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AUGUST 7, 2021 • BILLBOARD.COM



LIL BABY

BUILDS HIS LEGACY

**TIMBALAND &
SWIZZ BEATZ**

EXECUTIVES OF THE YEAR

IS AALIYAH'S MUSIC
FINALLY COMING
BACK ONLINE?

POWER
PLAYERS
2021

USHER

Takes Las Vegas



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AUGUST 7, 2021 • BILLBOARD.COM

POWER
PLAYERS
2021

LIL BABY

Builds His Legacy



USHER

TAKES LAS VEGAS

**TIMBALAND &
SWIZZ BEATZ**

EXECUTIVES OF THE YEAR

**IS AALIYAH'S MUSIC
FINALLY COMING
BACK ONLINE?**

CONGRATULATIONS TO JAM & LEWIS FOR THEIR RETURN TO THE TOP OF THE CHARTS!

DEBUT ALBUM VOL. 1



"Jam & Lewis: Volume One is a summit of R&B royalty" – **New York Magazine**

Most Added At Radio & Already Approaching Top 10

"Somewhat Loved (There You Go Breakin' My Heart)" (Feat. Mariah Carey)

#2 Current R&B Albums Chart Debut – **MRC Data**

#1 Overall Top Albums Chart Debut – **iTunes**

"Worth the 40-year wait" – **The Guardian**

Widespread critical acclaim from **New York Times, Variety, Rolling Stone, BET & More**

"He Don't Know Nothin' Bout It" (feat. Babyface)

Top 5 Song For 16 Weeks On Billboard's Adult R&B Airplay Chart



BMG

THE NEW
MUSIC COMPANY.



billboard Hot 100



Harlow (left) and Lil Nas X

‘Turned Haters To Consumers’: ‘Industry Baby’ Bows

LIL NAS X AND JACK HARLOW ENTER THE BILLBOARD HOT 100 at No. 2 with “Industry Baby,” which, following its July 23 release, opens with 40.6 million U.S. streams, 2.9 million in radio audience and 10,900 sold in the week ending July 29, according to MRC Data.

The anthem celebrating music business dominance (“This one is for the champions,” Lil Nas X boasts in the prechorus) also debuts atop the Streaming Songs, Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs and Hot Rap Songs charts. On the Hot 100, it’s Lil Nas X’s fourth top 10 — following “Montero (Call Me by Your Name),” which became his second No. 1 in April (and holds at No. 8) — and Harlow’s second, matching the high of his 2020 breakthrough hit, “Whats Poppin” (featuring DaBaby, Tory Lanez and Lil Wayne).

Notably, “Industry Baby” was produced by Kanye West, along with Take a Daytrip. West achieves his 22nd Hot 100 top 10 as a producer, in a third distinct decade, after tallying 14 top 10s in the 2000s and seven in the 2010s. He first hit the top 10 of the Hot 100 as a producer with JAY-Z’s “Izzo (H.O.V.A.)” (No. 8 peak, 2001) and most recently ranked in the tier with his own “Follow God” (No. 7, 2019).

—GARY TRUST

WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	CERTIFICATION PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	Artist IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
7	1	1	#1 9 WKS BUTTER	R. GRIMALDI, S. KIRK, R. PERRY (J. ANDREWS, R. GRIMALDI, S. KIRK, R. M. A. BILOWITZ, S. GARCIA, R. PERRY)	BTS HYBE/BIGHIT MUSIC/COLUMBIA	1	10
		2	HOT SHOT DEBUT INDUSTRY BABY	K. WEST, TAKE A DAY TRIP (M. L. HILL, D. M. A. BAPTISTE, D. BIRAL, N. LEE, J. HARLOW)	Lil Nas X & Jack Harlow COLUMBIA	2	1
2	2	3	GOOD 4 U ▲	D. NIGRO, ALEXANDER 23 (O. RODRIGO, D. L. NIGRO)	Olivia Rodrigo Geffen/Interscope	1	11
3	4	4	SAL AIR STAY	CASHGREGATO, FEDI, B. SLATKIN, C. PUTHI, K. J. HONNARD, J. BIEBER, M. A. HOBERG, FEDI, B. SLATKIN, C. PUTHI, M. J. MULLI, E. DEBONS, RAHMAN	The Kid LAROI & Justin Bieber RAYMOND BRAUN/COLUMBIA/DEF JAM	3	3
4	3	5	LEVITATING ▲	KOZ, S. D. PRICE (C. COFFEE, JR., S. KOZMENIUK, S. T. HUDSON, D. LIPA, J. L. KIRK)	Dua Lipa Feat. DaBaby WARNER	2	43
5	5	6	KISS ME MORE	YETI BEATS, R. CHAHAYED (A. Z. DLAMINI, D. SPRECHER, R. CHAHAYED, G. A. POWELL II, C. LANG, L. S. GOTTWALD, S. I. ROWE, T. SHADDICK, S. A. KIPNER)	Doja Cat Feat. SZA Kemosabe/RCA	3	16
6	6	7	BAD HABITS	FRED AGAIN..., J. MCDAID, E. SHEERAN (E. C. SHEERAN, F. GIBSON, J. MCDAID)	Ed Sheeran ATLANTIC	5	5
8	8	8	MONTERO (CALL ME BY YOUR NAME) ▲	TAKE A DAY TRIP, O. FEDI, R. LENZO (M. L. HILL, D. M. A. BAPTISTE, D. BIRAL, O. FEDI, R. LENZO)	Lil Nas X COLUMBIA	1	18
1	7	9	PERMISSION TO DANCE	STEVE MAC, S. KIRK, J. ANDREWS (E. C. SHEERAN, S. MCCUTCHEON, J. MCDAID, J. ANDREWS)	BTS HYBE/BIGHIT MUSIC/COLUMBIA	1	3
10	9	10	DEJA VU ▲	D. NIGRO (D. L. NIGRO, O. RODRIGO, T. SWIFT, J. M. ANTONOFF, A. E. CLARK)	Olivia Rodrigo Geffen/Interscope	3	17

THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CURRENT SONGS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY RADIO AIRPLAY, AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY MRC DATA, SALES DATA AS COMPILED BY MRC DATA AND STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA BY ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY MRC DATA. SONGS ARE DEFINED AS CURRENT IF THEY ARE NEW RELEASED TITLES. (S) SONGS RECEIVING WEEKLY AIRPLAY AND SALES ACTIVITY FOR THE FIRST TIME. SEE CHART'S LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2021 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND MRC DATA INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

URBAN HENRY WATT



JOEY JORDISON

1975 - 2021

ROADRUNNER
RECORDS



Table with columns: 2 WKS. AGO, LAST WEEK, THIS WEEK, TITLE, CERTIFICATION, PRODUCER (SONGWRITER), Artist, IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL, PEAK POS., WKS. ON CHART. Includes tracks like 'TODO DE TI', 'COUNTRY AGAIN', 'WAVES', 'THINGS A MAN OUGHTA KNOW', etc.



47

OLIVIA RODRIGO "traitor"

Rodrigo holds the top two spots on Billboard's Mainstream Top 40 airplay chart, with "good 4 u" at No. 1 for a third week and "deja vu" up to a new No. 2 high. Meanwhile, fellow Sour track "traitor" rises 40-34...

RODRIGO: DAVID P. BENNETT/Getty Images; ALDEAN, UNDERWOOD: RANDI EST. NICHOLS/S. SHALEY/DAVID DEBORA

RODRIGO: DAVID P. BENNETT/Getty Images; ALDEAN, UNDERWOOD: RANDI EST. NICHOLS/S. SHALEY/DAVID DEBORA; RODRIGO: DAVID P. BENNETT/Getty Images; ALDEAN, UNDERWOOD: RANDI EST. NICHOLS/S. SHALEY/DAVID DEBORA

Table with columns: 2 WKS. AGO, LAST WEEK, THIS WEEK, TITLE, CERTIFICATION, PRODUCER (SONGWRITER), Artist, IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL, PEAK POS., WKS. ON CHART. Includes tracks like 'PEPAS', 'MY BOY', 'HATS OFF', 'RED LIGHT GREEN LIGHT', etc.



15

JASON ALDEAN & CARRIE UNDERWOOD "If I Didn't Love You"

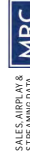
The track enters at No. 2 on Hot Country Songs. Since the survey began as an all-encompassing genre ranking in 1958, that's the highest arrival for a duet between a solo male and female.



57

SMILEY FEAT. DRAKE "Over the Top"

Rapper Smiley makes his Hot 100 debut as the song starts with 9.5 million streams in its first week. Drake, who praised Smiley in 2018 as an inspiration for his album Scorpion, adds his record-extending 236th entry.



**YEAH! CONGRATULATIONS, USHER ON YOUR SOLD-OUT OPENING RUN!
LOVE, YOUR LIVE NATION & CAESARS ENTERTAINMENT FAMILY**

USHER

THE LAS VEGAS RESIDENCY

THE COLOSSEUM

CAESARS PALACE



**CAESARS
ENTERTAINMENT**

LIVE NATION


RÉMY MARTIN

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST	CERTIFICATION	IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
26	1	#1 GREATEST GAINER THE KID LAROI ●		COLUMBIA	F*ck Love	1	53
3	2	OLIVIA RODRIGO ▲		GEFFEN/IGA	Sour	1	10
4	3	DOJA CAT		KEMOSABE/RCA	Planet Her	2	5
5	4	MORGAN WALLEN ▲		BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	Dangerous: The Double Album	1	29
1	5	POP SMOKE		VICTOR VICTOR WORLDWIDE/REPUBLIC	Faith	1	2
6	6	LIL BABY & LIL DURK		ALAMO/QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/IGA/CAPITOL	The Voice Of The Heroes	1	8
65	7	PACE SETTER EST GEE		WARLIKE/GMS/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Bigger Than Life Or Death	7	2
7	8	POLO G ●		COLUMBIA	Hall Of Fame	1	7
56	9	TAYLOR SWIFT ▲		REPUBLIC	Folklore	1	53
8	10	DUA LIPA ▲		WARNER	Future Nostalgia	3	69
12	11	LUKE COMBS ▲		RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	What You See Is What You Get	1	90
	12	HOT SHOT DEBUT YUNG BLEU		VANDROSS/EMPIRE	Moon Boy	12	1
11	13	MONEYBAGG YO ●		CMG/N-LESS/INTERSCOPE/IGA	A Gangsta's Pain	1	14
9	14	POP SMOKE ▲		VICTOR VICTOR WORLDWIDE/REPUBLIC	Shoot For The Stars Aim For The Moon	1	56
10	15	BO BURNHAM		BO BURNHAM/IMPERIAL/REPUBLIC	Inside (The Songs)	7	8
13	16	THE WEEKND ▲		XO/REPUBLIC	After Hours	1	67
NEW	17	LEON BRIDGES		LISASAWYERS3/COLUMBIA	Gold-Diggers Sound	17	1
15	18	JUSTIN BIEBER ▲		RAYMOND BRAUN/DEF JAM	Justice	1	19
NEW	19	PAUL MCCARTNEY		MPL/CAPITOL	McCartney III Imagined	19	1
2	20	JOHN MAYER		COLUMBIA	Sob Rock	2	2
19	21	LIL BABY ▲		QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/CAPITOL	My Turn	1	74
20	22	POST MALONE ▲		REPUBLIC	Hollywood's Bleeding	1	99
14	23	J. COLE		DREAMVILLE/ROC NATION/INTERSCOPE/IGA	The Off-Season	1	11
21	24	QUEEN ▲		HOLLYWOOD	Greatest Hits	8	449
16	25	MIGOS		QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/CAPITOL	Culture III	2	7
22	26	JUICE WRLD		GRADE A/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Legends Never Die	1	55
23	27	JUICE WRLD ●		GRADE A/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Goodbye & Good Riddance	4	167
18	28	TYLER, THE CREATOR		COLUMBIA	Call Me If You Get Lost	1	5
25	29	LUKE COMBS ▲		RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	This One's For You	4	217
31	30	ARIANA GRANDE ▲		REPUBLIC	Positions	1	39
28	31	ROD WAVE		ALAMO/GEFFEN/IGA	SoulFly	1	18
30	32	HARRY STYLES ▲		ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	Fine Line	1	85
29	33	FLEETWOOD MAC ●		WARNER/RHINO	Rumours	1	435
24	34	MACHINE GUN KELLY		EST19XX/BAD BOY/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Tickets To My Downfall	1	44
37	35	MORGAN WALLEN ▲		BIG LOUD	If I Know Me	10	148
41	36	TAYLOR SWIFT		REPUBLIC	Evermore	1	33
34	37	CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL ●		FANTASY/CONCORD	Chronicle The 20 Greatest Hits	18	534
32	38	DJ KHALED ●		WE THE BEST/EPIC	Khaled Khaled	1	13
45	39	TRAVIS SCOTT ▲		CACTUS JACK/GRAND HUSTLE/EPIC	ASTROWORLD	1	156
36	40	POOH SHIESTY ●		1017 GLOBAL/ATLANTIC/AG	Shiesty Season	3	25
35	41	ORIGINAL BROADWAY CAST ●		HAMILTON UPTOWN/ATLANTIC/AG	Hamilton: An American Musical	2	305
40	42	POLO G ▲		COLUMBIA	The GOAT	2	63
43	43	ELTON JOHN ▲		ROCKET/ISLAND/UMG	Diamonds	7	194
44	44	BAD BUNNY		RIMAS	YHLQMDLG	2	74
50	45	BILLIE EILISH ▲		DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/IGA	When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?	1	122
52	46	EMINEM ▲		SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Curtain Call: The Hits	1	539
42	47	GIVEON ●		NOT SO FAST/EPIC	When It's All Said And Done... Take Time	5	20
53	48	POST MALONE ▲		REPUBLIC	beerbongs & bentleys	1	170
55	49	MAROON 5 ●		222/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Jordi	8	7
59	50	DRAKE ●		YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC	Scorpion	1	161

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST	CERTIFICATION	IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART	
61	51	CHRIS STAPLETON ▲		MERCURY NASHVILLE/UMGN	Traveller	1	307	
38	52	SZA ▲		TOP DAWG/RCA	Ctrl	3	216	
48	53	H.E.R.		MBK/RCA	Back Of My Mind	6	6	
51	54	RAUW ALEJANDRO		DUARS/SONY MUSIC LATIN	Vice Versa	17	5	
54	55	BAD BUNNY		RIMAS	El Ultimo Tour del Mundo	1	35	
NEW	56	MIKE.		4THEHOMIES/DITTO	the highs.	56	1	
60	57	MEGAN THEE STALLION ▲		1501 CERTIFIED/300/AG	Good News	2	36	
57	58	TAYLOR SWIFT ▲		REPUBLIC	Lover	1	101	
80	59	J. COLE ▲		DREAMVILLE/ROC NATION/COLUMBIA/LEGACY	2014 Forest Hills Drive	1	347	
68	60	WALKER HAYES		MONUMENT	Country Stuff (EP)	60	6	
72	61	GLASS ANIMALS		WOLF TONE/POLYDOR/REPUBLIC	Dreamland	7	38	
66	62	THE WEEKND		XO/REPUBLIC	The Highlights	2	25	
58	63	BOB MARLEY AND THE WAILERS ●		TUFF GONG/ISLAND/UMG	Legend: The Best Of...	5	689	
63	64	JUICE WRLD ●		GRADE A/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Death Race For Love	1	125	
82	65	SLEEPY HALLOW		WINNERS CIRCLE/RCA	Still Sleep?	38	9	
64	66	JOURNEY ●		COLUMBIA/LEGACY	Journey's Greatest Hits	10	679	
70	67	AC/DC ●		COLUMBIA/LEGACY	Back In Black	4	474	
62	68	KENDRICK LAMAR ▲		TOP DAWG/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/IGA	good kid, m.A.A.d city	2	457	
67	69	DOJA CAT ●		KEMOSABE/RCA	Hot Pink	9	91	
71	70	CHRIS STAPLETON		MERCURY NASHVILLE/UMGN	Starting Over	3	37	
69	71	LIL DURK		ALAMO/GEFFEN/IGA	The Voice	2	32	
75	72	42 DUGG		4PF/CMG	Free Dem Boyz	8	10	
87	73	JACK HARLOW ●		GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC/AG	Thats What They All Say	5	33	
77	74	FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE		BMLG	Life Rolls On	21	24	
76	75	POST MALONE ▲		REPUBLIC	Stoney	4	242	
39	76	G HERBO		MACHINE ENTERTAINMENT/IMPERIAL/REPUBLIC		25	5	4
74	77	LIL TJAY ●		COLUMBIA	Destined 2 Win	5	17	
73	78	YOUNG THUG & VARIOUS ARTISTS		YOUNG STONER LIFE/300/AG	Young Stoner Life: Slime Language 2	1	15	
79	79	SUMMER WALKER ▲		LVRN/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Over It	2	95	
83	80	2PAC ●		AMARU/DEATH ROW/INTERSCOPE/UMG	Greatest Hits	3	381	
81	81	ED SHEERAN ▲		ATLANTIC/AG	+ (Divide)	1	230	
78	82	TOM PETTY AND THE HEARTBREAKERS ●		MCA/GEFFEN/UMG	Greatest Hits	2	420	
88	83	ROD WAVE ▲		ALAMO/IGA	Pray 4 Love	2	69	
86	84	LIL UZI VERT		GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC/AG	Eternal Atake	1	73	
123	85	KANYE WEST ●		ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM	My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy	1	144	
NEW	86	JACKSON BROWNE		INSIDE	Downhill From Everywhere	86	1	
84	87	MICHAEL JACKSON ●		EPIC/LEGACY	Thriller	1	481	
96	88	DRAKE ●		YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC	Take Care	1	439	
92	89	THE WEEKND ▲		XO/REPUBLIC	Starboy	1	228	
89	90	YOUNGBOY NEVER BROKE AGAIN ●		NEVER BROKE AGAIN/ARTIST PARTNER GROUP/ATLANTIC/AG	Top	1	46	
85	91	BRUNO MARS ▲		ELEKTRA/EMG	Doo-Wops & Hootligans	3	530	
95	92	LIL UZI VERT		GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC/AG	Luv Is Rage 2	1	205	
132	93	KANYE WEST ●		ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM	Graduation	1	182	
100	94	LUKE BRYAN ●		CAPITOL NASHVILLE/UMGN	Born Here Live Here Die Here	5	40	
93	95	ZAC BROWN BAND		HOME GROWN/BMG	Greatest Hits So Far...	20	315	
98	96	RODDY RICCH ▲		BIRD VISION/ATLANTIC/AG	Please Excuse Me For Being Antisocial	1	86	
99	97	DABABY ▲		SOUTHCOST/INTERSCOPE/IGA	BLAME IT ON BABY	1	67	
105	98	LEWIS CAPALDI		VERTIGO/CAPITOL	Divinely Uninspired To A Hellish Extent	20	115	
90	99	MAC MILLER ▲		WARNER	Swimming	3	151	
97	100	EMINEM ●		SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/IGA	Music To Be Murdered By	1	79	



The Kid Wins

Over a year after The Kid LAROI's *F*ck Love* was released, it surges from No. 26 to No. 1 on the Billboard 200 for its first week atop the list, following multiple reissues that added tracks to the project. The set, now in its 53rd chart week, earned 85,000 equivalent album units in the United States during the week ending July 29 (up 409%), according to MRC Data. Streaming activity powers most of that figure.

*F*ck Love* arrived July 24, 2020, with 15 tracks. It was reissued Nov. 6 with seven additional tracks and jumped 81-3 on the Nov. 21 chart — its peak until now. It was then reissued a third and fourth time, on July 23 and July 27, adding seven and six tracks, respectively, including his current Billboard Hot 100 top five hit, "Stay," with Justin Bieber. The *F*ck Love* tracklist now stands at 35.

Of the album's 85,000 units earned, streaming-equivalent album units make up nearly 82,000 (up 403%, equaling 113.97 million on-demand streams of the album's tracks), album sales 2,000 (up 978%) and track-equivalent album units nearly 2,000 (up 458%).

—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.

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	CERTIFICATION	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
102	101	GEORGE STRAIT	MCA NASHVILLE/UMGN	50 Number Ones	1	183
101	102	THE BEATLES	APPLE/CAPITOL/UME	1	1	483
110	103	DRAKE	YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC	Views	1	272
104	104	GUNS N' ROSES	GEFFEN/UME	Appetite For Destruction	1	251
113	105	THE BEATLES	APPLE/CAPITOL/UME	Abbey Road	1	421
194	106	KANYE WEST	G.O.O.D./DEF JAM	The Life Of Pablo	1	159
103	107	BTS	BIGHIT MUSIC	MAP OF THE SOUL : 7	1	75
106	108	XXXTENTACION	BAD VIBES FOREVER	?	1	176
111	109	NIRVANA	SUB POP/DGC/GEFFEN/UME	Nevermind	1	535
109	110	THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G.	BAD BOY/RHINO	Greatest Hits	1	285
119	111	LYNYRD SKYNYRD	MCA/GEFFEN/UME	All Time Greatest Hits	56	137
115	112	KHALID	RIGHT HAND/RCA	American Teen	4	230
114	113	SOUNDTRACK	WALT DISNEY	Moana	2	242
112	114	NICKELBACK	ROADRUNNER/EMG	The Best Of Nickelback: Volume 1	21	52
116	115	BOB SEGER & THE SILVER BULLET BAND	HIDEOUT/CAPITOL/UME	Greatest Hits	8	386
120	116	KENDRICK LAMAR	TOP DAWG/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/JGA	DAMN.	1	224
121	117	TAYLOR SWIFT	BIG MACHINE/BMLG	1989	1	346
129	118	KID CUDI	DREAM ON/G.O.O.D./REPUBLIC	Man On The Moon: The End Of Day	4	185
108	119	MANESKIN	RCA/SONY MUSIC ITALY/SONY MUSIC LATIN	Chosen	103	4
128	120	KAROL G	UNIVERSAL MUSIC LATINO/UMLE	KG0516	20	18
181	121	TOMORROW X TOGETHER	HYBE/BIGHIT MUSIC/REPUBLIC	The Chaos Chapter : FREEZE	5	8
125	122	THE BEACH BOYS	CAPITOL/UME	Sounds Of Summer: The Very Best Of The Beach Boys	16	263
RE	123	MILEY CYRUS	RCA	Plastic Hearts	2	30
137	124	KHALID	RIGHT HAND/RCA	Free Spirit	1	121
127	125	LIL DURK	ALAMO/GEFFEN/JGA	Just Cause Y'all Waited 2	2	64
135	126	PITBULL	MR. 305/POLO GROUNDS/RCA	Greatest Hits	120	26
33	127	THE ROLLING STONES	LONDON/ABKCO	Hot Rocks 1964-1971	4	358
136	128	GABBY BARRETT	WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WNN	Goldmine	27	58
126	129	BILLIE EILISH	DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/JGA	Dont Smile At Me	14	188
130	130	ABBA	POLAR/POLYDOR/UME	Gold: Greatest Hits	25	180
145	131	JHENE AIKO	2 FISH/ART CLUB/ARTIUM/DEF JAM	Chilombo	2	73
122	132	METALLICA	BLACKEANE	Metallica	1	618
131	133	TYLER, THE CREATOR	COLUMBIA	IGOR	1	97
150	134	BON JOVI	ISLAND/UME	Greatest Hits: The Ultimate Collection	5	218
148	135	RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS	WARNER	Greatest Hits	18	285
133	136	ARCTIC MONKEYS	DOMINO	AM	6	158
139	137	TAYLOR SWIFT	REPUBLIC	Fearless (Taylor's Version)	1	16
142	138	CARDI B	THE KSR GROUP/ATLANTIC/AG	Invasion Of Privacy	1	173
RE	139	THOMAS RHETT	VALORY/BMLG	Country Again (Side A)	10	11
154	140	DRAKE	YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC	More Life	1	220
46	141	WILLOW	MSFT MUSIC/ROC NATION	Lately I Feel Everything	46	2
153	142	IMAGINE DRAGONS	KID INAKORNER/INTERSCOPE/JGA	Evolve	2	214
147	143	HALSEY	CAPITOL	Manic	2	80
152	144	FUTURE & LIL UZI VERT	FREEBANDZ/EPIC/GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC/AG	Pluto x Baby Pluto	2	37
138	145	POP SMOKE	VICTOR VICTOR WORLDWIDE/REPUBLIC	Meet The Woo, V.2	7	77
143	146	HARRY STYLES	ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	Harry Styles	1	91
RE	147	EAGLES	ASYLUM/ELEKTRA/RHINO	Hotel California	1	139
157	148	WIZKID	STARBOY/RCA	Made In Lagos	80	5
162	149	MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE	REPRISE/WARNER	Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge	28	91
156	150	FUTURE	FREEBANDZ/EPIC	High Off Life	1	63



7

EST GEE
Bigger Than Life or Death

The title vaults 65-7 with 30,000 equivalent album units (up 141%) earned in the week ending July 29. It was released July 21, so it debuted on the July 31 chart at No. 65 with 12,000 units from just two days of activity in the week ending July 22.



9

TAYLOR SWIFT
folklore

The album jumps back into the top 10 (29,000 units; up 123%) after its wide release on vinyl on July 23, having previously been exclusive to Swift's web store and Target. Vinyl LP sales constitute 13,500 of its 15,000 sold for the week.



19

PAUL McCARTNEY
McCartney III Imagined

The remix set also reenters at No. 1 on Top Album Sales for its first week at the top, following its July 23 release on physical formats (21,000 sold). It was previously only available as a digital album and on streaming platforms.

