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The Pandemic Caused An Explosion In Vinyl Demand – Here's Why The Music Industry Can't Meet It

BY ED CHRISTMAN

Here's a simple way to put the explosion of vinyl record sales in perspective: Pressing plants around the globe have the capacity to manufacture 160 million albums a year, according to the estimate of one executive with decades of experience in physical formats. But, he explains, the current "extraordinary" demand for vinyl looks to be more than double that: somewhere between 320 million and 400 million units.

It is a stunning appraisal. Twenty years ago, vinyl albums were selling just over 1 million copies a year. But if manufacturers were able to meet today's demand, vinyl album sales would be set to surpass their all-time peak of 334 million LPs in 1978, according to the RIAA. Adjusted for inflation, the 1978 figure amounted to \$10.3 million in sales. If demand could be met today, sales could top \$2 billion.

Except they can't. In periods of low demand, vinyl albums take two to three months to produce and get into stores. While delays existed pre-pandemic, label sources tell *Billboard* that a spike in demand that began in July 2020, coupled with continuing supply shortages, means that vinyl record orders placed in

early May will be fulfilled in December at the earliest — while some manufacturers are telling clients they will have to wait until March 2022.

"There is not one area of the supply chain that hasn't been impacted," says Brandon Seavers, co-founder/CEO of vinyl manufacturer Memphis Records. "Even the houses that produce album packages, such as inner sleeves and album jackets, were not prepared for the surge in demand."

Music fans in COVID-19 lockdown spent their disposable income on turntables and vinyl instead of concert tickets, which makes the pandemic responsible for both the skyrocketing demand and the disruption of the supply chain and other factors that have caused the production bottleneck.

Pressing plant and label executives say that during the pandemic, order sizes have doubled. "Labels that used to do a couple of thousand copies on a title are now doing 5,000 copies, and labels that were doing 5,000 copies are now doing 10,000," says Matt Earley, co-founder/vp sales and marketing for Cleveland-

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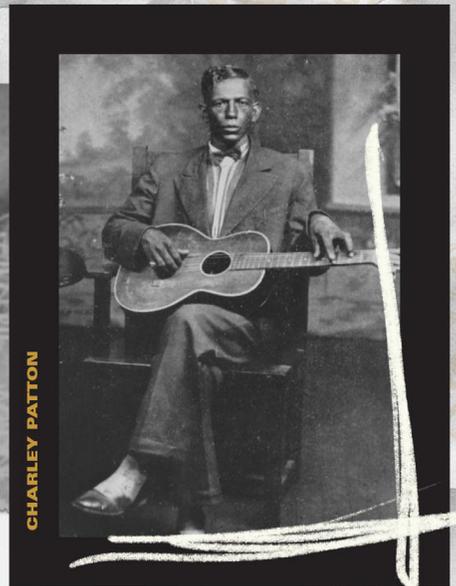
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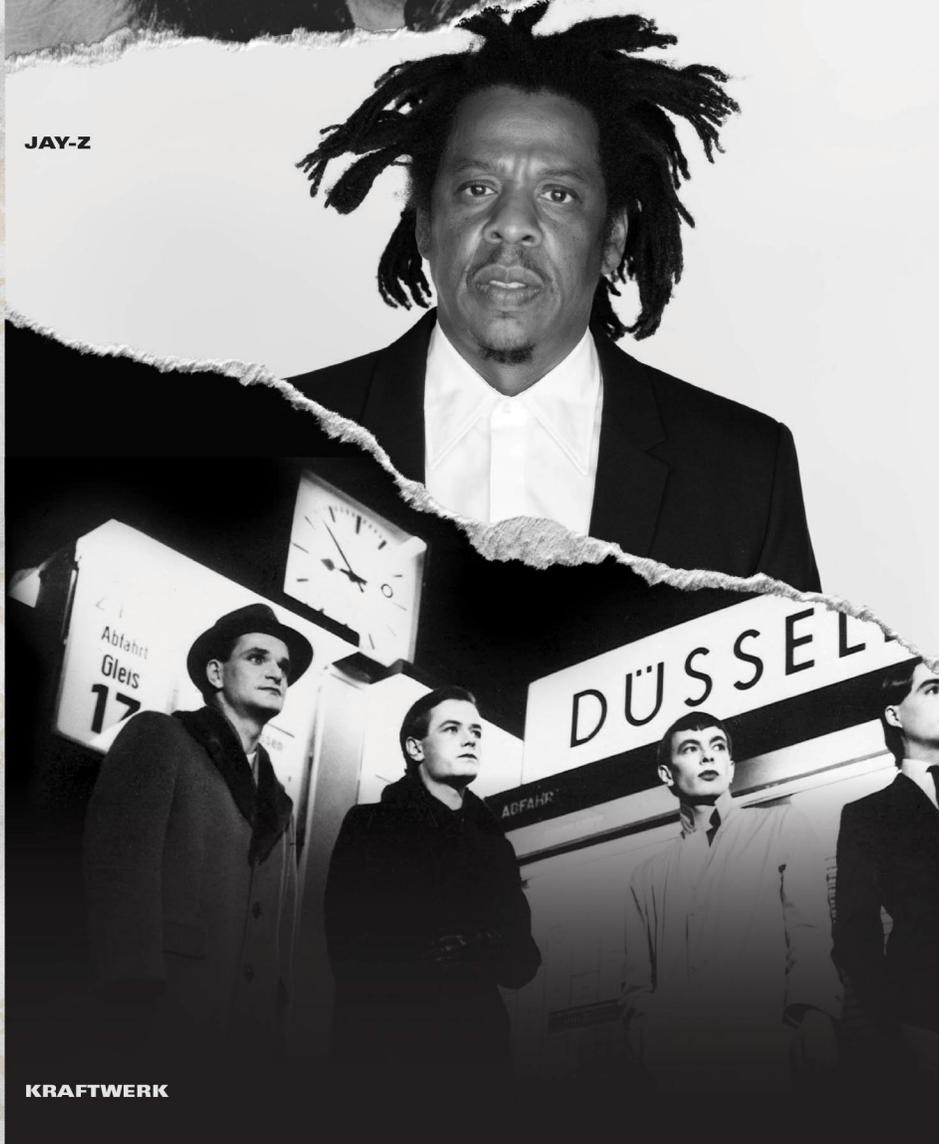
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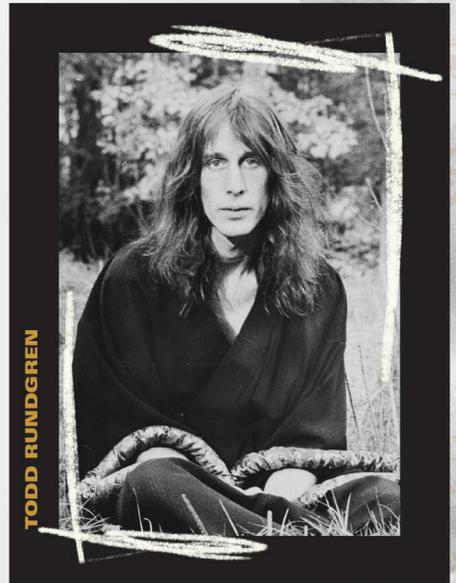
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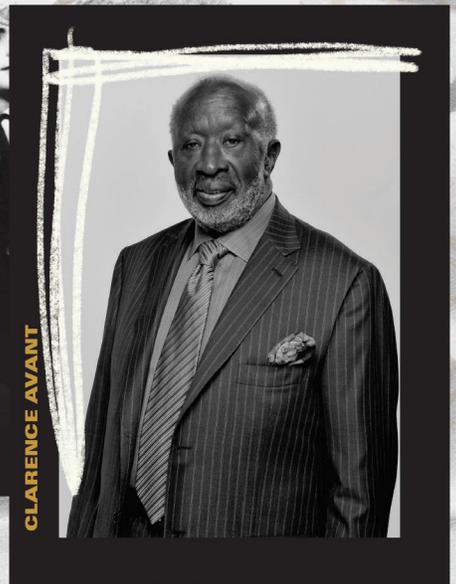
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based plant Gotta Groove Records. That increase has a lot to do with big-box brands Walmart and, to a lesser extent, Target. “Big boxes buying into vinyl has changed the picture,” says Seavers. “In 2020, the average order on a title was 3,700. Now the average order is 7,000 to 8,000.”

This demand for depth — more copies of a single title — has taken its toll on breadth — the range of available catalog titles, says Laura Provenzano, senior vp purchasing and marketing for vinyl wholesaler and distributor Alliance Entertainment. “Currently, we have 37,000 vinyl titles in stock,” she says. “At this time last year, we had 45,000. So that’s also where we are starting to feel the shortage.”

The slowdown hasn’t affected sales. The vinyl boom generated \$626 million in 2020 — a 46% increase in sales over 2018, according to the RIAA — and made it the No. 1 format for albums. In the first four months of 2021, that growth more than doubled to an eye-popping 98.8%, according to MRC Data, which suggests that vinyl will top \$1 billion in revenue this year. Demand isn’t the only thing driving revenue either: Since 2011, the average suggested list price for a vinyl LP has increased from \$21.71 to \$27.11 in 2020.

But on April 29, however, the numbers began to tell another story. Vinyl sales remained robust, but rising material costs, labor shortages and shipping delays signifi-

cantly reduced vinyl manufacturers’ production capacity. As the traditional spring and summer uptick in front-line releases started, CDs, which are faster to produce and can be ready weeks after an album’s digital release — compared with months for vinyl — edged out vinyl as the No. 1 album format in May, 13.7 million units to 13.5 million, according to MRC Data. The first Record Store Day drop, on June 12, could put vinyl back in first place — at least momentarily.

In the short term, those involved in vinyl manufacturing and sales say they are sanguine about the production crunch. “It’s a big, big problem,” says the physical sales executive who puts demand at twice the capacity. “But it’s a damn good problem to have.”

Unless this year’s delays affect demand down the road, that is. How long the vinyl boom — which began in 2011 — will continue has been an open question. Now that question looms larger, because if demand doesn’t break an already fragile production system, a growing consumer hunger for vinyl pressings of top-selling pop and hip-hop albums could threaten the long tail of reissues and indie-rock albums, which sparked the boom in the first place.

In 2019, the supply of vinyl albums had caught up with demand — for a minute. Until 2015, vinyl production had been dependent on vintage presses kept in operation by cannibalizing parts

from older machines that no longer worked. But that year ushered in new entrants to the vinyl business, including manufacturers of more efficient pressing machines. Viryl Technologies in Etobicoke, Ontario, for example, introduced pressers that operated on new technology, while Gz in the Czech Republic manufactured new units cloned from their predecessors and supplied them to affiliated manufacturers such as Memphis Records.

The Tennessee-based manufacturer is one of over a dozen new pressing plants that have opened in the United States since 2015, according to the [Vinyl Pressing Plants](#) website. Among them: Third Man Records in Detroit; Cascade Record Pressing in Milwaukee; Second Line Vinyl in Oakland, Calif.; New Orleans Record Press in Louisiana; Smashed Plastic in Chicago; and Brooklyn Vinyl Works in New York.

This influx of new pressing plants resulted in a flat year for vinyl manufacturers in 2019, says Gotta Groove’s Earley, who recalls “a period of about 18 months [ending in July 2020] when there was more capacity than demand.”

Beginning in 2020, however, a series of events would alter those market dynamics. That January, Rainbo Records, one of the industry’s oldest and largest vinyl manufacturers, closed and sold its pressing

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Then, in February, Banning, Calif.-based Apollo Masters — one of only two companies worldwide that produced the lacquer discs essential to the vinyl stamping process — burnt down in a three-alarm inferno that required 82 firefighters to extinguish it, according to local news reports. The remaining lacquer producer, MDC, is in Japan.

“At first, everyone s—t a brick,” says Quality Records Pressing and Acoustic Sounds owner Chad Kassem of the Apollo Masters disaster. MDC has increased its productivity, so the sector’s worst fears have not been realized. But a single manufacturer of lacquers remains a concern that points to just how tenuous the vinyl supply chain is.

When Apollo burned to the ground, the vinyl industry was still coming to grips with two problems that had emerged in 2019. First, Direct Shot Distribution, the Franklin, Ind., fulfillment house used by the three major labels to distribute their CDs and vinyl to wholesalers and retailers, was delivering the wrong product to stores and, in some cases, failing to fill orders at all. And the majors represent close to 85% of U.S. music sales. To make matters worse, labels began laying off executives who worked with physical product, largely because of growing confidence in streaming revenue, and some staffers who

inherited those responsibilities were ill-equipped to handle the Direct Shot mess, let alone the looming crisis. “All the bad news was hitting at the same time,” says a brick-and-mortar retail executive.

And then came the pandemic.

Initially, labels narrowed their focus to streaming and downloads, holding back releases of physical formats due to uncertainty over when brick-and-mortar stores would reopen. But as lockdowns eased in June 2020 and retailers began to reopen with limited capacity for shoppers, labels resumed ordering vinyl and CDs.

Many music fans had already turned to mail-order vinyl, and as stores reopened, they faced a slew of other challenges: warehouse closures, a shortage of truck drivers, shipping delays and an overall breakdown of the vinyl pipeline. Suppliers of packaging and raw materials, pressing plants and transport hubs were all subject to shutdowns or slowdowns due to COVID-19 outbreaks. Plants that didn’t shut down often operated at reduced capacity because safety measures that demanded social distancing allowed for fewer workers.

“We used to be able to fit 12 to 15 people on our assembly lines, but in order to keep the workers six feet apart, we could fit only six to eight,” says Eric Astor, president/CEO of Furnace Record Pressing in Alexandria, Va. “The pandemic made us re-think and reconfigure our entire operation,

from sales and logistics standpoints to the plant floor. So suddenly we have an assembly backlog because we don’t have space for everyone.”

“There is always something squeezing the supply chain,” says Independent Record Pressing GM/vp customer relations Sean Rutkowski, ticking off “shipping issues, getting color compounds, stampers or printed album covers” as pain points.

Making vinyl records is a combination of craft and science, which means there is a limited workforce qualified to create stamping plates from the lacquers — each of which can produce about 1,000 pressings before it needs to be replaced — and press operators are in short supply. With little time to train new workers, “it’s taking longer to make plates, to do test pressings — everything,” says Rutkowski.

Further complicating the pressing process is a surge in demand for limited-edition color vinyl pressings of releases. “Back in 2015, if it was flat, round and black — vinyl itself was the driver,” says Seavers of Memphis Records. “Now the driver is color vinyl, mixed-color vinyl and exclusive packaging with bells and whistles.”

Pressing albums on colored vinyl is an even more time-consuming process, says Rutkowski. “If we have 10,000 units on order from a label that are to be pressed in six different colors, that will definitely impact capacity, because every time

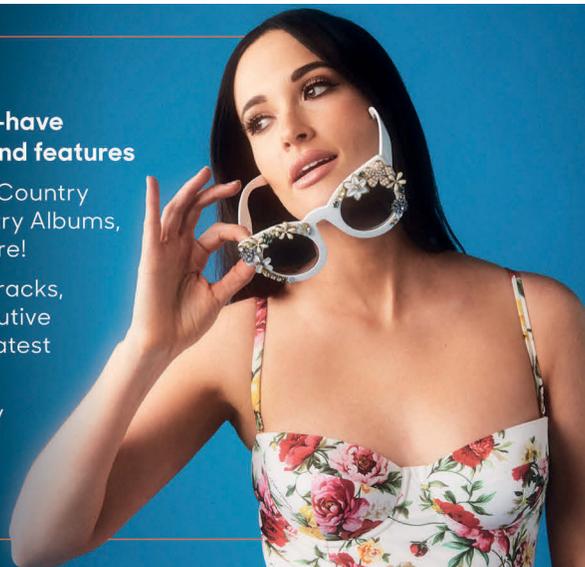
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we change the color, we have to clean the machine and [recalibrate] it in order to get good sound quality.”

Record Technology Inc. owner Don McInnes agrees that color vinyl slows the production process, but it “does not have as significant an impact as packing additional items like inserts and stickers into an album,” he says. “That requires a lot of additional handwork that clogs up everything.”

While grappling with production delays, record manufacturers are also dealing with rising production costs. “The price of vinyl pellets went up 17% on April 1,” says McInnes. And Rutkowski says that Independent Record Pressing, based in Bordentown, N.J., is operating in a warehouse district that is “remarkably competitive for labor.” The state is also gradually increasing its minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2024 — which, he adds, “drives up the wages for all the employees in the marketplace.”

Those rising costs are eating into manufacturers’ already slim margins. Bruce Ogilvie, chairman of behemoth wholesaler Alliance Entertainment/Super D, says vinyl manufacturers make 30 cents to 60 cents per unit, which was a key deterrent when Alliance was exploring entering the market. “The return on investment is nothing to write home about,” he says.

“Everyone assumes the vinyl manufacturers have this great thing now, but this is hard work,” says Dave Hansen, co-owner of Independent Record Pressing. “Vinyl manufacturers are being taken for granted. Everyone tries to beat us up on price, but no one is getting rich making vinyl records.”

