

# billboard

MARCH 13, 2021 • BILLBOARD.COM

ACM  
NOMINATIONS  
GUIDE



**Token Up**  
THE DL ON NFTs

**How'd That  
Happen?**  
THE SURPRISING  
GRAMMY NOMS  
EXPLAINED

BIEBER IN

B L O O M

**MARRIED. CENTERED.**

**RESPONSIBLE.**

**HOW POP'S LOST BOY**

**FOUND HIMSELF**

Justin Bieber  
photographed at  
the Houdini Estate  
in Los Angeles.



CBS PRESENTS



56<sup>TH</sup>  
**ACM**  
**AWARDS**<sup>®</sup>

SUNDAY APRIL 18 8 | 7c



LIVE + ON DEMAND + STREAMING

# billboard Hot 100®



## A Year For The Weeknd In The Top 10

**T**HE WEEKND'S "BLINDING LIGHTS" MAKES HISTORY as the first song ever to spend a year in the top 10 of the Billboard Hot 100 as it logs its 52nd week there.

The track, at No. 3, tallied four weeks atop the Hot 100 last April and May. After debuting at No. 11 on the chart dated Nov. 14, 2019, it first reached the top 10 on Feb. 29, 2020, and has spent all but three frames in the top tier since.

The single appears on The Weeknd's LP *After Hours*, which spent four weeks atop the Billboard 200 last April.

"*After Hours* was always meant to be a very personal project. It's a story I had to tell," says The Weeknd. "The fact I've been able to tell it with the world listening is incredible. This *Billboard* chart record is truly a result of the fans. I'm so humbled and forever grateful to them."

"Blinding Lights," which The Weeknd highlighted as the closer to his Super Bowl LV halftime show on Feb. 7, has totaled 4.2 billion in cumulative radio audience, 1.1 billion audio and video streams combined and 726,000 downloads sold in the United States through the week ending March 4, according to MRC Data.

—GARY TRUST

WKS. ON CHART	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	CERTIFICATION	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
			PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)		IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL		
1	1	1	<b>#1</b> 8 WKS	<b>AIR</b>	<b>DRIVERS LICENSE</b> ▲ D. NIGRO (O. RODRIGO, D. NIGRO)	1	8
5	2	2	<b>UP</b>		YUNG DZA, DJ SWANQO, SEAN ISLAND (CARDI B, J.K. LANIER, THORPE, J.D. STEED, E. SELMANI, M. ALLEN, J. BAKER) Cardi B ATLANTIC	2	4
4	5	3	<b>BLINDING LIGHTS</b> ▲		MAX MARTIN, O.T. HOLTER, THE WEEKND (A. TESFAYE, A. BAL SHE, J. QUENNEVILLE, MAX MARTIN, O.T. HOLTER) The Weeknd XO/REPUBLIC	1	65
2	4	4	<b>34+35</b> ▲		TBHTS, P.L. JOHNSON, XAVI, MR. FRANKS (A. GRANDE, T.L. BROWNS, NICHOLSON, V.M. MCCANTS, T.M. PARKS, C. X. HERRERA, P.L. JOHNSON, S. FRANKS, A. STANAJA, Z. ZILAMIN, M. J. PETE) Ariana Grande REPUBLIC	2	18
8	3	5	<b>GO CRAZY</b> ▲		G. RY, BORDEAUX, NON NATIVE (LIL T-JAY, R.V. VALENTINE JR., R.A. MARTINEZ, L.C. CAMPOZANO, B. WALSH) Chris Brown & Young Thug 300/RECORDS/COLUMBIA	3	43
6	6	6	<b>SAVE YOUR TEARS</b>		MAX MARTIN, O.T. HOLTER, THE WEEKND (A. TESFAYE, A. BAL SHE, J. QUENNEVILLE, MAX MARTIN, O.T. HOLTER) The Weeknd XO/REPUBLIC	4	12
7	7	7	<b>MOOD</b> ▲		O. FEDI, B. SLATKIN, K. BEAZY (G.L. VON JONES, O. FEDI, B. SLATKIN, K. BACH, M.I. OLMO) 24kGoldn Feat. iann dior RECORDS/COLUMBIA	1	30
3	8	8	<b>CALLING MY PHONE</b>		G. RY, BORDEAUX, NON NATIVE (LIL T-JAY, R.V. VALENTINE JR., R.A. MARTINEZ, L.C. CAMPOZANO, B. WALSH) Lil Tjay Feat. 6LACK COLUMBIA	3	3
12	11	9	<b>WHAT YOU KNOW BOUT LOVE</b> ▲		IAM TASH (B.B. JACKSON, T.ZENE, T. OLIVER, E. LUMPKIN) Pop Smoke VICTOR VICTOR WORLDWIDE/REPUBLIC	9	26
9	10	10	<b>LEVITATING</b> ●		KOZ, S. D. PRICE (C. COFFEE, JR., S. KOZMENIUK, S.T. HUDSON, D. LIPA, J.L. KIRK, M.A. ELLIOTT, M. CICCONE) Dua Lipa Feat. DaBaby WARNER	5	22

THE WEEKS MOST POPULAR CURRENT SONGS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY RADIO AIRPLAY, AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY MRC DATA, SALES DATA AS COMPILED BY MRC DATA AND STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA BY ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY MRC DATA. SONGS ARE DEFINED AS CURRENT IF THEY WERE FIRST RELEASED IN THE LAST WEEK. NEW RELEASES ARE INDICATED BY A "NEW" IN THE TITLE. SONGS RECEIVING WEEK-END AIRPLAY (P) OR SALES ACTIVITY FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE CHARTING ARE INDICATED BY A "NEW" IN THE TITLE. BILLBOARD PRESENTS MRC DATA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



MICHAEL CARTER

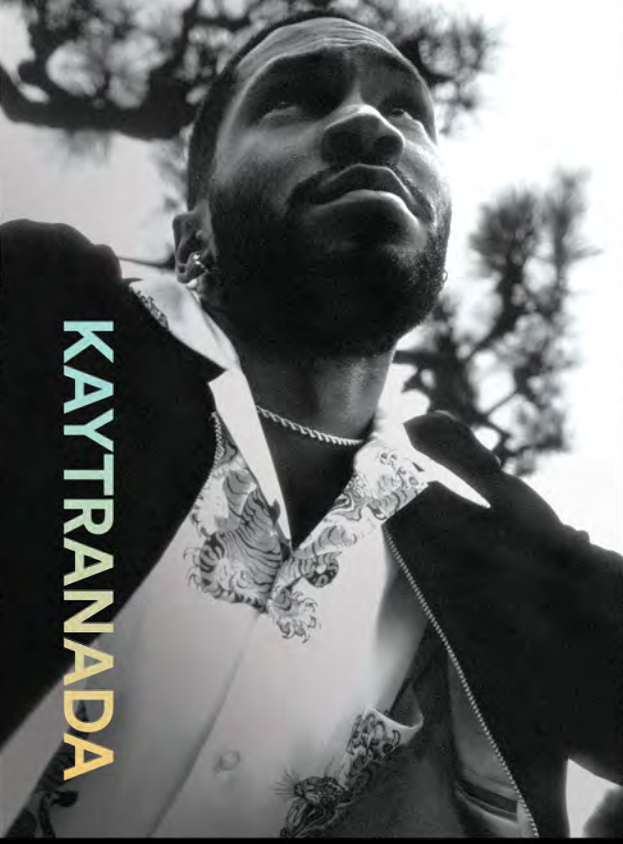








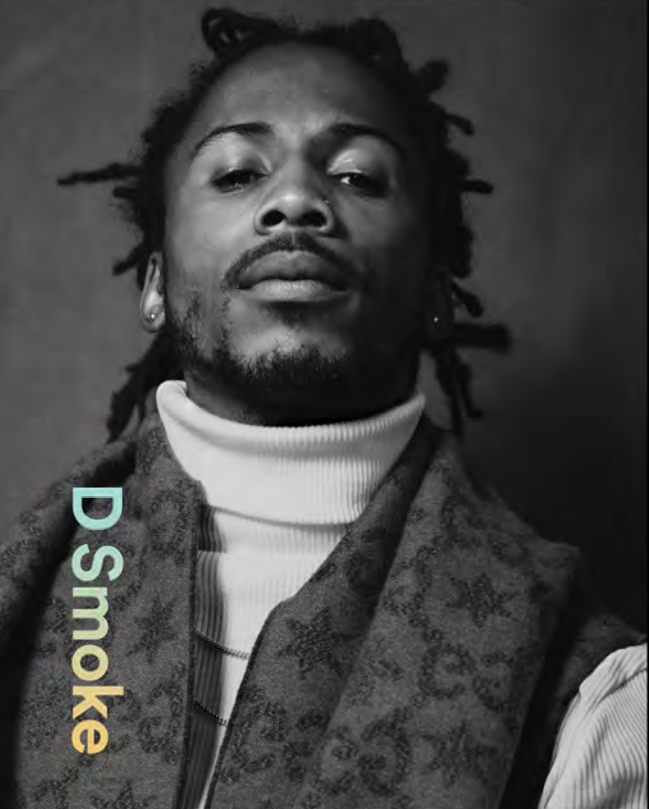
Megan Thee Stallion



KAYTRANADA



Ingrid Andress

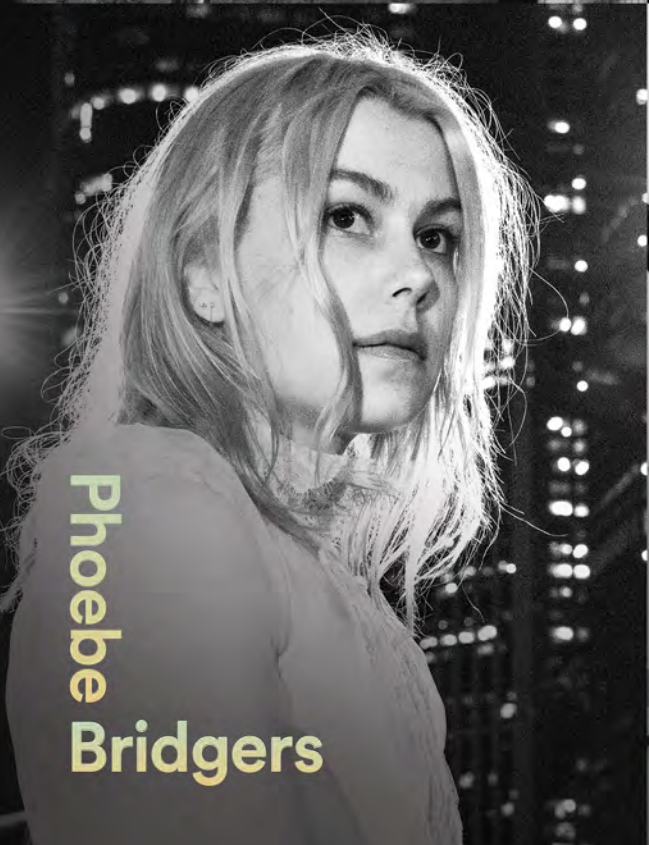


D Smoke

**Best  
New  
Artist  
2021**




Doja Cat



Phoebe Bridgers



CHIKA



Noah Cyrus







*Blxst*

# NO LOVE LOST



"It's a safe bet that Blxst will be even bigger than he is now"

**BET★**

"Bound to cash in on his immense talent in 2021"

**COMPLEX**

## OVER 150 MILLION STREAMS

**"OVERRATED" IMPACTING RADIO NOW**

"Primed to be LA's next superstar"

**THE RINGER**

"One of the more intriguing young acts to deserve recognition in LA"

**XXL**

"It's time for Blxst to shine"

**WEEKLY**



IN PROUD PARTNERSHIP WITH





LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST	CERTIFICATION	IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
1	1	<b>#1 8 WKS</b> MORGAN WALLEN		Dangerous: The Double Album	1	8	
12	2	<b>GREATEST GAINER</b> THE WEEKND		The Highlights	2	4	
3	3	POP SMOKE		Shoot For The Stars Aim For The Moon	1	35	
5	4	POOH SHIESTY		Shiesty Season	4	4	
4	5	LIL DURK		The Voice	2	11	
2	6	ARIANA GRANDE		Positions	1	18	
10	7	LIL BABY		My Turn	1	53	
8	8	DUA LIPA		Future Nostalgia	4	48	
9	9	LUKE COMBS		What You See Is What You Get	1	69	
11	10	JUICE WRLD		Legends Never Die	1	34	
14	11	POST MALONE		Hollywood's Bleeding	1	78	
13	12	BAD BUNNY		El Ultimo Tour del Mundo	1	14	
16	13	THE KID LAROI		F*ck Love	3	32	
17	14	MEGAN THEE STALLION		Good News	2	15	
28	15	BILLIE EILISH		When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?	1	101	
15	16	TAYLOR SWIFT		Evermore	1	12	
19	17	JUICE WRLD		Goodbye & Good Riddance	4	146	
21	18	MACHINE GUN KELLY		Tickets To My Downfall	1	23	
25	19	HARRY STYLES		Fine Line	1	64	
22	20	DOJA CAT		Hot Pink	9	70	
24	21	POLO G		The GOAT	2	42	
27	22	QUEEN		Greatest Hits	8	428	
26	23	ORIGINAL BROADWAY CAST		Hamilton: An American Musical	2	284	
23	24	TAYLOR SWIFT		Folklore	1	32	
31	25	BAD BUNNY		YHLQMDLG	2	53	
29	26	LUKE COMBS		This One's For You	4	196	
32	27	JACK HARLOW		Thats What They All Say	5	12	
30	28	MORGAN WALLEN		If I Know Me	10	127	
34	29	ROD WAVE		Pray 4 Love	2	48	
7	30	BTS		BE	1	15	
33	31	JUICE WRLD		Death Race For Love	1	104	
36	32	LIL UZI VERT		Eternal Atake	1	52	
37	33	DABABY		BLAME IT ON BABY	1	46	
40	34	POST MALONE		beerbongs & bentleys	1	149	
39	35	ELTON JOHN		Diamonds	7	173	
RE	36	BRYSON TILLER		ANNIVERSARY	5	7	
43	37	TRAVIS SCOTT		ASTROWORLD	1	135	
47	38	EMINEM		Curtain Call: The Hits	1	518	
HOT SHOT DEBUT	39	JULIEN BAKER		Little Oblivions	39	1	
38	40	EMINEM		Music To Be Murdered By	1	58	
35	41	GIVEON		Take Time	35	9	
41	42	SUMMER WALKER		Over It	2	74	
46	43	SZA		Ctrl	3	195	
44	44	LEWIS CAPALDI		Divinely Uninspired To A Hellish Extent	20	94	
69	45	BILLIE EILISH		Dont Smile At Me	14	167	
42	46	CHRIS STAPLETON		Starting Over	3	16	
NEW	47	ALICE COOPER		Detroit Stories	47	1	
18	48	KEVIN GATES		Only the Generals, Part II	18	2	
61	49	21 SAVAGE & METRO BOOMIN		Savage Mode II	1	22	
49	50	FLEETWOOD MAC		Rumours	1	414	

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST	CERTIFICATION	IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
48	51	DRAKE		Scorpion	1	140	
77	52	KALI UCHIS		Sin Miedo (Del Amor y Otros Demonios)	52	2	
50	53	CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL		Chronicle The 20 Greatest Hits	18	513	
45	54	FUTURE & LIL UZI VERT		Pluto x Baby Pluto	2	16	
54	55	JHENE AIKO		Chilombo	2	52	
51	56	RODDY RICCH		Please Excuse Me For Being Antisocial	1	65	
53	57	KENDRICK LAMAR		good kid, m.A.A.d city	2	436	
NEW	58	WILLIE NELSON		That's Life	58	1	
57	59	POST MALONE		Stoney	4	221	
55	60	YOUNGBOY NEVER BROKE AGAIN		Top	1	25	
58	61	J. COLE		2014 Forest Hills Drive	1	326	
52	62	TAYLOR SWIFT		Lover	1	80	
59	63	LIL DURK		Just Cause Y'all Waited 2	2	43	
66	64	CHRIS STAPLETON		Traveller	1	286	
NEW	65	MADISON BEER		Life Support	65	1	
65	66	BOB MARLEY AND THE WAILERS		Legend: The Best Of...	5	668	
63	67	FUTURE		High Off Life	1	42	
67	68	JOURNEY		Journey's Greatest Hits	10	658	
75	69	2PAC		Greatest Hits	3	360	
64	70	XXXTENTACION		?	1	155	
70	71	GUNNA		Wunna	1	41	
68	72	ED SHEERAN		÷ (Divide)	1	209	
94	73	THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G.		Greatest Hits	1	264	
72	74	DRAKE		Take Care	1	418	
74	75	AC/DC		Back In Black	4	453	
NEW	76	BOB DYLAN WITH SPECIAL GUEST GEORGE HARRISON		1970	76	1	
60	77	POP SMOKE		Meet The Woo, V.2	7	56	
73	78	LIL UZI VERT		Luv Is Rage 2	1	184	
20	79	TRIPPIE REDD		Pegasus	2	12	
NEW	80	ARCHITECTS		For Those That Wish To Exist	80	1	
76	81	HALSEY		Manic	2	59	
RE	82	GUNS N' ROSES		Greatest Hits	3	519	
180	83	PACE SETTER		SPOTEMGOTTEM	83	5	
96	84	GABBY BARRETT		Goldmine	27	37	
78	85	TAYLOR SWIFT		1989	1	325	
115	86	AVA MAX		Heaven & Hell	27	20	
90	87	KHALID		American Teen	4	209	
80	88	THE BEATLES		1	1	462	
82	89	KING VON		Welcome To O'Block	5	18	
84	90	TOM PETTY AND THE HEARTBREAKERS		Greatest Hits	2	399	
79	91	ARIANA GRANDE		Thank U, Next	1	108	
85	92	SOUNDTRACK		Moana	2	221	
71	93	JAZMINE SULLIVAN		Heaux Tales	4	8	
88	94	DRAKE		Dark Lane Demo Tapes	2	44	
92	95	MICHAEL JACKSON		Thriller	1	460	
87	96	KENDRICK LAMAR		DAMN.	1	203	
86	97	FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE		Life Rolls On	21	3	
99	98	CARDI B		Invasion Of Privacy	1	152	
83	99	PLAYBOI CARTI		Whole Lotta Red	1	10	
101	100	MICHAEL JACKSON		The Essential Michael Jackson	31	349	



## Who's Next At No. 1?

Morgan Wallen's *Dangerous: The Double Album* rules the Billboard 200 for an eighth consecutive week after having bowed atop the tally seven weeks ago (on the chart dated Jan. 23). It is one of only six country albums that have spent at least eight weeks at No. 1.

*Dangerous* earned 82,000 equivalent album units in the United States in the week ending March 4 (down 7%), according to MRC Data. It ties Taylor Swift's *folklore* for the second-most frames at the top in the last five years. Drake's *Views* has the most No. 1 weeks in that span: 13. (They were nonconsecutive and all in 2016.)

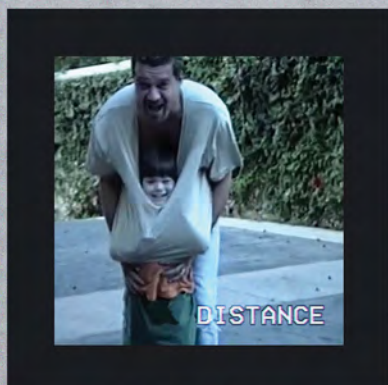
*Dangerous* might lose its perch thanks to any of these announced March releases by previous chart-topping acts: Kings of Leon (*When You See Yourself*, March 5), Justin Bieber (*Justice*, March 19), Lana Del Rey (*Chemtrails Over the Country Club*, March 19), NF (*Clouds*, March 26) and Carrie Underwood (*My Savior*, March 26).

—KEITH CAULFIELD



Explorer1 Music Group would like to Congratulate

# Wolfgang Van Halen



On his debut single  
**'Distance'**  
reaching #1 on the  
Billboard Mainstream  
Rock Airplay Chart

'Distance' is featured  
on his upcoming debut album  
**Mammoth WVH**  
June 11, 2021



Thank you to the entire  
team for making the  
**Mammoth WVH**  
**Debut Song #1**

Producer: Michael "Elvis" Baskette

Management: Janus Music Management

Press: Paul Freundlich Associates

Radio Promotion: CO5

Label: EX1 Records, a part of the Explorer 1 Music Group

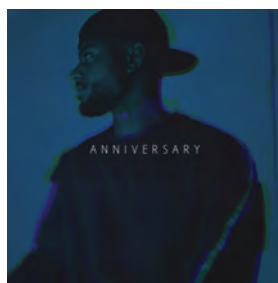
Worldwide Distribution: Kartel Music Group



[www.ex1records.com](http://www.ex1records.com)



LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	CERTIFICATION	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
93	101	<b>SOUNDTRACK</b> FOX/20TH CENTURY FOX/ATLANTIC/AG	3	The Greatest Showman	1	169
103	102	<b>MONEYBAGG YO</b> N-LESS/INTERSCOPE/IGA	●	Time Served	3	60
RE	103	<b>GEORGE STRAIT</b> MCA/NASHVILLE/UMGN	7	50 Number Ones	1	173
56	104	<b>CJ</b> CJ MUSIC GROUP/WARNER		Loyalty Over Royalty	56	2
105	105	<b>MAC MILLER</b> WARNER	▲	Swimming	3	130
95	106	<b>SOUNDTRACK</b> WALT DISNEY		Frozen II	1	68
108	107	<b>DRAKE</b> YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC	6	Views	1	251
98	108	<b>INTERNET MONEY</b> INTERNET MONEY/TENTHOUSAND PROJECTS		B4 The Storm	10	27
NEW	109	<b>NEIL YOUNG WITH CRAZY HORSE</b> REPRISE/WARNER		Way Down In The Rust Bucket	109	1
RE	110	<b>THE BLACK CROWES</b> DEF AMERICAN/AMERICAN/UME	5	Shake Your Money Maker	4	166
91	111	<b>NF</b> NF REAL MUSIC/CAROLINE	▲	The Search	1	83
102	112	<b>LEE BRICE</b> CURB		Hey World	45	15
89	113	<b>MILEY CYRUS</b> RCA		Plastic Hearts	2	14
104	114	<b>POLO G</b> COLUMBIA	▲	Die A Legend	6	90
113	115	<b>METALLICA</b> BLACKENED	16	Metallica	1	597
118	116	<b>KID CUDI</b> DREAM ON/G.O.D./REPUBLIC	●	Man On The Moon: The End Of Day	4	164
114	117	<b>KHALID</b> RIGHT HAND/RCA	▲	Free Spirit	1	100
116	118	<b>BRUNO MARS</b> ELEKTRA/EMG	6	Doo-Wops & Hooligans	3	509
112	119	<b>FRANK OCEAN</b> BOYS DON'T CRY	▲	Blonde	1	219
110	120	<b>LIL TJAY</b> COLUMBIA	▲	True 2 Myself	5	71
123	121	<b>LIZZO</b> NICE LIFE/ATLANTIC/AG	▲	Cuz I Love You	4	98
120	122	<b>GLASS ANIMALS</b> WOLF TONE/POLYDOR/REPUBLIC		Dreamland	7	17
119	123	<b>THE BEATLES</b> APPLE/CAPITOL/UME	12	Abbey Road	1	402
111	124	<b>RIHANNA</b> WESTBURY ROAD/ROCNATION	3	ANTI	1	258
100	125	<b>KID CUDI</b> REPUBLIC	●	Man On The Moon III: The Chosen	2	12
122	126	<b>KANYE WEST</b> ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM	5	Graduation	1	161
117	127	<b>YUNG BLEU</b> VANDROSS/EMPIRE		Love Scars: The 5 Stages Of Emotions (EP)	82	9
62	128	<b>SOUNDTRACK</b> SIX COURSE/RCA		Judas And The Black Messiah: The Inspired Album	12	3
144	129	<b>LUKE BRYAN</b> CAPITOL NASHVILLE/UMGN	●	Born Here Live Here Die Here	5	20
137	130	<b>LYNYRD SKYNYRD</b> MCA/GEFFEN/UME	▲	All Time Greatest Hits	56	116
125	131	<b>CHRIS BROWN</b> CBE/RCA	▲	Indigo	1	86
126	132	<b>ROD WAVE</b> ALAMO/IGA	●	Ghetto Gospel	10	69
124	133	<b>NIRVANA</b> SUB POP/DGC/GEFFEN/UME	10	Nevermind	1	514
81	134	<b>CHRIS BROWN &amp; YOUNG THUG</b> 300/CBE/RCA		Slime & B	24	37
142	135	<b>LADY GAGA</b> STREAMLINE/KONLIVE/CHERRY TREE/INTERSCOPE/IGA	6	The Fame	2	235
129	136	<b>IMAGINE DRAGONS</b> KIDNAKORNER/INTERSCOPE/IGA	2	Evolve	2	193
138	137	<b>BAD BUNNY</b> RIMAS		X 100PRE	11	114
135	138	<b>DRAKE</b> YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC		More Life	1	199
130	139	<b>ARCTIC MONKEYS</b> DOMINO	▲	AM	6	137
134	140	<b>EAGLES</b> ASYLUM/ELEKTRA/RHINO	26	Hotel California	1	124
141	141	<b>BRYSON TILLER</b> TRAPSOUL/RCA	3	TRAPSOUL	8	238
131	142	<b>SAM SMITH</b> CAPITOL		Love Goes	5	18
140	143	<b>TRAVIS SCOTT</b> GRAND HUSTLE/EPIC	▲	Birds In The Trap Sing McKnight	1	231
128	144	<b>HOZIER</b> RUBYWORKS/COLUMBIA/LEGACY	3	Hozier	2	200
136	145	<b>DABABY</b> SOUTHCOST/INTERSCOPE/IGA		KIRK	1	74
145	146	<b>TWENTY ONE PILOTS</b> FUELED BY RAMEN/EMG	4	Blurryface	1	293
154	147	<b>BOB SEGER &amp; THE SILVER BULLET BAND</b> HIDEOUT/CAPITOL/UME	10	Greatest Hits	8	365
153	148	<b>SAM HUNT</b> MCA/NASHVILLE/UMGN		SOUTHSIDE	5	44
132	149	<b>TAYLOR SWIFT</b> BIG MACHINE/BMLG	3	reputation	1	134
147	150	<b>YOUNGBOY NEVER BROKE AGAIN</b> NEVER BROKE AGAIN/ATLANTIC/AG	▲	AI YoungBoy 2	1	71



36

**BRYSON TILLER**  
*Anniversary*

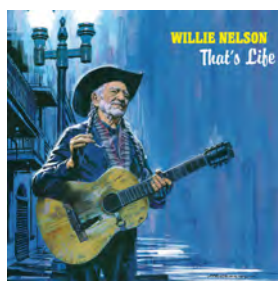
The album reenters after its deluxe reissue on Feb. 26 with five additional tracks. The set earned 15,000 equivalent album units (up 226%) in the week ending March 4, according to MRC Data.



