

CRSIII
NEW FACES
PROFILES
\*\*\*\*\*\*
SMALL TALK
SOLVED

CRIS L THE — INTERVIEW

LABEL CONTACTS INSIDE!

# A RCHECK

MARCH 2023



"Best debut single I've ever heard and the most excited I've been about an artist since Morgan Wallen. This song will make your station better the minute you play it. All opinions are my own and accurate."

- Mike Ryan (VP), WKMK/Monmouth

"I love Dalton's 'Giving Up on That' so much! I think it will be one of those songs that will be in power rotation for months on DRQ."

- David Corey (PD), WDRQ/Detroit

"Dalton is a powerful voice that cuts through. Play it."

- Hunter Meyer (PD), WCKN/Charleston (SC)

add now

Giving Up On That



KASSI IMPACTING

"Kassi captures the excitement with a catchy single that has the PERFECT lyrics and melody for radio stations across the country!" – Michael Levine (PD), KKGO Los Angeles

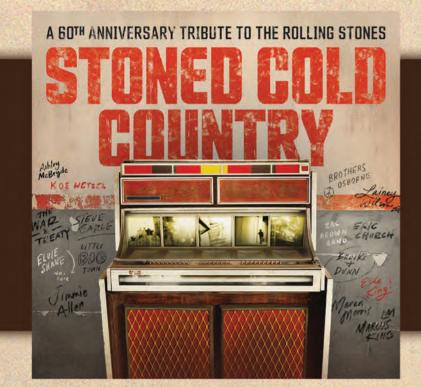
ASHTON NOW

"The energy, fun lyrics, and attitude make this the PERFECT tempo driven hit for Spring!" - Scott Roddy (PD), KWJJ Portland

NASHVILLE

**NASHVILLE'S LOVE LETTER TO THE ROLLING STONES** 

**OUT THIS FRIDAY, MARCH 17TH** 



A 60TH ANNIVERSARY
TRIBUTE TO THE ROLLING STONES
FEATURING COVERS FROM
COUNTRY'S BIGGEST STARS

# **TRACK LISTING**

1. (I CAN'T GET NO) SATISFACTION - ASHLEY MCBRYDE

2. HONKY TONK WOMEN - BROOKS AND DUNN

3. DEAD FLOWERS - MAREN MORRIS

4. IT'S ONLY ROCK 'N' ROLL (BUT I LIKE IT) - BROTHERS OSBORNE & THE WAR AND TREATY

5. MISS YOU - JIMMIE ALLEN

6. TUMBLING DICE - ELLE KING

7. CAN'T YOU HEAR ME KNOCKING - MARCUS KING

8. WILD HORSES - LITTLE BIG TOWN

9. PAINT IT BLACK - ZAC BROWN BAND

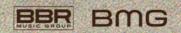
10. YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT - LAINEY WILSON

11. SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL - ELVIE SHANE

12. ANGIE - STEVE EARLE

13. GIMMIE SHELTER - ERIC CHURCH

14. SHINE A LIGHT - KOE WETZEL







# HSK BHCKWHKUS

# **Networking For Dummies (Like Us)**

n an industry filled with introverted extroverts who, admittedly, would rather talk to themselves in a padded room than introduce themselves to new people, networking can be intimidating. But, to make the most of the CRS 2023 experience, networking is key. To aid in breaking down walls, and to give everyone new

topics to discuss while waiting in line at buffets, Country Aircheck polled the CRB Board, CRS Agenda Committee, CRS scholarship winners and other industry leaders to find out what topics are most likely to get them chatting. And, no, which music scheduling software the station uses and when an artist's push week is are not included.

# **Emily Cohen Belote**

**Amazon Music Principal Music Curator** CRS Agenda Committee -**Digital Music Summit** 

- Cookies
- Real Housewives ... of any city
- Heist movies
- Dogs

# Stacy Blythe

**Big Loud SVP/Promotion** 

- The Pittsburgh Steelers
- 1980s Randy Travis bangers
- *Stepbrothers*, the movie
- Surviving life with a six-year-old tiny clone of yourself

# **Beverlee Brannigan** Beverlee Brannigan LLC Pres.

- CRB Board Secretary OrangeTheory Fitness
- Homemade bagels
- Spanish on the Duolingo app
- Cooking
- Black licorice

# **Becky Brenner**

Albright & O'Malley & Brenner **Consulting Partner CRB Board Member** 

- I'm addicted to movies: Star Trek, Star Wars, Lethal Weapon, Die Hard, Jurassic Park and every romcom ever made.
- Does being in a Miss Teen America pageant change your life?
- Golf
- How great Seattle is to visit and what guest rooms I have available.
- Raising kids what to do and what not to do.



# **Zena Burns Futuri SVP/Content** & Special Projects CRS Agenda Committee

- Coming To America
- Prince
- The Ohio State University Buckeyes football
- My mother, the ex-nun
- The time Paul McCartney made up a song about my lips



# Michael Chase

Warner/WAR Dir./ **National Radio Promotion** RS Agenda Comn

- I hate condiments.
- I'm a Buc-ees fanboy.
- New pickleballer
- Lover of weird music



- Formula 1
- Dogs
- Coffee Keith Urban
- Star Wars

# George Couri **Triple 8 Owner**

- **CRB Board Member** • The first five years of Elton John's
- Isaac Asimov
- Ask me if I've ever eaten a PB&J.
- Tell me something I don't know about stoicism. Challenge me to pong ... and make sure you talk some trash when you do.



# **RJ Curtis CRB Exec. Dir.**

- Cycling
- U.S. Presidents
- Root beer
- Black licorice
- Get Smart is the funniest show in the history of television.



# Liz DelGrosso KCLR/Columbia, MO morning host

Lisa McKay Scholarship Winner

- Dogs; I own two Corgis. Running and working out
- I'm a brand-new mom of a sevenmonth-old.
- Reality television



- Being a boy mom
- SEC football
- Ted Lasso
- Romcoms
- '90s Alternative music



# Tori Dunn

Cumulus/Boise Dir./Marketing Rusty Walker Scholarship Winner

- Being a go-getter: what's stopping you and why?
- All things pop culture
- The science of radio



# ASK BACKWARDS

# **Karina Farias**

Edison Research Project Coord. **CRS Agenda Committee** 

- Football
- Boy Meets World
- Pitbulls the doggos, not Mr. Worldwide, although that is welcome, as well.
- Marvel comics
- **Tattoos**

# Caitlin Fisher

KWEN/Tulsa morning host Rusty Walker Scholarship Winner

- Disney World and all-things Disney
- Theater and Broadway musicals; I was a double-major in theater arts and mass communications.
- The best beaches in Florida
- Movies, television and other visual media

# Tim Foisset

Warner Music Nashville SVP/ **Commercial Partnership** CRS Agenda Committee - Digital **Music Summit** 

- Liverpool FC
- Vegan cooking
- 90s Alternative and Indie Rock

# **Alek Halverson**

KAJA/San Antonio PD/ on-air talent

**CRS Agenda Committee** 

- Nobody knows more about skinny jeans than I do.
- Two-time owner of the Green Bay Packers
- Two-time Office trivia champion
- I've never met a pickle I didn't enjoy eating.

# **Shelley Hargis Broken Bow Records VP/Promotion CRS Agenda Committee**

- I'm a wino!
- I love dancing and can teach you the toilet paper dance.
- Total animal lover ... my two cats are my children.
- Fleetwood Mac
- I'm a crime drama freak!

# **Gator Harrison**

iHeartMedia/Nashville SVPP, iHeartCountry Brand Coord. **CRB Board Member** 

- Jesus
- Vols
- Golf
- John Piper books
- Chocolate gravy



# Krista Hayes

Cumulus/Nashville Dir./ **Promotions** 

CRS Agenda Committee

- UK basketball ... although Coach Cal is killing me right now.
- Roller skating
- **Puppies**
- Crab legs
- Bourbon, baby!

