and financial sources suggest to *Billboard* that Parton’s catalog generates anywhere from \$6 million to \$8 million a year; with current catalog valuations for top songwriters hitting multiples between 16 and 23 times net publisher’s share, that would value the catalog between \$96 million and \$184 million.

“At the right time, I probably would sell it to put more money in my estate or for my family and start all over again,” she says. “You still have to have some control. You don’t just say, ‘Here’s my whole life, my soul.’ You’re going to stay involved to a degree.”

At any given time, Nozell and Parton operate on a three-year plan for her career, which includes ideas for books, movies, a musical and, of course, new music and touring — whenever that can resume. Prior to the pandemic, Nozell was working on a 75th-birthday celebration for next year that included what they’re calling Dollyfest: a series of shows at 12 stadiums around the world that would feature Parton as well as acts she had influenced. It’s something Nozell could see existing even if Parton decided to one day stop performing.

But for Parton, that’s not happening anytime soon. She sounds surprisingly giddy as she talks about the next chapter of her career as if it’s her first. “I’m touched and honored that I’m still around and that I’m able to still be important in the business,” she says. “I honestly feel like I’m just getting started. I know that sounds crazy but I really feel like I might could have a big music career, record career. Who knows?” ■



EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR

BEN VAUGHN

PRESIDENT/CEO, WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC NASHVILLE

With a passion for finding and developing new talent, Vaughn is leading the publishing company to historic wins — and uplifting some of the genre's most vital writers

BY MELINDA NEWMAN



Rhett (left) and Vaughn
photographed by
Eric Ryan Anderson on
July 14 at Warner Chappell
Music in Nashville.

IN 2013, WHILE ATTENDING AN industry showcase, songwriter Nicole Galyon invited Ben Vaughn, then-Warner Chappell Music Nashville executive vp, to her car to listen to a rough mix of Keith Urban and Miranda Lambert's "We Were Us," a song she had co-written. "When it was over, he said, 'I'll see you at the BMI Awards next year. Have fun picking out your dress,'" she recalls. "That song went on to be my first No. 1."

Six years later, at its 67th annual Country Awards last November, BMI named Galyon songwriter of the year. Vaughn "poured rocket fuel" onto her career, says Galyon. A WCMN writer since 2007, she felt a momentous shift when Vaughn, who became president/CEO in 2019, arrived in 2012 after 10 years at EMI Music Publishing. "He was like, 'We're going to make some stuff happen for you,'" she says.

Galyon isn't the only songwriter who has flourished under Vaughn. Home to hitmakers such as Liz Rose, Chris Stapleton, Jesse Frasure and Kacey Musgraves, WCMN has become a powerhouse during Vaughn's tenure, claiming the No. 1 slot on *Billboard's* Publishers Quarterly rankings (based on the top 100 country radio songs) for 14 consecutive quarters. For the latest tally, ending June 30, WCMN's share was 21.44%, six percentage points higher than the next-closest publisher. In November 2019, ASCAP, BMI and SESAC all named WCMN their country publisher of the year — only the third time a publishing company has been honored as such, and a first for WCMN.

Vaughn is particularly invested in nurturing young talent: Over the past two years, more than 20 WCMN songwriters have been recognized for their first hit at the BMI or ASCAP country awards. The company also signed and developed acts like Dan + Shay (when they still went by Ragtop Red), Midland, LANCO and Devin Dawson before helping them find homes at major labels. "There's so many people that want that record deal, so

helping someone get to that spot is one of the hardest things in the music business,” says Vaughn, 44. “So the job is to take away the nos and help that person get to a place where you get a yes.”

At times, that means taking a patient, long-term view of someone’s career. While Vaughn always wants his writers to have radio singles, he doesn’t define a song’s impact by its chart position alone: A tune can help make connections in Nashville’s tight-knit songwriting community or spur an initial contact with a big-name artist. “It’s not as simple as what are the hits and what aren’t with Ben,” says Galyon.

A father of three who enjoys listening to demos while sipping bourbon on his back porch in Brentwood, Tenn., Vaughn grew up in the tiny community of Sullivan, Ky., and comes from “a proud tradition of coal miners, teachers and mechanics.” As a high school student, he got a job as a weekend DJ at country radio station WMSK-FM, which set him on a path to Nashville. “I would devour the vinyl and read all the publishing and writer credits,” he says. “I thought, ‘I want to go where these people are.’”

That led him to Nashville’s Belmont University and an internship at WCMN in 1994 under then-executive vp Tim Wiperman, who taught Vaughn the intricacies of publishing. While there, he got to know producer Scott Hendricks, whose Big Tractor publishing company had a partnership with WCMN. Hendricks was so impressed with Vaughn that he eventually asked him to run Big Tractor — while Vaughn was still a college student. “He said, ‘I’m going to give you six months to see how it goes, but if you quit school, I’ll fire you,’” recalls Vaughn.

Vaughn credits Hendricks with teaching him to fight for his roster. “He cared about every song because behind that piece of music is a creator who has labored so much,” he says. It’s an approach that still serves Vaughn today. Amid the coronavirus pandemic, he has launched Jody Williams Songs, a joint venture between WCMN and former BMI executive Williams, and signed Thomas Rhett, whom Vaughn had previously signed to EMI back when Rhett was still a student at Belmont.

“Ben is a dreamer. There is not a goal that is too high to attain,” says Rhett. “If I said, ‘Hey, man. It’s probably crazy to think we could get this song cut by an artist in Australia,’ Ben would be on a flight to Australia the next day to figure out how to make it happen.”

Vaughn says those kinds of moments — when he has a ringside seat to the creative process and an opportunity to help out — are what keep him motivated. “It is awe-inspiring how much talent it takes to create something out of nothing that literally can make the whole world sing,” he says. “The most sacred responsibility is to help connect writers’ dreams to their goals. The fact that as publishers we are trusted to hold that space for them is everything.”



▲
“The Bones” from Morris (above) helped Sony Music Nashville maintain momentum this year after ranking at No. 1 on *Billboard’s* year-end Top Country Labels chart for 2019.

LABELS

► Scott Borchetta

FOUNDER/PRESIDENT/CEO, BIG MACHINE LABEL GROUP; BOARD MEMBER, ITHACA HOLDINGS

► Jimmy Harnen

PRESIDENT/CEO, BMLG RECORDS

► Allison Jones

SENIOR VP A&R, BIG MACHINE LABEL GROUP

► Andrew Kautz

COO, BIG MACHINE LABEL GROUP

Borchetta, 58, may have sold part of his ownership stake in Big Machine Label Group last year, but his interest in the company and its roster is as intense as ever. On Aug. 21, Tim McGraw will release *Here on Earth*, his first album since returning to Big Machine Records, and Lady A’s “What If I Never Get Over You” became its first chart-topper on Country Airplay in five years, also after returning to Borchetta’s fold. Thomas Rhett’s “Be a Light,” released in March, has sparked “a national movement among fans to share kindness in their local communities through the #BeALight campaign,” says Borchetta. His company’s philanthropic moves have included the production of hand sanitizer by the Big Machine Vodka distillery, “which we donated to first responders amid the coronavirus outbreak.”

HOW COUNTRY CAN HELP MOVE THE NATION FORWARD

BORCHETTA “The most immediate way for us to change things is this November’s election.”

► Mike Curb

CHAIRMAN, CURB RECORDS/CURB | WORD ENTERTAINMENT

In his sixth decade as a label executive, Curb, 75, can point to both a history of genre-crossing artists — “whether their music was considered too pop or too country at the time, they remained strong” — and a current run of country, pop and Christian hits. Lee Brice reached No. 1 on Hot Country Songs and No. 27 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 with “I Hope You’re Happy Now,” co-

credited to his duet partner, Big Machine Records artist Carly Pearce. (“We shared that hit with my next-door neighbor Scott Borchetta,” says Curb.) Big Daddy Weave reached No. 1 on Christian Airplay with “I Know,” as did For King & Country with “Together” (with Tori Kelly and Kirk Franklin), which also hit No. 15 on Adult Contemporary.

HOW COUNTRY CAN HELP MOVE THE NATION FORWARD

“Focus on improving our relationships with respect to racial stereotypes and with the LGBT community. Strengthen our outreach to those who are less fortunate. Use our influence to help people through the major health issues that exist today, with respect to mental illness, drug abuse and other areas.”

► Mike Dungan

CHAIRMAN/CEO, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP NASHVILLE

► Cindy Mabe

PRESIDENT, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP NASHVILLE

► Royce Risser

EXECUTIVE VP PROMOTION, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP NASHVILLE

► Brian Wright

EXECUTIVE VP A&R, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP NASHVILLE

“Artist development is clicking on all cylinders,” says Dungan, 66, citing the success in the past year of rising acts Jordan Davis (No. 1 on Country Airplay with “Slow Dance in a Parking Lot”) and Travis Denning, whose “After a Few” reached the top of Country Airplay “after a crazy 65-week run,” adds Dungan. The company’s established stars — Carrie Underwood, Chris Stapleton, Darius Rucker, Dierks Bentley, Eric Church, George Strait, Kacey Musgraves, Keith Urban, Little Big Town and Sam Hunt, among others — have had their plans upended by the pandemic. The release of Luke Bryan’s *Born Here Live Here Die Here* shifted from April to August. New albums from Church and Stapleton, expected to coincide with tours now on hold, have been postponed. “Since there is no touring right now,” says Dungan,

“several album releases have been pushed back.”
THE SONG HE TURNS TO DUNGAN “Alan Jackson’s version of ‘Song for the Life,’ penned by Rodney Crowell, who is one of my idols. It says, ‘Slow down and enjoy the little things around you.’”

► **John Esposito**

CHAIRMAN/CEO, WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE

► **Ben Kline**

EXECUTIVE VP/GM, WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE

► **Cris Lacy**

EXECUTIVE VP A&R, WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE

► **James Marsh**

NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF RADIO AND STREAMING, WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE

► **Kristen Williams**

SENIOR VP RADIO, WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE

“This team has not just learned the art of working remotely — they have defined it,” says Esposito of his Warner Music Nashville staff. During the pandemic, Warner artist Kenny Chesney has achieved his ninth Billboard 200 No. 1 with *Here and Now*, and he claimed his 31st chart-topper on Country Airplay with the title track. Gabby Barrett’s “I Hope” became the first debut single by a woman to top Hot Country Songs. “Then there’s Brett Eldredge, Ashley McBryde, Ingrid Andress — all with their own incredible achievements,” says Esposito. “More important than the quantity of [our] successes, however, is their quality. The passion drives us.”

ADVICE FOR A YOUNG ARTIST ESPOSITO “Have no Plan B. Own it, top to bottom.”

► **Randy Goodman**

CHAIRMAN/CEO, SONY MUSIC NASHVILLE

► **Jim Catino**

EXECUTIVE VP A&R, SONY MUSIC NASHVILLE

► **Steve Hodges**

EXECUTIVE VP PROMOTION AND ARTIST DEVELOPMENT, SONY MUSIC NASHVILLE

► **Ken Robold**

COO/EXECUTIVE VP, SONY MUSIC NASHVILLE

Sony Music Nashville finished at No. 1 on *Billboard*’s year-end Top Country Labels ranking for 2019, and Goodman praises the artists who are helping Sony maintain that momentum amid the pandemic: Maren Morris’ country smash “The Bones” reached No. 1 on Adult Top 40 in April after a 45-week climb. With *What You See Is What You Get*, Luke Combs in July became the first act in the 56-year history of Top Country Albums whose first two studio releases each logged at least 25 weeks at No. 1. Old Dominion reigns as the Academy of Country Music’s 2019 vocal group of the year. Miranda Lambert’s “Bluebird,” her first solo No. 1 on Country Airplay in eight years, and Brad Paisley’s “No I in Beer” have both inspired fans. And Kane Brown has dedicated his “Worldwide Beautiful” to the movement against racism and discrimination. Says Goodman: “[Brown] has a unique moment and is a unique artist able to speak in a profound way for our format.”

THE IMPACT OF THE HALT ON TOURING GOODMAN

“It’s affecting the newer artists. Their foundation was being built in the clubs, and that has gone away.”

► **Gordon Kerr**

PRESIDENT/CEO, BLACK RIVER ENTERTAINMENT

In late March, Kerr’s Black River released Kelsea Ballerini’s third album, *Kelsea*, just as the coronavirus closed offices and canceled in-person events. Promotion plans shifted, with fans receiving CDs (and pizza) at home via drones and Ballerini singing “Homecoming Queen?” during the TV special *ACM*

Presents: Our Country on April 5 after the Academy of Country Music Awards were postponed. “Our staff has been incredible with their commitment to each other, as well as the artists and writers here,” says Kerr. *Kelsea* debuted at No. 2 on Top Country Albums and at No. 12 on the Billboard 200.

HOW COUNTRY CAN HELP MOVE THE NATION FORWARD

“My hope is that [country music] becomes one of the voices that helps bring together a country that is hurting and in deep need of a good dose of truth.”

► **Jon Loba**

EXECUTIVE VP, BBR MUSIC GROUP/BMG

► **Carson James**

SENIOR VP PROMOTION, BBR MUSIC GROUP/BMG

BBR Music Group, the Nashville division of BMG and home to Jason Aldean and Dustin Lynch, released five collaborations between Black artists and their white peers in recent months, “and that is not even counting Jimmie Allen’s collaboration EP, *Bettie James*,” says Loba. “This wasn’t in response to the events after George Floyd’s and Breonna Taylor’s deaths. It was because doing so was amazing art — not to mention great business.” He adds: “Most exciting is there is real consumer connection to those efforts.”

ADVICE FOR A YOUNG ARTIST JAMES “Make great, emotional and inspiring songs. Allow us, as a record company, to market and expose the world to your art.”

► **David Macias**

PRESIDENT, THIRTY TIGERS; PARTNER, TRIPLE TIGERS RECORDS

► **George Couri**

CO-OWNER, TRIPLE 8 MANAGEMENT; PARTNER, TRIPLE TIGERS RECORDS

► **Bruce Kalmick**

CO-OWNER/PARTNER, TRIPLE 8 MANAGEMENT; PARTNER, TRIPLE TIGERS RECORDS

► **Norbert Nix**

PARTNER/GM, TRIPLE TIGERS RECORDS

Triple Tigers Records — a co-venture among Triple 8 Management, Thirty Tigers and Sony Music launched in 2016 — quickly became a force on the radio, says Couri, 49. He cites a run of six singles, three each from Scotty McCreery and Russell Dickerson, that all hit No. 1 on Country Airplay between 2018 and 2020. In addition to McCreery’s success (“This Is It,” “In Between”), other management clients to reach the summit are Chase Rice (“Eyes on You”) and the Eli Young Band (“Love Ain’t”). In June, *Gone West*, the new band featuring Colbie Caillat, debuted on Thirty Tigers with *Canyons*. Other releases backed by the Thirty Tigers marketing/distribution division won Grammy Awards in January for Patty Griffin (best folk album for *Patty Griffin*) and Delbert McClinton (best traditional blues album for *Tall, Dark and Handsome*). Macias, 55, says Thirty Tigers has sought to be responsive to acts struggling financially by advancing royalties. Adds Nix, 62: “Each artist has been able to pivot and adapt by redirecting their creative flow.”

THE SONG HE TURNS TO COURI “Merle Haggard’s ‘Are the Good Times Really Over? (I Wish a Buck Were Still Silver)’ because it reminds me that things are cyclical and that, of course, the good times are certainly not over.”



