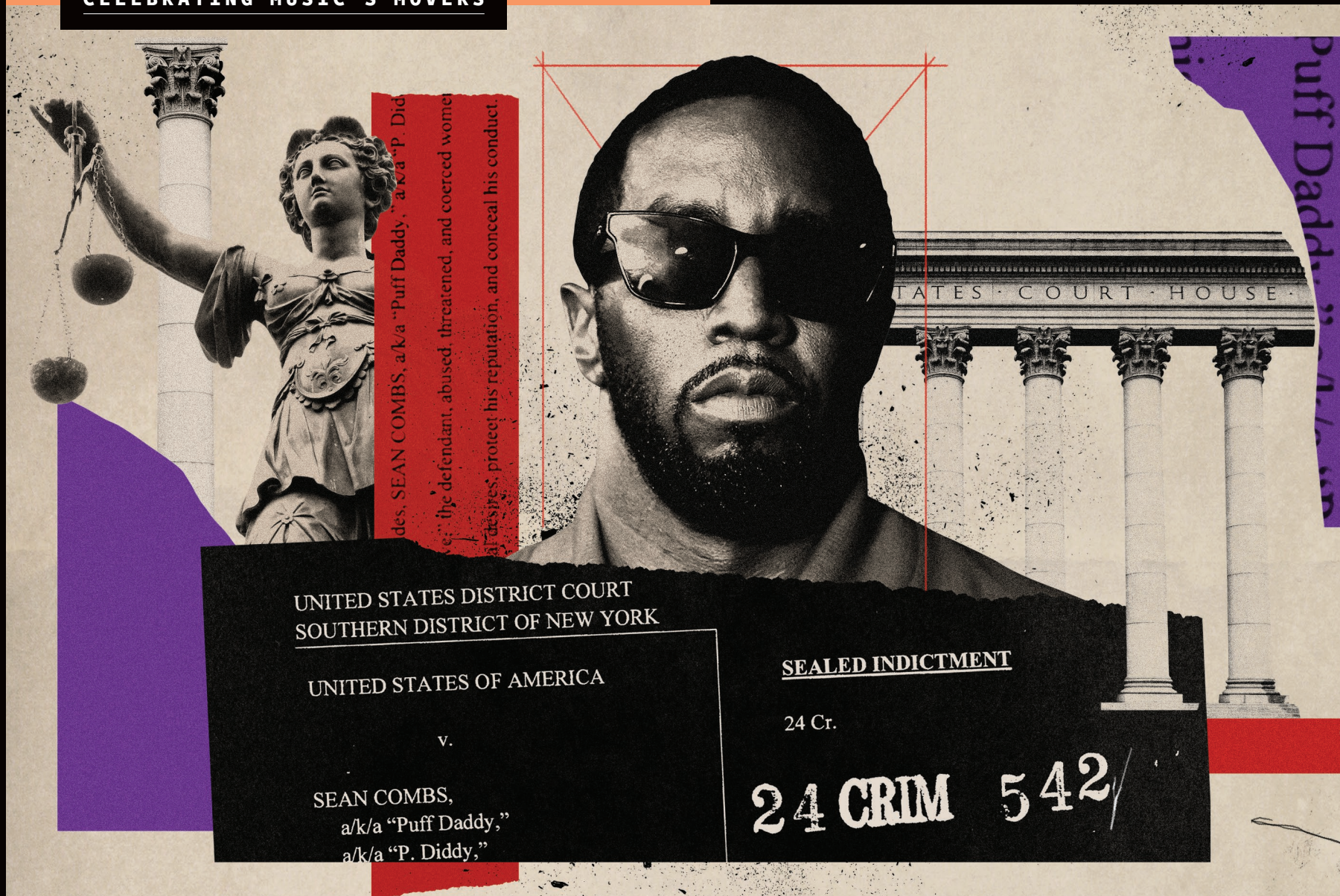


players

CELEBRATING MUSIC'S MOVERS



2025 TOP MUSIC LAWYERS

While the case of Sean “Diddy” Combs is the legal story of the year in the music industry, it’s business as usual for top attorneys who are making deals, guiding clients and watching out for AI

BY BILL DONAHUE

ILLUSTRATED BY ALVVINO

N O LEGAL STORY CAPTIVATED the music industry more in the past year than the downfall of Sean “Diddy” Combs — the once all-powerful hip-hop mogul who now faces horrific accusations of sexual abuse.

Starting with a lawsuit from his ex-girlfriend in late 2023, a slow stream of allegations against Combs gave way to a flood — including dozens of individual civil cases and a sprawling criminal prosecution centered on federal charges of sex trafficking and racketeering. Combs has denied all accusations and pleaded not guilty in the criminal case.

When the trial in the criminal case starts in a Manhattan federal courthouse — it is currently scheduled to begin in May — the whole music world will be watching. “Whether these allegations are true or not, the story is fascinating to people,” says Howard King, a top music attorney who has worked in the hip-hop space for decades. “It’s can’t-miss stuff.”

Before the claims against Combs became public, he had reached heights matched by few others in the industry — as a hugely successful artist and producer, as a music executive at his Bad Boy

Records and as a businessman behind popular brands of clothing, vodka and more. In the wake of the litigation, Combs is already facing the imminent loss of much of that once-formidable business empire; if convicted at a trial, he also faces the prospect of a life prison sentence.

"He was at the top. He had made so much money from his label and his apparel and everything else," King says. "They say, 'The higher you are, the bigger the fall.' Well, Combs couldn't have been any higher in the business. It's a spectacular fall."

Spread across a complex criminal case and civil lawsuits in multiple jurisdictions, the Combs debacle unsurprisingly involves a slew of high-powered lawyers, ranging from veteran defense attorneys to experienced sex-crimes prosecutors to a prolific plaintiff's lawyer who says he represents more than 100 victims. And that's not even mentioning the Big Law attorneys hired to defend top industry players who have been dragged — they say wrongly — into the messy litigation.

Combs himself is represented in the criminal case by Marc Agnifilo, a former prosecutor and longtime criminal defense attorney with an extensive background in handling the kind of complex, high-profile charges that Combs now faces.

After a stint at the Manhattan district attorney's office, Agnifilo spent several years as a federal prosecutor in New Jersey, targeting organized crime like the Mafia and the Bloods. Not coincidentally, many of those cases centered on the same federal RICO law (the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act) that the feds are now using against Combs, whom they allege built a vast crime syndicate to facilitate sexual abuse.

After leaving the government, Agnifilo spent nearly two decades working for prominent New York defense attorney Ben Brafman — a lawyer who himself repped Combs for years, including during his earliest abuse cases in 2023. At Brafman's firm, Agnifilo represented clients including Martin Shkreli, the so-called "Pharma Bro" convicted of securities fraud in 2017, and Keith Raniere, the leader of the upstate New York sex cult Nxivm.

Though Agnifilo lost the Nxivm case (Raniere was convicted in 2019 and sentenced to 120 years in prison), it could still provide valuable insights. Like the case against Combs, the charges against Raniere were part of a recent trend of prosecutors using the RICO statute, a law typically more associated with mobsters and drug cartels, against powerful men who allegedly commit mass-scale sex crimes with the aid of a criminal enterprise.

Rounding out the defense team are Teny Geragos, another Brafman alum (and daughter of celebrity attorney Mark Geragos) who joined Agnifilo when he left to start his own firm last year, and Alexan-



A courtroom sketch of Combs (center) with Agnifilo (left) and Geragos in court in 2024.

dra Shapiro, a well-known appellate law specialist. The team previously included Anthony L. Ricco, another leading New York defense attorney, but he withdrew in February for undisclosed reasons.

The charges against Combs were filed last year by Damian Williams, the top federal prosecutor for Manhattan, who is known for cases against cryptocurrency entrepreneur Sam Bankman-Fried, former U.S. senator Bob Menendez and New York Mayor Eric Adams. Following the election, President Donald Trump has said he'll fill that post — vacated when Williams resigned in December — with Jay Clayton, a corporate attorney at a prestigious Big Law firm who headed the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission during the first Trump administration.

Unlike the case against Adams — which was controversially dropped in early April — there has been no indication that Trump or Clayton plan to back away from Combs. The same attorneys under Williams (Meredithe Foster, Emily A. Johnson, Christy Slavik, Madison Reddick Smyser and Mitzi Steiner) are all still on board, and the district attorney's office has since added Maurene Comey — one of the lead prosecutors in the sex trafficking case against Ghislaine Maxwell, a top accomplice of Jeffrey Epstein.

Of course, the criminal case is only part of the story. Dozens of civil lawsuits have also been filed against Combs since late 2023 seeking monetary damages from the rapper over a wide range of alleged wrongdoing, including rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, sex trafficking, emotional distress and employment violations.

Due to the sheer volume of cases, the use of Doe pseudonyms and the potential for duplicates across jurisdictions, it's hard to isolate an exact number of lawsuits. But court records indicate that at least 70 have been filed across the federal judiciary and New York and Los Angeles courts, with more potentially filed elsewhere.

The very first came from Combs' ex-girlfriend Cassie Ventura, who alleged

in November 2023 that he had repeatedly abused her over their decadelong relationship, including one instance of rape. That lawsuit, which came with an unusual "trigger warning" and introduced the now-infamous term "freak off," ended in a settlement just a day after it was filed. But it started a cascade of accusations and litigation against Combs that hasn't stopped since.

In that case, Ventura was represented by Douglas Wigdor, a well-known plaintiff's attorney who rose to prominence during the #MeToo movement by filing lawsuits against Harvey Weinstein and Fox News. Later, after Ventura's case was settled, Wigdor filed a second case against Combs in December 2023, representing a woman who said the star raped her in 2003 when she was just 17 years old. Combs has denied the allegations.

An avalanche of cases followed Ventura's lawsuit. Legendary civil rights attorney Gloria Allred sued Combs on behalf of Thalia Graves, who claims he raped her in his New York studio in 2001. Lisa Bloom, Allred's daughter and a high-profile attorney in her own right, filed another suit for Dawn Richard, a member of the Bad Boy-signed Danity Kane, who claims he harassed and assaulted her during "years of inhumane working conditions." Combs has denied the allegations.

One case, filed by ex-Combs producer Rodney "Lil Rod" Jones, initially named Universal Music Group and its chairman/CEO, Lucian Grainge, as co-defendants, accusing them of aiding and abetting Combs' alleged misconduct. Repped by Donald Zakarin from the firm Pryor Cashman, UMG and Grainge blasted those claims as "recklessly false" and threatened to pursue sanctions against the attorney who had filed them. Weeks later, that lawyer, Tyrone Blackburn, conceded there had been "no legal basis" for the allegations and asked to have them "withdrawn immediately."

No one has filed more Combs lawsuits than Tony Buzbee, a Houston-area lawyer

who announced at a press conference in October that he was representing 120 alleged victims. Buzbee, who previously brought two dozen sexual abuse cases against NFL star DeShaun Watson, has since filed at least 40 lawsuits on behalf of men and women who say Combs victimized them.

In one, Buzbee made the headline-grabbing decision to add Jay-Z as a co-defendant, accusing him in December of joining Combs in the rape of a 13-year-old girl in 2000. Jay-Z vehemently denied those accusations and turned to Alex Spiro, a prominent litigator at Quinn Emanuel known as an aggressive advocate whose clients have included Adams, Elon Musk, Megan Thee Stallion and Alec Baldwin. Spiro went scorched-earth in defense of Jay-Z, not only attacking the lawsuit in a flurry of filings but launching a multipronged counteroffensive against Buzbee himself. First Jay-Z sued the attorney for extortion and defamation, and then he sued Buzbee's client over similar claims. Buzbee and his client have denied any wrongdoing.

That campaign hasn't always gone smoothly. Buzbee filed his own case against Quinn Emanuel, claiming the firm has been harassing his former clients. In late December, a judge admonished Spiro for his "relentless filing of combative motions containing inflammatory language and ad hominem attacks," saying it was inappropriate and "unlikely to benefit his client."

But it's hard to argue with the results. While the case against Buzbee remains pending and a judge indicated he'll allow parts of it to proceed to trial, his client voluntarily dropped her case against Jay-Z in February — a move Spiro quickly said had occurred without any kind of payment.

"By standing up in the face of heinous and false allegations, Jay has done what few can," Spiro said in a statement at the time. "He pushed back, he never settled, he never paid one red penny, he triumphed and cleared his name."



MUSIC GROUPS

Jeffrey Harleston
GENERAL COUNSEL/EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

Martha Braithwaite
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

Saheli Datta
EXECUTIVE VP/CHIEF COMPLIANCE OFFICER AND EMPLOYMENT

UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Steve Gawley
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

REPUBLIC COLLECTIVE, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Jason Kawejsza
EXECUTIVE VP/HEAD OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

INTERSCOPE CAPITOL LABELS GROUP, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Nicola Levy
EXECUTIVE VP OF DIGITAL BUSINESS AFFAIRS

Alasdair McMullan
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS/HEAD OF LITIGATION

Michael Seltzer
FORMER EXECUTIVE VP/HEAD OF COMMERCIAL TRANSACTIONS FOR BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Generative artificial intelligence continues to evolve and, for the second year running, was what UMG's legal team spent the most time on, filing or participating in lawsuits against AI firms Anthropic, Udio and Suno over the past year. "We believe in responsible AI and have been working to ensure that our artists can explore the creative opportunities provided by AI in an 'ethical context' ... 'in the service' " of the artist, Harleston says. UMG also expanded digital licensing deals with several streaming and social partners that Harleston says align with UMG's Streaming 2.0 agenda by "embracing artist-centric principles that better benefit artists and songwriters." (Seltzer, who is recognized for his work in the past year, has since left UMG.)

Most pressing issue "Working with artists to support their creative vision across all formats and platforms," Harleston says, "so they can effectively engage with their superfans globally."

Sony Music's acquisition of QUEEN's catalog last year — reportedly worth more than \$1 billion — spotlighted the value of name and likeness rights.

Paul Robinson
EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL

Brad Cohen
SENIOR VP/HEAD OF LITIGATION/ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL

Jon Glass
SENIOR VP/HEAD OF DIGITAL LEGAL AFFAIRS

Trent Tappe
SENIOR VP/DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL/CHIEF COMPLIANCE OFFICER

Michael Kushner
Maryrose Maness
SENIOR VPs/DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSELS

Dana Sheahan
VP/HEAD OF MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

WARNER MUSIC GROUP

WMG kicked off February with two big announcements: the \$450 million acquisition of a controlling stake in Tempo Music Investments' catalog and a new deal with Spotify that included a direct licensing component with Warner Chappell Music. Robinson says the legal team covering mergers and acquisitions, led by Sheahan, and the digital legal team, led by Glass, "pulled back-to-back all-nighters" working with the corporate and business development teams to meet the deadline of announcing the deals the same day as the company's quarterly earnings. "[It was] an excellent example of our team's skill and work ethic," Robinson says.

Most pressing issue "Finding ways to simplify digital licensing for the benefit of the entire music ecosystem," Robinson says. "Music companies and streaming services operate globally, yet much of the digital licensing framework remains highly localized."

Julie Swidler
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AFFAIRS/GENERAL COUNSEL

Wade Leak
EXECUTIVE VP/DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL/CHIEF COMPLIANCE, ETHICS AND PRIVACY OFFICER

James Mullan
EXECUTIVE VP OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS/INTERNATIONAL GENERAL COUNSEL

Jeff Walker
EXECUTIVE VP/HEAD OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, GLOBAL DIGITAL BUSINESS

Stephanie Yu
EXECUTIVE VP/HEAD OF BUSINESS/LEGAL AFFAIRS LEAD

David Jacoby
SENIOR VP/HEAD OF U.S. LITIGATION

Susan Meisel
SENIOR VP/CORPORATE DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL

Michael Roberson
SENIOR VP OF U.S. BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

Sony Music's acquisitions of Queen's and Pink Floyd's catalogs last year — reportedly worth more than \$1 billion and \$400 million, respectively — spotlighted the value of name and likeness rights. Sony had worked with both bands for decades and was keen to consolidate its ownership of their songs. The acquisitions positioned Sony to create new ways to interact with the "priceless" music digitally, says Sony Music Entertainment CEO Rob Stringer, who explains, "We think *Dark Side of the Moon* or *Thriller* or 'Bohemian Rhapsody' or *Born To Run* [by Bruce Springsteen, whose catalog Sony acquired in 2021] ... are going to be experientially very exciting for generations, certainly well beyond mine."

Most pressing issue "Artist deals. In the music industry, it takes years for artists to develop, but there is growing interest in signing shorter deals," Stringer says. "This may hinder the process and time needed to nurture the development of these creators."

STREAMING

Kevan Choset
INTERIM GENERAL COUNSEL

Darren Schmidt
ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL/GLOBAL HEAD OF RECORD LABEL LICENSING

Sofia Sheppard
ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL/GLOBAL HEAD OF LICENSING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

SPOTIFY

Spotify began this year with a bang by renewing its licensing agreements with Universal Music Group and Warner Music Group — deals that Choset says reflect the company's belief that innovation is crucial to making subscriptions more appealing to a global audience while also improving artist remuneration. "These multiyear deals require complex legal structuring to support new licensing frameworks and revenue models that benefit artists, songwriters and rights holders, enabling innovations like new paid subscription tiers, bundled music and nonmusic content, and richer audio and visual content catalogs," he says. "With nearly \$60 billion paid to rights holders to date, our legal and strategic work continues to expand the value of music on our platform."

Advice about AI now "The key is to balance innovation with responsibility," Choset says. "Consider not just what AI can do, but what it should do."

Jon Cohen
SENIOR CORPORATE COUNSEL

Stephen Worth
HEAD OF LEGAL/ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL

Cyrus Afshar
Nicolas Gauss
ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSELS

AMAZON MUSIC

In November, Amazon Music Unlimited began offering subscribers in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada one audiobook title per month from the vast collection on Amazon-owned Audible. "We worked quickly and effectively to offer this new benefit to customers," Afshar says, "and now we're proud to say that Amazon Music Unlimited customers have access to more than 1 million audiobooks in the U.S., and more than 800,000 in the U.K. and Canada, included with their subscription."

Charity I support "As an L.A. resident, it was incredibly rewarding to work on bringing the Los Angeles FireAid Benefit performances to life on Amazon Prime Video this past January," Afshar says. "FireAid raised in excess of an estimated \$100 million to support those in our community affected by the devastating fires, bringing both hope and showing the power of music as a unifying force."

Jordan Fasbender
EXECUTIVE VP/CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER/SECRETARY

Jon Kurland
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AFFAIRS/CHIEF ENTERTAINMENT COUNSEL

IHEARTMEDIA

Along with traditional deals like iHeartMedia's exclusive audio partnership for the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, which yielded original coverage and podcast programming, the company's legal team helped "drive iHeart's expansion into immersive music experiences" over the past year, as Kurland puts it. That included an exclusive Meta Horizon Worlds virtual reality concert capture of Charli xcx and Troye Sivan's Sweat arena tour and supported Coldplay's interactive Fortnite experience for its Billboard 200 No. 1 album *Moon Music*, which Kurland calls "an interactive blend of music and gaming that brought fans deeper into Coldplay's world." He adds, "These projects showcase iHeart's leadership in innovative audio experiences, amplifying cultural moments at an unprecedented scale."

Most pressing issue "As streaming and digital continue to grow," Kurland says, "ongoing collaboration among stakeholders is essential to ensure sustainable profitability while also fairly compensating artists and rights holders."

Kevin Montler
VP OF GLOBAL MUSIC, LEGAL

YOUTUBE

YouTube calls itself "the new television" and boasts of "robust 'twin engines' of growth with advertising and subscription-based services," Montler says of the "freemium" business model that has helped YouTube reach an estimated 2.5 billion monthly users globally and attract 125 million subscribers to YouTube Music and Premium combined. Operating on such a large scale requires working with a worldwide web of rights holders and organizations. "In the past year, we have developed a strong portfolio of global licensing deals with labels, publishers and societies," he adds. Meanwhile, looking at the industry overall, Montler acknowledges that a challenge remains in "creating sustainable distribution models that reward artistic contribution and recognize how people use music today as technology evolves."

Charity I support "The Alzheimer's Association. I've seen the disease steal people's vitality firsthand."

Ama Walton
EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL

SOUNDCLOUD

Walton touts SoundCloud's partnerships with a variety of pioneering AI music services, including FADR, Soundful, Voice-Swap, Tuney, Tuttii and AIBeatz, as part of the company's effort to "further democratize music creation." She says that leading the charge on these agreements has been rewarding because they are helping the company "provide user-friendly access to cutting-edge and ethical AI tools" that empower a diverse array of voices to create and easily share music on the service. "I've been deeply involved in navigating evolving regulations, championing ethical AI compliance and safeguarding intellectual property to ensure we're building a sustainable future for AI-supported creativity," Walton says.

Most pressing issue " 'Growing the pie' to expand revenue opportunities for creators and fans alike should be a key music business priority. Streaming is not enough to meet the needs of artists and fans in the streaming age."