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	ARTIST IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	CERTIFICATION	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
124	151	BIA	EPIC	For Certain	64	3
91	152	BILLY JOEL	COLUMBIA/LEGACY	The Essential Billy Joel	15	247
RE	153	CARRIE UNDERWOOD	CAPITOL NASHVILLE/UMGN	My Savior	4	9
RE	154	KANYE WEST	ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM	The College Dropout	2	80
RE	155	FALL OUT BOY	DECAYDANCE/FUELED BY RAMEN/ISLAND/UME	Believers Never Die: Greatest Hits	77	2
164	156	TRAVIS SCOTT	GRAND HUSTLE/EPIC	Birds In The Trap Sing McKnight	1	252
140	157	SAM HUNT	MCA NASHVILLE/UMGN	SOUTHSIDE	5	65
155	158	TYLER CHILDERS	HICKMAN HOLLER/THIRTY TIGERS	Purgatory	106	60
177	159	TIM MCGRAW	CURB	Number One Hits	27	190
170	160	DARYL HALL JOHN OATES	RCA/LEGACY	The Very Best Of Daryl Hall John Oates	34	139
163	161	FUTURE	A-1/FREEBANDZ/EPIC	DS2	1	158
169	162	GUNNA	YOUNG STONER LIFE/300/AG	Wunna	1	62
165	163	TOBY KEITH	SHOW DOG-UNIVERSAL/UME	35 Biggest Hits	2	100
172	164	POLO G	COLUMBIA	Die A Legend	6	111
178	165	YOUNGBOY NEVER BROKE AGAIN	NEVER BROKE AGAIN/ATLANTIC/AG	AI YoungBoy 2	1	91
167	166	ARIANA GRANDE	REPUBLIC	Thank U, Next	1	129
159	167	AJR	AJR/BMG	OK Orchestra	10	18
175	168	RIHANNA	WEST BURY ROAD/ROC NATION	ANTI	1	279
160	169	LIZZO	NICE LIFE/ATLANTIC/AG	Cuz I Love You	4	119
NEW	170	SLEEP FRUITS & AMBIENT FRUITS	AMBIENT FRUITS/STRANGE FRUITS	Relaxing Sleep Music	170	1
146	171	BTS	BIGHIT MUSIC	BE	1	36
190	172	DRAKE	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	Dark Lane Demo Tapes	2	65
NEW	173	DESCENDENTS	EPITAPH	9th & Walnut	173	1
134	174	JASON ALDEAN	MACON/BROKEN BOW/BMG/BBMG	9	2	63
195	175	LEE BRICE	CURB	Hey World	45	36
184	176	DRAKE	YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/REPUBLIC	Nothing Was The Same	1	385
171	177	FLEETWOOD MAC	WARNER/RHINO	Greatest Hits	14	199
17	178	CLAIRO	FADER LABEL/REPUBLIC	Sling	17	2
179	179	SOUNDTRACK	FOX/20TH CENTURY FOX/ATLANTIC/AG	The Greatest Showman	1	189
185	180	BLINK-182	GEFFEN/UME	Greatest Hits	6	65
180	181	BAD BUNNY	RIMAS	X 100PRE	11	135
187	182	TAYLOR SWIFT	BIG MACHINE/BMLG	reputation	1	150
174	183	21 SAVAGE & METRO BOOMIN	BOOMINATI/SLAUGHTER BOOMIN/REPUBLIC/EPIC	Savage Mode II	1	43
186	184	LIL TJAY	COLUMBIA	True 2 Myself	5	92
176	185	SELENA	CAPITOL LATIN/UMLE	Ones	42	27
183	186	LANA DEL REY	POLYDOR/INTERSCOPE/JGA	Born To Die	2	404
RE	187	BROOKS & DUNN	ARISTA NASHVILLE/LEGACY	The Greatest Hits Collection	4	104
191	188	FRANK OCEAN	BOYS DON'T CRY	Blonde	1	239
192	189	CHRIS BROWN	CBE/RCA	Indigo	1	107
199	190	H.E.R.	MBK/RCA	H.E.R.	23	181
144	191	TONES AND I	BAD BATCH/ELEKTRA/EMG	Welcome To The Madhouse	144	2
166	192	PRINCE AND THE REVOLUTION	NPJ/WARNER/RHINO	Purple Rain (Soundtrack)	1	153
197	193	KATY PERRY	CAPITOL	Teenage Dream	1	247
RE	194	WHITNEY HOUSTON	ARISTA/RCA/LEGACY	I Will Always Love You: The Best Of Whitney Houston	14	62
RE	195	DESTINY'S CHILD	COLUMBIA/LEGACY	#1's	1	37
189	196	LINKIN PARK	WARNER	[Hybrid Theory]	2	265
193	197	BLAKE SHELTON	WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WMN	Reloaded: 20 #1 Hits	5	213
RE	198	NF	NF REAL MUSIC/CAROLINE	The Search	1	100
RE	199	ZZ TOP	WARNER/RHINO	Greatest Hits	9	74
198	200	SUBLIME	GASOLINE ALLEY/MCA/GEFFEN/UME	Sublime	13	182

BILLBOARD GLOBAL 200

billboard

AUG. 7 2021

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
2	2	1	#1 STAY	The Kid LAROI & Justin Bieber	1	3
 <p>After spending its first two weeks at No. 2, "Stay" tops the chart in its third week with 75.1 million streams (up 6%) and 13,900 sold worldwide (up 11%). It's The Kid LAROI's first leader and Bieber's second.</p>						
3	1	2	BAD HABITS	Ed Sheeran	1	5
HOT SHOT DEBUT						
5	3	3	INDUSTRY BABY	Lil Nas X & Jack Harlow	3	1
4	4	4	BEGGIN'	Maneskin	3	8
1	5	5	GOOD 4 U	Olivia Rodrigo	1	11
8	7	6	PERMISSION TO DANCE	BTS	1	3
6	6	7	LEVITATING	Dua Lipa Feat. DaBaby	2	43
7	8	8	BUTTER	BTS	1	10
9	9	9	SAVE YOUR TEARS	The Weeknd & Ariana Grande	1	30
10	10	10	KISS ME MORE	Doja Cat Feat. SZA	3	16
11	11	11	MONTERO (CALL ME BY YOUR NAME)	Lil Nas X	1	18
12	12	12	TODO DE TI	Rauw Alejandro	3	10
14	14	13	YONAGUNI	Bad Bunny	3	8
16	13	14	PEACHES	Justin Bieber Feat. Daniel Caesar & Giveon	1	19
15	15	15	I WANNA BE YOUR SLAVE	Maneskin	13	10
17	16	16	AM	Nio Garcia X J Balvin X Bad Bunny	10	16
23	20	17	ASTRONAUT IN THE OCEAN	Masked Wolf	3	27
55	29	18	BLINDING LIGHTS	The Weeknd	2	47
18	17	19	NEED TO KNOW	Doja Cat	19	7
22	18	20	QUE MAS PUES?	J Balvin & Maria Becerra	17	9
19	19	21	TRAITOR	Olivia Rodrigo	7	10
34	26	22	DEJA VU	Olivia Rodrigo	3	17
30	24	23	HEAT WAVES	Glass Animals	23	30
21	22	24	AIN'T SHIT	Doja Cat	24	5
25	23	25	DYNAMITE	BTS	1	47
13	21	26	LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN	Silk Sonic (Bruno Mars & Anderson .Paak)	2	21
NEW	28	27	MOTLEY CREW	Post Malone	13	3
24	25	28	DON'T GO YET	Camila Cabello	28	1
28	30	29	YOU RIGHT	Doja Cat & The Weeknd	12	5
NEW	31	30	DRIVERS LICENSE	Olivia Rodrigo	1	29
26	28	31	NOT SOBER	The Kid LAROI Feat. Polo G & Stunna Gambino	31	1
40	35	32	FIEL	Los Legendarios, Wisin & Jhay Cortez	13	20
61	43	33	FANCY LIKE	Walker Hayes	33	6
-	83	34	LOVE TONIGHT	Shouse	34	5
27	31	35	GG PEPAS	Farruko	35	2
33	32	36	VOLANDO	Mora, Bad Bunny & Sech	27	3
37	37	37	FRIDAY	Riton X Nightcrawlers Feat. Mufasa & Hypeman	18	23
29	34	38	WATERMELON SUGAR	Harry Styles	9	47
39	42	39	HAPPIER	Olivia Rodrigo	14	10
35	38	40	BEAUTIFUL MISTAKES	Maroon 5 Feat. Megan Thee Stallion	24	21
38	39	41	RAPSTAR	Polo G	3	16
42	41	42	WITHOUT YOU	The Kid LAROI	10	36
NEW	44	43	LEAVE BEFORE YOU LOVE ME	Marshmello X Jonas Brothers	41	10
NEW	44	44	IF I DIDN'T LOVE YOU	Jason Aldean & Carrie Underwood	44	1

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
31	36	45	FAVORITE CRIME	Olivia Rodrigo	14	10
49	50	46	DANCE MONKEY	Tones And I	16	47
50	51	47	911	Sech & Jhay Cortez	47	20
43	44	48	THE BUSINESS	Tiesto	12	38
44	48	49	MOOD	24kGoldn Feat. iann dior	2	47
36	40	50	THOT SHIT	Megan Thee Stallion	27	7
41	47	51	DAKITI	Bad Bunny & Jhay Cortez	1	39
52	53	52	PERFECT	Ed Sheeran	30	47
NEW	53	53	OVER THE TOP	Smiley Feat. Drake	53	1
-	27	54	WILD SIDE	Normani Feat. Cardi B	27	2
46	54	55	PAREJA DEL AÑO	Sebastian Yatra X Myke Towers	16	15
58	52	56	HEARTBREAK ANTHEM	Galantis, David Guetta & Little Mix	52	10
45	57	57	WANTS AND NEEDS	Drake Feat. Lil Baby	2	21
47	55	58	JEALOUSY, JEALOUSY	Olivia Rodrigo	19	10
64	61	59	DON'T START NOW	Dua Lipa	30	47
62	65	60	SOMEONE YOU LOVED	Lewis Capaldi	24	47
63	64	61	SHAPE OF YOU	Ed Sheeran	60	47
53	60	62	HEARTBREAK ANNIVERSARY	Giveon	10	24
51	58	63	POBLADO (REMIX)	J Balvin x Karol G x Nicky Jam	47	6
56	63	64	GOOSEBUMPS	Travis Scott & HVME	15	31
74	76	65	MIENTEME	TINI X Maria Becerra	65	13
48	59	66	BUILD A BITCH	Bella Poarch	20	11
82	75	67	TIROTEO	Marc Segui & Pol Granch & Rauw Alejandro	67	4
20	45	68	NDA	Billie Eilish	20	3
32	56	69	WHOLE LOTTA MONEY	BIA Feat. Nicki Minaj	32	3
76	67	70	RUN	OneRepublic	67	12
-	159	71	2055	Sleepy Hollow	71	2
85	73	72	BABY SHARK	Pinkfong	38	46
80	78	73	SUNFLOWER	Post Malone & Swae Lee	47	47
83	82	74	MEU PEDACO DE PECADO	Joao Gomes	74	4
57	66	75	2/CATORCE	Rauw Alejandro X Mr. Naisgai	43	12
72	77	76	IKO IKO (MY BESTIE)	Justin Wellington Feat. Small Jam	68	8
90	86	77	BELIEVER	Imagine Dragons	70	47
78	81	78	ROSES	SAINT JHN	14	47
NEW	79	79	BETTER BELIEVE	Belly, The Weeknd & Young Thug	79	1
86	92	80	LIL BIT	Nelly & Florida Georgia Line	76	13
70	74	81	BY YOUR SIDE	Calvin Harris Feat. Tom Grennan	70	8
139	102	82	LOVE AGAIN	Dua Lipa	82	8
-	141	83	ENTRE NOSOTROS	Tiago pzk & Lit Killah	83	2
87	90	84	CIRCLES	Post Malone	49	47
60	71	85	BRUTAL	Olivia Rodrigo	11	10
67	84	86	LATE AT NIGHT	Roddy Ricch	27	8
71	94	87	EVERY CHANCE I GET	DJ Khaled Feat. Lil Baby & Lil Durk	27	13
108	137	88	SOBRIO	Maluma	88	3
88	88	89	RASPUTIN	Majestic X Boney M.	69	14
68	85	90	EL MAKINON	Karol G & Mariah Angeliq	39	18
117	126	91	POSITIONS	Ariana Grande	1	40
75	91	92	BOTELLA TRAS BOTELLA	Gera MX + Christian Nodal	9	14
73	95	93	RAM PAM PAM	Natti Natasha & Becky G	52	11
93	106	94	STREETS	Doja Cat	8	29
102	101	95	HEAD & HEART	Joel Corry X MNEK	17	47
77	97	96	WELLERMAN	Nathan Evans	16	27

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CAMILA CABELLO
"Don't Go Yet"

Cabello's 2019 Shawn Mendes duet "Señorita" has charted on the Global 200 every week since the list launched last September. (It jumps 127-117 on the Aug. 7 ranking.) The Cuban American singer-songwriter's new single debuts with 26.2 million streams and 7,600 sold worldwide in its first week of release, according to MRC Data.



141

BO BURNHAM
"Bezoz I"

Inside (The Songs), the album companion to Burnham's late-May Netflix comedy special, scores a second Global 200 entry. After "All Eyes on Me" reached No. 119 in July, "Bezoz I" bounds 198-141 with 9.6 million streams (up 14%) and 1,200 sold (up 6%) globally in the July 23-29 tracking week. The chart flight follows Amazon founder Jeff Bezos' brief rocket trip to space on July 20.

—ERIC FRANKENBERG

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
92	104	97	BALL IF I WANT TO	DaBaby	60	6
97	111	98	ARCADE	Duncan Laurence	36	26
107	113	99	SWEATER WEATHER	The Neighbourhood	62	44
66	87	100	BODY	Tion Wayne X Russ Millions	11	14
96	107	101	BAD GUY	Billie Eilish	54	47
69	129	102	MEMORY	Kane Brown X blackbear	69	3
104	108	103	DREAMS	Fleetwood Mac	10	44
89	103	104	YOUR LOVE (9PM)	ATB x Topic x A7S	37	25
134	140	105	OLD TOWN ROAD	Lil Nas X Feat. Billy Ray Cyrus	70	47
RE-ENTRY		106	CLASH	Dave & Stormzy	106	2
116	119	107	SHALLOW	Lady Gaga & Bradley Cooper	59	47
98	110	108	TELEPATIA	Kali Uchis	10	23
95	100	109	BED	Joel Corry X RAYE X David Guetta	48	21
105	117	110	BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY	Queen	105	43
111	121	111	ROCKSTAR	DaBaby Feat. Roddy Ricch	8	47
79	99	112	DINERO	Trinidad Cardona	46	7
81	93	113	YORU NI KAKERU	YOASOBI	16	47
126	124	114	DESPACITO	Luis Fonsi & Daddy Yankee Feat. Justin Bieber	114	43
94	125	115	BEST FRIEND	Saweetie Feat. Doja Cat	31	29
109	118	116	HAWAII	Maluma	3	47
120	127	117	SEÑORITA	Shawn Mendes & Camila Cabello	67	47
65	96	118	ZITTI E BUONI	Maneskin	22	10
187	80	119	JALEBI BABY	Tesher X Jason Derulo	80	4
NEW		120	NEW NORMAL	Khalid	120	1
NEW		121	BLAUES LICHT	RAF Camora & Bonez MC	121	1
RE-ENTRY		122	WOMAN	Doja Cat	92	2
101	115	123	SAVAGE LOVE (LAXED - SIREN BEAT)	Jawsh 685 x Jason Derulo	1	47
NEW		124	KISS MY (UH-OH)	Anne-Marie & Little Mix	124	1
91	109	125	COVER ME IN SUNSHINE	Plnk + Willow Sage Hart	49	21
177	164	126	LOCO	Justin Quiles, Chimbala X Zion & Lennox	126	3
131	135	127	SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT	Nirvana	127	30
100	114	128	UP	Cardi B	4	25
127	138	129	CLOSER	The Chainsmokers Feat. Halsey	100	43
159	151	130	ESSENCE	Wizkid Feat. Tems	130	3
133	134	131	FOR THE NIGHT	Pop Smoke Feat. Lil Baby & DaBaby	7	47
121	122	132	HIGHER POWER	Coldplay	24	12
129	153	133	BEFORE YOU GO	Lewis Capaldi	32	47
124	136	134	34+35	Ariana Grande	2	39
153	161	135	WHATS POPPIN	Jack Harlow Feat. DaBaby, Tory Lanez & Lil Wayne	17	47
110	133	136	CALLING MY PHONE	Lil Tjay Feat. 6LACK	2	24
-	33	137	TELL THE VISION	Pop Smoke Feat. Kanye West & Pusha T	33	2
54	89	138	BZRP MUSIC SESSIONS, VOL. 41	Bizarrap & Nicky Jam	26	4
112	120	139	FOREVER AFTER ALL	Luke Combs	4	32
84	68	140	RGB	YOASOBI	31	4
-	198	141	BEZOS I	Bo Burnham	141	2
130	142	142	LEMONADE	Internet Money & Gunna Feat. Don Toliver & NAV	4	47
148	145	143	COUNTING STARS	OneRepublic	143	25
-	98	144	U	millennium parade & Belle	98	2
106	139	145	WOCKESHA	Moneybagg Yo	58	14
135	158	146	LOVELY	Billie Eilish & Khalid	70	47
NEW		147	CHASING AFTER YOU	Ryan Hurd With Maren Morris	147	1
163	170	148	IN DA GETTO	J Balvin & Skrillex	119	4

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	TITLE	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
162	174	149	OUR SONG	Anne-Marie & Niall Horan	93	10
114	131	150	FOLLOW YOU	Imagine Dragons	66	20
138	143	151	FREAKS	Surf Curse	138	6
137	144	152	YOU	Regard x Troye Sivan x Tate McRae	113	14
160	166	153	TAKE ME TO CHURCH	Hozier	129	29
NEW		154	STILL CHOSE YOU	The Kid LAROI Feat. Mustard	154	1
140	156	155	TALKING TO THE MOON	Bruno Mars	57	18
-	187	156	SE FOR AMOR	Joao Gomes E Vitor Fernandes	156	2
-	105	157	KESI	Camilo & Shawn Mendes	105	2
NEW		158	AQUELAS COISAS	Joao Gomes	158	1
-	49	159	WOO BABY	Pop Smoke Feat. Chris Brown	49	2
NEW		160	FULANITO	Becky G & El Alfa	160	1
141	149	161	MEMORIES	Maroon 5	71	47
179	172	162	WHAT YOU KNOW BOUT LOVE	Pop Smoke	11	47
147	146	163	RIDE IT.	Regard	86	46
132	154	164	YOU BROKE ME FIRST.	Tate McRae	16	47
154	132	165	CRY BABY	Official HIGE DANdism	115	5
155	160	166	DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'	Journey	125	41
180	176	167	RIPTIDE	Vance Joy	167	9
149	171	168	WAP	Cardi B Feat. Megan Thee Stallion	1	47
156	173	169	SOMETHING JUST LIKE THIS	The Chainsmokers & Coldplay	133	34
185	162	170	DIOR	Pop Smoke	61	46
166	175	171	SWEET CHILD O' MINE	Guns N' Roses	154	30
NEW		172	REMEMBER	Becky Hill & David Guetta	172	1
167	165	173	HOTEL CALIFORNIA	Eagles	148	41
136	157	174	HOLD ON	Justin Bieber	4	21
143	150	175	LITTLE BIT OF LOVE	Tom Grennan	123	13
125	116	176	TRANSPARENTSOUL	Willow Feat. Travis Barker	84	8
118	155	177	LA NOCHE DE ANOCHE	Bad Bunny & Rosalia	7	35
173	181	178	ALL OF ME	John Legend	97	45
144	147	179	MONSTER	YOASOBI	87	28
182	200	180	GOOSEBUMPS	Travis Scott	102	44
174	189	181	THUNDERSTRUCK	AC/DC	167	19
151	177	182	I DON'T CARE	Ed Sheeran & Justin Bieber	105	43
169	182	183	THINKING OUT LOUD	Ed Sheeran	103	38
197	190	184	WAKE ME UP!	Avicii	181	10
170	185	185	ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST	Queen	159	19
RE-ENTRY		186	GLAD YOU EXIST	Dan + Shay	144	4
152	179	187	BABY ME ATENDE	Matheus Fernandes E Dilsinho	152	5
165	193	188	ANOTHER LOVE	Tom Odell	99	16
NEW		189	PARIS	Ingratax	189	1
-	195	190	MR. BRIGHTSIDE	The Killers	158	11
RE-ENTRY		191	YELLOW	Coldplay	134	20
NEW		192	A-O-K	Tai Verdes	192	1
113	152	193	ENOUGH FOR YOU	Olivia Rodrigo	13	10
NEW		194	THE NIGHTS	Avicii	194	1
115	167	195	RED LIGHT GREEN LIGHT	DaBaby	74	5
-	46	196	BOUT A MILLION	Pop Smoke Feat. 21 Savage & 42 Dugg	46	2
178	194	197	SAY SO	Doja Cat	50	46
RE-ENTRY		198	TENNESSEE WHISKEY	Chris Stapleton	175	8
181	199	199	SAY YOU WON'T LET GO	James Arthur	96	43
103	148	200	ALCOHOL-FREE	TWICE	41	8

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ON THE COVERS

Lil Baby photographed by AB+DM on July 15 at Ambient + Studio in Atlanta.

Usher photographed by Alexandra Gavillet on July 19 at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas.

THIS PAGE

Usher photographed at the High Roller Observation Wheel in Las Vegas.

Helmut Lang vest, Moncler sweater, Apotts pants, Nike x Sacai sneakers.

TO OUR READERS

Billboard will publish its next issue on Aug. 28. For 24/7 music coverage, go to billboard.com.

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REAL AS IT GETS

Hit singles and high-profile collaborations made **Lil Baby** a star. Community outreach made him a hero. As he grows his business, the onetime Atlanta hustler is still putting in the work — and staying true to who he has always been.

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THE GREATEST SHOWMAN

With a demanding Las Vegas residency and a new album that's on track to be his most vital in years, a fired-up **Usher** isn't ready to settle for legacy-artist status just yet.

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R&B/HIP-HOP POWER PLAYERS 2021

Timbaland and **Swizz Beatz** — who took **Verzuz** from pandemic entertainment to a still-evolving, profitable wealth generator for Black artists — rule *Billboard*'s list of the executives leading the genres forward now.

¡BRAVO!

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 Kilns Music
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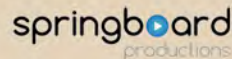
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The Market

PG. 17 ARE FESTIVALS BACK? * PG. 18 PUBLISHERS QUARTERLY * PG. 20 THE PAIN IN SPAIN

Blackground To Bring Aaliyah's Music Online

The singer's biggest albums have been unavailable for a decade. Now her uncle, who founded her label, has a deal to release them on streaming services. But Aaliyah's estate isn't happy about it

BY DAN RYS AND GAIL MITCHELL

ON AUG. 25, 2020, THE 19TH anniversary of Aaliyah's death, the singer's official Twitter account had a message for "our loyal fans. We are excited to announce," the message from the estate read, "that communication has commenced between the estate and various record labels about the status of Aaliyah's music catalogue, as well as its availability on streaming platforms in the near future."

Barry Hankerson, Aaliyah's uncle and the founder of Blackground Records, saw that as a green light. The reclusive 73-year-old mogul founded the label in 1993, specifically to support his niece Aaliyah's then-nascent music career. But years after Aaliyah's sudden death in an August 2001 plane crash at the age of 22, all of her music except her first album, which she made with R. Kelly, is now out of print and unavailable legally online; so is the rest of Blackground's catalog, including albums by Timbaland & Magoo, Tank, Toni Braxton and JoJo. All told, that music sold 14.43 million albums in the United States, according to MRC Data, before it was taken offline, making it one of the most significant catalogs that has never been available in the streaming era.

Now, Hankerson has struck a partnership deal with Bay Area independent distributor EMPIRE that will make Blackground's entire catalog available again — physically, digitally and, most important, on streaming services. The releases, which are scheduled to start arriving Aug. 20, will be followed by new music assembled from Aaliyah's unreleased recordings.

For Hankerson, the long-awaited release of his niece's music is cathartic, but also fraught. Aaliyah's estate — run by Aaliyah LLC on behalf of Hankerson's sister and Aaliyah's mother, Diane, as well as her son Rashad — doesn't approve.

Hankerson is determined to move

forward anyway. "It has been a long time since the fans could enjoy Aaliyah and other artists in our catalog, and there has been a lot of changes in the music business since we took the music off the market," he says. "We wanted to be sure to be with the right people, the right executives, and to give ourselves the right time to do the different things. So when you add all that up, it was a couple of years before we could even really consider putting the music out."

The right executive, says Hankerson, is EMPIRE CEO Ghazi, who founded the company in 2010, around the time the Blackground albums were no longer available. But his own interest in Aaliyah goes back to when Ghazi bought the 12-inch record of her song "Back and Forth" as a 15-year-old DJ who played house parties. "I still have the vinyl for that sitting in a crate in my mom's house," he says. "It was probably one of the first 20 records I ever bought."

Now Ghazi (who goes by his mononym) will be distributing Aaliyah records, after about a year of negotiations that started during the pandemic. "They're a smaller company with very hands-on executives," says Hankerson. "Ghazi is almost a reflection of what I would be doing if I just came into the music business."

As it happens, Hankerson has been in the business since the 1970s — he has managed Kelly, Gladys Knight and the late Dennis Edwards of The Temptations, among others — and he knew plenty of executives who wanted to distribute Blackground's catalog. Although he took meetings with every major music company, he was met with skepticism by executives who had seen previous plans to release the Blackground catalog get derailed.

"Everybody wanted to know, 'Is it really going to come out?'" says Matt Middleton, an attorney for Blackground. "And there was really no

Aaliyah in 2001.



way to convince people. Everybody had their reservations. But once we knew that the estate wanted the music out now, [Hankerson] just felt like the timing was right.”

Ghazi thinks the deal is worth the risk. Over the last 10 years, EMPIRE has grown to include a label, publishing and merchandise businesses, and an international operation that gives it the reach to handle the catalog.

“The easiest way to approach it is to say, ‘If it happens, it happens. If it doesn’t happen, it doesn’t happen,’” says Ghazi. “You are entering into something that is quite possibly one of the most monumental things you’ve encountered as an executive, for me. You want to make sure you do everything right.”

Even with her most significant music unavailable for years, Aaliyah looms larger than ever — as an icon, but also as a musician. “Let’s face it: R&B music today is based upon the groundwork that Aaliyah laid in 1996,” says Kathy Iandoli, author of the book *Baby Girl: Better Known as Aaliyah*, which will be published Aug. 17. “Aaliyah just has continuously looked and sounded like every single era we’ve entered in the 20 years since she has passed. That has allowed her an immortality that no

“EVERYBODY WANTED TO KNOW, ‘IS IT REALLY GOING TO COME OUT?’ AND THERE WAS REALLY NO WAY TO CONVINCe PEOPLE.”

—MATT MIDDLETON, BLACKGROUND

one has ever had before because she doesn’t look like a relic.”

EMPIRE has a fittingly ambitious rollout plan. On Aug. 20, the company will release Aaliyah’s second album, *One in a Million*, followed by the rest of the Blackground catalog, in roughly chronological order: Timbaland & Magoo’s three albums on Aug. 27; the soundtracks to *Romeo Must Die* and *Exit Wounds*, as well as Aaliyah’s “Are You That Somebody” single, on Sept. 3; and Aaliyah’s self-titled album on Sept. 10. Albums by Tank and JoJo, as well as Braxton’s *Libra* and two Aali-

yah compilations, will follow.

“All of these artists have serious fans, and if you do it wrong — especially in this cancel-culture world of social media — the attacks will start happening,” says EMPIRE vp A&R Tina Davis. “So one of the main things was trying to make sure that we represent them properly.”

The music will be released and promoted on platforms that didn’t even exist the last time Aaliyah’s recordings were available. “Her era was very much a brick-and-mortar marketing approach,” says Ghazi. “To be able to bridge it into Instagram and Facebook and Snapchat and Twitter and TikTok is going to be fascinating.”

Hankerson also plans to introduce a new streaming app he founded, called Music360, which will have licensing deals with a swath of companies, and offer music videos, vinyl-scratching capability and new Blackground remixes and releases that will initially be exclusive. In addition, he’ll relaunch Blackground as a front-line label — with distribution from EMPIRE — and he has already signed his first artist, Atlanta singer Autumn Marini.

All of these plans revolve around Aaliyah, though. Earlier this year, on Jan. 15, a day before what would have been her 42nd birthday — and five months after tweeting that label negotiations had begun — Aaliyah’s estate posted another message on the official Twitter account. “We hear you and we see you,” the message read. “While we share your sentiments and desire to have Aaliyah’s music released, we must acknowledge that these matters are not within our control and, unfortunately, take time... In the meantime, however, we are working diligently to protect what is in our control — Aaliyah’s brand, legacy and intellectual property... We need the support of the fans Aaliyah loved so dearly, until we can resolve all the issues in freeing her music.”

Those issues, says Aaliyah LLC attorney Paul LiCalsi, stem from Blackground’s failure to account to Aaliyah’s estate according to the terms of her recording contract. LiCalsi said in a statement provided to *Billboard* that the estate “has always been ready to share Aaliyah’s musical legacy but has been met with contention and a gross lack of transparency.” He also noted that Blackground had “inexplicably withheld” the singer’s catalog.

“For almost 20 years, Blackground has failed to account to the estate with any regularity in accordance

14.43M

Total sales of the 17 albums in the Blackground catalog that EMPIRE will distribute

6.38M

Total sales of the two Aaliyah albums and two compilation albums that Blackground released

1.68M

Total equivalent album units of the Blackground catalog accrued in the past decade, largely from YouTube streams, of which Aaliyah’s catalog accounts for 60.1% (1.01 million)

Source: MRC Data

with her recording contracts. In addition, the estate was not made aware of the impending release of the catalog until after the deal was complete and plans were in place. The estate has demanded that Blackground provide a full account of its past earnings and full disclosure of the terms of its new deal to distribute Aaliyah’s long-embargoed music.”

“The estate will receive everything that it is entitled to receive pursuant to the terms of our agreement,” says a Blackground representative, noting that a royalty payment was made this year. In addition, “Blackground has shared our rollout plans with representatives for the estate.”

Hankerson took the estate’s statement on Twitter that it had begun communicating with labels about releasing Aaliyah’s music as a sign it was time to make the albums available again — but he never directly spoke to his sister about it. Instead, Blackground and the estate communicated through representatives. The estate expressed a desire to be involved in finding a distributor, but says it was informed the EMPIRE deal was happening after it was final.

As this story was being reported, Aaliyah’s estate hired a public relations firm, which made it clear that the estate does not support Hankerson’s deal with EMPIRE. Interviews with Missy Elliott and Timbaland were canceled, and the status of Timbaland’s work on

the new Aaliyah recordings is unclear. Essentially, the old dance resumed: rumors of album rereleases, rumblings about new music, then quiet in deference to the wishes of the estate. Will it end differently this time?

It seems so. Blackground owns Aaliyah’s recordings, and because she did not write her own material, the estate has no stake in the publishing of the songs she performed, which are now administered by Blackground, through Kobalt. For the past decade, the only obstacle to the release of Aaliyah’s music has been Hankerson’s hesitation and respect for his sister’s wishes — he says she told him she didn’t want Aaliyah’s music released, but the estate says such a conversation never happened.

“I’ll be very candid with you — since the death of my niece, I don’t have the same relationship I used to have with my sister,” says Hankerson. “We were very close when we grew up. I don’t know if anybody can imagine, but when you lose a child, or a niece that you really loved, it was difficult for my family. So a lot of things in my family changed.

“I’m prayerful that she supports what we’re doing, but at the end of the day, we’ll all find out [whether she supports the deal] probably at the same time.”

For now, the estate has expressed a hope for “forgiveness” — moving forward with the releases, even as it says that issues of accounting remain unresolved, although legal action is not planned. “Ultimately, we desire closure and a modicum of peace so we can facilitate the growth of the Aaliyah Memorial Fund and other creative projects that embody Aaliyah’s true essence,” the estate said in a separate statement to *Billboard*.

