Sphere Factor: Inside The Opening of Las Vegas’ Game-Changing Venue

By Eric Renner Brown

Everything about Sphere, the state-of-the-art new live-entertainment venue on the Las Vegas Strip, seems designed to shock and awe.

There's its size: At 366 feet tall by 516 feet wide, it's big enough to fit the Statue of Liberty (a fact the executives involved in the project very much like to note), making it the world's largest spherical structure. Stand outside, and it's impossible to focus on anything but its skyline-dominating, dynamic LED screen Exosphere; stand inside, on the floor of its main event space, and cower beneath its 160,000-square-foot LED screen that curves and towers to an apex of 240 feet above.

And then there's its sheer capability: When it opens Sphere on Sept. 29 with the premiere of its U2:UV Achtung Baby Live at Sphere show, U2 will be playing an eye-popping 25 dates at a 20,000-capacity facility in the Nevada desert. It all seems tailored to elicit the same response: the conviction that, after picking one's jaw up off the floor, live entertainment will be changed forever.

And it very well might be. As the sands of the concert business shift, Sphere's model — prioritizing cutting-edge production, embracing an unorthodox residency model and rounding out its calendar with high-margin programming produced itself — provides intriguing paths forward for major touring artists and the arenas and stadiums they play.

But as Sphere prepares to open its doors, significant questions remain about who will play the venue next, how it will continue to draw fans (and enough of them) in the coming years and what it needs to do to become — and remain — financially viable. And with its $2.3 billion price tag, nearly double the $1.2 billion initially estimated when the project was announced in 2018, the legacy of the figure behind the project, James Dolan, executive chairman and CEO of both Sphere Entertainment and the closely related Madison Square Garden Entertainment, feels inextricably linked to Sphere's success. (Dolan declined an interview for this story.)

For now, though, existential questions about Sphere will have to wait. There's a U2 residency to launch — no small feat — and, a week after that, the premiere of Postcard From Earth, the Darren Aronofsky-directed nature film that Sphere will screen from one to four times daily on days U2 doesn't play and that prom-

(continued)
LIVE FOR THE MOMENT

HARD ROCK LIVE

The 7,000 capacity Hard Rock Live at Seminole Hard Rock Hollywood stands as the premier hub for South Florida’s vibrant entertainment scene. This renowned venue plays host to a diverse lineup of the globe’s most popular musicians, comedians, and entertainers.
ises to harness even more of the venue’s considerable stable of technological bells and whistles (while also, hopefully, quickly becoming a reliable revenue driver).

“This is essentially a new medium, which we call ‘experiential,’ ” Dolan said on an August earnings call. “Sphere is a brand-new, never-before-seen medium — and we believe it will take the world by storm.”

A month before Sphere’s scheduled opening, David Dibble, CEO of the Sphere Entertainment subsidiary MSG Ventures, is in a jovial mood, sitting on Zoom before a background rendering of the cosmos, the starship Enterprise soaring through space.

He drops references to everything from the ancient Greeks to the Gutenberg press to scenes from Jaws and Animal House — and links all these things to Sphere. The project has dominated Dibble’s life since Dolan first broached the concept to him in his office one evening in late 2015, shortly after the sale of longtime Dolan family asset Cablevision was finalized for $17 billion.

“He leaned back, looked out the window,” recalls Dibble, who was Cablevision’s chief technology officer before joining MSG after the former’s sale. “He says, ‘You know, Dibble, let’s reinvent the live-entertainment industry.’ Those were his exact words. And I said, ‘Oh, OK. Well, thinking small, are we?’”

For “at least three hours,” the two men “brainstormed and argued and laughed.” Dolan was resolute that his new venue should have an iconic shape. After ruling out a pyramid or a cube, he grabbed Dibble’s pad of graph paper, scribbling a circle and a stick figure, and holding it up. “I got it,” he told Dibble. “MSG Globe.” Dibble nixed the name; Dolan asked him why.

“I said, ‘Shakespeare’s got ‘Globe,’ man, come on. You’re good, Dolan, but you’re not going to compete with Shakespeare.’” Dolan paused and recast his concept: MSG Sphere.

According to Sphere executive vp/COO Rich Claffey, who oversaw venue management for MSG Entertainment’s full portfolio before assuming his current role, Dolan began discussing Sphere in specific terms around 2015 — but had interest in a venue that would address similar concerns even earlier.

“We would always talk about how we could make multiple events in a day happen without having huge changeovers and things of that nature,” says Claffey, who joined the MSG family as a stagehand at its flagship arena in 1983. “Ten years ago, we were trying to figure out the best way where we could do major productions, all in the same day, and [what it would look like] if we ever built a building.”

When Dolan conceived Sphere, he didn’t have Vegas specifically in mind and asked his team to prepare a list of candidate locations, according to Dibble. But around this time, he explains, MSG connected with Sheldon Adelson and Rob Goldstein of the Las Vegas Sands, then still owner of The Venetian, who found the idea compelling and “in their view, fit the direction that Las Vegas was going” — away from gaming and toward entertainment.

“Live entertainment defines this town, more so than gaming,” says Kate Wik, chief marketing officer for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, the government agency tasked with marketing and promoting southern Nevada. “It has been over a decade that nongaming revenues exceed that of gaming revenues. We are an entertainment destination.”

Sands and MSG inked a ground-lease agreement for a plot directly behind The Venetian, and the project was announced in February 2018. “We had no idea how we were going to do this. I mean, none,” Dibble says with a palpable sense of amazement that Sphere was ultimately built. “All we knew was what we were going to call it and what the shape was going to be.”

Populous — the acclaimed architectural design firm behind facilities including Seattle’s Climate Pledge Arena and Milwaukee’s Fiserv Forum — was attached from the jump, with AECOM added as general contractor in 2019, when construction began; AECOM estimated the venue would cost $1.7 billion. But with the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation and attendant supply chain problems, the project was soon marked by delays and other issues. In late 2020, MSG
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CONTACTS

Joe Maimone
joe.maimone@billboard.com

Lee Ann Photoglo
laphotoglo@gmail.com

Cynthia Mellow
cmellow615@gmail.com

Marcia Olival
marciaolival29@gmail.com

Ryan O’Donnell
rodonnell@pmc.com
Entertainment relieved AECOM of its role and took construction in-house. (AECOM remained involved with the project in a support role under a new services agreement.) Some key executives did not see the project through, including Jayne McGivern, MSG Entertainment president of development and construction, and Lucas Watson, MSG Sphere president, who parted ways with the company in 2021 and February 2023, respectively.

There was “a lot of skepticism around this project over the years it was constructed,” says Paul Golding, an equity research analyst at Macquarie Group who tracks several companies across the live sector, including MSG Entertainment and Sphere Entertainment. And some of that skepticism extended beyond challenges in conventional construction to the novelty of the tech that would make the venue much more than just another impressive Vegas edifice. “There was, throughout the construction process — and even starting from the early days — some concern [among the investment community] as to whether some of these characteristics or features would be feasible, and if so, at what cost,” Golding adds.

The team wanted best-in-class audio and visual capabilities — some of which didn’t even exist yet at the project’s inception. For the former, it partnered with Holoplot, a Berlin-based audio startup, to design Sphere Immersive Sound, which uses the German company’s patented 3D Audio-Beamforming technology to ensure that listeners anywhere in the venue hear identical mixes at identical volumes; algorithmic machine learning and environmental data collected in real time by sensors throughout Sphere further refine and standardize the sound attendees hear regardless of where they’re seated. And to ideate the venue’s LED display and 4D technologies, Sphere Studios, a Burbank, Calif.-based interdisciplinary team spanning creative, production, technology and software pros, launched to serve as Sphere’s in-house creative and production unit. Its proudest accomplishment to date is Big Sky, an innovative high-resolution camera system that far outpaces current industry standards and can produce content suited for the venue’s massive screen.

And as much interest as Sphere’s technology has generated, its business model is also challenging conventional wisdom about how buildings should be operated, particularly at the arena level. Traditionally, Dolan explained on the August earnings call, “if you have a team, they’re the first tenants in, but that generally only occupies 40 to 50 nights a year, and the rest of the time you’re renting out and you have a limited revenue stream.” Sphere, by contrast, “will be busy theoretically 365 days a year, because when we’re not bringing in someone like a U2, etc., we’re running our own content, and that business is a high-margin business.”

By all appearances, U2 isn’t playing Sphere because it’s forsaking the road or has a particular affinity for Vegas. Rather, from the multimedia-rich 1992-93 Zoo TV Tour promoting *Achtung Baby* and *Zooropa* to the 2009-11 U2 360° Tour, with “The Claw” — its striking, four-legged stage structure plopped on stadium floors around the world — to even Bono and The Edge’s wild, ill-fated Broadway experiment with *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*, the band has pushed the boundaries of live entertainment for more than three decades. Its Sphere show, described by a press release as “a futuristic *Achtung Baby* adventure in a unique desert landscape,” is another step in that progression. (U2, creative directors Es Devlin and Willie Williams, and other members of its creative and production teams were unavailable to participate in this story; manager Irving Azoff declined to comment and a representative for longtime Live Nation promoter Arthur Fogel did not respond to requests for comment.)

“U2 is on record publicly saying they wouldn’t have played Vegas if it weren’t for the Sphere,” Dibble says. “I think that that thesis is probably going to lather, rinse, repeat across a pretty broad spectrum of entertainers.”

Given U2’s success selling tickets at Sphere so far — as its residency launches, multiple dates are sold out and several others have extremely limited inventory — and the substantial creative investment made by it and the venue for *U2:UV*, Sphere could take a page out of the book of other popular Vegas residencies and extend the band’s run. After all, U2 announced only five dates initially, adding 20 more in three waves to meet demand. “I’m pretty sure we could have kept going,” says Josephine Vaccarello, executive vp, live at MSG Entertainment, who oversees booking for all venues across the company’s portfolio and added Sphere to her purview in January. Might that happen? “TBD. I think we’ll see.”

But who will play Sphere following the famed Irish rockers? The venue doesn’t have any announced bookings after U2 on Dec. 16 — and its team has been mum about what its calendar will look like in 2024 and beyond. “We expect to announce additional residencies shortly, which are slated to take place later this fiscal year,” Dolan said on August’s earnings call, citing a “real robust interest from the artist community.” But, he noted, “we expect maybe not as high profile as U2, but close, because those are the kinds of artists that have been coming to talk to us.”

“There are tons of conversations happening right now,” Vaccarello says with excitement. “It’s literally — it’s every genre.”

Still, in a report published after August’s earnings call, Macquarie expressed concern about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements and said Dolan’s warning about the lack of additional concert announcements.

In Claffey’s estimation, artists “probably would have to be able to do six to eight shows to be viable, just to make it worth their while and our while.” And though Vaccarello reiterates that Sphere’s doors are open to one-off touring acts, she’s skeptical that such plays are the best fit for them. “With the technology that exists within Sphere, it doesn’t make sense to come into Sphere if you’re not going to use the media plane [Sphere’s term for its LED screen] and let it do all the things that it can do,” she says. “Otherwise, you would just do your show in an arena.”

Sin City already has multiple such venues, including the relatively new T-Mobile Arena, the MGM Grand Garden Arena and an additional, in-the-works facility being plotted by Oak View Group, not to mention a just-approved baseball stadium and the recently opened Allegiant Stadium.
“There is a lot of competition, so if you’re really just doing a one-off [in Vegas], I could see why you would just go to one of those other venues,” says Jarred Arfa, executive vp/head of global music at the newly formed agency Independent Artist Group. At IAG, Arfa represents a roster that includes Metallica, Neil Young, Def Leppard, The Strokes and Billy Joel – the lattermost will notably conclude his monthly MSG residency after a decade in July 2024 – and he says several clients have expressed interest in playing Sphere. “What I’m curious to see is, does the Sphere help an artist sell tickets?” he wonders. “If we have an artist who’s maybe worth one or two arena plays in Vegas, does the Sphere make it seven?”

Both Sphere executives and Arfa offer a similar refrain: that the venue’s technology, and its capacity to allow artists to create unique shows that can’t play anywhere else, heavily incentivizes extended runs. And while Sphere’s decision to lean into residencies isn’t particularly innovative, the scale at which it plans to do so is. Massive stars with Vegas residencies like Adele and Usher play to far smaller rooms (the 4,300-capacity Colosseum at Caesars Palace and the 5,200-capacity Dolby Live at Park MGM, respectively) than Sphere. As Arfa says: “It’s weird, because it’s an arena size, but it’s the residency model.”

“If a roller coaster only went up, that’s what it’s like,” says Guy Barnett, Sphere Entertainment senior vp, brand strategy and creative development, 10 days before U2 debuts at the venue. “You don’t often get the chance to launch a brand that dabbles with so many entertaining things, from robots to giant screens to Aronofsky.”

Barnett helped Dolan develop an early “pitch reel” for Sphere when Dolan was forming the concept in 2016 and returned to the project in early 2023 to guide the venue as it established its identity. While concerts are an important component of Sphere’s business model, they’re far from its only revenue stream — and possibly not its most critical one. Sphere’s overall commercial success relies on how well it can establish itself as more than just a place for music, but as “a fusion of science and art, and what the outcome of those two things are,” Barnett says. “It has been our mission to fuse those two circles of influence — that we take science and art to create something wonderful.”

To that end, the venue has conceived something called The Sphere Experience, which starts the moment patrons enter the venue. Outside of the bowl-shaped theater, one of five identical, humanoid robots named Aura greets visitors and interacts with them about the venue’s technology. Activations in the atrium “tell the role of technology in humankind,” according to Dibble; he’s particularly excited about mathematical equations printed across the space with QR codes that, when scanned, explain how the formulas were applied in engineering Sphere.

