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R A I N M A K E R S

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—J. COLE

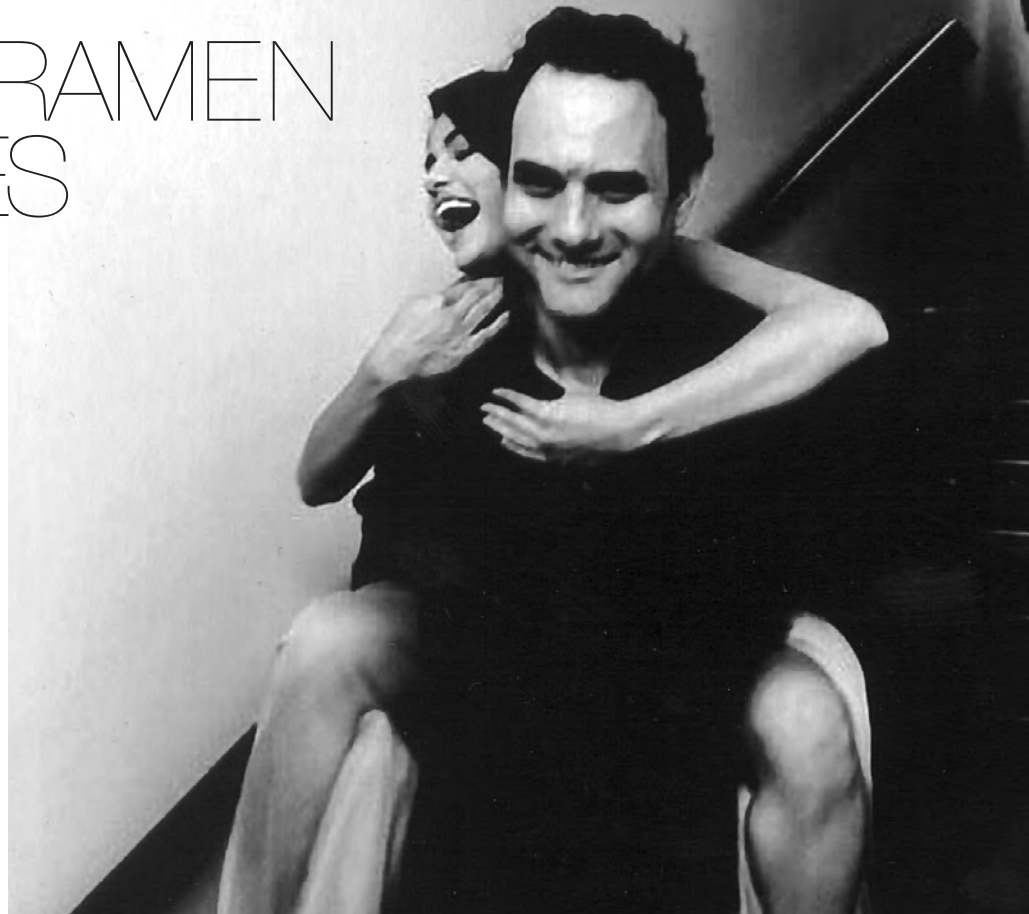
# JOHN JANICK

## FROM RAMEN TO RICHES

“**J**ohn Janick has consistently shown why he is widely regarded as one of the most talented, innovative

and entrepreneurial executives in the music business today and will be a key player in the future generation of industry leaders. He is the ideal executive to be writing the next chapter in IGA's illustrious history.”

Those were the words uttered by UMG overlord Sir Lucian Grainge when he announced the then-36-year-old executive's promotion to Chairman/CEO of Interscope Geffen A&M back in 2014. Two years earlier, Grainge had handpicked Janick as Jimmy Iovine's eventual successor at the helm of the company Iovine had steered to consistent dominance for more than two decades. What's more, Jimmy was all-in on Janick as the ideal choice to carry on Interscope's



*The Chairman/CEO with Selena Gomez*

considerable legacy—the charismatic Iovine recognizing the thoughtful, low-key Janick as an entrepreneurial kindred spirit.