► HONORING COUNTRY’S BLACK PIONEERS

DeFord Bailey

1899-1982

Known for his harmonica playing and signature tune “Pan American Blues,” the Tennessee native was the first Black artist to play the *Grand Ole Opry* and a fixture on the program in the 1920s and ’30s. He also shared stages with white contemporaries like singer Roy Acuff in the Jim Crow-era South, though a music licensing dispute in 1941 prematurely ended his professional music career.

—MIA NAZARENO

MORRIS: TERRY WYATT/GETTY IMAGES; BAILEY: GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES; PREVIOUS SPREAD: GROOMING BY AUBREY HELLER; ON-SITE PRODUCER: ASHLEY HORNE; HERRING

AMAZON MUSIC

▶ **Kelly Rich**

COUNTRY MUSIC LEAD, LABEL RELATIONS

▶ **Emily Cohen**

SENIOR MUSIC CURATOR, COUNTRY



Cohen (left) and Rich photographed by Diana King on July 22 in Nashville.

TWENTY YEARS AGO, WHEN AMAZON

first began selling physical CDs, country fans were among the online retail giant's most loyal music customers. "The genre has always performed well for us," says Rich, 53. "We've always invested heavily in country music events and marketing." That loyalty has carried into the streaming age with Amazon Music's Country Heat playlist, whose global streams have increased 4.7 times compared with a year ago, as of May. Monthly Alexa voice requests for country content have grown 1.4 times during the same period among Amazon Music's 55 million users worldwide.

Gabby Barrett's album *Goldmine* is the newest beneficiary: First single "I Hope" was Song of the Day last August. After concerts shut down due to the pandemic, Amazon Live hosted Barrett's performance with Charlie Puth and a live joint Q&A in April. The service created a custom voice utterance on Alexa ("Take me to the Goldmine") to build more streams, and Amazon Music bought Barrett billboards in New York, Los Angeles, Nashville and Atlanta. In June, *Goldmine*'s first-day and first-week streams broke a record for a debut country album on the service.

"I heard 'I Hope' and was like, 'This is a hit,'" says Cohen, 36. Amazon added Barrett's song to its Introducing: Country playlist on May 24, 2019, before Barrett signed with Warner Music Nashville. "It's always exciting to see new artists bubble up in our charts, and it's my job to recognize those trends and place them." In July, Amazon selected Barrett for its new Breakthrough initiative that will provide global support for emerging artists of all genres.

Two years after its launch, Country Heat is a centerpiece among Amazon Music playlists, and Cohen uses a combination of instinct and metrics to identify promising new artists. After Travis Denning delivered "David Ashley Parker From Powder Springs" in 2018, the service put him "in as many programming places as possible" and supported follow-up "After a Few," which reached No. 1 on Country Airplay. "The caliber and quality of music released since the playlist launched is really excellent," says Cohen. "We just want to honor that."

The service also launched its first country-focused minidocumentary, Kane Brown's *Velocity*, in February, and hosted livestreams for Kip Moore and others.

Although the pandemic halted touring, forcing labels and managers to frantically scramble acts' album and single release dates, Amazon's country team has persevered. "It has definitely been a juggling act," says Rich. "We've had to adapt quickly and change our plans. We'll continue to go big on our support."

—STEVE KNOPPER



▲
Brown (above) released "Worldwide Beautiful" during protests for racial justice as a benefit for Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

MANAGEMENT

► Narvel Blackstock

PRESIDENT, STARSTRUCK ENTERTAINMENT

Blackstock guides the careers of Blake Shelton and Kelly Clarkson. Shelton earned his 27th No. 1 on Country Airplay with "Nobody but You" (with Gwen Stefani). The two performed the song at the Grammys in January, while Shelton's "God's Country" is up for single, song and video of the year at the Academy of Country Music Awards on Sept. 16. Clarkson is reaching new audiences with *The Kelly Clarkson Show*, for which she won a daytime Emmy Award, and her home collection at Wayfair (which in April donated 25% of its profits to COVID-19 relief efforts). Both of Blackstock's clients are coaches on *The Voice*, which Shelton's contestant Todd Tilghman won in May.

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST "A lot of meetings will become Zoom meetings, and things like radio tours will probably never come back."

► Gary Borman

FOUNDER/PRESIDENT, BORMAN ENTERTAINMENT

Borman says that Keith Urban, his management client for nearly two decades, "continues to inspire." The artist will release his 11th studio album, *The Speed of Now Part 1*, on Sept. 18, two days after hosting the rescheduled Academy of Country Music Awards. Borman also represents vocal powerhouse Mickey Guyton, who released two politically charged singles in 2020 — "What Are You Gonna Tell Her?" is about misogyny, while "Black Like Me" tackles systemic racism — and is working on an album. Guyton "has found her voice," says Borman, "and is writing songs that will define this moment in time."

HOW COUNTRY CAN HELP MOVE THE NATION FORWARD

"It's time to diversify — our companies, our teams, our playlists, our leaders. Millennials and Generation Z are the most diverse generations in American history. Country music needs to reflect the nation."

► Virginia Bunetta

OWNER/ARTIST MANAGER, G-MAJOR MANAGEMENT

Bunetta's client Thomas Rhett, who released the top 10 ballad "Be a Light" on his 30th birthday in March to raise money for coronavirus relief, is still riding on the success of last year's Grammy-nominated *Center Point Road*: In May, he notched his 15th No. 1 on Country Airplay with the album's third single, "Beer Can't Fix" (featuring Jon Pardi).

But the 40-year-old Bunetta — whose roster also includes newcomers Patrick Droney and Trea Landon — is especially proud of keeping her team on the payroll and receiving benefits through a "tremendous financial shift in our business" due to the pandemic.

HOW COUNTRY CAN HELP LEAD THE NATION FORWARD

"Storytelling is core to country music and always has been. It's one of the most powerful tools our community has in sharing truth and creating unity."

► Coran Capshaw

FOUNDER, RED LIGHT MANAGEMENT

► Mary Hilliard Harrington

MANAGER, RED LIGHT MANAGEMENT

► Janet Weir

MANAGER, RED LIGHT MANAGEMENT; OWNER, HOUSE OF 42

Red Light's country music roster has proved every bit as diverse as it is successful, with albums from neotraditionalist Jon Pardi, genre-mixer Sam Hunt and country rocker Kip Moore all landing in the top five of the Top Country Albums chart. On Country Airplay, Red Light artists have sent 13 songs to No. 1 (through Aug. 3), including Gabby Barrett's debut single, "I Hope." "We are especially proud of the impact we're having with emerging female artists," says Harrington, citing Caylee Hammack, Lindsay Ell and Maddie & Tae as well. With "The Bones," Weir's client Maren Morris broke the record for the longest-running No. 1 on Hot Country Songs by a solo female artist. (See story, page 66.)

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST HARRINGTON "I can't imagine going back to a time of spending 12 hours a day running all over town just to sit in back-to-back meetings."

► Bob Doyle

PRESIDENT, BOB DOYLE & ASSOCIATES/MAJOR BOB MUSIC

Doyle, 72, has had plenty of recent opportunities to cheer on Garth Brooks, his friend and client of nearly 35 years. Last November, Brooks won the Country Music Association's entertainer of the year award for a seventh time. In March, he became the youngest recipient of the Library of Congress' Gershwin Prize for Popular Song. As the pandemic began, Brooks and his wife, Trisha Yearwood, offered an acoustic concert on CBS. And on June 27, Brooks staged a concert streamed to over 300 drive-in venues nationwide, drawing an estimated 350,000 people.

THE IMPACT OF THE HALT ON TOURING "It has stopped the bulk of what we had planned over the next three years. We are now waiting like everyone else and looking for alternative ways to access the fans."



Travolta as the titular character, atop a mechanical bull, in *Urban Cowboy*.

‘COUNTRY NIGHT FEVER’

Forty years ago, *Urban Cowboy*'s soundtrack made the genre a pop phenomenon — and paved the way for its modern hitmakers

BY JOE LEVY

MICKY GILLEY REMEMBERS THE moment he fell for the *Urban Cowboy*. It was 1978, and Gilley — the piano-playing cousin of Jerry Lee Lewis — was the namesake co-owner of Gilley's in Pasadena, Texas, just outside of Houston. The massive honky-tonk claimed to be the world's biggest nightclub — it held 7,000 on a good night — and was the setting for an *Esquire* cover story about refinery workers who rode a mechanical bull instead of the range. There was a busted marriage at the story's center, and Gilley was no fan of its distinctly New York tone. “The article started out, ‘Boy meets girl, twang, twang,’” he says. “I thought it was poking fun at country music.”

Then Gilley got a call from his partner, Sherwood Cryer, letting him know the *Esquire* story had sparked a movie deal, with John Travolta set to play the lead. Travolta had starred in *Saturday Night Fever* — a top 10 box-office hit in 1977 — and *Grease*, the No. 1 movie of 1978. Both had generated hugely successful soundtracks, with *Saturday Night Fever* spinning off six hit singles — four of them Billboard Hot 100 No. 1s — and topping the Billboard 200 for 24 consecutive weeks. For Gilley, it was dead simple: “I’m thinking *Saturday Night Fever* — *Country Night Fever*,” he says. “I liked that article from then on out.”

Indeed, when the movie arrived in June 1980, *Urban Cowboy* helped do for country what *Saturday Night Fever* had done for disco: make the music — and the culture that surrounded it — a pop phenomenon, and then inspire a backlash. Country became a costume you could try on for a night out (sales of Western wear boomed), and the music took hold on the Hot 100, driven not just by *Urban Cowboy* singles like Gilley's cover of “Stand by Me” and Johnny Lee's “Looking for Love,” but songs by far bigger country stars that leaned even more pop, such as “Lady” from Kenny Rogers and “9 to 5” from Dolly Parton.

The soundtrack — which also featured the Eagles, Jimmy Buffett and Linda Ronstadt — climbed to No. 3 on the Billboard 200 and launched six top 40 hits. Forty

years later, its vision of rock guitars and pop balladry alongside fiddle and pedal steel defines Nashville. But at the time, it sparked debate about what was true country and set the stage for the neotraditionalist triumphs of George Strait, Randy Travis and others.

It was Irving Azoff who recognized the *Esquire* story's potential and acted on it immediately. Days after the article came out, he was on the phone to Gilley's. “I met with Sherwood Cryer and Mickey and acquired the rights to the bar,” he told CMT in 2015. “That was easily done, because I said, ‘Mickey, you’ll be in this movie, and that will help make you a bigger star.’”

The superstar manager's first film venture, a movie called *FM*, had been a stinker, and he had pulled his name off the credits. But the soundtrack went platinum, and half of its 20 tracks featured Azoff clients, with Steely Dan's title song going on to win a Grammy Award. Reportedly, Azoff considered an all-Eagles soundtrack for *Urban Cowboy*, but in the end, the 18 cuts on the album (on Asylum and Azoff's label, Full Moon) featured just six from his clients, including Boz Scaggs, who co-wrote the seduction ballad “Look What You've Done to Me.” (It went to No. 14 on the Hot 100.)

The job of balancing Los Angeles country rock with the red dirt music of Texas fell to Becky Mancuso-Winding, who had been an A&R executive at Epic Records. As music coordinator, Mancuso-Winding essentially A&R'd the movie itself. The soundtrack's Hot Country Songs No. 1s — “Looking for Love,” “Stand by Me” and Anne Murray's “Could I Have This Dance” — are integrated into the film's action because she brought them to director James Bridges

while he was still filming. “She defined the modern music supervisor,” says John Boylan, who produced “Looking for Love” and had worked with Mancuso-Winding at Epic. “She reinvented the job as a perfect liaison between the music industry and the film industry.”

Mancuso-Winding has said that Azoff wanted the hardcore country kept to a minimum: “Irving would say, ‘This is not a trailer park, Becky. You can have the trailer park in the film but not on the soundtrack.’” That may be one reason Boylan and Jim Ed Norman were called in to produce tracks for Gilley and Lee. Before he became a producer and A&R man, Boylan had been Ronstadt's manager in 1971 when the nucleus of the Eagles first coalesced as her backing band. Norman had done string arrangements on the Eagles' albums and had recently topped both Hot Country Songs and the Hot 100 with his production of Murray's “You Needed Me.”

Though he would go on to become president of Warner Bros. Nashville in 1984, recording “Stand by Me” with Gilley was actually Norman's first session in Nashville, and he describes the contrast between Music City professionalism and L.A. perfectionism: “The studio that I went into was prepared to record up to four songs in three hours,” he says. “A set of drums was already set up, with microphones placed, and the sounds that came from those microphones were just foreign to me.” He spent the morning mic-ing the drums, which confused Gilley, who gained no confidence when they returned from lunch and Norman switched the keyboard player from acoustic to electric piano for a softer sound. “I didn't think he really knew what he was doing,” recalls Gilley. But he ended up with back-to-back No. 1s on Hot Country Songs. “I had to go back and apologize to him.”

For his part, Boylan says his instructions when producing “Looking for Love” came from the movie's director, Bridges, who wanted it to be “straight-ahead barroom country.” “The first thing he told me is, ‘The reason I want Johnny Lee in this movie is that he's every day, the kind of guy who's the opening act at Gilley's,’” recalls Boylan. “‘Don't make it too slick.’”

If “Looking for Love” wasn't slick by L.A. standards, it was by Nashville's. “There was some pushback about the whole *Urban Cowboy* thing,” says Boylan. “Nashville is very insular.” Joe Galante, who became president of RCA Nashville in 1982, remembers this moment: “We were having a great deal of success as a town crossing records with Alabama, Dolly, Eddie Rabbitt, Waylon [Jennings], [Ronnie] Milsap and Willie [Nelson]. Then we started to hear from some of the town: ‘That's not country music.’”

To Scott Borchetta, the president/CEO of Big Machine Label Group, it's a familiar cycle: “You can go all the way back to Patsy Cline and you have naysayers: ‘Those records are too pop. What is this new Nashville sound?’” *Urban Cowboy*, he says, “crossed the pop and rock borders in just the right way,” drawing a blueprint for the commercial dominance of Garth Brooks, Alan Jackson, Clint Black, Travis Tritt and others. “We look at that film as beginning to pave the way to the Class of '89, which swept through the '90s,” he says. “Sometimes the complainers are the loudest voices, but the one thing you can never argue with is success.”



Opposite poles of the movie's soundtrack: honky-tonk co-owner/singer Gilley (top) and the Eagles.

► **Martha Earls**

OWNER, EFG MANAGEMENT

Earls' client Kane Brown — who sold out Los Angeles' Staples Center in January and toured Europe in February — had recorded "Worldwide Beautiful" last fall as the title track to his next album. "However, the social climate created an environment where there was no way we could sit back and not release the track," says Earls, 42. The song arrived at midnight on June 4, raising funds for Boys & Girls Clubs of America. "Being able to release culture-relevant music is incredible," says Earls.

THE SONGS SHE TURNS TO "My daughters, ages 6 and 8, have become obsessed with every song ever written by Taylor Swift. 'Mean' and 'We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together' have become anthems in our house about protecting yourself from toxic and negative people."

► **Ann Edelblute**

OWNER, THE HQ

Carrie Underwood's self-help title *Find Your Path* arrived March 3 and reached No. 2 on the *New York Times* bestseller list for advice books. But when the pandemic hit, Underwood had her other 2020 plans, including concert and festival dates, postponed or canceled. Other projects have continued "where we can work remotely and stay productive, especially on the digital side," says Edelblute. That includes Underwood's fit52 fitness app and an upcoming Christmas album. The country superstar also performed her single "Drinking Alone" from her No. 1 album *Cry Pretty* for TV's *ACM Presents: Our Country* on April 5.

