

# MUSIC CONNECTION

## SPECIAL YEAR END ISSUE!

GIFTS UNDER  
A GRAND

50 BEST CAREER  
TIPS OF 2025

# LEON THOMAS

TOP 25 NEW MUSIC  
CRITIQUES

MONHEIM  
MICROPHONES

HOT 100 RISING ARTISTS  
& BANDS

Vol. 49 • December 2025 • \$3.95/\$4.95 Canada



Dear Santa

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But I haven't been recording because I still don't have a Scarlett



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★ ADAM Audio D3Vs - I need to feel the bass and hear the truth. Also, they'll look cool on my desk!

★ ADAM Audio H200 Headphones - For when I want studio detail, but my roommates want silence.

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By Eric Harabadian

Photos: Raymond Alva, Isaiah Johns



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Compiled by Ruby Risch



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photo by Julian David

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# Monheim Microphones

[monheimmicrophones.com](http://monheimmicrophones.com)

**Developing A Fresh Mic Aesthetic:** Though Andrew Monheim's deafness at birth was resolved by many childhood surgeries, starting out life that way made him hear sounds differently and gave him a greater sensitivity to how audio functions. His unique experiences have likewise impacted the way he has navigated and innovated in the audio industry. After years of running production factories for Blue Microphones and Manley Labs, he continued to observe a growing disparity between what engineers, musicians, and producers could afford and the quality of the gear. "I reached a point where I wanted to make things my own way and improve on what I saw," Monheim says. "I wanted to develop a fresh aesthetic for microphone design and manufacturing that would better the industry." He launched Monheim Microphones in 2016 with the Monheim Omni Microphone as the first product. His goal with the new company was to recreate and innovate on classic mic designs, crafting everything by hand. Keenly picking apart elements other engineering teams were missing, or cost cutting on, he envisioned the marketplace for the next phases of the future of sound.

**Flagship Mics:** Monheim offers two omnidirectional condenser microphones designed for high fidelity recording—the Omni Reference Microphone and the Omni High SPL Microphone. Both are sold as matched pairs and are designed to capture the enhanced detail of an instrument or performance. The Monheim Omni is described as "having a pair of your ears on the source!" The High SPL version is an upgrade to the standard model, featuring a lower noise floor and a higher Sound Pressure Level (SPL) response



Aviva Scott from Circle the Earth on Monheim FRESH at NRG Studios

for recording louder sources. Featuring full-bodied, rich low-end and smooth, extended top end, the Royalty Tube Condenser Mic, inspired by Prince and the classic 67 sound, is considered the "crown prince" of the company's lineage of condenser mics. The visual homage is completed with a custom candy-coated body paint, meticulously matched with a 24-karat gold-plated head basket and bottom cap, making the luxurious look of Royalty as inspiring as its lush sonics.



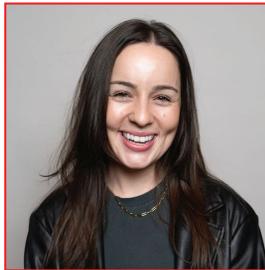
**Most Recent Products:** Monheim Microphones unveiled its Crème tube microphone line in 2023. The company presented the Crème as its first tube microphone, designed to bridge vintage audio quality with modern mixing techniques. It features a CK12-style capsule and a NOS 12AT7 vacuum tube. Based on the Crème's popularity and industry demand for vintage appearance, the subsequently released Crème XL features familiar vintage quality with the beloved tonality and aesthetic of a Monheim classic—boasting a cutting edge protective inner pop filter, and custom-made, vintage locking swivel mount for maximum style and reliability. Debuting at NAMM 2025, Monheim introduced the hand portable FRESH condenser mic, boasting crisp, open top end, natural low-end extension, internal pop filter, and a push button swivel mount to use on any stand or recording surface. FRESH allows the modern user an easy way to capture fresh ideas.

Contact Monheim Microphones, 323-217-6012, [sales@monheimmics.com](mailto:sales@monheimmics.com)

## Rachel Wein

Senior Director, A&R  
MNRK Music Group

MNRK Music Group announced the hiring of **Rachel Wein** as **Senior Director, A&R**. In her new role, Wein will identify and develop talent for both the MNRK and Dualtone labels, while cultivating deeper relationships with managers, attorneys, and other industry leaders. She will report directly to MNRK COO Chris Moncada and is based in Nashville, TN. Moncada said, "We are so very fortunate to have Rachel on board. Her compassionate ear is a huge asset as we continue to grow the artist roster at both MNRK and Dualtone." For more, contact [gmelchiorre@mnrk.com](mailto:gmelchiorre@mnrk.com).



## Alexander Shelley

Principal Conductor  
The National Concert Hall

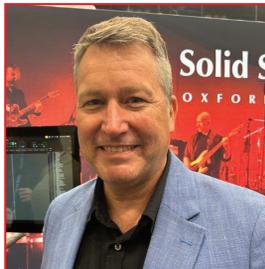
The National Concert Hall (NCH) has announced the appointment of **Alexander Shelley** as **National Symphony Orchestra Ireland's new Principal Conductor**. This will be for an initial term of three seasons, commencing in September 2026. Alexander takes on these roles further to the completion of Jaime Martín's term as Chief Conductor in May 2024. "I am deeply honoured to be joining National Symphony Orchestra Ireland and to become part of an organisation so devoted to making music a central force in Ireland's cultural life. I'm inspired by the extraordinary artistry of the Orchestra's musicians," said Shelley. For more, contact [assumpta.lawless@nch.ie](mailto:assumpta.lawless@nch.ie).



## Mark Skipper

National Sales Manager, Eastern U.S.  
Solid State Logic

Solid State Logic has announced the appointment of **Mark Skipper** to the position of **National Sales Manager, Eastern U.S.** Skipper will be responsible for SSL Broadcast and Live solutions, joining SSL's U.S.-based distributor, Group One Ltd. as part of expanding its business development and customer relationships, reporting to Rick Naqvi, Senior VP of USA Sales. "I am proud to be working alongside such an extraordinary team of professionals, making an audible difference in the productions of our customers," said Skipper. For more, contact [jeff@hummingbirdmedia.com](mailto:jeff@hummingbirdmedia.com).



## Tammy Hurt

Board of Directors Member  
Marathon Live

Music executive **Tammy Hurt** has joined the **Marathon Live Board of Directors**. She brings over 25 years of entertainment business experience to the growing Nashville based full-service facility promoter and operating company. "I'm thrilled to join the board of Marathon Live and contribute to its legacy as a vibrant hub for live music. It's an honor to help shape its future and champion the artists, fans, and community that make it extraordinary," said Hurt. CEO Mark Dinerstein added, "We value her decades of experience and perspective on the state of the music industry to help shape Marathon Live's future." For more, contact [agreenberg@falconpublicity.com](mailto:agreenberg@falconpublicity.com).



## Hannah Carlen

VP, Marketing and Communications  
Nonesuch Records

**Hannah Carlen** has been named **Nonesuch Records' Vice President of Marketing and Communications**. In her new role, Carlen oversees marketing, sales, publicity, new media, and content creation for the Warner Music Group's acclaimed label. Carlen reports to Nonesuch President David Bither and is based at the label's global headquarters in New York City. "I am grateful that Nonesuch will benefit from the rich experience [Carlen] brings us," said Bither. Carlen added, "I am honored beyond belief to have the trust of [Nonesuch's] leadership." For more, contact [melissa.cusick@nonesuch.com](mailto:melissa.cusick@nonesuch.com).



## Dr. Richard James Burgess, MBE

Chair  
PPL

PPL has appointed **Dr. Richard James Burgess, MBE** as its new **Chair**. Burgess will lead the PPL Board as the organization continues to grow. Peter Leatham OBE, CEO, PPL said, "[Burgess] brings a strong vision, a track record of balancing innovation with institutional stability, and deep personal experience across many of the roles our members hold." "I look forward to guiding the next chapter of [PPL's] growth and ensuring its continued strength and relevance in today's rapidly evolving global music ecosystem," said Burgess. For more, contact [jeff@thesyn.com](mailto:jeff@thesyn.com).



## Weston McGowen

Global Head of Catalog Services  
SourceAudio

SourceAudio has promoted **Weston McGowen** to **Global Head of Catalog Services**. Based in New Orleans, McGowen will now oversee SourceAudio's global catalog ecosystem, including client operations, metadata, and rights-management infrastructure for the company's extensive network of rightsholders, publishers, broadcasters, and media partners. He will also direct SourceAudio's Rights and Royalties Division, which includes SourceAudio Collect, the company's publishing-administration arm representing more than 1.6 million works. For more, contact [laurie@jaybirdcom.com](mailto:laurie@jaybirdcom.com).



## Brooke Webster

A&R Manager  
Prescription Songs

Prescription Songs has announced the promotion of **Brooke Webster** to **A&R Manager**. Webster, who is based out of the company's Los Angeles office, looks after a diverse roster of artists, songwriters and producers. "Brooke's passion for working with our writers and producers, and her knowledge of both the Nashville and Los Angeles music scenes, has been invaluable to Prescription," said Rhea Pasricha, Head of A&R, West Coast. "We are so excited to see her take on this new A&R Manager role and help shape the future of the company." For more, contact [agreenberg@falconpublicity.com](mailto:agreenberg@falconpublicity.com).





## ▲ BOSS RT-2 ROTARY ENSEMBLE: GUITAR AND KEYBOARD LESLIE SPEAKER PEDAL

Some of the most iconic tones ever recorded involve the sound of the Leslie Rotary Speaker. A staple sound for jazz, R&B, gospel, and rock music, the Leslie speaker was invented by Donald Leslie in the late 1930s to give the Hammond organ a more expansive sound similar to a pipe organ. Leslie's design used a spinning horn for treble frequencies and a spinning 15" drum for bass to create a rich, vibrato-like sound via the Doppler effect. Rock guitar players also gravitated to the sound, and in 1968 the Univibe pedal unleashed a swirling sound close enough to a Leslie that Jimi Hendrix, David Gilmour, Davey Johnstone, and Peter Dinklage quickly embraced it. Leslie speaker cabinets can weigh well over 100 lbs., so a guitar and keyboard pedal version was a welcome alternative.

Over the decades there have been dozens of effects pedals that have emulated the famous Leslie sound. Enter the BOSS RT-2 Rotary Ensemble. BOSS, one of the most popular and successful effects pedal companies since 1976, and famous for its CE-1 Chorus Ensemble, is no stranger to modulation effects. *MC* received and tested their new RT-2, and quite simply, this may be the best sounding emulation of a Leslie speaker to date. Usable in stereo or mono, it sounds spectacular and is extremely versatile.

The RT-2's three-position mode switch selects the classic rotary speaker voice and two modern variations. Mode I is a modeled reproduction of the most famous vintage Leslie 122 rotary speaker design. Mode II is also the vintage rotary sound, enhanced with a wider tonal range. This mode provides increased spatial performance when paired with overdrive and distortion pedals. Mode III provides enhanced definition for soloing and has a separate tube saturation drive control dial.

A hallmark of the Leslie sound is the ability to speed up and slow down the rotors to achieve emotional vibrato and tremolo tones. The RT-2 enables this in real time in several ways. Four selectable pedal switch modes for controlling the rotor speed can be toggled by holding the bypass switch down when the effect is on. For more precise control of the speed, an optional BOSS Expression Pedal can be connected for all the in between speeds. For some users, the ability to precisely control the speed is an essential feature. An optional BOSS footswitch can also provide brake control. A virtual rotor display the size of a penny lights red and blue to indicate treble and bass rotor speeds. A Rise/Fall Time switch adjusts the transition time between rotor speeds and a Drive/Balance switch assigns the Drive knob to control the saturation amount or the volume balance between the treble and bass rotors.

The RT-2 can be powered via an optional BOSS 9-volt adaptor or 9-volt battery. For a look at even more features and an informative video, check out the Boss website. Exclusive members-only services and support from the free Roland Backstage website is available with your purchase. A must have for musicians who love a great Leslie sound. \$239.99

[boss.info.com](http://boss.info.com)

## ▼ MARTIN D JR E STREETLEGEND® BURST JUNIOR SERIES ACOUSTIC GUITAR

C.F. Martin & Co. is recognized as the world's oldest surviving continuously operating guitar manufacturer. The company was founded in New York City in 1833 by German immigrant Christian Frederick Martin Sr. and has remained a family-owned and operated business for six

generations. It later relocated to Nazareth, PA where its headquarters remain today. Long renowned for crafting some of the best acoustic guitars in the world, Martin's premium and historical guitars are still crafted in Nazareth. The new and more affordable lines, including the Junior series, are built at their Mexican factory.

The Martin Junior Series is a line of compact, all-solid-wood acoustic-electric guitars designed to offer Martin tone and playability in a more portable and comfortable size. These instruments feature a shorter 24.9" scale length similar to a standard 000 model paired with slightly smaller 15/16 size. Bodies are offered in Dreadnought, 000, and cutaway shapes, plus a bass option. They



are targeted for travel, beginners, or players seeking an ergonomic and stage-ready companion.

*MC* received a Martin D Jr E StreetLegend Burst Junior for testing. Built in Mexico, they are designed with the same quality standards and traditions as the guitars made in Nazareth. An outstanding guitar at an intermediate price point, it quickly became a New Toys favorite and is a guitar worthy of the Martin name. *MC* had the opportunity to play this guitar at multiple live gigs and the attractive relic-ed sunburst finish proved to be an attention grabber at every show. But what really stood out was the sound. Though not in the premium price range, this instrument held up as a truly professional instrument in every aspect. Playability, intonation, and tone is excellent, with great projection. The idea of being able to travel and perform live on a great guitar without dropping \$2k-3k is attractive. The StreetLegend features all-solid tonewood construction.

The StreetLegend features a Martin E1 pickup which includes volume, tone, and phase controls to help reduce feedback. An innovative integrated chromatic tuner in visible in the sound hole and is a great addition.

The StreetLegend comes with a high-quality softshell case that is well made and attractive. The Dreadnought, 000, and bass version body styles offer aesthetic finishes, including natural, distressed satin StreetMaster, and vintage inspired StreetLegend Burst looks. Highly recommended. \$899

[martinguitar.com](http://martinguitar.com)

# WHEN DREAMS CROSS BORDERS: THE GIANLUCA ZANNA PHENOMENON



Gianluca Zanna with Claudette Lyons

## An independent artist proves that authentic artistry still conquers in the modern music landscape

In an era when the music industry increasingly favors corporate consolidation and algorithmic playlists, Gianluca Zanna stands as a remarkable counternarrative—proof that independent artistry, paired with unwavering vision and authentic storytelling, can still achieve what major labels spend millions pursuing. The Rome-born music producer and entrepreneur has just reached the number one position on the NACC charts with "You Are My Destiny," featuring vocalist Claudette Lyons. But the chart success is merely the most recent chapter in a journey that reads like a masterclass in perseverance, reinvention, and the power of meaningful industry relationships.

## From Contatto Discografico to Zanna Records

Long before Zanna became a fixture on American radio, he cut his teeth as the youngest music publisher for Italy's Contatto Discografico magazine, navigating European music circles while most of his peers were still finding their footing. It was at MIDEM 1995 that a chance encounter would reshape his trajectory entirely. There, he met Claes Cornelius, the legendary A&R executive from Denmark's Mega Records who discovered and launched Ace of Base to global superstardom.

"Something clicked immediately," Zanna recalls of that meeting nearly three decades ago. The connection planted seeds that would eventually draw him across the Atlantic in 1998, leaving behind everything familiar to pursue his American dream of becoming a music producer.

But the path from immigrant to industry success was far from linear. Like countless artists before him, Zanna took on unconventional work to sustain his musical ambitions—becoming a bodyguard and Krav Maga military instructor. Those years, rather

than derailing his dreams, became foundational. "In the music business, you need those skills more than you might think," he notes with characteristic pragmatism.

## The Power of Persistence and Partnership

Zanna's breakthrough came through his meeting with award-winning multiplatinum producer Brian Reeves, whose credits include work with U2, Billy Idol, Donna Summer, and Elton John. This collaboration led to the founding of Zanna Records, giving him the platform to create music on his own terms, free from major label constraints.

Yet perhaps the most compelling aspect of Zanna's recent success is its deeply personal foundation. "You Are My Destiny" isn't just another commercially crafted single—it's the musical embodiment of his real-life love of his life Claudette Lyons, whom he met through online connections. The authenticity resonates in every note, and audiences worldwide are responding. The track has accumulated 3,000 airplays across commercial stations globally, with the remix video surpassing 1.4 million views with an average of 500K views daily. "You Are My Destiny (Future Remix)" has climbed to #3 on Amazon's Best Sellers Dance & Electronic Charts, positioned just behind cultural phenomena like "Ghostbusters" and NSYNC.

The timing of Zanna's achievements feels almost cosmically orchestrated. In January 2024, after nearly thirty years, he reconnected with Claes Cornelius through Facebook—the very mentor who had inspired his American journey decades earlier. The reunion has proved creatively explosive. Cornelius has joined the Zanna Records team, and together they're co-writing Cornelius's autobiography "All That I Wanted" while simultaneously crafting new material that blends their combined decades of experience.

## Independent Artistry, Major Impact

What makes Zanna's current wave of success

particularly noteworthy is that it's been achieved entirely independently, without major label backing or traditional publishing support. Consider the metrics: a number one position on the NACC charts, billboards in Times Square and upcoming on the Las Vegas Strip, an exclusive photoshoot at Rolling Stone headquarters as a finalist for America's Top Next Hitmaker 2025, and global distribution through MoodMedia's network serving 500,000 commercial locations across 150 countries.

The duo—performing as Luca and Claudette—has also pioneered what they're calling a "Live Streaming Tour," delivering immersive performances directly to smartphones and computers from extraordinary locations worldwide: desert landscapes, Sedona mountain peaks, waterfalls, and caves. It's a bold reimagining of what live performance can be in the digital age.

## The Distribution Opportunity

Currently, Zanna is actively seeking distribution partnerships and subpublishing licenses for his catalog through Zanna Records. For the right partners, this represents an opportunity to work with an artist who has already demonstrated massive global traction and audience engagement—all built organically without the machinery of major label promotion.

His catalog, anchored by "You Are My Destiny" but extending beyond it, represents music with proven international appeal, currently spinning on stations across the United States, Canada, Europe, Israel, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Russia, South Africa, Indonesia, Romania, Spain, Colombia, Australia, Italy, and Brazil, with more territories coming online regularly.

## The Lesson in Zanna's Story

In a landscape increasingly dominated by manufactured personas and focus-grouped content, Gianluca Zanna's ascent feels refreshingly authentic. His story reminds us that the music industry, for all its corporate consolidation, still rewards artists with genuine vision, the patience to develop meaningful industry relationships, and the courage to tell their own stories in their own way.

From that Italian boarding school where a young dreamer pressed his ear to contraband radios absorbing American rock and pop, to the global airwaves now carrying his own creations, Zanna has lived the immigrant dream while staying true to his artistic vision. His collaboration with Claes Cornelius—coming full circle after three decades—adds a poetic symmetry to a career that's far from finished.

As Zanna himself puts it: "America gave me the chance to become who I was meant to be. But it took all those detours to give me something worth sharing." In an industry often criticized for its manufactured nature, his trajectory stands as proof that authentic dreams, pursued with unwavering dedication, still create magic.

The boy who once dreamed of American beats now creates them. And the music world is taking notice.

For distribution and publishing inquiries regarding the Zanna Records catalog, contact: [zanna@zanna.us](mailto:zanna@zanna.us) | [ZannaRecords.com](http://ZannaRecords.com)

## ▶ AUDIOMOVERS LISTENTO PLUGIN

Audiomovers was founded in 2017 to solve the challenge of remote audio collaboration. The 2020 pandemic created an unprecedented demand for remote work solutions in the music industry, which Audiomovers was uniquely positioned to meet. Audiomovers' premier product is the LISTENTO plugin which provides real-time, high-resolution multichannel streaming audio to collaborate remotely. LISTENTO quickly became the de-facto standard of the audio industry to the extent where Abbey Road Studios took notice and acquired the company in March 2021.

LISTENTO enables users to transmit in real-time uncompressed or lightly compressed audio directly from a DAW to a web browser or the LISTENTO Receiver plugin in a remote session. LISTENTO operates as an insert on a master or auxiliary channel and creates a shareable secure link that streams audio in real time. Recipients can monitor through a browser, standalone desktop app or mobile app (Android & iOS), and latency is usually low enough to allow for instantaneous collaboration. Outside issues such as Internet speed can affect latency, which may be solved through use of VPN.

Audiomovers recently announced updates including expanded channel count, sample-rate range, network/distributed audio workflows, and improved routing and monitoring features for remote or multi-machine collaboration.

Users can now transmit and receive up to 128 channels of audio in a session, up from a much lower limit. Practically speaking, stereo and 5.1 surround sessions are easily accommodated, as well as Dolby ATMOS. Sample-rate support has been increased, the application now supports up to 384 kHz, updated from 192 kHz. Bear in mind that most sessions are likely to be 48kHz or sometimes 96kHz and that the higher sample rates will require more powerful internet speed. Also, Multi-stream receiving capability—the receiver side can accommodate four LISTENTO streams simultaneously.

Added features for remote workflows include: 1. A built-in audio file player allowing playback/transmission of multiple audio files mid-stream. 2. A local video file player that can be synced with incoming streams. 3. Custom channel naming in the receiver interface. 4. Monitor mixer controls in the receiver: level, pan, mute/solo for both transmitted and incoming streams. 5. "Guest Pass" function in web/streaming domain allowing a collaborator short-term access to LISTENTO, for Pro subscribers.

Another software by Audiomovers is OMNIBUS. OMNIBUS is a virtual patchbay that simplifies complex audio routing between different applications, hardware devices, and other computers on a local network. It functions as a central hub, allowing users to route, split, or combine multiple audio sources. For example, you can record a Zoom call, mix hardware with applications, or send multiple audio sources to a live stream from a graphic interface that lists your software and hardware configurations and appears as a visual patchbay promising routing simplicity.

The difference between the programs is that OMNIBUS manages the flow of audio within your local machine and network, while LISTENTO manages the flow of audio between different physical locations over the internet.

Audiomovers offers a free trial and tiers of service levels, monthly or annual with different feature sets and pricing. Visit their website for pricing as well as additional audio solution software.

[audiomovers.com](http://audiomovers.com)

## ▼ SINGULAR SOUND BEATBUDDY 2

Singular Sound offers a selection of "one man band" pedals. Their integrated system of drum machine, the BeatBuddy, and looper pedal Aeros can be used individually or together and are designed to be controllable by a highly programmable switcher called MIDI Maestro. A comprehensive selection of dedicated switches and expression pedals further enhance the power of this system.



Following up on the 10th anniversary of the BeatBuddy, BeatBuddy 2 offers a significant upgrade in sonics and feature set. A medium size pedal, BeatBuddy 2 retains the look of its predecessor in an attractive design that more closely matches their other pedals than the BeatBuddy did. BeatBuddy 2 features an LCD display, two footswitches, a tap pad and three control knobs. The three knobs enable changing drum set, tempo and volume. The BeatBuddy 2 now features full-sized MIDI connections to replace the mini-MIDI cables from the BeatBuddy.

BeatBuddy 2 Includes 13 real drum kits and over 200 songs across 23 genres, with room for 320 drum sets and 3.2 million songs. Designed to be interactive and expandable, beats can be changed through pre-programming, or on the fly with footswitches that can trigger drum fills and song form changes. The emphasis is on being able to create nonlinear and real feeling drum performances that don't reek of... drum machine. The optional SuperSwitch with six switches (\$149) gives you the ability to pause and trigger an accent hit, switch parts, and start a fill without missing a beat. It also enables

jumping directly to any song part, triggering half-time or double-time tempo, accessing multiple accent hits and navigation of setlists hands free. An online program called BeatBuddy Manager enables fine programming down to individual drum sounds in a timeline. Sounds are stored onboard in an SD card and new is USB-C connectivity.

The software and firmware of Singular Sound products is an evolving environment with a company that is clearly dedicated to product development. Optional sound sets are available, and Singular has a history of recording additional drum and percussion sounds to expand your library. For musicians wanting accompaniment that is interactive, time spent learning the system will be well rewarded. Singular Sound has an innovative and systemic approach that is unique and powerful.

BeatBuddy 2 can also be used effectively by musicians that just want a plug and play situation where they don't have to dive deep into the product. For advanced users wanting specific functionality, Singular Sound has a customer support structure that you may want to avail yourself with.

Noted actor-musician Rob Morrow from *Northern Exposure* offered MC his experience: "During Covid I wanted to create a one-man band. I found Singular Sound's BeatBuddy and it was a revelatory discovery." \$499

[singularsound.com](http://singularsound.com)



Michael Stern, C.A.S., is a Music Engineer based in Los Angeles. He has recorded and mixed 260 film scores including *Iron Man 2*, *Sex And The City 1 and 2*, *The Notebook*, and *Borat Subsequent Moviefilm*. He has also worked with the artists Strawberry Alarm Clock, Richard Marx, Kenny Loggins, Jackson Browne, Micky Dolenz, The Cowsills, Bon Jovi, Tom Jones, Chick Corea, Lisa Loeb, and Rob Morrow. He can be reached at [newtoys@musicconnection.com](mailto:newtoys@musicconnection.com).



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ONE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT CHRISTMAS is conceiving cool and clever ideas for stocking stuffers to bless, impress, and outguess your musician friends, partners, lovers, etc. The next best thing, arguably, is reading about ideas for the same. The good news is that you're already doing the second, so minimally you're halfway there ("Whoa, you're halfway there"). Once again, *Music Connection* has taken the legwork out of the footwork for you. So dig if you will our 2025 stocking stuffer suggestions for musicians or anyone with dreams to become one. As always, stuff at your own discretion.

