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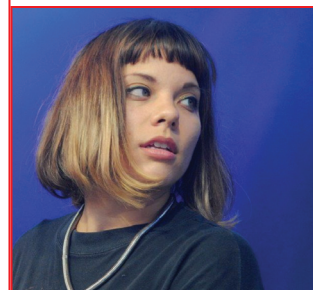
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Earth, Wind & Fire

MC chats with the iconic funk-soul group about their Questlove-directed documentary movie, and their stunning, groundbreaking career up to this point.

Photos: Jabiro Jaco

By Andrea Beenham



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Producer Crosstalk: Wynne Bennett

By Rob Putnam

California Schemin'

New movie *California Schemin'*, starring and directed by James McAvoy, tells the story of two Scottish lads who pretend to be real rappers to land a record deal.

By Brett Callwood



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Exclusive Directories of Film/TV Music Supervisors and Post-Production

Compiled by Robin Rose

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LyricFind

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From Dorm Room Discovery to Global Music Infrastructure: What began as a simple question among three University of Waterloo students—"Who sings the song that goes like this?"—ultimately inspired the creation of an entirely new segment of the music business. In 2000, music fans Darryl Ballantyne, Mohamed Moutadayne, and Chris Book launched an early lyrics search website, only to discover that while demand for lyrics was exploding, no system existed to license them legally at scale. The original venture was short-lived, but the idea refused to disappear. After graduating, Ballantyne was about to return to EMI Music under digital music pioneer Ted Cohen (where he'd spent his final University work term) when a call from Microsoft, seeking licensed lyric functionality for its music platform, inspired the founders to revisit their concept. With Cohen joining LyricFind's board and EMI Music Publishing becoming its first major publishing partner, the company laid the foundation for what would become the world's leading licensed lyrics platform.

Beyond Lyrics, Building an Ecosystem: Today, LyricFind provides licensed lyric content, rights administration, and royalty reporting for many of the world's leading music and technology companies, including Google, YouTube, Amazon Music, TikTok, Deezer, and numerous automotive, hardware, and educational platforms. Along the way, the company has evolved far beyond its licensing foundation. Its LyricIQ platform analyzes lyrical content for emotion, sentiment, and subject matter while offering sophisticated content filtration tools that help clients identify themes ranging from profanity and drug references to political or sensitive topics. LyricFind also employs A.I.-assisted transcription, synchronization, and translation workflows,



with human review ensuring the accuracy that has become one of the company's defining standards. Following its 2023 acquisition of Rotor Videos, LyricFind expanded into visual content creation, allowing artists to produce lyric videos, music videos, Spotify Canvas clips,

Apple Music Album Motion, and other promotional assets. Its new Artist Unlimited subscription makes unlimited video creation affordable for independent musicians while allowing them to retain ownership of their creative work.

Creating Value for Songwriters: Despite its growing portfolio of technology and creative tools, Ballantyne believes LyricFind's greatest achievement isn't software—it's the impact on songwriters. By creating the infrastructure that enables licensed lyrics to be distributed and monetized globally, the company helped establish a significant new revenue stream that previously didn't exist. "If you had told me 25 years ago this is what I'd still be doing, I never would have believed it," he says. "What I'm most proud of is that we've created a category of revenue for songwriters and publishers that simply wasn't there before." As LyricFind continues expanding its licensing, A.I., and creative services worldwide, that mission—empowering the music industry through lyrics—remains at the heart of everything it does.

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Elizabeth Lombardi

Vice President, Business and Legal Affairs
Spirit Music

Spirit Music has hired **Elizabeth Lombardi** as **Vice President, Business and Legal Affairs**. Lombardi specializes in negotiating publishing deals, catalog acquisitions, brand and endorsement deals and other business matters for the entire Spirit Music roster. "I'm thrilled to join Spirit Music and work alongside a team that is passionate about championing creators and protecting the songs that connect with audiences around the world," said Lombardi. For more, contact cindy.hunt@monarchpublicity.com.



Jack Higginbotham

CEO
PRS Guitars

PRS Guitars announced that **Jack Higginbotham** has been named **Chief Executive Officer**, making him the first person to hold that title in the company's history. In this new role, Higginbotham will continue to oversee the worldwide day-to-day business operations of the company, regularly traveling around the globe to strengthen manufacturing processes, dealer relationships, vendor connections, and every aspect of PRS Guitars. "PRS is an exciting place to be, now more than ever, and I'm thankful to be surrounded by talented, focused teams in the U.S., U.K., Europe and Japan," said Higginbotham. For more, contact ehammond@prsguitars.com.



Raul Contreras

West Coast Regional Sales Manager
DPA Microphones

DPA Microphones has appointed **Raul Contreras** as its new **West Coast Regional Sales Manager**. In this role, Contreras will oversee sales and customer relationships throughout the western United States, supporting DPA Microphones, Austrian Audio, and Wisycom while working closely with dealers, distributors, and end users to further strengthen the company's presence across the region. "As I begin this next chapter, I am honored to represent DPA Microphones, Austrian Audio and Wisycom, brands known for setting the benchmark for excellence and high standards in quality," said Contreras. For more, contact jar@dpamicrophones.com.



Timo Hoffmann

Head of A&R, Germany
Frontiers Label Group

Frontiers Label Group has announced the appointment of **Timo Hoffmann** as **Head of A&R, Germany**. With more than two decades of experience in the music industry, Hoffmann brings a strong track record in discovering talent and shaping successful artist careers to the label. "Frontiers is more than just an innovative label—it's a place where music truly lives. The company's expansion into the Frontiers Label Group further broadens its spectrum of musical genres and brings with it amazing new opportunities, which I'm excited to help explore," said Hoffmann. For more, contact allie@thesyn.com.



Todd Miller

Talent Buyer
Nederlander Concerts

Nederlander Concerts has announced that **Todd Miller** will be joining its team as a **Talent Buyer**, bringing more than three decades of experience in live entertainment, venue operations, talent buying, and strategic event development to the organization. "[Miller] brings a deep understanding of talent buying, strong industry relationships, and a passion for creating memorable live experiences. We're excited to welcome him to the team and look forward to the impact he will have across our organization," said Alex Hodges, CEO of Nederlander Concerts. For more, contact bbandel@nederlander.com.



David Goldsen

Executive Vice President, A&R
Warner Chappell Music

Warner Chappell Music (WCM) announced the promotion of **David Goldsen** to **Executive Vice President, A&R**. Since joining the publisher in 2009, Goldsen has discovered and championed a diverse range of chart-topping songwriters, further expanding WCM's creative presence across both North America and Australia. Based at the company's Los Angeles headquarters, he will continue to report to Ryan Press, President, North America, WCM. "[Goldsen has] become a key leader in Warner Chappell's continued evolution," said Press. For more, contact ricarda.tippkoetter@wmg.com.



Ben Ullery

Principal Viola
LA Philharmonic

The **LA Philharmonic** has appointed **Ben Ullery** as **Principal Viola**. Ullery, who has served with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in increasing artistic leadership roles, joins the orchestra's principal ranks following an internal progression—from section violist to Assistant Principal, Associate Principal, and now Principal Viola—a distinction that reflects both his artistry and longstanding contributions to the orchestra. "Ben Ullery's appointment as Principal Viola is a reflection of his incredible talent and his commitment to the Los Angeles Philharmonic," said Kim Noltemy, President and CEO of the LA Phil. For more, contact lev.mamuya@laphil.org.



Mike Gormley

Head of Label
Sho-Bud Records

Sho-Bud has named veteran music executive **Mike Gormley** to lead Sho-Bud Records' label and publishing operation. Gormley will work with Sho-Bud co-CEOs Dawn Jackson and Will Jackson and CFO and General Counsel Fred Waid, directing the label's A&R, artist development, marketing, distribution, publishing, sync and placement, and overall recorded-music strategy. "When a name [like Sho-Bud] carries that much history, the responsibility is to honor it, protect it and help introduce it to new audiences. That is exactly the kind of work L.A.P.D. was built to do," said Gormley. For more, contact press@methodq.com.



FOCAL LISTEN PROFESSIONAL HEADPHONES

Made in France since 1979, Focal Speakers have a passionate following in the recording industry of creators that are totally devoted to the brand. Their professional headphone line includes three different premium headphones, the Listen Professional, Lensys Professional, and Clear MG Professional. The most accessible are the Listen Professional which are a closed-back circumaural monitoring headphone intended for recording, mixing, and mastering. They offer excellent isolation and have a satisfying feel in relation to build quality. At 0.61 lbs, they are light, and they mold tightly to your head with the aid of red microfiber covered memory foam thermosensitive earpads. Its unique transducer combines a Mylar/Titanium alloy designed specifically for this model.



Designed for recording studios, at \$329 they are half the price of the ultra-high-end Focal Lensys Pro headphones that were profiled by MC in our March 2025 New Toys column yet share many characteristics. Both are closed back designs that offer an extended frequency response of (+/- 3dB) 5 Hz - 23 kHz. And both share the harmonic distortion rate 0.3 percent at 1 kHz / 100 dB SPL, but from there, their specifications deviate. The Listen Professional offers a highly efficient sensitivity of 122dB SPL @ 1kHz - 1VRMS compared to the sensitivity of 100 dB SPL/1 mW at 1 kHz for

the Lensys Pro. This makes sense when viewed through the context of what role each are likely to play given their distinct price points. The Listen Professional are likely to be used more for tracking when a louder headphone may be needed. That said, the Listen Professional are still a premium set of headphones that are useful for any critical listening application such as mixing and mastering. Coupled with a 32Ω impedance, the efficient Listen Professional can get extremely loud with both high and low powered headphone amps.

It's important to note that like many high-end speakers, the Listen Pro headphones require a break-in period to reach their intended sonic potential. Focal recommends, "These headphones need a running-in period to reach full performance. This will happen naturally after several hours of listening. If you wish to accelerate the process, we recommend that you play them for at least 24 hours at a relatively high-volume level, on tracks rich in low frequencies. This will stabilize the loudspeakers and enable you to enjoy your headphones to the full." MC utilized the accelerated "run-in" process described here as on first audition; the headphones were unusable for any critical listening. However, that was not at all the case after the break-in process had been accomplished as they improved dramatically.

The Listen Professional comes with a very nice hard case and two cables. Most useful in the studio is the 16.5 feet (5m) coiled asymmetric cable (1/8" - 3.5mm TRS jack). The 4.5 feet (1.4m) straight asymmetric cable (1/8" - 3.5mm TRS jack) also features a microphone, which is a nice addition and not a feature you might expect for a studio headphone. The length indicates that this shorter cable is intended for laptop or device use. Build quality on everything is good.

The Listen Professional are a versatile set of headphones that can be used in any capacity within a recording studio. Priced above where the casual listener might want to spend, they are not hyped with high end sizzle or "smiley face rock 'n' roll" curve with a scooped midrange and have a firm low end that will appeal to many. The midrange is not particularly exaggerated, and the treble is detailed and non-fatiguing. They have a tight stereo image that is controlled but not expansive. Some users might find the Listen Professional to be a bit tight on their head, and as headphones are a highly personal studio device, finding your favorite set is a very individual choice. \$329

focal.com

FENDER QUANTUM LT 16 USB-C AUDIO INTERFACE



In January 2026, Fender Musical Instruments Corporation rolled the majority of PreSonus products into the Fender brand name, unifying their complete recording system under the moniker, Fender Studio. The popular DAW, PreSonus Studio One Pro, became Fender Studio Pro while the Quantum and AudioBox Go lines transitioned to the Fender Quantum Series (not former PreSonus products), and Fender AudioBox Go. Offering a comprehensive and complete all-in-one economic solution for project studios and home recording, Fender Studio has DAW recording, a complete line of plugins, Fender amp simulators, and paired interfaces.

The Fender Quantum LT 16 is the most capable interface in the LT series, built for project studios, multi-instrument setups, and electronic musicians. With eight MAX-HD mic preamps offering a chunky 75 dB of gain that Fender says is "the most in its class," LT 16 offers eight front panel combination XLR/TRS inputs with front panel gain controls with lights to indicate if your signal is clipping and selectable phantom power for inputs 1-4 and 5-8. Inputs 1-2 are optimized for instruments like guitars or a stereo keyboard, and 3-8 are line inputs.

The look and operation of the LT 16 is as spartan as can be imagined, with simplicity being the essence of this unit. The front panel offers a single headphone jack with volume control as well as a large monitor level dial. Last, a Direct switch enables standalone "Mic Pre Mode" which enables you to use the LT 16 as an eight-channel standalone mic preamp. This feature makes it possible to use the LT 16 as a hybrid recording rig or to expand your studio's input options. "The Direct button's primary function is to turn the direct monitoring function on/off (the monitor mix can be adjusted using the Universal Control app or the Studio Pro hardware monitoring feature). The Direct switch does also engage Mic Pre Mode or Mixer Mode when using the LT 16 standalone (not connected to a computer)," the company said.

The LT 16 also features eight rear panel TRS analog line inputs for integration with outboard gear such as external mic preamps, synthesizers, mixers, or other line-level devices. Four hardware switches enable these inputs to run in stereo pairs at either +4dBu professional line level or at -10dBv consumer level. A pair of 1/4" connectors power the Main Outputs, and an additional six 1/4" connectors power line outputs. Last, five pin MIDI in and out DIN connectors and the main USB-C computer connection complete the package.

The LT 16 comes bundled with a perpetual license for Fender Studio Pro, Fender's premiere DAW recording platform. MC reviewed PreSonus Studio One Pro 7 in our February 2025 issue, and much has been improved with Fender Studio Pro, now on version 8.1. Designed to help answer questions instantly, "Studio Assistant" is an intelligent A.I. in-DAW guide provides real-time answers and creative support.

A first-of-its-kind integration now available directly in Fender Studio Pro 8.1, Moises Studio delivers powerful vocal transformation, the ability to generate stems from pre-existing tracks and stem separation. Moises Studio integration is available for all 8.1 users, providing 10 audio stem separations, 120 stem generations, and five voice conversions per month at no extra cost. Moises trains it's A.I. Studio models on content licensed from independent labels, artists and Moises' own internal production team. No user content is used for training A.I. models and users retain full creative rights over all uploaded material.

The new Vocal Tune plugin gives creators tuning ability, from subtle natural correction to stylized tonal transformation with formant shifting. Studio Pro 8 features Fender's famous amps and effects models.

Fender has created a complete recording ecosystem with recording interfaces, DAW software, as well as the free Fender Studio app for recording and jamming on the go. Fender Studio is a low-cost reliable system for musicians and creators that can handle the needs of project studios and home recording in an affordable package. Fender will continue to expand and develop the system with new features. \$499.99

fender.com



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NUGEN AUDIO MASTERCHECK 2 CROSS PLATFORM MASTERING PLUG-IN

NUGEN Audio is a British software company known for creating industry-standard loudness metering, post-production, and spatial audio plug-ins. Founded in 2004, their focus is on not only audio processing, but also on helping engineers with analysis, meeting technical specifications, and problem solving.

NUGEN Audio MasterCheck 2 is a professional loudness metering and streaming compliance plug-in designed to help engineers optimize audio for cross-platform playback. It acts as a reference and verification tool, revealing exactly how an audio mix or master will sound after being subjected to the loudness normalization and data compression used by modern streaming networks. Different streaming networks set different audio levels for their target for payout, and by emulating these real-world delivery platforms in real time, MasterCheck 2 allows creators to audition what network codecs will do to their audio. NUGEN Audio routinely works in direct collaboration with major networks and streaming media giants like Netflix, Amazon, Disney, and YouTube to write compliance code.

NUGEN Audio states that using MasterCheck 2 can help to maximize dynamics and avoid downstream distortion before final distribution. MasterCheck 2 includes presets that have the compression algorithms from major streaming platforms including Spotify, Apple Music, Tidal, YouTube, Soundcloud, Bandcamp, Qobuz, and Pandora. You simply load the preset corresponding to the streaming platform that you are mastering for and hear what your master will sound like when streamed from it. The plug-in applies the real-time data compression and loudness normalization filters that is unique to each streamer to your monitor path. It's important to note that MasterCheck 2 does not itself alter, process, or change the audio of your master in any way. It is strictly a metering, emulation, and auditioning tool. It is designed to sit at the absolute end of your mastering chain to analyze your signal and show you how streaming platforms will affect it.

The initial version of this technology, MasterCheck was originally released in 2014. When it first arrived, the music production world was just beginning to understand delivery to music streaming services. MasterCheck was the first loudness meter specifically built to show music producers how platforms like iTunes and early Spotify would automatically turn down their mixes. In 2017 NUGEN Audio expanded the plug-in by releasing a "Pro" version. MasterCheck Pro introduced their Codec Auditioning engine, which allowed engineers to hear how streaming compression algorithms like MP3 or AAC would impact their mixes before bouncing the track. After more than a decade of updates, NUGEN Audio "rebuilt the framework from the ground up" to launch MasterCheck 2, adding multichannel support including 7.1.4 immersive audio and Dolby Atmos capability to match modern streaming needs. \$249

Supports AAX, VST3, AU, and AudioSuite in 64-bit.

Minimum system requirements Mac OSX 11 / 512 MB RAM Windows 8 / 512 MB RAM

nugenaudio.com



YAMAHA PSR-SX720+ 61-KEY ARRANGER KEYBOARD

The **Yamaha PSR-SX720+** 61-Key Arranger Keyboard is a professional mid-range workstation. Designed for solo entertainers, hobbyists, composers, and keyboard players, the PSR-SX720+ combines an accessible interface with a vast collection of sounds, accompaniment styles, and performance tools to create an all-in-one keyboard that is fantastic for both studio tasks as well as live performance.

The PSR-SX720+ features 1913 voices, 128 note polyphony using Yamaha's AWM sampling, 450 preset accompaniment styles, great sounding built-in two-way 15 watt (each) stereo speakers, and Bluetooth audio connectivity. The PSR-SX720+ has a 61-key keyboard with touch-sensitive action. The keyboard has the feel of a synthesizer-style keyboard, offering a non-weighted light action suitable for piano parts, organ work, and synthesized sounds. While players who want the feel of an acoustic piano may prefer weighted keys, the lighter action supports fast passages, organ type glissandos, synth work, and extended playing sessions.

The sound library covers the most useful essentials, including over 40 acoustic, treated, and electric pianos, with the main piano being sampled from a Yamaha acoustic grand piano. Organ players will like the 55 Organ Flute voices that allow you to modify the organ sample in real time using organ controls to change drawbars, chorus, vibrato, rotary speaker, and percussion. Also included are solo strings and string ensembles, brass, guitars, basses, drums, synthesizers, and world instruments. Synth patches range from classic analog-inspired textures to retro and modern digital sounds. There are enough sounds and features to cover the needs of a gigging musician as well.

The PSR-SX720+ has a versatile arranger engine. Automatic accompaniment styles react to the player's left-hand chords while producing rhythm, bass, and backing instrument parts. The available styles span genres including pop, country, jazz, Latin, R&B, dance, and international music. Each style includes multiple variations, intros, endings, and fills.

The onboard touchscreen is descended from the top-of-the-line Yamaha Genos series and is easier to use than previous menu-driven arranger keyboards. Voice selection, style management, mixer adjustments, and registration recall are available, and the screen even allows for music notation and lyrics to be displayed. Physical controls surrounding the display provide quick access to frequently used performance functions, allowing players modifications while keeping their attention on the keyboard.

For composers, USB audio and MIDI support allow the PSR-SX720+ to function as both a controller and an audio interface for computer-based recording. Multitrack audio recording and a 16-track MIDI recorder are standard. External storage support makes it practical to organize registrations, user styles, and backing files. A microphone input with onboard vocal processing expands the feature set for singer-keyboardists performing without additional hardware. Although producers working on larger studio projects may still prefer dedicated recording software, the internal recording tools offer a convenient standalone approach.

The PSR-SX720+ wraps everything into an all-in-one self-contained approach that focuses on integrating accompaniment, performance, and recording features into a single instrument that presents a balanced combination of sound quality, arranger functionality, and performance-oriented features. \$1,699.99

yamaha.com



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

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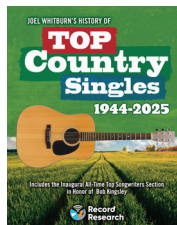
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Joel Whitburn's History of Top Country Singles 1944-2025

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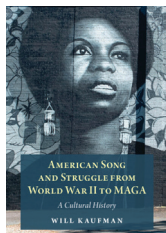


This comprehensive examination of "every song that appeared on *Billboard*'s Country singles charts from 1944 through 2025" is a reference guide, as opposed to the sort of book you'd read cover-to-cover. However, there's

plenty of fun to be had thanks to the "artist-by-artist listings, multiple song and artist rankings, a chronological list of every No. 1 Country hit, and the inaugural all-time Country Songwriters section." We at MC are nerds when it comes to these lists, packed with facts, figures and microscopic information. We'd wager plenty of our readers are too.

American Song and Struggle from World War II to MAGA

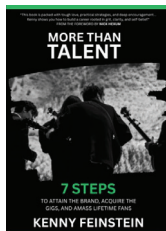
By Will Kaufman
(hardcover) \$35



Will Kaufman may have written the year's most important book on the subject of music. His latest work "explores songs from all genres that respond to war, racism, sexism, terrorism, the climate emergency, and political oppression: including the crisis of Trumpism itself." Of particular interest is the final chapter, "Wrecking Ball," in which Kaufman examines the songs and musicians that have provided the soundtrack to the U.S.A.'s recent descent into authoritarianism. P!nk, Joan Baez, and Macklemore all get a mention, among many others, and Kaufman's book is essential reading.

More Than Talent: 7 Steps to Attain the Brand, Acquire the Gigs, and Amass Lifetime Fans

By Kenny Feinstein
(paperback) \$25

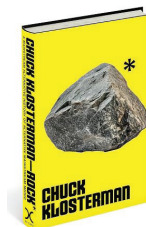


More Than Talent is the debut book from musician and entrepreneur Feinstein, and he's well placed to write about the "beyond the music" side of the industry for fellow artists. "I made all the mistakes so that you don't have to," Feinstein said. "This is the music

business manual I wish I had as I was learning the ropes of this industry. This book serves anyone in the industry." If there was any justice, talent would be enough but sadly, that's not the real world and Feinstein offers a seven-step guide to growing an audience.

Rock*: A Mainstream Alternative History of Alternative Mainstream Music

By Chuck Klosterman
(hardcover) \$32.50

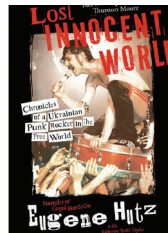


Seasoned scribe Klosterman's new book asks the question: "What if The Beatles had only developed a cult following while the Velvet Underground emerged as the most popular band in the world?" That's a fascinating premise—the sort of thing

that knowledgeable musos like to muse about, possibly while tipsy, deep into the dark hours. And yet, what might sound like a futile "sliding doors" concept actually develops into a deep look into what factors are necessary when success is the goal. How much is luck, how much is timing, and how much is pure talent? There's no definitive answer, but the journey is a contemplative joy.

Lost Innocent World

By Eugene Hutz
(hardcover) \$32

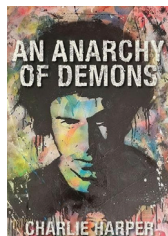


Tagged "Chronicles of a Ukrainian punk rocker in the free world," *Lost Innocent World* is the autobiography of Gogol Bordello main man Eugene Hutz, very likely the most famous Ukrainian musician in the world. His "gypsy punk" band (their words)

have performed at some of the biggest festivals and opened for some of the biggest acts, while playing plenty of big shows in their own right too. The band has a "border-blasting message of inclusion and personal liberation," and Hutz's book is a "deeply personal account of surviving conflict and displacement." It's an awe-inspiring, touching read.

An Anarchy of Demons

By Charlie Harper
(paperback) \$35



As frontman and mainstay with veteran English band the U.K. Subs, Charlie Harper's place in punk history is secure. He's a beloved figure, having influenced everyone from Rancid to Guns N' Roses (who covered "Down on the Farm"). That said, it's a

proper treat to get his story in his own words. Appropriately, given the U.K. Subs' output, the chapters are snappy, and there are many of them. "The memoir chronicles Harper's work with the U.K. Subs, his solo recordings, and his many side projects, painting an intimate portrait of one of punk's most enduring and beloved figures," reads a statement.



