

Plus Meet Classical's Man Of Mystery • A Brave New Grammy World

MAY 15, 2021 • BILLBOARD.COM

billboard

License to Thrive

Her record-breaking hit has dominated 2021.
Will an album kick **OLIVIA RODRIGO**'s career into overdrive?

A legend. An icon. A friend.



Al Schmitt
1930 - 2021

We mourn the loss of a member of our family whose genius was exceeded only by his kind heart.

His legacy will live forever through the iconic music he created.



billboard Hot 100®



The Kid LAROI

The Kid LAROI & Miley Cyrus' 'Without You' Vaults To Top 10

THE KID LAROI AND MILEY CYRUS' "WITHOUT YOU" BLASTS from No. 23, its prior best, to No. 8 on the Billboard Hot 100 following the April 30 release of its remix with Cyrus. It hits the top 10 with 12.5 million streams (up 54%) and 8,500 sold (up 254%) in the week ending May 6 and 43.5 million in airplay audience (up 9%) in the week ending May 9, according to MRC Data.

The track marks its first week in the top 10 on Digital Song Sales, surging 50-5, and jumps 13-6 on the Radio Songs chart. On Streaming Songs, it reenters at No. 21, likewise a new high.

The Kid LAROI posts his second Hot 100 top 10 — and first in a lead role — after his featured turn, with Polo G, on Juice WRLD and Marshmello's "Hate the Other Side," which debuted and peaked at No. 10 last July. Cyrus scores her 10th top 10 and highest rank since 2013, when "Wrecking Ball" spent three weeks at No. 1.

"I'm making the best music that I can," the 17-year-old Kid LAROI (born Charlton Howard in Australia) recently told *Billboard*. "I'm making money, and I'm making my family proud. That's all that matters to me." —GARY TRUST

WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	CERTIFICATION PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	Artist IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
6	1	1	#1 SAVE YOUR TEARS ▲	MAX MARTIN, O.T.HOLTER, THE WEEKND (A.TESFAYE, A.BALSHE, J.QUENNEVILLE, MAX MARTIN, O.T.HOLTER, A.GRANDE)	The Weeknd & Ariana Grande XO/REPUBLIC	1	21
2	2	2	LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN	BRUNO MARS, D'MILE (BRUNO MARS, B.ANDERSON, D.EMILE II, C.B.BROWN)	Silk Sonic (Bruno Mars & Anderson.Paak) AFTERMATH/ATLANTIC	1	9
3	3	3	AIR PEACHES ●	HARV SHINDOL, D.BIEBER, A.WOTMAN, G.D.EVANS, B.HARVEY, L.M.MARTINEZ, JR., L.B.BELL, F.KING, M.S.LEON, K.YAZDANI, A.SIMMONS	Justin Bieber Feat. Daniel Caesar & Giveon RAYMOND BRAUN/DEF JAM	1	7
5	5	4	LEVITATING ▲	KOZ, S.D.PRICE, (C.COFFEE, JR., S.KOZMENIUK, S.T.HUDSON, D.LIPA, J.L.KIRK)	Dua Lipa Feat. DaBaby WARNER	4	31
8	6	5	KISS ME MORE	YETI BEATS, R.CHAHAYED (A.Z.DLAMINI, D.SPRECHER, R.CHAHAYED, G.A.POWELL II, C.LANGL, S.GOTTWALD, S.ROWE, T.SHADDICK, S.A.KIPNER)	Doja Cat Feat. SZA KEMOSABE/RCA	5	4
1	4	6	RAPSTAR	E.BANKZ, SYNCO (T.T.BARTLETT, E.BANKZ, A.WU, S.L.LINDSTROM)	Polo G COLUMBIA	1	4
7	8	7	ASTRONAUT IN THE OCEAN	T.HAPI (H.MICHAEL, T.HAPI)	Masked Wolf TEAMWRK/ELEKTRA/EMG	7	12
31	23	8	SAL STM WITHOUT YOU ▲	O.FEDI, B.SLATKIN (C.K.J.HOWARD, B.WALSH, O.FEDI, B.SLATKIN, M.CYRUS)	The Kid LAROI & Miley Cyrus COLUMBIA	8	22
4	7	9	MONTERO (CALL ME BY YOUR NAME)	TAKE A DAY TRIP, O.FEDI, R.LENZO (M.L.HILL, D.M.A.BAPTISTE, D.BIRAL, O.FEDI, R.LENZO)	Lil Nas X COLUMBIA	1	6
HOT SHOT DEBUT		10	YOUR POWER	FINNEAS (B.E.O'CONNELL, F.B.O'CONNELL)	Billie Eilish DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE	10	1

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 ARE NEWLY RELEASED TITLES OR SONGS RECEIVING AIRPLAY (AND/OR SALES ACTIVITY) FOR THE FIRST TIME. SEE CHART'S LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2021 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND MRC DATA INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



SALES, AIRPLAY & STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY MRC DATA

STEVE CANON



HOT 100



The 30-year-old Bastrop, La., native's third Hot 100 entry also reaches a new No. 7 high on Country Airplay.

64

DYLAN SCOTT "Nobody"

How did "Nobody" come together?

My wife and I have been together since we were 15 years old... I remember us being on the back of the tour bus late one night in June 2018.

You released the song in 2019. Did you know then it would become a hit?

I did, and I don't always think that. This song immediately sounded like something that I would put out to country radio.

You're touring with Luke Bryan this summer. What are you most excited for?

Honestly, just being back on the road playing music. Going from our worst year ever as far as touring goes to coming back to the biggest tour of my life.



1 THE WEEKND & ARIANA GRANDE "Save Your Tears"

With the help of a remix with Grande released April 23, the song holds atop the Hot 100 with 68.5 million radio airplay audience impressions...

Chart table showing top 10 songs: BLINDING LIGHTS, UP, CALLING MY PHONE, DRIVERS LICENSE, DEJA VU, BEAT BOX, BEST FRIEND, ON ME, BEAUTIFUL MISTAKES, EVERY CHANCE I GET.

Main chart table showing songs 11-50: MY EX'S BEST FRIEND, HEARTBREAK ANNIVERSARY, FOREVER AFTER ALL, MOOD, BACK IN BLOOD, WHAT YOU KNOW BOUT LOVE, THE GOOD ONES, GO CRAZY, 34+35, SORRY NOT SORRY, TRACK STAR, MADE FOR YOU, THEREFORE I AM, HEAT WAVES, YOU BROKE ME FIRST, HELL OF A VIEW, POSITIONS, DAKITI, WE'RE GOOD, BREAKING UP WAS EASY IN THE 90'S, TIME TODAY, WANTS AND NEEDS, IDIDIT, YOU'RE MINES STILL, WHAT'S NEXT, TELEPATIA, WHAT'S YOUR COUNTRY SONG, SKI, GOOD DAYS, GOOSEBUMPS.

SCOTT: CORY VILLALBA/GETTY IMAGES; WEEKEND: MATT SVALES/INVISION/PHOTOFEST; CHART DATA: BILLBOARD.COM

19 RECORDINGS CONGRATULATES OUR VERY OWN

GABBY BARRETT

Top Nominated

FEMALE ARTIST *and* COUNTRY ARTIST

billboard
MUSIC AWARDS



TOP NEW ARTIST - TOP COUNTRY ARTIST - TOP COUNTRY FEMALE ARTIST - TOP COUNTRY ALBUM

ROCKSTAR - TOP SELLING SONG - TOP RADIO SONG - TOP COUNTRY SONG - TOP COLLABORATION

19

IM AN INDUSTRIAL MEDIA COMPANY

TOP HOT 100

SONG PRESENTED BY



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OSCAR WINNER - BEST ORIGINAL SONG

“FIGHT FOR YOU”

FROM *JUDAS AND THE BLACK MESSIAH* - H.E.R.

GRAMMY WINNER - SONG OF THE YEAR

“I CAN’T BREATHE”

H.E.R.

NO. 1 HIT ON THE HOT 100

“LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN”

SILK SONIC (BRUNO MARS & ANDERSON .PAAK)



CONGRATULATIONS!

DERNST “D’MILE” EMILE II

PRODUCER & SONGWRITER

BILLBOARD GLOBAL 200

billboard

MAY 15 2021

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
		#1	MONTERO (CALL ME BY YOUR NAME)	Lil Nas X	1	6
			PEACHES	Justin Bieber Feat. Daniel Caesar & Giveon	1	7
			SAVE YOUR TEARS	The Weeknd & Ariana Grande	1	18
			LEVITATING	Dua Lipa Feat. DaBaby	4	31
				The song holds at its No. 4 Global 200 high with 64 million streams (up 4%) worldwide in the week ending May 6, its top weekly total to date. It also hits a new No. 4 best on the U.S.-based Billboard Hot 100.		
			KISS ME MORE	Doja Cat Feat. SZA	5	4
			YOUR POWER	Billie Eilish	6	1
			ASTRONAUT IN THE OCEAN	Masked Wolf	3	15
			LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN	Silk Sonic (Bruno Mars & Anderson .Paak)	2	9
			RAPSTAR	Polo G	3	4
			GG WITHOUT YOU	The Kid LAROI & Miley Cyrus	10	24
			DEJA VU	Olivia Rodrigo	8	5
			BLINDING LIGHTS	The Weeknd	2	35
			HEARTBREAK ANNIVERSARY	Giveon	10	12
			BOTELLA TRAS BOTELLA	GeraMX + Christian Nodal	9	2
			FIEL	Los Legendarios, Wisin & Jhay Cortez	15	8
			DRIVERS LICENSE	Olivia Rodrigo	1	17
			THE BUSINESS	Tiesto	12	26
			PAREJA DEL AÑO	Sebastian Yatra X Myke Towers	18	3
			DYNAMITE	BTS	1	35
			FRIDAY	Riton X Nightcrawlers Feat. Mufasa & Hypeman	18	11
			UP	Cardi B	4	13
			DAKITI	Bad Bunny & Jhay Cortez	1	27
			GOOSEBUMPS	Travis Scott & HVME	15	19
			AM	Nio Garcia X Flow La Movie	24	4
			BODY	Russ Millions X Tion Wayne	25	2
			RUNAWAY	AURORA	22	5
			EVERY CHANCE I GET	DJ Khaled Feat. Lil Baby & Lil Durk	27	1
			MOOD	24kGoldn Feat. iann dior	2	35
			HOLD ON	Justin Bieber	4	9
			TELEPATIA	Kali Uchis	10	11
			WELLERMAN	Nathan Evans	16	15
			BEAUTIFUL MISTAKES	Maroon 5 Feat. Megan Thee Stallion	26	9
			I DID IT	DJ Khaled Feat. Post Malone, Megan Thee Stallion, Lil Baby & DaBaby	33	1
			IN THE MORNING	iTZY	34	1
			CALLING MY PHONE	Lil Tjay Feat. 6LACK	2	12
			STREETS	Doja Cat	8	17
			HEAT WAVES	Glass Animals	31	18
			BEST FRIEND	Saweetie Feat. Doja Cat	31	17
			DANCE MONKEY	Tones And I	16	35
			EL MAKINON	Karol G & Mariah Angeliq	39	6
			BANDIDO	Myke Towers & Juhn	11	19
			WATERMELON SUGAR	Harry Styles	9	35
			ARCADE	Duncan Laurence	36	14
			DON'T START NOW	Dua Lipa	30	35

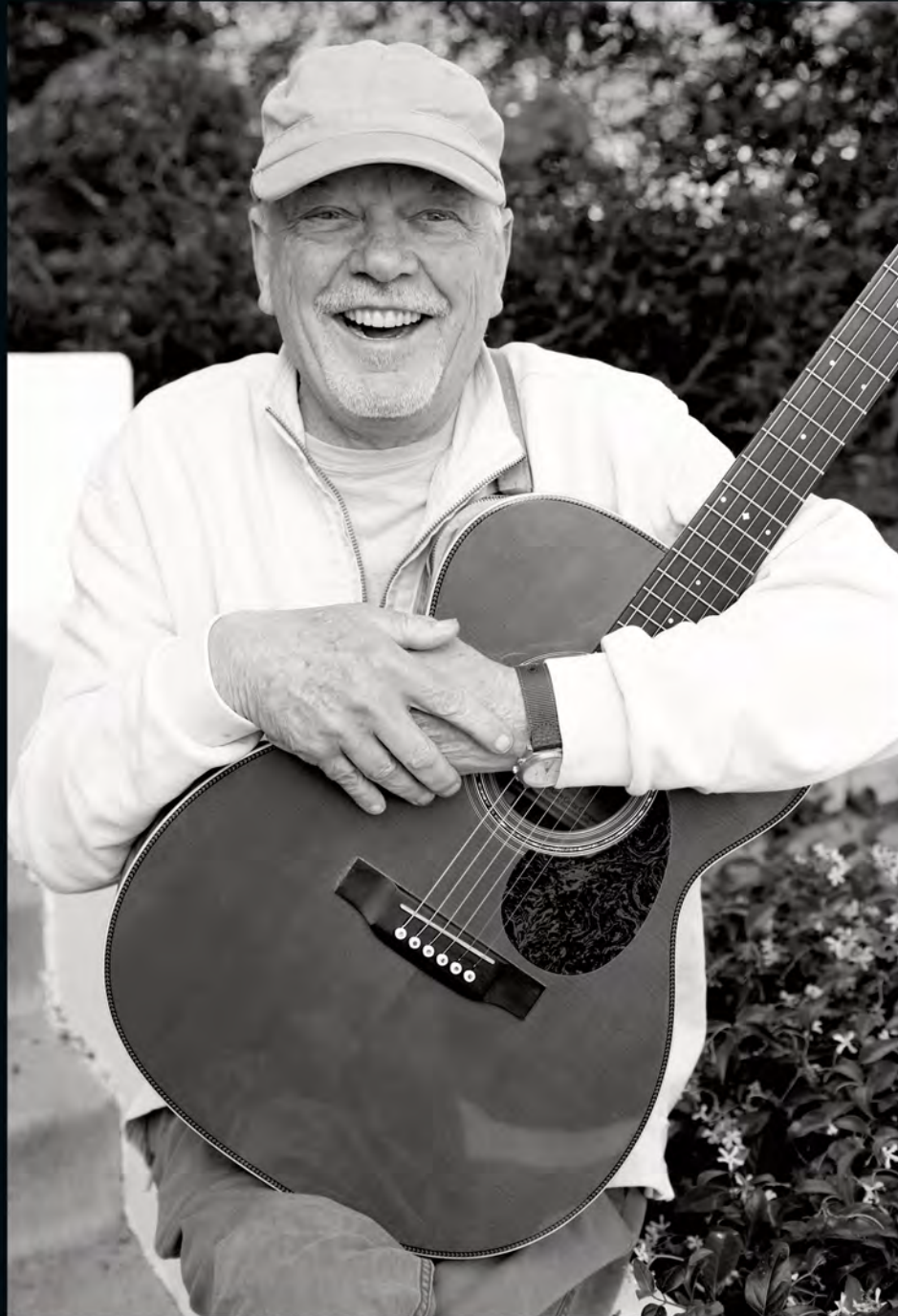
2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
			SOMEONE YOU LOVED	Lewis Capaldi	24	35
			WE'RE GOOD	Dua Lipa	21	12
			YOUR LOVE (9PM)	ATB x Topic x A7S	37	13
			SORRY NOT SORRY	DJ Khaled Feat. Nas, JAY-Z & James Fauntleroy	48	1
			LET IT GO	DJ Khaled Feat. Justin Bieber & 21 Savage	49	1
			WANTS AND NEEDS	Drake Feat. Lil Baby	2	9
			ON ME	Lil Baby	47	22
			SOLID	Young Thug & Gunna Feat. Drake	11	3
			BED	Joel Corry X RAYE X David Guetta	48	9
			BEAT BOX	SpotemGottem Feat. Pooh Shiesty Or DaBaby	38	14
			LA NOCHE DE ANOCHE	Bad Bunny & Rosalia	7	23
			PERFECT	Ed Sheeran	30	35
			COVER ME IN SUNSHINE	P!nk + Willow Sage Hart	50	9
			34+35	Ariana Grande	2	27
			GOOD DAYS	SZA	7	19
			TALKING TO THE MOON	Bruno Mars	59	6
			ROSES	SAINT JHN	14	35
			MY HEAD AND MY HEART	Ava Max	32	14
			SUNFLOWER	Post Malone & Swae Lee	47	35
			911	Sech	48	10
			VOLTA BEBE, VOLTA NENEM	DJ Guuga E DJ Jvis	65	3
			HEAD & HEART	Joel Corry X MNEK	17	35
			BAD GUY	Billie Eilish	54	35
			ROCKSTAR	DaBaby Feat. Roddy Ricch	8	35
			SHALLOW	Lady Gaga & Bradley Cooper	59	35
			BACK IN BLOOD	Pooh Shiesty Feat. Lil Durk	29	16
			POSITIONS	Ariana Grande	1	28
			SHAPE OF YOU	Ed Sheeran	68	35
			HAWAI	Maluma	3	35
			FOLLOW YOU	Imagine Dragons	66	8
			YOU BROKE ME FIRST.	Tate McRae	16	35
			BABY SHARK	Pinkfong	38	34
			DURAG ACTIVITY	Baby Keem & Travis Scott	77	1
			WHOOPTY	CJ	10	28
			SAVAGE LOVE (LAXED - SIREN BEAT)	Jawsh 685 x Jason Derulo	1	35
			THEREFORE I AM	Billie Eilish	2	25
			ANYONE	Justin Bieber	3	18
			SKI	Young Thug & Gunna	23	3
			WAP	Cardi B Feat. Megan Thee Stallion	1	35
			POPSTAR	DJ Khaled Feat. Drake	11	27
			LOVELY	Billie Eilish & Khalid	70	35
			YORU NI KAKERU	YOASOBI	16	35
			BATOM DE CEREJA	Israel & Rodolfo	57	8
			LEMONADE	Internet Money & Gunna Feat. Don Toliver & NAV	4	35
			WHAT'S NEXT	Drake	1	9
			FOREVER AFTER ALL	Luke Combs	4	20
			BELIEVER	Imagine Dragons	70	35
			CIRCLES	Post Malone	49	35
			FOR THE NIGHT	Pop Smoke Feat. Lil Baby & DaBaby	7	35
			BEFORE YOU GO	Lewis Capaldi	32	35
			DREAMS	Fleetwood Mac	10	32
			BODY IN MOTION	DJ Khaled Feat. Bryson Tiller, Lil Baby & Roddy Ricch	96	1

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 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.LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2021 BILLBOARD MEDIA, LLC AND MRC DATA, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



Rusty Young

1946-2021



Credit: Henry Diltz

“He wrapped around our hearts, refusing to unwind.”



In tribute “Love is Blindness” out June 4, 2021



25

RUSS MILLIONS X TION WAYNE
"Body"

The collaboration between the British rappers jumps up 168% to 27.9 million streams and 369% to 2,000 downloads sold worldwide in the week ending May 6, according to MRC Data. The song, whose remix featuring ArrDee, E1, ZT, Bugzy Malone, Buni, Fivio Foreign and Darkoo arrived April 22, also bounds 101-18 on the Billboard Global Excl. U.S. chart. It additionally tops the Official U.K. Singles chart, where it's the first drill No. 1 in the list's history.



34

ITZY
"In the Morning"

The opening track on South Korean group iTZY's new EP, *Guess Who* (released April 30), debuts with 39.6 million streams and 3,900 downloads sold. It also launches at No. 22 on the Billboard Global Excl. U.S. chart. ITZY earns its best ranks on each survey after "Not Shy," the first track on the quintet's 2020 EP of the same name, hit Nos. 124 and 70, respectively. On the U.S.-based World Albums tally, *Guess Who* enters at No. 2, the highest-charting of iTZY's three top 10s to date.

