

COUNTRY'S POWER PLAYERS

The year's most-consumed Nashville-based artists have a legion of experts behind them in the field, who are stars on their own

By HOLLY GLEASON, SHIRLEY HALPERIN, ROY TRAKIN AND CHRIS WILLMAN



BRAD BELANGER

Manager, RLM, owner, Homestead Management

Boutique meets behemoth: Belanger's firm hooked up with Red Light Management to make Sam Hunt into a nearly instant country superstar with the string of smashes off his debut album, "Montevallo," released three years ago this month. When Hunt's sophomore album wasn't near completion in time for a 2017 tour, Belanger advised the "Take Your Time" singer to take his time. It's a pause that's gone virtually unnoticed, since the single "Body Like a Back Road" is easily the BuzzAngle Music country song of the year, with more than twice the sales and streams of the closest contender.



MEGAN BARRY

Mayor of Nashville

Music City has never had a music lover for a mayor quite like Barry. Industry boosterism aside, she's got good taste, having spent her birthday last fall at a John Prine show. Prine, in turn, came to sing at her son's memorial service in

August. Barry appointed Jack White to the city's Council on Gender Equality, and every Record Store Day, you can find her at Grimey's, spinning her own DJ set.



NARVEL BLACKSTOCK

CEO, Starstruck Entertainment



BRANDON BLACKSTOCK

Manager, Starstruck Entertainment

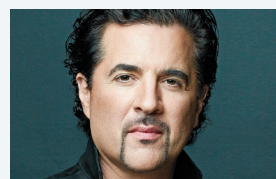
Never was a more prescient move made than when Narvel Blackstock reopened his management company in 2006 to represent a then-midlevel hat act, Blake Shelton. His nearly uninterrupted streak of No. 1 country radio singles beats any other Nashville artist's — and if Shelton only ranks as No. 11 on BuzzAngle's list of top acts for the year to date, that's because he's between albums and has a side gig on NBC's "The Voice." A November studio album will ensure no one forgets Blake's day job. The Blackstocks also snagged a new deal with Atlantic for Kelly Clarkson, Brandon's wife, who'd long chafed with label brass and now gets to make the old-soul record she'd always wanted.



BOBBY BONES

Radio personality, Premiere/iHeart

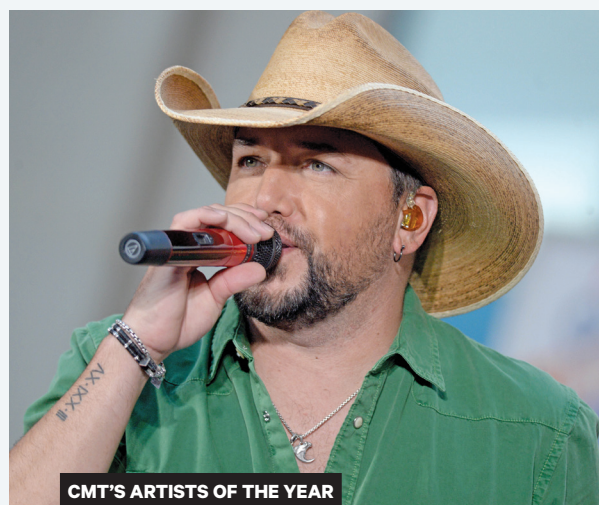
How do you win the 2017 CMA Award for national broadcast personality of the year without having anything resembling a traditional DJ voice? By being serious enough to do issues-oriented talk show stuff, on hot-button topics like underrepresented women in country, or the Las Vegas shootings, but still funny enough to moonlight with your own standup act and novelty songs. Bones is a crossover artist, too: He'll soon become the youngest inductee into the (non-country) National Radio Hall of Fame.



SCOTT BORCHETTA

President/CEO/founder, Big Machine Label Group

The son of a record label promotion man, Borchetta has proven to be Music City's top power broker, discovering Taylor Swift and building an impressive label empire that includes Big Machine Records, BMLG Records, the Valory Music Co. and Nash Icon records. After dabbling in race-car driving in between



CMT'S ARTISTS OF THE YEAR

JASON ALDEAN

The ACM Awards have crowned Aldean entertainer of the year for the past two consecutive springs, and he has a good shot at it when the CMAs hand out their version of that pinnacle award in November. The first three songs from his latest record, "They Don't Know," all topped the country radio chart, with a fourth, the album's title track, looking to follow. And he has a touring drawing power as reliable as anybody in the genre, which is why he was headlining when tragedy befell Las Vegas' Route 91 Harvest Festival. If there was any question of that trauma casting a pall over him as a performer, it was quickly answered when he opened "Saturday Night Live" the following weekend with Tom Petty's "I Won't Back Down." There, like his new single, he was acting not just as a potential agent of healing but a potent ambassador for rural America.