**D'ADDARIO - JOHN LENNON ART SERIES PICKS AND STRAPS - PICK PACKS OF NINE \$7.99, STRAPS START AT \$16.99**

The holidays are about many things, not least of which are pleasant, warm feelings. The Beatles (and consequently John Lennon) are so deeply embedded in pop culture that most people have known about them (and him) for their entire lives and the band can often feel like an old friend. And there are few things better than old friends at the holidays. D'Addario introduced their Lennon picks and straps just in time for Christmas but they're good for any day in the life. [tinyurl.com/bdjh8mh5](http://tinyurl.com/bdjh8mh5)

**PEICHENG WATERPROOF BLUETOOTH SPEAKER WITH IPX5 \$17.99**

This wireless, shower-friendly speaker is waterproof and comes in three cool colors: red, blue, and black... although technically black is the absence of color. But no one really thinks that and few musicians care. IPX5, incidentally, is a rating that indicates protection against low-pressure water jets. Think of these as Auto-Tune for shower singers. [tinyurl.com/pa5drtny](http://tinyurl.com/pa5drtny)



**MUSICAL STICKY NOTES \$9.95**

Stocking stuffers don't need to be practical. Indeed, they rarely are. There's nothing wrong with practicality but these music-themed sticky notes are pure, undiluted fun... in an Office-Depot/Staples kind of way. But so what: fun is fun. Imagine dinging someone's car and leaving your insurance details on one of these. Who knows: it could even lead to a label deal. Unlikely but not impossible. [tinyurl.com/3pssc58a](http://tinyurl.com/3pssc58a)

**PERSONALIZED CONCERT TICKET ACRYLIC ORNAMENT - \$5.84**

You submit the artist's name, date and anything else you deem appropriate (or inappropriate—your call) and you'll receive a custom-made concert ticket ornament. Available in more than

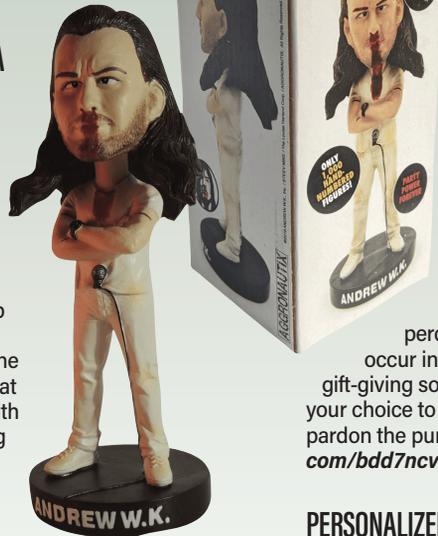
# STOCKING STUFFERS 2025

BY ROB PUTNAM

56 colors (again, black isn't a color, technically) and can double as a keychain in emergencies. [tinyurl.com/yszsmks7](http://tinyurl.com/yszsmks7)

**AGGRONAUTIX BOBBLEHEADS - AKA THROBBLEHEADS \$24.95 - \$39.99**

These "throbbles" are ideally suited to sit on your friend's (or friends') dashboard (or dashboards) and bop their head (or heads) along to whatever tune they've tuned. Oh what fun it'll be to ride... with Andrew W.K. nodding hard to "Party Hard." [tinyurl.com/yxnb74x](http://tinyurl.com/yxnb74x)



a day to finally obey your dentist? A 12.7-ounce jar is \$29.99. [tinyurl.com/y4bzx7vv](http://tinyurl.com/y4bzx7vv)

**WITHOUT MUSIC LIFE WOULD BE SOCKS \$7.99**

Putting a sock in a sock may feel a bit like putting a hat on a hat or a Starbucks inside a Starbucks. But what can't be denied is that "Without music life would B flat" will make even the most pun-averse artist smile. Moreover, A.I. whispered in MC's ear that 20 percent of all annual sock sales occur in December, driven by holiday gift-giving so minimally you're not alone in your choice to go with punny footwear (if you'll pardon the pun or even if you won't). [tinyurl.com/bdd7ncve](http://tinyurl.com/bdd7ncve)

**PERSONALIZED NFC CD KEYCHAIN \$11.25 + \$6.99 SHIPPING**

This customized NFC (near-field communication) keychain can be used by various smart devices to play whatever song was chosen when you ordered. Know someone who loves Taylor Swift? Of course you do; everyone does. Get that person (or yourself—come on, you know you want it) this handy handheld sonic shortcut. Think of it as a QR code but in keychain form. Can double as an ornament in emergencies. [tinyurl.com/yzmu6tv6](http://tinyurl.com/yzmu6tv6)

**OTAMATONE KIRBY \$45.99**

The Kirby is like the musical instrument for people who don't want to learn to play one. Users merely touch or slide their fingers along the stem to modify the pitch and squeeze the cheeks to apply vibrato. It's 14.5 inches high with two volume levels and three octave options. It requires three AAA batteries, which, like any classic Christmas gift, are not included. [tinyurl.com/2my866bw](http://tinyurl.com/2my866bw)

**INDIVIDUALIZED AMPLIFIER DOORMAT \$35**

What better way for cool musicians to welcome friends to their cool musician pads than with a cool customized amplifier doormat? There are cooler ways, of course, but virtually none within this price range. Sure, Mick Jagger answering the door wearing Fonzie's jacket from the Smithsonian would be cooler but good luck stuffing that into a stocking or your budget. These amp mats are like taking the holidays to 11, even if they only go to 10. But they look like they go to 11... because that's one louder, innit? #SpinalTap [uncommongoods.com/product/personalized-amp-doormat](http://uncommongoods.com/product/personalized-amp-doormat)

**GUITAR-SHAPED USB FLASH DRIVE \$9.88**

This 32GB guitar-shaped flash/thumb/memory drive makes backing up important files lyrical. Or at least as lyrical as file management can ever hope to be. For those that like to kick it '70s/'80s style, there are also cassette-tape flash drives that are equally as cool if not more so. [tinyurl.com/32kvd29j](http://tinyurl.com/32kvd29j)

**CUSTOMIZED M&M'S: ADD YOUR FRIEND'S BAND LOGO, NAME, ETC. - STARTING AT \$29.99**

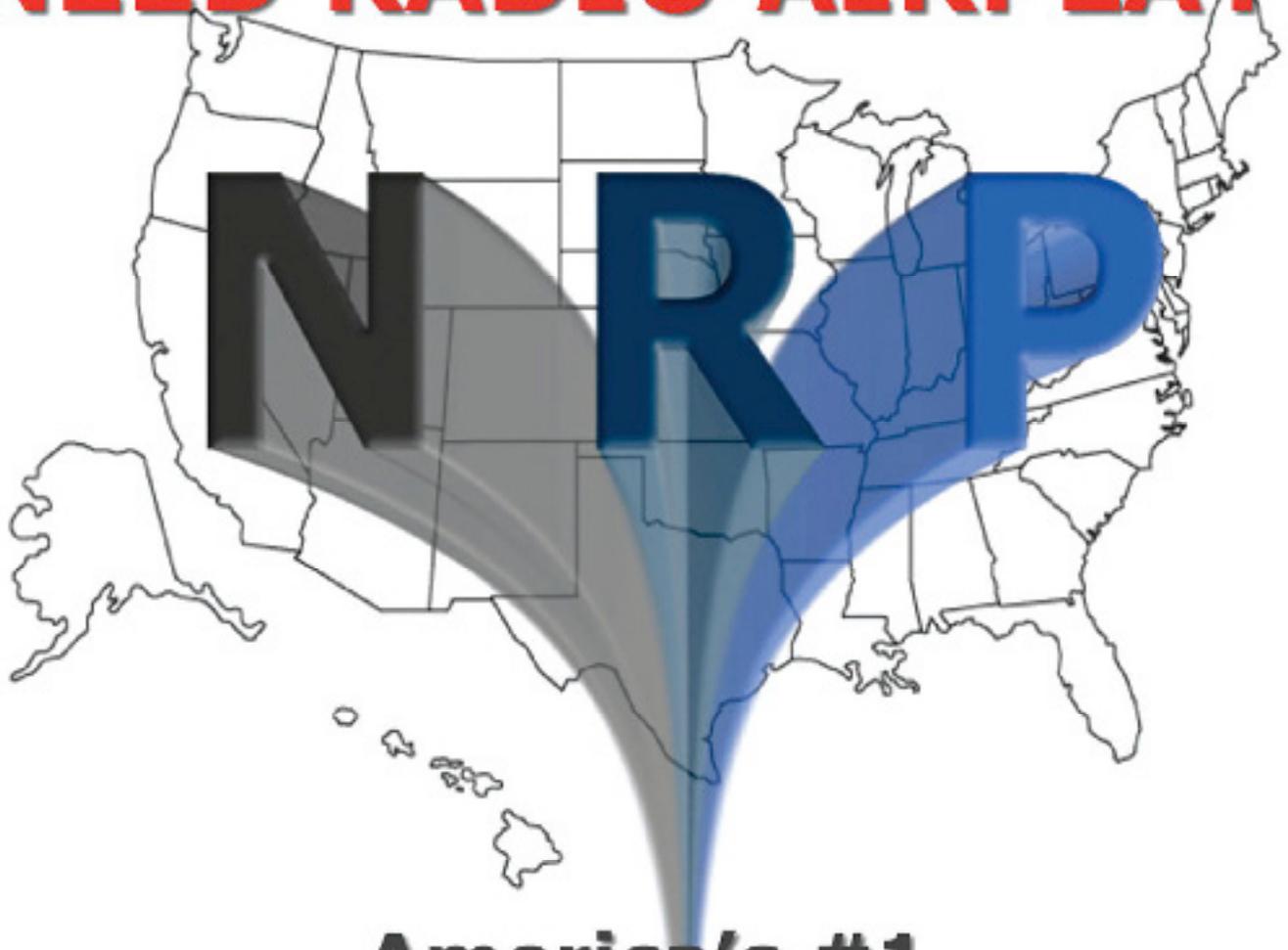
There's much to be said for being fun, different and unexpected at Christmas. There's even more to be said for candy. The M&M's website allows users to upload their own images, add text of their choice or select available clipart to create bespoke versions of the candy that was invented for troops in the trenches, which many musicians consider themselves. What's Christmas without candy, aside from



**D'ADDARIO MICRO HEADSTOCK TUNER \$21.99**

D'Addario's clip-on headstock guitar tuner includes a multicolor backlit LCD display. This makes it handy for tuning in dark spaces... such as backstage at the Garden, the Bowl or a rehearsal-space basement where the replacement of burnt-out bulbs isn't a high priority. Available in one color: black (again, not technically a color) and can double as a nightlight in emergencies. [tinyurl.com/yr5uurfy](http://tinyurl.com/yr5uurfy)

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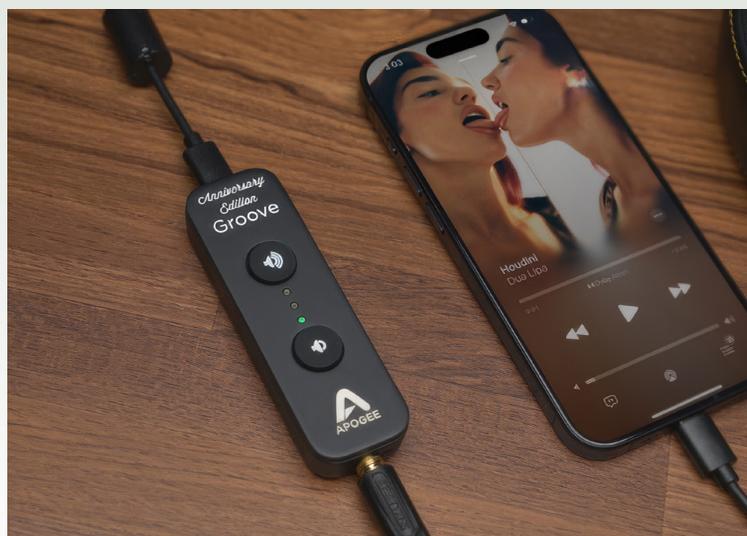
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**137 N. Larchmont Blvd S-#500  
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email: [lweir@larryweir.com](mailto:lweir@larryweir.com)**

## ▶ AKAI PROFESSIONAL MPK MINI IV 25-KEY MIDI KEYBOARD CONTROLLER

THE AKAI PROFESSIONAL MPK MINI IV is a compact 25-key MIDI controller designed for portable music creation. It features an upgraded keybed, RGB velocity pads, real pitch/mod wheels, and a color display. With assignable knobs, transport controls, and DAW integration, it streamlines production. USB-C connectivity, software instruments, and durable design make it suited for mobile producers. [akaipro.com/mpk-mini-4.html](http://akaipro.com/mpk-mini-4.html)

**\$99**



## ◀ APOGEE GROOVE ANNIVERSARY EDITION REFERENCE HEADPHONE AMP

THE APOGEE GROOVE ANNIVERSARY EDITION Reference Headphone Amp enables you to enjoy studio-quality headphone monitoring on the go. This portable DAC has 32-bit/192kHz resolution for dynamic range, frequency response, and distortion specs unheard of in its class. Boasting Mac, PC and iOS compatibility, this USB-powered unit is ideal for portable, laptop-based mixing rigs. Compact and bus-powered, it delivers consistent, detailed monitoring anywhere creative work happens.

[apogeedigital.com/product/groove-anniversary-edition](http://apogeedigital.com/product/groove-anniversary-edition)

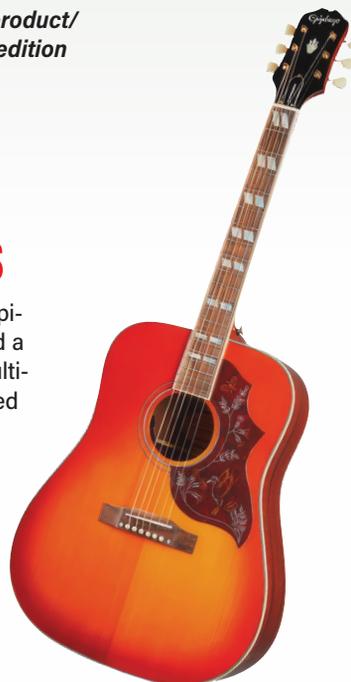
**\$249**

## ▶ EPIPHONE HUMMINGBIRD, AGED CHERRY SUNBURST GLOSS

THE HUMMINGBIRD is one of the most beautiful acoustic guitars ever built. The new Epiphone inspired by Gibson Hummingbird blends solid woods, vintage appointments, and a Fishman Sonicore pickup. Outfitted with gold Epiphone Deluxe tuners, top and back multiply binding, Kalamazoo-style headstock, and a bone nut and saddle, it's available in Aged Antique Natural Gloss and Aged Heritage Cherry Sunburst Gloss finishes.

[gibson.com/products/epiphone-hummingbird-all-solid-wood-fishman-sonitone-agedcherry-sunburst-gloss](http://gibson.com/products/epiphone-hummingbird-all-solid-wood-fishman-sonitone-agedcherry-sunburst-gloss)

**\$849**





## ◀ FENDER® CLASSIC SERIES TWEED CASE STAND - 7 GUITAR

THE FENDER TWEED GUITAR CASE from the 1950s has a special place in history and in guitar players' hearts. This tweed guitar stand looks like a traditional case but easily turns into a stage-worthy guitar stand that holds seven guitars. Crafted with road-reliable materials, this three-ply hardshell wooden case boasts a vinyl-wrapped steel carry handle and steel latches. The soft, crushed-acrylic plush interior lining ensures your guitars remain scratch and damage-free. Also in Black and Brown.

[fender.com/products/fender-classic-series-case-stand-7-guitar?variant=45940666302686](https://www.fender.com/products/fender-classic-series-case-stand-7-guitar?variant=45940666302686)

**\$367.99**

## ▶ SARAMONIC K9 LAVALIER MICROPHONE KIT

THE SARAMONIC K9-US is a professional dual digital UHF wireless microphone system built for creators who need a seamless mic system for two people. It features 24-bit digital wireless sound transmission via two lavalier mics, giving you cinema-quality sound. The system features a dual-channel camera-mount receiver that connects to cameras, mixers, and recorders with XLR or 3.5mm analog outputs, and digitally connects to devices via USB-C. The transmitters also feature 32-bit float or 24-bit on-board recording with advance timecode synchronization. The transmitters and receiver feature rugged aluminum construction.

[saramonicusa.com/saramonic-k9-professional-dual-digital-uhf-wireless-lavalier-system](https://www.saramonicusa.com/saramonic-k9-professional-dual-digital-uhf-wireless-lavalier-system)

**\$999**



## ▼ SSL ALPHA 8 8-IN/8-OUT AD/DA CONVERTER AND 18-IN/18-OUT USB AUDIO INTERFACE

BUILDING ON THE ACCLAIMED ALPHA LINK RANGE, Solid State Logic introduce ALPHA 8—an 8-in/8-out professional-grade analog to digital, digital to analog converter, perfect for expanding your audio interface via ADAT and S/PDIF. Alternatively, you can configure ALPHA 8 to address all analog and digital I/O simultaneously via USB, giving you an 18-in, 18-out audio interface. Featuring class-leading conversion, flexible routing, and impeccable audio performance, ALPHA 8 unlocks the full potential of your setup.

[solidstatellogic.com/products/alpha8](https://www.solidstatellogic.com/products/alpha8)

**\$899.99**



## ▶ ROLAND DJ HEADPHONES V-MODA M110 PRO HEADPHONES \$259 / M10 HEADPHONES

DESIGNED FOR PROFESSIONAL DJs, the M-100 PRO delivers an exceptional monitoring experience on stage. These stylish M110 phones provide the immersive, beat-tuned audio reproduction the M-100 series is famous for, coupled with improved durability over previous models. The cushioned ear cups also feature newly developed swivel mounts, offering enhanced comfort over long sessions and easy transitions to single-ear monitoring while performing. The M10 Headphones offer a more accessible version for DJs as well. [roland.com/us/products/m-100\\_pro](https://www.roland.com/us/products/m-100_pro), [roland.com/us/products/m-10](https://www.roland.com/us/products/m-10)

**\$179**



BY MICHAEL STERN

## ▶ AKG C214 LARGE-DIAPHRAGM CONDENSER MICROPHONE - MATCHED STEREO PAIR

THE C214 LARGE-DIAPHRAGM CONDENSER MICROPHONE set is a cost-effective alternative to the high-end C414 family. The C214 captures sound with one capsule of the legendary C414 dual capsule resulting in performance close to the famous C414 XLII. Every factory-matched pair of C214s is created from thousands of individual microphones selected by AKG's sophisticated computer-aided matching method. The result is the highest possible correlation over the whole frequency range and virtually identical sensitivity for stunning, three-dimensional recordings.

[akg.com/microphones/drum-microphone-bundles/C214MatPair.html](http://akg.com/microphones/drum-microphone-bundles/C214MatPair.html)



**\$859**



## ◀ JBL EON715 15" POWERED LOUDSPEAKER

LAUNCHED IN 1995, JBL's best-selling EON family of PAs set the benchmark for how great a powered loudspeaker system can be. The JBL EON715 15-inch loudspeaker is part of JBL's new EON700 Series of powered PAs, which represent a major step forward in innovation and technology: JBL engineers used exclusive, state-of-the-art design and measurement techniques to deliver the best-performing loudspeakers in their category. The EON700 Series leverages the latest acoustic science, transducer designs, cabinet materials and advanced DSP and control technologies to deliver extraordinary performance in a fully professional, highly flexible, easy to use, portable system.

[jbl.com/EON715.html](http://jbl.com/EON715.html)

**\$449**

## ▶ SONY WH1000XM6 BLUETOOTH HEADPHONES

MEASURABLY THE BEST NOISE CANCELING WITH STUDIO-QUALITY SOUND.

Designed with mastering engineers, the WH-1000XM6 premium headphones deliver studio-quality precision, their most advanced noise cancellation, and crystal-clear calls for pure, uninterrupted immersion. The WH-1000XM6 headphones deliver an ultra-wide frequency response, adaptive noise cancellation, and A.I.-based noise reduction. Onboard speech control makes it easy to adjust volume and make changes to playback, while EQ and noise cancellation settings within Sony's Sound Connect app allow for personalized changes to your output instantly during your listening session. Complete with the headphones' connector cable, USB charging cable, and protective carrying case, the Sony WH-1000XM6 ensures incredible high-fidelity audio.

[electronics.sony.com/audio/headphones/headband/p/wh1000xm6-b](http://electronics.sony.com/audio/headphones/headband/p/wh1000xm6-b)

**\$459**





## ◀ PRS SE EXOTIC MCCARTY 594 LAUREL BURL ELECTRIC GUITAR VINTAGE SUNBURST

THE PRS SE MCCARTY 594 LAUREL BURL LIMITED EDITION blends vintage tone, distinctive looks and modern reliability. With a mahogany body, maple top, and 24.594" scale neck, it offers warmth and comfort. PRS 58/15 LT "S" pickups provide versatile tones, while push/pull controls and vintage hardware ensure flexibility. Only 500 guitars will be produced for 2025.

[prsguitars.com/electrics/model/se\\_mccarty\\_594\\_laurel\\_burl\\_limited\\_edition\\_2025](https://prsguitars.com/electrics/model/se_mccarty_594_laurel_burl_limited_edition_2025)

**\$989**

## ▶ AUDIO TECHNICA AT4040 CONDENSER MICROPHONE

AUDIO TECHNICA MICROPHONES are considered pro mics without the high-end pro price. The AT4040 condenser microphone provides smooth, natural sonic characteristics. The AT4040 offers low noise, wide dynamic range and high-SPL capability. This consistent microphone may be used with confidence in a wide variety of studio and live miking applications. The AT4040's low-noise circuitry is transformerless, resulting in exceptional transient response and clean output signals for transparent reproduction.

[audio-technica.com/en-eu/at4040](https://audio-technica.com/en-eu/at4040)

**\$329**



## ◀ KRK ROKIT 8 GENERATION FIVE 8" STUDIO MONITOR

THE KRK ROKIT 8 GENERATION FIVE STUDIO MONITOR features onboard DSP with Mix, Create, and Focus modes for adaptable monitoring. An 8" Kevlar woofer and 1" silk dome tweeter deliver balanced sound up to 40 kHz. With 25 EQ combinations, bi-amplified Class D power, and KRK app integration, it offers precise tuning for varied studio environments.

[krkmusic.com/products/rokit-8-generation-five-powered-studio-monitor](https://krkmusic.com/products/rokit-8-generation-five-powered-studio-monitor)

**\$319**

## ▶ DW 2000 SERIES GREGG BISSONETTE TAMBOURINE PEDAL

DESIGNED ALONGSIDE SESSION and touring master drummer Gregg Bissonette, the foot-activated "Tambo Pedal" faithfully recreates the swinging hand motion of traditional tambourine technique. A height-adjustable, rubber padded stopper mimics the heel of the hand; an upright backstop for the dual-row steel jingle half-moon tambo. A single chain-and-sprocket drive system is attached to a compact, single post 2000 pedal. Easy to position next to the hi-hat in any setup!

[dwdrums.com/products/dwcp2010t-2000-series-tambourine-pedal](https://dwdrums.com/products/dwcp2010t-2000-series-tambourine-pedal)

**\$169**



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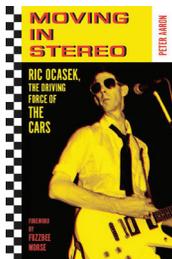
Enter at  
**musicconnection.com!**

### BOOKSTORE

#### Moving in Stereo: Ric Ocasek, the Driving Force of The Cars

By Peter Aaron

(paperback) \$29.95



This is the second book on the subject of new wave icons The Cars that we've reviewed in recent months, the first being Bill Janovitz's *Let the Stories Be Told*. Both are great, though Aaron's book focuses in on frontman Ocasek. That's an important distinction, and it makes for a compelling

read. As well as being a musician in his own right, Aaron has written books about the Ramones and has appeared in publications as respected as *The Village Voice*. This book "delivers an exhaustive examination of Ocasek's life and works as a musician," and it's a resounding success.

#### Street Smart: Succeeding in a Man's World

By Dina LaPolt

(hardcover) \$34.99



Powerhouse attorney and founder of LaPolt Law Dina LaPolt has written her memoir, and it's both a survival guide and a source for incredible personal stories. It's not at all surprising, sadly, to learn that women must work so much harder than men to make it in

the entertainment industry, in any capacity. But we learn that LaPolt hasn't only overcome obstacles but leapt over them with great aplomb. She's a force of nature. "Dina LaPolt is the embodiment of being 'street smart,'" says Joan Jett on the cover. "Fearless, innovative, and unapologetically bold."

#### Now Jazz Now: 100 Essential Free Jazz & Improvisation Recordings 1960-80

By Thurston Moore, Byron Coley, Mats Gustafsson

(hardcover) \$34.99

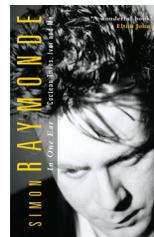


Musicians Mats Gustafsson and Thurston Moore have joined forces with music scribe Byron Coley for this, an exhaustive illustrated guide to free jazz records between the years 1960 and '80. On the one hand, that sounds incredible niche. On the other, there's acres of musical space for the men to run into. The book compiles, "personal archives with discussions and debates of their selections of recordings which could be contenders within a list defined by a parameter of 100 *most* essential releases," according to a statement. Even if you're not a jazz-head, the art will blow you away.

#### In One Ear: Cocteau Twins, Ivor and Me

By Simon Raymonde

(paperback) \$17.99



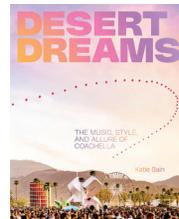
British producer, musician, and record-company CEO Simon Raymonde was one third of the Cocteau Twins and offshoot This Mortal Coil, and he's the founder of the Bella Union records label. He's also the son of Ivor Raymonde (as the book's title suggests), "the

legendary producer, musician and arranger for acts such as the Walker Brothers and songwriter for artists including Dusty Springfield." Simon Raymonde's book is a revelation, taking the reader through his time with the aforementioned, influential musical projects, and then his period with the label discovering artists as influential as Beach House, Fleet Foxes, and Father John Misty.

#### Desert Dreams: The Music, Style, and Allure of Coachella

By Katie Bain

(hardcover) \$24.99



Music journalist Bain has been attending the Coachella Festival for years, and she's put all those hours in the baking desert sun to good use. Her lungs full of dust were not for nothing. Bain's book isn't only an

exhaustive history of the event, although it is that. Rather though, she successfully captures the sights, sounds and general vibes of the festival since it got going at the start of the millennium. We feel the changes as the years move along, and it's refreshing that Bain doesn't take a largely cynical approach to the Coachella of today (outfits and all). A triumph, all told.