# Kevin Herring

**Triple Tigers SVP/Promotion** 

- Hunting: deer, turkey, ducks
- Hockey
- Bourbon
- Funny fart noises



# Scott Hinschelwood

ALSAC/St. Jude Dir./Country Cares For St. Jude Kids

- Dallas Cowboys football and Memphis Grizzlies basketball
- Having one leg
- Why asparagus and mushrooms
- Being an Eagle Scout
- Why Disney's Davy Crockett: King Of The Wild Frontier movie should've been more clear that he died at the end.



Sony/Nashville EVP/ **Promotion & Artist Development** CRB Board Member

- Nashville Stars and Music City Baseball - the MLB's next expansion team!
- Anything Arkansas Razorbacks
- My 2011 St. Louis Cardinals World Series ring

# Michelle Kammerer **Amazon Music Head/**

**Country Music CRB Board Member** 

- English Bulldogs pictures, videos, stories, I want them all - and will share my own of Tilly & Ditka.
- Golf tips; my seven iron and I are not getting along currently.
- A win. Something you accomplished this year that does not have to be work related.



# Chelsea Lee

Family

Sarah Kay WQMX/Akron, OH PD/

14 pink Christmas trees

Reduced Fat Cheez-Its are my

morning host

Tie-dye truck

covered dish.

Vista14 President

Horseback riding

**CRB Board Member** 

British Virgin Islands

**Judy Lakin** 

The Golden Girls

Sugarland

KIKV/Alexandria, MN morning host Lisa McKay Scholarship Winner

- My 23-year-old horse, Dusty, or my two rescue dogs, Daisy and Delilah
- My obsession with Baby Yoda and Chicken McNuggets
- I love music, play the fiddle, and sing
- in my church's praise band.
- I am domestically disabled.
- I love seafood so much I've been permanently banned from three allyou-can-eat restaurants for eating too many shrimp and/or crab legs.



# Mike McVay

McVay Media President **CRB Board Member** 

- What's your favorite varietal of wine?
- Do the Steelers have a QB in Pickett, or do they still need one?
- What color did your hair used
- What's your favorite radio station you ever worked at?
- If you hadn't gone into radio, what would you have done?



# **RJ Meacham Curb SVP/Promotion CRB Board Member**

- Scuba diving **Anything Colorado**
- Brisket
- Cheerleading or barrel racing I have daughters.
- Merle Waggard ... and that is not a typo.



# **Mason Meyer** Rubber City Radio/Akron, OH SVP/DOS

- CRS Agenda Committee I'm a professional pyrotechnician with all digits still in place.
- Pipe organs
- Smoked meats
- Craft beers and whiskey
- Gardens and gardening





**GEORGE BIRGE ERIN KINSEY** JAMES BARKER BAND NELLY DAX JENNIFER HART

THE PRETTY WILD

# who is NASHVILL

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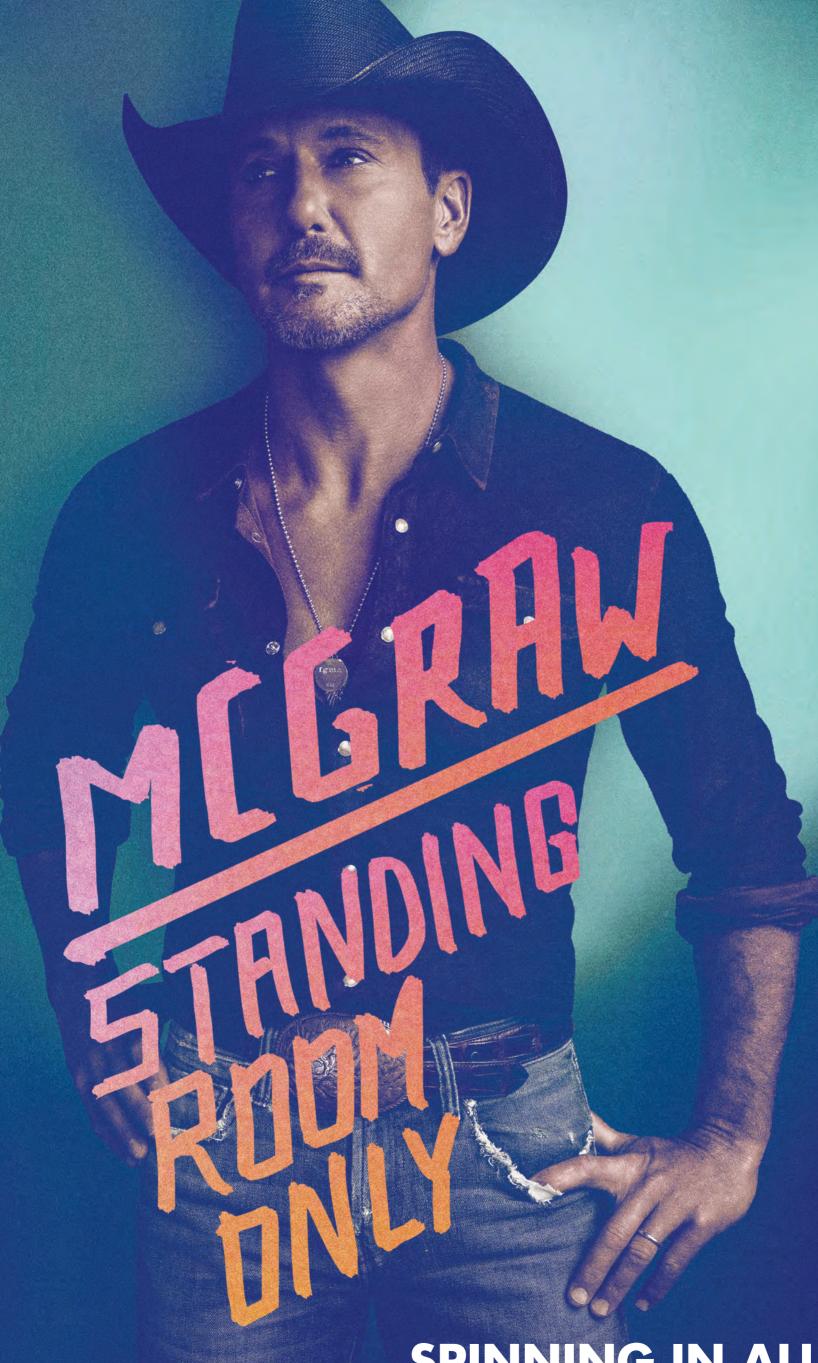
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MUSIC. ALBUM. TOUR.





McGRAW MUSIC

SPINNING IN ALL PRIME DAYPARTS NOW.

# ASK BACKWARDS

# **Brent Michaels**

**KUZZ/Bakersfield PD/on-air talent CRS Agenda Committee Vice** Chair & CRB Board Member

- The proper order in which to watch Kaleidoscope
- OrangeTheory
- The San Francisco 49ers

# Nicole Michalik WXTU/Philadelphia on-air host **CRS Agenda Committee**

- Sports
- Coffee Under The Covers, my Instagram Stories series
- Harry Styles
- Astrology Hallmark movies

# Tommy Moore

ACM VP/Artist & Industry Relations, **Board Administration & Governance** CRS Agenda Committee

- Aquariums
- The Royal Family
- What would you do if you won the lottery?
- Favorite travel locations
- Red Hot Chili Peppers

# **Ashley Morrison** WFUS/Tampa PD

**CRS Agenda Committee** 

- Manatees
- · Non-touristy things to do in Florida
- Being a sucker for any of the latest health and beauty trends ... which probably have no credibility

# **Rod Phillips**

iHeartMedia EVP/Country **Programming Strategy CRB Board Member** 

- Green Bay Packers
- Best hiking options
- UK basketball
- Anti-aging ... yup! · Gator's wardrobe

# **Joel Raab**

## Joel Raab Consulting **CRB Board Member**

Barbecue – Nashville's or anywhere else.