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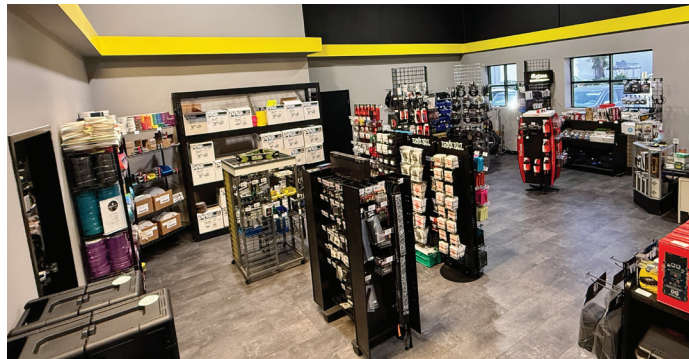
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Tour Essentials LA

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From Rehearsal Campus to One-Stop Touring Resource: When Alex Moore looks across the 110,000-square-foot Third Encore campus in North Hollywood, he doesn't just see rehearsal studios—he sees decades of relationships built with the touring artists, production crews, and music professionals who have relied on the facility since 1989. As Vice President of Third Encore, Moore has helped oversee the steady evolution of one of Southern California's premier rehearsal complexes, a multifaceted operation offering large-scale rehearsal studios, backline and pro-audio rentals, storage, cartage, and other production services. The launch of Tour Essentials LA marks the natural next chapter in that evolution. When the on-campus retailer that had long served Third Encore's clients closed its doors, the company recognized an opportunity to create something new and of their own. Rather than simply replacing a tenant, the team leveraged decades of relationships with manufacturers, firsthand knowledge of what touring artists need, and available space on the campus to create a specialized retail division focused on live event production and touring essentials.

Built by People Who Understand the Road: Unlike traditional music stores, Tour Essentials LA isn't centered on walls of guitars or amplifiers. Instead, it offers the practical gear, expendables and problem-solving products that musicians, production managers, and road crews often discover they need at the last possible moment. The inventory ranges from gaffer tape, batteries, cables, drumheads, drumsticks, and guitar strings to flashlights, padlocks, SKB and Enki cases, custom fly racks, and road cases, along with numerous pro audio accessories and tour supplies rarely found under one roof. Conveniently located on the Third Encore campus, the store also offers free same day local delivery, nationwide shipping, and online ordering backed by a modern inventory system and a helpful team in place. Serving both Third Encore's built-in rehearsal clientele and the broader Los Angeles production community, Tour Essentials LA combines competitive pricing with personalized service from professionals who understand the demands of touring because they support it every day.

Supporting Every Show, One Essential at a Time: Officially opening its retail space in early 2025, Tour Essentials LA is fast becoming an indispensable resource for touring professionals throughout Southern California. For Moore and his team, the greatest reward comes from knowing that Third Encore plays a small but meaningful role in bringing major productions to life. After helping artists rehearse, rent equipment, and pick up those last-minute essentials before heading out on tour, they often see the finished performances online or in concert, knowing their team contributed to the final result. "The most satisfying part is hearing from customers how convenient it is to have these products available when they need them and not having to order online," Moore says. "When I see a concert after watching that production come together on our campus, it's rewarding to know we helped them succeed in a small way."

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▲ GRACE POTTER REIMAGINES "THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND" FOR SONGS OF U.S. SERIES

Grace Potter appears in *Songs of U.S.*, delivering a powerful take on Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land" alongside a conversation on music's role in shaping American identity. The performance previewed her latest album *Trespasser* while pairing past and present through reinterpretations that reflect today's cultural landscape.



▲ ELI DERBY LINKS WITH BRI3 ON NEW SINGLE "PRETTY GIRL DANGEROUS"

Eli Derby returns with "Pretty Girl Dangerous," a new single featuring Bri3. Released via Warner Records, the track blends melodic R&B with atmospheric production and explores the pull of risky attraction. Co-produced with Delante "Butta" Murphy, it continues Derby's run of emotionally driven, guitar-laced releases.



▲ LO-FLO RECORDS UNVEILS RARE MCNEALY AND KUHN'S INSTRUMENTAL "WHY DOES THE SKY KEEP CHANGING (BOSSA NOVA DREAMS)"

Lo-Flo Records releases the previously unheard "Why Does the Sky Keep Changing (Bossa Nova Dreams)" by Jane McNealy and Alice Kuhns. Originally arranged by Mike Watts, the instrumental offers a bossa nova-tinged glimpse into the song's early form, highlighting the duo's enduring partnership and the evolution of a composition later recorded at Capitol Records.



▲ S.G. GOODMAN JOINS CARDBOARD SESSIONS WITH STRIPPED-DOWN, ALL-CARDBOARD PERFORMANCES

S.G. Goodman appears in *Cardboard Sessions*, delivering raw performances using instruments made entirely of cardboard. Inspired by a studio moment from *Planting by the Signs*, the session highlights her Kentucky-rooted songwriting and genre-blurring sound, transforming folk, rock, and country influences into an intimate, inventive live experience grounded in storytelling.

PRODUCER PLAYBACK

"Your disposition matters a lot. I make sure that I know something about the artist so that we can converse and I can learn what their expectations are." — EBONIE SMITH





▲ BLUE SKY STUDIOS OFFICIALLY LAUNCHES IN HISTORIC NASHVILLE SPACE

Blue Sky Studios officially opens its doors following a quiet 2025 debut, bringing a modern creative hub to the former Watershed Studios space. Founded by Eric Petrone and Myles Mancuso, the studio blends vintage Nashville recording heritage with contemporary production, quickly attracting top musicians and establishing itself as a premier destination for artists and creators.



▼ MARTEN LOU AND RIVO TEAM UP FOR MELODIC HOUSE SINGLE "TECHNICOLOR"

Marten Lou joins RIVO on "Technicolor," a melodic house track blending warm basslines, shimmering synths, and atmospheric vocals. Released via Warner Records, the single captures a euphoric, sunset-like mood while balancing emotional depth with club-ready energy, marking another step in both artists' rising global trajectories.



▲ THE STRING CHEESE INCIDENT SHARE NEW SINGLE "LIGHTNING SKY"

The String Cheese Incident return with "Lightning Sky," a reflective new single inspired by family, travel, and spirituality. Led by songwriter Keith Moseley, the track builds on the band's evolving approach to storytelling. The release arrives alongside ongoing tour dates and plans for their immersive 2026 destination event in Morocco.

A woman with long dark hair is wearing large black over-ear headphones. She is looking down, and her hand is near her ear, adjusting the headphones. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a studio setting with various equipment.

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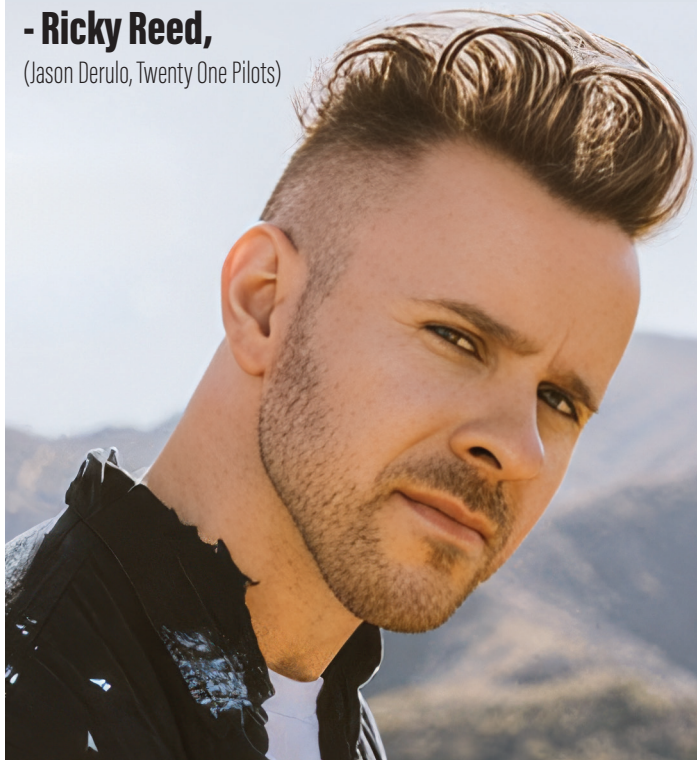
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PRODUCER CROSSTALK

- ROB PUTNAM



Composer, multi-instrumentalist, and producer Wynne Bennett discovered her affinity for piano at about the same time as she learned to read. Around age seven, noted jazz pianist and family friend Barry Harris took her on as a student and soon recommended her for a place at New York's famed Harlem School of the Arts. Following graduation, she majored in composition at the Mannes College of Music at The New School. She's composed music and cues for a number of TV shows and films, divides her time between her L.A. and New York studios, and remains active with the band Twin Shadow. Other artists she's worked with include Kid Cudi, Grimes, and HAIM. The songs that resonate most with her combine memorable melodies and choruses with adventurous harmonic ideas.

Bennett was tapped to co-produce Janelle Monáe's GRAMMY-nominated 2018 *Dirty Computer*. The single "Pynk," which she co-wrote and co-produced, has earned nearly 50 million Spotify streams. "The opportunity came up because she knew my records with Twin Shadow and we liked similar music," the producer explains. "She also wanted to work with more female producers. When we did the record, the studio had three different rooms, and we jumped around to each one. I didn't know what I was getting into, but I wanted to follow the path. What I learned most from that record was different ways of working. Changing rooms created an energy and a buzz. The vibe around the song is part of that."

More recently, Bennett has expanded into television and film scoring. Shows for which she's created music include Apple TV's *Maximum Pleasure Guaranteed*, *Queens*, and AMC's *Tales of the Walking Dead*. The transition came by way of connections and collaboration. "I'd always wanted to get into TV and film scoring but I didn't know how, necessarily," she says. "But I followed my path organically: going on tour with Twin Shadow, making records, and putting out feelers once I landed in L.A."

"I started collaborating with people so early, which is my strong suit," she continues. "I feel like my superpower is knowing what the other person wants. For example, when I talk with David, he'll use adjectives or feelings. He'll say things like 'I want this scene to feel like an anxiety attack or that [the character's] whole world is melting.'"

Counted among her favorite pieces of gear is the synth she bought years ago when its \$600 price tag made her gasp. "The [Roland] Juno-60 is a staple and always sounds good," she observes. "It's one of the first synthesizers I ever bought, and it has a place in my heart. I also love the Wunder CM7 mic and use it on everything because it has a clean and clear sound that's also warm."

Bennett continues to perform with Twin Shadow and will compose scores for several upcoming productions. The soundtrack for *Maximum Pleasure Guaranteed* was released in mid-July. Although she records largely in her L.A. and New York studios, she also enjoys working in commercial spaces that have a broader array of gear. One of her favorite studio memories dates back to her early years when she got to share pizza and talk shop with prolific composer Philip Glass at his legendary N.Y.C. Looking Glass Studios.

Contact wynnebennett.com, Instagram @whoiswynn

THE 3 MOST IMPORTANT

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

- Learn all the rules and break them.
- Collaboration is key. It's part of the business, it's part of artistic practice. No one's alone in this.
- Have fun!



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Grayson Sanders

CEO and Co-Founder
Chordal

Years with Company: 8
Address: Los Angeles, CA
Web: chordal.com
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BACKGROUND

Chordal is helping make it easier than ever for music makers and rights holders to clear their catalogs for synchronization. A graduate of NYU, Grayson Sanders helped build the company after experiencing success as a classical composer.

Syncing Up

I thought I was heading towards a film music career, so I was focused on film scoring and doing things in the experimental classical scene. A former roommate had moved to Los Angeles and started working for a publishing company. He got in touch and asked if I wanted to get involved in sync. That wasn't something I'd really heard of; surprisingly, I didn't learn about it in my overpriced music degree.

After getting involved in the sync world, I landed a placement for Coca Cola. I was like, "Wow, this is significant income for an artist." I decided to move to Los Angeles and ended up co-founding a licensing agency with that same colleague. We grew that for about 10 years. We were representing our own work but also a lot of different artists and record labels.

Striking a Chord

Chordal came out of the experience of licensing the traditional way and seeing how the pace of producing content was accelerating. And fees were going down for individual syncs, but the number of possible syncs was going up. Something's got to budge if deals are falling through because those old practices are too slow.

Who Are the Deciders?

Sync licensing requires all parties who share ownership of a song to approve a license and be involved in that transaction. If there's a song that a band of four members writes and there's a label, you have five stakeholders. So, if you're going to get a license from that band or the people that represent that band, there are sophisticated teams dedicated to surfacing those owners, contacting them, negotiating with them individually, contracting with them, and paying them out. Historically, a lot of focus in sync licensing has been *how do we get in front of those decision makers?*

Streamlining

Our goal was to bring all the parties under one roof so they can have a more streamlined way of clearing songs so that transactions can be expedited. And when that buyer needs to pay those parties, they're not getting five invoices. They're getting a single payment experience.



"What works on socials for micro-licensing is different than what's being licensed for big, broadcast ads."

The Rise of Royalty-Free Music

Think about where content is with everything taking place on social media, UGC [user generated content] gaming platforms, and creator marketplaces. Everything has gotten much higher volume and faster, and also much lower value in terms of per license fees. As the music industry stayed in the old model of finding out who owns what, calling them, and doing the contracts, this other industry of royalty-free music rose up to fill that void.

Coexisting With Artificial Intelligence

Right now, licensing generative A.I. music is legally fraught. Those licenses aren't properly in place yet with all the big rights holders. There's no attribution model for royalty payments that's scalable or frankly suitable for the industry. But I believe it will get there. And when it does, you're going to have these two hemispheres of music, one that is high-volume and fully democratized, and then another that has cultural value attached.

Finding What You're Looking For

We have a department that builds A.I. analysis tools—analyzing music for its lyrical content and how it sounds so you can search by describing what you're looking for. This is quickly becoming the expectation for any music platform. We're always finding ways to use emerging A.I. tools to help people get to the source faster and give them better insights.

Applications and Referrals

Music companies must go through an application process just to confirm they are a legitimate business. You wouldn't believe how many bots are trying to sign up every day. And we take referrals. Let's say you're a record label and the platform has 200 songs in your catalog controlled by a publisher. If that publisher is not on the platform, you have the ability to refer out to them. They can then create a free account and see the music that's already connected to them in the system.

Multiple Tiers

We wanted a free tier because we didn't want a barrier to entry for people claiming their rights on songs and being active. That account

is limited to one user and has some other limitations, but you can still monetize and make money through the platform. Then we have a subscription tier where you can have unlimited seats and access to some other functionality. You also have a lower revenue share rate on transactions. And the third tier is Enterprise. That's for large organizations with detailed and custom setups.

Pushing Change

Any tech startup is a challenge. Throw on top of that trying to innovate in a system that has done things a certain way for decades, and you're going to encounter friction. In the early days, the industry was skeptical, so we had to take the long road. We built brick-by-brick with small businesses that were willing to take a chance.

What Works for Sync

Music full of curse words probably won't get licensed often. Anything that's extremely experimental, aggressive, or noisy—not to say it will never find a home, it's just going to find a home in a really specific way. Think about music complementing a visual and what someone is trying to achieve. That's the thing that musicians and rights holders often forget. When you're creating a release, you're thinking about a music listener. In sync, you're complementing someone else's vision. So, think about your music through the lens of *what type of content would this supplement?* "This is great for this app." Well, is it? Maybe think about other stuff that this brand has used and see if anything in your catalog would fit.

There's also nuance between media. What works on socials for micro-licensing is different than what's being licensed for big, broadcast ads. And that's great, because it means the opportunity is spread out. Electronic, hip-hop, lo-fi, Latin pop, and mainstream Latin genres are killing it right now on our micro-licensing stuff. But some genres barely see any traction on the traditional licensing side.

Social Media and Courtroom Drama

In UGC, users signing into Instagram can post a video and search through music of well-known artists to add to it. The music industry negotiates large deals so the user can pull a song and use it in their video. But that doesn't cover branded use. And the platforms don't have any information about the difference, or if they do it's buried under three menus. As a result, you have a lot of infringement lawsuits, recognizable brands getting sued for large sums.

Customizing Contracts

If you are a less experienced licensor or rights holder, you may not have licensing agreements to work off. We have a suite of boilerplate agreements. They're automatically loaded when there's a license. They're industry-standard forms that are fair to both licensor and licensee. If you are a large rights holder, a name brand label, or publisher, you have sophisticated contracts. In some cases, you've negotiated specific deals with buyers. So, we have a sort of shorthand on the agreements that we use to manage those relationships.

Robert Xavier Burden's Music of the Spheres

Robert Burden fuses a labor-intensive Renaissance-level figurative technique with the obsessive-collector deep end of the pop culture canon in large-scale oil paintings whose Gen X-coded hyper-decorative motifs have only become more complex and dense with contemporary and historical references over the past 20 years.

Often incorporating toys—which he considers as talismans from the liminal space between fantasy and reality—as Proustian narrative prompts, Burden is aware of the “obvious irony in spending thousands of hours to create a single painting that glorifies a cheap, mass-produced toy.” At the same time, this fusion of highly honed technique and pop culture sensibility can offer viewers a transportive experience that is both sweeping and deeply personal. “The work is thematic in nature, but it’s akin to historical icon painting. With icon painting, there’s an emphasis on beauty through symmetry and decoration,” says Burden. “As pretentious as this sounds, I believe the paintings are a distillation of our collective imagination.”

With any one of his paintings taking years to complete, and fresh sources of inspiration arriving all the time, it’s rare that Burden takes commissions. But in the case of *Sine Language*, he found both. With its elaborate network of cables and wires and circuit boards resembling the borders of illuminated manuscripts, and the center representing the fractal harmony of the cosmos, the work is radiant with mystery and musicality.

The massive work took roughly 1,700 hours to complete—yes, by hand; yes, by himself—and was commissioned by a music producer named Louis Bell. “Brainstorming this painting with Lou was a lot of fun,” says Burden. “I hung out in his studio, [and] we talked about many different topics, but primarily things that influenced him as a musician—his favorite instruments (Juno 60 and Jupiter 6 keyboards), his first (a Casio PT-100 keyboard), and waveforms and musical elements” that became the architecture of the painting.

“Art has brought me a lot of joy at times,” he says, in spite of the hard, lonely work it demands. “I believe in the work. I believe it has an interesting and weighty social commentary. Twenty years ago, I had a vision for an epic body of work that would take me a lifetime,” he says. And that tune is definitely still playing.

robertburden.com



HALO KITSCH

MC wrote in a recent New Music Critique review (an 8.4/10 review, by the way) that alt-rockers Halo Kitsch describes herself as “underrated,” but that won’t be the case for much longer if there’s any justice. Of course, justice isn’t always readily available in the music industry, but we can hope.

For her part, the artist known as Halo Kitsch is a born performer. “I loved singing in the shower, playing *Rockband*, *High School Musical*,” she says. “I still do. As for ‘getting serious,’ I’m not sure that it ever will be serious to anything besides my own mental health. Songwriting became a sort of inhaler to me during my first year of college when I experienced symptoms of my depressive disorder for the first time and it felt sort of like I couldn’t breathe. It took weight off of my chest. I left school after two years and I suppose you could argue that it was then when I made up my mind and decided to pursue it full time.”

The artist describes her music as sounding like what the inside of her closet looks like: “Messy and raw, like ripped denim, a little punk like leather, intimate like lace, embellished with silver buckles and knuckle rings.”

Halo Kitsch’s latest release is the “American Medicine” single. “[It’s] the beginning of a new muse to me,” she says. “I think that will make more sense in a few months from now. It’s a tricky song to explain—there are so many layers in there, and hints left to interpretation, and ultimately, it’s a bit more of a collision of feelings to me than the narrative style I usually write in. But the easiest summation is simply that it is my own version of ‘love is the cure.’ And that, well, Americans need medicine.”

It’s a great track, only increasing the volume of the buzz around the artist. Halo Kitsch’s work ethic helps too. “DIY to me means, how dirty are your hands?” she says. “You’re the face of your own project, are you the arms? Legs? Mind? Heart? How many hats can you wear? And can you juggle?”

Visit halokitsch.com

Photo by Christina Bryson



THE LEGAL BEAT

BY GLENN T. LITWAK



Sony Music has sued A.I. startup Udio for copyright infringement for a second time. Sony asserts Udio used over 30,000 recordings it copied without permission in order to train its A.I. models.

The lawsuit was filed by Sony on July 20, 2026, in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. Sony had tried to add this belated claim to its first copyright case against Udio, but the court denied the motion.

The first lawsuit was filed two years ago and was coordinated by the Recording Association of America and included claims by Sony as well as Universal Music Group and Warner Music Group. However, Universal and Warner settled and entered into licensing deals with Udio. Sony is still pursuing that lawsuit.

Sony claims in the first action that the 30,117 recordings are “only a small portion” of what Udio used without authorization.

The complaint in the second action states “Udio’s belated embrace of licensing only underscores the unlawfulness of its decision to copy Plaintiff’s copyrighted sound recordings, without a license in the first place.” The complaint further states “that a functioning market exists for licensing sound recordings for use in connection with generative A.I.” and that “Udio recognizes that using copyrighted sound recordings for this purpose requires permission.”

Sony is now the sole major label that has not entered into a licensing deal with Udio.

At the present time, there is a lot of uncertainty about the legality of A.I. companies using copyrighted material. Under federal law, Sony could request damages over \$4.5 billion, consisting of up to \$150,000 for each infringed work. Consequently, Udio has a good reason to try and settle and enter into a licensing deal. Sony also has some incentive

to settle since if they lose at trial, it could establish a bad precedent.

Sony also claims Digital Millennium Copyright Act violations for allegedly stream-ripping tracks off of YouTube using such tools like YT-DLP (this is a command-line program used to download audio and video from YouTube and many other websites).

Udio will argue as a defense that copying music for A.I. training is a “fair use” under federal law and consequently, no permission is necessary.

Fair use is a legal doctrine in the U.S.A. that allows for certain uses of copyrighted material. It is a common defense in a copyright infringement case. It seeks to balance the copyright owner’s interests with the public interest in the wide distribution and use of original works by allowing it as an affirmative defense in copyright infringement cases. It provides for limited use of copyrighted works without the permission of the owner.

In determining fair use the court considers:

- The purpose and character of the use
- The nature of the copyrighted work
- The amount used as compared to the whole work
- The effect of use on the value of the work

Time will tell if a fair use defense prevails.

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 gtlaw59@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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TECH 21

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Date Signed: June 2026

Label: VHS Records

Type of Music: Singer-Songwriter

Management: mauricemusicmanagement@gmail.com

Booking: mauricemusicmanagement@gmail.com

Publicity: Kenzie Davis, Big Hassle - kenzie@bighassle.com

A&R: Reed Black, VHS Records - reedblacksound@gmail.com

Web: instagram.com/cocosmith__

New York singer and songwriter Coco Smith comes from a family of musicians and, as a child, she would regularly listen to The Beatles (courtesy of her dad) and Eleni Mandell (her mom's influence) in the car. She would sing along, but writing her own songs began in high school.

"I began to feel a lot of strong and deep emotions, probably to do with being gay and my dad's illness," Smith says. "I didn't know any other way to put them out except to write them into music—my parents had already kinda taught me how. Performing and playing the songs solo came soon after, a band came years later, in college. I would probably advise other parents to do the same, if they want their child to make music and still love it as they get older."

While her sound may have progressed and developed over the years, Smith's influences remain the same: Big Thief, Pinegrove, Julia Jacklin, John Lennon, and Maisy.

"I think, honestly, I just got more confident, and that changed my sound," Smith says. "The first couple of years of college, I didn't think anyone would

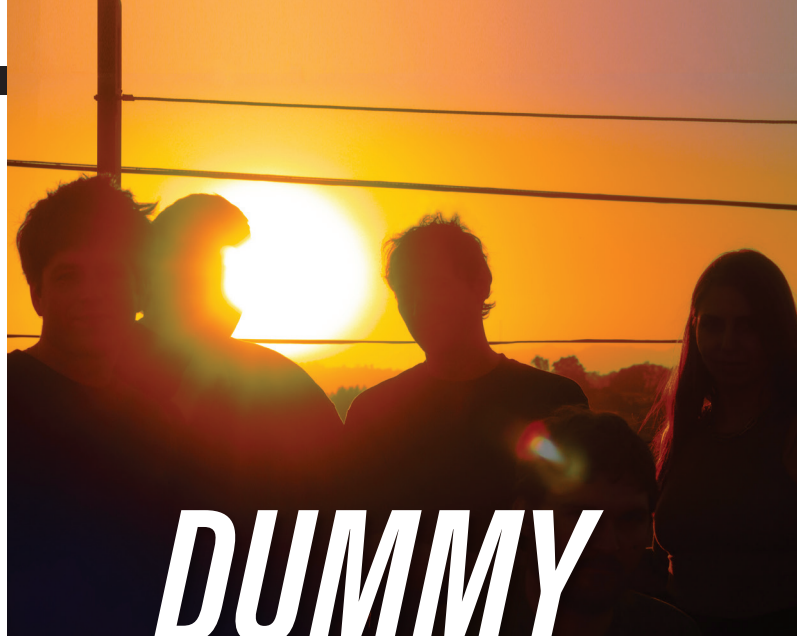
"I had angry things to say, in a mellow way, like Julia Jacklin. But I wanted the anger to come out from the instruments."

care enough to play my music with me. It wasn't until I began playing the basements in Allston that I was like, 'okay, I want a band so badly.' I started wanting songs with 'teeth' as Sam Skinner would say, and it took me a while to figure out what that meant. I had angry things to say, in a mellow way, like Julia Jacklin."