#### Unbreakable Rhythm: My Journey Through Music, Wellness and Mental Strength

By Frank Zummo

(hardcover) \$24.99



Frank Zummo is the drummer with Canadian pop-punk kings Sum 41 and, alongside veteran music journo Jason Pettigrew, he's penned an autobiography (published by *Modern Drummer*) that's all at once touching, funny, and genuinely helpful.

According to a statement, "Fans can expect a deeply inspiring and raw story." There's a foreword by Dhani (son of George Harrison), and conversations and interviews from Motley Crüe's Tommy Lee, Sum 41 bandmate Deryck Whibley, and more. Zummo has opened himself up, and it makes for a fascinating read.

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sleek machine.

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- 2 Channels
- Dual Amp / Bi-Amp / DI

TECH 21

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# Tech 21

[tech21nyc.com](http://tech21nyc.com)

**Emergence of the SansAmp:** B. Andrew Barta's success with the SansAmp and Tech 21, the company that evolved from the creation of his unique invention, is rooted in the simple desire to create a product he wanted for his own personal use. A performing musician with an electronics background whose job was repairing, modifying, and customizing amps, he started his own company in 1989 (with the help and encouragement of his longtime friend and company VP Dale Krevens) when his fresh technology and vision for the great possibilities of the SansAmp was rejected by numerous major manufacturers.

"Back then," Krevens says, "anything that wasn't a tube amp wasn't good enough. Their attitude was, 'tube amps rule,' and they couldn't figure out how a little black box could possibly sound like a tube amp. If it didn't have tubes, they didn't want to know about it." Of course, hearing was believing and eventually the industry caught

on to the 100 percent analog device, which delivered its mammoth sounds from a pocket-sized pedal. Over the subsequent decades, Tech 21 has continuously strived to offer player-friendly, flexible, multi-functional, and roadworthy products. They are designed to work seamlessly in both recording and stage environments.

**The SansAmp Technology:** SansAmps are notable for capturing the warm, rich, natural tones of the most sought-after tube amps. Within the parameters of each model's particular design, the controls provide access to specific, tone shaping characteristics within the tube amp sound spectrum. The SansAmp Tube Amplifier Emulation technology, which the relentlessly curious and inventive Barta created, encompasses the full signal chain, from pre-amp to power amp to speaker simulation. The SansAmp speaker simulation is designed and tailored for a smooth, even response as users might get from multi-miked cabinet, but without the peaks, valleys, and notches associated with single miking and many impulse responses.

**Fly Rig and Musician Collaborations:** Another revolutionary Tech 21 product is the Fly Rig, which allows musicians and producers to free themselves from the signal chains of bondage, backline loaners, overloaded flight cases, and the stress of airport security. The gunmetal-finish Fly Rig 5 is a sleek, compact "tonal titan" featuring warm analog tones. Krevens says, "It's just grab and go, with all the basics you need in a single pedal." Musicians who have worked with Tech 21 on developing specific Fly Rig models include Richie Kotzen (RK5 Fly Rig) and Paul Landers of Rammstein (PL1 Fly Rig). One of Tech 21's longest standing artist collaborations is with Geddy Lee, which has resulted in a series of signature SansAmp preamps designed to capture his unique bi-amped bass tone. In addition, former Megadeth guitarist Marty Friedman has a signature SansAmp pedal, Anthrax bassist Frank Bello has a signature SansAmp (the Street Driver 48), and Iron Maiden bassist Steve Harris helped develop the SH1 Signature SansAmp.

Contact Tech 21, 973-777-6996



FLY RIG 5 v2



RICHIE KOTZEN RK5 Signature FLY RIG v3



PAUL LANDERS PL1 Signature FLY RIG



ACOUSTIC/ELECTRIC FLY RIG



BASS FLY RIG v2

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▲ **FIRST ANNUAL ANTI SOCIAL CAMP UK**

PinkPantheress, Dave Bayley of Glass Animals, Jamie Cullum, Billy Bragg, Nicholas Petricca of WALK THE MOON, Parson James, Nathan Syke and 200 additional artists, songwriters, and producers kicked off the inaugural Anti Social Camp UK presented by Tileyard on November 3rd through 7th across London. Anti Social Camp is the first-ever songwriting camp in the vehicle of a front-facing festival with 200 recording sessions and 10 iconic public events showcasing world-renowned artists at premiere London venues.



▲ **NASHVILLE-BASED ALTERNATIVE POP BAND IN COLOR SIGNS WITH BIG LOUD ROCK, DEBUT EP SNOW DAY**

Nashville-based alternative pop band In Color signs with Big Loud Rock, bringing a fresh new hue to the roster. To celebrate the signing, In Color splatters onto the scene with the release of their debut EP *Snow Day*, out now.



▲ **NYU'S SONY AUDIO INSTITUTE NAMES GRAMMY-NOMINATED PRODUCER ALISSIA AS INAUGURAL ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE**

The Sony Audio Institute at New York University announced that GRAMMY-nominated producer Alissia has been named as its inaugural Artist-In-Residence. The Institute, launched earlier this year, fosters innovation at the intersection of technology and music by connecting students with industry leaders and cutting-edge audio technology. Alissia's appointment marks the first in what will be an ongoing program to bring world-class music professionals directly into the academic environment.



▲ **ST. PANTHER RELEASES SOULFUL R&B SINGLE "THE DEAL"**

Los Angeles-based Mexican/Colombian artist, producer, singer, rapper, and multi-instrumentalist St. Panther released a soulful R&B single, "The Deal." From their upcoming *Strange World* EP, accompanying the single, St. Panther releases a mesmerizing and meditative live performance video of "The Deal," featuring various long-time collaborators including the upcoming EP's co-producer, McClenney (H.E.R., Khalid, Jamila Woods).

**PRODUCER PLAYBACK**

*"Flaws are the most attractive or sentimental part of a record. Keith [Richards] used to say, 'I just play until I make the right mistakes.'"* – **ROB FRABONI**





▲ **MARGO PRICE SHARES NEW VIDEO WITH TYLER CHILDERS, SENDS POWERFUL MESSAGE AT FARM AID**

Margo Price dropped a video for “Love Me Like You Used To Do,” off her latest album *Hard Headed Woman* (Loma Vista Recordings). The video for the duet, featuring Tyler Childers and written by Steven Knudson, brings listeners into the recording process at Nashville’s Sound Emporium. Following her appearance on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, Price traveled to Minnesota for the 40th Anniversary of Farm Aid, where she serves as the first female artist elected to the Board of Directors.



▲ **KID HARPOON ANNOUNCED AS THE FIRST PRODUCER-IN-RESIDENCE AT ABBEY ROAD STUDIOS**

GRAMMY and Brit Award-winning producer, songwriter, and musician Thomas Hull, AKA Kid Harpoon, has been announced as the first Producer-in-Residence at London’s Abbey Road Studios. Kid Harpoon’s new role is part of Abbey Road’s vision to build a true home for music creativity and innovation, building on a legacy of 94 years. It is the latest in a series of ‘in residence’ announcements following Jordan Rakei’s Artist-In-Residence title at the studios over the last 18 months.



▲ **AEROSMITH AND YUNGBLUD SHARE “MY ONLY ANGEL (DESERT ROAD VERSION)”**

Multi-GRAMMY® Award-winning Rock and Roll Hall of Fame® inductees Aerosmith and British multi-platinum, award-winning artist YUNGBLUD shared “My Only Angel (Desert Road Version),” a stripped-back reinterpretation of the lead single from their upcoming collaborative EP *One More Time*, out November 21 via Capitol Records. “My Only Angel” debuted at No. 1 on *Billboard*’s Hot Hard Rock Songs chart, where it remained in the Top 10 for three weeks, and landed in the Top 40 on the Mainstream Rock Airplay chart, marking Aerosmith’s 45th appearance on the tally.

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**M**usician, producer, and composer Tiff Randol embarked on her formal career path at NYU where she studied classical voice performance. But she soon found that she had a talent for tinkering with audio, changed her major, and began to expand her repertoire. She interned with Philip Glass at his Looking Glass Studios and went on to compose for film and TV, notably Showtime's *Work in Progress* and for both The CW's *Arrow* and *The Flash*. In 2019, following the birth of her child, she established Mamas in Music, a community for—as the name suggests—mothers in music. It now has more than 500 members worldwide.

What Randol loves most about music and composing is that it helps her to communicate her feelings and otherwise express herself. "Music and art is where I've always felt safest," she explains. "When I'm in this flow space and environment, it wraps me with webs and layers of sound and colors that enables me to express myself and feel fulfilled and emotionally connected in ways that only music can do."

Following the birth of her child in 2018, Randol sensed isolation from the music scene and went in search of community. She didn't find exactly what she needed so she launched Mamas in Music. "I'd just wrapped several projects and my management team went a different route," she recollects. "Having a child is a big transition and figuring out where to go in an industry that generally isn't super friendly towards that transition was hard... I connected with my co-founder Mary Leay in the U.K. and we started to choose what we wanted, needed, and what the organization would look like."

Randol segued into TV and film composition in a way that was at once indirect yet also fortuitous. "I'd done commercials and little cues," she recalls. "I was doing a 360 Fulldome show when I mixed sound score with songs. That was how I discovered that I enjoyed working that way. When I first started out, I loved capturing sounds and effects. But I moved away from that for a while and focused more on songwriting and performing."

Recently she completed a record for BMG and now aims to drop a single a month for the near term. Indeed, her latest song "Free"—a remix of her "Holy Now," recorded under her pseudonym IAMEVE—was released on June 20, the day after *Music Connection* spoke with her. Among her favorite anecdotes is the time that she worked at Looking Glass Studios, David Bowie had been in and she got to savor the lyric sheets and other such pieces of studio candy.

Contact [tiffandol.com](http://tiffandol.com), Instagram @tiffandol, [mamasinmusic.org](http://mamasinmusic.org)

## THE 3 MOST IMPORTANT

*lessons she's learned as a composer and musician are:*

- Find your own technique. I spent a lot of time looking at how other people worked and trying to figure out why I wasn't able to work in the same way. Getting into my own flow and finding my own rhythm, especially as a female, has been the greatest gift.
- Production is about how to create worlds of sounds and to bring something unique and emotive to a song.
- Always be growing and in a space of play.

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# Who reads Music Connection?



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**- Jacqriot**



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*"Music Connection is the best magazine for every musician to subscribe to. The information the magazine provides for an artist is invaluable."*

**- David Fishof,**  
*Producer, CEO of Rock and Roll Fantasy Camp*



**THE STUDIO OWNER**

*"I find valuable information in every issue. I constantly refer engineers seeking employment to the annual Recording Studio issue, which has the most complete and comprehensive list of U.S. studios that you will find anywhere. And when I am asked for advice by a kid just starting out, I always tell them 'Well the first thing you should do is check out Music Connection.'"*

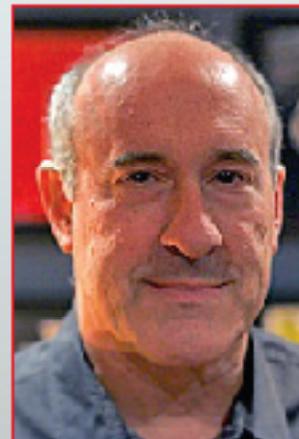
**- Kathleen Wirt,**  
*Owner, 4th Street Recording*



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*"Music Connection magazine is my barometer for staying on top of industry trends. My students receive invaluable feedback through the New Music Critiques and Reviews. Also, the national Directories are a great resource. The latest issue of Music Connection magazine has a permanent home in my teaching studio!"*

**- Chris Sampson,**  
*Vice Dean for Contemporary Music, USC Thornton School of Music*



**THE AUDIO PRO**

*"Music Connection is the most enjoyable magazine I read. It has the best advice, news, inside scoops, etc. As a designer and manufacturer, they keep me up to date as to where things are heading. The people there are awesome, and you can always find the 'magazine of choice' by looking in a studio's bathroom. There is ALWAYS a Music Connection magazine in there!"*

**- Paul Wolff, Designer, Inventor,**  
*Owner, FIX Audio Designs*

**MUSIC  
CONNECTION**

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## Louis Posen

President/Founder  
Hopeless Records

**Years with Company:** 31

**Address:** Los Angeles, CA

**Web:** hopelessrecords.com

**Email:** louis@hopelessrecords.com

**Clients:** Pvrís, The Wonder Years, Tigers Jaw, Destroy Boys, Neck Deep

### BACKGROUND

Going blind at an early age wasn't enough to stop Louis Posen from making a huge splash in the independent punk alternative space. Hopeless Records recently celebrated three decades of standing tall. Notable signings include young and old voices alike, including New Found Glory, Taking Back Sunday, Waterparks, and Scene Queen.

### A Surprising Career

At first, it was a hobby. I hadn't dreamed of starting a record label; I didn't even know labels existed. I was much more in tune with the film industry. I started working in film when I was 16 years old, knocking on doors and seeing who needed a production assistant, which led me to Cal[ifornia] State [University], Northridge, a film school.

And then the music industry crossed my path when I directed my first music video for NOFX. The opener for the show we filmed was Guttermouth, who said, "We'd love to do a video like NOFX." So they asked me to do that. During the filming of that video, the guys dared me to put out a 7" record for them. That got me down the path of starting a label.

### I Hear You

It's tough to tell what I would be like if I hadn't lost my eyesight. You can't really A/B it after the fact. But in hindsight, I feel like it's been a net positive. I don't wish on people that they go blind. But in my case, it's helped me listen better, not just to music but to understanding people better, being more empathetic and compassionate. And this is a people business. Life is a people business. It's led me to learning skills I probably wouldn't have learned otherwise. My life experience has been helpful in adapting to changes in the music industry.

### Fundamentals Vs. Changes

The most important things haven't changed, which are the connections between artists and fans, and how music affects people. I don't think that has changed. The things that have changed are what format people listen to music on, what marketing outlets people discover music on, and how the monetization structures work. Those things are changing all the time. As a label owner or anyone in the industry, you need to be looking at what's happening now and what's going to be happening in the future. But the essence of what it's all about hasn't changed.

### Hopeless Artists

We look at a bunch of different things [when picking artists], most of which is not data driven. Do they have charisma? Do they have that vision



*"Know who you are, know your vision, and make sure everything you do is in line with the story you're trying to deliver."*

for themselves of what they're about beyond writing good songs and playing? Of course, we're looking at songwriting, performance, how well they communicate with fans, social media numbers, all of that stuff. But what it comes down to is deeper than that. We're trying to find artists that have something to say and connect with fans in a meaningful way.

### The Right Contracts

We do a lot of different types of recording agreements, most of which are either royalty rate deals or profit splits. We've done shorter deals, longer deals, ones with bigger recording budgets and advances, and ones with smaller ones. For us, it's about what's commensurate with that artist. What's the best thing for where they're at in their careers? We are an artist development company, so we don't tend to do single deals or things that are so short term we can't really get into the artist development process.

### Building an Audience

We really think the work happens from the ground up, starting with super fans, serving them, then finding more fans and continuing that process.

The mainstream, major label, DSP world wasn't really talking about this five years ago, because streaming and revenues were growing rapidly. But we've been talking about this for 30 years because it's what we do, which is super serving the most dedicated fans.

And for us and other punk alternative labels, D2C [Direct to Consumer] has always been a part of what we do. There's a huge opportunity for the four major streaming services to put an

artist D2C on top. We've pitched this to all the services.

### Being There for Those in Need

Music is something that affects people in a deep way. We realized this early on. And the punk and alternative rock community is rooted in being there for each other. Everyone knows it as Do It Yourself, or D.I.Y. But it's really about doing it together. So that ethos along with my upbringing and other factors led to realizing there's a way to not just make artists rich and famous but to do something beyond that. And I'm a big believer that, when you have a purpose that goes beyond yourself, that's much more sustainable and rewarding.

We've raised more than three million for over 150 charitable initiatives. Recently, we started the Hopeless Music Academy, where we provide afterschool classes, summer classes, internships, mentorships, and soon there will be scholarships and job placements for kids in under resourced areas, free of charge. We have a recording studio in a youth drop-in center in North Hollywood. We're hoping to scale this up so it can be done not just here in the San Fernando Valley but throughout the world.

### Changing Times

The punk alternative world is changing all the time, although some things don't really change. I see us as a community for people who feel like other communities have left them behind. Back in the day, this was known as being for geeks and freaks. But it's expanded. So it's really for people who want to be connected and feel like they're part of something unique, where they are accepted for who they are and can be close to artists as peers, not as heroes. That part hasn't changed. But the sounds have changed. More guitars, less guitars, faster drums, more mid-tempo drumbeats, songs about breakups, songs about politics. These things tend to go in cycles.

### Owning the Fat Wreck Chords Catalogue

It's an honor to be leading Fat [Wreck Chords] into the future. It's one of the most incredible punk rock catalogs in history. It strengthens what we do. It allows us to be in places maybe we wouldn't have been. Fat is very strong in physical records, so it's going to allow Hopeless to be in stores. But mostly it's celebrating the history of the label, what it's meant to us, and what it will continue to mean for generations to come. We didn't really get involved in this partnership and acquisition as a direct benefit to Hopeless. It was more we wanted to make sure this special thing was kept intact and continued into the future.

### Paying It Forward

We care deeply about our artists, team and community, and we're always trying to be better artist developers. We're a company where decisions are based on principles. We have a purpose that goes beyond music and hope to be making a difference in our community and the world.

# Heartwarming Hatchets

At the intersection of snarling chords and flourishing brushwork, the collective known as Punk Rock & Paintbrushes stakes its claim as one of L.A.'s most compelling hybrid art experiments. The tradition was founded by surfer, erstwhile art student, and expansive, generous creative Emily Nielsen, when in the wake of her battle with cancer she asked friend Tim McIlrath of Rise Against to paint the lyrics to the disco anthem "Survive," a symbolic and gently cheeky gesture that became the genesis of a global art-and-music community.

The way PR&P turns creative energy into a communal act isn't a white-cube affectation; it's a portable, pop-up-ready, people-first model that has lived in festival fields, skate parks, independent galleries, and grassroots institutions, but always coming home to Los Angeles for the holidays. The aesthetic conversation is real—the work spans illustration, portraiture, satire, abstraction, photography, and hybrid media—and so is the social fabric.

Today the collective's mission is less about leather and eye liner—although there is still plenty of that, don't worry—and more about building a real creative ecosystem where musicians, photographers, painters, designers, and fans can cross-pollinate in ways the traditional art world rarely makes space for. Punk Rock & Paintbrushes champions the kind of makers who don't wait for permission. They uplift visual artists emerging from music culture, with structure, mentorship, and opportunity: gallery-level presentation, collectors who actually show up, and an ethos grounded in accessibility and philanthropy rather than exclusivity.

Crucially, every show also folds in charitable giving and support for local causes—as with December's Los Angeles Holiday show 2025. Because when systems fail us, rebellion looks like taking care of each other.

The 10th Annual Punk Rock & Paintbrushes Holiday Art Show comes to Echo Park on December 6-7. The exhibition will feature original artworks and limited editions, a whole skateboarding subgenre, live painting, DJ sets, a red-carpet reception, and art auction benefiting social-impact partners—plus maybe some surprise musician friends, and of course the warm glow of the holiday spirit. Just kidding, that's probably the moonshine.

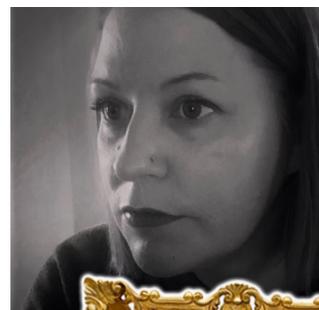
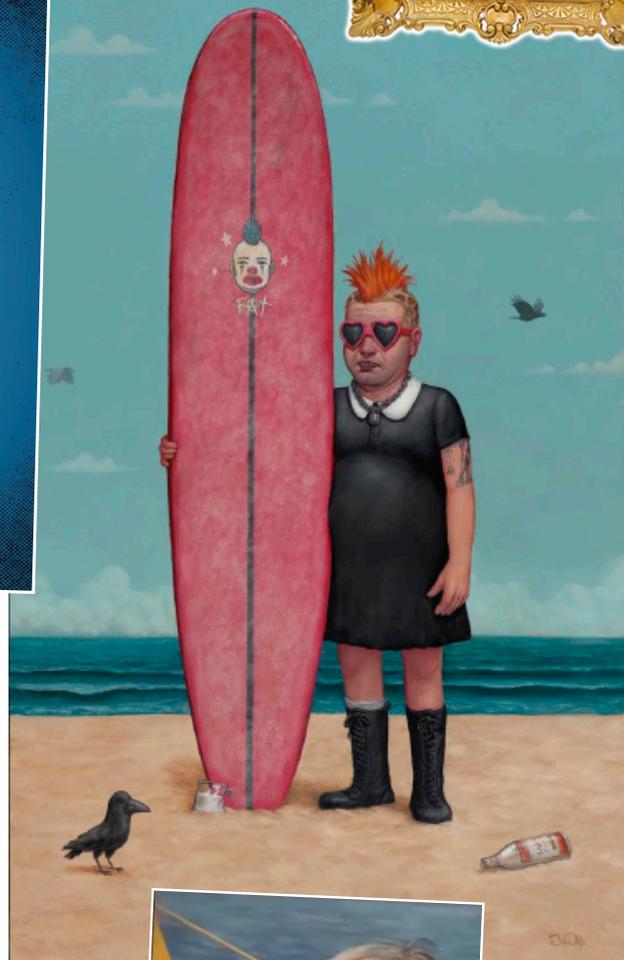
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# MARINA FLEMING

**Singer and songwriter Marina Fleming started writing** songs in middle school to make sense of her changing emotions.

"Music has always been there for me as an outlet to express my longing, frustration, or excitement," she says. "In high school, I started producing my music, experimenting with electronic sounds and vocal distortion. I would perform by myself with an electric guitar. A few years later, I started writing songs with a harder sound and collaborating with other musicians to create a really strong live sound. That was when I really fell in love with performing."

In describing her sound, Fleming says that she writes confessional songs. "Most of my songs have been about that ramshackle bridge between childhood and adulthood, because that has been my experience in life so far," she says. "Sonically, I am very influenced by '60s pop, '80s new wave, and 2010s indie rock. I love experimenting with layered guitar tracks, digital synths, unexpected vocoders, and accordion played through guitar pedals. I love creating songs with a dream-like atmosphere."

That can be heard in her new record, *Groupies in the Age of Consent*, "an emotional roller-coaster ride about a girl who runs away from home to become a groupie. Along the way, she encounters fleeting friendships, father figures, a taste of freedom, and a sobering coming of age. It was such a life-changing experience to record and produce this album. And it is so, so rewarding to perform these songs live with my incredible band."

As far as Fleming is concerned, as an artist, DIY is everything. "It means fighting through the learning curve, whether that be learning an instrument intuitively, recording an album in my dorm room, watching endless YouTube tutorials on how to master songs, getting photo shop free trial to make a show poster, screen printing last minute band merch, learning how to change my own guitar strings in a pinch, because I believe in my music. Because when you're an artist, you can't wait around for someone to do it for you. That sense of agency can transform your life."

Looking ahead, Fleming is planning a DIY West Coast tour of The Bay, Seattle, Portland, and Oregon with Lomie Blum, ("my bass player, roommate, and bestie") who is set to release an album if her own with Fleming producing.

"After that, I would love to go on tour with a larger artist as the opener Fleming says. "I think it would be such a meaningful way for people to hear my songs for the first time."

Visit [instagram.com/marinawfleming](https://www.instagram.com/marinawfleming)



## THE LEGAL BEAT

BY GLENN LITWAK



ON OCTOBER 26, 2025, Universal Music Group announced it had settled a copyright case with A.I. music company Udio. The copyright infringement lawsuit was filed last year by UMG, Sony Music, Warner Music Group, and the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) against Udio and another A.I. company, Suno. The plaintiffs contend that A.I. companies are subject to copyright law the same as all other companies.

The plaintiffs alleged that hundreds of songs by top artists were copied. This lawsuit is one of several high-profile ones brought by copyright holders against A.I. companies for using their work.

## UMG SETTLES COPYRIGHT CASE WITH A.I. COMPANY

The lawsuit was filed last year and UMG claimed that Udio committed copyright infringement on a "almost unimaginable scale" by using UMG's recordings to train its A.I. models. The plaintiffs were seeking "an injunction and damages commensurate with the scope of Udio's massive and ongoing infringement."

The UMG lawsuit only concerned sound recordings. However, the settlement covers music publishing as well. When the new platform launches in 2026, UMG artists and songwriters will have the chance to "opt in" and receive financial compensation for the training of A.I. model as well as its outputs.

UMG's press release indicates: "The new subscription service will transform the user engagement experience, creating a licensed and protected environment to customize, stream, and share music responsibly on the Udio platform."

UMG's new platform will, for instance, allow users to create new mashups and remixes to existing licensed music. The

two companies will launch the new platform next year. The settlement also includes monetary compensation for UMG, which has not been disclosed. In litigation, it is typical for a monetary settlement to be kept confidential.

Andrew Sanchez, the CEO of Udio, stated: "This moment brings to life everything we've been building toward—uniting A.I. and the music industry in a way that truly champions artists. Together, we're building the technological and business landscape that will fundamentally expand what's possible in music creation and engagement."

Sir Lucien Grange, the Chairman of UMG, stated the settlement provisions "demonstrate our commitment to do what's right by our artists and songwriters, whether that means embracing new technologies, developing new business models, diversifying revenue streams or beyond."

Not many more details of the settlement are available. This settlement would seem to undermine some A.I. companies'

hopes that they could use licensed music without restriction or compensation.

UMG has also entered into agreements with what it calls "responsible" A.I. companies such as Soundlab and Klay. Warner and Sony Music are still pursuing their lawsuits against Udio and Suno.