- TV and movie Westerns, old or new
- Cars
- Road trips
- Southern death food



# Tim Roberts **Audacy VP/Country Format** & WYCD/Detroit PD

CRB Board Member

- Ping pong. I started the Paddle Royale tournament with George Couri, and I'm a pretty good player.
- Cars. I love 'em, used to race them and previously worked for NASCAR.
- Football. I used to play and coach.



- Spotify/Nashville Head/ **Artist & Label Partnerships** CRB Board Member
- My one-year-old son and nearly three-year-old daughter
- Cocomelon and Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- Peloton bike and tread
- Yellowstone



# John Shomby

Country's Radio Coach CRB Board VP

- Anything about any Philadelphia sports team
- Dateline, 48 Hours and 20/20
- Unsalted nuts
- **Jogging**
- The Three Stooges

# Elaina Smith Westwood One syndicated Nights With Elaina host Fear of golf carts

- RuPaul's Drag Race
- How early Christmas decorations car
- Best pizza ever
- Broadway musicals

# Nick Steele

# KWJJ/Portland morning host CRS Agenda Committee

- Why has Superman been getting screwed in the DC Universe?
- Movies I'm gonna make my daughter watch when she gets older. What the next Star Wars trilogy
- should be about





# **Chuck Aly** Country Aircheck VP/GM **CRB Board Member**

**Matt Sunshine** 

**CRB Board Member** 

Mizzou sports

Jesse Tack

Film scores

• I'm an Iowa native.

Joey Tack
WIVK/Knoxville, TN

CRS Agenda Chair

fish off the hook.

terrible farmhand.

"Outta My Head."

**Monta Vaden** 

**Country Aircheck** 

and memories

**CRS Agenda Committee** 

and Peyton Manning

Sr. Radio Editor

Friends

My identical twin, Jesse, and

I were born 35 minutes apart.

I was raised on a farm but was a

I once recorded and released a

CrackaJack. Seriously. YouTube

University of Tennessee Volunteers

Dateline bae Keith Morrison.

football, basketball and baseball ...

hip-hop song under the pseudonym

morning host

Cycling

Jeeps

Growing up in St. Louis

**CRS Agenda Committee** 

CBS Sunday Morning

I have an identical twin.

WUBE/Cincinnati afternoon host

- Rum: 10-minute or 45-minute TED Talks available.
- What I ate in Japan: yay or neigh?
- Interning for a 1999
  - Rock HoF inductee CAC



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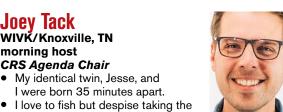












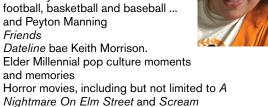














RISER HOUSE WELCOMES YOU TO

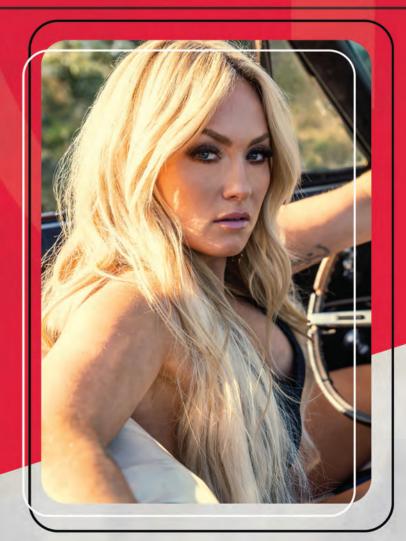
CRS, 2023.



ODILLON CARMICHAEL

COME SEE US AT THE RISER HOUSE LIVING ROOM & SUITE

MEGHAN PATRICK



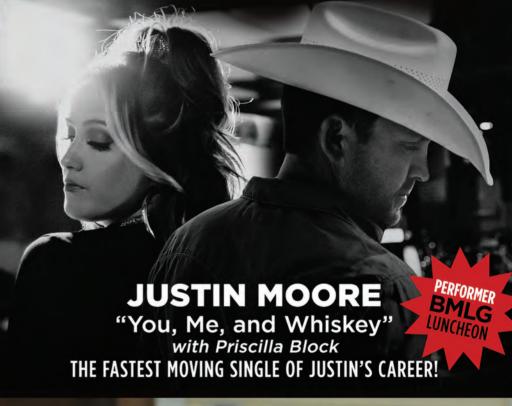
(H) RISER HOUSE

# CURRENTLY ON YOUR













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# Congratulations, Mike!



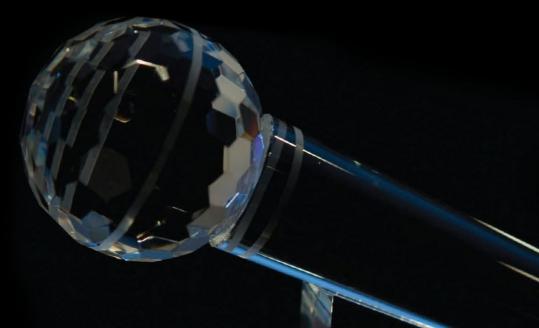
May your retirement days be filled with family, fun, and bologna sandwiches!

Thank you for everything.

xoxo, Carrie







# COUNTRY AIRCHECK AWARDS

# The Nominees Are...

# **Large Market Station**• KEEY/Minneapolis

- KKBQ/Houston
- KYGO/Denver
- WXTU/Philadelphia
- WYCD/Detroit

# Medium Market Station

- KFRG/Riverside
- WIRK/West Palm Beach
- WKDF/Nashville
- WUBE/Cincinnati WWKA/Orlando

# **Small Market Station** (tie)

- KZPK/St. Cloud, MN WGTY/York, PA WKSJ/Mobile, AL
- WQMX/Akron, OH
- WUSY/Chattanooga, TN
- WYCT/Pensacola, FL

# Platinum Label

- Big Loud
- Big Machine
- Broken Bow
- MCA
- Stoney Creek

# **Gold Label**

- Arista
- Curb
- EMI Nashville
- Mercury
- Valory

# Large Market OM/PD

- Christi Brooks, KCYY/San Antonio
   Travis Moon, KKBQ/Houston
   Tim Roberts, WYCD/Detroit

- Meg Stevens, WUBL/Atlanta
- Gregg Swedberg, KEEY/Minneapolis

# Medium Market OM/PD

- Carletta Blake, WGAR/Cleveland
- Casey Carter, WNOE/New Orleans
- Bruce Logan, WIRK/West Palm Beach
   MoJoe Roberts, KWNR/Las Vegas
- Steve Stewart, WWKA/Orlando

# Small Market OM/PD

- JD Greene, KZPK/St. Cloud, MNSarah Kay, WQMX/Akron, OH
- Brent Michaels, KUZZ/Bakersfield, CA
- Jon Shannon, WPOR/Portland, ME • Chelsey Steinhauer, WMAD/Madison, WI

# Large Market APD/MD

- Marty Brooks, WIL/St. Louis
   Lois Lewis, KNIX/Phoenix
   Brooks O'Brian, KSON/San Diego
- Dawn Santolucito, WKLB/Boston · Lauren "Lo" Sessions, KKBQ/Houston

# Medium Market APD/MD

- Heather Froglear, KRFG/RiversideBilly Kidd, WBEE/Rochester

- Bob Pickett, KVET/Austin
  Tyler Reese, WKDF/Nashville
  Jesse Tack, WUBE/Cincinnati

- Small Market APD/MD
- Michelle Buckles, KZSN/Wichita, KSKenn McCloud, KUZZ/Bakersfield, CA
- Charli McCloud, KOZZ/Bakersfield, CA
  Charli McKenzie, WNCY/Green Bay, WI
  Melissa "Mo" Wagner, WUSY/Chattanooga, TN
  Sarah Weaver, WKML/Fayetteville, NC

