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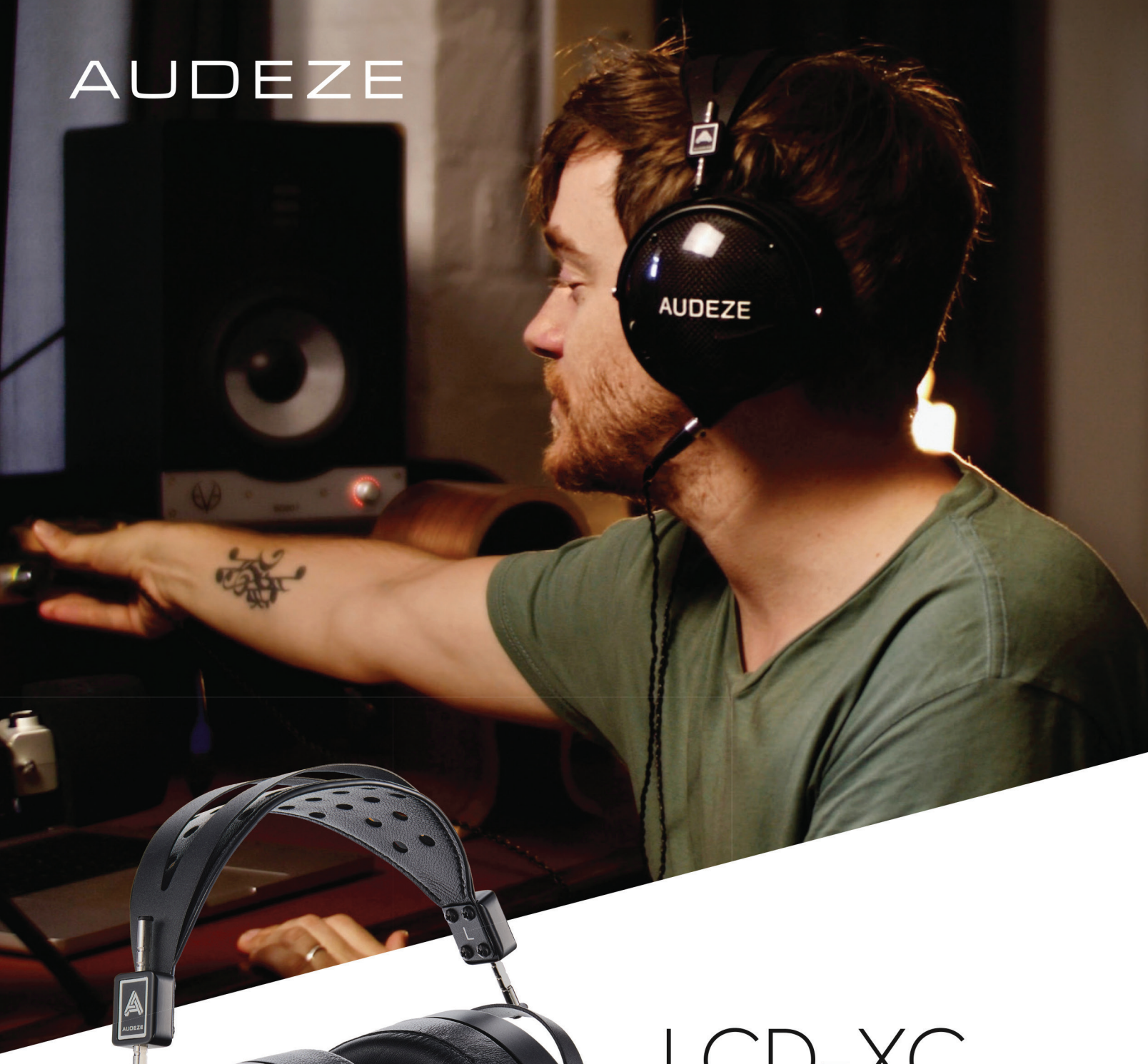
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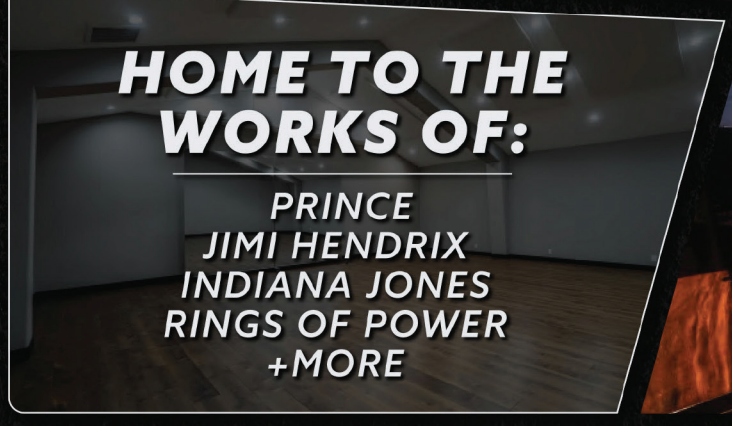
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Danny Griego/Freedom Horse Ranch

dannygriego.com
freedomhorseranch.info

Outlaw Country Artist Gallops Into Service: Danny Griego's musical journey has taken him from western saloons and the PRCA (Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association) circuit to Nashville songwriting sessions; recording with Hall of Fame legends such as Waylon Jennings. A Texas singer-songwriter whose music blends outlaw country, cowboy music, Americana and Latin influences, Griego spent years immersed in the close-knit cowboy community. While he owned Matt's Saloon in Prescott, AZ, he paid his dues, performed and developed his music throughout the Southwest. His eventual move to Nashville opened doors to legendary songwriters including Hank Cochran and Max D. Barnes, while a chance encounter led to his recording relationship with Jennings. Griego's demo of "At the Crossroads" reached Jennings through his producer Richie Albright, ultimately resulting in a recording featuring Jennings and members of his outlaw band. From there, he continued releasing music with studio cats from Jennings and Willie Nelson camps, most recently scoring top 10 Mediabase ranking with "Angelina" and currently, "Give It to Me Straight (Just Like Texas Whiskey)." Today, he says, "pretty much everything I do revolves around philanthropic efforts," as he uses his growing musical visibility to benefit people in need.

A Cowboy's Calling: Founded 2023 in Weatherford, TX, Griego's Freedom Horse Ranch 501(c)(3) (FHR) nonprofit is dedicated to improving the lives of veterans, first responders, and others facing physical, cognitive and emotional challenges through equine-related activities. The singer's



pursuits as a horseman—including years of working with horses while learning from legendary cowboys—eventually converged with his music via a longtime commitment to the military community. Through its Horse Warrior program FHR uses highly trained horses to help participants develop trust, communication, confidence, emotional regulation and practical coping skills. Griego has witnessed veterans arriving with enormous emotional burdens, then leaving FHR standing taller, energized and equipped with skills they can continue using. "All the roads in my life converged at Freedom Horse Ranch," he says, describing a place where the cowboy traditions that shaped him have become a powerful means of helping others heal.

Music With a Mission: Griego's advocacy for veterans is deeply personal. The loss of his World War II veteran grandfather has strengthened his resolve and performing at military installations has helped him to cultivate relationships. His 2018 project "Twenty-Two" addresses the veteran suicide crisis; while more recent work such as "Freedom" and "Thangs," co-written with Recon Marine Eddie Wright (about Wright's post battle experiences losing limbs in Fallujah), continues that commitment. FHR strategically partners with veteran organizations serving adaptive communities, allowing its Horse Warrior program to complement services that may not otherwise include horses. Griego is deliberately using the momentum of his current chart activity to introduce more people to the FHR mission. For an artist who has spent decades moving between music, business, cowboy culture and horsemanship, the convergence is remarkably natural. The songs create the audience, the ranch gives that audience somewhere meaningful to go, and both are ultimately about helping people find their way.

Contact Danny Griego, freedomsranch@outlook.com

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ASSIGNMENTS

Ivan Chen



CEO
BandLab Technologies

BandLab Technologies has announced the appointment of **Ivan Chen** as **Chief Executive Officer**. Meng Ru Kuok, who has served as Chairman and CEO since co-founding the company in 2015, becomes Executive Chairman. "Ivan has been closely involved with BandLab Technologies from its early years and has been a key contributor and partner in realizing our vision of making music creation more accessible for creators and artists around the world," said Kuok. "A decade on, this ambition has only grown and we are in the most dynamic and fast-moving period we have ever seen." For more, contact meg@rockpaperscissors.biz.

Noémie Lambert



Head of TuneCore, France
TuneCore

TuneCore—part of Believe, the Paris-based global artist development company—has named Noémie Lambert as the company's new Head of TuneCore, France. Lambert's role was announced jointly by Brian Miller, Chief Business Officer, TuneCore; and Basile Beaugendre, Regional Head of TuneCore, Europe, to whom she will report. Lambert commented, "Independent artists have never had more access to opportunities for success, but they have also never had to navigate a more complex industry to achieve success. I aim to solidify TuneCore as the first place French artists think of when they want to build a sustainable career." For more, contact john.graffo@believe.com.

Sonny Takhar



Chairman and CEO
Warner Music UK & Ireland

Warner Music Group (WMG) has announced the appointment of industry executive **Sonny Takhar** as **Chairman and CEO** of Warner Music UK & Ireland. Taking up the role in January 2027, Takhar will oversee creative direction, artist development, and strategic operations across WMG in the U.K., the world's third-largest music market, and Ireland. "I'm delighted to lead Warner Music UK & Ireland into its next chapter," said Takhar. "Drawing on my background across labels, management, publishing, and touring, I look forward to driving the business with spirit, ambition, innovation, and integrity." Contact communications@wmg.com.

Jay Sudarma



Vice President of Marketing
Music Services

Music Services, a division of SESAC Music Group, announced that Jay Sudarma has been named Vice President of Marketing for Music Services and CCLI Group, effective immediately. Sudarma steps into a new role as Vice President of Marketing for Music Services, alongside a promotion to Vice President of Marketing at CCLI Group, where he previously served as Director of Marketing. In this expanded capacity, he will lead global marketing strategy across both businesses, guide the division's forthcoming rebrand, and drive the global roll-out of its shared services platform. For more, contact jsmith@sesac.com.

Annie Christensen



VP, Catalogue
Warner Chappell Music UK

Warner Chappell Music UK (WCM UK) has announced the appointment of music executive **Annie Christensen** as **Vice President, Catalogue**. She will report into WCM UK President, Shani Gonzales. "Warner Chappell Music holds one of the most storied songbooks in music history, so it'll be a huge privilege to help lead the strategy that connects these classic songs to brand new audiences," Christensen said. "Having spent my career on the frontlines of A&R, I've gained a unique perspective on what truly resonates with fans." For more, contact communications@warnerchappell.com.

Andreea Gleeson



CEO
beatBread

beatBread has announced **Andreea Gleeson** has been appointed **Chief Executive Officer**. Gleeson, previously CEO of TuneCore, joins beatBread to accelerate commercial and international expansion and deepen partnerships across the independent music economy. "What drew me to beatBread is that Peter [Sinclair, founding CEO, sadly deceased] and this team solved a real problem for independent artists: how to access growth capital without giving up ownership or control," said Gleeson. "They've built sophisticated technology and a funding model that consistently gives artists more choice." For more, contact lynda@lyndadorf.com.

Coy Middlebrook



Artistic Director
Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts

Jean Davidson, Executive Director and CEO of the **Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts** (The Wallis), has announced the appointment of **Coy Middlebrook** as **Artistic Director**. "The opportunity before us is to think about the audience experience in a much broader way," said Middlebrook. "A performance can be a beginning rather than an endpoint—a way to open a door to a new artist, a newly discovered impulse to learn a new form of expression. Bringing artistic planning and education together gives us another powerful way to create those connections." For more, contact p.goldman@dcpublicity.com.

Paul Shaver



Senior Vice President, Business Development
SoundExchange

SoundExchange has announced the appointment of **Paul Shaver** as **Senior Vice President, Business Development**. In this role, he will lead efforts to identify strategic growth opportunities, expand partnerships, and position SoundExchange for the future of music. Shaver joins the SoundExchange executive team from the Canadian Musical Reproduction Rights Agency (CMRRA), reporting to President and Chief Executive Officer Michael Huppe. For more, contact jv@spinlab.net.

KALI AUDIO: PROJECT SANTA MONICA SM-8 POWERED 3-WAY STUDIO MONITORS



Kali Audio was founded in 2018 in Burbank, CA, by five former employees and industry veterans from JBL Professional. Kali was founded to achieve creative freedom to build high-performance audio gear with an aim to avoid corporate compromises. The company is named after the state of California ("Kali"), and every product line is named after a California town or city. Kali focuses on value engineering, delivering acoustic accuracy at accessible price points for musicians and engineers.

The top of the line in the Santa Monica series is the SM-8 powered 3-way studio monitor. Featuring an 8-Inch woofer, and a 4-Inch midrange with a coaxial 1-inch metal dome tweeter, the SM-8 looks like a two-way monitor system, but is cleverly engineered as a three-way system. This design further ensures time alignment and point-source phase coherency, an engineering standard. The transducers on the SM-8 are precision engineered for high dynamic range, smooth response, and low distortion. The SM-8 is designed to provide professional imaging, accuracy, and detail for critical mixing applications as a nearfield and midfield speaker set. Frequency Range is stated as (+/-3 dB) 45 Hz - 21 kHz with crossover points at LF-to-Midrange Crossover at 280 Hz and Midrange-to-HF Crossover at 2800 Hz. The SM-8 features 3 built-in Class D power amps per speaker enclosure. THD of the system is less than 0.5% and lower frequency response is 37 Hz at -10 dB. With 300 W of power, the SM-8 can deliver 119 dB peak SPL, making it capable of hitting 85 dB continuous output with 20 dB dynamic peaks from up to 4 meters away. The SM-8's are designed to be used at a 1m-5m distance.

Recording and mixing is a highly subjective creative art form. You can only address what you hear. With this in mind, the SM series speakers feature user-definable DSP for room calibration. The calibration for each speaker will be a little different, due to where they are placed in the room and how they interact with the room acoustics. Individually configurable, each speaker can process up to 8 parametric EQs, 12ms of delay and speaker trim from -12 dB to +6 dB. This allows you to tune the speakers for your room, delivering accurate monitoring that will translate without second guessing. DSP latency is <3ms. Kali Audio explicitly recommends the Earthworks M23R G2 omnidirectional measurement microphone, available at $549, for calibrating their SM series loudspeakers via the Kali Control Panel app. Kali Audio notes that the M23R is the only supported microphone for generating accurate target tuning files.

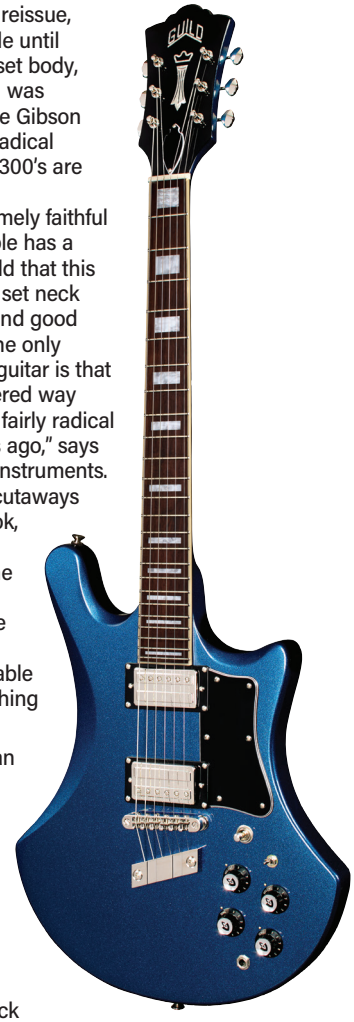
Kali has a distinct process for speaker calibration, supported by 14-minute video that describes 9 steps and pdf documentation. For a $50 per speaker fee, Kali can send you tuning files for your speakers based on your measurements. Early adopters of the SM-Series speakers who purchase an Earthworks M23R mic will have this fee waived for a limited time. You need to be reasonably technically inclined to accomplish this speaker tuning or hire someone that is, but the speakers also sound good without the room tuning, so while it's not a requirement to tune the SM's, it is an advantage.

MC tested a 5.1 surround setup in a film score mixing studio with three SM-8's for the LCR and two of the smaller Kali SM-5 speakers for the LS/RS. The studio's existing active subwoofer was retained. The room was analyzed, and the speakers were calibrated by Kali marketing manager Nate Baglyos. The process was smooth and efficient. In use on multiple surround and stereo musical projects, the SM-8's sounded clean and powerful, with a full frequency audio spectrum and a firm and accurate bass. And importantly, the system was non-fatiguing and enjoyable to work on.

The front-ported cabinet has access to USB-A which is used for calibration. The rear panel provides balanced XLR/TRS combination input, AES/EBU connectivity, and Ethernet. Passive versions are available on a custom order basis. The SM-8 can be mounted using hardware from Triad Orbit, or any other speaker mount that uses a 4.25x2 Inch hole pattern and can support the loudspeaker's 32 lb. weight. A great sounding and feature laden speaker in the midrange price. SM-8 $2,499

kaliaudio.com

GUILD S-300 DELUXE '70'S REISSUE ELECTRIC GUITAR



The new S-300 Guild Guitar, a Deluxe reissue, was originally released in 1977 and made until 1981. Guild's answer to a lightweight offset body, it replaced the SG style Guild S-100 and was intended to compete directly against the Gibson SG. Guild considered the design to be radical and modern, and to this day, vintage S-300's are collectable and sought after.

Feature-wise, the new S-300 is extremely faithful to the original guitar. *MC*'s review sample has a 4-piece mahogany body, and we are told that this may vary. A "Soft U" shaped mahogany set neck features a slim profile and 12.5" radius and good intonation. Lightweight at 7 lbs. 10 oz., the only immediate giveaway that this is a new guitar is that the finishes now available were not offered way back when. "The S-300 was viewed as fairly radical when it was introduced nearly 50 years ago," says Nick Beach, Product Manager, Fretted Instruments. "The guitar's offset body had dramatic cutaways and contours that gave it a futuristic look, and its phase switch was also unusual at the time, but since then it has become increasingly popular and collectable. With the new S-300 Deluxe guitar, we're bringing back a classic with a few key changes to make it even more comfortable and giving players a choice of eye-catching metallic finishes."

Also faithful to the original design is an Indian rosewood fingerboard with 24.75 scale length and easily accessible 24 frets. The action on our review sample was very good, and the guitar played very cleanly and precisely. Workmanship on the fingerboard is excellent, with medium sized fretwork, block inlays, and binding executed in a manner consistent with a much more expensive high-end guitar. The headstock features the famous Guild Peak logo, and the Chesterfield inlay made of pearloid. Tuning machines are open gear Grover G2, which is similar to what many of the original guitars came with. Guild logo Schaller tuning machines were also heavily used in the originals, which stand up to heavy strings bends more securely.

Pickups are Guild HB-2+ humbucking pickups with Alnico V magnets. In use, the guitar has a great sound, excellent feel for the entire run of the neck (especially in the higher registers) and a distinctive clarity. The three-way pickup selector feels a little loose in its action and might be a candidate for upgrade. And while faithful to the original guitars feature-wise, I would love to also see the Guild Top Hat volume and tone knobs offering push-pull coil taps for the pickups so that single coil tones are available like on many modern guitars. The Ultimate Angle TOM bridge and compensated hardtail are Guild original and are of excellent design and solidity.

There will be two types of S-300 players: the guitarist that always wanted one and now can buy it brand new, and the younger player who wants a guitar beyond the usual suspects and sees something unusual and different in the new S-300.

The S-300 is an exceptional value and packs a lot of guitar into the price. A fully professional instrument at a mid-entry level price point, the S-300 is great for touring, recording, and any application where a versatile guitar is needed. Currently available in Neptune Blue Metallic and Vintage Sterling Metallic, plans for additional finishes are being considered. I would suggest a 1- or 2-piece body for upcoming models of the S-300 where the wood on the body is visible. Additionally, Guild made an S-300 by request in white for Soundgarden guitarist Kim Thayil, a longtime Guild user. Case sold separately. $799

guildguitars.com



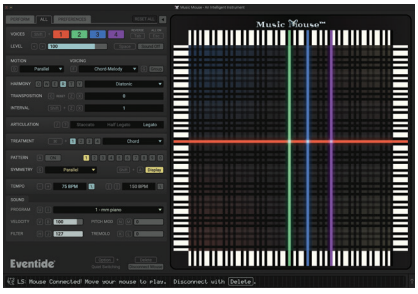
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EVENTIDE MUSIC MOUSE: YOUR COMPUTER MOUSE AS A MUSICAL CONTROLLER



With a cute and quirky name, it's easy to ask, what is Music Mouse? We have the answer. Music Mouse is an intelligent, algorithmic musical composition software developed by electronic music pioneer Laurie Spiegel. Originally released in 1986, it turns simple mouse movements into harmonically structured music in real time, functioning as a responsive musical instrument rather than a traditional sequencer or plugin. Spiegel was frustrated by the lack of available tools when personal computers emerged. Her self-released Music Mouse program transformed the Macintosh, Amiga, and Atari computers into accessible improvisational instruments by mapping advanced music theory logic directly onto cursor coordinates. Discontinued in 2021, Eventide Audio's involvement began in 2026. To celebrate the software's 40th anniversary, Eventide partnered directly with Spiegel to officially rebuild, modernize, and re-release the classic instrument for modern macOS and Windows operating systems. Note that Music Mouse is a standalone app and not a plugin.

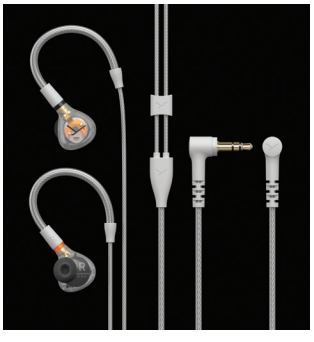
What happens when you launch Music Mouse? You can immediately start musically improvising. Music Mouse launches with a large graphic XY grid, and a comprehensive set of controls on the left side. Simply moving your mouse left or right, up or down creates polyphonic sounds that change pitches, melodic lines, and chord voicings, and it's easy, fun and inspiring right away. Music Mouse has four individually mutable active voices represented by four colored lines on screen. Two lines track your direct mouse location, and two lines represent automated algorithmic harmony. Pressing the space bar instantly toggles the live sound on or off. When the translucent cursor lines become solid, the instrument is live. When stopped, you can click and hold the mouse button while dragging to move the cursor silently across the grid without triggering new notes. Use this technique to create intervallic leaps. Pressing the Delete key can also disconnect or silence unwanted sound generation when maneuvering the interface.

