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BIG BUSKIN'
WITH **INK**

AUDIENT
TAYLOR SWIFT

Vince Gill



KALI AUDIO
HP-1 BLUETOOTH
HEADPHONES
PAGE 12



+
*New Music
Critiques*

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Vince Gill

MC spoke with country icon Vince Gill about his forthcoming series of singles building up to a new album, *The Eagles*, and much more.

By Gary Graff

Photos: David McClister, John Shearer

Ink

GRAMMY-winning songwriter INK is featured, as she discusses her debut solo EP *BIG BUSKIN'*, plus her collaborative work with Beyoncé and Kendrick Lamar.

By Brett Callwood



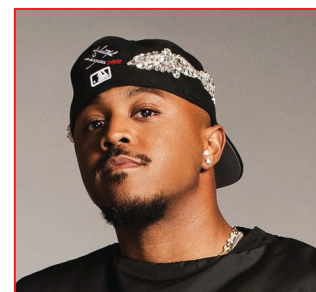
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By Rob Putnam

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New Pants/Old Pants Publishing

newpants.com; oldpants.com

Origins of an Indie Label and Publishing Company: Driven by a lifelong passion for music and songwriting, Robert Case borrowed some family money to launch a production company and label (Case Entertainment Group) in 1989. When a potential major label deal for a hair band he was championing fell through, he funded the artists' recording himself and quickly developed a completely independent multi-faceted business. By the early 2000s, his label had released over 30 albums which were available via every music retailer in the country. Shifting economic realities led him to secure a deal for many years with 5 Alarm Music, a subsidiary of Disc Marketing, and focus more on publishing and TV/film placements for his artists. Over the years, songs by his artists have appeared on such shows as *One Life to Live*, *South Park*, *Friday Night Lights*, the reality show *Miami Ink*, shows on the USA Network, and some independent films. The company's two publishing divisions became the ASCAP-affiliated New Pants Publishing and the BMI-affiliated Old Pants Publishing. Over the past 15 years, Case has assumed numerous roles for his artists, including management, contracting, marketing, financing, scheduling tour and event administration, production and distribution.

Wide Array of Artists: Both Old Pants and New Pants Publishing include deals with artists in a variety of genres, ranging from singer-songwriter, pop, rock and jazz to contemporary Christian music. Case's artists have appeared and performed at top music conferences and festivals, including PopKomm International, the Music Media Expo, Cutting Edge Music Conference, Crossroads Music Conference, Kerrville Folk Festival,



Telluride Bluegrass Festival, and others. Several of his current artists have been featured in *Music Connection*, including CCM artist James Becker, singer-songwriter Rocky Shaw, and Las Vegas Jazz Connection. Over the years, other artists in Case's fold have performed concerts and the National Anthem for the Colorado Rapids soccer team, the Denver Nuggets, and the GNC Vitamin Company Body Rock Fitness Competition.

Sharing His Expertise: Having found ways to remain a successful indie entity in the ever-shifting music industry over the past 35+ years, Case has been a popular panelist/speaker at events ranging from The Indy Sessions Radio Panel, The Music Business Conference-Career Development, and the Crossroads Music Conference, to the Independent Label Panel, and Booking and Touring Panel. These days, he is adamant that the music of the artists he champions isn't spread all over the internet. In lieu of traditional radio promotion and worrying about Spotify plays, he focuses on getting reviews in key publications, advertising in digital publications, and of course licensing. "Over the next few years," he says, "I'm going to continue to work with songwriters and put more great music out there. My success has always been an outgrowth by being at the right place at the right time. I've taken the time and invested energy and resources to market my large catalog, and I'm always on the lookout for new partnerships. What keeps me going is that I get up every day, still excited to hear great music and develop new artists."

Contact New Pants/Old Pants Publishing 719-339-8550

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ASCAP MEMBER

Alex Frank

Chief Brand Officer
237 Global

237 Global has announced the promotion of **Alex Frank** to the position of **Chief Brand Officer** for the company. In her new capacity, Frank will continue to report directly to Mark Weiss, Founder and CEO, and remain based in New York. "Since joining 237, Alex has demonstrated exceptional leadership, creativity, and sales acumen in shaping our brand. Her work has been instrumental in elevating our presence in the market and building meaningful connections with our clients," said Weiss. For more, contact deborah@drpr.us.



Alisa Coleman

Publisher Member, Board of Directors
ASCAP

The **American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP)** announced that **Alisa Coleman** has been elected as a **Publisher Member** to the **ASCAP Board of Directors**. "Alisa is a strong advocate for songwriters and publishers and will bring her expertise to ASCAP's Board at a time we are navigating complex issues in our industry, from Artificial Intelligence to licensee efforts to resist paying for music. We look forward to adding her voice as we work together to protect the value of our members' music," said President and Chairman Paul Williams. For more, contact lissa@ascap.com.



Agnieszka Roginska

AES Director
Audio Engineering Society

The **Audio Engineering Society's (AES)** Board of Governors has elected **Agnieszka Roginska** to assume the role of **AES Director** beginning January 1, 2026. Roginska will replace outgoing Director Bill Schulenburg as one of two BoG-elected Directors on the AES Board of Directors and will serve on the Board through 2027. Roginska has served the Society in a plethora of leadership roles, including previous terms on the BoD. She currently serves as the co-chair of the AES Event Coordination Committee. For more, contact pr@clynemedia.com.



Ian Harrison

Chief Executive Officer
A2IM

The **American Association of Independent Music (A2IM)**, announced that **Ian Harrison** has been appointed as **Chief Executive Officer** effective October 1. Harrison succeeds Dr. Richard James Burgess, who will step down at the end of this year following a decade of impactful advocacy for the independent music industry. "I am grateful to the A2IM Board for their trust as I step into the CEO role at such a pivotal moment. I take on this responsibility with a deep commitment to serving our community," said Harrison. For more, contact jeff@thesyn.com.



Andrew Mishko

Entertainment Manager
Stern Management

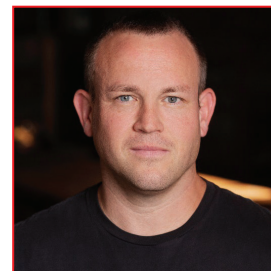
Stern Management is expanding to the U.K. with the hiring of London-based **Entertainment Manager Andrew Mishko**. Mishko was most recently a manager at Bad Habit while simultaneously serving as label manager of A.G. Cook-founded PC Music imprint—a role he will continue alongside his new duties at Stern. "As Stern Management grows, having a U.K. presence has become essential, and Andrew's ground-work in the market will prove invaluable to the company and our roster," said Stern. For more, contact jaclynu@grandstandhq.com.



Mark Chipello

President
Position Music

Position Music has announced the promotion of **Mark Chipello** to the role of **President**. In his new role, Chipello will partner with Founder and CEO Tyler Bacon in leading the company's overall direction as they continue to focus on growing both the music publishing and record label divisions. "We are completely aligned that the heart of this company is creative and serving clients. I am honored by and appreciate how committed he is to Position Music and trust him in moving into this larger role in our leadership," said Bacon. For more, contact deborah@drpr.us.



Fiona Ham

VP, Metadata Partnerships
Noctil

Noctil has announced the appointment of **Fiona Ham** to **Vice President of Metadata Partnerships**. In her new role, Ham will lead global metadata partnership strategy and drive solutions for unregistered and incomplete catalogs, ensuring assets are properly documented, credited, and monetized. Her leadership will support discoverability and revenue growth across traditional, digital, and live music markets. Alongside this, Ham will also spearhead new applications of Music Recognition Technology (MRT), starting with DJ and live event initiatives in Canada. For more, contact dom@3-nation.com.



Nick Ditri

VP, Business Development and Music
The Global Gaming League

The **Global Gaming League (GGL)**, the music-infused video game league run by music producer Clinton Sparks and T-Pain, has announced the appointment of **Nick Ditri** to **Vice President of Business Development and Music**. Ditri is a GRAMMY-winning producer from the Disco Fries duo, has collaborated with stars like Pitbull, Snoop Dogg, and Tiësto, and has led major music licensing deals with brands such as 7UP and Apple. Among his many duties at GGL, Ditri is building music for the video gaming division and is working on major partnerships. For more, contact owen@thoughtgangmedia.com.





▲ AUDIENT ID48 24IN / 32OUT USB-C AUDIO INTERFACE

Founded in the U.K. in 1997, Audient is a well-known manufacturer of both premium and entry level recording interfaces, as well as full-featured large-format recording consoles, and microphone preamps. Recently released, the Audient iD48 is their top-of-the-line 24in / 32out USB-C audio interface. Built around the company's Class-A analog console mic preamp design, the iD48 offers eight microphone preamps and two high-impedance guitar-type inputs on the front panel, and is intended to be the front end of your favorite DAW.

Audient microphone preamps are known for delivering clean, transparent, and detailed sound, providing an accurate translation of the source signal with minimal coloration and feature 68dB of gain, offering plenty of amplification for various microphones and recording situations. The front panel features monitor functions that indicate this interface is designed to be the master section—Main and ALT speaker selection is available, as are two headphone controls, stereo metering and more.

The rear panel features additional inputs and outputs. The eight microphone input connectors allow either XLR or 1/4" sources to be connected. Two pairs of ADAT optical connections add 16 digital inputs and outputs. Eight balanced analog channel inserts are available via two DB25 connectors. Alternatively, these connectors can be used as eight ADC inputs and eight line outputs.

Controlling the iD48 is Audient's iD Mixer software. The app defaults to a Mix page with faders for the microphone preamps, and digital inputs. The faders only control monitor level and don't change the recording mic preamp gain—the gain is accessed through the front panel hardware knobs. The mic inputs feature analog controls that affect recorded audio—available here are a 100 Hz high pass filter, a -10dB pad, a +10dB boost. An ADC (Analog Digital Converter) path control in this area switches three modes: mic, ADC direct, and mic insert. The first enables the mic direct to the preamp, ADC direct bypasses the mic preamp and is useful to record a line level signal, and mic insert is to record with an external hardware device like an EQ or compressor. The app supports four discrete stereo headphone mixes and controls all of the digital inputs and outputs and monitoring.

The Audient iD48 continues the tradition of high value, transparent and neutral sounding interfaces. It is a professional level interface capable of master recordings and highly recommended. \$1,299

audient.com

▼ CIARI GUITARS' STEVE STEVENS ASCENDER PREMIER ELECTRIC TRAVEL GUITAR

Plato famously said that "necessity is the mother of invention."

This is how the story of Ciari Guitars evolved. Founded in 2016 by musician and medical patent attorney Jonathan Spangler, he found that with his busy work travel schedule, the travel guitars available left something lacking. Most guitarists have endured the stress, lack of concern, and utter inconsistency that airlines display when flying with their precious instrument. Spangler saw a need to address the challenges of traveling with a full-sized, premium quality guitar.

Working with engineers, luthiers, and industry heavyweights like Joe Glaser and renowned Billy Idol guitarist Steve Stevens, Spangler and Ciari developed a folding electric guitar featuring a patented mid-neck hinge and a concealed actuator lever that allows it to fold in half for convenient transport in airline-compliant bags. The mid-neck hinge is made from aircraft-grade aluminum alloy. The actuator system precisely detunes the strings for folding and re-tensions them for playing. The Ascender comes with two bags—a quilted travel bag which fits into a well-made backpack. The two bags together fit underneath an airplane seat. The entire design focuses on maintaining premium instrument quality.

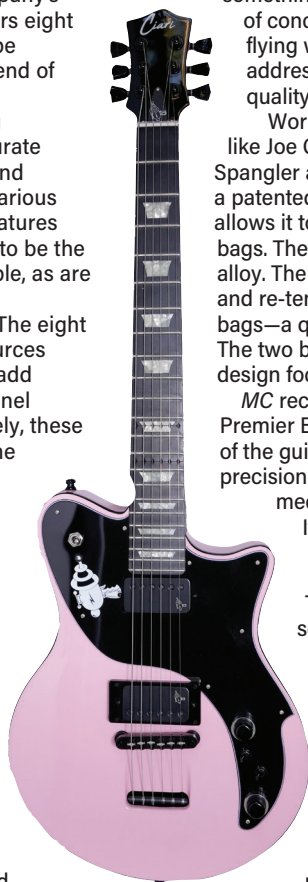
MC received their flagship instrument, a Steve Stevens Ascender Premier Electric Travel Guitar, for testing. The quality and ingenuity of the guitar was immediately apparent. There is a feeling of precision and modernness to the guitar. The patented folding

mechanism in the back is an impressive piece of technology. It's visible as you unfold the guitar from its case what needs to happen next—a label on the locking assembly that says "lift here" firmly snugs the guitar neck in place. The mechanism and floating tailpiece keep the strings securely in place during transit.

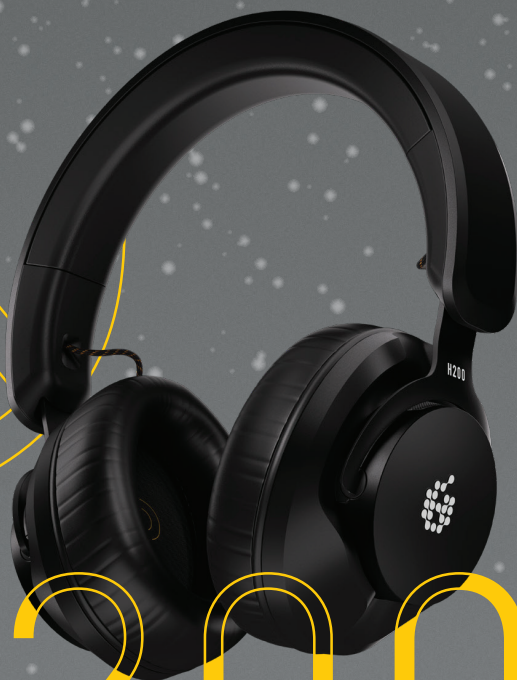
There is a clarity, power and cleanliness to the sound of this guitar that is fantastic. MC had the opportunity to test the guitar in multiple live music settings, and the Bare Knuckle Ray Gun pickups sound amazing. Both single coil and humbucking tones are switchable individually for each of the two pickups.

Ciari Guitars' headquarters is in Nashville. Each Ascender is luthier-assembled in Nashville with globally sourced parts, Plek technology, hand-crafted neck construction and set up for pro playability. Overall, the Ascender premier is an outstanding guitar that can be used in any professional setting, stage or studio. Available in Josie Pink, Jet Black Gloss, or Olympic White Gloss, paired with trapezoid inlays and distinctive Ray Gun-inspired details. \$3,499

ciarguitars.com



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► GIG PERFORMER 5 ESSENTIALS

Gig Performer 5 Essentials is a live performance plugin host designed for musicians who use virtual instruments and effects on stage. It functions as a bridge between studio software and real-time performance, allowing performers to build flexible setups without relying on a digital audio workstation. Performers can use GP5E to manage virtual instruments and effects, signal routing, play backing tracks, and map controllers for shows or rehearsals. GP5E is a host environment where performers combine their existing virtual instrument and plugin libraries. To get you started, it includes a special version of Synth Master with 1000 sounds and effects, LostIn70s plugins, and a special version of amp sim Overloud TH-U.

The first time you launch the program, it scans all the plugins installed on your computer. If you have a lot of plugins, this progress can be time consuming, but after it's done, the program boots up very quickly the next time you launch.

GP5E is centered on its modular Rackspace system, rather than a timeline like a DAW. This allows users to build complex live setups and GP5E is compatible with VST3, VST, and AU instruments and effects.

Each Rackspace can contain multiple signal paths, allowing musicians to manage real time performance of keyboard splits, guitar processing, or vocal chains without switching programs. Players can switch between Rackspaces instantly, changing the entire setup without reloading plugins. Within a Rackspace, variations allow parameter changes, such as adjusting mix levels or switching patches, while keeping the main structure active. This reduces CPU demand and prevents gaps in audio when changing sounds.

The main workspace is called Wiring View and is a visual drag-and-drop interface where you connect plugins with virtual cables, replicating a hardware signal chain. Here a guitarist can connect an amp modeler, cabinet simulation, and delay, while a keyboardist layers synths and routes them through compressors or filters. With the Wiring Activity feature enabled, play your instrument, and watch the wires light up to confirm that audio and MIDI are flowing as expected and at the correct levels. If a wire is not lighting up, you can see where your signal path is broken and fix the connection.

GP5E does much more than room permits. Intended as a comprehensive solution to the unique challenges of live performance, GP5E addresses the needs of musicians in a powerful, efficient, and easy to use affordable software program. For performers playing hybrid setups it offers a reliable solution. A more affordable build than the full version, GP5E offers the core power of Gig Performer with a focus on speed and simplicity. Users requiring more power can upgrade to the full version with the GP5E purchase price applied as credit. A 14-day free trial is available. \$59

gigperformer.com



▼ KALI AUDIO HP-1 MULTI-REFERENCE BLUETOOTH HEADPHONES

Kali Audio was founded in January 2018 by former JBL employees with the goal of creating high-performance, high-value professional audio products. All products are designed and engineered in their Burbank, California headquarters. Kali describes their mission, "To provide customers with best-in-class audio products, particularly loudspeakers, that offer superior value and performance". In September 2025, Kali Audio released their first headphones, the HP-1. The HP-1 is a closed-back, over-ear headphone that combines wired and Bluetooth wireless connectivity, three selectable voicings, and active noise cancelling. Priced in the mid-range, the HP-1 is for people who want one pair of headphones to carry multiple roles.

The three voicing modes are: Studio Mode, meant for neutral, flat professional monitoring. Bass-Heavy Mode, which amplifies low frequencies, useful for genres relying on pronounced bass. Last is Consumer Mode, intended to mimic more common headphone profiles found in phones or laptops. Switching among them is done via a button on the right earcup; an LED and a voice prompt indicate which voicing is active.

The Kali Audio HP-1 is a very pleasant-sounding headphone in all modes, with firm low end and smooth treble. Like many headphones, the midrange is less emphasized. What suits the individual user will come down to personal preference and application. The versatility of the modes is a nice feature for those who are interested in flexible voicing options.

The HP-1 uses 40mm dynamic drivers and offers a frequency response of 18 Hz to 22 kHz. Its weight is about 150 grams (0.4 lbs), which is toward lighter side among over-ears. The earpads are replaceable, and the frame is foldable, which aids portability. Materials include vegan leather on pads and headband, soft cushioning, to provide comfort during extended sessions or travel.

Connectivity comes in two flavors: a wired 3.5 mm option for lower latency tasks, and Bluetooth (AAC, SBC) for wireless use. The wired option bypasses the Bluetooth electronics. Unfortunately, the cable included was only 40" long, which for any realistic wired application would be unusable except for connecting to a laptop in an airplane. Users wanting a wired connection would be best served to get a longer cable. Battery life in wireless mode is stated as over 40 hours on a single charge. Charging is via USB-C. A carrying case is included. The Kali Audio HP-1 Headphones reward the listener with a versatile, smooth and satisfying listener experience at an accessible price point. \$199

kaliaudio.com

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

LATENCY SLAYER: HOW LUTFISH SUPERCHARGED TRIP TO THE MORGUE'S TOUR PREP

When last-minute lineup changes threatened to derail their national tour, these SoCal thrashers turned to Lutfish's real-time streaming device and never missed a beat

California-based **Trip to the Morgue** had all the momentum a rising thrash metal band could want: a new record deal, a packed touring calendar, and mounting industry buzz. But when three lineup changes hit just two months before a national tour, the Orange County band faced a logistical nightmare. How could they get new members up to speed on 12 intricate, high-tempo songs in time, without the luxury of endless rehearsal days and cross-state travel?

Their solution wasn't another van, bigger practice space, or marathon weekends. It was **Lutfish**, a real-time streaming device that allows musicians to play together online with no noticeable lag. For Trip to the Morgue, Lutfish wasn't just a piece of gear. As lead guitarist **J Patrick McCosar** puts it, "Lutfish was almost like a fully fledged band member. Imagine trying to get three new members up to speed on 12 songs in two months. Lutfish literally saved us."

From Vegas to the Stage — Without a Single In-person Rehearsal

One of the new members was guitarist Jamison "JJ" Jackson, based in Las Vegas. Instead of expensive, time-consuming trips to California, the band started meeting virtually on Lutfish. In just two weeks, JJ was performing with them on stage in Vegas, without a single in-person rehearsal beforehand.

"We planned on having a live practice, but something fell through at the last minute," McCosar recalls. "JJ told us, 'I feel good after playing on Lutfish. Let's just do it.' So we did. And it was seamless. The timing, the feel, our rehearsals via Lutfish, were exactly like being in the same room, minus the volume and the sweat."

The band's first gig with JJ went off without a hitch. Afterward, other musicians at the show were stunned to learn they'd never rehearsed together in person. "We started telling people about Lutfish, showing them the videos, and immediately other bands were like, 'How do we get that device?'" says McCosar. "Word spread fast."

A Shortcut to Tightness

As their touring schedule filled up, Trip to the Morgue leaned on Lutfish for near-daily rehearsals. The ability to connect instantly from their respective homes eliminated the usual headaches—commutes, gas money, and the scramble to book a rehearsal space.

"Let's be honest," McCosar says. "Making it in the music business nowadays requires bands to be tight, sound cohesive, and play like you've been together for years. Lutfish is like a shortcut. You skip travel time, random practice room challenges, and scheduling nightmares. With Lutfish, the only limitation is your time and dedication."

The numbers tell the story: between reduced practice space rentals and saved gas money, the band estimates they've saved over \$1,000 a month.



McCosar personally shaved about \$300 off his monthly rehearsal expenses. For JJ in Vegas, the savings were even more significant. "California gas prices are outrageous," he says. "Lutfish not only made it possible for me to be in the band, it made it affordable."

Band Bonding, Anywhere

Beyond logistics, McCosar says rehearsing with Lutfish strengthened their bond as a group. "It actually helped us get to know each other better, as musicians and friends, because we could meet more often with less hassle," he explains. "It's almost like using a normal FaceTime call, except we can crank loud guitars, bass, and drums with no latency. We can meet at any time, cover parts, work through rough patches in the set, and build confidence in the music. It was a lifesaver."

On a scale of 1 to 10, McCosar rates Lutfish "an 11." He laughs: "What other product lets you have that kind of freedom, saves you money, gives you flexibility, and strengthens your band relationships? None that I can think of."

No Lag, No Excuses

Trip to the Morgue's music is packed with precise picking rhythms and quick time changes. Latency or lag could ruin their signature thrash attack, but according to McCosar, Lutfish delivers. "JJ was amazed. He kept saying, 'I can't believe this thing has no lag. It feels like you guys are in the room.' We could stop mid-song, break down a section, have the bass player demonstrate a tricky transition, and watch him nail it, all in real time."

Lutfish also allowed them to customize how they

practiced: full-band sessions, one-on-one guitar rehearsals, or small rhythm-section lock-ins. "At the snap of a finger, we can meet," says McCosar. "The system's always been super reliable. There's just not enough good things I can say about it."