# **SVP-VP/National Promotion**• Stacy Blythe, Big Loud • Josh Easler, Records/Nashville

- Shelley Hargis, Broken Bow
  Ali Matkosky, Big Loud
  Erik Powell, Big Machine

# **Label Streaming Specialist**

- Rachel Clogston, Sony
- Benson Curb, Curb
- Brittani Koster, Big Loud
  Chris Loss, BMG/BBRMG
  Annie Ortmeier, UMGN

# **Director/National Promotion**

- David Friedman, UMGNBo Martinovich, Sony
- Lou Ramirez, WarnerShari Roth, Warner
- Tyler Waugh, Big Loud

Market Manager/GM Stephanie Callihan, KKBQ/Houston JC Campese, WWKA/Orlando Paul O'Malley, WCKN/Charleston, SC Taylor Walet, KXKT/Omaha

Allison Warren, WKDF & WSM-FM/Nashville

# Large Market Personality/Show

- Chris Carr, Kia Becht & McKaila Poppen; Chris Carr & Company; KEEY/Minneapolis
  Danny Dwyer, KUPL/Portland
  Nicole Michalik, WXTU/Philadelphia
  Andy "Riggs" Riggle, Katelyn Maida & Erica Rico; The 93Q Morning Show; KKBQ/Houston
  Angie Ward, WUBL/Atlanta

- Medium Market Personality/Show

  "Wayne D" Danielson & Tay Hamilton, WSIX/Nashville

  Heather Froglear, KFRG/Riverside

  Marty McFly, WSM-FM/Nashville

  Amy Paige, WKDF/Nashville

  Jesse Tack & Anna Marie, Jesse & Anna,

- WUBE/Cincinnati

- Small Market Personality/Show

   Brent Michaels, KUZZ/Bakersfield, CA

   Brook Stephens, KZPK/St. Cloud, MN

   Lewis Stokes, WOGK/Gainesville-Ocala, FL

   Melissa "Mo" Wagner & Greg "StyckMan"
  Owens, Mo & StyckMan, WUSY/Chattanooga, TN

   Philip Gibbons, WGSQ/Cookeville, TN

- National Daily Personality/Show

   Bobby Bones, The Bobby Bones Show, Premiere

   Derek "Big D" Haskins, Sean "Bubba"

  Powell, Patrick Thomas and Jessica "Carsen"

  Humphreville; Big D & Bubba; Silverfish Media/Compass
- Charlie Monk, The Mayor Of Music Row, SiriusXM
  Elaina Smith, Nights With Elaina, Westwood One
  Granger Smith, After MidNite With Granger Smith, Premiere

- National Weekly Personality/Show
   Whitney Allen, The Big Time, Westwood One
   Kix Brooks, American Country Countdown With Kix Brooks, Westwood One
- "Wayne D" Danielson, iHeartCountry House
- Party, iHeartMedia
   Lon Helton, Country Countdown USA, Compass
   Tracy Lawrence, Honky Tonkin' With Tracy
  Lawrence, Silverfish Media/Compass

# **National Programmer/Curator**

- Johnny Chiang, Pandora Charlie Cook, Cumulus
- Jay Cruze, then-iHeartMedia
- Tim Roberts, Audacy
- Bree Wagner, Apple Music Country

# **Regional Promotion**

- John D'Amico, Big LoudKatie Bright, CapitolNikki Wood, Big Loud

- Scotty O'Brien, Broken Bow
  Trudie Daniell, EMI Nashville

# **Independent Promotion Executive**

- John Ettinger, 16camino
  Larry Pareigis, Nine North
  Diane Richey, Diane Richey Promotions
- Lisa Smoot, Jerry Duncan PromotionJeff Solima, New Revolution

- New Face Of Country Music

   Kristian Barowsky, PickleJar

   Scot "Froggy" Langley, WQIK/Jacksonville

   Andrew "Latty" Latimer, WGKX/Memphis

   Bo Matthews, KBAY/San Jose

   Tucker "Frito" Young & Katy Dempsey, KCYY/San Antonio



# COUNTRY'S BEST DAY AND NIGHT

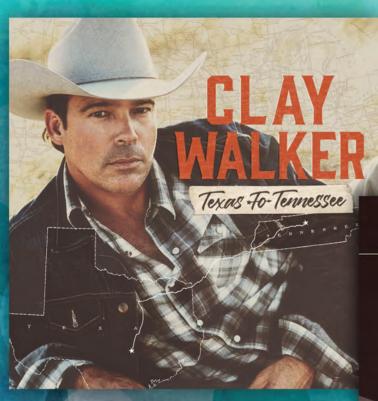
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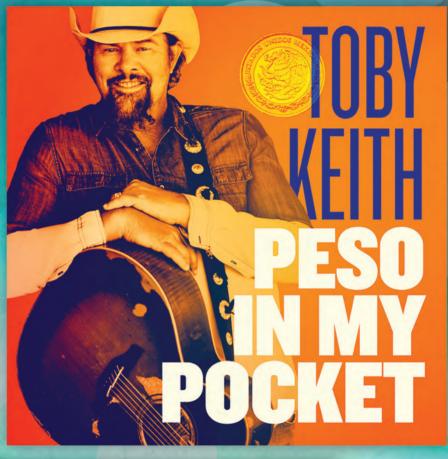


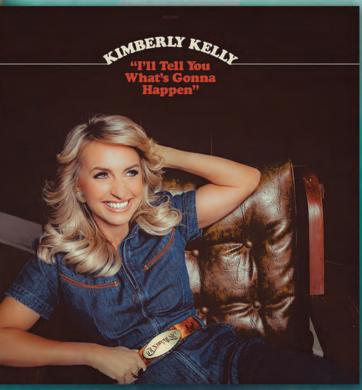
# GREAT ARTISTS L. GREAT MUSIC! SHOW DOG NASHVILLE

FEATURING THE HIT SINGLE "OKLAHOMA BREAKDOWN"



TOP 10 COUNTRY TIKTOK ARTIST. NEXT UP: "YOU LOOK GOOD"