Label: Broken Bow Management; Maverick Touring; Kevin Neal, WME Publishing; BMG Nashville Publicity: Greenroom PR

stints at MTM Records, MCA Nashville, DreamWorks Nashville and Universal Music Nashville, Borchetta launched his own label in 2005. The roster now includes arena headliners Florida Georgia Line, Brantley Gilbert and Thomas Rhett.



GARY BORMAN

Owner/founder, Borman Entertainment

He may be headquartered in California, but much of Borman's business is in Nashville, where clients like

Keith Urban are based. Long an advocate for transitioning country stars into mainstream artists by finding innovative partnerships — for instance, Faith Hill's Cover Girl deal and Urban's multi-season stint as a judge on "American Idol" — that their fans can get behind, the veteran manager also advocates for the ultimate fan-to-band engagement: touring.



BUSBEE

Producer, songwriter

His is the ultimate crossover

success story. Beyond contributing three pivotal tracks to Keith Urban's "Ripcord" album — "The Fighter" featuring Carrie Underwood, "Sun Don't Let Me Down" featuring Pitbull and Nile Rodgers, and "Your Body" — and launching country breakout Maren Morris into orbit, the L.A.-based Busbee's resume includes credits on songs by Pink, Christina Aguilera and Beyonce.

Country's Most Consumed Artists

The genre's top acts year-to-date by project units

1. Chris Stapleton 1,066,977
2. Zac Brown Band 668,584
3. Florida Georgia Line 661,358
4. Sam Hunt 624,756
5. Luke Bryan 622,511
6. Keith Urban 593,853
7. Jason Aldean 516,273
8. Eric Church 480,963
9. Garth Brooks 463,045



10. Johnny Cash 462,757

11. Blake Shelton 461,424

12. Thomas Rhett 458,122



13. Miranda Lambert 427,588

14. Brantley Gilbert 425,775

15. Kenny Chesney 392,235

16. Tim McGraw 369,114

17. Little Big Town 364,411

18. George Strait 351,681

19. Carrie Underwood 322,321

20. Dierks Bentley 315,410

SOURCE: BUZZANGLE MUSIC, JAN. 2017 THROUGH SEPT. 30 2017



CAA

Scott Clayton, Marc Dennis, Rod Essig, John Huie, Darin Murphy

CAA opened local offices in 1991 as a one-man experiment with the late Ron Baird, and now sports a five-headed leadership team plus a 24,000-sq.-ft. downtown Nashville spread with 120 employees. Huie, who had been working at ICM, joined Baird, along with Essig and then Dennis. Clayton came aboard in '94 with Train as his client, looking to diversify the roster to include pop and rock, signing John Mayer and later, Kings of Leon. Murphy arrived from William Morris in 1998 and is a former chairman of the Academy of Country Music. Other major CAA Nashville clients include country superstars Keith Urban, Tim McGraw, Lady Antebellum, Zac Brown Band, Shania Twain, Dixie Chicks, Brantley Gilbert and Kelsea Ballerini, as well as Twenty One Pilots, the Chainsmokers and Dead & Co. (featuring Mayer).



CORAN CAPSHAW 1. CLAY HUNT ZACH PETERS

Managers, Red Light Management

Overseeing a roster that includes some of the biggest acts in country (Chris Stapleton, Luke Bryan,

Lady Antebellum, and beyond (Dave Matthews Band, Alabama Shakes, Lionel Richie), Capshaw is a visionary who built the world's largest independent artist management company, while also helping launch Bonnaroo, South by Southwest and ATO Records. He has music venues in common with Peters, who started out at Charlottesville Pavilion, moved into social and alternative marketing and eventually took on day-to-day for Stapleton, along with Hunt.



DAVE COBB

Producer, Founder, Low Country Sound

The biggest country act of the year in sales and streams is Chris Stapleton. And behind the artist is Cobb,

a no-nonsense, keep-it-(deceptively)-simple producer. In Americana, he also shines — witness Jason Isbell and Sturgill Simpson — and with his own Low Country label, in conjunction with Elektra, he's taken on emerging artists, too. With another Stapleton album due before year's end, his 2015 Grammy nomination for producer of the year won't likely be his last.



ZACH CROWELL

Writer, producer

If all Crowell had done was co-write and produce Sam Hunt's "Body Like a Back Road," he'd have a 2017 for any of his contemporaries to envy. It easily tops BuzzAngle's country singles so far this year, and just wrapped up



CMT'S ARTISTS OF THE YEAR

LUKE BRYAN

Bryan has become quite the TV personality, making the leap from co-host of the ACM Awards every spring to a looming stint as judge on the resurrected "American Idol." But they do love him on the radio, too: In BuzzAngle Music's year-to-date ranking, he is the fifth biggest artist overall for music consumption in 2017, but No. 1 when it comes to radio spins, with a staggering 760,000 airwave plays in the year's first three quarters. He's also at No. 2 in audio streams, with 501 million. If fellow CMT artists of the year Aldean and Stapleton don't do a lot of smiling, that's OK — Bryan, country music's friendliest face, has enough grins for all of them.