Smith's new album, *You Won't Get My Message but You'll Hear It*, is out now via Brooklyn-based indie label VHS Records. "I found them online," Smith says. "I wanted an artist-forward label that wasn't affiliated with any major labels, based in N.Y.C. I also knew Fish Hunt's music and loved it and had seen People I Love open for my guitarist Ash's release show for her own project, Wulfer, and loved that too."

Smith recently dropped "Multiform," a single taken from the new album. "Multiform" was recorded with Sam Skinner, in his studio, with Isaiah, Isaac, and Theo," Smith says. "It was a part of my album, *You Won't Get My Message but You'll Hear It*. We recorded it last December, for three days. The 'triumph, despite' theme was nailed into the ground. That is always what I want for my music, the hopeful tinge out of something horrible, and Sam got it."

With the album out, Smith is looking forward to more releases this year. "I'm working on a song with my friend, Remy, and a couple long-distance songs with my friends Corbin and Cade," she says. - **Brett Callwood**



Date Signed: March 2026

Label: Polyvinyl Record Co.

Band Members: Alex Ewell, drums, synths; Emma Maatman, vocals, synths, organ; Nathan O'Dell, vocals, guitar, organ; Joe Trainor, guitar, synths; Lance Umble, bass

Type of Music: Ambient Rock

Management: Eric Mayers, Red Light Management - eric.mayers@redlightmanagement.com

Booking: Geoff McGovern - Ground Control Touring, geoff@groundcontroltouring.com

Legal: Paul Sommerstein

Publicity: Patrick Tilley / Pitch Perfect PR, patrick@pitchperfectpr.com

A&R: Seth Hubbard

Web: notdummy.com

For ambient rockers Dummy, making music a full-time endeavor wasn't part of the original equation. "Our ambition was solely artistic," asserts guitarist Joe Trainor. "The goal was just to make music we thought was cool, play some shows, and maybe put out a cassette."

And yet, through focusing on their craft, they earned the attention of Trouble In Mind Records. The husband-and-wife duo that founded the Chicago-based indie had discovered Dummy during the pandemic and decided to reach out. A conversation about likeminded artists ensued. "They were dweebs about music in the same way we were," explains Trainor.

Two albums later, the couple shut down the label, leaving Dummy in the

"It was a dream label for us."

lurch. The band soldiered on and recorded a demo for their third LP, with Trainor assuming the duty of sending the tune to friends on labels they liked. One was Fred Thomas whose group, Saturday Looks Good To Me, is signed to Polyvinyl Record Co., home to artists such as Laura Jane Grace, Deerhoof, and The Get Up Kids. Thomas subsequently passed a note to the label's cofounders, Darcie Knight and Matt Lunsford, informing them the band was a free agent.

As luck would have it, the label's heads were already fans. For their part, Dummy's members had been lovers of all things Polyvinyl for a long time. Trainor recalls discovering one of their leading artists, Rainer Maria, while he was still in high school. "In college, I was obsessed with all those records," chimes in drummer Alex Ewell. "It was a dream label for us."

Polyvinyl is much larger than Trouble In Mind, thus allowing the band greater financial resources for everything from longer studio sessions to lush album packaging. "For the first time, we have a budget for music videos and stuff like that," rambles Trainor with glee.

The label is also putting out Dummy's first two albums, *Mandatory Enjoyment* and *Free Energy*. Neither has been commercially available for approximately a year. Notes Trainor with gratitude, "We're stoked that those records will be back in stores." - **Andy Kaufmann**



KENNY WHITMIRE

Date Signed: May 2026
Label: MCA
Type of Music: Country
Management: River House Artists
Booking: The Neal Agency
Legal: Hunter Cottingham PLLC
Publicity: LEDE
A&R: MCA
Web: kennywhitmire.com

Hailing from Woodstock, GA, Kenny Whitmire came to Nashville in 2022. The blossoming country star's music draws on '90s-flavored hits every bit as much as the genre's most famous traditionalists. He started putting original songs on social media, with one in particular, "I Gave Her The Moon," taking off big time and generating a wave of industry attention.

Yet the wheels were already in motion for signing with MCA before that happened. Zebb Luster, who would eventually become Whitmire's manager, connected him with Hannah Wilson, one of the storied label's A&R reps. "She came to watch me play a gig, and soon after we had a little meeting," reveals the crooner, whose voice has been compared to Keith Whitley and Randy Travis. "We got dinner and talked about music."

That led to Wilson connecting Whitmire with producer Dave Cobb. "I had some phone calls with him, which is the coolest thing in the world," admits Whitmire, "because I grew up on a lot of Chris Stapleton." The artist was also impressed by MCA's current crop of rising newcomers, including Carter Faith and Vincent Mason.

Before offering a contract, the brass at MCA had Whitmire perform a quick acoustic show in their offices. "I played them five or six songs I had been writing. They seemed to enjoy most of them," he recalls

"I trusted my gut and the good Lord."

with characteristic modesty. Whitmire believes that the quality of his songwriting, combined with his videos going viral, is what ultimately got the venerable label to put forth a deal.

"It felt like the right choice. I trusted my gut and the good Lord," tells Whitmire. Instinct aside, he sought the opinion of fellow Georgian Austin Snell, for whom he'd played guitar. "I talked to him a lot about what I should do," he recalls. "And he seemed to be aligned with MCA."

Whitmire further felt comfortable going with MCA based on Luster's advice. "I put all my trust in him," the young performer swears. "I knew he had my best interests at heart." And despite meeting with other labels, he wanted to remain loyal to the home that first showed interest, calling it "a pretty easy choice."

The down-to-earth singer is currently in the midst of a major tour supporting Billy Currington, Ian Munsick, and Tracy Lawrence. His debut EP, *Fool In A King Size Bed*, is out now. - **Andy Kaufmann**



KYLE FISHMAN

Date Signed: June 2026
Publisher: ERN's Cadillac Music
Type of Music: Country, Pop, Rock
Management: Lauren Lieu
Publicity: Corey Brewer, Rachel Heatherly, Big Loud - corey@bigloud.com
A&R: Mike Giangreco, Dane Schmidt

Born and raised in California, Kyle Fishman has been making music most of his life. He started out playing in death metal bands and touring throughout his teens, but he always liked other genres, including pop and country.

Fishman began making a name for himself as a songwriter, collaborating with rock bands such as Underoath, The Used, and Story Of The Year. He eventually formed a friendship with fellow writer Dallas Davidson, who offered him a deal with his company, Play It Again Music Publishing, on the condition that he would move to Nashville. "I'll be

"It's a really comfortable and creative place to be."

there tomorrow," Fishman responded. "I just packed a backpack and my computer and left."

At the time, Davidson was renting the top floor of Big Loud from the renowned label's owner and founder, Craig Wiseman. Fishman moved in and started collaborating with others, including Morgan Wallen and a rapper named SNO (Ernest Keith Smith). Smith and Fishman continued creating together at each other's studios during the seven or eight years Fishman was signed with Play It Again Music.

Fishman then took a break from publishing, remaining a free agent for over a year. Meanwhile, Smith reinvented himself as a country artist under the stage name ERNEST. In 2023, he founded his own publishing house, ERN's Cadillac Music, through Big Loud Publishing and located on that third floor where Fishman had once lived. One day, Smith casually dropped that, if Fishman ever wanted another publishing deal, he'd be happy to sign him.

Being friends for so long meant negotiating the agreement was simple. "I told them what I wanted and expected, and he told me what he wanted and expected," explains Fishman. "It kind of lined up perfectly." Fishman has penned hits for artists such as Luke Bryan, Kane Brown, and Dustin Lynch. With that kind of talent, it's no surprise many other publishers made overtures, but going with ERNEST was the only decision he seriously considered.

Besides bringing his Music City journey full circle, signing with ERN's Cadillac Music feels like a homecoming. "It's a friends and family vibe," states Fishman, whose country-oriented production and writing credits now include Kenny Chesney, Florida Georgia Line, and Blake Shelton. "It's a really comfortable and creative place to be. It's just like hanging with your friends and songs happen in between." - **Andy Kaufmann**



▲ WIGS' SOFT CONTROL

Adding elements of soul and R&B to their trademark alt-rock sound, the Afghan Wigs release *Soft Control* (via Royal Cream/BMG), right on time to celebrate their 40th anniversary and a major U.S. tour. First jamming in basements in the mid '80s, the Wigs remain unmistakably feisty and original in their sound and delivery.



◀ DECCA SIGNS HOPKINS

Sir Anthony Hopkins has signed exclusively with Decca Records, with new recording project *Life Is A Dream* encompassing over 60 years of original compositions inspired by Wales, his life, and his family (music was his first love and he began piano at age four). Conductor Gustavo Dudamel leads the Philharmonia Orchestra.

▶ MAGNIFICENT LACHI ALBUM

Award-winning artist/disability advocate Lachi releases debut children's album, *Magnificent*, celebrating disability, neurodiversity, identity, inclusion, with collaborators Lisa Loeb, Mandy Harvey, 123 Andrés, Alphabet Rockers. Blending pop, hip-hop, world sound, it includes class curriculum from The Nora Project.



ASCAP THEATRE AND SCHOLARSHIPS

The ASCAP Foundation, in partnership with the Educational Theatre Association, extends congratulations to Theatre Director Shawn Hann at the Denver School of the Arts after being named the 2026 Stephen Schwartz Musical Theatre Teacher of the Year. The national award recognizes Hann's 25 years of exceptional arts instruction, antirational leadership, and her dedicated mentorship of the next generation of performers.

The ASCAP Foundation "Music is our Foundation" Scholarship is aiming to reduce the financial burden of music education, providing financial assistance to undergraduate and graduate students actively studying music and is open to students pursuing music majors so that students can be free to focus on their education and development. The deadline for this year's awards is August 31, 2026.

SOCAN Joins Musical AI

Canadian Performing Rights Organization SOCAN, which represents songwriters, composers, and music publishers North of the border, has joined forces with Canada-based rights management technology company Musical AI, with a mission to protect creators and help to control how their music is used, created and monetized.



▲ SONY SIGNS WENDELL

Sony Music Nashville signs Jackson Wendell. Starting out on a worship team, he wrote his "Ain't Coming Home" at 14. He has performed with Parker McCollum, Tucker Wetmore, Flatland Cavalry, Randy Rogers, William Beckmann. 2025's "Drunk Words Are Sober Thoughts" has almost three million global streams.

Their joint vision is based on A.I. being an opt-in technology, and the belief that creators must receive credit and compensation when works influence A.I. output.

The collaboration looks to address situations where A.I. music created using data from artist materials is played/used in public spaces (i.e. coffee shops, or through a sound system before a concert). When it is an artist piece, SOCAN and other PROs collect and distribute the royalties (and calculations are based on licensing and specific use of the music). The same system does not exist for instances of A.I. music (despite frequently pulls from existing creator work). Musical A.I.'s tech analyzes A.I.-generated outputs to trace the exact source material down to the percentage, differentiating between sound recording and musical composition licensing.

The Canadian government has lent its full support for the partnership and is taking a strong stance on the preservation of Canadian music, cultural identity, and the creative economic infrastructure across a shifting musical landscape. More at bit.ly/4h18r1g.

Grande Joins Backline

Launching The Brighter Days Ahead Foundation, Ariana Grande expands her philanthropy in a partnership with Backline in an organization with an initial focus on uplifting and protecting the rights of the trans and LGBTQ+ community, expanding access to mental health tools, and providing care during times of crisis. Backline is lending their support through the Heal & Dream Fund, which expands access to mental health care and community support, including B-Line, a 24/7 support line designed exclusively for the music industry (which 400 people have already accessed for support), and delivering 200 hand-packed wellness packs to crew members working behind-the-scenes on Grande's recent Eternal Sunshine Tour (including thoughtful wellness products for good mental health, stress reduction and self-care for touring professionals, as well as access to therapy grants through Music's Mental Health Fund).

Sureel Joins Symphonic

Symphonic Distribution has teamed up with Sureel AI to help unlock additional revenue streams for the members of their roster who opt-in. Sureel will track owners of compositions, lyrics, and sound recordings to track their use in A.I.-generated materials, while

Symphonic grants independent artists, labels and managers under their umbrella access to A.I.-driven revenue. Symphonic's roster will be in a position to monetize their work whenever and wherever it is used in A.I. models, and share in the revenue generated, while Sureel will tie payments to measurable contribution and enforce permission and restrictions on use. More at sureel.ai.

SONGSALIVE! Songwriters Workshop

For over 25 years, the Songsalive! Songwriters workshop has supported songwriters and composers from around the world in taking their songwriting to the next level. Share your work, get valuable feedback and industry insights, and connect with a thriving creative community. Most programs and events are 100 percent virtual, making it easier than ever to attend from the comfort of your own home, and to navigate workshops at your own pace. The program includes song critiques, industry guest speakers, and reciprocal feedback between presenters and attendees. Workshop details, community membership, and program registration at songsalive.org.

TSM's Animal Talk

Third Side Music (TSM) and electronic music group SOFI TUKKER (Sophie Hawley-Weld and Tucker Halpern) launch joint venture Animal Talk Publishing, with TSM extending the duo's global publishing administration agreement (following their original 2017 signing). The agreement will see TSM providing the Animal Talk roster with global administration, rights management, sync, and creative services.

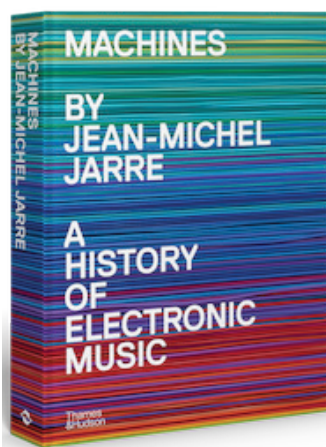
SOFI TUKKER credits TSM with landing over 450 placements for them in film, television, video games, movie trailers, and brand deals with Apple, Smartwater, Peloton, Absolut vodka, Lancôme, Acura, and more. With billions of streams and almost eight million monthly Spotify listeners, SOFI TUKKER's hits include "Best Friend," "Purple Hat," "Summer in New York," "Original Sin," "Drinkee," and recent single "Cook" with J. Balvin (which reached No. 20 on *Billboard*'s Hot Dance/Electronic Songs chart and has over 13 million streams) and "Pick Up the Phone" hitting No. 6 on Beatport's Top 100 Tech House Chart.

Joint A.I. Labeling

Music industry groups, including the RIAA, AZIM, IMPALA, and

others, are pushing for a system of standardized A.I. labeling on streaming platforms. The group is proposing a system to identify recordings as A.I.-generated or A.I.-assisted in order to bring clarity to the new world of machine-generated creative works. Under this system, humans must have performed 'lead vocal and primary instruments' in order to receive A.I.-Assisted (rather than A.I.-generated) labeling. Conversations have begun between the group proposing the changes, along with digital music platforms, distribution engines, and music aggregators, as well as regulatory groups. One of the challenges to the proposal is that the system relies on voluntary disclosure (not automatic A.I. tagging, as used on the Deezer platform). There is also discussion around the monetization of A.I.-generated music, which will likely be a part of the rollout moving forward.

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



▲ READ JARRE'S MACHINES

Electro pioneer Jean-Michel Jarre releases *Machines: A History of Electronic Music*, navigating avant-garde radio, pioneering studios, and technological breakthroughs from tape/analog systems to digital/3D/A.I. 130 examples and excerpts from Armin van Buuren, Vince Clarke, Gillian Gilbert, Nicolas Godin, and more.



▲ POPHOUSE'S IRON MAIDEN

Pophouse Entertainment secures 50 percent of GRAMMY-Brit-Ivor Novello-winning Iron Maiden's publishing, masters, rights to name, likeness, image. With 17 albums, 100+ million records sold, 2,500 concerts in 64 countries, Maiden's 50th celebration includes movie plans, *Infinite Dreams* Museum Experience at EddFest.



◀ V8 SPLASH PRESCRIPTION

Independent publisher Prescription Songs signs Memphis-born producer-songwriter-mixer V8 Splash to their roster. Collaborations include K Carbon, Tay Money, Big Homie G, Jayy Wick, FTO Sett and Big Mo, and he is known for Southern sound, melodic sensibilities, and a blend of R&B, hip-hop, and country style.



▲ BENSON DOES COLE

Legendary 10x GRAMMY-winner George Benson reissues *Inspiration: A Tribute to Nat King Cole* (his Candid Records debut). The 15-track John Burk production includes bonuses "Ramblin' Rose," "Almost Like Being in Love," "That Sunday, That Summer." Features Wynton Marsalis, Idina Menzel, Till Brönner, and Judith Hill.



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SONGWRITER PROFILE

- ANDREA BEENHAM

Jack Barksdale

Stirring Storyteller

Penning his first original at seven years old, live performances began at nine. Now with 10 years of touring behind him (including the United States, Canada, and England), Jack Barksdale is shifting the landscape of Americana. At barely 19, his prodigal guitar playing and old-soul lyrics deliver a rare, authentic style that defies his years. Playing guitar, slide, harmonica, mandolin, piano, and ukulele, he still considers himself—first and foremost—a songwriter.

With constant music at home and a basket of toy instruments, he first started on the violin but shifted gears after receiving a Toys “R” Us guitar for Christmas. “I’d seen other kids playing guitars, and they always looked like they were having a great time,” he says. “When I picked mine up, it sounded terrible.” Formal lessons began at seven. “I could put the guitar to lyrics and started trying to write songs,” he says.

Crediting his (English teacher) mother for his expansive vocabulary, she also introduced Country, Americana, and Texas singer-songwriters (Nancy Griffith, Lucinda Williams, and Kevin Welch). Dad was into ‘90s grunge, rock, and rap, and listening to Nirvana presented an unexpected gateway to the blues. Says Barksdale, “[On] that live unplugged album where they play ‘Where’d You Sleep Last Night,’ Kurt Cobain talks about learning from Lead Belly. A whole new world of music [opened] to me: Folk, Country, Blues, all the music coming out of the south during the late 1800s, early 1900s.”

His influences include the lyrical style of Towns Van Zandt, Guy Clark, Leonard Cohen, and John Prine, and listening to each of them helped Barksdale recognize songwriting as a serious art form. Jerry Abrams taught him music, the Nashville number system, and how to listen, and playing local picker’s circles helped him build confidence (Luckenbach Pickers’ Circle, Greenwood Saloon).

Barksdale played open mics and says it always felt supportive. “I got to meet interesting people and try out songs. [It never] felt competitive. It was [about] helping each other out, especially when you’re so young. That was extremely helpful, even if I didn’t realize it.” Barksdale admits that having a supporting network early on and performing young meant that he didn’t know what to be nervous about. “I have a comfort with playing in front of people because I’ve done it for so long,” he says. “When I started developing this comfort I didn’t know I would ever need it.” Hosting video series *Guitar Slingers*, interviewing players and asking how they learned guitar, their influences and backstory, he pivoted to a podcast format and expanded interviews to songwriters and other musicians during lockdown, launching *Jack Barksdale’s Roots Revival*.

Looking to record a new album, Barksdale reached out to friend (producer) Mike Meadows, who is friends with Guy Clark’s biographer, Tamara Saviano. Verlin Thompson (Clark’s guitarist) was a friend to Barksdale, and a Truly Handmade Records’ Board member. All fell into place, Barksdale signed to Truly, and *Voices* came out in June 2025 (now with eight million Spotify streams).

“Find what works and really speaks to you,” he says. “Professional music is strange. It is hard to quantify because it’s something inherently subjective. It really can be tough and discouraging at times.”

Uncompromising in his lyricism, with millions of streams and momentum on SiriusXM and Americana radio, Barksdale has shared stages with Wynonna Judd, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Junior Brown, John Fullbright, and Hayes Carll. Intentional with word selection, he says, “It’s important for the outside material world to affect your own philosophy [and to] use your philosophy to affect the world around you.”

Following *Phantom Trails* (2023) and *Out of Order* (2024), having just returned from a writing retreat in Blue Rock, Barksdale’s third EP *Battleground* comes out October 16, following performances at Mountain Stage and Americanafest. Leaning into the fire of his sharp lyrics and acoustic guitar sound, lead single “Battleground” (out September 15) follows “The Scam Song.”

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





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DROPS

Composer **Philip Glass** approaches his 90th birthday on January 31, 2027, with a multi-season celebration honoring his legacy alongside the 50th anniversary of *Einstein on the Beach*, his groundbreaking 1976 opera with the late **Bob Wilson**. The boundary-pushing work reshaped opera and left its mark across dance, film, and theater. Anniversary events include Philip Glass Ensemble concerts starting at BAM, a new staged production from English National Opera and collaborators premiering in Manchester in 2027, and performances in Estonia and Belgium. Additional celebrations include Symphony No. 15 premieres, global concerts and new releases from **Orange Mountain Music**. For details, contact Krista Williams at krista@sacksco.com.

Hollywood Records released *Marvel's Wolverine* soundtrack August 28. Its first single "Logan" debuted to enthusiastic crowds at **San Diego Comic-Con**. Composer **David Fleming**, known for *Widow's Bay*, *The Last of Us*, and *Superman*, scored the track, and the soundtrack arrives in advance of Insomniac Games' upcoming title, an original story following Wolverine as he rejoined Team X to stop Bolivar Trask's campaign against mutants across locations including Canada, Japan, and Madripoor. *Marvel's Wolverine* launches on PlayStation 5 September 15. Learn more by contacting Sarah Roche at sarah@whitebearpr.com.

Pasadena Playhouse will present the first post-Broadway production of *Real Women Have Curves: The Musical*, running April 14-May 16, 2027, as part of its 2026-2027 season. Producing Artistic Director **Danny Feldman** will bring on Obie Award-winner **Laurie Woolery** to direct the show, based on **Josefina López's** play, with music and lyrics by **Joy Huerta** and **Benjamin Velez** and a book by **Lisa Loomer** and **Nell Benjamin**. Set in 1987 Boyle Heights, the musical follows Ana Garcia navigating ambition, family and community. Woolery, returning to her L.A. hometown for the production, describes the



project as deeply personal, rooted in her early work with López in East L.A. decades ago. Contact Peter Goldman at p.goldman@dcpublicity.com for more information.

Milan Records released the original soundtrack for *007 First Light*, composed by duo **The Flight** (**Joe Henson** and **Alexis Smith**). Written for IO Interactive's new action-adventure game reimagining a young James Bond's origin, the score blends sweeping orchestral arrangements with modern electronic touches, paying tribute to the last six decades of Bond music while forging its own identity. The music evolved alongside Bond's journey toward becoming 007, launching alongside the game on PlayStation 5, Windows, and Xbox Series X/S, with a Nintendo Switch 2 release still forthcoming at the time of this writing. Contact Christian Endicio at christian@whitebearpr.com for more information.

Finneas O'Connell was the keynote speaker for **The Guild of Music Supervisors' 12th Annual State of Music in Media Conference**, held August 15 at West Los Angeles College. His address, exploring the connection between music and storytelling, was moderated by **Diallo Riddle**. GMS President **Jonathan Leahy** noted how Finneas' career



reflected the collaborative spirit of the industry. The conference also featured panels with Emmy-nominated composers and supervisors including **Andrew Bird**, **Nora Felder**, **Kris Bowers**, and **Dave Porter**, alongside sessions on music clearance and industry networking for Guild members. Learn more at gmsmediaconference.com.

OPPS

The final deadline is September 27 to submit your work to the Munich Music Video Awards, an international music video festival celebrating creativity, visual storytelling, and new talent from around the world. With



every submission, you get access to festival screenings, live events, network opportunities with industry professionals and creators, and the chance to have your video screened and international exposure. Learn more and submit at mmvawards.com/submit-your-video.

Got a music video you want to see in the 2027 SXSW Film & TV Festival, Austin's world-renowned annual conference held in March? You've got until September 15 to meet the second deadline (\$70 submission fee) and October 1 to meet the final deadline (\$90 submission fee). For rules and submission guidelines, visit cart.sxsw.com/products/musicvideoapp.

Applications are open for Steps Beyond Foundation's fall choreography lab, which is slated for November 15. Choreographers have until October 5 to apply. The lab focuses on building community among emerging and established choreographers and welcomes completed dance pieces in ballet, commercial, contemporary, fusion, hip-hop, indigenous/ceremonial dance, jazz, modern, performance art, tap, theater dance, urban, and world dance. Visit stepsbeyond.org for details.

PROPS

It's a big day for any community when it launches a new film-music festival, and this one has a special focus on films in which music drives the story. The inaugural **Niagara International Music Film Festival**, "founded on the belief that when sound and image truly unite, cinema evolves into a deeper and more transformative artistic experience," will be held September 17-20 at the **FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre** in Canada. With film screenings, industry programs and live performances, the event aims to unite artists, filmmakers, and audiences from around the world. Filmmakers and composers will be recognized for their work, with categories including Best Director, Original Score, Documentary, Short Film, Student Film,

and more. Learn more about the experience and contact its organizers at nimff.org.