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST "Due to traveling exten-

sively, I am more accustomed to working remotely. But after this, I can see many others continuing to do so more in the future."

► **Kerri Edwards**

PRESIDENT, KP ENTERTAINMENT

Luke Bryan's new album, *Live Here Born Here Die Here*, which includes "One Margarita," his 23rd No. 1 on Country Airplay, follows the success of his 2019 Sunset Repeat Tour, which Edwards organized and which featured fellow clients Cole Swindell, Jon Langston and DJ Rock. The outing grossed \$35.9 million from 37 shows between May and October. During the pandemic, Edwards has helped Bryan wrap the first remote season of *American Idol*, serving as "set designer, wardrobe, glam, camera operator, lighting crew and script reader," she says. Meanwhile, KP newcomer CB30, a country duo signed to Buena Vista Records, grew its TikTok following to over 966,000 as its videos collected over 15 million cumulative views.

THE SONG SHE TURNS TO Bryan's "Most People Are Good" because I truly do believe that. In a world where we are constantly being shown the bad right now, I know there is more good, and it is most likely right in front of you."

► **Chris Kappy**

FOUNDER, MAKE WAKE ARTISTS

► **Lynn Oliver-Cline**

FOUNDER, RIVER HOUSE ARTISTS

It has been four years since Oliver-Cline, 46, launched River House as a label, publisher and management company and her first label signing, Luke Combs — whom she co-manages with Kappy, 47 — became the first act to have his first



▲ Underwood (above) published a bestselling self-help book, *Find Your Path*, ahead of a planned Christmas album.

two albums, *This One's for You* and *What You See Is What You Get*, log 25-plus weeks at No. 1 on Top Country Albums. Kappy also manages *The Voice* finalist Ashland Craft and Hailey Whitters, both now affiliated with Big Loud Records, while Oliver-Cline's new management client Chrissy Metz (of *This Is Us* fame) has signed to EMI Records Nashville and released her second single, "Actress," co-written by River House's Nicolette Hayford.

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST KAPPY "I have lost 166 pounds and have found a new goal in life, and that is to live. I feel like a new man."

► **Marion Kraft**

CEO, SHOPKEEPER MANAGEMENT

Last November, when Kraft's client Miranda Lambert released *Wildcard*, its No. 1 debut on Top Country Albums marked the artist's seventh consecutive chart ruler. Single "Bluebird" became her first solo No. 1 on Country Airplay since 2012. Lambert played 17 arena dates of her *Wildcard* tour before the pandemic lockdown, just ahead of a swing through Australia. "Performing shows is the activity that our artists love the most," says Kraft, 56. "Not being able to do that has been difficult, to say the least." She notes that Lambert is very focused on her MuttNation Foundation, which has launched branded dog and cat food and accessories — and planning for whenever touring can resume.

THE SONG SHE TURNS TO "Bluebird" is the "perfect song for this time: 'And if the whole wide world stops singing/And all the stars go dark/I'll keep a light on in my soul/Keep a bluebird in my heart.'"

► **Dale Morris**

► **Clint Higham**

PARTNERS, MORRIS HIGHAM MANAGEMENT

In May, Morris and Higham celebrated the release of client Kenny Chesney's *Here and Now*. His ninth No. 1 on the Billboard 200 and his 17th chart-topper on Top Country Albums debuted "in the toughest of environments," says Higham. Chesney was forced to move his Chillaxification stadium tour to 2021, and "we could have postponed the album release," adds Higham. "But we felt our fans [needed] this and the escape Kenny's music provides." Old Dominion, meanwhile, reigns as the group of the year, as honored by both the Academy of Country Music and Country Music Association, and the managers also now represent the estate of Roger Miller.

THE IMPACT OF THE HALT ON TOURING HIGHAM "As managers, a majority of our income is based on the live element, and that has been flattened for all of us. We are fortunate to have been blessed with so many great years that we are able to survive the storm."

► **HONORING COUNTRY'S BLACK PIONEERS**

Lesley Riddle

1905-1979

Though a series of accidents left Riddle without a leg and two fingers, his inventive guitar playing was hugely influential on The Carter Family. Along with founder A.P. Carter, Riddle traveled throughout Appalachia documenting songs and ideas that the band would later release as some of its earliest recordings. —M.N.



► **Danny Nozell**

CEO, CTK ENTERPRISES

Amid the financial turmoil of the COVID-19 crisis, CTK Enterprises is having a banner year, says Nozell, 53. “I diversified my company. I closed book deals, podcast deals, record deals, publishing deals — everything that had to do with not being in public events. I adapt and overcome. I’m a solution guy.” And he has not laid off any staff. Nozell — whose management roster includes Dolly Parton (see story, page 38), K.C. & The Sunshine Band, Seether, Meat Loaf, Orianthi and Kenny G — says the Dolly Parton Challenge meme was a global viral moment, with fans sharing Parton-inspired images on social media. “At 74 years old, she had one of the biggest memes of the year.”

THE SONG HE TURNS TO Parton’s “Better Get To Livin’” “because none of us are getting out of here alive, so we better get to livin’.”

► **Jason Owen**

PRESIDENT/CEO, SANDBOX ENTERTAINMENT;
CO-PRESIDENT, MONUMENT RECORDS

Great collaborations have driven success for Owen’s management clients: Dan + Shay teamed with Justin Bieber for “10,000 Hours,” which spent 21 weeks at No. 1 on Hot Country Songs, and Kelsea Ballerini invited Halsey to duet on “The Other Girl,” which charted on the Hot 100, Hot Country Songs and Adult Top 40 simultaneously. As a live act, Dan + Shay had risen “from clubs and theaters to a sold-out arena tour that we were just beginning when COVID hit,” says Owen, who also manages Little Big Town, Faith Hill, Kacey Musgraves and Midland, and is co-president of Monument Records with Shane McAnally. (See story, opposite page.)

ADVICE FOR A YOUNG ARTIST “Don’t get married.”

► **John Peets**

FOUNDER, Q PRIME SOUTH

Q Prime South’s management roster includes Ashley McBryde (who released *Never Will* in April), Brett Eldredge (who unveiled *Sunday Drive* in July), The Black Keys, Brothers Osborne, Rhiannon Giddens, Marty Stuart and Eric Church, who ranked as one of the top-grossing touring acts in country music in early 2020. Since March, says Peets, he has helped keep Q Prime “not just intact but thriving. I’m very proud that everyone has been able to keep their positions and their benefits.”

THE IMPACT OF THE HALT ON TOURING “Our bands were built on the road. They love to play, and we believe in the power of that human exchange. Missing that is really a drag.”

► **Clarence Spalding**

PRESIDENT, MAVERICK

Spalding, 63, leads a team that manages Jason Aldean, Brooks & Dunn, Rascal Flatts, Reba McEntire and Darius Rucker — and he oversaw Rucker’s 2019 reunion tour with Hootie & The Blowfish that grossed \$42.5 million. Brooks & Dunn were inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame last October following the album *Reboot* that teamed them with contemporary artists such as Luke Combs and Kacey Musgraves. “It looked like we had a plan,” says Spalding, “but most things between us three, we just stumble around and good things happen.”

HOW COUNTRY CAN HELP MOVE THE NATION FORWARD

“A couple of weeks ago I was talking to Darius and I said, ‘You know, what would you ask people to do?’ And he said, ‘Just stand with me. Stand with me.’”

► **Erv Woolsey**

PRESIDENT, ERV WOOLSEY CO.

Woolsey’s longtime client George Strait grossed \$64.6 million from live shows in both 2019 and this year prior to the pandemic, including his residency at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas. Meanwhile, Woolsey, 76, has inked deals for clients Jaden Hamilton at Sony Music Nashville, the Davisson Brothers Band at Copperline Music Group and Ian Munsick at Warner Music Nashville — which signed him remotely. “Warner never saw him in person,” says Woolsey. “We did the [online] meetings, he played, they heard his music and signed him. It may be one of the very few that have happened that way.”

THE IMPACT OF THE HALT ON TOURING “This is the time that we’d be planning next year. But you hate to commit too much because you just don’t know.”

MULTISECTOR

► **Scooter Braun**

FOUNDER/CHAIRMAN, ITHACA HOLDINGS

Braun made his big splash in Nashville in June 2019 with the \$300 million acquisition of Big Machine Label Group and its publishing division, Big Machine Music, by his Ithaca Holdings and The Carlyle Group. But he has also maintained previously forged partnerships with Morris Higham Management, helping launch Kenny Chesney’s latest album, *Here and Now*, and with Sandbox Entertainment, teaming Justin Bieber with Dan + Shay for the hit “10,000 Hours.” Says Braun: “It has been a monumental year for our family members in Nashville.”

THE SONG HE TURNS TO “‘Be a Light’ by Thomas Rhett. It speaks to me. He made something beautiful in a time of need.”

LIVE

► **Seth England**

PARTNER/CEO, BIG LOUD

► **Craig Wiseman**

PARTNER, BIG LOUD

► **Austen Adams**

COO, BIG LOUD

► **Candice Watkins**

VP MARKETING, BIG LOUD RECORDS

Big Loud’s label marked its fifth anniversary on Aug. 1. “We had invested just enough to get us maybe three years,” recalls England, “as long as we didn’t mess anything up too bad.” Launched in the wake of the success of Big Loud’s publishing and management divisions, Big Loud Records has thrived since: Morgan Wallen topped the year-end Hot Country Songs and Country Airplay charts with “Whiskey Glasses” and hit No. 1 on Country Airplay with “Chasing You” and “Up Down” (featuring Florida Georgia Line). England says that he “can’t wait for another five years.”

THE IMPACT OF THE HALT ON TOURING “The loss of touring income is a ripple effect all the way to our acts’ bands and crews. If there is any silver lining, it might be that a few of our acts really craved a mental break, and I’ve watched them regain some hunger for touring during this time.”

► **Scott Bailey**

PRESIDENT, OPRY ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

► **Dan Rogers**

VP/EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, OPRY ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

To draw new fans worldwide, Bailey in January helped launch Circle TV, a country music lifestyle channel with original programming that is reaching “nearly 65% of homes in the U.S.,” he says. Rogers, who assumed his newly created position last August, has kept the music flowing at the Grand Ole Opry during the pandemic. “It amazes me,” he says, “to be in a completely empty Opry auditorium — other than a handful of artists and crew — on a Saturday night, then look down at my phone or laptop to be reminded that millions of people from around the world are tuning in.”

THE SONG HE TURNS TO ROGERS “‘Will the Circle Be Unbroken.’ It is very much like the Opry’s family Bible passed down from generation to generation. We sang it again on March 14 to conclude our first show without an Opry house audience, and I have no doubt it will ring from the rafters when audiences fill the Opry halls once again.”

► **Louis Messina**

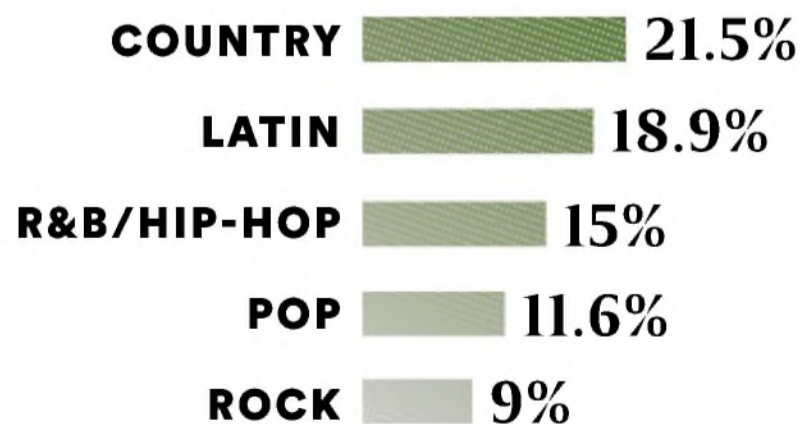
CEO, MESSINA TOURING GROUP

“Being unemployed is not fun,” says Messina as he waits out the coronavirus. “I doubt we’ll be able to return until there’s a vaccine.” The promoter was expecting a busy year with Kenny Chesney playing stadiums; Blake Shelton, George Strait and Kelly Clarkson touring arenas; and Taylor Swift bringing her *Loverfest* to Los Angeles and New York before heading to Europe. That’s all on hold now, he says, but he’s bullish on rescheduled tours. “Only a small percentage of fans have asked for refunds — we’re going to come back next year bigger than ever.”

THE SONG HE TURNS TO “‘Talladega’ from Eric Church because of its nostalgia for a simpler time.”

A STREAMING SURGE

Country has lagged in streaming, but as of July 23, it’s beating out the other major genres in year-over-year growth



SOURCE: NIELSEN MUSIC/MRC DATA

THE TRAILBLAZER

SHANE McANALLY

He's behind a slew of No. 1 hits for Nashville's biggest stars, but for the prolific songwriter, success means something more: championing the voices that push country forward

BY NOLAN FEENEY

A PANDEMIC MAY HAVE BROUGHT much of the music industry to a halt, but it hasn't stopped Shane McAnally from going to work. In Nashville studios this summer, the songwriter-producer and his collaborators have been wearing masks and keeping their distance in isolation booths. They have even started workshopping ideas over Zoom — which McAnally admits has taken some getting used to. “One thing I do love about it is that it's very efficient,” says the 45-year-old, who also juggles a publishing company (he's founder/CEO of SMACKSongs), a record label (he's co-president of Monument Records) and a mentor role on NBC's *Songland*. “We'll see how many of those songs have the same personality that things do when you're in the room with someone.”

With three Grammy Awards and 32 No. 1 singles on Country Airplay alone for such acts as Kenny Chesney, Luke Bryan, Old Dominion and Thomas Rhett, it's safe to say McAnally has high standards. Yet that volume of hits is only one element of a legacy that has earned him *Billboard's* 2020 Trailblazer honor. As one of the few out songwriters working in country music, he is often approached by other LGBTQ people who say they didn't know they could make it in Nashville until they saw McAnally thrive. (His response: “I didn't know you could, either!”) He's especially proud of championing voices like Kacey Musgraves and Sam Hunt, whose collaborations with McAnally — including, respectively, “Follow Your Arrow” and “Body Like a Back Road” — challenged conventional wisdom about what a country hit could be. Despite their recent successes, those artists were hardly safe bets early on in their careers. “When someone said ‘Kacey's too country’ or ‘Sam is too pop,’ these were things that made me want to do it more,” says McAnally. “I know the magic of when someone doesn't fit.”

For a long time, the Texas native didn't think he fit in Nashville, either. He had a brief stint as an artist,

releasing an album on Curb Records in 2000, but lost his label and publishing deals shortly after. He then moved to Los Angeles, where he spent about seven years wrestling with his identity and bitterly wondering if he would ever make it in the industry. Two things changed his attitude: He fully came out after meeting his now-husband, Michael McAnally Baum, with whom he has two kids, in 2007. (Baum is president of SMACKSongs.) He also gave up on waiting for his big break. “I finally had this epiphany of ‘I'm doing music because it's the only thing that consumes me. I'm not doing it to make money,’ ” he says. “When that happened, that's when I started making money.” In 2008, he landed his first big cut as a songwriter: Lee Ann Womack's “Last Call.”