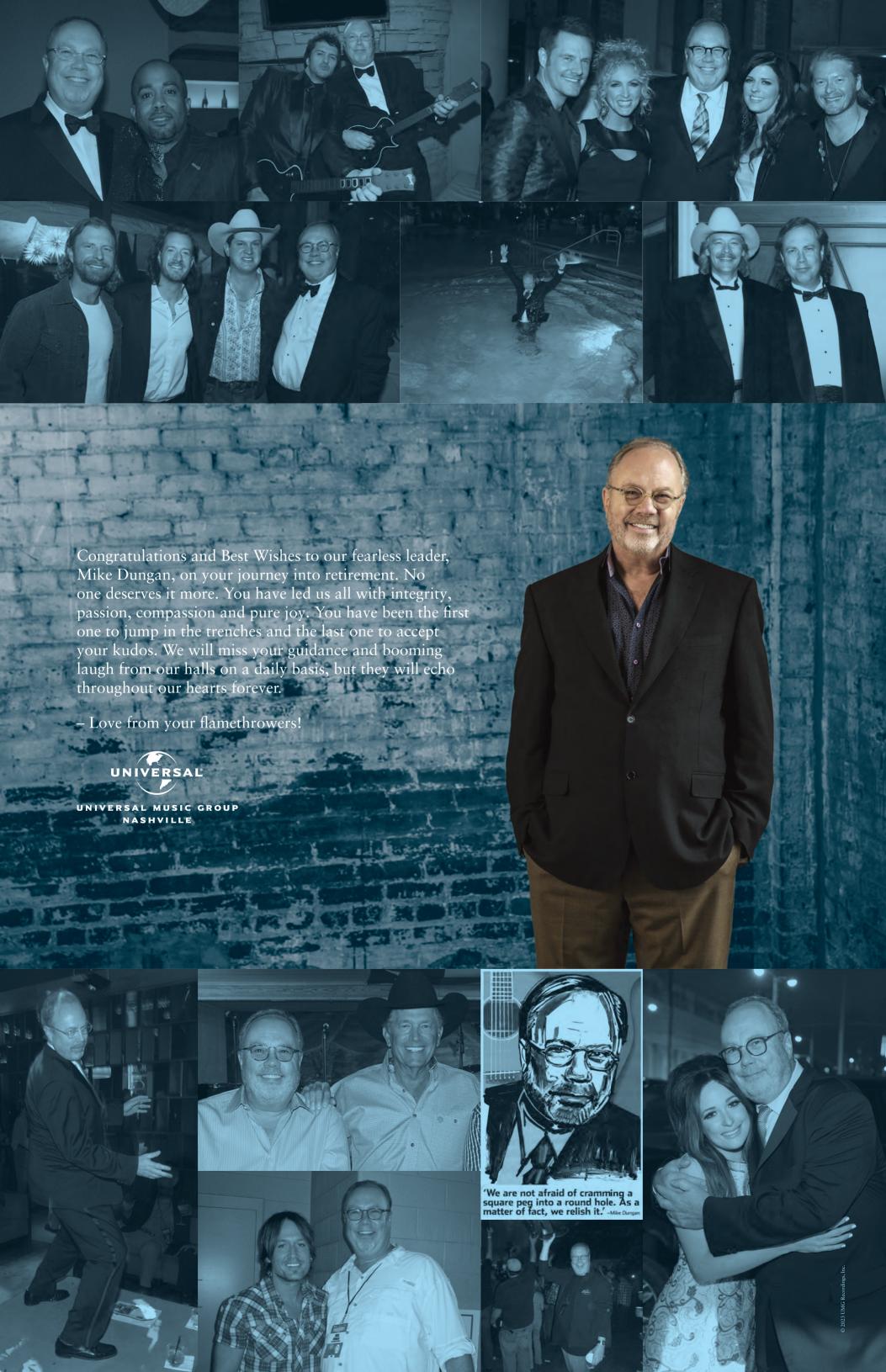




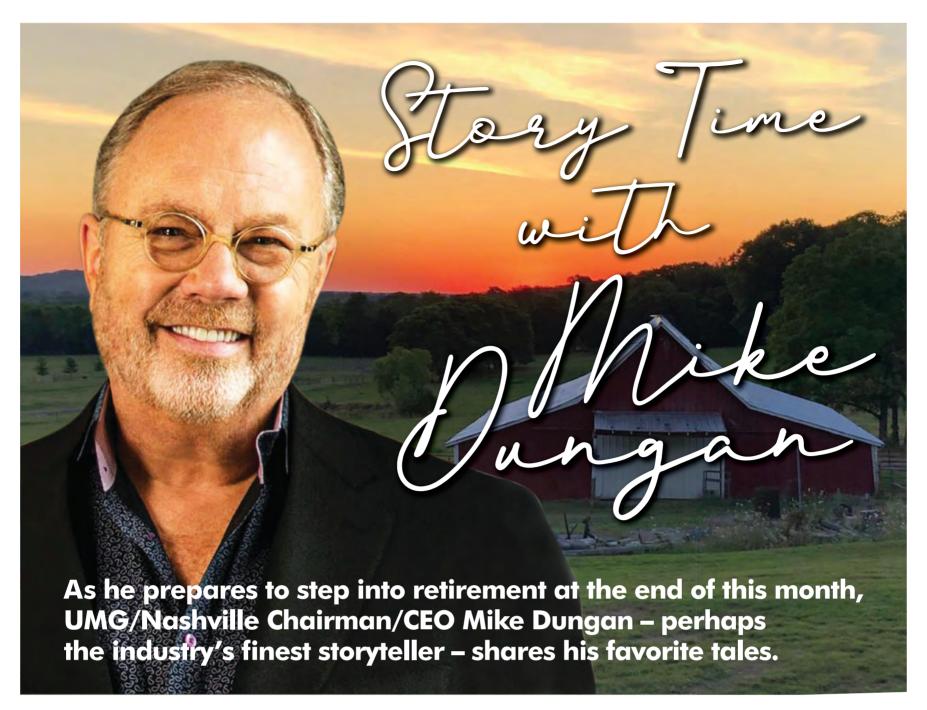
NEW SONG..."SUMMERS LIKE THAT"
COMING LATER THIS SPRING

NEVER APOLOGIZE FOR BEING COUNTRY!









# Seminar You Sure?

My first CRS was at the Opryland Hotel, which was bizarre enough. The plants alone will completely freak you out. You can't drink and walk around in there. And what I saw was a whole bunch of people who looked like they were entering a Charlie Daniels lookalike contest. Scruffy beards, big hats and really loud. I thought, "Oh my God. I guess this is the price we pay for doing country music."

I was aware of a song called "You'll Think Of Me," because it was written by my friend Darrell Brown along with Dennis Matkosky and Ty Lacy. To me, it was a chick song; the demo sounded like Gladys Knight. I pitched it to every woman I was working with, and they all passed. Keith [Urban] was doing what became the *Golden Road* record and told me he was cutting it. I said, "The one about the cat and the sweater? You can't cut that. It's a chick song." He said, "No, you're wrong, man. I'm going to prove it to you." When we got the album, everyone thought the song was incredible, but "too bad it will never be a single. It's not country enough." But something unpredicted happened.

Under my predecessor, Capitol did not have a presence at *CRS*. He didn't believe in it – didn't care. I was looking for an opportunity to participate and to show off our wares, particularly Keith, who was performing around the country and killing it everywhere he went. Connie Bradley gave up ASCAP's *CRS* show, and I jumped on it. I put Keith up there and told him, "Your mission is really simple. We're doing great. Radio is playing you, but you're still on a song-by-song basis, because that's all you've earned. But if you do the kind of show I've been seeing you



do on the road, it will close the door on you being an automatic add. You'll rise to that elite core with Tim McGraw and others whose every single goes straight on the air." Keith didn't really understand what I was saying, but he did his thing, and it was incredible.

I had introduced him onstage, so everybody saw me. When the show was over, I was walking back through that ballroom, and every 10 feet, someone would stop to tell me that they also programmed an AC or Hot AC station and intended to play "You'll



Think Of Me." I'd take another 10 steps, and the same thing would happen. Because of consolidation, suddenly programmers had three, four or five stations in their market, and this was the result. I came back to my office and had a call from Jim Ryan, AC format captain for then-Clear Channel. He said, "I don't know you or who Keith Urban is, but my phone just lit up over this song. Tell me what the hell's going on here." I just started laughing. I'd wanted this show to make Keith an automatic, but I hadn't expected this.

During another *CRS* lunch, RJ Curtis was board president and making all the announcements at the podium. I went out with him so I wouldn't have to do that long walk across the stage to introduce Ryan Shupe & The RubberBand and Jamie O'Neal ... a little too grandiose for that purpose. I'm standing to RJ's side trying to stay out of the spotlight, but it's hitting me in the shoulder, and I'm very conscious of it. So, I stepped to my left to get out of the spotlight and fell off the stage, straight down on my head, upside down.

I'd fallen five or six feet down into a box full of gear. I had no feeling – no pain. It was as if I was floating in air. Had I suffered an aneurysm? "I think I'm dead. This is what happens when you die." I was in some kind of purgatory, but I could hear someone talking over a loudspeaker. It was RJ – he had no idea.

Then, [event manager] Scott DeVoss is above me with a flashlight, talking into his backline mic. "Man down! Man down!" He pulls me out. The only people who saw it were in the front row because it was so dark. When I got up, I felt fine; all I could do was laugh. I fell off the fucking stage, and a thousand people didn't see it! When it was over, I pulled my jacket back, and my shirt was covered in blood. I'd scraped my torso all the way down. The world's biggest raspberry.

We were just getting started with Darius Rucker when I took him to *CRS* and the Bridge Bar. It was a feeding frenzy. I was hoping people would know and appreciate him, but I didn't expect that kind of attention. We were being pulled in different directions. I could see him at the bar, and the crowd around him getting bigger and bigger. He was continually reaching in his pocket and throwing tens and twenties up on the bar – he's buying people drinks. He's got like \$200 on the bar by the time I got back to him. I'm like, "No, no, no! I've got a tab! Use my tab!" He looks at me and goes, "Man ... I'm not like the other artists you work with. I'm already rich."