Label: Capitol Nashville Management; KP Entertainment Touring; Jay Williams, WME Publishing; Sony/ATV Publicity; Schmidt Relations Legal; Milom Horsnell; Crow Rose Kelley

a record 34-week run atop Billboard's country songs chart. But beyond his ongoing Hunt collaboration, he's also had radio success in the past year with Dustin Lynch's "Small Town Boy" and Cole Swindell's "Middle of a Memory," plus album cuts with Florida Georgia Line and Blake Shelton. Don't be surprised to see him resume his partnership with Carrie Underwood, who recently lent a hand to his Honduras charity.



ROBERT DEATON

Executive producer, Country Music Assn. Awards

Deaton has firmly established himself as the Ken Ehrlich of country, being the only guy the CMAs want to go to for their three signature primetime specials every year. He recently renewed his contract with the org, which knows he has mercenary instincts about what makes for good television but also can keep up with the most dedicated Opry-holic when it comes to conversing about classic country. He's moving into feature films and, given his newly signed deal with UTA, Nashville may have to fight to keep all his attention.



BOB DOYLE

Owner/president; Bob Doyle & Associates, Major Bob Music

RANDY BERNARD

Co-manager, Garth Brooks; Bob Doyle & Associates

After decades spent solo →

← at the helm managing the least predictable superstar in country, Garth Brooks, Doyle now has the added business acumen of Bernard, former CEO of the Professional Bull Riders, IndyCar and RFD-TV. Together they keep the reins on Garth's untraditional deals, like his soon-to-end, three-year-old, one-city-at-a-time tour; a partnership with Amazon; and a forthcoming series of memoir/documentary/CD boxed sets. Brooks may have crossed over to heritage status at radio, but he's hot as ever on the road.



VIRGINIA DAVIS

Artist manager, managing partner, G-Major Management

Davis was partnered with Irving Azoff and Scott Borchetta before she hung up her shingle with G-Major. An early client: young college student Thomas Rhett, who's since graduated to arena headliner with eight of his last nine singles landing at No. 1 at radio. Davis upped her ante in spring by launching a publishing company, Home Team, with Rhett and Roc Nation.



MIKE DUNGAN

Chairman/CEO, Universal Music Group Nashville

Of the 20 top country sellers and streamers to date, 10 are under Dungan's UMG umbrella. That's akin to 50% market share at the megastar level, with a quintet of arena acts — Chris Stapleton, Sam Hunt, Luke Bryan, Keith Urban and Eric Church — leading the charge. But bubbling not far under is Jon Pardi, a young good ol' boy and passion project for Dungan, who might be a frontrunner for the CMAs' new artist of



FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE

Florida Georgia Line has crossed a lot more lines lately than just the state one in their name. The duo's collaboration with the Backstreet Boys on the country radio chart-topping "God, Your Mama, and Me" blossomed into a full-fledged "CMT Crossroads" episode. The duo has guested on pop tracks by the Chainsmokers and Hailee Steinfeld, and took Nelly out as opening act on a 2017 tour. All this cross-genre friendliness has made the pair country's biggest streaming act of the year. While No. 3 in the overall BuzzAngle Music country rankings, FGL is right at No. 1 in audio streams for the year's first three quarters (with 571 million) and also No. 1 in video streams (212 million). In other words, much bigger than you and your mama, if not quite God.

Label: Big Machine/Republic Nashville Management; Big Loud Management Touring: Kevin Neal, WME Publishing: Big Loud Publicity: Sweet Talk Publicity Legal: Greenberg Traurig

the year. Little Big Town and a resurgent Lauren Alaina have brought the estrogen, but now that Carrie Underwood has defected from Sony, Dungan finally has a female superstar on his roster.

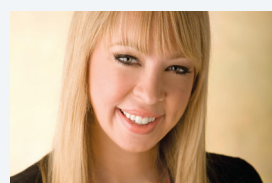


KENT EARLS

EVP/GM, Universal Music Publishing Group Nashville

This Nashville native and 20-year UMPG veteran has helped guide the careers of songwriter Rivers Rutherford, Grammy winners Luke Laird and Billy Currington and Paul DiGiovanni, among a roster that includes Keith Urban, Shania Twain, Sam Hunt, Jake Owen and Hunter Hayes. His placements include country chart-toppers like Rodney Atkins' "Take a Back Road" (Laird) and Brooks & Dunn's "Ain't Nothing 'Bout You"

(Rutherford). He is also behind recent global deals with Jack White, Nightly and Chord Overstreet.



ANN EDELBLUTE

Owner, The HQ

When Carrie Underwood's duet with Keith Urban, "The Fighter," was released to radio early in the year, it hinted at a new direction: to Universal. Edelblute negotiated the deal for her sole client, Underwood, to leave her longtime home at Sony. And it's not as if Underwood's career had been foundering — all four singles from her previous solo album reached No. 2 or No. 1 at radio — but Edelblute clearly believes country's most reliable female artist can be even bigger in partnership with the town's top label group.



