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deadmau5

Music Connection talks to electronic music giant deadmau5 about touring, new material, gear, and much more.

Photos: Matt Barnes

By Lily Moayeri



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By Rob Putnam

Electronic Music Roundtable

Hit the Decks! MC spoke to five electronic artists from various genres about their experiences in the industry up to this point.

By Brett Callwood



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MANUFACTURED AND PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Music Connection (ISSN# 1091-9791) is published monthly by *Music Connection, Inc.*, 3441 Ocean View Blvd., Glendale, CA 91208. Single copy price is \$3.95, Canada \$4.95. Subscription rates: \$35/one year, \$59/two years. Outside the U.S., add \$25 (U.S. currency) per year. We are not responsible for unsolicited material, which must be accompanied by return postage. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without written permission of the publishers is prohibited. The opinions of contributing writers to this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of *Music Connection, Inc.* Copyright © 2026 by E. Eric Bettelli. All rights reserved.
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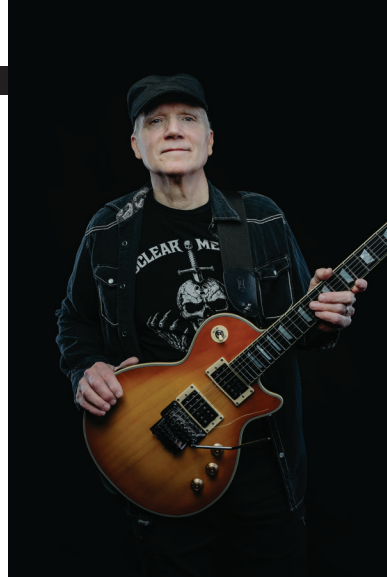
7th Street Rehearsal

7thstreetrehearsal.com

A Musician at the Helm: Legendary guitarist Chris Poland, best known for his work with Megadeth in the band's early years and his long-running jazz fusion outfit OHM, has spent nearly three decades as a central figure behind the scenes at one of Los Angeles' most vital rehearsal hubs. Originally arriving at the facility in the late '90s when it was still known as Downtown Rehearsal, Poland took on whatever work was needed—cleaning rooms, handling maintenance, and gradually stepping into management.

Over the past 27 years, he has evolved into the driving force overseeing a sprawling creative ecosystem that has supported generations of artists across genres, from established bands like The Strokes, Warpaint, Fear Factory, The Melvins, and Fantômas, to emerging young bands like Julie. His deep roots in the music community and hands-on leadership have helped maintain the space as an essential resource for working musicians.

A Hub for Creative Community: Rebranded in early 2026 as 7th Street Rehearsal, the expansive downtown L.A. facility spans approximately 90,000 square feet and houses over 200 rehearsal spaces of varying sizes—from compact drum rooms ideal for shredding to large-scale band rooms exceeding 800 square feet. Many spaces feature coveted window access, while others include control and tracking room capabilities used for professional recording and production. Designed with double-wall construction and sound isolation techniques that minimize bleed, the rooms provide a high-quality environment for serious rehearsal. With 24/7 access, month-to-month leases, ample free onsite parking, easy load-in, building security, and a central location, the facility has long been a go-to destination for hundreds of bands. Recently, when the previous management stepped away and the future of the space was uncertain,



billionaire philanthropists and arts patrons Stewart and Lynda Resnick of The Wonderful Company stepped in to preserve it—recognizing that closing the complex would displace hundreds of musicians with few viable alternatives in Los Angeles. Under new leadership, plans are underway for building upgrades and enhanced community amenities to support evolving artist needs.

Legacy and Forward Motion: Beyond managing the facility, Poland remains deeply active as a recording artist and collaborator. While OHM continues to explore heavy fusion territory, he is also preparing new material for M-Theory Audio that draws inspiration from guitar legends like Jeff Beck and John McLaughlin. In addition, Poland is featured extensively on *Black Flame*, the upcoming Cleopatra Records release by Nuclear Messiah, a project spearheaded by label president Brian Perera featuring nearly 40 guest musicians, including icons like Rick Wakeman, Bumblefoot, Pat Travers, Mick Box (Uriah Heep), and past Megadeth alumni such as Marty Friedman, David Ellefson, and many more. As 7th Street Rehearsal enters its next chapter, Poland's dual role as artist and mentor ensures that the space remains not only a professional facility, but a living, evolving music community where established players and emerging talents alike can develop their sound and sustain the creative spirit of Los Angeles music.

Contact: 7th Street Rehearsal, 818-232-1474

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Stevie Heckert

Senior Manager, Digital Marketing
The Syndicate

The **Syndicate** announced the hiring of digital strategy expert **Stevie Heckert** as **Senior Manager, Digital Marketing**. "I deeply admire The Syndicate's reputation for thoughtful, culture-forward campaigns," said Heckert. "Joining a dynamic team that prioritizes building genuine connections with fans through innovative thinking is incredibly exciting. I'm looking forward to building smart, impactful strategies that help our clients break through in substantial ways." For more, contact jeff@thesyn.com.



Jaymie Lunt

Junior Designer
The Syndicate

The **Syndicate** announced the expansion of its Creative Department with the addition of **Jaymie Lunt** as **Junior Designer**. Lunt most recently led marketing efforts for Bowery Ballroom and Mercury Lounge, where she played a central role in solidifying brand identity and elevating creative output through dynamic content and engaging design. Her background blends live music culture with strong visual storytelling, making her a natural fit for The Syndicate's expanding roster of entertainment clients. For more, contact jeff@thesyn.com.



Greg Levin

Chief Executive Officer/Board Member
Starbird

Starbird announced the appointment of **Greg Levin** as **Chief Executive Officer and Board Member**, effective immediately. Levin will lead the company's next phase of national expansion, bringing a guest-first leadership mindset, a proven record of scaling premium restaurant brands and deep experience building disciplined, high-performing restaurant concepts and operating systems. "As Starbird expands nationally, my focus is on building upon our strong, values-driven culture and strengthening execution and guest hospitality at every level," said Levin. For more, contact pdonahie@championmgt.com.



Mike Easterlin

Managing Director
ONErpm

ONErpm has hired **Mike Easterlin** as **Managing Director** of its Nashville division. Easterlin brings decades of experience in A&R and promotion to the role. "I've always believed in the independent spirit of artists—the drive to create, take risks, and build something real. Helping talent find their voice and turn it into a lasting career has always been my passion," said Easterlin. "ONErpm embodies those same values: passion, focus, transparency, and a real commitment to giving artists a global platform to grow on their own terms." For more, contact jonathan@rockpaperscissors.biz.



Guji Lorenzana

Director, A&R & Client Development,
APAC
Symphonic

Symphonic has promoted **Guji Lorenzana** to **Director, A&R and Client Development, APAC**. In his new role, Lorenzana will oversee regional A&R strategy, client development, and team growth across key APAC markets, working closely with artists, labels, and partners throughout Southeast Asia, East Asia, South Asia, and Australia. "The APAC team has been thriving under Guji's leadership," said Ed Poston, Head of A&R at Symphonic. For more, contact laurie@jaybirdcom.com.



Nick Weakley

Social Media Manager
Milestone Collective

Milestone Collective, the music-focused agency combining public relations and social media expertise, has promoted **Nick Weakley** to **Social Media Manager**, effective immediately. This title recognizes his creativity, strategic digital insight, and commitment to raising artists' online presence, all supported by his deep passion for the music industry and the clients he represents. "From day one, Nick's ambition, dedication, and willingness to expand his skillset, empowering our artists to make a greater impact on their social media platforms, stood out," said Mike Gowen, the company's founder and CEO. For more, contact jessica@milestonecollective.com.



Josh Kritzler

President, North American Venues & Content
Legends Global

Legends Global has announced that **Josh Kritzler** has been appointed to **President, North American Venues & Content**. In this role, Kritzler will oversee the company's portfolio of North American arenas, stadiums, theaters, and convention centers and lead venue operations, content, and booking across the network. "I'm excited to step into this role and work alongside our teams to bring even greater alignment across content, commercial strategy, and operations," said Kritzler. For more, contact sescudero@legendsglobal.com.



Allie Moskovits

Head of Sync & Business Development
The Patron Saints of Music

The **Patron Saints of Music** has appointed **Allie Moskovits** as **Head of Sync & Business Development**. In the newly created role, Moskovits will lead sync strategy for Patron Saints' rapidly expanding catalog to drive new business opportunities across TV, film, ads, gaming, and emerging media platforms. "I'm incredibly excited to join Patron Saints of Music," said Moskovits. "Sync is evolving quickly, and I look forward to growing this historic company into bold new opportunities that connect its incredible music with today's expansive media landscape." For more, contact kelly@kelleemackpr.com.



▼ SILVERBOY—THE NEW DIRTY BOY GUITAR PREAMP PEDAL



You might recognize the name of Dirty Boy Pedals. Founded in the 1980s by Alex Saraceno, father of noted session guitarist Blues Saraceno, Dirty Boy Pedals is a boutique stompbox manufacturer. The hand-built Dirty Boy pedals promise huge, authentic vintage tones and have been used by Linkin Park, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Bon Jovi, Journey, The Waterboys, and Black Eyed Peas. In 2024, the company was acquired by musician and designer Danny Gomez and manufacturing operations shifted to Spain.

Gomez partnered with Two Notes Audio to offer digital replicas of the classic analog circuits. The brand has focused on reissuing classic models while retaining the original "raw soul" and hand-built quality, alongside introducing digital versions through the Two Notes Genome platform. Originally developed in collaboration with Two Notes, the SilverBOY TSM-Ai™ virtual amp was inspired by the Dirty Boy Tube Amp Emulation Preamp design from 2018. Musician response was so strong that Dirty Boy decided to make an analog version. Dirty Boy used the behavior, response, harmonic content, and power feel of the virtual TSM-Ai™ amp to shape the tone, then rebuilt it in analog form.

New from Dirty Boys Pedals is the SilverBOY which has the unusual distinction of being the first analog preamp pedal that was inspired by a digital virtual amp. SilverBOY is a fully analog preamp and amplifier simulator and can be interfaced in three ways—for direct stereo line use as an all-in-one amp simulator, as a high-detail preamp for your amp's FX loop, or as a tube-like drive/boost pedal for a guitar or keyboard amp. SilverBOY pedal controls feature a Variac Simulator, 2x12 Cabinet Emulation, 3-Band EQ, Preamp Out, Emulated Out, Stereo Line In with level control, and Headphone Output. It features a true bypass switch and will pass signal even in the event of power loss.

Visually enhancing the pedal's "bad boy" image, the SilverBOY looks like it was built in someone's garage as a custom one-off experimental piece. The rough and tumble industrial look with crooked stickers is a no-frills deliberate statement in a crowded field designed to make it stand out. Even the serial number is handwritten in Sharpie. The pedal looks intriguing, and you can't help but wonder what it's going to sound like.

In practice, SilverBOY is a powerful and versatile preamp with an extensive amount of sounds available. The range of gentle breakup, edge, and distortion is touch responsive and goes from subtle to severe. The interaction between the Variac and the gain control is highly interactive with the ability to dial in bite, punch, bloom, tube-like sag, and raw harmonic crunch. And the lo-mid-hi controls let you fine tune the frequency response for exactly the tone you are looking for. With the three different connection options, all this makes SilverBOY much more than just a stomp box preamp.

"SilverBOY was born as (binary) code. Now it exists as hardware. It's the first time we've built an analog circuit from a virtual amp—reversing the whole industry's direction," said Danny Gomez, Dirty Boy owner. At \$476, it's not an entry level stompbox, but not unusual for a handmade boutique pedal. Highly recommended.

dirtyboy.co



▲ SSL ACOUSTIFIER PLUGIN: ACOUSTIC GUITAR TONAL MODELING

Solid State Logic recently released the Acoustifier, a unique modeling plugin that transforms an acoustic guitar D.I. signal into the sound of a miked acoustic guitar. Recording an acoustic guitar with a great microphone is not always possible, particularly in a live sound setting. The Acoustifier is a remarkable tool that can breathe life into a sterile sounding recording of a direct acoustic guitar pickup. The results are convincing and can substantially improve the tone of a direct acoustic guitar.

The Acoustifier is a full featured channel strip all on its own and features guitar size, XY or spaced pair mic positioning with choice of condenser, dynamic or ribbon microphone tones, compression, four types of reverbs including hall, plate, room, chamber presets, EQ and reverb ducking. Seven presets offer suggestive starting points. It's tremendously flexible and offers a substantial amount of tonal and spacial variation.

The Acoustifier features four standard acoustic guitar sizes: two dreadnought options, a jumbo body, and a concert body. The modeling is excellent and instantly conveys a tonal shift on a track of direct acoustic guitar to that of a guitar in front of a pair of microphones. *MC* found Dreadnought 1 to be particularly useful, with a forward sound that is balanced, warm, and big. Dreadnought 2 is more midrange forward and also present. Surprisingly, the Jumbo has a subdued low end and a midrange forward tone, with a clarity and hardness sounding like a maple body. The Concert guitar sounded similar to the dreadnought with a darker sounding bottom and nice sparkling top end.

The microphone type and spacing also substantially affects your sound. The mic choices sound as you would expect. Condenser is bold, big, and full; dynamic is smaller and even; and ribbon offers a sweet round treble and articulate bass. A range of mic configurations are also available, including XY and spaced pair setups, with controls to blend body and neck microphone signals. Each microphone can be turned off or mixed higher or lower.

Acoustifier includes a built-in EQ and real-time frequency analyzer which features a quick-access tilt band, enabling instant shifting of the tonal balance toward the high or low end. For more precise control, Acoustifier's EQ also features high-pass and low-pass filters, and three parametric mid bands. The frequency analyzer with real-time visual feedback can be effective to quickly find peaks or resonances.

Acoustifier is aimed at rescuing D.I. tracks and probably won't improve a well recorded miked acoustic guitar track. *MC* did try Acoustifier on a sampled mandolin and interestingly, it breathed life into the samples and made it sound like a real mandolin. The Acoustifier might be the plugin that you didn't know that you needed. A wonderful useful and powerful plugin to round out your toolkit. Acoustifier is available individually at \$99 or as a part of the SSL Complete Access Bundle subscription for \$19.99 per month.

solidstatellogic.com



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► CHARVEL PRO-MOD PLUS SO-CAL STYLE 1 HH FR CM ELECTRIC GUITAR

Credited with being the pioneer of the "SuperStrat," Wayne Charvel found himself in the right place at the right time. In the mid 1970s, Charvel had a guitar shop adjacent to Los Angeles in suburban Asuza. Initially a repair shop, it became iconic for modifying instruments, notably for Eddie Van Halen who lived close by in Pasadena. Guitar modifications became stylish and necessary in the mid '70s due to the high performance that shredders like Van Halen and Randy Rhoads required. As demand increased for hot rod Strat variations Charvel became synonymous with 1980s hard rock and metal musicians. The early "San Dimas" models had high-output humbucker pickups, custom paint jobs, Floyd Rose tremolos, and customized Strat-style bodies.

Owned by Fender Music Corporation since 2002, the Charvel guitar line continues to honor the spirit of the original '80s guitars. The Charvel Pro-Mod Plus So-Cal Style 1 HH FR CM electric guitar is billed as a "modernized take on the classic So-Cal shred machine (that) packs even more cutting-edge features for lightning-fast playing." A high-performance "SuperStrat" guitar designed for speed and technical playing, it does not disappoint.

MC's review sample weighed in at 8.2 lbs., the same as a light Les Paul and 2 lbs. heavier than a traditional Strat. This weight is consistent for a Strat with the humbucking pickups and a Floyd Rose tremolo. With an alder body and 22 fret caramelized dark maple neck, the guitar is nicely balanced and resonant. The build quality is excellent, and the guitar feels good to the touch. The 4-bolt neck includes graphite reinforcements to aid tuning stability. The neck has a 12"-16" compound radius consistent with the SuperStrat style. At the Nut (12"), the fretboard has a more noticeable curve for your hand to wrap around when playing chords or rhythm. At the Higher Frets (16"), the fretboard flattens out significantly allowing you to perform deep string bends without the note choking out. By contrast, a vintage-style guitar usually has a single, round radius all the way up. The compound radius is a more sophisticated "best of both worlds" design for modern players. The treble side cutaway is contoured to increase access to the upper frets with no restriction.

Tones are handled by a pair of Seymour Duncan Distortion high output humbucking pickups with oversized ceramic magnets. Duncan has an established history of making the finest pickups and they sound great not only for shredding and meaty distortion but can also provide sparkling clean tones. A 5-position pickup selector enable humbucking sounds in position 1, 3, and 5, and traditional single coil tones in positions 2 and 4, eliminating the need for separate coil tap toggles and preserving the clean look of this beautiful guitar. There is just a single volume and tone control, and in the fully on position of the tone is automatically bypassed. All hardware is matte black including the anodized aluminum pickguard.

The Charvel Pro-Mod Plus So-Cal Style 1 HH FR CM is manufactured in Ensenada, Mexico. While marketed for heavy metal and shred guitar, the guitar is so well made and versatile that any style of music can be played on it. Available in Blue Burst and Black. Includes Charvel® Multi-Fit Gig Bag. \$1,299.99

charvel.com



▼ HISONG AIRSTUDIO S1 COMPACT MOBILE RECORDING DEVICE



HISONG Music Technologies was founded in 2024 with a goal to simplify mobile recording. Billed as "the world's first all-in-one mobile recording capsule built for musicians and content creators," the AirStudio S1 is a wireless handheld microphone system designed to act as a portable studio. The battery powered rechargeable microphone is switchable between condenser and dynamic pickup elements and houses a wireless USB-C Bluetooth dongle and in-ear monitors. At just 4.75" long it is small enough to fit in your pocket.

It's unusual and versatile for a microphone to have both condenser and dynamic microphone elements built in. The dynamic microphone option has low sensitivity, and a super-cardioid polar pattern. The condenser mode has high sensitivity and is recommended for a richer, more detailed sound. In use, the condenser setting did sound fuller and more sensitive, louder.

Proximity effect was more pronounced in the dynamic setting and plosives for both settings were substantially reduced by using the included foam wind screen.

Control of the AirStudio S1 is accomplished via the HISONG Link App. Designed for iOS or Android devices, it works as a mobile studio for recording, audio processing, and content sharing. Users can adjust microphone monitoring levels, headphone volume, effects and the playback level of external backing tracks. A battery interface displays the remaining power of both the microphone and wireless monitoring earphones.

The HISONG Link App features a nine-band EQ, compressor, plate reverb, noise reduction, and a limiter. The app can capture backing tracks from some music apps on the phone while simultaneously recording the vocal as

an independent track. With built-in one-tap sharing, recordings can be sent directly to social platforms, messaging apps, and cloud services without transferring files to a computer.

Supported USB-C Cable Functions include multi-track recording and tuning mic settings. Supported Wireless RX Mini Bluetooth functions include music creation, mobile and outdoor recording and wireless in-ear monitoring of mic signal. RX Mini also connects to smart devices and cameras, supporting wireless audio recording and live streaming with low latency transmission. The optional Wireless RX Plus provides built-in 3.5mm audio output enables direct connection to speakers, cameras, mixers for live performances or video shoots.

HISONG is focused on "intelligent, user-friendly, and professional-grade solutions" for mobile audio creation. Operates for up to eight hours of use from both the microphone and ear buds. Includes Cubasis LE for iOS. Compatible with top DAWs. Available in matte black or chrome.

4-in-1 Musician Kit (includes the mic, IEMs, Audio interface USB-C In & Out and the HISONG Link App). \$299

5-in-1 Creator Kit (includes everything above plus a Wireless RX Mini (USB-C Out)). RX Mini connects to smart devices and cameras, supporting wireless audio recording and live streaming with imperceptible latency transmission. \$349

6-in-1 Master Kit (includes everything above plus a Wireless RX Plus (3.5 mm Out)). Built-in 3.5mm audio output enables direct connection to speakers, cameras, mixers and more—ideal for live performances or video shoots. \$399

hisong.io

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.

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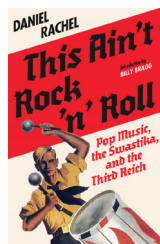
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This Ain't Rock 'n' Roll: Pop Music, The Swastika, and the Third Reich

By Daniel Rachel
(hardcover) \$29.95



Rarely has a book felt so timely. The subject of nazis, fascism, and general far-right awfulness is always going to raise heckles. These are dangerous waters to wade into. Author Rachel fearlessly and skillfully takes the bull by the horns, taking musicians—many mainstream and beloved—to task over their flirtations with nazi imagery. No icon is safe, as Rachel tackles commonly used nonsense arguments like “they like the fashion, not the politics,” “they’re fascinated by the history but don’t subscribe to it,” and “they just wanted to upset old people.” There’s also a great foreword by folkie activist Billy Bragg. A brilliant book!

Pet Shop Boys Volume: The Complete Visual Record

By Chris Heath with Philip Hoare
(hardcover) \$49.95



Here’s something we didn’t know until reading this gorgeous tome: the Pet Shop Boys are the most successful duo in the history of pop music with over 50 million records sold worldwide, and a ton of awards on their collective shelves. This beautiful, very orange book offers an exhaustive look at the group’s career, diving deep into each album, and indeed each single. The Pet Shop Boys deserve a thorough examination; Neil Tennant’s sharp, Oscar Wilde-esque lyrics could be the subject of the sort of book often written about Bob Dylan. For now though, this is more than enough.

The Drum Thing

By Deirdre O’Callaghan
(hardcover) \$45



This looks like it was a labor of love! Author O’Callaghan has interviewed close to 100 drummers from across the genres (jazz, rock, pop, funk, punk, hip-hop) and compiled them into a visually appealing collection of anecdotes, life lessons, and nuggets of career advice. The interviews and photoshoots were conducted between 2011 and 2015, and some of the drummers (Clem Burke, Ginger Baker, Neil Peart) are no longer with us. It’s bittersweet though, because their words are timeless. “Some say rhythm is medicine; drumming has been compared to an addiction,” O’Callaghan writes. Quite true!

All Good Cretins Go to Heaven: The Enduring Spirit of the Ramones

By Jenn L. Beckwith
(paperback) \$25



It’s been three decades since the Ramones were active, ending as they did in 1996. While former members Richie, Marky, and CJ do still tour and keep the music alive, the fact that all four original members (Joey, Johnny, Tommy, Dee Dee) have passed on means that any sort of real reunion is impossible. And yet, their legacy thrives. Author Beckwith has curated a collection of stories from Ramones devotees, loving assembling a book that shines a spotlight on the affection with which the New York punks are still held.

Shaping Sounds: Stevie Wonder, Devo, The Synth Revolution and My Life Behind the Music

By Robert Margouloff with Jim Reilly
(paperback) \$24.95



As the title suggests, renowned producer Robert Margouloff has worked with artists as respected and diverse as Motown hero Stevie Wonder and new wave provocateurs Devo. “Beginning on the set of his first film, *Ciao! Manhattan*, with Andy Warhol superstar Edie Sedgwick, Margouloff captures the tragic beauty of New York’s East Village and Warhol’s Factory as he discovers a powerful new way to score his movie: the Moog synthesizer,” reads the press release. That wealth of experience and a gift for spinning a yarn makes for a fascinating, informative, and witty memoir.

The Come Apart

By Susannah Felts
(paperback) \$26



Indie musicians will either get a kick out of Felts’ wide-eyed though somewhat cynical look at the trappings of the alternative music scene, or they’ll hide behind a tour bus seat because it all seems too real. The novel tells the tale of Maggie Corbin, “on the cusp of turning thirty, who’s spent a decade hustling on the peripheries of Chicago’s music scene. Her band, Spinning Birds, is finally hitting all the right notes.” Cult success withers away thanks to the streaming revolution, and she goes solo to keep things ticking along. Urgh, it all seems very familiar.

R O C K Y S H A W



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Marc DeSisto Audio

marcdesistoaudio.com



Full Circle at Mix LA Studio D: A GRAMMY-nominated engineer whose roots trace back to Sound Castle and the golden era of A&M Studios, Marc DeSisto has come full circle creatively in recent years, stepping into a purpose-built space at Mix LA in Tarzana that has reignited both his technical curiosity and artistic instincts. After years of working from a home studio, he outgrew the limitations—and loves capturing vibrant performances, lead vocals, a killer bass, drum takes, and loud guitar solos in his current space. The studio is fully equipped environment centered around an SSL Origin analog console. With 32 channels of onboard preamps, additional routing via 16 busses and a flexible patchbay system, DeSisto can approach sessions with an elevated level of depth and spontaneity. “You can be dial in the EQ and really shape things in a musical way,” he says of the console, noting its lineage to SSL’s classic 4000 series sound. The expanded routing options also allow for more creative parallel processing and live tracking setups, particularly when working with full bands. Combined with Focusrite RedNet converters and an intuitive studio layout, the space is designed for efficiency and inspiration—“turn on the coffee and get to work,” as he puts it.

A New Wave of Clients: While DeSisto continues to work with famed longtime collaborators like Dwight Yoakam and Australian guitar virtuoso Tommy Emmanuel, his current roster reflects an increasingly diverse mix of artists. These include rising indie band Dyes, whose genre-blending sound moves from atmospheric textures into high-impact rock, as well as country artist Johnny Marfa & The Lights and singer-songwriter Jesse Money, whose deeply personal material explores loss and legacy related to her legendary father Eddie. DeSisto has also worked on solo material with Aaron McLain, guitarist and music director for Air Supply; he also recently mixed a PBS special for the legendary soft rock duo, further showcasing his versatility across formats.