Robert Windom
CHIEF CONTENT COUNSEL

Elizabeth Miles
SENIOR LEGAL DIRECTOR OF APPLE MEDIA SERVICES

Adam Blankenheimer
PRINCIPAL COUNSEL OF APPLE MEDIA SERVICES

APPLE

Apple Music's new slate of subscriber offerings kept its legal team busy in the last year. The attorneys helped put together deals to bring features like Apple Music Classical to CarPlay and assisted in the launch of three live-hosted genre radio stations for Latin, dance and chill music on the service. On top of that, "we handled the talent deals and licensing for Apple Immersive Video music pieces on Apple Vision Pro with artists such as Alicia Keys, RAYE and Metallica," Blankenheimer says. "Bringing music to life in this kind of groundbreaking, mind-blowing way is the sort of work we love to do." Apple Music's paid subscribers total about 54 million in the United States and 115 million in the rest of the world.

The music industry today in a word "High volume," Blankenheimer says.

The attorneys at iHeartMedia supported the interactive Fortnite experience for COLDPLAY's Billboard 200 No. 1 album *Moon Music*.



LIVE

Michael Rowles
EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL

LIVE NATION ENTERTAINMENT

After several years of lobbying and preparation, Live Nation and Ticketmaster have begun implementing all-in pricing at the venues and festivals the company owns and tickets, "ensuring fans see the full ticket price up front," explains Rowles, who has served as the concert promoter's in-house attorney since 2006. "We've been advocating for all-in pricing for years, and it's encouraging to see support in both houses of Congress and adoption in a number of states," says Rowles, who has been lobbying Congress to make all-in pricing U.S. law as part of a larger ticketing reform package that would ban deceptive practices, give artists greater control over ticket resale and strengthen enforcement of the BOTS (Bolstering Online Transparency) Act.

Advice about AI now "Use AI to create efficiencies and reduce costs, but don't become overreliant on it."

Shawn Trell
EXECUTIVE VP/COO/GENERAL COUNSEL

AEG

Earlier this year, AEG opened The Pinnacle — a 4,500-capacity live-music and event venue anchoring the 19-acre mixed-use development Nashville Yards in Tennessee. (Kacey Musgraves performed at its inaugural concert on Feb. 27.) The venue is owned by the Yards development through a partnership between Southwest Value Partners and AEG Real Estate and is operated by AEG Presents. "The Pinnacle in Nashville is something we're exceptionally proud of," Trell says. "The reception from the city, the artists, the fans and the music community has been great across the board." Next up for AEG is a flexible, 2,500- to 4,000-seat venue in Portland, Ore., in development with local promoter Monqui Presents — which Trell says "continues to build on The Pinnacle's tail wind" — and a 4,000-capacity indoor venue in Austin's River Park development.

The Warner Chappell Music legal team has celebrated the breakthrough successes of hits including **SHABOOZEY**'s "A Bar Song (Tippy)," which tied the record for most weeks (19) at No. 1 on the Hot 100.

PUBLISHING

Peter Brodsky

EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS/
GENERAL COUNSEL

Jonas Kant

SENIOR VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

Nicole Giacco

SENIOR VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS/ETHICS
AND COMPLIANCE OFFICER

Michael Abitbol

SENIOR VP/HEAD OF U.S. DIGITAL

SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

SMP's attorneys facilitated Sony Music's Queen catalog acquisition, deal extensions with Usher and Lainey Wilson, new agreements with hit-makers like Mike Dean and more. "We've also continued to advocate for songwriters across major and emerging digital platforms, while also navigating strategy around AI and copyright protection," Abitbol says. And as the AI age is dawning, Abitbol remains optimistic following a recent ruling in favor of copyright holder Thomson Reuters in its case against Ross Intelligence. "It is a useful precedent that will hopefully encourage courts to reach the same conclusion in cases involving generative AI models," he says.

Most pressing issue "As subscriber growth in major markets begins to slow down," Abitbol says, "it is crucial that we find growth in emerging markets and license new business models."

Stephen Dallas

SENIOR VP OF BUSINESS/LEGAL AFFAIRS, GLOBAL DIGITAL
STRATEGY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Don Glista

VP OF BUSINESS/LEGAL AFFAIRS AND CREATIVE AFFAIRS

Kerrigan Hennings

Ira Hoffman

VPS OF BUSINESS/LEGAL AFFAIRS

Angelica Merida

VP OF BUSINESS/LEGAL AFFAIRS, INTERNATIONAL AND
DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP

UMPG's team of attorneys began 2025 with a massive win: The publisher was the first to make a deal with Spotify that improved streaming rates for its songwriters since the service's bundling of music and audio books cut royalty rates in March 2024. "It's a great example of finding common ground so that all boats are raised in the rising tide," Hennings says. But Dallas notes the team is also constantly "seeking the best terms possible for our songwriters and stakeholders" as it works with TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, SoundCloud and other platforms. Meanwhile, UMPG's team continues to secure catalog deals, sign new talent and re-up its current roster.

Charity we support "A colleague at UMPG, Tyler Gutowsky, heads up a foundation called Handle With Care," Hennings says, "whose stated purpose is to deliver everyday necessities — socks, food, water, blankets — in care packages that they create and distribute in real time to local homeless populations."



Peter Rosenthal

EXECUTIVE VP/GLOBAL HEAD OF LEGAL AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS

Steve Butler

HEAD OF LEGAL AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS FOR NORTH AMERICA

Chris Head

Tim Meade

SENIOR VPS OF LEGAL AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS

Chris White

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS

WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC

Among the highlights for the WCM team this past year was the company's acquisition of the controlling stake in Tempo Music Investments. "It exemplifies our approach to collaborate across our central, recorded-music and publishing teams to bring in the catalogs of Philip Lawrence, Tyler Joseph, Wiz Khalifa, Florida Georgia Line and others," Rosenthal says. The WCM legal team has also celebrated the breakthrough successes of artists like Shaboozey, Benson Boone, Teddy Swims and Rosé. Shaboozey's hit "A Bar Song (Tippy)" tied the record for most weeks (19) at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100, while Boone's "Beautiful Things" was No. 1 on the 2024 year-end Global 200 and Global Excl. U.S. charts.

Advice about AI now "It's still helpful to view [AI] through basic first principles of copyright law," Rosenthal says. "Does the AI process or its output implicate the rights holder's exclusive rights to make copies, to adapt or prepare derivative works, to distribute or to publicly perform or display?"

RIGHTS GROUPS

Christos Badavas

EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL

SESAC MUSIC GROUP

Badavas has spent the past year leading the legal work behind upsizing SESAC's entire business securitization and the group's October acquisition of media software and services company HAAWK. He has also been involved with SESAC's continued expansion of partnerships outside the United States, including with Soundreef in Italy, as well as the Korean Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers to take over licensing of repertoire in South Korea in an initiative that builds on SESAC's collaboration and joint ventures with the Asian societies through the Asian Alliance Music Rights Organization.

Most pressing issue "Streaming fraud [remains] a problem that impacts the payouts for legitimate songwriters and artists," Badavas says. "Addressing such fraud is a focus of major labels, industry organizations and digital music providers. As a result, I expect the industry to continue to consider new rules to curb artificial consumption in 2025 and add some new guardrails around streaming fraud."

Tim Dadson

GENERAL COUNSEL

SOUNDEXCHANGE

Dadson has been busy working on the Web VI rate proceeding that will set rates and terms for webcasters to stream sound recordings for the period of 2026-30, he says, adding that it “is of paramount importance to the recording artists and rights owners that SoundExchange represents.” He notes that he and his team are “always working diligently on licensing and enforcement to ensure that digital service providers are paying creators what they owe” — such as the organization’s ongoing lawsuit against SiriusXM for allegedly withholding over \$150 million in unpaid royalties by bundling satellite and web streaming services. SiriusXM has challenged the claims.

Most pressing issue “As companies seek to capture the attention of the public, music is frequently used to augment, enhance or simply be the product, but more often than not, the artists and rights owners behind that music see diminishing returns for their work.”

Clara Kim

EXECUTIVE VP/CHIEF LEGAL AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS OFFICER

ASCAP

“ASCAP continues to be focused on closing music-licensing deals that deliver the most value to our members,” Kim says, noting that ASCAP recently announced the highest reported revenue and distributions for any performing rights organization in 2024, with \$1.835 billion in revenue collected and \$1.696 billion available for royalty distributions. She adds that “90 cents of every revenue dollar is going back to creators because we, by our own governance, do not keep any profits and we don’t have any investors we have to pay.”

The music industry today in a word “In flux. The ever-increasing launch of new technologies, including generative artificial intelligence and applications and services that use music, has required every executive in the music industry to be hyper-aware of changes in the business landscape and in legal and regulatory regimes to operate successfully.”

Rick Marshall

GENERAL COUNSEL

MECHANICAL LICENSING COLLECTIVE

The Music Modernization Act requires that every five years, the MLC undertakes a review of the organization’s designation as the exclusive administrator of the compulsory blanket mechanical license. Its filing to the U.S. Copyright Office highlighted the successes and achievements since launching in 2018, Marshall says. “The ongoing review process also highlighted the overwhelming support that the MLC has received from its diverse group of stakeholders, including the number of individual rights holders and dozens of respected songwriter advocacy, publisher and industry organizations that filed public comments and expressed their support of the MLC,” Marshall adds.

Most pressing issue “The detection and prevention of fraudulent activity remains a top priority for the industry, and continued collaboration is key to strengthening efforts in this area. By working together, the industry can enhance fraud-detection systems and enforcement strategies to better protect artists, songwriters and other stakeholders from the effects of fraud.”

Stuart Rosen

SENIOR VP/CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER

BMI

One year after investment firm New Mountain Capital acquired BMI, the benefits of that historic deal still yield dividends, Rosen says. “Partnering with New Mountain Capital last year was the most consequential event of my 28 years at BMI,” he says. “We now have the ability to invest and build an even bigger and better BMI, all to the benefit of our incredible roster of songwriters, composers and publishers.” In September 2024, BMI filed a rate court action against SiriusXM to maintain fair compensation for its members. SiriusXM has challenged the petition.

Advice about AI now “Accept that AI is not going to go away or be legislated out of existence. Instead, consider how it can help in your creative process, all the while fighting for attribution and compensation.”

Global Music Rights extended its relationships with songwriters including POST MALONE, who spent six weeks atop the Hot 100 in 2024 with “I Had Some Help,” featuring Morgan Wallen.



Emio Zizza

GENERAL COUNSEL

GLOBAL MUSIC RIGHTS

Zizza’s main focus has been recruiting more artists in Global Music Rights’ fight for proper compensation from digital service providers. In addition to welcoming young rap stars like Yeat to the roster, Zizza oversaw the extension of the company’s relationship with several other songwriters, including Post Malone, who spent six weeks atop the Hot 100 in 2024 with “I Had Some Help” (featuring Morgan Wallen). “GMR’s very existence is based on the fact that creators deserve to be valued better than they have historically,” Zizza says. “It’s a fundamental problem, but if [digital service providers] properly recognize the value of creators, it’s a fixable problem.”

Advice about AI now “AI is a tool and that tool can be used for good or not. Artists should embrace all the ways that AI benefits them creatively but at the same time aggressively defend against the ways that artists can be exploited — and/or underpaid — by technology companies and other corporate interests.”

ASSOCIATIONS

Danielle Aguirre

EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL

NATIONAL MUSIC PUBLISHERS’ ASSOCIATION

“This year, the NMPA has been focused on our lawsuit against Twitter/X for its refusal to license the music on its platform,” Aguirre says. The publishers trade association is also fighting “Spotify’s bad faith move to significantly reduce songwriter royalties” after the streaming giant added audiobooks and reclassified some subscriptions as “bundles.” Plus, the NMPA issued takedown notices in February to some 2,500 podcast episodes that allegedly contain unlicensed music. “Both matters demonstrate that DSPs still disregard the importance of songwriters’ contributions to the success of their platforms and refuse to pay fairly for the works that drive their platforms’ value,” she says.

Most pressing issue “The overregulation of our music copyrights. Copyright owners must be able to negotiate rights in a free market instead of under burdensome and constraining rules and regulations.”

Ken Doroshow

CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER

RIAA

As AI keeps rapidly transforming the music industry from the recording studio to the Grammy stage, the RIAA’s top attorney is on the front lines for creators. Last year, Doroshow oversaw the filings of the first-ever lawsuits challenging the use of copyrighted sound recordings to train generative AI music services, taking on AI firms Suno and Udio for alleged copyright infringement. “A mature and sustainable AI industry needs to license the content that is so vital to its development — including copyrighted sound recordings — in the free market so that artists, songwriters and rights holders can have a voice in how their work is used and be fairly compensated for these valuable materials,” he says.

Charity I support “Several, but I’ll call out Bread for the City. It’s a wonderful organization that provides broad services and support for low-income residents of the District of Columbia.”

Ryan McWhinnie
VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS
MERLIN

McWhinnie cites closing the indie rights group's first AI pilot program with a global leader in the space as part of its inaugural Merlin Connect deal as a major milestone, accomplished with the support of Merlin senior director of business and legal affairs Shrina Patel. The deal is a "pioneering platform designed to help emerging tech platforms access an expansive library of high-quality independent music," McWhinnie explains. It reflects Merlin's "commitment to innovation, ensuring that independent music remains at the forefront of new technological developments, with partners who want to be on the right side of history about copyright, consent and culture."

Most pressing issue "Market consolidation. As major players continue to seek to offset falling market share by acquiring independent labels, we're seeing an increasingly concentrated market, which raises concerns about competition, artist opportunities and the long-term diversity of the music business."

TALENT & LITIGATION

Ken Abdo
Paul Bowles
Cynthia Katz
Tim Mandelbaum
Michael Reinert
Leron Rogers
Alex Threadgold
Heidy Vaquerano
PARTNERS
FOX ROTHSCHILD

The firm's clients span artists, labels and investment firms, including Kobalt Music, BMG, Primary Wave, Concord, Litmus, Iconoclast, Stevie Wonder, Wu-Tang Clan, \$uicideboy\$, Raphael Saadiq, Stone Temple Pilots, Mötley Crüe, Better Noise Music, Trace Adkins, Three Dog Night and Kool & The Gang. Mandelbaum highlights Fox Rothschild's work with HarbourView Equity Partners, where over the past year, "our team handled a \$500 million debt financing for HarbourView that was backed by its music royalties catalog. This was among the music industry's biggest deals of the past year."

Most pressing issue "The music landscape is shifting away from major labels, which once dominated, and toward independent DIY music creation and distribution," Mandelbaum says. "In this social media-driven world, it is increasingly hard for major labels to nurture and develop talent, let alone break new artists and sustain their careers."



Attorneys at Rimon won a trademark lawsuit last year against an EARTH, WIND & FIRE tribute act that used the legendary band's name without permission.

Jenny Afia
PARTNER
SCHILLINGS

As a leading attorney involved in privacy protection, Afia is fiercely protective of the reputations of those she represents — including megawatt artists like Adele, Madonna, Michael Bublé and Elton John — and cites "dis- and misinformation" that threatens "artists' license to operate" as one of the biggest issues facing stars today. To that end, Afia says one of her major accomplishments this past year was resolving a looming crisis for a "global house music act facing a cancel culture campaign" that ended in a public apology, retraction of false information on which the claim was based and the act's reputation remaining intact.

Charity I support "I'm on the U.K. advisory board of Common Sense Media, which works to improve the internet for children."

Lisa Alter
Katie Baron
PARTNERS
ALTER KENDRICK & BARON

Alter and Baron, who count Primary Wave Music, BMG Rights Management, Steve Miller, Kenny Gamble & Leon Huff, Paul Rodgers and other top industry names as clients, handled numerous big deals over the past year — including repping Iconic Artists Management in the acquisition of Rod Stewart's song catalog and acting as music counsel to Influence Media Partners in connection with an asset-backed securitization deal. Looking ahead, the firm is concerned about the threat posed by the "unchecked" power of tech companies and widespread deregulation, Alter says.

Advice about AI now "The implications of AI should be considered and addressed at the deal-making phase of every music transaction," Alter says, "together with the respective rights of the parties to monetize content through the training of AI models."

Jonathan Altschul
MANAGING ATTORNEY
THE ALTSCHUL FIRM

Altschul advised As1One Production Co. in connection with the Paramount+ docuseries *As1One: The Israeli-Palestinian Pop Music Journey*, which debuted in December and was created in association with Best Production Co. for MTV Entertainment Studios. The four-part project details the creation of as1one, the first pop group comprising both Palestinian and Israeli members, as well as the band's move to Los Angeles in October 2023 and its journey amid the ongoing war in Gaza. While Altschul does not name individual talent clients, he has represented companies on the corporate side such as Simon Fuller's XIX Entertainment and South Korea's SM Entertainment.

Advice about AI now "Artists need to be more vigilant about the grants of rights involving their recordings and the right to use their likenesses and voices contained in most recording agreements and releases," Altschul says. "Artists should avoid allowing others unfettered rights to use their voices and recordings to train AI systems."

Ken Anderson
Jill Berliner
Ray Garcia
Mark Lee
Celeste Moy
PARTNERS
RIMON

Rimon boasts a star-studded roster of clients, including iconic bands like Soundgarden, Foo Fighters and Nirvana, as well as entities affiliated with late stars like Frank Sinatra and Warren Zevon. Representing legendary R&B group Earth, Wind & Fire, attorneys at Rimon won a trademark lawsuit last year against a tribute act that used the band's name without permission. The firm is also repping the Beastie Boys in an ongoing copyright case claiming the restaurant chain Chili's used the rap trio's iconic 1994 song "Sabotage" in a social media advertisement without permission. According to the suit, "deceased Beastie Boys member Adam Yauch included a provision in his will prohibiting such uses."

Most pressing issue "What is next in the 'golden age of the arts'? The current administration's gutting of the Kennedy Center and determination of what music is suitable for consumption by Americans could have a significant impact on the industry," Lee says.

Peter Anderson
PARTNER
DAVIS WRIGHT TREMAINE

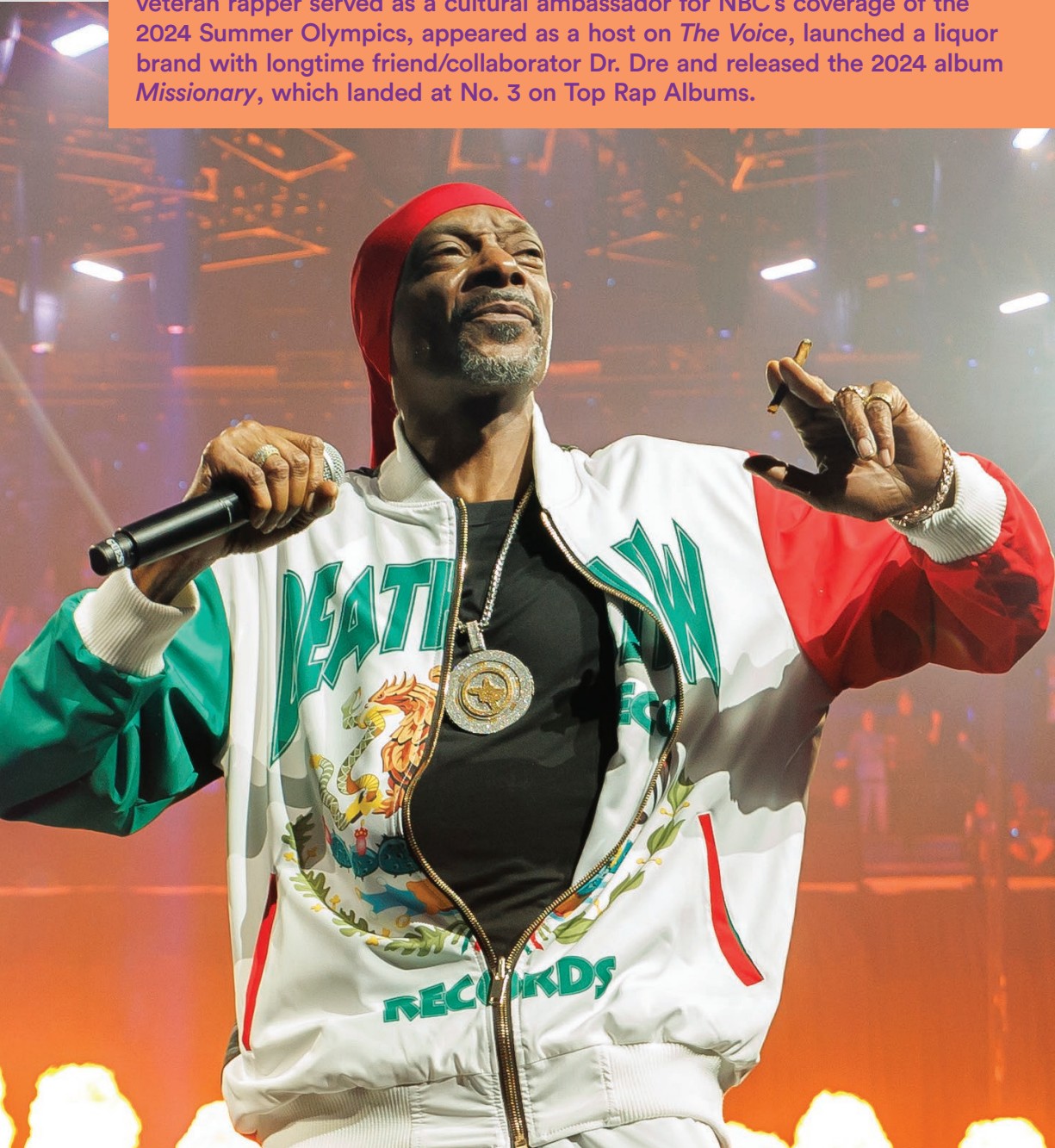
Davis Wright Tremaine's clients include the three major-label groups and artists such as Mariah Carey, Cher, Cardi B and Miley Cyrus. The firm scored a major victory for Cher last May in a closely watched copyright matter over the singer's half share of royalties on classic Sonny & Cher hits including "The Beat Goes On" and the No. 1 Hot 100 single "I Got You Babe." Sonny Bono's widow, Mary, "claimed that a Copyright Act notice of termination that she had sent to a number of publishers cut off Cher's rights under her and Sonny's 1978 marital settlement agreement," Anderson says. "We sued for declaratory relief, arguing that Ms. Bono conflated copyright interest with a contractual right to royalties." A federal judge found in Cher's favor, and the case will now go to trial on the issue of the amount owed to her.

