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Executive of the Week: Spotify Global Head of Editorial Sulinna Ong

BY DAN RYS

As global head of editorial at the biggest music streamer in the world, **Sulinna Ong** has plenty on her plate — not least of which is overseeing the programming of Spotify's playlists across genres, territories and fandoms. And this past week has been a big one for Ong and her team, as they **revamped Spotify's flagship K-Pop playlist**, K-Pop ON!, with a new name, a massive marketing push and a focused plan for new content catered to fans of the genre that has expanded significantly around the world in recent years. And the push has already started to pay off: daily streams and listening hours for the playlists grew 40% week over week, according to Spotify, and the playlist moved into the top five of the company's most-streamed playlists, which Ong says is "a first for the playlist and the genre."

Ong has also overseen another big initiative that rolled out this week: the **revamped EQUAL hub** timed to International Women's Day (March 8), which focuses on initiatives to promote equity for women in music around the world. This year, that meant a series of Spotify Singles covers from up-and-coming female artists; the "With Love" podcast playlist, which includes recordings from 25 women

from different backgrounds sharing love letters to their past selves "during a pivotal moment in time, or to someone who changed their life in a moment"; and the EQUAL Non-Profit Playlist Shelf, which includes playlists curated by five global non-profits focused on gender equity. And the success of each rollout earns Ong the title of *Billboard's* Executive of the Week.

Here, Ong lays out the plans behind the revamped K-Pop ON! and EQUAL initiatives, as well as her plans for where Spotify's editorial can go moving forward. "One of our main goals in our playlisting strategy is to create a truly borderless music consumption ecosystem," she says. "Our bread and butter is discovery, and we are laser-focused on exporting local artists and genres to a global audience, as well as focusing on local artists in their home markets."

You guys relaunched your flagship K-Pop playlist, K-Pop ON!, with daily streams and daily listening hours growing 40% week over week. What key decision(s) did you make in helping make this happen?

K-Pop fandom is a tightly-knit, inclusive and supportive community that loves to get actively involved

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with the artists and the genre as a whole. With our relaunch we wanted to create a destination that would add to that community and integrate with it. That's a key pillar in our approach to curating many of our playlists around the world — harnessing a community of fans and giving them a central home on Spotify to engage, discover and become lifelong listeners. We're already seeing concrete results in real time, with the K-Pop ON! playlist making it into our top five most-streamed playlists this week, a first for the playlist and the genre.

How are you positioning this playlist to take advantage of the global fascination with and growing fandom of K-Pop?

K-Pop has obviously been a key genre for fans in Asia for a long time, but over the last few years it has seriously exploded across the globe. K-Pop is not just about the music, but a movement encompassing an entire world of fandom, fashion, community and more. With last week's relaunch, our aim was to further build it out as an audio destination that will be fully relatable to long-time fans, as well as being a destination for potential new fans to pique their curiosity.

As for the playlist name change from K-Pop Daebak to K-Pop ON!, that was part of our global approach to how we disseminate music and enable discovery. The new name combines the Korean word “온” meaning, “100,” or “whole,” with the English word “on” to display the action of “turning on.” So

K-Pop ON! embodies the idea that “K-Pop is always on 100 for the whole world.”

What was the marketing strategy behind the relaunch — how did you promote it around the world?

As well as the obvious strategy of on-platform marketing, we have also pursued a strategy of out-of-home advertising on billboards globally, including a wide swath of K-Pop artists. We had NMIXX showing in L.A.; [BTS](#), [aespa](#) and NMIXX in NYC; [AT-EEZ](#), [Red Velvet](#), [NCT DREAM](#) and more in South Korea; [aespa](#), [SEVENTEEN](#), [BLACKPINK](#) and more in Indonesia; [BTS](#), [NMIXX](#) and [IVE](#) in Japan; and [BTS](#), [TWICE](#) and [ENHYPEN](#) in Toronto.

In the coming weeks you'll start to see video clips of K-Pop artists on the playlist, utilizing our Spotify Clips functionality, which we've found is a great way to increase fan-artist engagement. And really, this is just the beginning. Our focus on the K-Pop genre will span the rest of this year and beyond. In the coming months, you'll see further original content based on fans' favorite artists and songs, new ways for fans to discover music and connect with friends and artists on Spotify and partnerships within the industry and beyond.

It's also been one year since Spotify launched EQUAL, and there was a series of new content and initiatives launched this week for International Women's Day. How has that brand grown and why is it

important for you?

We see EQUAL as a 24/7/365 focus area, as we are constantly striving to reach gender equity across our playlists, marketing and the music industry at large. Over the last year, we have highlighted a main EQUAL artist each month globally, as well showcasing 35 female artists from around the world each month on our Times Square billboard. We've also updated our EQUAL hub on Spotify and opened up the program to new markets including those in the Middle East, North Africa and Pakistan, further expanding these artists' reach and audience base worldwide. In the first year of EQUAL alone, we've seen EQUAL playlists receive almost 60 million streams across all 184 markets where we're live, with EQUAL artists being added to over 1,000 additional Spotify playlists within the first month of joining the program.

What feedback have you gotten from the EQUAL initiatives in the past year, and from these new ones that just launched?

We are committed to equity for women in music and artists and industry partners recognize this. So the feedback from our EQUAL initiatives has always been incredibly positive and continues to be. The recent launch in the Middle East and North Africa has been covered by numerous press outlets, raising wide awareness of female artists across the region, which is vitally important.

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Two-time Grammy nominee [Arooj Aftab](#) is our first Artist of the Month for EQUAL Pakistan. Arooj has been making waves around the world since her track “Mohabbat” made it into **Barack Obama’s** summer playlist. She feels passionately about issues that Pakistani women face in the industry and makes for a perfect candidate to carry the EQUAL Pakistan torch.

In what areas do you want to expand Spotify’s playlists and editorial moving forward?

One of our main goals in our playlisting strategy is to create a truly borderless music consumption ecosystem. Our bread and butter is discovery, and we are laser-focused on exporting local artists and genres to a global audience, as well as focusing on local artists in their home markets.

Since becoming Spotify’s global head of editorial I’ve devoted much of my time to broadening our playlist strategy on a worldwide scale. We’ve prioritized collaborative curation through our Global Curation Groups, and having this wide swath of voices and local experts spread around the world is now crucial to our playlist curation. With this approach we’ve been able to create playlists based on the expertise of editors all around the world, who work together to pinpoint emerging artists, sounds and trends early and often, giving us the ability to elevate them and be on the pulse of culture. We are always striving for wide

representation across our playlists, be it gender, race, language, genre and so on — so you will see us continue to expand in this area as well. We prefer to think of our editorial philosophy as being about collective expertise and collaboration, rather than being individual gatekeepers, and I believe that will continue to impact the music industry in a positive way in 2022. **■**

Warner Music’s Freeze on Russia Follows Big Bet on a Once-Promising Market

BY ALEXEI BARRIONUEVO,
RICHARD SMIRKE

As major music labels weighed whether to follow the lead of Universal Music Group — the first to shut down its operations in Russia this week — Warner Music Group faced a more challenging road than its competitors.

The label has taken the biggest gamble on Russia’s potential as an emerging market for the music industry, buying two indie labels

since 2013 that expanded its footprint to almost 100 employees in the country.

And the public company’s major shareholder and owner, Access Industries founder **Len Blavatnik**, is a Ukrainian-born billionaire with long ties to at least two oligarch allies of Russian President **Vladimir Putin**. Blavatnik, a dual U.S.-UK citizen, has taken pains to distance himself from the Kremlin since he made his fortune buying industrial assets in Russia in the 1990s and 2000s.

Sources say he did not advise Access or Warner executives on whether to pull out of Russia (Deezer, which Access controls, was one of the first streaming services to exit the market) and he has not made any public statements directly denouncing Putin for the invasion of his former homeland. Blavatnik, who rarely gives interviews or makes statements to journalists, did not respond to a request made to Access for his personal comment, but Access did describe its position as a business.

“What is happening in Ukraine is unimaginable,” a spokesman for Access said in a statement sent to *Billboard* early Thursday (March 10). “We all hope and pray that the conflict ends quickly and that all Ukrainian citizens are once again able to live their lives in peace.”

Hours after sending the statement — and a day after bloody images of a maternity ward in Ukraine bombed by Russian planes

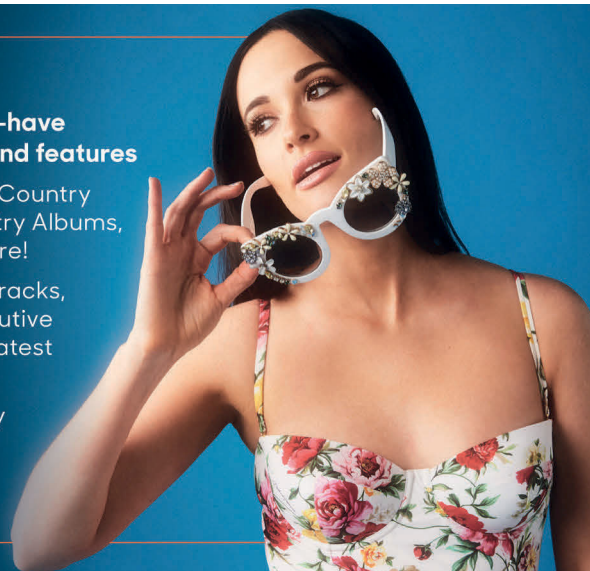
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shocked the world — both Warner Music and Sony Music Entertainment said they were joining UMG, which has just under 40 employees in Russia, in [suspending](#) their label operations in the country and closing their offices there. The labels were among the last Western music companies to pull out, after streaming companies Spotify, YouTube, Deezer and Chinese video app TikTok all said in the past week that they would shutter operations on the ground in the increasingly isolated country.

Warner Music and Sony, which has about 35 employees in Russia, are both effectively placing their employees on paid leave for the time being, according to people familiar with the situation. In a statement, Warner Music said its pullout included suspending investments in and development of projects in Russia, along with promotional and marketing activities and manufacturing of all physical products. “We will continue to fulfill our agreed upon obligations to our people, artists, and songwriters as best we can as the situation unfolds,” the label said.

All three labels are helping with humanitarian efforts involving Ukraine, including by making donations to international aid groups and those based in Poland, which has received the bulk of the more than 1.7 million refugees that have left Ukraine so far.

U.S. and U.K. officials have not targeted Blavatnik for sanctions nor said they would seek to freeze any of his fortune, estimated by *Forbes* to be \$31 billion, in the current conflict with Ukraine or in the previous Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014. On Thursday, the U.K. government announced a [new round](#) of sanctions against seven Russian oligarchs, collectively worth £15 billion (\$20 million), which included a former business partner of Blavatnik.

The British government said it was freezing the assets of Chelsea soccer club owner **Roman Abramovich** and his one-time business partner **Oleg Deripaska**, a leading industrialist with whom Blavatnik, along with **Viktor Vekselberg**, made his fortune acquiring aluminum and oil assets in Russia.

For both Deripaska and Abramovich, the government is prohibiting transactions on U.K. individuals and businesses, and impos-

ing a travel ban and sanctioning transport.

“There can be no safe havens for those who have supported Putin’s vicious assault on Ukraine,” British Prime Minister **Boris Johnson** said in announcing the new sanctions.

Deripaska was placed under sanctions by the U.S. Treasury Department in 2018. He is one of the few oligarchs to talk about the war, saying on Twitter on Monday (March 7) that “we need peace as soon as possible, as we have already passed the point of no return.” (Deripaska has taken legal action to challenge the sanctions imposed on him by the U.S. authorities over his alleged links to the Russian government.)

Born in Odessa, Blavatnik and his Jewish family of Refusenik refugees (Soviet citizens who were denied permission to emigrate) left the former Soviet Union and moved to New York when he was 21 years old. He earned a master’s degree in computer science from Columbia University and an MBA from Harvard.

Blavatnik’s childhood friend Vekselberg, who was also born in Ukraine, recruited him to do business deals for formerly Soviet-owned assets that were being freed up during the years when **Boris Yeltsin** was Russia’s president. The two later also worked with Deripaska to purchase aluminum-production assets. Both Deripaska and Vekselberg are reported to be close to Putin, who has been president of Russia, on and off, since 2000.

In 1986, Blavatnik formed Access Industries, a New York-based holding company that he has used as an investment vehicle to amass assets in natural resources and chemicals, media and telecom, biotech and real estate.

Over two decades, Blavatnik pulled more than \$14 billion out of Russia’s natural resources industries, the largest financial gain of any individual foreign investor in Russia, the *Financial Times* reported.

But around 2014, when Putin invaded Crimea in the south of Ukraine, Blavatnik pulled his remaining money out of Russia, removing some leverage the Russian leader might have had over him.

Using his fortune originally made in Russia, Blavatnik’s Access has diversified

its holdings into entertainment and music. He was an early investor in Beats Electronics’ streaming platform (codenamed Daisy), which later became Beats Music. In 2016, he created Access Entertainment, which has invested in films, television and theatre.

Blavatnik first became a director at Warner Music in 2004 when Seagram heir **Edgar Bronfman Jr.** led a private equity buyout of the company from Time Warner Inc. Although he stepped down from the board in 2008, Blavatnik retained a 2% stake in Warner Music.

The Ukrainian billionaire is close to Bronfman Jr. and his father, and he reportedly purchased Bronfman Jr.’s house in Manhattan in 2007 for about \$50 million.

In 2011, Blavatnik beat out other bidders when he acquired Warner Music for \$3.3 billion in an all-cash deal and took the then-public company private again. It came at a time when the music industry was coping with plummeting record sales and the transition to digital listening dominated by piracy.

Warner Music’s Bets on Russia: Gala Records and Zhara Music

Russia was thought to be an attractive emerging market for music’s rebirth. In 2013, Warner Music [acquired Gala Records](#), the first privately owned record label in Russia and WMG’s first wholly owned local presence in the country.

At the time of the acquisition, Gala was a record label, distributor and publisher, and had interests in the live sector. Gala CEO **Alexander Blinov**, who founded the company in 1988, was made General Director of Warner Music Russia. (For almost 20 years before, Gala had represented EMI’s international catalog in Russia and countries of the former Soviet Union.)

After going public in 2020 again, WMG expanded its footprint in Russia last March by acquiring [Russian indie label](#) Zhara Music, which it immediately rebranded as Atlantic Records Russia.

In 2021, Atlantic Records Russia released albums from **HammAli & Navai**, new albums by **EMIN, Jony, Idris & Leos, LSP, Morgenshtern, Rauf & Faik** and **Slava Marlow**, as well as a special collection dedicated to the launch of Atlan-

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On April 23rd, *Billboard* will publish its annual International Power Players list. This issue will profile the leaders in the global music industry including the label executives, concert promoters, managers, talent agents and lawyers, and recognize their achievements. Advertise and congratulate this year's International Power Players to reach an influential audience of decision-makers worldwide.

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tic Records Russia.

ADA Worldwide also expanded into Russia last year with an office in Moscow headed by **Alexander Kasparov**.

With the acquisitions, Warner Music has at least twice as many employees in Russia as Sony or UMG, which did not respond to requests to clarify their staffing level.

Until Putin's invasion, Warner Music's early bet seemed well-timed. In 2020 **Spotify launched** in Russia, Ukraine and 11 other emerging markets in Europe, bringing the service to 250 new listeners.

That year, Russia, the world's 16th-largest music market, saw its revenues grow by 30% to \$199.2 million. Along with China, the country logged the fastest growth of users of subscription streaming services across the top 10 markets for subscribers, according to IFPI's "Global Music Report."

The rapid pullout by labels and streamers, and the ongoing conflict with sanctions and economic fallout, "is a pretty deep wound for the music industry in Russia," says one source at a major label.

As of Wednesday, Access had 73.6% of WMG's economic interest, according to Securities Exchange Commission filings. Access and Blavatnik, who along with his younger brother **Alex Blavatnik** are on the WMG board, control 99.8% of the voting power in the music company.

Blavatnik, meanwhile, has become a major global philanthropist. His Blavatnik Family Foundation says it has given more than \$900 million to over 250 charitable organizations around the world, including a \$200 million gift to Harvard Medical School, the biggest in its history; a £50 million (\$65 million) gift to London's Tate Modern; and a £75 million (\$98 million) donation to Oxford University to set up a school of government.

He has also donated generously to campaigns for Republican and Democratic candidates alike, including \$1 million to **Donald Trump's** inauguration committee.

While Blavatnik has yet to comment on the conflict himself, some of the institutions he supports are condemning Putin's invasion. Last week, the Blavatnik School of Government at Oxford called for a "special tribunal to prosecute the crime of aggres-

sion committed against Ukraine."

While he has tried to keep a relatively low profile, Blavatnik has not shied away from occasionally flaunting his great wealth. He famously celebrated his 60th birthday in London in 2017 at his stately English home, which sits on Kensington Palace Gardens, a private road near the Russian and Israeli embassies, dressed up as Victorian British Prime Minister **Benjamin Disraeli**, while **Bruno Mars** sang, as the Financial Times described.

Days after the party, **Queen Elizabeth II** knighted Blavatnik for his philanthropic efforts, seven years after he became a British citizen. He is now the richest man in the U.K. **B**

Could Putin's War Bring Back Russian Piracy?

BY ROBERT LEVINE

Over the next few months, the music business in Russia will essentially shut down. Music will continue to be made – as well as marketed, presumably – but it's hard to imagine how it will be monetized. On March 8, Universal Music Group **announced** it would pull out of Russia in the wake of the country's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, **followed on March 10** by Sony Music Group and Warner Music Group. Much of the infrastructure of the modern music business is going, too: Spotify has **suspended premium accounts**, and YouTube and TikTok have cut some functionality. That leaves some local players – but any business in Russia will have a hard time taking payments without the credit card companies and payment systems that have stopped doing business there.

The companies pulling out of Russia did the right thing, but they also made a virtue out of a necessity: They could have had no practical way to make money.

By the standards of the recorded music business, Russia doesn't amount to much –

the business there took in just \$200 million in 2020, according to IFPI – less than the purchase price of some big songwriters' catalogs. But it was growing – up 30% over 2019, driven by subscription streaming – and consumers there have become accustomed to listening to music online.

So with the money gone, what happens to the music?

The Russian music business won't go back to 1986 – the **winds of change** have already blown through. But it could go back to, say, 2006, when the Russian-run pirate music site **allofmp3.com** made music available illegally worldwide. The site claimed it had the rights it needed to operate from the Russian Organization for Multimedia and Digital Systems, which licenses Russian radio stations and digital services – in Russia, although the site was available worldwide – but it was sued by the RIAA in the U.S. and then eventually shut down – reportedly under pressure from the Russian government.

What if that pressure now operates the other way? Vladimir Putin's government is tightening its control over the internet, but it seems more interested in dominating it than in shutting it down. So it wouldn't be surprising to see unlicensed online music services started by oligarchs who could be rewarded for their loyalty with a good business opportunity and, in turn, make sure that any news on the service has a point of view the government can get behind. Since Russia is already subject to sanctions, it's unlikely to pay rights holders, and the government might view illegally distributing their material as a sanction of its own.

What if those services don't stop at the border, though? With the ruble falling in value, Russia will need hard currency, and one way to get it would be to let an advanced version of **allofmp3.com** distribute Western intellectual property as a for-profit business. Imagine knockoffs like **Nyettflix**, **Spyotify**, and **YooToob** offering all-you-can-eat streaming deals for \$5 a month – payable with cryptocurrency. Russia has never exactly prioritized the protection of intellectual property – the RIAA has to sue the Russian stream-ripping operation **FLVTO/Kurbanov** in a **U.S. court** – but the situation there could get even worse if the govern-

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ment's tendency to ignore piracy turns into outright encouragement. Many European countries have legal mechanisms they could use to block such sites, but it would be harder in the U.S.

Even if these sites couldn't be taken down, however, enough pressure could be put on payment processors and other intermediaries that they would become inconvenient to use. The Internet tends to eliminate middlemen — then create new ones in their place.

But the real threat here is that Russia might not be the last market to slide backward into the bad old days. Over the last decade, the global revenue generated by recorded music has skyrocketed — from \$15.8 billion in 2011 to \$21.6 billion in 2020, according to IFPI. Most of that growth has come from the success of subscription streaming in established markets like the U.S., but some of it comes from markets that barely registered during the CD boom of the nineties, like those in the developing world and Eastern Europe. In 2016, the recorded music market in Russia was worth \$58.9 million, according to IFPI. The business in other countries has risen along with it — mostly because those countries have become more modern, more connected, and in most cases, more capitalist.

That only has so much to do with the music business, of course, and whether it continues has more to do with whether we've arrived at [“The end of history”](#) (as political scientist Francis Fukuyama famously claimed in a 1992 book) or the moment when [“The jungle grows back”](#) (to quote the title of a 2018 book by historian Robert Kagan). Right now, it looks more like the latter. So it's worth thinking about how future fractures in international relations — however unlikely they appear to be at the moment and however much we hope to avoid them — might affect the media business. It's hard to imagine, for example, that anything could interfere with Western trade with China, which is now the seventh biggest market for recorded music.

A month ago, however, it was hard to imagine a war in Europe. 📍

Kobalt Leans Into Its ‘Third Act’ After Profitable 2021: Inside the Earnings

BY ED CHRISTMAN

Kobalt Music Group posted \$5.8 million in net income from continuing operations on revenues of \$519.4 million in the year ended June 30, 2021. That represents a turnaround from a nearly \$66 million net loss in the prior year, while also showing an 11.5% increase in revenue from nearly \$466 million produced by those operations in 2020.