One-Stop, Artist-Focused: Increasingly focused on mixing and mastering—while still producing select projects—DeSisto has positioned himself as a full-service partner for artists at all levels. From tracking and co-production to final masters and DDP delivery, his goal is to streamline the process without sacrificing depth. “The artists I work with want to step back and hear the music again, not just the details,” DeSisto says. His approach often begins with identifying the emotional anchor of a track—whether it’s the vocal, drums, or bass—and building the mix outward from there. “If the bass isn’t right, nothing feels right. That groove has to hit. No matter who I’m working with, my goal is always the same—to make sure the song comes through in the mix in a way that feels natural and undeniable. You can have all the production in the world, but if the song gets lost, you’ve missed it. When everything locks in and the track just blooms out of the speakers—that’s the moment I’m chasing. That’s when I know we’ve got something real.” It is also great to know that artists trust you with their music, that is big!

Contact Marc DeSisto 818-259-4235

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▲ **DYLAN LEBLANC ANNOUNCES A SPECIAL 10TH ANNIVERSARY RE-RELEASE OF HIS ACCLAIMED ALBUM, CAUTIONARY TALE**

Louisiana singer-songwriter Dylan LeBlanc announced a special 10th Anniversary re-release of his acclaimed album *Cautionary Tale*, which is due out on May 15 via Single Lock Records. To herald the announcement, he has unearthed a demo of fan-favorite track “Roll The Dice (Bedroom Demo).” LeBlanc is also hitting the road on a U.S. tour, which kicked off on March 13 in his hometown of Shreveport, LA.



▲ **DAVID GUETTA FINDS SOUL IN A DIGITAL WORLD WITH RHODES MK8**

GRAMMY-winning DJ and producer David Guetta is integrating the Rhodes MK8 MIDI piano into his Ibiza studio, using it as both a creative spark and central controller. Blending its expressive feel with an in-the-box workflow, Guetta explores how soul can transcend genre—bringing warmth and musicality into his dance productions through the iconic Rhodes sound.



▲ **HARRISON 32CLASSIC ELEVATES PURE SOUND AT APSOON RECORDINGS**

APSoon Recordings has installed a Harrison 32Classic console in its Estonia studio, prioritizing clarity and zero coloration for its high-resolution jazz and classical recordings. Founder Aular Soon relies on the desk’s precise EQ, flexible inserts, and transparent sound to shape mixes captured in DSD, preserving natural acoustics while allowing subtle, dynamic control.



▲ **WAR CHILD RECORDS RELEASE “HELICOPTERS” BY EZRA COLLECTIVE & GREENTEA PENG**

War Child Records released “Helicopters” by Ezra Collective & Greentea Peng—from the highly anticipated forthcoming *HELP(2)* album. Produced by Ezra Collective and mixed by David Wrench, the group join forces with Greentea Peng for a commanding collaboration that seamlessly fuses their distinct sonic identities. “Helicopters” follows recent releases taken from the *HELP(2)* record, including “Opening Night” by Arctic Monkeys, “Flags” by Damon Albarn, Grian Chatten, and Kae Tempest, “Let’s Do It Again!” by The Last Dinner Party, “Begging For Change” by Pulp, and an exclusive stand-alone 7” addition of “Acquiesce (Live From Wembley Stadium, 28 September 2025)” by Oasis.

PRODUCER PLAYBACK

“The one ingredient has to be talking about something that people care about, whether that’s love, heartbreak or something political. If you can find a point of view and see it through, that’s one thing a song can’t be without.” – PHILIP LAWRENCE





▲ EPIPHONE PRESENTS: SPIRITUAL CRAMP "LIVE AT ALLY PALLY"

Epiphone Presents: Spiritual Cramp "Live at Ally Pally" captures one of punk's most compelling modern bands, live inside the historic Palace Suite of Alexandra Palace in London. Shot by Nick Suchak mid-stride during the group's late 2025 tour with The Hives, *Epiphone Presents: Spiritual Cramp "Live at Ally Pally"* distills the band's explosive, sweat-soaked stage energy into a tight, intimate performance.



▲ FLORE LAURENTIENNE UNVEILS "(À TRAVERS LES) CHABLIS" AHEAD OF VOLUME III

Flore Laurentienne teased his final chapter in the *Volume* series with "(À travers les) Chablis," blending ethereal synths and strings with free jazz percussion, harp, and Casavant organ. Released on April 10 via Secret City Records, *Volume III* closes the trilogy while celebrating nature, improvisation, and harmony born from chaos, offering a glimpse into the evolving, experimental world of the artist.



▲ GRAMMY-NOMINATED HITMAKER TENROC DROPS "MOURNING 2 DANCING" FT. TORI KELLY & JON KEITH, ANNOUNCES DEBUT ALBUM

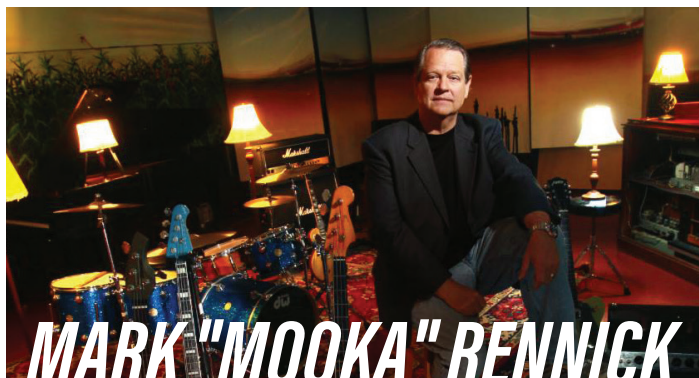
Fresh off the release of his debut single "PLAYLIST," multi-hyphenate singer, musician, and producer Tenroc released his second single "mourning 2 dancing," featuring GRAMMY-winning singer-songwriter Tori Kelly and genre-bending hip-hop artist Jon Keith. Following the release, Tenroc officially announced the forthcoming release of his debut album, *God Is a Person*, due on May 29th via Sony/Provident.

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MARK "MOOKA" RENNICK

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Originally from rural Illinois but with close ties to Chicago, musician, producer, and studio owner Mark "Mooka" Rennick relocated to Sonoma County, California in 1976. There, he established a basic home studio before later launching the now-shuttered Prairie Sun Recording, a residential studio that has hosted artists including Tom Waits, Michael Schenker, and Commander Cody. Indeed, metal label Shrapnel Records has recorded more than 100 albums there. Rennick now maintains several satellite studios (including one in Portland) and has worked closely with the late celebrated Chicago engineer Steve Albini.

Not surprisingly, one of the biggest obstacles Rennick faced when he opened his studio was dealing with the economics of the operation. He was an indie establishment amidst a sea of entrenched sonic spaces. "You had labels and a huge number of commercial studios [in the Bay Area] and I was kind of an outsider," he recalls. "But I also had much lower overhead costs than they did, so I worked with a lot of indie labels. That eventually segued into major label work, including the first records by Exodus and Faith No More. The challenge when I started was to try to get the budgets to work for indie bands and also to be taken seriously."

For Rennick, top mics rise above nearly all other pieces of gear. "Tom Waits recorded every note from 1989 until 2001 on a Neumann M 49 vintage microphone," he explains. "We use it to this day and it remains one of our go-to pieces. We also have a Neumann U 47 with its original tube. When Journey recorded at Prairie Sun, those were the mics they used. I love them because the records I grew up with used the same ones. I knew that if I didn't want to pay for studio time, I needed to own my own laboratory, which is what we call our studio in Portland."

With decades spent in studios across the country, Rennick has seen his share of magic. One of his favorite memories is of witnessing one legendary percussionist lead another through some musically murky waters. "I once watched Journey drummer Steve Smith play with tabla master Zakir Hussain," he recalls. "Zakir was playing tabla, Steve was playing traps and we were trying to get this extremely complex rhythmic crescendo finished. Watching a world-famous drummer keep missing the downbeat while Zakir patiently walked him through it was great. When we finally got it, Steve was smiling like a little kid."

As an industry veteran, Rennick urges rising producers and engineers to log hours however they can. "Get into a workable, learnable DAW," he suggests. "Acquire a good mic or two and work for free at first with talented people. Don't be too picky initially. Things have a way of working out."

After a lifetime in the business, he still finds engineering fun. "I don't know anybody who does this that *doesn't* live and breathe music," he observes. "They have to." Currently he's putting together a record of things he's recorded over the course of his career. "We've done four singles in the last year and we only have 196 to go," he says jokingly. He's also collaborating with golf course architect Robert Trent Jones Jr. on several projects.

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THE 3 MOST IMPORTANT

he's learned as a producer and studio owner are:

- Be open-minded. That's huge.
- Be humble. Don't impose your personality upon the production; don't make yourself a part of what the artist is doing.
- Serve other artists and make connections. Help other people's careers.

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CEO and Founder
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BACKGROUND

Tipify is a fresh way for fans to monetarily support the artists they're into. Founder Dan Carucci is a scientist, not a music industry insider, but he has a long history of tackling tough challenges. The downloadable app arrived in March.

Doing the Right Thing

I'm a physician and molecular biologist. I was the U.S. Navy physician and ran their malaria vaccine program. When I retired from the Navy, I worked with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation on global health programs. Then I found myself as the chief medical officer for McCann Health. I spent my life working in women's and children's health in sub-Saharan Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The common thread for all that and Tipify is there are inequities in the world that need to be fixed. Somehow, I find myself involved in those kinds of things. There's no money in making a malaria vaccine, but it affects millions of people. Getting women to breastfeed doesn't make a lot of money, but the impact is high.

A Revelation

About three years ago, I was talking to a couple musicians. They told me about the streaming services and the fact they get paid so little. Even if you have a lot of streams, you make only a couple thousand dollars. "You're telling me all the money I'm putting into subscription services doesn't actually go to the artists I'm listening to?" I felt that was fundamentally unfair. There should be a way to know what artists I'm listening to and a way to support them. That's how Tipify started.

Generating Trust

The connection with artists is there. But how do you tap into it? It's a matter of making sure artists understand it exists and empowering fans to use it. We launched in November after about two years of development. I have a good team. The infrastructure is there. It all works. Now it's a matter of—how do we get it out so people trust it?

A New Fan-Powered Artist Discovery Showcase: Road to Austin

We started having conversations with *SPIN*, and they were like, "This is pretty cool. Let's do something together during the week of SXSW." So we have a partnership where we're going to showcase Tipify artists. We want emerging artists to sign up for consideration, and *SPIN* will do the editorial process. We're super excited about that.



"The connection with artists is there. But how do you tap into it? It's a matter of making sure artists understand it exists and empowering fans to use it."

The Power of Music

I've always been a music lover. I was sitting in the middle of the Serengeti in Tanzania waiting for my puddle-jumper plane to pick me up. It was hours late. I'm sitting by myself under a tree with my iPod. And I remember listening to Elliott Smith. Here I am in this remote place by myself, and I've got my music. It was comforting.

Jumping In

I probably got into this because I didn't know what I was doing. Throughout my life, I've always said yes to everything. There was an opportunity in the Navy—"Do you want to fly airplanes?" I said yes. I could barely swim. I had to teach myself to swim a mile, which I'd never done. My boss retired, and they needed someone to take over the malaria vaccine program. I'd never made vaccines before. When I ran a \$200 million program for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, I'd never done that before. I don't know that I'm particularly fearless, but for some reason I don't mind putting myself out there.

Fans Will Pay

I knew [Tipify] was a great idea. We'd done market research showing that, for those between 18 and 34 years old, 60 percent of them would pay one to five dollars a month for their [favorite] artists. That's enough to go with right there.

How It Works

We take five percent of all tips. And Stripe, which is our financial system, takes about five percent. So the artist gets 90 percent of the tip. The first thing they have to do is create an account, which is free. Then they claim their profile. You sign up with Spotify. We have a database of about 600,000 artists from Chartmetric. There's a verification process through Instagram, just to make sure you're the person you say you are. The second step is ID verification through Plaid. And the third step is creating your Stripe account.

As a fan, it's much simpler. You just find an artist you like, push the button, and say how much you want to support them by. Maybe you want to make it monthly. You can use Apple Pay, PayPal, or a credit card, and the artist can pull the money into their bank account whenever they want.

Artists Are Already Providing Something

The problem with Patreon is it costs money

for the artists to sign up. They have to provide something of value beyond the music they're already creating, such as podcasts, merch, or new releases. That's flawed. They're already making the music we're listening to. Why should they put more money, time, and energy into something to get more money?

Paying Fans Exist

There are four major revenue streams for artists. One is streaming, which doesn't pay anything.

Then you've got touring and live performances. There are problems with both of those, depending on where you are in your career. There is merchandise, which costs money to produce and ship. And then you've got licensing and royalties. From my perspective, we're missing the biggest one, which is the direct

fan-to-artist connection. If a band has 800,000 followers and one percent of those fans tip a dollar, that's \$8,000.

Fan Connections

At Tipify, the artist can contact fans directly. Our system allows fans to be stratified by geography. If a band is going to be in Brooklyn, they can sort by Brooklyn and say, "We're going to be here. Here's a promo code to get in." With all the other tipping platforms, they're very one-way. There's no connection between the artist and fan. There's nothing that provides for any longevity. It's a one-off tip.

Artist Discovery

Our platform allows you to discover artists, because you've been listening to music on streaming platforms. Right now, [our users connect with] Spotify, but I think we'll be adding Apple Music and probably Tidal soon. And then we're going to do an artist recommendation feature. Our algorithm is going to be based on fan engagement. Let's say you and I both like artist A, and you also like artist B and I like artist C. The app's going to tell me, "Maybe you should look into artist B, because you both like artist A." It becomes because of our interaction.

The Data Speaks

We're going to have a huge amount of data that we think A&R people may be interested in. Say you want to find out who is the next up-and-coming artist; here are people supporting [a particular musician] financially. That's much more meaningful than a like or a follow. Venue owners are willing to schedule up to 25 percent of their venue to emerging artists, but they do that at a risk because they don't know if anyone's going to show up. But let's say it's a venue in Dallas, TX. Here's an artist that's from Dallas that has a substantial Tipify following. They're going to be more willing to put them on their schedule because they know the artist has paying fans.

Be Part of the Solution

People say, "Tipping's gotten out of hand. Someone makes you a cup of coffee, and you've got to tip for it." The difference there is you're already paying for something. This is an opportunity to do the first thing, which is pay for what you're consuming. Here's a way to feel good about supporting artists you love.

Alexandra Grant's New Old Classics

The *Gracias Gustavo* era at the LA Phil finds a fresh visual partner in artist Alexandra Grant, whose kaleidoscopic translations of text-based narrative into pure, expressive image now adorn a pair of definitive Prokofiev recordings from Deutsche Grammophon. For the digital release of *Romeo and Juliet*, captured as it soared alongside choreography by Benjamin Millepied's LA Dance Project at Disney Hall, the label worked with Grant's 2022 painting *Bounty*, an explosion of violet and crimson where submerged text on love and hate vibrates with the same tragic abundance as the score itself. This curated resonance thence evolved into a bespoke creation for the imminent *Peter and the Wolf*, featuring Viola Davis' star-turn narration at the Hollywood Bowl performance—a night of musical history so outrageously gorgeous that it necessitated an entirely new, interdisciplinary vector in its lineage.

Grant's eye-widening, poetically thoughtful, and somehow both unsettling and adorable *Peter and the Wolf* cover-art is a sharp, graphic dream inside a forest of melting lines and surrealist collage. Here, the iconic yellow of the DG brand is a main character, offsetting a landscape defined by ferality and containment. Like Grant's arrangements, young Peter's journey lingers at the threshold between instinct and discipline. "I wanted to show Peter as a young boy who follows his own intuition, will, and wildness in his relationships with the animal characters, and who is transformed by them," Grant told *Music Connection* in an interview. "As Peter enters the adult world, his understanding of the wild changes; the wolf ultimately ends up in a zoo."

Grant's is an eccentric visual libretto rooted in a personal lineage of orchestral discovery. "I grew up with Prokofiev's music," Grant recalls, and for her, like so many Gen X kids, "*Peter and the Wolf* served as an introduction to the instruments and sound of the orchestra." This commission was an opportunity to engage a new generation—while also dealing directly with its history. "The cover was inspired by the famous yellow cartouche, which I used as a collage element, and its brightness influenced the color palette," Grant says. "I also studied the cover of the Beatles' *Revolver* album, designed by Klaus Voorman, who effectively combined line drawing and collage." In fact, Grant has been utilizing a collage-inflected aesthetic in her painting practice for years, along with a salient relationship to historical texts from the West's pantheon of origin stories and folklore—but maybe not with this many cats, wolves, and ducks.

laphil.com
alexandragrant.com



ARILY MICHELE

Nashville dream-pop artist Arily Michele was recently the recipient of a well-deserved high scoring review in these pages, based largely on the three songs from her "Silver Dollar" single, her latest release at the time of writing. Her debut album, *Echolalia*, dropped in 2021, with the sophomore *Highway Hypnosis* coming out in '24. But the entirety of her musical journey is a much longer story.

"I started singing around age two, and writing around age eight," Michele says. "Singing and writing songs has stayed with me my whole life, but I started taking singing more seriously in high school. I was heavily involved in chorus and theater, and I finally started taking voice lessons when I was 17 to help me prep for college auditions. I started taking songwriting more seriously after I graduated from college. I studied classical music, and music theory helped me to extract ideas from my head and materialize them into written songs. After I graduated, I wanted to rebel against my classical training a bit, so I started a dream pop band in Denver. I had probably written hundreds of songs at that point and scrapped most of them, but the few that I kept are the first songs I ever recorded."

The artist describes her sound as "dreamy neo-psychedelic pop that is heavily inspired by the lofty peaks and sweeping valleys of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. I am also a classically trained operatic soprano, so I like to incorporate some coloratura vocal layers for a more cinematic feel."

The "Silver Dollar" single is the third taken from her forthcoming album. "It's inspired by the story of a girl named Rosemary Echo 'Silver Dollar' Tabor," Michele says. "Her family was absurdly wealthy when she was born, but lost their money a few years later, and she spent the rest of her life chasing after fame and fortune as a result. I felt like Silver Dollar's story reflected my own personal fears of failure, and also society's tendency to emphasize wealth and notoriety over joy and connection."

To Michele, DIY means "don't wait around for someone to do it for you."

"When I moved to Nashville, I couldn't afford to hire professional recording and mix engineers, so I recorded myself and taught myself how to mix," she says. "If I hadn't done that, I would have waited until I could afford to hire people, which might not have ever happened. So not only would I not have been able to release any music, I also would have missed out on what turned out to be a truly enjoyable experience, as well as the chance to learn some valuable audio engineering skills. I believe that sometimes it's best to just get things done and figure the rest out as you go along. Part of being an artist is embracing that you are on a journey. A journey becomes so much more interesting when there are unexpected twists and turns."

Michele has a bunch of shows and festivals lined up for the summer, with that third album due in September. Keep your eye out for her!

Visit arilymichele.com



THE LEGAL BEAT

BY GLENN T. LITWAK



Pras Michel, a former member of the highly successful hip-hop trio the Fugees, has dismissed (without prejudice) his lawsuit filed in New York federal court in October 2024 against former bandmate Lauryn Hill and MLH Touring Inc. Michel alleged in his complaint that Hill grossly mismanaged the Fugees' 2023 reunion tour, ending it early and canceled The Miseducation Anniversary Tour in 2024. The lawsuit was dismissed with each party bearing their own costs and attorneys' fees.

Michel alleged that the Defendants were liable for breach of fiduciary duty, breach of contract, improper

accounting, unjust enrichment, fraud, and refusal to allow an audit. The complaint alleged that due to the Defendants' conduct, the 2024 tour was cancelled just three days before it was scheduled to begin. By dismissing the case "without prejudice," Michel could re-file the action in the future (assuming the statute of limitations has not run). If the action had been dismissed "with prejudice," it could not be re-filed.

Michel claimed in his lawsuit that in connection with the 2023 tour, Defendants failed to pay certain expenses, such as credit card and hotel bills, as well as money due to musicians and crew.

Michel also contended that Hill refused a five million dollar offer for the Fugees to perform at the Coachella Music Festival because she would not agree to be billed below the group No Doubt.

Michel stated that Hill mismanaged the Fugees' tour "as a veiled and devious attempt to make a big score for herself." Michel further contended that

Hill and her touring company had "complete control over the business aspects of the tour which allowed her to have a total lack of transparency over the tour's management, including the handling of money." He further stated that he thought the tour could have been a "huge commercial success" if Hill's actions had not ended it early. Michel claimed that Hill profited from decisions made regarding the tour while he endured mounting legal problems.

Hill denied the allegations calling them "baseless" and "full of false claims and unwarranted attacks." She further stated: "I've been silent and pushing through because I understand that Pras was under duress because of his legal battles and that this was perhaps affecting his judgment, state of mind, and character."

The Fugees group was formed in 1989 in New Jersey by Hill, Wyclef Jean, and Michel. They had initial success with hits such as their cover of Roberta Flack's "Killing Me Softly with His Song" and "Ready or Not."

The band became a very

influential group known for combining different genres such as hip-hop, soul, and reggae.

Michel's legal problems include a conviction for aiding a foreign country in an effort to influence an election. Michel is set to serve a 14-year prison term. Michel is appealing that conviction.

GLENN T. 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 gtllaw59@gmail.com or check out his website at glennlitwak.com

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

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Date Signed: March 2026

Label: ANTI-

Type of Music: Indie rock / Country / Grunge

Management: Another Management Company

Booking: TBA Agency

Publicity: Kelly @ ANTI-

A&R: Andy Kaulkin + Allison Crutchfield

Web: brennanwedl.com

When singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist Brennan Wedl signed with ANTI- Records, the alt-roots sister label to the very punk-centric Epitaph, the deal made perfect sense. Placing Wedl on a roster that also included the likes of Fleet Foxes, Gitterer, and Mavis Staples saw the appropriate stars align.

Her debut for the label is a cover of Canadian artist Kathleen Edwards' "Six O'Clock News," though listeners should be ready for Wedl's original material.

"I made up songs a lot as a kid—always testing my two younger brothers' patience and eardrum receptivity levels," Wedl says. "I started writing songs on the acoustic guitar in fifth grade, and my first show was on November 26th, 2011. I took it upon myself in that coffeeshop to humbly offer the world my rendition of his 2011 hit song, 'How To Love.'"

Wedl describes her sound as, "acoustic guitar singer/songwriter roots hot-wired to a pair of go-go boots playing an electric guitar telecasting spells of crunchy, twangy truth bombs with hooky, singable melodies."

"A little bit of punk, Americana, and a nod to the music of the upper Midwest in the late '90s early 2000s."

The artist claims that the deal with ANTI- came about "through the power of music, magic, and madness." For Wedl, "Six O'Clock News" was the perfect vehicle to introduce herself to her new label.

"[Kathleen Edwards] is a legendary alternative country Queen and this song has always been a standout favorite of mine," she says.

With her feet firmly under the table at her new spiritual home, Wedl is ready for a big 2026. "I'm opening the shows on the Waxahatchee / MJ Lenderman tour starting April 13th in Atlanta," she says. "The joy and enthusiasm that fills my soul is beyond compare. I'm going to be playing solo and experimenting with the good ole trusty six-string acoustic guitar. Beyond that, more exciting tours—support and headline dates, hanging with loved ones, taking Spanish lessons, continuing to grow together in community and fighting to protect one another from the fallout of the American imperial war machine imploding all around us with each new day. We have the power in numbers, people. It's never too late to speak out. Time to join local organizations that align with what's right! We can build a better future when we organize together. Love you thanks for reading." - **Brett Callwood**



Date Signed: June 2025

Label: Nettwerk Records

Genre: Pop, Punk

Booking: Ryan Edmundson - UTA; Joel Baskin - The Feldman Agency ; Matt Bates - Primary Talent

Legal: Alex Ploegsma - Ploegsma & Shulman, LLP

Publicity: Claire Reynolds, creynolds@nettwerk.com

A&R: Mike Glita

Web: ilovegamesweplay.com

Games We Play is the band moniker and performance vehicle for singer-songwriter/multi-instrumentalist Emmyn Calleiro. The 20-something musician originally began in his hometown of Miami, Florida playing local pop-punk shows as a teenager. He proved a real go getter and self-promoter at 14 and 15 years old working with other bands and booking weekly shows.

"I dropped out of high school to do this, but it never really caught a wave until I was 21 years old," says Calleiro. "I did learn a lot but there was no need to drop out of high school on my end. That was something I did that I thought was smart at the time."

However, Calleiro's musical spirit and industrious business savvy paid off, eventually moving to Los Angeles and posting some of his power pop and punk songs on TikTok and various social media. He captured the alternative

"Right now, my plan is trying to make good stuff, not a lot of stuff."

punk zeitgeist in 2022 with the declarative single "I Hope You're Happy."

"There was nothing before that," says Calleiro. "And then the next day it was kind of like, 'oh, people are interested in my music.' It was a song I posted about my life and people really resonated with it."

After years of toiling in the trenches, he curried the favor and attention of Fall Out Boys' Pete Wentz and major indie label Fueled By Ramen/DCD2 Records. Calleiro worked with them for over two years performing sold out shows that took him to Europe and prestigious venues such as Red Rocks and Madison Square Garden.

