

billboard Bulletin

YOUR DAILY ENTERTAINMENT NEWS UPDATE

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Lil Baby's 'My Turn' Album Returns to No. 1 on Billboard 200 Chart After Three Months

BY KEITH CAULFIELD

Lil Baby's *My Turn* returns to No. 1 on the [Billboard 200](#) albums chart after three months, as the set rises from No. 3 with 65,000 equivalent album units earned (up 5 percent) in the U.S. in the week ending June 11, according to Nielsen Music/MRC Data. It's the second week at No. 1 for the album, following its debut atop the chart dated March 14. The album then spent the next 13 straight weeks lodged in the top six positions of the chart, between the charts dated March 21 and June 13.

The Billboard 200 chart ranks the most popular albums of the week in the U.S. based on multi-metric consumption as measured in equivalent album units. Units comprise album sales, track equivalent albums (TEA) and streaming equivalent albums (SEA). The new June 20-dated chart (where *My Turn* comes back to No. 1) will be posted in full on *Billboard*'s website on June 16.

With *My Turn* collecting 65,000 units for the week at No. 1, it tallies the smallest sum for a No. 1 album in over a year. The last time the No. 1 posted a smaller frame was on the June 8, 2019-dated list, when [Billie Eilish](#)'s *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?*

notched its third and final week atop the list, when it rose from No. 3 to No. 1 with 62,000 units.

My Turn climbs back to No. 1 thanks in part to its steady performance since its debut, and because of a lack of big new albums being released on June 5. How sparse was the June 5 release schedule? No albums debut inside the top 40 of the new chart.

My Turn's 13-week wait to return to No. 1 marks the longest gap between weeks at No. 1 for an album since [Lady Gaga](#) and Bradley Cooper's *A Star Is Born* soundtrack took a 17-week hiatus from the top slot between its first three weeks at No. 1 (Oct. 20, Oct. 27 and Nov. 3, 2018) and its fourth and final week at No. 1 (March 9, 2019). The album scored its fourth week at No. 1 in the wake of the film's showcase on the 2019 Academy Awards, where the soundtrack's Oscar-winning song "Shallow" was performed by Gaga and Cooper.

Back on the new Billboard 200, Lady Gaga's *Chromatica* slips from No. 1 to No. 2 in its second week, with 64,000 equivalent album units (down 77 percent

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from its opener of 274,000).

Two more former No. 1s follow at Nos. 3 and 4, as Gunna's *Wunna* rises 4-3 with a little more than 39,000 equivalent album units (down 20 percent) and Future's *High Off Life* climbs 5-4 with 39,000 units (down 11 percent).

Drake's *Dark Lane Demo Tapes* shifts 6-5 with nearly 39,000 units (down 6 percent).

DaBaby's former chart-topper *Blame It on Baby* rises 9-6 with 38,500 equivalent album units (down 1 percent), Polo G's *The Goat* is steady at No. 7 with 37,000 (down 10 percent) and Post Malone's former No. 1 *Hollywood's Bleeding* rebounds 12-8 with 36,000 units (up 1 percent).

Two previous leaders close out the new top 10, as Lil Uzi Vert's *Eternal Atake* ascends 13-9 with just over 35,000 equivalent album units (down less than 1 percent) and The Weeknd's *After Hours* is up 11-10 with 35,000 units (down 3 percent). ▀

Revealed: Billboard's 2020 Indie Power Players

BY BILLBOARD STAFF

During the past year, independent music executives have faced chaos in physical sales channels, questions about how data flows from social media platforms, disappearing brick-and-mortar stores and other challenges. Then the coronavirus pandemic struck, followed by the worst social unrest the United States has seen in a generation.

In response, the indie music community has shown the strength of its autonomy. Music associations and companies profiled here stepped up to help amid the economic hit of the pandemic. On June 2, multiple labels and distributors participated in Blackout Tuesday to support the fight for racial justice.

Indie labels and artists account for nearly one-third of the global music market, and, according to research by MIDiA, they've achieved a faster rate of streaming growth on Spotify in 2019 than the majors.

For Indie Power Players, labels are

defined as independent by their ownership through entities other than the three major music groups. Distributors, regardless of their corporate ownership, qualify as independent through the repertoire they market.

Many in the indie music industry will convene online June 15-18 for the American Association of Independent Music's first virtual Indie Music Week and the Libera Awards, which will conclude A2IM's conference. Ahead of Indie Music Week, *Billboard* recognizes the successes of those thriving on their own maverick terms.

Patrick Amory, 54

Co-owner/president, Matador Records

Gerard Cosloy, 55

Co-founder/co-owner, Matador Records

Chris Lombardi, 53

Co-Founder/co-owner, Matador Records

In the past year, Matador renewed deals with three of its signature acts — Pavement, Spoon and Interpol — and expanded its relationships with each to include worldwide rights for their catalogs. "This was our primary mission for the year," says Lombardi, "and we accomplished it."

How He Works Now: "We're finding new ways to [market] albums from King Krule, Car Seat Headrest, Perfume Genius and Muzz without promo trips, TV appearances, etcetera. We're discussing ways to care for our bands that have lost income streams during this crisis." - Lombardi

Noah Assad, 30

Welcome to Independence,
Tory Lanez.

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**CONGRATULATIONS TO
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BILLBOARD 2020 INDIE POWER PLAYERS**



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CEO, Rimas Entertainment

Assad's marquee artist **Bad Bunny** made history when his *YHLQMDLG*, released on Rimas, scored the highest debut for an all-Spanish-language album on the **Billboard** **200**, entering the chart at No. 2, just behind Lil Baby's *My Turn*. "Had we released it on Friday instead of [Saturday] Feb. 29, it would have been No. 1," says Assad. (Bad Bunny insisted on the leap day release.) Rimas now has over 100 artists, producers and songwriters, including Arcangel, Lyanno and Tito El Bambino.

How He Works Now: "You just have to figure out ways to keep releasing music. Now I'm home all the time. I get to play with my daughter every day. That's the bad and the good."

Bang Si-Hyuk, 47

CEO/executive producer, Big Hit Entertainment

Multiplatinum albums, a global stadium tour, an army of fans — BTS has achieved it all with Bang's independent Big Hit Entertainment. The K-pop supergroup's *Map of the Soul: 7* debuted atop the Billboard 200 in March, two months after BTS performed — in Korean — at the 62nd annual Grammy Awards, an evening Bang called "truly astonishing." Big Hit reports \$507.9 million in revenue in 2019, a 95% increase over its (as yet unaudited) 2018 numbers, and Bang is now expanding beyond music. Big Hit's global fan-community platform, Weverse, services video content, merchandise and direct social media messaging with BTS members to over 5 million subscribers.

Independence Defined: "We achieved such growth without relying on preexisting systems. Solely focusing on content and fans and our vision — this is the 'independence' and driving force of Big Hit."

Scott Borchetta, 57

Founder/president/CEO, Big Machine Label Group

Andrew Kautz, 50

COO, Big Machine Label Group

The big news in the past year for Big Machine Label Group was its acquisition by Scooter Braun's Ithaca Holdings for over \$300 million, but for Borchetta, retaining the company's autonomy was key. "We report to a board but remain independent

creatively and operationally," he says. "Our results are our boss." Among the major results over the past year: Lady Antebellum scoring its first No. 1 in five-plus years on Country Airplay with the trio's debut release for the label, "What If I Never Get Over You"; Thomas Rhett earning his 15th No. 1 on that chart; and Tim McGraw reuniting with Big Machine Records.

How They're Working Now: After the pandemic started, the Big Machine Vodka distillery division converted its operations to make hand sanitizer, which the company donated to first responders.

Ken Bunt

President, Disney Music Group

David Abdo

Senior vp global business operations and distribution, Disney Music Group

Karen Lieberman

VP sales and digital, Disney Music Group

Chip McLean

Senior vp/head of business affairs and development/gm, Disney Concerts Worldwide/Disney Music Group

The record company that shows how non-major ownership, rather than size, defines independence (it's a division of the Walt Disney Company), Disney Music Group kept the music playing during the pandemic through such global branded playlists as Disney Hits, Disney Piano and Best of Star Wars. Among its artists, Sofia Carson did an Instagram takeover with pop radio stations, and ZZ Ward performed remotely on *Good Morning America*. Over the past year, the music group also launched the For Scores podcast, while its Walt Disney Records imprint continued to dominate *Billboard*'s Kid Albums chart, with the *Frozen II* soundtrack topping the tally for 24 weeks.

How He Works Now: "We have seen a substantial increase in the consumption of Disney music during this challenging time, and it's a great reminder of the power of music and its ability to help people during difficult times." - Bunt

Frabian Eli Carrión, 28

President, Real Hasta La Muerte

Carrión guided Latin trap superstar Anuel AA (aka Emmanuel Gazmey Santiago) to No. 1 on Top Latin Albums with his 2018 debut, *Real Hasta la Muerte*, which gave Carrión

and Anuel AA's label its name. "Topping the charts is something I dreamed of as a child, and it's what excites Emmanuel and me above all else," says Carrión. In May, Anuel AA's *Emmanuel*, featuring collaborations with Travis Barker, Lil Wayne, Enrique Iglesias and Tego Calderón, debuted at No. 8 on The Billboard 200.

Advice for a Young Indie Artist: "Become good friends with lawyers and learn the law every day. In this business, you have to be half artist and half businessman."

Margi Cheske

President, Fantasy Records/Concord

John Strohm

President, Rounder Records/Concord

Andy Serrao

President/chief talent officer, Fearless Records/Concord

Sig Sigworth

Chief catalog executive, Concord; president, Craft Recordings/Concord

Tanya Tucker's double win at the 2020 Grammys for her Fantasy album, *While I'm Livin'*, as well as wins by another half-dozen Concord artists highlight the critical and commercial success of the company's recorded-music division. The results reflect Concord's "significant acquisitions and integrations across our recorded-music, publishing and theatrical companies," says Sigworth, plus its ability to develop new talent and support legacy artists. For Sigworth and his colleagues, independence equals integrity. "If we do what is right for the artist and we do what is right for the fan, success will come. It may take more time, but we're building careers and solidifying legacies."

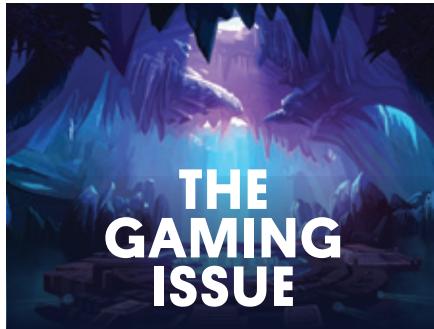
Looking Forward to When: "I can bring my team together in one room and let them all know how much I appreciate their focus, support and effort over what has been the most challenging time of our personal and business lives." - Sigworth

Alisa Coleman

COO, ABKCO Music & Records

ABKCO is home to the catalogs of acts including The Animals, Herman's Hermits, Bobby Womack, Sam Cooke and the early work of The Rolling Stones — and last year launched a 50th-anniversary box set of the Stones' landmark album *Let It Bleed*. In 2019, the company also released the

UPCOMING SPECIAL FEATURES



THE GAMING ISSUE

This special Gaming issue will highlight how artists, labels and promoters are harnessing major gaming platforms to market their music to a larger - and more engaged - audience. The editorial package will also spotlight other pioneering companies, executives and innovation at the intersection of music and gaming.



TOP MUSIC LAWYERS

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

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soundtrack to the second season of HBO's *Big Little Lies*. Coleman says the ABKCO team deserves "accolades [for] the ease with which the team was able to pivot and focus in the face of the pandemic. Being a small independent company, we are nimble enough to take advantage of systems and technology" to move business offsite.

Independence Defined: "The opportunity to create unique business models and lead by example."

Tomas Cookman

CEO, Industria Works/Nacional Records

While concert cancellations have affected Cookman's Latin alternative music company during the pandemic, he reports that streaming revenue has doubled in the past 12 months (his company doesn't report figures) and that he started a "mood-music business" that syncs mood music from multiple creators. "You adapt," says Cookman, whose new signings include Los Amigos Invisibles founder Cheo and regional Mexican singer-songwriter Gera Demara. The Latin Alternative Music Conference, which Cookman founded, was moved online for June 9-13.

Looking Forward to When: "I will have a full staff meeting with everyone in the company present, [then] celebrate by going to dinner with my family to one of our favorite neighborhood restaurants."

Mike Curb, 75

Founder/chairman, Curb Records

Curb Records' Lee Brice was among the first Nashville artists to respond to the pandemic with his single "Hey World" in early April. "Everything I need's right here at home," he sang. "Hey, world/Leave me alone." In Curb's six decades as a music executive, he has nurtured numerous artists like current roster stars Brice, Mo Pitney and Sidewalk Prophets. A longtime philanthropist, Curb has advocated on behalf of the homeless, the LGBTQ community and those affected by this year's tornadoes in Nashville as well as the pandemic.

Indies Stepping Up: "We've put together 25 different partners that deal with getting food to people during emergency circumstances — a program that will exceed \$10 million for food purchasing."

Angel Del Villar, 39

Founder/CEO, Del Records

Del Records, which has fused regional Mexican and urban sounds with acts like T3r Elemento, is also at the cutting edge of revenue-generating technology. The label now controls its own YouTube content management system, "where we upload our own content and collect all our royalties," says Del Villar. With over 8 million subscribers, that's substantial income that goes directly to the label's coffers. "The bulk of our business is in streaming," he says. "I own my entire catalog, everything we do is in-house — we're in great shape." In March, he says, "my revenues were up 30%."

Advice for a Young Indie Artist: "Use all the digital platforms. They're free."

Seth England, 34

Co-founder/CEO, Big Loud

Patch Culbertson, 34

VP A&R, Big Loud

Hits from Morgan Wallen ("Chasing You"), Chris Lane ("I Don't Know About You"), Jake Owen ("Homemade") and HARDY ("Rednecker") helped Big Loud achieve 2.2 billion global streams in 2019, according to the company, which includes a label, publishing, management and an investment division under its Nashville roof. Of Big Loud's success last year, England says, "Don't be surprised, because we can do it again." Culbertson has led the label's data-driven A&R strategy for artists like Canada's MacKenzie Porter, whom Big Loud aims to break stateside.

How He Works Now: "Instinctively, I want to be the person that's going out immediately. But I think I've learned that the smarter move is to not be that person." - England

Matt Galle

CEO/partner, Photo Finish Records; music executive leadership group, Paradigm Talent Agency

Mike Marquis

COO/partner, Photo Finish Records; agent, music, Paradigm Talent Agency

Photo Finish scored the "biggest alternative crossover hit of 2019" with SHAED's "Trampoline," says Galle. The track topped the Alternative chart for two weeks before leaping to No. 4 on the Mainstream Top 40 airplay list and then peaking at No. 13 on the

Billboard Hot 100 last November. Zayn also cut a remix of the song, which picked up a sync in an Apple iPhone commercial. "You never see those coming," says Galle. "But streaming blew up, radio followed, and it was just a windfall. It caught fire."

How He Works Now: "Feeding our artists ideas to engage their audience is key, not only for their business but also to help their fans personally." - Galle

Kris Gillespie

GM, Domino Recording Company

Last year, due to the physical supply chain breakdown at Direct Shot Distribution, Gillespie started having Redeye handle Domino's physical U.S. product. (The issue affected multiple labels and brick-and-mortar retailers.) He credits "the agility and dedication of our staff" for the London-based label emerging "more resilient and self-reliant" from the experience. During the pandemic, he says, "those qualities have come into even greater focus now in a way we couldn't have imagined a year ago."

How He Works Now: "Checking in with our artists and co-workers on their own wellness in this trying time, working to keep everyone feeling connected and informed, and maintaining a sense of purpose."

Daniel Glass, 63

Founder/president, Glassnote

Chris Scully, 53

GM/CFO, Glassnote

"Grammys, Oscars, stadiums," says Glass, summing up his artists' achievements in the past year. Aurora performed the *Frozen II* hit "Into the Unknown" with Idina Menzel at the Academy Awards; The Teskey Brothers' *Run Home Slow* earned a Grammy nomination for best engineered album, non-classical; and Mumford & Sons opened the North American leg of their Delta tour with stadium dates in Los Angeles and Vancouver (before the pandemic halted the tour). Glass considers live performance key to the development of younger artists like Jade Bird and Taylor Janzen. "It's very hard to get their personality, their DNA, without it," he says. So during lockdown, "we're doing extra-special visuals." One example: With Chvrches' "Forever" breaking thanks to a sync in Netflix's *Elite*, the trio made a "separate but together" video in the members' respective

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home studios. "That hit is galvanizing us," says Glass. "That's the morale-changer."

How He Works Now: "You have to be there for your people. I'm on the phone, on Zoom, on Webex seven days a week. It's like Hollywood Squares when you look at Zoom. It takes a lot of energy." - Glass

Michael Goldstone

Founder/co-owner, Mom + Pop Music

Thaddeus Rudd, 47

Co-owner, Mom + Pop Music

"We're fortunate and proud to be working with such dynamic and diverse artistry," says Goldstone. Mom + Pop's roster boasts Ashe, whose "Moral of the Story" was co-written and co-produced by FINNEAS; Caamp, whose "Peach Fuzz" hit No. 1 on the Triple A chart; Alina Baraz, who collaborated with Khalid on her debut album, *It Was Divine*; and Sleater-Kinney, whose most recent release, *The Center Won't Hold*, was produced by St. Vincent. The label's talent pipeline is also full. The past 12 months have brought the signings of Porter Robinson, Beach Bunny, orion sun and, most recently, 16-year-old Evann McIntosh of Kansas, who already has 12 million streams in the United States.

How He Works Now: "It's imperative more than ever to be a resource, connection and asset to your artists. We need to over-deliver wherever we can." - Goldstone

Elliot Grainge, 26

Founder/CEO, 10K Projects

Last August, Grainge's bold hip-hop label invested in the Generation Z-oriented digital marketing firm Homemade Projects, a move that has already paid off: The two companies worked with TikTok influencers to break Surfaces' single "Sunday Best," helping propel it to No. 24 on the Hot 100. "We're brainstorming nontraditional ways of keeping our artists visible," says Grainge of marketing amid the pandemic. Other recent strides include a joint-venture label with creative collective Internet Money and flagship signee Trippie Redd's first-ever No. 1 debut on the Billboard 200 last December for his album *A Love Letter to You 4*.

Independence Defined: "Giving artists complete creative freedom to develop over time and then working tirelessly with my team to make the artists' ideas come to life."

Brett Gurewitz

Owner, Epitaph Records

Matt McGreevey

GM, Epitaph Records/Anti-

Founded four decades ago by Bad Religion guitarist Gurewitz, Epitaph is home to punk veterans like Offspring as well as current acts like Joyce Manor, Greer and The Ghost Inside. Epitaph's staff hasn't "skipped a beat" during the pandemic, says McGreevey. But forces besides the coronavirus are shaping the business of Epitaph, sister label ANTI- and other indies, he says. "The continuation of streaming's growth and the decline of other formats has changed marketing. We always worked around albums, and now we are back to a singles-driven business, the way things were in the 1950s."

Advice for a Young Indie Artist: "Anytime I see an artist worried about how their music will be received, [I say] they should continue to create — and not let any success or failure trip you up." - McGreevey

Simon Halliday

President, 4AD Records

Nabil Ayers, 48

Label manager, 4AD Records

During a four-week streak in the spring of 2019, 4AD released Aldous Harding's *Designer*, Big Thief's *U.F.O.F.*, Holly Herndon's *PROTO* and The National's *I Am Easy to Find*. Each gained airplay and acclaim, including Big Thief's Grammy Award nomination for best alternative music album. Each title also affirmed 4AD's ability to challenge music-marketing pigeonholes. "Who needs genres?" says Ayers, who has been working on new releases from Becky & The Birds and Dry Cleaning.

How He Works Now: "Continuing to release great music by important artists despite less than optimum conditions." - Ayers

Jimmy Jeong

CEO, JYP Entertainment

While JYP has artists based in Korea, China and Japan, the company's distribution partnership with The Orchard has given it a global reach. Since early 2019, The Orchard has handled worldwide distribution for JYP's roster of boy bands and girl groups including Got7, Day6, TWICE, Stray Kids and Itzy. Meanwhile, Jeong struck a strategic alliance with Republic Records for the

female K-pop group TWICE, announced in February, which follows the troupe's arena-filling U.S. tour in 2019.

Gordon Kerr, 52

President/CEO, Black River Entertainment

Under Kerr's leadership, Black River in March moved forward with the release of *Kelsea*, the third album from the label's superstar singer Kelsea Ballerini, just as the pandemic shut down touring and in-person promotion. The move paid off, as the album reached No. 2 on the Top Country Albums chart — affirming Kerr's decision to sign Ballerini some seven years ago. The second single from *Kelsea* is "The Other Girl," a country/pop duet with Halsey, which the two artists debuted on CMT *Crossroads* in March.