The music industry today in a word "Evolving."

Gerard M. Anthony
FOUNDING PARTNER
ANTHONY LAW GROUP

As lawyer for Gabe P's trendsetting rap freestyle platform, On the Radar Radio, Anthony helped negotiate OTR's deal with beverage company Monster, ensuring that it "not only provided for branding support but touring and showcase resources," he says. A longtime legal adviser to the Afropunk Music Festival, Anthony negotiated and helped produce its first edition with Seattle public radio station KEXP. "The lineup featured a good mix of local artists and also headliner Cautious Clay that had not been featured in the market, despite a strong fan base," he recalls. Other clients include rappers 22Gz and Poison, singer-songwriter Raheem DeV Vaughn, producer KatoOnTheTrack and musicians Jack Freeman, 2forwOyNE, Luxury Lane and The Colleagues.

Most pressing issue "Royalty payments. Artists and producers in particular still have to go through archaic payment systems to receive royalty payments."



Attorney Stephen D. Barnes has represented SNOOP DOGG as the veteran rapper served as a cultural ambassador for NBC's coverage of the 2024 Summer Olympics, appeared as a host on The Voice, launched a liquor brand with longtime friend/collaborator Dr. Dre and released the 2024 album Missionary, which landed at No. 3 on Top Rap Albums.

Marvin Arrington Jr.
Vince Phillips
FOUNDING PARTNERS
Aurielle Brooks
PARTNER
ARRINGTON & PHILLIPS

Arrington & Phillips represents a roster of artists in genres ranging from hip-hop to country. YoungBoy Never Broke Again, Kevin Gates, Keri Hilson and country artist Kevin Smiley all benefit from the firm's guidance. Among its recent work is the "groundbreaking negotiation" to clear the AI sample on Sexxy Red and Drake's hit single "U My Everything," Phillips says. "The track debuted at No. 44 on the Billboard Hot 100, marking the first-ever clearance of an AI-generated 'BBL Drizzy' sample in music history."

Most pressing issue "Big tech. Artists now rely heavily on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, etc.," Phillips says, "but changing algorithms and pay-to-play models make organic reach unpredictable. Viral success is often random, making career longevity hard to maintain."

Craig Averill
Jeff Worob
Laxmi Vijaysankar
PARTNERS
SERLING ROOKS HUNTER MCKOY WOROB & AVERILL

With a roster that includes Maroon 5, Bailey Zimmerman, LCD Soundsystem, Zac Brown Band, Jason Isbell, Maggie Rogers, Leon Bridges, Interpol and producer Dave Cobb, Vijaysankar says high points of the firm's work in the past year include representing STEM Disintermedia in the company's distribution matters and advising longtime watch collector John Mayer on his "landmark collaboration" with luxury watchmaker Audemars Piguet. "Mayer was appointed creative conduit, advising the CEO and [chief marketing officer] on future directions and strategies in the luxury watch world," she says of the deal, which included Mayer helping to design the Royal Oak perpetual calendar wristwatch.

Most pressing issue "The power of music to shape culture cannot be overstated," Vijaysankar says. "It transcends boundaries and influences social change. Fostering inclusive and equitable representation in business is essential and should persist regardless of the reversals taking place in other industries."

Akinyemi Ayinoluwa
FOUNDER/MANAGING PARTNER
HIGHTOWER SOLICITORS AND ADVOCATES

Ayinoluwa says that Hightower — which represents major Afrobeats producers including Magicsticks (Asake), Ragee (Davido), Damie (BNXN), Rexxie (Zlatan) and Blaq Jerzee (Mr. Eazi) — "recently finalized a publishing agreement between Empire Music and Ragee," who co-produced Chris Brown's "Sensational." The track was nominated for best African music performance at the 2025 Grammy Awards for both featured artists Davido and Lojay. Ayinoluwa says, "This achievement, the result of many months of negotiation, exemplifies Hightower's commitment to guiding clients in building viable music catalogs."

Most pressing issue "In 2025, the fate of independent recording artists is uncertain, as the major record labels have started acquiring the label services and music distributor companies that once afforded independent artists a fair shot at controlling their destinies."



Ed Baden-Powell
Nick Eziefula
Paddy Gardiner
Ben Gisbey
Tom Iverson
Euan Lawson
Ed Weidman
PARTNERS
SIMKINS

Simkins clients include rights society PRS for Music, Universal Music Group and the estates of David Bowie and Freddie Mercury. The firm is also representing Experience Hendrix and Sony Music in the well-publicized claim for ownership of copyrights, related rights and royalties by the heirs of Jimi Hendrix's former bandmates in The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Noel Redding and Mitch Mitchell. Redding and Mitchell — both represented by estates since their deaths in 2003 and 2008, respectively — originally signed away their rights in the early 1970s following Hendrix's death.

Most pressing issue "Wall Street and the City of London continue to show a great interest in the music business," Lawson says. "But with all that interest comes heightened performance expectations, so the industry needs to continue to find ways to grow, but in a sustainable manner, ensuring that new talent is not overlooked in favor of catalog artists."

Hector Baldonado
FOUNDER
THE BALDONADO GROUP

The Baldonado Group "closed several catalog sales, placed record executives at the major record labels and closed high-level merchandising and touring deals," Baldonado says. Notably, the firm — which represents Rod Wave, Lil Durk, Moneybagg Yo, Yovng Chimi, Bossman Dlow, untiljapan, Jorjiana, BuVision, Great Day Records and the estate of Juice WRLD — closed the BuVision label deal that formed a partnership between record executive Abou "Bu" Thiam's label and Atlantic Music Group. Baldonado also directly negotiated his executive role with Atlantic CEO Elliot Grange and worked on the Juice WRLD-Fortnite collaboration. For the latter, an avatar of the late rapper appeared in Fortnite to debut a new song, "Empty Out Your Pockets," alongside Eminem, Snoop Dogg and Ice Spice.

Charity I support "Children of Promise NYC. Supporting young children affected by parental incarceration through targeted initiatives is a pivotal step in changing the course of a family's history."

The firm Ziffren Brittenham has represented **BEYONCÉ** for her *Renaissance* tour, the sale of concert film *Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé* to AMC, all aspects of her Grammy-winning album *Cowboy Carter* and an agreement with the NFL and Netflix for the creation of the Christmas Day halftime show *Beyoncé Bowl*.

Stephen Barnes
SENIOR PARTNER
YORN LEVINE BARNES KRINTZMAN RUBENSTEIN KOHNER ENDLICH GOODELL & GELLMAN

Barnes represents Snoop Dogg, who may be the busiest man in show business. Over the past year, he acted as a special correspondent and cultural ambassador for NBC's coverage of the 2024 Summer Olympics, appeared as a host on *The Voice*, launched liquor brand Gin & Juice with longtime friend/collaborator Dr. Dre and released *Missionary*, his first Dre-produced album since his debut, *Doggy-style*, that landed at No. 3 on Top Rap Albums. (In March, Snoop was announced as the commencement speaker at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business.) Barnes also represents Death Row Records, Jill Scott and comedians Chris Rock and Kevin Hart.

Charities I support "Cancer Support Community Los Angeles, The Girl Friends and Reading Partners of Los Angeles."

Richard Baskind
HEAD OF MUSIC
Alasdair George
Anthony Orum
PARTNERS
SIMONS MUIRHEAD BURTON

Simons Muirhead Burton represents a wide array of artists including NEMZZZ, Alan Walker and RØMANS, as well as producers P2J, Sammy SoSo and Ari Pensmith, all three of whom have worked with Tyla. The firm also repped Lola Young's label imprint, Day One, as the British singer-songwriter broke through with her top 20 Hot 100 hit single "Messy." Additionally, it represents music companies such as Cooking Vinyl, Kobalt Music and NWS Group. Orum points to the joint venture between Firebird Music and Yungblud's Locomotion/Special Projects team (which reportedly will have Firebird invest tens of millions of dollars in YungBlud's business) as a major achievement of the past year.

Charity we support "Death Penalty Project — a pro bono team associated with Simons Muirhead Burton that represents death row convicts and campaigns internationally for the abolition of capital punishment," Orum says. "In 2024, the team secured dancehall legend Vybz Kartel's release from prison after 15 years."

Jeffrey Becker
CHAIR OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA LAW
PRACTICE GROUP
SWANSON MARTIN & BELL

Becker continued his firm's work representing the estates of legends including Aretha Franklin and Frankie Knuckles, as well as working with rising artists such as Natalie Jane and WesGhost. He spent much of the past year working with legislators to strengthen the Right of Publicity Act in Illinois, which Becker says is "now one of the few states in the country to prohibit the use of artificial intelligence to replicate an artist's voice or image for use in sound recordings and videos without their prior consent." Other highlights include helping sign Ax and the Hatchetmen to Arista Records, while representing frontman Axel Ellis in his deal to star in the musical teen drama *The Runarounds* for Amazon Prime.

Charity I support Becker founded Sound of Summer, an annual charity concert held in Chicago, which has raised thousands of dollars to support a variety of music-related nonprofits including Musically Fed, She Is the Music, Soundgirls and, this year, the Save the Music Foundation.

David Bercuson
FOUNDER/PRESIDENT
DAVID BERCUSON

Bercuson has long represented KC & The Sunshine Band, InnerCat Music Group and Farruko and his label, Carbon Fiber Music, among others. In the past 12 months, he added Colombian stars and couple Greeicy and Mike Bahia to his roster, as well as reggae clients Buju Banton, Alkaline and Jovi Rockwell. Bercuson also negotiated the use of Willie Nelson's "On the Road Again" for a dancing plush toy and is assisting clients named as defendants in the massive *dembow* lawsuit, in which Jamaican duo Steely & Cleve are suing more than 150 artists including Bad Bunny, Karol G, Pitbull, Drake, Daddy Yankee, Luis Fonsi and Justin Bieber over their use of the duo's dembow rhythm.

Charities I support "The Anti-Defamation League, ACLU and Southern Poverty Law Center to protect democracy, freedom and the rights of all people and to eliminate hate."

Jason Berger
PARTNER
Matt Cottingham
NASHVILLE CO-MANAGING PARTNER
LEWIS BRISBOIS BISGAARD & SMITH

Throughout 2024, along with continuing to provide representation to clients including Wyatt Flores and Fridayy, Berger and Cottingham helped platinum-selling artists Tucker Wetmore and BNYX negotiate new recording contracts with their respective labels. Meanwhile, both partners have set their sights on getting their clients fairly paid, with Cottingham stating the music industry as it stands today should be working on "finding a solution to adequately compensate songwriters in the digital streaming era, while navigating the practical limitations within the current framework of the major-label system."

Charity I support "ACM Lifting Lives," Cottingham says. "As a member of the ACM board of directors and a passionate supporter of the country music community, ACM Lifting Lives is near and dear to my heart. Lifting Lives provides aid in times of need to those in the industry, with a focus on health-related initiatives."

Jason Boyarski

FOUNDING PARTNER

David Fritz

PARTNER

BOYARSKI FRITZ

Boyarski Fritz has been behind numerous noteworthy deals recently, including renegotiating Lil Tecca's deal with Republic Records, Blackpink member Jisoo's first solo major-label deal with Warner Records and label deals for Will Smith and Tainy. The firm also negotiated a catalog sale encompassing publishing, masters and neighboring rights for a former founding member of Maroon 5; deals for a documentary about Earth, Wind & Fire and founding member Maurice White; branding and touring deals for Interscope artist Towa Bird, including her opening slot on Billie Eilish's tour; and multiple producer and songwriter deals for top hit-makers like Louis Bell, Pete Nappi, Cirkut and Karl Rubin.

Most pressing issue "The transformation of traditional record deals — where labels owned the masters — into licenses and distribution-type models where the artists own the masters," Boyarski says.

John Branca

PARTNER/HEAD OF MUSIC DEPARTMENT

David Byrnes

David Lande

PARTNERS

ZIFFREN BRITTENHAM

After working with Beyoncé on her highest-grossing trek to date, the *Renaissance* world tour, including negotiations with Live Nation to promote the run's 56 stadium dates, Ziffren Brittenham handled legal aspects for the sale of the concert film *Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé* to AMC. The firm also has handled all legal aspects of her Grammy-winning album *Cowboy Carter* and negotiated the agreement with the NFL and Netflix for the creation of the Christmas Day halftime show Beyoncé Bowl. In addition, Ziffren Brittenham negotiated with Netflix for the production and distribution of Olivia Rodrigo's concert film and oversaw the *GUTS* star's endorsement deal with Lancôme. To top it off, Ziffren Brittenham worked on SZA's *SOS Deluxe: Lana* release, including the singer's distribution deal with RCA.

Advice about AI now "As an industry," Lande says, "we need to create ways in which artists can legitimately and permissibly use AI in the creative process."

William Briggs

Joshua Rosenberg

PARTNERS

VENABLE

With a client roster boasting A-list performers like Ariana Grande, The-Dream and Sony Music Entertainment, Venable provides legal representation for some of music's biggest stars. Most recently, Rosenberg has been defending client Jason Derulo and SME against a joint authorship claim over Derulo's 2020 No. 1 hit "Savage Love (Laxed — Siren Beat)," for which he recently sought a summary judgment. Rosenberg also points to cybersecurity cases he's working on where anonymous hackers are stealing and selling artists' demos to the highest bidder. "This is not only an egregious invasion of the artists' personal privacy," he says, "but also a threat to derail the artists' creative process and business plan where they control the release of their music rather than these cyber criminals."

Advice about AI now "Be prepared to both fight and adapt," Rosenberg says. "Napster showed that some things are inevitable."



Attorneys Elliot Groffman and Paul Gutman at Carroll Guido Groffman Cohen Bar & Karalian advised on the work between **BRANDI CARLILE** (right) and **JONI MITCHELL**, culminating in the Joni Jam show at the Hollywood Bowl.

Jordan Bromley

LEADER OF MANATT ENTERTAINMENT

Robert Jacobs

LEADER OF ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION

L. Lee Phillips

SENIOR PARTNER

W. Joseph Anderson

Binta Niambi Brown

Eric Custer

Gary Gilbert

Beau Stapleton

PARTNERS

MANATT PHELPS & PHILLIPS

A recent point of pride for Manatt Phelps & Phillips — which represents Rosé, Neil Young, Jack White, the Pop Smoke estate and others — was its pro bono legal services for FireAid, the January benefit concert that raised over \$100 million for wildfire relief in Los Angeles. "Our team helped identify and solicit sponsors and then drafted, advised on, negotiated and closed over 50 sponsorship deals and 20-plus streaming agreements to bring the concert to various platforms," Bromley says. "We also drafted and negotiated venue, production services and other related agreements in addition to overseeing all talent deals and advising on rights and clearance issues."

Advice about AI now "Be unique, be consistent and be yourself," Bromley says. "Artificial intelligence is not a replacement for the unbridled and incomparable creativity of people, but it is becoming more and more prevalent and accessible."

Vernon Brown

FOUNDER/PRESIDENT

V. BROWN & ASSOCIATES

When some of Brown's most notable clients — like Cash Money Records co-CEOs Ronald "Slim" Williams and Bryan "Birdman" Williams — first started releasing music, consumers bought physical albums and singles. Now most fans simply open a streaming app, and that has changed the way artists and labels make money. Brown believes the fair compensation surrounding that change is the most pressing issue facing the music industry today. "In this streaming era, the current revenue model heavily favors major labels and platforms. Artists only get fractions of a cent per stream, which means they can't make real money unless they hit absolutely massive streaming numbers," he says. "Further compounding this issue: Most artists don't understand how their royalty payments are calculated, and there's very little transparency about it."

Richard S. Busch

PARTNER IN THE LITIGATION SECTION/HEAD OF THE ENTERTAINMENT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY SECTIONS

KING & BALLOU

Busch has made a name for himself litigating complex copyright infringement cases, usually against digital services. He is representing Eight Mile Style (owner of songs written in whole or in part by Eminem) against Spotify in a copyright infringement action involving more than 240 musical compositions, which also includes the claim that certain provisions of the Music Modernization Act are unconstitutional. The judge in that case ruled against Eight Mile Style while avoiding the constitutional questions raised by the complaint, and Busch is appealing that decision. In another action, Busch represents a list of comedians including Andrew Dice Clay, George Lopez, Lewis Black, the heir of Bill Hicks and the estates of Robin Williams and George Carlin against Pandora for allegedly infringing their copyrighted literary works through distributing their content without obtaining performance or mechanical licenses for the underlying spoken word compositions.

The music industry today in a word "Unequal."

Rosemary Carroll
Michael Guido
Elliot Groffman
Rob Cohen
Gillian Bar
Renee Karalian
Ira Friedman

PARTNERS

CARROLL GUIDO GROFFMAN COHEN
BAR & KARALIAN

Achievements abounded among the firm's honorees (who were assisted by fellow partners Paul Gutman, Dave Keady, Celine Hollenbeck and Jenna Kon). Carroll advised Patti Smith regarding the 50th anniversary of her seminal album *Horses*, which will be celebrated by tours in Europe and the United States, plus the release of a box set including original demos. Guido represented FKA twigs in branding deals, as well as Mark Ronson on his move to Universal Music Publishing Group. Groffman, with Keady, negotiated a deal for Phish at Las Vegas' Sphere and, with Gutman, advised on Brandi Carlile's work with Joni Mitchell, culminating in the Joni Jam show at the Hollywood Bowl. Cohen represented Sabrina Carpenter in all aspects of her career, including her Netflix holiday special, Meta virtual reality concert, first arena tour and partnerships with Versace and Prada. Bar negotiated contract extensions for The National with 4AD, Gracie Abrams with Interscope Records and PinkPantheress with Sony Music Publishing; struck Aaron Dressner's new deal with UMPG; and celebrated Jack Antonoff's band Bleachers selling out Madison Square Garden. Karalian represents Mustard in his hit-making production projects, including his work on Kendrick Lamar's "Not Like Us," and also assisted with the release of Playboi Carti's Billboard 200 No. 1 album *MUSIC*. Friedman represented Alicia Keys in various deals, among them the negotiation of the cast album for her Broadway musical, *Hell's Kitchen*.

Uwonda Carter
Donald Woodard

FOUNDING PARTNERS

CARTER WOODARD

The Atlanta-based firm had a hand in some of the most notable hip-hop and R&B releases of the past year, from Carter negotiating Metro Boomin's publishing agreement with Universal Music Publishing Group (which yielded a pair of No. 1 collaborative albums with Future) in 2024 to Woodard representing producers like Dernst "D'Mile" Emile II and Christopher "Tricky" Stewart, who both contributed to Usher's *Coming Home* album. In addition, Woodard's representation of King Willonius, whose viral hit "BBL Drizzy" sampled an AI-generated track, has turned him into a key figure in discussions surrounding AI and copyrights in the music business.

Michael Cataliotti

PRINCIPAL

CATALIOTTI LAW

Cataliotti Law represents "multiple music industry executives at the vp, senior vp, executive vp and C-suite levels; Grammy-nominated producers, writers and performers; and internationally recognized chart-topping recording artists and writers-producers, as well as supporting members from audio engineers to managers," according to Cataliotti, though he declines to detail his recent achievements due to "the nature of the work." Skilled in immigration law, Cataliotti provides guidance for clients entering the United States and coordinates and supports them as they move around the globe. He expresses concern about "the political volatility that exists worldwide and the amount of incorrect, inaccurate and incomplete information that floods the conversations and policy-making halls."

Attorney Sandra Crawshaw-Sparks of Proskauer Rose represents the estate of QUINCY JONES.

The musician, songwriter, producer, conductor, arranger, artist, record-label owner/executive, TV/film producer, magazine publisher and philanthropist died in November.

Robert A. Celestin

FOUNDING PARTNER

Alicia Ferriabough Taylor

PARTNER

THE LAW OFFICES OF ROBERT A. CELESTIN

Country superstar Shaboozey was everywhere in 2024 — and Celestin's firm negotiated high-level branding opportunities on behalf of the "A Bar Song (Tipsy)" singer, including a Super Bowl ad with Nerds, a Cash App commercial and what Celestin describes as "the biggest endorsement deal [Jack Daniel's has] done with a multigenre artist." He adds that those deals wouldn't have been possible had it not been for the artist's broad appeal: "Shaboozey bridged the gap between country, pop and hip-hop in a way that has never been seen before."

