

P R I D E 2 0 2 1

JUNE 5, 2021 • BILLBOARD.COM

# billboard



**All Hail**

# Rina Sawayama

HOW SHE BUILT ONE OF POP'S FASTEST-GROWING FAN BASES

**PLUS 40 LGBTQ+**

**EXECUTIVES TO KNOW**



**tuneCORE**  
CERTIFIED

# 2021 Hot 100 Independent Artists to Watch

A\$H.  
Adam Sanders  
AdELA  
Aisha Vibes  
Alann8h  
Alee  
Alexa Melo  
Alexandra Kay  
Angel Haze  
Aria Ohlsson  
Austin Cain  
Bizzy Bone  
Blind.See  
Blondes  
Brent Morgan  
Brock Berrigan  
Buddy Mylez  
Caleb Hawley  
Carter Faith  
CLAVVS  
Constant Smiles  
Croosh  
David Correy  
Dilo  
DOLCEVITA

Dreya Mac  
Emily Ritz  
evrYwhr  
F4ST  
Fairview Treezy  
FS Green  
G Yamazawa  
Gabo  
Gabrielle Lynn  
Georgia Greene  
Golda May  
GOLDEN  
Goldyard  
Gregory Dillon  
Haich Ber Na  
Harmless  
Hiba  
Jaden Michaels  
Jakob Campbell  
Jamaar  
Jaycee  
Jonathan Terrell  
Jordan Adetunji  
Kathleen Regan  
Katie Belle

Keyyen Martin  
Kem Tuncer  
KIRBY  
Kota the Friend  
Lacy Cavalier  
Landy  
Laufey  
Layne  
Leegit  
Live in Peace  
Lydia Loveless  
Mad Wesley  
Mark Dohner  
Marlo Smith  
Matt Fine  
Midas Hutch  
Mike and The Moonpies  
Miko Marks  
Nané  
Nick Box  
NIGHT TRAVELER  
No Komment  
No Pressure  
ONEFOUR  
Ozoyo

Parker Chapin  
Primo the Alien  
Pxrselow  
Quique Neira  
Ralph Castelli  
Rayvanny  
Rève  
Riley Roth  
Rob Baird  
Roc Marciano  
Ruby Fields  
Ryan Mack  
Ryan Montgomery  
Sam Riggs  
Shamir  
Simone  
Stephen Day  
SVRCINA  
Swimming With Bears  
The Palms  
Travis Dupri  
Trillary Banks  
Wolftyla  
Yung Gravy  
Zero Theorem

INDEPENDENT AF

# 2021 Top TuneCore Artists

## Top 25 Hip Hop

38 Spesh	BlueBucksClan	GHOSTEMANE	Pouya	Tom The Mail Man
88GLAM	cupcakKe	Isaiah Rashad	Russ	Troyboi
Ab-Soul	Dom Kennedy	Nane	Scarlxrd	Upchurch
Amantej Hundal	Eric Reprid	papithbk	Sheek Louch	Vacca
Anth	Felly	Papoose	SNOW THA PRODUCT	YN Jay

## Top 15 Pop

AP Dhillon	DEAMN	Lexi Jayde
Boyce Avenue	EZI	Men I Trust
Charlotte Sands	Fiji Blue	Passenger
Chris Steger	Goth Babe	SALES
Dawin	Harmless	Natalie Taylor

## Top 15 Country

Casey Donahew	Easton Corbin	Logan Mize
Charley Crockett	Josh Abbott Band	Mitch Rossell
Cody Jinks	Josh Melton	Muscadine Bloodline
Colt Ford	Julia Cole	Nitty Gritty Dirt Band
Cooper Alan	Kolby Cooper	Taylor Ray Holbrook

## Top 10 Electronic

Approaching Nirvana	N I G H T S
Doctor Vox	Ozoyo
Harmless	Sevdaliza
Kalia Siska	Troyboi
King Henry	Utah

## Top 10 R&B / Soul

Ashanti	Mario
Cleo Sol	Monica
Daniela Andrade	Poppy Ajudha
Durand Bernarr	Steve Lacy
Jeff Bernat	Vulfpeck

## Top 10 Rock / Alt

Everybody Loves an Outlaw	Protest the Hero
Hum	Ron Pope
Michigander	Rude Boy
NEFFEX	SAULT
New West	Sleeping At Last







# THE NATIONAL MUSIC PUBLISHERS' ASSOCIATION

congratulates our 2021  
Annual Meeting honorees

**NMPA SONGWRITER ICON**

*Taylor Swift*





**REP. JERROLD NADLER**

NMPA President's Award

**SARAH TRAHERN**

NMPA Industry Legacy Award

**BILL SIMMONS**

Keynote

THANK YOU TO OUR SPECIAL GUEST PERFORMERS

**Sara Bareilles | Luke Bryan**

**Priscilla Block**

**SEE YOU JUNE 9**

**NMPA**



# JUNETEENTH

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**In the hope for a more just tomorrow, we wish our extraordinary fans, artists, songwriters, producers, and employees a Happy Juneteenth.**



**UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP**



# billboard Hot 100®



## Smooth Start: BTS' 'Butter' Bows At No. 1

**B**TS' "BUTTER" ROLLS IN AT NO. 1 ON THE BILLBOARD HOT 100, marking the superstar South Korean septet's fourth leader on the chart. With all four No. 1s banked in the last nine months, dating back to the fellow chart-topping debut of "Dynamite" on Sept. 5, 2020, BTS completes the quickest accumulation of four initial leaders since Justin Timberlake in 2006-07. Among groups, BTS has landed its first four No. 1s the fastest since The Jackson 5 in 1970. The Beatles hold the overall record by having notched their first four over four months in 1964.

Released May 21, "Butter" drew 32.2 million U.S. streams and 18.1 million radio airplay audience impressions and sold 242,800 downloads in the tracking week, according to MRC Data.

The single also starts atop the Digital Song Sales chart as BTS' seventh No. 1, extending the act's record for the most among groups. Meanwhile, the song scores the highest weekly sales total since "Dynamite" launched with 300,000. "Butter" begins at No. 4 on Streaming Songs and No. 39 on Radio Songs.

In between "Dynamite" and "Butter," BTS led the Hot 100 for a week each with "Savage Love (Laxed — Siren Beat)," with Jawsh 685 and Jason Derulo (Oct. 17), and "Life Goes On" (Dec. 5).

—GARY TRUST

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	CERTIFICATION	PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	Artist	IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
		<b>#1</b>	<b>BUTTER</b>		R.GRIMALDI, S.KIRK, R.PERRY, RM (J.ANDREWS, R.GRIMALDI), S.KIRK, R.PERRY, A.BILOWITZ, S.GARCIA)	<b>BTS</b>	HYBE/BIG HIT ENTERTAINMENT/COLUMBIA	1	1
	1	2	<b>SAL</b>	<b>STM</b>	<b>GOOD 4 U</b>	Olivia Rodrigo	GEFFEN/INTERSCOPE	1	2
17	21	3	<b>DEJA VU</b>		D.NIGRO (D.L.NIGRO, O.RODRIGO)	Olivia Rodrigo	GEFFEN/INTERSCOPE	3	8
2	3	4	<b>LEVITATING</b>	▲	KOZ, S.D.PRICE (C.COFFEE JR., S.KOZMENEUK, S.T.HUDSON, D.LIPA, J.L.KIRK)	Dua Lipa Feat. DaBaby	WARNER	2	34
1	4	5	<b>LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN</b>		BRUNO MARS, D'HAILE (BRUNO MARS, B.ANDERSON, D.EMILE II, C.B.BROWN)	Silk Sonic (Bruno Mars & Anderson .Paak)	AFTERMATH/ATLANTIC	1	12
3	6	6	<b>PEACHES</b>	●	HARV, SHNDD (J.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	10
4	9	7	<b>SAVE YOUR TEARS</b>	▲	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	24
5	10	8	<b>KISS ME MORE</b>		YETI BEATS, R.CHAHAYED (A.Z.DLAMINI, D.SPRECHER, R.CHAHAYED, G.A.POWELL II, C.LANGL, S.GOTTWALD, S.I.ROWE, T.SHADDICK, S.A.KIPNER)	Doja Cat Feat. SZA	KEMOSABE/RCA	5	7
NEW		9	<b>TRAITOR</b>		D.NIGRO (O.RODRIGO, D.L.NIGRO)	Olivia Rodrigo	GEFFEN/INTERSCOPE	9	1
6	11	10	<b>ASTRONAUT IN THE OCEAN</b>		T.HAPI (H.MICHAEL, T.HAPI)	Masked Wolf	TEAMWRK/ELEKTRA/EMG	6	15

COURTESY OF BIG HIT MUSIC  
THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CURRENT SONGS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY MRC DATA AND STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA BY ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY MRC DATA. SONGS ARE DEFINED AS CURRENT SALES, AIRPLAY & STREAMING DATA. IF THEY ARE NEWLY RELEASED TITLES, SONGS RECEIVING AIRPLAY AND/OR SALES DATA FOR THE FIRST TIME, SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2021 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND MRC DATA INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.









# BLACK MUSIC FOREVER RADIO

In honor of Black musicians and industry professionals — the backbone of the global music scene, Pandora has launched the **Black Music Forever Radio** station. And in recognition of **Black Music Month**, it's also available on SiriusXM during the entire month of June.



We invite you to explore curated modes that span many of the most iconic decades and eras of Black music, including Wake Up!, Modern-Day R&B, Black Love, Black Pop Hits and more.



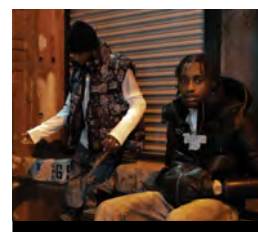
2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE CERTIFICATION PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	Artist IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
NEW	51	51	<b>TWERKULATOR</b> MR. HANKY (A. BAKER, C.A. JONES, E. WILLIAMS, E. SCHULT, J. MILLER, J. ROBBIE, A. BAMBATAA, L. TAYLOR, R. HUTTER, R. ALLEN)	City Girls QUALITY CONTROL/ MOTOWN/CAPITOL	51	1
61	55	52	<b>FAMOUS FRIENDS</b> C. YOUNG, C. CROWDER (C. YOUNG, C.R. BARLOWE, C. CROWDER)	Chris Young + Kane Brown RCA NASHVILLE	52	9
41	53	53	<b>TIME TODAY</b> REAL RED, YC (D.D. WHITE, JR., C. PEARSON, J.D. NELSON)	Moneybagg Yo CMG/N-LESS/ INTERSCOPE	31	16
31	46	54	<b>WE'RE GOOD</b> SLY (D. LIPA, S.W. SIVERSTEN, E.W. SCHWARTZ, SCOTT HARRIS)	Dua Lipa WARNER	31	15
59	62	55	<b>GONE</b> D. GARCIA (N. GALYON, B. JOHNSON, N. MOON)	Dierks Bentley CAPITOL NASHVILLE	55	11
64	61	56	<b>ALMOST MAYBES</b> P. DIGIOVANNI (J. DAVIS, J. FRASURE, H. LINDSEY)	Jordan Davis MCA NASHVILLE	56	18
49	57	57	<b>SETTLING DOWN</b> J. JOYCE (M. LAMBERT, L. DICK, N. HEMBY)	Miranda Lambert VANNER/RCA NASHVILLE	49	11
-	58	58	<b>BUILD A BITCH</b> E. RIZK, SUB URBAN (BELLA POARCH, S. DAVERN, D.V. MAISONNEUVE, J. GAMBELLA, E. RIZK, D. BREADMORE ARKWRIGHT)	Bella Poarch WARNER	58	2
-	8	59	<b>95.SOUTH</b> BOI-IDA, COLEMAN (J. COLE, J.H. SMITH, S. NORRIS, M.J. SAMUELS, COLEMAN, M. BIDAYE)	J. Cole DREAMVILLE/ROC NATION/INTERSCOPE	8	2
29	54	60	<b>YOUR POWER</b> FINNEAS (B.E.O'CONNELL, F.B.O'CONNELL)	Billie Eilish DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE	10	4
48	60	61	<b>NO MORE PARTIES</b> MAALY RAW, OKAY KHAN (B. COLLINS, T.H. KOO, J.T. HENRY, D.D. BANKS)	Coi Leray Feat. Lil Durk REPUBLIC	26	16
60	64	62	<b>LIL BIT</b> J.M. SCHMIDT (T. HUBBARD, J.M. SCHMIDT, B. REDFERRIN, C. HAYNES, JR.)	Nelly & Florida Georgia Line RECORDS/BMG/ COLUMBIA	60	10
11	50	63	<b>MISS THE RAGE</b> I. MAMET (TRIPPIE REDD, J.T. CARTER, C. VAN DER HILDEN)	Trippie Redd & Playboi Carti 1400/TENTH/THOUSAND PROJECTS/CAPITOL	11	3
51	63	64	<b>SKI</b> WHEEZY, BABY WAVE, OUTTATOWN (J.L. WILLIAMS, S.G. KITCHENS, W.T. GLASS, T. DEKKER, BABY WAVE)	Young Thug & Gunna YOUNG STONER LIFE/300	18	6
35	56	65	<b>MADE FOR YOU</b> J. MOI (B. DAVIS, J. HYDE, N.A. MEDLEY)	Jake Owen BIG LOUD	32	14
NEW	66	66	<b>SUN GOES DOWN</b> TAKE A DAY TRIP, D. FEDI, R. LENZO (M.L. HILL, D.M.A. BAPTISTE, D. BIRAL, Q. FEDI, R. LENZO)	Lil Nas X COLUMBIA	66	1
87	93	67	<b>4 DA GANG</b> TAY TAYMADELT (D.M. HAYES, R.W. MOORE, JR., T.D. CARTER, R. SCHENKER, K. MEINE)	42 Dugg & Roddy Ricch 4PF/CMG/ INTERSCOPE	67	8
NEW	68	68	<b>MAYBACH</b> NOT LISTED (NOT LISTED)	42 Dugg Feat. Future 4PF/CMG/INTERSCOPE	68	1
-	38	69	<b>STRAIGHTENIN</b> DJ DUREL, TAKE S, LIME CASTRO, SLUZY, YUKI, OSIRIS (Q.K. MARSHALL, K. CEPHUS, K.K. BALL, T. DOTTINGER, C. TRIEULI, KONSTANTINOS, K. MBELO, D. MOPHERSON, A.A. TRAN)	Migos QUALITY CONTROL/ MOTOWN/CAPITOL	38	2
96	96	70	<b>MINIMUM WAGE</b> S. HENDRICKS (C. CROWDER, N. GALYON, J. FRASURE)	Blake Shelton WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WMN	70	3
8	17	71	<b>INTERLUDE</b> T-MINUS, J.L. COLE, TOMMY PARKER (J. COLE)	J. Cole DREAMVILLE/ ROC NATION/INTERSCOPE	8	3
-	13	72	<b>APPLYING PRESSURE</b> J.L. COLE (J. COLE, B. EVANS, G. HENDRICKS, M. HUGEE)	J. Cole DREAMVILLE/ ROC NATION/INTERSCOPE	13	2
52	66	73	<b>WHAT'S NEXT</b> SUPAH MARIO (A. GRAHAM, J.D. PRIESTER, M. BIDAYE)	Drake OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	1	12
69	69	74	<b>ONE TOO MANY</b> K. URBAN, PH.D. CUTFATHER (D.H. DAVIDSEN, P. WALLEVIK, M.H. HANSEN, J. NORTON, C. TIGHE)	Keith Urban Duet With P!nk HIT RED/CAPITOL NASHVILLE/CAPITOL	62	24
65	71	75	<b>GLAD YOU EXIST</b> D. SMYERS (D. SMYERS, J. REYNOLDS, T.M. PARKS, S. MOONEY, R.L. TAYLOR)	Dan + Shay WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WAR	63	16
71	73	76	<b>BLAME IT ON YOU</b> M. KNOX (K.M. ALLISON, J. EDWARDS, T. KENNEDY, M. TYLER, B. WHITE)	Jason Aldean MACON/BROKEN BOW	71	5
66	70	77	<b>QUICKSAND</b> MORRAY, ANT CHAMBERLAIN (M. RUFFIN, A.J. PHILLIPS)	Morray PICK SIX/INTERSCOPE	65	16
80	77	78	<b>SINGLE SATURDAY NIGHT</b> M.R. CARTER (A. GORLEY, M.W. HARDY, M.L. HOLMAN)	Cole Swindell WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WMN	77	4
58	68	79	<b>STREETS</b> BLAQ TUXEDO (A.Z. DLAMINI, D. LOGAN, D. LOGAN, L. ASRAT, D. SPRECHER, T.O. FEEMSTER, C. JEFFRIES, D. SHEKI)	Doja Cat KEMOSABE/ RCA	16	20
-	14	80	<b>100 MIL'</b> T-MINUS, J.L. COLE (J. COLE, B. EVANS, M. HUGEE, G. HENDRICKS, A. HAMAD)	J. Cole & Bas DREAMVILLE/ ROC NATION/INTERSCOPE	14	2



## 2 OLIVIA RODRIGO "good 4 u"

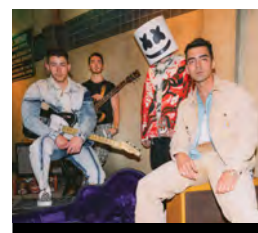
Rodrigo becomes the first artist to chart three songs simultaneously in the Hot 100's top 10 from a debut album thanks to a trio of tracks from *Sour*, which soars in atop the Billboard 200 (see page 10). "Good 4 u" ranks at No. 2 on the Hot 100 a week after debuting as her second No. 1, following "drivers license"; "deja vu" jumps to No. 3; and "traitor" debuts at No. 9. Meanwhile, album opener "brutal," which starts at No. 12 on the Hot 100, arrives as Rodrigo's first No. 1 on the Hot Rock & Alternative Songs chart. —G.T.

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE CERTIFICATION PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	Artist IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
57	76	81	<b>SOLID</b> DZ, WHEEZY, FOREIGN TECK, ELYAS (J.L. WILLIAMS, S.G. KITCHENS, A. GRAHAM, O.YILDRIM, W.T. GLASS, M. HERNANDEZ, ESTICKEN)	Young Thug & Gunna Feat. Drake YOUNG STONER LIFE/300	12	6
63	72	82	<b>TOMBSTONE</b> EIGHTY8, SAUCII, JAI BEATS (R. GREEN, E. FOLEY JR., J. HOWARD, J. HULLUM)	Rod Wave ALAMO	11	10
-	19	83	<b>LET GO, MY HAND</b> DJ DAHI, FRANK DUKES (J. COLE, A. HAMAD, D. NATCHE)	J. Cole, Bas & 6LACK DREAMVILLE/ROC NATION/ INTERSCOPE	19	2
47	65	84	<b>GOOSEBUMPS</b> HVME (B. KORSAN, D. JACKSON, TRAVIS SCOTT, K.L. DUCKWORTH, K. GOMRINGER, R.L. ATOUR, T. GOMRINGER)	Travis Scott & HVME LITHUANIA HQ/BI/ CACTUS JACK/EPIC	47	19
NEW	85	85	<b>LEAVE BEFORE YOU LOVE ME</b> MARSHMELLO, ALESSO, HEAVYWEIGHT, N. GALE (MARSHMELLO, J. PLESTEN, GALE, BOARDMAN, PBDOWN, M. WALSH, A.R. R. LINDBLAD, E. ROMANO, C. ARNOLD, G. MARROW, D. MARTIN)	Marshmello X Jonas Brothers JOYTIME COLLECTIVE/ REPUBLIC	85	1
67	74	86	<b>HOLD ON</b> ANDREW WATT, L. BELL (J.D. BIEBER, A. WOTMAN, A. TAMPOSI, J.D. BELLION, L.B. BELL, L. BONFA, W. DE BACKER)	Justin Bieber RAYMOND BRAUN/DEF JAM	20	12
RE-ENTRY	87	87	<b>ALL I KNOW SO FAR</b> G. KURSTIN, B. PASEK, J. PAUL, P!NK (P!NK, B. PASEK, J. PAUL)	P!nk RCA	74	2
78	80	88	<b>ARCADE</b> W. HARDY, O. HOLLEMAN (D.L. LAURENCE, W. HARDY, J. SJOO, W. KNOX)	Duncan Laurence SPARK RECORDS/ CAPITOL	78	7
68	75	89	<b>FOLLOW YOU</b> J. LITTLE (D. REYNOLDS, D.W. SERMON, B. MCKEE, D. PLATZMAN, J. LITTLE, E. DUHE, F. HALL)	Imagine Dragons KIDINAKORNER/ INTERSCOPE	68	8
90	87	90	<b>CHASING AFTER YOU</b> A. ESHUIS, T. REIMER (B. ADDINGTON, J. FLOWERS)	Ryan Hurd With Maren Morris ARISTA NASHVILLE	87	5
76	81	91	<b>PICK UP YOUR FEELINGS</b> DZL (J. SULLIVAN, M. HOLMES, B.C. CONEY, D. ANDREWS, K.C. COLEMAN, A.M. BUTTS)	Jazmine Sullivan RCA	75	18
NEW	92	92	<b>24 HOURS</b> BAND ON THE BEAT, CHUCK TAYLOR, S. DOT, R. CHAHAYED (A. BOOGIE WIT DA HOODIE, J. ZOU, MBOULIAS, D. COSTE, J. RAHMANSKI, S.F. THOMAS, R. CHAHAYED, D.D. BANKS)	A Boogie Wit da Hoodie Feat. Lil Durk HIGHBRIDGE THE LABEL/ATLANTIC	92	1
84	83	93	<b>HELLO</b> RICO BEATS, CASHMONEYAP (B.B. JACKSON, A. PETIT, R. LAMARRE, J. AVALOS, J. DUBOSE)	Pop Smoke Feat. A Boogie Wit da Hoodie VICTOR VICTOR WORLDWIDE/REPUBLIC	83	10
85	85	94	<b>WAY LESS SAD</b> R. METZGER (R. METZGER, J. METZGER, A. METZGER, P. SIMON)	AJR AJR/BMG/ S-CURVE	85	5
86	86	95	<b>DRANKIN N SMOKIN</b> BY KRAZY HAGAN (N.D. WILBURN, S. WOODS, D.L.J. AVERY, H. LANGE)	Future & Lil Uzi Vert FREEANDZ/GENERATION NOW/EPIC/ATLANTIC	31	17
95	99	96	<b>COUNTRY AGAIN</b> D. HUFF, J. FRASURE (THOMAS RHETT, Z. CROWELL, A. GORLEY)	Thomas Rhett VALORY	73	4
-	20	97	<b>PUNCHIN' THE CLOCK</b> TAE BEAST, MARIO LUCIANO (J. COLE, D.L. PERKINS, M. DRAGO)	J. Cole DREAMVILLE/ ROC NATION/INTERSCOPE	20	2
-	97	98	<b>WASTED ON YOU</b> J. MOI, J. DURRETT (M. WALLEN, E.K. SMITH, J. THOMPSON, CHARLIE HANDSOME)	Morgan Wallen REPUBLIC/ BIG LOUD	9	18
-	25	99	<b>THE CLIMB BACK</b> J.L. COLE (J. COLE, G. BAILEY, M. BAILEY, M. AXELROD, J. BEAVERS)	J. Cole DREAMVILLE/ ROC NATION/INTERSCOPE	25	4
-	94	100	<b>THINGS A MAN OUGHTA KNOW</b> J. JOYCE (L. WILSON, J.D. SINGLETON, J. NIX)	Lainey Wilson BROKEN BOW	94	2



## 25 LIL TJAY FEAT. 6LACK "Calling My Phone"

After ruling Rap Airplay and Rhythmic Airplay three weeks earlier, the track returns for a second week atop the former chart and reaches No. 1 on Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay.



## 85 MARSHMELLO X JONAS BROTHERS "Leave Before You Love Me"

The single starts at No. 8 on Digital Song Sales (7,600 sold), marking Marshmello's seventh top 10 and the Jonas Brothers' 15th. It also drew 9.4 million in radio audience and 4.2 million streams.

RODRIGO: DAVID NEEDLEMAN; TJAY: GARY FRYE; 6LACK: MARK SHILO; LIL TJAY: JONAS BROTHERS: MRC; MARSHMELLO: CENTINA PARONIBUS; LIL TJAY FEAT. 6LACK: MRC; MARSHMELLO X JONAS BROTHERS: MRC



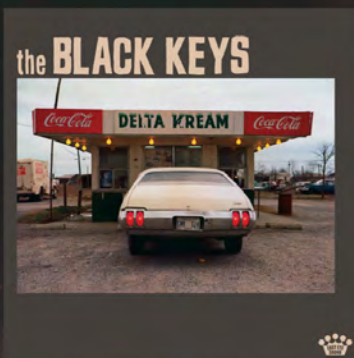
2 ARTISTS  
2 GENRES

1 COMPANY  
1 CHART POSITION

Congratulations to  
The Black Keys and Eric Church  
for Simultaneous #1  
Radio Singles

“Crawling Kingsnake”  
#1 AAA

“Hell of a View”  
#1 Country





LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	CERTIFICATION	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
HOT SHOT DEBUT	1	<b>#1</b> <b>OLIVIA RODRIGO</b> Geffen/IGA		Sour	1	1
1	2	<b>J. COLE</b> DREAMVILLE/ROC NATION/INTERSCOPE/IGA		The Off-Season	1	2
NEW	3	<b>TWENTY ONE PILOTS</b> Fueled by Ramen/EMG		Scaled and Icy	3	1
4	4	<b>MORGAN WALLEN</b> Big Loud/Republic	Dangerous: The Double Album	1	20	
3	5	<b>MONEYBAGG YO</b> CMG/N-Less/Interscope/IGA		A Gangsta's Pain	1	5
32	6	<b>GREATEST GAINER</b> <b>POOH SHIESTY</b> 1017 Global/Atlantic/AG		Shiesty Season	3	16
5	7	<b>DUA LIPA</b> Warner		Future Nostalgia	3	60
NEW	8	<b>42 DUGG</b> 4PF/CMG		Free Dem Boyz	8	1
7	9	<b>JUSTIN BIEBER</b> Raymond Braun/Def Jam		Justice	1	10
10	10	<b>POP SMOKE</b> Victor Victor Worldwide/Republic	Shoot For The Stars Aim For The Moon	1	47	
11	11	<b>LUKE COMBS</b> River House/Columbia Nashville/SMN		What You See Is What You Get	1	81
12	12	<b>THE WEEKND</b> XO/Republic		After Hours	1	58
NEW	13	<b>PINK</b> RCA	All I Know So Far: Setlist	13	1	
8	14	<b>DJ KHALED</b> We the Best/Epic		Khaled Khaled	1	4
13	15	<b>ROD WAVE</b> Alamo/Geffen/IGA		SoulFly	1	9
2	16	<b>NICKI MINAJ</b> Young Money/Cash Money/Republic		Beam Me Up Scotty	2	2
15	17	<b>LIL BABY</b> Quality Control/Motown/Capitol		My Turn	1	65
NEW	18	<b>BLAKE SHELTON</b> Warner Music Nashville/WMN		Body Language	18	1
14	19	<b>YOUNG THUG &amp; VARIOUS ARTISTS</b> Young Stoner Life/300/AG	Young Stoner Life: Slime Language 2	1	6	
17	20	<b>JUICE WRLD</b> Grade A/Interscope/IGA		Legends Never Die	1	46
19	21	<b>POST MALONE</b> Republic		Hollywood's Bleeding	1	90
21	22	<b>QUEEN</b> Hollywood		Greatest Hits	8	440
NEW	23	<b>LORD HURON</b> Whispering Pines/Republic		Long Lost	23	1
20	24	<b>THE KID LAROI</b> Columbia		F*ck Love	3	44
26	25	<b>HARRY STYLES</b> Erskine/Columbia		Fine Line	1	76
24	26	<b>POLO G</b> Columbia		The GOAT	2	54
22	27	<b>LIL TJAY</b> Columbia		Destined 2 Win	5	8
27	28	<b>MACHINE GUN KELLY</b> E519X/Bad Boy/Interscope/IGA		Tickets To My Downfall	1	35
23	29	<b>ARIANA GRANDE</b> Republic		Positions	1	30
29	30	<b>JUICE WRLD</b> Grade A/Interscope/IGA		Goodbye & Good Riddance	4	158
31	31	<b>LUKE COMBS</b> River House/Columbia Nashville/SMN		This One's For You	4	208
33	32	<b>MEGAN THEE STALLION</b> 1501 Certified/300/AG		Good News	2	27
30	33	<b>LIL DURK</b> Alamo/Geffen/IGA		The Voice	2	23
28	34	<b>GIVEON</b> Not So Fast/Epic	When It's All Said and Done... Take Time	5	11	
36	35	<b>BAD BUNNY</b> Rimas	El Ultimo Tour del Mundo	1	26	
34	36	<b>FLEETWOOD MAC</b> Warner/Rhino		Rumours	1	426
37	37	<b>BILLIE EILISH</b> Darkroom/Interscope/IGA	When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?	1	113	
40	38	<b>BAD BUNNY</b> Rimas	YHLQMDLG	2	65	
42	39	<b>MORGAN WALLEN</b> Big Loud		If I Know Me	10	139
38	40	<b>ORIGINAL BROADWAY CAST</b> Hamilton Uptown/Atlantic/AG	Hamilton: An American Musical	2	296	
73	41	<b>EMINEM</b> Shady/Aftermath/Interscope/IGA		Music To Be Murdered By	1	70
NEW	42	<b>WATERPARKS</b> 300/AG		Greatest Hits	42	1
41	43	<b>DOJA CAT</b> Kemosabe/RCA		Hot Pink	9	82
45	44	<b>CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL</b> Fantasy/Concord	Chronicle The 20 Greatest Hits	18	525	
35	45	<b>TAYLOR SWIFT</b> Republic		Fearless (Taylor's Version)	1	7
44	46	<b>EMINEM</b> Shady/Aftermath/Interscope/IGA		Curtain Call: The Hits	1	530
RE	47	<b>NIPSEY HUSSLE</b> All Money In No Money Out/Atlantic/AG		Victory Lap	2	99
39	48	<b>J. COLE</b> Dreamville/Roc Nation/Columbia/Legacy		2014 Forest Hills Drive	1	338
46	49	<b>ELTON JOHN</b> Rocket/Island/UMe		Diamonds	7	185
43	50	<b>TAYLOR SWIFT</b> Republic		Folklore	1	44

49	51	<b>DRAKE</b> Young Money/Cash Money/Republic		Scorpion	1	152
48	52	<b>TRAVIS SCOTT</b> Cactus Jack/Grand Hustle/Epic		ASTROWORLD	1	147
50	53	<b>POST MALONE</b> Republic		beerbongs & bentleys	1	161
9	54	<b>ALAN JACKSON</b> ACR/EMI Nashville/UMGN		Where Have You Gone	9	2
47	55	<b>KENDRICK LAMAR</b> Top Dawg/Aftermath/Interscope/IGA		good kid, m.A.A.d city	2	448
51	56	<b>JUICE WRLD</b> Grade A/Interscope/IGA		Death Race For Love	1	116
53	57	<b>BOB MARLEY AND THE WAILERS</b> Tuff Gong/Island/UMe	Legend: The Best Of...	5	680	
55	58	<b>THE WEEKND</b> XO/Republic		The Highlights	2	16
58	59	<b>TAYLOR SWIFT</b> Republic		Lover	1	92
56	60	<b>CHRIS STAPLETON</b> Mercury Nashville/UMGN		Traveller	1	298
59	61	<b>LIL UZI VERT</b> Generation Now/Atlantic/AG		Eternal Atake	1	64
54	62	<b>CHRIS STAPLETON</b> Mercury Nashville/UMGN		Starting Over	3	28
63	63	<b>POST MALONE</b> Republic		Stoney	4	233
60	64	<b>JACK HARLOW</b> Generation Now/Atlantic/AG		That's What They All Say	5	24
57	65	<b>JOURNEY</b> Columbia/Legacy		Journey's Greatest Hits	10	670
62	66	<b>ROD WAVE</b> Alamo/IGA		Pray 4 Love	2	60
64	67	<b>AC/DC</b> Columbia/Legacy		Back In Black	4	465
76	68	<b>GLASS ANIMALS</b> Wolf Tone/Polydor/Republic		Dreamland	7	29
66	69	<b>DABABY</b> SouthCoast/Interscope/IGA		BLAME IT ON BABY	1	58
161	70	<b>PACE SETTER</b> BTS BIGHIT Entertainment		BE	1	27
85	71	<b>MICHAEL JACKSON</b> Epic/Legacy		Thriller	1	472
67	72	<b>SAM HUNT</b> MCA Nashville/UMGN		SOUTHSIDE	5	56
65	73	<b>GUNS N' ROSES</b> Geffen/UMe		Greatest Hits	3	531
61	74	<b>TAYLOR SWIFT</b> Republic		Evermore	1	24
74	75	<b>SUMMER WALKER</b> LVRN/Interscope/IGA		Over It	2	86
123	76	<b>BTS</b> BIGHIT Entertainment		MAP OF THE SOUL : 7	1	66
70	77	<b>LEWIS CAPALDI</b> Vertigo/Capitol		Divinely Uninspired To A Hellish Extent	20	106
68	78	<b>BRUNO MARS</b> Elektra/EMG		Doo-Wops & Hooligans	3	521
79	79	<b>YOUNGBOY NEVER BROKE AGAIN</b> Never Broke Again/Artist Partner Group/Atlantic/AG		Top	1	37
72	80	<b>2PAC</b> Amaru/Death Row/Interscope/UMe		Greatest Hits	3	372
69	81	<b>SZA</b> Top Dawg/RCA		Ctrl	3	207
83	82	<b>RODDY RICCH</b> Bird Vision/Atlantic/AG		Please Excuse Me For Being Antisocial	1	77
52	83	<b>SELENA</b> Capitol Latin/UMe		Ones	42	18
75	84	<b>ED SHEERAN</b> Atlantic/AG		+ (Divide)	1	221
81	85	<b>TOM PETTY AND THE HEARTBREAKERS</b> MCA/Geffen/UMe		Greatest Hits	2	411
NEW	86	<b>JORDAN DAVIS</b> MCA Nashville/UMGN		Buy Dirt (EP)	86	1
80	87	<b>FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE</b> BMLG		Life Rolls On	21	15
NEW	88	<b>YG &amp; MOZZY</b> Mozzy/4Hunnid/Empire		Kommunity Service	88	1
77	89	<b>BILLIE EILISH</b> Darkroom/Interscope/IGA		Dont Smile At Me	14	179
71	90	<b>GABBY BARRETT</b> Warner Music Nashville/WMN		Goldmine	27	49
86	91	<b>DRAKE</b> Young Money/Cash Money/Republic		Take Care	1	430
87	92	<b>FUTURE &amp; LIL UZI VERT</b> Freebandz/Epic/Generation Now/Atlantic/AG		Pluto x Baby Pluto	2	28
90	93	<b>THE WEEKND</b> XO/Republic		Starboy	1	224
91	94	<b>LIL UZI VERT</b> Generation Now/Atlantic/AG		Luv Is Rage 2	1	196
84	95	<b>KENDRICK LAMAR</b> Top Dawg/Aftermath/Interscope/IGA		DAMN.	1	215
89	96	<b>ZAC BROWN BAND</b> Homegrown/BMG		Greatest Hits So Far...	20	306
82	97	<b>LUKE BRYAN</b> Capitol Nashville/UMGN		Born Here Live Here Die Here	5	31
97	98	<b>GEORGE STRAIT</b> MCA Nashville/UMGN		50 Number Ones	1	179
96	99	<b>THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G.</b> Bad Boy/Rhino		Greatest Hits	1	276
103	100	<b>DRAKE</b> Young Money/Cash Money/Republic		Views	1	263



## Sour's Sweet Start

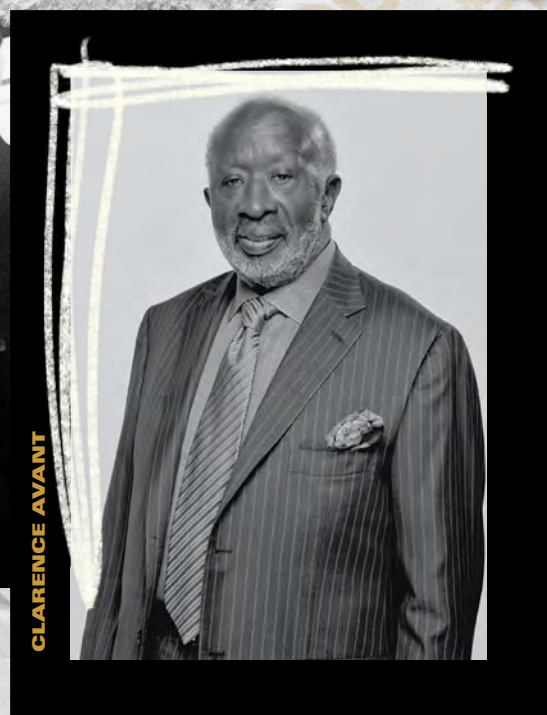
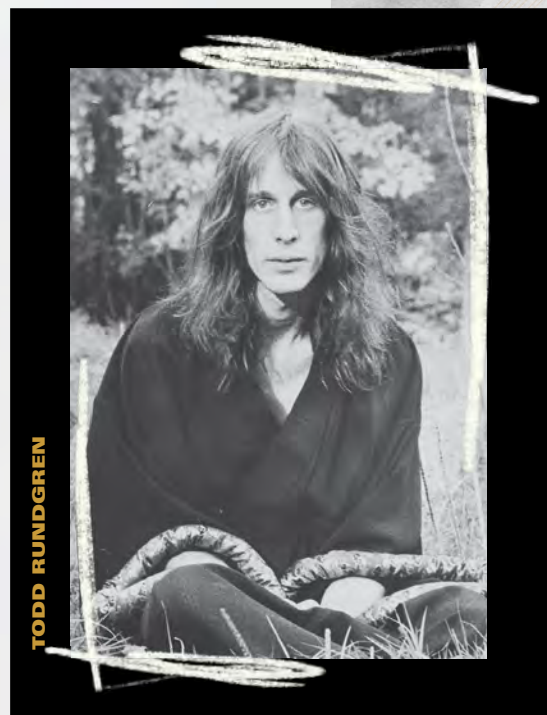
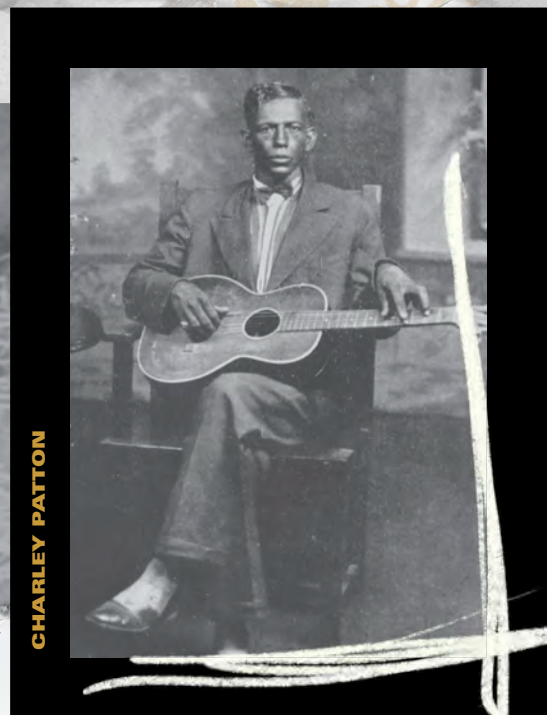
Olivia Rodrigo's debut album, *Sour*, captures the biggest week of 2021. It arrives at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 with 295,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending May 27, according to MRC Data. It surpasses the year's previous high, when Taylor Swift's *Fearless (Taylor's Version)* debuted at No. 1 with 291,000 units on the April 24 chart.