McAnally talks about his second act in Nashville — and the community he has found there — in almost cosmic terms. He compares working with people like SMACKSongs chief creative officer Robin Palmer and artist manager Jason Owen, his Monument co-president, to being “surrounded by angels.” He believes in putting your dreams out into the universe, because when he did, people like Brandy Clark (with whom he's writing a musical) and Josh Osborne (a close collaborator and SMACKSongs partner) entered his life and helped make them happen. In McAnally's world, business partners become friends and family and vice versa. “I'm going off in bumper-sticker land saying all these clichés,” he says with a laugh. “But this is just the way it's supposed to happen. It's meant to be.”




'TIMES ARE CHANGING.'

Black artists and executives like Warner Music Nashville's **JAMES MARSH** and Big Loud Records' **CANDICE WATKINS** know the genre is becoming more inclusive — but is Music City taking enough action to help them thrive?

BY GAIL MITCHELL

WE HAVE TO CORRECT THIS'





Watkins (left) and Marsh photographed by Cedrick Jones on July 21 in Mount Juliet, Tenn.

ON JULY 10 — SIX WEEKS AFTER THE POLICE killing of George Floyd ignited protests around the world — Jimmie Allen released his *Bettie James* EP. One track, “Why Things Happen,” particularly stood out: With its lyrics about life’s fleeting nature and a plaintive refrain asking “why things happen like they do,” it poignantly captured the mood of a nation torn apart by both a pandemic and racial tensions that had reached a boiling point. But it was the voices on the track that made it most powerful: Allen, Darius Rucker and Charley Pride — three generations of Black country stars singing together.

“We got a chance to represent Black country artists for younger Black kids who want to do country but don’t feel anyone out there looks like them,” says Allen. “No matter your race, it’s important to see someone who looks like you doing what you love. It makes it more realistic. It makes it seem achievable.”

What might have once seemed unachievable is slowly becoming a reality. Allen — a 34-year-old Delaware native who, in 2018, became the first Black artist to launch his career with a No. 1 single on Country Airplay (the platinum-certified “Best Shot”) — is part of a growing circle of Black country singer-songwriters claiming their rightful place in Nashville and on the charts, 50 years after Pride’s arrival as a pioneer in mainstream country. That group includes Kane Brown, who is biracial and in 2017 became the first artist to post a simultaneous No. 1 on all five main *Billboard* country charts; Mickey Guyton, a 2016 Academy of Country Music award nominee for best new female vocalist; and Blanco Brown, who went platinum with his debut single, the 2019 Hot Country Songs chart-topper “The Git Up.” And there are promising rising talents to watch, like country-trap singer-songwriter Breland, whose “My Truck” was just RIAA-certified gold, and prolific songwriter Shy Carter (who has worked with Kane Brown, Keith Urban and Sugarland), who released his own first single, “Good Love,” on Juneteenth.

As these artists’ persistence pays off, some proactive label executives are backing their efforts. “The country music fan base was ready for Black artists. But it takes a record label actually signing [Black] artists to make that happen — to put them out there on a mainstream level to the masses,” says Allen, who is signed to Stoney Creek Records/BBR Music Group. Still, these artists say they need more support, noting that the music industry’s systemic racism — brought into focus by the #TheShowMustBePaused initiative in June — is something they’re all too aware of. “There’s always pushback, having to

prove how country I am,” adds Allen.

Rucker, 54, a Grammy-winning singer-songwriter who also fronts Hootie & The Blowfish, perhaps has the best perspective on what has and hasn't really changed in Nashville. He signed with Capitol Nashville as a country artist in 2008. When his debut single that same year, “Don't Think I Don't Think About It,” hit No. 1 on Hot Country Songs, Rucker became the first Black country artist to reach that pinnacle since Pride in 1983.

“I've been in Nashville 12 years, helping to open a door that a lot of people didn't know could get open,” says Rucker. He remembers three radio programmers telling him early on that their audiences wouldn't accept a Black artist, although his voice was awesome. “When other guys started playing [his first single], they added it and told me, ‘I was frigging dead wrong. You proved to me that the music beat all that crap.’”

Two years ago, Kane Brown and Rucker made history when they claimed consecutive chart-toppers on Country Airplay with “Heaven” and “For the First Time,” respectively — the first time that two artists of color accomplished such a coup in the chart's 28-year history. “Kane came in and knocked the door down,” says Rucker. He believes that, at long last, “more record companies are listening” when it comes to working with Black country artists.

Both Guyton and Carter say that they too have found the Nashville music community at large and their respective labels welcoming overall. But what happens outside the studio and the office often strikes a different tone. At her concerts, Guyton — best known for her 2015 Country Airplay hit “Better Than You Left Me” — has encountered audience members waving the Confederate flag and shouting out the N-word at her.

“A lot of people have questioned my sincerity, because you don't see Black women singing country a lot,” says the 37-year-old Texas native, a Capitol Records Nashville artist whose influences include Dolly Parton, LeAnn Rimes and Whitney Houston. “So I just started writing about my honest-to-God truth. Country music is three chords and the truth. So why can't I sing about being a Black woman and have people listen? That outlook has changed everything for me.” She recently released the song “Black Like Me.”

Singer-songwriter and producer Carter got his start signed to a production deal with rapper Nelly in Atlanta before segueing into writing for artists



like Charlie Puth, Meghan Trainor and Jamie Foxx. Working in Los Angeles was “depressing and frustrating at times,” says Carter, 35: He wanted to work with more pop and country artists, but kept getting siloed into R&B and hip-hop, “not based on my music as much as what I look like.”

The Memphis native, who has now written for several country stars, moved to Nashville two-and-a-half years ago and signed with Warner Music Nashville in January. “I've watched country music changing,” he says today. “There've been some experiences, being in the South in general, that have been hard. But I've felt very embraced and blessed by this community. They have been ready for bringing different sounds into the music.”

Of course, Black singers and musicians have long played a formative role in country music — a fact largely forgotten as industry gatekeepers marginalized their contributions once country's precursor, dubbed hillbilly music, became commercialized in the 1920s. Once hillbilly music began catering to rural white artists and fans, “race” music was designated the province of their Black counterparts.

As Ken Burns chronicled in his epic 2019 PBS documentary, *Country Music*, the banjo evolved from West African lutes fashioned out of gourds that slaves brought with them to America. Country pioneers like The Carter Family, Hank Williams, Johnny Cash and Bill Monroe were influenced and mentored by Black guitarists such as Lesley Riddle, Rufus “Tee Tot” Payne and Arnold Schultz. And harmonica player DeFord Bailey, a frequent performer on WSM radio's popular *Barn*



Watkins (left) and Marsh

Dance program and the first Black artist to perform on *Grand Ole Opry* in the 1920s, ended up shining shoes and renting out rooms in his home to survive after being fired by WSM over a licensing dispute between radio stations

including WSM and ASCAP. Today, he is one of three Black artists to have been inducted into the Grand Ole Opry, alongside Pride and Rucker.

Whether country's future resembles its past or breaks from it will be up to the industry executives with the power to, as producer Claude Kelly puts it, challenge what has been “the norm for so long.” Kelly and his production partner, Chuck Harmony, relocated to Franklin, Tenn., four years ago from Los Angeles. Best known for their work in R&B/hip-hop, they recently worked with Allen and Sara Evans and played the Opry with the former. “What you're comfortable seeing is what you end up employing, and it goes in a cycle,” says Kelly. “If the world would see more than just white, country will inspire everyone to discover lots more amazing talent.”

JAMES MARSH IS USED TO breaking down barriers. In 2000, after working as a DJ and in promotion at top 40, rhythm and alternative rock radio stations in Dallas, he became an artist development representative at Universal Music Group, where he says he was pigeonholed in the urban departments of MCA, Def Jam, Interscope and Universal. Then Mike Easterlin, an Island Def Jam executive at the time, suggested he interview for the label's Southwest regional promotion post. When Marsh met then-label chief Lyor Cohen and Julie Greenwald, he recalls Cohen saying, “‘Wait, he's Black and he knows rock?! That's the fucking future.’ And that was my first

venture into the pop and rock side of the industry, which was very rare at the time.”

His career diversified from there. After promotion stints at Atlantic, Roadrunner and Warner Bros. Records, Marsh joined Scott Borchetta's Big Machine Label Group, where his friend Chris Stacey had been named GM of the revived Dot country label. “Chris always told me, ‘I don't need you to live country. I need you to know country,’” remembers Marsh. As head of Southwest regional promotion for Dot, he “took that to heart: know the artists, the music, the facts, the consumption — and the rest is your personality.” Two years ago, he moved from Dallas to join Warner Music Nashville as national director of the WAR (Warner, Atlantic, Reprise) team, working with artists like Blake Shelton, Ashley McBryde, Chris Janson and Dan + Shay. Earlier this year, he was appointed national director of radio and streaming for Warner Music Nashville and sister Nashville divisions WEA and WAR.

Marsh, 52, acknowledges the mentors who helped pave the path for his advancement. But he's also frank about the systemic racism he has faced along the way and says the Nashville music community needs to reach out to more people like himself. “I'm a big guy and give people the benefit of the doubt, but when I go backstage sometimes I'm still mistaken as security. I've learned to smile and block it out because I know my artists and executives at the label get it. But some people just can't get it through their head.” During nationwide protests in late spring, concerned family members called to ask if he was OK, “like I was going to get strung up here,” he says with a rueful laugh.

As a high-ranking Black executive in the lucrative country music industry, Marsh knows he is still one of very few. “We have to spread the wealth and push the door open more,” he says. “Times are changing; we have to correct this.” His most notable peers include Big Loud Records vp

marketing Candice Watkins, BMG Music Publishing creative director Rakiyah Marshall and Sony/ATV Nashville's recently hired vp human resources Courtney Pender.

Watkins, 38, is a longtime Nashville resident, with posts at Red Light Management, Borman Entertainment (where she was Keith Urban's day-to-day manager) and Universal Music Group Nashville on her résumé. In 2018, she was named vp marketing at Big Loud — the first company she has worked with during her 14 years in town where she says she isn't the only Black person on staff, and the first that has asked for her perspective as a Black woman, both before and since the industry's recent reckoning with racism.

"Before you can actually act, you have to listen," says Watkins. Praising Big Loud's approach, she points to having "a great network of people around me, supportive white colleagues and peers who do 'get' that the country music business is not diverse. Period." As a member of the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force that the Academy of Country Music (ACM) launched in 2019, she's eager to erase the stereotype that Black people don't like country music (one she says Black people can sometimes feed into) and to encourage her colleagues to speak out when they witness racist actions. Her own most painful and eye-opening experiences working in country music have stemmed from their silence, she says. "In all the situations that I've been in — being called the N-word or 'colored,' [hearing] racist questions and comments in front of my peers — no one ever called out the behavior," she says. "No one has really said it was wrong, apologized, empathized or even acknowledged it — until now."

Marshall, 28, who grew up on country queens like Shania Twain, Faith Hill and Rimes, joined BMG Music Publishing in 2018 as creative director after working at pop-centric Republic Records; her roster of writers now includes Lindsay Ell, Shawn Stemaly, Ryan Griffin and Emily Landis, who has her first single at radio with Gabby Barrett's "The Good Ones." She says her time in Nashville hasn't been marked by the "harshness and hate" other Black executives have experienced. But that doesn't mean she's oblivious to the not-so-subtle microaggressions sparked when she is the only Black person in the room.

She has heard two questions more times than she can count: "How did you end up here?" and "Do you like country music?" She usually responds calmly: "That's kind of a silly ques-



Clockwise from top: Guyton, Kane Brown, Rucker and Allen.

tion. I currently work in this position, so obviously I like the music." Today, she says, change in Nashville is happening "as we speak. Close friends have reached out and asked [important] questions that feel uncomfortable: I see the strength it's taking to talk about it and want change for the future. I can't expect anyone to change overnight and understand what it's like to be a Black artist or executive and [stand] in our shoes. But if we talk more, people will become aware that it's normal to be Black and sing a country song."

It was that kind of communication that led to Kane Brown's history-making performance at the BET Awards' virtual 20th-anniversary show in June, the first biracial male country artist to do so. Brown debuted his song "Worldwide Beautiful" alongside Black gospel singer Jonathan McReynolds, who sang his hit "People" — a momentous pairing that resulted from a conversation across divisions between Randy Goodman, chairman/CEO of Sony Music Nashville, and RCA Inspiration senior vp/GM Phil Thornton, who was tapped in the wake of Blackout Tuesday to lead SMN's Equality Task Force.

Goodman asked Thornton to attend a marketing meeting for Brown with Sony Music's national team. "After listening to the song," recalls Thornton, "it hit me that here was a chance for Kane to be a bridge. You've

got BET, which speaks to the African American side of Kane and introduces him to a totally different audience. Then there's the audience on CBS [which aired the awards show for the first time], which is probably more familiar with Kane. Before I knew it, I was on a thread with Kane's manager Martha Earls and the Sony team, and things moved forward."

There's good reason to think that kind of progress will continue. The ACM task force, whose members also include Guyton, is "doing real work, having real dialogue and will take real action — no performative BS," says Guyton. Before racial tensions erupted nationwide in May and June, BMG's BBR Music Group, home to Allen and Blanco Brown, had already begun working on tracks that paired Allen with pop singer Noah Cyrus ("This Is Us") and Brown with country rock band Parmalee ("Just the Way"). BBR executive vp Jon Loba predicts an increase in minority hires in Music City over the next three years. "There will be mechanisms in place to fix that," he told *Billboard* in June. "The country community's really good about doing the right thing, and I think there will be focus there now."

In the wake of Floyd's death on May 25, the Nashville Symphony's corporate partnerships manager, Kortney Toney, partnered with mtheory Nashville president Cameo Carlson and Middle Tennessee State

University College of Media and Entertainment dean Beverly Keel to form Nashville Music Equality, an organization dedicated to educating nonminority colleagues about Black Americans' struggles and encouraging them to increase minority representation in the music industry. Already, NME has put together a number of virtual panels, titled "Dear Music City," that address racial inequality in Nashville — from the executive level down to treatment of Black country fans.

And there's more reason for optimism: This fall, the National Museum of African American Music is slated to open. Overseen by CEO H. Beecher Hicks, the 56,000-square-foot building is part of the \$450 million Fifth + Broadway commercial development underway in downtown Nashville. At a press conference in February 2019, then-Mayor David Briley called investing in the museum an essential step for Music City "to get past its history of racism and to start to move to an era where African Americans both know and can tell their own history in our city."

Learning from history is crucial. But immediate and sustainable change in leveling the playing field will come only if the industry takes more concrete steps to ensure that Black artists and executives working in country — and across the board — have more equitable opportunities.

"It feels like the veil has been lifted and people are actively fired up to change this," says Guyton. She's trying to uplift fellow Black women artists, including mentoring buzzy "Stompin' Grounds" singer Reyna Roberts. After Guyton shared Roberts' cover of Carrie Underwood's "Drinking Alone" on Twitter — writing, "Country music also looks like this" — Underwood retweeted her. "It's ridiculous when people describe my music as only 'soul' or 'more like R&B,' not country," says Roberts. "I can sing the exact same song, in the exact same style, as Carrie Underwood." She is currently meeting with labels — something Guyton says she isn't sure "would have been as easy for her a few months ago."