The decade of growth that vinyl sales have enjoyed since 2011 has been fueled by a shift in consumer demographics. Once dominated by older white males, vinyl buyers are now a diverse group, according to retailers and label executives.

So, while sales of classic rock have dominated the past decade — according to *Billboard* estimates based on figures from MRC Data, The Beatles and Led Zeppelin respectively sold 3 million and 1 million vinyl albums during that time — contemporary artists in pop, hip-hop and country are the top sellers for the first 19 weeks of 2021: No. 1 is Harry Styles’ *Fine Line*, which

has scanned 94,000 copies this year; No. 2 is Kendrick Lamar’s 2012 breakthrough, *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, at 72,000 copies; and Billie Eilish owns Nos. 3 and 4, with *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* and 2017 EP *Don’t Smile at Me*, which together have sold 134,000. Current country is in demand as well: Chris Stapleton’s 2020 album, *Starting Over*, has scanned 67,000 copies so far this year, while his catalog has moved over 400,000 vinyl LPs.

Manufacturers say that increased demand for front-line releases has led labels to shift their vinyl pressing priorities from catalog to recent releases. “Labels want their new releases to come out before doing the repressing of catalog titles,” says Kassem of Quality Records Pressing. “I can’t get catalog back on the presses because of new releases with a street date.”

Ratcheting up orders for current titles are big-box brands Walmart and Target, which, after retreating from physical sales, are once again betting on vinyl. The mass-merchant sector accounts for 13.6% of the 14.9 million units that have been sold this year as of May 27, according to MRC Data. That’s up from a 4% market share in 2018 but down slightly from 13.8% in 2020. According to label sources, Walmart accounted for about 8.2 points of the latter percentage, while Target’s share was 5.4 points.

While these mass merchants do help drive catalog sales, they capture an outside market share when it comes to vinyl sales for current hit artists. According to calculations made by *Billboard* using numbers from MRC Data, in 2020 mass merchants accounted for 26.4% of Styles’ catalog vinyl sales, which totaled 535,000 copies; 24.3% of the 400,000 copies sold from Stapleton’s catalog; 19% of the 760,000 copies sold from Lamar’s catalog; and a whopping 43.3% of Eilish’s catalog sales, which totaled 740,000.

Label sources say that demand for vinyl has revived Walmart’s interest in music product. Its 4,473 U.S. stores now carry approximately 300 titles and, label sources say, have scanned over 50,000 copies of some popular titles.

The priority — and shelf space — given to hitmakers like Styles and Eilish signals a shift in the customer base for vinyl and raises questions about what the vinyl boom might look like if it continues. Rising orders on front-line titles could crowd out the indie-rock and reissues that first sparked the vinyl renaissance at independent music retailers.

For the moment, though, the rising tide has lifted all ships. From 2018 through 2020, indie merchants were vying for 40% of the market with Amazon and other online sellers. In 2021, the surge in vinyl demand gave indie retailers a commanding market share — 45.6% of the 14.9 million vinyl copies that have been scanned as of May 27, compared with the 35.7% garnered by Amazon and its ilk. And should vinyl become a lasting habit for younger buyers, what started out as a fad will have grown into a multibillion-dollar business for the music industry.

A version of this article originally appeared in the June 5, 2021, issue of [Billboard](#). □

Inside Hipgnosis’ \$2.2B Valuation, NFT Plans and Synchron Music Wins: ‘We Bought Well’

BY GLENN PEOPLES

Since its IPO in 2018, Hipgnosis Songs Fund Limited has built a \$2.2 billion music rights business that generated \$138.4 million in net revenue last year, the company revealed in an unaudited financial report on Monday. Although only five pages in length, the document — which covers the year ended March 31, 2021 — has plenty of interesting details ahead of full-year results coming June 29.

To date, investors have piled £1.1 billion (\$1.56 billion) into the London-based, Guernsey-domiciled royalty fund, enticed by

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steady returns from a unique asset class, and a lucrative, fast-growing streaming market. That interest has given Hipgnosis enough money to buy a staggering number of catalogs in fewer than three years. “At a point in time when the explosion of streaming has transformed music from a discretionary consumer purchase to a utility purchase and new heights of consumption we have acquired amongst the most important songwriter, artist and producer catalogues of all time,” said Merck Mercuriadis, founder of Hipgnosis, in the report.

Integral to Hipgnosis’ thesis is the value of classic songs — especially on streaming services. With record amounts of money pouring into music investments, some critics worry that companies are overpaying for rights in order to beat competitors to the seller. But Mercuriadis doesn’t see Hipgnosis’ investments that way. The pandemic accelerated streaming growth and leaves Hipgnosis “well positioned for the future,” he said, adding that synch revenues “exceeded all expectations” and “highlighted not only that we have bought well but also how undervalued our iconic songs have been by traditional publishers and the massive opportunity this affords Hipgnosis.”

Here are seven key takeaways from the report:

After over \$1 billion in acquisitions, Hipgnosis’ catalog is now worth \$2.2 billion. Over the past year ended March 31, 2021, Hipgnosis paid \$1.06 billion to acquire 84 catalogs, including songs by Neil Young, Lindsey Buckingham of Fleetwood Mac, Shakira, Steve Winwood, Barry Manilow and Chrissie Hynde of The Pretenders. Those acquisitions have since brought Hipgnosis’ net asset value — the value of the catalog minus debt — to over \$2.2 billion. Hipgnosis is choosy about its acquisitions and targets what it calls “culturally important songs” of successful songwriters, recording artists and producers. Of the 64,555 songs in its entire 138 catalogs, 3,738 songs have held a number one chart position. They’re heavily skewed toward pop (46.1% of portfolio value) and rock (27.3%). Only 2.5% of the songs are three years old or younger while 60.2% are over 10 years old. Many of the prominent acquisitions in

the year are music released from roughly 1970 to 1985, putting these valuable titles in the 35 to 50 years old range.

The catalog is giving double-digit returns. Net asset value per ordinary share increased 11.3% in the last financial year compared to the year prior. (Note that Hipgnosis has released unaudited figures in document.) The NAV per share rose from \$1.5114 to \$1.6829 after a bump in catalog’s value minus the expense of dividends paid to shareholders, and a couple smaller items. The NAV return is 40.7% since its \$260 million [IPO in June of 2018](#).

Quietly getting into NFTs, starting this August Hipgnosis is getting into the NFT business by launching “personalized digitally focused merchandise and collectibles utilizing our copyrights alongside significant activity across the top tier lucrative NFT landscape, the first of which launches in August this year.” To date, company has not publicly revealed anything about its NFT plans. The Hipgnosis [website](#)’s only mention of NFTs is an email address for people interested in licensing their music. But given the new popularity and potential of NFTs, it’s sensible for any rights-owning company to entertain ways of getting into the space.

TikTok and Peloton royalties are on their way. Emerging platforms such as TikTok and Peloton have paid administrators but those royalties are not expected to reach Hipgnosis until later in the year. Among them will be for Chic’s “Everybody Dance,” written by Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards, which was used in Public Health England’s NHS x TikTok campaign.

More than 110 game placements this year. Placements in TV, movies and advertisements often get more attention, but gaming is a bountiful market for music, too. Hipgnosis has placed more than 110 songs in video games since January, with more than 75 songs cleared for Beatstar, a song-based smartphone app in the vein of Guitar Hero. Among the placements are Lizzo’s “Tempo” in Call of Duty Cold War; Chic’s “Warm Summer Night” in Grant Theft Auto V Online, and Lorde’s “Supercut” in EA’s FIFA ’22. In addition, Hipgnosis now exclusively

represents the original music in EA Games.

COVID-19 hammered performance royalties by more than a quarter. Performance royalties, which accounted for 29% of net revenue, declined 25.8% in the second half of the year compared to the first half of the year. Hipgnosis expects “a further, modest fall” in performance royalties in the first half of the current year and an end to the decline in the autumn. U.K.-based PRS For Music announced on in April that its performance royalties dropped 19.7% in 2020.

Developing a new system to solve data problems and prevent lost royalties. Hipgnosis built a proprietary platform — not mentioned publicly until now — that weeds out data issues across the 200 companies that collect its royalties. When fixed, these data problems, which outside of Hipgnosis from the previous owners, are expected to provide a “revenue uplift...as much as 40%.” Every fix “is pure revenue upside,” says the report. 

Apple’s Eddy Cue Believes the Future of Music Isn’t Lossless — It’s Spatial Audio

BY MICAH SINGLETON

Apple Music launched a major update to its service Monday, rolling out a lossless service offering high-fidelity music and enabling Spatial Audio, a feature supported by Dolby Atmos that provides a surround sound-like experience for music listeners, at no additional charge to its subscribers.

Although lossless music has been thought to be the next big thing in the music industry for years, Apple sees it differently, positioning high-fidelity music as a “pro” feature for a limited group of audiophiles who have the proper equipment (lossless music can’t be streamed over Bluetooth which means

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Apple's AirPods don't support it) and talking up Spatial Audio as the great leap forward for consuming music. Apple is putting Spatial Audio wherever it can — it has been available for TV and films on iPhone devices since last year, and on Monday during its Worldwide Developers Conference the company announced it would bring Spatial Audio to FaceTime, its Apple TV 4K and its Macs.

Billboard had a chance to listen to Spatial Audio in Apple Music before it was released, and the quality of its offering exceeds similar services from Tidal and Amazon Music, which both offer 3D Audio tracks from Dolby Atmos and Sony 360 Reality Audio. But Apple has an uphill battle on its hands to make surround sound in music stick. With a limited selection of Spatial Audio tracks (Apple says Spatial Audio tracks number in the thousands, while the service offers over 75 million tracks in total) and a lot of work to do to convince the public that there's a leap to be made in music outside of better audio quality.

Billboard spoke with **Eddy Cue**, Apple's senior vice president of internet software and services, whose responsibilities include Apple Music to discuss the streaming service, lossless music, and what Spatial Audio may mean for the future of music consumption.

We saw some of your competitors launch their own versions of immersive music, which have had varying levels of success. What makes Spatial Audio different?

I've been waiting for something in music that was a real game-changer. The quality of audio has not been able to really rise because there hasn't been anything out there that when you listen to it, it truly is differentiated to everybody. It doesn't matter whether you're eight years old or 80 years old, everyone can tell the difference and everyone knows this one sounds better than the other one.

And the analogy to that is obviously the first time you ever saw HD on television: you knew which one was better because it was obvious. And we've been missing that in audio for a long time. There really hasn't been anything that's been substantial. We'll

talk about lossless and other things, but ultimately, there's not enough difference.

But when you listen for the first time and you see what's possible with Dolby Atmos with music, it's a true game-changer. And so, when we listened to it for the first time, we realized this is a big, big deal. It makes you feel like you're onstage, standing right next to the singer, it makes you feel like you might be to the left of the drummer, to the right of the guitarist. It creates this experience that, almost in some ways, you've never really had, unless you're lucky enough to be really close to somebody playing music.

So we said we want to get behind this in a huge way and that revolves around a bunch of different things. One is it revolves around devices that can play it. One of the other problems with new technology is, for example, when HD gets introduced for television, you have to buy a whole new television. It takes many, many years for that to take place. We've got the opportunity of being able to do this with our AirPods, or phones, or MacBooks that people have had, so we don't have the problem of people having the hardware to be able to listen to it. We didn't have the problem on our side of basically taking Dolby Atmos and doing all the right things to play it back from a technology point of view. What we had is the issue of getting artists, and the labels, and publishers excited about what the possibility of Dolby Atmos was.

One of the first people that told me about Dolby Atmos was Adam Levine. I happen to know him, and we were in the same place, so he was like, "Have you listened to this?" And he sends me this song and he was really excited. He said, "I can't believe what I can do with this." It's going to be really exciting to see how this evolves, and all of what artists are going to be able to do with this, and how exciting it is for fans and listeners to be able to do this.

So we went after the labels and are going to the artists and educating them on it. There's a lot of work to be done because we have, obviously, tens of millions of songs. This is not a simple "take-the-file that you have in stereo, processes through this software application and out comes Dolby Atmos." This requires somebody who's a

sound engineer, and the artist to sit back and listen, and really make the right calls and what the right things to do are. It's a process that takes time, but it's worth it.

I think we're going to see certainly every new song that comes out very quickly here in Dolby Atmos, and you're going to see people going to their back catalogues. We've already seen that. We've seen it with Taylor Swift and, obviously, Ariana Grande, J. Balvin, The Weeknd, Kacey Musgraves, and Maroon 5. We're really excited about this.

You talk about Spatial Audio being the future. Does that mean that you want to add this to CarPlay and in third-party speakers like Sonos? How do you look at making this available on all those devices?

Yeah. My belief is Spatial Audio will go everywhere because it's that big of a deal. It's going to take time because, as I said, it takes time with things, it's no different in television. On cars, it's not just the simple thing of putting it into CarPlay. The car has got to have the right systems because CarPlay plays back to the stereo in the car around it. But there's no doubt. I've listened to cars already with Spatial Audio — not from a factory, but modified — and it's incredible. To me, when I look at Dolby Atmos, I think it's going to do for music what HD did for television. Today, where can you watch television that's not in HD?

One of the advantages of the music has over television is you can't take an old TV show and truly up-res it to HD because it was shot on low-quality cameras. But in the case of audio, all these things were recorded on multiple tracks, and so it's possible to go back to a lot of the songs and be able to do this.

I think this is going to take over everything. It's the way I want to listen to music when I'm in my car. It's going to be the way I listen to music immediately with my AirPods. It's going to be the way I listen to music in my house. In a way, it won't feel very good when I'm listening to something that's not Dolby Atmos because it's so good. It's like when I'm watching HD, it's hard to go back.

The music industry, for a few years now, has been talking about lossless. It

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has said it will be the next-gen technology that's going to change everything. And you seem to think Spatial Audio is going to be that. Was that initial thinking around lossless incorrect?

There's no question it's not going to be lossless. Because the reality of lossless is: if you take a 100 people and you take a stereo song in lossless and you take a song that's been in Apple Music that's compressed, I don't know if it's 99 or 98 can't tell the difference.

For the difference of lossless, our ears aren't that good. Yeah, there are a set of people who have these incredible ears, and that's one piece of it. There's the other piece of it, which is do you have the level of equipment that can really tell the difference? It requires very, very high-quality stereo equipment. What you find is, for somebody who's a true, for example classical connoisseur, they may be able to tell the difference in lossless. I can't tell personally — I do the blind tests all the time with the team — I can't tell. That's a problem. That's not going to work because that's a marketing play, not a true customer play. Dolby Atmos, Spatial Audio? You can tell. I can tell, everyone can tell. That's going to make all the difference in the world.

Now, we're supporting lossless and we think there's a set of customers. It's a small set of customers, but they want it and we'll certainly give it to them, and they'll have it as part of this. The good news is they'll have lossless and they'll have Dolby Atmos and Spatial. It really does work very well for that [set of customers], but it's not going to be lossless [leading the way].

Does your focus on Spatial Audio over lossless present a marketing issue? When you announced the new features in May, people were upset that AirPods Max (Apple's \$550 headphones) didn't support lossless.

Well, I think most people don't understand what lossless is. When you hear the word lossless it sounds better than loss. If you hear, "Hey, do you want to listen to this lossless, or do you want to listen to a lossy?" I don't know. I'll take lossless. That sounds pretty good. I think there's that part of it, but I don't think it will matter.

99.9% have never heard Spatial and when they get to hear it for the first time, that's what it's going to be all about. The problem with lossless is you can tell somebody, "Oh, you're listening to a lossless [song]," and they tell you, "Oh, wow. That sounds incredible." They're just saying it because you told them its lossless and it sounds like the right thing to say, but you just can't tell.

So, yeah, I think there's a small problem with that, but it's a niche problem because, again, most people never have even heard of lossless to begin with and it's only when you tell them [they acknowledge it]. When they hear Spatial Audio and they get to listen to it, I think it's game over. ▣

'Going to Get Ugly': Advocates Sound the Alarm Ahead of Copyright 'Restatement' Vote

BY CHRIS EGGERTSEN

A host of music creator advocacy organizations are gearing up for battle against the latest part of the American Law Institute's "restatement" of U.S. copyright law, with several signing on to a new letter urging ALI members to vote against it. At 5 p.m. ET today (June 8), several sections of the copyright Restatement pertaining to issues including fixation (how a work must be "fixed" in a tangible medium to bget protection) and joint authorship go up for a vote in front of the full ALI membership for the first time.

The American Law Institute is a century-old organization that compiles and publishes legal books, including so-called "Restatements of the Law," which guide judges by summarizing and clarifying court

decisions from around the U.S. Although it is a private organization with no legislative power, ALI's Restatements are often cited by judges, giving it immense power to influence court decisions.

In the June 4 letter obtained by *Billboard*, three organizations — Songwriters of North America (SONA), Black Music Action Coalition and Music Artists Coalition — urge ALI members to vote against the Restatement, arguing the project is "deeply flawed in its approach and unquestionably aims to erode protections for creators."