More tension will surround any release of new Aaliyah music, the prospect of which has fueled much of the public rancor over the past decade. There are plans to release a posthumous album, and Hankerson has been working to assemble new songs that include features from Drake, Future, Ne-Yo, Chris Brown and Snoop Dogg. Timbaland has remixed and produced some of the sessions.

“It has been really nice,” says Hankerson about his work with the new recordings. “The only part that has been a little distasteful has been so many people being angry with me because the music didn’t come out when they wanted it. But I learned to live with that. There’s nothing I can do about it.”



Clockwise from left: Jack Harlow onstage at Lollapalooza in Chicago; festivalgoers at the entrance to Rolling Loud in Miami Gardens, Fla.; Alison Wonderland onstage at Lollapalooza.



The Shows Must Go On. But How?

Lollapalooza was expected to lead a wave of post-pandemic festivals. Instead, it's offering a preview of an uncertain summer season

BY JASON LIPSHUTZ and DAVE BROOKS

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE vaccinated?" Limp Bizkit frontman Fred Durst asked the crowd at Chicago's Grant Park during the band's set at Lollapalooza on July 31. "Very cool," he replied when most of the audience cheered. "Very considerate!" It was an encouraging sign amid the unexpectedly complicated return of large-scale music festivals, just a week after Rolling Loud Miami and the Newport (R.I.) Folk Festival unofficially opened a late-summer season that promoters hoped would take place as life returned to normal in the wake of the pandemic's peak.

Promoters Live Nation and Chicago-based C3 Presents have not released ticket sales data for the four-day event, which started July 29 and drew over 100,000 attendees per day to see headliners Foo Fighters, Post Malone, Tyler, The Creator and Miley Cyrus, but *Billboard* estimates the festival generated \$42 million to \$48 million in ticket revenue. That's a good payday, especially after a year with scant concert activity. Even as the Delta variant pushed COVID-19 cases up more than 500% across the country compared with the prior month (according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), with local and national pressure mounting on officials to cancel the festival, Lollapalooza forged ahead "in the eye of the hurricane," as founder and Jane's Addiction singer Perry Farrell told *Billboard*. Other festivals will presumably follow its lead.

Since it became clear that Lollapalooza would be the first major multigenre U.S. festival since the start of the pandemic, promoters hoped it would kick off a shortened but vital festival season, with Bonnaroo, Governors Ball and Firefly scheduled to follow in September. But circumstances have changed as another wave of COVID-19 cases spreads — along with fears that festivals could become super-spreader events. In Chicago, one

source tells *Billboard* that, as Lollapalooza approached, promoters grew nervous that public health officials would impose limits on the event's capacity.

Live Nation and rival AEG have already worked out a compromise with the major talent agencies in case other festivals are forced to cancel. If that happens 30 to 60 days before the event, the promoter only has to pay 10% of an artist's fee; if it happens less than 30 days before the event, the promoter pays 50%. Since insurance does not cover COVID-19 cancellations, these arrangements will allow promoters to move ahead with booking shows without fear of major losses.

That policy could be important for long-term planning, but a source at Live Nation tells *Billboard* it didn't factor into the decision to go ahead with Lollapalooza. Days before the event, company executives were optimistic — Rolling Loud had just wrapped in Miami Gardens, Fla., with about 75,000 fans per day, and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot remained confident that Lollapalooza could be held safely. Attendees had to show a vaccination card or recent negative COVID-19 test, and while thousands of glitter-streaked teens shrugged off masks to watch their favorite artists, midway through the weekend, the festival made masks mandatory in indoor spaces — such as a large, enclosed merchandise area — in order to comply with city health officials.

The next two weeks, and whether cases surge during that time, will be the real test of the festival's success, according to AJ Niland, a longtime promoter whose Health Screening Solutions provides vaccine and testing services for the concert industry. The risk posed by outdoor concerts is still unclear. At recent European festivals, results have varied: There were 1,000 new COVID-19 cases among attendees of a July 3-4 Dutch festival with 20,000 attendees, all of whom had been vaccinated, recently tested negative or already had the virus. In the week after

Rolling Loud Miami, cases in Florida grew 50% week over week, while hundreds of attendees reported contracting the virus or virus-like symptoms on a Reddit forum about the event. (A Rolling Loud representative said the festival isn't "surprised" by this, "given the huge influx of COVID positive cases in South Florida over the last three weeks," but noted that it "followed government guidelines.") Officials will be watching for a spike in the wake of Lollapalooza, although secondary ticketing and the way consumers buy multiple tickets make this at best an inexact science.

Despite rising COVID-19 cases, Niland says Lollapalooza marked an important turning point when the concert business started taking the Delta variant and the risks it poses more seriously. "It seems the managers and agents just woke up," he says. On Aug. 3, Live Nation CEO Michael Rapino said a "roaring era is ahead" and indicated that the company planned to press forward with the 2021 concert season, citing "better than pre-pandemic" ticket sales. But that will only sustain if local and federal governments allow it.

In the meantime, restrictions are likely to get more stringent. The best way to ensure concerts' full return is mass vaccinations across the country. It's not just Limp Bizkit preaching this message. Garth Brooks is offering vaccinations at his Aug. 7 concert in Kansas City, Mo.; come September, New York will require proof of vaccination for all concerts; and even Spotify is running a campaign to get music lovers jabbed. The hope is that if vaccinations are required to see shows, more people will eventually comply.

"We're right on the other side of it, [but] we're still in it and it might be another year before we're fully away from it — it depends on our actions," says Farrell. "We all are hurting a little bit, we're all a little afraid, but yet we're exercising courage." **b**

Additional reporting by Lyndsey Havens.

● BRYAN ADAMS SIGNED A GLOBAL RECORD DEAL WITH BMG. ● COLBIE CAILLAT SIGNED WITH CREATIVE ARTISTS AGENCY, MOVING OVER FROM WME.

SONY DOES DOUBLE DUTY (AGAIN)

Disco-inflected songs from Silk Sonic and Dua Lipa dominate the publishers rankings, which feels like 'That '70s Showdown'

BY ED CHRISTMAN

SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING REGAINED CONTROL over both publishers rankings for the period from April 1 to July 1, after slipping to No. 2 last quarter on Top Radio Airplay. The company won especially big on Hot 100 Songs, where it scored a 32.58% market share — the highest of any publisher since *Billboard* began tracking the song chart in 2019.

The lead single of Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak's Silk Sonic collaboration, "Leave the Door Open," led both song charts, and Warner Chappell Music and BMG claimed shares in the tune. Olivia Rodrigo and her collaborator Daniel "Dan" Leonard Nigro — both of whom are represented by Sony — tied atop the Top Radio Airplay's songwriters tally, and also came in at No. 1 and No. 2, respectively, on Hot 100 Songs.



.Paak (left) and Mars of Silk Sonic

Sony has now led Hot 100 Songs for eight quarters out of the chart's 10-quarter history, this time edging out No. 2 publisher Universal Music Publishing Group by more than 14 percentage points. It ranked 60 songs (up from 59 and a 23.56% market share), including Dua Lipa's "Levitating" featuring DaBaby (No. 2).

On Top Radio Airplay, it had 56 songs with a 23.48% market share (up from 55 songs and 22.59%), including Justin Bieber's "Peaches" featuring Daniel Caesar and Giveon (No. 2).

As UMPG fell from No. 1 to No. 2 on Top Radio Airplay, its market share dropped to 21.05% with 49 songs (from 22.59% and 55), including "Peaches." On Hot 100 Songs, it maintained its No. 2 position, landing 47 songs for an 18.02% market share (down from 58 and 22.64%), including "Levitating."

Warner Chappell took the No. 3 position on both charts, after 11 quarters at No. 4 on the Top Radio publisher ranking and four quarters on the Hot 100 ranking, all behind Kobalt. On Top Radio Airplay, Warner Chappell scored a 17.44% market share with 48 songs (from 16.05% and 55 songs); on Hot 100 Songs, it nabbed a 16.95% market share with 47 songs (from 16.97% and 53 songs). The publisher was also tops among the top 100 Country Airplay songs for an 18th consecutive quarter, with a 26.6% share.

Falling to No. 4 on both rankings, Kobalt dropped to a 14.71% market share on Top Radio Airplay with 34 songs (from 18.26% and 48 songs), including "Peaches." On Hot 100 Songs, it slid to a 12.82% market share despite increasing its number of songs to 47 (from 16.99% and 42 songs), including "Levitating."

BMG grew its market share on Top Radio Airplay to 9.41% with 24 songs (from 7.74% and 25 songs) and on Hot 100 Songs to 7.4% with 21 (from 6.48% and 21 songs).

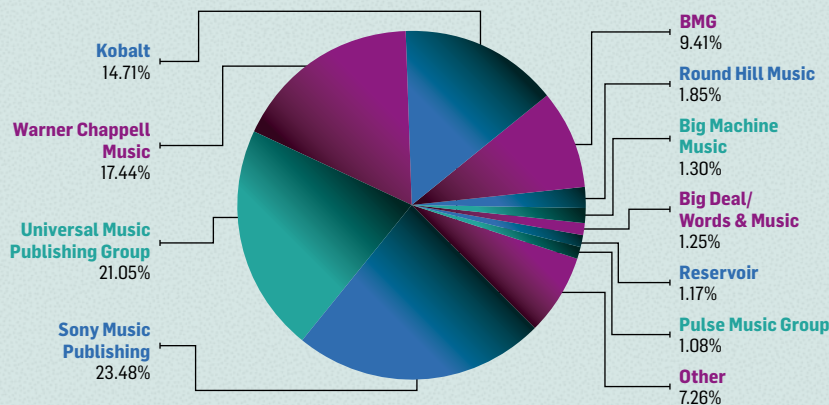
On Top Radio Airplay, Round Hill Music came in sixth again, with a 1.85% market share; Big Machine Music came in seventh, with 1.3%; Big Deal/Words & Music placed eighth, with 1.25%; Reservoir ninth, with 1.17%; and Pulse Music Group 10th, with 1.08%.

On Hot 100 Songs, Jermaine "J" Cole came in sixth with a 1.89% market share; Reservoir seventh, with 1.52%; Big Deal/Words & Music eighth, with 1.30%; Concord ninth, with 0.81%; and Spirit 10th, with 0.73%. **b**



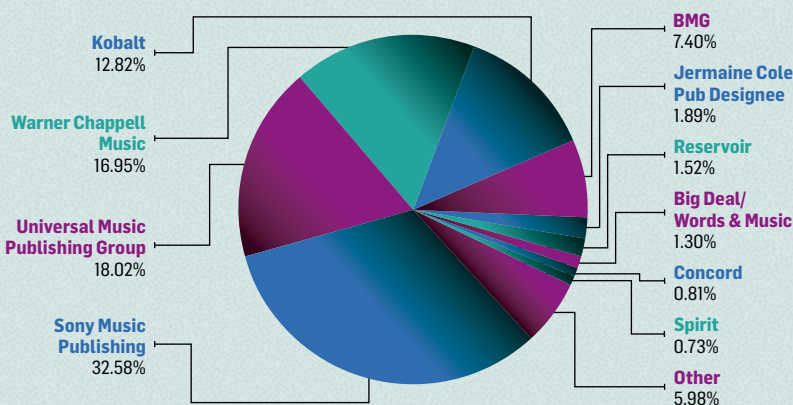
Lipa

TOP RADIO AIRPLAY: PUBLISHERS*



RANK	TITLE	ARTIST	LABEL
1	"Leave the Door Open"	Silk Sonic (Bruno Mars & Anderson .Paak)	Aftermath/Atlantic
2	"Peaches"	Justin Bieber feat. Daniel Caesar & Giveon	Raymond Braun/Def Jam
3	"Save Your Tears"	The Weeknd	XO/Republic
4	"Levitating"	Dua Lipa featuring DaBaby	Warner Records
5	"Without You"	The Kid LAROI & Miley Cyrus	Columbia
6	"drivers license"	Olivia Rodrigo	Geffen/Interscope
7	"Beautiful Mistakes"	Maroon 5 feat. Megan Thee Stallion	222/Interscope
8	"My Ex's Best Friend"	Machine Gun Kelly X blackbear	EST19XX/Bad Boy/Interscope
9	"What You Know Bout Love"	Pop Smoke	Victor Victor Worldwide/Republic
10	"Blinding Lights"	The Weeknd	XO/Republic

HOT 100 SONGS: PUBLISHERS*



RANK	TITLE	ARTIST	LABEL
1	"Leave the Door Open"	Silk Sonic (Bruno Mars & Anderson .Paak)	Aftermath/Atlantic
2	"Levitating"	Dua Lipa featuring DaBaby	Warner
3	"Peaches"	Justin Bieber feat. Daniel Caesar & Giveon	Raymond Braun/Def Jam
4	"Save Your Tears"	The Weeknd & Ariana Grande	XO/Republic
5	"Kiss Me More"	Doja Cat featuring SZA	Kemosabe/RCA
6	"Montero (Call Me by Your Name)"	Lil Nas X	Columbia
7	"Butter"	BTS	HYBE/BigHit Music/Columbia
8	"Astronaut in the Ocean"	Masked Wolf	Teamwrk/Elektra/EMG
9	"good 4 u"	Olivia Rodrigo	Geffen/Interscope
10	"Rapstar"	Polo G	Columbia

● NORTH STAR MEDIA BOUGHT PART OF THE SHREK FRANCHISE SCORE ROYALTY RIGHTS FOR \$2.2 MILLION. ● TRAVIS BARKER SIGNED A GLOBAL ADMINISTRATION DEAL WITH WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC.

*For the Top 10 Publishers Top Radio Airplay chart, percentage calculations were based upon the overall top 100 detecting songs from 1,990 U.S. radio stations electronically monitored by MRC Data, 24 hours a day, seven days a week during the period of April 1 to June 30. For Top 10 Publishers Hot 100 Songs, percentage calculations were based upon the top 100 songs as ranked by Billboard Hot 100 points calculated from digital sales, streaming and MRC Data-tracked radio airplay detections during the period of April 2 to July 1, reflecting the issue dates of April 17 through July 10. Publisher information for musical works on both charts has been identified by the Harry Fox Agency. A "publisher" is defined as an administrator, copyright owner and/or controlling party.

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BRITNEY DAVIS
BRYAN "BIRDMAN" WILLIAMS
CARLON RAMONG
CAROLINE "BAROLINE" DIAZ
DANIEL "BIRDMAN ZOE" DESIR
DANIELLE PRICE
DANTE SMITH
DAUD CARTER
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ETHIOPIA HABTEMARIAM
GARRETT WILLIAMS
GEORGE "G-MONEY" DICKINSON
GHAZI SHAMI
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J. COLE
JAY BROWN
JAY-Z
JEFF HARLESTON
JEFF VAUGHN
JOSH BERKMAN
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LA MAR C. TAYLOR
LATRICE BURNETTE
LAURA CARTER
LINDSEY LANIER
MR. MORGAN
NAIM MCNAIR
NATINA NIMENE
NICK MIRA
NICKI FARAG
NICOLE WYSKOARKO
NIMA ETMINAN
NOAH "40" SHEBIB

NOAH PRESTON
OLIVER EL-KHATIB
PETER JIDEONWO
PIERRE "P" THOMAS
RAMON ALVAREZ-SMIKLE
RODERICK SCOTT
RODNEY SHEALEY
RONALD "SLIM" WILLIAMS
SAMMIE TAYLOR
SEAN "FAMOSO" MCNICHOL
SERGE DURAND
STEVE CARLESS
STEVEN VICTOR
SUREETA NAYYAR
TAZ TAYLOR
TERRENCE "PUNCH" HENDERSON
THE WEEKND
THEO BATTAGLIA
TIM GLOVER
TINA DAVIS
TRAMIEL "TWIN" CLARK
TUNDE BALOGUN
WALTER JONES
WASSIM "SAL" SLAIBY
XIARRA-DIAMOND NIMROD



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Europe's Cruel, Cruel Summer

There's pain in Spain as the resurgent pandemic brings new restrictions to live shows there, as well as in other European countries

BY RAPHAEL MINDER

MADRID — In July, Colombian singer Camilo was looking forward to a sold-out performance at the LUCE Benicàssim festival in Valencia, Spain. During the pandemic, though, “sold out” has become a flexible concept. Only three days before Camilo’s July 13 concert, regional authorities abruptly reintroduced COVID-19 restrictions that include mask mandates, a prohibition on dancing, a requirement for socially distanced seating and a limit on outdoor concerts to 3,000 people — 25% less than the festival’s previous capacity of 4,000. To comply, organizers reimbursed about 700 people who had most recently purchased online tickets for the show.

As Europe limps through the pandemic’s second summer, promoters and performers alike are grappling with fast-changing health and safety rules. Parts of Spain and Greece have reimposed curfews, France began requiring proof of vaccination to attend events with over 50 people, and the United Kingdom imposed a new quarantine for travelers from France due to a surge in cases linked to the Beta variant first detected in South

Africa in 2020. For its part, the U.S. Department of State warned Americans on July 26 not to travel to Spain, Portugal and Britain because of rising numbers of virus cases — only for the United Kingdom to decide two days later to drop a 10-day self-isolation requirement for vaccinated Americans and visitors from other European countries, starting Aug. 2.

The U.K. action will make it possible for U.S.-based artists booked for the Reading and Leeds festivals Aug. 27-29 — headliners include Post Malone and Machine Gun Kelly — to make the trip. Canadian metal band Spiritbox, for example, “wouldn’t have been able to fly to do these shows even if they had chosen to quarantine,” says the act’s agent, John Jackson, CEO of London-based K2 Agency, “because they have commitments in the U.S.”

Still, it may be too little, too late for U.S. artists who may be dissuaded by how the patchwork of restrictions has shrunk Europe’s touring map. “Even for a one-off, you take a risk,” says Jarred Arfa, GM of Artist Group International, which represents Billy Joel, Metallica and Rod Stewart. “You could

fly over for a big date, and then the next thing you know, it’s blown out.”

Few markets illustrate the confusion sweeping the continent’s touring industry like Spain, where promoters have been forced to cancel, reschedule and downsize shows amid the surging COVID-19 variants. With much of Latin America shut down for live shows, Latin artists like Camilo and Rauw Alejandro have looked to tour Spain instead this summer and fall.

But Spain’s infection rate spiraled in July, even though the country has one of Europe’s highest vaccination rates. (Over 55% of the population was fully vaccinated by July 27.) As of July 29, Spain had a cumulative 14-day infection rate of nearly 700 registered cases per 100,000 inhabitants, 40% higher than two weeks earlier. Authorities attributed the rise mostly to gatherings of unvaccinated younger people.

As they try to respond to the virus’ unpredictable evolution, local authorities in the country’s 17 regional administrations have been changing regulations almost on a weekly basis. In late June, Spain ended its outdoor face mask requirement, but various regions have since called for the rule

to be reinstated amid the spread of the more contagious Delta variant.

Ibiza’s dance clubs have remained closed for another summer, much to the despair of their owners, who had hoped a trial outdoor event at the island’s Hard Rock Hotel in June would convince authorities to let them reopen. Since that party, though, the Balearic Islands’ 14-day cumulative infection rate reached 969 registered cases per 100,000 inhabitants on July 26, over six times the 161 registered on July 1, according to local health authorities.

Ibiza venues Ushuaïa and Cova Santa are now featuring outdoor table seating at music performances — with restrictions. Ushuaïa requires temperature checks at the door, a maximum of eight people per table and mask usage, says spokeswoman Clare Dover. But these types of seated shows, along with private villa parties happening on the island, “have nothing to do with Ibiza clubbing,” says Maurizio Schmitz, agent for techno DJ Sven Väth. “It’s another lost summer.”

In Barcelona, the July 8-11 Cruïlla festival sold one-third fewer tickets than its 25,000 capacity all three nights. “The new fear about [virus variants] certainly impacted our sales, especially in the final week,” says spokesman Marc Tapias. Cruïlla was one of three festivals (alongside CanetRock and Vida) that authorities greenlighted in early July for standing crowds without social distancing. Since then, though, the situation has worsened, and rules have tightened.

Barcelona-based music promoter Tito Ramoneda is moving ahead with two music festivals in Catalonia even as Spain’s northeastern region reintroduced a nighttime curfew in mid-July in most of its municipalities. Ticket sales, he says, have been falling by 30% to 40% a week since then. “The situation now really feels schizophrenic,” says Ramoneda.

But even with Spain in flux, artists haven’t abandoned their touring plans. Camilo has already played 12 of 29 scheduled dates in the country, and on Aug. 24 will resume playing the tour’s 17 remaining concerts. Rising star Alejandro is also slated to play his first-ever European shows in Spain beginning in October without any modifications. “It’s the year to keep forging ahead,” says Camilo’s manager, Jorge Ferradas, “despite everything.”

Additional reporting by Leila Cobo and Alexei Barrionuevo.

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SONY MUSIC GROUP





Senderoff photographed June 20 in Santa Monica, Calif.

FROM THE DESK OF

SHARA SENDEROFF

Partner/President, Raised In Space Enterprises

BY TATIANA CIRISANO PHOTOGRAPHED BY CLAUDIA LUCIA

SHARA SENDEROFF ESTIMATES that during the last two-and-a-half years, she has looked at over 1,000 music and technology startups, hunting for the music industry's next game-changer. As partner/president of Raised in Space Enterprises — the venture capital firm she and former BMG executive Zach Katz launched in 2019 with Scooter Braun's Ithaca Holdings and blockchain company Ripple's investment division, Xpring — Senderoff selects the most promising startups for investment. So far, RISE has made investments of between \$500,000 and \$5 million in 11 companies, from virtual concert platform Wave, which has created shows for The Weeknd and John Legend; to data management system Audigent, which raised \$19 million in series B funding in July; to direct-to-fan SMS text service Community, used by artists like Jessie Reyez and Shawn Mendes.

Senderoff landed in the music industry after nearly a decade as a film executive at The Mark Gordon Company, where she partnered with Gordon on the online recruitment platform Intern Sushi. When record labels swarmed Intern Sushi, Senderoff realized

that her knack for leveraging data and technology to tell stories in film could be applied to music. As she saw it, the music industry had been hesitant to engage with new technology, and tech startups and venture capitalists didn't understand the nuances of the music business well enough to solve problems together. That's where RISE comes in.

One year in, the pandemic forced the music industry to tap into digital revenue streams like virtual concerts and non-fungible tokens (NFTs). As the industry warms up to tech, RISE's mission is fittingly astronomical: Senderoff wants to transform the entire music ecosystem value chain, from creation, registration and distribution to fan engagement, touring and merchandise.

"It's not an overnight process," she says. "It's pushing a boulder up a hill."

While examining startups, what trends emerged?

There are a lot of problems that entrepreneurs who look at the music industry see, but does the industry want to solve that problem right now? For example, we got inundated with rights management solutions built on a blockchain. We believe

in the future of rights management on blockchain, but are the complexities of the industry in a place where it's possible for a company like that to succeed right now? No.

So what problems are ready to be solved?

We're hyper-focused on two buckets: new revenue streams and improving ROI. The music industry is challenged when it comes to making strategic decisions on where and when to spend money for scale. I'm focused on new revenue streams because I believe that as we evolve from the traditional label model, there are going to be opportunities to build businesses without needing to be in the stranglehold of a major label. That doesn't mean I'm anti-label. I'm not. But I do believe that there is a subset of artists who can do it independently and make a great living.

What are some examples?

Our overall strategy is to have portfolio companies that an artist can use at different times within their rollout. Community is tangibly useful within seconds. Once you put out a phone number to your fans, you can communicate with them directly in a way that doesn't feel like a marketing line. We're here to tell stories and share experiences, and I think Community is a two-way street.

Community is a place for intimacy, whereas Audigent is a place for broad amplification of messaging. J Balvin has worked with Audigent for the last couple of years to build out revenue lines from music to brand partnerships to merch [using] precision targeting to find his fans [with ads]. Community might



be used on the front end to make an initial announcement, but then Audigent might be used every day as an ongoing campaign to promote everything.

What is Scooter Braun's role in RISE?

Look at Scooter's wealth of experience. He built [Justin] Bieber from absolutely nothing. There's almost nothing he hasn't done or worked on. When you've encountered it all, you know what to do.

What have you — and the wider music industry — learned from the pandemic?

That strategy is going to win no matter what. There isn't a shortcut. We saw the cash-grab frenzy around NFTs, and we saw people fall short of their expectations because they didn't understand what they were getting into. A lot of artists just did one-off NFT drops. They were in a race to get an NFT out for fear of missing out, and their fans didn't come because consumers didn't understand crypto yet. What was missing was a tool set that was community- and mass consumer-driven, that would speak to an audience that isn't crypto sophisticated.

Look at livestreaming. We had passed on about 15 livestreaming platforms before COVID-19, and then they all came back to us when COVID-19 hit, like, "Ha! You were wrong." But what happens when touring returns? How does a band or an artist integrate livestreaming, and what is it going to mean for your bottom line? If you want to be a leader, you have to strategize your long-term plan.

How can artists better bridge their online and offline presence?

One area ripe for the addition of metaverse capabilities is touring. We need to add the ability for fans to collect [digital] items that are tied to particular shows and allow access to different items based on your [level of] fandom. The next version of the fan club is immersive, where fans can take part and connect to an artist via a social token — by owning it, they can buy tickets sooner or get into meet-and-greets or access limited-edition merch.

How soon do you think that the metaverse — the concept of a shared, entirely virtual world — will become a reality?

I just saw [Mark] Zuckerberg announce that Facebook is going to be a metaverse company. I think we're two to three years away from the larger, visible use cases. That will begin with the rise of [augmented reality] in the next 18 months and seeing more

utility of NFTs — assets that can be the economic drivers of a metaverse. In order to have a virtual world, you need buy-in of virtual products.

This isn't the first time we've seen hype surrounding blockchain. What's different now?

The technology — the pipes of blockchain — is fundamentally different. This is not just an app. This is technology that can allow for a different kind of accountability and audit of business. As we see larger platforms like Amazon start to integrate cryptocurrency, it's going to change how we think about everything. You can't be caught with your pants down at this point.

Can blockchain's driving concept of decentralization ever take off in the music industry, which has long been predicated on centralized power?

I don't think that the goal should ever be so black and white. It should never be about complete decentralization. That's why I'm not anti-label. The labels are incredibly important because it takes an army. The reality is that decentralization will work for certain products and certain artists, just like anything we do in music works for certain artists and not others.

Both music and tech are male-dominated. Is it part of your mission to equalize the playing field?

I feel a great responsibility to keep going, not only for me, but for a larger community of women. I hardly take vacations — I am always, always working. If nothing else, I'll chisel away and show certain males who will impact a lot of other women that they have to look at something differently or they have to listen more. The more you sustain, the more people see that they can do it, too.

How does that affect your work at RISE?

None of our portfolio founders are women, and that was not my choice. I'm making investments based on ideas that I think hit the right timing and are viable. Any time a female founder comes across my email, I jump toward it, and if nothing else, I focus on [them in] a mentorship capacity. But the systemic problem is not the fact that I didn't invest in a female founder just to invest in a female founder. It's that we need to encourage more female founders to start more companies. My answer to that is continuing to mentor any women that cross my desk and continuing to be at the forefront of innovation and tech as a woman. **Q**



1. "This framed still from *Don't Tell Mom the Babysitter's Dead* represents the first set of rights I secured for a film remake when I started my career in the movie biz. The snow globe was the crew gift for 2012, for the first film I worked on from beginning to end. The Sol Oxenhandler nameplate belonged to my late grandfather. He reminded me every day that anything is possible." **2.** "I have had these in all my offices since I graduated college. They represent a love for music that my dad instilled in me as a child." **3.** "My [management client] Johnny Yukon wrote a track on *Tha Carter V*. Having both grown up on Lil Wayne, this holds a special place in my heart, as does the photo of my grandmother, who was proud of everything I accomplished." **4.** "My grandfather had me watching the Eagles when I was a toddler. Randall Cunningham was known as 'the ultimate weapon.' This is the role I aspire to in everything I do." **5.** "An illustrated collection of ideas and thoughts from a brainstorm dinner of top industry execs hosted by RISE."

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The Sound

PG. 26 MEET TANZANIA'S BIGGEST STAR * PG. 28 MONICA'S COUNTRY PIVOT

TAKING TIME

Giveon has become R&B's most relatable rising artist — thanks in part to a year-old hit

BY NEENA ROUHANI
PHOTOGRAPHED BY TAYO KUKU

Giveon photographed July 23 in Los Angeles.

Styling by Yashua Simmons
Calvin Klein tank top, LOEWE cardigan, Maison Margiela jeans, Polite Worldwide pearl necklace, SHAY necklaces.

WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE people expect the artist to just be the same person they were five years ago,” says Giveon from the recording studio of his West Hollywood condo.