KERRI EDWARDS

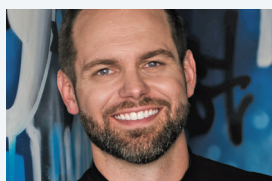
Manager, president, KP Entertainment

A veteran of label A&R and publishing with an eye and ear for talent, Edwards launched KP Entertainment 12 years ago to manage a young hopeful named Luke Bryan. Getting the singer a deal at Capitol Nashville, Bryan's 2007 hit "All My Friends Say" charted and kick-started a career that's now stadium-sized and includes a judge's seat on the rebooted "American Idol."

RICH EGAN

CEO, Hard 8 Management

The co-founder of the punk-rock Vagrant Records and longtime manager of Chris Carrabba (Dashboard Confessional) traded L.A. for Nashville in 2010 and hasn't looked back. He's spearheading the impressive rise of country star Brantley Gilbert, who had hits as a songwriter with Jason Aldean ("Dirt Road Anthem" and "My Kind of Party") before scoring a pair of chart-toppers in his own right ("Bottoms Up" and "One Hell of an Amen"). His most recent release, "The Devil Don't Sleep," is the sixth-most-consumed country album of the year so far.



SETH ENGLAND

Manager/owner, Big Loud



CRAIG WISEMAN

Songwriter/owner, Big Loud

Take a seasoned manager and a Nashville Songwriters

Hall of Famer, put them together and you have the Big Loud Organization. England helped build the career of the duo Florida Georgia Line — two college friends from Belmont — and the team around them. Wiseman is his own powerhouse, having penned 26 country chart-toppers; his extended empire includes ownership in Big Loud Shirt Publishing, Big Loud Mountain Management and Big Loud Records. With FGL, Tim McGraw, Kenny Chesney, Blake Shelton and Faith Hill all recording Wiseman's songs, his words travel far.



JOHN ESPOSITO

Chairman/CEO, Warner Music Nashville

During Esposito's eight-year run atop Warner Nashville, flagship artist Blake Shelton released 20 singles to radio. An astonishing 19 went to No. 1. New single "I'll Name the Dogs," from Shelton's forthcoming "Texoma Shore" album, looks certain to be the 20th. He has pet projects in the Last Bandoleros and Charlie Worsham, who had one of 2017's best, if not biggest-selling, albums. But right now the focus is on pushing Chris Janson's "Fix a Drink" through the top 10 to become that upstart singer's first No. 1, if Shelton doesn't beat him there.



PETE FISHER

CEO, Academy of Country Music

LISA LEE

SVP creative & content production, Academy of Country Music

Fisher is revered as the guy who, in 18 years with the Grand Ole Opry, brought that institution into the modern era with younger and fresher artists without sacrificing a traditionalist base. So after he moved to California this year to take the top spot at the ACM, it wasn't surprising to see a Haggard tribute and a Backstreet Boys appearance at that org's May awards. Among the ACM's holdover execs, Lee has definitely put her stamp on the ancillary ACM Honors telecast each September, which graduated from a cool/cred kudocast for Nashville locals to getting its own primetime CNS berth. Lee even writes the script for the telecast herself.



PAUL FREUNDLICH

Owner, Paul Freundlich & Associates

Established in 2002, the agency that bears Freundlich's name has represented Keith Urban for much of his career. The New York-based PFA counts Aerosmith, James Taylor, Paul McCartney and Janet Jackson among its former clients.

ASHA GOODMAN

Vice president, Sacks & Co.

After five years working out of Sacks & Co.'s New York office, Goodman moved to Nashville in 2010 to establish the respected firm's Music City outpost. A savvy strategist, Goodman helped build the critic-supported foundation for Chris Stapleton through pivotal album releases for 2015's "Traveller" and 2017's "From A Room: Volume 1."



RANDY GOODMAN

Chairman/CEO, Sony Music Nashville

Sony recently lost one superstar (Carrie Underwood) and gained a couple of others (Tim McGraw and Faith Hill, whose first duets album is about to hit). But the vast majority of the action since Goodman took over in mid-2015 has been, enviably, at the freshman level. Maren Morris is the media darling of the second half of the country decade, Old Dominion revived the dormant country-band concept, Luke Combs predicted a "Hurricane," and Kane Brown just had his first radio No. 1 with "What If's."



CLINT HIGHAM

President/Partner, Morris Higham Management

This NorCal native graduated Nashville's Belmont College with a dream of becoming a country music manager, and got his wish managing first Alabama and then signing Kenny Chesney when both were still teenagers. Higham was the man who helped Chesney fulfill his dream of performing in football stadiums, while managing partnerships with Apple Music and Corona Light. Morris Higham's roster also includes Jake Owen and Old Dominion.