The New Normal

Even after the tour wrapped, Lutfish has remained a core part of the band's workflow. With two major shows on the horizon, Field of the Dead in Arkansas and the Undead Halloween Bash in Vegas—plus an MTV single and video due by December, the band expects to "Lute" even more in the coming months.

"It almost feels like a cheat code," McCosar says. "In our group text, I'll see someone say, 'You able to Lutfish at 7?' and boom—anyone who's free hops on. We work smarter, faster, and more focused. The normal limitations of rehearsal spaces disappeared from my thoughts long ago. Now it's just a given: I can practice with the band anytime."

While they haven't fully explored every Lutfish feature yet, they've already used the record and share functions extensively. "That alone is huge," McCosar notes. "People in our band can listen back and work on their parts later. It's amazing."

Beyond the Rehearsal Room

As their career ramps up with music in an upcoming video game, an MTV video premiere, and more tours on the horizon, Trip to the Morgue sees Lutfish not just as a tool but as a competitive advantage.

"We have so much going on that it'd be easy to get lost in the chaos," McCosar says. "Lutfish keeps us sharp and connected. It's honestly changed the way we think about being a band."

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Iron Maiden: Infinite Dreams

By Steve Harris, Bruce Dickinson, Iron Maiden

(hardcover) \$65



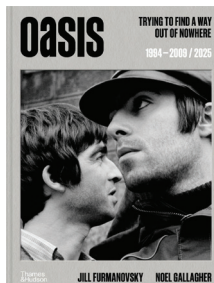
tickets and flyers from the very early days, some of founding member, bassist and songwriter Steve Harris' diary entries from back in the day, guitars, t-shirts, battle vests, and so much more. It's a pricey book, but for hardcore fans it's a must.

One of the greatest and most consistent heavy metal bands of all time, the men of Iron Maiden have come together to create this absolutely stunning, photo-heavy history of the group. As well as a mass of photographs, there are some fascinating

Oasis: Trying to Find a Way Out of Nowhere 1994-2009/2025

By Jill Furmanovsky, Noel Gallagher

(hardcover) \$65



"Organized chronologically, the book depicts more than 500 photographs, contact sheets, and sequenced film strips of the band on stage, backstage, on the road, in the studio, and behind the scenes," reads the press release. "She captured the drama of the band's lifestyle during the 1990s." Again, the price isn't for the faint-hearted but devoted fans will love this.

Like the Iron Maiden book, this Oasis tome is published by Tames & Hudson, and it's equally impressive. With the Brit-pop icons back together and out on tour, this is a great time to revisit their career through Furmanovsky's incredible photos.

Revolution: Prince, The Band, The Era

By James Campion

(paperback) \$27.95



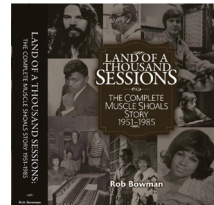
The Revolution were, and so does Campion. "This is the story of the genre-shifting, multi-media, trailblazing Prince & the Revolution from their humble inception to their precipitous rise in celebrated hot singles, albums, films, and tours to their controversial and shocking demise," reads a statement.

Campion has penned a long-overdue book that gives Prince's band The Revolution their dues. When you're fronted by one of the greatest musical minds of modern times, it's easy to get overlooked. But real musicians know how good the individuals in

Land of A Thousand Sessions: The Complete Muscle Shoals Story 1951-1985

By Rob Bowman

(hardcover) \$74.98



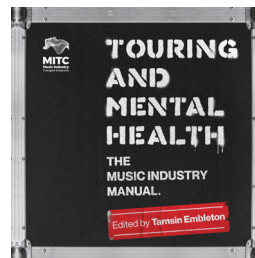
and unlikely stories in the history of modern music - as it has never been told before, and as it can never be told again." Bowman sat with some of the world's best musicians including Mavis Staples, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, to put together the definitive history of Muscle Shoals.

Music scholar Bowman has already dug into one legendary institution with his book *Soulsville U.S.A.: The Story of Stax Records*. His new slab of work, "captures one of the most beloved

Touring and Mental Health: The Music Industry Manual

Edited by Tamsin Embleton

(audiobook) \$32



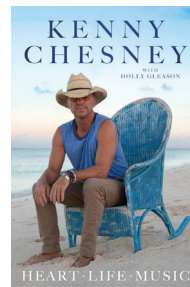
loved ones if they've suffered from the cycles of separation and reunion inherent in touring." Important stuff, and if there's any book that perhaps requires a travel-friendly, soothing audio release, it's this one. London-based Embleton is a psychotherapist, editor, and music industry health consultant, and her work here is vital.

MC reviewed the physical version of this invaluable book back in April, and noted that "the book instructs you how to navigate band conflicts and how to repair relationships with

Heart*Life*Music

By Kenny Chesney

(hardcover) \$32.50



superstar to Country Music Hall of Fame Class of 2025 electee." If you're familiar with Chesney's lyrics, then you'll know what to expect from the book. It's the poetically-told story of a journey, and what can be achieved through hard work. "I remembered moments, connected dots and laughed a lot about some of the places I've been," Chesney says. Quite!

Country icon Kenny Chesney's long-awaited and highly-anticipated book was, they say, "written to capture the road from small town dreamer to every aspiring songwriter and artist who moves to Music City, from so many young male acts signed to Nashville labels in the '90s to emerging

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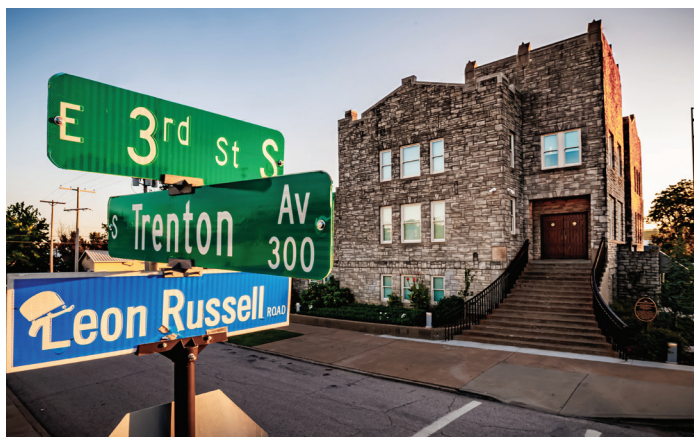
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The Church Studio

thechurchstudio.com

Amazing Grace and Leon Russell: Located in the Pearl District of Tulsa, OK, The Church Studio is a legendary facility originally launched by singer/songwriter Leon Russell in 1972 as a creative hotbed for his own recording activities and a home for Shelter Records, the label he started with partner Denny Cordell. Located in a converted church building, the studio is known as the heart of the Tulsa Sound, a mix of blues, blues rock, country, rock, and swamp pop vibes pioneered by Russell, J.J. Cale, Roger Tillison, and Elvin Bishop. During Russell's decade and a half there, the sanctuary became a dynamic destination for classic sessions by the iconic likes of Kansas, Dr. John, Willie Nelson, Stevie Wonder, Jimmy Buffett, Eric Clapton, Bonnie Raitt, Charlie Wilson/The Gap Band and Tom Petty and Mike Campbell, first with Mudcrutch and then the



Heartbreakers, among many others. After Russell sold the studio, he continued to record there; others who tracked at the facility were Freddy Fender, Roy Clark and Hanson. The building's history extends back to 1915, when Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, funded by oil barons, was one of the earliest churches built in Tulsa. Having survived the infamous race riots of 1921, it was known as the First United Brethren Church for several decades, then the First Church of God. The Church Studio was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2017.

Recent Restoration: When entrepreneur and fourth generation Oklahoman Teresa Knox first walked through the Church Studio, she was immediately struck by the different woods used for construction, including oak and cedar. She and her husband Ivan Acosta purchased the historic building sight unseen in 2016 after seeing its dilapidated condition, taking an interest in saving it from further decay. They and their team worked diligently over the next six years to develop it into a non-profit recording studio, engineering school, event space, museum and tourist destination. Opening the studio in 2022, their goal is to create a sustainable business model to keep it running for 100 years in the spirit of what Russell created in the '70s and '80s. Being caretakers of his legacy is of the utmost importance to Knox and Acosta as they continue to establish as collaborative space and entertainment network. In August 2025, Knox released her book *Sanctuary of Sound: The Church Studio Story*.

World Class Recording Studio: Unlike many other historic studio "museums," The Church Studio is a state-of-the-art facility boasting top of the line analog and digital gear. Knox says, "Our clients love the warmth of the analog sound and wood surroundings. There's a sense of belonging and feeling protected when they work here. They feel like they're part of something bigger." Even some of the items on their extensive gear list have powerful musical history behind them, starting with the Neve 8069, a grand piano that belonged to Dan Fogelberg and Jamie Oldaker's classic drum kit. The Church Studio won its first GRAMMY in 2025 for Taj Mahal's *Swingin' Live At The Church in Tulsa*.

Contact The Church Studio 918-894-2965

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▲ THE BARR BROTHERS RELEASE NATURALLY (FEAT. LA FORCE), NEW LP LET IT HISS OUT VIA SECRET CITY RECORDS

Montreal's The Barr Brothers have released "Naturally," a heartfelt ode to personal growth and self-acceptance. Rooted in the tradition of classic American songwriting, the track evokes the melodic charm and lyrical depth of artists like Harry Nilsson and Paul Simon. "Naturally" is the fourth glimpse into *Let It Hiss*, their long-awaited fourth studio album, which dropped October 17.



▲ ANIMAL COLLECTIVE CELEBRATE THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF FEELS WITH NEW LIMITED-EDITION FORMATS

Animal Collective celebrates the 20th anniversary of their landmark sixth studio album *Feels* with two new limited-edition formats via Domino: *Feels 20th Anniversary* is a reissue of the original album with a bonus disc featuring nine B-sides and previously unreleased demos and are available on 3xLP, 2xCD, and digitally.



▲ DRAKE'S SOME \$PECIAL SHOWS 4 U TOUR SOUNDS \$PECTACULAR WITH DIGICO QUANTUM852 CONSOLES

Drake is the first artist to take a new Clair Global-supplied DiGiCo Quantum852 console out on tour for last year's It's All A Blur Tour - Big As The What? outing. Now, he's taking the pair of DiGiCo Quantum852 consoles on an Optocore network that also supports three SD-Racks and one SD-MiNi Rack on his current Some \$pecial Shows 4 U Tour. "It's the Swiss Army knife of consoles," said tour Monitor Engineer Chris Lee. (Photo: Audio Engineers Chris Lee (left) and Demetrius Moore)



▲ ESQUIRE STUDIO SESSIONS: SONS OF THE EAST TALKS MUSIC AND LIFE ON THE ROAD

Sons of the East have launched the North American leg of their biggest world tour yet in support of their acclaimed new album *SONS*—out now via MGM (Metropolitan Groove Merchants). With over 700 million global streams, 75 million YouTube views, and over 200,000 headline tickets sold, the Australian indie-folk trio have earned a global reputation as one of the country's most exciting live acts. (photo credit: Jasper Karolewski)

PRODUCER PLAYBACK

"You'll benefit more from making mistakes than [from] being hesitant." - MAX PERRY





▲ JAKE OWEN ANNOUNCES NEW STUDIO ALBUM *DREAMS TO DREAM* PRODUCED BY SHOOTER JENNINGS AND JAKE OWEN

Jake Owen has announced his new studio album *Dreams to Dream*, produced by Shooter Jennings and Jake Owen and recorded at Snake Mountain (Sunset Sound Studio 3) in Los Angeles. The album was mixed by Trina Shoemake, mastered by Pete Lyman at Infrasonic Sound in Nashville, TN, with additional production by Kendell Marvel, and additional recording by Dan Ballard at Gold Pacific Studios in Nashville, TN.



▲ RUEN BROTHERS SHARE NEW SONG "THE CABIN ON THE HILL," AWOOO OUT ON YEP ROC RECORDS

British-born, Louisville-based duo Ruen Brothers—Henry and Rupert Stansall—dropped "The Cabin on the Hill," the third song from *Awooo*, their highly anticipated fourth full-length album and second for Yep Roc Records. Self-produced, arranged, mixed, and mastered by Rupert, *Awooo* follows a meticulous sonic philosophy.



▲ TEO PREMIERES HIS PERFORMANCE IN EPISODE #47 OF THE BIBLIOTECA SESSIONS

Colombian singer-songwriter Teo, one of the freshest emerging voices in today's Latin pop, recently participated in Chapter #47 of *La Biblioteca Sessions*, a release that reveals all the authenticity, sensitivity, and interpretative strength that distinguish him. In this intimate format, Teo performed tracks including "Tu Recuerdo," and "Qué Te Faltó"—the latter alongside renowned artist Shadow Blow.

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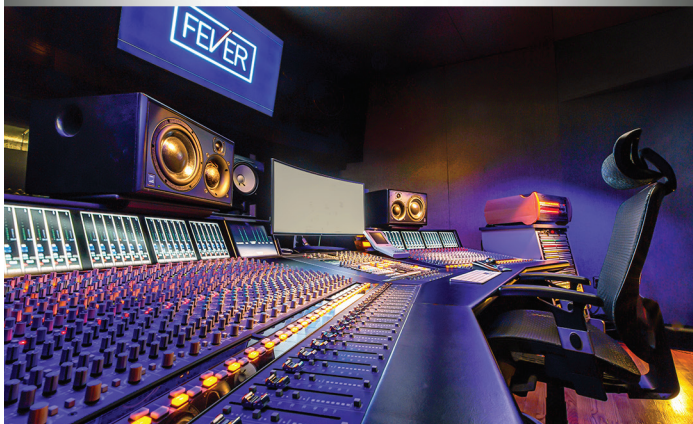
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PRODUCER CROSSTALK

- ROB PUTNAM



KHRIS RIDDICK-TYNES

For L.A.-born GRAMMY-winning musician, songwriter, and producer Khris Riddick-Tynes, crafting tunes is virtually a family business.

His father—who was in a band with Randy Jackson of the Jackson dynasty—and grandmother were songwriters and seven-time GRAMMY-winning engineer Neal Pogue is his godfather. When his dad bought a Pro Tools rack, he needed help to learn how to use it, which is what prompted the then-teenaged Riddick-Tynes to begin to write and produce with friends. He soon partnered with Leon Thomas III and has gone on to work with artists including Ariana Grande, Chris Brown, and SZA.

One of his latest projects is the Kehlani single “Folded,” which dropped on June 11. But the pair have worked together for years after they connected online when they were both still in their teens. Interestingly, the song had multiple writers and producers. “That wasn’t really a challenge because the pieces and credits came from different parts,” Riddick-Tynes explains. “It wasn’t like everybody was in the room stepping on each other’s shoes. I kind of came in and tied everything together when it came to flushing out the hook. With her, I look at myself as the finisher. I asked questions like ‘How can we say that better?’ and ‘What are we really trying to say?’ It’s about collaboration. That’s how these things happen now.”

Perhaps one of the most important insights that Riddick-Tynes has gained is the importance of hustle. “You’re not in the music business,” he asserts. “You’re in the business of music. You have to understand relationship building and where you fit in. You can’t wait for Beyoncé, Ariana Grande or Drake to pick your record. They get a million sent to them every day. If you’re talented enough and work hard, you’ll get a fair shot. The opportunities are there.”

Riddick-Tynes’ favorite mic is the Sony C-800G and his chain includes an Avalon M5 preamp, an Avalon AD 2055 equalizer and then a Tube-Tech CL 1B compressor. Recently, he completed his home studio, which he finds less congested than commercial spaces and there’s less pressure to make a hit.

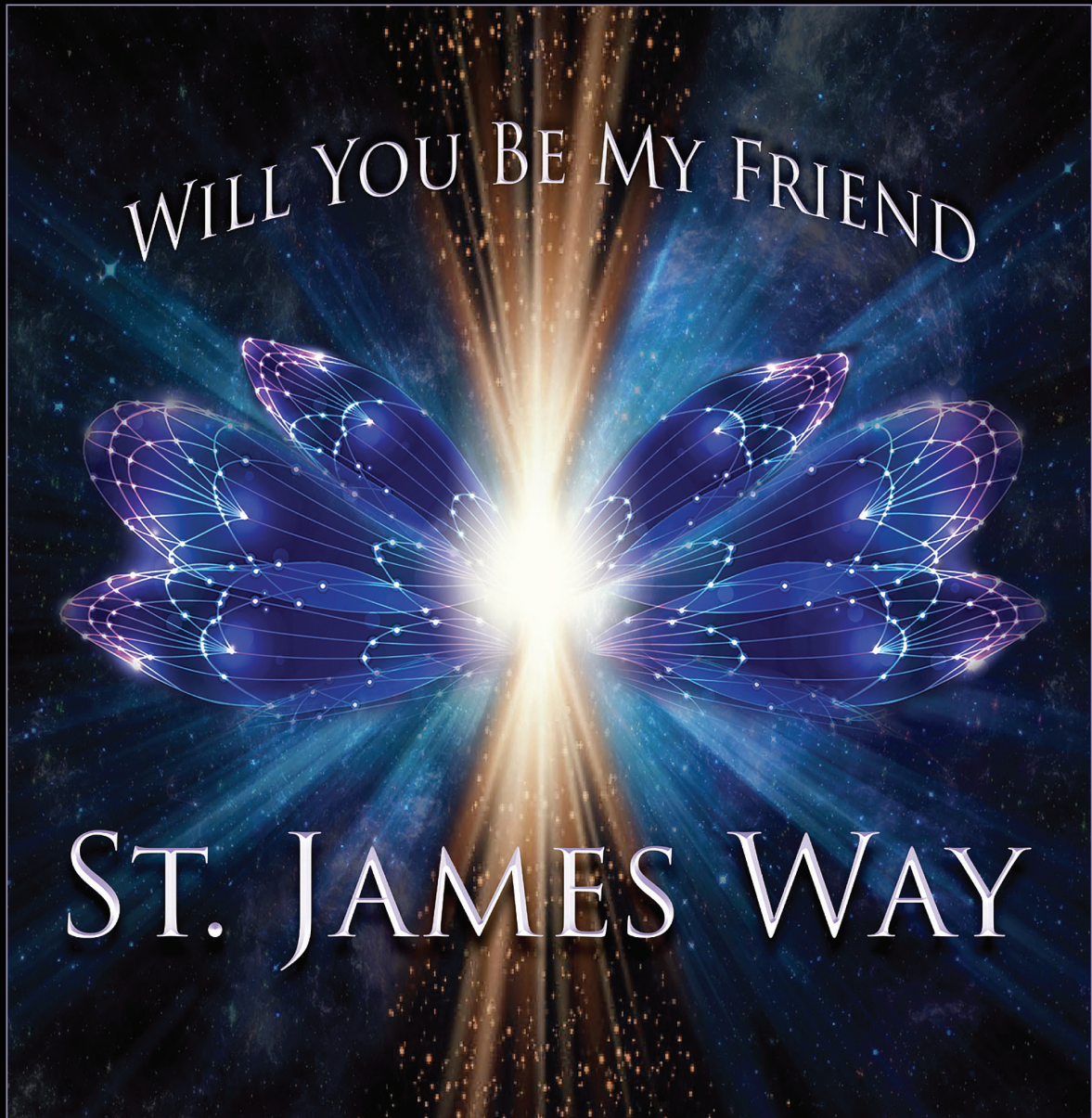
Currently, the producer has a number of projects in his queue, most of which are too early to discuss, Kehlani’s upcoming full-length record excepted. Earlier in his career he earned his law degree while he continued to produce. Later he logged some time in A&R with various labels. Both experiences taught him a lot about the industry.

THE 3 MOST IMPORTANT

lessons he’s learned as a musician and producer are:

- Patience.
- If you listen, the song will write itself. You must have conversations with the artist and dig deep into how they feel. Always put their DNA in the song and they’ll be more inclined to choose your record.
- You’re in the business of music and not everything is Rihanna and Beyoncé. Work with foreign artists or an artist that does stuff for movies or commercials. It all adds up. Don’t ever shun work that doesn’t seem sexy. It’s more important to be wealthy than to be famous.

Visit Instagram @khrisriddicktynes



Produced by James L Becker and Robert Case

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Eric Tobin

Co-Founder

idobi Radio Summer School Tour

Years with Company: 2

Address: Los Angeles, CA

Web: summerschooltour.com

Email: peter@peterquinn.co

Clients: Charlotte Sands, Beauty School Dropout, Taylor Acorn, Rain City Drive, Arrows In Action, If Not For Me, Huddy

BACKGROUND

Having worked at Hopeless Records for more than two decades, Eric Tobin knows a thing or two about raising the profiles of hard rock bands. Along with Michael Kaminsky and Warped Tour founder Kevin Lyman, he founded the idobi Radio Summer School Tour, which recently wrapped up its second season.

Getting Schooled

Michael Kaminsky and I have been friends for 20 years. About a year and a half ago, Warped Tour finished. That outlet for both my artists at Hopeless and the artists he was managing [was gone]. And we started talking about doing a festival.

We went to a BBQ at Kevin's house and started chatting about this idea. And Kevin's like, "There are so many promoters that feel the same way. There are sponsors that want to get involved with something national." We'd had conversations with managers and labels saying, "I wish this was still here." We had an early conversation with idobi, and they came in quickly as a partner and backer.

Taking a Chance

I give kudos to Mike. He was like, "We should try this." And I said, "Maybe we should look at a few other opportunities." Once we met with Kevin, I said to Mike, "You're right. Let's build this thing. Let's find that artist that isn't the headliner. Let's have a rotating bill where every fan gets to discover six or seven artists for a low-ticket price."

Bands on the Verge

The goal is to have multiple headliners. The idea is: let's pick artists that are starting to pop. They're getting some radio or social success. We want to work with labels as much as possible. And if we're looking around and going, "This band is doing 700 to 800 tickets or more," let's find two others that are like them.

Feeling the Vibe

For the first year with Magnolia Park, Stand Atlantic, The Home Team, and Scene Queen, it felt like all these artists are in the same spot on a ticketing level. And they've all sort of known each other on the periphery. They'll all have a good time being together and creating a Summer Camp vibe.

The same goes for this year with Charlotte Sands, Taylor Acorn, and Rain City Drive. And then for the artists just below them [on the bill], we say, "In two years, we'd like to see you headline."



"If you live in that space of metal or hardcore, metalcore, punk, or alternative, there's always a fan."

Heavy Music Is Always in Vogue

If you live in that space of metal or hardcore, metalcore, punk, or alternative, there's always a fan. And there's this great crop of artists that is going to grow that community even more. I want to double down on it, because I care. I love the artists I work with.