The letter further sounds the alarm by noting that the Restatement, instead of relying on the Copyright Act — the federal statute that governs copyright law in the U.S. — creates a set of "black letter" rules for copyright, which the organizations argue are "consistently oriented to diminish the rights of creators" and "harmful to those who depend upon copyright for a living."

"In presenting a biased and false view of copyright, the ALI not only harms creators and does a disservice to judges and lawyers, but damages its own reputation as well," the letter goes on.

Sources who spoke with *Billboard* stressed that the potential fallout for music creators is vast if the ALI chooses to adopt the sections of the Restatement that are scheduled for a vote tomorrow. One source opposed to the Restatement, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, was particularly troubled by the section on fixation. "The Copyright Act says you can fix a work while it's being broadcast...if you have a live show, and someone's recording it, that's considered fixed, so it's protected," says the source. "[The ALI] just left that out of their black letter."

Also of note is a section that addresses joint authorship of works in terms that could complicate claims of ownership for songwriters. As opposed to existing copyright law, the Restatement asserts that all contributions must be put down in writing prior to the start of the songwriting process. "If you think about that, in practical terms for songwriters, that's crazy that they would sit in a room and sign a contract before they start writing a song," the source adds.

The ALI declined to comment for this

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2021

COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS

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

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

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ISSUE DATE 6/26 | AD CLOSE 6/16 | MATERIALS DUE 6/17

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story.

The fight between music creator advocates and ALI, which has been bubbling up for years, began boiling over in Jan. 2018, when Acting U.S. Register of Copyrights **Karyn Temple Claggett** [wrote her own letter](#) to the organization imploring it to reconsider the Restatement project, stating that it “appears to create a pseudo-version of the Copyright Act.” She went on to question the necessity of the project given that copyright law is largely covered by federal statute, not common law codified by court decisions, like most of the ALI’s Restatement projects.

Current U.S. Register of Copyrights **Shira Perlmutter**, who was previously an adviser to the ALI’s copyright Restatement project before stepping down following her appointment to the Copyright Office, echoed Claggett’s concerns in a letter sent to the organization last month that was obtained by *Billboard*. Perlmutter called the copyright Restatement “unusual among ALI projects” in its rephrasing of statutory law, saying that doing so “inevitably introduces imprecision and interpretive choices.” She also urged more transparency in the Restatement process, saying it “has been perceived by onlookers, including some Advisers, as inadequately documented, leading to questions being raised about the possible influence of the normative views of the Reporters.”

The latter concern is shared by other critics of the Restatement, who point out that the project has been guided by “reporters” (i.e. ALI members who lead projects at the organization) who are perceived as being skeptical of the extent of current copyright law. They include New York University School of Law professor **Christopher Sprigman**, who for years has been critical of the scope of copyright in the U.S. In a book he co-authored entitled *The Knockoff Economy: How Imitation Sparks Innovation*, Sprigman argued that copying has helped fuel creativity in fields including the fashion industry. He also represented Spotify in a copyright infringement lawsuit brought by music publishers in which he argued that on-demand streaming didn’t qualify as a reproduction, under the legal definition of the term, as well as a public performance.

That would mean that such services would no longer need to license mechanical rights as well as public performance rights.

“If you look at each of the reporters, [it’s a] not very balanced group,” says **Keith Kupferschmid**, president and CEO of the Copyright Alliance, a trade organization that represents businesses that depend on copyright. “It’s a bunch of individuals... who have long had an agenda of minimizing copyright and creators and copyright owners’ rights. And they are...pushing that agenda in this restatement.”

Other critics of the latest part of the project include music industry lawyers, as well as scholars like Columbia Law School professors **Jane Ginsburg** and **Shyam Balganesh**, University of California Berkeley School of Law professor **Peter Menell** and copyright lawyer **David Nimmer**. All four, who serve as project advisers to the copyright Restatement project, sent a joint letter on May 31 encouraging their fellow ALI members to strike down the project in tomorrow’s vote. Like the SONA-BMAC-MAC letter, it lays out what it sees as the consequences of the ALI disregarding established copyright law.

“Not only will this current approach cause confusion as to the operative language and meaning, the project will serve as precedent for future Institute efforts to restate subjects covered by federal statutes,” the letter reads.

While music creator advocates are deeply worried about tomorrow’s outcome, they’re even more concerned about what the future holds as more contentious issues come up for a vote. “What we really, really worry about is, if they can’t get these sections right, what happens when we take on the controversial stuff, like fair use, the DMCA?” says Kupferschmid. “That’s really going to get ugly at that point.”

What’s On Vinyl, And Why

BY STEVE KNOPPER

For the past year, hallowed jazz label Blue Note Records has reissued dozens of titles on vinyl, from classics such as Cannonball Adderley’s *Somethin’ Else* to obscurities like Tina Brooks’ *The Waiting Game*. And somehow, each one succeeds — the label’s Classic and Tone Poet audiophile series combined to sell 500,000 LPs in 2020. But as they look to build on this success, how do they choose which albums to press?

In the age of big data, the answer varies wildly, for both reissues and new front-line titles. Some labels rely on metrics and formulas, checking every available data source from Spotify streaming numbers to resale prices on Discogs, and supplementing those numbers with calls to record stores to gather feedback from retailers. Others, like Blue Note, prefer to rely on gut instinct. “It’s primarily frivolous,” says label president Don Was, laughing deeply before crediting longtime Blue Note producer Joe Harley with the selections. “We’re just sitting around. There’s zero data involved.”

But as vinyl begins to matter more and more to the bottom line — it’s the No. 1-selling album format year to date, outpacing CD and download sales — a wrong answer could mean leaving money on the table or flushing it down the drain. Some of these decisions are obvious, like expansions of catalog classics such as Tom Petty’s *Wildflowers* and *All the Rest* and Prince’s *Sign O’ the Times: Deluxe Edition*. So are new releases from front-line artists like Pearl Jam and Eminem, whose dedicated audiences have already shown an interest in vinyl. Yet though music retailers have been asking for more vinyl on front-line pop and hip-hop releases, many titles don’t get vinyl pressings, at least at first.

Take Pop Smoke’s posthumous debut studio album, *Shoot for the Stars, Aim for the Moon*. It came out in July 2020 and hit No. 1 on the [Billboard 200](#) in its first week,



2021

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

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

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

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

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eventually racking up 4.4 billion streams, according to MRC Data. Yet the vinyl lagged six months behind. That's because "master clearances and various components were not available months in advance," according to Kevin Lipson, Republic Records executive vp global commerce and digital strategy. In early 2021, Republic put out the vinyl version in response to what Lipson calls "insatiable consumer demand," and *Shoot for the Stars* has sold 12,000 LPs through the week ending May 20, according to MRC Data.

Music retailers have alerted labels to that demand over the last few years, begging for more front-line titles on vinyl. "It's like trying to turn around the Titanic," says Carl Mello, brand engagement director for New England retail chain Newbury Comics. "You have this big, lumbering machine." But the requests are finally sinking in. Harry Styles' *Fine Line* was the best-selling vinyl album of 2020, outstripping catalog mainstays like *Abbey Road* and Queen's *Greatest Hits* to sell 231,000 copies. And K-pop has made inroads on vinyl as well: Although BTS doesn't release vinyl in the United States, Blackpink put out a pink-vinyl version of *The Album* in January and has sold 9,000 copies as of June, according to MRC Data. "Vinyl TikTok is real, and it's filled with young people super excited about vinyl," says Mello. "Before you're going to press the fifth-worst Eric Clapton from 1981, please press something that people alive today enjoy."

To determine which titles to release on vinyl, current or catalog, labels consult with Newbury and other retailers; analyze streaming, sales data and other statistics; and assess whether they have pristine-sounding master recordings or original artwork. "We're a very data-driven label," says Lyn Koppe, executive vp global catalog for Legacy Recordings/Sony Music, adding that data "doesn't take away our gut and feel."

When Sony put out the first *Stranger Things* soundtrack in 2016, Koppe's team figured the Netflix series would draw a younger audience and thus do better with streaming than on vinyl. They were wrong — it sold more vinyl copies than expected, prompting multicolor-vinyl releases

for the soundtrack's second volume, and then the series sequel a year later. Similarly, says Koppe, hip-hop releases are often assumed to be streaming-focused, but "suddenly a light goes on: Why are we not thinking about vinyl when it comes to hip-hop?"

Certain rappers are especially vinyl-friendly, like Tyler, The Creator, whose latest album, 2019's *IGOR*, sold 96,000 LPs last year, hitting the vinyl top 20. But hip-hop catalog tends to sell the best, like Kendrick Lamar's 2012 album *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, Travis Scott's 2018 *Astroworld* and the late Mac Miller's 2018 *Swimming*. Labels haven't fully cracked the genre's vinyl code. "Hip-hop is the hardest one, for sure," says Matt Sawin, GM of Virgin Music Label and Artist Services. "We have done some vinyl pieces, with Migos, that have been successful, but nothing like the more vinyl-centric world of alternative."

Indeed, alt-rockers have been vinyl-friendly since the beginning of the format's resurgence, with Jack White's Third Man Records opening two retail stores and a pressing plant and artists such as Josh Homme, St. Vincent and Pearl Jam serving as celebrity "ambassadors" for Record Store Day over the past decade or so. Indie rock labels are all-in on vinyl — Merge Records makes just about every release available on LP, from The Mountain Goats to Dawn Richard — but major labels sometimes have to make tough cost-benefit choices: They can reissue 3,000 units with a \$13 wholesale price and make \$3 or \$4 in profit per release, but for just \$9,000 to \$12,000, Virgin's Sawin asks: "Was it worth it?"

To help make release decisions, labels turn to data: "first-week projections, historical sales, manufacturing and shipping needs, vinyl capacity and life-of-project expectations," says Republic's Lipson. In addition to streaming and sales metrics and internal label data, says Mark Pinkus, president of Rhino Records and Warner Music Group's U.S. catalog, label employees consult Discogs, looking at used LP prices to determine demand. "There's a variety of criteria we use," says Pinkus.

At Capitol Records, some artists build in vinyl decisions from the beginning of a campaign, like Paul McCartney, whose *Mc-*

Cartney III came out with multicolored discs and alternate packages and wound up selling 35,000 copies in 2020. Others start out by emphasizing streaming, but, like Pop Smoke, end up doing big-time vinyl sales, too — often taking their labels by surprise. Capitol's Maggie Rogers and Troye Sivan, for example, are unexpectedly strong on vinyl, as is Halsey, whose *Manic* sold 37,000 LPs last year, prompting a pink-and-blue disc campaign and beating *McCartney III* on the vinyl albums chart. "Sometimes vinyl after the fact is great," says Capitol senior vp marketing Arjun Pulijal. "Often, we put something out digitally, and we add tracks to increase the value."

For catalog titles, labels lean heavily on anniversaries and other cultural events to put out new vinyl versions. Jane Gowen, executive vp product development and marketing for Universal Music Enterprises, says Katy Perry's 10-year-old *Teenage Dream* and Nelly's 20-year-old *Country Grammar* received the deluxe-vinyl treatment for this reason in 2020, as did an elaborate Bob Marley 75th-anniversary box set this year. And at Universal Music Group's Verve/Impulse Records, label executives take care to keep classic albums like Billie Holiday's *Body and Soul* perpetually in print, but they reissued her *Lady Sings the Blues* because they had an idea for a new blue-and-pink cover. They also reissued the less-known *Out of the Afternoon* from drummer Roy Haynes because the international retailers they consulted told them "it was an important one to include, and there were no exceptions," says Jamie Krents, executive vp of Verve/Impulse.

Booming demand for vinyl has helped record stores and mail-order specialists like Vinyl Me, Please stay in business throughout the pandemic and allowed labels to experiment with unexpected releases. "The great news for us is the market will bear more and more and more," says Krents. "It was dubious to do vinyl reissues even 10 years ago, but obviously we're in a very different place now."

On rare occasions, major labels sell the rights to license a classic title from their catalog to a smaller, independent reissue specialist. Sundazed Music, for exam-

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ple, promotes five Sony-owned mono Bob Dylan LPs on its website, such as *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Greatest Hits*, for \$28.98 apiece. That was a rare score, says Jay Millar, the label's A&R director, because Sony generally prefers to reissue its own titles, but the 32-year-old indie was able to persuade Dylan's longtime label to sell the rights to a small LP run for a bit more money. It was worth it. "The profit margin is very thin when dealing with the majors," says Millar. "It's a form of advertising: Rather than 'We're going to make a bunch of money off these Bob Dylan records,' it's 'These Bob Dylan records will bring us more attention to the deeper titles in our catalog.'"

Instead of Dylan, Millar prefers to discuss a Sundazed passion project — a recent partnership with Something Weird Video, which owns the rights to songs and dialogue from a magic-and-horror carnival, *The Ghost (or Spook) Show*, which traveled the United States from the 1930s to the '70s. The collaboration led to several LPs, including a green-vinyl compilation of surf-rock trailers, shrieking noises and dialogue snippets. "We get inspiration from everywhere," says Millar. "People will just call us and say, 'Hey, my uncle was in this band. He's got a bunch of reels in the attic.' These days, the unifying factor is always the vinyl. It starts with the vinyl, then goes as wide as we can get it from there." 📺

Ari Emanuel Leaves Live Nation Board After Stocks Vest, Taking Endeavor Public

BY DAVE BROOKS

Ari Emanuel has resigned from his position on the Live Nation board of directors nearly 14 years after the founding partner at Endeavor was elected to represent shareholders of the world's largest concert promoter, according to an SEC filing from Friday.

Emanuel had planned to leave following the launch of Endeavor's IPO in April, according to a source at Live Nation. After a false start in 2019, Emanuel was able to successfully take the sprawling entertainment company Endeavor — which owns the WME and IMG talent agencies, the Miss Universe Pageant, Ultimate Fighting Championship and ticketing and hospitality company OnLocation — public on the New York Stock Exchange, raising about \$511 million at a valuation of a little over \$6 billion.

But his timing exiting Live Nation makes sense for another reason: Documents obtained by *Billboard* suggest Emanuel was waiting until June 3 for the vesting of his final stock award of 4,470 shares issued June 2020 worth nearly \$400,000.

In a Live Nation SEC filing announcing Emanuel's exit, the company said he "withdrew from reelection to the board of directors and will not be standing for reelection at the Company's annual meeting of stockholders" on June 10. Live Nation officials note that the split was amicable and "not the result of any disagreement."

Emanuel has enjoyed a long relationship with Live Nation chief executive and president **Michael Rapino**. Endeavor's talent agency, WME, is one of the world's largest music agencies and has booked the com-

pany's clients across Live Nation's portfolio of venues, festivals and global touring deals, resulting in billions of dollars in tickets sold. Endeavor also holds a partial ownership stake in Lollapalooza with Live Nation, which the promoter acquired in 2014 with the purchase of C3 Presents.

Live Nation's stock value has grown nearly 350% during Emanuel's time on the board, trading for approximately \$20.30 per share in September 2007, down to a low of less than \$5 per share in 2009 during the worst months of the financial crisis before beginning its ascent in 2013 and eventually reaching \$75 a share in 2019. That's a point Emanuel famously reminded **Irving Azoff** of in June 2013, six months after Irving unexpectedly resigned from his chairman position at Ticketmaster and cashed out his stock.

Emanuel **began the fight**, with many executives and WME agents on copy, forwarding an article from the *Financial Times* reporting that Live Nation's stock price nearly doubled in the first half of the year.

"The article says since you left stock has continued to grow....interesting," Emanuel wrote. "How much money you lost by selling. Stupid move."

Irving Azoff's wife, **Shelli Azoff**, disagreed: "I am in the air on my new g450 (private jet)," she replied "We did ok with the LN stock."

Years later, Emanuel might now be wondering if he sold his own Live Nation stock too early. On March 3, 2020, about 10 days before the company pulled touring shows off the road due to the growing COVID-19 pandemic, Emanuel sold more than 71,000 of his shares in Live Nation — representing 97% of his holdings in the company for approximately \$58.26 per share, for a total of \$4.8 million. Had he waited 15 months until his other stocks had vested on June 3, 2021, to cash out his holdings, it would have been worth \$90 per share, buoyed by investor expectations for a strong recovery after the pandemic, generating \$6.4 million. 📺

Here's How Much Americans Spend on Vinyl, Per This Online Marketplace

BY FRANK DIGIACOMO

In a year without live music, fans turned to vinyl records and CDs for home entertainment, and many of them bought their albums and logged their collections on the recorded-music database and marketplace [Discogs](#), which sells new and used albums, singles and other recorded music in all formats.

Discogs communications content head Aub Driver says approximately 75% of orders placed through the site are for vinyl, and in 2020, 11.96 million vinyl albums were sold through the site — an almost 40% increase over the previous year — while 3.44 million CDs were purchased, a 37.26% bump.

Driver says those numbers are proof that “physical media is not going anywhere. Vinyl is crushing it,” he adds. “But so are CDs.”