But The Sphere Experience’s centerpiece is exclusive content produced by Sphere Studios to be presented in the bowl — upon its opening, the Aronofsky-directed Postcard From Earth, a narrative-meets-documentary experience that was filmed on every continent. The show flexes the full potential of Sphere’s 4D multisensory technology, including effects like vibration, wind, scent and temperature fluctuations; it will debut with a per-show capacity of 5,000, with the possibility to increase attendance in the future (Sphere has 10,000 seats equipped with haptic capabilities). Across up to four showings, as many as 20,000 people will be able to experience Postcard From Earth on some days this fall, each paying between $49 and $249; as many at Sphere note, far more patrons will conclude with the venue through Postcard From Earth rather than U2.

“It’s a new medium, and we were really figuring it out as we went along,” Aronofsky tells Billboard. “The joke was often that we were building the plane while learning how to fly it. And so I think now that we have made Postcard From Earth, which uses the form in perhaps its most obvious way, I look forward to seeing what filmmakers in the future do in this medium.”

On Sphere’s August earnings call, Dolan called original content like Postcard From Earth “sort of the backbone of the business. That is basically a high-margin business, because you’ve already invested your capital. You’ve made your show, you’ve built your attraction, and now your running costs are basically things like ushers, security, merch, those kinds of things. So the return on that is pretty strong.”

Postcard From Earth is slated to run well into 2024 and possibly beyond; it will likely become the first piece of content in Sphere’s library of nonmusical programming that exists in perpetuity.

“A core component, in our view, of the revenue picture for Sphere will be Postcard From Earth” and future Sphere Experience programming at the venue, Macquarie’s Golding says, though he expresses caution because tickets are “at a price point that is significantly higher, in our view, than what the traditional film exhibitor might charge. We are watching to see whether that demand comes through, given the large amount of supply [number of screenings and available tickets] relative to visitation to Las Vegas.”

In a report published in August, Macquarie outlined a scenario where Sphere runs 710 shows in fiscal year 2025 with 9,000 optimal seats per show — which would come out to a supply of about 6.4 million “optimal seats.” In 2022, 38.8 million people visited Las Vegas, according to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, which has a metro area population of 2.9 million.

But another core facet of Sphere’s business revolves around the people who never even walk through its doors. The 580,000-square-foot Exosphere envelopes the structure — and offers creative and financial opportunity. Since coming to life on July Fourth, Exosphere has become an eyeball, a tennis ball, Mars and more.

“Sphere has not opened yet, and it’s already one of the top must-see attractions for this destination,” says Wik of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, describing it as “a character in and of itself” that people are already lining up to see.

And its features, of course, aren’t merely aesthetic. “Following our demonstration of the Exosphere’s capabilities, we’ve seen a significant increase in inbound interest from potential advertisers and marketing partners,” Dolan said in August.

On Sept. 1, Sphere launched two Exo-
sphere partnerships that illustrate the primary types of programming it will display. Turkish American artist Refik Anadol became the first creative to make Exosphere his canvas with the debut of *Machine Hallucinations: Sphere*, an abstract, immersive digital experience he describes as an artificial intelligence “data sculpture.” Meanwhile, YouTube became the first brand to generate a campaign specifically for Exosphere, using it to promote its subscription product, NFL Sunday Ticket. For Sphere, the challenge will be balancing these two purposes — and finding creative ways to fuse them.

In conversations with Dolan, Barnett has sought to “[make] sure that we’re always, within reason, around 50/50,” he says. “We’re leading the way and inspiring a lot of our commercial partners to see what they can do on this. Part of the art is to make sure that we are always surprising and delighting our audiences, and we want our commercial partners to do the same.”

But while Dolan has encouraged patience — “You should not expect the venue to reach its full economic potential right from the start,” he said in August — financial realities may pressure Sphere to behave more aggressively in its business, including when it comes to commercial Exosphere deals. Sphere’s higher-than-expected price tag “puts a greater degree of pressure on management to utilize the capacity of the venue,” from programming and booking to brand partnerships to finding operational efficiencies, Golding says.

While the Vegas Sphere experiment unfolds, its team isn’t stopping there: Though planners have been stymied by government red tape and local opposition, another Sphere has been in the works for London’s Stratford neighborhood since 2018. “Vegas is the first; by no means is it the last,” Dibble says. “By the way, we’ve got designs that can go from 2,000 to 20,000 people [in capacity], all maintaining the basic geometry of the bowl so that our content is portable.”

Don’t expect them to do it on their own the next time around, though. “We want partners,” Dolan said in August. “We’re looking at more of a franchise-type model.

Going forward, construction of additional Spheres will be, for this company, capital-light.” With construction lessons learned from the Vegas project and the possibility of smaller future Spheres, Dolan anticipates some iterations of the facility could be built in less than two years.

“The company has talked in the past about using this venue as a model for future opportunities to deploy this venue with partners or by licensing the design and the technology and the expertise,” Golding says. “It’ll be interesting to see if its success — if, in fact, it is successful — lends itself to other venue developers and managers seeking to deploy this format in lieu of what might be a more traditional opportunity in their respective geographies.”

Back in Vegas, as Sphere’s opening looms, the venue’s team continues to project confidence — with total sincerity, it seems. “If we’d listened to skeptics, we would have folded our tent years ago,” Dibble says without a hint of worry, citing the dozens of patents Sphere has secured to ward off imitators. “We think it’s going to be the hallmark of what is going to define the next generation of live entertainment.”

Or, as Dolan put it on August’s earnings call: “The proof is in the pudding — and the pudding is about to show up.”

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**Songtradr Acquires Bandcamp from Epic Games**

*BY KRISTIN ROBINSON*

Epic Games has sold Bandcamp to Songtradr, an online music licensing marketplace. News of the sale arrives as the Fortnite developer also announced plans to eliminate 16% of its workforce — around 830 jobs — and to spin off its SuperAwesome services division, according to a memo on Epic Games’ website.

“We’ve been spending way more money than we earn...We’re cutting costs without breaking development or our core lines of businesses so we can continue to focus on our ambitious plans,” explained Epic Games CEO Tim Sweeney in the memo.

**Epic Games acquired the independent music platform** for an undisclosed sum in March 2022. Though the purchase initially shocked the music business, several music executives explained to Billboard right after the sale that the motive behind buying Bandcamp might be to improve Epic’s relations with musicians or ease synch licensing. According to Epic Games at the time of the sale, “Bandcamp will play an important role in Epic’s vision to build out a creator marketplace ecosystem for content, technology, games, art, music and more.”

In the company’s latest memo, it continued to stress its desire to build itself into a wide-reaching “ecosystem for creators” but added that it needed to reach profitability.

In the past few years, Songtradr has been active in acquiring new businesses to expand its reach. In March 2023, it purchased **B2B music company 7digital** for a reported $23.4 million. It also recently acquired AI metadata and music search platform MusicCube in 2022, Massive Music and Song Zu in 2021, and Big Sync Music in 2019. Other companies in its expanding portfolio include Tunefind and Pretzel; it also invested $1 million in music credits database Jaxsta.

Bandcamp’s new owner says it will continue to operate the platform as a marketplace and music community with an artist-first revenue share, while the acquisition will enable it to expand its capabilities to support the artist community. In addition, Songtradr will now offer all Bandcamp artists the ability to have their music licensed to all forms of media, including content creators, game and app developers, and brands.

In a press release announcing the acquisition, Songtradr added that Epic Games is “exploring ways” to allow Bandcamp artists to opt-in to have their music licensed for use in Epic’s gaming and metaverse ecosystem via a partnership with Songtradr. Epic will continue to collaborate with Bandcamp on Fortnite Radio and “is investing in Songtradr to support Bandcamp’s successful integration into” the company, according to the Songtradr release.
“The acquisition of Bandcamp will help Songtradr continue to grow its suite of services for artists,” said Songtradr CEO Paul Wiltshire in a statement. “I’m a passionate musician myself, and artistry and creativity have always been at the heart of Songtradr. Bandcamp will join a team of music industry veterans and artists who have deep expertise in music licensing, composition, rights management, and distribution.”

“Songtradr shares Epic and Bandcamp’s values around ensuring artists are fairly compensated for their work,” added Epic Games vp/GM, store Steve Allison. “Bringing Bandcamp to Songtradr will make it easier for independent artists to connect with creators and developers looking to license their music and enable Epic to focus on its core meta-verse, games, and tools efforts.”

PodcastOne
Paid Brendan Schaub $1.6M,
While Other Kast Podcasters Were Asked to Accept Pay Cuts

BY DAVE BROOKS

S
ince LiveOne announced plans to acquire Kast Media in May, CEO Rob Ellin has not budged on his offer to compensate the podcasters to whom Kast owes millions of dollars. Ellin’s best offer: one-third of the money Kast Media owes them in cash, one-third of what they are owed in promissory notes to be paid over two years and one-third of what they are owed in stock from LiveOne subsidiary PodcastOne. In exchange, the podcasters must sign a multi-year agreement with PodcastOne and agree to reduce their cut of ad sales from 80% to as low as 60%.

“We’ve spoken to every podcaster. We’ve offered really fair deals — equity in our IPO to help them,” Ellin told Podcast Business Journal on Aug. 11. (Technically PodcastOne wasn’t actually going public via IPO, but making its shares available through a direct listing on the NASDAQ.) Podcasters had a tough choice ahead, Ellin explained — dig in their heels or take the settlement offer. “No other platform is going to pay them for the past,” he said. “They’re only going to work with them in the future.”

PodcastOne and its parent company LiveOne were, however, willing to pay at least one podcaster what Kast owes them in full — even if it meant taking out a high interest loan. Records obtained by Billboard show that in early August, LiveOne borrowed $1.7 million from CapChase, an online bank based in Madrid. That money, Billboard confirmed, was borrowed to pay UFC fighter-turned-podcaster Brendan Schaub what he was owed by Kast Media, the Los Angeles-based podcast company launched in 2016 by founder and CEO Colin Thomson. Kast Media, like PodcastOne, is a podcast network that provides a variety of services to podcast creators like production assistance, show distribution and, most commonly, advertising sales. Among its top shows are Logan Paul’s Impaulsive and Theo Von’s This Past Weekend.

In February, Schaub and other podcasters noticed that Kast’s payments on advertising money were becoming irregular, before falling off altogether by the end of the month. By August, Kast Media owed Schaub, an accomplished podcaster with three successful shows – the Golden Hour, The Fighter and the Kid and the Brendan Schaub show – a whopping $1.6 million in unpaid revenue. A month later, Schaub and his co-host Bryan Callen announced on the Fighter and the Kid podcast that they were leaving Kast Media and joining PodcastOne.

“Brendan spoke to a number of agencies, and the company that gave us the best deal when we were out this money was a company called PodcastOne,” Callen said at the time. “PodcastOne has been the agents of a lot of people we know, and they have been very happy with them.”

A rep for Schaub declined to comment for this story. LiveOne did not respond to requests for comment.

After announcing LiveOne’s plans to acquire Kast Media in May, Ellin revealed that the deal would only close if 70% of Kast’s podcasters would join LiveOne under the proposed settlement terms. To date, PodcastOne has not announced the closing of the Kast Media acquisition. On Sept. 8, the day PodcastOne was listed on the NASDAQ, LiveOne released a statement increasing its revenue and earnings guidance for the year that included Kast Media’s revenue and adjusted earnings and assumed “the previously announced Kast Media” acquisition “would have taken place at the start of the fiscal year,” which is April 1, 2024. On Wednesday (Sept. 27), LiveOne issued a press release saying that it “reiterates” its previous revenue guidance.

That reiteration has not helped the company’s share price. In July, ValueScope, a third-party valuation firm hired by parent company LiveOne, valued PodcastOne between $230 million and $275 million, which came out to $8 to $12 per share, a valuation Ellin had hyped to podcasters considering joining PodcastOne.

That estimate ended up being overly optimistic – PodcastOne’s share price immediately dropped 46% after being listed on the NASDAQ and has since tumbled even further. Three weeks after being listed on the NASDAQ, the stock closed Tuesday at $1.91 per share with a $45 million market capitalization, a drop of more than 80% after less than three weeks of trading.

“I hope this serves as a wakeup call for creators, because long-term, they’re much better off doing everything themselves – they don’t need these big podcast networks,” says Bryan Last, president of Arcadian Vanguard and the on-air co-host of The Jim Cornette Experience and Jim Cornette’s Drive-Thru. While Arcadian Vanguard produces each episode, it started contracting its advertising sales to Kast Media in 2018, in 2023 it brought sales back inhouse.

“Any service a network offers, most podcasters can do themselves,” he tells Billboard. “When their model puts an entire community of creators at risk, there’s obviously something wrong with the model.”
Rewind It Back: Usher Gets Streaming and Sales Bump From Super Bowl Announcement

BY KYLE DENIS, JASON LIPSHUTZ, ANDREW UNTERBERGER

Welcome to Billboard Pro’s Trending Up newsletter, where we take a closer look at the songs, artists, curiosities and trends that have caught the music industry’s attention. Some have come out of nowhere, others have taken months to catch on, and all of them could become ubiquitous in the blink of a TikTok clip. This week: Fans rush to Usher’s back catalog following his Super Bowl announcement, Swifties find clues seemingly foreshadowing her high-profile new relationship, a late Afrobeats artist has a surge of posthumous streams and more.

Usher’s “Good Good” Showing in Streams and Sales Post-Super Bowl Announcement

To the surprise and/or delight of many, the pop and R&B superstar Usher was announced on Sunday (Sept. 24) as the halftime performer for the halftime show of Super Bowl LVIII in February. Though he might not have been the most obvious choice for a 2023 halftime headliner, the veteran hitmaker’s catalog speaks for itself – and fans were quick to remind each other – and new album, Coming Home, scheduled for release the same day will certainly help with that. - ANDREW UNTERBERGER

87 + 89 = 2 Older Taylor Swift Songs Benefiting From Travis Kelce Relationship

When Taylor Swift showed up in Kansas City on Sunday afternoon to cheer on her apparent new romantic partner, Chiefs star Travis Kelce, fans responded by gobbling up Kelce’s mercury, with a nearly 400% spike in jersey sales the following day. As for Swift, two songs in particular have enjoyed streaming increases in the wake of the new relationship, thanks to perceived lyrical links between Swift and her new beau.