CEO **Laurent Hubert** pointed out in a written note in the financials that the company's continuing operations enjoyed a nearly \$72 million swing. “With our sale of AWAL and Neighbouring Rights divisions in May 2021 [to Sony Music Group], our business has catapulted into the next generation, both financially and strategically,” Hubert said in a statement.

Moreover, this year's results represent the first profitable year in the company's 20-year history, after the first 19 years of Kobalt had produced negative \$318.49 million in retained earnings.

Finally, thanks to the sale of its indie distribution and neighboring rights operations, Kobalt turned in overall income of \$341.3 million for its fiscal 2021 year. That deal received provisional clearance in February from the U.K. regulatory agency Competition and Markets Authority, which sent the process into comment period, with a final report to be published by March 17.

Furthermore, that \$430 million sale to Sony catapulted Kobalt's retained earnings from red ink into black at \$22.8 million.

Another operation, Kobalt Capital sold two investment funds that owned music assets on behalf of institutional investors for about \$1.4 billion and one of those deals closed in the fiscal 2021. As a result of that

sale of Fund 1 to Hipgnosis Songs Fund for \$323 million, Kobalt Music Group realized a \$20 million gain. The other fund was sold for about \$1.1 billion in October 2021 to an investment group comprised of KKR and Dundee Partners; and that likely will impact the results of the current fiscal year in some way.

In order to accommodate for the sale of AWAL and its neighboring rights operations to Sony, the company restated its 2020 financials to reflect a comparison between the continuing operations of its music publishing arm and AMRA, its global performance rights collections operations.

With that, Kobalt reported adjusted earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization of \$44 million, but the company says in a press release accompanying its financial statement that its EBITDA, before adjustments, was \$48.5 million. That compares with a prior year EBITDA loss of \$53.85 million. In other words, the company's turnaround into profitability produced another big swing of \$102.4 million. Moreover, the company expects that in its current fiscal year ended June 30, 2022, its EBITDA will improve to \$65 million while it says revenue will hit \$625 million.

Meanwhile, fiscal 2021's operating profit came in at \$12.79 million, and after taxes, the aforementioned \$5.8 million in net income for continuing operations. But if it hadn't been for a nearly \$14 million gain from foreign currency exchanges, the company's continuing operations would have wound up slightly in the red for both operating income and net income.

Breaking out revenue by territory, North America generated \$235.84 million, or 45.4% of overall revenue; the U.K. \$70.2 million, or 13.5%; the rest of Europe, \$135.7 million, or 26.1%, and the rest of the world \$77.7 million, or 15%.

Looking at individual operations, the publishing group generated \$478.4 million in revenue, or a 9.7% increase over the prior year's revenue of \$436.1 million; while AMRA enjoyed explosive growth of 40.3% to \$109.8 million from 2020's \$78.3 million.

That transformation of the company into a profitable entity that is well capitalized will enable Kobalt “to fully concentrate

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on doubling-down on our award-winning publishing and digital society businesses,” Kobalt founder and chairman **Willard Ahdriz** said in an opening statement to the company’s financial results.

As a further statement on the company’s improved financial health, the sale to Sony allowed the company to pay down all debt and it finished the year debt free and with \$315 million in cash. While it’s unclear if the company has a revolving credit facility—the financial results make no reference to any arrangements—a report by the Bloomberg news agency says the company has negotiated a deal to arrange for \$550 million in debt from J.P. Morgan and HPS Investment Partners in order to acquire music assets. Kobalt declined to comment on this report and the Bloomberg report didn’t specify what form the debt facility would take.

However, with the \$315 million in cash being a cash flow-positive company — Kobalt produced \$35.2 million in operating cash flow in fiscal 2021 — plus access to hundreds of millions of dollars in debt, it looks like the Kobalt Music Group can finally start buying music publishing assets for its own account. While such acquisitions would deplete its cash somewhat — it would have to complement the debt with equity in order to make acquisitions — such acquisitions would work toward improving profitability margins in the long run, although in the near term that profitability would be dependent on how much debt is used and how much in interest payments that debt requires.

The financial results noted that during the year Kobalt was awarded ASCAP’s Latin Independent Publisher of the Year, BMI’s Gospel Publisher of the Year and BMI’s Hip-Hop/R&B Publisher of the Year. Also, Kobalt consistently ranks in the top four music publishers in the Billboard Music Publishers Quarterly, which measures publisher’s market share by their share of the top 100 radio airplay songs and the Hot 100 for the quarter.

With its impact on the marketplace and the strong financial health achieved during the year, Ahdriz said in the opening statement that he is optimistic about the company’s future. In that statement, Ahdriz

posited that Kobalt had been a change agent by innovating with transparency, fairness and technology in its first two decades of existence.

“These milestones have paved the way for our third act: removing the frictions and spillage in the last mile of paying songwriters and rights holders with AMRA, our global digital society,” Ahdriz continued in his written statement. “With the strong growth in multi-territorial music services like Spotify and Apple as well as new segments in health and fitness, I believe AMRA is much needed in the industry, and it will be our biggest innovation to date. As we embark on this next act, I’m proud of our leadership team and our entire staff as we are well-positioned for future success.”

Iconic Desert Cantina Pappy + Harriet’s Facing a Heated Ownership Fight

BY DAVE BROOKS

The future of one of Southern California’s most beloved music venues hangs in the balance of an ongoing legal feud.

Pappy + Harriet’s, a popular desert oasis for music fans visiting Southern California’s Mojave Desert, is the subject of a bitter legal battle between ex-partners who bought the venue last year.

JB Moresco and **Lisa Elin**, a Los Angeles couple managing the iconic restaurant, bar and concert venue since April 2021, are being accused of illegally seizing the business from an investment group two months after investors funded the purchase. Attorneys for the group, led by Knitting Factory Entertainment CEO **Morgan Margolis**, filed a nine-count lawsuit in June 2021 against the couple, alleging Moresco concocted a fake crisis involving Pappy + Harriet’s outdoor concert permit and falsely claimed his role

managing the restaurant side of the venue gave him veto power over the concert calendar.

According to emails reviewed by *Billboard*, Moresco solicited a \$2.5 million investment from Margolis’ group to buy a controlling stake in Pappy + Harriet’s, which included exclusive rights to book the venue, then seized the property for himself two months later and canceled a concert series Margolis had booked for the venue.

The series in question, Desert Daze Deconstructed, was to be a new format for the Desert Daze festival, which Margolis and festival founder **Phil Pirrone** had partnered on since 2016. Margolis had booked the series at the venue prior to the acquisition to include 21 shows, spread out through October and November 2021. **War On Drugs**, **Primus**, **Ty Segall** and **Courtney Barnett** were all set to perform. On June 15, the day before tickets went on sale, Moresco emailed Margolis and said he was canceling the series, claiming it violated Pappy + Harriet’s permit for outdoor concerts. He then ordered Margolis to immediately fire Pirrone from his new role as talent buyer for Pappy + Harriet’s and amended Margolis’ own exclusive talent buying agreement from 10 years down to one.

This came as a shock to Margolis, whose investment group had put up the \$2.5 million to purchase the venue just two months earlier. That deal included a term sheet that Moresco signed acknowledging that Margolis and the investors held majority control of Pappy + Harriet’s — not Moresco and Elin. On June 18, three days after the festival showdown, investors voted to officially fire the couple as the venue’s managers and cancel their restaurant management contract. But over the past nine months, the couple have refused to leave the restaurant property, while allegedly locking the investors out of the venue’s business accounts and canceling Margolis’ remaining concert bookings at the venue.

The actions have cost Margolis “hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost revenue,” the lawsuit claims. Margolis says Moresco’s behavior has hurt both Pappy + Harriet’s and Knitting Factory’s reputation and, according to the complaint, “There has already

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been one agent who has threatened to pull all future business as a result of [Moresco's] actions."

Problems in Pioneertown

Margolis has spent the last few months scrambling to rebook his shows elsewhere and tried to minimize his contact with Moresco and Elin, but he still receives inbound complaints about the couple. Last year, he had his lawyers begin documenting the complaints as sworn declarations, so they'd be admissible in court. Several residents allege Moresco and Elin screamed at a 70-year-old Pioneertown resident during an argument about her fence and allegedly called her "a fucking liar" in front of "dozens of longtime community members," filmmaker **Julian Pinder** wrote in a Nov. 2 declaration. Another filmmaker, **Tao Ruspoli**, wrote in a Nov. 8 declaration that an employee at the restaurant approached his table while he had stepped away to greet a friend and told the guest that Ruspoli was "being investigated for murder."

So far Margolis has collected 17 declarations, including one from the Pioneertown general store owner **Sarah Tabbush**, who says Moresco terminated her lease inside of a barn adjacent to Pappy + Harriet's for no reason, angering locals who had supported the independent business.

Moresco submitted his own declaration in the case, writing how he and his wife met previous owners **Linda Krantz** and **Robyn Celia** and were asked to bid on the business when it was put up for sale. The cantina was first built in 1947 to anchor Pioneertown, a Hollywood film set built by film stars like Roy Rogers and Gene Autry to film Westerns including *The Cisco Kid* and *Annie Oakley* TV shows. In 1972, Jihn and Francis Aleba converted it into a biker burrito bar, before their daughter, **Harriet**, and her husband, "**Pappy**" **Allen**, took over in 1982 and turned the roadhouse into a working venue.

Krantz and Celia, who bought the venue in 2003, were "'worried sick' that PH would fall into the hands of someone who would seek to exploit the name and attempt to turn PH into another Coachella," Moresco wrote in his declaration. "They wanted me and my fiancé to purchase PH because they believed that we would be the best stewards

of what they had built."

Krantz and Celia did not respond to requests for comment.

Moresco says he signed a letter of intent to buy Pappy + Harriet's and began approaching investors. While the deal was valued at \$7.5 million, Moresco and Elin needed \$2.5 million in cash to close the sale for Pappy + Harriet's restaurant business. Under the terms they worked out, the remaining \$5 million for real estate could be paid out over five years through rent charged at 10% of food and beverage sales. Once the new owners had paid the couple \$3.5 million in rent, they would have an option to make a one-time \$1.5 million payment to buy and own the land.

A \$2.5 million price tag for a restaurant is high by most standards. The National Restaurant Association estimates the median price to buy a restaurant business (and not the real estate) in the U.S. is \$150,000. But, as Moresco explained in a February 2021 email to a member of Margolis' investment group, Pappy + Harriet's generated \$6 million a year in food and beverage sales in 2019. Besides, the real opportunity in Pioneertown was the real estate, writing that "the next phase of the plan" was to "target neighboring properties and co-brand them with the Pappy + Harriet's name which will make them more desirable."

The Partnership Goes Sideways

Moresco and Elin's goal when buying Pappy + Harriet's was to both raise all of the money from outside investors and maintain a controlling stake in the project. So they structured the deal with Margolis' group as a limited partnership, a commonly used business entity to organize companies where one or more parties simply serve as a passive, or silent investor that provides capital, while a general partner manages the business and makes management decisions on behalf of the partnership. The benefit for investors is that limited partners face limited liability beyond their initial investment and passthrough tax benefits.

Limited partnerships are more commonly used for investment pools, hedge funds or to fund film projects or artist endeavors where investors buy into a person's vision. In the case of Moresco and Elin, they too were

asking investors to buy into their vision for Pappy + Harriet's, and Moresco had experience with projects in Hollywood and L.A. that he felt allowed him to demand majority control of a project without making his own significant capital investment.

This didn't jibe with everyone. At least one investor, **Mumford and Sons** member **Ben Lovett** and his new company TVG, passed on investing into Pappy + Harriet's because of how Moresco structured the deal.

Margolis and his investors also wanted to make changes to the structure of the agreement when they met Moresco in December 2020. And while they thought the iconic venue was a great match that easily routed with Knitting Factory's own venue holdings — which included the 1,100-cap Regent Theater in L.A. and three Knitting Factory venues in the U.S. — they refused to put up any money unless the investors had majority control. Eventually, Moresco agreed.

On April 1, 2021, Margolis and the investors closed the purchase, paying \$2.5 million to Krantz and Celia in exchange for majority control of Pappy + Harriet's and the exclusive booking rights to the performance space. Moresco and Elin received a 40.5% minority interest in the business and an annual management fee equal to 5% of food and beverage sales, which penciled out to \$300,000 annually.

Less than 60 days after closing the sale, the passwords for the venues social media pages and banks accounts were changed. Margolis and investors were also told not to set foot on the property. While Moresco insists he was trying to protect the venue's permit, the investors' attorney believe Moresco was looking for an excuse to force them out after accepting their money. So far, Margolis and his investors have not had much luck regaining control. In the days immediately following the lockout, LA County Superior Court Judge **Michael Stern** rejected a request for an emergency injunction to remove the couple from the land and set a hearing date for July 2022.

Next Stop: Court

In November, four waitresses contacted Margolis and complained about a COVID-19 outbreak at the restaurant. Margolis' attor-

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ney petitioned Judge Stern to sign a protective order but was denied. A month later, Margolis learned that Moresco's attorney had begun subpoenaing and deposing Pappy + Harriet's waitresses to find out who complained. One waitress said a process server posing as a customer served her with a subpoena while she was waiting on her table. Still holding the court files in her hand, Elin allegedly laughed at the waitress and said, "You're going to perjure yourself."

Margolis's attorney then filed a motion asking the judge to schedule an earlier hearing in light of the alleged harassment. That request was also denied.

"The plaintiffs have not won a single part of a ruling in any hearing in this case. They are losers and so is their case," Moresco's attorneys **Bryan** and **Brandon Fernald** said in a statement to *Billboard*, calling the lawsuit "a case study in malicious prosecution" and "frivolous and nothing more than an unethical attempt to bully and defame the owners of Pappy and Harriet's."

Margolis remains hopeful that he will prevail in July.

"There is a pending motion for injunctive relief that speaks for itself," he said in a statement. "The court has not heard it yet. We did not lose, it's on for July. The sworn community declarations detail the unprofessional, unlawful, and damaging behavior Defendants are engaged in."

"They can say whatever they like and call us any names they like, however the fact remains, we 100% funded everything, they got our money and have locked us out since June of 2021." 📧

Genius Loses Legal Battle Against Google Over Song Lyrics

BY BILL DONAHUE

The lyrics website Genius cannot sue Google for copying the service's content, a federal appeals court ruled Thursday, because the site doesn't actually own the copyrights for the lyrics it displays.

Genius, a popular platform that lets users add and annotate lyrics, claims that Google steals the site's carefully-transcribed content and re-posts them in search results, essentially free-riding on the "time, labor, systems and resources" that goes into creating such a service.

But the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit dismissed the case Thursday. Affirming an earlier ruling by a lower court, the judges said that only actual copyright owners — like songwriters or publishers — could have filed such a case, not a site that merely transcribed lyrics.

Genius sued Google in 2019, claiming the tech giant had stolen the site's lyrics and displayed them in its own "information boxes" when users search for a song. In a splashy twist, Genius said it had used a secret code buried within lyrics that spelled out RED-HANDED to prove Google's wrongdoing.

Though it sounds like a copyright case, Genius didn't actually accuse Google of stealing any intellectual property. That's because it doesn't own any; songwriters and publishers own the rights to lyrics, and both Google and Genius pay for licenses to display them. Instead, Genius argued it had spent time and money transcribing and compiling "authoritative" lyrics, and that Google had unfairly "exploited" that effort for its own profit.

On Thursday, that distinction proved fatal. The Second Circuit ruled that the case was "preempted" by federal copyright law — meaning that the accusations from Genius

were so similar to a copyright claim that they should have been filed that way.

At [oral arguments in October](#), attorneys for Genius argued that the site must be able — copyrights or no copyrights — to protect the "substantial investment of time and energy in our service." But the court said Thursday that the case was really aimed at protecting content, not labor or investment.

"Genius repeatedly alleges that defendants misappropriated content from Genius's website, not a process or system," the court wrote. "Thus, the subject matter of Genius's claims is the content that appears on Genius's website—the lyrics transcriptions."

The ruling is likely a final defeat for Genius' case. The decision can be appealed to a special full hearing of the Second Circuit or to the U.S. Supreme Court, but such requests are only very rarely granted. A spokesman for Google declined to comment on Friday. An attorney for Genius did not immediately respond to a request for comment. 📧

Katy Perry Wins in 'Dark Horse' Copyright Appeal

BY BILL DONAHUE

A federal appeals court on Thursday (March 10) refused to reinstate a \$2.8 million [copyright](#) infringement verdict against Katy Perry over her 2013 chart-topper "[Dark Horse](#)," ruling that the two songs share only basic musical "building blocks."

A rapper named **Marcus Gray** sued Perry in 2014 over accusations that she ripped off his song "Joyful Noise," and jurors later awarded him the big verdict. But a judge [overturned that verdict](#) in 2020 on the grounds that the "ostinato" Perry allegedly copied was too simple for copyright protection.

By a 3-to-0 vote, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit upheld that decision on Thursday, saying a decision against Perry would have dangerous consequences for

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future creativity.

“The portion of the ‘Joyful Noise’ ostinato that overlaps with the ‘Dark Horse’ ostinato consists of a manifestly conventional arrangement of musical building blocks,” the appeals court wrote. “Allowing a copyright over this material would essentially amount to allowing an improper monopoly over two-note pitch sequences or even the minor scale itself.”

Barring an unlikely trip to the U.S. Supreme Court, the ruling is the end of the road for Gray’s claims against Perry, ending years of litigation over “Dark Horse,” which spent 57 weeks on the *Billboard* **Hot 100**, including four weeks at No. 1 in early 2014.

Gray, who uses the stage name Flame, sued Perry and others in July 2014, claiming she had lifted a key “ostinato” — a short series of notes that’s repeated throughout a song — from his “Joyful Noise” and used it prominently in “Dark Horse.” And the case initially went well, resulting in a **\$2.8 million jury verdict** against Perry in July 2019.

But then came **an influential ruling** on “Stairway to Heaven,” which imposed key new limits on how copyrights cover basic aspects of music. After that decision, the judge overseeing Perry’s case overturned the verdict. Gray appealed that ruling to the Ninth Circuit, setting the stage for Thursday’s decision.

In its decision, the appeals said it was clear that material Perry allegedly copied was too commonplace to be copyrighted. The court said it was “really nothing more than a two-note snippet of a descending minor scale, with some notes repeated. The court noted that same sequence appears in “Merrily We Roll Along” and “Jolly Old Saint Nicholas,” and said they must be free for future songwriters to use.

“Just as films often rely on tropes to tell a compelling story, music uses standard tools to build and resolve dramatic tension,” the court wrote.

Much like the ruling on “Stairway To Heaven,” the decision for Perry will likely be seen by legal experts as a counterbalance to an earlier decision over Robin Thicke’s “Blurred Lines,” which was criticized at the time for expanding the scope of copyright protection for music to more basic elements.

The decision is likely to be heavily-cited in future copyright cases over music.

Following Thursday’s decision, Gray’s attorney Michael A. Kahn told *Billboard*, “The notion that this simple, original, and clearly distinctive 8-note melody can’t be protected by copyright runs contrary to a series of simple and clearly distinctive 8-note opening melodies, including Dave Brubeck’s ‘Take Five,’ The Rolling Stones’ ‘Satisfaction,’ and, of course, the 8-note opening to Beethoven’s 5th Symphony. We are considering our options.”

Christine Lepera, an attorney who represented Perry’s label Capitol Records, said she and her client were “very pleased” with a ruling that “recognized the importance of a court’s gate keeping function in determining whether the claimed musical similarities in a case — alone or in combination — rise to the level of copyrightable expression.”

What’s In a Band Name? Apparently Lots of Litigation

BY BILL DONAHUE

Until recently, Morris Day thought he was in the clear to use “Morris Day and the Time” — the name of the funk band assembled by Prince in 1981 that Day has led for more than 40 years. He says Prince himself never had a problem with him using it before he died, and Day even secured his own federal trademark registration on the name in 2016.

But in December, he **received a letter** from the Prince estate telling him he could no longer use the name “in any form.” The estate’s attorneys cited a 1982 contract in which Day allegedly agreed that Prince’s company would retain the rights to “The Time” name. Day’s attorneys dispute that claim, saying the same deal gave him the right to keep on using it and Prince wanted him to do so.

It’s an unfortunate situation for the beloved act, but hardly a novel one. Over the past 10 years, nasty legal disputes over band names have cropped up regularly, both for big acts like Journey, Stone Temple Pilots and Jefferson Starship, as well as groups like the Rascals, the Ebonys, the Commodores and the Platters.

One common fault line: Who truly constitutes *the* band? Is it the members, or an LLC that owns the rights to the name? Is it the original lineup, or the one that produced the biggest hits? Does one key member and a bunch of replacements count? Fans, band members and lawyers will likely give you different answers.

In the new dispute, the Prince estate might be right that Morris Day doesn’t own “The Time,” but is it *really* “The Time” without Morris Day?

“There can be a real disparity between the legal answer, about who owns the trademark, and the emotional answer as to what the name of the band means to the members and to the public,” said **Marty Schwimmer**, a trademark lawyer at the law firm Leason Ellis who worked on the Ebonys case.

When the Stone Temple Pilots split with longtime frontman Scott Weiland in 2013, it quickly devolved into litigation. The other members **filed a lawsuit** against their former bandmate, claiming the band’s partnership retained all rights to the name — and that he had “misappropriated” those rights by using “Stone Temple Pilots” to tout solo shows. Weiland then **sued them back**, claiming the band had no right to use the name without him.