“I don’t understand that.”

Case in point: Five years ago, Giveon worked at Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. in Long Beach, Calif., a 21-year-old who made music in his free time. Today, creating undeniably arresting R&B has become his full-time gig. In the past year alone, he has gone from that relatively unknown voice on Drake’s “Chicago Freestyle” to a singular star with multiple *Billboard* hits, including his breakthrough top 20 solo outing, “Heartbreak Anniversary.” He’s also coming off a Grammy Award nomination for best R&B album and a win for best new artist at the BET Awards.

Yet within a music market in which R&B artists often contort their sounds to fit the mainstream, Giveon has stayed true to the style that he embraced as a wide-eyed service-industry worker a half-decade ago. For instance, “Peaches,” Justin Bieber’s *Billboard* Hot 100 chart-topper featuring Giveon and Daniel Caesar, finds Bieber’s pop-radio aesthetic channeling Giveon’s soulful approach, not the other way around. “I don’t see myself staying in the same pocket forever,” says Giveon, “but I also don’t see myself abandoning the sound that I’ve naturally loved.”

Since penning his first song at the age of 11 following a fifth-grade breakup, Giveon has strived to write music that “takes the words out of [your] mouth. Ever since that moment, I always tried to touch on relatability as the starting point. If one person understands where I’m coming from, I know there’s going to be a world of people who relate.”

That approach contrasts with the baritone crooner’s public persona, where much of his personal life remains unknown (“I’m literally nothing like what people would think,” he says), but one that has proven to be effective. After self-releasing a pair of singles, Giveon signed to Not So Fast/Epic Records

in 2019. He has since released two EPs, which were combined with one new track to make up his March deluxe album, *When It’s All Said and Done... Take Time*. The set debuted at No. 5 on the *Billboard* 200 and peaked at No. 2 on the Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart.

All the while, Giveon was also enjoying the delayed success of his nostalgic 2020 single, “Heartbreak Anniversary.” Over a year after its release, the track went viral on TikTok in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia before crossing over to the United States, where it climbed to No. 16 on the Hot 100 and topped the Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart.

“Based on these analytics, we took a new view of the song and prioritized the crossover and pop playlist with our streaming partners and took the song to all three radio formats simultaneously,” says Epic Records chairman/CEO Sylvia Rhone. “It was the perfect storm for the release of the deluxe album.” Says Giveon’s co-manager Simon Gebrelul: “I expected Giveon’s career to blossom into what it is right now. But if I told you I expected it to happen this quickly, I’d be lying.”

Giveon says he has never been in a rush to find success, but being in lockdown during the pandemic helped accelerate his personal and musical development. It’s an experience that he feels artists today are too often deprived of: “You make a song, you put it on the internet, and then you feel like you’re ready. Just because I made ‘Heartbreak Anniversary’ and it did what it did doesn’t mean I’m anywhere near the artist I should be yet.” But being able to break through with a straightforward R&B ballad — one Rhone calls a “watershed” moment for the genre —

showed fans the kind of artist he plans to be.

Now working on a new studio album, Giveon is trying to stay grounded amid his recent wins. “Making something that people liked could be just as detrimental as making something that people didn’t like,” he says. “They go hand in hand because once they like it, they just want the next thing even faster.”

He’s doing his best to deliver, noting that he hopes the project will arrive before the end of the year and that his growth will be evident on the album. “From the birth of me as an artist, [I thought], ‘What if people don’t like my voice? What if people say these songs coming from a man are too emotional and vulnerable?’” he recalls. He finally learned to stop asking those questions — and embrace those vulnerabilities. “The things that make you insecure,” he says, “are what make people gravitate to you.”



Marni jacket, Nike sneakers, SHAY ring.

BIG IN... Tanzania

DIAMOND PLATNUMZ

WHEN DIAMOND PLATNUMZ WAS 17, he worked odd jobs selling second-hand clothing and pumping gas to try to save up money to book a recording session, but it wasn’t enough. Eventually the singer, born Naseeb Abdul Juma Issack, sold his mother’s gold ring. “I told her I lost it in the bathroom — that it fell down the toilet,” says the now 31-year-old, calling from his home in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

The single from that studio session,



“Toka Mwanzo,” which hinted at the R&B stylings he hadn’t yet developed, didn’t take off. But the session did lead Diamond to his first manager,

who paid for more studio time. In 2010, he released what became his breakthrough song, “Kamwambie,” which led to three major wins at the Tanzania Music Awards, and soon after, Diamond released his debut album of the same name. Steeped in the bongo flava genre — known for its mix of American rap and East African *taarab* — Diamond’s music, which often turns heartbreak into uplifting anthems, found a fan base. His 2013 single “Number One” arrived with an even grander goal: “I wanted to go global,” he says, adding that he learned English, in which he sang the chorus, ahead of recording the track.

In 2020, Diamond became the first sub-Saharan African artist to earn over 1 billion YouTube views and this

year was nominated for best international act at the BET Awards for a third time. In May, the artist — who plans to release his next album in 2021 — signed a 360 deal with Warner Music Group through his own label, WCB Wasafi (launched in 2018 and home to Lava Lava, Queen Darleen and Mbosso). Under the partnership, WMG supports Diamond’s label with the goal of creating more viable pathways for East African artists to attract some of the attention that the continent’s acts have been getting in North America. “There’s a lot of talented African artists that can’t get airtime, can’t get record deals,” he says. “I can see myself changing a lot of people’s lives.”

—NADIA NEOPHYTOU

Congratulations to Wasserman's R&B Hip-Hop Power Players



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Q&A

MONICA STEPS OUT

The R&B legend on her upcoming independent debut album and love of country music

BY DARLENE ADEROJU

WHEN MONICA SIGNED WITH Rowdy Records at the age of 12, the star-to-be had one goal: “I said, ‘I want the world to know you can come from nothing and have anything you dream of that you’re willing to work for.’” Now, at 40, with a Grammy Award and eight top 10 hits on the Billboard Hot 100, Monica is proving that yet again with her upcoming independent debut album, *Trenches*, which she previewed during her 2020 *Verzuz* battle with Brandy and will arrive on her own label, MonDeenise Music. Though *Trenches* isn’t even out, Monica is already thinking ahead to her next project: a country album. Having been inspired by Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers while growing up, she recently worked in the studio with Brandi Carlile. In June, she made her country music debut, guesting on Jimmie Allen’s “Pray” alongside Little Big Town, a song she says “explains why I live the way I do — and why I love God as much as I do.”

What inspired you to launch MonDeenise Music and release music independently?

This happened on its own. My deal [with RCA] came to an end, but throughout the process of being on a label, you learn a lot about them, and it becomes a lot easier for you to step into that type of arena and feel comfortable. It’s a very expensive thing to do but it’s extremely rewarding, because I know what’s happening in every area.

You first played the *Trenches* title track, which features Lil Baby and The Neptunes, during

your *Verzuz* battle last year. Why was that the right name for this album?

[The name] *Trenches* came about when Pharrell [Williams] and I were talking. “*Trenches*” the single didn’t have a name at the time. I was explaining to him that my ultimate goal is to remain authentic and connected to my people. I said, “One of the key elements is that a lot of the people I love are in the trenches.” I’ve had so much happen over the last couple of years that I am continuously dealing with. My uncle was killed [as I was finishing] the album [at the top of the year], and that brought things to a complete hold. It’s really difficult, but that’s a part of life and that’s what I want to continue to share.

Looking back on *Verzuz*, how did it feel to bury the hatchet with Brandy?

If there was a hatchet, I buried it many years ago. But I [did] not verbally [say] that to her, because we don’t have a reason to have an issue. The promotion of “The Boy Is Mine” and everything else was made really complex by other people, not by us. But those things festered and became very real over time. It was important for us to have the conversation that we had, but we had it just before the whole world saw us sitting next to each other.

Who would you still love to collaborate with?

Mary J. Blige is the first person that comes to mind, simply because our friendship is next level. She tells the truth in her music. She’s OK with who she is. She is definitely one of the people that paved the way for me to be able to speak and live in my truth. **B**

BEHIND THE HIT

“ESSENCE”

THE BILLBOARD HOT 100 DEBUT OF WIZKID’S “Essence” in July became the culmination of a nearly yearlong global expedition, after the song arrived on *Made in Lagos*, the Nigerian artist’s second album under RCA Records and his own Starboy Entertainment imprint, last October. RCA executive vp A&R Tunji Balogun recalls first tracing the track’s growth from beyond Africa to the United Kingdom, where Wizkid has a strong performance history and radio presence. From there, “Essence,” the sultry downtempo song featuring singer-producer Tems, crossed over to the United States as the country slowly reopened in spring, with Balogun noticing a sizable increase in streams every Saturday as more parties took place.

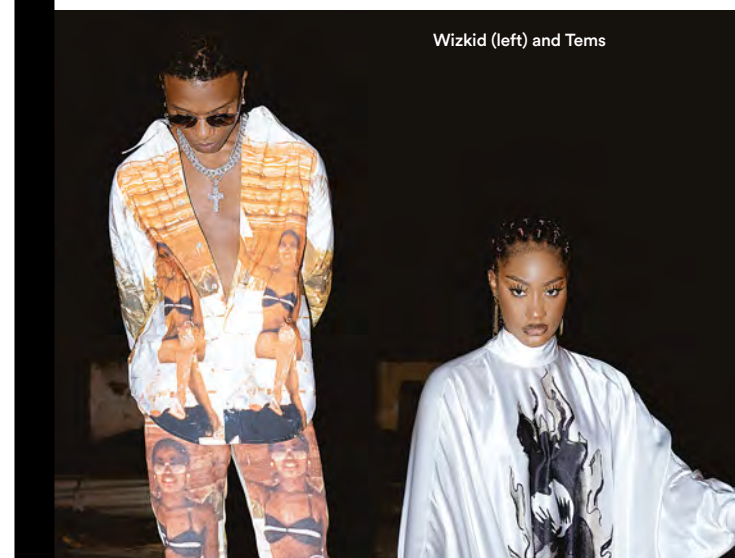
“That song has become emblematic of being back outside,” he says. “Then, a narrative on the internet started about the song being the song of the summer — and we took that energy and ran with it.” Adds Wizkid: “We just came out of the craziest pandemic ... Afrobeats just spreads love around a room when you play it.”

The label rereleased “Essence” as a single in April, accompanied by a music video filmed in Ghana that has over 18 million YouTube views. Balogun says its Hot 100 debut (the song currently sits at No. 67) feels “extremely gratifying” and underlines how pairing a flagship Afrobeats artist with a rising star like Tems, also from Lagos, is “breaking barriers globally.” The hit also topped *Billboard’s* World Digital Song Sales chart and entered the Billboard Global 200, becoming the first song on the tally to contain vocals in Nigeria’s Yoruba dialect.

Wizkid has had U.S. success before, as a collaborator to Western superstars: His feature on Drake’s “One Dance” became both his first Hot 100 entry and No. 1 in 2016, while this year, he earned his first Grammy Award for best music video for his collaboration on Beyoncé’s “Brown Skin Girl.”

“This is the first time where it feels like a song is competing on the level of a similarly promoted song from Western artists in the pop genre,” says Balogun. “And I hope that’s the lasting influence of the record — that it opens doors for more people with different styles and different textures.”

—HERAN MAMO

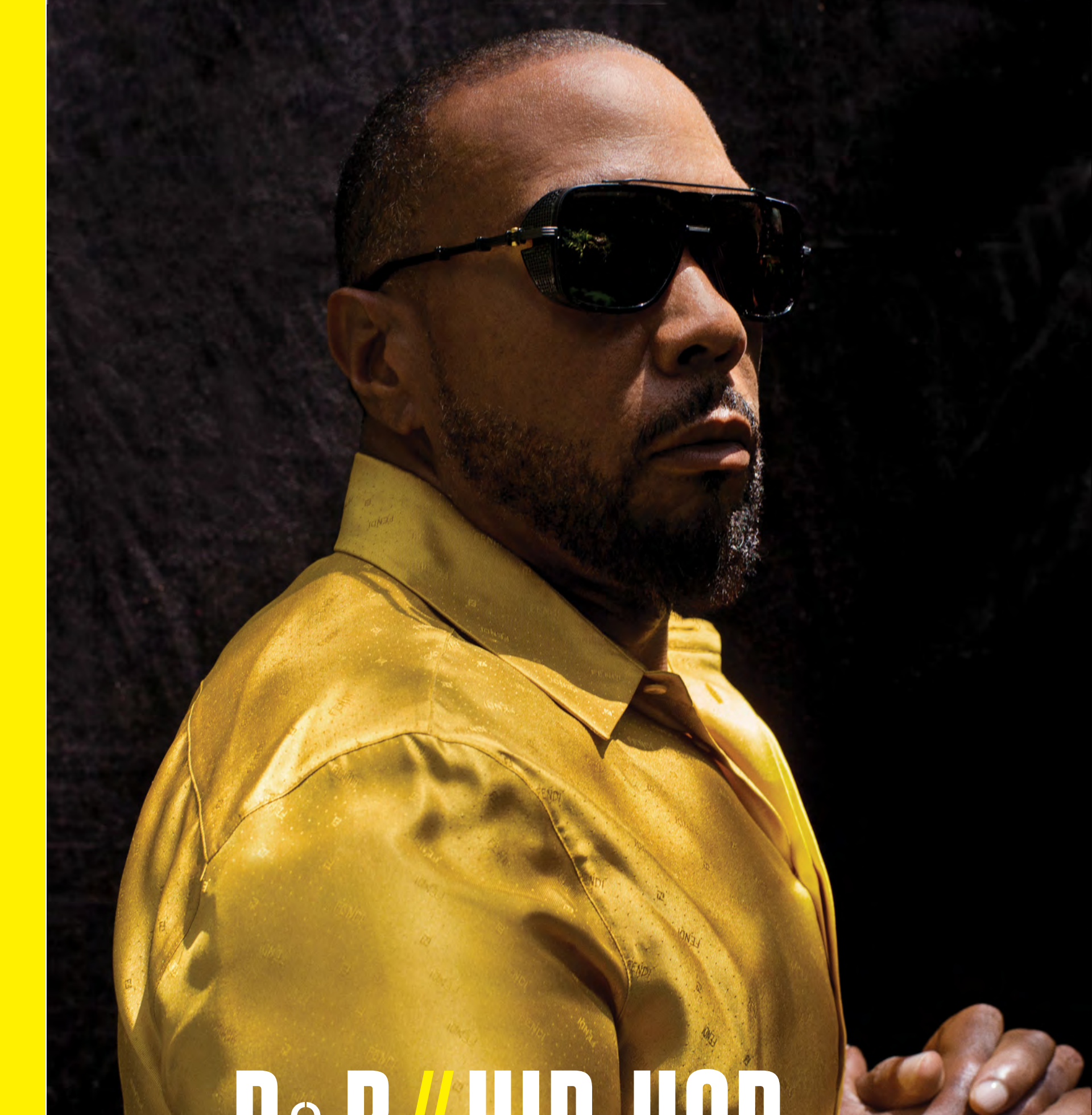


Wizkid (left) and Tems

CONGRATS TO OUR
POWER PLAYERS!

ELLIOT
DANIELLE
THEO

10K[PROJECTS]



R&B // HIP-HOP P O W E

EXECUTIVES OF THE YEAR

Timbaland

In a fast-changing live landscape, they proved that *Verzuz* not only had staying power, but could be



Timbaland (opposite page)
photographed by Devin
Christopher on July 22 in Miami.

Swizz Beatz photographed
by Yuri Hasegawa on July 23
at Signature Sound Studios
in San Diego.

R P L A Y E R S 2 0 2 1

and Swizz Beatz

profitable — and forged a new way to create generational wealth for Black artists **By Neena Rouhani**

IN LATE JUNE, AS THE temperature warmed and COVID-19 vaccination rates rose, a sense of normalcy started to return to the world. Restaurant patios overflowed; nightclub lines wrapped around the block; festival and tour announcements flooded social media. And yet still, the pandemic's top virtual entertainment series made headlines when, on June 26, Soulja Boy and Bow Wow went head-to-head in a *Verzuz* battle.

Over 3 million viewers tuned in across Instagram, Fite TV and Triller to watch the two face off in front of a live audience — the latest sign that as fans return to in-person concerts, *Verzuz* isn't going anywhere. Since its inception in March 2020, the battle series created by multihyphenates Swizz Beatz and Timbaland has become a cultural staple, highlighting the impact of Black artists. It also has become a thriving business, attracting brand sponsorships, including a multimillion-dollar deal with Diageo,

parent company of Ciroc. Swizz says that allows *Verzuz* to pay artists “at least” what they would make from doing a traditional show — and in the process help redefine how legacy acts can build wealth. In March, *Verzuz* was acquired by the Triller Network for an undisclosed sum, and Triller co-owner Bobby Sarnevesht confirms that come the fourth quarter, it plans to take the company public. “*Verzuz* is not just for the pandemic,” says Swizz. “It’s for the culture.”

Speaking today from their respective home bases — Swizz in San Diego, Tim across the country in Miami — the two founders look more like the behind-the-scenes creatives they started out as than high-powered media executives. Before becoming business partners, they were friends and competitors; *Verzuz* was born out of their own good-natured onstage battles. Today, Tim has his phone propped up in a recording studio, and Swizz wears a simple T-shirt and hat. “Daddy daycare

Mondays,” jokes the father of five.

“We’ve only seen each other [four] times since *Verzuz* started,” says Swizz. But as is usually the case for the two these days, those were largely business meetings: signing their contract with Triller; a Peloton-*Verzuz* commercial shoot; their own *Verzuz* rematch (their first battle kicked off the entire series) — and, naturally, a boat hangout with Busta Rhymes and Pharrell Williams.

Reflecting on their wins as executives, the pair repeatedly return to one lasting achievement: the career boosts artists experience following their *Verzuz* appearances, known as “the *Verzuz* effect.” Take last August’s face-off between Brandy and Monica, who gracefully delivered some of the most notable songs from their catalogs 23 years after their chart-topping duet, “The Boy Is Mine.” The episode attracted 1.2 million viewers on Instagram Live alone — the equivalent of filling Madison Square Garden 57 times — making it the second most-

streamed IG Live event of 2020.

Within 72 hours, the two scored a combined 21.9 million U.S. on-demand catalog streams, according to MRC Data, a 248% gain from the three days leading up to the stream.

They aren’t alone. *Verzuz* has become a crucial platform for legacy acts, ensuring they get their flowers — both financial and cultural — while they’re still active. “*Verzuz* is a platform of celebration and love, and it makes people remember,” says Tim. “It allows these legacy artists to do other things.”

Since their April appearance with soul legends Earth, Wind & Fire, The Isley Brothers have gone on to tour, explore NFTs and a “docu-concert,” and release a single with Snoop Dogg. In the week following their *Verzuz* appearance, R&B artists Keyshia Cole and Ashanti scored more sales, downloads and over 23 million combined streams.

“The *Verzuz* effect was a great promotion tool for them to take things to the next level,” says Swizz. “What we do is put you right in front of every-





Swizz Beatz

body.” And the *Verzuz* founders have done that for their artists in another monumental way: They’ve given all 46 artists who participated (preceding the Triller deal) a portion of their equity stake. “Me and Tim wanted to give the artists a little piece of the pie,” says Swizz. “Was it the biggest piece? No, but it was a little piece when all these other companies ain’t giving no pieces.”

Iranian American entrepreneur Sarnevesht clearly recalls his first hangouts with Swizz at the height of last year’s nationwide racial justice protests. The two men would look down at the marches 40 floors below Sarnevesht’s Beverly Hills, Calif., apartment, thinking about how “we have these platforms and we could probably tell some [positive] stories,” says Sarnevesht. “Because granted, everything is bad. But there’s a lot of beauty out there too, that we always forget.”

At the time, *Verzuz* had entered partnerships with Apple, Instagram and Twitter without intent to sell. Soon, though, prospective buyers began making offers, from companies including Apple and, ultimately, Triller. (Swizz and Tim decline to quantify them, but Triller won out,

with a bid reportedly higher than Apple’s.) Sarnevesht’s pitch was, as he recalls, simple: “We’re cool with all those people [at the major platforms], but Apple is Apple and Facebook is Facebook. Not going to do anything for you guys, not going to do anything for us. Let’s do our own thing.”

Swizz and Tim’s arrangement with Triller also allowed them one key freedom other companies had not offered: bringing their first 46 *Verzuz* acts into the deal. As Sarnevesht says, that now makes the majority of Triller investors Black — a point Swizz and Tim also emphasize to any critics who say they’ve sold out. “Black-owned don’t mean ‘own 100% of nothing.’ Black-owned means that you can do business,” says Swizz. “We

have ownership in [Triller], which makes that company Black-owned, and the people we brought in make that company majority Black.”

The deal also allows Swizz and Tim to maintain creative control. “One thing we put in the contract was to protect the brand, protect the artists, protect ourselves and protect the integrity,” says Swizz. “Even though we did the deal with Triller, we still run *Verzuz*. We can’t feel the transition, and the people can’t feel a transition. All they can feel is the quality going up.”

Going forward, he and Tim plan to expand beyond the mainly hip-hop and R&B artists with whom *Verzuz* built its reputation, with Bollywood and Latin battles in the works, as

**“Black-owned don’t mean
‘own 100% of nothing.’
Black-owned means that
you can do business.”**

—SWIZZ BEATZ

well as one featuring Nigerian artists. Sarnevesht sees *Verzuz* becoming more of a full-scale production (with DJ hosts, amateur openers and a recurring weekly time slot) and, already, a showdown between New York hip-hop mainstays The Lox and Dipset is planned at Madison Square Garden’s Hulu Theater on Aug. 3 — preceded by a 10-round heavyweight boxing match.

“These guys work at night because music production is a late-night business. When they wake up in the morning, they’re executives,” Sarnevesht says of Tim and Swizz. “These aren’t bullshit job titles. I thought they were just going to chill and get involved every once in a while, and I was very, very wrong.”

Tim and Swizz know that work won’t end anytime soon — and they wouldn’t have it any other way. “It’s going to take the artists to save the artists, it’s going to take the artists to celebrate the artists, it’s going to take the artists to change what we don’t like as artists,” says Swizz. “The executive side is what really makes the creative fly.”

“All my career has built me up for this moment,” says Timbaland. “We were built for this.” **B**

Labels/ Distributors

Chris Atlas

Executive vp urban music and marketing,
Warner Records

Ray Daniels

Senior vp A&R, Warner Records

Eesean Bolden

Senior vp A&R, Warner Records

Warner Records' banner year included hip-hop hits such as CJ's "Whoopy," with a Latin remix from Anuel AA and Ozuna, as well as Saweetie's and NLE Choppa's ongoing successes, and gold records for Erica Banks and YFN Lucci. Daniels, 41, Bolden, 36, and Atlas are prioritizing artist development, which, Atlas says, is more necessary than ever: "Coming out of the pandemic after a year without touring, developing new artists will need time and support to make up for the lost year." Adds Bolden: "You can have records that do numbers but never truly build the artist into a star."

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE "We continue to see too much violence in our communities. As an industry we need to remain vigilant in supporting programs that can provide opportunities, alternative outlets and options for growth for our young people as a way to truly influence change." —ATLAS

LaTrice Burnette

President, 4th & Broadway; executive vp,
Island Records

At Island, Burnette helped propel Skip Marley's success with his H.E.R.-assisted track "Slow Down," his first leader on any Billboard airplay chart, reaching the top of Adult R&B Airplay. At the helm of the revived 4th & Broadway, Burnette hopes to do the same with Young Devyn, newly signed during the pandemic. Says Burnette: "She brings a fresh perspective to the game through raw lyricism and her relatable life experiences as a young African American girl from Brooklyn."

CONCERT I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO "The Rolling Loud festival in New York City, Miami and Los Angeles. The energy at those shows is unmatched. I love the fact that they also give new artists a chance to shine."

Katina Bynum

Executive vp East Coast labels, Universal
Music Enterprises

In the newly created role she's been in since May 2020 at UMe, the global catalog and special markets division of Universal Music Group, Bynum works with senior executives at Republic, Island, Def Jam and Cash Money to develop strategic initiatives across their urban

rosters. Bynum previously worked at Cash Money/Young Money/Republic with both emerging artists Jacquees and Kiana Ledé and stars including Lil Wayne, Nicki Minaj and Drake. "[We need] more people of color in decision-making roles," says Bynum, who is proud of UMe's "ongoing commitment to meaningful change inside and outside the company."

THE POWER OF BLACK MUSIC IN ONE WORD "Motivating."

Don Cannon

Leighton "Lake" Morrison
Tyree "DJ Drama" Simmons

Co-founders, Generation Now

Generation Now's roster of young stars includes Lil Uzi Vert, Killumantii and Seddy Hendrix. But it was Kentucky rapper Jack Harlow who secured another win for the Atlanta-based label with his 2020 album, *Thats What They All Say*, which debuted at No. 5 on the Billboard 200. "Jack's trajectory has changed so much since the pandemic," says Morrison, 42. "We're excited to see his first real show back."

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC "Bob Marley, because he kept me at peace." —SIMMONS

Steve Carless

A&R, Republic Records; founder, SC Company

Josh Berkman

Senior vp A&R, Republic Records

Roderick Scott

Vp marketing strategy, Republic Records

Sammie Taylor

Executive vp A&R, Republic Records

Xiarra-Diamond Nimrod

Vp marketing strategy, Republic Records

In addition to winning label of the year at the inaugural Clio Music Awards along with honors for its campaign for The Weeknd's *After Hours*, Republic scored with a recent trio of chart triumphs: The Weeknd's "Blinding Lights" broke the Hot 100 record for most weeks in the top 10 (59), rapper-singer Coi Leray earned her first top 40 hit with the Lil Durk-assisted "No More Parties," and Pop Smoke's posthumous album, *Shoot for the Stars, Aim for the Moon*, bowed at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 and became the longest-running No. 1 on Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums since 1990. "He's one of one," says Nimrod, 26. "His legacy is absolutely untouchable."

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE "We need more Black women to be properly represented, recognized and uplifted into top-level roles within our industry. We are the foundation, and the merit we bring to the table needs to be amplified further and louder in order to efficiently expand our ecosystem." —NIMROD

Carl Crawford

Founder/CEO, 1501 Certified Entertainment

Crawford launched his label after retiring from Major League Baseball in 2016, hop-



Juice WRLD

ing to spotlight undiscovered artists. He has already succeeded in that by signing Megan Thee Stallion, who has amassed 11 platinum singles and two Hot 100 No. 1s. Next up? Erica Banks. Says Crawford of his rising artist: "We just got our first gold record with our newest rap superstar."
MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP "There's a lack of recognition of the machine behind the artist, especially toward those of us who invest our own money and time in unknown talent we believe in. There needs to be acknowledgment of the amount of hard work it takes and who greatly contributes to the artist's success."

Brandon "Lil Bibby" Dickinson

Founder, Grade A Productions

George "G-Money" Dickinson

Partner, Grade A Productions

Peter Jideonwo

Partner, Grade A Productions

In July 2020, Grade A Productions and In-

terscope Records released Juice WRLD's posthumous album, *Legends Never Die*, which debuted atop the Billboard 200 with the biggest week of 2020 for any R&B/hip-hop set. "Properly honoring Juice WRLD's legacy was an amazing achievement," says Jideonwo, noting that he finished 2020 at No. 4 on *Billboard's* year-end Streaming Songs Artists chart.
MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP "We should look to better serve artists who are not signed. If we're able to provide programs that help independent artists find financial stability, we can help grow and advance the independent community. Many artists just need a bit of help in order to progress their crafts to the next level." —JIDEONWO

Serge Durand

Vp A&R, Virgin Music

Virgin recently made a deal with Soulja Boy to release the prolific rapper's latest hit, "She Make It Clap." Originally

a Twitch freestyle, the tune went viral, leaping from No. 19 to No. 1 on *Billboard's* Top Triller U.S. chart in April. Durand, 40, would like to see oversaturation in the genre cease to allow more focus on quality over quantity. "There are so many songs and albums being released weekly that it doesn't give fans time to really digest an album," he says.

THE POWER OF BLACK MUSIC IN ONE WORD "Trendsetting. We create the sound and everybody else copies it, or attempts to."

J. Erving

Executive vp creative development, Sony Music Group; executive vp, The Orchard
In December, Sony acquired Human Re Sources, Erving's Los Angeles-based distribution and artist services company, from the music/tech firm Q&A, and folded it into The Orchard. Human Re Sources, which Erving describes as a "boutique company that's primarily made up of young, nontraditional people of color," is continuing to sign and develop artists directly. The deal is "going to help create jobs for people of color," he says. "People will come to recognize that we are doing good work and will want to hire these new executives."

CONCERT I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO "The DJ D-Nice concert. I feel like I've partied with D-Nice throughout quarantine at

home, and to be able to do that in person will be a great time. I'm a fan of how he moves a party, and I know there's going to be a lot of nostalgic moments."