Advice for a Young Indie Artist: "Always try to be optimistic because the alternative just isn't going to be helpful."

Allen Kovac, 65

CEO, Better Noise Music

While Kovac's Eleven Seven Label Group was rebranded as Better Noise Music in 2019, the company still follows his guiding principle of long-term career growth — not short-term profits — working with veteran acts like Five Finger Death Punch and Papa Roach, and such new signings as AWOLNATION and Atlas Genius. The company's Nashville office is developing country-edged rocker Cory Marks. "I don't hire people from the music business anymore," says Kovac of his search for fresh perspectives. "It has really changed my company dramatically."

How He Works Now: "If you're an artist manager, you've got no tours, and 80% of your income comes from that; the rest from publishing and royalties. That's a tough one. When I started the record company, the management company helped float the record company, and now the record company's going to help the management company. I'm very lucky."

Kevin Liles, 52

Co-founder/CEO, 300 Entertainment

Roger Gold, 50

Co-founder, 300 Entertainment

Rayna Bass, 33

Senior vp marketing, 300 Entertainment

Selim Bouab

► IN BRIEF**Head of A&R, 300 Entertainment**

Liles led the 300 Entertainment team in driving the success of Megan Thee Stallion, Young Thug, Gunna and others. Megan Thee Stallion's "Savage" (featuring Beyoncé) hit No. 1 on the Hot 100 in May. Young Thug's guest star-ladden *So Much Fun* arrived atop the Billboard 200 last August, and Gunna's latest, *Wunna*, debuted at No. 1 on the chart in June. "But I'm most proud of how we're responding right now in this crisis," says Liles. "Crisis doesn't create character — it reveals it. Our team is showing resilience and passion in serving our partners, audience and each other, and we're all stepping up to support our artists."

Independence Defined: "Freedom. The freedom to do what I want, when I want and with whom I want." - Gold

Sergio Lizárraga, 45

CEO, Lizos Music

Lizos Music is the home of Banda Sinaloense MS de Sergio Lizárraga (aka Banda MS), which ended 2019 as *Billboard*'s top regional Mexican albums act of the year and at No. 10 on the Top Latin Artists recap. For founder Lizárraga, the experience of Banda MS selling out two shows at Los Angeles' Staples Center and playing New York's Madison Square Garden were highlights of the past year, and in May, the group's collaboration with Snoop Dogg, "Que Maldición" ("What a Curse"), debuted at No. 4 on Hot Latin Songs. Working with new acts like Los 2 de la S also opens new territory for Lizos Music, says Lizárraga.

Advice for a Young Indie Artist: "Look at the data. If it shows you doing something right, don't stop."

Jon Loba

Executive vp, BBR Music Group/BMG

John Loeffler

Executive vp repertoire and marketing, New York, BMG

Thomas Scherer

Executive vp repertoire and marketing, Los Angeles, BMG

Jason Aldean, John Fogerty, Akon, Jason Mraz, Run the Jewels, Rufus Wainwright, Huey Lewis, Avril Lavigne, Diane Warren, George Harrison's Dark Horse Records — these are just a few of the names from BMG's impressive recording roster. Three

years after BMG's acquisition of BBR Music Group, Loba oversees the company's new, 36,000-square-foot Nashville office. Loeffler, a songwriter himself ("Pokémon"), manages BMG's East Coast presence in New York, including S-Curve Records. Scherer, a former drummer, has driven the company's rock-focused artist-development surge in Los Angeles. "You must maintain a startup mentality and that 'indie feeling,'" says Scherer. "You have to extend to everyone in the company an invitation to innovate. And you have to mean it. No red tape."

How He Works Now: Live-at-home shows "may not change once things begin to normalize. This intimate and immediate connection between fan and artist is here to stay." - Loeffler

David Macias, 55

President, Thirty Tigers

Nancy Quinn, 49

Executive vp/GM, Thirty Tigers

For two decades under Macias, Thirty Tigers has nurtured rising and veteran indie artists alike, releasing music from John Prine, Lupe Fiasco, Jason Isbell & The 400 Unit, Dr. Dog, Colter Wall and CeCe Winans, among others. Quinn is responsible for all of the company's agreements and business developments with new artists as well as negotiating the best terms with its distribution partners. Macias, who has invested in such independent films as *Fruitvale Station*, last year released *Once Upon a River* through his company's film division.

Advice for a Young Indie Artist: "If at all possible, keep ownership of the content you create." - Macias

Franklin Martinez, 38

President/CEO, Carbon Fiber Music

While guiding the career of his management client Farruko, Martinez has also been steadily growing the Carbon Fiber Music label (where Farruko is his partner). "We just signed a distribution deal with Ingrooves, and in the past eight months, I've signed five new artists," including Lary Over and Ankhal, says Martinez. Carbon Fiber now has a staff of nearly 50, including in-house designers and booking agents. While the pandemic has meant leaving "literally millions on the table" from lost Farruko tour earnings, says Martinez, "we've had more

time to strategize creatively."

Advice for a Young Indie Artist: "Set aside your friends who are managers. They are the best weapon to destroy a new artist because they create doubts, they don't know. New artists have to have a good structure, believe in their art and develop it with someone who really manages."

Josh Méndez, 31

President/COO, Rich Music

Rich Music surged during the past 12 months with the success of Latin urban artists like Sech, Dalex and Justin Quiles. The label's YouTube channel, a major source of revenue, has nearly 900,000 subscribers — Sech's channel alone has drawn 5.7 million. "We've doubled streams and signed key business deals," says Méndez, citing Sech's touring deal with Cárdenas Marketing Network and a distribution pact with Ingrooves. "We're a one-stop shop."

How He Works Now: "My role has changed because of COVID-19 and also because my dad is now serving a sentence. [Rich Méndez began serving in a federal prison in January on a wire fraud conviction related to timeshare sales.] I've always dealt with the artists, but now I'm dealing with a lot of the business, quarterbacking everything from home."

Martin Mills, 70

Founder/chairman, Beggars Group

Matt Harmon, 48

President, Beggars Group

Rusty Clarke

VP Sales, Beggars Group

Miwa Okumura

Senior vp West Coast operations and licensing, Beggars Group

Risa Matsuki, 48

VP promotions, Beggars Group

Beggars Group — which consists of 4AD, Matador, XL, Rough Trade Records and Young Turks — reshuffled its deck in the past year. The company restructured divisions, created the role of head of streaming, increased emphasis on content teams and supply chain support, and bolstered staff to deal with metadata and digital service providers. It also switched from its longtime physical distributor, Alternative Distribution Alliance, to Redeye following widespread supply issues with ADA's fulfillment

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partner, Direct Shot. Says Harmon: "We've really transformed the Beggars team, both in the U.S. and globally, to deal with the digital marketplace."

How He Works Now: "I'm proud that I've built a company that technologically and resource-wise can survive this [pandemic] without cutting any staff and paying everyone full wages, and be pretty confident of coming out on the other side in pretty good shape." - Mills

Doug Morris, 81

Founder/owner, 12Tone Music Group

Steve Bartels

12Tone Music Group

Bartels calls 12Tone "a nimble, modern" new company able to "anticipate music trends, pivot and support our artists with bespoke and specific campaigns." That meant working with Warner Records to break Lauren Daigle at pop radio and drive her song "You Say" to the top of *Billboard's* Adult Contemporary chart. It also meant helping rappers like Rich Brian and Joji turn YouTube virality into lasting music careers — and working closely with Aftermath and Full Stop Management to secure Anderson .Paak's two victories at the 2020 Grammys.

How He Works Now: "I am able to engage the staff with mobile conferencing, WhatsApp, video comms, etcetera, so we all feel united. The goals remain the same: More than ever, artists and the music we bring to the world can help lift spirits." - Bartels

Lonny Olinick, 38

CEO, AWAL

Paul Hitchman

President, AWAL

Ron Cerrito

President, AWAL North America

Revenue for AWAL, the independent distribution and label services division of Kobalt Music Group, grew 86% to \$106.2 million in its fiscal year ending June 30, 2019, according to Kobalt's financial results announced in March. Behind the numbers are the successes of artists like Lauv (5 billion global streams, according to AWAL), Rex Orange County and Lil Peep (1 billion streams each), Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds and Frank Carter & The Rattlesnakes, and rising stars FINNEAS and Kim Petras. For

the strong fiscal results, Olinick credits AWAL's artists and a business model that "allows them to reach their full potential while getting a fair deal." Cerrito points to upcoming releases from Gus Dapperton, Alaina Castillo, Blake Rose, Boy in Space, Quadeca, YEEK and deadmau5. "Having proven ourselves against the majors," says Hitchman, "we are now seeing some of the most exciting new talent come to us."

Independence Defined: "Never accepting the status quo and always pushing for better, bigger, faster." - Olinick

Maykel Piron, 45

Co-Owner/CEO, Armada Music

Under Piron, Armada Music thrives as one of the world's leading dance music labels, with headquarters in Amsterdam and offices in New York and London. The company has a catalog of over 15,000 titles and scored myriad hits in 2019. Its artist roster includes Andrew Rayel, whose recent track "Stars Collide" appears on Armin van Buuren's annual compilation album, *A State of Trance*, which arrived in April. Piron, van Buuren and David Lewis co-founded Armada Music — combining the first two letters of their first names for the label's moniker.

Looking Forward to When: "I may just throw a big office party in our own club for the entire team as a thank-you. The way they're handling this situation is amazing, and I'm super proud to be standing alongside them through it all."

Louis Posen, 49

Founder/president, Hopeless Records

The punk label that launched from Posen's garage in 1993 continued to break new ground in the past year, "setting up big campaigns for Sum 41 and Waterparks, and developing new artists Stand Atlantic, Point North and Fame on Fire," says Posen. He praises his worldwide team for adapting marketing campaigns to online-only during the pandemic. "I tend to lean into tough times," says Posen. "That's part of my personality."

Indies Stepping Up: "The signature initiative of our nonprofit organization Sub City is called Songs That Saved My Life, where artists cover a song that got them through a tough time, and proceeds from that project go to mental health and suicide

prevention charities. This project has been going on these past two years. Along with our other Sub City initiatives, [we've raised] more than \$3 million."

Scott Robinson, 57

Co-founder/CEO, Dualtone Music Group

Robinson says fostering a "community of camaraderie" among his acts is one of his proudest accomplishments at Dualtone, a division of Entertainment One. The Lumineers, for example, tapped three up-and-coming labelmates — Shakey Graves, Gregory Alan Isakov and Mt. Joy — to open their arena shows through March. (The pandemic cut the tour short.) "We're very selective, and when we sign an artist we end up working records much longer, with a record cycle sometimes lasting two years," says Robinson, noting that Mt. Joy has earned "130,000-plus consumed units" of its debut self-titled album released in 2018.

Indies Stepping Up: "When the Dualtone office in Nashville took a direct hit from the tornadoes [in early March], my staff didn't miss a beat. We were able to get back online together virtually and continue our daily operations. Our Dualtone family raised resources for local charities affected by the Nashville tornadoes and the coronavirus."

Jake Round, 37

founder/president, Pure Noise Records

The hardcore punk band Knocked Loose released its second album, *A Different Shade of Blue*, on Pure Noise last August and surpassed expectations "by leaps and bounds," says Round. After the label successfully placed the title in big-box retailer Target, Knocked Loose debuted atop *Billboard's* Emerging Artists chart while the album reached No. 26 on the *Billboard* 200.

Independence Defined: "I've never been more grateful to be small in my life and also to have complete control of my own destiny. I'm making the decisions, and I don't have to run anything up the flagpole. I am the flagpole."

Vicente Saavedra, 37

Founder, Dimelo Vi

At Dimelo Vi, Saavedra celebrated as Ozuna (whose music was co-released with VP Records before he signed with Sony and The Orchard) came in at No. 2 on *Billboard's* 2019 year-end Top Latin Artists recap, best-

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ed only by Bad Bunny. Earlier in the year, at the Billboard Latin Music Awards, Ozuna made history by taking home 11 honors, the most by any artist in a single year. Saavedra, who formerly managed Ozuna, says that "as an indie label, competing with major labels is one of my greatest accomplishments."

How He Works Now: "Aside from being a manager and producer, I am also now a psychologist. It has been a moment in which I also have to deal with artists' anxiety and their preoccupations."

Jon Salter, 48

GM, ATO Records

"Brand-new band, debut album, boom!" is how Salter describes the breakout of Black Pumas, whose self-titled 2019 release led to a best new artist nomination at the 2020 Grammys. That was one of a remarkable seven nods for ATO Records, with Brittany Howard, Emily King and Altin Gün also being recognized, while Rodrigo Y Gabriela won the best contemporary instrumental album award for *Mettavolution*. The label's new in-house film/TV department, which placed Black Pumas' "The Power to Be Me" in a Bank of America campaign, "equips us to control our own destiny," says Salter.

How He Works Now: "We're staying the course with all our spring releases — Chicanos Batman, Margaret Glaspy, a King Gizzard [& The Lizard Wizard] live album. You can't go to [Austin's] Waterloo Records to buy an album," says Salter of his local retailer. "But you can mail-order it or order curbside pickup, and we're going to make [releases] available."

Luis Sánchez, 42

CEO, Afinarte Music

Sánchez says revenue for his Mexican music label has increased by 40% compared with the previous year. (Afinarte does not report specific revenue figures.) That growth comes thanks to the success of artists like Kanales, Los Dos Carnales and El Fantasma, who nabbed his eighth top 10 entry on the Regional Mexican Airplay chart with "Palabra de Hombre" ("A Man's Word") in March. "We had 10 artists signed last year. Now we have 19, and I'm very proud of our expansion toward Mexico," says Sánchez of his roster, which is focused on young and developing acts. "We are self-

driven, self-motivated, self-sufficient and willing to take a risk."

Advice for a Young Indie Artist: "Be patient and follow your dream. Many people will say no. But one man's trash is another man's treasure. I lived that firsthand with El Fantasma."

Huib Schippers

Director/curator, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

It would be easy for Schippers to point to Smithsonian Folkways Recordings' two 2020 Grammy wins earlier this year as a marker of success. *Pete Seeger: The Smithsonian Folkways Collection* won best historical album, and Mariachi los Camperos' De Ayer Para Siempre was named best regional Mexican music album [including tejano].) But Schippers defines success differently, with a broader vision of the cultural role of the Washington, D.C.-based label that goes beyond industry accolades. To that end, Schippers is also proud of *Songs of Our Native Daughters*, a critically acclaimed Folkways release featuring Rhiannon Giddens that "beautifully and fearlessly chronicles the history and position of African-American women at the crossroads of misogyny and racism."

Advice for a Young Indie Artist: "Make amazing music that you believe in. Then go to people you trust and ask for brutally honest feedback. Swallow your pride and listen. Make it better. Then find a label that gets you."

Melanie Sheehan

U.S. label manager, Rough Trade Records

In the past year at Rough Trade, Sheehan has helped the London band black midi launch its debut album, *Schlagenheim*; promoted new releases from Lankum and Pineglove; gained the first U.S. TV slot for SOAK on *Late Night With Seth Meyers*; and "now, after a lifetime of fandom," she says, she's working on Jarvis Cocker's first new album in a decade, titled *JARV IS...*

How She Works Now: "So. Many. Video Conferences!"

Jonny Shipes, 40

CEO, Cinematic Music Group

From Joey Bada\$\$ to Nipsey Hussle, Cinematic CEO Shipes has a keen ear for discovering rap stars. Even with a diverse

roster that includes such artists as veterans Cam'ron and T-Pain to breakthrough acts including Flipp Dinero and Luh Kel, Shipes emphasizes he isn't solely responsible for his label's success. "Without a dope team," he says, "I could never have built Cinematic from where it was a few years ago to where it is today."

Indies Stepping Up: "I have been giving out \$50,000 singles deals to artists with one catch: They have to donate \$50 to submit their music for consideration. After sifting through hundreds of songs, I pick a winner. We are donating all the [submission] money to charities that are helping kids, the elderly and those creating [personal protective equipment] for the essential medical people. It's a priority for us."

Paul Sizelove, 50

President, Gaither Music Group

Under Sizelove, Gaither in 2019 finalized a partnership with Primary Wave Music Publishing, which gives the gospel and Christian music company access to Primary Wave's marketing, branding and digital teams, plus additional departments for help with licensing and syncs. Sizelove also expanded Gaither's agreement with Universal Music Group's Capitol Christian Music Group for worldwide digital and physical distribution, and has overseen the expansion of Gaither's team, with new roles focused on streaming and social media marketing. One measure of the impact of those moves? Gaither reached 348 million streams in 2019, a 30% increase over the previous year, according to the company.

Independence Defined: "There is something about independence that gives you a sense of urgency and ownership. You have to be on your game always, as it takes hard work to blaze a trail. But the reward is fulfilling, and the lines of character developed from it run deep."

Adolph "Young Dolph" Thornton Jr.

Founder, Paper Route EMPIRE

Jeremel "Daddy O" Moore, 34

Co-founder, Paper Route EMPIRE

To his fans, he is rapper Young Dolph, whose collaboration with labelmate Key Glock on *Dum & Dummer* sent the album to No. 8 on the Billboard 200. But as an entrepreneur, Thornton is the founder, with

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Moore, of Paper Route EMPIRE, home also to artists Kenny Muney, Big Moochie Grape and Jay Fizzle. "I've been preaching the benefits of being independent since day one," says Thornton. "The best thing about the position I'm in is, I can drop music how I want to drop and when I want to drop. There is no one else telling me how to run my business."

Looking Forward to When: "As life and business return to normal, the first thing I plan to do is go see my grandma. She's 94 years old." - Thornton

Fiona Whelan Prine, 58

President, Oh Boy Records

Jody Whelan, 39

Managing partner, Oh Boy Records

The death of John Prine on April 7 at age 73 due to complications from the coronavirus shattered his fans and the music industry. But apart from the extraordinary legacy of his songwriting, Prine also was an indie music business pioneer, co-founding Oh Boy Records with his late manager Al Bunetta in 1981. It is now run by his widow, Fiona Whelan Prine, and son Jody Whelan. Oh Boy in 2016 struck a deal with Thirty Tigers to exclusively handle its physical and digital distribution worldwide. "It was a big deal for me when Oh Boy decided to work with us," says Thirty Tigers co-founder/president David Macias. "Like many others, I revere John as an artist, but John was equally heroic to me for the business decision he and Al Bunetta made in running their own label." In the days after Prine's death, his songs and albums returned to the charts amid the emerging pandemic. "We wanted to give Fiona and Jody all the space that they needed," says Macias. "They lost a husband and a father. It was difficult given that pressing plants were closed and indie retailers were closed for the most part, but we did everything that we possibly could." Macias says the entire Oh Boy staff is "the embodiment of John in label form. His vibe permeates the company, which is a really, really good thing." He adds: "If I had a nickel for every time I name-checked John and Oh Boy as an example of how artists can and should own their own work, I could buy a full meal at Arnold's Country Kitchen — and that includes banana pudding."

Bryan "Birdman" Williams, 51

Co-founder/Co-CEO, Cash Money Records

Ronald "Slim" Williams, 55

Co-founder/Co-CEO, Cash Money Records

Consistency. That's the accomplishment of the past year that the Williams brothers are most proud of, as Slim relates: "From the quality of [our artists'] music to some becoming entrepreneurs themselves; something we've preached since back in the day." And that philosophy continued to drive their success in 2019. Between Drake's *Scorpion* and Blueface's "Thotiana" (No. 8 on the Hot 100), Cash Money helped its partner Republic Records close out 2019 as the year's top label. The onset of the pandemic didn't slow Drake's pace, as his *Dark Lane Demo Tapes* (released through OVO Sound/Republic) debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard 200 on May 1.

Independence Defined: "Being in control of your destiny. We have a great situation and are able to do what we want to do, and nobody questions or gets in the way of that. We've been with [Republic/Universal Music Group] a lot of years. They trust our judgment in music and what we do." - Slim

Richard James Burgess

President/CEO, American Association of Independent Music

A2IM, which has 800 members, worked throughout the fall of 2019 to ensure California's AB5 "gig economy" legislation would protect indie musicians. Burgess, along with heads of the RIAA and the Music Artists Coalition, explained to legislators that the law would, among other effects, force music groups to become employers if they collaborated with freelance musicians. Burgess says the law's sponsor, Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez, had "good intentions" to protect gig workers, but music reps had to hammer out an amendment before the law passed in April. "It was unbelievably challenging," he says.

Advice for a Young Artist: "Never give up. Persistence is everything. You have to buy the time to get lucky."

Charlie Phillips, 46

COO, Worldwide Independent Network

Phillips was named in February 2019 to run Worldwide Independent Network, reporting to chairman Justin West. Last Octo-

ber, he unveiled an initiative that WIN and IFPI have been working on for some five years, the Repertoire Data Exchange (RDx), a "single point of entry for data relating to management of performance rights internationally," as he puts it. The RDx, which is still in its early stages, will roll out widely in the months ahead. "Most indie labels are based in one territory, or two if they're pretty big," he says. "But they've got to manage these rights in 50 or 60 countries, and that means that a lot of money gets left on the table or paid to the wrong people. The whole industry, majors and indies together, has come together to plug that one gap."