You can think of Music Mouse as an idea generator, where you may come up with chord changes and melodies that you might not come up with on a traditional instrument. Music Mouse features harmony systems where you can switch between like chromatic, diatonic, pentatonic, middle eastern, octatonic, and quartal harmony scales. Voicing can be set to parallel or contrary motion with settings, voice melody, and voice pairs. The articulation control offers Staccato, Half legato and Legato articulations. The Treatment Control offers Chord, Arpeggio, Line and Improv rhythmic selections. Sound Mode features 32 classic FM synth patches curated by Spiegel, and MIDI Mode to control external hardware or software like Ableton Live or Logic Pro.

Is Music Mouse designed for beginners or professionals? Both. Music Mouse was intentionally designed so beginners can generate harmonically rich music immediately, while experienced composers can use it as a powerful compositional and improvisational tool. $29

eventideaudio.com

BEYERDYNAMIC DT 30 IE: ACCESSIBLE IN-EAR MONITORING FOR STAGE AND STUDIO



For over 100 years, Beyerdynamic has been making some of the very finest audio gear. Designed and primarily handmade in Heilbronn, Germany, Beyerdynamic invented the dynamic microphone and currently manufactures headphones, earbuds, microphones, headsets, and speakerphones.

New from Beyerdynamic is the DT 30 IE in-ear monitor. The DT 30 IE is engineered as an affordable and versatile IEM for musicians who want a reliable and balanced monitor for any instrument across any stage situation without sacrificing quality. For many musicians, the DT 30 IE will be their first professional in-ear monitoring system, built to support the transition from floor wedges to IEM monitoring. At $149.99, the DT 30 IE represents a significant step in accessibility compared to the high-end Beyerdynamic DT 70 IE series, which offers premium monitoring with four individual models designed and voiced specifically for mixing and critical listening, drums and bass, vocals and guitar, and classical instrument and keys at the price point of $579.99. The DT 30 IE is voiced to support any onstage need.

The Beyerdynamic DT 30 IE uses a three-way balanced-armature driver configuration to handle all frequency ranges within a compact in-ear monitor. Rather than asking a single driver to reproduce the entire audible spectrum, the design divides the workload across a dedicated three-way array, with low-, mid-, and high-frequency drivers. A passive three-way crossover manages those bands, giving the DT 30 IE an all-in-one approach to reproducing vocals, instruments, and playback tracks.

IEM's have unique requirements. They must sound excellent, be durable under onstage performance conditions, and be comfortable. Beyerdynamic is one of the most qualified transducer companies as well as one of the most experienced, and the DT 30 IE sound great and meet the task. Correct fit is of primary importance. The DT 30 is supplied with multiple eartip options, (3) pairs of silicon and (3) pairs of foam eartips sized large, medium, and small to allow performers to optimize the seal between the earpiece and ear canal. A good fit and consistent seal is important because it affects both isolation and low-frequency response. Loose fit translates to poor isolation and thin bass tone.

The DT 30 IE features two lightweight 11mm dynamic drivers with a full frequency response of 5Hz–20kHz. Distortion is rated at THD <0.09%. Passive noise isolation is rated at 39dB, which is again why you need a perfect fit. The DT IE 30 does feel very secure and stable when worn by this reviewer. A headphone impedance of 18 Ω helps achieve a nominal sound pressure level is rating at 111dB SPL @ 1mW. Maximum Sound Pressure Level (SPL) achievable is 137 dB, quite louder than healthy for anyone and comparable to the premium DT 70 series. Wiring is a Kevlar-reinforced, detachable 1.4 m cable with gold plated MMCX connector, firm Y slider, and 3.5 mm 3-pin plug. Integrated memory wire allows you to form the cable above your ear in a steady and repeatable fashion. Also supplied are a pair of Cerumen filters, commonly called wax guards, which are small, replaceable mesh screens placed at the tip of the IEMs to prevent earwax from damaging the IEM drivers. Made to withstand an intense stage environment, an IP54 protection rating indicates the DT IE 30 enclosure is protected against limited dust ingress and water splashes from any direction. IEMs take a beating onstage and replaceable parts help to ensure that your DT IE 30s will not let you down.

The DT IE 30 represents an entry into the affordable range of IEMs by one of the most trusted names in audio transducers. It's hard to go wrong with any Beyerdynamic product, and the DT IE 30s are a strong and useful IEM representing a serious workhorse for the working musician. $149.99

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

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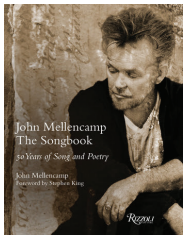
By Danny Peykoff, Jamie Neese, Jason Neese, Kevin Mellon
(hardcover) **$34.99**



Inspired by characters from Rancid's 1995 album *...And Out Come the Wolves*, this graphic novel follows three young punk outcasts named Willy, Brixton, and Ruby as they attempt to escape their difficult lives in California's East Bay. With hopes of creating better futures for themselves, the story follows their action-packed and brutally bleak journeys as they face countless challenges along the way. Detailed and colorful artwork brings the characters and their punk rock world to life, making it easy to become immersed in the story. Not for young readers, it's an entertaining read for Rancid fans and might even inspire new listeners to check out the band's music.

John Mellencamp: The Songbook

By John Mellencamp
(hardcover) **$55**



Lovingly compiled through a series of handwritten notes and candid photos, *John Mellencamp: The Songbook* offers a glimpse into blue collar hero Mellencamp's process, his mindset, even his soul. Fans, both casual and hardcore, will relish the opportunity to peek behind the curtain at an artist who has felt guarded at times. And this book is very much Mellencamp's baby, as opposed to an exercise in voyeurism. "For fans, musicians, and collectors alike, this is the essential volume on one of America's most iconic voices and songwriters," reads a statement. The foreword by horror icon Stephen King is the icing on the cake.

Music Video Mischief

By Nigel Dick
(paperback) **$23.95**



Nigel Dick might not be a mainstream household name, but within the industry he's known to be one of the great music video directors having worked with the likes of Ozzy Osbourne, Britney Spears, Guns N' Roses, Cher, Oasis, Celine Dion, Def Leppard and, of course, Band Aid. The quotes on the cover highlight the fact that artists love working with him, and his memoir is an eye-opening treat. "Boisterous and entertaining," but never classless, Dick essentially takes us behind the scenes on the shoot that has been his fascinating life.

Put Your Dress Down and Sing

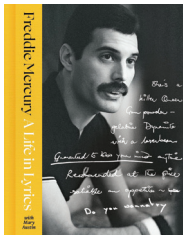
By Darlene Koldenhoven
(paperback) **$22**



Grammy-winning artist Darlene Koldenhoven might be best known to the mainstream public as the tambourine-waving nun alongside Whoopie Goldberg in *Sister Act*, but there's a whole lot more to her than that. *Put Your Dress Down and Sing* is her memoir, and it's a witty, touching and honest look at a wonderful life. "She shares insider stories of her work with A-List celebrities as a studio singer for artists such as Pink Floyd and a stage background singer for Paul McCartney, who kissed her on the cheek onstage at the Hollywood Bowl," reads a statement. It's a truly lovely read.

Freddie Mercury: A Life in Lyrics

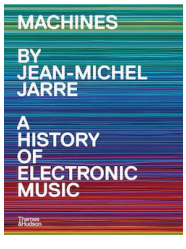
With Mary Austin
(hardcover) **$50**



The brilliance of Queen frontman Freddie Mercury isn't in question (or at least it shouldn't be). Not only did the man have a generational voice, not only was he the greatest rock frontman of all time, but he also introduced a rock crowd to other genres, from funk to opera. Frankly, Mercury is underrated. On top of all that, he was an incredible lyricist. This book, put together by confidante and former fiancé Mary Austin, "unveils the archive's remarkable unseen contents by combining beautiful illustrations, historical analysis and personal photographs with Mary Austin's own personal perspectives and recollections." It's beautifully put together, and a joyful reading experience.

Machines: A History of Electronic Music

By Jean-Michel Jarre
(hardcover) **$65**



Alongside Kraftwerk, French artist Jean-Michel Jarre is considered one of the key pioneers of electronic music. There were others of course, but those two had the biggest impact early on. His 1976 album *Oxygène* is a masterpiece, and he's well known for creating instruments (laser harps and the like) when the toys he wanted didn't exist in the stores. So few people are better placed to pen a history of electronic music. "Jarre charts the creative and technological breakthroughs that transformed modern music—from tape manipulation and analogue synthesis to the digital revolution," a statement reads. Importantly, he gets into the weeds without getting tangled.

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Education Over Enforcement: When the International Music Software Trade Association (IMSTA) was founded in 2003, its members faced a growing dilemma: how best to address music-software piracy in an industry where unauthorized copies could directly affect the companies and people creating the tools musicians depend on. Rather than making litigation the centerpiece, the organization chose education, with the simple philosophy that changing behavior requires understanding the consequences. "Buy the software you use" remains IMSTA's guiding message, emphasizing that software is the product of real people's creativity, investment and labor, whether it comes from a one-person operation or a major company. Executive Director Paul Fattahi, who has been involved with IMSTA since 2007, says the organization continues tracking attitudes through its annual piracy survey and is seeing more users advocate for legitimate software use. The larger point, he notes, is that musicians have a vested interest in keeping software companies healthy so they can continue providing technical support, upgrades and the next generation of creative tools.

IMSTA FESTA Brings Technology Face-to-Face: That educational philosophy comes vividly to life through IMSTA FESTA, the organization's free events for musicians, songwriters, producers, engineers, students and educators across North America, Europe and Asia. Combining software and hardware exhibits with demonstrations, workshops, industry panels and master classes, IMSTA FESTA gives creators an opportunity to interact directly with the companies behind their tools while learning from accomplished professionals. Past and current presenters have included Grammy-winning engineers, producers and songwriters, with 2026 events featuring such names as Jimmy Douglass, Lu Diaz, Supa Dups, Zaytoven, Major Seven and Preston "Prizzie" Reid. Past participants include Harvey Mason Jr., Noah '40' Shebib, T-Minus, Young Guru, !llmind, Darkchild, Dave Pensando, Tony Maserati and many more distinguished music industry leaders. Song reviews provide another hands-on component, offering creators professional feedback at no cost. Accessibility is intentional. By eliminating an admission fee, IMSTA makes education available to musicians who might otherwise never have access to this kind of industry gathering.

Developing the Next Generation of Creators: IMSTA's songwriting competitions take that philosophy one step further, turning education into opportunity. Regional competitions are held in conjunction with IMSTA FESTA events, while standout songs can advance toward the annual IMSTA Songwriting Competition, where the grand prize includes more than $5,000 worth of music software. Recent winners demonstrate the range of creators working with today's technology, from Miami's Nico Grana and his self-produced pop to Atlanta's Shy Bunny, an SAE graduate who combines R&B, rap and pop with hands-on studio expertise. For Fattahi, however, the real reward is watching the caliber of participants improve and seeing musicians return year after year. With a newsletter reaching roughly 20,000 people and Managing Director Ray Williams—part of IMSTA since its inception—continuing to play a central role, the organization has grown beyond its original anti-piracy mission into a global community built around education, ethical software use and the shared understanding that healthy technology companies and healthy music-making communities need each other to thrive.

Contact Paul Fattahi, Executive Director - 416-789-6850









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▲ THE BARBARIANS OF CALIFORNIA BRING HARDCORE MAYHEM TO CARDBOARD SESSIONS

The Barbarians of California bring their signature blend of hardcore, punk and unfiltered mayhem to Hollywood's historic Chaplin Soundstage for an explosive Cardboard Session performance of "Bomb to a Knife Fight." The band tears through the track using Ernest Packaging's unconventional cardboard instruments, delivering a performance that matches the chaotic spirit of their newly released album, *Megatons*.



▲ LÉA THE LEOX REIMAGINES "FAST CAR" FOR SONGS OF U.S.

L.A.-based alt-R&B artist LÉA THE LEOX puts a soulful, personal spin on Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car" as part of Salt Lick Sessions' *Songs of U.S.* series, which explores songs that have shaped America's cultural identity. Through her performance and accompanying interview, LÉA reflects on identity, representation and the song's enduring message of hope, togetherness and reaching for something more.



▲ KID HARPOON CONTINUES A STANDOUT YEAR BEHIND THE BOARDS

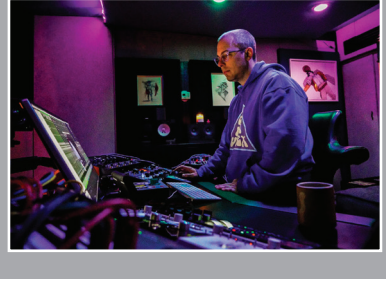
GRAMMY and BRIT Award-winning producer and songwriter Kid Harpoon has continued his run of high-profile collaborations in 2026, following his work on defining releases including Harry Styles' *Harry's House*, "As It Was," and Miley Cyrus' "Flowers." This year, he has added David Byrne's *Who Is the Sky?*, Inhaler's *Hole in the Ground*, and recent singles from Sophie Ellis-Bextor and Lainey Wilson to his growing production catalog.

▲ STEVE HACKETT AND STEVE ROTHERY UNITE FOR ATMOSPHERIC PROGRESSIVE INSTRUMENTAL ALBUM

Progressive music icons Steve Hackett of Genesis and Steve Rothery of Marillion join forces on *The Roaring Waves*, a cinematic instrumental album released via InsideOutMusic. Nearly a decade in the making, the seven-track collection blends improvisation, evocative guitar work, and oceanic atmosphere.

PRODUCER PLAYBACK

"Focus on what you're doing, not on what everyone else is doing. Focusing on other people's stuff can get you off track." – **JOSH GUDWIN**





▲ ADAM ARGYLE FINDS A FASTER, MORE MUSICAL WORKFLOW WITH SSL ORACLE

Songwriter and producer Adam Argyle has transformed his Milton Keynes home studio with a 24-channel Solid State Logic Oracle console, giving him the speed of a modern DAW workflow while retaining a fully analogue signal path. Working with artists including Dua Lipa, James Arthur, and James Bay, Argyle says Oracle's instant recall, flexible routing and analogue processing have streamlined everything from tracking to mixing—while reigniting his excitement for long studio sessions.



▲ CATHY YOUNG RECLAIMS A LOST LOVE STORY ON "I DON'T WANT TO LOSE YOU"

Canadian music veteran Cathy Young returns with "I Don't Want to Lose You," a deeply personal single written in 1974 that found its true meaning five decades later. A Juno-winning artist and longtime fixture of Toronto's Yorkville scene, Young transforms the song into a heartfelt tribute to a once-in-a-lifetime love, honoring the musician who became her soulmate before his unexpected passing. Produced by John Zych, Ann Hunter and Dennis Nieves, the track marks a poignant new chapter for an artist whose story is still being written.

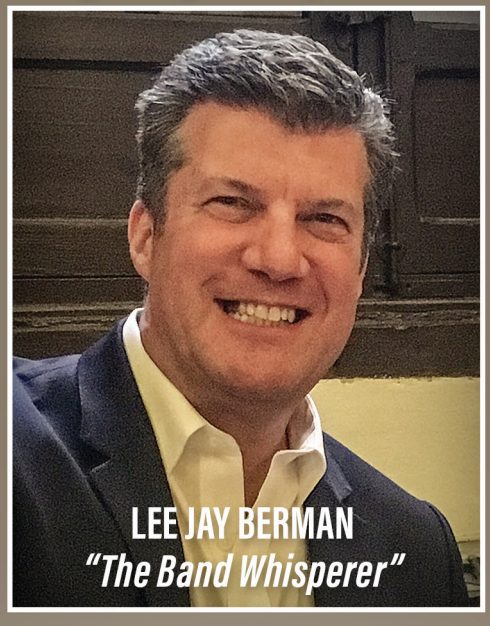
▼ SHADOW CHILD RECONNECTS WITH HIS RAVE ROOTS ON NEW EP DNA

U.K. DJ and producer Shadow Child returns to his dancefloor roots with *DNA*, a five-track EP blending acid house, breakbeats, and rave influences with modern production. Released via London Records, the project features collaborations with Guinean vocalist Falle Nioke and Manchester trio Delphic, marking a new chapter for the veteran electronic artist.





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KENNY ARONOFF

Long admired for his intense dedication to his craft, rock drummer Kenny Aronoff has recorded and toured with some of the best in the business: Bob Dylan, members of the Rolling Stones and a pair of legendary Johns—Mellencamp and Fogerty. He began his journey by studying classical music in college, graduated to jazz and fusion and ultimately found his home in rock. He's recorded at renowned studios all over the world but now works almost entirely from his space in North Hollywood. Earlier in his career he kept drum sets staged in multiple cities, so he was always primed to hit the ground running.

"I figured out when I was ten that drumming was my life's purpose before I even knew what that meant," Aronoff recalls of his fabled work ethic. "To be successful and *stay* successful, you must work hard, be disciplined and persevere. That formula will help you overcome any setbacks or obstacles. You blaze through criticisms and learn from them; you don't take them personally. Heroes succeed despite all challenges."

THE 3 MOST IMPORTANT

lessons he's learned as a drummer and studio owner are:

- **Good drumming is like making a cake. Pick the right beat and make it feel good. Creativity is the icing.**
- **The reason I keep getting rehired is because of the three Cs: connecting, communicating and collaboration. You've got to be cool and authentic.**
- **Co-elevate your bandmates in the studio. The North Star is to get the record on the radio and be a number one single.**

Like many musicians, Aronoff is not a fan of A.I. "I can hear it, especially with drums because it's too perfect," he observes. "It's very hard to get a human to play like that, although the sounds have the same decay. It's sort of like chocolate: one piece is good, two is great and three starts to make you sick. It's cool when you hear the human element; when time bends a bit."

A drummer's mic setup is like a chef's secret recipe, and the combination is his or her signature dish. "I use a Mojave MA-100 on top of the snare and a Shure SM57 underneath," Aronoff explains. "On the kick I have a Shure Beta 52A inside and I also have a Mojave MA-50 on the head. On my toms I use a Mojave MA-100, which kind of gives me an analog sound. My overheads are two Roswell Aztecs and on my hi-hat and live cymbals I've got Shure SM81s. Behind my kit I have an AKG C214, which kind of sprays around the drums and gives ambiance. I believe Alex Van Halen used to do the same at one point. Then I have a few mics in the traditional overhead placement."

Over the years, Aronoff has encountered many challenges. But his biggest came about a decade ago when he was tapped to re-record "My Sharona," the Knack's smash 1979 anthem. "Whoever owned the rights—probably the label—sold the master," he recollects. "In that case, the band has no negotiating power. Somehow the surviving members could use another take of the song. I played to one of the original vocal takes—I'm not sure why they could use the vocal but not the drums. Anyway, I got every single mic and its placement that was used on the original drum set so I could make a precise chart."

Recently Aronoff came off tour with Steve Vai and Joe Satriani, and is on the road regularly with Sammy Hagar. He's also part of the Aerosmith and Friends mega-shows, late October at the Hollywood Bowl. Aside from his own studio, his favorite places to record include New York City's The Power Station, London's legendary Abbey Road and L.A.'s now-shuttered United Recording Studios, which operated for years as Ocean Way. Its Studio B was noted for its "drumbrella," which could be raised or lowered over the kit.

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Karen Shelley

Executive Director
D'Addario Foundation

Years with Company: 2.5
Address: New York, NY
Web: daddariofoundation.org
Email: foundation@daddario.com
Grantees: Over 200 nonprofit organizations



BACKGROUND
Playing an instrument brings many benefits, but not everyone has access to instruction. The D'Addario Foundation—the charitable arm of the renowned instrument accessory brand—has been bringing music education to high-needs communities for decades. Karen Shelley is in her third year as the nonprofit's Executive Director.

> *"Being an eight-year-old violinist, you might not sound fantastic, but you still need that audience applauding for you."*

From One Student to Another
I played clarinet as a kid. I also played saxophone and piano, but clarinet was my primary instrument. As an adult, I've been learning guitar. [Having played an instrument] makes me feel more connected to our grantees and partners. I have a sense of what it means to be a 12-year-old learning an instrument.

Supporting the Classics
Jim D'Addario is still involved at D'Addario & Co. He and his late wife, Janet, were the ones who launched the foundation, I believe in concert with their son John D'Addario, Jr. It started with recording up-and-coming classical guitarists. They brought artists to Carnegie Hall and would have them perform. It also meant they were in New York and could take some U.S. touring opportunities, because some were coming from overseas. Then we shifted to music education.

Play Time
We support hands-on music making as opposed to music exposure. We get a lot of grant requests from folks who are bringing concerts to schools, for instance. While that's great, we must have parameters for what we support. And we support putting music into the hands of individuals of any age and teaching them, turning them into music makers.

Mission No.1: Funding Nonprofits
I like to think of our work falling into three different buckets. One is our nonprofit partnerships. We've got about 200 around the world. They are all teaching music, and we support them with cash and in-kind grants, which are product donations. Those partners are, for the most part, teaching music to high-needs communities. So, it's either individuals who come from low-income households or have something that would otherwise block them from accessing music education—an individual who is currently incarcerated, going through the foster care system, or unhoused. Our partners are going into these communities and teaching music. There might be a small registration fee but for the most part these are free programs with free instruments.

Mission No.2: Doing Research
The Immersive Music Challenge has two components. The original is this five-year study, where we're evaluating the impact that music education has on a child's academic performance and social-emotional wellbeing. We consider "immersive" to be four hours a week or more of instruction; they also have an opportunity for sectionals and ensembles, for both practice and performance. In most cases, there are wraparound services, like transportation or homework help. We've got a third-party team at the University of Chicago conducting that evaluation. And then this year we introduced the IMC Ecosystem, which is our effort to expand this work and bring attention to the study by bringing on partners from nonprofit music education providers.

Mission No.3: Granting Scholarships
Each year, we give college scholarships to up to 10 recipients. The primary qualification is that the applicant has grown up in one of our partners' music programs. Beyond that, we prioritize students who will be the first generation in their family to attend college. We also prioritize students who have a demonstrated financial need. It's a hard decision to make, because we get about 100 applications each year. Once they have that award, it stays with them for all four years of college as long as they're in an accredited program.

Prison Songs
Our most common [partners] are nonprofit, after school programs. But we're agnostic—if you're helping people make music, we want to support that. We have one partner who teaches music inside prisons, working with incarcerated individuals. There are concerts produced right there behind bars.

In-Kind Contributions
We're providing any product that D'Addario & Co. manufactures. When we give out a cash grant, it's literally a check. But all our cash grants also come with an in-kind contribution. The partner receives a promo code that they input on checkout at daddario.com. If it's worth $1,000, it will knock off $1,000 from their total for that purchase. That way, we're able to donate products they need, as opposed to us saying, "We've got some drumsticks, pads, and reeds," and passing those out. They're able to select what is most needed for their programs.