Phylicia Fant

Executive vp urban music, Columbia Records

Azim Rashid

Senior vp, urban promotion, Columbia Records

Luis Mota

Senior vp A&R, Columbia Records

Shahendra Ohneswere

Senior vp content development/co-head digital marketing, Columbia Records

John Salcedo

Vp digital marketing, Columbia Records

Maria Arangio

Vp A&R, Columbia Records

Victoria White-Mason

Senior director of marketing, Columbia Records

Home to Beyoncé, John Legend and Tyler, The Creator, Columbia is equally devoted to its next generation of superstars. The label notched two Grammy nods with Chloe X Halle, including best progressive R&B album for *Ungodly Hour*, as well as Hot 100 No. 1s from Lil Nas X, with "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)," and Polo G, with "Rapstar." The latter bolstered his mainstream breakthrough with the 2020 album *The Goat*, followed by this year's Billboard 200 No. 1 *Hall of Fame*, which "showed his growth as an

artist and put him with his peers musically," says Ohneswere, who also cites as a highlight Polo G's "sit-down interview with [NBA star] Scottie Pippen and his *L.A. Leakers* freestyle, which deftly paid tribute to DMX."

CONCERT I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO "The Day N Vegas Festival. Really great lineup with Tyler, The Creator, Baby Keem, Polo G, Joey Bada\$\$, SZA and Kendrick Lamar." —OHNESWERE

Jenny Gorotiza

12Tone Music

During the pandemic and amid calls for racial justice, Anderson .Paak delivered "Lockdown," which captured the moment and set the company on a mission to "provide the wide-reaching platform to get the song and video to the people" during a tumultuous time, says Gorotiza, 36. The song won the artist his fourth Grammy Award, while his catalog has surpassed 1.3 million album consumption units in the United States. As Gorotiza adds, "the bigger win is getting people to pay attention to a truly prolific artist, a lifetime artist." In July, Warner Music Group acquired the assets of 12Tone Music, bringing .Paak and the label's other acts to WMG.

THE POWER OF BLACK MUSIC IN ONE WORD

"Foundational. You can easily argue that most — if not all — genres of music

stem from Black culture. I'm eternally grateful to have it in my daily life."

Elliot Grainge

Founder/CEO, 10K Projects

Danielle Price

Senior vp business and legal affairs,

10K Projects

Theo Battaglia

Executive vp/head of creative, 10K Projects

In June 2020, the independent label 10K Projects pledged \$500,000 to support social justice causes through a new charitable division, 10K Together. The initiative includes paid internships for Black youth, support for local Black-owned businesses and a creative fund to pay for "dream projects" for creatives of color, says Price, 40. The company awarded \$10,000 to each of three winners last summer. Meanwhile, 10K Projects landed three songs in the Hot 100 top 20 since June 2020 with signees Internet Money ("Lemonade"), Surfaces ("Sunday Best") and Trippie Redd ("Miss the Rage").

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/

HIP-HOP "Recent court rulings that hip-hop lyrics can be admitted as evidence of a defendant's guilt. The rulings are dangerous, could have a silencing effect on the tradition of Black storytelling through hip-hop and also very clearly and disproportionately impact Black creatives." —PRICE

'I'm A Student Of The Game'

ARTIST-TURNED-ENTREPRENEUR YO GOTTI THRIVES WITH NEW CMG-INTERSCOPE PARTNERSHIP

With a career spanning over three decades, Yo Gotti has always dreamed of building the next big-time rap label. After watching the likes of JAY-Z, Birdman and Master P transition from artists to boardroom executives with their respective imprints, Gotti saw himself following their path, bringing his Memphis flair into the mix.

Today, his label, the 14-year-old CMG, not only boasts a formidable roster — including Moneybagg Yo, 42 Dugg, EST Gee, Bloc Boy JB and Blac Youngsta — but also announced an eight-figure partnership deal with Interscope Records in June.

"I'm a student of the game. I try to look into everybody's story and history," says Gotti. "When we talk about Cash Money — Birdman and Slim — and Roc Nation, some of these people I was not only able to study but almost sit in the classroom [with] because I was there to experience it firsthand. I take everything I can learn, take it in and do my thing."

Throughout Gotti's 25-year-plus career, he has recorded as an artist with RCA Records and Epic Records. In 2016, he joined forces with Roc Nation for management and has since used the knowledge he has acquired to shape his CMG label. While Gotti signed Mon-



Gotti

eybagg Yo, Bloc Boy JB and Blac Youngsta from his native Memphis, he has expanded his talent-scouting sights to recruit EST Gee from Louisville, Ky., and 42 Dugg from Detroit.

Earlier this year, Moneybagg Yo notched his first No. 1 on the Billboard 200 with his album *A Gangsta's Pain*; the project enjoyed a two-week run at the

summit. In May, 42 Dugg maintained CMG's momentum when he debuted at No. 8 on the Billboard 200 with his mixtape *Free Dem Boyz*. Now, EST Gee is an artist to watch thanks to collaborations with Lil Baby and Gotti himself.

"Our long-term goal is to continue to dominate the game and build the brand even

bigger," says Gotti. "[We'll] continue to find the hottest artists to work with and make sure CMG becomes one of these Roc-A-Fella, Cash Money, Ruff Ryders and Death Rows 10 to 20 years from now, so that a new Yo Gotti — a new executive — is going to say *they* want to be the new CMG."

—CARL LAMARRE

Benjy Grinberg

Founder/president, **Rostrum Records**

Grinberg's Rostrum Records, which launched the careers of Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller, reached a new milestone in April when it signed Rich the Kid to release the rapper's recordings in partnership with BMG. The company's songs were streamed a whopping 2.4 billion times globally in 2020, according to the label, and Grinberg anticipates that number will increase this year. Rich the Kid's signing solidified Rostrum's "position in hip-hop," says Grinberg, 43, while further highlighting that "independent" doesn't mean "small."

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE "Many artists from past decades had very bad deals that are often still unrecovered. Sony made a great step in getting rid of these artists' unrecovered balances so that they can start to see revenue from streaming, but more needs to be done."

Alan Grunblatt

President, **urban, eOne**

Amid celebrating the 30th anniversary of Death Row Records — which it acquired in 2013 — eOne's music division also scored with its current roster. Sevyn Streeter's "Guilty" (with Chris Brown and A\$AP Ferg) cracked the top 25 of the

Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart, while Blueface has earned 2.2 billion on-demand streams in the United States. His latest song, "Outside (Better Days)," is a co-release with 5th Amendment/Empire. The company, which was acquired by a Blackstone Group investment fund from Hasbro in a deal that closed June 30, has big plans for Juicy J's album, *The Hustle Continues*, says Grunblatt.

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC

"Bob Marley, because his music is rebel music, both spiritually and politically."

Ethiopia Habtemariam

Chairman/CEO, **Motown Records**

Tramiel "Twin" Clark

Senior vp, **Motown Records**

Britney Davis

Vp artist relations, marketing and special projects, **Motown Records**

Lindsey Lanier

Vp A&R talent, **Motown Records**

Dante Smith

Senior director of digital marketing, **Motown Records**

Lil Baby, who was initially signed to Motown in a joint venture with Quality Control and is now signed directly to the label, had the top album of 2020 in the United States with *My Turn*, which earned 2.6 mil-

"As an industry, we have to continue to find ways to provide mental health resources, support and guidance for our artists, partners and peers."

ETHIOPIA HABTEMARIAM, MOTOWN RECORDS



Jhené Aiko

lion equivalent album units. Motown has regained its status as "a stand-alone record label within the Universal Music Group ecosystem, something it hasn't been for 20 years," says Habtemariam, who is only the second woman of color to be appointed chairman/CEO at a major label since Epic Records chairman/CEO Sylvia Rhone.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP

"The rise in mental health issues, as well as destructive behaviors such as crime and drug abuse. Our responsibility in supporting our artists stretches far beyond their music. We support them holistically." —**HABTEMARIAM**

Wayne Hampton

Co-founder/chief business development officer, **Create Music Group**

Mark Hill

Head of urban, **Create Music Group**

Carl LeGrett

Director of A&R, music publishing, **Create Music Group**

Create — an emerging power player in independent distribution with annual revenue topping \$100 million after working with artists like Tory Lanez and 6ix9ine — introduced an innovative new product, Create Carbon, a credit card for distributed clients that allows them to access their royalties as soon as they are earned. The Create executives say such transparency is the future of the industry, and that's why the company is "building tools that help artists gain a clearer understanding of their worth."

CONCERT I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO "The Rolling Loud festival. It'll be exciting to see a lot of artists together again in the

same place. I'm looking forward to the festival environment returning, because it can foster exciting and unexpected collaborations." —**LEGRETT**

Jeff Harleston

Interim chairman/CEO, **Def Jam Recordings**; general counsel/executive vp business and legal affairs, **Universal Music Group**

Nicki Farag

GM/executive vp, **Def Jam Recordings**

Rodney Shealey

Executive vp, **Def Jam Recordings**

Noah Preston

Executive vp A&R, **Def Jam Recordings**

Natina Nimene

Senior vp urban promotions and artist relations, **Def Jam Recordings**

Naim McNair

Senior vp A&R, **Def Jam Recordings**

In the wake of chart-topping albums from Jhené Aiko, Justin Bieber and Big Sean, Def Jam's team has also proved that it can break artists that don't "fit the traditional definition of what it means to be a commercial act," says Preston, citing Aiko's *Chilombo* and upcoming label priority Kaash Paige. In June, Def Jam announced the creation of an in-house task force, Def Jam Forward, to promote social, economic and educational equality for its Black and larger minority community members, and label executives and artists supported the reopening of Los Angeles' Leimert Park to commemorate Juneteenth. "It was beautiful to see a major label's presence at a historical event that means so much to our community," says Preston.

THE POWER OF BLACK MUSIC IN ONE WORD "Unstoppable." —**PRESTON**

Andre Howard

Vp, commerce and digital, Black music, ADA

In the past year, Howard has overseen ADA partner releases including HITCO's gold-certified SAINt JHN album, *While the World Was Burning*, and its No. 4 Hot 100 "Roses" and accompanying remix, which have been certified platinum and gold, respectively. ADA has also had success with U.K. rapper Central Cee's *Wild West* album, which spent nine weeks in The Official U.K. Albums Chart's top 40. "Our other talents Rubi Rose, Ayiana Lee and BJRNCK are all poised to break out this year," says Howard.

FAVORITE ARTISTS DURING THE PANDEMIC "Freddie Gibbs, Griselda, Moneybagg Yo and also a lot of Prince and Sade, because like everyone else, my emotions ran the gamut after being in quarantine for 16 months."

Darrale Jones

Senior vp A&R, Atlantic Records

Angelique Jones

Vp streaming and sales, Atlantic Records

Kendra Ellis

Vp marketing, Atlantic Records

Ali B Bianchi

Vp marketing, Atlantic Records

Justin Grant

Director of digital marketing and sports partnerships, Atlantic Records

Carla Pagano

Senior director of marketing, Atlantic Records

Atlantic's roster of established and emerging artists has continued to rack up Hot 100 hits between Cardi B ("W.A.P." featuring Megan Thee Stallion, "Up"), Silk Sonic ("Leave the Door Open") and the label's latest breakthrough, rapper Pooh Shiesty ("Back in Blood" featuring Lil Durk). "Atlantic has consistently been a company that truly believes in artist development," says Darrale Jones, citing Lizzo's rise as an example, with the "Truth Hurts" artist "on the runway building and building until it was her time to take off."

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE "Established talent embracing up-and-coming artists. It can be challenging for brand-new artists to afford big features or receive guidance from established artists. I'd really love to see them take these younger artists under their wings and offer them more support." —DARRALE JONES

Kevin "Coach K" Lee

COO, Quality Control

Pierre "P" Thomas

CEO, Quality Control

See story, page 40.



Central Cee

Kevin Liles

Co-founder/CEO, 300 Entertainment

Selim Bouab

Executive vp/head of A&R, 300 Entertainment

Rayna Bass

Senior vp marketing, 300 Entertainment

Shadow Stokes

Senior vp promotion, 300 Entertainment

Az Cohen

Vp A&R research, 300 Entertainment

Geoff Ogunlesi

Vp A&R, 300 Entertainment; vp, YSL Records

300 Entertainment's marquee artist, Megan Thee Stallion, scored three wins at the Grammy Awards in March, including best new artist and best rap song for her "Savage (Remix)" featuring Beyoncé. Other highlights for the company in the past year include Young Thug's recent *Slime Language 2* compilation album topping the Billboard 200, released in partnership with the rapper's Young Stoner Life imprint, and Fetty Wap's 2014 single "Trap Queen" earning diamond certification from the RIAA for 10 million digital units. Liles says he's also proud of the label's new music distribution company, Sparta, which launched in June to empower independent artists and entrepreneurs. Adds Liles: "Independence is in our DNA."

FAVORITE ARTISTS DURING THE PANDEMIC

"Marvin Gaye. A lot of the things he sang about with *What's Going On* became the soundtrack to 2020. Lastly, Mary J. Blige's *My Life* album — the *My Life* documentary is a must-see." —LILES

Todd Moscowitz

Founder/CEO, Alamo Records

Nigel Talley

Vp A&R, Alamo Records

Tiara Hargrave

Executive vp/GM, Alamo Records

Alamo, in which Sony Music recently acquired a majority stake, watched signees Rod Wave and Lil Durk each notch their first No. 1 debuts on the Billboard 200: Wave for his third studio album, *SoulFly*, in April, and Durk for his collaborative album with Lil Baby, *Voice of the Heroes*, in June. Both are among the six Alamo artists who performed at the Rolling Loud festival in Miami in July. "Hip-hop is at the top of the charts," says Hargrave, "and it's no mistake that this starts and refuels mainstream trends."

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE "More celebrations of what Black music really is: a springboard for a full spectrum of expression and representation to the mainstream." —HARGRAVE

Mark Pitts

President, RCA Records; co-founder, Keep Cool

Tunji Balogun

Executive vp A&R, RCA Records

Carolyn Williams

Executive vp marketing, RCA Records

Archie Davis

Senior vp marketing, RCA Records; CEO,

Six Course Entertainment

Aaron "Dash" Sherrod

Senior vp A&R, RCA Records

Sam Selolwane

Co-head of promotion (hip-hop, R&B, mixshow), RCA Records

RCA won a bronze 2020 Clio Award in recognition of its integrated multimedia marketing campaign for Black Music Month. Titled "Black Sounds Beautiful," the campaign highlighted the work of genre-defining R&B and hip-hop artists signed to the label, including Alicia Keys, Khalid, Childish Gambino, H.E.R. and Kirk Franklin, who have a collective social media reach of 100 million across platforms.

The campaign allowed the label to recognize "how much of a role R&B/hip-hop music plays in overall music and culture," says Williams.

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC

"Jazmine Sullivan's *Heaux Tales*, because it created a bit of escapism from the heaviness of what was going on in the world." —WILLIAMS

Antonio "L.A." Reid

Founder/co-chairman, HITCO

Charles Goldstuck

Founder/co-chairman, HITCO

Jaha Johnson

Head of A&R, HITCO

The independent label founded by Reid and Goldstuck celebrated a breakout year with rapper Rubi Rose, who landed on the cover of *XXL*'s 2021 Freshman Class summer issue, which was "an incredible acknowledgment for her," says Johnson. The

breakout star was also featured in Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's "W.A.P." video and released her debut mixtape, *For the Streets*, in December. Another recent coup is "the rise of SAINt JHN," says Johnson, citing the July release of his SZA collaboration "Just for Me," which led "into the launch of the summer blockbuster *Space Jam: A New Legacy*," he adds.

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE "While I love the push to have more Black executives inside the major labels, the real push should also be to support more independent labels and production companies. It is the vision of labels like Quality Control, LVRN and HITCO that will become the major labels of the future." —JOHNSON

Sylvia Rhone

Chairman/CEO, Epic Records

Traci Adams

Executive vp urban promotions, Epic Records

Ezekiel Lewis

Executive vp/head of A&R, Epic Records

June Cardona

Vp mixshow and lifestyle promo, Epic Records

Jennifer Goicoechea

Vp A&R, Epic Records

Mike Hamilton

Senior director of sales, Epic Records

Sylvia Rhone's team at Epic watched Giveon's 2020 single "Heartbreak Anniversary" take off on TikTok, amassing over 1.5 billion streams and peaking at No. 16 on the Hot 100 more than a year after its release, while his album *When It's All Said and Done... Take Time*, debuted at No. 5 on the Billboard 200. Epic also helped drive the success of projects from the Black Eyed Peas, Travis Scott, Future, 21 Savage, DJ Khaled, DDG, Tyla Yaweh and Littlejohn 4K, among others. Rhone is equally proud of Sony Music Group's 2020 social

“Innovation and authenticity are the building blocks of R&B and hip-hop and should never be watered down.”

SYLVIA RHONE, EPIC RECORDS

impact campaign, Your Voice, Your Power, Your Vote. “Through a series of short films and PSAs featuring artists and songwriters from the Sony roster like Pharrell Williams, DJ Khaled, H.E.R. and will.i.am,” she says, “we encouraged and empowered voters to take action and be heard.”

THE POWER OF BLACK MUSIC IN ONE WORD “Reflective.” —**RHONE**

Moe Shalizi

Founder, Pick Six Records

Shalizi’s Pick Six Records this year partnered with Interscope for the release from the newest Pick Six artist, Morray. The North Carolina rapper also scored a hit with his collaboration with J. Cole on “my.life,” which reached No. 2 on the Hot 100 in May, and Morray will join Cole on tour this fall. Meanwhile, Texas-born Pick Six artist Wacotron has gained nearly 300,000 monthly listeners on Spotify.

Arnold Taylor

CEO, South Coast Music Group

Daud Carter

Senior vp, South Coast Music Group

Garrett Williams

Vp marketing/head of operations, South Coast Music Group

South Coast Music Group’s marquee star, DaBaby, released his third studio album, *Blame It on Baby*, in April 2020, notching his second consecutive No. 1 on the Billboard 200 and his first Hot 100 No. 1 with the Roddy Ricch-assisted “Rockstar.” The latter earned him top rap song and top streaming song honors at the Billboard Music Awards, as well as nominations for best rap song and record of the year at the Grammys. In April, DaBaby made his live return with his first post-pandemic show in Orlando, Fla., with the SCMG and Interscope teams on site to deliver “multiple

platinum-plus album and single plaques for his accomplishments,” says Taylor.

FAVORITE ARTISTS DURING THE PANDEMIC

“Zay the Goat and Littlejohn 4K. When I listen to them, I hear and feel the hunger, passion and truth that every artist needs to make it to the next level.” —**CARTER**

Taz Taylor

Founder, Internet Money

Nick Mira

Executive producer, Internet Money

Daniel “Birdman Zoe” Desir

Manager, Internet Money

Production collective and record label Internet Money cemented its rising star status last year with the multi-artist album *B4 the Storm*, which debuted at No. 10 on the Billboard 200, led by its breakout hit, “Lemonade.” The track dominated both stateside and abroad, peaking at No. 6 on the Hot 100 and the Billboard Global Excl. U.S. charts, among other top rankings in “all places I’ve never been to but look forward to experiencing,” says Taylor, 28. “In Australia we had a top 10 album, in the U.K. we went No. 1 and in Portugal we went No. 2. It’s just cool that fans now know who Internet Money is because of what we were able to achieve during quarantine.”

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC “The Weeknd. The overall rollout of his album is an example of how, with good planning and brand identity, you can stretch an album’s life span. It’s rare to see artists live out their albums and let you be part of their world. Great albums tell an overall story, and he did that.” —**TAYLOR**

Anthony “Top Dawg” Tiffith

Founder/CEO, Top Dawg Entertainment

Terrence “Punch” Henderson

President, Top Dawg Entertainment

TDE counts “surviving the pandemic”



Megan Thee Stallion

as the company’s chief recent win, says Tiffith. Still, the house that Kendrick Lamar built did more than just make it through. Lamar’s 2012 breakthrough album, *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, earned the distinction of spending over eight years on the Billboard 200, while “on top of that, we’ve had two top 10 entries for SZA on the Hot 100 with ‘Good Days’ and [a featured spot on] Doja Cat’s ‘Kiss Me More,’” says Tiffith.

CONCERT I’M LOOKING FORWARD TO “TDE’s annual Christmas concert and toy drive in the Nickerson Gardens projects [in Los Angeles]. Nothing means more to me than giving back and putting a smile on kids’ faces.” —**TIFFITH**

Jeff Vaughn

Chairman/CEO, Capitol Music Group

Bill Evans

Executive vp urban promotion, Capitol Music Group

Amber Grimes

Senior vp global creative, Capitol Music Group

Emmanuelle Cuny

Senior vp video production, Capitol Music Group

Continuing to move R&B and hip-hop forward is on the top of Vaughn’s mind, as is continuing CMG’s success with new signee Mooski, whose “Track Star” topped the Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart in May. “The challenge is always to evolve,” says Vaughn. “R&B and hip-hop have been dominant in the U.S. for

some time now in terms of consumption. How can we, as a creative community, identify and uplift new voices, sounds and perspectives, and in doing so, reach more people with music?”

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE

“Long-term meaningful commitment to mentorship and professional development opportunities for underrepresented racial and ethnic groups in the executive ranks of our business.” —**VAUGHN**

Steven Victor

CEO, Victor Victor Worldwide; senior vp A&R, Universal Music Group

In June 2020, Victor established a philanthropic division of his VVW company, the Victor Victor Foundation, with a \$1 million pledge to fight systemic inequalities in the music industry. The organization now supports students in Brooklyn through the Fund for Public Schools, with an initial grant of \$25,000, as well as a \$100,000 contribution raised from the sale of rapper Pop Smoke’s capsule collection with Palm Angels. “You can’t wait around for other people to do the work,” says Victor, who also played an integral role in the release of Pop Smoke’s posthumous album, *Shoot for the Stars, Aim for the Moon*, which debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 and has yielded two top 10 hits on the Hot 100.

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC

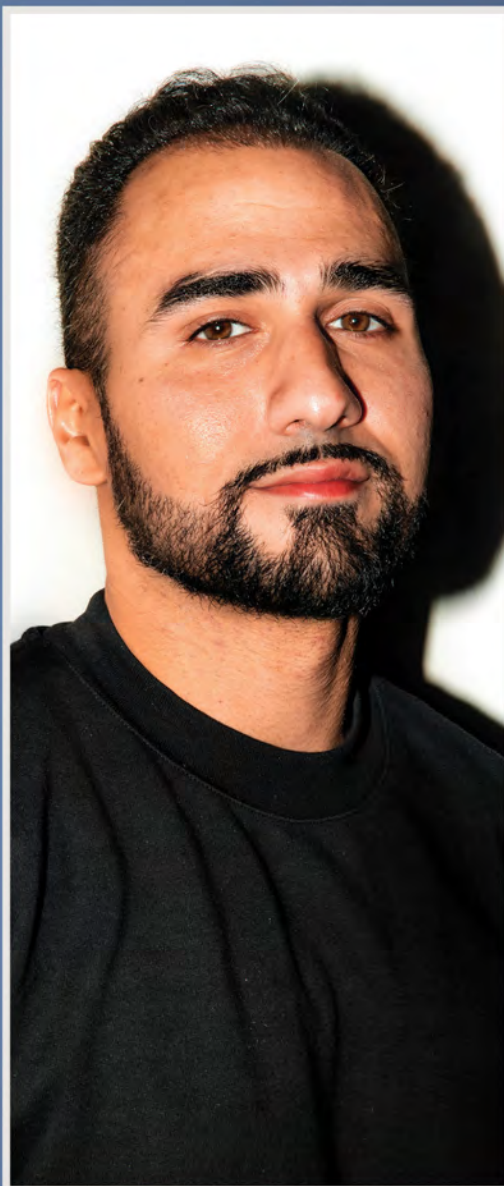
“Donna Summer. She defined my favorite era, disco.”

CONGRATULATIONS

GHAZI SHAMI
FOUNDER / CEO

NIMA ETMINAN
COO

TINA DAVIS
SVP OF A&R



2021 HIPHOP & R&B POWER PLAYERS



Real As It Gets



Lil Baby photographed July 15 at
Ambient + Studio in Atlanta.

Styling by Jason Rembert
Polo Ralph Lauren T-shirt, Prada vest.

PRADA
MILANO



Hit singles and high-profile collaborations made **LIL BABY** a star. Community outreach made him a hero. As he grows his business, the onetime Atlanta hustler is still putting in the work — and staying true to who he has always been

BY CARL LAMARRE

PHOTOGRAPHED BY AB+DM

LIL BABY

HAS INHALED THE LAST PIECE of his beef short rib inside Atlanta's plush brunch spot Toast on Lenox, and is about to dig into why he has had such a wildly successful past year when his phone starts to ring. He pauses the conversation for a very important FaceTime: His 2-year-old son, Loyal, is calling to tell his dad about a significant W in potty training.

Loyal also has a lofty request: He wants to meet Batman. Baby doesn't ask for more details — without hesitation, he agrees to facilitate a meeting. "Batman's gon' come," he reassures his son. "You'll see."

The rapper, born Dominique Armani Jones, is only 26 and on a major professional hot streak. Yet at a time when most young artists would be relishing fame and fortune, Baby has already shifted his priorities elsewhere. "Everything I'm doing is really for my kids," he says of Loyal, and his 5-year-old son Jason. When we first sat down to brunch, he avoided eye contact, but as he dives into his life as a father, he perks up, his voice no longer quivering. "I want more kids than I got because once you get older, you start to look at life differently," he continues. "Where I come from, I'm the only one, so I have to build the generation up and keep the family going. I need more children to continue the legacy."

That vision of legacy has sharpened recently for Lil Baby, a high school dropout and one-time weed dealer who, over the past 18 months, has not only joined hip-hop's A-list, but reached its peak. His second album, *My Turn*, released in February 2020, was his mainstream breakthrough, a hip-hop missive defined by his frenzied delivery and thoughtful storytelling that topped the Billboard 200 for five weeks. This year, he also emerged as a top-notch co-star, working alongside rap heavyweights Drake ("Wants and Needs") and J. Cole ("pride. is. the. devil") on top 10 Billboard Hot 100 hits as a featured artist, then teaming up with Lil Durk for collaborative LP *The Voice of the Heroes*, which returned Baby to No. 1 with 150,000 album-equivalent units in its



Louis Vuitton suit, Nike Air Jordan sneakers.



debut week, according to MRC Data.

And while those feats have propelled him to stardom, his position as a leader in the Black community is what has helped set him up as a potentially generation-defining artist. Last year, he wrote “The Bigger Picture” in response to the police killing of George Floyd — a rallying cry that was poignant but not preachy, bringing African Americans together for a common goal amid a chaotic period across the nation. Offering a more urgent dimension to the typically reserved rapper’s approach, “The Bigger Picture” reached No. 3 on the Hot 100, at that point the highest-charting song of Lil Baby’s career.

“To make that song about social justice, and even talk about what happened to George, was phenomenal,”

“I try to carry myself differently because I got people watching. I don’t even be doing what I really want to do. I do what I got to do now.”

—LIL BABY

says Philonise Floyd, the younger brother of George Floyd. “I thank [Baby] a lot for that, because he let a lot of other people understand that, ‘I might be from the streets, but I understand what’s going on in this world.’”

Baby’s heroics went beyond “The Bigger Picture”: In May, he joined the Floyd family at the White House, alongside attorney Ben Crump, to support passing the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. (The House of Representatives passed the bill in March, but the Senate has yet to approve it.) “He wanted to make a difference,” says Crump of Baby. “He reached out to people he knew to help George Floyd’s daughter, and that was his first involvement. He just continued to use his influence to encourage his follow-



Polo Ralph Lauren
T-shirt, AMIRI
jacket and pants.

ers to educate themselves so we can make a change, so this won't happen to other unarmed Black people.”

And Baby hasn't just acted on a national stage: He has devoted to his hometown of Atlanta as well. In June, he bought out an entire Foot Locker store and gave away sneakers in his old neighborhood; afterward, Baby downplayed his efforts on Instagram, telling fans that he was working on more important things that he wasn't ready to share on social media. He knows that his community needs a hero, not a celebrity figurehead. That mindset informs his every move, and may ultimately define his time in the spotlight.

“My life feels like a responsibility,” says Baby. “I'm not even trying to be no role model, honestly. [But] now that I know that I am, I try to carry myself differently, because I got people watching. I don't even be doing what I really want to do. I do what I gotta do now.”

WHEN LIL BABY WAS FIRST released from jail — in 2017, for possession of marijuana with intent to sell — and began his rap career in earnest, Quality Control co-founders Kevin “Coach K” Lee and Pierre “Pee” Thomas spotted a diamond in the rough. “The first records he made coming out of prison — when he played them, I was like, ‘These are not great, but they're good.’” recalls Thomas. “He looked at this like a hustle. This is the same type of dedication he had to making money in the streets. He was treating the studio like his music is the product, so he was dedicated to perfecting his craft and turning it into some money.”