**GLENN LITWAK** is a veteran music and entertainment attorney based in Santa Monica, CA. He has represented platinum selling recording artists, music producers and hit songwriters, as well as management and production companies, music publishers and independent record labels. Glenn is also a frequent speaker at music industry conferences around the country, such as SXSW and the Billboard Music in Film and TV Conference. Glenn has been selected as a "Super Lawyer" by *Super Lawyer Magazine* for 2022-2026. Email Glenn at [gllaw59@gmail.com](mailto:gllaw59@gmail.com) or check out his website at [glennlitwak.com](http://glennlitwak.com)

The above is a brief overview of the subject and does not constitute legal advice.

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## ABSOLIGHT

**Style:** Rock, Alt-Rock  
**Location:** Quebec, Canada  
**Web:** absolightmusic.com

## AFRIQUA

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Berlin, Germany  
**Web:** instagram.com/afriquamusical

## AKIRA GALAXY

**Style:** Alt-Pop  
**Location:** Seattle, WA  
**Web:** akiragalaxy.com

## ALEXA VILLA

**Style:** Dance, Electronic  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** alexavilla.com

## ALIEN BOYS

**Style:** Punk  
**Location:** Vancouver, Canada  
**Web:** alienboys.ca

## ALIX

**Style:** Singer-Songwriter  
**Location:** Bay Area, CA  
**Web:** soundcloud.com/alixfullerton

## ANA POPOVIC

**Style:** Blues/Rock  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** anapopovic.com

## ANDY MCKEE

**Style:** Acoustic  
**Location:** Topeka, KS  
**Web:** andymckee.com

## ANDY PEAKE & THE PEAKE POCKETS

**Style:** Blues/Roots/Americana  
**Location:** Nashville, TN  
**Web:** andypeake.com

## ANNA TIVEL

**Style:** Singer-Songwriter  
**Location:** Portland, OR  
**Web:** annativel.com

## ARDALAN

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** San Francisco, CA  
**Web:** instagram.com/ardalander

## THE ATOMIC CAFE

**Style:** Rock, Pop  
**Location:** Ann Arbor, MI  
**Web:** theatomiccafeband.com

## AZRUM

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Anonymous  
**Web:** instagram.com/iamazrum

## BEC

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Berlin, Germany  
**Web:** instagram.com/listentobec

## BEN LANDSVERK

**Style:** Americana, Folk, Country, Rock  
**Location:** Portland, OR  
**Web:** benlandsverk.com

## BETWEEN FRIENDS

**Style:** Indie Rock, Electropop  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** itsbetweenfriends.com

## BLACK V NECK

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Miami, FL  
**Web:** blackvneckmusic.com

## BRENDA CARSEY

**Style:** Singer-Songwriter  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** brendacarseyart.com

## BUSHFIRE

**Style:** Punk  
**Location:** Long Beach, CA  
**Web:** instagram.com/bushfire\_is\_dad

## CARAVAN222

**Style:** Outlaw Country, Psych-Rock  
**Location:** San Francisco, CA  
**Web:** caravan222.com

## CARDINAL BLACK

**Style:** Alt-Rock, Soul  
**Location:** Wales, U.K.  
**Web:** thecardinalblack.com

## CHARLOTTE DICKSON

**Style:** Alt-Pop  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** instagram.com/charlottedicksonofficial

## CHIMERA

**Style:** Hardcore  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** instagram.com/chimera\_hc

## CHUCK PROPHET

**Style:** Cumbia Pop  
**Location:** San Francisco, CA  
**Web:** chuckprophet.com

## COURTNEY HADWIN

**Style:** Rock, Pop  
**Location:** Durham, U.K.  
**Web:** courtneyhadwinmusic.com

## CREEDS

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Fréjus, France  
**Web:** instagram.com/creeds\_official

## DAGGER POLYESTER

**Style:** Punk, Glam, Art-Rock  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** daggerpolyester.com

## DAUGHTER OF SWORDS

**Style:** Indie Groove Rock  
**Location:** Durham, NC  
**Web:** daughterofswordsmusic.com

## DEEP SEA DIVER

**Style:** Noise Rock  
**Location:** Seattle, WA  
**Web:** deepseadiver.com

## DESS DIOR

**Style:** Hip-Hop  
**Location:** Atlanta, GA  
**Web:** instagram.com/1dessdior

## DIJON

**Style:** R&B/Indie Rock  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** dijondijon.com

## DIM KELLY

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Brussels, Belgium  
**Web:** instagram.com/dimkelly\_music

## ELLE BELLE

**Style:** Garage Rock  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** instagram.com/ellebelleband

## ELLISE

**Style:** Alt-Pop  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** ellise.wtf

## ERNIE NICKELS

**Style:** Rock/Pop  
**Location:** Nashville, TN  
**Web:** ernienickels.com

## FAY DEAN

**Style:** Singer-Songwriter  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** instagram.com/faydeanie

## FISE

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Panama  
**Web:** instagram.com/satisfies

## GIRLI

**Style:** Alt-Pop  
**Location:** London, U.K.  
**Web:** girlimusic.com

## GOJNEA76

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Bucharest, Romania  
**Web:** instagram.com/gojne76

## GRABBITZ

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Buffalo, NY  
**Web:** instagram.com/grabbitz

## JACKIE VENSON

**Style:** Blues, Electro-Funk, R&B  
**Location:** Austin, TX  
**Web:** jackievenson.com

## JAY HOLLYWOOD

**Style:** Hip-Hop, Rap  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** jayhollywood.co

## JEFF DRACO

**Style:** Indie-Pop  
**Location:** Washington, D.C.  
**Web:** jeffdraco.com

## KANEB ANDREWS

**Style:** Indie-Folk, Singer-Songwriter  
**Location:** Brooklyn, NY  
**Web:** instagram.com/kanebandrews

## KATIE

**Style:** Alt-Pop  
**Location:** Brooklyn, NY  
**Web:** instagram.com/katiemadison

## KELLIE ROSE

**Style:** Singer-Songwriter  
**Location:** Seattle, WA  
**Web:** kellierose.com

## KIKI FEEL

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** London, U.K.  
**Web:** instagram.com/kiki\_feel

## KITTY KASH

**Style:** House  
**Location:** Brooklyn, NY  
**Web:** instagram.com/kittycash

## LADY TAZZ

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** California, Toronto, Europe  
**Web:** instagram.com/dj\_ladytazz

## LEXA GATES

**Style:** Hip-Hop  
**Location:** Queens, NY  
**Web:** instagram.com/lexagates

**MUSIC CONNECTION'S ANNUAL LIST OF UNSIGNED LIVE PERFORMERS** puts the spotlight on individuals and bands who delivered unique excitement, expert musicianship and intriguing songcraft to stages during the past year. In addition to *MC* staffers and freelance writers, the contributors to this list include producers, club bookers, music attorneys, managers, agents and other industry professionals. Currently, *MC* has reviewers in Los Angeles, New York, Detroit, Seattle, Asheville and Nashville. Livestreams are also part of our offerings. So, to be considered for a live review, go to [musicconnection.com/reviews/get-reviewed](http://musicconnection.com/reviews/get-reviewed).

## LOLA CERISE

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Paris, France  
**Web:** [instagram.com/lola\\_cerise](http://instagram.com/lola_cerise)

## LØLØ

**Style:** Alternative, Indie  
**Location:** Toronto, Canada  
**Web:** [itslolomusic.com](http://itslolomusic.com)

## LORD FRIDAY THE 13TH

**Style:** Trash-Glam, Punk  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [lordfridaythe13th.com](http://lordfridaythe13th.com)

## LUCIFENA

**Style:** Metal, Trap  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [instagram.com/lucifenaa](http://instagram.com/lucifenaa)

## MAIA SHARP

**Style:** Singer-Songwriter  
**Location:** Nashville, TN  
**Web:** [maiasharp.com](http://maiasharp.com)

## MARADO

**Style:** Alternative Soul  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [instagram.com/therealmarado](http://instagram.com/therealmarado)

## MARIA ELLIS

**Style:** Pop  
**Location:** Long Island, NY  
**Web:** [instagram.com/mariaellis\\_](http://instagram.com/mariaellis_)

## MARIELLE KRAFT

**Style:** Singer-Songwriter  
**Location:** Nashville, TN  
**Web:** [mariellekraft.com](http://mariellekraft.com)

## MARINA FLEMING

**Style:** Singer-Songwriter  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [instagram.com/marinafleming](http://instagram.com/marinafleming)

## THE MEMORIES

**Style:** Indie-Rock  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [instagram.com/thememories420](http://instagram.com/thememories420)

## MISS MOLLIE

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Liverpool, U.K.  
**Web:** [instagram.com/missmollie\\_dj](http://instagram.com/missmollie_dj)

## MK.GEE

**Style:** Indie Rock  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [mkgee.com](http://mkgee.com)

## MONRROE

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Bath/Bristol, U.K.  
**Web:** [instagram.com/monroe\\_uk](http://instagram.com/monroe_uk)

## MONSTERWATCH

**Style:** Eccentric Alt-Punk  
**Location:** Seattle, WA  
**Web:** [m0nsterwatch.com](http://m0nsterwatch.com)

## MOTHE

**Style:** Alt-Pop  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [instagram.com/mothemothemothe](http://instagram.com/mothemothemothe)

## MXGPU

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Lisbon, Portugal  
**Web:** [instagram.com/mxgpu](http://instagram.com/mxgpu)

## MYKEL

**Style:** Pop, Singer-Songwriter  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [mykelverse.com](http://mykelverse.com)

## THE MYNABIRDS

**Style:** Indie-Pop  
**Location:** Omaha, NE  
**Web:** [themynabirds.org](http://themynabirds.org)

## MZ NEON

**Style:** Synth-Pop, Rap  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [instagram.com/mz\\_neon](http://instagram.com/mz_neon)

## NAMI

**Style:** R&B/Alt-Pop  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [namiondas.com](http://namiondas.com)

## NICOLE MOUDABER

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** London, U.K.  
**Web:** [instagram.com/nicolemoudaber](http://instagram.com/nicolemoudaber)

## NIGHT TALKS

**Style:** Alt-Rock  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [nighttalks.com](http://nighttalks.com)

## NOIZINSKI

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Paris, France  
**Web:** [instagram.com/noizinski](http://instagram.com/noizinski)

## NOVA TWINS

**Style:** Rock  
**Location:** London, U.K.  
**Web:** [novatwins.co.uk](http://novatwins.co.uk)

## PATRIA JACOBS

**Style:** Americana  
**Location:** Palm Desert/Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [patriajacobs.com](http://patriajacobs.com)

## PATTERSON HOOD

**Style:** Indie Soul Pop  
**Location:** Athens, GA  
**Web:** [pattersonhood.com](http://pattersonhood.com)

## PHIA MOORE

**Style:** Singer-Songwriter  
**Location:** Long Beach, CA  
**Web:** [phiamoore.com](http://phiamoore.com)

## POPPIES

**Style:** Indie-Rock  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [instagram.com/auderpopz](http://instagram.com/auderpopz)

## POPPY JEAN CRAWFORD

**Style:** Alternative, Indie  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [instagram.com/poppyjeancrawford](http://instagram.com/poppyjeancrawford)

## PRETENCE

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Sydney, Australia  
**Web:** [pretencemusic.com](http://pretencemusic.com)

## RACHAEL SAGE & THE SEQUINS

**Style:** Alt-Pop  
**Location:** New York, NY  
**Web:** [rachaelsage.com](http://rachaelsage.com)

## RUBY FRIEDMAN ORCHESTRA

**Style:** Alt-Rock, Country, Blues  
**Location:** Portland, OR  
**Web:** [rubyfriedmanorchestra.com](http://rubyfriedmanorchestra.com)

## SAGE ARMSTRONG

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [instagram.com/sagearmstrong](http://instagram.com/sagearmstrong)

## SAINT GARDENIA

**Style:** Pop  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [saintgardeniaofficial.com](http://saintgardeniaofficial.com)

## SAVANNAH POPE

**Style:** Art-Rock  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [instagram.com/iamsavannahpoppe](http://instagram.com/iamsavannahpoppe)

## SHADIENT

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** London, U.K.  
**Web:** [instagram.com/shadient](http://instagram.com/shadient)

## SHAMON CASSETTE

**Style:** Dance, Electronic, Hip-Hop  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [shamoncassette.com](http://shamoncassette.com)

## SHEVA ELLIOT

**Style:** Rock 'n' Soul  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [sheva-elliott.com](http://sheva-elliott.com)

## SIMBASÖL

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Montreal, Canada  
**Web:** [instagram.com/simbazol\\_sounds](http://instagram.com/simbazol_sounds)

## SOL CHYLD

**Style:** Hip-Hop  
**Location:** Camden, NJ  
**Web:** [solchylid.com](http://solchylid.com)

## SOUL HUSTLER

**Style:** Rock, Soul  
**Location:** Detroit, MI  
**Web:** [facebook.com/soulhustlersound](http://facebook.com/soulhustlersound)

## SPOOKY MARVIN

**Style:** Alt-Rock, Post-Punk  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [spookymarvin.com](http://spookymarvin.com)

## TAZ

**Style:** Rock  
**Location:** New York City, NY  
**Web:** [tazguitar.com](http://tazguitar.com)

## TOBIAS PAUL

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Essex, U.K.  
**Web:** [instagram.com/tobiaspaul\\_](http://instagram.com/tobiaspaul_)

## TOTAL WIFE

**Style:** Experimental Pop  
**Location:** Nashville, TN  
**Web:** [totalwife.bandcamp.com](http://totalwife.bandcamp.com)

## THE VIOLENT HOUR

**Style:** Hard Rock, Metal  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [theviolenthour.com](http://theviolenthour.com)

## THE VOIDS

**Style:** Punk  
**Location:** Orange County, CA  
**Web:** [thevoids.bigcartel.com](http://thevoids.bigcartel.com)

## WHITNEY TAI

**Style:** Alt-Pop  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [instagram.com/whitneytai](http://instagram.com/whitneytai)

## WILL PAQUIN

**Style:** Indie  
**Location:** Boston, MA  
**Web:** [willpaquin.com](http://willpaquin.com)

## XIE

**Style:** Electronic  
**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Web:** [instagram.com/xiemusic](http://instagram.com/xiemusic)



**▲ CAPITOL CMG'S BARNES**

Capitol Christian Music Group Publishing signs Dave Barnes to exclusive publishing. Credits include Carrie Underwood, Billy Currington, Florida Georgia Line, Tim McGraw, Reba McEntire, Dan & Shay, etc. "God Gave Me You" (Shelton) and "Craving You" (Rhett/Morris) both hit No. 1.

**▶ RIAA CROWNS DAIGLE**

With multiple awards, billions of streams, years of sold-out global tours, Lauren Daigle was the first woman to hit Top 20 on *Billboard* Pop and Christian charts simultaneously, first artist with 100 weeks as Top Christian No. 1. 6x platinum "You Say" remains longest No. 1 on any *Billboard* chart.



**▲ PWM JOINS LABELLE**

Primary Wave Music partners with multi-award-winning Patti LaBelle for catalog artist royalties. Selling 50+ million records globally, 42 singles hit *Billboard*'s Hot R&B/hip-hop song charts, 20 albums on *Billboard* 200. Includes "Lady Marmalade," "If Only You Knew," "New Attitude," "On My Own."

**SMP Acquires Elements**

Sony Music Publishing (SMP) has acquired a large stake in Finland's Elements Music, including their catalog of about 10,000 published works. Partnering to enhance Elements' roster support through SMP Scandinavia and SMP's resources, Elements will continue the work they are doing, while the duo collaborate to strengthen Finnish music on a global scale.

Elements Music has been Finland's lead independent music publisher since 2005 and represents songwriters including Axel Ehnstrom, Johannes Brotherus (KUUMAA), OLGA, Jonas Olsson, Timo Kiiskinen, Kyosti Salokorpi, Samuli Sirvio, and BESS. Their catalog includes Eppu Normaali, Yö, and Popeda.

**ASCAP Experience Returns**

This February, creatives and executives from across the music community will gather in Los Angeles for advice, insights, and opportunities to expand their work in the industry at the ASCAP Experience music conference. Designed to help songwriter and composers thrive, the day will include advice from industry pros on how to build your skillset, improve your writing, monetize your work, and add new streams of income. Attendees receive face-to-face networking opportunities for potential future collaborations and live performances from hit songwriters.

Stream past events at [ascapexperience.com/on-demand](http://ascapexperience.com/on-demand), with tickets to this year's at [ascapexperience.com/buy-tickets](http://ascapexperience.com/buy-tickets).



**▲ BOMAR'S SUNG BLUE**

Producer-engineer-composer Scott Bomar returns with music for Craig Brewer's *Sung Blue* this month. Credits include *Hustle & Flow*, *Black Snake Moan*, *Soul Men*, *Mississippi Grind*, work with Cyndi Lauper, William Bell, Anthony Hamilton, and he is bandleader/bassist for The Bo-Keys.

**Too Lost Gets Xposure**

Independent music distributor Too Lost has joined Xposure Music for ongoing music financing, with Too Lost to distribute and co-fund catalog acquisitions sourced and underwritten by Xposure. Using machine learning to evaluate music catalogs, Xposure Music (founded in 2021 in Montreal) provides financing to artists. Moving forward, Xposure will handle the deal sourcing and financial underwriting and valuation, while Too Lost will manage the global distribution, rights administration and royalty processing once deals close.

**Songsalive! FREE Membership**

After 24 years, Songsalive! is now offering a no-cost community plan for artists and creatives to connect and share. As the largest non-profit community for songwriters and composers worldwide, the organization offers an all-access pass to the business of songwriting, with support, education, and development opportunities for songwriters at every levels. Learn more at [songsalive.org](http://songsalive.org)

**Kobalt/umn Acquire Plate/Sommer**

Kobalt and umn (formed a year ago by ex-BMG executives Dominique Casimir, Maximilian Kolb, and Justus Haerder) have joined forces to acquire the authors' share and publishing rights of songwriters Peter Plate and Ulf Leo Sommer, raising the bar for German music rights acquisition. Plate/Sommer's work has been a staple in Germany since the early 1990s and includes chart toppers and platinum albums.

Covering the duo's full catalog, including their Rosenstolz era and hits written for artists including Sarah Connor (*Muttersprache*), Roland Kaiser, Max Raabe, Zweiraumwohnung, etc., the purchase also includes work on German kids' film franchise *Bibi & Tina* (with billion-plus streams). Musical work on Berlin's Theater des Westens (*Ku'damm 56*, *Ku'damm 59*, *Romeo & Julia - Liebe ist alles*, *Die Amme* is a part of the deal as well). Plate/Sommer's combined work now has almost three billion streams. The duo has said that the sale will mean more time and capacity to focus on developing their new theatre works (including upcoming musical *Wir sind am Leben*).

**BMI / ASCAP / SOCAN..... A.I.**

Three major U.S.-based PROs have released their new A.I. registration rules, jointly announcing that they are giving the go-ahead

for "registrations of musical compositions partially generated using artificial intelligence (A.I.) tools." Despite the potential 'partial' use of A.I. and machine learning to create these works, creatives will not be compensated differently.

For BMI's part in the discussion, they have indicated that this also applies to "substantial A.I.-generated elements," provide they are "integrated into a human-led creative process." There is also mention that registered works must meet the "U.S. Copyright's standard of the minimum threshold for human creativity." BMI 'recommends'—but does not require—disclosing the use of A.I. in registered works. It is unclear as to what is *not* covered under this new mandate.

### Warner's Italy, Oz & UAE

Warner Music Italy has announced the launch of two new frontline labels: Warner Records Italy and Atlantic Records Italy, in an expansion as part of its 50th anniversary. Looking to grow their focused and personalized teams across a changing landscape, Eleanora Rubini has been appointed Label Director of Warner Records Italy, while Marco Masoli will act as Label Director of Atlantic Records Italy. President of WM Italy, Pico Cibelli, and Vice President, Gianluca Guido, will serve as liaison between the two labels.

Expanding their footprint in Australia, WCM signs songwriter Sam Hale to global publishing for the entirety of his catalog and future works, alongside label Rico O Muerto (co-founded by Oscar Maydon and Alexis Fierro). Producing and writing as frontman of The Jungle Giants, Hale and the Giants have garnered almost a billion global streams, have a 31 ARIA-charting album, in addition to touring globally. Co-writing credits include Hermitude, RENEE, electronic remixes with Odd Mob, Joe Goddard (Hot Chip), Chromeo, Tom Trago, and he produced The Wombats' *Love Fame Tragedy*, *Murph* lead single.

WMG has also launched a label in Riyadh through a partnership with Saudi Arabia's multimedia company Merwas. With 22 studios and creative spaces forming 'the largest studio in the world,' Merwas is looking to help attract prominent international artists as well as encouraging local talent (adding to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 framework). Roster details to be announced.

### Virgin Joins MiPROMO

Virgin Music Group has announced a global distribution partnership with Ghana's decades-old digital distribution and creative media platform, MiPROMO. Virgin continues to invest in Africa's creative community and MiPROMO adds digital and video distribution, social media marketing, web publishing, branding, and event expertise in the region. The partnership provides Ghanaian artists enhanced platform access platforms and increased, longer-term promotional opportunities worldwide. MiPROMO's neo-media has helped Ghanaian artists leverage their musical talents into a source of income and builds confident while supporting their digital efforts. MiPROMO's existing systems will continue, adding Virgin's international reach and broad services to their menu of offerings.

### WME Scoops Maesic

Breakout French producer-DJ Maesic signs with WM (Steve Hogan). Named *Billboard's* Dance Rookie of the Month (June 2025) and 1001Tracklist's "Top 101 Producers" on "Future of Dance" power list, Maesic blends tech-house, EDM, Afro House, melodic techno, with his hit track, "Life Is Simple (Move Your Body)" reaching house anthem status with 60M+ total streams.

### Ireland's Artist Income

Setting the standard for artists everywhere, Ireland is making their basic income for artists program permanent as of 2026. Initially launching as a trial run in 2022 (as part of a COVID relief initiative), selected artists will receive about \$350 per week (\$1,500 a month). 2,000 spots are available under next year's launch, with hopes to expand as funding allows (applications open in September 2026). Pilot results showed an increase in time spent on creative work and improved overall wellbeing. Minister of Culture, Communications, and Sport, Patrick O'Donovan, shared that he sees a positive impact on the overall economy.

**ANDREA BEENHAM** (aka Drea Jo) is a freelance writer and marketing consultant based in Southern California. The South-African born, Canadian-raised California transplant has a passion for music, people and fun. She can be reached at [drea@dreaajo.com](mailto:drea@dreaajo.com)



### ▲ BILLBOARD'S ICONIC ESTEFANS

BMI presented *Billboard* Latin Music week's "Icon Q&A" with Gloria Estefan and Emilio Estefan, discussing their creative journey, ongoing influence, and global fan connection. The two touched on early inspiration, their songwriting/composition approach, and career-defining collaborations.



### ▲ THICK RICH AND DELICIOUS

Lo-fi classic rockers Guided By Voices release new album *Thick Rich and Delicious* (GBV Inc. Records). Produced/engineered by Travis Harrison, tracks were cut live in a Brooklyn studio with minimal overdubs (l-r: Robert Pollard, Doug Gillard, Bobby Bare Jr., Mark Shue, and Kevin March).



### ▲ BLANCHARD'S LUMINARY AWARD

Spike Lee's go-to composer Terence Blanchard receives Eastman School's Luminary Award. 75+ film/television scores (*BlacKkKlansman*, *Da 5 Bloods*, *Mo' Better Blues*, *25th Hour*, etc.) later, the GRAMMY, EMMY, and NEA Jazz Master recipient remains a passionate jazz advocate/educator.

# Band Conflict? Partnership Issues? Royalty Disputes?



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## Minami Minami: Tenacious Path

"I've taken the challenge even though I wasn't qualified at all at the time. Pushing yourself and not being scared can really take you places. I'm living proof of that."

Raised in Kobe, Japan, Minami Minami is the perfect example of having a clear purpose and watching it unfold. Babysitting for four or five families a week by age 10 and singing in choirs as a child, music came knocking at age 14. "I had a knowing I was going to be a part of the music industry," she says. "I already had goals, who I wanted to work with, and was telling all my friends." As part of an international school, her peers were focused on getting accepted into prestigious colleges, but she wasn't interested. "I was the only one that didn't take the SATs because I knew I was going to Tokyo," she adds.

In 2008, friend Young Kirk was offered an opening spot for Chingy in exchange for ticket sales. Minami offered to help, sold 60 tickets, and was invited to sit in alongside Kirk's bandmate Staxx T. Following the show, the duo asked her to join the group (lyse). The trio didn't work out, but Minami and Staxx T formed Hip-Hop duo Cream.

Relocating to Tokyo, Minami soon met Rapper-producer Verbal, of Hip-Hop group M-Flo, telling him she would one day work with him. Six months later, she began door-knocking at agencies, inadvertently on a national holiday with no one around—apart from one nice car in the garage. Catching sight of the car at a red-light Minami, ran over and gave the driver a demo. It was the CEO of the agency, and Cream was signed the next day. Within three years, Minami was songwriting with Verbal. Her first credit for K-pop artist BoA (through Verbal) changed her career trajectory, with credits now including M-Flo, Namie Amuro, BoA, ICONIQ, and V6.

In 2011, Cream launched their YouTube channel (, one of the first in Japan to be music-driven (now with 25,000,000+ views, 260,000+ subscribers). Translating hit songs into Japanese, and releasing a new song every week for two years, sporadically adding in originals. "It was a lot of work," admits Minami. "People were not getting paid; there was no monetizable system. We struggled with the monetization part of music for a really long time."

Covid brought major challenges. Quitting their agency and leaving their record company, Staxx T was arrested for marijuana possession (right after launching StUFF brand), and there was a quarantine music festival scandal. Minami's fiancé—who she was in a very public relationship with—cheated on her with a porn star. Recognizing a pattern of horrible relationships, and a need to choose differently, she quit smoking, quit drinking, and went into a period of deep reflection, discovering Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's theory of the seven stages of grief (Minami adds that there is no such thing as therapy in Japan). While she could conceptualize Kübler-Ross' theories, she couldn't pinpoint the feeling of each stage. Wanted to create a project that helped walk listeners through grief, her journey inspired upcoming EP, seven.