Qualifications
We have clear eligibility guidelines on our website. But generally speaking, it must be a nonprofit organization specifically teaching music education. We're looking at the percentage of individuals an organization serves that are high need. That's important to us. This is a competitive process; those who get awarded are those who match highest with our criteria. We prioritize organizations that are teaching either year-round or for the full academic school year. We also prioritize organizations on the length of time the individual is engaged. For in-kind contributions, they must be teaching at least one student on average at least two hours per week. For cash grant consideration, it must be a minimum of three hours. But we have organizations that are teaching six hours a week.

By the Numbers
For 2026, we have 35 states and 22 countries represented in our grantees. Last year, we were in 34 states and 16 countries, so we've grown a bit. And each year we have around 200 partners. In 2025, we awarded $455,000 in cash awards and $155,000 in product. In 2026, it will be $615,000 in cash grants. I don't yet have a total for in-kind, because those awards continue to happen, whereas the cash awards are done.

Make a Difference
We have an interactive map on our website of who we support, and it has all 200 or so grantees and partners. Those groups may need teaching artists, volunteers, patrons, even just people to come to their concerts.

First-Hand Experience
Going on visits is amazing. To see how engaged the students are is incredible. I visited a site in Miami a couple months ago, and afterwards a couple of the kids gave me a picture they drew that said thanks for listening. As a visitor, I don't want to intrude. I want them to have their day the way they would normally. But they saw it as someone coming out to listen.

Two-Year Grants
Historically, we've only given one-year grants, and our partners have had to reapply for additional funding the next year. They would still go through the same competition process for that grant. This year, we introduced two-year grants. We had to introduce that over the course of a couple years, because if we did it all in one then the next year our entire budget would be spent just on those renewals.

Internships and Beyond
The D'Addario Foundation occasionally offers paid internships, and we prioritize applicants who are recipients of the D'Addario Foundation College Scholarship or students who are alumni of our partner organizations.

Lauren Halsey Imagines All That at the Hollywood Bowl

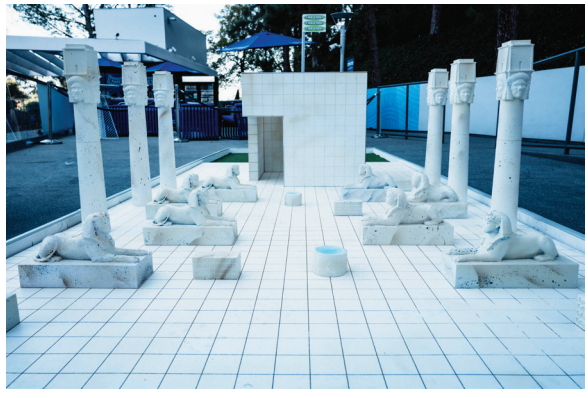


Put this woman in charge of the Olympics opening ceremony, like right now, today.

Transforming the iconic stage and grounds of the Hollywood Bowl into a sprawling monument to civic imagination, multidisciplinary artist Lauren Halsey reconfigured not only the amphitheater's shell but its energetic frequency as well. Her vision for *emajendat*—an immersive terrain of maximalist splendor more like an opera than a concert—while driven by collaboration and composed of hundreds of interdisciplinary elements and more than one superstar, represented one woman's singular, self-possessed artistic vision.

Halsey's visual art lexicon is built on two parallel modalities. The first is her regal, beguiling urban hieroglyphics—architecturally scaled sculptures which perfectly channel ancient Egyptian cuneiform and plasters, but chronicle the lives of people in her community with the reverence once reserved for far-off gods and pharaohs. This aspect of her practice has wowed global audiences from the Hammer to the Met and LACMA, and has most recently been permanently enshrined at her Sister Dreamer public sculpture park in the heart of her beloved South Central neighborhood.





The other side of Halsey's artistry enacts a hyperchromatic world-building, drawing from South Central's vernacular architecture and street-culture iconography—home to her *summaeverything* mutual aid center since the pandemic—to forge somatic objects of soulful maximalism and contagious joy. That is the vibrant energy she brought front and center to the Bowl in late September. From the extensive pre-concert activations including hand-carved and brightly painted statuary and signage, cozy Afrofuturist self-stations, roller skating, and Los Angeles landmark-themed minigolf turning the whole thing into a proper block party—or in art-speak, a living systems sculpture—with no jewel tone or unhinged font left behind, to the top tier production design of sets, costumes, lighting effects, and projection mapping, Halsey gave us the kind of unforgettable and truly immersive shared experience that imprints on the sensory memory of everyone who was part of it.



Starting with the cerebral, genre-defying polyphonic stream of music consciousness by the Charles Gaines Collective, led by an eminence gris of a drummer who is also a canonical conceptual artist himself; to subsequent dynamic turns by DJ Pee.Wee (the slightly manic, not entirely unlike Kat Williams alter ago of Anderson Paak); and a solo trumpet, loop-machine, bass, ecstatic free-for-all by Flea as no one has ever seen him before—the night built inexorably toward the apparition of Erykah Badu. With her effortless command of neo-soul's cosmological vagaries, ebbs, flows, crescendos, and conversations moving alongside the hypnotic, cinematic sample-craft of producer The Alchemist, Badu inhabited the technicolor multi-level set like the queen of Wonderland. Now, about that Olympics thing...

instagram.com/summaeverything

TROUBLES



Helsinki, Finland-based punk 'n' roll rabble-rousers Troubles formed when bassist Laura (who uses one name) was in the hardcore punk outfit Karkaisu. "I knew she liked garage-punk as well, so I asked if she would like to come to play with me some time," says singer and guitarist Ida-Lotta. "She did, and it was nice playing together. She asked on her social media if there was any drummer or drummer-ish person around who would like to join us. That's how Mikko got in. I already had some songs ready, so it was an easy start for a band. I'm not sure if we are still very serious. We just like to play and make songs together."

Ida-Lotta describes the band this way: "Melodic songs played with open chords with hot dirty overdriven tone, Dead Boys drums and the bass is like what The Gories would sound like if they had one," adding, "Laura's singing voice is raw while mine is a bit cute, so they combine well.

Troubles' most recent album, *Red Alert*, came out in April of this year, and fans of fellow Finnish band Hanoi Rocks, Swedish rockers Backyard Babies, and SoCal icons Social Distortion will find plenty to love. It's gloriously trashy, with big riffs and tons of 'tude.

"We had released some demos before, but *Red Alert* finally sounds like we are sound-wise, where we want to be," Ida-Lotta says. "The album contains 10 garage punk songs with most of them lasting only two minutes or so. It's a 21-minute rollercoaster through melancholy, depression, anger, heartache and period cramps."

The singer says that, for her, DIY means having control of her own music, schedule, and how Troubes is seen as a band. "Being DIY in music is not doing things entirely alone but more like together with other underground community members," she says. "We don't need big music production companies or big promoting moneys to make cool things happen. We have huge respect for DIY venues, shoestring budget shows, and all activists beyond them. That's where the punk happens."

Looking ahead, Troubles has plenty planned for the coming months. "We were about to rest and make new songs the rest of the year, but it seems like we are bad at it," Ida-Lotta says with a laugh. "So, more gigs coming! We are also about to release a cassette version of *Red Alert*. We have enough new songs for the next album, but we'll see when we have time for that. What we really would like to do is go touring abroad. Invite us to your country!"

Visit troublespunk.bandcamp.com

THE LEGAL BEAT

BY GLENN T. LITWAK

THOMSON REUTERS WINS A.I. FAIR USE CASE



On September 29, 2026, the US Court of Appeals for the Thirds Circuit upheld a district court judgment and ruled in favor of Thomas Reuters (the owner of the legal research engine, Westlaw) and against Ross Intelligence rejecting its fair use defense. Ross was a competing platform to Westlaw which took down its search engine in 2021 indicating that it did so because of the cost of the litigation.

Ross used Westlaw's summaries known as "headnotes." Ross asserted as a defense that its use of the headnotes to construct its training data was fair use. Headnotes are brief summaries of legal points in a court's decision.

The Fair use defense provides for limited use of copyrighted works without the permission of the owner. It analyses four factors:

1. Purpose and Character of the Use
2. Nature of the Copyrighted Work
3. Amount and Substantiality Used
4. Effect on the Potential Market

A brief in the case was filed by The Recording Association of America and the National Music Publishers Association. The brief argued that training an A.I. model on copyrighted works with the intention of creating a competing service or product "cannot qualify as fair use." The RIAA and NIMP brief noted:

"But as daunting as past challenges have been, they are dwarfed in scope and jeopardy by A.I. services that produce digital files that emulate and compete with human-authored music.

To train these models, A.I. companies unlawfully duplicate virtually all copyrighted music on the internet to ensure that the resulting outputs sound credibly similar in style and genre to the music on which the models were trained and to the music users seek in prompting the models.

The resulting outputs are proliferating in the marketplace at alarming rates. They flood streaming platforms, displace human-authored music, dilute royalty pools by diverting payments to fictional bands, and deceive consumers, who cannot tell whether they are listening to human artists or digital files created by a computer."

The judge in the court of appeals case stated:

"Ross took an intermediate step of using the headnotes to train an A.I. program, which arguably presents a slight degree of difference in use," the judge wrote. "But the undisputed evidence demonstrates that Ross used the headnotes to train an A.I. program for the benefit of its legal-research platform."

"The undisputed evidence reflects that Thomson Reuters' materials possess a creative spark, and Ross aspired to be a direct competitor by using them for a highly similar purpose. We therefore hold that Thomson Reuters' materials are copyrightable and that Ross' use was not fair use."

Thomson Reuters released a statement:

"We are pleased that the appellate court affirmed the trial court's decision in our favor. The appellate court agreed that Westlaw's editorial content ---- created and maintained by our attorney editors --- is protected by copyright and that Ross' copying of Thomson Reuters content did not constitute fair use."

There has been a proliferation in the last few years of cases regarding the use of A.I. This case is a landmark case which addresses several issues.

GLENN T. LITWAK is a veteran music and entertainment attorney based in Santa Monica, CA. He has represented platinum selling recording artists, music producers and hit songwriters, as well as management and production companies, music publishers and independent record labels. Glenn is also a frequent speaker at music industry conferences around the country, such as SXSW and the *Billboard* Music in Film and TV Conference. Glenn has been selected as a "Super Lawyer" by *Super Lawyer Magazine* for 2022-2026. Email Glenn at gtllaw59@gmail.com or check out his website at glennlitwak.com

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


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HARVEY STREET

Date Signed: August 2026
Band Members: Jerome Bermudez, vocals, rhythm guitar; Jackson Reed, lead guitar; Finn Ulrich, bass; Josh Burgess, drums; Eric Kronschnabel, keys, synth
Genre: Indie Rock
Management: Deep South Entertainment
Booking: Atlas Touring
Legal: Jake Davidowitz
Publicity: Sarah Facciolo, Facci PR, sarah@faccipr.com
Web: harveystreet.co

Dave Rose, President and CEO of management and event production company Deep South Entertainment, has a rich history, naming headliner acts Little Feat, Bruce Hornsby, and Sixpence None the Richer as clients. With one of his offices located in Raleigh, North Carolina (the other being Nashville), he's passionate about helping young artists from that area.

Perhaps it was inevitable that local indie rockers Harvey Street would land on his radar, as they've sold over 15,000 tickets and amassed more than 1.2 million monthly listeners on Spotify without a label. Rose initiated a FaceTime meeting between himself, lead guitarist Jackson Reed, and

"We quickly became Deep South's top priority."

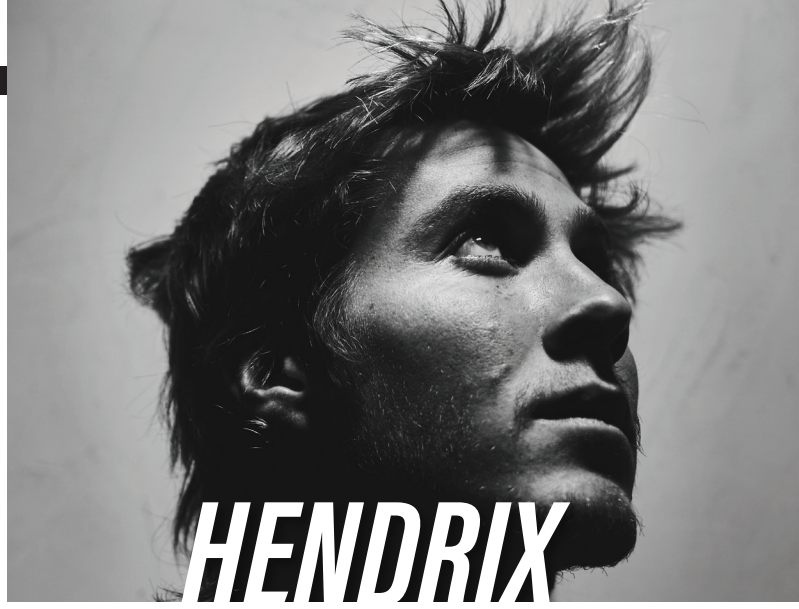
drummer Josh Burgess. "He asked a ton of questions," remembers Burgess, explaining that they'd been reaching the upper limit of how far they could grow on their own. Rose let them know he was happy to act as a free resource; Burgess took him up on the offer, and they started regularly communicating.

Towards the end of 2025, Harvey Street began booking larger venues. They were also receiving overtures from labels and management companies. Burgess continued talking with Rose to help them weigh their options. Although the band currently hasn't accepted any label deals, that should soon change. "We probably have 15 offers," boasts Burgess. "We get hit up every day. We needed somebody to help sort through all that."

Through their conversations, Rose and Burgess discovered they have similar thought processes. "The way I think is very long-term, big picture, 30,000 feet," explains the drummer. "And Dave thinks in a similar way."

Rose ultimately decided it made the most sense for him to become their manager. He brought in the rest of the players to make his formal pitch. Lainey Wilson being a developing artist when Rose began working with her added a point in his favor. Further, Harvey Street wanted someone with experience in multiple genres, and Rose fit the bill.

"We've quickly become Deep South's top priority," testifies Burgess. "It's something I'm really thankful for." ***- Andy Kaufmann***



HENDRIX

Date Signed: March 2026
Label: Severance Records/Big Loud Rock
Genre: Soft Rock, Singer-Songwriter
Management: Cooper Anstett, Anthony Manker, The Group Projects
Booking: Maxx Lesnick- ROAM Artists
Legal: Jeremy Mohr - Rothenberg, Mohr & Binder
Publicity: Jenny Huynh - Big Loud Rock
A&R: Steve "Stevo" Robertson - Severance Records
Web: hendrixf.com

Hendrix Frankenreiter grew up surrounded by music. It took him two decades to admit he was one of the people making it. Now, the 22-year-old singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and surfer from Hawaii has officially signed to Severance Records/Big Loud Rock, marking the moment with his label debut single, "Wanna Go."

Son of pro-surfer/musician Donovan Frankenreiter, Hendrix spent his childhood bouncing around the globe, picking up sounds wherever he landed and absorbing lessons from family friends like Jack Johnson. But it took him a while to actually call any of it a career. "Guitar has always been in my life. Growing up, I had a band from elementary into middle school, and that's where my love for singing and guitar started! I never really took music seriously until I was about 20 years old," he says.

Don't ask him to define his sound though, as it's always in flux. "My sound keeps changing every time I pick up the guitar. My inspiration pulls from a variety of music. Whatever is exciting me in the moment is my sound," he says. It's less a genre than a mood, and Hendrix seems perfectly happy leaving it that way. His writing process follows the same logic: get out of the way and let it happen. "I'm inspired to play and write because I never know

"We all connected, and everything organically just fell into place!"

what's gonna come through! I believe ideas and music are already floating around waiting to be created through your own filter of expression!"

The Severance Records/Big Loud Rock deal, by his account, wasn't so much chased as it was met. "The moment I met Big Loud Rock/Severance Records, I had a good feeling. We all connected, and everything organically just fell into place," he says, crediting his team for making it possible in the first place.

"Wanna Go"—produced and co-written by Adam Friedman (Quinn XCII, Mike Posner, O.A.R)—was born in two places: the lyrics in Hawaii, chasing a guitar riff that wouldn't leave him alone, and the finished song in L.A., at Friedman's studio. "Adam always brings the best out of me in the studio. He's an amazing human! We had so much fun working on this song together." The two have been quietly stacking up material for the past year, which Hendrix describes as "a beautiful body of work"—and this single is just the opening move. "I'm so stoked to get this music out into the world."

He's already made his festival debut at BeachLife, with Fuji Rock in Japan next on the calendar. And if there's a thesis running underneath all of it, it's this: stop trying to get it perfect. "You will never create something you're completely satisfied with. And that's okay!" ***- Ruby Risch***



HYPER MINDS

Date Signed: October 2026
Label: DC-Jam Records
Band Members: Roland O'Cello, vocals; Juan Rodriguez, bass; Omar Gutierrez, drums; Robert Canales, guitar
Genre: Punk, Garage, Psych
Publicity: Mike Cubillos - Earshot Media, mike@earshotmedia.com
A&R: DC-Jam Records
Web: instagram.com/hypermindsband

Roland O'Cello is the face of Hyper Minds. The rising garage-punk act has been playing the Los Angeles area for the last two and a half years. Since they formed, their strategy has been simple: keep making noise. "We were just in the mode of grind, grind, grind," says the vocalist.

On the back of two raucous EPs and a handful of singles, they booked a gig at Permanent Records Roadhouse in Cypress Park opening for Ultrabomb. The hardcore supergroup, signed to DC-Jam Records, apparently liked what they heard. O'Cello's theory is that the power trio instructed the label's president, Darron Hemann, to check them out.

Hemann did and emailed O'Cello. Before responding, the singer inspected the indie label's website and was impressed by their roster. "The Adicts is a huge inspiration to us," reveals the front man, adding that everyone in Hyper Minds grew up listening to the British punk rockers. Other notable acts with DC-Jam include T.S.O.L., Meat Puppets, and JFA.

The email discussion eventually triggered a Zoom call. The two chatted for hours while the others tracked parts for the group's next release. "We had a great rapport from the get go," notes the singer. "We have similar goals, and the stuff he said he could help with all made sense."

"We had a great rapport from the get go."

Once a contract arrived, O'Cello asked his father to look it over, as his dad has examined many legal agreements during his time in the film industry. Everything passed muster. "The only thing I requested is that [Hemann] help me find a booking agent," the singer adds.

The choice to sign with DC-Jam ultimately rested on O'Cello's shoulders, but he nonetheless made sure everyone in the band was happy calling the label home. "Everybody gave me the thumb's up," he reports. "I definitely wanted the guys to feel comfortable with what we were doing."

After the ink dried, O'Cello connected with Ultrabomb's drummer, Derek O'Brien, who welcomed him into the DC-Jam family and assured him that he'd be taken care of. Affirms O'Cello, "Hearing that from an O.G. gave me peace of mind."

Look for the DC-Jam debut from Hyper Minds, Perfect Chaos, out now.

- Andy Kaufmann



TRUEBLOOD

Date Signed: January 2026
Label: Mercury Records
Band Members: Cameron Trueblood, drums; Dylan Trueblood, guitar; Mason Trueblood, vocals, guitars; Ethan Trueblood, bass
Genre: Alternative Rock
Management: Allison Kaye
Booking: Megan Glendinning
Legal: Nicky Stein
Publicity: Marisa Bianco, Katie O'Gara
A&R: Jake Levensohn
Web: truebloodtheband.com

It's almost as if their last name was tailor-made to reflect their musical ambitions. The four brothers (Cameron, Dylan, Ethan, and Mason) in Trueblood started making music together during COVID when they were no more than 6, 8, 10, and 11 years old. With the world on lockdown, it was one of the few activities at their disposal at home.

The boys began playing shows after the pandemic lifted, even when hardly anyone noticed. They once rocked out in front of a candle shop tucked behind a bar. "We had a two-hour time slot, and maybe four people walked by," reports Cameron, the alt-rock group's drummer.

In August of 2024, they did their thing on the beach for around 300 people. At the time, that was their biggest show ever. "I was so excited," exclaims Ethan. "I talked to my friends about that for the next few months."

"For us, signing with Mercury was a form of motivation. They kind of put a seed in our brains of taking the right path."

That could have been their last show ever, given that Cameron was applying for college and Dylan wasn't far behind.

But come November, they posted a video on TikTok of a Linkin Park cover, and it went viral. A series of songs on social media followed, ultimately generating a billion views. "That made us start taking all this much more seriously," claims vocalist Mason.

They began uploading tracks to DSPs in 2025 and the natural next step was to start building a team. "Our parents helped us a lot as we were navigating finding a lawyer and a manager," says guitarist Dylan, pointing out that they were all minors at the time. They did just that and subsequently let their management field label offers, one of which came from Mercury Records.

"Mercury impressed us the most," flatly states Mason. Adds Dylan, "We've been really grateful for all the work they've done. We love the team." The fact that the label's reps came to see them play, rather than just speak with them over Zoom, led the teens to feel comfortable joining the UMG family.

Since inking the deal, the Trueblood siblings have worked with a modest galaxy of megastars, including Maroon 5, Black Eyed Peas, sombr, and Coldplay. It's something that likely wouldn't have happened without the label's backing. They also connected with producer Andrew Goldstein, who helmed their recent 5-track EP, *First Impressions*.

"For us, signing with Mercury was a form of motivation," insists Mason. "They kind of put a seed in our brains of taking the right path."

Listen for their song, "Come Back, I Miss You," on the EA SPORTS *FC 27* Official Soundtrack. ***- Andy Kaufmann***



▲ ON THE RECORDS

Brian Beck and Piotr Orlove have released this compilation of musician essays (80 of them, including Dolly Parton, Sonny Rollins, Erykah Badu, Chris Stapleton, and Billie Eilish). *On The Records* brings insight on albums that shaped each artist but never received attention. Book events start in November with guests. Purchase at Amazon.



◀ ELLA BUMPS MARIAH

In week 23 at No.1 on Billboard's Hot 100 chart, Ella Langley's "Choosin' Texas" surpasses Mariah Carey's "All I Want For Christmas Is You." Entering the Hot 100 last November (Langley's fifth entry), it hit top 10 in January, and No. 1 in February. Hot 100 measures streaming, radio play and sales data across all genres.

► SIA TO POPHOUSE

Pophouse Entertainment has purchased a 50 percent stake in Sia's publishing and master rights, with development support for future works (for a rumored cost of $180 million). With billions of streams and nine GRAMMY nominations, the deal includes "Unstoppable," "Chandelier," "Titanium," "Elastic Heart," and "Cheap Thrills."