Mike Culotta and I put together a CRS Relay Race. There were 10 teams that had to ride a tricycle, walk with an egg in a spoon, pass pool noodles back and forth and pull someone on a broom. Culotta was great, because he brought in tiki bars and palm trees from remotes he'd done. I told him I'd take care of the material for the relays, but as the day drew closer, I was keenly aware I didn't have it yet. I would go to CRS in the morning, work my ass off all day, then get caught up in the bar scene at night and get really drunk. I just kept putting it off.

The night before the race, I got pulled into a room by Erv Woolsey to hear an artist. Then, I was in the bar again. Next thing I know, it's 1am, and I still don't have tricycles. So, I go to Walmart in Franklin. I grab 10 brooms, 10 noodles, tricycles – I'm pushing all this around the store in a cart, drunk, and everyone is looking at me. There's so much stuff it won't fit in my car, so I get a kid from the store to stand outside with it all while I run home and get my wife's vehicle, which fortunately could hold it all.

# Come Fly With Me

For my 13th birthday, my mom bought me two tickets to The Rascals at Cincinnati Gardens. I watched Dino Danelli spin his drumsticks, throw them 20 feet in the air, catch them, and go right back into the song. Holy fucking shit! I didn't have any desire to play, but I thought, "I'm going to be in this business in some way!" Not long after that, I discovered a record store called Swallens that was the coolest place in the world. I started hanging out there and begging for a job, which they gave me. For two years, it was just



# STORYTIME WITH MIKE DUNGAN

me and my best friend Glenn Lindahl. We probably sold more music than anyone in Cincinnati. I was 17. Then, we moved to Sight & Sound and built a monster bigger than Swallens. Some of our best customers were Bootsy Collins, Mike Reid, Joe Morgan and Ken Griffey, who always held the hands of his two boys – Craig and Ken Griffey Jr, who were about five and seven at the time. Of course, I had no idea one of them would grow up to be one of the most feared batters to ever step into the box.

I loved all music and had what some described as an old soul. Someone returned a copy of *Sinatra At The Sands* accompanied by Count Basie saying it was scratched. We put it on the turntable of our in-store sound system. Good god! That record boomed in the store – Sinatra at his finest. From that moment on, I became a massive fan.

Fast forward a couple of years. I'm 19, and my Sinatra obsession makes me the subject of some loving ridicule from a few of my too-cool friends. Sinatra un-retires and is bringing his tour to my hometown. I applied every bit of pressure I could as a part-time record buyer to get tickets – fifth row. Six rows in front of Johnny Bench. Yeah, I was a bit of an oddball in the room with long hair and a healthy beard. There was an empty seat beside me, right



on the aisle. After the opening act, a little old bald guy sits down. "How ya doin?" "Doing good." "Gonna be a great show, isn't it?" "I can't wait." "Me too."

Four minutes later, Sinatra jumps onstage – black tie, Nelson Riddle orchestra behind him. Oh my God. Without saying a word, the man and the band go right into it – "Come Fly With Me." Four songs with barely a pause in between – no talking. When he finally breaks, Sinatra talks about how happy he is be there. Then

another song. Then he says, "Ladies and gentlemen, we are blessed tonight to have one of the greatest tunesmiths in the world with us in the audience. A man who can take common words in the English language and turn them into magic. Please, everyone, welcome one of the greatest songwriters ever, Mr. Sammy Cahn." And the guy next to me stands up. The spotlight hits him, he waves, and Sinatra goes on to say, "I don't know why you're here in Cincinnati, Sammy, but I'm happy you are, and I love you. I love you so much, I made sure you got a seat right next to Jesus!"

I claim to be the first person in the nation to get airplay on Rick Springfield's "Jessie's Girl." It showed up in the mail one day, no advance warning, and I don't know anything about the guy. But it's great. The next day, I'm going to Columbus, OH, so I take it with me, along with all the music I'm supposed to get played. I got two big stations to play it out of the box. Of course, it went on to massive success, and Rick and I became friends.

Later, one of the station GMs came to me because he was on the board of the new zoo, which was really struggling. He said, "It has rained every weekend, and I think we're going to go under. I need your help. Don't you have this Rick Springfield guy who's on *General Hospital*? Could we do a benefit for the zoo?" We set up "98-cent WNCI day with Rick Springfield" at the zoo with a temporary stage, barriers and security. Rick was not



veryone in this town admired and respected Chris Stapleton. When *Traveller* was completed, Cindy Mabe had a plan to get him CMA Awards votes – mainly by mailing the music to everyone in the city. By the time voting started, everyone had a copy and was saying the record was life changing. Well, it put [CMA Awards Exec. Prod.] Robert Deaton in a spot, because Chris had five nominations but didn't have a hit on the radio or anywhere else.

Joe Fisher was in A&R for us at the time. He hadn't signed Stapleton but, like all of us, was falling in love with the music as the demos were coming through. One Saturday, Joe was driving around town with a new friend named Trace Ayala, who was know to us as "Justin Timberlake's best friend since they were in the third grade together back in Memphis." Joe's CD changer flips over to the new Stapleton rough mixes, and Ayala flips out. "Justin would love this! Can I send it to him?" So, Joe calls me from the car, and I said, "Yeah, okay. What's the worst that can happen?"

Fast forward a bit, Joe's in his office and gets call from a woman who says, "You don't know me, but I'm Jessica Biel. I'm Justin Timberlake's wife, and his birthday is coming up. He's got everything, so I can't buy a gift, but I try to give him experiences. Is there any way you can convince Chris Stapleton to fly on our jet to our place in Montana to play at his party?" So, we make the calls. Chris comes to my office and asks if he should do it. I said, "Hell yeah. Why wouldn't you? Whatever happens in your career, you'll be able to tell your grandkids you hung out one night with Harrison Ford and probably a bunch of other famous people." Well, the story goes that

Stapleton was so great and Timberlake was so infatuated that Timberlake borderline ignored all the other guests.

Back to Robert Deaton's problem. Can he put an artist with no hits on the show? But can he just ignore someone with five nominations? The only time that has happened was Kacey Musgraves with the ACMs, and I'll go to my grave carrying a grudge about that. Anyway, Cindy Mabe brings up the idea of asking Justin if he would perform with Chris on the award show, and Stapleton makes the call.

There's a wrinkle here, because Tim McGraw was dropping a big new record the week of the CMAs, but Eric Church came to us at the last minute wanting to drop a record, too. It was not the way I wanted to do it, but it's Eric Church. I was trying to honor his wish to get music to his fans. So, we busted our chops to get the record out, which pissed off McGraw and his manager Scott Siman immensely. Scott texted me during the show to rip me for doing them dirty.

The night of the show, we are more than \$900,000 in the hole on *Traveller* ... because marketing music is expensive. We didn't have streaming yet, just iTunes downloads. We agreed internally that if we sold 30,000 units from this performance, we'd be really happy. Well, I'm in the audience watching on my phone in real time, and the numbers are flying. People are buying at an incredible pace. I did the math in my head and, by the time the performance was over, we were in the black. I got home at 3am, drunk, and called Scott Siman to say, "What me, you, Tim and Eric didn't see coming ... was Chris Stapleton." That record just fucking blew by everyone. We did 350,000 equivalent units in that week and never looked back.



harles Kelley just dove into the pool. Luke Bryan started laughing, and he dove in. Ten minutes later, I was grabbed, but I was digging in, because I was wearing really expensive shoes from Barney's and had my phone in my pocket. I wasn't going! But Dierks Bentley reached from behind and grabbed me by the balls ... and when somebody grabs you by the balls, you go anywhere they want you to go.