But after that successful run, Calleiro took stock in the direction he was going with his life and music and thought it was time for a change. At this same time he met A&R man Mike Glita from Nettwerk Records. "Is This What I'm Made Of" is the debut single for the Nettwerk imprint. The deal will involve the release of subsequent singles leading to a full album release by the end of 2026.

"Right now, my plan is trying to make good stuff, not a lot of stuff," says Calleiro. - **Eric Harabadian**



Date Signed: February 2025
Label: Daptone
Members: BG, Zeimani, and Kucha Womack
Type of Music: R&B
Management: thewomacksisters@redlightmanagement.com
Booking: josh@crossovertouring.com, kate@crossovertouring.com
Publicity: judy@motormouthmedia.com, mick@motormouthmedia.com
A&R: Gabe Roth/Daptone
Web: thewomacksisters.com

It's been a long time since we heard a soul vocal group like The Womack Sisters. With a sound rooted in the classic R&B of the Supremes, the Pips, Aretha, etc. despite their relative youth, theirs is a refreshingly traditional, warm, and quite sweet throwback. That's not to say that these women—BG, Zeimani, and Kucha Womack—don't have an edge. But if we were told that a song like "You Went Away Too Long" had been written and recorded for Motown back in '68 we'd have no reason to doubt it.

It shouldn't be any surprise; the sisters are the offspring of Cecil and Linda Womack (AKA Womack & Womack), and the granddaughters of Sam Cooke. That's a remarkable family history, marking three generations of musical brilliance.

Kucha says that she started writing music seriously when she was 11, but had been performing since she was just six.

"I started writing when I was nine—just poems but I later evolved to songwriting," adds BG. "I kept them to myself for a long time no one knew."

"I've been on stages performing and in studios making music with my family for as long as I can remember," says Zeimani.

In describing their own sound, the trio says, "We would say our sound is soulful, gritty, rhythm & blues. We have always been eclectic as songwriters, there are so many different dimensions that have always existed within our musical wheelhouse."

The Womack Sisters have signed with Brooklyn-based indie funk and

"There are so many different dimensions that have always existed within our musical wheelhouse."

soul label Daptone, with the deal occurring after a "good vibes" meeting with Gabe Roth.

"It was right after we put out the single "Darling," they say. "We had released it independently and shot a video that was getting a lot of love, and people were seeing the clear direction we were taking with our music—soulful, classic rhythm & blues. It was a close friend that said we should call his friend at Daptone Records, because it would be a musical match."

That's how it turned out, and "You Went Away Too Long" is the first fruit of the relationship. "'You Went Away Too Long' has a special meaning for all of us," they say. "It's about the void that is felt when a loved one disappears out of your life for what seems like forever, leaving you to face life alone." - **Brett Callwood**

Date Signed: January 2026
Label: Fearless Records
Members: Nathanael Pulley, vocals; Ben Koehler, guitar; Grayson Mesarosh, drums
Type of Music: Rock
Management: Scott Sheldon and Ben Bruce, RM 64
Booking: Imran Xhelili - ixhelili@independentartistgroup.com
Publicity: Amy Sciarretto and Tori Kravitz, Atom Splitter PR - tori@atomsplitterpr.com
Web: archersband.com

There's a particular kind of musician who doesn't choose music so much as get chosen by it. Nathanael Pulley, vocalist of metalcore outfit Archers, is of that kind.

"Deep down, I always knew that for me, it was this or nothing," he says, and he means it without any of the melodrama you'd expect. Just a kid in a church choir who grew up, discovered bands, and never once entertained an alternative reality. "I never had that 'Ah hah!' moment," Pulley says. "For me, making music was just my baseline."

That baseline, built on years in the DIY trenches, has now earned Archers a deal with Fearless Records—and a label debut single called "The Dirt" that asks the age-old question: *If I get everything I want, will it be enough?*

"All of us, after so long in the DIY scene, have felt real burnout over the years," he says. "The Dirt," produced by Erik Ron, grew out of that exhaustion—a record made, fittingly, from scratch. "We'd gone to him with

"It wasn't until I learned to let it all go that the good things started to come together."

a blank slate and just a few inklings of ideas of where to go."

What emerged is the sound of a band that refuses to be pinned down. Ask Pulley to describe Archers' genre and he'll give you an answer, then immediately undermine it. "Metalcore is what I tell people," he says. "But honestly, we just used the sounds and styles that speak to us in the moment. Our music will always be evolving and growing because, if you do life right, we as people are always evolving and growing." He calls himself "pretty genre blind," which in 2026 is less a cop-out than a survival skill.

The Fearless deal, for its part, came together without the chaos you might romanticize. "We'd been shopping some new demos around to see if anyone was interested in helping us make a record," Pulley explains. "Fearless and a few others showed some real interest, but ultimately we went with Fearless because they seemed to really understand our vision and goals."

Clean. Decisive. Very Archers, apparently.

But the real story—the one that threads through everything Pulley says—isn't about the deal or the record or even the songs. It's about the moment he stopped white-knuckling the whole thing.

"I used to hold onto this band with a death grip," he says. "It was synonymous with my life and happiness. It wasn't until I learned to let it all go that the good things started to come together."

Which is, if you think about it, exactly the kind of thing a guy who just got signed should say—and somehow still sounds like he means it.

Archers hit festival stages this summer at Welcome To Rockville, Louder Than Life, and Inkarceration. New music is in the works. - **Ruby Risch**



▲ **TINA TURNER'S POPHOUSE**

Sweden-based investment firm Pophouse Entertainment (co-founded by ABBA's Björn Ulvaeus) acquires majority stake in Tina Turner's catalog—including name, image, likeness—in a deal with BMG (following BMG's purchase of Turner's artist/writer/neighborhood/name/likeness in 2021).



◀ **FOY VANCE'S WAKE**

Emmy-winning (*Ted Lasso*) Foy Vance releases final tribute album to his father. Losing the traveling preacher as a youngster, *The Wake* is the 7th in a series honoring his father's favorite words, "Give me the boy until he is 7, and I will show you the man." More at foyvance.com.



▲ **AVEX TO MARS**

16-time GRAMMY winner Bruno Mars has joined Avex Music Group for exclusive global publishing administration in an agreement that will start upon completion of his current BMG/Warner Chappell deal.

Landmark Piracy Ruling

The US Supreme Court has unanimously sided with Cox Communication in a landmark music piracy case presented by a group of record labels. The ruling claims that Cox cannot be held responsible for music piracy committed by its subscribers and that Cox neither induced its users' infringement, nor provided a service tailored to infringement. The ruling follows a \$1 billion jury verdict win by the label group (Sony Music, Universal Music Group, Warner Music Group, and other rightsholders) in 2019 (the ruling was overturned with a request for a retrial in 2024), after Cox ignored 163,000 infringement notices relating to over 10,000 subscriber downloads of copyrighted songs. Justice Clarence Thomas stated that Cox did not intend for the service to be used to commit piracy, and therefore, could not be held liable as it would "expand secondary copyright liability beyond our precedents."

RIAA Chairman and CEO feels that Cox's actions are akin to mass scale theft facilitation. Following the latest decision, rightsholders must now prove that a provider actively encouraged copyright infringement, or that the service was designed purely for piracy with no other real lawful use.

AIM's Future Independents

The Association of Independent Music presents the no-cost *Future Independents* online conference for emerging independent artists, labels, and entrepreneurs. Running May 18-26, there will be 10 sessions

of inspired programming across five days, taking place twice daily at 12 p.m. and 2 p.m., covering topics including marketing, campaign strategies, monetization, partnership, touring, and much more. Attendees receive insight from leaders in the independent music community with insightful talks, panel discussions, and practical workshops. Register at futureindependents.co.uk/ programming.

AIM is a non-profit organization representing the U.K.'s independent music scene (1/4 of recorded music) and combines a diverse community of independent labels, music businesses, self-releasing artists, and entrepreneurs. AIM works to promote, support, and grow the independent music sector through services, opportunities, and practical support to help with innovation, expansion, and market breakthroughs. For more information, or to join AIM, email info@aim.org.uk.

New Beasley Release

Prolific Los Angeles-based jazz pianist-arranger (and current President of the International Society of Jazz Arrangers & Composers) John Beasley (Miles Davis, Freddie Hubbard, Steely Dan, Dianne Reeves, Chaka Khan, Christian McBride, Chucho Valdes, Queen Latifa, MONK'estra) releases *Invisible Piano* this month (single "Fire and Rain" is out now). Right on time to celebrate Miles Davis' Centennial on May 26, the *Unlimited Miles: Live from Blue Note Tokyo* concert set for broadcast on KJAZZ the same day. A summer of performances is also in the works (see johnbeasleymusic.com). The new album was recorded on a Steinway Spirio, a piano with built-in computer that captures performances as data, allowing Beasley to transfer his improvisations directly into ProTools and Silbelius and expanding improvised fragments into full orchestral arrangements. The new instrument has a playback feature that allows Beasley to play his own recorded performance while simultaneously conducting the big band, or dueting with himself on his KeyWi instrument.



▲ **BMI'S LUNY TUNES**

Production duo Luny Tunes (Francisco Saldaña/Víctor Cabrera) receive 33rd annual BMI President's Award as reggaetón pioneers, producing 500+ songs, launching careers for Daddy Yankee, Don Omar, Wisin & Yandel, Tego Calderón, Ivy Queen. More at awards.bmi.com/show/latin-2026.

ASCAP Honors Vanacore

The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) extends heartfelt congratulations to composer David Vanacore on his ASCAP Golden Note Award. With credits including *Hell's Kitchen*, *Big Brother*, and *Survivor*, the latter of which Vanacore is celebrating the

50th season of scoring. Presented to members who have achieved extraordinary milestones, Vanacore joins Lionel Richie, Jeff Lynne, Quincy Jones, Jermaine Dupri, Reba McEntire, Alicia Keys, Alf Clausen, and Mark Snow. Starting out as a session and touring musician before switching to composition, Vanacore launched one of the first full-service film and television production houses (Vanacore Music). His work on *Survivor* has included collaborations with indigenous musicians using traditional instrument sand integrating native languages for authenticity and to highlight the cultures and locations feature in the series. Vanacore has been named the top ASCAP winner for Most Performed Themes & Underscore 21 consecutive times.

Ongoing Songwriter Retreats

Limited spots remain for the Performing Artist Songwriter retreat with Jonatha Brooke next month. Taking place over three days—June 17-20—in Nashville, participants will join Brooke in discovering new ways to tap into their creative flow. Limited to just 15 attendees; spots will fill fast. Themes will include working through words and phrases, creating melodies, the use of rhythm, expanding collaborative approaches, as well as exploring Brooke's favorite guitar tunings and capos. Includes opening and closing night group dinners and song circle, and inspiring surprise guest songwriters (friends of Brooke). Details and registration at performingsongwriter.com/creative-workshops.

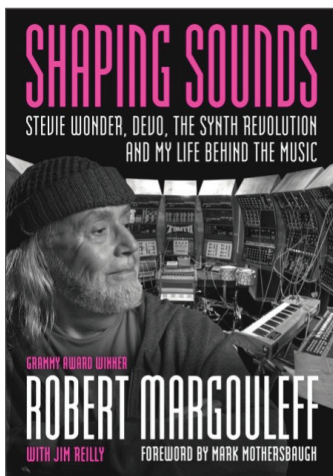
Primary Wave's Kitt

The Estate of Eartha Kitt and daughter Kitt Shapiro have partnered with Primary Wave Music in a catalog and name and likeness rights deal. Known for "Santa Baby," "C'est Si Bon," and "Let's Do It," Kitt's music has picked up in popularity following the virality of "Santa Baby" on social media, now with close to 500 million Spotify streams. Kitt's catalog includes 17 studio and eight live albums, and more than 50 singles. The deal covers "Under the Bridges of Paris" and "Where is My Man" (the latter earning Kitt her first gold record status). Starting as a dancer with the Katherine Dunham Company, the three-time Emmy Award Winner (the last posthumously) became one of the most recognized entertainers of the 20th century with performances in Paris cabarets, on Broadway, and in film and television.

Seeker Gets \$267 M

Evan Bogart's creator-led music rights and publishing label, Seeker Music Group, has won asset-backed securitization (ABS) of \$267 million from international savings and investment business M&G. Secured by Seeker's portfolio, the funding creates space to expand their ever-growing catalog (now including over 19,000 copyrights and master recordings valued in excess of \$400 million). Driven by artist-led catalog reinvention, Seeker has seen success with work including their "Samplémoose" program, where songwriters, artists, and producers work together to reimagine classic songs from their catalog. One such success was Shaboozey's "A Bar Song (Tipsy)," which used elements of "Tipsy" by J-Kwon and a 2025 interpretation of JoJo's 2006 "Too Little Too Late," which was reworked into "2 Little 2 Late" (performed by Levi featuring Mario).

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



MARGOULEFF'S SHAPING SOUNDS

GRAMMY-winning producer, engineer, and audio pioneer Robert Margouloff and Jim Reilly release Margouloff's memoir *Shaping Sounds*, navigating innovation, art, tech, work with Stevie Wonder, Billy Preston, Jeff Beck, DEVO, The Isley Brothers, David Sanborn. 5/19, Jawbone Press.



▲ BMG'S FLOCK OF SEAGULLS

With 3+ million Spotify listeners, British new wave MTV superstars A Flock of Seagulls sell U.S. publishing rights and a portion of catalog (1982-1986) to BMG, with hits "I Ran (So Far Away)," "Space Age Love Song," and "Wishing (If I Had a Photograph of You)." See aflockofseagulls.net.



▲ JIMMY'S 25TH YEAR

25 years after releasing landmark alt-rock album *Bleed America*, Jimmy Eat World hits the road with dates through November (at Vans Warped Tour in Orlando, FL). Designed as an elevated experience with increased production, select special guest shows. See jimmyeatworld.com.



▲ SMP SIGNS SPEAR

Sony Music Publishing Nashville/Dan Isbell sign rising artist-songwriter Scout Speer to global publishing. Modern country hits "Strangers," "Against Me," "That'd Be Crazy," and EP *Scout Speer*, built traction with 5+ million streams, sold-out shows and booked festival. New music soon. [L-R: Chelsea Kent (SMP), Rusty Gaston (SMP), Tom Luteran (SMP), Cam Caldwell (SMP), Scout Speer, Dan Isbell, Scott Safford (Safford Motley PLC), Jeff Peterson (Interstate Music).]

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Jarrold Lawson*Sonic Truth*

Exploring his father's recording studio from an early age, Jarrold Lawson started playing the drums at just two years old. Moving with his family to an Oregon farm for a different way of life, Lawson was never pushed to pursue music but was shown major and minor scales and their triads by his father. Encouraged to play inversions up and down the keyboard, Lawson says, "That was such valuable advice. He taught me that, and then just let me go."

At 13, things shifted. "Something just lit up for me. I realized I had an aptitude for it and my ears worked well," he says. "I would listen to stuff on the radio, sit down and figure it out. I realized I loved and really wanted to do this." He still listens to the Stevie Wonder records that first inspired him.

With no manager, no agent, no publicist (and no label) guiding him, he wrote, performed, and produced everything on his first album. Casually releasing *Jarrold Lawson* in 2014, it blew up immediately. Admits Lawson, "I didn't have a clue what I was doing. I had zero touring experience, didn't have a manager, didn't have a team at all. I literally threw it up on iTunes haphazardly. The next thing I knew, deejays and tastemakers in the U.K. had found [it] and were reaching out with a barrage of questions." A guest appearance on horn player Farnell Newton's 2011 *Class is Now In Session* had already garnered praise from English radio station JazzFM, and the momentum led to Lawson's debut international performance at Ronnie Scott's jazz club in London. Says Lawson, "I didn't do the thing you're supposed to do—roll out the album slowly and have a big marketing plan—I didn't do any of that."

Lawson used to keep a Dictaphone at his bedside for nightly inspirations that needed capturing. He frequently hears a groove, bass line and changes before he even sits at the piano. If he notates the essence, he can let it breathe and come back to it. While a great song needs a compelling lyric that moves him, or a question he hasn't thought of in the same way before, Lawson approaches writing from all angles. "Sometimes it's the lyrics, sometimes it's about the more visceral feeling you get from the song. That's one way I keep it interesting for myself."

His third album adds a new blend of sound. Says Lawson, "I'm leaning into that urban direction very intentionally to separate myself from getting pushed into jazz too much. I love jazz, but consider myself more soul/R&B." The shift came unexpectedly as Lawson thought the record was already finished before his team suggested incorporating some collaborations. Adding hip-hop and rap elements, the project also brought moments of vulnerability. "On 'Let Your Heart'—one of my favorite songs on the album—I'm not playing any instruments," reveals Lawson. Hip-hop producer CARRTOONS had already created the track and shopped it around, with no takers. "The moment I heard it," says Lawson, "I was like, 'yes!' I started writing lyrics immediately [and] the hook came to me. The next day I wrote the rest, and we pitched it to JSWISS to make it a rap feature. It's just my voice and CARRTOONS playing all the instruments." Having done everything on his previous projects, Lawson initially struggled with the idea. "It was weird at first, but the more I thought about it, I was trying to step outside the box with this album," he says. "What could be more outside the box than that?"

Lawson praises advice shared by Quincy Jones (to Jacob Collier). "Don't try to be cool, be warm. The world needs more warm people." Adds Lawson, "Everybody's trying to be so cool. How about we just be warm instead? That's such a beautiful philosophy."

With a fan base including Gilles Peterson, Trevor Nelson, Louie Vega, and Michelle Obama, his new album, 14-song *Just Let It*, is out this month, with features including Raquel Rodriguez, Eric Roberson, Allen Stone, JSWISS, and CARRTOONS.

Contact Fiona Bloom, *The Bloom Effect* - fiona@thebloomeffect.com
Visit jarroldlawson.com

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Rachel Stilwell

Entertainment & Intellectual Property Attorney
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Stilwell - LAW -

Meet Rachel Stilwell, Owner of Stilwell Law, a music and intellectual property firm based in Los Angeles. Rachel's law practice focuses on entertainment, copyright, trademark, licensing, and commercial transactions. Rachel is proud to have been named to Billboard's Top Music Lawyers List for the last seven consecutive years. She is an advocate for artists' rights, having worked closely with the Recording Academy, musicFIRST Coalition, Future of Music Coalition, and Songwriters of North America.

Find out more about Stilwell Law at: rmslawoffices.com

Meet Rachel Stilwell at The NAMM Show at her panel for music creators and pro audio professionals:

"Protecting Creative Identity: Trademarks, Rights of Publicity, and Brand Integrity in the Age of AI & Artificial Creativity."
Friday, January 23rd, 2026; 1:00 - 2:00 PM Pacific Time, Hilton Anaheim, 4th Floor, Palos Verdes Room. Rachel will be joined by 3x GRAMMY and 1x LATIN GRAMMY winning mastering engineer Gavin Lurssen, owner of Lurssen Mastering®.

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DROPS

On May 15, Adhyâropa Records drops Matt White's *Dolly*, an album from South Carolina-based trumpeter, composer, and arranger Matt White, reimagining songs written and recorded by country queen Dolly Parton. The self-produced recording connects White's ongoing exploration of Southern musical history with one of the most celebrated bodies of songwriting in American culture. Drawing on jazz, gospel, country, and regional folk traditions, the ensemble, featuring vocalist Liz Kelley, guitarist Tim Fischer, organist Demetrius Doctor, and drummer Colleen Clark, combines Southern sacred tradition, chamber-like arranging, and open improvisation. The album will be available in digital and CD formats. For more information, contact Maria Malta at mariamaltamedia@gmail.com.

"I Played The Fool (Main Title Theme)," the official main title theme from the HBO Original series *Rooster*, created by Bill Lawrence and Matt Tarses, is out now via WaterTower Music. The song pairs GRAMMY Award-winning producer and musician Andrew Watt with Michael Stipe, the former frontman of R.E.M., marking Stipe's first new song in three years. The track also features Travis Barker on drums and Josh Klinghoffer on guitar and piano. A campus-set comedy starring Steve Carell, *Rooster* debuted March 8 on HBO and is streaming on Max, with new episodes airing

the original song "Light Over the Hill" by the GRAMMY-nominated artist Noah Cyrus, as well as a cover of Coldplay's "Yellow" performed by singer-songwriter Morgan Harper-Jones and produced and arranged by Howe. Based on the *New York Times* bestselling novel by Colleen Hoover, *Reminders of Him* opened in theaters in March, starring Maika Monroe and Tyriq Withers in a story of motherhood, forgiveness, and love following a woman's release from prison. Contact Ray Costa at rcosta@costacomm.com for more information.

Brandon Wilson (*Nickel Boys*), Soap Collins, and Aaron Holliday (*Cocaine Bear*, *Euphoria*) are all set to star in *Pockets of Heaven*, the feature directorial debut of Maria Belafonte, who is known for her work on music videos, commercials, and more. Also joining the ensemble are Academy Award nominee Alfre Woodard (*Clemency*, *12 Years a Slave*, *Luke Cage*), Jonas Gordin (*Lurker*), Gilberto Ortiz (*Atropia*), and rapper-musician MAVI—creator of *Laughing So Hard*, *It Hurts*, who is making his feature acting debut. Set against a Los Angeles wildfire evacuation, the film follows three young people from vastly different worlds as their lives intertwine across boundaries of love, addiction, and survival. Co-written by Belafonte and Alexander Zeke Musca, the production wrapped principal photography in December 2025 in Los Angeles, with post-production slated for completion in summer 2026. For more information, contact Kelly MacGaunn at kelly@kelleemackpr.com.

WaterTower Music has released *They Will Kill You (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)*, featuring original music by GRAMMY-winning and three-time Emmy-winning composer Carlos Rafael Rivera.

Blending aggressive synths with acoustic and electric guitars and sweeping orchestral textures, the score channels the hyper-violence of the film while grounding it in a striking emotional undercurrent. Directed by Kirill Sokolov and starring Zazie Beetz, Myha'La, Paterson Joseph, Tom Felton, Heather Graham, and Patricia Arquette, *They Will Kill You* hit



North American theaters on March 27. The soundtrack is now available on streaming platforms, with a vinyl release forthcoming via Waxwork Records. For further details, contact Sarah Roche at sarah@whitebearpr.com.

The Pretty Lethal Original Motion Picture Soundtrack has dropped on Milan Records. It was composed by BAFTA Award-winning, Emmy-nominated, and Ivor Novello-nominated composer Paul Leonard-Morgan and recorded in Glasgow with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra alongside a rock band and solo violin. The score combines orchestral textures with synths and unexpected sounds, creating a sonic world that Leonard-Morgan described as a combination of "orchestra, rock band and cyberpunk electronics." Directed by Vicky Jewson and starring Uma Thurman, *Pretty Lethal* follows five ballerinas forced to fight for survival at a remote inn. The film is now streaming on Amazon Prime Video. Contact Christian Endicio at christian@whitebearpr.com for more information.

OPPS

Young screen composers can have the chance to showcase their work through the World Soundtrack Academy's annual Film Music Composition Contest. Registration is now open to composers under the age of 36, who have until May 15 to submit their work. The excerpt for this year's contest is from the 2020 horror television series *Ratched*. Get the competition guidelines and submit your work at worldsoundtrackawards.com/wsa-talent/composition-contest.

The Pacific Northwest Film Scoring Program's 2026 Film Scoring Competition—the program's first ever—is now open, offering aspiring composers a chance to win a professional recording with a 52-piece orchestra. The deadline is May 17 to submit music to accompany *The Walk Home*, a short drama from filmmaker Jeremy Osborn. All the details



weekly through May 10. Contact Chandler Poling at chandler@whitebearpr.com for details.

Reminders of Him Original Motion Picture Soundtrack, featuring a score by award-winning composer Tom Howe, is out now on Back Lot Music. The soundtrack includes

OUT TAKE



Lena Raine

Composer

Web: youtube.com/lenaraineMost recent: *Chicory: A Musical Tale*

Composer Lena Raine recently partnered with game music remixing community Resonant Union to release a special arrangement album, *Chicory: A Musical Tale*, which pays tribute to the indie game and its soundtrack, originally composed by Raine. The album release is noted for how closely its music mirrors the emotional journey of the game's story with themes of self-doubt, creative block, and rediscovering joy. Raine says these themes tied in with her own personal experiences, allowing her to write emotionally honest music. "I would love to simply have an easy time writing music, but the truth is that it often doesn't flow naturally at all times. Greg's story in *Chicory* feels so resonant to all of those things, and so it was natural for me to try and score those emotions with ones that matched up with what I've felt."

As someone who has worked across a range of projects, Raine says she is most creatively fulfilled by scoring moments in which the gamer is doing something that aligns emotionally with what the game is trying to articulate. "A lot of times this comes from boss battles or dynamic moments in gameplay," she says. "I've always used the metaphor of bosses being something akin to a musical number, where through music we're able to show the narrative development rather than simply talk about it. A boss battle or narrative sequence that has the chance for a great score is the most exciting stuff I've ever written."

Raine's advice to aspiring composers is to find collaborators that allow them to write. "I think everyone intrinsically brings something unique to music through their experiences, but it's project direction that often tamps it down into monotony. But the other thing is to make sure you're out there discovering more and more music that resonates with you. Find where your favorite music comes from, listen to more and more styles that excite you, and try to incorporate ideas from those into what you write. When you find enough things that inspire you in music, spinning those into your own voice is how you surprise people with something uniquely new and exciting."



can be found at pnwfilmmusic.com/score-competition.