Independence Defined: "Generally, a company [is independent] where over 50% is owned by the founders, or people who have taken over that share — but not the major labels. But there's a much wider question when it comes to data ownership and digital asset control, like who owns your metadata, can you get it back off a distributor, what happens to your track counts — are we really independent if we don't have any control over that?"

Jeremy Sirota, 43

CEO, Merlin

Joining Merlin as its new CEO in January, Sirota came on board at the worldwide digital rights agency just as the coronavirus pandemic shut down the global economy. "When I wrote my first 90-day plan, this wasn't on my list," he says. But it allowed him to see how well the Merlin team he had inherited is handling the crisis, while also operating during a management transition. "Folks here are driven by the mission to help our members and partners, and want to do even more than what we are doing already," says Sirota. "In some ways it has helped me to get close to our partners, members and our team in a way that might not have happened so quickly."

Most Urgent Indie Issues: "[The control of] data coming from Facebook and TikTok, more access to capital for the indie sector and the growth of user-generated content and social platforms into the music space. All of this really flattens and democratizes the [music marketplace], which allows indies to thrive, and that allows more room for diversity. The more healthy, diversified

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and democratized the space, the better for independents."

Jorge Brea, 36

CEO, Symphonic Distribution

"Today's major record labels operate differently," says Brea. "They rely on throwing money at projects with the goal of being more successful than the other major record label. In the process, they forget about the art behind what we do." Symphonic Distribution, based in Tampa, Fla., has grown over the past year "without large budgets like the ones you typically see in this industry," says Brea. His company has new partnerships in China, expanded its video distribution through Vida Primo in Colombia and opened a new synch licensing division with Bodega Sync in Brooklyn.

How He Works Now: "With less travel, we've had more time to hunker down and be productive. It's made me push myself to think of new creative ways to help out as many artists and record labels as possible, especially with the decline of touring revenue during the pandemic."

Paris Cabezas, 48

Managing director/CEO, InnerCat Music Group

Ana Gonzalez, 42

Managing director, InnerCat Music Group

Garrett Schaefer, 58

GM, InnerCat Music Group

The Miami-based InnerCat has reported 300% growth between 2016 and 2019 (the company does not specify revenue figures) by providing digital services to indie artists on an international scale. CEO Cabezas, a classically trained pianist and Grammy-nominated producer (with a master's in applied mathematics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology), credits his "dream" team" of company collaborators. "Without them, InnerCat would not have evolved as it did," he says. The company's latest move: "a smart digital tool, Play & Follow, capable of enhancing music marketing campaigns exponentially," says Cabezas.

Advice for a Young Indie Artist: "Slow down, take time to understand your audience, try to amplify your connection with fans — especially now that we are all at home."

Ethan Diamond, 48

Co-Founder/CEO, Bandcamp

Joshua Kim, 34

COO, Bandcamp

On March 20, in the early days of the pandemic shutdown, Bandcamp waived its share of profits from sales made through the platform (10% to 15% of gross revenue), returning that money to artists' pockets. Fans responded by buying \$4.3 million of merchandise and albums — both physical and digital — that day. On May 1, Bandcamp waived its fees for a second time and will do so again on June 19 to benefit the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. Even when not forgoing its fees, Bandcamp has long proved to be a reliable partner for indie acts. "By early this summer," says Diamond, "fans will have paid artists half a billion dollars on the site."

Indies Stepping Up: "We're seeing artists and labels donating some or all of their earnings, or participating in compilations, to benefit relief organizations ranging from local food banks to the World Health Organization." - Diamond

Ghazi

Founder/CEO, EMPIRE

Nima Etminan, 32

COO, EMPIRE

Under Ghazi (who solely uses his first name professionally), EMPIRE has been ruling the charts through its role in the success of artists including XXXTentacion, Young Dolph & Key Glock, Money Man, Robin Thicke and Tyga. While EMPIRE recently opened a 10,000-square-foot studio in downtown San Francisco, "we've [also] acquired a couple of companies," says Ghazi. While declining to identify the acquisitions, he says they will further expand EMPIRE's footprint. The Iran-born Etminan — who was raised in Germany and learned English from hip-hop music and pop culture — began his EMPIRE career as an intern. He rose to a level where he signed Kendrick Lamar to his first EMPIRE deal in 2011. In the past year, "a big step forward that we took was expanding into international territories," he says. "We'd been active in Latin and South America for a few years already. But we set up shop in Europe, Asia and Africa" — specifically with a presence in London; Amsterdam; Jakarta, Indonesia; Shanghai;

and Lagos, Nigeria.

Nando Luaces, 53

CEO, Altafonte

Since launching his Madrid-based digital distribution company, Altafonte, in 2011, working with artists like Argentine singer-songwriter Noel Schajris and Mexican cumbia singer-songwriter Amandititita, Luaces says he has "established our global digital marketing team [to] offer a comprehensive service with top-notch creativity." Reporting revenue growth of 55% in the past year (Altafonte does not specify revenue numbers), Luaces says he has also sharpened his company's focus. "We work with fewer artists but with larger profiles, [who are] at the top of their game in terms of quality and artistic interest."

Pandemic Lessons: "In this crisis, we can see the real leaders; most of the time they're ordinary people. We also see powerful people who are completely useless."

Jason Peterson, 38

Chairman/CEO, GoDigital Media Group

When GoDigital's AdShare division started managing Daddy Yankee's YouTube rights in 2010, "we began to realize the power of Latin music and Hispanic artists," says Peterson. The company continued its push into the Latin music business over the past year, with its divisions partnering with corrido-focused label Rancho Humilde on a distribution deal and buying Latinx digital media company Mitú.

Independence Defined: "I like to keep it simple: not controlled by Warner, Universal Music Group or Sony. You can be distributed by them but not be controlled by them."

Jacqueline Saturn

President, Caroline/Harvest Records

Matt Sawin

GM, Caroline

Cindy James

Head of commercial marketing, Caroline

Adam Starr

VP/head of marketing, Caroline

Caroline, the indie label services division of Capitol Music Group, extended its reach under Saturn into all corners of the globe, including a partnership with Korean powerhouse SM Entertainment, which resulted in a No. 1 debut on the Billboard 200 from SuperM and a top five debut on that chart from

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NCT 127. Saturn also heralds “our growing presence in both Latin and Afropop spaces, with label partnerships including Sie7tr3, Duars Entertainment and Mavin Records.”

Looking Forward to When: “[I can] hug my Caroline family. Even though we’re using all of this wonderful technology to stay in touch on a minute-by-minute basis, I miss their physical presence terribly.” - Saturn

Camille Soto Malavé, 38

CEO, GLAD Empire

Soto Malavé’s GLAD Empire offers digital label and distribution services to artists like Latin trap star Anuel AA and Myke Towers (who scored his first No. 1 on Top Latin Albums with *Easy Baby Money*). Before the pandemic, the company had opened state-of-the-art recording facilities in Orlando, Fla., and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Now, Soto Malavé says, “my music producers are not working because we had to close the studios.”

Advice for a Young Artist: “Don’t choose a manager just because they’re your friend.”

Ben Swanson, 42

COO, Secretly Group

Chris Swanson, 45

Co-CEO/president of A&R, Secretly Group

Phil Waldorf, 45

Co-founder/Chief marketing officer, Secretly Group

Jon Coombs, 34

VP A&R, Secretly Group

(COMPANY DECLINED TO PARTICIPATE)

Secretly Group is one of the largest independent label companies in the world, with labels whose rosters include such critically acclaimed acts as Bon Iver, Angel Olsen, Sharon Van Etten, Whitney, Jamila Woods, Phoebe Bridgers, Moses Sumney and newcomer Porridge Radio, bringing the company both artistic and commercial success. Secretly executives state they have decided to decline comment “for any lists that do not reflect diversity and that are not fully transparent about their selection process.”

Chris Taylor

Global President of Music, Entertainment One

In a year where toy-making giant Hasbro acquired Entertainment One for \$4 billion

in cash, Taylor cites his division’s integration of the music production company Audio Network as its 2019 high-water mark. The \$215 million investment “brought us valuable scale and enabled us to take our publishing administration in-house,” he says. “Now our synch and publishing teams are working closer together to feed our content producers.” The music library of London-based Audio Network is used for “50-plus unscripted shows,” says Taylor, adding that eOne’s union with Hasbro has also resulted in over 15 projects. “We are their go-to music department,” he says. The music division’s growth was reflected in its bottom line: eOne generated revenue of \$121 million in 2019 — \$37.7 million of it by Audio Network — up from \$69 million the previous year.

How He Works Now: “Artists are still delivering. We have a real pipeline of content on the music side — I’m really excited about that. It really is still very busy. I haven’t sensed a letup at all.”

Glenn Dicker, 54

Co-founder, Redeye Worldwide

Aaron Freeman, 40

CEO, Redeye Worldwide

Tor Hansen, 55

Co-founder, Redeye Worldwide

Redeye finished 2019 with the December acquisition of Swedish distributor Border-Music. “The ability to establish a physical presence in Europe was very exciting and fit well with our long-term goals,” says Freeman. Coming into this year, Redeye established new distribution relationships with Beggars Group, Domino and Saddle Creek. “We have long admired these labels in terms of their releases and the way they run their businesses and champion their artists,” says Freeman.

How They Work Now: “Within a week [of the pandemic lockdown], we had not only reshaped critical parts of our business but had spoken with over 100 of our distributed labels, artists and independent retail customers — the true heart of what we do — to tailor our planning based on their feedback and needs.”

Diego Farias, 39

Co-founder/CEO, Amuse

Amuse, the data-driven label that gives

artists advance royalties in exchange for distribution rights, launched Amuse Pro in March. For \$5 per month, the service allows artists to sort out royalty splits among multiple contributors to a track and release their music more quickly to Instagram, TikTok and other platforms. “We knew if we could solve the pain points in a technological way” for indie artists, says Farias, “it would remove a lot of headache and hassle and help in their careers.”

How He Works Now: “Providing digital tools that allow artists to create, collaborate and release music from home has proved more important than ever.”

Wayne Hampton

Co-founder/chief business officer, Create Music Group

Jonathan Strauss, 34

CEO, Create Music Group

Alexandre Williams, 32

Co-founder/COO, Create Music Group

Create Music Group, which focuses on unsigned artists that self-release their music, reports that it surpassed \$100 million in revenue in 2019. Moreover, it says that it has 500 clients alone that generate \$3,000 per month in revenue. “We’re laser-focused on creating a middle class for the music industry,” says Strauss, “and we believe that over the next five years, as we expand globally, we will have over 10,000 artists that are able to support themselves entirely through streaming royalties — something that has never been possible in the industry traditionally dominated by a select few.”

Advice for a Young Indie Artist: “Make quick decisions, release music, engage with fans and be authentic.” - Strauss

Drew Hill, 42

Managing Director, Proper Music Group

Proper, the largest indie distributor in the United Kingdom with nearly 11% of the country’s physical recorded-music market, was on track in 2020 to boost year-on-year sales some 50%, says Hill. But the pandemic reversed that trend. Still, 2019 was a strong year for the company, which continues to grow through acquisitions of smaller players. Hill cites Proper’s purchase in October 2019 of Topic Records, with some 2,500 publishing copyrights and 12,000 master recordings. As the pandemic spread, Hill set

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in motion a plan for about half of Proper's staff to work remotely, with only the company's 60 pickers and packers remaining at the warehouse. With safe practices in place, they move about 100,000 units per week.

When Businesses Reopen: "I don't think I'm ever going to moan again about having to go to three gigs in one night."

Philip Kaplan, 44

Founder/CEO, DistroKid

Under Kaplan, DistroKid has had a busy 18 months, first with Spotify acquiring a minority passive stake in the company and then becoming one of the first indie distributors specializing in DIY artists to cut a deal with TikTok. While the company says it distributes the music of over 2 million artists with 10 million-plus songs, Kaplan says he is most proud of DistroKid's "culture of innovation, speed and fun," with zero turnover of team members. He notes that DistroKid is on its way to revenue of \$200 million and that the company's close relationships with digital service providers means that when they "have a new idea that can help artists, DistroKid is one of the first calls they make."

Indies Stepping Up: "Several of us at DistroKid have done volunteer engineering work in the community. In March, we gave every employee \$1,000 extra to help with any unforeseen issues — which many then donated to COVID-19-related causes."

Roy LaManna, 40

CEO, Vydia

"We have our own version of what the future of music looks like," says LaManna of Vydia, an end-to-end platform that manages digital distribution, data flow, rights management and payments to artists. A high-profile test for Vydia came with its role in the release of *Jesus Is Born*, the first album from Kanye West's Sunday Service Choir. The company received less than 24 hours' notice, on Christmas Eve, of West's desire to deliver the project on Christmas Day. Vydia received the tracks at 5 a.m. the morning of Dec. 25, and the album and artwork reached major streaming services within the hour. Says LaManna: "I'm proud that we are blazing our own trail."

Indies Stepping Up: "The worst of times often brings out the best in people, and it

has been amazing to see various independent organizations, artists, managers and labels sharing resources and opportunities to help everyone get through this."

Tracy Maddux

CEO, AVL Digital Group

Maddux oversaw AVL's sale in 2019 to Downtown Music Holdings. Early this year, AVL acquired the Dutch distributor FUGA, bringing "some exceptional music industry executives and technologists" into its fold, he says. With the combination of FUGA's European presence and AVL's U.S.-focused distribution flagship, CD Baby, the company's independent artists released 30,000 titles in April — "an unprecedented pace," says Maddux.

How He Works Now: "I used to travel internationally all the time. I haven't been out of the country since February. Working to communicate and lead a global music organization from Portland, Ore., is a new challenge. But since we're all using the same technologies globally — Zoom, Slack — it really feels that we haven't missed a beat."

Brad Navin, 49

CEO, The Orchard

Colleen Theis, 51

COO, The Orchard

Mary Ashley Johnson, 46

Senior vp North America, label management and sales, The Orchard

Alan Becker, 66

Senior vp product development, The Orchard

In the past year, says Theis, The Orchard grew its global team by six new offices in Amsterdam; Beijing; Manila, the Philippines; Tokyo; Nairobi, Kenya; and Johannesburg. It also "had chart-topping releases from around the world and lifted our clients' overall business by continuously launching products and driving strategy." Navin says that on the homefront, such varied releases as the latest Billboard 200-topping albums from The Raconteurs and BTS "demonstrate diversity of genres, audiences and even formats — but validates the fact that all music matters."

How They Work Now: "Time management has been the most dramatic change. Because of video chats, we have crisp and effective meetings both internally and ex-

ternally, while still making it more personal than an audio call. The Orchard team and industry at large seem to be super engaged."

- Navin

Ben Patterson, 42

Founder/CEO, DashGo

In March 2019, Downtown acquired AVL Digital Group, the parent company of distributor DashGo. (AVL had previously acquired the online indie distributor CD Baby in 2018.) The Downtown deal "really supercharged our ability to support" global growth, says Patterson. Shared assets now stretch from Brazil to Taiwan to complement DashGo's 15-person staff in its Los Angeles headquarters. Under Patterson, the company has grown to the point where DashGo's indie artists and labels average over 1 billion combined monthly streams, with its application programming interface powering two dozen platforms worldwide. He's especially proud that DashGo-distributed regional Mexican group Los Tucanes de Tijuana made the main stage at Coachella in 2019.

Looking Forward to When: He can "load the kids in the car and wander aimlessly around a big-box store."

Milana Rabkin Lewis

CEO, STEM

Kristin Graziani

VP artist and label relations, STEM

Building on STEM's success in offering distribution and payment technology to independent artists, the company last year launched STEM Direct, a membership service that gives artists one-to-one access to specialists in their specific genre. Each STEM Direct specialist "not only supports the nuts and bolts of distribution and marketing and financial insights, but also ensures success around playlist and promotion strategy," says Graziani. The company's latest launch, Scale by STEM, is a flat-fee financing product for artist advances. It "affords the flexibility to access capital when needed and gives artists the latitude to assemble the right team around them," says Graziani.

How She Works Now: "I am fortunate to have a team that was able to have a smooth transition to remote working. That being said, nothing can replace a meal with an art-

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ist or handshake with a manager." - Graziana

Bob Roback, 53

CEO, Ingrooves Music Group

Amy Dietz

GM/executive vp, Ingrooves Music Group

Following the acquisition of Ingrooves by Universal Music Group in February 2019, the distributor — which offers indie labels artificial intelligence-based data insights and marketing tools — has opened offices in São Paulo, Madrid, Tokyo and Seoul, and increased its presence in Australia and the Nordic territories. The global expansion includes key deals with labels like Brazilian heavyweight GR6, the United Kingdom's Dirty Hit (home to The 1975) and Carbon Fiber Music.

Independence Defined: "Content owners and creators acting as entrepreneurs who rent infrastructure and services." - Roback

Ed Seaman, 54

COO, MVD Entertainment Group

In an industry increasingly focused on streaming, MVD stands out among a handful of distributors in the United States still focusing on shipping physical music and video releases to brick-and-mortar stores — with 2019 marking the strongest revenue year in the company's 32-year history. MVD's revenue is split almost equally between DVDs and Blu-ray versus music sales, with digital comprising about 22% of MVD's music revenue. (The remainder comes from CDs and vinyl.) "As streaming continues to grow in both music and video, many consumers recognize that they don't own anything," says Seaman. "So labels that make collectible products thrive in this environment. While there are less shelves to merchandise products, the demand is growing."

Eliah Seton, 38

President of independent music and creator services, Warner Music Group

John Franck

Executive vp commercial and marketing, Alternative Distribution Alliance Worldwide

Warner Music Group's independent distributor, ADA Worldwide — where Franck was named executive vp commercial and marketing last July — is demonstrating its "strong culture" through the pandemic, says Seton. One executive's spouse has made

branded face masks for the global team.

Seton himself has been raising two infants while his husband has worked as a New York hospital doctor and self-isolated separately from the family. Among ADA's recent notable wins was partnering with Incubus and Ciara, and distributing the original soundtrack to *Joker*, whose composer, Hildur Guðnadóttir, won an Academy Award in February for best original score.

Independence Defined: "A culture of trust. Empowering our team to experiment, create, question, innovate, debate and [share] ideas, while having the runway to fail without judgment." - Franck

Dean Tabaac

Head of AMPED Distribution

Proving the vitality of physical music in a market with fewer places to sell it is a challenge that keeps Tabaac motivated. "I'm most proud of the combined tenacity of our labels and us to keep physical releases relevant, knowing that other distributors, and the labels they represent, are deemphasizing those configurations," he says. Tabaac cites the ability of AMPED's distribution centers to "continually get product into retailers, offline and online, faster than anyone else."

Urgent Indie Issue: To meet the demand for vinyl, says Tabaac, "where we used to have a 40-foot row that was highly automated for processing CD orders, we had to build three mezzanines so our people could do manual LP picks more efficiently."

Darius Van Arman, 48

Co-CEO, Secretly Distribution

Christopher Welz, 39

*Managing director, Secretly Distribution
(COMPANY DECLINED TO PARTICIPATE)*

With its own physical distribution pipeline stateside and around the world, Secretly Distribution is thriving, scoring a record year with U.S. revenue in excess of \$50 million. The company has taken on new label partners while continuing to work with affiliated labels Secretly Canadian, Jagjaguwar and others. The distributor recently completed a systems integration to strengthen its repertoire management and digital supply chain capabilities. Early in 2020, the company celebrated the four Grammy Award nominations (including record and

album of the year) earned by Bon Iver's *i,i*, released by Jagjaguwar. Secretly executives state they have decided to decline comment "for any lists that do not reflect diversity and that are not fully transparent about their selection process."

Michael Weissman

President, SoundCloud

In February, Weissman helped close the deal through which SiriusXM took a \$75 million minority stake in SoundCloud. "I wasn't expecting the timing to be perfect, but it essentially was," he says. The timing was also perfect in April when SoundCloud CEO Kerry Trainor announced a plan worth \$15 million to support creators during the shutdown and bolster their careers long term. During the same month, Weissman helped lead the launch of Repost by SoundCloud, giving all SoundCloud creators — 25 million-plus, according to the company — access to professional marketing and monetization services and distribution features. Weissman says he was proud "to see the teams come together using Slack, email and various video tools to release a product into the market [during the pandemic] and also have the customer reception to be unbelievable."

Best Advice for a Young Indie Artist:

"Learn the business side of music, how deals work, especially on rights. It's a complex industry."