Ongoing Academy Advocacy

Recording Academy members across the country united for Music Advocacy Day last month in an effort to share concerns around the protection of independent music creators in the age of artificial intelligence, encouraging fair pay and arts funding. More at grammy.com/advocacy.

SMP Joins Leader

Expanding their Spanish-language children and family materials, Sony Music Publishing joins Leader Entertainment (parent company of El Reinao Infantil, a global leader in children's entertainment) for worldwide administration of El Reino Infantil's complete catalog. The agreement looks to expand the reach of El Reino across new audiences, formats and markets through collaboration across SMP's roster and network. Launched in 2011, El Reino Infantil now includes more than 240 million subscribers across 64 YouTube channels and has received over 150 billion views. Produced and adapted in 11 languages across YouTube, streaming, and television platforms, franchises include *La Granja de Zenón, Bichikids, Canciones del Zoo, Familia Blu,* and *Paco el Marinero*, receiving nearly 9 billion views the first half of 2026 alone. After 15 years, El Reino now includes live entertainment, consumer products, and gaming, with over 800 live performances and 1.5 million tickets sold in 20 countries to date.



▲ PRESCRIPTION ADDS AKI

Prescription Songs adds L.A. producer-songwriter-instrumentalist Riley Aki to the roster. Producing ADÉLA's "Homewrecked," Aki is go-to collaborator for Slush Puppy, Grace Power, Babe America, We Patrick, with cuts for aespa, DANNA, Rhea Raj, Lilyisthatyou, Alexandra Starr, Marianne Ross, and many others.

ASCAP Launches' Connections

Using their mobile app (first launched in 2010), the American Society for Composers, Authors and Publishers has rolled out ASCAP Connections, a new feature to help match ASCAP member collaborators, songwriters, composers, publishers, and mentors with similar goals, skills and interests with a direct request/chat feature. Further information at ascap.com/music-creators/mobile-app.

Road Rally Returns

The TAXI Road Rally returns this month at the Westin LAX November 5-8. With industry panels, workshops, masterclasses, and extensive networking opportunities with top music executives, the event is free to TAXI members. Details and registration at taxi.com/rally.

Primary's Palmer and Pickett

Primary Wave has negotiated with their estates and purchased the catalog, name, image, likeness rights of Robert Palmer and Wilson Pickett. Covering 14 solo albums: *Sneakin' Sally Through the Alley* through to *Drive,* ("Johnny and Mary," "Every Kinda People," "Simply Irressistable"), Palmer's agreement includes part of "Weird" Al Yankovic's "Addicted to Spuds" and the Talking Heads' "Remain in Light," to which Palmer contributed. The agreement with the Wilson Pickett Estate (including Brother Max Pickett) covers publishing on more than 50 songs that reached US R&B charts (many on the Billboard Hot 100), and the team is working on new marketing, branding, digital and sync, as well as film and television projects. Recordings include "In the Midnight Hour" (co-written with Steve Cropper), his versions of "Mustang Sally" and the "Land of 1000 Dances."

In a portfolio now including Bob Marley, Prince, Whitney Houston, James Brown, Ray Charles, Smokey Robinson, and more, Primary Wave's latest acquisitions follow deals this past summer with Donna Summer, Foreigner co-founder Mick Jones, and the acquisition of Kobalt in a transaction worth in the USD $1.5 billion ballpark.

MIIST's controversial Entry

As the first Native Chinese artist to reach Billboard's Pop/Adult Contemporary Top 25 list, MIIST says she will be entering the controversial New Asian Pop Music Performance Category with her bilingual (Chinese-English) duet, "It's Too Late To Love You" (out now with three-time GRAMMY winner Narada Michael Walden). Speaking with Billboard, MIIST says she understands why people may refuse to participate, but says she has a different perspective. Rather than staying stuck in controversy, MIIST's perspective is to ask: Can a category created around Asian-language music expand opportunity without placing new boundaries around Asian artists? She wants to help participate and demonstrate what the category can become and shares that, "most of all, I hope the category becomes a doorway rather than a destination." Her full op-ed with Billboard is at billboard.com/pro/grammys-asian-pop-category-why-entering-backlash-op-ed.



▲ SONGWRITER SOUP NON-PROFIT

With 30 cuts across country, pop, Christian, and soundtrack, 2026's NMPA/Billboard Songwriter of the Year Laura Veltz ("The Bones," "Speechless," etc.) launches season five of the *Songwriter Soup* podcast as a non-profit to "help songwriters protect their minds, their money and their legacies."

2027 Songwriter Workshops

Performing Songwriter Workshops return with intimate three-day Nashville songwriting camps led by respected songwriters including Mary Gauthier, Gretchen Peters, Jonatha Brooke, Beth Nielsen Chapman, Verlon Thopmson, Suzy Boguss, Emily Saliers, and Matt Rollings. Moving into its 13th year, the organization has been bringing people of all skill levels, ages and occupations from around the world together for three days in Nashville to help find their writer's voice and learn to tell their story. Details and registration at performingsongwriter.com/creative-workshops.

Texas Songwriters HOF

2027's Texas Songwriters Hall of Fame Inductees include Sony Publishing four time Songwriter of the Year Jim Beavers ("Drink A Bear," "Red Solo Cup," "Am I the Only One"), Shane McAnally ("Merry Go 'Round," "Follow Your Arrow," "Body Like a Back Road"), songwriter-performer-playwright-author Kimmie Rhodes (with songs for Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Emmylou Harris, Wynona Judd, Joe Ely), and modern Texas blues phenoms Jimmie and Stevie Ray Vaughan (The Fabulous Thunderbirds and albums *Double Trouble* and *Texas Flood*). Grammy-winning producer-songwriter-instrumentalist Lloyd Maines will also be honored with the Darrell K. Royal Texas Music Legend Award for his outstanding contributions to Texas music and its legacy. Details at texassongwriters.com.

BMI's Health Connect

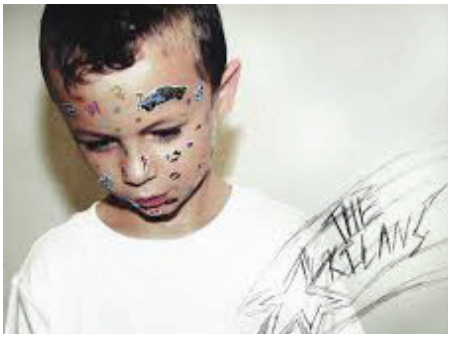
Launching as a free service exclusive to BMI songwriters and composers—in partnership with Gallagher Alternative Health Solutions—BMI's Health Connect helps members find the right health insurance for themselves and their families. With instant access to expert insurance advisors, the program minimizes confusion and helps find the best coverage for your situation, needs and budget. More at bmi.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@dreajo.com



▲ NEW NORMAL CAMP

Angry Mob Music's 4th New Normal Writing Camp, first launched to encourage diversity and inclusion, offered eight L.A. studios and fifty-four songwriters/producers (20 cultures, 32 women, two non-binary, 31 new attendees) to deliver 40 songs in five days. Next camp set for Spring 2027. Contact Ralph Torrefranca @ Angry Mob.



◀ KILANS' KEEP IT DARK

Fresh from Salt Lake City, indie rockers The Kilans release debut album *Could You Keep It Dark?* (via Mom + Pop Music), with lead track, "Oh, Lucy."



▲ CALGARY'S LATEST HOWELLS

Rising Calgary heavy alternative band Howells blends gothic emo, post-hardcore, shoegaze, melodic hooks for a blend they call "Halocore." Their latest release, *Fade Into Being Pt. 2*, is a two-part project extending into a neo-gothic universe of connected videos, characters, photography, live shows, and a book. More at howellsmusic.com.



Mica Millar



Independent Soul

With over 25 million streams of 2022's debut *Heaven Knows* on Spotify alone, British singer-songwriter-producer (and Golden Hour Music founder) Mica Millar has become the U.K.'s voice of contemporary soul. Incorporating sounds of R&B, gospel and jazz, the fiercely independent songstress has become internationally recognized, performing sold-out headline shows and supporting Gladys Knight, Stevie Wonder, Lionel Ritchie, and Gregory Porter, all while carving her own path.

Learning to play the piano from her session-drummer father, she performed with Red Sky Noise, receiving BBC 1 Xtra radio success with "Only You," before 2016 marked a turning point. "I'd [been] doing my own songs, playing with a band, toplining, working with producers, and realized this isn't what I want." Growing up watching live performances, Millar was passionate about soul music (The Supremes, The Staple Singers, Aretha Franklin, The Emotions) and became driven to create her own sound.

Sometimes using stream-of-consciousness methodology, other times sitting at the piano, Millar says her first records included many mid-tempo songs, while the new project (*A Little Piece of Me*) is more varied. Writing the bass and drum lines first, she worked on the overall feel and began the process with the percussion rather than piano. Inspired by Motown, she says the parts are subtle, but moving and intricate.

Meeting drummer Marcus Finney at *Leverkusener's Jazz Stage*: Finney introduced her to bassist Jay White and guitarist Adam Smith. Keyboardist Daniel Weatherspoon had worked with Finney and White, and Millar describes the group as a "magical combination." Additional magic arrived after learning about Studio Miraval at the Cheltenham Jazz Festival. Seeing a photograph in the back of a catalog, Millar spoke with the on-site team and was invited to visit. Having just recovered from an accident that nearly paralyzed her, Millar says the trip was "like *Eat, Pray, Love*—I became myself again. I was in love with the idea of just following the trail—and if the trail lead[s] you to Miraval, it's a *really* good trail."

Feeling strongly that creating music should be approached "without taking into account what other people or the industry think," Millar says, "the best music is created like that," and suggests designing your own path (not chasing what you think others will like). "People don't want another version of somebody else," she says. "They want *you*, your authentic sound and expression."

"I learned a lot producing the first record, wanted to put those things into practice, work with great musicians, expand and hone in on things I'd missed the first time, but creating authentic music is really just about listening to your inner voice."

A great song is about longevity: "The most iconic records of all time—the Joni Mitchells and Stevie Wonders of this world—are visionaries. They're self-producing, writing their own records, [without] a team. Those songs where it is [about] the true vision of the artist are often the ones revered as classics." While creating her own music, Millar says, "if I get to the end of the process, having listened to it a few thousand times, and I don't hate it—I'm confident it's good."

First promoting her own shows around Manchester, she garnered support from Jazz FM, with the head of music helping her find an agent. She now has a U.K. plugger and publicist, teams in Germany, France, and the Netherlands to help with live shows, and an expanded team for international rollouts.

"It's about deciding what you want, your version of success, then going at that 110 percent all the time," suggests Millar. "The great thing about being independent is that it's up to you how you approach your career. You can carve your own destiny and path. Don't let people tell you what isn't going to work; nobody really knows. We're all testing and figuring it out as we go."

Receiving Jazz FM's Soul Act of the Year Award, Millar was inducted into the Recording Academy in 2023. *A Little Bit of Me* (via Golden Hour), featuring trumpeter Keyon Harrold, received praise from BBC TV, BBC Radio 2, and has been submitted for GRAMMY consideration.

Contact Leah Concialdi, Champagne House Media - leah@champagnehousemedia.com

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DROPS

WaterTower Music has released the soundtrack for season one of the **HBO Max Original Series *Lanterns,*** composed by Grammy winner **Stephanie Economou** and available now on all major digital platforms. Economou's music goes from moody to gritty to intimate over the course of the score, drawing on '90s and early 2000s rock and trip hop for its character themes, built from guitars, Wurlitzer, saturated synths and found percussion like scrap metal, wood sticks and chains. More experimental textures define the Green Lantern Corps, Manhunters, and alien species, including processed violas, duduks and upright basses. The album also features the original song **"Away From Home (Rushville's Lament),"** featuring **Ari Mason** and **Wayne Ingram.** Contact Chandler Poling at chandler@whitebearpr.com for more information.



Jazz and blues vocalist **Mara Kaye** joins the **Marlonius Jazz Orchestra** to celebrate the legacy of **Billie Holiday** on November 8 at Sierra Madre Playhouse. Kaye, a Brooklyn native who has performed from Moscow to Lincoln Center, channels the emotional power and swing of Lady Day alongside the sorrows and joys of **Bessie Smith.** Bassist and composer Marlonius, a **Colburn Conservatory** alumnus and a leading voice in L.A.'s jazz community, directs the orchestra in original compositions and fresh reinterpretations of jazz classics. Tickets are $35, which can be purchased at sierramadreplayhouse.org. For more information, contact Libby Huebner at libby@adlibpr.com.

Pasadena Playhouse presents the Los Angeles premiere of the Tony Award-winning rock musical ***Passing Strange,*** running November 4-29 with a press opening November 8.



Featuring book and lyrics by **STEW** and music by STEW and **Heidi Rodewald,** the show marks its 20th anniversary during the run. **Vintage Trouble** frontman **Ty Taylor** stars as Narrator, alongside **Britton Smith** as Youth and Tony nominee **Saycon Sengbloh** as Mother, under the direction of Tony winner **Zhailon Levingston.** The story follows a young artist from South Central L.A. on a cross-continental journey of self-discovery. Tickets are on sale now. Contact Peter Goldman at p.goldman@dcpublicity.com for additional details, or visit pasadenaplayhouse.org.

Scarlet Moon has released ***Scarlet Moon Halloween Volume V,*** the latest installment in its annual video game music series, available now on all digital storefronts and streaming platforms. The eight-track collection features **FamilyJules** arranging **"Mad Monster Mansion"** from **Banjo-Kazooie** and **bLiNd** taking on ***Castlevania's*** **"Vampire Killer"** for its 40th anniversary, plus **GLADIOLUS** reimagining **Persona 5's "Tokyo Daylight"** and **Steven Silo** covering **"Yoshi's Island." Nami Nakagawa, Alex Doty** and returning guest **George "The Fat Man" Sanger** contribute original works. In a series first, the album includes a pop crossover, with **GENTLE LOVE** turning **Michael Jackson's "Thriller"** into a jazz lullaby. For details, contact Jayson Napolitano at jayson@scarletmoonproductions.com.



Milan Records released the original motion picture soundtrack for ***Ha-Chan, Shake Your Booty!,*** featuring music by Emmy-nominated composer **Nathan Halpern.** Written for Sony Pictures Classics' dramedy starring **Rinko Kikuchi,** the romantic score traced the emotional inner life of Haru, a Tokyo ballroom dancer who withdrew into isolation after tragedy. Halpern built the music from flutes, layered harps, chamber strings, whistled melodies and samba-driven themes drawn from her ballroom world. Directed by **Josef Kubota Wladyka,** the film won the Directing Award in the U.S. Dramatic Competition at the **2026 Sundance Film Festival.** Contact Chandler Poling at chandler@whitebearpr.com for more information.

Milan Records released a new orchestral medley from composer **P.T. Adamczyk** inspired



by the themes of ***The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt.*** Newly arranged and recorded with the **Vienna Synchron Orchestra,** the suite arrived alongside ***The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt Remastered,*** a free upgrade for existing owners on PC, PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X|S and Nintendo Switch 2, and debuted in the game's launch trailer. The track followed ***Songs of the Past,*** a five-track EP by **Magda Urbańska, Marcin Przybyłowicz** and **Daniel Elms** that previewed music from **CD PROJEKT RED's** third expansion, which is slated to launch in 2027. For more information, contact Greg O'Connor-Read at greg@topdollarpr.com.

OPPS

LA Indie Shorts Fest, which takes place December 20, is an international annual event and seasonal competition celebrating independent short films worldwide and across genres. The final deadline to submit your work to be featured in the festival is November 22. Submission guidelines and the rundown on categories, which covers music videos, can be found at tinyurl.com/3tu7c7x4.

December 19 is the deadline to be considered for **The Malta Dance Film Festival**, which takes place June 19, 2027. The event fosters dialogue among choreographers, filmmakers, and audiences. Awards and prizes go to the best in choreography, cinematography, and student film. Learn more at filmfreeway.com/maltadancefilmfestival.

You have until December 15 to register and until January 15, 2027 to submit your work for consideration in the **Berlin International Film Scoring Competition**. Three winners will be announced March 1. View the rules, submission guidelines and past winners at bifsc.org.

PROPS

The **Bowl for Ronnie Celebrity Bowling Party** will return November 12 at **PINZ Bowling Center in Studio City.** Hosted by **SiriusXM's Eddie Trunk,** the celebrity bowling tournament will include raffle prizes and memorabilia. As always, net proceeds will benefit the **Ronnie James Dio Stand Up and Shout Cancer Fund,** which supports cancer prevention, education and research. Past events have drawn musicians, actors and other entertainers such as **Jack Black** and **Kyle Gass (Tenacious D), Phil Buckman** and **Brett Scallions of Fuel, John Bush** and **Joey Vera** of **Armored Saint, Dave Grohl (Foo Fighters), Tom Morello (Rage Against the Machine)** and more. For more information, contact w3pr@yahoo.com and visit diocancerfund.org where celebrity bowlers will be announced.



Orchestral Soundtracks, San Diego's volunteer video game and anime orchestra, expanded its fall concert into a free festival this year, which was held in October at Torrey Pines High School. The event opened with sets from anisong cover band **Blue Moon Sanitzer** and surf rock trio **Less Coronados** featuring game composer **George Sanger,** and followed with a live "Name That Tune" game show. The orchestra performed music from ***Xenoblade Chronicles 3, Genshin Impact, Made In Abyss*** and ***One Piece.*** **Scarlet Moon Records** was also there to showcase its debut game, ***Sir Noggin.*** For details, contact Jayson Napolitano at jayson@scarletmoonproductions.com.

The **17th Annual Hollywood Music in Media Awards** is slated for November 18 this year and will take place at The Avalon in Hollywood. The annual awards ceremony celebrates the best in music in film, television, commercials and video games, and includes categories for best original score, song, music documentary, video game and more. In addition to the presentation of honors, each year's celebration includes live music. Previous years have honored the likes of **Hans Zimmer, Billie Eilish, Trent Reznor** and **Atticus Ross,** and more. Past winners and nominees and further details about the event can be found at hmmawards.com.

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

OUT TAKE



Carmichael Castaños

Composer

Web: carmichaelcastanos.com
Most recent: *Kaya IV*

For composer Carmichael B. Castaños, scoring *Kaya IV*, an official selection at the 2026 Tribeca Film Festival, meant looking inward. The film follows Nia, a half-Filipina teenager training in Filipino Martial Arts to prove she's "Filipino enough." "*Kaya* is about mixed-race identity," Castaños says. "The idea was to embrace both a traditional Filipino sound and a Western sound in the music without being too on-the-nose with one or the other."

Avoiding cliché meant drawing from his own life. "I'm a Filipino who spent most of my life growing up there, and then moved here," he says. "It was a culture shock, and I had to consider the meaning of home, which is something I think of as warm and familiar." That search led him to the kulintang, the traditional Filipino gong. "It's an instrument I gravitate to, because it feels like home to me," he says. "With the Western side of the score, we went with the traditional string orchestras and bombastic brass you typically hear in those scores, because we wanted to again play on that ideology of the familiar."

Castaños grew up with a guitar-playing father and a mother who made moviegoing a family tradition, but never considered film composing as a career. It wasn't until his last semester of unhappily studying aerospace engineering that a good friend encouraged him to pursue composing instead. "I fell in love with it and am proud to be one of the Filipino composers doing this," he says.

That resolve was tested on the upcoming Great American Family film *Christmas at Moose Lake*, which premieres Nov. 15. Castaños was given a deadline of less than two weeks to write music for a 2+ hour movie. "My first thought was: this will be a testament to myself of how well I can do this work without compromise. And I made it happen."

After nearly four years supporting mentorship and industry collaboration as a Los Angeles administrator with the Society of Composers & Lyricists, Castaños said he's learned that you build stability for yourself in the profession by building community.

▶ LAILA! EMBRACES POSSIBILITY ON NEW SINGLE "ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN"

Alternative R&B/pop artist LAILA! returns with "Anything Could Happen," a self-written, self-produced single and visual that transforms reflection into a dance-ready rush of possibility. Pairing bass-heavy production with footage from St. Thomas, the track celebrates life's unpredictability, creative freedom and the courage to keep moving forward. It marks the second chapter of LAILA!'s latest musical era.





▲ THE WOMACK SISTERS RELEASE SOULFUL DEBUT ALBUM WITH "CHAUFFEUR"

The Womack Sisters are stepping into the spotlight with their self-titled debut album via Daptone Records. Led by the gritty new single "Chauffeur," the record blends classic soul with deeply personal stories of struggle, resilience and family. Zeimani, BG and Kucha showcase their distinct voices while proving their greatest strength comes from singing together as one.





◀ DOX BRINGS BASS-DRIVEN HEAT TO DVIR-NUNS' "BAD B$TCH" EP

Producer DOX joins DvirNuns on "Bad B$tch," the title track from the indie dance producer's new three-track EP on Max Styler's Nu Moda. Built around sultry bilingual vocals, punchy drums, buoyant bass and tense electronic textures, the collaboration delivers a gritty, hypnotic club cut that spotlights DOX's knack for powerful, groove-heavy production while setting the tone for the EP.

◀ KREWELLA DRAW THEIR OWN "BLUEPRINT" WITH BASS-HEAVY NEW SINGLE

Krewella return with "the blueprint," a bass-heavy, hard dance single that celebrates 15 years of forging their own path. Blending ethereal melodies, dance-pop vocals, hyperpop chops and drum and bass, the track captures the duo's adventurous creative spirit. Released via their Mixed Kids Records imprint, the song marks another bold step into a new era for sisters Jahan and Yasmine Yousaf.



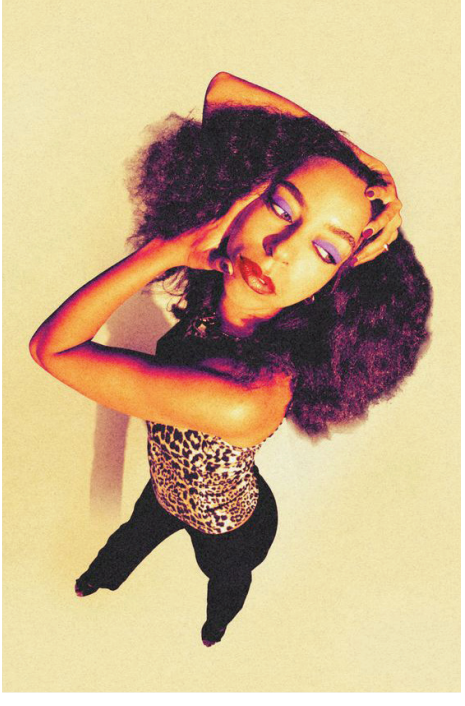
▲ HAAI IGNITES THE DANCEFLOOR WITH "IGNITION" FEATURING ECHONOMIST

HAAi returns with "Ignition (feat. Echonomist)," a high-energy new single from her latest album *DIGITiSE* via Mute. Blending broken beats, crystalline textures and four-to-the-floor momentum, the track pairs a rave-ready production with deeply personal lyrics about HAAi's coming-of-age as a queer kid. The collaboration continues her evolution toward communal dancefloor music.