Discogs’ 10 million users also had the time to inventory their album collections on the site and added 100 million titles to the database, which has surpassed 500 million albums.

In analyzing that [information](#), Driver determined that the average Discogs user owns 184 recordings — the individual with the largest collection on the site owns over 512,000 releases — and that the average collection value is \$3,160. When it comes to limited-edition recordings, 78% define them as releases of 1,000 copies or less, while 22% say that a run of 5,000 or less is acceptable. And though color vinyl has become a hot commodity, 66% of Discogs collectors prefer black vinyl because it is easier to find, sounds better and costs less.

Billboard asked Driver to dig deeper into the Discogs database for information on which genres are the most collected; aver-

age buyer spends in 10 countries; domestic versus export percentages for sellers in 10 countries; and a price comparison between a sold-out limited-edition rerelease of legendary jazz saxophonist Cannonball Adderley’s 1958 album *Somethin’ Else* versus the original issue.

Driver says 2015 “was the first year that we saw a large number of reissues on vinyl,” which sparked a surge of purchases on Discogs through 2017. He theorizes that growth leveled off in 2018 and 2019 because consumers who hadn’t yet embraced the vinyl format “were still trying to figure out whether it was worth the investment — you need a turntable and space to store the albums.” He adds that the onset of the pandemic in 2020 convinced many people to take the plunge, which dovetails with MRC Data and RIAA statistics on the growth of vinyl sales during that period. “People said, ‘We’re going to be spending a lot more time at home,’ and went back into music appreciation, which resulted in massive growth” — more than six times the format’s growth from 2018 to 2019. The pandemic also proved beneficial for CD and even cassette sales in 2020, albeit at a lower volume. Discogs users bought 3.44 million CDs in 2020, up 37.26% over the previous year, and 282,798 cassettes, up 33.58%.

Although Discogs was founded in 2000 as a database for electronic dance music DJs to catalog their collections, rock music has overtaken EDM to be the top-collected genre on the site. Based on the music in all formats that Discogs users added to their collections in 2020 — not all users log their collections — more than twice as many rock records were added compared with electronic music.

When it comes to marketplace transactions on Discogs, “the United States doesn’t do a lot of export,” says Driver. “We are a buying nation.” For countries or regions that export most of their sales, Driver says, in most cases “it’s all about the regional releases that those sellers have in their stock. The U.K. and Europe have some of the most desired pressings, so they see more exports,” he explains. “When vinyl dried up in the ’90s in the United States, the U.K. and Europe continued to press wax, so many

nostalgic fans seek those releases in lieu of a reissue.” Using Pink Floyd’s 1973 classic, *The Dark Side of the Moon*, as an example, Driver says, “If you use our database to [filter](#) by country of origin, you’ll see that the U.S. has a ridiculous amount of releases on many formats, but the U.K. and European Union combined have a similar quantity. The majority of those buyers are looking for a specific version and, similar to Australia, those buyers will pay to ship and add them to their collection.”

The dollar amounts in the Average Spend Per Order column were converted from each country’s currency — Discogs continuously updates exchange rates internally — and Driver says that the average Discogs order is two items. Buyers in the United States and the United Kingdom spend less per order than those in other countries, but they buy with more frequency. From January 2020 through the end of March 2021, 452,228 buyers placed an average of eight orders with Discogs sellers. “This all comes back to market value,” he says, which can be tracked by looking up a release’s sales [history](#) in the database, where users can see the last 10 sales of any release anywhere in the world. “CDs and vinyl are not necessarily more expensive outside of the United States, but there is a demand for rarity,” says Driver. “The international record collector will find the version they are looking for eventually, but the right factors of price and shipping need to be in place.”

The limited-issue Blue Note Classic Vinyl Edition of jazz great Cannonball Adderley’s 1958 *Somethin’ Else* LP, which features Miles Davis on trumpet — one of the few recordings he made as a sideman after 1955 — sold out quickly when it was released this year. Mastered from the original two-track tapes and pressed on 180-gram vinyl, the edition was praised for its rich stereo sound. Driver says that reissues like this are in demand “because people want availability,” but, he adds, “the original release is the one true collectors want.” A comparison of the Blue Note rerelease and the 1958 original bears this out. Although the 2021 rerelease has sold for a high of \$91.55 on Discogs, the album goes for an average of \$36.04, which is about \$11 more than its

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\$24.98 list price.

Although the list price for *Somethin' Else* in 1958 could not be found, LPs generally sold for under \$2 in the 1950s. Today, an original copy could cost approximately 90 times that or more, depending on its condition. Discogs data shows that the original pressing sells for an average price of \$189.13 and has gone for as much as \$1,275. Says Driver: "You are going to pay a premium for something that is much harder to source." 📺

Dick Clark Productions President Amy Thurlow to Exit

BY RICK PORTER

Amy Thurlow will step down as president of Billboard Music Awards producer [Dick Clark Productions](#) at the end of June.

Thurlow, who has been with DCP since 2014 and served as its president [for the past year](#), is leaving the company to pursue other opportunities. Her departure comes as Dick Clark Productions, which produces several other awards shows in addition to the BBMAS, including the Golden Globe Awards, has seen viewership for such programming nosedive during the pandemic (though recent upticks for live sports could offer a glimmer of hope for awards shows as well).

Her departure also comes a month after NBC said it [will not air](#) the 2022 Golden Globes following a February [Los Angeles Times](#) story that revealed the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which puts on the awards, has no Black members. The HFPA recently adopted a new [code of conduct](#), but organizations including Time's Up, a coalition of PR firms and streamers Netflix and Amazon have threatened to boycott the Globes unless more concrete progress is evident. As of publication, the 2022 awards do not have a TV home.

Despite those challenges, Thurlow's

tenure at Dick Clark Productions — first as COO and CFO before taking over the top job from Mike Mahan — has been one of growth, said Modi Wiczzyk and Asif Satchu, co-CEOs of parent company [MRC](#).

"Amy leaves behind an admirable seven year record; her tenure launched a consistent period of financial growth at DCP," Wiczzyk and Satchu wrote in a memo to staff (read it [here](#)). "Most recently, she led the team through the hardest year for live television since its creation."

Thurlow came to DCP from what was then the TV Guide Network (now Pop TV), where she served as CFO and executive vp sales strategy. She previously worked at NBCUniversal and its former parent company, GE.

"Over the last seven years, I am most proud of the team that I have had the privilege of working with and building," Thurlow wrote in her own memo to DCP staff (also in full below). "Each of you is a trusted and remarkable colleague. I am in awe of your accomplishments, and I have every expectation that DCP and [multichannel marketer Direct Holdings Group] will continue to flourish.

"As some of you know, in addition to our work together, I have also been passionate about pursuing and achieving other professional opportunities. After getting through this year's ACM [Awards] and [Billboard Music Awards], it felt like the right time for me to do so."

Dick Clark Productions is a division of MRC, which is a co-owner of *Billboard* and *The Hollywood Reporter* through a joint venture with Penske Media titled P-MRC.

Thurlow's memo to DCP staff is below, followed by the note from Wiczzyk and Satchu.

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

The Limited-Edition Gold Rush

BY DAN RYS

In 2018, as Blue Note Records prepared to celebrate its 80th anniversary, the staff of the iconic jazz label began exploring ways to commemorate its extensive legacy and approached Vinyl Me, Please, a subscription-driven online vinyl retailer that specializes in exclusive and limited-edition releases. The result was *The Story of Blue Note Records*, a numbered, limited-edition seven-LP box set curated by label president Don Was covering a half-dozen eras of the label's history, accompanied by a booklet of liner notes and a four-episode podcast series. The 1,000 box sets — available for \$230 to those who signed up with an email address ahead of time or \$280 when they become available for sale — sold out within three hours, and Blue Note realized it had a hit.

"We've done box sets in the past, but approaching them from a limited-edition standpoint is something we've seen be super successful," says Blue Note GM Justin Seltzer. "It's not always going to hit a wide consumer base — you're talking about hardcore fans of some of these projects — but there is definitely an insatiable demand for these deep dives into some of these projects and the labels and legacies."

Since its launch in 2013, Vinyl Me, Please has grown from a small record club of friends and family to a business with a subscription base of 75,000 customers and an e-commerce operation that shipped 500,000 units to over 45 countries in 2020. Driving that growth are colored vinyl, exclusive pressings and limited-edition packages — the company tells *Billboard* that, at this point, almost 100% of its sales are colored or limited-edition releases.

At times, the markup on such releases can be significant: For Darkside's forthcoming *Spiral*, for example — available in black vinyl at Matador's online store for \$22.49 or white marble vinyl for \$24.74 — VMP secured an exclusive foil-stamped and num-

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bered 2,000-copy run on “seaglass wave” vinyl, priced at \$46, or \$50 for nonmembers. (Most other VMP offerings are closer to the sale prices for black vinyl available elsewhere.) But VMP head of A&R Alexandra Berenson describes the company’s approach to vinyl as akin to a wristwatch: As technology has evolved beyond the exclusive need for such products, they’ve in turn evolved into products of value in different ways, which for VMP has meant providing versions of records and packaging that its customers can’t find anywhere else. “As the founders evolved the record of the month club,” she says, “they were like, ‘How can we make this a really special product that just the people who are part of this club are getting?’”

The comparison to a watch is instructive: limited-edition or colored pressings shifts vinyl from a listening experience to a collectible one. As vinyl has grown from a forgotten format into a significant revenue driver — up 74.3% to \$619.6 million over the past five years in the United States, according to the RIAA — exclusivity has helped drive the boom, creating the same sort of demand that limited-edition merchandise does. And that demand has now moved beyond the confines of Record Store Day exclusives, which still drive headline-grabbing sales — RSD’s Black Friday promotions helped move 1.3 million records in 2020, according to MRC Data, which at the time was just the second week that vinyl sales had passed 1 million since MRC Data began electronically tracking music sales in 1991 — but are also available elsewhere.

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

“In music there are so few things left that are physical,” says Craig Rosen, execu-

tive vp A&R and label operations at Atlantic Records. “At a time when most music is consumed digitally, the closest thing to owning the music as a physical reflection of the art that you love is a piece of vinyl. Then when you introduce something like a special color, making it limited-edition, now it’s a collectible as well. If you’re that kind of artist with those kinds of fans, there’s tremendous demand for a collectible.”

Specialty vinyl has become a bigger focus not just for labels, artists and fans, but retailers — both online and brick-and-mortar — that can request exclusive variants from labels and bring in business after years of digital sales cutting into physical profits. (Though a few retailers have been frustrated by some of the limited-edition releases that, when they’re sold out of one color, are then rereleased in another.)

“Exclusive vinyl is what our customers demand and love,” says Stephen Godfrey, director at indie retailer Rough Trade, who adds that continually updated offerings of limited pressings drive “a virtuous circle of repeat purchase, customer loyalty and social engagement,” as well as “sky-high” open rates on marketing emails and thus a real return on advertising spends. “As a result, the challenge for us is not demand but supply. Our sales growth is outpacing our committed quantities.” Godfrey says decisions on how many copies of a title to press that were made six months in advance often look ambitious and prove to be too cautious. “We’ve underestimated the demand and we sell out before we know it. Demand for exclusives through Rough Trade is going through the roof.”

Urban Outfitters launched its exclusive vinyl program in 2010, with Best Coast’s *Crazy for You*, and has worked with artists and labels on hundreds of colored variants over the past decade. UO Exclusives “has been an integral part of growing the vinyl business” at the company, says global music curator Corbin Speir-Morrone, adding that Urban Outfitters generally identifies an upcoming release it finds exciting and works with the label on a colored variant, with the artist usually choosing the color. Stores will then work on artist performances, meet-and-greets (which have

gone virtual during the pandemic), social videos and signed giveaways to promote the releases, as well as the retailer’s short-form video series, *Open Up*, that it initially launched to help market the exclusives. “We’ve seen successes in exclusives for titles from developing artists on their first or second album,” says Speir-Morrone, “as well as catalog releases from superstar acts that originally came out years ago.”

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

Robertson’s company has dealt with all kinds of different requests, beyond just colored variants — Rhymesayers wanted to put custom crayons and an activity book into an Atmosphere package, which proved trickier to keep apart that one might think; Kamasashi Washington hid a fifth record inside the packaging of a four-LP release, requiring the buyer to cut apart the packaging to find the secret record; for Matador, a Gang of Four box set included cassettes of unreleased outtakes, badges and a 100-page, full-color, hand-bound book of photos, flyers and essays.

“People are trying to really deliver something that goes beyond just a piece of music — they may be streaming the music, but they want to own a beautiful product, and I think that’s where we’ve seen that real difference,” says Robertson. “The resurgence of vinyl in the last couple of years has spoken to not just create the most beautiful package that speaks to the fan, but certainly in the last year it has been a time where people have really tried to connect with that audience.”

And the last year — during which U.S. vinyl sales jumped 29.2% — has seen demand

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escalate. Carl Mello, purchasing director at Newbury Comics, says that vinyl sales across the board have exploded, and Newbury's exclusives have been a growing part of its business for the past eight years.

"Over the pandemic, collecting has sort of gone crazy," says Mello. "All of a sudden everybody's cooped up at home, nobody's going on vacation or buying steaks or anything. So they're like, 'What do I do with my money, and how do I keep myself entertained?' And it's a fairly cost-effective way to do that. It's a better pandemic habit than following QAnon."

A version of this story originally appeared in the June 5, 2021, issue of [Billboard](#).

Inside The Rise of Vinyl Me, Please, The Hottest (And Biggest) Record Club Anyone Can Get Into

BY LYNDSEY HAVENS

In 2013, when monthly record club Vinyl Me, Please first launched, "we had one of those blue classic Ikea bags and were walking to the post office like, 'Holy s—t, man, 12 people are paying us real money,'" recalls VMP co-founder/chairman of the board Matt Fiedler. "We had no idea it was going to be a real thing."

Within a year, the company had grown from 12 to 300 subscribers — and within two to 5,000. Now, with 80,000 active customers, the company just finished its highest-performing quarter with a 74% growth in membership from the same time period last year. (A three-month subscription costs \$119.)

Most recently, in 2020 the company shipped a half-million units as demand for the format soared through the pandemic. All the while, VMP has become a significant outlet for major and independent labels

alike looking to market reissues and also offer exclusive variant pressings of new releases, from the black-and-white pressing of Madlib's *Sound Ancestors* (limited to 2,000 units) to the white marble and alternate cover for St. Vincent's *Daddy's Home* (pressed on 180-gram vinyl).

"As everything was switching over to paying to access music rather than owning it, people were listening to music more and more passively," says co-founder/CEO Cameron Schaefer. "We wanted to see if there were other people like us, and that really has remained the throughline throughout the growth of the company."

"What stands out to me now looking back at the origin of VMP is the simplicity of what we were trying to do," he continues. "We were trying to just pick one record a month that we thought would be worth your time and attention, and that was it. The first several years we were living in constant awe that we got to do it for another year. I don't feel like, early on, we had the luxury of looking ahead at what this could become."

Fiedler says he and co-founder Tyler Barstow — who were mentored early on by Scott Bergman, Alternative Distribution Alliance's vp of sales and marketing — maxed out their personal credit cards to launch the company. "Because it was a subscription model, everything kind of paid for itself from the get-go," says Fiedler, who graduated from Belmont University with a degree in music business and entrepreneurship.

As VMP grew, it was able to invest more into marketing. Ten months in, Schaefer (a former Air Force pilot) took over the company's marketing and social media with a monthly budget of just \$500. "We really had to rely on the experience and the packaging," he says. "People would get the record package and it would be hand-wrapped — we'd have a note with it — and I think people felt all the energy we were putting into it. I always joke you never invite your friends over to check out your MP3 collection. There's something about a physical object where, if it's beautifully made and if there's care and quality put into it, it's something people want to share."

As Fiedler says: "The purpose of vinyl transcends utility. It's about, 'How does this

fit into my identity as a person? What does this say about me? How does it fit into who I am or the life that I'm trying to create for myself?'" Which is precisely why Schaefer argues that "people should pay good money for music. I think that's the only way this continues in a healthy way."

He also asserts that a driving principle of VMP is its unspoken zero-judgment, come-one-come-all policy when it comes to members, seeking to appeal to audiophiles and casual consumers alike. "The majority of the world is not able to come out of the gate with a \$5,000 set up," he says. "If that's the barrier to entry, we're screwed. So maybe it's Crosley, maybe it's your parent's turntable, maybe it's something that you found at a garage sale that's beat up — but the minute that you drop that needle, you're on the path."

While VMP launched with the intention of sending its members one hand-picked record a month, it quickly started presenting customers with more options. It now offers four choices — Essentials, the flagship subscription that recently hit its 100th pressing; Classics, which focuses on jazz, blues and soul, and Hip-Hop, both of which launched in 2017; and Country, which debuted in March.