Emmanuel Zunz, 47

Founder/CEO, OneRPM

Nashville-based OneRPM, an indie digital distribution company, continued to expand its international presence (with staff now in 20 locations worldwide) while creating a new content management system to improve the quality of service it provides to clients, says Zunz. "It's a way for us to manage marketing globally, allowing us to create campaigns and [oversee] them across all our 20 offices. It enables us to be held accountable" with the ability to measure performance. Looking ahead, he adds, the new system "will allow us to scale our business without sacrificing quality of service to our clients." Urgent indie issue "[With the] consolidation of indie distribution, the amount of money going for artist advances is absolutely insane."

Contributors: Trevor Anderson, Katie Bain, Steve Baltin, Alexei Barrionuevo, Jeff Benjamin, Harley Brown, Ed Christman, Tatiana Cirisano, Leila Cobo, Danica Daniel, Steven Edelstone, Griselda Flores, Bianca Gracie, Hilary Hughes, Steve Knopper, Carl Lamarre, Joe Levy, Geoff Mayfield, Gail Mitchell, Melinda Newman, Paula Parisi, Glenn Peoples, Bryan Reesman, Annie Reuter, Jessica Roiz, Craig Rosen, Dan Rys, Taylor Weatherby, Deborah Wilker, Nick Williams

Methodology: The record companies featured on Billboard's Indie Power Players list are defined as independent because they are not owned by one of the three major music groups: Sony, Warner and Universal. Distributors are defined as independent, regardless of ownership, based on the repertoire they market, largely from labels not under the majors' umbrellas. Billboard editors and reporters weighed a variety of factors in determining the 2020 Indie Power Players list including, but not limited to, nominations by peers, colleagues and superiors at selected music companies, as well as recommendations by indie trade group A2IM. In addition to nominations, editors weigh the success of each executive's label or distributor as measured by chart, sales and streaming performance. Career trajectory and industry impact were also considered. Unless otherwise noted, Billboard Boxscore and Nielsen Music/MRC Data are the sources for tour grosses and sales/streaming data, respectively. Nielsen is also the source for radio audience metrics. Unless otherwise noted, album streaming figures cited represent collective U.S. on-demand audio totals for an album's tracks, and song/artist streaming figures represent U.S. on-demand audio and video totals.

This article originally appeared in the June 13, 2020 issue of Billboard. ▀

Twitch Users Are Getting Takedown Notices En Masse for the First Time: Here's Why

BY TATIANA CIRISANO

Over the last week, users on gaming-focused livestream platform Twitch received a sudden flurry of takedown notices for clips of old videos using unlicensed background music. The more than 2,500 notices — which the RIAA filed on behalf of rights holders for recordings including [Ariana Grande](#)'s "7 Rings" and [DNCE](#)'s "Cake By The Ocean" — caused a storm on social media, with users [complaining](#) on Twitter they felt blindsided by the requests, some for clips dating as far back as 2017.

Contrary to some users' claims, Twitch's [Music Guidelines](#) — which explicitly prohibit users from incorporating music into their streams without the proper license — have not suddenly changed. What's really going on at the Amazon-owned platform has to do with the coronavirus pandemic, the music industry's history of cracking down on infringing online platforms as they grow to a certain scale and a discussion brewing in Congress about amending copyright law.

Like YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and other platforms that host user-uploaded content before it, Twitch has been operating under the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act's (DMCA) "safe harbor" provision, which shields content-hosting platforms from liability for copyright violations by users, so long as they promptly respond to takedown requests from rights holders. The way the process works, Twitch itself doesn't issue takedowns — rather, rights holders (mostly record labels and publishers) notify the platform of infringement, after which Twitch is legally obligated to remove the allegedly infringing content and notify the user who posted it. (Users

who believe their content has been flagged by mistake or misidentification have the option to contest this by submitting a counter-notification.)

Clearing music for livestreaming platforms is a [thorny process](#), and there are still disagreements about exactly what licenses are required. Every livestream requires a license to use a recording (usually from a label), as well as a public performance license from a collecting society like ASCAP or BMI. Any video that's available on-demand also requires a synch license and a mechanical license — the latter of which may also be required for a live performance. A DJ set that involves remixes or samples also requires licenses to sample or interpolate songs.

Technically, anyone who created video for Twitch always needed these licenses — but it was never a big issue before now.

"This is the first time we have received mass DMCA claims against clips," the Twitch Support team said in a [string of tweets](#) on June 7. "We understand this has been stressful for affected creators and are working on solutions, including examining how we can give you more control over your clips."

Why now? As artists turn to livestream performances as an alternative to touring in the coronavirus era, Twitch is becoming increasingly relevant to the music industry, with artists like [Diplo](#) and [ZEDD](#) launching new channels and festivals like [Willie Nelson](#)'s signature Luck Reunion going virtual with livestreams on the platform. Back in March, artists like [John Legend](#) and [Charlie Puth](#) performed as part of Twitch's 12-hour coronavirus relief fundraiser, Stream Aid 2020. Hours watched on Twitch grew by more than 50% during the first four weeks of social distancing, compared with the four weeks prior, according to a company spokesperson. (Twitch declined to comment further for this piece.)

At the start of the pandemic, the music industry largely turned a blind eye to music licensing issues on livestreams, since livestreaming was not yet a big business, and labels and publishers were lenient towards artists who were clearly still adjusting to making a living during a crisis. One expla-

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nation for the sudden attention to Twitch is that three months in, that attitude has changed.

"Our job is to protect artists on all digital platforms, and when we see a platform start to emerge as an important player, our job is to establish their rights as quickly as possible," RIAA chairman/CEO **Mitch Glazier** tells *Billboard*. "During COVID-19, more and more artists have had to turn to livestreaming and innovate. They want to and need to reach their fans. And this could be a wonderful platform. But it makes it hard for artists to be able to do that, for the benefit of the whole ecosystem, if the company is not going to compensate them for their work."

National Music Publishers' Association (NMPA) president and CEO **David Israelite** said by email that publishers also have an eye on the platform. "We are concerned about unlicensed songs being used on Twitch," he said, "and are exploring all options to protect the songwriters and music publishers who we represent."

Users are spending more time than ever on music-centered Twitch videos. But those figures still pale in comparison to the platform's gaming-centric videos. According to a recent [report](#) by Twitch livestream software developer StreamElements and analytics company Arsenal, the "music and performing arts" category on Twitch saw 17 million hours watched in April — a massive 385% jump year-over-year, but only 1% of total viewing hours on Twitch that month.

Still, given that jump, it's unsurprising the music industry is pouncing on Twitch now to establish a way to collect its due. Similar stories played out with platforms like YouTube, which signed multi-year licensing deals with the three major music groups in 2017, and more recently, TikTok, from which the music industry has [demanded better licensing deals](#) as the platform has become wildly popular over the past several years.

Ted Kalo, executive director of artist advocacy organization Artist Rights Alliance, hopes the surge in Twitch takedown requests serves as a "wake-up call" for Twitch in this respect.

"With touring shut down, artists need all available income streams more than ever, and big tech companies depriving artists

of royalties owed to them has come into greater focus," he says. "A technologically-savvy company like Amazon could solve this problem for artists and Twitch users quickly: by licensing music and providing Twitch creators tools to avoid unlicensed uses of music."

Currently, Twitch does not have licensing deals of any kind with Universal Music Group, Sony Music or Warner Music Group, or any of their publishing entities. *Billboard* understands Twitch is in talks with global performance rights organizations — which collect and distribute public performance royalties — regarding non-interactive audio-visual licenses, and already has deals with ASCAP, SESAC and BMI. Additionally, a source tells *Billboard* that Twitch has licensing deals in place with close to 200 publishers for the rights to include their music in its karaoke-style app Twitch Sings, though the deals do not apply to Twitch itself.

The music industry has long rallied against the DMCA, arguing that by putting the onus on rights holders to police piracy, the law makes it difficult to license a work for its market value. And this time, the sudden burst in takedown notices arrives against the backdrop of [a current debate](#) in Congress over whether or not the DMCA should be updated, where [The Eagles' Don Henley](#) recently [testified](#) that "the DMCA is a relic of a MySpace era in a TikTok world." The RIAA is [at the center](#) of that debate. All of this is happening at a time when the new European Union Copyright Directive gives platforms more responsibility to monitor infringement, although it has yet to take effect.

"There's going to be additional folks coming forward to give testimony, there's going to be a lot of back and forth with lawmakers, and this is an ongoing discussion," comments music writer, DJ and producer **Dani Deahl**. "It makes sense for entities like the RIAA, which represents the majors, to start building their case with largely untouched platforms like Twitch."

Deahl adds that the lack of copyright savvy in the rapidly-growing livestreaming community only added to this week's headline-grabbing social media storm. "I see a lot of Twitch creators saying that Twitch is not

advocating on behalf of them as creators, and there really has to be a bridge built to say, musicians are also creators," she says. "These people spent a lot of time and effort to make the music that you're using. We're all in a creative community together. So how can we create a system that benefits all?"

Twitch [says](#) it is working on solutions, starting with expanding the use of content identification service Audible Magic to automatically identify and delete existing clips which may contain copyrighted music without penalty, and adding the ability for users to sift through and delete clips more easily. While Twitch has long used Audible Magic to police on-demand videos on the platform, this is the first time it has applied the technology to short clips highlighting old livestream videos that are saved on the streamer's page.

And of course, Twitch isn't the only platform which has seen a rise in takedown requests as artists stuck at home turn to livestream performances. Instagram felt the need to [release](#) new guidelines for including music in videos and livestreams, and even added a notification system to alert users whose streams are in danger of being taken down due to copyright violations.

But for now, if Twitch wants to build out a music strategy, the only real solution is licensing. Until the company can secure strong licensing deals, for its users frustrated over takedown notices, this is only the beginning.

"COVID-19 has shined a light on livestreaming, and if everybody comes to the table and they're accountable and they create a great consumer experience, it can be great for everybody," Glazier adds. "Our job is to make sure that [rights holders] have those opportunities to get compensated. We're going to ferociously do that." ▀

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Virgin EMI Boss Ted Cockle Exits the Universal UK Label

BY TATIANA CIRISANO

Virgin EMI president **Ted Cockle** has departed the label, which he helped build into one of Universal Music UK's largest over the past seven years, with successes like Scottish superstar [Lewis Capaldi](#).

The news, which *Music Business Worldwide* first reported and *Billboard* can confirm, caps Cockle's 15-year run with Universal Music Group. He joined Island Records UK in 2005, and within three years, rose from head of marketing to co-president alongside **Darcus Beese**. He has run Virgin EMI since the label's [launch](#) in 2013 as an amalgamation of Universal Music subsidiary Mercury Records and Virgin Records.

Virgin EMI's roster of British artists includes Capaldi, [Bastille](#) and [Emeli Sandé](#), while it also serves as the UK label home for superstars like [Justin Bieber](#), [Migos](#), [Shawn Mendes](#) and [Taylor Swift](#). News regarding Cockle's successor is expected soon. □

Maria Egan Joins Splice as Chief Music Officer Following Pulse Exit

BY TATIANA CIRISANO

Former Pulse Music Group president and head of creative **Maria Egan** has joined music creation platform Splice, where she will serve as its first-ever chief music officer.

In her new role, Egan will connect Splice with the commercial music industry by identifying new talent and developing initiatives and products to support the songwriting, record label and publishing communities. Founded in 2013, Splice offers a community of more than four million musicians a platform to find sounds, rent gear and collaborate on projects.

"At Pulse I used Splice as an A&R tool, signing new writers that built their brands on the platform," says Egan, who exited Pulse after seven years in June. "I've watched Splice become a key player in this space and believe they're positioned to be a leader in the future of collaboration. It couldn't be a better time to leverage their innovative tech and thriving community to give creators all around the world opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have."

Added Splice co-founder and CEO **Steve Martocci**: "Maria deeply understands the creative process and how Splice fits into creation and collaboration at the top tiers of music. She also understands firsthand how Splice can be a pathway for talented bedroom creators to reach the traditional music industry. Maria joins at a time when the existing team's contributions have helped put Splice on the music industry map and all over the radio in a major way. I couldn't be more proud to have Maria leading Splice's connections with the wider music community."

Egan will also oversee a new structure for Splice's music and industry relations department. **Jen Mozenter** has been promoted to vp of A&R, after bringing A-list creators like Boi-1da ([Drake](#), [Rihanna](#)) and WondaGurl ([Travis Scott](#), [Lil Uzi Vert](#)) over to the platform for original sample packs as part of its Splice Sounds library.

"Any creator should be able to come to Splice and see themselves represented in our community," Mozenter says. "I'm honored to share the stories of artists who help drive and shape culture. And that's the work I'll continue to do alongside my team." □

Grammys First-Look: The Most-Likely Big Four Contenders

BY PAUL GREIN

When the nominations for the 63rd annual Grammy Awards — slated for Jan. 31, 2021 — are announced later this year, [Post Malone](#), [The Weeknd](#), [Harry Styles](#), [Dua Lipa](#), [Roddy Ricch](#) and [Maren Morris](#) all have a good chance of appearing in both of the highest-profile categories: album and record of the year.

Now, with less than three months left in the eligibility period (which began Sept. 1, 2019, and will end Aug. 31), *Billboard* takes a look at the potential Big Four nominees, listed in descending order of their likelihood.

No country albums were nominated in this category last year, but that's likely to change this time around. In fact, it's possible that more than one country release will receive nods for the first time in Grammy history.

Post Malone, Hollywood's Bleeding

The genre-blurring star's previous album, *beerbongs & bentleys*, was an album of the year nominee in 2018. This LP, Post Malone's third, topped the *Billboard 200* for five nonconsecutive weeks, longer than any other album in this eligibility year so far.

The Weeknd, After Hours

The R&B artist's 2015 album, *Beauty Behind the Madness*, was nominated for album of the year — but two years later, his follow-up, *Starboy*, was passed over. Now, The Weeknd has another shot with his fourth LP, *After Hours*, which spent its first four weeks at No. 1 on the *Billboard 200*.

Fiona Apple, Fetch the Bolt Cutters

Apple's fifth album reached No. 4 on the *Billboard 200* (just one spot below her 2012 album, *The Idler Wheel...*). Apple, who released her first album in 1996, was nominated for best new artist at the 1998 ceremony, but hasn't been recognized in any of the

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other general-field categories since.

Harry Styles, *Fine Line*

Styles has yet to receive a Grammy nomination as a solo artist or as a member of One Direction. But *Fine Line*, his second solo release, not only spent its first two weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 but also prompted Stevie Nicks to tweet: "Way to go H~ it is your *Rumours*." (That Fleetwood Mac classic won album of the year in 1978.)

Dua Lipa, *Future Nostalgia*

The British singer won two Grammys, including best new artist, at the 2019 ceremony. This album, her second, reached No. 4 on the Billboard 200 — Lipa's best showing to date — and was praised for its smooth rollout despite arriving in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic.

Luke Combs, *What You See Is What You Get*

Combs' second full-length album topped the Billboard 200 for one week and the **Top Country Albums** chart for 20 nonconsecutive weeks and counting. Combs has previously received two Grammy nominations, including best new artist, which he lost to Lipa.

Roddy Ricch, *Please Excuse Me for Being Antisocial*

Roddy Ricch's debut album — which boasted featured artists such as Gunna, Meek Mill and Ty Dolla \$ign — topped the Billboard 200 for four nonconsecutive weeks, confirming his status as a rap star in the making.

The Highwomen, *The Highwomen*

All members of this supergroup — Brandi Carlile, Natalie Hemby, Maren Morris and Amanda Shires — have won Grammys on their own. If nominated as The Highwomen, they would be the second all-female collaboration to earn an AOTY nod; 33 years ago, Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris' *Trio* became the first. The Highwomen reached No. 1 on Top Country Albums and No. 10 on the Billboard 200.

Lady Gaga and Dixie Chicks are both three-time nominees in this category, and either or both acts could easily receive nods with their latest albums. Gaga's *Chromatica* is her first proper album in four years, since *A Star Is Born* heightened and broadened her stardom, while Dixie Chicks' *Gaslighter*,

expected this summer, is the country trio's first album in 14 years. Additional hip-hop contenders include Lil Uzi Vert's *Eternal Atake*, DaBaby's *Kirk*, Megan Thee Stallion's *Suga* and Mac Miller's posthumous *Circles*, while Miranda Lambert's *Wildcard* and Jason Isbell & The 400 Unit's *Reunions* are other potential country contenders.

Though two of the 2019 nominees — Bon Iver's "Hey, Ma" and H.E.R.'s "Hard Place" — didn't crack the Hot 100, the other six were all top three hits. Of this year's likely nominees, four have reached No. 1 so far.

The Weeknd, "Blinding Lights"

This would be The Weeknd's second record of the year nod after he was nominated in 2015 for "Can't Feel My Face." "Lights" logged four nonconsecutive weeks atop the **Billboard Hot 100**.

Post Malone, "Circles"

Post Malone was nominated two years ago for "rockstar" (featuring 21 Savage) and this past year for "Sunflower" with Swae Lee. If nominated again, he would become the fourth artist in Grammy history — following Frank Sinatra, Roberta Flack and Steve Winwood — to make it into this category three years running.

Billie Eilish, "everything i wanted"

This was Eilish's second top 10 hit on the Hot 100 (it peaked at No. 8) and would be her second record of the year nod in a row after winning in January for "bad guy." Now, Eilish could become the first artist to be nominated in this category the year after winning since U2 nearly two decades ago.

Maren Morris, "The Bones"

This would be Morris' second record of the year nod, but the first on her own. (She was nominated in 2018 for "The Middle," her dance-pop hit with Zedd and Grey.) With "The Bones," which has logged 14 weeks at No. 1 on **Hot Country Songs**, Morris could join Taylor Swift on the short list of artists who have received ROTY nominations for both pop and country records.

Harry Styles, "Adore You"

This was Styles' second top 10 solo hit on the Billboard Hot 100, peaking at No. 6, following his solo debut single, "Sign of the Times."

Roddy Ricch, "The Box"

This hip-hop smash remained at No. 1 on

the Hot 100 for 11 consecutive weeks, the longest reign atop the chart so far this year.

Megan Thee Stallion feat. Beyoncé, "Savage Remix"

This collaboration also hit No. 1 on the Hot 100. If nominated, it would be the third all-female collab to receive a record of the year nomination following Brandy & Monica's "The Boy Is Mine" (1998) and the Iggy Azalea-Charli XCX team-up "Fancy" (2014). This would be Beyoncé's sixth nomination in this category, surpassing Barbra Streisand as the female artist with the most career nods.

Dua Lipa, "Don't Start Now"

This disco-inspired pop single reached No. 2 on the Hot 100, becoming Lipa's highest-charting hit on the chart to date.

Drake, who has been nominated twice in this category, has two strong candidates with his track "Toosie Slide" and a feature on Future's "Life Is Good"; Lady Gaga, who is also a two-time nominee in this category, could be back in the running with "Stupid Love" or her new Ariana Grande collaboration, "Rain on Me"; Travis Scott's "Highest in the Room," which entered the Hot 100 at No. 1, is also a top contender; as is Doja Cat's "Say So," which reached No. 1 on the Hot 100 thanks to a remix featuring Nicki Minaj.

There's often overlap between nominees for record of the year (which awards artists, producers, recording engineers, mastering engineers and remixers) and song of the year (which awards songwriters) — and now, there could be plenty.

Post Malone, "Circles"

Post Malone co-wrote this Hot 100 hit with longtime collaborators Adam Feeney (who works under the moniker Frank Dukes), Billy Walsh and Louis Bell, all of whom are credited on Post Malone's debut album, *Stoney*.

Billie Eilish, "everything i wanted"

Eilish co-wrote this dreamlike ballad with her brother and collaborator, FINNEAS; at the 2020 ceremony, the pair won in this category for "bad guy." Should "everything I wanted" win, they would become the first songwriters to score back-to-back awards in this category.

Maren Morris, "The Bones"

Morris co-wrote this country slow jam

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with Jimmy Robbins and Laura Veltz, both of whom she worked with on her 2016 major-label debut album, *Hero*.

Harry Styles, "Adore You"

Styles co-wrote this smash with Amy Allen, Tyler Johnson and Thomas Hull (aka Kid Harpoon). The latter two also co-wrote and co-produced a handful of tracks on Styles' self-titled solo debut album.

The Weeknd, "Blinding Lights"

The Weeknd co-wrote this hit with Ahmad Balshe (aka Belly), Jason Quenneville (DaHeala), Max Martin and Oscar Holter. Martin, who also co-wrote Lady Gaga's "Stupid Love," is a four-time nominee in this category.

Selena Gomez, "Lose You To Love Me"

Gomez co-wrote this ballad with Julia Michaels and Justin Tranter, along with Mattias Larsson and Robin Fredriksson (Mattman & Robin). Michaels and Tranter were nominated in this category three years ago for co-writing Michaels' hit "Issues."

Alicia Keys, "Underdog"

Keys — who won in this category in 2001 for "Fallin'" — co-wrote "Underdog" with Johnny McDaid, Ed Sheeran, Amy Wadge, Jonny Coffer and Foy Vance.