► HAYLEY LAW GETS CAUGHT UP IN THE MOMENT WITH "CIRCLE BACK"

Hayley Law shares "Circle Back," the latest single from her debut album *Last Summer*, co-produced with Jesse Boykins III and MeLo-X. Exploring the rush and uncertainty of a whirlwind fling, the track finds Law embracing romance while reminding herself to stay grounded. To celebrate the release, Law threw a record-release show at Los Angeles' Silverlake Lounge.





◄ THUNDER BAE GOES DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE WITH NEW "GAY ALICE IN WONDERLAND" VIDEO

Düsseldorf-based artist THUNDER BAE unveils the surreal new video for "Gay Alice In Wonderland," a standout from her debut album *A WOMAN*. Using Lewis Carroll's fantastical world as a metaphor for growing up, chasing validation and discovering self-worth, the genre-defying artist delivers a playful celebration of queer identity, freedom and embracing yourself without anyone else's permission.

MUSIC CONNECTION

Tidbits From Our Tattered Past



1999 – Rob Zombie – #21

Looking back at our 1999 issue, MC caught up with theatrical shock-rocker Rob Zombie as he designed his immersive Universal Studios horror maze. Reflecting on the uncompromising demands of live performance and stage spectacle, Zombie declared, "You have to be quite an egomaniac to think that you can just walk onstage with nothing but your songs and captivate someone sitting a quarter mile away." Staying relentlessly driven to evolve his art and maintain his connection with his audience, he added, "I'm always working to make it better. Because if you become stale or put out crap and disappoint your fans, they'll move on."



2013 – Paramore – #4

In our 2013 issue, MC spoke with Paramore front-woman Hayley Williams following major lineup changes. Reflecting on navigating line-up shifts and internal growth, Williams admitted, "Sometimes you really need to go through the one thing you don't want to go through." Unwavering in her determination to connect with crowd members during intense live performances, she added, "I learned that the microphone is power and I can use that... If [someone] walks away loving us, that feels like a win, even if it's just one person."

Back issues available at musicconnection.com



Molly Tuttle

A Stripped-Back Return for Little Miss Sunshine

BY BRETT CALLWOOD



While the official line is that bluegrass music was born in 1939 when mandolin maestro Bill Monroe called his band the Blue Grass Boys, the reality is that musicians were playing mandolin, fiddle, acoustic guitar, banjo and double bass, or at least some combination of them, in the Appalachian Mountains and beyond, for years before that.

It's up there with the rootsiest of rootsy music, and it's tough to paint bluegrass as fresh. Think bluegrass, and you think Monroe, Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs and, for a pop culture reference, *Oh Brother Where Art Thou*. Mountains and countryside. Moonshine and overalls. That said, Alison Krauss and even Dolly Parton brought bluegrass into the modern era. Enter Molly Tuttle.

From her 2019 debut solo album *When You're Ready*, right through to her brand new *So Long Little Miss Sunshine* acoustic EP (which features six stripped-down tracks from the full-length album of the same name), Tuttle has been one of bluegrass' brightest lights. She's not the only one–friend and collaborator Sierra Hull has played her part too–but Tuttle has certainly shone as bright as anyone.

MC spoke with Tuttle via Zoom for this interview and found her to be an engaging conversationalist. She opened up about everything from her relationship with the bluegrass genre to her work raising awareness of alopecia (a condition Tuttle lives with), and spoke eloquently with charm, intelligence and authenticity. Even when speaking, and Tuttle is considerate with her answers, there's a songlike quality to her voice.

A Bay Area woman, Tuttle was introduced to bluegrass by her dad. "He's a music teacher, and he moved out to the West Coast in the '70s," Tuttle says. "He started teaching bluegrass music. He plays all the different bluegrass instruments, so banjo, fiddle, mandolin, guitar, and bass. He's been a music teacher out there for many years. And he was my guitar teacher growing up."

With her passion instilled, Tuttle was able to see several artists around the Bay Area, including Laurie Lewis.

"She's a wonderful singer-songwriter and leads her own bluegrass band," she says. "So I saw her a lot growing up. Another woman named Kathy Kallick is someone I got to know when I was a kid, and they were both great mentors to me when I was just starting out. We listened to a lot of bluegrass around the house, and some of my favorites were Hazel Dickens, and I loved Gillian Welch a lot. She's still one of my biggest heroes. So yeah, those were some of the folks that I listened to when I was first learning to write songs and sing and play the guitar."

Those local shows, and a bunch of Northern Californian bluegrass festivals, forged the beginnings of a career which has seen Tuttle pick up a bunch of International Bluegrass Music Awards, winning Guitar Player of the Year on numerous occasions. She twice won the Grammy for Best Bluegrass Album–in 2023 for *Crooked Tree* and in 2024 for *City of Gold*.

Her latest release, the acoustic EP, could better be thought of as a "stripped back" EP, as bluegrass is largely an acoustic artform anyway. Regardless, Tuttle took six of the best-suited songs and recorded them as a trio.

"So I was on acoustic guitar, and then my bass player Vanessa [McGowan], who's been on the road with me the past year and a half, she plays bass and sings," says Tuttle. "And then Mary [Meyer], who up until recently was on the road with me as well, she plays the mandolin and fiddle and sings. We had been working on these songs for the live shows, and there were a couple of radio shows, to not have the full band–we'd



go in and just play them as a trio, and it was so fun to hear the song stripped back into these just more simple versions with the three instruments. I felt like it gave everyone room to do a little extra. Like for me, my guitar playing is more of a centerpiece than in the original versions that have more production, have percussion, keys, and a bunch of different instruments and sounds that we're experimenting with in the studio, the fully produced versions off the original album. I feel like they're really exciting, and in our live show we play them pretty true to those versions as well. But I also wanted to show people how the songs sound in a more simplified way, leaning into that rootsy bluegrass side of what I do on these songs."

Neither McGowan nor Meyer were on the original, full-length *So Long Little Miss Sunshine* album; Tuttle started performing with the pair 18 months ago, and they toured the album with her. The musical relationship blossomed.

"I liked recording this EP last fall because we recorded it after we played the songs a bunch of times on stage, and I always feel like when you first record an album, you're all still learning the material," she says. "You're getting used to it, coming up with the arrangements on the spot, and then you can have a really fun, spontaneous, new, exciting energy in the studio. But then you go and play them live a bunch of times, and you settle into the songs in a different way, and you might play them a little differently than you did when you first recorded them. So I liked capturing that. That was fun for me, to get to go back and sing them slightly differently, because I'm so used to singing them now. I approach my guitar playing slightly differently. Some of the arrangements are a little different than on the original recordings, because we would come up with different arrangements for the live show."

The five songs chosen for reinvention on the EP are "The Highway Knows," "Rosalee," "Easy," "Old Me (New Wig)," and "Story of My So-Called Life." Tuttle says they were chosen simply because they're the songs that worked well with the simple instrumentation of bass, guitar and mandolin. Plus, she admits, they're some of her faves from the album.

"Some of them were ones we perform all the time, like 'The Highway Knows' is one we perform a lot," she says. "Same with 'Rosalee'—those ones also worked really well with the stripped back instrumentation. And then a couple of songs off the new EP were ones we hadn't performed live that much, like 'Story of My So-Called Life.' I felt like I wanted to give that song a moment on the EP, because we hadn't played it live as much, and it wasn't one of the first singles, but it was one of my favorite songs off the record. So, I just wanted to highlight that on the new EP. It has this indie-folk kind of rock vibe to it, but it also worked really well as a totally acoustic track that has really different instruments on it than on the original recording."

Tuttle self-produced, while Steve Burns engineered the EP. That said, the songs were just played and allowed to breathe.

"We'd played them a lot, so it was easy," Tuttle says. "We just went in and played them as we'd been playing them live, and playing them in our trio configurations whenever we got a chance to do that. So yeah, it was really natural and a lot different from when you first start recording new songs and you haven't played them a million times–this was more like, 'okay, we know how it goes. Let's go in and do it.'"

As mentioned, Tuttle's journey to this point has seen her release five albums, and win a ton of awards including those two Grammys. Her sound and style has grown and evolved as she's taken different paths.

"My first record was called *When You're Ready*, and that one was more in the singer-songwriter vein," she says. "I was exploring what I did on the guitar, still, and figuring out how it would fit into my songs in different ways. After that, I made a cover record [*But I'd Rather Be With You*] during the pandemic, and continued to explore those more contemporary sounds. But it was all cover songs that I liked to play. Some of them I covered live, or some I learned for that record."

Covering artists as diverse as the Rolling Stones, Rancid, Harry Styles and Cat Stevens, the covers album really showcased Tuttle's expansive musical vocabulary. But following *But I'd Rather Be With You*, she went back to her bluegrass roots.

"I wanted to make an album [*Crooked Tree*] that really stayed true to the tradition of the music I grew up playing with my dad, with my family," she says. "Honor my grandfather who was a banjo player, and started that tradition in my family. I'm the third-generation bluegrass musician. Then my follow-up to that was called *City of Gold*, and that was another bluegrass

record. But it took a few more left turns with the songwriting, pushed into some slightly more uncharted territory, but still was a totally bluegrass record in some ways. It has the five-piece bluegrass band. My live touring band, Golden Highway, was on that record, and that was our first band record we ever made. With this new album, I wanted to go back to my solo sound and just explore what it would sound like for me to write songs that didn't really fit into any specific box genre-wise, and push myself as a guitar player, and a singer and songwriter. Not feel like I had any constraints around what sound I was going for."

Bluegrass is a very traditional genre, with hardcore fans who will often insist on authenticity. Tuttle loves the music, but doesn't feel constrained.

"No matter what, I'm always going to be playing a lot of bluegrass," she says. "I do a lot of bluegrass in my show. I'm always getting together with other bluegrass musicians for this and that. It's just a constant in my life. So when my new record came out, some of my fans were like, 'Oh, you're not doing bluegrass anymore,' and I'm like, 'Well, it's just such a big part of who I am that I'm never gonna not do that.' It's never not gonna be part of what I do. But I like to have all these other facets to my art as well, and explore different sounds. It really just boils down to what my songs are calling for, and what kind of style I'm feeling inspired by."

With the new EP out, Tuttle has already been writing for her next album. She says, in fact, that she's always writing.

"I've got a new batch of songs that I'm excited about," she says. "I love recording with the people I play shows with. I didn't do that on my last album. I think that would be really fun because, now I've gotten together with these great players out on the road and we've toured so much, I feel like it would be fun to bring some of them in on this next project."

Tuttle says that she tends to write with her partner and husband, Ketch Secor (of the Old Crow Medicine Show). "We actually just got married a couple weeks ago, but we write together all the time," she says. "The new album, we wrote most of it together, and same with my last couple records. My first album we ever wrote for was *Crooked Tree*, and we wrote about half that record together. And then the next one we wrote a little more. This last one, we wrote almost everything together except for a couple of tracks that I wrote with my friend Kevin Griffin, who's a great songwriter. But yeah, I'm just comfortable writing with Ketch, and then I have a few other friends in Nashville that I write with. I've done so much more co-writing than I ever did starting out. When I first started writing, I only wrote by myself because I didn't really know any other songwriters, and then moving to Nashville, everyone likes to collaborate. I really like writing with other people because it can help you get out of your rut. It helps you bounce ideas off someone else who might have a good outside perspective."

MC saw Tuttle perform with the aforementioned Sierra Hull at Eric Clapton's Crossroads festival, and the pair have collaborated in the past. Tuttle says that she's been open to more.

"I would love to do more with Sierra," she says. "We talk about it every so often, and I'm sure it'll happen eventually. I just don't know when because we're both so busy with our own projects all the time. But I would love to get into the studio with her. You know, work on something, or if it's not a recording, maybe do some shows together. I've known her for so long, and I just love anytime I get to play music with her."

Naturally, we have to ask Tuttle about her current must-haves when it comes to gear: "On stage, I use my Felix preamp," she says. "That's been kind of my trusty preamp that I run my guitar through. With my guitar, I have a short clip-on mic inside the guitar and my Can KA pickup. So I use the Felix to blend those two channels together. And my front-of-house guy JoJo, he's really awesome at just kind of mixing in just a just enough mic to make it sound still like an acoustic guitar while relying on the pickup for a lot of the volume and beefiness to the tone when we play live, and he's got a lot of fun new effects and toys he's been playing with out on the road. I don't know exactly what they are, but my rig is pretty simple. I run the two channels, and just go through my preamp and tuner pedal, and it's pretty simple for me. But I do have a new double neck Martin I've been playing out on the road, which is fun. It's like a 12-string on one neck and then a six string on the other one. So I've been bringing that out with me in the studio. I defer to the producer or whoever I'm working with, and or maybe we test out a few different mics and see which sounds the best. It's always a work in progress with my live tone, but I'm in a place where I'm pretty happy with it now."



At the time of writing, Tuttle was preparing for some shows with Lukas Nelson, after which she was hoping to get into the studio for a bit. Perhaps play some solo shows in 2027.

"My band tour, touring with my full band, wraps up in mid-October," she says. "We have some more festivals, some headline shows, then some shows with Lucas Nelson co-headling. That's going to be super fun. So then around the holidays, I'm planning to go back home to California, maybe do a holiday show or two in my hometown. Then to kick off the new year, I'm teaching at a camp called the Pickin Party that's run by the McCurries, Del McCurry's family, and Jerry Douglas. My real focus is going to be my next record, probably towards the end of this year, going back and starting to work on that. So, my touring usually slows down a little bit around the holidays."

Despite the fact that she apparently never stops working, Tuttle finds time to work with and advocate for the National Alopecia Areata Foundation (NAAF).

"They're awesome," she says. "They raise awareness. They offer all sorts of different support. So if people are interested in treatments, they connect you with the latest research or doctors in your area who are specialists. If people don't really want to pursue treatment and just want to meet other people who have alopecia or join the local support group, they can do that for you. They work with schools. But yeah, they take all these different approaches depending on what people need, and they work every month. September is Alopecia Awareness Month, so they always do a big campaign to raise awareness. And they do an annual conference in June, where people from all over the country get together. They go to different cities, and it'll be a few hundred people. They do support groups throughout the weekend, and have specialists come in and talk about new developments and what we've learned about it, because it's an autoimmune disease that people don't know a ton about. They're an awesome foundation, and were super helpful for me getting involved with them because I needed to have that community and that support system."

Of course, she needs to find time to enjoy being a newlywed too. "We had a little time after the wedding, but only a few days," Tuttle says. "So I want to go on an official honeymoon at some point next year. I don't know when, but it feels like we both went right back on tour after the wedding, so we haven't had a lot of downtime to soak up the newlywed vibes."

Conveniently for "something old, something new and something borrowed," the grass is blue.

mollytuttlemusic.com

New Country Roundtable 2026

By Brett Callwood



Country music means many things to many people, and it isn't solely the stomping ground of truck drivers and rhinestone wearers. It's a big tent that incorporates many cultures, religions, and political ideologies. Importantly, there are fresh artists looking to carry the genre forward into a new era. We spoke to a handful...

Chris Johnson

hollywoodhillbillies.us

What drew you into country music originally?
Well, it was really big in my hometown, which was an equestrian, agricultural, and farming community. The town had regular country music concerts at the local fair and rodeos, and there were several local nightclubs that featured live country bands where I would go to see musicians perform.

Who were your early influences?
I was really into all kinds of music, but mostly country, Southern rock, and blues rock. For country, my influences were Merle Haggard, George Jones, Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, David Allan Coe, Johnny Paycheck, Gram Parsons, and The Byrds.

My Southern rock influences were the Allman Brothers, Lynyrd Skynyrd, ZZ Top, The Marshall Tucker Band, The Eagles, and The Black Crowes. My blues-rock influences were The Rolling Stones, Stevie Ray Vaughan, The Fabulous Thunderbirds, Arc Angels, George Thorogood, Buddy Guy, J.R. Wells, and Little Walter.

How do you think the genre has changed since your involvement, if at all?
Well, it has changed somewhat. It has become a big tent of musical sounds and themes. On the charts now, you have really traditional stuff, '90s-sounding material, along with all types of mashups and influences, with folk, pop, rock, and hip-hop overlapping.

There's always a battle between the traditional and contemporary. Where do you sit?
I lean more toward the traditional side of storytelling, but on this record I experimented with modern production styles, hoping to reach a greater audience.



How do you describe your sound, and where does it sit on the country spectrum?
I would say this record is more traditional. However, it's somewhat folk on the ballads and darker-themed songs, a little country-pop on the up-tempo stuff, and perhaps has a little sprinkling of Southern rock on the songs with higher-gain guitar sounds.

Tell us about your latest release.
It was recorded and produced by Nick Morzoff. It features Jordan Ziff on guitar, Federico Delfino on bass, Stephen Haaker on drums, Skip Edward on keys, Randall Hess on pedal steel, and Aubrey Richmond on fiddle and harmony vocals.

The songs were all pulled from my catalog of tunes that I had written and that we auditioned for this record.

Redd Faye
reddfaye.com

What drew you to country music, and who were your early influences?
I don't know. By 5 or 6, I loved to sing. To anything. Dog, doll, the sky. I grew up in a place where I could sing wildly and expressively, without borders. When I visited my grandfather on his farm in Oklahoma, on later visits my signed recording artist and great-uncle Stoney Edwards would play guitar and we would all sit on the porch and sing together. That seed grew after his death. To continual lineage, which belongs to me. Dolly Parton, Crystal Gayle, the Judds and Stoney Edwards.

My love for country music began [with] the storytelling, the connection, basic emotion, a freedom to exist.

How do you think the genre has changed since your involvement, if at all?
The game has changed a lot in country music since my great-uncle Stoney and his generation. Charmingly enough, so many people still love the recognizable sounds of country, folk, Appalachian that those roots have remained.

Music is like a wire—how far can you stretch it? It can stretch and evolve, but it still has a starting point. Collaborations have come from every walk of music to country now and some of them work.

There's always a battle between contemporary and traditional country music. Where do you stand?
I suppose from the outside looking in, it can look like a battle. But from the inside looking out, I see banjos the steel guitar, drums, fiddles notes, and expression.

Yes, some of it is very different, but it all comes from an organic place. Finding the two that actually work together—that's where something spectacular happens. It's inevitable, to fit some of that in, but you've got to know when and when not to.

How do you describe your sound, and where does it sit in the country spectrum?
When I put my phone to someone's ear or my mouth close to the microphone to sing, I expect to hear something warm, I recognize—something traditional—but I also expect to hear something surprisingly intelligible. Roughness versus softness. Desperation versus subtlety, anger versus love. Telling the story. Giving life to those origin expressions that come from us all. Like yodeling.

I don't think music has to have boundaries, but the emotion and essence of what makes my voice my voice must be there. I think it's important to have foundation in traditional country, but from there, it's completely natural to take a fork in the road.

What inspired your next release?
I'm ecstatic to answer this because my next release is called "Yippee Ki Yay Mothertrucker."

It's about empowering us women and celebrating the unsung heroes I've met out on the road.

They're great people, dedicated men and women with big hearts who just want to get the job done.

It's truly about women truck drivers, but it's also about the trucking industry as a whole. This industry has kept America moving for many years, as it will for many years to come. I'm proud to say it's kind of a truckers' anthem!

What's next for you?
I've been putting my band together so we can begin our USA tour, and hopefully, in the coming months, take it overseas. I'm excited putting the name Redd Faye really out there and letting people commune with what we're creating. Everything I'm doing is to connect and flow.

Jesse Lynn Madera
instagram.com/jesselynnmadera

What drew you into country music, originally?
Love this question. I write songs that seem to fall into a few different genres, but country is pretty much always somewhere in there. My sensibilities as a songwriter come from growing up on country music. Willie, Kris, Dolly… they were gods. I was born In Parkersburg, West Virginia, and my grandparents were self-described hillbillies. Country music was always



on the radio. Grandma sort of sounded like Kitty Wells when she sang around the house and Grandpa taught himself how to play banjo. I think I was just born with it in my ears.

How do you think the genre has changed since your involvement, if at all?
Well, it has changed a lot, and I know that's a sensitive topic. Modern day country, on pop country radio, does sound a lot different from what I grew up on. And it's not to say that the songs themselves aren't good. I think those hitmakers still crank out some well-crafted songs. The '90s were a glorious time in country music, and I miss those kinds of songs, that kind of production, that kind of musicianship. On the other hand, we have never had so many incredible singers all at once! I just guess that the demand may have changed or something. I'm not sure. But I don't consider myself a true country artist anyway, so maybe I should just keep quiet!
There's always a battle between the traditional and contemporary. Where do you sit?
Team traditional, I'm sentimental.

How do you describe your sound, and where it sits on the country spectrum?
I am an artist like a painter is an artist and I see what I do as creating collections. I'm indie so I have some freedom to just write and sing what comes naturally. We moved around a lot when I was young so I picked up a lot of different sounds. Country music tends to show up somehow, somewhere in most of my songs but I don't know that I'd be officially classified as a country artist. Some of my songs, like 'Austin' or 'Sweet Pretender' or 'That House' fit neatly on the spectrum. I'd say they're more '90s country with some southern rock. There's a Hammond on Austin for instance, which probably immediately gets it kicked out of the Country Club.

Tell us about your latest release...
My latest single is called 'Woke Up In L.A.' and it's my version of country. There's a lot of Dolly influence I can hear, there's an Appalachian feel to the melody. I wrote it several years ago about moving from New York to L.A. and fantasizing about Montana. I love so many places and am an escapist. I'd left my band in N.Y.C. and moved to L.A. for love. It was scary to leave the momentum I'd achieved for a place where I hardly knew anyone and to start over from scratch. I was scared. I was not fun to live with and I take responsibility for my own discontentment. I learned from that time of life and I don't regret the move at all.

What do you have planned for the coming months?
I'm about to go on tour with Amy Speace in October, play festivals in winter, more shows in the early spring, and then I'm heading out late spring with Colin Blunstone to tour in the Netherlands. I'm also finishing writing songs for my next album and will be recording those soon. Looking forward to all of it!