Intrigued by Baby's potential, Lee and Thomas signed him to Quality Control at a time when the label was molding Migos into superstars while building its roster with budding talent like Lil Yachty and City Girls. When Baby's 2017 mixtapes *Harder Than Hard* and *Too Hard* started gaining underground attention — and when his subsequent 2018 debut, *Harder Than Ever*, made him a star, thanks in part to his top 10 hit with Drake, “Yes Indeed” — Baby channeled his street savvy into a legitimate endeavor: the music industry. He recalls the day he quit hustling, a wide grin on his face. “I started making more money rapping than I did hustling — monthly, I'm saying,” he

says. “At that point, I made [\$500,000] rapping: 20 bands a feature and four shows a week. It was no risk. Who ain't going to take the lowest risk?”

His entrepreneurial instincts developed further when he launched his own imprint, 4PF (Four Pockets Full). The label's roster of rising stars — Alabama rapper Rylo Rodriguez and Detroit newcomer 42 Dugg — is small but making an impact: Last December, Rodriguez's *G.I.H.F.* debuted at No. 11 on *Billboard's* Top Rap Albums chart, while Dugg, who also signed with Yo Gotti's CMG imprint in 2019, was featured on Lil Baby's Hot 100 top 10 single “We Paid” in 2020.

Baby's eye for talent isn't based on whether the music sounds polished or not — he prides himself on building personal relationships with his artists and judging authenticity before moving forward with them on the business front. “Most of the people that I sign come from my walk of life,” he says. “I got to feel your vibe because I ain't on no ‘studio rapper’ shit.”

His early wins as an executive haven't gone unnoticed. In July, Motown Records agreed to a label partnership with 4PF, giving Baby the freedom to sign, develop and launch the careers of a new generation of creative artists. “I look at him, and I think a lot about JAY-Z and the way Jay put out music on a consistent basis at the beginning of his career,” says Motown Records chairman/CEO Ethiopia Habtemariam. “Seeing where he came from — quiet in the back, but really pulling all the strings and making all the business moves and decisions — there's a lot of similarities there.”

And much like with JAY-Z, Baby's business acumen has impressed executives outside the music industry as well, including billionaire and Philadelphia 76ers partner Michael Rubin, who recently invited the rapper to perform at his Fourth of July party on Long Island. The two men have built a friendship based on their shared love of music and business, and Baby has taken a special interest in Rubin's REFORM Alliance initiative, which focuses on criminal justice reform. Co-founders JAY-Z and Meek Mill have landed major victories for the organization, most notably in 2020 when they got California Gov. Gavin Newsom to sign into law AB 1950, a bill that will limit adult probation sentence maximums to one year for misdemeanors

and two years for felonies.

“[Baby] is always asking the right questions and looking for new opportunities to learn and expand his skill set,” says Rubin. “I truly believe that he has the potential to make a meaningful impact on our world — way beyond the music industry — and become a leader for the next generation.”

According to Thomas, Baby's rhymes about social change resonate because they're grounded in personal experience. A song like “The Bigger Picture” doesn't speak about the need for police reform from a removed perspective; in the opening verse, Baby recounts how his own mother was devastated when police told her that her son wasn't leaving his jail cell. “None of us are trust-fund babies,” says Thomas. “There's a lot of opportunities out there, but in the Black community, it still is what it is. You have to be from here and understand this culture we come from. And [Baby's] the real definition of what Atlanta is and what it is to be a Black man making it out.”

Baby's origins remain his badge of honor, not just in the studio but in the boardroom. “I maintain all the street principles: You got to give respect to get respect,” he says. “My grandma used to tell me, ‘You're a first-class citizen.’ I know in these rooms they assume for me to be a thug or a rapper. But I'm going in as a first-class citizen.”

“LE BABY! LE BABY!”

In June, Lil Baby was in Paris, hanging out with NBA superstar James Harden during Fashion Week, when paparazzi surrounded the two as they were leaving their hotel. The yells of one particularly enthusiastic reporter became viral gold as a frazzled Baby delivered a half-hearted smile before heading out with Harden.

But the trip wasn't all lighthearted social media fodder. Baby was arrested while in Paris and taken into police custody on charges of carrying marijuana. (He was released the same day and ordered to pay a fine.) “The whole Paris experience let me know I got to get bigger overseas,” he says matter-of-factly. “Not saying to not go to jail for breaking the law, but for the police to know who I am.”

Parisian police may not have recognized him, but the 14,000-plus fans who attended his concerts during

his stay in Europe certainly did.

Though he admits to not rehearsing often over the course of the pandemic, Baby received an adrenaline rush after performing overseas in July every night. He's looking forward to fine-tuning his stage show once he launches the Back Outside Tour with Lil Durk, beginning in September, but he'll get some practice this summer, as a headliner at the 10th annual Made in America Festival and also as a top-line performer at Rolling Loud in New York and Los Angeles. “I'm going to be better prepared for the tour,” says Baby confidently. “Right now, my goal is to make my show the craziest shit on Earth. Like Rolling Loud, I'm trying to make my sets crazy. What else would I be doing — vacation?” At Rolling Loud Miami in July, Baby prioritized the 4PF brand, bringing out Rodriguez and 42 Dugg to assist on different tracks.

Meanwhile, he's also piecing together his as-yet-untitled third solo album, for which he's making one key change to his previous creative process: writing out his lyrics, after previously freestyling all of them. “I'm in a whole different head space than I was at with *My Turn* — I'm going to be at a different level every time I drop because I'm at different levels in life,” he says. Though he remains tight-lipped about further details of his forthcoming album, he says his dream collaboration, with André 3000 — whom Baby describes as “a cold motherfucker” — is in the works. “I talked to somebody who be talking to him, and he's on it right now. We're in third-party communications.”

As both his fans and business partners have learned at this point, trusting Baby's instincts — and his reputation for more than following through on them — is a no-brainer as he prepares for his next chapter. “The thing about Baby is, he's going to watch, learn, listen, let you speak and pay attention, but he's also going to do the work,” says Habtemariam. “He's going to show up and be there.”

Case in point: Last December, in the midst of closing out the biggest year of his career, Lil Baby attended and paid for George Floyd's daughter Gianna's seventh birthday party in Atlanta. “He took time out of his life to make sure that my niece had a great birthday party, and he's still in her life,” says Philonise Floyd. “To me, it's a beautiful thing.”

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

Co-founders/co-CEOs, Cash Money Records
Cash Money reported close to \$20 million in global recorded music revenue in 2020, thanks to its current acts and catalog roster of Nicki Minaj, Drake and Lil Wayne. The company has expanded its infrastructure in promotion, marketing, video, publicity and streaming to benefit its next class of talent, which includes Jacquees, Eighty8, Reese Youngn and Casper Bluff. In October 2022, the Williams brothers will receive a lifetime achievement award from the Living Legends Foundation, which recognizes entertainment industry trailblazers.

Nicole Wyskoarko

**Executive vp/co-head of A&R,
Interscope Geffen A&M**

Ramon Alvarez-Smikle

**Senior vp/head of urban digital marketing,
Interscope**

Laura Carter

Senior vp/head of urban marketing, Interscope

Tim Glover

Senior vp A&R, Interscope

Keinon Johnson

Senior vp/head of urban promotions, Interscope

Caroline “Baroline” Diaz

Vp A&R, Interscope

Thanks to its culture-dominating roster—including Juice WRLD, DaBaby and Summer Walker — Interscope Geffen A&M earned three top honors in 2020: top Billboard 200 label, top Hot 100 label and top label on *Billboard’s* year-end charts. IGA’s partnerships with CMG and Dreamville were also successful, securing No. 1 Billboard 200 debuts from Moneybagg Yo and J. Cole, respectively. “Those huge accomplishments really showcase how well the Interscope team works together with our partners,” says Wyskoarko.

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE “We must continue to fight for representation across all verticals in the industry, from creatives to C-suite executives, and stay committed to the long-term work required for meaningful change.” —WYSKOARKO

Multisector

Tunde Balogun

Co-founder/president, LVRN

Junia Abaidoo

**Co-founder/head of operations and touring,
LVRN**

Justice Baiden

Co-founder/head of A&R, LVRN

Sean “Famoso” McNichol

**Co-founder/head of marketing and brand
partnerships, LVRN**

Carlton Ramong

Co-founder/creative director, LVRN



J. Cole

In May, LVRN — whose roster includes Summer Walker, Shelley (formerly known as DRAM) and 6LACK — announced a slew of executive hires and company promotions to bolster its female leadership. “We believe in empowering women across the board and hope to continue to show women coming up that there is always a place at the table for them,” says Baiden, who adds that the move was “the missing link.” The Atlanta-based label and creative agency also recently signed to its management roster Toronto R&B duo dvsn, which is also repped on the label side by Drake’s OVO Sound.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP “Artists and labels need to find more efficient ways to stay active but still create demand without oversaturation.” —BAIDEN

Shawn “JAY-Z” Carter

Founder, Roc Nation

Desiree Perez

CEO, Roc Nation

Jay Brown

Vice-chairman, Roc Nation

Roc Nation surged into 2021 with clients J. Cole, DJ Khaled and Moneybagg Yo, who combined to rule the No. 1 spot on the Billboard 200 with their latest albums. The label and management company’s talent roster also continues to score with new albums from Willow and Snoh Aalegra and an expected set from Belly. In September, Roc Nation will put on the 10th edition of its Made in America festival, which will take place at Philadelphia’s Benjamin Franklin Parkway with performances by Justin Bieber, Lil Baby and Megan Thee Stallion.

CONCERT I’M LOOKING FORWARD TO “The Made in America festival, because Jay-Z continues to curate a stellar lineup.” —PEREZ

J. Cole

Co-founder, Dreamville

Ibrahim “Ib” Hamad

Co-founder, Dreamville; manager, J. Cole

Cole collected his sixth Billboard 200 No. 1 album in May with *The Off-Season*, which launched with 282,000 equivalent album U.S. units — 2021’s biggest week for a hip-hop release. “The energy around the release felt like a special moment,” says Hamad, 37. Cole kicks off a 17-city tour on Sept. 24, and the following month the Dreamville roster — which includes Bas, J.I.D., Omen, Lute, Ari Lennox, Cozz and EarthGang — will reunite for a one-night-only concert at the Red Rocks Amphitheater in Colorado. The label is also working on its multidisciplinary media and content divisions, which formed last October.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP “Respect for our genre. A lot of times we still don’t get the same look and push as a pop artist.” —HAMAD

Sean “Love” Combs

**Founder, Combs Enterprises, REVOLT,
Bad Boy Records**

Combs spoke out in April with a scathing open letter to corporate America. “If you love us, pay us,” he wrote, taking issue with the national advertising spend on Black-owned businesses like his cable network REVOLT, stating that the amount of spending by national advertisers on Black-owned businesses was less than 1% of \$239 billion in 2019. Two months later, on June 1, he upped the stakes with a “buy Black” initiative, announcing a partnership with cloud computing giant Salesforce to launch Shop Circulate, a digital marketplace for Black-owned businesses. “Building Black wealth,” Combs says, “starts with investing in Black-owned businesses.”

DJ D-Nice

Founder, Club Quarantine, Brand Nice

D-Nice established the Instagram livestream series *Club Quarantine* — with attendees including Rihanna, Michelle Obama and Drake — to help create a sense of togetherness amid the pandemic. In June, he partnered with Live Nation Urban to launch a live-music series based on the livestream, with the first in-person event “already sold out” at Los Angeles’ Hollywood Bowl in August, featuring Common and The Isley Brothers, and followed by a Brooklyn show in September, with Stephanie Mills and KRS-One. “I’ve seen an overwhelming response from the artist community,” says D-Nice.

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE “More Black executives driving Black music conversations.”

Ghazi

Founder/CEO, EMPIRE

Nima Etmnan

COO, EMPIRE

Tina Davis

Senior vp A&R, EMPIRE

In 2020, the San Francisco-based distributor and record company launched its music publishing division with signings including producer !llmind and songwriter Justin Love, as well as EMPIRE recording artists Young Dolph and Yung Bleu. But what Etmnan is most proud of is the independent company’s 2021 Grammy nominees, including D Smoke, Freddie Gibbs & The Alchemist and The Free Nationals. “D Smoke getting that best new artist nomination, our first since Anderson .Paak a few years ago,” he says, “was icing on the cake.”

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE “Getting rid of traditional record deals that don’t empower the artist.” —ETMINAN

HIP-HOP HONORS

SWAY

SHADE 45
CH. 45



HIPHOP
CH. 44

RONNIE



the heat
CH. 46

DION

pandora
Now
CH. 3

JOSH "J1"



It's an honor to work with these honorees

CONGRATULATIONS

Sway Calloway, On-Air Host, *Sway in the Morning*/SiriusXM

Ronnie Triana, Director, Music Programming/SiriusXM

Dion Summers, Vice President, Music Programming/SiriusXM

Josh "J1" Raiford, Director of Hip Hop/Pandora and
Director, Music Programming/SiriusXM

for being named to **Billboard's 2021 R&B/Hip-Hop Power Players List**.
So proud you're part of our radio family.



Yo Gotti

Founder/CEO, CMG Records
See story, page 35.

Aubrey “Drake” Graham

Co-founder, OVO/OVO Sound

Noah “40” Shebib

Co-founder, OVO/OVO Sound; producer

Oliver El-Khatib

Co-founder, OVO/OVO Sound

Mr. Morgan

President, OVO Sound

The OVO team stands behind Drake’s continued dominance in pop and R&B/hip-hop. Drake ranked No. 5 on *Billboard’s* year-end top artists chart for 2020 and No. 5 on the year-end Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs Artists recap. In June, Drake’s “One Dance” was one of a select number of tracks named to Spotify’s Billions Club playlist for having scored more than 1 billion streams. Also that month, during an interview at the Ultimate Rap League’s N.O.M.E. XI battle rap event, the Toronto MC stated that his next, much-awaited full-length album, *Certified Lover Boy*, will arrive before the end of summer, but an official release date has not been set.

Shawn Holiday

Full Stop Management, Giant Records, Giant Music Publishing

In February, it was reported that Shawn

Holiday, the Columbia Records co-head of urban music, was launching a new label and publishing venture with The Azoff Company. The highlights of the months since, says Holiday, include a deal between Giant Music Publishing and DJ SwanQo, who co-produced and wrote “Up,” the No. 1 Hot 100 single from Cardi B. “A huge achievement for us,” says Holiday. “This signing happened as a result of my relationship with [rapper/songwriter] Pardison Fontaine that I have built throughout my years of working with him. Pardison delivered DJ SwanQo to us, and this marks another exciting milestone in our professional relationship. We are looking forward to all of the successes this partnership will bring.”

THE POWER OF BLACK MUSIC IN ONE WORD

“Transformative.”

Neil Jacobson

Founder/CEO, Hallwood Media

Cory Litwin

Executive vp, Hallwood Media

Cristina Chavez

Senior vp A&R, Hallwood Media

Hallwood Media, which manages producers and songwriters, launched in May 2020 but already has contributed to some of the biggest hits of the past year, including two Hot 100 No. 1 singles produced or co-written by their signees: Cardi B’s

“Up” (Yung Dza) and Polo G’s “Rapstar” (Murda Beatz). Hallwood has recruited other producers from across the globe, including Daysix from the Czech Republic and Zypitano from the United Arab Emirates, both of whom produced Rod Wave’s “Rags 2 Riches,” and Elyas from Germany, who worked on “Solid” by Young Thug & Gunna, featuring Drake. The latter track debuted at No. 12 on the Hot 100 and was featured on Thug’s Billboard 200 No. 1 album, *Slime Language 2*.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/

HIP-HOP “The glorification of drugs and violence. We need more artists with voices to make music with positive messages or at least to let their fans know that music is just entertainment, and that drugs and guns aren’t cool.” —LITWIN

Gee Roberson

Co-CEO, Blueprint Group; partner, Maverick

Cortez “Tez” Bryant

Co-CEO, Blueprint Group; partner, Maverick

Jean Nelson

CEO, BPG Records; partner, Blueprint Group

Al Branch

Partner/chief marketing officer, Blueprint Group

Bryan Calhoun

Head of digital strategy, Blueprint Group

Bryant and Roberson count the blockbuster release of management client Lil Nas X’s “Montero (Call Me by Your Name)” among their top achievements of the past year — silencing any talk that the Atlanta native (co-managed with Adam Leber of REBEL) could be a one-hit wonder, following the record-breaking “Old Town Road,” featuring Billy Ray Cyrus. “Montero” secured Lil Nas X his second No. 1 on the Hot 100 and topped both of *Billboard’s* global charts, reestablishing the artist as a hitmaker with staying power.

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC

“A Tribe Called Quest’s *Midnight Mayhem*, because great, classic music keeps me in a positive zone for the future.” —ROBERSON

Wassim “Sal” Slaiby

Founder/CEO, SALXCO/XO Records

Abel “The Weeknd” Tesfaye

Co-founder, XO Records

Amir “Cash” Esmailian

Co-founder, XO Records

LaMar Taylor

Co-founder, XO Records

Gordan Dillard

Artist manager, SALXCO

Team XO celebrated a major win in early 2021 when The Weeknd became the first solo Black Canadian artist to headline the Super Bowl halftime show. The pop superstar then embarked on an awards show sweep: 10 Billboard Music Awards, five iHeartRadio Music Awards, five Juno Awards and a flurry of SOCAN, ASCAP

Turning Talk Into Action

FOR #THESHOWMUSTBEPAUSED AND THE BLACK MUSIC ACTION COALITION, THE WORK OF HOLDING THE INDUSTRY ACCOUNTABLE CONTINUES

A year later, the quest remains the same. #TheShowMustBePaused and the Black Music Action Coalition (BMAC) steadfastly continue their fight to achieve sustainable racial diversity, equity and inclusion in the music industry.

After #TheShowMustBePaused co-founders Brianna Agyemang and Jamila Thomas brought the multibillion-dollar industry to a standstill on June 2, 2020 (marked by black boxes on social media), that day of reckoning inspired some immediate action. Major labels and other companies established funds to donate to various Black community organizations. Task forces were created to support Black employees and executives advocating for in-house change. Black diversity, equity and inclusion officers were hired. And Sony, BMG and other firms launched initiatives to cancel recoupments and fix inequities in royalty payments to legacy artists.

Those efforts, however, only warranted a passing grade when the BMAC released its first Music Industry Action Report Card in June. Headed by co-presidents/co-chairs Binta Niambi Brown and Willie “Prophet” Stiggers, the BMAC — a coalition of Black artists, managers, attorneys and allies — voiced serious concerns at its findings.

“Many of the changes appear to be surface,” Brown told *Billboard* following the release of the 37-page report. “They appear to be just enough as opposed to manifesting a deep, internal churning and transformational change leading toward true equity. When it comes to justice, average isn’t good enough.” Moving forward, the BMAC plans to annually expand its report until it “represents a 360-degree view of the industry and is acknowledged and respected as a standard and official tool of accountability.”

Agyemang and Thomas of #TheShowMustBePaused are doubling down on their commitment as well. In a statement released June 2, the duo announced its Still Paused public self-accountability report, asking music companies and industry professionals for “five things your company has done to push the industry toward equitable change in the past year. The launch of this new initiative marks us formally asking people to turn their black boxes into actionable change for individuals and companies alike.” —GAIL MITCHELL



Drake

and BRIT Awards in the wake of his 2020 album, *After Hours*. Beyond these accolades, Slaiby, 41, says that “what’s even more special is Abel and XO’s drive to give back to those in need. His initiative to help the Ethiopian crisis [highlights] his passion for philanthropy.” Meanwhile, SALXCO client Doja Cat, co-represented by 10Q Management, earned three Grammy nominations, hit No. 1 on the Hot 100 with “Say So” featuring Nicki Minaj and aggregated 3.7 billion U.S. streams. SALXCO also signed EDM supergroup Swedish House Mafia, which recently returned with new music and is planning a 2022 global tour. “I can go on and on,” says Slaiby of his company’s various endeavors, including managing new client Sean Combs. “We’re busy.”

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE “Equality and opportunity for all.” —**SLAIBY**

Steve Stoute

Founder/CEO, UnitedMasters/Translation

Stoute’s drive to empower artists has fueled his recent successes, from registering more than a million independent acts with UnitedMasters to creating two virtual SelectCon events attended by 1.6 million people, which “each provided inspiration and advice to help artists build their careers on their own terms,” says Stoute. In April, Apple Invested in UnitedMasters, Joining Andreessen Horowitz and Alphabet’s investment, which will “translate to more resources, tools and opportunities for UnitedMasters’ community of independent artists,” he says.

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC

“Tobe Nwigwe’s songs ‘I Need You To (Breonna Taylor)’ and ‘Make It Home’ brought people together across the country regardless of economic status or race and garnered support from LeBron James, Madonna, Michelle Obama and the NBA to name a few.”

Management

Lydia Asrat

Co-founder/CEO, 10Q Management

Josh Kaplan

Co-founder/president, 10Q Management

10Q Management’s marquee artist Doja Cat (co-managed with Gordan Dillard of SALXCO) was forced to delay her tour supporting her 2019 album, *Hot Pink*, when the pandemic hit. She rallied with high-profile award show performances, including the 2021 Billboard Music Awards in May, where she debuted her SZA-featured, Hot 100 top five hit “Kiss Me More.” “She never really got to bring her vision to life,” says Kaplan, noting that the live performances gave fans “a glimpse of what to expect from her live show.” The experience elevated the rising



The Weeknd

star to the level “we knew she would and should be at when we started working with her years ago,” adds Asrat.

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE

“The creatives who make the product have to not just have a voice, but the deciding voice in how their art is presented, exploited and monetized. Without that involvement, things won’t really change.”

—**KAPLAN**

Fee Banks

CEO, Good Money Global

After nearly two decades in New Orleans’ hip-hop scene— working with Lil Wayne’s Young Money and Sqad Up — Banks’ managing career took off with the success of Baton Rouge, La., rapper YoungBoy Never Broke Again, who scored three No. 1 albums on the Billboard 200 in under a year and also topped the Artist 100, Hot 100 Songwriters, Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums and Top Rap Albums charts. With artists such as rappers RJA and Rojay signed in 2020 and plans to open a studio in his hometown, Banks and Good Money Global are aiming for continued strength post-pandemic.

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE

“I would like to see a change in the younger generation with gun violence and having guns on display as a way of expressing how gangster they are.”

Charlene Bryant

Founder, Riveter Management

Launching Riveter Management in 2018, Bryant guided the rise of Trippie Redd, whose 2020 album, *Pegasus*, peaked at

No. 2 on the Billboard 200 in November. The rapper’s Playboi Carti collaboration “Miss the Rage” debuted at No. 11 on the Hot 100 in May, marking the highest bow for both rappers as lead artists.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/

HIP-HOP “Artists are starting to get accolades for their accomplishments; however, there is still a lack of Black executives leading the genre.”

Adam Leber

Founder, REBEL

Leber, who has managed Lil Nas X with his former partners at Maverick, announced in April the formation of his new management company, REBEL (his surname spelled backward), in partnership with Live Nation. He retained Lil Nas X (with Gee Roberson), Miley Cyrus and Labrinth as clients in the move. “I launched REBEL the same week we released Lil Nas X’s ‘Montero (Call Me by Your Name),’” says Leber. “I can’t think of a better way to start things off than with a song that caused so much controversy simply because the artist was being his truest self.”

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE

“Tolerance. We’ve got to be more tolerant toward one another.”

Dre London

Founder/CEO, London Ent.

Last year, London, who manages Post Malone, launched the subscription-based concert-streaming service AUX Live, which allows artists to perform for their fans around the world and doubles as a library of archived concerts. London’s

next goal is to allow fans to purchase tickets to live shows that they can enjoy from home. “I feel as if the pandemic has taught us to hustle even harder and be innovative,” he says.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/

HIP-HOP “The pandemic shuttered a lot of historic venues, especially in the underground circuit. And these venues were crucial in the development of artists early on in their careers in a lot of markets.”

Jeff Robinson

Founder/CEO, MBK Entertainment

Jeanine McLean-Williams

President/managing partner, MBK Entertainment

MBK had “incredible moments” to celebrate in 2021, says McLean-Williams, thanks to the talent of clients including H.E.R. and Tiara Thomas. The artists earned a song of the year Grammy in March for writing “I Can’t Breathe,” and a month later, their “Fight for You” earned the Academy Award for best original song — the first time in 35 years that a songwriting team won an Oscar and a Grammy in the same year for different compositions. “Two African American women winning both accolades back to back is historic,” says McLean-Williams. “Seeing the joy on their faces after each win was heartwarming and priceless.”

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/

HIP-HOP “R&B is not dead and will never die — it’s the core, the lifeblood of all music. It deserves the same marketing dollars, visibility and respect as ‘pop’ music.”

—**MCLEAN-WILLIAMS**

Paul Rosenberg

President/CEO, Goliath Artists; president/CEO, Shady Records; president/CEO, Goliath Records

In December 2020, Rosenberg, 50, helped steer the deluxe release of his longtime client Eminem's latest album, *Music To Be Murdered By*, which resurged to No. 3 on the Billboard 200. The Detroit rapper's catalog also continues to soar: His 2002 No. 1 Hot 100 hit "Lose Yourself" became one of just a handful of songs to reach 1 billion streams on Spotify in February, while his 2005 greatest-hits album, *Curtain Call*, has spent almost 10 consecutive years on the Billboard 200. "Respect for the culture has always been the cornerstone of hip-hop," says Rosenberg. "Anyone who is entrusted with the music and artistry needs to ensure they're actively working to advance that legacy."

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE "People taking large steps toward each other for greater understanding by communicating with one another. I'm a firm believer that most problems start and end there."

Anthony Saleh

CEO, Emagen Entertainment Group

Ebonie Ward

Music manager, Emagen Entertainment Group

Saleh, whose management roster includes hip-hop stars like Nas and Gunna, says that "collaborating with David Ali on managing Kehlani" was a major recent win, as the R&B singer scored her highest-charting album to date with 2020's *It Was Good Until It Wasn't*, which peaked at No. 2 on the Billboard 200. Also, Saleh used his platform as a founding member of the Black Music Action Coalition to increase voter registration in the Black community.

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC

"Wizkid. I thought he had the album of 2020." —**SALEH**

Travis Scott

Founder, Cactus Jack

David Stromberg

GM, Cactus Jack

While the pandemic slowed down the music world, Cactus Jack moved at rocket speed. Stromberg applauds his team for innovative ideas throughout the year, including the highly successful Travis Scott x *Fortnite* event and the rapper's Cacti Agave Spiked Seltzer deal and McDonald's partnership. Tickets for the 2021 Astroworld Festival sold out in 30 minutes — before the lineup was announced, and Cactus Jack apparel has become top-grossing merchandise on several sales platforms, says Stromberg. The Cactus Jack team also launched philanthropic partnerships with the Parsons School of Design in New York and the city of Houston.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/

HIP-HOP "Hip-hop drives the culture, and artists need to know their value and retain their rights and ownership and not be taken advantage of by major corporations."

—**STROMBERG**

Chris Thomas

Managing partner, Range Media Partners

After seven years at C3 Management — where he signed rapper Jack Harlow, among others — Thomas, 33, joined Range Media Partners as managing partner in July. Thomas still works with his marquee star, who scored his first Grammy nomination in 2020 for best rap performance with "Whats Poppin'," followed by an appear-



Travis Scott

ance on *Saturday Night Live*. "It felt like the culmination of a year of hard work and success," says Thomas, "but also the byproduct of half a decade of Jack pushing himself to evolve."

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC

"Frank Ocean. Frank's music has soundtracked so many moments of my life, from late-night parties to the first dance at my wedding. His catalog hit the full spectrum of emotions we all went through during the last 18 months."

Justin "Meezy" Williams

CEO, Meezy Entertainment

In the spring, Williams, 32, helped his star client, 21 Savage, break into the movie business when he brokered a deal for the rapper to executive-produce the soundtrack for the next *Saw* film installment, *Spiral: From the Book of Saw*, and contribute the theme song. "Putting that whole thing together and having everyone on our team play a part opened a lot of doors for us in Hollywood for the future," he says. Williams is also proud of the rapper's appearance at Miami's Rolling Loud music festival in July along with A\$AP Rocky, Travis Scott and Post Malone.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/

HIP-HOP "Knowing what you sign. Understanding leverage and not following everything that looks shiny. A lot of managers and companies don't give a fuck about

building you a solid team or understanding that all money ain't good money."

Anthony Wilson

Founder, Anthony Wilson Management

Wilson took on Chris Brown as a management client, calling the artist "authentic" and "the ultimate performer." He also flexed his talent for visual media over the past year, executive-producing 50 Cent's upcoming Starz drama series, *Black Family Mafia*, which reports say stars Snoop Dogg, La La Anthony and Kash Doll, among other well-known music names.