DANN HUFF

Songwriter, record producer

Huff produced or co-produced no fewer than eight of the year's 30 biggest country singles to date. Those include new classics by established veterans, including Keith Urban's "Blue Ain't Your Color," but also breakout smashes for freshmen Kane Brown (current country chart topper "What If's"), Brett Young ("In Case You Didn't Know," the second biggest song of the year, after Sam

Hunt's), and Midland ("Drinkin' Problem"). The one-time studio guitar shredder still plays on a lot of the records he produces, and even some he doesn't, such as Michael McDonald's new one.



MICHAEL KNOX

Producer

Knox has produced all of fellow Georgian Jason Aldean's albums, along the way creating a red dirt- and blue collar-inspired sound that others in the genre emulate. Credit Knox's own wall of sound, a cascade of guitars with a driving backbeat, along with a physicality and a toughness that begets their birthplace.



MARION KRAFT

CEO, ShopKeeper Management

The management firm founder, whose roster includes Miranda Lambert, Ashley Monroe, Chris Young and Pistol Anni's, is an expert at brand partnerships, matching Miranda Lambert with Ram Trucks in 2014 and arranging a cross-country Airstream trailer tour to promote her album, "Platinum," which has moved 219,000 units so far this year.



STEVE LASSITER

Partner, SVP, head of concerts, APA Nashville

This Music City veteran joined the Nashville office of Agency for the Performing Arts in 1998 from William →

MONEY CITY

Business managers and bankers who maintain country's coffers

LORI BADGETT AND DIANE PEARSON

Senior vice president and team leaders entertainment banking, City National Bank



For an institution long affiliated with California, City National has made quite a presence for itself in Nashville, where its entertainment banking division commands an impressive 80% of the city's music industry business. In the past year, that's meant more than \$100 million generated in net new financing for such endeavors as publishing, production, management, legal services, performing rights organizations and agencies.

MARY ANN MCCREADY

Business manager/co-owner, Flood Bumstead McCreedy & McCarthy



Local recognition follows McCreedy's every move — she was recently honored with the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce's Impact Award. But in industry circles, she's known for a formidable client list — or maybe unknown for it. The firm's roster is held secret, but of course, it's hard to hide hometown heroes like Keith Urban, Sam Hunt and Blake Shelton under a bushel.

KERRY O'NEIL

Co-founder, O'Neil Hagaman



Garth Brooks, who, at mid-year, had grossed \$48 million from 48 tour dates in just 12 cities is a client. O'Neil also proved his business acumen in co-founding with Carla Wallace Big Yellow Dog Publishing, which boasts songwriters Maren Morris, along with country No. 1's co-penned by Meghan Trainor (Lauren Alaina's "Road Less Travelled") and Josh Kear (Florida Georgia Line's "God, Your Mama, and Me").

LOU TAYLOR

CEO, Tri Sports and Entertainment



Managing the businesses of high net worth individuals from two primary bases — Nashville and Los Angeles — the nearly 25-year-old firm boasts clients Britney Spears, Steven Tyler, Gwen Stefani, Meghan Trainor, and Florida Georgia Line. Extended runs in Las Vegas are another specialty of Taylor's as is the day-to-day guidance of multihyphenates like Jennifer Lopez and Priyanka Chopra.

← Morris, overseeing a staff increase from eight to 33 and client base from 10 to over 65. These include such heavy-hitters as Clint Black, Crystal Gayle, Dolly Parton, Lee Greenwood, Little Texas, Phil Vassar, Sawyer Brown, the Charlie Daniels Band and Travis Tritt.



JONATHAN LEVINE

Co-head of Nashville office, Paradigm Talent Agency

This veteran talent executive has been with Paradigm since the agency acquired Monterey Peninsula Artists in 2004 and formed a separate division. He relocated to Nashville five years after spending the first part of his career in New York at William Morris Agency and Artists & Audience Entertainment. The company's eclectic roster includes such country stars as Sturgill Simpson, Jamey Johnson, Margo Price and Lee Ann Womack, as well as several members of the Grateful Dead, the Lumineers, Ben Folds and Dr. John. In addition, Levine has a client in Dave Cobb, who produced both Chris Stapleton and Zac Brown Band's latest albums.



JON LOBA

Executive VP, BBR Music Group Nashville

Jason Aldean was to Broken Bow as Taylor Swift was to Big Machine: a superstar who single-handedly put the indie on the map. No wonder the label group drew major acquisition interest, culminating in an approximately \$100 million buyout by BMG this year. Other top execs exited, but Loba continues to steer the ship. Aldean is the No. 7



CMT'S ARTISTS OF THE YEAR

CHRIS STAPLETON

There's longevity in that beard. Some figured he might be a flash in the pan — albeit a very welcome flash in the pan — after a CMA Awards appearance with Justin Timberlake three years ago made his sales skyrocket overnight. And how many country stars have ever become true titans without generating top 10 hits at country radio? Yet Stapleton remains the unlikely phenomenon of the decade in the genre. The Southern-rock-country-blues belter is far and away the top country artist of 2017 in BuzzAngle's year-to-date ranking, even though he only ranks 55th in radio spins. With 735,000 in pure album sales in the year's first three quarters, 1.2 million in singles sales, 322 million audio streams, and 149 million video streams, Stapleton is the brilliant cult artist you still can't believe accidentally became a wildly beloved superstar.