Fernando Garibay (Lady Gaga, Kylie Minogue, Armen Van Burren) appeared magically through a mutual contact and, loving Minami's concept, brought Ramiro and Daniel Padilla as co-producers, and Nasri (vocalist/songwriter from Magic) to help on vocals. Working with Garibay's team in Los Angeles proved life-changing. Calling her out on her victim mindset, Garibay helped her become more self-aware. "I started to realize the words I was choosing were putting me in that frequency and I needed to get out of it," confesses Minami. "You need to take responsibility and stand in it to completely come out of it."

Doing her best to enjoy the ride on her solo work (as advised by Verbal), and to be more present than she was on the initial ascent with Cream, seven is out in Q1. 2025's singles "How Could You?" "In My Head," "Black Dress," and "Please" follow 2022's "Broken Heart" (released a week after her breakup). Cream's new album is anticipated later in 2026.

Contact Deborah Radel @ DR PR / [deborah@drpr.us](mailto:deborah@drpr.us)  
Visit [instagram.com/minamiminami.official](https://www.instagram.com/minamiminami.official)  
Photo Credit: NaeJay



# Loop Earplugs Continues Its Mission To Protect the World's Hearing in Comfort and Style

**M**usicians have a vested interest in protecting their ears, as does every other variety of individual with a passion for music. Sadly, the tendency for venues to blare music at dangerously high volumes puts everyone's hearing at risk. Once someone incurs damage or tinnitus develops, there's no going back.

The logical solution is to use earplugs, but doing so has traditionally been an unappealing prospect. They tend to be uncomfortable, make it difficult to hear music as properly intended, and just plain look unattractive. Maarten Bodewes became aware of these problems as a high school student growing up in Antwerp, Belgium. An ardent music fan, he was blessed to have Tomorrowland, the annual electronic festival that started in 2005, taking place nearby.

One year while attending college, he spent an evening out soaking up the nightlife. He'd been standing close to one of the speakers and, after he came home, experienced a shock. "I remember my ears hurting and wondering where that beeping sound was coming from," he recalls. In search of a remedy, Bodewes began trying every earplug on the market, but each fell short in various ways.

The budding entrepreneur decided the situation didn't have to be this way. Not only could earplugs be comfortable and effective, but they could also be cool. This notion sparked Loop, a fast-growing startup that's doing for earplugs what Ray-Ban once did for sunglasses. Founded in 2016 with his business partner Dimitri O, to date they've sold over 20 million pairs.

As one might expect, traversing the road to success took considerable effort. The cofounders first needed to create a design that was equal parts sexy and functional, a task they tackled through 3D printing. After countless iterations, they finally came up with Loop's iconic ring shape, which makes putting them in and taking them out a snap in comparison with disposable foam earplugs.

The outer ring also allows for a splash of creative flair. Customers can choose practically any color under the sun. In the early days, they used spray paint from their local Home Depot to see how various hues would look. Today, Loop creates snazzy patterns and styles through unique

partnerships. The limited edition Swarovski x Loop Experience 2 contains 12 Swarovski crystals, turning earplugs into genuine jewelry. Other versions are only available at specific locations. "Coachella was an ideal collaborator," says Bodewes, referencing the blue and orange edition sold exclusively at the famed gathering. Tomorrowland also offers its own one-of-a-kind Loop earplugs.

Since the concert experience was the



catalyst for the company's formation, its original name was Loop Nightlife. It wasn't until 2020 when COVID shuttered live performances that their mission expanded. They began branching out by designing versions optimized for other goals, like increased focus and getting a good night's sleep. Thus was born the Loop Dream, a potentially ideal option for traveling performers craving rest before a big show. It's made out of soft silicone so, if the wearer sleeps on their side, it puts minimal pressure on the inside of the ear canal.

For those whose primary concern remains hearing protection during concerts, the Loop Experience 2 is a better alternative. It offers crisp, clear sound while reducing volumes by 17dB. Anyone desiring control over how much noise gets blocked should consider the Loop Switch 2, as it contains a three-tier switch for different levels of noise obstruction.

A potential drawback to Loop Earplugs is that they require maintenance. They must be cleaned and, unlike many other earplugs, these devices are forever, so the ear tips must be periodically changed. On the plus side, having swappable tips means it's possible to experiment with different sizes to achieve maximum comfort. Additionally, handling these tasks is relatively simple. Loop's website contains explicit instructions in both text and video.

While it's possible that formal musicians' earplugs are technically superior, this option comes with disadvantages. On top of the time needed to see an audiologist and have them created, they cost hundreds of dollars. Loop's best-selling earplugs currently list between \$24.95 and \$59.95 on their website. And if you don't like them for whatever reason, every purchase comes with a 100-day return policy.

Loop Earplugs used to be only available through their online storefront or Amazon. These days, they sit on shelves at physical retail outlets as well, including 640 Target locations across the United States. Although the company launched in Belgium, the team quickly realized America was hungry for their products. Loop is currently being sold in more than 150 countries, such as Canada, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and India. The biz achieved around \$190 million in revenue throughout 2024.

Loop is always working on improving their offerings. "We keep trying to create better products," emphasizes Bodewes. For instance, they're striving to reduce the occlusion effect, the disturbing sensation of your own voice sounding either muffled or booming, as though your head is trapped in a barrel. As the situation stands, he's noticed more and more concertgoers sporting the trendy devices. "Seeing people wearing our products," smiles the Belgian, "gives me a lot of pride."

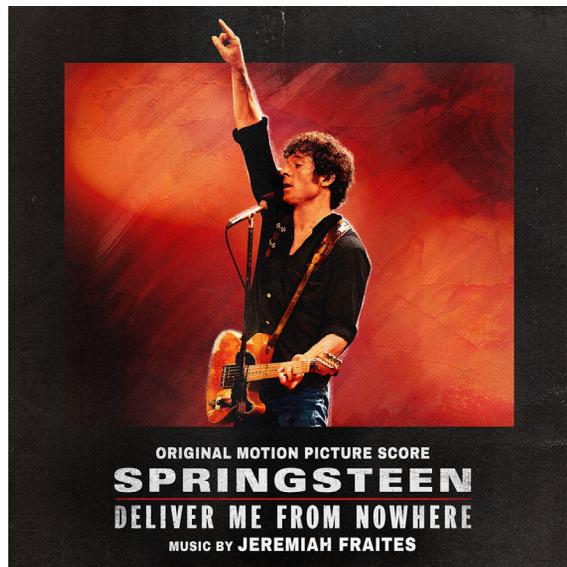
[loopearplugs.com](http://loopearplugs.com)

DROPS

*The Twits (Soundtrack from the Netflix Original Film)* has been released worldwide, which includes a score by composer Oli Julian that showcases his signature mix of wit, warmth, and orchestral creativity, as well songs by new wave/punk icon David Byrne of Talking Heads fame. The release accompanies the first-ever feature adaptation of beloved author Roald Dahl's classic children's tale, published in 1980. A lifelong admirer of Dahl, Julian captured the grotesque humor and heart of the animated comedy with a chaotic musical approach that combined banjos, jaw harps, Balkan brass, and musical saws with lush orchestral and choral textures. For more information, contact Christian Endicio at christian@whitebearpr.com.

Americana troubadour **Jim Stanard** continued his inspiring late-in-life musical rise with a featured interview and live performance on ABC7-TV's popular morning program *Suncoast View*, where hosts praised him for "seeing his dreams of a successful musical career come true." At 76, the Sarasota, FL, resident reached No. 1 on the RMR Charts and reached one million views on his recent music videos from his acclaimed album *Magical*. With heartfelt performances like "Lookin' Back" and cinematic storytelling in "Kansas," Stanard has been compared to Bob Dylan, Kris Kristofferson, and John Denver, proving it's never too late to chase the dream. Learn more by contacting Seth Cohen at seth@sethcohenpr.com.

*Ballad of a Small Player (Soundtrack from the Netflix Original Film)* is out now, featuring a score by Academy Award-winner **Volker Bertelmann**, who's known for work on *All's Quiet on the Western Front*, *Conclave* and more. For this film, Bertelmann teamed up with director Edward Berger and delivered an evocative, atmospheric soundscape that echoed the film's exploration of memory, loss, and redemption. Delicate piano motifs, textured strings, and haunting ambient tones come together to capture the story's melancholy, mystery, and the emotional turmoil of the



characters, played by Colin Ferrell, Fara Chen, and Tilda Swinton. For more information, contact Christian Endicio at christian@whitebearpr.com.

**Milan Records** released *Springsteen: Deliver Me from Nowhere (Original Motion Picture Score)*, featuring music by **Jeremiah Fraites** of The Lumineers. For the biographical film about one of rock music's most beloved icons, Bruce Springsteen, and the making of his acclaimed 1982 album *Nebraska*, Fraites composed an intimate and emotional score centered on a weathered upright piano, layered with warm synths and sweeping orchestral textures. His music evoked the raw vulnerability at the heart of Springsteen's story, which complements the film directed, written and produced by Scott Cooper and starring Jeremy Allen White as the Boss. Contact Christian Endicio at christian@whitebearpr.com for more information.

*Nobody Wants This Season 2: The Soundtrack* was released worldwide, featuring 19 all-new tracks from top artists including Selena Gomez, Chris Stapleton, Kacey Musgraves, Role Model, and more. The genre-spanning collection arrived alongside the second season of Netflix's hit rom-com, showcasing the GRAMMY-winning, multi-platinum selling Gomez's new single "In The Dark," a dance-pop anthem produced by Andrew Watt, Cirkut, and Louis Bell. Curated by The Core Records and Interscope, the album brought



together chart-topping stars and rising voices across pop, rock, and country to accompany the story of this unconventional romance, starring Kristen Bell and Adam Brody. For further details, contact Annabelle Bartsch at annabelle.bartsch@umusic.com.

*A House of Dynamite (Soundtrack from the Netflix Original Film)* is out now, showcasing a score by Academy Award-winner **Volker Bertelmann**. Teamed up once again with director Kathryn Bigelow, Bertelmann composed a textural score that pivots from quiet psychological unease to sweeping moral reckoning. Bertelmann uses low woodwinds, brass swells, pulsating bass, and subtle synth layers on these 26 tracks that deliver high tension to this dramatic apocalyptic thriller starring Idris Elba and Rebecca Ferguson. Contact Christian Endicio at christian@whitebearpr.com for more information.



## OPPS

November 15 is the early bird deadline to submit to the Berlin Music Video Awards of 2026. There are categories for best animation, narrative, song, low budget, cinematography, art director, most trashy, visual effects, editor, director, concept, most bizarre, experimental, and performer with special categories as well for cash prizes. Learn more and submit your work at [berlinmva.com/submit](http://berlinmva.com/submit).

The early bird deadline for the 37th Annual Festival of New Musicals is December 16, after which you must pay a \$40 fee until the final January 6 deadline. Your work can be featured in this long-running festival intended to celebrate and nurture musical theatre development and production. Learn about submission requirements and get your work in at [namt.org/newmusicals/festival-submissions](http://namt.org/newmusicals/festival-submissions).

The College Music Society (CMS) will host its 69th CMS National Conference in Grand Rapids, MI, November 12-14, 2026, in conjunction with the Association for Technology in Music Instruction (ATMI), National Association for Collegiate Wind and Percussion Instructors (NACWPI), and Pi Kappa Lambda (PKL), and they have issued a call for film and visual media scores due January 5, 2026. Learn more at [music.org/2026-calls-for-program-participation/call-for-film-visual-media-scores.html](http://music.org/2026-calls-for-program-participation/call-for-film-visual-media-scores.html).

## PROPS

Theater leaders, artists, and supporters came together this fall to launch Theatre Commons LA, a new community-powered nonprofit created to serve the entire Los Angeles theatre ecosystem. Its first initiative, [theatrecommonsla.org](http://theatrecommonsla.org), debuted as a public listings website simplifying how audiences discover current and upcoming shows across the region. Guided by a volunteer steering committee and supported by the Nonprofit Sustainability Initiative, TCLA's early work laid the foundation for growth. In September 2025, the Perenchio Foundation made a major investment, enabling TCLA to expand its mission and hire its first Executive Director, strengthening connections between L.A. audiences and stages. For more information, contact Tim Choy at [t.choy@dcpublicity.com](mailto:t.choy@dcpublicity.com).

The ninth annual Hollywood and African Prestigious Awards, or HAP Awards, took place November 1 in Los Angeles honoring actor and director Bill Duke, actor Glynn Turman, photographer Arnold Turner, and more. Started in 2017, the awards event honors American and African community leaders, international political figures, dignitaries, celebrities, and stars who are pioneers in the motion picture, arts, music, and comedy industries. Maskandi star Khuzani "Indlamlenze" Mpungose received the honor of Best Independent Artist this year. The organization's vision is to celebrate cultures and the arts while giving back through the I Dream 4 All Foundation, a nonprofit that provides educational empowerment to women and girls in Africa and worldwide. Contact Edna Sims at [espr@icloud.com](mailto:espr@icloud.com) for more information, or visit [hapawards.com](http://hapawards.com).

This fall, filmmaker Spike Lee's go-to composer **Terence Blanchard** was honored with the Luminary Award at Eastman School of Music's Soundtrax Film Music Festival. Soundtrax, North America's first film-music festival and conference, was held in October in Rochester, NY, the birthplace of motion picture film, fulfilling the school's and Eastman Kodak Company founder George Eastman's vision. During the event, Blanchard led the all-Black Gateways Festival Orchestra in selections from his 75+ film scores, including *BlackKkKlansman*, *Da 5 Bloods*, *Mo' Better Blues*, and *25th Hour*. Other highlights from the festival include A.I. and music production discussions with GRAMMY-winning engineer James Anderson (*Interstellar*, *The Revenant*, *Black Panther*), a rare performance of John Corigliano's *The Red Violin* with five-time Emmy-winning guest conductor Jeff Beal (*House of Cards*, *Blackfish*), organist Roger Sayer performing Hans Zimmer's score live on Rochester's historic Third Presbyterian Church Sanctuary Organ, and more. For more details, contact Luci Paczkowski at [lpaczkowski@shorefire.com](mailto:lpaczkowski@shorefire.com).

**JESSICA PACE** is a music journalist-turned-news-reporter based in Durango, CO. She is from Nashville, where she started a writing career by freelancing for publications including *American Songwriter* and *Music Connection*. Contact her at [j.marie.pace@gmail.com](mailto:j.marie.pace@gmail.com).

## OUT TAKE



## Dan Deacon

Composer

Website: [dandeacon.com](http://dandeacon.com)  
Most recent: *Task*

**DAN DEACON SAYS SCORING A FILM** is like baking a cake—and the score is the egg. It holds the cake together, but you don't want to taste it. This mentality has shaped his "nothing is precious" approach to scoring and helped him in his most recent work on the HBO series *Task*, for which he created a layered soundscape of electronic textures, piano, and experimental vocals to heighten the crime drama's emotion and tension.

As someone who had established himself in the indie electronic music scene by the late 2000s, film scoring wasn't necessarily something on Deacon's radar, but that changed through a surreal experience: legendary filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola contacted him after hearing Deacon discussing film and music in an NPR interview, established a rapport, eventually invited him to work on a film, and Deacon never looked back.

Deacon says learning to write for film was trial by fire, and he's learned a lot about working through doubt, including through projects such as Kelly Marcel's *Venom: The Last Dance*. "It was a huge film with a tight window, and I'd never done a studio film before. It was like taking mushrooms, finding out they're twice as strong as you thought, and then someone tells you some really intense news—every day," he says. "The pressure is real, but that's the fun part, and you have to lean into it and trust your ability to get it done."

His background as independent artist has shaped his composing style, which has a sonic density not usually associated with film composing, as well as his drive to pursue creative unknowns. "I think what drew me to film scoring was in part wanting to make more types of music than my albums allowed me," he says. "Every musician that does this has to have the drive to do something they've never done before."

Deacon also says aspiring film composers should seek out film festivals wherever they happen to live, and specifically seek out makers of short films.

▶ **CAUTIOUS CLAY SHARES SINGLE AND VISUALIZER FOR "5TH FLOOR (10PM)" FEAT. Q-TIP OFF NEW ALBUM THE HOURS: NIGHT**

Singer-songwriter, producer, and multi-instrumentalist Cautious Clay shared his latest single and visualizer, "5th Floor (10 PM)," ahead of releasing his album (via Concord Records). Featuring hip-hop pioneer Q-Tip and co-produced by the legendary Raphael Saadiq, the track beautifully intertwines Clay's introspective lyricism with the timeless musicianship of two of music's most influential icons.



▲ **GRACE VANDERWAAL RELEASES NEW SINGLE, "HIGH"**

Internationally acclaimed artist and actress Grace VanderWaal returns with her new single "High," out now via PULSE Records. The song arrives as the first taste of new music, following the release of her second album, earlier this year.



▲ **LARRY WEIR AND MICHAEL DAMIAN PROMOTE NEW SINGLE ON FOX 11**

*Publisher's Choice:* National Record Promotion's Larry Weir accompanied his client and brother Michael Damian to Fox 11 News to promote Michael's current radio single "Let Me Into Your Heart" (via Virgin Music Group). Photo L-R: Michael Damian, news host Marla Tellez, and Larry Weir.

◀ **EMEI RELEASES "TALK TALK TALK," TEAMED UP FOR ALL THINGS GO: 10 YEARS CHARITY COMPILATION BENEFITTING THE ALLY COALITION**

In 2023, All Things Go launched a partnership with The Ally Coalition (TAC) to further support LGBTQ+ youth through on-site programming and artist-driven engagement across its festival platforms. The charity compilation *All Things Go: 10 Years*, with all proceeds benefitting The Ally Coalition, recently revealed its sixth track: "Talk Talk Talk" by Emei, including production by Timfromthehouse and written by Emily Li, Tim Nelson, and Gigi Grombarcher.

## Tidbits From Our Tattered Past



### ▲ IV4 SHARES "STILL ALIVE"

IV4, AKA Ivana Petrovic, released a new single, "Still Alive," and its accompanying music video. The anthem of resilience signals a new era for the talented singer-songwriter. The song follows on the heels of previously released hit singles "Stroke" featuring Jeremih and "Swimming" featuring Trippie Redd.

### ▶ MARINA RELEASES PRINCESS OF POWER (DELUXE) FEATURING FIVE PREVIOUSLY UNRELEASED TRACKS

Following a whirlwind 2025 and fresh off her sold-out North American tour, internationally acclaimed, award-winning artist and author MARINA returns with the deluxe edition of her sixth studio album, *PRINCESS OF POWER*, out now via Queenie Records/BMG. Expanding on the fearless, self-assured energy of the original release, the deluxe album features five previously unreleased tracks, including the commanding new single "SEX IS POWER."



### ◀ ALMA MUÑECA RELEASES NEW SINGLES, EMBARKS ON FIRST TOUR

Alma Muñeca, a four-piece art-pop group based in Austin, TX, is led by vocalist and creative force Cocó Allegra and produced by Ernesto Grey. Blending the experimental spirit of '90s icons like Björk with the boundary-pushing artistry of FKA twigs and Rosalía, the band aims to amplify and celebrate the queer and Latino communities, bringing visibility and vibrancy to the stage. Alma Muñeca is now embarking on their first Texas tour in support of new singles, including the evocative "Anhelo," out now.



### 1995 - The Beatles - #1

On the cover in 1995 was the ever-iconic Beatles. The feature, "Re-Meet The Beatles!" celebrated the newly released album, calling it "a revelation" that proved "what a great live band they were." Chronicling performances recorded over 30 years ago, it captured the raw excitement of the group's early radio days. The article reflected how "John, Paul, George & Ringo played as if their lives depended on it," and that the BBC tapes revealed "their humor, spontaneity, and energy—untouched by studio polish." Simply put, "The Beatles were already legends in the making."



### 2005 - The Rolling Stones - #20

Gracing the cover in 2005, the Rolling Stones were still redefining rock decades into their career. Reflecting on drummer Charlie Watts' cancer diagnosis, Keith Richards recalled, "Mick and I looked at each other, like, 'How many did we start off with? You're one, I'm two... Do we just wait for Charlie?' Within seconds we knew that wouldn't do him any good... No, we'd carry on." On *A Bigger Bang* (2005), Mick Jagger said, "You write songs in many, many ways. There's not one way of writing." Richards added, "There was extra pressure... but the closer we work, the better it gets."

Limited back issues available to order at [musicconnection.com](http://musicconnection.com)

A portrait of Leon Thomas III, a Black man with long dreadlocks, wearing a patterned headwrap, black-rimmed glasses, and a blue denim jacket. He is sitting and looking slightly to the right. The background is a warm, textured wall with some greenery.

LEON THOMAS  
PHOLKS HAVE SOUL  
BY ERIC HARABADIAN

What is soul? Everyone from Parliament Funkadelic and Donny Hathaway to Aretha Franklin and the recently departed D'Angelo has defined and put their distinct stamp on it in some unique and indelible way. And while heartfelt lyrics, impassioned raw delivery, and an incendiary musical aesthetic are at the core of this R&B tradition, there are those artists who are embracing these elements, while at the same time re-designing and re-shaping them.

Leon Thomas III is one such musician; a contemporary practitioner and aficionado of the genre who has grown up in the arts and is set on embracing the mantle that he's accepted for well over 20 years now. And he's earnestly changing the game, yet respectful of its abundant legacy.

Signed to rapper Ty Dolla \$ign's Motown Records' imprint EZMNY (Easy Money), Thomas has recently rolled out his fifth record, the adventurous EP *PHOLKS*. Over the course of seven tracks, the young singer-songwriter takes you on a musical journey of epic proportions.

"With *PHOLKS* it's nice because I'm just being true to myself on it," explains Thomas. "It is definitely a representation of me not compromising to be recognized. I'm just being me, you know? You get to hear me playing drums, bass, guitar, lead vocals and keys on the album. But, for a lot of the tracks, shout out to my co-producers David Phelps and Freaky Rob. They really hit the bulk of a lot of the instrumentation because those guys are beasts, man. They really locked it in."

The dreadlocked 30-something auteur draws on a rich tapestry of influences in crafting this new recording, with a sonic melting cauldron of rich psychedelic rock, funk, progressive, jazzy and, of course, soulful touchstones. Songs like "5 More Minutes" and "Lone Wolf" blend ambient textures, with lush vocals. "Baccarat" features dynamic guitar riffs and "My Muse" and "Just How You Are" run the gamut from old school R&B to classic '80s-style Prince.

"I'm just really honing in on my love for the '70s and soul, rock and funk music," says Thomas. "At my shows there's like no LED screens with a bunch of high tech visuals and things going on. It's really about stripping it back to what you might have seen back in the day at a Prince show, or even a Hendrix show. With them it was really about the music and the performance where the band is up front. They're live and center, with the lights locked in and the stage design is amazing. But it's not necessarily this big extravagant thing. And it's about connection. I'm excited for people to connect with me in a way that maybe I haven't been able to present prior to this."

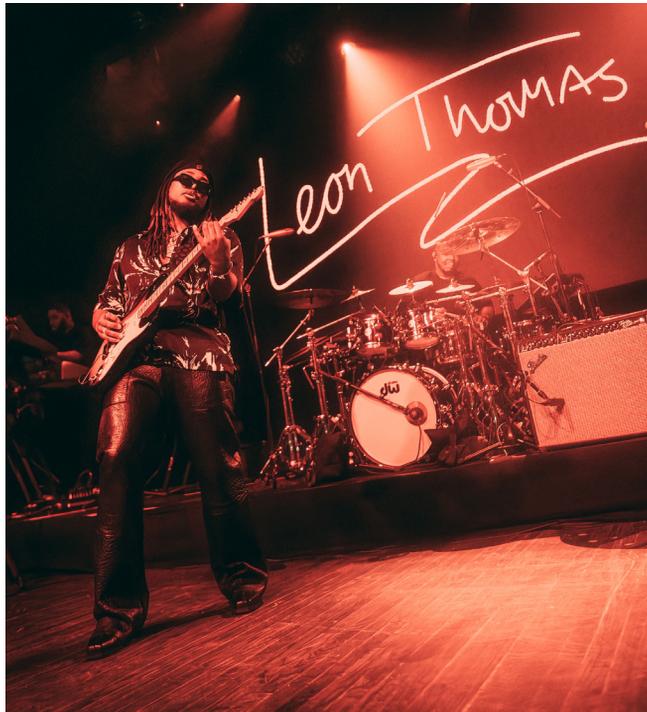
The release of the EP *PHOLKS* is just the latest episode in the series that is the life of Leon Thomas III. And the use of a TV metaphor in documenting this artist's journey is apropos, for he is a man that literally grew up in, and has dedicated his life to, show business.

You can't talk about Thomas without acknowledging his deep family roots in the arts and entertainment. His mother is a singer and vocal coach and his stepfather was a guitarist

with blues great B.B. King. Also, his grandfather, John Anthony, was an opera singer who appeared on Broadway in the '70s in productions of *Porgy and Bess* and Leonard Bernstein's *Mass*. So, by age 10, the Brooklyn/N.Y.C.-born and bred Thomas was immersed in theater and music by way of his environment.

"I like to say I come from a tribe of musicians," says Thomas. "In my language just about everybody in my family can play or sing something. It was just a healthy place to grow up in, wanting to chase being in the arts. And from a really young age they supported this passion and just created an environment that really told me I could do whatever I put my mind to. That's why I play so many instruments and I'm an actor and a songwriter, artist and producer. I was never told I couldn't do something. It was always, 'alright, well learn it and don't be horrible at it.' So, hard work was the mission, but they made the work fun for me, so I was constantly having a good time."

As a pre-teen, Thomas got his first taste of performing by auditioning for, and getting



the part of, Young Simba in *The Lion King* on Broadway. He went on to appear in productions of *Caroline, or Change* and *The Color Purple*. His acting abilities opened doors for signature roles on television and in films as well. His film credits include *August Rush* (2007) with Robin Williams and the 2017 Kathryn Bigelow-directed drama *Detroit*.