*Sour* nabs the largest week for an act's debut charting album since the Billboard 200 switched from an album sales-only ranking to a units-based list (with the chart dated Dec. 13, 2014). It beats Cardi B's debut studio set (and first entry), *Invasion of Privacy*, which opened at No. 1 on April 21, 2018, with 255,000 units.

Of *Sour*'s 295,000 units, 218,000 are streaming-equivalent units — equaling 300.73 million on-demand streams of the album's tracks. That's the second-largest streaming week for a non-R&B/hip-hop title and second-biggest for an album by a woman in any genre (trailing Ariana Grande's *thank u, next* in both categories, with 307.07 million, on the chart dated Feb. 23, 2019). —KEITH CAULFIELD

THE BILLBOARD 200 CHART RANKS THE MOST POPULAR ALBUMS OF THE WEEK, AS COMPILED BY MRC DATA, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION (BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, TRACK-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS AND STREAMING-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS). SALES DATA COMPILED BY MRC DATA.





**CONGRATULATIONS CAROLE KING, JAY-Z, TODD RUNDGREN, CHARLEY PATTON, KRAFTWERK, CLARENCE AVANT, AND ALL THE 2021 ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES**



**SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING**



LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST	CERTIFICATION	IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
88	101	<b>BILLY JOEL</b>		COLUMBIA/LEGACY	The Essential Billy Joel	15	238
6	102	<b>THE BLACK KEYS</b>	EASY E SOUND/NONESUCH/WARNER	Delta Kream	6	2	
NEW	103	<b>SPOTEMGOTTEM</b>	REBEL RECORDS/GEFFEN/IGA	Most Wanted	103	1	
100	104	<b>XXXTENTACION</b>	BAD VIBES FOREVER	?	1	167	
98	105	<b>LIL DURK</b>	ALAMO/GEFFEN/IGA	Just Cause Y'all Waited 2	2	55	
94	106	<b>KAROL G</b>	UNIVERSAL MUSIC LATINO/UMLE	KG0516	20	9	
143	107	<b>NF</b>	NF REAL MUSIC	Clouds (The Mixtape)	3	9	
101	108	<b>SOUNDTRACK</b>	WALT DISNEY	Moana	2	233	
152	109	<b>BTS</b>	BIGHIT ENTERTAINMENT	Love Yourself: Answer	1	100	
NEW	110	<b>THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA</b>	SOLID STATE	ZII (EP)	110	1	
RE	111	<b>MICHAEL JACKSON</b>	EPIC/LEGACY	The Essential Michael Jackson	31	355	
104	112	<b>POLO G</b>	COLUMBIA	Die A Legend	6	102	
99	113	<b>KHALID</b>	RIGHT HAND/RCA	American Teen	4	221	
105	114	<b>JHENE AIKO</b>	ZFISH/ARTCLUB/ARTUM/DEF JAM	Chilombo	2	64	
110	115	<b>LYNYRD SKYNYRD</b>	MCA/GEFFEN/UME	All Time Greatest Hits	56	128	
25	116	<b>KODAK BLACK</b>	ATLANTIC/AG	Haitian Boy Kodak	25	2	
106	117	<b>ERIC CHURCH</b>	EMI NASHVILLE/UMGN	Soul	4	5	
92	118	<b>THOMAS RHETT</b>	VALORY/BMLG	Country Again (Side A)	10	4	
102	119	<b>TAYLOR SWIFT</b>	BIG MACHINE/BMLG	1989	1	337	
112	120	<b>NICKELBACK</b>	ROADRUNNER/EMG	The Best Of Nickelback: Volume 1	21	43	
119	121	<b>DRAKE</b>	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	Dark Lane Demo Tapes	2	56	
115	122	<b>GUNNA</b>	YOUNG STONER LIFE/300/AG	Wunna	1	53	
117	123	<b>THE BEACH BOYS</b>	CAPITOL/UME	Sounds Of Summer: The Very Best Of The Beach Boys	16	254	
120	124	<b>CARDI B</b>	THE KSR GROUP/ATLANTIC/AG	Invasion Of Privacy	1	164	
114	125	<b>LEE BRICE</b>	CURB	Hey World	45	27	
126	126	<b>DRAKE</b>	YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC	More Life	1	211	
116	127	<b>24KGOLDN</b>	RECORDS/COLUMBIA	El Dorado	22	9	
124	128	<b>FUTURE</b>	FREEBANDZ/EPIC	High Off Life	1	54	
113	129	<b>NIRVANA</b>	SUB POP/DGC/GEFFEN/UME	Nevermind	1	526	
168	130	<b>TWENTY ONE PILOTS</b>	FUELED BY RAMEN/EMG	Blurryface	1	305	
122	131	<b>KHALID</b>	RIGHT HAND/RCA	Free Spirit	1	112	
118	132	<b>21 SAVAGE &amp; METRO BOOMIN</b>	BOOMINATI/SLAUGHTER BOOMIN/REPUBLIC/EPIC	Savage Mode II	1	34	
128	133	<b>AJR</b>	AJR/BMG	OK Orchestra	10	9	
121	134	<b>ARIANA GRANDE</b>	REPUBLIC	Thank U, Next	1	120	
154	135	<b>IMAGINE DRAGONS</b>	KIDINAKORNER/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Evolve	2	205	
131	136	<b>BON JOVI</b>	ISLAND/UME	Greatest Hits: The Ultimate Collection	5	209	
93	137	<b>YOUNG NUDY</b>	PDE/SAMEPLATE/RCA	DR. EV4L	93	2	
136	138	<b>HALSEY</b>	CAPITOL	Manic	2	71	
138	139	<b>KANYE WEST</b>	ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM	Graduation	1	173	
RE	140	<b>PINK</b>	LAFACE/JIVE/RCA	Greatest Hits... So Far!!!	5	132	
145	141	<b>POP SMOKE</b>	VICTOR VICTOR WORLDWIDE/REPUBLIC	Meet The Woo, V.2	7	68	
132	142	<b>THE BEATLES</b>	APPLE/CAPITOL/UME	Abbey Road	1	412	
141	143	<b>RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS</b>	WARNER	Greatest Hits	18	276	
RE	144	<b>EAGLES</b>	ASYLUM/ELEKTRA/RHINO	Their Greatest Hits 1971-1975	1	361	
RE	145	<b>THE ROLLING STONES</b>	ABKCO	Hot Rocks 1964-1971	4	356	
134	146	<b>MIRANDA LAMBERT</b>	VANNER/RCA NASHVILLE/SMN	Wildcard	4	38	
130	147	<b>LIZZO</b>	NICE LIFE/ATLANTIC/AG	Cuz I Love You	4	110	
142	148	<b>BAD BUNNY</b>	RIMAS	X 100PRE	11	126	
125	149	<b>VARIOUS ARTISTS</b>	ONLY THE FAMILY/EMPIRE	Only The Family Presents: Loyal Bros Compilation	12	12	
159	150	<b>CROSBY, STILLS, NASH &amp; YOUNG</b>	ATLANTIC/RHINO	Deja Vu	1	99	



3

**TWENTY ONE PILOTS**  
*Scaled and Icy*

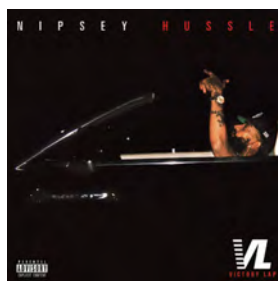
The duo captures 2021's biggest week for a rock or alternative album (75,000 units) and also garners its third leader on both Top Rock Albums and Alternative Albums. It's also the third release from the act to reach the top three on the Billboard 200.



6

**POOH SHIESTY**  
*Shiesty Season*

The title returns to the top 10 (35,000 units, up 97%) after a reissue on May 21 with four additional tracks. The album first arrived Feb. 5 with 17 tracks and reached No. 3 on the March 20 chart.



47

**NIPSEY HUSSLE**  
*Victory Lap*

Of the set's 14,000 equivalent album units earned (the week ending May 27, according to MRC Data), nearly 9,000 are vinyl album sales — the largest sales week for an R&B/hip-hop title in the format in 2021.

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST	CERTIFICATION	IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
147	151	<b>ABBA</b>	POLAR/POLYDOR/UME	Gold: Greatest Hits	25	171	
153	152	<b>PITBULL</b>	MR. 305/POLYDOR/RCA	Greatest Hits	152	17	
140	153	<b>ARCTIC MONKEYS</b>	DOMINO	AM	6	149	
135	154	<b>THE BEATLES</b>	APPLE/CAPITOL/UME	1	1	474	
155	155	<b>LIL TJAY</b>	COLUMBIA	True 2 Myself	5	83	
151	156	<b>TRAVIS SCOTT</b>	GRAND HUSTLE/EPIC	Birds In The Trap Sing McKnight	1	243	
167	157	<b>MO3</b>	HSM/EMPIRE	Shottaz-t4Eva	36	7	
146	158	<b>KING VON</b>	ONLY THE FAMILY/EMPIRE	Welcome To O'Block	5	30	
129	159	<b>FLEETWOOD MAC</b>	WARNER/RHINO	Greatest Hits	14	190	
157	160	<b>CHRIS BROWN</b>	CBE/RCA	Indigo	1	98	
156	161	<b>RIHANNA</b>	WESTBURY ROAD/ROCNATION	ANTI	1	270	
162	162	<b>KID CUDI</b>	DREAM ON/G.O.O.D./REPUBLIC	Man On The Moon: The End Of Day	4	176	
164	163	<b>MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE</b>	REPRISE/WARNER	Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge	28	85	
148	164	<b>BOB SEGER &amp; THE SILVER BULLET BAND</b>	HIDEOUT/CAPITOL/UME	Greatest Hits	8	377	
180	165	<b>FUTURE</b>	A-1/FREEBANDZ/EPIC	DS2	1	149	
177	166	<b>LANA DEL REY</b>	POLYDOR/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Born To Die	2	395	
165	167	<b>DABABY</b>	SOUTHCOST/INTERSCOPE/IGA	KIRK	1	86	
109	168	<b>DEMI LOVATO</b>	ISLAND/REPUBLIC	Dancing With The Devil...The Art Of Starting Over	2	8	
182	169	<b>LIL BABY</b>	QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/CAPITOL	Harder Than Ever	3	131	
150	170	<b>MILEY CYRUS</b>	RCA	Plastic Hearts	2	26	
149	171	<b>DARYL HALL JOHN OATES</b>	RCA/LEGACY	The Very Best Of Daryl Hall John Oates	34	130	
RE	172	<b>LINKIN PARK</b>	WARNER	[Hybrid Theory]	2	257	
RE	173	<b>SUBLIME</b>	GASOLINE ALLEY/MCA/GEFFEN/UME	Sublime	13	173	
166	174	<b>TYLER, THE CREATOR</b>	COLUMBIA	IGOR	1	88	
137	175	<b>AVA MAX</b>	MAX CUT/ARTIST PARTNER GROUP/ATLANTIC/AG	Heaven & Hell	27	32	
186	176	<b>TOBY KEITH</b>	SHOW DOG-UNIVERSAL/UME	35 Biggest Hits	2	91	
171	177	<b>MONEYBAGG YO</b>	N-LESS/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Time Served	3	72	
RE	178	<b>PRINCE AND THE REVOLUTION</b>	NPG/WARNER/RHINO	Purple Rain (Soundtrack)	1	144	
163	179	<b>METALLICA</b>	BLACKENED	Metallica	1	609	
169	180	<b>TIM MCGRAW</b>	CURB	Number One Hits	27	181	
144	181	<b>KALI UCHIS</b>	EMI/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Sin Miedo (Del Amor y Otros Demonios)	52	14	
139	182	<b>VARIOUS ARTISTS</b>	DREAMVILLE/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Dreamville & J. Cole: Revenge Of The Dreamers III	1	95	
174	183	<b>SOUNDTRACK</b>	WALT DISNEY	Frozen II	1	80	
192	184	<b>DRAKE</b>	YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC	Nothing Was The Same	1	376	
189	185	<b>BLAKE SHELTON</b>	WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WMN	Reloaded: 20 #1 Hits	5	205	
175	186	<b>SOUNDTRACK</b>	FOX/20TH CENTURY FOX/ATLANTIC/AG	The Greatest Showman	1	181	
176	187	<b>MAC MILLER</b>	WARNER	Swimming	3	142	
188	188	<b>YOUNGBOY NEVER BROKE AGAIN</b>	NEVER BROKE AGAIN/ATLANTIC/AG	AI YoungBoy 2	1	83	
RE	189	<b>LADY GAGA</b>	STREAMLINE/KONLIVE/CHERRY TREE/INTERSCOPE/IGA	The Fame	2	245	
18	190	<b>ENHYPEN</b>	BELIFT LAB/STONE MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT/GENIE	Border : Carnival (EP)	18	2	
133	191	<b>ELEVATION WORSHIP &amp; MAVERICK CITY MUSIC</b>	ELEVATION WORSHIP/PLG	Old Church Basement	30	4	
200	192	<b>JASON ALDEAN</b>	MACON/BROKEN BOW/BMG/BBMG		9	54	
95	193	<b>TEE GRIZZLEY</b>	300/AG	Built For Whatever	15	3	
183	194	<b>BROOKS &amp; DUNN</b>	ARISTA NASHVILLE/LEGACY	The Greatest Hits Collection	4	97	
173	195	<b>KANYE WEST</b>	ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM	My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy	1	135	
187	196	<b>NF</b>	NF REAL MUSIC/CAROLINE	The Search	1	95	
185	197	<b>FRANK OCEAN</b>	BOYS DON'T CRY	Blonde	1	231	
197	198	<b>YOUNG THUG</b>	YOUNG STONER LIFE/300/ATLANTIC/AG	So Much Fun	1	91	
196	199	<b>A BOOGIE WIT DA HOODIE</b>	HIGHBRIDGE THE LABEL/ATLANTIC/AG	Hoodie SZN	1	120	
RE	200	<b>MAC MILLER</b>	ROSTRUM	K.I.D.S. (Kickin Incredibly Dope Shit)	62	3	





## Nino Bravo forever in our hearts

### “Nino Bravo Una Orquesta Y Una Voz” was successfully presented in Spain Eleazar Mora “The Latin Tenor” promotes the orchestra format

All the way from Venezuela, Eleazar Mora stood out singing with the group “Tradiciones” representing the folklore of his country, and since then his love for musical instruments, as well as big orchestras has not stopped growing, and it is present in his record productions: “Nino Bravo An Orchestra And A Voice”, “Simon An Orchestra And A Voice”, “Javier Solís An Orchestra And A Voice”, “Venezuela Speaks Singing”, “Bella Italia” and “Remembering Latin America”.



**This year the tenor Eleazar premiered “Nino Bravo Una Orquesta Y Una Voz” in tribute to the Spanish singer. What connection did he have with Bravo?**

The day I met him in Venezuela is unforgettable! Nino was doing his tour in Latin America and I was only a teenager. I was attending a television show program with my classmates when I saw him performing live, and I was shocked. After the show, which I won by performing song and dance routines, I found Nino and he congratulated me and said: “You have a great voice”.

**The Miami-based artist from Caracas combines his musical work with his career, he is also an engineer and businessman. How did he prepare to record this album where more than 30 musicians have participated?**

It has been a work of two and a half years in collaboration with great talents recognized by the Latin Recording Academy: Pedro Mauricio Gonzalez, (in charge of arrangements and general direction), The recording engineer Tomas Cardona, (in charge of recording the orchestra), engineers Keith Morrison and Juan Cristobal Losada (in charge of voice recording and mixing), engineer Michael Fuller, (in charge of mastering) and vocal coach Manny Perez, We chose great Latin Grammy® winning musicians Agustin Espina, Francisco Grillo, Alberto Estrada, Frank Haslam, Jack Levy, Juan Briceno, Evelina Ishakbaeba, Joice Honores, Jorge Rivera, Rodolfo Reyes, Michelle de Los Rios, Claudia Villasmil, Maria Villasmil, Carlos Montero, Martha Zambrano, Willmeny Lugo, and Gaston Garcia among others in order to give strength to the melody. We spent several months in the studio practicing without a day off, but we were very happy and honored with the results.



**How has the reception of this musical work been in Spain?**

My intention was to take the album to Spain because I believe it is a tribute to Nino, and the acceptance has been very good. The songs have been played on several national radio station, and we are in the Top 10 of Radio Nervión and Radio Rumbera. The press has treated me with a lot of respect and admiration. They asked me a lot about my way of interpreting Nino Bravo and they always said: “Que pedazo de voz!”. Which translates to “What a voice!”.

Recently Eleazar, who is studying a Master’s in Music Business at the prestigious Berklee College of Music, in Boston, release a music video recorded at the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Doral Fl, for the song “Ave Maria”. This song is a prayer for the eradication of Covid-19.

**Finally, Eleazar also has several prizes and recognitions. Among them are the Mara de Diamante 2020 recognition as Singer-songwriter with the Greatest International Projection in Venezuela, the Platinum Record at the 42nd Latin American Song Festival in California, Platinum Award at the Hispanic Video Festival, Platinum Festivegas, Four Silver medals at the Global Music Awards, four awards at the LIT Talent Awards and a nomination at the 18th Independent Music Awards.**

*Eleazar Mora*

THE LATIN TENOR

ELEAZARMORAOFICIAL.COM





# BILLBOARD GLOBAL 200

billboard

JUN. 5 2021

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
HOT SHOT DEBUT		1	<b>#1 1WK BUTTER</b>	BTS	1	1
						
			The song debuts with 289.2 million streams and 249,000 sold worldwide, both new weekly highs since the chart launched in September. It is also BTS' record-extending fourth Global 200 No. 1.			
-	1	2	<b>GG GOOD 4 U</b>	Olivia Rodrigo	1	2
15	13	3	<b>DEJA VU</b>	Olivia Rodrigo	3	8
3	2	4	<b>LEVITATING</b>	Dua Lipa Feat. DaBaby	2	34
5	3	5	<b>KISS ME MORE</b>	Doja Cat Feat. SZA	3	7
1	5	6	<b>MONTERO (CALL ME BY YOUR NAME)</b>	Lil Nas X	1	9
NEW		7	<b>TRAITOR</b>	Olivia Rodrigo	7	1
4	7	8	<b>SAVE YOUR TEARS</b>	The Weeknd	1	21
17	22	9	<b>DRIVERS LICENSE</b>	Olivia Rodrigo	1	20
2	6	10	<b>PEACHES</b>	Justin Bieber Feat. Daniel Caesar & Giveon	1	10
NEW		11	<b>BRUTAL</b>	Olivia Rodrigo	11	1
6	10	12	<b>ASTRONAUT IN THE OCEAN</b>	Masked Wolf	3	18
NEW		13	<b>ENOUGH FOR YOU</b>	Olivia Rodrigo	13	1
NEW		14	<b>HAPPIER</b>	Olivia Rodrigo	14	1
7	12	15	<b>LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN</b>	Silk Sonic (Bruno Mars & Anderson .Paak)	2	12
NEW		16	<b>FAVORITE CRIME</b>	Olivia Rodrigo	16	1
NEW		17	<b>1 STEP FORWARD, 3 STEPS BACK</b>	Olivia Rodrigo	17	1
21	33	18	<b>DYNAMITE</b>	BTS	1	38
NEW		19	<b>JEALOUSY, JEALOUSY</b>	Olivia Rodrigo	19	1
9	19	20	<b>RAPSTAR</b>	Polo G	3	7
14	23	21	<b>BLINDING LIGHTS</b>	The Weeknd	2	38
NEW		22	<b>HOPE UR OK</b>	Olivia Rodrigo	22	1
-	24	23	<b>BUILD A BITCH</b>	Bella Poarch	23	2
-	4	24	<b>MY LIFE</b>	J. Cole, 21 Savage & Morray	4	2
11	21	25	<b>BODY</b>	Tion Wayne X Russ Millions	11	5
NEW		26	<b>ZITTI E BUONI</b>	Maneskin	26	1
12	25	27	<b>WITHOUT YOU</b>	The Kid LAROI	10	27
16	27	28	<b>PAREJA DEL ANO</b>	Sebastian Yatra X Myke Towers	16	6
-	9	29	<b>PRIDE.IS.THE.DEVIL</b>	J. Cole & Lil Baby	9	2
20	30	30	<b>FIEL</b>	Los Legendarios, Wisin & Jhay Cortez	15	11
NEW		31	<b>TODO DE TI</b>	Rauw Alejandro	31	1
23	35	32	<b>FRIDAY</b>	Riton X Nightcrawlers Feat. Mufasa & Hypeman	18	14
18	28	33	<b>THE BUSINESS</b>	Tiesto	12	29
19	31	34	<b>HEARTBREAK ANNIVERSARY</b>	Giveon	10	15
-	8	35	<b>AMARI</b>	J. Cole	8	2
26	36	36	<b>AM</b>	Nio Garcia X Flow La Movie	24	7
10	32	37	<b>YOUR POWER</b>	Billie Eilish	6	4
25	37	38	<b>DAKITI</b>	Bad Bunny & Jhay Cortez	1	30
22	38	39	<b>BOTELLA TRAS BOTELLA</b>	Gera MX + Christian Nodal	9	5
31	41	40	<b>BEAUTIFUL MISTAKES</b>	Maroon 5 Feat. Megan Thee Stallion	26	12
27	40	41	<b>GOOSEBUMPS</b>	Travis Scott & HVME	15	22
29	43	42	<b>MOOD</b>	24kGoldn Feat. iann dior	2	38
34	44	43	<b>HEAT WAVES</b>	Glass Animals	31	21
NEW		44	<b>GANG GANG</b>	Polo G & Lil Wayne	44	1

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
28	39	45	<b>UP</b>	Cardi B	4	16
40	46	46	<b>EL MAKINON</b>	Karol G & Mariah Angeliq	39	9
NEW		47	<b>SUN GOES DOWN</b>	Lil Nas X	47	1
39	49	48	<b>DANCE MONKEY</b>	Tones And I	16	38
42	51	49	<b>WATERMELON SUGAR</b>	Harry Styles	9	38
48	62	50	<b>ARCADE</b>	Duncan Laurence	36	17
32	47	51	<b>TELEPATIA</b>	Kali Uchis	10	14
33	48	52	<b>WELLERMAN</b>	Nathan Evans	16	18
45	58	53	<b>WANTS AND NEEDS</b>	Drake Feat. Lil Baby	2	12
49	70	54	<b>COVER ME IN SUNSHINE</b>	Plnk + Willow Sage Hart	49	12
30	45	55	<b>RUNAWAY</b>	AURORA	22	8
-	18	56	<b>SEEING GREEN</b>	Nicki Minaj, Drake & Lil Wayne	18	2
36	54	57	<b>CALLING MY PHONE</b>	Lil Tjay Feat. 6LACK	2	15
71	61	58	<b>WOCKESHA</b>	Moneybagg Yo	58	5
37	52	59	<b>STREETS</b>	Doja Cat	8	20
41	55	60	<b>DON'T START NOW</b>	Dua Lipa	30	38
194	107	61	<b>2/CATORCE</b>	Rauw Alejandro X Mr. Naisgai	61	3
46	59	62	<b>SOMEONE YOU LOVED</b>	Lewis Capaldi	24	38
35	53	63	<b>HOLD ON</b>	Justin Bieber	4	12
44	57	64	<b>BEST FRIEND</b>	Saweetie Feat. Doja Cat	31	20
-	97	65	<b>NEXT LEVEL</b>	aespa	65	2
53	67	66	<b>PERFECT</b>	Ed Sheeran	30	38
50	64	67	<b>YOUR LOVE (9PM)</b>	ATB x Topic x A7S	37	16
47	63	68	<b>BANDIDO</b>	Myke Towers & Juhn	11	22
87	68	69	<b>FOREVER AFTER ALL</b>	Luke Combs	4	23
-	11	70	<b>95.SOUTH</b>	J. Cole	11	2
43	56	71	<b>WE'RE GOOD</b>	Dua Lipa	21	15
13	50	72	<b>MISS THE RAGE</b>	Trippie Redd & Playboi Carti	13	3
51	69	73	<b>BEAT BOX</b>	SpotemGottem Feat. Pooh Shiesty Or DaBaby	38	17
38	60	74	<b>EVERY CHANCE I GET</b>	DJ Khaled Feat. Lil Baby & Lil Durk	27	4
55	72	75	<b>ROSES</b>	SAINT JHN	14	38
52	66	76	<b>BED</b>	Joel Corry X RAYE X David Guetta	48	12
8	15	77	<b>INTERLUDE</b>	J. Cole	8	3
-	191	78	<b>RAM PAM PAM</b>	Natti Natasha & Becky G	78	2
24	65	79	<b>HIGHER POWER</b>	Coldplay	24	3
54	73	80	<b>LA NOCHE DE ANOCHE</b>	Bad Bunny & Rosalia	7	26
76	89	81	<b>SAVAGE LOVE (LAXED - SIREN BEAT)</b>	Jawsh 685 x Jason Derulo	1	38
NEW		82	<b>TWERKULATOR</b>	City Girls	82	1
NEW		83	<b>HEARTBREAK ANTHEM</b>	Galantis, David Guetta & Little Mix	83	1
68	79	84	<b>SUNFLOWER</b>	Post Malone & Swae Lee	47	38
69	78	85	<b>SHAPE OF YOU</b>	Ed Sheeran	68	38
-	96	86	<b>POBLADO</b>	Crissin X Totoy El Frio X Natan & Shander	86	2
59	76	87	<b>34+35</b>	Ariana Grande	2	30
60	77	88	<b>HEAD &amp; HEART</b>	Joel Corry X MNEK	17	38
57	75	89	<b>TALKING TO THE MOON</b>	Bruno Mars	57	9
84	94	90	<b>BELIEVER</b>	Imagine Dragons	70	38
67	83	91	<b>ROCKSTAR</b>	DaBaby Feat. Roddy Ricch	8	38
95	93	92	<b>RASPUTIN</b>	Majestic X Boney M.	92	5
NEW		93	<b>OUR SONG</b>	Anne-Marie & Niall Horan	93	1
RE-ENTRY		94	<b>LIFE GOES ON</b>	BTS	1	21
153	139	95	<b>TRACK STAR</b>	Mooski	95	12
-	14	96	<b>APPLYING.PRESSURE</b>	J. Cole	14	2

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**DONATE NOW**



**Treatment centres**



**Cash relief**



**Meals & Ration**

This year, Warner Music Group is donating ad space in Billboard to elevate voices of activists, organizations, and charities that are creating real change. Our 2021 Indie Label Power Player honorees — Cat Kreidich and John Franck — selected GiveIndia for their dedication to creating equal opportunities for all in India and providing critical COVID relief efforts.



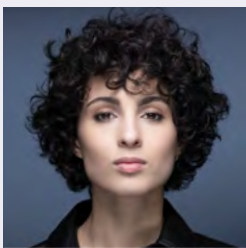




26

MANESKIN  
"Zitti E Buoni"

The Italian quartet's track blasts onto the Global 200 as the newly minted winner of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021. The competition's finale was held May 22, helping propel the song's worldwide streams to 30.1 million (up 869%) and sales to 10,600 (up 2,942%) in the week ending May 27, according to MRC Data. "We love rock arrangements but also like to match them with [lead vocalist] Damiano [David]'s melodic, pop-oriented lines or with hip-hop elements," says bassist Victoria De Angelis. "We have such diverse musical influences that our music reflects all of them."



148

BARBARA PRAVI  
"Voila"

The first runner-up in the Eurovision Song Contest 2021 enters the Global 200 at No. 148 (and the Global Excl. U.S. chart at No. 70). The French singer-songwriter's track arrives with 8.5 million streams and 6,600 sold. Plus, Eurovision's fifth-place finisher, Go\_A's "Shum," starts at No. 158 on the Global 200 (and No. 80 on Global Excl. U.S.) with 9 million streams and 5,400 sold — the first Ukrainian-language song to hit the Global 200.

—ERIC FRANKENBERG

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
82	92	97	<b>BABY SHARK</b>	Pinkfong	38	37
106	95	98	<b>MIENTEME</b>	TINI X Maria Becerra	95	4
-	42	99	<b>STRAIGHTENIN</b>	Migos	42	2
72	88	100	<b>BAD GUY</b>	Billie Eilish	54	38
74	86	101	<b>HAWAI</b>	Maluma	3	38
94	99	102	<b>DICK</b>	StarBoi3 + Doja Cat	94	4
77	90	103	<b>SHALLOW</b>	Lady Gaga & Bradley Cooper	59	38
66	87	104	<b>FOLLOW YOU</b>	Imagine Dragons	66	11
75	91	105	<b>YOU BROKE ME FIRST.</b>	Tate McRae	16	38
61	81	106	<b>GOOD DAYS</b>	SZA	7	22
-	17	107	<b>LET.GO.MY.HAND</b>	J. Cole, Bas & 6LACK	17	2
78	85	108	<b>DREAMS</b>	Fleetwood Mac	10	35
-	16	109	<b>100.MIL'</b>	J. Cole & Bas	16	2
79	105	110	<b>BACK IN BLOOD</b>	Pooh Shiesty Feat. Lil Durk	29	19
90	101	111	<b>CIRCLES</b>	Post Malone	49	38
56	98	112	<b>SOLID</b>	Young Thug & Gunna Feat. Drake	11	6
108	106	113	<b>BIPOLAR</b>	MC Don Juan, MC Davi & MC Pedrinho	106	3
73	100	114	<b>POSITIONS</b>	Ariana Grande	1	31
65	155	115	<b>ALL I KNOW SO FAR</b>	P!nk	65	3
64	84	116	<b>911</b>	Sech	48	13
88	102	117	<b>WAP</b>	Cardi B Feat. Megan Thee Stallion	1	38
85	104	118	<b>LEMONADE</b>	Internet Money & Gunna Feat. Don Toliver & NAV	4	38
99	109	119	<b>ANOTHER LOVE</b>	Tom Odell	99	7
63	80	120	<b>IN THE MORNING</b>	iTZY	34	4
86	108	121	<b>WHOOPTY</b>	CJ	10	31
62	82	122	<b>MY HEAD AND MY HEART</b>	Ava Max	32	17
120	125	123	<b>OLD TOWN ROAD</b>	Lil Nas X Feat. Billy Ray Cyrus	70	38
91	112	124	<b>FOR THE NIGHT</b>	Pop Smoke Feat. Lil Baby & DaBaby	7	38
97	110	125	<b>SWEATER WEATHER</b>	The Neighbourhood	62	35
89	111	126	<b>BEFORE YOU GO</b>	Lewis Capaldi	32	38
RE-ENTRY		127	<b>FILM OUT</b>	BTS	5	6
113	115	128	<b>BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY</b>	Queen	107	34
RE-ENTRY		129	<b>4 DA GANG</b>	42 Dugg & Roddy Ricch	110	4
92	114	130	<b>LOVELY</b>	Billie Eilish & Khalid	70	38
171	185	131	<b>RUN</b>	OneRepublic	131	3
110	121	132	<b>MEMORIES</b>	Maroon 5	71	38
98	117	133	<b>YORU NI KAKERU</b>	YOASOBI	16	38
116	123	134	<b>MY EX'S BEST FRIEND</b>	Machine Gun Kelly X blackbear	25	38
124	136	135	<b>MONSTER</b>	YOASOBI	87	19
121	126	136	<b>CLOSER</b>	The Chainsmokers Feat. Halsey	100	34
100	122	137	<b>WHAT YOU KNOW BOUT LOVE</b>	Pop Smoke	11	38
103	124	138	<b>MARTIN &amp; GINA</b>	Polo G	94	29
117	127	139	<b>WHATS POPPIN</b>	Jack Harlow Feat. DaBaby, Tory Lanez & Lil Wayne	17	38
125	129	140	<b>GOOSEBUMPS</b>	Travis Scott	102	35
122	131	141	<b>RIDE IT.</b>	Regard	86	37
NEW		142	<b>MAYBACH</b>	42 Dugg Feat. Future	142	1
132	132	143	<b>DESPACITO</b>	Luis Fonsi & Daddy Yankee Feat. Justin Bieber	120	34
NEW		144	<b>I WANNA BE YOUR SLAVE</b>	Maneskin	144	1
NEW		145	<b>SAL Y PERREA</b>	Sech	145	1
111	119	146	<b>THE GOOD ONES</b>	Gabby Barrett	96	13
RE-ENTRY		147	<b>SHY AWAY</b>	twenty one pilots	73	4
NEW		148	<b>VOILA</b>	Barbara Pravi	148	1

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
154	135	149	<b>KIRARI</b>	Fujii Kaze	135	3
-	26	150	<b>THE CLIMB BACK</b>	J. Cole	26	2
147	103	151	<b>MOU SUKOSHI DAKE</b>	YOASOBI	103	3
81	113	152	<b>ON ME</b>	Lil Baby	47	25
-	20	153	<b>PUNCHIN'.THE.CLOCK</b>	J. Cole	20	2
NEW		154	<b>LEAVE BEFORE YOU LOVE ME</b>	Marshmello X Jonas Brothers	154	1
129	186	155	<b>RELOJ</b>	Rauw Alejandro & Anuel AA	41	30
146	148	156	<b>LITTLE BIT OF LOVE</b>	Tom Grennan	146	4
RE-ENTRY		157	<b>BOY WITH LUV</b>	BTS Feat. Halsey	151	9
NEW		158	<b>SHUM</b>	Go_A	158	1
NEW		159	<b>SATURDAY</b>	twenty one pilots	159	1
83	116	160	<b>BATOM DE CEREJA</b>	Israel & Rodolfo	57	11
105	137	161	<b>WHAT'S NEXT</b>	Drake	1	12
101	118	162	<b>LACURIOSIDAD</b>	DJ Nelson Presenta Jay Wheeler & Myke Towers	40	38
NEW		163	<b>24 HOURS</b>	A Boogie Wit da Hoodie Feat. Lil Durk	163	1
133	146	164	<b>SOMETHING JUST LIKE THIS</b>	The Chainsmokers & Coldplay	133	25
183	165	165	<b>LIL BIT</b>	Nelly & Florida Georgia Line	165	4
136	151	166	<b>ALL OF ME</b>	John Legend	97	36
131	143	167	<b>SAY SO</b>	Doja Cat	50	37
119	134	168	<b>BAILA CONMIGO</b>	Selena Gomez With Rauw Alejandro	22	17
NEW		169	<b>MALIBU</b>	Sangiovanni	169	1
139	128	170	<b>NO ROLE MODELZ</b>	J. Cole	128	9
145	161	171	<b>INTENTIONS</b>	Justin Bieber Feat. Quavo	65	37
148	157	172	<b>DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'</b>	Journey	148	32
104	133	173	<b>PARADISE</b>	Meduza & Dermot Kennedy	30	29
137	154	174	<b>I DON'T CARE</b>	Ed Sheeran & Justin Bieber	105	34
156	158	175	<b>HOTEL CALIFORNIA</b>	Eagles	149	32
RE-ENTRY		176	<b>IN THE END</b>	Linkin Park	163	6
140	153	177	<b>SAY YOU WON'T LET GO</b>	James Arthur	96	34
-	29	178	<b>HUNGER.ON.HILLSIDE</b>	J. Cole & Bas	29	2
144	172	179	<b>LUCID DREAMS</b>	Juice WRLD	103	37
150	152	180	<b>TAKE ME TO CHURCH</b>	Hozier	129	20
112	140	181	<b>HOLY</b>	Justin Bieber Feat. Chance The Rapper	3	36
155	179	182	<b>HELL OF A VIEW</b>	Eric Church	120	6
126	164	183	<b>SEÑORITA</b>	Shawn Mendes & Camila Cabello	67	38
149	169	184	<b>DIOR</b>	Pop Smoke	61	38
142	162	185	<b>ADORE YOU</b>	Harry Styles	68	37
NEW		186	<b>512</b>	Mora & Jhay Cortez	186	1
151	166	187	<b>SICKO MODE</b>	Travis Scott	70	36
-	74	188	<b>HIS &amp; HERS</b>	Internet Money, Don Toliver & Lil Uzi Vert Feat. Gunna	74	2
177	188	189	<b>SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT</b>	Nirvana	167	21
NEW		190	<b>PHANTOM THIEF</b>	back number	190	1
-	156	191	<b>TIPO GIN (AO VIVO)</b>	MC Kevin O Chris	156	2
186	170	192	<b>ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST</b>	Queen	159	12
128	142	193	<b>RAIN ON ME</b>	Lady Gaga & Ariana Grande	22	38
170	183	194	<b>THUNDERSTRUCK</b>	AC/DC	170	10
107	149	195	<b>SKI</b>	Young Thug & Gunna	23	6
175	181	196	<b>SWEET CHILD O' MINE</b>	Guns N' Roses	167	21
161	174	197	<b>COUNTING STARS</b>	OneRepublic	143	16
-	195	198	<b>LAMAMA DELA MAMA</b>	El Alfa x CJ x Chael Produciendo Feat. El Cherry Scum	195	2
138	159	199	<b>BREAKING ME</b>	Topic & A7S	21	38
RE-ENTRY		200	<b>STRESSED OUT</b>	twenty one pilots	184	6

MANESKIN: FRANKENBERG; PRAVI: GETTY IMAGES; PRAVI: JACOB GETTY IMAGES

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# Contents

JUNE 5, 2021 • VOLUME 133 / NO. 8

## ON THE COVER

Rina Sawayama photographed by Zoe McConnell on May 10 at The White House London.