Hailey Benedict
haileybenedictmusic.com

What drew you into country music, originally?
From an early age, I remember twirling in my living room with my mom to artists like The Chicks, Dolly Parton, Shania Twain, and Martina McBride. A couple of years later, I was gifted a CD and discovered my love for Taylor Swift. I was immediately enthralled by her picturesque storytelling and the sheer relatability of her music. Looking back, it's funny because I never even realized the music I was listening to was "country" at the time. To me, it was always just great, relatable music that made me feel something. One thing I always admired about my parents is that they listened to all types of music without ever putting it in a specific box or genre. Although they weren't musical themselves, we had music of all kinds playing around the house. When I started writing songs at age nine, much of what I grew up listening to naturally infused itself into my sound. As I developed, it became very apparent that storytelling, the true core of country music, was always the North Star of my writing and became the true home for my music.



How do you think the genre has changed since your start, if at all?
I think the genre itself has embraced a crossover spirit over time, and it has been so exciting to watch it grow. Country music has so many different influences nowadays, and with so many diverse voices, its landscape has become incredibly rich and special. There is a reason it is one of the biggest genres today, and I believe that's due to its ability to embrace so many subgenres. But the really special part is that no matter where it explores musically, country storytelling always lies at the center.

There's always a battle between the traditional and contemporary. Where do you sit?
I would definitely say contemporary, but it often depends on the song. Part of the joy of being a songwriter is that sometimes a song naturally writes itself, and almost in a kismet kind of way, it chooses its own style. Those writing moments can exist separately from my specific artist brand, letting the song dictate whether it leans more traditional or modern.

How do you describe your sound, and where it sits on the country spectrum?
I'd describe my sound as a true country-pop mix. The heart of it is always in the lyrics, and like any good country song, my favorite challenge is nailing the "hook" or the "flip." Musically, I love to experiment and infuse whatever I'm currently listening to into my own songs, regardless of the genre. I like to think of musical genres like a really good painting: you can paint a beautiful picture using just the color red, but there are so many other colors on the palette. Adding those different shades makes the art more vibrant, dynamic, and full of depth, so why not use all the colors available to you? I feel the same way about creating music and trying not to let anything keep me in a box.

Tell us about your latest release...
"Chem History" is my newest single, and it captures that country-pop fusion I was describing earlier. Sonically, it features staple country instrumentation like steel guitar, banjo, and shimmery acoustics, but we also layered in luscious vocal stacks, unique synths, and pop-leaning melodies. The song actually started as a hook I had saved in my phone. It's not just a play on words, but a clever, tongue-in-cheek way to describe that one relationship that always has a funny way of reappearing in your life. It tackles that age-old question: could it be fate, or is it just a bad habit? I had so much fun co-writing this one with my incredibly talented friends and co-writers, Claire Douglas and Clara Park!

What do you have planned for the coming months?
It's been such an exciting year getting to release the music I've been working on for the last couple of years. I'm incredibly grateful for my team at Big Loud and how much they've encouraged me to write and push myself to constantly beat my own catalogue. On top of having new music out, I'm continuing to write and work toward my debut album. I've been collaborating with Josh Kerr (Keith Urban, Maddie & Tae, Thomas Rhett) on producing, and it has been so inspiring to watch his process and learn alongside him. Beyond the studio, I absolutely can't wait to get back out on tour and connect with fans everywhere!



Timmy McKeever
timmymckeever.com

What drew you into country music, originally?
For as long as I can remember it's always been country music playing around the house and in the car. It was always legends like Eric Church, Jason Aldean, Toby Keith... guys who influenced me as well as many other artists. Growing up on the West Coast, people think it's strange that I fell into country music but because that's all that we listened to, it felt right.

How do you think the genre has changed since your start, if at all?
I think it's definitely widened as far as what can classify as a "country" song. I believe streaming has had a huge impact on the genre as a whole because artists are now being influenced by whatever kind of music they want to listen to. I think some artists have been influential in the sonic trends of the mainstream genre, and that goes back to the roots of it. There have always been trailblazers like Hank Jr. and other legends that redefined the genre, but I think the interesting thing about country music today is not the mainstream trend but all the different subgenres that fall beneath it. I think this aspect of it will only continue to grow as country music expands its global reach.

There's always a battle between the traditional and contemporary. Where do you sit?
Full transparency I pull from so many different influences that I think my music has flavors of both. I listen to classic country just as much as I do contemporary. But I also listen to rock & roll, pop punk, rap, and many other genres, and I think all of it comes to light in its own unique way with the different melodic, lyrical, and production decisions I make.

How do you describe your sound, and where it sits on the country spectrum?
I describe my sound as rock-leaning country with pop elements. At the end of the day, I make music that feels authentically cool, and music that feels like me. I'm just grateful that my music has been able to reach an audience that connects with my sound like I do.

Tell us about your latest release...
My latest release is a track called "Drove Her Away." It's a feel-good take on a breakup situation about taking accountability for the relationship ending. It lives up to its name and is a great song to bump with your windows down on a backroad, on a boat, or anywhere in between. I love the track so much and I hope the fans love it as much as I do!

What do you have planned for the coming months?
Our next release is one of my favorite songs I have ever written, and I absolutely cannot wait to get it out. Aside from that I'm grateful to be able to spend some time in Nashville as touring for the year winds down and pull back the slingshot as we head into next year. Right now, I'm in the works with what is in my opinion the best music I've ever created.

Kim Carnes' Universal Songs



Singer and songwriter Kim Carnes may be best known for her 1981 single "Bette Davis Eyes," but she has a lot more in her arsenal than that one song. Between 1971 and 2004 she released 13 studio albums and a new box set, *Universal Songs*, compiles 10 of them. Only the *Rest On Me* debut, *Checkin' Out the Ghosts* (1991) and *Chasin' Wild Trains* (2004) are missing. But the 10 records released on A&M, EMI America, and MCA are all here.

The music is, obviously, amazing. But the packaging is stunning too; a 24-page booklet includes a foreword written by Carnes and some gorgeous photos. Unsurprisingly Carnes, who recently moved back to Los Angeles and spoke to *MC* via Zoom, is delighted with the finished product.

"Super happy," she says. "I love the idea of having everything in one box. People have asked for that for a long time, and I've always said no plan. I don't think it's ever going to happen, so I'm thrilled that it's going to come out soon."

It is wonderful, though we do wonder why the remaining three albums weren't included to please the completists.

"No reason," Carnes says. "I'm thrilled that David Ackerman in the U.K. put all these songs together and did a box set, and he's been great to work with. I've gotten candid photos together, which I haven't actually seen in the package. I picked the cover, and that was easy. Henry Diltz took the cover in downtown L.A., and I really like it. I hope you know my greatest hope is that people who aren't longtime fans and only know my singles, things that have been hits, but they don't know the other songs on the albums that are my personal favorites, I want them to discover those songs, so I hope that happens."

The cover is lovely, with Carnes in a stylish and quite heavy coat sitting in front of a wire fence with the words "Stop the Madness" painted on a wall behind her.

"Henry and I went to downtown L.A. six, seven years ago, and we saw the graffiti on the walls, "Stop the Madness," and we both just looked at each other and went, 'We've got to take a picture in front of that'," Carnes says. "And sadly, it pertains to today just as much as back then, or any time in history. I like the statement that it makes because I wish we could stop the madness for sure. And I loved the old vintage French coat I got at a used clothing place here in L.A. It just all worked out perfectly. I love that cover a lot. And Henry Diltz, over the years, had taken lots of photos with me. The cover of my *Lighthouse* album, lots of promo photos. So he was a good friend, and I haven't talked to him in several years. And I would love to reconnect with him. I'm not a fan of photo sessions. I don't like it, but he made it fun. We'd go on location and just talk away, and he made it super casual and fun."

Carnes says that, when it came to putting the packaging together, Ackerman gave her total control. "The photos, the songs that weren't to be included," she says. "Every album, there'd be a couple of songs that I would record and realize I didn't want them on the album. I didn't like my vocal for a million reasons, and I wanted to make sure those weren't part of the box set, just the albums like they were intended, and then with some dance tracks and a few bonus tracks on it, which fans wanted. Actually, fans wanted a lot more than that. They wanted super long mixes, lots of dance mixes, and David Ackerman honed it down to just what we could do so. I'm anxious for it to come out, and I'm super happy with it."

Carnes has been dabbling with new material, but don't expect a full new album any time soon. "Not a whole new album," she says. "But my next project is recording a bonus track or two to put out *Chasin' Wild Trains*, on a limited vinyl, which I'm really excited about. I love that album. It was just a pure labor of love with writers who were good friends, and I had them all come play guitar on songs we wrote together, sing artists that I admire greatly. So I really love that album, and I'm excited to have it on vinyl."

This box set will help Carnes' legacy forge forward, aided by the fact that pop artists from Kylie Minogue to JoJo Siwa have cited her as an influence. "I don't know that I influenced them, but if I did, great," Carnes says. "In that same vein, I love mentoring new young artists and passing along anything that I can pass along that might help them. I think more than anything, just believe in yourself, stick to it because there's a million voices in your ear, and you have to know who you are and what you want to do to not listen to everybody. You have to be selective. Just believe in yourself and follow your truth."

With the box set out, Carnes is focusing on the *Chasin' Wild Trains* reissue. "Next project will be finishing the bonus cuts for *Chasin' Wild Trains*, getting that on vinyl, and then writing for the next project," she says. "It was funny last year, totally unexpected–a really wonderful, successful DJ out of Atlanta contacted me. I have my own artist master of 'Bette Davis,' and it does really great on streaming, in movies and TV, and I used most of the original people who were on the track to re-record it. And she came to me and said, 'Can we use your master? I want to send it out to four really successful DJs to do their own dance mixes, and we'll make an EP. Is that okay?' And I was like, sure, that sounds great. And in 24 hours on all the streaming platforms, it was number one, which was a total shock to me. I never anticipated that happening, so it was interesting and super fun."

kimcarnes.com

Nicko McBrain

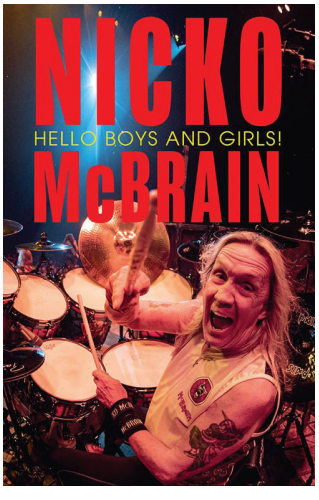
The Number of the Beat

Characters like Nicko McBrain don't come along very often. The larger-than-life tub-thumper with British metal icons Iron Maiden may have recently retired from live duties, but a conversation with the man (ours took place via Zoom) is still a life-affirming experience. This writer has interviewed McBrain a few times but, even when spending time in his company for the first time, he makes you feel like you're an old pal. Warm and lovely, and blessed with a big, hearty laugh, he's simply the kind of human that the world needs more of.



He's also written a book about his clearly epic existence. We reviewed it favorably last month, noting that he's been using his downtime since semi-retirement wisely. The idea popped into McBrain's head about 15 years ago, when he was offered a book deal and made a start but ran into the brick wall that we like to call "writer's block," and ended up paying back the hefty advance. Fast-forward to now and McBrain, without a grueling touring schedule tying him down, revisited the book with more success.

"Harper Collins went, 'Yep, fantastic'," McBrain says. "I got together with a guy called Ben Dirs in London last year, and he would ask me questions. I would tell him stories. Then he would transpose those stories for me. So, he co-wrote the book. Really, he helped me finish it off. So, we got to the stage where the first chapter he wrote for me, it wasn't me speaking. It wasn't like me telling that story. And then we had another meeting in London together, and he went 'right, I've got you now.'"



They *did* do a great job! McBrain has a distinctive voice, and one can imagine the words in the book being read aloud by him. In fact, you don't need to imagine it because McBrain has voiced the audiobook.

"You know, the thing that I wanted to pull across is that it's my story, and it's like me telling the story," he says. "As I said, I had 21 chapters, but obviously, when you give the book to the publishers, they go, 'Hang on a minute, we've got to get rid of that, that, that. And you go, 'Well, no, that's important. You can't get rid of that one. Well, all right, that's going to go then. This this one's going to go.'"

With that in mind, McBrain told us a story that *didn't* make the book, about an overnight session with veteran musicians Mike Leslie and Billy Day at the end of 1972 at the Whitfield Street CBS Studios, London, and a young Iggy Pop helping them load their gear afterwards. A little bit of sleuthing reveals that Iggy was there at the time to record the Stooges' *Raw Power* masterpiece.

The book covers McBrain's time in Pat Travers' band and Trust before, obviously, joining the metal behemoth that is Maiden. The drummer is honest throughout it all, reflective, and always decent.

"I wanted to have class," he says. "I didn't want to be in the gutter with it. There are certain little stories in there that are a little bit risqué, with a bit of dodgy language and stuff. People think about me as, 'he's a drummer in this fantastically fantastic, famous band.' Yes, I lived that rock 'n' roll lifestyle, but I didn't want it to portray that. I wanted it to be more the personal side. How I was feeling in my life, and relating those stories was very important. Getting those memories and knowing the fullest story for some of them was hard. It was like going back into an emotion that I suppressed for a while, but I wanted it to portray me. My life hasn't always been Iron Maiden. Obviously, you know 10 years of professional playing with all kinds of different and wonderful people, and not so wonderful people. That's what I wanted to do, and I think we achieved that."

He absolutely did. A man of faith nowadays, McBrain has let go of his grudges. We find out in the book that he was angry with Pat Travers for years over the way that he had been ousted from that band. Now, the two old comrades are close again.

"I took that skeleton out, and that was the last one that was rattling about," he says. So, I don't really have any others. Well, I would apologize to Tony Herbert, the guy I kicked in the bollocks when I was at school. That's the only skeleton I've got."

With the book out, McBrain has been engaging in "An evening with Nicko" readings and conversations. He has a restaurant called Rock 'n' Roll Ribs. Plus, he has a Maiden tribute band of his own, amusingly called Titanium Tart, which keeps him playing the music he loves without having to spend months on the road away from his family.

"We have one rehearsal a week, and so that keeps my hand in," McBrain says. "It keeps me from deteriorating, from not remembering songs. I need to keep those songs going, and I'm doing pretty good on that. I'm happy with the band. They're great players, all young guys, except for Mitch [Tanne, also co-owner of the restaurant]. He's an old fart like me."

Performing in small venues with Titanium Tart may not be the same as playing the world's biggest venues with Maiden, but McBrian appreciates the intimacy. This is, after all, a choice he made.

"I love that vibe, that intimacy," he says in conclusion. "In the smaller venue, you're playing to everyone. I love it. And you know, we do about seven songs, and then I get up and talk to the audience for sometimes 20 minutes. I haven't got a problem chatting to people as you can tell."

We wouldn't have it any other way.

instagram.com.titanium.tart
rocknrollribs.com

Out of Order

Peter Hook On New Order's Ongoing Turmoil, the Rock Hall and...Dogs

"Sometimes you literally do have to pinch yourself...how lucky I've been." Peter Hook, co-founder of Joy Division and New Order, is in a place of immense gratitude. His career, which has spanned six decades, has given him a life most musicians only dream of. Now, as the frontman for Peter Hook & the Light, he tours the world playing some of Joy Division and New Order's most beloved albums and hits, including the highest-selling 12" single of all time, "Blue Monday," along with selections from the Light's catalog.

But to say New Order's legacy is a complicated one would be an understatement. The original lineup—Bernard Sumner, Hook, Stephen Morris and Gillian Gilbert—hasn't played together since 2007, when Hook announced the split. However, Hook maintained a 25 percent stake in Vitalturn Company Ltd. to maintain royalty rights in a secure manner once their label, Factory Records, closed down.

Sumner and Morris initially denied the breakup, then Sumner, Morris and Gilbert regrouped as New Order in 2011 without Hook, leading to scathing memoirs, contentious legal battles and royalty disputes over using the band name. Hook sued Sumner, Morris and Gilbert in 2015, alleging they'd formed a new company behind his back, one that generated an income close to $11 million. A final settlement was reached in 2017.

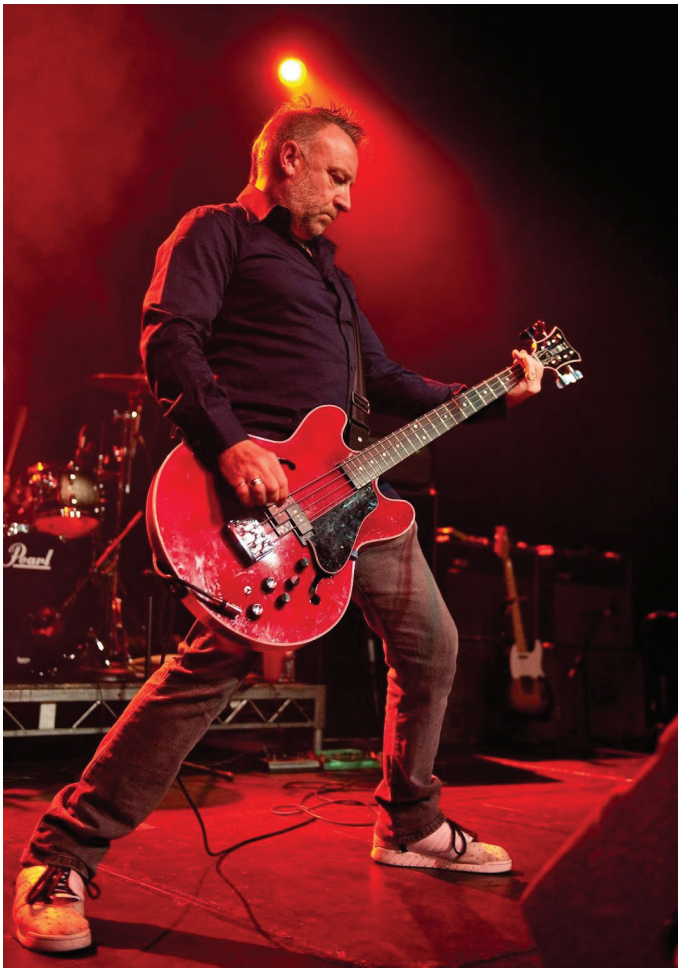
"What they did was, in my mind, absolutely unforgivable," Hook says via Zoom. "It's not particularly what they did, because it was basically about money and carrying on, which I sort of do get, but I didn't get the *et tu Brute* bit."

The ongoing disputes have plagued the relationship between Hook and Sumner to such a degree that Hook doesn't anticipate sharing the podium with him when both groups are inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame on November 14. Nonetheless, Hook doesn't shy away from discussing it and offers his own insights into New Order's latest lineup change.

"Do you know what's the weirdest thing?" he asks. "Now that Barney's [Bernard] doing it on his own, it seems even more ridiculous than ever. Stephen and Gillian quit touring with him in June."

Hook's candor recently landed him in hot water with Sumner once again. Speaking to *Rolling Stone* in April, he evidently made some comments that didn't sit right with his former mate.

"I did get a letter telling me off for my comments, so we're still each at each other's throats," he says. "It's quite interesting. I was looking up freedom of speech, which is a big thing, isn't it? Even with old Donald [Trump], especially in America, freedom of speech is a big thing. I was quite shocked that they are criticizing my freedom of speech. I cannot tell you exactly what they took issue with, for legal reasons, but I think you can probably guess.



But you're entitled to tell your side and your story—you're entitled to that."

The most perplexing part for Hook is the lack of communication at the onset of the dispute. Considering they'd been friends and bandmates for decades, he wonders why Sumner and the rest of the group didn't simply start a dialogue. There's a sense he'd much rather be on good terms with them than not. After all, the Rock Hall induction is a big deal.

"They have a team round them in the same way that I do, and surely your first port of call would be to talk," he says. "Then, if you couldn't get anywhere, then do it. But the thing is that we're all still here and we should be celebrating that fact that we're getting in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame."

The conversation suddenly pivots to dogs after Hook's daughter arrives. She has a little guy named Ned that Hook clearly adores. On his desk, he points out, sit the ashes of his beloved Labrador, who died at 15. His tone softens as he talks about her, then he notices this writer's chihuahua Paco. Though he initially thought Paco was a cat, we explain he's just a small dog that has somehow managed to live to 17 (and counting). He seems genuinely interested in hearing about him and, in that moment, it's obvious just how caring and sensitive Hook really is. It's no surprise the betrayal he felt from his bandmates cut so deeply.

But despite the dissolution of New Order, Hook's career has continued to flourish. In addition to his work with Peter Hook & the Light, he was the guest bassist for Gorillaz's 2020 single "Aries" from the band's *Song Machine, Season One: Strange Timez* project. His relationship with frontman Damon Albarn stretches back to the Blur days.

"Someone like Damon Albarn is incredible," he says. "I find him to be incredible. He's so consistent. He writes non-stop. It's unbelievable."

He asks me if I've seen the Blur documentary and with a tinge of embarrassment I reply, "No, but I need to."

He continues, "Well, Damon lives in a lighthouse at the edge of England. It's a beautiful place. The band convened there in his studio, and there was a really sad moment when he was talking about the lighthouse. He turned around and he goes, 'I never thought I'd end up here on my own.' It was a really sad moment for somebody as successful as him with all the things that he's achieved for him to say that he was lonely. And weirdly, the other three members of Blur ignored it, and that's probably one of the most profound things he could have said. Mate, if I'd have been there, I'd have gone and given him a hug. No one gave him a hug or anything, not even a slap on the back."

One can't help but wonder if he sees himself in Albarn and that maybe—just maybe—he needs a hug from Sumner, Gilbert and Morris to finally be at peace.

peterhookandthelight.live

RAMPD Keeps Creating Space





"We really want to impress upon the industry that not everybody is created equal in this industry the way it is now, and we believe that they should be—regardless of their gender, race, disability, or neurodivergence," says Lachi, RAMPD.org's founder & CEO.

Launched in January of 2022 as a grassroots organization to address lack of visibility, accessibility and representation for disabled artists and industry professionals within music, RAMPD (Recording Artists and Music Professionals with Disabilities) was created by singer-songwriter and music executive Lachi, alongside co-founder violinist-songwriter Gaelynn Lea (winner of 2016's NPR Tiny Desk Contest).