After three years held in Brooklyn, the fourth annual **Caribbean Music Awards (CMA)**—a yearly celebration of Caribbean music, dance, and culture—is making history this year by bringing the event to Trinidad and Tobago for the very first time in an effort to highlight the diversity and global influence of Caribbean music. The awards ceremony is set for September 19 at the **National Academy for the Performing Arts (NAPA)** in Port of Spain. Among the awards categories is Video

of the Year, with subcategories in both soca and dancehall—two distinct genres in Caribbean music. Attendees can expect a weekend of dance and live performances, and while it's too late to vote, see the 250+ nominees and get the details at caribmusicawards.com.

The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills has announced additional attractions for its 2026-2027 season, and that includes ***Passing the Crown: Celebrating the***



Queens of Hip-Hop, a live orchestral mixtape and dance experience. The production makes its Los Angeles premiere on January 29, 2027, and will feature the groundbreaking and influential **MC Lyte**. Besides being the first female MC to release a solo hip-hop album, and the first hip-hop artist to perform at the White House, her claims to fame include 2026 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee, two-time GRAMMY Award nominee, and multiple Gold and Platinum recording artist. See thewallis.org/show-details/passing-the-crown-celebrating-the-queens-of-hip-hop for more information.

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



Norihiko Hibino of GENTLE LOVE, and Jayson Napolitano of Scarlet Moon Records

Most recent: *Prescription for Sleep: Ghibli*
Web: scarletmoon.com

Prescription for Sleep: Ghibli is the latest release in the *Billboard*-charting series featuring soothing instrumental arrangements of video game and anime soundtracks. This one includes arrangements across the Studio Ghibli catalog and was timed with the 25th anniversary of Oscar-winning film *Spirited Away*, scored by Joe Hisaishi. Two from the series' creative team, GENTLE LOVE saxophonist Norihiko Hibino and Scarlet Moon Records founder Jayson Napolitano, shared details.

Music Connection: What about Hisaishi's writing was adaptable to this series?

Jayson Napolitano: For the first album in 2014, I intentionally picked game music tracks that were already soothing in nature. As we became more confident, I started throwing curve balls at GENTLE LOVE, culminating in 2017's *Prescription for Sleep: Fight for Your Dreams*, which adapted intense action and battle music into lullabies, so we've done it all.

MC: What's the creative shift like, moving from the adrenaline-driven games you've composed to music meant to soothe listeners?

Norihiko Hibino: In terms of touching the "soul" beyond the "mind and body" through music, adrenaline-driven music and comforting music are the same.

MC: What did you want "Compassion" (an original on the album) to say that the covers couldn't?

HN: This song is purely focused on peace and comfort. Ghibli's movies also include a continuous theme: "love for someone."

MC: Where is the series heading next?

JN: Hibino-san's goal is to help and heal as many people as possible through music. So by venturing into pop music, anime, and more spaces, we're trying to bridge the musical divide and make pop and anime fans out of game music fans and vice versa.

► **CREWCUTZ RETURN TO FACTORY 93 WITH ACID-DRIVEN LATE NIGHT MOVES EP**

Crewcutz return to Factory 93 Records with the *Late Night Moves* EP, a groove-heavy set of club tracks blending acid textures, rolling basslines, and crisp percussion. Following their 2025 collaboration with Classmatic, the duo continues to build momentum across global house scenes, with recent sets at DC-10 Ibiza and Solid Grooves marking their rising international profile.



▲ **999999999 AND MARIE VAUNT UNLEASH ACID-FUELED TECHNO ANTHEM "I GOT ACID"**

Italian techno duo 999999999 team up with Marie Vaunt for "I Got Acid," a high-energy release via Insomniac's Mutate Records. Driven by 303 basslines, industrial textures, and relentless rhythms, the track showcases both artists' signature acid sounds while delivering a festival-ready anthem built for global dancefloors.



◀ **VIOT MAKES NU MODA DEBUT WITH "FLEX / CARDIO"**

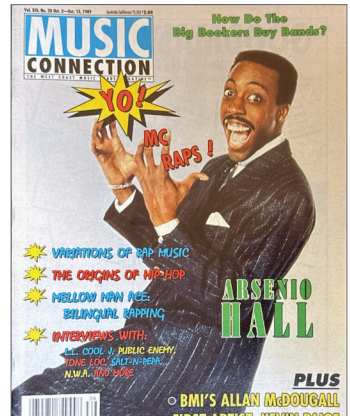
Brazilian producer Viot makes his debut on Max Styler's Nu Moda imprint with "Flex / Cardio," a double-sided single capturing the intensity of the dancefloor from peak-time energy to late-night immersion. Blending deep tech, house, and Brazilian influences, the rising artist delivers two club-ready cuts that highlight his evolving sound and global momentum.



◀ **SAINT MICAH SHARES "THE GRIND" VIDEO AND REMIX WITH DAVE AUDÉ**

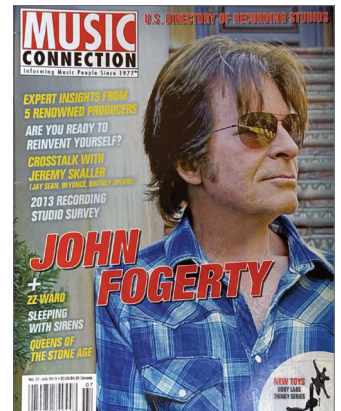
Saint Micah unveils the official video for "The Grind," a stylized, fashion-driven visual directed by Domen and Van De Velde. The release coincides with a new remix from Dave Audé, extending the track's themes of identity and self-expression through both cinematic storytelling and club-ready production.

Tidbits From Our Tattered Past



1989 - Arsenio Hall - #20

MC's 1989 issue celebrated late-night icon Arsenio Hall. Hall reflected on achieving his childhood dream, sharing, "I specifically wanted to have a talk show. I used to set up chairs in my basement and interview kids in my neighborhood." Transforming television, he noted, "What I've created is basically a young, hip vehicle for the Nineties." Rejecting combative interviewing styles, Hall insisted, "For me, it's a party," adding, "I don't invite guests so I can antagonize them and I don't invite people I don't like so I can tear them apart." For Hall, "Being a star... is like being elected to an office."



2013 - John Fogerty - #7

In 2013, MC caught up with rock legend John Fogerty as he celebrated his collaborative album, *Wrote A Song For Everyone*. Looking back at his phenomenal career, Fogerty reflected on his newest musical partners, stating, "I have many established artists on the album. And I will tell you Dawes is as good as any of them." However, his journey wasn't without industry scars. He offered crucial guidance to rising musicians trying to navigate the business: "If you're in a band, you need to come to an agreement about where you all want to go—get it in writing. Make it a legal document. Have everyone sign it."

Limited back issues available to order
at musicconnection.com



▲ KARLEE GIRL SEARCHES FOR WHAT'S NEXT ON NEW SINGLE "WHAT NOW?"

Rising artist KARLEE GIRL returns with "What Now?," a melodic new single exploring life's pivotal moments and uncertainty about the future. Blending her signature rap flows with pop-driven sensibilities, the track highlights her growth as a songwriter and storyteller. Following viral hit "Right Back!," the release continues KARLEE GIRL's evolving musical journey.

► SIENNA SPIRO RELEASES DEBUT ALBUM VISITOR

London-born singer-songwriter Sienna Spiro unveils her debut album *Visitor*, a sweeping collection blending soulful vocals, symphonic pop, and deeply personal storytelling. Featuring the new single "Great Expectation," the album explores love, loss, impermanence, and emotional resilience. Following a breakout year with charting singles, major performances, and sold-out shows, Spiro continues her rise as a powerful new voice.



◀ ANDRE CYMONE DROPS NEW ALBUM THE RESURRECTION OF FUNK

Funk pioneer Andre Cymone returns with *The Resurrection of Funk*, a bold new album celebrating the genre's enduring power, cultural roots, and connection to Minneapolis Sound. Featuring Cymone performing every instrument himself, the record reclaims funk as a force of joy, resistance, and human expression while honoring the musical legacy he helped create alongside Prince.



A group of seven Black men are posed in a desert landscape with rolling sand dunes in the background. They are dressed in 1970s-style clothing, including sweaters, turtlenecks, and patterned shirts. The man at the top center has a large afro and wears a light-colored sweater over a dark shirt. The man to his left wears glasses and a dark turtleneck. The man to his right wears a red shirt. The man in the center wears a dark shirt. The man to the right wears a blue and red striped shirt. The man at the bottom left wears a plaid shirt. The man at the bottom center wears a white turtleneck and glasses. The man at the bottom right wears a black shirt with a colorful pattern. The title "Earth, Wind & Fire" is written in large, white, serif font across the bottom of the image.

Earth, Wind & Fire

Staying Power

By Andrea Beenham



Having formed in 1969, the Chicago-born genre-blending band Earth, Wind & Fire has released 21 studio albums, plus a string of singles and a large number of compilations. But for a short break between 1984 and '87, they've remained a creative force over those 57 years. With 100 million album sales worldwide, eight number ones across their albums, and eight songs Double Platinum-certified and in the Top 10, perhaps most unique is the positivity and palpable transcendence enshrined in their lyricism and genre-defying sound.

Meeting people exactly where they are, they invite listeners on a journey to upliftment and inspiration, with the strength of incomparable musicianship and genuine groove to believably impart a true sense of joy. While they were the first Black act to simultaneously top the *Billboard* album and singles charts (with "Shining Star"), their sound defies race, age, nationality, and genre, and the ongoing impact and unshakeable love that shines through Earth, Wind & Fire's music remains undeniable.

Incorporating elements of funk, soul, jazz, gospel, Latin, Afro-pop, disco, and rock, themes of positive spirituality, and Vegas-level stagecraft (decades before it became a regular part of the touring landscape), EWF is known for their dynamic sound and passionate performances, both of which changed music forever. Inspiring artists from Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, Prince, and Lionel Richie to Kanye West, Justin Timberlake, Alicia Keys, H.E.R., Flea, and many more, skillsets born from serious jazz chops—and a sense of grounding rooted in deep spirituality—deliver a levity of sound and production rarely seen today.

Their unique combination of African rhythms, punchy brass, phenomenal vocals, and unwavering energy continues to add influence, including a resurgence of sampling and collaborations with contemporary hip-hop artists (including Nas, Wu-Tang Clan, and Wyclef

Jean). To spotlight the profound significance of their work, producer-drummer Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson produced and directed documentary *Earth, Wind & Fire (To Be Celestial vs. That's The Weight of the World)*.

MC spoke via Zoom with Ralph Johnson, Verdine White, and Philip Bailey about the movie and their career, and all three were great company. White was engaging, and excited about the rollout of the film, and Johnson was clearly enjoying this stage of the adventure, basking in the time afforded to reminisce about all that has transpired. Bailey had an incredible sense of humor and quick wit.

We told the trio of pioneers that we enjoyed the movie intensely and asked for their thoughts. "I've seen the rough cut and was very happy," says Johnson. "Questlove knows exactly what he's doing."

"The way it was put together, the way Quest captured us—our music, our humanity, our manhood—the growth from the beginning to now, I was proud of it, very happy," adds White.

It makes sense that they enjoyed the film—Questlove has done an impeccable job of telling their story respectfully, while keeping an eye on the details. It's loving without being *fawning*, and that's a tough tightrope to walk. Naturally, the movie digs deep into the band's beginnings, though we wanted to dig deeper still. Johnson talks about seeing the triple drumkit at a James Brown show, his first concert.

"I saw that and said, 'Aww man, what a setup,' you know?" he says. "But I always wanted to be a musician. It was just *in* me to do, so I kept at it, kept pursuing it, and things worked out."

Johnson doesn't think that Brown provided the impetus for late EWF player Fred White doubling up the drums later.

"No, I don't think so," he says. "Maurice [White] was going for a bigger sound, so we went for a two-drummer thing, which worked out nicely—as you can hear on the *Gratitude* album. I just think he wanted to broaden the sound."

Verdine White is one of music's biggest

characters. From his infectious smile to his undeniable stage presence, not to mention his exemplary bass playing, the man is a one-off. He's also, of course, the brother of sadly deceased band leader Maurice White.

"We're from a large family and there was nothing but music played all around every day, but when I went to orchestra class and saw that big upright bass, that bass spoke to me and I was hooked," White says. "I slept with that bass. That bass was *mine*, you know? Chicago's a rough city sometimes, and I used to take the bass on the bus. Everybody would be nice to me with the bass, so it was really great."

"My mom said I was singing before I was talking," adds Bailey. "Strangely enough, there's never been any other light in my consciousness. I've always followed it—it's always been in my trajectory. I just thought everybody knew what they wanted to do in life. I've also always had this radio going in my head and I thought everybody did. It's just who I am."

Bailey opened for EWF as a member of Denver's Friends & Love in 1971, before officially joining as the co-lead singer in 1972.

"We didn't know that this is the great Earth, Wind & Fire," he says. "We were all just kids. Every experience at that age is grand because you haven't done anything. It was a grand experience meeting Verdine, and Maurice smelled like coconut oil, had a big cowboy hat on, and bell bottoms. The memories are vivid and memorable. We have a great story, and I'm glad Quest captured it."

From the beginning, EWF was geared towards success. "You had chosen your place, and you just wanted to be great at what you did—and then you had nine of those kinds of mindsets going after this one thing, so I think that makes a difference, you know?" says Johnson.

"It was destiny," says Bailey. "This whole thing is bigger than somebody deciding this or that. It's way bigger than that. Maurice's vision was enlightened and we were chosen. Fifty-something years later, we're still chosen ones



“We’re living a dream as they say,” says Verdine White.

to take on the legacy. The band’s been together now 30 years longer than Maurice was there, and we’re still selling out houses. This documentary is a great time we’re able to experience and really revel in it.”

“The audience is gonna learn a lot,” adds White. “Some things we were learning too when I saw the rough cut. It really hit all the right spots. Quest did a fantastic job. Being a great musician and producer himself, it really helped having someone who is in music that we could discuss it with.”

Despite their collective ambition and desire to succeed, the members of EWF couldn’t have predicted just how monumental and influential the band would become.

“You cannot know on the front end, when something is in its embryonic stages, how big it’s going to be,” says Johnson. “It is not really up to you. All you can do is put your very best into it and hope that it’s received well and on a broad scale. You go for the ride and hope everything turns out okay.”

Committed to a disciplined, health-conscious lifestyle, Maurice White was a strict vegetarian, abstained completely from drugs and alcohol, and followed a deep spiritual practice that involved meditation, yoga, and philosophical study. That said, Bailey doesn’t believe that Maurice’s push for clean living helped the band to any great degree. “I wouldn’t put that much on it,” he says.

“I definitely like some ribs, adds Johnson. “But some granola helped, yes.”

In March 1972, at the Uptown Theater in Philadelphia, the crowd began booing the band. Maurice quietly moved to the floor, sitting

cross-legged in a yoga pose, with the rest of the band silently joining him. Sitting in total silence for almost 10 minutes, the crowd was thrown off. Maurice brought the music back with his Kalimba, as the band joined in piece by piece. It was an unusual, daring move for a popular band at a time when meditation was yet to fully enter the public’s consciousness.

“Well, no doubt that was a bold move,” says Johnson. “For Maurice to say, ‘Okay, look, here’s what we’re going to do. Go out here, sit on the stage in Lotus position, and we’re gonna look at the audience.’ Who does that? Bands don’t do *that*. But we did it, and somehow it worked out. Fifty-plus years later, something worked. I was thinking, ‘Okay, I’m gonna sit here and hold his pose until Maurice says, “head for your instruments,” or “let’s strike up the band.”’”

Still, there was no doubt that the band was going to play.

“Oh, there was never any doubt,” says Johnson. “It’s just a matter of him counting it off and saying, ‘Okay, here we go.’”

We put it to the guys that we don’t know if anyone’s ever done anything like that before, or since. As Goethe said, “Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.”

“Well, it was definitely magic that night—and we were in Lotus position,” says White.

One particular gig with George Clinton’s Funkadelic in 1972 at the D.C. Armory in Washington D.C. changed the way that EWF saw funk. Johnson describes the show as, “the one we try to forget” with a laugh.

“We were on the same bill but weren’t in the same lane,” says Johnson. “We weren’t looking down on them for smoking dope, that just wasn’t

something we were doing. They funkyed us out. We went back to the drawing board, learned to get funky, came back and started to write different songs, so that was a good experience.”

“We still talk about that every time we see George,” adds Johnson.

In 1973, the band traveled to the Caribou Ranch Mountain Studio to get away as a group without distraction to record their fifth studio album, *Open Our Eyes* (released March 1974 and reaching No. 1 on *Billboard* Top Soul (R&B) Albums, No. 15 on the Top Pop Albums chart, and Certified Platinum by the RIAA), which included hit singles “Mighty Mighty” and “Devotion.” They returned in late 1974 for a three-week residence, recording GRAMMY-winning album *That’s the Way of the World*, which included GRAMMY Hall of Fame inducted song, “Shining Star.”

“Caribou Ranch was a time of high creativity,” says Bailey. “It was nice to be able to get away and record, just be with the band with no outside distractions. Those albums we did at Caribou were really great.”

“Yeah—*Open Our Eyes* and *That’s The Way of the World*—it was a beautiful experience being up in the mountains,” adds White. “We had a chance to get away, really tune in. [We’d] watch movies every night.”

“I don’t know exactly how many weeks we were there, but we did all our tracks and some of the vocals,” says Bailey.

Around this time, Maurice White put more focus on the live shows, and everything shifted.

“We were in there grinding it out, as they say today,” says White. “We were putting our all into creativity, wardrobe, sound, and we were together every day.”

With a sharp eye on every small detail, Johnson was moved to the front of the stage, partly for the purposes of symmetry, to balance things out.

"We had two drummers, so I could afford to come off the drums and do something different," Johnson says. "I was back there having a ball doing the drum thing and George Faison says, 'Ralph, Come off the drums. Stand right here next to Maurice.' That's how I got out front. I never went back."

Fast forward to April 6, 1974, and EWF is at the California Jam. Importantly, they were the only band of color on the bill, something what White describes as "huge," though Johnson admits that he forgot that particular fact.

"We came on number two," says White. "Seals and Crofts came on as number one—and it was on ABC."

"It sure was," adds Johnson. "At that time, ABC was doing a thing called *In Concert*, whereas NBC had *Midnight Special*. It was just a matter of Maurice going up and counting it off; we would do the rest."

"On the *Gratitude* album, open it up in the middle—that's the California Jam," says White.

Bailey says that EWF always just wanted to be the best band that they could be.

"Following the heart of the music," he says. "We weren't into, 'Okay, let's change the culture.' We were just trying to make good music that rocked our heart and soul and that hopefully other people would like, and they did."

We ask the trio if there are any memories from their incredible career that stand out.

"If you had asked me maybe 10 years ago, I could give you one," says White. "But now there's so many. In a long and very heartfelt career, there's so many wonderful memories."

Johnson says that the whole thing has been a fun ride.

"We've done so much over the last 50-something years," says Bailey. "These past couple of weeks were a special time to celebrate and visit our past on the silver screen. We're going to collaborate with the Roots at the Tribeca Film Festival, then go on the road with Lionel for a couple months, so we got a busy schedule. We're having fun. We've been doing this for 30 years, we tour every year, and we're always working."

Verdine's brother Maurice led the band until his passing in 2016. The three men have no doubt that he would be proud of where EWF is a decade later.

"Absolutely—no doubt in my mind," says Johnson. "To see what it evolved into, are you kidding? He would love it."

"He would say—'No shit!'—that's what he would say," adds Bailey.

All three say that their partners, a stable home life, has been vitally important.

"You don't want to come home off a tour and find everything's gone, she's moved out, the car's gone and your dog is dead," says Johnson. "I've been married coming up on 47 years, and I wouldn't trade my wife for anything in the world. We're a team and we work together to make things happen."



Quick facts:

Touring included real magic, working with magicians Doug Henning, David Copperfield, and choreographer George Faison, with vanishing, levitating, and reappearing acts

Receiving 1975's GRAMMY for Best R&B Vocal Performance for "Shining Star," the group didn't perform at the GRAMMYS until 2004

Brother Monte White (who passed in 2020) served as EWF's manager from 1974-1984 (in addition to bandmember brothers Maurice, Verdine, and Fred White)

The lyric "21st of September" in "September," thought by many to be random (even by co-writer Allee Willis), is a reference to Maurice's oldest son's expected due date

Maurice was a respected Chess Records Jazz / session drummer before EWF, playing for Etta James and as a member of the Ramsey Lewis Trio

Verdine White learned Bille double bass method from Radi Velah of the Chicago Symphony before switching to electric bass lessons with Louis Satterfield (they co-authored 1978's *Playing the Bass Guitar*)

Ralph Johnson holds two black belt degrees (First degree in Tang Soo Do, Third Degree in Kung Fu Sansoo), is an avid art collector, certified open water scuba diver, and student pilot

Philip Bailey has a four-octave vocal range and released 11 solo albums, including 1984's *Chinese Wall*, GRAMMY-nominated for "Easy Lover" duet with album producer Phil Collins

At this point in their career, Bailey says that there is no longer any pressure, and the guys are having a lot of fun.

"We don't have a need for psychological

support," he says. "We've been doing this for a long, long time. We have our lives on the road—as well as home—very comfortable, and we know what's gonna happen. We're just enjoying it and elated we're still doing it on a very high level, still having fun. Now that the documentary is out, people are gonna learn a lot more about the vision, and the band and its history. It's just all good."

"We're living a dream as they say," says White.

"At this point, we're able to stop and smell the roses," adds Johnson.

"Yes, and drink the coffee," says White.

The biggest surprise, they say, is that EWF has lasted as long as it has.

"When you get into something like this, you don't know how long it's gonna last," says Johnson. "To see it last 50-plus years is surprising. It really is."

When it comes to the best advice that they've received, Johnson refers to Tony Award-winner Pearl Bailey (from 1968's *Hello, Dolly!* and recipient of 1988's Presidential Medal of Freedom).

"The great Pearl Bailey, who was married to the great Louie Bellson—one of the greatest drummers of all time—once told me that 'all the stars are in the sky,'" he says. "I've always carried that with me. That helps you keep your feet on the ground."

"My dad said just keep working, keep your feet on the ground, stay humble," says White.

We ended the interview by asking what gets each of them out of bed in the morning. Bailey and White say "God" and "Love" respectively.

Adds Johnson, "God gets me up every morning—and once I get vertical, I can make the rest happen."

Earth, Wind & Fire's work is technically complex but embedded in feeling, and they are broadly respected as a group epitomizing the meaning of a musician's musician (Miles Davis, Quincy Jones, and Dionne Warwick all cited EWF as their favorite band).

Five decades later, accolades include six GRAMMY Awards (18 nominations), four American Music Awards, a Recording Academy Lifetime Achievement Award (plus Heritage and Lifetime honors from ASCAP and BET), and two GRAMMY Hall of Fame-inducted recordings ("That's the Way of the World" and "Shining Star"). With a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, Soul Train Legend Award, NARAS Signature Governor's Award, Kennedy Center Honors in 2019, and induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Vocal Group Hall of Fame, and the NAACP Image Award Hall of Fame, EWF's current tour continues through April.

Meanwhile, with a debut at the June Tribeca Film Festival, the Questlove project—*Earth, Wind & Fire (To Be Celestial vs. That's The Weight of the World)*—holds a rare 100 percent approval rating on *Rotten Tomatoes* (at the time of writing), and is available for direct streaming on HBO Max, Hulu, and Prime Video.

earthwindandfire.com



CALIFORNIA SCHEMIN'

Wild story of Scottish rappers hits the big screen

By Brett Callwood

It's been a long wait, but the movie *California Schemin'* is finally getting its U.S. release in October having premiered at the Toronto Film Festival last September. That the film—which tells the tale of two Scottish rappers, a duo called Silibil N' Brains, who fool record executives into thinking they're American in order to score a deal—is based on a true story only makes it all the more mouth-watering.

Billy "Silbil" Boyd and Gavin "Brains" Bain were the rappers, and it was Bain who wrote the book *California Schemin': How Two Lads from Scotland Conned the Music Industry*, which the movie is based on.

Samuel Bottomley plays Boyd, Séamus McLean Ross plays Bain, and Lucy Halliday plays Boyd's partner Mary. James McAvoy directed the film, and he has a small role as record exec Anthony Reid. Elaine Gracie and Archie Thomson took the tale from book to screenplay. *MC* chatted with Bottomley, Halliday, Bain, and Thomson about it all...

Samuel Bottomley
(actor, Billy "Silibil" Boyd)

How did you get involved with the project?

What was the casting process like?