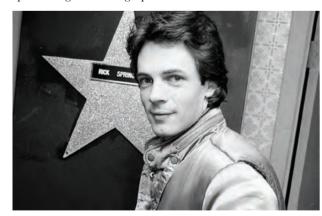
For as long as I have known my wife, the minute she has more than two drinks, she has to have pancakes. After that party, there

was no place to get pancakes. The days of all-night breakfast at those casinos were long gone. But the manager of the MGM was so happy with all the energy our party had brought to his place that he stepped up and said, "If you want pancakes, pick a place, and I'll make sure our chefs make you pancakes." So, at 2am, we all went to Wolfgang Puck's. We sat at the bar – me in my new MGM robe they gave me after the pool incident – and ate pancakes. My wife was happy.

going to perform, just take the mic and say a few words. We got there, and I've never seen anything like it. It was a Woodstock of 12-year-old girls as far as the eye could see, screaming at the top of their lungs.

Rick hits the stage, starts to talk, and it gets louder and louder with each passing moment. They surge forward, crush the barriers, get by security, push up against the stage and are rocking it. The cops say, "We're shutting this down." We run off the stage trying to get to the administration building, and there are 4,000 little kids running after us.

Rick is a few steps ahead of me. At one point, I got stepped on by a cop's horse. And there's this little, tiny speedster girl catching up to us from the side. I've never



seen anybody so fast in my life! If she catches Rick, she's going to slow him down, and we're all dead. Without even thinking, I elbowed her in the side of the face and knocked her to the muddy ground, saving our lives.

We ended up in lockdown in that admin building with the new zoo director until the police could clear it all up. That zoo director is a guy named Jack Hanna, otherwise known as Jungle Jack Hanna. So, every time I needed a semi-celebrity to do something funny on tape, I called Jack.

John Grady and I were friends before BMG bought our companies. I was the RCA guy, and John was the Arista guy. We were friendly competitors, and that office in Minneapolis was full of troublemakers. There was a lot of funny shit going on; we had the police there a couple of times trying to nail us down. One of the innocent things that would happen when you have a lot of snow outside is snowball fights in the office. You'd be sitting behind your desk and, bam, you'd get hit in the face. You'd go,

"Fuck you," go outside, and make a snowball. Pretty soon, snowballs are flying everywhere down the hall, and the poor people who weren't involved would come in the next morning to all their papers having blotted out ink from the water.

Grady and I were the last two out of there after one of these famous big time snowball fights – alcohol and all kinds of other bad things were involved. We continued to pound each other with snowballs in the big, empty parking lot. We pretty much finished when I ran outside after Grady, who was getting into his car. I nailed him square in the face ... and I hurt him. I hurt him, and he was pissed.

He jumped in his car and started after me. There's a foot of snow, and I'm trying to run in zigzags, but Grady keeps coming like he was seriously going to kill me. I finally get back to the office, but I'm scared I'm not make going to make it. He's coming really hard, so at the last minute, I dive into some bushes. When I did, Grady's Jeep slid into the three steps up to the front door, pretty severely bending the iron railing. When you go by that building to this day, that railing is bent. That was 38 years ago. He would've killed me. "Hey, remember when Grady maimed that RCA guy with his car? Those guys were always fun!"

We moved to Nashville Thanksgiving weekend of

1990. A couple weeks later, Arista had the Del Beatles performing at their Christmas party at the Ace of Clubs. My wife and I joined the throngs on the dancefloor, and over time, worked our way right up front by the stage. The band finishes a Wilson Pickett song and goes into what sounds like "I'm A Man" by Spencer Davis Group. I'm like, "Holy shit, this guy sounds just like Steve Winwood." I look up right above me and ... it's Steve Winwood! Right there at the edge of the stage. That's what used to happen in Nashville.

Hanging from the ceiling, they had a disco booth over each side of the stage – just cages really – with scantily clad women dancing like they were on *Shindig*. Then, our hired Santa Claus got into one of them, and I was drunk enough to join them – three of us dancing in a disco booth. People were pointing me out to [label head] Tim DuBois going, "Who is that?" Tim laughs, "Oh, that's our new head of marketing!" I danced so hard, I triggered an asthma attack and had to literally crawl out of there to find my wife's purse, hoping my inhaler was in it. One of the most fun nights of my life.

**From the outside**, my impression of Nashville was it's where people go to semi-retire. Everyone I knew who worked there played a lot of golf. I thought it would be

easier, but it wasn't; it was just nicer. I thought I was going to teach these hillbillies how to do business that would take them to the next level, but they taught me how to accomplish the same thing without being a motherfucker. I had come from the motherfucker side of the business.

Four or five days after I got to Nashville, I was driving in, late for a meeting. It was lightly raining, and I was on one of those cellphones mounted on the floor of my Toyota Camry. I turned left on Chet Atkins Drive, and there was a little blue car parked on the side of the road. Just as I'm about to turn left into the alley, this car bolted out in front of me. I jammed on my brakes and started spinning in slow motion – bam, bam, bam. Finally, my car comes to a stop facing backwards on the other side of her. I jump out and am screaming at this young lady. She's frozen and terrified. I look at my car to see how bad the damage is, but I hadn't hit her. I must have spun all the way around her car, and the noises I heard were stuff in the trunk or in my head. At this point, other cars are lined up waiting for this raving lunatic to get out of the way. I'm climbing back into my car, embarrassed I've made a public spectacle of myself, and the first car in line is a white Lexus LS. The license plate says, "No Show" and – you got it – it's George Jones. He is laughing his ass off. At that moment I

# Belind The Music

Dierks Bentley was the first artist I signed who just took off. We had accomplished that at Arista when Tim DuBois signed Alan Jackson ... then when Tim DuBois signed Brooks & Dunn ... and when Tim DuBois signed Diamond Rio ... BlackHawk. Dierks' little white tank top – "What Was I Thinkin'" – was a huge hit out of the box.

Keith Urban had his first record out when I got to Capitol, but he hadn't had anything close to a hit at radio, and the record was not selling well. We got into "I Want To Be Your Everything" and, by hook or by crook, got it to No. 1. We came back with "But For The Grace Of God," which also went to the top. Then we had the *Golden Road* record and, boom.