Music City, after all, is at its best when its moniker means music for, and by, everyone. As Marshall puts it: "When we say we want change in the country genre, we're not asking you to create something different for us. We just want to have a seat at the same table."

Additional reporting by Heran Mamo, Taylor Mims, Melinda Newman and Tom Roland.

► **Brian O’Connell**

PRESIDENT OF COUNTRY TOURING, LIVE NATION

► **Julie Matway**

COO, COUNTRY NATION, LIVE NATION

► **Sally Williams**

PRESIDENT OF NASHVILLE MUSIC AND BUSINESS STRATEGY, LIVE NATION

Live Nation’s country road warrior, O’Connell, 54, spent 46 weeks on the road in 2019 guiding 13 tours and Country Megaticket, the biggest country bill in the company’s history, which featured superstars Jason Aldean, Brad Paisley, Luke Bryan, Miranda Lambert and Thomas Rhett, as well as Kane Brown. During the pandemic, he has collaborated with Live Nation president of North American venues Tom See on a series of drive-in shows with headliners Paisley and Darius Rucker. As COO of Country Nation, Matway, along with McConnell, has built a portfolio of events — including the Faster Horses Festival, which the Academy of Country Music named festival of the year in 2019. Williams, who joined Live Nation last year after nearly 20 years with Ryman Hospitality Properties, drives the company’s business and entertainment strategy in Nashville and its venues in the city — including the Ascend Amphitheater and The Quarry — and the development of new venues. The COVID-19 crisis, says O’Connell, “has not been a fun experience.”

► **Stacy Vee**

VP FESTIVAL TALENT, GOLDENVOICE;
VP ARTIST RELATIONS, MESSINA TOURING GROUP

In her two roles, Vee oversees strategy for Messina Touring Group’s roster while also booking and producing Stagecoach and Buckeye Country Superfest. Stagecoach 2020, with headliners Carrie Underwood, Thomas Rhett and Eric Church, was set to break last year’s attendance record of 80,000 festivalgoers before it was canceled, she says. “So many amazing festivals and tours never got to see light or were cut dramatically short,” says Vee. “The projects I had going were all on pace to be the best of my career — even if they didn’t materialize, I am still super proud” of that work.

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST “The video call is here to stay and may replace a lot of in-person meetings you would have previously traveled for.”

► **Adam Weiser**

VP TALENT, GLOBAL TOURING, AEG PRESENTS

In a touring year cut short by the coronavirus, Weiser still got to see Luke Combs open his *What You See Is What You Get* tour in February and booked Dan + Shay for sold-out shows at Nashville’s Bridgestone Arena in early March. The duo’s dates were “both a personal and professional highlight,” says Weiser, “as I’ve had the opportunity to work alongside [their management at] Sandbox Entertainment and [their booking firm Creative Artists Agency] throughout the guys’ career.” Plus, the shows raised \$100,000 for the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee to help victims of the tornadoes that had hit Nashville days earlier.

THE IMPACT OF THE HALT ON TOURING “It’s a balance trying to understand what the world will allow us to do at a given time and what impact [the pandemic] will have on future tour cycles.”

AGENCIES

► **Mike Betterton**

AGENT, PARADIGM TALENT AGENCY

► **Jonathan Levine**

MUSIC EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP GROUP,
PARADIGM TALENT AGENCY

Betterton arrived at Paradigm following its late-2018 acquisition of the booking division of Morris Higham Management and brought his expertise working with Old Dominion’s and Kenny Chesney’s stadium-packing tours. Levine signed Kacey Musgraves ahead of her award-sweeping success with *Golden Hour* and booked her Oh What a World Tour across six continents and 21 countries. He has guided the live and online appearances of clients Tanya Tucker, Sturgill Simpson, Margo Price and Tyler Childers. In June, he envisioned a livestream by Simpson from the Ryman Auditorium that raised over \$400,000 for the Special Forces Foundation, the Equity Alliance and the MusiCares COVID-19 relief fund.

ADVICE FOR A YOUNG ARTIST **LEVINE** “Stick to your dreams and your vision. March to your own drummer, strum to your own strummer.”

► **Marc Dennis**

CO-HEAD OF THE NASHVILLE OFFICE,
CREATIVE ARTISTS AGENCY

► **Darin Murphy**

CO-HEAD OF THE NASHVILLE OFFICE,
CREATIVE ARTISTS AGENCY

► **Jeff Krones**

MUSIC AGENT, CREATIVE ARTISTS AGENCY

► **Aaron Tannenbaum**

MUSIC AGENT, CREATIVE ARTISTS AGENCY

CAA clients Brett Eldredge, Maren Morris, Kelsea Ballerini, Brett Young and Jon Pardi each moved

from supporting slots to headliner status in the past year. “A common theme with all these artists is there isn’t a common theme,” says Krones, 38. “They’re all doing it their way and bringing new fans to the format.” CAA’s country roster began 2020 with sold-out arena tours from Luke Combs and Dan + Shay before the coronavirus halted touring. “As an agent, you make long-term recommendations to a client based on expectations for the future,” says Tannenbaum, 40. “The pandemic has significantly elevated the uncertainty around all of these things.”

HOW COUNTRY CAN HELP MOVE THE NATION FORWARD

DENNIS “Our format has always been a comfort when things get a bit uncomfortable. Our storytellers just need to keep telling their stories, and people should find solace in them.”

► **Becky Gardenhire**

PARTNER/CO-HEAD OF THE NASHVILLE OFFICE, WME

► **Jay Williams**

PARTNER/CO-HEAD OF THE NASHVILLE OFFICE, WME

► **Braeden Rountree**

PARTNER, WME

► **Nate Towne**

PARTNER, WME

“It goes without saying that this year has been difficult for so many reasons,” says Gardenhire, 39. “It’s hard to talk about business achievements while facing more urgent issues, such as a global pandemic and a long overdue reckoning regarding racial injustice in our country.” WME books many of country music’s hottest live acts, including Eric Church, Florida Georgia Line, Thomas Rhett and Zac Brown Band. But as live events were postponed or canceled beginning in March, the agency turned inward to explore “sustainable change,” says Gardenhire, in both surviving the pandemic and addressing systemic racism. “One



► HONORING COUNTRY’S BLACK PIONEERS

Henry Glover

1921-1991

One of the few prominent Black executives of his era, Glover wrote songs and scouted artists for King Records, which launched in 1943 and specialized in country music during its early years. In the studio, Glover also produced The Delmore Brothers, Hawkshaw Hawkins and Moon Mullican. —M.N.

LEE
BRICE
ONE
OF
THEM
GIRLS



of the ways we [as an industry] can start is by hiring more diverse candidates for musicians for road crews, executive roles at agencies, labels, etc.," she says. "We must be intentional about creating those opportunities."

► **Josh Garrett**

AGENT, MUSIC, UTA

► **Nick Meinema**

NASHVILLE MUSIC LEADERSHIP, UTA

Post Malone wasn't an obvious booking for the July 2019 edition of Wyoming's annual country-focused Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo and Western Celebration, but Meinema sensed that putting the hip-hop star alongside acts like Keith Urban, Tim McGraw and Lady A would work. He was correct: Post Malone's addition to the lineup contributed to the fastest one-day sellout in the 100-plus-year history of the rodeo and Western celebration, he says. Meinema, Garrett and their colleagues work with artists ranging from veteran Toby Keith to Blanco Brown.

THE SONG HE TURNS TO " 'If We Make It Through December' by Merle Haggard."

MEDIA

► **Charlie Cook**

VP COUNTRY FORMATS, CUMULUS MEDIA; OPERATIONS MANAGER, CUMULUS NASHVILLE; PROGRAM DIRECTOR, WSM-FM NASHVILLE

► **Paul Williams**

DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING, WESTWOOD ONE, NASHVILLE; PROGRAM DIRECTOR, WKDF NASHVILLE

Radio is still king in country music, and the battle for listeners couldn't be more competitive than in Nashville itself. Cook — who advises all Cumulus country stations nationwide, oversees the Cumulus outlets in Nashville and handles day-to-day programming at WSM-FM (Nash Icon) — says that even amid the coronavirus, his team "has overperformed at every level." In April, Cumulus tapped Williams to oversee Westwood One's syndicated country programs and to be program director of WKDF (103.3 Country).

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST **COOK** "I know that I can do almost everything from home. One snowflake and I am logging on."

► **RJ Curtis**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COUNTRY RADIO BROADCASTERS

In February, one month before the pandemic shut down public gatherings, Curtis, 61, oversaw CRS 2020 in Nashville, "a very complicated event involving a million pieces of detail," he says. While precise attendance was not reported, Curtis says there were about 3,000 participants. They were drawn by an agenda that included onstage interviews with Eric Church, Carrie Underwood, Miranda Lambert and Rascal Flatts — and an acoustic set by Garth Brooks during a tribute to late country radio legend Bob Kingsley.

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST "Employers will place a greater emphasis on the health and safety of their staff on both a physical and emotional level."

► **John Foxx**

PROGRAM DIRECTOR, WNSH-FM NEW YORK

► **Tim Roberts**

VP PROGRAMMING/COUNTRY FORMAT CAPTAIN, ENTERCOM COMMUNICATIONS; PROGRAM DIRECTOR, WYCD-WOMC-WDZH DETROIT

In 2019 Entercom acquired WNSH-FM (New York's Country 94.7), and, under Foxx, ranks as the company's No. 1 station nationwide with over 1 million weekly listeners. Roberts oversees 22 country outlets for Entercom and day-to-day programming for Detroit country powerhouse WYCD (as well as classic hits WOMC and adult contemporary WDZH). He says the chain's reach has allowed it to serve listeners nationwide during the pandemic. "Because of Entercom's news presence in major markets such as New York, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis and others," says Roberts, "we were able to deliver critical up-to-the-minute information on our country brands, websites, social platforms and Radio.com."

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST **ROBERTS** "Innovation. The pandemic has made us all look at the business differently, develop efficiencies and connect in new, effective ways."

► **Leslie Fram**

SENIOR VP MUSIC AND TALENT, CMT

Under Fram, her company in February launched CMT Equal Play, a plan for a 50/50 gender mix for artists whose videos air on CMT and CMT Music channels. CMT also partnered with Coleman Insights to release CMT Equal Play Radio Research, with insights into country radio listeners' habits and attitudes toward female artists. CMT's research "proved what we've known all along: Fans want to hear more women on the radio," says Fram. "Now it's time to lock arms and demand industrywide change."

ADVICE FOR A YOUNG ARTIST "Follow your arrow."

► **Phil Guerini**

VP MUSIC STRATEGY, DISNEY CHANNELS WORLDWIDE; GM, RADIO DISNEY NETWORK

This past year, Guerini, 56, oversaw the opening of a new studio on Music Row for the satellite station Radio Disney Country. Originating from that studio is the "Let the Girls Play" segment promoting female country artists. (A weekly country feature block on Music Choice airs from Burbank, Calif.) Disney also secured a deal with Entercom that brought its country station, which focuses on females 17-24, to the Radio.com platform.

THE SONG HE TURNS TO "Carrie Underwood's 'Love Wins' because this song's lyrics sum up perfectly what I believe, and Carrie's delivery of this message is flawless."

► **Cameron Lutz**

MUSIC PARTNERSHIPS, FACEBOOK/INSTAGRAM

Lutz, 28, helped launch Facebook and Instagram's Women of Nashville Brunch in June 2019 — hosted by Little Big Town's Karen Fairchild and Kimberly Schlapman with Kelsea Ballerini — to give female artists and executives a place to offer mutual support. Since joining Facebook in 2015, he has worked with Garth Brooks, Blake Shelton, Florida Georgia Line, Luke Combs, Midland and others to connect with fans on the platform.

THE IMPACT OF THE HALT ON TOURING "We've seen such incredible artist-fan moments online, which I hope for the fans will continue to thrive."

► **Rod Phillips**

EXECUTIVE VP PROGRAMMING FOR IHEARTCOUNTRY, IHEARTMEDIA

► **Bobby Bones**

VP/CREATIVE DIRECTOR, IHEARTCOUNTRY; HOST, *THE BOBBY BONES SHOW*, IHEARTMEDIA

► **Meg Stevens**

SENIOR VP PROGRAMMING FOR ATLANTA, IHEARTMEDIA; PROGRAM DIRECTOR, WUBL ATLANTA

Phillips oversees iHeartMedia's country stations in over 150 markets that reach more than 109 million listeners per month through broadcast and digital platforms, according to the company. In an extension of his multiplatform brand beyond country, Bones announced in May that he'll host a new weekly travel TV show, *Breaking Bobby Bones*, in partnership with *National Geographic* and BBC Studios. In Atlanta, where her station WUBL (94.9 The Bull) airs Bones' syndicated daily show, Stevens moved the outlet into the market's overall top 10 ahead of the pandemic in its target 25-54 demographic. "This occurred simultaneously with the

BIG LOUD

R E C O R D S



HERE'S TO BEING
BIG & LOUD
FOR FIVE YEARS

...AND MANY MORE TO COME

CHRIS LANE · JAKE OWEN · MORGAN WALLEN · HARDY
ASHLAND CRAFT · ERNEST · LARRY FLEET · MACKENZIE PORTER · MASON RAMSEY
SEAN STEMALY · HAILEY WHITTERS · MADISON KOZAK · BEN BURGESS

EXIT/IN — one of the indie venues that has joined Music Venue Alliance Nashville since the pandemic began — in July.



THE NEXT STAGE

After a COVID-19 case spike, Nashville's most vaunted rooms eye safe ways to reopen — while the city's indie venues struggle with a tough road ahead

BY TAYLOR MIMS

ON JUNE 13 AND 14, OVER 200 friends and patrons of Nashville's Douglas Corner came to an indoor yard sale. Wearing masks, they picked up pieces of the venue's storied history — posters, stage equipment, merchandise — and said goodbye to a place they had never imagined losing. After nearly 34 years, owner Mervin Louque had announced the official closure of his singer-songwriter haven where artists such as John Prine, Jon Bon Jovi, Garth Brooks and Neil Diamond had once dropped in to watch shows.

"This COVID thing changed everything," says Louque. When he announced Douglas Corner's closure, the Nashville community rallied around him, from individuals offering to set up GoFundMe campaigns to groups of investors — including Nashville Songwriters Association International executive director Bart Herbison, who helps run the famed Bluebird Cafe — offering to help out. But "there was no real way of knowing when things would get back to normal, if they would," says Louque, so he decided against fundraising, fearing expenses would leave him back at square one. He now plans to reopen Douglas Corner on his farm on the outskirts of Nashville as a

livestreaming room available to a limited in-person audience.

Louque is just one of many Nashville venue owners facing difficult questions about whether, and how, to reopen for business. Tennessee's initial efforts to contain the coronavirus came up short, and in early July, Mayor John Cooper announced that due to a spike in cases, the city would move back a phase in its reopening. A modified phase two allows music venues to operate at 50% capacity or a maximum of 250 people — but for independent venues like the 500-capacity EXIT/IN or 1,800-person Marathon Music Works, those numbers don't add up to financial feasibility.

"Restarting the engine just isn't that easy," says EXIT/IN owner and Marathon co-founder Chris Cobb, who is also a member of the nonprofit Music Venue Alliance Nashville that formed in response to the pandemic. To reopen, owners need to rehire staff, find and book local bands, restock inventory (from alcohol to toilet paper) and introduce new safety protocols, such as sanitation stations, wireless ticket scanners and contactless points of sale. Of the 16 indie venues that MVAN represents, 14 have remained closed since March, and the two that reopened

at 50% ceased operations within weeks.