—ERIC FRANKENBERG

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
79	80	97	PARADISE	Meduza & Dermot Kennedy	30	26
81	86	98	WHAT YOU KNOW BOUT LOVE	Pop Smoke	11	35
98	96	99	SWEATER WEATHER	The Neighbourhood	62	32
70	81	100	HOLY	Justin Bieber Feat. Chance The Rapper	3	33
99	94	101	MARTIN & GINA	Polo G	94	26
100	100	102	ANOTHER LOVE	Tom Odell	100	4
92	97	103	LA CURIOSIDAD	DJ Nelson Presenta Jay Wheeler & Myke Towers	40	35
NEW		104	RAMEN & OJ	Joyner Lucas & Lil Baby	104	1
76	89	105	BAILA CONMIGO	Selena Gomez With Rauw Alejandro	22	14
108	103	106	MONSTER	YOASOBI	87	16
127	106	107	MY EX'S BEST FRIEND	Machine Gun Kelly X blackbear	25	35
106	102	108	MEMORIES	Maroon 5	71	35
147	73	109	TIME TODAY	Moneybagg Yo	70	13
94	98	110	OLD TOWN ROAD	Lil Nas X Feat. Billy Ray Cyrus	70	35
117	107	111	BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY	Queen	107	31
103	105	112	WHATSPOPPIN	Jack Harlow Feat. DaBaby, Tory Lanez & Lil Wayne	17	35
96	108	113	THE GOOD ONES	Gabby Barrett	96	10
118	110	114	CLOSER	The Chainsmokers Feat. Halsey	100	31
NEW		115	LOVE RACE	Machine Gun Kelly Feat. Kellin Quinn	115	1
-	114	116	WOCKESHA	Moneybagg Yo	114	2
-	54	117	SHOTTAS (LALA)	Moneybagg Yo	54	2
115	111	118	RELOJ	Rauw Alejandro & Anuel AA	41	27
89	95	119	GIRL LIKE ME	Black Eyed Peas X Shakira	39	22
135	126	120	DESPACITO	Luis Fonsi & Daddy Yankee Feat. Justin Bieber	120	31
119	123	121	SEÑORITA	Shawn Mendes & Camila Cabello	67	35
NEW		122	ODO	Ado	122	1
129	128	123	RAIN ON ME	Lady Gaga & Ariana Grande	22	35
126	115	124	RIDE IT.	Regard	86	34
NEW		125	CONFETTI	Little Mix Feat. Saweetie	125	1
139	127	126	SAY SO	Doja Cat	50	34
120	125	127	TRACK STAR	Mooski	107	9
110	112	128	GO CRAZY	Chris Brown & Young Thug	26	35
NEW		129	MIENTEME	TINI X Maria Becerra	129	1
105	109	130	AT MY WORST	Pink Sweat\$ Feat. Kehlani	78	16
122	124	131	PRISONER	Miley Cyrus Feat. Dua Lipa	12	24
143	136	132	GOOSEBUMPS	Travis Scott	102	32
RE-ENTRY		133	GREECE	DJ Khaled Feat. Drake	38	12
140	132	134	INTENTIONS	Justin Bieber Feat. Quavo	65	34
97	117	135	ELLA NO ES TUYA	Rochy Rd X Myke Towers X Nicki Nicole	39	12
107	116	136	BICHOTA	Karol G	7	28
138	137	137	TAKE ME TO CHURCH	Hozier	129	17
163	169	138	KAIKAI KITAN	Eve	111	19
123	113	139	YOU	Regard x Troye Sivan x Tate McRae	113	3
133	133	140	SAY YOU WON'T LET GO	James Arthur	96	31
RE-ENTRY		141	EVERYTHING I WANTED	Billie Eilish	82	29
RE-ENTRY		142	USSEWA	Ado	41	15
164	152	143	COUNTING STARS	OneRepublic	143	13
177	182	144	DRY FLOWER	Yuuri	48	19
131	131	145	ALL OF ME	John Legend	97	33
101	118	146	HEADSHOT	Lil Tjay, Polo G & Fivio Foreign	42	7
-	189	147	RASPUTIN	Majestic X Boney M.	147	2
150	145	148	BREAKING ME	Topic & A7S	21	35

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
NEW		149	CHOKER	twenty one pilots	149	1
132	130	150	SICKO MODE	Travis Scott	70	33
152	148	151	LUCID DREAMS	Juice WRLD	103	34
71	68	152	LIFE IS GOOD	Future Feat. Drake	39	35
146	139	153	I DON'T CARE	Ed Sheeran & Justin Bieber	105	31
148	144	154	KINGS & QUEENS	Ava Max	31	35
144	140	155	DIOR	Pop Smoke	61	35
NEW		156	BIG PAPER	DJ Khaled Feat. Cardi B	156	1
149	141	157	BREAK MY HEART	Dua Lipa	47	33
145	142	158	ADORE YOU	Harry Styles	68	34
NEW		159	THANKFUL	DJ Khaled Feat. Lil Wayne & Jeremih	159	1
NEW		160	DICK	StarBoi3 + Doja Cat	160	1
153	146	161	THE BOX	Roddy Ricch	66	35
162	150	162	SOMETHING JUST LIKE THIS	The Chainsmokers & Coldplay	150	22
165	159	163	DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'	Journey	150	29
NEW		164	GIRL FROM RIO	Anitta	164	1
134	138	165	GIRLS LIKE US	Zoe Wees	124	10
161	166	166	HOTEL CALIFORNIA	Eagles	149	29
136	147	167	WILLOW	Taylor Swift	2	21
109	122	168	LONELY	Justin Bieber & benny blanco	5	29
169	157	169	HIGHEST IN THE ROOM	Travis Scott	83	34
198	196	170	YELLOW	Coldplay	170	14
168	162	171	MIDNIGHT SKY	Miley Cyrus	15	35
172	165	172	THINKING OUT LOUD	Ed Sheeran	103	30
167	120	173	HELL OF A VIEW	Eric Church	120	3
166	163	174	ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST	Queen	159	9
NEW		175	LITTLE BIT OF LOVE	Tom Grennan	175	1
155	153	176	DEATH BED	Powfu Feat. beabadoobee	43	34
NEW		177	WE GOING CRAZY	DJ Khaled Feat. H.E.R. & Migos	177	1
170	156	178	STARBOY	The Weeknd Feat. Daft Punk	52	13
192	176	179	THUNDERSTRUCK	AC/DC	176	7
158	158	180	LAUGH NOW CRY LATER	Drake Feat. Lil Durk	5	35
187	183	181	WAKE ME UP!	Avicii	181	3
91	134	182	FILM OUT	BTS	5	5
RE-ENTRY		183	4 DA GANG	42 Dugg & Roddy Ricch	110	3
184	167	184	SWEET CHILD O' MINE	Guns N' Roses	167	18
185	179	185	SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT	Nirvana	167	18
-	101	186	HARD FOR THE NEXT	Moneybagg Yo & Future	76	4
130	151	187	NO MORE PARTIES	Coi Leray Feat. Lil Durk	70	11
178	177	188	JUST THE WAY YOU ARE	Bruno Mars	162	8
47	129	189	RENEGADES	ONE OK ROCK	47	3
RE-ENTRY		190	SHY AWAY	twenty one pilots	73	3
188	184	191	TAKE ON ME	a-ha	162	15
141	164	192	HECHA PA' MI	Boza	43	21
-	74	193	COME THROUGH	H.E.R. Feat. Chris Brown	74	2
RE-ENTRY		194	GUNJOU	YOASOBI	44	12
RE-ENTRY		195	OCEAN EYES	Billie Eilish	169	11
142	161	196	YOU'RE MINES STILL	Yung Bleu Feat. Drake	67	20
194	186	197	MR. BRIGHTSIDE	The Killers	178	4
RE-ENTRY		198	WHEN THE PARTY'S OVER	Billie Eilish	179	2
NEW		199	LIL BIT	Nelly & Florida Georgia Line	199	1
186	173	200	BIG GANGSTA	Kevin Gates	132	8

WAYNE: OLIE MILLINGTON/REDFERNS GETTY IMAGES; ITZY: JYP ENTERTAINMENT

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 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.LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2021 BILLBOARD MEDIA, LLC AND MRC DATA, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



STREAMING & SALES DATA COMPILED BY

NICK JONAS
HOSTS

billboard
MUSIC AWARDS

FEATURING
P!NK ICON AWARD HONOREE
DRAKE ARTIST OF THE DECADE

TOGETHER. LIVE!

SUN MAY 23 • 8ET/5PT  NBC

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TEENAGE DREAM

Olivia Rodrigo's "drivers license" instantly made her a pop-music sensation. With her surprising debut album, *Sour*, she's determined to prove her staying power — and join the next generation of bona fide singer-songwriters.

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SECRET AGENCY MAN

After wresting control of IMG Artists in an internal power struggle, Russian-born tycoon **Alexander Shustorovich** has kept the agency alive through the pandemic to become the world's largest manager of classical music talent. *Billboard* investigates the secretive CEO's unlikely path to classical prestige.

ON THE COVER

Olivia Rodrigo photographed by David Needleman on April 16 at Smashbox Studios in Los Angeles.

TO OUR READERS

Billboard will publish its next issue on June 5. For 24/7 music coverage, go to billboard.com.

CORRECTION

Gustavo Menéndez is president of Warner Chappell Latin America. Due to an editing error, his surname was misprinted in International Power Players in the April 24 issue.

CONGRATULATIONS
**NOEL
SCHAJRIS**

ON 20 YEARS OF
INCREDIBLE SONGS

HERE'S TO
THE NEXT 20!



**SONY MUSIC
PUBLISHING**

History is always being written.®

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Lainey Wilson photographed by Diana King on April 21 at Red Light Management in Nashville.

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A New Davis



Sony Music chief creative officer Clive Davis has assumed an important new role: great-grandfather. His first great-grandchild, Chase Davis (above), was born April 29.

DAVIS: COURTESY OF THE DAVIS FAMILY



THE FIGHTS OVER RIGHTS

As the recorded-music business continues to grow, debates about whether consumers will pay for music are giving way to new ones about the spoils of streaming. The Billboard Pro Spotlight "Creators and Copyright," presented by Yankovsky Law, features interviews with choreographer **JaQuel Knight** (Beyoncé, Megan Thee Stallion), U.S. Register of Copyrights **Shira Perlmutter** and both ABBA co-founder and CISAC president **Björn Ulvaeus** and CISAC chief executive **Gadi Oron** — plus panels about copyright termination and proposed German legislation that could make it hard for rights holders there to license TikTok and other clip-focused platforms.

▷ billboard.com/spotlight



“The love for music is what drives me and in Altafonte, I found a partner that shares that same love, let’s keep doing it!”

NOEL

SCHAJRIS

Congratulations Noel, you’re not only a remarkable musician & songwriter, but also an amazing human being. We are honored to be part of your 20 years of music making!

Your Team



altafonte

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2021

PRIDE ISSUE

On June 5th, *Billboard* will publish its 3rd annual Pride issue honoring culturally moving and influential people who have contributed to the community's history and its current landscape. Year-round *Billboard* and *Rolling Stone* celebrate the LGBTQIA+ community through the lens of music, amplifying the culture of the proud LGBTQIA+ community across our editorial channels, including *Billboard Pride*.

Building on this platform, *Billboard* and *Rolling Stone* will be joining together for the entire month of June to celebrate love, acceptance, diversity and what it means to be queer in music. All month long, *Billboard* and *Rolling Stone* will be the go-to destination for music and entertainment Pride content. Leveraging our iconic voices within music and culture, *Billboard* and *Rolling Stone* will curate a mix of engaging video and social content featuring thought-provoking panels, heartfelt performances, and glam tutorials – all fostering a community of consumers and influencers in celebration of LGBTQIA+.

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ISSUE DATE 6/5 | AD CLOSE 5/26 | MATERIALS DUE 5/27

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2021

INDIE

LABEL POWER PLAYERS

On June 5th, *Billboard* will publish its fourth annual Indie Label Power Players List. This special feature in advance of Indie Week (6/14-6/17) and the 10th Anniversary Libera Awards will profile leading executives at top independent record labels, publishing companies and distribution companies. Positioning themselves as the driving force behind the success of independent music, these executives contribute to the independent music sector and to the world of music at large.

Take this opportunity to advertise and congratulate this year's 2020 Indie Label Power Players.

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ISSUE DATE 6/5 | AD CLOSE 5/26 | MATERIALS DUE 5/27

The Market

PG. 22 HI-FI STREAMING WARS * PG. 24 PUBLISHERS QUARTERLY * PG. 26 WILL GERMAN COPYRIGHT GO KAPUT?



Rock The Vote

The academy's decision to ditch Grammy nomination-review committees gives more power to members, who are younger and more diverse than ever

BY PAUL GREIN

AFTER DECADES OF having “secret” review committees determine Grammy Award nominations in an ever-increasing number of categories, it’s majority rule again at the venerable awards show. So the nominations for the 64th annual Grammys may look a bit different when they’re announced later this year: Expect fewer surprise omissions of records that met the usual benchmarks for commercial and artistic success and cultural impact, and fewer head-scratching inclusions of projects that didn’t make a significant impression. And when the next outrage does inevitably occur, the Recording Academy can now skirt blame by pointing to an easy-to-understand nomination process that

puts power back in the hands of the 11,000-person voting membership.

The academy board of trustees’ April 30 vote to disband nomination-review committees — whose membership, but not existence, was kept secret — walks back a decades-old practice that frequently stirred controversy and was at odds with the academy’s professed desire for transparency. The process started in 1989, when the first nominations-review committee was added in the classical field. By 2020, it was implemented in 59 out of 84 award categories. The major turning point came in 1995, when the committee approach was adopted in the Big Four categories — album, record and song of the year, and best new artist — after Tony Bennett and The Three Tenors both

scored album of the year nods the year prior, while alternative rock and hip-hop artists that dominated the era were left out. The idea was that the creatives and executives deemed genre experts who made up the 15- to 30-person committees would be less likely than the general membership to vote for sentimental favorites, big names or bestsellers. In the first five years, this benefited acts such as Pearl Jam, The Smashing Pumpkins, Radiohead, Garbage and TLC, all of whom received album of the year nominations. Over time, however, the committee also seemingly bypassed front-runner pop acts including Justin Timberlake, Ed Sheeran and, most recently, The Weeknd, whose hit album *After Hours* and its smash single, “Blinding Lights,” failed to receive

even one nomination this year. In an ironic twist, committee oversight was implemented to keep the Grammys from seeming out of touch; now it’s being abandoned for the same reason.

Since 2018, academy leadership has aggressively focused on increasing membership diversity, primarily through recruitment: After adding 1,345 new voting members last year — about 12% of its total — the academy reported that people from traditionally underrepresented (nonwhite) communities now account for 27% of overall membership (up from 25% the year before), and people who are 39 or younger account for 28% (up from 25%). Women account for 26% (the same as the year before).

Now the academy is also planning a new review process that’s likely to

● WME PARENT ENDEAVOR LAUNCHED ITS INITIAL PUBLIC OFFERING, SEEKING TO RAISE \$588 MILLION. ● TUNECORE OWNER BELIEVE MUSIC BEGAN ITS IPO PROCESS, WITH PLANS TO RAISE \$608 MILLION.

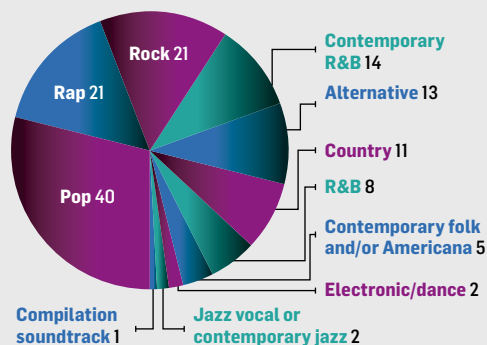
disproportionately weed out older members. As part of the April 30 vote, the academy will begin requiring existing members to reapply for membership. By the end of 2021, over 90% of members will have undergone the requalification process, with a goal, according to a statement, of “ensuring that the voting body is actively engaged in music creation.” Whereas academy membership had previously been for life, members will now have to show that they have accrued one new credit within the past five years and that music remains their primary career.

A younger, more diverse membership will be less likely to snub acts like The Weeknd, and probably won't pick as many surprise nominees like Jacob Collier (whose 2020 album of the year nod had many Googling his name) or Black Pumas, Tank and the Bangas and Yola (who all notably edged out Lewis Capaldi from 2019's best new artist class). But don't expect drastic changes: As the broadest genre, pop will likely continue to dominate, while hip-hop's growing influence is sure to continue and country may move up the ranks thanks to the academy's sizable Nashville membership.

While the review committees became controversial, they did consider genre, gender and racial diversity,

...JUST TO BE NOMINATED

Since nomination-review committees were implemented in the Big Four categories in 1995, these genres and artists received the most nods for album of the year



Note The *Waiting To Exhale* soundtrack wasn't eligible in a genre album category because of rules in place at the time. It would have competed in either the R&B or compilation soundtrack fields. The name of contemporary R&B was changed to urban contemporary and then progressive R&B.

Taylor Swift	4
Beck	3
Beyoncé	3
The Chicks	3
Eminem	3
Lady Gaga	3
Kendrick Lamar	3
Radiohead	3
Kanye West	3

Note Lamar was also nominated as a featured artist, producer and songwriter on *Black Panther: The Album, Music From and Inspired By*, a project with various artists.

albeit imperfectly. That oversight won't exist now, and the academy can only hope that an increasingly diverse membership can deliver results that make sense to both the industry and fans.

Looming over the change is the search for a permanent academy president/CEO after Deborah Dugan was ousted in January 2020 after less than six months in the position. That hire is expected to be made by the end of May or early June. This will likely be the last major action that Harvey Mason Jr. will oversee as interim president/CEO (although he's expected to be elected to a second term as chair). With the 13-month

eligibility period for the 64th awards already about two-thirds finished, the academy needed to move now to enact this change for the 2022 honors.

And then there's The Weeknd, whose name will forever be linked to this decision, even though a task force had been considering a proposal to disband nomination-review committees since last summer, according to an academy representative — months before this year's nominees were announced. “The Grammys remain corrupt,” The Weeknd tweeted Nov. 24. “You owe me, my fans and the industry transparency.” The academy just took a big step in that direction. **B**

MARKET WATCH

22.1B

0.0%

TOTAL ON-DEMAND STREAMS WEEK OVER WEEK

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

16.34M

0.4%

ALBUM CONSUMPTION UNITS WEEK OVER WEEK

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

380.3B

10.4%

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.

Luxury Listening

THE NEXT BATTLE OF THE STREAMING WAR WILL BE HIGH FIDELITY

BY MICAH SINGLETON

THIS YEAR, MORE BIG streaming services are offering a new way to listen to music that makes it sound richer than it has in ages. The question is, How many people will pay a premium for it?

Early results from Amazon Music, which launched its “high-quality, lossless audio” high-definition service in 2019, are promising. The company says that HD subscriptions (\$12.99 a month for Prime members, compared with \$7.99 for its standard Unlimited tier) have grown 100% globally year over year as of March. Amazon is also seeing a bump in engagement from customers upgrading to its HD option: Those subscribers streamed,

on average, 11% more overall and 16% more on albums in the first 30 days after switching, and both the hip-hop and rock genres' global market shares are 20% higher on HD than on Unlimited.

“It has exceeded everybody's expectations,” says Amazon Music vp Steve Boom. While he declined to share numbers, he notes, “You could add up [the subscribers to] all the other HD services together and they wouldn't be close to us.”

That bodes well for Spotify, which will launch its own hi-fi tier later this year, and Apple Music reportedly has a version in the works as well. With high-fidelity subscriptions averaging \$15 to \$20 a month, this could help Spotify increase its closely

watched average revenue per user, which has been declining since 2017.

Music's sound quality tanked with the popularity of MP3s and then the arrival of iTunes in 2001, prompting most listeners to sacrifice CD-quality sound for compressed digital files. Since then, companies like TIDAL and Deezer have established businesses in part as high-fidelity alternatives, but for the most part, streaming audio quality is near that same low point it was when file-sharing was the norm.

According to a 2020 study from music research firm MusicWatch, 69.2 million people in the United States between the ages of 13 and 65 are open to paying more for a service that can provide studio-quality sound. “The question is, How do the hardware partners, the [digital service providers] and even the labels bring the consumer to the water and make them drink?” says MusicWatch managing partner Russ Crupnick. “Eventually, we will all be listening to something that has better sound quality, regardless of what it's

called, just as TV went from 720p to 1080p to 4K and now 8K.”

Marketing hi-fi streaming may be the biggest challenge, but as more platforms start offering the option, Amazon expects its HD tier to become its subscribers' most popular choice. “We see this as the future,” says Amazon Music global head of artist and label relations Andre Stapleton. “We wanted to set this standard, and we want it to be adopted by everybody.” **B**



Home studio headphones

HEADPHONES: BETTY BRAGES



Coming Subtractions

For film composers, screen time is money — and they're getting less of both

BY KRISTIN ROBINSON

THE PANDEMIC ISN'T just hurting performers who make money touring — public performance royalties have fallen as stores, clubs and concert venues close for various lengths of time. Among those affected most seriously: film composers.

In nearly every major country except the United States, composers and songwriters whose work is used in movies are paid a “cinema royalty,” a special public performance fee for theatrical showings that can, in some cases, add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars. The fees — collected by performing rights organizations, which in turn pay creators and publishers — are pegged to box-office revenue in most territories. (They're not collected in the United States because of a 1948 antitrust ruling against ASCAP.) Last year, however, amid pandemic lockdowns, they declined “between 50% and 90%” in Europe, according to Robert Neri, executive vp/head of

European business development at Downtown Music Holdings.

Because PROs pay out cinema royalties on an annual basis after the first quarter of each year, the issue is only now starting to affect film composers, and it could last a year or more after theaters reopen. “Performance royalties are a very slow-moving thing for us,” says John Powell, who composed music for the *Ice Age* and *Bourne* films, as well as *Solo: A Star Wars Story*. “You could have a hit today and not see any money from it for a year.”

Video streaming services, which grew in popularity in 2020, also pay composers and songwriters, generally by allocating a percentage of their subscription revenue. Cinema royalties are usually far more lucrative, though. “Apart from the fact that I love the films and the people working on them,” says Powell, “there was definitely a consideration [about] how well the *Ice Age* films would do abroad versus others I had been offered.”