If you're interested in speaking at the 2026 Game Music and Sound Design Conference, proposals for talks will be accepted until May 10. Topics can be anything directly related to game/interactive audio. The event will be October 20-21 in Burbank with an option to attend virtually. Learn how to submit your proposal at gamesoundcon.com/submissions.

PROPS

WhyHunger, a global nonprofit dedicated to ending hunger and advancing the human right to nutritious food, will host its annual Chapin Awards Gala on May 6 at Cipriani 25 in New York City. GRAMMY Award-winning singer/songwriter, activist, and actress Andra Day will be honored with the Harry Chapin Humanitarian Award for her dedication to social justice and philanthropy. Past recipients have included Barbra Streisand, Harry Belafonte, and Jon Batiste, among others. Day's notable body of work includes a captivating portrayal of Billie Holiday in *The United States vs. Billie Holiday*—her very first on-screen acting role. The event will celebrate an organization that has connected 6.6 million people to food and invested \$9.6 million in community-led solutions across 25 countries in the past five years. For more information, contact Luci Paczkowski at lpaczkowski@shorefire.com or visit whyhunger.org/chapinawards2026.

There is still time to catch Sierra Madre Playhouse's *One Million Words - Rilke*, a hit solo show created by and starring Ivo Müller, with performances on May 1-3. The production, inspired by the groundbreaking work of Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke, made its North American premiere in California as part of an international tour honoring the centennial of Rilke's death in 1926. Directed by Arieta Corrêa, the show follows both a present-day actor and a 19th-century poet as they explore themes of creativity, belonging, love, and human connection. Following its Sierra Madre run, the production will head to its U.K. premiere at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Contact Libby Huebner at libby@adlibpr.com for more information or visit



sierramadreplyhouse.org for tickets.

Music and game label Scarlet Moon has debuted *Prescription for Pop*, a crossover jazz series designed to bring a fresh sound to popular music. Composer and saxophonist Norihiko Hibino, renowned for his work on video games including *Metal Gear Solid*, *Bayonetta*, and *Yakuza*, joined pianist AYAKI to form GENTLE LOVE. Following their Billboard-charting, 16-album run reimagining game and anime music as jazzy lullabies, the duo launched the new series with two albums dedicated to top 2025 and 2024 pop hits. *Prescription for Pop: 2025 Hits* and *Prescription for Pop: 2024 Hits* are now available, featuring highlights such as "Gone Gone Gone" and "Golden" from 2025 and "Too Sweet" and "Flowers" from 2024. Learn more at scarletmoon.com/sleep or by contacting Jayson Napolitano at jayson@scarletmoonpromotions.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.

► **SOPHIE POWERS & LEXIE LIU JOIN FORCES FOR "KLEPTO"**

After a streak of explosive singles including the provocative "popoff," apocalyptic "muddy," and electrifying "spiderwebs," pop disruptor Sophie Powers returns with her most confidently chaotic release yet: "klepto," a hyper-catchy collaboration with Chinese superstar Lexie Liu. Out via Encore Recordings, the single blends bold storytelling with a sonic rush that feels like a late-night shopping spree gone haywire.



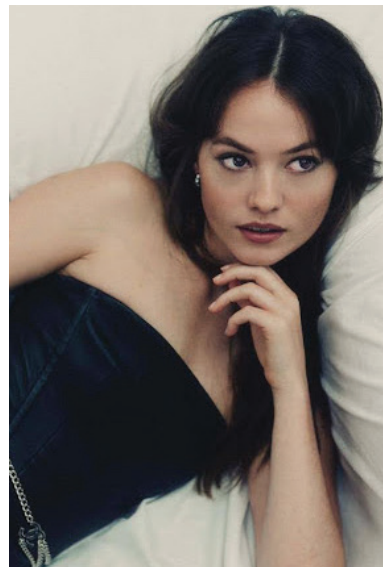
▲ **NESSA BARRETT DIVES INTO DARK ROMANCE ON JESUS LOVES A PRIMADONNA**

Nessa Barrett unveils her new EP *Jesus Loves a Primadonna*, an eight-track exploration of toxic love and vulnerability wrapped in noir rock and trip-hop textures. Alongside the release, she drops the cinematic "Buffalo 66" video starring Jesse Rutherford and announces intimate, sold-out shows, offering fans a closer look at this moody, emotionally charged chapter.



◀ **BEA STEPS INTO A NEW ERA WITH "CAN'T HELP FALLING OUT OF LOVE"**

London singer-songwriter Bea, formerly Bea and her Business, redefines her sound and identity with the emotive new single "Can't Help Falling Out of Love" via Warner Records. Co-written with Matt Maltese and produced by Jordan Riley (RAYE, Cat Burns), the track showcases her majestic vocals and stripped-back power balladry, marking a fearless fresh chapter in her journey from Gen Z breakout to confident, introspective artist.



◀ **VENDREDI SUR MER SETS THE MOOD WITH "DES MONTAGNES DE TOI" AHEAD OF AMERICAS TOUR**

Vendredi sur Mer returns with "Des Montagnes de Toi," a delicate, piano-led track steeped in melancholy and intimacy. Serving as a bridge to her *Malabar Princess* era, the single highlights her signature poetic storytelling as she hits the road for an eleven-date North and South American tour, bringing her dreamy, nostalgic sound to audiences across the continent.

Tidbits From Our Tattered Past



▲ YEAT AND ESDEEKID UNITE ON "MADE IT ON OUR OWN"

Multi-platinum artist Yeat linked up with Liverpool rapper EsDeeKid for the high-energy single "Made It On Our Own," produced by Lucid and Mathaius Young. Shot at Drake's Toronto home with Director X, the track fuses Yeat's galactic rage rap with EsDeeKid's scouse style, arriving amid Yeat's ongoing rollout for his upcoming album *ADL (A Dangerous Lyfe)*.

▶ LYKKE LI LAUNCHES EXISTENTIAL ERA WITH "LUCKY AGAIN" AND ALBUM THE AFTERPARTY

Lykke Li returns with "Lucky Again," the first glimpse of her forthcoming album *The Afterparty* (out in May via Neon Gold/Futures), ushering in her existential era. Layered with disco strings, Max Richter samples, and euphoric momentum, the track turns samsara into maximalist pop, marking a fearless reinvention as Li explores mortality, hedonism, and impermanence with her signature emotional intensity.



◀ ALEX ISLEY CAPTURES L.A.'S AFTER-HOURS GLOW ON WHEN THE CITY SLEEPS

Alex Isley unveils her major-label debut *When the City Sleeps*, a lush, late-night meditation on love and solitude inspired by Los Angeles after dark. Alongside the album, she drops the nostalgic "Westside" video and announces a 2026 North American tour, marking a new chapter in her evolving artistry and continued presence in contemporary R&B.



1992 - Guns N' Roses - #20

The 1992 issue of *MC* saw Chuck Crisafulli's profile on Guns N' Roses at the peak of their chaotic fame—their rise from the Sunset Strip to global dominance, while cataloguing a trail of controversies—riots, lawsuits, and lineup changes. Co-headlining with Metallica and approaching 37 million records sold, Geffen publicist Bryn Bridenthal recalls first seeing them at the Whisky and thinking they "glowed in the dark." The story includes a detailed timeline of the band's turbulent history from 1985–1992, concluding that despite everything, GNR "gives the damned beast a reason for living."



2000 - The Offspring - #24

MC's 2000 feature interviews Dexter Holland of The Offspring around the release of *Conspiracy of One*. Holland discussed the band's high-profile dispute with Columbia Records, who sued to prevent them from offering the album free online. He was surprisingly pragmatic about Napster, suggesting it could actually help bands. On the lawsuit atmosphere, he quipped that lawyers end up yelling at each other in court, then go grab a beer afterward—"that's kinda how it is." He also reflected on the band's musical evolution and the challenge of following the massive success of *Americana*.

Limited back issues available to order at musicconnection.com



DEADMAUS

By Lily Moayeri

Joel Zimmerman, professionally known as deadmau5, licks his finger then rubs it against his phone's camera lens to clean it. In his home in the outskirts of Toronto, Canada—connected to the farm he owns—he sits on a Restoration Hardware Cloud sofa where he says he spends most of his at-home time. "I eat dinner on this couch. I watch TV on this couch. I work on this couch. I fucking sleep on this couch," he says. "Two things in your life you need to really spend money on: a good bed and a good couch."

Roman columns rise to the ceiling on either side of him, gracious and majestic, at odds with Zimmerman in his Kitties of Doom T-shirt and black-and-white baseball cap—not a mau5head in sight. He grabs a cigarette and lighter but doesn't light up for at least 15 minutes. Instead, they're like props for emphasis points in his conversation. Once he lights the cigarette, the number of times it makes contact with his lips is minimal, but he knocks the ash off intermittently.

Zimmerman is in fine form—animated and chatty, intelligent and biting, like a combination of Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. One of the most high-profile electronic dance music artists of the last 25 years, he has been nominated for eight GRAMMYS. He performed at the awards ceremony in 2012, bringing the rave to the mainstream stage while Dave Grohl headbanged in the pit. He has collaborated with Mötley

But Zimmerman is not one to dwell on his past achievements. He's just completed a secondary studio room for his modular synths so they don't interfere with the mix process in his main studio where, in addition to classic mixing, he also has a Dolby Atmos system. Unlike his electronic dance music contemporaries who primarily work in the box, the centerpiece of Zimmerman's studio is a 32-channel Neve console. He uses channel strips for EQing and slide potentiometers to adjust levels, and converts to digital audio using Burl Audio's B80 Mothership, an 80-channel configurable AD/DA interface.

"That's what we like to call atmosphere models," he pokes fun at magazine covers of EDM producers standing in front of a 128-channel SSL desk with the aux cord connected to the audio output of their laptop. "I don't do that for the fashion. That is an expensive flex."

"My sequencing and editing happen in the computer, but the signal path goes through the Neve. The Burl is pretty high end. It's the best way to capture the Neve sound without compromise. It does the tape emulation real good. You could mix on the Neve and take the master output into a Focusrite into your computer, but bro, that's how you catch a slap. Don't do that. My way is an extra two steps. But to me, it's that .00001 percent of difference. To consumers, it sounds the same on their iPhone, but producing music is more for me than anyone else."

Groundloop Productions is where Zimmerman

that I know what an original idea sounds like, and I couldn't hear one. While it's impressive that it's making a piece of shit EDM song, it sounds like every EDM song. It's not coming up with new ideas. It's not inventing things. It's diffusing ideas. There's no unpredictability with it. I've gotten this far without it; I'll be fine moving forward."

At this point, his lawyer Dina LaPolt calls—eerie coincidence since she is at the forefront of advocating the No FAKES Act of 2025. Its aim is "To protect intellectual property rights in the voice and visual likeness of individuals, and for other purposes." Earlier this year, an A.I. version of Zimmerman was posted promoting an artist he's never heard of and while his immediate response was reactionary, he now says, "When you get some success, you're playing the lottery. It's going to be very difficult to prevent generative A.I. from doing something that sounds like you. But, if you're able to be cloned that way, then you're not doing it right. You're not doing anything incredibly different. You can't rely on existing data to create something new so good luck to you."

"Creating something new" should be Zimmerman's short bio as that is what he does whether it's music, audio tools or live shows for which he developed OCS/Pilot, an open sound control app. In addition to audio, OCS/Pilot can also control lights and video, and is customizable on the spot with modular layouts. He used this system for his standard-setting (now retired) cube shows in all their iterations and made it



Crüe's Tommy Lee, My Chemical Romance's Gerard Way, The Neptunes, Imogen Heap, Skylar Grey, Foster the People, and Portugal. The Man, among many other household names. He's been integrated into *Rocket League*, *Fortnite* and *World of Tanks Blitz*, and built his own game, *Meowingtons Simulator*, named after his beloved cat.

He was the first electronic music artist to grace the cover of *Rolling Stone*, not to mention *Billboard*, *Vibe*, *NME*, and *Music Tech*, and the first to headline Lollapalooza. His 2019-2020 cubev3 tour was the No. 2 touring show in the U.S. His 2022 show at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum with Kaskade as Kx5 was the biggest ticketed headliner dance event of the year globally. He performed milestone shows at the Hollywood Bowl and Brooklyn Mirage to mark his silver anniversary.

Despite his very public presence, Zimmerman is known for making outrageous statements on the internet—then apologizing for them, and for posting cat content. He's said many inexcusable things, yet he's become uncancellable. It's an impressive achievement and didn't stand in the way of him being inducted into the Canadian Music Week's Music Industry Hall of Fame in 2024.

cut his studio teeth as a young intern in a mainly computer-free environment. He credits the facility's owner-operator, Dean Malton, as his mentor and good friend with whom he still works on projects. Zimmerman arrived at the nascence of Pro Tools, Cakewalk, and Cubase, and was tasked with integrating the tape workflow into computers, cataloging Tascam DA-88 tapes. Although laborious, it made him an expert in understanding signal paths. When the shift happened to software, he took his knowledge and seamlessly transferred it to the screen.

A technophile, he harnesses A.I. to assist him with development of audio tools, but not for creative tasks. "The only intelligent thing involved in generative A.I. is the creation of the algorithm and diffusion network," he says. "In my ideal world, where A.I. integration is acceptable use in the music industry would be where I have a band coming in that I have to track. I need four microphones set up and 12 busses and stuff like that. I would write a prompt to do that, and my templates would be made and ready to go. But nobody's doing that."

He continues, "Everybody's like, 'Make me a melody in the style of...' I spent a full day with generative A.I. to see how scared I should be. It fucking sucks. I've been doing this long enough

available publicly in 2020.

But as is his wont, even after using OCS/Pilot for years and perfecting its capabilities, he's still dissatisfied with the app's lack of tactile feedback saying he prefers some clicks and less screen staring. For the last six months, Zimmerman has been working on a tool that he says bridges the gap between CDJs and a DAW.

"We'll have this cool hybrid set up for producers because producers aren't DJs and DJs aren't producers, full stop," he says. "The only way producers can get money is to perform, but they aren't performers. They click mouses and listen to the same loop 20 times. Now you want to put them on a stage? The path of least resistance is to throw some Pioneers at them and there's your show. There's your income."

"It's a very hard fucking thing to illustrate what you're doing on a large scale, so that everyone's making that connection," he continues. "Nine Inch Nails, the gods of production, had this moment where Josh Freese had to go out and be Vanna White on a giant step sequencer on the screen. I saw them last week with Boys Noize and they've got a cool centerpiece where they've got their gear out and they're really doing shit. Don't get me wrong, Atticus is no idiot, but it's hard to make the connection of what they're doing. I'm

five feet from them and I still don't understand."

Zimmerman has taken the deadmau5 show from festival stages to traditional, high-capacity, seated venues that don't generally host electronic music events. Besides the Hollywood Bowl and the L.A. Coliseum, he's performed at Red Rocks, CO, and The Pinnacle, TN, among others. The bigger the venues, the more responsibility there is on him to make the audience go past the conventionality of the space and get involved in the show.

"EDC, you show up on this massive clown dick stage," he says. "If you bring anything bigger than an ashtray, it ruins everything because they can't put their big inflatable fucking owl up. We just play the game and hit the CD player a few times. Larger installations like Red Rocks and the Bowl, it's doing the most with the least. We bring a little extra, but nothing so dangerously expensively crazy where we start looping up ticket prices into the \$500 area. That's why I like these mid venues with Red Rocks being the larger of them versus the MGM Grand Garden Arena. Filling that out with production and having that big of a command on tickets is just not for me. I like those safer plays because we can control it better."

While some of his contemporaries like Anyma and Illenium have had residencies at Las Vegas' Sphere, Zimmerman is not keen to have that venue in his gigography. "Everybody goes in with their optics hat, I went in with my business hat, and the numbers don't make sense," he says. "The Sphere is expensive. The running costs, the hands involved, the content creation alone, I have done full tours on less than 90 minutes of content that would need to be generated by the Sphere. It's a big undertaking. I've seen a few shows there and I walked away thinking two things: 'What a great fucking show,' and 'That must have cost a fucking fortune.' For it to make sense, I'd have to do 12 shows. I'm not looking to play if I'm going to owe money."

What is seen more and more infrequently is Zimmerman's identifying marker, the oversized mau5 head. This item was a key factor in his success, creating a mystique around him, helping catapult him as an artist and making him recognizable beyond his music. These days, the head—of which he has many variations—sits alongside him more often than on his head. It's not because he's fed up with it so much as he neurologically can't handle wearing it.

"It's not punishing to wear, but I cannot see left or right, and I get freaked out," he explains. "I have overwhelming anxiety then I feel more conscious about my breathing and my surroundings. It's just not comfortable. I used to be able to cope with it when I was younger but it's just been getting worse and worse. I wish I could wear it the whole time and be deadmau5 and be anonymous, but I could not hack it. I understand it's what people love because when I put this shit on, every phone is out and everyone's filming it. I don't have any misgivings towards it. I owe my life to that mau5 head."

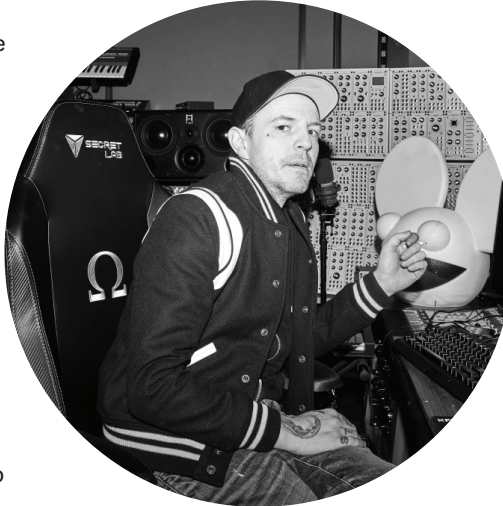
This year he released the Westend remix of "Animal Rights," his track with Wolfgang Gartner, and "Science" with Stevie Appleton—which hit No. 1 on dance music radio. Last year he released an EP, *Error5*, and a grip of singles and remixes. The word on the street is that there is an album in the works, but with all his accomplishments, what's the next uncharted frontier?

"It's more boring than you'd expect," he says. "As I'm getting older, my ambitions are getting

less." I remember a time when I was really excited about making music and doing new things, but I'm not as stoked about it. I low-key almost sometimes dread having to go into the studio and sit down in front of a blank screen and start something. Not because I don't want to, but because I've done it so much that I'll sit there and whittle away at something and if I don't hit it in 15 minutes, I'm going to try again tomorrow. The fire is kind of out."

Notably more than other genres, electronic dance music is decidedly youth oriented. It was never expected that DJ/producers would persist beyond their 20s, staying up all night and controlling dancefloors into their midlife years, let alone well past conventional retirement age. This fact is not lost on Zimmerman who admits he fights with "the existentialism of being 45 in an industry where 20-year-olds with their shirts half off are just fucking killing it."

One thing is for certain; he's not looking for more fame or scrutiny than he already has.



What he is continuing to do is diversify his interests while stamping the deadmau5 brand on all his ventures. At the moment, he's building a 20,000-square foot, polished concrete floor warehouse and two-ton payload trusses with the aim of building stages, not only for himself, but for other artists. He's excited about working on stage technology and he says it was seeing Nine Inch Nails that brought it home for him.

"It's not just about buying some lights and programming them right," he says. "It's about the design, the execution, the timing, the storytelling and the use of technologies in other ways. I love that shit and I always have with my stage designs. Building a workshop for that kind of thing is going to be really fun."

Wherever the public is in their perception of Zimmerman's deadmau5, he's likely a few steps ahead of them. He sold his catalog for \$55 million to Create Music Group in 2025, a deal that includes his mau5trap label. This covers publishing and masters of 4,000 songs. He is one of a handful of electronic music artists who have been offered catalog deals, the others being Calvin Harris, David Guetta, Avicii, and Diplo. Considering how long Zimmerman held onto the majority of his recordings, the decision to sell was a shrewd one.

One of his reasons for selling is simply that those songs are 20 years old and he's ready to move on from them, handing over the administration to Create. Having the safety net

of the catalog sale relieves Zimmerman from the pressure of creation for income's sake, and gives him creative freedom. He also points out that the lifespan an electronic dance music artist is two to five years before "some 18-year-old kids comes along and east your fucking lunch and you're out." He's seen it countless times.

"Selling the catalog was 'get out while the getting's good,' but not get out for my own benefit," he says. "Get out as in, get the fucking bag so that's secured, so every venture I do moving forward—obviously with risk management involved in calculation and in accordance to the bag—that I don't have to fucking worry about the new kid. If you don't exit, here's what happens: your career goes up, right at the top, just like trading stocks, that's the most your catalog will ever be worth—unless you're dead. Then because that's just life, this is what happens: new music and new trends come, and you will 'fall off,' or decline, or you won't be getting booked as much. Your catalog is devaluing unless you've had that legacy and that precedent of that value. Then you've waited until you're 80 years old. Electronic music, as it were, doesn't fucking exist. Your catalog that was worth maybe \$20 million isn't worth anything, because they're not playing it and no one's going to buy it. Selling now is hedging your bets and ensuring that security."

This security also allows him to pursue other projects, including focusing more on mau5trap and trying to be consistent with his fan-focused, and music making-driven, mau5trap Mondays livestream. He soundtracked Jonas Åkerlund's 2019 Netflix movie, *Polar*. He had a great experience with it as Åkerlund was easy to work with and didn't give him notes like, "Make it more green-sounding or make it more pensive. There is no such thing as pensive music. That's just the word they use for the subtitles," Zimmerman says. He teases that he might be doing another score soon but doesn't reveal more than that.

He's also made a sizable donation to his former high school to rebuild its entire music facility from the ground up, revitalizing it from the 1980 era it was suspended in. The project is under construction now, and he's making himself available to consult on the new modern music making program while ensuring there is enough space for traditional instrument education.

"We've had a very similar pipeline in Ontario where the music in high school was, 'Bang a tambourine to the beat and you get your grade,'" he says. "I wouldn't trust the decision of my kid wanting to go to Full Sail for 80 fucking grand after high school not knowing anything about it. There was no intro into the recording arts or digital audio, only shit they've seen on YouTube. Now you can learn the things that you need to get a taste of it and know if you want that formal education."

Zimmerman's commitment to his roots runs deep. Two weeks prior to this conversation, he was inducted into the Milton Walk of Fame and is thrilled about having his name etched in the concrete in front of his hometown's City Hall. He's been nominated for 15 Juno Awards and won four, which he's much more enthused about than his GRAMMY nods.

"I love Canadian stuff," he says. "I take a lot of pride in being Canadian. I'm holding out for the Order of Canada."

deadmau5.com



ELECTRONIC MUSIC ROUNDTABLE 2026

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

It's now the norm that *Music Connection* goes cyber in May. This year, we have the Digital Resources guide at the back, deadmau5 is on the cover, and for the second year we have a roundtable discussion with some of the best up-and-coming DJs and producers on the circuit. Enjoy!

NOSTALGIX

When and how did you start DJing/producing, and when did it get serious?

In 2017, I was in university studying film production and I had fallen in love with dance music the prior year, so I decided to start DJing for fun.

I didn't know what it was at the time and didn't know anyone in the music industry, but I just really loved dance music so I started djing for fun in my dorm room. I spent about a year DJing and then after that I got into music production in 2018.

I would say it became serious for me pretty quickly within the first year of music production. The more that I started to learn about Ableton and how music production worked, I fell more in love with it. I feel like it got very serious for me very quickly, but I didn't start seeing a lot of success until around 2020. That's when things started really growing in my project and I started to receive a lot more recognition for my project.

Describe your sound...

I would describe my sound as high energy and powerful. My roots lay in the world of bass house. My sound is basically a hybrid



NOSTALGIX

between house music and bass music.

Tell us about your latest release...

I just released my debut album *Inferno* (March 27th). It is my biggest body of work yet and I am so insanely proud of the entire project. I've put everything that I have into this project and I feel so proud of how everything came together. I really brought my vision to life with this album which feels so fulfilling as an artist. I also worked with artists that I absolutely love—we made some really beautiful records together and I'm so excited for everybody to listen to it.

What are some key pieces of gear that you use?

Since I tour a lot I'm always traveling on planes and in different cities, so my go-to main pieces of gear are my laptop and Ableton. I also have really great headphones that I've been working with for a long time when it comes to music production, so I always travel with my KRK kns 6400s. They're definitely my go-to headphones on the road, but sometimes I'll also just use my AirPods if I'm just writing an idea. I'm on a plane, I'll just use noise cancellation and put on my AirPods and I'll just put together an idea very quickly. I love being able to

work with the least amount of gear possible.

What else do you have planned for the coming months?

I just released my debut album *Inferno* and we'll be touring the album across North America which is something I'm very excited about.

nostalgixmusic.ca

MELTX

When and how did you start DJing/producing, and when did it get serious?

I started producing because I couldn't find the exact sound I was hearing in my head. I was scoring my own short films, building emotion through strings, silence, and tension. Eventually I realized the club was the cinema I'd been searching for. It got serious the moment I understood I wasn't just playing tracks—I was creating an atmosphere people wanted to drown in. When crowds started coming back specifically for me, not just the lineup, that's when MELTX stopped being a hobby and became a mission.