## THIS PAGE

Mugler bodysuit and bracelets, Richard Quinn bow, Christian Louboutin shoes, Omnèque earrings, David Morris and Motley rings.

## TO OUR READERS

Billboard will publish its next issue on June 26. For 24/7 music coverage, go to [billboard.com](http://billboard.com).

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With her genre-obliterating sound and gripping lyrics about identity, **Rina Sawayama** became one of the most exciting queer voices in pop. Now she's making room for anyone else who feels like an outsider.

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**CONGRATS ON BEING NAMED A**  
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**MUCH LOVE,**



PHOTO CREDIT: RUKES



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Tobi Parks photographed by Megan Poole on May 12 in Des Moines, Iowa.



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The vinyl boom only accelerated during the pandemic, generating \$626 million in revenue in 2020 in the United States, where it became the No. 1-selling album format — and so far this year, sales have almost doubled compared with the same period in 2020, according to MRC Data. In a special Deep Dive report, "How Vinyl Got Its Groove Back," *Billboard* looks at what's driving the market for vinyl, as well as the problems that could threaten it. While limited editions and exclusive pressings have become new forms

of merchandise drops, supply-chain issues have exacerbated pre-pandemic pressing-plant delays. Can green manufacturing help? A Billboard Pro Spotlight with the same title, sponsored by the RIAA, looks at both the format's remarkable comeback and its post-pandemic future, with panels about what's on the horizon for physical stores and how younger buyers are putting their own spin on the business. Plus: a keynote interview with Atlantic Records chairman/CEO — and world-class vinyl collector — Craig Kallman. For more information, Billboard Pro subscribers can go to [billboard.com/deep-dive](http://billboard.com/deep-dive) and [billboard.com/spotlight](http://billboard.com/spotlight).



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# The Market

PG. 26 WE'RE JAMMIN' \* PG. 30 TENCENT FACES THE MUSIC \* PG. 36 AN OPEN LETTER TO SENATORS



## A Whole Lotta Letters

Labels are overwhelmed with requests from artists asking to direct their royalties straight to the buyers snapping them up as assets. How much direction can they take?

BY ED CHRISTMAN and GLENN PEOPLES

**OVER THE PAST SIX** months, artists and producers have been rushing to sell their royalty streams in unprecedented numbers as investors pour into music assets and drive prices to heady new heights. So at least two artist representatives became concerned in May when they received messages from different executives at Universal Music Group about its “corporate policy” on the so-called “letters of direction” that artists have long sent their labels, publishers and performing rights organizations when they sell their royalties — notes that instruct the company to pay the artist’s royalty buyer directly.

According to one of several such

emails reviewed by *Billboard*, received mid-May by a representative of an artist who had recently sold a royalty stream on a recording: “UMG has instituted a new policy where we are not accepting LODs in connection with the sale of royalty streams.”

But although such messages have sparked some worry among buyers and sellers eager to close deals, UMG tells *Billboard* those fears are completely unfounded. While the world’s biggest record company has indeed decided to apply more scrutiny to the explosion of LODs it has been receiving, many of which force it into business with unfamiliar third parties and raise tricky questions about accounting, auditing rights and taxation, a UMG representative says the company has

not turned down a single artist request to direct royalties to a buyer, including those by their producer, engineer and side-player collaborators so long as the filings for the requests have met UMG’s standard requirements.

“To be clear, nothing prevents our artists from independently entering into a transaction to sell their royalty streams — or from transferring the royalties UMG pays them to a third party,” UMG told *Billboard* in a statement on May 28. “Our long-standing approach regarding the acceptance of letters of direction to pay third parties for the sale of royalty streams has not changed. We remain committed to working with artists to find solutions to any issues that may arise when royalties are sold or transferred.”

In an earlier statement, provided to *Billboard* for a May 24 article about the market concerns surrounding LODs, UMG said of its philosophy, “Nothing is more important to us than our relationships with our artists and fulfilling the terms of our recording agreements. Even though most of our agreements prohibit assigning rights, we had voluntarily accommodated these requests, and we will continue to do so for artists who assign a share of their royalty streams to producers who work on their records. However, the acceptance of letters of direction for the sale of royalty streams, essentially reassigning these payments to entities with no legally recognized relationship with the company, potentially posed significant tax and legal liability issues.

● THE RECORDING ACADEMY AMENDED ITS ALBUM OF THE YEAR FIELD, AMONG OTHERS. ● TAYLOR SWIFT EARNED THE NATIONAL MUSIC PUBLISHERS’ ASSOCIATION’S 2021 SONGWRITER ICON AWARD.



To be very clear, should our artists choose, nothing prevents them from independently entering into these transactions or transferring the royalties UMG pays them to a third party.”

Some sources say that UMG’s increased caution surrounding LODs, along with some of its private communications with individual artist reps, have been misinterpreted. UMG, meanwhile, says the aforementioned emails from UMG executives to the artist representative, reviewed by *Billboard*, were either taken out of context from a lengthy email exchange or reflected LOD requests it couldn’t grant due to its standard requirements.

As recently as a year ago, requests for LODs on master recording royalties to third-party buyers were relatively infrequent, label sources say. They have most commonly been used to assign artist royalties due to producers, engineers and players who have

**“WE’RE LOOKING OUT FOR THE ARTISTS’ BEST INTERESTS, WHICH IS WHY WE’D NEVER TRY TO HINDER THEIR RIGHTS TO SELL, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, WE’RE RUNNING OUR OWN BUSINESS.”**

—A MAJOR-LABEL EXECUTIVE

“points” — a percentage of revenue — on a recording. But suddenly labels are being deluged with such requests, as all types of music assets soar in value.

UMG is not the only label having internal discussions on how to handle the influx. It has become a pressing issue across the industry as the sheer volume of income-stream sales create headaches for royalty departments, business affairs executives and legal teams.

At UMG, those discussions have resulted in a move to increase corporate oversight over decisions to grant LODs — decisions that were previously left to the sublabel behind the music in question, says a source familiar with the situation.

The reason for the additional oversight as sales boom: These ar-

rangements “put the label in business with someone it didn’t choose to be in business with,” says a major-label executive. “A label would have no problem with artists selling the income stream, but wouldn’t want to be put in a position where its priority is to the third party, which starts asserting rights that should belong to the artists.” If the label is paying a third-party buyer directly, the arrangement raises messy legal questions regarding audit rights, approval rights and reporting requirements — which, a label source says, cannot be transferred to a buyer — in the absence of defined terms.

Synchronization approval is also a concern. “We’re looking out for the artists’ best interests, which is why we’d never try to hinder their rights to sell,” says the executive, “but at the same time, we’re running our own business.”

Even when labels accommodate LODs, they do not treat it as a legally binding contract, and the paperwork says as much. Most labels won’t counter-sign the letters or acknowledge in writing that they are aware of the sale of the income stream.

“If I buy an income stream and the artist subsequently goes belly up and files for Chapter 11, his creditors can come after the income stream I bought because I am not in the first position. Some other creditor could have seniority,” says one longtime industry music asset trader. Such uncertainty could make a bank less likely to help finance a

buyer’s deal, sources say.

Label sources dismiss such worries because the buyer will have a contract signed by the creator who sold the income stream. They say reliance on a countersigned LOD means nothing because the documents are, by design, not legally binding. “It’s an accommodation that can be revoked at any time by the label,” says the label executive. “It is fairly meaningless.”

For UMG, even if its stance on how it handles LODs isn’t as crucial as it was made out to be, traders are paying attention. While approval for an LOD was long assumed, and still may be the most common outcome, UMG is now sending a signal that it has the right to reject such requests. It remains to be seen whether it, or other rights holders, will choose to do so. **B**



Goose performed from the top of Rockefeller Center in New York in 2020.

# Jam On

THANKS TO LIVESTREAMING, ACTS LIKE GOOSE AND BILLY STRINGS ARE EMERGING FROM THE PANDEMIC BIGGER THAN EVER

BY DAVE BROOKS

**WHEN THE JAM BAND** Goose kicked off its five-night Bingo virtual tour last June, the

Connecticut quartet wanted to mix things up beyond improvising through changing setlists every show. So it introduced a bingo machine that spit out balls with musical and aerobic challenges for the band — maybe covering Bob Dylan’s “Shelter From the Storm” or running a lap around the barn where they filmed the series.

“They’re always looking for ways to make each show feel different,” says Ben Baruch, Goose co-manager and owner of management company 11E1even Group. Such spontaneity helped Goose gross nearly \$500,000 in ticket sales at \$15 per night or \$50 for all five shows.

Jam bands have quietly become the surprise earners of the pandemic thanks to devoted fans and compelling livestreams, and are now poised to dominate touring as live concerts return. Ticket sales for these kinds of acts have been exceptionally strong, says Don Strasburg, vp/senior talent buyer for AEG Live Rocky Mountains, though he’s hesitant to use the “jam” label, considering the genre’s diversity of styles from bluegrass to funk. Such acts that value “spontaneity and improvisation,” says Strasburg, “were already the largest for us in terms of number of shows and, based on sales so far, have grown significantly.”

Live recordings have long been an integral part of the jam scene since the 1960s, when fans started trading Grateful Dead concert bootlegs. In 2015, Nugs.TV — which had launched

18 years earlier for sharing live Grateful Dead and Phish recordings — switched to livestreams, and by 2019 was working with over 1,000 acts a year. When the pandemic began, this audience had already proved itself willing to pay for virtual concerts, says Peter Shapiro, owner of the Brooklyn Bowl venues in Brooklyn, Nashville and Las Vegas; the Capitol Theatre in Port Chester, N.Y.; and Lockn’ Festival in Arrington, Va., which all host livestreams. “Jam bands typically don’t sell a lot of records or stream particularly well on Spotify,” he says, “but fans put a premium on live performances because it’s how they most enjoy engaging with the music.”

As big-name acts like Dead & Co. and Phish are leading the first wave of touring this summer, bands that broke out as livestream successes during the pandemic are leveling up, too. Take Billy Strings, for example, who was playing clubs and theaters before the pandemic: In February, the bluegrass phenom sold 20,000 pay-per-view \$15 tickets for four shows, with another 200,000 viewers tuning in for the free series opener and finale broadcast on Twitch. He’s now starting an amphitheater tour in June.

Goose is also seeing real-life results from its livestreaming strategy, kicking off a fall tour at Bonnaroo in September before heading to New York’s 3,000-capacity Terminal 5 for back-to-back nights. “Our last New York show in 2019 was the Music Hall of Williamsburg, which holds about 600 people,” says Baruch. “The band is coming out of the pandemic much bigger than they were going into it.” **B**

TRE CASSETTA





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# How's Spotify Doing?

Depends on whom you ask. Family plans and other subscriber deals are causing tension between the company and creators

BY GLENN PEOPLES

**A**T SPOTIFY, "OUR continued focus is on reaching more listeners, as ultimately this will translate into long-term value for our investors," said CEO Daniel Ek on an October 2020 earnings call. The company's strategy has always been that growth comes before everything else — to the occasional frustration of creators, who are sometimes more interested in today's royalty payouts than tomorrow's valuation. On the same call, CFO Paul Vogel said, "For us, it has historically been about really thinking about growing users and subscribers first before worrying about the monetization part."

Some rights holders don't like that. They're less focused on how many subscribers a music service has than on how much money it takes in from each. That number is the average revenue per user, or ARPU, and it's closely watched because of its direct relationship to royalties, which many creators wish were higher. In 2020, Spotify's global ARPU was \$5.25 a month, of which it paid out about \$3.90 a month to rights holders. That number is down 39.4% since 2015, when it was \$8.66 due to a number of factors, including expansion in countries with lower prices, telecom bundling, student deals and family plans. When Spotify makes less per user, of course, so do creators.

What some creators see as bad news, however, might be good for Spotify — and, perhaps eventually, those creators as well. Spotify says the leading factor in ARPU erosion is its family plan, which allows up to six members of a household to use one account for \$14.99 in the United States. (Amounts differ by country.) That makes average revenue decline because that payment is split among more users.

Spotify and other services see family plans and other discounts

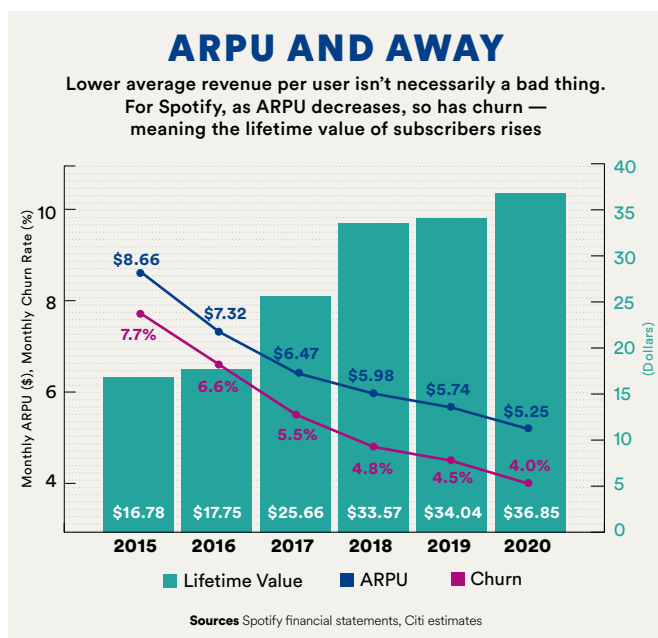
as a way to solve an even bigger problem: churn, or the percentage of subscribers who leave a service within a given period. What looks like smooth, steady subscriber growth is really an unruly process in which some customers leave for varying periods of time while more sign up or rejoin. (Spotify does not reveal its current churn rate, but Citi analyst Jason Bazinet estimates it was about 4% in 2020, down from 7.7% in 2015, according to one of the company's financial filings.) And deals like the family plan give subscribers an incentive to stay.

The question that could set creators at odds with Spotify is whether the negative impact on ARPU is worth it. "The short answer is it's a really good trade-off," says Bazinet, because less churn can increase subscribers' "lifetime value," the expected future revenue from a subscription, because they'll stay with the service longer. So even though Spotify's ARPU declined nearly 40% between 2015 and 2020, the lifetime value of new subscribers to the service more than doubled from \$16.78

to \$36.85, according to *Billboard* calculations based on how Spotify values users, and total annual royalty payments — for both recorded music and compositions — grew from less than \$2 billion to roughly \$5 billion.

That's where the conflict arises. Higher ARPU means higher royalties, while Spotify's priority involves more subscribers staying with the service longer. And while Ek talks about that goal, he has never said much to creators about lifetime value. Instead, Spotify tends to focus on more familiar metrics and talking points. This could be a missed opportunity because lifetime value of subscribers does shed light on royalty payouts. The longer subscribers stay on Spotify, the more royalties they generate. "Our model drives more fan engagement and generates revenue from more places," said Spotify in a statement to *Billboard*. "That means larger total checks from Spotify to rights holders."

Those may be coming for other reasons, too. Spotify's ARPU could rise modestly in 2021, thanks to its intended introduction of a high-quality, lossless audio plan that will likely come at a higher subscription price, as well as price increases in 42 markets, including a \$1 increase in the U.S. family plan and a similar rise in price for three discount plans in the United Kingdom. So far, says Spotify, these changes haven't materially affected the company's churn rate. Which is good news for both sides — at least for now. **b**



Delanancy (left) and Ferdinand

GOOD WORKS

## BREAKING B.A.D.

How a spreadsheet of Black artists on Bandcamp ballooned into a database of 3,500 creators

**L**AST JUNE, AMID THE GROWTH OF the Black Lives Matter movement and an ongoing conversation about diversifying the music industry, DJs Niks Delanancy and Kay Ferdinand created Black Bandcamp — a public Google spreadsheet of Black artists with links to their pages on the online music marketplace. The London-based duo hoped the resource would bring recognition — and revenue — to Black artists, especially in the electronic scene, which is dominated by white acts who benefit from the work of the genre's Black pioneers.

"The whole music industry has relied on the erasure and commodification of Black culture," says Delanancy. "It has become so normalized that unless it's called out ... then there's no change."

What started as a simple online spreadsheet rapidly grew into a community-run platform, and on May 5, Black Bandcamp relaunched as the Black Artist Database (B.A.D.). It now has over 3,500 user-submitted profiles representing Black creators from across international markets, genres and industries, from visual artists to publishers and labels, directing visitors to Bandcamp pages or personal websites. The B.A.D. website also publishes artist interviews and DJ mixes, as well as mixed-media features through its new editorial division, Voices. "With the conversation on race in wider society being so prevalent," says Ferdinand, "it seems the industry is more inclined to listen."

That exposure has already benefited acts like Nairobi, Kenya-based ambient musician KMRU, who has scored new fans and opportunities since listing himself on B.A.D. last June. "I got so many requests for compilations, remixes and commissions from festivals," he says, noting he has also used B.A.D. to connect with fellow African artists.

B.A.D.'s founders also aim to influence the music industry workforce, where just one in five senior-level roles are filled by people of color, according to UK Music's 2020 Diversity Report. Through a new initiative called [pause], B.A.D. will help music businesses develop plans to diversify their workforces in exchange for a donation to help B.A.D. cover expenses, which include paying administrators and maintaining the website.

Next, Delanancy and Ferdinand hope to launch in-person B.A.D. events like workshops and panels, and they have already been invited to curate festival stages. They also wish to recruit more profiles from lesser-represented regions like Australasia, Africa and South America.

"There are millions of Black artists on this planet," says Delanancy. "We're still in the premature stages."

—CYDNEY LEE

DELANANCY: SAGAR GAUTAM; FERDINAND: THOMAS MURPHY



“yes, and...”

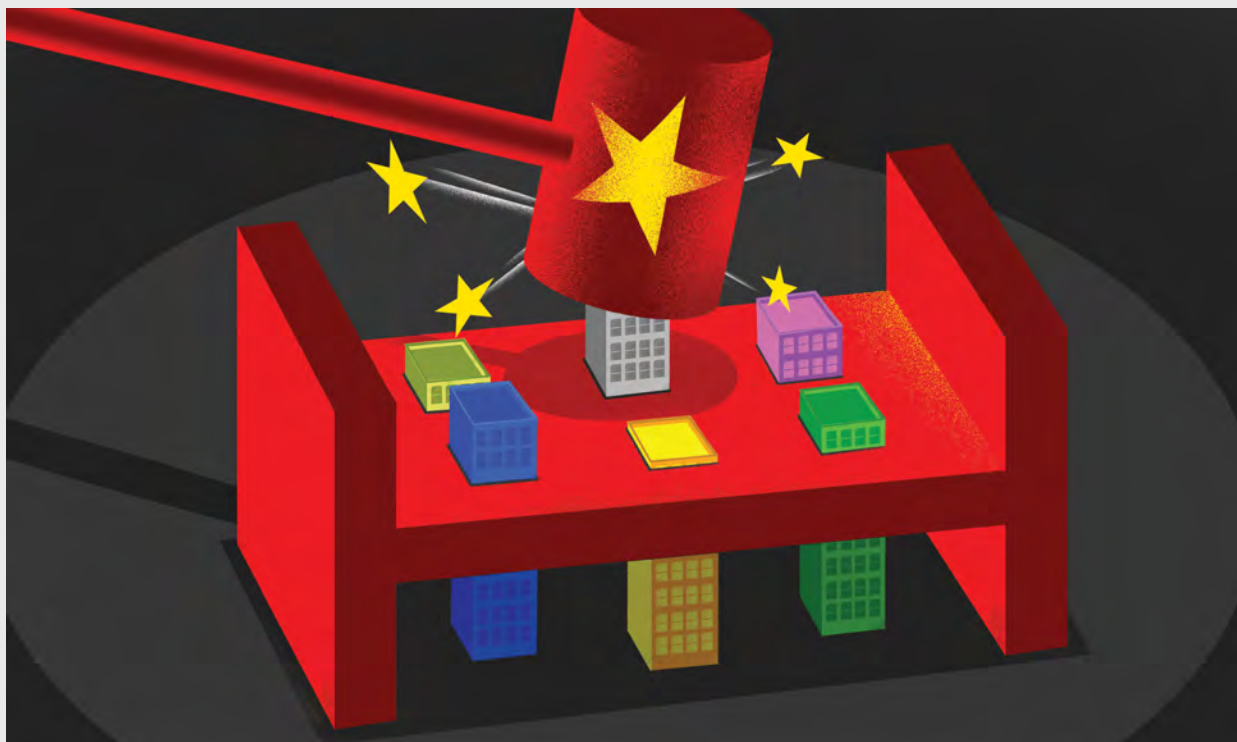
Tyson Haller	SVP, Promotion
Karen Kloack	SVP, Sync Marketing
Bruce McIntosh	VP, Latin Catalog
Carrie Smith	VP, Creative Services
Mason Williams	SVP, Catalog A&R



**CONCORD**  
RECORDED MUSIC







# Tencent Faces The Music

Chinese antitrust regulators are circling the company — but competitors are already diminishing its dominance

BY ALEXEI BARRIONUEVO

**BEIJING** — Chinese competition regulators are considering a crackdown on Tencent Music Entertainment to bring the streaming giant down to size, but the company may already be losing its edge in the country's rapidly developing music market.

Since its formation in 2016, TME has built its strength by relying on exclusive distribution deals with record labels and artists like Mandopop star Jay Chou to muscle out competition for the streaming services it owns. Lately, though, those arrangements have been unraveling even without the interference of regulators. In the past two years, Universal Music Group (UMG), Sony Music and Warner Music Group (WMG) have decided to diversify their distribution and leverage intensifying competition for better deals offered by companies like NetEase Cloud Music.

If regulators act, TME could essentially be penalized for dominating the industry, despite the key role it played in shifting China's music business away from piracy and into licensed streaming. Over the past five years, China's recorded-music business has grown at an unparalleled pace:

up 278% from \$209.4 million in 2016 to \$791.9 million in 2020, according to IFPI, with streaming accounting for 90.5% of last year's revenue. As of December, among China's top five streaming apps, TME's three platforms — QQ, Kuguo and Kuwo — controlled 77% of China's monthly active users, according to QuestMobile, a Chinese research company. And since TME went public on the New York Stock Exchange in 2018, its market cap has grown from \$21 billion to \$26 billion. The company has also capitalized on listeners who do not use its services, sublicensing its exclusive distribution deals to its competitors for two to three times what it pays, NetEase CEO William Ding claimed publicly last year, while cutting major labels out of the market with direct artist deals like the one with Chou — for whose songs NetEase paid TME nearly \$3 million to sublicense in 2018, according to court filings in China.

Still, "I really don't think we are dominating the market," counters Andy Ng, TME group vp. "We were just doing whatever we could to make the pie bigger so everybody could get a nice piece of it."

Ng says the perception that the

company has overcharged competitors to sublicense content is unfair. He claims that NetEase is paying major labels more this year for nonexclusive distribution deals than TME charged it to sublicense the labels' content in 2020. (A NetEase representative declined to discuss terms but said that through the new direct arrangements, "the uncertainties of facing huge price increases proposed by third parties is now greatly reduced.")

The Chinese competition authority has a history of targeting companies that it perceives are growing too dominant. Last year, it issued a record \$2.8 billion fine against Alibaba Group Holding, before taking action in April against over a dozen other companies, including TME parent Tencent Holdings. The crackdown stems from the Communist government's desire to slow the rapid growth of internet companies, which control reams of personal data and hold cultural sway, analysts say.

Reuters has reported that regulators may force TME to divest Kuguo and Kuwo, which would knock down TME's market share by about 68%, based on data from QuestMobile. Already, though, WMG's exclusive

arrangement with TME expired in March, and after UMG announced its first-ever distribution deal with NetEase Cloud Music last August, Sony Music followed suit in May, while all three also renegotiated nonexclusive deals with TME. That should be good news for the Chinese music ecosystem, says Andy Mok, a senior research fellow at the Center for China and Globalization, a Beijing think tank, who foresees more negotiating, deal-making and — ultimately — opportunity. "[The labels'] catalogs will be everywhere, more like the West," says Mok.

NetEase Cloud Music — which applied May 26 to go public on the Stock Exchange of Hong Kong and intends to raise \$1 billion — could benefit most from regulatory action against TME. The app, part of video-game giant NetEase Inc., is a popular music curator for Generation Z consumers in larger, more affluent cities like Beijing and Shanghai than TME, which is stronger in lower-tier cities, label executives say. Analysts think that forced divestitures by TME could also usher a third major competitor into China's streaming market. That would likely be either Alibaba, which shut down its Xiami music app in February, or TikTok owner ByteDance.

In its zeal to sign exclusive deals, some competitors say, TME routinely overpaid for its deals with the majors, which involve minimum guarantees. (Ng says the prices were in line with projections of streaming users.) But royalty reporting was almost an afterthought, frustrating artists and managers — something that will improve as the market moves away from exclusive deals, says Alex Taggart, head of international for label services firm Outdustry, which last year formed an independent publishing company specializing in China. "We learned the best way to get better reporting out of everybody is to play them off against each other," he says. (Ng says TME issues monthly reports and is working on a system for real-time reporting that will more closely match international standards.)

Ng says NetEase's planned initial public offering illustrates how rapidly the music landscape is changing. "I'm sure there will be more competitors coming in the future," he says. "Everybody is still talking about how the China music industry is doing great. Everybody is still trying to jump in." **E**

Additional reporting by Hsiuwen Liu and Kyle Mullin.



# RIMAS

## INDIE POWER PLAYERS 2021

"NO ONE WINS  
CHAMPIONSHIPS  
ALONE"

- NOAH ASSAD





FROM THE DESK OF

# JOSH DEUTSCH

Founder/Chairman/CEO  
Premier Music Group

BY JOE LEVY

PHOTOGRAPHED BY HAMADI PRICE

**D**URING THE PANDEMIC, Josh Deutsch let the lease for his 4-year-old music supervision and strategy shop, Premier Music Group, run out. When he was ready to start working somewhere other than home again earlier this year, he found space at The National Arts Club, a 137-year-old Gothic Revival landmark building in Manhattan's Gramercy Park, a short walk from his apartment. The club has over 600 paintings and sculptures in its permanent collection, so the place is like a lived-in museum. Randall Poster — the music supervisor known for his work with Wes Anderson and Martin Scorsese, and a friend of Deutsch's since grade school — took an office down the hall after Premier acquired his firm, Search Party. Poster says it's like working inside an Anderson movie.

Deutsch is best known for Downtown Music, the label he co-founded 15 years ago, that signed an array of artists who helped define the freewheeling indie aesthetics of the 2000s: Gnarls Barkley, Santigold, Major Lazer, Eagles of Death Metal and Cold War Kids. The label brought about Downtown Music Publishing and harnessed its startup mentality to a series of digitally focused side businesses.

He founded Premier in 2017 with the idea of bringing scale to music supervision. A 2019 investment from Primary Wave allowed him to acquire Wool & Tusk, a boutique firm with expertise on the advertising side of synch, to which Poster's Search Party adds depth and prestige in the worlds of film, TV, original composition and music production.

Poster is currently overseeing the recording of period music for Scorsese's upcoming *Killers of the Flower Moon*, set in 1920s Oklahoma, and also worked on Questlove's soon-to-be-released *Summer of Soul* documentary. Last year, Premier's supervision business grew 60% and the company added podcasting to its work with brand clients such as AT&T, Coca-Cola, Google and Samsung. Among Premier's podcasts are Rick Rubin's *Broken Record* and the Barack Obama-Bruce Springsteen conversation series *Renegades*. "Podcast production budgets are not huge," says Deutsch, who believes the format will better grow audience with licensed tracks rather than the library music many podcasts rely



on. He compares the conversation around licensing to the early days of streaming, when rights holders were concerned about streams paying a fraction of a penny while digital service providers were hemorrhaging money. "They were both right. But over time we're at scale and it's now returning significant value to the publishing community and the recorded-music community." He sees the podcast universe expanding and wants to figure out licensing fees that make sense for both podcast producers and rights holders. "We don't find that uncomfortable," he says. "We want to lead in that role."

**You've said that when you started Downtown Records you were also interested in starting a publishing company, but that would have taken more money than you had at the time.**

I was a songwriter before becoming an A&R person and had been the veteran of a couple of publishing

deals, so I understood the intrinsic value of that kind of intellectual property. Gnarls Barkley was the first act we signed, and I would have liked to acquire the publishing rights. But we didn't have enough money. We'd raised just enough, hat in hand, from friends and family. "Crazy" topped every chart. It was the first record to go to No. 1 [in the United Kingdom] on the back of digital sales. And when I saw what happened, the next thing we did was start a publishing company.

**But you were also conscious of building out other areas than recorded music and publishing.**

We made some investments — pre-streaming — in the discovery landscape to solve specific problems or frustrations that we had. We launched the first ad-supported legal download site, RCRD LBL, and we started an offshoot with Ian Rogers from Topspin called RCRD DLS to try and crack



# EMPIRE CONGRATULATES OUR 2021 BILLBOARD INDIE POWER PLAYERS



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SHAMI**  
FOUNDER / CEO



**NIMA  
ETMINAN**  
COO



**TINA  
DAVIS**  
SVP OF A&R



**HEATHER  
VASSAR**  
VP OF MARKETING  
NASHVILLE



**ERIC  
HURT**  
VP OF A&R  
NASHVILLE





the direct-to-consumer space. We bought We Are Hunted, which scraped SoundCloud. Twitter acquired that business in 2012.

**What problem was Premier built to solve?**

I had a side hustle as a music supervisor over the years, and I saw a hole in the market. There wasn't really a scalable solution to music supervision, or even a full service offering strategy, supervision or [administration] on an integrated basis. So we built up a full music-strategy stack. The idea is to help our clients make more considered decisions. It's not just about the good taste of the people that work here. It's about showing the client why they should use this music and how they will get a better return.

**Give me an example.**

I'll give you a micro example and a macro example. We did a project with an agency called RGI for Lifewtr, which is a Pepsi product. The brief was multicultural positivity. The music is usually an afterthought in advertising — an editor falls in love with a track that the budget doesn't allow, and then we come in to put out a fire. This was not that. We were brought in early, and our strategy team leveraged data and cultural insights to say, "This aligns with your brand value, with this campaign and with the audience you want to reach." We advocated hard for the dancehall artist Koffee. We knew that there was a lot of love for her track "Toast," and it was reacting with the right market segment. This was right before [the 2020] Grammys, and we had a pretty good feeling she was going to win [for best reggae album]. The client went with it, and it was very successful. Koffee won the Grammy, and there was all this earned media love around the use of the track.

**What's the macro example?**

We've done some brand musical-identity work. You see so many brands investing heavily in visual identity and then not thinking about music from a strategic perspective: "What am I trying to sound like? What does that actually mean for my brand?" We worked with ESPN where we were brought on by McKinney to help craft a music strategy for ESPN's SEC and ACC networks and to give each property a distinct music identity. For the SEC Network, working closely with ESPN music director Kevin Wilson, we covered a wide base of established and emerging artists with roots in SEC territory, from the southern soul of Wilson Pickett to Terrell Hines' hip-hop to alternative and Americana acts like Thad Cockrell and Moon Taxi. It culminated with Big Loud artist HARDY customizing his song "Where Ya At" to call out specific SEC teams and towns.

**How does what you offer big-brand clients differ from the way they work with an ad agency?**

A lot of those clients come to us through their agencies. With T-Mobile, we sit across six agencies, and we work very nicely with all of them. We're not trying to do what they do. I'm not trying to be a full-service creative agency.

**Besides the Super Bowl, what are some other big opportunities for advertising synchs?**

The Olympics are always big. Back to school is big.



1

We were already starting to see holiday in April and May, which is early for us. You're months ahead, so you're thinking about things two quarters early. It's always holiday season around here. But the calendar is a little bit more dynamic than it was a decade or two ago. There's all sorts of new and important cultural moments. Black History Month, now more than ever, is taking on cultural and commercial significance. Same thing with Women's History Month and women's movement issues. Pride as well. We did an amazing Juneteenth activation last year with Chika and [ad agency] R/GA. It was very moving and last year took on an unusual amount of significance.

**You were in the publishing business. What's your take on the prices that publishing assets are commanding these days?**

It makes sense to me, because coming from the publishing world I understand the return profile. The right assets behave like annuities. For a certain type of investor, it's a very reasonable return. There's a reason why Anthem is funded by the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan. You have a lot of institutional money because the return profile of music publishing assets is very consistent. The explosion of the streaming ecosystem has only accelerated that growth, and at a time of uncertainty it's nice to know that you can get a reasonable return out of this asset class. I've been drinking that Kool-Aid for a long time. It's hard for me to see anything about this that isn't great.

**Sometimes investors and creativity aren't a great mix.**

There's always a risk that reckless capital is going to have a deleterious effect on the creative process. Maybe that will impact the front-line business a little bit more than the catalog business. However, I would say that the biggest players in the space are people coming from the music industry. Primary Wave, full disclosure, is a partner. But Merck Mercuriadis has built a team of veteran folks. The multiples can seem incredibly aggressive, but by and large you have a lot of very talented music industry veterans helping to guide that investment. It's returning value to the artist community, it's returning value to the rights holders. It's hard for me to see someone who is suffering as a result. ☐



2



3



4

1. "Randy and I are lifelong, long-suffering Knicks fans, and we commissioned these paintings of Julius Randle by Isabella Di Scalfani," says Deutsch. 2. A magenta Gretsch guitar that, explains Deutsch, is aligned with Premier client T-Mobile's branding. "It's apropos to what we are doing here," he says. 3. A tea set from Puerh in Brooklyn and Teastream in Los Angeles. "We have tea together every day in our offices as a way to focus and consider the day's activities and opportunities." 4. Deutsch and Poster have yet to install sound systems in their spaces, so this boombox — alongside an Elvis image Deutsch calls "some vintage swag" — does the job.



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POWERFUL  
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CONGRATULATIONS CHRIS TAYLOR AND THE eOne MUSIC TEAM  
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AN OPEN LETTER TO SENATORS

# STOP GUN VIOLENCE NOW

Five years ago, amid a string of deadly attacks at live-music venues, including the horrific mass shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Fla., on June 12, 2016, the cover of *Billboard's* July 2016 issue featured an open letter to Congress signed by 200 artists and music industry executives calling for gun reform. Unfortunately, the need for reform has only grown more urgent as such shootings have continued around the country at a terrifying pace. Now, as venues prepare to reopen after a pandemic shutdown and music fans ready to return to concerts and festivals, we stand again with the music community and ask lawmakers to take swift action to stop the violence.

▶ **AS LEADING ARTISTS AND EXECUTIVES IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY, WE ARE ADDING OUR VOICES TO THE CHORUS OF AMERICANS DEMANDING CHANGE.**

Music has always been celebrated communally, from dancefloors to concert halls. But this life-affirming ritual, like so many other daily experiences — going to school or church or work — continues to be threatened because of gun violence in this country.

The one thing that connects the tragedies like the shootings in Boulder, Colo.; El Paso, Texas; Las Vegas; Parkland, Fla.; and so many other places in America to the one that happened in Orlando is that it is far too easy for dangerous people to get their hands on guns.

We call on the Senate to do more to prevent the gun violence that kills more than 100 Americans every day and injures hundreds more:

Take action on background checks.

*Billboard* and the undersigned implore you — the people who are elected to represent us — to close the deadly loopholes that put the lives of so many music fans, and all of us, at risk.