The whole casting experience was really fun. Once I'd forwarded my tape I found out I had a recall and a meeting with the director and

casting director. So, I packed a bag and shot off to London. I was waiting outside the building as I didn't want to go in too early. Then McAvoy walked up to me and said, "You alright mate?"



Do you want to walk in with us?" I sort of just like composed myself and I got stuck into the audition. Then the next time I saw them was at the chemistry readthrough where I was reading opposite a bunch of "Gavins" and that's where I met Seamus. I was then offered the job and that was the start of Silibil N' Brains.

Had you heard about the real events prior to reading the script? Or seen the documentary?

In short no. I didn't have any knowledge of the story until I read the script. However, as soon as I'd read the script, I watched the documentary, and this helped me understand the world I was stepping in to.

What was your reaction when you read the script?

My first thought was how relatable the script was. [It's] normal having big dream, it's definitely something I can connect with. It feels like something from a comic book.

Had you had any musical experience prior to this film?

Not of this nature. Music is a massive part of my life, so it made this kind of thing more exciting for me.

How did you prepare? Did you spend much time with Gavin and/or Billy?

I watched the documentary a few times and listened to the music.... on repeat. Worked alongside the accent coach to get both accents right and had the pleasure to be able to pick Billy's brain, whenever I needed.

Are you pleased with the way the film turned out?

Yes. We had so much fun whilst filming. Everyone worked so hard, and it makes me very

proud to watch everyone's hard work come to life.

***Lucy Halliday
(actor, Mary Boyd)***

How did you get involved with the project? What was the casting process like?

It was a very standard casting process. I got sent the script and I read it and I immediately loved it and knew I wanted to put my hat in the ring for this project. So I did a self-tape, following which I met with James and Kathleen Crawford—our casting director—and Samuel Bottomley—who plays Billy. We all read together and then I had the job, so I was very lucky that it wasn't a convoluted or tricky process and I immediately loved all the people involved and knew I wanted to work with them.

Had you heard about the real events prior to reading the script? Or seen the documentary?

I actually hadn't heard about it, but as soon as I read the script I went and watched the documentary and I was so surprised that this had passed me by because it is such a notorious event in Scottish history and pop culture that I wish I'd grown up hearing about it as a folk tale of sorts because I think it would've inspired me greatly as a child.

What was your reaction when you read the script?

In shock. In hysterics. I loved it immediately. I thought it's such a brilliant and strong Scottish story and we always need more of those, and I thought it showed a lens of Scotland in the media that isn't always portrayed—authentic Scottish humor prevailed and I loved it.

Did you spend any time with the real Mary?

I did spend time with the real Mary. I was very fortunate that she was so forthcoming with speaking with me before we started filming and so we had various conversations. I really did utilize her insight and her memories of that time in her life and put that into the character that you see on screen because her version of events is obviously going to differ greatly to that of the boys. I fervently desired to highlight this contrast but also highlight her as a human being because she's such a ferocious force of nature and formidable feature in the story. I really wanted to ensure that I was authentically portraying her.

Are you pleased with the way the film turned out?

Oh, absolutely. I had such a joy of a time working on this film and I'm so proud of everyone who was involved in it both on screen and off. Also getting to be part of anyone's directorial debut is such a special and privileged moment and I really hope this is the start of many more to come.

***Gavin "Brains" Bain
(writer, member of Silibil N' Brains)***

After writing the book and then a documentary getting made, were you surprised that a movie was also going to happen?

No not at all, that was a part of the plan. In 2007, after coming clean on stage, I told friends I was going to write a book and take it to the big screen and of course everyone I told laughed and shook their head, just Gavin being crazy again. I actually told my closest friends the truth... that I was going to write the book, make a documentary, adapt the book for the big screen and take the story to the West End and Broadway. By this point, my best friends knew not to doubt me. At every stage of my journey



there was gatekeepers and industry types in music, in book, and film, who told me I'm crazy, that I'm not good enough, not marketable, they don't get it or can't see the vision. It has never stopped me. I appreciate challenges and difficulty; it makes the wins bigger.

It's taken 15 years since writing the book. Yes, reaching your dreams can take time and they should be incredibly difficult and take everything in you to reach them or else what would be the point. Nothing easy is ever worthwhile. Next, we take the story to the stage and complete the entire musical journey. The reason I set such a ridiculous unreachable dream was to test the universe and my inner belief. Everything I ever wanted to achieve, I did, so I wanted to set the finish line in the realms of fantasy, the so called "impossible." So that each day working towards it would bring tests and challenges but also the baseline feeling of joy that I am on a road towards greatness and when it's done, I will have achieved something that nobody I know or have even heard of has ever achieved. Not bad for a kid from Scotland who was told he would never make it. My life, my journey stands as example for every kid with big dreams who might be stuck in a nowhere town, in the ass end of the planet, with no chance of making it. If you start and don't stop, you will succeed, as long as you're humble and dedicated to the art and getting better. If you believe in yourself and your ability and have an honest willingness to learn then the universe will obey.

So, as the great Nate Diaz once said with a face full of blood, "I'm not surprised motherfuckers!"

How much involvement did you have? Did the cast speak with you?

Before signing the film deal I had grown frustrated with receiving really bad pitches and low-quality scripts from great writers, even BAFTA and Oscar-nominated writers, who just couldn't get the voice of the characters right. And I had grown frustrated at myself for not just having a go at writing the screenplay myself, I had given in for a brief moment to influential people in the film business telling me I can't

write it. When COVID hit, I got COVID and while sick I decided "fuck it, I'm just going to have a crack at it, what is there to lose?" At least I'd be happy that I gave it a shot. And it was actually really good. We sold that script into the deal, and it began to inform everything we did in the project but most of all the voice was right, it was real and authentic. It was a further two years of building the team before we finally got James McAvoy on board. And from that point we were flying within six months we were in production and six weeks after that the film was made.

I was an executive producer on the film and would consult whenever needed. I was on hand from the start to help costume department with photos and information on our clothing and they did a world class job. I had had very good conversations and sit downs with James who really got the story and the voice, and I loved what his screenwriters Archie Thomson and Alain Gracie did with the script. My main job day to day was the music, rebuilding the songs from scratch to bring them to life in the film. That was a fantastic journey to take songs from the bedroom in 1998 to 800-seat cinemas in 2026. A hell of a musical journey. And in the cinema when you see people giving that screw face and nodding their heads and moving in their seats to the tracks, that made me feel very proud. I got to build a really cool friendship with Sam and Seamus who loved the music and did incredible jobs nailing the performances. I felt quite proud of them. My lyrics at times can be fast and technical and while it wasn't easy they adapted to the technics and actually became really good rappers by the end of it.

Are you pleased with the way it turned out? Is it weird watching someone play you?

I wasn't just pleased with the outcome... I fucking loved it. As a lifelong film fan, I felt like it was an impossible job for the film to impress me. I had seen so many bad scripts and had met so many people in the film business over the years who just have very cheesy programmed minds and so I had nightmares of the film being very corny. It wasn't, James and everyone involved totally understood a lot of

the dark context of what I had gone through in my life, they understood the treatment of Scots in England and everyone on board had a story of people trying to hold them back and ruin their dreams just because of their voice, what they looked like or where they were from. And it translated through the screen and in every performance. While it's almost impossible to capture every part of the story or translate the book beat for beat, what they did was captured a vibe that felt realer than real.

The film is funny but also extremely deep and moving in parts. I saw it five times and every time I saw something different in the film. I've laughed, I've cried, and, in many ways, it's helped me feel better about the whole journey. It's been a cathartic process. It achieved the impossible by exceeding my expectations and I think it will really hit home with so many people.

How do you look back on the whole *Silibil N' Brains* experience now?

My book *California Schemin'* takes the reader on a deep journey of self-discover dealing with bullying, addiction, being the outsider and finding your way back from trauma. These themes allowed me to reach a lot of people, and I think the film continues the themes and motifs of identity, imposter syndrome, big dreams, hopes and aspirations, fear and desperation. Universal themes relatable to anyone pulling themselves out of a dark place and trying to achieve and find meaning and purpose in their life. I recently recorded the audiobook and at times during the recording I had to stop (sometimes I would burst out laughing) but sometimes it would be to hold back tears. I'm so glad that I didn't give up when people told me you can't, and I feel blessed that I've been able to write about my journey, tell my story to so many people with the aim to inspire them to live their best life and never take no for an answer. Fans reach out to me on all the social media platforms and tell me their epic stories and it touches me to learn that at some point reading my story helped them push through or inspired them to go for it. And that allowed me to realize a deeper purpose and meaning to my



artistic life. For that I'm humbled and grateful.

I want people to watch this film and get out of their seat and shout "LET'S FUCKING GO!" and then go after what it is they want in their life to bring them a consistent state of joy. Because I took the journey of telling my story, it gave me the confidence to keep pursuing my dreams and become a better musician producer and writer. So, I was able to move on and achieve what I view as success on my terms and because of that I have no regrets and look back on everything fondly. I still do what I love and love what I do and hope anyone who comes across my story does the same.

Some people think *California Schemin'* is a cautionary tale, a "be careful what you wish for" story, but actually I believe my story tells young people to not be afraid, to think big and to go for it with everything they've got, to become other people, to experiment, see how far you can go, to make mistakes, to fail, fall and get back up until eventually you find out who you really are and what your capable of along your epic journey.

Have you been up to anything musically since?

I'm a little odd I guess but I'm sure there's a hell of a lot of weirdos out there like me. When I sleep, (if I don't have night terrors) I have these incredible lucid dreams where I see whole movies, epic novels play out for me, or I see myself performing a killer song I haven't written yet. Whatever the idea is in the dream, I get up and I work on that. I've honed talents and skills over the years to have the ability to interpret and translate and bring the art from my dreams to life so that I can live a fully creative artistic life, this for me is freedom.

What's next for you?

I just released my album *California Schemin'* as Brains McCloud, my 11th, which acts as the soundtrack for the film and book. Albums 12 and 13 are almost finished, and I also have two more books I'm aiming to release this year as I begin the journey of taking *California Schemin'* to the West End and Broadway.

Archie Thomson (screenwriter)

How did you get involved with the project? Were you approached, or did you put yourself forward?

I was put in touch with producer Danny Page by a mutual contact of ours, who said he had the rights to this crazy story. I hopped on a call with the producers and after a great introductory chat they sent me the book. I read it in one sitting! I could immediately see that it had all the ingredients of a great film—an incredible true story that was wildly entertaining, but also had something to say about identity, ambition, and the lengths people will go to in pursuit of a dream. It felt funny, heartbreaking, and uniquely Scottish all at once, so it was an easy project to say yes to.

What did you think of the book and the real-life events? First impressions?

My first reaction was simply disbelief that it had actually happened. It's one of those stories that sounds too outrageous to be true, yet it is. Beyond the headline, though, what really struck me was Gavin and Billy's friendship. The humor is obvious, but underneath that there's a surprisingly emotional story about two young men trying to escape the limitations of where they grew up and chasing a version of success they felt was otherwise out of reach. That emotional core was what made it worth adapting.

How does the process work—two writers turning a true story in book form into a screenplay?

The first step was really about identifying the general shape of the story. Gavin's autobiography is such a wild ride, full of great little episodes, characters, and anecdotes, so it was really about working out what to include and what to leave out; where to combine and compress, and where to invent certain characters or moments to create a satisfying cinematic structure while remaining true to the spirit of what happened. Elaine came onboard

later to bring a fresh perspective to the script and the characters, adding a lot of wickedly funny lines that really helped the dialogue sing. That's one of the great things about filmmaking—it's an incredibly collaborative process, and every new creative voice helps make the script stronger.

Did you spend much time with Gavin and/or Billy?

I actually didn't, no, but I had the pleasure of meeting Gavin at the premiere in Glasgow, which was a little surreal given how much time I had spent thinking about him. Luckily, he had enjoyed the film and was very nice about the script!

What was James like to work with? How much input did he have on the script?

James was fantastic to work with. He was deeply invested in getting the characters right and was always focused on making every moment feel truthful rather than simply entertaining. He asked thoughtful questions, challenged ideas in a really constructive way, and brought a huge amount of energy and intelligence to the process. His instincts as an actor really helped sharpen the characters—what they were thinking and feeling at any given moment—and his transition to the director's chair seemed pretty seamless!

Are you pleased with the way the film turned out?

Absolutely. Film is such a collaborative medium that every stage adds something new, and it's been exciting to watch so many talented people build on what started on the page. The cast are brilliant, they all give such terrific performances, and James has directed it with such vim and vigor it practically leaps off the screen. More than anything, I hope audiences enjoy the ride. It's a wildly entertaining true story that also touches on some deeper themes: friendship, identity, and believing in *who you really are*. With all the color and music, it's definitely one for the big screen. Make sure you don't miss out!

Strawberry Alarm Clock's *Where's One?*

Strawberry Alarm Clock (SAC) released the highly anticipated album *Where's One?*, their first studio record since 2012, in August. With a legacy spanning over 60 years, the seminal psychedelic rock group—best known for their 1967 No. 1 hit “Incense and Peppermints”—continues to captivate. SAC fans and critics alike have responded enthusiastically to the four singles released so far: “Monsters,” “Blow Your Mind,” “Live Water,” and “The Sky Isn’t Falling.” Not entirely a revisitation of nostalgia, the new *Where's One?* covers a vast spread of musical ground while retaining the signature lush vocal harmonies, intricate guitar solos, dual drummers, and enough Farfisa Organ to remind you that this is a SAC record. From the intricate prog rock sound of “White Light” to the theatrical “Monsters” to the humorous “Tahitian Gardens” and the soulful and yearning folk-tinged rock ballad about the loss of Anderson’s mother, “Since You’ve Gone Away,” SAC traverses styles effortlessly as lead vocals are interchanged with four singers, often within the same song. There is a sense of musical experience, maturity, and virtuosity that is the culmination of the years following the innocence of the “Incense and Peppermints” days.

The six-member band features five original members from their initial run of four albums from 1967-1969, which is a stunning and rare achievement on its own these days. *Where's One?* features Mark Stephen Weitz (keyboards), Randy Seol (drums/percussion), George Bunnell (bass), Gene Gunnels (drums/percussion), Steve Bartek (guitar, flute, sitar, and production—also well-known as a founding member of Oingo Boingo), plus “the new guy” guitarist Howie Anderson, who’s been a full member since their 1986 reunion.

Decades of musical chemistry and versatility are a key part of what keeps the band so compelling to fans of all ages. SAC has an annual homecoming at The Sunset Strip’s The Whisky, and this writer was fortunate enough to have seen the last three years of shows there, including where SAC was the headliner for the weeklong celebration of The Whisky’s 60th anniversary. Always a packed house, it is not unusual seeing 20-year-olds dressed in ‘60s gear with GoGo boots singing and knowing all the words at their shows.

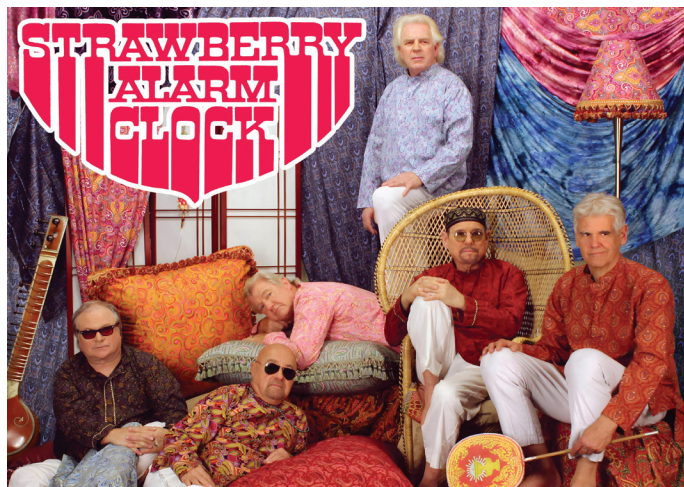
What makes *Where's One?* more than just a trip down memory lane is a sense of heart, humor, virtuosity, and experimentation that concludes with a sense of having gone on a journey. The ‘60s spirit is here and you can hear it in the immaculate capella harmony of the opening track “Feel The Love.” As the needle hits the second track, the captivatingly ominous “Monsters” (released as the album’s first preview single last Halloween) makes clear that SAC are here not to relive former glories but to push the psych-rock form ever forward with new ideas and fresh sounds. Track three features an odd time signature reimagining of The Beatles “Day Tripper” that lets the listener know to expect

the unexpected. This holds true as well on a delightfully skewed performance of “Within You Without You.” By the fourth track, “White Light,” a musically and emotionally raw journey that blends psychedelia and dream rock with intense, prog influenced rhythms, and harmonies, the restless creativity of SAC in 2026 is abundantly evident, summed up in the opening lyrics: “Where am I going? What will I do when I get there?”

Following is Weitz’s jaunty “Blow Your Mind,” which is making waves on the global indie airwaves and touches on musical idioms that followed and drew upon SAC’s original work. You’ll hear gorgeous chamber strings arranged by in-demand orchestrator Bartek on “Since You Have Gone Away,” as well as angular guitars recalling the postpunk and new wave years, and bright harmonies that evoke the best of ‘70s AM Gold on “The Sky Isn’t Falling.” There are intricate prog rock-adjacent time signatures “I’m Not The One,” “White Light,” Beefheart/Zappa-inflected art rock “Primordial Soup,” and grooves worthy of ‘70s funk and ‘90s trip hop “Live Water” and “Monsters.” There’s a sly take on exotica in “Tahitian Gardens” before SAC close the album, saving the trippiest for last with “Galactic Symphony – Persian Skies,” a psychedelic romp written by the full band and featuring a spoken-word performance by Stephen J. Kalinich, the legendary poet laureate of Beach Boys fame and the ‘60s L.A. pop scene.

It’s all breathtakingly fresh for a band 60 years into their career, playful and experimental but loaded with consummate tunefulness. What binds it together is the time-tested chemistry of the players, and a connection greater than the sum of its considerable parts, as George Bunnell, official SAC historian explains: “*Where's One?* was not intended as a concept album but as it turns out, I guess it is. I think it’s about family, life, and love. Howie wrote ‘Since You Have Gone Away’ about his mom coming to him in a dream, and ‘I’m Not The One’ about his kids leaving the nest. Randy wrote the lyrics to ‘White Light’ about his late father appearing to him in his car while driving, and ‘Live Water’ about the good fortune of meeting his wife, Beverly. Mark wrote ‘Blow Your Mind’ about his girlfriend. David Glück wrote the lyrics to ‘Monsters’ about his ex who is still his best friend, and ‘Primordial Soup,’ refers to bridging the gap between inorganic matter and biological life, human, plant, animal, and otherwise. The album tells our long story about lifelong relationships and life in general.”

The title “Where’s One?” was brought to



the band by Mark Weitz and refers to the old musician joke of finding the downbeat, where is beat one of a musical bar after a series of time signature changes. As for the title, Bunnell continues, “After all this time, you’d think the clock would know. That’s the great thing about music; you’re always searching for that elusive something. I love it when someone brings in an idea and we start exploring and expanding on it. We all have one thing in common, and that’s to find what a song idea can turn into. It keeps us going. We’ve found that if we are open minded, a good song will open itself up to us. This is the album we wanted to make. We’ve poured our hearts into it. As our own Steve Bartek (co-producing with this writer) kept reminding us, we’re not looking for perfection... we just want a great-sounding album, but not at the risk of losing its heart and soul and sense of humor. I think we’ve accomplished that.”

Bartek agrees: “This album is a testament to the power of long-lasting creative relationships, despite interruptions of time and distance. We are always searching to connect to each other as we play... and land together on ‘one,’ occasionally.”

Where's One? is the first full album of new music from psychedelic rock pioneers Strawberry Alarm Clock since 1969. *Where's One?* returns the band to the pinnacle of the genre they helped to invent, with a lineup unmatched for its authenticity and decades of performing and songwriting chemistry on display. *Where's One?* was released and distributed by Big Stir Records, Burbank, CA and hit record stores in a Deluxe Double LP edition, CD, as well as streaming on all digital platforms worldwide, on August 7.

orcd.co/strawberryalarmclock-w1

Strawberry Alarm Clock celebrated the record release with a concert at The Tiki Oasis in San Diego on August 9. Look for more appearances and keep up with SAC at strawberryalarmclock.com

Rap Fame

Innovative App Allows Up-And-Coming Rappers To Win Money and Earn Fame

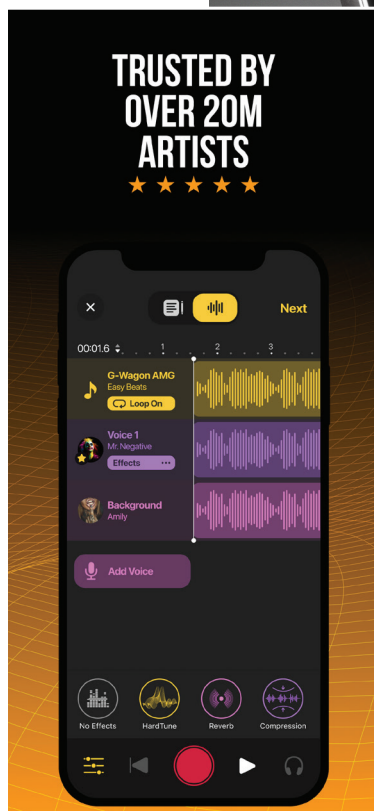
It's extremely difficult to gain traction as a musician since the market is flooded with contenders. Rap is the most popular genre on the planet, making it especially challenging to stand out in the hip-hop universe. Helping level the playing field is Rap Fame, an app available for Apple and Android devices that allows creators to compete in contests with cold hard cash and prestige up for grabs. Tracks can be recorded independently or done right in the app. Rap Fame boasts over one million active users, 15 million registered artists, and more than 20 million tracks.

Rap Fame originally began as BattleMe, its mission being to let rappers challenge each other head-to-head from anywhere. Although the company pivoted in 2019, battles are still an option. "That's not a massive part of the platform anymore, but it is cool," asserts John Lister, Rap Fame's Head of Community. "You can put your battle out there, someone will reply, and people can vote on the winner."

These days, the focus is on the contests. Rookie competitions run every week, with winners receiving \$50. That might not seem like a lot but consider that unknown artists putting their music into the world often generates little to no cheddar. Plus, the exposure one gains from entering can lead to Crew invites—Crews being virtual groups of up to 20 emcees. Being accepted into a Crew makes one eligible to compete in Crew Tournaments, as well as able to connect privately with the Crew's other members over Crew Chat.

The Weekly Tournament is the big one, with the top rhymers being awarded \$500. But that's not all that can be at stake. One of the prizes this year was a personal mentoring session from one of Rap Fame's illustrious peeps. These contests always come with a theme, anything from a summer hit to a Christmas love song. "We had a recent contest called Strong," continues Lister, who is also an amateur rapper. "Some people took the gym route. Some said they're emotionally strong. And some said they smoke the strongest weed."

The top 20 tracks that receive the



most likes, plays, and comments will automatically be put on the short list for recognition. Then the Rap Fame insiders scour what's out there to decide who will receive the five wild card slots. The top five winners receive money, and the next best five get Rap Fame merch. The rest are gifted Benjis, in-app currency that can be used to help promote tracks. Benjis are always available for purchase or may be earned for free by logging on with regularity.

Utilizing a freemium model allows rappers who have low bank accounts to get into the game. Tons of backing tracks are available for use, 100 percent gratis. Simply open the app, pick a beat, press record, and start spitting game. Premium subscribers

have access to an even greater selection of rhythms. Simple in-app editing tools help performers add layers, mix, and master their tracks for maximum shine.

Besides the ability to compete for goodies and reputation, Rap Fame fosters a community of likeminded hip-hop heads. Supportive feedback happens all the time, both from other Rap Fame users as well as the app's staff. A recent upgrade is the addition of voice notes, which can trigger a meaningful confidence boost when real listeners start dropping positive critiques. The written word is simply

not as effective at expressing such unbridled enthusiasm.

Then there's the Rap Fame Awards, built to recognize the best in independent hip-hop. Started in 2017, it's grown by leaps and bounds. More and more categories have been added over the years. Winners are calculated by a combination of Rap Fame community members, staff, and guest judges. This year's edition brought Scott Storch, Jahlil Beats, and Nikki Page to the table. Having your track win an award may feel impossible, but with the Rap Fame Awards it's a real possibility.

"Something like 40 percent of tracks dropped on Spotify last year had zero plays," notes Lister. "On Rap Fame, that doesn't happen. If your song is good, someone in the community will find it, and it'll get some motion." Take Cairo Snow, winner of Rap Fame's Best Young Artist award. The 13-year-old Canadian is a genuine phenom who recently joined the Wu-Tang Clan on stage at Scotiabank Arena. Reports Lister, "He enters all the competitions, and he's bitterly disappointed when he doesn't win."