The music industry today in a word "Perfunctory," Celestin says. "The music industry is in a bit of a struggle to make culturally relevant, impactful and thoughtful music. Aside from a few artists like Kendrick Lamar and Chappell Roan, the industry seems to be focused on finding the quick, viral one-hit wonders via algorithms rather than developing artists who have something substantive to say."

Ross J. Charap

PARTNER

BARTON

Charap recently moved from the firm ArentFox Schiff to Barton, where he advises BMG Rights Management U.S., Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, and the estates of Billy Preston, Harold Arlen, Jessye Norman and pioneering hip-hop producer Larry Smith Sr., among others. Along with his former partner, ArentFox Schiff's Matthew Fin-

kelstein, Charap says, "On behalf of the Stones and BMG, my team successfully challenged a distribution rule of the Mechanical Licensing Collective that resulted in terminated publishers continuing to receive MLC royalties after their rights had been terminated." After intervention by the U.S. Copyright Office (which oversees the MLC), "all writers or their families who have exercised their termination rights will receive all post-termination royalties," Charap says, "as well as a refund of all such royalties previously misdirected."

Most pressing issue "The dilution of royalty payments across the board."

Jacqueline Charlesworth

PARTNER

FRANKFURT KURNIT KLEIN & SELZ

Charlesworth joined the entertainment litigation group at Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz's Los Angeles office in September, bringing with her a deep knowledge of copyright law. The one-time general counsel of the U.S. Copyright Office previously ran her own boutique firm in Los Angeles for five years. She represented Malcolm McLaren's publisher, Satisfaction Fulfilled, and peermusic, the work's administrator, in their case against Sony Music Publishing over the usage of the World's Famous Supreme Team's 1984 R&B hit, "Hey DJ," co-written by McLaren, in Lizzo's "About Damn Time." On behalf of the plaintiffs, Charlesworth won back the co-owner's rights to the song from a publisher that had claimed full ownership of the sampled material.

Advice about AI now "If you use AI tools in creating songs, make sure there's enough human authorship to register the songs for copyright."



Jay Cohen

PARTNER

PAUL WEISS RIFKIND WHARTON & GARRISON

"I currently represent ASCAP in high-stakes rate court litigation against the Radio Music License Committee concerning the licensing fees to be paid by commercial radio stations," Cohen says, noting that he's also representing the Mechanical Licensing Collective in "a case alleging Spotify systematically revised its subscription structure" to deny artists royalties. As the industry evolves, the protection of artists' royalties in the face of domineering corporations remains paramount — and Cohen is helping lead that fight. He also represents the National Music Publishers' Association, Sony Music Entertainment and StubHub.

Charity I support "I am the chairman of the board of Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts in New York. It is the oldest and largest provider of pro bono representation to artists and arts organizations and plays a vital role for the vast bulk of creators who cannot afford to pay lawyers to protect their work and livelihood."

Sandra Crawshaw-Sparks

SENIOR PARTNER

Anthony Oncidi

CO-CHAIR OF LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT LAW DEPARTMENT/
HEAD OF WEST COAST LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE

PROSKAUER ROSE

Crawshaw-Sparks says that her firm "recovered more than \$60 million for our clients for the unlicensed use of their content on social media. We also defended Live Nation and Madonna in multiple class actions arising from The Celebration Tour." One suit claimed the music legend harmed her fans by starting concerts in New York later than scheduled. Proskauer Rose still represents the Recording Academy and Sony Music Entertainment in connection with multiple ongoing litigation, arbitration and advice/counseling matters, as well as the estate of Quincy Jones.

Charities I support "L.A. wildfire relief because the wildfires were devastating to the music industry and greater L.A.," Crawshaw-Sparks says, and "the Wildlife Society and Kitten Rescue — because they're kittens, for Pete's sake!"

Sy Damle
Gabe Fleet
Andrew Gass
Alli Stillman
Jonathan West
Joe Wetzel

PARTNERS

LATHAM & WATKINS

"The Latham team recently secured a significant win for Spotify in a first-of-its-kind federal lawsuit against the Mechanical Licensing Collective over royalty payouts for bundled music service offerings in a case closely watched by the entire digital streaming music industry," Stillman says. "The [Spotify] decision for the first time interprets a regulation governing how digital music services pay mechanical royalties, which was a key part of the settlement of the Phonorecords IV rate-setting proceeding before the Copyright Royalty Board." That victory was a major achievement for the firm, which also represents the Digital Media Association, the North American Concert Promoters Association, the Digital Licensee Coordinator and Live Nation in its ongoing antitrust lawsuit brought by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Most pressing issue "There is a lot of focus on competition and revenue distribution in the digital streaming era," Stillman says.



David C. Eisman of Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom worked with **DRAKE's OVO Sound** on the sale of a majority stake in the label's catalog and artist roster to Sony Music's Santa Anna Label Group in connection with a new partnership between the two companies.

Robert Darwell

HEAD OF GLOBAL MEDIA

Alexis Robinson

LEADER OF THE ENTERTAINMENT, TECHNOLOGY, MEDIA AND
ADVERTISING PRACTICE GROUP/CO-LEADER OF THE MUSIC TEAM

Daniel Schnapp

PARTNER/CO-LEADER OF THE MUSIC, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE,
INTERACTIVE MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSACTIONS TEAMS

SHEPPARD MULLIN RICHTER & HAMPTON

On behalf of Domain Capital Group, the team at Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton oversaw deals to acquire the catalogs of Iggy Azalea, composer Andrew Bissell and country/pop songwriter Ashley Gorley, while also negotiating for Gorley's future catalog on behalf of Sony Music Publishing. Robinson says the team "represented financiers and producers in connection with the sale to Paramount Pictures of the North American theatrical rights to the Rob-bie Williams biopic, *Better Man*. Paramount's \$25 million domestic acquisition fee makes it one of the biggest indie sales in years." Additional notable clients of the firm include ASCAP, Steinway Musical Instruments, Bandsintown, the Songwriters Hall of Fame and Spotify.

The music industry today in a word "Remixing," Robinson says. "The industry is splicing old models with new tech and sampling from different business verticals."

Doug Davis

FOUNDER

THE DAVIS FIRM

The Davis Firm represents a broad roster of clients including artists Pitbull, DJ Snake, LL COOL J, Lil Jon, Barry Manilow and Dionne Warwick, as well as executives like Ron Perry, Jorge Mejia, Ezekial Lewis, Ryan Press and Jeannette Perez. Davis is particularly proud of his involvement in bringing LL COOL J back to Def Jam Records in 2019 and the rapper's first new release since his return, 2024's *The FORCE*, which notched a top 10 debut on Top Rap Albums. "It was such a personally rewarding experience when LL invited me to his press day and acknowledged my role in supporting the effort to make the album realized," Davis says. "He is a gem and representing him remains a privilege."

The music industry today in a word "Resilient. The music industry is constantly evolving, adapting to new technologies, shifting business models and changing audience behaviors."

Jacob Ebin Paul Fakler

PARTNERS

MAYER BROWN

Fakler describes the music industry as "complex," as demonstrated by its representation of Pandora Media in a "cluster of copyright infringement cases brought by nine comedians or their estates in the Central District of California" who claim that it and other streaming services failed to obtain sufficient rights to the underlying comedic material. "Despite decades of industry custom and practice to the contrary," Fakler says, there was an effort "to impose the music industry's byzantine licensing practices on the comedy industry." He adds, "The case will make new law on various topics related to sound-recording licensing and the comedy industry."

Advice about AI now "Don't panic," Fakler says. "And do not allow the panic strategically generated and exploited by content owners to bully you into rash and ill-conceived 'solutions' — whether legislative or contractual — to a problem that is not fully understood and may not be a problem at all."

Scott A. Edelman

CHAIRMAN/PARTNER OF LITIGATION AND ARBITRATION GROUP

Atara Miller

PARTNER OF LITIGATION AND ARBITRATION GROUP/
MEMBER OF GLOBAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MILBANK

Milbank secured a victory on behalf of its client BMI against major concert promoters that helps BMI's affiliated songwriters, composers and music publishers earn more royalties when their copyrighted songs are performed at live concerts. "It sends an important message that the live-performance industry should recognize the value of those who craft the music that artists perform," Miller says. (The case is under appeal.) The firm also advises SoundExchange, Universal Music, Sony Music and Warner Music, among others.

Advice about AI now "AI will likely transform important aspects of the industry, from how music is made and distributed to ownership and rights issues," Miller says. "It's crucial for songwriters, composers, music publishers, record labels and performing artists to understand, at a granular level, the streaming platforms, licensing frameworks and compliance mechanisms that protect their artistic works — especially if copyright protections are weakened by deregulation and new technologies."

players

Scott Edelman

PARTNER

Orin Snyder

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF TRIALS
PRACTICE GROUP

GIBSON DUNN & CRUTCHER

Gibson Dunn & Crutcher has represented music industry powerhouses like Bob Dylan, Lady Gaga, Elton John and Mariah Carey over the years, as well as sports stars such as LeBron James. Other clients include nonmusic companies like AMC Networks and DraftKings — with the firm recently scoring a big win for the latter in a trade secret and noncompete lawsuit. Snyder also handles legal issues for OpenAI and other technology companies.

Charity I support “I am proud to serve on the board of directors of the David Lynch Foundation, which promotes Transcendental Meditation, particularly in at-risk communities,” Snyder says. “Having practiced TM for many years, I have seen firsthand its benefits in reducing stress, improving focus and fostering mental resilience.”

David C. Eisman

PARTNER/HEAD OF MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

SKADDEN ARPS SLATE MEAGHER & FLOM

Last year, Eisman guided the \$775 million sale of client Downtown Music Group to Virgin Music Group, the label and artists services division of Universal Music Group. The deal — expected to close in mid-2025 — will bring Downtown-owned CD Baby, FUGA and Songtrust to Virgin. Eisman also worked with Drake’s OVO Sound on the sale of a majority stake in the label’s catalog and artist roster to Sony Music’s Santa Anna Label Group in connection with a new partnership between the two labels. (The deal was followed by the chart-topping Billboard 200 debut in February of PartyNextDoor and Drake’s *Some \$exy \$ongs 4 U* through OVO Sound, Republic and Santa Anna.) Other Eisman clients include Dreamville Records, gamma., S10 Management, LitMUS Music, Shady Records and Ntertain.

Most pressing issue “Ensuring artists, including emerging and independent talent, are fairly compensated across all platforms and media types.”

Tim Epstein

PARTNER

DUGGAN BERTSCH

As a top attorney in the independent festival space, Epstein stayed busy helping his clients navigate a tumultuous season. He advised La Familia Presents founders Chris Den Uijl and Aaron Ampudia as they formed Collectiv Presents alongside Hulaween founder Michael Berg to buy back the Florida festival from Etix’s Travis Janovich. Duggan Bertsch is also pursuing monies owed by secondary-ticketing platform Lyte, which shut down without warning in September. “I tried to right the ship and find a solution for the industry,” Epstein says of the situation that left many concert promoters unpaid for hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of tickets sold on the platform, “but no one wanted to bite because it was too toxic and worthless.”

Most pressing issue “Food and beverage sales are also down because Generation Z consumes less alcohol than millennials or older generations.”



Adam J. Farag

FOUNDER/OWNER

AJ FARAG LAW

Farag’s law firm is the choice team for high-profile clients including Doja Cat, Coco & Breezy, Blaq Tuxedo and Songfinch. He says he develops trust with those he works with because he appreciates the pressure of being an artist. “In this demanding landscape, prioritizing both mental and physical well-being is more important than ever,” he says. “A balanced approach — through healthy eating, regular exercise, therapy and mindful habits — can help artists navigate these pressures without unnecessary strain. By taking care of themselves, they can sustain their creativity and career longevity while maintaining their well-being.”

Advice about AI now “If there’s an aspect of your artistry where you need support or lack resources, AI can help fill in the gaps — whether it’s generating chord progressions for a melody or refining production elements,” Farag says. “However, be mindful of how AI-generated content impacts originality and ownership. The key is to use AI to enhance your creativity, not replace it.”

Matt Finkelstein

PARTNER/MUSIC PRACTICE LEADER

ARENTFOX SCHIFF

Finkelstein, with his former law partner Ross Charap (now at the firm Barton; see page 66), won a victory for clients Mick Jagger and Keith Richards and all songwriters and their heirs who exercise termination rights under U.S. copyright law. They successfully argued for the Copyright Office to revoke a rule of the Mechanical Licensing Collective that resulted in terminated publishers continuing to receive MLC royalties after their rights had been discontinued. Additionally, Finkelstein represented BMG in its acquisition of Paul Simon’s royalty income from Simon & Garfunkel recordings, as well as his neighboring rights income, representing a substantial stake in Simon’s work.

Advice about AI now “AI is here to stay. Decide whether you want to lead or follow the lead of others in its use. We encourage our clients, whether music companies, recording artists or songwriters, to learn how AI technologies can be harnessed for good and their potential pitfalls and risks.”

Last August, **TIMBALAND’s** independent label, Mosley Music, teamed with Universal Music Group Nashville, and in October, the producer announced a partnership with AI music creation tool Suno. Timbaland is represented by attorney Jeff Gandel.

Sidney Fohrman

PARTNER OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA/CHAIR OF THE
MUSIC INDUSTRY PRACTICE

PAUL HASTINGS

Fohrman’s major transactions last year included work as outside music counsel to Create Music Group on more than 10 acquisitions, including deadmau5’s recording and publishing catalogs and label, and advising on CMG’s \$165 million investment from Flexpoint Ford at a \$1 billion valuation. Fohrman also represented BMG, HYBE America, ByteDance/TikTok and Primary Wave; for the lattermost, he worked on transactions such as acquisition and joint-venture partnership agreements with the Village People, including name, image and likeness rights. “The multifaceted deal will bring the Village People into the 21st century,” Fohrman says, “and to new audiences throughout the world in a variety of bold and innovative ways.”

Most pressing issue “Innovating economic models so that revenue sharing becomes more equitable. The status quo could result in the world missing out on the next Rihanna, Prince or U2. Heck, we may be now and don’t even know it.”

John Frankenheimer

CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY/
CHAIRMAN EMERITUS

Derek Crownover

VICE CHAIR OF MUSIC
INDUSTRY/CO-OFFICE
ADMINISTRATIVE PARTNER
OF NASHVILLE

Debbie White

VICE CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY

Tiffany Dunn

CO-OFFICE ADMINISTRATIVE
PARTNER OF NASHVILLE

Kenneth Kraus Monika Tashman

PARTNERS

LOEB & LOEB

Loeb & Loeb has guided numerous collaboration, venture, endorsement and sponsorship agreements with public and private companies for its clients, which include Big Loud Records, Warner Music Group, the Academy of Country Music, Sony Music Publishing, *American Idol*, Blondie, Luke Combs, Christina Aguilera, Diana Ross and Morgan Wallen. “We continue to represent both active buyers and sellers concerning a wide range of music [intellectual property] across all platforms and genres — approximately \$700 million in the past year alone,” Frankenheimer says, noting the firm is also helping develop projects for its clients that range from film and TV to sports and books.

Advice about AI now “Be very careful in every agreement that you enter into regarding the rights you are conveying and how they are monetized to ensure that you fully comprehend what is and is not permissible,” Frankenheimer says. “AI is evolving at unprecedented speed, and there will be continuing tension between those that grant rights and those that obtain them.”

Kenneth D. Freundlich

FOUNDING PRINCIPAL

FREUNDLICH LAW

Freundlich Law secured a temporary restraining order against Breakbeat Media for comedian Funny Marco that prevented the podcast network from issuing false take-down notices. The firm’s strategic defense of Bad Bunny in the dembow litigation effectively bifurcated the issue of “originality and protectability” to streamline legal processes and cut costs, according to Freundlich; he also represented Walter Afanasieff, a writer and producer of Mariah Carey’s “All I Want for Christmas Is You,” in a copyright infringement case. “We moved for summary judgment and sanctions against the plaintiff and their firm,” Freundlich says, “and the decision is currently pending.”

Charity I support “Harmony Project. This is an L.A.-based charity that puts instruments into the hands of underprivileged youth and provides lessons and groups to play in and venues for live concerts.”



The firm of Grubman Shire Meiselas & Sacks handled the legal work behind **LADY GAGA’s** new album, *MAYHEM*.

Jeffrey B. Gandel

FOUNDER

THE LAW OFFICE OF JEFFREY B. GANDEL

With clients including Timbaland and DJs such as ACRAZE, REZZ and GORDO, among other songwriters, producers and musicians, Gandel describes the music industry as “fun.” In August, Timbaland’s independent label, Mosley Music, teamed with Universal Music Group Nashville, and in October, the iconic producer announced a partnership with AI music creation tool Suno. “In this day and age as everyone is talking about AI,” Gandel says, “the most important thing is for each of my clients to understand what it is and how it interacts with their work.”

Charity I support “The Crohn’s and Colitis Foundation. Both of my children were diagnosed with Crohn’s disease. My son passed away from complications from that disease about six years ago. I am raising money to help find a cure so that no one has to go through that loss, and what my other kid goes through, to keep the disease in check.”

Eric German Christine Lepera Bradley Mullins David Steinberg

PARTNERS

MITCHELL SILBERBERG & KNUPP

Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp represents Dua Lipa, Drake, Daryl Hall, Post Malone, Kobalt and others, boasting one of the industry’s top litigation teams for artists, songwriters and music companies facing copyright lawsuits. Case in point: In 2023, it won the dismissal of a high-profile infringement case against Lipa over her smash hit “Levitating” and, in 2024, it helped Universal Music Group beat a copyright lawsuit over the song “Glow” by Drake and Ye. Kobalt Music Publishing also retained the firm for representation in a copyright infringement case involving Eminem’s publisher, Eight Mile Style, and Spotify in connection with ongoing litigation and appeals.

Most pressing issue “In connection with advocacy efforts for creators,” the most pressing issues with this new administration, Lepera says, are the ones “regarding secondary ticketing/concert pricing.”

Damien Granderson

PARTNER

Guy Blake

MANAGING PARTNER

Lynn Gonzalez Elizabeth Moody Colin Morrissey

PARTNERS

GRANDERSON DES ROCHERS

Granderson Des Rochers made significant strides with its impressive roster of clients, which includes A\$AP Rocky, J. Balvin, Ne-Yo, Wizkid, Snoh Aalegra and Queen Naija. The firm secured Coachella 2024 performance agreements for Balvin and Sid Sriram and played a vital role in constructing RAYE’s performance agreements for the 2025 Grammy and Academy Awards. It was also instrumental in A\$AP Rocky’s partnerships with Ray-Ban — where he became the eyewear company’s first creative director — and Puma Formula, and facilitated the deal between Antonio “L.A.” Reid and Usher’s Mega label and Larry Jackson’s gamma.

Advice about AI now “Always be aware of where your music is,” Granderson says, “and be apprised of unauthorized uses of your songs, voice and likeness, including in training materials.”

Matthew Greenberg

MANAGING PARTNER

Stephanie Chopurian-Valencia

PARTNER

GREENBERG CHOPURIAN-VALENCIA & ASSOCIATES

Greenberg and Chopurian-Valencia’s client list is a who’s who of Latin music that includes Farruko, Arcangel, Gerardo Ortiz and Prince Royce, as well as labels Big Ligas and Emporio Records. In the past year, the firm negotiated catalog sales for artists and songwriters exceeding \$40 million, including securing the worldwide recording and publishing rights for the father of late Venezuelan rapper Canserbero; negotiating joint venture and publishing administration agreements for Ovy on the Drums, Yandel and Sech; and developing motion picture and streaming series for several music-related properties. The practice also negotiated sponsorship or endorsement deals for its artist clients with consumer brands including Heineken and Stella Rosa.

Advice about AI now “Alert your label or distributor whenever you find unauthorized AI and press them to resolve,” Greenberg says.

Eric Greenspan
Aaron Rosenberg
Francois Mobasser
Jeffrey Light
Audrey Benoualid
Josh Karp
Craig Marshall
Tamara Milagros-Butler
Robert Minzner

PARTNERS

MYMAN GREENSPAN FOX ROSENBERG
MOBASSER YOUNGER & LIGHT

The firm's clients include both major artists — Ariana Grande, Big Sean, Common, Dead & Company, Erykah Badu, Jennifer Lopez, John Legend, Khruangbin, Meghan Trainor, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Tate McRae, Deftones and Troye Sivan — and leading executives such as Aaron Bay-Schuck, Ben Adelson, Katie Welle, Tunji Balogun, Tyler Arnold and Wendy Goldstein. "Over the past year, our firm has had the privilege of guiding several landmark moments," Rosenberg says, "but two stand out: Ariana Grande's seamless transition from global pop icon with *Eternal Sunshine* to her Oscar-nominated turn in *Wicked* and Dead & Company's historic residency at Sphere in Las Vegas. These deals showcase the intricate and evolving nature of artistry and the legal and strategic paths that make them possible."

Most pressing issue "Pay equity for songwriters," Rosenberg says. "All popular music begins and ends with the song, and we have not been taking care of creators in the way that we should. That needs to change."