Choosing the Next Lineup

UTA [United Talent Agency] is our agent. We're talking about 2026. We're looking at what's coming up and having phone calls with managers and labels. "What's the timeline?" "What are you feeling?" "Here's the marketing we're going to offer." "Let's find those artists we feel are on the way up and support them." Mike, Kevin, and I sit down, look at a list of artists we feel good about, and then get people to understand their plans. That's the fun part.

Discovering Bands and Making Friends

We want [Summer School] to be important to the community. We want the artists, managers, and agents to understand that, so every night the band says, "Show up at 4:00 and discover all the bands." During the first year, all the bands were covering a Linkin Park track. They were all on stage together at the end [performing] it and became best friends.

What Changed Between 2024 and 2025?

We had a few more resources. We were able to bring on an amazing marketing person. As far as the approach, not a ton, because it's young and the mission is clear. Again, it was to find artists on the rise. We're still telling kids to show up early to see all the bands. It's been a bit more about staying consistent.

Keeping Tickets Affordable

If you're a 17-year-old kid going to a couple of these bigger festivals, what's left in your pocket to discover bands? We want to keep this at \$35 and under. For us, the ticket price is so important, to ensure that a kid goes, "Every summer, I can afford to discover this many bands and have a great time."

Close Quarters Mean Tight Bonds

You remember those days when you're a college kid living in an apartment with four other people as being the best. In tighter spaces, it creates that summer camp camaraderie. There's positivity in having that group experience. I toured for five years before I started this job. When I look back, [that's when] I made my best friends and learned my best lessons. Part of this is about fostering that friendship and chosen family experience.

Saving Lives Through Music

I hope that [concert attendees say], "That band changed my relationship with music," not, "I went to a festival and paid a lot of money." It's, "This artist saved my life." In year one, at least a third of these kids had never been to a show before. They're just discovering this lifestyle and these friends. It starts with, "I feel a way..." And then you check out your first band, listen to the lyrics, and now there are words where emotions used to be.

We're doing this for that kid who needs it. I was that kid. I didn't have tons of friends when I got to school. Music opened up a door to a world of people putting on shows. I made more friends. I played in bands and made more friends. I went from "I'm struggling" to "I know who I want to be." I hope the things we do create that opportunity.

The Right Match

I'll bring [an artist] to Hopeless, and we'll talk about it as a team. We've got to answer that question—can we do a great job? None of us here believe in signing something just because. We're signing things that we feel we can grow. And we sign pretty eclectically within the bounds of alternative music. I want to find an artist that's having some momentum and has a message that's resonating. Some kid's going, "This means something to me." If there's a connection there, the artist is motivated, and we can do a great job within the scope of what we do, I want to work on it. Let's see if our philosophies match.

Building Worlds

I want to build a world for an artist. And that comes in a variety of ways. What is the message? What is the look and feel connected to that? What is that story you need to share in a song? How do we make that song come to life? And then, how do I have that sit-down with Spotify or Apple or Amazon or press and say, "It's not about the single I'm dropping. It's about the story in the long term that we're creating"? I want to work with artists that fit into the way we do that world building.

November: When Art is the Best Side Dish

As the holidays approach, our column takes a more homey turn, savoring the ways that a pair of the icons who soundtracked our young lives have also long been busy with brush and canvas. Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell, our folksy mom and dad and iconic troubadours of the American songbook, are creatives who each paint exactly the way they play—layered, lyrical, and acutely attuned to life's telling textures and meaningful details. It's earnest work, looking for life's ordinary poetry—and though it's side dishes where music has been their main courses, each of them have used their work on album covers over the years, making it clear that visuality has been their constant companion.

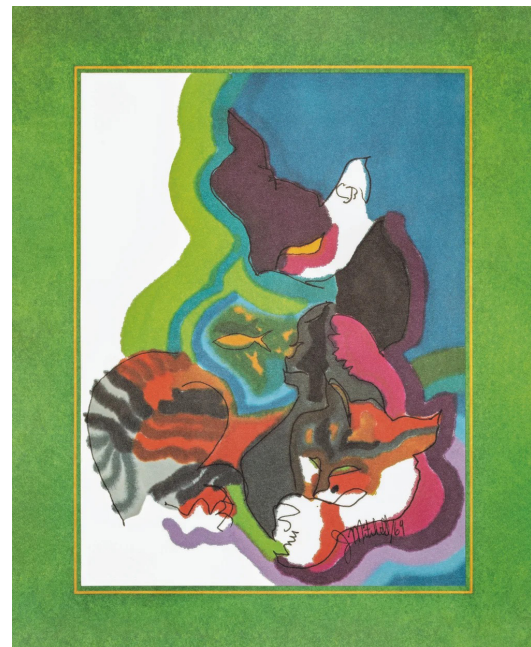
Dylan's second life as a painter involves extending the vernacular poetics of his music into the visual register. Since the '60s, he has sketched and painted scenes from memory and travel—motels, diners, rusted cars, industrial skylines—rendered in watercolor, acrylic, oil, and even welded iron. His *Drawn Blank Series*, reworked in 2007 from tour notebooks, sets an earthy tone: loose, atmospheric, rooted in the everyday. Later projects like *The Beaten Path* fix overlooked spaces in the cultural memory. His style favors bold color, strong outline, and a slightly naïve draftsmanship, recalling both folk art and German Expressionism. Like his music, the paintings mythologize the ordinary, evoking melancholy, grit, and the romance of the road.

Joni Mitchell has always considered herself, "a painter derailed by circumstance," and in fact trained in commercial art before music took hold of her destiny. Yet she has painted all along, often designing her own album covers—*Clouds*, *Ladies of the Canyon*, *Turbulent Indigo*—with self-portraits and lyrical abstractions that mirror her emotional candor. Her portraits, especially of herself, are psychologically charged: elongated features, probing eyes, boldly colored, as in *Turbulent Indigo*, where she recasts herself as Van Gogh. Her landscapes, looser and more impressionistic, capture skies and foliage with the same haunting, moody lyricism we expect from her songbook. Across subjects, her brushwork is energetic, her palette shifting from earthy greens to piercing blues and fiery oranges.

Both remind us that for true artists, self-expression spills into every act—in a seasonal reminder that art can be music's best side dish.



Courtesy of Halcyon Gallery



Courtesy of Joni Mitchell/Canongate Books



KIESZA

Dance music singer and instrumentalist Kiesza wrote her first songs as a child on the piano.

"My early writing was all instrumental, and it was not until I picked up the classical guitar at around 16 that I truly discovered my passion and my original voice as a songwriter," she says.

Obviously, she's grown massively as an artist since then; when describing her sound, she says that, "My style flows with whatever inspires me in the moment. I have many unreleased songs in different genres sitting on my hard drives. The sound I am best known for is dance music, and I have been exploring that genre again, blending it with other styles I love."

Kiesza's latest release is the *Dancing and Crying Vol. 2* EP, which she says is her "sexiest and most sensual work to date."

"I have never gone this deeply into that energy before," she says. "It was inspired by writing 'Stays in Bed' with Sammy Virji and Jess Cake. I loved that sound so much that I wanted to expand on it."

The "Stays in Bed" single does set up the EP perfectly; a pulsing, rhythmic beat frames purred vocals—the song is reminiscent of Madonna's "Justify My Love."

"We all carry sides of ourselves that we rarely let the world see," Kiesza said in a statement. "People have known me for my quirkiness, my nerdiness, my carefree spirit, my retroflair, and my love of dance. But it's my sensuality that quietly fuels my creative fire. It's the pulse beneath the surface that allows me to shape-shift into a kaleidoscope of expression. Sexuality is deeply woven into the fabric of our reality, whether we choose to embrace it or not."

Kiesza is doing this her own way—forging her own path. She's a DIY artist, in the truest sense.

"It feels a lot like the word 'indie,' staying outside of the big machine," Kiesza says. "It is about creating one-of-a-kind pieces, focusing less on perfection and more on authenticity. For me, it is a way of connecting more deeply with the process than with the result."

Looking ahead, Kiesza has plenty planned for the rest of 2025.

"I am still touring," she says. "I am heading out with Aqua soon, who were a big part of my childhood. After that, I plan to take a break in the fall and most likely focus on finishing *Dancing and Crying Vol. 3*."

Visit kiesza.com



THE LEGAL BEAT

BY GLENN LITWAK



NEIL YOUNG HAS RECENTLY been sued in federal court in Los Angeles for trademark infringement by Chrome Hearts, an L.A.-based fashion company known for its clothing and accessories. Chrome Hearts has been in business for decades and has trademarked its name.

Chrome Hearts alleges that Young's current band, "Neil Young and the Chrome Hearts," infringes on its trademark. It contends that the band's name exploits its brand and creates a likelihood of confusion for consumers which is a primary issue in a trademark infringement case. The current lawsuit alleges that Young never got permission to use the name.

NEIL YOUNG SUED FOR TRADEMARK INFRINGEMENT

In July 2025 (prior to filing the lawsuit), Chrome Hearts sent Young's team a cease-and-desist letter which was ignored as the band continued to use the name for its album and international tour. The lawsuit seeks damages and an injunction to stop the use of the name by Young's band. Young's production company, The Other Shoe Productions, was also named as a defendant.

Young was born in Canada and is in the Rock and Roll Hall of fame both as a solo artist and as a member of Buffalo Springfield. He is perhaps best known as a member of the supergroup Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. He has toured for many years with his former band Crazy Horse. Some of his most popular songs are "Down by the River," "Cowgirl in the Sand," "Cinnamon Girl," and "Helpless."

According to the complaint: "Defendants have copied Chrome Hearts' federally registered trademarks in an effort to exploit Chrome Hearts' reputation in the market."

The Plaintiff contends that Young's use of the name could

easily create confusion and the band's merchandise is already selling. The band does not actually copy the Plaintiff's logo which features a cross. But the Plaintiff contends that third party sellers are causing confusion by selling tee shirts online that have photos of Young with graphics similar to the Plaintiff's trademark.

Chrome Hearts was founded in 1988 and has a long-standing reputation as a company with an independent mindset. Its gothic-inspired fashions have been favored by celebrities and rock stars, including its leather goods and jewelry. The Plaintiff states it is concerned that its connection to Young's band could damage its brand which took decades to develop by creating the impression that it is collaborating with Young's band.

Chrome Hearts attorneys argue that marketing by Young's band shows a connection between the band and the brand. They give an example:

"Because its Neil Young, right? That voice of a generation, the guy who makes you feel stuff, man.

And Chrome Hearts? That's serious style. It's that edgy, that rebellious, luxury. But then, you think about the two together and it just hits you, and the clash of aesthetics really makes sense."

The Plaintiff's attorneys contend that this type of advertising is why consumers may think the band and the brand are connected.

GLENN LITWAK is a veteran music and entertainment attorney based in Santa Monica, CA. He has represented platinum selling recording artists, music producers and hit songwriters, as well as management and production companies, music publishers and independent record labels. Glenn is also a frequent speaker at music industry conferences around the country, such as SXSW and the Billboard Music in Film and TV Conference. Glenn has been selected as a "Super Lawyer" by *Super Lawyer Magazine* for 2022-2026. Email Glenn at 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: May 2025

Label: Metal Blade Records

Band Members: Dave Haley, drums; Joe Haley, guitars; Jason Peppiatt, vocals; Jason Keyser, vocals; Todd Stern, bass

Type of Music: Tasmanian Death Metal

Booking: Liam Frith, TKO Booking

Publicity: Liz at Earsplit PR, liz@earsplitcompound.com

Web: psycroptic.com

A&R: Ryan Williams, Metal Blade

According to Todd Stern's philosophy on life, it was either kismet or merely good fortune that his Australian tech-death metal band, founded in 1999, found a home in arguably America's best-regarded metal label, Metal Blade Records. Those with a contrary point of view might suggest that the band's tireless efforts over more than a quarter-century of crushing it had something to do with the contract signing. Not only are they beloved in the "land down under," Psycroptic have cultivated an American fanbase that resulted in them headlining multiple tours here.

"Mostly, we want to work alongside career bands that have stood the test of time and to have a close relationship with a label that believes [Psycroptic] still has plenty of room to grow," Stern said. "It also doesn't hurt to have a record label in our corner that has such a far reach and also the

"Mostly, we want to work alongside career bands that have stood the test of time."

street cred to back it up. Plus it just feels like such a great fit."

Getting into the nuts and bolts of Psycroptic's signing to Metal Blade, Stern explained that they became free agents after their previous deal with Prosthetic Records ended, at which point they started working with TKO Booking Agent Liam Frith.

"As we all started riffing ideas about what to do next as far as releasing a new record, new media ace [Ryan] Bart [Williams] at Metal Blade seemed to show interest and before we knew it there was an offer on the table," Stern recalled.

It also didn't hurt that Psycroptic are chums with a gaggle of acts on Metal Blade's roster, including Black Dahlia Murder (for which Williams plays bass), Cannibal Corpse, Revocation, Goatwhore and The Red Chord.

"We're very good friends with many bands that have called Metal Blade home forever, so naturally there were 'consultations,'" Stern elaborated. "We've all been playing shows for ages, and it's obviously common for recording artists to discuss the experiences that they've had over years."

Shortly after Psycroptic's signing to Metal Blade, they set loose a new song, "Architects of Extinction," to be featured on their next record. It's a long time coming, as the band's last was 2022's *Divine Council*.

"We just finished an amazing European Festival run that was really amazing for us," Stern said in closing. "We'll finish up the last touches on this new album, and then we'll be ready to hit the ground running in 2026."

- Kurt Orzeck



Date Signed: July 2025

Label: UNFD

Type of Music: Metalcore/Rock, Ethereal-Metal

Publicity: Atom Splitter PR

Web: instagram.com/whoisrune

Toronto-based multi-genre artist Rune (formerly known as WholsRune) has released an EP and 14 tracks since her debut tune, "Adrenalin," accumulating over eight million streams in the process. It's been a long road to her current deal with UNFD.

"I always tell people I feel like the path of music chose me, I didn't choose it," Rune says. "A sort of serendipitous way of looking at it I suppose, but I have always seen myself being a part of the world of music. At a young age, my friends and I made bands and would play music and sing when we hung out. I remember that my interest in music would also continue at home, where I would spend my time writing my own songs. It was my way of storytelling or working my way through my difficult feelings. I am an only child, and I call myself an extroverted introvert. Writing and singing was my escapism but also how I loved to spend my time alone, other than playing *World of Warcraft*."

As the musical ground firmed up beneath her, the gear around her got better. "My parents supported me by getting my very first rig," Rune says. "A good ol' preamp + mic + headphone combo from Focusrite, and a Midi controller that came with Studio One. I ended up using that same preamp from Focusrite for over 10 years, and only just replaced it a few years ago!"

Rune says that her sound has evolved, and it's a blend of everything that she loves. "Metal, ethereal ambient, pop, and electronic music," she says. "I love all of the music I've been a part of, including my humble beginnings with my debut EP packaged in a very synth-pop sound. Everything has come together to create where I am now, which is so fulfilling to me."

"Sometimes grief can feel like a very isolating experience, and ['Fast Asleep'] definitely portrays that to me."

"Fast Asleep" is Rune's first release for UNFD. "I went to go see Invent Animate play again in Toronto," she says. "Ended up running into and saying hello to Keaton [Goldwire] from Invent outside the venue, and mentioning how I've been covering their work for a while. While working on my new record, I sent it to Keaton just to hear his thoughts and he enjoyed the direction of my new music. He set me up with a meeting with the lovely people of UNFD, and now here we are. I'm so very grateful for the support and encouragement from everyone involved. It's very special to me, and something I don't take for granted at all."

Rune says that the song was written while she was trying to navigate her first experience of grief. "It was a very challenging time in my life, one I am still learning to grow from," she says. "This song stems from my experience of dreaming about the person I lost. It was always a beautiful but terribly sad experience. I still remember the dream I woke up from that prompted the writing of this song. The song feels like a narrative between yourself and the person in your dreams. Sometimes grief can feel like a very isolating experience, and this song definitely portrays that to me." - Brett Callwood



Date Signed: June 2025
Label: Green Hill Music
Type of Music: A Cappella
Management: David Britz, Works Entertainment
Booking: Andrea Johnson, Wasserman Music
Publicity: Ashley White Public Relations
Web: sncmusic.com

Not since The Flying Pickets in the '80s has an a cappella group achieved so much, and bothered the charts to this degree. The nine voices of Straight No Chaser have sold three million albums worldwide, pulled in a billion streams on Pandora, and sold over 1.5 million concert tickets.

"This group formed in 1996 on the campus of Indiana University in Bloomington, IN," says band member Steve Morgan. "We met through a show choir of just over 100 guys and girls, and we decided to get together to sing the music that we were listening to and start an a cappella tradition at IU. This group was the starting point for a lot of the guys as writers and arrangers."

Morgan says that the group's sound has changed a lot since '96. "Honestly, I would contend that we have never sounded better. The addition of Freedom Young three years ago has really amped up the percussion (no offense to Tyler and Don intended) and top to bottom, I believe we can cover any style with a lot of flexibility in the voice parts to match the sound we want. If I was describing this as emotional well-being, I would say we're in a good place."

As they approach their 30th anniversary, Straight No Chaser have celebrated by signing with Green Hill.

"We were impressed with the Green Hill team from the first meeting, and we've long admired the roster of artists they've worked with over the years," Morgan says. "Their commitment to timeless music resonated with us, so

"Honestly, I would contend that we have never sounded better."

when the opportunity came along to join their roster, it felt like the right fit."

The group is releasing a holiday album, *Holiday Road*, their first in five years. "We have once again put together a wide variety of styles, from classic songs to which we trimmed the tree with our families to religious carols to fun originals to unique collaborations with incredible guest artists, all with that signature Straight No Chaser twist," Morgan says.

Looking ahead, Straight No Chaser has plenty planned for the coming months. "This summer, we did a second tour of songs from the 1990s, which was an absolute blast," Morgan says. "So we have a couple final shows for that tour on the West Coast in September, and then we will turn our full attention to the Holiday Road tour. The second half of our shows in the fall always involve holiday music, but the first half is, as always, some of the best music of the last 80 years, so we are putting that show together." - **Brett Callwood**



Date Signed: Summer 2025
Publisher: Limited Edition Music Publishing/Warner Chappell
Type of Music: Bluegrass
Management: Neil Mason - Red Light Management, neil.mason@redlightmanagement.com
Booking: Carter Green - WME, cgreen@wmeagency.com
Publicity: Erin Morris Huttlinger - Morris Public Relations, erin@morrispr.biz; Alison Auerbach - AAPR, alisonapr@aol.com
Web: wyattellis.com
A&R: Wyatt Ellis, Teresa Ellis, Neil Mason

One way of gaining a foothold in the music industry is by racking up so many accomplishments and accolades that powerful people come to you. It's even better if you can make those achievements happen at an early age. Wyatt Ellis is such an individual. Raised in Tennessee's Smoky Mountains region, the 16-year-old mandolin player has jammed with everyone from the late Bobby Osborne to Billy Strings. He received two IBMA New Artist of the Year nominations, and his collaboration with Marty Stuart topped the bluegrass charts for over 10 months.

One evening, his prodigious talent was on display at The Station Inn. In wandered Greg Sowders, Vice President of Warner Chappell Music,

"We're just now getting into the swing of things."

who had been staying at a nearby hotel and had nothing better to do. His interest piqued, he searched online for the picking prodigy and began following him on Instagram. He also messaged Ellis's mother.

Sowders rang Neil Mason, the young artist's manager, the next day. They connected on both a personal and professional level. "It was a perfect scenario, because we were just wrapping up promoting *Happy Valley*," explains Mason, referencing Ellis's independent debut, an album of instrumentals that went to No. 1. "Wyatt is going to spend his life in music, and I think that was clear to Greg and the Warner team."

Conditions were ripe for formulating a deal, yet Sowders and everyone else helping steer the rising star's career was willing to wait. Penning songs with lyrics would be a natural progression, and all understood Ellis needed time to develop his artistic voice. The last thing they wanted was to lock him down with a restrictive contract. So wait they did before forging a low-pressure agreement with Sowder's Limited Edition Music Publishing.

Since inking the contract, the team has helped the teen performer grow by arranging co-writes and helping him penetrate the Nashville scene. "I've written a bunch of great songs since then, but we're just now getting into the swing of things," chirps Ellis, who's also a formidable vocalist. "I'm real excited." - **Andy Kaufmann**



▲ 2025 SESAC AWARDS

Ariana Grande was named SESAC's 2025 Songwriter of the Year, with "We Can't Be Friends (Wait For Your Love)" named Song of the Year. UMPG was named Publisher of the Year, with The Legendary Traxster and Dez Wright voted Producer of the Year. More at sesac.com/2025-sesac-la-music-awards.

► PRIMARY GRANDMASTER

Primary Wave Music adds trailblazing deejay, hip-hop founding father, and Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee Grandmaster Flash (Joseph Saddler) to their roster of managed artists, which already includes Cypress Hill, Bell Biv DeVoe, CeeLo Green, Jefferson Starship, Skid Row, etc.



▲ CARLA PATULLO'S NOMADICA

Celebrating the follow up to 2024's GRAMMY-winning *So She Howls*, Carla Patullo releases *NOMADICA* with mini-documentary, live performance, Q&A session in West Hollywood [L to R: Martha Mooke, Kim Dawson, Kion Heidari, Alexander Lloyd Blake, Carla Patullo, Cara Fesjian].

Listening Room Retreats

Serving the songwriter community since 2002, and hosting over 2000 songwriters from over 30 countries, Brett Perkins' Listening Room Songwriter Retreats and workshops support writers from all backgrounds and levels to explore their creative talents. With early registration discounts, paid referrals, interest-free monthly payment plans, and a supportive group of artists from around the world, alumni have gone on to record, co-write, and tour internationally, many with commercially-released music. Retreats have been held in Ireland, Denmark, Greenland, California, Scotland, and elsewhere. Registration and details at listeningroomretreats.com.

Touring and Mental Health

With endorsements from Nile Rogers and Philip Selway (Radiohead), feedback from Dua Lipa, and interviews with Charles Thompson IV (Pixies), Justin Hawkins, Taylor Hanson and others, The Music Industry Therapist Collective (MTC) releases audiobook *Touring and Mental Health: The Music Industry Manual*, edited by psychotherapist Tamsin Embleton (also available in paperback). Including meditation exercises and narrated by voiceover artists Laura Howard (*Midsomer Murders*), with music from Edward Butler, this essential resource delivers a comprehensive manual with help for musicians, touring artists, and those working in live music to help identify and copy with the physical and psychological challenges of touring.



▲ RUBY DEE PHILLIPPA

Part three of musician-author-storyteller Ruby Dee's (Ruby Dee and the Snakehandlers) book trilogy *Back of Tricks* is out this month, navigating music, identity, and rebellion through the lens of her journey through music and activism through early 1980s punk. More at rubydeephilippa.com.

Written by health and performance experts, it provides clinical advice, backed by the latest research, and offers practical strategies and resources.