Dixie Chicks, "Gaslighter"

The trio, who co-wrote this track with Jack Antonoff, won in this category at the 2007 ceremony for co-writing "Not Ready To Make Nice."

Bob Dylan may be in the conversation for "Murder Most Foul," his nearly 17-minute song about President John F. Kennedy's assassination, which would be Dylan's first nomination in this category. Ozan Yildirim (aka OZ) has two strong candidates with Travis Scott's "Highest in the Room" (OZ and Scott co-wrote the song with Nik Franscioni and Mike Dean) and Future featuring Drake's "Life Is Good" (co-written with the artists, plus Darius Hill and Mathias Liyew). Meanwhile, Beyoncé and Terius Nash (aka The-Dream), who won in this category 11 years ago for co-writing "Single Ladies (Put a Ring On It)," could make it back to the finals with "Savage Remix" (co-written with Megan Pete [aka Megan Thee Stallion], Anthony White [J. White], Bobby Session Jr., Derrick Milano, Jordan Kyle Lanier Thorpe [Pardison Fontaine], Shawn Carter [JAY-Z]

and Brittany Hazzard [Starrah]).

Though breakout stars including Roddy Ricch, DaBaby, The Highwomen and The Scotts are all ineligible for various reasons, many contenders remain.

Megan Thee Stallion

The Houston rapper achieved a measure of prominence in 2019 with her *Fever* mixtape and rose to Hot 100-topping stardom in 2020. Under the old rules, she would have been ineligible (she had released over 30 tracks prior to the start of the current eligibility year), but now it will be up to the screening committee to determine if her 2019 inroads should preclude a shot here this year.

Summer Walker

The R&B singer's debut album, *Over It*, reached No. 2 on the Billboard 200 and boasted collaborations with Drake (a 2010 best new artist nominee), Bryson Tiller and Usher — all of which landed on the Hot 100. Last November, Walker won best new artist at the Soul Train Music Awards.

Doja Cat

The 24-year-old singer-rapper's second album, *Hot Pink*, reached No. 9 on the Billboard 200, while its breakout single, "Say So," which later featured Nicki Minaj (a 2011 best new artist nominee) on a remix, hit No. 1 on the Hot 100.

Tones and I

The Australian singer's breakout hit, the quirky alt-pop "Dance Monkey," reached No. 4 on the Hot 100 (and No. 1 in many regions around the world), while her debut EP, *The Kids Are Coming*, climbed to No. 30 on the Billboard 200.

Ingrid Andress

Following the release of Andress' debut album, *Lady Like*, which reached No. 9 on *Billboard's* Top Country Albums chart, the country singer-songwriter's debut single, "More Hearts Than Mine," reached No. 3 on **Country Airplay** and No. 30 on the Hot 100.

Gabby Barrett

Two years ago, this up-and-coming country singer finished third on *American Idol*. This April, her breakout single, "I Hope," which previews her debut album, *Goldmine* (June 19), became the first debut track by a woman to top *Billboard's* **Country Stream-**

ing Songs chart.

Rex Orange County

Following the singer-songwriter's two self-released albums and a feature on Tyler, The Creator's 2017 album, *Flower Boy*, the English musician's third album, *Pony*, became his major-label debut on RCA and climbed to No. 3 on the *Billboard* 200.

Conan Gray

After developing a devoted following on YouTube in his early teens, Gray released his debut album, *Kid Krow*, this March. It reached No. 5 on the *Billboard* 200 and earned praise from Taylor Swift (a 2007 best new artist nominee) on Instagram.

SuperM has a chance of becoming the first K-pop group to be nominated in this category with its self-titled EP, which debuted at No. 1 on the *Billboard* 200. And, there are several strong hip-hop candidates in addition to Doja Cat, including Polo G, Saweetie, NLE Choppa and Lil Mosey — the latter two of whom are still in their teens. Several rookie hitmakers are also in the running, including hip-hop artist Arizona Zervas, whose "Roxanne" reached No. 4 on the *Billboard* Hot 100; Surfaces, the Texas electro-pop duo that has a current hit with "Sunday Best"; SHAED, the Washington, D.C.-based pop trio whose 2018 single "Trampoline" was a sleeper hit this year; Trevor Daniel, the Los Angeles-based singer-songwriter behind "Falling"; and Benee, a 20-year-old New Zealand singer who delivered the unintentional quarantine anthem "Supalonely" (featuring Gus Daperton).

This article originally appeared in the June 13, 2020 issue of Billboard. **b**

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2020 BET Awards: Drake, Megan Thee Stallion & Roddy Ricch Lead Nominees, CBS Airing Show For First Time

BY GAIL MITCHELL

Drake, with six nominations, and newcomers **Megan Thee Stallion** and **Roddy Ricch**, tied with five nominations each, are among the top nominees for the 2020 BET Awards.

Also, in celebration of the award ceremony's 20th anniversary and BET's 40th anniversary, the BET Awards will simulcast live (8 p.m. ET) across ViacomCBS networks, including BET and BET HER, and make its national broadcast premiere on CBS on June 28 (8 p.m.-11 p.m. ET/PT).

Drake's six nominations include best Male Hip-Hop Artist, Video of the Year and two nods for both Best Collaboration and Viewer's Choice, for his features with **Chris Brown** ("No Guidance") and **Future** ("Life Is Good").

In addition to Viewer's Choice, Megan Thee Stallion's five nods include Best Female Hip Hop Artist, Best Collaboration, Album of the Year and Video of the Year. Ricch is also a contender in the Best Male Hip Hop Artist, Album of the Year, Video of the Year and Viewer's Choice categories as well as Best New Artist.

The latter category finds Ricch vying against DaniLeigh, Lil Nas X, Pop Smoke, Summer Walker and YBN Cordae.

Rounding out the top nominees slate with four nods each are Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj, Chris Brown, Lizzo and DaBaby.

All told, the BET Awards recognizes achievements in music, television, film and sports across 21 categories.

This year's Humanitarian and Lifetime Achievement honorees will be announced soon as will the show's host and talent participants.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, BET announced on May 20 that it would move forward with airing the BET Awards on June 28. The company's release stated in part, "Using an array of innovative techniques and artist-generated content, the show will continue, allowing the audience to join in a celebration of black love, joy, pride and power with an all-star lineup."

The BET Experience — the annual three-day lifestyle event leading up to the awards show — will return in 2021.

Connie Orlando, BET's executive vp of specials, music programming & music strategy, and Jesse Collins, CEO of Jesse Collins Entertainment, are executive producers for the 2020 BET Awards. For the latest news and updates, visit BET.com/Awards.

Here is the complete list of nominees for this year's BET Awards:

BEST FEMALE R&B/POP ARTIST

- BEYONCÉ
- H.E.R.
- JHENÉ AIKO
- KEHLANI
- LIZZO
- SUMMER WALKER

BEST MALE R&B/POP ARTIST

- ANDERSON .PAAK
- CHRIS BROWN
- JACQUEES
- KHALID
- THE WEEKND
- USHER

BEST GROUP

- CHLOE X HALLE
- CITY GIRLS
- EARTHGANG
- GRISELDA
- JACKBOYS
- MIGOS

BEST COLLABORATION

- CHRIS BROWN FT. DRAKE - NO GUIDANCE

- DJ KHALED FT. NIPSEY HUSSLE &

- JOHN LEGEND - HIGHER

- FUTURE FT. DRAKE - LIFE IS GOOD

- H.E.R. FT. YG - SLIDE

- MEGAN THEE STALLION FT. NICKI

MINAJ & TY DOLLA \$IGN - HOT GIRL SUMMER

WALE FT. JEREMIH - ON CHILL

BEST MALE HIP HOP ARTIST

- DABABY
- DRAKE
- FUTURE
- LIL BABY
- RODDY RICCH
- TRAVIS SCOTT

BEST FEMALE HIP HOP ARTIST

- CARDI B
- DOJA CAT
- LIZZO
- MEGAN THEE STALLION
- NICKI MINAJ
- SAWEETIE

VIDEO OF THE YEAR

CHRIS BROWN FT. DRAKE - NO GUIDANCE

DABABY - BOP

DJ KHALED FT. NIPSEY HUSSLE & JOHN LEGEND - HIGHER

DOJA CAT - SAY SO

MEGAN THEE STALLION FT. NICKI MINAJ & TY DOLLA \$IGN - HOT GIRL SUMMER

RODDY RICCH - THE BOX

VIDEO DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR

- BENNY BOOM
- COLE BENNETT
- DAVE MEYERS
- DIRECTOR X
- EIF RIVERA
- TEYANA "SPIKE TEE" TAYLOR

BEST NEW ARTIST

- DANILEIGH
- LIL NAS X
- POP SMOKE
- RODDY RICCH
- SUMMER WALKER
- YBN CORDAE

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

- CUZ I LOVE YOU - LIZZO
- FEVER - MEGAN THEE STALLION
- HOMECOMING: THE LIVE ALBUM - BEYONCÉ

- I USED TO KNOW HER - H.E.R.

- KIRK - DABABY

- PLEASE EXCUSE ME FOR BEING ANTI-SOCIAL - RODDY RICCH

- DR. BOBBY JONES BEST GOSPEL/INSPIRATIONAL AWARD

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FRED HAMMOND - ALRIGHT
JOHN P. KEE FT. ZACARDI CORTEZ - I MADE IT OUT
KANYE WEST - FOLLOW GOD
KIRK FRANKLIN - JUST FOR ME
PJ MORTON FT. LE'ANDRIA JOHNSON & MARY MARY - ALL IN HIS PLAN
THE CLARK SISTERS - VICTORY

BEST ACTRESS
ANGELA BASSETT
CYNTHIA ERIVO
ISSA RAE
REGINA KING
TRACEE ELLIS ROSS
ZENDAYA

BEST ACTOR
BILLY PORTER
EDDIE MURPHY
FOREST WHITAKER
JAMIE FOXX
MICHAEL B. JORDAN
OMARI HARDWICK

YOUNGSTARS AWARD
ALEX HIBBERT
ASANTE BLACKK
JAHI D'ALLO WINSTON
MARSAI MARTIN
MILES BROWN
STORM REID

BEST MOVIE
BAD BOYS FOR LIFE
DOLEMITE IS MY NAME
HARRIET
HOMECOMING: A FILM BY BEYONCÉ
JUST MERCY
QUEEN & SLIM

SPORTSWOMAN OF THE YEAR
AJEÉ WILSON
CLARESSA SHIELDS
COCO GAUFF
NAOMI OSAKA
SERENA WILLIAMS
SIMONE BILES

SPORTSMAN OF THE YEAR
GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO
KAWHI LEONARD
LEBRON JAMES
ODELL BECKHAM JR.
PATRICK MAHOMES II
STEPHEN CURRY

BET HER AWARD
ALICIA KEYS - UNDERDOG
BEYONCÉ FT. BLUE IVY CARTER,

WIZKID & SAINT JHN - BROWN SKIN GIRL
CIARA FT. LUPITA NYONG'O, ESTER DEAN, CITY GIRLS & LA LA - MELANIN
LAYTON GREENE - I CHOOSE
LIZZO FT. MISSY ELLIOTT - TEMPO
RAPSYOD FT. PJ MORTON - AFENI

VIEWER'S CHOICE AWARD
CHRIS BROWN FT. DRAKE - NO GUIDANCE
DABABY - BOP
FUTURE FT. DRAKE - LIFE IS GOOD
MEGAN THEE STALLION FT. NICKI MINAJ - HOT GIRL SUMMER
RODDY RICCH - THE BOX
THE WEEKND - HEARTLESS

BEST INTERNATIONAL ACT
BURNA BOY (NIGERIA)
INNOSS'B (DRC)
SHO MADJOZI (SOUTH AFRICA)
DAVE (U.K.)
STORMZY (U.K.)
NINHO (FRANCE)
S.PRI NOIR (FRANCE)

VIEWER'S CHOICE: BEST NEW INTERNATIONAL ACT
REMA (NIGERIA)
SHA SHA (ZIMBABWE)
CELESTE (U.K.)
YOUNG T & BUGSEY (U.K.)
HATIK (FRANCE)
STACY (FRANCE) ▶

Bars Reopening in New Orleans, But Live Music Remains Prohibited

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bar owners in New Orleans prepared for a soft opening, and an uncertain one, as they began letting customers in Saturday (June 13) for the first time in months. Capacity is limited to 25%, live music remains prohibited, and nobody knows how many tourists

will show on Bourbon Street in the age of COVID-19.

Pam Fortner, owner of six French Quarter venues, is opening only two of them, both on Bourbon, where the customary blocks-long frat party atmosphere ended in an abrupt shutdown in mid-March.

Now, she's not sure what to expect. She sat at a sidewalk table at Royal and St. Ann on Thursday, eating a Caesar salad and deriving hope from the occasional out-of-state license plate she saw amid sparse traffic.

"I think Saturday will be busy," she said in an interview.

Cherie Boos, manager of Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop, in an authentically rustic, creaky floored 18th-century Creole cottage, said she's hoping locals will help keep the bar financially afloat as Bourbon Street revives. But she adds, "We're hoping that, you know, we can start generating some tourists in the city, too, now that the bars are going to be open."

Bourbon Street, which had the ambiance of an empty movie set in April, has experienced a slow re-awakening in recent weeks. Dine-in restaurants have been allowed to reopen at 25% capacity, as have bars with food permits. Still, traffic has been slow and plywood covered numerous tavern windows until Mayor LaToya Cantrell announced the latest easing of restrictions in a city that, in the spring, had become an international hot spot for COVID-19.

Even as they announced the reopenings on Tuesday, city officials admitted they were concerned about a possible recurrence.

"Oh, I'm worried. I am worried," Cantrell said at a news conference. She said city code enforcement officials will watch to make sure social distancing, masking requirements and building capacity limits are enforced.

Customers will have to be mindful, too, said Dr. Jennifer Avegno, the city's health director. "If you're there, with your household group and you're having drinks at a table at a bar, we really need you not to go off and mingle with the other tables," she said Tuesday.

Toward that end, there will be no musicians on stage at Fortner's Tropical Isle bars on Bourbon Street. That prevents people

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from congregating near the stage and eliminates the possibility that a singer belting out a song could also be unknowingly spreading the virus. That fear that has kept the city from allowing live music performances, including choirs in churches.

Some New Orleans bar owners are critical of the restrictions. "Why are they picking on the musicians?" said Fortner.

And some bars, like the Maple Leaf, a venerable late night haunt in the Carrollton neighborhood, decided not to open.

"While our City leaders have decided to allow bars to reopen ... we will not be allowed to have Live Music and what is the Leaf without our musicians?" read a post on the Maple Leaf's Facebook page.

One of the quarter's best known tourist spots, Pat O'Brien's, also didn't plan an immediate reopening. Manager Shelley Waguespack has numerous concerns as she decides when and how to reopen.

She's hoping the state Legislature will address one concern — liability. She said she worries about getting sued if someone who visits the bar later comes down with COVID-19.

She's also unhappy about the limits on live music.

"We wanted to put a piano player on the patio," Waguespack said. "We thought that would have been lovely." ▀

Event Designer Bobby Garza in Austin, in a Pandemic: 'You're Hopeful Every Day That the Needle Moves a Different Direction'

BY STEVE KNOPPER

When the concert business shut down in mid-March, **Bobby Garza** abruptly shifted from putting on live events to tearing them down — his company, Austin-based Forefront Networks, had to cancel the California food-and-music festival Yountville Live later that month, and massive productions like December's Trail of Lights in Austin are in question, too. In early April, his life changed even more dramatically: Forefront furloughed 30 percent of its staff, including him.

As part of *Billboard*'s efforts to best cover the coronavirus pandemic and its impacts on the music industry, we will be speaking with Garza, a 43-year-old Forefront creative team leader who used to be general manager of festival producer Transmission Events, each week to chronicle his experience throughout the crisis. (Read last week's installment [here](#) and see the full series [here](#).)

We spent last week's interview on emotional topics: Black Lives Matter, George Floyd, the protests and the brutality of the police response. It seems like we're actually starting to see real progress. Do you agree?

Yes. **Ta-Nehisi Coates** had [an interview](#) with **Ezra Klein** — those are two of my favorite voices — and Ta-Nehisi Coates was saying, "I didn't think I was going to say this, but I do see progress and I'm hopeful." That for me was a validation, for the

first time, that there probably is tangible, demonstrative progress. The thing I always try to temper that with is "OK, that doesn't mean you take your foot off the gas." That's what happens a lot of times in social political movements: "We got it!" That's never the case. We're at that inflection point now, where it's like, "No, we should be having more and deeper conversations, rather than less."

Where do you see this discussion happening in the concert business?

The last couple of weeks have definitely been a reflection about what's happening in the world, and that needs to have some space to breathe. People need to talk and learn and figure that out, and the next part is the tangible things you can do within your industry. I don't know that anybody's gotten there yet — and I don't think that they have to just yet. If we're going to make changes that are going to last then we have to spend some real, honest time working through all that stuff. It's super-hard work. I hope what happens is not that somebody puts on a show with people of color, then that's the end of it. I hope what happens is: "Can you look around and say the people you work with and for are as diverse as they can be, the people that you book are as diverse as they can be?" It needs to be part of everyday conversation.

Shifting to the pandemic, do you see any light at the end of the tunnel? Every few hours I search the word "vaccine."

I know, right? I had to stop doing that.

I've been following this New York Times tracker that suggests a vaccine could appear by the end of the year or early next year, pending a lot of things. Do you feel hopeful?

If it's tangible, the people that are smartest from a business standpoint should be having conversations now about what happens next year. The Music Cities Together organization is talking to cities about how to open safely, and compiling data from not just this country but from other countries, about what those recommendations are. This idea that things will "go back to normal" — it's folly. There are things that we're going to have to do from now into the future that promoters, venues, artists and guests

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are going to have to be comfortable with. That's the tough work that needs to happen now — it probably feels like, "I'm not getting paid for it so why should I do it?" or "I've got bigger fish to fry because I'm trying to figure out how to feed my kids or pay my rent" or all of those important things. I'm cooking lunch for my kids while you and I are talking.

Coachella recently canceled until next year — what are your emotions about that?

I mean, all of them suck. Not just nationally but internationally. I was talking to some of my friends about Primavera Sound — that's my bucket list festival and I've never been and I love Barcelona. You're hopeful every day that the needle moves a different direction. Dude, nobody wants to cancel any of this stuff and I think you try to push it all the way up to the edge. It's not because you're being careless, it's because you want to do it. Like I've told you before, putting on shows and doing live music stuff is the stuff that feeds my soul. Why would you want to entertain a notion that you're going to cancel that? What could be more terrible than that right now? Everybody needs joy in their life now, more than ever.

What's for lunch?

I made pasta and there's like this mushroom cream sauce situation with chicken. I learned this from my grandmother: I like to express my care with food. Now that I've been home and I have a little more time, I'm doing my best to not give them sandwiches.

Anything new on the ukulele or martial-arts front?

We did our School of Rock intro class. My oldest son did a bass lesson and my youngest did a keyboard lesson. One step closer to family band, right?

I think you're the weak link.

I am 100% the weak link! I know that and you don't have to remind me. □

Blues Singer Lady A Speaks Out Against Lady Antebellum's Recent Name Change: 'It's Not Right'

BY MITCHELL PETERS

A Seattle blues singer who has performed under the name Lady A for the past 20 years is speaking out against Lady Antebellum over the country trio's recent [name change](#) in response to the Black Lives Matter movement.

Anita White, a 61-year-old black woman who plays under Lady A, says she was blindsided last week after learning that Lady Antebellum had officially shortened its name without reaching out to her first. On Thursday (June 11), in the wake of nationwide protests surrounding the death of George Floyd, the Grammy-winning country act announced that it would be dropping the word Antebellum from its title, a reference to the pre-Civil War era in the American South.

"I feel that it's not right that they can come and decide that they want to use this name and take it from me, because now it feels like another knee on my neck, as Reverend Al Sharpton said," White [told](#) CBS affiliate WUSA in Washington, D.C. "Take your knee off our neck."

White, whose day job is working with Seattle Public Utilities, has released multiple albums under Lady A over the past two decades. She's currently gearing up for the July 18 release of her new album, *Lady A: Live in New Orleans*.

"This is my life. Lady A is my brand, I've used it for over 20 years, and I'm proud of what I've done," White told *Rolling Stone* last week. "They're using the name because

of a Black Lives Matter incident that, for them, is just a moment in time. If it mattered, it would have mattered to them before. It shouldn't have taken George Floyd to die for them to realize that their name had a slave reference to it."

Representatives for the country group Lady A told *Rolling Stone* they were unaware of White's use of the name and had plans to contact her. The trio's reps said they had no further comment when contacted by *Billboard*. White, meanwhile, had not responded to *Billboard*'s request for comment as of press time.

In a lengthy note to fans on social media last week, Lady Antebellum — who first broke through in the late 2000s with hits like "Love Don't Live Here," "I Run To You" and "Need You Now" — explained the reasoning behind the name change.