Expanding from advocacy into consulting, professional development, programming, talent discovery, and accessibility training, RAMPD recently held their first songwriter camp to empower disabled and/or neurodivergent artists, songwriters and producers, as well as those with chronic conditions. Teaming up with Concord Music Publishing (see Concord's initiative at bit.ly/3VqHQNq)—their last official event before becoming part of BMG—with support from BetterHelp (three months' free services to all), Backline (wellness packs to all), Nixie (various drinks) and StageWATER (water), for a multi-day hybrid camp with 30 disabled and neurodivergent creators (22 from the RAMPD network—many of whom are Recording Academy voting and professional members—and eight from the Concord side) at Los Angeles' Paramount Studios. Empowering disabled artists, songwriters and producers in an effort to encourage connection and collaboration alongside Concord-affiliated creatives (including Danielle Hollobough, Ivan Estrella, Marsha Elle, Natalis and Jai Yoo), disabled creators received direct access to industry professionals to showcase their skills and create potential sync opportunities, with virtual participants attending via livestream songwriting-production room access (through RAMPD's partnership with Muse Sessions).

"It couldn't have gone any more spectacularly," Lachi says. "The beauty of what RAMPD brings—and especially what we brought to the camp—was a feeling of not having to perform, getting to be yourself. Whether you were one of the participants who identify as having a disability or neurodivergence, one of the participants from the Concord side, or worked at Paramount Studios, everyone had this beautiful feeling of being able to work with other folks who are just amazing songwriters, creators and producers, making amazing music, and telling stories that are not often told from perspectives that are not often heard from. Liberation: that really is what it was."

RAMPD's leadership team—including Founder/CEO Lachi, interim Executive Director Terra Lopez, Head of Operations Arthur Gwynne, along with Concord leadership (Sync VP Mayra Vargas) made space for disabilities across the board, ensuring wheelchair accessibility and accommodating participants' individual needs, including ASL services, wellness kits, extra breaks and staff support, gluten-free and low-sodium food options, fidget spinners, asthma and energy support, and providing travel stipends for those without resources to attend.

Culminating in a club mixer and listening party celebration at Bar Covell, the event produced 30 original songs that will join the Concord (now a BMG company) library for potential use in future film, television, and gaming sync projects. Says Lachi, "It was a beautiful give and take; a couple of people wanted to join the [RAMPD] network. We love when that happens."

Some Paramount staff observed parts of the camp, even joining the club mixer, and shared that it was "one of the most beautiful camps ever run," adding that they loved the feeling of everyone rooting for each other. Adds Lachi, "they really loved the vibe and good company with folks just being their open selves." Ultimately, she says, "we're trying to make it so folks who would never get opportunities like this begin to feel supported the way they deserve, but also that the music industry at large sees what RAMPD is doing and wants to fashion after what we're doing."

"We had two days of folks coming in, making music at this world-renowned studio, with world-renowned producers and writers, topped off with what we call a DisCo house—a disability community house—where everyone participated [at Bar Covell]. We took pictures, listened to the music, Concord was checking the tracks out live. It was such a good, beautiful vibe. Everybody was dressed up. We had wheelchairs, walkers, canes and dogs on that red carpet. It was a beautiful time. I'm smiling ear to ear just harkening back to the experience that we had," Lachi reflects.

Since becoming a corporate partner at the 64th annual GRAMMY awards, which saw the addition of a visible stage ramp, sign language on the red carpet, and live caption and audio descriptions for their programming. RAMPD's partnership with the Recording Academy has expanded to include ASL access and deaf media participation and representation. 2026 also saw RAMPD member Matthew Whitaker take home a GRAMMY. The hope is to extend ASL interpretation to streaming services so that viewers at home can also benefit from full program access.

Selected as a Zero Project Honoree (2022), inducted into the Susan M. Daniels Disability Mentoring Hall of Fame and named a Music Business Association Agent of Change (both in 2023), Lachi was named a *USA Today* Woman of the Year for her leadership and inclusion efforts. As a recording artist, songwriter, speaker, and music-industry executive, she is the first openly disabled, blind, and neurodivergent person to become a Recording Academy Trustee.

Now with support from Netflix, Live Nation, the National Independent Venue Association (NIVA) and A2IM, RAMPD is being recognized by Spotify for its female leadership. They're also working to support the LARAS (Latin Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences), and look forward to working alongside the Children's Music Network to create sensory rooms at their conferences and festivals. Lachi's *Magnificent* children's album was also recently named a Shorty Award finalist for its 'We are the industry' campaign, using 'joy as resistance.'

For full details and upcoming events, disability or policy consultations, cultural training, sensory room support, or to help the RAMPD organization in their efforts (the company is fiscally sponsored by a 501(c)(3) and tax donations are tax-deductible), visit rampd.org.

Tinashe

9

Popstar

Nice Life Recording Company, Atlantic Records, Tinashe Music
Producers: Various



Tinashe challenges the meaning of being a superstar with her eighth studio album *Popstar*. It's a candid glimpse into her musical journey over the past decade, the good and the bad. In "Empty Stadium," Tinashe's anxiety takes over as she imagines an empty arena where no one can hear her music, while the title track focuses on the romanticization of being a popstar. The song "Heavy Weight" takes things further, tapping into her personal struggles: "I know everyone relies on me to keep it all together, And I'm killing myself tryna make it better." The true star here is the interesting production, filled with textures of pop, R&B, and electro. Album opener "Sunglasses" starts with alluring ASMR sounds as Tinashe's soft vocals kick in with infectious reverb. The bubbling energy continues with the in-your-face track "Too Easy." Creatively, the song seamlessly transitions into the infectious acid house/electro track "Melatonin." The 16-track list could have come off bloated, but every song has a different sound that keeps things interesting. *Popstar* is ambitious and highlights the best sides of Tinashe. **- *Jacqueline Naranjo***

Gretchen Parlato

8

The Wild Ones

The Orchard
Producers: Gretchen Parlato, Alan Hampton



With trademark ethereal mastery, Gretchen Parlato releases her seventh album, *The Wild Ones*. The gorgeous collection features Robert Glasper, Gerald Clayton, Alan Hampton, Mark Guiliana, Becca Stevens, Amber Navran (Moonchild) and Meshell Ndegeocello navigating a dreamy blend of jazz, R&B, and soulful vocals, syncopated harmonies and clean, contemporary instrumentals. In a partnership favoring instinct over arrangement, Parlato and co-producer Alan Hampton incorporate old and new material, including original interpretations of Stevie Wonder, Roland Orzabel and Josh Mease music. A captivating journey that draws on jazz sensibilities while injecting fresh combinations of sound. **- *Andrea Beenham***

The Linda Lindas

7

Gotta Get Out

Reprise Records
Producer: Carlos De La Garza



Unapologetic and raw, L.A.-based punk rock quartet The Linda Lindas really know how to capture the restlessness of growing up in uncertain times on their third studio album, *Gotta Get Out.* The title track and album opener, "Gotta Get Out," aptly showcase the themes of the record with urgency and vulnerability. The group is not afraid to sing about tough subjects including fascism on "Blood in Our Hands" and climate change on "Nothing Left." The choice to highlight bassist Eloise Wong's deep husky screamo-like vocals and aggressive guitar riffs on some of these tracks helps hone in on the energy. The group's unfiltered songwriting is refreshing and a lot of fun to listen to. **- *Jacqueline Naranjo***

Brand X

8

Theory of Nothing: Recorded Live 1977

Moon June Records
Producer: Percy Jones



Presumed to have been lost, this live two-disc document sees British jazz-rockers Brand X at the top of their game. These tracks, taken from two nights in Chicago, were unearthed from the late keyboardist Robin Lumley's personal vault. These blokes were right up there with RTF, Bruford and Mahavishnu Orchestra, taking progressive music in a direction that has still not been replicated. Their collective ability to navigate Latin, funk, rock and bop-like runs, with a sense of melody and cinematic style is breathtaking. **- *Eric Harabadian***

Greta Van Fleet

6

Tear it Down

Republic Records
Producers: Mike Elizondo, Greta Van Fleet



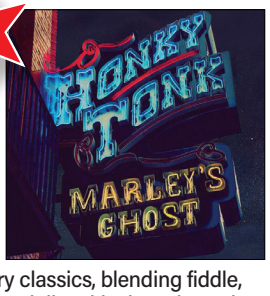
After a three-year hiatus, Greta Van Fleet return with their fourth studio album *Tear it Down*. The album starts off strong with the atmospheric instrumental track "Into the Beginning," and *Tear it Down*'s instrumentation is ambitious with lots of focus on the vibrant riffs and solos on the title track and the tune "Heart and the Beat." Vocalist Josh Kiszka has a strong command over his vocal range; his inflections are powerful and his wailing screams are hypnotic and haunting. However, at times their sound feels outdated. It's clear that Greta Van Fleet are not chasing trends or mixing up their sound, they're focused on producing a clean rock 'n' roll album. **- *Jacqueline Naranjo***

Marley's Ghost

8

Honky Tonk

Sage Arts
Producer: Larry Campbell



Marley's Ghost's *Honky Tonk* proves that heartbreak and a backbeat have always belonged together. The veteran folk, gospel and bluegrass ensemble brings four decades of adventurous chemistry to 14 country classics, blending fiddle, pedal steel, piano, electric guitar, dobro and mandolin with shared vocals and effortless authenticity. "Invitation to the Blues" sets the tone, while "Honky Tonk Song," "Brand New Mister Me," and "Just Someone I Used to Know" balance regret with irresistible grooves. Waylon Jennings' "Only Daddy That'll Walk the Line" adds swagger, while "Slowly" and "Waltz of the Angels" offer a touch of tenderness. **- *Jonathan Widran***

Swans

7

Newly Sentient Being

Young God Records/Mute
Producer: Michael Gira



This marathon two-hours and 41-minute live album, recorded in Berlin last November, captures Michael Gira and his gloriously perplexing experimental collective closing out their so-called "Big Sound" era. An endlessly evolving prism of chaos, it seamlessly moves from soothing to hypnotic to unapologetically savage. The mélange spewing forth feels as if birthed from some unholy reality, leaving humanity the task of figuring out what to do with it. An accompanying DVD is also included. **- *Andy Kaufmann***

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Minaxi

Contact: minaxitheband@gmail.com
Web: minaxi.bandcamp.com
Seeking: Label, Film/TV
Style: Alternative, Hindustani Folk, Shoegaze

Production ····· 7
Lyrics ····· 7
Music ····· 8
Vocals ····· 7
Musicianship ····· 8

SCORE 7.4

Minaxi are no strangers to these pages; the Brooklyn band always make sure they submit their latest efforts, and we're grateful because the music is always fascinating, blending (as they do) shoegaze and psychedelic rock with Hindustani (Northern Indian classical) music. Their new album is the very mystical *Darbar-e-Ishq*, a body of work that carries the listener away in a swirl of sweet-smelling smoke. "Jaan" is a slow-builder, but it's worth the effort. By the end, you feel like you really experienced something wonderful with these guys. "Dil-e-Khumaar" (featuring the talents of Milan Ganatra and John Westphal) is more immediate but still blessed with depth.



Acacia Grace

Contact: info@acaciagrace.com
Web: acaciagrace.com
Seeking: Media
Style: Soul, R&B

Production ····· 8
Lyrics ····· 7
Music ····· 8
Vocals ····· 7
Musicianship ····· 8

SCORE 7.6

DC-born soul singer Acacia Grace evokes a multitude of moods and vibes on her latest *Moonchild*. Her vocals and jazzy arrangements are sensual and soothing, which we imagine elevating a lounge vibe or backdropping the perfect date night at home (think roaring fire and a bottle of fine wine). However you listen, what stands out most on love-inspired odes like "Feel You" and "Infatuated," is Grace's effortlessly emotive stylings, which recall Jill Scott and Angie Stone's tones but with more layered delivery. Speaking of tones and layers, her cover of Toto's "Georgy Peorgy " brings a faithful but notably more dimensional funk-driven feel to the classic.



Dea Lazzari

Contact: erica.delazzari90@gmail.com
Web: Spotify
Seeking: Booking, Representation, Press
Style: Soul, R&B, Funk

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

SCORE 7.0

Italian singer-songwriter Dea Lazzari brings a sway and sensuality to her music that feels fresh yet decidedly retro. Originally from Milan and now based in Los Angeles, her neo-soul stylings have seen her collaborate with producer Wayne Vaughn, who inspired her latest, "The Wayne Song," a mid-tempo funk ode to the music maker driven by jazzy horn-fueled melodies. Known for her slate of covers, which she performs at various L.A. clubs, Lazzari's originals see her stretching herself in inventive ways that also give back, such as on "The Sound of Christmas (Light of Hope – LA Fires)," a tribute to those affected by the Los Angeles wildfires last year.



George Voukanos

Contact: gvoukanos@gmail.com
Web: Spotify
Seeking: Press, Film/TV
Style: Cinematic Industrial, Electronic, Contemporary

Production ····· 8
Lyrics ····· X
Music ····· 8
Vocals ····· X
Musicianship ····· 8

SCORE 8.0

According to his online bio, "George Voukanos is an award-winning Greek composer whose work brings together symphonic music, opera, film and television scoring, theatre, contemporary electronic sound and cultural heritage." A lazy comparison would be fellow Greek composer Vangelis, although they both share a gift for epic, swathing and textured music that can work immaculately as a score but is equally listenable in isolation. "The Dance of Champions," as the name suggests, sounds like the sort of thing you might hear at the opening ceremony for the Olympics.



Rachelle Garniez

Contact: planetella@gmail.com
Web: rachellegarnieznybandcamp.com
Seeking: Booking, Film/TV
Style: Jazz, French, Tin Pan Alley, Rock

Production ····· 8
Lyrics ····· 8
Music ····· 8
Vocals ····· 8
Musicianship ····· 7

SCORE 7.8

Listening to New York jazz artist Garniez singing Bob Dylan's "Born in Time," one feels transported back to '60s St. Marks Place. Her voice is gorgeous—smooth and expressive—but there's also a sweet edge there that feels reminiscent of the counterculture age. According to her online bio, Garniez was, "born and raised in New York City by an American classical pianist and a European professor of French existentialist literature." Original songs on her *Born in Time* album, such as "Lucky Day," showcase the sum of her experiences. She has a deft ear for songwriting, and a gift for getting to the heart of the matter with her lyrics.



Roddy Blues

Contact: blankcheckholdings916@gmail.com
Web: Spotify
Seeking: Booking, Film/TV, Press
Style: Urbano Latino, Latin hip-hop

Production ····· 9
Lyrics ····· 7
Music ····· 6
Vocals ····· 7
Musicianship ····· 6

SCORE 7.0

While his earlier output was mostly in Spanish, Roddy Blues latest album, *My Puerto Rican Girl*, is serving English speakers a heavy pour of Latin rhythm-driven dance vibes and audacious lyricism, too. Deserving props for the super-catchy title track which celebrates Latina thickness, the standout is "Rum Coladas," which, just like the cocktail, it's quite tasty. Of course, it's got some hefty competition subject matter-wise: "Escape (The Pina Colada Song)" is iconic. But "Rum" is a whole other kind of swig: a modern, glossily produced dance jam that should appeal to fans of Bad Bunny, Shakira, etc. We could also see it as a jingle for a rum brand (take note Bacardi)!

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.



Imiuswi Aborigine

Contact: imiuswi@gmail.com
Web: each1teach1song.com
Seeking: Press, Booking, Licensing
Style: Hip-Hop, Alternative Hip-Hop

Los Angeles-based hip-hop artist Imiuswi Aborigine has a sound that leans into the traditions of the region's underground rap scene. There are elements of classic funk and soul in there, and the vibe on "Each One Teach One" can best be described as warm and uplifting. "Rise and Fall," meanwhile, has some wonderfully filthy guitar licks running all over it offering ever-so-slight Rage Against the Machine hints. She's a talented rapper and songwriter, capable of penning a tune that will make you bounce and think. Perhaps at the same time.

Production 7
Lyrics 8
Music 8
Vocals 8
Musicianship 7

SCORE 7.6



Criminal Hero

Contact: criminalheroband@gmail.com
Web: criminalhero.com
Seeking: Media
Style: Rock, Punk

The influences behind Canadian rocker Rick Harkness' Criminal Hero—gritty Detroit bar garage and a rhythm-minded take on California and New York punk—are loud and clear. "You Better Believe" is a straightforward ditty that hits hard, but not in a sonically aggro way; its hooks and charismatic vocals provide the most impact. A proper power trio (Nathan Snyder is on bass and Brian Petry is on drums), Hero's new album *Walk Through the Fire*, is loaded with these kinds of raw stompers ("Don't Listen to Rumors," "Do You Wanna Go") recalling the pop sensibility of bands like Green Day and a sludgy swagger akin to the Dead Boys. It's a proper rock effort that smolders.

Production 7
Lyrics 6
Music 8
Vocals 7
Musicianship 7

SCORE 7.0



Amy Matthew

Contact:
reflectedlyricalproductionsllc@gmail.com
Web: amynicolematthew.com
Seeking: Film/TV
Style: Pop, R&B

Matthew seems to be keen to put herself forward as much as a songwriter and lyricist as a singer in her own right. She's written for brand new Florida boy band Beatzone Boys (from the Trans Continental stable that brought you the Backstreet Boys and NSYNC). But songs like "Messin' Around" prove that she has a wonderful voice of her own. Powerful and expressive, Matthew can hold a note for days, and she has impressive range. We don't always buy the emotions that she's desperate to convey, but that authenticity may come with time.

Production 8
Lyrics 7
Music 7
Vocals 8
Musicianship 7

SCORE 7.4



Catie Turner

Contact: amanda@trendpr.com
Web: catieturner.com
Seeking: Film/TV, Distribution
Style: Indie-Pop, Folk-Pop, Singer-Songwriter

Apparently, Catie Turner appeared on Season 16 of *American Idol* back in 2018, respectably placing in the top seven. That's a lesson to nose-in-the-air musos to not be dismissive when it comes to those pop reality shows, because Turner is the real deal. Her voice has a magical, smokey quality to it that is simultaneously smooth and edgy. On "Who Am I," Turner sings the line "identity is like an orgasm, I wanna have one," which is both brilliant and layered. "California" is a quirky little gem, blessed with elements of college rock bands such as REM and Everclear. In fact, Turner's entire *Blue Alchemy* album is excellent, so get clued in.

Production 8
Lyrics 9
Music 8
Vocals 9
Musicianship 8

SCORE 8.4



Grant Maloy Smith

Contact: beatrice@empktmedia.com
Web: grant-maloy-smith.com
Seeking: Film/TV
Style: Americana

There's a wholesomeness about Grant Maloy Smith's music that will surely resonate with country fans, both of the older ilk who love their tunes to reflect heartland values and aesthetics, and newer listeners who lean towards rootsy singer-songwriter fare. Smith is clearly a seasoned storyteller who relishes singing about his country (his last album was titled *Dust Bowl - American Stories* and his latest is called *Wild West: American Stories*). His newest tracks, "Go West Boys," "Voices on the Wind," and "Tear Trail," meld twangy touches with a spirited optimism that aims to bring new perspectives on the past, and it does so with earnestness.

Production 8
Lyrics 8
Music 7
Vocals 7
Musicianship 8

SCORE 7.6



Dream Phases

Contact: dreamphases@gmail.com
Web: dreamphases.com
Seeking: Film/TV
Style: Psychedelic Rock

Making groovy psych-hued rock with an ethereal flair, Dream Phases is aptly named. The group's gentle jangle and harmonic focus make for a chill treat on repeat, especially their latest, "Little Blue Magnolia," written as a tribute to band members Brandon Graham and Jeanna's Fornier's young son. The carefree themes and nostalgic nods recall classic West Coast hippie-pop—think The Beach Boys and Mamas and the Papas—only with a modern alt-pop feel that's hipster-appropriate as well, as their set at L.A.'s Echo Park Rising festival made clear for happy crowds this past summer.

Production 7
Lyrics 8
Music 8
Vocals 7
Musicianship 8

SCORE 7.6

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



MÖTLEY CRÜE

F&M Bank Amphitheater *Long Beach, CA*

Web: motley.com
Players: Vince Neil, vocals; Nikki Sixx, bass; Tommy Lee, drums; John 5, guitar

MORE COLUMN INCHES HAVE BEEN written about hard rock veterans Mötley Crüe than some former presidents. Movies and TV shows have been made, and books have been written (notably, in both cases, *The Dirt*). Band members have exited and, in the case of frontman Vince Neil and drummer Tommy Lee, returned. There have been scandals and wild anecdotes, all told, if we're being totally honest, with a public in mind that will gobble up with an insatiable appetite all manner of lascivious, debauched and decadent goings-on. Pearls will be clutched while scrolling continues.

Three members of the classic Crüe lineup are in the current incarnation: Neil, Lee, and bassist Nikki Sixx. When they reneged on their promise to retire a decade ago, guitarist Mick Mars gave the reunion a go but retired as a touring member in 2022 due in part to his ongoing battle with ankylosing spondylitis, an aggressive form of arthritis. So here we are in 2026, and Mötley Crüe is still out there on the circuit. John 5, the bag-of-tricks guitarist who has previously played with David Lee Roth, Marilyn Manson, and Rob Zombie, has taken Mars' place. Business as usual.



Well, not quite. See, here's the thing: While the guys still dress and speak as if they're young bucks raising hell on the Sunset Strip, they're actually in their mid-60's. Even new lad John 5 is in his mid-50's. This current tour, which we experienced in Long Beach, CA and Phoenix, AZ, is dubbed the Return of the Carnival of Sins and, before the band emerged onto the stage from behind a sort of "big top," an animated, monstrous ringmaster, a lecherous take on P.T. Barnum, told the crowd about the insane sights that they were about to soak up. Crazy, crazy shit was to be expected. The dude really built it up, like we were about to be dropped into the last days of Sodom and Gomorrah. And then... four middle-aged chaps ambled up and, surrounded by some female dancers who were likely a third of the band members' age, played some absolutely decent rock 'n' roll.

The show was far from bad. A lot has been made of the state of Neil's voice nowadays, and there are definitely moments, sometimes entire songs, where he does struggle. One of the set's great surprises, the song "Afraid" from 1997's underrated *Generation Swine*, should have been a highlight but ended up falling flat due to Neil sounding like he'd only just learned it. But the yin to that yang is Crüe's power ballad "Home Sweet Home," which the singer grasped with both hands.

The three musicians sounded phenomenal, in fairness. Sixx and Lee have always been a powerhouse rhythm section, and that remains the case. The rumble they create at the start of "Dr. Feelgood" in particular, is unparallelled. And while Mars is known for his bluesy riffs, John 5 is a wildly unpredictable, maverick guitarist. It's a bit like when Buckethead joined Guns N' Roses or, going back a bit further, when Steve Vai joined Whitesnake. They can do far more than the songs require. 5 had the chance to shine during a solo that saw him cover his eyes with a towel, the big, ol' showoff!