Describe your sound...

Imagine a rave that feels like a fever dream: hyper-feminine, metallic, saccharine, slightly unhinged. I love contrasts—soft vocals over hardcore kicks, sweetness that bites, nostalgia that feels toxic in the best way. I make techno like a film score: dramatic, sensual, cinematic. The kind of sound that makes you feel like the main character, even if you're sweating at 160 BPM.

Tell us about your latest release...

The latest release is me pouring gasoline on everything I've built so far. It's hard dance wrapped in candy colors—playful, dangerous, addictive. I wanted it to feel like slipping into a world where beauty is armor and heartbreak becomes fuel. It's not a track you listen to passively; it's something you survive. The drop isn't just impact—it's revelation. A reminder that vulnerability can be violent and still be gorgeous.

What are some key pieces of gear that you use?

Pioneer CDJ-3000s and a Xone 92 mixer when I'm performing—they respond beautifully to aggression. Production-wise, I'm mostly in Logic Pro X. It gives me cinematic control—I can sculpt synths like a character arc, automate atmospheres the way you'd light a set. For headphones, I always use Sennheiser HD 25.

What else do you have planned for the coming months?

I'm building worlds. More singles, darker visuals, sets that feel like theatre. I'm in love with the idea of bringing high-emotion feminine energy into spaces that used to be macho and monotonous. Expect more collaborations, more storytelling, more places to get lost in. I don't just want to tour—I want to make every city feel like they're stepping into the CANDYCORE

universe for the first time. I especially can't wait for my debut North American tour. New York and Los Angeles have been my dream shows. I'm so grateful to be living my childhood dream.

[instagram.com/meltx__](https://www.instagram.com/meltx__)

Mary Droppinz

When and how did you start DJing/producing, and when did it get serious?

I started DJing in 2015 in SoCal and I started producing in 2019 and went to IO academy in Hollywood to learn Ableton, it got serious for me in 2021 when I first got a manager/agent.

Describe your sound...

It's experimental and experiential... with breaks, garage, jungle, riddim, 140. My sets are journeys and selections!

Tell us about your latest release...

Just dropped a tune with my friend Neumonic—it's called "What?" It's out on Deadbeats—cheeky ting, I love it!

What are some key pieces of gear that you use?

Cdj 3k's, Sennheiser hd-25's, 900 nexus 2 mixer—my personal fav's ... software Ableton & Rekordbox—I am FL curious lol.

What else do you have planned for the coming months?

My first single of 2026 dropping on Deadbeats called "Pop." I've been playing this track in my sets for a while and this newer elevated 2026 version was just perfect for the label. Full EP will be dropping, just making tons of music, I'm really having fun.

marydroppinz.com

ELIIZA

When and how did you start DJing/producing, and when did it become serious?

Music has always been part of my life, it's in the family. Over the past few years, that connection turned into a real obsession with dance music. I didn't start out DJing, I started by producing. I became fascinated by digging for tracks, understanding how they're built, and learning how different elements create energy in the room. From there, DJing came naturally, and I've built my skill set from the ground up. It became serious when I played my first live set for Teletech in my hometown, Manchester and felt the crowd respond. That moment made everything click. From then on, I committed by investing in my setup, spending more time in the studio, and focusing on developing a sound that felt true to me.



Mary Droppinz

Describe your sound...

My sound blends bouncy, hypnotic rhythms with harder techno elements. I'm really drawn to movement and flow, building tension gradually, then releasing it in a way that lifts the room. There's a strong focus on bass, groove, and energy, but always with enough space to keep people locked in rather than overwhelmed.

Tell us about your latest release or set...

My recent sets have been very much about progression and storytelling. I like starting slower and more hypnotic, letting the room settle, then gradually pushing into heavier, bouncier territory as the energy builds. I've been playing longer sets where I can take my time and shape the journey properly. One of my recent sets was an opening slot that evolved naturally into something much more intense by the end, that sense of control and release is where I feel most comfortable.

What are some key pieces of gear that you use?

I place a lot of value on being adaptable. I'm comfortable across different setups, whether that's a Xone, an A9, or a V10. I've recently invested in a Pioneer V10, which has given me more flexibility to explore layering, longer blends, and subtle changes in energy. Investing in both my studio and DJ setup has been important in helping me develop a consistent sound.

What do you have planned for the coming months?

Right now, my focus is on production, refining my sound and releasing music I've been sitting on over the past year. I want to keep building momentum through stronger releases, bigger rooms, and more opportunities to connect with new crowds.

I've got some exciting shows coming up this year, including XXL Malta and Creamfields, with podcasts and mixes also lined up. It feels like a really natural next step.

[instagram.com/eliiza.dj](https://www.instagram.com/eliiza.dj)

XS BULLY

When and how did you start DJing/producing, and when did it become serious?

Music was never a plan for me—it's always been instinctive. I started producing around the age of 13 or 14 after getting an audio interface and immediately began experimenting. Early on, I was working with more acoustic and vocal-based sounds before moving fully into electronic music as I became more involved in club culture.

It started to feel serious when I became interested in DJing and began producing music I actually wanted to play out in clubs.

[instagram.com/xsbully_](https://www.instagram.com/xsbully_)



Describe your sound...

My sound is constantly evolving. Latin club and rhythm-driven electronic music strongly influence how I approach groove and repetition. I'm drawn to abrasive, high-pitched synths, distortion, and tension, but always with structure. A big part of my sound is shaped by queer club spaces and the communities I'm part of. The dancefloor—and the people in it—are central to how I make music.

Tell us about your latest release or set...

My latest release is "BELLA.K.HORSE," a collaboration with NegraConda and SANTZZ for a Muakk compilation titled XOXO III. I had the opportunity to be part of the project alongside many talented producers from the Latin club scene.

The track came together over the summer and was finalized in December. It's one of those tracks that ages like fine wine—sometimes giving a track space, or revisiting it after some time, allows it to evolve and gives you a completely different perspective. Shoutout to both of them—they're brilliant artists, and this project really shows how music and scene can bring people together.

Sonically, it's high-energy and rhythm-driven, blending distorted textures with percussive grooves rooted in a hard Latin club approach.

What are some key pieces of gear that you use?

I keep things very basic. I work entirely in-the-box using virtual instruments, often starting from sounds I find and then processing them depending on the idea I'm following in that moment.

My creative process is very impulsive and organic—I never force it. I make music with whatever I have at hand, even if it's not my laptop.

What do you have planned for the next months?

Alongside new releases, I'm continuing to build spaces within the scene. I run a queer club event called NEXO in London, which focuses on hard Latin club sounds and artists operating outside mainstream club circuits.

On a more personal level, I'm developing new performances, productions, and DJ sets that expand the project beyond a traditional club format. Some things are already in motion, but I prefer to let them surface at the right moment. The direction is clear, even if the details aren't—everything is deeply connected to the community and energy that surround me. I'm here for the long run.



Ashley McBryde

Wrangling the Dream

There's a word Ashley McBryde uses: *Wild*.

It's the title of her forthcoming record, sure, but it's also the most honest shorthand for the life she's lived to make it. A life that started in the Ozark Mountains of a tiny Arkansas town called Mammoth Spring, wound through storage units and biker bars, and eventually landed her in the spotlight which she describes with almost reverent disbelief. "I'm blown away by the stages my boots have stood on," she says, with the kind of plainspoken gravity that makes you believe every word. "I take the stage informed on whose feet have carved the path for mine."

That awareness—of history, of lineage, of gratitude—is baked into everything McBryde does. She didn't stumble into country music. She clawed her way into it, mandolin-first, at age four, and never once let go.

McBryde started "really playing" at nine years old, crediting the bluegrass festivals she grew up around as the spark that lit the fuse. By 12, she was writing her own songs. "They weren't 'good,'" she admits with a laugh. "But they were big ideas to tackle for a 12-year-old." By 19, she was playing bars. And at 23, she packed up and drove to Nashville to, in her words, "wrangle the dream."

She didn't arrive with a record deal and a publicist. She arrived with a friend, a storage unit to sleep in, and a relentless willingness to play anywhere that would have her. "I played every beer joint, pizza place, biker bar, and rough spot I could for over a decade with a happy heart," she says. The emphasis on *happy* isn't incidental. This isn't a redemption arc; it's a love story. She finally signed with Warner Records Nashville at 33, a decade-plus of dues paid in full, in cash and in calluses. "There ain't a thing I don't love about this life," she says. "There are things it gives you and things it costs you... takes from you. But I happen to be built for the long hours on the road, the short hours you spend in any city or town."

Ask McBryde to describe her sound and



she doesn't bother hedging. "I'd say it's most accurate to call my sound Chick Rock with a Southern Accent." Country music, she notes, is a broad tent these days—"a big spectrum of sound and messages and lifestyles"—and she's not particularly interested in fitting neatly inside anyone else's box. What she *is* interested in is the song. Always the song. "There's a pull in me that compels me to make sure the songs don't go unheard," she says. "So I answer that call." When it comes to inspiration, she reaches for an analogy that's both humble and perfectly accurate: "Creatives are like roombas. We're always soaking up ideas from every corner and feelings and experiences and stockpiling them for when we want to sit down and paint you a picture, or give you a feeling, or sit in a moment with you."

Her latest album, *Wild*, marks a departure—not just in sound, but in process and vulnerability. Unlike previous records built around fictional towns and invented characters,

and arguably most alive—McBryde has ever sounded on record. "It's the scariest feeling and the most exciting at the same time," she says.

McBryde has no plans to slow down. Her vision for the rest of 2026 reads like a manifesto: "As much music as I can possibly make and take in. Shows, writing, going to see shows, getting more tattoos to show the roadmap of my life on my skin, reading more books so I have new adventures in my head so more magic can come out of my pen." She performs with her band Deadhorse, and the joy she describes in those moments is the kind most musicians spend their whole careers chasing. "There is no joy quite like making music with my band Deadhorse," she says. "It's the most alive I feel, the most free... the most

normal."

But beyond the stage and the studio, McBryde lives by a credo as unguarded as her songwriting: "If it scares you, do it scared." And that might be the most rock and roll thing she's ever said.

this one is starkly, unusually personal. "I've made records about fictional towns and I've written songs about countless characters," she explains. "This time there wasn't anything to make up, just a story to tell. No character to dream of, just me." The recording process was equally unorthodox, built in shorter stints and guided entirely by instinct. "Each day the only criteria for what song was about to come to life was 'what song do we want to play today?'" she recalls. "Not, 'what's a hit, not, we need a mid-tempo toe tapper.' Only: 'what song is in us today? What do we feel like taking to our tree fort to show our friends?'" The result is the most exposed—

Ashley's Advice for Aspiring Artists

- You are needed. "No matter who tells you how hard it is—because it is—or tries to tell you how slim your chances are—because they are for us all—we need you."
- Tell your story. "Play your instrument. Write your songs. Sing your story. There's someone who needs it. Might be me."
- Don't let the songs go unheard. "People like you and I, we can't let the songs go unheard. So go make sure they're heard."

VOLTA and Dave Matthews Band: The Interactive Power of Live Music

The Fan at Heart

Holding a deep love for music is a universal force that connects people at a profound emotional level. When that passion becomes hard-coded into a person's identity—aligning personal conviction with professional purpose—this self-determination can transform a career into a reflection of one's inner world. For Andrew Corbett, founder and CEO of VOLTA, that meant linking the improvisational heart of music with the structured logic of technology. He envisioned an immersive, multi-view platform that would turn audiences from passive spectators into active participants in shaping their own live concert and media experiences. Fans could curate vantage points, follow favorite performers, and craft a personalized front-row experience—all delivered in a seamless, high-speed format.

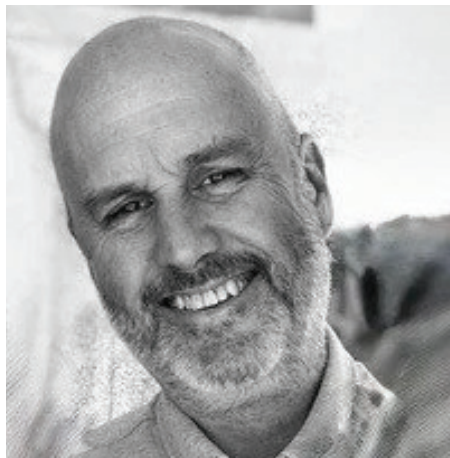
Partnership: Road to Code

The foundational architecture of VOLTA's technology and stage perspective was solidified in 2021 when Corbett brought in Fenton Williams, original tour manager and longtime lighting and production designer for Dave Matthews Band. Williams' role went beyond technical design—his honorary band member perspective helped bridge live performance aura with digital capture. His decades of stagecraft experience ensured that the extemporaneous heart of a DMB show—where every performance is distinct—could be faithfully captured in a multi-angle, fan-controlled format.

With Williams' input, the platform began capturing concerts from multiple vantage points while preserving light geometry and stage dynamics. The result was a digital canvas where fans could explore the minutiae of live musicianship—from expressive improvisations to subtle interactions between performers—while still experiencing the full energy of the show. Live production was essentially captured and transformed into code that powers VOLTA.

The Gorge Field Test

The definitive field-test for VOLTA's technology arrived at The Gorge Amphitheatre during Dave Matthews Band's 2025 Labor Day weekend residency. VOLTA deployed its multi-camera interactive array to capture this historic performance—a yearly pilgrimage for DMB diehard fans—including a full-album rendition of *Before These Crowded Streets*. During this phase, VOLTA assembled a steering committee of fan community leaders, podcast hosts, and representatives from Dave Matthews Band management. More than 50 people contributed to shaping the rollout strategy, ensuring the release reflected both fan expectations and the band's legacy. Additionally, a select group of fans gained early access to the platform, experiencing the concert from multiple angles rather than passively watching.



Encore Live

The final step in VOLTA's journey was transforming its interactive viewing concept into a commercial product with a paywall. Building on The Gorge test, Encore Live with DMB launched in February 2026, simulating the energy of a live release while broadcasting previously recorded performances.

The Encore Live debut marked an important milestone for VOLTA—not just as a technical achievement, but as a broader business model built around interactive concert experiences, giving viewers control over multiple camera angles—with the resulting analytics providing information into how fans engaged.

Fan Agency and Metrics

The results offered an early glimpse into how interactive streaming and broadcasting might reshape engagement. Thousands of tickets were sold, with 95 percent of buyers opting for the bundled night pass, suggesting fans valued the communal experience. More revealing, how fans interacted with the performance: rather than passively watching a traditional director's cut projected over the stage, fans explored multiple perspectives—unique angles of Dave, wide crowd shots, and other perspectives not typically shown—millions of times across the weekend.

"We thought that was fascinating," Corbett said. "It's really a new metric for fan engagement. People are choosing how they want to watch. They're not just consuming but exploring it."

The platform's analytics highlighted this trend:

Out of a nine-camera multi-view setup, "two of the grid views were the third and fourth most watched," Corbett notes. "Interestingly, the director's cut came in fifth or sixth. Fans are getting comfortable exploring and creating their own perspective, rather than just consuming a pre-set version."

Audiences even caught rare moments, such as a live cover of "All Along the Watchtower," echoing Corbett's early Charlottesville live

show experiences, but captured, curated, and delivered to a global audience in a digital front-row medium.

"Take a song with a big horn solo," Corbett says. "You're watching Rashawn or Jeff on trumpet or sax, and it's amazing. But next to them, Tim and Buddy are having their own musical conversation while Dave is taking in the moment. That's the magic of letting people explore the scene, and it makes me really happy."

Moments like this illustrate why VOLTA isn't just streaming a performance—it's giving fans the ability to co-create their own experience, exploring interactions, musicianship and improvisation in real time, even during an interactive encore.

Expanding Beyond Music and Technology

While this year's Encore Live focused on the Dave Matthews Band community, VOLTA's underlying model is universal and extends far beyond a single artist or genre. The same multi-angle fan engagement platform could apply to music festivals such as Glastonbury or Roskilde, underground raves, professional sports, or competitive gaming—any environment where fans want to explore the action rather than passively watch.

The goal remains the same for Corbett: creating connection, agency, and community through immersive, participatory experiences that mirror the passion fans bring to the event. While the full sports and gaming integrations may come later, audiences are already familiar with multi-view experiences. "Fans regularly watch six games at once, such as March Madness," he notes. "The same applies for competitive gaming—each competitor's experience is seen through their own virtual cam. The potential for fan agency is enormous."

VOLTA is also expanding its technological ecosystem. Native apps for iOS, Android, and connected televisions are currently in development, bringing multi-angle interactivity to home theaters—big screens, surround sound included. Using phones as remotes, fans can seamlessly control camera shots, preserving the immersive interactivity of live events while optimizing the home experience.

Digital Memento: A Universal Experience

Ultimately, VOLTA may transform each viewing session into something more than a stream—a documented personal archive of the event itself. Much like fans wanting to purchase tour shirts as keepsakes, the platform allows audiences to preserve their own version of a performance: the perspectives they chose, the scenes they explored, and the memories they experienced. A true personal, digital memento.

Fans aren't just spectators; they are co-creators of their own experience.

volta.live

Francis Rossi

Solo Quo

One of the music industry's great mysteries is the fact that British boogie-rockers Status Quo never broke the United States. They had the songs, they had charismatic characters and, contrary to popular opinion, they have varied their style quite a lot between 1967 (when the band then known as The Status Quo came into existence) and the present.

There are theories. Some say that there were already bands of a similar type wowing American audiences, including Creedence Clearwater Revival and Grand Funk Railroad. Others say that Quo's look was "too British."

The good news is that it's not too late to discover them (although beloved longtime member Rick Parfitt passed away in 2016), and we'd encourage all our readers to deep-dive into Quo's extensive catalog. Meanwhile, singer and guitarist Francis Rossi has stretched out a little with new solo album *The Accidental*.

The most recent Quo album is 2019's *Backbone*, and Rossi has since said that it will be the last full-length from the band due in part to the costs involved nowadays. "People say you shouldn't mention that," Rossi says. "I'm going to. I mean, I'd rather make money but as long as I don't lose, I'm happy."

After spending a few days in the studio with producer Andy Brook, Rossi found that his creative juices were flowing again, some creative excitement had returned, and he was ready to record something new.

"I came back to the wife and said, 'God, I so enjoyed that,'" Rossi says. "I had a kind of realization that it's one of the things I've enjoyed over the years. The idea of structuring songs, and even more so now with computers. My generation says that they miss the days of multitrack. Oh yeah, you don't miss how much it costs you for so many reels. So anyway, I enjoyed doing it so much."

Part of the appeal for a solo album is having total control over the music. "I'm used to being in a democratic outfit, which I don't really believe in," he says. "I believe in democracy, but it doesn't really work in many scenarios. And I'd have to do two of [one member's] songs, two of his songs, or whatever else. And there were certain people who, over the years, would only bring two. So there was no fucking choice, and there was no quality control. So I realized I didn't have to do that."

That's telling, the fact that Rossi feels



that some Quo records were let down by a "too many cooks, not enough good broth" approach. It's understandable, then, that the creation of this solo album was a freeing experience for him.

"I realized that a lot of the songs I've done with everyone else, it doesn't mean I think they're all shit, or that any of them are shit," Rossi says. "In our political state of the world these days, the thought police are telling you how to think and feel. With the band, I did these things that I probably wouldn't have done. We did, years ago, decide we were going to have quality control, and we never actually did. There are things about Quo I thought were great, but to assume that everything we did was wonderful, it's far from the truth, and that applies to nearly every band on the bloody planet. Great stuff guys, but Christ there's some shit on that album."

Rossi says that his working relationship with Andy Brook blossomed on this record. "I enjoy working with Andrew a lot," he says. "Working with Andy Brook, we both have the same aim. I'm sure people have said this before with me, but the aim changes, or the position changes. We just go, 'Well, look at it again tomorrow.' And then, 'No, I don't like that. Change that for me.' And he'll try. He won't argue, I don't think. And then I go back, 'sorry, you were right,' or I'll ask him his opinion. So I feel very much at home, working with him."

Rossi also worked with guitarist Hiran Ilangantileke on this album, who he met through his son.

"It's happened so bloody late in my life," Rossi says. "I've known Hiran since he was 12 or 13. He's been around the house many, many times since he was young. And he's a stunning guitar player, if a little too stunning, you know what I mean? I've always liked his company. I get on very well with him. We love talking politics and just general life."

Ilangantileke suggested to Rossi that they write together, jam together, with no new initial view to making a record. But, as the title suggests, something happened by happy accident.

"All those things just fell into place," Rossi says. "You lay a sketch to get the format, and sometimes change the format around."

As for gear: "I took a camper out on tour after being told not to, and I recorded this little baby Vox in my bedroom," Rossi says. "There are so many presets that are really good. And we tend to use a box. It's in the box, so to speak, and we use Logic. And I quite like that, because you can leave it in MIDI. I might have used the AC 30 in the room, I don't know, but generally the box, or my Kemper came out, and we might have used a four or 12 here or there, but generally, most of the stuff is kind of against the grain for someone of my age."

francisrossi.com

Los Frankies

D.E.D. City
Self-released
Producer: Miles Delaco

The name might be a little on-the-nose—Los Frankies is the dual Frankie attack of Clarke (of Frankie & the Studs) and Frankie Salazar—but when you have a quirk, why not lean into it? Salazar takes lead vocal duties with this project, though his harmonies with Clarke are key. Anyone already familiar with the Studs' balls-out rock 'n' roll will find much to enjoy here. That said, it's the differences between the two projects that makes it utterly fascinating. There are a couple of tunes right at the end of the album—"Death to the King" and "Far Away (S.F.S.C.)"—where Los Frankies switch moods on us. The former is a dark, post-punk mood-builder while the latter has fuzzy, '90s indie rock elements. Both are great, and a great surprise after a whole lot of punk 'n' roll glory. There's no filler here; "I'm On Drugs" and "Sugar Town" have that awesome, trashy HellaCopters/Hives vibe, and that can only be a good thing. - **Brett Callwood**

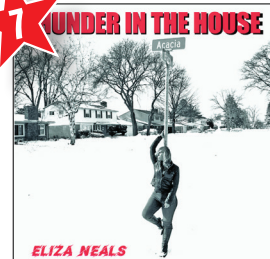


8

Eliza Neals

Thunder in the House
E-H Records
Producers: Eliza Neals, Michael Puwal

Detroit's Eliza Neals has one of the most underrated blues-rock voices in the United States. *Thunder in the House* is Neals' 13th studio album, and it's typically jam-packed with soul-infused, hard-riffing, insistent tunes. "Speedy Beady" kicks off the record—a classic, *Blues Brothers*-esque R&B monster. Straight away, we're reminded of the joy to be found in Neals' throaty, emotive vocal delivery. "All Alone" is another highlight—an anthemic little gem, reminiscent of prime Heart. - **Brett Callwood**



7

Club d'Elf

Loon & Thrush
Royal Potato Family
Producer: Mike Rivard

Mike Rivard's criminally underrated groove collective once more achieves cosmological liftoff. Past journeys have explored genres such as funk, electronica, and dub—always with Moroccan trance as the base. Here, the jazzy jam masters cover a pair of Grateful Dead tracks. Their first release since the passing of founding member Brahim Fribgane, the group feels as impassioned as ever. Let these metaphysical elixirs lift your spirit and shake your ass in equal measure. - **Andy Kaufmann**



7

Bella Litsa

Drasticism
Distrokid
Producers: Bella Litsa, Hayden Ticehurst, Huxley Kuhlmann

Ethereal voicings lead in the first full-length ornamental pop collection from Cypriot-American Bella Litsa. With inspiration ranging from baroque to *Billboard*, Litsa explores grand living through her haunting operatic sound—lilting vocals dance over rich, clean instrumental arrangements that juxtapose orchestral flourishes against dark pop etchings. The cinematic New Yorker is building a reputation for grandiose harmonic lines and throwback sounds that give way to soothing lyrical voicings. Litsa's project includes moments of gently whispered storytelling, lush instrumentals, intriguing mellotron, and rich reverb effects, wrapped into a tantalizing combination for the ear. - **Andrea Beenham**



7

The Claypool Lennon Delirium

The Great Parrot-Ox and the Golden Egg of Empathy

ATO Records
Producers: Les Claypool, Sean Ono Lennon

Wanna get weird? This pair does. Well, that's always been true, but this album is their best yet. A meditation on the perils of artificial intelligence, it's their version of a rock opera, albeit a somewhat inscrutable one. The lush comic book it comes with helps explain it all. Musically speaking, imagine if Primus recorded a sequel to *Sgt. Pepper's*, or a still alive John Lennon stepped into the studio on too much acid. Finale "It's a Wrap" is a nearly 13-minute tour de force worth listening to on its own. - **Andy Kaufmann**



8

Asher Brinson

Midnight Hurricane
Independent - Brinson Records
Producer: Christopher Henry

Asher Brinson's debut album is a strikingly assured introduction, especially for a 16-year-old, leaning fully into the hallmarks of bluegrass. The record threads together familiar staples of the genre: big love, quiet heartbreak, restless freedom, grounded faith, and a good ramble. The instrumentation is equally timeless—nothing adventurous, but nothing careless either—and for listeners drawn to classic bluegrass country, there's real charm in its dedication to form. While one can't help but wonder what Brinson might sound like if he pushed the genre forward rather than honoring it, his guitar and vocal prowess isn't something to be overlooked. - **Ruby Risch**

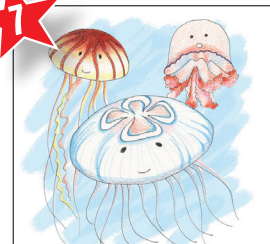


7

Mei Semones

Kurage
Bayonet Records
Producer: Mei Semones

There's a wondrous curveball quality to Mei Semones' music; the Brooklyn-based singer, songwriter and guitarist has the innate ability to lead the listener down a path and then turn on a dime, and that artistic dexterity works to the immense benefit of the songs on *Kurage*. First single "Koneko," which sees her performing with British-Brazilian artist Liana Flores, is a marvelously jazzy yet delicate slice of sweet indie-pop. The weightless manner with which she switches from English to Portuguese to Japanese throughout also adds plenty to songs that one could image serving as a movie soundtrack. - **Brett Callwood**



7



Kenny Peagler

Contact: kenny@kennypeagler.com

Web: kennypeagler.com

Seeking: Booking, Film/TV, Sync

Style: Soul, R&B, Jazz

"This is music designed to breathe—prioritizing the 'unplugged' moment and the raw, emotional intelligence of an honest melody," reads a statement on Kenny Peagler's website. That's reasonable, and appropriate.