THE POWER OF BLACK MUSIC IN ONE WORD

"Strength. It is the key ingredient to our daily lives. Black music has a very strong influence on the majority of the human population, not just African Americans. We work to it, work out to it, cook, dance [and more]."

Streaming

Kathy Baker

Head of U.S. label relations, YouTube

Naomi Zeichner

Artist partnerships lead, YouTube

Brittany Lewis

Artist relations manager, YouTube

Rachel Jackson

Artist relations manager, YouTube

"It's becoming increasingly difficult in this attention culture to get fans to focus on anything for more than a heartbeat. Our challenge is to make our audiences care."

PAUL ROSENBERG, GOLIATH ARTISTS/SHADY RECORDS

Through the #YouTubeBlack Voices Fund, established in 2020, the YouTube Music team named 21 artists to its inaugural class, provided them with grants and worked with community organizations to reach underserved youth aspiring to enter the music business and other creative fields. The next iteration will feature expanded eligibility to include songwriters and producers, while the company's Artist on the Rise programs have continued to highlight young up-and-coming R&B/hip-hop artists like 24kGoldn, Latto, Jack Harlow and Rod Wave.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP "Equity for Black artists and improving monetary outcomes, and improving visibility and opportunities for the elevation of Black executives." —**BAKER**

Swizz Beatz Timbaland

Co-founders/co-owners, *Verzuz*
See story, page 30.

Caiaffa

Interim head of music, SoundCloud

Erika Montes

Head of artist development and relations, SoundCloud

After a yearslong process — and what she describes as a "very tense and emotional" 2020 — Montes, 44, and her team at SoundCloud discovered a way to bring fairer payments to artists, in the form of "fan-powered" royalties. Starting in April, acts could establish a deeper connection with their fans "so that the artists are encouraged to build a real audience who will support them both on and off SoundCloud," she says.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP "It's important to remember the work and activism that started last June and to remember to keep that energy going and stay united. Let's be less critical and more supportive in real life and not just our socials." —**MONTES**

Tim Hinshaw

Head of hip-hop and R&B, Amazon Music

Andrew Sexton

Senior label relations manager, hip-hop and R&B, Amazon Music

Rochelle Balogun

Hip-hop music curator, Amazon Music

As the streaming platform continues to grow, this year Amazon Music's hip-hop team highlighted Black artists who shatter genre barriers through the new playlist PRSM. "Through this playlist and similar programming," says Balogun, "we continually strive to ensure that the right artists, genres and sounds are being served to our listeners while also increasing their opportunities for artist discovery."

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE "More storytelling in music. Our strength has always been our ability to create our own worlds sonically while illustrating life with

lyrics. Right now, we [need to] document the moments we're experiencing beyond emotions and really tell stories that connect with people and can stand the test of time."

—**BALOGUN**

Larry Jackson

Global creative director/co-head of artist relations, Apple Music

Ebro Darden

Host/global head of editorial, hip-hop and R&B, Apple Music

Programming exclusive Apple Music radio shows like *Mo Talk Radio With Monica* and Lil Wayne's *Young Money Radio* were among the highlights of the past year for Jackson and Darden. The hit pandemic series *Verzuz* hosted by Swizz Beatz and Timbaland, now on Triller, came first to Apple Music in July 2020 in a unique deal that had the artist battles, which began on Instagram, simulcast on Apple and Apple Music 1 with audio and eventually video and highlights on demand.

Dave Macli

Co-founder/CEO, Audiomack

David Ponte

Co-founder/chief marketing officer, Audiomack

Jason Johnson

Vp marketing and brand strategy, Audiomack

Audiomack's recent achievements include securing licensing deals with the three major labels and integrating the artist-first music streaming platform into the *Billboard* charts. The music discovery app also selected rappers Pooh Shiesty and Rod Wave for the company's #UpNow series, which provides specialized marketing, editorial programming, social promotion and play-listing to support their artist development.

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE "More Black executives in C-suite positions. Global culture is influenced by American culture, and American culture is influenced by Black culture. Black music and culture helped create the new economy."

—**JOHNSON**

Mjeema Pickett

Head of R&B/soul, Spotify

Sydney Lopes

Head of hip-hop and R&B, artist and label partnerships, Spotify

Carl Chery

Creative director/head of urban music, Spotify

Spotify influences Black music culture with RapCaviar, the most popular hip-hop playlist on the streaming platform with nearly 14 million followers and a robust social media following that has "become an extension of the hip-hop team's editorial voice," says Chery. Next up is Feelin' Myself, which boasts 1.8 million followers and was launched in 2019 in the hopes of "leveling the playing field for female artists." Its first marketing campaign exclusively featured female performers. "The playlist has become the second-fastest-growing and second-biggest hip-hop playlist on Spotify," says Chery.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP

"Rappers have been dying at an alarming rate. We lost XXXTentacion, Mac Miller, Nipsey Hussle, Juice WRLD, Pop Smoke, King Von and Lil Loaded in less than three years. I can't remember a time in hip-hop history when we were surrounded by this much death." —**CHERY**

Josh "J1" Raiford

Director of hip-hop, Pandora; program director, SXM Pandora Now

Raiford — a graduate of Atlanta's historically Black Morehouse College — says his involvement in SXM/Pandora's Pathways Associates Program was "very special to me." The program will provide recent graduates and early-career professionals from historically Black colleges and universities with the opportunity to take part in a 12-month training, networking and mentorship program geared toward bringing more diverse talent into the streaming service and "the development of more Black executives and decision-makers," he says.

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC

"Lil Baby. He continues to evolve and improve. His song 'The Bigger Picture' really showed his versatility and understanding of many social issues."

Elliott Wilson

Chief content officer, TIDAL

Wilson says that the months following Square's acquisition of TIDAL in March have been the most exciting in the streaming platform's six-year history, noting that "a lot of game-changing plans are on the horizon." With hip-hop and R&B "at the forefront of pop culture [as well as] market leaders at streaming, physical sales and digital sales," the company aims to be the "most nimble digital service provider, with outsize cultural influence and impact," he adds. "Some call TIDAL 'the people's app.' It's what we strive to be each day."

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP

"How many artists struggle to sustain fan and media interest over time, even with acclaimed releases. Too much quality music is discarded too quickly due to a consuming desire to discover the next new thing."



Kehlani

The Greatest Showman

With a demanding Las Vegas residency and a new album that's on track to be his most vital in years, a fired-up **USHER** isn't ready to settle for legacy-artist status just yet

BY GAIL MITCHELL

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ALEXANDRA GAVILLET



Usher photographed July 19
at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas.

Styling by Jason Rembert
Louis Vuitton jacket, shirt and
sneakers; Denim Tears jeans.





Louis Vuitton jacket,
Dolce & Gabbana shirt.

IT'S LATE AFTERNOON IN Las Vegas, and the temperature outside is an ungodly "100-plus stupid," according to a local newscast — the kind of weather that sends people scuttling to sit beneath the nearest AC unit. But down in the cool darkness of The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, Usher Raymond IV is busy working up a sweat.

He's wrapping up the first day of rehearsals with the full cast and crew for his first Las Vegas residency, which will open in just 10 days, on July 16. Against a backdrop of a neon-lit city skyline that stretches the width of the massive stage, the superstar and his dancers — including several zipping about on skates — gyrate around a dozen floor-to-ceiling pillars that give the roughly 4,300-seat theater some added drama. He powers through some of his early-2000s hits in quick succession: "Lovers and Friends," "Bad Girl," "My Boo," "U Remind Me." Later that night, in a black-and-white backstage suite that was originally built for Céline Dion — it includes a dressing room, a kitchen, a conference room and a separate garage housing his motorcycle — he says he has been relishing the creative freedom of a residency like this. "I always put so much effort into the choreography of these songs and the emotional aspect," he says. "But with this, I was given an opportunity to be a little theatrical, so I decided to make the show an evolution of all my work."

It makes perfect sense that Usher would end up on a Sin City stage. Watching the lithe 42-year-old, even in rehearsal mode, is a reminder of the dazzling showmanship that set him apart from his pop and R&B peers when he first started scaling the charts in the 1990s. And with nine Billboard Hot 100 No. 1s to his name — tied with the Bee Gees, Elton John, Katy Perry and Paul McCartney for the 10th most in the chart's history — he is a fitting choice to help welcome back Vegas nightlife with one of the first major residencies since the pandemic began. (It was originally scheduled to open last July, and completes a string of summer dates in August before returning in December.) He'll be joined in town this year by returning residency headliners like Bruno Mars (whose Park MGM residency has grossed \$29.1 million from 25 shows, according to figures reported to Billboard Boxscore) and Gwen

Stefani (\$22 million from 49 shows at Planet Hollywood Las Vegas), as well as Vegas first-timers like Perry and Carrie Underwood (whose shows will debut in December).

"This is something we've wanted to do for a long time," says Amanda Moore, senior vp Las Vegas residencies at Live Nation Entertainment. "People want to party in Vegas, and there's no greater soundtrack than Usher's hits with their multigenerational and global appeal. I don't think there's a person on the planet that doesn't know the words to 'Yeah!'"

Usher: The Las Vegas Residency isn't just arriving at a pivotal time for live music. It's kicking off at a pivotal point for Usher, too. He hasn't toured North America since 2014's UR Experience trek. Despite his popular-

music industry, hip-hop has become the dominant cultural force, and a new generation of R&B prodigies has revived the genre — and also made it more competitive than ever. But while the enthusiastic response to his Vegas residency suggests he could easily coast on nostalgia, Usher isn't ready to settle into legacy-artist status just yet. "I would call myself 'seasoned' more than 'elder statesman,'" he says, smiling.

Still, Vegas is just one part of a multipronged plan to reintroduce Usher and his catalog to the public, according to Laffitte, who took him on as a client two years ago. Laffitte was the one who suggested a residency to Khan — he also manages the Backstreet Boys, whose first Vegas residency, which ran from 2017 to 2019, was a spring-

Doja Cat and Jazmine Sullivan. It's also where Usher gets to work with longtime friend Mark Pitts, who was named label president in January. The two have history: A teenage Usher briefly lived in New York with Pitts and Sean Combs, who were rooming together at the time, while recording his self-titled 1994 album, and Pitts had a top A&R role at Arista during Usher's early-2000s tenure there. Asked if he still sees that precocious teen in Usher today, Pitts laughs fondly. "The pain in the ass? Yeah, absolutely," he says. "He was always singing in the hallways, whether it was the scales or something else from his vocal lessons. We'd be like, 'Shut the hell up.' And he still does that!"

Though Usher has steadily released new tracks in the last few years, Pitts credits Adult R&B Songs No. 1s like 2019's "Don't Waste My Time" with Ella Mai and 2020's "Bad Habits" with "putting the battery back in the pack" for the new album, which was originally due last summer but postponed amid the pandemic. "That has given us time to make things as bulletproof as possible," continues Pitts. "The game may be changing as to how new music is introduced, but what hasn't changed is that it always goes back to making great, timeless R&B music. The rest will work itself out."

Besides, Usher has always been a natural shape-shifter, building out his R&B foundation with forays into pop, EDM and trap — see 2018's *A*, a joint project with producer Zaytoven paying tribute to Atlanta hip-hop — and working with everyone from Diplo and David Guetta to Jermaine Dupri and Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis. A member of his team previewed half a dozen songs for *Billboard*, which feature a mix of old and new collaborators. There's the Dupri-produced "Believe," an uptempo breakup track; a new-lease-on-life anthem called "Fresh Air" produced by Mike Sabath (Lizzo, Meghan Trainor); and "Kissing Strangers," a striking reflection on the aftermath of a relationship produced by the late busbee (Maren Morris, P!nk).

Collectively, those songs are reminiscent of the classic R&B sounds and intimate lyrics on a pair of his career-defining albums, *8701* and *Confessions*. Some of Usher's most treasured hits have been the anguished slow jams that felt ripped from his diary, even if they weren't strictly

"There's a playful nature that I think is coming back. I actually feel like I'm having fun. And that had been missing for some time."

—USHER

ity as a touring artist, his team was a little nervous when it put tickets on sale last September, months before vaccine rollouts. "I knew there was pent-up demand to see Usher in this setting, yet we didn't know if it was going to work against us," says Julia Khan, who co-manages him with Patriot Management's Ron Laffitte. "But people voted with their ticket purchases, feeling there would be light at the end of this tunnel."

Usher also hasn't released a proper studio album since 2016's *Hard II Love*, which yielded two top 10 singles on the Adult R&B Songs chart but became his first album in 12 years to not debut at No. 1 on the Billboard 200, ending a four-album streak that began with 2004's blockbuster *Confessions*. In that time, the growth of streaming has reshaped the

board for a subsequent world tour and the group's first No. 1 album on the Billboard 200 in almost 20 years. (The group will return to Planet Hollywood for a Christmas residency in November.) "Usher understands what it means to level up," says Laffitte. "Between hosting the iHeart Radio Awards [in May] and now the residency, the purpose was to reactivate and reenergize Usher's multigenerational fan base at a time when youth is dominating with Spotify, Apple and other [streaming platforms]."

Usher has also spent the last few years working on his ninth studio album — his third on RCA — which he expects will roll out later in 2021. RCA is, of course, not a bad place to be for an R&B artist — right now, it's home to next-generation powerhouses like Khalid, SZA, H.E.R., Normani,

autobiographical, and Usher has lived a lot of life since his last album, including a divorce from second wife Grace Miguel in 2018. But there has been plenty to celebrate, too, including a new relationship with Jenn Goicoechea, vp A&R at Epic Records, with whom he is expecting a second child. (Daughter Sovereign Bo was born in September; Usher has two sons from his other previous marriage.) Even his voice sounds richer with experience. “He has always been an energetic singer and performer,” says RCA chairman/CEO Peter Edge. “But his vocals now are insane.”

Vegas, to hear Usher tell it, is where his story comes together: a chance to celebrate his legacy, sharpen his creativity and let his life off the stage thrive as much as his life on it. “I’m feeling like I’m about 18 right now — in terms of passion, not wisdom,” Usher says with a laugh. “There’s a playful nature that I think is coming back. I actually feel like I’m having fun. And that had been missing for some time.”

Why a residency, and why now?

I probably would have had a different answer before the pandemic. But after we shut down, it made even more sense. After a year of being isolated, there was an opportunity for people to come from all around the world and experience what felt like the reopening of life and entertainment. The other side of it is: I have a bit of difficulty bottling up all the different audiences I’ve collected over time. But the one place where you can speak to everybody is Las Vegas. It’s universal ground, a melting pot of people coming from all over America, Australia, India, Asia, Europe, Africa.

There are tons of festivals, but Las Vegas gives you a different opportunity — a guarantee in some way. It has also afforded me the opportunity to really be the family man I’ve always wanted to be with an incredible partner I love very much.

You’ve always been a showman at heart. How did that inform your Vegas residency?

It’s hard for me to stand still. I work for every bit of applause I get. I try my hardest to give people an incredible experience. Because we’re in Las Vegas, you’ve got all types of shows, from burlesque to others that are more risqué, so why not take that opportunity to be as creative as possible? There’s a strip-club scene [in the show]. Skating is a part of my culture from Atlanta, and that’s something that I’ve never actually done onstage before. When I think of Vegas, I think Gene Kelly, Sammy Davis Jr., Elvis — those are the people who’ve inspired me to play in this space. I had a lot of time to think about the show, and I really do enjoy the added value of being immersed in a theatrical experience.

What’s your daily regimen like to prepare for this?

My preparation starts at six in the morning with stretching and yoga to wake my body up. Then I’ve been working out every day with an amazing trainer at a UFC facility. We work in water, lift weights and do a lot of core exercises, focusing on my pelvic floor, to make sure I can handle all the dancing, skating and singing I’m doing. I’m arming my body almost like an athlete, a boxer. Between 7 and 9 a.m., I have a little something



Dior turtleneck and pants, Berluti coat, Louis Vuitton sneakers, Boucheron ring, Hublot watch.

“How people feel about my music has never been up to me. It’s up to their interpretation of how they feel about it.”

—USHER

to eat. By then, my body is warmed up just enough to work with my vocal coach. Then I move into a few meetings about the show, maybe work with the band, have a little lunch and squeeze in another meeting. I try to stop around six o’clock, review notes I’ve made during rehearsal. Then I get home around eight to spend time with the kids, have a little dinner and then decompress.

Listening to the new music, it sounds like you spent a lot of time soul searching and pressing the reset button — like many of us have lately.

I had already spent two years collaborating and recording with some of the producers I worked with on *Confessions*, like Jermaine Dupri and Bryan-Michael Cox in Atlanta. There’s always the responsibility to speak to the audience that has been growing with you, and also to a new audience. What I’ve always done is just try to make music that’s as true as I can possibly be and also offer something I think people can learn from and experience with me: relationships, love, life, the reality of our growth and maturity. But you’re right. I think this pandemic gave me another year to kind of reset, even though I did put out a few records and made some videos.

In 2019, you posted an Instagram from the studio with a whiteboard that read “Confessions 2.” Is that the title of the album?

I am not at the place where I’m going to sign off on the album title at this point. But I am working on an album, and it would be very smart to say it will come out this year. It’s probably too vague right now to determine whether it’s going to be in the *Confessions* vein or if it’ll be something else. It’s still kind of a moving target, as I’m just beginning to put together a sequence. Some of the songs that you heard have been at the top of my list for the last year. And you heard a few new ones as well. I do want to put together a body of work that speaks to all of the people that I’ve been able to capture as fans but also will be something unique to me and to R&B music that doesn’t just live in one space.

How do you feel about having veteran status in an industry so focused on the next young, new thing?

It’s not easy to sustain a career, but there are artists who have managed to do it and have been here for some time: Beyoncé, Alicia Keys, Justin Timberlake, Janet Jackson. And that hasn’t changed opinions about who they are and what their



contributions still are. I just hope I'm in that same category. But it hasn't changed my ability to embrace new artists coming up, like Summer Walker, Yuna, doing duets with Ella Mai or Chris Brown. I definitely understand the reality — and the idea — of embracing [the] new.

My mother used to always say, "When all else fails, just continue to do something good." The more music you put out, the more people begin to understand. That's why I stay creative and collaborative, working with up-and-comers like Mike Sabath. How people feel about my music has never been up to me. It's up to their interpretation of how they feel about it.

Is there a song or album you wish the public had understood better?

I think people have understood the way they could have. And I was as sure as I possibly could have been from *8701* and *Here I Stand* to *Looking 4 Myself*, *Confessions* or *Hard II Love*. People are critical. But you continue to do it for the love. You do it for people to connect with what you're trying to articulate. That pressure is there every time. That's why I try to give myself as much of a shot as I possibly can by giving fans variety. You're going to like *something*. (Laughs.)

How important are numbers — charts, streaming — to you now?

No. 1 is always going to mean a lot to everybody. But it doesn't, and shouldn't, change your passion. It hasn't changed mine, whether I put out a record that hit No. 1 instantly or took time to get there. I have a record company that's willing to fight for it and get it heard, to connect with my audience and prospective new fans. I've tried a lot of stuff. There's a way to play in R&B where you can be as creative as you want. Don't cut yourself off — don't feel you need to be tied so authentically to one thing. I see what H.E.R. is doing, what Giveon, Daniel Caesar and Justin Bieber are doing. But people choose to try and segregate [R&B music]. Sometimes it's a bit odd that an R&B record with worldwide appeal has to go through a very specific funnel before the rest of the world can hear it. Why is it that an R&B record can't just be launched and heard around the world?

Are you still involved in the Raymond Braun Media Group, which you co-founded with Scooter Braun?

Yes, it's our production company. The only artist we have together in RBMG is Justin Bieber. We're not doing any other projects currently, but we'll be

friends for life. I am on a remix of Justin's "Peaches." He doesn't need me now. (Laughs.) But he asked me to do it. It has been great to be part of what was already an amazingly successful record.

In the recent Netflix docuseries *This Is Pop*, T-Pain said he battled depression after a conversation years ago in which you made harsh comments about his use of Auto-Tune. He clarified on social media that there's no bad blood between you, but the story got a lot of attention. How do you respond to that?

I'm happy that T-Pain said something — I'm not sure if it was before or after our actual conversation, after I heard what was said. It was very hurtful to know that he had experienced that kind of hardship in life. I wouldn't wish that on any person. Private conversations for me have always been intended to uplift. But when or if people get pieces of it, they can always have some other interpretation. But we've spoken since and we're good.

In an interview last year, The Weeknd described hearing your 2012 song "Climax" and thinking it directly borrowed from his style, though he

was flattered. You then posted a video of yourself singing those high notes, as if to say, "No one else can sing this but me." Where do you two stand?

With regard to The Weeknd, he's another person I had a positive conversation with who completely felt [the headlines were] a misinterpretation. Again, I can't get caught up in what's said outside when I know person to person that no harm was meant.

Fans have been clamoring for an Usher session on *Verzuz*. Is that on your radar?

I'm really happy to see what's going on with *Verzuz*. But I don't think I'm going to do it as of right now. However, if you want to hear a curated catalog of songs, come to Las Vegas. It's waiting for you, baby. (Laughs.)

Outside of music, you were at the White House earlier this year when President Biden formally declared Juneteenth a federal holiday. What did that mean to you?

I'd heard of Juneteenth, but there was an awakening in me to investigate deeper and understand the reality of our history: We had to declare our individuality and independence because it gives us recognition, ownership and entrepreneurship here on American soil. It's the ability to uplift and truly be a participant in what it is to be an American. Should I have been the person advocating for it as much as I did? I don't know. But more than just making music, I wanted to use my life to be able to shine a light in that direction. I wanted people who didn't necessarily know their history to understand. We deserve to have that day.

With everything going on for you right now, it feels like your 40s have become a clarifying phase in your life.

I'm really at peace right now. Part of it has to do with living long enough to have come through certain things. Time management now is very important — knowing what to choose to give your attention to and how that will determine your outcome. You can pick a job and do that job every day. Yet it may not necessarily be as gratifying because it feels like a regimen, an obligation. But I'm still in love with music and so glad I chose this as my life's passion, because it continues to fuel me. 📺

HAR BY SHAWN SHIZZ; FORTIER; MAKEUP BY COLE PATTERSON; MARKET EDITING BY NICOLA SAKIL AND SONIA BEDIERE

Publishing

Nikisha Bailey

Vp A&R, administration, operations and production, Artist Partner Group

Matt MacFarlane

Vp A&R, Artist Publishing Group

Eli Piccarreta

Vp A&R, Artist Partner Group

Artist Partner Group saw 24kGoldn's "Mood" first hit No. 1 on the Hot 100 last October — then again in November, December and earlier this year in January. APG, led by Mike Caren, also became a fully independent label separate from Warner Music Group in the past year, with its previous shared Atlantic recording roster staying there — and landed its first hit with Cico P's "Tampa." The success continued in March with a Grammy win for songwriter Derrick Milano for Megan Thee Stallion's "Savage" remix.

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC

"The Kid LAROI because of how dynamic and well-written his music is. Good songs always win." —MACFARLANE

Steven Greener

Partner, Primary Wave Music

Greener in the past year signed Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis to Primary Wave's management division and closed a deal with BMG for their new album, *Jam & Lewis Vol. 1*. He helped Fantasia and her husband, businessman Kendall Taylor, launch their social media channel, Taylor Talks Tuesday. Greener says now it's time for "real industry recognition" of R&B and hip-hop — especially at the Grammys. "Beyoncé, Kanye West, JAY-Z, Drake, SZA, Kendrick Lamar... none of these artists [have won album of the year]. It sounds odd just hearing that."

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE "More women as producers and heads of labels. Women in the power seats."

Ian Holder

Senior vp creative, Sony Music Publishing

Adrian Nunez

Vp creative A&R, Sony Music Publishing

Jennifer Drake

Senior director of creative, A&R,

Sony Music Publishing

Will Skalmoski

Senior manager of creative, A&R,

Sony Music Publishing

Sony Music Publishing opened a fifth U.S. office in April 2020, complete with a studio complex in Atlanta. Located in the former RedZone Entertainment space where artists and producers have made music for Beyoncé, Rihanna, Future and Usher, among others, the complex in the city's Buckhead neighborhood will offer master classes and songwriting workshops for music creatives from the area. "It is an honor to better serve our Atlanta songwriters and give back to the city's dynamic music community," says Holder.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/

HIP-HOP "Predetermined creative boundaries." —HOLDER

Walter Jones

Co-head of A&R, Universal Music Publishing Group

Ari Gelaw

Director of A&R, Universal Music Publishing Group

Sureeta Nayyar

U.S. international A&R director, Universal Music Publishing Group

In June, UMPG took home publisher of the year at ASCAP's Rhythm & Soul Awards, landing No. 1 hits on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart from The Weeknd ("Blinding Lights"), DaBaby and Roddy Ricch ("Rockstar") and Drake and Lil Durk ("Laugh Now Cry Later"). Those wins were "a major testament to the hard work of our talented songwriters and team," says Jones. Nayyar signed and represents Grammy winner Burna Boy from Nigeria and his producers. She also created UMPG Nightshift, a global songwriting



Ari Lennox

collaboration initiative with writing camps taking place in Paris, London and Atlanta and on Zoom during the pandemic.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/

HIP-HOP "Lack of education about the business. As a publisher, it is shocking that people are more concerned with their credits showing up on Spotify than they are about making sure they properly registered their song at ASCAP and BMI." —GELAW

Chris Lakey

Senior vp creative synch, Kobalt Music

Rob Brown

Vp business affairs and commercial strategy, Kobalt Music

Kobalt celebrated a 2020 Clio Music Gold-winning entry for client Moses Sumney, whose track "Doomed" was featured in an anti-racist ad for Procter & Gamble. Lakey says he wants to see "Black music represented more in the music synchroni-

zation world" and "Black songwriters and producers being considered for original and bespoke work."

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE

"More diversity in industry boardrooms. Until we have more of us at the table with authority, meaningful change will always run the risk of dilution to the point of insignificance." —BROWN

Tab Nkhereanye

Senior vp A&R, BMG

In May, BMG re-signed songwriter-producer Dernst "D'Mile" Emile II in a deal that was a "total team effort," says Nkhereanye. Emile has recently been honored for his work with H.E.R. — including an Academy Award for best original song for "Fight for You" from *Judas and the Black Messiah* and a song of the year Grammy for the protest anthem "I Can't Breathe." "Black music represents 44% of music on the Hot 100, but we're only 4% of the decision-makers," says Nkhereanye. "That has to change."

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE "The lack of senior-level leadership."

Ryan Press

President of A&R, U.S., Warner Chappell Music

Rich Christina

Senior vp A&R, Warner Chappell Music

Wallace Joseph

Vp A&R, Warner Chappell Music

Natascha Augustin

Senior creative director, Warner Chappell Music Germany

Amber Davis

Head of A&R, Warner Chappell Music U.K.

The Warner Chappell team signed breakout R&B singer-songwriter Ari Lennox, whose *Shea Butter Baby* spent four weeks on the Billboard 200. "It has been incredible

"The power of Black music and artists is universal. It influences everything, every genre, every singer... you name it."

STEVEN GREENER, PRIMARY WAVE MUSIC

Congratulations!

Michelle Richburg

Billboard Hip-Hop
Power Players 2021

"Everyday I woke up to be the best. I did not think about the challenges and the uphill battle. Everyday, I had to underpromise and overdeliver."

—Michelle Richburg
The Dreamers Podcast



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to see her progress as both a songwriter and a performer,” says Joseph. “Her unique sound has truly captivated fans around the world with hit songs like ‘Shea Butter Baby’ and ‘Self Love,’ and I couldn’t be prouder to have the opportunity to represent her at Warner Chappell.”

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE “Getting more qualified Black executives — especially female Black executives — in leadership positions across all parts of the music industry, not just in urban- and R&B-focused roles. While things are starting to change and move in the right direction, there’s a lot more work to do to ensure our teams are as diverse as the music we represent.” —**JOSEPH**

Media

Jade Lewin

Former music partnerships manager, Facebook

Prior to departing Facebook earlier this summer, Lewin was chosen for the R&B/Hip-Hop Power Players list on the strength of her recent work for the social media giant. “I’m most excited about the Kid Cudi Oculus Venues show that I booked in December 2020, which was his first performance since the release of *Man on the Moon III: The Chosen*. I’ve been a

fan since high school, and he’s one of the reasons I’m working in music today. This was a full-circle moment for me.” Lewin was also involved in Facebook initiatives featuring Megan Thee Stallion, H.E.R., Miguel, D-Nice and others.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP “Equity and accountability.”

Connie Orlando

Executive vp specials, music programming and music strategy, BET Networks

Orlando and her team spent the last year helping to reinvent BET’s award shows. When the 2020 BET Awards aired, they were the first all-virtual major awards show presented after the pandemic began. In 2021, the BET Awards were one of the first to bring back a full, in-person, vaccinated audience, all while sticking true to what Orlando calls the “core” of the awards themselves: “unforgettable moments and the celebration of Black excellence and culture as a whole.”