“The band that played last weekend was not ‘Stone Temple Pilots,’ and it was wrong of them to present themselves as that,” Weiland wrote at the time. “They don’t have the ethical right to call themselves ‘Stone Temple Pilots’ because it’s misleading and dishonest to the millions of fans that have followed us for so many years.” The case ended in a settlement in 2014.

Partnership agreements and holding companies are designed to avoid these disputes, but they only go so far.

In 1985, the members of Jefferson Starship all signed onto a written agreement to “retire” the band’s name, but in the 1990s

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founding frontman Paul Kantner started using it again – in clear violation of that deal. Eventually, the band struck a settlement that allowed Kanter to keep using it, and he later recruited two other former members to play shows under the old name. All settled, right?

But when Kanter died in 2016, former Jefferson Starship guitarist Craig Chaquico [filed a lawsuit](#) against the surviving members of Kanter's band, calling their use of the name an “affront” to the band's legacy. He said the settlement had applied only to Kanter, and that his bandmates' connection to the original was “too attenuated” to use the name. The two sides eventually reached a settlement in late 2018.

Even with the best written agreements, experts say bands pose unique problems that are tricky to plan around. Chief among them are the kind of shifting lineups and varying levels of success over long periods time seen in the Starship dispute.

“In my experience, lineup changes and leaving members have been the most significant issues, particularly if there are periods of time when the band is inactive,” said **Robert J. deBrauwere**, an attorney at the law firm Pryor Cashman LLP who has handled multiple such cases. “After such a lapse, which iteration or members has the right to use the name?”

Such disputes can last years – or decades. Members of the Beach Boys spent more than 10 years litigating over their name, before a [settlement was reached](#) in 2008. Members of the Platters, an early rock group known for hits like “Only You” and “The Great Pretender,” started fighting over their name in 1974 and basically never stopped, resulting in what one court called “a tangled web” of inconsistent rulings spanning four decades. Founding member Herb Reed finally [won a definitive ruling in 2012](#), but litigation has persisted even after that.

In Day's case, things might move a bit faster. The two groups of heirs who will soon take control of the Prince estate have [already said they oppose the dispute](#), and that they want Day to be able to use the name. But soon enough, another fight over an iconic band name is bound to crop up.

“There are all these weird factors that pertain to bands that increase the possibil-

ity of a dispute by a small amount,” said Schwimmer, the Leason Ellis attorney. “And they all add up.”

Martina McBride Sells Master Royalty Rights to Primary Wave

BY KRISTIN ROBINSON

Martina McBride has sold a portion of her master royalties for her first 10 albums to Primary Wave Music, the company announced Thursday (March 10). The company also took ownership and distribution rights to McBride's 2014 album *Everlasting* and her 2018 album *It's the Holiday Season* and will provide the singer with creative services covering marketing, digital, licensing and branding. McBride will retain 20% of her artist royalties across all 12 albums included in the massive deal.

Primary Wave's acquisition includes stakes in the Grammy nominee's most enduring hits, including “Independence Day,” “This One's for the Girls,” “A Broken Wing,” “Valentine” and others. The first 10 albums of her more than three-decade career were released under a recording deal with Sony, and the ownership of those masters remains with the company.

McBride's longstanding contract with Sony ended following the release of 2009's *Shine*, and since then, the singer has released subsequent records under labels including Big Machine Label Group, Broken Bow Records and her self-owned label Vinyl Recordings.

McBride was represented in the deal by attorney **Jess L. Rosen** of Greenberg Traurig, LLP.

The Kansas-born McBride first shot to prominence in the early '90s when superstar **Garth Brooks** offered the then-unsigned singer the chance to open for him on tour, provided she could find a record deal. She soon inked a contract with Sony's

RCA Records and launched her career with her 1992 album *The Time Has Come*. Over time, McBride grew to favor a more contemporary country-pop sound than what she showcased in her debut, an evolution that resulted in some of her biggest career triumphs. This included her hit 1999 single “I Love You,” which spent 5 weeks at No. 1 on *Billboard's* Hot Country Songs chart and crossed over to reach No. 24 on the *Billboard* Hot 100.

“It is a privilege to have the opportunity to work with Martina and the catalog of incredible songs she has built throughout her career,” says **Dominic Pandiscia**, chief strategy officer of Gaither Music Group & Primary Wave Business Development. “She has been a powerful voice in the Country genre with songs that touch fans across all music genres. Martina, we welcome you to the Primary Wave family.”

Nat King Cole Legacy to Be Managed by Irving Azoff's Iconic Artists Group

BY CHRIS EGGERTSEN

Irving Azoff's Iconic Artists Group has signed on to manage the legacy of **Nat King Cole** in a new deal with the singer's family, it was announced Friday (March 11).

Under the agreement, Iconic will “manage, protect, preserve, and expand” Cole's legacy to new generations. The deal will cover a “broad range of rights” from his career, including his recorded music, publishing, TV shows and name and likeness.

The velvet-voiced singer and jazz pianist is known for a string of classic singles, including “The Very Thought of You,” “Straighten Up and Fly Right,” “Unforgettable,” “Nature Boy,” “Stardust,” “When I

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Fall In Love,” “Mona Lisa,” “L-O-V-E,” and holiday standard “The Christmas Song (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire),” which has been certified six-times platinum by the RIAA.

According to a press release announcing the deal, Cole has sold more than 50 million records worldwide, and his catalog includes six platinum and two gold albums. In 1959, he won the Grammy for best performance by a “Top 40” Artist for the song “Midnight Flyer.” Following his death in 1965 at age 45, he was posthumously honored with a lifetime achievement award from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences and inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Cole started his career as a jazz and classical piano player and signed his first record deal with Capitol in 1943. His debut album with The King Cole Trio was released in 1945 and hit No. 1 on *Billboard’s* very first album chart. His success helped lead to the construction of the iconic Capitol Records Tower in Hollywood, which became colloquially known as “The House That Nat Built.”

In addition to his musical output, Cole is remembered for paving the way for Black Americans in popular media. In 1946, he and his bandmates began hosting a 15-minute national radio show, *King Cole Trio Time*, making him the first Black musician to host a program of that kind. In 1956, he became the first Black entertainer to host a national network variety TV show with the debut of *The Nat King Cole Show* on NBC. His film work included roles in *China Gate*, *St. Louis Blues* and *Cat Ballou*.

“We’re delighted to entrust our father’s legacy to Irving Azoff and the team at Iconic,” said Cole’s daughters, **Timo-lin** and **Casey Cole**, in a joint statement. “Through the years, it’s been amazing to see how dad’s music continues to inspire and bring people together, and with Iconic at the helm, we know his musical legacy will endure and continue to grow.”

Azoff added, “We are thrilled that Nat King Cole’s family is trusting us with his musical legacy. He was a groundbreaking artist that influenced generations of artists that followed him. One of our true greats

– his voice is instantly recognizable and an enduring piece of the fabric of our lives.”

In his own statement, Iconic president **Jimmy Edwards** said the company looks forward to working closely with Cole’s family, “as well as Universal Music Group and his label, Capitol Records to ensure that his incomparable talent continues to be celebrated around the world.”

Since launching in February 2021, Iconic Artists Group has acquired the publishing and recorded music rights to David Crosby’s catalog, as well as Linda Ronstadt’s recorded music rights. The group also struck an intellectual property deal with The Beach Boys encompassing the group’s recordings, brand, memorabilia and select compositions and acquired a controlling interest in their IP. **■**

Kesha Loses Key Ruling in Dr. Luke Defamation Case

BY BILL DONAHUE

A New York state appeals court has handed a major win to **Dr. Luke** in his defamation lawsuit against **Kesha**, ruling that New York’s expansive new free speech law – expressly designed to restrict libel lawsuits – does not apply to his case.

In a ruling Thursday, the appeals court said that New York’s newly enacted anti-SLAPP law could not apply retroactively to Dr. Luke’s lawsuit, which claims that Kesha defamed him by accusing him of rape. The producer filed his case several years before the statute went into effect.

The decision is important because the new statute would have required Dr. Luke to prove Kesha acted with “actual malice” when she allegedly accused him falsely – a rigorous standard that would make it much harder to win his case. Applying the new anti-SLAPP law would also have allowed Kesha to win repayment of her **legal** bills if she eventually wins the case.

In a statement to *Billboard*, attorneys for Kesha called Thursday’s ruling “manifestly

erroneous and contrary to the conclusion reached by approximately 20 other courts,” and they vowed to “promptly” seek to appeal the decision to New York’s top court. Dr. Luke’s attorney, **Christine Lepera**, said she and her client were “pleased” with the court’s ruling.

Dr. Luke, whose full name is **Lukasz Gottwald**, filed his lawsuit in 2014, claiming he had been legally defamed by Kesha, whose full name is **Kesha Rose Sebert**. At issue in his lawsuit was her “false and shocking” allegation that he once drugged and raped her.

In late 2019, New York enacted its new anti-SLAPP law – SLAPP being short for “strategic lawsuits against public participation.” The statute is designed to prevent rich or powerful people from using libel lawsuits to silence critics.

Among other provisions designed to make such lawsuits harder, the law means that anyone suing over a matter of “public concern” must adhere to the tough “actual malice” rule. To do so, they can’t just show that someone said something false and harmful; they must instead prove that their opponent either intentionally lied or acted with a reckless disregard for the truth.

In 2021, a judge ruled that that the law applied retroactively to Dr. Luke’s case, a major blow to his case against Kesha. But Thursday’s decision overturned that ruling.

“There is insufficient evidence supporting the conclusion that the legislature intended its 2020 amendments to the anti-[SLAPP] law to apply retroactively to pending claims such as the defamation claims asserted by plaintiffs in this action,” the court wrote.

A trial is currently scheduled for February 2023, but it likely won’t happen until New York’s highest appeals court issues a ruling in another key pending appeal. That proceeding will decide whether Dr. Luke is a so-called “public figure,” which would also subject him to the difficult “actual malice” standard. Arguments are set for sometime in the next few months. **■**

Russia Blocks Instagram Amid Widening Social Media Crackdown

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AP) — Russian regulators said Friday that internet users will be blocked from accessing [Instagram](#) because it's being used to call for violence against Russian soldiers, in Moscow's latest move to tighten up access to foreign social platforms.

The communications and media regulator, Roskomnadzor, said in a statement that it's restricting national access to Instagram because the platform is spreading "calls to commit violent acts against Russian citizens, including military personnel."

Facebook parent [Meta](#) Platforms, which also owns Instagram, didn't respond immediately to a request for comment.

Roskomnadzor specifically cited a Thursday tweet by Meta spokesman **Andy Stone** conveying a company statement saying it had "made allowances for forms of political expression that would normally violate our rules on violent speech, such as 'death to the Russian invaders'."

Stone's statement followed a Reuters report that Meta was making a temporary change to its hate speech policy to allow Facebook and Instagram users in some countries to call for violence against Russians and Russian soldiers in the context of the Ukraine invasion.

The statement stressed that the company "still won't allow credible calls for violence against Russian civilians."

Russia has already blocked access to Facebook, limited access to Twitter and criminalized the intentional spreading of what Moscow deems to be "fake" reports, as part of President Vladimir Putin's crackdown on social media and news outlets like the BBC.

Big tech companies, meanwhile, have moved to restrict Russian state media from

using their platforms to spread propaganda and misinformation, especially for European users.

Google has blocked European users from viewing YouTube channels operated by RT and Sputnik, which TikTok has disabled their European accounts. Meta has barred Russian state media from Instagram and Facebook. **■**

Pentatonix Sign With YM&U for Management as Group Shops for New Label Deal

BY CHRIS EGGERTSEN

P[entatonix](#) has moved to YM&U for management, the company tells *Billboard*. The singing group — comprised of Scott Hoying, Mitch Grassi, Kirstin Maldonado, Kevin Olusola and Matt Sallee — are co-managed by the firm's **Peter Katsis** and **Joel Mark**. They were formerly managed by **Jonathan Kalter** at The MGMT Company.

Pentatonix quietly joined the YM&U roster over six months ago, with longtime day-to-day manager **Sara Baczewski** (formerly at The MGMT Company) in tow. The group is currently working on new music — though, with their current RCA Records deal set to expire in April after eight years, it's uncertain who will release it. "We are currently in discussions with a number of top labels, including RCA," says Katsis.

Since joining YM&U, Pentatonix has continued to thrive as a live act. According to the firm, the group boasted the eighth highest-grossing U.S. tour in December, with the *Evergreen* Christmas tour, and saw a 41% increase in ticket sales over 2019, during which they were in the midst of Pentatonix: The World Tour.

Though best known for their Christmas music — Pentatonix has put out a total of six holiday albums to date, including last

year's *Evergreen*, released on Oct. 29 — one emphasis for Katsis and Mark will be to broaden the way the group is perceived.

"I think a lot of people in the music industry think of them [as a holiday act] because their Christmas songs are so big and their streaming numbers are so big over the holidays," says Katsis. "But their ticket sales are the same year-round, and I don't think that story's been told. If you were to look up their ticket sales, you would realize, 'Oh, yeah, they sell just as many tickets in Australia in February as they do in Dallas in December.'"

Highlighting the group members' multifaceted talents will be a core of the strategy going forward. "It's really connecting those dots over the next couple years, with releases, touring, TV/film, so that people really start to get to know this band more than just the songs they're hearing in a playlist," says Mark, adding that fans can expect to see scripted and unscripted TV projects from the group — who rose to fame after winning Season 3 of NBC's *The Sing-Off* — going forward.

Increasing the group's visibility has been a primary area of focus, and as a result, Pentatonix has had no shortage of appearances on major TV shows. Over the holiday season alone, the band performed on shows including *The Queen Tribute* and *Disney Parks Magical Christmas Day Parade* on ABC, NBC's *Christmas in Rockefeller Center*, *The Today Show* and *The Ellen Show*. YM&U has also been working to build up Pentatonix's presence on social platforms, with a particular emphasis on TikTok, where the firm says the group racked up an additional 1.5 million followers between late September, when the *Evergreen* album was first announced, and late December — a 120% increase. Along with their plethora of TV appearances, that's the kind of added visibility that Katsis and Mark are hoping will catapult the group to even greater heights.

"I think one of the keys is that they're talented enough to make it on any level with pop music," says Katsis. "And they should not be limited to being the biggest holiday group." **■**

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Spencer Davis Group Beats Another ‘Gimme Some Lovin’ Copyright Suit

BY BILL DONAHUE

Another federal court has rejected accusations that the Spencer Davis Group ripped off its 1966 hit “Gimme Some Lovin’” from an earlier song, two years after a federal appeals judge complained that such an outcome was a “grave injustice.”

In a decision issued Tuesday, Judge William L. Campbell tossed out a lawsuit that claimed the late Spencer Davis infringed the copyright to “Ain’t That a Lot of Love,” a song written in 1965 by Homer Banks and Willia Dean Parker.

The two tracks feature a similar bass riff, and a 1990 book quotes Davis saying he had based “Gimme” off of “Lot of Love.” But Judge Campbell said the Memphis duo had failed to submit their song to the U.S. Copyright Office at the time as required, meaning they could not sue.

“Ain’t That a Lot of Love,” written in 1965, didn’t make waves at the time, but it was later covered by many others, including The Band and Tom Jones. “Gimme Some Lovin’” was released a year later to far more commercial success, reaching No. 2 on the UK charts and No. 7 on the Billboard [Hot 100](#). In the years since, the song has been heavily featured in movies, television and advertisements.

More than five decades later, a copyright lawsuit against Davis, Winwood and others accused them of “knowingly incorporating” the bass riff from “Lot of Love” into “Gimme.” Filed by Banks’ widow and Parker, it pointed to the fact that the similarities had been noted by numerous music commentators.

A federal appeals court [rejected the case in 2019](#), ruling that there was no evidence

that anyone copied the song. The court refused to admit several pieces of evidence, including an excerpt from the 1990 book *Rock Lives: Profiles and Interviews*, which included quotes from Winwood talking about using the earlier song.

The ruling, by a 2-1 vote, came with scathing dissent from Judge Bernice Donald, who said the songs were “strikingly similar” and cited the fact that many British bands in the 1960s had been “inspired by the works of black R&B artists.”

“There is a fine line between inspiration and infringement, and evidence in the record below supports a finding that the defendants crossed this line,” the judge wrote. “Regrettably, the majority has denied plaintiffs their deserved opportunity to present their case to a jury, which is a grave injustice.”

Months before that ruling was issued, a new, separate case was filed against only Spencer, who had not participated in the earlier case. It was this lawsuit that was dismissed this week.

Under the version of copyright law that existed in 1966, Banks and Parker were required to file a so-called deposit copy of their song at the Copyright Office. In Tuesday’s ruling, Judge Campbell said they had clearly failed to do so.

“The requisite deposit has not been made,” the judge wrote. “Because there is no evidence that Plaintiffs or anyone else submitted deposit copies of ‘Ain’t That a Lot of Lovin’” as either a published or unpublished work the infringement suit is barred.”

An attorney for Banks’ widow and Parker declined to comment on Friday. An attorney for the late Davis, who passed away last year, did not immediately respond to requests for comment. □

Executive Turntable: Republic Appoints A&R EVPs, Beggars Group Names Streaming Head

BY CHRIS EGGERTSEN

Republic Records named **David Wolter** executive vp, A&R out of the label’s New York headquarters and **Miles Beard** executive vp, A&R out of Los Angeles.

Wolter was most recently executive vp of Virgin Records at Capitol Music Group, a role he assumed in 2018. Before that, he worked for 10 years at RCA Records, where he signed Bleachers, Walk The Moon and Elle King, among others. That was preceded by an earlier stint at Republic, where he worked between 1997 and 2007; he signed Gorillaz during that time.

At Republic, Wolter will oversee upcoming releases for Bennee, Greta Van Fleet and Jimmy Fallon, among others, as well as sign new talent.

“David is not only one of the most respected A&R executives in the business, but he’s also an arbiter of culture,” said Republic co-president **Wendy Goldstein** in a statement. “He has left an indelible mark on popular music with incredible and groundbreaking signings throughout his career. He really sets the tone for the future of our A&R team. We immediately connected from our first meeting, and he’s going to be a major asset to the evolution of our department.”

Beard comes to Republic from APG, where he started as an intern and rose to senior vp, A&R. During his tenure, he signed Charlie Puth, Alec Benjamin and Pink Sweat\$. He has also worked extensively as a DJ in nightclubs across the U.S., on-air at KIIS-FM and at private events.

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“Miles has really set the pace for pop music with an unbelievable winning streak of incredible signings throughout the past decade,” said Goldstein. “The impact of his work is palpable throughout the industry. As we continue to expand our A&R team, he’s the perfect addition as a prescient executive with sharp instincts and a diehard work ethic. It’s an honor to welcome him to Republic Records.”

The Beggars Group of Labels announced several hires and promotions in its streaming division.

Brandon Becker was promoted to global head, streaming, where he will direct campaign streaming strategy in collaboration with the labels and maintain primary relationships with the company’s streaming partners worldwide.

Matthew Gawrych joined Beggars as U.S. streaming director. He joins the company from FUGA, where he served as global head, marketing strategy. In his new role, he’ll be tasked with overseeing Beggars’ U.S. streaming business and day-to-day relationships with designated U.S. accounts. He’ll also lead U.S.-originating campaigns.

Marissa Esposito was promoted to U.S. junior streaming account manager, where she’ll directly support Gawrych in handling direct relationships with several streaming partners, along with providing administrative support to the global streaming team.

Finally, **Shaun Delaney** will now assume sole oversight of all U.K. streaming activity as Beggars’ senior streaming lead, while **Molly McIntyre** moved from the U.K. radio department to become U.K. junior streaming account manager.

Kobalt promoted **Jon Trumbull** to head, global writer & publisher relations. He was previously vp, writer & publisher relations.

Trumbull, who has been with Kobalt since 2011, was the second employee at Kobalt’s writer & publisher relations team in the U.S. In his most recent role of vp, he oversaw the company’s New York and Nashville offices and the team’s analysis division. He has directed the administration of some of Kobalt’s top clients, including Dave Grohl, Nine Inch Nails and Paul McCartney.

“Jon has consistently raised the bar for servicing our clients,” said Kobalt president

and COO **Jeannette Perez**. “Kobalt continues to stand alone as the best-in-class client services to songwriters and publishers, and Jon has been a key part of that. With his leadership, I am confident he will continue to find new ways to strengthen our service offerings and support Kobalt’s continued growth.”

The Recording Academy appointed **Ryan Butler** as vp, diversity, equity & inclusion, effective immediately. He reports to co-president **Valeisha Butterfield Jones**, his predecessor in the DEI role.

Butler joined the Academy in 2019 as a key member of the advocacy and public policy team and later served as director, then senior advisor, of the DEI department. He has led various efforts including the launch of the Academy’s first-ever Black Music Collective and podcast of the same name, the Women in the Mix study alongside Berklee College of Music and Arizona State University, and the implementation of an inclusion rider for the upcoming 64th Annual Grammy Awards. Butler also was instrumental in launching a series of partnerships including Color of Change and GLAAD.

During his tenure as senior advisor, Butler simultaneously served as the founding executive director of the Warner Music/Blavatnik Center for Music Business at Howard University, his alma mater. – *Paul Grein*

Orangetheory Fitness appointed artist, DJ and producer **Steve Aoki** as its first-ever chief music officer. In the newly-created role, Aoki will oversee the “musical vibe” for Orangetheory’s global network throughout the year, according to a press release, while helping the brand “evolve its member experience” in terms of music. The relationship will continue throughout 2022.