Sincerely,

CHRISTINA AGUILERA

TORI AMOS

SARA BAREILLES

AARON BAY-SCHUCK

TONY BENNETT

SELIM BOUAB

ROB BOURDON

SCOOTER BRAUN

CORTEZ BRYANT

MICHAEL BUBLÉ

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STEVE COOPER

TOM CORSON

LEE DANIELS

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BRAD DELSON

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JOHN ESPOSITO

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FLETCHER

LUIS FONSI

BECKY G

KEVIN GORE

JULIE GREENWALD

JOSH GROBAN

HORACIO GUTIERREZ

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HALSEY

BILLY JOEL

CRAIG KALLMAN

ALICIA KEYS

KID CUDI

CAROLE KING

ELLE KING

ADAM LAMBERT

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KEVIN LILES

DRE LONDON

JENNIFER LOPEZ

MACKLEMORE

ZAYN MALIK

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JULIA MICHAELS

GUY MOOT

JASON MRAZ

GREGG NADEL

YOKO ONO

MARK PINKUS

GREGORY PORTER

PRINCE ROYCE

BONNIE RAITT

DAWN RICHARD

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PAUL ROBINSON

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MATT SIGNORE

BRITNEY SPEARS

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STING

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EDDIE VEDDER

ANDREW WATT



# billboard



2021

# COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS

*Billboard's eighth annual Country Power Players issue will profile the people who have driven another solid year for the country music industry, generating billions in sales, streaming and publishing. This special feature will highlight the top executives, artists and changemakers who kept the music playing during an incredibly challenging year, as well as coverage of the changing face of country music.*

**Advertise in Billboard's Country Power Players issue to congratulate this year's honorees while reaching key decision-makers who are driving the music business.**

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# The Sound

HOW VINYL GOT ITS GROOVE BACK THE BIGGEST STORIES HELPING BRING THE FORMAT TO THE FOREFRONT

## NEED FOR SPEED

Vinyl became the top-selling album format just as the pandemic delayed manufacturing.

How are pressing plants keeping up?

BY ED CHRISTMAN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHRISTOPHER PAYNE

Independent Record Pressing photographed on May 20 in Bordentown, N.J.



**E**ARLY IN 2020, JUST before the pandemic disrupted the vinyl supply chain and delayed turnaround times, the manufacturing industry was already looking at a rocky future.

In January, Rainbo Records, one of the industry's oldest and largest vinyl manufacturers, closed after losing its lease (its pressing machines were sold off and are now in use elsewhere), and in February, the only U.S. lacquer plant, Apollo Masters, burned down. It was one of two places in the world, along with MDC in Japan, that produce the lacquer discs that are made into master metal molds used to stamp vinyl records.

Months prior in 2019, major labels began letting go staffers who worked with physical products. "These were the people who understood the vinyl business — its packaging, design and pricing," says one retail executive, and their replacements were struggling with delivery issues, let alone what was coming next.

"All the bad news was hitting at the same time," says the executive. Then, in March, as COVID-19 hit, things really went haywire.

Initially, the economic shutdown seemed to dampen prospects all across the economy. But in the music industry, the vinyl sector appeared to be most immediately affected as labels held back releases in all physical formats due to uncertainty about when stores would reopen. Once they did, last summer — following government-mandated capacity and safety restrictions — labels began opening up their release schedules, which caused an instant backlog in manufacturing. Due to a combination of warehouse closures, shortages of truck drivers and the halting of commercial flights — resulting in materials and finished products being shipped by boat, which could more than double arrival times — shipments backed up.

Plus, one COVID-19 outbreak at a certain point in the supply chain could shut down or delay the entire process. At Furnace Record Pressing in Alexandria, Va., the company had to "look at how we do the work," says president/CEO Eric Astor. The pandemic "literally made us rethink and reconfigure our entire operation not only from a sales standpoint, but a logistics



Independent Record Pressing's six Viryl Technologies WarmTone machines, which can press up to 2,000 records a day.

standpoint, physically on the plant floor. For our assembly lines, we used to be able to fit 12 to 15 people, but if we have to separate them by six feet, we could only fit maybe six or eight. So all of a sudden we have a backlog in the assembly, because we don't have anywhere to put everyone."

On top of that, the vinyl supply chain is complicated — and vulnerable even outside of a pandemic. "There's only so many people that do plating, there's only so many people that do cutting," says Astor, referring to the stamper plates used to press vinyl and the cutting of the master into a lacquer. "It puts a lot of pressure onto those industries to step up, and that's not something you can change overnight. It takes a long time."

Another issue that emerged in the last two months is the increased cost of labor. "Here in New Jersey, it's remarkably competitive for labor because we are located in a really heavy warehousing area," says Sean Rutkowski, GM/vp label and customer relations at Independent Record Pressing, who adds that the state is increasing its minimum wage. "That drives up wages for all employees in the marketplace," he says. Don MacInnes, owner of Record Technologies, adds that it's not the only rising price, pointing to cost increases in fuel and, as of April, a 17% spike in the cost of vinyl pellets.

Since 2020, the demand for vinyl has grown stronger as consumers suddenly had more time at home. Rutkowski says that "people weren't spending money on tickets for shows, they weren't going out to eat as much, so there was just more disposable income in the marketplace" for vinyl. Adds Memphis Records co-founder/

CEO Brandon Seavers: "Vinyl is the best way to experience music when you are not moving around."

Even so, Seavers notes that "none of the pressing plants were prepared for the vinyl demand that the pandemic brought on. No one thought they would be almost completely booked through the end of 2021 by April."

Last year, the format was up 46% over 2018, according to the RIAA. So far this year, it's increasing at a pace of 97.5%, or doubling last year's growth, and helping it become the top-selling album format year to date, outpacing CD and download sales. (In the last four weeks, however, as vinyl plants began to bottleneck in preparation for Record Store Day — which will follow last year's schedule and have two drop dates — the CD surpassed vinyl in a year-to-date tally of 14.37 million to 14.2 million.)

With the increase in consumer demand came a corresponding increase in order sizes, which have doubled, according to various vinyl plant and label executives. "Labels that used to do a couple of thousand copies on a title are now doing 5,000, and labels that were doing 5,000 copies are now doing 10,000," says Matt Earley, co-founder/vp sales and marketing at Gotta Grooves Records in Cleveland.

That demand for depth — more copies of a single title — is also taking its toll on the variety, or the spread of catalog availability, says Alliance Entertainment senior vp purchasing and marketing Laura Provenzano. "Currently, we have 37,000 vinyl titles in stock," she says. "At this time last year, we had 45,000 vinyl titles in stock. So that is where you are starting to feel the shortage."

The plants feel it, too. "Labels want their new releases to come out before repressing catalog," says Chad Kassem, owner of Quality Records Pressings in Salina, Kan. "I can't get catalog on the presses because of new releases with a street date."

The expanding backlog of catalog titles and demand for more units on front-line titles have spurred some plants to add shifts or invest in more pressing machines. "At the end of the summer, we had so many orders coming in that we couldn't keep up," says Rutkowski, "so we are now running shifts seven days a week."

It's hard to say whether all of this extra capacity will still be needed after the pandemic. For now, however, Astor says Furnace is "turning down more work than we're bringing in. You can call 10 plants and eight of them won't even take your business — they're too busy."

Meeting demand is a "dilemma that everyone is trying to solve, and that is a crazy good problem to have," says Kassem, who has been making vinyl since 1986. Since then, he says, "I've invested like I knew this day was coming: We have mastering, plating, pressing and a print shop, but I still can't satisfy the current demand. I knew it would never die, but I never thought it would do this good again." **B**

*Additional reporting by Lyndsey Havens.*

**From left: Barrels of polyvinyl chloride pellets used to make records; records that do not pass quality control are reground into PVC pellets; labels bake in an oven to remove moisture before they're inserted into the pressing machine; excess trim cut from pressed records to be reground.**







2021

## BLACK EYED PEAS 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Over the past 25 years, the Los Angeles trio—will.i.am, apl.de.ap, and Taboo—earned six GRAMMY® Awards and achieved sales of 35 million albums and 120 million singles across seminal releases such as Elephunk, The E.N.D., and more

One of the era's biggest acts, they emerged as "the second best-selling artist/group of all-time for downloaded tracks," (Nielsen) and landed on Billboard's "Hot 100 Artists of the Decade." In 2011, they dazzled the world with a landmark performance at the Super Bowl XLV Halftime Show.

Their eighth studio album, TRANSLATION, achieved staggering international success after its release in 2020, and features major collaborations with artists such as J Balvin, Ozuna, Maluma, Shakira, Nicky Jam, and Tyga. The album resulted in a series of chart-topping singles, including the massively successful "RITMO (Bad Boys For Life)" [feat. J Balvin] and "MAMACITA" [feat. Ozuna and J.Rey Soul], both of which achieved #1 status on three Billboard Charts each, numerous award nominations, and gold, platinum, and diamond certifications globally.

The album single from December 2020, "GIRL LIKE ME" [feat. Shakira] achieved success on Latin and Top 40 radio, and was the subject of a viral TikTok challenge in late 2020. The success of TRANSLATION continues to demonstrate Black Eyed Peas' ability to reinvent themselves along with the ceaseless changing of the times.

Please join Billboard as we celebrate the 25 years of Black Eyed Pea success as one of the most compelling acts in the music scene

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# Going Clubbing

As record-club subscriptions spiked through the pandemic, Vinyl Me, Please expanded users' options — and its reach

BY LYNDSEY HAVENS

**I**N 2013, WHEN MONTHLY record club Vinyl Me, Please first launched, “we had one of those blue classic Ikea bags and were walking to the post office like, ‘Holy shit, man, 12 people are paying us real money,’” recalls VMP co-founder/chairman of the board Matt Fiedler. “We had no idea it was going to be a real thing.”

Within a year, the company had grown from 12 to 300 subscribers — and within two to 5,000. Now, with 80,000 active customers, the company just finished its highest-performing quarter with a 74% growth in membership from the same time period last year. (A three-month subscription costs \$119.) VMP has become a significant outlet for major and independent labels alike looking to market reissues and also offer exclusive variant pressings of new releases, from the black-and-white pressing of Madlib’s *Sound Ancestors* (limited to 2,000 units) to the white marble and alternate cover for St. Vincent’s *Daddy’s Home* (pressed on 180-gram vinyl). “As everything was switching over to paying to access music rather than owning it, people were listening to music more and more passively,” says co-founder/CEO Cameron Schaefer. “We wanted to see if there were other people like us, and that really has remained the throughline throughout the growth of the company.”

## GETTING STARTED

Fiedler says he and co-founder Tyler Barstow — who were mentored early on by Scott Bergman, Alternative Distribution Alliance’s vp of sales and marketing — maxed out their personal credit cards to launch the company. “Because it was a subscription model, everything kind of paid for itself from the get-go,” says Fiedler, who graduated from Belmont University with a degree in music business and entrepreneurship. As VMP grew, it was able to invest more into marketing. Ten months in, Schaefer (a former Air Force pilot) took over the company’s mar-



*The Story of Zamrock!, eight rare African garage-rock albums released as part of VMP’s Anthology series.*

keting and social media with a monthly budget of just \$500. “We really had to rely on the experience and the packaging,” he says. “People would get the record package and it would be hand-wrapped — we’d have a note with it — and I think people felt all the energy we were putting into it. I always joke you never invite your friends over to check out your MP3 collection. There’s something about a physical object where, if it’s beautifully made and if there’s care and quality put into it, it’s something people want to share.”

## GAINING MOMENTUM

While VMP launched with the intention of sending its members one hand-picked record a month, it quickly started presenting customers with more options. It now offers four choices — Essentials, the flagship subscription that recently hit its 100th pressing; Classics, which focuses on jazz, blues and soul, and Hip-Hop, both of which launched in 2017; and Country, which debuted in March. “While we do play the role of curator, the reality is people have the ability to customize their journey through VMP,” says Schaefer. “Sometimes we call ourselves ‘sonic archaeologists’ because we’re constantly digging around in catalogs, and in new music as well, finding lost sounds. That’s a lot of the value people feel: You’re being presented every month with this array of records that you know a lot of people have gone and sourced.”

When VMP started, “it was the millennials who were really breathing energy into the resurgence and were some of the early adopters of subscription-box companies,” says Schaefer. He adds that while its customer base was 70% to 80%



Fiedler (left) and Schaefer

25- to 34-year-olds, it has expanded in both directions over the last few years. “One of our fastest-growing segments has been the 40- to 45- to 60-[year-old range], and then we’ve also recently seen — and especially during COVID-19 — a lot of teenagers and young 20-somethings getting into it.” As a result, senior manager of brand partnerships Emily Greenstein (who joined as an intern in 2015) helped create a VMP TikTok account this year.

## GROWING BEYOND

For the first record VMP shipped in 2013, Fiedler recalls emailing the artist’s manager asking to purchase 15 copies directly. A few years later, he says the company hit a “weird threshold” when it still wasn’t big enough to justify its own pressings (then, he says, most plants had an order minimum of 500 units) but

too big to only purchase from existing inventory. By 2020, VMP had shipped a half-million units — the company relies on a total of five plants across the United States, Germany and the Czech Republic for its inventory — and Schaefer says VMP’s growth outpaced that of overall U.S. vinyl sales, which accounted for 62% of physical sales in 2020, according to the RIAA. With the growth of vinyl came demand for more subscription clubs, too, with Secretly Society (launched in 2016 by indie label Secretly Group) seeing subscriptions more than double last fall. “Anyone that enters the market that wants to champion vinyl and tangible experiences with music, we want to support,” says Schaefer. “If no one was entering the space, I actually think that would be an ominous sign. If no one’s wanting to get into the business you’re in, you might want to explore why.”



# MUSIC IS UNIVERSAL

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP CELEBRATES PRIDE AND  
CONGRATULATES THE 2021 PRIDE LIST HONOREES**



**UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP**





One of eight limited-edition colored variants in honor of Swift's eighth studio album, *folklore*, released through her webstore.

# Gold Rush

How exclusive vinyl on limited-edition color variants drives insatiable demand

BY DAN RYS

**A**S VINYL HAS GROWN FROM an almost obsolete format into a significant driver of revenue — up 74.3% to \$619.6 million over the past five years in the United States, according to the RIAA — exclusivity has helped drive the boom, creating the same sort of demand as limited-edition merchandise. And that demand has now moved beyond the confines of Record Store Day exclusives, which still drive headline-grabbing sales — RSD's Black Friday promotions helped move 1.3 million records in 2020, according to MRC Data, which at the time was just the second week that vinyl sales had surpassed 1 million since MRC Data began tracking music sales in 1991 — but are also available elsewhere.

One example is Taylor Swift's *folklore*, released last July through her webstore with eight limited-edition colored variants, each priced at \$26 and available for just a week. The album sold 135,000 copies on vinyl alone in the United States, and a cursory glance through a Swift subreddit thread about the variants found dozens of fans saying they bought multiple copies for display, or bought one with the intent of buying a record player later, or bought all eight because they couldn't decide which one they liked best.

"In music, there are so few things left that are physical," says Craig Rosen, executive vp A&R and label operations at Atlantic Records. "At a time when most music is consumed digitally, the closest thing to owning the music as a physical reflection of the art that you love is a piece of vinyl. Then when you introduce something like a special color, making it limited-edition, now it's a collectible as well. If you're that kind of artist with those kinds of fans, there's tremendous demand."


Specialty vinyl has become more important not just for labels, artists and fans, but also retailers — both online and brick-and-mortar — that can request exclusive variants from labels and bring in business after years of digital sales cutting into physical profits. "Exclusive vinyl is what our customers demand and love," says Stephen Godfroy, director at indie retailer Rough Trade, who adds

that continually updated offerings of limited pressings drive "a virtuous circle of repeat purchases, customer loyalty and social engagement," as well as "sky-high" open rates on marketing emails and thus a real return on advertising spends.

Urban Outfitters launched its exclusive vinyl program in 2010, with Best Coast's *Crazy for You*, and has worked with artists and labels on hundreds of colored variants over the past decade. UO Exclusives "has been an integral part of growing the vinyl business" at the company, says global music curator Corbin Speir-Morrone, adding that Urban Outfitters generally identifies an upcoming release it finds exciting and works with the label on a colored variant, with the artist usually choosing the hue. "We've seen successes in exclusives for titles from developing artists on their first or second album," says Speir-Morrone, "as well as catalog releases from superstar acts that originally came out years ago."

Variants can be one color or marbled, translucent or opaque, and manufacturers often will create color combinations on manual vinyl presses, not just to ensure that each record is unique, but also to produce swirls or other patterns that automatic presses can't handle. "A lot of labels are looking at differentiating between different points of sale, whether it's an Urban Outfitters or a direct-to-fan, by making color variants," says Sarah Robertson, founder of vinyl pressing and manufacturing plant A to Z Media, which specializes in elaborate packaging. "It's a very easy and not crazy-expensive way to differentiate and break your release up."

Robertson's company has dealt with all kinds of different requests beyond just colored variants — Rhymesayers wanted to put custom crayons and an activity book into an Atmosphere package; Kamasi Washington hid a fifth record inside the packaging of a four-LP release, requiring the buyer to cut apart the packaging to find it; and Gang of Four's reissue box set on Matador included a cassette, outtakes, buttons and a 100-page, full-color, hand-bound book of photos, flyers and essays. "People are trying to really deliver something that goes beyond just a piece of music," says Robertson. "They may be streaming the music, but they want to own a beautiful product, and I think that's where we've seen that real difference."

Newbury Comics director of brand engagement Carl Mello points out that specifically during the pandemic, "collecting has sort of gone crazy. All of a sudden, everybody's cooped up at home like, 'What do I do with my money, and how do I keep myself entertained?' It's a better pandemic habit than following QAnon." 

Was



Q & A

## JAZZING UP REISSUES

### VINYL JAZZ REISSUES USUALLY COME IN

two flavors: bare-bones budget releases or expensive audiophile editions. But in 2019, Blue Note Records president Don Was launched the label's *Tone Poet* series, produced by Joe Harley, which offers high-quality reissues from the imprint's storied catalog at a recommended price of \$35 — more than most vinyl but a bargain by audiophile standards. Consumers are responding. Blue Note says projected orders for releases are up over 400%, to the point that this year's reissue of Lee Morgan's *The Rajah* has sold more than 9,000 copies worldwide, an impressive number for a lesser-known album. Says Was: "We sell everything we make."

### How did you start doing these *Tone Poet* releases?

**DON WAS** For our 75th anniversary [in 2014], we talked to independent record stores and they said, "We need reissues with list prices of under \$20." I thought I knew what I was doing, but when I compared it to what Joe was doing, what he did sounded so great. We took some heat on those [75th-anniversary] reissues, and we learned from it. I spoke to Joe and the conversation ended with, "Why don't you do this for us?"

### What's different about the reissues?

**JOE HARLEY** The mastering, the plating, the pressing. Everything

### *Tone Poet* now has its own reputation. Did you set out to make it a brand within a brand?

**WAS** We're very conscious of that. And it's wonderful to see people trust Joe, both in terms of how he does this and what albums he's going to choose [to reissue].

### Do you have a sense of who's buying these records?

**HARLEY** Recently, I became more aware of this universe of people on YouTube who go on and do their own reviews. And 90% of them are kids.

### Does the success of *Tone Poet* suggest that there's a market for high-quality vinyl at a slightly higher price point?

**WAS** We're going to find out! We just want people to hear music in the best way possible. And you can see others trying to follow our lead — but they don't have Joe. —ROBERT LEVINE



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Photo credit Ari Seth Cohen @AdvancedStyle/SAGE

This year, Warner Music Group is donating ad space in Billboard to elevate voices of activists, organizations, and charities that are creating real change. Our 2021 Pride List honorees — Daniel Lang, Darrin Schaur, Drew Maniscalco, Liz Goodwin, and Mark Baker — selected SAGE for their dedication to supporting, honoring, and uplifting LGBTQ elders.





# Pressing For The Planet

How some vinyl plants are tackling the pollution and waste of record manufacturing

BY LYNDSEY HAVENS

**I**N 2018, CHICAGO GOT ITS first vinyl pressing plant in nearly two decades: Smashed Plastic. Even more exciting? Instead of purchasing vintage presses — the kind heated by big, energy-hungry steam boilers — the plant opted for newer, fully automatic units. As a result, Smashed Plastic became the first steamless plant in the United States.

While vinyl sales have grown steadily since the 2008 launch of Record Store Day, the production of vinyl itself hasn't changed much for the last 40 years. It's a traditionally environmentally unfriendly business — one that relies on steam-powered presses, lead-containing polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pellets, plastic shrink-wrap and fuel-burning global distribution — that's overdue for a face-lift.

Though pressing plants in the European Union have been held to higher standards for over a decade — and a 2017 report from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency classified vinyl chloride as a Group A human carcinogen — in the United States, there isn't any national oversight of the industry, resulting in patchwork state-by-state regulations.

Most U.S. vinyl manufacturers agree that sustainability has never been a priority. Plus, as Smashed Plastic founder/co-owner Andy Weber puts it, "Up until about five or six years ago, this industry had literally no technological advancements of any sort."

Fortunately for Smashed Plastic, just as the Chicago plant was gearing up, so too was Viryl Technologies, a Toronto company with a mission to "modernize the vinyl pressing industry." Launched in 2015 and co-led by Chad Brown, a friend and industry peer of Weber's, Viryl manufactures the WarmTone press, which runs on a steamless system that uses an energy-saving electric heater. Brown knew the new tech would solve Weber's permit problems while also helping him launch a more sustainable pressing plant — one that wouldn't need a gas line or additional space for a boiler room. "Once we heard the whole pitch," says Weber, "it was a no-brainer." (Smashed Plastic just ordered its second WarmTone press and is eyeing a third.)

Weber admits that going green was less a choice and more a necessity due

to Chicago's heavy regulations on steam boilers. "Looking back, we barely had a clue of anything we were doing," he says. Smashed Plastic considered installing the full boiler room required for vintage presses "because that's what we felt we *had* to do. We were hitting our heads against the wall dealing with the city of Chicago, trying to bring a new machine into the market that had not been here for years, so of course we didn't get greenlit."

As dozens of new pressing plants around the world have come online to meet growing demand, a handful of them, such as Smashed Plastic, have used the opportunity to construct greener, more efficient plants from the ground up. It's potentially better business, too. Viryl's presses — two of which are in operation at the Third Man plant in Detroit, as well as manufacturers' in over 14 other countries — cost \$195,000, comparable to the cost of vintage presses. But operators can save money on upkeep since older machines often require obsolete replacement parts, which sell at a premium. Plus, says Weber, the WarmTone "required a lot less build-out and was able to just use electricity to heat water. Our electric cost is actually a little bit less than we had originally thought, and the footprint of the plant as far as square footage was way less."

Other plants both new and old continue to operate using outdated methods, largely because they can. That is in sharp contrast to Europe, where PVC is no longer an option, thanks to the European Union's 2006 passage of REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals). The Netherlands-based Deepgrooves, launched in 2017, is billed as the "greenest vinyl pressing plant on the planet." Because of REACH, Deepgrooves presses albums from a safer calcium zinc pellet blend rather than PVC. But founder Chris Roorda was eager to take sustainability further.

"You can do everything as green as possible, but when the energy is still a gray source, then it's not workable," he says. "You can drive a car with vegan leather, but when the outside of the car is dripping oil, then the whole car is not sustainable." The presses at Deepgrooves



Above: A Deepgrooves staff member with the Phenix Alpha pressing machine, which processes around 100 records per hour. Left: Deepgrooves' calcium zinc pellet blend.

have faced lengthy delays on overseas shipments — which have been arriving by boat rather than plane — as well as rising prices. Weber says Smashed Plastic has seen a spike in business because of such delays, which might also be giving clients pause to consider the bigger picture. "Some clients have come to us based on the fact that they don't feel good about the idea of having 3,000 records shipped from overseas because of the carbon footprint," he says.

Yet while Smashed Plastic does get its lacquers cut locally, either by Chicago Mastering or Saff Mastering, the plant still must go outside city limits for PVC (imported from overseas) and plating (done at Nashville's Welcome to 1979 and New Jersey's Mastercraft). "We try to keep [the process] in Chicago," says Weber. "But it's not easy because of the way things have been set up in the industry for such a long time."

Which raises the question, if you're not a new plant starting from scratch, is it even possible to pivot to green? Roorda isn't so sure. "Most plants were built up in the '50s, '60s and '70s, and they are still running with the same infrastructure, equipment and inefficiency," he says. Weber agrees: "It would be a major overhaul. If we [already] had a boiler room, I'm not sure why we would ever switch over."

He says that since places like Viryl started to enter the scene — and especially following the 2020 fire at Apollo Masters, which eliminated the only U.S. lacquer manufacturing plant — the industry is finally starting to think differently. "There has just been no product development in this business for such a long time," he says. "The good news is you have a lot of green-conscious people getting into the business." **b**

rely on solar power and natural gas.

Roorda and his team have tackled packaging waste as well. Shrink-wrap is a primary concern. Deepgrooves makes its own 50% sugar cane-based sealing and has been exploring a simple paper sticker to seal record sleeves, while Smashed Plastic is looking into biodegradable vegetable-based shrink-wrap.

As for distribution, green solutions emphasize locality — a concept that the Vinyl Record Manufacturers Association of North America has rallied behind since its formation in March 2020 by Addison, Texas-based manufacturer Hand Drawn Pressing. "If you choose a pressing plant that is geographically close to you, then your carbon footprint is smaller — and you're going to save money on shipping," says Chris Mara, a VRMA member and owner of Nashville's Welcome to 1979 Studios and the Mara Machines plating and stamper facility.

For Smashed Plastic, "Locality was 100% the impetus of starting this," says Weber. The plant is adjacent to Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood — home to many of the independent artists with whom Smashed Plastic works. "People can come in and talk to us about their orders and can come watch their records being made," he says. "It's the biggest thing we have going for us."

The pandemic has made locality even more important. Artists and consumers



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SB 1229/HB 529 (Rose/Moody)

“Bathroom Bill 2.0” *Passed and signed by Governor Bill Lee*  
SB 1367/HB 1233 (Bell/Zachary)

“Bathroom Signage for Business” *Passed and signed by Governor Bill Lee*  
SB 1224/HB 1182 (Rose/Rudd)

“Trans-Youth Hormone Ban” *Passed and signed by Governor Bill Lee*  
SB 126/HB 1027 (Haile/Kumar)

“Transgender-youth Healthcare Ban” *Pending*  
SB 657/HB 578 (Bowling/Ragan)

“Diversity Training Opt-Out” *Pending*  
SB 193/HB 372 (Bowling/Casada)

“LGBT in Textbook Ban” *Pending*  
SB 1216/HB 800 (Niceley/Griffey)

“Anti-Trans Locker Room Bill” *Pending*  
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Sawayama photographed May 10 at  
The White House London.

Styling by Jordan Kelsey  
Andrea Brocca top and shoes, Wolford  
bottoms, FALKE tights, Harris Reed  
headpiece, Mugler earrings and bracelets,  
Pebble London rings.

PRIDE 2021

# Call Her By Her Name

With her genre-obliterating sound and gripping lyrics about identity, **RINA SAWAYAMA** became one of the most exciting queer voices in pop. Now she's making room for anyone else who feels like an outsider

BY MITCHELL KUGA // PHOTOGRAPHED BY ZOE MCCONNELL









**A FEW YEARS AGO, RINA SAWAYAMA** was starting to wonder if she was unsignable. There was the casual racism, like the time she found out that a senior record executive jokingly referred to her as “Rina Wagamama” behind her back. Or that time a major-label A&R executive backed out of a deal at the last minute, leaving her scrambling to cover lawyer’s fees she had planned to pay for with her advance.

Her infraction? The demo for “STFU!” a thrashing, nu metal romp that sounds like the reincarnation of Limp Bizkit if Fred Durst were JoJo. The song’s chorus — “Shut the fuck up,” intoned over and over again in a feathery singsong — was both absurd and intimate, aimed at the very sort of person in the industry who thought replacing Sawayama’s name with that of a Japanese-inspired British restaurant chain was funny. From the label’s perspective, though, “STFU!” was too stark a departure from the R&B-inflected minimalism of *RINA*, her 2017 EP. She remembers feeling “devastated” when the deal fell through, looking around the Los Angeles studio she was renting for the month and wondering how she was going to afford it. But at no point did she ever question her vision.

“I was like, ‘*Fuck off!*’” Sawayama, dressed casually in a gray hoodie, says over Zoom from her London flat on a recent afternoon, her laughter revealing a sliver of blue braces. The Japanese-British singer, 30, had spent her 20s toiling independently in London’s underground music scene, playing small clubs and fine-tuning what would become her boundary-pushing approach to pop. So by the time she started pursuing a record deal, she knew she was on to something: “I think that’s the benefit of me waiting so long. Had I been younger, I might have been like, ‘Oh, no. I need to change my sound.’”

Then she took a meeting with British independent label Dirty Hit. Founder Jamie Osborne had a different reaction to “STFU!”: He couldn’t

stop laughing. “It was bonkers,” says Osborne. “It was such a collision of different cultural elements, of genres.” He also knew a thing or two about developing misunderstood acts. When he launched Dirty Hit in 2009, his first band was pop-rock powerhouse The 1975, which “every label in the fucking world seemed to pass on twice,” he says. Sawayama signed to the company in 2019 — and became the pop-star outlier among a rock-leaning roster that now includes Pale Waves, Wolf Alice and Beabadoobee.

“I often say there are two types of artists: artists that have to do it and artists that want to do it, and Rina is the former,” adds Osborne. “She can’t be anything else other than Rina Sawayama.”

“STFU!” became the lead single

in April. “Her debut album is a clever and confident kaleidoscopic odyssey that zips and zooms through a compendium of pop music genres. She exuberantly changes gears from track to track and keeps the listener guessing where she’s going to go next.”

Genre fluidity is essentially the norm today, but Sawayama takes the concept to dizzying new heights: She’s less interested in blending sounds than in pushing each to its extreme. Throughout *Sawayama*, she pivots with ease from New Jack Swing to stadium rock to slinky club beats. Time-stamping it all are influences from the Y2K days, back when Korn and Britney Spears vied for the top spot on MTV’s *Total Request Live*. “I love the chaos of that era,” says Sawayama, who in conversation

to exist in the mainstream world, but on her own terms.”

Sawayama has yet to produce any major hits, but her music has turned her into the rare artist equally beloved by underground auteurs and A-listers like Elton John and Lady Gaga, who will feature Sawayama on her upcoming *Chromatica* remix album. Sawayama won’t spoil what song she’s on, though as a longtime Gaga disciple, she was hardly picky. “If they said, ‘You need to cover ‘Chromatica I,’” — the first of the album’s instrumental interludes — “I’d be like, ‘Yeah, I’ll do it!’ I’ll just sing the whole orchestra: *dum-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum!*”

Like Gaga and her Little Monsters, Sawayama has been intentional about cultivating her passionate fan base, the Pixels. On her 2018 tour, she offered special wristbands to audience members who had come alone so they could find one another and build community. She’s also a savvy creator on YouTube, where she posts not just behind-the-scenes footage and performances but also guitar lessons and makeup tutorials, all branded as “RINA TV” with algorithm-friendly, vlogger-style titles like “How to make a MUSIC VIDEO in 5 STEPS.”

“Showing the creative process can be really exciting for people who, like me, had no idea how to do this,” she says. “I learned so much from being independent, but I really wished I knew so much before. It would have saved me a lot of time.”

The conversations she fosters in her music — what it means to be queer, what it means to feel torn between homelands — are ones she continues outside of the studio, too. Last summer, she signed an open letter asking the U.K. government to ban conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ youth. More notably, her criticism of the citizenship requirements for some U.K. honors, including the BRIT Awards, has inspired new eligibility rules that recently opened up nominations to musicians like her — immigrants who had spent much of their lives in the United Kingdom.

Sawayama makes music about feeling like an outsider and fighting for agency; that she wields it back at the music industry, making room for other outsiders in the process, cuts to the heart of what makes her so exciting. It shows in the video for “STFU!,” which begins with Sawayama out to dinner with a white guy. As he stabs at his sushi, he unleashes a string of

**“There are two types of artists: artists that have to do it and artists that want to do it, and Rina is the former. She can’t be anything else other than Rina Sawayama.”**

— OSBORNE

from 2020’s *Sawayama*, her debut album and one of the most critically lauded releases of the year. (It appeared prominently on over two dozen best-of lists last year.) It felt like the foundation for a new kind of pop star: unabashedly queer, unapologetically Asian and completely unconcerned with genre conventions. Sawayama’s identities don’t just inspire her music — they permeate its DNA. On “Chosen Family,” a shimmering, gospel-tinged ballad, she sings about finding solace in queer friendships, especially in the face of rejection from loved ones. On futuristic tracks like “Tokyo Love Hotel” and “Akasaka Sad,” she explores her relationship with Japan as a U.K. transplant — her family emigrated from Niigata when she was 5 years old — who feels both protective of and disconnected from her culture.

Her material is often dark and deeply personal, but she wraps each song on *Sawayama* in the pageantry of pop music. “Rina is a pop-art chameleon,” says friend Elton John, a longtime fan who duetted with her on a new version of “Chosen Family”

is enthusiastic and quick to laugh, usually at herself. She stresses that her affection for these sounds is in no way ironic. “I always get asked: ‘Who are you listening to at the moment?’ I’m like, ‘Kelly Clarkson? I don’t know if you’ve heard of her? Um, Katy Perry’s first album?’”

There’s an exhilarating whiplash in hearing her go from “Dynasty,” an Evanescence-inspired rock anthem about intergenerational trauma, to “XS,” a snappy critique of consumerism that evokes Spears’ frothy collaborations with The Neptunes. In less skillful hands, the transition would crumble into mere pastiche. Sawayama’s approach, however, feels reminiscent of code switching, something many queer people — and more specifically, queer people of color — know intimately: the ability to flit between presenting queer and straight, constantly modulating identities depending on circumstances. “That’s part of the magic of Rina, the fact that she was able to stitch it all together,” says Dirty Hit A&R manager Chris Fraser. “Her identity brings it together. She wants





Andrea Brocca top, Balenciaga shorts and shoes, David Morris jewelry.



Richard Quinn unitard,  
dress and shoes; Shaun  
Leane earrings.



microaggressions, from comparing her to Asian actresses to expressing surprise that she sings in English. At one point, he asks, “Have you been to that Japanese place... Wagamama’s?” Every remark is something Sawayama has heard before from real-life dates, strangers or, yes, label executives.

The freedom to make such artistic decisions, says Sawayama, makes her feel “really lucky that [I’ve been] able to do me, 100%. Because if I wasn’t, I don’t think I’d be proud of where I am now.” Which is a fairly unique position: She’s a kind of cultural critic embedded in the front lines, a pop scholar using the diva playbook to punch up at the industry that has tried to pigeonhole her.

It’s a role that’s unlikely to change, even as she enters the next phase of her career and advances toward pop’s molten center. Sawayama is

working on her second album, which she promises will mine even more left-field references from decades past. In the fall, she’ll finally embark on a rescheduled tour of the United Kingdom and Ireland, playing some venues that are double or triple the size of those she planned to hit pre-pandemic. (A North American tour, originally scheduled for later this year, is now booked for next spring alongside other European dates.) “I feel like Rina is going to explode once people start going to shows and seeing her,” says Osborne, adding that her success has played a big role in the label’s recent expansion, with new offices in Los Angeles and Sydney. She’ll also make her feature-film debut in 2022, starring alongside Keanu Reeves in *John Wick: Chapter 4*.

Sawayama’s rise has even inspired those who didn’t get it to reach out to

congratulate her — including the A&R executive who pulled the plug on a deal after hearing “STFU!” It felt good, says Sawayama, but it wasn’t quite good enough. “I was like, ‘Next time I see him, I’m still going to demand that money,’” she says with a laugh.

**R**INA SAWAYAMA HAD two goals for her U.S. TV debut, on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, in October.

She wanted to convey a sense of stakes: At that stage of the pandemic, remote performances often felt as slickly produced as music videos — so instead, she designed a performance that relied on a few camera cuts to capture the feeling that anything could happen if the viewer stuck around. “Rina was like, ‘It has to be

live, but it has to be capital-L live,’” says Tom Connick, product manager at Dirty Hit. “You have to really hear my vocals — I don’t want it to be super polished.”

Her second mission: “I’m going to try to get the straights and the locals,” she recalls thinking — in other words, win over the masses. “And then I came out with that fucking outfit.” She’s referring to her Marie Antoinette-goes-to-the-fetish-shop number: a red leather bodice and garter-style harness with opera gloves and opulent costume jewelry. “My entire team was like, ‘Babes, I don’t think you’ve nailed the brief,’” she says. “It was so high drag.” *Vogue* called the look “a performance in itself.”

Sawayama traces her sense of theatricality to her days at Cambridge’s Magdalene College,



**“When you’re an immigrant, you kind of move through life being masked and shielded to the fact that not everyone is welcoming of you.”**

— SAWAYAMA

inspired by drag because people wear their trauma and insecurity and celebrate it or make a character out of it, and that’s really what I wanted to do with the album,” she says. “I wanted to talk about these things that have caused me so much pain — so much expensive therapy bills — and make it into something that just sounded like a pop song, to make people want to really listen over and over to what was being said.”

After graduating, she worked a series of odd jobs in London, sometimes two or three at a time, to independently fund her music: selling ice cream sandwiches out of her friend’s truck, working as a nail technician at a high-end salon, logging a few months at an Apple Store before she got fired for modeling in a Samsung ad. Pursuing music full time often felt like a distant dream. “When I started out, I was like, ‘What do you do as an artist?’ I had no idea how to release things or why it’s important to release songs or albums,” she says. “I didn’t grow up around the music industry. I have no connections.”