Gary R. Greenstein

MEMBER

WILSON SONSINI GOODRICH & ROSATI

In 2024, Greenstein, who helms technology transactions at his firm in Washington, D.C., represented Marriott International after Sony Music Entertainment sued the hotel company for copyright infringement. SME alleged that Marriott and its influencer partners misused over 900 Sony songs from artists including Beyoncé, Harry Styles and Michael Jackson in advertising on social media platforms. In October, the music company dropped the case, and both entities ended the litigation with prejudice so it could not be refiled. Major music companies are an ongoing concern for Greenstein, who says, "The concentration of power among a handful of major licensors is limiting innovation and requiring enormous table stakes to enter the marketplace."

Charity I support "Human Rights Campaign as a defender of the rights of the transgender community. I am a parent to two transgender 21-year-olds."

Allen Grubman

FOUNDING PARTNER

Lawrence Shire

HEAD OF MOTION PICTURE, TV, THEATER, PUBLISHING,
 NEW MEDIA AND SPORTS

Kenny Meiselas

NAMED PARTNER/HEAD OF THE MUSIC DEPARTMENT

Eric Sacks

NAMED PARTNER/HEAD OF THE CORPORATE DEPARTMENT

GRUBMAN SHIRE MEISELAS & SACKS

The high-powered firm led by Rock & Roll Hall of Fame founder and inductee Grubman spent the last year and a half working on deals for music's biggest stars, including the upcoming Bruce Springsteen biopic *Deliver Me From Nowhere* starring Jeremy Allen White and Lady Gaga's new album, *MAYHEM*. The firm also represented Usher for his 2024 Super Bowl halftime show performance and endorsement deals with Ralph Lauren, BMW and Uber Eats, as well as The Weeknd for his latest album, the Billboard 200 No. 1 *Hurry Up Tomorrow*, and upcoming film of the same name. Plus, Sacks' department handles acquisitions by Live Nation, Sony Music, HYBE America and iHeartMedia, in addition to representing Atlantic CEO Elliot Grainge in transactions related to his 10K Projects' venture with Warner Music Group. **Most pressing issue** "To develop the next generation of superstar artists and executives," Meiselas says.

Michael Frisch of Herbsman Hafer Weber & Frisch negotiated the music rights from labels for all of GARLAND JEFFREYS' music for the award-winning documentary *Garland Jeffreys: The King of In Between*, which portrays the underrecognized artist whom Bruce Springsteen called "one of the American greats."

Jordan Gutglass

Evan Krauss

Daniel Shulman

Owen Sloane

PARTNERS

EISNER

Eisner represented Jon Batiste in the deal for the Grammy- and Academy Award-winning artist's first Jon Batiste Jazz Club, a 278-seat venue that opened in January at luxury resort Baha Mar in Nassau, Bahamas. Gutglass cites that deal, which allowed Eisner to "leverage several practice areas," as a recent highlight for the firm. Eisner's clients also include PartyNextDoor, the Aaliyah estate, Leon Thomas, KATSEYE, Sofi Tukker, Boi-1da, Hype Williams, Matchbox Twenty and Ceremony of Roses.

Charity I support "Music's Promise encourages and empowers artists, music companies and executives to use their influence to support causes that are important to them," Gutglass says. "Founded during the pandemic in 2020, Music's Promise recognized the unique position that the music industry had to create exciting ways to give back to its communities."

Pierre Hachar

FOUNDER/MANAGING PARTNER

Cody Pellicer

GENERAL PARTNER

THE HACHAR LAW GROUP

"We successfully structured and closed a worldwide licensing agreement with Island Records and a publishing administration deal with Sony Publishing for Gigi Perez following the meteoric success of her hit 'Sailor Song,' which reached No. 1 in the U.K. and charted globally," Hachar says of his firm's recent successes. The law group also represented Carín León in his landmark global partnership with Virgin Music Group and Island Records, which bolstered the musician internationally, and works with Carlos Rivera, Justin Quiles, Alejandra Guzmán, Chayanne, the Celia Cruz estate and HYBE Latin America, among others.

Most pressing issue "Building careers rather than songs," Hachar says. "With so much emphasis on virality, the industry is too focused on finding the hit rather than building the artist."

Joe Halbardier

OWNER

HALBARDIER

In 2024, Halbardier closed deals worth over \$150 million for its clients, who range from T-Pain to Surfaces and Grupo Frontera, according to the firm. "Highlights include advising T-Pain on the sale of a portion of his assets to HarbourView Equity Partners and Forrest Frank's breakout year as a solo artist," Halbardier says. While his clients continue to succeed, he points to ticket pricing as an ongoing "frustration" for artists, their fans and the promoters. "Artists want sellouts, fans want reasonable and transparent pricing and the promoters want to maximize their profits," Halbardier says. "If ticket sales have softened but promoters' profits have reached new levels, something isn't right."

Advice about AI now "We obviously have to protect our clients' creative works and copyrights, which so far the industry is doing a decent job of. The last thing we want is a flood of machine-made music flooding the market, so having strong guardrails in place is of utmost importance."



David L. Hecht

MANAGING PARTNER

HECHT PARTNERS

Hecht was lead counsel for choreographer Kyle Hanagami in a landmark copyright infringement case against Epic Games. A federal appeals court issued a first-of-its-kind ruling on copyright protections for dance routines in favor of the celebrity choreographer who has worked with BTS, Jennifer Lopez, Justin Bieber and Britney Spears. The firm won “an appeal in the Ninth Circuit that redefined the limits of protection for choreography in the era of ‘short form’ media and resulted in new law being established in the field,” Hecht says. Hanagami ended the case in 2024 after reaching an out-of-court agreement with Epic Games.

Most pressing issue “The lack of diversity and inclusion in some parts of the industry, particularly in positions of power and decision-making. Women, people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals still face significant barriers to equality in terms of recognition, opportunities and treatment within the industry.”

Jonas Herbsman

MANAGING PARTNER

Dorothy Weber

Michael Frisch

PARTNERS

HERBSMAN HAFER WEBER & FRISCH

Herbsman and partners — who represent clients including the Blue Note jazz clubs, Lenny Kravitz, Patti LaBelle, Judy Collins, Alice Coltrane, Foreigner, Art Garfunkel, Yoko Ono and the estates of John Lennon and Roberta Flack — worked “extensively” on the critically acclaimed 50th-anniversary box set of Lennon’s 1973 album, *Mind Games*, which arrived last July and, earlier this year, won the Grammy for best boxed or special limited-edition packaging. Frisch negotiated the music rights from labels for all of Garland Jeffreys’ music for the documentary *Garland Jeffreys: The King of In Between*.

Charity I support “I support Why Hunger, a charity founded by the late [musician] Harry Chapin and radio DJ Bill Ayres,” Herbsman says. “I believe in their mission to end hunger by providing long-term solutions and helping communities address the root causes of hunger at a grassroots level.”

Ken Hertz

FOUNDING PARTNER

Jamie Young

Ed Bugge

PARTNERS

HERTZ LICHTENSTEIN YOUNG & POLK

Hertz Lichtenstein Young & Polk’s roster ranges from Apple Music, Céline Dion and Gwen Stefani to Herbie Hancock, H.E.R. and Stevie Nicks. While the firm declines to disclose specific deals, Hertz and Young explain that they are maintaining a close eye on the various unresolved copyright issues related to the exponential acceleration of AI platforms, for they believe the technology is here to stay and should be embraced with caution. “The U.K.’s model to make licenses for data mining more available is the likely trend,” Young says. “But, on the flip side, the rise of AI should create greater value in live experiences and support continued growth in the concert touring business.”

Charity we support “In addition to directly supporting first responders and those affected by the wildfires, we strongly support the ACLU,” Young says. “The work of the ACLU in the defense of constitutional rights has never been more important than today. Unfortunately, the Constitution’s amendments cannot defend themselves.”

Larry Iser

MANAGING PARTNER

Jon Steinsapir

PARTNER

KINSELLA HOLLEY ISER KUMP STEINSAPIR

The longtime attorneys for Michael Jackson’s estate scored a California appellate court victory in August after what Iser calls a “contentious dispute” with the late King of Pop’s mother, Katherine Jackson. She had argued that the sale of half of Jackson’s \$1.2 billion catalog to Sony contradicted his will, which established a trust naming her and his children beneficiaries. The court determined that the will gave the executors “broad power of sale” and that they did not violate the contract when they struck the deal with Sony to purchase half of the catalog for more than \$600 million. The firm also represents Jackson Browne, Sofi Tukker, Del Records, Signature Tracks, the *Ron Miller Songbook*, Roland, Spectrasonics and Third Side Music, among others.

The music industry today in a word “Algorithms,” Iser says.

Erin M. Jacobson

FOUNDER/OWNER

ERIN M. JACOBSON

As founder and owner of her own boutique music law firm, Jacobson says she handles legal matters for a slate of artists that include “Oscar-, Emmy-, Golden Globe- and Grammy-winning songwriters” and “songwriters and/or artists of many *Billboard* No. 1 and top 10 hits,” as well as “evergreen catalogs, iconic TV theme songs, celebrated holiday classics, a variety of 1950s and 1960s artists and other eminent songwriters.” Recently, she has worked on complicated copyright termination projects for hit songs and a variety of sophisticated legacy and estate catalog issues. Though she does not disclose client names, she has negotiated “for large, multimillion-dollar catalog acquisitions, including acquisitions of writer’s shares.”

Most pressing issue “Unfortunately, the overall issue of fair payment for creators persists.”

Douglas L. Johnson

MANAGING PARTNER

Neville L. Johnson

SENIOR PARTNER

JOHNSON & JOHNSON

Johnson & Johnson recently settled a class action against Comedy Central for \$11 million on behalf of artists who had been shortchanged millions of their SiriusXM royalties, according to the firm. It’s also serving as lead counsel in a lawsuit filed by client Kobalt Music Publishing and other music companies against 14 NBA teams, alleging the basketball teams used songs by Migos, Britney Spears, Cardi B, Jay-Z, Outkast, Justin Bieber, Meek Mill, Wiz Khalifa, Lizzo, DJ Khaled, John Legend and others in social media clips without permission, with 14 separate actions filed in federal court in New York.

Charity we support “World Vision because they support kids who live in poverty,” Douglas says, “and 87% of every dollar donated goes directly to the children or families in need.”

Rusty Jones

ATTORNEY

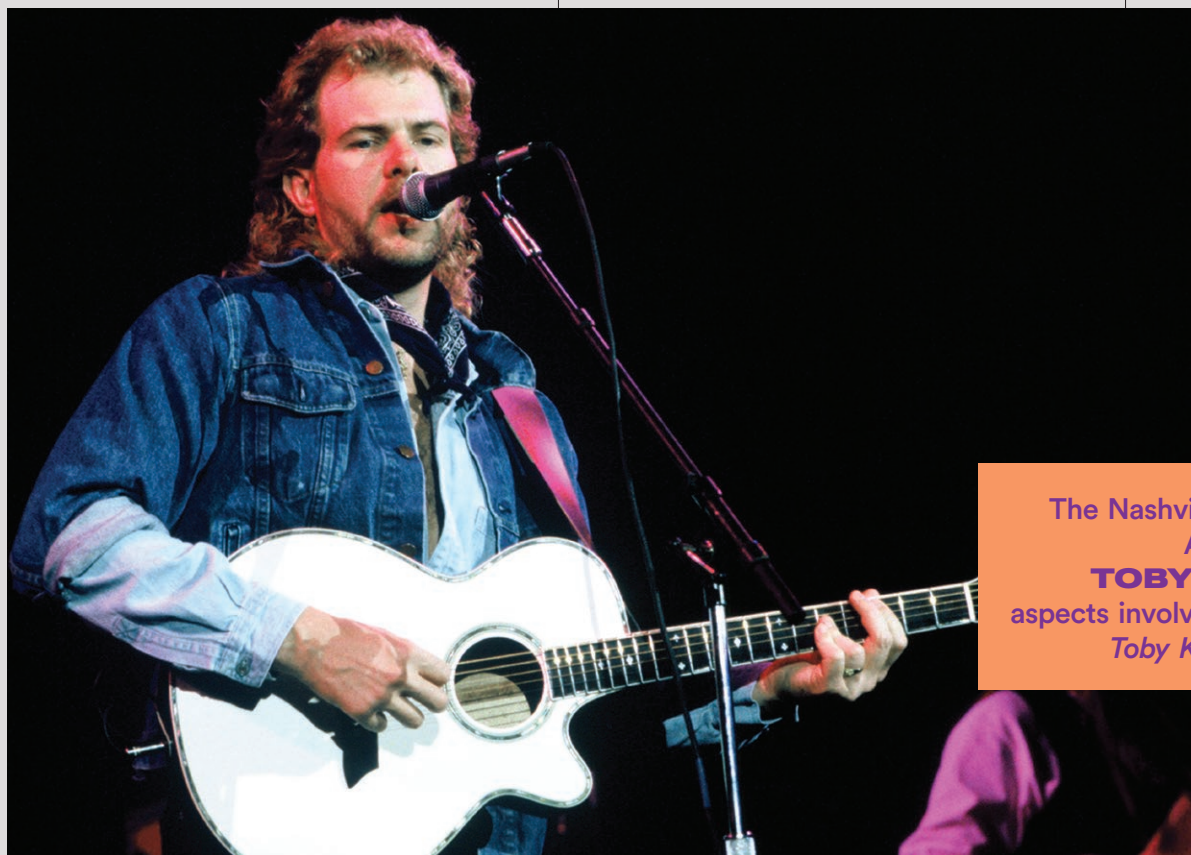
LAW OFFICE OF RUSSELL A. JONES JR. AND ASSOCIATES

Jones represents an array of artists including Garth

Brooks, Trisha Yearwood, Tim McGraw and the estate of Country Music Hall of Famer Toby Keith, who died in 2024 from stomach cancer. Over the past year, Jones worked on the legal aspects involved in bringing the NBC TV special *Toby Keith: American Icon* to music fans. The two-hour program, which aired in August and featured artists such as Jelly Roll, Carrie Underwood, Lainey Wilson and Darius Rucker paying tribute to Keith, drew 4.7 million viewers, according to Nielsen. When it comes to AI, Jones advises: “Watch out. It’s too early to see where this is going.”

Most pressing issue “Consolidation. Labels, publishing. It’s big guys gobbling up big guys right now.”

The Nashville firm of Russell A. Jones Jr. and Associates represents the estate of **TOBY KEITH** and worked on the legal aspects involved in bringing the NBC TV special *Toby Keith: American Icon* to music fans.





Mark Music & Media Law negotiated a deal with Pepsi for rapper **ICE SPICE** to appear in the brand's latest Super Bowl commercial.

Joshua A. Kamen
FOUNDER/OWNER

THE LAW OFFICES OF JOSHUA A. KAMEN

Kamen negotiated Teddy Swims' lucrative publishing administration deal with Warner Chappell Music following the success of his breakout hit, "Lose Control," which ruled the Hot 100 and was named the top Hot 100 song and top radio song at the 2024 Billboard Music Awards. Kamen even played the role of A&R executive when liaising between Teddy Swims and Giveon for their song, "Are You Even Real." In addition to that pair of artists, Kamen represents talent including 6LACK, JT, Yung Miami, OZ and Cubeatz.

Most pressing issue "Too many clearances, not enough lawyers. It feels like nearly every song these days has at least six writers and producers. And more often than not, these collaborators weren't in the room creating the song together and may not even know each other."

Jason Karlov

PARTNER/ENTERTAINMENT, MEDIA AND SPORTS PRACTICE
GROUP CHAIR

Brian Schall
Amanda Taber

PARTNERS

BARNES & THORNBURG

Barnes & Thornburg represents clientele including Bob Dylan, John Fogerty, T Bone Burnett, the NFL and the Grateful Dead's publishing company, Ice Nine. The firm also handled legal matters for the upcoming Bob Marley exhibit, "Hope Road," that is slated to open later this year at Las Vegas' Mandalay Bay and will offer fans an immersive experience celebrating the reggae legend's life and music.

Advice about AI now "Take a wait-and-see approach if you can afford to do so, but if you can't wait, then strike while things are hot for the shortest term possible, the most money and preserve your future rights including post-term reversion rights," Karlov says. "How AI plays out will continue to evolve like many technologies we have seen historically in the music business."

Priyanka Khimani

FOUNDER/MANAGING PARTNER

KHIMANI & ASSOCIATES

Based in Mumbai, India, Khimani advises companies such as Reservoir, Snap, Songtrader and GoldState Music, and artists including Academy Award-winning composer A.R. Rahman; Canada's AP Dhillon, the first rapper of Indian origin signed to Republic Records; and Indian singer-songwriter Jasleen Royal, who opened for Coldplay in India. Among her recent achievements: "We advised and represented 13 leading independent artists and singer-songwriters in India, including Anuv Jain, on a strategic, first-of-its-kind partnership with Universal Music India."

Most pressing issue "We need an overhaul of the publishing and collection society ecosystem. [Performing rights organizations] were set up much before a thriving, fast-paced digital streaming era existed. Territorywise, negotiations or piecemeal clearance of rights ends up being needlessly time-consuming and expensive."

Howard King
Peter Paterno
Laurie Soriano
Joseph Carlone
Leslie Frank
Marjorie Garcia
Scott McDowell
Michael Rexford
Jacqueline Sabec

PARTNERS

KING HOLMES PATERNO & SORIANO

Client Tyler, The Creator had a busy 2024. The artist's eighth album, *Chromakopia*, ruled the Billboard 200 for three weeks, marking his third No. 1 on the chart. Beyond his recorded-music success, King notes the firm "negotiated and papered all transactions" for Tyler, including merchandise and video-game deals, his Golf Le Fleur fashion line, 2025 world tour and festival Camp Flog Gnaw Carnival, which celebrated its 10th edition in 2024. The company also represents Dr. Dre, Metallica, Nicole Scherzinger, Twenty One Pilots, Van Morrison, Alanis Morissette, Sia, Frank Ocean, Ms. Lauryn Hill, Carole King, blink-182 and the estate of Tupac Shakur.

Charity we support "Metallica's All Within My Hands Foundation," Paterno says, "because Metallica is a very longtime and beloved client of ours and we fully believe in their foundation's laudable work in supporting workforce education, the fight against hunger and other critical civic issues."

Russell L. King

DIRECTOR

KING LAW FIRM

King says that he provides "the tools that my non-U.S. clients need for live performances, from tax efficiency through prospective agreements with the IRS, help with visas and [navigating] sponsorship and endorsement deals." With a client list that includes Maluma, Juan Luis Guerra, Emilia, Quevedo, Melendi and Andrés Cepeda, he has had no shortage of international travel to follow. Maluma's 2025 +Pretty +Dirty tour dates span several continents, and Argentine artist Emilia has increased her time spent in the United States as part of her effort to globally expand.

Most pressing issue "There has been

a rise in lawsuits that allege that certain fundamental components and building blocks of music are in fact protected intellectual property. This has a stifling effect on creativity and needlessly bogs down musicians in energy-sapping litigation."

Christiane Kinney

PRESIDENT

KINNEY LAW

As an attorney specializing in copyright and intellectual property law, Kinney has spent the last year and a half ensuring "our clients retain control over their works, as well as their name, image, unique vocal features and likeness, building in strong contractual protections against the use of AI and fighting back against deepfakes and other technological abuses." Although Kinney declines to reveal her firm's client list, she says that handling "music catalog sales, termination of transfer rights and negotiating deals and partnerships with companies and brands who have a forward-thinking mindset that values artists" are among her recent achievements.

Charity I support "I co-founded a nonprofit organization called Hearts Giving Hope Foundation in 2002, which is dedicated to improving the lives of abused and underprivileged children by providing them with positive outlets of self-expression and growth through music and visual arts."

Mark Kraiss
Simon Goodbody

PARTNERS

BRAY & KRAISS

Kraiss and Goodbody, who represent such iconic British acts as The Rolling Stones and Elton John along with younger ones like Skepta, Ed Sheeran and Mumford & Sons, have been involved in one of the live sector's biggest recent stories: the Oasis reunion tour, which is set to play more than 40 dates across four continents when it begins later this year. The two lawyers negotiated the necessary paperwork and agreements for the band's notoriously at-odds Gallagher brothers, paving the way for their first shows together since 2009.

Advice about AI now "Get involved," Goodbody says. "The voices of artists and creators are crucial for the debate as we try and navigate what we want the future of AI — and music — to look like and what limits we should place on it."

Dina LaPolt

FOUNDER

Lindsay Arrington

Dominic Chaklos

Mariah Comer

PARTNERS

LaPOLT LAW

LaPolt expanded her reach this year with the launch of LaPolt Media, a company focused on content production, but the powerhouse attorney says that her firm remains her “first passion and first priority.” Though LaPolt Law declines to cite specific cases for confidentiality reasons, its clients include Cardi B, 21 Savage, deadmau5, Steven Tyler, Mary J. Blige and Tinashe. “Our firm continues to be at the forefront of major industry negotiations, policy advocacy and high-profile legal matters that shape the future of music and artists’ rights,” LaPolt says.