Aoki’s duties will include leading music advisory sessions with the Orangetheory team, providing customized musical beats for exclusive member content and helping the brand to establish a music advisory board. He will additionally design a custom track for the company’s forthcoming “More Life” ad campaign.

As a brand partner for the company, Aoki will work closely with the Orangetheory fitness team on setlists that will serve as the soundtracks for a new workout series en-

titled “All Out with Aoki,” the first of which will debut globally on March 26.

“We know the critical role music plays in the workout experience, which is why we enlisted Steve Aoki as CMO,” said **Dave Long**, co-founder and CEO of Orangetheory Fitness. “Steve’s dedication to health and wellness coupled with his passion for science and technology makes him a natural fit. His values align perfectly with Orangetheory’s science-backed, technology-tracked workout.”

Added Aoki, “Health, science and technology are three personal passion points for me and as Chief Music Officer for Orangetheory Fitness, I’m able to put them all in play. There is a strong parallel between the energy at my shows and how Orangetheory coaches light up their own classes every day – my new setlists are meant to enhance this already amazing workout.”

Keith Hagan launched **Skylark Artist Management**, a new management/marketing/publicity company.

Hagan served as co-owner of SKH Music for the past 12 years, during which he was involved with the careers of The Afghan Whigs, TOTO, Kenny Rogers and Robert Finley. Joining him in the new venture on the client side are The Afghan Whigs, Robert Finley, Cymande and Lily & Madeleine; Hagan will also continue handling publicity for the Kenny Rogers estate. New clients for Hagan at Skylark include Beth Orton, The Whitmore Sisters and The Mastersons.

“During the pandemic, I was quite active in a couple of different areas, not all of them management related,” Hagan commented. “I became a full-time volunteer for Joe Biden’s campaign along with contributing to the launch of Brooklyn Made Presents. However, at the end of last year, I felt the time was finally right to strike out on my own fully. I have an excellent support team around me here at Skylark, and I’m very excited for what the future holds.”

Before SKH, Hagan was vp/general manager at PFA Media, which he helped launch in 2002. He also served as vp, publicity at Mammoth Records for nearly eight years and as the “alternative” publicist at Arista Records for two years.

EMPIRE hired **Stephen White** as chief

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product officer. White will oversee all data and technology and be responsible for the strategic product direction of the company, including product vision, innovation, design and development.

White was previously the CEO at StageIt Corp, which he joined in May 2020 and remained with through its sale to VNUE in January. Before that, he was chief executive and chairman of the board at Dubset Media Holdings, where he led the charge on repositioning and rebranding; the business sold to PEX in February 2020.

Between 2012 and 2014, White was chief executive and president at Gracenote, where he worked for a total of 14 years and played a pivotal role in growing the company from a small startup. Prior to Gracenote, he served as vp, product at streaming music startup Echo.com and as senior director and executive producer at CKS, a media consultancy based in Silicon Valley.

Distribution and payments platform **Stem** hired **Charleton Lamb** as head, marketing. In the role, Lamb will lead the team responsible for introducing Stem's tools and services to the music industry, developing its visual identity and crafting brand communications.

Lamb arrives at Stem from Spotify, where he spent over four years on the Spotify for Artists team. While there, he played a key role in the development, launch and success of tools including Direct Upload, Marquee and Discovery Mode.

"Charleton has been a powerful advocate for independent artists and labels for a long time, and he's one of the best at breaking down the complexities of the music industry into simple messages and engaging creative," said **Milana Lewis**, CEO of Stem. "We're thrilled to have him on the team."

Matthew Hargis, senior vp, promotion and marketing at Big Machine Label Group imprint **BMLG Records**, is exiting his role at the company to spend more time with his family. Hargis will continue on with the label until a successor is found.

"After 11 years at BMLG Records, I have made the decision to step away," said Hargis in a statement. "Our children have reached an age where my wife and I believe the focus needs to be on them for these foun-

dational years. I have been blessed by the last 22 years in this amazing Country music community which has afforded me the ability to take some time away.

"I am forever grateful for the opportunities **Scott [Borchetta]**, **Jimmy [Harnen]** and all of our world-class artists have provided me at BMLG Records as well as our previous stints together at DreamWorks and Capitol," he added, "It is bittersweet to leave BMLG, but it is the right decision for our family at this time."

In his own statement, Harnen, BMLG Records' president & CEO, said, "Matthew led the BMLG Records promotion team to 38 number one singles in just 11 years. Two of those number one songs, FGL's 'Cruise' and 'Meant To Be', were Diamond Award winners (signifying over ten million in sales). The incredible list of number ones also includes the eight-times platinum 'If I Die Young' by The Band Perry, as well as seven number one multi-platinum singles by Brett Young."

Harnen added, "I know I speak for everyone at the Big Machine Label Group when I say thank you so much for your incredible leadership, friendship, kindness, honesty and expertise. People like you are in short supply in this world. We wish you the very best and if you ever decide to rejoin the music business you will always have a home with us."

Sarah Jones was promoted to general manager of concert discovery service **Songkick**, which is owned by Warner Music Group. Jones is stepping in for current Songkick manager director **Bill Ashton**, who will leave the company at the end of March after a ten-year stint at WMG.

Jones has been with Songkick since 2018, when she joined the company as commercial director. She was promoted to vp, commercial in 2021. Before that, she worked at the BBC for 14 years, most recently leading its global partnership strategy across videos and podcasts.

In her new role, Jones will oversee the launch of marketing service Songkick Campaigns, which will allow for direct and bespoke fan messaging. It will additionally allow tour marketers to have exclusive control of how to activate marketing campaigns

and promote tours directly to fans.

Benjamin Blank, president of WMG's media business, said in a statement, "Sarah's track record is incredible and I can't think of a better person to take the reins of Songkick. I'm sad to see Bill leave, and I want to thank him for all he's done and for leaving the business on such a high. When live music grinded to a halt, Sarah and Bill were central to the business pivoting and finding new ways to engage our audiences and artists."

Also at Songkick, **Simon McCabe** was promoted to vp, technology, WMX Media, WMG's recently-launched next generation services division. While his role has expanded to encompass all of WMX's media businesses, including HipHopDX and Uproxx, his main focus will be continuing to develop and build on Songkick's core business and suite of artist marketing tools.

Downtown Music Holdings appointed **Alison Moore**, CEO of Comic Relief USA, and **Kelli Turner**, CFO of Sun Capital Partners, to its board of directors.

Moore formerly served as chief revenue officer at Soundcloud and as chief business officer, beauty collection at Conde Nast, where she oversaw the Glamour and Allure brands. She's also held multiple gm and executive-level positions across digital products, strategy and brand development at NBC Universal, DailyCandy and HBO.

Turner was previously president and COO at SESAC and worked as president and CFO of RSL Management Corporation and CFO and executive vp of Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia before that. She also held executive roles at Tim Warner and New Line Cinema.

Luca Gentili was promoted to vp, operations & industry relations at **Warner Chappell Music Italy**.

In the new role, Gentili will continue being based in Milan and report to Warner Chappell president, Southern Europe **Santiago Menéndez-Pidal**. He'll be WCM's main point of contact with Italian collection society Società Italiana degli Autori ed Editori (SIAE), with a goal of helping the organization further drive efficiency and transparency on behalf of the publisher's songwriters.

Gentili joined WCM in 2008 as adminis-

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trative director. He was later named finance director, covering the company's operations in Italy and Greece. He sits on the board of directors at the Federazione Editori Musicali (FEM), which represents Italian music publishers and authors.

Artist management company **In De Goot Entertainment**, led by president/owner **Bill McGathy**, recently opened a Nashville office, located at 900 South Street, Ste. 101. The Nashville office joins the company's locations in New York City, St. Louis and London, as well as its presence in Los Angeles and Detroit.

It was simultaneously announced that several In De Goot staff members received promotions. They include **Michael Iurato**, promoted to president, A&R and artist development; **Adam Lebensfeld** to president, promotion; **Alison Shepard** to president, marketing & strategy; **Gwyther Bultman** to senior vp, artist management; **Chris Frank** to vp, promotion; **Katrina Tuman-dao** to digital marketing director; and **Matthew Young** to director, digital marketing/artist manager.

Iurato said of the new Nashville office, "Nashville has always been a destination for musicians. Over the past couple of years its infrastructure in the rock world has been extremely influential. We felt the time was right to extend our reach not only for us as a company but for how we can best represent our artists."

McGathy previously served as national director, rock promotions for Polydor/Polygram, and later worked as national director, rock promotions at RCA.

In De Goot Entertainment represents artists in genres including rock and alternative, with an artist roster including Halestorm, Shinedown, Black Stone Cherry, Ayrton Jones and more. — *Jessica Nicholson*

The Opportunity Network, a New York-based nonprofit that aims to close the opportunity gap for underrepresented students, appointed **Caron Veazey** — Black Music Action Coalition co-founder and chair and chair of Splice Global Music Council — to its board of directors.

In a statement, **AiLun Ku**, president and CEO of The Opportunity Network, said Veazey will "help us further our mission of

building equitable structures of access, and increasing professional mobility for underrepresented students across the country."

Veazey is also the founder and CEO of boutique management and consulting company Something in Common and previously managed Pharrell Williams, with whom she co-founded the creative collective i am OTHER.

Artist Growth, a collaboration platform for labels, artist managers and creative teams, hired **Rob Weitzner** as executive vp, revenue & growth.

Weitzner will be responsible for developing "new pathways and partnerships for the company," according to a press release, as he leads marketing, business development and sales strategies around the company's music industry API. He arrives at the company from The state51 Music Group's digital supply chain company Consolidated Independent (CI), where he was head of business development, strategy & partnerships.

Working in artist management for the first decade of his career, Weitzner went on to serve as vp, business development at eMusic and as vp, business development and digital strategy at TVT Records. He later worked in leadership roles at A2IM (American Association of Independent Music) and at IODA, where he served as head, global business development. ■

Jussie Smollett Sentenced to 150 Days in Jail for Staged Attack

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jussie Smollett was sentenced Thursday (March 10) to 150 days in jail for lying to police about a racist and homophobic attack that the former *Empire* actor orchestrated himself.

Cook County Judge James Linn sentenced Smollett to 30 months of felony probation, including 150 days in the county jail. Linn denied a request to suspend Smol-

lett's sentence and ordered he be placed in custody immediately.

Smollett was also ordered to pay \$120,106 in restitution.

Smollett loudly proclaimed his innocence after the sentence. "I am innocent. I could have said I am guilty a long time ago," Smollett shouted as sheriff's deputies led him out of the courtroom, capping an hourslong sentencing hearing.

Ahead of his sentencing, Smollett declined to make a statement at the hearing, saying he agreed with his attorney's advice to remain quiet. Smollett's decision came after special prosecutor Dan Webb asked Cook County Judge James Linn to include "an appropriate amount of prison time" when sentencing the actor for his conviction. Webb said he would not ask for a specific amount of time, leaving that to Linn's discretion.

Smollett's defense attorney Neny Uche asked Linn to limit the sentence to community service. He said Smollett "has lost nearly everything" in his career and finances and asked that Linn give him time to make restitution if that is part of the sentence.

Witnesses for both the state and Smollett testified at Smollett's sentencing at the Cook County Courthouse. Chicago Police Supt. David Brown, who was called by the state, submitted a statement that was read aloud by Samuel Mendenhall, a member of the special prosecution team.

In the statement, Brown, who became superintendent in April 2020 and wasn't with the city at the time of Smollett's police report, said Smollett's false report of a hate crime harmed "actual victims" of such crimes. Brown asked that the city be compensated for its costs, saying the cost of investigating his claim could have been spent elsewhere in the city.

Jussie Smollett's grandmother, testifying for the defense, asked Linn not to include prison time in his sentence for Smollett.

"I ask you, judge, not to send him to prison," Molly Smollett, 92, told the court. She later added, "If you do, send me along with him, OK?"

Smollett's brother, Joel Smollett, Jr., told the court that Smollett is "not a threat to the people of Illinois. In my humble opinion he

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is completely innocent.”

Smollett’s attorneys also read aloud letters from other supporters, including an organizer with Black Lives Matter, the Rainbow PUSH Coalition and LaTanya and Samuel L. Jackson that asked Linn to consider the case’s effect on Smollett’s life and career and to avoid any confinement as part of his sentence.

Other supporters spoke about worries that Smollett would be at risk in prison, specifically mentioning his race, sexual orientation and his family’s Jewish heritage.

Smollett will eventually learn if a judge will order him locked up for his conviction of lying to police about a racist and homophobic attack that he orchestrated himself or allow him to remain free. Before the sentencing began, Linn rejected a motion from the defense to overturn the jury’s verdict on [legal](#) grounds. Judges rarely grant such motions.

“I do believe at the end of the day that Mr. Smollett received a fair trial,” Linn said.

Smollett, who is expected to continue to deny his role in the staged attack in January 2019, faces up to three years in prison for each of the five felony counts of disorderly conduct — the charge filed for lying to police — of which he was convicted. He was acquitted on a sixth count.

But because Smollett does not have an extensive criminal history and the conviction is for a low-level nonviolent crime, experts do not expect that he will be sent to prison. The actor could be ordered to serve up to a year in county jail or, if Linn chooses, be placed on probation and ordered to perform some kind of community service.

The sheer size and scope of the police investigation was a major part of the trial and is key in a \$130,000 pending lawsuit that the city filed against Smollett to recover the cost of police overtime, so the judge also could order the actor to pay a hefty fine and restitution.

Thursday’s sentencing could be the final chapter in a criminal case, subject to appeal, that made international headlines when Smollett, who is Black and gay, reported to police that two men wearing ski masks beat him, and hurled racial and homophobic slurs at him on a dark Chicago street and ran off.

In December, Smollett was convicted in a trial that included the testimony of two brothers who told jurors Smollett paid them to carry out the attack, gave them money for the ski masks and rope, instructed them to fashion the rope into a noose. Prosecutors said he told them what racist and homophobic slurs to shout, and to yell that Smollett was in “MAGA Country,” a reference to the campaign slogan of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign.

Smollett, who knew the men from his work on the television show *Empire* that filmed in Chicago, testified that he did not recognize them and did not know they were the men attacking him.

During the hearing, Smollett will be allowed to make a statement. He could repeat some of the things he told jurors during the trial about how he was simply a victim of a violent crime.

Unlike the trial, Linn has agreed to let photographers and a television camera inside court for the hearing — meaning the public will for the first time get to see and hear Smollett speak in court. **■**

How Love Rocks’ Founders Silenced the ‘Naysayers’ By Raising Over \$20M for Charity

BY TAYLOR MIMS

Over the past six years, the [Love Rocks](#) benefit concert has helped nonprofit God’s Love We Deliver prepare and deliver more than 2 million meals to people too sick to shop or cook for themselves, each nutritionally tailored to the person’s specific needs. The annual event has seen the likes of Jon Bon Jovi, Dave Matthews, Robert Plant, Joe Walsh, Emmylou Harris, Sheryl Crow, Sara Bareilles, Nathaniel Rateliff and more volunteer their time and talent to the cause, and on Thursday night, Keith Rich-

ards & The X-Pensive Winos, Mavis Staples and Hozier added their names to the roster.

The star-studded events have been inarguably successful — raising more than \$20 million since 2017 — but early on not everyone believed that real estate agent **Greg Williamson** and event producer **Nicole Retcher** could pull it off without a big-name artist at the forefront calling in favors, like Willie Nelson’s Farm Aid or Sting’s Rainforest Fund.

“There were so many naysayers ... we had never done this before,” says Retcher. “Everybody told Greg, ‘You’re a nice guy, but no way.’”

The duo’s naivety, says Williamson, was what led them to relentlessly forge ahead. “Anybody with half a brain who knows what it takes to put on one of these, wouldn’t go forward,” he adds.

Williamson was relentless in his efforts to put together the first Love Rocks concert in 2017 when the duo assembled a lineup that included Jackson Browne, Joe Walsh, Aaron Neville, Gary Clark Jr., Michael McDonald and Mavis Staples. To land that lineup, Retcher and Williamson first hired a world-class backing band led by Will Lee — a 30-year veteran of the CBS Orchestra for *The Late Show With David Letterman* — who reached out to all of the top-tier musicians they knew to join the benefit. The duo, who continue to work their day jobs in addition to running the annual event, also partnered with close friend and clothing designer **John Varvatos**, whose clout in the music industry helped solidify talent.

An additional key to Williamson and Retcher’s success over the years has been finding just the right combination of artists who want to play together. “The artists love it,” says Williamson. “They love it because we take exceptional care of them and they get to see all their friends that they don’t get to see while they are on tour.”

Most important Love Rocks’ success is its support of a cause everyone can get behind. God’s Love We Deliver was founded more than 35 years ago during the height of the AIDS/HIV epidemic, when most individuals feared interacting with AIDS patients. It was started by hospice nurse Ganga Stone, who began delivering nutritionally-tailored

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meals to people living with AIDS in Manhattan. To date, the organization has delivered nearly 30 million meals to individuals suffering from a range of diagnoses including AIDS, cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Williamson and Retcher have parlayed the success of Love Rocks into RWE Partners, a production company that has raised \$30 million for charities through events like CBS primetime special *Play On* hosted by Kevin Bacon and Eve, which brought in more than \$8 million for transformational racial, social and food justice in 2020.

Williamson “makes us all do things we never thought we would do,” says Retcher. “They are scary and they’re outside your comfort zone, but at the end of the day you’ve done something really special and you keep signing on for the next one.”

Influence Media Calls Tainy Catalog Acquisition an ‘Eight-Figure Deal’

BY ED CHRISTMAN

Influence Media Partners, which [previously acknowledged](#) its acquisition of rights from producer/artist [Tainy](#), has provided additional details on the deal, saying it consists of the producer’s song publishing catalog from 2005 to 2021 and includes such songs as [Cardi B](#)’s “I Like It” featuring [Bad Bunny](#) and [J Balvin](#); [Bad Bunny](#) and [Jhay Cortez](#)’s “Dakiti;” and [Kali Uchis](#)’ “Telepatía.” Terms of the acquisition were not disclosed, other than to describe it as an eight-figure deal.

“I am happy to continue to be a part of this cultural awakening for Latino music and artists in this business,” Tainy said in a statement. “This acquisition solidifies my hard work and the power that Latin music has in the global mainstream.”

Influence Media, which is backed with funding from BlackRock Alternative Invest-

ors, Warner Music Group and other institutional investors, says its strategic focus includes investing in and cultivating “modern evergreen” contemporary compositions as well as investing in female creators, with an emphasis on diversity.

“Tainy has redefined the sound and the future of Latin music,” Influence Media founding advisor & partner [Rene McLean](#) said in a statement. “We are honored to be part of the creative journey as he and [manager] [Lex Borrero](#) continue to push music and culture into a new stratosphere.”

Borrero and [Jason Boyarski](#) of Boyarski Fritz LLP brokered the deal, which marks a historic moment for a Latin producer and for Latin entertainment, as stated in the announcement.

“Tainy’s catalog is part of Latin music history and I wanted our partners to treat it and value it as such,” Borrero said in a statement. “The team at Influence did just that.”

Eagles of Death Metal’s Jesse Hughes Details Legal Battle Over Fiancee Tuesday Cross’ Life: ‘She Deserves to Live’

BY DANIELLE BACHER

The love of my life is going to die.” Jesse Hughes, the frontman for [Eagles of Death Metal](#), lifts his head a few inches. Tears run down his cheeks into his handlebar mustache and beard. He drags on a cigarette. “I believe the hospital wants to end her life,” he says, shaking his head. “She deserves to live.”

A few blocks away from Hughes’ home, in a private room in the intensive care unit of

Dignity Health Glendale Memorial Hospital, about a 20-minute drive from Los Angeles, Hughes’ fiancée, 31-year-old Marina Cardenas — better known as EODM’s bassist and keyboardist Tuesday Cross — lies comatose. She has been in a vegetative state for approximately six weeks since an asthma attack sent her into cardiac arrest, and it has been more than a month since Hughes has seen or communicated with her.

“What if she never wakes up?” he asks, defeated, exhaling a thick plume of smoke. “What if I can’t ever talk to her again?”

Hughes, 49, alleges that an EEG test administered by staff at Glendale Memorial indicated that Cross had suffered brain damage, and because of those results, “The hospital made up their minds long ago that they didn’t want to treat her.” According to Alexandra Snyder, an attorney working on Hughes’ behalf and another source familiar with Cross’ care, there was no indication that the hospital was supplying nutrition to Cross and was limiting treatment to intravenous hydration. According to Hughes’ declaration to the court, he states, “I am afraid that the hospital is ignoring any signs that Marina is responsive in order to remove her ventilator and medical treatment. I recently found out [she] has not received any form of nutrition since she was admitted to the hospital.”

Snyder says limiting care to hydration is a common method used to prepare terminally ill patients’ organs for donations. Christina Zicklin, director of external communications at Glendale Memorial Hospital, says via phone, “We cannot disclose any information regarding any patient due to HIPAA regulations and California privacy laws.” (In a [legal](#) response from the hospital, Leah Nubla, director of quality at Glendale Memorial, said “nutrition was supplied intravenously.”)