"When you're dealing with such limited resources, like we all are right now since we've got no money and no staff, you really have to protect where you choose to focus those extremely limited resources," says Cobb. "If you falter and you put them in the wrong place, you run the risk of depleting them 100%."

Nashville has had a turbulent 2020. Even before the pandemic prompted mass-gathering bans across the United States, a tornado that hit the city on March 2 demolished indie venue The Basement East and stalled the grand opening of Brooklyn Bowl Nashville. (It still has not opened to the public.) On July 27, White House adviser Dr. Deborah Birx recommended that Tennessee shut down all bars and limit indoor seating at restaurants as the state passed 100,000 confirmed cases. Gov. Bill Lee declined to follow the recommendation, even as the state recorded more cases per 100,000 citizens than California — the state with the most positive tests, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and where concerts of any size have been banned since March.

"We're in a wait-and-see situation," says Bridgestone Arena senior vp

entertainment and marketing David Kells. "Everybody's being flexible and having contingencies, but also realizing that we're not all completely in control of this." The 20,000-capacity venue, which regularly hosts the annual Country Music Association Awards in November, is working with Davidson County's Metro Public Health Department to develop plans to safely host private events and audience-free shows.

Kells says that in the face of the pandemic, the live community has united for the benefit of venues large and small: "Everybody's hypercollaborative and totally willing to share their plan — just dumping entire documents on a shared drive." He is part of a weekly call discussing best practices with over 20 Tennessee facilities, including Bristol Motor Speedway (where 20,000 fans attended the NASCAR All-Star Race in July), and promoters like Live Nation Nashville (which hosted drive-in concerts by Brad Paisley and Darius Rucker in the parking lot of Nashville's Nissan Stadium). "As people start opening up and doing things in a smart way, it paves the road for all of us to follow," adds Kells.

On Aug. 14, Ryman Auditorium will kick off Live at the Ryman, a performance series featuring paid livestream access, with a show from For King & Country. In partnership with Vanderbilt University Medical Center and Metro Public Health, the Ryman plans to test a hybrid model of livestreams with a limited number of in-person concertgoers in the near future. "It's a glimmer of hope for some sense of normalcy," says Opry Group Entertainment president Scott Bailey. "If this does work, then it's a repeatable model."

While Opry Group Entertainment has hosted audience-free shows for 20 weeks with help from local health agencies, independent venues are seeking other ways to wait out indefinite closures. MVAN is petitioning city council members who oversee the COVID-19 Response Fund to create another fund from the federal CARES Act money Nashville has received. It would contain roughly \$2 million: under 2% of what the city received in relief funding, but enough to guarantee MVAN's venues could survive closure through March 2021.

Cobb says it is a struggle to secure relief funds amid the county's widespread needs related to the tornado and the pandemic. Still, he's hopeful. "It feels like a lot of people are taking live music for granted right now, and I'm afraid the result is going to be that we're going to lose a lot of it," he says. "But I would take independent music operators up against just about anybody else when it comes to ability to hustle and figure it out and in the right way."

ROUND HILL MUSIC
CONGRATULATES

**MARK
BROWN**

2020
billboard
COUNTRY
POWER
PLAYER

Congratulations to Mark on this special achievement being named one of Billboard's 2020 Country Power Players! You've built an awesome company with us here in Nashville. Also, congrats to our Power Player team of superstar songwriters and amazing staff who make it all possible!

*Love & Best Wishes,
Your Round Hill Family*

**ROUND
HILL
MUSIC**



► HONORING COUNTRY'S BLACK PIONEERS

Linda Martell

Born 1941

After 44 years on the air, the Grand Ole Opry welcomed Martell to its stage in 1969, making her the first Black woman to perform on the famed showcase. Known for hits like "Color Him Father" and "Before the Next Tear-drop Falls," the South Carolina native played the Opry several more times before retreating from the spotlight in the mid-'70s. —M.N.



Apple acquired in 2018, Herman has helped fans discover breakout country artists including Gabby Barrett and Blanco Brown. "The integration of Shazam's data within the Apple Music for Artists dashboard has been a game-changer for artists," says Herman, "as they can see how and where their music is reacting with their fans."

THE SONG SHE TURNS TO HERMAN "On the Road Again" by Willie Nelson. I challenge anyone to not smile when singing along to that."

► **John Marks**

GLOBAL HEAD OF COUNTRY, SPOTIFY

► **Brittany Schaffer**

HEAD OF ARTIST AND LABEL PARTNERSHIPS, NASHVILLE, SPOTIFY

► **Rachel Whitney**

HEAD OF EDITORIAL, NASHVILLE, SPOTIFY

Marks oversees 30-plus country playlists on Spotify, including Hot Country, currently the fourth-most popular genre playlist worldwide on the streaming platform, according to the company. In 2018, the Country Music Association honored Marks — who leads Spotify's initiative to increase global consumption of country — for his work advocating for the genre outside of the United States. In February, Whitney left YouTube to join Spotify as its head of editorial for Nashville. Schaffer, 35, who is Spotify's link to artists and labels, made certain that the Music Health Alliance of Nashville was one of 20 organizations that benefited from Spotify's COVID-19 Music Relief Project that launched March 25. The company will match up to \$10 million in donations to organizations supporting artists in need.

THE SONG SHE TURNS TO SCHAFFER "The House That Built Me" by Miranda Lambert. It relaxes me and gives me a sense of being grounded."

► **Kelly Rich**

COUNTRY MUSIC LEAD, LABEL RELATIONS, AMAZON MUSIC

► **Emily Cohen**

SENIOR MUSIC CURATOR, COUNTRY, AMAZON MUSIC

(See story, page 48.)

▼
Brown (below), *Billboard's* top new country artist of 2019, works with UTA agents Garrett and Meinema.



challenge of moving out of our building and learning the best way to work remotely," she says. "It has been a very challenging and productive year."

HOW COUNTRY CAN HELP MOVE THE NATION FORWARD

STEVENS "We all must do better to increase diversity and inclusion within the industry, speak out anytime we see racism [and] take action."

► **J.R. Schumann**

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF MUSIC PROGRAMMING, SIRIUSXM

Schumann, who oversees country and Christian programming for SiriusXM, including the satellite broadcaster's influential channel The Highway, last year guided partnerships with major country events including Stagecoach. This year, amid the pandemic, "we partnered with Stagecoach to create a virtual version of the festival based on their planned 2020 lineup and had the artists submit 'at home' performances. It took over what would have been Stagecoach weekend on The Highway and was a huge success."

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST "Our industry's ability to adapt."

STREAMING

► **Beville Dunkerley**

HEAD OF COUNTRY MUSIC, PANDORA

Dunkerley oversees country programming that draws some 20 million consistent listeners to Pandora, according to the company, and the size of that audience has spiked during lockdown. Listening hours on the Today's Country station rose 52% from March to early May, according to Pandora. But Dunkerley sees her greatest accomplishment of 2020 as "learning how to juggle." Like millions of other parents, she has had

to home-school her sons and "wear my mom hat 24/7 without skipping a beat at work."

THE SONG SHE TURNS TO "Darrell Scott's 'It's a Great Day To Be Alive,' made famous by Travis Tritt. It just reminds me that my problems are small and my blessings are vast."

► **Margaret Hart**

LABEL RELATIONS MANAGER, YOUTUBE

► **Copeland Isaacson**

ARTIST RELATIONS MANAGER, YOUTUBE MUSIC

Hart, 34, and Isaacson, 38, have collaborated on numerous YouTube initiatives to promote country artists, including Cash Fest, featuring Midland, Grace Potter, Little Big Town and others, which took place at Nashville's War Memorial Auditorium last November ahead of the premiere of the YouTube Originals documentary *The Gift: The Journey of Johnny Cash*. During the pandemic, says Isaacson, "the entire industry is shifting release strategies and reevaluating how they can engage fans in the 'new normal.' And we really feel it's our duty to help partners navigate that shift on YouTube and beyond."

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST ISAACSON "Streaming is exploding for country music."

► **Jay Liepis**

HEAD OF MUSIC BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS, APPLE MUSIC NASHVILLE

► **Debra Herman**

MUSIC PARTNERSHIPS, SHAZAM, APPLE MUSIC

Under Liepis, Apple Music in Nashville last year launched new playlists and a weekly radio show on Beats 1, *Today's Country* (with host Kelleigh Bannen), reaffirming the streaming platform's commitment to the genre. Liepis has put Apple Music behind releases including Luke Combs' *What You See Is What You Get* and Miranda Lambert's *Wildcard*. Working with Shazam, which



GLOBAL
MUSIC
RIGHTS

CONGRATULATES

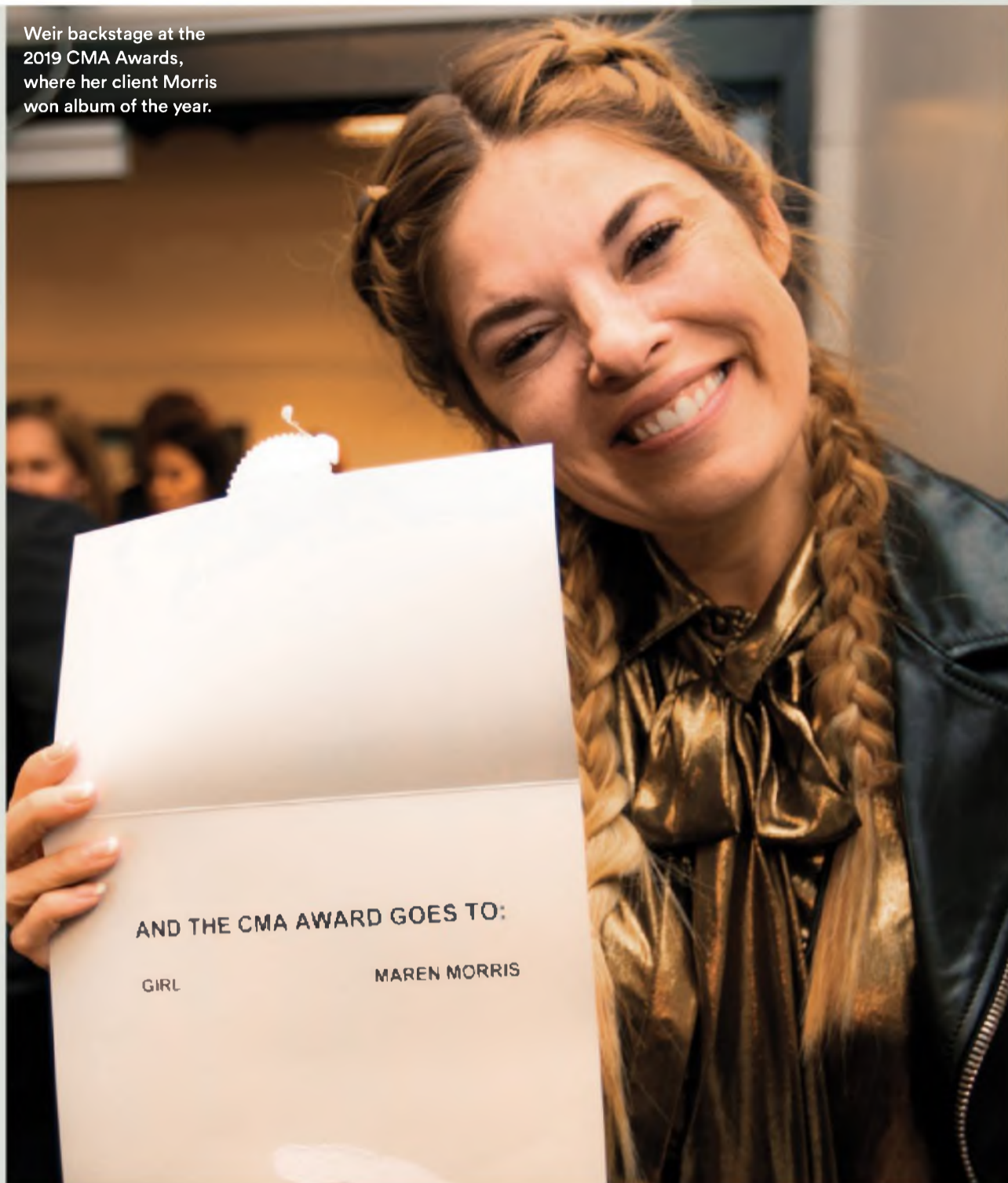
**SHANE
MCANALLY**



billboard

**COUNTRY
POWER
TRAILBLAZER
AWARD**

Weir backstage at the 2019 CMA Awards, where her client Morris won album of the year.



► Janet Weir

MANAGER, RED LIGHT MANAGEMENT; OWNER, HOUSE OF 42

IT MAKES SENSE THAT A COUNTRY SONG beginning with the lyric “we’re in the home stretch of the hard times” would take off after the double whammy that hit Nashville in early 2020: a tornado in March and the pandemic lockdown just a couple of weeks later. Maren Morris’ “The Bones” single had been out for over a year when it hit No. 1 on the March 14-dated Hot Country Songs. It ultimately spent 19 weeks at the summit, a record for a solo female artist.

The crossover smash led Adult Pop Songs on the survey dated April 11 and also logged time on the Hot 100, Adult Alternative Songs, Adult Contemporary and Pop Songs charts. “It just naturally got into some big pop playlists,” says Janet Weir, Morris’ manager. “I remember saying to Maren, ‘I feel like this is just the beginning of this song.’ It provides so much comfort for people because it talks about the most important foundations of a relationship.”

When the pandemic hit, Morris, 30, was already planning to take time off from her career — she and her husband, country singer-songwriter Ryan Hurd, had a son in late March — so the first few weeks of quarantine didn’t affect Weir, 46, much. “At first, I felt like, ‘We’re going to be fine; we already planned on several months.’” Weir had booked Morris for 2020 festivals such as Austin City Limits and

Lollapalooza, “but I needed to have an A plan, a B plan and a C plan for whatever way this goes. The C plan was moving everything to 2021 — and we did that.”

“Girl,” the title-track first single off Morris’ early-2019 album on Sony Nashville, went to No. 1 on Country Airplay last year, then peaked at No. 44 on the Hot 100. If she were touring this year, particularly on high-profile pop and country festivals, the one-two hit-single punch might have pushed her to broader pop stardom, which started with Zedd’s 2018 dance/pop smash, “The Middle” (featuring Morris and Grey). Instead, like every artist, she’s stuck at home, writing songs. “It’s time to dip into creative mode again,” says Weir, who also manages Hurd and works with Morris’ group, The Highwomen.

Weir started her career as an intern at Nettwerk, signing Old Crow Medicine Show to a label deal before relocating to Red Light Management in Los Angeles. After signing Morris and moving to Nashville, Weir named her company House of 42, in part because Morris’ album *Hero* hit No. 1 on Weir’s 42nd birthday. “I’ve stuck with it and waited for the right thing to happen,” says Weir. “A big part of that was meeting Maren before she was signed and believing in her.” —STEVE KNOPPER

PUBLISHING

► Mark Brown

SENIOR VP/GM, ROUND HILL MUSIC NASHVILLE

Last November, Round Hill writer Ashley Gorley was named songwriter of the year at the ASCAP Country Music Awards for the seventh time. Round Hill’s Jimmy Robbins co-wrote Maren Morris’ “The Bones,” a record-setter on Hot Country Songs. “But the one I’m most proud of is our writer-artist Katie Pruitt,” says Brown, 63. Pruitt wrote or co-wrote all of the tracks on her Rounder Records debut album, *Expectations*, which arrived in February. “It is particularly rewarding,” he says, “when you see the growth and the accomplishment from a young writer that you believe in.”