Label: Mercury Nashville Management: Coran Capshaw, Zach Peters and Clay Hunt, Red Light Touring: Jay Williams and Kevin Meads, WME Publishing: Warner/Chappell Publicity: Sacks & Co.

artist for the year to date, but that'll surely go up, with "They Don't Know" coincidentally peaking as the star was forced to become a news figure.



CINDY MABE

President, Universal Music Group Nashville

With an artist-friendly mission statement, UMG Nashville's No. 2 has long said: "Let the artist make the music they believe in, then let's figure out how to sell it." Mabe has distinguished herself with musically driven marketing campaigns from Alan Jackson's return and Lady Antebellum member Hillary Scott's award-winning solo Christian album. But



MATT MAHER

Partner, head of Nashville Office, Roar

This New Jersey native and Wake Forest grad is a partner in the Music City branch of the talent, music and brand management company, whose clients include the Zac Brown Band. After the group's one-off stint on John Varvatos Records/Republic, earning a

platinum plaque for "Jekyll + Hyde," Maher got the band a deal to release "Welcome Home" on their own Southern Ground label via Elektra. With production by Dave Cobb, it's the third highest-selling country album of the year.



SHANE MCANALLY

CEO, Smack/co-president Monument Records

The Texas native was a solo artist on Curb Records before evolving into a songwriter and record producer for the likes of Kacey Musgraves, Kelly Clarkson, Sam Hunt and Kenny Chesney, and earning two Grammys. This year, he joined Sandbox Entertainment CEO Jason Owen to relaunch Monument Records at Sony Music, signing Caitlyn Smith and Walker Hayes. He also runs his own publishing company, SmackSongs.



UTA

Nick Meinema, Curt Motley

Canadian native Meinema originally came to town to set up a satellite office for The Agency Group in 2012. When it was acquired by UTA in 2015, Meinema took over co-running the company with Lance Roberts. Motley joined the agency in 2016 after 21 years at Paradigm, bringing with him longtime clients Toby Keith and Mac McAnally. The combined roster now includes Dolly Parton, Dwight Yoakam, John Michael Montgomery and Tanya Tucker, as well as the touring groups of Kevin Costner, Jeff Bridges and Bruce Willis.



LOUIS MESSINA

CEO, Messina Touring Group

The Austin-based promoter helped guide Taylor Swift through her \$250 million-grossing 2016 tour for the album, "1989." His roster of clients includes not only country stars Kenny Chesney, Eric Church, George Strait, and Faith Hill and Tim McGraw but also such mainstream pop acts as Ed Sheeran, Kelly Clarkson and Shawn Mendes.



MIKE MILOM

Partner, Milom, Horsnell, Rose, Crow, Kelley

A noted entertainment and intellectual property rights lawyer for more than two decades, Milom concentrates on the rapidly evolving music industry with clients that include Luke Bryan, the Country Music Hall of Fame, the Country Radio Broadcasters Inc. and Country Radio Seminar.



JOEY MOI

Producer, songwriter

Since leaving his native Vancouver for Nashville more than a decade ago, the producer known for his work with rock radio perennials Nickelback has established himself as one of country music's most dominant go-tos. And it's no wonder: in addition to credits on albums by Tim McGraw and Jake Owen, Moi has a close affiliation with Florida Georgia Line, the genre's most-listened-to act with half a billion audio streams.



GREGG NADEL

President, Elektra Records

The man who signed Sturgill Simpson to a major label deal is a two-decade veteran of the Atlantic Records family. Named Elektra GM in 2015, then president of the storied label in January, he signed Zac Brown Band, and forged a partnership with Dave Cobb's Low Country Sound label (including Anderson East and Brent Cobb), landing him to produce Simpson's Grammy-winning "A Sailor's Guide to Earth."



BRIAN O'CONNELL

President of country music, LiveNation

The man known as BOC has played a major role in the explosion of the genre over the past decade, bringing the megaticket "season pass" concept to country at LN's 34 amphitheaters, and selling about 1.5 million plans annually. His tours feature headliners Luke Bryan, Jason Aldean, Toby Keith, Keith Urban, Brad Paisley and more. Festivals under O'Connell's watch include Seattle's Watershed, New York's FarmBorough and Las Vegas' tragic Route 91 Harvest.