Posthumous Hall of Fame

Songwriter-producer Bert Berns has been posthumously inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame. Passing in 1967 (age 38), his mark on music included hit songs "Twist and Shout," "Piece of My Heart," "Tell Him," "Hang On, Sloopy," "Everybody Needs Somebody to Love," "I Want Candy," "Cry to Me," "I'll Be a Liar," "Cry Baby," and "Heart Be Still."

His work has been recorded by the likes of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Van Morrison, Janis Joplin, Led Zeppelin, Solomon Burke, Otis Redding, Melissa Etheridge, David Bowie, the Isley Brothers, the Moody Blues, Wilson Pickett, and many more. Replacing Leiber & Stoller at Atlantic Records in 1963, he was the first American producer in London during the British invasion, launching BANG records in 1965 with a roster that included Neil Diamond, Van Morrison and The McCoys. He launched Shout Records the following year. More at songhall.org.

Rates, Royalties, and Fees

AIMP presents their webinar on music rates, royalties and fees in 2025 and beyond, with panelists Jeff Brabec (Sr. VP of Legal at BMG, MLC Board Member), Todd Brabec (Entertainment Law Attorney, former ASCAP VP), and Serona Elton (interim Vice Dean at Frost School of Music, University of Miami, Head of Educational Partnerships for the MLC, Attorney in New York and Florida).

Covering topics including copyright royalty boards, rate courts, legislation and litigation, rates set by statutes (mechanical/sound), negotiated rates (film/tv/advertising/gaming), consent decrees, dispute resolution, and much more, this session promises to be incredibly informative for anyone looking to get more clarity around their royalty rights and options. Details and registration at aimp.org/event/music-rates-royalties-and-fees.

Limited/Warner's Ellis

Limited Edition Music Publishing and Warner Chappell Music have signed IBMA-nominated 16-year-old bluegrass phenom Wyatt Ellis in a deal covering his full catalog and including new releases, with a new solo album out soon.

ASCAP's Monthly VERSED

Check out ASCAP's monthly podcast *VERSED* and take a deep dive behind-the-scenes with songwriters and composers on their journey through the music industry. With interviews, tips, and insights to help you navigate your music career, recent episodes include GRAMMY-nominated indie pop quartet Lucius (led by Holly Laessig and Jess Wolfe), featuring special guest singer-songwriter Alex Warren, and Jazz pianist-composer-bandleader Jahari Stampley. Visit ascap.com for more.

Landmark A.I. Partnerships

Rumors are swirling that Universal Music and Warner Music are working towards joint A.I. licensing agreements with multiple tech outlets (following discussions with ElevenLabs, Google, Spotify, Suno, and others), despite ongoing infringement complaints involving multiple tech platforms. Universal Music already has a 'coordinated model' in place with Klay Vision for A.I. generated music, Spotify recently renewed negotiations with majors (with no mention of gen A.I. training). Discussions have also circulated around artists being compensated for A.I. training models.

VMG To Vietnam

Virgin Music Group has partnered with digital creator organization The Metub Company and expands into Vietnam, forming Virgin Music Group Vietnam (VMG Vietnam), led by Nam Nhu Nguyen in Hoc Chi Minh City. Metub houses over 5,000 music-entertainment-gaming-commerce-merchandise creators and artists, with the new group focused on signing and servicing local artists and independent labels for domestic and global career growth. Newly appointed General Manager of Southeast Asian Operations, Cindy Giu is responsible for divisions in Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

The Vietnam venture builds on an existing relationship through Virgin's parent company,

UMG, which has been in place since 2022, and follows new partnerships with Mom+Pop Music, and the unveiling of The Official Southeast Asia Charts which will feature weekly music charts from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam (a first for the Philippines and Vietnam).

PROs Join Forces

Joining forces to encourage transparency, ASCAP, BMI, GMR, and SESAC are collaborating to provide a single source of public performance copyright information. Now including over 38 million pieces of musical work, the Songview data platform now includes information licensed by all four major performing rights organizations and offers the most authoritative collection of copyright ownership and administration. Incorporating data from GMR and SESAC in coming months, Songview is also looking to include publisher names on titles with split ownership percentages to provide even more clarity. Accessible information now includes songwriter, affiliate, publisher, performer, and alternative title, ISWC and IPI code details, with reconciled songs appearing with a green checkmark to indicate that all relevant PROs agree on the information provided. Free to the public and currently available on ASCAP and BMI websites, details can be found at songview.com.

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



▲ BMI FOUNDATION AWARD

The BMI Foundation congratulates singer-songwriter Janette Mata on 2025's peermusic Latin Music Award, with her original song "Triste Despedida." Since 2003, the peermusic Award has recognized 21 young Latin songwriters, with recipients including Mane de la Parra, Daneiela Blau.



▲ GREATNESS COMES TOGETHER

Two-time Oscar-nominated, GRAMMY-nominated singer-songwriter Carol Connors ("Hey Little Cobra," "The Rip Chords") and 16-time Oscar-nominated, GRAMMY-winning songwriter Diane Warren join forces alongside Carroll Shelby's famous Cobra at an industry event in Los Angeles.



▲ MILES DAVIS' RESERVOIR

Reservoir Media acquires 90 percent of Miles Davis' publishing/recording rights (120+ albums), as well as use of name and likeness. The Hall of Fame inductee earned eight GRAMMYS, GRAMMY Lifetime Achievement, and *Kind of Blue* hit No. 12 on *Rolling Stone's* list of Greatest Albums of All Time.



▲ MUSIC MAMA EPPS

Mamas in Music spotlights multi-hyphenate artist Stacy Epps, whose journey from attorney-educator-healer-artist, saw recent release *Flowheart*, following a collaboration with MF DOOM / Madlib on "Eye" that brought international fandom and performances. See stacyepps.com.

Band Conflict? Partnership Issues? Royalty Disputes?



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Damien Quintard: Sonic Humanity

Producer, engineer, composer, and entrepreneur Damien Quintard was playing the piano and learning music theory at three years old. Born in Paris, he spent his childhood between Paris, Mumbai, Hong Kong, and Singapore, studying classically at various conservatories and local schools. Producing his own band (Dot Legacy) as a teenager, he was also fascinated by math and physics, studying aerospace engineering before switching to audio. Inspired by Rupert Neve, he remains curious about new sound possibilities. "It was this mixture of art blended with progress and discovery that always fascinated me," shares Quintard. His growth mindset never wavers. "With music, you can really explore your ignorance," says Quintard. "It's a humbling process."

Starting at a classical recording studio in 2012, Teodor Currentzis became his mentor. "I had to replace one of the engineers for a couple of hours," says Quintard. "He [Currentzis] wanted a rock and roll approach to classical music and I was totally up for it." The two finished Currentzis' record and still collaborate today, with Quintard's MusicAeterna Orchestra (Mozart and Tchaikovsky) work winning multiple recording awards. Producing orchestral pieces requires intense learning, and Quintard strives to understand people around him. "A big thing about passion when you work, especially with classical musicians (but also rappers, rockers, etc.)," says Quintard, "is that you find beautiful things in happiness and love, but also in depression, angst and anger. Music can find humanity in all emotions."

Director Ilya Khrzhanovsky and producer Vangelino Currentzis worked with Quintard on 2019's *DAU* project, involving live performance and sound over 30 days and nights, collaborating with Brian Eno and Arca. Theatrical work opened Quintard's mind to other genres, styles, and possibilities, and he founded SoundX in 2019. As the world's first patented A.I. system using advanced frequency analysis A.I. and a wearable haptic backpack to translate sound into real-time vibrations for the deaf community, SoundX has won multiple awards and been adopted by La Philharmonie de Paris, Théâtre du Châtelet, and the Olympic Games (Coldplay and Lara Fabian have also started using SoundX in their tours). Says Quintard, "There is a beautiful future for inclusivity. We'll be able to make more museums, concert [and] town halls, cinemas, more open to the deaf community. That's my push right now and I'm hopeful for the future."

Creativity unfolds "the moment where you go deep into your soul and blurt out something digestible," reveals Quintard.

Quintard advises to stop scrolling on social media. "More and more young artists are forced to be on machines [and] platforms. Go deep into your own music and spend some human time with yourself." Currentzis encouraged him to never compromise. "When you have a vision as a creative person, you will be confronted with people that have a totally different vision. If you follow too much of what everybody is doing or saying, it's going to blur the original vision. Most ideas are bound to fail, but it's in those failures that you learn so much. If you spend your time listening to what other people did years ago, you're not thinking of what could be done tomorrow."

With an Emmy Award for engineering/producing 2015's European Games Opening Ceremony in Baku, a Diapason d'Or, Edison Award, multiple prizes in Japan for 2017's Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 "Pathétique," and accolades as producer for pianist Bertrand Chamayou, Quintard joined *Forbes'* 30 under 30 in 2020. Miraval Studios' 2022 reopening alongside Brad Pitt (the former iteration hosted legends Pink Floyd, AC/DC, The Cure, Sting, etc.) brought Quintard work with Justin Bieber, Justice & Tame Impala (mastering "Neverender" on GRAMMY-winning *Hyperdrama*), Laurie Anderson, Jon Batiste, Bono, etc.

Contact Kip Kouri - Tell All Your Friends PR, kip@tellyourfriendspr.com
Find out more at soundx.fr/en, miraval-studios.com.

Photo Credit: Hunter Moreno





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DROPS

Little Twig Records has released HBO's *Prime Minister (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)*, featuring music by **Sofia degli Alessandri**, known for her work on *Red, White & Royal Blue*, *All of You*, and *Dickinson*. The



album is available on Spotify, Apple Music, and other streaming platforms. Alessandri's score accompanied the documentary, which streams on HBO Max and captures the story of former New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern as she navigated her political career and motherhood at age 37. Blending classical instrumentation performed by the **London Contemporary Orchestra** with ambient textures, analog synths, layered vocals and the sounds of the GuitarViol, the score creates an emotional soundscape for Ardern's political and personal journey. Learn more by contacting Christian Endicio at christian@whitebearpr.com.

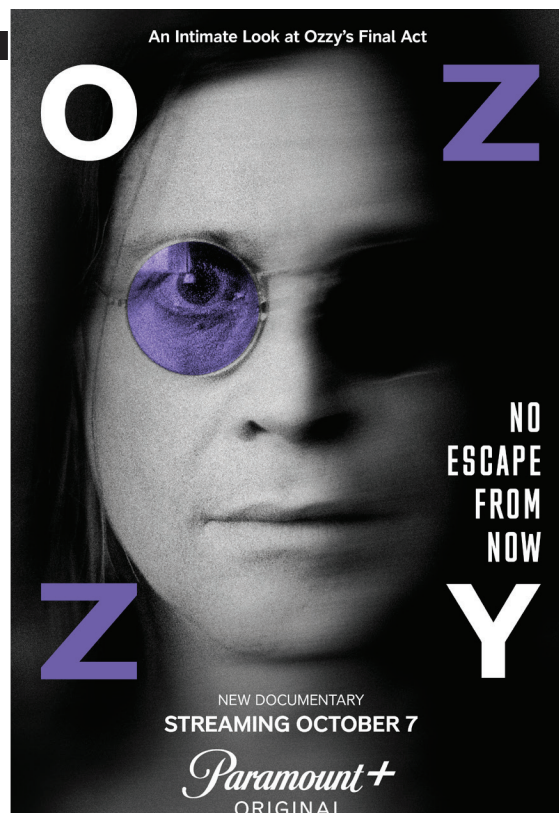
Vevo and **Oasis** released a new episode of *Vevo Footnotes*, exploring the story behind the iconic track "Don't Look Back In Anger," delving into the inspiration, creative journey, and enduring impact of one of the defining songs of the 1990s Britpop era. The episode detailed the song's John Lennon-inspired piano riff, the **Nigel Dick**-directed music video featuring British actor **Patrick Macnee**, and its rise as Oasis' second U.K. No. 1 single from *(What's the Story) Morning Glory?*. Featuring the memorable lyric "So Sally can wait," the track became an anthem of resilience and unity. The episode also shares insights from brothers **Noel and Liam Gallagher**, including about the song's lyrics and lasting connection with fans. Contact Greg Miller at greg@bighassle.com for more information.

Scarlet Moon released *Scarlet Moon Halloween IV*, a festive compilation celebrating the Halloween month, featuring original works from **Nami Nakagawa** (*Demon Slayer*, *NieR*) and **Soyo Oka** (*Super Mario Kart*, *Pilotwings*). Returning guest **George "The Fat Man" Sanger** and his band

Los Coronados contributed a surf rock cover from *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*, while **Sean Schafianski** delivered a *Silent Hill 2* remix and the San Diego-based **Rogov** added an original Halloween rock anthem. Available on all digital platforms, the album continued Scarlet Moon's holiday music tradition, following the success of previous Halloween and Christmas compilations that highlight game music and celebrated the creativity of its roster of artists. For further details, contact Jayson Napolitano at jayson@scarletmoonproductions.com.

20th Century and Hollywood Records released *Swiped (Original Soundtrack)*, featuring an energetic score by Emmy-nominated composer **Chanda Dancy**. The soundtrack included two original songs by Dancy and performed by **Ronan My Love**, including "Bumble Rising / All the Stars Are Raging" and "All the Stars Are Raging" in addition to a cover of **Daft Punk's "Get Lucky"** performed by **Deap Vally**. The release coincided with the film's streaming debut on Hulu and Disney+. Inspired by the story of **Whitney Wolfe** (played by **Lily James**), founder of the online dating platform Bumble, *Swiped* tells the story of her innovation and endurance through her career journey. Contact Sarah Roche at sarah@whitebearpr.com for more information.

Milan Records has released *Eleanor the Great (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)*, featuring music by award-winning and Oscar-nominated composer and pianist **Dustin O'Halloran** (*Marie Antoinette*, *Transparent*, *Lion*) for actress **Scarlett Johansson's** comedic directorial debut. The score accompanied the story of Eleanor, a 94-year-old woman whose tale takes on a dangerous life of its own following a devastating loss. Developed



in close collaboration with Johansson during filming, O'Halloran's compositions blend delicate solo piano movements with orchestral suites, to create a musical backdrop for the film's themes of grief, identity and human connection. The film hit theaters after a premiere at Cannes Film Festival. For more information, contact Chandler Poling at chandler@whitebearpr.com.

Platoon has released the *All of You (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)*, featuring music by **Ian Hultquist** and **Sofia degli Alessandri**, to coincide with the film's global premiere on Apple TV+. The digital soundtrack is now available on Apple Music, Spotify, and other platforms. The two composers crafted a score that reflected the film's bittersweet yet humorous tone and the depth of its characters, Simon and Laura. Combining traditional instruments with unconventional sounds, including GuitarViol, Terra touch-synth, vocal drones, Stylus synth, felt piano and strings, the music created an intimate yet expansive soundscape that supported the narrative across the film's multi-year, subtly futuristic story. For further details, contact Christian Endicio at christian@whitebearpr.com.

OPPS

Submissions for the **2026 Contemporary Dance Choreography Festival** will open November 25. If you have choreography to showcase in this annual festival celebrating both established and newcomers to the world of dance and choreography, visit cdcfest.com/submit-your-work for submission guidelines and more information about the event. Benefits for participants include video and photos of your choreography work, an opportunity to audition for the festival's opening



number, and master class options.

November 15 is the late deadline to submit work for consideration in the Beverly Hills International Film Festival.

For over 25 years, this festival has celebrated the art of cinema with award categories honoring best score, best short film, and more. Learn more and apply for your work to be featured at filmfreeway.com/beverlyhillsfilmfestival.

The submission window for the New Century Dance Project Festival in summer 2026 will open on November 1. Francisco Gella, founding artistic director of the project, is calling on artists to submit a choreographic work to be considered for one of three choreographic fellowships as well as an audition for one of 36 ensemble dancers. Learn more about this opportunity at newcenturydanceproject.org/about-the-calls.

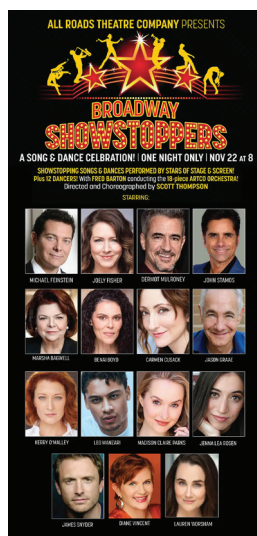
PROPS

The feature-length documentary **OZZY: NO ESCAPE FROM NOW** premiered exclusively on Paramount+ on October 7, offering a definitive look at the late rock icon **Ozzy Osbourne's** life over the past six years. Directed by BAFTA Award winner **Tania Alexander** and made in collaboration with the Osbourne family, the film chronicled his 2019 fall and the life-changing impacts of the accident, ongoing health battles, Parkinson's diagnosis—and how it all influenced his music. Featuring candid interviews, performance clips, and reflections on albums **Ordinary Man** and two-time GRAMMY-winning **Patient Number 9**, the film captures the rock star's resilience, artistry, and enduring legacy through the voices of family, friends, and collaborators. To learn more, contact Margaret Ivy Johnston at margareti.vy.johnston@paramount.com.

Fraser Entertainment Group will present the

third annual **You Will Be Found – A Benefit Concert for NAMI GLAC** (National Alliance on Mental Illness, Greater Los Angeles County) on November 9, at **Catalina Jazz Club** in

Hollywood. The evening's performances will feature **Eydie Alyson, Owen Bakula, David Burnham, Chelsea Field, Kate Flannery, Emily Goglia, Jane Lynch, James Snyder, Shannon Warne and Nita Whitaker**, with **Brad Ellis** acting as music director, pianist and co-host, alongside co-host **Carla Renata**. Proceeds will benefit NAMI GLAC's vital education, advocacy and support programs for individuals and families affected by mental illness. To purchase tickets and learn more about the event, visit ticketweb.com/event/you-will-be-found-catalina-bar-grill-tickets/13931214?pl=cbg&RE FID=clientsitewp.



All Roads Theatre Company will present its second annual benefit gala, **Broadway Showstoppers**, on November 22 at the **Saban Theatre** in Beverly Hills. Headlined by **Michael Feinstein, Joely Fisher, Dermot Mulroney, and John Stamos**, the evening will showcase a star-studded cast under the direction of—and choreography by—**Scott Thompson** with **Fred Barton** leading the 18-piece **ARTCO** orchestra. Broadway veterans and talent including **Carmen Cusack, Jason Graae, Tyler Hanes, Kerry O'Malley, James Snyder, Lauren Worsham**, and more will perform alongside rising talent. The event will also highlight ARTCO's youth ensemble, the **ARTCO All-Stars**, while supporting the company's artistic and educational mission. Learn more at wheremusicmeetsthesoul.com/events/broadway-showstoppers-a-song-dance-celebration.

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.

OUT TAKE



Matthew Feder

Composer

Website: matthewfeder.com

Most recent: *Asteroid*

FOR COMPOSER MATTHEW FEDER, his lifelong love for music and playing guitar eventually led him to the world of film scoring, which presented a unique challenge that he describes as "a puzzle to crack" that he's pursued ever since. Most recently, he co-composed the immersive short *Asteroid*, which marks the fifth collaboration between co-composer **Chris Beck** and director **Doug Liman** and the third for Feder, who worked on *Road House* and *The Instigators* prior.

For *Asteroid*, he and Beck arrived at the musical tone through trial and error. "We first tried a futuristic, sci-fi, spacey kind of approach, and it was cool but made the characters feel a little too polished," Feder says. "It didn't fit, because the characters are a ragtag group of strangers who are rough around the edges. So we used electric guitar to symbolize that and infuse the score with a kind of rebellious DNA. It was used throughout the whole film, and there are moments it's not recognizable as a guitar."

Feder said he enjoys sharing creative control and combining his sensibilities with another's in the co-writing process, and points to the challenge of co-composing the docuseries *Arnold* with Beck as a project that informed his growth as a musician. "We wrote over three hours of music for it, and I learned a lot from that project about always looking for ways to make the music more cohesive and think about the larger story."

For those starting out, Feder says fledgling composers should seek out ways to finesse their craft and learn to trust their instincts. "It applies in any field: your instinct is what defines you as an artist, and the sooner you can hone that, trust it, and move forward with it without complicating your music too much—that's how you'll find your way," he says. "And less is more. A lot of aspiring composers tend to overwrite."

► **MARGUERITE RELEASES YOU ARE FULL OF MAGIC AND LOVE AND VISIONS AND IDEAS AND IDEALS AND BEAUTY AND JOY MUSIC VIDEO**

Los Angeles' intimate indie-rock/shoegaze band *marguerite* have released their music video for single "you are full of magic and love and visions and ideas and ideals and beauty and joy," directed by Destinee McCaster. The video is a beautiful depiction of dream visitation, using stop motion and mixed media to create a world of magical realism. With two EPs out already, *larger now* and *things we found*, *marguerite* is currently working on their first full-length album.



▲ **MULTI-PLATINUM DUO CAFUNÉ RELEASE THEIR SECOND ALBUM BITE REALITY**

American indie pop duo *Cafuné* have released their second album *Bite Reality* via the band's own Aurelians Club label, distributed by SoundOn. *Bite Reality* is about the fine line between documenting your existence and doing the work to actually exist. "At the end of the day, all we have is one another. You can't take anything with you when the lights go out. Embrace the future, bite reality," the band shared.



▲ **LAUFEBY DROPS HIGHLY ANTICIPATED THIRD ALBUM A MATTER OF TIME**

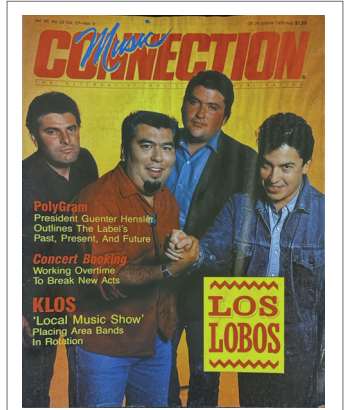
A Matter of Time, the highly anticipated new album from GRAMMY®-winning L.A.-based Icelandic-Chinese artist, composer, producer, and multi-instrumentalist Laufey, is now available worldwide via Vingolf Recordings / AWAL. Laufey will perform the new songs on the *A Matter of Time* Tour, which sold over 265,000 tickets upon its initial sale.



◀ **GOOD NEIGHBOURS RETURN WITH NEW SINGLE "PEOPLE NEED PEOPLE" BEFORE DEBUT ALBUM BLUE SKY MENTALITY**

London-based duo *Good Neighbours* preceded the release of their debut album, *Blue Sky Mentality* (via Capitol Records) with the roll out of their stirring new single, "People Need People." The single, which premiered as BBC Radio 1's Hottest Record, is a widescreen anthem centered on friendship, solidarity and the moments we lean on each other most.