On “Mary’s Song (Oh My My My),” a track from Swift’s 2006 self-titled debut, she sings, “I’ll be 87, you’ll be 89 / I’ll still look at you like the stars that shine / In the sky, oh my my my.” While Swift was born in 1989 – and is about to release the Taylor’s Version re-record of her blockbuster album 1989 next month – Kelce’s jersey number is, of course, 87. Thirteen (!) years later, Swift released the song “Cornelia Street” on Lover, with the line, “Filling in the blanks as we go / As if the streetlights pointed in an arrowhead / Leading us home.” Where do the Chiefs play? Arrowhead Stadium, of course.

As a result, “Mary’s Song” earned an 88% increase in daily U.S. on-demand streams to 53,000 streams from Saturday to Sunday, according to Luminate, while “Cornelia Street” bumped up 12.7% to 211,000 daily streams. Of course, both songs were written years (if not decades) before Swift and Kelce became an apparent item – but what if she told you that none of it was accidental? - JASON LIPSHUTZ

Doja Cat Eyes Next ‘Scarlet’ Hit With ‘Agora Hills’

Last week (Sept. 22), Doja Cat unleashed her Scarlet album — and while she’s already topped the Billboard Hot 100 with “Paint the Town Red,” she could be gearing up for her next smash from the somewhat divisive new record.

“Agora Hills,” a sensual R&B-rap hybrid that features a verse rapped entirely in Valley Girl vocal fry, has emerged as one of Scarlet’s most promising future singles. According to Luminate, “Agora Hills” has collected over 8.4 million official on-demand U.S. streams since its Sept. 22 release. The song scored its biggest daily streams total (2.43 million) on release day, and it never dipped below 1.91 million daily streams during the period of Sept. 22-25.

The official Hannah Lux Davis-directed music video, which arrived alongside the LP’s full release, has already garnered over 5.7 million views on YouTube, and over on TikTok, the official “Agora Hills” sound has earned over 14,400 posts. Outside of “Paint the Town Red,” “Agora Hills” has consistently been the most streamed Scarlet track on both US Apple Music and US Spotify since the album’s release.

Although “Paint the Town Red” is still going strong, “Agora Hills” is already making a strong case to become the next hit from Scarlet. With endless meme potential, a true earworm of a hook and a sound that recalls her Grammy-nominated Hot 100 top 10 hit “Need to Know,” “Agora Hills” could very well become one of the main anthems for cuffing season ’23. - KYLE DENIS

MohBad’s Tragic Passing Spurs Massive Streaming Gains

Earlier this month (Sept. 12), the Afrobeats world lost one of its brightest rising stars; MohBad, the rapper behind hits such as “Peace” and “Feel Good,” tragically passed at the age of 27. The investigation into his death remains ongoing, led by Lagos Police Command. MohBad and his wife welcomed a son just a few months before his untimely death. In the wake of his passing, MohBad’s catalog has seen a massive boom in streaming.

According to Luminate, streams for MohBad’s catalog exploded by over 1,755%
over the past two weeks. From Sept. 15-21, the Headies Award nominee’s discography collected a whopping 6.89 million official on-demand U.S. streams, a 208% increase from the period prior (Sept. 8-14), during which his catalog earned over 2.2 million streams.

Less than three months before his death, Mohbad released *Blessed*, his sophomore EP. Two songs in particular from that project have posted sizable gains in recent weeks: “Sabi” and “Beast & Peace.” The former pulled over 680,000 official on-demand U.S. streams during the period of Sept. 15-21, a 2,164% increase from the 30,200 streams it earned during Sept. 1-7. Similarly, the latter garnered over 888,000 official on-demand U.S. streams during the tracking week ending Sept. 21, a 1,755% increase from the 48,000 streams it earned during two weeks earlier.

As the investigation continues to unfold, #Justice4MohBad keeps gaining steam across Africa and the rest of the world. A social movement that has already sparked critical conversations regarding the regulation of the Nigerian music industry, #Justice4MohBad is far from over – and Mohbad’s music should continue to soundtrack its evolution. – KD

**Q&A: Lizzy Szabo, Senior Editor of Indie & Developing at Spotify, on What’s Trending Up In Her World**

**How has Lorem, Spotify’s flagship alt-pop playlist, evolved as a platform since its launch four years ago?**

Oof. Where do I even begin? The list is never personalized with algorithms. Each track is intentionally chosen by a human, through a mix of data and instinct. We consider not only what we feel the audience would respond to, but also consider how the artist would like to be represented. In many ways, Lorem has evolved as the community around it has grown, but I think the overarching beauty of Lorem is that it has stayed the same in concept.

The sounds, artists, and culture around “indie music” are constantly evolving. Bedroom pop went from a bubbling subgenre to influencing the top charts, and this year we’ve seen a similar trend with “indie twang” (shoegaze, as a broader term). That’s a listening trend we love to see from the indie audience - they push new sounds and movements to the forefront where Spotify can step in and support momentum and context, like we aim to do with Lorem. The visual identity is meant to feel like a magazine - at this point, our design team has crafted 75 distinct L’O’rem ‘O’s, which makes every cover feel uniquely personal to the artist or project.

**Considering that Lorem is primarily focused on emerging artists, why do you think the playlist has become so effective as an artist discovery tool compared to other platforms (within and/or outside of Spotify)?**

Since 2019, we’ve featured over 2000 artists, 900 of which in 2023 alone. Upon realizing that Lorem had evolved into a prominent hub for artist discovery, particularly among young audiences seeking more opportunities for exploration, we made the strategic decision to refresh the playlist with more new artists on a more regular basis. In that sense, Lorem is consistent. We listen to artists, to fans, and just want to shine a light on good music - no matter who is making it or how it’s made. There’s a point of view, but we love to take risks.

I think four years ago I wouldn’t have believed you if you told me there would be country music in Lorem. But last summer, as Zach Bryan grew in popularity, I remember Max Motley and Dev Lemons talking on Lorem Life about how their friends couldn’t stop talking about this song. So not surprisingly, “Something in the Orange” crushed in the list. A year later, from day one, “I Remember Everything” shared a similar trajectory. Zach is also a huge indie fan (just look at what he posts on IG) so that creates a natural synergy that particularly resonates with an audience that reads into all those contextual cues. Helping the community and the industry piece together the puzzle - what works well together, who works together, a nice reminder of an iconic fan (just look at what he posts on IG) so that creates a natural synergy that particularly resonates with an audience that reads into all those contextual cues. Helping the community and the industry piece together the puzzle - what works well together, who works together, a nice reminder of an iconic

**What are some of the recent stylistic trends that you’ve noticed, as alt-pop and its subgenres continue to change?**

We’ve loved seeing the ‘folkification’ and country twang influence this year. Everyone is making folk albums or adding a folk song to their project. I can’t tell you why, perhaps the artists and producers can demystify it, but I like to think it’s the return to a classic, stripped-back, heartfelt sound in a wild time of political/technological/environmental crisis.

We’ve also seen a huge rise in shoegaze - both in younger audiences discovering icons of the space (especially as bands like Slowdive have released new projects), and new artists like Wisp or flyingfish have emerged as artists to watch in the space. According to Google Trends, the term has never been searched more in history than it has this year!

**Fill in the blank: my favorite artist that started on Lorem, and has since become a household name, is _______.**

Remi Wolf. She’s on the cover this week and co-hosting our very first Lorem & Friends event with us tomorrow - couldn’t be more thrilled to do it together. – JL

**Season’s Gainings: Listeners Still Remember the 21st Night of September**

It’s been two years now since Demi Adejuyigbe – the comedian whose elaborately staged and filmed yearly videos, set to Earth, Wind & Fire’s “September,” helped turn Sept. 21 into something of a pop national holiday – announced his retirement from the annual celebration. But it appears folks no longer need his viral reminders to commemorate the occasion: “September” racked up nearly 1.8 million official on-demand U.S. streams on its signature date last Thursday, up 280% from the day before (462,000). That’s also up from 1.4 million such streams two “September” Days earlier, meaning the ’70s classic continues to inch ever closer to becoming the “All I Want for Christmas Is You” of the autumn equinox season. - AU
Beyoncé Re-Set Monthly Boxscore Record With $179 Million in August

BY ERIC FRANKENBERG

In July, Beyoncé set the record for the highest one-month gross in the history of Billboard Boxscore (dating back to 1985) with $127.6 million. That haul narrowly edged out Bad Bunny’s $123.7 million from September of last year. But immediately after breaking ground, Queen Bey re-asserts herself, and the Renaissance World Tour, as an all-time dominant Boxscore force. According to figures reported to Billboard Boxscore, Beyoncé’s 14 shows in August earned $179.3 million.

Improving upon her existing record by 40%, Beyoncé distances herself from the pack, notching two of just four $100 million months since the charts launched in February 2019. Bad Bunny and Harry Styles achieved the other two.

After leading Top Tours in May and July, Beyoncé scores a third month at No. 1. That puts her in four-way tie with Ed Sheeran, the Rolling Stones and Trans-Siberian Orchestra. Bad Bunny spent four months at No. 1, and Elton John leads with seven.

With her freshly extended earnings record, Beyoncé claims the month’s highest attendance total for the first time, after falling short of Coldplay in May and The Weeknd in July. Her 14 shows sold 697,000 tickets.

After crowning Top Boxscores in July with two shows at New Jersey’s MetLife Stadium, Beyoncé ups the ante with three shows at Atlanta’s Mercedes-Benz Stadium. The triple-header grossed $39.8 million and sold 156,000 tickets on Aug. 11-12 and 14. That puts it among the top 10 grossing headline engagements ever, and the third highest in North America. The only two bigger reports are courtesy of Harry Styles, with 15-show runs at Madison Square Garden and the Kia Forum, making for an apples-to-oranges comparison to Beyoncé’s three-night stadium sweep.

Elsewhere, Beyoncé brought in $294.4 million on Aug. 6-7 at FedEx Field in Landover, Md. (Washington, D.C. area) and $25.8 million on Aug. 26-27 at Las Vegas’ Allegiant Stadium. Those three engagements alone would be enough for No. 1 on Top Tours, before adding the other seven shows she played between Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Mass. (Boston area) on Aug. 1 and Levi’s Stadium in Santa Clara, Calif. (San Francisco area) on Aug. 30.

This gigantic monthly haul adds to an already record-breaking summer for Beyoncé. Previously, Billboard reported that the Renaissance World Tour is the highest-grossing tour of all time by an R&B artist, replacing her own Formation World Tour from 2016. Now, at $461.3 million, it passes Madonna’s Sticky & Sweet Tour (2008-09) to become the highest-grossing tour by a woman in the Boxscore archives.

The Renaissance World Tour will come to a close on Sunday (Oct. 1). With 10 shows left to be reported, its global haul will blow past the $500 million mark, likely closer to $560 million. That will be enough to situate it among Boxscore’s 10 highest grossing tours ever. As of now, it’d make her the only woman, only Black artist, and only American solo act on the all-time leaderboard.

These records, and all Boxscore data, are based on figures reported to Billboard by various industry sources, such as venues, concert promoters and artist management.

In terms of attendance, the Renaissance World Tour is up to 2.247 million tickets, narrowly eclipsing the Formation World Tour’s 2.242 million to become her best-selling tour yet.

When Beyoncé crowned the May report, she became the first woman in almost four years to lead the list, since P!nk was No. 1 in July 2019. Three months later, with Beyoncé still at No. 1, the stars align with P!nk at No. 2. That marks the first time since the charts premiered four years ago that two women top the chart side-by-side.

P!nk claims the runner-up spot by a razor thin margin. Her 10 shows in August earned $68.59 million, just 0.025% ahead of Metallica’s $68.57 million, themselves barely separated from Morgan Wallen’s $68.36 million.

All three acts launched nine-figure tours earlier this year. P!nk began the Summer Carnival Tour in Europe in June before traveling stateside. Metallica hit the road on the M72 World Tour in April with a brief European leg. Now 10 shows deep in North America, the tour has grossed $123.7 million and sold 1.2 million tickets worldwide, becoming the band’s sixth million-ticket-tour.

For Wallen, the One Night at a Time Tour started in March, days after the release of its namesake One Thing at a Time album. The LP has gone on to top the Billboard 200 for 15 non-consecutive weeks, never leaving the top five in its 29-weeks-and-counting run on the chart. Between Australia and North America, the tour has earned $218 million so far, becoming the highest grossing tour by a country artist ever. Good year for Morgan Wallen!

While Beyoncé posted all-time high numbers for North American stadiums, her three Atlanta shows are No. 2 on Top Boxscores. She’s blocked by Another Planet’s Outside Lands Music and Arts Festival. The annual San Francisco event grossed $40.1 million and sold out all three days at 225,000 tickets. That’s the festival’s biggest gross and attendance ever, surpassing last year’s $33.9 million by 18%.

It’s the fourth time that Outside Lands has been No. 1 on Top Boxscores, following its triumphs in August 2022, October 2021 and August 2019. Across 13 reports (2008; 2011-19; 2021-23), the festival has welcomed just under 2.5 million customers (2,497,832 to be exact), amounting to $318.6 million in ticket sales.