Janick's stratospheric ascent wasn't exactly a shocker. At the typically awkward and confusing age of 18 years old—when most college kids are

“finding themselves” and buckling under the anxiety of a quarter-life crisis—the Starke, Miss., native was making music history. As the story goes, Janick started the now-famous indie *Fueled by Ramen* with friend and *Less Than Jake* drummer Vinnie Fiorello out of his dorm room at the



University of Florida in Gainesville.

In 1998, FBR released **Jimmy Eat World's** eponymous EP, as much a game-changer for the label as it was for the Arizona-based band. Five years later, Janick scored his next breakthrough with the release of **Fall Out Boy's** *Take This to Your Grave*, which would go on to become the group's first gold album. "A few years in, I kept seeing flyers for this band from Chicago called Fall Out Boy," Janick recalled in an interview with *Entrepreneur*. "I remember thinking, 'That name is so horrible.' But when I finally checked them out, they were so good. I gave them a call and signed them immediately over the telephone, just based on their music and vibes... Fall Out Boy obviously went on to have multiple platinum albums—they were our first really big success.

"This photo of me and [Fall Out Boy's] **Pete Wentz**, and some of the guys from **The Academy Is...** and **Cobra Starship**, was taken backstage after a show in 2007. Fall Out Boy and **Panic! At the Disco**, another band on our roster, had gone platinum by then. It's crazy to think about where I am now—running Interscope, living in L.A. with my wife and two kids—compared to where I was then, having spent years sleeping on an air mattress in a dorm room. This picture sits in my office and reminds me of that hustle, but mostly that Fueled by Ramen was a family. We worked together, ate together, played basketball at night together."

It was his artist-first heart, along with the signature chance-taking gut of a true entrepreneur and remarkable intuition—specifically, the ability to stay ahead of the curve with a nose for trends before they happen—that cemented Janick's space in the upper echelon. "I tried to emulate Interscope as a small indie label in Florida," he explained in a 2017 *HITS* interview. "When you think about the history of Interscope, you think about **Dr. Dre** and **No Doubt** and **Nine Inch Nails** and **Lady Gaga** and **Eminem**—the list goes on and on. It's all these artists who don't fit into a box, who have this vision."

Following a move to Manhattan, his first big business coup resulted in **Warner**



*With Lady Gaga*

**Music Group** buying Fueled by Ramen. The year was 2008—not long after the platinum certifications of Panic!'s *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out* (2005) and **Paramore's** *Riot!* (2007). The success of his indie roster persuaded Warner

to distribute his imprint and, in 2009, elevate him to Co-President of **Atlantic** subsidiary **Elektra**, where he helped nurture mainstream acts like **Bruno Mars** alongside **Mike Caren**. He personally signed **fun.** in 2010, and in the



*This 2007 photo with Fall Out Boy's Pete Wentz and members of The Academy Is... and Cobra Starship sits in Janick's Interscope office.*

year that followed, the band dropped “We Are Young”—the career-changing lead single off *Some Nights* that would go on to become nine-times platinum. fun. won the Best New Artist **Grammy** in 2013, but by that point, Janick had

gotten out of his Warner deal early and was on his way west to Santa Monica.

Before we go any further, it's necessary to point that, in order to understand the importance of John, you need to understand the importance of Jimmy.

If you know anything about the music business—or you read the first edition of *Rainmakers*—you're fully aware of the utter legend that is Jimmy Iovine. Think of Iovine as the **Bill Belichick** of records. As **Bono** put it, the man's a “heat-seeking





Top to bottom: Steve Berman, Janick and Dennis Dennehy feeling maad love for Kendrick Lamar; with Benny Blanco, Joie Manda and Tim Glover

missile” that “happens to you like a virus.” The top-notch engineer/producer, who stood proudly behind key albums from the likes of **John Lennon**, **Bruce Springsteen**, **Patti Smith**, **Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers** and **Stevie Nicks**, went on to rule a wildly successful Interscope Records for 24 years. For quite some time, he was widely considered the greatest label head of the modern era, before he decided to shift gears and spearhead pivotal music initiatives at a little company called **Apple**, launching **Apple Music** in 2015 and significantly aiding in the formation of today’s streaming-based industry.