The setlist in Long Beach was great; all of the hits you want to hear, plus some deep cuts. "Louder Than Hell" is a killer track from 1985's underappreciated *Theatre of Pain*, and it was great to hear that get an airing. The raucous *Too Fast for Love* debut was represented in the form of the title track, "Live Wire," and "Take Me to the Top."

The killer cover of Brownsville Station's "Smokin' in the Boy's Room" was a riot, as was "Primal Scream" from the *Decade of Decadence* comp.

"Shout at the Devil," "Kickstart My Heart," "Girls, Girls, Girls," "Wild Side"—all gave the crowd something to sing and dance to (a crowd that, earlier on, had been warmed up expertly by Extreme and Tesla).

Ultimately, this was a perfectly adequate Mötley Crüe show. They're not kids anymore, and it's impossible to capture the fire and energy that comes with a determination to succeed and a desperation not to fail. The lads did just fine.

- Brett Callwood

Photos by Alex Kluft, taken at the Talking Stick Resort Amphitheater, Phoenix, AZ



REV. HORTON HEAT

Cat's Cradle Carrboro, *NC*

Web: revhortonheat.com
Contact: sethweiss@atomicmusicgroup.com
Players: Jim Heath aka Rev. Horton Heat, guitars, vocals, preachin'; Jimbo Wallace, bass, double bass, vocals; Jonathan Jeter, drums, percussion

THIS WASN'T JUST A SHOW—it was a psychobilly sermon that erupted into a rockabilly riot the moment this three-alarm fire walked onstage. And there can be no doubt: rockabilly is alive and well in the church of what's happening now, and its Pastor, Prophet and Minister of Groove is the Rev. Horton Heat hisself!

Tonight, the Reverend Horton Heat took the scenic route to Bedlam, and this enthusiastic, very vocal crowd went right along with him—no questions asked—drenched in a sermon of guitar groove that never let up.

Maybe that's the whole point. It was loud, immersive and loaded with rockabilly guitar and boogie riffs that had every player in the crowd salivating, anxious to get back to the bedroom and practice what they'd just witnessed. From the first notes of "Bullet," "Baddest" and "Rock 'n' Roll Now," it was a rockabilly wet dream—and you could hear every shade of the groove imaginable.

Think early Carl Perkins on a bus driven by Wanda Jackson, with Scotty Moore loading the bags, Gene Vincent serving Mai Tais, and the great Cliff Gallup and Brian Setzer playing cards in the back and shouting out the roadside attractions. Oh, and maybe a little bit of the Centuries thrown in for good measure.

It's high-energy proto-punk, and the songs are wildly creative in that unmistakable groove-a-billy style. Tucked among the next three rockers was "Teach," a beautiful, down-tempo billy-ballad that clearly demonstrated the Reverend's remarkable touch.

This trio was on fire, and the bass player was tearing through the rockabilly bass lines with complete insanity. His white shock of hair flew this way and that as he slapped and slammed that poor bass into submission. Stop! Help! Police!

"Galaxy," "Do I Love You" and "Big Red Rocket" showcased another side of this groove machine. Playing rockabilly that fast can obscure just how schooled—and downright musically sophisticated—these boys really are. "D for Danger" and "I Can't Surf" revealed a sonic intelligence that could easily be missed amid all the glorious commotion.

Brian Setzer and the Stray Cats pulled this genre out of the dusty trunk of lost and discarded grooves. The Reverend grabbed that torch, poured gasoline on it and headed straight down the tracks.

This band has complete control of the madness. They take it to the edge, balance it on a shoestring fifty floors above the pavement, then lower you so smoothly that you think you're fine—until the next song hits like the hot kiss at the end of a wet fist. **– *Eric Sommer***



SÉBASTIEN TELLIER

The Belasco *Los Angeles, CA*

Web: sebastientellier.com
Contact: inge@goldatl.as
Players: Sébastien Tellier, lead vocals, guitar, keyboards; Corentin Kerdraon, keyboards; Gérard Black, keyboards, backing vocals; Adrian Edeline, guitar, bass; Louis Delorme, drums

AS PART OF HIS *Kiss the Beast* tour, cinematic synth-pop artist Sébastien Tellier (son of guitarist Alain Tellier of Magma) played an intense 90-minute set at his Los Angeles stop. Launching into an ethereal and moody synth-mix with nature sounds and spooky vibes, the singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist walked to the front of the stage, gave a little wave, and sat down at his keyboard.

Instantly invested and connected, being in the audience felt like being part of a live instrumental-led dance club experience. From intimate ballads to suspensefully synthesized underpinnings, deep bass sound, and great crash cymbal and brush work, Tellier's four-piece backing band held a tight groove and flow, dressed head-to-toe in white. While the overall experience felt experiential and explorative (rather than strictly musical), the space was liberating and inviting in its edginess. The unapologetic, authentic self-expression somehow granted permission for all in the room to just *be*—just as they were.

With moments of intense electronica, pulsating cowbell, and intensely danceable stretches of club sound, you could still hear solid musical influences peeking out from time to time (including hints of Coldplay, Pink Floyd, and Pet Shop Boys). There were also moments of funk (not surprising given Tellier's work with Nile Rodgers) and elements from Daft Punk (also not a surprise, given Guy-Manuel De Homem-Christo's production of *Sexuality*). With this evening of intense electro soundscapes, Tellier and his band created a unique space of community and a captivating experience.

Representing France in the 2008 Eurovision Song Contest in Serbia, Tellier created controversy by performing ("Divine") in English at his nomination (although he actually sings in English, Spanish, French, German, and Italian). Known for film music [*Narco* (2004), *Steak* (2007)] and his longtime partnership scoring and performing at Chanel events (2014-2023), Tellier also performed with the Ensemble Matheus at the Paralympic Games opening ceremony in Paris in 2024, and was appointed as a Chevalier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2025. His latest album, *Kiss The Best*, includes work with Rodgers, Slayyyter (both on "Thrill of the Night"), and Kid Cudi ("Amnesia"). **- *Andrea Beenham***



V. TORRES

The Mint *Los Angeles, CA*

Web: vtorresmusic.com
Contact: heather@reybee.com
Players: V. Torres, vocals, acoustic guitar; Kira Lingman, backing vocals, acoustic guitar

PLAYING A PACKED HOUSE on a Wednesday night, Los Angeles favorite V. Torres delivered a gorgeous, understated show, with great guitar hooks, warm harmonies, and vocals that moved between belting duets (alongside accompanist Kira Lingman) and a gravelly rock sound. Sharing the entirety of her new album *Woman*, along with a handful of songs from 2017's *Real Life Love* (the title track, "Uncovering," and "Old Soul"), V. Torres presented warmly as a salt-of-the-earth artist with genuine chops.

Solid musicality and powerful delivery were the hallmarks of the evening. From beautifully strummed guitar underpinnings and a smokey vocal sound on "Uncovering," to the lovely harmonies on "Winter Solstice" and clean, simple vibe on "Slow" (Torres' vocals joining Lingman's guitar work for the breakdown), Torres' sonic sensibilities were apparent. "That Night" added belting vocal duet sections and a fun interplay of solos, while "Beginnings" returned to simple guitar work that highlighted the clear stylings and storyline. Taking the stage by herself for the captivating ballad "I Know Nothing," Torres demonstrated a fabulous use of space and tension, continuing with "Old Soul" for more beautiful guitar work and great vocal leaps. Torres has an incredibly powerful sound for a solo act.

Nearing the end of the set with "Great Escape," the tune added a lovely Americana feel, gently harmonized and a great transition to upbeat rock, with richer harmonies and guitar exchange. Closing the night with the title track, "Woman" (which felt like a war cry for the plight of women in 2026), the storyline navigated the realities of underappreciation, while bringing a great feel, harmonies, and dueling guitar solos to rock out the ending.

Demonstrating a clear understanding of how to work an audience, V. Torres shared a solid set of genuine music for an enthusiastic, appreciative room. Relatable lyricism and rich musicality in her latest release demonstrate a more vulnerable side to her storytelling that lands incredibly well with her local audience. ***- Andrea Beenham***



MELANIE C

The Fonda Theater *Los Angeles, CA*

Web: melaniec.net
Contact: melissa@highrisepr.com
Players: Melanie C, vocals, decks

IT'S EASY TO FORGET, GIVEN the fact that the world has churned up so much in the years between, but there was a time when the Spice Girls was one of the biggest groups in the world. As synonymous with the '90s as Brit-pop and grunge, the Spice Girls were somehow hyper-choreographed yet utterly unpolished. They loudly proclaimed that it was ok for girls to be themselves—a sea of whirling hair, Union Jack dresses, impossible-to-ignore choruses and, yes, Girl Power! Frankly, the Spice Girls were a phenomenon.

And then they were gone. The 1996 debut album *Spice* was followed by *Spiceworld* in '97. By 2000's *Forever*, Geri "Ginger Spice" Halliwell was out and the album, while reaching number two in the U.K. album chart, wasn't as well received. It would prove to be the group's last studio record.

A year before that, Melanie "Sporty Spice" C had released her debut solo album, 1999's *Northern Star.* This year's *Sweat* is her ninth, though her first since 2020's self-titled effort. It feels like it's been a while since we heard anything from Sporty, because it has. A lot has happened in the past four years, but Mel C is still a brilliant show-woman.

She always had a voice that stood out in the Spice Girls. Powerful, emotive and bursting with the sort of energy you might expect from someone nicknamed "Sporty." She's still playing with that image. On this tour, the merch stand features shirts adorned with the slogan "Sporty Says Sweat."

She's well aware that there are plenty of people in attendance who adore her band, so C performed three Spice Girls songs: "Say You'll be There (acoustic), "Who Do You Think You Are," and a lively "Spice Up Your Life." Predictably, the crowd went wild.

But the set was packed with goodies. It's interesting that she only played songs from the new *Sweat* and that *Northern Star* solo debut. Nothing from the seven solo albums in-between. But *Sweat* is a dance-pop monster of a record, not least the pumping title track, and the opening "Undefeated Champion."

Still, the closing "I Turn to You," from the debut, proved the perfect way to conclude the evening. The catchiest of choruses, the hottest of beats—the song is the perfect vehicle for C's vocal range and energy. It's simply wonderful to have her back! ***- Brett Callwood***



TAJMO

The Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts
Cerritos, CA

Web: kebmo.com/tajmo
Contact: doug@bigfeatpr.com
Players: Taj Mahal, vocals, guitar, harmonica; Keb' Mo', vocals, guitar, harmonica; Ann Harris, backing vocals, violin, percussion; Martina Menendez, backing vocals, guitar, percussion; Dave Farnsworth, keyboard, organ; Keb Hutchings, guitar; Anton Mosby, bass; Casey Wasner, drums

ENTERING THE STAGE AS the band played, Taj Mahal boogied into place with a happy swagger, arm-in-arm with backing singer Martina Mendez, as the room erupted in gratitude. Slipping into a beautiful old school blues vibe ("She Keeps Me Movin'"), with Mahal on the harmonica, Keb' Mo' and the rest of the group joined together with palpable joy and respect for a gorgeous unfolding of masterful sound.

Drawing from their *Room On The Porch* album, alongside classic selections from their individual work—and covers of Jimmie Cox's "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out" and Sleepy John Estes' "Diving Duck Blues"—Taj Mahal and Keb' Mo' (collectively touring as 'TajMo') delivered a passionate, ninety-plus minute set in Cerritos. "Better Than Ever" brought syrupy melancholy and gorgeous organ sound from Dave Farnsworth, along with a quick French refrain from Mahal to finish the piece. "Don't Leave Me Here" added more great harmonica, a beautiful rhythm guitar intro, solid drumkit push, great organ transitions, and a perfectly understated backing band sound, under Keb' Mo's guitar solo. Gorgeous backing vocal harmonies, incredible organ solos, and a perfect vocal balance between Mahal and 'Mo followed on swampy "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out."

At 84 years young, Taj Mahal sounds incredible, performing more soulfully and with more presence than ever, clearly enjoying every moment, from his singing to his guitar work, harmonica, and decorative vocalizations. At ten years his junior, Keb' Mo' sounds clean, distinct and full of flavor. Together, TajMo delivers old school magic and brings a warm, comforting sound and depth to the stage.

With phenomenal musicianship, incredible player communication, and a palpable passion for their work, TajMo and their band shared a stunning performance. The show reminded the room of everything that music was meant to be: unifying, comforting, emotive, raw—and *true*. From the lyrics and musicality, through to the understated delivery, there were no frills, and you were left thirsty for more of the soothing artistry. Bringing invitational camaraderie and irrefutable musical virtuosity, being in the room felt both inspiring and rejuvenating. A TajMo show feels like home, instantly unifies you with the rest of the audience, and makes you want to stay all night. ***- Andrea Beenham***

Photo Credit: Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts



ROD MACDONALD

Cul-de-Sac Soundtrack *Ann Arbor, MI*

Web: rodmacdonald.com
Contact: Via website
Players: Rod MacDonald, vocals, acoustic guitar, harmonica; Cheryl Dawdy, vocals

A TRAVELING POET, COMPOSER, musician and street performer—these are all the requisite qualities of one known as a troubadour. Singer-songwriter Rod MacDonald has fulfilled all those roles, including the author of three books, for nearly five decades. He's released over 15 albums, with his latest being *Undo the Damage*.

MacDonald learned the craft of songwriting the old-fashioned way, by rolling up his sleeves, putting pen to paper and absorbing all the information he could consume from experiences as a resident of the storied Greenwich Village café and folk club scene for over 20 years. A number of his songs have been recorded by such luminaries as Jonathan Edwards, Dave Van Ronk, Four Bitchin' Babes, Shawn Colvin and Garnet Rogers.

MacDonald has played various folk festivals, theaters and sheds around the globe, but, assuredly, one of the forums where he exceptionally shines is within the intimacy of a living room house concert. It is a setting that appeared most comfortable for the 70-something singer-songwriter where there was no artifice; just the man and his music.

Over a series of two sets MacDonald played a treasure trove of his own compositions that were reflective of his views on society, politics, love and romance and an overall smattering of personal philosophy. The opening tune, based on a Scottish fiddle reel, was called "Come Out, Come Out Annie." It was a decidedly upbeat and lighthearted number that aroused the crowd and thoroughly engaged the attendees from the get-go. That was followed by another lively and clever take on married life called "You're Already My Wife." MacDonald is certainly an artist that immediately knows how to read a room, and his autobiographical tale of mid-life marital bliss connected with his demographic. He offers commentary on all aspects of the human condition and demonstrates his ability to break down a political regime on the calypso-flavored "Banana Republic."

The diversity of subject matter expanded into some Chuck Berry-like rock 'n roll for one of his newer songs called "Leather Jacket." It was simply about the joys of purchasing his first leather and all the exploits and memories they've shared. After that, MacDonald invited a friend and colleague Cheryl Dawdy to join him on one of her original compositions called "The Last Time." Dawdy was a member of the celebrated Ann Arbor-based vocal trio The Chenille Sisters for many years and it was nice to see her connect with MacDonald once again on a truly beautiful ballad. They collaborated on a couple more tunes throughout the night. The troubadour capped the first set performing the title track off his latest album. With lyrics inspired by our nation's turbulent course of events, it appeared to be a rallying cry for many in the audience.
- Eric Harabadian

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336-904-8347
Email: miracleworxmusic@gmail.com
Web: miracleworx.weebly.com
Contact: Ken Gay, Jr.
Styles: Gospel, R&B/Soul, Pop, Blues
How to Submit: Send web links via email to your bio, music tracks, social media sites. No mail please

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Nashville, TN 37204
615-255-9837
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Web: mojomusicandmedia.com, concord.com
Styles: all styles
How to Submit: no unsolicited material

Additional locations:
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2355 Westwood Blvd, #1245
Los Angeles, CA 90025
310-213-6109
Contact: Matt Lilley
Email: clearance@mojomusicandmedia.com

MORAINE MUSIC
500 E. Iris Dr.
Nashville, TN 37204
615-383-0400
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Web: morainemusic.com
Styles: country, rock, blues, Americana
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615-383-9029
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Contact: Dennis Morgan
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Email: info@mountainapplecompany.com
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Web: johnnyreed.com/
Contact: John Reed
Styles: rock, pop, film music
How to Submit: no unsolicited material

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New York City, Calabasas, CA
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Styles: all styles
How to Submit: no unsolicited material

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Published: see web
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Email: nashville@peermusic.com

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Contact: Michael Eames, President
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How to Submit: no unsolicited material, publishes Diane Warren exclusively and does not sign outside songwriters.

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Web: recognitionmusicgroup.com/

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212-380-0080

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212-967-4300
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Web: roynet.com
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Web: sextillionmusic.com
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Styles: All Styles
Published: Matthew Finch, Freudz Couch, The Boston Shakers, Long John
How to Submit: Links and contact information to info@sextillionmusic.com

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Web: facebook.com/evolutionpromotionmusic
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New York, NY 10016
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Contact: Randall Wixen
How to Submit: call for more info

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And now, Two Bits From Geza X





BIT ONE: Dub Russell and his INSANE BEAT MACHINE

Picture the console of a spaceship that jumps between dimensions. That's 2020, a semi-modular beat machine that ditches the timeline for a single window where you manipulate, randomize, wire and perform beats in real time. Its website describes it as a German DAW, a Swedish hardware groove box and a cable-tangled modular synth torn apart and fused into one. Four probability-driven grid sequencers, a sample slicer, loopers, a dozen samplers, a kick synth and two FM synths feed 14 patchable effects, including granulators, bitcrusher, glitch and repeater, with freely configurable routing. Then comes "Dejavu," which turns every parameter randomizer into a generative sequencer that recalls its own past values. Millions of patterns, and it still surprises. Map it to MIDI, OSC or keyboard shortcuts, sync it through Ableton Link, and let it run.

A Beat Machine That Thinks for Itself

Yotaro Shuto, who performs as DUB-Russell, started DJing at 15, inspired by the Invisibl Skratch Piklz, then moved to breakbeats on an MPC. He has no formal training in code. He taught himself Max, then C, then C++, all for the love of sound.

The idea behind 2020 was there from the start, back when Shuto first opened Max (ableton.com/en/live/max-for-live/): a beat machine that could semi-autonomously evolve its own patterns. For years he refined it for his own live shows, then decided to pull all of it together into one standalone application.

The crowd agreed. When 2020 hit Kickstarter, it reached 670 percent of its funding goal. "It was much more successful than I expected," he says. (This was where I first discovered 2020 and I've been a fan ever since.)

The hard part came after. The first version lived in Max, and Shuto kept supplying it to his backers for a long time. But staying in Max would make stability and new features ever harder, so he rewrote the whole thing from scratch in JUCE, a C++ framework. "That was really, really hard. I underestimated how difficult it would be," he admits, recalling how new problems forced him to start over "again and again." His verdict: "I never want to go through that again. Haha."

The payoff is a semi-modular environment with enormous routing freedom. The interface looks complicated, but it is built for live improvisation onstage. Shuto's DJ experience shaped it, and the design pairs open routing with several ways of "taming randomness and making it musically useful." The result surprises even its creator. "Even I, as the developer, can sometimes create beats that surprise me." (Editors note: That is the understatement of the century!)

He keeps it moving on his own. Nearly every feature gets reworked and improved regularly, and he does it all alone. He's also 2020's "biggest and most obsessive user," so he enjoys the work. Sometimes he links multiple computers running the app to one another or uses multiple screens and projectors.

Glitch With a Tribal Pulse

Shuto's own music is where the machine's personality shows. He describes his approach as using noise and Japanese glitch techniques "while aiming for something that feels more like tribal music." On paper that clashes with software that looks IDM-oriented, and he knows it. What he's chasing is "a much more raw and organic groove." Add to that the sophisticated and surprising self-evolving elements created inside 2020, and you have a whole new form of magic!

Intelligent Dance Music (IDM) is an experimental genre of electronic music from the early 1990s characterized by individualistic studio experimentation rather than fixed dancefloor conventions. Key artists include Aphex Twin and Autechre.

Is he more programmer or DJ? "Both. I really enjoy doing both."

What's Next

Shuto says he finally has a clear path to the features he originally imagined for 2020. After that comes a Windows version, and he says there is plenty left to explore.

Get 2020: Available now on the Apple Store. More at 2020.dubrussell.com.

BIT TWO, WHY VINYL?

Files And Artwork

Last time I promised to walk you through the obstacle course of vinyl production. Fasten your seat belt, it's a trip. Let's start at the first hurdle, the one that trips up almost everybody: the files you hand the plant.

Your audio is a size problem, not just a mixing problem.

Vinyl is a physical format, and a groove can only hold so much. For a 12-inch LP, the commonly recommended maximum is about 22 minutes per side, and 18 to 20 is safer for loud or bass-heavy material. The more minutes you cram onto a side, the quieter and thinner it has to sound. The loudest record I can think of is Daft Punk's *Around The World,* which is notorious for skipping on some record players. That's what hot BASS is all about.

Heavy low end that's wide in stereo, harsh sibilance and hot, overloaded peaks can all cause trouble when a lathe cuts them into a groove, and that can mean skipping or distortion on the finished record. A mastering engineer who cuts for vinyl knows how to tame them. Mastering for streaming and mastering for vinyl are NOT the same job. Abandon all hope when ye enter here. For the record (pun intended) a dynamic range of 12db is recommended and its best to minimize everything below 30 hz and above 12k.

Then check the plant's spec sheet, because it is never the same twice. Every plant publishes its own requirements for audio format, track labeling and side breaks. You will want to provide a "cut sheet" listing track titles, the order, the gaps, length of each track and total per side.

Artwork is where deadlines go to die. Your jacket and label art must be built on the plant's own templates, not a generic one from the internet. Expect requirements on resolution, color mode, bleed and safe zones. Don't be surprised if the plant sends your art back a number of times if it's the wrong format, created in the wrong art app, doesn't fit the template right…I mean it can be daunting to say the least. Using an artist who is familiar with print specs is recommended.

Before you send anything:

- Check each file against the current spec sheet, not an old email. Requirements change frequently.
- Listen to your master on more than one system. Make SURE it isn't over compressed.
- Have someone else proof spelling, track order and credits. A typo on a printed jacket lasts forever.
- ALWAYS get a test pressing. If you're short of cash or in a hurry, a "digital test pressing" is ok since it's made from an actual pressed disc.

Or hand the project to someone who jumps through these hoops for a living. This is exactly why I do what I do. A professional vinyl broker and project manager knows each plant's quirks, catches problems before they become rejected orders and missed release dates, and gives you one honest, all-in price. You stay focused on the music while someone else keeps the process on track.

Next time, we'll look at what happens once the files are accepted. That's when the real fun begins.

Geza X has legendary status as an independent producer and proponent of the DIY recording scene. He can be reached at gezaxrecords.com.


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BX1
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