A photographer friend introduced Sawayama to Will Frost, who had worked in music publicity and now manages her along with day-to-day manager Caspar Harvey. At the time, Sawayama was content to just put out singles. Frost, she says, stressed the importance of planning for a larger body of work and thinking long term.

“Even when the money was running out, I had such belief in how successful Rina could be that we had to just keep going independently and not make any decisions that didn’t feel right,” says Frost. “It shows now in everything she does, whether it’s the fearlessness in the music or being outspoken on any topic she is passionate about — they’re all possible because of those formative years and the resilience she developed.”

Frost connected her to Adam Crisp, the singer-songwriter and

producer who works under the name Clarence Clarity. Though it took a while for them to click — “The first song he did was ‘Alterlife,’ and I remember being like, ‘Ugh! That’s too much!’” — his maximalist tendencies turned out to be a perfect match for Sawayama’s instinct to, says Crisp, “blow the lid off everything” as a performer. He ultimately co-produced all but two of *Sawayama*’s 13 tracks. “He always brings a slightly cooler reference,” says Sawayama, “which is helpful, because I’ll be like, ‘Remember Avril Lavigne’s fourth track when she did this?’ And he’ll be like, ‘Yeah, but did you know that’s a rip-off of Radiohead?’”

Instead of sanding down her influences into one neat package, Crisp helped her embrace their contrasts. “We’ve got a running theme of face-melting guitar solos that pop up all over the place and really audacious, ridiculous key changes,” he says. “That’s the kind of stuff we both like, particularly Rina: putting things in places that have no right to be there.” In the end, he notes, “the most ridiculous idea wins.”

**P**LENTY OF PANDEMIC albums sounded like queer dance parties incarnate, from Dua Lipa’s disco trip *Future Nostalgia* to Gaga’s ebullient *Chromatica*. But *Sawayama* felt the most purely communal: a celebration of all the ways queer bodies can come together in their own hallowed spaces, whether that’s moshing to “Dynasty,” strutting down imaginary runways to “Comme Des Garçons (Like the Boys)” or swaying sweatily side to side, with interlocked arms, to “Chosen Family.”

That has made the lack of live shows as tough for the artist herself as it has been for her community. “I

think a song is complete in terms of its writing when it’s performed and fed back to you through the audience, when you hear them singing it. It’s almost like a comedian testing their material,” she says. “For me, it’s important how people’s bodies move to the songs because as a pop writer, you’re essentially carrying people on this journey.”

Still, Sawayama never considered pushing her album back. So during lockdown, she focused her promotional efforts on social media, pivoting her album-launch event to a last-minute YouTube party and releasing new episodes of RINA TV. “We had to be super adaptive with the album coming when it did,” says Connick. “Especially when we went into lockdown, a lot of our marketing ideas were shelved and canned pretty much overnight. So we had to very, very quickly figure out what it was we wanted to do.”

Sawayama has learned what many pop stars have in the streaming age: The albums that make the biggest impact are the ones you can keep breathing new life into. In December, she released a deluxe edition of *Sawayama* featuring live versions, remixes (including one with Brazilian drag superstar Pabllo Vittar) and the dopamine-spiking dance-pop single “LUCID.” For the one-year anniversary of the album in April, she put out the new version of “Chosen Family” with John. (“Will was like, ‘We should get Elton on a song,’” recalls Sawayama, “and I was like, ‘You’re fucking insane.’”) The same month, she also filmed a *Tiny Desk* concert for NPR, which felt like a counterpoint to the bombastic *Fallon* performance: a stripped-back showcase for her operatic voice.

Not everything on her wish list went according to plan. In her first meeting with Dirty Hit, Sawayama said it would be her dream to receive the prestigious Mercury Prize, which is awarded to a single album each year. But last summer, she realized she was ineligible for both that honor and the BRIT Awards, the U.K. equivalent to the Grammys. Both are run by the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) trade group, which at the time required solo artists to have British or Irish nationality. Sawayama has spent most of her life in the United Kingdom but is not a citizen — she’s on an Indefinite Leave to Remain visa. There are pathways to citizenship for those



where she studied politics, psychology and sociology while singing in a hip-hop group called Lazy Lion. “I thought we were the second coming of Black Eyed Peas,” she says. “I wasn’t nearly as iconic as Fergie, but I was trying.” At times, however, she struggled. She has called the university culture of Cambridge “horribly patriarchal” and felt isolated and stereotyped as an international student during much of her time there. But in her senior year, she fell in with a group of queer creatives, including the drag band Denim, which gave her a much-needed sense of belonging. Sawayama, who has been open about her experiences with depression, credits that scene with saving her life.

Their sensibility — proudly camp with an academic twist — has become a defining feature of her music. “I’m



with such visas, but she would have to give up citizenship in Japan, where her parents now live and which does not allow for dual citizenship.

Realizing she was locked out was heartbreaking. “When you’re an immigrant, you kind of move through life being masked and shielded to the fact that not everyone is welcoming of you,” says Sawayama. “And that was a moment when that veil came off.”

One phrase in particular kept running through her mind: *Am I not enough?* “I’ve lived here for this many years, I went to Cambridge, I pay taxes here, and I’m still not good enough,” says Sawayama before backpedaling — as if realizing she has boxed herself into the model-minority myth. “You can still be an amazing person and belong to this country without those things, too. But I think I’ve conditioned myself to believe that I’m not deserving if I don’t have those things, which is the reason I work so hard.”

After waiting a bit to gauge whether she had been truly snubbed — “Can you imagine if my album was shit and no one was talking about me, and then I was like, ‘Excuse me, I should have been nominated?’” — she did an interview with *VICE* calling attention to the eligibility requirements, which she labeled a form of artistic “border control.” A day after the article was published, the hashtag #sawayamaisbritish started trending on Twitter in the United Kingdom.

Eventually, BPI chairman Ged Doherty reached out to Sawayama to explain that he didn’t realize how restrictive the rules were, she recalls. (“Rina is an incredible artist, and we are grateful to her for raising her concerns,” Doherty wrote in a statement to *Billboard*.) A few months later, in February, the organization announced some changes: Any musician who has been a resident in the United Kingdom for at least five years is now eligible. Soon after, Sawayama was shortlisted for the BRITs’ 2021 Rising Star Award. “Telling my mum was amazing,” she said in a teary-eyed video responding to the nomination. “She was so proud.”

She ultimately didn’t win, but getting a seat at the table was its own

kind of victory. In April, Sawayama attended the 2021 BRITs ceremony in a purple Balmain couture gown with an impossibly long tulle train, looking every bit the belle of the ball. On Twitter, she posted a photo of herself on the red carpet with the caption: “sawayama looking v british tbh !!!!”

**R** *I-NA! RI-NA! RI-NA!*  
 “Who’s Gonna Save U Now,” a crunchy, ’80s-style rock jam on *Sawayama*, opens with the sounds of an imaginary crowd chanting her name. Even before she released an album, Sawayama always had grand visions for her live show. Her first official concert, celebrating the arrival of her 2017 EP, was at the 150-capacity East London venue The Pickle Factory. As she listened to fans singing along to her music, she recalls, “I literally thought I was selling out a stadium.”

“She only ever thinks in mega pop-star terms because that’s the world she grew up loving,” says Frost. “When she was playing to 300

people, it was always outfit changes, choreo, drama — how can we make this tiny venue with this small fan base feel like they’re at an arena?”

On her tour this fall, Sawayama won’t be playing arenas, but she will perform at her biggest venues to date. She’s relishing the creative opportunities that come with a larger stage and hopes her show will offer a safe space for a fan base that spans a diversity of backgrounds. “I feel like my entire live team is queer. It’s like a lovely queer family,” says Sawayama. Directing the tour is her friend Chester Lockhart, the musician-actor who also directed her *Tiny Desk* performance. “Me and Chester always talk about live shows — we’re *obsessed* with iconic shows of the 2000s.”

In the meantime, Sawayama has been back in the studio with Crisp recording her second album, which she says will explore other influences from the Y2K era and beyond, including ’90s rave music, The Cardigans, No Doubt and Bon Jovi. “That’s what’s so fun about music from the ’90s and 2000s— it’s so broad,” she says.

At first, writing new music felt

terrifying: “I was like, ‘I have fucking nothing to say, I haven’t lived life, I haven’t met people.’” Not being able to tour the first album also made it hard to start thinking about the next. “Mentally, as a songwriter, that’s hard,” she says, “because I haven’t gotten [*Sawayama*] out of my system.” But after getting into the studio with Crisp earlier this year, Sawayama slowly found her voice again. In two weeks, they cranked out 14 songs. A writing trip to L.A. is also in the works.

The staff at Dirty Hit believes that, with the right timing and positioning, this next album could finally push her into the mainstream. But they’re not in a rush. “We haven’t taken anything to radio in America yet for a reason: I want to build an undeniable foundation first,” says Osborne. “I feel like we’re almost there.”

For now, they’re letting Sawayama lead the way. “We’d love for her to become a Main Pop Girl,” says Connick. “But I’m trying not to focus too much on any particular model or existing success story and just continue what we did from 18 months ago, which was to facilitate Rina being Rina.” It’s a common refrain among her team — “Let Rina be Rina” — that speaks to both her singular artistry and the general strategy at Dirty Hit. “We’re not really selling music,” says Osborne, “we’re selling identity.”

A few years ago, Sawayama contemplated going simply by the name Rina. “I’ve always been conscious that my surname is an inconvenience,” she says, recalling her earliest days in British school, when staff would regularly butcher her name. “I would be in floods of tears. That anxiety of someone trying to say my last name as a 5-year-old was the most excruciating thing.”

In the end, after talking it through with her team, she decided to keep it. “I think it’s important for people to instantly recognize that it’s a Japanese or Asian-sounding name,” she says. “But in the future, I’m definitely not counting off dropping the surname — if I become iconic enough.” For Sawayama, maybe the question is not *if*, but *when*. **B**



Atsuko Kudo bodysuit and hat, Jamie Challinor shoes, Mugler earrings and necklace, Motley ring.









Parks photographed by  
Megan Poole on May 12 at xBk  
in Des Moines, Iowa.



# The 2021 PRIDE List

AFTER ENDURING A YEAR OF UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES, **40 LGBTQ+ PROFESSIONALS** FROM ACROSS THE MUSIC BUSINESS SHARE THE WINS THAT HAVE KEPT THEM GOING, THE INNOVATIONS THAT INSPIRE THEM AND THE STEPS THEY'RE TAKING TO ENSURE THAT EVERYONE HAS A PLACE IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

## Tobi Parks

- vp **NATIONAL INDEPENDENT VENUE ASSOCIATION (NIVA) FOUNDATION**
- owner/artistic director **xBk**
- founder/board president **STATION 1 RECORDS**
- attorney, business affairs administration **SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT**

**A** **T THIS POINT IN THE PANDEMIC,** Tobi Parks' xBk music venue in Des Moines, Iowa, has been open for almost half the time that it was closed. The 250-capacity artist space, which she envisioned as a home for LGBTQ+ music fans and others from marginalized communities, had been operating for only six months when the coronavirus halted concerts. (It has since resumed limited-capacity shows.) Soon after the shutdown, a fellow venue owner sent Parks, 44, an email to join a Zoom call with other panicking live-music professionals from across the country.

"That one email changed the trajectory of my life," says Parks, whose previous music industry experience focused on copyright and licensing work for Sony and a nonprofit label/artist-development company she launched in 2015 — the same year she moved with her wife and kids from Brooklyn to Des Moines. Her peers

on that Zoom call eventually became the National Independent Venue Association, and today Parks is vp of the association's nonprofit, the NIVA Foundation, and co-chair of its diversity, equity and inclusion task force. Without NIVA's support, she says it would have been "so easy to be sitting in despair, wondering, 'What am I going to do with my business?'"

Instead, Parks spent the last year successfully lobbying Congress for federal funding for independent venues: The late-December relief package included \$15 billion in Shuttered Venue Operators Grants. (President Biden's March relief package has since allocated another \$1.25 billion.) She's also working with NIVA to share best practices for diversifying the industry's workforce, from how and where venue staff post job listings to how they can communicate a welcoming work environment to those candidates.

Parks is sensitive to the barriers women and people

of color face in this field. Even though she had a full-time position with Sony and owned the xBk building with her wife, every local bank turned her down for a "not terribly significant" construction loan to build out the venue until a white male business partner joined the venture. She has no way of knowing, of course, if systemic bias was at play — bringing a partner on board certainly lowered the risk for banks. Still, she says, "It was pretty eye-opening that it took that and we couldn't do it on our own."

The work is far from over. Since March 2020, over 100 independent venues have permanently closed. And because many indie-venue operators often do not own the buildings in which they work, such spaces are often at the mercy of landlords and spiking rents. That's why Parks believes one of the most effective ways to create equity is for more venue operators, especially people of color, to own their businesses. In addition to youth and internship programs that will showcase the variety of career paths in the live industry, Parks and the NIVA Foundation want to create mentorship resources that will expand pathways to the top.

"I'm one small speck in the large spectrum of things, but it's important for queer women of color to see me having this venue and doing things differently than the other folks in my community," says Parks. "I want to be there to help usher in the next generation of folks who are interested in live music." —TAYLOR MIMS



## Charlie Adelman

● director of marketing/artist manager

CRUSH MUSIC

Whether he's working with rock stars like Weezer or pop powerhouses like Sia, Adelman, 33, finds creative ways to "make noise with our artists" through brand partnerships and other opportunities. Last year, he spearheaded *Such Pretty Forks in the Mix*, an EP of Alanis Morissette remixes from a trans-inclusive pool of women producers. He also co-manages singer Marina, whose 2012 track "Bubblegum Bitch" just went gold thanks to a TikTok trend. "The growth and opportunity for catalog," he says, "continues to excite me."

**MY FAVORITE GAY BAR** "Julius" in Greenwich Village. Historic and heavenly burgers."

## Eric Alexander

● vp global consumer marketing

UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Alexander, 32, focuses on brand strategy and marketing initiatives that put fans "front and center of our thinking" — whether that's promoting new releases from LGBTQ+ superstars like Sam Smith and Halsey or supporting UMG's Use Your Voice voter registration campaign, which featured A-listers like Billie Eilish. It's all in service, he says, of building "a stronger relationship with music fans for our artists and our labels."

**AS TOURS RETURN, I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE** "It's a tie between Megan Thee Stallion and Lady Gaga."

## David Alvarado

● senior vp operations

RICH MUSIC

With stints at major labels and Telemundo under his belt, Alvarado, 47, brings his myriad talents together at independent label Rich Music, where he has a hand in everything from management to publishing to merchandise for a roster that includes rising stars Sech and Dalex. Alvarado, who has long pushed for LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Latin music industry, is especially focused on growing Rich's digital business. "It's no longer just ancillary revenue," he says, "but a must for us."

**THE PANDEMIC HOBBY I PICKED UP** The mobile app Parchisi STAR "is so addicting but great stress relief."

## Mark Baker

● senior vp public policy and government relations

WARNER MUSIC GROUP

Baker, 52, spends his days at "the intersection of music and technology," advising on legislation and dealing with regulatory organizations around the world, often with the goal of ensuring that rights holders are properly compensated in the streaming age. He also serves on the board of WMG's \$100 million Social Justice Fund that was established last year to combat racial injustice — "one of the most rewarding things I've worked on in my career."

**THIS YEAR, I'LL CELEBRATE PRIDE BY** If events are virtual, "the motorcycle club may do our own Pride parade."

## Theo Battaglia

● executive vp/head of creative

10K PROJECTS

Whether it's with TikTok or blockchain, Battaglia, 28, spent the pandemic helping artists get creative with how they ideate, market and monetize their art. His work overseeing all consumer-facing aspects of the independent label boosted hits like hip-hop collective Internet Money's "Lemonade," which hit No. 6 on the Hot 100. "The unconventional approaches we've adopted will continue to be woven into our strategies post-pandemic," he says.

**MY FAVORITE GAY BAR** "Barracuda in New York. The drag shows are hilarious, and the energy in there is always buzzing."

## Akim Bryant

● head of R&B programming

PANDORA

Bryant launched Pandora's Black Music Forever station at the start of Black Music Month in June 2020, but it met the moment in the wake of George Floyd's death. The station, which has drawn a million unique listeners, showcases decades of Black artists who have inspired progress and demanded justice. "We still face intense resistance to change," he says, "but I feel even more responsibility to continue using my voice."

**MY FAVORITE GAY BAR** "I'm constantly daydreaming about The Warehouse, which used to exist in the Bronx during the early 2000s."

## Branden Chapman

● COO

RECORDING ACADEMY

Reimagining the Grammy Awards was no easy task: Chapman and colleagues worked with COVID-19 compliance officers and redesigned both indoor and outdoor stages so honorees could celebrate safely. "The significance of this moment was not lost on us," says Chapman, who has helped make LGBTQ+ inclusion a pillar of the academy's diversity initiatives. "So we also [showcased] independent venues from around the world, as they've been hit so hard."

**THE PANDEMIC HOBBY I PICKED UP** "Does mastering the Netflix menus count?"

## Richie Coppolino

● senior vp finance/controller

300 ENTERTAINMENT

Coppolino, 32, handles all accounting operations under the C-suite level but has recently expanded his role to include leading the company's student loan and tuition assistance program — something that hits home for him as a recent MBA — and handling the label's "300 Takes a Break" mental health initiative, which "gave each employee a stipend to spend on themselves in any way they chose, as long as they were offline for three working days," he says. "It was a huge hit, and we'll be bringing it back."

**MY SIDE HUSTLE** "I began a small nonprofit called PADL that [supports] different LGBTQ+ causes each year during Pride Month."



ADELMAN



ALEXANDER



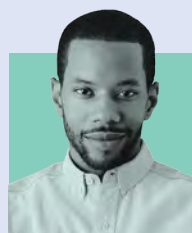
ALVARADO



BAKER



BATTAGLIA



BRYANT



## SOPHIE, Forever

The visionary late producer's brother shares plans for posthumous releases

**W**hen SOPHIE died in January at the age of 34, it was clear the avant-garde transgender musician had left an indelible mark on the industry. With a visceral, futuristic sound, SOPHIE — who fell from a balcony in Athens, Greece, while trying to take a photo of the moon — thrillingly challenged the norms of pop and electronic music through solo work and collaborations with Charli XCX, Madonna and Vince Staples. Yet the producer's musical legacy is far from over.

"There is a lot of music in the vaults, absolutely," says SOPHIE'S brother, Ben Long, including hundreds of tracks ranging from rough sketches to finished tunes. Which of those songs will see the light of day is an ongoing discussion between SOPHIE'S family — Long, his two sisters and their parents — and SOPHIE'S labels, Australia's Future Classic and the United Kingdom's Transgressive Records. (Both declined to comment.)

Whatever does come out, says Long, will involve him. He was a key member of the producer's team, having worked first as a tour manager and live engineer, then as mixing engineer on SOPHIE'S 2018 album, *Oil of Every Pearl's Un-Insides*, and an unreleased follow-up that Long says just needs finishing touches. "The idea SOPHIE and I discussed many times was to do one abstract experimental album and then a pop record — this was going to be the pop one — and to keep going on that cycle for years," he says. "I don't want to be like, 'We're going to put everything out,' because sometimes SOPHIE didn't want it to or it wasn't finished. But it was quite clear with a lot of songs, just from the fact that we had been working on them and mixing the album, that I know the direction a lot of things were supposed to be going."

Long says the family plans to release as much of the music as makes sense, but it's too soon to detail specific plans — it has been only four months since SOPHIE'S death. "There are many, many discussions to be had," says Long. "The most important thing for us is doing right by SOPHIE — putting stuff out that SOPHIE was happy with and would want to be out." —KATIE BAIN



## Michael Crepezzi

● assistant vp distribution and administration services

BMI

With over three decades of experience, Crepezzi, 55, helps the rights-management company's roster of TV and film composers understand "how their work is being consumed and monetized" in a complex and increasingly digital world. In collaboration with BMI chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer Sandye Taylor, he's currently organizing a panel of publishing professionals and studio leaders "to ensure that underrepresented communities have a voice."

**THE PANDEMIC HOBBY I PICKED UP** "Exploring the Hollywood Hills on foot."

## Joshua Edmond

● senior director of A&R

BMG

"What I do as a creative is an inspirational game of chess," says Edmond, 32, who works alongside hitmakers like Bebe Rexha, Diane Warren and Kim "Kaydence" Krysiuk. "Every move we make on behalf of our artists, songwriters and producers is strategic, calculated and well thought out. We're here to better their careers." And not just in the studio: Edmond led BMG's #Voices4Change campaign on social media, where he hosted conversations about how social justice movements impact creatives.

**THIS YEAR, I'LL CELEBRATE PRIDE BY** "Donating to LGBTQ+ charities."

## Evangeline Elder

● director of brand partnerships

EMPIRE

Every day, Oakland, Calif.-based Elder, 29, looks for opportunities for the independent label, distributor and publisher's roster to work with brands like Dolby, Jack Daniel's and Bumble to "enhance an artist rollout or elevate an artist's career." A livestream concert she put together in March with Amazon Music starring EMPIRE Grammy nominees like D Smoke and Freddie Gibbs drew over 400,000 viewers on Twitch — one of Amazon's biggest livestreams to date.

**MY SIDE HUSTLE** "I'm the co-founder of Women Sound Off, a true intersectional platform for women and nonbinary creatives."

## Jeff Florez-Taylor

● director of marketing

TICKETMASTER

The pandemic sidelined most events in 2020, but Florez-Taylor, 38, kept busy with the *Live From the Drive-In* series — socially distanced shows from Brad Paisley, Darius Rucker, Jon Pardi and Nelly — and Dua Lipa's record-breaking *Studio 2054* livestream. "As the world opens up, there isn't going to be a one-size-fits-all solution in our return to shows," he says. "We're putting the work in to make sure the experience is as seamless as possible for fans."

**MY FAVORITE GAY BAR** "The Stonewall Inn. It's sacred ground."



CHAPMAN



COPPOLINO



CREPEZZI



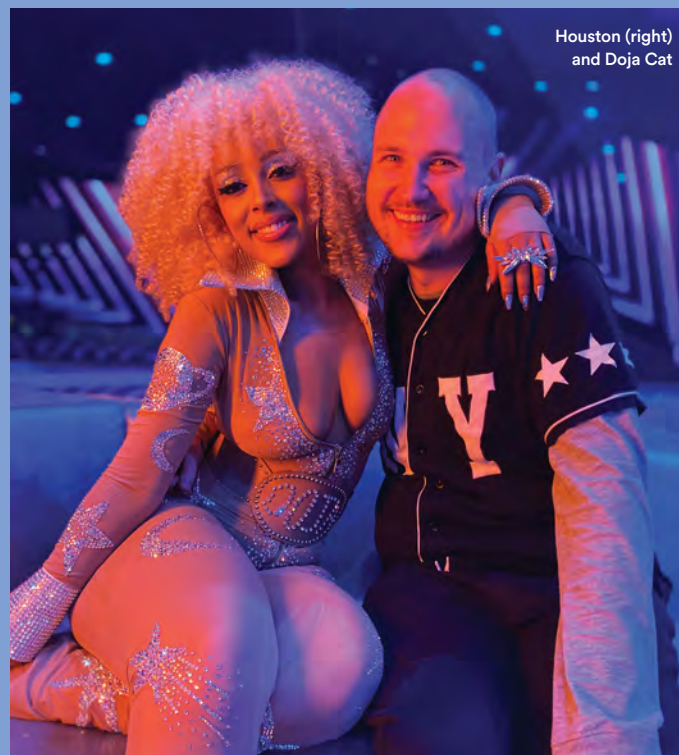
EDMOND



ELDER



FLOREZ-TAYLOR



Houston (right) and Doja Cat

## Sam Houston

● director of visual content production

RCA RECORDS



### AS A KID, SAM HOUSTON

used to watch the MTV Video Music Awards in awe. Now he helps make

similarly cinematic moments happen in his role commissioning music videos for RCA artists like longtime collaborator Doja Cat. "I got to really get in there at the early stages with her, and we both grew together," says Houston, 33. "It has been so fun to be on the bus and watch it go."

### How do you describe what you do?

You're the person overseeing every single aspect of the video — hearing what the artist is looking for, trying to feel out their vision and matching that with the right team. Then it comes to the actual shoot day. If I've done my job well, I just sit back and watch because, at that point, everything has fallen into place.

### How did you get into this work?

I started off in Houston, working for Music World Entertainment [the management company founded by Mathew Knowles] back in 2010. Then they downsized, so I lost my job. I moved to Los Angeles and was at the Apple Store when my now boss [RCA executive vp creative content Camille Yorrick] came in and bought an iPad from me. It came up that she was in the music industry. I was like, "I used to work at Beyoncé's dad's company." And she was like, "I actually used to do

all of Beyoncé's videos." I kept in touch with her until there was an opportunity to join the team as a coordinator.

### How did the pandemic change your job?

Through the wonderful use of all of this remote technology, the cameras can actually plug into a Zoom feed. I was able to commission a few shoots from my living room, just looking on my laptop. I could see everything the director could see. It was incredible how well it all worked.

### Doja Cat's videos for "Say So" and "Streets" both nod to the TikTok dance challenges and memes that helped them blow up. Why was that important?

It's something that definitely came from Doja's side. When "Say So" came around, Doja thought it would be really cool to celebrate Haley [Sharpe, the TikTok user who] actually created the dance. Then with "Streets," we were all getting ready for [Doja's upcoming album] *Planet Her*, but "Streets" was just too big to deny. So we all looked at each other like, "Let's do it. Let's take this Silhouette Challenge and make the hottest one we could ever imagine." It has been so fun taking these little moments and making them into these huge visuals — and seeing not only how happy it has made Doja, but also how happy it makes the fans.

—HERAN MAMO



## Liz Goodwin

● GM

ATLANTIC RECORDS U.K.

"I've still yet to meet some of the team in person," says Goodwin, 44, who started her job early in the pandemic. But with recent U.K. chart smashes like Joel Corry and MNEK's "Head & Heart" and Anne-Marie's "Don't Play," she has been able to hit the ground running. Coming out of lockdown, "I'd like to hang on to our improved level of creative thinking when planning and executing global launches."

**THIS YEAR, I'LL CELEBRATE PRIDE BY** "Heading up to Manchester [England] with my wife to the events there, probably taking our nieces to see Shura play as well."

## Jerrold Grannis

● senior director, digital business development

UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP

Grannis, 45, works with tech startups to open new revenue streams for UMPG songwriters, and last year — in conjunction with Universal Music Group's Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging team — he helped launch Prism, the company's LGBTQ+ employee resource group. Among its priorities: "Reviewing HR policies and benefits to make sure they are best-in-class, especially as they relate to the trans community."

**THE PANDEMIC HOBBY I PICKED UP** "Nesting. I bought my first home during the pandemic."



GOODWIN



GRANNIS



GRINSPAN

## Michael Grinspan

● comedy touring agent

ICM PARTNERS

With a roster of many queer clients, Grinspan, 34, spent 2020 "getting ICM into the drag business" — he signed top-tier *RuPaul's Drag Race* stars Bob the Drag Queen, Katya and Trixie Mattel — and continuing to highlight standup's underserved LGBTQ+ market. (In the past, he has had clubs advertise shows on Grindr and Scruff, resulting in big box-office gains.) Now he's excited about the "calendar reset" of the live industry's return: "It has scrambled the old ways of doing things and opened up a lot of opportunities."

**THIS YEAR, I'LL CELEBRATE PRIDE BY** "Finally going out dancing for the first time in 16 months."

## Kristina Hedrick

● vp U.S. business development

SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

Hedrick's in-depth financial analysis and strategic thinking have made her one of the publisher's top dealmakers. A co-chair of OutLoud, Sony's New York LGBTQ+ employee resource group, the 41-year-old describes the company's uninterrupted service to its songwriters as a major win during a pandemic — while noting that "achieving fair compensation for songwriters continues to be the most pressing issue in music publishing."

**AS TOURS RETURN, I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE** "Janelle Monáe and Tegan and Sara — they're all incredibly innovative songwriters."

## Garrett Illing

● social media marketing manager

YOUTUBE MUSIC

In a year without touring, Illing, 31, made it easier for fans to connect globally: His social media promotions for *Blackpink: The Show*, YouTube's first livestream concert that used channel memberships, reached over 2 billion people, and his extensive digital campaign for the Save Our Stages Festival helped the National Independent Venue Association raise \$2 million in relief funds. "As we see artists and festivals increasingly lean toward livestreaming," he says, "YouTube Music's socials will become more of a promotional lever for ticket sales."

**MY SIDE HUSTLE** "Music supervision. I got my start in the Music for Visual Media department at WME and am still fascinated by soundtracks that complement storytelling."

## Matt Jones

● partner/vp copyrights and royalties

PRIMARY WAVE MUSIC

A 13-year veteran of the company, Jones wears many hats: negotiating sample clearances, providing catalog valuations and working on publishing/master acquisitions with artists such

# Mark McDevitt

● senior vp/deputy chief content protection and enforcement

RIAA



**MONTHS AFTER MARK** McDevitt started his RIAA career as an office clerk in October 1997, he heard

the word "Napster" — and his whole life changed. He graduated to online copyright protection and spent years fighting file-sharing and peer-to-peer networks. Today, he battles stream-ripping, or the use of apps and websites to create unauthorized copies of content on streaming platforms, as well as prerelease piracy.

**When Napster cropped up, I imagine your life got very busy.**

It changed considerably. A good part of my time back then was spent understanding how Napster worked. And doing demos and trying to lay it

out in easily understood terms so other people could understand.

**Back then, how much of your job was teaching non-tech-savvy record executives what Napster, MP3s and even the Internet were?**

I did a demo for an executive in the entertainment industry: "Here's how you install Napster, here's where all the songs are listed, here's what the categories mean." This individual stopped me and said, "I need you to step back, because what I'm trying to understand is what that little thing is that's moving across the screen." That little thing was the mouse pointer.

**Now that streaming has neutralized much of the peer-to-peer and**



**file-sharing piracy, what content-protection issues are you working on today?**

Prerelease piracy has moved to a much more sophisticated and insidious approach. Instead of trying to find a CD from some friend of a friend who works for a magazine or record store, it's trying to hack into an artist's email account, social network systems, cloud storage, home computers, recording studios, lawyers, managers, publicists, even family members. In the Napster era, people would leak things for bragging rights. Now these folks are doing it for money — or cryptocurrency, actually.

**How do you defend against it?**

Trying to help labels and artists understand it doesn't benefit anyone to be sending an unmastered release to another person via a Gmail account or storing it on an unprotected Dropbox account and passing on a link.

**How big of a problem is stream-ripping?**

I'm optimistic that it's slowly going down. We've sued, and those lawsuits have been very highly publicized, but the stream-ripper sites are trying to evade our protection efforts, changing their domain names in some minor way so they can bubble up to the top of the search results. It's a constant cat-and-mouse.

**Since 1997, how has the record industry's attitude toward LGBTQ+ issues changed?**

Very progressive and becoming more so. To be able to protect content for artists like Lil Nas X who have been very open, very out, I've found it personally gratifying. —STEVE KNOPPER



as Stevie Nicks, Devo, Air Supply, Olivia Newton John and the Ray Charles estate. “Despite everyone being in different cities and countries,” says Jones, 44, “we closed some of the biggest deals in Primary Wave’s history and in the industry as a whole.”

**THE PANDEMIC HOBBY I PICKED UP** “I adopted a pandemic puppy. He’s a Corgi named Pepper, and he’s a handful.”

## Lenore Kinder

● senior vp  
WASSERMAN MUSIC

In addition to steering the live careers of country powerhouses like Kacey Musgraves and Tanya Tucker, Kinder signed rising queer singer-songwriter Joy Oladokun to her roster in 2020 and notes the importance of “waving my flag high” and “using my influence to amplify all marginalized voices.” Now at Wasserman (which recently acquired Paradigm’s North American live-music business), she’s juggling “confirming tours for [the fourth quarter] of 2022 and relaunching tours that start in two months.”

**THE PANDEMIC HOBBY I PICKED UP** “Cooking — I love the *New York Times* app and *Mission Chinese* cookbook.”

## Daniel Lang

● vp digital licensing, Europe, Middle East, India and Africa  
WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC

Now a few months into the job, London-based Lang, 29, handles commercial negotiations with digital services around the world, working closely with regional subpublishers, local societies and other partners with the goal of “maximizing opportunities” for songwriters. The pandemic has changed the landscape: “From live streaming to in-home fitness,” he says, “the challenges have been to adapt to the influx without reinventing the wheel and to legitimize the revenue stream for songwriters without stifling innovation.”

**THIS YEAR, I’LL CELEBRATE PRIDE BY** “Having a boozy dinner party with my boyfriend, my best friends and the people I love.”

## Nick Lehman

● executive vp/chief strategy and digital officer  
ASCAP

Lehman, 50, and his team found “common ground” with the performing rights organization’s biggest competitor, BMI, to “drive data integrity, transparency and consistency across the industry” with the joint launch of Songview in December. The tool mines data for 20 million works to give users accurate and comprehensive information about songs’ rights holders — and it even earned a commendation from the U.S. Department of Justice’s antitrust division.

**AS TOURS RETURN, I CAN’T WAIT TO SEE** “Alanis Morissette’s rescheduled *Jagged Little Pill* tour, to reexperience songs that were so meaningful to me 25 years ago.”



HEDRICK



ILLING



JONES



KINDER



LANG



LEHMAN



Ponthier (left) and JORDY

## Tapping In On TikTok

JORDY and Allison Ponthier are winning fans on the app by showcasing their creativity — and giving queer stories a spotlight

Jordan Shulman has been hustling in the music industry since 2017. The singer-songwriter, who makes spare, intimate pop music as JORDY, used to cold-call producers and network his way into as many songwriting sessions as possible. But when he started posting his music on TikTok in March 2020, he stumbled into one of his most important career moves yet. Today, he has accrued over 150,000 followers, watched his streaming numbers skyrocket and signed a deal with 300 Entertainment thanks to heartfelt, hook-laden tunes like “Long Distance.”

“I posted ‘Long Distance’ and everything changed,” says JORDY, 26. “When I’m reading through comments, there’s more than just a couple of people being like, ‘Oh, my God. The way you’re using [male] pronouns in such a casual setting — I’m hearing myself in mainstream pop.’ That’s everything I want to do.”

Over the last few years, TikTok has become a haven for queer artists to showcase their creativity in ways they haven’t always had the freedom or platform to do. Often, songs blow up on the app when users insert snippets into their own videos (like with Lil Nas X’s hits). But artists like JORDY and colorful country pop star Allison Ponthier have built their followings as savvy content-creators in their own right, using the features and trends of TikTok to take viewers inside their music — and put queer stories front and center.

Ponthier, 25, started posting in 2019, sharing breezy covers of popular songs while displaying her talents with sculpture and stop-motion animation (also featured in her official music videos). Eventually, labels took notice, and in late 2020, she signed with Interscope Records. “I started posting on TikTok as a joke,” says Ponthier. “It was not to get famous, it was not to promote music, it was just because I wanted to have fun.”

But she was very good at it, attracting

hundreds of thousands of followers. Not every video was musical — she’d also post comedic clips or take part in viral memes of the day — but it all laid the groundwork for her debut single, “Cowboy,” which arrived in March. The plaintive track about struggling with identity became a conversation starter as fans used it to soundtrack posts about their coming out experiences. “Seeing people be vulnerable and tell their stories to a song I wrote when I was going through the exact same thing — it really makes me emotional,” says Ponthier.

Connecting with viewers takes many forms: Ponthier enjoys “harmony” challenges, in which singers invite others to use TikTok’s “duet” feature to add new layers to an original recording. JORDY will occasionally put a musical twist on an existing trend, like his series reimagining early-2000s pop hits with contemporary sounds. He also posts clips of himself singing unreleased tracks to build anticipation for new releases. “It’s literally free market research,” he says with a laugh. “It’s like, ‘Let’s put this on TikTok and see how people react.’ And if people really like it, like with ‘Long Distance,’ then it’s like, ‘Great, we’ll put it out.’”

Letting fans lead has been revolutionary. JORDY says songwriters and producers have suggested he change the pronouns of his songs to make them, in their words, “more universal.” The grassroots success of “Long Distance,” he says, proves them wrong: “People don’t care if I said ‘guy,’ they’re just intrigued because I’m being honest in the fact that I met a dude on the internet last week.”

For Ponthier, a series in which she updated traditionally “straight” songs with queer-themed lyrics was eye-opening. “There is a very hungry fan base for [queer] love songs,” she says. “People don’t realize how huge the community is — and how much we want songs that represent our experiences.”

—STEPHEN DAW





From left: Cazares, Huerta, Raymix, Esteman and Alborán.

## Latin's Coming Out Party

At long last, established and rising stars across its genres are publicly embracing their LGBTQ+ identities

It's an ode to an ex-lover that sounds like any other at first. On the buoyant synth-pop track "Fuimos Amor," Colombian pop star Esteman sings in Spanish of what it's like to fall under someone's spell: "I have you here by my side, I can't control it/I don't care about anyone else here or who they are." But the track, from his critically acclaimed 2019 album, *Amor Libre*, is something that, for decades, has been all too rare in Latin music: one man proudly recalling his love for another, with a male love interest cast in the music video.