By the time versatile newcomer Janick stepped through the Universal doors in October 2012 to become Iovine’s right-hand man and heir apparent, Jimmy had already lost considerable interest in the record world. The label co-founder, who’d launched Interscope with **Ted Field** back in 1990, had been playing in other sandboxes for some time at this point, plotting the birth of **Beats Electronics** with co-founder Dr. Dre in 2006 and joining *American Idol* as a mentor in 2011. So it wasn’t surprising that he made the leap over to Apple, which bought Beats for \$3 billion in tandem, triggering the ascension of his handpicked successor to Chairman/CEO of the House That Jimmy Built.

When it came to the matter of who was capable of perpetuating such a legacy, the list of candidates was a short one indeed. Enter Janick—who stepped into Iovine’s gargantuan shoes with gusto and understated flair. With a cool confidence, Janick unblinkingly took on this considerable challenge and proved that he was a force, as he has done and continues to do time and time again.

**T**he fall of 2012 was a whirlwind. Not long after Janick started at Interscope as President/COO, he was diagnosed with cancer. Fortunately, he was dealing with one of the most treatable





Janick, Berman, Brenda Romano and team with Imagine Dragons during platinum celebration

“John lifts the people around him and calls as little attention to himself as possible—he’s the best kind of leader.” —Dan Reynolds, Imagine Dragons

cancers, which was at a very early stage when detected, and he kept his condition on the downlow.

“I had surgery, then had the option to have chemo or monitor to see if it spread,” Janick eventually revealed in a commendably candid interview with *Variety* in 2018. “There was about a 65% chance if I monitored that I would never have to get chemo. I chose to monitor, and unfortunately last October the cancer showed up in a lymph node. Again, it was a very early stage. The doctor wanted me to get an MRI of my head also, and they discovered a benign tumor unrelated to the cancer. I did nine weeks of chemo for the cancer, then recuperated for four months and had the brain surgery to remove the pituitary adenoma.

“I’ve had two scans since finishing the chemo and the cancer has been

killed,” he said with palpable relief. “They got it out and, knock on wood, it’s good. My hair is growing back, and I’m not as pasty as I was... I didn’t want to hide it, but I wasn’t going to make it a big deal. So I brought in my key staff and tried to make it as positive as I could. Being in this business, you don’t want to be vulnerable in any way. For the company and for me personally, I’d rather people know that I’m not invincible, [even though] my mentality is to just power through things and get through it with work.”

Quiet resilience defines Janick in more ways than one. Not a loud or boastful guy, he’s propelled by an innate passion and the zest that derives from uncovering hidden gems. These attributes apply to both his work and personal life. Cancer may have threatened his two decade-plus career, but he never

let it slow him down, as Interscope’s momentum continued without a hitch.

Immediately following his 2012 arrival, Janick had made his mark with the breakthroughs of previously signed acts **Kendrick Lamar** and **Imagine Dragons**, while shepherding **OneRepublic** to the biggest album of the band’s career. Imagine Dragons’ debut LP, *Night Visions*—the now two-times-platinum set that houses 10-times platinum “Radioactive” and five-times platinum “Demons”—came out right before he got to the company. But once he arrived, it was his team—fronted by IGA Vice Chairman/marketing Yoda **Steve Berman**, Janick’s close collaborator throughout his tenure—that set up the long-term plan.

“I remember when John had a conversation with **Nick Holmstén** and **Troy Carter** at **Spotify** about this new idea



EVP Urban Operations Nicole Wyskoarko, Grade A Productions' George "G Money" Dickinson, VP A&R Aaron "Dash" Sherrod, Grade A's Lil Bibby, EVP Joie Manda and Janick with Juice WRLD

to have artists do vertical videos for playlists," Berman offers. "He came back to the company, explained it and then did not stop until we got it done. Every day, all day, he drove us to create this new format as an opportunity for artists to engage with their fans. The first one for the industry was **Selena Gomez's** 'Bad Liar.' This was John moving not only Interscope but the whole business forward."

"Berman—being here for more than 25 years and just being a rock at the company—has been amazing, and he's a great partner," Janick confirmed in a 2018 *HITS* Q&A. "It goes without saying that [longtime promotion head] **Brenda Romano** is one of the best. What's great about her is, when it comes time to drop the hammer, she can really drive a record home. And I'm really excited about what [EVP/Chief Revenue Officer] **Gary Kelly** has done with his [combined revenue and digital] team."