As an actor, Thomas is probably best known for playing Andre Harris on Nickelodeon's series *Victorious* (2010-2013). It was there that he got a chance to display his early instrumental and vocal chops along with burgeoning stars at the time like Ariana Grande and Keke Palmer. He also provided the singing voice of the character Tyrone for an animated Nickelodeon show called *The Backyardigans*. But making the transition from New York City to sunny California for those television opportunities did not come without its share of challenges.

"Prior to moving to Los Angeles I was doing pretty well, with the Broadway plays and that

movie with Robin Williams," says Thomas. "I got this offer to do the TV show *Victorious* and they flew me and my family out there and put us up at the Four Seasons. And, to be honest, the hardest part of this wasn't breaking into the acting biz, but it was surviving the biz. So, after the TV show it was tough, you know? I had a lot of hopes and expectations and dreams to really utilize being on a number one TV show as an opportunity to become potentially a movie star or even just run straight into being an artist in a very big way. But there was a lot that God put on my journey that had me learning more. So I ended up just producing and songwriting more than anything. I got the opportunity to work under Babyface, learning the production side of things. I got some movies and TV shows in that interim, but it was all school for being an artist. And now I'm seeing how that paid off."

And this juncture was, indeed, the fork in the road. This was the period of time where Thomas had some real decisions to make regarding what career direction he was going to follow and what pathways to best pursue. His fortunes truly

changed when he decided to eschew college studies in favor of diving into the music production world. Through GRAMMY-winning engineer-producer Bob Power he got a crash course in navigating his way around recording studios. And at 18 that led to the opportunity of a lifetime when he was afforded the chance to work with award-winning artist and producer Babyface.

"My mom asked me, 'are you sure you don't want to go to college?'" recalls Thomas. "But I knew what I wanted to do. And I felt like Babyface was doing everything I wanted to do as a songwriter or producer. Being at a studio and seeing his Bentley and knowing that he owned the building we were creating out of, let me know there was more to music than just notes. There's a business side to it and there was no better way for me to build a career. So, I spent about six years producing and writing for other artists, but I was studying the entire time. He was the first mentor that I really had a chance to watch."

As a producer, Thomas worked with Ariana Grande, Drake, SZA, Kanye West, Ty Dolla \$ign, Toni Braxton, and Post Malone. As part of the production duo The Rascals he won a GRAMMY Award for Best R&B Song for his work on SZA's smash "Snooze." He also received a nomination for Rick Ross and Drake's single "Gold Roses."

"I was spending years behind the scenes, making records for other people, and was getting fair amounts of success doing songs and getting placements, but I wasn't really feeling financially abundant at that time," says Thomas. "And I think the hunger is what really brought me to a place where I had to start being myself and unapologetically me."

So, while working on several projects for others, Thomas was starting to develop his own persona as an artist in his own right. With his, now, well honed business and technical savvy, he brokered a modest deal in 2018, with Priority/Rostrum Records to release his debut solo joint called *Genesis*.

On the strength of respectable airplay off

the *Genesis* record, and with his consistent and award-winning work in the production realm, people in the industry were starting to take notice. In particular, was Motown Records A&R representative Shawn Barron, who was partnering with rapper Ty Dolla \$ign on a new venture, with the aforementioned EZMNY Records. A chance meeting at a stop light in traffic brought Barron and Thomas together.

The association with EZMNY led to the release of subsequent albums *Electric Dusk* (2023), *Mutt* (2024), *Mutt Deluxe: Heel* (2025) and, of course, the latest project *PHOLKS*. Each project has been a musical steppingstone toward Thomas' dreams of artistic autonomy and creative freedom. And, while the intrepid singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist adhered to the basic tenants of pop song construction, the path to getting there was anything but conventional.

While *Genesis* featured the seminal vocal stylings and lean production that set the groundwork for an emerging pop talent, his *Electric Dusk* joint bumped things up a notch. With the blessing of Ty Dolla \$ign, and collaboration with Freaky Rob and Dave Phelps, the sky's the limit, in terms of sound design and lyrical filigree. The dreamy and ethereal cascading keyboards and hip-hop sensibilities that weave through tracks like "Slow Down," "X Rated," and "Love Jones" embrace chill vibes and ambient textures. "Blue Hundreds" and "Fade to Black" experiment with odd meters and sound effects, while the epic single "Breaking Point" shines a spotlight on the true depth and breadth of Thomas' storytelling capabilities and vocal prowess.

Moving on to the *Mutt* release was a crucial and pivotal moment in Thomas' career maturation and goals in becoming a fully formed artist. "There was just a barrage of different things between me watching the Elvis biopic that had come out at that time and 'Hound Dog' being his signature song and his mascot," explains the singer-songwriter on the concept behind the title for his 2024 album release. "I felt like it was a really cool and smart thing to do for popular culture. George Clinton and the song 'Atomic Dog' is another thing that comes to mind. It's that dog reference that has been made throughout pop culture. I felt like it would be a smart way to have my own spin on it and, you know, utilize the term 'Mutt' to my advantage. It's just a different outlook on it, and the hook came to me fairly quickly prior to even hearing the track. So, once we had the track for it, the song kind of just flew out. And throughout the record I'm dealing with all of these falling in love stories and break-up stories. So, it was a good metaphor for control, essentially."

*Mutt* was the second in the current series of full-length and visionary releases that continued to perpetuate Thomas' progressive musical and personal view. Referencing his dog Terry as the template for the title "Mutt" is not about manipulation or misogyny as much as about viewing himself as a "mutt" in relationships that

are not so fully formed and somewhat self-deprecating; a searcher with some lessons on life and love, yet to be explored.

*Mutt* really set the tone and put Thomas on the map as a real player and a notable artist. Sonically, it is a continuation, in many ways, of his multi-genre blending of a classic and neo-soul aesthetic. All of the songs possess a deep and intimate vibe that truly draws the listener in to his world. "How Fast" kicks off the album and deals with the price and trappings of fame, while "Safe Place" offers another observational aspect on seeking solace in one's life. "Dancing with Demons" matches a subtle groove, with a mystical feel and "Vibes Don't Lie" simply tells the truth in a trance-like and sultry way. Thomas' Marvin Gaye meets Raphael Sadiq approach

of a world tour billed as *Mutts Don't Heel*. The completely sold-out North American leg of the tour kicked off October 30th in Dallas, hitting Austin, Nashville, Atlanta, Brooklyn, Toronto, Chicago, and Los Angeles, with rising R&B star Ambre in support. In 2026, the tour heads across the pond for a bunch of European dates, including London's Eventim Apollo, Paris' Elysee Montmartre, Berlin's Huxleys Neue Welt, and Dublin's 3Olympia Theatre, before heading to Australia for stops in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, and Perth.

"So, this tour is starting at the end of October and I'm just really excited about being on the road, man," says Thomas. "It's gonna be a long journey of shows because I'm also doing Europe the top of next year. It's gonna be a stretch, but my team and I are working hard to be ready for every twist and turn."

While Thomas is just kicking off this massive world tour he's been keeping his live performance skills honed by making public appearances at key events such as Coachella 2025 where he sat in on sets by Muni Long, Ty Dolla \$ign, fellow *Victorious* cast mate Victoria Justice and one of his all-time heroes George Clinton of Parliament Funkadelic.

But as Thomas prepares for, what should prove to be, one of the biggest tours of the coming year, he maintains a program that has kept him in good stead for well over two decades now. "I actually have a very iron-clad pre-show ritual, I would say," says Thomas. "I usually eat pretty light. I meditate for about 15 minutes. And then I have another meditation that just preps me for any nerves or anything. It's just like all about calming the mind. I do about a 30-minute vocal warmup. It's very light on the voice, but it just gets me right. And then I listen to this playlist that I curated with all the people that inspire me over a range of different genres from Prince, to Earth, Wind and Fire, to Led Zeppelin, to Black Sabbath and Michael Jackson. It's just like my war music. I'm just prepping to get out there. By the time that playlist is over and a couple of people are popping in and out of the dressing room, I'll put my

in-ears on and I'm ready to kick some ass!"

GRAMMY Award-winning producer, singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and actor; Leon Thomas III has never shied away from hard work or a challenge. He has always faced it head on and has done it with grace, humility and a sense of decorum. That discipline is what fuels his work ethic, and his passion for the music.

"Soul is true emotion," says Thomas. "I mean, you know, I've been prepping for my tour, so I've been watching like a lot of old live concert footage of James Brown. It's so theatrical, man! You know what I'm saying? It's on stage and they're all on their knees and you can feel their pain, you can feel when they're happy and that whole range of emotion is so big."

For more information, visit [leonthomas.com](http://leonthomas.com)

## QUICK FACTS:

- ▶ Thomas cites Art Blakey and Miles Davis as major influences on the chord progressions in his songs.
- ▶ The drum pattern in Thomas' song "Blue Hundreds," off his *Electric Dusk* album, was inspired by the rhythms of "Time of the Season" by The Zombies.
- ▶ Thomas cites Bootsy Collins as one of the main inspirations for his *Mutt* album.
- ▶ Dream collaborations for Thomas would include Tame Impala, Frank Ocean, Beyoncé, Coldplay, and Quentin Tarantino.
- ▶ George Clinton was so taken by his performance with Thomas at Coachella 2025 that he made a hat for him which is displayed under glass in the singer-songwriter's home.
- ▶ Thomas has appeared on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, *The Jennifer Hudson Show*, and his NPR *Tiny Desk* performance has become a viral phenomenon by many defining voices in the music media.

has really served him well, with a project that has made a phenomenal impact on the music industry as well as with fans.

And the facts don't lie. *Mutt* has racked up charting accolades, including No. 1 *Billboard* R&B Songs, Digital Song Sales, R&B Streaming Songs and Adult R&B Airplay. The *Mutt* release was also *Billboard's* R&B Album for 2024 and was certified Platinum by the RIAA.

With the incredible success gleaned from the *Mutt* album, Thomas followed that up earlier this year, with a star-studded addendum to it entitled *Mutt Deluxe: Heel*. It includes nine new songs as well as remixes of tracks from the original *Mutt* featuring vocal collabs with luminaries such as Big Sean, Kehlani and Halle Bailey.

The self-professed workaholic is certainly riding high and not prepared to take his foot off the gas pedal any time soon. With the release of his new joint *PHOLKS* Thomas is in the midst

# Derek Shulman's Giant Steps

**T**he complete title for musical raconteur Derek Shulman's new book for Jawbone Press is *Giant Steps: My Improbable Journey From Stage Lights to Executive Heights*. It is a fascinating "warts and all" account of the vocalist and multi-instrumentalist's evolution from his professional beginnings in the mid-'60s, with British pop/soul band Simon Dupree & The Big Sound to seminal progressive rockers Gentle Giant, to his emergence as a prime mover and shaker in the '80s and beyond as a record executive responsible for signing and reviving the careers of major acts such as Bon Jovi, Dream Theater, Slipknot, Pantera, Bad Company and AC/DC.

In very real and honest accounts, Shulman describes the experiences as a kid growing up poor in Glasgow, Scotland and Portsmouth, England. He hailed from a large Jewish family that included his siblings Phil and Ray, who would later join him in Simon Dupree & The Big Sound and Gentle Giant.

Lewis Shulman was patriarch and father and was a professional jazz trumpeter by trade. Naturally, there was a lot of musical influence early on in the house. But, beyond poverty, life at home was not without its emotional and existential challenges.

"My dad was a jazz musician and lived that life," says Shulman. "He imbibed in whatever he did. I never smoked, took drugs or drank, except for an occasional glass of wine. The negative thing I learned from my father was to stay away from those things. He passed away at 50 years old. However on the positive side, he encouraged all of us to practice and become really good at an instrument. My brother Ray, in particular, could pick up the violin, a wind instrument or any kind of brass and master it in 10 minutes."

So, amid the trauma of losing his father at a young age, Shulman, like many kids, maintained a love for the pop and rock artists of the day. Music became a personal sedative and a salve to counteract the strife he was feeling at home. But as he excelled at mastering various musical disciplines like guitar, woodwinds or vocals, his confidence in joining a band and becoming a professional musician became his calling and creed.

Not long after declaring to his teachers that he would eschew the traditional routes of employment in Portsmouth, in favor of becoming a pop star, Shulman and his siblings proceeded down the path of making it so. With their brother-in-law as their manager, Simon Dupree & The Big Sound got an audition with Parlophone Records at the storied Abbey Road Studios. Being that they were all huge Beatles fans only made the experience that much more palpable and surreal.

A successful audition landed them a record deal that quickly set them on a grueling schedule playing eight or nine gigs a week throughout the U.K. as well as other parts of Europe. And it naturally gave Shulman and the



band a great apprenticeship and seasoning that led to recording a series of ear-catching and soulful singles. They scored a hit in 1967, with the psychedelically-infused tune "Kites," making it to number nine on the U.K. charts.

Toward the latter part of the '60s, into the early '70s, burned out on what they called the "scampi and chips circuit," Shulman and company were ready for a stylistic change. And they found it via the urging and guidance from an interim keyboard player by the name of Reginald Dwight. Dwight, who later became Elton John, turned Shulman and his band mates on to what was happening musically in America and other regions during the "summer of love." "He was a real music fiend," says Shulman. "And when he was working with us in Simon Dupree he would tell us, 'man, you guys are really good and you should listen to bands like Spirit and all these West Coast groups.' We knew about Frank Zappa and artists like that but we took Reg's advice. He was very influential in us breaking out of our little bubble."

Hence, Gentle Giant was born and changed the face of progressive rock and the global music landscape as we know it. "There were no musical labels like 'prog' back then," explains Shulman. "Gentle Giant became just some music that we heard and wanted to put together. We knew we wanted to expand our musical vision and write and perform material that was reflective of our personalities."

From 1970 through 1980 Gentle Giant released a series of critically-acclaimed albums that fulfilled their collective concept of music that embraced diversity and blended the classic harmonic structures they were previously

known for in the pop world, with a more avant garde and experimental approach.

But, alas, with lukewarm record sales and spotty commercial airplay, the sun eventually set on the Gentle Giant years. The early '80s found Shulman at a figurative fork in the road. And this is where the seemingly "improbable" became reality. Through the urging of a friend and associate at Polygram Records, the former front man for Gentle Giant was offered an unexpected opportunity.

"I never in a million years, having been in a band, thought of myself as a record label executive," says Shulman. "That was so far off my radar. But when I got that call from a friend to interview for the job, I figured, why not take a look and see what the job is all about? I remember the first day I was there I went from office to office and literally realized that the music business wasn't the music business. It was, in fact, the business of music and every office had their own agenda and had their own priorities."

These days Shulman works with his son Noah in preserving and re-mastering some of the Gentle Giant back catalog. And many artists in the hip-hop world like Travis Scott and Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson of The Roots cite Gentle Giant as an influence and have integrated samples from those classic GG tracks into chart-topping hits.

Perhaps if someone were to ask Derek Shulman what his definition of success was in business and in life, he would best summarize it as just trying to be as authentic as possible. And that has been something that has kept him in good stead and has maintained his sanity in an industry that is often anything, but.

# TOP 25 NEW MUSIC CRITIQUES

**MUSIC CONNECTION** offers a variety of ways for unsigned artists to receive recognition for creating exceptional music. Each month, for example, our New Music Critiques area spotlights the recordings of a dozen unsigned recording artists. The cream of the 2025 crop is here on the pages before you. 25 remarkable recording artists. Independent recording artists of all genres are welcomed to sign up for a free critique at [musicconnection.com/reviews/new-music-critiques](http://musicconnection.com/reviews/new-music-critiques).

## ▼ LOVECOLOR... 8.0

Web: [lovecolorband.com](http://lovecolorband.com)  
Style: Alt-Pop



## ▼ THE SOFT PARTS... 8.7

Web: *Spotify*  
Style: Sophisti-Pop, Avant-Lounge, Jazztronica



## ▼ JESS JOCOY... 8.6

Web: [jessjocoy.com](http://jessjocoy.com)  
Style: Country, Folk



## ▼ CLAY AND KELS... 8.4

Web: [clayandkelsy.com](http://clayandkelsy.com)  
Style: Electronic, Pop



## ▼ AFRODITE... 8.4

Web: [afrodite-singer.com](http://afrodite-singer.com)  
Style: Atmospheric Pop, Indie



## ▼ SHINING GLASS... 8.4

Web: [shiningglass.bandcamp.com](http://shiningglass.bandcamp.com)  
Style: Indie-Rock



## ▼ LIPS SPEAK LOUDER... 8.4

Web: [lipsspeaklouder.com](http://lipsspeaklouder.com)  
Style: Alt-Rock



## ▼ TERRY BLADE... 8.4

Web: [terryblademusic.com](http://terryblademusic.com)  
Style: Blues



## ▼ SOPHIA ELIANA... 8.4

Web: [sophiaeliana.com](http://sophiaeliana.com)  
Style: Indie-Folk, Dream-Pop, Singer-Songwriter



## ▼ ERITTAGE... 8.4

Web: *Spotify*  
Style: Afro-Fusion, Nigerian Hip-Hop



## ▼ JOSHUA JOSUÉ... 8.4

Web: [joshuajosuemusic.com](http://joshuajosuemusic.com)  
Style: Americana, Chicano-Rock



# 2025

## ▼ JAKE WORDEN ... 8.4

Web: [jakewordenmusic.com](http://jakewordenmusic.com)  
Style: *Orchestral Doom Metal*



## ▼ THE TROUT ... 8.3

Web: [thetroutshow.com](http://thetroutshow.com)  
Style: *Rock, Soundtrack, Indie, Pop*



## ▼ MICHAEL MCCLURE ... 8.3

Web: [michaelmclure.bandcamp.com](http://michaelmclure.bandcamp.com)  
Style: *Prog*



## ▼ DRONEHANDS ... 8.3

Web: [dronehands.net](http://dronehands.net)  
Style: *Experimental Electronic*



## ▼ ROBIN YOUNG ... 8.2

Web: [robinyoungmusic.com](http://robinyoungmusic.com)  
Style: *Folk, Americana*



## ▼ DALYA ... 8.2

Web: [linktr.ee/dollshop4](http://linktr.ee/dollshop4)  
Style: *R&B, Alternative, Jazz*



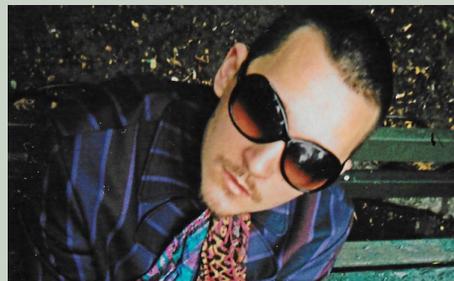
## ▼ DILYARA ... 8.2

Web: [voiceofgalaxies.com](http://voiceofgalaxies.com)  
Style: *Cinematic, World Music*



## ▼ CULT GODDESS ... 8.2

Web: [cultgoddess.bandcamp.com](http://cultgoddess.bandcamp.com)  
Style: *Psych-Pop*



## ▼ RAINBOW CITY PARK ... 8.2

Web: *YouTube*  
Style: *Pop-Rock*



## ▼ EMBRYONIC DEVOURMENT ... 8.2

Web: [embryonicdevourment.bandcamp.com](http://embryonicdevourment.bandcamp.com)  
Style: *Death Metal*



## ▼ VIGNÈ ... 8.2

Web: *Spotify*  
Style: *Singer-Songwriter, R&B*



## ▼ CHASE THE BEAR ... 8.2

Web: [chasethebearmusic.com](http://chasethebearmusic.com)  
Style: *Rock*



## ▼ YBS SKOLA ... 8.2

Web: [ybsskola.com](http://ybsskola.com)  
Style: *Motivational Rap*



## ▼ CHARLOTTE MORRIS ... 8.2

Web: [charlottemorrismusic.com](http://charlottemorrismusic.com)  
Style: *Folk*



# TOP 20 ALBUMS

# 2025



◀ **LUVCAT... 9**  
*Vicious Delicious*  
AWAL



◀ **WET LEG... 9**  
*Moisturizer*  
Domino Recording Co. Ltd



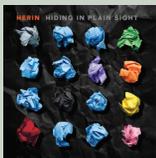
◀ **I'M WITH HER... 9**  
*Wild and Clear and Blue*  
Rounder Records



◀ **WARREN HAYNES BAND... 9**  
*Million Voices Whisper*  
Fantasy Records



◀ **UTE LEMPER... 9**  
*Pirate Jenny*  
The Audiophile Society



◀ **HERIN... 9**  
*Hiding in Plain Sight*  
The Laser's Edge



◀ **LIL WAYNE... 8**  
*Tha Carter VI*  
Young Money/Republic



◀ **DOJA CAT... 8**  
*Vie*  
Kemosabe and RCA Records



◀ **THE WILDHEARTS... 8**  
*Satanic Rites of The Wildhearts*  
Snakefarm



◀ **RICO NASTY... 8**  
*Lethal*  
Fueled By Ramen



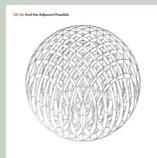
◀ **BELINDA CARLISLE... 8**  
*Once Upon a Time in California*  
Demon Music



◀ **GG MAGREE... 8**  
*Spit Love*  
Rise Records/BMG



◀ **AMORPHIS... 8**  
*Borderland*  
Reigning Phoenix Music



◀ **OKGO... 8**  
*And the Adjacent Possible*  
2B Entertainment



◀ **LAURA JANE GRACE... 8**  
*In the Trauma Tropes: Adventure Club*  
Polyvinyl Records



◀ **ALISON KRAUSS... 8**  
*And Union Station: Arcadia*  
Down the Road Records



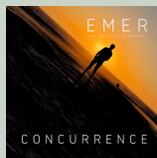
◀ **MAVIS STAPLES... 8**  
*Sad and Beautiful World*  
Anti Records



◀ **GHOSTFACE KILLAH... 8**  
*Supreme Clientele 2*  
Mass Appeal



◀ **JESIKA VON RABBIT... 8**  
*Bunnywood Babylon*  
Dionysus Records



◀ **EMER... 8**  
*With the Emersion Ensemble: Concurrence*  
Camerata Records

# BEST CAREER TIPS

## FOR THE ARTISTS

### MATTHEW FEDER

"Your instinct is what defines you as an artist, and the sooner you can hone that, trust it, and move forward with it without complicating your music too much—that's how you'll find your way."

### BRIAN KENNEDY

"Sometimes we second-guess ourselves. It's harder when you have to navigate the views of people who have no clue but have all the say in your career. This can be someone at a label or someone's family member. People listen to the opinions of people they [know and] trust and sometimes those are more valued than those of people who are accomplished. That's a big challenge but ultimately it helps you to build character."



BRIAN KENNEDY

### KEITH MITCHELL

"Learn everything you can about the music industry—because it is a business. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Diversify your interests to build long-term stability and income."

### DONITA SPARKS, L7

"My advice to young bands, as far as political stuff, is absolutely do it if you feel it. But if it's not your forte, don't. And don't feel forced to, either. Not every writer is good at every kind of sentiment. Don't pay attention to trends, because trends come and go. Right now, we're in a feisty punk rock kind of front person mode, but in two years it's going to be something else, and it just keeps changing. So do what you want to do, be brave."

### BAZ HALPIN

"Originality. This can be the hardest thing, especially when we're living in an age of algorithms. As an artist, look for somebody who has an original look, can understand you, and

create something that is uniquely you. You want to stand out and be unique. I often hear artists saying they want to do something that's never been done before. For the most part, everything has been done before, it's just done in different ways. So it's carving something out for you that feels original, but also feels authentic. Fans have a very clear understanding of their artists, and there's sort of a contract when they come to see a show."

### MELBA MOORE

"Feel a personal connection with the song. It has to resonate on a spiritual and emotional level with you before it can move others. Not just the lyrics, either... think about the emotion of the music and the importance of a great resonant mood-setting melody—and not just the message of the words you are writing."

### BLUE MONKEY

"Embrace the times when nothing is obvious, and to allow for things to be confusing. Being in flow means that not everything makes sense all the time. Because we grew up with tangible goals like finals and graduation, we're always looking for some kind of indicator that we're on the right path. But there is no right path, there is only movement and stillness."



BLUE MONKEY

### BRAD DELSON, LINKIN PARK

"You really gotta love [what you're working on] in the studio to have the conviction that this is something important to share. If we're not listening to it instead of everything else in the world... we wouldn't expect anyone else to care."

### GEORGE WHITTY

"Learn to get things framed but not necessarily finished, so the ideas can keep flowing without you stopping to 'perfect' things; the minute The Perfectionist shows up, half your mind is diverted off of the original inspiration."

### TOBY GAD

"The less you learn, the more you find your unique way of interpreting. The only way to survive is to have your own distinct identity in which you do things. Schools probably teach you the opposite... Do things your way. Try to be truly original and listen to your own instincts."

### RACHEL STILWELL

"Make sure you register your copyrights with the United States Copyright Office, which can usually be done D.I.Y. If you don't have an ownership dispute, there's no excuse for not registering your work. If you have work that is copyrightable and it is infringed before you have a registration with the Copyright Office, you have much less recourse against the infringer."

### KIESZA

"It is about creating one-of-a-kind pieces, focusing less on perfection and more on authenticity. For me, it is a way of connecting more deeply with the process than with the result."



KIESZA

### HEIDI VINCENT

"Creative control is important—you end up being more authentic. You maintain ownership of masters, royalties (long term earnings), and have a stronger negotiating power later—you understand what's going on and how it works."

### YUNGBLUD

"The boundaries placed on art often make it mediocre, because it's not supposed to be that way. It's not supposed to be so paint-by-numbers... In the past, the only parts of my career that I regret, or that maybe weren't real, were when I listened to other people too heavily."

# BEST CAREER TIPS

2025

## MARCUS KING

"Be as truthful as you can. And when you feel like you don't fit in, that means you're creating your own path. That's going to be the hardest path to take. And as long as you're looking behind you and see the road that you've created, you're going in the right direction."



## GREG SPERO

"A balanced lifestyle is essential to surviving the life of a musician or industry creative. It's not healthy to just engage in the roller coaster of recording and touring without giving any attention to overall emotional and physical wellness."

## FOR THE COLLABORATORS

### DON WAS

"I would find it offensive, especially with the caliber of people I'm working with, to take over someone's record. Why should someone else paint themselves into Bob Dylan's portrait? That's a lot of nerve. It's not my job. I try to get to the essence of these people, but I don't invent the essence. What I have to offer is that I can clear away some of the stuff that obscures who they are. I try to make personal records for the people I work with."