When Esteman broke out in 2009 with the viral hit "No Te Metas a Mi Facebook" ("Stay Off My Facebook"), "I was out of the closet and had [shared] my sexual orientation with my family and friends," the 37-year-old (real name: Esteban Williamson) tells *Billboard* in Spanish. But for years, being gay never felt like something he could talk openly about in his music: "The advice always was, both from my family, for my protection, but also from the people who were getting to know me [in the industry]: 'Don't reveal your personal life; one must be prudent.'"

Though it's easy to take queer representation for granted today, progress has been slower in Latin music, where openly gay role models were scarce. But 11 years after Ricky Martin announced he was gay, becoming Latin's most prominent LGBTQ+ artist, real change has finally come. In the past two years alone, a striking number of established and rising Latin stars from across genres have come out, including Joy Huerta from sibling duo Jesse & Joy, Johnny Cazares from regional Mexican band Grupo Firme, electro-cumbia hitmaker Raymix and pop crooner Pablo Alborán. They join the ranks of vocal queer artists like Kany García, who came out in 2016, and Javiere Mena, who has been out since the beginning of her career in the early 2000s.

"There was a bit of uncertainty not

knowing what was going to happen, but I've always followed my convictions," says Raymix, 30, of his decision to come out in a YouTube video in 2020. "The reaction was very positive. It felt good knowing society is moving forward and I'm not the only one."

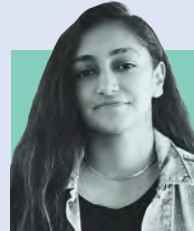
The diverse Latin music community is hard to generalize. But according to the Human Rights Campaign, obstacles that Latinx LGBTQ+ people face in coming out include religious discrimination and various cultures' emphasis on *machismo*, a particular concept of manliness that values strict gender roles. Attitudes have been evolving though, especially as a number of countries have legalized same-sex marriage, including Argentina (2010), Brazil (2013), Uruguay (2013), Colombia (2016), Ecuador (2019) and Costa Rica (2020).

Driving change in the industry, Esteman says, are young creators who are far removed from the generation of execs for whom coming out represented career suicide. And as the industry gets more democratized, the LGBTQ+ artists who break through, in turn, inspire "other artists to believe there is more room than ever to be themselves," says Roberta Pate, Spotify's head of artist/label partnerships, Latin America.

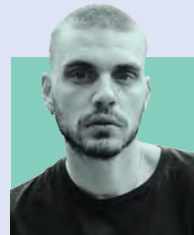
Still, Esteman and Raymix say there is more progress to be made, particularly outside of Latin music's more progressive bubbles. A 2019 survey from the GLSEN Research Institute and Chilean advocacy group Fundación Todo Mejora, found that, in seven different Latin American nations, the majority of LGBTQ+ students ages 13 to 20 faced bullying related to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

"I know I will not be the first or the last," Raymix says, "but I can encourage other people to be more free — and have complete peace of mind knowing that coming out will not affect their careers."

—ERNESTO MACIAS



LOPEZ



MANISCALCO



MANN



MILLER

### Inez Lopez

● senior manager of security, festivals

GOLDENVOICE/AEG

As a queer woman of color working in the male-dominated field of security, Lopez knows that festival safety needs to include everyone there. She's working closely with GV BLACK — a resource group started by Black employees at the promoter in 2018 — to assess inclusion practices at festivals like Coachella. "As festival promoters," she says, "we must do everything in our power to make the event industry equitable."

**MY FAVORITE GAY BAR** "Akbar in Silver Lake. It's one of those places where you always run into a friend."

### Drew Maniscalco

● senior director, streaming and sales

ATLANTIC RECORDS

How do you get a No. 1 single? Just ask Maniscalco, 30, whose team crafts Hot 100 strategy for chart-toppers like Cardi B and Silk Sonic by analyzing streaming data and building relationships between the label's roster and digital service providers. Just as exciting to him, though, are the organic successes: "For every song being heavily backed by a label, there are so many artists putting up singing videos or track demos that are going 'viral' and finding real fans."

**THE PANDEMIC HOBBY I PICKED UP** "Rhinestoning! From my reading glasses to my calculator, everything has been stoned."

### Carly Mann

● head of marketing/manager

THREE SIX ZERO

While looking after twin toddlers from home, Mann, 39, helped launch client Calvin Harris' Love Regenerator side project and worked with the DJ-producer and his frequent collaborator, director Emil Nava, on NFT art drops. She also oversees the campaign for WILLOW's forthcoming album, adding that she's thrilled about bringing "female-fronted rock back to the forefront of modern music."

**AS TOURS RETURN, I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE** "Lady Gaga. I instantly fan-girl out at her shows."

### Glenn Miller

● brand consulting and music executive

CREATIVE ARTISTS AGENCY

As COVID-19 ravaged the live-music industry, London-based Miller provided a glimmer of hope as an instrumental team member behind the outdoor Virgin Money Unity Arena, the United Kingdom's first socially distanced music venue. Launched last summer, it supported rising artists like Sam Fender and L Devine and "showed how the live industry can innovate and adapt to the changing environment," says Miller, who also leads CAA's international podcast strategy.

**MY FAVORITE GAY BAR** "The Glory on Kingsland Road. So much more than a gay pub, it's an important place for the LGBTQ+ community to gather."



**HE  
SHE  
THEY  
WE  
CREATE  
MUSIC**



**Thank you to our LGBTQIA+ members who inspire us to embrace our identities and live out loud.**

**You add color to our lives and magic to our music.**

**ASCAP is proud to support you and fight for you, during Pride Month and every other month, too.**

**#ASCAPProud**



## Acts Of Kindness

The producer says that simply sharing information can make the industry more inclusive

Last year, Adam Bainbridge — the acclaimed British electronic musician who records as Kindness — published an accessible online glossary of over 80 industry terms, like “mechanical royalties” and “retention period.” It’s one of many ways the transfeminine producer has tried to level the playing field for marginalized artists, from tweeting about how they did their taxes to sharing their contracts and other documents with rising musicians. “No one ever talks about this stuff,” says Bainbridge. “We live in fear of nondisclosure agreements, but fuck it. Life’s too short.”

### What meaningful steps can the industry take to be more inclusive?

Parent labels have sometimes empowered people of color to run imprints or labels within labels — where people of color are the CEO, the decision-maker, the A&R. I’d like to see more of that. That could start within indie labels. I work with [the Union of Musicians and Allied Workers], and we have to actively try and recruit people of color. We would struggle sometimes to get people [of color] to come to UMAW meetings and keep coming. If you’re just staring at a Zoom room of 20 white faces, it is alienating.

### Are there specific areas of focus you work on with the union?

Myself and Josephine Shetty [UMAW co-founder, who records as Kohinoorgasm] started an LGBTQ+ members group. Sometimes for the most marginalized, what’s really helpful is being able to exist without being tasked with a job. Maybe there’ll be a movie night or a hangout. Queer people end up having to problem-



Kindness

solve for everyone else — people of color do, women do. You end up being asked to highlight the flaws in the system. Some days, I just want to pick up an instrument.

### How can queer artists avoid being taken advantage of?

Artists should just talk to each other. One of the quickest shortcuts to exposing exploitative practices or inappropriate behavior is for artists to talk. [Sometimes] the more successful queer artists leave the rest of us behind. [We’ll] never get anywhere if those who have crossed the threshold of success don’t reextend the hand. What else could people do? Educate themselves. I understand label contracts are overwhelming, but carving certain things out of an unfair deal will still make it better than signing as is. Always talk to a lawyer about everything.

### LGBTQ+ artists haven’t always had equal access to the support white, straight, cisgender artists have.

Yeah. I can think of a big New York lawyer who was known in indie circles as the go-to person, but I also know that he made his non-men clients deeply uncomfortable. That’s something that most men don’t realize is even an issue — that their own lawyer might make someone feel uncomfortable. There are marginalizations that are only revealed in the day-to-day. I’d like to go to a label and have them get my pronouns right off the bat, but it invariably doesn’t happen.

—NOLAN FEENEY

## Tommy Moore

● vp artist and industry relations, board administration and governance

ACADEMY OF COUNTRY MUSIC

After the pandemic delayed last year’s ceremony, Moore, 32, helped produce the 2020 and 2021 ACM Awards only seven months apart. “The logistics and communications needed to put on a safe show for all the artists, industry and crew were no small feat and something I’m very proud of,” he says. As a founding member of the ACM’s diversity and inclusion task force, he’s also excited to see the group’s work this past year “take shape with actionable steps.” **THIS YEAR, I’LL CELEBRATE PRIDE BY** “Supporting my friends’ LGBTQ-owned small businesses.”

## Jen Mozenter

● vp A&R

SPICE

In just four years on the job, Mozenter, 32, and her team have built relationships with over 800 creators who now use the music platform to distribute their sounds and samples — some of which have ended up on hits by Bad Bunny and Doja Cat. The company paid creators a record \$15 million last year, and Mozenter is particularly proud of Spice’s efforts to support female and gender nonconforming producers by offering “education, tools and the mentorship needed to succeed.” **MY FAVORITE GAY BAR** “Gay Asstrology, a queer dance party in L.A.”



MOORE



MOZENTER



PATE



SANTOS



SCHNUR



SILVA

## Roberto Pate

● head of artist/label partnerships, Latin America

SPOTIFY

Making sure LGBTQ+ artists are represented in every Spotify initiative is a priority for Miami-based Pate, 34, who leads a team spread across Latin America and the United States. Last year, she took a lead role with the inaugural Spotify Awards in Mexico City and helped launch the streaming giant’s emerging-artist program, RADAR, which boosted 45 Latin acts and “became a central pillar for stimulating local music” during the pandemic.

**THE PANDEMIC HOBBY I PICKED UP** “Taking online courses on modern art and the history of Brazilian art.”

## Enrique Santos

● president/COO/radio host

I HEART LATINO

With his show kicking off at 6 a.m. and meetings that can go until 9 p.m., Miami-based Santos — the first openly gay Spanish-language radio personality — says there’s “never a dull moment” juggling on-air duties with his role developing Latin-focused programming. The 46-year-old, who also hosts and produces iHeartRadio Fiesta Latina, credits his audience with keeping him on track: “The most urgent thing in my line of work is my listeners.”

**MY SIDE HUSTLE** “I’m a proud partner in the growing Cuban Guys fast-food chain.”

## Darrin Schnur

● regional director of promotions, Southeast

ELEKTRA MUSIC GROUP

A veteran radio promoter, Atlanta-based Schnur has helped the label notch 13 No. 1 singles across multiple formats since its 2018 relaunch while also helping it secure the biggest market share at alternative radio in 2020 for the second consecutive year. “While airplay can be data-driven, you cannot have success unless the radio programmer has a reaction,” says Schnur, 52. “Eliciting that reaction is still the most fun part of the job.”

**AS TOURS RETURN, I CAN’T WAIT TO SEE** “Tones and I. Who wouldn’t want to shake off the last year by seeing ‘Dance Monkey’ live?”

## Jeremiah Silva

● music/talent executive

NBC’S LATE NIGHT WITH SETH MEYERS

When he’s not helping Meyers hit the bar with Rihanna and Kelly Clarkson for the show’s viral “Day Drinking” segments, Silva is out securing buzzer-beater bookings. For Election Day eve, he landed Tracy Chapman’s first TV appearance in five years, then in January locked in Run the Jewels’ Killer Mike for a powerful, last-minute conversation about the U.S. Capitol riot.

**AS TOURS RETURN, I CAN’T WAIT TO SEE** “At this point, almost anyone. But mostly and always Mariah Carey.”



A portrait of Akim Bryant, a Black man with a short beard and mustache, wearing a light blue button-down shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a vibrant gradient of purple, blue, and orange.

Way to go,  
**AKIM  
BRYANT**

Congratulations for being named to **Billboard's 2021 Pride List**.  
As Head of R&B Programming at Pandora, you're an invaluable  
part of our team. We're honored to work beside you every day.

From your SiriusXM & Pandora Family





## Marissa Smith

● music agent

WME

"This pandemic has forced us to ask the question 'Should we add a virtual element to this show?' more than ever before," says Nashville-based Smith, 27. In addition to her own roster, she leads both WME Music's social action efforts, which involves booking talent for nonprofit and political events, as well as the agency's digital concert business. In 2020, its new Virtual Appearances group took part in hundreds of shows, including Dua Lipa's *Studio 2054* livestream.

**MY SIDE HUSTLE** "Mentoring the next generation of women in music. I also sit on the boards of She Is the Music, Diversify the Stage, Noise for Now, Sustainable Partners and Children in Conflict."

## Macie Spear

● artist partnerships, North America

TIKTOK

Even artists need help navigating TikTok. That's

where Spear, 30, comes in. Over the past year, she has served as a bridge between the short-form video app and acts like Daya and Rebecca Black, helping them amplify their music and tell their stories in ways that feel authentic. "I believe it's important to make [LGBTQ+] artists feel supported and champion them through their careers," she says.

**AS TOURS RETURN, I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE** "Kim Petras. I've been a stan since I first saw her music video for 'I Don't Want It at All.'"

## Julie Vastola

● director of visual content

REPUBLIC RECORDS

Vastola, 30, works on campaigns for tentpole releases (like Ariana Grande's *Positions* and Nicki Minaj's *Beam Me Up Scotty*) and commissions assets ranging from custom motion graphics to Spotify Canvas loops. In helping to bring artists' visions to life, she's able to empower her community, too: "I was proud to work on Drake's first two lyric videos, created by a fellow LGBTQ+ creative whom we frequently work

with, [photographer-animator] Katia Temkin."

**AS TOURS RETURN, I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE**

"Joy Oladokun, an extremely talented singer-songwriter."

## Jessica Vaughn

● vp sync and creative

HEAVY HITTERS MUSIC

● president

HEAD BITCH MUSIC

The recently promoted vp increased department revenue by 107% in her first year at the boutique publishing/licensing firm — and kept the numbers up during the pandemic. "I've always refused the limits and labels others assign to me in my career," says the 33-year-old, who also runs custom music house Head Bitch Music. "Every day, I make a step to dismantle the old ways to create space for the industry we all deserve to work in."

**MY SIDE HUSTLE** "The over 20 monikers I create music under: LACES, JPOLND and Rvrside are my favorites."

## Alyse Velluro

● associate director of label management

THE ORCHARD

● founder

SLEEP WELL RECORDS

Velluro, 33, serves as "the go-between for all of our different services" at the Sony-owned distributor — the kind of work, she says, that puts her "at the forefront of any and all changes in music, social media and technology." Velluro, who also runs her own label, appreciates that there's no one right way to do business at The Orchard: "It's scary and risky, but being able to watch everyone adjust and grow from it has been really exciting."

**MY SIDE HUSTLE** "I'm also known as the artist PRONOUN — I fully write, record and produce all my own music."

## Zoe Williamson

● agent, music

UTA

"Live performance is a huge piece of every musician's career," says the 26-year-old, whose roster includes acclaimed LGBTQ+ artists like St. Vincent, Arlo Parks, Big Freedia and Pom Pom Squad. But Williamson — who co-founded La Femme Majeure, a UTA event series spotlighting women in the industry — likes to think beyond tours, too: "[Helping] clients recognize a variety of brilliant personal and unique creative aspirations is the part of my job I love the most."

**MY FAVORITE GAY BAR** "Cubbyhole! There are way too few lesbian bars left in NYC."

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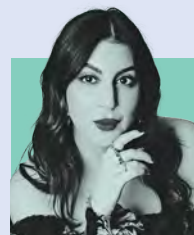
SMITH



SPEAR



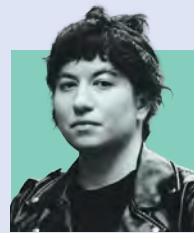
VASTOLA



VAUGHN



VELLURO



WILLIAMSON

## Hyperpop Pops Off

Rising star **ElyOtto** explains the genre's connection to the queer and trans communities

**F**rom rock'n'roll icon Little Richard to punk pioneer Jayne County, queer and trans artists have always pushed the aesthetics of popular music to the extreme. That includes the rising genre of hyperpop, whose biggest architects — like SOPHIE, Dorian Electra and 100 gecs — have used Auto-Tune, saccharine synths and ear-splitting distortion to make music that both celebrates and parodies the mainstream. "Hyperpop can really appeal to that teen in their bedroom who isn't feeling very good about themselves," says 17-year-old trans artist ElyOtto (aka Elliott Platt), whose manic breakout track, "SugarCrash!," has soundtracked nearly 9 million TikTok videos. He explains the genre's appeal.

**A lot of LGBTQ+ artists have defined hyperpop. What's the relationship?** Hyperpop is very filtered — you can manipulate it however you want. That's appealing to a lot of transfemme people. Like Laura Les from 100 gecs: She pitches up her vocals, puts a lot of Auto-Tune in there and uses that to scream and express all that raw emotion. I admire that so much. A lot of it also is that hypermasculine, hyperfeminine gender-role thing going on in mainstream pop. It's parody-



ing that by taking it to the next level: "We can do this, too, and we're trans."

**How does your identity shape your work?**

A lot of my lyrics are based around being dysphoric and how I treat myself. In "SugarCrash!," I did pitch up my vocals, but not because I'm dysphoric about my deep voice — it's more to detach myself. I can push it into the world without worrying people will be like, "He sounds like a girl." I can be like, "Duh! I pitched it up, of course I'm going to sound like a girl."

**You're only 17, and you have an RCA deal and millions of streams. Do you ever sit back and go, "Wow, I'm incredible"?**

I should probably start doing that because I have pretty low self-esteem otherwise. It has failed to hit me as hard as it should. I get recognized in the streets, and I'm like, "Yep, that's me. What's up?"

**What's on your post-pandemic wish list?**

I've never been to a rave before. I've been to moshes at local all-ages metal shows and miss them so much. I assume a rave is like that — only with EDM music and less teeth being knocked out. —JOE LYNCH



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on being named to Billboard's  
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OH BOY RECORDS**

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**INDEPENDENT**





# The Players

Indie stars, clockwise from upper left: Freddie Mercury, Megan Thee Stallion, Bad Bunny, Lil Durk and BTS.

## 2021 Indie Power Players

THESE ARE THE EXECUTIVES TO WATCH — AT LABELS, DISTRIBUTORS AND ASSOCIATIONS — WHO HAVE WEATHERED THE PANDEMIC AND IGNITED THE SUCCESS OF ARTISTS ON THE CHARTS, UNCONSTRAINED BY THE MAJOR-LABEL SYSTEM

**A** MID ALL OF THE challenges of the past year — office shut-downs, tour cancellations, a surge in social music platforms and even a vinyl supply backlog — the independent music sector has been thriving. Independents as a whole grew market share in 2020 from 29.7% to 31.1%, according to an analysis in March by MIDiA, which previously estimated that indie labels and artists account for nearly one-third of the global music market.

*Billboard's* Indie Power Players recognizes industry leaders — nominated by their companies and peers and selected by our editors — at independent labels and distributors. Labels are defined as independent, regardless of size, by their ownership through entities other than the three major music groups. This year's list particularly reflects the strength of independent labels in the R&B and hip-hop genres (often achieving hits through joint ventures with majors). Distributors, regardless of their corporate ownership, qualify as independent through the repertoire they market.

Executives from over 80 companies are recognized here. Many will gather

June 14-17 as the American Association of Independent Music hosts its second virtual Indie Week, presented by SoundExchange, as well as the Libera Awards, presented by Merlin (see page 89). A2IM's four days of panels, keynotes and networking sessions, followed by the awards celebration, will affirm — along with these profiles — that the state of independence in the music industry has never been stronger.

### ASSOCIATIONS

**Richard James Burgess**  
PRESIDENT/CEO, AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT MUSIC

Burgess salutes his team's "short-notice pivot to all-virtual events" in 2020 for both the Indie Week conference and the Libera Awards. Both will be presented online again this year. As A2IM has moved toward a more diverse and gender-balanced board, it also has launched initiatives like the Black Independent Music Accelerator program, which brought "many more Black-owned businesses into our fold," says Burgess. "We continue to build back to a viable economic environment for creators."

**The next legislation we need** "The lack of [a performance right for sound recordings on terrestrial radio] deprives creators of hundreds of millions of dollars a year from the U.S., and similarly from around the world. That giant conglomerates are exempted by law from having to pay for the product of someone else's labor and for the use of someone else's property is unique and shameful."

**Jeremy Sirota**  
CEO, MERLIN

Merlin is the digital rights music licensing partner for independent labels, distributors and other music rights holders around the world. After Sirota became CEO in January 2020, he welcomed 81 new members, with first-time members from Burkina Faso, Ghana, Peru, Singapore, Slovakia and the United Arab Emirates. "In 2021, we've already welcomed 15 new members from all corners of the world, including India, the Middle East, Kenya, Europe, Japan and North America," he says.

**Trend most affecting the indie community** "The rise of social music platforms. In the last year alone, new services launched, existing services grew and a few large platforms expanded. Merlin was

the first partner to sign a sound recording agreement with Snap, we closed a deal with Triller, we expanded our relationship with YouTube — via Super Chat, Super Stickers and Shorts — and we've deepened our partnership with Facebook."

### LABELS

**Patrick Amory**  
CO-OWNER/PRESIDENT, MATADOR RECORDS

**Gerard Cosloy**  
CO-OWNER, MATADOR RECORDS

**Chris Lombardi**  
CO-OWNER, MATADOR RECORDS

Matador's recent achievements include launching international campaigns for Perfume Genius, Julien Baker and Lucy Dacus; bringing in new signees Mdou Moctar and The Goon Sax; and acquiring new catalogs from Interpol, Pavement, Spoon and Gang of Four. The company also has reissued some of its earlier works through the Matador Revisionist History series. The label was also able to save "an incredible amount of money on our annual travel and entertainment budget," says Cosloy, 56. "Sometimes sacrifices are necessary."



**Trend most affecting the indie community** “The two-year turnaround time for new vinyl is taking some getting used to.” —**COSLOY**

**Noah Assad**

CEO, RIMAS ENTERTAINMENT

In 2020, Bad Bunny’s *El Último Tour del Mundo* became the first all-Spanish album to ever reach No. 1 on the Billboard 200. His single “Dákiti,” with Jhay Cortez, debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard Global Excl. U.S. chart, and Bad Bunny was Spotify’s most streamed artist of the year. Behind Bunny is manager Assad, 31, who signed him to his own Rimas Entertainment. The Puerto Rican indie now has a staff of 60 and over 100 artists, producers and songwriters on its roster. “When it comes to disruption, anyone can do it. The problem is the vision,” says Assad. And his vision? “I wanted to be one more major [label]. We can do the same things they can.”

**Tunde Balogun**

CO-FOUNDER/PRESIDENT, LVRN

**Junia Abaidoo**

CO-FOUNDER/HEAD OF OPERATIONS AND TOURING, LVRN

**Justice Baiden**

CO-FOUNDER/HEAD OF A&R, LVRN

**Sean “Famoso” McNichol**

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

**Carlton Ramong**

CO-FOUNDER/CREATIVE DIRECTOR, LVRN

The Atlanta-based label and creative agency LVRN (which stands for Love Renaissance) boasts R&B superstar signees 6LACK and Summer Walker and has spent the past year expanding different aspects of the company, including boosting its songwriting division through a publishing deal with Warner Chappell and growing the management roster by signing dvn. The company is also marking the first year of the LVRN Mental Health Department, which Balogun says helps artists and staff cope with challenges from creativity roadblocks due to COVID-19.

**Best timesaving tip** “Prioritizing what’s really important first, then getting to everything else. In essence, we want to answer and try to do everything in the moment at once, which can lead to being drained or tired, especially when you’re rushing to get things done. It can lead to missing important information.” —**BALOGUN**

**Bang Si-hyuk**

CHAIRMAN/CEO, HYBE

**Lenzo Yoon**

GLOBAL CEO, HYBE AND HYBE AMERICA

HYBE, formerly known as Big Hit Entertainment, acquired Scooter Braun’s Ithaca Holdings in a \$1.05 billion deal in April that includes management, label services and publishing for clients including BTS, Justin Bieber and Ariana Grande. The company also acquired Naver’s V Live video streaming service and partnered with



Parton (left) and McGraw



Universal Music Group’s Geffen Records to create a K-pop label in the United States and a music competition series that will debut in 2022. Yoon will serve as the conduit between the label’s Seoul and Los Angeles outposts. The moves align with Bang’s vision of creating “the world’s best entertainment lifestyle platform based on music,” he says.

**Pandemic business practice that will last**

“The format of concerts. A mixture of on-line and offline performances will become commonplace, and the value of offline performances will increase further.” —**YOON**

**Steve Bartels**

12TONE MUSIC

With the Joji catalog on its way to 2 million album consumption units and **DOLLY PARTON**’s *A Holly Dolly Christmas* piling up nearly 250,000 album consumption units since its October release, the label has now turned its attention to its new signing, Illenium, to build momentum for the artist’s next album expected this summer. “We continued to keep our core staff motivated during the pandemic, releasing and promoting five different songs with multiple remixes — close to 30 versions in total — while delivering two No. 1 Dance Mix/Show Airplay Songs in the process,” says Bartels.

**Best timesaving tip** “Know what is important in each artist campaign and further it without wasting time on things your experience tells you won’t pan out. From having worked within the major-label system and now in indie entrepreneur land, I have learned what part of the marketing and signing footprint can give you immediate results for analysis in order to read whether you move forward, move differently or just stop.”

**Scott Borchetta**

FOUNDER/PRESIDENT/CEO, BIG MACHINE LABEL GROUP

**Andrew Kautz**

COO, BIG MACHINE LABEL GROUP

Under Borchetta and Kautz, **TIM MCGRAW**’s return to Big Machine last year led to the singer’s No. 1 on Top Country Albums in September with *Here on Earth*, while the rechristened Lady A joined Big

Machine’s BMLG Records, scoring two chart-toppers on Country Airplay and earning a Grammy nomination for its album *Ocean*. Carly Pearce hit No. 1 on Country Airplay with “I Hope You’re Happy Now” (with Lee Brice), while the country-pop trio Avenue Beat captured the zeitgeist with “F2020,” which went viral on TikTok.

**Shari Bryant Omar Grant**

CO-PRESIDENTS, ROC NATION LABEL

While its clients include Rihanna, JAY-Z and J. Cole, Roc Nation’s label division takes pride in developing younger talent, including recent signings Snoh Aalegra, Kalan.FrFr and Maeta, as well as the continuing advancement of Rapsody, Belly, and Jaden and Willow Smith. “We aren’t in the volume business, because we are a smaller company,” says Bryant. “It takes a little longer, but we will have a good amount of new artists that will be in the mainstream conversation.”

**Best timesaving tip** “Systems. If you don’t have a strong foundation with systems to handle your check list of mandatory things that an artist must have — social media, photos, updated bio, one sheet, clearances — you don’t have room to enhance.” —**GRANT**

**Ken Bunt**

PRESIDENT, DISNEY MUSIC GROUP

**David Abdo**

SENIOR VP GLOBAL OPERATIONS AND DISTRIBUTION, DISNEY MUSIC GROUP

**Robbie Snow**

SENIOR VP GLOBAL MARKETING, DISNEY MUSIC GROUP

**Karen Lieberman**

VP SALES AND DIGITAL, DISNEY MUSIC GROUP

Disney Music Group, which includes Hollywood Records and Walt Disney Records, counts the launch of its parent company’s new streaming service, Disney+, as a coup for its artist roster that also helped spread cheer during the pandemic. “Our music resonated with people around the world, especially during quarantine,” says Bunt. “Between fans singing Queen songs on their balconies to three television specials of *Disney Music Family Singalongs*, music is a universal language

that brought joy and comfort to millions.” Timed to Juneteenth, the company will release the third volume of *Music for the Movement*, a collaboration with ESPN’s *The Undefeated*.

**The next legislation we need** “Reform of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act in order to update safe harbor provisions and promote more effective control of music piracy.” —**BUNT**

**Missi Callazzo**

CO-OWNER, MEGAFORCE RECORDS

Callazzo started as an intern at Megaforce in 1989 and ended up taking over the company that released early Metallica albums, as well as records by Ace Frehley, Testament, Ministry and Anthrax. The lattermost band celebrates its 40th anniversary this year and Megaforce itself is one year shy of that milestone. “We have not slowed down, the pandemic notwithstanding,” says Callazzo, who notes forthcoming releases from Third Eye Blind, Umphrey’s McGee and Rebelution.

**Best way to observe Juneteenth** “There is always more to learn, and this is a day to reflect, step back, fill in the blanks and educate oneself.” —**CALLAZZO**

**Don Cannon Leighton “Lake” Morrison Tyree “DJ Drama” Simmons**

CO-FOUNDERS, GENERATION NOW

Before 2020, Generation Now earned success on the Billboard Hot 100 through its lone superstar, Lil Uzi Vert. The burgeoning label now has the luxury of pairing the “XO Tour Llif3” rapper with Kentucky-born co-star Jack Harlow. During the pandemic, the Louisville native scored a top five Billboard 200 debut with *That’s What They All Say*, anchored by his No. 2 Hot 100 hit, “Whats Poppin.” “[The pandemic] made us more meticulous than ever,” says Morrison, “from the music to production to project rollouts.”

**Pandemic business practice that will last**

“We’ll continue to address the importance of mental and physical health. Most businesses continue to push the narrative of working hard every minute but fail to address staying mentally and physically healthy in the process of reaching your dream.” —**MORRISON**

**Marie Clausen**

HEAD OF NORTH AMERICA/HEAD OF GLOBAL STREAMING, NINJA TUNE

In a difficult year for independent labels, Clausen, 39, and her team managed to pull off a successful deal with the label of electronic duo ODESZA, Foreign Family Collective. Together, the two labels launched the eponymous debut album by Bronson, the duo’s collaborative project with Golden Features, which notched a No. 5 debut on the Top Dance/Electronic Albums chart. “This new venture allows us to work even





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**billboard**  
INDIE POWER PLAYERS 2021



**ANGEL  
DEL VILLAR**

CEO / FOUNDER

*Angel Del Villar*

# 10+ YEARS OF EXCELLENCE



ARTISTAS EXCLUSIVOS

ULICES CHAIDEZ | ESLABON ARMADO | LENIN RAMIREZ | T3R ELEMENTO  
JOSE MANUEL | CHELI MADIRD | EL MAKABELICO | RUBEN FIGUEROA  
GABINO MONTALVO | ANGEL PEREZ | OSCAR CORTEZ | MARCO SORIANO  
DAVID BERNAL | SUPREMO



more closely to create the best environment for artists and their music," says Clausen, who serves on the boards of both A2IM and Merlin.

**Trend most affecting the indie community** "Removing market barriers and gatekeepers through streaming, allowing in return commercial success for independents of all shapes and sizes on a gradually more level playing field."

### Tomas Cookman

CEO, INDUSTRIA WORKS/NACIONAL RECORDS

For the second year in a row, Cookman's team pivoted its weeklong Latin Alternative Music Conference in May to a free, virtual event that had 25,000 registrants (compared with 10,000 last year) and a peak viewership of 5,000. "It's further proof that the music industry is thriving," says Cookman, who this past year hired five new staffers for his company, which includes a record label and management division.

**Trend most affecting the indie community** "As more and more funding enters the music industry, especially in areas like publishing, the further clarification of creator rights and subsequent payments will be key."

### Mike Curb

FOUNDER/CHAIRMAN, CURB RECORDS

As a philanthropist, Curb has made major contributions to, among others, the National Museum of African American Music, Bethune-Cookman University, Fisk University and Nashville organizations to aid underserved communities during the pandemic. As an activist, he penned a *Billboard* op-ed last year titled, "Why a Slate of Tennessee Bills Are Discriminatory and Could Hurt the State's Music Community." And at 76, he remains a hitmaker:

Curb Records' Dylan Scott reached No. 4 on Country Airplay in May with "Nobody" from his EP *Nothing To Do Town*, which hit No. 3 on Top Country Albums. Lee Brice's latest album, *Hey World*, peaked at No. 7 on Top Country Albums in January, and "Amen," the latest single from the Christian pop duo for King & Country reached No. 6 on Christian Airplay in May.

### Angel Del Villar

FOUNDER/CEO, DEL RECORDS

Del Villar, 40, reports that despite the pandemic his label has had one of its most successful years on digital platforms, highlighted by the flourishing career of regional Mexican group Eslabon Armado, which claimed its third No. 1 on the Regional Mexican Albums chart in January with *Corta Venas*. For now, Del Villar is focused on getting Del Records' roster back on tour. "It's the time to join forces, especially in the genre, and create tours that people are dying to see," he says.

**Pandemic business practice that will last** "The fast and constant way we consume music. We have to constantly release content."

### Brandon "Lil Bibby" Dickinson George "G-Money" Dickinson Peter "Pete" Jideonwo

PARTNERS, GRADE A PRODUCTIONS

The Grade A team took pride in "properly honoring **JUICE WRLD**'s legacy," says Jideonwo, by delivering (in partnership with Interscope) the rapper's posthumous album *Legends Never Die*, which debuted last July at No. 1 on the Billboard 200. "This, combined with the success of **THE KID LAROI**, has been great to witness," says Jideonwo of the label's Australian rapper, whose duet with Miley Cyrus on "Without You" has reached the top 10 on the Hot 100. "The progression of Grade A into a musical and business force has paved the way for a bright future."

**Best way to observe Juneteenth** "Take the day off to reflect on how far we have come and how far we still have to go. We should volunteer for a cause or organization dedicated to equality and be sure to do our part in giving back. Juneteenth should be a nationally celebrated holiday." —**JIDEONWO**

### Seth England

PARTNER/CEO, BIG LOUD

While Morgan Wallen has had one of the best-selling country albums of the year for Big Loud with *Dangerous: The Double Album*, the company in February suspended his recording contract after video emerged of Wallen using a racial slur. (Wallen in May sang of "making some bad decisions" in a new song, "Thought You Should Know.") England's team kept the label on the charts, however, with roster mates Chris Lane, HARDY, Dallas Smith and Sean Stemaly, among others.



Juice Wrld

### Matt Galle Mike Marquis

PARTNER/CEOs, PHOTO FINISH RECORDS

Home to 3OH!3, Handsome Ghost and Marian Hill, Photo Finish Records is still counting the returns from SHAED's breakthrough single, "Trampoline," which has racked up 2 billion streams worldwide, according to the company. The surprise hit set up the label for its "best years yet" leading up to its 15th anniversary in 2021, says Galle. Meanwhile, Marquis is proud of a new partnership with alternative rock band The Maine to help grow the 600 million streams of its catalog and get the Arizona act "to the next level of success," he says.

**The next legislation we need** "To address the monopolization of ticketing. The ticketing companies have too strong a hold on the buyers and charge outrageous fees to the consumer, which are typically not shared with the artist." —**MARQUIS**

### Daniel Glass

FOUNDER/CEO, GLASSNOTE MUSIC

### Chris Scully

GM/CEO, GLASSNOTE MUSIC

Artist development is the "true DNA" of Glassnote, says Glass, who cites the label's commitment to developing career artists like Chvrches and Aurora as "the reason people sign with us." When Chvrches' 2018 song "Forever" gained in streams and sales after a 2020 synch on the Netflix series *Elite*, Glassnote promoted the song to radio. The label did the same for Aurora's 2015 song "Runaway" after a viral TikTok video propelled it to Nos. 19 and 22 on *Billboard*'s Global Excl. U.S. and Global 200 charts, respectively, in May. "And with the return of touring," says Glass, "they're both on the cusp of joining the pantheon of arena artists."

**Best timesaving tip** "Counting to 10. Inhaling and exhaling. Ironically, taking a moment to think before responding or taking action can end up saving the most time in the end. Taking the subway will save you a lot of time, too." —**GLASS**

### Michael Goldstone

FOUNDER/CO-OWNER, MOM + POP MUSIC

### Thaddeus Rudd

CO-PRESIDENT/CO-OWNER, MOM + POP MUSIC

"During a challenging time, we were able to break through with Ashe," says Goldstone of the "Moral of the Story" singer-songwriter whose debut album, *Ashlyn*, arrived May 7 featuring collaborations with FINNEAS and Niall Horan. Goldstone also points to Beach Bunny's "Cloud 9," which he says hit over 2 million streams per day; electronic artist Porter Robinson's "brilliant" sophomore album, *Nurture*, which debuted at No. 1 on the Top Dance/Electronic Albums chart in May; and upcoming priority releases from FKJ, Courtney Barnett and Lucius.

**Best timesaving tip** "Being flexible and inclusive empowers voices to break through. Most of our company touches every release. Having 25 people working on a release with management, agents and publicists makes for an optimum team." —**GOLDSTONE**

### Elliot Grainge

FOUNDER/CEO, 10K PROJECTS

"This year, two of our label partners had incredible success," says Grainge, 27. "Taz Taylor and Nick Mira at Internet Money had one of the biggest records of the year with 'Lemonade' and established their company as an artist brand. And our partners Zack Friedman and Tony Talamo at Homemade Projects launched the careers of Surfaces, Peach Tree Rascals and Salem Ilese. The success of these two partnerships really shows what we can do as independents when we work together."

**The next legislation we need** "Artists need healthcare now and too many of them are falling through the cracks. As a Brit who grew up where we had universal healthcare, the fact that this country does not provide a comprehensive healthcare plan to all of its citizens is so surprising to me. How many years away are we from solving this problem in the U.S.?"