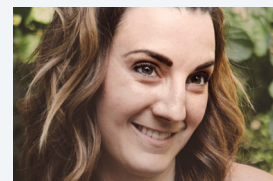


JASON OWEN

President/CEO, Sandbox Entertainment; co-president, Monument Records

As the manager of Little Big Town, Kacey Musgraves and Faith Hill, and former rep for Shania Twain, Owen is known

for having one of the most female-friendly management shingles in Nashville. But it was "high time" (as Musgraves might say) for him to boost some dudes, and also to finally work with Big Machine. He accomplished both with Midland, the neo-traditionalists who may be the breakout story of the year. He's also helped turn Hill and LBT's Kimberly Schlapman into TV producers, and his faith in long-dormant Faith has paid off with another joint tour with hubby Tim McGraw and the duets album fans have demanded for decades.



TYNE PARRISH

Green Room PR

As Jason Aldean's liaison with the media, Parrish has had a difficult October during which both she, her client, and the greater country music community were forced to look terror in the eye. The veteran PR strategist, who purchased Green Room from founder Mary Hilliard Harrington, sprang to action, coordinating messaging and a special appearance on "Saturday Night Live," during which Aldean performed a resolute cover of Tom Petty's "I Won't Back Down."



CHRIS PARR & CLARENCE SPALDING

Maverick Management

The two multi-faceted managers have taken Jason Aldean's career to astonishing heights. Parr is a veteran video programmer, having left

a VP gig at CMT to assume management. He teamed with Spalding, the man behind Brooks & Dunn's enduring run, to help forge a touring franchise that has brought former baseball star Aldean to iconic stadiums including Boston's Fenway Park and Chicago's Wrigley Field — as a singer. Believers in a balanced career, the partners stress strong touring, as well as aggressive attention to song selection.



JOHN PEETS

Founder, Q Prime South

Founded by Peets in 2001, the Nashville office of Cliff Burnstein and Peter Mensch's mega-management firm boasts a roster that includes

Eric Church, Rhiannon Giddens and Marty Stuart, as well as the Black Keys and frontman Dan Auerbach, who makes his home in Music City. Says Peets: "We build career artists who make great albums and have a distinct point of view."



JESS ROSEN

Co-chair, Atlanta Entertainment + Media Practice, Greenberg Traurig

The always dapper deal-maker is attorney of choice for Florida Georgia Line, along with a host of touring companies, publishers, and labels. Based in Atlanta, he co-chairs the entertainment and media practice (with Bobby Rosenblum) at law giant Greenberg Traurig.



CMT'S ARTISTS OF THE YEAR

KEITH URBAN

Urban is at that point in his career where at least a little bit of fan fatigue ought to be setting in. Instead, his latest album, "Ripcord," made for a serious case of Urban renewal. Of the five radio singles released from the album, two made it to No. 2, and the other three went all the way to the top. Among those that went all the way was the ballad "Blue Ain't Your Color," which already seems like a modern standard. What came next was colored red-hot — a frothy, old-school duet with Carrie Underwood, "The Fighter," that played out in multiple joint awards show appearances and never got old. It really is true: Nice ganjo-ists finish first.

Label: Capitol Nashville Management: Borman Entertainment Touring: Darin Murphy, CAA Publishing: UMPG Publicity: Paul Freundlich Associates



JESSIE SCHMIDT

Owner, president, Schmidt Relations

One of Nashville's premier PR firms, Schmidt Relations' roster includes longtime clients Carrie Underwood and Luke Bryan. Each artist has crossed over from country star to television personality and influential brand — Bryan being the latest, via his new gig on ABC's "American Idol" — thanks, in part, to guidance by company founder Schmidt.



**JEFF STEVENS
JODY STEVENS**

Songwriters, producers

The father-son duo behind Luke Bryan's "Kill the Lights" bring balance to Bryan, providing the purists with their "country" while offering newbie fans a hint of hip-hop and rock with their twang. Father Jeff is an accomplished engineer, as well as classic country fan, while Jody merges his love of urban and alternative music into his own unique sound. The result is both fresh and familial.



JENSEN SUSSMAN

President, owner, Sweet Talk Publicity

Beyond hit duo Florida Georgia Line, Sussman's independent boutique media relations firm also handles

← female up-and-comer Kelsea Ballerini. Closing out her first decade in the business, Sussman has put forth a strategy that emphasizes television and broadcast opportunities.



FRANK TANKI

General manager, CMT

Tanki only took over as GM of CMT in June after the exit of Brian Philips, but he's already begun putting his stamp on things. He's ramped up the network's presence in the digital space and is pushing forward with a reality show, "Music City," from Adam DiVello ("The Hills"). He's reaping the rewards with advertisers of the network, having gone classier with scripted shows like "Sun Records" and, of course, a highly successful "Nashville" pickup. And though the "M" in CMT is only part of the lifestyle branding, he's keeping the music and promising to expand the "Next Women of Country" initiative into even more of a franchise. An unexpectedly sensitive challenge: making this year's Artists of the Year special less congratulatory and more about a troubled year for many fans and artists.