47

**ALICE COOPER**  
*Detroit Stories*

The rock artist claims his first No. 1 on the Top Album Sales chart (which launched May 25, 1991) with 13,000 copies sold. The set also starts atop Tastemaker Albums, which ranks the top-selling titles at independent stores and small chains.



58

**WILLIE NELSON**  
*That's Life*

The legend continues to rack up No. 1s on *Billboard's* jazz charts. This covers set of tunes made famous by Frank Sinatra is Nelson's fourth No. 1 on Traditional Jazz Albums and third on the overall Jazz Albums tally.

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	CERTIFICATION	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
107	151	<b>BTS</b> BIGHIT ENTERTAINMENT	▲	MAP OF THE SOUL : 7	1	54
NEW	152	<b>NOFX</b> FAT WRECK CHORDS		Single Album	152	1
168	153	<b>ZAC BROWN BAND</b> HOME GROWN/BMG		Greatest Hits So Far...	20	294
RE	154	<b>RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS</b> WARNER	2	Greatest Hits	18	267
139	155	<b>BRS KASH</b> TEAM LITTY/LVRN/INTERSCOPE/IGA		Kash Only	98	6
150	156	<b>BILLY JOEL</b> COLUMBIA/LEGACY	3	The Essential Billy Joel	15	226
164	157	<b>DRAKE</b> YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC	▲	Nothing Was The Same	1	364
152	158	<b>YOUNG THUG</b> YOUNG STONER LIFE/300/ATLANTIC/AG	▲	So Much Fun	1	79
149	159	<b>MONEYBAGG YO &amp; BLAC YOUNGSTA</b> HEAVY CAMP/CMG/EPIC/N-LESS/INTERSCOPE/IGA		Code Red	6	24
159	160	<b>XXXTENTACION</b> BAD VIBES FOREVER/EMPIRE	▲	17	2	182
163	161	<b>BON JOVI</b> ISLAND/UME	▲	Greatest Hits: The Ultimate Collection	5	197
148	162	<b>VARIOUS ARTISTS</b> DREAMVILLE/INTERSCOPE/IGA	▲	Dreamville & J. Cole: Revenge Of The Dreamers III	1	83
6	163	<b>THE WEEKND</b> XO/REPUBLIC		After Hours	1	50
127	164	<b>LANA DEL REY</b> POLYDOR/INTERSCOPE/IGA	▲	Born To Die	2	383
169	165	<b>SAM SMITH</b> CAPITOL	5	In The Lonely Hour	2	322
160	166	<b>H.E.R.</b> MBK/RCA	▲	H.E.R.	23	165
165	167	<b>LIL BABY &amp; GUNNA</b> YOUNG STONER LIFE/300/QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/AG/CAPITOL	▲	Drip Harder	4	119
162	168	<b>KANE BROWN</b> RCA/NASHVILLE/SMN		Mixtape, Vol. 1 (EP)	15	28
155	169	<b>KANYE WEST</b> ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM	3	My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy	1	123
175	170	<b>THE BEACH BOYS</b> CAPITOL/UME	3	Sounds Of Summer: The Very Best Of The Beach Boys	16	242
170	171	<b>PITBULL</b> MR. 305/POLO GROUNDS/RCA		Greatest Hits	170	5
167	172	<b>A BOOGIE WIT DA HOODIE</b> HIGHBRIDGE THE LABEL/ATLANTIC/AG	▲	Hoodie SZN	1	108
133	173	<b>SHAWN MENDES</b> ISLAND/REPUBLIC		Wonder	1	13
156	174	<b>JACKBOYS</b> CACTUS JACK/EPIC		JACKBOYS	1	61
143	175	<b>TAYLOR SWIFT</b> BIG MACHINE/BMLG	7	Red	1	164
181	176	<b>DARYL HALL JOHN OATES</b> RCA/LEGACY	▲	The Very Best Of Daryl Hall John Oates	34	118
RE	177	<b>THE ROLLING STONES</b> ABKCO	12	Hot Rocks 1964-1971	4	348
176	178	<b>ADELE</b> XL	14	21	1	504
151	179	<b>NF</b> NF REAL MUSIC/CAPITOL/CAROLINE	▲	Perception	1	171
183	180	<b>LIL BABY</b> QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/CAPITOL	▲	Harder Than Ever	3	119
166	181	<b>ELVIS PRESLEY</b> RCA/SONY STRATEGIC MARKETING GROUP/LEGACY	▲	The Essential Elvis Presley	42	84
177	182	<b>BLINK-182</b> GEFFEN/UME		Greatest Hits	6	54
182	183	<b>LINKIN PARK</b> WARNER	12	[Hybrid Theory]	2	247
157	184	<b>MAC MILLER</b> WARNER	●	Circles	3	57
NEW	185	<b>T-PAIN</b> KONVICT/NAPPY BOY/RCA		T-Pain Presents Happy Hour: The Greatest Hits	185	1
185	186	<b>TYLER CHILDERS</b> HICKMAN HOLLER/THIRTY TIGERS	●	Purgatory	106	41
RE	187	<b>ABBA</b> POLAR/POLYDOR/UME	6	Gold: Greatest Hits	25	159
178	188	<b>WHITNEY HOUSTON</b> ARISTA/RCA/LEGACY	●	I Will Always Love You: The Best Of Whitney Houston	14	46
97	189	<b>FOO FIGHTERS</b> ROSWELL/RCA		Medicine At Midnight	3	4
194	190	<b>TIM MCGRAW</b> CURB	▲	Number One Hits	27	169
NEW	191	<b>NIKO MOON</b> RCA/NASHVILLE/SMN		Good Time (EP)	191	1
199	192	<b>LAUREN DAIGLE</b> CENTRICITY/TZTONE	●	Look Up Child	3	123
179	193	<b>TRIPPIE REDD</b> TENTHOUSAND PROJECTS	●	A Love Letter To You 4	1	64
RE	194	<b>BEE GEES</b> POLYDOR/UNIVERSAL/CAPITOL/UME		Number Ones	5	71
121	195	<b>DAFT PUNK</b> DAFT LIFE/PARLOPHONE/RHINO	●	Discovery	23	30
184	196	<b>A BOOGIE WIT DA HOODIE</b> HIGHBRIDGE THE LABEL/ATLANTIC/AG	●	Artist 2.0	2	53
190	197	<b>NIPSEY HUSSLE</b> ALL MONEY IN NO MONEY OUT/ATLANTIC/AG		Victory Lap	2	93
189	198	<b>50 CENT</b> SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/UME	9	Get Rich Or Die Tryin'	1	111
174	199	<b>BLACKPINK</b> YG/INTERSCOPE/IGA		The Album	2	22
RE	200	<b>KATY PERRY</b> CAPITOL	8	Teenage Dream	1	239





Maverick. Legend. Partner. Friend.  
We will miss you, Michael.


**AEG**  
PRESENTS



# BILLBOARD GLOBAL 200

billboard

MAR. 13 2021

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
	1	1	<b>#1</b> <b>DRIVERS LICENSE</b>	Olivia Rodrigo	1	8
	3	2	<b>SAVE YOUR TEARS</b>	The Weeknd	2	9
	4	3	<b>BLINDING LIGHTS</b>	The Weeknd	2	26
2	4	4	<b>CALLING MY PHONE</b>	Lil Tjay Feat. 6LACK	2	3
6	5	5	<b>UP</b>	Cardi B	4	4
8	7	6	<b>DAKITI</b>	Bad Bunny & Jhay Cortez	1	18
9	9	7	<b>MOOD</b>	24kGoldn Feat. iann dior	2	26
10	8	8	<b>DYNAMITE</b>	BTS	1	26
11	10	9	<b>LEVITATING</b>	Dua Lipa Feat. DaBaby	7	22
24	17	10	<b>ASTRONAUT IN THE OCEAN</b>	Masked Wolf	10	6
				The breakthrough hit from the Australian rapper (born Harry Michael) reaches the top 10 with 32.8 million streams (up 12%) and 12,000 downloads sold (up 20%) globally in the tracking week.		
-	29	11	<b>GG TELEPATIA</b>	Kali Uchis	11	2
15	12	12	<b>THE BUSINESS</b>	Tiesto	12	17
5	6	13	<b>34+35</b>	Ariana Grande	2	18
12	11	14	<b>BANDIDO</b>	Myke Towers & Juhn	11	10
18	15	15	<b>GOOSEBUMPS</b>	Travis Scott & HVME	15	10
31	20	16	<b>WELLERMAN</b>	Nathan Evans	16	6
20	16	17	<b>LA NOCHE DE ANOCHE</b>	Bad Bunny & Rosalia	7	14
13	13	18	<b>STREETS</b>	Doja Cat	8	8
14	14	19	<b>WITHOUT YOU</b>	The Kid LAROI	12	15
16	19	20	<b>GOOD DAYS</b>	SZA	7	10
17	18	21	<b>WHOOPTY</b>	CJ	10	19
75	32	22	<b>HEARTBREAK ANNIVERSARY</b>	Giveon	22	3
25	23	23	<b>DANCE MONKEY</b>	Tones And I	16	26
19	21	24	<b>ANYONE</b>	Justin Bieber	3	9
27	26	25	<b>YOU BROKE ME FIRST.</b>	Tate McRae	16	26
26	24	26	<b>HAWAI</b>	Maluma	3	26
23	22	27	<b>POSITIONS</b>	Ariana Grande	1	19
22	25	28	<b>BICHOTA</b>	Karol G	7	19
49	38	29	<b>BACK IN BLOOD</b>	Pooh Shiesty Feat. Lil Durk	29	7
28	30	30	<b>SOMEONE YOU LOVED</b>	Lewis Capaldi	24	26
21	27	31	<b>WE'RE GOOD</b>	Dua Lipa	21	3
29	28	32	<b>LEMONADE</b>	Internet Money & Gunna Feat. Don Toliver & NAV	4	26
91	65	33	<b>MY HEAD AND MY HEART</b>	Ava Max	33	5
32	33	34	<b>THEREFORE I AM</b>	Billie Eilish	2	16
42	31	35	<b>BAILA CONMIGO</b>	Selena Gomez With Rauw Alejandro	22	5
37	37	36	<b>HEAD &amp; HEART</b>	Joel Corry X MNEK	17	26
44	34	37	<b>WHAT YOU KNOW BOUT LOVE</b>	Pop Smoke	11	26
38	40	38	<b>ROSES</b>	SAINT JHN	14	26
51	43	39	<b>BEST FRIEND</b>	Saweetie Feat. Doja Cat	39	8
35	36	40	<b>PARADISE</b>	Meduza & Dermot Kennedy	30	17
45	46	41	<b>GIRL LIKE ME</b>	Black Eyed Peas X Shakira	39	13
40	41	42	<b>WATERMELON SUGAR</b>	Harry Styles	9	26
53	52	43	<b>ROCKSTAR</b>	DaBaby Feat. Roddy Ricch	8	26
39	45	44	<b>DON'T START NOW</b>	Dua Lipa	34	26

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
56	50	45	<b>HEAT WAVES</b>	Glass Animals	45	9
138	71	46	<b>ELLA NO ES TUYA</b>	Rochy Rd X Myke Towers X Nicki Nicole	46	3
43	44	47	<b>WAP</b>	Cardi B Feat. Megan Thee Stallion	1	26
47	42	48	<b>FOR THE NIGHT</b>	Pop Smoke Feat. Lil Baby & DaBaby	7	26
66	57	49	<b>ARCADE</b>	Duncan Laurence	49	5
30	47	50	<b>PERFECT</b>	Ed Sheeran	30	26
46	49	51	<b>SAVAGE LOVE (LAXED - SIREN BEAT)</b>	Jawsh 685 x Jason Derulo	1	26
-	151	52	<b>BEAT BOX</b>	SpotemGottem Feat. Pooh Shiesty Or DaBaby	52	5
-	54	53	<b>BABY SHARK</b>	Pinkfong	38	25
52	55	54	<b>LIFE IS GOOD</b>	Future Feat. Drake	39	26
34	48	55	<b>PRISONER</b>	Miley Cyrus Feat. Dua Lipa	12	15
33	51	56	<b>AFTERGLOW</b>	Ed Sheeran	13	11
55	59	57	<b>YORU NI KAKERU</b>	YOASOBI	16	26
92	73	58	<b>YOUR LOVE (9PM)</b>	ATB x Topic x A7S	58	4
		59	<b>AP</b>	Pop Smoke	59	1
58	58	60	<b>LA CURIOSIDAD</b>	DJ Nelson Presenta Jay Wheeler & Myke Towers	40	26
116	39	61	<b>GO CRAZY</b>	Chris Brown & Young Thug	26	26
62	67	62	<b>SUNFLOWER</b>	Post Malone & Swae Lee	47	26
76	77	63	<b>BAD GUY</b>	Billie Eilish	54	26
36	53	64	<b>WILLOW</b>	Taylor Swift	2	12
50	61	65	<b>HOLY</b>	Justin Bieber Feat. Chance The Rapper	3	24
41	56	66	<b>USSEWA</b>	Ado	41	7
-	120	67	<b>FRIDAY</b>	Riton X Nightcrawlers Feat. Mufasa & Hypeman	67	2
59	72	68	<b>SHALLOW</b>	Lady Gaga & Bradley Cooper	59	26
60	66	69	<b>RELOJ</b>	Rauw Alejandro & Anuel AA	41	18
57	62	70	<b>HECHA PA' MI</b>	Boza	43	12
77	83	71	<b>CIRCLES</b>	Post Malone	49	26
61	68	72	<b>BEFORE YOU GO</b>	Lewis Capaldi	32	26
79	75	73	<b>ON ME</b>	Lil Baby	53	13
68	74	74	<b>SHAPE OF YOU</b>	Ed Sheeran	68	26
54	60	75	<b>MONSTER</b>	Shawn Mendes & Justin Bieber	4	15
78	80	76	<b>WHATS POPPIN</b>	Jack Harlow Feat. DaBaby, Tory Lanez & Lil Wayne	17	26
69	79	77	<b>SWEATER WEATHER</b>	The Neighbourhood	62	23
-	70	78	<b>NO MORE PARTIES</b>	Coi Leray Feat. Lil Durk	70	2
74	76	79	<b>YOU'RE MINES STILL</b>	Yung Bleu Feat. Drake	67	11
70	78	80	<b>BELIEVER</b>	Imagine Dragons	70	26
48	69	81	<b>DRY FLOWER</b>	Yuuri	48	10
65	81	82	<b>LONELY</b>	Justin Bieber & benny blanco	5	20
		83	<b>ONLY WANNA BE WITH YOU</b>	Post Malone	83	1
82	93	84	<b>LOVELY</b>	Billie Eilish & Khalid	70	26
73	86	85	<b>MY EX'S BEST FRIEND</b>	Machine Gun Kelly X blackbear	25	26
72	85	86	<b>MIDNIGHT SKY</b>	Miley Cyrus	15	26
81	82	87	<b>LAUGH NOW CRY LATER</b>	Drake Feat. Lil Durk	5	26
84	88	88	<b>DREAMS</b>	Fleetwood Mac	10	23
87	95	89	<b>MEMORIES</b>	Maroon 5	71	26
115	99	90	<b>THROAT BABY (GO BABY)</b>	BRS Kash	88	6
85	91	91	<b>RELACION</b>	Sech, Daddy Yankee & J Balvin Feat. Rosalia & Farruko	13	26
98	106	92	<b>MONSTER</b>	YOASOBI	87	7
64	84	93	<b>IN YOUR EYES</b>	The Weeknd	50	23
88	101	94	<b>AT MY WORST</b>	Pink Sweat\$ Feat. Kehtani	88	7
80	89	95	<b>STARBOY</b>	The Weeknd Feat. Daft Punk	52	4
90	102	96	<b>SEÑORITA</b>	Shawn Mendes & Camila Cabello	67	26

THE BILLBOARD GLOBAL 200 CHART RANKS THE TOP SONGS BASED ON STREAMING AND/OR SALES ACTIVITY FROM OVER 200 TERRITORIES AROUND THE WORLD - INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES - AS TRACKED BY ARC DATA. THE RANKING IS BASED ON A WEIGHTED FORMULA INCORPORATING OFFICIAL ONLY STREAMS AND AD-SUPPORTED TIERS OF LEADING RADIO AND VIDEO MUSIC SERVICES, PLUS DOWNLOAD SALES FROM TOP MUSIC RETAILERS ACROSS THE GLOBE. SEE CHARTS.LEGENDON.BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2021 BILLBOARD MEDIA, LLC AND ARC DATA, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.







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TAYLOR SWIFT  
"Willow"

The March 13 chart week marks six months since the Global 200 and Global Excl. U.S. surveys launched in September. In that 26-week span, Swift boasts the most total entries on the Global 200 — 22 — followed by Ariana Grande and Morgan Wallen, each with 21. On the Global Excl. U.S. chart, Grande has made the most appearances — 20 — followed by Bad Bunny and Swift, with 18 apiece.



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JUBIN NAUTIYAL  
FEAT. EMRAAN HASHMI  
"Lut Gaye"

The Hindi-language song debuts with 32.2 million streams, up 19%, worldwide. It's the third track by Indian artists to hit the chart — and the second within three weeks, after Yo Yo Honey Singh's "Saiyaan Ji," featuring Neha Kakkar (both from India), spent a week at No. 188 on the Feb. 27 list. Previously, Afsana Khan's "Titliyan" reached No. 98 in December.

—GARY TRUST and ERIC FRANKENBERG

THE BILLBOARD GLOBAL 200 CHART RANKS THE TOP SONGS BASED ON STREAMING AND/OR SALES ACTIVITY FROM OVER 100 TERRITORIES AROUND THE WORLD — INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES — AS TRACKED BY MRC DATA. THE RANKING IS BASED ON A WEIGHTED FORMULA INCORPORATING OFFICIAL ONLY STREAMS ON BOTH SUBSCRIPTION AND AD-SUPPORTED TIERS OF LEADING AUDIO AND VIDEO MUSIC SERVICES, PLUS DOWNLOAD SALES FROM TOP MUSIC RETAILERS ACROSS THE GLOBE. SEE CHARTS.LEGENDON.BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2021 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND MRC DATA INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

STYLING & SALES DATA COMPILED BY MRC DATA

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
117	90	97	TIME TODAY	Moneybagg Yo	70	4
63	87	98	LOCATION	Karol G, Anuel AA & J Balvin	63	3
RE-ENTRY	99	99	GUNJOU	YOASOBI	44	4
109	109	100	CLOSER	The Chainsmokers Feat. Halsey	100	22
83	100	101	TAKE YOU DANCING	Jason Derulo	32	26
100	108	102	OLD TOWN ROAD	Lil Nas X Feat. Billy Ray Cyrus	75	26
67	92	103	THE HILLS	The Weeknd	44	4
97	119	104	ALL OF ME	John Legend	97	24
86	98	105	CRY BABY	Megan Thee Stallion Feat. DaBaby	66	12
108	96	106	LOVE NOT WAR (THE TAMPA BEAT)	Jason Derulo X Nuka	90	10
93	97	107	WASTED ON YOU	Morgan Wallen	19	8
102	105	108	BREAKING ME	Topic & A7S	21	26
-	126	109	TAPAO NA RABA	Rai Saia Rodada	109	2
89	104	110	JERUSALEMA	Master KG Feat. Burna Boy & Nomcebo Zikode	38	26
126	107	111	DIOR	Pop Smoke	61	26
110	114	112	RAIN ON ME	Lady Gaga & Ariana Grande	22	26
-	125	113	WASURENA	Awesome City Club	113	2
111	116	114	DEATH BED	Powfu Feat. beabadoobee	43	25
132	122	115	RIDE IT.	Regard	86	25
107	111	116	KINGS & QUEENS	Ava Max	31	26
112	110	117	THE BOX	Roddy Ricch	66	26
96	127	118	SAY YOU WON'T LET GO	James Arthur	96	22
123	117	119	MOOD SWINGS	Pop Smoke Feat. Lil Tjay	13	26
120	113	120	BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY	Queen	113	22
-	35	121	TEST DRIVE	Ariana Grande	35	2
136	136	122	SICKO MODE	Travis Scott	70	24
105	130	123	ADORE YOU	Harry Styles	68	25
140	128	124	I DON'T CARE	Ed Sheeran & Justin Bieber	105	22
134	63	125	LIFE GOES ON	BTS	1	15
119	129	126	SAY SO	Doja Cat	50	25
118	112	127	I FEEL IT COMING	The Weeknd Feat. Daft Punk	75	4
113	124	128	TE MUDASTE	Bad Bunny	19	14
129	135	129	TAKE ME TO CHURCH	Hozier	129	8
71	103	130	ROPA CARA	Camilo	47	6
NEW	131	131	#PROBLEMA	Daddy Yankee	131	1
114	123	132	GOLDEN	Harry Styles	62	18
101	118	133	LA NOTA	Manuel Turizo, Myke Towers & Rauw Alejandro	59	21
135	134	134	NOTE ENAMORES	Milly X Farruko X Nio Garcia X Jay Wheeler X Amenazzy	132	6
121	132	135	LUCID DREAMS	Juice WRLD	103	25
94	115	136	BODY	Megan Thee Stallion	27	15
193	139	137	LIFESTYLE	Jason Derulo Feat. Adam Levine	137	4
137	141	138	KAIKAI KITAN	E ve	130	10
NEW	139	139	SUGARCRASH!	ElyOtto	139	1
139	143	140	DESPACITO	Luis Fonsi & Daddy Yankee Feat. Justin Bieber	130	22
179	172	141	SOMEBODY THAT I USED TO KNOW	Gotye Feat. Kimbra	141	4
103	138	142	THINKING OUT LOUD	Ed Sheeran	103	21
141	145	143	HOW YOU LIKE THAT	BLACKPINK	24	26
NEW	144	144	LUT GAYE	Jubin Nautiyal Feat. Emraan Hashmi	144	1
-	163	145	GOOD TIME	Niko Moon	145	3
147	148	146	HIGHEST IN THE ROOM	Travis Scott	83	25
145	147	147	MARTIN & GINA	Polo G	107	17
163	178	148	EVERYTHING I WANTED	Billie Eilish	116	24

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
155	149	149	HOTEL CALIFORNIA	Eagles	149	20
95	121	150	BUSS IT	Erica Banks	95	8
164	154	151	BANG!	AJR	84	22
130	146	152	DIAMONDS	Sam Smith	32	24
176	168	153	DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'	Journey	150	20
150	153	154	GOOSEBUMPS	Travis Scott	102	23
124	142	155	BREAK MY HEART	Dua Lipa	47	24
106	133	156	SAND IN MY BOOTS	Morgan Wallen	47	8
191	179	157	COUNTING STARS	OneRepublic	157	4
125	140	158	BEBE	Camilo & El Alfa	59	13
128	131	159	BETTER TOGETHER	Luke Combs	87	16
-	174	160	HELLO	Pop Smoke Feat. A Boogie Wit da Hoodie	102	18
152	155	161	INTENTIONS	Justin Bieber Feat. Quavo	65	25
178	165	162	TAKE ON ME	a-ha	162	7
172	161	163	GODZILLA	Eminem Feat. Juice WRLD	138	21
133	152	164	HEATHER	Conan Gray	20	26
122	150	165	LA TOXICA	Farruko	24	25
166	170	166	SOMETHING JUST LIKE THIS	The Chainsmokers & Coldplay	166	13
143	160	167	UN DIA (ONE DAY)	J Balvin, Dua Lipa, Bad Bunny & Tainy	30	26
196	171	168	MEMORIES	David Guetta Feat. Kid Cudi	150	5
195	173	169	NO ROLE MODELZ	J. Cole	169	5
180	167	170	SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT	Nirvana	167	9
NEW	171	171	GIRLS LIKE US	Zoe Wees	171	1
177	158	172	FLY AWAY	Tones And I	152	7
131	157	173	VIDA DE RICO	Camilo	29	23
146	159	174	7 RINGS	Ariana Grande	126	22
168	176	175	WITHOUT ME	Halsey	135	21
190	184	176	SWEET CHILD O' MINE	Guns N' Roses	176	9
153	169	177	DO I WANNA KNOW?	Arctic Monkeys	153	8
NEW	178	178	WHAT OTHER PEOPLE SAY	Sam Fischer & Demi Lovato	178	1
RE-ENTRY	179	179	OCEAN EYES	Billie Eilish	169	9
197	183	180	ALL WE GOT	Robin Schulz Feat. KIDDO	130	8
-	137	181	GET LUCKY	Daft Punk Feat. Pharrell Williams	137	2
-	191	182	NO GUIDANCE	Chris Brown Feat. Drake	113	14
199	193	183	THUNDER	Imagine Dragons	174	14
198	192	184	STRESSED OUT	twenty one pilots	184	4
170	190	185	YELLOW	Coldplay	170	9
157	162	186	I HOPE	Gabby Barrett	77	26
167	198	187	IF THE WORLD WAS ENDING	JP Saxe Feat. Julia Michaels	104	21
161	177	188	CARAMELO	Ozuna x Karol G x Myke Towers	16	26
-	185	189	BILLIE JEAN	Michael Jackson	185	2
174	181	190	HASTA ABAJO	Kevin Roldan, Bryant Myers & Lyanno	165	5
NEW	191	191	THE GOOD ONES	Gabby Barrett	191	1
182	182	192	POPSTAR	DJ Khaled Feat. Drake	11	25
-	164	193	ONE MORE TIME	Daft Punk	164	2
158	194	194	SOMEONE LIKE YOU	Adele	157	12
RE-ENTRY	195	195	CHICA IDEAL	Sebastian Yatra & Guaynaa	74	18
175	189	196	FALLING	Trevor Daniel	94	22
NEW	197	197	911	Sech	197	1
RE-ENTRY	198	198	MI NINA	Los Legendarios, Wisin & Myke Towers	82	16
RE-ENTRY	199	199	IN THE END	Linkin Park	163	5
156	166	200	NEKO	DISH//	142	17



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How a yearslong strategy helped **LOONA**'s "Star" become a rare K-pop hit at U.S. radio.