Although the app's headquarters are located in London, its success in America means there are plans to create a greater IRL presence stateside. "The aim is to offer in-person opportunities," Lister reveals. "Starting off, it will be for competition winners. We'll work together on new music and give career focus." Beyond cheddar and clout, Rap Fame is actively uniting the independent rap community. Members of Crews from different cities have been known to meet in the middle for hangs and recording jams. Romances have even blossomed, causing some to dub it Tinder for rappers. "We've had three babies born out of people who've met on the platform," says Lister. "It blows my mind."

rapfame.app

Egyptian Lover Scores

The Electro-Hip-Hop Pioneer Just Keeps Getting Better and Better

Los Angeles in the early 1980s was undoubtedly wild—cocaine was a routine party favor, reaching near-epidemic proportions throughout the entertainment industry, dance clubs were bumping with new wave, and gang wars were exploding in the city.

Amid the chaos, a musical revolution was happening inside places like the L.A. Sports Memorial Arena and The Penthouse. Armed with a Roland TR-808 drum machine, Greg Broussard, better known as the Egyptian Lover, helped pioneer West Coast electro-hip-hop, a genre so cutting edge and novel at the time that he was initially hesitant to introduce it to the crowd. But once he dropped the beat, the audience erupted. Broussard was hooked, and he practically sprinted to the studio every chance he got to make more 808-driven masterpieces.

Though Broussard's first single, "Dial-A-Freak," was a local club hit, it was his breakthrough record, "Egypt Egypt," that really pushed the genre to the forefront and was being obsessively played on local radio stations like KROQ, but it quickly spread across the nation. The phones were ringing off the hook for more of that Egyptian Lover sound.

Since catching the bug from Afrika Bambaataa's 1982 single "Planet Rock," Broussard has never wavered from his original style. More than 40 years later, albums like *1984*, *1985* and *1986* are still anchored by the boom-bap beats of the 808, intoxicating synths and vocoders along with Broussard's party-oriented lyrics. He's been able to tour the globe multiple times and sustain a career he never imagined possible as a young student at James Monroe High School.

"I definitely have a lot of 'pinch-me' moments," he says. "Right now, everything is one big blur. It's like one big concert, and I just did it. One time a promoter came over and says, 'So what was your favorite show?' I'm like, 'Man, it's like one big blur.' My friend was sitting there and says, 'I've only been working with you for two years now, and it's one big blur to me, so I know 40 years of this is one big blur.' He was right."

Prince also played an integral role in the birth of the Egyptian Lover. After hearing the song "Controversy," in which Prince does what Broussard calls a "chant rap" at the end, he wanted to emulate that style.

"Give me a freaky kinky nation," a part of the lyrics to "Egypt Egypt," was his attempt at his own chant rap. He essentially married Prince's vocals with Afrika Bambaataa's "Planet Rock," Kraftwerk's "Numbers," and Twilight 22's "Electric Kingdom" to come up with the Egyptian Lover sound.

He recalls a trip to Sydney, Australia, where he really wanted to take a picture of the Sydney Opera House but never got the chance. So he



asked a booking agent if he could play a show there in the future.

"He called me back about a month later and says, 'I did one better—you're playing at the Sydney Opera House and headlining the festival,'" he recalls. "I'm walking up to the Sydney Opera House and I've got goosebumps. I'm like, 'Oh my God, can't wait to hear the 808 in this building.' When I go on the back of the building, I see all this equipment that says Prince. I'm like, 'What!? Oh my god. Prince performed here last week!' All his equipment was there."

Broussard's music is being discovered in 2026 like it's 1986. Last year, "Rack City" rapper Tyga sent Broussard a simple Instagram message that read, "Hey fam, let's work."

Tyga's father, Stevie J. Stevenson, had been a friend of Broussard's in the '80s (though in 1991 he was sentenced to life without parole for several federal charges, including drug trafficking and kidnapping). Initially, Broussard thought maybe it was a favor for his father, but he soon learned that Tyga landed the lead role in a movie called *Baby You're a Star* and wanted Egyptian Lover music to be the soundtrack.

"I was like, 'Sure, let's do something,'" he says. "When he told me the whole story and that he was doing a movie based in 1989, I was in. He said instead of doing Egyptian Lover-sounding records, he'd rather have me just do it. I went to the studio and worked on some stuff with him."

Broussard estimates he did around 20 songs, but he isn't sure how many of them are going to make the cut. The musical drama, which is loosely based on Tyga's life, is currently in production in Portland, Oregon. According to *Deadline*, *Baby You're a Star* co-stars Madison Bailey and Ashton Sanders as well as Apollonia, Clifton Powell, Patrick Cage, David Alan Grier, and Mike Epps. For Broussard, it's another

moment in his career that seems surreal and the best part, he says, is he's "still having fun."

He adds, "As long as I'm still having fun and traveling, I won't stop. I usually save 'Egypt Egypt' for the last song of my set. They usually sing along and love it. A kid ran up to me after a show once and goes, 'Did you make Egypt Egypt, too? Is that a new song?' I'm like, 'No that's an old song from 1984,' and he says, 'The album 1984?' I reply, 'No, the year 1984.' He told me it sounds brand new [laughs]."

Months later, the same kid found Broussard on Instagram and told him he did a deep dive into his catalog and is now a "big fan." It blows Broussard's mind.

"I did a small club tour in the U.K. and I hit this one club up and the promoter says, 'There's about 50 kids who asked me if you're really using real vinyl; they said they're tired of A.I. and all this fake stuff,'" he remembers. "They lined up

early and were all in the front row. While I'm DJing, I hear one kid scream out, 'He is real. It's not A.I.!' I had to keep a straight face and keep mixing and doing my thing. He just was loving it."

It gives Broussard more hope for future generations.

"The kids are loving it," he says. "When a video of me mixing in Germany came out, it went viral. All these kids started loving it, so a lot of things happened to me at the same time. I did a song with Josh Baker called 'Dr. Feel Right' and that went viral. I got all these friend requests on Instagram and this whole year is booked up as well as the first four months in 2027."

Despite Broussard's demanding travel schedule, he's been able to continually carve out time for his family—it's a must.

"I was off last week and I had the grandkids over to the house," he says. "We had a summer vacation at the house. I'll be going on the road soon and I won't be back on the weekends, so I just took this whole month to spend with them."

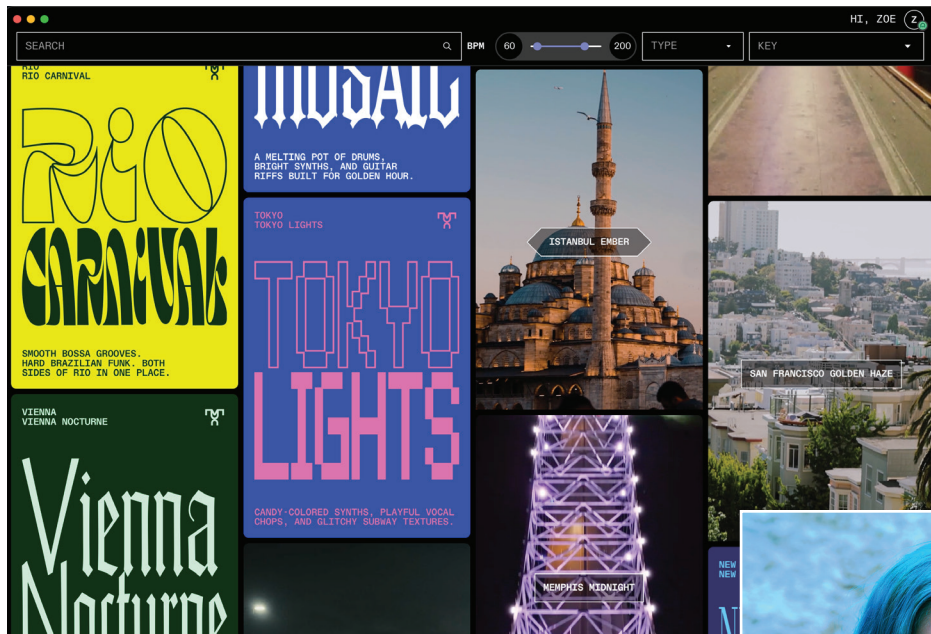
Broussard married somebody he went to high school with, the same girl who introduced him to Kraftwerk. They've been married for 27 years, a rarity in the music industry. He notes, "She knows that this is my life, and she's okay with it."

Broussard, now 62, is in awe his records are selling the way they are. In fact, sometimes it feels like he can't keep up.

"They're selling faster than ever now," he says. "I think last month [June 2026] and during COVID, I sold more vinyl than anything. Everybody was buying vinyl during COVID. And when I put out 'Everything She Wants' last year, it actually outsold 'Egypt Egypt' for the last 20 years. We're selling them out. It's so crazy."

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

Tamber Offers Sonic Intelligence



Let's be frank here—just about everyone is terrified of A.I. Within the arts, be it music, writing, filmmaking, or anything else, a lot of that fear stems from two things: being replaced, and having your work stolen and incorporated into the A.I. “hive” of data. And to be fair, much of that fear is valid. There are bad people out there, soulless creatures who put the bottom line over artistic endeavor. Tamber isn't that.

In May, Tamber launched its “sonic intelligence-powered creative suite, introducing a new category of music technology designed to work alongside artists as they create,” according to a company statement. “Built to bridge the gap between instinct and execution, Tamber helps musicians translate abstract ideas—from language, emotion, color, texture, taste, gesture, and place—into sound in real time.”

For the non-techy folks out there, what does this mean? Tamber doesn't do anything generative, which is key. It doesn't “generate” the music for you at all, using other people's work without their knowledge or consent. Rather, the tool is purely assistive.

“I think the term ‘artificial intelligence’ has become incredibly synonymous with something that it not necessarily is, because of the Suno's and the Udio's of the world,” says founder and creator Zoe Wrenn. “I think a lot of people have assumed A.I. is consistently generative A.I., which is just not the case. So, we don't really like to be associated with that kind of terminology.”

Rather, Wrenn refers to Tamber as “Sonic Intelligence.”

“Tamber has been created to be like the Adobe Creative Suite of music creation and discovery tools,” she says. “The whole goal is to create a suite of tools that basically function like a bionic arm for musicians to move faster, expand their capabilities, etc. And I've created it with a lot of different musicians. All of our

back end, our models, have been trained on the back end with artists that have synesthesia [defined on Wiki as a ‘perceptual phenomenon where the stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway automatically and involuntarily triggers experiences in another’]. So, it understands what a note sounds like, but what does it taste like? What color is it? It learns to be a pretty flexible, fluid system.”

Wrenn was perfectly placed to create a tool like Tamber. A musician in her own right, Wrenn has also been coding since she was 13. Tamber combines her two loves. The fact that Wrenn has the heart of a musician means that, rest assured her intentions are good. Nobody is getting burned.

“For college, she attended the Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music at NYC Tisch, leaving after a year to tour behind her own music,” reads Wrenn's bio. “She used a beta version of Tamber to create her 2020 breakout single ‘Hailey,’ which reached No. 2 on the *Billboard* Digital Song Sales chart, generated more than 350 million TikTok impressions, and surpassed 30 million streams.”

MC showed up at Tamber HQ for a presentation of just what the tool is capable of. It quickly became apparent that Tamber is a tool that will aid musicians, not replace them.

“Tamber points toward a future where technology amplifies creative instinct rather than replacing it,” reads a statement. “By pairing advanced sonic intelligence with human-centered design, the platform opens new pathways for expression—empowering artists to create in ways that are more intuitive, immersive,

and distinctly their own.”

We watched as Wrenn asked Tamber to elongate guitar parts and then used her hands, in thin air, to manipulate the sounds. It was incredibly impressive, and absolutely intuitive. One must wonder how the sound library was gathered though.

“We hired a whole bunch of musicians and filmmakers from all over the world and had them go out with handheld microphones and capture the ambient sounds of the streets, and then we remixed them into usable samples,” Wrenn says. “So, there's a lot of really interesting stuff from singing in Istanbul to toys in the alleyway. We hired musicians, like actually on the streets, to play things that turn into a lot of these song starters. It's really cool.”

That's important. The musicians in the library were hired, while ambient sounds

were remixed. The sound library was ethically curated. And the proof is in the pudding.

As previously mentioned, Wrenn used an early version of Tamber to create her own song “Hailey.”

“I like to say it's something that helps you cut through the noise,” she says. “I think right now we've got very much a tragedy of choice. There's just a lot of

things all the time, and I think that can become very difficult for a user to create something that's very pointed. I do archery as well, and so I like to say, you can shoot and fire things, but if you have a bullseye, you're much more likely to hit an actual target, like hit a bullseye. So, I think this just like it cuts out the noise. You're able to focus a lot more.”

All of that said, anything A.I. is still going to raise eyebrows in certain corners of the music industry. That might not ever change. But Wrenn is doing all she can to involve everyone.

“There's a feature I'm working on currently where you can plug in any piece of analog gear and speak to it,” she says. “You can change your parameters in real time. Do I ever know this will be part of this? I don't know. I've gone into quite a few big analog studios, and they've been very interested in what this can do. Tamby (Tamber's “in-session co-producer, allowing users to control Ableton Live using spoken or written language”) has been an exciting one because she is very adaptable to people's workflows. My father is a very intense analog musician and tells me what he likes and what he doesn't like, and I think Tamby's been an interesting thing even to him.”

Find out more at tamber.music.



photo by Jennifer Medina

In the Studio with IAN SWEET

The Origin: For nearly a decade, Jilian Medford's silvery vocal presence has been the heart of IAN SWEET—soothing and strong, it continually draws listeners into her ever-shifting soundscapes. This signature strength has guided listeners through the collaborative, angular rush of her debut *Shapeshifter* and the denser haze of *Crush Crusher*, as well as the introspective *Show Me How You Disappear* and the electro-pop-tinged *SUCKER*.

Strewn within these atmospherics and propulsive rhythms are Medford's lyrics, documenting frictions found in everyday life, processing the world through a melancholic-meets-luminous, kaleidoscopic lens, and notating everything from the painful to the divine. For Medford's newest release *Shiverstruck*, vocals and lyrics remain her definitive creative prism, yet she deepens her approach by leaning into a hyper-focused writing process.

By lasering into these smallest lyrical and instrumental details before jumping into the studio, she allowed a brand-new sense of creative spontaneity to emerge. Below, Medford shines a light onto this process, detailing how reexamining her songwriting workflow allowed her to find an assured version of IAN SWEET.

The Production: While chaotic spontaneity defined much of IAN SWEET's prior recording history, for this collection of songs, Medford deliberately chose to let patience prevail. Before tracking began, she meticulously refined her demos, dialing in the exact shapes and structural foundations for each song. This newfound discipline became the ultimate core of the album's creation. Paradoxically, instead of feeling confined by this structure, having the underpinnings of each song completed gave Medford a pseudo-safety net—leaving her free to sonically explore while tracking. This elevated form of pre-production in turn allowed for deeper in-the-room exploration, securing her creativity before a single microphone was turned on.

"I just wanted to be confident with every song before stepping into the studio," Medford explains. "I wanted to use the studio time for elevating it... It was like a little bit more mature way to approach creating, which is different for me. But it felt good to have everything in a very solidified place."

This methodical approach to the first phase of recording—ticking the boxes for drums, bass, guitar, and piano—might seem counterintuitive, but it ultimately created the free time to dabble and dive into the unknown depths of sonic exploration. Medford credits producer Ben Allen's seasoned workflow for maintaining a sense of calm that allowed for the magic to happen. "He has a method to the madness and makes it so that we're never over our heads," she notes. "We'd get the basics tracked, leaving time to try whatever the hell we want, make crazy mistakes and run with those... It was just great to have the foundations and then be able to explore a bit more, giving a little glitter on top."



Photo by Wrenne Evans

This structural sense of security extended beyond instrumentation; it gave Medford the psychological permission to fully release her vocal register, navigating the quiet moments before blowing out the loud. "My favorite thing about singing is the release that you get," Medford shares, highlighting her tracks' extreme emotional range. "You can have these really introspective, soft, personal moments... and then you can just explode at any moment."

For Medford, this vocal dynamic mirrors the complexity of the human experience. "We can be soft, vulnerable, shy, and insecure, and then we can be the most confident, loud, take-up-space person as well. Through the vocal production and the vocal takes, and where they sit in the mix, that complexity really gets a chance to shine."

This emotional freedom was augmented by the copacetic, creative vibe of Maze Studios in Atlanta. The space, owned by Allen, offered Medford an alternative to the sterile confines of traditional recording spaces, mirroring her headspace. "What I loved about Maze is that they weren't trying to be anything but themselves," Medford reflects. "It's a feeling like you're in your living room. The gear has been collected over the years, and it is part of it. Everything has a very personal story to it, a history. It felt like a similar place to where I'm at in my life... I'm just trying to work hard, get my hands dirty, and find my truest self."

Liberated from outside expectations, this absolute creative environment allowed her to let the messy, physical world bleed straight onto the microphone. Because the foundations of the songs were already set, these environmental disruptions never derailed the tracks.

"I think just the space in general that we were recording in felt very down and dirty and industrial and really raw," Medford continues. "We would sometimes have to stop vocal takes because a storm outside was shaking the garage door in the room... But at times those earthly sounds made their way through anyway. That

was the point though—even more than hearing my voice, you're hearing the world around me."

This deep alignment of values fostered an environment of total ease among her tight, three-person tracking team consisting of herself, producer Ben Allen, and engineer Ben Etter—a unified front that provided something invaluable: the freedom to claim absolute ownership over her performances without fear of judgment. Medford felt safe to try anything, including playing piano, a testament to the unspoken connection within the sessions.

"It was just the three of us really making this record together," Medford notes. "I think them drawing something out of me—I wasn't afraid to say, 'Can I hop in there and play?'... I'm not an amazing piano player, but I wanted to play piano on this record. I wanted to be the one sitting at the piano playing it. It was important for me to do it, even though that's not my main instrument."

Their answer was always an encouraging yes. "There was no question from the Bens. It was like, 'Yeah, go down there and play.' And even if I messed up the notes, nobody said anything," she shares. "Just feeling that room felt like being equal in the process... it's my music, so I want to be the one there doing it. I don't want anybody else playing everything, because I'm going to look back and feel as though I wasn't a part of it. It was very important for me to feel very, very part of it."

In the end, *Shiverstruck* stands as the sonic realization of an artist finally aligning with herself. By stepping out of the crowded, chaotic expectations of her early career, Medford used the studio to chisel away the noise, leaving a lean soundscape where her voice, lyrics, and instrumentation are entirely her own. In doing so, she conquered her chaotic instincts and reclaimed total creative confidence, turning daily tracking sessions into a space to embrace and push boundaries.

iansweetmusic.com

Charli xcx

Music, Fashion, Film

Atlantic

Producers: A.G. Cook, Finn Keane

Thirteen years after the release of her debut *True Romance* album, British pop artist Charli xcx has dropped her seventh full-length and, while not the year's best album by any means, it offers further proof that her musical journey is a rewarding one, both for her fans and herself. It's gratifying to see Charli xcx having a Gaga-esque period of her career where the naysayers, the people decrying her for being over-produced and over-stylized, are being silenced by the sheer quality of her recent output, this album included.

Music, Fashion, Film has also arrived just a few months after Charli xcx's soundtrack for the recent *Wuthering Heights* movie, and in many ways, it feels like a continuation of that, more so than 2024's much-heralded *Brat*. This is pop, sure, but it's so much more. The artist, and we use that word deliberately, does her thing of taking the listener on a rollercoaster of emotions with the backdrop of contemporary life looming over everything. But it's the left turns that she takes on a song like "Yeah" or "Persona," where she'll just slam on the brakes seemingly on a whim (though obviously not really).

There are moments that feel bleak, others that are lush. She lashes out on "Camera," justifiably so. And then unleashes melody overload on "Magic Metal Montana." The album ends with "No One Lasts Forever," a collab with movie legend David Cronenberg, which included the line "You need to understand the feeling, of the crushing highs and lows of ego." One gets the feeling that, as she continues this journey, she's understanding it more and more. - **Brett Callwood**



Chuck Bergeron

Bass & Face

Summit Records

Producers: Paul Wickcliffe and Chuck Bergeron

Chuck Bergeron is a first-call jazz bassist and composer that has been the engine behind small combos and big bands, such as his South Florida Jazz Orchestra. Self-admittedly, he's always been somewhat jealous of the intimacy guitarists and pianists have shared in duet with a singer. So, why not bass? Here he teams with some of the best vocalists in the biz, including Janis Siegel, Sheila Jordan, Kevin Mahogany, and others for, essentially, standards stripped to their essence. Relax and prepare for a rare musical treat. - **Eric Harabadian**



CJ Wildheart

Devil

Devilspit Music

Producers: CJ Wildheart, Dave Draper

British band The Wildhearts is, as far as this scribe is concerned, the best to have emerged in the past four decades. Criminally underrated, The Wildhearts simply don't do bad songs. The main ingredient is frontman Ginger, but it's also a fact that he has a gift for surrounding himself with brilliant musicians and songwriters. CJ is one such fellow. His work with The Wildhearts, and also Honeycrack and The Jellies, is consistently phenomenal. *Devil* is his latest solo album, and it's start-to-finish awesome from the abrasive, punky fire of "Nein Nein Nein" to the unrelenting "Diva." - **Brett Callwood**



Anthony Garone

OK, But Why?

Moonjune Records

Producer: Anthony Garone

Garone is a guitarist's guitarist who runs a successful YouTube channel called "Make Weird Music." This is a collection of select odds and ends he's been cultivating in his audio lab since 2007. While "weird" might be the optimal word here this 14-track document is an adventurous listener's wet dream. From angular King Crimson-inspired fare to reflective ballads and Yngwie-tinged takes on J.S. Bach, Garone proves to be a wearer of many musical hats. Fans of Canadian microtonal masters Angine de Poitrine might just discover a new recipient for their idolatry. - **Eric Harabadian**



Sherri Harding

Storyland

Instant Replay Music

Producer: Richard Cooper

Ottawa-based vocalist Sherri Harding is a soulful singer that is cut from the cloth of like-minded artists such as Bonnie Raitt, Mavis Staples, and Susan Tedeschi. In addition, she is assisted on this album by members of the Muscle Shoals Horns and rhythm section. And she delivers with all the passion and fire one would expect from that kind of pedigree. The auto-biographical "Down in the Shoals," the straight-ahead rocker "Rainy Day," and the signature title track spotlight Harding as a superb storyteller that truly inhabits and owns the song. - **Eric Harabadian**



Ariana Grande

Petal

Republic Records, Babydoll Music

Producers: Ariana Grande, Ilya, Max Martin

If you are expecting a grandiose pop album from Ariana Grande, then *Petal* is not the album for you. Grande takes a step back with her eighth studio album—it's more experimental with a strong focus on its pop synth arrangements. The production is airy and haunting especially on tracks like "freak" and "like i do." Grande's subdued vocals are a divisive stylistic choice as it makes all the songs sound repetitive and muddled. As a result, none of the songs really stand out. It's nice to see Grande get out of her comfort zone and do something different, but it's also disappointing that she's hiding her amazing vocals through the production. - **Jacqueline Naranjo**



The Hollywood Stars

Hey! LA!

Rum Bar Records

Producers: The Hollywood Stars, Loren Molinare, Paul Roessler

Not all veterans are destined to stay the course and, conversely, sticking around doesn't guarantee legendary status. That said, The Hollywood Stars is one of those bands that you can't help but feel got a raw deal. The Los Angeles glitter stompers' best known song, "King of the Night Time World," was covered by Kiss for the classic 1976 *Destroyer* album, and most people think it's Kiss' song. The Stars has rerecorded it for this new album and, importantly, it's not even the best song on here. The title track is an insistent, glammy good time, and "Will the Lights Go on Again?" recalls the heyday of American radio rock. - **Brett Callwood**





Ruby Otis

Contact: info@rubyotis.com

Web: rubyotis.com

Seeking: Label, Film/TV

Style: Alternative

In a sweet little bait-and-switch, Ruby Otis is the name of a band, not a solo artist. Don't worry, we fell for it too. In fact, the singer in Ruby Otis is Los Angeles native Sabrina Judge, a woman who puts massive amounts of emotion and swagger into her vocals. The song "Weather Systems" is reminiscent of '80s alt-pop duo Shakespear's Sister (remember "Stay?"), with Judge sharing a jazzy croon with that group's Marcella Detroit. That Lynchian lounge-club feel continues on "Hold On" and "Ready, Set, Free," from the self-titled debut album. It's a classic light/dark dichotomy, and there's a lot to explore here.

Production	8
Lyrics	8
Music	8
Vocals	8
Musicianship	8

SCORE 8.0



AITA

Contact: booking@aitaband.com

Web: aitaband.com

Seeking: Label

Style: Pop Punk

Baltimore foursome AITA is a band that sounds like it's already outgrowing the room it's playing in. "KNOW HARD FEELINGS" thrives on its dual-vocal dynamic, landing somewhere between a sparring match and a perfectly synced duet. There's a clear nod to early-2000s radio staples—think Bowling for Soup—but it never feels derivative. Instead, the band sharpens that influence into something punchier and more immediate. The sugar-rush energy rarely dips, and the hooks stick. Consider this your warning: turn the volume up and prepare for impact.