The August Boxscore report is home to a particularly diverse set of artists. The artists among the month’s top 10 tours have charted on key Billboard charts across country, dance/electronic, Latin, pop, R&B, rap and rock, just in the last year. ■
Zach Bryan’s Nearly $44 Million Summer Tour Previews an Inevitable Level-Up in 2024

BY ERIC FRANKENBERG

H e’s country, he’s rock, he’s a superstar. Zach Bryan wrapped the Burn Burn Burn Tour at the end of August after touring the continent all summer. According to figures reported to Billboard Boxscore, the trek grossed $43.9 million and sold 475,000 tickets across 32 dates.

The Burn Burn Burn Tour took Bryan around the U.S. and Canada in a mix of amphitheaters and arenas, promoted by AEG Presents. The routing mixed primary markets such as New York and Los Angeles with secondary markets including Wilkes-Barre, Penn., and Grand Rapids, Mich., just as his music fuses genres and eschews traditional demographic lines.

With that, the biggest shows on the tour were not major pop stops such as Chicago or San Francisco, nor country hot spots Nashville or Dallas (he didn’t play anywhere in Tennessee). Instead, with roots in each city, double-headers at Philadelphia’s Wells Fargo Center (May 30-31) and Tulsa’s BOK Center (Aug. 10-11) shone the brightest, with earnings of $3.7 million and $3.2 million, respectively.

The Burn Burn Burn Tour was Bryan’s second live outing in two years. Just last year, he mounted the American Run Tour. Each tour was almost identical in length (32 shows in 2023 vs. 31 in 2022) but the results were dramatically different. The average attendance scaled from 5,735 tickets on last year’s run to 14,841 this summer, jumping by 158%. While his reach grew, so did demand. All while endeavoring to control a ballooning ticketing market, the average price jumped from $51 in 2022 to $92.52 in 2023.

Those are stellar improvements for any artist, but even more stark considering the six-month break between tours. And while the Burn Burn Burn Tour ended last month, Bryan has already plotted his next live venture. The Quittin’ Time Tour kicks off in Chicago on March 6, scheduled to run through mid-December with two final hometown shows at the BOK Center.

Even at his current pace, Bryan is already situated to do bigger business in 2024 than 2023. The initial Quittin’ Time announcement included 53 shows, more ambitious than this year’s 32. Just by adding 20-plus dates, next year’s run is on track to land in the $70 million to $75 million range. But he’s unlikely to top out there, as his ’24 routing is bulked up not just in length, but in size.

Bryan will return to some of the arenas from this summer’s tour, coming back to Las Vegas’ T-Mobile Arena and the Desert Diamond Casino in Glendale, Ariz., playing two shows at each venue rather than one. In other markets, there are clever extensions, like playing two shows at the Prudential Center, N.J., and two at Brooklyn’s Barclays Center, compared to this year’s double header at Forest Hills Stadium in New York City’s Queens. Despite its name, the latter venue functions more like a scaled amphitheater, smaller than either of next year’s New York-area arenas.

Elsewhere, it’ll be a whole different ball game. Two 2023 arena dates in Philadelphia will translate to a night at the city’s football stadium (Lincoln Financial Field) in 2024. More stadiums fill out his routing in Atlanta; Foxborough, Mass.; Minneapolis; and Tampa, some of which will be new concert markets for Bryan altogether.

It’s easy to plot Bryan’s transformation from theaters to arenas to stadiums over such a short window. This year’s Burn Burn Burn Tour was plotted, announced and went on-sale amidst the lingering success of American Heartbreak, which debuted and peaked at No. 5 on the Billboard 200 and spawned a No. 1 arrival on the Billboard Hot 100 songs chart with “I Remember Everything,” featuring Kacey Musgraves. Just last week, he followed it with Boys of Faith, an EP that is currently posting major streaming numbers that are atypical for a seemingly casual release.

Following post-pandemic stadium transformations for Luke Combs and Morgan Wallen, Bryan will likely mount one of the biggest country tours in Boxscore history. The expanded and fortified routing could lead the Quittin’ Time Tour toward $100 million and one million tickets in 2024.

Yung Gravy and Rick Astley Settle Vocal Impersonation Lawsuit

BY KRISTIN ROBINSON

On Tuesday (Sept. 26), singer-songwriter Rick Astley settled the vocal impersonation lawsuit he filed in January against meme rapper Yung Gravy and his collaborators for an undisclosed sum.

Filed in Los Angeles court, the lawsuit had claimed that while Yung Gravy and his collaborators secured rights to re-record the melody and lyrics of his 1987 hit “Never Gonna Give You Up” for their track “Betty (Get Money),” they “illegitimately impersonated” Astley’s distinctive vocals from the original track, thereby infringing his so-called right of publicity. “Betty (Get Money)” peaked at No. 39 on the Billboard Hot 100 and No. 9 on Billboard’s Hot Rap Songs chart.

Rights of publicity laws, which vary state by state, protect public figures from the commercial exploitation of their names, voices and likenesses without their authorization. Astley argued that by mimicking Astley’s voice in a “nearly indistinguishable” way, Gravy’s team “obliterated” Astley’s

IN BRIEF

By Eric Frankenberg

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Next year’s Quittin’ Time Tour was announced at the tail end of this year’s run, upon the release of his self-titled album. That one debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 and spawned a No. 1 arrival on the Billboard Hot 100 songs chart with “I Remember Everything,” featuring Kacey Musgraves. Just last week, he followed it with Boys of Faith, an EP that is currently posting major streaming numbers that are atypical for a seemingly casual release.

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Rights of publicity laws, which vary state by state, protect public figures from the commercial exploitation of their names, voices and likenesses without their authorization. Astley argued that by mimicking Astley’s voice in a “nearly indistinguishable” way, Gravy’s team “obliterated” Astley’s
chance to “collaborate with another artist and/or producer to create something new with his voice from ‘Never Gonna Give You Up’” and take advantage of other commercial opportunities.

The lawsuit arrived just as emerging artificial intelligence (AI) tools had sparked new conversations around right of publicity protections for artists. The debate hit a fever pitch in April when an anonymous TikTok creator named Ghostwriter made headlines with his song “Heart On My Sleeve,” which employed an AI voice filter to deepfake the voices of Drake and The Weeknd without their knowledge or consent. Since then, some leaders, including Universal Music Group’s general counsel/executive vp of business and legal affairs, Jeffery Harleston, have called for a federalized right of publicity to protect artists against the seemingly growing issue.

Notably, Gravy’s song did not employ AI to mimic Astley’s trademark tone. Instead, “Betty (Get Money)” producer Nick “PopNick” Seeley recreated Astley’s voice the old-fashioned way: through trial and error in the studio. In a previous interview with Billboard, Seeley said he has “a knack for vintage stuff” and has also helped recreate older recordings for other songs, including “I Like It” by Cardi B and “Dirty Iyanna” by YoungBoy Never Broke Again.

In a previous interview with Billboard, producer Marc “Fresh2Def” Soto — half of the duo ClickNPress — said it’s common for producers to be asked to recreate older songs as closely as possible. “A record label will be like, ‘Hey we can’t get the clearance for the sample, but we can get an interpolation, would you be able to replay XYZ thing?’ I’ve been through that on several records with different labels,” Soto says. However, most of these so-called “replays” of old songs don’t end up being quite as exact as the one in Astley’s case.

Astley was represented by attorney Richard S. Busch, the same lawyer who represented Marvin Gaye’s family in the controversial “Blurred Lines” trial. Gravy and the other defendants were represented by attorney Michael J. Niborski.

Busch and Niborski did not immediately respond to Billboard’s requests for comment.

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### AI-Generated Voices Can Do for Singers What Synths Did for Pianists (Guest Column)

**BY GERALDO RAMOS**

YouTube recently launched an AI Music incubator with artists and producers from Universal Music Group. The purpose of the group, according to Universal CEO Lucian Grainge, is to explore, experiment, and offer feedback on the AI-related musician tools and products the Google team is researching — with the hope that more artists will benefit from YouTube’s creative suite.

This partnership demonstrates the clear desire to involve the industry in the development stages of AI products and protect the human component of artistry. This desire is heightened in the face of deepfakes. Just last month, Google launched its Synth ID watermark meant to spot AI-generated images (Google DeepMind CEO Denis Hassabis cited the importance of deepfake detection ahead of a contentious election season). “Heart on My Sleeve,” the song created with AI-generated voices of fake Drake and The Weeknd kicked off the music industry’s scramble to shut down and stamp out any unauthorized use of artists’ voices. Most importantly, though, the viral track proved that AI voice models are here and only improving with each passing day.

As artists, labels, and other rights holders have grown more concerned about AI models learning and profiting from their copyrighted material, fans and creators have discovered new ways to engage with their favorite artists and imagine completely new musical works using their AI voice models. This is prompting other industry executives (myself included) to wonder how these models can continue to be used to explore this new creative frontier of music while protecting artists.

With all of this in mind, the industry needs to mull over a few philosophical questions and consider the distinction between voice cloning and voice synthesis. A singer is much more than timbre, the primary quality that voice models modify in a voice. AI voices are not the same as samples, where the whole vocal element is based on an underlying artist’s full performance which would include pitch, emotion, timbre, accent, tone, etc.

Regardless, AI innovations will only reach their maximum potential if the industry faces one foundational issue: artists and their labels need to control the ways in which their image, likeness and voice are used. Whether the industry decides to embrace these innovations or limit AI-powered cloning entirely, the next step begins with synthetic voice detection. Is the artist singing on any given track fake or the real deal?

In the early 2000s, music companies found themselves losing control of their content to the digitalization of music. The industry’s initial impulse to crush file-sharing networks like Napster led to the launch of Apple’s iTunes store in 2003 and, eventually, legal streaming. Other digital rights management tools, like ContentID on YouTube, were developed to detect unauthorized use of music. Once the industry learned to embrace digital music and formed a foundational infrastructure to support it, streaming revenues soared — breaking the $10 billion mark for the first time in 2022 and making up 84% of the industry’s total revenue, according to the RIAA.

The industry needs synthetic voice detection, but with 120,000 new tracks uploaded to streaming platforms daily (according to Luminate) on top of the already existing back catalogs, can it be done accurately and at scale? The short answer: yes.

As the industry begins to embrace the responsible use of AI for synthetic voice creation, I strongly believe there should be a corresponding willingness for artists and labels to collaborate in that training process. It’s in their best interests to do this now. AI applications are already scaling in a variety of categories. Well-engineered models are
Global Music Diplomacy Initiative Unveiled at State Department Event in Washington, D.C.

BY PAUL GREIN

U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken launched the Global Music Diplomacy Initiative on Wednesday (Sept. 27), a worldwide effort to elevate music as a diplomatic tool to promote peace and democracy.

The launch event was held at the Department of State in Washington, D.C. Secretary Blinken was joined by Harvey Mason, Jr., CEO of the Recording Academy; Lyor Cohen, global head of music for YouTube and Google; and David M. Rubenstein, chairman of the board at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

The event featured live performances by Jamie Barton, Toni Blackman, Myles Frost, Gayle, Denyce Graves, Dave Grohl, Mickey Guyton, Herbie Hancock, Christopher Jackson, LADAMA, Aimee Mann & Paul Bryan, Rakim, Armani White and DJ 2-Tone as well as a video message from Bono.

In addition, Mason and Secretary Blinken awarded Quincy Jones the first-ever Peace through Music Award. The award, a collaboration between the Department and the Academy, recognizes an American music industry professional, artist or group who has played a key role in cross-cultural exchanges and whose music work advances peace and mutual understanding globally.

Jones has won 28 Grammy Awards, the third highest tally of all-time behind Beyoncé and classical conductor Sir Georg Solti. In addition, he has received several high-profile honors from the Recording Academy: a trustees award in 1989, the Grammy Legends Award in 1991 and MusiCares’ Person of the Year award in 1996. His non-grammy honors include the Jean Hersholt Award from the Motion Picture Academy in 1994 and the Kennedy Center Honors in 2001.

The event culminated with several announcements that, it is hoped, will shape the future of music diplomacy, ranging from public-private partnerships with American music industry leaders to educational opportunities for youth globally.

The Global Music Diplomacy Initiative builds on the bipartisan PEACE Through Music Diplomacy Act, which President Joe Biden signed into law last year. It will augment current U.S. efforts that consist of various public diplomacy exchange programs using music as a diplomatic tool, including American Music Abroad, Arts Envy, Center Stage, Next Level and OneBeat.

Several of the initiatives announced on Wednesday were collaborations with The Recording Academy. “From advocating for the Peace Through Music Diplomacy Act in 2022, to partnering with the U.S. State Department on the Global Music Diplomacy Initiative, the Academy firmly believes that music’s transformative power can be a global force for good,” Mason said in a statement. “We’re honored to begin our work with the State Department to promote peace and cross-cultural understanding through music while continuing our mission to lift up music people around the globe.”

“Music reminds us that we have more in common than what separates us,” Cohen added. “It heals us. It unites us. It gets us hyped. ... For centuries, music has helped fuel important social and cultural movements. Artists like Aretha Franklin, John Lennon, Kendrick Lamar, and so many more have written songs that bring people together to create understanding and drive peace. This initiative creates a new avenue for us to raise their voices and drive global music diplomacy forward; breaking down cultural barriers and fostering peace through music.”

The Global Music Diplomacy Initiative launch announcements include:

- **American Music Mentorship Program**
  This program, a partnership between the U.S. Department of State and The Recording Academy, will bring international mid-career music industry professionals, who may include musical artists, to the United States for mentorship and networking opportunities. The first program will be held in the fall of 2024.

- **Fulbright-Kennedy Center Visiting Scholar Award in Arts and Science**
  The Fulbright Program, the United States’ flagship international academic exchange program, will collaborate with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts to create a new fellowship opportunity for foreign scholars. The new Fulbright-Kennedy Center Visiting Scholar Award in Arts and Science will focus on the intersection of the arts and science, including how the arts can contribute to individual and global health and well-being and the environment. An award competition will be announced this...
fall, and the Kennedy Center will host the first scholar in academic year 2024-25.