TROY TOMLINSON

President/CEO, Sony/ATV Nashville

This Tennessee native, who joined the company in 2005 from fabled Acuff-Rose Music Publishing, has overseen the songwriting careers of Taylor Swift, Kenny Chesney — whom he's credited with discovering — Miranda Lambert, Luke Bryan, Eric Church, Blake Shelton, Rascal Flatts and Brooks & Dunn. In addition he's keeping an eye on the

catalogs of Hank Williams, Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, Buck Owens and the Everly Bros. He was named chairman of the Tennessee Film, Entertainment & Music Commission in 2013.



SARAH TRAHERN

CEO, Country Music Assn.

The head of country's chief trade organization and charitable foundation, Trahern has calmly steered its oft-fractious membership into a powerful force with more than \$44 million in annual revenue. Hired in 2013, she presides over its influential CMA Fest and the televised awards show every spring. She worked her way up on the TV side of music with successful stints at C-SPAN, The Nashville Network and Scripps Networks' Great American Country (GAC) digital cable and satellite channels.



BEN VAUGHN

President, Warner/Chappell Music Nashville

Warner/Chappell has received the ASCAP Award for country publisher of the year three years in a row, and on Nov. 6, will be going for four. It's hard to bet against the company when it has Chris Stapleton's publishing on two of the biggest-selling country albums of the year ("From A Room: Volume 1" and the still lively catalog seller "Traveller"). The success of Midland's co-self-penned debut album is another feather in the cap of Vaughn, who's been able to rely on such stalwarts as Little Big Town, Rhett Akins, Thomas Rhett's writer dad, who just had a No. 1 with Dustin Lynch's "Small Town Boy."



KOS WEAVER

EVP, BMG Nashville

With an extensive background in publishing, and having come up as a touring musician, Weaver understands how to make songs connect. A veteran of Reba McEntire's Starstruck, Warner/Chappell and Disney Music Publishing, BMG's formidable run with Jason Aldean — 19 No. 1 country singles and counting — seems all but unstoppable.



WME

Rob Beckham, Joey Lee, Kevin Meads, Kevin Neal, Greg Oswald, Akiko Rogers, Jay Williams

Beckham and Oswald are co-heads of WME's Nashville branch, with 26,000-sq.-ft. offices at the Gulch tower on Demonbreun Street. They support a client list that boasts Jason Aldean, Dierks Bentley, Luke Bryan, Eric Church, Florida Georgia Line, Miranda Lambert, Dustin Lynch, Jake Owen, Brad Paisley and Thomas Rhett, among others. Williams and Meads run point on Chris Stapleton's touring, while Neal is the agent for Florida Georgia Line (\$20 million in box office gross mid-way through 2017, per Pollstar) and Jason Aldean. Rogers started her career at APA, joining WME 16 years ago where she is responsible for booking the agency's country acts internationally. Lee came aboard when his 360 Artist Agency was acquired by WME in 2010, bringing with him Lambert, Lee Ann Womack and Clay Walker. **W**

TANKI TAKES CHARGE OF CMT TURNAROUND

Viacom veteran aims to spin the 'Nashville' net into something bigger

By CHRIS WILLMAN

In the seminal days of music cable webs, CMT used to be in competition with the long-gone Nashville Network. Now, you could almost call CMT the "Nashville" network, which is to say, the channel best known for picking up the obsessively viewed nighttime drama of that name after ABC handed Deacon and Juliette their walking papers. CMT execs believe as many as half of its "Nashville" viewers are brand new to the network. How to make sure they stick around after hours?

That challenge has fallen largely to another CMT newbie: general manager Frank Tanki, who in June came in from the Viacom E-suite upon the exit of 16-year CMT veteran Brian Philips. (His new duties also include running sister network TV Land.)

Tanki inherited a change in programming philosophy already taking shape, and brought his own ideas about how to further owning the country music and lifestyle space and moving more deeply into digital and experiential initiatives.

Picking up "Nashville" has been a tre-

mendous decision for this brand," says Tanki. "We've surrounded that series with a really high polish that has felt very premium in many ways."

Indeed, for a network that as recently as last year still had "Redneck Island" and the controversial "Party Down South" on the schedule, juxtaposing class-act properties like "CMT Crossroads" and "Next Women of Country" is key. And in losing the rowdy shows, "the pivot had already started," says Tanki.

One new project he's excited about is the yet-to-be-seen "Music City" from Adam DiVello ("The Hills," "Laguna Beach"). "[It's] about young, emerging artists who are chasing their dreams in the music industry, then getting into all the touchpoints of relationships and emotions," says Tanki. "It feels like the perfect follow-up to 'Nashville.'" And a chance to do right by Southern reality. **W**

Talk Country to Me
Jason Derulo and Luke Bryan perform onstage during the "CMT Country Awards."