## CORRECTION

In the Publishers Quarterly report that appeared in the Feb. 20 issue, Reservoir should have been ranked at No. 9 on the Hot 100 Songs chart and Round Hill Music at No. 10, bumping Dean Kay's Demi Music from the top 10 list.

## ON THE COVER

Justin Bieber photographed by Sami Drasin on Feb. 20 at the Houdini Estate in Los Angeles.

## TO OUR READERS

Billboard will publish its next issue on April 3. For 24/7 music coverage, go to billboard.com.

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### A NEW PURPOSE

Pandemic downtime and marital bliss helped **Justin Bieber** make peace with his past. As he gets back to work with his new album, *Justice*, he's taking ownership of his career — and his music.

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### GRAMMYS 2021

Polymath and album of the year hopeful **Jacob Collier** leads a pack of refreshingly unexpected nominees that includes seasoned rap veterans, a country truth-teller and the women dominating rock.



# DO WE HAVE ROYALTIES FOR YOU?



## More than \$400 Million Distributed To Musicians and Vocalists

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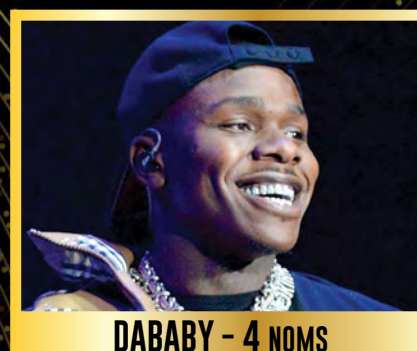
BEYONCÉ - 9 NOMS



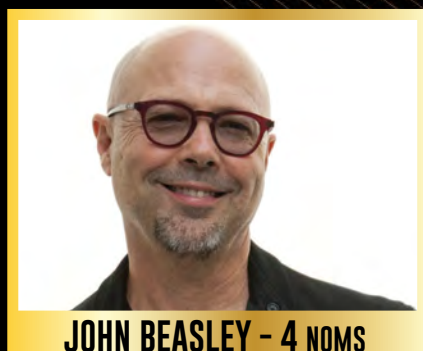
DUA LIPA - 6 NOMS



BILLIE EILISH - 4 NOMS



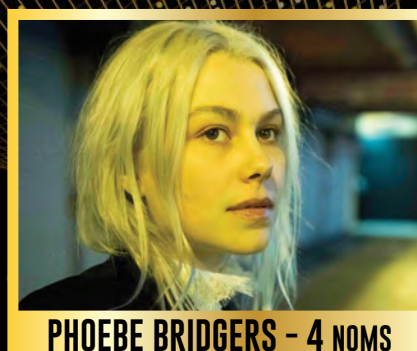
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**NOMINEE**  
BEST RAP  
PERFORMANCE

SAVAGE Remix,  
Megan Thee Stallion feat. Beyonce

**NOMINEE**  
BEST POP  
VOCAL ALBUM

CHANGES  
Justin Bieber

**NOMINEE**  
RECORD OF  
THE YEAR

SAVAGE Remix,  
Megan Thee Stallion feat. Beyonce

**NOMINEE**  
BEST RAP  
SONG

SAVAGE Remix,  
Megan Thee Stallion feat. Beyonce

**NOMINEE**  
BEST RAP  
ALBUM

KINGS DISEASE  
Nas

## ANDRE 'DRE' HARRIS

Producer, Songwriter

**NOMINEE**  
BEST GLOBAL  
MUSIC ALBUM

TWICE AS TALL  
Burna Boy

## AMBRÉ PERKINS

Songwriter

**NOMINEE**  
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R&B ALBUM

UNGODLY HOUR  
Chloe X Halle

In Participation with UMPC, a special congratulations to

## ANT CLEMONS

Universal Music Publishing & Christian McCurdy, for  
Ant's incredible pen on his debut

**NOMINEE**  
BEST R&B  
ALBUM

HAPPY 2 BE HERE  
Ant Clemons







in a smart contract. It also requires paying for “gas,” the fluctuating price for writing data onto a blockchain. “It costs \$30 to \$50, depending on what gas prices are, to mint an NFT,” says Mike Darlington, founder/CEO of the electronic music label Monstercat. (Environmentally friendly artists, beware: The Ethereum network alone annually uses as much power as Ecuador.) Once minted, an NFT can be sold in a “drop” — vernacular adopted from the sneaker-head community — on marketplaces like OpenSea, Zora and Nifty Gateway.

NFTs have been traded online since 2017, but they’ve captured the interest of the music business over the last few months. In December, deadmau5 announced he would sell virtual stickers and trading

Kings of Leon earned \$2 million with NFT collectibles, including the band’s new album, *When You See Yourself*, with a portion of proceeds going to Live Nation’s Crew Nation Fund.

Even with 3LAU’s success, questions remain about the viability of selling albums as NFTs. The price of gas makes it hard to sell music at scale, and it’s far less convenient to listen to than Spotify. “I’m not the biggest advocate for straight music NFTs,” says Darlington. “It feels like we’re going back in time, like owning MP3s.”

Right now, “the NFT business is a collectibles business,” says Wilson. “What we’re seeing is a hype moment like when dot-com businesses boomed and then busted. There will be a boom where everybody thinks there’s a gold rush and there’s free money out there, and then the collectible businesses will come out the back of this hype. It’s taking the baseball card mentality of collectibles into the digital space.”

So far, NFTs aren’t easy for ordinary people to buy. Prices are out of reach for most music fans, and most marketplaces only accept payment in Ethereum. Some marketplaces, like

Nifty Gateway and NBA Top Shot, accept credit cards, but the market won’t grow significantly until more sellers and buyers better understand how it works. (A fact made clear in Kings of Leon’s NFT drop, which didn’t sell as quickly as expected.)

“We’re dealing with a moment of clear digital divide where people are illiterate to how technology works,” says Daouda Leonard, Grimes’ manager and founder of the firm CreateSpace. “I’m seeing a lot of people just going after the gold rush, wanting to get in and sell NFTs, and not doing the work and figuring out how these things work.”

If music NFTs become popular, they will also raise additional questions — whether artists who don’t own the rights to their recordings will be able to sell an NFT without permission from labels, what kinds of royalties labels might pay artists when they sell an NFT and what kinds of licenses buyers will need to display their collections online. “We’re entering a new era of accounting that nobody’s ready for,” says Darlington. “None of the publishers are ready, none of the collection societies are ready. The technology is going to far surpass the systems that we have in place.” **B**

## “IT’S TAKING THE BASEBALL CARD MENTALITY OF COLLECTIBLES INTO THE DIGITAL SPACE.”

—DEAN WILSON, DEADMAU5’S MANAGER

cards with animations of his iconic mouse helmet. After selling a 30-second audiovisual collaboration of music set to video he created with the augmented reality artist Sutu, deadmau5 teamed with digital artist Mad Dog Jones on another NFT auction that showed the benefits of a royalty on third-party sales.

“With Mad Dog Jones, we did \$420,000 in 15 minutes,” says Dean Wilson, deadmau5’s manager and founder/CEO of management firm Seven20. “Two weeks later, Mad Dog Jones does his own drop. He clears \$4.2 million. In the same week, for our art that we did with him, we alone got paid \$22,000 on the secondary market.”

On Jan. 27, Monstercat became one of the first labels to release an NFT, taking in over \$500,000 with the producer Varien and digital artist Giant Swan. Mendes brought in \$600,000 for his charitable foundation in February with a collection of NFT wearables for digital avatars. On Feb. 28, Grimes auctioned 10 pieces of digital art featuring original music that collectively pulled in over \$6 million. On March 2, the members of Disclosure livestreamed themselves producing a song on Twitch, minted it as an NFT and sold it for \$69,000. And on March 5,

## THEY’RE DOWN WITH NFTS

THESE ARTISTS WERE AMONG THE FIRST TO SEE TOKEN SUCCESS



▶ Oct. 5

### RAC

Money raised **\$26,000**

The Portuguese producer made a splash auctioning off the pastel pink audiovisual “Elephant Dreams” in October, and on March 1 announced his new NFT creative agency, called 6. “The rest of the industry is scrambling to understand this,” he wrote on Instagram, “and we’ve been doing it since 2017.”



▶ Dec. 11

### DEADMAU5

Money raised **\$97,000**

The dance heavyweight and early crypto adopter made his NFT debut with a collection of packs containing animated stickers, virtual trading cards and more. Several new deadmau5 NFT drops since have raked in over \$500,000, and his latest collection, Slickmau5, arrived March 9.



▶ Feb. 28

### 3LAU

Money raised **\$11.7 million**

After the electronic producer was the first in music to drop an NFT in September (for \$23,000), his 33-token drop celebrating the three-year anniversary of his album *Ultraviolet* smashed records for the initial sale of an NFT collection and a single NFT: \$3.6 million, which included the opportunity to record a song with him.



▶ Feb. 28

### GRIMES

Money raised **\$6 million**

The 10 digital art pieces in Grimes’ WarNymph collection build off an art project that she and her brother, Mac Boucher, have worked on for years. The highest-selling item: “Death of the Old,” a one-of-a-kind video involving flying cherubs and set to an original song that sold at auction for nearly \$389,000.



▶ March 5

### KINGS OF LEON

Money raised **\$2 million**

The two-week auction for the Nashville rockers’ “NFT Yourself” lot included six “Golden Tickets” — front-row seats for the holder to every Kings of Leon tour for life. Its launch coincided with the release of the band’s album *When You See Yourself*, which became the first album to be sold on the blockchain the same day it debuted on streaming platforms.

—TATIANA CIRISANO

### MARKET WATCH

**21.2B**

↑ 0.9%

#### TOTAL ON-DEMAND STREAMS WEEK OVER WEEK

Number of audio and video on-demand streams for the week ending March 4.

**15.66M**

↑ 2.3%

#### ALBUM CONSUMPTION UNITS WEEK OVER WEEK

Album sales plus track-equivalent albums plus streaming-equivalent albums for the week ending March 4.

**183.4B**

↑ 3.5%

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

Number of audio and video streams for 2021 so far over the same period in 2020.





FOR YOUR ACM CONSIDERATION  
**LEE BRICE**  
SINGLE & MUSIC EVENT

THE NO. 1 PLATINUM-CERTIFIED SINGLE

“I HOPE YOU’RE HAPPY NOW” WITH CARLY PEARCE  
BILLBOARD TOP COUNTRY SONGS OF 2020 (#9)

“TWO OF THE BEST VOICES IN COUNTRY MUSIC...”  
- NASH COUNTRY DAILY

“PEARCE AND BRICE’S VOICES BLEND BEAUTIFULLY...”  
- BILLBOARD

“CARLY PEARCE AND LEE BRICE REINVENT THE CLASSIC  
COUNTRY MALE/FEMALE DUET...”  
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## THE LATE SHOW

INDEPENDENT VENUES ARE COUNTING ON FEDERAL ASSISTANCE, BUT ITS ENTRANCE SEEMS TO BE DELAYED

**WHEN CONGRESS PASSED A COVID-19 RELIEF** bill in December that included \$15 billion in grants for independent music venues, promoters and other performing arts organizations forced to shut down during the pandemic, concert business executives saw it as a lifeline. More than 10 weeks later, however, the Small Business Administration (SBA) hasn't even started accepting applications — which means funds probably won't arrive before May.

Indie venues have been in “desperate” need of government assistance since July, says Audrey Fix-Schaefer, head of communications at promoter I.M.P. and a board member for the National Independent Venue Association (NIVA), which helped lobby for the venue grant program. Venues can't pay rent now, she adds, with “a promise of hope of funding.”

“The SBA is building the program from the ground up, and that is a long process in government,” says Andrea Roebker, a regional communications director at the SBA. While the SBA was able to distribute Paycheck Protection Program loans soon after the CARES Act passed in March 2020, those were handled by delegated bankers, and the venue grants program is a “different animal,” says Roebker, noting that this is the first time the department has created a grant process focused on for-profit entities. There's a lot involved: compliance with the legislation, interagency work with the Office of Management and Budget, and the creation of systems to prevent fraud and prioritize venues in need. (Those that lost 90% of revenue in 2020 will get priority.)

Over 30,000 entities could be eligible for the grants, according to the SBA, which will need to hire additional staff in order to meet demand. (Currently, about 15 employees work on the program, receiving expertise from supplementary staff.) An amendment in the \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill would provide an additional \$1.25 billion to the grant program with \$840,000 allocated to SBA staffing.

Since the pandemic began, nearly 100 indie U.S. music venues have shuttered permanently, and the list continues to grow after a year without touring. NIVA had two wishes for the venue grants, says Fix-Schaefer: expediency and priority for those that need money most. “In a way, they run counter to each other,” she says. “It's a push-pull.” For a New York venue owner who pays \$150,000 a month in rent, “she's going to go bankrupt if this doesn't come through fast,” says Fix-Schaefer. “After a year, there are no other stones to return.” —TAYLOR MIMS



## iTunes Discounts: Not Just A Cheap Trick

Streaming rules the music business, but consumers still buy downloads for the right price — think .34 + .35 = \$uccess

BY STEVE KNOPPER

**T**O BOOST RAPPER CJ'S hit “Whopty,” Mike Sherwood's staff at Warner Records came up with a plan that might seem unusual these days: Sell it. As a 69-cent download, on iTunes. And — “Boom,” he says — “Whopty” surged from No. 16 to No. 10 on the Billboard Hot 100 in mid-February.

It's a streaming world: In 2020, digital downloads generated just 6% of U.S. recorded-music revenue, according to the RIAA. But since Apple returned 69-cent song sales to the iTunes homepage, some of the tracks involved have surged in sales. After a late-February “69-cent R&B Hits” promotion, Blackstreet's “No Diggity” (featuring Dr. Dre) spiked 1,421%, to 8,000 sales, and The Temptations' “My Girl” jumped 727%, to 5,000.

Those kinds of numbers won't shift a label's balance sheet, but they're basically found money — especially for catalog hits like Tears for Fears' “Everybody Wants To Rule the World” and The Mamas & The Papas' “California Dreamin'.” “Maybe you can drive an impulse purchase for 69 cents,” says Russ Crupnick, MusicWatch's managing partner.

Sherwood, who is senior vp streaming and revenue at Warner, says Apple has been “testing” more 69-cent sales since the holidays, although a source close to the tech giant says the labels set their

own prices. The idea is to attract fans who still want to own music in a streaming world, as well as older consumers who haven't yet subscribed to a streaming service. The price has an appealing simplicity. “Anywhere between 69 and 99 cents would have created confusion in what right now is probably a very effective and clean experiment,” says Frank Luby, a pricing consultant who has previously worked with major labels.

Downloads peaked in 2012, and iTunes is unlikely to make a substantial comeback the way vinyl has. A MusicWatch consumer survey shows that the percentage of the U.S. “internet population” that purchased a music download dropped from 10% in 2019 to 6% last year. “We're talking about a rapidly diminishing population,” says Crupnick. “It reminds me of the bargain-bin days of DVDs.”

But 69-cent sales can still boost catalog staples or help promote newer hits, especially when they're tied to marketing campaigns. The discount on singer Andra Day's “Rise Up” coincided with a Super Bowl ad synch, and its sales jumped 313%, to 10,000, for one week in February.

How long will these sales last? Probably as long as they stay lucrative. “It's funny that we're having this conversation in 2021,” says Sherwood. But “as long as it's profitable, we're absolutely continuing to support it.” **B**



Sherwood



# JIMMIE ALLEN

## FOR YOUR ACM CONSIDERATION NEW MALE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

**"BEST SHOT" & "MAKE ME WANT TO"**

BACK-TO-BACK #1 SINGLES & PLATINUM CERTIFICATIONS  
OVER 1/2 BILLION COMBINED STREAMS

**524M+**

ON-DEMAND STREAMS

**2M TOTAL SHAZAMS IN THE US**

31K DURING DICK CLARK'S NEW YEAR'S ROCKIN' EVE PERFORMANCE

**THREE ITUNES TOP 15**

ALL GENRE SONGS FROM  
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*BETTIE JAMES* "BEST ALBUMS OF 2020" LISTS  
BILLBOARD, ROLLING STONE & SOUNDS LIKE NASHVILLE

CHILDREN'S BOOK "MY VOICE IS A TRUMPET"  
AVAILABLE JULY 13, 2021

"A PROMISING EP"  
- NEW YORK TIMES

"COUNTRY SINGER JIMMIE ALLEN CONTINUES TO RISE"  
- AP

"MUSIC THAT TESTIFIES TO HIS FULL SPECTRUM OF CREATIVE ABILITIES"  
- MUSIC ROW

"AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF [ALLEN'S] ARRIVAL"  
- NPR

"A POWERFUL STATEMENT FROM A DEVELOPING VOICE"  
- BILLBOARD

"A HUGE STEP FOR COUNTRY"  
- NPR





# Fare Play

Streaming services pay by overall popularity, which makes superstars more dominant. Now SoundCloud is trying a new approach. Will others follow?

BY GLENN PEOPLES

**W**HEN SPOTIFY FIRST NEGOTIATED its initial licensing deals with labels in the late 2000s, both sides focused more on how much money the service would take in than the best way to divide it. The idea they settled on, which divides artist payouts based on the overall popularity of recordings, regardless of how they map to individuals' listening habits, was "the simplest system to put together at the time," recalls Thomas Hesse, a former Sony Music executive who was involved in those conversations. They decided on a price point "and had the big pie that gets distributed," he says. "It was early days, when we invented the whole model."

Over the last decade, that model has become successful enough to bring back the music business — and also reshape it in ways that might have been unimaginable at the time. Paying artists and other rights holders a pro rata share of total streaming revenue means that users who spend more time streaming music have a greater influence than those who listen less. This favors hip-hop artists with young audiences, dedicated fans and broad reach. And at least some of their wins come at the expense of acts in other genres, especially those that appeal to older audiences, who generally spend less time streaming music.

What would the business look like if payouts had instead been calculated with a "user-centric" model, which would allocate money by dividing up the revenue generated by each individual, so that, for example, a jazz fan who only listens to Blue Note artists would have his \$10 monthly fee divided among them? For years, a few big-name European artists and their managers have pushed for such a model, and starting April 1 SoundCloud will pay some independent rights holders this way.

This won't change much anytime soon: SoundCloud is only applying this accounting to recordings uploaded to the service directly, and the company only represents a small fraction of the streaming business. And while it's hard to imagine the current model changing soon, for a variety of reasons, SoundCloud's move is reigniting a debate that until now has been confined mostly to continental Europe.

To understand why, let's say hypothetically that 20% of streaming service subscribers account for 80% of overall streams, although the actual figures have never been made public. That would mean



that these heavy listeners — presumably younger and probably more engaged with their favorite acts than most — have an outsize influence in determining overall payouts. And some executives believe that this is one reason, although certainly not the only one, why hip-hop and pop have boomed in recent years — partly at the expense of album-based genres like rock and jazz.

How much of a difference could the user-centric model make? A 2021 study conducted by Deloitte based on Spotify and Deezer data found that user-centric streaming would favor rock and pop at the expense of hip-hop, while a 2014 Norwegian academic paper that used data from WiMP, the precursor to TIDAL in Europe, concluded that a user-centric approach would increase the royalties of local artists by 13%.

A change in payment models would not significantly affect the market share of the major labels, according to these studies, as well as several sources. Both the majors and streaming services prefer to focus on total payouts, and Spotify CEO Daniel Ek has said that the best way to support artists is to grow subscriptions. The major labels seem to have the same focus — especially at a time when the overall business is growing so fast.

Such a change might not make it any easier for young artists to make a living solely from recorded music. "It's not like money will rain for everyone," says Maximillian Kolb, managing director of BMG in Germany, where the company has supported the user-centric model. "Music still needs to be successful."

But a change like this would certainly help acts in some genres more than others. "It helps ensure

that the rock community benefits" from streaming, says Seether singer Shawn Morgan. It could also revive them, since the current model seems to be incentivizing labels to sign artists with potentially viral hits.

Could more services follow SoundCloud's lead? Executives from Spotify, Apple Music and Amazon Music said at a Feb. 23 U.K. Parliamentary inquiry into music streaming that they're open to discussing the user-centric model, and Deezer endorsed the idea in 2019, although the company has not yet debuted a pilot program originally announced for early 2020.

Any change to the current system, however, would require broad agreement among stakeholders — not just the services but also the majors, large indie labels and potentially even star artists — in a business where unanimity is rare. (Labels would presumably come under pressure from artists who could be hurt by the change to a new model.) From a technical perspective, this would be "not a trivial transition," said Horacio Gutierrez, Spotify's head of global affairs and chief legal officer, at the Parliamentary inquiry. That could create even more problems, as greater competition is in the interests of rights holders and the Deloitte study said smaller services might struggle to afford the change. The politics could also be problematic, since a shift to the user-centric model would disadvantage hip-hop artists at a time when the music business is facing renewed scrutiny about its history of unfairness to minority artists.

That doesn't mean the issue will go away, though. "As always," says Hesse, "these models need to evolve." ■



FOR YOUR ACM CONSIDERATION

HARDY

NEW MALE ARTIST  
OF THE YEAR

OVER 701 MILLION ARTIST  
ON-DEMAND STREAMS

"A BREAKOUT IN THE MAKING"

- *HITS*

SONGWRITER  
OF THE YEAR

"HARDY IS A LYRICAL GENIUS  
AND HE PROVES IT ON 'A ROCK'"

*American*  
- *songwriter*  
the craft + music

4 #1 SINGLES AS A WRITER  
IN 2020

MUSIC EVENT OF THE YEAR

"ONE BEER" FEAT. LAUREN ALAINA  
& DEVIN DAWSON

#1 BB AND CA/MB  
COUNTRY RADIO AIRPLAY SINGLE

BIG LOUD





## Are Real MCs Getting Fake Clicks?

Problems with fraudulent streams in Germany trigger global concerns

BY CLIFFORD COONAN and ALEXEI BARRIONUEVO

**BERLIN** — Since September, Berlin rapper Fler has been feuding with Hamburg’s Bonez MC — about buying fake streams. After Bonez’s first album in eight years, *Hollywood*, and four of its singles topped the country’s GfK music charts, Fler accused him of juicing his streaming numbers. “Everyone knows that you bought them #klicks,” said Fler on Instagram Stories. Bonez responded with a chart showing that eight of Spotify’s top 10 streamed songs in Germany in September were his. “People lie,” he said. “Numbers don’t.”

Fraudulent streams are a source of particular concern in Germany, where the music business is still transitioning away from CDs — which represented 24% of revenue in 2019, according to IFPI — toward streaming. This is boosting German rap and pitting established artists like Kontra K and Capital Bra against newcomers who they allege have been illicitly enlarging their numbers.