Consider the music Powell wrote for *Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs*, which took in over \$690 million in theaters outside the United States, according to Box Office Mojo. Different countries handle payments in different ways, but U.K. theaters allocate up to 1% of box-office revenue for music. Production companies give their cue sheets to the U.K. PRO, PRS for Music, to determine what music plays during the film and for how long. If Powell's score was, hypothetically, featured in 50% of *Dawn of the Dinosaurs*, which grossed \$56.8 million in U.K. theaters, PRS would collect 50% of 1% of box-office revenue, or \$284,000. Most film scores are created under “work for hire” agreements — which means the production company owns the publisher's share of the copyright while the composer retains the writer's share — so PRS would then send the writer's share of that money to either Powell or his PRO. So, in this case, minus the PRO administrative fees, Powell (who is an ASCAP member) would potentially make about \$100,000 from this film in the United Kingdom alone.

For the past year, Europeans have only been watching movies at home, of course, and video streaming numbers have skyrocketed. And although streaming services still compensate composers — they pay PROs, which pay creators based on the popularity of the content their music appears in — composer-conductor John Debney,

who is known for his music for *Elf* and the *Spider-Man* films, calls cinema royalties “the bread and butter” of a composer's income in the long term.

Streaming services don't pay as well, and the way music licensing deals are negotiated, as well as the limited amount of information available on the popularity of various programming, means their accounting is less transparent. Some streaming services are also pushing rights buyout deals in which they pay composers more upfront but no royalties later.

“I haven't done the calculations,” says Powell, “but I've talked to lots of people, and we think [the performance royalties from streaming are] just a fraction of royalties we make from cinema.”

Will that money return? Before the pandemic, there were reasons for optimism: Global box-office revenue reached an all-time high in 2019 of \$42.5 billion, of which \$31.1 billion was generated outside the United States, according to Comscore. But lockdowns have been hard on companies that own theaters: Cineworld, which has locations in the United States, the United Kingdom and Ireland, stopped operating in October. And continental Europe lags behind the United States and the United Kingdom in vaccinations, so theaters there, which provide the lion's share of cinema royalties worldwide, are in deeper trouble because they're unlikely to be able to reopen at full capacity until late this year.

When the pandemic does end, however, many people may be eager to go to a movie theater — or, really, anywhere — and plenty of major movies have been delayed until then. “Massive tentpole releases were held back,” says PRS director of strategic partnerships Gavin Larkins, who thinks that will give consumers good reason to get off their couches.

In the long term, theaters aren't going anywhere soon — but there may be fewer of them in Europe, which is the most important source of these royalties. Although theaters are likely to struggle in 2021 and 2022, according to veteran analyst Eric Wold of B. Riley Financial, he believes the business will recover in 2023. “We remain optimistic,” says Wold, “that moviegoers will return to theaters when permitted to catch the best film slate in years.”

Powell remains optimistic too. “Nobody has a crystal ball, but I think we will be fine,” he says. “Things will just transform.” **B**

'LICENSE' PARKS AT NO. 1

Sony Music Publishing pulls into No. 1 on the Hot 100 ranking while UMPG takes its spot at Top Radio Airplay

BY ED CHRISTMAN

SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING CAME IN AT NO. 1 ON THE Hot 100 Songs publishers ranking for the period from January to March, but the company was dethroned by Universal Music Publishing Group on Top Radio Airplay after a 13-consecutive-quarter reign.

Olivia Rodrigo's "drivers license" dominated Hot 100 Songs, and she and co-writer Daniel "Dan" Leonard Nigro tied atop the list's songwriters ranking. (Sony represents both of them.) On Top Radio Airplay, 24kGoldn's "Mood" (featuring iann dior) remained at No. 1. (UMPG and Kobalt control stakes in the song.) Kobalt's Finneas Baird O'Connell (better known as FINNEAS) was the No. 1 writer on Top Radio Airplay, with stakes in two songs: his sister Billie Eilish's "Therefore I Am" (No. 4) and Justin Bieber & Benny Blanco's "Lonely" (No. 12).



FINNEAS

Sony has led Hot 100 Songs in seven quarters out of the chart's nine-quarter history, and had a stake in 59 songs with a 23.56% market share (up from 54 songs but down from 24.13% last quarter). It ranked second on Top Radio Airplay with 55 songs, including Chris Brown and Young Thug's "Go Crazy" (No. 2).

UMPG's Top Radio Airplay lead reflects its increased market share (22.59%, up from 20.56%, but down to 55 songs from 58). On Hot 100 Songs, where the publisher ranked second, it earned a 22.64% market share with 58 songs (up from 20.29% and 50 songs), including The Weeknd's "Blinding Lights" (No. 2).

Market-share calculations on both charts could change — but not enough to alter the rankings — because both Sony and UMPG are disputing the shares that the Harry Fox Agency assigned for Brown and Young Thug's "Go Crazy." Publishers of writers on that song have claimed over 100% of it, and when that happens, HFA assigns a pro rata share to each publisher until the matter is resolved. If Sony and UMPG have the stakes in the songs that they claim, as opposed to what HFA assigned, their shares could increase by 40 to 70 basis points, although it's not clear which publishers would lose share.

On both Hot 100 Songs and Top Radio Airplay, Nos. 3-5 remained the same as the previous quarter: Kobalt, Warner Chappell Music and BMG, respectively. Kobalt rebounded to an 18.26% market share on Top Radio Airplay (from 16.79%) and to 16.99% on Hot 100 Songs (from 15.27%). Warner Chappell's share grew on both charts, reaching 16.05% on Top Radio Airplay (from 15.15%) and 16.97% on Hot 100 Songs (from 14.82%). And BMG stumbled to 7.74% on Top Radio Airplay (from 8.22%) and 6.46% on Hot 100 Songs (from 7.61%).

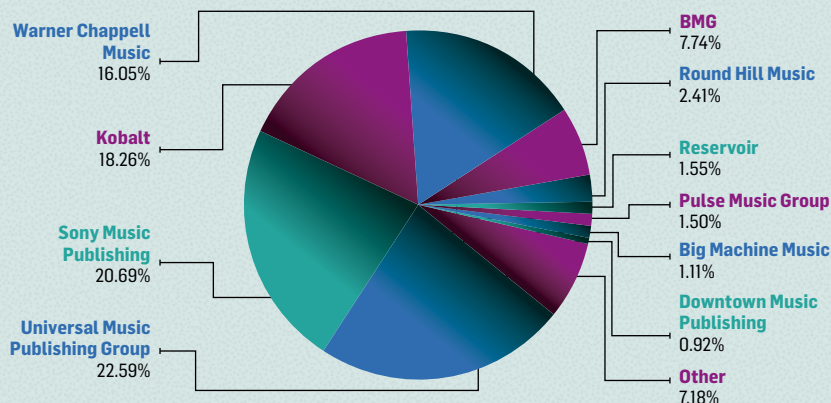
On Top Radio Airplay, Round Hill Music came in at No. 6 (2.41%), Reservoir at No. 7 (1.55%), Pulse Music Group at No. 8 (1.50%), Big Machine Music at No. 9 (1.11%) and Downtown Music Publishing — which sold the song copyrights it owned to Concord on April 26 — at No. 10 (0.92%).

On Hot 100 Songs, Round Hill Music ranked No. 6 (2.54%), Reservoir No. 7 (1.08%), the Hipgnosis-owned Big Deal/Words & Music No. 8 (1.05%) and Big Machine Music No. 9 (1.01%). ST Music, also known as Songtrust, made its publisher ranking debut at No. 10 with a 0.71% share. **B**



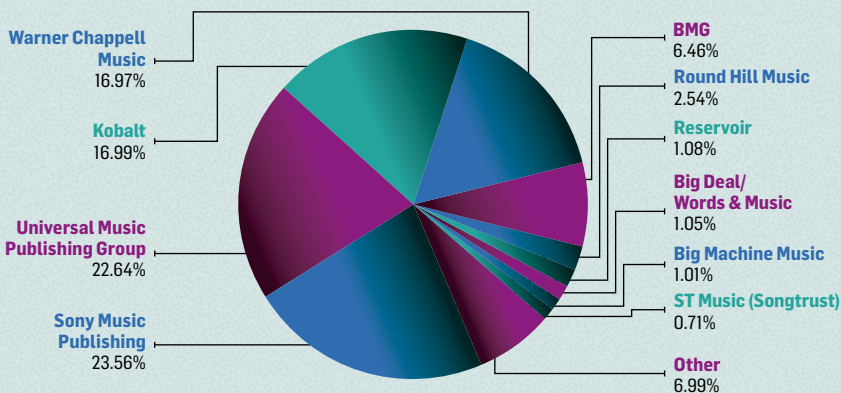
Rodrigo

TOP RADIO AIRPLAY: PUBLISHERS*



RANK	TITLE	ARTIST	LABEL
1	"Mood"	24kGoldn feat. iann dior	RECORDS/Columbia
2	"Go Crazy"	Chris Brown and Young Thug	300/CBE/RCA
3	"Positions"	Ariana Grande	Republic
4	"Therefore I Am"	Billie Eilish	Darkroom/Interscope
5	"34+35"	Ariana Grande	Republic
6	"HOLY"	Justin Bieber feat. Chance the Rapper	Raymond Braun/Def Jam
7	"Blinding Lights"	The Weeknd	XO/Republic
8	"drivers license"	Olivia Rodrigo	Geffen/Interscope
9	"Levitating"	Dua Lipa feat. DaBaby	Warner Records
10	"Bang!"	AJR	AJR/BMG/S-Curve

HOT 100 SONGS: PUBLISHERS*



RANK	TITLE	ARTIST	LABEL
1	"drivers license"	Olivia Rodrigo	Geffen/Interscope
2	"Blinding Lights"	The Weeknd	XO/Republic
3	"Mood"	24kGoldn feat. iann dior	RECORDS/Columbia
4	"34+35"	Ariana Grande	Republic
5	"Go Crazy"	Chris Brown and Young Thug	300/CBE/RCA
6	"Levitating"	Dua Lipa feat. DaBaby	Warner
7	"Save Your Tears"	The Weeknd	XO/Republic
8	"Positions"	Ariana Grande	Republic
9	"What You Know Bout Love"	Pop Smoke	Victor Victor Worldwide/Republic
10	"Up"	Cardi B	Atlantic

● WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC NAMED **MICHAEL LOBIONDO** HEAD OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT. ● HIPGNOSIS SONGS BOUGHT THE CATALOG OF POP SONGWRITER-PRODUCER **ANDREW WATT**.

*For the top 10 publishers Top Radio Airplay chart, percentage calculations were based upon the overall top 100 detecting songs from 2,007 U.S. radio stations electronically monitored by MRC Data, 24 hours a day, seven days a week during the period of Jan. 1 to March 31. For the top 10 publishers Hot 100 Songs chart, percentage calculations were based upon the top 100 songs as ranked by Billboard Hot 100 points calculated from digital sales, streaming and MRC Data-tracked radio airplay detections during the period of Jan. 1 to April 1, reflecting the issue dates of Jan. 16 through April 10. Publisher information for musical works on both charts has been identified by the Harry Fox Agency. A "publisher" is defined as an administrator, copyright owner and/or controlling party.

billboard



2021

GERARDO ORTIZ 10TH ANNIVERSARY

Gerardo Ortiz is one of Latin music's most defining artists of the last decade, scoring a total of ten No. 1s on the Billboard Regional Mexican Airplay chart, over 22.3 Million followers on social media, and an astounding ONE BILLION and counting views on VEVO. The two-time GRAMMY® nominee and one-time Latin GRAMMY®, is one of the architects of the alternative corrido movement and one of the most award-winning singers of Regional Mexican music in the past years.

In recent years, Ortiz has winning a number of awards including twenty seven Billboard Latin Music Awards, twelve Premios Lo Nuestro, earning four Platinum records and five Gold records as certified by the RIAA, and selling out festivals, dance halls, and arenas across the United States and Mexico.

He breaks schemes with each production, after his successful 9th studio album, "Más Caro Que Ayer" was released in February 2020 he placed at #1 on Apple Music's "Mexican Music" chart. His first single titled popular charts followed by the hit single "Otra Borrachera", the band version that reached #1 on México's Monitor Latino "Popular" chart, and #1 on the Billboard's "Regional Mexican Airplay" chart. Starting a new decade and commemorating his 10th career anniversary, Gerardo Ortiz celebrates with the debut of his production "Décimo Aniversario" (10th studio album.)

Join Billboard in congratulating Gerardo Ortiz on his remarkable career over the past 10 years.

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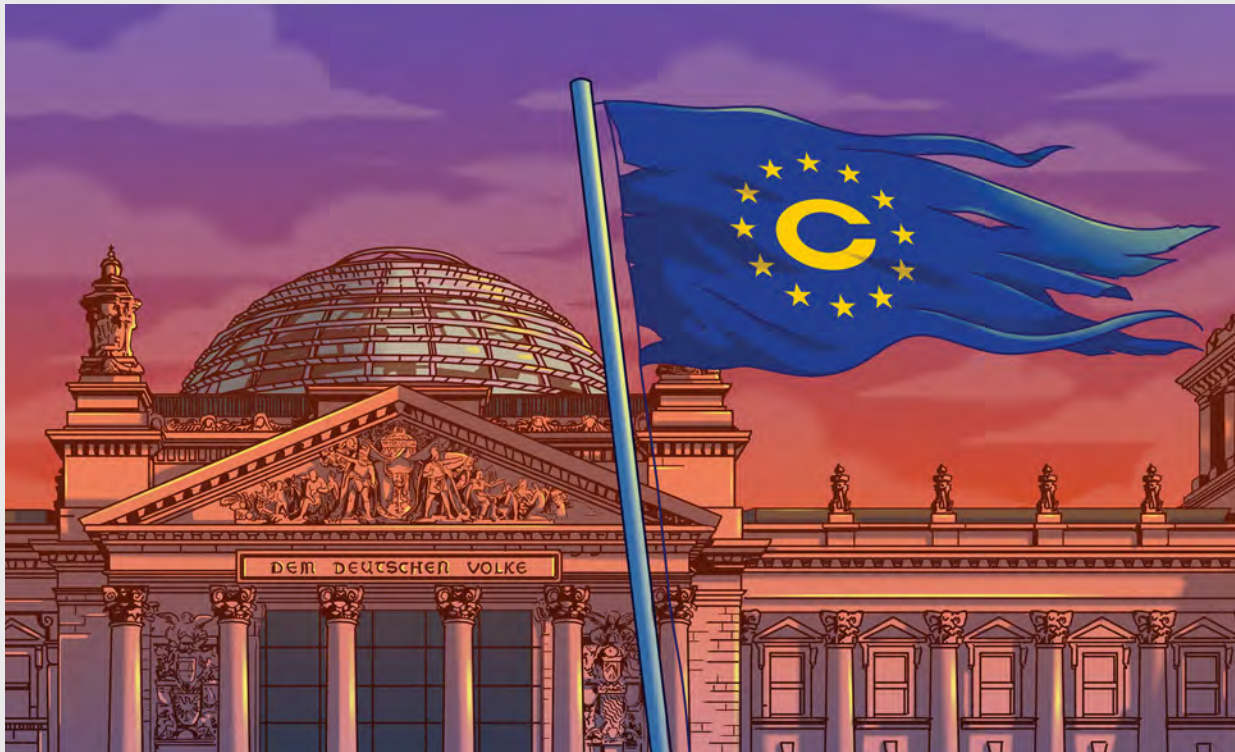
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Will German Copyright Go Kaput?

Proposed legislation could make it difficult for music rights holders to license TikTok and other clip-focused platforms

BY RICHARD SMIRKE

 **LONDON** — The music business may have spent the better part of a decade trying to solve one problem with online licensing, only to create another that could make it harder to monetize song clips at a time when sites like TikTok are exploding in popularity.

For years, labels, publishers and performers lobbied Brussels to address the “value gap” that let online platforms like YouTube avoid indirect liability for copyright infringement and, rights holders say, use those laws as leverage to license music on more favorable terms. In 2019, the European Union passed a new Copyright Directive that would require platforms to make “best efforts” to remove unlicensed content, take concrete steps to ensure it wasn’t uploaded again and reach “fair remuneration” deals with rights holders.

The legislation, which was aggressively lobbied on both sides, drew thousands of young people into the streets of German cities in March 2019 to protest online filters that they described as “censorship machines,” which many sites use in some form already. The directive passed anyway

that spring, giving the 27 EU countries until June 7 to incorporate it into their national laws. (It’s not unusual for countries to run late when implementing changes in policy.)

The political fallout from those protests seems to have influenced German lawmakers to loosen the directive’s liability provisions so much that it could become hard to license sites like TikTok and Triller, which rely mostly on short clips. Germany’s draft bill, which is scheduled for a final presentation to the Bundestag on May 20, calls for platforms to license content, as well as remove infringing material. But it also states that clips of under 15 seconds will be considered “minor use” and thus essentially exempt from the liability provisions in Article 17 of the directive, although platforms will have to pay collecting societies for their use under a fixed-rate tariff.

If a rights holder can show that an upload would create significant economic harm, it can request a take-down with what policymakers call a “red button” mechanism; platforms then have a week to comply. At a time when YouTube is working more close-

ly with labels and clips are becoming a more important source of revenue, the bill essentially substitutes one kind of safe harbor for another one that’s more relevant now.

“The proposed German approach is miles away from the text of the EU directive and is out of touch with the reality of today’s music market, where short clips are big business,” says Helen Smith, executive chair of European independent labels organization IMPALA.

Most EU countries are planning legislation that’s closer to the text of the directive: The Netherlands and Hungary have already passed laws, and France, Italy and Croatia are well on their way to doing so. The legislation for Germany — the world’s fourth-largest music market, worth \$1.4 billion in 2020, according to IFPI — “would go against the spirit of the directive, undermine legal clarity for rights holders and platforms, and kill value,” says Dr. Florian Drücke, CEO of the German music industry association BVMI.

German politicians want to pass a law that offers more leeway to internet users, says Drücke, because they

remember the 2019 protests and want the support of young people in the upcoming national elections scheduled for Sept. 26. “They’re deeply scared in regard to the young voters,” says Drücke, “and the potential effect that talk of upload filters and censorship could have on the election.”

Germany is not alone in pushing back against the directive, however. Austria has been considering legislation that is incompatible with the intent of the directive, although that plan may be revised, and Poland has brought a case to the European Court of Justice asking it to annul parts of Article 17 that involve online filters. A ruling is expected later this year.

The German bill includes a remuneration right — meaning that sites that rely on song clips would have to pay collecting societies, which would then distribute money to rights holders. But labels and publishers see this as a clumsy, less lucrative substitute for direct licensing that would suppress growth. Artists don’t like it either: Over 1,200 acts, including big names like Rammstein and Helene Fischer, have signed an open letter voicing their objections.

Without liability to incentivize platforms to keep infringing content offline, “it’s very hard for the industry to negotiate with these behemoths,” says John Phelan, director general of the international music publishing trade association ICMP. “Rights holders need to be able to say to YouTube or other digital platforms, ‘We’re going to enforce notice and stay down [orders] if you don’t agree on a fair license.’”

The German legislation is now with the Bundestag’s legal committee, so it could still be changed before it is formally presented. But if it passes in anything like its current form, says Drücke, BVMI plans to challenge it — first in the German constitutional court and then, if necessary, in the European Court of Justice. **B**

For more information on how the EU Copyright Directive could change the music business, check out the Billboard Pro Spotlight event “Creators and Copyright,” which includes several panels and keynote interviews with ABBA co-founder and CISAC president Björn Ulvaeus and U.S. Register of Copyrights Shira Perlmutter. [▷ billboard.com/spotlight](https://billboard.com/spotlight)



“NOEL SCHAJRIS

ES UNO DE LOS ARTISTAS MÁS COMPLETOS CON LOS QUE HE TRABAJADO, SIN BANDERA HA SIDO UN PROYECTO DE BALANCE Y EQUILIBRIO Y SU TALENTO MUSICAL HA SIDO PIEZA CLAVE PARA SU SUBSISTENCIA. NUNCA LE HA ASUSTADO LA IMPROVISACIÓN, LO QUE HA DADO FRESCURA Y NOVEDAD CADA NOCHE QUE NOS PRESENTAMOS, COMPARTIMOS EL GUSTO POR LA SORPRESA EMOCIONAL Y LO NO PLANEADO. NUESTRAS PERSONALIDADES DIFIEREN MUCHO Y AL MISMO TIEMPO SE COMPLEMENTAN, CREO QUE NOEL REPRESENTA EN **SIN BANDERA** LO EXTROVERTIDO Y YO LO INTROVERTIDO LO QUE GENERA UN YING/YANG QUE LE DA AL PROYECTO UNA DIMENSIÓN INCREÍBLE. NOEL ES UN ARTISTA CON CAPACIDADES ESPECTACULARES. ¡FELICIDADES POR ESTOS 20 AÑOS HERMANO, VAMOS POR 20 MAS! ”

LEONEL
GARCÍA



Gibbs photographed April 29 at his home in Los Angeles.

FROM THE DESK OF

ROBERT GIBBS

Partner/head of music, ICM Partners

BY GAIL MITCHELL PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAMON CASAREZ

IT'S ONE THING TO TALK about diversity," says Robert Gibbs. "It's another to actually put people in positions of power to help shape the future."