"John is very human and other-worldly all at once—a genius in sheep's clothing," Imagine Dragons frontman **Dan Reynolds** marvels. "He's very humble and reserved, and yet when he opens his mouth, it's always methodical and wise. He has always allowed me the complete freedom to be the artist I want—while also being a mentor and listening ear. John lifts the people around him and calls as little attention to himself as possible—he's the best kind of leader."

Band manager **Mac Reynolds** holds Janick in similarly high regard. "John's an enigma," he says. "Too often, us managers giggle—or weep quietly—when labels give lip service about artist development, or that they care more about the long arc of an artist's career than the yearly bottom line. John actually walks the walk, and he does so with incredible results at the helm of a very successful label. It's why his roster

loves and respects him; they actually *want* his input. He surrounds himself with great people, he listens more than he talks, and he leads by vision instead of motivating with fear. He's a testament that you can actually both care and succeed in this business."

Kendrick's *good kid, m.A.A.d city* came out three weeks after he started and just kept growing every week. In working with Dragons and Lamar—the latter alongside **Top Dawg Entertainment**—Janick didn't just carry on Iovine's signature style of making deals and/or closely collaborating with talented creative entrepreneurs, he brought new life to it.

The Dragons scenario is particularly interesting, considering how the band represents the same type of alt/pop act that brought Janick his Fueled by Ramen success. Think about it: The man found his power alley taking rock acts and crossing them to Top





Billie with bad guys Justin Lubliner, Berman, Sir Lucian Grainge and Janick

“John is impressive. He and his Interscope team have built an amazing roster of developing artists, and it goes without saying that the global Billie Eilish launch is the best artist-development story this year.” —Jody Gerson

40. However, under Iovine’s guidance—and with the assistance of **Joie Manda**, whom he brought over from **Def Jam** to handle all things urban—he began to fruitfully navigate the hip-hop realm.

Janick welcomed **Maroon 5** to the label in 2013, a few months before the release of **Eminem’s** *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. This was around the

time he helped re-craft **Lady Gaga’s** image with **ARTPOP** and encouraged her to keep flexing her artistic muscles, leading to a bravura jazz-duets album with **Tony Bennett**. 2014 also saw the inking of **Selena Gomez**, who came aboard after seven years at **Disney-owned Hollywood Records**, triggering a metamorphosis rooted in the starlet’s own maturation.

Three key signings stood out in 2016: **Ella Mai**, **6LACK** and **Billie Eilish**, all trailblazers in their respective genres. Eilish, in particular, has obviously grown into a supernova. “Forget **Beatlemania**,” proclaimed a 2018 concert review in London’s *Telegraph*.



“Welcome to Billiemania.” The piece noted the nonstop screaming of Eilish’s fans, describing the artist as “**Morrissey** for the **Instagram** generation.” **Dave Grohl** even likened her to **Nirvana** in a recent interview, declaring, “When I look at **Billie Eilish**...rock & roll is not close to dead.”

The entire industry was blown away not only by this young artist’s remarkable command but also by her record company’s thoughtful and patient rollout.

“John is impressive,” says **Jody Gerson**, Janick’s colleague at **UMPG**. “He and his **Interscope** team have built an amazing roster of developing artists, and it goes without saying that the global **Billie Eilish** launch is the best artist-development story this year.”

Indeed, what **Interscope** has pulled off with this strikingly original artist already ranks as one of the greatest artist-development stories of the streaming era—a game-changer that is impacting the entire music business to a profound degree.

**Paradigm**’s **Tom Windish** brings some context to **Gerson**’s assessment. “I met **John** 15 years ago when I was a fledgling independent agent trying to get the attention of the music business, and he was a hardworking label exec changing the way artists were discovered and marketed,” **Windish** remembers. “He’s a master at development and gives artists the tools and runway to build their audience and brand.”

In terms of the growth of her brand, it’s worth noting that **Eilish**, who filled **L.A.**’s 300-capacity club **The Hi Hat** in August 2017, sold out three **L.A.** dates for July 2019, with two nights at **Shrine Expo Hall** and one at the **Greek Theatre**—equating to nearly 16k tickets. Released this March, her debut album dominated the **HITS Top 50 Chart**, bowing with an incredible 307k. Powered in part by a ticket bundle connected to that sold-out tour, the teen phenom impressively emerged from left field to rack up the third-biggest debut of the year so far, behind only **Ariana Grande** and **The Jonas Brothers**—a particularly stunning achievement for a new artist.