"While we do play the role of curator, the reality is people have the ability to customize their journey through VMP," says Schaefer. "Sometimes we call ourselves 'sonic archaeologists' because we're constantly digging around in catalogs, and in new music as well, finding lost sounds. That's a lot of the value people feel: You're being presented every month with this array of records that you know a lot of people have gone and sourced."

In the future, VMP's senior director of business development and partnerships, Courtney Catagnus, hopes to hone in on more tailor-made VMP subscriptions curated by artists, noting she's a personal fan of the "Beyoncé of the world and the queens like Dolly. Being able to work with artists of that caliber will be an amazing experience that we're working towards." It's all part of the company's quick and constant evolution, aiming to appeal to and include more and more music fans along its way.

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When VMP started, “it was the millennials who were really breathing energy into the resurgence and were some of the early adopters of subscription-box companies,” says Schaefer. He adds that while its customer base was 70% to 80% 25- to 34-year-olds, it has expanded in both directions over the last few years. “One of our fastest-growing segments has been the 40- to 45- to 60-[year-old range], and then we’ve also recently seen — and especially during COVID-19 — a lot of teenagers and young twenty-somethings getting into it.” As a result, senior manager of brand partnerships Emily Greenstein (who joined as an intern in 2015) helped create a VMP TikTok account this year.

For the first record VMP shipped in 2013, Fiedler recalls emailing the artist’s manager asking to purchase 15 copies directly. A few years later, he says the company hit a “weird threshold” when it still wasn’t big enough to justify its own pressings (then, he says, most plants had an order minimum of 500 units) but too big to only purchase from existing inventory (VMP now relies on a total of five plants across the United States, Germany and the Czech Republic for its inventory).

By 2020, Schaefer says VMP’s growth outpaced that of overall U.S. vinyl sales, which accounted for 62% of physical sales in 2020, according to the RIAA. With the growth of vinyl came demand for more subscription clubs, too, with Secretly Society (launched in 2016 by indie label Secretly Group) seeing subscriptions more than double last fall. “Anyone that enters the market that wants to champion vinyl and tangible experiences with music, we want to support,” says Schaefer. “If no one was entering the space, I actually think that would be an ominous sign. If no one’s wanting to get into the business you’re in, you might want to explore why.”

It’s not only other clubs who want in on the action, as brands, too, are more frequently seeking to partner with VMP. “They come to us already a little bit familiar about who we are, who our audience is and I think they have a pretty big interest in tapping into that audience,” says Greenstein. “[They are] recognizing that, through VMP, we’re shipping to people’s houses every month

and they have an opportunity to land their brand or product inside the homes of these in-tune consumers.”

At the same time, Catagnus works with the labels and artists to meet their fans in even more direct ways. She cites a recent example, teaming with Sony and Jennifer Lopez last year on reissues of *On the 6* and *J. Lo*. “Through working with her team and management about where her fanbase lives online, we found out she really engages through the messaging app Community,” says Catagnus, “so we tapped into her dedicated audience on the app and we actually saw the most website traffic in our company’s history that day because she texted them [about pre-orders], and our website was like a slot machine lighting up.”

The team collectively stresses, though, that their top metric for determining what to release isn’t stream count or initial reception, but as Greenstein says, “It’s [about asking], ‘Does this music resonate, and is it essential to someone’s collection?’”

A version of this story originally appeared in the June 5, 2021, issue of [Billboard](#). **B**

How Pressing Plants Are Tackling Vinyl’s Pollution Problem

BY LYNDSEY HAVENS

In 2018, Chicago got its first vinyl pressing plant in nearly three decades: Smashed Plastic. Even more exciting? Instead of purchasing vintage presses — the kind heated by huge, energy-hungry steam boilers — the plant opted for newer, fully automatic units. As a result, Smashed Plastic became the first steamless plant in the United States.

Fans snapping up bespoke 180-gram virgin-vinyl pressings may be unaware of the environmental impact of their latest audio-ophile acquisitions. Steam-powered presses rely on inefficient and outdated heating technology, and the polyvinyl chloride

(PVC) pellets used in those presses contain lead, leading to the release of carcinogenic chemicals. (PVC is a problem two times over: first when the material itself is produced, most often overseas in Thailand, and then when it’s pressed into a record.) Shrink-wrap — the plastic that seals new vinyl and is discarded upon opening — is pure packaging waste. Distribution is less visible waste, as albums shipped out of state (or imported to meet escalating demand) burn fuel.

While vinyl sales have grown steadily since the 2008 launch of Record Store Day to boom proportions, the production of vinyl itself hasn’t changed much for the last 40 years, meaning an environmentally unfriendly business is overdue for a face-lift. Though pressing plants in the European Union have been held to higher standards for over a decade — and a 2017 report from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency classified vinyl chloride as a Group A human carcinogen — in the United States there isn’t any national oversight of the industry, resulting in patchwork state-by-state regulations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

then the whole car is not sustainable." The presses at Deepgrooves rely on solar power and natural gas.

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

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

But Mara says that for many recording artists, knowing where their vinyl is manufactured is "not a conscious or informed decision." He compares it with his experience engineering and producing: "That process is so in front of the artists — who's going to play guitar, what amp, what studio, what brand of cymbals, and who is going to master it," he says. "And then after that they're like, 'Oh, yeah. And we're getting vinyl made.' And it's like, 'Cool, who's doing the mastering?' No clue. 'Who's doing the lacquer plates?' No clue. If a guitar cable matters and then you suddenly don't care who's pressing your mixes onto vinyl — I'm not asking you to change how you act, I'm just asking you to continue acting how you act."

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

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

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

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

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

A version of this story originally appeared in the June 5, 2021, issue of [Billboard](#). 

One Year In: Lodge Room's Raghav Desai Is Healthy & Back to Booking Full-Cap Shows

BY CHRIS EGGERTSEN

As the coronavirus pandemic enters its final phase in the U.S., *Billboard* is catching up with individuals we interviewed at the beginning of the crisis to see how they've weathered the past year.

This installment is told by Raghav Desai, the talent buyer at Los Angeles venue *The Lodge Room*. After the venue was forced to shutter last March due to COVID-19, Desai was able to keep his job and has been helping the business stay afloat ever since, including through a partnership with *Audiotree* on the live-stream series *Staged*. On a personal level, he has been tending to something far more important: His mental health and battles with addiction.

[Ed. Note: This interview was conducted in early April 2021.]

The venue basically has been surviving. We received money from the initial PPP loan. The venue owner Dalton has been handling almost all of that, but he did tell me that we received some money. We've applied for the [Shuttered Venue Operators Grant, which] is in the works of being reviewed and all of that.

I had negotiated a pay bump, but before that could ever see my bank account, the pandemic hit. So they asked me to go back to my pre-pandemic salary, which is totally fine with me, because at least I had some money coming in. In my head I've rationalized it as, "Well, I never saw that money, so technically I never received a pay cut."

We've had a solid amount of rentals. Obviously, nothing compared to the business that would have come in if we were doing shows,

but some money is better than zero money. We did a shoot with *Local Natives*, which is amazing, shout out to them. We did *Perfume Genius'* performance on *Fallon* back in August, so that was really f***ing cool. And recently we teamed up with the fine folks at *Lincoln Hall* in Chicago and *Audiotree* to produce a series called *Staged*, which is a purely live live-stream show. We had our first [*Staged*] event with *Julia Holter*, who is magnificent and charming, and it was a resounding success.

I think in the last six months, there was a collective acceptance in the music industry that "We're not gonna do a show in 2020. It's just not going to happen." And it became, "We're probably not going to do a show in the first half of 2021." And now, I feel like people are a bit more optimistic.

I have stuff on the books for as early as September that I do believe will happen. [Ed. Note: Since this interview took place, *The Lodge Room* has scheduled a [handful of in-person shows](#) for Summer 2021.] Watch, I say that now, and I'm going to eat like 10 crows. But things are still starting to look — maybe just a notch below optimism, or maybe a notch above pessimism.

I've been sending my offers based on full capacities. That's kind of the assumption that we're working off of, and it might be an incredibly foolish assumption, but we will have to cross that bridge when we get to it. Because financially, both for the artist and for the venue, it's hard to make things work without that capacity. There's a reason that venues, when they get built, are like, "Okay, we want to be this cap." And especially at the level of an independent venue, where we don't [have] the corporate money of a *Live Nation* or *AEG* or whatever, every dollar counts. Our margins are so razor thin that we really need 500 bodies in there.

I consider myself very lucky to have had a job throughout this, and to have had the assurance of my bosses that, "Hey, we're not going away, we're going to survive this thing." They've had a certain dead-eyed optimism of, "We're not going to be one of the venues that folds, and we're going to do whatever it takes to try to keep this place afloat."

I've been talking to a few of my bartender friends. I talk to my audio and lighting folks

and my venue manager, and it's tough. It can be said for everyone, but especially, I think, in the live event space. People's livelihoods depend upon going out on a few tours a year as the audio engineer for a band, or working bar six nights a week and hoping that money can pay your rent or put food on the table, or working security as a second job. And all of that has just been washed away in the last year and change.

The last year has been tough for me personally. My struggles with my mental health and my addiction led to a couple of hospitalizations and a couple trips to rehab. But I've got a little over six months of sobriety under my belt now. [Because of] our incredibly f***ed insurance system, I wasn't gonna be able to stay in outpatient rehab, so I launched a *GoFundMe* and it ended up being wildly, wildly successful. It got me two more months at my outpatient rehab facility. So much of that money came from people who I have worked with, and some of whom I've only contacted over email, and they were still kicking in, you know, 20 bucks, 30 bucks at a time when money's so tight. It just kind of shows you that this industry, for as adversarial as it can be at times — you know, agent versus manager, venue versus venue, agent versus promoter — we take care of our own.

In a way, the silver lining of COVID for me has been, I would not have been able to get the help that I needed if I were working six shows a week. It just wouldn't have happened. And whenever it did get to that point, it was going to be much, much worse than what it was last year. It's weird to say I'm thankful for COVID, but if there ever was a time to say it, I think it would be in [this] instance.

I think the biggest collateral damage of this thing will be all of the bands that never even got a chance to fully commit themselves to music because of this pandemic. I think there's so many f***ing creative people who don't come from money, don't have mom and dad to fall back on, who have been cheated of the chance to make something in the music and art space, and I think that will be something that really affects us down the line.

As told to *Chris Eggertsen*. **B**

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Hip-Hop, R&B And Pop Challenge Rock's Vinyl Dominance In 2021

BY FRANK DIGIACOMO

Vinyl LP sales are up almost 100% so far in 2021, according to a June MRC Data analysis of the physical-product market. And while rock is far and away the top genre with consumers, it's declining as pop, R&B and hip-hop gain ground at both big-box retailers and independent record stores. In just three days, the vinyl edition of Taylor Swift's *evermore*, which arrived May 28, sold over 40,000 copies and set [the record](#) for the biggest sales week for a vinyl album in the United States since MRC Data began tracking sales in 1991. For the week ending June 3, the LP became the top-selling vinyl album of 2021, selling 102,000 units, almost doubling the 53,000 that No. 2 artist Ariana Grande's *Positions* has sold in that time period. Hip-hop and R&B are doing particularly well at indie retail, where Kanye West's *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly* and SZA's *Ctrl* are among the top five LPs that have sold over 10,000 copies and generated 50% or more of total physical sales through independent retailers. **■**

Vinyl's Gray Zone

BY STEVE KNOPPER

Three years ago, Sundazed Music put out a blue vinyl pressing of [Bo Diddley's](#) 1958 Chess debut. The independent reissue label paid a "hefty licensing fee," as A&R director Jay Millar describes it, to Universal Music Group, which owns the Chess catalog. So Millar was dismayed on release day

to find not one but three rival pressings of the album for sale online, from Italy, Russia and elsewhere.

None, other than Sundazed, had permission to issue the album from UMG. "All of a sudden, a different version of the same title comes out internationally, at half the price," says Millar. "It just muddies things up."

These sorts of unauthorized pressings take advantage of a gap in international copyright law, leading to what Millar and other U.S. labels and retailers say is a "gray market" of vinyl reissues. Some, like Bo Diddley; [Herbie Hancock's](#) 1962 debut, *Takin' Off*; [Johnny Cash's](#) 1957 Sun Records debut, *With His Hot and Blue Guitar*; and the [Bill Evans Trio's](#) 1961 classic, *Sunday at the Village Vanguard*, are albums that have slipped into the public domain in Europe but remain under copyright in the United States. Others are recordings of live radio broadcasts that are legal to distribute throughout Europe but fully protected by U.S. copyright law.

Verve and Impulse! Records executive vp Jamie Krents says his labels closely monitor this "fairly consistent issue," though the losses on jazz and Chess reissues aren't likely to do much damage to the bottom line of parent company UMG. But it's a bigger problem for the little guys, like Sundazed and Concord's Craft label, which presses 1950s Miles Davis and John Coltrane recordings and relies on sales of a few thousand per title. "It's extremely common and increasing in frequency," says Millar.

The overseas gray market exists because a 2006 European Union copyright directive protected musical recordings for only 50 years. After the term ends, the work — whether it's a song or an album or even cover art — goes into the public domain, free for anyone to use, so long as they pay royalties to songwriters and publishers.

The EU changed the rule in 2011 to extend the copyright protection term to 70 years — but that leaves a gap, leaving vulnerable the works that came out between 1956 and 1961. In Europe, any label, from Jazz Wax Records (the Spanish label that put out the Evans title) to Doxy Records (which released the Cash album and identi-

fies itself on Discogs as a "Russian bootleg label"), can cash in on these recordings.

In the United States, however, copyright laws cover works for 95 years, so *Bo Diddley* and the rest are not in the public domain. The American equivalent of Jazz Wax or Doxy cannot reissue *Takin' Off* here for a quick buck. And while gray market LPs (and CDs) are in U.S. record stores everywhere and all over Amazon, a 2013 Supreme Court decision, *Kirtsaeng vs. Wiley*, prevents international distributors from selling them here.

So the releases are illegal in the United States — but they're rarely caught. Gray market titles are generally too small for major labels to worry about much, and the RIAA, which makes part of its mission stamping out piracy and bootlegging, has more pressing issues, like YouTube stream-rippers. But for Concord-owned Craft, says senior vp A&R Mason Williams, legal European reissues being sold illegally stateside is "a big problem."

"It's a constant game of Whack-A-Mole," he adds. "It might be down for a few weeks and somebody else puts it up. It's something that we try and monitor, but it's a lot. It can easily be a team's full-time job."

It's not easy for consumers to know if they're buying an authorized or gray market pressing. A Dol Records version of Hancock's *Takin' Off*, recently purchased through Amazon, reproduces the original cover image but has noticeably thin sound quality, with less oomph in the bass. When asked about the availability of gray market pressings of these kinds of titles, an Amazon representative told *Billboard* the company would investigate: "Amazon respects intellectual-property rights and requires third-party sellers do the same when listing items for sale." Discogs changed its policy in 2017 to disallow unauthorized recordings, but hundreds of clearly unauthorized gray market LPs remain posted on the site, like the more than 450 titles listed on Doxy Records' profile page. It's difficult for Discogs to police its 13.8 million releases, according to spokesman Aub Driver.

Who are these labels? Some are explicit outlaws: Doxy, the self-described "Russian bootleg label," thrives in part because

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Russia is not a member of the European Union, and copyright rules there are rarely enforced. Along with sibling companies Dol and Lilith, Doxy is part of a Russian partnership between MiruMir and Vinylogy, which opened in Moscow 13 years ago and ramped up its catalog, according to Discogs, to “literally hundreds of thousands of titles” by fall 2011. These include classic recordings by Miles Davis, Ray Charles, Henry Mancini and even Elvis Presley, as well as the unauthorized 1958 LP *Bo Diddley*, which came out on Vinylogy subsidiary Rumble.

The Facebook page for Goodfellas Records borrows a line from its Scorsese-movie namesake — “I’ve always wanted to be a gangster” — but label manager Roberto Corsi maintains that the Rome-based company has always paid royalties to songwriters and other rights holders for music it reissues. The company has released many classic-jazz, James Brown and calypso titles from the ’50s and ’60s, believing they had slipped into the public domain, but largely abandoned this reissue approach once the EU changed its copyright laws. “We stopped that,” says Corsi. “Also, the market was really overwhelmed. On the same record, you could find dozens of editions.” Goodfellas focuses on Italian new wave and other contemporary music.

Another problem is that while Blue Note and Verve and other top jazz labels have more aggressively reissued their catalogs during the vinyl boom in recent years, many sought-after titles remain unavailable. So retailers sometimes hold their noses and agree to stock the gray market reissues. “A lot of the great jazz, all that stuff from the ’50s and ’60s that is really in demand — a lot of the American record labels really haven’t paid attention to it,” says Terry Currier, owner of the 52-year-old Music Millennium in Portland, Ore., which stocks gray market reissues. “Europe is so far ahead of this thing, and people wanted these. We needed to take care of our customers.” Chad Kassem, founder/owner of online-focused retailer Acoustic Sounds, adds that labels could “play offense instead of defense” and flood the marketplace with authorized versions of classic LPs so gray market labels won’t be able to

compete. But if they don’t, “somebody fills that fucking void,” he says. “Put it out, and they wouldn’t have a bootlegger.”