That's the position Gibbs finds himself in now as head of music at ICM Partners. He's also the highest-ranking Black music executive in the agency business, following the restructuring of ICM's leadership team in February. Based in Los Angeles, Gibbs took over Mark Siegel's role in an ICM shuffle that saw Siegel replacing Rob Prinz as ICM's head of worldwide concerts. (Prinz returned to being a full-time agent and remains a partner.) Gibbs says the blueprint mapped out under Prinz's watch was "a redefining moment for ICM's music department, despite the challenges" created by the pandemic. Just prior to the shutdown of the live-music business last March, ICM expanded its international footprint by partnering with London-based agency Primary Talent International (The 1975, Alt-J, Stormzy). Over the last year, nine new music agents from Paradigm, WME and other companies also came on board.

Born and raised in Ann Arbor, Mich., Gibbs was enrolled in the music business program at the Art Institute of Philadelphia when, in his words, he "stumbled upon the agency world" during an internship with a boutique firm. He found his mentor in Dennis Ashley at Creative Artists Agency, where he was hired as Ashley's assistant in 2001 before becoming an agent. Gibbs later joined Ashley as co-head of ICM's West Coast urban music division in 2006. Both advanced to partner status in 2016. (Ashley, still a partner and concerts agent, reps Nelly, D'Angelo and Trey Songz, among others.) Then last August, Gibbs joined ICM's leadership team as head of contemporary music before ascending to his current position.

Throughout his career, Gibbs has focused on R&B and hip-hop and still maintains relationships with artist clients in those genres as well as their managers. They include J. Cole (whom he has repped for 12 years); Cole's manager and Dreamville president Ibrahim Hamad; Dreamville artist Ari Lennox and her manager, Justin Lamotte of Blackwax; PartyNextDoor and manager Tyler Henry of Range Media; and, most recently, SoFaygo, who is co-managed

by Barry Hefner of Since the 80s. Now as ICM's head of music, he adds oversight of pop, rock, electronic and alternative, alongside Siegel.

Gibbs is intent on paying his success forward through his role as a board member of DiversifyICM. "I love this world," he says of the agency business. "Hopefully, we can inspire other young men and women that look like me to feel the same way."

After *Billboard* spoke with Gibbs, ICM was the subject of a May 5 story in the *Los Angeles Times* in which former employees alleged a toxic work environment involving misconduct ranging from sexual harassment to a culture of pervasive bullying. He would not comment, but ICM issued a statement from board members and department heads Lorrie Bartlett, Jennifer Joel and Janet Carol Norton. "Neither we nor our company are perfect; no one is," the statement read, in part. "But in a challenging, competitive and labor-intensive industry that demands much of its participants, we feel privileged to enjoy a safe and encouraging environment, fair and abundant opportunities, and the respect and support of all colleagues of all genders."

COVID-19 decimated the live industry. How was ICM able to remain resilient?

When things shut down, we said, "How do we get better?" So, we went out and acquired agents like Simon Clarkson and Paul Gongaware to build out and oversee our new electronic music department. We also brought in Pete Nash from WME. He represents Kings of Leon and Pet Shop Boys. We began integrating more on the international front



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with the March 2020 acquisition of Primary Talent International. We pivoted to virtual shows and brand and TV/film deals for artists that wanted to dive into those. Now it feels like full steam ahead.

As festivals and shows ramp up, how are the economics of the agency business and booking changing?

When we started to negotiate artist fees for festivals, the conversation was, “Well, the artists are going to need to take a reduction, because we don’t know what the capacity is or what other restrictions are in place.” Then, over time, there was more science and more people were being vaccinated. Outside Lands was one of the first festivals that went up, and they had massive numbers on their launch day. After that you had Life Is Beautiful, Bonnaroo and the Reading and Leeds festivals in Europe — all with sales numbers going up and up. Then promoters were saying, “Let’s not worry so much about reducing artists’ guarantees. The demand is there and people are ready to go.”

People are paying a premium right now. That is great for our business. However, agents, artists and managers can’t get lost in this moment of pent-up demand. As we go into 2022, there are going to be more shows and festivals — along with movie theaters and restaurants reopening. There are going to be so many options for fans. We have to be very smart about ticket charges.

Hip-hop had explosive growth in streaming and touring before the pandemic. Do you see more hip-hop artists selling out arenas as live music returns?

Selling out arenas doesn’t always correlate with streams. Do I see more artists moving into that space? Yes. You’re probably talking about a handful of hip-hop artists from the present generation that can headline arenas: Drake, Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole, Travis Scott, Childish Gambino and Tyler, The Creator. And from the generation before them, there are just four headliners: JAY-Z, Kanye West, Eminem and Lil Wayne. I’m not including R&B artists like The Weeknd, Rihanna or Beyoncé. When you look at the careers of all those artists, it has taken time to build up to that level.

How is R&B holding its own in relation to hip-hop?

It hasn’t gotten the credit it should have over the years. R&B is stronger than ever, and it’s only going to get bigger. With Chris Brown — who continues to deliver No. 1 records — Rihanna, The Weeknd and

Queen Bey herself, the sky’s the limit. And beyond the high-profile artists, people’s eyes are opening up. That’s why you’re seeing the success of H.E.R., SZA, Jhené Aiko, Ari Lennox, Daniel Caesar and others who are phenomenal songwriters.

Conversations have arisen recently about the lack of diversity at ICM and other agencies. Given how important the live business is to the music industry, why haven’t agencies come under the same scrutiny in terms of systemic bias?

It’s no secret that there aren’t a lot of minorities in our business. But current events have opened everyone’s eyes to look around and say, “This isn’t right.” It’s incumbent upon all of the agencies to step up, educate and truly mentor — to not only get people of color in the door but to make sure we’re there to walk them through the process. Saying that we are doing our job because we hired someone of color is not going to fly. We must reach into our communities on a local and national level to find candidates. ICM has partnered with HBCU LA to bring in one-third of our interns this summer from historically Black colleges and universities around the country. Education is where it starts. Going to school, I didn’t know much about what agencies did or their history. I stumbled upon the agency business when someone took me under their wing and mentored me. That gave me the opportunity to grow and succeed.

Endeavor, the parent company of rival agency WME, recently went public. What does that mean for ICM and other agencies moving forward?

Agencies are getting into other businesses. We’re diversifying our portfolio. While a primary goal remains building a global footprint musicwise, we’ve also entered the sports world, having just acquired the U.K.-based sports agency Stellar Group. I hope Endeavor is successful, because their success is good for the entire sector.

As the live industry reboots, what does the new landscape look like?

It will be a hybrid of different things until everything is back. Livestreams and virtual meet-and-greets will continue. And as that market sector and virtual technology continue to develop, there will be big events that people can tap into and feel like they’re inside the venue. Over the past year, there have been some pretty good virtual shows, but the majority have been underwhelming. Live trumps everything. 📺



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1. A collection of tour credentials and tickets spanning two decades: “This reminds me of my journey from fan to intern to assistant to executive.” 2. In his home office, Gibbs keeps this award on his desk: “A reminder of my first time making *Billboard*’s Power 100 list.” 3. A tour plaque celebrating one of Gibbs’ longtime clients: “I was very proud to be a part of J. Cole’s worldwide tour in support of *Your Eyez Only*. The tour grossed over \$37 million in ticket sales.” 4. This Can AM Custom Ryker is a recent diversion: “My friend/client Bas and engineer Derek ‘MixedByAli’ Ali decided to buy three-wheeled motorcycles for a unique way to enjoy outdoors during the pandemic.”



NOEL SCHAJRIS:

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Gwendolyn
Dennett
Emma
Dylan

The Sound

PG. 32 ISAIAH RASHAD'S RETURN * PG. 34 THE MAKING OF *IN THE HEIGHTS*



SAYING IT RIGHT

How Justine Skye unlearned habits from six years in the major-label system and scored Timbaland as the producer for her latest album

BY TATIANA CIRISANO
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
MICHELLE GENEVIEVE GONZALES

Skye photographed
April 23 in Los Angeles.

JUSTINE SKYE WAS AT A lunch meeting in the fall of 2019 with E&E Creative agency founders Emily Pires and Elena Hristu, who were hoping to sign the newly independent artist. But Skye had barely said a word.

“Elena and I were looking at each other like, ‘Is this going well?’” recalls Pires. “Finally, I was like, ‘Listen, do you like us? I want to make sure you want to work with us.’”

At that, Skye removed her sunglasses and said: “That’s the first time someone has asked me that.”

A Brooklyn native, Skye found fame in her teens thanks to her popular Tumblr, which helped her early-2010s YouTube cover of Drake’s “Headlines” take off. She signed her first record deal with Atlantic in 2013 at age 17 and scored commercial success with her single “Collide” (featuring Tyga). She parted ways with Atlantic three years later and signed with Roc Nation, which released her 2018 debut album, *Ultraviolet* — only to leave that label, too, the following year. “You get comfortable with a big system making all these calls for you,” she says. “You’re not exactly happy, but it’s going, so you go with the flow.”

But now, Skye, who is 25 and splits time between New York and Los Angeles, has a new outlook on what success means — and how to achieve it on her own terms. She hired Pires and Hristu as her co-manager/creative directors, rounding out an all-women core team alongside Skye’s mother and business manager, entertainment lawyer Nova Perry. Last June, Skye released her first independent album, *Bare With Me*, which she calls an “appetizer” to the main course coming June 25, *Space & Time*. The record, which



“You get comfortable with a big system making all these calls for you.”

—SKYE

Skye has started referring to as “the bad bitch manual” and oozes confidence on tracks like “It’s About Time” and the pop-flavored jam “In My Bag,” will arrive on her own label, Nynetineth, and was produced by her idol: Timbaland.

The famed producer direct-messaged Skye last spring while she was deep in her quarantine project, *Space & Time Sessions* (an Instagram series of song covers), asking to produce an upcoming clip. She

suggested covering Nelly Furtado’s “Say It Right,” but he wanted an original. The next morning, she sent him her verse, which later became the starting point for “Intruded,” the tender lead single from *Space & Time* that arrived in February.

Skye and Timbaland weren’t planning to make an album. But as they continued pumping out clips on a weekly basis, with each video gathering hundreds of thousands of views, they soon realized

they had the foundation for one. Ten clips later, Skye and her team rented an Airbnb near Timbaland’s home studio in Miami — where the two met in person for the first time — and knocked out the project in just over two weeks.

Skye says she had to unlearn habits she had picked up from the major-label system, like people-pleasing and relying on co-writers. “It’s easy for her to play a beat and find the pockets that she falls in,” says Pires. “Where she never spent enough time was, ‘You landed the melody. Now what are you talking about?’” Before getting in the studio, her team held quasi-therapy sessions, complete with candles, wine and a lot of talking. Few were invited into the creative process, with the exception of Timbaland’s longtime collaborator, Justin Timberlake, one of two guests on the album (along with Nigerian artist Rema).

“The biggest hurdle, which is what labels are really good for, is the money,” says Skye. “Most of this stuff is financed literally from my pocket.” Rather than dilute E&E’s creative vision, the team took a quality over quantity approach and was helped along by directors and other collaborators who willingly lowered their rates. “In a perfect world, we’d do a video for every song, but it’s a matter of being selective,” says Hristu, citing a technology-filled visual for “Intruded” with cameos from Bella Hadid and Lil Yachty that has raked in over 1 million YouTube views. (Meanwhile, the single has collected 4 million global on-demand streams, according to MRC Data.)

As Skye and her team begin to route a fall tour and conceptualize her next video, she isn’t afraid to look back.

“I see so much growth,” says Skye. “I’m really forming into the artist I always wanted to — and knew that I could be.” **B**

Q & A

BACK ON TRACK

AMID BIGGER STARS LIKE

Kendrick Lamar and SZA, Isaiah Rashad has become Top Dawg Entertainment’s secret weapon for his fearless storytelling and unapologetic candor. Now, after a five-year hiatus during which he battled substance abuse issues, Rashad will return in 2021 with his third album, *The House Is Burning*, featuring 6LACK and Smino, led by the single “Lay Wit Ya.” With a renewed mindset and a strong commitment to sobriety, the 29-year-old artist is more

prepared than ever to hit the ground running.

Label founder/CEO Anthony “Top Dawg” Tiffith talked about dropping you during your hiatus. Why didn’t he?

If anything, I might have made that n—a a little soft. I went through more in these five years than I did last time. After [my 2016 album] *Sun’s Tirade*, [my manager] Matt [Miller] checked me into rehab, and we got all that shit out the way. Top was damn near about to cry through the shit, bro. I had a dad that I ain’t never had in my life. I got love that I been looking for from n—as that if you was coming from any other place, you’d think they want you for money, but I

know if all else fails and I don’t want to rap anymore, I’ll fuck around and just work at the office. Them n—as as love me, and they love us.

How did it feel to record your upcoming album entirely sober?

It challenged my confidence because I had to rely on myself. At first, it was hard, but once I had some sessions with [producer] Kenny Beats, he taught me some of the methods that he used with [Atlanta rapper] Key! and what he seen [Young Thug] do and how they got comfortable to say whatever’s on their mind. [My collaborators] gave me the space and time to practice that shit.



You’ve said critical acclaim didn’t mean much to you. Do you still feel that way?

Nah. If n—as as going to stick around and help me with all the streaming, pay my bills, help me keep money in my pocket and have me looking good,

then I have to continue giving them parts of me. I have to make sure for every new fan I get that I’m still hitting my bills from back in my SoundCloud days. I’m still making myself cry sometimes. That’s what I’m most proud of about this project — the only compromise was to get bigger.

Knowing what you’ve overcome, what does turning 30 mean?

I was scared until I got here. I was like, “Damn, I hope it ain’t over.” At 30, I just hoped I don’t have to do anything except fulfill my promises. That’s all I’m at right now. I don’t have any responsibility to nobody but myself.

—CARL LAMARRE

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Ramos (left) and Barrera in Warner Bros. Pictures' *In the Heights*.

INSIDE LOOK

Reaching New 'Heights'

Lin-Manuel Miranda's decades-old musical finally hits the silver screen — and makes history along the way

BY LEILA COBO

IN THE HEIGHTS WAS BORN IN THE WINTER of 1999 in Lin-Manuel Miranda's dorm room at Wesleyan University, inspired by what simply wasn't there. "It was, in many ways, an attempt to write what I saw was missing, both in terms of representation and in terms of stories about [Latinos] in popular culture," he says. Now, Miranda's story has made its way to movie theaters as an adaptation of the Broadway show that ran from 2008-11 — one of the few Latin musicals to become a feature film.

It's a journey that has taken two decades and many rides on New York's A train, where Miranda rewrote much of his original score, while also working with arranger/producers Bill Sherman and Alex Lacamoire, both of whom worked on *Hamilton*. Miranda says that "about five notes from the DNA of the Wesleyan version" carried over to the movie, directed by Jon M. Chu (*Crazy Rich Asians*) and filmed in Manhattan's Washington Heights neighborhood, a tiny, mostly Dominican microcosm of the Latin experience. (The movie was originally slated for a summer 2020 release but was delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic.)



Miranda

In the Heights tells the story of young Usnavi — a role Miranda relinquished to Anthony Ramos, a former understudy who stepped into the part during a Washington, D.C., production in 2018 after the original actor hurt his foot. Usnavi, a young bodega owner who lives

with his grandmother Claudia (Olga Merediz), spends his days pining for Vanessa (Melissa Barrera), who wants to be a fashion designer. The cast includes such up-and-comers as Dominican-American singer Leslie Grace, who took on the role of Nina, while Gregory Diaz IV portrays Usnavi's nephew, a "Dreamer" with an alcoholic father played by Marc Anthony. (Miranda says he wasn't shy about shooting down suggestions to cast stars who "tested international," like Jennifer Lopez or Shakira.)

Bringing the story and its young cast of developing artists to the forefront is even more powerful when considering Latinos represent only 4.5% of speaking roles in U.S. films, even though they represent 18% of the U.S. population and 23% of the moviegoing public, according to a 2019 study by the University of Southern California's Annenberg Inclusion Initiative.

"It's the paradox of, 'We don't have Latino stars that test international,' so you don't take chances on young talent and you don't make stars that test international," says Miranda. "Many of the biggest Latin stars in the world are music stars," he adds. "Bad Bunny can reach No. 1 on [the Billboard 200] all in Spanish ... and now everyone is, 'When's Bad Bunny doing movies?' But again, that's Hollywood passing the buck to the music industry to create stars for them. Busting up those cycles is really important."

It's why he's proving that investing in young Latin talent can be just as fruitful, evidenced by the opening musical number that brings to life the beat of the clave, the quintessential Latin rhythm, in spectacular fashion.

"The opening clave betrays [those] who really listen to Latin music and [those] who only know show tunes," says Miranda with a laugh. "The people who only know show tunes go, 'What a cool homage to "America" from *West Side Story*.' No, [composer] Leonard Bernstein is doing an homage to Latin music. The three and the two is the fundamental building block for many of our rhythms."

In spite of how many boundaries *In the Heights* has already broken, Miranda admits that one story "can't hold it all."

"I also want Latinos who see *In the Heights* and say, 'That wasn't my experience. I didn't grow up in a Latino neighborhood' — and then begin to write that experience. Because the more stories we have, the stronger we are." **b**



ONE TO WATCH

Zoe Wees

FROM Hamburg, Germany

AGE 19

LABEL Capitol Records UK

FOUNDATION Zoe Wees grew up without any local idols: "People always think you won't get out of Germany; they don't believe in you at all," she says. But at age 12, when her aunt introduced her to the music of Jessie J, particularly the song "Who You Are," Wees says, "I directly fell in love. The song changed the whole way I think when I look at myself in the mirror. It gave me confidence and strength." With the encouragement of her mother and music teacher at the time, Nils Bodenstedt, she decided to double down on pursuing music as a career. "[Bodenstedt] showed me that it's possible to turn this hobby into a full-time job, and that's always what I wanted."

DISCOVERY In 2017, Wees competed on the fifth season of Germany's *The Voice Kids* but was eliminated. Two years later, she had her first songwriting session with a pair of co-writer/producers she now sees as older brothers. That session resulted in "Control," the artist's breakout hit that has earned 75.1 million U.S. streams, according to MRC Data. She wrote two more songs that same week, including her latest single, "Ghost." By the fall of 2020, her music teacher quit his job to join the rising singer's management team at Valeria Music, and soon after, Wees had her first major-label meeting with Capitol Records UK. By the start of 2021, the label announced it had signed her to a worldwide recording contract with a license from Valeria.

FUTURE Wees will release her debut EP, *Golden Wings*, which includes hits "Control" and "Girls Like Us," on May 21. "I was on 'Control' for like eight months [where I didn't] release any songs after, and was just so annoyed," she recalls. "I actually wanted to stop because I was so depressed. I write songs because it's my therapy, and when I can't release the stuff I'm writing about, I can't let it go." She says she has written prolifically through the pandemic ("You're more creative when you're sad"), and is looking forward to her first album, for which she and her collaborators have already written a few tracks. "If the album is finished," she says, "I'm unstoppable."

—LYNDSY HAVENS

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04 MONTREAL, CANADA
07 TORONTO, CANADA
08 CHICAGO, IL
11 BERKLEY, CA
12 LOS ANGELES, CA
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Teenage Dream

OLIVIA RODRIGO's "drivers license" instantly made her a pop-music sensation. With her surprising debut album, *Sour*, she's determined to prove her staying power — and join the next generation of bona fide singer-songwriters

By Andrew Unterberger

Photographed By David Needleman



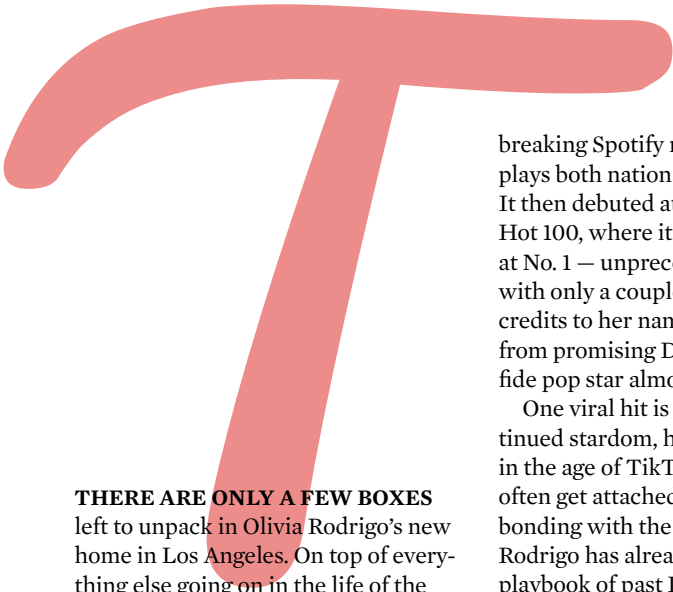


Rodrigo photographed
on April 16 at Smashbox
Studios in Los Angeles.

Styling by Dani + Emma
Thom Browne jacket, Sami Miro
Vintage jeans, Versace shoes, Asos
rings, Fox and Bond earrings.



Rodarte shirt and pants,
Gladys Tamez Millinery
hat, Marc Jacobs earrings.