Boosting English-Language Learning Through Music

Recognizing the strategic importance of English-language learning overseas, especially for youth and underserved communities, the Department will incorporate music into its existing $40 million investment in English-language learning worldwide to provide access to English-learning classes for promising students between the ages of 13 and 20.

The Department will augment broader global English-language learning by supporting Sing Out Loud, a program that provides resources for teaching English through music in collaboration with American Music Abroad, bringing music and lyrics into classrooms across the world.

In addition to the Secretary’s announcements, the Global Music Diplomacy Initiative will include programming around the world, including:

Arts Envoys to Travel to the Middle East, People’s Republic of China

Hancock, along with Dee Dee Bridgewater and the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz Ensemble at UCLA, will perform in Jordan in October to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the 1963 Jazz Ambassador tour of the Duke Ellington Orchestra.

Hancock’s tour will then travel to Saudi Arabia for a four-day Arts Envoy program, the first of its kind between the United States and Saudi Arabia.

From Nov. 9-18, The Philadelphia Orchestra is slated to commemorate the 50th anniversary of its historic 1973 tour of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) with ensemble performances and residency activities in multiple cities in the PRC.

Ten American Bands to Travel to 30 Countries Through American Music Abroad

Representing various genres, Birckhead, The Beatbox House, The Invisibles, Marielle Kraft, Matthew Whitaker, Pipeline Vocal Project, Raining Jane, Sihasin, Sub-Radio and Tap Music Project will travel to 30 countries from October through June 2024.

In November, the 2023 American Music Abroad Academy Cleveland will bring together young professional musicians from the Ukrainian diaspora and around the world for collaboration with and mentorship opportunities from American instructors with a focus on cultural preservation through music.

Next Level to Use Hip-Hop in Nigeria, Bring International Artists to the United States

In September, four U.S. hip-hop artists focusing on conflict transformation will travel to Lagos, Nigeria for a two-week Next Level Academy. In addition, 10 international participants will travel to Washington, D.C., and New York for a two-week professional development program on conflict transformation through hip-hop.

Scaling Social Entrepreneurship Projects, Strengthening Creative Economy Through OneBeat

From Nov. 6-20, musicians from Ghana and Nigeria will come together to collaboratively create and discuss how music can bring people together through social entrepreneurship projects as part of the OneBeat program.

Harmundi International Music Summit to Welcome Students from Every Continent

Virtually connecting more than 60 international students from every continent through music, the Harmundi Summit will provide intense music training, cross-cultural collaboration, studio recordings and live performances under the mentorship of world-class musicians and producers. The Summit, which will take place Nov. 3-5, will be led by alumni of the Department’s exchanges and is part of the Department’s Citizen Diplomacy Action Fund. This fund provides grants of up to $10,000 for public service projects that utilize the skills, knowledge and networks of International Music Summit students.

Music Groups Launch Year-End Push for Bill That Would Provide Tax Break for Music Creators

Proponents of the Help Independent Tracks Succeed (HITS) Act are making a renewed effort to get the bill through Congress.

On Wednesday (Sept. 27), the Recording Academy and the American Association of Independent Music (A2IM) sent a letter to House Ways and Means Committee chairman Jason Smith (R-MO) and ranking member Richard Neal (D-MA) urging them to add the bill to end-of-year tax legislation.

The HITS Act would provide an extra tax break to musicians, technicians and producers for recording sessions, allowing them to deduct 100% of recording expenses up to $180,000 on their taxes in the year they’re incurred. That would be a change from the current law, which requires music creators and labels to amortize those expenses over the economic life of a sound recording, a period that usually ranges between three and four years.

“The bill is designed and tailored to specifically incentivize independent artists, songwriters and labels to produce new music, sparking important creative investments in countless music small businesses across the country,” reads the letter, signed by Recording Academy chief advocacy and public policy officer Todd Dupler and A2IM president/CEO Richard James Burgess.

“This targeted approach makes the HITS Act a fiscally responsible investment in the American creative economy.”

The letter goes on to point out that film, TV and live theatrical productions all enjoy the option of fully deducting production costs in the year they’re incurred and argues...
that music productions should get the same
treatment. For independent creators and
labels, being forced to amortize expenses
“slows down their reinvestment in new
projects that can fuel growth,” the letter
adds.

Speaking to Billboard last year, Burgess
put it in starker terms, noting that specifical-
ly for independents, “getting $150,000 per
project [that can be] written off against your
taxes in the year that you incurred it, could
really make a difference between being able
to make another record next year or not.”

The bipartisan HITS Act was first
introduced in the House on July 31, 2020
(followed by a companion bill in the Senate
on Dec. 3, 2020), though it failed to pass as
part of the two pandemic relief packages or
as part of the $3.5 billion budget reconcili-
ation package known as Build Back Better,
which was ultimately halved and renamed
the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 before
being signed into law in August 2022. A
similar lobbying effort at the end of last year
to pass the bill ahead of the changeover to
a new, split Congress — Republicans took
control of the House of Representatives in
January while Democrats held the Senate —
also failed.

Read the full letter below.

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Mem-
ber Neal:

On behalf of independent music makers
and record labels we call on the Committee
of Ways and Means to advance into law the
bipartisan and bicameral Help Independent
Tracks Succeed (HITS) Act (H.R. 1259) as
part of any tax policy package considered
before the end of the year. The HITS Act is
a low-cost and commonsense modification
to existing U.S. tax law that will incentiv-
ize the production of new sound recordings
and songwriter demos by allowing qualified
productions to deduct 100% of their costs
upfront. With an annual deduction limit of
$150,000, the bill is designed and tailored to
specifically incentivize independent artists,
songwriters and labels to produce new music,
sparking important creative investments in
countless music small businesses across the
country. This targeted approach makes the
HITS Act a fiscally responsible investment in
the American creative economy.

The HITS Act also brings much-needed
parity to the tax code for all creative indus-
tries. Currently, under Sec. 162 of the Internal
Revenue Code, qualified film, television, and
live theatrical productions may elect to fully
deduct new production costs in the year they
are incurred. Music production, which occurs
in every state and congressional district,
deserves the same treatment. Instead of being
able to fully deduct production expenses in the
year they occur, independent music makers
must currently amortize production expenses
for tax purposes over the full economic life
of their creation. For small creators and the
small businesses that invest in their careers,
this timing difference slows down their
reinvestment in new projects that can fuel
growth. The HITS Act harmonizes the tax
code and ensures that all the major creative
industries are treated similarly.

As you consider how to best craft compre-
hensive tax legislation this year, the music
community strongly urges you to include
the HITS Act in any vehicle. It represents
exactly the type of bipartisan, bicameral, and
non-controversial economic investment that
Congress should be proud to support. Passage
of H.R. 1259 is a smart and simple step that
will make a lasting difference for countless
independent music creators and music small
businesses.

Thank you for your consideration.

Signed,

Dr. Richard James Burgess
President and CEO
American Association of Independent Music
(A2IM)
Todd Dupler
Chief Advocacy and Public Policy Officer
Recording Academy

Disturbed Scores Career-High
Amphitheater Attendance

BY ERIC FRANKENBERG

T

his summer, Disturbed launched
a North American amphitheater
tour in support of Divisive, the
band's eighth studio album over
a three-decade career. For a group that
deep into their journey as live performers,
another summer tour can feel like a bit of
plug-and-play. But this time around, the
band's Boxscore results were bigger than
ever before. According to figures reported to
Billboard Boxscore, the Take Back Your Life
Tour earned $17.4 million and sold 336,000
tickets.

That makes 2023 the biggest year of the
band's touring career, surpassing the $14.6
million earned in 2019.

On a per-show basis, Disturbed averaged
$601,000 per night, beating previous career-
bests of $473,000 in 2011 and $405,000
in 2019. But as proven by an endless list
of post-pandemic examples, inflation and
platinum ticketing and dynamic pricing
and primary-market re-sale make bulking
up tour grosses more possible, if not easier,
than ever. But in Disturbed's case, this peak
revenue cannot be explained by exploiting
2023's chaotic ticketing market.

The average ticket price for the Take Back
Your Life Tour was $51.07. That's actually
down by 11% from 2019's $58.66, and only
7% above the average from 2016 ($48.72).
That means that the band's soaring earnings
can be explained by increased attendance.

The Take Back Your Life Tour averaged
11,573 tickets per show, up from 6,901 in
2019 and 4,404 in 2016. Over the last two
album cycles, Disturbed has multiplied its
ticket-buying fanbase by more than two and
a half. Sorted by attendance, the band's 10
biggest concerts ever all happened this sum-
mer, led by the Sept. 2 show at Ruoff Home
Mortgage Music Center in Noblesville, Ind.,
marking its first headline show with more than 20,000 fans.

This year’s tour was in key Live Nation amphitheaters, after mostly playing in scaled down arenas. Located just outside of primary touring markets, these outdoor venues have the space to accommodate thousands of fans, often more than the indoor arenas situated in the center of major cities.

Not only did Disturbed have the literal space to sell more tickets, taking advantage of the venues’ large lawns (all dates had a baseline price of $29.50), but the infrastructure around amphitheaters also allows for modest pricing, even up to the first row. Parking, merchandise and concessions are major parts of the experience, especially with bulked-up lineups on long summer days. Breaking Benjamin and Jinjer supported Disturbed on the road this summer.

The decision to level up to amphitheaters did a lot of the heavy lifting for Disturbed’s new career peak, but the release of last year’s Divisive certainly helped as well. Before the tour began, the album had already made “Hey You” the band’s 11th No. 1 on Billboard’s Mainstream Rock Airplay chart, with “Bad Man” reaching No. 2 in March. Throughout the tour, “Unstoppable” climbed the ranks, ultimately becoming the band’s 12th chart-topper in mid-August. “Don’t Tell Me” featuring Ann Wilson is the band’s 12th chart-topper in mid-August.

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Bad Bunny Will Perform a New Song at 2023 Billboard Latin Music Awards

Bad Bunny is ready to sing a new song live on Oct. 5 for the first time, when he takes the stage at the 2023 Billboard Latin Music Awards.

Billboard and Telemundo announced Thursday (Sept. 28) that the Puerto Rican superstar will be part of the ceremony at the Watsco Center in Coral Gables, Florida. The show will be broadcast live on Telemundo and simultaneously on the Spanish entertainment cable network Universo, on Peacock and on the Telemundo app. Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, it will be available on Telemundo Internacional.

They didn’t specify what song Bad Bunny will be performing. His most recent release is the reggaeton banger “Un Preview,” which just came out Monday.

The singer of “Tití Me Preguntó” and “Me Porto Bonito,” a 15-time finalist at this year’s Latin Billboards, joins a stellar list of artists confirmed to sing at the gala, including Calibre 50, Chiquis, Eddy Lover, El Alfa, Eladio Carrión, Farruko, Grupo Frontera, Justin Quiles, La Factoría, Los Ángeles Azules, Manuel Turizo, Marc Anthony, Marshmello, Olga Tañón, Los Sebastianes, Myke Towers, Nicki Nicole, Pepe Aguilar, Peso Pluma, Sky Rompiendo, Sofia Reyes, Tini, Ximena Sariñana, Yandel and Yng Lvcas.

Mexican music sensation Peso Pluma leads the list of finalists with 21 nods across 15 categories, including Artist of the Year, Songwriter of the Year, Global 200 Latin Artist of the Year and Top Latin Album of the Year. His collaboration with Eslabon Armado, “Ella Baila Sola,” is up for six awards, including Hot Latin Song of the Year, Global 200 Latin Song of the Year and Sales Song of the Year. And his hit with Yng Lvcas, “La Bebe,” competes in five categories, including Hot Latin Song of the Year and Latin Rhythm Song of the Year.

Following Peso Pluma are Bad Bunny and Grupo Frontera with 15 nods each, including four together for their collab “un X100to,” while Karol G has 13, and Shania and Fuerza Regida have 12 each. See the complete list of finalists here.

Among the special honorees, Los Ángeles Azules will receive the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Latin Billboard Music Awards 2023, while Ivy Queen will be recognized with the Icon Award. Colombian superstar Karol G will be honored with the Spirit of Hope Award in recognition of her commitment to civic, community and humanitarian causes through her Con Cora Foundation.

As has been the case for more than 20 years, the Billboard Latin Music Awards coincide with Billboard’s annual Latin Music Week, the single largest and most important gathering of the Latin music industry, taking place Oct. 2-6. The event will feature panels, conversations and workshops at the Faena Forum and exclusive performances and fan experiences throughout the week in Miami. Shakira, Myke Towers, Vico C, Grupo Frontera, Peso Pluma, Nicki Nicole, RBD and many more are confirmed to participate. Purchase tickets to the 2023 Billboard Latin Music Week here.

Jet Forges ‘Landmark’ Deal With BMG

BY LARS BRANDLE

Sydney, Australia – As Jet flies through a particularly busy stretch, the reunited rock band strikes a catalog deal with BMG.

Terms were not disclosed in the arrangement, announced Thursday (Sept. 28), which sees BMG acquire Jet’s recordings. BMG gets rights to the band’s first two...
albums for Australian and New Zealand, Get Born (2003) and Shine On (2006), the global royalty stream for these recordings in perpetuity, plus global rights to their third album Shaka Rock (2009).

Included in the pact are such Billboard Hot 100 hits as “Are You Gonna Be My Girl” (peaking at No. 29), “Look What You’ve Done” (No. 37), and “Cold Hard Bitch” (No. 55).

After years on the sidelines, the classic lineup of Nic Cester (vocals/guitar) his brother Chris Cester (vocals/drums), Cam Muncey (vocals/guitar) and Mark Wilson (bass) recently reformed ahead of their induction into the ARIA Hall of Fame, set for Nov. 15 during the annual ARIA Awards in Sydney.