"We are deeply sorry for the hurt this has caused," the group's Hillary Scott, Charles Kelley, and Dave Haywood wrote on [Instagram](#). "We've watched and listened more than ever these last few weeks, and our hearts have been stirred with conviction, our eyes opened wide to the injustices, inequality and biases black women and men have always faced and continue to face every day. Now, blind spots we didn't even know existed have been revealed." □

Tomorrowland's Online Festival Will Feature a Predictably Massive Group of Artists: See the Lineup

BY KATIE BAIN

Earlier in June, Tomorrowland [announced Tomorrowland Around the World](#), a sprawling online festival set to happen June

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25-27. (These three days would have been the second weekend of the annual Belgian mega-festival.)

Monday (June 15), the festival announced the lineup for the sprawling online event, and the group of participating artists is everything you'd expect from the world's largest dance music festival.

The three-day livestream will feature more than 60 artists, including Amelie Lens, Armin van Buuren, Carnage, Charlotte de Witte, Dixon, Gryffin, Martin Garrix, San Holo, Tiësto, Tale of Us and many other musicians spanning techno, trance, trap, EDM, house, hardstyle and more. See the complete lineup below.

"Tomorrowland Around the World is a great opportunity for me to connect with my fans during these lockdown times," van Buuren said in a statement, "and I hope that this will help everyone to hold on for a bit longer until we can party together on actual festival grounds again! Very delighted to be part of this ground-breaking event."

Tomorrowland Around the World will feature eight stages and include the reveal of the 2020 mainstage, a marquee attraction of the festival. Additional activities will include games, workshops and educational talks on topics including lifestyle, food, fashion and the Tomorrowland Foundation, which focuses on charities working to help disadvantaged children. Fans can participate via a PC, laptop, smartphone or tablet, with no VR equipment necessary.

The festival is also one of the first livestreams to charge an admission price, with one-day passes going for \$13 and a two-day passes costing \$22. (The two-day price includes a week of video-on-demand content from the event.) Tomorrowland Around the World will broadcast from 9 a.m. - 7 p.m. EST, with "time-zone-friendly" options for people tuning in from North and South American and Asia.

Tomorrowland Around the World

Lineup:

- Adam Beyer
- Adriatique
- Afrojack
- Alan Walker
- Amelie Lens
- Andrew Rayel
- ANNA
- Armin van Buuren
- Bassjackers
- B Jones
- Carnage
- Cat Dealers
- Cellini
- Charlotte de Witte
- Claptone
- Coone
- Da Tweekaz
- David Guetta
- D-Block & S-te-fan
- Dimitri Vegas & Like Mike
- Dixon
- Don Diablo
- EDX
- Eptic
- Fedde Le Grand
- Gryffin
- Jack Back
- Joris Voorn
- Joyhauser
- Klingande
- Kölsch
- Laidback Luke
- DJ Licious
- Lost Frequencies
- Marlo
- Martin Garrix
- Modestep
- Mr Pig
- NERVO
- Netsky
- NGHTMRE
- NWYR
- Oliver Heldens
- Patrice Baumel
- Paul Kalkbrenner
- Ran - D
- Regard
- Reinier Zonneveld
- Robin Schulz
- San Holo
- Solardo
- Stephan Bodzin
- Steve Aoki
- Sub Zero Project
- Sunnery James & Ryan Marciano
- Tale of Us
- Tiësto
- Timmy Trumpet
- Vini Vici
- Vintage Culture
- Wildstylez
- Yellow Claw
- Yves Deruyter
- Yves V

- Vintage Culture
- Wildstylez
- Yellow Claw
- Yves Deruyter
- Yves V

Why Orville Peck Is the Unconventional Best New Artist Pick the Grammys Need

BY JOE LYNCH

In January, [Orville Peck](#) was seated at his first Grammy Awards after walking the red carpet with his friend [Diplo](#). Peck recalls sitting "five rows from the front having the time of my life when I hear someone calling my name during the commercial break. I turn around, and [Shania Twain](#) is running down the aisle."

By mid-March, the queer troubadour was recording a duet with Twain at her Las Vegas ranch just before the pandemic forced a lockdown. The session yielded the rollicking track "Legends Never Die" from Peck's upcoming EP, *Show Pony*, out this July on Columbia. "I've been the biggest Shania fan my whole life, and she was literally the last person I got to hang out with before [self-isolating]," he says over Zoom, calling from his sunny Los Angeles apartment. Even in the comfort of his own home, he's wearing his ever-present Lone Ranger disguise that shields his identity; today, it's in the form of black tassels dangling down from his mask. (Peck keeps his real name, age and most other personal details private.)

Earning co-signs from Diplo and Twain speaks to the wide-ranging appeal of Peck, whose sonorous voice has garnered comparisons to Johnny Cash's baritone and whose lyrics evoke the widescreen Westerns of old Hollywood. Peck's self-produced debut album, *Pony*, arrived in March 2019 on Sub

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Pop, but by that December, he signed a new recording contract with Columbia. Since, he has performed the album's breakout track, "Dead of Night," on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*; was booked for first-time slots at Coachella and Stagecoach (both of which are postponed); and is slated to open for labelmate **Harry Styles'** Harryween shows in 2021 (postponed from Oct. 2020).

Now, following a buzzy career launch and while gearing up for the release of his major-label debut, which should arrive before the Grammys' eligibility period ends, Peck could be a dark horse contender for best new artist at the 2021 ceremony. His team submitted him in two Americana categories last year to no avail, but with backing from Columbia this time — which at the 2020 ceremony had **Lil Nas X** and **Rosalia** up for best new artist — there could be a similar push for Peck. "Having some recognition on a level like that?" he says. "Anybody would be lying to say they would not be thrilled."

Peck always knew he wanted to perform, feeling "drawn to the theatricality of country stars" from the 1970s. "**Gram Parsons** used to wear the most incredible Nudie suits — **Liberace** could never," he says. "Porter Wagoner came off fairly conservative [but wore] crazy bedazzled outfits ... while singing about holding back tears and heartbreak. The combination of all those things to me is a gay person's dream. It's drama. It's bold." And though he says he has been "making music practically my whole life," it wasn't until the late-2010s birth of his Peck persona in Toronto that he went all-in on country. "I had it ingrained that I had to work toward something that was employable or acceptable," he says. "It's the opposite of what you need to do as an artist." Peck started creating his own brand of queer camp for the Wild West.

Show Pony continues the narrative, but with added "dark flair" best heard on his gender-bending reinvention of "Fancy," the 1969 feminist anthem by **Bobbie Gentry**. The EP's visuals are similarly theatrical: In the clip for lead single "Summertime," he trades his leather jacket for a flower-laden shirt after getting pinned down by vines with a mind of their own; meanwhile, "No Glory in the West" depicts Peck as a solitary

cowboy dancing around a bonfire in the snow-covered mountains. It's a sublime mixture of the heartfelt and the ridiculous that could only arrive through a distinctly queer lens. (As novelist Christopher Isherwood wrote about camp in 1954: "You can't camp about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun of it, you're making fun out of it.") Peck is so committed that he even caked his wall with old-timey "Wanted" and "Reward" posters ahead of a virtual Oculus gig.

"Without sounding cliché and pretentious, I genuinely try to make music that is important to me," he says. "As long as the sincerity is there, it gives you the freedom to play it any way you want. It allows you to take it to a world of camp or theatricality."

It has paid off so far, as his 35 million total U.S. streams (according to Nielsen Music/MRC Data) prove, but will it translate to a Grammy nod? A country act hasn't won best new artist since **Zac Brown Band** in 2010, but Peck's appreciation for and commitment to the genre's traditional roots might get him there — or at least help round out those in the running. Either way, it's nothing Peck is too hung up about. As he says, creating his persona "was the first step toward being the artist I always wanted to be."

This article originally appeared in the June 13, 2020 issue of Billboard. □

Bobby Lewis, '60s Singer and 'Tossin' & Turnin' Hitmaker, Dies at 95

BY ANDREW UNTERBERGER

Bobby Lewis, singer of "Tossin' & Turnin'," died on April 28 after contracting pneumonia. The news — **initially reported** but not widely circulated in late April — was announced by **his granddaughter Sabreen LaRae Simmons** on Facebook, and has been

confirmed to *Billboard* by his son, the author Zain Abdullah. He was 95.

Lewis was born in Indianapolis and raised in an orphanage, eventually moving to a foster home in Detroit at age 12. When he was 14, he ran away from home and began to perform as a singer, eventually moving to New York. After spending some time on Mercury Records, he was convinced by singer-songwriter Ritchie Adams to record a song he'd co-written as a one-off for the smaller Beltone label.

That song was 1960's "Tossin' & Turnin'," a kinetic R&B rave-up as restless as the insomnia Lewis described in its lyrics, which exploded commercially in 1961. The song hit No. 1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 on July 10th of that year, staying there for seven weeks — an unusually long reign in the chart's early history — and ultimately topping *Billboard*'s year-end Hot 100 for 1961. In 2018, it landed at No. 36 on *Billboard*'s **all-time Hot 100**, fourth-highest of any song from the '60s.

Lewis' time in the mainstream was relatively brief. After scoring one more top 10 hit (**"One Track Mind,"** No. 9) that October, he only hit the Hot 100 twice more, and never again made the top 40. "Tossin' & Turnin'" endured in the cultural memory, though, in large part due to its prominent use in two hit comedies of the '70s, both set in the early '60s: *American Graffiti* (1973) and *Animal House* (1978). The song has also been covered by acts ranging from girl groups **The Marvelettes** and **The Supremes** to rockers **Peter Criss** and **Joan Jett**.

The singer spent the last four decades of his life in New Jersey, with his final years spent at the Forest Hill Healthcare Center in Newark. He continued to play live well into his 80s — though vision problems made performing challenging, and he described himself as "virtually blind" **to NJ.com** in 2011. "It's like Stevie (Wonder) said: We all have that inner vision," he explained. "That helps a lot."

Lewis is survived by three children — Fonda Simmons, Marva Brooks and Zain Abdullah, born Zayne Lewis — as well as by 11 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Abdullah tells *Billboard* that he is writing a father-son memoir, for which he's

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interviewed his father extensively, and that there will be both a memorial and tribute concert to Lewis, which he began planning even before his father's death. Artists interested in playing the tribute concert can sign up for it [here](#). **B**

Oscars Pushed Back to April 25, Eligibility Window Extended

BY SCOTT FEINBERG

As a result of the global pandemic, the 93rd Academy Awards ceremony has been pushed back from Feb. 28 to April 25, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and its Oscars broadcasting partner ABC announced on Monday. In turn, the Oscars eligibility period for feature films — which began on Jan. 1, 2020, and was set to expire at the end of Dec. 31, 2020 — has been extended to Feb. 28, 2021. *The Hollywood Reporter* [exclusively reported](#) on Sunday that this was set to happen.

While highly unusual, these moves are not unprecedented. The Oscars has been delayed three times before — due to LA flooding in 1938; following the assassination of Dr. **Martin Luther King, Jr.** in 1968; and after the attempted assassination of Pres. **Ronald Reagan** in 1981. And, [as I noted back in March](#), the Oscars eligibility window was extended beyond the traditional 12-month period once before, ahead of the 6th Oscars. (That ceremony, in March 1934, was preceded by a 17-month eligibility window spanning Aug. 1, 1932 through Dec. 31, 1933, so that thereafter the eligibility period could be the actual calendar year preceding each ceremony, Jan. 1 through Dec. 31.)

In a statement, the Academy indicated that the Oscars will still be held "at the Dolby Theatre at Hollywood & Highland Center in Hollywood" and "will air live on ABC," an apparent rejection of the possibility of a pre-taped and/or virtual gathering.

And the Academy emphasized, "The intent going forward is to ultimately return to awarding excellence for films released in the January-December calendar year."

A number of other major changes were also announced.

The Oscar submission deadline for general entry categories — among them best picture, original score and original song — is now Jan. 15, 2021. The submission deadline for specialty categories — best animated feature, documentary feature, international feature, animated short, documentary short and live-action short — is now Dec. 1, 2020. Oscar shortlist voting will now run from Feb. 1 through Feb. 5; nomination voting will now run from March 5 through March 10 (nominations will be announced on March 15); and final voting will now run from April 15 through April 20.

Meanwhile, the Academy's annual Governors Awards, a gala dinner, usually held in the second week of November, at which the organization, for the past 11 years, has presented honorary Oscars and, in some years, the **Irving G. Thalberg** Memorial Award and the **Jean Hersholt** Humanitarian Award, will not take place this fall. "Additional information about the ceremony and selection of honorees will be provided at a later time," the Academy said, suggesting that honorees may still be chosen and feted ahead of or even at the Oscars ceremony.

And the Academy's Scientific and Technical Awards presentation, which was scheduled for a June 20, 2020 ceremony in Beverly Hills, has been postponed to a later date still to be determined.

Additionally, the Academy also announced two key dates pertaining to its long-gestating Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, which was previously expected to open on Dec. 14, 2020. It will now be unveiled to a select audience at a gala event a few days ahead of the Oscars, on April 17, and will open to the public a few days after the Oscars, on April 30.

"For over a century, movies have played an important role in comforting, inspiring and entertaining us during the darkest of times," Academy president **David Rubin** and CEO **Dawn Hudson** said in a statement. "They certainly have this year. Our hope,

in extending the eligibility period and our Awards date, is to provide the flexibility filmmakers need to finish and release their films without being penalized for something beyond anyone's control. This coming Oscars and the opening of our new museum will mark an historic moment, gathering movie fans around the world to unite through cinema."

Karey Burke, ABC Entertainment's president, added, "We find ourselves in uncharted territory this year and will continue to work with our partners at the Academy to ensure next year's show is a safe and celebratory event that also captures the excitement of the opening of the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures."

And Academy Museum director **Bill Kramer** chimed in, "I speak for all of us at the Museum when I say that we have been eagerly awaiting the moment when we can share the Academy Museum with movie lovers everywhere. With the unprecedented and devastating pandemic happening around the world and our commitment first and foremost to the health and safety of our visitors and staff, we have made the difficult decision to wait a few more months to open our doors. Thankfully, with CO-VID-19 safety protocols in place, exhibitions continue to be installed. We look forward to April 2021 when Los Angeles and the world will be able to join together as the Academy celebrates the Oscars and the opening of its long-dreamed-of Museum."

Here is a full breakdown of the revised key dates related to the 93rd Academy Awards and the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures...

Preliminary voting begins

Monday, February 1, 2021

Preliminary voting ends

Friday, February 5, 2021

Oscar Shortlists Announcement

Tuesday, February 9, 2021

Nominations voting begins

Friday, March 5, 2021

Nominations voting ends

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

Oscar Nominations Announcement

Monday, March 15, 2021

Oscar Nominees Luncheon

Thursday April 15, 2021

► IN BRIEF**Finals voting begins**

Thursday April 15, 2021

Museum Gala

Saturday, April 17, 2021

Finals voting ends

Tuesday, April 20, 2021

Osars

Sunday, April 25, 2021

Museum Public Opening

Friday, April 30, 2021

*This article was originally published by
[The Hollywood Reporter](#).*

Two Illegal Weekend Raves in Manchester Leave One Dead & Others Injured

BY KATIE BAIN

A pair of illegal weekend raves around Manchester, UK drew roughly 6,000 people and resulted in three stabbings, a rape and one death.

Footage that surfaced on social media showed attendees dancing around a sign saying “Quarantine Rave” at an illegal event on Saturday, June 13 in Failsworth, located on the outskirts of Manchester. This event drew roughly 4,000 people and saw the death of a 20-year-old man from a suspected drug overdose.

The second event in the suburb of Carrington drew roughly 2,000 people. The greater Manchester Police Force is investigating the rape of an 18-year-old woman, along with three stabbings, with one of the stabbing victims left with life threatening injuries. According to a police report, “police officers managed to safely enter the crowds, locate the man and administer life-saving first aid before paramedics arrived.”

Police at this event also reported that attendees threw trash at them and vandalized a police car when they attempted to engage with participants.

“Those who attended put themselves & their loved ones at risk,” [tweeted](#) British Parliament Member Angela Rayner. “Completely irresponsible. A lot of effort went into online events this weekend across GM to stop this sort of stupidity. Those who attended should be ashamed of themselves. My local area now has to deal with the aftermath.”

Indeed, volunteers were at both sites early on Sunday, June 14 to pick up the aftermath of the events, with the grounds littered with bottles, plastic bags, empty nitrous canisters and other trash. Attendees are also being criticized for gathering en masse while social distancing guidelines are still being mandated throughout the UK.

“These raves were illegal and I condemn them taking place,” Chris Sykes, the Assistant Chief Constable of Greater Manchester is quoted in [a statement](#). “they were clearly a breach of coronavirus legislation and guidelines, and have had tragic consequences.”

Tones And I, Jimmy Barnes, Amy Shark & More Set for COVIDSafe Concerts Program In Australia

BY LARS BRANDLE

B RISBANE — Live music is returning to Sydney, with a little help from government.

As Australians kicked back for another weekend in lockdown, a statement dropped Saturday (June 13) from the New South Wales government detailing “Great Southern Nights,” a live music campaign featuring some of the biggest and brightest homegrown artists.

A lineup starring Tones and I, Jimmy

Barnes, Birds of Tokyo, Missy Higgins, The Jungle Giants and Paul Kelly will present 1,000 gigs for Great Southern Nights, curated by ARIA and an industry advisory committee and playing out in venues across regional New South Wales and the state capital, Sydney.

Other big names booked include Thelma Plum, The Presets, Amy Shark, Tash Sultana, The Teskey Brothers and The Veronicas.

There is one slight catch. The shows don’t kick off until November. Action-starved Australians won’t mind the wait, and the program gives concert fans something to look forward to, notes Minister for Jobs, Investment, Tourism and Western Sydney Stuart Ayres.

“With the NSW Government’s 24-hour economy strategy set to reinvigorate Sydney’s nightlife,” he points out, Great Southern Nights will be a “big step forward for our state’s live music and hospitality community that has been hit hard in recent times.”

These are the hardest times many Australians can remember.

The health emergency is just the latest calamity in what’s been a bitter year in these parts, as many Australians struggled with an unprecedented bushfire season and a prolonged drought in the months before COVID-19 became a trending topic.

The live music industry has lost more than \$340 million in income due to this triptych of disasters, according to the [Lost My Gig](#) platform, set up by Australian Music Industry Network and the Australian Festival Association to tally the impact on the creative community.

Venues and artists are invited to submit an expression of interest to be involved in Great Southern Nights at www.greatsouthernnights.com.au.

A string of industry organizations on Monday applauded the initiative, including APRA AMCOS, Live Performance Australia, Sounds Australia and the Live Entertainment Industry Forum.

The NSW program follows the announcement last week of Anti-Social, [a series of live gigs](#) starting this July at the Zoo in Brisbane, Queensland.

On show night, the Zoo will operate

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with a reduced 100 capacity and, like Great Southern Nights, the Anti-Social shows will feature all-local bills and observe physical distancing.

The music stopped across Australia in March, when the federal government enforced strict social distancing measures and closed the country's borders.

Billboard understands a raft of southern winter-warmer shows will be trialed around the country in July, to coincide with relaxations on health and safety restrictions.

Australia's live industry got a boost last Friday (June 12) when prime minister Scott Morrison announced socially-distanced crowds of 10,000 could soon attend concerts and sporting matches, and the 100-capacity rule on indoor gatherings could soon be scrapped, depending on coronavirus infection rates in the weeks ahead.

Outdoor festivals will be allowed under these new plans, but promoters would need to offer seating to guests. □

Katy Perry and Black Eyed Peas Set to Headline Rock the Vote's Democracy Summer Concert: Exclusive

BY CATHY APPLEFELD OLSON

In an election year like no other, **Rock the Vote** is kick-starting its **Democracy Summer** campaign Thursday (June 18) with a two-hour virtual concert co-headlined by **Katy Perry** and **Black Eyed Peas**.

Co-hosted by actors **Logan Browning** and **Rosario Dawson** with **Chuck D** and **Eve**, the event will stream live beginning at 8 p.m. ET/5 p.m. PT on democracysummer.org, and Democracy Summer's Facebook and YouTube pages.

Ne-Yo, Big Freedia, Lucy Hale, Amara La Negra, Saweetie, Sklyar Astin, Max, Leslie Grace, Dove Cameron, Sofia Carson, Rich Brian and Michael K. Williams are among those slated to appear remotely. Sen. **Elizabeth Warren** (D-MA), Sen. **Cory Booker** (D-NJ) and former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development **Julian Castro** will make appearances.

"I'm excited to be a part of this kickoff to Democracy Summer 2020 with so many amazing talents, activists and speakers," says Perry. "The young people of America are speaking loud and clear on the streets and online, and come November, it will be more important than ever to fight for justice and equality, and against systemic racism, with our ballots."