HOW COUNTRY CAN HELP MOVE THE NATION FORWARD

“Our artists have a really big platform to push for positive change. Likewise, our songwriters have a big pen — and they can use that pen and the power of the word to affect change.”

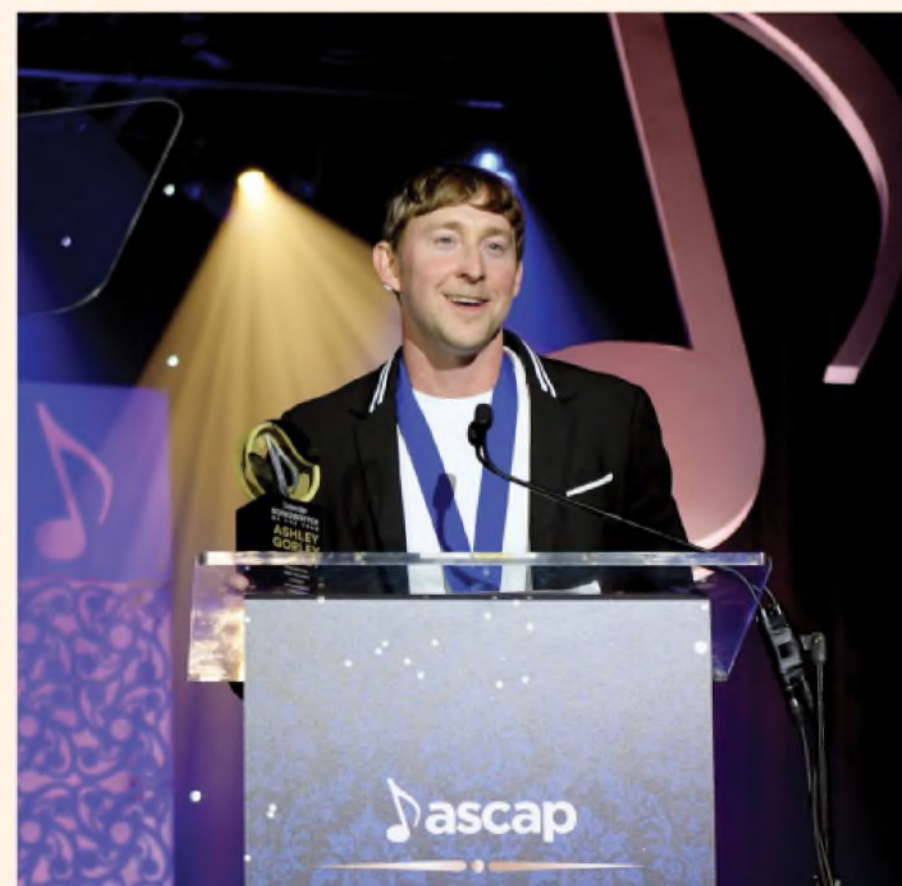
► Stephanie Cox

SENIOR VP CREATIVE, KOBALT

Kobalt Nashville reports that it had a publisher’s share in 14 No. 1 singles on Country Airplay in 2019. Cox says that after helping to guide HARDY’s success as a writer for acts such as Blake Shelton and Florida Georgia Line, as well as for his own recordings (“One Beer”), the publishing veteran is focused on Hayley McLean, whose co-write “Hope” landed on *Grey’s Anatomy*. “My passion and successes,” says Cox, “have resulted from finding and working with talented writers at the onset of their careers.”

THE IMPACT OF THE HALT ON TOURING COX “Although it greatly saddens me to see the livelihoods of musicians threatened, it has given me the opportunity to see more artists ‘live’ on social media — some I might not have had the opportunity to get out to see in normal circumstances.”

▼ Gorley (below), published by Round Hill, was named songwriter of the year at ASCAP’s Country Music Awards for the seventh time in 2019.



"When writing with Shane it's a miracle we ever leave the room with any fully-finished songs because we LAUGH so much the whole time. He's pure joy to be around and I'm so incredibly thankful for the impact he's made on music and my life."

- **Kacey Musgraves**

First #1 "Mama's Broken Heart"
Miranda Lambert
2013

"Shane's creative intuition is as sharp as anyone I've ever been around. You're a better songwriter when you're in the room with him."

- **Sam Hunt**

First #1 "Come Over"
Kenny Chesney
2012

"Shane makes every writer in the room better. He has this amazing ability to always know where the song needs to go - he recognizes where it is great, when it is boring, and where it needs to go. When I write with him, I have absolute confidence not only in him but also in myself, and that makes it almost impossible not to be inspired and energized."

- **Trevor Rosen**

First #1 "Better Dig Two"
The Band Perry
2013

billboard

TRAILBLAZER AWARD
SHANE MCANALLY

"When I met Shane over 10 years ago he saw something in me that I wasn't even sure I saw in myself. Writing with him has made me a better songwriter, a better listener, and most importantly a better champion of others. Whether you've had zero hits or fifty, the second you walk in that room he believes in you and I don't know if he'll ever know how much that has meant to so many people."

- **Josh Osborne**

First #1 "Come Over"
Kenny Chesney
2012

"Shane is just pure, wild talent wrapped into this red headed ball of energy that explodes joy & mischief into every room he walks into. His passion for music & life flows out of him as naturally as his infectious laugh and million dollar smile. To get to write and be friends with Shane is a gift I wish everyone could have."

- **Midland**

First #1 "Drinkin' Problem"
Midland
2017

"Every time I am fortunate enough to write a song with Shane, I am somehow a better writer. From the first song we wrote to the most recent one.

He has a way of making everyone in the room the very best version of themselves. And he is always the very best version of himself as a result. Which is a real creative force unlike anyone else I have ever known."

- **Brandy Clark**

First #1 "Mama's Broken Heart"
Miranda Lambert
2013

"Shane has taught me how to dig deep and pull out the most painful or most joyful parts of myself and put them into song form. He does that so effortlessly and naturally you can't help but follow that lead. The day we wrote 'Say You Do' was the first day I learned that being vulnerable can take you to some unbelievable places."

- **Matthew Ramsey**

First #1 "Say You Do"
Dierks Bentley
2015

"Writing with Shane was like being handed a box of crayons after only having a pencil. He encouraged my wildest ideas and suddenly they came spilling out over the radio."

- **JT Harding**

First #1 "Somewhere With You"
Kenny Chesney
2011

**YOU NEVER FORGET
YOUR FIRST**

"Shane's creative ability is no secret with the long list of hits he's written, but his greatest gift is his ability to bring out the best in everyone he's around, in and out of the writing room. This list of first time #1's clearly speaks for that and we're lucky to call him not only one of our favorite collaborators, but a dear friend."

- **Brothers Osborne**

First #1 "Stay A Little Longer"
Brothers Osborne
2016

*ALL QUOTED EARNED THEIR
FIRST NUMBER 1 WITH SHANE

SMACK

► **Rusty Gaston**

CEO, SONY/ATV MUSIC PUBLISHING NASHVILLE

Gaston, 44, arrived in January as the new head of Sony/ATV in Nashville from his own independent THiS Music (which Sony/ATV acquired when he joined the company). He helped re-sign Cole Swindell and Jon Pardi and recruited Ben Hayslip (co-writer of Luke Bryan's "Huntin', Fishin' and Lovin' Every Day") and Josh Kear (co-writer of Carrie Underwood's "Before He Cheats"). "During this uncharted time, I'm so proud of how our team has come together," says Gaston, "solely focused on deepening relationships with songwriters."

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST "Virtual [songwriting] sessions have encouraged new relationships and opportunities that wouldn't have occurred otherwise, and I think songwriters are excited about that."

► **Michael Knox**

SENIOR VP NASHVILLE, PEERMUSIC;
FOUNDER, MUSIC KNOX RECORDS

Knox, 53, who runs both peermusic's Nashville operation and his own Music Knox Records in partnership with BMG, sold the royalties he will receive for producing Jason Aldean's albums to Merck Mercuriadis' Hipgnosis Songs in June 2019 and, as a producer, reached a career milestone this year of over 24 million albums sold. Besides his dual executive roles, he hosts the syndicated radio show *Knox Country 360*, which airs weekly in 30 markets. "I wear a lot of hats," says Knox, who is the son of pioneering rockabilly singer-songwriter Buddy Knox.

ADVICE FOR A YOUNG ARTIST "Don't be afraid of taking the long path. You have to put in the work and the time."

► **Steve Markland**

EXECUTIVE VP A&R,
DOWNTOWN MUSIC PUBLISHING NASHVILLE

Downtown Music singer-songwriter Yola earned four nominations at the 62nd annual Grammy Awards, including a best new artist nod. Kelly Archer co-wrote Travis Denning's "After a Few," a chart-topper on Country Airplay, while Marc Beeson's co-write "How They Remember You" for Rascal Flatts reached No. 24 on Hot Country Songs. But Markland says he takes pride in a simpler accomplishment: "connecting our writers around the world from our living rooms."

THE SONG HE TURNS TO "Don Williams' 'I Believe in You.' It's simple, brilliant and reminds us all to slow down and love one another and focus on what is important in life."

► **Rakiyah Marshall**

CREATIVE DIRECTOR, BMG MUSIC PUBLISHING

(See story, page 54.)

► **Shane McAnally**

FOUNDER/CEO, SMACKSONGS;
CO-PRESIDENT, MONUMENT RECORDS

(See story, page 53.)

► **Mike Molinar**

GM, BIG MACHINE MUSIC

With a publishing share in two massive hits — "The Bones" by Maren Morris and "10,000 Hours" by Dan + Shay and Justin Bieber — Molinar, 44, notes



▲ Spirit Music Nashville has a publisher's share of "Body Like a Back Road" by Hunt (top) and "Meant To Be," recorded by Rexha and Florida Georgia Line.

that Big Machine Music has had a presence atop Hot Country Songs for 40 consecutive weeks. Earlier this year, Laura Veltz ruled Country Songwriters for five weeks with her co-writes on "The Bones," Lady A's "What If I Never Get Over You" and Ryan Hurd's "To a T." For 2019, Big Machine Music ranked at No. 3 on *Billboard's* Hot Country Publisher Corporations year-end recap, behind only Warner Chappell Music Nashville and Sony/ATV Nashville.

THE IMPACT OF THE HALT ON TOURING "Most artists are putting an emphasis on listening or writing right now, which means increased co-writing and pitch opportunities."

► **Frank Rogers**

CEO, SPIRIT MUSIC NASHVILLE;
FOUNDER/PRESIDENT, FLUID MUSIC REVOLUTION

Hitmaking songwriter-producer Rogers was named CEO of Spirit Music Nashville in 2019, and among his signings was David Garcia, co-writer of Bebe Rexha and Florida Georgia Line's "Meant To Be." A publishing share of that track and Sam Hunt's "Body Like a Back Road," respectively, gave Spirit the No. 1 and No. 2 Hot Country Songs of the Decade. Earlier this year, says Rogers, "we also had three No. 1 Country Airplay singles in a row," with Spirit writers contributing to Kenny Chesney's "Here and Now," Scotty McCreery's "In Between" and the Carly Pearce-Lee Brice duet "I Hope You're Happy Now."

ADVICE FOR A YOUNG ARTIST "Don't be 'the next' anything. Be 'the first' you."

► **Troy Tomlinson**

CHAIRMAN/CEO, UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP
NASHVILLE

Tomlinson, 56, had been president/CEO of Sony/ATV Nashville from 2005 until June 2019 when he was named UMPG Nashville's first chairman/CEO — and in February, Taylor Swift left Sony/ATV to reunite with him as her publisher. Kenny Chesney, whom Tomlinson had signed while working at Acuff-Rose Music, has also rejoined him at UMPG Nashville. "We've come together to grow our roster with high-quality, proven signings," says Tomlinson, including Brad Tursi, Ray Fulcher, Justin Ebach, Caitlyn Smith, Jacob Davis, John Pierce, Shane Minor and Jeff Middleton.

ADVICE FOR A YOUNG ARTIST "If you don't know who you are, you better figure it out pretty damn quickly. No one else can do that for you."

► **Ben Vaughn**

PRESIDENT/CEO, WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC NASHVILLE

(See story, page 44.)

PERFORMING RIGHTS

► **Clay Bradley**

VP CREATIVE, NASHVILLE, BMI

Bradley succeeded Jody Williams as BMI vp creative in Nashville in February, a month before the COVID-19 crisis hit. "It was a strange time to step into this role," says Bradley, for whom the BMI move is a homecoming of sorts: Earlier in his career, he spent seven years as an assistant vp in BMI's writer/publisher department, signing Toby Keith and Kenny Chesney, among others. Prior to his return, Bradley was CEO of Eclipse Music Group, working with singer-songwriters Katie Pruitt and Payton Smith.

HOW COUNTRY CAN HELP MOVE THE NATION FORWARD "The more this community speaks up about inclusiveness, diversity and unity, [the more] I believe the fans will listen and follow."

► **Mike Sistad**

VP NASHVILLE MEMBERSHIP, ASCAP

When the 58th annual ASCAP Country Music Awards are given out in November, the organization can draw from the experience of presenting its virtual Rhythm & Soul Music Awards July 15-17, as well as the ASCAP Experience: Home Edition this summer. "We have been able to maintain our strong relationships with our writer and publisher friends during a very challenging time," says Sistad, 56. "Learning to work remotely as a cohesive team has only strengthened our ability to serve our members when we're on the other side of this."

THE SONG HE TURNS TO "Lord, I Hope This Day Is Good," recorded by Don Williams and written by Dave Hanner. "When I question things in the world, this simple message helps me put things in perspective."