Some of this is just hip-hop trash talk. But a 3,000-euro payment to one of dozens of online services can buy 1 million Spotify streams, say some in the rap business — that’s about how much the service pays an artist for that number of streams. “Fake streams

are like doping; it’s not cool,” said Kontra K in a 2019 interview with a German radio station. “The more fake streams get generated, the less money there is for each artist.”

As the accusations have flown — especially within hip-hop, where streaming has grown most — the German labels trade association, BVMI, has stepped up its legal efforts to fight fraud. In June 2019, IFPI, music groups and the big streaming platforms all signed a code of best practices to detect and prevent stream manipulation. Since last March, IFPI has cracked down on companies selling fake streams — often bundled with social media “likes” and “follows” — through court injunctions and other legal tactics. So far, 21 companies in Germany and Brazil have shuttered, and IFPI lawyers are looking into entities in other countries, executives there say.

At a time when Spotify is rapidly expanding globally, the proliferation of fake streams threatens the credibility of music charts and — more importantly — royalty accounting. The music associations say the streaming platforms are better positioned to secure their systems and should lead the fight. “Since we are not running

the servers, we really don’t know what is going on [there],” says Florian Drücke, BVMI’s managing director. “But when we see a service trying to make money with fraudulent acts, we can attack this service.” To combat websites such as likeservice24.de, which received an injunction in January, the BVMI has shifted from trying to prove copyright infringement to relying on competition law, arguing that streaming manipulation is not only fraudulent but deceptive, misleading and unfair to the music business.

The streaming services, for their part, have been unwilling to discuss the scale of the problem of artificially generated streams. “It’s a continual arms race,” says Mark Mulligan, managing director at MIDiA Research in London.

Some German rappers allege that criminals are using fake streams to launder money in the country, where suspected cases of money laundering and terrorist financing jumped by 50% in 2019, according to Germany’s Financial Intelligence Unit. “There are four or five people who are big players right now who are filling their pockets through [international money transfer service] Western Union,” rapper Koool Savas tweeted in September, referring

to hackers. “To spell it out clearly — money is laundered using streaming.” If that’s true, says German entertainment and media lawyer Ramón Glassl, it would be relatively easy: Someone would pay ill-gotten money to a stream manipulator and receive in return artificial streams and the royalties that follow — in “clean” currency. (Neither BVMI nor IFPI said they were aware of investigations involving allegations of money laundering.)

Hackers can also play a key role in manipulation schemes. In a 2019 report on German public TV, journalist Ilhan Coskun featured an anonymous masked hacker named “Kai” who detailed how he creates playlists with thousands of followers by obtaining login data from Spotify users. Kai rotates the tracks he wants to promote in a continuous loop and deflects attention by filling the playlists with other, legitimate artists. Coskun, adopting the rap alias ERROR281, produced a song and video, “8K,” to demonstrate how fake streams affect the hip-hop market and had Kai help him generate 150,000 streams on Spotify.

Some artists are unwitting beneficiaries of this fraud. Last March, German rapper Apache 207 angrily posted on Instagram that someone in Hong Kong had streamed his song “Matrix” 14,000 times, helping drive it to No. 2 on Spotify’s Hong Kong charts. “Someone is clearly trying to piss on my leg with these dubious Hong Kong chart placements,” he said.

Spotify says it is working to strengthen its fraud-detection systems. “Those who engage in this activity threaten the livelihood of hard-working artists and rights holders, and we are continuously working to reduce its impact by detecting and mitigating such activity on our platform,” says a representative.

“Ultimately, this kind of fraud and manipulation will always be part of the model,” says Mulligan. “Streaming services’ most realistic ambition should be to ensure it remains at the margins, much like high-street retailers keep shoplifting to the margins while understanding they will never fully eradicate it.”

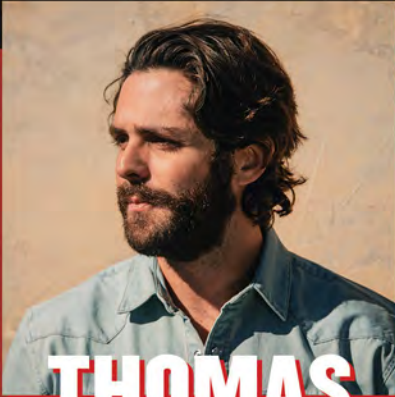
Glassl says the industry is waking up to the threat that fake streams pose to trust in the digital marketplace. “The artists have a severe interest in taking down the manipulators,” he says. “Otherwise, it would be a race for the best streaming manipulator. And this is not what artists and associations are looking for.” **B**



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LABEL GROUP

## CONGRATULATES OUR 2021 <sup>56<sup>TH</sup></sup> ACM AWARDS NOMINEES



### THOMAS RHETT

ENTERTAINER OF THE YEAR  
MALE ARTIST OF THE YEAR  
MUSIC EVENT OF THE YEAR  
"BE A LIGHT" - FEATURING REBA MCENTIRE,  
HILLARY SCOTT, CHRIS TOMLIN, KEITH URBAN  
SONG OF THE YEAR  
"SOME PEOPLE DO" - OLD DOMINION  
[SONGWRITER(S): JESSE FRASURE, MATT RAMSEY,  
THOMAS RHETT, SHANE MCANALLY]



### FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE

DUO OF THE YEAR



### CARLY PEARCE

FEMALE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

SINGLE OF THE YEAR  
"I HOPE YOU'RE HAPPY NOW" - CARLY PEARCE & LEE BRICE  
MUSIC EVENT OF THE YEAR  
"I HOPE YOU'RE HAPPY NOW" - CARLY PEARCE & LEE BRICE



### LADY A

GROUP OF THE YEAR



### THE CADILLAC THREE

GROUP OF THE YEAR



### LAURA VELTZ

SONG OF THE YEAR  
"THE BONES" - MAREN MORRIS  
[SONGWRITER(S): LAURA VELTZ, JIMMY ROBBINS]





FROM THE DESK OF

# JENIFER MALLORY

Executive VP/GM,  
Columbia Records

BY DAN RYS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERICA GÉNÉCÉ

**I**N MAY 2013, THOUSANDS OF people descended on the small Australian town of Wee Waa for the global album launch of Daft Punk's *Random Access Memories*, a dance party on a giant LED floor that marked the first time anyone heard the French duo's Grammy Award-winning release — even though the DJs never planned to show. For Jenifer Mallory, then vp international marketing for Sony Music, the event was “one of the most impactful, pivotal campaigns I've ever worked on in my career,” she says. “They taught me everything about building a narrative and doing things that create conversation. It was one of those things that changed me forever.”

Less than a decade later, the world is a very different place — for starters, Daft Punk has announced its retirement — but the lessons Mallory took from that campaign have become even more valuable since the pandemic forced artists to experiment with new ways to connect with fans. As executive vp/GM of Columbia Records, a position to which she was promoted in September 2018, Mallory oversees marketing, plus digital, promotion, publicity, sales, licensing and brand partnerships for the record industry's oldest label. And over the past year, she has helped to guide a young, digitally savvy staff through a once-in-a-century pandemic while adapting to a changing marketplace that can now shift at the whims of proprietary algorithms. Alongside chairman/CEO Ron Perry, Mallory has molded Columbia into a more nimble operation that caters to its legacy artists (Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, AC/DC) and superstars (Adele, Beyoncé, Harry Styles), while breaking a new wave of genre-blending MCs like Polo G, Lil Tjay and Lil Nas X and tapping into the burgeoning international pop market through a partnership with Korean megastars BTS and the signing of Spanish dynamo (and Grammy winner) Rosalía.

The principles of marketing and promotion remain steady, but strategy shifts at a breakneck pace. “As soon as you feel like you've figured out something that really has an impact on consumption or as a way for an artist to break through, it no longer works when the next thing crops up,” she says. “It's a constant learning curve. And by the way, once we come out of quarantine — God willing — it's all going to change again.”



Mallory photographed March 3 in New York.

**You have been in your current role for two and a half years. How has Columbia evolved during that time?**

Ron has brought a lot of incredible new and fresh energy. Probably the biggest shift in the industry over the past three years is the necessity to move quickly. Starting with A&R, there is an urgency to find artists and quickly sign them, and that bleeds over into marketing and digital. Every day and night, our teams scour the internet for live-time conversations on culture that are happening and try to insert our artists and their music into them. We've spent a lot of energy revitalizing the digital team at the company. Ron is incredibly internet-savvy and understands how critical it is, especially now in lockdown, to utilize the internet to drive artist narratives.

In addition to that, we've put a lot of focus on urban music, and hired a lot of new people — a diverse, young staff with female leaders. Ideas can come from anyone, no matter what your rank or what department is. The vibe is level in a great way.

**How has the marketplace evolved?**

There's a huge emphasis on singles versus albums. With all of these global short-form video platforms — Reels and Shorts and TikTok — kids identify with a song long before they even know who sings it. So, at Columbia we're constantly trying to balance that with making sure we focus on artist development and driving fans back to either a larger body of work or a larger artist narrative. The Kid Laroi is a great example of that: He put out several songs over the course of the last 18 months, but we used press and interviews in the right places online to make sure that his story wasn't just about one song.

The connection between fan and artist has never been more critical. There's so much noise in the marketplace right now with the pandemic, politics and all the different music coming from every corner of the world, it's important that the tracks Columbia releases are coupled with a story that makes fans of the music want to connect with an artist. Songs are easier to break in a way, because you have so much





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ACM AWARDS**





1



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more access to consumers, but that access is giving thousands of artists the same ability to connect. So, you have to be that much more savvy at it.

I used to run international for Sony overall — all three labels — and in the last 18 months, even though I haven't gotten on a plane in so long, I've never felt more connected with our markets overseas. The streaming and promotional platforms have really leveled the playing field, and there's no passport control for music anymore. The internet doesn't know borders, and it's wild. You have BTS taking over the Billboard Hot 100 chart in America, and between them and Rosalía, songs that are not sung in English are breaking through in English-speaking markets. It's thrilling.

#### How has that changed the way you break artists globally?

Streaming has a lot to do with it. Access is now available to every fan around the world. And, specifically at Columbia, our philosophy is it's important to think globally. For Harry Styles, for example, we started the last album campaign in Australia. We did a cryptic, sniping campaign and über-fans down there found it and took to Twitter. That's the first place people saw it, and that was intentional. Because while we think globally, it's important to market locally. Connecting our acts to fans in local markets is imperative. You need local activations to knit these fan bases around the world together.

The most recent example would be our AC/DC campaign, where we started sniping that there was a new album coming outside of Angus Young's old high school in Sydney. We were very thoughtful about starting it in a targeted way that makes sense for the band, not just buying random pieces of media. What that does is get all this earned media. News sites and papers will pick it up. It's those little idiosyncrasies that really make the difference now.

#### I can imagine that opens up possibilities but can also make it hard to decide on strategies.

We start with the artist and where they fit in culture and what is true to their story. One example is Bruce Springsteen. We put out *Letter to You* during

quarantine, which, without Bruce touring behind the record, was a little daunting. What really drives his story is that he's an incredible live performer. So we had to get creative about mobilizing his fans in a digital world. And one thing we did was a Bruce emoji. We weren't the first to think of this idea, but it was very purposeful in the way it was designed. We took it from the *Born in the USA* album cover, where he's holding the guitar and his arm is up. We thought it captured everything that Bruce is — a rock star. It garnered so much earned media — *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert* brought it up to him when they interviewed him; all the morning news shows brought it up to him; NPR did a feature on it. If we had actually bought media across all these platforms, it would have been incredibly expensive. Instead, we did something that was true to his brand and unexpected, and it drove the narrative.

#### When you approach a campaign for a new artist, where do you start?

The importance of community building is critical. Look at what the Reddit community did to the stock market a couple weeks ago. These communities are so powerful, and whether it's on Reddit or Twitter, Discord, Twitch, Clubhouse or Roblox, we have to find the fans. But we also have to make sure that it feels authentic to the artist. So an artist who's not a big gamer doesn't make a whole lot of sense on *Fortnite* or Twitch. It's also important for artists to make every effort to connect with their fans. BTS and Harry Styles have some of the strongest fan bases in the entire world, and it's their efforts that ultimately help drive their songs up the charts.

We have teams of people learning about the new thing every week. Now you've got these NFTs [non-fungible tokens, a method for buying and selling media], which are adding new angles and layers to artistry. We've seen a lot of artists selling their creations on the internet for millions of dollars, but this could add more dimension to the industry because there's more opportunity for artists to sell components of their art now. We don't really know how it's going to evolve, but we're excited to explore it with our artists. It's a whole new world. **■**



3



4

1. "We created these condoms as promotional items for 'Get Lucky.' Fans went crazy for them," says Mallory. "We also made the bowling ball for our Japanese album launch event, which took place at a roller rink in Tokyo." 2. "For his single 'Watermelon Sugar,' Harry Styles sent these ceramic watermelons to me and Ron." 3. "Fader was Rosalía's first U.S. cover," she says. "We serviced one of her first singles from Columbia to partners via these bejeweled flip phones. It was a fun way to tie the whole campaign together." 4. Chocolates of Bob Dylan album covers made by the Sony Japan team for his 2006 album, *Modern Times*.



# CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2021 ACM AWARDS NOMINEES



**LUKE COMBS**

ENTERTAINER  
MALE ARTIST  
MUSIC EVENT

"DOES TO ME" (FEAT. ERIC CHURCH)



**MIRANDA LAMBERT**

FEMALE ARTIST  
SINGLE | SONG | VIDEO  
"BLUEBIRD"



**MAREN MORRIS**

FEMALE ARTIST  
SINGLE | SONG - "THE BONES"  
VIDEO - "BETTER THAN WE FOUND IT"  
GROUP - THE HIGHWOMEN



**KANE BROWN**

ALBUM - MIXTAPE VOL. 1  
VIDEO - "WORLDWIDE BEAUTIFUL"



**OLD DOMINION**

GROUP  
SONG - "SOME PEOPLE DO"



**BROOKS & DUNN**

DUO

56<sup>TH</sup>  
**ACM**  
AWARDS



FOR YOUR ACM CONSIDERATION  
CHRIS STAPLETON

ALBUM OF THE YEAR  
"STARTING OVER"

ENTERTAINER/MALE  
ARTIST OF THE YEAR

SONG OF THE YEAR  
"STARTING OVER"

**npr**

"Chris is at the top of his game with this record. It sounds like a record from a great."

**The New York Times**

"lands precisely where country meets Southern soul: with grit, details, clarity and ache."

**Billboard**

"you'll be hard-pressed to find a better country album this year than Starting Over"

**AP** Associated Press

"a sure-footed masterpiece... one of the year's best."

**VULTURE**

"Elegant writing and delicate musicianship combine in an album ranking among the year's best."

**Entertainment**

"Starting Over is a reminder of why Stapleton has made such a splash over the past few years: that sharply observed yet plainspoken lyrics."

**Los Angeles Times**

"vividly exemplifies the complex emotional character of Stapleton's best music. He's burly but soft. Tough yet vulnerable. A protector of his loved ones and a man in perpetual search of shelter."

**THE RINGER**

"the results are stunning...his most personal work yet."

**The New York Times**

"Chris Stapleton's roar isn't designed to scare you off. It's regal, an announcement of an alpha figure asserting his primacy..."

**VARIETY**

"one of the most significant figures in contemporary country music"

**AP** Associated Press

"To say Chris Stapleton is one of country music's best singers is to sell him short. He's one of the world's finest singers of any genre, period."

**Billboard**

"Simply put, there are few recording artists in country operating at Stapleton's level"

**GQ**

"one of the most popular voices in music"

**STEREOGUM**

"an unstoppable force"

**Billboard**

"sounds designed for this moment, an exhalation in the middle of an anxiety-stricken year, with Stapleton's gruff voice providing hope for a better future."

**npr**

"This year's bless-the-broken-road classic"

**Rolling Stone**

"'Starting Over' is for a new day and, like its title implies, a fresh start."



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# The Sound

PG. 32 HOW 'LOCATION' BECAME A COUNTRY-REGGAETÓN HIT ✦ PG. 34 THE MUSIC OF VR FITNESS

Aly (left) and AJ  
photographed Feb. 19  
at Good Times at Davey  
Wayne's in Los Angeles.

## WHOLE NEW WORLD

Sister duo Aly & AJ used their Disney start to educate themselves on driving their career — and are now more empowered than ever

BY LINDSEY HAVENS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY SHELBY GOLDSTEIN



**T**HE LAST TIME SISTER duo Aly & AJ released a full-length album, *Insomniatic*, it was 2007, and the only social media platforms the then-Disney stars had to navigate were Myspace and the early days of YouTube. But 14 years later, at the end of 2020, that album's lead single, "Potential Breakup Song," unexpectedly went viral on TikTok and ushered in a new era for the duo.

The original TikTok clip, in which a college student filmed her mother poorly lip-syncing along, has gained over 11 million likes since October. Meanwhile, the song has been tagged to 1.7 million other uploads. The traction prompted the now-all-grown-up pop-rock pair to rerecord and release an explicit version (they changed "stuff" to "shit," among other swaps) of the hit that has earned 10.8 million U.S. streams, according to MRC Data.

Even though the original "Potential Breakup Song" earned Aly & AJ their highest-charting hit on the Billboard Hot 100 to date, reaching No. 17 in 2007, they say that rerecording an expletive-filled version all these years later feels more gratifying. That's not only because they did so independently — Aly & AJ signed a distribution deal with AWAL in 2017 — but also because this time around, they own the master recording. Another bonus? The viral moment crafted the perfect setup for the pair to begin promoting its long-awaited fourth album.

"As the TikTok thing was happening, the girls called me and said, 'Hey, can we sit down and strategize? We think there might be an opportunity to

release music sooner than we had initially thought,' " recalls their manager, Primary Wave's Jared Rosenberg, who came on board in February 2020. "We were fortunate enough to have everything done so that as the trend kept living, we were able to be proactively reactive." As a result, the new album's lead single, the aching and stripped-down "Slow Dancing," arrived a month ahead of schedule in December. It previewed Aly & AJ's *A Touch of the Beat Gets You Up on Your Feet Gets You Out and Then Into the Sun*, due May 7 and distributed by AWAL, which they say is about seeing the light at the end of the tunnel — not just for the pandemic but as adult artists in charge of their own careers.

"When we were younger, it was a lot easier to be derailed in terms of our taste or our opinion," says Aly. "Now we're a bit more set in our ways, but that actually suits us and is helpful when it comes to decisions about mixing [a song] or choosing an image. When you make your first record, you're like a puppy dog. But we needed that experience and those records to get to where we are now."

Born in Torrance, Calif., sisters Alyson, 31, and Amanda "AJ" Michalka, 29, signed a recording contract with Hollywood Records in 2004 and released their debut album, *Into the Rush*, the following year as the Disney-owned label was also breaking acts like the Jonas Brothers and Hannah Montana. Aly & AJ released two more albums through 2007 while simultaneously starring in Disney Channel originals — Aly was a series regular on *Phil of the Future*, and she and AJ later co-starred in the film *Cow Belles*. They promoted



their third album, *Insomniatic*, by opening for Miley Cyrus in 2007-08 on her Hannah Montana arena tour.

After Aly & AJ left Hollywood Records over a decade ago, when they were only just entering their 20s, they struggled to find their place as a duo and were eager to start over. In 2013, they released the jangly indie-pop single "Hothouse" as 78violet, a rebranding meant to distance themselves from their Disney past. But four years later, they returned as Aly & AJ with the EP *Ten Years*, which spotlighted their synth-pop strengths, followed by the *Sanctuary* EP in 2019. AJ says those releases were a learning experience on navigating independent promotion in a digital age, from Twitter banners to Instagram swipe-ups. "You have to follow up on a lot of different platforms and keep those all consistent and cohesive and creative and authentic to the band," she says. "It's a challenge."

Even so, Aly says it's a responsibility they are embracing, with AJ agreeing that having control is "empowering" and a feeling that informed the new album. "There's a confidence to our music and our direction," adds AJ. "We're very clear about what we want to put out, and [if we did it] any sooner, we wouldn't feel the same way."

That creative certainty allowed them to place more uptempo tracks, like the airy and horn-heavy "Break Yourself," alongside more unexpected tunes like the ominous and twangy "Personal Cathedrals." It's also why they decided to release the five-and-a-half-minute-long "Pretty Places" as their third single earlier in March.

"How great that we don't have to be in the confines of pop rules," says AJ.

"I'm also like, 'Who made the rules?'" adds Aly. "We can do whatever we want." **B**

Clockwise from left: Anuel, Karol G and Balvin.



## BEHIND THE HIT

### "LOCATION"

▶ **WHEN KAROL G** mentioned to Ovy on the Drums that she wanted her next single to be more "international," the Colombian producer knew exactly what it needed: country twang.

"I had saved a country guitar loop [from 2019] that I never used and figured it would be perfect for 'Location,'" says Ovy. "Since we're in a pandemic and can't leave the house, I had more time to look through

my music library — and there it was. It seemed so fresh."

Though Becky G collaborated with Kane Brown in 2019, and more recently Anuel AA and Ozuna released the polka-tinged "Municiones," no modern-day reggaeton track has deftly fused pop and western nuances until "Location," which arrived in February and features Latin stars Anuel and J Balvin.

The hit came together late last summer when Ovy met Karol G and Anuel in the studio to play them the country-tinged loop. The trio

recorded the intro and chorus in one day, while Balvin did his verse separately. "We had country as a starting point but it didn't sound 'Latin,' so we added the reggaeton drums," says Ovy. "It was a risk, but it worked well."

The country-reggaeton fusion debuted at No. 6 on *Billboard's* Hot Latin Songs chart, making Karol G the female artist with the most top 10s (11) on the list in the past five years. Meanwhile, the hit raked in 4.2 million U.S. streams in its debut week, according to MRC Data, and its rodeo-inspired

music video, directed by Colin Tilley, has garnered over 60 million views on YouTube.

Since January 2020, Karol G has scored five top 10 entries on Hot Latin Songs, four of which were produced by Ovy. "We've been working together for eight years, so I've learned to make her thoughts into music," he says. "She hums something, and I automatically understand what she wants — that's magic. To have that kind of chemistry with an artist isn't easy to find, but I found that with Karol."

—GRISELDA FLORES



# CONGRATULATIONS

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**STEVEN, PETER**

*and everyone at*

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MUSIC MOVES  
OUR WORLD





# Ready, Headset, Go!

Why virtual reality workouts set to top-charting songs are the future of fitness

BY JASON LIPSHUTZ

**A**S GYMS AROUND THE WORLD CLOSED due to ongoing pandemic safety restrictions, many fitness enthusiasts transported themselves to an Icelandic lake or an Ethiopian volcano for a workout thanks to the virtual reality fitness platform Supernatural. Launched last April by tech company Within, the subscription-based app available on Oculus Quest allows users to strap on a headset so they can swing at incoming objects with VR bats, and squat to avoid others, for a choreographed cardio workout to uptempo hits.

Now, thanks to a mid-February deal with Universal Music Publishing Group, Supernatural has unlocked even more chart-toppers — including Post Malone’s “Better Now,” Billie Eilish’s “bad guy” and The Weeknd’s “Blinding Lights” — to motivate users and expand in-app programming.

“We’re looking at hundreds of thousands of new songs,” says Supernatural vp content Samantha Storr of the UMPG deal, which follows similar agreements with Sony/ATV, Warner Chappell, Kobalt and BMG, as well as label partnerships with Universal Music Group and Warner. Since the new deal, Storr developed a female rappers workout for Women’s History Month featuring Nicki Minaj’s “Chun Li” and Megan Thee Stallion’s “Savage,” as well as a hair metal workout with KISS and Iron Maiden tracks and a low-impact course to Bob Marley tunes. “It adds so much depth to our catalog,” she says. “A lot of these artists you’ve seen on Supernatural, but we didn’t have their No. 1 hits. Now we do.”

Supernatural was always envisioned as an exercise option distinguished by premium music: Co-founder/CEO Chris Milk is a former music video director with deep industry ties, having developed VR projects for acts like Arcade Fire, Beck and U2 in the early 2010s. Within started as a media distribution platform before Milk and co-founder Aaron Koblin realized the potential of at-home fitness and started

imagining an app that functions like a full-body, calorie-busting *Dance Dance Revolution*.

“It feels like you’re playing a sport from the future, but you can do it on a yoga mat in your bedroom,” says Milk, who started talking with major publishers while developing Supernatural in 2018 and had multiple deals in place when the app launched last spring. With an expansive music catalog, the app has leaned into the genre cross-pollination of the streaming era: There are pop, rock, dance and hip-hop hits, but Milk says one of the most popular routines is *Sweat Symphony*, a classical music workout in which users swing their arms like orchestra conductors.

Of course, Milk couldn’t have predicted that Supernatural would launch a month after the coronavirus pandemic forced the widespread need for at-home exercise alternatives; according to a Macquarie Research report in February, fitness technology could eventually generate an estimated \$300 million annually for the industry. Companies such as Peloton and Mirror have accrued millions of subscribers over the past year, but VR fitness apps like Supernatural (as well as predecessors *Beat Saber* and *Synth Riders*) offer an even more immersive experience, allowing users to virtually escape their living rooms during quarantine.