There is a sweetness about Peagler's music that is as reminiscent of Randy Newman and Neil Diamond as it is any soul and country icons. A song like "Wasn't Meant to Be" is blessed with a level of emotional maturity not heard in song since Dua Lipa's "We're Good." His voice is strong and warm, and he clearly surrounds himself with exceptional musicians. It all adds up to a great body of work.

- Production 8
- Lyrics 8
- Music 8
- Vocals 8
- Musicianship 8

SCORE 8.0



JimMiDaxX

Contact: jimmidaxofficialbooking@gmail.com

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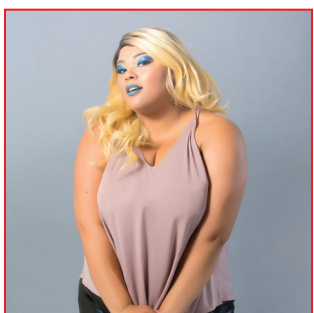
Seeking: Label, Film/TV, Manager

Style: Hip-Hop, R&B, Alternative

There's a joy, a playfulness, about JimMiDaxX's music (as well as his name), that reflects positively on his music. He bounces between alt-pop, trad R&B, and contemporary hip-hop on a song like "Indigo Green" or perhaps "Stargazer" that suggests a determination not to be pigeon-holed, or to rest on his laurels. He's not the finished article, but he doesn't need to be and, for the listener, joining him on the journey is where the fun is. "Zodiac Love" is another tune that plays with big themes in a grounded manner. That, in and of itself, is a gift. Revel in it.

- Production 8
- Lyrics 7
- Music 7
- Vocals 7
- Musicianship 7

SCORE 7.2



Eye'z

Contact: whitegirlventsvip@gmail.com

Web: itseyez.com

Seeking: Review

Style: Blues/Pop

Bay Area artist Eye'z isn't short on ambition, layering her beats with a maximalist texture that recalls the glitz of late-'90s R&B pop. While the dense production occasionally feels like a smokescreen for lackluster vocal takes—and the spoken interlude on "Sugar" misses the mark of being the "moment" she intended—there are flashes of genuine potential. On "It's the one," the vision starts to crystallize, showing a clearer path forward. Her undeniable passion and confidence suggest she's more than willing to put in the work, and while the experimentation isn't flawless, it's brave—and sometimes, that's enough to keep a listener curious.

- Production 7
- Lyrics 7
- Music 6
- Vocals 6
- Musicianship 7

SCORE 6.6



Back pOrchEstra

Contact: esch@backporchestra.com

Web: backporchestra.com

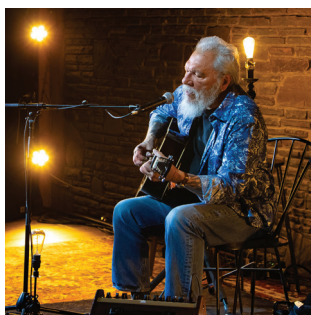
Seeking: Review

Style: American Roots, Indie Rock Americana

The gloriously named Back pOrchEstra feels very much like a labor of love. That very name suggests a group of friends sitting on a porch, perhaps drinking something boozy or perhaps not, but certainly chilling in the warm air and enjoying each other's company while rattling through some rootsy tunes for no one's pleasure but their own. The songs only serve to solidify that image. "Ever Think About It" and "What Does Your Heart Say?" are fun swing-alongs; catchy, honest, and earthy, but also skillfully composed and not at all cheesy. The production is a bit rough, but you can't have everything.

- Production 6
- Lyrics 7
- Music 8
- Vocals 7
- Musicianship 8

SCORE 7.2



Jorma Kaukonen

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Web: jormakaukonen.com

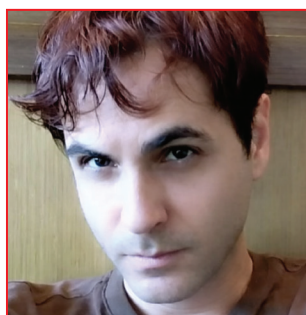
Seeking: Review

Style: Folk

There's something truly beautiful about the music that Jorma Kaukonen is making. His fingerpicking style on tracks like "Embryonic Journey" suggests a seasoned artist who isn't afraid of their talent. It's folksy, sure, but it's also eclectic, occasionally flirting with bright, Hawaiian-inspired tonalities. Every note, every pull of the string is meticulously honest, and the production preserves the tactile beauty of his craft. He seems unconcerned with trends or expectations, creating music for no one but himself—and somehow, that makes it universally compelling. It's profound and unhurried and feels like a necessary balm for our noisy, modern era.

- Production 8
- Lyrics 8
- Music 8
- Vocals 8
- Musicianship 9

SCORE 8.2



XCO

Contact: viko007@gmail.com

Web: xcogames.com

Seeking: Review

Style: Experimental

There's a lot going on here and it's not particularly easy to get a grasp of it all. XCO appears to be behind a company/website called XCOGAMES, putting out video games. This writer isn't a gamer, so a full appreciation of that is impossible. Thankfully, it doesn't appear necessary to "get" the gaming to enjoy XCO's music. XCO refers to himself as "experimental" and, as broad as that tag is, it certainly applies here. The artist's droning vocals and repetitive beats create the sort of soundscape that you have to imagine would effectively score a digital realm.

- Production 7
- Lyrics 7
- Music 8
- Vocals 7
- Musicianship 7

SCORE 7.2

Music Connection critics rate recorded music on a scale of 1 to 10. Number 1 represents the lowest possible score, 10 represents the highest possible score.

MC can only guarantee that a review will be fair and honest. For more information, see Submission Guidelines on the next page.



The Tape Cassettes

Contact: thetapecassettes@gmail.com
Web: thetapecassettes.com
Seeking: Booking
Style: Appalachian Garage Rock

Dakota Free and Wade Gillette of The Tape Cassettes have reportedly been jamming together for their entire lives, and that chemistry is evident. Tracks like "I Said, I Said" showcase their garage rock prowess, drenched in a thick, glorious fuzz that leans so heavily into distortion that it occasionally swallows the lyrics whole. However, they show a lighter, more agile side on "Late Love (Live)," where the playfulness of their chemistry finally emerges from the feedback, proving there's a heart beating under all that grime. It seems that they revel in the work they are doing, inviting listeners to share in their joy—and sometimes their chaos.

- Production 7
- Lyrics 7
- Music 7
- Vocals 7
- Musicianship 7

SCORE 7.0



The Dead and Blue

Contact: ceh0917@gmail.com
Web: Spotify
Seeking: Booking, live shows, fill bills
Style: Indie rock/blues, bilingual

LA.-based outfit The Dead and Blue feels like a love letter to the canyon-rock era, channeling the storytelling grit of the likes of Eagles with a modern, dust-on-the-dashboard soul. On "6 p.m.," they offer a laid-back anthem that resonates deeply with the local sprawl, moving between genres with the fluid ease of a seasoned traveler. "Pontiac 7" is a sweet little ditty. Their effortless genre-hopping—sometimes across languages—is a testament to musical curiosity. Production could be tighter, but there's a warmth in the minor imperfections, the kind of beauty one hears in vinyl crackle. Endearing stuff.

- Production 6
- Lyrics 7
- Music 7
- Vocals 7
- Musicianship 8

SCORE 7.0



Alison Whiteacre

Contact: alison@bigplanetmusic.com
Web: YouTube
Seeking: Label, Film/TV
Style: Modern fingerstyle guitar

According to an online bio, "Alison Whiteacre has had an amazing music career as a recording artist, producer, composer for film, TV, and commercials, and the publisher of her own 4500-plus track music catalog." After listening to "The Lively Maiden" and "The Fake McCoy," it's little wonder that Whiteacre has enjoyed such a long career, earning accolades and no small amount of respect along the way. Her fingerstyle guitar is technically dazzling, but also wonderfully warm. There are no lyrics, but Whiteacre conveys a ton of emotion with her instrument, and we "feel" along with her.

- Production 8
- Lyrics X
- Music 8
- Vocals X
- Musicianship 8

SCORE 8.0



The Velvonic

Contact: thelvelvonic@yahoo.com
Web: thelvelvonic.com
Seeking: Booking
Style: Pop

Burbank quartet The Velvonic claims that "If we can't get your party swingin', you invited the wrong people." And after spinning their latest, this writer is beginning to suspect we are the "wrong people." Their aesthetic is a dizzying cocktail of B-52s camp and *Fear and Loathing* disorientation. The spoken-word delivery, paired with beach-core psychedelia, feels more like a frantic hallucination than a cohesive groove. It's an ambitious swing at a retro-kitsch vibe that's clever in theory, though a tad too chaotic in execution. It's clearly an acquired taste, one that will either enthrall you with its wild, quirky energy or leave you dizzy and slightly bewildered.

- Production 6
- Lyrics 6
- Music 6
- Vocals 6
- Musicianship 7

SCORE 6.2



Tiffany Johnson

Contact: natalie@ladysavagemgmt.com
Web: YouTube
Seeking: Label, Booking, Film/TV, Sync
Style: Pop

Nashville pop artist Tiffany Johnson released her debut album *Tempress* on April 24, and the songs that she submitted to us make us want to hear the whole damn thing. "You're a nice guy right until you're not," she sings on the frankly brilliant "Shocked," a song with a catchy chorus that kicks hard. Taylor Swift is an obvious reference point; Johnson employs singer-songwriter devices, acoustic jangle-pop, and then allows some pop-punk energy to make the choruses bouncy. Add some honest, journal-entry lyrics, and you have an authentic, enjoyable, and promising pop star.

- Production 9
- Lyrics 8
- Music 9
- Vocals 8
- Musicianship 8

SCORE 8.4



J Donte

Contact: jayne@redwarriorrecords.com
Web: YouTube
Seeking: Audience, Sync
Style: SophistaPop, R&B, Pop

J Donte wields a voice that's as confident as it is effortless, gliding through tracks with Broadway-worthy clarity and concert-ready soul. "There Is No City As Pretty As Savannah" and "Dead End Street" showcase the duality of his appeal: intimate storytelling and infectious swing. There's a subtle charm in the way he commands a track without trying too hard, letting the melody carry you while his voice does the heavy lifting. Whether he's painting a picture of Southern charm or navigating a lonely pavement, his voice acts as a gravitational force.

- Production 7
- Lyrics 7
- Music 7
- Vocals 8
- Musicianship 8

SCORE 7.4

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES: There is absolutely no charge for a New Music Critique.

To be considered please go to musicconnection.com/reviews/get-reviewed. All submissions are randomly selected and reviewed by MC staff.

Shrine Exposition Hall Los Angeles, CA

Web: ashnikko.com

WHEN IT COMES TO MUSICIANS, and indeed all artists, the most intriguing, compelling, and ultimately interesting individuals are those who keep you guessing. What exactly *is* this person doing? What genre do they fit into? What the hell are they going to do next? The best artists don't allow you to answer those questions comfortably before they've shape-shifted in another direction and tangled your brain up in knots. Ashnikko is one such artist.

We first caught Ashnikko at Coachella a few years ago. Playing late in the day on one of the tented stages, we could only sample a few songs before moving on to whomever was performing on the main stage, but what we *did* hear stayed with us and we made a mental note to dig deeper into Ashnikko's world.

As it turned out, 2021's *Demidevil* mixtape is a bit of a masterpiece, while the *Weedkiller* and *Smoochies* albums that would follow solidified Ashnikko's rep as one of the most artistically vibrant, gloriously colorful and just damned talented contemporary musicians on the circuit. She seamlessly blends the most "now" genres, resulting in a sound that is very much hers. Hyper-pop meets alt-pop meets hip-hop meets dance, all of which would just be a word salad if not for the fact that the songs are *huge!* The most infectious melodies and sing-along lyrics working to the benefit of gorgeous queer anthems.

At the Shrine on a Friday night in late March, it felt like L.A.'s most flamboyant contingent was out in force to celebrate Ashnikko, to bask in her glowing presence. Gleefully basking in the adoration, Ashnikko turned in a performance that was theatrical, cheeky, and magical in a cartoonish sort of way. Ashnikko has long dabbled with anime imagery; at the Shrine, with blue hair bouncing and eyes wide, she looked every inch the animated heroine.

It all kicked off with an *Alice in Wonderland*-esque narrative about Ashnikko finding some sort of a hidden doorway (possibly at the bottom of her purse, if we heard correctly), crawling through it, and finding herself on stage. Apparently surprised to suddenly be faced with a room full of brightly made-up Angelenos (you have to admire her commitment to the bit), Ashnikko dove straight into "Working B*tch" from 2019's *Hi, It's Me EP*.

It's an interesting way to start the show. On the surface, the artist has songs that drop harder and stimulate adrenaline levels to a greater degree. That said, this song is a simple, effective statement of intent. Yes, the show is magical but behind it all is a lot of grind.

Next was "Microplastics" from *Smoochies*. "I want you in my body like microplastics," she sings, boldly melding sensuality with, um, pollution. From there, the set continued to build momentum. "Smoochie Girl" and "Lip Smacker" dial up the intensity, all pulsing beats and poetically suggestive lyrics.

"You Make Me Sick" is one of her punkier tunes, a caustic gem from *Weedkiller*, and that exploded in L.A. "Stupid," the single that saw Ashnikko join forces with Baby Tate, sounded equally incendiary. "Nothing about you is



ASHNIKKO

attractive to me," she sings—a middle finger to the cis-centric patriarchy.

The set just kept getting better. The industrial-tinged "Chokehold Cherry Python" is a grimy, stunning anthem. "I Want My Boyfriends to Kiss" is a future EDM gay club classic. "Itty Bitty," from the new album, is the ode to short skirts that we didn't know we needed. "Itty bitty teeny tiny little sl*tty skirt," she sings, in a show of unapologetic female empowerment.

When we finally reached the absolute joy of "Slumber Party," we knew that the end was

nigh. "I'm not shy, I'll say it, I've been picturing you naked," Ashnikko purrs, before she's joined by rapper Princess Nokia and the Shrine rejoices.

"Daisy," also from *Demidevil*, ends the night. "I'm crazy but you like that," she croons, throwing in knowing cackles. The thing is, she's absolutely right. Her artistically unhinged demeanor is a huge part of her appeal because, again, it means that we can't see what's coming. Ashnikko keeps us guessing, and we wouldn't have it any other way. **-Brett Callwood**

Jewel's Catch One Los Angeles, CA

Web: brassrootsdistrict.com

Contact: jon@prospectpr.com

Players: Celeste Butler Clayton, vocals; Ari Herstand, vocals, guitar; Brandon 'Butta B' Samuels, trumpet; Fabio Kizambo, trombone; Dee Simone, drums, Kevin Eknes, guitar; Kya Karine, bass; Quintin Farr, keyboards; Randal Fisher, saxophone

CELEBRATING THE RELEASE OF THEIR first full-length album (*Welcome to the Brassroots District*) earlier this year, following standalone band productions in 2021 and 2023, Brassroots District enlisted a troupe of talented actors to join them in a story-driven evening of lively merriment. With 11 songs performed as a '70s-themed album release party, attracting a mixed crowd of all ages, backgrounds, and persuasions, lively scripted scenes unfolded simultaneously throughout the building. The production lasted approximately 90 minutes—and there was never a dull moment.

With phones locked up to keep everyone present and in the '70s era, the evening began with (fictitious) club owner Gem (played by Morgan Daneille Day) delivering a passionate intro to her community-centered nightclub, commanding that all in attendance be good to each other—and her club. Encouraged to choose their own adventure, attendees could sit as concertgoing spectators, stand in the performance hall to be a direct part of the production, or move between rooms to witness



BRASSROOTS DISTRICT

the scripted mini-dramas up close. The nine-piece band brought tight boogielicious sound, navigating "Mama's Gonna Keep It Hot," "Aim High," a "Smash"/"Take Allotta Sweat" mashup, "Love In Every Language," "These Feet Ain't Got No Body," "So Damn In Love," "Repetition," "Takin' Back Daydreamin'," "Together," and Billy Preston's "Will It Go Round In Circles."

Focusing on values of integrity, authenticity, and community, the storyline navigates corporate label versus independent, artist-minded music, with feuds and dramatic sequences of campy characters adding fun and laughter. Ursa Major (Celeste Butler Clayton) and Copper Jones (Ari Herstand) led their band

through a chaotic storyline with the help of Gem, Gil, Nancy, Donny, Barry, Cassie the Brassie (adding fabulous vocals on "I Ain't Pickin' Up On You"), Suzy, and Lola. 'That Guy' (played by Alex Vergel) was everywhere all the time (greeting you on the VIP carpet before the show even began).

With personalities galore, and sights and sounds everywhere, the concert-theatre-nightclub evening repeatedly broke audience-performer boundaries, culminating in a full room sing-along and Soul Train dance tunnel exit to cap off the unforgettable immersive experience. Lively, fun, and freewheeling. - **Andrea Beenham**

GRAMMY Museum Los Angeles, CA

Web: halestormrocks.com

Contact: ashley@ashleywhitepr.com

Players: Lzzy Hale, vocals; Joe Hottinger, guitar, backing vocals

FOLLOWING 2025'S EVEREST, Halestorm's lead singer Lzzy Hale and guitarist (and partner of 22 years) Joe Hottinger delivered a stunning rock show at the GRAMMY Museum. Hosted by Katherine Turman (*Nights with Alice Cooper, RIP Magazine*), the two discussed early days, musical heroes, and the overwhelming honor of being asked to join Ozzy for his "Back to the Beginning Celebration" (the only female on the bill, she sang "Ultimate Sin" alongside Jake E. Lee, Nuno Bettencourt, David Ellefson, Mike Bordin, and Adam Wakeman). Of the experience, Hale says, "my name wouldn't be spelled L-Z-Z-Y without Ozzy Osbourne."

Van Halen's "Panama" blasted at home when she was young. Hale's first purchased concert tickets were for Tool; Hottinger's were for The Verve Pipe, Tonic, and K's Choice. Holding a deep respect for her 'fore sisters' (including Janice Joplin, Heart, Pat Benatar, Patty Smith, Joan Jett)—and the challenges forced to navigate during their journey into music—Hale says, "I didn't have to sit in anyone's lap to get my record played."

Moving into stripped-down versions of "Amen," "Mz. Hyde," "Love Bites (So Do I)," "Like A Woman Can," "The Silence," "I Miss the Misery," and "I Like It Heavy," Hale and Hottinger delivered an incredibly rich, full performance that



LZZY HALE & JOE HOTTINGER

defied expectation. Highlighting her gorgeous vocal control and power, seamless octave transitions, contradiction of gentle sweetness and gravelly rock, and her trademark belted vocals, Hale shared a fantastic rock sound and

powerful projection. Hottinger added fantastic guitar stylings (a great intro on "Love Bites (So Do I)") and beautiful backing vocals. "I Like It Heavy" delivered a bluesy guttural sound and fabulous vocal melody lines. - **Andrea Beenham**

Neumos Seattle, WA

Web: spiritualcramp.com

Contact: caitlin@atomsplitterpr.com

Players: Michael Bingham, vocals; Mike Fenton, bass; Orville Neely, guitar; Nate Puntly, guitar; Julian Smith, drums; José Luna, keyboards

IF YOU'VE EVER WANTED TO combine your love of Franz Ferdinand with your love of the Germs, then you're in luck because San Francisco's Spiritual Cramp is the perfect blend of distorted classic punk notes and post-punk revival melodies. Taking their name from the Christian Death song of the same title, the group is an explosive powerhouse of passion and noise, currently touring in support of their third album, *RUDE*. Spiritual Cramp got their start in the East Bay hardcore scene initially as a spinoff of singer Michael Bingham's first band, Creative Adult. Since then, they have opened for bands like Bad Nerves and Rise Against, and played events like Riot Festival and Reading Festival. The group crash-landed in Seattle on March 18th to get audiences sweaty and screaming at Neumos.

As per the city's rigid yet complicated liquor laws, the venue opts to place the under-21s closer to the stage and the over-21s further back, a much better system than many of the area's other venues. Opening band Fentanyl arrogantly proclaimed they couldn't wait to "get this over with" as they serenaded the crowd with their emo hardcore-influenced style of punk. As more people filtered in for the second opener, a space was left in the middle of the room to account for the pit that was soon to form, the audience knew what was soon to be in store for them. Bass Drum of Death followed shortly, channeling the

Cat's Cradle Carrboro, NC

Web: jonahkagen.com

Contact: kylie@jonahkagen.com

Players: Jonah Kagen, guitars, vocals; Jefferson Rinck, guitars, bass, lower register musings; Sam Johnson, guitar; Dalton Thomas, drums, percussion

SMART ACTS USE A COOL walk-on track so the audience knows what's about to happen. The music starts, and people begin drifting in from the hallways or the parking lot.

Tonight was different. At Cat's Cradle, the room was already flirting with full sardine mode—packed tight and breathing as one organism.

The band spread across the big stage but stayed close enough to pass the current between them. What came out was a double-super-smokin' sound: big vocals, razor-placed slide guitar, and a floor tom and bass pedal that seemed almost untethered from gravity—charging forward like they had somewhere urgent to be, occasionally glancing back to see who was keeping up.

Answer: everyone. "Simon," "The Reaper," and "Candyland" popped the cork on the evening, immediately followed by a quad-pod of "You Again," "Matches," "Black Lung," and "Moon," before sliding into "Krissey." Anyone who's ever played a stage knows dead air is the enemy, and



classic 2010s Burger Records surf punk sound with melancholic guitar and an upbeat, worry-free disposition.

Sprinkles of indie influence permeated the night as the venue chose to play everything from Interpol to The Dandy Warhols between the bands' sets. Distorted vintage TVs appeared on either end of the stage like pillars, establishing the confines of how far the group's insanity is permitted to go. After a few moments of tense silence, the band detonated into a whirlwind frenzy of jumping, kicking, and punching into their instruments with extreme force. Hard-hitting tracks off the new album, such as "Go Back Home," "At My Funeral," and "Young Offenders" were played in the beginning, establishing them as soon-to-be classics among fans. Michael gyrated, convulsed, and spasmed in every way possible, still managing to express a level of Mick Jagger-esque swag in every movement.

At any given moment, if you weren't dodging Michael's kicks, you were probably fielding

guitarist Nate Puntly's killer riffs being played inches away from your nose. Spiritual Cramps' allure in many ways is their ability to be so intense and mosh worthy in some aspects, and so danceable and fun in others. The ghost of electroclash's past is alive and well in the souls of Jose Luna's keyboard and Mike Fenton's bass. Their grungy garage adjacent cover of the Caesars' "Jerk It Out" highlighted just that, giving the crowd a hefty dose of nostalgia and an opportunity to sing along together. As the night progressed into its latter half, we were treated to hits off the band's previous albums, such as "Dog In A Cage" and "Better Off."

The closer the show came to coming to a close, the rowdier the pit grew, as various forms of fake currency were thrown into the crowd, and political statements were yelled out left and right. Michael proudly proclaimed that he "had no enemies" before ripping his sweat soaked shirt off and kicking the final few songs into gear. — **Cade Pinkerson**



the Kagen juggernaut made sure the groove train never stopped rolling.

True pros, they came alive on the first note—spinning intricate melodies across the wide stage and then drop-kicking them into the rafters. Each note chased the one before it, tumbling into the sonic backwash with a snicker and a sneer.

At the center of it all was Jonah Kagen, holding the whole engine together while the band roared behind him. And what a band it was. They played like they'd been magnetized at the downbeat—atoms snapping into place, herding their collective molecules toward the same musical corral.

By the time "Same Wind," "The Roads," "Save My Soul," and "God Needs the Devil" closed the set, the room was already at full boil. Then came the double encore—"Sunflowers & Leather" chained directly to "Burn Me"—which finished the job with surgical precision.