Production	8
Lyrics	8
Music	8
Vocals	8
Musicianship	8

SCORE 8.0



Martin Mayer

Contact: hello@martinmayermusic.com

Web: martinmayermusic.com

Seeking: Film/TV, Booking, Management, PR

Style: Neoclassical, Classical Crossover

It's been six years since pianist Mayer was in these pages, with *MC* saying at the time that "Mayer seems to have a mainstream ear and the skills to render smooth, catchy, vanilla-sweet instrumental music." We nailed it then, and nothing has changed in that regard. Recent tunes such as "Prague Sunrise" showcase Mayer's ability to convey a ton of feelings in what is often the most delicate, almost minimal musicianship. The guy is so skilled, such a master of his instrument, that it almost feels like he's singing on songs like "Heart of an Angel" and "New Beginnings." That's a rare skill.

Production	8
Lyrics	X
Music	7
Vocals	X
Musicianship	8

SCORE 7.7



Rohmeela

Contact: rohmeela.sound@gmail.com

Web: Spotify

Seeking: Label, Booking, Airplay

Style: Afro-Fusion, Afro-Hip

Rohmeela, born Chukwumela Ohia, blends hip-hop with afro-beat, and the results are startlingly effective. Rohmeela creates sounds that make dancing practically compulsory. "Give Me Love" and "Crazy Love" have a "slow dance in the dancehall" vibe, while "3 Minutes" is where the artist shows off his rap skills. It all makes for a heady brew, as Rohmeela combines his ability to sing and spit rhymes, while telling his authentic tales. He can switch from romantic to aggressive at the shake of a dog's tail, which is fascinating when working your way through his *Grace of God (G.O.D.)* album.

Production	8
Lyrics	7
Music	7
Vocals	8
Musicianship	7

SCORE 7.4



The Psycodelics

Contact: max@atlas-touring.com

Web: psycodelics.com

Seeking: Label, Film/TV, Distribution, PR, Publishing, Sync

Style: R&B, Funk, Rock, Pop, Soul

Funk revivals can often fall into tired pastiche, but The Psycodelics avoid the trap by playing with real intention. On "You've Got to Know," the band locks into an infectious, body-moving groove that serves as a backdrop for surprisingly thoughtful songwriting. Vocalist versatility shines on "Middle Man," shifting the project's dynamic before "Only Takes Forever" dials down the tempo for an intimate, slow-burning atmosphere. What's compelling is their refusal to play by a genre rulebook—The Psycodelics are actively carving out an authentic, modernized lane. It's a stylish, sharp-witted offering.

Production	8
Lyrics	8
Music	8
Vocals	8
Musicianship	8

SCORE 8.0



EBF BUK

Contact: rainmanbonez@gmail.com

Web: instagram.com/ebf_buk_hbs

Seeking: Label, Sync, Film/TV/Games

Style: Alternative Rock/Punk Rock/Rap

EBF BUK (Everybody's Favorite Bright Unusual Kid) showcases genuine potential on his latest output, though uneven execution holds it back. "GPA" stumbles out of the gate—a repetitive beat paired with dated, 2007-era Auto-Tune choices that quickly wear thin behind a lyrical loop that mistakes crude for clever. Thankfully, "Everything You Promised" recovers ground with a more emotionally grounded delivery alongside Young Nyke, despite a cramped, clumsy vocal pocket near the track's end. The real gem is "My Sanity," where ditching the heavy vocal pitch correction reveals raw, authentic rap talent alongside Precise504.

Production	7
Lyrics	6
Music	7
Vocals	6
Musicianship	7

SCORE 6.6

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.



Justin Schaefer

Contact: justinschaefer@gmail.com

Web: Spotify

Seeking: Label, Booking, Promotion

Style: Indie Rock

Modest Hits is Justin Schaefer's debut solo album, after years in bands like Winkler and Doss. It's also a brilliant oxymoron, when you really dig into it. "I am excited to put myself out into the world in ways that I haven't before," Schaefer recently told *MC*, and it's fitting that he's buzzing. Songs such as "Nuthin'" and "Silver" showcase the artist's ability to say and convey a lot, while keeping the tunes relatively sparse and simple. The songwriting is frankly brilliant; "Bad Head" might be the best of a great bunch. Thirty minutes in Schaefer's company is 30 minutes well spent.

Production	7
Lyrics	7
Music	8
Vocals	8
Musicianship	7

SCORE 7.4



Paula Boggs Band

Contact: eric@4entertainmentllc.com

Web: paulaboggsband.net

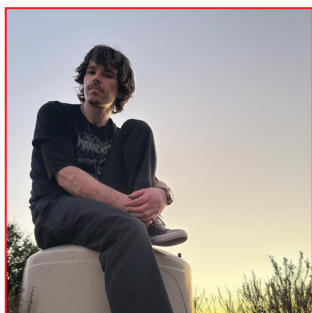
Seeking: Booking, Film/TV, Label

Style: Soulgrass, Americana, Indie Folk

"Formed in Seattle in 2007, Paula Boggs Band has spent nearly two decades walking the long American road—not chasing trends, but gathering stories," reads the Paul Boggs Band's online bio. The latest album, which dropped in March, is *Sumatra*, and it includes 10 examples of just these great musicians can do with said gathered stories. The title track feel deeply spiritual, Boggs' voice sparing over some wonderfully restrained musicianship. "Soulgrass" is a great description of these soulful, rootsy, and authentic tunes, with "Airline Boogie" able to get the most stubborn toes a-tapping. Dig in!

Production	8
Lyrics	8
Music	8
Vocals	8
Musicianship	8

SCORE 8.0



Empty Angelo

Contact: emptyangelomusic@gmail.com

Web: soundcloud.com/emptyangelomusic

Seeking: Label, Manager, PR

Style: Indie Rock

Well, this is very personal. Empty Angelo describes himself online as, "A Los Angeles native who fled to St. Louis in hopes of building a relationship with his absent father, David Paul. After five wonderful months, Paul passes away under mysterious circumstances after a successful spine operation." If that feels like it's a lot to process for the listener, imagine what it must be like for the artist. As often happens, Empty Angelo decided to use his music as a form of therapy and it's resulted in some deeply honest, evocative and heartbreaking indie rock.

Production	7
Lyrics	8
Music	8
Vocals	7
Musicianship	7

SCORE 7.4



Chase Bethea

Contact: chasebethea@gmail.com

Web: chasebethea.bandcamp.com

Seeking: Booking/Interview

Style: Caribbean Noir

Game composer Chase Bethea understands how to construct immersive auditory worlds. Building on his atmospheric synth work from *Aground*, Bethea's score for *Duppy Detective Tashia* strikes a delightfully mysterious tone. He weaves delicate string arrangements and driving backbeats, crafting a shadowy, brooding sonic environments that feels inseparable from the spaces they're meant to inhabit. Every cue breathes with intentionality, establishing a moody aesthetic that fuels side-quest immersion without overwhelming the player. Bethea proves once again that a great soundtrack isn't just background noise—it's a living, breathing character.

Production	8
Lyrics	X
Music	8
Vocals	X
Musicianship	9

SCORE 8.3



Aly Navarro

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Web: alynavarro8686.wixsite.com/aly-navarro-music

Seeking: Booking

Style: Indie Pop

Miami-born, L.A.-based singer-songwriter Aly Navarro crafts stripped-back music with breathtaking weight. Channeling the raw clarity of early Ingrid Michaelson, she lets her pen do the heavy lifting. On the quietly furious "You're Just A Man," Navarro delivers devastating lines like "You're just a man, you made me question, my right to my body, when you taught me a lesson"—disarming the listener by pairing lyrical indictment with deceptive musical simplicity before unleashing an epic, cathartic guitar solo. "Not Mine To Lose" continues that thread, showcasing her knack for turning personal reckonings into universally resonant moments.

Production	8
Lyrics	8
Music	8
Vocals	8
Musicianship	9

SCORE 8.2



Soul Rash

Contact: jim@timbercanyonstudios.com

Web: Spotify

Seeking: Listeners, Sync Licenses

Style: Rock

Forged during the height of the 2020 pandemic lockdowns, Soul Rash transformed global anxiety into explosive, cathartic rock 'n' roll. "Divided We Stand," the opener to their latest full-length offering, *Trilogy*, kicks the doors down immediately, delivering a gritty, hard-hitting assault where every band member plays completely dialed in. It's unabashedly classic hard rock—fueled by the kind of raw urgency that only emerges when musicians craft an outlet out of sheer necessity. There's nothing revolutionary in the formula, but there doesn't need to be; this is meat-and-potatoes rock played by a band that clearly means every note.

Production	7
Lyrics	7
Music	7
Vocals	7
Musicianship	8

SCORE 7.2

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

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

The Regent Theater Los Angeles, CA

Web: badbrains.com

Players: H.R., vocals; Earl Hudson, vocals, drums; Soul Syndicate, dub set; Chuck Treece, vocals; Norwood, bass; Vernon Reid, guitar; Rocky George, guitar; Thomas Prigden, drums; Mario C, DJ

SOMEBODY, NAMELY EVENT ORGANIZER

Kentyah Fraser, noticed that 2026 is the year that hardcore pioneers the Bad Brains turned 50 years old. Well, kinda! Technically, the group formed in 1976 though it was initially called Mind Power. It's not until around 1979 that the original four—guitarist Dr. Know, bassist Darryl Jenifer, and brothers Paul "H.R." Hudson (vocals) and Earl Hudson (drums)—took on the iconic Bad Brains name.

But hey, close e-fuckin-nough, right? Fifty years of that band's music, in any form, is cause for a proper shindig. And boy, did shins ever get dug at the Regent in L.A. on a Tuesday night in late July.

But first, a quick history lesson for those that need one. While there's some debate about the details, the basics are clear: Bad Brains are one of if not *the* first black punk band, and they're certainly the most influential. Detroit proto-punks Death have laid a claim to the "we were first" title, and they might be right. The timeline is fuzzy. But also, who gives a crap? The important thing is that the Bad Brains were there from the start, they created some of the most infamously riotous, energetic hardcore that the scene ever spat out, and their legacy stands strong next to anyone else's, to this very day.

It makes sense, then, that the 50th anniversary of their formation would be of interest, and a group of awesome musicians, connected to the Bad Brains via friendship, influence, or both, came together at the Regent.

There were three sets, each with its own angle. First up, Earl Hudson took to the stage to sing a song of his own, before being joined by H.R., who perched himself on a stool. Earl took the drumsticks for one song, marking the first time the brothers have performed on stage together since 2017, and then H.R. essentially played an abbreviated version of his solo show.

It's tough to imagine a Bad Brains celebration

BAD BRAINS' 50TH CELEBRATION

without H.R. being involved, and his presence really was enough. His dub version of classic Bad Brains track "Attitude" was the highlight.

The second set was dubbed "Soul Brains" which, oddly enough, is a name the original Bad Brains lineup went by between 1998 and 2001.

This band saw veteran Jamaican reggae band Soul Syndicate joined by vocalist Chuck Treece (also a renowned skateboarder, who briefly played drums for Bad Brains in '94). Another former Brains vocalist, Israel Joseph I, was supposed to appear at this celebration but his

absence meant that most of the vocal duties were left to Treece and, to be fair, he did an admirable job.

The dub set was enjoyable, certainly very chill when compared to what would come later. It was odd, therefore, to see two fights break out during this set. It was almost as if some chaps were anticipating the impending mayhem before it got started. Musically, the Soul Syndicate guys were impeccable despite, as we told, a short amount of rehearsal time. A solid effort!

That said, the "hardcore" set was better. The band was tagged Living Fish Brains, a nod to the fact that Treece was joined by Vernon Reid from Living Colour and Norwood (a co-event organizer) from Fishbone, plus Rocky George of Suicidal Tendencies/Cro-Mags fame. With drummer Thomas

Prigden rounding out the lineup, that made for a killer band.

There may have been a couple of false starts but, from start to finish, the set was a triumph. Treece once again let nobody down, while there are few better guitarists on the circuit than Reid. Similarly, Norwood is a beast of a bassist—technically dazzling and capable of laying down a groove that will shake you to your core.

Between the Soul Brains and Living Fish Brains sets, L.A. got to enjoy both sides of the Bad Brains—the two elements that made the group so special. Maybe there will be a similar celebration in 2029 when we can celebrate 50 years of the Bad Brains name—Earl Hudson hinted at as much. For now, though, this was a glorious celebration and a wonderful tribute to a special band. — **Brett Callwood**



Kia Forum Inglewood, CA

Contact: greg.cortez@42west.com

Web: ive-official.com

Players: Gaeul, An Yu-jin, Rei, Jang Won-young, Liz, Leeseo

SHEDDING THEIR YOUTHFUL IMAGE, the South Korean girl group IVE are ready to showcase their mature and confident growth with their latest tour Show What I Am. Since their debut in 2021, the six members have built their identity around the concept of "I," delivering a message rooted in self-confidence and individuality. "GOTCHA (Baddest Eros)" was a great song to start the show as it perfectly encapsulates the group's fierce energy. The group barely paused between the first eight songs, focusing all their energy into their dynamic choreographed dances. The group's catalog is filled with catchy dance-pop hooks and plenty of English lyrics that are fun to sing along to. Unfortunately, it was hard to hear all the members sing at times as the playback music was often louder than some of their voices. However, together the group sounded strong. The best moments were always when they would harmonize together as their voices really complimented each other. It also uplifted the delivery of difficult high-pitched songs like "I AM" and "Holy Moly."

The show also featured solo performances that showcased each member's individual talents. The group sang their solo songs from



their latest album *Revive+*, which each member helped compose. Won-young, arguably the best-known member of the group, got the segment started with her solo track called "8." The performance highlighted Won-young's flirty confidence and the clever wordplay had everyone singing along. Rei followed with a youthful and cute concept for her track "In Your Heart," which showcased her bright and distinct melodic vocal tone. Liz was the only member to come out on stage without any backup dancers for her solo performance of "Unreal." This made her performance feel more intimate, as all eyes were on her as she belted those stable high notes. Gaeul brought a romantic vibe with her hypnotic whispery performance of "Odd." Leeseo's fierce anthem "Super Icy" was a great song to hear live, as

the fast-paced, in-your-face lyrics are a show-stealer. Yu-jin, the group's leader, was the last member to perform with her 2000s-inspired hip-hop track "Force." Yu-jin has an amazing stage presence; she has great rhythm and isn't afraid to belt out to show off her powerful vocals.

The two-hour-long show was filled with a good balance of fan service and performances. The group took several small breaks to chat and get the crowd hyped. For their performance of "WOW" and "Off the Record," the group just vibed along to the songs, waving and smiling to fans. IVE have great stage presence and are very likable. The group set ended on a fun note with "After LIKE," this disco pop had everyone singing, "What's after like?"
- **Jacqueline Naranjo**

3 Clubs Los Angeles, CA

Web: threeclubs.com

Contact: info@threeclubs.com

Players: Loyal Thomas Ruddell (Spike); Lauren Sperling (Any); Lee Thomen; Mike Bowers (Mustard Solo/Ensemble); Susannah Corrington (Willow); Heidi Kendrick (Tara); Kelly Maryanski (Buffy); Ronnie Tullo (Dawn); Matt Zunich (Xander); Phil D'Amore (Sweet)

SOMETIMES, YOU SEE SOMETHING advertised on a venue's calendar, and you must blink to ensure that you read it correctly. Once the details are confirmed, you simply have to attend. There's no way on God's green Earth that this writer could see that Hollywood cocktail bar Three Clubs was hosting a live "parody" version of the musical episode of *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, and not show up.

The "Once More, With Feeling" episode was the seventh of the sixth season of *Buffy*, originally airing in November 2001. So this insane hour of television is a quarter of a century old now and it's developed quite the cult following. There's a soundtrack album available, and it's occasionally screened in movie theaters with attendees encouraged to dress as the characters, *Rocky Horror* style. A live parody was always the logical next step.

"The idea actually came from back in 2014 between me, original Director Jason Fliess, and a few other *Buffy* lovers in Chicago," says Kelly Maryanski, who plays the role of Buffy and had a huge hand in the development of the show. "The first version of this parody show was produced as a one-night-only staged concert



reading at Hamburger Marys in Chicago in 2015. We kept getting requests to bring it back, so we did pretty much every year after that until the pandemic. The cast and team rotated a bit with every reiteration of the show as gags and other stage directions were changed into what it is today."

What it is, is a joy. There are clearly superfans of the show in attendance, people who know every single word. A few did dress up, and they got to strut their stuff on stage at the beginning. Meanwhile, the fact that the show started with a live performance of the "Previously, on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" recap is hilarious, right out of the traps.

The cast are full of beans; their enthusiastic,

joyful, and genuinely heartfelt takes on these beloved characters is to be admired. Josh Whedon has been praised for the music he wrote for this bizarre episode, and they really shine on stage.

Special mention for Ruddell as anti-hero Spike, and Kendrick for a delicate Tara, as well as Maryanski's Buffy. But everybody was a ton of fun.

"This show was originally just going to be another one night only fun bar show, but as the fates have it, we are actually doing a residency at Three Clubs in Hollywood for the rest of 2026, performing once a month on Tuesdays (except for October)," Maryanski told *MC*. Try to get there. - **Brett Callwood**

Echoplex *Los Angeles, CA*

Contact: evanjthomaspr@gmail.com

Web: lordsofacidofficial.com

Players: Praga Khan, keyboards, programming, backing vocals; Carla Harvey, vocals; Olivier Adams, percussion, keyboards, programming; DieTrich Thrall, bass

BELGIAN ELECTRONIC ROCKERS Lords of Acid sure know how to put on a show. The sex-obsessed party animals have been knocking around since 1988, when acid house musician Praga Khan got it into his nut that he wanted a band of his own, and so the Lords of Acid were born, appealing to fans of industrial rock/metal, as well as Khan's existing house aficionados. In the years since, the lineup has shifted with members coming in and out. Khan's the constant—he's the creative force. And there has always been a female frontperson, a strong woman to keep the crowd in check. Oddly but interestingly, a few of the former Lords of Acid singers and musicians have come together as of late, as the Queens of Acid.

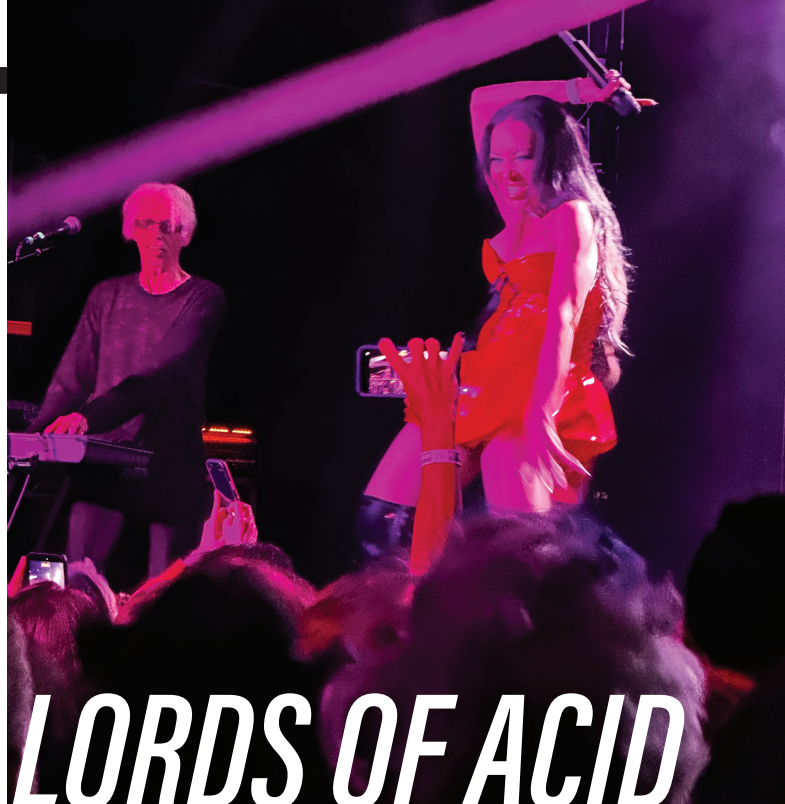
At the Echoplex, in the Echo Park area of Los Angeles just as summer was kicking into gear, the Lords of Acid rolled into town and hosted the most gloriously hedonistic, debauched, and decadent gig that the region has seen in some time. With genres and genders blurred with equal enthusiasm, it felt very much like a throwback to the sort of Berlin cabaret vibes celebrated in Hedwig and the Angry Inch.

Each and every opening act brought it, from

trans electro-rapper Mz. Neon to theatrical synth-pop stars-in-waiting Tony & the Kiki, from larger-than-life diva Princess Superstar to dark Denver crooners Dead on a Sunday. The whole event was about a celebration of sexual freedom, and freedom of sexuality. And in these dark times, that's something to take Pride in.

All of that said, nobody was stealing Lords of Acid's thunder. The most recent addition to the ranks is powerhouse singer Carla Harvey, formerly of the Butcher Babies and also a member of The Violent Hour. While previous LOA singers have had a sultry growl and coo, Harvey is a proper singer and it initially makes for an odd fit. She's also a tremendous show-woman though, and the pairing works.

There are some new tunes, notably "Karaoke Superstar," featuring guest vocals from the returning Princess Superstar. The dudes from Tony & the Kiki also pop back up for their recent collab with LOA—"El Mundo Está Loco."



Meanwhile, Harvey does a great job on tunes from the early albums, including "Drink My Honey," "Rough Sex/Take Control," and the closing "I Sit on Acid." There's no subtlety here, but we don't want any. The Echoplex simply embraced the filth and had a blast doing it.

—Brett Callwood

The Hall at Elsewhere *Brooklyn, NY*

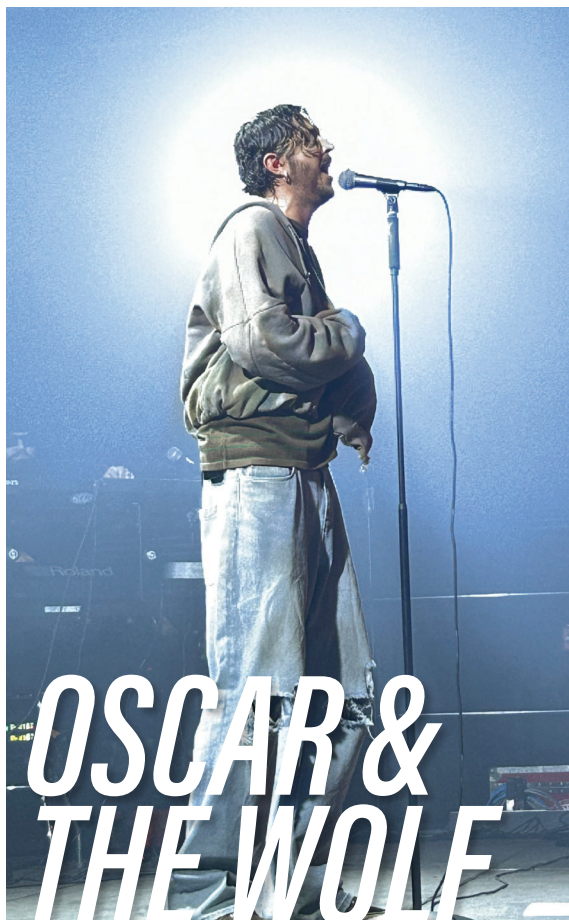
Web: oscarandthewolf.com

Contact: inge@goldatl.as

Players: Oscar & the Wolf (Max Colombie)

IN THE HEART OF BROOKLYN, Belgian artist Max Colombie, better known by his moniker Oscar & the Wolf, took to the stage for his first New York City show. Accompanied by only a DJ and guitar and in unassuming street clothes, Colombie walked into a flood of light and simply began to sing. The Hall at Elsewhere is an intimate venue, but fans filled the room from wall to wall. During the third song, "Dancing Machine," Colombie encouraged everyone to jump around to the rapid heartbeat of the track, smiling broadly and talking with the crowd. Strobing lights and thrumming bass washed over the audience as they danced and jumped in time with the music. Frequently, he would toss directions out, asking everyone to dance, move, and throw their hands in the air as if tonight was the last night on Earth, with the audience rapt and eager to participate.

Despite the stripped back accompaniment, creeping synth phrases, grooving beats, and reverb in the vocals immersed the room in sound. The arrangements showcased Colombie's dynamic lyrical skills, sometimes slow and melancholy and other times quick and clubby. In "Princes," dramatic strings and a swelling synth bass shook the room but



abruptly switched to staccato strings and speeding hi-hats found in '90s hip-hop. In "Think About You," Colombie introduced the audience to the music genre "lullaby club"—where dreamy ballads are played over club beats. He feels that most of his music can fit in this genre, with slow, romantic vocal phrasing paired with intense and unyielding synth rhythms.