Glendale Memorial’s care of Cross — and who is legally empowered to determine what that care should be — is the focus of litigation currently playing out in Los Angeles Superior Court. Hughes, with the help of the Life Legal Defense Foundation, that fought to keep [Terri Schiavo](#) on life support during a headline-making case in the late 1990s and early 2000s, is petitioning the

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hospital and Cross' mother, Maria Virginia Gaytan, alleging that the hospital chose to take direction from Gaytan and blocked him from seeing or communicating with his fiancée, even though he has documentation that Cross gave him power of attorney over her health care.

On Feb. 18, Judge Daniel Juarez ordered that the hospital could not remove Cross from respiratory support or other medical treatment, including nutrition, and that she was to remain on life support. The impending issues are expected to be determined at a Friday (March 11) hearing presided over by Judge Juarez. "She's all by herself with these monsters who don't give a sh— about her," Hughes says of his partner of a dozen years — and, since March 2016, when he dropped to one knee and proposed during a concert in Australia, his fiancée. Their bond had deepened just a few months earlier when on Nov. 13, 2015, Islamic State jihadists stormed Paris' Bataclan nightclub while Eagles of Death Metal were performing, taking hostages and killing 90 people there — part of coordinated attacks that left another 40 dead in the city. As Hughes and his band dodged bullets and escaped backstage, Cross, who was supposed to play keyboards later in the set and was not onstage, waited for him between the vehicles that the terrorists had driven to the club.

"She didn't go anywhere without me then, and I'm not going anywhere without her now," he says.

On the afternoon of Jan. 23, Hughes says he and Cross had cuddled on the couch in their bungalow-style home in LA's Atwater Village as she puffed a few times on the inhaler she used to treat her asthma. She was exhausted from graffiti tagging the past few nights, and the spray-paint vapor had given her a slight cough. When she fell asleep, Hughes headed to a nearby record store with two friends.

While he was gone, Jennifer Ortega, a TV and film producer and good friend of the couple, stopped by, found the door unlocked, and discovered Cross struggling to breathe on the kitchen floor. Cross had vomited and "was on her side making noises when I was trying to pull her up," Ortega recalls.

Unable to lift her friend, Ortega called Laura Garcia, a friend and a trained EMT, who was with Hughes. They raced back to the house with another friend, Julian Major, then put Cross in the backseat of Ortega's Honda CR-V, and while Garcia and Major tended to her, Hughes drove the few blocks to Glendale Memorial's emergency room.

In the hospital's declaration filed in response to Hughes' petition, Glendale Memorial's Leah Nubla said that Cross was "in full cardiac arrest" when ER doctors got to her and that Hughes "reported the patient had recently been smoking crack or meth." Hughes claims that he didn't know if she was on drugs but wanted to be safe. He says she was never tested in the hospital. Nubla further stated that Cross was resuscitated, admitted to the intensive care unit, intubated and placed on a ventilator.

Although the hospital's response does not indicate this, Hughes says Cross also tested positive for COVID, and he was told that hospital visits from family and friends were not permitted because of the risk of spreading the virus.

In the reply filed to the hospital's response, a Life Legal Defense Foundation attorney alleges that on or about Jan. 27, Hughes "spoke with the physician overseeing [Cross'] care regarding her condition" and requested a second EEG be performed. The document says that "the doctor snapped at [Hughes], saying, 'Absolutely not. There's no point. She's never going to breathe on her own again.'" The reply further alleges that the doctor told Hughes "he should authorize the Hospital to remove [Cross'] ventilator."

Recalling the conversation at his home, Hughes says he told the doctor, "I'm not pulling her off life support. I'm not doing that to her."

Ortega, who was listening in on the call, says, "The fact that the doctor was so dismissive and rude made us really question him, especially since it hadn't been nearly long enough to see if she'd recover. His complete lack of empathy was shocking."

Around that same time, Hughes also made contact with Gaytan. Though his fiancée was long estranged from her mother and had what he calls a "complicated" rela-

tionship with her, he thought she should be informed of the situation. Hughes says Gaytan declined his offer to fly her from Denver, where she lives, to Los Angeles, but copies of texts between Hughes and Gaytan included in Hughes' court filings indicate that Gaytan did agree that Hughes should oversee her daughter's care. In one, she wrote, "Okay just called [the hospital] to let them know that you will be making decisions since she has been living with you for the last 13 years and practically married and that you will speak to me before consenting anything." In another, she wrote, "I am going to follow anything you say, I trust you."

The hospital's response also says Gaytan agreed to let Hughes make decisions on Cross' care and gave permission for him to visit her daughter via Facetime. That same document also indicates that Gaytan changed her mind after an ICU doctor recommended that Cross be extubated, given a tracheostomy, a surgical procedure that enables a person's trachea to receive direct access to a breathing tube, and that Cross be fitted with a G tube, a surgically planted device that gives direct access to a patient's stomach for feeding. While Gaytan approved the procedures, the response says Hughes wanted more time to consider the recommendations.

The response says that the following day, Feb. 1, Gaytan informed the hospital's social worker that she was no longer comfortable with Hughes being the decision-maker, and at that point began taking directions from Cross' mother since she was next of kin.

Hughes says the hospital did not inform him of this change and he did not learn about it until Gaytan texted him to say that she now wanted to be the decision-maker regarding Cross' health care with input from him. But Hughes says that in June 2021, Cross signed a document giving him power of attorney over her health care after a similar incident landed her in Glendale Memorial. The document, which is dated June 2, 2021, is included in Hughes' petition.

According to the reply filed by Hughes' lawyer, he attempted to provide the hospital with a copy of Cross' power of attorney document (DPOA) but was "repeatedly turned away in the lobby and told the hos-

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pital would not receive any documents from him.”

Glendale Memorial’s response acknowledges that it did receive the DPOA but alleges the document was improperly executed and therefore chose to continue taking directions from Gaytan. Snyder, Hughes’ attorney, tells Billboard that they properly executed the document and that the hospital is still not acknowledging Hughes as POA.

Gaytan tells Billboard that she believes the document was forged. “That’s not my daughter’s signature,” she says.

Amid this conflict with the hospital and Gaytan, Hughes continued to call her via Facetime. In early February, he and a group of the couple’s close friends called Cross, and he asked his fiancée, “Baby, if you can close your eyes, everyone would surely love that.” Cross stared into the screen and closed her eyes. He waited about three or four minutes, then he asked her to do it again. She did.

Hughes says he called the nurses’ station and informed them of this development.

“See, she’s responding!” he said. “You’ve got to look! I think she’s trying to wake up!”

The nurse’s reply, he says, was, “It’s nothing.”

He captured the moment on his iPhone, snapping photos to ensure that he had some proof of her recovery. “It showed her gasping for air, reacting to me and having brain function,” he says.

The last time Hughes saw his fiancée was on Feb. 8. “She’s been in there for so long. I miss her,” he says. “She’s probably heard so many conversations about how they are going to terminate her.” As soon as he started talking to Cross, she responded, moving her head slightly. His interpretation was that his fiancée was happy to hear a familiar voice. Court documents filed by his lawyer, allege that when Hughes asked the nurses to note Cross’ responses, they “moved the iPad away from [Cross’] face. However, the audio was still on and [Hughes] could hear the nurses saying something about sedating [Cross] before [Hughes] would be allowed back on the video call. Gaytan then put a stop to the Facetime sessions as well. Referring to this incident, the hospital’s response alleges

that “the patient was and is reported by the caregivers as unresponsive.”

Furious that he’d been banned from seeing Cross, Hughes engaged the Life Legal Defense Foundation and set up a [GoFundMe page](#) for his fiancée. On social media, he asked his fans to get involved by calling the hospital. Gaytan says she was livid when she learned of his actions. As of Wednesday, Hughes had raised a little over \$6,000.

On March 11, Judge Juarez is expected to determine whether Hughes or Gaytan has legal power of attorney and to decide where Cross will get the best care. Hughes has requested that his fiancée be transferred to UCLA Medical Center, where he says they’ve agreed to treat her. He adds that he will raise funds and pay for her medical care if insurance won’t cover it.

According to Gaytan, Cross remains in a coma but occasionally breathes on her own. When she tires, her tracheostomy tube must be connected to a ventilator. She initially told Billboard that she doesn’t want her daughter moved to another hospital yet and was waiting for Medi-Cal to approve a long-term care facility for her care and rehabilitation. But Glendale hospital’s response to Snyder’s petition indicates that Gaytan was trying to obtain funding to airlift her daughter to Denver.

Right before Covid hit, Hughes and Cross were making plans to marry in Amsterdam at a small ceremony that would be attended by a few close friends. Now it has been over a month since he’s seen her, and he says he’s scared that he may never see her again. “It seems like a cruel punishment not to let me speak to her,” he says. He pulls up his shirt to show her face inked on both sides of his chest.

One night in late February, Hughes hangs out with friends at the house he shares with Cross. They used to stay up all night, her painting canvases on the floor, while he rehearsed his music.

Over the course of the evening, he vacillates between an almost manic confidence that he will get the love of his life back by any means, and despair. “They weren’t counting on a dude like me. Nothing is going to stop me,” he says at one point. Later that

night, he breaks down, crying while he rocks back and forth. “I can’t even talk to her, touch her, hold her,” he says.

Between sips of Dr. Pepper, he takes to Instagram Live to sing Simon & Garfunkel’s “Bridge Over Troubled Water” on a karaoke machine. He dedicates the song to Cross. “I sing karaoke every night. It helps me,” says Hughes. I’m singing to her. I hold a prayer session on Instagram, too. He’s also constructed a 25-foot wooden cross adorned with jagged sections of mirror, glitter and resin. He plans to erect it on a mountain in Griffith Park that overlooks both his house and the hospital. “I’m calling it Tuesday’s Cross,” he proclaims. “I just love her so much.”

From ‘Encanto’ To The Oscars: Sebastián Yatra Is Ready For Latin Pop’s Closeup

BY LEILA COBO

No, no, no. You were too late,” says [Sebastián Yatra](#), lifting his phone again and turning it to selfie mode. “One more time.”

It’s nearly midnight at a half-empty restaurant in Miami’s hip design district, and Yatra has roped me into what he calls “Instagram therapy”: lip-syncing on camera to his track [“Melancólicos Anónimos,”](#) with me playing the prissy-voiced therapist to Yatra’s lovelorn Romeo.

And while we may technically be filming for the 27-year-old Colombian pop star’s 29 million Instagram followers, there’s another rapt audience here — namely, the young Venezuelan mothers and their well-manicured husbands at the table next to us, not-so-surreptitiously looking on. So I focus on delivering my lines on the beat and, this time, nail it.

“Yes!” Yatra exclaims, uploading the video to both his Instagram account and mine.

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Get tickets [here](#) to see Sebastián Yatra perform at Samsung + Billboard Present THE STAGE at [SXSW](#) on March 19.

With his puppy-like enthusiasm and unpretentious good nature — both on constant display on his social media — Yatra seems more like a chill, cute younger cousin than an artist on the brink of superstardom. But he is very much the latter: Since 2018, he has placed 18 hits on *Billboard's* [Hot Latin Songs](#) chart and scored 10 No. 1s on the [Latin Airplay](#) chart, including the sexy duet [“Pareja del Año”](#) with Myke Towers, which hit No. 9 on the [Global Excl. U.S.](#) chart and No. 16 on the [Global 200](#).

Though he has experimented sonically with different genres, Yatra has achieved all that by largely sticking to a core brand of melodic Latin pop — one reminiscent of 1990s stars Ricky Martin and Enrique Iglesias, who tapped Yatra to open for their 2021 U.S. arena tour — that lately has been overshadowed by reggaetón. His first two albums debuted at No. 1 on the [Latin Pop Albums](#) chart. On his current, irresistible bop [“Tacones Rojos”](#) (whose music video has 100 million YouTube views and counting), Yatra eschews graphic lyrics for airy good humor, with sweet lines like “My slice of sunshine, the apple of my eye/The one who dances reggaetón with red heels and makes me fly.”

Recently, a much more unlikely hit has been introducing Yatra to a significantly bigger audience. He's the voice of [“Dos Oruguitas,”](#) the gorgeous all-Spanish tearjerker by Lin-Manuel Miranda from Disney's *Encanto* that's now Academy Award-nominated for best original song. (Yatra will perform it at the ceremony on March 27.) It has become Yatra's highest-charting entry on Hot Latin Songs yet (reaching No. 2) and his first appearance on the [Billboard Hot 100](#) (where it cracked the top 40) at a time when, suddenly, it feels like the artist is everywhere. He's now starring in the Netflix musical series *Érase Una Vez, Pero Ya No (Once Upon a Time... Happily Never After)*, in which he plays dual lead roles and sings the theme. All of that has set the stage nicely for Yatra's third album, *Dharma*, which debuted in February at No. 2 on Latin

Pop Albums — and came after a period of intense work and introspection.

“‘Dharma’ means the acceptance of reality,” he says — the word is tattooed in tiny cursive above his right wrist. “We all know the meaning of karma: If you do bad things, bad things will happen to you. But dharma refers to the lessons learned in life. [Before], I was giving the best of myself and wonderful things were happening to me, but I was obsessed with controlling everything. Every problem metastasized. Now I face issues head on, and that's amazing because you take their power away.”

“Yatra is in an exceptional moment in terms of personal and musical maturity,” says Universal Music Latin president Angel Kaminsky, who signed Yatra. “As a composer, he's at a moment where he not only releases hit songs but is also a well-rounded artist who is recognized by all markets and all ages in the Latin region.”

Like his role model Iglesias, Yatra is a pop singer who likes to explore other genres but is obsessed above all with songcraft. Yet he began his career at a time when urban music and the stars performing it, like fellow Colombians J Balvin and Maluma, were dominating Latin music and expanding far beyond its borders.

“When I first started, everyone was reggaetón, reggaetón, reggaetón,” recalls Yatra. “And my dad told me: ‘It's better to have 10 people go hear you sing the music that really touches your soul than to sing what you don't like for thousands.’ That stuck with me. I said, ‘I'm going to do the music I love, no matter what genre it is, but I want to do songs that I think are great.’ I love reggaetón, but you can't stay in one genre forever, in the same beat forever, and think that's the only thing that can transmit emotion. I think pop in Spanish is having one of its best moments again, and it's going to get stronger and stronger.”

Unlike the vast majority of Colombian stars — from veterans like Carlos Vives and Juanes to younger superstars like Maluma, Balvin and Karol G — Yatra spent most of his childhood and teenage years in the United States. His well-to-do family fled Medellín in the early 2000s amid escalating political violence in the country that threatened

many civilians' lives, moving to Miami's suburban Pembroke Pines area, a “Colombian bubble” where his close family lived in the same neighborhood and Spanish was spoken at home.

After he landed the lead role of Troy in a middle school production of *High School Musical*, “something just clicked,” Yatra says. He began wearing a scarf, as some singers do to care for their vocal cords (yes, his flair for the dramatic began at age 12), and threw himself into a kind of triple-threat training, taking voice, dance and guitar lessons while writing songs and cutting demos. His mother, who supported him from the onset, became his manager (she's still involved in the back office, though Yatra says their relationship has become more mother-son than “momager”-client), and together they brainstormed a stage name that would have international appeal but still feel natural. (His given surname, Obando Giraldo, didn't quite roll off the tongue in English.) They arrived at “Yatra,” a Sanskrit word meaning “journey” or “pilgrimage” in Hinduism and Buddhism.

“I always had in my mind that at some point in my life, I was going to sing in English and have a more global career, so I was preparing myself,” says Yatra. “It's like building a big city: If you don't plan it well, the roads are tiny and the access doesn't work. I wanted to lay the foundation so that people could pronounce my name easily.”

Once he graduated high school, Yatra returned to Colombia, a more manageable market in which to launch a career, and began performing at high schools and radio stations. He hired a manager, Roberto Andrade (now managing director at Warner Music Latina), who arranged a songwriting session with Dandee of successful pop/reggaetón duo Cali y El Dandee. Together they wrote [“Por Fin Te Encontré,”](#) a track intended for the pair, but when Spanish DJ Juan Magán jumped on it, Yatra also asked to be included.

That feature became Yatra's entry to the Hot Latin Songs chart — and to record labels' radar. By 2016, he was on the verge of signing with Sony Colombia when Universal Music Latin executives Kaminsky and then-managing director Alejandro Duque (now at

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Warner) flew to Medellín from Miami with instructions not to return without signing Yatra. Enticed by the deal's international potential, Yatra took it, also signing a co-management agreement with Universal's management/artist development division, GTS, which fast-tracked him to priority status at the label and immediately offered him ample touring support.

At just 21, Yatra was well on his way to becoming the global artist he had always imagined he would be. From the start, Universal developed him not country by country (as is usually the case with new Latin artists) but with simultaneous emphasis on the United States, Colombia, Spain, Argentina and Mexico. By the time the coronavirus pandemic began in early 2020, Yatra was an established star in Latin America. But he had yet to achieve massive success stateside, and, between albums, felt stuck.

"Sebas was right at his inflection point," says Paula Kaminsky, Angel's sister, who took over as Yatra's manager two years ago when Universal Music Latin hired her to helm GTS. "He was about to explode. If an artist is lucky to get to that big moment, the problem is, what comes next? The challenge was getting past that stage."

"I felt like I was losing momentum," Yatra recalls. "You've seen a lot of artists go through that: You're *the* artist one day, you're on top of your game, and then maybe you don't have the same engagement. Even if from the outside things look great, you can get into your head. And you can't overcome that by making more hits or releasing more songs. You overcome that by making an interior change, by going somewhere else within you and realizing you make music for love of the music and the songwriting and the performance, but not for the results."

He began meditating and, for the first time in his life, going to therapy, which he still does weekly. ("You have to work on yourself every day," he says.) And with the pandemic pause, he began to regroup professionally, too. "Sebastián started this crazy career seven years ago, exploded and never had time to sit down and figure out what kind of album he wanted to do," says Paula. "He told me he wanted an organized plan and to try new things."

She sought out opportunities for Yatra that felt somewhat outside of music but still related to it. Amid the pandemic, Yatra filmed a Disney talent show, *Conecta y Canta*, and the Netflix series, and also appeared as a judge on *The Voice Kids* in Spain, which helped solidify his profile in that country. Paula also enacted a more cohesive Latin American touring strategy, setting up a year of global dates in advance instead of piecemeal in response to demand.

But the most effective opportunity for Yatra was entirely unplanned. Matt Walker, senior vp of music for Walt Disney Animation Studios, stumbled upon Yatra after hearing "[Robarte un Beso](#)," his 2017 duet with Carlos Vives, the Colombian music legend who had been tapped early on to contribute a song for *Encanto*. "Robarte un Beso" led Walker to two poignant Yatra ballads, "[Fantasía](#)" and the bilingual "[No Hay Nadie Mas](#)."

"Both those masters blew me away because I heard a voice that was intimate but powerful," says Walker. "There was no audition. I sent the tracks to [*Encanto* composer] Lin-Manuel and the directors, and they said, 'He will kill this song.'"

Yatra sings "Dos Oruguitas" — a song telling the story of two caterpillars that transform into butterflies, which Walker calls "the heart and soul of the film" — entirely in Spanish, without subtitles, during *Encanto*'s emotional climax, a dialogue-free flashback montage in which the characters of Abuela and her husband are seen fleeing violent marauders and he is killed trying to protect his family. It's a distressingly familiar tragedy for Colombians that Yatra brings to heartbreaking life, in one of only two musical numbers not performed by cast members. (The other is Vives' jubilant "Colombia, Mi Encanto.") "Sebastián could not only perform it but act it," adds Walker, "so we felt [the characters'] love and presence."

Walker called Paula, and within an hour, Yatra was in. He flew to Los Angeles and recorded at Capitol studios, with Miranda coaching over Zoom. "Sebastián was prepared," says Walker. "When he started singing that first verse and bringing that character to the performance, that's when we said, 'This is special. Something miracu-

lous is happening.' We were all convinced this was the song we wanted to present to the Academy [of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences]."

A "Dos Oruguitas" Oscar would go to Miranda, but Yatra's performance — especially in the wake of *Encanto*'s extraordinary, and ongoing, success on the charts — could be a game-changer for his career. "He's already a star," says Walker. "The Academy Awards would be able to open up entirely new audiences to how talented this man is."

And soon, he'll have a chance to see just how many people now want to know who Sebastián Yatra is. In August, he'll embark on the Dharma tour, with over 70 dates in Central and South America and Spain (where he'll play the 15,000-seat Wiznik Center in Madrid), as well as 22 U.S. shows at venues ranging from Los Angeles' YouTube Theater to Miami's FXT Arena. Already, he has performed on *Good Morning America* and *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* — where, midperformance of "Tacones Rojos," he threw in a shy "What's up, USA?" and was greeted by the audience's supportive screams.

"We haven't done the work yet [outside the Latin market]," says Yatra. "Once all that starts, stuff starts to happen. There's an opportunity for me to get known here as a person and not just as a voice."

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How a 2-Year Delay Changed ATEEZ's First U.S. Arena Tour & Inspired Their Next Steps

BY JEFF BENJAMIN

When [ATEEZ](#) returned to America for the first time since 2019, the breakout [K-pop](#) group wasn't as much amazed by upgrading from 800-person-capacity clubs to sold-out arenas as they were with finally reuniting with the actual people in the audience.

"We just saw them on screens for two years, but now finally we see each other," says Hongjoong, ATEEZ's bubbly leader who turns into the fervent and fiery captain onstage. "When we were in Korea, we had online fan meetings with many American fans, but it felt like we were watching them on TV. It's really amazing to see them in person; it's almost unbelievable."