Tidbits From Our Tattered Past



1983 - Los Lobos - #22

Mexican-American rock band Los Lobos graced *MC*'s cover in 1983. "You ask anyone about Mexican music, and they think of mariachi music," said drummer Louie Perez, "But that's only part of Mexican music... We didn't play mariachi music, we played regional music which differed instrumentally and musically." "That was just another stereotype," said guitarist Cesar Rosas. "We've never been a political band. But there's a way to be political without actually going out and carrying picket signs. The fact that the record has songs with Spanish lyrics says something about the Mexican community in America, and our place in the world," added Perez.



2006 - The All-American Rejects - #8

For *MC*'s 2006 cover story, Tyson Ritter, pianist of The All-American Rejects, reflected on the band's resilience: "Everybody reacts differently to pressure. I think we're one of the few bands to respond well to it." On songwriting, he noted, "You gather a lot of great material when you step away from writing. I believe in that process: you grow when you step away." Addressing the industry, Ritter added, "People choose to be signed to a major label. I hate all of these stories about bands who whine about the limitations of their major label deal."

Limited back issues available to order
at musicconnection.com



▲ POP NEWCOMER CIL DROPS NEW SINGLE "SOMETHING LIKE THIS," SUPPORTS DUA LIPA ON RADICAL OPTIMISM TOUR ACROSS NORTH AMERICA

After igniting the summer with her *don't hold me accountable* EP, singer and songwriter Cil is back with a brand-new single entitled "something like this," out now on Warner Records. In addition to the new single, she recently supported pop megastar Dua Lipa for 24 arena dates across North America on the Radical Optimism Tour.

► NIIA RELEASES BRAZEN NEW SINGLE MUSIC VIDEO PAYS HOMAGE TO FIONA APPLE

L.A.-based jazz vocalist and composer NiiA dropped the new single "fucking happy," from her recently released fifth studio album, *V* (out via Candid Records), alongside the accompanying music video—a sly nod to Fiona Apple's iconic "Criminal." Shot through the lens of director Lili Peper, the video updates that voyeuristic energy for a new era while keeping the same sense of intimacy and unease that made the original so unforgettable.



◀ SINGER-SONGWRITER AND ACTRESS TELE RELEASES HER DEBUT EP HONESTY PROJECT

Burgeoning new singer-songwriter and actress Tele's debut EP *Honesty Project* is out now via Sound Factory Records/RCA Records. The EP follows recent single releases "More," "Evil," "VHS," and "Barking Dogs," all largely featured production by Rob Bisel and Noise Club (Jessie Murph, Kiana Ledé).





VINCE

Smilin' in front of a few thousand fans at the Fox Theatre in Detroit during the summer, Vince Gill promised to tell some stories and "play for as long as you'll let me." He also told fans that if more than three hours of music proved too much, "you won't hurt my feelings" if they were to leave early.

As if.

At 68, Vince Gill is in the realm of bona fide national treasure. He's a multi-threat as a performer, singer, songwriter, instrumentalist and producer. He's been part of notable bands—Pure Prairie League, Rodney Crowell's Notorious Cherry Bombs, the Time Jumpers and, since 2017, Eagles. Forty years ago, he started releasing his own music, beginning with *The Things That Matter* with 18 more albums since, including collaborative efforts with pedal steel virtuoso Paul Franklin and Olivia Newton-John. Fifteen of those titles landed in the Top 10 of the Billboard Country Albums chart, with nine selling platinum or better.

From those have come more than two dozen Top 10 country hits, including chart-toppers such as "I Still Believe in You," "Don't Let Your Love Start Slippin' Away," "Tryin' to Get Over You" and, with Reba McEntire, "The Heart Won't Lie." His 1995 hymn "Go Rest High on that Mountain," meanwhile, has become a memorial staple that Gill himself sang at music legend George Jones' funeral during May of 2013. Gill's won 22 GRAMMY Awards—the most

right as can be." Bonnie Raitt, who sang on Gill's 1987 album *The Way Back Home*, considers him "one of the most extraordinary voices I've ever heard—soulful, heartbreaking—and his guitar playing is fantastic. He's a great musician all the way around, and just a wonderful, modest person."

Don Was produced Gill on the 1994 compilation *Rhythm Country and Blues*—a duet with Gladys Knight on Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell's "Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing"—and has worked with him on other occasions. "The thing that makes Vince Gill so great is that he's got tremendous control over his instruments, both the guitar and his voice," Was explains. "His technique is beyond reproach, and it never gets in the way of emotion. He's one of the most soulful singers and most soulful guitar players I've ever heard...And he's versatile; he fits into the Eagles as easy as he could into the Allman Brothers."

Gill could have gone in a number of different directions, in fact. He was raised in music; father Stan Gill, a judge, played guitar and banjo, while his mother Jerene sang and played harmonica. "Growing up I heard everything, man—rock, country, bluegrass, all of it," recalls Gill, who was tutored in playing by his father as well as a local guitarist named J. Julian Akins. He'd eventually add banjo, mandolin, bass guitar, dobro, and fiddle to his repertoire. "We listened to the Grand Ole Opry [radio broadcasts]. I heard...maybe not everything, but I heard a lot." Bluegrass exerted the greatest pull initially, as Gill

GILL

for any male solo country artist—18

Country Music Association Awards, and six Academy of Country Music trophies, including a Career Achievement Award. He was inducted into the Grand Ole Opry in 1991.

And that's the tally as of this year, which also marks 50 since he left his home town of Norman, OK, to embark on his life in music—and which he'll be commemorating with a series of monthly EPs drawn from a cache of some 12 dozen songs he's accumulated but not yet released, part of a new "lifetime record deal" he recently signed with MCA.

"I'm just filled with gratitude, just gratefulness for being able to have had a lifetime of doing what I love more than anything," Gill tells *Music Connection* via phone, prior to that Detroit show—part of his An Evening With Vince Gill tour. "That's a gift in itself. I love getting to play—still do. It feels like it did when I was 18. That hasn't changed."

Joe Walsh calls playing alongside Gill in Eagles—which has currently found a residence at Sphere in Las Vegas—"terrifying. He's that good. He just plugged right into the band, with the vocals and of course his guitar, and he does everything just as

BY GARY GRAFF

led his own group, Mountain Smoke—

which he remembers was booed off stage when it opened for Kiss during the spring of 1976—and then played in Bluegrass Alliance with Tony Rice and then Boone Creek, whose lineup also included Ricky Skaggs.

"I liked how familiar it felt right off the bat," Gill recalls. "I love the democracy of a bluegrass band, how they play together and make the sound that it makes. It just really needs everybody to equally come to the table with the gifts they have and the way the music works, minimal instruments and a lot of power when it's done right."

"What was unique is with bluegrass I felt successful right off the bat. In those first bands I played in there were a lot of great musicians and a lot of good history, so it was a great way to get started. I felt like I was playing with some of the best bluegrass musicians as a young kid, and that's inspiring. It feels like, 'Hey, I'm doing something pretty worthwhile here.'"

Gill also learned certain tools of the trade, as it were, that he's carried throughout his career. "It takes a really great understanding of harmony stuff



and how that works," he explains. "You've got the famous kinds of stuff with the Stanley Brothers or (Bill) Monroe, the way Bill would sing the high part and Bobby Osborne was singing lead on top and the two harmonies were below him...So there were all kinds of neat things to learn early on that I've been mindful of ever since."

Joining Pure Prairie League in 1978, after moving to Los Angeles a couple years before, gave Gill a berth for his songwriting as well as his playing. He appeared on three studio albums with the group and sang lead on the Billboard Hot 100 Top 10 hit "Let Me Love You Tonight." He left to back Crowell in the Cherry Bombs and was generally happy being a guitar-slinging band guy more than anything else.

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

Nevertheless, Gill began to feel an itch to strike out on his own. "After my first child, Jenny, was born in 1982, I kinda saw the writing on the wall that Pure Prairie League was not my future," he explains. "And I said, 'I've been writing more and more songs; maybe I could make it as an artist.'" He was further encouraged by Cherry Bombs bandmate Tony Brown, an established hitmaker in Nashville, who recommended him to RCA Records in Nashville (and would go on to produce Gill's best-selling albums).

"Tony said, 'You should be a country singer. You talk country, act country. All that other [pop stuff] isn't in your wheelhouse as much as when you're doing country music,'" Gill says. "So I made a decision to try it, got a record deal in '83, made my first record and struggled for years trying to get a hit, but I didn't know how to do anything else. I always thought they were not gonna like me coming into [Nashville] 'cause I'm moving from L.A. and 'What's a pop guy from Pure Prairie League doing trying to be a country singer?'"

But focusing on country, he adds, made a great deal of sense, especially with the genre starting to become more welcoming of pop flavors at the time.

"I just think it was more natural, more of my upbringing, to go that way," Gill explains. "It had more to do with my bluegrass years and my

mother and father's love of country music and the records they had when I was a kid, how drawn I was to Merle Haggard and Buck Owens and Patsy Cline—just as much as I was to the pop stars and singer-songwriters. I just loved it all."

"But I just felt like bluegrass wasn't enough to hold me, and making country-rock records was probably not enough to hold me. I wanted to make country records. I wanted to make records that felt like [Merle] Haggard. That's what I love the most. I wanted to crack that code, and I did for a little while."

"The one thing I wish I hadn't done so much of is I tried to make records I thought the record company would like because of who they had as artists and what their stance was and what they seemed to gravitate towards. In hindsight I think that was probably an error, but not enough of one to worry me too much."

Nonetheless, Gill became one of country's most dominant forces during the '90s alongside Garth Brooks, Clint Black, Alan Jackson, Travis Tritt, Tim McGraw and the like, reeling off eight platinum albums and four consecutive multi-platinum efforts. Gill also hosted the CMA Awards starting in 1991 and going through to 2003.

"Then," he acknowledges, "it was back to not as much interest; they



kind of turned the faucet of fad to the younger folks," he says—without lamenting his fate. "You knew it would happen, so it didn't bother me. I was pretty consistently okay with that the whole time. I knew I had enough talent I could go back and play guitar in everyone's band and do sessions and that would've been okay, too."

Gill—who married his second wife, fellow singer and songwriter Amy Grant, in 2000 after meeting during a holiday concert special in 1993—hardly faded away. He continued recording and winning awards, regrouped the Cherry Bombs during 2004 and two years later released one of the most ambitious albums of his career—*These Days*, box set whose four albums each explored a different style, with a corps of guest players and vocalists. It won a GRAMMY Award for Best Country Album and was nominated for the prestigious Album of the Year. He also began releasing albums with the Time Jumpers, a Western swing band he joined during 2010 and stayed with for a decade, and with whom he won another GRAMMY.

There was one adventure he didn't expect, however.

"In 2017 I would've never thought in a million years that Don Henley would call and say, 'You want to come finish this ride out with me

and come play with Joe [Walsh] and Timothy [B. Schmit]?" says Gill, who was friendly with all of the Eagles—including the late Glenn Frey, who he was called in to replace (along with Frey's son Deacon) when they band decided to continue after Frey passed away during January of 2016. "I was just like, 'God, can you make the question harder? Of course I'll come. It'll be perfect.'"

"It's such a great...I think more than anything, the validation I feel like it gives me, for a lifetime of work and what I've tried to accomplish and tried to be good at. For one of the best bands in history to recognize it and ask me to come along for their final ride is really special."

He does acknowledge some initial reservations, however. "Oh, I think everybody was unsure if it was even doable," Gill says, "and then it was and it was eerily cool and kind of, 'okay...' I mean, the only reason I got to do it was because of something sad and something tragic in the passing of Glenn, so I keep that in the forefront of my mind 'cause he was an old friend, and I actually knew all those guys fairly well over the years. But I don't beat on my chest and go, 'Hey, I'm in the Eagles!' I never bring it up very often."

"I remember the first gig I did with those guys, I was really, really scared. I could feel the apprehension in the people sitting in the crowd; it's a stadium and there's 50,000 people there or whatever and it's like, 'Good luck. You're gonna be the guy that sings all of Glenn's songs.' And the first song, 'Lyin' Eyes,' I remember singing a verse and chorus and I felt like everyone was taking a deep breath and going, 'It's gonna be okay.' It was palpable, and I was grateful for it."

One thing you won't hear Gill doing with Eagles, however, is any of his own songs.

"I was singing an old song of mine, 'Whenever You Come Around,' at sound check before the first show. Don heard it and came over and said, 'What is that song?' I said, 'It's an old hit of mine from years ago.' He said, 'Man, we should work that up and do it,' and I said, 'Don, with all respect, I'd rather not.' He said, 'Why?' I said, 'Look, what I'm getting ready to do is not gonna be easy, and I really don't want to give these people one more reason not to like me or not accept me—I didn't come here to hear a Vince Gill song!'"

"He said, 'Man I really respect that.' It was my way to not only protect myself; it seemed like the right thing to do. Still does. But it meant something to me that Don said that. Somebody asked him, 'Why did

you get a country guy in your rock band?' and he laughed and said, 'He knows how to be in a BAND.'"

With Eagles having transitioned from a farewell tour into the Sphere situation—"It's pretty cool, and I think it's a great way to keep the band going," Gill notes—Gill also took the opportunity this year to refocus on his own music. He hit the road with his own band, an eight-member all-star crew that included the likes of Jim "Moose" Brown on keyboards, guitarists Tom Bukovac and Jedd Hughes, pedal steel player Eddie Dunlap, and backing vocalist Wendy Moten. "I just missed playing my songs," Gill says. "Y'know, building the career catalog of all that stuff for the last 40 years, it's just fun to get remember these songs and play 'em." More importantly, the shows were also woodsheds for new material—and a lot of it; during the Detroit show he incorporated nine brand new songs into the set list, nearly a third of the overall show, giving fans an early taste of the Mavis Staples-inspired "Some Times," the guitar love song "Nobody Held Her Like Me," the moving military tribute "When a Soldier Dies," the soulfully defiant "March On, March On" and "Benny's Song," a bona fide tear-jerker about Gill's longtime guitar tech and best friend since grade school.

"My audience has always been willing to go with me any way I choose," Gill says, "and...we always finish up with familiar stuff, so they go home happy."

Many of those specific songs will be heard on the first couple volumes of *50 Years From Home*, the series of monthly EPs that's slated to commence in October with *Vol. 1: I Gave You Everything I Had* and *Vol. 2: Secondhand Smoke* sits on the runway. "I have this wealth of information and treasure trove of songs, and I started wracking my brain about how I can find a way to really celebrate this music" he explains. He credits a creeping sense of mortality—the subject of more than a few of these songs, in fact—as one impetus for driving this prolific spate.

"Part of it is just how much I love being creative and realizing that I'm 68 years old, and the pages of time has flipped to the other side of the dial," Gill says. "That puts a burr in your saddle—it has for me, anyway. The more I've done it, the more I've learned how to do it better—how to be more patient, where not to waste my time, what to do and not to do, to be willing to edit myself and keep digging."

"Experience is experience; there's no shortcut. This is what comes from doing this for 50

years."

Recording at his own Brushwood Studios near Nashville with his corps of musical luminaries, Gill is curating each volume of the series, right down to choosing cover images of specific instruments that seem appropriate to the disc they're part of. "I try to find six songs that seem cohesive with each other...that sit well together," he explains. "I love the motion of music; that's what I got into it for. It stirs something inside me that I can't describe. I just feel it, and the songs I do and the way I sing 'em and the way I play 'em tries to convey those emotions."

By the time each of the EPs comes out, Gill hopes "have a little bit of everything," and in doing so create a microcosm—albeit a lengthy one—of what his career has been about since leaving Oklahoma those 50 years ago.

"I think that what I've enjoyed most about my career is the diversity of it," he says. "As I look at the entirety of all this, there's some ridiculously traditional country music stuff, there's some pop stuff that could get played on Yacht Rock Radio, some rockin' tunes with great swagger, singer-songwriter kind of songs."

"And at the core of it all is this knucklehead, me, that loves all kinds of things."

VINCE & FRIENDS

During more than 50 years of playing music, Vince Gill has been known to play nice with others and is, in fact, one of music's most collaborative artists. Amidst his trove of notable team-ups, we recommend this dozen for special attention...

- ▶ "Restless" with Mark O'Connor and the New Nashville Cats from the violinist's 1991 album *New Nashville Cats*.
- ▶ "The Heart Won't Lie" with Reba McEntire, a No. 1 country hit from her 1993 album *It's Your Call*.
- ▶ "House of Love," with (then) future wife Amy Grant on her 1994 album of the same name.
- ▶ A cover of Marvin Gaye-Tammi Terrell's Motown hit "Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing" from 1994's all-star *Rhythm Country and Blues* compilation.
- ▶ "Daydream" with Kermit the Frog ('nuf said), from 1994's *Kermit Unpigged*.
- ▶ "Burning Bridges" from Brooks & Dunn's 2006 album *Hillbilly Deluxe*, which also features Sheryl Crow.
- ▶ "Don't Cross Me Wrong" with John Oates, from his 2014 solo album *Good Road to Follow*.
- ▶ "Sober Saturday Night" with Chris Young, a Top 5 Country hit from Young's *I'm Comin' Over* album in 2016.
- ▶ "Dear Hate" with Maren Morris, a GRAMMY Award-nominated 2017 response to the mass shooting at the Route 91 Harvest music festival just a few days before in Las Vegas.
- ▶ "Take It to the Limit" with Eagles, from the 2020 concert album *Live from the Forum MMXVIII*.



INK

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

GRAMMY-NOMINATED SONGWRITER, PRODUCER, AND GENERAL BADASS INK has had the sort of last few years that most artists dream of. She worked on Beyoncé's *RENAISSANCE* album (co-writing "ALIEN SUPERSTAR," "THIQUE," "SUMMER RENAISSANCE"), and then *COWBOY CARTER* (co-writing "16 CARRIAGES," "AMERIICAN REQUIEM"). She also worked on several songs on Kendrick Lamar's *GNX* record ("gloria," "dodger blue"), including 13-week No. 1 hit "luther," which has already earned Ink Songwriter of the Year buzz at the 2026 GRAMMYS.

At the start of October, Ink released her debut solo EP *BIG BUSKIN'*, a genre-bending mix of country, indie rock pop and soul. It's a tour de force of a record, a victory for quality songwriting and a stubborn insistence on caring little for scenes. Ink just concentrates on the song.

Born in Germany and raised in Georgia, Ink started on her musical journey busking in the streets before people started paying attention. Collabs with Trae tha Truth and Nipsey Hussle followed, and she went on to work with artists as prestigious as Childish Gambino, Justin Bieber, Kacey Musgraves, Lil Nas X, and Jennifer Lopez (as well as the aforementioned Bey and Kendrick). It's been a wild ride, laced with endeavor and, obviously, a ton of talent.

"I've always been in a musical crowd," Ink says. "I grew up singing at church. I used to sing at a church in Columbus, GA, that's where my home's at. I was singing over there, yeah."

Church gave Ink the confidence to keep singing, and her passion for creativity flourished. "I was singing everywhere I went," she says. "At school, I would do projects. I started singing choir, and then later, taught myself the guitar. From there, it just became a real portal for me. And then I was like, 'Yo, so I really want to be successful at this. I've got to surrender to my gift and see if I can survive on just music.' So I took to the streets every day, and that's when I was busking, singing and just putting my art on display, just being in vulnerable situations to present people with music."

Ink says that her early influences were decidedly old school. "I've got enough new school for us all," she says. "So I'll be on that James Brown, you know? Pointer Sisters, Andraé Crouch—kind of like that old gospel chic. I love a lot of rap, a lot of downtown rap, like Ghostface. I like classic Bruce Springsteen stuff. I like to go big with emotion."



It was on the streets of Georgia that Ink was busking, though busking anywhere appears to be a terrifying experience. Performing for a crowd that isn't there to see them, that has other things to do—it's not for the faint-hearted.

"Man, nerve wrecking the first time I was out there," Ink says. "I don't remember the details of the first day, but I just remember the feelings of, like, man it's tough. And you know, when you put yourself in uncomfortable situations, you're training yourself to be able to handle any situation comfortably. So it's just like, I knew what it was doing. And I also wanted my music to elevate my city, and really have an impact on the people and the culture and our way of life, because it's not necessarily about making a living all the time. It's about making sure that we all could live. So it was really like taking it to the streets, getting better as an artist, putting my craft out, and then surviving. So it was simply scary. But I tell people all the time, if you want to be great and you want to be prepared, you've got to go to those places where you feel uncertainty. Like, if you could make a fan out of somebody that didn't even want to hear your shit that day, and now they're walking away, and they actually turn around like, you know what? I was being an asshole. This sounds amazing. It's like, those type of encounters. I feel like it's just gonna build me to be one of the greatest."

The rewards are intense. If you can stop a pedestrian in their tracks, make them forget their own thoughts and day's mission and think, "Hold on, I have to listen to this," you've really achieved something.

"The best feeling," says Ink. "It's like, you're out there fishing, you threw that rod in the water. You don't know what's over there, you know, I'm saying you see a couple sharks. But something takes a little bite on that reel. If it ain't meant for you, you got to be ready for it."

Busking offered Ink the opportunity to blossom as a musician under harsh conditions, and she gave the Atlanta music scene little choice but to welcome her in and support her.

"I just knew that if I get you to listen, you're gonna love it," she says. "Atlanta came together for me, you know? People really kept me going, all the time. I wanted to quit and give up, you know—you've got a bad day, it's hot outside, you're not getting up any motion. But the people will always just be like, no matter how bad it could be, just keep going. So the city of Atlanta made sure I didn't quit, you know what I mean? That speaks for the people there, and just our culture."

Regarding the process of songwriting, Ink describes it in very aquatic terms.

"It's like when you turn the faucet on, you hear the water running, you walk away and do a whole bunch of stuff, and when you come back that water is still going," she says. "The water's still going, still pouring, still overflowing. That's me. So it's really about the best way I could try to capture the process, because I don't like to have the same process every time. I like it to be variable. I mean, based on emotion, my real feelings. It's not calculated every time, like some people have a different method. They go in and do the same thing. For me, I just see how it comes to me. And I mean, whether I write it on the guitar or I get inspired by melody first, I will always hear melody, you know? Sometimes I might be like, 'This is a message that I want to say,' or, 'This is something that I would like to do,' so I kind of put the things that I want to do and experience, I make a song about that so that it manifests in real time. Or I'm working with my co-writers or producers, and we're kind of just pow-wow."

We asked Ink to drill down on a specific example, namely her recent "Sweet Tea" single. "That one came about because I had all the music," she says. "And I was like, 'Man, I want people to know about my family and my life,' because I always think the music should just be so personal that it is personal to everyone else, because



everyone's got their version of sweet tea, you know? So I was just like, let's go into the family dynamic. Let's go into the environment growing up. I've got an amazing family, and I just want people to get to know who I am through the music."

It's one thing to write and record your own music, another thing entirely to collab with others, especially those as enormous as the artists we previously mentioned. Ink is clearly in demand; Beyoncé doesn't work with just anyone once, never mind twice.