THERE ARE ONLY A FEW BOXES left to unpack in Olivia Rodrigo's new home in Los Angeles. On top of everything else going on in the life of the world's busiest 18-year-old, the star singer-songwriter-actress just moved out of her parents' house. "Yeah, it's very weird," she says over Zoom from her living room in April. "I turned 18, and then I came back and finished my album and moved out and everything. So it was all a very condensed growing-up experience."

Rodrigo is happily nesting in her new digs, which she nervously but excitedly refers to as "my first, like, own house, sort of, situation." But she won't have time to get too comfortable. "We're traveling a bunch, this month and the next month," she says. "So I'm trying not to get too settled anywhere."

That's understandable, because the month Rodrigo has ahead of her is exhausting just to think about. On May 14, *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*, the popular Disney+ show on which she stars as talented but insecure theater kid Nini Salazar-Roberts, launches its second season. A week later, she'll release *Sour*, her full-length debut album and one of the year's most anticipated releases, through the revamped Geffen Records. Plus, at some point, she'll probably have to find time to graduate high school. "I have like a month left of senior year, and I've sort of been neglecting that," she says. "Because I've been off making my album, I sort of forgot I was a high school student."

All of this is happening quickly for Rodrigo, in large part because her official debut single — the midtempo breakup ballad "drivers license" — was the kind of runaway hit that demands to be capitalized on. The brilliantly detailed tearjerker struck an immediate chord with listeners everywhere and went viral on TikTok as Internet speculation about its real-life inspirations added fuel to the fire. By the end of its first weekend, it was already the biggest new smash of 2021,

breaking Spotify records for daily plays both nationally and globally. It then debuted atop the Billboard Hot 100, where it spent eight weeks at No. 1 — unprecedented for an artist with only a couple of TV soundtrack credits to her name. Rodrigo went from promising Disney starlet to bona fide pop star almost overnight.

One viral hit is no guarantee of continued stardom, however, especially in the age of TikTok, when listeners often get attached to a song without bonding with the artist behind it. Rodrigo has already departed from the playbook of past Disney stars — unlike Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato and Selena Gomez, she skipped a stint at Disney-owned Hollywood Records and went straight to a major label. But the path to artistic independence is not clear-cut, especially when the sheer phenomenon of her success (spawning fan theories, think pieces and parodies in short order) could very easily drown out the art itself.

Despite the challenges ahead of Rodrigo, no one around her seems particularly worried about her coming down with senioritis. Her work ethic is already the stuff of legend, both on the set of *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series* and at her label. "I honestly don't think she sleeps," says Nicole Bilzerian, executive vp at Geffen. "She sets the bar for us. We definitely have to rise to the occasion and work as hard, if not harder, to make all of this happen."

That focus and ambition also inform her songwriting — which, despite her list of accomplishments, remains both her primary artistic calling card and her top career priority. "She's never satisfied," says Dan Nigro, her *Sour* producer and co-writer. "With Olivia and I's dynamic, there's a constant, like, 'What if we tried this? What if we changed all the pianos out and made them guitars? What if we rewrote the lyrics?' No song feels like it's done."

Rodrigo's team is betting that she has the presence, the talent and the fortitude to use "drivers license" as a springboard to greater things — and come into her own as a singer-songwriter in the classic sense. "It's the music, and that's what people are connecting to, but I think that people believe in her," says John Janick, chairman/CEO of Interscope Geffen A&M (IGA). "She's the real deal. And that's why she's going to be a global superstar who's going to be around for a long

time. Because she gets it — but she also has the drive and wants to win."

OVER THE COURSE OF OUR conversation, Rodrigo raves about her infatuation with all sorts of musical subjects: vinyl records, the Grammy Awards, Jack White, Taylor Swift's recently released *Fearless (Taylor's Version)*. But while she may have many obsessions, she's perhaps most obsessed with, well, being obsessed. "I am just *obsessed* with all types of music," she says, even though she can't help but give an eye roll at her own overexuberance. "You know how somebody's like, 'Oh, what kind of music do you listen to?' And they're like, 'I like all music!' And you're like, 'OK, that gives me nothing.' But I truly am!"

Rodrigo's inextinguishable excitement for music is one of the most striking things about her. Along with certain wardrobe choices (like the *Twilight: Eclipse* shirt she wears during our Zoom call) and a habit of responding to questions that catch her off guard with a gleeful but slightly anxious giggle, it's a reminder that the wise-beyond-her-years songwriter is still a teenager.

"She's a young adult now, but I remember being struck and moved by how ordinary the conversations were [between her and her castmates] in between takes," says Tim Federle, creator and showrunner for *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*. "All the insecurities and all of the self-doubts and all of the dreams that every kid out there has, Olivia has and had them too. And she happened to strike gold where her dreams met a perfect intersection of her abilities."

Rodrigo inherited her earliest musical obsessions from her parents: Jennifer, who is German and Irish, and Christopher, from whom Rodrigo gets her Filipino heritage. (Rodrigo calls the recent wave of violence against Asian Americans in the United States "heartbreaking," adding that "we all need to keep speaking out against these injustices in the world.") Growing up in Temecula, Calif., she would go record shopping with her mom, a third-grade teacher. Although Rodrigo describes her mother as "the sweetest woman ever," Jennifer gravitated toward metal, punk and '90s alternative rock. Those influences, mixed with Rodrigo's fondness for Lorde's emotionally layered pop anthems and

the vivid storytelling of country music, began to influence her own songs, which she started writing as a tween.

Her first chance to write professionally came on *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*, where she was cast by Federle, who wasn't aware of her songwriting abilities. Federle realized he needed a song for Rodrigo's character at the end of a mid-first-season episode. He found out about the diaristic original songs Rodrigo was posting on Instagram and asked her to try writing it herself.

"I sent Olivia this email, being like, 'I think Nini needs a song, and I think you should be the person who tries to write it,'" says Federle. "And I remember three days later, Olivia was sort of sheepishly like, 'I've got a little something, do you mind if I show you?'"

That "little something" was "All I Want," a piano ballad about being repeatedly let down by significant others, which blew Federle away, and landed in episode four of the first season. Though the song was one of many featured in that season — and far from the showiest or most prominently placed — it was the one that became a hit on TikTok, crossing over to the Hot 100 in early 2020. "I didn't even have TikTok at the time. I was like, 'What's this thing? Why are people making stuff that's [just a few seconds] long?'" Rodrigo says with a laugh. "But that song is how Interscope found me."

"You just knew right away — her personality, her vision, her talent as a songwriter and as a singer," says Janick of his first meeting with Rodrigo. "She had all of the pieces that we look for in an artist. We knew right away that we wanted to sign her."

Still, it took six months, as Rodrigo was being courted by multiple other majors at the time. "It has always been important for Olivia as a songwriter and artist to be able to separate herself from the characters she has played on TV," says manager Kristen Smith. "When the time came to look at labels, we were lucky enough that we had created the freedom for her to be able to meet with different potential partners who would be the best fit for Olivia."

An industry source tells *Billboard* that Rodrigo's camp proposed to at least one company that it pay roughly \$10 million to sign her, but Janick ended up signing her to Geffen for closer to \$2 million, the source says; neither Geffen nor Rodrigo's reps commented on the terms of the agreement.

In the end, Rodrigo says Geffen had the right pitch for her. “All the other major labels were like, ‘Oh, you could be a star,’” she recalls. “And I remember going into Interscope for the first time and [Janick] telling me, ‘We love your songwriting. We think you’re a great songwriter, and that’s the most important thing to us.’ And I remember being like, ‘Oh, OK, this is where I’m supposed to be.’”

Janick saw Rodrigo as a potential new face of the resurgent Geffen — once home to iconic ’80s and ’90s artists like Aerosmith, Guns N’ Roses and Nirvana — which officially relaunched in 2017 as part of the IGA family. The label’s rap-heavy roster now boasts streaming stars Lil Durk and Rod Wave, but few pop singer-songwriters, and no one with a hit the size of “drivers license.” “As we rebuild it, it’s hyperfocused on her and turning her into a global act,” says Janick. “[She’s one of] those artists who move culture and are going to be career artists.”

So far, Rodrigo says she’s very happy with the fit. “I really just trust and value their input,” she says of the team at Geffen. “I’ve done a good job of surrounding myself with people who are really honest with me and can help me make my music instead of just being like, ‘Yeah, you’re perfect!’ Because I hate that. Like, that’s my least favorite thing in the whole world.”

IN EARLY APRIL, RODRIGO POSTED a snapshot of a parking ticket she had recently received from the city of Los Angeles to her Instagram story: “damn this driving shit isnt all fun and games,” read the quippy caption. “I parked on street cleaning day,” she explains a few weeks later, still incredulous at her own naiveté. “I remember being like, ‘Huh, nobody’s parked on this street. Oh, well!’ So stupid.”

Writing one of the most popular songs of all time on the subject of driving tends to mean you’ll forever be associated with motor vehicles. For her part, Rodrigo’s fine with her pop cultural place behind the wheel — some young fans even write to her asking for advice about their own driver’s tests. “Driving in the car is like my favorite thing — any time I’m stressed out, I just get in the car and drive around aimlessly and listen to music or something,” she says. (She says a few car companies have reached out about using the song in commer-

cial, though no such licensing deals have been struck to date.)

Though Geffen announced her signing only three days before the song’s release, Rodrigo first played them “drivers license” last August. The label was immediately taken with it. “When ‘drivers license’ came in, we were like, ‘Whoa, we got one here!’” says Sam Riback, co-head of A&R at IGA. “Obviously we didn’t know the level of bigness, but we knew it’d do well.” Rodrigo, however, says she was convinced of the song’s power when she played it for her father in — where else — the car: “I could just see the tears under his sunglasses — and I like, never see my dad cry, ever. I was like, ‘Oh, OK, maybe I did something here.’”

Seeing people react to her music in person is still a novelty. Apart from a lone TV performance on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, Rodrigo experienced her debut smash mostly through stat updates and celebrity co-signs viewed on her phone — she was ensconced in Utah, under strict COVID-19 protocols, while filming the second season of *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*. “While everything was happening, I was literally doing the same thing [as always],” she says. “Going to set, doing my statistics homework and then going to sleep.”

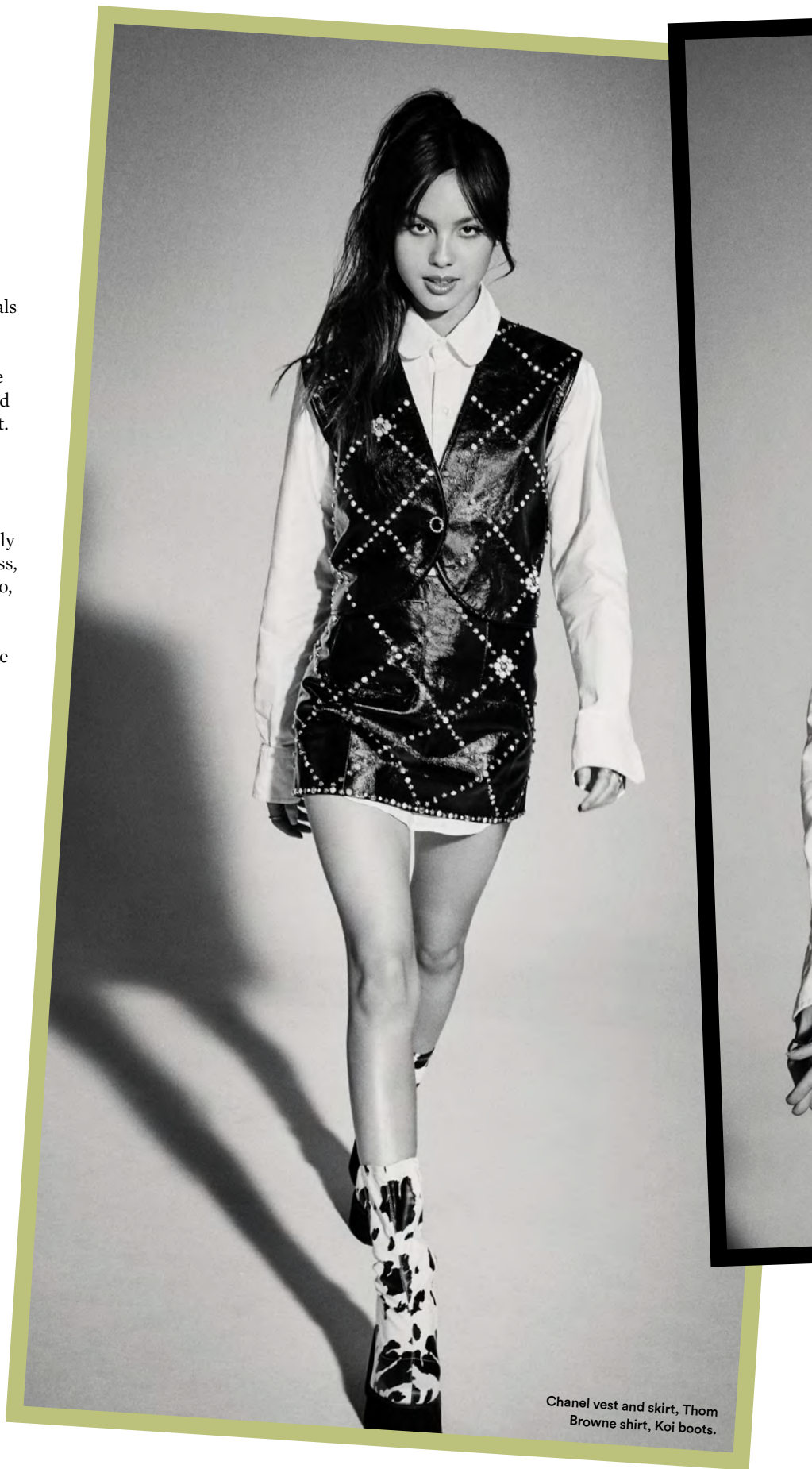
“Drivers license” wasn’t a song that needed much of a promotional boost from Rodrigo. It received countless covers and reinterpretations, both through scores of amateur musicians on TikTok and more established artists like pop-punk social media star Jxdn. *Saturday Night Live* even dedicated an entire skit to the song — on Rodrigo’s 18th birthday, no less — with a bar full of male cast members discussing the song’s lyrics and belting along to its towering bridge. “It was really crazy to see [how much] it started to impact culture,” says Matt Morris, part of Geffen’s A&R team. “People where I’m from were talking about it — people reaching out to me that I hadn’t talked to in 10 years.”

The song was also inescapable in the headlines. Fan theories quickly circulated that it was written about

Rodrigo’s rumored relationship and breakup with co-star Joshua Bassett and his supposed new flame, fellow singer-actress Sabrina Carpenter. Rodrigo never commented publicly on the matter — “to me, that’s really the least important part of the song,” she told *Billboard* in January. But subsequent single releases from Bassett (“Lie Lie Lie”) and Carpenter (“Skin”) appeared to come at least partly in response to Rodrigo’s song, turning the “drivers license” love

triangle into one of the biggest entertainment stories of early 2021.

That buzz was hardly quashed by Rodrigo’s follow-up single in April, the wistful but seething “deja vu,” which appeared to be a thematic continuation of her breakout hit — down to Rodrigo’s disappointed sighs in the second verse about her ex’s new girl: “another actress.” Returning to that subject matter was not necessarily a safe choice: It further churned the gossip mill and risks typecasting her as, in



Chanel vest and skirt, Thom Browne shirt, Koi boots.



her words, “the heartbreak girl.”

There’s much more where that came from on *Sour*, which has no shortage of additional heartbreak on its 11 tracks. “At first I was like, ‘I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to be pigeonholed,’” says Rodrigo. She even tried to balance out *Sour* with some sweeter-skewing love songs. In the end, though, it wasn’t worth fighting inspiration. “I’m a songwriter who writes from a place of authenticity and truth,” she says. “And truthfully, love and happiness and everything weren’t feelings that I was feeling at the time. And what’s the point of putting out a record if it isn’t something that you feel is important to say to people?”

If listeners got déjà vu of their own from Rodrigo’s second single, they certainly didn’t mind: It debuted at No. 8 on the Hot 100, mak-

ing her the first artist ever to debut both of her first two official singles in the top 10. “When you have a monster song, sometimes it takes up all the oxygen for your second release,” says Riback. “In this case, ‘déjà vu’ has held up fantastic.”

Lee L’Heureux, executive vp and GM at Geffen, feels confident that the rumors and tabloid fodder around Rodrigo’s early songs won’t be a big part of their legacy. “It’s the songs that are really resonating with people,” he says. “Any other sort of story that somebody wants to make of it, that’s not what people will be talking about down the line.”

Besides, any notions that Rodrigo has already shown all she has to offer won’t last more than 12 seconds into *Sour*. That’s when album opener “brutal” swiftly transitions from a

“I’m a songwriter who writes from a place of authenticity and truth. And truthfully, love and happiness weren’t feelings I was feeling at the time.”

fluttery string intro to a stomping, distorted-guitar crunch — an homage to her mother’s ’90s alternative favorites and a bold opening statement that, of course, Rodrigo says she’s “obsessed” with, too. The song’s pivot comes by request of Rodrigo herself, who is first heard on the album giving instructions in the studio: “I want it to be, like, *messy*.”

Those instructions were for Dan Nigro, who got his start in the 2000s indie rock band As Tall as Lions before becoming a go-to collaborator for left-field pop artists like Carly Rae Jepsen and Conan Gray. Though he co-wrote and produced all but one song on *Sour*, he describes their early sessions as bumpy but promising. “We both knew that there was something really special there,” says Nigro. “I feel like it took about two to three months — a couple of days a week of us getting together. We did a real deep dive into exploring the sonic palette of every song we were working on before we kind of decided on, ‘Oh, this is how it should be.’”

Originally, Geffen planned for Rodrigo to release an EP. Instead, unsatisfied with the scope of the shorter project, she focused on making a full album that was “truly reflective of what I can do.” (It’s also good business sense: Plenty of viral-breakout artists have taken their time working up to an album only to lose the momentum.) Rodrigo, in fact, can do quite a lot: *Sour* includes ballads, folk torch songs and sung-rapped freakouts. One song starts off like a menacing Billie Eilish creeper, then explodes into an early-Paramore-style rave-up. For an artist whose early praise often focused on comparisons to other acts, *Sour* is exceptional at subverting listener expectations.

As with other close writer-producer partnerships in recent years — Eil-

ish and FINNEAS, Lorde and Jack Antonoff — the album works because the songs are so gut-punching. A lyrical detail like Rodrigo decrying her ex and his new flame “watching reruns of *Glee*, being annoying, singing in harmony” (in “déjà vu”) hits not only because the image is so specific, but also because she and Nigro cleverly double her vocals on the last three words so she’s “in harmony” with herself.

The album has plenty of drama for fans to nibble on, but what Rodrigo really excels at with these songs is building her own pop universe — something Taylor Swift, her songwriting idol, would be proud of. Swift has, in fact, said as much publicly on Instagram, where she offered “drivers license” a valuable early co-sign, and in a handwritten letter to Rodrigo.

“I don’t want to divulge too much because it’s really sweet and personal,” says Rodrigo of the note. “But she talks a lot about how, I think, you make your own luck in the world. And when you do kind things to others, good things come your way...” She trails off, worried that she’s not doing the writing justice. “I don’t know, she put it so eloquently, and when I say it now... it’s not as cool.”

IN FEBRUARY, RODRIGO SPENT her 18th birthday in L.A., hanging out on the beach and getting her Tarot cards read in Malibu with her best friend. “The Tarot card lady predicted some good things happening in my life,” says Rodrigo, laughing at the timing. “She was talking about, like, success and celebration. She might’ve saw the *Billboard* charts that day or something.”

With just two singles, Rodrigo has pulled off the kind of four-quadrant approval very few artists can achieve



Sami Miro Vintage jacket,
skirt and top, Thom
Browne shirt, Gucci
socks, Koi shoes.

Hollywood's Moment?

RODRIGO BYPASSED SIGNING WITH THE LABEL THAT LAUNCHED MILEY, DEMI AND OTHER STARS. IT, TOO, HAS GROWN UP — EVOLVING AND EXPANDING WITHIN DISNEY'S SEEMINGLY BOUNDLESS MUSIC UNIVERSE

BY MELINDA NEWMAN

in 2021 — dominating not just streaming but also the airwaves, topping *Billboard's* Radio Songs chart and crossing over to a half dozen formats. In order to capture as big an audience as possible, Geffen is taking a long-term approach to promoting *Sour*. “We’re really looking at: ‘What does it look like for Olivia for the next 12 to 18 months?’” says Janick.

That means more music videos and singles, her own *Saturday Night Live* appearance on May 15 and, when it’s safe, Rodrigo’s first headlining tour — her first time playing her own songs anywhere, for anyone besides her mom. (She got her first vaccine dose the day before her *Billboard* cover shoot: “So if I look tired as hell, that’s probably why.”) But her team wants her to take some time off first. “Booking a vacation is really important,” says Smith. “We’re making sure we’re taking into account all aspects of her as a human being, not just as an artist.”

Rodrigo is already dreaming about her future beyond *Sour*. She’s still making music in the studio, but what she’s most looking forward to is collaborating with other artists, particularly as a writer. “The second the album cycle for this is over and I’m not traveling, that’s the one thing that I want to do so bad,” she says. “I always said that I wanted to do that: Maybe when I was, like, 30 or something and I had kids — I’d stop making music and just write for other people. Because I just love songwriting. I love songwriting more than putting out songs.”