The Supernatural team is eager to secure more deals with independent publishers and expand internationally (the app is available in the United States and Canada). That growth will partially depend on wider adoption of VR by the general public, but Michael Cibula, executive vp business development and finance, believes advances in technology — and the release of the Oculus Quest 2, a sleeker model whose price dropped from \$399 to \$299 in October — have helped that proliferation.

“Working out in a VR headset sounds so strange,” says Cibula. “But as soon as you do it something clicks, and you realize it’s the best thing ever.” **B**

## BIG IN... South Africa



### SHA SHA

**AT THE VIRTUAL 2020 BET AWARDS,** amapiano artist Sha Sha beat out crossover successes Rema, Celeste and Young T & Bugsey to win the viewer’s choice best new international act award. “I never saw that coming,” she says over Zoom from her home in Johannesburg. “I felt like I was still working toward that type of recognition.”

Sha Sha, who has been recording music in her bedroom since she was 19, got her start when a friend sent one of her songs to a radio station in Zimbabwe. It received airplay and attracted the attention of local producer-singer Audius Mtawarira, who served as a mentor to Sha Sha. Her first single, “Miss Independent,” found success in Zimbabwe and South Africa, where she often traveled to visit her mother before relocating. It’s there she connected with DJ Maphorisa — one of South Africa’s most established producers who’s credited on Drake’s “One Dance” and Major Lazer’s “Particula” — after talking to a cab driver who put her in touch. “I played Maphorisa one of my ballads,” says Sha Sha. “From there, I started working with a whole different level of artists.” By 2018, Sha Sha signed a record deal with Maphorisa’s Blaqboy label, which has a joint venture with Sony Music Africa. She released her debut EP, *Blossom*, the following year.

Working with Maphorisa — a pioneer in amapiano, a genre best known for its jazz elements and piano melodies, and a softer sound than the harder-hitting *gqom* — helped the now 26-year-old Sha Sha (born Charmaine Mapimbiro) earn the nickname “Queen of Amapiano.” She says she enjoys adding her own flair (she sings in English, Zulu, Shona and Ndebele) and that “when that drum hits, you just want to dance.”

Since *Blossom* arrived, Sha Sha released the shimmering single “Woza” in December, which has garnered 850,000 YouTube views, and is working on a full-length album as well as a documentary about her career. In spite of the spotlight, the self-confessed “shy child” still prefers to keep her head down. “I like to be a little mysterious and work silently,” she says. “Then everybody will see it when it pops off.” —NADIA NEOPHYTOU



# THE MOST CERTIFIED K-POP AGENCY AROUND THE WORLD

## WHO WE ARE?

Aren't you curious about the largest Billboard chart-topping company in Korea? REELS Corporation Inc. (except YG, BigHit, SM, and JYP) is the agency that has the most artists on the World Digital Song Sears chart.

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President Taeon Yoo was a performance marketer who was in charge of marketing Korean Affiliate for luxury retailers such as Farfetch, YOOX, Net-a-Porter, Luisa Via Roma, Neiman Marcus, Harvey Nichols, and MATCHESFASHION in Korea.

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REELS Corporation Inc. entered the entertainment industry in July 2020, and in less than a year, They produced incredible results. They managed more than 10 entertainments, two of which debuted at the top of the Billboard charts. They were even artists who had never been named on the Billboard charts. They are collaborating with media and magazines and are highly anticipated for their future moves.

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# A NEW PURPOSE







Bieber photographed Feb. 20 at the Houdini Estate in Los Angeles.

Styling by Karla Welch  
Left: Bode cardigan, x karla tank, Carhartt pants, Casablanca x New Balance shoes.  
Right: TOD's sweater.

Pandemic downtime and marital bliss helped **JUSTIN BIEBER** make peace with his past. As he gets back to work with his new album, *Justice*, he's taking ownership of his career — and his music

BY KATIE BAIN | PHOTOGRAPHED BY SAMI DRASIN



Isabel Marant hat,  
TOD's sweater,  
Second/Layer pants.







**JUSTIN BIEBER WANTED TO** drive himself. On a cloudless, windy afternoon in February, three cars pull up to a mansion in Los Angeles' Laurel Canyon: a hulking Yukon Denali, followed by a grey Tesla model X, followed by a black Range Rover.

Two serious-looking bodyguards get out of the first and last vehicles. Bieber emerges from the Tesla; his wife, Hailey Baldwin Bieber, steps down from the passenger seat. The bodyguards hover nearby at a respectful distance, while the couple — swaddled in oversize, especially soft-looking clothing — offer up their nasal passages for rapid COVID-19 tests ahead of Bieber's photo shoot.

Bieber is a month out from releasing *Justice*, his sixth studio album (out March 19) and his second in 13 months; the R&B-focused *Changes* arrived on Valentine's Day 2020, just as the world was going through some major changes of its own. Bieber's two most recent albums have bookended the most tumultu-

ous year of American history in living memory — but for Bieber, whose life in the spotlight has been strange and tumultuous enough, it was a much-needed reset. "It's the first time I've had this much consistency and predictability," he says over Google Hangouts the day before, "like ever, really." He pauses. "It's really nice."

These days, Bieber stops working at 6 p.m. so he can spend the evenings on the couch with his wife. ("Hailey's love language is just lying around watching a movie," he says.) He goes to bed at a reasonable hour. He rises by eight and checks in with his management to learn what has happened for Justin Bieber the pop star while Justin Bieber the husband was offline. He uses an iPad for this communication because he does not possess a cellphone, which isn't actually that normal but gives him the power to limit who can reach him. "I definitely learned how to have boundaries, and I just don't feel like I owe anybody anything," says Bieber. "That has helped me to be able to just say no and just be firm in it and know that my heart [wants] to help people, but I can't do everything. I want to sometimes, but it's just not sustainable."

"Boundaries" is a key word in the 2021 Bieber lexicon. Back when he was a teen phenom releasing four albums in five years — and promoting them with roughly 450 tour stops between 2010 and 2017 — not doing things he didn't want to do wasn't really an option. Even the most casual music fan has absorbed the rough outline of his life story through pop culture osmosis — the single mother, the hardscrabble childhood, the YouTube origin story — just as they are undoubtedly familiar with the lowlights that nearly consumed him. Last fall, he released *New Chapter*, a 25-minute addendum to his 2020 YouTube docuseries, *Seasons*, in which he revealed there were times when he felt "really, really suicidal."

Today, the 27-year-old Bieber is

able to look back on harder times with a surprising degree of Zen. "I can talk about that part of my life and not feel like, 'Oh, man. I was such a bad person,' because I'm not that person anymore," he says. "I also have done the work to know why I was making those decisions. I know where that pain was coming from, that caused me to act the way I was acting." (It doesn't hurt that the documentary arrived on the cusp of a wider reckoning with the trauma of child stardom — he hasn't watched *Framing Britney Spears* yet, he says, "but I'm going to.")

The calm of quarantine life, his stabilizing marriage and a renewed commitment to his faith have put him, as every single member of his inner circle attests, "in a really good place." Promoting and touring an album, though, means he'll have to leave the comfort of his 2020 bubble. With *Justice*, he'll find out just how compatible building schedules around date nights, staying right with God and getting a good night's sleep are with maintaining a perch at the pop apex — if that's even what he wants. "At this point, I've reached a level of success so many times that I know success isn't a be-all, end-all to my happiness," says Bieber.

To date, Bieber's catalog has earned a combined 22.6 million equivalent album units in the United States, according to MRC Data. If *Justice* becomes another Bieber success story, it will be a major win for his longtime label, Def Jam, where Bieber is the reigning pop prince — and, label sources say, its biggest moneymaker by a landslide. Around 70% of his streams and music consumption come from fans outside of the United States, and Def Jam's parent company, Universal Music Group, has designated him as one of its global priority artists, an international program that in past years has supported powerhouses like Billie Eilish and J Balvin. That means all of UMG's resources — "Every dol-

lar, every door," says a source close to the company — are available to ensure he stays at the top.

To hear members of his team tell it, that's a refreshing change from last year. Bieber released *Changes* during a transitional period for his label: One week after the album came out, news broke that Def Jam's then-chairman/CEO, Paul Rosenberg, was stepping down. "*Changes* was a bit of a struggle for us," says SB Projects president Allison Kaye, who has long co-managed Bieber with Scooter Braun. "We needed a team that was supermotivated and ready to jump in, and we didn't feel like we got it. And thankfully, [UMG's central corporate team] stepped in. It ended up being a No. 1 album, everything ended up being great. But this time around, it's a different scenario." (Among the promising changes: Def Jam now has a product manager solely dedicated to Bieber.)

Perhaps no one is more crucial in keeping the trains running smoothly these days than Bieber himself. "He was driving this at such a rapid pace," says Braun of *Justice*. Bieber now pays attention to the little things, like the final mixes of his songs. ("I could for sure do that for him, but he didn't defer to me," says Josh Gudwin, Bieber's longtime producer, engineer and mixer.) He takes the lead in conceptualizing performances, like a Valentine's Day TikTok livestream concert that drew 4 million viewers. He is an active participant at rehearsals. "This is a kid who I used to have to beg to go to a rehearsal," says Kaye, who during less stable moments of Bieber's life was often the one who had to ground him. "We used to have to take his computers away or put someone outside his door so he couldn't sneak out."

None of these feats are especially remarkable — being where you need to be and caring deeply about your creative output are basically the bare minimum in 2021, when the most celebrated pop stars tend to be

**"I've reached a level of success so many times that I know success isn't a be-all, end-all to my happiness."**





workhorses, creatively or otherwise. But for a guy who freely admits he's still learning how to be an artist and a healthy adult at the same time, showing up, staying present and enthusiastically doing the work are a good start. In conversation, Bieber is earnest ("I appreciate you giving me a platform to speak with all my heart"), endearingly polite ("I hope

you have a great day") and, for once, pretty excited to be doing all this. "I think this is the first time in my life where I've actually enjoyed the process of releasing an album," he says.

"He's not even becoming a boss — he's becoming a leader," adds Kaye. "It's such a beautiful thing to see out of someone whom you've known since he was, like, 12."

#### **T**HE SONGS CAME QUICKLY.

Early on in the pandemic, Bieber and Hailey were holed up at their house in Toronto when Braun, Kaye and Gudwin started passing him tracks culled from the pool of demos submitted by writers, managers, publishers and producers. "It's a lot of crap material," says Gudwin of these submissions, "but a

lot of the stuff I get directly from the actual songwriters and producers is usually stronger because they have more of an idea of where Justin is as an artist and person."

From his home studio, Bieber cut the tracks he liked and sent them back to this inner circle. When he returned to L.A. a few months later, his recording intensified. With





CELINE jacket, x karla tank,  
Second/Layer pants, Nike shoes.

*Changes*, Bieber was determined to make an R&B record — and went so far as to call out the Grammy Awards for nominating him only in pop categories last fall, a decision he called “very strange” on social media. “It can definitely get frustrating,” he says today, before softening: “They’re humans, and they can’t get it all right every time.”

This time, however, nothing was off limits. *Justice* spans the beatific brightness of “Someone” to the *No Jacket Required*-era Phil Collins nod of “Deserve You,” from the R&B-centric pop of “Peaches” to the acoustic balladry of “Lifetime,” which will surely soundtrack plenty of nuptials in the post-vaccination wedding boom of 2021. “He’s singing the best

I’ve ever heard,” says writer-producer Benny Blanco, who has worked with Bieber since his 2010 debut, *My World 2.0*. “When we were doing *Saturday Night Live* [last year] and he was hitting these runs, I was like a little kid sitting there like, ‘Wow.’ ”

The team hadn’t planned to follow up *Changes* so soon, says Gudwin, “but once you see a list of songs in front of you, it’s like, ‘Oh, shit. We have a fucking album.’ I think Justin realized we had an album maybe two months ago.” (Kaye, on the other hand, jokes she had that realization “yesterday, when it got turned in.”)

*Changes* was by no means a commercial failure: It spawned two top 10 hits on the Billboard Hot 100 and has earned 1.1 million equivalent album units. But it didn’t exactly live up to expectations. *Changes* never produced a Hot 100 No. 1, even though it seemed like Bieber *really* wanted one when he shared a since-deleted Instagram post advising fans to boost the chart performance of lead single “Yummy” by, among other things, streaming the song while they slept. (He did, however, score a No. 1 last May with the one-off Ariana Grande collaboration “Stuck With U,” a charity single that benefited the families of frontline workers.) Then, in March 2020, eight stadium shows on the *Changes* tour were downgraded to arenas because of slower-than-expected ticket sales, sources told *Billboard* at the time. (The tour was later canceled due to the pandemic.)

*Changes* was hardly uncommercial in its sound, but members of his team talk about it like some wild stylistic departure that faced an uphill battle from the start. There’s Gudwin, who describes it almost as a niche personal project: “With *Changes*, Justin gave what he needed to give at the time, and that was an R&B album. [*Justice*] has a lot more pressure because of the style of music.” Or Braun, who describes it as if it were an outlier in his discography that really can’t compare to his other albums: “On *Changes*, he led [creatively] as well, but that was R&B — it was a different project.” Or Kaye, who says that Def Jam was “out of their comfort zone” when it came to releasing an R&B album by a pop artist: “It wasn’t what they were used to doing.”

It certainly looked like his team

was trying to get some distance from *Changes* last fall, when Bieber started releasing an avalanche of singles, well before *Justice* was even a fully formed album. “I can’t pretend like there was never any plan to put out a [deluxe edition of] *Changes* or any of those things,” says Kaye, “but we headed into COVID and he just started cutting all of this music.”

First came the sprightly Chance the Rapper collaboration “Holy,” then the tearjerker ballad “Lonely,” then the Shawn Mendes duet “Monster” — a Canadian wunderkinds summit — and, finally, Bieber’s own “Anyone,” all of which became Hot 100 hits. (“Lonely” peaked at No. 12, while the other three reached the top 10.)

This deluxe-style rollout came from Braun and Kaye, along with Def Jam executive vp promotion Nicki Farag, who has been working with Bieber since she escorted him on a run of small-town radio appearances when he was a kid. Initially, Farag was skeptical when Braun proposed the idea while playing her a dozen new songs last fall: “I’m like, ‘You’re out of your fucking mind. Who’s going to want to consume that much Bieber in such a short amount of time?’ ” But she came around, and today says that it’s an effective, “never been done before” way to reintroduce stars like Bieber to a wider pop audience.

It’s also a fitting strategy for promoting music during a pandemic, says Kaye. “There’s no common culture, there’s no office, there’s no water cooler everyone’s going to,” she says. “So it’s about meeting people where they are because they’re only talking to their friends who are interested in the things they are interested in.” “Lonely,” she continues, was a track that worked well at adult contemporary radio “that my parents were loving like my little sister’s friends were loving ‘Monster’ at the same time. When you’re only working one single at a time, you’re only reaching the people that single speaks to.”

The team also knows that a No. 1 only has so much value. Chart turnover in 2020 was historically high: There were 20 new Hot 100 No. 1s — the most since 1991 — and 12 of them were No. 1 debuts, the most instant chart-toppers ever in a single year. Big, splashy debuts are



common; hanging around, less so. “I know consumption patterns have changed, and it’s like, ‘OK, let’s jam it to the top, and who gives a fuck if it falls down,’” says Farag, “but we make more revenue if it’s consistent for months, and that’s what ‘Holy’ has been doing.”

And in the end, a slew of No. 1 singles isn’t necessarily what makes an artist happy or productive. *Purpose* was a blockbuster album that spawned three inescapable back-to-

one gave a shit/They criticized the things I did as an idiot kid.” When Bieber recorded it, he broke down crying in the studio and “had to go sit down and, like, drink a tea,” recalls co-writer Blanco. “This is the most honest Justin you’re going to get.”

There is a sense among his team that Bieber has been unfairly doomed to a life of having to constantly explain himself, of having to revisit low periods from fresh angles no matter how far in the

young musicians that ended up, like, not making it,” he says. Pop music, it turns out, is a pretty effective vessel for sharing a message for the masses: “There was a time where I really did have my identity wrapped up in my career, but I really do have an overflow of feeling like my purpose is to use my music to inspire.”

Recommitting to his faith has, no doubt, been easier with the support of a like-minded partner. Bieber and Hailey, who married in 2018 at a New York courthouse, are, undeniably, cute together. While posing in the estate’s sprawling gardens, Bieber dotes on his wife: “Babe, let’s go for a walk,” he asks between shots. “Babe, let’s build one of these,” he offers while sitting in a gazebo. He sings along to Kacey Musgraves’ *Golden Hour*, a sonic snapshot of newlywed bliss that has been his go-to photo shoot soundtrack since he and Hailey had it on heavy rotation during a road trip to Utah last summer. “God really blessed him with her,” says Bieber’s

longtime collaborator Jason “Poo Bear” Boyd. “He could have ended up with anybody. To get a female who actually is equally yoked and as heavy into Christianity as he is, it’s really a blessing.”

She is also undoubtedly good for business. “There are very few people in my life where you’re like, ‘Everything’s going to be better if their spouse is here,’” says Kaye, who calls her “a godsend.” “Days that I know Hailey’s coming to set, I’m like, ‘This is going to be the greatest day ever.’”

Though Hailey does not exactly have a traditional desk job — she is best known as a model and has appeared on the cover of *Vogue* in 11 different countries — the way she operates her life and career has been a positive influence. “One thing that has been so helpful is my wife is so by the book,” says Bieber. “She’s so structured and routine and so responsible.”

That has inspired Bieber to take a more active role in his own career. It’s a work in progress: He says he’s “learning about contracts and trying to get what’s fair,” and sources tell *Billboard* that Bieber has been in the

process of negotiating a new deal that would allow him to own his masters going forward and license them to UMG, while participating at a higher rate in the revenue from his UMG-owned catalog. (This is an increasingly common arrangement that lets artists claim ownership without necessarily changing the returns much for them or their label over the course of the licensing deal, which can span decades.) But he still relies on his team to do, well, all the things an artist hires a team for in the first place. And he credits Hailey with helping him “realize that I either take responsibility for this or else I’m not going to be able to sustain a certain lifestyle that I want.”

Hailey will also accompany him when he goes on tour, which Kaye expects will be sometime in 2022. Though Team Bieber has now tried twice to make him a stadiums act in the United States (on the *Purpose* tour, he played stadiums in Africa, Asia, Europe and Australia), Kaye says the next tour will focus on arenas for logistical reasons. “Our initial attempt to figure out a show that could work for both stadiums and arenas was a fiscally daunting thing,” she says of the *Purpose* tour. “I don’t think we’re going to try to do that again. Building a show for both sounds great in theory, but in practice it’s not the easiest.”

Bieber himself is “really excited” to get back on the road, and being married is a big reason why. “We’re going to plan really cool excursions with the two us,” he says — one of the ways they plan to make the grueling nature of life on the road a little more bearable. “He’s done tours before, but he’s done tours as a kid, he’s done tours when he was in a bad place, and he’s done tours when he was going through it on *Purpose*,” says Kaye. “He’s never toured as a healthy adult.”

Bieber doesn’t seem all that concerned about when this tour will actually happen. For now, he’s got his wife, his relationship with God, his fans, his voice, his team and a new album that overflows with appreciation for all of them. At the end of the photo shoot, he thanks everyone and announces he’s going for lunch (“with Babe,” of course). Then he climbs back into the Tesla — sandwiched between two other SUVs, but in control behind the wheel. ■

## “I can talk about that part of my life and not feel like, ‘Oh, man. I was such a bad person,’ because I’m not that person anymore.”

back No. 1 singles: “What Do You Mean?,” “Sorry” and “Love Yourself.” Its album campaign also ended with the cancellation of its last 14 tour dates, including several U.S. stadiums, for what was described at the time as “unforeseen circumstances” but was in fact, his team says now, a clear mental health crisis. “He was going through something that he wasn’t expressing to anyone,” says Kaye. “We didn’t really understand what we were canceling it for — we just kind of had to.”

“Everything was about success, benchmarks and such, and then I was just still empty, you know?” says Bieber of earlier chapters in his career. “All my relationships were suffering, but I had all this success and all of this money, and it just wasn’t fulfilling for me.” It was time, he knew, to start putting in the work on something other than his music.

**T**HERE ARE FEW SUMMARIES of Bieber’s youth as succinct as the one he delivers on “Lonely”: “Everybody saw me sick,” he sings, “and it felt like no

rearview mirror they are. “He spent all of the *Purpose* tour apologizing for being a teenager, which was ridiculous,” says Kaye. “If someone had cameras on me at 18, it would have been way worse than what anyone saw on him.”

But lately, Bieber himself has more willingly embraced that role. That was part of the impetus behind *Seasons* and *New Chapter*. “I just want to be somebody who can say, ‘Look, I did some things that I’m not too proud of, but I took a look in the mirror and decided to make some changes, and you can too,’” he says. When asked what’s at the top of his list when he’s thanking God for his many blessings, he replies without hesitation: “That I’m forgiven.”

When he talks about his faith, Bieber closes his eyes and rubs his temples in a way that seems like he’s pulling the words from the depths of his soul. When he canceled the last leg of the *Purpose* tour, the biggest changes he made to get better were going to therapy regularly for the first time and reconnecting with God. “I just changed my priorities so that I didn’t [become] another statistic of





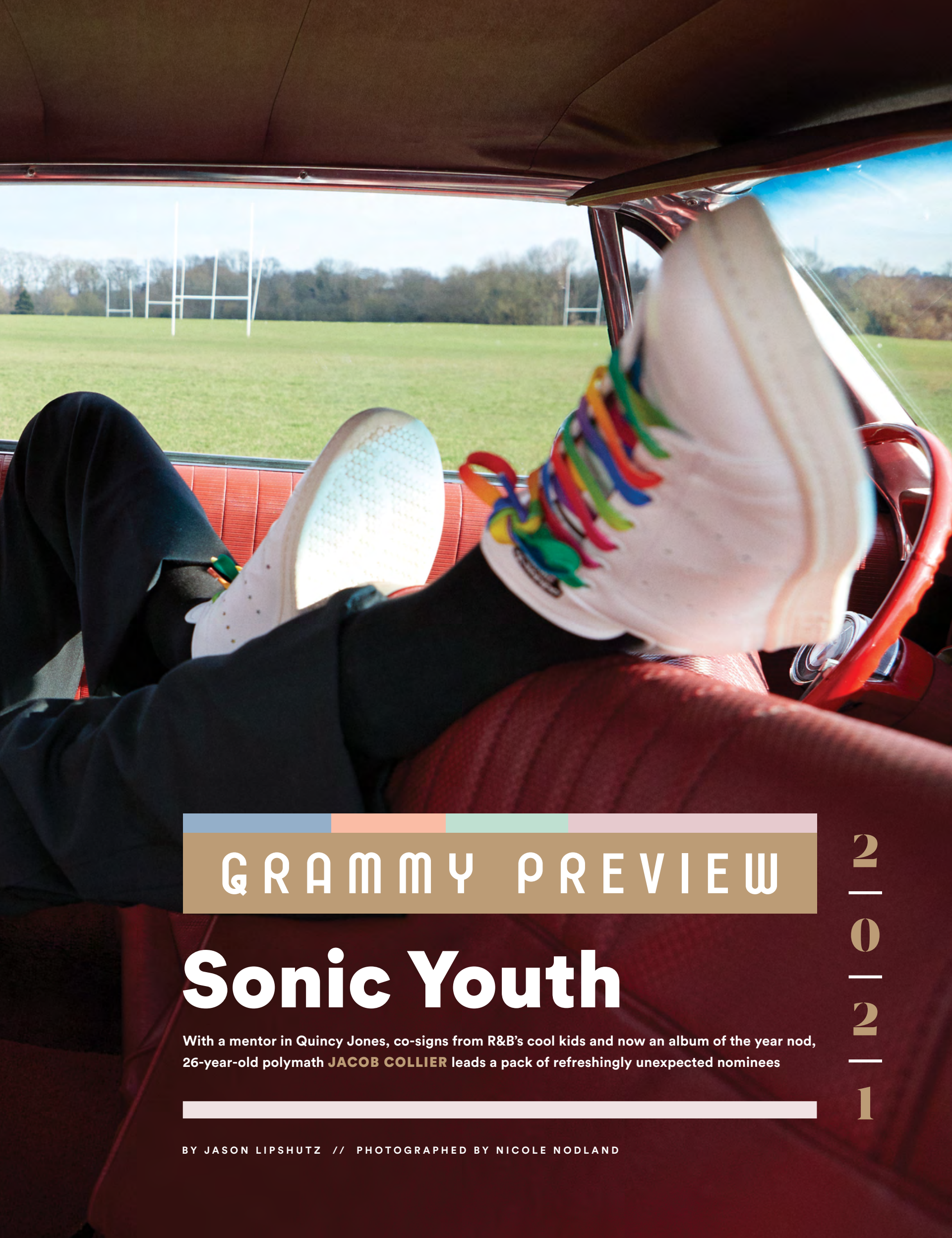
X karla beanie, Isabel Marant shirt,  
vintage Tommy Hilfiger jeans, Vans shoes.





Collier photographed  
Feb. 12 at Glebelands  
Park in London.