"It always was a thing," Ink says. "I was sending demos, and they would be like, 'This is fire. Stay on it.' And they would just keep me on it, because they would start putting other people on there. It didn't sound as fire. Their friends must have been like, 'Yo, I don't know, you should have kept the other girl on that because it was more real, was more authentic.' So they just like keeping me on the songs. So I've always been blessed with crazy features and everything. I just love working with real artists."

Early days, Ink collabed with late hip-hop star Nipsey Hussle, while Yo Gotti of CMG was the first person to buy her beats. But working with Beyoncé took things up to a whole new level.

"It's always an experience working with Beyoncé," Ink says. You know what I mean? Like, I learned so much. It's crazy, because when I was working with her, she was like, 'Yeah, you. Thank you for being the most consistent creative.' And I was blown away. I mean, to hear that. I'm thinking, 'I'm not doing enough.' So I learned so much from working with her. This lady is absolutely a producer and she just makes everything better. She thinks with a different type of mind. It is inspiring. Just makes me go harder, you know?"

Similarly, Kendrick Lamar is no slouch. "We had a mutual friend," Ink says. "He put it together, and we just had a mutual vibe, you know? It was just a cool first time encounter. And I was like, okay, yeah, this is my trial. Like, awesome. I love to work with all great artists on the planet, and if I don't get to I'm still content, because the artists that I've worked with are just so incredible, and I've left such a mark on my artistry and my story and my journey. So I think I've already worked with all my dream artists, but I'm definitely open to working with the rest of the greats of the world. Just making music every day is a dream."

It's all built up to the debut EP, *BIG BUSKIN*'. Ink says that it was recorded all over the place.

"I think it was recorded in Nashville, L.A., Atlanta, and Miami," she says. "We really have been all over just capturing this. Me and the homies, we all got together. We called up a buddy of mine. He's like, 'You gotta do it. You gotta do it.' Dave Tama. So we finally got it done, and the team came together. And, you know, we just locked in. So it's just like all my friends, my guys, from my band to producers that I met."

If there's a theme, a concept, to *BIG BUSKIN*', it's that music is all she has, and what she had to surrender to get her gift out there.

"You're big busking too," she told MC. "What you're doing, your interviews, really change the landscape of music and journalism. And you know, the narrative is your big buskin'. No matter if you're selling CDs, no matter if you print a t-shirt or you make a snow cone on the street, you do it with the passion that surpasses other people's understanding. And I mean, you're big buskin', no matter if it's uncomfortable or what, you got a big blessing and big results, you know what I mean? And it's just the journey of how you started. So first I was busking. I was walking miles and miles a day. I was really busting, and then I started the next level of my life through songwriting with artists that inspire me. So now it's like, I look up and I'm still doing the same thing. It's just the scenery and the people that allow me to bring my creativity to these faces that changes, but you still be busking. You're just doing it in a bigger way."

Much like the fact that the EP was recorded in a variety of cities, a lot of gear was used as well. "We went for classic vibes," Ink says. "We had a whole garage full of amps and archival reverbs, and all types of gear. The engineers and producers were wiggling out over that. We record a lot of stuff on tape, the drums we recorded on tape as well. So on each song, you kind of hear a different vibe."

BIG BUSKIN' came out on Big Loud/Electric Feel Records. "Big Loud identify with what I like," Ink says. "So it just made sense. We came together, and put paint where it ain't."

With the EP out, Ink has plenty planned for the remainder of 2025, going into 2026. "We'll just keep dropping singles," she says. "I'm looking forward to performing the music, for sure. That's what I'm most excited about, bringing the music to people and to the stages. Bringing all the different avenues of my expressions together. A clothing line, acting—we've got a lot of different brand things coming up. Filming, and a lot of different cool things we're working on outside of music. I think it's all going to come together beautifully."

High Moon Records

This is the age of artificial intelligence and streaming, where music is accessed and consumed through virtual means. In many cases, cell phones and various mobile devices are the platforms by which many people listen to and experience music and movies.

Arguably, it would be safe to assume that, by and large, as traditional methods of consuming and enjoying music and media become less physically tangible and more mercurial, vinyl and compact disc sales have dramatically tapered off. And to a great extent that is the case, but High Moon Records and label owner George Baer Wallace have tapped into a specialty market that is changing the game regarding music collecting and consumerism.

Wallace started the boutique reissue label with the late French New York City music maven JD Martignon in 2010. Martignon moved from Paris to N.Y.C. in the early 1970s and immersed himself in the, then, burgeoning rock and art scene. For many years he owned a world renowned retail store called Midnight Records. Young Wallace had befriended Martignon in the early 2000s and was a frequent customer at the store. After Martignon lost his lease he set up shop for a time out of his apartment. And eventually the two had a meeting of the minds and decided to expand their love of obscure and hard-to-find records and artists and give their product a platform.

What makes High Moon Records different from a lot of other music distribution entities is that they are an independent label with a heart and creative vision. All their releases feature deluxe packaging, extensive liner notes by authoritative journalists and, often, the artists themselves. Many of the label's catalog spotlight rare photos and never-before-seen artwork. And most albums get the immaculate re-mastered audio treatment, with additional bonus material.

High Moon Records' mission is all about championing artists that are legendary, that never got a proper promotional push from their initial record labels back in the day and just artists and bands that, for whatever reason, slipped through the cracks and never got that big break. But the "heart" comes in where Wallace, his associate Patrick Whaley, and their team lovingly give these artists and projects the professional attention they deserve.

The majority of the album releases that you'll find on the High Moon Records imprint are artists and bands from the '60s and '70s. And many of them are folks whose careers were birthed out of creative hubs and scenes like San Francisco, Laurel Canyon, Los Angeles, and New York City. The label's roster consists of seminal singer-songwriters like Terry Dolan and Laurie Styvers, proto-garage rockers Sons of Adam and The Final Solution, progressive racially-integrated rock/R&B bands like Love and Sly & The Family Stone, alternative underground soul

singers like Lotti Golden, The Byrds' Gene Clark, psychedelic Bay Area siren Jeannie Pierson, and one of the first progressive and diverse all-female rock acts Ace of Cups.

"Our audience is pretty diverse," says Wallace. "It is, geographically, pretty wide where we get a lot of customers overseas from Europe, Japan, and South America. We've done analytics and we get emails from people in their 20s and 30s right up to the baby boomers. But I think it's true that people overseas seem to appreciate American music sometimes more than Americans do. And it's tough because a lot of the musicians that we release are just not that well known. But we do all we can to get their music spread as wide as possible."

No doubt, the recent release of the 2025 documentary on Sly Stone entitled *Sly Lives (The Burden of Black Genius)* has proven to be a major boost for the High Moon Records roster. Although the indie label has no formal ties to the Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson directed film,



it certainly has made a significant impact on music maven/producer Alec Palao's rare issued release of Sly & The Family Stone's album *The First Family: Live at Winchester Cathedral 1967*. The silver packaged live recording captures Sly (Sylvester Stewart) Stone and the classic Family Stone lineup performing at one of their first recorded events. It is a fascinating look at a band that was on the cusp of influencing and changing the culture of that moment and many generations to come.

"Our most recent release, with Sly & The Family Stone is kind of a household name in the rock, soul and funk worlds," says Wallace. "So the sales, with streaming, have been selling upwards of 10,000 copies. Now that doesn't sound like very many, but for us that's a lot."

Three of the label's other flagship artists that really got the ball rolling, if you will, are Terry Dolan, Arthur Lee's Love, and Ace of Cups (pictured). Every band and artist on their roster has an amazing story, but these three in particular seem to typify the stylistic essence of what High Moon is all about.

Dolan was a San Francisco-based musician that recorded, what was to be, his debut album for Warner Brothers in 1972. However,

due to unforeseen circumstances, this "lost masterpiece" was never released. It was produced by legendary British session keyboard player and sideman Nicky Hopkins and also featured contributions from a laundry list of musical celebs, including The Pointer Sisters, Neal Schon (Journey/Santana), John Cipollina (Quicksilver Messenger Service), and Prairie Prince (The Tubes/ Todd Rundgren). "It's still kind of an unsolved mystery why Warner Brothers pulled it back then," says Wallace. "But this self-titled debut album got such universally rave reviews from veteran NPR non-commercial music people, podcasters, and WXPB in Philadelphia."

Love was a Los Angeles band that was formed in 1965 by the late Arthur Lee. They broke through the charts with hits like "Little Red Book" and "7 and 7 Is," but while they continue to be influential to many contemporary artists and fans, arguably, they have virtually retained a cult-like status. With the re-release of the original 1974 RSO Records rock/R&B classic "Reel-to Real" and the never-before-released proto-alternative masterpiece "Black Beauty," Wallace's commitment to Lee, his widow Diane Lee, and the plethora of devotees everywhere is manifested in the beauty and tender loving care bestowed on the David Fricke/Ben Edmonds booklet commentary and pristine audio fidelity.

Ace of Cups was one of those Bay Area groups that emerged in the late '60s and shared bills with everyone from The Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane to Jimi Hendrix. The fact that they were an all female ensemble that wrote and performed all their own tunes was even more impressive, considering the time. But the band-family began

to unravel when members of the group started having children and their own families. However, after nearly 50 years, and with the assistance of producer Dan Shea and, again, Alec Palao, the members of these female folk, blues and gospel-ing trailblazers dropped a long overdue self-titled album of their un-released original songs in 2018. That album featured guest spots from their friends Buffy Saint-Marie, Bob Weir, Taj Mahal, and Peter Dinklage. On the strength of that release, Ace of Cups enjoyed a revival which landed them on the *Today* show as well as being the subjects of a short documentary produced by KQED called *The World's Forgotten Band*. They followed things up in 2020 with the High Moon Records' release "Sing Your Dreams," which featured contributions from Jackson Browne, Sheila E., and Jack Casady.

"That KQED documentary got over eight million views. But when COVID hit, we could not capitalize on the progress we made at that time," concludes Wallace. "But it's still amazing and I still love that music. We're still trying to get their story out in the world, and I think we will."

For more information on their entire roster of artists and releases please go to highmoonrecords.com.

Getting Great Sound on a Budget

What Singer-Songwriters Need to Know About All-in-One PAs

For the solo artist, a well-chosen all-in-one PA system can mean the difference between a compelling live show and a forgettable performance. Whether you're playing a coffeehouse, a farmers market, or a small venue, controlling your own sound is both empowering and essential. Fortunately, today's market offers plenty of budget-friendly, compact PA systems from QSC, JBL, and Mackie that combine portability with surprising power and clarity. But great gear alone won't carry your performance—understanding how to set gain, avoid feedback, apply reverb tastefully, and properly place your speakers is just as important.

Choosing the Right All-in-One System

Today's singer-songwriters have access to an impressive range of portable PA systems that deliver clarity, power, and reliability—without blowing the budget. Many of these solutions are compact, battery-powered, and designed for ease of use in solo performance settings. Models from brands like QSC, JBL, and Mackie offer great examples of how far all-in-one PA technology has come.

QSC KC12: Premium Performance in a Column Format

For singer-songwriters looking for professional-grade sound in a column-style PA, the QSC KC12 is a standout. This three-way active loudspeaker combines a 12-inch subwoofer, dual four-inch midrange drivers, and a one-inch compression driver—powered by a 3000-watt Class D amp. The result is detailed, full-range sound from 45 Hz to 18.5 kHz with wide, even dispersion thanks to QSC's proprietary LEAF™ waveguide (145° horizontal, 35° vertical).

What makes the KC12 especially appealing for singer-songwriters is its flexibility. It features two XLR combo jacks that support mic, line, and Hi-Z signals, allowing users to plug in a guitar and mic directly—no mixer required. A digital display lets you dial in EQ, presets, delay, Bluetooth settings, and even onboard reverb. With True Wireless Stereo and Bluetooth streaming, backing tracks are easy to integrate. And at 60 pounds, it's portable enough for most gigging musicians. With rugged ABS housing and a six-year warranty, the KC12 is built to last.

JBL EON ONE MK2: True All-in-One Versatility

JBL's EON ONE MK2 is a fully self-contained column PA system ideal for street performers, café artists, or anyone needing battery power. It features a 10-inch woofer and eight two-inch tweeters in a C-shaped array for 140° x 30° dispersion. The system can output up to 123 dB SPL on AC power (119 dB on battery), which is plenty for most solo gigs.

A built-in five-channel mixer includes three

XLR combo jacks, Hi-Z input, 3.5mm aux, and Bluetooth 5.0 streaming. Artists can access Lexicon reverb, delay, and chorus effects, as well as dbx DriveRack processing, automatic feedback suppression (AFS), and an eight-band EQ—all controllable via the JBL Pro Connect app.

At just 42.5 pounds with a six-hour lithium-ion battery, the EON ONE MK2 is as portable as it is powerful. The Soundcraft Easy Ducking feature automatically lowers background music when you speak—handy for announcements or between-song banter.

Mackie Thump GO: Affordable and Lightweight

Mackie's Thump GO is one of the most affordable battery-powered PA systems in this category, offering simplicity and convenience for solo performers on the go. Weighing under 20 pounds, it features a two-channel mixer, 200 watts of Class D amplification, an eight-inch woofer, and a one-inch compression driver. It delivers a maximum SPL of 115 dB and covers a frequency range of 50 Hz to 20 kHz—ideal for small to medium spaces.

Bluetooth audio streaming and wireless control via the Thump Connect 2 app allow you to manage levels, EQ, and voicing modes from your phone. There are four onboard EQ presets—Music, Live, Monitor, and Sub—to quickly adapt to different venues. A built-in feedback eliminator and up to 12 hours of battery life make this a plug-and-play favorite for acoustic gigs, busking, or outdoor performances.

Gain Structure: Getting It Right from the Start

Gain staging is a critical step in getting your PA system to sound clean and powerful. The gain (or trim) knob sets the input sensitivity for each channel. If it's set too low, your signal will be weak and noisy. Too high, and you risk distortion or feedback.

To dial it in, start with your channel level at unity (typically labeled 0). Then raise the gain while you sing or play your loudest passage, watching the input meter or clip indicator. Aim for a signal that peaks around -6 dB. Always set gain based on your loudest moments to maintain headroom and prevent overload.

Avoiding Feedback in Small Rooms

Feedback is one of the most common—and frustrating—issues in small live sound environments. The high-pitched squeal occurs when a microphone picks up its own signal from the speaker and loops it. Thankfully, good placement and a little know-how can prevent it.

Position your speakers in front of your mic and angled away from you, especially in reverberant or reflective spaces. Avoid putting speakers behind your mic unless your PA

includes strong feedback suppression. Use cardioid-pattern mics to reduce room bleed. If your system offers notch filtering or a feedback eliminator—like the Mackie Thump GO and JBL EON ONE MK2—turn it on early, not after feedback starts.

Lowering your mic gain slightly and raising the speaker's main output volume can also help reduce the chance of a feedback loop.

Reverb and Compression: Less is More

Most modern all-in-one PAs include basic effects—primarily reverb, with occasional options for compression or delay. Reverb adds ambiance, but too much—especially in a live room—can muddy your vocals. Stick with short hall or plate settings and keep levels modest.

Compression helps balance dynamics, particularly useful for vocalists with wide dynamic range. If your PA doesn't offer onboard compression, consider a pedal or preamp with light compression (2:1 or 3:1 ratio). Be careful not to overdo it; excessive compression can rob your performance of expression and nuance.

Room Placement and Acoustic Awareness

Speaker placement can make or break your sound. Always elevate your speakers to ear level and tilt them slightly downward to minimize reflections. Ground-stacked speakers can sound boomy and unclear, especially in crowded rooms or corners.

In small, untreated rooms, rolling off some low end using onboard EQ can tighten up your mix. Many systems have preset voicings such as "Speech" or "Music." For acoustic sets, "Speech" often improves vocal clarity, especially in noisy spaces.

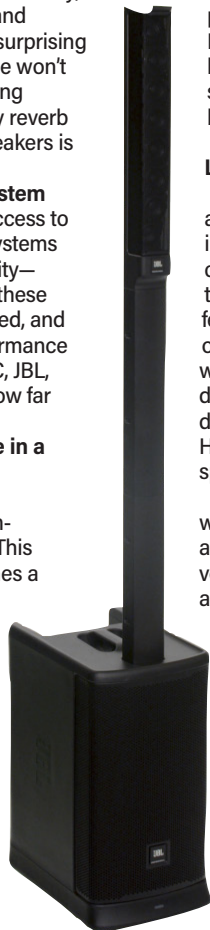
Outdoors, you'll need more output to compensate for lack of walls and reflections. Consider running two units in stereo or pairing your main PA with a compact sub if you use backing tracks or looped percussion.

Final Soundcheck Tips

Many all-in-one PAs also serve as front-ends for livestreaming or recording. Both the JBL and Mackie systems offer line outs or Bluetooth streaming, making it easy to capture performances. Before every show, do a quick soundcheck and record a snippet—even using your phone—to hear what the audience will hear.

If you're looping, running effects, or using backing tracks, make sure to test your entire signal chain. Don't assume levels will be right just because they were yesterday.

In Closing: Your songs and performance are what matter most, but a solid, well-set-up PA helps ensure those songs are heard with the clarity and emotion you intended. Whether you're looking at the refined power of the QSC KC12, the smart versatility of JBL's EON ONE MK2, or the grab-and-go ease of the Mackie Thump GO, there's never been a better time to build a portable, pro-level rig that works as hard as you do.



Brian Kennedy

Musician, songwriter, and producer Brian Kennedy got his start in the trade when he began to teach himself piano at the prodigious age of four. He swapped his hometown of Kansas City for Los Angeles in 2004 when he was 20. Two years later, he caught his big break when he co-wrote and produced "My Love" for Ciara's sophomore album *Ciara: The Evolution*, which earned him a publishing deal. He's since worked with creatives including Rihanna, Chris Brown, and The Weeknd. He remains a prolific solo artist, collaborates closely with Steinway and is a four-time GRAMMY winner. What he loves most about music is its power to help us transcend the mundane.

In the two years between relocating to L.A. and finding success, Kennedy was able to remain engaged and optimistic primarily by becoming a play-for-hire musician *and* through a bi-weekly piano night at now-shuttered Monroe's Bar on Melrose, which included friends such as Bruno Mars, Frank Ocean, and James Fauntleroy. "Every other week people would come to see these young gentlemen from Kansas City doing extraordinary pieces," he recalls. "That community and my friends kept me hopeful. We pushed and helped each other write music. I was young and knew that it was only a matter of time before things happened."

It's often been observed that fortune favors the bold and there's much to be said for taking risks. Certainly, it's paid off for Kennedy. One of his favorite studio memories is of the time that he was working with songwriter Andre Merritt at L.A.'s recently defunct Record Plant. "That's when I met Rihanna," he says. "I approached her and said, 'I have a new sound for you,' put my number in her phone and suggested she give me a call. Chris Brown asked me to play the piano part before I left, which I did. That evening she texted me and said 'I appreciate your energy. Bring me what you have.' The next morning, I woke up at six a.m., did the 'Disturbia' track in 15 minutes and brought it to the studio." The song went on to sell more than seven million copies in the United States alone.

The biggest challenges Kennedy's ever faced are ones with which many artists struggle: self-doubt and uncontrollable external forces. "Sometimes we second-guess ourselves," he notes. "It's harder when you have to navigate

the views of people who have no clue but have all the say in your career. This can be someone at a label or someone's family member. People listen to the opinions of people they [know and] trust and sometimes those are more valued than those of people who are accomplished. That's a

and expressed so much more due to its simplicity. It's a bass, strings and a piano. When I created it, I wasn't thinking about anything other than making a great song. That's why I'm proudest of it because I wasn't trying to pursue something great. It flowed

naturally and has a Stevie Wonder or Beatles feel to it."

One of his most astute and/or timely observations is the blessing and curse into which social media has evolved (or perhaps *devolved*). "It's a great thing," he concedes. "But there's a study which showed that young pianists will see even younger performers who are geniuses, they'll get discouraged and then give up. The art of music isn't what it used to be because [now] people only want the aesthetic and not the actual work. It can be distracting. I can imagine coming up in this business with social media and trying to compete with God knows who. There will always be someone who's better than you and you can find them in a second."

Kennedy works largely from his home studio The Red Piano but of course steps into commercial spaces regularly. What makes a renowned studio worth it to him? "The gear, experience, and history," he explains. "There's something cool about

working at Westlake where Michael Jackson recorded. I also like the idea of being spoiled at a studio where they have runners."

Chief among his most prized audio gear is the Arturia PolyBrute analog synthesizer and the Korg Triton, which his father gave to him when he was a teen. His recent work includes records with Japanese boy band SixTones and Thai girl group 4Eve. A tour that will take in China and South Korea is likewise on his calendar and he continues to collaborate with label/management group 88rising and with his friend comedian Bill Burr. Further, he's active with his organization Hits to Healing (their podcast launches soon), which works towards healthcare equity and education about focal segmental glomerulosclerosis (FSGS), a disease that led Kennedy to receive a kidney transplant from his brother Kevin, who also manages him.

Contact briankennedy.me, Instagram @ [iambkennedy](https://www.instagram.com/iambkennedy), hitstohealing.org



big challenge but ultimately it helps you to build character."

The three most important lessons he's learned as a musician and producer are:

- How to communicate. You don't want to challenge the artist or label but sometimes you have to speak up when you disagree.
- How to collaborate and learn to put your ego aside. Some new kid who doesn't have a hit can still show you something.
- Become a therapist. It's not about the song as much as it is about creating space for the artist to feel comfortable. Once that happens, the sky's the limit.

Of his entire body of work, Rihanna's "Close to You," co-written by James Fauntleroy, is the production of which Kennedy is most proud. "It's one of my favorite pieces I've ever created," he reflects. "It was simple, melodic

Julian Shah-Taylor, AKA The Singularity, on Collaborations, Musical Tributes, and Hanging On To Yourself

Beloved for channeling David Bowie in the stellar tribute group The Band That Fell to Earth, and for representing seminal Depeche Mode member Alan Wilder in the DM experience Strangelove, Julian Shah-Taylor also makes original music that fans of both legendary artists have adored for years—and continue to discover.

The U.K.-born, L.A.-based musician's brilliance is on full display on his latest release via his revered solo project The Singularity. *Honne/Tatemae*, which came out earlier this year, evokes melancholy moods and melodious moments, and features glimmers of Brit pop, new wave, and glam that might be expected considering his other endeavors. Poignant, powerful, and personal, he soars on the record, but in many ways it's also a group venture, with collaborations and guests that music fans will definitely recognize.

Bowie band members Mike Garson and Carmien Rojas, Bauhaus and Love & Rockets' David J, and many more are heard on the release, which delves into the heartbreak and feelings of despair after love lost, as a follow-up to his previous release, *Elysium*, which was an ode to the joy and elation of *being* in love. Of course, listeners can relate to both.