There are few artists operating at her level who are fantasizing about slinking back into the writing credits. But Rodrigo seems a little ambivalent about the glare of imminent stardom.

“To a certain degree, having really commercially successful music means that lots of people are really affected by your music and really like it, and that’s awesome in and of itself,” she says. “If my music becomes really commercially successful, that’s incredible, and that means I did a good job. But some of my favorite artists are not commercially successful, and that doesn’t mean that they’re any less amazing.”

“The answer is I don’t know,” she concludes, sounding at peace with not having all the answers. “But I’m really just truly enjoying myself, and I love that I get to do this for a living. And it’s super cool that people want to listen.” Maybe they’ll get a little obsessed themselves. **B**

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN DISNEY MUSIC GROUP’S Hollywood Records was primarily associated with the Disney Channel’s homegrown stars: Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, the Jonas Brothers and, more recently, Sabrina Carpenter.

When *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series* star Olivia Rodrigo made her debut on Geffen Records in early 2021 — coincidentally, around the same time that Carpenter departed for Island Records — it seemed like Hollywood, much like the stars it raised, might be going through growing pains. But just like those artists, the 22-year-old label has simply grown up, and in a newly expanded Disney musical universe, its reach extends further than ever before.

In 2019, Disney acquired 20th Century Fox, ushering in a major shift for Hollywood. The imprint trimmed its artist roster by roughly 30% to around 20 artists, making way for a wealth of new musical releases associated with incoming franchises. “We expect our volume [of releases] is going to increase about four or five times over the next three to five years,” says Disney Music Group president Ken Bunt. “Our traditional theatrical and direct-to-streaming releases are ramping up dramatically.”

Disney does not disclose financials for its music business, but Bunt says 2020 was DMG’s most profitable year yet. *Billboard* estimates that its U.S. revenue last year (excluding synchronization) was between \$125 million to \$150 million, with significant additional revenue coming from outside the United States. (DMG has put out the music from *Frozen*, for instance, in 45 languages.)

Walt Disney Records and Hollywood — both of which are distributed in the United States by Universal Music Group, which licenses DMG releases around the rest of the world — have operated independently for a long time. But, since Bunt took over DMG in 2012, they’ve combined staffs and share most resources. “We have a dedicated artist marketing team [at Hollywood], but our digital sales team works everything,” says Bunt, noting that at digital service providers, for instance, soundtracks and artists alike are promoted by one team.

Each imprint has a unique focus, though. Walt Disney Records releases music related to Disney-branded properties including Walt Disney Animation, Disney+ and Pixar (whose *Soul* just won the Academy Award for best original score), as well as Lucasfilm. Hollywood’s roster includes individual artists, as well as the music from content produced by 20th Century Fox, National Geographic, Hulu, Marvel, ESPN, ABC and more. (After three years of awarding the winner of ABC’s *American Idol* a contract, Hollywood recently ended that affiliation; it is still home to season 20 winner Laine Hardy.)

Talented, young multihyphenates from Disney’s franchises like Sofia Carson, Olivia Holt and Latin sensation TINI still populate Hollywood’s roster, and Bunt describes Rodrigo’s Geffen signing as more disappointing than debilitating. “We wanted to sign her, to be honest,” he says, and typically, DMG has first option on signing artists from Disney Channel shows; Rodrigo, along with co-star Joshua Bassett, who signed with Warner Records, were rare exceptions to that rule. Still, DMG reaps some benefits of their sudden mainstream success. The new music they perform as part of *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*’ second season, which premieres May 14, will arrive weekly on Walt Disney Records.

Hollywood already has lucrative long-term success stories. For two decades, DMG has owned Queen’s masters in North America. A perennial seller, the legendary band and Hollywood got a major boost in 2018 from the *Bohemian Rhapsody* soundtrack, which has earned 2.55 million equivalent album units in the United States, according to MRC Data.

Its relationship with a younger rock act has also proved fruitful. Breaking Benjamin, which has landed eight albums on the *Billboard* 200 and 16 top 10s on the mainstream rock chart, signed to Hollywood 20 years ago and has repeatedly renewed its deal. “My experience [has been] nothing but great,” says frontman Benjamin Burnley. “They’ve never tried to change the music, never tried to change what we wanted to do.” As the label’s flagship rock act, he says, Hollywood has “really put in the work [at radio] and [understands] how we want to express our message. That’s really important to us.”

Since 2015, Hollywood has also partnered with S-Curve Records to work Andy Grammer, We the Kings and AJR to pop radio formats. (It has worked in tandem with S-Curve’s promo staff since 2018.) “We’re a really good fit,” says Steve Greenberg, S-Curve Records founder and AJR’s manager, noting that the relationship has yielded nine platinum singles. “They treated the records as their own.”

Walt Disney Records’ Disney-branded streaming playlists, which rely heavily on music from films like *Moana*, *Frozen* and *The Lion King*, have become a financial windfall for DMG, too: Worldwide, music from Disney TV and film averages 3 million streams per day, according to Bunt. But more significantly, Disney owns its master recordings and publishing. “We’re in a unique position,” says Bunt. “Other companies might not own all the publishing, or maybe it’s split across seven writers. We own everything 100%.” (As work-for-hires, composers’ works belong to Disney, which usually gives back the writers their royalty share.)

Now, Bunt and his team are looking to the next phase of expanding Disney’s musical universe. Hollywood’s roster will grow slightly to around 25 artists, including recent signee Area21, the duo of Dutch DJ-producer Martin Garrix and American producer Maejor. Bunt also emphasizes that while the Disney Channel is “still an important piece of the Disney company,” it’s far from the only one capable of producing music. “Look at what Disney+ is now,” he says. “There will be more talent that we will want to sign.”

In April, Hollywood artist Alt Bloom released a song in conjunction with NatGeo’s Disney+ series *Planet Possible*. Bunt sees opportunities for alt-rock band Joywave, whose vocalist, Daniel Armbruster, is a big hockey fan — fortuitous, considering Disney’s new rights deal with the NHL. Around Juneteenth, Hollywood will partner with ESPN and its sports/culture site The Undefeated to release *Liberated* — the third volume in its *Music for the Movement* series — as part of a Black music initiative. And toward the end of the year, the label will have another potential gold mine on its hands: the soundtrack to Steven Spielberg’s highly anticipated remake of *West Side Story*.

For good reason, Bunt looks across the Disney spectrum and says he sees nothing but possibility: “Our playground is just so big.”

Additional reporting by Ed Christman.

Secret Agency



fashiontv

Hedge Fund Executive Guilty of Securities Fraud

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After wresting control of IMG Artists in an internal power struggle, Russian-born tycoon **Alexander Shustorovich** has kept the agency alive through the pandemic to become the world's largest manager of classical music talent. *Billboard* investigates the secretive CEO's unlikely path — from building a publishing fortune to igniting a U.S.-Russia summit crisis — to classical prestige

BY FREDRIC DANNEN // ILLUSTRATION BY SELMAN HOŞGÖR



Some of the players who figure in the byzantine story of IMG Artists and president/CEO Alexander Shustorovich, from left: Ksenia Sobchak, Nina Kotova, Barrett Wissman, Boris Yeltsin, Shustorovich, Mark McCormack and Donald Trump.

O

n the morning of April 15, 2009, Elizabeth Sobol was flipping through *The New York Times* in her Miami Beach apartment when a headline and photo stopped her cold.

"You son of a bitch," she said.

Sobol, managing director of IMG Artists, one of the world's premier classical music talent agencies, was looking at a picture of the agency's 47-year-old chairman, Barrett Wissman, in a story titled, "Hedge Fund Executive Guilty of Securities Fraud." Wissman, a Texas financier and classical pianist, had purchased IMG Artists for \$7.5 million in July 2003, two months after the death of the previous owner, legendary sports impresario Mark McCormack. Originally a division of parent company IMG, which also operated businesses in sports, media and modeling, IMG Artists was an international firm with an A-list roster that included conductor André Previn, pianist Evgeny Kissin, violinist Itzhak Perlman, soprano Renée Fleming and flutist James Galway. But McCormack's unexpected death had thrown the company's future into jeopardy. Wissman, a fashionably stubbled bon vivant with a taste for linen suits and fine wines, had been welcomed by the staff of IMG as a savior. He seemed ideal — a wealthy financier with musical talent.

But, as Sobol learned from the *Times*, Wissman had lately enhanced his wealth by illegitimate means. He and two New York state political operatives had conspired to direct billions of dollars from the state's pension fund to private investment firms in return for kickbacks. Wissman had personally made millions from the pay-to-play scheme and was awaiting sentencing. Angry and incredulous, Sobol picked up the phone and called Wissman at his home in Dallas. She demanded that he assemble the New York staff for a morning meeting, get on the speakerphone and explain what his guilty plea meant for the company's future. "And then," she added, "you are going to ask the staff for forgiveness."

Wissman obeyed, but he faced bigger problems than winning back the good graces of his staff. If he did not appease the New York state attorney general's office, he was looking at up to four years in prison. To avoid that, he testified against his co-conspirators and paid \$12 million in penalties and forfeitures.

IMG Artists felt the financial repercussions. "We were already undercapitalized," says a former senior manager. "And once Barrett's assets were frozen, there came a point where we were holding back payments to artists."

Finally, in 2011, Wissman sold part ownership of the agency to a minority shareholder. At first, the staff knew little more than his name: Alexander Shustorovich. "We could find nothing, and I mean nothing, about him on the web," says Alec Treuhaft, then an IMG senior vp, apart from Shustorovich being a Russian-born U.S. citizen who had made his fortune in what sounded like an arcane field, publishing scientific

journals. Wissman insisted he would remain in full control, and all but characterized Shustorovich as a silent partner. “Barrett told us, ‘You’ll never see him,’” recalls Treuhaft.

It didn’t work out that way. Before long, the staff was summoned to meet Shustorovich at IMG’s New York office, and he confounded expectations. “We pictured some greying guy in a rumpled suit,” says Treuhaft. Instead, they encountered a tall, slender, preppy-looking man in his mid-40s. “He was much more vital than we had imagined, more so than Barrett.” Shustorovich, who turns 55 in June, projected intelligence — he had graduate degrees from Harvard’s law and business schools — but little charm and less tact. “He showed up without having any idea who was who and talked about everything we were doing wrong,” says Treuhaft.

In the decade since, Shustorovich has conspicuously elbowed Wissman aside. “Alex is very much running the show,” says Ian Smallbone, former managing director of IMG in Europe. Wissman, 58, is designated chairman and Shustorovich president/CEO, but those are not legal corporate titles. Shustorovich says he now has majority control of the privately held company. Wissman claims his stake and Shustorovich’s are equal. The two men do not appear to agree on much, and their mutual distaste is palpable. Wissman will not speak of it on the record; Shustorovich has no such qualms. “People have asked, why would I get in a bed with a guy like this?” says Shustorovich of his fellow shareholder. “I thought he’d done his penance. He presents himself like he’s a nice guy, and a lot of people fall for that crap. Now that I’ve got to know him better, I’ve learned to be more careful.”

Shustorovich says he recently had to sue Wissman in New York State Supreme Court for failing to repay a large personal loan. Wissman is currently suing Shustorovich in the same court for allegedly overcharging the agency for rental space in a New York townhouse Shustorovich owns.

A brawl at the top was once inconceivable at IMG Artists, but the company bears little resemblance to the collegial agency founded in 1979 by two former school teachers. For a quarter-century, says co-founder Edna Landau, “We ran our office like a family.” The camaraderie was such, she adds, that “nobody ever left.” The era of Wissman and Shustorovich changed all that. During their reign, senior managers have departed en masse — including Sobol, who had risen from intern to U.S. managing director — taking with them decades of institutional memory. They also took artists. When Charlotte Lee, a 17-year IMG veteran, left in 2015 to start her own boutique agency, Itzhak Perlman went with her. Many of the managers who quit grumbled about Wissman, but said the tipping point was Shustorovich. “We used to call him ‘The Oligarch,’” says Lee.

Shustorovich is known for speaking frankly,

but not for speaking to the press, and his *Billboard* interview is his first ever with a music publication. “Alex is a difficult person to get information on, and shrewd about keeping himself out of the limelight,” says Smallbone. Though now a major player in the business of classical music, he remains an elusive presence in that world. He has been equally coy about his other ventures, which, in addition to publishing scientific journals, include Russian media, advertising and real estate interests. “I’m the opposite of Elon Musk. I try not to be the frontman,” he says. Learning about facets of his complicated life — Yeltsin-era wheeler-dealer, uranium broker, million-dollar Trump donor — required interviews with knowledgeable sources, supplemented by court filings



Mosbacher (left) and Shustorovich in New York in 2005.

and other documents, public and private. Many details about Shustorovich appear here for the first time in English, or anywhere.

Say what you want about Shustorovich, he has continued subsidizing IMG Artists with his own money at a time when COVID-19 has devastated classical-artist management. “I told our people from the beginning of the pandemic, ‘I will keep our business afloat,’” he says. Not every agency has been so lucky. IMG is surely now the world’s largest performing arts agency, following the unforeseen collapse of its biggest stateside rival, Columbia Artists Management. Last August, the music world was staggered by the news that Columbia had been felled by the pandemic and was shutting down for good. For decades, Columbia Artists was the king of agencies, the looming giant across the street from Carnegie Hall. Its client list filled page after page of the trade magazine *Musical America* — without even including its roster of conductors. There was no need to publish it: Columbia boss Ronald Wilford seemed to control almost every major orchestra leader in the world.

When Wilford died in 2015, he left a successor, Tim Fox, who held no voting stock. Columbia was owned by Wilford’s widow and other private shareholders, who peremptorily shut the company down, effective Aug. 31, 2020, after making their intentions known via email just two days earlier. “Stunning and sad and scary,” says David Lai, co-president of management agency Park Avenue Artists. “If a behemoth like Columbia Artists can fold so easily, what does that mean for the rest of us?”

Another dramatic announcement came less than two months later, this time involving IMG’s other biggest competitor in the United States, Opus 3 Artists. Headquartered in New York, Opus 3 is the lineal descendent of the agency founded in the 1920s by impresario Sol Hurok. In October, Opus 3 disclosed that it had been 100% acquired by the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, the first time a nonprofit institution has bought a for-profit artist agency. David Foster, the president/CEO of Opus 3, says that during the pandemic, “Our income shrunk to about a seventh or eighth of what it was,” and 40% of the staff was let go. Had it not been for the sale to SFCM, Foster admits, “We might have gone the way of Columbia.”

Today, artist management companies are among the last remaining for-profit organizations in classical music. Record labels are another example, but their margins are slimmer than they were in the heyday of the CD. “Record deal advances are zero percent of the business now,” says Michael Benchetrit, president of Minerva Artists, an agency he founded in October after the collapse of his previous employer, Columbia Artists. The fee structure for classical management in North America is a standard 10% for opera and media and 20% for concerts and recitals. The financial returns tend to be unexceptional. Says Lai: “You don’t go into this business unless you love music.”

Another distinctive feature of classical music management is the long lead time for performances. Opera companies and symphony orchestras plan their seasons years in advance — sometimes four and five years out. Or at least they used to. COVID-19 has created a logistics nightmare. “At the moment, I’m working as hard as ever,” says veteran manager Kathryn Enticott — not on booking events, but on rescheduling them.

For now, star violinist Joshua Bell is not complaining about the postponements. After 30 years of nonstop touring, he is finally getting the sabbatical he had craved, and is practicing Bach, shooting hoops, raising chickens and playing with his sons. But when his touring schedule resumes, he tells *Billboard*, “It’s going to be like fitting Tetris pieces together.”

There is still only sporadic classical concert activity in the United States. The Metropolitan Opera, the nation’s largest performing arts or-

PREVIOUS SPREAD: SOPHIAK; ARTWORK: BECKMAN/TASS/GETTY IMAGES; BASES: WIGMORE/KETTER/PHOTO; KOTVA: SCOTT FRUDD/PATRICK MCILL/ANGLER/GETTY IMAGES; WISSMAN: MAURY FINE/IFP/GETTY IMAGES; YELTSIN: BETTER TURKEY/COBBLES/GETTY IMAGES; KESTRABO: NERHAIZ/ISTOCKPHOTO; ROLLS ROYCE: CARLOS SANCHEZ/ANTHONY FOTODIOLA/PRESSE/ANTHONY FOTODIOLA/GETTY IMAGES; SHUSTOROVICH: CLAY SPAULDING/WWD; URANUM: GRESHAM/MAN/W/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES; PLUS FLAG: DEREK BRUNBY/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES; PLUS MCCORP/ACK; EVENING STANDARD/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; TRUMP: CHIP SONDBEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES; HORN: CHURABAT MUSIC/ISTOCKPHOTO.



Clockwise from top: Wissman and wife Kotova in 2017; Evgeny and Alexander Shustorovich with Wissman in 2013.

of McCormack's former deputies. When IMG sponsored a 1988 production of *Aida* at Earl's Court in London, "Prince Charles and Princess Diana showed up. They wouldn't have come to a golf tournament."

The prestige factor cannot have been lost on Shustorovich, who has been known to chauffeur prospective clients around New York City in a Rolls-Royce. He was a patron of the arts before investing in IMG — he financed the 2007 Metropolitan Opera revival production of Prokofiev's *War and Peace*, which led to a meeting with the female lead, soprano Anna Netrebko, then an IMG client. Two years later, her manager informed Shustorovich of IMG's financial woes, and he says he invested in the agency "because I believe classical culture is very important."

He does not deny that being CEO of a big performing arts agency lands him in social settings with other business leaders — many of them, like himself, immensely wealthy. Shustorovich has been labeled a billionaire in the Russian press, though his name has never appeared on *Forbes'* annual list. "If I made an effort to be on the list, I probably could," he says. "I don't disclose my net worth. Is it substantial? Yes."

Shustorovich arrived in New York in 1977 at age 11 with his parents, Evgeny and Maria, Russian Jewish émigrés fleeing Soviet oppression.

They came, he told *The Wall Street Journal*, with "two suitcases and not enough money to buy food." During the 1970s, the USSR, bowing to social pressure, allowed nearly a quarter-million Jews to emigrate, but the application process was maddeningly capricious. Shustorovich and his parents received their exit visas after only four months. Evgeny's brother waited 10 years.

Evgeny, a master chemist, joined Eastman Kodak's research department in 1979, and the family moved to Rochester, N.Y. Maria, who had taught high school mathematics in Moscow, learned English and American Sign Language in order to accept a teaching job at Rochester's National Technical Institute for the Deaf.

Alexander earned a bachelor's degree from Harvard University, followed by a J.D. from Harvard Law School and an MBA from Harvard Business School. Remarkably, while Shustorovich was taking postgraduate courses, he was shuttling between the Soviet Union and the United States. There were opportunities for him in Russia, and Shustorovich was a young man in a hurry.

During a trip to the USSR in 1989, Shustorovich met British-born John Evans, IMG Artists' current COO, and then international director of General Media — the publisher of *Penthouse*. Evans want-

ed to launch a Russian edition of General Media's pop-science magazine, *Omni*. Shustorovich had befriended Yuri Osipov, a high-ranking official at Russia's prestigious Academy of Sciences. (Before emigrating, Evgeny Shustorovich had been an academy member, but Alexander says his father never met Osipov until years later.) The Osipov connection would prove invaluable. By September, General Media had entered a joint venture with the academy to distribute Russian *Omni*.

On Dec. 26, 1991, the Soviet Union was dissolved, and Boris Yeltsin, president of the Russian Federation, ushered in sweeping economic reforms, privatizing state-owned industries in a way that created once in a lifetime business opportunities for the well-connected. For Shustorovich, there was a much bigger prize to be gained than the *Omni* deal. The academy published hundreds of scientific journals, for which universities and corporations paid hefty subscription fees — especially if they were translated into English. With General Media's backing, Shustorovich launched an academic publishing firm, Pleiades Publishing.

In September 1992, 19 prestigious Academy of Sciences journals previously translated and published by the American Institute of Physics came up for grabs. AIP executive director Kenneth Ford could not believe that Shustorovich, a non-scientist in his mid-20s, bankrolled by the publisher of *Penthouse*, was in contention for the rights. He complained about Pleiades to the British magazine *Nature*, which ran an article about the controversy, alongside a cartoon of a leering magazine salesman telling a customer, "If you want something stronger, I've got the Journal of Experimental and Theoretical Physics under the counter." AIP ultimately held on to the 19 journals. "It's a miracle we prevailed, because Pleiades had political connections and clout," says Ford. "But scientific loyalty triumphed."

In the long run, Shustorovich prevailed. Today, Pleiades is the world's largest publisher of translated Russian scientific journals, with an estimated 90% of the market, and Shustorovich is Pleiades' principal, if not sole, owner. "Alex has become very wealthy as a result," says Evans.

The Russian press has accused Shustorovich of monopolizing a state industry. "My detractors make it sound like the fairy godmother came to me and gave me some big business," he says. "It's a competitive industry — we have over 100,000 authors' rights contracts every year — and no one person could control that volume of people, including Mr. Osipov.