Just a few weeks before the release of



Top: With **Machine Gun Kelly** at the 2018 **IGA X BET Awards** party; with **Wyskoarko**; attorney **Angela Rogers** and **SVP of Urban Promo Larry Khan**

**Eilish**’s album, the label dropped **Juice WRLD**’s highly anticipated follow-up to debut studio album *Goodbye & Good Riddance*, which had yielded breakout single “**Lucid Dreams**”—now north of 860 million streams at **Spotify** alone. The rapper—signed by **Janick** and **Manda** in 2018—charted at #1 with a whopping 164k. “He didn’t have much going on in terms of a fanbase, didn’t have that many streams, but the music was just amazing,” **Janick** said of **Juice WRLD**’s start. “It was one of those gut/

ear things where you know something’s great and feel people are really gonna connect with it.”

**Manda** is now viewed as one of the top execs in the hip-hop community, following the signings and marketing of **Roc Nation**’s **J. Cole**, **Juice WRLD**, **Ella Mai**, **DaBaby**, and **LVRN**’s **6LACK**, among other breakout acts, as well as **Mustard**. He’s also helped **Janick** realize **Interscope**’s move into the **Latin** market through his role in bringing in **Nir Seroussi** as **EVP** and head of the



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company’s newly launched, Miami-based Latin division.

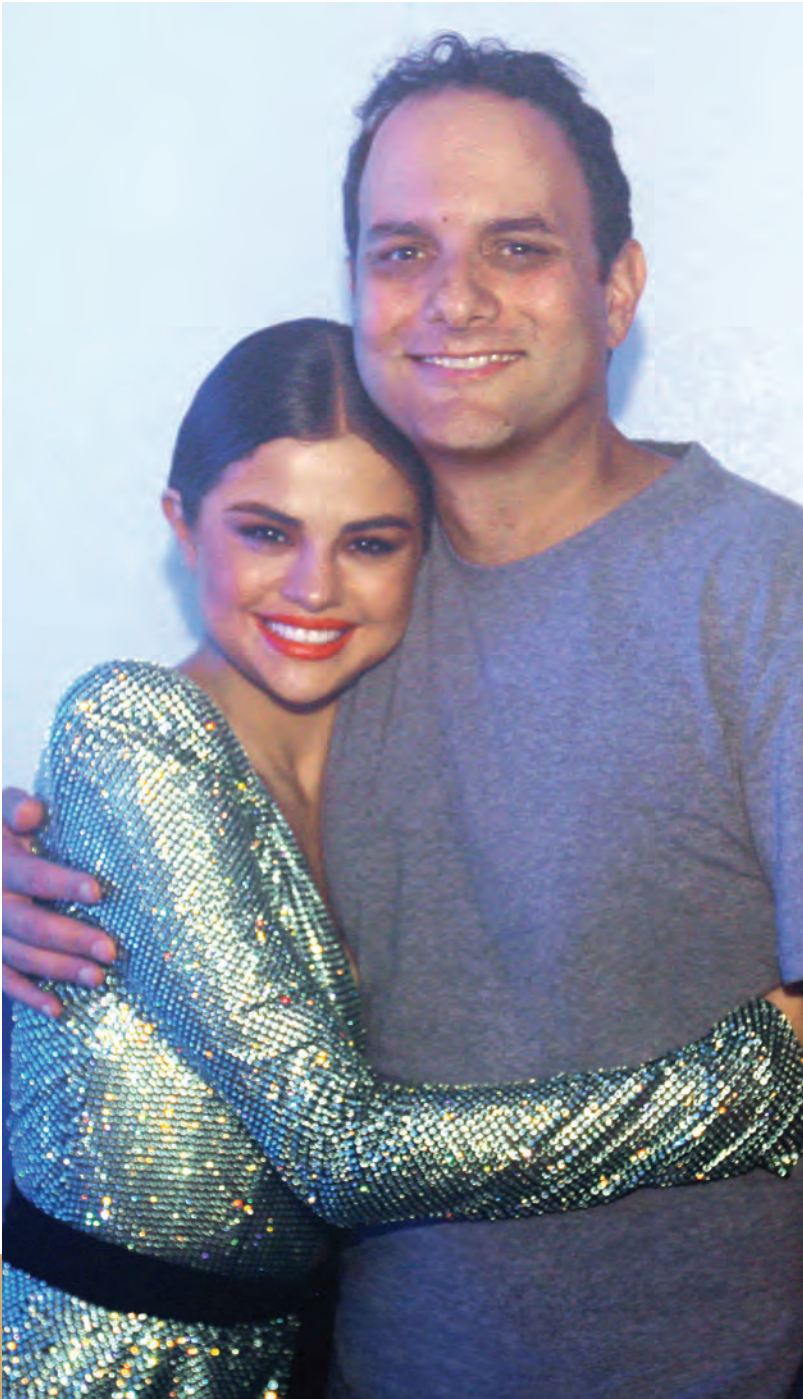
**T**hrough the first few months of 2019, the label has remained completely ablaze, thanks to the impact made by white-hot signings, as well as the continued success of two massive soundtracks. The