We asked Shah-Taylor about his unique experiences playing iconic hits, celebrating music legends and creating his own material at the same time. He provides great insight into making music independently and building a fanbase while staying true to a personal thematic vision.

Singular, But Not Alone

"Singularity means one thing, one person. It became the band's name, because I had a band for a while, but the recording process was always just me at home, playing all the instruments and recording myself."

"Mike Garson (Bowie's pianist) plays on a song called 'Lights Out.' I got David J to play bass on it and Carmine Rojas to play bass on it as well. And the song sort of developed. When I got Mike's piano part back, it was *The Wizard of Oz*—which starts off in black and white, and then, the curtains lift and it's full Technicolor. It was magnificent."

Collaborations Come Easier if You Have Previous Credits... Release What You

Create!

"I have a large and deep catalogue with collaborations with Siobhan Fahey (Bananarama), Lana Del Rey, etc. which come simply from my production work, remixes, and songwriting. I met all the people involved on *Honne/Tatemae*, through my original music and a willingness to get involved and release stuff, which is to me a very important part of



music. Get it out there!"

"Some of the music I released a long time ago is probably not very good, but I got better at writing and producing. And now if someone wants

to listen to something for 'proof of concept' (perhaps for a production gig or a remix) I can direct them to literally hundreds of pieces of my work with 'social proof' attached to it in the form of known artists. The other option of course, is you can pay handsomely for their contributions by contacting their representatives."

Tribute Band To-Dos

"It's really important to be passionate about the artist you're tributing. It really shows if you're 'in it for the money' and most tribute bands don't come close to a financially

worthwhile career. For my part, I've always been incredibly inspired by Bowie in my own work as well as the fact that I feel honored to be given the opportunity to share his songs with other true fans. It's like having a chosen family who come to the shows."

"Both Bowie and Depeche Mode fans are of a certain ilk: generally thoughtful, kind, and with great music taste, of course! This has the incredible benefit that when they come to listen to my own work, they feel like they have found a new artist that really reflects the musical world of their favorites. This brings me and my own songs to many new fans, which is wonderful. One caveat: you have to view the performance in the tribute world as 'fan service' and an acting role. I have had to get used to being defined by my Bowie persona, which can be psychologically very challenging."

Getting Attention—From the 'Gram to the GRAMMYS

"I mainly use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, but I am so busy *making* music that promotion sometimes gets ignored or treated as an afterthought."

Honne/Tatemae is on the GRAMMYS ballot this year in a very over-full category: 'Best Alternative Album' which is a great honor. My prior record *Elysium*, was also on there, but it's a big leap to think that a fiercely independent artist with zero budget is going to beat a fully financially supported 'signed' artist whose label can afford the double page spread in *Billboard* or the Sunset Boulevard posters with a long running TikTok viral campaign."

"I do have the advantage of supporting Strangelove live with my original project, which enables me to play live to thousands of people rather than the traditional five people and the bartenders. I was recently very honored to be asked to open up our show at the Wiltern with Stabbing Westward and there were so many of my friends and new fans there."

Love, Anger, and Heartbreak on Record

"People contemplate their pain more easily than they contemplate their joy. Because if you're experiencing joy, you just experience it. If you're experiencing pain, there's a lot of stuff that goes along with that. There's self-doubt. There's reflectiveness. And there's catharsis. There's one song on the new album, which is my angry song. I haven't written any angry songs in the past, and it's called 'Malicious Intent.' A man wiser than I once said, 'If a snake bites you, you should never go and chase the snake to ask why it bit you. You should just write a fucking song about it.'"

Visit julianshahtaylormusic.com.

Taylor Swift

The Life of a Showgirl

Republic Records

Producers: Max Martin, Shellback, Taylor Swift

It's back to the drawing board for Taylor Swift as *The Life of a Showgirl* doesn't live up to her captivating popstar persona. Her 12th studio album starts off strong as "The Fate of Ophelia" and "Elizabeth Taylor" feature the sort of interesting pop hooks and storytelling that Swift is known for. Sonically, the album is cohesive but as it goes on it starts to fall apart. The main problem is the songwriting. The lyrics sound like first drafts, it's clunky and wordy. Swift has a lot to say but not enough room to fit it all in. - **Jacqueline Naranjo**



John McFee, Stu Cook, Keith Knudsen

Jackdaw

Liberation Hall

Producers: John McFee, Jackdaw

Behold the cover: That vampyric Pomeranian has gone straight for the jugular, and what's left? The sweet drippings of rock 'n' roll revived. Featuring Stu Cook (of Creedence Clearwater Revival) and John McFee and Keith Knudsen (of The Doobie Brothers), the album blends southern rock, swamp pop, and rootsy grooves with effortless harmonies. - **Ruby Risch**



Doja Cat

Vie

Kemosabe and RCA Records

Producers: Various

A fitting love letter to '80s R&B and dance-pop, Doja Cat's fifth studio album, *Vie*, is one of her most exciting and romantic albums to date. The album draws inspiration from powerhouse artists like Janet Jackson and Madonna. The tracks are overflowing with personality and ambition. "AAHH MEN!" and "Silly! Fun!" highlight her signature wit and unfiltered songwriting, while the interesting inflections on "Stranger" and experimental synth sound of "One More Time" showcase Doja's growth as a singer. Doja plays to her strengths as the low-tempo sounds of *Vie* perfectly compliment her raspy vocals. - **Jacqueline Naranjo**



Rosy Nolan

Main Attraction

Rosy Nolan / Treble in Mind Music

Producer: Rosy Nolan

Rosy Nolan is faithfully keeping country traditions alive with *Main Attraction*. These tracks evoke the old country canon without pretension and while few moments feel truly daring or unique, the execution rarely falters. The standout "Dead on the Vine" epitomizes Nolan's strength: a bittersweet narrative wrapped in traditional instrumentation. At its best, the record is a solid homage to country's roots; at its weakest, it hesitates to take risks. Still, for fans of pure, unvarnished country, there's much to like. - **Ruby Risch**



Dark Angel

Extinction Level Event

Reversed Records

Producer: Rob Shallcross

Now this is exciting. SoCal thrash metal band Dark Angel formed back in 1981, yet *Extinction Level Event* is only their fifth studio album. To be fair, they took breaks between '92 and '02, and again between '05 and 2013. But Dark Angel is properly firing on all cylinders now, thanks in no small part to the pile-driving power of metal drummer extraordinaire Gene Hoglan (also of Death, Testament, Strapping Young Lad). Ron Rinehart's vocals have never sounded so gloriously mangled and gnarly as they do on the title track and "Circular Firing Squad." Turns out, this was worth the wait. - **Brett Callwood**



Sofia Gillani

Pieces of Me

Frequency Records

Producer: Dr. Krane

A blend of pop, soul, and R&B are the flavors of London based singer/songwriter Sofia Gillani's new release. Though inspired by artists like Adele and Ariana Grande, her sound is grittier with considerably more edge. The album kicks off with "Horizons," with its message of renewed energy and a positive outlook towards the future. "Read Your Mind," confronts the frustration of uncertainty in a relationship. Throughout the album, Gillani seems to be grappling with ways to gain control and take back what should be rightfully hers. - **Ellen Woloshin**



GG Magree

Spit Love

Rise Records/BMG

Producer: Duncan Murray

"Objectify me 'cos it makes you feel powerful," GG Magree exclaims in "Sex," on an album that celebrates female empowerment and sex-positivity. There are industrial elements mixed in with the synth-pop; songs such as "Bleed" have a BDSM vibe, Magree purring but letting everyone know that she's in charge. - **Brett Callwood**



Matisyahu

Ancient Child

SoundOn

Producers: Various

Matisyahu has always served up forward-thinking raps atop reggae rhythms. That remains true here, though this album goes full chill mode, dropping the heavier, rock-oriented aspect of his sound in favor of poppy transcendence. Drinking in these powerful rhymes and gravity-defying beats is like microdosing while exploring an uninhabited tropical paradise. - **Andy Kaufmann**



To be considered for review in the Album Reviews section, you must have a record deal with a major label or an independent label with an established distributor. If you do not, please see our New Music Critiques section.



"Music Connection is consistently the best source for how to make records and sustain a career in music."

- Greg Wells,
producer, songwriter-musician
(Katy Perry, Panic!, Adele)

MUSIC CONNECTION

JESS JOCOY
CUL-DE-SACK KID
new album out now



"Jess Jocoy's songwriting is too good to remain in the shadows."

- Saving Country Music



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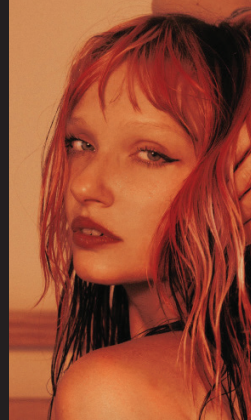
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IN PERSON ATTENDANCE RSVP:
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Robin Young

Contact: campbell@milestonecollective.com

Web: robinyoungmusic.com

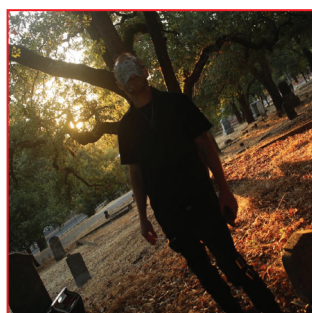
Seeking: Label, Distribution

Style: Folk/Americana

Berklee-trained songwriter Robin Young has been writing songs since she was eight, and that lifelong passion shines through her folk/Americana sound. Drawing lyrical inspiration from Joni Mitchell, she tempers introspection with a soft country warmth that feels timeless and sincere. Songs like "Brooklyn" and "There's a Part of Me" reveal her gift for crafting quietly stirring, confessional pieces that never tip into indulgence. Young's music is marked by thoughtful craftsmanship, emotional clarity, and an understated grace—qualities that suggest she's just beginning to tap into her full potential. She's the kind of artist you find yourself rooting for right away.

Production	8
Lyrics	9
Music	8
Vocals	8
Musicianship	8

SCORE 8.2



Austin Spence

Contact: subgenrerecords666@gmail.com

Web: austinspence.bandcamp.com/album/sect-of-the-triple-six-demo

Seeking: Film/TV, Booking, Label

Style: Darkwave/Goth

Austin Spence's "Sect of the Triple Six" unfurls like a fog-drenched darkwave dirge—slow, brooding, cinematic. It's challenging to tackle such an immersive and atmospheric style, and in the end, it's a touch too unvaried; the songs vulture-circle rather than soar, lingering in similar moods without much contrast. The eerie restraint works in moments, but without melodic evolution or dynamic peaks, it risks monotony. Still, the vision is clear—he's cultivating a world, not just a sound. With more melodic variation and structural tension, Spence could transform that haunting murmur into something fully spellbinding.

Production	6
Lyrics	6
Music	6
Vocals	6
Musicianship	7

SCORE 6.2



Léah Duque

Contact: leahhuerto@gmail.com

Web: instagram.com/leahduqueh

Seeking: Streams

Style: Pop, R&B

On paper, Duque has everything in place to succeed. The production is impeccable, her voice is captivating, and the dream-pop, synthy sound is super-contemporary and utterly current. There's a lot to like, yet it takes a hit when it comes to the songwriting. "Pleasure" has been submitted to us twice, the original and the a cappella version, yet neither version is memorable enough to leave any sort of an impression. It feels like Portishead, Beth Orton, Dido and perhaps Goldfrapp are valid reference points, and Duque has a lot to work with. But the songs just have to be better.

Production	8
Lyrics	7
Music	6
Vocals	7
Musicianship	7

SCORE 7.0



Zoe

Contact: zoeofficial@gmail.com

Web: zoeemusic.com

Seeking: Film/TV, Label, Management, Booking

Style: Country-Pop

According to her online bio, Zoe journeyed from Tasmania to Nashville in order to realize her country music dreams. "Growing up diving for abalone and crayfish, she once dreamed of being a dirt bike racer—until she found her true calling in a shipping container filled with her parents' vinyl collection," it reads. It was certainly worth the effort; Zoes's brand of pop-country might be heavy on the sweet melodies but it's anything but superficial. The lyrics to "I Could Complain" and "Red Flags" in particular are oozing with authentic life experiences. Zoe is for real.

Production	8
Lyrics	8
Music	7
Vocals	8
Musicianship	8

SCORE 7.8



Firefly

Contact: iamfarahmitha@gmail.com

Web: iamfirefly.com/music

Seeking: Management, Agent, Label

Style: World Pop

According to her bio, Firefly, AKA Farah Mitha, is the founder of Firefly World, a "youth empowerment enterprise [that] leverages music, technology, and social media to help young people develop healthy emotional coping skills while curating inspirational experiences worldwide." Pair that mission-driven vision with her magnetic music—infectious beats, versatile vocals, and a knack for making listeners move—and you get a compelling artist on the rise. While more instrumental experimentation could further elevate her sound, Firefly already shines with warmth, rhythm, and purpose, glowing bright in the world-pop lane and hinting at even bigger things ahead.

Production	8
Lyrics	7
Music	7
Vocals	8
Musicianship	8

SCORE 7.6



Minaxi

Contact: minaxitheband@gmail.com

Web: minaxitheband.com

Seeking: Booking, Film/TV

Style: Shoegaze, Psychedelic Rock, Hindustani Music

Absolutely fascinating. Brooklyn-based band Minaxi have taken upon themselves to blend shoegaze and psychedelic rock with Hindustani (Northern Indian classical) music, and the results are staggering. Hypnotic and ambient, the sound is chill in the classic psych-rock style, but it also feels spiritual and frankly gorgeous. "Minaxi's vision is as bold as its execution. The band seamlessly integrates elements of Hindustani and Sufi music with the guitar-driven angst of psychedelia, the shimmering textures of shoegaze and ambient music, and the emotionally raw ethos of Midwest emo," they say.

Production	8
Lyrics	8
Music	9
Vocals	8
Musicianship	8

SCORE 8.2

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.



Gianluca Zanna

Contact: zanna@zanna.us

Web: YouTube

Seeking: Booking, Distribution

Style: EDM, Rock, Pop

Gianluca Zanna says that he's known for creating "unforgettable songs with music and lyrics that touch your heart and awaken your mind". Fair enough. His blend of electronic music and synth-pop in particular results in a sound that is very '90s dance-pop. The likes of C&C Music Factory burst into the mind when listening to a song like "You Are My Destiny," featuring the vocal stylings of one Claudette Lyons. That said, it's actually a breath of fresh air to hear some dance-pop like this. It's been a while, and Anna's tunes are well-executed and beautifully produced.

Production	9
Lyrics	7
Music	7
Vocals	7
Musicianship	7

SCORE 7.4



Dilyara

Contact: campbell@milestonecollective.com

Web: voiceofgalaxies.com

Seeking: Label, Booking

Style: Cinematic, World Music

"Dilyara is an extraordinary sonic phenomenon whose vocal range spans an astonishing 5.5 octaves," reads her bio. "Her innate ability to move effortlessly across frequencies allows her to create sounds that reach deep into the human soul." Never have truer words been spoken. Dilyara's cinematic, epic and gloriously huge is instantly compelling, and it only gets better when she starts singing. Her voice is an instrument, and one that she has full command over. The results, on songs such as "Eden" and "The Cosmic Mother," are quite beautiful. Spiritual and almost unearthly. That's a rare talent.

Production	8
Lyrics	8
Music	8
Vocals	9
Musicianship	8

SCORE 8.2



Charlie Kogen

Contact: bob@bradleypublicity.com

Web: charliekogenmusic.com

Seeking: Film/TV, Booking

Style: Indie Rock

Having "began writing songs at 13" and already earned National YoungArts honors and Kennedy Center performances, Los Angeles native Charlie Kogen writes with the poise and insight of someone someone twice his age. The singer-songwriter, producer, and multi-instrumentalist crafts tracks brimming with subtle groove and a natural sense of soul. His vocals carry warmth and ease, while songs like "Comfort in the Pain" reveal a storyteller's instinct—effortlessly rhythmic and emotionally grounded. Kogen doesn't just sing; he sketches moments that linger, finding beauty in reflection and grace in restraint.

Production	8
Lyrics	8
Music	7
Vocals	7
Musicianship	8

SCORE 7.6



The Legendary Ten Seconds

Contact: legendarytenseconds@gmail.com

Web: linktr.ee/legendarytenseconds

Seeking: Label

Style: Singer-songwriter

The Legendary Ten Seconds could very well be *Schoolhouse Rock*'s eccentric cousin. Their goal, as they say, is "keeping history alive through story-driven songs that resonate with modern listeners," even if that puts them outside mainstream playlists. Their whimsical, educational tracks brim with historical narratives and playful textures, making each listen unique. That said, this writer suspects their audience may be limited to renaissance fairs and history buffs. Still, for those willing to embrace the quirk, Ten Seconds offers a charmingly offbeat musical lesson with personality to spare.

Production	6
Lyrics	6
Music	6
Vocals	6
Musicianship	7

SCORE 6.2



JESSE!

Contact: jesse.azriel16@gmail.com

Web: Spotify

Seeking: Exposure

Style: Pop, Rock, Rap, Reggaeton

According to his Spotify bio, JESSE! makes "songs about Jesus and a wife I don't have." That's a telling line. The genre-blending artist cares deeply about his faith, clearly. That's apparent in the crunchy "Please Come Down," and "My Heaven." But the fact that he's looking for love, and is willing to make himself vulnerable—that makes for fascinating lyrical content. "I Are" is perhaps his most interesting tune, but it also highlights the fact that his sound is a little all over the place. No matter, his talent is obvious, and he's got time to iron out the creases.

Production	7
Lyrics	7
Music	7
Vocals	7
Musicianship	8

SCORE 7.2



Jess Jocoy

Contact: campbell@milestonecollective.com

Web: jessjocoy.com

Seeking: Label, Booking

Style: Country/Folk

Nashville's Jess Jocoy reminds us what country music is meant to feel like—authentic, soulful, and grounded in story. On "Cul-de-Sac Kid," she sings, "I have to believe country needs a country song from a cul-de-sac kid like me," and she's absolutely right. Her vocals carry lived-in wisdom and her lyrics resonate with honesty and heart. Tracks like "You Sure Showed Me" and "I Could Live On That Alone" showcase a natural twang and folkly nuance, making every note feel intentional. Jocoy's music isn't showmanship—it's genuine storytelling that lingers long after the song ends.

Production	8
Lyrics	9
Music	8
Vocals	9
Musicianship	9

SCORE 8.6

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.

Sony Music Hall New York, NY

Contact: monica@thinkpress.net

Web: anapopovic.com

Players: Ana Popovic, lead vocals, guitar; Buthel, bass; Jeremy Thomas, keyboards; Kevin Jones, drums; Traci Nelson, backing vocals; Skyler Jordan, backing vocals

ANA POPOVIC IS QUITE the force to be reckoned with. Under the umbrella of rock, her unique blend of contemporary blues, soul, and jazz combined with her powerful but refined vocals come together in a way that keeps you riveted.

Nominated for seven Blues Music awards, Bruce Springsteen has referred to her as "one helluva guitar-player." She has also shared the stage with acts like B.B. King, Joe Bonamassa, and Gary Clark Jr. Though her forte is her guitar playing, the songs and performance all meld into one cohesive statement.

Sometimes sassy, sometimes cynical, the songs are always direct and unsentimental in their message. In "Slow Dance," a would-be suitor sets his sights on his mark but as the song admonishes: "It's just a slow dance/ not a romance/you know you've got one chance/it's just a slow dance." "California Chase" is a look at a promised land that often disappoints; a place where people go to chase their dreams but often fall prey to the dark side: "You better hustle for a living/skid row is unforgiving/when they just won't go your way/they change colors like the sunset sky/the city of angels but the devil's alive...

California Chase." Sometimes her songs are fueled by, as she states, "angry moments," but they always maintain an objectivity that doesn't get swept up in over-the-top emotion.

While Popovic never fully relinquishes the spotlight, everyone in the band still has the chance to shine. The way the elements are woven together never upstages what other band members contribute. Their timing is impeccable, and the grooves are right in the pocket.

A refreshing aspect of her artistry is her refusal to kowtow to what she refers to as "the rock police" and "blues police," who demand

a certain amount of purity to be considered fully accepted in their genre. She describes her writing as more of a conduit to her live shows which is her main musical focus. An added plus in the set might have been to hear the band's take on a big cover in their genre alongside like-minded songs.

It's evident that exhaustive touring has paid off for Popovic and her band. They are not only top shelf musicians, but they understand how to keep an audience engaged. Ana Popovic might serve as an inspiration especially to women who might want to follow in her footsteps. - **Ellen Woloshin**



ANA POPOVIC

Photo: Mark Shwartz



BUDDY MILES BIRTHDAY SHOW

The Cutting Room New York, NY

Contact: fiona@thebloomeffect.com

Web: jamesbiscuitrouse.com

Players: James Biscuit Rouse, producer, drummer, vocals; V. Jeffery Smith, woodwinds; Igmar Thomas, brass; Mark Bowers, electric guitar; Shelly Spruill, electric bass

IN N.Y.C.'S PLUSH Cutting Room theater, James Biscuit Rouse invited artists and fans

to celebrate one of his personal heroes—the late Buddy Miles. At the end of 2024, Rouse released a tribute album, *Biscuit and Buddy*, honoring Miles' legacy. A drummer himself, Rouse brought his personal flair to Miles' iconic repertoire.

Before the performance, a distinguished panel briefly assembled on stage. Led by Billy Amendola and Maria Malito, artists Vernon Reid, Marcus Machado, Corky Laing, Liberty Devitto, and Will Calhoun gathered to offer personal

tributes to Buddy Miles. To them, he was larger than life, equal parts legendary and notorious. They took turns sharing personal anecdotes, reminiscing on instances when Miles inspired them or made them laugh. It set a warm and reverent tone for the rest of the night.

To bring Miles' music to life, Rouse assembled an all-star team of musicians. Alongside featured musicians Mark Bowers, Igmar Thomas, V. Jeffery Smith, and Shelly Spruill, special guests Vernon Reid, Marcus Machado, and Arden Altino made notable appearances onstage.

As the drummer and vocalist, Rouse was tasked with anchoring the group, providing a solid foundation for other instrumentalists to layer their sound. Rouse's drums fluidly flexed different muscles across the set, driving energy, adding funk accents, or getting the audience on their feet. Supported by drums, the guitar and bass lines soared. The bassline remained a steady force, grooving through and deepening the colors.