Regardless of how legal these gray market reissues are in Europe and elsewhere, an additional concern is that the labels rarely pay artists and songwriters what they’re owed for sales, say U.S. label reps. “It does hurt the artist,” says Concord’s Williams. “And it’s definitely a pain in the ass.”

Blue Note Founder Don Was On Creating Demand For Jazz Reissues

BY ROBERT LEVINE

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

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

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

What’s different about the reissues?

Joe Harley: The mastering, the plating, the pressing. Everything.

***Tone Poet* now has its own reputation.**

Did you set out to make it a brand within a brand?

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

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

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

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

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

This story originally appeared in the June 5, 2021, issue of [Billboard](#).

Rolling Stones, Tom Jones, Other Big U.K. Musicians Join Campaign For Larger Streaming Share

BY ALEXEI BARRIONUEVO

The Rolling Stones, Tom Jones and Barry Gibb are among scores of prominent British musicians who’ve joined a campaign by artists and songwriters pushing for a larger share of streaming royalties from platforms like Spotify and YouTube — and closer scrutiny on the major labels’ hold on the market.

The call by over 75 musicians comes two months after a group of more than 150 artists — including [Paul McCartney](#), [Annie Lennox](#) and [Chris Martin](#) — sent the same letter to U.K. Prime Minister Boris

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Johnson calling for the British leader to change U.K. copyright law so that streaming revenues would be treated more like radio revenue.

The new push by British artists to show solidarity in their quest for fairer compensation also comes as a Parliamentary body — the Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) Committee — is set to release recommendations after [an inquiry](#) into the music streaming economy that concluded in March.

The letter's signatories are calling for a government referral of the multinational corporations that wield "extraordinary power" over the music business to the U.K. competition enforcer, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), which can act against businesses engaging in anti-competitive behavior.

The U.K. Parliamentary probe has seen major labels' dominance of the market emerge as a central issue. The first stage of the inquiry concluded with government minister **Caroline Dinenage** saying she would support a referral of the three biggest music companies — Universal Music, Sony Music and Warner Music — to the CMA.

The committee expects to publish their report next month before Parliament breaks for its summer recess, although a date has not been announced. Ministers will then have eight weeks to respond, and although they aren't obliged to enact its recommendations, they are expected to engage with them.

During the inquiry, bosses from all three major labels faced hostile questioning from DCMS committee members over how labels pay out streaming royalties to creators. Senior execs from Spotify, Amazon Music, Apple Music and YouTube also appeared before members.

The musicians are pressing for a change in the U.K.'s 1988 Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, which would see music streaming classified in the same way as radio and TV broadcasting. Songwriters earn on average 50% of radio revenues, but only 15% of streaming receipts, the signatories say in their letter to Johnson. If a re-classification were to happen, streaming would be subject to the principle of equitable remuneration,

which guarantees royalties to performers on recordings.

Currently, music streams are covered in most international markets by a "making available right," meaning that only copyright owners receive payments, which they then share with featured artists according to the terms of their contract. Unlike royalties for U.K. television and radio, session musicians do not typically receive a share of streaming royalties.

The major labels strongly oppose any change to copyright law around how streaming is classified. The labels have said that a move towards equitable remuneration would result in a substantial loss of earnings, reducing their ability to invest in new acts. It could also hamper the ability of rights holders to negotiate licensee agreements with streaming services, they say, by making it harder for them to walk away from negotiations.

The renewed call from British artists also comes after the World Intellectual Property Organization said in a report last week (June 1) that streaming should start to pay more like radio.

The [WIPO reported](#) noted that global recorded music revenues have grown six consecutive years to a total of \$21.6 billion in 2020, even growing substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic. "This streaming-fueled success has not trickled down to performers, especially non-featured performers," the report said. "The more global revenues surge, the harder it is for performers to understand why the imbalance is fair—because it is not."

The latest signatories to the letter to Johnson include well-known British music acts such as the [Pet Shop Boys](#), [Alison Moyet](#), [Emeli Sandé](#), [Van Morrison](#), and the Estates of [John Lennon](#) and [Joe Strummer](#).

"This letter is fundamentally about preserving a professional class of music-maker into the future," **Tom Gray**, founder of the #BrokenRecord Campaign, one of the U.K. organizers, says in a statement. "Most musicians don't expect to be rich and famous or even be particularly comfortable, they just want to earn a crust." 📧

Dierks Bentley Reveals Full Seven Peaks Lineup and Why He Feared His Festival Wouldn't Return: Exclusive

BY MELINDA NEWMAN

For [Dierks Bentley](#), the return of his Seven Peaks Music Festival over Labor Day in Buena Vista, Colo., is especially sweet after having to take a year off during the pandemic and facing uncertainty about the status of the event he and Live Nation launched in 2018.

"We haven't made any money off it yet. We're not doing it for that — we're doing it because it's awesome," Bentley tells *Billboard* via phone from Nashville. "We're hoping one day it does work out that way, but we're still growing it. So when it got cut last year, that really hurt and the question of whether Live Nation's going to put their money behind something that's not yet making them a lot of money was very worrisome for me."

But then Live Nation's president of country touring **Brian O'Connell** gave the go-ahead for the Sept. 3-5 event, and then, as *Billboard* is exclusively announcing, [Keith Urban](#) signed on to headline along with Bentley.

"When Keith signed on, that was such a huge thing; that was the ultimate green light," Bentley says. "You've got to have that one big country headliner at a country festival. It allows you to do some other fun and really cool things like the '90s Night and have [bluegrass artist] Molly Tuttle and some other bands that aren't mainstream country, like [Old Crow Medicine Show](#). That made it feel pretty real."

Starting June 7, Bentley began rolling

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out the names of the artists on the bill by performing short covers of their hits on Instagram and YouTube. Watch the premiere of Bentley's cover of Urban's "Somebody Like You":

Since its inception, Seven Peaks has focused on country, bluegrass and '90s country. "This is a direct reflection of the top three kinds of music that I love," Bentley says. "So to have a festival whose three components is experimenting with that, I can't believe Live Nation and the fans allow us to get away with it."

Joining Urban, Tuttle, Old Crow Medicine Show and Bentley on the main stage will be [Kip Moore](#), [Ingrid Andress](#), Caitlyn Smith, Travis Denning, Hailey Whitters and [Randy Houser](#).

The Whiskey Row stage, named after Bentley's five bars in the franchise, will feature up-and-coming artists Calista Clark, Jackson Dean, Payton Smith, Rapidgrass, Reyna Roberts, Caroline Jones, Willie Jones, Ray Fulcher and Bentley's resident DJ, Aydamm.

The '90s Night on Sept. 3 will feature [Pam Tillis](#), Mark Chesnutt, [Clay Walker](#) and Hot Country Knights, Bentley's parody '90s band featuring his alter ego, Doug Douglason.

"From the first note Pam Tillis hits, I'll be sitting side of the stage with my band and crew," he says. "A lot of guys in my crew save up their beards all year long so they can shave them down to a sick mustache for '90s night, and everybody's got their denim shorts on and their mullet wigs. It looks like a time machine backstage. Having a theme is pretty fun. I think we're the only festival that does that and I know we're the only one that has Hot Country Knights headlining. I don't know if that's a good thing or not," he laughs.

The lineup's diversity — including four women on the main stage and highly touted Black country artists Reyna Roberts and Willie Jones — is a direct result of Bentley's musical preferences. "The last five years some of the most compelling and most risk-taking music is being made by female artists," he says. "One reason I love '90s country is the songwriting — I felt like they were painting with many more colors back

in the '90s than we are in some ways today, and I feel like the women are picking that back up. As far as the Black artists go, I'm all down for the push to open things up and bring some people in."

When not on stage as part of Hot Country Knights — his own headlining slot on Sept. 5 — and popping up during other performers' sets, Bentley will be found mingling with festivalgoers. Bentley, who will arrive on site the Monday before, rises every morning of the festival after sleeping in a tent next to his bus, takes a cold plunge in the creek and then meets with O'Connell. "We start talking about last night or the night ahead and he'll say, 'Jump in the golf cart, there are some fans hanging out at this intersection and we should go surprise them,'" Bentley says. "We go out and mess with the fans and think about what we can do to make this the most talked about festival."

While all COVID-19 restrictions are likely to be lifted by early September, Bentley says he didn't contemplate requiring any proof of vaccination by attendees. "I think it should be completely wide open, and hopefully it will be by then," he says. "We want to make sure we're doing everything safe [according] to the county and state, and definitely play by all the rules, but if you trust the science, there's just not that much outdoor spread."

Vaccinations for his band and crew, however, are mandatory. "I did pay everybody during the pandemic, full salary. If you want to work for us, you've got to be vaccinated. That's just the way it is," Bentley says, adding he lost one employee who opted to leave instead of get vaccinated. "I hate it for them and I hate it for us, but we want to get back out there as safely as possible. We're mingling with people backstage and with stagehands, and none of us want to be responsible for passing something along to somebody else."

Like many people, surviving the pandemic has left Bentley with a new appreciation for, well, everything. "What I take this time over the previous years' festivals is the heightened sense of that you can't take anything for granted — your time with your family, with your friends, your time as a country singer hosting your own festival. This is beyond dreams — just being there, being

totally present, having the feeling of joy and wonder and spreading that throughout the festival grounds."

Three-day passes for the music and camping experience go on sale June 18. **B**

Drake Teams With Live Nation on New Toronto Music Venue

BY TATIANA CIRISANO

As the touring industry awakens, [Drake](#) is collaborating with Live Nation Canada on a new live entertainment venue in the rapper and businessman's beloved hometown of Toronto that will open its doors later this year.

The venue, called History, has a capacity of 2,500. The intimate size is intentional: "Some of my most memorable shows were playing smaller rooms," Drake said in a statement. "I wanted to take those memories and what I learned to create an incredible experience for both the artists and the fans."

History has been in development for more than three years, and construction is scheduled to be complete later this summer. The venue includes both general admission and reserved seating areas. Once doors open, it will host 200 concerts and other events annually.

"We saw an opportunity to bring Toronto a great new venue, and we have so much gratitude and respect for Drake teaming up with us to bring it to life in the best way possible," Live Nation Entertainment president/CEO **Michael Rapino** said.

Added Live Nation Canada chairman **Riley O'Connor**: "History will offer guests up-close experiences with their favorite artists that are unrivaled in Toronto. We take pride in and expect History to become an important part of the community."

As of last week, 2 million Toronto residents have received at least one dose of the

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coronavirus vaccine, and 303,000 of them have been fully vaccinated.

While dozens of North American music venues were closing their doors during the pandemic, other venues have been in development, and History joins a growing list of soon-to-open venues across the globe. Live Nation also [plans](#) to open a 5,000-capacity venue called Terminal in Houston this November; touring industry executives Dan Merker and Brian Carp have [broken ground](#) on a 3,000-capacity venue just outside St. Louis, MO, dubbed The Factory; and [Harry Styles invested](#) in Oak View Group's Manchester arena Co-Op Live, set to open in 2023. 📍

Foo Fighters to Play First Full-Capacity Madison Square Garden Show This Month

BY LYNDSEY HAVENS

As more of the world continues to safely reopen and return, today brings yet another victory for live music. On June 20, [Foo Fighters](#) will reopen Madison Square Garden with its first full-capacity show since March 2020. Fans eager to attend will have to be vaccinated.

"We've been waiting for this day for over a year," frontman Dave Grohl said in a statement. "And Madison Square Garden is going to feel that HARD. New York, get ready for a long ass night of screaming our heads off together to 26 years of Foos."

Added James Dolan, Executive Chairman and CEO of MSG Entertainment: "The Garden is ready to rock. We've been waiting for this moment for 15 months and are excited to finally welcome a packed house of roaring, fully-vaccinated Foo Fighters fans to Madison Square Garden."

Foo Fighters is currently celebrating its 26th anniversary with an upcoming tour;

the band intended to celebrate last year with a 25th anniversary trek, though such plans were paused due to the pandemic. Now, the Madison Square Garden show will precede the six-date run that spans July 28-Aug. 9 in cities including Cincinnati, St. Louis and Albuquerque, among others, with more dates to be revealed soon.

Most recently, Foo Fighters were announced as one of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame's 2021 inductees and this summer will headline Chicago's Lollapalooza and Bonnaroo. The band's latest and 10th studio album, *Medicine at Midnight*, arrived this February and hit No. 3 on the Billboard 200. The album also reached the summit of all three Billboard rock album charts (Top Rock, Alternative and Hard Rock Albums) while album single "Waiting on a War" topped the Hot Hard Rock Songs chart — the band's first No. 1 on the tally.

Tickets will be available for purchase on June 11 at 10:00 A.M. ET. 📍

2021 MTV Video Music Awards Will Return to New York City: Here's the Date

BY PAUL GREIN

On Tuesday (June 8), MTV announced that the 2021 Video Music Awards will return to New York City. The show will air live from Barclays Center in Brooklyn on Sunday, Sept. 12. Last year's show, held on Aug. 30, 2020, was a virtual production.

This year's show date is the day after the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, a fact that is not lost on MTV.

MTV is collaborating with [9/11 Day](#), the nonprofit that began and leads the federally recognized Sept. 11 National Day of Service and Remembrance, for a series of activities during the week leading up to the VMAs.

The alliance between MTV and members

of the 9/11 community — which dates back to the star-studded Concert for New York City on Oct. 20, 2001 — will encourage participation in various acts of charitable service across the country on Sept. 11.

MTV bills the 2021 show as a celebration of the return of live entertainment after a pandemic brought concert-going to a standstill for more than a year. MTV stresses that it and Barclays Center are working closely with state and local officials to implement best practices in order to safely bring together music fans from around the globe. Barclays Center's current health and safety protocols can be found [here](#). Any additional protocols will be announced closer to the event.

The VMAs emanated from Barclays once before, in 2013. In the past seven years, they have been held twice at the Forum in Inglewood, Calif. and once each at four venues — Microsoft Theatre in Los Angeles, Madison Square Garden in New York, Radio City Music Hall in New York and Prudential Center in Newark, N.J., plus last year's virtual show.

In the past seven years, the show had no host three times and a host four times, with [Miley Cyrus](#), [Katy Perry](#), [Sebastian Maniscalco](#) and [Keke Palmer](#) each fronting the show once. 📍

Take a Journey Into HYBE's 'Insight,' The Newest Museum to Celebrate K-Pop

BY YOONHA KIM

SEOUL — On two underground floors of the new HYBE headquarters in the Yongsan district, a new museum dedicated to K-pop opened to the public last month. The 50,000-square-foot space is a visual

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exhibition of the musical successes that built HYBE, formerly known as Big Hit Entertainment, the company synonymous with superstar boy band [BTS](#).

This was not the first attempt at representation of K-pop in a form of exhibition. In 2018, SM Town opened its own SM Town Museum at Coex Artium in the heart of Gangnam to showcase the history of its artists from their debut to current successes in addition to the exhibition of costumes and props used in their performances. Fans could also participate in VR experiences to virtually meet their favorite artists, which all contributed to the growing popularity of the museum among international fans visiting Korea.

Two weeks after its opening, I decided to let myself explore the new HYBE establishment. My first impression was that a tremendous amount of effort was put in to truly embrace its identity as a museum while still maintaining the traditional spirit of K-pop museums, which focused on offering a variety of experiences to K-pop fans. Basically, you can tell that HYBE has put a lot of thought into turning their acts, including BTS and ENHYPEN, into something that could be exhibited for visitors to engage in and experience.

As soon as you walk in, the first thing you'll notice is music. It's obvious they are trying to convey the message that music is where they started and it will continue to be their main focus despite their recent transformation to a platform company by eliminating the word "entertainment" from the original corporate name. The museum is sectioned into three key spaces: Sound, Movement and Story. "Sound Layer" is the most popular space, as fans can listen to a particular song in different layers of sounds here. At any time of the day, you will see long lines of fans waiting to listen to BTS' "Fake Love."

In the middle of the second floor underground, you walk into a captivating space called "Dynamic Movement" where dance movements are portrayed as a way of expressing music and communicating with the public. Choreographies of HYBE's BTS, [NU'EST](#) and [GFRIEND](#) are reconstructed to the music of unique artists

such as DJ Dguru. Standing in the middle, surrounded by huge screens on which the dance videos are played, was an overwhelming experience, and I saw many others just as mesmerized as me and watching the fascinating dance videos repeatedly.

"Inspiring Story" is where many interesting exhibitions can be enjoyed in one space — interviews with artists on their thoughts about the lyrics of their songs and visualized pieces created by various artists groups such as Sunny Studio. There are also a three-dimensional map and pop-up books that have been transformed from HYBE's "A Flower for Love" and "The Queen's Knight," which have been loved for their unique world views. Despite the diverse attempts at visualizing stories, they fell short of the overwhelming sense of energy that the artists directly convey through their movements.