The Kid LAROI





*Congratulates*

**JIMMY HUMILDE**



**ON BEING NAMED ONE OF billboard**  
**2021 INDIE POWER PLAYERS**





### Benjy Grinberg

FOUNDER/PRESIDENT, ROSTRUM RECORDS

Rostrum Records, once the label home of Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller, signed rapper Rich the Kid earlier this year in a move that affirms the view of Grinberg, 43, that “independent doesn’t mean small.” Under the multimillion-dollar deal, Rostrum will release **RICH THE KID**’s music in partnership with BMG. Grinberg calls him “a key voice of this generation, and we’re very excited that he chose Rostrum as his new home.”

**Trend most affecting the indie community** “Blockchain has so much potential to help create a database of music rights. It’s crazy that the music industry hasn’t gotten its act together in this respect.”

### Brett Gurewitz

FOUNDER/CEO, EPITAPH/ANTI- RECORDS

### Matt McGreevey

GM, EPITAPH/ANTI- RECORDS

The roster of Epitaph/Anti-, the label founded in 1980 by Bad Religion guitarist Gurewitz, succeeded this year despite the pandemic. Fleet Foxes’ *Shore* topped the Americana/Folk Albums chart, while Architects’ *For Those That Wish To Exist* reached the top 10 on the Top Album Sales chart. The label’s past year also included releases by Ben Harper, M. Ward, The Menzingers and The Ghost Inside. “It has become very clear that we don’t need to be in the same building to be successful,” says McGreevey, adding that continuing virtual operations “allow for our teams around the world to collaborate in a more meaningful and immediate way.”

**Trend most affecting the indie community** “The rise in demand for vinyl



Rich the Kid (left) and Maidza

records has been great, but this is putting a major strain on the plants, causing production timelines to expand and resulting in delays.” —**McGREEVEY**

### Tyson Haller

SENIOR VP/HEAD OF PROMOTION, CONCORD

### Karen Kloack

SENIOR VP SYNC MARKETING, CONCORD

### Carrie Smith

VP CREATIVE SERVICES, CONCORD

Concord’s promotion team helped The Pretty Reckless become “the first female-fronted band to score six No. 1s on the Mainstream Rock Airplay chart,” says Haller, when the band’s single “And So It Went” (featuring Tom Morello) reached the top spot in April. Kloack helped Nathaniel Rateliff “fulfill his dream of performing on *Saturday Night Live*,” she says, and brokered his partnership with Apple TV+ to pen “Redemption” for the 2020 film *Palmer* starring Justin Timberlake. Smith celebrated her creative team’s three wins in physical album packaging at the virtual Making Vinyl Packaging Awards in February.

**The next legislation we need** “An amendment to the Copyright Act granting owners of sound recordings the same public performance right [on terrestrial radio] that is enjoyed by copyright owners in virtually all other developed countries.” —**KLOACK**

### Simon Halliday

WORLDWIDE MANAGING DIRECTOR, 4AD

### Nabil Ayers

GM, 4AD

Despite the loss of live performances as a promotional avenue, 4AD broke two new acts during the pandemic: the London quartet Dry Cleaning and **TKAY MAIDZA**,

a singer-songwriter-rapper and a native of Zimbabwe who lives in Australia. “During a time when both campaigns would rely heavily on touring,” says Ayers, “they’ve both managed to feel omnipresent due to press, radio, video content we’ve created with partners and great word-of-mouth.”

### Pandemic business practice that will last

“Without the pressure of pegging an album release to a tour or major festival, we’ve had more space to release music, video and to build a story. When touring comes back we’ll surely revert, but hopefully we can implement some of what we’ve learned.” —**AYERS**

### Jimmy Humilde

FOUNDER/CEO, RANCHO HUMILDE

Humilde’s label has helped launch a wave of urban regional Mexican artists who’ve connected with a new generation of listeners. They include 20-year-old Natanael Cano, who had the most-consumed regional Mexican album of 2020 and helped Rancho Humilde end the year as the No. 1 Regional Mexican Albums label on the *Billboard* charts, outranking Universal and Sony. Says Humilde: “I think the playing field is more level than before.”

**Best timesaving tip** “Trust your gut feeling. If you feel that a certain project will be successful, don’t doubt yourself, and go all in.”

### Eric Hurt

VP A&R, EMPIRE NASHVILLE

### Heather Vassar

VP MARKETING, EMPIRE NASHVILLE

In its first 12 months of existence, Empire Nashville made an impact with Willie Jones, whose album *Right Now* in-

cludes the Black empowerment anthem “American Dream.” Hurt signed Jones to a publishing deal that led to the Empire Nashville release. (Jones has since moved to Sony Music Nashville.) Empire Nashville’s Bear and a Banjo, meanwhile, is a collaboration between hitmakers Jared Gutstadt and Jason “Poo Bear” Boyd, and Americana artist Waylon Payne made his national TV debut on *CBS This Morning: Saturday* with a three-song performance.

### Matthew Johnson

PRESIDENT, FAT POSSUM RECORDS

### Melinda Caffin

COO, FAT POSSUM RECORDS

A bevy of new releases and blasts from its past are paving the road for Fat Possum’s 30th anniversary in 2022. On tap: a forthcoming seventh album by Wavves — the band’s first for the label in 10 years — and a partnership with Seymour Stein’s Blue Horizon Records that brings back Fleetwood Mac’s Peter Green-era catalog. In May, Possum alums The Black Keys released *Delta Kream* on Nonesuch Records, featuring covers of early signings R.L. Burnside and Junior Kimbrough. The album served as a tribute to their first label home and to the band’s roots in the Mississippi hill country blues tradition.

### Gordon Kerr

PRESIDENT/CEO, BLACK RIVER ENTERTAINMENT

Launching an album during the pandemic was a bold move for any artist or label. With the support of Kerr and his Black River team, Kelsea Ballerini released two — *Kelsea*, which arrived in March 2020, and *Ballerini*, in September. Earlier in 2021, Ballerini earned an Academy of Country Music Award nomination for female artist of the year. Under Kerr, Black River also has been nurturing rising acts like MaRynn Taylor, Josh Wilson and Carolina Story.

### Allen Kovac

FOUNDER/CEO, BETTER NOISE MUSIC/IOTH STREET ENTERTAINMENT

With Better Noise named *Billboard*’s No. 1 mainstream rock label of 2020, Kovac’s companies keep making a bang in the guitar-crunching game. While working “to amplify the iconic success of Mötley Crüe and elevating Five Finger Death Punch into one of the biggest hard rock bands in the world, we have consistently developed younger artists,” says Kovac, 66, noting the chart-topping success of Bad Wolves and the global breakthrough of Mongolian band The Hu.

**The next legislation we need** “Much stronger regulation of the streaming services and the three major record companies.”

### David LaPointe

FOUNDER/OWNER, LP

Tropical music continues to successfully compete against regional Mexican and reggaetón thanks, in part, to



# billboard

INDIE POWER PLAYERS  
& PRIDE HONOREES



**DAVID PORTER**  
MADE IN MEMPHIS ENTERTAINMENT  
CEO



**TONY ALEXANDER**  
MADE IN MEMPHIS ENTERTAINMENT  
PRESIDENT & MANAGING DIRECTOR



**JESSICA VAUGHN**  
HEAVY HITTERS MUSIC  
VICE PRESIDENT, SYNC & CREATIVE

## Congratulations

to Made in Memphis Entertainment's (MIME)  
Indie Power Players & Billboard Pride honorees.  
From everyone across the MIME family of  
companies, thank you for all that you do.



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LaPointe's independent label, marketing and management firm, LP. His clients include Puerto Rican salsa legends such as N'Klabe, whose latest album "spawned the worldwide smash 'Me Enamoré Como Nunca,'" says LaPointe, and La India, who reemerged with her first new music in five years. And despite streaming models putting "independent artists in a more difficult situation," says LaPointe, the label finished at No. 4 on *Billboard's* Tropical Airplay year-end labels chart in 2020.

**Trend most affecting the indie community** "The pandemic has certainly brought to light many issues for indie artists with streaming ... and the ways data can be manipulated for leverage."

#### Kevin "Coach K" Lee

COO, QUALITY CONTROL

#### Pierre "Pee" Thomas

CEO, QUALITY CONTROL

In 2020, Quality Control maintained its dominance in rap (in partnership with Motown) with Lil Baby's second album, *My Turn*. By earning 2.63 million equivalent album units in the United States, according to MRC Data, Lil Baby bested pop titans Taylor Swift and The Weeknd for the year's most popular album. Thomas gushes that *My Turn* "was the [most-consumed] album of all genres in 2020, and we rode into 2021 with a monumental Grammy performance."

**Trend most affecting the indie community** Non-fungible tokens "open up a world of ownership and secondary transactions like we all have never seen. It'll be interesting to see how it impacts music and the content artists make." —THOMAS

#### Kevin Liles

CO-FOUNDER/CEO, 300 ENTERTAINMENT

#### Rayna Bass

SENIOR VP MARKETING, 300 ENTERTAINMENT

#### Selim Bouab

SENIOR VP/HEAD OF A&R, 300 ENTERTAINMENT

#### Geoff Ogunlesi

VP A&R, 300 ENTERTAINMENT; VP, YSL RECORDS

#### Leesa Brunson Boland

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

The roster for 300 Entertainment has a deep bench of success stories: Young Thug and Gunna topped the Billboard 200 with their latest albums, and Megan Thee Stallion landed two Hot 100 No. 1s and three Grammy Awards in 2021, including best new artist. Liles says his team is most proud about becoming the first label to land on *Inc.* magazine's Best Workplaces list. "The humanization of our industry is a priority for me," he says. "We're not just talking about employees, artists, writers, producers and managers. We are first talking about human beings."

**Pandemic business practice that will last** "Now more than ever, mental health should be valued. This year we launched a program to reimburse employees for the cost of mental health services up to twice a week. [We have] also started another companywide initiative, 300 Takes a Break, which is a fund for employees to take a vacation." —LILES

#### Justin Lubliner

CEO, THE DARKROOM

Lubliner's independently owned imprint, The Darkroom, in partnership with Interscope, launched Billie Eilish to stardom in 2019 and watched her sweep the Grammys' top honors in 2020 with her debut album, *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* The highlight of the past year for Lubliner, 30, was helping put together

Eilish's documentary, *The World's a Little Blurry*, which he executive-produced.

**Pandemic business practice that will last** "Long walks for business meetings instead of sitting in an office."

#### David Macias

PRESIDENT, THIRTY TIGERS

Two decades after Thirty Tigers was founded in Nashville, the label, under Macias, has become home to an acclaimed 120-act roster of Americana, country and folk artists, including the late John Prine, whose albums it distributes. Macias (who also is a partner in Triple Tigers Records; see below) in the past year has seen Alanis Morissette debut at No. 1 on Top Rock Albums with *Such Pretty Forks in the Road* and **JASON ISBELL AND THE 400 UNIT** peak at No. 1 on Top Country Albums with *Reunions*, while Lucinda Williams reached No. 3 on Americana/Folk Albums and No. 21 on Top Rock Albums with her 13th studio set, *Good Souls Better Angels*.

#### Joshua Mendez

CO-FOUNDER/COO, RICH MUSIC

Rich Music is a nimble company where label executives benefit from "dealing directly with the artist and not having to go through 20 channels to make a decision," says Mendez, 32. In 2020, Rich Music artists such as Sech, Dalex and Dimelo Flow amassed 2.5 billion streams, according to the company, while the Miami-based label ranked on multiple *Billboard* year-end charts, including No. 6 on Top Latin Labels, No. 5 on Hot Latin Songs Labels and No. 6 on Top Latin Albums Labels.

**Trend most affecting the indie community** "Major labels changing terms for artist collaborations."

#### Martin Mills

CHAIRMAN, BEGGARS GROUP

#### Matt Harmon

PRESIDENT, BEGGARS GROUP U.S.

#### Risa Matsuki

VP PROMOTIONS, BEGGARS GROUP

#### Miwa Okumura

SENIOR VP WEST COAST OPERATIONS AND LICENSING, BEGGARS GROUP

Beggars Group focused on the well-being of furloughed touring workers amid the pandemic. The label group, which includes 4AD, Matador Records, Rough Trade and XL Recordings, created a band-crew fund that distributed money to nearly 180 people among their artists' crew members during the holiday season — a time when they had "no way to generate income," says Harmon. The record company — alongside Ninja Tune — also committed to become completely carbon-negative by the end of 2022 by reducing emissions through product and supply changes.

**Best timesaving tip** "Picking up the phone. The best and most economical way to avoid Microsoft Teams or massive email threads is to plug in your headphones, make the call and get the issue sorted."

#### Todd Moscovitz

FOUNDER/CEO, ALAMO RECORDS

#### Tiara Hargrave

EXECUTIVE VP/GM, ALAMO RECORDS

In the five years since rock-to-rap mogul Moscovitz founded Alamo Records, the label has established itself as a dominant force in hip-hop, with a roster that includes Lil Durk, Rod Wave, blackbear and Smokepurpp. Most recently, the label has released two of the biggest rap albums of 2021 to date: Lil Durk's *The Voice* (co-released with Geffen) peaked at No. 2 on the Billboard 200, and Wave's *SoulFly* topped the chart in April — the company's first No. 1.

**The next legislation that we need** "Making mental health, financial literacy and addiction-reform resources available to all artists, which can change the life span of artists and help their quality of life." —HARGRAVE

#### Norbert Nix

PRESIDENT, TRIPLE TIGERS RECORDS

Under Nix, Triple Tigers has scored two Country Airplay chart-toppers in the past 12 months: Scotty McCreery's "In Between" and Russell Dickerson's "Love You Like I Used To." The latter was Dickerson's fourth consecutive single to reach the peak when it topped the list in November. That streak set up the arrival of his second album, *Southern Symphony*. Nix guided the strategy for the set, which included the video "Southern Symphony Album Experience," a collection of clips telling the story of the release, track by track. *Southern Symphony* reached No. 14 on Top Country Albums.



Jason Isbell and The 400 Unit





**THE RICHMUSIC TEAM AND ITS  
DISTINGUISHED ARTIST ROSTER**

**CONGRATULATES  
JOSHUA MENDEZ AND  
DAVID ALVARADO!**

**NAMED ONCE AGAIN AS ONE OF  
BILLBOARD'S INDIE POWER PLAYERS,  
JOSHUA MENDEZ'S LEADERSHIP  
REMAINS UNMATCHED,**

**INSPIRING US TO ALWAYS DREAM.**

**THRILLED TO SEE  
DAVID ALVARADO**  
IN BILLBOARD'S 2021  
PRIDE LIST RECOGNIZING  
HIS CONTRIBUTIONS  
TO DIVERSITY AND  
INCLUSION IN MUSIC  
AND ENTERTAINMENT.



**RICHMUSIC**





**Patrick North**

LABEL HEAD, XL RECORDINGS/YOUNG

**Laura Lyons**

U.S. CAMPAIGN MANAGER, XL RECORDINGS/YOUNG

The Young label recently partnered with TV network FX to premiere fka Twigs' visuals for "Sad Day," directed by Hiro Murai. It also launched the solo career of the xx's Romy with the release of the single "Lifetime" and the breakthrough debut of Mustafa on his Regent Park Songs imprint. In 2020, XL Recordings celebrated having the first openly nonbinary artist to receive a Grammy Award nomination with Venezuelan artist Arca's fourth studio album, *KiCk i*, landing a nod in the best dance/electronic album category.

**Trend most affecting the indie community** "Increased demand for exclusive content from all partners. Labels and artists have to be resourceful and creative and find new angles to tell a story while keeping the music front and center." —LYONS

**Maykel Piron**

CO-OWNER/CEO, ARMADA MUSIC

Piron, 46, was proud of the "tremendous team effort" of his staff for remaining focused, productive and calm amid the pandemic. "Dance music is our bread and butter, so we took a hit when clubs closed," he says. "But we managed to keep each other motivated and kept [sales] at almost the same level."

**Best timesaving tip** "Find out where your main audience is and focus on reaching them first. You'll be able to grow from there. It is interesting to see that some of our releases have taken longer to grow into a huge success. So it is not always about saving time; it can also be about giving things time."

**Louis Posen**

FOUNDER/PRESIDENT, HOPELESS RECORDS

Posen, 50, used TikTok to boost his punk rock acts, which helped All Time Low's 2007 sleeper hit "Dear Maria, Count Me In" reach double-platinum status in March, racking up 4 million on-demand streams per week. "Hopeless has been playing a leading role in redefining alternative music," says Posen, "by diversifying our artist roster to be more representative of the genre-blending music that alternative fans love."

**Best timesaving tip** "Setting specific time each day and week to quietly assess all the opportunities and all the issues helps to focus on the things that matter most and remove the things that don't."

**Antonio "L.A." Reid  
Charles Goldstuck**

FOUNDER/CO-CHAIRMAN, HITCO ENTERTAINMENT

**Joel Klaiman**

PRESIDENT, HITCO ENTERTAINMENT

After "Roses" bloomed into a top five Hot 100 hit, SAINT JHN underscored his breakthrough with two Grammy wins, including best remixed recording. "That

felt like a culminating moment in what was exceptional work by team Hitco," says Goldstuck, who also notes that the launch in March of D-Nice's new single "No Plans for Love" (featuring Ne-Yo) marked the one-year anniversary of the producer's first Club Quarantine livestream.

**Best way to observe Juneteenth**

"Regard it as a proper company holiday and offer access to resources so employees are able to further educate themselves on the significance of the day and all that surrounds it." —GOLDSTUCK

**Jon Salter**

PRESIDENT, ATO RECORDS

After receiving seven Grammy nods in 2020, ATO's artists earned 11 nominations in 2021, with **BRITTANY HOWARD** winning for best rock song. For Salter, 49, the Grammy performances of Howard and **BLACK PUMAS** were among the company's highlights of the last year. He also takes special pride in the ATO compilation album *Silence Is Not an Option (turn this up)*. "It's full of powerful anthems from the ATO catalog that explore issues of identity, community, social injustice and resistance," he says. The album raised over \$10,000, with proceeds going to three Black Lives Matter charities.

**Pandemic business practice that will last**

"The pretaped 'at home' content for TV/online programming. When done well, they can really sizzle, be dynamic, clever, more creative and exciting."

**Thomas Scherer**

PRESIDENT OF REPERTOIRE AND MARKETING, NEW YORK AND LOS ANGELES, BMG

**Jon Loba**

PRESIDENT, BMG NASHVILLE

BMG, under Loba in Nashville, has scored with publishing client Carly Pearce, who won two Academy of Country Music Awards — including single of the year for her Lee Brice duet, "I Hope You're Happy Now" — and Gabby Barrett, whose hit "I Hope" (featuring Charlie Puth) became the third-longest-reigning No. 1 on Hot Country Songs at 27 weeks. Scherer's deal-making on the recorded-music front has led to success with AJR, Leslie Odom, Cheap Trick, KSI and Evanescence, and the acquisition of catalogs including George Harrison's Dark Horse Records, which released the *Concert for Bangladesh* triple album in 1971.

**Trend most affecting the indie community**

"The continued power shift to the artist, and more awareness of the real value of owning your assets and creative treasures. BMG is committed as a partner and an indie with global muscle. We're the best of both worlds." —LOBA

**Moe Shalizi**

FOUNDER, PICK SIX RECORDS

In the fall of 2020, Shalizi launched Pick Six Records, which he runs alongside his man-



Black Pumas (top) and Brittany Howard



agement company, The Shalizi Group. The indie label's 10-person team has signed hip-hop artist Wacotron, alt-pop act Prop, R&B artist Kameron and rapper Morray, who recently signed a deal with Interscope in partnership with Pick Six. "Sign less," says Shalizi of the label's tight roster, and "give more time to those artists until they have a solid team around them."

**Pandemic business practice that will last** "Building opportunities outside of touring and music."

**Jonny Shipes**

FOUNDER/CEO, CINEMATIC MUSIC GROUP

Cinematic had a prolific 2020: For the second year in a row, the label with a roster that includes Flipp Deniro, Smoke DZA, Joey Bada\$\$ and Cam'ron doubled its streams. "To be coming up on two decades in the game and still seeing growth at that level feels good," says Shipes, 41. "Seeing budding superstar Druski take off the way he has over the past year is very exciting." For 2021, Shipes also plans to focus on the management division of the company, which includes hip-hop veteran Styles P.

**Best way to observe Juneteenth** "At Cinematic, it's a closed-office holiday. We're proud of the platform we've created to amplify the voices of our Black artists and employees, which we showcase not just this month but year-round."

**Paul Sizelove**

PRESIDENT, GAITHER MUSIC GROUP

Since Gaither Music Group partnered

with Primary Wave Music in early 2019, Sizelove, 51, has seen the company continue to expand through strategic alliances, including a new deal with Universal's newly rebranded Virgin Music Artist and Label Services. "This is a very good, strategic partnership for Gaither Music Group, allowing us to further develop the Gaither, Green Hill and Rural Rhythm labels, both digitally and internationally," says Sizelove.

**Wassim "Sal" Slaiby  
Amir "Cash" Esmailian  
La Mar C. Taylor**

CO-FOUNDERS, XO RECORDS

XO continued to make history with The Weeknd's *After Hours*. The record charted three Hot 100 No. 1s including "Blinding Lights," which became the longest-running top 10 song in the chart's history. These achievements helped bolster the label's philanthropic endeavors, including co-founding The Weeknd's million-dollar donation to hunger relief in Ethiopia and XO's aid for the survivors of the deadly blast that rocked Slaiby's home country of Lebanon in 2020.

**Best timesaving tip** "Pick up the phone to resolve issues immediately and efficiently; never wait. Choosing your team wisely is the key to moving mountains." —SLAIBY

**Ben Swanson**

FOUNDING PARTNER/COO, SECRETLY GROUP

**Chris Swanson**

FOUNDING PARTNER/PRESIDENT OF A&R, SECRETLY GROUP

**Phil Waldorf**

FOUNDING PARTNER/CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, SECRETLY GROUP

**Hannah Carlen**

U.S./CANADIAN MARKETING DIRECTOR, SECRETLY GROUP

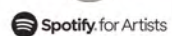
As one of the world's largest independent label groups, Secretly includes subsidiary imprints like Jagjaguwar, Secretly Canadian and Ghostly International, with artists like Phoebe Bridgers, who launched her own label, Saddest Factory, under Secretly in October. "We're in the process of re-signing a few artists," says Carlen, which "speaks to the ways we're able to grow with artists." The company's pandemic-motivated investment in direct-to-consumer initiatives like the



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Secretly Store and record club, she adds, will “most definitely endure.”

**Best timesaving tip** “Be on when you’re on and off when you’re off. If you’re in a position to keep that balance between work and the rest of life, keep it and prioritize it. It’s a timesaver in itself.” —CARLEN

**Arnold Taylor**

CEO, SOUTH COAST MUSIC GROUP

**Daud Carter**

SENIOR VP, SOUTH COAST MUSIC GROUP

**Garrett Williams**

VP OF MARKETING/HEAD OF OPERATIONS, SOUTH COAST MUSIC GROUP

The independently owned South Coast Music Group, through its partnership with Interscope Records, saw **DABABY**’s third album, *Blame It on Baby*, released a month into the pandemic in April 2020, debut atop the Billboard 200. Meanwhile, his single “Rockstar” (featuring Roddy Ricch) spend seven nonconsecutive weeks at No. 1 on the Hot 100 and was *Billboard*’s Song of the Summer for 2020.

**Best timesaving tip** “Build a solid team so you can delegate tasks evenly. A team is only as strong as its weakest link, so it’s important to have reliable and trustworthy people in position.”

**Fiona Prine**

PRESIDENT, OH BOY RECORDS/SOUR GRAPES MUSIC/TOMMYJACK MUSIC

**Jody Whelan**

MANAGING PARTNER, OH BOY RECORDS

More than a year after John Prine’s death, his legacy shines on at Oh Boy Records, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary. Oh Boy, which was founded by Prine in 1981 with Al Bunetta and Dan Einstein, is the second-oldest artist-owned independent label in the United States (and the oldest in Nashville) and has released past titles from Prine and Kris Kristofferson, among others. Prine’s widow Fiona, 59, is proud of how the company, which she runs with her son, Jody, 40, has “continued to support artists on our label and keep fans engaged by offering exciting and relevant entertainment content and opportunities to support a variety of local and national nonprofits.”

**Trend most affecting the indie community** “Corporate consolidation and these giant platforms that deprioritize and squeeze out smaller, more niche artistic communities.” —WHELAN

**Bryan “Birdman” Williams**  
**Ronald “Slim” Williams**

CO-FOUNDER/CO-CEOS, CASH MONEY RECORDS

Cash Money has launched some of the biggest artists in hip-hop during its two-decade history, and younger artists like **JACQUEES** are now leading its next wave of new talent. But the Williams brothers have also focused on giving back during the pandemic. In June 2020, they donated over \$225,000 to Forward

Together New Orleans, offering rent relief for residents of their childhood housing project. “We are most concerned,” says Slim, “with the financial wellness, literacy and attaining generational wealth within the Black community.”

**The next legislation we need** “We’d like to see laws in place that support access to capital for small Black businesses and equal access to mortgages and loans.” —SLIM WILLIAMS

**Mason Williams**

SENIOR VP CATALOG A&R, CONCORD/CRAFT RECORDINGS

**Bruce McIntosh**

VP LATIN CATALOG, CONCORD/CRAFT LATINO

Craft spent the last year investing heavily in the development of audiovisual content, producing thoughtfully curated clips and relevant series for its label and artist channels. The catalog strategy has led to significant gains for its various YouTube channels — most notably for Fania Records, which boasts nearly 700,000 subscribers; and Discos Musart, which counts roughly 800,000. “From A&R to e-commerce,” says McIntosh, “it’s all about audience cultivation and engagement and offerings of all sorts for everyone from explorers to superfans.”

**Best way to observe Juneteenth** “Our Stax and Fania Records labels both have repertoire associated with the social justice movements that took place in each of their respective communities.” —MCINTOSH



**LABELS/  
DISTRIBUTORS**

**Paris Cabezas**

MANAGING DIRECTOR, INNERCAT MUSIC GROUP

**Ana Gonzalez**

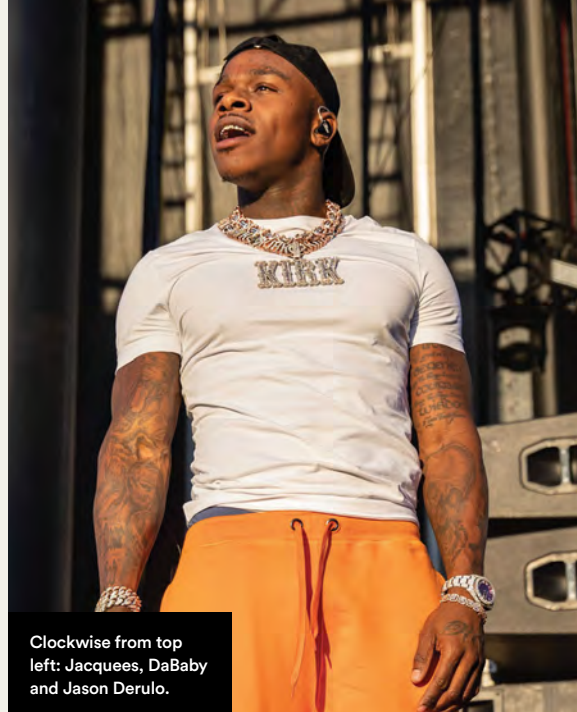
MANAGING PARTNER, INNERCAT MUSIC GROUP

**Garrett Schaefer**

GM, INNERCAT MUSIC GROUP

InnerCat, which describes itself as a full-service music technology company, saw its catalog reach 22.75 billion total streams to date, with breakouts like Jamby El Favo, whose platform rose to 1.87 million subscribers on YouTube, according to the company. During the pandemic, InnerCat also developed a proprietary video player that broadcasts virtual on-demand concerts such as Gilberto Santa Rosa’s Christmas special that had over 500,000 viewers. And while InnerCat was eligible for federal loans through the Paycheck Protection Program, the company didn’t want to “take anything at the expense of other small businesses who really needed the help,” says Cabezas, 48. “That’s a testament to the team here — we’re a family.”

**Best timesaving tip** “Programming or coding. Seriously, we’re a tech company as much as we are a music company.” —CABEZAS



Clockwise from top left: Jacquees, DaBaby and Jason Derulo.

**Ghazi**

FOUNDER/CEO, EMPIRE

**Nima Etminan**

COO, EMPIRE

**Tina Davis**

SENIOR VP A&R, EMPIRE

In the past year, Empire’s expansion into West Africa led to “extensive growth and success with artists such as Fireboy DML and Olamide from our partnership with YBNL, as well as Wande Coal, Yaw Tog, Patoranking, L.A.X. and more,” says Davis, the result of a “super talented and dedicated team” on the continent.

**The next legislation we need** “Updated laws regarding policing to abolish qualified immunity to officers that engage in unconstitutional or illegal acts that result in death or incarceration. The law should also include a standard on how to investigate the use of lethal force, which should be a last resort, not the first tactic.” —DAVIS

**Jason Peterson**

CHAIRMAN/CEO, GODIGITAL MEDIA GROUP

GoDigital grew from just over 100 employees to a staff of 450 following acquisitions of two multiplatform networks for \$9.6 million: mitu, an entertainment and lifestyle network for Latinx audiences that will work in tandem with GoDigital’s own Latido Networks, and YogaWorks, a health and wellness platform that includes on-demand and live yoga classes. In addition, its Cinq Music Group — a distributor, label and publisher — acquired the rights to catalogs by pop star **JASON DERULO** and regional Mexican label Rancho Humilde.

**Pandemic business practice that will last**

“We will probably never have a fully staffed office. Rather a rotation of people through a smaller facility.”

**David Porter**

CO-FOUNDER/CEO, MADE IN MEMPHIS ENTERTAINMENT

**Tony D. Alexander**

CO-FOUNDER/PRESIDENT/MANAGING DIRECTOR, MADE IN MEMPHIS ENTERTAINMENT

Made in Memphis Entertainment is working to revitalize the city’s music scene, and the multifaceted company includes — in addition to its indie label MIME Records and distribution divisions Beatroot

Music and Beatroot Africa — a studio, 4U Recording; a film/TV synch company, Heavy Hitters Music Group; and MIME Publishing. Recent success stories include Memphis rapper Moneybagg Yo, who recorded much of his No. 1 Billboard 200 album, *A Gangsta’s Pain*, at 4U, and BIG30, who is distributed through Beatroot. The goal was to “create a global network of interconnected, hyperlocal music communities,” says Alexander, 49. Plans for a new 4U studio in Atlanta “is a big step toward that goal.”

**Best way to observe Juneteenth** “Volunteering with an organization focused on dismantling the vestiges of systemic racism. Many of today’s injustices remain tied to slavery, which is why it’s important to support organizations fighting for social justice like When We All Vote.” —ALEXANDER

**Jacqueline Saturn**

PRESIDENT, VIRGIN MUSIC LABEL AND ARTIST SERVICES

**Matt Sawin**

GM, VIRGIN MUSIC LABEL AND ARTIST SERVICES

**Marni Halpern**

SENIOR VP PROMOTION, VIRGIN MUSIC LABEL AND ARTIST SERVICES

**Cindy James**

HEAD OF COMMERCIAL MARKETING, VIRGIN MUSIC LABEL AND ARTIST SERVICES

**Adam Starr**

SENIOR VP/HEAD OF MARKETING, VIRGIN MUSIC LABEL AND ARTIST SERVICES

In February, Universal Music Group rebranded Caroline, the independent label services division of Capitol Music Group, as Virgin Music Label and Artist Services. The new entity revitalized the Virgin brand created by Richard Branson nearly 50 years ago to serve as a global network for indie artists including Lil Baby and SHAEED. The rebrand enabled UMG to further its commitment in “building our worldwide network,” says Saturn, who helmed the change, by “providing our partners with more resources and an intricate global plan for releases.”

**Best timesaving tip** “A 30-minute Zoom can be just as productive as an in-person meeting. Commuting time really adds up, and it’s amazing to consider just how much more business and personal interaction can be done on a daily basis.” —SATURN

JACQUEES: DABABY: RMV/SHUTTERSTOCK; DE RULO: SAM TABONE/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES





# WE GIVE YOU MORE



Fifteen years ago TuneCore disrupted the music industry.

We were built on the belief that artists' careers should be on their own terms, not decided in boardrooms. We rewrote the rules of the music business, put control back in the hands of the artists, and tore down the barrier to entry set by the major record labels. Today, thanks to companies like TuneCore, the playing field is leveling and even favoring independent artists.

We believe that all artists have the right to call the shots. We want to inspire creators to pursue their passion and do things the way they want to do it. We give you **MORE**, so that you can achieve **MORE**.

## **MORE MONEY**

We partner directly with digital streaming services, so you can keep 100% of the money you earn and 100% ownership of the music you create. With TuneCore there's no middleman shaving a percentage off the top.

## **MORE GLOBAL REACH**

TuneCore artists are releasing more music than ever in 200 countries and 150+ stores. Music has no borders, it's global and your songs should be heard around the world. TuneCore is available in 14 languages, operates in 14 countries, across 4 continents and offers payments in 6 currencies.

## **MORE ARTIST SUPPORT**

We're a team of real artists helping artists. No matter where you are in the world or what language you speak, TuneCore offers support in 29 languages in multiple time zones. If something isn't working, we make it quick to get answers and easy to get in touch.

## **MORE THAN MUSIC DISTRIBUTION**

TuneCore is for the newcomers and the legends. From your first TuneCore master class to your first sync placement and songwriter royalty check. We're the platform empowering you to make it yourself and never give up. And when you need even more, TuneCore can move you up to Believe via our Signed By program to scale your development and accelerate your global career.

Simply put, TuneCore gives you **MORE**, so you can do **MORE**.



**Andreea Gleeson**  
Co-Head | CRO



**Matt Barrington**  
Co-Head | COO



tuneCORE



**Camille Marie Soto Malavé**

CEO, GLAD EMPIRE

Over the past year, Glad Empire launched production division Conteni2 Media Group and opened a new media studio in Orlando, Fla., to produce livestreams and podcasts. "It's a one-of-a-kind place for musicians and content creators," says Soto Malavé, 39. Her team distributed titles including Myke Towers and Juhn's "Bandido," which peaked at No. 4 on Hot Latin Songs and No. 6 on the Global Excl. U.S. chart in February. Soto Malavé and her team also inked a distribution deal with Flow La Movie, the label behind Nio Garcia and Casper Magico.

**The next legislation we need** "Stricter anti-piracy and copyright laws that protect creators from getting their works leaked online and/or stolen. It is a huge problem."

**Chris Taylor**

GLOBAL PRESIDENT, MUSIC AND LIVE, EONE

"We do records in a real traditional way," Taylor told *Billboard* last year. "We'd rather sign 50 artists and have 40 of them making money." So, in a moment of transition, with financial firm Blackstone agreeing to buy eOne Music from Hasbro for \$385 million, Taylor singles out some traditional product — a 12-album Black Label Society box set that includes 20 colored-vinyl records and other collectibles — as a notable accomplishment. "It's tangible evidence of the TLC our teams put into our artists' art and a tribute to the extent eOners are willing to go to excite fans."

**Trend most affecting the indie community** "Rights management and administration. Independent companies, not to mention unsigned artists, that lack scale and resources might have some commercial success, but many are not collecting all the money owed to them, due to inadequate resources in this regard."

**DISTRIBUTORS****Joel Andrew**

PRESIDENT, CD BABY

Excelling at service to independent artists is in CD Baby's DNA, says Andrew, who takes pride in how the company has helped sustain acts during the pandemic. "Artists turned to us in droves, and we got to pay them a whole lot of money, [helping sell] 2.2 million new tracks [that yielded] \$140 million paid out to indie artists in 2020," he says.

**Best timesaving tip** "Have a plan months before releasing content. We added a

free new tool, our CD Baby Release Plan Generator, where artists can improve or customize releases. It's saving them so much time."

**Matt Barrington**

CO-HEAD/COO, TUNECORE

**Andrea Gleeson**

CO-HEAD/CHIEF REVENUE OFFICER, TUNECORE

The digital distributor TuneCore pays its artists "a true 100%" of all earnings, says Barrington. "This is because we partner with our parent, Believe, and deal directly with [digital service providers], while most of our key competitors use a middleman who takes a percentage off the top before passing along earnings." (Believe revenue topped \$448 million in 2020.) In March, the company introduced TuneCore Rewards, which provides entrepreneurial guidance on music promotion, release planning and social media for artists, giving them a "road map to success, eliminating the guesswork," says Gleeson. "It's a key educational component in our support of artists."

**Jorge Brea**

FOUNDER/CEO, SYMPHONIC DISTRIBUTION

**Janette Berrios**

HEAD OF CORPORATE MARKETING, SYMPHONIC DISTRIBUTION

Brea, who founded Tampa, Fla.-based Symphonic Distribution in 2006, is increasingly finding success in U.S. Latin and hip-hop: opening an office in Brazil, landing Dominican legend **JUAN LUIS GUERRA** as a client and inking a licensing deal with African streaming startup Me-Playlist. In 2019, Symphonic hired former Columbia Records executive Brandon Hixon to head its new Black music division in its Brooklyn office.

**Best timesaving tip** "Block out time on your calendar to avoid doing calls. Sometimes you have to just do the work and stop talking." —BREA

**Drew Hill**

MANAGING DIRECTOR, PROPER MUSIC GROUP

The United Kingdom's Proper Music saw its sales of vinyl music jump 41% in 2020 from 2019, compared with 13.3% industrywide in the market. Despite COVID-19 restrictions, Hill, 43, says his working-from-home team understood that "artists and labels were relying on us to keep them afloat." Without live gigs, physical music sold online became a lifeline, confirming that nimble indies are "better placed" to respond to a shifting market, he adds.