With puppy-like energy palpable as they hang out together, hardly any question for ATEEZ goes answered by just one member. San quickly adds after leader Hongjoong begins, "I'm really happy because my fans and I can look each other eye to eye again," the athletic singer shares, his ferocious onstage personality tamed by a fuzzy cardigan tonight. "It's just a really important thing."

While the face time was thrilling, so was playing for the biggest crowds of their career. According to figures reported to Billboard Boxscore, five of the reported six U.S. stops in ATEEZ's 2022 *The Fellowship: Beginning of the End* tour sold 43,500 tickets and grossed \$4.6 million. That included a \$1.1 million gross at the Prudential Center in Newark, N.J., for their Jan. 24 show, and \$2.2 million at The Forum in Inglewood, Calif., for Jan. 30-31. These numbers mark one of the fastest rises for K-pop artists in

Billboard Boxscore history.

ATEEZ gets a chance to reflect on their first arena shows during an after-hours tour of the Empire State Building as the touring team's one night out as they kept all focus on finishing the trek safely and healthily with only limited activity outside hotel stops. Hongjoong, San, Seonghwa, Yunho, Yeosang, Wooyoung and Jongho spent the visit taking photos together and with their staff. During the night visit, eighth member Mingi rested at the hotel as a precaution after the rapper felt muscle aches earlier in the day.

"This was our first experience with more than 15,000 ATINYs," Hongjoong reflects while naming the group's adoring fandom. "The loudness from the screams was different — louder than any time we've experienced."

Dance machine/burgeoning actor Yunho describes the volume as "so amazing" with San sharing, "When they shout out our names, my heart really starts beating — it feels like my heart is still beating from it."

That rush has been a long-time coming for ATEEZ, who were on track to have their breakout moment in America back in 2020 and show the competitive K-pop industry what they were capable of accomplishing as touring *tour de forces*. Originally titled as *The Fellowship: Map the Treasure World Tour*, [Billboard first reported](#) how seven instant sellouts in markets like Los Angeles, New York and Dallas led to additional tickets opening for for what should have been a humongous world tour across continents. All before COVID-19 concerns shut down everything.

Instead, the group kept the momentum going from home in Korea. ATEEZ held virtual concerts and events from Seoul (about a dozen live streams), released four EPs as part of their *Zero: Fever* album series (that landed them their first-ever [Billboard 200](#) entries last year), and snagged major TV gigs (including opportunities to act, host, collaborate, and compete on the boy-band performance show *Kingdom: Legendary War* alongside other chart-topping groups).

ATEEZ say the time not only led to increased domestic visibility but helped deliver a better show for their first go at arenas.

"Off-camera and on-camera [performances] are so different, so what we learned from performing online is how to work better with the camera," Yunho shares of two years of performing to cameras instead of live audiences. "We grew in that sense: how we express ourselves evolved."

"While we were on *Kingdom*, we all worked together to make good performances and stages because we weren't with the fans directly and we had to think of ways to make better stages of communicating fully," ATEEZ's youngest, most vocally blessed member Jongho says. "That translated into our concert and tour as well, so we can see the different colors that we brought from *Kingdom* and those two years working on new albums."

Hongjoong recognizes that "most of ATEEZ's songs are really energetic, so it's different when there's an audience of fans and when there are no fans — most of the members just missed the time before the pandemic," before noting there were "good points too, but we like being with fans." San bluntly adds, "I don't like it because ATINYs were not there, [it felt like] 'This was not a stage.'"

The break also led to a rebranding for the tour that expressed their ongoing artistic story and hopes for the [global](#) pandemic itself.

"As you might've noticed, the name of the tour got changed to *The Beginning of the End*," says Seonghwa, another superstar juxtaposition as quiet and subtle off stage but instantly draws your eyes with his confidence on stage.

"With this tour, we wanted to express exactly what was happening with 'the beginning of the end' of the pandemic but, also, if you noticed that during the opening show of the tour in Seoul, the first song was 'Win' which was more like, 'Let's finally go! Let's win this!' But these U.S. shows started with 'Wonderland' which has lyrics in it that express the beginning of the end — we're going into this final chapter."

Upon closing out the tour, ATEEZ confirm that their *Fever* era is officially at its end as well. A new era of music is already in the works to send ATINYs into yet another dimension of the group's growing musi-

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cal universe that began with the Treasure Ep.1 album in late 2018.

“I can say that the Fever series is definitely finished,” Hongjoong says carefully. “The Fever series tells the story before the Treasure series and many ATINYs are making guesses about the next series. But if Fever is before Treasure, why don’t we go with the next series following the time after Treasure. Maybe!?! We’ve already prepared that next album and ATINYs will love it differently. To our longtime fans, I think the Fever series might have come off as softer — we debuted with really hard and high-tempo, intense songs, which we love. Fever was more soft and catchy. No matter what, we want to keep showing who ATEEZ is.”

Since their start, ATEEZ has shown themselves to be masterful performers as well as self-aware idols in touch with the more significant social impact they can create within their fandom. Their music tells lyrics of finding brighter days and journeys of self-discovery while the members took moments during The Beginning of the End tour to speak about self-love and their dreams. That’s created an even more intimate connection with their ATINY that has fans caring about new music and the people behind the songs.

“ATINYs always worry about our health, our mental and physical health, but I’d say that, yeah, we are good,” Hongjoong asks to add before the night out ends. “I’d say that, yeah, we are really good, and we are really happy that we can finally perform in front of so many ATINYs. That’s the cure to it. So I have to say to ATINYs, ‘It’s okay, don’t worry.’”

“That’s a really good sentence,” San adds. “It’s the cure.”

Even when ATEEZ have run into difficulties, the guys push through with camaraderie (“When one of us is stressing out, instead of working it out by ourselves, we find a way to work it out together,” says Wooyoung, the second-youngest member whose confidence and biceps have grown remarkably since the last tour) and gratitude (“We will be working hard to only give fans happiness back to show you all tenfold what they’ve given us,” says Yunho).

All of these elements are working together to make ATEEZ’s ultimate goal — the pinnacle of touring accomplishments — come true.

“Our concerts were first at small venues; now we are in arenas,” Hongjoong says. “Our next goal is to go to stadiums. Yeah, that’s our big goal — and we’ll make it someday. I trust that. And our fans really want it too.”

“We can do this,” San adds, naturally right in step after Hongjoong speaks. “We believe in ATEEZ.”

Nirvana’s ‘Something in the Way’ Surges in Streams After ‘The Batman’ Release

BY XANDER ZELLNER

Thanks to its feature in *The Batman*, the latest DC Bat-movie starring Robert Pattinson, a deep cut from Nirvana’s classic 1991 album *Nevermind* has been surging in streams since the film’s release on Friday, March 4, according to initial reports to MRC Data.

The song in question, “Something in the Way,” appears twice in the film, and also appeared in trailers leading up to its release. The trailer synch actually helped the song debut on Billboard’s charts for the first time in September 2020. It reached No. 2 on Rock Digital Song Sales and No. 45 on the all-genre Digital Song Sales ranking (dated Sept. 5) in the first tracking week after the trailer’s release.

Since the film’s theatrical release, though, the song has seen an explosion in its streaming numbers, according to initial reports to MRC Data. In the first four days of *The Batman*’s release (encompassing Friday, March 4 through Monday, March 7), “Something In The Way” earned 3.1 million on-

demand official U.S. streams. That number is up from 372,000 on-demand official U.S. streams from the prior four days (Feb. 28 through March 3). That’s a 734% increase over the given period. Its steady growth also helped it crack the top 5 of Spotify’s Daily USA Top 50 songs ranking on Tuesday.

The sharpest overnight growth of the song occurred from Sunday, March 6, to Monday, March 7. It tallied 808,000 streams on Sunday, and then surged to 1.5 million the following day. That’s an 86% increase.

Daily On-Demand Official U.S. Streaming Totals For Nirvana’s “Something In The Way”

Feb. 28: 72,000, according to initial reports to MRC Data
 March 1: 78,000
 March 2: 99,000
 March 3: 123,000
 March 4*: 291,000
 March 5: 505,000
 March 6: 808,000
 March 7: 1.5 million
 March 8: 1.6 million

(*indicates the theatrical release date of *The Batman*)

Nevermind spent two weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 in 1992. It marked the group’s first of four No. 1 albums, and spawned three Billboard Hot 100-charting singles: “Smells Like Teen Spirit” (No. 6 peak), “Come As You Are” (No. 32) and “Lithium” (No. 64). The group only returned to the Hot 100 once more afterwards, in 2002, with “You Know You’re Right,” a previously-unreleased track from 1994 that appears on the group’s self-titled greatest hits album.

“When I write, I listen to music, and as I was writing the first act, I put on Nirvana’s ‘Something in the Way,’” *Batman* director Matt Reeves told *Empire* in December. “That’s when it came to me that, rather than make Bruce Wayne the playboy version we’ve seen before, there’s another version who had gone through a great tragedy and become a recluse. So I started making this connection to Gus Van Sant’s *Last Days*, and the idea of this fictionalized version of Kurt Cobain being in this kind of decaying manor.”

This isn’t the first time Nirvana’s deep cut

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has appeared in a popular film. It appeared in the 2005 Sam Mendes film *Jarhead* and a brief cover appears in Cameron Crowe's 1996 comedy *Jerry Maguire*. 📺

Bobbie Nelson, Willie Nelson's Sister and Longtime Bandmate, Dies at 91

BY LARS BRANDLE

Bobbie Nelson, the singer, pianist, and a regular collaborator with her younger brother [Willie Nelson](#), has died at the age of 91.

Nelson was the first member of the Willie Nelson and Family Band, and devoted more than 50 years to touring and recording with her brother.

Music was in the family's DNA. Raised in Abbot, Texas, it was Bobbie and Willie's grandparents who inspired the youngsters to take up instruments and pursue a career in music.

"My grandfather had said to me when I was learning to play the piano: You know, if you really work at this, you could earn your living playing music one day," Bobbie once said. "And I never forgot that."

The siblings caught on quick. By their teens, they were cutting their teeth in honky-tonks, and they'd form a band with Bobbie's husband Bud Fletcher, and their father Ira Nelson on guitar. When Fletcher died in a car accident, Bobbie was left to raise her three sons and consider a more-stable career.

After completing business college in Fort Worth, her set of skills across music and admin helped her score a job with Hammond Organ Company, for whom she would the music library and demonstrate its instruments. Later, as her children grew, she returned to the piano as a means of income,

playing restaurants, lounges and supper clubs in Austin and Nashville.

Bobbie's collaboration with Willie, *Hill Country Christmas*, peaked at No. 60 on Billboard's Top Country Albums chart in 1997. Her debut album, *Audiobiography*, a collection of a dozen of her favorite songs, was released in 2007 through Justice Records. Willie contributed vocal and guitar on two songs.

More recently, she was featured on the 2021 album *The Willie Nelson Family* (Legacy Recordings), a collection of country gospel-tinged songs performed by Willie's Family Band.

The siblings also collaborated on two books: the memoir *Me and Sister Bobbie: True Tales of The Family Band*, published in 2020 by Random House, and the only children's book they penned *Sister, Brother, Family: An American Childhood in Music*, published in 2021, by Doubleday.

Nelson passed away Thursday morning (March 10), peacefully and surrounded by family, according to a rep.

"Her elegance, grace, beauty and talent made this world a better place," reads a statement confirming her passing. "Our hearts are broken and she will be deeply missed. But we are so lucky to have had her in our lives. Please keep her family in your thoughts and give them the privacy they need at this time." 📺

Latinas Behind the Hits: These Female Songwriters, Producers and Engineers are Blazing New Paths for Women in Latin Music

BY BILLBOARD STAFF

As Latin music's fortunes continue to rise, Latin women still struggle to be heard — both on the charts and behind the hits.

As part of *Billboard's* celebration of Women's History Month, today we highlight 22 extraordinary Latin songwriters, producers and engineers who are breaking down barriers as we speak. All of the women here are more often than not the only female faces in the studio, or the writing session, or behind the console — creatives whose talent and craft have been essential in the creation of some of the biggest hits of recent years, and whose advocacy is ensuring a smoother path for those who follow in their wake.

Ale Alberti

Los Angeles-based songwriter Ale Alberti says that signing her first publishing deal with Pulse Music nearly three years ago "led to getting me in bigger rooms, which resulted in everything I have going on now." Fast-forward to present day, the bilingual creator has penned songs for artists such as Becky G ("LDB"), Anitta ("Get to Know Me"), Danna Paola ("Sola"), Alaina Castillo ("triste como yo"), among many others. Currently, she's working on projects for Jennifer Lopez and the *Fast and Furious* soundtrack — as well as managing fellow songwriter Dani Blau, who is signed to her own music company Rare Breed, which she co-founded

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over a year ago.

"I've always been aware of how important it is to build other females in this industry, especially since it was so tough for me to break," Alberti says. "Helping [Blau] reach her goals and put her in the right situations has been very gratifying."

Quote: "Not only is it hard enough by being a woman in an industry that's predominantly male — but add the fact that we are also minorities. It's all about breaking down those stigmas and walls and showing people why you belong in those rooms. The talent speaks for itself."

Ali Stone

Ali Stone has been influenced by her Colombian roots throughout her career as a producer, songwriter, singer and multi-instrumentalist — which gives her "a wide variety of sounds and styles to start a song from scratch and know in which direction to take it," Stone tells *Billboard*. The projects she credits as kickstarting her career include working on the remix of the soundtrack for Disney's *Monsters University*, co-producing Cami's Grammy-nominated album *Monstruo* with Sebastian Kryz and producing Danna Paola's 2020 multi-platinum album *Sie7e+*.

Quote: "To have more inclusion, it's essential to not only have us in the writing sessions and camps — but to also hire us for the final production of the song or project, and pay us the same fee. And this includes not only producers & writers, but engineers, musicians. EQL and She Is The Music have directories of women in music, listed by their skill, location, etc., for people looking to hire us."

Alih Jey

Alih Jey comes from a musically-driven family who encouraged and supported her music dreams from day one. With a keyboard in her room, she began writing music as a teenager before getting her big break signing to Universal Music at the age of 16. Now, the Latin Grammy nominated artist is composing and producing music for herself and other artists.

"As a female composer, my perspective on expressions of love, sexuality and empowerment is palpable in the music I write," she tells *Billboard*. "As a female producer, I share

my take and my experience with different genres to feed the creative process during sessions." Not only is she experimenting with urban and indie pop sounds that delve into her Dominican roots but she's also mixing and mastering, writing for syncs, and playing in an all-female band called The Mexican Standoff — composed of Fernanda Ulibarri, Nancy Sanchez and herself.

Quote: "I'm continuing to hone my production and engineering skills to help open doors and represent us in this arena. I also think it's important that we unite, in order to be at the forefront of music."

Beatriz Luengo

Although many will recognize Luengo as an eight-time Latin Grammy nominee and recording artist, she has also brought her touch to multiple hits by the likes of Ricky Martin and CNCO, Ozuna, Daddy Yankee, Chayanne, and Thalía.

Luengo, who writes for men as well as woman, often focuses on vulnerability in telling the male point of view. "Men can also suffer and they can also heal through love," she says. A fierce and very public advocate of equality, the Spanish-born Luengo recently posted a "female" version of Maluma's "Hawái" on her social media accounts that went viral, and also co-wrote the Cuban liberty anthem, Latin Grammy-winning song "Patria y Vida" alongside her husband, Yotuel Romero.

Quote: "I always fight for the female point of view. The notion of women as belongings frightens me. I never put my credits on a song where the woman is portrayed as belonging to someone."

Caroline Shaw

The "youngest recipient" of the Pulitzer Prize in Music for *Partita for 8 Voices* (Roomful of Teeth), according to her website, Shaw is a renowned producer, composer, violinist, and vocalist who most recently collaborated with Rosalía on her upcoming album *MOTOMAMI*. She has also produced for Kanye West, Woodkid, and Nas.

Claudia Brant

An established hitmaker who has over 2,000 recorded songs, including hits by the likes of Camila Cabello, Fifth Harmony, Reik and CNCO, the Argentine-born Brant is also an artist in her own right, winning the

best Latin pop album Grammy in 2019 for her *Sincera*. Brant has been able to navigate the recording studio by producing quality work, beginning with "No me doy por vendido," the massive hit she co-wrote with her friend Luis Fonsi.

Quote: "Women have a unique sensitivity and a different approach to creativity and work ethics. I've been able to successfully juggle motherhood with work for many, many years. I had to work very hard to earn the respect I got in the music industry and I don't take anything for granted."

Dani Blau

Costa Rican-born songwriter Dani Blau has written singles for artists such as The Fray, Lali, Danna Paola, HaAsh and Paty Cantú. But it was her song "Quiero Volver," recorded by Tini and Sebastian Yatra in 2018, that gave her that first big break. "I wrote the song while I was traveling and the producers of the record placed it, which opened the door for me to start working on bigger projects," she says. Blau is signed to Alberti's Rare Breed management and label company.

Quote: "To be more inclusive, we need to bring women into projects or sessions and giving them the chance to prove themselves, even if they're not "inner circle" yet. Being mindful as a male and trying something different when you're in a project that has no female presence. As a female, building up and supporting your female coworkers—the better each one of us does, the more we pave the way for the rest."

Elena Rose

At age 11, rising Venezuelan singer-songwriter Elena Rose began writing poetry as an outlet to express her emotions. "Everything I was feeling or what I thought someone else was feeling, I would write it down," she tells *Billboard*. She hasn't stopped writing since then. Now, the 26-year-old artist has become one of the most coveted songwriters in the industry. Most recently, she's co-written tracks for Jennifer Lopez ("Pa' Ti"), Daddy Yankee ("De Vuelta Pa' La Vuelta") and Selena Gomez ("De Una Vez)."

Her first big break came when Sony invited her to a writing camp for Becky G. That's when she wrote "Dollar" for the Mexican-American artist, which peaked

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at No. 27 on Billboard's Hot Latin Songs in 2019. "It was the song that changed my life in many ways," she says. "My first big placement and now I met my manager Benito, so it's very precious to me."

Quote: "When we walk in believing in ourselves and not believing that we are better or more or less, we allow the energy to flow in in a positive way. We have to be strong enough to let our wall down but not our guard down. I walk [into a studio] with a smile and a focused mindset. That's all you need to start."

Ella Bric

At the beginning of her career, Ella Bric, formerly Linda Briceño, was not 100 percent confident in her songwriting, but she later fell in love with the process after teaming up with other creatives in the field. Along the way, she won producer of the year at the 2018 Latin Grammys, becoming the first woman to ever nab the reputable title. Her win started a conversation about the lack of women representation in the music industry. "The issue here is to make sure that jobs and opportunities are created for these women," she says. "I'm talking about mentorship, funding and grant programs that allow them to keep creating and growing."

Quote: "I'm making sure my work speaks for itself regarding my gender. I'm making sure that I stay in contact and honor the leading women that came before me and do the same to the next generation of girls."

Erika Ender

Ender became a household name after co-writing "Despacito" with Luis Fonsi. But her prowess predates that hit by many years and many hits, including 2016's Latin Grammy-winning "Ataúd," which she wrote for Los Tigres del Norte. Born in Panama to a Brazilian mother and a U.S.-born father of German ancestry, Ender speaks Portuguese and Spanish fluently, which helps inform her multi-genre songwriting; in 2017 she became the youngest inductee into the Latin Songwriters Hall of Fame.

A key to her success, she says, is "understanding this is a business of emotions. Besides my computer, my guitar or some beat... I look for ways to communicate with the artist/producer/co-writer with an open heart and mind, and try to under-

stand what feeling are they tuned into and what are they looking for." In addition to her songwriting and her own career as an artist, Ender is also the founder of Talenpro, a foundation and singing competition that fosters education and new talent in Panama.

Quote: "I've learned to initially bring to the table another point of view. If a room is full of masculine energy, us as females, bring a different perspective. Also, a self-confident attitude that mixes bright ideas and performance, from a collaborative approach. Songwriting is not meant to be a competition, but a collaborative moment of creation."

Erika Vidrio

Vidrio is among the few prominent songwriters in the male-dominated regional Mexican genre. With more than 100 songs under her belt, she's penned chart-topping tracks for artists such as Banda La Trakalosa ("Borracho de Amor"), Christian Nodal ("Quién Es Usted?"), Beto Zapata ("40 y 21") and Voz de Mando ("El de Arriba"). But her big break was back in 2008 when Conjunto Primavera recorded her song "Sentí," for which she received her first-ever royalty check.

"I would look at the check every day and think, should I call to make sure it's not a mistake?" the Mexican singer-songwriter remembers. "It was already beautiful to hear them on the radio, but I never knew I'd get paid. Actually, I didn't know much about how the industry worked back then." Now, the five-time BMI Awards winner is focused on creating a network of women songwriters in the regional Mexican space that she hopes will not only guide and help connect up-and-coming female songwriters, but also send a message to the industry.

Quote: "I want us, female songwriters, to be visible so that the industry knows that we're here, we always have been."

Esty

The self-proclaimed "Sailor Moon Dominicana" is making waves not only as a singer, who typically fuses pop, dembow, R&B and trap, but also as a songwriter who's writing has become a quasi therapy session for herself. And also for her fans who made her 2019 "Por Ahí" viral on social media thanks to a dance challenge on skates.

Quote: "If I want to produce, go for it and

don't fit in any box, if there's not a space for you make space."

GALE

GALE is a singer-songwriter and producer who most recently worked alongside Christina Aguilera and Ozuna. The Miami-based artist, who cites Shakira and Avril Lavigne's music as her inspiration, co-wrote the pair's chart-topping collaboration "Santo." She has also penned songs for other artists such as Joel DeLeon ("Coco") and Lele Pons ("Se Te Nota").