"Was he a relevant person at the time? Yes," says Shustorovich of Osipov, who nine days before the dissolution of the Soviet Union became the academy president.

While publishing scientific journals made Shustorovich's fortune, Osipov and other powerful friends supported him in a venture of far greater significance: Megatons to Megawatts, the program that paid Russia around \$17 billion to destroy over 30,000 nuclear weapons, creating enough reactor fuel to provide, for two decades, 10% of all the energy consumed in the United States. It was arguably the most consequential business transaction

ganization, is scheduled to reopen in September, and the classical industry is anxiously watching. If the Met makes a comeback, it augurs well for live classical performances in the United States.

Shustorovich thinks a fall recovery is "optimistic," adding that IMG's budget is based on the expectation that bookings for 2021 will be only 25% of pre-COVID-19 levels. "I think that was our estimate last year, but it came in at 10%." IMG will not lack for bookings when concert halls fully reopen, however long that may take. It has hundreds of artists on its roster, many of them stars, such as pianists Leif Ove Andsnes and Mitsuko Uchida, vocalists Susan Graham and Lawrence Brownlee, violinists Hilary Hahn and Sarah Chang, and conductors Semyon Bychkov and Franz Welser-Möst. IMG also has departments for dance, world music and jazz.

Whatever the long-term economic impact of COVID-19, the classical music business will go on, because prestige drives it more than profit. It is the reason sports marketing mogul Mark McCormack took ownership of IMG Artists in its early years, and let it run at lower margins than the rest of his business empire. "Mark understood that the sports business had good names, but never the level of prestige of a classical music business," recalls one

KOSBACHER, JOE SCHILDHORN/PATRICK MCHILLAN VIA GETTY IMAGES; KOTOVA, JEFFREY PATER/WIREIMAGE; EVGENY SHUSTOROVICH, DREW WALTZER PHOTOGRAPHY

of modern times — Russian warheads meant to obliterate American cities ended up lighting them — and Shustorovich wanted in. His involvement disrupted and ultimately threatened the success of the entire program. From corporate boardrooms to the U.S. State Department, the question was repeatedly raised: What is he doing in this deal?

One person asking that question was the man who conceived Megatons to Megawatts and for 20 years helped hold it together, Massachusetts Institute of Technology physicist Thomas Neff. In October 1991, U.S. and Soviet scientists and Soviet officials met at a hotel in Washington, D.C., to discuss a dire problem: What would become of the Soviet nuclear arsenal after the USSR was dissolved? The dying empire was so broke that Victor Mikhailov, head of the USSR nuclear program, could not even pay the security personnel guarding the weapons. During a break, Neff found Mikhailov chain-smoking in a corridor and made a proposal. If Mikhailov could collect and dismantle Soviet weapons, the highly enriched uranium could be blended down into nuclear reactor fuel worth billions. Intrigued, Mikhailov asked how much uranium he could sell. Neff took a gamble and proposed a huge number: 500 metric tons. Mikhailov believed he could provide that amount.

Neff's big idea changed the world. The Megatons to Megawatts agreement was cosigned in February 1993 by Victor Mikhailov and William F. Burns, a retired U.S. major general. It was dubbed the "HEU deal," shorthand for highly enriched uranium. By then, Osipov had introduced Shustorovich to Mikhailov, who now ran Minatom — Russia's Ministry of Atomic Energy — and who subsequently supported Shustorovich's involvement in the deal. Neff points out that Osipov was a frequent visitor to the Yeltsin household, and suspects that when Mikhailov backed Shustorovich, "He might have just been following orders."

The Megatons to Megawatts program was negotiated to run for 20 years — 1993 to 2013 — as a commercial enterprise backed by two governments. Tenex, the overseas trading company of Minatom, was selected as Russia's executive agent, while the United States assigned the U.S. Enrichment Corporation (USEC), a business division of the Department of Energy.

Shustorovich first popped up in the HEU deal in 1994, when Osipov proposed replacing Tenex with a new company for which Shustorovich would be vice chairman. The proposal never got

off the ground, but Neff, acting as a back-channel intermediary between the United States and Russia, was baffled. Who was this young man? Neff recalls thinking that the instructions to give him a central role in the HEU deal "had to have come from above, likely far above." In time, Neff saw evidence that the Yeltsin family, Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and oligarch Boris Berezovsky were supporters of Shustorovich. Neff never met Shustorovich in person but remembers a Russian official describing him as "a guy who can get up your ass without grease."

Shustorovich reemerged in the HEU deal in January 1996, when he registered a new Delaware corporation called Pleiades Group — not to be confused with his publishing company — with the stated goal of buying USEC, which was about to be privatized. If Pleiades acquired USEC, Shustorovich

incorporated Pleiades Group, he managed to meet then-U.S. President Bill Clinton as one of 15 invitees to a coffee klatsch in the White House Map Room. It is unlikely the HEU deal was brought up, but Shustorovich no doubt endeavored to make a good impression. He had come as the guest of a business friend, Democratic donor Ronald Oehl.

Shustorovich was himself a lifelong Republican. At 18 he had cast his first vote for Ronald Reagan and sought influential Republican business allies to enhance his credibility with the U.S. government. His first such ally was Max Kampleman, formerly Reagan's chief arms negotiator, but Kampleman soon became uneasy over Pleiades' Russian ties and opted out.

Then Shustorovich met Georgette Mosbacher, a socialite and cosmetics entrepreneur married to Robert Mosbacher, former secretary of commerce for the George H.W. Bush

administration. Georgette told journalist Andrew Cockburn that Shustorovich was introduced to her as someone who could help her sell her Borghese cosmetics line in Russia, and that he agreed to assist if her husband joined his company. In October 1996, Robert Mosbacher became chairman of Pleiades Group.

Pleiades now had more credibility with the U.S. government — "a clean bill," Robert Mosbacher told *The Wall Street Journal* — but by then buying USEC had taken a back seat to other moneymaking opportunities in the HEU deal. The natural uranium content of the nuclear fuel shipped by Russia was a state asset. Under the terms of the agreement, it had to be replaced with ore warehoused in the United States, or its equivalent sale value — an estimated \$4 billion over the span of the program. The broker for that uranium stood to make a handsome profit, while helping Russia replenish its near-empty coffers. Cameco, a Canadian uranium trading company, made a bid to be sales agent, as did Cogema, a French nuclear company. Pleiades, which had no experience in the uranium market, also put itself in the running.

In a March 1998 article headlined "Uranium-Gate," the Russian business daily *Kommersant* reported what happened. "The Minatom leadership opted for the Pleiades company, previously unknown to anyone... No one knows how Shustorovich charmed the leaders of Minatom." Under the terms of an April 4, 1997, agreement between Pleiades and Tenex, Pleiades would store the uranium for two years in anticipation of market prices going up and Russia getting more money. In reality, there was no reason to expect prices to rise. Meanwhile, Pleiades could conceivably borrow money against the stockpile, while the Russian Federation got nothing. "In-

"Wissman presents himself like he's a nice guy, and a lot of people fall for that crap. Now that I've got to know him better, I've learned to be more careful."

— SHUSTOROVICH



From left: Putin, Shustorovich and former fiancée Sobchak, and Russian politician Lyudmila Narusova in 2003.

ich would become the U.S. executive agent in the HEU deal. And if he had influence with Minatom (and therefore Tenex) through his association with Osipov and Mikhailov, he could conceivably control both sides of the deal. It was, Neff says, "a breathtakingly audacious scheme."

There was a legal obstacle. In order to buy USEC, Shustorovich had to persuade a dubious Clinton administration State Department that he was not a foreign agent. Two weeks before he in-

comprehensible,” an unnamed Minatom employee told *Kommersant*.

Pleiades had thrown a monkey wrench into the HEU deal. On March 8, 1998, Neff wrote to the office of Vice President Al Gore and reported that “there is no money from [the natural] uranium because Minatom chose to do business with inexperienced friends of Russian officials when it could have done a good deal with major western companies that could pay immediately.”

By that time, Pleiades’ status in the HEU deal was already imperiled. A week earlier, Yeltsin had summoned Mikhailov to his office and asked for his resignation. An increasingly hostile Russian press had taken to calling Shustorovich “uranium boy.” Mikhailov’s replacement, Yevgeny Adamov, no fan of Pleiades, essentially tore up the company’s 1997 agreement with Tenex.

The long delay in Russia receiving money for the natural uranium took its toll. At a Moscow summit on Sept. 2, 1998, Yeltsin informed Clinton that Russia was pulling out of the HEU deal. Though the deal was not supposed to use public funds, Congress approved paying Russia \$325 million for two years’ worth of natural uranium, saving Megatons to Megawatts and putting an end to Pleiades’ involvement.

Shustorovich was not ready to give up, and he initiated a round of lawsuits, all unsuccessful, including a \$1 billion suit against the Russian government filed in Stockholm. A breach of contract suit against Tenex was thrown out of New York federal court when the Clinton administration filed a statement of interest branding Pleiades’ case a national security risk. “That was extraordinary,” says a U.S. lawyer for Tenex.

Today, Shustorovich’s account of the HEU deal differs radically from the accepted historical record. “Thomas Neff may think otherwise, but I’m the person who brought the Megatons to Megawatts idea to the Russian government,” he says. “That’s nonsense,” says Neff, who for his efforts received the coveted Leo Szilard Award for “the use of physics for the benefit of society.”

Though no longer in business with Robert Mosbacher, Shustorovich maintained a lasting friendship with Georgette, who inadvertently brought him unwanted publicity. In August 2000, just before the Republican National Convention nominated George W. Bush for president, Shustorovich, at Mosbacher’s urging, wrote the RNC a check for \$250,000. Through a clerical error, the check bounced. Shustorovich offered to replace it with a certified check, but by then the RNC had made inquiries and learned about the uranium controversy. His money was refused. A *New York Post* headline read: “A Fat 250g ‘Donation’ to GOP Goes A’Bouncin’.”

Shustorovich had an even harder time ducking the spotlight in Russia, where his business ventures included the broadcast franchise for Fash-

ionTV. He was often photographed escorting models, and his wedding engagement in 2005 made him fodder for Russian gossip columns.

Shustorovich’s fiancée, Ksenia Sobchak, was a blond society girl dubbed “Russia’s Paris Hilton.” She was the daughter of Anatoly Sobchak, the first post-Soviet mayor of St. Petersburg, who held the



From top: Sobol (left) and Bell in 2014; McCormack in 1987.



dubious honor of being the teacher and political mentor of Vladimir Putin. Ksenia’s notoriety was of a different kind. She hosted *Dom-2*, a long-running reality TV show marked for its vulgarity, and occasionally acted in Russian B-movies (she was Eva Braun in a 2008 spy caper called *Hitler Goes Kaput!*). Later, she became a political activist and worked to rehabilitate her image, a transformation even some Russian opposition leaders thought genuine.

Sobchak told *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, a Russian tabloid, that she met Shustorovich on Feb. 19, 2001, at a concert in honor of her father on the first anniversary of his death. (Putin had wept at Anatoly’s funeral.) Shustorovich “courted me for a year, then we began to live together,” said Ksenia. They shared an apartment on Tverskaya Street, the most expensive shopping street in Moscow. Shustorovich proposed in 2004, and a wedding was set to take place in St. Petersburg on July 1, 2005. He would be 39, and she, 24.

Sobchak decreed the wedding would be “simple,” by which she meant 300 guests at the Konstantin Palace, a bridal gown from fashion designer Valentin Yudashkin and a wedding-reception band

hired for \$200,000: the Pet Shop Boys. One week before the ceremony, the wedding was called off. According to the gossip pages, Shustorovich’s family disapproved of the bride; Sobchak, for her part, said she decided she was too young. She has since married twice; Shustorovich remains a bachelor.

Shustorovich’s engagement to the daughter of Putin’s mentor led to speculation about a Shustorovich-Putin connection, but that was examined and dismissed by investigators in the course of Robert Mueller’s probe of Russian interference in the 2016 election. Shustorovich had sent a \$1 million check to Donald Trump’s inaugural committee — this time his money was accepted, no questions asked. He thereby became one of six Russian-born million-dollar donors invited to an exclusive, black-tie “Chairman’s Global Dinner” on the eve of Trump’s inauguration. (Warner Music Group owner Leonard Blavatnik was another.) An FBI inquiry into whether men with supposed Kremlin ties were reporting their private conversations with Trump to Russian intelligence proved a dead end. All that is certain is that for \$1 million, Shustorovich, who once described himself as a “political junkie,” got to break bread with the president-elect. Georgette Mosbacher, who knew Trump from her New York socialite days, reaped a more tangible benefit from his election: He made her ambassador to Poland.

No one could have imagined an owner like Alex Shustorovich when IMG Artists was getting started. In the late 1970s, Charles Hamlen, a French teacher and sometime pianist, had a stint as a page turner for a chamber music series, where he heard performers grumbling about their managers. Around that time, Hamlen

met Edna Landau, a former choral instructor at New York’s High School of Music and Art. “We had this incredible bonding — two school teachers, idealistic about wanting to help artists, caring more about ethics than money,” says Landau. They launched Hamlen/Landau Management in 1979.

Elizabeth Sobol, a young pianist, joined as an intern. The Hamlen/Landau office was “a small basement apartment on W. 85th Street in Manhattan, with plywood furniture,” recalls Sobol. “The phone rang maybe three times a week — and two of those times it was Charlie’s mom.” The outgoing calls were relentless. “I’d hear Charlie and Edna trying to book artists nobody ever heard of, with nothing to go on but pure passion. When they’d finally nail a \$500 contract for pianist so-and-so to play in Paducah [Ky.], they would literally do a dance of joy.”

In 1982, Hamlen saw a 14-year-old violinist named Joshua Bell perform with the Philadelphia Orchestra after winning a national competition. Bell lived in Bloomington, Ind., with his father and mother — a research psychologist and therapist, respectively. “Charlie and I got in the

car — we didn't have money to fly in those days — and drove to the Bells' farmhouse," says Landau. Joshua signed with the small agency, but only after reassurances from Hamlen. "My psychologist parents had a heart-to-heart with Charles," says Bell. "They told him, 'We don't want him to overdo it. We want him to be a kid.' He was very sympathetic." Hamlen developed Bell at a deliberate pace. Many other prodigies were pushed too hard and burned out; Bell built a career. In October 2018, two months after Hamlen died of leukemia, Bell gave a memorial concert in his honor.

Hamlen/Landau now had a future star, but no marquee names and no big earners. Few in the business took the agency seriously. In the early 1980s, classical management was dominated by two large firms — Ronald Wilford's Columbia Artists and ICM Artists, the company that would one day become Opus 3. Hamlen/Landau was dwarfed by those competitors and constantly on the edge of insolvency. At one music festival, says Landau, "Charlie and I camped out in a tent." She recalls thinking, "We can't go on like this."

While Hamlen and Landau were struggling, another company owner was on his way to becoming a billionaire: Mark McCormack, the man credited with inventing the sports marketing business. As a student athlete at The College of William and Mary, McCormack had dreamt of becoming a golf pro, until a varsity tournament encounter with another student athlete, Arnold Palmer, made him rethink his ambitions. McCormack instead got a law degree from Yale and went on to practice law in Cleveland. In 1960, he and Palmer crossed paths again and, over a handshake, Palmer became his first sports client. McCormack made Palmer a millionaire several times over through endorsement deals. Other sports clients, including Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Rod Laver and Martina Navratilova, followed. McCormack's International Management Group would soon make him, according to *Sports Illustrated*, "the most powerful man in sports."

Despite his success, McCormack sensed a gap in his expanding business empire. IMG had become a marketing consultant to major corporations — and corporations were interested in the arts. McCormack credited a 1983 golf outing with soprano Kiri Te Kanawa as his inspiration for moving IMG into classical music, about which he was largely ignorant. Te Kanawa advised McCormack that the first thing he needed to learn was that at a concert or opera, the break was called "intermission," not "halftime."

It remained for McCormack to find managers who knew the classical business. Through a friend, investment banker James Wolfensohn, then-chairman of Carnegie Hall, he learned about Hamlen and Landau. The two managers were flown to London as McCormack's guests at Wim-

bledon — the tennis tournament was an IMG client — and summoned to meet the sports impresario at a townhouse there. They were nervous. "We walked up a very long staircase to meet Mr. McCormack for the first time," says Landau. "I looked at Charlie and said, 'Everything's going to be fine,' because I found out [French composer Hector] Berlioz once lived in the same townhouse." She took that as a good omen.

The meeting went well. It was decided that McCormack's corporation would acquire Hamlen/Landau and rename it IMG Artists — a big brand name for what was still a tiny agency. Landau recalls one remark by McCormack that terrified the two managers, however. "He looked at us and asked, 'Do you know who Ronald Wilford is?' Of course they did. 'I'm going to put him out of business,'" said McCormack.

Mark McCormack liked to be first at everything. Tall and blond, he had an Ivy League bearing — until you sat across from him in a negotiation. Then he became the man the sports industry called "Mark the Shark." His daily schedule was a rigorous to-do list broken down into 15-minute segments. McCormack could consult one of his yellow legal pads and tell you where he would be at a given moment six months' hence. At the end of a workday, after checking off every item on his legal pad, he went to sleep, or, as his second wife, tennis doubles player Betsy Nagelsen, put it, "accom-



Hamlen (left) and Landau outside their Upper West Side office in 1981.

plished rest." In his bestselling book *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School*, McCormack owned up to being "very demanding of myself," and consequently "very demanding of our management executives."

No one at IMG Artists believed McCormack was too tough. "Mark liked the business, he liked the people running it, and he was super supportive," recalls one of his former deputies. Artist managers who worked at the agency during McCormack's reign remember him fondly. "Those 20 years un-

der Mr. McCormack allowed us to grow without counting nickels and dimes," says Sobol.

One day in 1985, Sobol picked up the office phone, and a man claiming to be Itzhak Perlman asked for Charles Hamlen. Sobol thought it was a gag — the violinist's baritone voice was easy to imitate — but the call was genuine. Perlman's manager, ICM Artists president Sheldon Gold, had died, and Perlman had heard good things about Hamlen and Landau. He was also a sports fan who was familiar with McCormack. By the following year, Landau was Perlman's manager, and IMG Artists had its first household name. More eminent artists followed, including pianists André Watts and Evgeny Kissin.

Though now a player, IMG Artists remained a small agency. McCormack saw an opportunity to expand in 1989, when Harold Holt Ltd., then the largest classical agency in Britain, was looking for an investor to offset its financial troubles. He made a tentative bid to buy Holt, but, before closing the deal, asked one of his department heads to go over the agency's books. Late the following year came a new, markedly lower bid. "The rest of the board was outraged," says Stephen Wright, then Holt's youngest director. "To me the revised bid stood to reason."

When McCormack's offer was officially rebuffed, Wright quit Holt for IMG, taking around 25 staffers, including virtually all of Holt's orchestral touring department, and many illustrious artists. The IMG roster now had top-tier conductors — the glory of any classical management agency — among them Mariss Jansons, Neville Marriner and John Eliot Gardiner. IMG Artists was no longer a boutique.

Sobol, meanwhile, had risen to associate director and begun building IMG's dance department. In 1996, she wanted to sign one of the earliest hip-hop dance companies, GhettoOriginal Prods., but to land the deal, IMG had to agree to co-produce the troupe's forthcoming off-Broadway show, *Jam on the Groove*.

"I called Mr. McCormack's secretary and asked to see him," says Sobol. "The secretary asked, 'What is the smallest amount of time you require?' I said, 'Seven minutes.' She said, 'Be on the corner of 74th and 5th at 2:07 p.m. His limo will pull up and you'll get in. You will have exactly seven minutes.'" The car arrived on cue; Sobol was dropped off at 2:14, with permission granted.

McCormack continued to push himself, and friends warned he was rushing headlong to an early grave. In January 2003, he had a coronary and went into a coma. Four months later, he was dead at age 72. He left behind a company overleveraged from ambitious expansion plans. IMG's top executives, Bob Kain and Alistair Johnston, laid off employees, closed offices and divested assets. After 20 years of stable ownership, IMG Artists was up for sale.

One month before McCormack went into the hospital, he spoke to Wright, then the managing director of IMG Artists Europe. “He said, ‘There’s someone I want you to meet,’” recalls Wright. “‘He’s a Texas businessman and a pianist. I’m thinking of bringing him in as a minority shareholder.’” But, McCormack told Wright, he had no qualms about turning the investor down “if you’re against the idea.”

The businessman was Barrett Wissman. “I met Barrett a couple of times,” says Wright, “and didn’t like him. But by then, McCormack was in a coma.” Wissman’s \$7.5 million purchase of IMG Artists in July 2003 was 50% above the next-highest bid. (Parent company IMG’s sports, modeling and other businesses were sold in 2004 to private equity firm Forstmann Little and today are jointly owned by Endeavor and Silver Lake Partners. Endeavor also owns a small stake in IMG Artists.)

Wissman’s official biography states that he began performing as a concert piano soloist at age 11, graduated cum laude from Yale in economics and political science, and earned postgrad degrees in music from Southern Methodist University and the Accademia Chigiana in Italy. In the 1990s, Wissman founded a money management firm, HW Partners, with Clark Hunt, a Dallas schoolmate and the grandson of oil billionaire H.L. Hunt. “The investment management business was pretty successful,” says Wissman. Within a decade, he had homes in Dallas, Montana, St. Croix and Tuscany.