At that point the walls looked ready to burst outward, spilling the great unwashed into the parking lot—dazed, ringing, and happily disoriented. They'd just spent the evening basking in the Kagen heat lamp, and now they could navigate their way home through the Milky Way, powered by the celestial groove of Jonah Kagen. — **Eric Sommer**

Rivian *New York, NY*

Web: rarariot.com

Contact: inge@goldatl.as

Players: Wes Miles, vocals, guitar; Rebecca Zeller, violin; Kenny Bernard, drums; Heartstrings Music, additional strings

MUSIC ORGANIZATION The Wild Honey Pie hosted a community event in New York last month, bringing local music professionals to Rivian for a night of pizza and performance. Although not hosted in a typical music venue, the floor to ceiling windows kept the intimate event from feeling crowded. Instead, leafy plants and views of the Hudson River framed the stage. On a makeshift platform in the center of the showroom, Ra Ra Riot and Heartstrings welcomed the crowd. All mic equipment was powered by an electric car parked beside them, but the instrumental arrangement remained entirely acoustic.

After an introduction from the team at The Wild Honey Pie, powerful phrases from the strings enveloped the audience, opening the show with "Ghost Under Rocks." The song surged forward quickly, sweeping the audience along in the river rapids, propelled by the energetic drumbeat, while the strings lingered on long notes. Miles' clear and bright vocal timbre bounced over, splashing up out of the flow.

Dreamy strings guided listeners through "Oh,



RA RA RIOT

Lah" and "Water," with harmonies floating over the crowd. Dark colors in the cellos kept the airy melodies grounded, shifting below a lilting vocal melody. In "I Need Your Light," sharp, staccato notes and a thundering bass drum build undulating waves of intensity. The earnestness in "Water" gave the set release - an unbridled end, as if running towards freedom. On a whim, they decided to through in a fifth track as an encore. Miles' laughed that it wasn't rehearsed, instead following the spontaneity of the evening. They ended on a high note, with an upbeat, poppy track that invigorated the crowd.

The set was short and sweet, a special treat for the audience. After the show, the band and organizers invited the crowd for drinks across the street at a local bar. Part of The Wild Honey Pie's mission is to support local nonprofits with music, highlighting the Bronx River Alliance as their choice for the night. It made the lyrics "We've got a lot to learn from each other/We have got to stick together" from "Oh, Lah" feel especially poignant. Although Ra Ra Riot isn't currently planning to tour, their tremendous repertoire is available for fans online. - *Emily Mills*

Cat's Cradle *Carrboro, NC*

Web: robertlesterfolsom.com

Contact: dshaw@baselinemusic.com

Players: Nep, vocals; Tyler Pons, drums; Sophia Damiani, bass; Jake Sonderman, guitar

GRAB YOUR SLIDE RULES: Albert Einstein almost had it right, but the real equation on display at Cat's Cradle was $E = NEP^2$.

That proof arrived in the form of NEP (yes, that's really her name)—a shadow-boxing indie-pop artist who brought a cocktail of swagger, nervous laughter, and Daytona Beach daydreams to the adoring Back Room crowd.

NEP burst onto the stage with a quick four-song salvo: "Daytona," "Fender," "Lovelace," and "Milkdown," followed by the brisk pop flash of "Rocket Ship." None of it calmed the room. If anything, the next stretch detonated the place: "Teddy," "Biketoberfest," "All Around Beauty," and "Soundtrack" spilled out in a sugar rush of jangling guitars and nervous giggles.

The crowd surged toward the stage in what became a kind of musical cyclone. The quartet itself looked almost comically small against the swell of bodies pressed forward—NEP, her guitarist, and drummer hovering around the five-foot mark, while the bass player stood like a benevolent giant beside them.

Add NEP's constant giggle—somewhere between nervous energy and mischievous charm—and the whole affair began to resemble a cinematic "escape from the kids' table at Thanksgiving."

The guitar work was simple and unadorned—almost stubbornly so—but it carried a kind of innocence that fit the material. The grooves



NEP

were uncomplicated, the structures tidy, and the melodies had the breezy, slightly sunburned feel of songs written somewhere between a dorm room and a beach parking lot.

At times, the silliness threatened to overwhelm the music. There were genuinely lovely musical moments that got sliced apart by NEP's constant asides and laughter. The vibe in the room became so beach-soaked you could almost smell the Coppertone and feel sand under your feet. The sugary, slightly smug Hello Kitty delivery sometimes obscured the delicate little juxtapositions the band—competent if understated—was putting together.

Mid-set, the groove settled into something like autopilot before reanimating with "I Close My Eyes," "Florida Girl," and the crowd favorite "Pup." Without a dominant soloist or any real instrumental grandstanding, the evening became less about virtuosity and more about atmosphere: a blend of sonic melancholy and

occasional Beach Blanket Bingo chaos.

The songwriting itself showed care. Songs were thoughtfully paced and clearly diaristic. There may not yet be an obvious hit single lurking in the catalog, but a certain gravitational pull—something about Daytona, about leaving and remembering—kept the set moving forward.

That Florida lineage occasionally bubbled at the surface. The warm embers of Tom Petty and Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers flickered here and there, and the ghost of Southern guitar traditions that ultimately fed into The Allman Brothers Band hovered around the edges of the sound.

Elsewhere you could hear faint splashes of quirky new-wave DNA—moments that hinted at the playful pop instincts of Bow Wow Wow and the bright theatricality later embraced by Culture Club—another clue to the mixing bowl of beach culture, pop instinct, and youthful irreverence that NEP seems to inhabit. - *Eric Sommer*



2026 GUIDE TO DIGITAL RESOURCES

From livestreaming concerts from home studios to interacting with fans directly on social media platforms, the music industry increasingly lives online. Every entry in this Guide to Digital Resources & Social Media was nominated by your fellow music-makers—*Music Connection* readers like yourself. Be sure to check out the newly added categories, such as Beat Selling Websites, Music Sales Tracking, Online Instruction, Film/TV Licensing, and Monetized Video Posting.

SOCIAL MEDIA & DIGITAL MARKETING TOOLS

BITLY

Web: bitly.com

Services: URL Shortener, Custom Branded URLs, API & Link Management.

CANVA

Web: canva.com

Services: Graphic-design tool website. Design presentations, social media graphics, and more with thousands of beautiful layouts.

CINDERBLOCK

Web: Cinderblock.TV

Services: Video streaming app that is built for music videos, concerts, interviews, etc.

CROWDMOUTH

Web: instagram.com/crowdmouthapp

Services: Crowdmouth is a direct-to-fan platform empowering creators to engage, monetize and grow their audiences.

FLYTEVU

Web: flytevu.com

Services: Full-Service entertainment marketing company based in Nashville, TN.

HOOTSUITE

Web: hootsuite.com

Services: Social media marketing and management platform. Helps you keep track and manage your many social network channels. It can enable you to monitor what people are saying about your brand and help you respond instantly.

Fee: Professional - \$49/mo.

LINKMY.PHOTOS

Web: linkmy.photos

Services: Instagram photos and captions are currently not linkable. The only place where you can add a link to your website is through the URL in your Instagram bio. Link My Photos has created the destination for your Instagram bio. Your personalized Link My Photos page displays all of your clickable photos to help your followers get to the content and products that you post.

Fee: Free, Shutterbug - \$4.99/mo., paparazzi - \$9.99/mo

MAGROOVE

Web: instagram.com/magro_music

Services: Magroove was founded by musicians for musicians, offering a radically simple, transparent, and affordable method for independent artists to seamlessly distribute their music to more than 40 streaming services, engage in direct-to-fan commerce, and access tools for website development.

MAILCHIMP

Web: mailchimp.com

Services: Email marketing tool that allows you to send emails to hundreds or thousands of recipients all at once. It is essentially a tool you can use to create and manage mailing lists and newsletters, as well as automate your email campaigns and collect leads.

Fee: Free, Grow \$11, \$17/mo, Pro -\$299/mo.

NUMBER ONE MUSIC

Web: n1m.com

Services: A music portal dedicated solely to the development and exposure of indie artists/bands

SIMPLY GIGANTIC

Web: simplygigantic.com

Services: PR Agency

SPROUT SOCIAL

866-878-3231

Web: sproutsocial.com

Services: Social media management and optimization platform for brands and agencies of all sizes. Gives you a single hub for social media publishing, analytics and engagement across all of your social profiles.

Fee: Standard - \$89/mo, professional \$149/mo, Advance \$249/mo.

UTOPIA-HEARTBEAT

Web: instagram.com/utopiaheartbeat

Services: Cross-platform music data analytics, career recommendations to increase revenues.

VENTURE MUSIC

Web: venturemusic.com

Email: info@venturemusic.com

Clients: Universal Music Group, BMG, Red Light Management, Quartz Hill Records, Flobots

VERTIGO

Web: viberate.com/artist/vertigo-361

App: ertigo-music-stream-together-live-ios.soft112.com/#google_vignette

Services: Fans can access artist content on Vertigo from anywhere, no app download required. Artists can further boost streams and sync any content to subscribers' accounts. Independent Artists/Bands.

UNSPASH

Web: unsplash.com

Services: Database of high-resolution, watermark-free images that are free for use.

WEB DESIGN

BANDZOOGLE

Email: support@bandzoogle.com

Web: bandzoogle.com

Features: Unlimited support, free domain name, premium hosting, unlimited bandwidth, mobile-ready themes, music player, SEO tools, tour calendar, EPK's, more.

Fee: Lite - 8.29/mo, Standard - \$12.46/mo, Pro - \$16.63/mo.

NING

855-233-6436

Web: ning.com

Services: Social integration, custom design, 24/7 support, basic features toolkit, monetization options

Fee: Basic - \$25/mo, Performance - \$49/ mo, Ultimate - \$99/mo.

SQUARESPACE

Email: support.squarespace.com

Web: squarespace.com

Features: Modern templates, adobe image editor, audio collections, social sharing, email campaigns, product merchandising

Fee: Personal - \$12/mo., Business - \$18/mo., Commerce, \$26/\$40

WIX

Web: wix.com

Features: Design freedom, SEO, mobile optimization, unlimited fonts, media galleries, custom domain name, social tools, customizable music player, music selling options, stats.

Fee: Free version available, Combo - \$14/ mo, Unlimited - \$18/mo., Pro - \$23/mo., VIP - \$39/mo.

WORDPRESS

Web: wordpress.com

Features: Custom domains, mobile friendly, built-in social sharing, in-depth stats, search engine optimized

Fee: Free, Personal - \$4/mo, Premium - \$8/mo, Business - \$25/mo.

LEGAL SERVICES/ADVICE

ARRANGEME

Web: arrangeme.com

Services: Copyright services

AUDOO

Web: audoo.com

AVVO

Web: avvo.com

Services: Ratings, reviews and disciplinary records for lawyers in every state. Get free legal advice, find the right lawyer, and make informed legal decisions.

FREE LEGAL ADVICE

Web: freeadvice.com

Services: Comprehensive legal and insurance advice, articles, answers, videos and news.

LAWCHAMPS

866-653-3017

Web: instagram.com/lawchamps

Services: Instantly matches consumers with solo attorneys based on budget. Clients and attorneys can instant message, call & video chat with members only app.

LAWHELP.ORG

Web: lawhelp.org

Services: Created for people living on low incomes

and the legal organizations that serve them. LawHelp.org provides referrals to local legal aid and public interest law offices, basic information about legal rights, court forms, self-help information, court information, links to social service agencies, and more in your state.

LEGAL SERVICES LINK

844-529-3279

Web: legalserviceslink.com

Services: Anonymously post your legal needs quickly and for free. Lawyers interested in helping you contact you via email. Review the emails and select the best lawyer for you.

LEGALZOOM

800-773-0888

Email: support@legalzoom.com

Web: legalzoom.com

Services: Online legal help on business, intellectual property, contracts & agreements, legal advice.

MUSIC CONNECTION

Web: musicconnection.com/industry-contacts,

NOLO 800-631S-5158

Web: nolo.com

Services: Answers to everyday legal and business questions, lawyer directory

UCLA SCHOOL OF LAW'S MUSIC INDUSTRY CLINIC

Email: mic@law.ucla.edu

Web: linkedin.com/company/ucla-law-music-industry-clinic

Services: Free 30-minute consultations to individuals who need legal advice relating to their careers in the music industry

VOLUNTEER LAWYERS FOR THE ARTS 212- 319-2787 ext. 1

Email: vlany@vlany.org

Web: vlany.org

Services: VLA provides legal services to low-income artists and all non-profit arts organizations in every artistic discipline.

FUNDRAISING/FINANCIAL MATTERS

ARTISTSHARE

Email: support@artistshare.com

Web: artistshare.com

Services: Operates as a record label and business model for artists which enables them to fund their projects by allowing the general public to directly finance, watch the creative process, and in most cases gain access to extra material from an artist.

Fees: 5% fee on contributions raised in addition to third party credit card processing fees (3-5%).

BEATBREAD

Web: beatbread.com

Services: The pioneering music funding platform that enables artists to access growth capital while maintaining control of their careers and ownership of their music.

CENTTRIP

Web: centtrip.com

Services: global fintech providing expense management and card payment technology, has launched its platform, app, and card in the United States, to change the way music and entertainment industry manages tour and team expenses

FUNDLY

Web: support.fundly.com/hc/en-us/categories/200398977-fundly

Services: Crowdfunding site for online fundraising. Raise money online from friends, family, colleagues, donors, and other supporters via email, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google, and social media networks.

Fees: Platform fee of 4.9% per transaction in addition to payment processing fee of 3% + 30 cents per transaction.

GOFUNDME

Web: gofundme.com

Services: For-profit crowdfunding platform that allows people to raise money. 0% platform fee.

Fees: Fees vary based on country. United States is 2.9% + 30 cents per donatio.

INDIEGOGO

Web: indiegogo.com

Services: International crowdfunding website. Indiegogo allows people to solicit funds for an idea, charity, or start-up business. Indiegogo charges a 5% fee on contributions.

Fees: 5% of funds raised in addition to processing fee of 3% + 30 cents per transaction. Bank may charge additional fees depending on currency and bank account location.

JACKTRIP FOUNDATION

Web: jacktrip.org

Services: The JackTrip Foundation Equipment Grant supports nonprofit arts, education, and technology organizations, as well as individuals applying through organizations. The funds are for purchase of equipment for network arts projects to further innovation and access in this cultural work.

KICKSTARTER

Web: kickstarter.com

Services: Crowdfunding platform for creative projects. A home for film, music, art, theater, games, comics, design, photography, and more.

Fees: Kickstarter fee of 5% of total funds raised in addition to payment processing fees of 3% + 20 cents per pledge. (Pledges under \$10 have a discounted micropledge fee of 5% + 5 cents per pledge)

MUSIC BENEFACTORS/EXPLORER 1 MUSIC GROUP

Email: contact@explorer1music.com

Services: We work with recording artists, indie labels, publishers, venues, and other music businesses to sell debt and equity securities to investors. The capital raised is used to help fund their businesses.

PATREON

Web: patreon.com

Services: Membership platform that provides business tools for creators to run a subscription content service, with ways for artists to build relationships and provide exclusive experiences to their subscribers, or "patrons."

Fees: 5% of successfully processed fees in addition to an effective payment processing fees that may vary based on transaction amount and method of payment and a fixed fee. These average around 5% and 30 cents per transaction. There are also Payout fees for moving your funds from your Patreon account to your bank account.

PLUMFUND

Web: plumfund.com

Services: Free to fundraisers and donors.

There are no transaction fees for organizers or contributors, and no setup fees.

Fees: Third party fee of 2.8% + 30 cents deducted from each transaction.

ROYALTY EXCHANGE

1-800-718-2269

Web: royaltyexchange.com

Services: Online marketplace/auction platform where investors & owners of royalty streams can buy royalties and sell all types of royalties.

Fees: Commission is collected after auction at rate determined prior to listing from sellers. Third party fees for transfers depend on bank account, location, and method of payment for buyers.

SOUND ROYALTIES

Email: info@soundroyalties.com

Web: soundroyalties.com

Services: Offers music professionals non-credit based financing and funding without having to deal with banks or traditional lenders.

MUSIC REVIEW/OPINION/ FEEDBACK

FLUENCE

Email: contact@fluenceapp.com

Web: fluenceapp.com

Services: Makes curators directly accessible to artists/promoters through their platform.

MUSIC CONNECTION

(Live Reviews, New Music Critiques)

Email: contactmc@musicconnection.com

Web: musicconnection.com/reviews/get-reviewed

Services: 12 recorded artists and 7 live performances are selected to be reviewed by Music Connection staff from artist submissions every month. Unsigned Artists only.

REVERBNATION

(CROWD REVIEW)

Email: support@reverbnation.com

Web: facebook.com/reverbnation

Services: Artist feedback from targeted sample, data analytics.

SONGCHECKS

Web: songchecks.com

Services: Songchecks is a curated platform for Producers, Mixers, Bands, and Songwriters of all levels and locations to get affordable written feedback on your songs from the world's best music talent.

SONGU.COM

Web: songu.com

Services: Provides multi-level song writing courses developed by award winning songwriters, song feedback, mentoring, one-on-one song coaching, cowriting, unscreened pitching opportunities and more.

TUNECORE

(FAN REVIEWS)

646-651-1060

Web: tunecore.com/artist-services

Services: Artist feedback, data analytics

GIG FINDER

AIRGIGS

Email: help@airgigs.com

Web: airgigs.com

Services: platform for hiring professional session musicians, vocalists and audio engineers online. Songwriters, music producers, bands and creatives can hire talent to enhance their existing productions, or they can produce an entire song from composition to mastering completely online.

GIGMASTERS

866-342-9794

Web: gigmasters.com, thebash.com

Services: Event services booking platform. Hire local musicians, DJs, bands, photographers and speakers for special events.

GIGSALAD

Web: gigsalad.com

Services: Find and book everything from bands, musicians, and DJs to entertainers, speakers and event services.

REVERBNATION

Email: support@reverbnation.com

Web: facebook.com/reverbnation

Services: Online platform that provides marketing tools and opportunities for musicians, artists, and bands to manage their careers.

Fee: Free, Basic- \$12.95/mo., Premium - \$19.95/mo.

SONICBIDS

Email: support@sonicbids.com

Web: sonicbids.com

Services: Connects bands, music promoters and major brands through an online platform. Engage new fans, discover new music and find gigs.

Fee: Sonicbids Basic - Free, EPK Pro - \$5.00, Gig-Seeker Pro - \$19.99

SOUNDBETTER

888-734-4358

Email: info@soundbetter.com

Web: soundbetter.com

SONG SUBMISSIONS/ PLACEMENTS

ADAPTR

Web: adaptr.com

Services: An all in one platform to easily add hit music to your apps and digital experiences

MUSIC CONNECTION

Web: musicconnection.com, musicconnection.com/reviews/get-reviewed

MUSIC GATEWAY

Email: support@musicgateway.com

Web: musicgateway.com

Fee: Influencer - \$22/mo., Adventurer - \$7.50/year, Game Changer - \$37/mo.

Services: Music industry marketplace where you find music industry jobs, receive daily job postings worldwide, start collaborations, send your demo submissions and more.

MUSIC GORILLA

201-796-8742

Email: info@musicgorilla.com

Web: musicgorilla.com

Services: Submit your music to film, TV, songwriting and major label showcase opportunities. Get heard by a wide range of industry pros from music supervisors to internet radio hosts to major label A&R.

Fee: Free to sign up.

MUSIC OPPS

Web: musicopps.com

Services: Music opportunities for independent & unsigned artists

MUSIC XRAY

Email: support@musicxray.com

Web: musicxray.com

Fee: Submission fee set by the Industry Professional, and an additional \$10.00 just for the first submission of that song.

Services: Submit your songs to music producers, publishers, supervisors and managers for

marketing, music licensing, label roster, publishing, distribution and more. Your track goes directly to the decision makers: no middle-men, no prescreeners, just a direct link between artist and Industry Professional.

SUBMITHUB

Email: jason@submithub.com

Web: submithub.com

Services: Share songs with music bloggers, record labels, radio stations, Spotify playlists and YouTube or SoundCloud channels.

TAXI

818-222-2464

Web: taxi.com

Services: Helps songwriters, artists, and film/TV composers get their music to record labels, music publishers, music supervisors and music libraries

THAT PITCH

Web: thatpitch.com

Fee: Monthly/\$0-\$39, Annual/\$390

Service: Pitch unlimited music to ads and major motion films.

BEAT SELLING WEBSITES

AIRBIT

Web: airbit.com

Services: Buy, sell and license tracks.

Collaborate with other producers. Sell sound kits. Customize your own beat store with the Infinity Store feature.

Fee: Basic Free, Gold-\$8.33/mo., Premium-16.66/mo

AUTO-BOUNCE

Web: auto-bounce.com

BEATSTARS

Web: beatstars.com

Fee: Free, Marketplace Plan - \$9.99/mo., Pro Page Plan - \$19.99/mo.

Services: Post, sell and buy beats online. Create your own custom beat selling website with themes and domain with the Pro Page plan. Earn ad revenue when people stream your music on SoundCloud and Audiomack.

BOPPER

Web: boppermusic.com

Services: Ad music licensing platform, Bopper, has come to an agreement with all of the rights holders it represents to pre-clear tracks for use in brand content productions on Tik Tok, YouTube, Instagram and Twitch. A safe and easy way for brands to license music from independent recording artists for immediate use in digital advertising.

BRIDGER

Web: bridgermusic.io

Services: Bring independent songwriters towards copyright by offering them an innovative and easy solution to collect their royalties generated on digital platforms.

SOUNDCCLICK

Email: support@soundclick.com

Web: soundclick.com

Services: Stream, download, buy and sell beats on a social media platform that includes photo

albums, video uploads, blogs and message boards.

TRAKTRAIN

Web: traktrain.com

Services: Invitation only platform to sell, buy and listen to instrumentals. Paid creative assistance and track mixing available.

SONG COMPETITIONS

GREAT AMERICAN SONG CONTEST

Email: info@greatamericansong.com

Web: greatamericansong.com

Summary: Open to songwriters, lyricists & music composers worldwide. This annual event is designed for amateur and semi-pro songwriters only. Individuals who earn over \$10,000 annually from song publishing royalties are not eligible.

Prizes: Grand Prize Winner receives \$1,000 cash in addition to a free membership to TAXI Independent A&R, free one-year Platinum Membership to SongU.com and more.

Fee: \$35 per song

INTERNATIONAL SONGWRITING COMPETITION

615-251-4441

Web: songwritingcompetition.com

Summary: Annual song contest that provides opportunity for both aspiring and established songwriters to have their songs heard in a professional, international arena. 71 winners will share in the cash and prizes.

Categories: AAA (Adult Album Alternative), AC (Adult Contemporary), Americana, Blues, Children's Music, Christian, Comedy/Novelty, Country, EDM (Electronic Dance Music), Folk/Singer-Songwriter, Instrumental, Jazz, Latin Music, Lyrics Only, Music Video, Performance, Pop/Top 40, R&B/Hip-Hop, Rock, Teen, Unpublished, Unsigned Only, and World Music.

Fee: \$25.00 per song or category

JOHN LENNON SONGWRITING CONTEST

888-884-5572

Email: info@jlsc.com

Web: jlsc.com/about.php

Summary: The JLSC is open year-round and features two Sessions - with 72 Finalists, 24 Grand Prize Winners, 12 Lennon Award Winners and 1 "Song of the Year." The Contest is open to amateur and professional songwriters who submit entries in any one of 12 categories.

Fee: \$30.00 per song

LEE RITENOUR'S SIX STRING COMPETITION

Email: ritsguitar@aol.com

Web: sixstringtheory.com

Summary: The Six String Theory Competition, hosted by Grammy winning guitarist and producer, Lee Ritenour, is a biennial competition that accepts performer applications for guitar, bass, piano/keyboards and drums, and offers winners performance opportunities and scholarships, as well as prizes from sponsors.

MUSIC CITY SONGSTAR

Email: mcscs@musiccitysongstar.com

Web: facebook.com/musiccitysongstar

Summary: A songwriting competition for up-and-coming writers and musicians in all genres.

Prizes: The Grand Prize winner receives money,

an invitation to perform their song at an exclusive event and instruments.

MUSIC CONNECTION

Web: musicconnection.com

NASHVILLE SONGWRITERS

1710 Roy Acuff Pl

Nashville, TN 37203

800-321-6008

Email: reception@nashvillesongwriters.com

Web: nashvillesongwriters.com

SKIO MUSIC

Web: skiomusic.com

Summary: Download free stems and win official releases, collabs, plugins and more

SPlice

Web: splice.com

Fee: Must sign up to Splice Sound for \$7.99/mo.

Summary: Remix contests. Win official releases, collabs, plugins and more.

UNSIGNED ONLY MUSIC COMPETITION

615-251-4441

Email: info@unsignedonly.com

Web: unsignedonly.com

Summary: Unsigned Only is designed for solo artists, bands, and singers all over the world who are looking for exposure, recognition, and a chance to be noticed by industry professionals. Open to all artists who are unsigned to a major record label.

Prizes: Grand Prizes \$20,000, mastering services, music distribution and more.

Fee: \$35 per song

USA SONGWRITING COMPETITION

Web: songwriting.net

Summary: Open to all amateur and professional songwriters and anyone regardless of nationality or origin.

Prizes: Winning songs receive radio airplay. Overall Grand Prize winner will receive \$50,000 worth of cash, merchandise and services. Overall 2nd Prize winner will receive \$9,000 worth of merchandise. Overall 3rd Prize winner will receive \$6,500 worth of merchandise.

Categories: Songwriters can enter in 15 different song categories such as: Pop, Rock/Alt, Folk, R&B, Hip-Hop, Jazz, Instrumental, etc.