They’re currently on the road for a national tour, a 20th anniversary celebration of Get Born, an album that won six ARIA Awards back in 2004, is nine-times platinum-certified, and recognized as one of the top 5 highest-selling Australian rock albums of all time.

BMG president, Australia, New Zealand and South-East Asia, Heath Johns negotiated what he describes as a landmark deal,” extending the global publishing pact between both parties, forged in 2017.

Jet, he continues, are a “generation-defining band who achieved global success of the rarest kind.”

All three studio albums impacted the top 40 on the Billboard 200 chart, and cracked the Official U.K. Albums Chart, with Get Born peaking at No. 14 and Shine On going one better, at No. 13. Career sales top 5 million, reps say.

Jet’s works have enjoyed a second life through syncs across international advertising campaigns, feature films, TV series and video game franchises, the most memorable an Apple iPod campaign in the 2000s featuring “Are You Gonna Be My Girl.”

BMG, explains Sydney-based Johns, “has become the fastest-growing music company in Australia via our organic recordings and publishing growth and now, as we expand our scope via acquisition, I can think of no bigger statement than the acquisition of the Jet catalog.”

Since opening for business in Australia in 2016, BMG has signed a roster of Australian and New Zealand acts including Chet Faker, Angus & Julia Stone (ANZ), Daniel Johns, Dope Lemon, Hockey Dad, Julia Stone, The Living End, Pacific Avenue, Ladyhawke, CHAII, Dune Rats and Winston Surfshirt.

“With big decisions like this it comes down to personal relationships. We’ve known the BMG team for years,” notes Chris Cester in a statement announcing the new agreement. “We're already with BMG for our publishing and they do what they say they're gonna do. That’s a rare thing in this business. Sooner or later you figure out that's the only thing that matters, if you're serious about what you do.”

Publishing Briefs:

WCM Hosts Annual Vegas Camp; Primary Wave Buys P.F. Sloan and Eddie Rabbitt

BY KRISTIN ROBINSON

Warner Chappell Music recently wrapped a Las Vegas-based songwriting camp, featuring 300 songwriters, artists and producers from around the world. The annual event was held in partnership with YouTube Music, Warner Records, Atlantic Records, and RCA Records, along with other label sponsors and included artists like Chlöe, Bebe Rexha, Yng Lvcus, P2J, The Proof, Lydia Night, Murda Beatz, Tay Keith, Amy Allen, Ian Kirkpatrick, Nova Way, Benson Boone, and Leigh-Anne Pinnock.

Primary Wave Music has acquired the publishing and writer’s share of P.F. Sloan’s catalog, as well as the late-singer’s master royalty income. Sloan wrote, performed, and produced for artists across all genres of music — from Barry McGuire to Herman’s Hermits to the Mamas and the Papas. Hits like “Eve of Destruction,” “A Must To Avoid,” “Secret Agent Man,” and “You Baby” were included in the deal.

Primary Wave Music has acquired a stake in the works of singer-songwriter Eddie Rabbitt. With 17 No. 1 hits on Billboard’s Hot Country Songs chart, including “I Love a Rainy Night” and “Drivin’ My Life Away,” the Grammy-nominated talent “left a lasting impression in the country music community and beyond,” said Primary Wave’s vp of business & legal affairs, Lexi Todd.


Position Music has signed BRIT-nominated producer and songwriter Joe Kearns to a worldwide publishing deal. A consistent collaborator of Ellie Goulding and cuts with Lukas Graham, Henry Moodie, Zara Larsson, IVE, Seeb, and MONSTA X, Kearns says he’s “very excited to get to work and make lots of records” with Position.

MusicBird has acquired the catalog of Greek-Swedish songwriter and producer Alexander “Alex P” Papaconstantinou. Included in the deal are Alex’s writer and publisher’s share of songs like “I Like How It Feels” by Enrique Iglesias, “C’est La Vie” by Khaled, “Live It Up” by Jennifer Lopez, “Boys Will Be Boys” by Paulina Rubio, and “Whip It” by Nicki Minaj.

Joie Manda’s Platinum Grammy Publishing has forged a new partnership with Photo Finish Publishing. Though Photo Finish, which is best known as a record label, has had previous publishing ventures with Warner Chappell and UMG that were coterminous with their respective label deals, Atlantic and UMG, together with Manda Photo Finish Publishing is launching anew. Under the deal, Photo Finish with sign songwriters and producers and are “thrilled to be working with artists, writers, producers from a different perspective,
other than the label.”

Warner Chappell Music, The Core Entertainment and Bailey Zimmerman have signed Dipper to a global publishing deal. A rising country singer-songwriter, Zimmerman calls Dipper a “raw talent” that he is “psyched” to work with.

Concord Music Publishing has signed country artist Clayton Mullen to an exclusive worldwide publishing agreement, including his full catalog and future works.

Rock Hall of Fame to Livestream Induction Ceremony for the First Time – Here’s Who’s Performing

BY JOE LYNCH

For the first time ever, viewers will be able to watch a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony live without being there in the flesh. On Thursday (Sept. 28) morning, the Rock Hall announced that the 2023 ceremony will be streaming live on Disney+ at 8 p.m. ET when it takes over Brooklyn’s Barclays Center on Nov. 3. In past years, an edited version of each Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony aired on HBO several weeks following the in-person event; now, that edited broadcast of highlights will air on ABC come Jan. 1, 2024, from 8-11 p.m. ET.

That news also came with the first announcement of who we can expect to take the stage at the Class of 2023 induction. Of the new inductees, Sheryl Crow, Missy Elliott, Chaka Khan and Willie Nelson have been revealed as performers at the Nov. 3 event. Additionally, special guests Brandi Carlile, Elton John, Dave Matthews, H.E.R., Chris Stapleton, St. Vincent and New Edition will also take the stage.

The Class of 2023 also includes Kate Bush, the late George Michael, Rage Against the Machine and The Spinners in the performers category. Additionally, DJ Kool Herc, Link Wray, Al Kooper, Bernie Taupin and Don Cornelius will be inducted.

“This historic live stream on Disney+ special on ABC is a testament to the diverse sounds and enduring power of rock and roll,” said John Sykes, chairman of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Foundation, in a press release. “Over the last three decades, the annual live Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Induction has become music’s highest honor, celebrating the artists who’ve defined generations and changed music forever.”

This year will mark the first induction ceremony since Rock Hall co-founder Jann Wenner was removed from the foundation’s board of directors by a near-unanimous vote. The Rolling Stone founder was widely lambasted following an interview with The New York Times about his book The Masters, which didn’t include interviews with women or Black artists. When pressed on this by the Times, he replied that women were not “as articulate enough on this intellectual level” about rock music and added that Black artists “just didn’t articulate at that level.” Since then, Wenner apologized in a statement, saying, “In my interview with The New York Times, I made comments that diminished the contributions, genius, and impact of Black and women artists and I apologize wholeheartedly for those remarks.”

How Adam Mac Went From Cancelling a Concert Over Anti-LGBTQ Protests to Opening for Maren Morris

BY STEPHEN DAW

In his song “That Ain’t Country,” queer artist Adam Mac proudly declared to his detractors that, if they tried that in his small town, they would be met with a community that supports him unconditionally. “The people in the town where I was raised/ They love me/ And they got my back,” he defiantly proclaimed.

Yet over the past week, Mac watched as his theory was tested in real time. “I couldn’t help but feel embarrassed that I would preach this love and acceptance that my hometown has had for me, and then immediately feel a little betrayed in the moment,” Mac tells Billboard over a Zoom call. Dressed in a wide-brimmed hat and a lavender pointelle polo, the singer sighs. “This has been the most insane emotional whirlpool that I have ever experienced in my life.”

Last Thursday (Sept. 21), Mac announced an emotional video posted across his social media channels that he would be canceling his scheduled appearance as the headliner of the Logan County Tobacco and Heritage Festival’s Grand Finale concert. The reason behind the cancellation, Mac told his fans, was that there were concerns he would be “promoting homosexuality or sexuality in a family friendly environment” with his performance. “I’m really sad about it,” he said in the clip, fighting back tears. “I really, really wanted to be there.”
But just one week later, the situation has dramatically shifted for the rising country singer. In a post to her Instagram Stories on Thursday (Sept. 28), country superstar Maren Morris announced that Mac would be joining RuPaul’s Drag Race alum Shea Couleé as an opener for her exclusive, fans-only sold-out show in Chicago next week. “Like I said,” Mac says, laughing. “Emotional whiplash.”

As he reflects on the chaotic week he’s experienced, Mac briefly looks as though the information is just setting in for the first time. “It started as something so disappointing and embarrassing and sad, and very quickly turned into the most insane amount of love I have ever been flooded with in my life,” he says, giddy with excitement. “It’s led to one of the coolest things I am ever going to do.”

Mac originally hails from Russellville, Kentucky, which he describes as a town small enough that “we pretty much all know each other.” Leaving home at 22 to chase his dream as a singer-songwriter in Nashville, Mac spent years writing and self-releasing music to try and make a name in an industry that wasn’t necessarily open to the idea of an openly gay country star.

But eventually, people began to take notice. In September 2022, Mac’s music video for “Disco Cowboy” premiered on CMT, where it remained the station’s No. 1 video of their 12-Pack Countdown for four weeks. In March, Mac posted a clip to TikTok of an emotional ballad dedicated to his mother called “Boy Like Me”; the video has since been viewed over 300,000 times. In April, he was highlighted alongside Shelly Fairchild, Sonia Leigh and Angie K at the Country Music Hall of Fame’s Country Proud showcase.

With a performance at CMA Fest in June, and bookings around Nashville and Los Angeles throughout the rest of the summer, 2023 officially felt like it was Mac’s year — especially with the release of his album Disco Cowboy in May. “What we created is something that feels so much like me. I feel like I finally found my home, where I don’t have to sacrifice being ‘too gay’ or loving this sound,” he says. “It just felt like the perfect marriage to be able to tell my story and do it in a way that that felt good to me.”

When the Logan County Chamber of Commerce reached out to ask Mac to headline their annual Tobacco and Heritage festival, he says it felt like a full-circle moment. “The initial process was just so warm and welcoming,” he recalls. “It felt like this big ‘welcome back home’ after a crazy year of successes.”

That’s when the shift started. Two days after the festival announced Mac as the headliner for their Grand Finale Concert and Fireworks in a since-deleted Facebook post, the singer received a call from the person who booked him for the show, a woman Mac says he’s “known my whole life.” She said that the board members at the Chamber of Commerce had some concerns.

“Some board members wanted her to call to ensure that I would not be ‘promoting homosexuality in a family friendly environment, and they wanted to make sure that I knew that this was not a Pride festival,’” he recalls. “It just felt like they were telling me, ‘We know you’re gay, just please don’t be too gay. This is a family event,’ as if being gay is inherently sexual.”

The call was prompted not only by board members concerned about queerness represented on their stage — a number of townsfolk, both online and in person at the Chamber of Commerce, made it clear that they intended to protest Mac’s performance while it was happening. “I wanted it to be this homecoming — that vision did not include protesters with signs and pitchforks behind me,” he recalls. “And so I just told her, ‘I just think it’s best for us to pull out of the show.’”

Having “never cancelled a show,” Mac felt it was only fair to explain why he wouldn’t be performing at the festival in his own video. Sporting a Maren Morris “lunatic country music person” t-shirt, the singer filmed himself explaining the entire situation to his fans, and posted it across all of his social media accounts. “I just wanted people to see me and see that I was genuinely hurt to do this.”

The message stuck. Immediately, the video went viral, with fans, both from and outside of Russellville sharing their disappointment that Mac would be treated this way and offering him their support. The feedback also reached the Logan County Chamber of Commerce — Mac received a call from the Chamber after his video went live, saying that there were “[number of] people that were originally saying that they would protest the show, now saying they can’t believe that we would cancel your show.”

It was a validating moment for Mac, especially when those fans continued to share his the message, which eventually reached country stars like Morris, Kelsea Ballerini, Lindsay Ell and Brandy Clark. “You are loved. I’m sorry this happened but glad you’re sharing it here,” Morris commented on his Instagram post.

“It was all these divas who I have f—king looked up to, and who have been allies to our community, and who have been there for us when no one else was,” he says. “Not only did my community show up for me, but this music community, this country community also showed up for me.”

But the fun was not yet over. Just a few days after his video went viral, Mac received a call from a number he didn’t recognize — which he knew meant “either they want some money, or they’re about to give me a hell of a lot of money.” When he answered, a representative from CAA was on the other end, saying that his name had come up in a meeting discussing openers for Morris’ show at Joe’s on Weed Street in Chicago, and wondering if he would be interested in performing. “I literally collapsed,” Mac says, still stunned. “I’m still pinching myself.”

Between massive artists like Morris showing him support, and organizations like CMT inviting him to perform at their Equal Access showcase, Mac says he’s never felt more supported by the country music industry. But he also recognizes that country music is also currently fractured; progressive country acts — led largely by women, queer folks and people of color — are advocating for change, while more conservative stars are actively appealing to a right-wing fanbase. Morris herself has expressed her intent to essentially leave the genre after years of fighting against its general failures of inclusivity.

“That is the climate that has been created
‘September’ Makes Splash on TikTok Billboard Top 50, ‘Wassup Gwayy’ Holds at No. 1

BY KEVIN RUTHERFORD

FamousSally and YB are the first acts to lead the TikTok Billboard Top 50 chart for more than one week, as “Wassup Gwayy” remains at No. 1 on the Sept. 30-dated tally.

The TikTok Billboard Top 50, which began two weeks ago, is a weekly ranking of the most popular songs on TikTok in the United States based on creations, video views and user engagement. The latest chart reflects activity Sept. 18-24. Activity on TikTok is not included in Billboard charts except for the TikTok Billboard Top 50.