The two separate sections of the museum are connected by a dramatic display of the history of HYBE and all the trophies their artists have won. The long path HYBE has walked on is integrated with the corporate philosophy and made into a video, and the best part is when a spotlight is turned on the wall display full of trophies. The impressive array of 180 trophies won at some of the most prestigious music shows, including Billboard Music Awards, MAMA and Korean Music Awards, were enough to wow the visitors.

Leaving visitors' cheers behind, I move on to continue the exploration on the first floor underground, where the exhibition begins with "SEVEN PHASES," an art piece by Taiwanese-American artist James Jean. After passing through BTS-inspired character drawings portraying members as the spirits of flowers and another unique piece named "Garden" inspired by the "Universal Truth" lyrics "A flower resembling you that bloomed in the garden of loneliness," a complete hands-on experience awaits the visitors where they can extensively engage in HYBE music with all five senses. Visitors can also enjoy the display of HYBE artists' costumes, accessories and souvenirs, as well as an augmented-reality game where they are divided into two teams and participate in the game. This can be a love it or hate it activity depending on the person, but it defi-

nately adds fun elements to the whole experience at the museum. Even so, the most popular photo spot out of all these unique spaces is by the picture in a frame designed to celebrate BTS' "Dynamite" hitting No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100.

A two-hour tour seems too short when the exhibition ends with videos playing the artists' interviews and "Resonance," a completely sound-proof space where you can completely immerse yourself into the surrounding music and sound. The interview videos are edited with style and show the artists' genuine characters, but the most memorable moment out of the entire tour has to be in "Resonance" where you can explore the complete silence and tranquility, which is a rare experience that can resonate for days to come. It's the moment where people who meet through music get to be genuinely serious with music in a space that's filled with silence. "What if there was no music in the world?" is written on the wall and it suddenly seemed like a very different question after the exhibition.

The music in us has grown and brought all of us here. 📺

Billboard Teams Up With Rolling Stone For Special 2021 Pride Celebration

BY STEPHEN DAW

This Pride Month, [Billboard](#) and [Rolling Stone](#) are joining forces to help you celebrate the LGBTQ artists, music and culture that you love.

Today, Billboard and Rolling Stone are launching their first ever joint [Pride Celebration](#) — an online hub of content focused on the LGBTQ experience in entertainment, featuring special videos, lists, articles and more. Capital One and Facebook are joining in the celebration as presenting sponsors of

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this special moment in culture.

Throughout the month of June, fans will get to see special, exclusive conversations with LGBTQ artists about rising to fame, managing success, and living their truth, all while being 100 percent themselves with our “Inclusivity and Coming Out Stories” series. In the first of a series of videos, New Orleans bounce icon [Big Freedia](#) chats with Billboard staff writer Taylor Mims to discuss Pride season following a pandemic, her queer role models, adjusting to life in quarantine and much more.

From interviews with some of your favorite LGBTQ artists, to playlists of LGBTQ songs, to spotlights on different areas of LGBTQ culture, check out Billboard and Rolling Stone’s Pride Celebration 2021 [here](#). 🗨️

Shemekia Copeland & Christone ‘Kingfish’ Ingram Lead 2021 Blues Music Awards Winners

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

Singer [Shemekia Copeland](#) and guitarist Christone “Kingfish” Ingram are among this year’s top winners at the Blues Music Awards.

Veteran musicians [Charlie Musselwhite](#) and [Elvin Bishop](#) also won multiple awards for their album *100 Years of Blues* during Sunday’s awards show, which was held online due to COVID-19 pandemic precautions.

Winners were chosen by members of The Blues Foundation, based in Memphis. The awards have been held for 42 years.

Copeland won the B.B. King Entertainer of the Year award, the show’s top honor. She also won the contemporary blues female

artist and the contemporary blues album awards.

Ingram, who [won five times last year](#), took home the contemporary blues male artist and guitar instrumentalist awards.

The collaboration between Bishop and Musselwhite led to awards for album of the year and traditional blues album of the year.

Mike Zito won in the categories of blues rock artist and blues rock album for *Mike Zito and Friends-Rock ‘n’ Roll: A Tribute to Chuck Berry*.

Blues Hall of Fame members [Bettye Lavette](#) and [Bobby Rush](#) also won awards.

Performers in the show included Rush, Ingram, John Németh & the Blue Dreamers, Shaun Murphy, Don Bryant, Watermelon Slim and Southern Avenue.

Find the [full list of winners here](#). 🗨️

Future & Gunna to Headline Expanding JMBLYA Fest 2021

BY TAYLOR MIMS

Texas’ JMBLYA is going nationwide. The hip-hop festival promoted by ScoreMore Shows is bringing its flagship event to Texas, Arkansas, Arizona, Massachusetts and California for six dates in 2021.

Kicking off Labor Day weekend with three back-to-back concerts, attendees will first be treated to JMBLYA’s return to Rogers, Ark., on Sept. 3 near Fayetteville after the festival expanded to the state with a sold-out event in 2019. On Sept. 4 and 5, the festival will return to its home state with stops in Dallas and Austin. The fall festival later concludes with three brand new stops including Phoenix on Sept. 25, the San Francisco Bay Area in Mountain View, California on Oct. 2, and lastly Mansfield, Massachusetts on Oct. 9.

The 2021 festival will be headlined by Future, who also topped the lineup in 2016. Future will be joined by Gunna, The Kid

LAROI, Lil Tecca, Flo Milli, Phora and SoFaygo. Special guests throughout the festivals tour will include Trae Tha Truth, SpottemGottem, Cico P and Metro Marris.

“Our business has always been about providing something different. JMBLYA going nationwide is the culmination of the idea of bringing an affordably priced festival experience to markets that don’t have something like it,” said ScoreMore’s president and founder **Sascha Stone Gutfreund** in a release. “We are known for curated events that pair big-name acts with future superstars. If you look back on our lineups, you’ll see that many of the openers we book later go on to become headliners. Save that lineup tee. See y’all soon.”

Tickets for each individual stop will go on sale Friday at 10am local time. Check out a full list of dates and performers below. 🗨️

Swizz Beatz, Timbaland & D-Nice to Receive ASCAP Voice of the Culture Award

BY PAUL GREIN

Songwriter-producers [Swizz Beatz](#), [Timbaland](#) and D-Nice will receive the ASCAP voice of the culture award to kick off the 2021 ASCAP Rhythm & Soul Music Awards on June 22. Following the presentation, the music creators will take part in a 2021 ASCAP Experience conversation, “Voices of the Culture: How Swizz Beatz, Timbaland & D-Nice United the World Through Music,” at 12:00 p.m. ET/ 9:00 a.m. PT.

The virtual conversation will explore how Timbaland and Swizz Beatz’s virtual music battle series Verzuz and D-Nice’s Club Quarantine became tools for uplift within the Black music community and touchstones of empowerment during the pandemic. To join the conversation, participants can RSVP at www.ascapexperience.com/

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schedule. They can also submit a question for the three creators before June 10.

Verzuz has featured such epic matchups as Gladys Knight vs. Patti LaBelle, Erykah Badu vs. Jill Scott, Earth, Wind & Fire vs. The Isley Brothers, and Snoop Dogg vs. DMX. Club Quarantine attracted a virtual community of millions to Instagram Live for sets of funk, disco, hip-hop and R&B.

In addition to launching these popular events, Swizz Beatz, Timbaland and D-Nice are accomplished music creators in their own right.

Grammy-winning songwriter-producer Swizz Beatz has been in the music and business worlds since he was 16. He began DJing and working at his uncle's company, Ruff Ryders Entertainment, while still in high school. Within a short time, Swizz produced the company's first hit, by DMX. More success followed as a producer and artist. As a producer, Swizz has worked with a diverse array of artists, including Jay-Z, Madonna, Kanye West, Lil Wayne and Metallica.

Timbaland, a four-time Grammy winner, has created hits for such artists as Jodeci, Aaliyah, Beyoncé, Jay-Z, Kanye West, Justin Timberlake, Nelly Furtado, One Republic, Keri Hilson, Bryson Tiller, Ginuwine, Missy Elliott, Destiny's Child, Ludacris, Snoop Dogg, Drake, Katy Perry, Madonna and Alicia Keys. Timbaland, born Timothy Mosley, founded Mosley Music Group, one of the most successful independent record labels in the business. He also co-founded the music-tech start up BeatClub which is launching in 2021.

Derrick "D-Nice" Jones has achieved success as a DJ, rapper, beatboxer, producer, photographer and philanthropist. The BET Awards named him an honorary recipient of the Shine a Light Award, and he took home the 2020 Webby artist of the year award in the special achievement category. D-Nice is set to deliver a full-length album in 2021.

The 2021 ASCAP Rhythm & Soul Music Awards is a virtual celebration that takes place on social media from June 22-24. The event recognizes songwriters, composers and publishers behind the most performed R&B/hip-hop, rap and gospel songs of the past year. Friends and fans can join the online festivities as ASCAP shares photos,

videos, acceptance speeches and more from some of its top songwriters and publishers, posted with the hashtag #ASCAP Awards to [@ASCAPUrban](#) on Instagram and [@ASCAP](#) on Twitter and Instagram.

The ASCAP Experience takes place twice a month on Wednesdays through the end of 2021. Songwriters, composers and music business professionals can join the ASCAP Experience community for access to conversations with songwriters and producers from across the musical spectrum, plus panels with top industry executives, song feedback, networking opportunities and more. The virtual sessions are free to attend and take place on a variety of platforms, including YouTube, Instagram and on the [ASCAP Experience](#) website. 📺

Kid Rock Filmed Using a Homophobic Slur Onstage

BY KATIE ATKINSON

Kid Rock was caught on camera over the weekend using a homophobic slur onstage at a Tennessee bar.

In the video, published Monday (June 7) by [TMZ](#), Rock is calling out crowd members filming him at FishLipz Bar & Grill in Smithville, Tennessee, when he yells, "You f---ing f---s with your iPhones out!" He also sings in the video, "You can post this di--- right here," while grabbing his crotch and looking right at the camera.

Rock made headlines last month when his Nashville bar hosted [Morgan Wallen](#) for his [first performance](#) since being caught on camera saying the N-word back in February. Rock's Big A— Honky Tonk Rock N' Roll Steakhouse was also in the national news in March 2020 for being one of the last bars to comply with Nashville orders and close its doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Billboard has reached out to Rock's rep for comment on the new video and hadn't heard

back at press time.

Back in November 2019, [Rock was removed from the stage](#) of the Honky Tonky bar in Nashville when he went on an explicit tirade against Oprah Winfrey, saying she could "suck a di--- sideways." And in 2018, [the rocker was booted](#) from the Nashville Christmas parade lineup following profane remarks he made about then-*View* host Joy Behar during an appearance on *Fox & Friends*. 📺

Sinead O'Connor Isn't Retiring After All: I'm Gonna Keep on Being Fabulous'

BY GIL KAUFMAN

Just days after announcing that she intends to retire from touring and recording new albums after the upcoming release of her *No Veteran Dies Alone* collection, it appears [Sinéad O'Connor](#) has had a change of heart.

"Sinéad has endured much trauma throughout her promo for the book resulting in her decision to retire," her manager, Kenny Papenfus of 67 Management, tells *Billboard* in a statement on Tuesday (June 8). "After much thought, reflection and consideration, Sinéad has resumed her faith in herself and her value in being a musician."

The Irish singer-songwriter, known for her ethereal take on the [Prince](#)-penned "Nothing Compares 2 U" that peaked at No. 1 on the [Billboard Hot 100](#) in 1990, announced her retirement plans on Friday evening (June 4) in a series of tweets. O'Connor's Twitter feed is not verified but is believed to be maintained by the singer.

"This is to announce my retirement from touring and from working in the record business. I've gotten older and I'm tired. So it's time for me to hang up my nipple tassels, having truly given my all. *NVDA* in 2022 will be my last release. And there'll be no more touring or promo," [O'Connor tweeted](#). Replying to a fan's query about her upcoming concert dates, O'Connor clarified that all the shows originally set for 2020 and rescheduled for 2021 and then 2022 would be "pulled. Because this soldier woman has grown old quicker than covid."

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In a [follow-up tweet](#), she added, “It’s not sad news. It’s staggeringly beautiful news. A wise warrior knows when he or she should retreat: #MeTime.” On Saturday, [she apologized](#) to anyone on her team who was upset or surprised by her announcement.

O’Connor recently released a memoir, *Rememberings*, which delves into her upbringing, her journey in music and her struggles with physical, sexual and psychological abuse. The book was announced in late December, just after the singer said she was entering a yearlong treatment program for trauma and addiction. At the time, she told fans that she planned to return with both a new album and tour in 2022.

In a follow-up tweet on Monday, O’Connor retracted her earlier retirement statement, writing, “Good news. F—k retiring. I retract. Am not retiring. I was temporarily allowing pigs in lipstick to f—k my head up... here’s my statement..... in the form of these three photos. It’s ‘colourful’ but that’s me :)” In an accompanying statement, O’Connor explained that she felt “badly triggered” by interviews about the memoir, specifically calling out the host of a British chat show for repeating a statement by a *Telegraph* music journalist from several years ago, who referred to the singer as “the crazy lady in pop’s attic.”

She wrote that she should have brought a lawyer along on her book tour, “because I hadn’t realised how much talking about the past, particularly my experience of abuse not only as a child, but as a legally vulnerable adult... would trigger so much emotional catharsis.” The singer noted that interviewers were asked to be sensitive and not ask questions about child abuse or “dig deep into painful s—t about mental health which would be traumatising for me to have to think about.”

After the BBC interview, O’Connor said she was so upset that she thought it would be safer, “if I ran away and gave up being in music at all.” And though the experience reminded her of the many other times over the past three decades that she’s felt triggered by prying questions, at the end of the day, “I love my job. Making music that is...I am born for live performance and with the astonishing love and support I have received

in the last few days.”

Reconfirming her plans to tour in 2022, O’Connor apologized to fans and promoters for putting a scare into them, admitting that she “gave myself a fright too... Anyway, the dude abides. I am not gonna retire. I’m gonna keep on being fabulous,” she wrote. “And I’m not gonna be made feel any shame associated with my exhibiting the symptoms of trauma.”

See O’Connor’s tweet retracting her retirement below. [▶](#)

Brian Eno Opens His Vault of Unreleased Music for New Sonos Radio Station

BY LARS BRANDLE

Brian Eno, the iconic British composer, visual artist and innovator, is bringing his own light to Sonos Radio. Today, Eno unveils The Lighthouse, a new station that will stream exclusively on the Sonos Radio HD platform, which expands into five new global markets.

The Lighthouse will be a beacon for decades of new and unheard Eno music. According to a statement unveiling the project, its two parties came together to create a new station format that explores Eno’s “extensive archive of unreleased work.”

There’s no shortage of material from Eno’s treasure chest. The Hall of Famer boasts a recording career spanning more than 50 years, and includes the 1978 electronic gem *Ambient 1: Music for Airports*, a record that inspired Aphex Twin and countless other producers, and is today considered the cornerstone of the “ambient” genre.

“The music that will be broadcast from The Lighthouse covers a pretty broad period,” explained Eno. The earliest track ready to air is from 1990, though additional cuts will resurface in due course. “New

pieces will be entering the mix and some of that will go back even further,” he explains. “You will be listening to a sequence of tracks which will be randomly generated, chosen by chance so there is the possibility of odd, I hope exciting collisions - things that are very slow next to things that are very fast next to things that have no tempo, no pulse at all.”

In the month ahead, Eno will host a series of three programs related to The Lighthouse, kicking off with a session in which he discusses the unreleased material and his decision to visit the vault. and share it with the world. Program 1 is out now and can be streamed on [Mixcloud](#).

Eno and his sonic wizardry needs to introduction for audiophiles. In 2019, Eno was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a member of Roxy Music. As producer, he has worked on album with Talking Heads, David Bowie, U2, Laurie Anderson and others, and collaborated with the likes of David Byrne, John Cale, Grace Jones and Underworld’s Karl Hyde.

His most recent album, 2020’s *Film Music 1976-2020*, was his first ever body of works drawing from his film and television soundtrack oeuvre.

The launch of The Lighthouse happens alongside the expanded availability of [Sonos Radio HD](#) into Austria, Canada, France, Germany and The Netherlands.

Sonos, the smart speaker manufacturer and audio specialist, launched its high-definition subscription service in 2020, initially for customers in the U.S. and U.K. The ad-free tier is priced at \$7.99/€7.99 per month after a free, one month trial. [▶](#)

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BTS' 'Butter' Debuts Atop Billboard K-Pop 100

BY BILLBOARD KOREA STAFF

BTS' "Butter" debuts at No. 1 on the Billboard K-Pop 100 chart (dated June 5) with the most streams, downloads and radio airplay in the tracking week ending May 27.

"Butter" is the act's third No. 1 since they led the chart for three weeks early last year with "ON" followed by their smash hit "Dynamite", which stayed atop for 22 weeks only six months ago. ("Dynamite" ranked No. 8 this week.)