### VINCE GILL

"I played in different bands and did pretty okay with that. I didn't have to be the front guy or the focal point; if I got to be in a good band and play great music as the harmony singer, lead guitar, rhythm guitar... just getting to do it was a gift. I had the respect of my peers and other musicians. All those kinds of things mattered more to me than cracking the code of being a big shot smarty pants, as my friend says."

## CLEO TIGHE

"The main thing is to be in that trusting kind of energy that it's going to happen... we're all just there to create."

## INK

"I love to work with all great artists on the planet, and if I don't get to I'm still content, because the artists that I've worked with are just so incredible, and it has left such a mark on my artistry and my story and my journey."



## PHILIP KLEIN

"Your job is to help the composer's vision come to life, so you have to check your ego at the door. It's actually a good thing when your creative voices are different, because you learn more."

## CHRIS SEEFRIED

"The trick is to make this musical story make sense. One way we did was to tie it lyrically with [Lady Blackbird's] personal story. Strongly relate to the story and feeling of what's being delivered... an alchemy between melody and lyric."

## CHARLIE ROSEN

"You don't have to play a lot of instruments at a high level, but the more you can at least somewhat play, the better you'll be at writing with those instruments and communicating with musicians who do play them. With visual media, think about the point of what's occurring onstage or onscreen."

## OLIVIER DERIVIÈRE

"My role is to listen. I'm not here to impose. And when I understand enough, I can start offering things... The one thing I never talk about with them is music. I'm talking about intentions."

## FOR THE PRODUCERS

## CHARLIE PEACOCK

"Be imaginative with ideas and solutions but don't voice them, necessarily. You want them to be available but you also don't want to overwhelm the artist."

## STEVE SYKES

"It's all about creating the most complementary environment for instruments and voices... As engineers, we tend to become possessive of our output even though we're working for someone else. It's a trap you don't want to fall into because at the end of the day, this is a service industry."

## MARIO CALDATO JR.

"Be open to ideas, suggestions, and sounds. Don't shoot anything down. Try to understand it. You can make anything sound like music."

## TOBY WRIGHT

"Bringing out [an artist's] creativity... that's what it's all about. Songs will always sell music regardless of the genre. When you have a great one, then you have something good to work with. Getting the best out of an artist depends on what they're into. I like to sit down with them and talk about their vision."

## ROB CHIARELLI

"When it comes time to try new ideas, always be openminded. Often, people make a suggestion, and it's rejected out of hand. Rather than fighting, just do it. Maybe it'll inspire another idea."

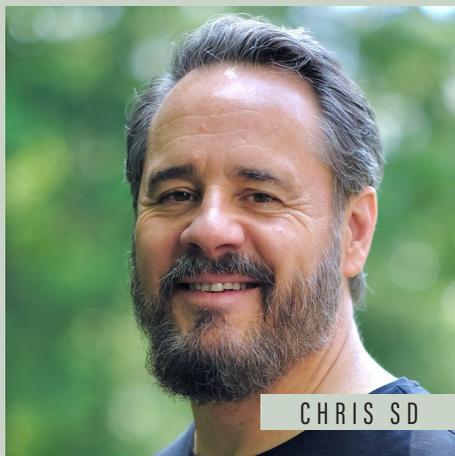


## RODNEY JERKINS

"I want to see who they are as an artist and then I dig into who they are currently. I try to get into their psyche, into where they might be in their life. A lot of this is gaining insight into whether an artist is coming out of a relationship or maybe going into one. Understanding that leads the direction of the song."

## CHRIS SD

"Music production's not that hard. If you've done it for a while, you can make something sound good. My own internal battle sometimes is wanting to cut new cloth; wanting to carve a fresh path to the point that [a song] sounds original."



## EVAN BLAIR

"[Music is] an unbelievably complex, ever-changing puzzle and a lifelong learning. Every time you feel you're close to figuring it out or think you have the answer, you see that it's wildly deeper than that."

## YUHENG YAN

"This is a service business and it's not always about how creative your music is. It's about how well it works with the picture. If you have an average idea but can execute it with professional-level production, then it'll work and help pave [the path of] your career."

## DAWN KAMERLING

"If you're going to send a cold email, don't make it too long. Check that your links work before you send it. Make sure you have the person's name right. Don't send a novella or your full-length bio. No one is going to read it... Make it digestible."

## KHRIS RIDDICK-TYNES

"You're not in the music business. You're in the business of music. You have to understand the relationship building and where you fit in."

## AINA

"I didn't wait for anyone to believe in me—I learned to produce myself. Learning to produce gave me the freedom to create songs exactly the way I envisioned them... DIY means not waiting around, you have to do it yourself (produce, write, make your own cover art, etc.)."

## LZZY HALE, HALESTORM

"There's a difference between believing you're capable of doing things and them happening."

## FOR THE MASSES

## DEEANN

"Always stay true to yourself, be honest and follow your gut because you might have different people trying to pull you in various directions based on what they think they know about you."



## DAMIEN QUINTARD

"When you have a vision as a creative person, you will be confronted with people that have a totally different vision. If you follow too much of what everybody is doing or saying, it's going to blur the original vision."

## LANZ PIERCE

"The label [is] a bank. It has a mandate like venture capitalism. It's not personal; it's all followers. If you're a pre-rev company, they won't invest past a certain amount because they want you to find product market fit and prove you have an audience, but there's exceptions."

## JOSÉ JAMES

"Have people around you that believe in you. It's a myth as an artist that you're always going to believe in yourself."

## MITCH RYDER

"Get yourself a lawyer and an accountant if you're serious about wanting to go forward as a musician."

## JANIVA MAGNESS

"Be prepared because people are gonna stand next to you if you're fortunate enough to have any kind of success... Most of the people will be waiting for you to stumble and fall, with a fork and knife to eat you alive... Don't be naïve."

## JET JAGUAR

"Making music a serious pursuit requires big sacrifices."

## BRENDA RUSSELL

"It's important right off the bat to encourage the new songwriters out there, folks trying to express themselves through music as I've always done."



## PANCHO BURGOS-GOIZUETA

"I graduated Berklee at 28, didn't get my first assistant job until 30, and wrote my first film at 34. I wish someone had said: don't wait. Just suck at it for a while... You just have to evolve and close that gap."

## SPENCER HATCHER

"[Social Media is] so crucial in today's world. If you wanna be a musician you also have to be a famous content creator. It's really hard to do. But social media is how you're gonna make it anymore."

## GINO VANNELLI

"There are a lot of sad stories out there. We don't wanna listen to sad stories of people we don't know, unless they do something for us."

## MICAH PLISSNER

"Your style, attitude, stories and persona, and how you express yourself personally on stage and in the studio are the most important things."

## ANTHONY MARTINI

"You need your own identity and something unique. The fact you have a shitty voice might be what makes you cool. Look at someone like Bob Dylan. He didn't have a great voice, but it's unique and you know it when you hear it. He leaned into his strengths, which were lyrics and poetry."

# OUR FAVORITE SIGNING STORIES

## *Jet Jaguar* (April)

**Label:** Steamhammer/SPV

**Band Members:** Raiden, vocals, guitar; Ariyuki, lead guitar; Bori, bass; Jimmy, drums

**Type of Music:** Metal

**Booking:** jetjaguarmetal@gmail.com

**Publicity:** Atom Splitter PR, press@atomsplitterpr.com

**Web:** linktr.ee/jetjaguarmusic

Jet Jaguar's journey toward securing a label deal was a determined and strategic one. One of Mexico's hottest contemporary metal acts, Jet Jaguar has recently been signed to Hanover-based imprint Steamhammer/SPV. "Luckily, Olly [Hahn] liked our music and wrote back," they say, and from there, things began to move quickly.

The band's journey began in 2014 in Cancún, Mexico with a blend of original songs and covers of their early influences. Over time, however, it was clear that they were carving their own path



in the metal world. Their big break came in 2017 when they won the prestigious Wacken Metal Battle competition. "That's when things started getting serious," they recount, as it marked a turning point that saw them shift their priorities toward extensive touring across Europe and Latin America. "Making music a serious pursuit requires big sacrifices," they say, and it's evident that they practice what they preach as "drummer Jimmy dropped out of medical school, and our bass player Bori left his business administration studies" in order to fully commit to the music.

Their highly anticipated new album, *Severance*, is set to release this autumn, promising to push boundaries and explore new sonic horizons. "We knew we wanted—and in a way *needed*—a gloomier, heavier sound," they explain, reflecting on the emotional challenges they faced during the pandemic. The album's thematic content is equally bold, tracks like "Severance" reflect the band's struggles and growth, while "Fool's Paradise" examines modern society, tackling issues like fake news, radicalization, and the addictive nature of social media.

Jet Jaguar's commitment to their craft is evident not only in the music they produce, but in their attitude towards performance. "At the end of the day, your job is to entertain," they say. - **Ruby Risch**

## *ViperSnatch* (May)

**Label:** Golden Robot Records

**Band Members:** Lily Chellingsworth, vocals, guitar; Riley Doherty, drums, backing vocals; Kailee Butcher, bass, flute

**Type of Music:** Punk Rock

**Publicity:** Sarah Facciolo - Facci PR, sarah@faccipr.com

**A&R:** Sarah Facciolo and Kay Macauley

**Web:** linktr.ee/vipersnatch

The impact that Australia has had on modern, shit-kicking, rebellious music is immeasurable, and rock 'n' roll continues to flourish down under. Take ViperSnatch, a no-bull riot grrl trio from Central Queensland's Darumbal Land that have been releasing a wonderfully punky, grungy noise since 2018.

After dropping their most recent single, lead vocalist and guitarist Lily Chellingsworth figured she'd send it off to various labels. An internet search brought her to Golden Robot Records,



which names Faster Pussycat, Judas Priestess, Devo, and Johnny Thunders as part of its fearless roster. Fortunately, Golden Robot was actively taking submissions.

Though ViperSnatch approached other labels, Golden Robot was the one that returned the most enthusiastic response. Kay Macauley, the label's manager, delivered the assessment. Macauley lives a short four hours away, so they went to meet her and the label's founder/president, Mark Alexander-Erber. A deal was soon falling into place.

Says Doherty, "Once we were comfortable with everything, we were like, fuck it, why not?"

Most important to ViperSnatch is the artistic freedom that Golden Robot provides. "The biggest thing for us is staying true to ourselves," says bassist Kailee Butcher. "We've got a message that we're passionate about and strongly want to push." - **Andy Kaufmann**

## *Militia Vox* (June)

**Label:** Golden Robot Records

**Type of Music:** Alt Metal, Rock, Goth, Industrial, Prog

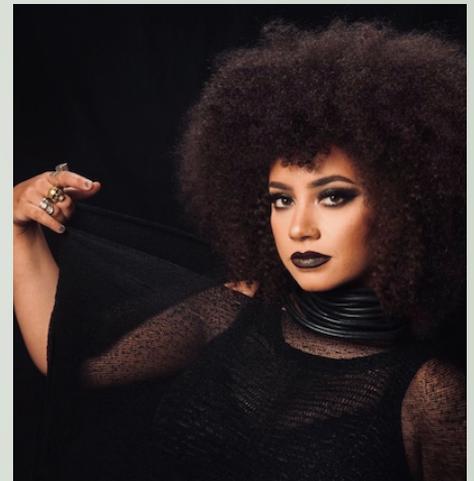
**Booking:** Joy Collingbourne, joy@mobagency.com

**Publicity:** Sarah Facciolo, Facci PR, sarah@faccipr.com

**A&R:** Kim Bencic

**Web:** militiavox.com

Some artists are inherently suspicious of record labels. That's especially true for singer, songwriter, visual artist, and all-around creative badass Militia Vox. As a teenager, she was in a band signed to Cleopatra Records. She recorded



an album for them that ultimately got shelved, leaving a sour taste in her mouth. Also, as a woman of color who performs heavy music, she's had to battle negative industry attitudes from many corners. "Any record deal I've been offered I turned down, because it was always contingent on changing something," she divulges. "If they're changing who you are, they don't want you."

Besides, she's been thriving on her own for years, earning her way onto the stage and in the studio with artists such as Twisted Sister, L7, 24-7 Spyz, and Cyndi Lauper. Another act she became friendly with is Living Colour, including lead singer Corey Glover. One day, producer Tony Bruno suggested she cover the '80s hit "It's Only Love" by Bryan Adams and Tina Turner. Glover was Vox's immediate choice for laying down the duet. Also on the cut are Living Colour's Vernon Reid and Nuno Bettencourt of Extreme.

Vox knew the track was special and wished to give it a bigger promotional boost than she could on her own. Wondering where to take it, Glover suggested Golden Robot Records.

"I would like to publicly thank Golden Robot for giving me a shot," says Vox, who recently made her Lincoln Center debut. - **Andy Kaufmann**

# 2025

**FOR YEARS**, a staple in *Music Connection* has been our Signing Stories, showing our readers how other artists have arrived at their deal with a record label, music publisher or manager. The folks we talk to—artists, managers, producers and A&R reps—give you the ups and downs, the do’s and don’ts, of getting signed.

## **N8NOFACE** (July)

**Label:** Stones Throw Records  
**Type of Music:** Synth-Punk  
**Management:** Daniel Hall (Worldwide)  
**Booking:** Nick Storch (North America) Luc Favié (EU)  
**Legal:** Bryan Christner  
**A&R:** Peanut Butter Wolf  
**Web:** n8noface.la

Anyone who has seen N8NOFACE live won't forget the experience in a hurry. The synth-punk provocateur (think L.A. pioneers the Screamers, but even more unhinged) has mastered the ability to grab a melody and then twist it round his hairless cranium and impressive moustache, the result emerging from his tear-filled ocular cavities like a dancing *Basket Case* mutant.

N8NOFACE was a fan of Stones Throw Records, long before signing on with them himself. "Being a hip-hop head who also loves different styles of music, Stones Throw was that label," he says. "Then in L.A., finally meeting and becoming friends with Peanut Butter Wolf, getting to send him stuff from time to time



and then him remixing a song of mine. The relationship was building, then I sent him the latest project produced by Chico Mann, he was like 'Let's do some stuff.' I was with it."

N8's latest release is "Waiting to Wait for You." "Chico Mann produced, performed, and wrote all the music on this," he says. "I just came up with the words and singing. I watched you try five outfits on, I'd wait and watch five thousand more,' is the first line. The song is about maybe while being a little anxious to step out, [and] you are enjoying watching your partner get dressed."

N8NOFACE is hitting the road with Eyedress in July before going back into the studio to record a debut album for release in 2026. The man just won't stay still. - **Brett Callwood**

## **Brittany Davis** (July)

**Label:** Loosegroove Records  
**Type of Music:** Neo-Soul/Funk/Jazz  
**Management:** Chris Mosher  
**Booking:** Lucia Wade, International Touring Booking  
**Publicity:** Kevin Calabro, kevin@calabromusicmedia.com  
**A&R:** Stone Gossard  
**Web:** brittanydavismusic.net

When you listen to singer-songwriter/keyboardist Brittany Davis' music you can't help but get swept up in her spiritual fervor and undeniable joy. Many of her songs are auto biographical and reflect wisdom, pain,



compassion and enlightenment. Over the span of the last few years Davis has created a stylistic arc that encompasses soul, funk, and improvisational elements that usher in a fresh and exciting direction in pop music.

Blind since birth, Davis was born in Kansas City to a broken family and relocated to Seattle to live with her grandmother after her mother was incarcerated. It's there in the Seattle area where a fortuitous meeting with Pearl Jam's Stone Gossard led to a life altering experience. Davis was performing at a benefit for musicians' health care and, apparently, Gossard, who was in attendance, had heard some recordings of her that she had previously done locally at his Studio Litho.

Signing with Gossard's Loosegroove Records, the intrepid Davis released an EP in 2022 called *I Choose to Live*. It was a powerful statement, born out of the morass of the COVID pandemic, where she wanted to spread songs of positivity and inspiration. That was followed by 2024's critically acclaimed full-length album *Image Issues*, which further proffered her uplifting and neo-soul flavored message. The new album *Black Thunder* is an interesting departure in style and substance. - **Eric Harabadian**

## **Luvcat** (Oct)

**Label:** AWAL  
**Type of Music:** Alternative Pop, Rock  
**Management:** Ben Carey & Fred Lane Fox, Gum Music Management  
**Booking:** Ben Coles, Carly James & Ben Buchanan CAA  
**Legal:** Paul Lennon - SGD  
**Publicity:** Toast & AWAL  
**A&R:** Will Hunt  
**Web:** luvcat.co.uk

Remember the name Luvcat. Soak it in, marinate in it, file it in the mental lockbox. Rarely are we presented with a new artist who seems so ready-made, so completely built, for success. Liverpool-born artist Luvcat, born Sophie Morgan Howarth, has a sound that is absolutely and undeniably her own, while also being instantly relatable and radio-friendly.

She's worked hard to get here, mind you. Luvcat honed her sound in the pubs, clubs, and streets of Northern England. "I was singing before



I could speak," she says. "I started learning piano when I was a very young child, and reading poetry, and then writing my own rhymes. I wrote my first song when I was nine or 10, and then I started singing in the pubs and clubs when I was 14. I was just doing that and busking."

Luvcat says that she grew up with her dad's and granddad's record collection, which included the standards such as Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack, West End musical soundtracks, Barbra Streisand and Judy Garland, but also The Smiths, The Cure, the Velvet Underground and Nick Cave. She discovered Leonard Cohen and Tom Waits when she hit her 20s. Her debut album, *Vicious Delicious*, is out now and it's a contender for album of the year. "It's like a swinging pendulum between two extremes," she says. "Like innocence and eroticism, love and kink or life and death. It had a bit of both of those things, and never too much." - **Brett Callwood**

# Miki Berenyi Won't Be Back

**M**iki Berenyi, the angel-voiced lead singer of U.K. dream-poppers Lush, wrapped up a fall North America tour promoting Miki Berenyi Trio's new otherworldly album, *Tripla*, with her life and musical partner KJ "Moose" McKillop (of Moose) and bassist Oliver Cherer. Along the way, she put out various statements on her socials that this would be their last trip stateside.

Somewhere on a bus in the Pacific Northwest, while sick with a nasty cold, Berenyi answered questions via email, and all we had to do was change a few British "u"s and "zeds" from her pristine copy.

In 2022, Berenyi also published a humdinger of a memoir, *Fingers Crossed: How Music Saved Me from Success*, an extremely fun and lively read that's part rising rock band tale along with what is perhaps the most colorful, and at times upsetting, growing-up section of all rock bios.

**Music Connection:** You have stated that this will likely be your last stateside tour due to the high costs. How do you stay positive knowing you may never return?

**Miki Berenyi:** One of the hurdles we have with touring is that Moose HATES to fly—for both phobic and environmental reasons. So the fact that he even agreed to this tour is a miracle. Taking on a three-week tour of the U.S. and Canada has maxed out our workdays off, and there is no time—or money!—for a leisurely sea crossing.

I feel sad that this will be the last time we tour the U.S., but it doesn't really cross my mind when we are playing the shows.

Yesterday in Seattle, the mood of the touring party was pretty low. The previous week of the tour had been insanely stressful and I was completely depleted. But rather than sit backstage feeling sorry for myself, I had a brilliant getting-to-know-you chat with the woman doing lights for the gig (hello, Monica!) and helped set up the merch stall with a lovely woman called Jen. We then got news that Gina Birch's band member (another Jen!) was on her way from the airport—she literally got to the gig with two minutes to spare and was onstage for the set. Amazing! And watching them vibe off each other and on-the-hoof pull off an amazing performance—it completely lifted me.

**MC:** From reports I've read, it seems this tour is not all jolly holiday, not just visa and financial issues, but I heard you have a cold. What have been some enjoyable moments?

**Berenyi:** BEING here—touring here—is not the problem. It's the hurdles to making it all possible that make it so stressful and demoralizing. I'm sorry to be blunt, but the U.S. visa system is an absolute shit show. It is punishingly expensive and there is zero transparency, so you are hurling your money into a void, with no



guarantees or reassurances that any of it will work to plan.

We applied for Moose's visa in February, which cost us \$4,000. You'd think that eight months would be plenty of time, but no—by August there was no news, so we were advised to pay another \$2,800 to expedite and hope that this would speed things up. It then costs another \$300 to sort the interview at the U.S. embassy in the U.K., plus extra for various documents and delivery systems. By now, the dates are all booked, as are the flights, hotels, bus, tour manger etc.—all of which require deposits and payment. Everything hangs in the balance of getting that visa returned in time.

And so we spent three weeks, logging into the embassy website on an hourly basis, watching the status change from "Pending" to "Awaiting Approval" to "Approved," then back to "Awaiting Approval," hoping for it to finally show as "ISSUED."

Moose's visa turned up about an hour after his flight left for Washington, D.C. So this meant another \$3,000 to add to our costs.

I realize all this detail is insanely dull, but it's what kills the whole idea of ever touring again in the U.S. for us. This level of impenetrable bureaucracy means only bands with buckets of spare money can take the financial hit of the inevitable delays. For someone like me, who has had to cull money from my mortgage to fund the advance payments required to set up a tour, the stress is debilitating.

**MC:** Do you agree with Shirley Manson that "You're gonna lose generations of esoteric, risk-taking, creative weirdos. You're gonna get fucking white bread."

**Berenyi:** I guess if A.I. takes off and people are happy with going to see holograms play live, then I concede that the visa problems will no longer be a hurdle. Although I'm sure that the powers that be will find a way to monetize a new form of visa requirement for virtual entities!

But of course, Shirley is right. That thrill of seeing a band at a nascent stage, still raw and unformed, powered by the momentum of their exploding energy. Yes, that will certainly be gone. Only well-established bands with millions in their coffers already will be able to tour. We're already there, really. Sterile stadium gigs backed by corporate funding, where 90 percent of the audience are watching the performance on a screen. It's heartbreaking.

**MC:** "Doldrum Days"—your enchanting voice with Moose's guitar is just magic, and as an opener really draws you in for a long and glorious ride. When putting a live set together, how carefully do you try to curate an emotional ride?

**Berenyi:** My obsession with curating setlists is legion! I will write a list of the songs, cut the paper into strips and spend days shifting them around, rehearsing the set in its various arrangements until I feel it is absolutely right. And there are many factors—tempo, key, tuning ("Manu" and "8th Deadly Sin" are together in our set because Moose uses a particular tuning for those two songs), not having the old or new songs all bunched together... so many considerations! But, ultimately, I pace everything the way I feel I would most enjoy it if I was in the audience.

# Beatport

Communities. Influencers. Superfans. These buzzwords have dominated music industry discourse in recent years—but they've always been integral to DJ and electronic dance music culture. Digging for music, sharing it with friends, playing it, personalizing it, remixing it, recontextualizing it, are some of the tenets of that universe. Few understand this better than the Beatport Group, whose multi-purpose platform has built a DJ-centered ecosystem offering a cross-section of services designed to meet their particular needs.

"It's nice to be able to be specific," says Beatport's Chief Revenue Officer, Helen Sartory. "We're music nerds. We're the people in the corner of the party talking about the artists they love, making music, transitions. In a lot of ways, our job is simpler [than mainstream DSPs] because we know exactly what we're building and who we're building it for."

Beatport has come a long way since its visionary beginnings in 2004 as a DJ-focused music download marketplace. Today, it encompasses a subscription streaming service, Beatport LINK, a DJ mixing app, Beatport DJ, and its editorial site, Beatportal, among other services and initiatives. The platform continues to evolve, broadening its musical reach with open-format genres and bridging digital and in-person experiences through Beatport Live & Interactive, which connects the broader dance music community—fans, DJs, and industry professionals—via Beatport Tickets and Beatport Connect.

A dance music-exclusive ticketing platform, Beatport Tickets—currently available in the U.K. and Europe through Beatportal—will soon launch in North America, integrated into the Beatport store.

"It feels like a long time coming for us," says Sartory. "For electronic music, live revenue makes up a huge portion of the livelihoods of artists and labels and promoters and everybody that is around the community. Quite a large proportion of DJs on Beatport are putting on their own events or performing at events and need to promote. As a split has emerged between huge arena tours and festivals thriving whilst grassroots venues and smaller promoters are struggling, we partnered with an existing technology platform, Weeztix, to create a ticketing platform that is tailored towards independent promoters and small venues that are putting on electronic music events."

These events are often less about the headliner and more about the scene they represent and help shape. As a result, listings require nontraditional information that provides context for the event beyond a marquee name or a playlist. In support of this new venture, Beatportal is expanding into deeper nightlife culture coverage focused on events, promoters, city scenes, and the subcultures surrounding them. This content, in turn, attracts a wider audience that isn't strictly DJs, but fans of electronic music—some of whom may be toying with becoming DJs themselves. Following a

cyclical logic, by tracking the events these audiences attend, Beatport gains insight into the music they're interested in and, in the process, can potentially turn fans into customers of the catalog, and vice versa.

Extending this real-world approach to the electronic music industry, Beatport has spent the past year hosting one-day summits called Beatport Connect in key cities worldwide. The Los Angeles event this past September focused on timely topics such as A.I., breaking an



artist, fan engagement, and staying grounded, featuring major industry players and creatives while also providing space for emerging talent.

Ease of entry for potential DJs is one of Beatport's cornerstones. Through Beatport LINK and Beatport DJ, curious fans can cost-effectively explore the craft without heavily investing in downloads or equipment. Says Sartory, "It's only recently that we realized we've got a lot of people visiting the platform who wouldn't necessarily consider themselves a DJ yet, but they're really interested in the scene. The lines between what's professional and what's hobbyist are very blurred. We're hoping to make everything more accessible where you can enter at any level. We can welcome them into the community and show them interesting events and find other ways for them to engage."

Established DJs with regular bookings are less likely to use Beatport LINK, instead relying on USBs, where they can organize, tag, cue, and mark their downloaded music files for a professional mixing experience. Sartory says there are three categories of users: new DJs who use streaming, experienced DJs who collect downloaded music, and hybrid DJs who do both—using streaming as a testing ground

for discovery and downloading the tracks they want to keep.