Quote: "We have been fighting for our space in the music industry for so many years. It is important to continue leading the way and include more women in writing rooms, behind mixing boards and on stage. This is the perfect moment because the world is starting to listen and they are paying attention. We just have to keep working hard and not forget the reason why we do this: music."

Isabella "Itzza" Primera

Itzza Primera got her foot in the door via Colombian producer and songwriter Chez Tom, who forms part of Reykon's team. The singer-songwriter, who has collaborated with artists such as Chyno Miranda and the late Legarda, says "there's still a long way to go" for female composers in a male-dominated industry.

"But every day we see more women in record companies, publishers, and independent teams capable of conquering spaces with their talent," she says. "I feel like it will only be a matter of time to see a more equitable percentage in the industry." Currently, Itzza is working on growing her catalog as a composer via Sony/ATV Music Publishing, and will soon release her debut EP as an artist.

Quote: "Songs are the essence of the music industry. Composers and producers have a great responsibility in creating that seed that becomes the success of the artist and their team. It all starts with a great song."

K Sotomayor

As a singer-songwriter, K Sotomayor always celebrates her projects no matter how big or how small they are. But 2019 was a big opportunity in her career because she created real relationships with people in the industry that truly "paid off."

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“I had records with Sofia Reyes, whom I love working with,” she says, adding, “and Kat Dahlia, who is someone I deeply respect and admire, and is not only an amazing creator but one of my best friends.” K was also one of the Latin hitmakers behind Selena Gomez’s Spanish-language EP *Revelación*, co-writing Gomez’s DJ Snake-assisted “Selfish Love.” “I am so excited about this chapter of my career not only as a writer but as an artist,” she notes. “As a writer I am working with incredible talent and have some great stuff coming out soon. And as an artist I am also finishing my first EP, which I can’t wait to share.”

Quote: “As women I feel we often experience life from a very vulnerable place, because of the way we look/feel. I believe there is a special type of beauty in that, in seeing the world with such detail, and bringing that into a song makes it so much abroad to whom can relate to it. Also we are the masters of multitasking and strength. And as a gay latin woman, I bring the vibes.”

Kunvi

Producer, songwriter and engineer, the Ecuadorian artist kicked off her career as a singer at age 17 as an opening act in her native country for chart-topping artists. Kuinvi graduated from Berklee College of Music in 2019 but it wasn’t until 2021 when doors began to open for her in a big way co-producing and co-writing songs for artist such as Danna Paola, Becky G, Sebastian Yatra, Lele Pons, Piso 21, among others.

Quote: “I believe we’re going through a transformational moment in the music industry where as women, we’re empowering each other to use our voice, and the world today is genuinely inspired to listen.”

Lila Jaramillo

Multi-genre songwriter, engineer and producer Lila Jaramillo is best known for producing children’s music — in 2003 the Colombian artist was up for best Latin children’s album at the Latin Grammys for *Carta Al Niño Dios* — but has also dabbled in pop, rock and reggaeton. In fact, Jaramillo kicked off her career with local rock band Pasaporte. Currently, she’s based in Medellín where her recording studio, Souland Music, are located.

María Elisa Ayerbe

One of the few female Latin producers and sound engineers in the market, the Colombian-born Ayerbe has worked for the likes of Laura Pausini, Ricky Martin, Mary J Blige, Marc Anthony, Juanes, New World Symphony and Mau y Ricky among many others. Ayerbe, who is currently producing, engineering and co-writing the upcoming album by Latin Grammy nominee Paula Arenas, got her big break through producer Julio Reyes, and says her technical abilities, as well as her ability to create a great vibe in the studio, are essential in a session.

“I believe inclusion is a priority at the studio, but even above inclusion, we need equity,” she says. “Inclusion enables access for women in the music industry, but what is an opportunity in our industry when women aren’t paid the same as men?”

Quote: “Not only do we need an open door for women, we need women to be calling the shots as music executives, we need female producers and engineers to get paid as much as their male peers, female artists need to be heard and their voices respected. Inclusion has already begun in our industry. Now it is time for the next step: equity.”

Marian Oviedo

Rising singer-songwriter Marián Oviedo released her covers album *Mis Versiones 1* in 2018 injecting new life into regional Mexican tracks such as “Me Vas a Extrañar” and “Te Metiste” and “Se Va Muriendo Mi Alma.” Since, she’s released eight additional cover albums and in 2021, released *Considerame*, featuring new tracks penned by her.

Natalia Ramirez

Grammy Award-winning vocal engineer, Natalia Ramirez has worked on records by Jennifer Lopez, Marc Anthony, Alejandro Sanz, Kany Garcia, among others, after being mentored by Julio Reyes Copello. Ramirez grew up in a musical as the daughter of a musician and sister to an audio engineer.

Natalia Schlesinger

Natalia Schlesinger wears many hats: producer, engineer, pianist, composer and songwriter. Born in Bogotá, Schlesinger started playing piano when she was five years old and went on to major in musical arts at the Pontifical Xaverian University in Bogotá with a double minor in piano jazz

interpretation and sound engineering. She started her career as an intern at the Miami Art House recording studio where she’s worked with artists such as Kany Garcia and Pablo Alboran.

Sky Monroe (real name: Cynthia Pareja)

Cynthia Pareja, artistically known as Sky Monroe, says her participation on “Happy Mama Day,” part of Pitbull’s 2019 album *Libertad*, opened all the doors for her in the industry. “As a producer and songwriter, I usually always contributed towards composition; this includes lyrics, music, melody and vocal production,” she says. “Also as a vocalist or Top-liner, I focus on finding melodies that connect and move the room, this for me is the most important thing since music is energy.”

Last year, she joined forces with Universal Music Publishing Group. “One of my passions is helping other singer-songwriters,” she adds.

Quote: “As a woman, I personally feel that we need to educate ourselves and be more prepared for whatever and everything that comes along! Always say ‘yes’ to every opportunity, to grow more and set a positive example for others to follow, since we know that this industry is hard for us. It’s important to recognize and support each other.”

Kira Kosarin Signs With Republic Records, Releases ‘Mood Ring’ Single: Exclusive

BY JASON LIPSHUTZ

Kira Kosarin, the 24-year-old singer-songwriter and actress best known for her role on *The Thundermans*, is launching her adult **pop** career by signing to Republic Records, *Billboard* can exclusively reveal. Kosarin has also shared her first single with the label, the sparkling, harmonies-laden

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pop track “Mood Ring.”

“Being part of the Republic family truly feels like I’ve got the dream team around me,” says Kosarin.

After growing up in a musical theater family, Kosarin starred as Phoebe Thunderman on the hit Nickelodeon series *The Thundermans* from 2013 to 2018, while also finding time to develop as a songwriter. She independently released a pair of EPs, *Off Brand* and *Songbird*, in 2019 and 2020, respectively; the latter included the track “First Love Never Lasts,” which grew into a TikTok hit.

“After these last several years navigating the industry as a completely independent artist, having this group of heavy-hitters on board trusting my creative vision and helping bring it to life is just magical,” Kosarin continues of her Republic deal. “I’m so excited to share what we’ve been able to do together.”

Kosarin’s debut project on Republic will arrive later this year. In a press release, she says of her “Mood Ring” single, “I’m excited to have something out there that when people come and look, is actually a reflection of me, for maybe the first time in my life.”

Emilio Delgado, Luis on ‘Sesame Street,’ Dies at 81

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

Emilio Delgado, the actor and singer who for 45 years was a warm and familiar presence in children’s lives and a rare Latino face on American television as fix-it shop owner Luis on [Sesame Street](#), died Thursday (March 10).

His wife, Carol Delgado, told The Associated Press that Emilio Delgado died from the blood cancer multiple myeloma at their home in New York. He was 81. As Luis, Delgado, a Mexican American, got to play an ordinary, non-stereotypical Latino character at a time when such depictions were few and far between on [TV](#), for adults

or children.

“There really wasn’t any representation of actual people,” Delgado said in a 2021 interview on the YouTube series *Famous Cast Words*. “Most of the roles that I went out for were either for bandits or gang members.” That changed with *Sesame Street*, where a diverse cast interacted with a diverse group of children, along with Jim Henson creations Big Bird, Oscar the Grouch, Elmo and Grover.

Delgado joined the show starting with its third season in 1971. He said the producers embraced his suggestion to sprinkle Spanish terms into the script. “The first time that I saw Big Bird walk on, my line was, ‘Big Bird!’” Delgado said in the 2021 interview. “But I didn’t say ‘Big Bird,’ I said, ‘pájaro!’”

After a quick meeting in which Delgado explained that “pájaro” meant “bird,” the producers decided to keep it in. “I called him ‘pajaro’ from then on every time I saw him,” Delgado said.

Delgado was born in 1940 in Calexico, California, near the U.S.-Mexico border and raised a few miles away in Mexicali, Mexico. From his home, he could hear music into the night from a pair of beer gardens across the street. “I remember going to sleep to the sound of mariachis,” he said in a 2011 interview on the public television series, *Up Close with Patsy Smullin*.

He was enchanted, and decided to become a performer, singing whenever possible and appearing in school plays, with the full support of his proud parents. As a young man he moved to Los Angeles to become an actor, and had little luck. He received a call out of the blue from the producers of “Sesame Street” in New York. After an interview with *Sesame Street* producer Jon Stone, in which he spoke to Delgado, but didn’t ask for any kind of audition, he got the job.

“He didn’t want actors,” Delgado said in the 2021 interview. “He wanted real people.” He would remain on the show for 45 years, an integral part of the childhood of generations of children, and for Latino kids a rare character that looked like them.

“His warmth and humor invited children to share a friendship that has echoed through generations,” the Sesame Workshop said in a statement Thursday night. “At the

forefront of representation, Emilio proudly laid claim to the ‘record for the longest-running role for a Mexican-American in a TV series.’ We are so grateful he shared his talents with us and with the world.”

Sesame Street would also allow him to sing regularly, and sometimes play his guitar. Luis Rodriguez (the adult characters had last names, though they were rarely used), would marry the show’s other prominent Latina, Maria Figueroa, played by Sonia Manzano, in a ceremony on the show in 1988. The storyline allowed the show to teach children about love, marriage and childbirth.

“Luis and Maria were the first Latinos I ever saw on TV,” Rosy Cordero, a television reporter for *Deadline*, said on Twitter. “They were a huge part of my family. They paved the way.” He would leave the show when his contract was not renewed during a retooling in 2016.

Figueroa made frequent appearances in the theater and on other TV series during his time as Luis. He played a recurring character on the newspaper drama *Lou Grant* from 1979 to 1982, and made multiple appearances on *Quincy M.E.*, *Falcon Crest*, and *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*.

His death was first reported by TMZ. Delgado was diagnosed with multiple myeloma late in 2020, but was still making appearances and giving interviews in 2021, until his health started to decline.

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Cardi B Big Screen Debut 'Assisted Living' Scrapped Over Rapper's Busy Schedule: Report

BY GIL KAUFMAN

Cardi B's planned first leading role in a Hollywood movie, the comedy *Assisted Living*, has reportedly been put on ice due to the rapper's busy schedule. According to *Deadline*, Paramount Players hit the brakes on the fish-out-of-water feature just one week before production was slated to begin after Cardi reportedly backed out of the film, with the rest of the cast and crew informed that it will not go forward for now.

Deadline reported that the given reason for Cardi's exit was that she is "overextended." The movie, written by Kay Oyegun (*This Is Us*, *Queen Sugar*), was to tell the story of small-time thief Amber (Cardi B), who struggles to contain the fall-out from a robbery gone wrong. Desperate to outrun the cops and her crew, Amber dresses up as an elderly woman and hides out in her estranged granny's nursing home.

While Cardi's larger-than-life personality is on display every day on her socials and her often-hilarious Facebook video series *Cardi Tries*, it would have been her first starring role in a Hollywood project. She played a small role in the 2019 Jennifer Lopez drama *Hustlers*, where the former exotic dancer appeared alongside Constance Wu, Lili Reinhart, Julia Stiles and Keke Palmer as a stripper named Diamond; she also had a small role as Leysa in 2021's *F9: The Fast Saga*.

At press time a spokesperson for Cardi had not returned *Billboard's* request for comment on the cancellation of the film.

Cardi has been hard at work on the follow-up to her 2018 smash debut, *Invasion*

of *Privacy*, whose release date and title have not yet been announced. The "WAP" MC and mother of two has also stayed busy promoting her vodka-infused whipped cream product [Whipshots](#). 📺

Adele's 'An Audience With Adele' Special Coming to NBC

BY RANIA ANIFTOS

If you were unable to watch Adele's *An Audience With Adele* special on the U.K.'s [ITV](#) channel and its on-demand ITV Hub platform, worry not. The star's *30* send-off party is crossing the pond to the United States this month.

The two-hour NBC special, *An Audience With Adele*, is set for Sunday, March 20, at 9 p.m. ET/PT. The special will stream the following day on [Peacock](#), which you can sign up for [here](#).

The Fulwell 73 production, which originally aired in the U.K. on Nov. 21, 2021, was executive produced by Adele herself, along with Jonathan Dickins, Ben Winston and Sally Wood.

The one-off concert was filmed at the prestigious London Palladium in England, where Adele performed new songs as well as fan favorites, before an audience comprised of her "own personal heroes and heroines, fellow musicians, artists, actors, sportsmen, sportswomen and more."

This will be Adele's second two-hour special on American television in a little more than four months. On Nov. 14, CBS aired Adele: One Night Only, which combined a performance at Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles with an interview with Oprah Winfrey. The special drew more than 10 million viewers. Adele, Winston and Dickins also executive produced that special, along with Raj Kapoor.

Adele and Dickins also served as executive producers (along with Lorne Michaels) of Adele's 2015 TV special, *Adele: Live in*

New York City, which was filmed at Radio City Music Hall. The show, hosted by Jimmy Fallon, aired on NBC in December of that year and received four Emmy nominations, including outstanding variety special.

The news comes fresh off Adele's big night at the [2022 Brit Awards](#), which were presented at the O2 arena in London on Feb. 8. She won artist of the year, Mastercard album of the year for *30* and song of the year for "Easy on Me." She lost in just one category, the fan-voted best pop/rock act, which went to [Dua Lipa](#).

The accomplishment marked Adele's third win for both album and song of the year. She previously won album of the year for *21* (2012) and *25* (2016). She is the [first solo artist in Brits history](#) to win this award three times. She's also only the second artist in Brits history, following [Coldplay](#), to win this award with three consecutive studio albums. 📺

Riot Fest Launches Merch Fundraiser to Benefit Ukrainian Organizations

BY STARR BOWENBANK

Riot Fest, the annual three-day musical festival that brings alternative, punk, metal and hip-hop artists to Chicago's Douglass Park, is getting involved in the [Russia-Ukraine conflict](#). The festival organizers announced the creation of an emergency fundraiser on Friday (March 11) and shared that two shirt designs will be sold to benefit Ukrainian soldiers and citizens.

"Riot Fest stands with the people of [Ukraine](#), and against the unjust war and suffering that Russia has brought upon the country. In light of the escalating situation overseas, the festival is starting an urgent fundraiser with 100% of the proceeds donated to two organizations supporting

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life-saving measures in Ukraine,” an official statement from the festival reads. “Two new shirt designs are now available at [Riot-Brand.org](#), benefiting Razom for Ukraine and Revived Soldiers Ukraine.”

Riot Fest founder Mike Petryshyn (who is Ukrainian-American) shared that he will match proceeds up to \$15,000 to help the population under siege. He also explained his family’s history with the Russian conflict and urged people to help if they have the means to.

“Eighty years ago, Ukrainians like my grandparents left everything they knew and loved to escape Stalinism,” he said. “It appears history may be repeating itself. With mortars exploding behind them, Ukrainians are beginning to flee their homeland as their sovereignty and independence begin to crumble.”

He continued, “As the world watches innocent lives being lost, I humbly ask—as a proud Ukrainian-American—to not sit idly.”

The shirts retail for \$25 each and are currently available for pre-order. Find the shirts [here](#). **B**

Ex-‘American Idol’ Finalist Caleb Kennedy Still in Jail Over Fatal Car Crash

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

The former [American Idol](#) contestant accused of [barreling into a man](#) with his pickup truck, killing him, will remain in a South Carolina jail while toxicology results from state investigators are still pending, a judge said Thursday (March 10).

Circuit Judge Daniel Hall ended the hearing without setting bond for 17-year-old Caleb Kennedy, according to news outlets. The [country](#) music singer has been charged as an adult and could face up to 25 years in prison if convicted of driving under the influence resulting in death.

Officials said Kennedy on Feb. 8 inhaled marijuana from a vape pen before he drove up a residential driveway and ran over Larry Duane Parris outside the workshop where the 54-year-old repaired boats in Spartanburg County.

Kennedy’s lawyer, Ryan Beasley, said Thursday that his client is now on suicide watch in jail and needs to be freed or sent to an alcohol and drug treatment center, The State newspaper [reported](#). Beasley has previously called the incident a “terrible accident” and said his client is deeply sorry.

Hall said a different judge has already ordered Kennedy to remain in jail until toxicology results are available. Hall said those results still weren’t in as of Thursday.

Kennedy advanced into the Top 5 of the ABC talent show last year, but dropped out of the singing competition after a video circulated of him sitting next to someone wearing what appeared to be a [Ku Klux Klan hood](#). Kennedy apologized at the time for the video, saying “it displayed actions that were not meant to be taken in that way.”

Kennedy’s mother, Anita Guy, told news

outlets that the video was filmed when Kennedy was 12 and had been taken out of context. She said Kennedy had been imitating characters from the film *The Strangers: Prey at Night*. Kennedy’s hometown is listed as Roebuck, which is just south of Spartanburg. **B**

New Around the World: Labrinth & Zendaya Hit Global Charts Following ‘Euphoria’ Finale

BY ERIC FRANKENBERG

After HBO’s *Euphoria* aired its season 2 finale on Sunday, Feb. 27, music featured in, and written for, the show continues to permeate *Billboard*’s global surveys.

“I’m Tired” is the series’ newest chart entry, marking the fourth title to appear simultaneously on the [Billboard Global 200](#) and [Billboard Global Excl. U.S.](#) rankings for *Euphoria* composer [Labrinth](#) and the first on either list for the show’s Emmy Award-winning lead [Zendaya](#).

Released digitally Feb. 25, the duet debuts on the Global 200 at No. 70 and the Global Excl. U.S. tally at No. 149. It drew 13.3 million streams and sold 2,800 downloads worldwide in the week ending March 3, according to MRC Data. The song [joins](#) Labrinth’s “All for Us,” “Formula” and “Mount Everest,” all of which continue their runs on the March 12-dated lists.

Domestically, “I’m Tired” debuts on the U.S.-based [Billboard Hot 100](#) at No. 76, powered by 6.2 million U.S. streams. It also enters Digital Song Sales at No. 34 (2,100 sold).

Zendaya released another tune as part of the *Euphoria Season 2* soundtrack March 4, this time duetting with [Dominic Fike](#) on “Elliott’s Song,” originally performed in

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the season 2 finale. (Next week's March 19-dated charts will reflect activity in the March 4-10 tracking week.)

'Encanto' Completes 11-Week Climb to No. 1 on Australia's Albums Chart

BY LARS BRANDLE

Encanto works its magic on the Australian albums chart, as the original soundtrack rises to No. 1 in its eleventh week.

The tie-in with the hit [Disney](#) animated film of the same name, *Encanto* (via (Walt Disney/Universal) earns its first [ARIA Chart](#) crown, with three songs from it impacting the singles survey: "We Don't Talk About Bruno" (No. 8), "Surface Pressure" (No. 22) and "The Family Madrigal" (No. 50).

Encanto completes its climb after debuting at No. 29 at the start of January, before lifting into the Top Ten for the first time in its second week, and staying there ever since.

ARIA Award-winning singer and songwriter [Missy Higgins](#) lands the highest new entry on the national chart this week with *Total Control* (Eleven/EMI), new at No. 3. The mini-album is her first set of new material since 2018's *Solastalgia*, which peaked at No. 7 on the ARIA Albums Chart. *Total Control* is Higgins' seventh Top 10 title.

[Foo Fighters](#) made a whistlestop visit to Australia last week for a concert at Geelong's GMHBA Stadium, a coming out party for Victorians, many of whom endured the longest lockdowns on the planet.

Thanks to the excitement around that show, the first international, full-capacity stadium date since the start of the pandemic, the Foos' *Greatest Hits* (RCA/Sony) flies 32-10, for its first appearance in the top tier since January 2010.

Since that one-off show in Geelong, 50 miles southwest of Melbourne, The Foos have announced their return visit, a full-scale stadium tour of Australia and New Zealand later this year, [produced by Frontier Touring](#).

Further down the list, Swedish metal exponents [Sabaton](#) mark their third appearance in the ARIA Top 50 with *The War To End All Wars* (Nuclear Blast/Universal), new at No. 25. The group's tenth album is the sequel to *The Great War*, which peaked at No. 7 in July 2019.

Over on the [ARIA Singles Chart](#), [Glass Animals](#)' "Heat Waves" (Polydor/Universal) holds at No. 1 for an eighth non-consecutive week atop the leaderboard.

Last week, "Heat Waves" returned to the summit for the first time in 47 weeks, and the single now leads the [Billboard Hot 100](#) for the first time, getting there 59 weeks after its debut.