GRAMMY PREVIEW

# Sonic Youth

With a mentor in Quincy Jones, co-signs from R&B's cool kids and now an album of the year nod, 26-year-old polymath **JACOB COLLIER** leads a pack of refreshingly unexpected nominees

BY JASON LIPSHUTZ // PHOTOGRAPHED BY NICOLE NODLAND

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**Jacob Collier knows what you're thinking. He has heard it all: the memes, the think pieces, the "Who's Jacob Collier?" tweets that flooded the internet following his album of the year Grammy Award nomination. "I saw a lot of it," says Collier, his posh British accent slightly elongating. "And it's fair."**

The 26-year-old is sitting in his home studio, surrounded by stacked keyboards, bass guitars, a ukulele and a Wurlitzer in the back room of his family's North London home. It's the same spot where in November he heard his Grammy nominations announced, first for best arrangement (instrumental and vocals), then for best R&B performance. After that came the shortlist for the most coveted prize, album of the year — a mix including massive commercial successes from Taylor Swift and Post Malone, as well as year-end-list darlings from HAIM and Dua Lipa. And then, sneaking in where odds-on favorites like The Weeknd's *After Hours* and Lady Gaga's *Chromatica* were expected, there was Collier's *Djesse Vol. 3*: an electro-R&B magnum opus from a self-trained British prodigy who had previously won a Grammy for a jazzy a cappella arrangement of the *Flintstones* theme.

Collier's team certainly wasn't anticipating this; one of his managers was at a doctor's appointment during the announcement. But Collier himself was the most shellshocked, and says he needed a few days to fully process



the news. "I mean, I would have expected The Weeknd to get nominated way before I would, and Gaga, and... everybody," he says unflinchingly.

Album of the year contenders have historically included outliers, with artists like Sara Bareilles, Sturgill Simpson and Brandi Carlile getting major profile boosts thanks to surprise nods. Last year, H.E.R. and Bon Iver competed on the strength of projects that didn't crack the top 20 of the Billboard 200; this year, the deluxe edition of indie psych-soul duo Black Pumas' self-titled album is nominated after spending just one week on the chart.

Still, there's truly no nominee in recent memory quite like Collier's *Djesse Vol. 3*. (The title is a phonetic spelling of his initials.) As he himself proudly recites, it's the first release since 1963 to squeeze onto the ballot without having appeared on the albums chart. The set has earned 20,000 equivalent album units since its August arrival, according to MRC Data — well below the 1.27 million average of this year's eight nominees.

"I'm not the kind of artist who has had a massive hit single or one video that blew up," says Collier, musing his hair in the direction of one of his keyboard stacks. "I've allowed people to come in on their own terms, and I've never particularly asked for a huge spike of a moment."

Collier has, however, had consider-

able help reaching this breakthrough, beginning in October 2013, when he uploaded a cover of Stevie Wonder's "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" to YouTube. By that point, the then 19-year-old had been using production software for over a decade, learned piano without any training and briefly studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where his mother teaches violin. In 2011, he started uploading clips showcasing his one-kid-band wizardry — feats of multitracking and harmonization that suggested a certain level of genius. His Wonder rendition made its way to Quincy Jones, via a friend's emailed recommendation, the same day it was posted.

"It was apparent that this kid's understanding of music theory, melody, harmony and improvisation was exactly where it needed to be," says Jones. The legendary producer told Adam Fell, president of the Quincy Jones Productions management company, to find Collier and finalize a deal no matter what. Soon, Fell was on a Skype call with the teen and his mom, making the not-so-hard sell for why he might want to learn more from the producer who had worked with Miles, Michael and Aretha.

Mentorship from Jones proved to be the kind of golden ticket most aspiring musicians can only dream of: Collier got to jam with Herbie Hancock at the Montreux Jazz Festival and perform "P.Y.T. (Pretty Young

Thing)" during a private hang at the home of the man who had co-written and produced it. But Jones didn't just lend his imprimatur to Collier — he has been a vocal advocate of his for years. "There was a period of time in Quincy's life where he walked into every single meeting — it didn't matter whether it was with Queen Rania of Jordan, Hillary Clinton or Donald Glover — and the first thing he would do is pull out his laptop and a Bluetooth speaker, and play Jacob's video of 'Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing,'" recalls Fell, who now manages Collier with Michael Peha. "And he would say, 'Have you ever seen anything like this in your life? Because I haven't.'"

As Collier's recording career began in earnest — he harmonized with himself and played every instrument on his 2016 independent experimental jazz debut, *In My Room* — his circle of industry connections expanded accordingly. He hosted master classes at Berklee College of Music, teamed up with international orchestras while touring for *In My Room*, played with Pharrell Williams at Coachella and even helped Hans Zimmer finish the score to the 2017 film *The Boss Baby*.

In 2018, Collier signed to Interscope in partnership with Hajanga and Decca for a four-part album series crystallizing his musical journey across genres. ("It's rare to meet an artist who has a vividly clear understanding of what they want to do



for the next four albums,” says Nick Groff, senior vp A&R at Interscope.) *Djesse Vol. 3* is its most accessible installment, the first time Collier’s jazz-centric sound veers toward a more recognizably neo-soul approach. It’s also his most collaborative and mainstream-leaning album to date, with Tori Kelly, Daniel Caesar, Jessie Reyez and T-Pain among the guest stars. “Jacob is the real GOAT,” says Ty Dolla \$ign, who features on “All I Need” with Mahalia. (The song got Collier his R&B performance nod.) “He plays everything, sings his ass off and writes incredible songs.”

That kind of reverence from the artist community, one in which Collier is increasingly embedded, could partially explain his seemingly out-of-nowhere album of the year nomination. And although Jones says he didn’t lobby for *Djesse Vol. 3* — “As with any registered Grammy voting member, I voted!” — he had certainly set a crucial foundation for the wider industry to champion Collier’s virtuoso appeal.

“I don’t think a lot of people quite realize that the Grammys is not a popularity contest,” says Fell, pointing out that in order to vote, Recording Academy members must have credits on at least six commercially available tracks on a physical release or 12 on a digital album. “That group of musicians — engineers, producers, musicians contributing to the music ecosystem — they are who decides. Where does Jacob resonate? I think it’s with that audience.”

And that audience will likely only grow from here. SZA discovered Collier one night scrolling through Instagram and ended up spending hours watching his YouTube videos, awestruck. She soon asked him to co-write and provide backing vocals for her single “Good Days.” “I knew he could elevate it because he did that with everything,” she says. “I asked him to section it, and he sent it back literally in no time. He was like, ‘I don’t know if this is what you were thinking of,’ and I was like, ‘Ahhh! Don’t do anything, it’s perfect!’” It became the R&B star’s highest-charting solo single to date, reaching No. 9 on the Billboard Hot 100 in January.

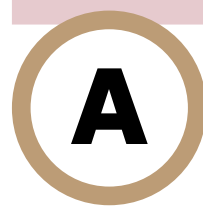
Regardless of what happens on Grammy night, those kinds of collaborations could become a regular thing for a wunderkind previously unknown to the pop world. “Partners had been like, ‘We love him, but it’s not the right time to make this happen,’” recalls co-manager Peha. “That obviously has changed. Now they’re like, ‘Let’s make this happen.’” **B**

Kilgore onstage in New York in 2020.



## From Broadway To The Ballot

With his soulful debut single, **MYKAL KILGORE** makes the rare leap from musical theater to mainstream recognition



### AS PATHS TO SUCCESS IN

musical theater go, Mykal Kilgore’s was fairly familiar. He started out as a cruise ship performer. In 2009, he auditioned

for a Dallas-Fort Worth production of the musical revue *Five Guys Named Moe* and was hired by director Billy Porter — who went on to win a Tony Award for his performance in *Kinky Boots*, as well as become Kilgore’s mentor. On Porter’s advice, Kilgore moved to New York and began booking roles on Broadway — including *Hair*, *Motown the Musical* and *Dear Evan Hansen* — as well as in TV musicals like *Jesus Christ Superstar* with John Legend and *The Wiz Live!*

By 2018, Kilgore was ready to make a leap many Broadway performers before him had: writing and recording an album. But the results he has seen since have been decidedly less expected: In November, he was nominated for a best traditional R&B performance Grammy for his debut single, “Let Me Go.”

“He pulled a rabbit out of the hat with this nomination,” says a proud Porter. “If an artist starts on Broadway, the music industry doesn’t see you like that. I got my Grammy from being in a Broadway show [*Kinky Boots* won best musical theater album in 2014], not for any of my own albums. Whether Mykal wins or not, he did it. There’s power in that.” As Kilgore himself puts it: “Just because you’re small doesn’t mean you’re not mighty.”

A nomination in a mainstream category for an artist from the theater world is rare — but not unheard of in the history of the Grammys. Melba Moore, a Tony winner for *Purlie* in 1970, charted a string of R&B and dance hits in the 1980s and early ’90s, and earned three Gram-

my nods along the way, including for best new artist and best female R&B vocal. Winning the latter category in 1981 was Stephanie Mills, the original Dorothy in *The Wiz* who parlayed that spotlight into five R&B No. 1 songs. *Dreamgirls* star Jennifer Holliday won twice in the ’80s, and *Aida* Tony winner Heather Headley, a four-time nominee, took home an award as well.

Kilgore, 38, joins that group thanks to a song that, like the album it appears on, embraces the great, soul-stirring R&B tradition in a modern way. “Let Me Go” is “a very emotional look at love — not just romantic, but any kind of love relationship that I don’t know is commonly looked at,” says Kilgore, who is gay. “I wanted to say and do something that felt substantial.” That impulse translates throughout the album, *A Man Born Black*, produced by drummer-singer Jamison Ross, a member of Grammy-winning multi-instrumentalist group Snarky Puppy. Kilgore pays tribute to the likes of Donny Hathaway and Marvin Gaye by tapping into the timeless sounds of Blackness that shaped American music — gospel, ’70s soul, New Orleans second line rhythms — as he sings about navigating the world as a Black man. For Kilgore, “To Zimmerman,” a track honoring slain teenager Trayvon Martin, set the tone from the get-go: “If I was going to be this raw, then that’s what the album had to be.”

His debut is also the inaugural project for Affective Music, a Los Angeles-based label services and management firm that artist manager David S. Hargrett launched in June 2019. Hargrett, who is now Affective’s CEO, is learning alongside his artist, and drew upon his marketing background to roll out a Grammy campaign for Kilgore last May. Research led him to focus on reaching voters through advertising (a full-page ad in *Billboard* and spots on social media), releasing an a cappella version of “Let Me Go” and building awareness through his, Kilgore’s and Ross’ relationships in the creative community from which the Recording Academy draws its voting membership.

But they’re also hoping that the same raw talent that got Kilgore nominated in the first place — regardless of where he had developed it — will be enough to score a win. “Our approach was to be as true to the art as we could,” says Hargrett. “We didn’t have a strategy on how Mykal should go from Broadway to R&B. When people ask how he got a Grammy nomination, my response is, ‘Listen to the song, and I guarantee you’re going to understand why he’s here.’ Now we’ll see how it all plays out on March 14.” —GAIL MITCHELL





## Where There's D Smoke There's 🔥🔥🔥

How did a teacher-turned-Netflix competition star become a Grammy hopeful? It actually makes perfect sense



### WHEN DANIEL ANTHONY

Farris won the first season of Netflix's hip-hop reality competition, *Rhythm & Flow*, he got some advice from one of the show's MC judges, T.I. "Enjoy this moment," the veteran rapper told him. "You're going to be chasing this high for the rest of your career." But Farris — better known as D Smoke — says he respectfully disagreed: "I knew [the show] was just a steppingstone to put me on a platform to do all the things that the world is now seeing that I can do."

He wasn't wrong: Almost one year after his 2019 win, the Inglewood, Calif., native earned two Grammy nominations: best new artist and best rap album, for his official debut, *Black Habits*. With its cinematic pacing, shape-shifting soundscapes and his own limber flow and world-weary positivity, the set likely appeals to the kinds of voters who have made two-time best rap album winner Kendrick Lamar a Grammy darling in recent years. But while D Smoke's team had a modest plan for potential recognition — including a Grammy.com interview to familiarize Recording Academy members with his story — they say they were shocked by the nods.

"They took us out of the blue," says Thomas "DJ Shanxx" Culley, D Smoke's music and marketing manager. "We just wanted to put out a fantastic project to make sure that D Smoke represented." The rapper himself was more surprised by the timing: "It was one

of those things that I wanted to accomplish in my career," he says. "And it just came early."

Many in the hip-hop community were similarly taken aback by the dual nominations, given D Smoke's unlikely path to success as a former schoolteacher-turned-competition winner. (Some Twitter users even snarked that voters may have mixed him up with the late New York rapper Pop Smoke, an artist who made a much stronger charts impact in 2020.) "He has a great album, great songs," says Carl Chery, creative director/head of urban music at Spotify. "But it's not like he has a bunch of hits or is someone [who relies] on the typical Instagram shenanigans to get noticed. He's more traditional in that sense."

What D Smoke does have working in his favor, however, is recognition among many Grammy insiders, thanks to his years of industry work both as a songwriter and with his own music well before his *Rhythm & Flow* breakout. "The musician's musicians know who he is," says his manager, Greg Johnson, "and a lot of those are voting members."

Two other factors may have helped. One is that, in 2020, many of hip-hop's heavy hitters — including not only Lamar, but each of the winners of the last five best rap album awards — didn't release an LP, leading to more open slots for first-timers. (Of the five artists now up for the award, Nas is the only previous category nominee.) The other is that two of those aforementioned winners, Cardi B and Chance the Rapper, were judges on *Rhythm & Flow*. "It makes total sense for the Grammy voters to pay attention to that show," says Chery. "An endorsement from these previous winners — that had to help."

Despite the majority of newcomers in the best rap album category, it's still a seasoned crew compared with most artists at hip-hop's center. At 35, D Smoke is the youngest of the bunch. That has drawn some criticism from the rap community, which sees the nominations as out of touch with the genre's most vital artists. "Hip-hop needs balance," D Smoke allows. "In country music, if somebody comes out with a new hit song and they got gray hair and a beard, nobody's like, 'He's too old to write a hit!' But why is it that hip-hop is looked at like, 'Oh, it's the teenagers. It's only for lost souls'? Why is it only for lost souls when it's guiding the younger generation? But of course, I'm a schoolteacher — what do I know?" —ANDREW UNTERBERGER



Royce Da 5'9 (left) and Gibbs

## The Wise Guys

**IF HIP-HOP IS A YOUNG MAN'S GAME, DON'T** tell this year's best rap album nominees. With an average age of 42, the five veterans — D Smoke, Jay Electronica, Freddie Gibbs (jointly nominated with producer The Alchemist), Nas and Royce Da 5'9 — are showing that classic lyricism can still triumph in an era of viral hits. Gibbs, 38, and Royce, 43, unpack the category.

### How did you react to your nominations?

**FREDDIE GIBBS** I was just as shocked as everybody else. I knew I had the best rap album in my heart this year, but I didn't know if I had enough juice to get nominated for a Grammy. I'm glad they considered me this year. I'm humbled. With this nomination, I already won.

**ROYCE DA 5'9** No fancy story. I didn't even know that we had submitted the album. [Rapper] Joyner Lucas called me and told me, "Congratulations." I was like, "What are you talking about?" I had just gotten off a teleconference with my doctor, who told me I had tested positive for COVID-19. *That's* when I found out I was nominated.

### This year's nominees are all known for their lyrics and wordplay. What does that say about the state of rap?

**GIBBS** When I saw the nominees, I was like, "Damn, they really took it a different kind of way this year with the voting. They really are going to put guys who can really rap in there." They started that shit with Rapsody [in 2018]. When they put her in the top rap categories and then Pusha T [the following year], I started getting a little hope.

**ROYCE** It says to me that somebody who is thinking about the best interest of the culture is somewhere where they think this is important. That's cool. As commercial as the Grammys are, we need that. I wish other areas of culture could look at it that way.

### How have you stood the test of time?

**ROYCE** Me and Freddie didn't have a choice. The goal posts were moved at the beginning of our careers. We walked onto a field with the goal posts moved. The goal posts had wheels on them. We went through the gantlet, and we took our lumps. If you can't celebrate us [when we're] dragging our nuts, you can't call yourself [a fan of the culture].

**GIBBS** Guys don't have to blow up as a rapper when you're 23 years old. You can keep going and build a career that can last your whole life. A lot of rappers want to get rich when they're 20, but they're broke when they're 30. I've been doing this thing since I was 20 years old, so I've seen a lot of guys come and go, and I haven't seen a lot of guys stay. Consistency and longevity win the race. —CARL LAMARRE



# 'Nobody Believed In Me. Nobody Saw Me'

**MICKEY GUYTON's** "Black Like Me" took off amid last year's reckoning with systemic racism. But its success is bittersweet

**I**F COUNTRY MUSIC IS THREE chords and the truth, it wasn't quite ready for Mickey Guyton's. After writing "Black Like Me" at a writers' retreat in 2019, the Capitol Nashville artist says she felt like the stirring ballad fell on deaf ears. But when she released the song amid 2020's protests against racial injustice, it found plenty of champions — and later scored a nod for best country solo performance, marking the first nomination for a Black female solo artist in the category. Guyton, 37, recalls the song's unlikely journey in her own words.

## THE ORIGIN

Singing on a major tour, singing in front of Confederate flags, being called the N-word after a show by country music fans — that absolutely inspired "Black Like Me." [That last incident] was in front of a bunch of people, and nobody

stood up for me in that moment. That really, really hurt.

I had the song for a long time. And not only did I send it to people at my label, I sent it to friends that are freelance writers. I got the same reaction: "Wow, this is so powerful. I need a minute to sit with it." Like, OK. I never thought the song would see the light of day.

## THE MOMENT OF CLARITY

I was trying to release all of this music that I had been writing. At the Universal Music Group Grammy afterparty [in 2020], I went over to a streaming executive to talk about "Black Like Me," and I'll never forget it. My manager's white, this executive was white, and I went into artist mode and batted my eyelashes and tried to look like a star in the moment [to advocate] for a song that meant so much to me on a personal level. I felt completely ashamed that I went into that mode to try to get an opportunity because just being myself wouldn't be enough. I was like, "I'm not going to do this anymore."

## THE RELEASE

I was just really coping with the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. And then seeing that awful, awful murder [of George Floyd]. So many people in my country music community weren't even talking about this awful moment in our history.

I just put this song on my socials. I didn't have a plan for it, didn't ask my label for permission. This isn't one of those moments to think strategically about how to release a song that is so important, that is so serious, that represents so many people. You can't make a profitable decision off something like that. And then Spotify hit up my label and



my management and wanted to feature it on Blackout Tuesday. Everything started blowing up from there.

## THE RESPONSE

Honestly, when I wrote the song, I felt it was Grammy-worthy. The reaction is when I thought that it could win a Grammy. I tried not to get my hopes up too much because this is a country category — the song did make a lot of people mad. But it also made a lot of people reach out and have a greater understanding of what I've gone through. [When I got nominated], I just crumbled. It was unbelievable and surreal. And I felt like God had something to do with that. Because there's no way — like, nobody believed in me. Nobody saw me. I hate to say this, but I felt like sometimes I was a reason for people not to feel racist: They had the Black girl country

singer, you know? But that was the first time they saw me.

## THE MISSION

It's not like country radio is jumping at the chance to support women. A white friend of mine signed to a major label was told by a radio promo person that country radio will not play Black people. So I realized I'm not going to get on any kind of country station. And I'm certainly not going to do that by falling in line and shutting up and singing. I've made peace with that. I may not ever have some massive career, but I'm going to use the influence I have to open those doors for the future generation. And for young Black and Brown girls who have dreams that people will never consider, I'll consider them. I'll see them. And I will use the connections that I have to help them. —HERAN MAMO



## Making R&B Magic

BEFORE HIS LATEST GRAMMY NODS, WRITER-PRODUCER **NASRI ATWEH** ALMOST LEFT HITMAKING BEHIND

## NASRI ATWEH WAS DONE WRITING

for other people. After spending years crafting hits for stars like Shakira, Pitbull, Justin Bieber and Chris Brown, Atweh (who records under his first name) achieved global success as the lead singer of MAGIC! after the band's 2014 reggae-pop smash, "Rude," spent six weeks atop the Billboard Hot 100 and spawned three albums and as many world tours. "I was like, 'I don't like working with artists anymore,'" says Atweh, 40. "When you start seeing the world, you change."

Or so he thought. In 2017, Atweh met Wassim "Sal" Slaiby, the power manager who has guided The Weeknd's rise as CEO of management company SALXCO. Both Torontonians and of Middle Eastern descent, the pair linked when Atweh had

a session with SALXCO artist Massari. "Sal was like, 'I think you're throwing half of your career away by not writing for people,'" recalls Atweh.

So he hired Slaiby as his manager, then forged ahead writing for a growing network of superstars like John Legend and Gwen Stefani — and getting Grammy attention for his work with some of R&B's coolest acts. Late last year, he earned a best R&B song nod for co-writing Skip Marley and H.E.R.'s chart-topping "Slow Down," and he also contributed to Chloe x Halle's *Ungodly Hour*, which is up for best progressive R&B album. Atweh sees the recognition as a helpful reintroduction: "It's like, 'Does anybody new want to talk to me? Has there been anyone who has been hesitant to take a song who might not be hesitant now?'"

His chill studio presence — Atweh likens his role to "songwriter and party host" and is fond of pregameing with pingpong — and comfort across genres have kept him in demand. He and longtime writing partner Adam Messinger recently moved Stefani to tears when they helped her finish a folk-reggae track she had been trying to write for years. "Whether they're a country or R&B act, they just want to tell their story," says Atweh.

And studio sessions haven't kept him from telling his own. In January, he self-released his debut solo EP, *Here for You*, which had a more sensual, Sade-influenced sound that Slaiby told him was too good to wait for a label. "It was one of those 'Bro, I'm down, let's go' moments," says Atweh. "When everybody believes in the music, no rules apply." —KATIE BAIN



## An Eye For Talent

Americana nominee **MARCUS KING** is the latest artist to gain Grammy cred after working with a particularly discerning producer and label founder: **DAN AUERBACH**

# G

### GROWING UP IN A MUSICAL

family in Greenville, S.C., Marcus King was “really into counter-culture — especially anything guitar-oriented,” recalls the 25-year-old. By high school, he was spending his afternoons studying jazz theory at art school and his evenings at punk shows or DIY house concerts. “All those kids were really into The Black Keys,” says King, noting that the rock duo’s 2011 album, *El Camino*, had recently come out (and hit No. 2 on the Billboard 200). “I was like, ‘This is mainstream rock, and it’s badass. It’s got a lot of soul behind it.’”

A decade later, King is an artist in his own right, who has released three albums with his five-piece Southern-rock act, The Marcus King Band, all of which went to the top 10 of *Billboard*’s Blues Albums chart. And last year, his solo debut, *El Dorado*, arrived — produced by and co-written with none other than the Keys’ Dan Auerbach and released on Fantasy Records in partnership with Auerbach’s own Nashville independent label, Easy Eye Sound. It has garnered a best Americana album nomination, along with new acclaim for King — further fueling the notion that every project Auerbach touches tends to turn into Grammium.

Auerbach, 41, is a 17-time Grammy nominee and eight-time winner; at the 2013 ceremony, he was the most-awarded artist of

the night, including for producer of the year, non-classical — an award he’s now up for a third time, and for the second year in a row. Though some of those nods honored his work in The Black Keys, more have reflected Auerbach’s taste as a producer: He gravitates toward left-of-mainstream artists with big voices in soul, blues, Americana and roots music. His 2020 producer nomination included albums with The Gibson Brothers and Yola, and he’s now up for his work with Early James and Jimmy “Duck” Holmes, among others. All of those albums were released on his label. “I don’t think it’s coincidental,” says King, “as much as it is the effort and the ear and the attention to detail that everything out of Easy Eye has.”

“I should consistently be putting out new voices, important records,” says Auerbach. “I don’t think I deserve to be [in this field] every year, but I’m definitely going to be doing the same thing this year as I did last year and the same thing next year as I do this year. I’m going to continue to try and find those overlooked voices and bring them to light. The reality of the music and how genuine it is — that’s going to win out all the time.”

Since its 2017 launch, Easy Eye Sound has released a modest 20 albums, but in February the label entered a joint venture with Concord, and Auerbach announced it would release 12 in 2021 alone. He insists he has no master plan for those albums, but it’s safe to say they’ll have one thing in common: The artists “have to impress the shit out of me — blow me away in some way.”



Auerbach (left) and King at Easy Eye Sound Studio in Nashville in 2019.

King did just that. The first time he and Auerbach played together, he wowed the producer with only his voice and an acoustic guitar — so Auerbach cut much of *El Dorado* from King’s live in-studio performance. “Not many people can do that. Most people can’t. But Marcus does,” says Auerbach. King recalls the “magic moment” of recording the tender track “Wildflowers & Wine,” saying it felt “almost like a fucking hand-crocheted blanket by the fireplace.” The pair recorded *El Dorado* in just three days, but spent several weeks prior deep in a writing process that tapped into Auerbach’s

expansive network: A different writer would join each day, including legends like Pat McLaughlin and Paul Overstreet.