► **Kelli Turner**

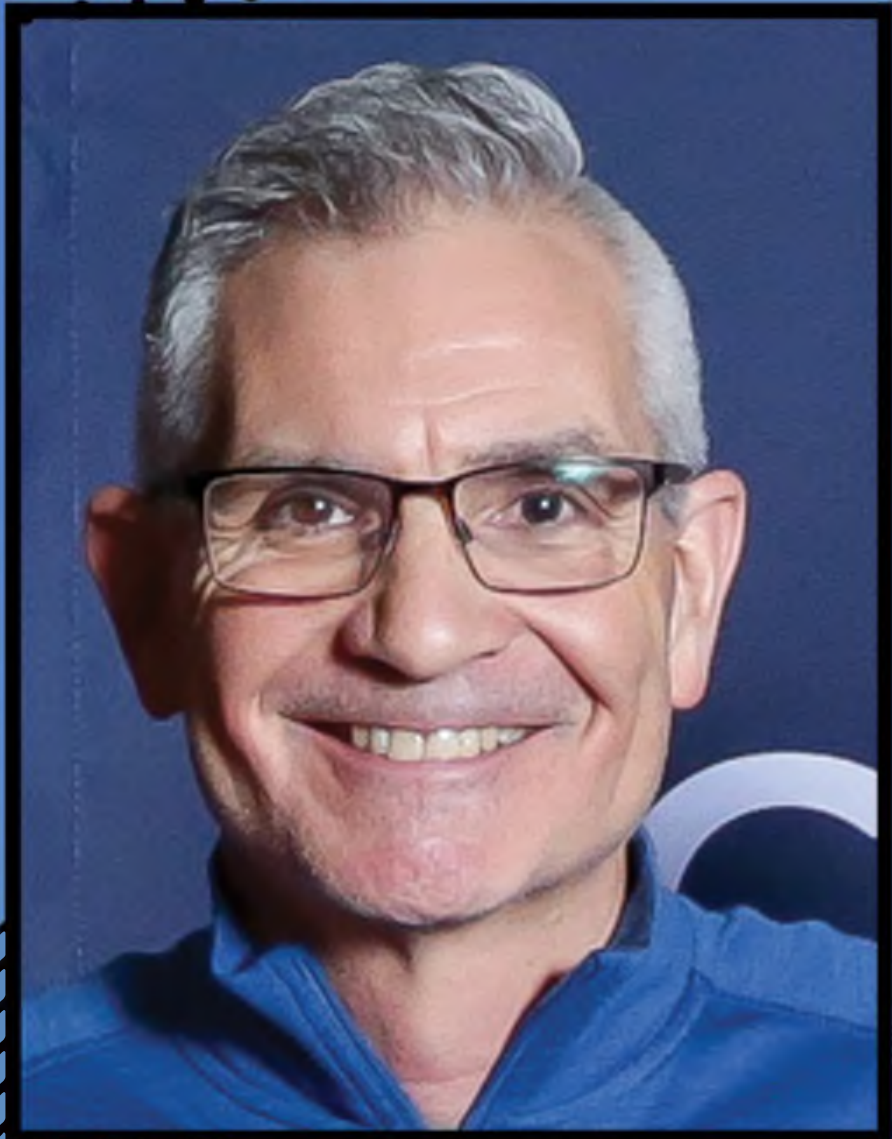
PRESIDENT/COO, SESAC

SESAC's Nashville members include Lady A's Hillary Scott, Runaway June, Blanco Brown, Jimmie Allen and SESAC's 2019 songwriter of the year, Justin Ebach, who penned Dustin Lynch's hit

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LOVE, JASON



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▶ COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS 2020

“Good Girl” and Brett Young’s “Here Tonight.” In August 2019, Turner oversaw SESAC’s refinancing of its capital structure. The performing rights organization sold \$530 million in debt and gained commitments for a \$30 million revolving credit facility. Turner says the money moves make SESAC “more dynamic and eager to strike the best deals for our affiliate songwriters and publishers.”

ADVICE FOR A YOUNG SONGWRITER “Participate with co-writers as much as possible, and register your songs and recordings. Copyright protection is essential to earning a living as an artist or songwriter.”

LEGAL

▶ Derek Crowover ▶ Tiffany Dunn

PARTNERS, LOEB & LOEB

Loeb & Loeb recruited Crowover and members of his team of lawyers from Dickinson Wright last fall. The firm now represents an impressive roster of artists (Carrie Underwood, Jordan Davis, Matt Stell, Sam Hunt), songwriters (Ashley Gorley, Craig Wiseman, Luke Laird) and companies (Big Loud Records, Spirit Music Nashville, MV2 Entertainment). “[By] adding those attorneys,” says Dunn, “we were able to broaden our areas of expertise and capacity as well as expand our client base, which also includes Kane Brown and Luke Combs.” During the pandemic, she says, “I have come to realize that distance doesn’t have to mean interruption or disruption.”

HOW COUNTRY CAN HELP MOVE THE NATION FORWARD

DUNN “The country music community has the trust of millions of listeners. It should do what it can to reach the listeners where they are — whether that be in a place of hurt, despair, fear, confusion or misunderstanding.”

▶ Rusty Jones

ATTORNEY, LAW OFFICE OF RUSSELL A. JONES JR.

Jones keeps his list of clients confidential, but they’re said to include Garth Brooks, Trisha Yearwood, Tim McGraw and Toby Keith. During the pandemic, Jones says he has been involved with “television, theatrical and social media productions that have brought joy during these trying times. We have stayed very busy.” What word would Jones use to describe the country community right now? “Survivors,” he says.

THE SONG HE TURNS TO “‘Can’t Tell Me Nothin’ by Tim McGraw. [I play it] when I see federal, state and local leaders who still do not believe in science, social distancing or face masks.”

▶ Joel Katz

FOUNDING CHAIRMAN OF THE GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE/FOUNDING SHAREHOLDER OF THE ATLANTA OFFICE, GREENBERG TRAURIG

▶ Jess Rosen

SHAREHOLDER/CO-CHAIR, ATLANTA ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE, GREENBERG TRAURIG

The June 2019 sale of Big Machine Label Group to Scooter Braun’s Ithaca Holdings and The Carlyle Group was certainly one of Nashville’s biggest recent deals, but it is far from Katz’s only high-profile Music City negotiation over the last 18 months. Warner Music Nashville chairman/CEO John Esposito and Sony Music Nashville chairman/CEO Randy Goodman turned to Katz for the most recent extensions of their employment agreements, and Katz renewed the deal between Jason Owen’s Sandbox Entertainment and Ithaca Holdings in 2019. Rosen negotiated Kenny Chesney’s (now postponed) 2020 stadium tour and sponsorship deals, a Christmas TV special and song placement in *Frozen II* for Kacey Musgraves, a new Sony/ATV publishing deal for Miranda Lambert and Live Nation partnerships for Thomas Rhett and Florida Georgia Line.

▶ Michael Milom

PARTNER, MILOM HORSNELL CROW KELLEY BECKETT SHEHAN

Milom says he was working on a diverse slate of deals before the pandemic, including a global distribution pact for one superstar’s album, creative service agreements for another’s release, the extension of an exclusive publishing deal for one top songwriter, plans for an artist to develop new products for a global musical instrument company and awards show hosting gigs. With artists now trading concert stages for digital platforms, he reports “an unusual number of new endorsement or ‘influencer’ agreements submitted to our clients.” On a pro bono basis, Milom has reviewed many agreements for his clients to appear in virtual charity concerts during the pandemic.

BUSINESS AND BRANDING

▶ Marcie Allen

PRESIDENT, MAC PRESENTS

Music and branding executive Allen turned to booking two all-star nights at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta last November to raise funds for veterans organizations and homelessness prevention centers. The ATLIVE benefit, supporting the Johnny Mac Soldiers Fund and the Quest Community Development Organization, boasted Keith Urban, Blake Shelton, Eric Church, Luke Combs, Brothers Osborne, Sam Hunt, Sugarland, Judah & The Lion and newcomers Cale Dodds and Caylee Hammack. Says Allen: “Little did I know those two nights would be [one of] the last live-music events for us for a while.”

HOW SHE WORKS NOW “My side hustle” — a CBD and wellness coffee shop in Nashville called Anzie Blue that she opened with her husband — “has kept me sane while the music industry is on pause.”

▶ Lori Badgett

▶ Diane Pearson

SENIOR VPs/TEAM LEADERS, ENTERTAINMENT DIVISION, NASHVILLE, CITY NATIONAL BANK

To help clients benefit from the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) after legislation passed in March, the City National Bank entertainment team in Nashville “worked 18 to 21 hours every day for over three solid weeks,” recalls Pearson. “The situation was incredibly dynamic. We didn’t know how long the money would last, so we were racing against the clock. Thankfully, we were able to help clients keep their doors open.” Adds Badgett: “[With] so much at stake for so many people, the bank has been able to provide support and funding to help bridge the gap caused by COVID-19.”

THE IMPACT OF THE HALT ON TOURING PEARSON

“Typically [in spring], we are ramping up with lines of credit for artists’ touring companies as well as increasing credit card limits to accommodate travel and road expenses. The day I saw a post showing that four of my clients had canceled their tours for 2020 hit me really hard.”

▶ Julie Boos

CO-OWNER/CHAIRMAN/BUSINESS MANAGER, FBMM

Boos, who was named business manager of the



▶ HONORING COUNTRY’S BLACK PIONEERS

Charley Pride

Born 1934

One of the most successful Black country stars of all time with 29 genre No. 1s, Pride signed with RCA Records in the 1960s after producers discovered his rich baritone — and for a time, he was the label’s bestselling artist behind Elvis Presley. Inducted into the Grand Ole Opry in 1993, he is one of its few Black members, alongside DeFord Bailey and Darius Rucker. — M.N.



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MICHAEL KNOX

▶ COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS 2020

year at the Country Music Association's touring awards in 2018, has worked with her fellow owners at FBMM "to address the greatest financial challenge our industry has experienced in any of our lifetimes," she says. "Instead of managing tours, we're managing cash flow, dealing with difficult employee decisions, getting a crash course in PPP, EIDL [economic injury disaster loans], unemployment insurance, etc. It's definitely not business as usual."

▶ HOW COUNTRY CAN HELP MOVE THE NATION FORWARD

"We keep it simple. Golden rule-type stuff: 'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.' We just need to continue to walk forward with that kind of empathy."

▶ Jeremy Holley ▶ Laura Hutfless

CO-FOUNDERS, FLYTEVU

To help health care workers fighting COVID-19, Nashville-based marketing agency FlyteVu worked with 80 artists, including Brad Paisley and Thomas Rhett, to create Gratitude — performances posted on Instagram — to thank Vanderbilt University Medical Center staff and paired with client Cracker Barrel to facilitate meal donations in conjunction with Sony Music Nashville acts like Chris Young and Matt Stell. "Whether it's supporting and elevating women in country music, launching a website to donate to Black organizations fighting for racial justice or helping create a first-of-its-kind trauma-informed workshop for mass-shooting survivors," says Holley, "Laura and I hold ourselves accountable to put words to action through everything our agency does."

▶ HOW COUNTRY CAN HELP MOVE THE NATION FORWARD

"We can start by banning the Confederate flag at our festivals and events. If NASCAR can do it, so can country music. Music unites people, and there should be nothing that makes our fans feel threatened or unsafe."

▶ Andy Moats

EXECUTIVE VP/DIRECTOR OF MUSIC,
SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT,
PINNACLE FINANCIAL PARTNERS

While Pinnacle has been "extremely active in the publishing and label finance space and has closed hundreds of millions of dollars in loans over the past few quarters," says Moats, 43, his music, sports and entertainment team also moved quickly early in the pandemic to close hundreds of PPP loans and working capital lines of credit for clients.

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST "A more flexible workspace is here to stay. The office environment won't disappear, but we have proven to ourselves that we can be productive outside of our traditional offices."

▶ Kerry O'Neil

PARTNER, O'NEIL HAGAMAN;
CO-FOUNDER, BIG YELLOW DOG MUSIC

O'Neil, 67, takes pride in carrying on as a leader in two industry sectors with "a sense of empathy and passion intact," he says. As co-founder of publisher Big Yellow Dog Music with Carla Wallace, he has guided a roster of hit-making clients including Meghan Trainor and Daniel Tashian, co-producer of Kacey Musgraves' *Golden Hour*. He and his four partners in the business management firm O'Neil Hagaman have seen touring income plummet. "The touring stoppage has affected everyone," he says. "We will need the full array of our innovative skills to rebuild this."

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST "Remote work has finally come of age."

▶ Jennie Smythe

CEO, GIRLILLA MARKETING

With the pandemic forcing promotion to go online, Smythe, 43, says her 12-year-old digital marketing agency — with clients including Jason Aldean, Hootie & The Blowfish, Chrissy Metz and Maddie & Tae — "has never been busier." She notes that artists forced off the road have more availability for digital events. "On certain days, we can have seven-plus hours of livestreams or fan activations," says Smythe. "It's a case of lemons [and] lemonade."

CHANGE THAT WILL LAST "Now that our clients are more comfortable [with online events] and see the results, we are optimistic they will continue being proactive."

▶ Lou Taylor

OWNER/CEO, TRI STAR SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT
GROUP

Taylor says that she and her team have achieved a key goal in the past year: "being resilient and calm in a time we haven't ever seen before," says the business manager, whose roster includes country stars Florida Georgia Line and Reba McEntire, as well as Britney Spears. Working during the pandemic has involved guiding clients and staff "while managing all the federal [assistance] programs and requirements." The good news? "Business is still moving forward," she says, "and deals are being made."

▶ Sarah Trahern

CEO, COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION

With both tornadoes and the pandemic striking Tennessee in early 2020, the CMA has had a role to play, says Trahern. "As a trade organization, we've been in constant contact with our members about their concerns, which include financial stability, making hard decisions like having to lay off employees, their health or the health of loved ones, and general uncertainty," she says. "We've frequently offered resources, from instructing



▶ Jennifer Nettles and Kristian Bush of Sugarland onstage during the ATLive 2019 benefit concert at Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium booked by Allen of Mac Presents.

members how to file for various financial support to hosting COVID-specific webinars of interest to several sectors of our business."

THE IMPACT OF THE HALT ON TOURING "The ripple effects are deep, and we're only just beginning to see the long-term impact. I'm encouraged by the innovative ideas our industry is coming up with — from drive-in concerts and tours to virtual programming — for our fans."

▶ Damon Whiteside

CEO, ACADEMY OF COUNTRY MUSIC

"This has been a year for the academy record books," says Whiteside. Forced by the pandemic to postpone its annual awards show in Las Vegas, the organization created *ACM Presents: Our Country*, an April 5 special on CBS that drew an average 7.73 million viewers over its two hours, according to Nielsen. The ACM Lifting Lives COVID-19 Response Fund donated \$1.4 million in grants to country professionals in need. The ACM Awards, shifted to Sept. 16, will broadcast from Nashville for the first time in the show's history.

THE SONG HE TURNS TO "'I Saw the Light' by Hank Williams is a song of redemption. It has uplifting and spiritual lyrics that give you confidence that no matter how hopeless you feel, things will get better." 📺

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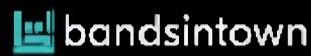
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jxdn

Why Travis Barker's first signee embraces his TikTok fandom — which is helping “Angels & Demons” take off

🕒 Nineteen-year-old Chattanooga, Tenn., native Jaden Hossler was raised on classic rock, but Juice WRLD and XXXTentacion soundtracked his senior year when he fell into a deep depression. “I didn’t think I was going anywhere,” he says. He downloaded TikTok in 2018 — posting brief comedic clips set to music — and in a matter of months, had raked in millions of followers (he currently has 7.6 million), earning him an invite to join Los Angeles-based TikTok influencer home Sway House, as well as a social media management team in Talent X. Now, he’s fusing the worlds of rock and hip-hop under his stage name, jxdn (pronounced “Jaden”) — and turning his social media savvy into his biggest tool for artistic promotion. “He’s got a huge built-in audience online that normally takes artists years to acquire,” says Hossler’s Maverick manager, Larry Rudolph. At the top of this year, Hossler released his first song, the trap-rock fusion “Comatose” (which his former Talent X manager and Larry’s son, Gavin Rudolph, uploaded to DistroKid), and in February signed a recording contract with Blink-182 drummer Travis Barker’s DTA Records, a joint venture with Elektra Music Group. Hossler has released two songs this year, “Angels & Demons” in May, which was recently sent to rock radio, and “So What!” in July, both of which entered the top 10 of *Billboard*’s Hot Rock & Alternative Songs chart. (“Comatose” debuted at No. 23 on Rock Digital Song Sales in March.) “Everyone is wondering what do you do in a time like this to break an artist where you’d usually be touring or be playing late-night shows,” says Barker. “We just plan on moving at a rapid pace, dropping music constantly when everyone is sitting at home on their phones waiting for something.”

—LYNDSEY HAVENS

Barker (left) and jxdn photographed by Ssam Kim on July 27 in Los Angeles.

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