Kendrick-helmed *Black Panther* project and Lady Gaga & Bradley Cooper’s *A Star Is Born* set each scored Best Original Song Oscar and Grammy noms for their lead singles, “All the Stars” and “Shallow”; the latter won both. “Shallow” was also nominated for Record and Song of the Year at the Grammys. And both movies were nominated for Best Picture at the Oscars. Before those two, there was also *La La Land*, which received a record-tying fourteen nominations at the 2017

Oscars—where the much-talked-about musical won six awards, including Best Original Score and Best Original Song (“City of Stars”). At the 2018 Grammys, the soundtrack, released via Interscope, won Best Compilation Soundtrack for Visual Media.

Janick’s interest in the movie business goes beyond creating and releasing soundtrack albums, as he demonstrated in April with the release of the first feature from the newly launched **Interscope Films**—Max Minghella’s music-themed





Clockwise from left: With Selena Gomez; with Mike Will Made-It; with Youngblud and Jamie Rose

*Teen Spirit*, starring a grown-up Elle Fanning. A few weeks later, the news broke that the newco would be premiering three pictures at the **Tribeca Film Festival**: *Sublime*, a documentary about the star-crossed '90s band; the documentary *A Day in the Life of America*, and *The Wrong Man*, an animated musical about capital punishment

"I'm not the music executive that just thinks film is sexy, that wants to get into film because it's a great thing to do, because I don't need to add more work to my schedule or our teams," Janick told *Variety*. "But with all the work that we do every day, the last thing I want to do is just completely pass something off to another company and hope they get

it right. We'd like to help guide and be partners with our artists and other creatives along the way and strengthen their brand overall."

"He's much more practical than I ever was, which I appreciate," Iovine said of Janick in the *L.A. Times*. "But labels have to innovate, because up until now they've left the path of innovation



*With Grainge, Manda, Ella Mai and Berman*

“ [John Janick] has consistently shown why he is widely regarded as one of the most talented, innovative and entrepreneurial executives in the music business today and will be a key player in the future generation of industry leaders. [He] is the ideal executive to be writing the next chapter in IGA’s illustrious history.” —Sir Lucian Grainge

up to everyone else. John knows how to manage a record company, but he’s also a great A&R guy with a feel for the business and he can move with the flow.”

Says J. Cole, “Many people wonder if it’s possible to climb to the top ranks of the music industry without being an asshole. John Janick answers that question. Incredible executive, even better person.”

Iovine may have brought Interscope to vibrant life, but Janick has infused the iconic label with newfound energy, ambition and purposefulness. In the half-decade since he was given the keys, during a radically transitional period, Interscope has adapted in a seemingly effortless manner while experiencing steady incremental growth. At press time,

the company was a solid #2 in the 2019 marketshare standings while closing in on 10%. When your marketshare numbers are as high as Interscope’s have been, it’s hard to make dramatic leaps—which makes the label’s 2019 power play all the more mind-blowing. And with Janick running the show, the ceiling appears to be unlimited. ■