Sessions with these “architects of music,” says King, helped him establish “a more solid foundation to everything I was trying to say. It was kind of like the first time you go to Las Vegas — a sensory overload.” Auerbach also brought in members of the Memphis Boys, iconic rhythm musicians who played with Dusty Springfield and Elvis Presley. “There was so much sage wisdom being passed around,” recalls King. “There was a buzzing energy, and it was contagious. There is

certainly a lot I’m going to carry with me for the rest of my life and hopefully can pass on.”

To do so would be to follow in the footsteps of the man King sees as an older brother and who views him as the latest young artist he can elevate to the next level of his career. Auerbach recalls how, when he first met Yola, she told him she just wanted to quit her day job. “Three years later, and everything has changed,” he says of his now signee. “I hope things continue to change for Marcus in the same way. It’s really all up to what the artist wants — how big they want their world to be.”

—LYNDSEY HAVENS





## ‘It Feels Like Doors Opening’

For pop savant **DEVONTÉ HYNES**, his first-ever nomination — for classical music — has a deeper meaning

*PRODUCER, COMPOSER AND multi-instrumentalist Devonté Hynes, 35, has worked with acts like Solange, Carly Rae Jepsen, HAIM and Mariah Carey; records on his own as Blood Orange; and has scored screen projects, including Queen & Slim and HBO’s We Are Who We Are. But his first-ever Grammy nomination came in a wholly unexpected realm: classical music. Fields — a suite of his music recorded by Third Coast Percussion, with Hynes himself on synths — began three years ago as one piece that Hynes was commissioned to write for a dance performance. Now he’s nominated for best chamber music/small ensemble performance. (The album is also up for best engineering.) No one’s more surprised than Hynes himself.*

It’s the first time I wrote music for other people to perform. Before

that, for the most part, I’d be writing subconsciously based upon my own performing ability. Around the same time I started working with Third Coast, I ended up playing the [Philip] Glass Etudes [for a performance of the composer’s work at the Kennedy Center]. It was a pretty formative time for me — I’d never really performed other people’s music before. I’d played in bands or played an instrument or two for someone else live, but it’s a very different world. Those two things really did stretch my mind, which aided a lot of my compositional writing after that.

It really was a collaboration. I went to Philadelphia to see Third Coast’s studio, their equipment. I got to see them perform up close, see how they move, how they create. My entire thought process while writing it was for performance. I went back to New York and wrote and demo’d the first 20 minutes or so, then sent that to them with the scores. That was, like, not a test, but seeing what that would become. They worked it out and recorded it, then sent it back to me, which was really mind-blowing and magical. I was able to then see what I could do in a bigger way.

There were times I wondered, “Is this a little too crazy?” I was trying to see what I could get away with. And they were more than able to do it and to add their own thing to it. I’d say to them, “If you want to try this any way you want to do it, go ahead! I’m curious to see what shape it can take.” They’re incredibly intuitive, so in sync with each other. It was very motivating.

I was reading recently about Gershwin and his hangup about not necessarily being the most advanced in terms of music theory and education, which is something I definitely relate to. I’m not at conservatory level. The fact that this nomination is within the compositional, classical world — it takes on a different connotation in my mind. It feels like doors opening, whether that’s for me personally or for other people who may see it. Whatever kind of viewpoint you may have in regard to awards, the idea of a Black composer even breaking through is something. I think about being younger and the things I’d see that would inspire me and make me feel not so alone. From that angle, it does feel nice to put a foot in and hopefully make classical music more accessible for people of color, people of varying genders or [who are] gender nonconforming, people of lower income. I didn’t own a cello until I was in my late 20s — when I was learning cello growing up, I’d save up to rent one that I’d have to give back at the end of the school year. So this [nomination] really speaks to the heart of a lot of things I care about.

I hadn’t really gone inside that music since I wrote it, so since the nomination, I did a deep listen, and it’s a pretty weird album! “Classical music,” it’s a funny term. When I use it, I’m just thinking about music that’s composed. It can be stretched in so many different ways, and that’s always exciting to me — music that’s stretched beyond the limits of what it’s known for.

—AS TOLD TO REBECCA MILZOFF



## How Kaytranada Found His Groove

THE BEST NEW ARTIST NOMINEE IS HONORING DANCE MUSIC’S PAST

**IN THE YEARS BETWEEN HIS BREAKTHROUGH** 2016 album, *99.9%*, and his late-2019 follow-up, *BUBBA*, producer Kaytranada moved out of his childhood home in Montreal, signed a major-label deal with RCA Records and publicly came out as gay. It’s not a surprise, then, that the 28-year-old (real name: Kevin Celestin) describes *BUBBA* as “a project I made from the bottom of my heart.” Now it has earned him three nominations: best dance/electronic album, best dance recording (for “10%,” featuring Kali Uchis) and best new artist. A dance act has never won the latter category, and for Kaytranada — who says *BUBBA* was influenced by the Black and queer pioneers of dance music — the award would be a win for more than just his genre.

**Did the life changes you experienced after 99.9% affect your work?**

[99.9%] is all over the place — I didn’t know whom to please. But then I moved out, and I had my own life, finally. Going out [to clubs] really inspired me to create this project as a part of me. I wasn’t getting shitfaced or anything — I was just going out to enjoy music, whether it was house music or top 40.

**How did the roots of dance music shape *BUBBA*?**

I was finding out about the Black DJs like Larry Levan, Ron Hardy and Frankie Knuckles. Clubs like Paradise Garage and Muzic Box were mainly Black people, gay people, Latinos — they were all going there and dancing their asses off. You can hear the mixes on YouTube. Those are samples, classic disco songs, where they just extended the drum break and made their edits. It was very influential.

**Does your nomination give you hope for a more inclusive future in dance music?**

Ten years ago, I would’ve been like, “That’s crazy.” A lot of kids who aspire to be musicians probably have the same struggles as me, being Black and gay just [trying to] fit in. It could be inspiring to them. That’s why I want to win — that’s who I’m going to dedicate it to.

**The day of the nominations, someone tweeted, “we don’t care about the Grammys,” and you responded, “But I do.” Why?**

We love it and we hate it, but it’s still a prestigious award. We can’t really just ignore the Grammys like that. A lot of legends want Grammys. A lot of legends never got nominated, too. I’m sure that back in the day people were talking, it’s just that there was no social media. Marvin Gaye won his first Grammy with “Sexual Healing,” which was not [from] his best album, of course, and it was late in his career. I’m sure Twitter would’ve been crazy then. —TATIANA CIRISANO

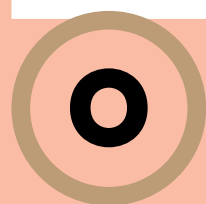




Some of the standout children's music artists whose albums were ignored by Grammy voters include, clockwise from left: Smith, Elena Moon Park, SaulPaul, Freelon and 123 Andrés' Andrés Salguero (left) and Sanabria.

## A Seat At The (Kids) Table

When the children's music album category produced an all-white ballot, three nominees protested — and the conversation about the diversity that should define it is just getting started BY FRANK DIGIACOMO



**ONE OF THIS YEAR'S MOST** startling Grammy developments came in a category that rarely gets much attention: children's music albums. In November,

Family Music Forward, a collective dedicated to dismantling racial bias in the industry, called out the fact that the ballot was all-white and included only one woman. A month later, three of those five nominees — Alastair Moock, The Okee Dokee Brothers and Dogs on Fleas — asked to have their names withdrawn from consideration.

In a corner of the music world historically known for its progressive messages, the situation wasn't, in fact, an anomaly: During the past three years, the category has included just one act of color on each ballot, and in 2017, it had none. But the protesting acts have seen some positive change begin. Recording Academy officials

(including interim president Harvey Mason Jr. and chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer Valeisha Butterfield Jones) met with FMF members twice to address their concerns, admitted that the category's nomination review committee lacked diversity and issued a statement "reaffirm[ing] our commitment to drive necessary change." While it hasn't officially granted the protesting artists' withdrawal from the Grammy ballot, it won't count votes for them, and the award will go to one of the two remaining nominees.

"All white people have to do to be part of racist society is nothing because the system already serves us," says Moock. He and The Okee Dokee Brothers' Joe Mailander sat down with some of their peers who submitted but weren't nominated — Pierce Freelon, whose debut, *D.a.D.*, was widely celebrated; Christina Sanabria, of Latin Grammy-winning husband-and-wife duo 123 Andrés, which released *Hola, Amigo: Songs of*

*Friendship*; and children's music veteran/reggae artist Aaron Nigel Smith, who put out the concert album *Live in L.A.* — to discuss the path toward changing that system. An excerpt of that conversation follows.

**AARON NIGEL SMITH** Children's music is received by youth without preconceived notions. We can teach numbers, letters and colors, but we can also teach loving kindness. We can teach how to be a good neighbor. This year of all years, it was disappointing that there was no [Grammy] acknowledgement of the rich diversity in the children and family music space.

**PIERCE FREELON** This year, I thought a lot about how racism starts at a young age. I put out *D.a.D.* as a Black father at a time when I also had to have a conversation with my Black son about institutional racism. I really started thinking about the power of children's music to flip a switch in the minds of folks who are killing Black men and boys at these alarming rates. What images of Black men [are they] seeing in their childhoods? They're largely absent from children's media and media in general.

**CHRISTINA SANABRIA** This category is uniquely positioned to serve all children. And all children include what I looked like as a child. There were days when I was like, "I want bubble gum," but I also dealt with concerns of having parents who were undocumented immigrants. You might say, "Are children ready to think about that?" But this summer, we attended a number of protests and saw so many children who were the age that [12-year-old police-shooting victim] Tamir Rice



would have been or younger. Some were carrying signs that read, “I won’t be cute in 15 years.” They showed us that this is the reality for a lot of children today.

**JOE MAILANDER** [The Okee Dokee Brothers] won in 2013, and it had a tremendous impact on what we were doing at the time. We were just coming up in the industry, and it led to a relationship with a booking agent that put us in front of performing arts center audiences and the national press.

**ALASTAIR MOOCK** The Grammy is a very big deal. It opens a huge number of doors — especially in a small category like this — to use as part of your brand for the rest of your life. But what happened this year is not the way that any of us wanted it. We were all taken aback.

**SMITH** When we did our initial protest, I felt there was a sense of urgency. [The academy was] like, “Can we meet today?” On Dec. 4, we had a heart-to-heart with them, where they acknowledged that there was a lack of judgment within the Grammy organization, and we were appreciative of that. We presented recommendations for how we can move forward, [which included] more transparency in the entire process — the nominating process included — and an overhaul of the nominating committee. Then there was a follow-up meeting on Dec. 11 where FMF and the artists were represented.

**MAILANDER** The big thing that the academy admitted in that meeting was that the nomination review committee did not have strong representation from people of color. They said it should have been stronger and that it was unacceptable. We could see that our music, which kind of fits within the white narrative, seems to have unseen advantages when there’s only white people listening to it. But this is a special category that really needs to have experts who understand the diverse genres submitted — hip-hop, R&B, reggae and Latin music.

**FREELON** Children’s music is a relatively obscure genre. The Grammys play a big role in the media’s interest in what’s going on in our category. And so for them to see this very narrow representation of talent — imagine a best-of-the-best competition where the top four are Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, James Taylor and Joan Baez. They are among the best — as are, by the way, the five nominees for this year’s category. But why aren’t Bob Marley, Lauryn Hill and 2Pac in the conversation?

**MOOCK** There’s a real disconnect for a lot of people in our field when it comes to hip-hop, reggae, R&B. I don’t think many of us have the tools to evaluate that music critically. Yet, Pierce’s album got more national press this year than any children’s album that came out by far. He was on the *Today* show and a bunch of other programs. So the national audience understood that this album was important. How does that not get a nomination?

**SANABRIA** There’s something unique about family music in that it’s not a genre — it’s more for an audience that listens to many genres. But there’s also something that’s not unique about children’s music: It’s what American music looks like. The members of Family Music Forward want to approach change through the idea of intersectionality. Unless we move forward together, we are not achieving justice, equality and representation.

**SMITH** We do feel heard to a certain degree, and hopeful. But we’re operating on the principle of “Trust but verify.” The change is coming with or without the academy.

*Additional reporting by Joe Levy. Go to [billboard.com](https://www.billboard.com) for the full conversation.*



## Rocking In The She World

HOW SIX WOMEN-LED ACTS MADE HISTORY AND TOOK OVER  
A DUDE-DOMINATED GENRE CATEGORY

**I**N ITS 10 YEARS OF EXISTENCE, THE best rock performance category has included 46 nominees — only 10 of which have been women, and only one of which, Alabama Shakes’ Brittany Howard, won.

But at this year’s Grammy ceremony, that pattern will finally change: Phoebe Bridgers, HAIM, Grace Potter, Fiona Apple, Big Thief (fronted by singer Adriaenne Lenker) and a solo Howard make up the category’s first ballot of only women or female-led acts. Four of them also appear in the best rock song category, where Tame Impala is the lone male-fronted act nominated.

That evolution follows another promising change at the Recording Academy itself: In November, it welcomed a new class of 1,345 voting members, 40% of whom are women, after an effort to expand and diversify. And in a year when the pandemic rendered the usual industry gatekeepers less all-powerful, the nominees figured out how to put themselves in front of as many of those voters as possible, and on their own terms.

Bridgers planned to spend last spring opening for The 1975 on an arena tour. When it was canceled, she turned herself into a headliner, taking “advantage of the fact that she wasn’t one person on a huge stage and instead had a blank slate,” says Robby Morris, creative director at Bridgers’ label, Secretly Group. She played an NPR Tiny Desk concert in a digitally rendered Oval Office for an audience of over 1 million; three months later, on *The Late Late Show With James Corden*, she performed the now Grammy-nominated “Kyoto” from her bed, green-screened into Carnegie Hall.

Despite having to halt her own tour in March, Potter made her electric onstage presence hard to ignore: For six months, she livestreamed *Twilight Hour* concerts every Monday, attract-

ing over 300,000 views — more than 13 times the number of fans she would have reached by the end of her live tour. “To see her cover Led Zeppelin or get her Flying V [guitar] out, and then also concentrate on [new album *Daylight*] — it all came together to remind people of what a force Grace Potter is,” says Stephanie Hopson, project manager at Potter’s label, Fantasy Records.

Though HAIM had to cancel the majority of its shows set at Jewish delis across the country promoting *Women in Music Part III*, the sisters found inventive ways to engage with fans — like teaching the signature “wancing” (walk-dancing) moves from their music videos on Zoom. Those interactive events, as Columbia Records senior director of marketing Betsy Whitney puts it, let listeners “fall in love” with HAIM’s “point of view and their sound,” not with “just a traditional marketing plan.”

It may well have helped that many of rock’s usual male suspects weren’t even part of this year’s Grammy conversation. Acts like Foo Fighters, Jack White and Bruce Springsteen (each with at least 25 nominations and 10 wins each) didn’t release eligible albums, which, as radio programmer Rosemary Welsh of WYEP Pittsburgh points out, left less room for “the laziness of the voter” drawn primarily to recognizable names. Then again, the quality of these women’s albums may have simply spoken for itself: All were among 2020’s biggest critical hits, with four receiving a Metacritic score of 85 or above.

“There are and always have been amazing female artists in the field that deserve to be recognized,” says Grammy rock and alternative genre manager Brian Clasby. “The voters’ job is to identify the year’s best music in the field — and they felt that the best performances in the category came from these particular artists.” —TAYLOR MIMS



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## Congratulating Peter Raleigh and Steven Storch at Raleigh Music Group



From their meticulous attention to detail, to their innovative and visionary creative endeavors, Peter Raleigh and Steven Storch have implemented “a matter of complete trust that I have not found until Peter and Steve started their own company,” says Susan Aberbach.

Of their diverse roster of legendary and up and coming artists and songwriters, Raleigh Music Group is proud to represent the Elvis Presley catalog on behalf of the family of music publisher Jean Aberbach.



# The Players

## Nice Work If You Can Earn It

RALEIGH MUSIC GROUP CO-FOUNDERS

PETER RALEIGH AND STEVEN STORCH

MARK THE PUBLISHER'S FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

BY DISCUSSING THEIR OLD-SCHOOL APPROACH

TO SERVICING THEIR BLUE-CHIP SONG

CATALOGS AND UP-AND-COMING INDIE TALENT

BY ED CHRISTMAN

BETHMANN ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES



Presley in 1956.

**W**HILE THE PRINCIPALS of Kobalt, Big Deal and other music publishers are making tens and even hundreds of millions of dollars selling to investment funds like Hipgnosis and Primary Wave during this booming period for song catalog sales, Raleigh Music Group co-founders Peter Raleigh and Steven Storch continue to conduct their publishing business using the traditional and unflashy principles on which they built their company. “We don’t chase deals, and we ain’t in the business of outbidding people,” says Storch. “We sell our company as one that’s going to deliver service, and we win deals based on what we do.”

Established in 2016, Raleigh Music Group provides creative and administrative services to a portfolio that includes work by legendary composer George Gershwin and rock’n’roll icon Elvis Presley. The Ger-

shwin catalog includes songs from the 1951 film classic *An American in Paris* and the 2012 Broadway musical *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, as well as such Great American Songbook entries as “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off” and “Summertime.” Presley titles include “Can’t Help Falling in Love,” “All Shook Up” and “Jailhouse Rock.” Other song catalogs administered by Raleigh include works by Hugo Peretti, co-writer of “The Lion Sleeps Tonight”; R&B icon Bo Diddley; boxer-poet Muhammad Ali; 1970s rock band America; and contemporary artists Baby Goth and Hollis Brown, as well as producers Eric Hudson and Ezra.

Raleigh’s global royalty collection network operates in over 75 countries and includes offices in New York and Los Angeles. The publisher’s contemporary songwriting catalog contains 60,000 songs, and the company says it’s still diversifying as it moves into production music while also

mining rock, pop, R&B, hip-hop and even country. “We want to provide great service to great catalogs and also sign new songwriters who can develop the standards of tomorrow,” says Raleigh. Storch calls the company “a throwback to what traditional music publishing used to be.”

Collectively, the partners have 40 years of experience in the music publishing business: Raleigh’s prior credentials include stints at Cherry Lane Music and BMG before a five-year run as head of copyrights at ImaGem. There he met Storch, who at the time was the company’s CFO. Before that, Storch had worked for over 16 years at Sony, where he started out as a financial analyst, then moved into CD manufacturing, sales and budget/revenue projections in various roles at Sony Music, Sony International and culminating in CFO at Sony/ATV.

The two executives, who mark

their fifth year in music publishing in March, discussed their strategy for the administration of estate catalogs and their “high-touch, high service” approach to A&R, which prioritizes close relationships with their clients.

### What made you decide to start your own company?

**PETER RALEIGH** We were at ImaGem for five years when it was put up for sale [to Concord]. I always wanted to start something like this — it was just the question of finding the right business partners. When I met Steve, I thought, “Let’s take it to the next level.” The industry was changing. We could see that when catalogs were acquired, only the top songs were taken care of. The rest of the catalogs were neglected. We saw a niche that we could offer: bringing value, service and monetization to great catalogs.



### How did you finance the business at first?

**RALEIGH** We asked our longtime clients if we could have their business. I have known Susan Aberbach, one of the owners of the Elvis Presley catalog, for 23 years. I had met her in my days at Cherry Lane, and I had done a lot of work for her, including reclaiming 400 copyrights. I thought I could get her business, and she responded, “You already have my business, but can I invest in your company?” That took our breath away. We could not have started the company without her and her partner Richard Mincheff’s support.

### What percentage of your net publisher’s share comes from administration as opposed to publishing?

**STEVEN STORCH** When we began, we were 100% administration, but as we have grown, we have been able to acquire more copyrights — through small acquisitions of existing songs as well as co-publishing deals that we have with artists and songwriters. So our NPS [also known as gross profit] now is approximately 50% administration and 50% ownership.

### What deals have you cut recently?

**RALEIGH** We met some of Denise Rich’s people at the Songwriters Hall of Fame Awards. We finally met with her and did a presentation with the Raleigh team. A week later, we negotiated a deal. She is one of the most prolific songwriters of the 1990s. Her songs are the modern standards of the last 20 or 30 years. For a writer of her stature to trust us with her catalog — that’s a huge milestone. We worked hard to acquire that catalog.

### What is your A&R philosophy?

**STORCH** The company is client-centered, and they appreciate our expansive experience and our high-touch, high service approach. We recognize that a lot of the

business is changing, and we feel that our niche now, to a certain extent, is independent artists and songwriters. It’s becoming a very important and growing sector. That’s where we really focus our A&R.

### I can see what you do for classic catalogs, but what do you bring to independent artists and songwriters?

**STORCH** A lot of the independent artists and songwriters don’t necessarily have a lot of experience and don’t have big teams around them. Peter and I can teach them the business and fill in the gaps for them, whereas a larger publisher wouldn’t have the resources, time or focus. We nurture these artists.

**RALEIGH** We found one of our younger artists, Shawn James, on the internet and signed him to an administration deal. He is developing an incredible catalog of future standards. One of his songs, “Through the Valley,” is in a Sony video game, *The Last of Us Part II*. James is an example of crossing boundaries. He doesn’t have a top 10 song on radio, but he has great songs and a loyal fan base.

### Where are you focusing your A&R?

**RALEIGH** We are interested in signing producers and top line songwriters because both are equally important.

**STORCH** The most successful companies in publishing have a little bit of everything, so we are interested in music from all genres to create the most rounded and diverse portfolio. It’s good to have ownership, administration and co-publishing deals. We are also looking for strategic partnerships. We recently did a joint venture with Kevin Jonas, who is the father of the Jonas Brothers. This joint venture will give us exposure to country music in Nashville, where we always wanted to be.

### What about the Wall Street interest in buying catalogs? Have you gone there?

**STORCH** We bought a writer’s share



from one of the writers of “Bawitdaba,” the Kid Rock song. It has been used in so many TV shows that it turned out to be a good acquisition. We own a piece of the Madonna song “Superstar.” We’re happy to see the value for songs increase through acquisitions. Private equity buyers should hire us to help them buy and administer the catalogs. We sit back and observe, but it is so far outside our purview. It’s not what we do; it’s not in our mindset.

### What kinds of deals are attractive to you?

**STORCH** Our interests are pretty much all over the board, but we don’t chase deals and we ain’t in the business of outbidding people. We don’t try to win on the highest advance or the lowest fee rate. But we are not afraid to pay a big advance if we believe in the artist and the structure of the deal is flexible. We sell our company as one that’s going to deliver service, and we win deals based on what we do. We have a service mindset that is different from a lot of other companies out there.

### What are the highlights from your first five years?

**RALEIGH** Some of the big synch licenses that we landed with big brands. Wrigley’s Extra gum used Elvis Presley’s “Can’t Help Falling in Love” in ads for four years. We are really proud of that license, which helped elevate the copyright of that song.

**STORCH** Every time we see one of our contemporary artists or songwriters get a synch in a TV show or movie, it’s incredible. We got one of our young writers, Eliza Shaddad, a synch as the end title to the first episode of a new Netflix series, *Behind Her Eyes*. The producers wanted a custom use of “Please Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood,” and we arranged for her to go into the studio. She had the right sound for it. It’s something we totally put together for her. In that deal, we retained the master. She is an up-and-coming developing songwriter. That placement will be very important to her career. In addition

to the catalog, we will have contemporary songwriters pumping out today’s hits — that’s our challenge now. To keep the balance of the catalog.

### How has the coronavirus pandemic affected the firm?

**RALEIGH** It really hasn’t impacted us the way it has other companies. We are doing the business of publishers, getting songs placed and doing synch licensing.

**STORCH** Even though we saw television and film production slightly slowed down, we still did a lot of business with reality shows— like *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, *America’s Got Talent* and *The Voice*. Commercials were still very strong for us. Advertisers were looking for classic songs. People were looking to be comforted by nostalgia, and we have it. Last year was still our best year ever.

### What are your goals now?

**STORCH** To keep building by carefully signing songwriters and new catalogs. We have a business that actually works. We are not beholden to a private equity [company] or financial sponsors. We do have a close relationship with our bank, Pinnacle [Financial Partners] and Andy Moats [executive vp/ music entertainment director]. Andy knows our background and has worked with us in the past, so it’s like an old-time traditional banking relationship with us as trusted clients. We are lucky to have that.

### With prices the way things are now, are you concerned that your heritage catalogs might decide to up and sell?

**STORCH** We have worked with the heirs of the copyrights we represent for many years. They have special relationships with their catalogs and have decided to retain control of the songs so that they are looked after in a way they are comfortable with. But what we are doing is proactive estate care for our clients by making sure the songs are being promoted. Whether they want to keep them for future generations or sell them, we will help them build value. **b**



Ali in 1963.



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Morris (left)  
and Stapleton



# The 56th Annual ACM Awards Return To Music City

THE WEST COAST-BASED ACADEMY OF COUNTRY MUSIC EMBRACES NASHVILLE FOR A SECOND CONSECUTIVE CELEBRATION; MAREN MORRIS AND CHRIS STAPLETON LEAD THE FIELD OF NOMINEES; KEITH URBAN AND MICKEY GUYTON TO CO-HOST

BY MELINDA NEWMAN

**S**HORTLY AFTER THE Academy of Country Music Awards took place last September in Nashville — five months later than in their traditional April slot and 1,800 miles away from their usual Las Vegas home — ACM CEO Damon Whiteside and the Encino, Calif.-based organization's board of directors decided to keep the 2021 edition in Music City.