Most pressing issue “The further consolidation of the music business and the political massacre” of diversity, equity and inclusion, LaPolt says. “As companies scale back or eliminate [DEI] initiatives, we’re seeing a disproportionate impact on women and people of color — many of whom are the first to be laid off.”

Shay M. Lawson

MANAGING ATTORNEY

LAW FIRM OF LAWSON MCKINLEY

Lawson McKinley remains a choice firm among R&B and hip-hop artists, representing clients ranging from Offset and Xscape to producers Henny Tha Bizness (Kendrick Lamar, Jeezy, Chris Brown) and Groove (Mustard, Smino, Anwar Carrots). The team oversaw the legal aspects of Xscape’s co-headlining Queens of R&B Tour with SWV, which featured special guests MYA, 702 and Total. Despite the tour’s success, Lawson points to “the harm to consumers and artists from ticketing bots and inflated secondary-market prices” as a major issue facing the music industry.

Advice about AI now “AI has as many opportunities as it does challenges. Go take advantage of the exciting opportunities. Let the lawyers handle the challenges.”

Bill Leibowitz

FOUNDER/PARTNER

WILLIAM R. LEIBOWITZ LAW GROUP

The Leibowitz Law Group assisted in the transactions that resulted in the publicly held Hipgnosis Songs Fund going private. “Since I had represented the public Hipgnosis company in the negotiation and drafting of almost all of its intellectual property acquisition agreements, I had intimate knowledge of the agreements and the background and dynamics of their negotiation,” Leibowitz says. Blackstone completed its \$1.6 billion acquisition of Hipgnosis in July. The firm’s other notable clients include rock bands INXS, Iron Maiden and Of Mice & Men, as well as Global Merchandising Services.

Most pressing issue “For recording artists, it will be achieving success — either by virtue of victories in the federal courts or by amendment of current copyright statutes — that will establish their right to terminate a record company’s ownership of U.S. rights in the artists’ master recordings pursuant to Section 203 of the U.S. Copyright Act.”

Kent Marcus

OWNER/PARTNER

MARCUS & COLVIN

Marcus represents Lainey Wilson, whose recent accolades include the 2024 Academy of Country Music Awards for entertainer of the year and female artist of the year, the 2024 Country Music Association Award for female vocalist of the year and the 2024 Grammy for best country album. His client roster also boasts Kings of Leon and Charley Crockett, while his partner, Jeff Colvin, represents 2024 best new artist Grammy nominees Noah Kahan and The War and Treaty. Colvin played “an integral part of renegotiating Kahan’s recording agreement with Republic Records,” says Marcus, who also counseled Kings of Leon when the band transitioned to Capitol Records and Crockett as he signed his first major-label deal with Island Records.

Charity we support “The Busyhead Project, a mental health initiative founded by Noah Kahan, and the Out of the Woods Foundation, founded by Jeff Colvin and his wife to fund the recovery and rehabilitation of children who have sustained brain and spinal cord injuries.”

Doug Mark

FOUNDING PARTNER

David Ferreria

Leon Morabia

Harry Roberts

Jared Tankel

PARTNERS

MARK MUSIC & MEDIA LAW

Mark Music & Media Law has recently helped several clients leverage music stardom into lucrative opportunities outside of the industry. Morabia cites three examples of the firm’s negotiating prowess: a deal with Pepsi for rapper Ice Spice to appear in the brand’s latest Super Bowl commercial; a contract with Harper Collins for Benny Blanco’s cookbook, which entered *The New York Times*’ bestsellers list; and the agreements for the production and theatrical release of Laufey’s *A Night at the Symphony: Live at the Hollywood Bowl*. The firm also represents Amy Allen, Guns N’ Roses and The Chainsmokers, among others.

Advice about AI now “Great music has a unique, intangible quality that no algorithm can replicate,” Morabia says, “and that authenticity will always cut through the noise.”

Benjamin Marks

PARTNER/HEAD OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND MEDIA PRACTICE

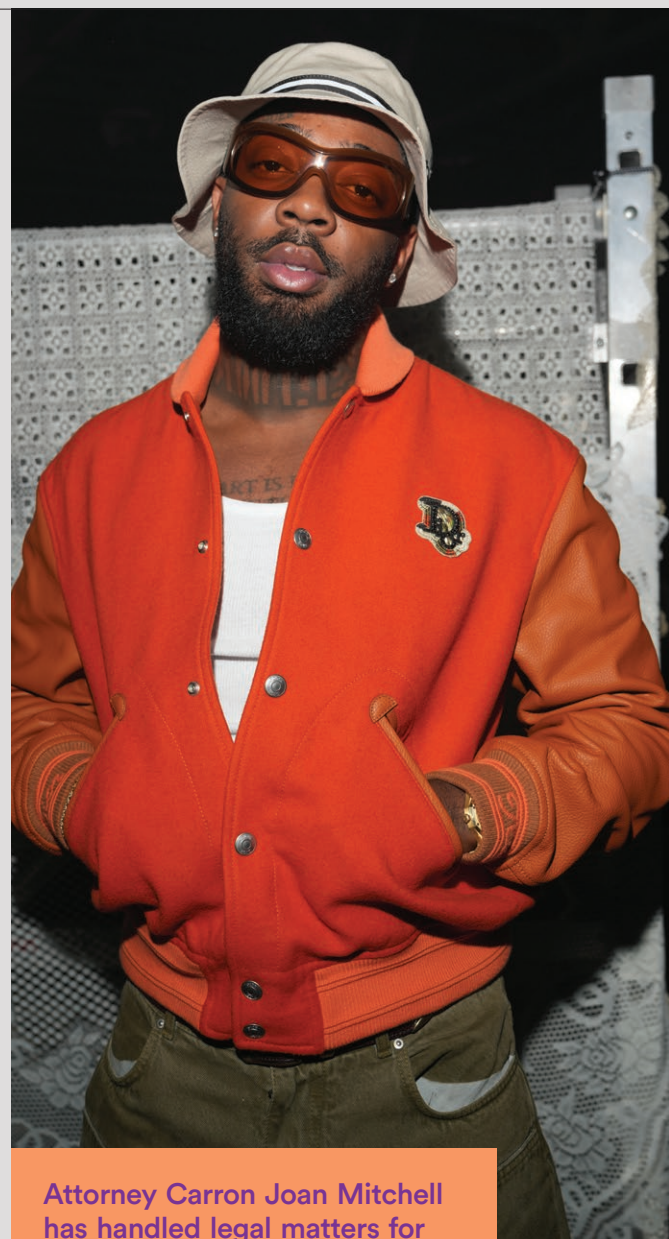
Todd Larson

PARTNER, INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND MEDIA PRACTICE

WEIL GOTSHAL & MANGES

Lined up against SoundExchange and the major labels, Weil Gotshal & Manges represents SiriusXM and Pandora in the Copyright Royalty Board’s Web VI proceeding, which will set statutory noninteractive streaming rates for the next five years with hundreds of millions of dollars in royalties at stake. Larson and Marks also work with Meta, Spotify, TuneCore, the North American Concert Promoters Association and more as clients. Larson adds that “how to promote competitive markets and competitive-market outcomes for licensing music rights from record companies, music publishers and their respective collecting societies” is a major issue facing the industry, the result “of which is stifling growth and innovation throughout the music ecosystem.”

Advice about AI now “Unfortunately, it’s still wait and see,” Larson says, “but as courts start deciding the fair-use questions at the root of the many pending cases, the legal picture will clear up significantly.”



Attorney Carron Joan Mitchell has handled legal matters for **BRENT FAIYAZ**, including the launch of his creative agency, ISO Supremacy.

Gavin Maude

PARTNER/HEAD OF MUSIC

Chris Gossage

Simon Jordan

Ryan Vince

PARTNERS

RUSSELLS

Russells represents leading companies including Universal Music Group, Sony Music Publishing, Warner Chappell Music and Primary Wave; top artists such as The Weeknd, Roger Waters and Lana Del Rey; and four of the five 2025 BRIT Awards best new artist nominees. In the past year, the firm’s business included advising Coldplay on its *Music of the Spheres* tour, which set a record in January for the largest stadium shows of the 21st century with two concerts in India. It also worked with Sony Music Publishing on the acquisition of Tame Impala’s catalog.

Most pressing issue “Unpredictable financial markets, inflation rates and a significant increase in red tape in crossing borders in mainland Europe have led to persistent increases in the costs of global touring,” Jordan says. “Coupled with the fact that fans are saving their money to go to fewer but [more expensive] events, it is harder and harder for artists to tour.”

Ed McPherson

PARTNER

McPHERSON

With more than 40 years of experience, McPherson has built a notable client list that includes Kelly Clarkson, Travis Scott, Linkin Park, Justin Timberlake, Tool and Bret Michaels. Most recently, McPherson has worked to protect his clients from their own managers. “We continue to be vigilant about protecting artists’ rights against managers that blatantly violate the Talent Agencies Act, seeking commissions for entire tours that they unlawfully procure or seeking commissions in perpetuity,” he says. The managers keep filing de novos, a challenge of an arbitration award or a previous court’s decision, after the artist prevails at the California Labor Commission, “only to get the same result in [the state] Superior Court.”

Charities I support “Planned Parenthood, because they do good, essential work for people that really need them. Wounded Warriors, because they do good, essential work for people that really need them.”

Louis “Skip” Miller Sasha Frid

PARTNERS

MILLER BARONDESS

Miller Baroness represents Mötley Crüe, Logic, Azealia Banks, Gavin Rossdale and Big Time Rush, and Frid cites recent court victories including securing a confidential settlement for business manager Thomas St. John against Ye for breach of a business management agreement. The firm also won a federal jury defense verdict while representing William “Smokey” Robinson, whose former manager had sued the Motown legend for breach of contract and alleged commissions due from the artist’s concerts and tours. Also in the win column: another verdict in favor of music technology firm Virtual Sonics against former investors seeking millions of dollars.

Most pressing issue “Marketing, promotion and artist development,” Frid says. “Getting your label and manager to put you on the right track.”

Mike Milom David Crow

MEMBERS

MILOM CROW KELLEY BECKETT SHEHAN

The company represents an array of clients such as Kelsea Ballerini, Luke Bryan, Scotty McCreery, Carly Pearce, Emmylou Harris, Alabama, Lindsay Ell, Ricky Skaggs and Keith Urban. Milom Crow Kelley Beckett Shehan still represents both buyers and sellers in catalog sales, as well as in new artist signings and joint ventures, in addition to sponsorship and endorsement activities as the firm’s clients team with various brands. With labels “no longer performing many of the traditional artist-development activities as they have in the past,” Milom says the responsibility has fallen to publishers and managers. “This, in turn,” he adds, “has impacted deal structures, and newer deals often won’t support labels sticking with a new artist for multiple releases.”

The music industry today in a word “Recalibrating,” Milom says.

Carron Joan Mitchell Farrah Usmani

PARTNERS

NIXON PEABODY

Mitchell and Usmani had their hands full in 2024. Mitchell handled all legal matters for breakout R&B star Brent Faiyaz, including the launch of his creative agency, ISO Supremacy, and Vince Staples relied on him for business such as the release of his final album with Def Jam, *Dark Times*, and his Netflix series, *The Vince Staples Show*, which was picked up for a second season. Usmani addresses all business affairs for Russian group Pussy Riot in North America and attended to legal needs for Rainbow Kitten Surprise, including the renegotiation of the band’s publishing partnership with Kobalt Music.

Charity I support “Girls Write Nashville is a 501(c)(3) that provides after-school music education to kids in the Nashville metro area,” Usmani says. “I support them because they empower young songwriters to find their voice, build confidence and express themselves through music in a supportive community.”

Zia Modabber

MANAGING PARTNER OF THE CALIFORNIA OFFICES/
CHAIR OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA LITIGATION

KATTEN

Modabber’s clients include Live Nation, the Michael Jackson estate, André 3000, Stevie Wonder and Trent Reznor, whom Modabber represents “across all of his projects,” including Nine Inch Nails and its 2025 tour and Reznor’s acclaimed and award-winning film and TV score work. In January, Reznor and Atticus Ross won their third Golden Globe for best original score for the film *Challengers*, while Nine Inch Nails is scoring the upcoming Disney film *TRON: Ares*. “Our work also includes [Reznor’s] nascent production company, With Teeth,” Modabber adds.

Advice about AI now “Know your rights when it comes to right of publicity and name/image/likeness. There are new laws in California, Tennessee and elsewhere regarding right of publicity, unauthorized digital replicas and deepfakes and AI.”

Jeffrey Movit

PARTNER/HEAD OF LITIGATION

CHAUDHRYLAW

In January, Movit’s clients Artist Partner Group, Artist Publishing Group and Release Global launched a copyright infringement action against Create Music Group and its affiliates, accusing the company of uploading and monetizing songs without holding the proper ownership rights. Additionally, the suit alleges that CMG has interfered with artists’ established contracts. “Our complaint demonstrates that APG will aggressively protect its contracts and copyrights,” Movit said in a statement at the time. (CMG has disputed the claims.) Other clients include Ronald Isley, Dr. Luke, Polo G, Ultra International Music Publishing and Playboi Carti, whose album *MUSIC* earned 30 simultaneous entries on the Hot 100 and debuted atop the Billboard 200 in March.

Advice about AI now “Keep up with the latest developments because the landscape is constantly shifting.”

Andrew Myers

PRINCIPAL/CEO

**Peter Button
Berkeley Edwards
Alastair Kenwood
Nicky Stein
Victoria Wood**

PRINCIPALS

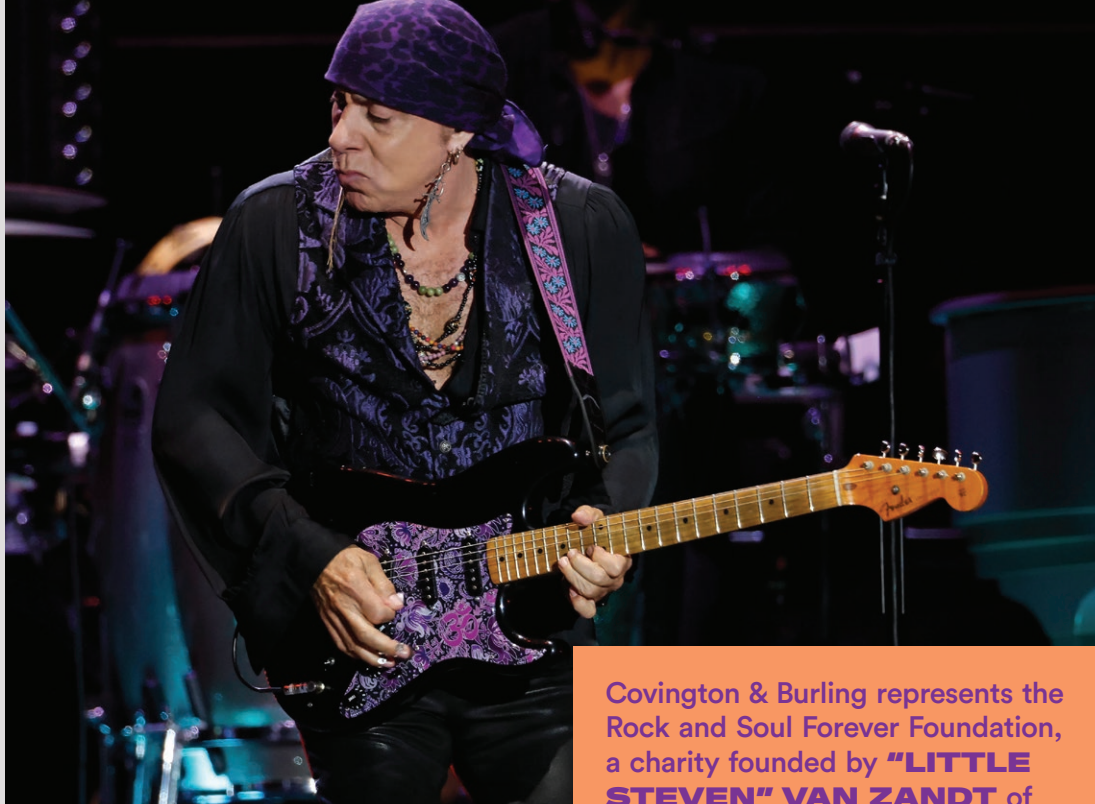
CLINTONS

As Charli xcx romped through 2024 — earning six Hot 100 hits from her *brat* album and remix sequel *brat and it’s completely different but also still brat* that featured collaborations with Robyn, Lorde, Kesha and Sweat tourmate Troye Sivan, among others — Clintons was “intricately involved in the negotiation and structuring of all of the global branding and sponsorship deals” that accompanied the album, according to Edwards. Charli is just one of the firm’s high-flying clients, who also include Chappell Roan, The Who, The Cure, The Jam’s Paul Weller, Radiohead, The 1975, Daft Punk, Fred again..., Lewis Capaldi, Stereophonics and Barry Can’t Swim.

Charity we support “As a firm, we support different charities each year,” Edwards says. “I personally am a trustee for the National Foundation of Youth Music, which supports music education in disadvantaged communities.”



Gang Tyre Ramer Brown & Passman oversaw **RANDY NEWMAN**’s sale in October of his share of his recorded-music and publishing rights to Litmus Music.



Aliya Nelson
PARTNER

Sandra Brown
Alan Clarke
Jerry Juste
OF COUNSEL

GREENSPOON MARDER

In negotiations handled by Clarke, Greenspoon Marder represented boutique music rights investment company MusicBird in its latest portfolio expansion that covered mixing and neighboring rights. The acquisition marked MusicBird's sixth investment since 2021, expanding its portfolio to more than 1,500 songs across 70 different artists with a catalog that boasts album sales of over 50 million units globally, according to the firm, including collaborations with acts such as Jason Derulo, OneRepublic and One Direction. Greenspoon Marder also represents Durand Bernarr's DSing Records, Akon and Jermaine Dupri, among others.

Most pressing issue "Fair compensation for artists in the streaming era," Clarke says. "To address this challenge, it would require an industrywide collaboration to create a more equitable revenue model to ensure artists are being fairly compensated."

Matt Oppenheim

CO-FOUNDING PARTNER/MANAGING PARTNER

Scott Zebrak

CO-FOUNDING PARTNER

Jeff Gould

Alexander Kaplan

PARTNERS

OPPENHEIM + ZEBRAK

Two years after music publishers including Universal Music Group, Concord Music Group and ABKCO (all Oppenheim + Zebrak clients) filed a complaint against Anthropic over the unlawful use of lyrics to train its AI models, a judge approved an agreement in January saying Anthropic must maintain existing guardrails to train future AI models and music publishers may intervene when they suspect copyright infringement. But in March, the court declined the publishers' request for an injunction that would have immediately blocked Anthropic from using copyrighted lyrics to train said models, saying the music companies could not show that they faced the kind of "irreparable harm" necessary to win such a drastic remedy.

Most pressing issue "After years of efforts to build a sustainable and profitable streaming business," Oppenheim says, "we are now seeing numerous efforts to improperly divert streaming payments from the legitimate music industry."

Covington & Burling represents the Rock and Soul Forever Foundation, a charity founded by "LITTLE STEVEN" VAN ZANDT of The E Street Band that includes TeachRock.org, a curriculum that uses music to help students from kindergarten through 12th grade in all academic disciplines.

Ed Pagano

PARTNER

Casey Higgins

SENIOR COUNSEL

AKIN GUMP

As the top lawyers for the National Independent Venue Association and the Fix the Tix Coalition, Higgins and Pagano have been working on both state and federal legislation to repair the ticket-buying experience for fans and combat scalpers. Last year, Fix the Tix worked closely with a bipartisan coalition of members of both chambers of Congress, along with artists like Chappell Roan, to introduce the Fans First Act. They argue that FFA is a stronger version of the TICKET Act, which Higgins and Pagano also led negotiations for and became the first ticketing-reform legislation to pass either chamber of Congress when the House of Representatives voted in favor of it in May 2024.

Most pressing issue "Venues and artists continue to face a complex set of challenges causing economic strain that threatens the independent music ecosystem," Higgins says. "If venues can't afford to operate and artists can't afford to tour, what are the alternatives?"

Lulu M. Pantin

PARTNER

LOOP LEGAL

The firm's clients include artists Thundercat and Flying Lotus, producer Trackside, artist-songwriter Georgia Ku and multi-instrumentalist/singer Pedro Martins, as well as athletes, music festivals, art galleries and executives. "We treat catalogs as family heirlooms," Pantin says. "Each heirloom receives white-glove service, with a strategy uniquely tailored to the family's goals. It is reminiscent of my first job in music working on the Jim Morrison, Rick James, Janis Joplin and Tupac Shakur estates, where I learned art's impact and value can be perpetual. Work like this furthers our mission to make music a sustainable asset."

Most pressing issue "Sexual misconduct and exploitation. #MeToo did not improve the music community. Violent offenders continue to be nominated for — and win — Grammy Awards. I am alarmed by how many victims I've encountered while working on routine entertainment transactions."