To further pave the way for burgeoning DJs—and curious fans—Beatport offers a "Track ID" feature on its mobile app, a kind of "Shazam" for DJ sets that can identify tracks even when they're sped up, slowed down, mixed, or played in loud environments. It's a somewhat controversial move, as keeping selections secret has long been part of DJ culture, with some DJs even covering the labels on their records to keep tracks exclusive.

Sartory acknowledges this, but asserts, "The modern outlook is: We're here because we love music, we're here to promote music, if you're going to be performing music, you should be shouting out the artists and producers and labels that have made it. On every social media post, half of the comments are, 'Track ID,' meaning 'What's the track?'"

While DJing can sometimes veer elitist, Beatport has widened its scope beyond granular electronic dance music genres to include African, Caribbean, Hip-Hop, Latin, Pop, and R&B filed under the "Open Format" heading. These genres have also been added to the song choices on Beatport LINK. Previously, these styles lived on Beatsource, Beatport's open-format DJ community.

Genres are subjective, to say the least, and the names and categories Beatport assigns to songs don't always align with those used by DJs thereby making it confusing and difficult to find what they're looking for.

Beatport is actively working to address these issues. Sartory says, "Genre classification is really important and it's hotly debated. There's whole teams of people that decide: Is this a new sound? Is this a fork in the road? Is this a genre that's going to last or is it a flash in the pan? As we start to release more personalization tools, you'll start to see your own mix of music that hopefully appeals to your taste, whether you are a purist or a genre blender."

## The Last Dinner Party

*From the Pyre*

Island Records  
 Producer: Markus Dravs

The Last Dinner Party let their creativity run wild on their sophomore album *From the Pyre*. The album is an interesting collection of character driven stories. These stories dramatically come to life through the theatrical glam rock arrangements of tracks like "This is the Killer Speaking" and "Rifle." Abigail Morris' powerhouse vocals are another highlight, as her vocal tone is haunting and charming. *From the Pyre* is an album you want to sink your teeth into and dissect track by track. Although the songs aren't immediately catchy as the material in their debut, the band's ambition is admirable. - **Jacqueline Naranjo**



## The Beths

*Straight Line Was a Lie*

ANTI  
 Producer: Jonathan Pearce

After over 10 years together, New Zealand indie pop rock group The Beths have found who they are in their latest album, *Straight Line Was a Lie*, by confessing that they know nothing about being alive. As the album title claims, nothing is as it seems in this record that has a little bit of everything—some of The Cure here, a little of Alvvays there, and some Phoebe Bridgers thrown in for good measure—though this album is perfect for fans of Grouplove. It's a great album for a coming of age during any time of life - **Anna Jordan**



## Brian Eno & Beatie Wolfe

*Liminal*

Verve Records  
 Producers: Brian Eno, Beatie Wolfe

For the closing installment of their three-part saga, ambient grand master Brian Eno and conceptual artist Beatie Wolfe explore even darker and stranger territory than before. Eno's compositional calculus is as subliminally potent as ever, and Wolfe's lyrics provide an interesting complement, even if they are, at times, overly poetic. Consider the track "Laundry Room" for reference. Beyond that, *Liminal* serves sheer enlightenment for all souls, earthbound and beyond. - **Andy Kaufmann**



## They Are Gutting a Body of Water

LOTTO  
 ATO Records, Julia's War, Smoking Room (joint release)  
 Producer: Douglas Dulgarian

LOTTO cements Philadelphia shoegazers They Are Gutting a Body of Water (AKA TAGABOW) as one of the most important musical groups in contemporary independent music. The band's experimental mix of shoegaze noise and lo-fi electronica are more refined than ever. Echoes of local legends Blue Smiley and Alex G can be heard nestled into the melodic tendencies of "rl stine" and "sour diesel." - **Shalen Farahi**



## Katy & the Null Sets

*Troublemaker*

Self-released  
 Producer: Yu Kiatvongcharoen

Katy Ohsiek (of Foamboy) trades disco-pop glitz for the after-hours introspection of her solo debut, *Troublemaker*. This nine-song venture is a confident, genre-skipping conversation, melding bossa nova grooves with raw, '90s-alt bursts. Highlights like the jarring, cathartic "Fuck me!" and the jazzy guitar eruption of "Last Time/Next Time" showcase a songwriting prowess that turns messy self-reflection into intimate, hook-driven indie gold. Though it occasionally leans inward, Ohsiek's wry, honest lyricism ensures this collection of fuzzy guitars and fluid rhythms truly sticks. - **Ruby Risch**



## Various Artists

*Tehrangelles Vice: Iranian Diaspora Pop 1983-1993*

Discotchari  
 Producer: Zachary Asdourian (executive)

*Tehrangelles Vice: Iranian Diaspora Pop 1983-1993* is a generational rediscovery. Exiled Iranian musicians in post-Islamic Revolution Los Angeles recorded these songs, later unearthed by Armenian-Iranian tastemakers Discotchari. From a vault of Persian pop gems that transcend language and era, they selected 12 tracks to remaster and press to vinyl for the first time. The result is a dazzling mix of disco and rock-infused dance numbers that could soundtrack a roller rink—or Space Mountain. - **Lily Moayeri**

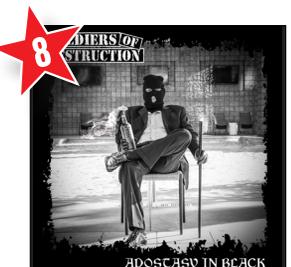


## Soldiers of Destruction

*Apostasy in Black*

American't Records  
 Producer: John Feeney

Formed in London back in 1981, the Soldiers of Destruction are now based in Las Vegas and, while some things have changed over the decades, they're still fronted by beloved singer and scribe Morat. A long-time friend of the late, great Lemmy, Morat pours himself into a cover of Motörhead's "Sex & Death," but SOD's own "Nonce," "Government Suppression," and the deeply personal "Chaos Forever" are aural face-punches. - **Brett Callwood**



## The Devil Wears Prada

Solid State Records  
 Producer: The Devil Wears Prada

When hardcore bands nurse a fixation on being louder and scarier than anyone else, they can turn one-dimensional. On *Flowers*, metalcore veterans TDWP avoid this trap by fusing anguished vocals and violent instrumentation with uplifting pop melodies accented by soul-cleansing flourishes. Though some tonal shifts feel forced, these weaker moments are fleeting and rare. Truth be told, it seems the band is just now hitting its stride. - **Andy Kaufmann**



**The Pinnacle** Nashville, TN

**Contact:** katie@grandstandhq.com

**Web:** djomusic.com

**Players:** Joe Keery, vocals, guitar, mellotron; Adam Thein, keys; Trent Prall, bass, keys; Sam Jordan, guitar; Javi Reyes, guitar, keys; Wesley Toledo, drums; Teddy Matthews, drums

**OUTSIDE OF THE PINNACLE, FANS CAMPED**

over 12 hours to see Djo's Nashville debut. Djo (pronounced "Joe") is the brainchild of Joe Keery, star of Netflix's *Stranger Things*.

Djo is not Keery's first musical endeavor. After studying theater at DePaul University, he began creating music with Post Animal—a Chicago-based psych rock band. Due to his acting commitments, Keery parted ways with the band in 2017, but has since rejoined to record their latest record *IRON*. Post Animal opened the night with a set that had fans equally as excited.

The stage was soaked in a dark red light and the crowd was struck silent as Djo walked on stage and began to strum his guitar to the tune of "Awake." Besides the music, all that could be heard was the quiet shutter of the photographers' cameras in the pit. It was a scene unlike most concert openers. After a couple of minutes, the chords progressed and one brave fan shouted, "let's go!" just as the lights turned bright white and the bass dropped. With that, a switch was flipped and the room became electric with shouts and cheers as the song transitioned into "Uglyfisherman."

Djo's latest album, *The Crux*, was released this past spring, breaking the Top 10 in U.S.



DJO

Rock charts. It is a bit of a departure from previous albums *Twenty Twenty* and *DECIDE*, as it features more of a classic rock sound as opposed to the synthpop that fans were used to. With its deeply vulnerable lyrics, the album acts as a commentary on the idea of success, insecurity, fear, fame, and more.

A fan project turned the crowd into a sea of green light for the song "Potion." Djo remarked that whoever coordinated the endeavor ought to be proud of their work. He also shared that his grandmother was in the crowd, prompting everyone to welcome her with cheers. "End of Beginning" practically shook the room with the crushing weight of nostalgia. The hit song has joined the Billions Club on Spotify and has

become a part of the pop vernacular. After "Back On You," fans pleaded for an encore, to which Djo happily obliged with "Chateau (Feel Alright)" and "Flash Mountain."

Perhaps the most undercover artist of the night was Carlos Katsurayama, lighting designer and programmer. His work added an entirely new dimension to the performance. At times, he managed to split the stage in half, with one side appearing to be in black and white and the other in color. His use of light and color transformed the space into something that could not be achieved within the physical confines of the space, and truly left an impression on the crowd.

- Erica Beatey



KISS THE TIGER

**Mercury Lounge** New York, NY

**Contact:** ava@girlieaction.com

**Web:** kisssthetiger.com

**Players:** Meghan Kreidler, vocals; Michael Anderson, guitar, vocals; Alex Sandberg, lead guitar; Isabella Dawis, keys, vocals; Paul DeLong, bass; Alyse Emanuel, drums, vocals

**AMIDST THE CHAOS ON THE LOWER EAST**

Side, Minnesota's Kiss the Tiger curated a memorable night at the Mercury Lounge. Celebrating the release of their newest album, *Infinite Love*, Kiss the Tiger embarked on a 10 date United States tour this September. Fronted

by fierce vocalist Meghan Kreidler, the group has spent the better part of a decade sculpting themselves into the band they are today. From start to finish, they delivered a spirited and entertaining show, captivating the audience.

Kiss the Tiger pulls influence from a wide breadth of music genres. Audience members could find strings of indie, rock, ska, math rock, '90s pop country, funk, and blues weaved in through guitar riffs and keyboard lines. In the Minneapolis scene, Kreidler earned her stripes as an actor. This shone through as she expertly flitted between tempos, genres, and intensity. A vocal powerhouse, big swings in "We Don't Fight Anymore" sounded just as natural as the

light and breezy melody in "I Wanna Love Ya." She would go above and beyond, conveying emotions that were larger than life through screams, jumps, kicks, and high energy. It was impossible to take your eyes off of her.

The variety in Kreidler's vocal dynamics was echoed by the rest of the band. For a moment, they would lull the audience with a dreamy start, and in the next sudden heavy drums would kick off a visceral instrumental break. Despite occasionally changing on a dime, the music never got away from them. They moved through the tracks together as a unit, every member fitting seamlessly into the puzzle that is Kiss the Tiger.

On stage, the band's charisma won over the (albeit already eager) audience. Every member danced, jumped around, or engaged with the crowd from start to finish. Never once did the audience doubt that the band was having just as much fun as they were. Capitalizing on the intimacy of Mercury Lounge, Kreidler drew the audience in with personal anecdotes and behind the scenes stories about the songs. She would look out lovingly at the crowd during romantic tracks, as if she wrote it about each person there. Call and response was highly encouraged, with the group taking time to shout out some of their lyrics between tracks.

Although they have wrapped on their 2025 tour, *Infinite Love* is now available for streaming. Hopefully they will continue to bring the energy in 2026, so be sure to check them out now.

-Emily Mills

**Gothic Theatre** Denver, CO

**Contact:** katie.ogara@umusic.com

**Web:** miradorband.com

**Players:** Jake Kiszka, vocals, guitar, harmonica; Chris Turpin, vocals, guitar; Nicholas Pini, bass, keys; Mikey Sorbello, drums

**AS FANS SPENT THE DAY CAMPING OUTSIDE** the venue and curious pedestrians strode by, the same question arose time and time again: "Who are you waiting to see?" Mirador, they explained, the result of a creative partnership between Jake Kiszka (Greta Van Fleet) and Chris Turpin (Ida Mae). After meeting in Detroit in 2018, the two quickly found a kindred soul in each other. One thing led to another, and the idea for the band was born. Now, years later, their work has finally been shared with the world.

Mirador has cited artists like early Fleetwood Mac, the Allman Brothers, Elmore James, Muddy Waters, Fred McDowell, and Lead Belly as influences for the bluesy-rock they've created. They operate as a dual guitar band, with Kiszka and Turpin working in conjunction to complement the other. Somehow, their distinct styles of playing fall into a seamless, almost romantic, interplay. Rounding out the band is Nicholas Pini, who keeps the groove down on bass and keys, and Mikey Sorbello delivers finesse on the drums. Both Pini and Sorbello have worked alongside Rival Sons' Jay Buchanan in his solo endeavors, amongst other projects, and bring an incredible wealth of talent to the stage.

This world tour—spanning North America and Europe—comes just as the band released their debut, self-titled album. Kiszka paired up once



again with producer Dave Cobb, who worked on Greta Van Fleet's last album, *Starcatcher*, to bring the Mirador sound to life. The result is a sort of lawless rock that unites everything from British folk to American Delta Blues under one sonic landscape. It evokes a certain nostalgia for times past while also feeling like uncharted territory.

After an incredible opening set by Linka Moja, the lights came down at 9 p.m. and Jim Ghedi's "What Will Become of England" boomed over the speakers, riling up the crowd and setting the scene for revelry. Mirador took the stage to "Heels of the Hunt" wielding their guitars as swords followed by "Raider," which included an extensive guitar aside with Kiszka and Turpin sparring via fretboards.

"Feels Like Gold" was Mirador's first official release and the first song written together. The heavy riff has quickly become an iconic part of the setlist. After an electric performance of

"Roving Blade," Pini showed off with a heavy bass solo that practically had the walls shaking, all while humbly hidden behind the curtain of his hair. He then turned it over to Sorbello who took the spotlight for a drum solo that simply stole the show. At many other concerts, the solos may be a good time to use the bathroom or buy merchandise without the line. At Mirador? Absolutely not. Sorbello used every part of his body to create a dynamic performance that left everyone in awe. As fans bowed down to their master of percussion, the rest of the band reassembled for "Fortune's Fate."

For "Ten Thousand More to Ride," Kiszka broke out the harmonica while Turpin took his chance to rile up the crowd with that *oh-so-poetic* British lilt. The tender feeling carried over into the next song, "Must I Go Bound," before bringing the volume back up for "Blood and Custard." — **Erica Beatey**



**Cat's Cradle** Durham, NC

**Contact:** g@garretscullin.com

**Web:** @kittycraft\_band

**Players:** Carrie Hansen, vocals; Pamela Valfer, vocals, guitar; Nils Bryant, guitar

**THE CAT'S CRADLE IS A BIG STAGE.** Even bigger when there are only three on it—as in a trio. As in Kitty Craft.

'Twas such for this show: just two singers, two guitars—no backline, no drum riser, no bass

rig, and no heavyweight pedalboards or other flotsam and jetsam of your typical touring act. Nope. Here was a stage set as stripped down as you could get, and the near-capacity crowd couldn't have cared less. They'd already tasted the Kool-Aid, gulped it down, and from the first note, they were roaring their approval.

The songs came off like the hot kiss at the end of a wet fist: "Faltered," "When Fortune Smiles," and

"Par 5" were deliciously unpretentious, basking in simple chords that made room for thoughtful and well-delivered lyrics.

"Androgynous" was a bit of a head-scratcher since it was hard to understand what was going on—was it a protest tirade, an affirmation of alternative culture, or a commentary on the difficulty of telling the AC from the DC? In these days of Modern Times, it's no easy feat. "A Priori" was deliciously low, and the crowd perked up and took notice—after all, there hasn't been a song titled in Latin since Bad Bunny and Feid

released "Perro Negro," which, incidentally, isn't Latin at all but Spanish.

There were so many stellar moments in this set: "11 Hours 16 Days" had a jumbled but sonically trippy arrangement, and some of Niles Bryant's riffs were pulled straight from the Plain White T's catalog. But so what? Good artists steal—great artists copy!

The key takeaway—aside from the solid sonics—is that everything from the songs to the light show, the constantly shifting images behind the stage (Think Barbara Kruger in a Robert Rauschenberg short film), the crafty cassette displays (Think Red Grooms meets Duchamp) at the modest merch table, and even the record covers were all designed and created by Pam Valfer, performing under her nom de groove: Kitty Craft. Including the 20-year-old backing tracks playing behind every song.

This was her one-woman vision of reality—framed by her songs, her lyrics, and the vast personal landscape she spread before this crowd with bold, unwavering commitment.

And if there was anything to be less excited about, it's this: with such a stripped-down stage set—no bass player, no percussionist, nothing but backing tracks—there was very little musical interaction happening on stage. If that's the sound she wanted, that's the sound her diminutive trio delivered. — **Eric Sommer**

**Hotel Café** Los Angeles, CA

**Contact:** james@pressherepublicity.com

**Web:** rachaelsage.com

**Players:** Rachael Sage, vocals, guitar, keys; Dave Eggar, cello; Andy Mac, drums

**RACHAEL SAGE IS ONE OF** this country's best kept secrets. She practically sneaks by the general public with her brilliant, innovative mind and gift for writing alt-pop tunes that scurry down your ear canal and set up camp in the front and center of your brain. Like, say, Tori Amos, you can't shake the feeling that Sage is the smartest person in the room, that she's three steps ahead of everybody else, and there are layers to her art.

We interviewed Sage back in 2023, and she told this writer that, "I initially started writing songs to express my feelings about being bullied in school, but also I can remember having a very clear vision after watching shows like *American Bandstand* and *Solid Gold* that 'That's what I want to do!' I just felt, instinctively, there was an otherworldly magic in performing—not only singing but also dancing and acting—and have been thoroughly immersed in the creative arts ever since!"

Sage has just dropped her latest full-length album *Canopy*, and it's a typically

joyful, thought-provoking, emotion-stirring slab of work. She played a lot of them at the Hotel Café, as she celebrated the release. "I believe with every beating of my heart, if the world were run by women there would be an end to war," she sings in the title track, a sentiment that's difficult to argue with. It's a beautiful indie-folk song that sounds great on record; in the live environment it soars to a whole other level. It feels like Sage is singing to every individual in attendance, and that's a rare gift. She's the musical equivalent of one of those portrait paintings where, no matter where you are in the room, it feels like the eyes are watching you.

"Just Enough" is *Canopy's* opening track, and that dazzled at the Hotel Café too. "Every time that you touch my hand, I feel love," Sage coos, before detailing the multitude of other ways that she feels love. It's an absolute love-in, but it feels absolutely natural and genuine.



## RACHAEL SAGE & THE SEQUINS

"*Canopy* is the first album that I feel reflects every aspect of my artistry, not only as a singer, producer, and musician, but also as a songwriter," said Sage in a statement. It shows. - **Brett Callwood**



## VOLA

**Gramercy Theatre** New York, NY

**Contact:** john@bands.management

**Web:** volaband.com

**Players:** Asger Mygind, vocals, guitar; Martin Werner, keys; Nicolai Mogensen, bass; Adam Janzi, drums

**In the midst of their** 2025 tour, Danish-Swedish band VOLA delivered a fully immersive show to fans. Performing songs from their new album, the band leaned heavily into lighting design, incorporating it as an extension of their sound and an instrument in its own right. During "Napalm," deep reds drenched the crowd, while "Alien Shivers" featured rays of a severe, white light

slowly spread out from Mygind. Other tracks featured bursts of colors or specific spotlights to punctuate each song. A semicircle of thin LED strips framed the band, morphing the set to fit each track.

The lightshow rendered VOLA incorporeal—beamed in from another realm. Known to write their music in secluded areas of Denmark, the isolation and introspection echo through the performance. They seem untethered, just out of reach. And yet, despite appearing otherworldly on stage, VOLA remained connected with the audience. Mygind made a point to engage with the crowd, encouraging dancing, moshing, and singing along. VOLA's fans were deeply devoted, drinking in every note.

Throughout the show, the band moved fluidly between headbanging metal guitar, distorted vocals, dreamy synth, and simmering drums—sometimes all within a single track. "Alien Shivers," for example, required these quick switches between textures. As vocalist and lead guitarist, Mygind set the tone, shredding in "Cannibal" or practicing haunting restraint in "These Black Claws." Reverb and distortion played key roles, texturizing his vocals and guitar. As a whole, VOLA toyed with genre, incorporating glittering '80s rock influences and new-age ambiance with their metal grit.

Their ability to create lush soundscapes on synth sets the group apart from their peers. Warner deftly moved from flowing runs on "We Will Not Disband" to blanketing the audience in "Stray the Skies." Quintessential to creating the mood for each track, the keys sat below the guitars but never buried. On bass, Mogensen added gravitas, grounding the group with rumbling riffs. Bass and synth lines played off each other, bubbling below the surface and creating tension, released only by explosions of sound in Janzi's drums. Seething cymbals and unyielding bass drums urged the group forward, sometimes snapping them back to reality after a particularly dreamy synth section. A true heartbeat, Janzi kept the swimming layers of sound together, containing the chaos without restraining it.

Although VOLA has wrapped up their North and South American tour, they will be traveling to Australia in 2026, kicking off in Newstead, Brisbane this February. Their album, *Friend of a Phantom*, recently celebrated its first anniversary, so be sure to give it a listen if you haven't already. - **Emily Mills**



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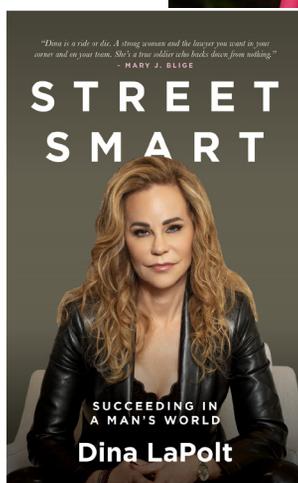
# Succeeding in a Man's World

Excerpt taken from the book *Street Smart* by Dina LaPolt.

Here's a jarring thought: It's a man's world. Actually, it's a white, straight man's world. Every president of the United States has been a man. Most CEOs and chairpersons of boards of directors are men, and so are most billionaires. As of 2023 in the U.S., the number of women holding the prestigious role of CEO within Fortune 500 companies stood at a modest 52. To put this limited representation into perspective, women make up a mere 10.4 percent of CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. Out of the top 50 Fortune 500 companies, 37 of the CEO positions are held solely by white men. In stark contrast, only seven of the CEO positions in the top 50 companies belong to women. How great would it be for society if the statistics were flipped?

In 2023, a movie that Greta Gerwig wrote and directed called *Barbie* was released. It is a live-action film based on Mattel's Barbie dolls. The movie starts off in "Barbieland," which is a quintessential matriarchal society completely run by women. The Barbies demonstrate societal roles, showcasing careers like doctors, lawyers, judges, physicists, pilots, and more. The president of Barbieland, played by Issa Rae, is a Black woman. The men in this society play an obsolete role and their job is to "beach," which is essentially sitting and looking pretty. By a strange turn of events, Barbie, played by Margot Robbie, must venture out to the "real world" to solve a crisis in Barbieland. To her dismay, when Barbie enters the real world, she discovers the cruel reality that a patriarchal, sexist, and misogynistic society exists beyond her world. Everywhere Barbie ventures, she sees that men hold all positions of power while simultaneously degrading and putting women down. Not too different from how I grew up.

Women rule Barbieland, and they all have positions of power and maintain the classic Barbie look, but *Mad Men* is the reality. Women still need to look like a Barbie in a *Mad Men* world, because Barbie's world, where women are in charge of everything, is



still a fantasy. To be really successful in a corporate business environment, women still have to be put together like Barbie.

As women age, they're judged harshly for it. The older you get, the more you have to be put together. When I was in my early 30s, I wore hardly any makeup when I went to the office. Most mornings, I came right from my recovery meetings or a work-out class at the gym. But now I'm in my late 50s. I have to be more put together. In the later years, you become more conscious of how people relate to you.

How they perceive you is still important, especially in this day and age. You don't want to be written off just because of age or what you look like. Sadly, us women are still dealing with that.

There are things we can do to change the male-dominated landscape, like engaging in activism and policy or effecting real change by creating awareness and changing and/or making laws. But here is a startling fact—the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was proposed in 1923 and finally passed in Congress in 1972 but was never ratified into the Constitution.

Under U.S. law, amendments to the Constitution must be ratified by three-fourths of the Senate and then the archivist of the United States (appointed by the president) must formally publish the amendment for it to be ratified. As of this writing, that has not

happened. The ERA would guarantee women equal pay and legal rights. On April 27, 2023, a full century after its introduction, the U.S. Senate again failed to ratify the ERA by a vote of 51–47. It required 60 votes to pass. Truth be told, since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, which decriminalized abortion nationwide and recognized a woman's right to choose whether to have an abortion, the situation for women's rights in the U.S. is the worst it's been in over half a century. We are going backwards!

In the meantime, acceptance of this reality is the only way to turn lemons into lemonade. As they say in the rooms of recovery: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. As we seek to make change for ourselves, we must adapt if we are to rise, grow, and be successful within our current reality. So, if you want to be at the top of your game, learn how to play the game, the "man game."

Most men love beautiful and stylish women, even gay men. Work it! Whether you're a young business executive at a company or a creative person working in an art gallery, learn how to work within the *Mad Men* reality and move the needle for yourself. How do you do this? Through various means, like having a magnanimous personality and being able to "work the room," but which only comes naturally to some people.

Women can control and manipulate some things, such as self-care and practicing wellness. Other than the traditional forms of health and wellness like fitness, nutrition, preventive doctor's visits, and getting eight hours of sleep each night (which are all important) women also have more new and improved modern forms of self-care: fashion, medicine, surgery, and also through restoring and improving facial balance and harmony through "natural intention beauty guidance" as described by Medical Aesthetic Providers Vanessa Lee and Christine Son at The Things We Do.

**Dina LaPolt is the founder of LaPolt Law, the only music and entertainment firm of its stature owned and operated by a sole female attorney. She leads groundbreaking wins like the Music Modernization Act, championing creators' rights through fearless advocacy and bold legislative action. A lawyer, entrepreneur, activist, and inductee into Billboard's Women in Music Hall of Fame. With grit and determination, anything is possible.**

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