“Weassup Gwayy” debuted at No. 1 on the Sept. 23 TikTok Billboard Top 50. In the Sept. 15-21 tracking week, the song earned 495,000 official U.S. streams, according to Luminate.

The song reigns over Doja Cat’s “Paint the Town Red,” which returns to the No. 2 peak it originally attained on the inaugural Sept. 16 survey before it fell to No. 3. Concurrently, the track drops to No. 2 on the Billboard Hot 100, a week after spending its first week at No. 1.

Earth, Wind & Fire’s seminal “September” makes the week’s big move on the TikTok Billboard Top 50, roaring onto the list at No. 3. A No. 8 hit on the Hot 100 in February 1979, the song makes moves each year around Sept. 21, owing to its opening verse namechecking the date. TikTok is no exception, with many users incorporating the track into their routines and videos. “September” jumps by 31% to 5.5 million streams Sept. 15-21.

Odetari and 9lives’ “I Love You Hoe” continues its steady rise on the TikTok Billboard Top 50 at No. 4; it debuted at No. 7 on the inaugural list, followed by a move to No. 5 the following week. At No. 5, in the top five for the first time, is BashfortheWorld’s “Darkest Before Dawn.” While the former has scored further Billboard chart success, including a No. 3 high on Hot Dance/Electronic Songs, the latter has yet to make an additional ranking. The rap track was originally released in 2020, but has exploded in recent weeks, snagging 704,000 streams Sept. 15-21, up 75%.

Check out the full TikTok Billboard Top 50 chart here to see additional debuts from Tate McRae, Dominic Fike, Kenya Grace and more.

How well do you know the charts? Earn exclusive rewards by playing less than one minute of Billboard Playback trivia based on your favorite artists, albums and songs.

SZA’s ‘SOS’ Breaks Record for Most Weeks at No. 1 on Top R&B Albums Chart

BY TREVOR ANDERSON

SZA’s SOS adds another record to its ever-growing list of achievements on Billboard’s charts, as the blockbuster album collects an unprecedented 41st week at No. 1 on the Top R&B Albums chart, the most by any project since the list launched in 2013.

SOS achieves its record week on the list dated Sept. 30, where it earned 53,000 equivalent album units in the tracking week of Sept. 15 – 21, according to Luminate. The album gained 17% in units compared with the prior week, ending Sept. 14, helped by the arrival of a remix with Justin Bieber for the album’s single “Snooze.”

With a 41st week at the summit, SOS takes the title for the longest-running No. 1 from The Weeknd’s After Hours, which clocked 40 weeks in charge from April 2020 – June 2021. Here’s a look at the updated standings for the list’s 11-year history:

- Weeks at No. 1, Album Title, Artist, Year(s) at No. 1
- 41, SOS, SZA, 2022-23
- 40, After Hours, The Weeknd, 2020-21
- 33, 24K Magic, Bruno Mars, 2016-18
- 31, Planet Her, Doja Cat, 2021-22
- 19, Lemonade, Beyoncé, 2016
- 18, American Teen, Khalid, 2017-19

The new coronation continues the album’s colossal chart year that began with its No. 1 debut on the Billboard 200, which ranks all albums regardless of genre, and Top R&B/Hi-Hop Albums charts last December. While it racked up 10 weeks atop the former, it rolled to 21 weeks at No. 1 on the latter, breaking the record for the longest stay for an album by a woman in the chart’s history and managing the longest run.
of any LP since 1990. Plus, SOS’ “Kill Bill” single racked up its own 21-week run at No. 1 on Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs, the most of any song since the chart launched in 1958.

On this week’s Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs list, SZA lands her third No. 1 through a featured spot on Drake’s “Slime You Out.” The new champ, which premiers in the top slot, follows her prior leaders “I Hate U” and “Kill Bill.”

Think you know everything about the charts? Play trivia on Billboard Playback now!

Chencho Corleone Scores First Solo No. 1 on Latin Airplay With ‘Un Cigarrillo’

BY PAMELA BUSTIOS

Chencho Corleone earns his first solo No. 1 (without any other acts) on Billboard’s Latin Airplay chart as “Un Cigarrillo” rises 3-1 to lead the chart dated Sept. 30. The Puerto Rican singer-songwriter and producer adds a fourth champ to his Latin Airplay chart career.

“Un Cigarrillo” puffs its way to No. 1 after 18 weeks on the list with a 10% gain in audience impressions, to 8.9 million, earned in the U.S. during the tracking week ending Sept. 21, according to Luminate.

The song was released May 4 via Cerco/Sony Music Latin. It’s Corleone’s first official release after he signed a global record deal with the major label earlier in the year. As for the Cerco label, “Un Cigarrillo” is its first No. 1 on any Billboard chart.

“Un Cigarrillo” gives Corleone his fourth leader on the overall Latin Airplay ranking. He claimed his first No. 1 in July 2022 through his co-billed Rauw Alejandro collaboration “Desesperados.” Corleone returned to the penthouse with another co-billed collab, “Me Porto Bonito,” with Bad Bunny, in August 2022, which also gifted him his only No. 1 on Hot Latin Songs (20 weeks in charge). His Don Omar collab “Podemos Repetirlo” followed (one week, Sept. 16-dated list).

Elsewhere, “Un Cigarrillo” jumps 2-1 on Latin Rhythm Airplay, his fifth champ there. Over on the multimetric Hot Latin Songs, which blends airplay, digital sales and streaming activity, the song rebounds from No. 49 to its No. 47 high.

Diddy Returns to the Top 10 on R&B/Hip-Hop Albums Chart With ‘The Love Album’

BY TREVER ANDERSON

For the first time since 2011, Diddy is back in the top five on Billboard’s Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart thanks to his new album, The Love Album: Off the Grid. The set, released on Sept. 15 via the mogul’s own Love Records, earned 27,000 equivalent album units in the U.S. in the week ending Sept. 21, according to Luminate.

Streaming contributes 24,000 units of the 27,000-unit starting sum, equating 31.7 million official U.S. audio and video on-demand streams of the project’s tracks. Traditional album sales contribute 2,000 of the remaining units, with 1,000 units of activity from track-equivalent album units. (One unit equals the following levels of consumption: one album sale, 10 individual tracks sold from an album, or 3,750 ad-supported or 1,250 paid/subscription on-demand official audio and video streams for a song on the album.)

The Love Album: Off the Grid gives Diddy his sixth top 10 album on Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums. In total, Diddy has notched seven entries on the chart, all of which reached the top five save for the MMM mixtape, which hit No. 45 in 2016. Here’s a rundown of the collection, which now stretches to 26 years and one month:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Album Title, Artist Billing, Peak Position, Peak Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Way Out, Puff Daddy &amp; The Family, No. 1 (five weeks), Aug. 9, 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forever, Puff Daddy, No. 1 (one week), Sept. 11, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Saga Continues..., P. Diddy &amp; The Bad Boy Family, No. 2, July 28, 2001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Press Play, Diddy, No. 1 (one week), Nov. 4, 2006
Last Train to Paris, Diddy – Dirty Money, No. 3, Jan. 1, 2011
The Love Album: Off the Grid, Diddy, No. 5 (to date), Sept. 30, 2023

Elsewhere, The Love Album: Off the Grid starts at No. 2 on the Top R&B Albums chart and No. 19 on the all-genre Billboard 200.


In addition, the album’s new single, the rap-leaning “Another One of Me,” with French Montana and The Weeknd featuring 21 Savage, enters multiple charts, including a No. 29 start on R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay and a No. 34 bow on Hot R&B/ Hip-Hop Songs.

Vanessa Amorosi, Tones And I, Kate Ceberano Win Big at 2023 AWMA

BY LARS BRANDLE

Singers Vanessa Amorosi, Toni Watson, and Kate Ceberano were in the winner’s circle Wednesday night (Sept. 27) at the 2023 Australian Women In Music Awards (AWMA), held in Brisbane.

Amorosi, who has lived in Los Angeles for the past 13 years, returned to home soil for this year’s event, at which she performed a new work from her forthcoming eighth album, Memphis Love, slated for release Nov. 17, and collected the inspiration award.

Meanwhile, Watson, the one-time busker who led the charts in 30 countries with “Dance Monkey,” recognized as one of the five most-streamed songs on Spotify (with 2.9 billion plays), scored the songwriter award. Watson solely wrote “Dance Monkey,” and is currently abroad working on her sophomore album, expected to drop in 2024.

“I genuinely think Australia has some of the best songwriters in the world,” she said via a pre-taped acceptance speech. “We write some of the best music with integrity and a lot of heart. I say that wherever I go.” There are “more women coming out and expressing themselves, we’ve got so many amazing artists coming up, so many exciting female coming out of the Australia music industry. It’s truly an honor to be someone helping pave the way.”

Established in 2018, AWMA shines a light on accomplishments of women across all areas of Australia’s music industry.

Other winners at The Tivoli included Vika & Linda (artistic excellence), Ashli (emerging artist), and soul singer Renee Geyer, who was posthumously inducted into the AWMA Honour Roll, alongside Judy Stone.

In a first, all three nominees for the lifetime achievement award went home with the prize, presented to a female artist or musician who has made an outstanding artistic contribution to the field of recording and/or live performance during her lifetime. Ceberano, Clare Moore and Jeannie Lewis jointly accepted the honor.

“I’ve been up for many awards in my life, and I’ve never really gotten any of them. I couldn’t be more proud,” remarked Ceberano, a legend in these parts who has been at the top of the game since the 1980s, initially as a singer with The Models and I’m Talking, before embarking on a successful solo career.

The triumvirate on stage, she quipped, were the “last of the Mohicans,” and “of a generation, it seems, that came through before social media and we weren’t being watched while we were doing what we were doing. And we still did it.”

During proceedings, Tony Burke MP, minister for the arts, made a pledge to support the AWMA’s cause. “I’ve never understood why so much in the system has made it so hard,” he explained in a pre-recorded bit. “I want to make sure that your careers are just as easy to prosper as it is for men in the industry. I don’t know why its harder to get radio play, why its hard to get festival lineups, I don’t know why its been harder for fundamentals, like just having a safe workplace. But I want you to know you have a government determined to fix this,” he said, pointing to the creation of Creative Australia, formed through the National Cultural Policy.

Organizers handed out 23 AWMAS to some of the industry’s “most accomplished and emerging female artists, musicians and music practitioners,” with winners decided by a 37-member music industry panel.

The AWMA caps a two-day conference and live music program, and is supported by the Queensland government.

“AWMA is calling on the industry to adopt gender equality as a core music industry value as a matter of priority, significant policy change needs to occur at both state and federal level to ensure women form an equitable part of the industry,” comments AWMA executive producer and program director Vicki Gordon. “Gender bias can only be addressed by prioritizing inclusivity and representation as core music values.”

Performers included Dami Im, Vika & Linda, Hot Brown Honey, and an all-star rendition of AC/DC’s “It’s a Long Way to the Top (If You Wanna Rock ‘N’ Roll),” featuring Amorosi and the Bull sisters on lead vocals, and Sarah McLeod on lead guitar.

Check out all the 2023 Australian Women in Music winners.

Studio Production
Robyn Lee Payne

Artistic Excellence
Vika & Linda

Diversity in Music
Cerisa Benjamin

Music Journalist
Jane Gazzo

Excellence in Classical Music
Celia Craig

Emerging Artist
Ashli

Creative Leadership
Claire Edwarides

Inaugural ARIA Executive Leader

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Inaugural ARIA Executive Leader
Luck Ra & BM’s ‘La Morocha’ Adds Second Week Atop Billboard Argentina Hot 100

BY BILLBOARD ARGENTINA

Luck Ra and BM’s “La Morocha” adds a second week at No. 1 on the Billboard Argentina Hot 100 chart (dated Sept. 30). The song bests Luck Ra’s previous one-week champ, “Ya No Vuelvas,” featuring La K’onga and Ke Personajes, in February.

LIT Killah, Tiago Pzk, Maria Becerra, Duki, Emilia, Rusherking, Big One and Fmk’s “Los Del Espacio” rebounds to No. 2 from No. 4. The former seven-week leader pushes Myke Towers’ “Lala” 2-3.

The Greatest Gainer honors of the week goes to Argentinian Mesita, as his latest “Una Foto” rises 35 places, from No. 71 to No. 36.

Meanwhile, Nathy Peluso and Tiago PZK score the Hot Shot Debut of the week with “Ella Tiene,” at No. 66. The bachata team-up is the first entry for the singer-songwriter, after she secured a No. 62 high through “Esta Buenísimo” in Dec. 2022.

Further, Elaggume, Fauna Music, and Eme Saray claim their first entry with the Alejo Isakk and Locura Mix collab “Con Tu Amiga,” at No. 78. Plus, Chench Corleone, Brray and Anuel AA’s “Corazón Roto Pt. 3” opens at No. 82.

Lastly, two more songs join the ranking: El Negro Tecla’s “Ahi Ahi,” at No. 91 and Nahuel Pennisi & Luciano Pereyra’s “Regresa” at No. 96.

The Kid LAROI Serves up New McDonald’s Collaboration

BY LARS BRANDLE

On his fast-track to the top, the Kid LAROI cut tracks with Justin Bieber, Miley Cyrus, Lil Durk and his late bestie Juice WRLD. His latest collaboration sees the Australian singer and rapper step out with McDonald’s.

Through a new partnership unveiled this week, LAROI launches the McCrispy chicken burger across the fast-food chain’s Australian outlets.

It’s the second time flipping McDonald’s burgers for Laroi, who stars in a new nationwide campaign, which includes “The Next Big Thing” TVCs and behind-the-scenes social clips. Last year, the Kid and Macca’s teamed up for Australia’s first local “Famous Order” campaign.

“I love a good chicken burger and am a huge Macca’s fan,” he comments in a statement, “so when I found out McDonald’s was launching its best chicken burger yet, I had to get involved.”