Don Passman
Ethan Schiffres

PARTNERS

Gene Salomon

MANAGING PARTNER

GANG TYRE RAMER BROWN & PASSMAN

Last fall, client Taylor Swift wrapped her 149-date, two-year The Eras Tour, reportedly earning more than \$2 billion — and fellow client P!nk concluded her 18-month Summer Carnival tour, which, with nearly \$700 million grossed, became the second-highest-grossing tour in history among women, behind only Swift's multibillion-dollar juggernaut. The Beverly Hills firm also oversaw Randy Newman's October sale of his share of his recorded-music and publishing rights to Litmus Music. "Randy's a national treasure," Salomon says. That deal followed client Neil Finn of Crowded House and Split Enz selling his publishing catalog to Primary Wave in April 2024.

The music industry today in a word "Exciting," Salomon says. "There's so much opportunity right now. The business has found its footing after a number of years of difficult times."

Roger L. Patton

FOUNDER/PRINCIPAL

LAW OFFICES OF ROGER L. PATTON

Patton — whose clients include Africa Creative Agency, Grammy-winning South African star Tyla and producers RoccStar (Chris Brown), Bankroll Got It (Megan Thee Stallion, Latto) and Nick Lee (Ariana Grande, Lil Nas X) — says he "recently structured a label distribution deal" for Africa Creative Agency's new record label, Exodus Records. "The mission of Exodus Records is to dispel the notion that Afrobeats is the only genre of music from Africa," Patton says. "They are dedicated to introducing the world to myriad African musical genres including African hip-hop, R&B, neo-soul, *kwaito*, Afro house, *amapiano*, Afro-fusion and more."

Most pressing issue "The devaluation of music by the streaming platforms — paying minuscule fractions of pennies for streams. While streaming has revolutionized access to music, it has drastically reduced the economic value of recorded music, making it nearly impossible for new artists to sustain themselves without big-brand deals or touring."

Michael Perlstein

Robert Lieberman

PARTNERS

FISCHBACH PERLSTEIN LIEBERMAN & ALMOND

Over the past year, Fischbach Perlstein Lieberman & Almond oversaw the sale of music catalogs to BMG and peermusic and the acquisition of catalogs for GoDigital and parent company Cinq Recordings; those deals totaled over \$100 million. And although client Bob Dylan joined TikTok this year — debuting with a single post in January that urged potential followers to "explore the world of Bob Dylan, now on TikTok" — Lieberman says that social media stats have become too prominent in the modern industry. "Without social media numbers, it is impossible for talented new recording artists to get noticed," he says. "Talent is talent, which may not be reflected in their social media numbers."

Advice for AI now "Do not grant your name and likeness rights in connection with artificial intelligence creation of your songs or recordings," Lieberman says.

Adrian Perry

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA INDUSTRY GROUP/CO-CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY GROUP

Neema Sahni

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA INDUSTRY GROUP/CO-CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY GROUP/CO-CHAIR OF COMMERCIAL LITIGATION PRACTICE

Jonathan Sperling

PARTNER/CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY GROUP

Phillip Hill

SPECIAL COUNSEL

COVINGTON & BURLING

The firm represents industry leaders like Sony Music Entertainment and BMI and represented Vice President Kamala Harris in music-related matters during her presidential bid, including the licensing of Beyoncé's anthemic "Freedom" for the candidate's campaign launch announcement. The firm also represents companies on the vanguard of AI, like Jen Music AI and Image-Line Software. "AI isn't going anywhere, and like other technological advances, the industry should seek to harness it," Perry says. "Staying on the sidelines will not ease anyone's fears or allow the industry to take advantage of the benefits of these innovations."

Charity we support "We represent the Rock and Soul Forever Foundation, a charity founded by 'Little Steven' Van Zandt of The E Street Band," Perry says. "It seeks to integrate music and music history into school curricula to make learning more accessible and relevant, which is something we really enjoy supporting as pro bono counsel."

Daniel Petrocelli

TRIAL PRACTICE CHAIR/FIRM VICE CHAIR

David Marroso

GENERAL LITIGATION PRACTICE CHAIR

Leah Godesky

PARTNER

Terrence Dugan

OF COUNSEL

O'MELVENY & MYERS

O'Melveny & Myers represents the performing rights company Global Music Rights, "the innovative startup that advocates for composers such as Bruno Mars, Don Henley, Lizzo, Bad Bunny, Nicki Minaj, Bruce Springsteen, Gwen Stefani and Harry Styles," Petrocelli says. In January 2024, GMR filed a copyright lawsuit against Vermont Broadcast Associates, a Vermont-based group of seven radio stations, for allegedly playing 66 songs in the GMR catalog since 2017 without a license, amounting to 1,600 violations of copyright law. In April, GMR and VBA reached an agreement that includes a long-term GMR license, as well as settlement of past alleged infringements.

Advice about AI now "Protection of artists and their rights is and will always be the most paramount issue in the music industry," Petrocelli says. "Without the blood, sweat and tears and creative brilliance of artists, there would be no music."

Tabetha D. Plummer

FOUNDER/CEO

PLUMMER LAW GROUP

CO-FOUNDER/PARTNER

PLUMMER CARLYLE WILLIAMS

Plummer cites the "powerful and strategic merger" of her Plummer Law Group with Carlyle Legal and Group 1 Law as a recent professional milestone "combining decades of expertise in sports, entertainment, intellectual property and corporate law." Clients include Grammy winner and Super Bowl LIX performer Ledisi, Emmy-winning music director Adam Blackstone and former NFL star/Colorado Buffaloes head coach Deion Sanders. "This groundbreaking partnership creates a full-service legal powerhouse designed to offer a broader, more dynamic platform, deliver innovative strategies and provide next-level client service," Plummer says.

Most pressing issue "The introduction of new technology resulting in a drastic decline in sales and revenue distribution for music creators — artists, producers and songwriters, [as well as] job layoffs throughout a once thriving and very lucrative industry."

Michael Poster

PARTNER/MUSIC ACQUISITIONS AND FINANCING CHAIR

MICHELMAN & ROBINSON

The firm's client GoldState Music acquired portfolios of music publishing and recorded-music royalty income streams from music asset investment firms CatchPoint Rights and AMR Songs. Both deals employed a structure adapted from private equity exit transactions, "which is rarely used in the music industry," Poster says. "This required a knowledge of music rights, corporate structure and the methods used in other industries to sell these types of portfolios of rights in an efficient manner." The CatchPoint portfolio includes stakes in Ye's "Flashing Lights" (featuring Dwele) and Sheryl Crow's "If It Makes You Happy." Meanwhile, the AMR catalog includes John Sebastian's writer's share of the Lovin' Spoonful tracks "Summer in the City," "Daydream" and "Do You Believe in Magic."

Charities I support "City Harvest, The Trevor Project, the Environmental Defense Fund, Doctors Without Borders and my alma mater, the University of Massachusetts."

Edwin J. Prado

FOUNDER

PRADO LAW OFFICES

Prado's client roster includes Puerto Rican stars Don Omar, MC Ceja, Darell, Anuel AA and Bryant Myers, whom he has represented in various capacities. Most recently, he negotiated deals with Kobalt for producer HYDRO (Bad Bunny, Eladio Carrión), songwriter-producer Angel Sandoval (Peso Pluma, Grupo Firme) and producer-composer BASSY (Eladio Carrión). Two high-profile criminal cases have been on his docket in the last year: He successfully defended Puerto Rican rapper CDobleta, helping him obtain the dismissal of weapon charges, and is representing the artist in a federal capital murder case. Prado also represented record executive-producer Raphy Pina, who was released from prison last year, in his criminal case for gun possession and his appellate process.

The music industry today in a word "Transformative. This term encapsulates the dynamic and evolving nature of the music industry."

Gregor Pryor

MANAGING PARTNER, EUROPE AND MIDDLE EAST

Steve Sessa

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA INDUSTRY GROUP

Josh Love

Eric Marder

Ed Shapiro

PARTNERS

REED SMITH

Reed Smith counts among its A-list clients Rihanna, Nicki Minaj, Justin Bieber, Bon Jovi, The Smashing Pumpkins, Korn, Kesha, Lil Uzi Vert, John Summit, Kaskade, Fatboy Slim, Concord, Sony, Lyric, Kobalt, Hipgnosis, Litmus, Iconic, Seeker, Roc Nation, Amazon Music, SoundCloud, YouTube, Firebird and BandLab. "Given the breadth and scope of our practice," Sessa says, "the biggest legal issue involving our firm is maintaining a neutral position to advise clients on all sides of the AI debate."

Advice about AI now "Be cautious when using AI tools in your creative process," Sessa says. "AI-generated content is likely to be considered copyright-free and in the public domain, which can make works that incorporate it unprotectable. While the legal framework is still developing, the current reality presents significant risks for artists and rights holders."

Ritholz Levy Fields represented **CYNDI LAUPER** in a deal with Swedish entertainment company Pophouse, which included her music assets and the creation of a joint venture for the exploitation of her music and name, image and likeness.

William T. "Bill" Ramsey Mariam Stockton

PARTNERS

NEAL & HARWELL

Ramsey and Stockton work with some of country music's biggest names, including Garth Brooks, Kenny Chesney, Keith Urban, Taylor Swift and Tanya Tucker. One of their biggest recent victories came in January 2024, when charges of assault and resisting arrest against client Chris Young after an alleged altercation at a bar were dismissed. "We were pleased that the baseless charges against our client were dismissed, reaffirming that our client should never have been arrested in the first place," Ramsey says. The firm also aided in the negotiation of recording contracts for two country acts and took action against stalkers of high-profile artists.

Advice about AI now "I am concerned that the use of AI will 'homogenize' music," Ramsey says. "I feel that my clients should focus on being innovative and explore new creative opportunities. The best defense is to focus on the human and empathetic side of music."

Rollin Ransom Matthew Thompson

CO-LEADERS OF ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS AND MEDIA GROUP

SIDLEY AUSTIN

Sidley Austin represented a sponsor consortium comprising global asset manager DWS Group and investor and manager of niche media music rights Cutting Edge Group in the creation of a joint venture with Warner Bros. Discovery. The transaction is "one of the largest and highest-valued music rights deals ever executed, covering almost a century's worth of music copyrights," Thompson says, adding that the firm advised on all aspects of the transaction, including asset acquisition/contribution regarding the partnership. The joint venture involves over 400,000 iconic film/TV songs from such entities as DC Comics movies and the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* franchises.

Most pressing issue "Monetization of music assets on subscription platforms at fair and equitable rates for all parties involved," Thompson says, "including artists, labels, consumers and platforms themselves."

Berkeley Reinhold

OWNER

REINHOLD GLOBAL

Reinhold's range of expertise is as varied as her clientele, with her Reinhold Global firm representing major names in touring, entertainment and sports including Wrexham, Magnus Media, Tuff Gong Worldwide, Marc Anthony, Ziggy Marley and Thievery Corporation. Client Live Nation had another record year in 2024 with \$23.2 billion in revenue, while festival client Lollapalooza broke its attendance record for the largest day crowd ever in the event's 30-plus-year history with Chappell Roan's performance. Over the past year, Reinhold and her firm have been combating the exploitation of name, image and likeness rights for college athletes in the age of AI and holograms.

Most pressing issue "Climate change. This brings about not only unpredictable weather patterns but also poor air quality, disrupted utilities and the spread of infectious diseases, all of which have a substantial impact on the concert business."



Attorney Todd Rubenstein negotiated publishing and catalog deals for Grammy-winning songwriter of the year **Theron Thomas**.

Adam Ritholz

FOUNDER/MANAGING PARTNER

Jeff Levy Chip Petree

PARTNERS

RITHOLZ LEVY FIELDS

Ritholz Levy Fields manages a diverse portfolio of clients, including Grammy Award winners Chris Stapleton and Maxwell and video-game publishers Rockstar and 2K. Last year, the firm notched several key wins, representing Cyndi Lauper, in a transaction with Swedish entertainment company Pophouse covering her music assets and the creation of a joint venture for the exploitation of her music and name, image and likeness, and Concord Music Group, as the indie music giant acquired parts of Daddy Yankee's music publishing and recorded-music catalog. The latter deal encompasses certain rights to the reggaeton superstar's songs including "Con Coma" and his rights as an artist on "Despacito."

Advice about AI now "For our artist clients, put it out of your mind," Ritholz says. "Write, perform and record the music that comes through you. AI is irrelevant to you."

Carlos Rodríguez-Feliz

MANAGING PARTNER

RODFEL LAW

RodFel Law "was involved in the negotiation for Young Miko's U.S. tour with Live Nation [and] her Coachella performance, among others," says Rodríguez-Feliz, whose current clients also include RaiNao, ROA and Villano Antillano. Following Young Miko's Coachella debut, the Puerto Rican star launched her 2024 XOXO Tour throughout the United States. "We played 40 minutes" when touring in 2023, Young Miko told *Billboard* for her September cover story. "Now I'm onstage for two hours. Our crew was like 10 people; now it's more than 50 of us. Everything has multiplied." Her album *att.*, released last year, reached No. 9 on Top Latin Albums.

Advice about AI now "It is a very useful tool to incorporate if used properly. Always be mindful and respectful of other creators' rights when using AI."

Bobby Rosenblum

CHAIRMAN OF GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE

Jonathan Koby

SHAREHOLDER OF GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE

Jeff Biederman

Steve Plinio

Charmaine Smith

SHAREHOLDERS OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE

Paul Schindler

SENIOR CHAIR OF NEW YORK ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE

Jess Rosen

CO-CHAIRMAN OF ATLANTA ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE

Jay Cooper

SHAREHOLDER/FOUNDER OF LOS ANGELES ENTERTAINMENT

GREENBERG TRAURIG

In October, the Recording Academy announced that beginning in 2027, after 50-plus years on CBS, the Grammys ceremony will call ABC and fellow Walt Disney Co. properties Disney+ and Hulu home — a historic agreement Greenberg Traurig helped facilitate. "We led the negotiations on behalf of the Recording Academy for its unprecedented 10-year global television and media rights deal with Disney and ABC Television," says Rosenblum, whose firm represents Katy Perry, George Strait and the Miles Davis estate, among others. "This landmark agreement is one of the largest non-sports television deals of all time."

Most pressing issue "The increasing fragmentation of rights, particularly when considering the rise of international music platforms, makes it increasingly difficult for new offerings to launch," Rosenblum says. "This, in turn, serves as an inhibiting factor to growth and expansion of the market, limiting revenue opportunities for music creators."

Oswaldo Rossi

FOUNDER/MANAGING PARTNER

John Baldivia

Pamela Klein

Gary Fine

PARTNERS

ROSSI BALDIVIA KLEIN FINE & SPECTOR

The attorneys of Rossi Baldivia Klein Fine & Spector recently managed Karol G's high-stakes deals, including a lucrative merchandise arrangement with Bravado and a collaboration with Coke Studio that resulted in billboards in Japan featuring the Colombian star. The firm secured an extension of the publishing administration agreement for Peso Pluma and George Prajin's Double P Records with Downtown Music Publishing that includes work from Peso, as well as Tito Double P, Jasiel Nuñez and Estevan Plazola, and it also worked on Venezuelan singer Danny Ocean's 2024 *Reflexa* tour that ran through the United States and Mexico. Additional clients include artists such as Rauw Alejandro and executives such as Rimas Records founder Noah Assad and Rancho Humilde founder Jimmy Humilde. **Charity I support** "Con Cora," Baldivia says, "Karol G's foundation for empowering women."

Paul Rothenberg

Jeremy Mohr

Josh Binder

FOUNDING PARTNERS

ROTHENBERG MOHR & BINDER

The firm played a pivotal role in orchestrating SZA's appearance during Kendrick Lamar's Super Bowl LIX halftime show that drew a record-breaking 133.5 million viewers, according to Apple Music and the NFL. It also worked with Doechii to secure her February performance at the Grammys, where she became only the third woman in history to win best rap album for her breakout mixtape, *Alligator Bites Never Heal*.

Advice about AI now "I'm conflicted, as I believe songwriting and recording are sacred human art forms and the intellectual property rights of creators must be protected at all costs. But I've seen what happens when our business ignores or attempts to completely kill new technologies, and it's not pretty," Mohr says. "This genie is not going back in the bottle. My advice is [to] embrace and find ways to use technology — in legal and ethical ways — to help creators but not to shortcut or replace them."

Todd Rubenstein

FOUNDING PARTNER

TODD RUBENSTEIN LAW

Among Rubenstein's latest achievements are negotiating publishing and catalog deals for Grammy songwriter of the year Theron Thomas and negotiating a new-model label distribution and funding deal for client Skillet after closing a catalog deal with Primary Wave covering the band's first five albums of masters and songs. He advised and negotiated on behalf of Poems — the new publishing company of hit producers The Monsters & Strangerz and long-term partners Mega House — in connection with funding and administration agreements with Kobalt, as well as a co-funding deal with Position Music for songwriter Jack LaFrantz (Benson Boone's "Beautiful Things"). He also handled deals for viral sensation "Man in Finance" creator Megan Boni.

The music industry today in a word "Gig economy. Yes, that's two words, but one phrase."

Daniel Schacht

PARTNER

DONAHUE FITZGERALD

Schacht represents a diverse group of heavy-hitting artists in multiple genres. Ranging from Carlos Santana to Missy Elliott, as well as the estate of Malik Taylor, who was professionally known as A Tribe Called Quest's Phife Dawg. Schacht specializes in several areas including advising artists and creators on how to best control their name, image and likeness rights. Recently, he won a jury verdict in favor of Wixen Music U.K. in litigation with Transperence Entertainment Group. The case focused on a trade secret matter involving neighboring rights. The firm also did legal work for albums including Carlos Santana's *Sentient* and mxmtoon's *liminal spaces*.

Charity I support "We like to support the local Oakland [Calif.] community and its businesses. Like many communities, Oakland is brimming with creativity and talent and is still rebuilding after the pandemic."

Brianna Schwartz

Alexis Schreiber

FOUNDING PARTNERS

SCHWARTZ & SCHREIBER

Schwartz & Schreiber aided music festivals including Vibra Urbana and Deep House Bible in navigating the legal landscape of launching and managing live events. "We're passionate about the live-performance space because it offers a unique opportunity to see our work come to life in an impactful and dynamic way," Schreiber says. Additionally, the firm served as general counsel for its extensive roster of clients — such as Rolling Loud co-founder Matt Zingler, Secuoya Studios, RIVA Studios and Pitbull and his businesses — through mergers and acquisitions, from entity formation to corporate structuring to negotiating agreements.

Most pressing issue "The need for alternative revenue streams for artists," Schreiber says. "In today's industry, the combination of low streaming payouts and an over-saturated market makes it challenging for artists to earn a sustainable income. Consequently, many artists rely on touring, merchandise sales and endorsement opportunities for income; however, these avenues often demand substantial upfront investment and are not always feasible for emerging talent."

John E. Seay

OWNER

THE SEAY FIRM

With a background in the industry as a musician and tour manager, Seay leads legal battles for artists such as Faye Webster, Rylo Rodriguez, the estate of Ol' Dirty Bastard, Priscilla Block, Model/Actriz, Baby Kia, Nino Paid and Homixide Gang and producers like Roark Bailey, Bandplay and Truebeatz. The firm has closed millions of dollars' worth of recording and publishing deals for artist and producer clients in the past year alone, according to Seay. **The music industry today in a word** "Fluid. Labels and artists keep finding new ways to do deals and make money, and it's our job as lawyers to continue to make sure that the 'asks' from labels align with the actual risks they're taking in the deals they're offering."



LEADING LAW SCHOOLS OF THE TOP MUSIC LAWYERS

THE MOST FREQUENTLY CITED ALMA MATERS OF THE 2025 CLASS OF HONOREES

Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University (New York)

Enrollment: 957

Brooklyn Law School (Brooklyn)

Enrollment: 1,198

Columbia Law School, Columbia University (New York)

Enrollment: 1,357

Fordham University School of Law (New York)

Enrollment: 1,358

Georgetown University Law Center

(Washington, D.C.)

Enrollment: 2,053

Harvard Law School, Harvard University

(Cambridge, Mass.)

Enrollment: 1,758

Loyola Law School, Loyola Marymount University

(Los Angeles)

Enrollment: 1,015

New York University School of Law (New York)

Enrollment: 1,413

Southwestern Law School (Los Angeles)

Enrollment: 922

University of California, Berkeley, School of Law

(Berkeley, Calif.)

Enrollment: 1,022

University of California, Los Angeles, School of Law (Los Angeles)

Enrollment: 1,006

University of Miami School of Law (Miami)

Enrollment: 1,149

University of Southern California Gould School of Law (Los Angeles)

Enrollment: 644

Enrollments source: U.S. News & World Report. Schools are presented alphabetically and not ranked. An alums-count tie results in 13 schools listed this year.

Lauren Spahn of Buchalter represented **JELLY ROLL** in negotiations to open his Goodnight Nashville bar and handled his brand and intellectual property portfolio, both nationally and internationally.

Michael Selverne

MANAGING PARTNER

SELVERNE BRADFORD

While Selverne declines to provide client names or notable deals he and his firm worked on in 2024, it has been reported that his clients include Spin Doctors, Cheap Trick, Alibaba Music and Round Hill Music Group. Moreover, Selverne has been known to represent songwriters, artists, producers and companies in shopping their music assets. For example, in 2023, he provided legal representation for Round Hill when it was buying music assets as well as handling the sale of its publicly traded royalty fund to Concord for about \$470 million.