"The young people are engaged. Their voices are loud and getting louder. The world is watching. And we need to vote," agrees Chuck D, an early and consistent supporter of Rock the Vote, which was founded in 1990 by Virgin Records America co-chairman **Jeff Ayeroff** primarily to increase voter turnout among young adults.

The **Public Enemy** front man was honored by the organization at its 10th anniversary awards ceremony in 2003.

"We are seeing the urgency for change in America happening in real time. This is the moment for us to use the most important tool on the planet to fight for that change... our right to vote," says Ne-Yo. "Our democracy needs our voices. Voting is the moment to be the voice for injustice and for equality. But most importantly, to be the voice for humanity. We cannot let each other down in the local elections or on Nov. 3."

Produced by BWG Live and in partnership with Voto Latino Foundation, When We All Vote and March For Our Lives, the concert marks not only the first live-streamed event for the Rock the Vote, but also its first large-scale summer activation. In previous years the organization amped up in the fall before a Presidential election and typically staged a live event. Both pivots are a direct result of Covid-19.

"One of the realities is coronavirus derailed the momentum that is required in a major election cycle," Rock the Vote president **Carolyn DeWitt** tells *Billboard*.

"A few months ago we began seeing how the restrictions were affecting young people in particular, by moving them off college campuses and disrupting graduations and proms," she says. "Our effort is really about building that momentum back up."

With some 4 million young people turning 18 this year and innumerable issues at stake, the goal of Democracy Summer is to bring 200,000 new voters to the polls in November when Democratic presidential candidate **Joe Biden** challenges **Donald Trump**, as well as myriad primary and local elections throughout the summer and fall. Those interested in the event are encouraged to register at the Democracy Summer web site to get the latest details and lineup updates, although preregistration isn't required to tune in. Viewers can go to [Rock the Vote's website](#) to register to vote.

The murder of **George Floyd** by a Minneapolis police officer and the swell of support around the Black Lives Matter movement also has catalyzed Thursday's event. As protesters around the country have taken to the streets, Rock the Vote registered 107,000 new voters through its platforms and gained more than 25,000 new Instagram followers during the week of June 1, DeWitt says—numbers that dwarf those of a typical week.

"With what we've seen over the last couple weeks, the effort around Democracy Summer has become even more important. It's not just the virus, it's bigger than the economy standing still. The world feels like it's on the brink of chaos and yet this moment around Black Lives Matter is bigger than that," DeWitt says. "Frankly speaking, a big part of that is people are exercising their rights in a democracy. Young people are looking for things they can do and actions they can take in order to create change. We want to make sure we're continuing to sustain that fire and passion into November, and make sure young people know the power of their votes and create the change they want to see."

The live stream will include opportunities for viewers to donate to black-led and -focused organizations including the Community Justice Action Fund and National Action Network.

"Now, more than ever, voting is key for

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long-term change," Black Eyed Peas said in a statement. "The youth vote is going to decide the future of America. It's not just our duty but our honor to spread the word in an election year."

"The diversity of America is what makes it great, and it is also what makes it our country," says La Negra. "I am Dominican proudly, yet I am a black woman always. I matter. You matter. And together, we will always matter!"

Media and promotional partners include Facebook, YouTube, Tixr Play, Epic Records, iHeartMedia, FaZe Clan, Influential, the Krim Group and Participant, which will air an exclusive clip from its new documentary, *John Lewis: Good Trouble*, about the civil rights activist and longtime Georgia congressman.

"The need for young people to get out and vote has never been more important," says Participant CEO **David Linde**. "We are proud to be working with Rock the Vote in making that need a reality and by using the inspiring, powerful message of Rep. John Lewis to make good trouble."

Rock the Vote is planning additional Democracy Summer activations throughout the summer including on the Fourth of July and on Aug. 6, the anniversary of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. ▀

2020 Bellwether Festival Canceled Due to Coronavirus Pandemic

BY GIL KAUFMAN

The third annual Bellwether Music Festival has been cancelled.

"Bellwether Music Festival announces today the cancellation of its third-annual 3-day event, citing current government mandates and circumstances surrounding COVID-19," organizers said in a statement on Monday (June 15).

"A 3-stage alternative music festival with camping, the 2020 Bellwether Music Festival was originally scheduled for Thursday, Aug. 6 – Saturday, Aug. 8 at Renaissance Park in Waynesville, Ohio," the statement continued. "All ticket buyers will automatically receive a refund on the credit card used to make the purchase within the next 30 days. Bellwether Music Festival is targeting Aug. 12-14, 2021 for the rescheduled dates, additional details to follow."

Nathaniel Rateliff, The Devil Makes Three, The Growlers, Shovels & Rope and **The Lone Bellow** were all set to perform at the rustic alt music fest, which was to take place on the grounds of the Renaissance Park in Waynesville, Ohio.

American Idol alum Scarypoolparty, Langhorne Slim, Hayes Carll, Waxahatchee, Cloud Nothing and many more were also on the lineup. ▀

A2IM's Libera Awards Go Virtual

BY THOM DUFFY

Indie artists, and the companies that bring their music to the world, have a reputation as fast, nimble and responsive to change. So it's no surprise that the American Association of Independent Music (A2IM), the trade group for the indie sector, acted quickly in March to reinvent its annual Indie Week conference scheduled for June 15-18 as an online event, with over 50 panels, talks and workshops.

"Because of the challenges being faced by the whole world, it was even more important to bring the family of independents together again this year," says Richard James Burgess, president/CEO of A2IM, which is marking its 15th anniversary of promoting education, advocacy and community for the indie-music industry.

Burgess notes that the digital delivery of data, "the very technology that disrupted our industry two decades ago, is now enabling us to maintain some momentum through this pandemic. A2IM was formed to deal with a global crisis of change, and we

continue to adapt so we can better champion the independent artists and labels whose diverse voices need to be heard."

The presentation on June 18 of the Libera Awards, which will recognize the best indie releases and feature live online performances, will be the high point of Indie Week. Following is a list of the 2020 nominees, as provided by A2IM.

Album of the Year

Sponsored by The Orchard

FKA Twigs, *Magdalene* (Young Turks)
Angel Olsen, *All Mirrors* (Jagjaguwar)
Brittany Howard, *Jaime* (ATO Records)
Orville Peck, *Pony* (Sub Pop Records)
Big Thief, *U.F.O.F.* (4AD)

Best Live Act

Flying Lotus (Warp Records)
Courtney Barnett (Mom + Pop Music)
Mavis Staples (ANTI-)
Fontaines D.C. (Partisan Records)
IDLES (Partisan Records)

Best Alternative Rock Album

The National, *I Am Easy To Find* (4AD)
Fontaines D.C., *Dogrel* (Partisan Records)
Big Thief, *U.F.O.F.* (4AD)
Sharon Van Etten, *Remind Me Tomorrow* (Jagjaguwar)

Angel Olsen, *All Mirrors* (Jagjaguwar)

Best Americana Album

The Lumineers, *III* (Dualtone Music Group)

Keb' Mo', *Oklahoma* (Concord Records/Concord)

Calexico and Iron & Wine, *Years To Burn* (Sub Pop Records)

Cass McCombs, *Tip of the Sphere* (ANTI-)
Steve Gunn, *The Unseen In Between* (Matador Records)

Best Blues Album

Christone "Kingfish" Ingram, *Kingfish* (Alligator Records)

Various Artists, *Ann Arbor Blues Festival 1969 Vol. 1 & 2* (Third Man Records)

North Mississippi Allstars, *Up and Rolling* (New West Records)

Delbert McClinton and Self-Made Men, *Tall, Dark, and Handsome* (Thirty Tigers)

Mavis Staples, *We Get By* (ANTI-)

Best Classical Album

Paul Cardall, *Peaceful Piano* (Stone Angel Music/CD Baby)

Florence Price, *John Jeter/Fort Smith*

Symphony – Symphonies 1 & 4 (Naxos American Classics)

Beth Gibbons, *Henryk Górecki: Symphony No. 3* (Symphony of Sorrowful Songs) (Domino)

Rachel Fuller, *Animal Requiem* (Wistler Records/Bob Frank Entertainment)

Benny Gebert, *Triptych* (Arts & Crafts)

Best Country Album

Hayes Carll, *What It Is* (Dualtone Music Group)

Robert Ellis, *Texas Piano Man* (New West Records)

Orville Peck, *Pony* (Sub Pop Records)

Kelsey Waldon, *White Noise/White Lines* (Thirty Tigers)

Jim Lauderdale, *From Another World* (Yep Roc Records)

Best Dance/Electronic Album

Holly Herndon, *PROTO* (4AD)

Thom Yorke, *Anima* (XL Recordings)

Tycho, *Weather* (Mom + Pop Music)

Hot Chip, *A Bath Full of Ecstasy* (Domino)

Flying Lotus, *Flamagra* (Warp Records)

Best Folk/Bluegrass Album

Bedouine, *Bird Songs of a Killjoy* (Spacebomb Records)

Patty Griffin, *Patty Griffin* (Thirty Tigers)

Julia Jacklin, *Crushing* (Polyvinyl Record Co.)

Jake Xerxes Fussell, *Out of Sight* (Paradise of Bachelors)

Jessica Pratt, *Quiet Signs* (Mexican Summer)

Best Hip-Hop/Rap Album

Sponsored by Songtrust

Chance the Rapper, *The Big Day* (Chance the Rapper/Ditto Music)

Danny Brown, *uknowhatimsayin_* (Warp Records)

Clipping., *There Existed an Addiction to Blood* (Sub Pop Records)

Denzel Curry, *ZUU* (Loma Vista Recordings)

Megan Thee Stallion, *Fever* (300 Entertainment/1501)

Best Indie Rock Album

Crumb, *Jinx* (Crumb Records)

(Sandy) Alex G, *House of Sugar* (Domino)

Jay Som, *Anak Ko* (Polyvinyl Record Co.)

Weyes Blood, *Titanic Rising* (Sub Pop Records)

Charly Bliss, *Young Enough* (Barsuk

Records)

Best Jazz Album

Sponsored by Qobuz

Terri Lyne Carrington and Social Science, *Waiting Game* (Motéma Music)

Hiromi, *Spectrum* (Telarc/Concord)

Nerija, *Blume* (Domino)

Nat “King” Cole, *Hittin’ the Ramp: The Early Years: 1936-1943* (Resonance Records)

Eric Dolphy, *Musical Prophet: The Expanded 1963 New York Studio Sessions* (Resonance Records)

Bill Evans, *Evans in England* (Resonance Records)

Best Latin Album

Juan Wauters, *La Onda de Juan Pablo* (Captured Tracks)

Rodrigo y Gabriela, *Mettavolution* (ATO Records)

Y La Bamba, *Mujeres* (Tender Loving Empire Records)

Preservation Hall Jazz Band, *A Tuba to Cuba* (Sub Pop Records)

Sech, *Sueños* (Rich Music)

Best Mainstream Rock Album

Melissa Etheridge, *The Medicine Show* (Concord Records/Concord)

The Raconteurs, *Help Us Stranger* (Third Man Records)

Desert Sessions, *Volumes 11 & 12* (Matador Records)

Reignwolf, *Hear Me Out* (Reignwolf/Ditto Music)

Cigarettes After Sex, *Cry* (Partisan Records)

Best Metal Album

Boris, *LOVE & EVOL* (Third Man Records)

Cattle Decapitation, *Death Atlas* (Metal Blade)

King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard, *Infest the Rats’ Nest* (ATO Records)

Babymetal, *Metal Galaxy* (Cooking Vinyl)

Periphery, *Periphery IV: Hail Stan* (3DOT Recordings)

Best Outlier Album

Cate Le Bon, *Reward* (Mexican Summer)

King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard, *Fishing for Fishies* (ATO Records)

Various Artists, *Thank You, Mister Rogers: Music & Memories* (BFD/Bob Frank Entertainment)

Kim Gordon, *No Home Record* (Matador

Records)

Alex Cameron, *Miami Memory* (Secretly Canadian)

Best Punk/Emo Album

Amyl and The Sniffers, *Amyl and the Sniffers* (ATO Records)

The Menzingers, *Hello Exile* (Epitaph Records)

Empath, *Active Listening: Night on Earth* (Fat Possum Records/Get Better Records)

American Football, *American Football* (LP3) (Polyvinyl Record Co.)

Bad Religion, *Age of Unreason* (Epitaph Records)

Best R&B Album

Sudan Archives, *Athena* (Stones Throw Records)

FKA twigs, *Magdalene* (Young Turks)

Blood Orange, *Angel’s Pulse* (Domino)

Jamila Woods, *Legacy! Legacy!* (Jagjaguwar)

Durand Jones & the Indications, *American Love Call* (Dead Oceans)

Best Re-Issue

Various Artists, *Kankyo Ongaku: Japanese Ambient, Environmental & New Age Music 1980-1990* (Light in the Attic Records)

Ray Charles, *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music, Volumes 1 & 2* (Concord Records/Concord)

Superchunk, *Acoustic Foolish* (Merge Records)

Stereolab, *2019 reissue campaign* (Warp Records)

Fela Kuti & Roy Ayers, *Music of Many Colours* (Knitting Factory Records)

Best Sync Usage

IDLES, *Peaky Blinders* (Partisan Records)

Bon Iver, “Naeem” — Nike “Beginnings: LeBron” (Jagjaguwar)

Kamasi Washington, Apple (Young Turks)

Perfume Genius, *The Goldfinch trailer* (Matador Records)

Cigarettes After Sex, “Opera House” — *Killing Eve* (Partisan Records)

Best World Album

Afro B, *Afrowave 3* (AfroWave Digital/EMPIRE)

Mdou Moctar, *Blue Stage Sessions* (Third Man Records)

Altin Gün, *Gece* (ATO Records)

Tinariwen, *Amadjar* (ANTI-)

Sinkane, *Dépaysé* (City Slang)

► IN BRIEF**Breakthrough Artist/Release**

Sponsored by Ingrooves
Sudan Archives, *Athena* (Stones Throw Records)

Black Pumas (ATO Records)

Fontaines D.C. (Partisan Records)

Orville Peck (Sub Pop Records)

Julia Jacklin (Polyvinyl Record Co.)

Creative Packaging

Various Artists, *VMP Anthology: The Story of Ghostly International* (Ghostly International)

Flying Lotus, *Flamagra* (Warp Records)

Various Artists, *WXAXRXP* box set (Warp Records)

Various Artists, *Sub Pop Singles Club* (Sub Pop Records)

IDLES, *A Beautiful Thing: IDLES Live at Le Bataclan* (Partisan Records)

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Label of the Year (Large)

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Sacred Bones

Drag City

Label of the Year (Small)

Innovative Leisure

Father/Daughter Records

Oh Boy Records

Hardly Art

Wichita Recordings

Marketing Genius

Thom Yorke, *Anima* (XL Recordings)
black midi, *Schlagenheim* (Rough Trade Records)

Megan Thee Stallion, *Hot Girl Summer* (300 Entertainment)

FKA twigs, *Magdalene* (Young Turks)

Better Oblivion Community Center, *Better*

Oblivion Community Center (Dead Oceans)

Video of the Year

Aldous Harding, "The Barrel" (4AD)

Flying Lotus, "More" (Warp Records)

FKA twigs, "Cellophane" (Young Turks)

Orville Peck, "Dead of Night" (Sub Pop Records)

Fontaines D.C., "Big" (Partisan Records)

This article originally appeared in the June 13, 2020 issue of Billboard. ■

Hank Williams Jr.'s Daughter Dies in Tennessee Car Accident

BY MITCHELL PETERS

The daughter of country music star **Hank Williams Jr.** was killed in a single-vehicle automobile accident over the weekend in Tennessee.

Katherine Williams-Dunning, 27, died Saturday night (June 13) after losing control of her 2007 Chevrolet Tahoe and rolling over on a highway in Henry County, the Tennessee Highway Patrol confirmed to *Billboard*.

Her husband, Tyler Dunning, was injured in the crash and airlifted to a nearby hospital. His condition was not immediately known at press time.

Billboard has reached out to Williams Jr.'s representatives for comment.

Sam Williams, Katherine's brother, shared news of the car accident in a [Facebook post](#). "My sister and brother in law have been in a terrible accident. Please pray for them so hard!" he wrote.

Country music star **Travis Tritt** also took to social media to share his condolences for the tragic loss.

"This news is just heartbreaking. My family and I knew Katie ever since she was a kid. I cannot even imagine what Hank, Mary Jane and the rest of the Williams family are going through right now. Please say a prayer for all of them and share your love any way you can," Tritt tweeted. ■

Edward James Olmos to Produce Tito Puente TV, Film & Music Projects: 'We're Bringing His Magic to Life'

BY JESSICA ROIZ

When Tito Puente Jr. received the news that Edward James Olmos wanted to produce a set of projects honoring his late father, [Tito Puente](#), it was a no brainer for the Puente family to give the green light.

"This is a fantastic opportunity," Puente Jr. tells *Billboard*. "My father is truly missed and remembered, and Mr. Olmos is going to bring light to someone who impacted Latin American culture in general."

Celebrating the life and legacy of the iconic Puerto Rican musician, songwriter, producer, and *timbalero*, known for mambo hits such as "Oye Como Va" and "Ran Kan Kan," Olmos, along with producer/writer Damon Whitaker, music artist/producer David Guzman, and his own son, director/producer Michael D. Olmos, has partnered with the Puente family for a set of projects that include a TV docuseries, a movie and an album, to name a few.

"Every person that has heard his music has been touched by it," Olmos, best known for his remarkable trajectory as an actor, director, and producer, says. "It's time we solidify it with an understanding of his life so that in turn, 100 years from now, people will know of him."

During a virtual interview with *Billboard*, Olmos and Puente talked more in-depth about the upcoming projects honoring the artist's 20th-year anniversary since his passing and who Tito Puente was as a father, a friend and an artist.

Tell us a bit more about the various

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tribute projects that are in the works in celebration of Tito Puente's legacy. We know that fans can expect a docuseries and an album.

Edward James Olmos: Of course, the most important aspect is going to be the documentary, even though there's going to be a mini-series because his life was very flamboyant. He was a very extroverted, wonderful human being. His life is going to be longer than what you can share in a documentary. There are also plans of releasing a musical album, his whole retrospective done by contemporary artists of today. That's really the key to the whole thing, to embrace that he's the Latin jazz king. His career ran from 1946 until the 2000's when he passed away. He made music like "Oye Como Va" which was an institutional classic and has been done by different artists and personified by Carlos Santana. It will be an inspirational piece of work. It's been an ongoing process. The timing is everything.

Why is it important to tell his life and success story now, 20 years after his passing?

Tito Puente Jr.: I'm so excited that we're teaming up with Mr. Olmos and that he's a fan of my late father, practically his whole life and he loves mambo music. I'm glad that we got someone on board that knows my father's music, he was a very good friend of my father too, and we're celebrating his life and his legacy on the 20th-year anniversary of his passing. Everything that we're going to put together is going to be something to be seen. The fans deserve to hear the story of Tito Puente from his humble beginnings in el barrio in New York to become the ambassador of Latin music worldwide. This might take a few episodes but I know Mr. Olmos is going to have the family's best interest in mind and he has a vision that we all, inclusively, would like to see on screen or through a streaming service. Tito Puente's legacy should be told with the family in mind. There are over 186 albums in my father's career, so we have plenty of music to choose from. This is a fantastic opportunity. My father is truly missed and remembered and Mr. Olmos is going to bring light to someone who impacted Latin American culture in general.

Edward: The key is not only what it did to the Latino community but what it did to the understanding of the Latino community throughout the world. One of the greatest forms of communication is the arts. Music, film, books, painting, dance, all give you an inside look at the cultural dynamic of the person. Very few of us got to his level... he was advanced in his field. The essence of his work was monumental. The kind of person that he was, he was really authentically ambitious. His music transcended cultures and went into the unification of humanity. We're trying to bring his magic to life.

Knowing him on a personal level, how would you describe Tito Puente, the friend?

Edward: We did a lot of things together throughout time. I had such a kick with him. With these projects, I want people to get the full range of who he was. He was no angel but he was a really authentic, really passionate, and vibrant human being who gave more than he received. Every person that has heard his music has been touched by it. It's time we solidify it with an understanding of his life so that in turn, 100 years from now, people will know more of him.

Tito, what was the family's initial reaction upon receiving the news? Did you have to think about it or was it an immediate "yes"?

Tito: It was a no brainer for me! We've seen everything Mr. Olmos has produced and it's absolutely phenomenal. My mother has always been a fan. They've known each other for many years. I know Edward was a good friend of my father, he was there at his passing on May 31st. Both families were going back and forth. We've been trying to get together for some time now to get some sort of story or documentary and bring this story to life. I'm glad we all got together. We're going to give Edward the best quality of footage and insight on how Tito Puente was at home, the husband, the father.

What do you think these projects will signify for the new generation of artists and music lovers?