At a London concert in 1996, Wissman was, as he later said in an interview, “swept away” by the soloist Nina Kotova, a 26-year-old Russian cellist and former catwalk model. As a child, Kotova studied at the Moscow Conservatory and showed early promise, but fell on hard times at 15 when her father, a virtuoso double-bassist, died suddenly. She moved to the United States and found herself in New York, too broke to afford a cello. That problem was solved when she aced an audition at the Ford Modeling Agency. Kotova quit the runway when a British management company landed her a solo debut at London’s Wigmore Hall. She got mostly good reviews.

Soon after Kotova’s London concert, Wissman began courting her. He bought her an engagement ring with a gemstone “the size of your watch face,” in the words of one newspaper columnist, and the 1673 Stradivarius cello that had once belonged to British cello legend Jacqueline du Pré. Wissman and Kotova were married June 30, 2001, on his Montana ranch.

Shortly after Wissman bought IMG Artists, he and Kotova got to work developing a new line of business for the agency: lifestyle festivals — a melding of music, wellness, wine, haute cuisine and fine arts in a vacation setting. The debut event, in 2003, was the Tuscan Sun Festival in Cortona, Italy. Well-known artists played at reduced fees, says one former IMG staffer, “in exchange for good wine, good food and free spa services in a beautiful

place where there were no music critics.” The success of Tuscan Sun led IMG to establish lifestyle festivals in California’s Napa Valley; Boca Raton, Fla.; and Singapore. Movie stars were frequent guests. “I have to hand it to Barrett,” says Sobol. “Those festivals were really brilliant.”

They also provided showcases for Kotova, leading some industry observers to suggest that Wissman had bought IMG to advance her career. “Not at all true,” he says. “It would have been a lot less difficult to make a major donation to a symphony orchestra and have her play a series of concerts.” Kotova was aware of the suggestion; last August, she wrote on her Facebook fan page, “I once heard that I wasn’t supposed to do it all: to be a performer and to be an Artistic director of a festival at the same time. Why not?”

Wissman’s standing at IMG never fully recovered from the New York state pension-fund kick-back scandal. The scheme’s alleged mastermind,

“Shustorovich showed up without having any idea who was who and talked about everything we were doing wrong.”

— TREUHAFT

Hank Morris, a powerful consultant to the New York state comptroller, ended up serving over a year in the state penitentiary. In a closed hearing on Feb. 3, 2009, Wissman pleaded guilty to one felony and one misdemeanor. Judge Lewis Bart Stone admonished him that unless he cooperated fully with ongoing cases and paid the negotiated \$12 million settlement, “all bets are off,” and he could expect to do time. Three and a half years later, Stone permitted Wissman to withdraw his felony plea, and he walked out of court a free man convicted only of a misdemeanor.

The public relations problem that resulted from Wissman’s conviction was addressed in June 2009, two months after the scandal broke, when Charles Hamlen, who had left IMG in 1993 to start an AIDS charity, was brought back as chairman. It was a cosmetic move — Wissman retained control of the agency — and did not last long. In October 2011, Wissman announced he was returning as chairman. A few months earlier, an IMG press release disclosed that a “significant minority position” in IMG had been acquired by Alexander Shustorovich.

Damage control. That was the mission Alec Treuhaft set for himself after Shustorovich spoke to the New York staff. “He immediately said several things that made all the kids, my assistants, think they were going to lose their jobs,” he recalls. Shustorovich showed an equal lack of deference to Elizabeth Sobol. “After less than two minutes, he started talking over me,” she says.

Mark McCormack had written books disapproving of business-school orthodoxies; Shustoro-

vich adhered to them — including the value of basing corporate decisions on data, a concept foreign to artist management. “We went through every MBA model of how to run our company,” says Romana Jaroff, who still works in the agency’s vocal department. “I didn’t take it personally.”

Treuhaft did. In 2013, after he and Jaroff worked overtime for weeks compiling data, they were handed spreadsheets based on those numbers. The calculations were wrong. “The projected income of one of my clients was 60% of the correct figure,” says Treuhaft. “This was information we all walked around with. I can tell you to this day how much Renée Fleming earned in 2002.” He adds, “I lost my temper and walked out, slamming the door.”

Sobol quit the same year, after more than three decades with the agency. Today she is director of the Saratoga Performing Arts Center in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. “IMG was my whole life, my heart and soul,” she says. “I imagined the last working breath I took would have been for IMG. But I decided for the health of my soul I could not continue.”

David Lai, who was hired to replace Sobol, left after two years to run his own management agency, Park Avenue Artists. Joshua Bell went with him, although he is still managed in Europe by IMG Artists. Bell’s bookings are handled by Charlotte Lee, the 17-year IMG veteran who quit in 2015 to create Primo Artists, taking Itzhak Perlman. Lai is vague about his reasons for leaving; Lee is blunt about hers. “Shustorovich didn’t get that the talent of IMG was us, the senior managers and the staff,” she says. “He thought artists could just be assigned to someone else if their manager departed. He learned the hard way once we all left, and the Perlman and Bells went with us.”

The lesson was learned in time to avert disaster. Two London managers, Nicholas Mathias and Kathryn Enticott, were given sweetheart deals to prevent them from leaving the fold. They now manage their artists as independent contractors in exclusive arrangements with IMG Artists, which provides back-office support. Mathias and Enticott collectively handle around 30 top conductors and instrumentalists. Losing those artists would have been a gut punch to the agency.

Shustorovich puts a different face on the Enticott and Mathias deals. “I think of it as profit sharing,” he says. “It was improper to be paying them a few hundred thousand a year for business that was worth a lot more.”

For his part, Shustorovich says he just wants IMG Artists to pay for itself or make a modest profit, as it did pre-COVID-19. “I don’t draw a salary or take expenses out of the company,” he says, adding that his investment in the agency has run into tens of millions of dollars. “It borders on charity.” Some of the money put up, he says, was to compensate artists for unpaid royalties during the period of Wissman’s financial difficulties. Asked whether the open conflict between him and Wissman will eventually lead to a parting of the ways, Shustorovich says, “It is what it is. He’s a shareholder now.” He adds, “Time will tell.” ■



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The Players

Noel Schajris 2.0

THE LATIN PIANIST-COMPOSER IS CELEBRATING 20 YEARS IN THE BUSINESS BY LAUNCHING HIS INDEPENDENT CAREER AND HIS OWN SUBSCRIPTION MODEL

BY LEILA COBO

THE SUMMER OF 1997, Noel Schajris arrived in Mexico from Argentina with \$600 in his pocket — the proceeds from the sale of his upright piano. He had left behind his sick mother and a fledgling music career for the promise of stardom as the singer of a Mexican funk band. The group went nowhere, but Schajris signed as a solo artist with Sony Mexico and released his debut album, *Cita en las Nubes* (*Date in the Clouds*), in 1999. It marked the start of a career that has lasted two decades and seven solo albums, as well as five more as half of the Grammy Award-nominated duo Sin Bandera.

Schajris' sound — both on his own and with Sin Bandera — borrows from different eras, traditions and genres, mapping out a future that crosses borders and generations in Latin music. Sin Bandera — which translates to “Without a Flag” — formed just a year after the release of Schajris' solo debut. Alongside Mexican singer-songwriter and guitarist Leonel García, Schajris created a unique form of Latin balladry, with touches of jazz and R&B, that showcases his soulful and plaintive tenor.

Starting with *De Viaje* (2003), the duo placed three titles in the top 10 on *Billboard's* Top Latin Albums chart, including the one-week champ *Una Última Vez* in 2016. The act also earned five top 10s on the Hot Latin Songs chart, led by the No. 1 hit “Mientes Tan Bien,” which ruled for eight weeks in 2003. Schajris also landed a solo top 10 on Latin Pop Albums with *Uno Es Uno* in 2009.

While the COVID-19 pandemic delayed Schajris' 20th-anniversary plans, it also opened him up to new creative ventures. “It was an awakening,” he says. In 2020, he launched a multimedia platform on his website (noelschajris.fan) that provides exclusive access to content, merchandise, tickets, streaming and album sales to over 500 monthly subscribers.

“The pandemic made me realize where I stood, and I said, ‘It’s time to move,’” he says. “My goal was to be really close to fans; to take everything from the kitchen directly to them. To do that, I needed to have my own business.”

Schajris still records and tours with Sin Bandera, which is managed and booked by Westwood Entertainment and signed under the Sony banner. For the past two years, he has been fully independent on his own Dynamo Productions label, which is distributed through Spain-based Altafonte; and he’s managed by Diana Rodríguez of Criteria Entertainment, whose clients include Moby and Draco Rosa.

“Noel has a spectacular vocal range, and his domain of the piano, as well as his composing ability, grow every day,” says García. “Through the years, we have come to understand the sentimental and musical importance this project has, both for us and our fans. Our solo careers have allowed Sin Bandera to feed from our individual experiences.”

In October, Schajris will begin a 15-city North American tour, promoted by Sound Talent Group, in support of *Mi Presente* (*My Present*), a new album with 20 tracks. As he celebrates the 20th anniversary of his solo debut, the 46-year-old composer discusses his Elon Musk fandom and why leaving behind the majors allowed him to bet on himself.

You’ve found success both as a solo artist and with Sin Bandera. How did that first happen?

I was getting ready to compose my second solo album, and Leo [García] said, “Do you want to try a few songs? We sound good together.” Many people thought I was crazy to step into a duo. But I had gigs all over Mexico City, and every time I invited Leo to come sing with me, we got the biggest ovation of the night, playing songs no one knew. Sin Bandera was different. At the beginning, people thought

Schajris



it was boring — the songs were too long, too slow; they didn’t have a huge chorus. It took a while, but when we exploded, we really exploded.

Success is a lot of work, and it’s exhausting, and Leo needed a break. He hadn’t released a solo album, and he needed to explore his identity. And now, as I look back on my 20 years, celebrating so many things, I see the growth of our solo careers and Sin Bandera, and both shine. It’s a beautiful time to celebrate music.

What’s the biggest difference between Noel Schajris and Sin Bandera records?

It’s a different musical exploration. Sin Bandera is ballads and R&B and a little bit of hip-hop. It’s a third sonic energy that Leo and I only generate when we get together. It’s impossible to explain. But it’s like yin and yang. I’m a little bit the smile, Leo the

frown. Historically, I’m the melody guy. I’m like Elton John, and he’s Bernie Taupin. But increasingly, I’m becoming perhaps not “a little Taupin” but maybe a “little ‘Pin.’” (*Laughs.*) I’m learning and becoming more confident in my songwriting, which has to do with the liberty of having my own label and making my own decisions.

What song makes you the proudest?

“Entra en Mi Vida” [written with García] is perhaps the most important song I wrote, because it’s the song that changed our careers.

What is your biggest songwriting asset?

When it comes to songwriting, I’m a little old school. I don’t understand those songs that have 10 writers. A song is something that’s very personal, very from the heart.

I'd say [that] at the most, four people can co-write. Otherwise, it's too much. It's a process that needs to be treated with a lot of respect.

You have both an independent and major-label career. That is very unusual in this business, no?

Yes, and very original, because those of us who break with the majors usually do it 100%. I wanted to do what was best for me. I wanted to explore my solo career through my own platform, but with Sin Bandera, we are still with a major. I do have one foot in conventional channels, and I'm not fighting against what works. Sony administers my publishing, and I'm very happy with that. The catalog I've built is important; it's my legacy. I'm simply looking at reality and deciding how I can best manage my solo career, which is what I control 100%.

Were you worried about leaving a major-label deal?

I thought about it for a long time. I didn't look for another label deal because they all have the same structure and philosophy. What I slowly came to understand, and especially during the pandemic — which forced us to stay home — is that shows represent 70% to 80% of my income. And that's when I realized how much my music generates [for myself], and it didn't generate much. I was trying to grow those metrics, but if you don't own your masters and your music, you don't get much.

How is your revenue now?

Sin Bandera generates eight to 10 times more revenue. After all, I've been a recording artist for 20 years, but I've owned my masters for only two. As you may imagine, there's a major catalog of successful albums and songs that are still administered by and belong to Sony. But if my catalog

generates a huge amount per month, I may only get 10% of that. But on my own platform, launched just six months ago, I get 100%. The beauty will be when we speak in a couple of years, I'll be able to say that I own my catalog and I have over 10,000 subscribers, and we can take a great vacation.

To go solo, you also had to build a new team. How did you approach that?

Something I've learned in the past couple of years is that you need a manager who is next to you, and if they want to be with you, a handshake is enough. If you want to do something, you'll do it whether you have a signed paper or not. When you have that drive and that belief in a project, that's all that matters. I have Diana Rodríguez; Manuel Vera, my publicist, who was previously my manager; and Altafonte distributes me. Everything is great teamwork. All my relationships right now are based on handshakes.

Your new pride and joy is your website, which operates as a multimedia platform that offers a subscription model. How does it work?

Our team of engineers built it from scratch. Ricardo Arjona had something similar, but in reality, we built a brand-new platform. In my case, my goal was to be very close to the fans and take everything directly to them. That closeness and interaction has been essential. I offer vocal master classes. We're selling T-shirts. If you buy your CD, I sign it and mail it to you. It's an experience I'd never had before. We've sent some 500 CDs and about 600 vinyl albums. There's definitely a nostalgia for physical formats, and I pay a lot of attention to the credits.

Have you invested a lot in this new venture?



From left: Fonsi, David Bisbal, Brant and Schajris at the Latin Grammys in 2009.



Schajris (left) and García in 2016.

'TRULY ONE OF A KIND'

NOEL SCHAJRIS' SOLO CAREER HAS allowed him to stretch himself sonically by collaborating with other artists and like-minded composers, from Maluma, Camila Cabello, Alejandro Sanz, John Legend and Luis Fonsi to Paul Williams, Luis Enrique and Claudia Brant. Following are some of their reflections about his songwriting legacy. —L.C.

"We've written countless songs, and he's one of the most talented people I know, with unmatched musical ability and talent for melodies."

—CLAUDIA BRANT

"His joy, enthusiasm and passion for music are contagious. His songs were always playing in my home, and his incredible lyrics and melodies have been part of every memorable moment with my family." —CAMILA CABELLO

"There are few singers who can draw so much emotion with just piano and voice. I've had the pleasure of writing and singing many songs with Noel, and the feeling he puts in each note is unique. Congratulations, my brother. To 20 more years of good music." —LUIS FONSI

"My admiration for Noel as a composer and recording artist is indescribable. It has been an honor to collaborate with him and perform these songs on international stages. He is truly one of a kind." —MALUMA

"Friendship can grow based on notes, songs and experiences. I've had the pleasure [of sharing] the stage and a friendship with Noel. I want to congratulate him and thank him for treating music with the kind of sensibility that any musician can reach." —ALEJANDRO SANZ

Yes. I can't stop watching videos of Elon Musk where he talks about his investments. Obviously, I'm not comparing myself to Elon Musk, but six months after launching, the signs indicate that we're going in the right direction. In my opinion, this is where the industry is headed. The market share for indies is growing. You can control your content, connect with your fans and have a return on what your music generates.

You have close to 800,000 followers on Spotify and over 500,000 subscribers on YouTube. Are you leveraging those audiences to grow the new platform?

Yes, but it's also about getting back to reality. Whether you have 500, 600 or 1,000 people who follow you, it's an incredible achievement as an artist. And those 1,000 subscribers on your platform are equal or better to a million elsewhere. You can sell millions of albums, like we did [with Sin Bandera], but what you get after advances

and returns is minimum. What I generate with my platform, my product and my store may be small for now, but it's so much more gratifying because it brings me closer to my fans and to my art.

Why does this business model make sense for you?

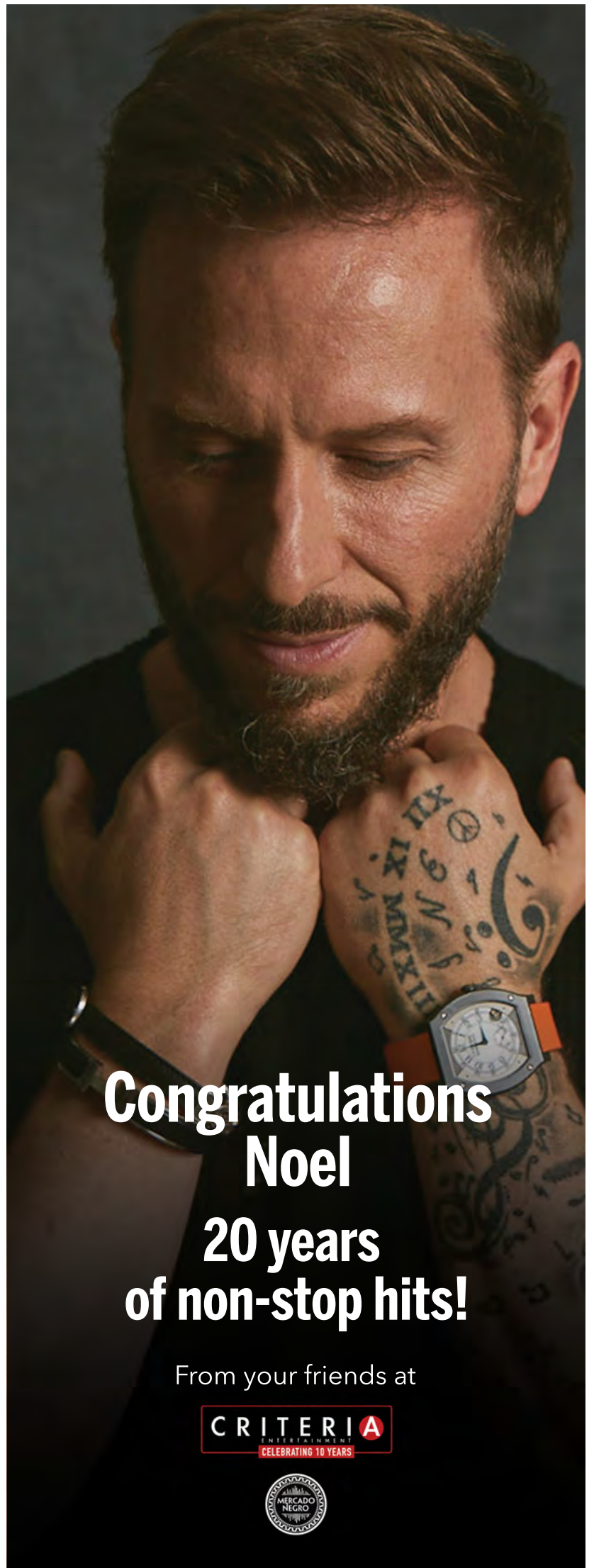
As a soloist, I realized some people were interested in big money and not in developing concepts. There's an audience, and I'm going to connect with them and I'm going to generate real numbers, not those inflated numbers that make you think that any video that has less than 200 million views is a failure. It's crazy. Having any number of people see and appreciate what you do is an incredible thing. Noel Schajris, the *guerito* [little blond guy] from Sin Bandera is a developing artist. The way I see it, I love music in any format or style, and I'm blessed to live from it. Thank God, I've done it for over 20 years. **b**



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Chartbreaker

Loba (left) and Wilson photographed by Diana King on April 21 at Red Light Management in Nashville.

No. 19

PEAK ON *BILLBOARD'S*
COUNTRY AIRPLAY CHART

Lainey Wilson

The country artist is soaring — and educating listeners — with breakout hit “Things a Man Oughta Know”

🎯 Lainey Wilson moved from the 300-person town of Baskin, La., to Nashville in 2011 at the age of 19, arriving with an Airstream trailer full of her belongings attached to a pickup truck. The country singer-songwriter parked outside a family friend’s recording studio and lived in it for three years. “I was known as that crazy girl with the trailer back then,” she recalls. By 2016, she independently released her debut album, *Tougher*, which hit No. 44 on *Billboard’s* Top Country Albums chart, and followed it up with a self-titled EP.

By March 2018, she scored a publishing deal with Sony/ATV, and by August, a contract with Broken Bow Records. The indie label released her four-track EP, *Redneck Hollywood*, the following year, which included early standout “Things a Man Oughta Know.” The track has since spent 18 weeks on *Billboard’s* Country Airplay chart, recently surging into the top 20 and raking in 59.4 million U.S. on-demand streams, according to MRC Data. But as the label was gearing up to release her major-label debut full-length — *Sayin’ What I’m Thinkin’* — finally arrived in February — much of the world was in lockdown due to COVID-19.

It helped that prior to the pandemic, the label arranged for Wilson to meet with key radio players and digital service providers. Jon Loba, executive vp of Broken Bow Records, says iHeartCountry, for example, met Wilson over a year ago and, because she remained visible throughout 2020, was eager to work together, naming her a 2021 “On the Verge” artist. Spotify followed, adding Wilson to its inaugural Hot Country Artists To Watch list.

Loba predicts Wilson to be a future “stadium-touring act.” Even with concerts on hold, she has honed her live vocal skills, mostly through intimate online performances. As for Wilson, she’s hoping to one day play *Saturday Night Live*. Her other desire? “I want to keep my head screwed on straight.”

—MARCUS K. DOWLING

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2021

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