Most pressing issue “Bloating and overcrowding. While most people are creative and artistic, that does not make them artists. The uploading of 200,000-plus recordings per day is overwhelming to consumers and can obscure and hide truly brilliant work in a sea of mediocrity.”

Robert Sherman

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF ENTERTAINMENT FINANCE PRACTICE

DLA PIPER

Sherman’s client list at DLA Piper includes Concord, HarbourView Equity Partners, Duetti, Multimedia Music, Catch Point Royalties Holdings, Mom + Pop Music, Bella Figura Music, beatBread and City National Bank. In 2024, he represented Concord in one of the larger asset-backed securities deals of the year. Concord raised \$850 million in October from an existing asset-backed security that ballooned to \$5.1 billion after the acquisition of Round Hill Music Group and Mojo Music. The security is backed by the royalties of publishing, recorded music and related assets by such acts as Carrie Underwood, Genesis, Phil Collins, R.E.M. and Creed. (Numerous other companies have raised capital through such securities, which allow an issuer to borrow money against the revenue created by music assets used as collateral in the transaction.)

Advice about AI now “Tread carefully while looking out for opportunities to grow the music ecosystem.”

Jodie Shihadeh

FOUNDER

SHIHADAH LAW

Years of hard work paid off for Shihadeh and her team in 2024, as they reached catalog agreements for publishing and producer royalty assets that amassed over \$17.5 million for their clients. “We focused heavily on structuring their businesses” in previous years, Shihadeh says, “with the long-term focus of a sale in the future.” The firm’s roster is heavily centered on dance artists, producers and songwriters, including J. White Did It, El Guincho, Matoma and KREAM, as well as companies run by clients like Steve Aoki’s Dim Mak Records and Billy Corgan’s National Wrestling Alliance. Shihadeh also joined the advisory board for File Eaters, a nongenerative AI program that automates file exportation and delivery, serving both creatives and businesses.

Most pressing issue “The mass consolidation of the major-label system and the impact it has had and will have on developing career artists in the future.”



Shardé Simpson Ciara Reed

CO-FOUNDERS

SIMPSON & REED

Simpson & Reed represents a diverse roster of clients including Meek Mill, Natalie Nunn, Hotboii, The Breed and Empress Of. In the past year-and-a-half, the firm’s co-founders closed major deals for their clients for Grammy-winning projects, Super Bowl commercial placements and blockbuster films. “We’ve worked with artists, producers and executives to launch new ventures, expand existing businesses and negotiate deals that will have a lasting impact,” Simpson says. “And we’re still inking agreements that are set to shape the future of the industry.”

The music industry today in a word “Ever-evolving,” Simpson says. “It’s always changed, but the way music is distributed now is a whole different game. Streaming, social media and new platforms are giving artists more control, but they’re also forcing everyone to rethink how they make money and reach fans. You have to stay sharp to keep up.”

Simran A. Singh

MANAGING PARTNER

Michael Trauben

Christopher Navarro

PARTNERS

SINGH SINGH & TRAUBEN

Singh and partners represented Mexican pop group RBD in federal court litigation and California Labor Commission actions against the band’s former manager, Guillermo Rosas. “This case was pivotal in ensuring artist rights and financial transparency in the Latin music industry while navigating the complexities of global music contracts,” Singh says. (In October, RBD said it reached a confidential settlement with Rosas.) The firm, which represents other megastars like Daddy Yankee, Grupo Firme and Missy Elliott, also aided Ozuna in the sale of his publishing catalog to Kobalt/KMR Holdings, which Singh called “one of the most significant publishing transactions for a Latin artist,” and also negotiated the Puerto Rican star’s new deal with Sony Music Latin.

The music industry today in a word “Transformative,” Singh says. “From streaming shifts to AI disruption, the industry is in a constant state of reinvention, presenting both challenges and unprecedented opportunities for artists, labels and executives willing to adapt.”

Lauren Spahn

SHAREHOLDER

BUCHALTER

Buchalter represents clients including Ian Munsick, Paramore and Jelly Roll, and Spahn represented Jelly Roll in negotiations to open his Goodnight Nashville bar as well as handling his brand and intellectual property portfolio, both nationally and internationally. The firm also negotiated the re-signing of Kelsea Ballerini to Black River Entertainment’s roster and secured a summary judgment on behalf of the Harry Fox Agency, alongside co-defendant Spotify, in a case alleging unauthorized streaming of Eminem’s music. The court dismissed all claims against Harry Fox and Spotify, and the ruling is under appeal before the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Advice about AI now “I initially viewed AI as a disruptive force in the music industry, but as its impact has become clearer, I now see its potential benefits. A great example is Randy Travis, who lost his ability to sing after a stroke in 2013. Last year, AI technology [allowed] fans to hear him sing again — an incredible moment.”

Stanton “Larry” Stein

MANAGING PARTNER

Irene Y. Lee

Ashley R. Yeargan

PARTNERS

RUSS AUGUST & KABAT

In April 2024, Russ August & Kabat achieved a significant legal victory by overturning a \$2.5 million jury verdict against Drake (a success that was “unbeknownst to him and his team,” Stein says). The firm also played a key role in the dismissal through summary judgments of over 1,000 lawsuits against Drake in connection with the 2021 Astroworld Festival tragedy. The company has been instrumental in protecting, enforcing and managing the intellectual property of Mariah Carey, Mary J. Blige, Cardi B and others, successfully defended Black Label Media in a copyright case involving music used in a Whitney Houston biopic and obtained a judgment in favor of Tyga in a legal action seeking to recover over \$3 million in damages.

Most pressing issue “Artists still deal with paparazzi who capture images of the artists, obtain copyright registrations on the images and demand six-figure damages from the artists for posting such images featuring themselves,” Stein says.

Rachel Stilwell

FOUNDER

STILWELL LAW

One of the company’s biggest cases in the past year involved clients musicFIRST Coalition and Future of Music Coalition. “I secured a win before the [Federal Communications Commission] when the agency declined to allow local radio monopolies,” Stilwell says. “Subsequently, a group of broadcasters sued the FCC in an attempt to reverse that decision. That lawsuit is now in the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, where I co-authored an amicus brief on behalf of musicFIRST and FMC.” The firm’s other clients include LeAnn Rimes, Noel Schajris, Take 6 and songwriter Darrell Brown. Regarding the challenges created by the rise of AI, Stilwell says, “We should all be advocating for the passage of the NO FAKES Act.”

The music industry today in a word “Hopeful. The Grammy category this year for best new artist was filled with unspeakably great talent.”

Michael Sukin

PARTNER

SUKIN COLTON LAW ASSOCIATION

Known for its expertise in music publishing, recording, catalog purchases and company sales, Sukin Colton is a leader in entertainment law. This past year, Sukin led the way on numerous film, TV, recording and publishing projects for the firm's list of clients, which includes the estates of George Gershwin and Aretha Franklin; the latter waived all usage fees for the late soul singer's song "Think" for Vice President Kamala Harris' 2024 presidential campaign. The firm also represents St. Nicholas Music, which is home to the catalog of Christmas classics by the late Johnny Marks.

Ron Sweeney

FOUNDER

RON SWEENEY AND COMPANY

Sweeney became the attorney and confidant of Clarence Avant, the late "godfather of Black music," at age 25 and ran Avant's Tabu Records for a while. Through the years, his clients have included a who's who of R&B and hip-hop: James Brown, Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis, Swizz Beatz, Lil Wayne and Young Money Records, Easy-E and Ruthless Records, Irv Gotti and Murder Inc., Public Enemy, DMX, Ja Rule, Morris Day, The Time, Klymaxx and Kool & The Gang. A former president of Epic Urban, Sweeney signed Ghostface Killah, Cameron, Ginuwine, Charlie Baltimore and others, with oversight for Babyface, Luther Vandross and Michael Jackson. He has been an advocate for greater Black executive representation in the music industry and for contracts that let artists build equity and long-term wealth. Most recently, he created his own company for investments in entertainment assets.

Most pressing issue "Monetizing AI."

Andy Tavel Elliot A. Resnik

PARTNERS/CO-CHAIRS OF ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

William Hochberg Rami S. Yanni

PARTNERS, LOS ANGELES

RAINES FELDMAN LITRELL

"We again did fantastic work in the catalog space, including on behalf of the legendary Itzhak Perlman for his partnership with Primary Wave," Tavel says of a late-2024 royalty deal between the violinist and the publisher. Killer Mike, another of the firm's clients, enjoyed sold-out domestic and international tours, as well as involvement in "a global campaign" for *Call of Duty: Black Ops 6*. In addition to representing the National Independent Venue Association as it "continues to fight a good fight," the firm represented All Things Go Festival, which "sold out tens of thousands of tickets in two cities for its first-ever simultaneous festival production at Forest Hills Stadium and Merriweather Post Pavilion."

The music industry today in a word "Exciting — again!" Tavel says. "The caliber of the talent in the best new artist category at the Grammys was outstanding. We're in an era where a whole new generation of stars are at the forefront with many more great talents behind them."

Seth Traxler

PARTNER

KIRKLAND & ELLIS

In a transaction that closed in July, Kirkland & Ellis advised longtime client Blackstone on its \$1.6 billion acquisition of Hipgnosis Songs Fund, ending the history of the 6-year-old, London-listed investment trust as a publicly traded company. "This intricate deal, led by partners in our London office, navigated a competitive auction process under the oversight of the U.K.'s Panel on Takeovers and Mergers," Traxler says. Meanwhile, the firm's U.S. music team helped evaluate rights to approximately 45,000 tracks, including hits like Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'," Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance" and 50 Cent's "In Da Club." The examination of those rights, Traxler says, "exemplifies Kirkland's multidisciplinary strength and our tight integration of corporate, regulatory and music industry expertise to help our clients drive transformative deals worldwide."

The music industry today in a word

"Ascending."

Brittney Trigg

FOUNDING PARTNER

BTRIGGLAW

BTriggLaw "recently negotiated Lexa [Gates]' deal with Kith for its spring 2025 campaign, which also included the song 'New York to the World' with Jadakiss and Fabolous," Trigg says. On the music side, the firm "negotiated and closed numerous seven- to eight-figure agreements for its clients," she adds. That list includes DeeBaby's distribution deal with Create Music Group, PapiYerr's publishing deal with Sony Music Publishing and Rico Brooks' deal with Kobalt Music. The firm has also represented 808-Ray, who won a Grammy for Killer Mike's album *Michael*; Nickie Jon Pabón, who co-produced Jack Harlow's Hot 100 No. 1 "Lovin' on Me"; and Marshak, who landed a Grammy nomination for Peso Pluma's *ÉXODO* album.

Most pressing issue "The oversaturation of music has caused a general devaluation of the music."

David Vodicka

FOUNDING PARTNER

Rob Glass Julian Hewitt Stephen King Marcus Walkom

PARTNERS

MEDIA ARTS LAWYERS

Australia's Media Arts Lawyers enjoyed another robust year facilitating deals with a long list of the country's top acts and brightest newcomers. Among them, a record contract and publishing catalog sale with Tame Impala, as well as recording deals for Spacey Jane, Amyl and the Sniffers, Luude, Ruel and rising stars Teen Jesus and the Jean Teasers. The firm also advised Jet on the sale of master catalog recordings to BMG that included hits "Are You Gonna Be My Girl" and "Cold Hard Bitch"; Rūfūs Du Sol on the band's recent Exhale World Tour; and Dom Dolla on his recent trek that played New York's Madison Square Garden.

Charity I support "SupportAct," Vodicka says. It's the "Australian music industry's charity, delivering crisis relief services to musicians, managers, crew and music workers across all genres."



Raines Feldman Littrell negotiated the partnership between acclaimed violinist **ITZHAK PERLMAN** and Primary Wave.

James L. Walker Jr.

CEO

WALKER & ASSOCIATES

On behalf of the estate of Isaac Hayes, Walker's firm sued the Trump presidential campaign last year for unauthorized use of the Sam & Dave classic "Hold On, I'm Comin'," which Hayes and David Porter co-wrote. "We sought an injunction in federal court," Walker says, "and the judge granted our client's request. Mr. Trump can no longer use our client's music — and Hayes is the first artist or songwriter to [win] such a legal remedy." The firm's clients also include Front Row Productions, producer of the Broadway plays *Hell's Kitchen* and *MJ: The Musical*.

Most pressing issue "[With] the use of music on the internet by streaming and digital platforms, there are billions of downloads and streaming of songs, and our clients are not seeing any of the real money."

Previn Warren

MEMBER ATTORNEY

MOTLEY RICE

Warren is known for actions against companies including SiriusXM and Google on behalf of the performing rights organization SESAC. "Motley Rice is honored to represent SESAC in advancing its interests and mission to ensure fair compensation for music creators, including the interests of its affiliated publishers and songwriters," Warren says. Along with a two-week arbitration hearing that resulted in a meaningful increase in the license fees owed by commercial radio stations represented by the Radio Music License Committee, he adds: "We are proud to have helped SESAC reinforce the value of songwriters' creative output to the music industry."

Advice about AI now "Given the current landscape, I wouldn't hold out hope for meaningful regulation or legislation around AI until at least the midterms. If you believe your rights have been violated by AI or a large language model or other AI tech, consider hiring counsel who is experienced in repurposing common law."

players

Alex Weingarten

PARTNER/CHAIR

Michael Gottlieb

Shane Nix

PARTNERS

WILLKIE FARR & GALLAGHER

Willkie Farr & Gallagher made headlines in January when Gottlieb filed Drake’s lawsuit against Universal Music Group over Kendrick Lamar’s “Not Like Us,” a case that accused the music giant of defamation. Willkie’s lawyers recently won a ruling in the case letting discovery move forward, allowing them to seek documents like Lamar’s record deal. The firm, which counts Selena Gomez, Adam Cohen, Tempo Music Investments, Jamie Spears, Dennis DeYoung and Create Music Group as clients, also represented an undisclosed band in connection with a multimillion-dollar catalog sale.

Charity we support “Willkie recently partnered with [Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services] to help establish a new substance abuse disorder treatment center for children ages 12 to 17,” Nix says. “The project is made possible through a donation from the recently launched Willkie Los Angeles Foundation.”

Douglas H. Wigdor

FOUNDING PARTNER

Meredith A. Firetog

Michael J. Willemin

PARTNERS

WIGDOR

Wigdor represents survivors of sexual abuse and harassment in the entertainment field, including Casandra Ventura, Julia Ormond and several Jane Doe and private clients. The firm represented Ventura in a civil case against Sean Combs that was settled in a single day. “The civil lawsuit has enabled our firm to continue challenging powerful people within the music industry, as victims of similar instances of harassment and assault now feel more comfortable in speaking up about their experiences,” Wigdor says. “We have been able to help them demand accountability and change, whereas they previously felt pressured into silence.”

Advice about AI now “Our cases often pull from years of communication between our client and the defendant,” Wigdor says. “There is a concern that defendants may use AI-generated texts or voice memos to concoct a false narrative that discredits the victim.”

Andrea Yankovsky

FOUNDER

YANKOVSKY LAW

Yankovsky represents several high-profile clients, but she’s most proud of her work with those making noise behind the scenes in the music industry, such as Grammy-winning songwriter-producer Iman Jordan and boutique indie label Impex Records. Yankovsky Law last year achieved success in multiple royalty recovery cases for artists and rights holders. While the music business is ever-evolving, Yankovsky is focused on returning the rights, power and money to the hands of the individuals who keep the industry running. “Major labels and publishers could disappear, and there would still be a thriving music business,” she says. “But without the people who make [music], there would be none.”

Advice about AI now “In all areas of our practice, we advise clients to ask questions and not make assumptions about the law and how it applies to their circumstances.”

Helen Yu

PARTNER/PRINCIPAL

YU LESEBERG

In 2024, Yu handled the key legal agreements for singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist Ty Dolla \$ign’s Billboard 200 No. 1 album *Vultures* and its Hot 100 No. 1 single “Carnival,” both made in partnership with Ye, while the latter features Rich the Kid and Playboi Carti. Yu and her firm handled the signing of the first artist to Ty’s EZMNY Records, Leon Thomas, as well as the release of Thomas’ critically acclaimed second album, *MUTT*, and its Hot 100 top 40 hit title track. Yu also negotiated the joint-venture label deal for client Polo Molina’s Ligas Mayores Records, which landed at Sony Music Latin Entertainment after a bidding war. In August, she represented Canadian musicians Burton Cummings and Randy Bachman of The Guess Who in recovering the group’s trademark to its band name after 40 years.

The music industry today in a word “Fast-paced.”

Donald S. Zakarin

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE LITIGATION AND MUSIC GROUPS AND MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION PRACTICE

Ilene S. Farkas

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE MUSIC GROUP AND COPYRIGHT, MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION AND MUSIC LITIGATION PRACTICES

James G. Sammataro

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE MUSIC GROUP AND MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION PRACTICE

Frank P. Scibilia

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE MUSIC GROUP AND COPYRIGHT, MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION, MUSIC LITIGATION AND MUSIC TRANSACTIONS PRACTICES

Benjamin Semel

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE MUSIC GROUP AND MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION PRACTICE

Brad D. Rose

PARTNER/CHAIR OF THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY GROUP

PRYOR CASHMAN

“AI is not a friend or foe — it’s a frontier,” Sammataro says. “[You must] understand its possibilities but also take the steps to ensure your creative works and assets remain protected.” Pryor Cashman lawyers know about protecting copyrights. Not only do they work for the National Music Publishers’ Association, Mechanical Licensing Collective, RIAA and Nashville Songwriters’ Association International defending the value of music, they also count stars like Justin Bieber, Ed Sheeran and Daddy Yankee, as well as the top four music publishers, among their clients. The firm is representing over 100 defendants in the pending dembow litigation, a sprawling action initiated by reggae duo Steely & Clevie that claims that more than 1,800 songs and recordings, including the hits “Despacito,” “Bailando” and “Dame tu Cosita,” infringe a drum pattern they say they exclusively own. “The lawsuit threatens not only the fundamental principles of copyright law,” Sammataro says, “but the process of creating music.”

Adam Zia

FOUNDING PARTNER

Marc Geylman

Nate Kuo

PARTNERS

THE ZIA FIRM

After his breakthrough in January with “Tweaker,” rapper LiAngelo Ball (known onstage as GELO) sparked a bidding war for his music licensing — and thanks to the work



For TY DOLLA \$IGN (left), Helen Yu of Yu Leseberg negotiated agreements for his No. 1 album *Vultures* and its No. 1 single “Carnival,” both made in partnership with Ye.

of The Zia Firm, he was able to negotiate a reportedly record-breaking deal with Def Jam worth up to \$13 million, with \$8 million guaranteed. That’s just a taste of what the practice has accomplished in the last year, along with helping breakout star Tommy Richman sign his publishing administration agreement and representing stars like Cash Cobain, MGK and French Montana.

Most pressing issue “Artists’ and their teams’ ability to properly register for, track and audit the various revenue streams,” Zia says. “With the rapid timelines of releases, the artist has to keep up with a sizable amount of content and make sure everything being released is properly registered, monetized, collected — and collected accurately.”

Leslie Jose Zigel

Javier Feito

PARTNERS

SMGQ LAW

In 2024, Zigel and Feito’s client Carlos Vives was named the Latin Recording Academy Person of the Year. The following year, their client Bobby Weir and the other members of the Grateful Dead were honored as the 2025 MusiCares Persons of the Year. Additionally, clients Marco Antonio Solís and Los Bukis hosted the first Spanish-language residency at the Dolby Theatre at the MGM in Las Vegas. SMGQ Law also represented Rebel 11 Studios in its sale to Rimas Entertainment and the series *Chiquis Sin Filtro*, featuring artist Chiquis Rivera, which was the No. 1 show on the VIX streaming platform, according to Feito.

Charity I support “Young Musicians Unite,” Feito says. “YMU serves over 9,000 students weekly, making it one of the largest nonprofit providers of free music education in the U.S. Their presence in schools doesn’t just create musicians — it builds community, improves attendance and inspires excellence.” **B**

Contributors

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Methodology

Billboard’s Top Music Lawyers recognizes only outside counsel at law firms with the exception of in-house attorneys at market-leading companies in the sectors shown. Nominations for all of *Billboard’s* industry-sourced executive lists open no less than 150 days in advance of publication, and a submission link is sent by request before the nomination period. (Please email thom.duffy@billboard.com for inclusion on the email list for nomination links and for how to obtain an editorial calendar.) *Billboard’s* 2025 Top Music Lawyers were nominated by their firms and chosen by editors based on factors including the stature of their clients, as measured by year-end *Billboard* charts; sales and streaming performance; market share; revenue or, where not available, *Billboard* revenue estimates, which may be aided by company guidance; social media impressions; and radio audiences reached, using data available as of Feb. 1. Career trajectory and momentum were also considered. Where required, U.S. record-label market share was consulted using Luminate’s current market share for albums, plus track-equivalent and streaming-equivalent album consumption and *Billboard’s* quarterly top 10 publisher rankings. Unless otherwise noted, *Billboard* Boxscore and Luminate are the sources for tour grosses and sales/streaming data, respectively. Luminate is also the source for radio audience metrics. The source for radio metrics is monitored station airplay from Mediabase provided by Luminate.