Fee: \$35.00 per song

ON THE ROAD: LODGING

AIRBNB

415-800-5959, 855-424-7262

Web: airbnb.com

Services: Find hosts with extra rooms, entire homes and unique accommodations.

COUCH SURFING

Email: support@couchsurfing.com

Web: couchsurfing.com

Services: Arrange homestays, offer lodging and hospitality

HOTEL TONIGHT

Email: help@hoteltonight.com

Web: hoteltonight.com

Services: Last minute hotel deals, discounted room rates

INDIE ON THE MOVE

Email: info@indieonthemove.com

Web: indieonthemove.com

Services: Show & tour booking, Music Venues Database, QuickPitch Emailing, College & University Show Booking Database, Bands Directory, Show Availabilities, Classifieds

Fee: Free, Premium - \$9.99/mo.

PRICELINE

877-477-5807

Web: priceline.com

Services: Discount rates for travel-related purchases including airline tickets, hotel stays, cars, cruises

ARTIST COLLABORATIONS

AIRTABLE

Web: airtable.com

Services: Shared database/spreadsheet

Fee: Free or paid membership (\$10/mo, \$24/mo.).

AUDDLY

Email: info@auddly.com

Web: auddly.com

Services: Allows music creators to collect their song data and make it accessible for the business side, in order to secure transparent and correct credits and payments for everyone involved.

AUDIOBRIDGE

Web: audiobridgeapp.com, facebook.com/audiobridgeapp

Services: Mobile recording studio, tool for mobile music collaboration. Communicate directly with your collaborators with dedicated chat-rooms for every session. Keep track of your entire history of edits in one place with both real-time and delayed collaboration.

AVID

Web: avid.com

Services: Provides information on all digital solutions for capturing, creating, editing and distributing digital media.

BANDHUG

Web: bandhug.com/videos/updated?page_id=1

Services: Bandhug is an international music platform that fosters collaboration between musicians and the globe.

BANDLAB

Email: hello@bandlab.com

Web: bandlab.com

Services: Social media network for musicians and fans with unlimited cloud based storage.

BANDMIX

877-569-6118

Web: bandmix.com

Services: Online classified network for connecting local musicians and bands.

Fee: Free or premier membership \$12.95/\$17.90mo

BEATSTARS

Web: beatstars.com

Services: Digital production marketplace that allows music producers to license and sell beats and give away free beats.

Fee: Free or Unlimited for \$9.99/\$19.99mo

DOWNWRITE

Web: downwrite.com

Services: Downwrite is a platform for the co-creation of music for fans and artists.

It allows fans to bring a personal experience, idea, or occasion into the creative realm of an artist, who through their unique talent, transforms the shared experience into music.

DROOBLE

Email: team@drooble.com

Web: facebook.com/droobleofficial

Services: Social media network for musicians with promotional features, also allows users to submit reviews of other users music for payment.

FRETTIE

Web: stage.frettie.com/inside

Services: Connect with other songwriters from around the globe. Frettie is a valuable songwriting community made up of students, professionals and hit songwriters who are all eager to learn, discover, give feedback and connect with each other.

INTROBOT

Web: introbot.co

Services: App for musicians, filmmakers, actors, models, photographers, writers, dancers, artists, designers, and people with ideas, to collaborate with people from around the world who have the skills to realize their creative idea

KOMPOZ

Web: kompoz.com/music

Services: Social network platform for musicians, to share, collaborate, distribute music and crowdsourcing production/ performers

Fee: Free or premier membership (\$5/ mo., \$10/ mo., \$20/mo.).

MUSIC LAUNCH HUB

Web: musiclaunchhub.com

Services: Global music network where working musicians and the next wave of music professionals, come together to better navigate their future in music.

MUSICIAN'S CONTACT

818-888-7879

Email: info@musicianscontact.com

Web: musicianscontact.com

Services: Connecting musicians and bands together for over 45 years, from club and casual groups, to traveling bands, to concert and recording acts.

MUSIVERSAL

Web: musiversal.com

Fee: \$49/mo, \$490/yearly

Services: Access to world-class session musicians, vocalists, producers, and audio engineers.

OFFTOP

Web: offtop.co

Services: Mobile recording studio to rap and sing over beats. Explore a library of fresh instrumentals, record freestyle or written verses, and share your rap or song with the world.

PROCOLLABS

Web: procollabs.com

Services: online music collaboration service that gives you access to experienced and talented

songwriters, musicians, audio engineers, and music producers from all around the world.

Fee: Free or premier membership (\$20/mo., \$50/mo., \$95/mo.).

ROLI

Web: roli.com

Services: Makes the process of producing music interactive. The social platform helps music producers share music projects in source format, perfect for remixing, collaborating, learning from, and gathering feedback from others in the global community.

SLACK

Web: slack.com

Services: Collaborative hub for work colleagues with features such as messaging, file sharing, screen sharing, searchable history, and integration with other filesharing/messenger apps. Organizes conversations between work colleagues into a streamlined layout.
Fee: Paid membership (\$6.67/mo., \$12.50/mo.).

SONGSALIVE!

Web: songsalive.org

Services: Largest global songwriters squad. A non-profit organization supporting, promoting and educating songwriters and composers worldwide.

SONGSPACE

Web: songspace.com

Services: Helps music creators and publishers collaborate, pitch, track and share song projects and playlists.

Fee: Creator - \$8/mo., Business - \$15/mo.- Plus - \$28/mo

SONGTOWN

Web: songtown.com

Services: A virtual music "town" where creative people gather to be encouraged, educated and inspired. Writers of all genres, from all over the world come to SongTown to find other creative cowriters, to learn how to improve their craft from #1 hit songwriters and publishers, and to be mentored by successful music industry pros.
Fee: Platinum Annual Plan \$197 per year, Diamond Fast Track \$649 per year, monthly membership for \$24.99/mo.

SONGWRITER LINK

Web: songwriterlink.com

Services: Songwriting collaboration website that makes finding the perfect co-writer faster than before. It's the only website that uses matching engine technology—the same kind that dating websites use—to help find you exactly the type of songwriters you're looking for.

SOUNDATION

Web: soundation.com

Services: This feature unlocks many unique opportunities for Plugin manufacturers and sample pack and beat marketplaces to have a slick way of showcasing their products and allow site visitors to try them out. Producers and other creators engage their audience in a new way by letting them actively listen to or remix their creations.

SOUNDSTORMING

Web: soundstorming.com

Services: Helps musicians to connect,

collaborate and promote themselves using their musical ideas, riffs and fragments.

SOUNDTRAP

Web: soundtrap.com

Services: Online recording studio/DAW with collaborative features, plugins/ drumtracks, autotune, other audio engineering features. Also educational features

Fee: (Free, \$7.99/mo., \$11.99/mo., \$13.99).

SPLICE

Web: splice.com

Services: Musicians use Splice to find sounds, get gear, enter contests, discover projects and connect with one another.

STUDIOTRAXX

Web: studiotraxx.com

Services: Provides instant access to a vast global network of musicians-for-hire who are ready to work and collaborate via the web. Private collaboration areas are also available to those who don't need to find and hire musicians but simply need an efficient way to manage files across partners.

TULLY

Web: tullyapp.com

Services: Recording artists and songwriters can play, write, and record song ideas all within one application. Artists can share their projects with their engineer before studio sessions, allowing instant access to the audio file, lyric sheet, and recording ideas. All your files are organized and stored to the cloud, keeping all your creative work safe in one location.

TUNEBLADES

Web: tuneblades.com

Services: Empowers both professional and non-professionals to quickly resize and remix songs To match any duration, remove vocals from songs, and stream indefinitely for live presentations or programs.

VAMPR

Email: support@vampr.me

Web: vampr.me

Services: App that helps you discover, connect and collaborate with fellow musicians, the music industry and music lovers alike.

VOCALIZR

Web: vocalizr.com

Services: Created to connect professional singers and producers world-wide. Community of producers looking for talent.

Fee: Free or Pro Membership (\$9/mo).

MUSIC SALES TRACKING

CHARTMETRIC

Web: chartmetric.io

Services: Music data analytics company. They combine hundreds of thousands of real-time data points across iTunes, Spotify, Youtube, Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in order to make sense of the increasingly complex landscape of the music industry.

CRYPTO.COM

Web: crypto.com

Services: Cryptocurrency tracking app, and has

recently expanded to covering and paying NFTs for artists and audiences.

MAYKI

Web: mayk.it/#stations

Virtual studio where you can create music on demand with our team of producers.

NEXT BIG SOUND

Web: blog.nextbigsound.com

Services: Provides online music analytics and insights, tracking hundreds of thousands of artists around the world. As part of Pandora, they deliver powerful analytics tools used by music makers, labels and marketers looking for data and insights about artists and their fans.

RCRDSPH STUDIO

Web: facebook.com/rcrdshp/videos/

Email: newsletter@rcrdshp.com

Services: a curated digital collectibles platform, built by and for the electronic music industry, and validated by technologies like the blockchain and non-fungible tokens.

SONGTRUST

Web: songtrust.com

Services: World's largest global royalty collection service, Songtrust streamlines the music publishing administration of 1,000,000+ songs.

SOUNDCHARTS

Web: soundcharts.com

Services: A full-stack solution (database, desktop, mobile apps & API) that brings together real-time and historical music consumption data, (social, charts, playlist, airplay monitoring) to improve project management, reporting and artist scouting.

WIO PRO

Web: wiopro.com

Services: empowers entertainment stakeholders to track the airing of movies and television episodes, vital information that drives the payment of guild residuals, composer royalties and profit participations.

ONLINE INSTRUCTION

ARI'S TAKE ACADEMY

Web: aristakeacademy.com

Services: Multiple individual courses available, created by indie musician and music business author Ari Herstand. Courses range from topics such as managing tours to streaming and social media growth.

BERKLEE COLLEGE OF MUSIC

Web: berkeley.edu

Services: Multiple online degree and certificate programs. Interactive 12-week courses. World-renowned faculty and classmates.

HIFI LABS

Web: hifilabs.co

Services: HIFI Labs' Web3 Artist Cohort is a free virtual three-week immersive program that helps connect emerging musicians with the resources they need to further develop and launch their next music project using Web3 tools.

LESSONS.COM

Web: lessons.com

MELOPHY

Web: staging.melophy.com

Services: Melophy is a teaching site by artists for artists to organize calendars, live lesson streams to individuals and groups of students, and schedule virtual performances, all while promoting artists' music.

MUSICIANS INSTITUTE

Web: mi.edu/programs/mi-online

Services: Access to acclaimed curriculum and supportive interactive course content. Certificates in guitar performance and artist/entrepreneur/production and Associate degrees in guitar performance and music business.

MUSIC CREDITS DATABASES

DISCOGS

Web: discogs.com

Services: Discover new music. Track your collection. Contribute to the database.

GENIUS

Web: genius.com

Services: Wide collection of song lyrics and musical knowledge.

MUSICBRAINZ

Web: musicbrainz.org

Services: Open music encyclopedia that collects music metadata and makes it available to the public. MusicBrainz captures information about artists, their recorded works, and the relationships between them.

TOUR DATES CALENDAR

BANDSINTOWN

Email: support@bandsintown.com

Web: bandsintown.com

Services: Music website billed as a "platform where artists and fans connect." The site allows users to receive notifications about tours and bands playing in the user's area. It also has tools for artists to manage tour dates.

SONGKICK

Web: songkick.com

Services: Provides concert discovery services and ticket sales for live music events.

LIVE STREAMING

DREAMSTAGE

Email: support@dreamstage.live

Web: youtube.com/channel/UCbO3K7d8zFhsbDnquGQ-pKw

Services: A streaming platform where musicians of all genres perform and interact with fans worldwide.

STAGEIT

Web: stageit.com

Services: Artists perform live, online shows from their laptop that are never recorded or archived. Fans are encouraged to ask the artist questions, request songs, and even chat with other fans during the show. Virtual tip jar available on every show.

TWITCH

Web: twitch.tv

Services: Site primarily focuses on video game live streaming, including broadcasts of eSports competitions, in addition to music broadcasts, creative content, and more recently, "in real life" streams. Content on the site can be viewed either live or via video on demand.

YOUKNOW

Web: younow.com

Services: Discover talented broadcasters, watch live streams and video chat live with people from around the world.

T-SHIRTS & MORE: MERCH & MANUFACTURING

9 CAFEPRESS

877-809-1659

Web: cafepress.com

Services: Create and sell your personalized designs on t-shirts, bags, mugs, posters and many more unique gifts.

AKA

Web: galleryyaka.com

Services: AKA is an independently owned & operated retail boutique and custom printing company based in San Diego, California.

BANDS ON A BUDGET

866-471-3868

Web: bandsonabudget.com, merchly.com
facebook.com/bandsonabudget

Services: Prints custom merchandise for all types of businesses and brands, with a large majority of its customers being up-and-coming musicians. With products varying from shirts to stickers, banners to tour posters, BandsonaBudget.com can help you cover all of your bases in one shot, eliminating the need to deal with different companies.

BIG CARTEL

Web: bigcartel.com

Services: Build a unique online store, sell your work, and run a creative business. Perfect for clothing designers, bands, jewelry makers, crafters, and other artists.

CUSTOM INK

800-293-4232

Web: customink.com

Services: American-based online retail company that makes custom apparel.

DISC MAKERS

Email: info@discmakers.com

Web: discmakers.com

Services: Disc Makers is the world's largest CD, DVD, and Blu-ray manufacturer for independent musicians, filmmakers, and businesses. They offer duplication, replication, printing, graphic design, audio mastering, DVD authoring, worldwide distribution and more.

FIVERR

Web: fiverr.com

Services: Online marketplace for freelance services including digital marketing, graphic design, music, audio and more.

KILLERMERCH.COM

Web: killermerch.com

Services: Full-service branding agency, global merchandising, product development

MERCH CAT

Email: info@merchcat.com

Web: merchcat.com

Services: Merch sales, inventory management, track payments and get real-time reports.

MERCH.LY

866-522-4012

Web: merchly.com

Services: Custom t-shirts, hoodies, bags and more, customized with your band logo or design.

PRINTFUL

818-351-7181

Email: support@printful.com

Web: printful.com

Services: On-Demand order fulfillment and warehousing service. Products include: clothing, accessories, and home & living items for online businesses. It's free to set up, with no monthly fees or minimum order.

REDBUBBLE

Web: redbubble.com

Services: Online marketplace to print on-demand products based on user submitted artwork.

RUSHORDERTEES

**2727 Commerce Way
Philadelphia, PA 19154**

Web: rushordertees.com

Email: sales@rushordertees.com

Services: Screen printing, embroidery, delivery

SHOPIFY

Web: shopify.com

Services: Shopify is a commerce platform that allows anyone to easily sell products. Shopify offers a professional online storefront, a payment solution to accept credit cards, and the Shopify POS application to power retail sales.

Fee: Basic Shopify - \$29/mo., Shopify - \$79 /mo., Advanced Shopify - \$299/mo.

SONGLORIOUS

Web: songlorious.com

Services: Employs a stable of hundreds of musicians who create customized songs for anniversaries, birthdays, and yes marriage proposals. Customers simply fill in details for their song, choose a genre song length and in four days-time a certified musician will send back a customized song ready to share. Cost for the song starts at \$90.

SPREADSHOP

800-381-0815

Email: help@spreadshop.com

Web: spreadshop.com

Services: Create and sell custom merchandise on your own online shop for free.

SQUARE

Web: squareup.com/us/en

Services: Financial services, merchant services aggregator, and mobile payment company

Fee: Charges 2.75% per swipe.

STICKER MULE

Web: stickermule.com

Services: Custom stickers, labels, magnets

& more. Get free proofs, free shipping, 4-day turnaround & 24/7 customer support

TEEPUBLIC

Web: teepublic.com

Email: help@teepublic.com

Services: Largest marketplace for independent creators to sell their work on high-quality merch

VISTAPRINT

866-614-8002

Web: vistaprint.com

Services: Design and order custom printed marketing materials, signage, t-shirts, hats, pens

ZAZZLE

Web: zazzle.com

Services: Allows designers and customers to create their own products with independent manufacturers, as well as use images from participating companies.

MUSIC DISTRIBUTION & FILM/TV LICENSING

AIMI

Web: aimi.fm/about

Services: World-class artists have collaborated with the platform to present original compositions and Experiences, oftentimes they provide an album's length of material. Aimi's unique AI proactively chooses the right pieces of audio to play at the right moments, constantly rearranging and repurposing segments, to generate brand new presentations of these artists' material.

AMUSE

Email: support@amuse.io

Web: amuse.io

Services: Strategic planning, marketing, financing, branding and PR, 50/50 profit.

AWAL

Email: info@awal.com

Web: awal.com

Services: Global distribution, marketing and release management, A&R, funding, playlist promotion, radio & PR, YouTube monetization, and music data and insights through the AWAL App.

BEATBREAD

Web: beatbread.com

Services: BeatBread's mission is to empower artists so that they can own their art and control their careers. We give more artists access to funding and more choice to select the promotion, marketing, and production partners that best fit their unique needs.

BEATCHAIN

Email: enquiries@beatchain.com

Web: beatchain.com

Fee: Free sign-up, \$14.99/mo., \$19.00/mo.

Services: distribution, insights, marketing

CD BABY

800-289-6923

Web: cdbaby.com

Services: Digital distribution, sync licensing, publishing administration, CD/vinyl sales

DISTROKID

Email: support@distrokid.com

Web: distrokid.com

Services: Distribute cover songs legally, get paid when other people use your music on YouTube, unlimited backups, instant Spotify verified checkmark, manage your Apple Music page, get your credits & lyrics into stores, Spotify pre-save.

DITTO MUSIC

Web: dittomusic.com

Services: Distribution service offers unlimited releases to all major online stores on an annual subscription basis. Non-exclusive deals with artists keeping 100% of their royalty earnings. Record label services including PR, social media and playlist pitching to independent artists.

FWAYGO

Web: fwaygo.com

Services: Built by music artists and powered by fans, the platform provides a first-of-its-kind music discovery experience for consumers as well as a disruptive business model enabling undiscovered artists to increase both their exposure and their earnings by avoiding the exploitative music ownership, royalty and streaming revenue policies of traditional labels and streaming services.

LANDR

Email: contact@landr.com

Web: landr.com

Services: AL mastering, collaboration workflows, artist-friendly distribution, promotion tools, free samples, stats.

Fee: \$24.99/mo/\$207yr/\$149.99yr (billed upfront)

OCTIIVE

Email: support@mondotunes.com

Web: octiive.com

Services: Distribution, marketing, mastering, licensing opportunities.

ONERPM

Email: support@onerpm.com

Web: onerpm.com

Services: Music distribution, marketing, business intelligence, rights mgmt. & publishing, etc.

QOBUZ

Web: qobuz.com

Services: Offers high-quality sound and unlimited listening, anytime, everywhere

REPOSTEXCHANGE

Web: repostexchange.com

Services: Offers SoundCloud monetization, content protection, and upgraded profile features to musicians and podcasters on the platform.

REVELATOR

Web: revelator.com

Services: State of the art full-stack copyright management platform for independent artists, labels, and distributors to distribute to music digital platforms, manage revenue reporting and royalty settlement to all rights holders

REVERBNATION

Email: support@reverbnation.com

Web: reverbnation.com

Services: Opportunities, digital distribution, site builder, fan reach, crowd review, gig finder, sell direct, electronic press kits.

RIGHTSHOLDER.IO

Web: rightsholder.io

Services: A simple music rights search engine designed with music licensing & synchronization professionals in mind.

SONGTRADR

424-744-8190

Email: support@songtradr.com

Web: songtradr.com

Services: Free sign-up, online music licensing, free submission to music licensing opportunities, unlimited music storage, non-exclusive licensing.

SYMPHONIC DISTRIBUTION

813-907-3128

Web: symphonic.com

Services: Video distribution, publishing administration, neighboring rights, marketing, video marketing, sync licensing, web and graphic design, YouTube "website monetization" and SoundCloud monetization.

SYNC SONGWRITER

Web: syncsongwriter.com

Services: Selectively licenses music with licensing agents. The goal of the site is to teach you how to get your songs into TV & film.

THE ORCHARD

Email: communications@theorchard.com

Web: theorchard.com

Services: distribution, marketing, data analytics, performance rights, accounting

TUNECORE

Web: tunecore.com

Services: Vinyl pressing and distribution, physical copies of your music, guaranteed plays on services like Deezer and 8track, engagement stats, custom artist website using designs tailored for musicians

UNITEDMASTERS

Email: info@unitedmasters.com

Web: unitedmasters.com

Services: Distribution, marketing, analytics

Fee: \$100 monthly payment made through paypal, UnitedMasters keeps 50% of royalties.

MONETIZED VIDEO POSTING

DROPP TV

Web: droppgroup.xyz

Services: Dropp Tv unleashes the power of the creator through an innovative blend of art, technology and e-commerce creating a new mode of digital interaction.

SONGFLUENCER

Web: songfluencer.com

Email: info@songfluencer.com

Services: Strategically pairs songs, artists, and brands with key tastemaker influencers on music-forward social media platforms.

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Robin Beck Still Sings Like It's the First Time

Rocker Robin Beck might be best known for the single "The First Time" (a smash hit just about everywhere except the U.S.), but a career that began in 1979 has spawned a tremendous catalog of work. Her disco-flavored '79 debut album *Sweet Talk* featured guest spots by Irene "Fame" Cara and Luther Vandross but, by 1989's *Trouble or Nothin'*, Beck was in full rock mode.

"I guess you could say I found myself," she says. "I was doing more and more original material, and it was leaning in that direction. I was digging it and so I stuck with it."

"The First Time" was on that killer album, alongside covers of songs by John Waite, Pat Benatar, and three by Bonnie Tyler. In the years since then, Beck has released nine albums, with the most recent being this year's *Living Proof*. The quality hasn't dipped, even if the sales have. This industry can be terribly fickle. So what keeps her going?

"Well, I eat my Wheaties," Beck says. "I don't know how to be any other way. I came into this world singing, and I'll go out singing."

In the early years, Beck worked as a backing singer for artists as prestigious as Chaka Khan, Melissa Manchester, and Leo Sayer. These could be seen as prime learning years

"It's not so much what I learned from *them*, but what I learned from the producers and being in that position to sing on albums with Leo Sayer and David Bowie, Queensrÿche, Michael Bolton, Eddie Money, Cher—the list just goes on," Beck says. "You have to fit into a sound. I

became a chameleon. I also learned how to be much more gracious and thankful for not always being in the front of the band, but in the back. You learn how hard it is for the actual artist to pull out a hit."

Yep, Beck sang with Bowie on "As the World Falls Down" from the *Labyrinth* soundtrack and provided backing vocals to Cher's classic "If I Could Turn Back Time." That's quite the resume. But still, "The First Time" stands tall. This writer recalls Beck on British TV show *Top of the Pops*, sporting a top hat and belting out the song.

"My recollections are that of the luckiest girl on earth," she says. "Getting a phone

call in the middle of the night from the label asking me if I wanted to be on *Top of the Pops* just sounded more like a prank phone call at the time. I was over the moon, being on cloud nine! I don't recall being nervous, but I do recall the Bangles being in the dressing room with me and feeling like, 'what

"There are times when it makes life easier and there are times when it makes it kind of rough," she says. "Both James and I are strongly committed to the types of music that we do and we are bound to have a difference of opinion now and then but, in the end, we always feel like we have reached the perfect compromise without compromising the music. We support each other completely. I couldn't ask for a better partnership."

Beck re-recorded *Trouble or Nothin'* for a 20th anniversary rerelease in 2009. "I had to wait to be able to re-issue that album and the wait was so long and the demand for it was so big that I just decided to re-record it," she says. "That's how much I love my fans. It was a gift!"

Again though, her other albums are tremendously strong, yet they rarely receive the attention that they deserve.

"Everything in the music business is frustrating," Beck says. "But if you love what you do you just keep on doing it!"

New album *Living Proof*, and the single of the same name, showcase Beck at full strength. The songwriting is on point, and her voice sounds amazing.

"On this album, I worked with James Christian and Peppy Castro," she says. "Kept it simple. It was a fun album, and I took it all to heart. [It was recorded in] many different places, but mostly at Her Majesty's music room, which is our studio. The way things are done these days, you fly it in from everywhere, so I guess you could save the recorded all over the world. Mixing and mastering were done in L.A., in Nashville and in Germany... I like to get around!"

2026 will see Beck perform at the Frontiers Music Festival in Milan, Italy on May 1, and then the 80s'er festival in Vienna on July 24.

"I was slated for a much larger tour but unfortunately, the promoter called that one off and extended it to another time, then called that one off and then canceled that one," Beck says. "See what I mean—you keep on doing things even though the music business is frustrating. Once the album comes out, we'll be booking dates in the U.S. and overseas. God only knows where you'll find me. Stay in touch at my platforms either on Instagram or Facebook or X. I don't know. Maybe I'll have it written in the sky."

robinbeckrocks.com



the hell, where am I?' It was a great, great experience! My very first number one. It had a pretty big impact in Germany and the neighboring countries—Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and so on. It did not have the same success in the U.S."

The three Bonnie Tyler songs on that *Trouble or Nothin'* album came through a connection with the songwriters, Desmond Child and Diane Warren.

"Those songs came to me as demos," Beck says. "I never had any idea that they were recorded before. I have never met Bonnie."

Beck is married to fellow solo artist and House of Lords frontman James Christian.

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