Earlier this year, Oscar & the Wolf released a cover of R.E.M.'s "Losing My Religion," and Colombie eagerly shared it with the crowd. Low, held notes from a piano rumbled under dramatic vibrato in his vocals. Swelling bass thundered from below, rising up to wash over the crowd. It felt like a religious experience, ethereal and mythical, with the audience echoing his words back at the chorus. Colombie's cover delivered more yearning and heartbreak than the original, softening R.E.M.'s rock edge. Instead of a true cover, Colombie smoothly blended his voice into the track.

Oscar & the Wolf has since released another single, "Safe and Sound," with S10, and will be touring Europe this summer. Colombie frequently plays festivals, and even performed at a Met Gala party in May, so keep an eye on Oscar & the Wolf's schedule for future shows.

—Emily Mills

Ro Cham Beau *Detroit, MI*

Contact: oliviavangoormusic@gmail.com

Web: oliviavangoor.com

Players: Olivia Van Goor, vocals; Mike Harrison, piano; Jeff Pedraz, acoustic bass; Dave Zwolinski, drums.

DETROIT-BASED VOCALIST Olivia Van Goor kept the spirit of bebop and traditional jazz alive at a recent appearance at one of the Motor City's best new listening rooms Ro Cham Beau. Right from the get go Van Goor possessed a welcoming demeanor encouraging the audience to clap along on Eddie Jefferson's brisk and swinging "Things are Getting Better." As is a tradition in improvisational circles some vocalists inject, not only their own arrangement to another composer's tune, but alternate lyrics as well. That was the case here where Van Goor uttered personalized references to the joys of playing at the very nightclub they were performing in.

Irving Berlin's "Blue Skies" began with some light interaction between Van Goor's mellifluous phrasing and Jeff Pedraz's gently plucked bass lines. Mike Harrison's lithe keyboard entry blended perfectly with the leader's seemingly effortless scat singing. Cannonball Adderley's slow and bluesy "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy," once again, proved a great vehicle for Van Goor to add her own original lyrics to such an established piece. Her inspiring words on humanity, love, and forgiveness seemed to really connect with the crowd. Digging into the deep tracks, the



quartet took a normally lush Billie Holiday ballad, and transformed "Crazy He Calls Me" into a brisk top shelf burner. Dave Zwolinski stepped out toward the latter section of the piece and brought it home. They followed that with another Holiday classic called "God Bless the Child." Van Goor locked in nicely with Harrison who really got inside the melody. "Nature Boy," a staple from the late '50s/early '60s by Nat "King" Cole, gets a thoughtful and ponderous solo intro by Pedraz. That leads into a slow and enchanting samba that dreamily drifts into the New Orleans feel of Louie Armstrong's "La Vie En Rose."

Set two opened with Van Goor's faithful take on the Judy Garland classic "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." She also made reference to Christmas in July as she performed a selection off her 2025 vinyl release *Waiting for Santa*. Pedraz opened the gem "Honeysuckle Rose"

with solo bowed bass. That was a nice lead-in to Harrison's Fats Waller-like stride runs and melodic leads. The light swing of Blossom Dearie's "Sweet Georgie Fame" served as a brilliant vehicle that displayed Van Goor's sweet sense of enunciation and phrasing. In maintaining that light-hearted fare Van Goor offered a tune off her *Don't Be Mad at Me* album called "Sweetness." It is an auto-biographical tribute to the singer's love of chocolate and swung in a bluesy and tongue in cheek manner. The quartet wrapped up the night with a tribute to Ella Fitzgerald's "Moonlight Serenade" followed by the finale, where everyone took a solo, Jerome Kern's "Look for the Silver Lining."

Olivia Van Goor has an active performance schedule throughout the year. For the best in straight ahead jazz, with a velvet touch, you can't go wrong. - **Eric Harabadian**

The Laurie Beechman Theater *New York, NY*

Contact: phil.robinson@roomfulofsky.com

Web: instagram.com/philrobinsonmusic

Players: Phil Robinson, vocals, guitar, harmonica; Anthony Surace, electric guitar; Jason Vitelli, keyboards, vocals, sax, guitar; John Carlos Feliciano, bass; Ryan McBride, drums; Swagata Biswas, vocals; Lisa Trenary, vocals; Samantha Echo, vocals; Heather Conrad, vocals; Maxie Poe, vocals, percussion.

ONE WAY TO RING IN YOUR birthday is to book a performance and invite your music colleagues and friends to share the stage. That's just how Phil Robinson chose to celebrate his big day. Treating us to 90 minutes of his mix of pop, rock, and blues, Robinson covered the gamut with originals and covers. Kicking off the set with Bon Jovi's "Livin' on a Prayer," followed by George Michael's "Careless Whisper," the show ramped up the mood and enthusiasm of both performers and audience. In "25 Miles," one of his originals, Robinson recalls the drive home from college after an exhausting semester. The long anticipatory lead up, almost spoken, breaks into a quasi-frenzied rant conveying the urgency to reach his destination. One can't help being all in with "Through the Middle," with its infectious hook that repeats numerous times, making it hard to forget.

Widely known for his harmonica playing, lending his talents to many other artists, a highpoint in the show was "Transcendental Cowboy." The playing was smooth and polished adding further sonic dimension to the set.

Not knowing what a typical Robinson



show looks like and strictly from a staging perspective, less might be more. The crowded space and numerous female backup singers in a rainbow of colored dresses, made it hard to take in everything simultaneously. Because Robinson shares the stage with so many performers the focus on him is sometimes deflected. Moving the singers to the back or sides and featuring each when the spotlight is on them would keep Robinson front and center. But he easily grabs it back with his gift

of gab and does not leave any empty moments. There's always an anecdote to share or an endearing quip, "I'm New Jersey's third favorite singer," he proclaims. Or a shout out to his mom who couldn't attend the show.

He closed with Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah," always a poignant note to end on.

Overall, it was an entertaining and celebratory evening from a performer who knows how to give his audience exactly what they came for. - **Ellen Woloshin**

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N. Hollywood CA 91601
818-505-9537
Email: jay@2activate.com
Contact: Jay Warsinske & Madeleine Smith
How to Submit: by email only

35 SOUND

P.O. Box 217
Pacific Palisades, CA 90272
310-454-1280 Fax 310-454-3443
Email: gmarq@35sound.com
Web: 35sound.com
Music Supervisors: G. Marq Roswell, Carter Little
Credits: Man With the Iron Fists, Half the Sky, Birth Story, The Bronx is Burning
How to Submit: no unsolicited material

5 ALARM/SLEEPSTREAM MUSIC

2140 N. Hollywood Way, #11028
Burbank, CA 91505
626-304-1698, 800-322-7879
Email: terrilyn@rescuerecords.net
Web: 5alarmmusic.com, sleepstreammusic.com

AIR-EDEL USA

1416 N. La Brea Ave.
Hollywood, CA 90028
323-802-1670
Web: airedel.com
Credits: see web
How to Submit: does not accept unsolicited composer submissions

Additional location:

Air-Edel Associates Ltd.
18 Rodmarton St.,
London W1U 8BJ
+44 (0)207 486 6466

AUDIO MOTION MUSIC

600 Biscayne Drive
West Palm Beach, FL
305-859-1697
Email: info@audiomotionmusic.com
Web: audiomotionmusic.com
Additional locations:
Atlanta, Boston, New York, London

BROOKE WENTZ - THE RIGHTS WORKSHOP

230 California St. Suite 602
San Francisco, CA 94111
415-561-3333
Email: bmw@rightsworkshop.com
Web: rightsworkshop.com
Contact: Brooke Wentz
Comments: Music director for ESPN, TechTV, Times Square Millennium Celebration, award-winning soundtrack producer; extensive music and IP rights experience. MBA.
How to Submit: submissions@rightsworkshop.com

CINECALL SOUNDTRACKS

P.O. Box 854
Red Bank, NJ. 07701
732-450-8882
Web: cinecall.com
Contact: George McMorrow
How to Submit: no unsolicited material

CLEARSONGS

244 Fifth Ave, Suite 2262
New York, NY 10001
212-627-8767
Email: jim@clearsongs.com
Web: clearsongs.com
Contact: Jim Black
Credits: HBO, Artisan, Lion's Gate, October Films, USA Films, Oxygen Music Works, Miramax, Columbia, Searchlight
How to Submit: no unsolicited material

Additional location:

8240 Beverly Blvd., Ste. 15
Los Angeles, CA 90048
323-419-3898
Email: gabe@clearsongs.com
Contact: Gabe Hilfer

CODA MUSIC SERVICES, INC.

17345 Marlin Pl.
Lake Balboa, CA 91406
818-317-9332
Email: margaret@codamusicservices.com, kelly@codamusicservices.com
Web: codamusicservices.com
Music Supervisors: Margaret Guerra Rogers, Kelly Bennett, Alvaro Morello, Dayna Demaine
Credits: 30 Días con Anuel, HBO Live on Max Series, Así Se Baila, Enamorándonos, Real Women Have Curves, East Los High, La Voz, En Letra de Otro, Mariposa del Compo, Decades of Fire, Jodi Arias Story, Pequeños Gigantes, La Banda, Escaramuza: Riding from the Heart, Tortilla Heaven, Tales of Masked Men, The Outsiders (series), Highlander (series); Price of Glory, Chicano Rock! The Sounds of East Los Angeles, Gloria Estefan: Sangre Yoruba, For Love or Country: The Arturo Sandoval Story
How to Submit: no unsolicited material

CREATIVE CONTROL

9942 Culver Blvd. Unit #2
Culver City, CA 90232
310-845-4146
Email: info@creativecontrolent.com
Web: creativecontrolent.com
Contact: Joel C. High
How to Submit: Email before sending material

DAVID FRANCO, PRODUCER

International Productions
Film/TV/Music
Sherman Oaks, CA, 91403-USA
Cell: 310-721-3977, 818-922-2096

DE ROCHE MUSIC INC.

18246 Los Alimos Street
Porter Ranch, CA 91426
818-216-6493
Email: dayrowshay@gmail.com
Contact: Jonathan deRoche, Ross deRoche
Credits: Comic-Con San Diego (2023), John Wick-Chapter 4 (2023), Boogeyman (2023), Pearl (2022), Dayshift (2022), The Swearing Jar (2022)
Deadpool 2 (2018), the Magnificent Seven (2016), SWAT, Castle, Guardians of the Galaxy, The Spy Who Dumped Me
How to Submit: no unsolicited material

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78677 Rainswept Way

Palm Desert, CA 92211-3035

760-972-4559

WB/Burbank office 818-795-4235

Email: daniel@desertcam.com or chip@desertcam.com

Web: desertcamstudios.com

Contacts: Chip Miller (Director/Producer/Writer/Music Producer) & or & Daniel Pomeroy (VP Music Supervisor/Film & TV Licensing)

How to Submit: For unsolicited materials, CD and/or DVD physical formats only. For industry submission products, e-cards, music transfer links or CD and/or DVD formats

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Web: facebook.com/dondi.bastone
Credits: Election, The Crew, The Descendants, more
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814 S. Spring St., 8th Fl.
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310-399-6900
Email: paul@emotomusic.com
Web: emotomusic.com
Comments: work with various filmmakers
How to Submit: no unsolicited material

GOODNIGHT KISS MUSIC

(323) 393-0634
Email: janetfisher@gmail.com
Web: goodnightkiss.com
Contact: Janet Fisher
Credits: HBO, Showtime, NBC
How to Submit: please see web

IDM MUSIC

1178 Broadway
New York, NY 10001
Email: miriam.westercappel@idmmusic.com
Web: idmmusic.com
Comments: Music licensing and music clearance, music representation; master and publishing, music supervision, catalogue and copyright admin.
Credits: ABC, BBDO, CBS, Disney, Fox, HBO, MTV, Showtime, Grey Worldwide, NBC
Check site for full list.
How to Submit: send us an email

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Porter Ranch, CA 91326
818-700-9655
Email: rivers@sylvesterrivers.com, sr@imc-entertainment.com
Web: sylvesterrivers.com
Contact: Sylvester Rivers
Music Supervisors: Sylvester Rivers

INAUDIBLE

Los Angeles, CA
818-385-3400 Fax 818-385-3456
Email: info@inaudibleprod.com
Web: inaudibleprod.com
Music Supervisors: Peter Afterman, Alison Litton, Jane Berry
How to Submit: No unsolicited material

LICENSE YOUR MUSIC

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Contact: A&R
How to Submit: email streaming links only

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Pasadena, CA 91102
626-441-0400
Email: martune@sbcglobal.net
Web: martunemusic.com

MICHAEL WELSH PRODUCTIONS

2215 Lambert Dr.
Pasadena, CA 91107
626-796-0961
Contact: Michael Welsh
Comments: Music searches and clearances.
Credits: Macy's, Gap, American Eagle Outfitters, DKNY, FedEx, Old Navy, Mitsubishi, Ford, Banana Republic, Yahoo, Nokia, Chivas Regal, Payless Shoes
How to Submit: No unsolicited material

MIKE FLICKER MUSIC SERVICES

Burbank, CA
Web: mikeflicker.com
Contact: Mike Flicker
Music Supervisors: Mike Flicker, CEO
Credits: Viacom, 20th Century Fox, Showtime, Granada Entertainment, WB, ABC
How to Submit: no unsolicited material

MORRIS & YOUNG

310-699-7026
Email: music@morris-young.com
Web: morris-young.com
Contact: Wendy Morris
Credits: The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, Project Runway, CBS Sports Spectacular

MUSIC ORANGE

1 Icehouse Alley
San Francisco, CA 94111
415-398-6264
Email: info@musicorange.com
Web: musicorange.com

MUSIC WITHOUT BORDERS (MWB)

159 Fishing Trail
Stamford, CT 06903
203-428-6720
Email: info@musicconsultant.net, shows@musicconsultant.net
Web: musicwithoutborders.com
Contact: Steve Lurie, Founder and President

NAXOS OF AMERICA

113 Seaboard Lane, Suite B-100
Franklin, TN 37067
615-771-9393
Email: customer.service@naxos.com
Web: naxos.com
How to Submit: no unsolicited material

NEOPHONIC, INC.

Los Angeles, CA
310-550-0124
Web: neophonic.com
Contact: Evyen Klean, music supervisor; PJ Bloom, music supervisor
How to Submit: We do not accept unsolicited music submissions.

OWL EYE RECORDS

P.O. Box 4789
Walnut Creek, CA 94596-0789
415-449-1886
Contact: Sable Winters
Email: license@owleyerecords.com
Web: owleyerecords.com
Submission: Send streaming links only. No

unsolicited attachments, CDs or DVDs.
Comments: All music genres. Original material only.

PEACE BISQUIT

Brooklyn, NY
718-789-1689
Email: staff@peacebisquit.com

Web: peacebisquit.com

How to Submit: no unsolicited material

PUSH.audio

Email: sdudley@push.audio
Web: push.audio
Music Supervisors: Scott Dudley, Corey English, Kirk Dudley
Directory of Film/TV
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Credits: BRIT Awards, FOX Sports, ESPN, NBA/TNT, Redbull, MTV, VH1, WSOX/NBC, FOX, SBNation

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Studio City, CA 91604
310-428-5924
Email: info@reelent.com
Web: reelent.com
Contact: Mark Wolfson
Credits: The Playtone Company, Mi Vida Loca, Philadelphia, Stop Making Sense, Silence of the Lambs, Colors
How to Submit: Email submission request

REEL SOUND, INC.

818-618-REEL (7335)
Email: reelsoundinc@aol.com
Contact: Michael Becker
How to Submit: Email before submitting

RIGHTS WORKSHOP, THE

230 California St. Suite #602
San Francisco, CA 94111
415-561-3333
Email: submissions@rightsworkshop.com, bmw@rightsworkshop.com
Web: rightsworkshop.com
Contact: Maryam Soleiman, Brooke Wentz
Credits: La Mission, Everyday Sunshine: The Story of Fishbone, The Devil & Daniel Johnston, American Hardcore
How to Submit: Direct any content to the email address

RIPTIDE MUSIC GROUP

9469 Jefferson Blvd., Ste. 100
Culver City, CA 90232
310-437-4380
Email: contact@riptidemusic.com
Web: riptidemusic.com
How to Submit: no music submission

SL FELDMAN & ASSOCIATES

33 Hazelton Ave, 2nd floor
Toronto, ON, M5R 2E3 Canada
416-598-0067
Email: info@feldman-agency.com
Web: feldman-agency.com
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How to Submit: no unsolicited material accepted

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818-505-9600
Web: smcartists.com
Contact: Otto Vavrin II
How to Contact: call before submitting material

SONG & FILM, LLC

4079 Governor Dr. Ste. 185
San Diego, CA 92122
802-279-3233, 224-850-4129
Web: songandfilm.com
Contact: Glory Reinstein
Comments: One-Stop song licensing for independent artist; S&F has placed songs in TV shows including NetFlix, film, and sport networks and events.
How to Submit: Submissions are only accepted in April, August and December. Send your three strongest songs.

SONGFINDER

Atlanta, GA
404-437-7978
Email: info@songfinderlicensing.com
Web: songfinderlicensing.com
Contact: Melissa Love, Sr. Director

SOUNDTRACK MUSIC ASSOCIATES

1601 North Sepulveda Blvd. #579
Manhattan Beach, CA 90266
310-260-1023
Email: info@soundtrk.com
Web: soundtrk.com
Contact: John Tempereau, Roxanne Lippel, Koyo Sonae
Music Supervisors: George Acogny, Anastasia Brown, Kathy Dayak, Jason Eldredge, Matt Kierscht, Frankie Pine, Michelle Silverman, Koyo Sonae
How to Submit: no unsolicited material

STEELMAN STUDIOS

818-465-3357
Email: steelmanstudios@live.com
Web: steelmanstudios.net
Contact: John Tempereau, Roxanne Lippel, Koyo Sonae
Credits: TV Networks, Film Studios, Ad Agencies
How to Submit: no unsolicited material
Basic rate: call for info

TLS MUSIC SERVICES

818-848-2330
Email: tracy@tisms.com
Web: tisms.com
Music Supervisor: Tracy Lynch-Sanchez
Credits: Napoleon Dynamite, 20th Century Fox, Universal Studios Home Entertainment, MGM
How to Submit: No unsolicited material

TRUE TALENT MANAGEMENT

9663 Santa Monica Blvd., #320
Dept. WEB
Beverly Hills, CA 90210
310-560-1290
Email: ineedpr@truetalentmgmt.com
Web: truetalentmgmt.com
How to Submit: accepts unsolicited material

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Nashville, TN 37201
615-244-8944
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Styles: Country, rock, singer-songwriter
Clients: Shania Twain, Toby Keith, Willie Nelson, Ryan Adams, George Strait, Reba McEntire, more
Credits: Lost Highway, Mercury, MCA, Dreamworks
How to Submit: no unsolicited material

UNIVERSAL PRODUCTION MUSIC

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310-865-4455
Email: production.upm.us@umusic.com
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VERSUSMEDIA

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Credits: Over 900 independent films worldwide
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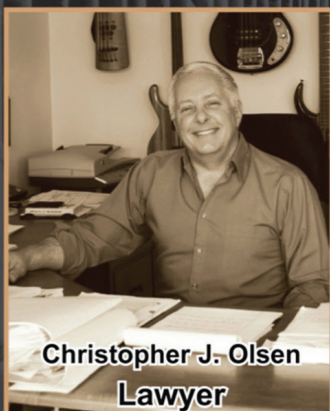
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Two Bits

BIT ONE: WHAT WOULD MUSIC SOUND LIKE ON MARS?

Scott Beibin defies easy categorization. He is an inventor, artist, musician, and self-taught engineer who has presented his work at Harvard, Stanford, and Oxford. He is passionate about the intersection of science and art, and attributes his accomplishments to “focus, open mindedness, and making it a point to stay humble and seek out really good teachers.”

That combination of DIY tenacity and rigorous intellectual curiosity has taken Beibin from running Bloodlink Records, an influential underground record label, to 3-D scanning the surfaces of ancient Egyptian monuments with LiDAR, and now to building an audio filter that simulates what music would sound like on Mars.

Early Film Experiments

He co-founded the Lost Film Fest in 1999—a touring video/storytelling show that predated YouTube by years and helped break what would become known as viral video. He toured the globe projecting clips like Heavy Metal Parking Lot and early Yes Men footage, to Sundance, then South by Southwest, long before any of it had a name. It was through the Lost Film Fest that he and Elizabeth Jane Cole began managing the Yes Men, the political pranksters known for corporate impersonations that made global headlines. Their company Evil Twin Booking still manages them today.

Listening to the Ancients

In recent years, Beibin has turned his attention to a field called archaeoacoustics—the study of spaces created in antiquity for the deliberate propagation of sound.

“Things that fall under archaeoacoustics would be the study of how sound propagates in ancient, constructed spaces,” he explains, “ceremonial spaces like churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples of all sorts, anywhere you see architecture designed to accentuate resonant properties—like at Chichen Itza—where you realize the acoustics were likely deliberately engineered.”

His method combines precision LiDAR surface scanning and photogrammetry with impulse response audio recording. LiDAR works by firing a laser across a surface and using multi-camera triangulation to construct an extraordinarily detailed 3D map—a digital fingerprint of every cut, scrape, and tool mark on a stone. “With a LiDAR scanner you can measure volume and see tool marks not visible to the naked eye—where faint cut and scrape marks on pieces of hard granite become plain as day,” he explains. His hope is that the engineering feats of the past are made clearer with 3D scanning and believes the process will become more common because modern iPhones come with built in advanced LiDAR capabilities. So far, he

has done preliminary scans in Egypt for a larger research project at sites like the Great Pyramid of Giza, The Osirion at Abydos, Saqqara, Abu Ghorab, Elephantine Island, Dendera, and more.

His impulse response recordings capture the acoustic signature of a space, which he then convolves into reverb filters and visualizes inside 3D environments reconstructed from the LiDAR data by his AncientScan and Archaeoacoustic Artifacts team. (This is the same process used to create virtual guitar cabinets and reverb units.) He is currently working to secure formal permission from Egypt's Ministry of Antiquities to conduct the first true acoustic survey of the Great Pyramid and the Saqqara complex, which will be backed by multiple academic institutions. “I'm looking forward to returning to Egypt in the future with a professional team,” he says.

Music on Mars?

If archaeoacoustics asks what ancient spaces sounded like, Beibin's most recent project asks something stranger: what would music sound like on Mars?

The answer begins with data from the Mars Perseverance rover's SuperCam team, which carried two small microphones—one ranging from 20Hz to 20kHz, another reaching 50kHz—and used them to measure the Martian speed of sound. By recording lasers zapping rocks at known distances, and tracking the acoustic signature of the Ingenuity helicopter, the team analyzed sound propagation. Their published findings revealed that Mars has two speeds of sound: below 240Hz, sound travels at 240 meters per second; above 240Hz, it increases to 250 m/s. For comparison, Earth's speed of sound at sea level is 343 m/s. And because Mars's atmosphere is 170 times less dense than Earth's and composed of 97 percent carbon dioxide, sound above roughly 5kHz becomes inaudible entirely.

Beibin obtained the raw data through connections at JPL—friends Kryss Blackwood and John Carr, who introduced him to SuperCam team member Baptiste Chide—and set to work building a filter that would simulate these conditions. An album is planned for 2027 and will include the original dry field recording, two versions of the filter applied to it, and a booklet explaining the methodology.

Scott wishes to acknowledge the following collaborators: Julius Dobos, Michael Flood, Yul Jorgensen, Felipe Cuenca Galán, John Knott,



Caz Coronel, Sherif Errefae, Savej, Chris “Alaska” Rose, Carl Golembeski, and Omar Auf. Inspiration from Carl Hayden Smith and Donnie Savej.

Scott Beibin's work can be found at scottbeibinstudios.com.

BIT TWO: VINYL, BUT HOW?

The resurgence of vinyl records has engendered a lot of wild talk but pressing vinyl records is surprisingly complicated. Like the saying goes: “Don't try this at home, kids.” Yes, you can Google pressing plants by price, looking for a deal, and then attempt to work with their sales team but honestly, it's not as easy as it looks. For one thing, the listed prices are deceptive, with many hidden costs and upsells. It can be cheaper in the long run to work with a specialist who will give you an honest, all-in price.

The Ghost In The Machine

I've been handling vinyl production for my clients for five years now and have learned that whatever *can* go wrong *will* go wrong. In my experience, nearly *each* vinyl project runs into some difficulty along the way, starting with the actual music files and artwork submitted by the artist. Everything must conform to the pressing plant's specifications, and those vary greatly from plant to plant. It's an obstacle course, even to an expert. In future episodes, I will be teaching you *exactly* how to navigate this complicated process step-by-step.

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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