Australians were early supporters of the song. In January 2021, the song won triple j's Hottest 100, an annual countdown of the greatest tracks of the [previous year](#).

The highest new entry on the ARIA Chart this week belongs to [Camila Cabello](#) and [Ed Sheeran](#), as their collaboration "Bam Bam" (Warner/Sony) bows at No. 19, while new releases from [Labrinth](#), [Tyga](#) & [Doja Cat](#), [Elley Duhé](#) and [Dave](#) appear in the ARIA Top 50 for the very first time.

Lil Durk's 'Ahhh Ha' Hits Top 10 on Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs Chart

BY TREVOR ANDERSON

Lil Durk's "Ahhh Ha" advances into the top 10 of *Billboard's* [Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs](#) chart as it climbs 11-5. The tune's ascent, on the chart dated March 12, comes after its first full week of tracking.

"Ahhh Ha," released on Tuesday, Feb. 22,

only had three tracking days in the chart's Friday-Thursday weekly tracking cycle behind its No. 11 debut. Following its first full tracking week, the new track registered 16.7 million U.S. streams in the week ending March 3, according to MRC Data, up 43% from the 11.7 million in its first chart week. The 16.7 million translates to a 4-2 gain on the [R&B/Hip-Hop Streaming Songs](#) chart and a 12-3 jump on the corresponding [all-genre list](#).

Though streams support nearly all the song's activity, "Ahhh Ha" also records activity in the other two metrics that also influence the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart: song sales and radio airplay. In the former, "Ahhh Ha" logs 700 downloads, while it accrued 270,000 in radio audience.

"Ahh Ha" gives Lil Durk his 11th top 10 appearance on Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs. It's his second of 2022, after "Broadway Girls," featuring Morgan Wallen, which topped the list for one week in January. Both "Ahhh Ha" and "Girls" are slated to appear on the rapper's forthcoming album, *7220*, which will arrive tomorrow (March 11) after a delay from a planned February drop.

Here's a look at all of Lil Durk's top 10 hits on Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs:

Song Title	Artist (if other than Lil Durk)	Peak Position	Peak Date
"Laugh Now Cry Later,"	Drake featuring Lil Durk	No. 1 (six weeks)	Nov. 7, 2020
"Back in Blood,"	Pooh Shiesty featuring Lil Durk	No. 6	March 6, 2021
"Every Chance I Get,"	DJ Khaled featuring Lil Baby & Lil Durk	No. 6	Aug. 21, 2021
"Hats Off,"	Lil Baby & Travis Scott	No. 5	June 19, 2021
"Voice of the Heroes,"	Lil Baby	No. 7	June 19, 2021
"Sharing Locations,"	Meek Mill featuring Lil Baby & Lil Durk	No. 7	Oct. 16, 2021
"In the Bible,"	Drake featuring Lil Durk & Giveon	No. 6	Sept. 18, 2021
"Who Want Smoke?"	Nardo Wick featuring G Herbo, Lil Durk & 21 Savage	No. 5	Nov. 6, 2021
"Pissed Me Off,"		No. 10	Oct. 30, 2021
"Broadway Girls,"	featuring Morgan Wallen	No. 1 (one week)	Jan. 1, 2022
"Ahhh Ha,"		No. 5 (to date)	March 12, 2022
Elsewhere, "Ahhh Ha" rises 7-5 on Hot			

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[Rap Songs](#) and 42-19 on the all-genre [Billboard Hot 100](#). [▶](#)

Benee Enters The 1,000,000,000 List With ‘Supalonely’

BY LARS BRANDLE

Benee is welcomed into The 1,000,000,000 List. The New Zealand artist (real name Stella Rose Bennett) and her collaborator Josh Fountain gain entry to the club for 1 billion plays of “[Supalonely](#),” a Top 40 hit on the [Billboard Hot 100](#) following its release in 2019.

The alt-pop breakup song caught fire on TikTok, where it became a dance challenge, and promptly made the leap to commercial radio and the mainstream charts.

As NZ entered its first level-4 lockdown in 2020, “Supalonely” took flight, and Benee’s career soared. She went on to perform the song virtually on *The Tonight Show* with feature vocalist, New York singer-songwriter Gus Dapperton; and collected a slew of awards, including the 2020 APRA Silver Scroll Award for “Glitter,” four Tuis at the Aotearoa Music Awards, and her first BMI Pop Award.

“I have no doubt that this is just the launch pad for more global hits from both Stella and Josh, both super talented writers whom we are very proud to have as part of the APRA AMCOS team,” says APRA AMCOS NZ head of operations, who presented the creators with their awards earlier this week.

“Supalonely” [is published](#) by Sony Music Publishing and Universal Music Publishing, and co-written with Brendan Rice, and Canadian songwriter Jenna Andrews.

An initiative of Australasian PRO **APRA AMCOS**, the 1,000,000,000 List recognizes streams from all major services including Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, YouTube Music, Vevo, Amazon, and more.

The List is said to be the first award of its kind to acknowledge a **song-writer’s achievement**. Past recipients include **Lorde**, (for “Royals”) **Kevin Parker** (for **Tame Impala**’s “The Less I Know The Better”), **Dean Lewis** and **Jon Hume** (for “Be Alright”), **Flume** (for “Never Be Like You”), **Starley** and P-Money (for “Call On Me”), Vance Joy (for “Riptide”), **Gotye** (for “Somebody That I Used to Know”), and **Vassy** (for “Bad”). See the full list [here](#). [▶](#)

Kygo & DNCE Plant ‘Feet’ in Hot Dance/Electronic Songs Top 10

BY GORDON MURRAY

Kygo’s “Dancing Feet,” featuring **DNCE**, steps onto [Billboard](#)’s multimetric [Hot Dance/Electronic Songs](#) chart (dated March 12) at No. 6. It’s the Norwegian DJ/producer’s 22nd top 10 (21 of which have begun in the region), the most among all acts dating to the chart’s January 2013 inception. The Chainsmokers and Calvin Harris follow with 19 top 10s each.

“Dancing Feet” is the first top 10 on the tally for the Joe Jonas-fronted DNCE.

Released Feb. 25, the track tallied 3 million U.S. streams, 2.6 million radio airplay audience impressions and 1,800 downloads in the week ending March 3, according to MRC Data. Concurrently, the collab debuts on Dance/Electronic Digital Song Sales (No. 3) and Dance/Electronic Streaming Songs (No. 10).

Additionally on Hot Dance/Electronic Songs, Becky Hill and Galantis bow at No. 17 with “Run.” It’s Hill’s 12th visit and second-highest debut (after “Remember,” with David Guetta; No. 16, July 2021). The 33rd entry for Galantis, the track starts with 833,000 U.S. streams.

Staying with Hot Dance/Electronic Songs, Swedish House Mafia and Sting enter at No.

20 with “Redlight.” The trio (Steve Angello, Axwell and Sebastian Ingrosso) makes its sixth appearance and Sting adds his second. The song opens with 710,000 streams and 500 sold, as it also debuts at No. 15 on Dance/Electronic Digital Song Sales.

The clubby track, for which Sting recorded new vocals, incorporates the hook of The Police’s classic “Roxanne,” which reached No. 32 on the [Billboard Hot 100](#) in 1979, marking the first of nine top 40 hits for the Sting-led trio.

On Dance/Mix Show Airplay, Diplo and Miguel’s “Don’t Forget My Love” hits the top 10 (12-3) in just its second week on the survey. As Diplo notches his 11th top 10 and Miguel earns his first, the track wraps the quickest trip to the tier since Regard, Troye Sivan and Tate McRae’s “You” also needed only two frames (13-4) last May. “Forget” makes the fastest flight to the top three since Calvin Harris’ “My Way” in October 2016.

“Forget,” from Diplo’s eponymous album, released March 4, is drawing core-dance play on stations including Music Choice’s Dance/EDM channel and SiriusXM’s BPM and Diplo’s Revolution. (The Dance/Mix Show Airplay chart measures radio airplay on a select group of full-time dance stations, along with plays during mix shows on nearly 80 top 40-formatted reporters.) [▶](#)

Ricardo Arjona Captures 21st Top 10 on Latin Pop Albums Chart With ‘Blanco y Negro’

BY PAMELA BUSTIOS

Ricardo Arjona posts his 21st top 10 on [Billboard](#)’s [Latin Pop Albums](#) chart as *Blanco y Negro* debuts at No. 8 on the March 12-dated survey.

Blanco y Negro was released exclusively

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in a deluxe two-CD/book package. He had previously released the *Blanco* and *Negro* albums as separate titles. The albums were recorded at Abbey Road Studios in London.

Blanco y Negro starts with 2,000 equivalent album units earned in the U.S. after its first full tracking week ending March 3, according to MRC Data. The double-CD was released Feb. 25 via Metamorfosis/Sony Music Latin. The set's opening sum is derived entirely from traditional album sales, a sum that also makes it the top-selling Latin pop album of the week — enough to earn a No. 74 debut on the 100-deep Top Album Sales ranking, his first chart visit since *Circo Soledad* arrived at No. 41 in 2017.

The Latin Pop Albums chart ranks the most popular Latin pop albums of the week in the U.S. based on multi-metric consumption as measured in equivalent album units, compiled by MRC Data. Units comprise album sales, track equivalent albums (TEA) and streaming equivalent albums (SEA). Each unit equals one album sale, or 10 individual tracks sold from an album, or 3,750 ad-supported or 1,250 paid/subscription on-demand official audio and video streams generated by songs from an album.

As *Blanco y Negro* bows in the Latin Pop Albums' top tier, Arjona adds a 21st consecutive top 10 on his chart account. He ties with Rocio Durcal for the third-most top 10s since the chart began in 1985.

Here's a recap of the leaderboard:

- 26, Juan Gabriel
- 22, Marco Antonio Solís
- 21, Ricardo Arjona
- 21, Rocio Durcal
- 20, Cristian Castro
- 19, Ana Gabriel
- 19, Luis Miguel
- 18, Ednita Nazario
- 18, José José
- 17, Alejandro Fernández

Beyond his top 10 debut on Latin Pop Albums, *Blanco y Negro* opens at No. 46 on [Top Latin Albums](#). The debut comes on the heels of his Blanco y Negro U.S. tour that launched March 24 in Albuquerque, NM and will take the Guatemalan through a 34-city run ending in San Juan, Puerto Rico in June 12.

Gilberto Santa Rosa's New Top

10: Elsewhere on the Latin charts, Gilberto Santa Rosa adds a 37th top to his [Tropical Airplay](#) chart account as "Cartas Sobre La Mesa" jumps 12-10 with 1.86 million audience impressions, up 11%, earned in the U.S. in the week ending March 6.

He continues to rank third among all acts, trailing just Victor Manuelle with 62 top 10s and Marc Anthony with 53.

"Cartas Sobre La Mesa" is Santa Rosa's first single from his forthcoming album *Debut y Segunda Tanda* due out in the spring. **■**

Bizarrap & Residente Unite Atop Billboard Argentina Hot 100 With 'Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 49'

BY PAMELA BUSTIOS

Residente scores his first No. 1 on the [Billboard Argentina Hot 100](#) as "Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 49," his first collaboration with Argentinian producer Bizarrap, debuts at No. 1 on the March 5-dated survey, two days after the rap song was released via DALE Play Records.

Bizarrap, meanwhile secures his fourth No. 1, all of which have arrived through his lauded music sessions, except for his featured role on Trueno and Nicki Nicole's "Mamichula," which also features Tatu and Tatuol (four weeks at the lead in August 2020).

The incendiary eight-minute and 39-second-long song is the first Spanish-language diss of its kind, broken down into three chapters that criticize managers who take songwriter credits, digital streaming platform acts and J Balvin, among other heated topics.

The controversial studio session dethrones "Entre Nosotros" by Tiago PZK, LIT Killah, Nicki Nicole & Maria Becerra

from its 15-week reign, the second-most just behind Karol G and Nicki Minaj's "Tusa" (25 weeks at the lead starting the Jan. 22, 2020-dated ranking) and sends it to the runner-up slot.

Elsewhere on the tally, Argentinian band La K'onga lifts 4-3 with "Universo Paralelo," featuring Nahuel Pennisi. FMK and Maria Becerra's "Tranquila" drops 4-3, while Rauw Alejandro and Chenchó Corleone's "Desesperados" holds steady at No. 5 for a fifth week.

Meanwhile, Argentine cumbia ensemble La Delio Valdez takes the week's Greatest Gainer honors as "Inocente" rises 77-50. The song was recorded live at the band's 10-year anniversary show at Gran Rex theater in Buenos Aires.

Lastly, the chart posts four other debuts, starting with La K'onga's "Te Mentiría" at No. 14, Argentinian Salastkbron follows with "Turromantiko" at No. 75. Soledad and Natalie Perez's "Lágrimas y flores" bows at No. 94, while Argentinians Alejo Isakk, Roldan Emi and Pandora Prod secure their first entry with the No. 95 start of "Bellakeo." **■**

Taylor Swift & Adele Lead 2022 Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards Nominees

BY KIMBERLY NORDYKE

Nickelodeon on Wednesday unveiled the nominees for the 2022 Kids' Choice Awards, adding that iCarly star [Miranda Cosgrove](#) and NFL star Rob Gronkowski have been tapped to host the in-person show.

[Taylor Swift](#) and [Adele](#) lead the individual nominations with four each, while *Danger Force*, *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*, *iCarly*, *Cobra Kai* and *The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge on the Run* also earned four nominations apiece.

First-time nominees include [Olivia Ro-](#)

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drigo, Saweetie, Elizabeth Olsen, Awkwafina, **The Kid LAROI** and **Doja Cat**. Other nominees include **Ariana Grande**, Tom Holland, LeBron James, Dwayne Johnson, Ryan Reynolds and **Zendaya**.

Nickelodeon added that, for the first time, the show will feature “1,000 epic slimings,” with an onscreen running tally for those watching at home, along with “dozens of fun-filled pranks.”

The ceremony is set to take place Saturday, April 9, from the Barker Hangar in Santa Monica, Calif. It will air live at 7:30 p.m. ET on Nickelodeon, TeenNick, Nicktoons and the Nick Jr. channel. Awards are voted on by fans.

Nickelodeon said that musical performers will be announced at a later date.

A full list of nominees follows.

MUSIC**FAVORITE FEMALE ARTIST**

Adele
Ariana Grande
Billie Eilish
Cardi B
Lady Gaga
Taylor Swift

FAVORITE MALE ARTIST

Bruno Mars
Drake
Ed Sheeran
Justin Bieber
Shawn Mendes
The Weeknd

FAVORITE MUSIC GROUP

Black Eyed Peas
BTS
Florida Georgia Line
Jonas Brothers
Maroon 5
Migos

FAVORITE MUSIC COLLABORATION

“Beautiful Mistakes” — Maroon 5 featuring Megan Thee Stallion
“Best Friend” — Saweetie featuring Doja Cat
“Leave Before You Love Me” — Marshmello & Jonas Brothers
“Rumors” — Lizzo featuring Cardi B
“Save Your Tears” — The Weeknd & Ariana Grande
“STAY” — The Kid LAROI & Justin Bieber

FAVORITE GLOBAL MUSIC STAR

Adele (U.K.)

Camilo (Latin America)
Tones and I (Australia)
Tems (Africa)
BTS (Asia)
Rosalia (Europe)
Olivia Rodrigo (North America)

FAVORITE SONG

“All Too Well (Taylor’s Version)” — Taylor Swift
“Bad Habits” — Ed Sheeran
“Easy on Me” — Adele
“Happier Than Ever” — Billie Eilish
“Take My Breath” — The Weeknd
“Up” — Cardi B

FAVORITE BREAKOUT ARTIST

Chlöe
Glass Animals
Jack Harlow
Olivia Rodrigo
Saweetie
Walker Hayes

FAVORITE ALBUM

30 — Adele
Certified Lover Boy — Drake
Fearless (Taylor’s Version) — Taylor Swift
Happier Than Ever — Billie Eilish
Justice — Justin Bieber
Red (Taylor’s version) — Taylor Swift

TELEVISION**FAVORITE KIDS TV SHOW**

Are You Afraid of the Dark?
Danger Force
High School Musical: The Musical: The Series
Raven’s Home
That Girl Lay Lay
The Baby-Sitters Club

FAVORITE FAMILY TV SHOW

Cobra Kai
iCarly
Marvel Studios’ Loki
Marvel Studios’ WandaVision
The Flash
Young Sheldon

FAVORITE REALITY SHOW

American Idol
Kids Baking Championship
LEGO Masters
America’s Got Talent
The Masked Singer
Wipeout

FAVORITE CARTOON

Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous
Looney Tunes Cartoons

SpongeBob SquarePants
Teen Titans Go!
The Loud House
The Smurfs

FAVORITE FEMALE TV STAR (KIDS)

Havan Flores (Chapa / Volt, *Danger Force*)
Malia Baker (Mary Anne Spier, *The Baby-Sitters Club* | Gabby Lewis, *Are You Afraid of the Dark?*)
Olivia Rodrigo (Nini, *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*)
Raven-Symoné (Raven Baxter, *Raven’s Home*)
Sofia Wylie (Gina, *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*)
That Girl Lay Lay (Lay Lay, *That Girl Lay Lay*)

FAVORITE MALE TV STAR (KIDS)

Bryce Gheisar (Elliott Combes, *The Astronauts* | Luke McCoy, *Are You Afraid of the Dark?*)
Cooper Barnes (Ray Manchester / Captain Man, *Danger Force*)
Joshua Bassett (Ricky, *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*)
Luca Luhan (Bose / Brainstorm, *Danger Force*)
Raphael Alejandro (Matteo Silva, *Bunk’d*)
Young Dylan (Young Dylan, *Tyler Perry’s Young Dylan*)

FAVORITE FEMALE TV STAR (FAMILY)

Elizabeth Olsen (Wanda Maximoff / Scarlet Witch, *Marvel Studios’ WandaVision*)
Hailee Steinfeld (Kate Bishop, *Marvel Studios’ Hawkeye*)
Mary Mouser (Samantha LaRusso, *Cobra Kai*)
Miranda Cosgrove (Carly Shay, *iCarly*)
Peyton List (Tory Nichols, *Cobra Kai*)
Yara Shahidi (Zoey Johnson, *Black-ish, Grown-ish*)

FAVORITE MALE TV STAR (FAMILY)

Iain Armitage (Sheldon Cooper, *Young Sheldon*)
Jeremy Renner (Clint Barton / Hawkeye, *Marvel Studios’ Hawkeye*)
Jerry Trainor (Spencer Shay, *iCarly*)
Nathan Kress (Freddie Benson, *iCarly*)
Ralph Macchio (Daniel LaRusso, *Cobra Kai*)
Tom Hiddleston (Loki, *Marvel Studios’ Loki*)

FILM**FAVORITE MOVIE**

▶ IN BRIEF

Cinderella

Clifford the Big Red Dog

Disney's Jungle Cruise

Space Jam: A New Legacy

Spider-Man: No Way Home

Tom & Jerry: The Movie

FAVORITE MOVIE ACTRESS

Angelina Jolie (Thena, *Marvel Studios' Eternals*)

Camila Cabello (*Cinderella*, *Cinderella*)

Emily Blunt (Lily Houghton, *Disney's Jungle Cruise*)

Emma Stone (Estella / Cruella, *Disney's Cruella*)

Scarlett Johansson (Natasha Romanoff / Black Widow, *Marvel Studios' Black Widow*)

Zendaya (MJ, *Spider-Man: No Way Home* | Chani, *Dune*)

FAVORITE MOVIE ACTOR

Dwayne Johnson (Frank Wolff, *Disney's Jungle Cruise* | John Hartley, *Red Notice*)

John Cena (Jakob Toretto, *F9: The Fast Saga*)

LeBron James (LeBron James, *Space Jam: A New Legacy*)

Ryan Reynolds (Guy, *Free Guy* | Nolan Booth, *Red Notice*)

Tom Holland (Peter Parker / Spider-Man, *Spider-Man: No Way Home*)

Vin Diesel (Dominic Toretto, *F9: The Fast Saga*)

FAVORITE ANIMATED MOVIE

Disney and Pixar's Luca

Disney's Encanto

PAW Patrol: The Movie

Sing 2

The Boss Baby: Family Business

The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge on the Run

FAVORITE VOICE FROM AN ANIMATED MOVIE

Awkwafina (Otto, *The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge on the Run* | Sisu, *Raya and the Last Dragon*)

Charlize Theron (Morticia Addams, *The Addams Family 2*)

Keanu Reeves (Sage, *The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge on the Run*)

Reese Witherspoon (Rosita, *Sing 2*)

Scarlett Johansson (Ash, *Sing 2*)

Tom Kenny (SpongeBob SquarePants, *The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge on the Run*)

OTHER CATEGORIES**FAVORITE MALE CREATOR**

Austin Creed

MrBeast

Ninja

Ryan's World

Spencer X

Unspeakable

FAVORITE FEMALE CREATOR

Addison Rae

Charli D'Amelio

Emma Chamberlain

Kids Diana Show

Lexi Rivera

Miranda Sings

FAVORITE FEMALE SPORTS STAR

Candace Parker

Chloe Kim

Naomi Osaka

Sasha Banks

Serena Williams

Simone Biles

FAVORITE MALE SPORTS STAR

Cristiano Ronaldo

LeBron James

Patrick Mahomes II

Shaun White

Stephen Curry

Tom Brady

FAVORITE VIDEO GAME

Brookhaven

Minecraft

Just Dance 2022

Mario Party Superstars

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