CONCERT I’M LOOKING FORWARD TO “All of them. I just want to surround myself with people, music and good times.”

Kashon Powell

Vp programming, Radio One

In May, officials in Richmond, Va., chose Urban One’s development proposal — one of six — for a \$560 million casino, complete with an on-site TV/radio production

studio. The win was “monumental,” says Powell, 48, and will help the company “develop a world-class entertainment destination in Richmond.”

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC

“New Edition. I’ve been a fan from the very beginning. When I listen to their music, it takes me back to a simpler time in my life.”

Isabel Quinteros

Director of artist partnerships, TikTok U.S.

TikTok exposure contributed to the success in the past year of No. 1 Hot 100 hits including Olivia Rodrigo’s “drivers license,” Cardi B’s “Up” and Lil Nas X’s “Montero (Call Me by Your Name).” In January, the social media company revealed the first class of its new incubator program, selecting 100 Black creators on the platform to take part in educational events and town halls with Common, Charlamagne Tha God and Gabrielle Union, among others, and learn how to advance their careers. The program aims to “further grow and develop an already flourishing Black creative community on TikTok,” says Quinteros, who notes that “three program participants were signed to agencies for representation.”

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC

“Pop Smoke. He brought back that cocky, flashy New York style of rapping that dominated in the 2000s and felt like a breath of fresh air.”

Reggie Rouse

Urban format captain, Audacy; vp programming, Audacy Atlanta; brand manager, WVEE (V-103) Atlanta

This past year, Rouse participated in Audacy’s partnership with Clark Atlanta University, “which includes our dinner-and-learn series and seminars with our leadership team, our on-air team and teams from our programming, digital, sales and podcast departments. This program will eventually expand to other HBCUs [historically Black colleges and universities],” he says.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP

“Social justice and using our voices to be heard musically and socially.”

Kenny Smoov

Vp urban formats/classic hip-hop, Cumulus Media

Cumulus marked Juneteenth this year as a companywide holiday with supporting promos on-air and online. “Our executive team is moving the needle when it comes to inclusion and diversity,” says Smoov, who oversees 37 R&B/hip-hop stations in 25 U.S. markets. Another proud moment, he adds, was navigating the still ongoing pandemic without “massive” cuts within the company: “We did it as a team.”

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP

“The sameness of the music, sonically and lyrically. Our music moves generations — it has done that for decades. Lately, however, we’ve been in a rut, on

the hip-hop side particularly. We have big voices and stars that can change the world. I’d like to see them tap into that.”

Dion Summers

Vp music programming, SiriusXM

Ronnie Triana

Director of music programming, SiriusXM

Sway Calloway

On-air host, *Sway in the Morning*, SiriusXM

In its latest superstar programming collaborations, SiriusXM launched Drake’s *Sound 42* channel as well as *The 2Pac Channel*, a limited engagement channel created with the late rapper’s estate. “They are testaments to our commitment to provide exclusive and compelling Black music entertainment to our subscribers,” says Summers, 47, who believes the industry needs to acknowledge, promote and compensate executives of diverse backgrounds “with the same level of consistency that other executives are afforded.”

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE

“Mindsets. Stop looking at us as less than or undeserving of the rights and respects that others take for granted. The times have changed, but the mindsets have stayed the same. Until that changes, we will never advance to where we need to be as a society.” —**SUMMERS**

Doc Wynter

President of hip-hop and programming strategy, iHeartMedia; program director, KRRL (Real 92.3) Los Angeles

Thea Mitchem

Executive vp programming/executive vp hip-hop and R&B strategy, iHeartMedia; program director, WWPR (Power 105.1) New York

Charlamagne Tha God

Co-host, *The Breakfast Club*, iHeartMedia; co-founder/chief creative officer, Black Effect Podcast Network; senior creative officer of cultural content and programming, iHeartMedia

DJ Envy

Co-host, *The Breakfast Club*, iHeartMedia; podcast creator, *The Casey Crew*

Angela Yee

Co-host, *The Breakfast Club*, iHeartMedia; podcast creator, *Angela Yee’s Lip Service*

In February, Roddy Ricch and 21 Savage performed for iHeartRadio’s *Living Black!*, shot at Black-owned businesses across the United States, with Mitchem as executive producer. Last October, iHeartMedia launched the Black Effect Podcast Network with Charlamagne Tha God and iHeartRadio’s HBCU Homecoming, with participating acts including Megan Thee Stallion and Lil Baby. “When homecoming season was canceled,” says Mitchem, “[we] stepped in to bring some of the joy, magic and pride to HBCU members everywhere with an uplifting monthlong celebration across multiple platforms.”

CONCERT I’M LOOKING FORWARD TO “Kirk Franklin. His music centers me and gets me ready to take on the world.” —**MITCHEM**



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BILLBOARD'S

R&B/HIP-HOP

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TRISTAR
SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT GROUP
BUSINESS MANAGEMENT - TAX

Agencies

Ari Bernstein
Mari Davies
Yves C. Pierre
Jacqueline Reynolds-Drumm
Concerts agents, ICM Partners

ICM came out of the gate looking strong this year, signing U.K. soul singer Joss Stone for worldwide representation, shaking up its leadership team to add more diversity to its board and inking Imanbek, which it will share with Primary Talent International (which it teamed up with in 2020 for worldwide representation). “We grew during the pandemic and believe we will come out of this pandemic stronger than ever,” says Reynolds-Drumm. She, Bernstein and Pierre were appointed to the agency’s concerts leadership committee in May.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP “Recovery. The last 18 months were tough, and it’s important that we not just recover but rebuild stronger and with equity at every level of our industry.” —**BERNSTEIN**

Callender
Vp, Wasserman Music
Anthony DiStasio
Vp branding, Wasserman Music
 Paradigm Talent Agency announced the sale of its North American music division to Casey Wasserman’s sports, entertainment and lifestyle marketing agency in March, signaling the launch of Wasserman Music. During a challenging time for the live industry, the creation of a new agency,

with a roster that includes Jack Harlow, Gucci Mane and Run the Jewels, was an accomplishment that “speaks volumes on our culture,” says Callender, 36. “We’re determined and resilient.”

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP “Sitting out for a year with no shows has created a touring bottleneck, as all artists of every genre are looking to hit the road simultaneously. Creativity, innovation and flexibility will be key during this time as we work alongside managers, promoters, festivals and affiliated partners to create opportunities to get these artists on the go, performing and paid appropriately.” —**CALLENDER**

Mark Cheatham
Co-head of global hip-hop/R&B touring group, Creative Artists Agency

Akin Aliu
Anthony Brown
Ryan Thomson
Music agents, Creative Artists Agency
 Representing Cardi B, A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie, Saweetie, Lakeyah, Anthony Hamilton, City Girls and NLE Choppa, among others, Cheatham is co-head (along with Joe Hadley) of CAA’s global hip-hop/R&B touring group. He and Hadley oversee a department of 15 agents and executives, including Aliu, who represents Doja Cat, Becky G and others; Brown, who services artists in the genre outside North America; and Thomson, who brought Lil Nas X, Lil Tecca and, most recently, Playboi Carti to CAA. The agency’s most notable achievement of the past year? “Helping establish the Social Change Fund,” says Cheatham, “which aims to invest in and support Black communities.”

“Pop culture as we know it is based on the evolution of Black music around the globe.”

CARA LEWIS, CARA LEWIS GROUP

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP “How we return to live music — at full venue capacities — in a safe way.” —**CHEATHAM**

Zach Iser
James Rubin
Kevin Shivers
Caroline Yim
Partners/co-heads of hip-hop/R&B, WME

In 2021, WME expanded its commitment to racial justice when it signed Sean Combs and partnered with the legendary producer/entrepreneur to launch the Excellence program. It aims to be one of the largest virtual development programs for aspiring entertainment executives from underrepresented communities. “This is so important to us,” says Rubin, 42. “It empowers, educates and inspires the next generation of leaders and executives.”
CONCERT I’M LOOKING FORWARD TO “Festivals have always been a place where people from different backgrounds can discover new artists and bond over a shared love of music.” —**ISER**

Cara Lewis
Founder/owner, Cara Lewis Group
 For the Cara Lewis Group, 2020 was a year of rerouting tours, booking livestreams and signing branding deals, such as Travis Scott’s partnership with McDonald’s. Now, Lewis says her agency is preparing for “a super-busy fourth quarter” of bookings for BIA, Vic Mensa, Erykah Badu and The Roots, among others. One highlight: Scott’s two-day Astroworld 2021 festival, which “sold out in 30 minutes — 50,000 tickets — without an announced lineup,” says Lewis, whose team is also planning 2022 road trips for Eminem, Chance the Rapper and Russ.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP “Reading through a recent study by the University of Southern California’s

Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, female Black executives still aren’t getting the positions that they deserve — white male executives in the music industry still outnumber Black women executives 17.7 to one. With Black music shaping what pop culture looks like today, the statistics for Black female leadership should be incomprehensible.”

Cheryl Paglierani
Partner/agent, music, UTA
Chris Jordan
Agent, music, UTA
Mike G
Agent, music, UTA

This year, UTA expanded its global footprint with the acquisition of U.K.-based Echo Location Talent Agency, which brought in clients in hip-hop, dance music and beyond. Recently promoted partner Paglierani, together with Jordan and UTA’s global music brand partnerships team, closed a deal for client YG to be a creative director for K-Swiss, for which the artist is designing two new versions of its classic sneaker, as part of the Compton Country Club campaign.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP “Venue availability and the potential oversaturation of the touring market in 2021. With so many artists looking to tour again at the same time, it’s going to be challenging for all to succeed. We are seeing great success across initial on-sales, but we may see a temporary drop before we’re able to level back up.” —**PAGLIERANI**

Live

Tariq Cherif
Matt Zingler
Co-founders/co-CEOs, Rolling Loud



Erykah Badu



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QUALITY CONTROL

AND ALL OF OUR

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PLAYERS

WHEREVER THERE ARE BLACK DREAMS
AND DREAMERS, MOTOWN IS THERE



Cherif and Zingler started the 2021 summer touring season with the announcement of Rolling Loud Presents, the hip-hop festival's new national touring company with Live Nation, with upcoming tours from Rod Wave, Trippie Redd and Jack Harlow. After multiple pandemic postponements of Rolling Loud Miami, originally scheduled for February 2020, the show finally took place July 23-25 and will be followed by festivals in New York in October and Los Angeles in December. Says Zingler: "I just can't wait to see all the fans together again."

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP "Oversaturation — artists who, either by the label or on their own, do not pursue a unique sound or lane in their career." —ZINGLER

Shawn Gee

President, Live Nation Urban

Gee is preparing for the return of live music with LNU's first event, Club Quarantine Live, featuring the pandemic's go-to DJ and rapper, D-Nice. "We sold out the Hollywood Bowl in L.A. and are preparing a rolling announcement strategy for other markets we are playing," says Gee, noting that he is ready to continue R&B/hip-hop's steady upward trajectory post-pandemic. "We plan to continue to invest to help scale live platforms in the R&B space, like the Lights On Festival, our partnership with H.E.R., and a few new brands we are building."

THE POWER OF BLACK MUSIC IN ONE WORD "Foundational. Black music and Black culture is at the foundation of so much; its influence is seen, felt and heard everywhere."

Heather Lowery

President/CEO, Femme It Forward

Last December, Femme It Forward launched its new mentorship program, Next Gem Femme, to accelerate career opportunities for women of color in the workforce. The program has so far connected young industry professionals with over 100 mentors. "The response and support have been inspiring," says Lowery. "On and off the stage, we need to empower, educate and celebrate women and under-represented voices in the industry."

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC "The Clark Sisters, because their music inspires me to push forward."

Tyler Scott

Tour promoter, Live Nation

Jen Smith

Director of tour marketing, Live Nation Concerts

In September, Live Nation Urban will celebrate the return of H.E.R.'s Lights On Festival in Concord, Calif. Now in its second year, the R&B festival — featuring H.E.R., Erykah Badu, Bryson Tiller, Ari Lennox and others — sold out within days. That shows

the "demand for R&B as a genre," says Scott, 28, "which hasn't traditionally been filled or celebrated at that level."

THE POWER OF BLACK MUSIC IN ONE WORD "Fortitude. Black music is a celebration of the struggle. To transcend suffering and create something beautiful out of it." —SCOTT

Business Management

Michelle Richburg

President/CEO, Richburg Enterprises

In May, Warner Music Group tapped Richburg Enterprises — whose clients include SAINt JHN and A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie — as the accounting and tax compliance firm for its \$100 million WMG/Blavatnik Family Foundation Social Justice Fund. Established in June 2020 in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, the fund aims to create change for historically underserved and marginalized communities. "The fund's grant-making supports organizations investing in Black communities worldwide and prioritizes selecting Black business leaders to advance its mission," says Richburg.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP "Financial literacy — from understanding contracts to personal expenses and overall tax consequences."

Lou M. Taylor

Founder/CEO,

Tri Star Sports & Entertainment Group

Lauren Cooper

Business manager,

Tri Star Sports & Entertainment Group

Taylor's business management company recently created the Tri Star Sports & Entertainment Group Finish Line Scholarship, which this year provided \$70,000 in funds to help 21 seniors at Spelman College, a historically Black college for women, pay the balance of their tuition. While Cooper represents Travis Scott, Justin Tranter and others, Tri Star's roster under Taylor, 56, also includes Mary J. Blige, YBN Cordae and the Prince estate.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING R&B/HIP-HOP "The proper allocation of the earnings generated by an artist actually being received by the artist." —TAYLOR

Performing Rights

Nicole George-Middleton

Senior vp membership, ASCAP; executive director, ASCAP Foundation



H.E.R.

During the pandemic, ASCAP rallied to "increase revenue collections by 4% and provide the financial support that our members needed during a difficult time," says George-Middleton, noting that "the crisis is not over." The performing rights organization established a new Aspire internship program with historically Black colleges and universities to cultivate the next set of Black entertainment executives. "We still need to see more executives of color at the tables where decisions are made, especially relating to Black music," she says. "Representation is extremely important."

CONCERT I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO "Beyoncé, because her concerts are electrifying from beginning to end."

Sean Glover

Director of industry engagement, SoundExchange

Despite the pandemic's economic downturn, SoundExchange in 2020 maintained "business as usual," says Glover, and paid out \$947 million in royalties collected from noninteractive digital radio operations like SiriusXM, Pandora and other webcasters. "I am extremely excited that we were able to continue to pay artists at a time when musicians weren't able to perform live to earn a living," he says.

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE "Equality and respect for all Black artists. If Black lives matter, then value them in the music industry as if it does. We don't need any more symbolic gestures."

Wardell Malloy

Vp creative, Los Angeles, BMI

Among Malloy's recent signings is R&B breakout star H.E.R., whose achievements in the past year include an Academy Award for best original song, for the *Judas and the Black Messiah* collaboration "Fight for You," written alongside D'Mile and Tiara Thomas, and a song of the year Grammy for the protest anthem "I Can't Breathe." "Watching H.E.R. and my longtime signee D'Mile take over the R&B scene made me feel like a proud parent," he says.

FAVORITE ARTIST DURING THE PANDEMIC

"Snoh Aalegra. I love her voice and musicality — all real songs. I would put her on and zone out."

Mario Prins

Vp creative, SESAC

Prins, who signed Nigerian star and Grammy winner Burna Boy to SESAC for direct U.S. representation last August, points to the creation of the Diversity & Inclusion Network as one of the company's highlights from the past year. "I'm proud to be on this team and to have an opportunity to contribute to the committee's efforts toward change," he says.

THE CHANGE WE STILL NEED TO SEE "Equality."

Contributors Darlene Aderoju,

Trevor Anderson, Rania Anifetos, Rich Appel, Chuck Arnold, Katie Bain, Alexei Barrionuevo, Anna Chan, Ed Christman, Tatiana Cirisano, Leila Cobo, Mariel Concepcion, Stephen Daw, Frank DiGiaco-mo, Marcus Dowling, Thom Duffy, Chris Eggertsen, Griselda Flores, Josh Glicks-man, Lyndsey Havens, Gil Kaufman, Steve Knopper, Carl Lamarre, Joe Levy, Jason Lipshutz, Joe Lynch, Heran Mamo, Taylor Mims, Gail Mitchell, Mia Naza-reno, Melinda Newman, Glenn Peoples, Jessica Roiz, Neena Rouhani, Dan Rys, Micah Singleton, Andrew Unterberger, Christine Werthman, Jewel Wicker

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UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP CONGRATULATES

Liz Dunster &
Erika Records



on 40 years of
elevating vinyl records.



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**TO ALL WHO MADE THE LAST
40 YEARS POSSIBLE...
THANK YOU!**

The Players



Dunster at Erika Records in the 1980s.

Smells Like Vinyl Spirit

ERIKA RECORDS FOUNDER LIZ DUNSTER, THE FIRST FEMALE OWNER OF A VINYL PRESSING PLANT, ON FOUR DECADES IN THE VINYL BUSINESS — AND HER WORK FOR NIRVANA, BOB MARLEY AND OTHER TOP ACTS

BY GARY GRAFF

DESPITE OPPOSITION FROM THE start — mostly from men, including her own father — Liz Dunster established the heavy metal-focused vinyl label Erika Records in 1980. A year later, she added a vinyl manufacturing plant in a bid to have tighter control of the creative aspects and quality of vinyl she released on her label. The venture made Dunster the first female owner of such an operation. And while the label's output slowed down in the late 1980s, her vinyl production business boomed, creating iconic custom pieces for Elvis Presley, KISS, The Clash, The Police, Bob Marley, Bon Jovi, Gwen Stefani, Iron Maiden and Poison.

The full-service facility, based in Buena Park,

Calif., is entering its fifth decade of vinyl artisanship and has expanded its manufacturing capacity from two presses to 42. Erika takes orders from major and independent labels and makes everything from black vinyl and variant-color pressings to specialty items like picture discs and records in the shape of just about anything from a space shuttle to fast food. The company also prints and designs record jackets and inserts, handles vinyl lacquer mastering and presses gold and platinum album plaques for the RIAA.

Throughout its existence, Erika Records has remained a family business: Dunster's husband, Charles, does "anything that needs to be done," she says, while son Janos "John" Schermerhorn is operations manager and daughter Erika lent her name for

the company. Erika Records is also an innovator: As CDs boomed in the 1980s, it stayed afloat thanks to its out-of-the-box designs. Erika is now the largest manufacturer of custom records and picture discs in the United States. It's also the first plant to use lead-free PVC for all of its pressings, taking a greener approach to vinyl manufacturing.

"When Third Man was preparing to open our own pressing plant, Liz welcomed us to Erika, gave us an in-depth tour of her facility and even took our team out for lunch," says Ben Blackwell, co-founder of Jack White's Third Man Records, which opened its manufacturing facility in Detroit in 2017.

To commemorate Erika Records' 40th anniversary, Dunster, 67, discusses the uphill battle of the nostalgia business and vinyl's bright future.

Does it feel like you've been doing this for 40 years — or 400?

It feels like a lot. (*Laughs.*) I've got a lot more gray hair, a lot more wrinkles. But I love it. I won't give it up. I tell people I can cut my veins and PVC will come out — in different colors. It really is in my blood, but trust me, my body feels it after all this time.

How did you get into this business?

I had my own label, and I didn't like the quality I was getting. My father at one time built presses, and I asked him if he would help me build some. He said, "No, your job is to stay home and have babies" — very old-fashioned. He said, "You being a female, you won't make it in this industry," because it was male-dominated at the time. So I saved enough money to buy my first machine shop in Signal Hill [in Los Angeles] and asked my father again if he'd help me, and he goes, "Hell, no!" I thought, "OK, I'm not going to have my own pressing plant." Then I said I was going to go into law and wanted to be a judge, and he finally gave in and helped me build my first two presses.

Rather than have you go into law?

Yes. He didn't want me doing that. He was like, "You'll probably get killed in the first two weeks." But that's OK, because music was my real love and passion.

What made pressing records more rewarding than running a label?

I really like to create a finished product and see it in stores, knowing that I made it, that I was part of that release. Back in the late '80s, I had to pick what I wanted to do: The label or the pressing? You can't have both, because you're pulled back-and-forth so much. So I picked the pressing, especially when people told me I couldn't do it.

Did you encounter more sexism, beyond your father's attitude, when you were getting Erika going?

Sure I did. I'm not going to go into all the details. But being blond and walking into places, I've heard people say, "Another blond coming in!" and they wouldn't take me seriously because I was the first female to get into the pressing business, and it was tough. I remember one of the guys saying it and I turned around and said, "I'm a bleach blond, just remember that," and walked away. I really don't want to say what some of the other challenges were, because they were such inappropriate things. I can write a book about it, and might do it at my 50th year, if I last that long.



From left: Michael Jackson's *Thriller* picture disc, Erika Records' largest reorder to date; Misfits' "Monster Mash" glow-in-the-dark 7-inch, pressed in 1999; space shuttle Columbia-shaped picture disc, pressed in 1981.

So how did you get past those attitudes?

Just by keeping at it. I pretty much get along with everybody now, and the ones I don't I still stay away from. Really, my second husband, Charles, helped me fulfill my dream. When I met him, I had two presses and he knew it was my dream. We just worked and worked. We actually pressed our own records ourselves here on Saturdays and Sundays, whatever needed to be done. We scrubbed down the machines, changed things in the back — it didn't matter. I was not going to fail.

Starting out in 1981, you came in at the dawn of the CD age. That had to be a challenge.

Oh, that just about killed me. Only half my presses were going. What kept me going was we did unique records, not just standard black vinyl. We'd do a record, and I'd put an ant farm in it, floating, or a Pez dispenser with candies — made out of paper, of course. I made a record shaped like a Christmas tree, with little lights in it, and when it would spin, they would twinkle. I'd go out to different companies and say, "Hey, why don't you put a record out with your logo on it?" We did that with the [now Las Vegas] Raiders football team. I just like to do things that are different, and that's something that kept Erika going when the music industry wasn't pressing as much vinyl after CDs. We've always been busy because of the unique records.

What do you say to those who think the picture discs and things like that are just a gimmick and not the meat and potatoes of the industry?

Picture discs got a bad rap. People said that the sound quality sucked. I said, "No, no, no — it sucks for some people because they're using thinner material." I was using the better material, and the sound quality was still good. That made a difference.

How do you explain the current vinyl boom?

The kids, the young generation, being home has a lot to do with it. They can't go anywhere, so they were staying at home listening to records instead of CDs, and they just started something new. They see the jackets are bigger. They can open it, they can touch it. I have kids coming in here — no kidding — and they open the record and smell it. I think, "What the hell is going on?" But they say there's a smell to it that they love. I start sniffing and I can't smell it, but OK. So then once the older generation saw the young kids were doing it, they started going back to it, and collectors were back into it big-time.

Has the pandemic affected business in other ways?

We've grown. We're putting more presses in. A lot of releases that were on CD are coming back out on vinyl. Right now, I'm booked until June of 2022. It's crazy. We've got a huge order for the next *Guardians of the Galaxy* soundtrack that's going to take a lot of time. I've got to wait for the city to give us permits, but I want to have 60 presses altogether. So it has been a real growth time for us.

What are the biggest issues facing the pressing industry now?

I'm hearing that PVC is going to be an issue here soon. Every time you turn around, [the price] goes up. In December, it was \$1.10 a pound, and now it's \$1.65. Every time you turn around, something goes up. Now they're saying there's going to be a shortage of PVC. My suppliers are saying get as much as you can, so that's what I'm doing. I'm stocked up like you wouldn't believe.

Erika was the first plant to use only 100% lead-free vinyl material. Why was that important to you?

We're in California, so I made sure we're very green. We got rid of everything that's leaded, sold it to other companies. The unleaded material is harder to work with, but I have children and grandchildren, so I want to make sure we're totally green. We recycle all our PVC, all the jackets, everything. We make our own dyes here. Everything we can do on our own, we do it.

What are your favorite projects?

The one I put out myself would be the space shuttle. My ex father-in-law was one of the guys that worked at NASA here in Downey [in Los Angeles]. They gave me a recording of an astronaut talking and we made a space shuttle-shaped disc with that on it. It's silk-screened and really unique. We have a french fry one that's really hot, too. They're just different things to catch people's eyes and get attention. That's what I like to do.

Have you met many of the artists over the years?

KISS came in, and I know Stryper. And Gwen Stefani, when she was still a teenager. The funniest one was when Poison came in. A couple of the guys came in, and it was really hot outside. I said, "Why don't you tell your girlfriends to come in?" Because they were in the car, and it was hot outside. And they said, "That's the other band members." I was like, "Oh, shit." But that's what they get for having prettier hair than me. (Laughs.)

As Erika turns 40, how would you describe its legacy?

That a woman did it when they said it couldn't be done. It wasn't easy, but I kept plugging away, and here we are, still doing it. I'm very proud. I'm tickled to death. I can look in the mirror and say, "I did it" — and I still am. **b**

By The Numbers

A look at the metrics behind the largest manufacturer of custom records and picture discs in the United States, which pressed first releases for No Doubt, Nirvana, Soundgarden, Sublime and many others

► 65,000 square feet

The Erika Records plant includes three buildings, and in a given week presses 20 to 40 releases, translating to nearly 100,000 records.

► 75 employees

Dunster's operation has evolved from its DIY, family roots to a staff of over six dozen industry professionals.

► 42 presses

The vinyl factory has 18 12-inch automatics, 16 12-inch semiautomatics, two 7-inch automatics and six 7-inch semiautomatics, with seven more presses to be added soon.

► 5 Winklers

The fabrication machines are used to print designs for record jackets, inner sleeves and other packaging.

► 1 lathe

The machine rotates on an axis to cut lacquers — hard, shiny finishes — on vinyl. —G.G.



Erika expanded its fleet of presses from eight to 42 in 2010.



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on 40 Great Years!

Thank you for being great partners.



Congratulations Liz and Chuck on 40 years

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We love you guys

Team Domino



Congratulations



Liz

Keeping Vinyl Alive
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Richard Simpson
Mastering

@erikarecords

Liz, we could not be more proud to be your labor partner and celebrate your legacy and contribution to the music world.

Happy 40th Anniversary!

Sincerely,
Devon Galpin, Loretta LaCarte,
Claudia Acevedo and all the
staff at First Rate!



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CLEOPATRA

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ON THEIR 40TH ANNIVERSARY!



Partners since the birth of Cleopatra Records.
Thank you for taking us in & helping us make the best vinyl in history!
Congratulations on your 40 year anniversary and many more to come!

Chartbreaker

Clockwise from top left: Måneskin's Thomas Raggi, Ethan Torchio, Damiano David and Victoria De Angelis photographed by Clotilde Petrosino on July 22 in Milan.

Måneskin

With a Eurovision win and a viral cover smash, the Italian rock group has fans "Beggin'" for more

No. 35

PEAK ON THE
BILLBOARD HOT 100

In May, Italian rock quartet Måneskin took home the top prize at the Eurovision Song Contest with the riotous rave-up "Zitti e Buoni," which reached No. 22 on the Billboard Global 200 chart in the two months following that win. Meanwhile, the band's newer single, the stomping "I Wanna Be Your Slave," rocketed to No. 13 on the chart and stirred buzz with the gender-bending fashion and inclusive, sex-positive messaging of its music video. However, neither of these songs (both found on the group's 2021 album, *Teatro D'Ira: Vol. I*) have become Måneskin's biggest global hit — one that has broken the act stateside and placed it on the Billboard Hot 100. That would be the band's 2017 cover of The Four Seasons' 1966 soul-pop hit "Beggin'," which unexpectedly went viral on TikTok and crossed over to domestic streaming services.

"It's not just that people are discovering the music," says Arista senior vp marketing Brian Vinikoor. "They are engaging with the band, interested in learning their story, connecting with them on socials and continuing to dig deeper into the band's music."

The "Beggin'" cover actually dates back to Måneskin's breakthrough as a contestant

on the Italian version of *The X Factor* in 2017, just two years after the band had formed as high school students in Rome. The quartet's lithe, muscular rendition of the pop classic was well-received by audiences — "it was our first standing ovation," recalls singer Damiano David. And though Måneskin ultimately finished as the show's runner-up, the song remained in its catalog, appearing on the group's debut EP, *Chosen*, released by Sony Latin following the finale. The band topped the Italian albums chart with its 2018 debut album, *Il Ballo Della Vita*, and eventually earned its entry to Eurovision as the Italian competitor. But while Eurovision is often a springboard for artists to more widespread European success, seldom does the contest take them all the way to America.

Måneskin doesn't have plans to further promote "Beggin'," instead turning its attention to "I Wanna Be Your Slave." "Right now, we are focused on making sure ["Slave"] continues its upward trajectory and follows 'Beggin'' as another No. 1 streaming record," says Vinikoor. In the meantime, the band is working on new music, which David says "represents us better than that song that came out four years ago."

—ANDREW UNTERBERGER





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