Tito: My dad has some very big fans, young and old. Everyone loves Tito Puente's music. He was such a huge influence on the new generation and in the 20-year since his

passing, we were compelled to team up with someone that knew his story, was personal friends with him, and can really tell it in a productive and clear and honest way. My dad had ups and downs in his career and he would always be innovative and come back with a new sound, whether it was Latin jazz or his Afro-Cuban roots or he would go back to his Puerto Rican heritage. He would stick his timbal-playing into other genres just to keep up with the new generation. One thing's for sure, if you listen to a Tito Puente album, even today, it sounds so advanced for his time. Again, I'm happy that we got this opportunity and I'm so happy to be working with Mr. Olmos and his sons, they're great producers. A new generation is going to discover fantastic music.

If Tito Puente were alive today, how do you think he would have reacted to this docuseries and film?

Edward: We talked about this when he was alive!

Tito: I think he would say, "don't ask me any question, man!" He'll say something sarcastic. And I think he'll get a kick out of it, especially knowing that Edward is doing it.

Is there a set release date for these projects?

Edward: There's no rush but yet we're all in a rush. 2020 marks his 20th anniversary, that's why we're doing this but it'll be here when it needs to be here. ☐

Beyoncé Demands Justice for Breonna Taylor in Letter to Kentucky Attorney General

BY ASHLEYIASIMONE

Beyoncé has penned a public letter to Daniel Cameron, Attorney General of Kentucky, urging him to take action and bring justice to Breonna Taylor three months after her murder.

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"Three months have passed — and the LMPD's investigations have created more questions than answers," she wrote Sunday (June 14). "Three months have passed — and zero arrests have been made, and no officers have been fired."

"Three months have passed — and Breonna Taylor's family still waits for justice. Ms. Taylor's family has not been able to take time to process and grieve. Instead, they have been working tirelessly to rally the support of friends, their community, and the country," Beyoncé said.

Taylor was killed on March 13 when police officers used a battering ram and a "no-knock" warrant" to enter her apartment, where she was asleep and unarmed. They opened fire, striking Taylor at least eight times.

"Your office has both the power and the responsibility to bring justice to Breonna Taylor, and demonstrate the value of a Black woman's life," Beyoncé wrote to Cameron.

She then outlined three critical actions to take: "Bring criminal charges against Jonathan Mattingly, Myles Cosgrove, and Brett Hankison. Commit to transparency in the investigation and prosecution of these officers' criminal conduct. Investigate the LMPD's response to Breonna Taylor's murder, as well the pervasive practices that result in the repeated deaths of unarmed Black citizens."

"Don't let this case fall into the pattern of no action after a terrible tragedy," said Beyoncé. "With every death of a Black person at the hands of the police, there are two real tragedies: the death itself, and the inaction and delays that follow it. This is your chance to end that pattern. Take swift and decisive action in charging the officers. The next months cannot look like the last three."

Beyoncé recently honored Taylor on June 5, which would have been her 27th birthday, by posting a link to a petition demanding justice.

Read her full letter to Daniel Cameron on her website. b

40 Years of 'The Breaks': Kurtis Blow Remembers the 'Dream World' Surrounding Rap's First Gold Hit

BY MICHAEL SAPONARA

A quick flashback to the simpler times of 1980 takes you to a place where 50 cents gets you a dozen eggs, \$2.25 could purchase a movie ticket, and hip-hop was still in its commercial infancy. And then Kurtis Blow arrived.

A wide-eyed 21-year-old hailing from Harlem, Blow helped thrust rap into the mainstream for the masses with his second single "The Breaks," which celebrates its 40th anniversary on Sunday (June 14). The seven-minute "progressive disco-funk" anthem — which is the sub-genre Kurtis Blow coined when crafting his signature sound — would go on to notch the Mercury Records artist a series of music firsts, as Blow entered the "dream world" that allowed him to live out his fantasy as rap's first solo superstar.

"The Breaks" made history as the first rap song to ever be gold-certified by the RIAA — yes, he's still got the plaque — and the second 12-inch single overall to go gold. Kurtis' funky rhymes freed hip-hop from the shackles to infiltrate radio dials across the country. The domino effect continued for Blow to impact the charts, which led to "The Breaks" peaking at No. 87 on the Hot 100 and No. 4 on *Billboard*'s R&B Songs chart.

One person in the studio that helped write and produce the salient "The Breaks" was the late Robert "Rocky" Ford Jr., who passed away at age 70 in May. The hip-hop pioneer played an integral role in Blow's rise to stardom, as Kurtis looked at him as a father figure, who helped him shed his shy tendencies and turn into a more evocative

performer on stage.

"He traveled with me for the first year or so, doing shows, live performances," Blow told *Billboard* earlier in June. "I remember having many conversations with him, either on a plane or riding in a car somewhere or waiting backstage. He taught me how to become a man."

With your boombox turned all the way up, dive into our nostalgic interview with Kurtis Blow, where he reminisces on 40 years of "The Breaks," his friendship with Robert Ford Jr., why Michael Jordan stopped talking to him on the quest to his first NBA title, and more.

Billboard: "The Breaks" is turning 40-years-old this weekend. What do you remember most from that time in your life?

Kurtis Blow: I remember it being like a dream world. It was a series of miracles and blessings from God. I was in the right place at the right time and available for all of the promotion and press for the documentation of this birth of the culture. The record was the first certified-gold record in hip-hop.

Do you still have the plaque?

Yes, I do. It was the second certified 12-inch in the history of music. It was one of the first songs to have a hook that was a repetitive chorus and once you heard it, you were hearing it throughout the day.

"The Breaks" was one of the first rap songs to make the Hot 100. Were the charts something you were focused on?

It was something incredible. I was 21-years-old and the record actually peaked at No. 4 on the *Billboard* R&B [Songs] chart. I thought I hit the big time and had a hit record. The chart positions were proof. I'm 21, and I just made it into manhood and here I have the No. 1 record in the country. It was an awesome time for me.

With Robert Ford Jr. passing away in May, can you speak to your friendship with Rocky and him writing a portion of "The Breaks," as well as being like a father figure to you?

Here's a great story about that. Rocky and I were at odds in the studio over this song. I had developed a love for the piano, which is my favorite instrument. Denzel [Miller] comes in the studio — he's one of the guys

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that helped me build my sound — we already cut the song and we're at the part creating the solo.

Rocky loves Denzel Miller doing a solo with a synthesizer, which is an electronic instrument and the sound was called a clavinet. Of course, he did the piano solo first. I wanted the piano, but Rocky wanted the clavinet. So we were going back-and-forth and we decided to use both of them. So you'll hear the clavinet under the piano and Denzel Miller played the same kind of solo and it matched perfectly.

How about Rocky urging you to become a better performer?

The problem I had was still being shy. Dealing with people after the show was always a problem. Of course, he gave me good pointers as far as eye contact and focusing on one person in the crowd, then move across to the next one with eye contact in the audience and smile and be happy. If you're smiling, you're projecting happiness and that's gonna make people feel good inside when they leave. He explained the job of an entertainer is to entertain. You don't want them to feel bad or be angry, you want them to be happy and that's when they'll come back to get more.

The performance aspect of it — we discussed crowd response, which was so very important. In the first shows of hip-hop, making the people in the audience part of the concert was very important. People love that, and want to go to the next club. That was a big feather in the cap of hip-hop. It gained so much popularity because of the crowd response, and Rocky was a big stickler for it. He was telling me to analyze my audience, because you'll get caught out there without a response.

"The Breaks" really helped push hip-hop into the mainstream.

Yes, it definitely did — because it was a pop song. It was a huge radio record, and opened the door to radio for [hip-hop]. I think it was the seventh or eighth rap record ever made. So you had this possibility of careers happening. We opened the door for radio to say, "Okay, this is normal and not a flash in the pan — and we can support this thing." I became a big radio artist for a couple of years after that. I was the only

[rap] artist on the radio nationally between 1980 to 1983.

With Andre Harrell also passing away in May, I was wondering if you had any stories to share about your time working with Dr. Jeckyll & Mr. Hyde?

I had a great time working with Andre Harrell and his partner Alonzo. They came along at the time I was really a hot producer. I put together this song for them that signified success in creating hit songs. They put out "AM/PM" and it was just a beat and that went to No. 1 in New York City. I remember hearing that on the radio and thinking that we had arrived. I had a team of writers and we'd go into the studio and knock out these songs like an army.

How does it feel when artists sample your work — like "Basketball" on the *Like Mike* soundtrack?

Whenever that happens, it's a straight honor. My appreciation goes out to all the artists that covered my songs. The best form of flattery is doing a cover to their songs. Next went triple-platinum with that "Too Close" song.

There was a band called Queen, who did a song called "Another One Bites the Dust," and that uses the "Christmas Rappin'" bassline. They just did *Bohemian Rhapsody*, and they talked about creating that beat and they asked them where'd they got the bassline from, and the dude was silent in the movie. I'm not mad, I have a lot of songs that did get credit. It lets you know that it's a real classic.

Are there any artists now that remind you of yourself?

I see a lot of myself in Nas. I say that because his lyrical content is really conscientious. At one point, I was like that myself. I see a lot of myself in Drake. His melodies and that's one thing I can say that I was doing back in 1980. I like his stuff. He's taking it to the next level and I wish we could've done something together.

What did you think of the backlash disco was receiving around 1980 and were you happy to see hip-hop break away from those roots?

It takes me back to a story I have about this. When Russell introduced me to two producers in J.B. Moore and Robert Ford.

They decided to make a record with this "Christmas Rappin'" record. I'm sitting at J.B.'s house and they ask me what kind of sound I'm looking for with this record. I said, "James Brown." I was thinking that — and the No. 1 group was Chic. I said, "I would like a style of music that's a cross between James Brown and Chic." I actually gave it its own box with "progressive disco funk."

I want to get your opinion on the protests against police brutality going on right now following the murder of George Floyd.

My condolences go out to the family of George Floyd and all of the families who have lost someone to police brutality and racism. This oppression goes back 400 years that we're now standing up and saying, "Take a look!" Thank God for the cell phone because it's finally being exposed after all these years. There are so many things about systemic racism that are now being exposed.

There's a lot of pain coming to the forefront. There's a lot of mental health issues Black people have been faced with for 400 years. There's racism in religion, institutions, and it's something that's infiltrated society for 400 years. I think the encouraging thing about this is to see all the multicultural protestors out there fighting for equal rights. I see white people out there saying, "Black lives matter." I think there's hope for this country and we're ready for change.

What did you think of ESPN's The Last Dance docu-series?

Yes, I relived all of that stuff. I was hanging out with Charles Oakley, that was my buddy. He actually called me when he got traded to the Knicks and I gave him all the telephone numbers to all the DJs in New York. I wrote a song for Michael Jordan called "Jordan." It was a crazy good song, but we never put it out. I was hanging out with Jordan when the Bulls finally got to a Finals against the Lakers when I was living in Los Angeles. The press got a hold of me before they got to the Finals during the playoffs, and I was asked about the Bulls chances about getting to the Finals.

I was like, "I don't know what's going to happen if they get to play L.A." I was a big Lakers fan. So Michael got wind of that, and I haven't talked to him since. That was a lo-

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cal interview in L.A., but it hit the AP. Oakley called me and said, "Michael's pissed at you, don't come to the game." I went to the game and [Jordan] did not acknowledge me. I was hollering at him like, "Mike, Mike." He just walked away. I did end up seeing him 10 years later after he retired at a function with Russell Simmons and he grabbed us both and gave us big hugs.

What's the update on the Universal Hip-Hop Museum coming to the Bronx in 2023?

That's been a dream for the last eight years. This Universal Hip-Hop Museum, we open the doors in 2023, but we start construction in July. The location is 65 East 149th St. across from the Bronx Terminal Market. It's a dream brick-and-mortar location that everyone can come and learn the history, legacies, stories, and see the memorabilia of this incredible culture all in one place. It's also going to support the present-day hip-hop as well.

Do you care about getting into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame one day?

It's so painful at times, because I see artists like Run D.M.C. and Grandmaster Flash [getting in]. Of course, it's a little frustration, pain, jealousy, and envy. Bottom line, the Bible says you store your treasures up in heaven, so I'm not concerned with that. I've experienced so much love and joy being in hip-hop while traveling the world. I've met all my heroes and told them I love them. I met Michael Jackson, Prince, The Temptations, Aretha Franklin, and James Brown. That's big for me, just getting out there and showing love. I know I've done many great things, and I'm secure in that. ▀

Barbra Streisand Gifts George Floyd's Daughter Gianna With Disney Stock

BY HERAN MAMO

Barbra Streisand gifted George Floyd's 6-year-old daughter Gianna with Disney stock and two of her television specials over the weekend, *Billboard* can confirm.

Gianna, whose father's murder in Minneapolis in May sparked protests against police brutality all across the world, shared a message of gratitude to the EGOT superstar on her Instagram Saturday (June 13). She showed off a folder from Disney as well as Streisand's early TV specials *My Name Is Barbra* from 1965 and *Color Me Barbra* from 1966.

"Thank You @barbrastreisand for my package, I am now a Disney Stockholder thanks to you," Floyd's daughter wrote. It's unclear how many shares the multihyphenate purchased for Gianna.

Streisand told *Billboard*: "I sent Gianna videos where I played a little girl in my first television special singing kid songs and my second special a sequence with lots of baby animals."

Streisand isn't the only Grammy award-winning artist investing in Gianna's future. *Billboard* confirmed earlier in June that **Kanye West** organized a **529 education plan** that fully covers the 6-year-old girl's college tuition. Gianna also received a full scholarship from Texas Southern University in honor of her father's "powerful legacy" and Houston roots, according to the **university's official press release**.

See her latest gift from Streisand below. ▀

Tekashi 6ix9ine and Nicki Minaj Aim for U.K.'s Highest New Debut With 'Trollz'

BY LARS BRANDLE

Tekashi 6ix9ine and **Nicki Minaj** are bound for the highest new entry on the U.K. singles chart with "Trollz".

After a busy weekend of sales and streaming activity, "Trollz" starts at No. 5 on the Official Chart: First Look.

It's on track to secure Minaj her highest-charting single in the U.K. since **Little Mix's** 2018 hit "Woman Like Me," on which assisted. "Woman Like Me" peaked at No. 2.

Tekashi 6ix9ine has only impacted the U.K. top 10 on one occasion, with his "comeback" track "Gooba," which hit No. 6 last month.

A portion of the proceeds from the single, including merch items, will benefit **The Bail Project**, Minaj explains, which provides free bail assistance to low-income individuals who can't afford to pay bail while awaiting their trial.

Leading the U.K. sales blast is DaBaby's reigning champ "Rockstar" featuring **Roddy Ricch**, which is aiming for a fifth non-consecutive week at the summit of the Official Singles Chart.

Just behind is **Lady Gaga** and **Ariana Grande's** former leader "Rain On Me," which is unchanged in second place.

The Official U.K. Singles Chart is published Friday evening local time. ▀

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Lady Gaga's 'Chromatica' Enters Week Two Atop Australia's Chart

BY LARS BRANDLE

Lady Gaga's *Chromatica* (Interscope/Universal) hangs on for a second week at [No. 1 in Australia](#), as DaBaby's "Rockstar" (Interscope/Universal) completes [a month at the top](#).

Chromatica, which also snags the U.K. chart lead for a second week (by a narrow margin), is Gaga's fourth No. 1 Down Under.

The highest new debut this week belongs to Melbourne alternative rock act **Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever**, whose sophomore album *Sideways To New Italy* arrives (Ivy League/Universal) at No. 5 on the ARIA Albums Chart and is the best-selling vinyl album of the week. It's the followup to their debut *Hope Downs*, which peaked at No. 24 in June 2018.

Sideways To New Italy impacts the Official U.K. Albums Chart this week, at No. 45.

Also bowing in the Australian top 5 is The Ghost Inside's self-titled fifth album, at No. 5, a new career high.

The Ghost Inside (Epitaph/RKT) is the American metalcore act's second title to impact the chart after *Dear Youth*, their most recent set which peaked at No. 16 in November 2014.

U.S. hip-hop duo **Run The Jewels** bag a career-best No. 25 bow for *RTJ4* (BMGWarner), their collab-heavy first album release since *Run The Jewels 3*, which peaked at No. 36 in January 2017.

Over on the ARIA Singles Chart, DaBaby's "Rockstar" featuring [Roddy Ricch](#) enters a fourth week at No. 1. The international hit is also the leader on both sides of the Atlantic.

And finally, after performing "Supalonely" (Universal) with [Gus Dapperton](#) on *The Tonight Show* [last week](#), New Zealand-born singer **Benée** sees her latest release climb 11-6, a new peak. ■

Samsung Rolling Out BTS-Themed Phones & Earbuds

BY GIL KAUFMAN

The ARMY is about to have their own signature communication device. Samsung has announced that it is a special edition dedicated to [BTS](#). The Galaxy S20 Plus BTS Edition has an iridescent purple exterior and the BTS logo on the back and the band's heart icon on the camera array; it is available with matching Galaxy Buds Plus earbuds.

According to Samsung, the phone also comes with [photo cards of the band](#) in the box as a keepsake for fans. "Galaxy S20+ and Galaxy Buds+ BTS Edition are the result of a collaboration between BTS, whose members spread messages of love and harmony through music, and Samsung, which is creating a better future with meaningful innovation," said Stephanie Choi, Senior Vice President and Head of Global Marketing Team of Mobile Communications Business, Samsung Electronics in a statement. "We hope it will be a source of joy and entertainment for fans and consumers around the world."

The BTS edition also has band-inspired Android themes and a preinstalled copy of BTS' preferred social media platform, Weverse.

Fans can pre-order the BTS phone beginning on Monday (June 15) exclusively from Weverse (only in South Korea and the U.S.); the phone and earbuds will also be available to pre-order online from [Samsung.com](#) beginning on June 19. The devices will officially go on sale on July 9, marking the seventh anniversary of the ARMY. ■

One To Watch: Remi Wolf on How Island Supports Her 'Drastic, Crazy' Ideas

BY GAB GINSBERG

By the time Remi Wolf started high school in the Bay Area, she had joined a music center that held recitals every week. "I was constantly learning new songs and classics, Like Stevie Wonder, Led Zeppelin, the Beach Boys," she recalls. "Getting to learn a bunch of songs and perform a lot was definitely foundational."

At the same time, she had to split her time training as a competitive skier; she attended school two days a week, which she complemented with an independent study program through junior year. "That's when I decided to stop doing that myself, because it was crazy," she says.

As skiing fell to the sidelines, she spent the next decade trying to figure out who she wanted to be as an artist. She started writing songs in college — she attended USC's Thornton School of Music — and by the time she graduated, she says she "started finding my sound production-wise."

She started uploading her music online, occupying the space of pop-funk, and now, after signing a recording contract with Island Records at the top of the year, the 24-year-old is ready to "unleash" her first major-label EP, *I'm Allergic To Dogs!*, which will arrive June 24.

Between the ages of 7-17, Wolf commuted from the Bay Area to Lake Tahoe almost weekly (and even lived there for a few years) to hone her ski racing skills. All the while, she was juggling multiple music projects — from singing in a female "barbershop quartet-style" trio, to writing and performing songs around her hometown in a band with friends. But her sport only grew more demanding, and eventually something had to give; at 18, Wolf decided

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to prioritize music. Soon after making that decision, and while still a high school senior, Wolf auditioned for *American Idol* (she sang Marvin Gaye's "Let's Get It On") and her performance ended up airing on the 2014 season. She quickly put the show behind her and moved to Los Angeles for college, where she studied music theory and history, and became much more interested in writing her own songs. She says of one of her earliest compositions, "Crawl," written her junior year: "That was the first song where I really felt like I told the truth."

By the fall of 2019, after college graduation, Wolf was eager to take her project to the next level by scoring a recording contract. That summer, she had organized a mini concert tour in New York City, and Island Records A&R representative Hill Coulson happened to catch one of her sets. By September of that year, she started negotiating with the label and by this January, she signed the contract. Wolf says she knew that Coulson "would have my back and be on my side," and she was impressed with Island president Darcus Beese's track record of signing acts like Amy Winehouse and Florence + the Machine. Her first Island release, "Woo!" arrived in April accompanied by a far-out video. "I always knew I wanted my visuals to be really drastic, pretty crazy," says Wolf, referring to her zany concepts for songs like "Woo!" and "Disco Man." "I felt like the only way I could do that was to be backed by a company that had the funds to make that happen."

Wolf had planned to spend her spring supporting Republic Records breakout BENEE on a tour that has since been postponed due to the pandemic, but has developed a strong quarantine game plan in the meantime: "I've taken the route of, 'Make these videos, release content, post on social media, reply to people's PMs and pray that people connect with my music,'" she says of her upcoming EP that follows 2019's *You're A Dog!* Wolf also recognizes that all artists are all in the same boat — and that she's not alone in this incredibly uncertain time. "We're all mutually trying to find ways to get our music heard and connect with fans in really creative ways," she says. "It's a whole other ball game." ▀