Though based in Los Angeles, the 20-year-old LAROI (real name Charlton Howard) is one of Australia’s favorite homegrown artists.

As a teen, LAROI led the Billboard 200 with F*ck Love, and ruled the Billboard Hot 100 with “Stay,” his global hit with Bieber. The Sydney-raised artist also hit No. 1 on the singles and albums charts in his homeland, smashing records along the way.

He returned to Australia in May and June 2022 for the End of the World Tour, which stopped at arenas and outdoor spaces across the country. And he can add to his growing collection of industry honors at the 2023 ARIA Awards this November, where he nab nominations for best solo artist and song of the year for “Love Again” (Columbia/Sony Music).

LAROI gives a push to the McCrispy, which is now installed in the restaurant’s permanent menu next to the Big Mac, Quarter Pounder, Cheeseburger and Fillet-O-Fish.

According to reps, the burger, filled with 100% Aussie RSPCA-approved crispy chicken breast, shredded iceberg and cos lettuce, tomato, Aussie Jack cheese and a new signature sauce, served in a soft glazed bun, has already “performed exceptionally” across other markets including the U.S., U.K., Sweden, France and Spain.

‘America’s Got Talent’ Crowns 2023 Champion

BY LARS BRANDLE

If every dog has its day, today very much belongs to Hurricane. Hurricane, a Border Collie, and his human Adrian Stoica are the winners of the latest, 18th season of America’s Got Talent, their dog show capturing the hearts of the American public.

Magician Anna DeGuzman came sec-
ond in the 2023 competition, announced Wednesday (Sept. 27), and dance troupe Murmuration came third.

Indonesian singer Putri Ariani and acrobat duo the Ramadhani Brothers respectively round out the top 5.

The top ranked singer this year, Putri made a notable impression on the judges, particularly Simon Cowell, who gave the teen his Golden Buzzer. “Nobody can take away the fact that you are an amazing, amazing singer. And performer. And person,” Cowell told Ariani.

The judges also adored Stoica and Hurricane’s double-act, apparently as much as armchair voters.

“I was on my feet then I sat down, then I was on my feet. It just shows you how tough it is,” Howie Mandel enthused earlier in the season, following an act to Smash Mouth’s “I’m a Believer.” “We didn’t know whether to stand, we didn’t know whether to sit. He’s a dog, he gets more cues than we do. That’s my favorite dog Act ever on AGT.”

Sofia Vergara though the dog-and-man show “was perfection” and Heidi Klum remarked, “it is mind blowing to me how you do this routine with him.”

Added Cowell earlier in the season: “I think in terms of stepping up from the audition to the Live Show, this is the best act we’ve seen tonight. This was live, and that was a tricky routine. She was amazing.”

Stoica and his canine buddy collect the $1 million prize and a coveted Las Vegas residency.

The two-hour finale on NBC featured special performances from 30 Seconds to Mars, Jason Derulo, Jon Batiste, Leona Lewis (in a duet with Putri) and Season 17 winners The Mayyas.
### WEEKLY UNIT COUNT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Streams</th>
<th>Audio On-Demand</th>
<th>Video On-Demand</th>
<th>Album Sales</th>
<th>Vinyl Album Sales</th>
<th>Digital Tracks</th>
<th>Albums Consumption Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>This Week</strong></td>
<td>28,404,896,000</td>
<td>24,463,682,000</td>
<td>3,941,214,000</td>
<td>1,670,000</td>
<td>752,000</td>
<td>2,385,000</td>
<td>19,795,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Last Week</strong></td>
<td>28,075,662,000</td>
<td>24,127,956,000</td>
<td>3,947,706,000</td>
<td>1,766,000</td>
<td>779,000</td>
<td>2,396,000</td>
<td>19,645,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Change</strong></td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>-0.2%</td>
<td>-5.4%</td>
<td>-3.4%</td>
<td>-0.5%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

|                      | This Week Last Year | 25,085,950,000 | 21,955,363,000 | 3,130,587,000 | 1,746,000 | 661,000 | 2,645,000 | 18,122,000 |
| **Change**           | 13.2%              | 11.4%           | 25.9%           | -4.4%       | 13.8%    | -9.9%   | 9.2%       |

*All data measures U.S. activity as of the week ending September 21, 2023. All units counts are rounded to the nearest thousand.

### YEAR TO DATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2023</th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total On-Demand Streams</td>
<td>1,049,019,796,000</td>
<td>913,378,820,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audio On-Demand Streams</td>
<td>903,612,639,000</td>
<td>799,118,510,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Digital Track Sales</td>
<td>101,178,000</td>
<td>114,845,000</td>
<td>-11.9%</td>
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<td>Album Sales</td>
<td>72,266,000</td>
<td>67,942,000</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Albums Consumption Units</td>
<td>743,944,000</td>
<td>664,050,000</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
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### ALBUM CONSUMPTION UNITS BY FORMAT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2023</th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>Change</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CD Sales</td>
<td>25,049,000</td>
<td>24,817,000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinyl Sales</td>
<td>33,412,000</td>
<td>27,862,000</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Sales</td>
<td>13,418,000</td>
<td>14,881,000</td>
<td>-9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Sales</td>
<td>387,000</td>
<td>381,000</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track Equivalent</td>
<td>10,118,000</td>
<td>11,485,000</td>
<td>-11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio On-Demand Equivalent</td>
<td>661,560,000</td>
<td>584,623,000</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Albums consumption units — also known as albums plus TEA plus SEA — consists of album sales; track-equivalent album (TEA) sales whereby 10 tracks equal one consumption unit; and stream-equivalent albums (SEA) whereby 1,250 paid and/or 3,750 ad-supported audio on-demand streams (OAD) equal one consumption unit.
### HOT 100 SONGWRITERS™

1. **DAN NIGRO**
2. **OLIVIA RODRIGO**
3. **ROD WAVE**
4. **ZACH BRYAN**
5. **TRACY CHAPMAN**
6. **BEATSBYTRAIN**
7. **JACK ANTONOFF**
8. **TAYLOR SWIFT**
9. **SZA**
10. **OLIVER ANTHONY MUSIC**
11. **ASHLEY GORLEY**
12. **KACEY MUSGRAVES**
13. **CHARLIE HANDSOME**
14. **ALDAE**
15. **MICHAEL POLLACK**
16. **MILEY CYRUS**
17. **JOHN BYRON**
18. **ST. VINCENT**
19. **JELLY ROLL**
20. **SELENA GOMEZ**
21. **JKASH**
22. **ICE SPICE**
23. **RIOTUSA**
24. **DRAKE**
25. **PRODBYCAM**

### HOT 100 PRODUCERS™

1. **DAN NIGRO**
2. **ZACH BRYAN**
3. **JOEY MOI**
4. **BEATSBYTRAIN**
5. **RIOTUSA**
6. **JACK ANTONOFF**
7. **TAYLOR SWIFT**
8. **EELMATIC**
9. **EDGAR BARRERA**
10. **DRAKE**
11. **NOEL CADASTRE**
12. **DRAYVEN RIFFE**
13. **AUSTIN NIVAREL**
14. **ADERINSOLA SOLEBO**
15. **TRAVIS SCOTT**
16. **JACK ANTONOFF**
17. **TAYLOR SWIFT**
18. **SZA**
19. **OLIVER ANTHONY MUSIC**
20. **KACEY MUSGRAVES**
21. **CHARLIE HANDSOME**
22. **ALDAE**
23. **MICHAEL POLLACK**
24. **MILEY CYRUS**
25. **J WHITE DID IT**

### COUNTRY SONGWRITERS™

1. **ZACH BRYAN**
2. **TRACY CHAPMAN**
3. **ASHLEY GORLEY**
4. **OLIVER ANTHONY MUSIC**
5. **KACEY MUSGRAVES**
6. **CHARLIE HANDSOME**
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3. **DRAVEN RIFFE**
4. **AUSTIN NIVAREL**
5. **ZACH CROWELL**
6. **JAY JOYCE**
7. **MICHAEL KNOX**
8. **DANN HUFF**
9. **ROSS COPPERMAN**
10. **CHIP MATTHEWS**
11. **DEPUTY**
12. **FINNEAS**
13. **NOEL CADASTRE**
14. **LUKE COMBS**
15. **JONATHAN SINGLETON**
16. **J WHITE DID IT**
17. **DUNK ROCK**
18. **FLORIAN “FLO” ONGONGA**
19. **DRAKE**
20. **NOEL CADASTRE**
21. **DRAKE**
22. **NOEL CADASTRE**
23. **DRAKE**
24. **NOEL CADASTRE**
25. **DRAKE**

### R&B/HIP-HOP SONGWRITERS™

1. **ROD WAVE**
2. **BEATSBYTRAIN**
3. **SZA**
4. **DRAKE**
5. **PRODBYCAM**
6. **BABYFACE**
7. **BLAIR FERGUSON**
8. **KRISTOPHER RIDDICK-TYNES**
9. **LEON THOMAS III**
10. **21 SAVAGE**
11. **BNYX**
12. **CHRIS POWELL**
13. **DALTON TENNANT**
14. **GRANT LAPOINTE**
15. **NOEL CADASTRE**

### R&B/HIP-HOP PRODUCERS™

1. **BEATSBYTRAIN**
2. **RIOTUSA**
3. **DRAYVEN RIFFE**
4. **AUSTIN NIVAREL**
5. **ZACH CROWELL**
6. **JAY JOYCE**
7. **MICHAEL KNOX**
8. **DANN HUFF**
9. **ROSS COPPERMAN**
10. **CHIP MATTHEWS**
11. **DEPUTY**
12. **FINNEAS**
13. **NOEL CADASTRE**
14. **LUKE COMBS**
15. **JONATHAN SINGLETON**
16. **J WHITE DID IT**

### R&B SONGWRITERS™

1. **BABYFACE**
2. **BLAIR FERGUSON**
3. **EELMATIC**
4. **DRAKE**
5. **NOEL CADASTRE**
6. **BLAIR FERGUSON**
7. **EELMATIC**
8. **DRAKE**
9. **NOEL CADASTRE**
10. **DEPUTY**

### R&B PRODUCERS™

1. **BABYFACE**
2. **BLAIR FERGUSON**
3. ** sistem56 SOLEBO**
4. **TRAVIS SCOTT**
5. **DUNK ROCK**
6. **21 SAVAGE**
7. **FLORIAN “FLO” ONGONGA**
8. **21 SAVAGE**
9. **FLORIAN “FLO” ONGONGA**
10. **J WHITE DID IT**

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The top songwriters and producers on the Billboard Hot 100 and selective genre songs chart that utilize the Hot 100 formula (blending streaming, airplay and download sales data) for the charts dated September 30, 2023. Rankings are based on accumulated weekly points for all charted songs — on the specified chart for the week — on which a songwriter or producer is credited. If a song is written or produced by more than one person, points are divided equally among all credited parties.
### Rap Songwriters™

1. **Rod Wave**
2. **Beatsbytrain**
3. **Dunk Rock**
4. **Florian “Flo” Ongonga**
5. **Gunna**
6. **Necie**
7. **Prodbycam**
8. **21 Savage**
9. **Desirez**
10. **Babe Rexha**

### Rap Producers™

1. **Beatsbytrain**
2. **Eelmatic**
3. **Riotusa**
4. **Dr. Luke**
5. **Aderinsola Solebo**
6. **Dunk Rock**
7. **Florian “Flo” Ongonga**
8. **Coupe**
9. **Dj Replay**
10. **Earl on the Beat**

### Dance/Electronic Songwriters™

1. **Odetari**
2. **Kenya Grace**
3. **Suicidal-Idol**
4. **Peggy Gou**
5. **Garelyhuman**
6. **David Guetta**
7. **Kanii**
8. **9Lives**
9. **NbspLV**
10. **Bebe Rexha**

### Dance/Electronic Producers™

1. **Odetari**
2. **Kenya Grace**
3. **David Guetta**
4. **Timofey Reznikov**
5. **9Lives**
6. **Bungulu**
7. **Peggy Gou**
8. **Josh Lloyd-Watson**
9. **Cameron Cassels**
10. **Cirkut**

### Latin Songwriters™

1. **Peso Pluma**
2. **Edgar Barrera**
3. **Pedro Tovar**
4. **Karol G**
5. **Keityn**
6. **Jasiel Nunez**
7. **Jose Antonio Martinez Oviedo**
8. **Alexis Armando Fierro Roman**
9. **Gabito Ballesteros**
10. **Mag**

### Latin Producers™

1. **Edgar Barrera**
2. **Ovy on the Drums**
3. **Ernesto Fernandez**
4. **Mag**
5. **George L. Prajin**
6. **Jesus Ivan Leal Reyes**
7. **Peso Pluma**
8. **Tito Lajza**
9. **Jimmy Humilde**
10. **Pedro Tovar**

### Rock & Alternative Songwriters™

1. **Zach Bryan**
2. **DAN Nigro**
3. **Olivia Rodrigo**
4. **Kacey Musgraves**
5. **Noah Kahan**
6. **Billie Eilish**
7. **Finneas**
8. **Mitski**
9. **Post Malone**
10. **Billy Joel**

### Rock & Alternative Producers™

1. **Zach Bryan**
2. **DAN Nigro**
3. **Austin Nivarel**
4. **Finneas**
5. **Gabe Simon**
6. **Noah Kahan**
7. **Rob Kirwan**
8. **Patrick Hyland**
9. **Leo Alba**
10. **Ian Kirkpatrick**
### Rock Songwriters

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<th>Artist</th>
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<tbody>
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### Alternative Songwriters

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### Hard Rock Songwriters

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### Christian Songwriters

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### Gospel Songwriters

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<td>NAOMI RAINE</td>
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### Rock Producers

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### Alternative Producers

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### Hard Rock Producers

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### Christian Producers

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### Gospel Producers

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