“We had a really good template,” he says. “Even though April seemed like a long time away, we thought, ‘Let’s not put artists at risk with travel. Let’s just repeat that success again.’”

That means the 56th annual ACM Awards, set to air April 18 on CBS and Paramount+, will be held again at three historic Nashville venues: the Grand Ole Opry House, the Ryman Auditorium and The Bluebird Cafe.

“We learned that being able to change locations, especially when you don’t have the ability to show the audience reactions and the audience between performances, is an important factor,” says Whiteside. “We like creating a bit of visual variety.”

However, he is hoping the coronavirus pandemic has

eased enough for all performances to be live, unlike the September event, when the show combined live and pretaped performances. At press time, Whiteside was also hoping to have all acts accept their awards in person, as well as have a small audience in all three venues, if possible. After 2020’s delay, Whiteside



Whiteside

MORRIS: JOHN RUSSELL/COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION; SHUTTERSTOCK; STAPLETON: TERRY WYATT/GETTY IMAGES; WHITESIDE: COURTESY OF THE ACADEMY OF COUNTRY MUSIC.





says it was “really important to get back on cycle because that April window has traditionally worked really well for us. People are expecting us in April.”

With the return to the same venues only seven months later, the academy wanted to make sure the show felt fresh. 2020 host Keith Urban, who is up for two awards, will return, but this time with Mickey Guyton, who’s nominated for new female artist, as co-host. That idea emerged shortly after last year’s show when Urban backed Guyton on piano while she performed “What Are You Gonna Tell Her.”

“I’m sitting with the executive-producer team at dick clark productions and we were watching that live performance, and we literally had goose bumps watching her just blossom onstage like that,” remembers Whiteside. “It was so powerful watching Keith play piano for her. We were so moved by it. Literally right after that, we were like, ‘We’ve got to ask her to host with Keith next year.’ We let the show cool and gave it a little time to breathe, but we were thinking about it from then.”

Guyton is the first Black artist to co-host since Charley Pride in 1984. There are other signs that Whiteside hopes point to broader inclusivity in country music.

For the first time, every single of the year nomination features a woman artist: Miranda Lambert, Gabby Barrett, Carly Pearce (with Lee Brice), Ingrid Andress and Maren Morris. (Morris and Chris Stapleton lead all artists with six nominations.)

“We have come a long way when the five most focal singles of the year are female, when you figure there’s been so much discussion about the lack of females at radio and just the lack of female content and presence in general in the country music industry,” says Whiteside.

In addition to Guyton, three other Black artists — Jimmie Allen, Kane Brown and John Legend (for a duet with Carrie Underwood) — are nominated in various categories. “That’s really exciting and a big step in the right direction because we didn’t have any [Black artists nominated] last year,” says Whiteside.



For the third time in four years though, none of the nominees for entertainer of the year are women. And among the 2021 contenders, four are the same as last year — Luke Bryan, Eric Church, Luke Combs and Thomas Rhett — with Stapleton replacing

For the first time, the ACM has nominated four Black artists in one year. Clockwise from top left: Allen; Brown (center), onstage with Swae Lee (left) and Khalid at the 2020 Billboard Music Awards; Guyton; and Legend.



FOR YOUR ACM CONSIDERATION

# INGRID ANDRESS

NEW FEMALE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

SINGLE OF THE YEAR - "MORE HEARTS THAN MINE"  
(ARTIST AND PRODUCER)

"[LADY LIKE IS] NOT JUST ONE OF THE YEAR'S BEST DEBUTS, BUT ONE OF THE YEAR'S STRONGEST ALBUMS"

**AP** Associated Press

"INGRID ANDRESS EMERGES AS COUNTRY'S LATEST STREAMING STAR...[WITH] LYRICALLY RICH SONGS, CONVERSATIONAL AND STORY-DRIVEN THE WAY THE BEST COUNTRY SONGS OFTEN ARE"

**RollingStone**

"ONE OF COUNTRY'S BRIGHTEST NEW STARS, ANDRESS' LADY LIKE PROVES TO BE ONE OF THE MOST MEMORABLE RELEASES OF 2020."

**billboard**

"['MORE HEARTS THAN MINE'] IS AN ELEGANTLY WRITTEN SONG ABOUT A LOVE THAT LETS YOU DOWN"

**The New York Times**

ONE HALF BILLION GLOBAL CAREER STREAMS

DEBUT SINGLE "MORE HEARTS THAN MINE" CERTIFIED PLATINUM

APPLE UP NEXT ARTIST

4X ACM NOMINEE | 3X GRAMMY® NOMINEE | 2X CMA NOMINEE







ACM performances will be staged at the Grand Ole Opry House (pictured), the Ryman Auditorium and The Bluebird Cafe.

Underwood, who tied with Rhett for the win in 2020.

“It’s hard to get into voters’ minds, but certainly all of these gentlemen had major, major years. I can’t even imagine one of those who shouldn’t be on this list,” says Whiteside.

“That’s not to say I don’t think there are some female artists that deserve to be there too, because I absolutely do. I think it just speaks to the fact that we have a really competitive environment right now.”

According to the eligibility require-

ments, success at radio, consumption and music videos, as well as artistic merit and songwriting, are among the criteria. However, voters tend to heavily rely on live performance as a major indicator, usually nominating artists who regularly sell out arenas.

Whiteside says the awards committee did discuss whether to modify the criteria this year, given that artists were able to tour for only the first two months of the eligibility period (Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 2020), but decided not to alter it because there

## “Moving to Nashville these last two years really showed us that we can be nimble. We have an open playbook at this point.”

—WHITESIDE

were so many other factors involved in judging the category.

One artist who will not be involved this year is Morgan Wallen. After a video emerged Feb. 2 of the budding star using the N-word, the academy took the extraordinary step of announcing it was pausing his involvement and eligibility for the 2021 awards. The organization had to act fast, as the second-round ballot was set to hit Feb. 10.

“We felt that it could be a huge detriment to country music and to our industry if the following week a ballot came out with an artist that was in the spotlight with this negativity associated with it,” says Whiteside. “If we’re dedicated to diversity and inclusion efforts — which we are as an organization — how can we just turn and look the other way in this case?”

Whiteside adds that Wallen’s

suspension “is not forever” and that voting criteria has not been changed, but to keep him on the ballot “would have really cast a very dark shadow on our awards ballot ... and we felt we can’t do that to all the other artists who are so deserving to be part of this awards cycle.”

This year’s show ends the academy’s current deal with CBS. “We remain hopeful that we’re going to have a renewal very soon,” he says, “but we’re still in our negotiating period.”

Looking ahead to 2022, with the pandemic hopefully on the decline, Whiteside says a return to Las Vegas is under consideration, but “we’re strategically looking at where we should take the show. Being that we moved to Nashville, these last two years really showed us that we can be nimble. We have an open playbook at this point.”

## Country Music Community Benefits From \$3.5 Million Raised By ACM’s Lifting Lives During Pandemic

MUSICIANS AFFECTED BY NASHVILLE CHRISTMAS BOMBING AMONG MANY AIDED BY CHARITY

### ▶ LIFTING LIVES, THE

Academy of Country Music’s philanthropic arm, has distributed \$3.5 million directly to individuals in the country community through its COVID-19 Response Fund. More help is on the way.

“In terms of putting money into people’s hands who need it — to feed their family, to pay rent, whatever that looks like — we’re uber-focused on fundraising right now,” says ACM CEO Damon Whiteside.

Lifting Lives usually replenishes its coffers through various Party

for a Cause events surrounding the ACM Awards. However, the most recent in-person events were staged in 2019, and the likely inability to gather in person due to the pandemic left the academy to consider other solutions.

“We’re still keeping the possibility out there of a Party for a Cause live event, but knowing that it might be unlikely, we’re also out to market with some virtual event concepts,” says Whiteside. The academy will also highlight Lifting Lives “in and around the show wherever we



Party for a Cause events were last staged in person in June 2019, when Jessie James Decker played The Bluebird Cafe.

can,” he says, including providing nominated artists with a “toolkit” so they can promote the nonprofit in interviews and social media.

For the second year, Nashville will host the April 18 awards show. To thank the town for its hospitality,

Lifting Lives will donate \$25,000 to Music City Inc.’s foundation for their Nashville Christmas Day Explosion Relief Fund. The money will go to local musicians who are out of work due to damage to downtown venues from the Dec. 25 bombing. —M.N.



FOR YOUR ACM  
CONSIDERATION



ASHLEY McBRYDE

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

NEVER  
WILL

{ THE ONLY ALBUM NOMINATED  
FOR CMA + ACM + GRAMMY®  
COUNTRY ALBUM OF THE YEAR  
(CURRENT AWARD SEASON) }

FEMALE ARTIST  
OF THE YEAR

SONG OF THE YEAR  
"ONE NIGHT STANDARDS"

"...REPRESENTS THE PINNACLE OF WHAT CONTEMPORARY  
MAINSTREAM COUNTRY CAN BE." *VARIETY*

4X GRAMMY® NOMINEE

2019 ACM NEW FEMALE ARTIST | 2019 CMA NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR | 2019 CMT BREAKOUT ARTIST OF THE YEAR  
2020 CMA NOMINEE ALBUM OF THE YEAR & FEMALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR



BEST OF 2020: *RollingStone* *Esquire* *VARIETY* *SPIN* :: STEREOGUM *American songwriter* *billboard* *Paste*



# The Top ACM Award Nominees

**A**MONG THE CONTENDERS FOR THE 56TH ACADEMY OF COUNTRY Music Awards, 14 creators — 12 artists and two producers — earned nominations in three or more categories: Maren Morris and Chris Stapleton lead the field, with six nods each, while Miranda Lambert received five, and Jay Joyce, Ashley McBryde and Thomas Rhett each earned four. —PAUL GREIN

## ► MAREN MORRIS

*Six nominations, including single of the year*

Morris' "The Bones," which topped *Billboard's* Hot Country Songs chart for 19 weeks, is nominated for both single and song of the year. She received two nods in the song category as artist and co-writer. "The Bones" was the second single from her 2019 album, *Girl*. Morris is also nominated for female artist (which she won in 2020) for the fifth straight year and video of the year for "Better Than We Found It." Her sixth nod is as a member of The Highwomen, a supergroup that also features Brandi Carlile, Natalie Hemby and Amanda Shires, which is up for group of the year for the second time.

## ► CHRIS STAPLETON

*Six nominations, including entertainer of the year*

Stapleton's fourth solo album, *Starting Over*, entered Top Country Albums at No. 1. It also scored a nomination for album of the year, earning him two nods as both artist and co-producer. His first three solo albums were also nominated in that category. *Starting Over's* title track/lead single, which reached No. 4 on Hot Country Songs (thus far), is nominated for song of the year, giving Stapleton two nods as artist and co-writer. The Kentucky native is also nominated for entertainer of the year for the third time in four years and male artist of the year for the sixth time in a row.

## ► MIRANDA LAMBERT

*Five nominations, including single of the year*

Lambert's "Bluebird" is nominated for

single, song and video of the year. It's this year's only work to be nominated in all three of these categories. In the song of the year category, Lambert is nominated as both artist and co-writer. "Bluebird," from her seventh studio album, *Wildcard*, became her first solo No. 1 on Country Airplay in eight years. She is also nominated for female artist of the year — a category she has won a record nine times — for the 15th consecutive year. Lambert's five current ACM nominations bring her career total to a whopping 68, the record for a female artist.

## ► JAY JOYCE (PRODUCER)

*Four nominations, including album of the year*

Joyce is competing with himself for album of the year. He is nominated for producing Ashley McBryde's *Never Will* and Brothers Osborne's *Skeletons*, both of which reached the top five on Top Country Albums. Joyce won the 2012 award in that category for co-producing Eric Church's *Chief*. The Nashville native is also nominated for single of the year for producing Miranda Lambert's "Bluebird" and producer of the year for the sixth time. He has won in that category in every even-numbered year dating back to 2012.

## ► ASHLEY McBRYDE

*Four nominations, including album of the year*

McBryde's second album, *Never Will*, which reached No. 5 on Top Country Albums, is nominated for album of the year — her first in that category. McBryde is also nominated for female artist for the second time in three years and song of the year as both artist and



Lambert



FOR YOUR ACM CONSIDERATION

# GABBY BARRETT

“COUNTRY MUSIC  
**POWERHOUSE**”  
People

**NEW FEMALE  
ARTIST  
OF THE YEAR**

**BILLBOARD'S TOP NEW  
COUNTRY ACT OF 2020**

**MOST FIRST WEEK DEBUT ALBUM  
STREAMS FOR ANY COUNTRY  
ACT IN HISTORY**

**OVER 1 BILLION  
GLOBAL STREAMS**

**FORBES 30 UNDER 30  
ARTIST**

**SINGLE  
OF THE YEAR  
“I HOPE”**

**#1 MOST STREAMED  
COUNTRY SONG OF 2020**

**THIRD LONGEST-REIGNING  
#1 SINGLE ON BILLBOARD'S  
HOT COUNTRY SONGS CHART**

**CERTIFIED 4X PLATINUM**

**iHEART TITANIUM AWARD**

**CMT BREAKTHROUGH  
VIDEO OF THE YEAR**





co-writer of “One Night Standards,” the lead single from *Never Will*. The single reached No. 17 on Hot Country Songs. The Arkansas-bred singer-songwriter was nominated for song of the year in 2020 for “Girl Goin’ Nowhere.”

► **THOMAS RHETT**

*Four nominations, including entertainer of the year*

Rhett, who tied with Carrie Underwood for entertainer of the year at the last ACM Awards, is nominated in the category for the second year in a row. He is also nominated for male artist of the year for the fifth time. He won in that category in 2016 and 2018. Rhett’s other nods are music event of the year for “Be a Light” and song of the year for “Some People Do,” which he co-wrote for Old Dominion. “Be a Light,” which features Reba McEntire, Hillary Scott, Chris Tomlin and Keith Urban, reached No. 7 on Hot Country Songs.

► **INGRID ADDRESS**

*Three nominations, including single of the year*

Address’ “More Hearts Than Mine,” which reached No. 5 on Hot Country Songs, is nominated for single of the year; she is nominated both as artist and co-producer. The exquisite ballad, the lead single from her debut album, *Lady Like*, is this year’s only single of the year contender that was produced or co-produced by the artist. The Denver native is also nominated for new female artist of the year for the second year in a row. (The ACM Awards, unlike the Grammys, allows artists two nominations in new artist categories.)

► **ERIC CHURCH**

*Three nominations, including entertainer of the year*

Church is nominated for entertainer of the year for the third time and male artist for a fourth. He’s also nominated for music event of the year for “Does to Me,” his hit duet with Luke Combs. The North Carolina-bred star was the ACM’s new solo vocalist of the year for 2010. In a unique move, he is set to release three studio albums in the space of a week: *Heart* is due April 16, followed by *&* on April 20 and *Soul* on April 23.

► **LUKE COMBS**

*Three nominations, including entertainer of the year*

Combs is nominated for entertainer for the second year in a row, male artist — which he won in 2020 — for the third year in a row and music event of the year for the first time for “Does to Me,” his duet with Eric Church. The collaboration, which reached No. 1 on Country Airplay, was featured on Combs’ Billboard 200-topping sophomore album, *What You See Is What You Get*. Combs and Church are competing for both entertainer and male artist of the year.

► **HARDY**

*Three nominations, including new male artist of the year*

Michael Hardy — who uses the moniker HARDY as a recording artist — is nominated for songwriter of the year for the second time in a row. He’s also nominated for new male artist and for music event of the year for “One Beer,” which features Lauren Alaina and Devin Dawson. “One Beer,” the lead single from



Address

**SONG OF THE YEAR**

THE ACM HONOR GOES TO THE ARTIST, SONGWRITERS AND PUBLISHER

“BLUEBIRD”

**Miranda Lambert**

**SONGWRITERS** Luke Dick, Miranda Lambert, Natalie Hemby  
**PUBLISHERS** Emileon Songs, Little Louder Songs, Pink Dog Publishing, Songs of Universal, Sony/ATV Tree Publishing, Wrucke for You Publishing

“ONE NIGHT STANDARDS”

**Ashley McBryde**

**SONGWRITERS** Ashley McBryde, Nicolette Hayford, Shane McAnally  
**PUBLISHERS** Canned Biscuit Songs, Smackworks Music, Smack Blue, Smackstreet Music, Tempo Investments, Warner Geo Met Ric Music, Warner-Tamerlane Publishing

“SOME PEOPLE DO”

**Old Dominion**

**SONGWRITERS** Jesse Frasure, Matt Ramsey, Thomas Rhett, Shane McAnally  
**PUBLISHERS** Carrot Seed Songs, EMI Blackwood Music, Smackville Music, Songs of ROC Nation, Telemetry Rhythm House Music, Warner-Tamerlane Publishing, Smack Hits, Tempo Investments, Warner Geo Met Ric Music

“STARTING OVER”

**Chris Stapleton**

**SONGWRITERS** Chris Stapleton, Mike Henderson  
**PUBLISHERS** I Wrote These Songs, Straight Six Music, WC Music

“THE BONES”

**Maren Morris**

**SONGWRITERS** Jimmy Robbins, Maren Morris, Laura Veltz  
**PUBLISHERS** Big Machine Music, Extraordinary Alien Publishing, International Dog Music, Oh Denise Publishing, Round Hill Songs, Warner-Tamerlane Publishing



McBryde



**A HISTORY MAKING 2020**

# **DAN + SHAY**

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GLOBAL CAREER STREAMS + OVER 15 BILLION IN CUMULATIVE AUDIENCE ALL-FORMAT  
RADIO REACH + 35 TOTAL RIAA US PLATINUM AND GOLD CERTIFICATIONS TO DATE +  
34 CUMULATIVE WEEKS AT #1 ON THE BILLBOARD HOT COUNTRY SONGS CHART +  
12 CUMULATIVE WEEKS TOPPING THE BILLBOARD COUNTRY AIRPLAY CHART**



Hardy's sophomore album, *A Rock*, reached No. 1 on Country Airplay. Hardy was nominated in four categories last year, mostly for his work on Blake Shelton's "God's Country." (Dawson was one of Hardy's collaborators on that song, which earned them both an ACM win as co-writers of the single of the year.)

► **DANN HUFF (PRODUCER)**

*Three nominations, including album of the year*

Huff is nominated for producer of the year — which he has won three times — for the 11th time. He is also nominated for album of the year as a co-producer of Kane Brown's EP *Mixtape Vol. 1* (which reached No. 2 on Top Country Albums). Huff has won album of the year twice, for co-producing Keith Urban's *Be Here* (2004) and Carrie Underwood's *Some Hearts* (2006). Huff's third nod is for music event of the year as producer of Thomas Rhett's all-star charity single, "Be a Light."

► **CARLY PEARCE**

*Three nominations, including single of the year*

Pearce received two nominations for "I Hope You're Happy Now," her collaboration with Lee Brice. The track, which reached No. 1 on Country Airplay, was the second single from her sophomore self-titled album. It is nominated for single and music event of the year. Pearce is also nominated for female artist of the year for the first time. The Kentucky native was nominated for new female artist of the year for both 2017 and 2018.

► **MATTHEW RAMSEY**

*Three nominations, including song of the year*

Old Dominion's Ramsey co-wrote the band's "Some People Do," which is a song of the year contender. The third single from the group's third studio album, *Old Dominion*, reached No. 28 on

Country Airplay. Ramsey also received two nominations as part of the group: *Old Dominion* is nominated in the song of the year category as the artist, and it's also nominated for group of the year for the sixth time in a row. The Nashville quartet has won the award the last three years running.

► **KEITH URBAN**

*Three nominations, all for music event of the year*

Urban, who hosted last year's ACM Awards, has competing entries for music event of the year. He's nominated as both artist and co-producer on "One Too Many," his collaboration with P!nk, and as a featured artist on Rhett's "Be a Light." "One Too Many," the third single from *The Speed of Now Part 1*, reached No. 13 on Hot Country Songs. Urban has won this category three times, for "Start a Band" (with Brad Paisley), "We Were Us" (with Miranda Lambert) and "The Fighter" (with Carrie Underwood).



**ENTERTAINER OF THE YEAR**

- Luke Bryan
- Eric Church
- Luke Combs
- Thomas Rhett
- Chris Stapleton

**FEMALE ARTIST OF THE YEAR**

- Kelsea Ballerini
- Miranda Lambert
- Ashley McBryde
- Maren Morris
- Carly Pearce

**MALE ARTIST OF THE YEAR**

- Dierks Bentley
- Luke Combs
- Eric Church
- Thomas Rhett
- Chris Stapleton

**DUO OF THE YEAR**

- Brooks & Dunn
- Brothers Osborne
- Dan + Shay
- Florida Georgia Line
- Maddie & Tae

**GROUP OF THE YEAR**

- Lady A
- Little Big Town
- Old Dominion
- The Cadillac Three
- The Highwomen

**NEW FEMALE ARTIST OF THE YEAR**

- Ingrid Andress
- Tenille Arts
- Gabby Barrett
- Mickey Guyton
- Caylee Hammack

**NEW MALE ARTIST OF THE YEAR**

- Jimmie Allen
- Travis Denning
- HARDY
- Cody Johnson
- Parker McCollum





F O R Y O U R A C M  
C O N S I D E R A T I O N

# CODY JOHNSON

**NEW MALE ARTIST**  
O F T H E Y E A R

**2 BILLION CAREER  
GLOBAL STREAMS**

**AIN'T NOTHIN' TO IT** DEBUTED  
#9 ON ALL-GENRE BILLBOARD  
200 CHART AND #1 ON  
BILLBOARD'S TOP COUNTRY  
ALBUMS CHART AND #1 ON  
BILLBOARD'S ALL-GENRE  
DIGITAL ALBUMS CHART

**FEATURES PLATINUM SINGLE  
"ON MY WAY TO YOU" AND  
GOLD SINGLE "NOTHIN' ON YOU"**

**CURRENT SINGLE "DEAR RODEO,"  
AND ITS IMPACTFUL DUET VERSION  
WITH MUSIC ICON REBA MCENTIRE,  
HAVE GARNERED A COMBINED 65  
MILLION+ GLOBAL STREAMS  
TO DATE**



# Chartbreaker

# No. 31

ON BILLBOARD'S  
MAINSTREAM TOP 40 CHART

Standing: HyunJin; seated on couch, from left: JinSoul, Yves and Olivia Hye; seated on floor, from left: ViVi, HeeJin, Kim Lip, Yeojin, Choerry, Go Won and Chuu. Not pictured: HaSeul.

## LOONA

How a yearlong strategy helped “Star” become a rare K-pop hit at U.S. radio

Before LOONA — whose members range in age from 18 to 24 — ever attempted a U.S. crossover, the act’s Korean management company, BlockBerryCreative, prioritized domestic growth by promoting each member of the 12-piece unit individually. In an atypical move, the members of LOONA were revealed over nearly two years starting in 2016, announcing a new face every few months — hence its Korean name, 이달의 소녀, which translates to “girl of the month” — along with a solo single. “We were happy to be the main characters,” says member

Chuu. “It took a long time to debut as a whole, but I’m proud that we’ve created our own unique characteristics.” The intensive launch strategy wrapped in 2018 with the release of LOONA’s debut single, the hyper and hooky “Hi High.”

Until last year, LOONA had done little U.S. press, aside from a performance at the 2019 KCON convention in Los Angeles. But that changed when BlockBerryCreative doubled down on a global strategy to turn LOONA’s English-language B-side, “Star,” into a U.S. hit. It started with a digital initiative in October 2020 called Map of Orbits,

a website where LOONA’s fans, known as Orbits, could register to become a “star” in the group’s “galaxy,” the LOONaverse. Next, BlockBerryCreative focused on local promotion, investing in digital advertisements and an L.A. billboard in support of the group’s third EP, [12:00] (pronounced “midnight”), which reached No. 112 on the Billboard 200. “Star” was recorded in English as a gift for LOONA’s international fans (the Korean-language version is titled “Voice”), and its music video, which arrived in November and has over 10 million YouTube views, was the bow on top. “Having

an English song was the best way to get attention from the radio stations,” says a representative from the group’s U.S. team. “LOONA has no feature with a Western artist. It’s just [them].”

“Star” helped the act debut on the Mainstream Top 40 chart in February. The track also became the top song on iHeartRadio’s *Most Requested Live* for five consecutive weeks. “It just grew and grew,” says the U.S. rep. “Now radio DJs and promoters are like, ‘We want to meet these girls.’ Because the fan engagement is crazy.” —CRYSTAL BELL





2021

# TOP MUSIC LAWYERS

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Behind every artist, songwriter and music producer is a trusted group of advisers who provide guidance, advice and negotiate deals. Billboard's 6th annual Top Music Lawyers list will recognize the biggest names and most prominent legal minds in the world of music and entertainment law. They are the deal makers behind the major contracts and lawsuits in the music industry.

This feature will also include a round-up of top law schools attended by the notable alumni on the Top Music Lawyer list.

Please join Billboard in congratulating this year's music power lawyers. Advertise and position your law firm to the decision makers in the industry who are always in need for the best legal counsel.

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