**Trend most affecting the indie community** "The indie community has successfully innovated to embrace e-commerce as a viable way to continue connecting fans with the music they love, despite the adversity of various lockdowns."

**Laura Campbell Pittard**

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, REDEYE WORLDWIDE

**Jason Taylor**

DIRECTOR OF SALES AND LABEL RELATIONS, REDEYE WORLDWIDE

**Michael Howard**

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, REDEYE WORLDWIDE

A year into the global pandemic, Red-eye, a worldwide distribution and music services company, has learned how to turn a negative into a positive. Taylor says that despite the difficulties of the past year, the company is most proud of "our ability to navigate the challenges and obstacles of the pandemic and come out stronger than we were pre-pandemic."

**Trend most affecting the indie community** "The staggering increase in demand for vinyl and the barriers indies face in supplying products to fulfill that demand. While there have been significant changes in manufacturing turn[around] times, freight costs and international transit times because of the pandemic, consumer demand continues to be at an all-time high." —HOWARD

**Philip Kaplan**

FOUNDER/CEO, DISTROKID

DistroKid now distributes at least 30% of all new music: 20 million tracks from 2 million artists, with over 35,000 new tracks a day. The company says it also collects over \$200 million annually from digital service providers for its distributed artists. "Blows my mind," says Kaplan, who notes that recent integrations with Twitch, Snap and Audiomack have added value for clients including **21 SAVAGE**, Arizona Zervas and Dan the Automator.

**Best timesaving tip** "During meetings, I try to get as much done as possible, even coding, so that the meeting doesn't create a lot of new to-dos." —KAPLAN

**Cat Kreidich**

PRESIDENT, ALTERNATIVE DISTRIBUTION ALLIANCE

**John Franck**

EXECUTIVE VP COMMERCIAL AND MARKETING, ALTERNATIVE DISTRIBUTION ALLIANCE

To expand its global network, Warner Music Group's independent label and artist services division, Alternative Distribution Alliance, launched ADA Latin, encompassing Latin America, Spain and Portugal; and ADA Asia, covering greater China, Korea and Southeast Asia, says Kreidich. The distributor has also signed deals with Toy Selectah's Worldwide Records and Cosmica Records and a new joint venture with Billy Mann and Benton James' icons+giants label. In the United States, ADA worked with S-Curve/BMG to break AJR's "Bang!," which "grew over a full calendar year," says Franck, and "is now two-times platinum in the United States after crossing four radio formats."

**Best way to observe Juneteenth** "On my children's school calendar, Juneteenth is a holiday for our school district. I was happy to see that and think the best way to observe the day is

From top: Juan Luis Guerra and 21 Savage





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to spend time with my two daughters, educating them on the importance of the day and making sure they understand the history around it.” —FRANCK

**Brad Navin**

CEO, THE ORCHARD

**Colleen Theis**

COO, THE ORCHARD

**Mary Ashley Johnson**

SENIOR VP NORTH AMERICA,  
LABEL MANAGEMENT AND SALES, THE ORCHARD

**Alan Becker**

SENIOR VP PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT, THE ORCHARD

**Tim Pithouse**

SENIOR VP/HEAD OF ARTIST SERVICES, THE ORCHARD

This past year was the distributor's biggest ever, one that included 40 Grammy nominations that yielded 10 awards for artists it represents, plus over 399 albums reaching the Billboard 200. One of those made history: K-pop sensation BTS became the first group ever to simultaneously debut at No. 1 on both the albums chart and the Hot 100. “We are able to scale our business and nimbly respond in real time to engagement, because we lead with aggressive data and technology, coupled with great relationships,” says Johnson, 47.

**Trend most affecting the indie community** “Leaning too hard on playlist adds and viral moments without off-platform marketing, strategic planning and driving fans back to partners. We need all of the elements to give artists the best shot at true development.” —JOHNSON

**Ben Patterson**

COO, DOWNTOWN MUSIC SERVICES

With the sale of Downtown Music's publishing copyrights to Concord, announced in April, Downtown will further focus on offering services to unsigned and established indie artists. Patterson transitioned from head of Downtown subsidiary DashGo to COO of Downtown Music Services. “One of our first releases as Downtown Music Services is Cheat Codes' debut album, *Hellraisers, Pt 1.*,” he says. The release, through 300 Entertainment, “shows the capabilities we can offer artists who wish to maintain independence and ownership of their music.”

**Pandemic business practice that will last** “I have a sinking sensation that these video calls are going to hang around — if only because a three-meeting day with L.A. traffic can now be a five- or six-meeting day in front of a camera.”

**Milana Rabkin Lewis**

CO-FOUNDER/CEO, STEM

**Kristin Graziani**

VP ARTIST RELATIONS, STEM

In 2020, artist services company Stem launched the funding tool Scale with \$100 million in advances for independent artists and labels. Unlike the typical terms for advances, artists keep their masters and decide what percentage of their earn-

ings to contribute to recoupment each month. So far, over 50 artists, including Brent Faiyaz, have used Scale to finance projects. “Our artists can access capital on their terms,” says Graziani, “empowering them to take control of their music and their business.”

**Trend most affecting the indie community** “Artists and labels are able to access capital easier than ever before. The growth of streaming has made music as an asset class more and more recognizable to financial markets.” —GRAZIANI

**Bob Roback**

CEO, INGROOVES MUSIC GROUP

**Lloyd Hummel**

EXECUTIVE VP GLOBAL COMMERCIAL STRATEGY,  
INGROOVES MUSIC GROUP

Ingrooves has been experiencing expansion and growth both geographically and in its data-driven distribution products. “We've carefully built out a strong, connected team across the world over the past 18 months,” says Hummel. “That's hard in normal times, but this group has more than met the challenge during a global pandemic.” On the product front, adds Hummel, “our new Smart Audience advertising program finds fans who are most likely to actually stream our artists' music, not just social media surfers who might click on an ad.”

**Trend most affecting the indie community** “The challenge of building an audience [with] 400,000-plus new tracks being released every week, plus the competition for mindshare among so many emerging platforms. It's more important than ever that indie artists educate themselves, build a trusted, knowledgeable team around them and use tools and insights to help guide their careers.”

**Ed Seaman**

COO, MVD ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

As a distributor, MVD represents audiovisual products across DVD, Blu-ray, CD, vinyl and digital rights in shipping releases and merchandise to brick-and-mortar retailers. The company posted its “best year ever in 2020, by a lot,” says Seaman, 55, who notes its chief accomplishment is a bunch of recent “label renewals” with clients Bear Family (Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis), JSP Records and others. “Very few labels move on from MVD,” he says. “We don't take that for granted.”

**Trend most affecting the indie community** “Turnaround time for vinyl [manufacturing]. It is causing release dates to push way out on the horizon.”

**Jonathan Strauss**

CO-FOUNDER/CEO, CREATE MUSIC GROUP

**Wayne Hampton**

CO-FOUNDER/CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER,  
CREATE MUSIC GROUP

**Alexandre Williams**

CO-FOUNDER/COO, CREATE MUSIC GROUP

Create Music Group, which focuses on unsigned artists that self-release their music, introduced the Create Carbon credit card last year, “which gives creators the ability to access their royalties as soon as they're earned rather than wait to receive them in regular monthly payouts,” says Strauss. “For way too long legacy music companies have held on to artists' money unnecessarily, and this innovation has been hugely popular with our artist clients.”

**Trend most affecting the indie community** “Transparency, and the lack of it. One reason that artists are flocking to Create is that we show artists what they are earning on a daily basis. We aren't hamstrung by the same legacy accounting and reporting systems that the major-label system uses. Independents are truly leading the way in this regard.” —WILLIAMS

**Dean Tabaac**

HEAD, AMPED DISTRIBUTION

**Jocelynn Pryor**

VP MARKETING, AMPED DISTRIBUTION

The measure of AMPED's success for Pryor is simple math. “Week over week we're consistently bringing the heat on our acts' chart positions,” she says about Waxahatchee's *Saint Cloud* landing at No. 1 on *Billboard's* Heatseekers Albums chart, as well as other chart successes from Adam Lambert, AWOLnation and Testament. Tabaac, meanwhile, highlights his company's “record-breaking” year by noting that receipts were up over 45% from the previous fiscal year and that AMPED's many distribution partners — which include Glassnote, Bloodshot, Epitaph and AWAL — had impressive showings on the Independent Albums chart on a week-to-week basis, as well as 20% of CD sales at indie music stores.

**The next legislation we need** “I'd like to see H.R. 1 [the For the People Act] passed because without free and fair elections the whole ship goes down.” —PRYOR

**Michael Ugwu**

FOUNDER/CEO, FREEME DIGITAL

Named the first Black member to the board of Merlin in 2020, Ugwu leads Freeme Digital, which describes itself as Nigeria's foremost online digital music distributor. The company works with over 2,000 artists including stars Rudeboy, Flavour, emerging local act The Cavemen and Nigerian comedy legend Basketmouth. Ugwu has developed Freeme Space as a creative hub that over the past year has seen nearly 100 videos recorded by artists including Burna Boy and multinational brands like Budweiser and Hennessy Cognac.

**Darius Van Arman**

CO-CEO, SECRETLY DISTRIBUTION;

FOUNDING PARTNER, SECRETLY GROUP

**Christopher Welz**

MANAGING DIRECTOR, SECRETLY DISTRIBUTION

**Jacqui Resur**

HEAD OF LABEL RELATIONS, SECRETLY DISTRIBUTION

**Shelly Westerhausen Worcel**

HEAD OF NORTH AMERICAN PHYSICAL SALES AND MARKETING,  
SECRETLY DISTRIBUTION

Secretly Group's distribution division welcomed new label partners Awful Records and Father/Daughter; grew its artist services division with clients including Crumb, Portugal. The Man and Yaeji; and led a release campaign for Phoebe Bridgers' *Punisher*, which earned the singer-songwriter four Grammy nominations including best new artist. “We're constantly evolving our services to meet partners' needs,” says Welz, who also notes the company's creation of over 50 virtual workshops for label partners on topics like diversity and metadata optimization.

**Trend most affecting the indie community** “It takes a village to manage volatile vinyl manufacturing timelines. Strategic planning between label, distributor and manufacturer is at an all-time premium.” —WELZ

**Emmanuel Zunz**

FOUNDER/CEO, ONERPM

The Nashville-based distributor expanded internationally in 2020, with new operations in London and Nigeria and 130 new hires. In January, the company launched a streamlined user interface on its website combining “daily performance stats and demographic consumption data with direct-to-fan marketing,” says Zunz, 48. The platform offers three tiers of service for talent — DIY, Taking Off and Next Level — with artists earning more personalized support as their fan bases grow. “We are one of the few companies where an artist can start DIY and graduate to bespoke marketing and label services,” he says.

**Pandemic business practice that will last** “We will remain more virtual, and our direct-to-fan initiative is more important than ever.”

**CONTRIBUTORS**

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**METHODOLOGY**

The record companies featured on *Billboard's* Indie Power Players list are defined as independent because they are not owned by one of the three major music groups: Sony, Warner and Universal. (They may release repertoire through the major groups in joint ventures). Distributors are defined as independent, regardless of ownership, based on the repertoire they market, largely from labels not under the majors' umbrellas. *Billboard* editors and reporters weighed a variety of factors in determining the 2021 Indie Power Players list including, but not limited to, nominations by peers, colleagues and superiors at selected music companies, as well as recommendations by indie trade group AZIM. In addition to nominations, editors weigh the success of each executive's label or distributor as measured by chart, sales and streaming performance. Career trajectory and industry impact were also considered. Unless otherwise noted, *Billboard* Boxscore and MRC Data are the sources for tour grosses and sales/streaming data, respectively. MRC Data is also the source for radio audience metrics. Unless otherwise noted, album streaming figures cited represent collective U.S. on-demand audio totals for an album's tracks, and song/artist streaming figures represent U.S. on-demand audio and video totals.



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**EMPIRE  
CONGRATULATES  
EVANGELINE ELDER**  
BRAND PARTNERSHIPS

**BILLBOARD'S  
2021 PRIDE LIST**

A vertical graphic with a black background. At the top, the text 'EMPIRE CONGRATULATES EVANGELINE ELDER BRAND PARTNERSHIPS' is written in white. Below this is a portrait of a woman with short dark hair, wearing a white top. At the bottom, the text 'BILLBOARD'S 2021 PRIDE LIST' is written in white.

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A vertical graphic with a background image of a man in a hat and a woman in a fishnet top. The text 'billboard LATIN NEWSLETTERS' is written in white and pink. Below this, the text 'GET EXPERT INSIGHT ON THE LATIN MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT SECTORS — STRAIGHT TO YOUR INBOX' is written in white. At the bottom, the text 'SIGN UP AT BILLBOARD.COM/NEWSLETTERS' is written in white.





Bridgers has been nominated in five categories, including record of the year for her album *Punisher*.

# A2IM'S LIBERA AWARDS RETURN AS A LIVESTREAM

THE VIRTUAL INDIE WEEK CONFERENCE WILL CONCLUDE WITH A MULTIGENRE CELEBRATION OF THE BEST OF THE INDEPENDENT MUSIC COMMUNITY

**W**HEN A2IM — THE AMERICAN Association of Independent Music (A2IM) — made the fast, tough call last year to move its annual Indie Week conference online, followed by a livestreaming edition of its Libera Awards, no one expected the same precautions would be needed a year later.

But Indie Week and the Libera Awards will be virtual once again. Indie Week, the world's largest independent music conference, will take place June 14-17 and is sponsored by SoundExchange, with keynotes, panels, networking sessions and more.

The Libera Awards, presented by Merlin, will feature performances from nominees as well as the presentation of the Independent Icon Awards. For a second year, all proceeds raised during the show will go to A2IM's charity partner, Sweet Relief, to help career musicians and industry professionals in need.

"As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the A2IM Libera Awards, it is extremely satisfying to see the remarkable growth of the independent sector," says CEO Richard James Burgess. The awards are an acknowledgment, celebration and representation of everything independents work so hard to accomplish."

The following is a list of the 2021 Libera nominees as provided by A2IM.

## Record Of The Year

- PHOEBE BRIDGERS** *Punisher* (Dead Oceans)
- RUN THE JEWELS** *RTJ4* (Jewel Runners)
- PERFUME GENIUS** *Set My Heart on Fire Immediately* (Matador Records)
- YVES TUMOR** *Heaven to a Tortured Mind* (Warp Records)
- THUNDERCAT** *It Is What It Is* (Brainfeeder)
- WAXAHATCHEE** *Saint Cloud* (Merge Records)

## Video Of The Year

- FKA TWIGS** "Sad Day" (Young Turks)
- PERFUME GENIUS** "Describe" (Matador Records)
- PHOEBE BRIDGERS** "Savior Complex" (Dead Oceans)
- RUN THE JEWELS** "Ooh LA LA" (Jewel Runners)
- CHRISTINE AND THE QUEENS** "La vita nuova" (Because Music)
- FORD** "Fruit&Sun" (Foreign Family Collective)

## Best Live/Livestream Act

- RUN THE JEWELS** (Jewel Runners)
- PHOEBE BRIDGERS** (Dead Oceans)
- FONTAINES D.C.** (Partisan Records)
- PERFUME GENIUS** (Matador Records)
- ARCA** (XL Recordings)

## Breakthrough Artist/Release

- Presented by Ingrooves*
- ARLO PARKS** (Transgressive/PIAS)
  - BONNY LIGHT HORSEMAN** (37d03d)

- OVERCOATS** (Loma Vista Recordings)
- ARLO MCKINLEY** (Oh Boy Records)
- ORION SUN** (Mom + Pop Music)

## A2IM Humanitarian Award

- REV. MOOSE** (Marauder/NIVA)
- KILLER MIKE & EL-P OF RUN THE JEWELS** (Jewel Runners)
- MEGAN THEE STALLION** (300 Entertainment)
- PAUL REDDING** (Beggars Group)
- KEVIN LILES** (300 Entertainment)

## Best Alternative Rock Record

- PHOEBE BRIDGERS** *Punisher* (Dead Oceans)
- SOCCER MOMMY** *Color Theory* (Loma Vista Recordings)
- CAR SEAT HEADREST** *Making a Door Less Open* (Matador Records)
- LIDO PIMIENTA** *Miss Colombia* (Anti- Records)
- ROLLING BLACKOUTS COASTAL FEVER** *Sideways to New Italy* (Sub Pop Records)

## Best Americana Record

- BONNY LIGHT HORSEMAN** *Bonny Light Horseman* (37d03d)
- KEVIN MORBY** *Sundowner* (Dead Oceans)
- CALEXICO** *Seasonal Shift* (Anti- Records)
- COURTNEY MARIE ANDREWS** *Old Flowers* (Fat Possum Records)
- LUCINDA WILLIAMS** *Good Souls Better Angels* (Highway 20/Thirty Tigers)

## Best Blues Record

- BOBBY RUSH** *Rawer Than Raw* (Deep Rush Records/Thirty Tigers)
- DON BRYANT** *You Make Me Feel* (Fat Possum Records)
- ROBERT CRAY BAND** *That's What I Heard* (Nozzle Records/Thirty Tigers)
- FANTASTIC NEGRITO** *Have You Lost Your Mind Yet?* (Cooking Vinyl)
- SONNY LANDRETH** *Blacktop Run* (Provogue Records)

## Best Classical Record

- ERIK HALL** *Music for 18 Musicians* (Steve Reich) (Western Vinyl)
- PAUL MORAVEC** *Sanctuary Road* (Naxos American Classics)
- ECHO COLLECTIVE** *The See Within* (TK!)
- NIKLAS PASCHBURG** *Svalbard* (TK!)
- VITAMIN STRING QUARTET** *Vitamin String Quartet Performs Lana Del Rey* (CMH Label Group/Vitamin Records)

## Best Country Record

- MARGO PRICE** *That's How Rumors Get Started* (Loma Vista Recordings)
- WAXAHATCHEE** *Saint Cloud* (Merge Records)
- COLTER WALL** *Western Swing & Waltzes and Other Punchy Songs* (La Honda Records/Thirty Tigers)
- VARIOUS ARTISTS** *Willie Nelson American Outlaw* (Live at Bridgestone Arena/2019) (Blackbird Productions)
- JAIME WYATT** *Neon Cross* (New West Records)

## Best Dance/Electronic Record

- CARIBOU** *Suddenly* (Merge Records)
- ARCA** *KiCk i* (XL Recordings)
- ELA MINUS** *acts of rebellion* (Domino Recording Co.)
- YAEJI** *What We Drew* (XL Recordings)
- ACTRESS** *Karma & Desire* (Ninja Tune)

## Best Folk/Bluegrass Record

- BEN HARPER** *Winter Is for Lovers* (Anti- Records)
- ANGEL OLSEN** *Whole New Mess* (Jagjaguwar)
- GILLIAN WELCH** *Boots No. 2: The Lost Songs* (Acony Records)
- JASON MOLINA** *Eight Gates* (Secretly Canadian)
- LAURA MARLING** *Song for Our Daughter* (Partisan Records)

## Best Hip-Hop/Rap Record

- Presented by Virgin Music*
- RUN THE JEWELS** *RTJ4* (Jewel Runners..)
  - CLIPPING.** *Visions of Bodies Being Burned* (Sub Pop Records)
  - LITTLE SIMZ** *Drop 6* (AGE101/AWAL)
  - THE KOREATOWN ODDITY** *Little* (Dominiques Nosebleed) (Stones Throw Records)
  - NAEEM** *Startisha* (37d03d)

## Best Jazz Record

- Presented by Qobuz*
- GIL SCOTT-HERON & MAKAYA McCRAVEN** *We're New Again—A Reimagining by Makaya McCraven* (XL Recordings)



**JEFF PARKER** *Suite for Max Brown* (International Anthem)

**ALI SHAHEED MUHAMMAD AND ADRIAN YOUNGE** *Azimuth JID004* (Jazz Is Dead)

**CHRISTIAN McBRIDE** *The Movement Revisited: A Musical Portrait of Four Icons* (Mack Avenue Music Group)

**JOHN CARROLL KIRBY** *My Garden* (Stones Throw Records)

**RAUL MIDÓN** *The Mirror* (Artistry Music)

**JYOTI** *Mama, You Can Bet!* (SomeOthaShip/eOne)

**Best Latin Record**

**BAD BUNNY** *El Último Tour del Mundo* (Rimas Entertainment)

**GABRIEL GARZÓN-MONTANO** *Agüita* (Jagjaguwar in partnership with Stones Throw Records)

**THE MAVERICKS** *En Español* (Mono Mundo Recordings/Thirty Tigers)

**BUSCABULLA** *Regresa* (Ribbon Music)

**JUNGLE FIRE** *Jungle Fire* (Nacional Records)

**Best Metal Record**

**ARCHITECTS** *Animals* (Epitaph Records)

**HUM** *Inlet* (Earth Analog Records)

**GHOSTEMANE** *Anti-Icon* (Blackmage)

**INGESTED** *Where Only Gods May Tread* (Unique Leader Records)

**PYRRHON** *Abscess Time* (Willowtip Records)

**Best Outlier Record**

Presented by The Orchard

**KHRUANGBIN** *Mordechai* (Dead Oceans)

**ONEOHTRIX POINT NEVER** *Magic Oneohtrix Point Never* (Warp Records)

**YVES TUMOR** *Heaven to a Tortured Mind* (Warp Records)

**BEVERLY GLENN-COPELAND** *Transmissions* (Transgressive/(PIAS))

**MARY LATTIMORE** *Silver Ladders* (Ghostly International)

**MOSES SUMNEY** *Græ* (Jagjaguwar)

**Best Punk Record**

**IDLES** *Ultra Mono* (Partisan Records)

**PROTOMARTYR** *Ultimate Success Today* (Domino Recording Co.)

**METZ** *Atlas Vending* (Sub Pop Records)

**VIAGRA BOYS** *Common Sense* (YEAR0001/AWAL)

**PORRIDGE RADIO** *Every Bad* (Secretly Canadian)

**Best R&B Record**

**THUNDERCAT** *It Is What It Is* (Brainfeeder)

**KHRUANGBIN & LEON BRIDGES** *Texas Sun* (Dead Oceans)

**ROBERT GLASPER (FEAT. H.E.R. & MESHELL NDEGEOCELLO)** "Better Than I Imagined" (Loma Vista Recordings)

**SON LITTLE** *aloha* (Anti-Records)

**ORION SUN** *Hold Space for Me* (Mom + Pop Music)

**STEVE ARRINGTON** *Down to the Lowest Terms* (Stones Throw Records)

**Best Rock Record**

Presented by Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp

**FONTAINES D.C.** *A Hero's Death* (Partisan Records)

**KING KRULE** *Man Alive!* (True Panther Sounds/Matador)



Libera Award nominees span multiple genres. They include (clockwise from upper left) Mould, Bad Bunny, Cray and Run the Jewels.

**BARTEES STRANGE** *Mustang* (Single Memory Music)

**BOB MOULD** *Blue Hearts* (Merge Records)

**CAROLINE ROSE** *Superstar* (New West Records)

**Best Spiritual Record**

**SUN RA ARKESTRA** *Swirling* (STRUT)

**LECRAE** *Restoration* (Reach Records)

**JON HOPKINS** "Singing Bowl (Ascension)" (Domino Recording Co.)

**THAD COCKRELL** *If in Case You Feel the Same* (ATO Records)

**WANDE EXIT** (Reach Records)

**Best World Record**

Presented by Redeye Worldwide

**ANTIBALAS** *Fu Chronicles* (Daptone Records)

**BEBEL GILBERTO** *Agora* ((PIAS))

**ALTIN GÜN** "Ordunun Dereleri" (ATO Records)

**SONHOY BLUES** *Optimisme* (Fat Possum Records)

**EHEL** *The Tunis Diaries* (Partisan Records)

**Best Reissue**

**J DILLA** *Donuts (Jelly Edition)* (Stones Throw Records)

**PYLON** *Pylon Box* (New West Records)

**HIROSHI YOSHIMURA** *GREEN* (Light in the Attic)

**PIXIES** *Bossanova 30th Anniversary Reissue* (4AD)

**MOTÖRHEAD** *Ace of Spades 40th Anniversary* (Sanctuary Records)

**ELLIOTT SMITH** *Expanded 25th Anniversary Edition* (Kill Rock Stars)

**GRANDDADDY** *The Sophtware Slump 20th Anniversary Collection* (Dangerbird Records)

**Best Sync Usage**

**RUN THE JEWELS** (Jewel Runners) "Ooh LA LA" — season three of Netflix's *Ozark*

**BLACK PUMAS** (ATO Records) "Colors" — Samsung Galaxy S20

**BRITTANY HOWARD** (ATO Records) "You'll Never Walk Alone" — Johnnie Walker's #KeepWalking Campaign

**BLOOD ORANGE** (Domino Recording Co.) "Tuesday Feeling (Choose To Stay)" — season four of HBO's *Insecure*

**IDLES** (Partisan Records) "Grounds" — *Watch Dogs: Legion*

**Creative Packaging**

**SOCCER MOMMY** (Loma Vista Recordings) *Color Theory* limited-edition back-to-school binder

**BLACK PUMAS** (ATO Records) *Black Pumas (Deluxe Edition)*

**PERFUME GENIUS** (Matador Records) *Set My Heart on Fire Immediately* vinyl

**PYLON** (New West Records) *Pylon Box* CD box set

**IDLES** (Partisan Records) *Ultra Mono*

**Independent Champion**

Presented by Merlin

**BANDCAMP**

**SOUNDEXCHANGE**

**SECRETLY DISTRIBUTION**

**TUNECORE**

**THE ORCHARD**

**Marketing Genius**

**JEWEL RUNNERS** Run the Jewels x *Cyberpunk 2077*, "No Save Point"

**BEGGARS GROUP** Supporting indie retail #loverecordstores campaign

**PHOEBE BRIDGERS** *Punisher* (Dead Oceans)

**LIGHT IN THE ATTIC** Social media and digital marketing

**PERFUME GENIUS** *Set My Heart on Fire Immediately* campaign (Matador Records)

**Label Of The Year (Big)**

Presented by Alternative Distribution Alliance

**PARTISAN RECORDS**

**SUB POP RECORDS**

**WARP RECORDS**

**STONES THROW RECORDS**

**NINJA TUNE**

**Label Of The Year (Medium)**

**LIGHT IN THE ATTIC**

**SACRED BONES RECORDS**

**MATADOR RECORDS**

**GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL**

**ROUGH TRADE RECORDS**

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# X ANIVERSARIO



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# 10 YEARS, ZERO REGRETS

GERARDO ORTIZ'S VIDEOS HAVE BEEN PULLED FROM YOUTUBE, AND HE'S BANNED FROM PERFORMING IN PARTS OF MEXICO, BUT THE GENRE-BENDING SINGER-SONGWRITER SAYS HE CONTINUES TO DELIVER HITS BY LISTENING TO HIS FANS

BY GRISELDA FLORES



Ortiz in 2020.

**E**VEN BEFORE HIS VOICE CHANGED, Gerardo Ortiz knew he wanted to be a musician. While performing at a baptism party in Sinaloa, Mexico, at the age of 8, a label executive asked if he wanted to record his first album. Since then, he has helped transform the regional Mexican genre by creating a musical fusion of provocative *corridos* and emotional *ranchera* ballads with *bachata*, *urbano* and drug ballads known as *narcocorridos*.

Over his 10-year career, the Mexican American artist, now 31, has earned six No. 1s on *Billboard's* Top Latin Albums chart and eight No. 1s on the regional Mexican albums list. His most recent LP, *Más Caro Que Ayer*, released in 2020 through BadSin/Sony Music Latin, debuted and peaked at No. 7. By the end of 2010, Ortiz was the top-selling regional Mexican act, and he won six honors at the inaugural *Billboard* Mexican Music Awards the following year, including artist and new artist of the year. The two-time Grammy Award nominee has earned 2.1 billion career on-demand streams, according to MRC Data.

While the past decade has brought Ortiz ample success, it also has come with “a lot of ups and downs,” he says: from having to defend his “Fuiste Mía” music video after a petition asked YouTube to remove it because it “promoted and incited violence against women” in 2016, to his 2019 legally messy departure from DEL Records, his label home for nearly his entire career. “I’ve learned that I’m not perfect and that actions have consequences, but I’ve been able to navigate those obstacles with professionalism and by continuing to deliver hits,” he says.

What has remained a constant is Ortiz’s steadfast fan base, which he considers a barometer for plotting his next musical moves. With over 5 million listeners on Spotify and nearly 8 million collective followers on Twitter and Instagram, he stays current with his fans by regularly checking his DMs and replying on social media. “They are the ones that give life and credibility to my music. That’s all that really matters to me as a songwriter,” he says. “They’re No. 1, always.”

Ortiz says he is focused on returning to the stage as states loosen their COVID-19 restrictions. In honor of his career milestone, he launched his X Aniversario tour on May 16 in Florida to support *Décimo Aniversario*, an 11-track album released in February that features a Sinaloan band and traditional mariachi rhythms. He spoke to *Billboard* about his “rancho” roots, his influences, his fans and other keys to his enduring career.

## How would you describe your decade in music?

It has been an adventure, to say the least. Ten years ago, my music gained force on both sides of the border because my movement was different. I was singing corridos, and they were getting a lot of radio airplay, which surprised many people. It has been 10 years



of ups and downs. I've had many wins, but I've encountered controversy and many challenges.

**How has your songwriting process evolved?**

The old Gerardo wasn't conscious of what he was writing. I would write in the moment — whatever came to me. I would record the song without questioning any of the lyrics, and that was that. Now I take my time writing a song. I know what I want to write, what I want to modify in a song, and I've learned to be more in control of that process. I'm a better storyteller overall. But sometimes, I do miss that spontaneity, because I took risks with my lyrics. There are times when that old Gerardo comes back, and it's a nice balance.

**What has helped you remain consistent?**

Knowing what my fans want and letting them determine the direction of my music. That has been my strategy since the beginning. My music has stayed true to my essence, texture and color. I sing about topics that resonate with my fans. When you truly know your fan base, that's key to remaining a constant in this industry. If I see that they like something, I keep giving them that. The way I know they like something or not is by reading the comments they leave on social media, which has been a blessing because you can see their reactions in real time.

**You've said that "Quién Se Anima" marked a before and after in your career. Why?**

It was the first corrido that marked a new era for my songwriting. I had been writing corridos that were very *rancheros* — local to people who lived in pueblos or worked the ranches in Mexico. They were the only ones that really identified with those types of corridos. But "Quién Se Anima" was my first modern corrido. It was more contemporary and mature, and about two compadres just wanting to have a good time and live a good life. People our age on both sides of the border could relate to that storyline.

**Narcocorridos are often criticized for glamorizing drug trafficking and its criminals, but they are a big part of your musical DNA. What has that songwriting style taught you?**

I've learned that the type of corridos that resonate with fans are more emotional and nostalgic. For example, the part of "Más Caro, Que Ayer" that connected with the fans wasn't about the controversial character [Rafael Caro Quintero]. It was the part about returning home to your land. I sing, "Que bonitos se ven los cerros cuando voy a mi ranchito." ["The hills look so beautiful when I visit my rancho."] In that moment, I've touched a very sensitive part in people because they start imagining their little rancho. It's a very powerful hook that resonates strongly with my fan base.

**Who is your springboard for new ideas?**

Now, I'm more in tune with my brothers who are musicians. I have a piano in my house, and

my brother [Oscar Ortiz, who wrote Gerardo's single "Estar Con Otra"] will start playing his own stuff and I start singing some of my new stuff. It's great because they give me honest feedback. They're not afraid to tell me how they really feel about something I've written.

**How involved are you in the production of your music?**

I've always loved to be involved. Even when I'm just starting to write a new song, I'm already thinking of the arrangements. I decide if a song will be a ballad, if it will be accompanied by a mariachi or if it'll be a *banda* song with drums and guitars. I plan all of that while I'm writing.

**What distinguishes your sound from other regional Mexican artists who play banda music?**

I like to add guitars and drums or even a piano to make them sound more pop. I've been doing that since the beginning of my career. You can listen to an album from 2010, and I was doing that then. Banda artists don't typically add guitars or drums — they're mainly using wind instruments. That's a touch that makes my music a bit more unique and, at the same time, makes my music a bit more digestible for those who don't traditionally listen to banda.

**What has been the biggest lesson of your career?**

Knowing that I'm not perfect, and understanding that I've made decisions that have directly impacted my career and have had major consequences.

**What was the biggest challenge?**

Having to defend my music and my movement. My music videos have been taken down from YouTube because of graphic content, and I've also been banned from playing in certain parts of Mexico. When your movement doesn't represent what is considered the norm, it doesn't sit well with people. It's like that in politics, it's like that with other controversial genres, and corridos aren't the exception. But I've been able to navigate those obstacles with professionalism and by continuing to deliver hits.

**You've collaborated with many artists outside of the regional Mexican genre, in bachata and urbano. Why have you embraced those styles?**

I love that there's so much respect and camaraderie on the urban side. You don't see that often in our genre. When I collaborated with Darell and Gente de Zona, we each did our own thing without stepping on one another's toes and had so much fun.

**What advice would you give your younger self?**

Everything that has happened in my career has made me the artist I am now. The good and the bad moments have been instrumental to my growth. So I wouldn't advise my younger self to do anything differently. **b**



Ortiz (center) with Gente de Zona's Alexander Delgado (left) and Randy Malcom.

# Corridos Without Borders

**G**ERARDO ORTIZ HAS HELPED USHER IN A regional Mexican music renaissance by collaborating with bachata and urbano acts from Prince Royce to Gente de Zona.

When Ortiz released his first collaborations — bachata versions of his hits ("Sólo Vine a Despedirme," "Eres Una Niña") in 2014 and a duet with Royce ("Moneda") in 2017, which topped *Billboard's* Tropical Airplay chart — they came across as unprecedented and daring. A bona fide regional Mexican act known for bold corridos, Ortiz navigated the tropical realm with ease. "Bachata was happening at that time and I didn't want to stay behind," he says. "I had an itch. I thought, 'I have to do a bachata,' so I released two songs and my fans embraced them."

Before that, regional Mexican artists mostly stayed in their lane as traditionalists. Only a handful, including Ortiz, Roberto Tapia (who also collaborated with Royce in 2014) and Joan Sebastian, who worked with The Black Eyed Peas' Will.i.am in 2013, experimented with different sounds. Collaborations with nongenie acts have since become more prominent. In the past year, Banda MS and Snoop Dogg's hip-hop fusion track "Qué Maldición" debuted at No. 4 on Hot Latin Songs; Karol G recorded her first corrido, "200 Copas," with rising *tumbados* singer-songwriter Danny Felix; and Carin León and Adriel Favela featured on Spanish rapper C. Tangana's bold album, *El Madrileño*. Most recently, Ortiz released the trap song "Billetes de 100" with urbano artist Darell and the mariachi-infused reggaeton track "Otra Botella" with Gente de Zona.

Ortiz's experiments within the regional Mexican genre have contributed to its recent popularity on *Billboard's* charts, as well as the global growth of its fan base on music streaming services. "I always have fun with these collaborations, and it's liberating to step out of your comfort zone once in a while," he says. "Our genre has had many great moments, but right now, people are listening to our music in countries we never thought we would reach. We're finally getting more visibility."

—G.F.

FELIPE CUEVAS





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# Chartbreaker

From left: Silverstein, JESSIA and Tedder  
photographed by Martha Galvan  
on May 19 in Los Angeles.

# No. 34

PEAK ON BILLBOARD'S  
POP AIRPLAY CHART

## JESSIA

**How TikTok helped the emerging artist turn insecurities into a hit and score a major-label record deal**

On Jan. 1, Canadian singer-songwriter JESSIA (born Jessika Harling) took to TikTok — as she had over 100 times since joining the platform in April 2020 — to sing the chorus of what would become her breakout hit, “I’m Not Pretty.” Filming from the driver’s seat of her car, she says with a laugh in the New Year’s Day clip, “I don’t know if this is total trash or actually a bop, but here we go!”

One of the 11 million-plus views on that initial clip was

from songwriter-producer Elijah Woods, who took the seed of the song and helped her flesh it out, showing the process on TikTok for followers to watch in real time. They wrote the song in two days and released it three days later. A dance challenge soon followed. “And then, literally, everything changed,” says JESSIA.

The buzz around the song caught the attention of singer-songwriter Ryan Tedder, who DM’d the aspiring pop star asking her to send more material. “I won’t sign a writer that’s not an artist, and I won’t sign an artist that’s not a writer,” says Tedder. “She was both in full spades — and I’m convinced had she not been living on an island off the coast of Vancouver, there’s no shot I would have had a chance of getting her. It would have been a feeding frenzy.” He did face some competition, but by Jan. 31,

Tedder’s Artist Driven Records and Brandon Silverstein’s S10 Entertainment record-label division signed JESSIA in partnership with Republic Records. Her manager, Studio 44’s JR Antoine, had come on just over a year ago.

In April, Bebe Rexha hopped on a remix of the hit, while the original now soundtracks a body-positive Dove Self-Esteem Project campaign on TikTok. “I’m Not Pretty” has racked up 49.4 million on-demand U.S. streams through May 27, according to MRC Data, and JESSIA topped the Canada Emerging Artists chart on May 8. Perhaps most affirming, though, are the steady stream of texts she now receives: “I constantly get messages like, ‘You were playing in Home Hardware!’ or ‘We haven’t talked in five years, but way to go, girl!’”

—KATIE ATKINSON



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