Throughout the evening, Rouse welcomed guest guitarists Machado and Reid, and keys player Altino, to the stage. Machado played first, bringing a clean, rock tone to his solos. Reid followed, casting swirling runs over other layers. At one point, both guests returned to join Bowers. Despite the potential for overcrowding, all artists maintained a laidback stage presence, giving space for their talent to draw listeners into the fold. - **Emily Mills**

The 5 Spot Nashville, TN

Contact: ernienickelsmusic@gmail.com

Web: ernienickels.com

Players: Andrew Kahl, drums; Luca Wilbur, guitar; Ernie Nickels, guitar, lead vocals; Will Harris, bass; Ayla Stone, guest vocals

THERE'S A BENEFIT FOR any musician growing up in the jam scene. It means the individual will be immersed in a wide array of genres, causing a thick bouillabaisse of savory sounds and creative inspirations to take hold deep within the artist. That's certainly true for Ernie Nickels, who spent his formative years amid Connecticut's flourishing jam band culture. Living in territories as diverse as Brooklyn, Dallas, and Honolulu undoubtedly contributed further to his affinity for a wide selection of musical styles.

Take, for example, the dynamic set that took place one September night in his current base of Nashville. It launched with an acoustic cover of "Wild Horses" by The Rolling Stones; the number featured additional vocals from Ayla Stone, who had just served as opener. Nickels then went electric as the rest of his band joined him on stage and launched into an original song, alternative rocker "Mourning Light." Subsequent covers included a take on Marty Robbins' "Devil Woman," which delivered a classy (as well as local) touch of country flair, and a version of Martha & The Vandellas' "Dancing in the Street" so funky it would have made Sly Stone proud.

All of his unique compositions are equally delightful. "Rainbow Revival" is a tasty mix of surf and grunge. "All in All" delivers a dash of Southern rock flair, while "Comfort Colors"



ERNIE NICKELS

puts prismatic strumming front and center. The evening finished with "hangin' round," a true showstopper that showcased the front man's guitar pyrotechnics. It must also be mentioned that the rest of the group remains perfectly in sync, both with their bandleader and each other. Nickels' weakest factor is his vocals. While perfectly admirable, he doesn't display enough power or quirkiness to be

labeled an iconic singer.

Nickels could level up by refining elements such as describing the meanings behind his songs, cracking jokes, introducing the band, etc., but the meat of what he offers, his musical oeuvre, is already pure gold. Behold, a sonic soul who's more than capable of making audiences feel rich in spirit. - **Andy Kaufmann**



KELLIE ROSE

Hotel Café Los Angeles, CA

Contact: jonathan.sosis@gmail.com

Web: kellierose.com

Players: Kellie Rose, vocals, guitar

YOU CAN WALK INTO THE Hotel Café, either of the venue's stages, on any given night and be assured of seeing some quality musicians. The people who book the artists there really do a stellar job, but what that does mean is

that a musician has to be quite spectacular to stand out. And that's tough when, in most cases, the general format is to simply stand or sit at a mic with a guitar. The songs carry all the weight. Fortunately, Kellie Rose has them by the bucketload.

Rose is a singer, songwriter, producer, and musician based out of Seattle. "Using her voice, a looping pedal and acoustic guitar, she intricately layers vocals, percussion, and strings producing

a performance that might be mistaken for a pre-recorded show," her bio reads. "With vocals characterized by soulful tones, powerful delivery, and an impressive range, create a captivating experience as Kellie Rose illuminates the room with warmth and genuine human connection."

All of that was apparent when Rose took her seat on the Hotel Café's second stage on a late August evening. Before she could get

started, she had to record her loops, live and in person. No games, no tricks—Rose lets everyone in on some tricks of the trade, like an acoustic Penn and Teller.

But even then, even while getting prepared, she's a charismatic and likeable presence. Rose jokes with the crowd, interacts with humility and charm, while simultaneously, somehow, amping up the anticipation. When she does get going, the set was worth the wait. "Dive In" appears to be a very real and relatable song about relationships—taking the rough with the smooth and putting the work in.

Elsewhere, some of her tunes have a country twang and a drinking theme. She effortlessly switches from vulnerable to "hell hath no fury like a woman in her stride." All the while, she has those live loops going, her guitar playing impeccable and her voice emotive.

It makes for a wonderful combination and a compelling set. Towards the end, she plays a delicious R&B medley that includes "No Scrubs" and "Waterfalls," and those TLC classics provide the sort of singalong job that the show needed to end on an appropriate high note.

You have to be better than great to stand out at the Hotel Café, and Kellie Rose was. - **Brett Callwood**

Hotel Café Los Angeles, CA

Contact: wendy@hellowendy.com

Web: maiasharp.com

Players: Maia Sharp, vocals, guitar; David Carpenter, bass; Garrison Starr, backing vocals; Haleigh Bowers, backing vocals

WITH A CAREER THAT STRETCHES over three decades, Maia Sharp released her 10th solo studio album, *Tomboy*, this year. 20 years ago, this writer reviewed her third album, 2005's *Fine Upstanding Citizen* for a U.K. publication and wrote "The themes that Sharp explores are feelings that most people have experienced, and for that reason it's an album that will have an impact on anyone who lets it into their lives."

It was true then, and it's true now. Sharp has a gift for molding her life experiences, emotions and thoughts into deeply personal pieces of work that are also utterly relatable. In *MC's* review of *Tomboy* in last month's issue, the writer said that it "exudes charm and warmth," and that's true too. From the moment she sets foot onto the Hotel Café's second stage and does a quick tune up, she exudes the sort of calm warmth that is utterly compelling before she's even played a note.

There's no "show" to Sharp's performance. She's a singer-songwriter-guitarist, and so

she'll stand on stage while singing and playing the songs that she has written. Dry ice and pyrotechnics would just be freaking weird.

And yet it did feel like we were witnessing a proper performance, thanks in no small part to Sharp's gift of the gab.

Sharp metaphorically takes us by the hand and guides through her arsenal of journal entries set to music, by her gentle banter between songs or through the welcoming, inclusive nature of her lyrics. Sharp has relocated from Los Angeles to Nashville, but she clearly still has a core group of friends and fans who are delighted to see her perform.

She shows her teeth when she wants to, though. "Junkyard Dog" tells the tale of a previous relationship that left Sharp feeling less than hunky-dory. "I thought I was the queen of your castle, turns out I'm just your junkyard dog," Sharp sings over a bluesy riff, the song dripping with pain and resentment.

"Kind," meanwhile, is the opposite—a joyful, hyper-positive sing-along that features the line, "My kinda people are kind... if you have a



good heart that's a good start, if you wanna be a friend of mine."

Life is like that—it drags us through the full gamut of emotions, and Sharp provides a soundtrack. — **Brett Callwood**



The Granada Theatre Santa Barbara, CA

Contact: tperry@shorefire.com

Web: samarajoy.com

Players: Samara Joy, vocals; Connor Rohrer, piano; David Mason, alto saxophone, flute; Kendrick McCallister, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; Alexandra Ridout, trumpet; Donavan Austin, trombone; Conway Campbell, bass; Evan Sherman, drums

CELEBRATING THE RELEASE of her third full-length album, *Portrait* (which she co-produced with GRAMMY-winning trumpeter-bandleader Brian Lynch), Samara Joy performed to an adoring crowd at Santa Barbara's Granada Theatre. 2021's self-titled debut received critical acclaim and 2022's *Linger Awhile* received a GRAMMY Award for Best Jazz Vocal Album. 2023's EP, *A Joyful Holiday* took home two 2025 GRAMMY Awards for Best Jazz Vocal Album

and Best Jazz Performance, and the new album has already received an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Album. Joy's extraordinary live show leaves no question as to reason for the accolades. At just 25 years old, Joy's breath control, vocal decoration and subtle command of the stage are *incredible*.

Kicking things off with bandmember/tenor saxophonist Kendrick McCallister's arrangement of Thelonius Monk's "Round Midnight," Joy shared an impressive combination of contrasting dynamics and rhythmic timing before Connor Rohrer launched into a beautiful piano solo. With a seven-piece backing band that followed her every move, the show felt more like the live orchestration in an old movie theatre than an intimate presentation. *A glorious painting of sound*.

Launching into a Latin rendition of Betty Carter's "Beware My Heart," Joy's trademark melismatic sprinklings were on full display

(accompanied by David Mason on the flute), seamlessly running through her full vocal range. Alexandra Ridout and David Mason added exceptional decorative solos on the trumpet and alto saxophone. Original "Three Little Words" was recorded alongside their latest album (although not included on the project), showcasing the group's tight cutoffs, offbeat accents, contagious energy, and featuring Donavan Austin on the trombone. Thick, molasses-sounding "A Fool In Love Is Called a Clown" (composed by Austin) followed with more of a traditional big band backing sound, with the gentle comforting sway of "You Stepped Out of a Dream" (Nacio Herb Brown/Gus Kahn) as the follow up.

An upbeat version of Carmen McRae's "The Little Things That Mean So Much" (Theodore Wilson/Harold Adamson) appeared before Joy took the room to church on syrupy "Come Sunday" (Duke Ellington). Sharing fabulous, little-known (and never-recorded) Billie Holiday song "Left Alone" (Billie Holiday/Mel Waldron) came next, showcasing Joy's phenomenal octave leaps and vibrato control, and reminding all in attendance of what makes Joy's voice so indelible (also featuring Kendrick McCallister on bass clarinet). The group closed the night with delicious muted horns and offbeat rhythms on Antônio Carlos Jobim's bossa nova "No More Blues," before returning for an encore rendition of Count Basie/Joe Williams' blues number "Five O'Clock In The Morning" (George M. Cohan) that left the audience happy and satiated.

With fantastic solos dotted throughout the evening, powerful band cutoffs, and unexpected vocal lines, Joy and her band delivered a phenomenal showcase of original sound, while bowing deeply to the traditional jazz influences that brought them together. — **Andrea Beenham**

Shakori Hills Art Center *Pittsboro, NC*

Contact: shakorihillsgassrootsfest.org

Web: shakorihillsgassrootsfest.org

Players: Various

DON'T PACK AWAY THAT tie-dye just yet. For nearly two decades, the Shakori Hills Music Festival has been a twice-yearly rite of passage in North Carolina—a colorful gathering of roots, rhythm, and rural soul. But the Fall 2025 edition felt more like a comfortable rerun than a revelation. Same as it ever was—just more so.

Donna the Buffalo opened the weekend on Thursday, as they have since the festival's founding, setting the familiar tone. What followed was a steady flow of polished, bluegrass-tinged and folk-inspired acts—competent, easygoing, and predictably safe. Fiddles, harmonies, and one or two original songs dotted the sets. Local performers were well slotted, and a few managed to stand out: Ric Robertson was a genuine treat, while The Tan and Sober Gentlemen were equal parts head-scratcher and hoedown—strange, but irresistibly fun.

The Vicious Fishes deserve honorable mention for the name alone, offering a refreshing detour from the standard festival sound. But that highlights the central issue here: plenty of acts, plenty of variety, plenty of players—yet no spark to unite them. There was no clear torchbearer saying, “Follow us—this is where it's headed.”

Friday's lineup stayed full but scattered. The Deacon Band brought some energy, and a newcomer called “New Planets” turned heads



during their set. As evening settled in, the crowd thickened, and for a moment, it felt as if Shakori might finally slip into its groove—stretching out, shaking off the dust, and becoming its own circus midway. Almost.

By Saturday, the focus shifted from music to spectacle. The “Paperhand and Bulltown Strutters Parade” added color and nostalgia, a nod to the countercultural spirit of Wavy Gravy, The Merry Pranksters, and The Hog Farm. It was comforting to see that lineage carried forward—just not particularly groundbreaking.

A few names still shone through the haze. David Childers remains a master craftsman and heavyweight songwriter, his set a lesson in

lyrical precision and grit. The Shoaldiggers—a local legend known to frequent Nash Street and The Cat's Cradle—delivered a lively, grounded performance that reminded everyone why roots music endures.

But with four stages and dozens of acts, it was surprising how often the weekend felt “safe.” Given the festival's roots in Donna the Buffalo's Southern Tier and Ithaca scene, one expected a little more risk, a little more chaos, a little more soul fire.

In the end, Shakori Hills 2025 was friendly, familiar, and well-run—just missing that jolt of inspiration that turns a good gathering into something unforgettable. — **Eric Sommer**



Baby's All Right *Brooklyn, NY*

Contact: tvodmusic@gmail.com

Web: tvodmusic.com

Players: Tyler Wright, vocals; Jenna Mark, synth, vocals; Denim Casmir, guitar; Serge Zbritzher, guitar; Elizabeth Wakefield, bass; Michael Karson, drums

ON A WARM AUGUST NIGHT, TVOD (AKA Television Overdose) hosted a release party for their new album, *Party Time*, in their hometown of Brooklyn. They packed Baby's All Right from wall to wall with fans, supported by fellow Brooklynites Balaclava and Atlanta's CDSM as

show openers. Happily on their home turf, TVOD went all out to entertain the crowd.

With six members, TVOD boasts an imposing stage presence. Main vocalist Tyler Wright fluidly alternated between impassioned, gritty shouts and melodic, lyrical lines depending on the track. Although it never overpowers the instrumentals, his voice sat out in front, assertive and commanding. Jenna Mark, primarily on synthesizer, took the mic for one track, bringing a Y2K punk twist that the audience adored. While on synth, Mark shifted between moody, thrumming backdrops or bubbly dance beats. Wakefield's bass droned on behind, deepening the tracks' color, while technically complex

guitar riffs from Casmir and Zbritzher frequently sliced through the wall of sound. Together, they all played off the rhythm set by Karson on the drums. Drawing influence from post-punk, metal, and pop punk, TVOD's repertoire allowed for an energetic and eclectic set.

At all times, the band was in full control of the show. Wright walked every inch of the stage, and they played with volume, lighting, and even laid down at one point. TVOD was dedicated to putting on a full show, never letting the energy dip. It was clear from start to finish that they were only interested in putting on a great show and having fun.

TVOD's connection with the crowd was palpable. Both the band and the crowd were part of the performance, feeding off each other's enthusiasm. Before certain tracks, TVOD shouted out lyrics, giving the room opportunities to participate in a call and response. Several attendees crowd surfed, eventually joined by Wright. Wright immersed himself in the audience a few times, even starting a song from the floor. Towards the end of the show, they invited attendees on stage for the song “Party Time,” fully leveling the room's dynamics.

After the show, TVOD took the show overseas, but will be returning to the U.S. for the last leg, finishing the tour at Evolution Festival in Missouri. Other festival performances this year included Rock en Seine, Pelpass Festival, and Brighton Psych Fest. Hopefully they will continue to tour throughout 2026, so be sure to keep an eye out. — **Emily Mills**

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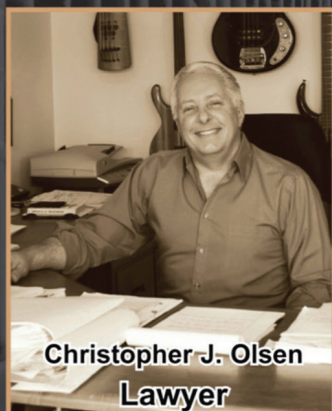
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Staying True To Yourself While Navigating Non-Stop Career Twists And Turns

My journey as a singer/songwriter and recording artist is a bit unconventional because changing life circumstances led me to perform in various genres at different times over the years before I found my current creatively fulfilling niche, which incorporates the jazz sensibilities of my family's roots into a soulful R&B/pop sound.

I found singing in the choir growing up in the Catholic church boring, but the experience taught me a lot about working with vocal harmonies that would come in handy later in my career. My dad Frank DiMeo, a popular jazz singer in the Buffalo area, was my first musical mentor, while my mom turned me on to Barbra Streisand. Music was an essential foundational part of growing up in my family. I was always in the school choir and took as many music classes as I could. Helping form a 16-piece swing group in high school, in which we sang everything from '60s to Broadway music, got me even more hooked and allowed me to sing my first solo song. I learned more about blending harmonies through a quartet I created as an offshoot. I had been writing music from the time I was 15 or 16 and when I started recording music in my 20s, I arranged a lot of my own harmonies.

Dreaming of becoming a professional singer came naturally to me in my teens and I was hoping to apply to several music colleges, hoping even that I would be accepted at Julliard, but my parents' separation and then divorce at that time made attending college out of the question. My dad was this 100 percent jazz guy, but when I started looking for opportunities to make a living in music, the greatest opportunities were in Top 40 cover bands. I was good at it and I could adapt to multiple styles in what was considered pop music - but doing it for a long time stripped me away from how I envisioned myself as an artist.

One of the musicians I worked with suggested I try singing country music, and I absolutely didn't want to—until I realized just how great female artists like Trisha Yearwood, Shania Twain, and Martina McBride were. I started out only wanting to sing a few country songs per set, then got better at it and I envisioned a potential road for me in the genre. I started singing the National Anthem at county fairs throughout New York state, and the Erie County Fair hired me to open for country legend George Jones. I took it seriously enough to record some music (I didn't write) in Nashville, and to this day some of the country I recorded plays in other countries throughout the world. Despite the diversity, every step took me one step closer to figuring out my musical identity.

I've always admired women who can balance busy musical careers with family life, but when



my husband and I decided to have children, raising them became my focus and I stepped away for a while. When the bug hit me again, as my son and daughter got a little older, I started teaching music at a Catholic school and even became a popular funeral singer. I seriously missed the stage, the lights, communicating with audiences and the passion I put into performing.

For my soul to survive, I knew I had to make some changes. Here's where the so-called "branding of DeeAnn" gets even trickier. I felt these deeper life experiences gave me a desire to sing something deeper and more soulful—and that led me to sing the blues! But I quickly realized that I couldn't sing the blues all night long, so I fell into jazz, which of course made my dad very happy! I incorporate those jazz experiences, including my ability to scat into some of the R&B/pop music I make today.

One of the biggest problems in not being true to myself was that I didn't believe I could be a songwriter, even though my musical journey started out that way as a teenager. Meeting my first producer RiShon Odel, who has worked a lot with renowned smooth jazz artists Najee and Brian Culbertson, made a huge difference in getting me back in touch with this side of my artistry. Just as my confidence was at a low ebb, I sent RiShon the melody and lyrics of a song I had just written, and he created an incredible arrangement that developed into "Stay Here with Me," which is to this day my all-time favorite original song I have released. He put so much soul into it. It was originally released on my 2019 live EP *Stay Here* and I released it as a single in 2024. I titled my debut album *Desperately Seeking DeeAnn*, first as a nod to the Madonna movie *Desperately Seeking Susan* but mostly because it captured the struggle of trying to find myself as an artist—and finally reconnecting with the vision I had for my life and career when I was younger before I joined all those cover bands. RiShon also produced my second album, *It's My Time*.

RiShon helped me believe in myself as a songwriter again and he brought my songs to life with some really dope musicians from his band Fifth Element who gave everything an R&B/gospel feel. The painful loss of my son William to a motorcycle accident has been a driving force for my artistry both spiritually and creatively because I sing much deeper and more soulfully and authentically, with so much emotion emerging from a place of pain. The albums I recorded with RiShon helped me lock in on who I am as an artist and taught me the value of not playing it safe. I bring the same blend of visceral emotion and freewheeling adventure to the three recent singles I recorded with my current

producer Ted Perlman that re-imagine three of my favorite songs, Al Green's "Simply Beautiful," Sade's "Kiss of Life," and Brenda Russell's "Piano on the Dark." I feel like those songs, and the originals Ted and I are working on for my upcoming full length album, are authentically me. It's been a long process, but I finally got here—and so can you!

TIP No. 1: Always stay true to yourself, be honest and follow your gut because you might have different people trying to pull you in various directions based on what they think they know about you. No matter what you may be doing to make a living in the music industry, if you have solid ideas in your head about who you are as an artist, be consistent and stay real as you develop your authentic style. Trust in who you are because audiences relate to you best when you're authentic and honest. They can tell when you're faking it or just going through the motions.

TIP No. 2: Use social media to share what drives and inspires you as an artist to connect in a deeper way with fans. Take them behind the scenes into your process and things that have happened in your life that give you stories to tell in your songs. Your fans may not want to be saddened by your pain all the time, but they do want to know what makes you create your music. It's also an opportunity to share other meaningful endeavors in your life. For me, that would include sharing the \$84,000 I have raised for a scholarship at my son William's alma mater, Canisius High in Buffalo, to fund national and international mission trips for male students.

TIP No. 3: Finding the right producers and collaborators to work with is essential in helping you discover who you are. RiShon Odel and Ted Perlman have believed in me and my talent even when I haven't. They bring their own experiences working with great artists into their work with me and I benefit not only from their musical brilliance but their life wisdom, which has helped take my own artistry to the next level.

Building off the success of her sultry breakthrough track "Stay Here With Me," DeeAnn's 2025 got off to an inspiring start with numerous accolades in the 10th Annual JazzBuffalo Poll honoring musical greats in her beloved hometown. She was awarded Jazz Female Vocalist of the Year, received the most votes for the still very popular *It's My Time* and was chosen runner up for the Most Memorable Performance and the John Hunt Jazz Artist of the Year Award. This extends a run of honors that began in her early days as a pop/rock singer, when she won Best Female Vocalist at the Buffalo Music Awards two years in a row.

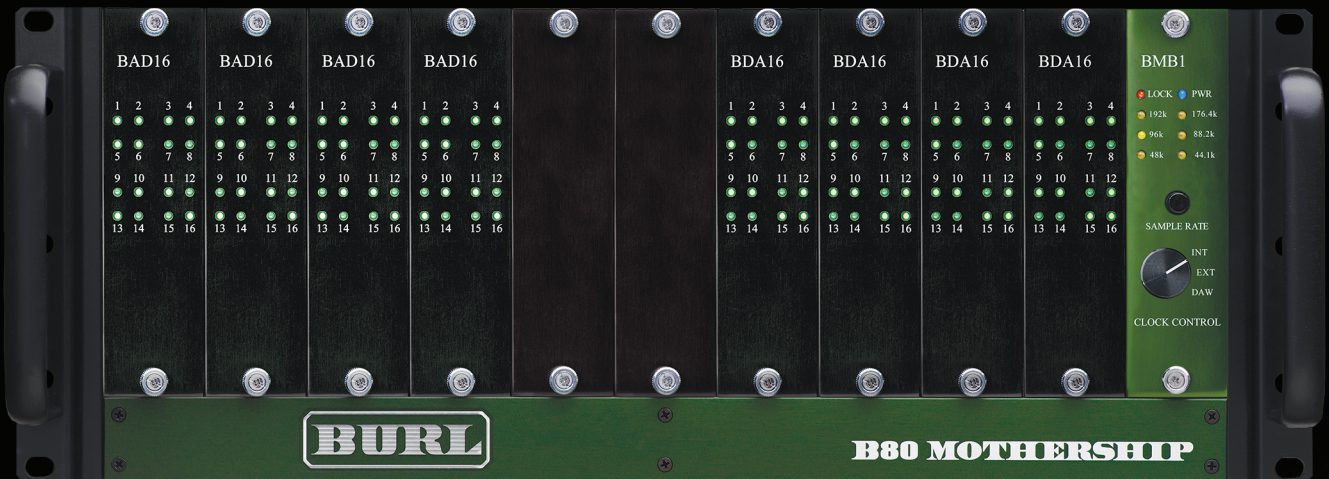
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