When it comes to the K-Pop 100, the artist with the most No. 1 hits is IU with a total of five songs, of which BTS' Suga was the featuring artist for "eight". He is right behind IU on the rank with a total record of four chart leaders.

Within just one day of dropping their new release "Butter" on May 21, BTS broke their own record of the 'Most-Viewed YouTube Music Video in 24 Hours' while dominating a number of charts including the K-Pop 100, Hot 100 and Billboard's two other global charts.

This week's No. 2 is enjoyed by OH MY GIRL with "Dun Dun Dance", which had successfully made it on top 10 last week at No. 3 before climbing up the chart by one with most TV airplay. Brave Girls' "Rollin'" stepped down to No. 3 after spending a sixth week at No. 1 while their other hit "We Ride" joined the fall from No. 5 to No. 9. IU's "LILAC" also dropped by two sitting at No. 4 this week with "Celebrity" also down by three at No. 7.

SM Entertainment's newest girl group 'aespa' is on the rise. The new single "Next Level," a remake of the soundtrack of Hollywood film *Fast & Furious: Hobbs & Shaw*, blasts in at No. 5 only a week after entering the chart at No. 33.

It took the group only two songs to chart

in the top 10 after hitting No. 21 with the debut song "Black Mamba", which was released last year. "Black Mamba" sits at No. 60, up 16 from last week. asep's success is not just witnessed by the K-Pop 100. The girls are consistently rising on the Billboard Global 200. They broke their own record with "Next Level", which debuted at No. 97 last week and went straight up to No. 65 this week. Their best record on the chart was in last November with "Black Mamba" hitting No. 138.

Heize's "HAPPEN", the title track of her seventh album HAPPEN released on May 20, debuts at No. 6. Known for her distinctive vocal talent, the female rapper's earthy and raspy vocals are once again highlighted in the

new song. Another track from the album "Like the first time" also entered the chart at No. 29 while "You, Clouds, Rain," which was charted off last July, has re-entered at No. 90 as her new album begins to gain popularity.

The final spot on top 10 is acquired by a new girl group STAYC's "ASAP," which debuted at No. 72 on the chart dated April 24 and has consistently worked its way up for the past five weeks, finally nestling in at No. 9 last week. Although it's down by one this week, they are still managing to stay on top 10.

The Billboard K-Pop 100 measures multi-metric consumption including streaming, digital sales, radio and television data to present the most popular K-Pop songs in South Korea every week. **B**

'Minimum Wage' Increases As Blake Shelton Adds 36th Top 10 on Country Airplay Chart

BY JIM ASKER

Blake Shelton nabs his 36th top 10 on *Billboard's* **Country Airplay** chart, as "Minimum Wage" lifts 11-10 in its 21st week on the list dated June 12. In the week ending June 6, the song gained by 9% to 16.4 million impressions, according to MRC Data.

The track is the sophomore single from Shelton's 12th full-length, *Body Language*, which opened at No. 3 on the June 5-dated Top Country Albums chart with 24,000 equivalent album units.

Body Language lead single "Happy Anywhere," featuring Gwen Stefani, led Country Airplay in December, becoming Shelton's 28th leader (and Stefani's second). It hit No. 3 on the airplay-, sales- and streaming-based Hot Country Songs chart.

Shelton first hit the Country Airplay top 10 with "Austin," which started a five-week domination in August 2001. With 36 top 10s, he ties Garth Brooks for the ninth-most since the chart launched in January 1990. George Strait leads with 61, followed by Kenny Chesney and Tim McGraw (58 each); Alan Jackson (51); Keith Urban and Toby Keith (42 each); Brooks & Dunn (41) and, the top female artist in the category, Reba McEntire (37).

On Hot Country Songs, "Minimum Wage" ranks at No. 14 after hitting No. 12 a week earlier. It drew 4.7 million U.S. streams and sold 3,000 downloads in the week ending June 3.

'FOREVER' AND TWO WEEKS Luke Combs' "Forever After All" tops Country Airplay for a second week (35.5 million impressions, up 10%). Of Combs' record 11 consecutive career-opening No. 1 singles, the song is his 10th to reign for multiple

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weeks. Fittingly, “One Number Away” is so far his lone leader to miss the mark, leading for a week in June 2018.

WHERE THERE’S SMOKE Country-rock band Blackberry Smoke scores its fifth Top Country Albums top 10, as *You Hear Georgia*, produced by Dave Cobb, enters at No. 5 with 13,000 equivalent album units (12,000 in album sales). The set, a nod to the group’s home state, follows *Find a Light* (No. 3, April 2018); *Like an Arrow* (No. 1, one week, November 2016); *Holding All the Roses* (No. 1, one week, February 2015); and *The Whippoorwill* (No. 8, September 2012).

The new set concurrently starts atop Americana/Folk albums, marking the group’s second No. 1, following *Like an Arrow*, and at No. 7 on Top Rock Albums. It debuts at No. 4 on the all-genre Top Album Sales list.

THOMAS REMEMBERED The late B.J. Thomas, whose career endured for more than five decades, shows on Country Digital Song Sales (which began in January 2010) for the first time, led by “Raindrops Keep Fallin’ on My Head,” which debuts at No. 17. It sold 1,900 downloads, up 1,959%, in the week ending June 3. **Thomas died** May 29 at age 78 after battling lung cancer.

The 1969 classic became Thomas’ first leader on any *Billboard* survey, spending four weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 and seven frames atop Adult Contemporary.

Plus, Thomas’ “Hooked on a Feeling” (a rerecorded version) opens at No. 23 on Country Digital Song Sales with 1,600 sold, up 2,625%. The original reached No. 5 on the Hot 100 in January 1969.

Thomas enjoyed notable success in the country format. He scored his first Hot Country Songs entry in 1975 with “(Hey Won’t You Play) Another Somebody Done Somebody Wrong Song,” which led the chart that May. The single sold 1,200 in the tracking week, a surge of 2,885%. In 1975-2000, he notched 16 Hot Country Songs appearances, including three No. 1s among five top 10s. **B**

Wolf Alice Leap Into Top Spot on U.K. Midweek Chart With ‘Blue Weekend’

BY LARS BRANDLE

Wolf Alice is the leader of the pack on the U.K.’s midweek chart with *Blue Weekend* (Dirty Hit), the British alternative rock act’s third album.

Blue Weekend is proving hard to beat. It’s outselling the rest of the **Top 5 combined**, and is the best seller on physical formats and downloads in the first three days of the chart cycle, the OCC reports.

The London band will hope to go one better than their previous albums. Their 2015 freshman set *My Love Is Cool* and 2017 followup *Visions of a Life* both reached No. 2 on the Official U.K. Albums Chart, missing out to releases from Florence + The Machine and Shania Twain, respectively, after leading at the hallway mark.

Coming in at No. 2 on the Official Chart Update is veteran Manchester band **James** with *All The Colours* (Nothing But Love Music), while last week’s leader, Olivia Rodrigo’s *Sour* (Geffen), dips 1-3.

Neil Finn’s reunited Crowded House could snag their **highest-charting album** in 14 years with *Dreamers Are Waiting* (EMI), the followup to 2010’s *Intriguer*. It’s new at No. 4. The ARIA Hall of Fame-inducted band has four U.K. Top 10s, including a No. 1 for 1996’s career retrospective *Recurring Dream*.

American punk rock act **Rise Against** is aiming for a first Top 10 with *Nowhere Generation* (Loma Vista), new at No. 6; **ZZ Top’s Billy F Gibbons** is targeting a second solo Top 20 with *Hardware* (Concord), new at No. 7; while *The Voice of the Heroes* (Motown/Quality Control), **Lil Baby & Lil Durk’s** collaborative LP, bows at No. 8.

Meanwhile, Olivia Rodrigo stays on track

for a third week atop the U.K. Singles Chart with “Good 4 U”. It leads the **singles chart blast**, ahead of **The Weeknd’s** “Save Your Tears” (Republic Records/XO) and **Doja Cat’s** “Kiss Me More” (Ministry of Sound) featuring **SZA**.

The Official U.K. Singles and Albums Charts are published late Friday, local time. **B**

Yuuri, SixTONES, and YOASOBI Lead Billboard Japan Mid-Year Charts

BY BILLBOARD JAPAN

Billboard Japan unveiled its 2021 mid-year charts Friday (June 4), tracking the weeks of Nov. 23, 2020 through May 23, 2021. Breakout singer-songwriter Yuuri’s “Dry Flower” rules the Japan Hot 100, while the rising boy band SixTONES’s 1ST is the No. 1 album for the first half of this chart year.

Yuuri’s “Dry Flower” is the sequel to the songwriter’s previous viral hit from 2019 called “Kakurenbo,” a continuation of the story depicted from a female perspective. The track dropped digitally in October 2020 and went on to rack up over 275 million streams (275,855,527) during the tracking period. It’s the second single without a CD version to hit No. 1 on the mid-year song chart, following YOASOBI’s mega-hit “Yoru Ni Kakeru” from last year that ruled the year-end tally.

“I’d see the charts every week and feel happy that so many people were listening to my song,” said the rising J-pop artist in a statement. “I never imagined it would become No. 1 for the first half of the year. It really took me by surprise and at the same time, I’m really happy. Thank you.”

At No. 2 is LiSA’s “Homura,” the theme of last year’s blockbuster anime movie *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie: Mugen Train*, and at No. 3 is BTS’s “Dynamite,” the

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first all English single by the South Korean superstars that became their first No. 1 hit on the Billboard Hot 100. The top three songs on the mid-year tally were long-running favorites in the digital metrics, namely streaming, downloads, and video views.

The straightforwardly titled debut album by the six-member Johnny's group SixTONES — pronounced “Stones” — rules the mid-year Japan Hot Albums chart. In contrast to the top songs on the mid-year song tally, SixTONE's 1ST hasn't been released in digital form and took the top spot fueled by physical sales (No. 1, with 572,074 copies sold during the tracking period) and look-ups (No. 2), which counts the number of times a CD is ripped to a computer.

“We're so grateful that our first album 1ST became ‘1st’ (No. 1) on the chart. Thank you so much,” member Jesse commented in a statement. “Our biggest goal is to deliver our music to as many people as we can, so the fact that our album became No. 1 means we were partly able to achieve that goal, and that makes us happy.”

He went on to note that the group's second album will likely be different from the chart topping debut set, and promised to keep striving to expand the boys' reach. “We'll keep going so that as many people as possible will know about SixTONES and listen to our music,” he said. “And if we can receive the honor of becoming No. 1 again, that would make us happy, so we'll continue to do our best!”

Coming in at No. 2 is the breakout male-female duo YOASOBI's THE BOOK, which topped downloads and look-ups, and veteran pop-rock band Mr.Children's SOUNDTRACKS followed at No. 3.

The honor of Top Artist — compiled from the results of the Japan Hot 100 and Hot Albums charts — goes to YOASOBI. The pair had five songs break into the top 10 of the Japan Hot 100 and have continued to gain wider recognition during the tracking period.

“I'm incredibly happy,” said Ayase, the music producer and songwriter. “We've been checking out various charts and have seen YOASOBI's name multiple times in the rankings. Of course, ‘Yoru Ni Kakeru’ led the way, but our other past songs would slip into

one of the charts at a timing that surprised us, so that has helped us get a feel for just how much people of different demographics have been listening to our work.”

Ikura, the vocalist, commented, “Last year around this time, ‘Yoru Ni Kakeru’ began showing up on various charts. We've released a number of singles since then, and while ‘Yoru Ni Kakeru’ was what brought us here, I feel this past year has been a process of gradually having our band name recognized by a wider audience.”

The 2021 mid-year charts enjoyed a surge in new artists whose works first took off on video platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, for example Ado, whose rebellious track “Usse-wa” became something of a social phenomenon in Japan.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, listeners have gotten used to “viewing” music from home, enabling them to access a myriad of tracks and accelerating the rise of interactive hits. The market for online live concerts is expanding as well, becoming a new way to connect music content to the live music market, which bodes well for the music industry struggling to recover from the effects of the pandemic.

Billboard JAPAN Hot 100 Mid-Year Chart 2021

1. Dry Flower / Yuuri
2. Homura / LiSA
3. Dynamite / BTS
4. Yoru Ni Kakeru / YOASOBI
5. Usse-wa / Ado
6. Niji / Masaki Suda
7. Step and a step / NiziU
8. Kaibutsu / YOASOBI
9. Kaikai Kitan / Eve
10. Gunjo / YOASOBI

Billboard JAPAN Hot Albums Mid-Year Chart 2021

1. 1ST / SixTONES
2. THE BOOK / YOASOBI
3. SOUNDTRACKS / Mr.Children
4. BE / BTS
5. One Last Kiss / Hikaru Utada
6. Fab! -Music speaks.- / Hey! Say! JUMP
7. rainboW / Johnny's WEST
8. STRAY SHEEP / Kenshi Yonezu
9. SZ10TH / Sexy Zone
10. LOVEHOLIC / NCT 127

Billboard JAPAN Top Artists Mid-Year

Ranking 2021

1. YOASOBI
2. BTS
3. Official HIGE DANdism
4. NiziU
5. Yuuri
6. LiSA
7. Aimyon
8. Ado
9. Kenshi Yonezu
10. SixTONES

Billie Eilish, Selena Gomez, Katy Perry & More Sign UNICEF Letter Urging COVID-19 Vaccination Donations

BY GIL KAUFMAN

Billie Eilish, Selena Gomez, Katy Perry and a number of other stars have signed a UNICEF letter urging the Group of Seven (G7) countries to donate more coronavirus vaccines to the international COVAX initiative. The [open letter](#) — also signed by David Beckham, Orlando Bloom, Sofia Carson, Ewan McGregor, Liam Neeson, Whoopi Goldberg, Gemma Chan, Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Olivia Colman, P!nk, Lucy Liu and several others — notes that more than a year into the COVID-19 pandemic new variants of the disease have the potential to “put us all back where we started” in March 2020 if we don't take decisive action.

“This means more school closures, more healthcare disruptions and greater economic fallout — threatening the futures of families and children everywhere,” read the letter. “The pandemic will not be over anywhere until it is over everywhere, and that means getting vaccines to every country, as quickly and equitably as possible.”

▶ IN BRIEF

The signees — which include a mix of UNICEF Ambassadors and supporters — said this weekend's G7 summit in the UK is a "vital" opportunity to reach an agreement to send vaccines where they are needed the most. "UNICEF is already on the ground delivering vaccines on behalf of COVAX, the international vaccine equity initiative. But right now, COVAX is 190 million doses short of where it needs to be, which leaves vulnerable people dangerously unprotected," the letter continues; COVAX is an international coalition working to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines with a goal of guaranteeing fair and equitable access to every country in the world.

"Some countries have committed to donating vaccines later this year, but doses are needed now. UNICEF analysis shows that G7 countries will soon have enough doses to donate 20 per cent of their vaccines between June and August — over 150 million doses — without significant delay to current plans to vaccinate their adult populations." The note ends with a request to make those donations by August and release a roadmap to scale up donations as supplies increase.

"The hopes of the world rest on your shoulders," in concludes. "Together, you must rise to this challenge. Let's build a healthier, brighter and fairer future for every child and for everyone."

See the letter below. [▶](#)

Rob Zombie Confirms He's Directing a Reboot of 'The Munsters'

BY JAMES HIBBERD

Rob [Zombie](#) has confirmed his long-rumored resurrection of *The Munsters* is really happening. The musician-director announced the news on his Instagram page

Monday.

"Attention Boils and Ghouls!" Zombie wrote. "The rumors are true! My next film project will be the one I've been chasing for 20 years! THE MUNSTERS! Stay tuned for exciting details as things progress!"

The film is from Universal Studios via its 1440 Productions division, which means it's likely going to Peacock instead of getting a theatrical release.

The Munsters was a 1964 sitcom about a family of friendly monsters who relocated from Transylvania to an American suburb. The show ran for just two seasons along with the similarly premised spooky comedy, *The Addams Family*. Yet despite their brief runs, both shows cast a rather long shadow over popular culture in the decades since.

Addams Family was previously rebooted as a modern-day film (the 1991 hit *The Addams Family* and then its 1993 sequel *Addams Family Values*). While *The Munsters* spawned a few TV movies with the original cast and a 1988 sequel series titled *The Munsters Today* in which the family awakens decades later. NBC and Pushing Daisies showrunner Bryan Fuller also tried to reboot the premise as a drama under the title *Mockingbird Lane* starring Eddie Izzard, Jerry O'Connell and Portia de Rossi (the series was scrapped, but its pilot eventually aired as Halloween special in 2012).

Zombie is the co-founder of the heavy metal band White Zombie and the director of a slew of rather hard-core horror films, starting with 2003's surprise hit *House of 1000 Corpses*, followed by the *The Devil's Rejects* (2005) and a reboot of *Halloween* (2007). His last was *3 From Hell* (2019).

Universal did not respond to a request for comment.

This article originally appeared in [THR.com](#). [▶](#)