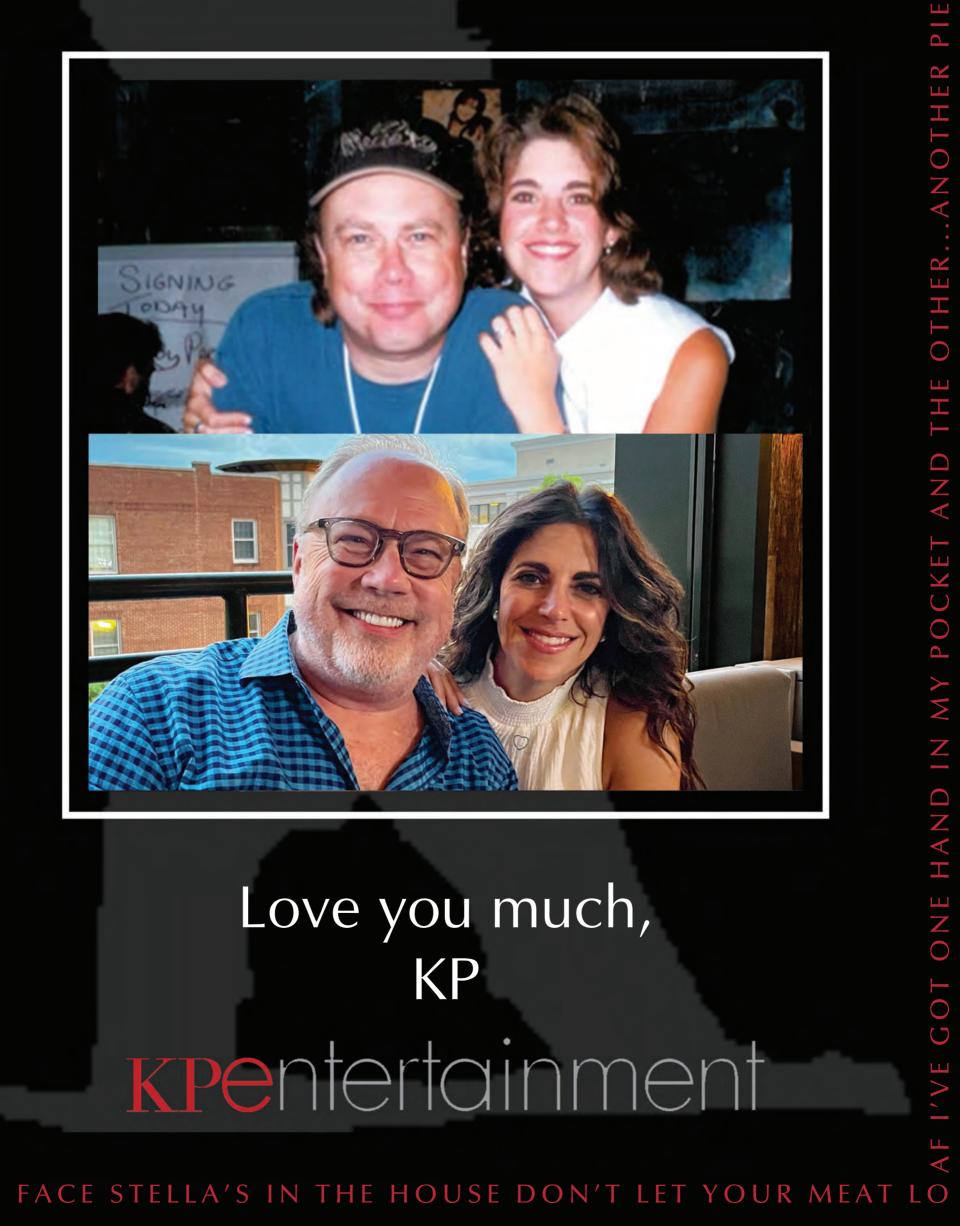
Cindy Thompson was fun – a grind, but we proved to ourselves we could make it happen. I lived through that with Bill Catino – really fighting, scratching and clawing. We got a No. 1 record, went gold off that single, and then she quit. Walked away.

One I wish we'd done better with is Ryan Shupe & The RubberBand, who were phenomenal. I don't want to say they were ahead of their time, but this environment would've been a lot more friendly to them, and they would've gotten more shots. Same with The Jenkins – I thought they were the real

# Thank you,

# DUNGAN

for all the memories and for teaching me how to do this business.





Thank you **Dungan** for letting me be me in my music and building a team of wonderful people around me. You were born to be a music guy and will always be.

Love ya,





# Snow Business

Gary Noftz worked for our distribution company in Pittsburgh. He was a very odd guy who carried around a blow-up Frosty The Snowman in a pack on his belt. If he ever saw a famous person, he'd blow it up and take a picture of them holding it. When I went to a cabin he had on an island in the middle of the Allegheny River, he had big books: Frosty & Me volumes one through six full of these pictures. Sandy Kofax, Robert DeNiro – Dolly had it between her boobs. I even talked Clive Davis into taking a picture with it for Gary. Tim DuBois and I were at a BMG convention, and Gary was there, so I was like, "Gary! I need Frosty!" He blew it up and we took the picture. It remains one of my favorite photos.

# STORYTIME WITH MIKE DUNGAN

deal. We got off track when the too-country guys at radio loved this one song and told me I was a fucking fool if I didn't lead with it. Well, the other 85% of PDs thought it was too country. So, we ruined it.

In our first real meeting after Cindy Mabe joined the company I said, "Okay, we have one issue that we should think about dealing with: Dierks Bentley." He'd come on so hard, winning all the New Artist awards, there was a real concern he wouldn't even be nominated in the next cycle. I'm not sure if he deserved to win, but I knew it would crush him if he wasn't even nominated. Cindy said, "Well, I've had this idea I've always wanted to do and worked on for years at RCA, but Joe Galante would never let me do it." I said, "Stop right there. Whatever it is, do it." She built the Nashville Pub Crawl with a concert on Demonbreun and Dierks as the headliner. And he got the nomination. That was the first of many flashes of brilliance Cindy had with us.

# You Can Do Magic

When we were launching Eric Church, we had several singles that never quite got traction. We were selling music, and he was selling tickets, but he was so bombastically different from everybody else that he was held outside of the mainstream by all but a few supporters. We got to the midway point of the second album, and it explodes. He's playing arenas and winning awards. I wrote a note to these people – I call them the Magic 23 – saying, basically, "A

lot of great things are happening for Eric Church, but they weren't always. You are one of the people who was there from the beginning, and I'll never forget it. There were exactly 23 of you, and I know, because I took notes. Those other fuckers can kiss my ass. I'd mow your lawn, but I'm really tired, old, and fat. So, I'm just going to say thank you." A lot of people framed that and put it up in their office. When I took Alan Jackson out on the road, he kept seeing that and said, "I'm sick of seeing that Eric Church thing. If I knew how much you loved him, I don't think I would've come back with you."

that song, I was worried we weren't in the place we needed to be. They were doing the "Fuck you, we're going to prove it to you" thing. When I heard the finished track, I was like, "Nuh-uh." Not only that, but their version was also worse than the demo.

I don't have a good poker face. When I'm happy you see it; when I'm not you see it. They played two more songs that were just okay. Then they played a song they'd just written that I was aware of from a guitar-vocal demo: "Need You Now." I was sitting at the board with all of them behind me. I raised my arms straight up, turned around slowly and went, "Touchdown!" They're like, "You like that?" I said, "Fuck me! Yeah!" One of those gifts from God, straight out of nowhere.

# I raised my arms straight up, turned around slowly and went, 'Touchdown!'

Lady A's "Need You Now" would be a defining moment for anyone's career, and it was for me. Especially because the band was focused on another track. They were cutting four sides and had another one they thought was a smash. I didn't – not that I have all the answers, but I was scared. This was their second record, and we had accomplished enough on the first to give us the right to come back. Based on

I inherited Trace Adkins, whose career wasn't in a great shape. There were people advising me to walk away, but I thought he was the most talented and unique vocalist out there. We were butting heads about material. Trace and his producer Dann Huff also didn't see eye-to-eye, and I sided with Dann more than anything. There was a weird song Dann wanted to cut, but Trace refused. I said, "Look, we owe this to Dann. Let's cut it. If it's as horrible as you and I both think it is, it'll never see the light of day, I promise."

I got a call from Dann one night telling me they just couldn't get the song he liked to wor in the studio. He said, "I appreciate you going as far as you did with it. But I added another song into the session that you might know called 'I'm Trying.'" I got the CD the next day and was listening to the tracks in my car as they were coming up. When I got to "I'm Trying," I almost wrecked the car. I had to pull over on I-65. I thought it was the best thing Trace ever did, but my promotion staff hated it ... Trace hated it ... his manager hated it. But in my mind, we didn't have anything even close. I've never practiced the pound-down on my artists to make them do things they don't want to do, but I will wear their ass out until they see my logic.

Finally, I convinced Trace to come with it first. Then, I had to say to the promotion staff, "I know you don't believe in this, but our relationship is new, and you want to prove yourself to me. You have to show me you can get a tough record played – one you don't necessarily believe in. As my boss used to say to me, I don't pay you to get Hall & Oates records played." They responded, and goddamn, we went to No. 2. A shame not to go to one, but it was just awesome. Trace still resents it, because he thinks it's not really him – had a mellotron on it. But to me, it's what country music should be.



Mike,

It was so good to have you on my side for all these years. Thank you for all you've done for me and my career.

A good friend of mine once told me 'there comes a time when you've gotta set your bucket down.' So true. Set your bucket down, my friend.

All the best to you and your family in the many years to come. Hope our paths cross often.

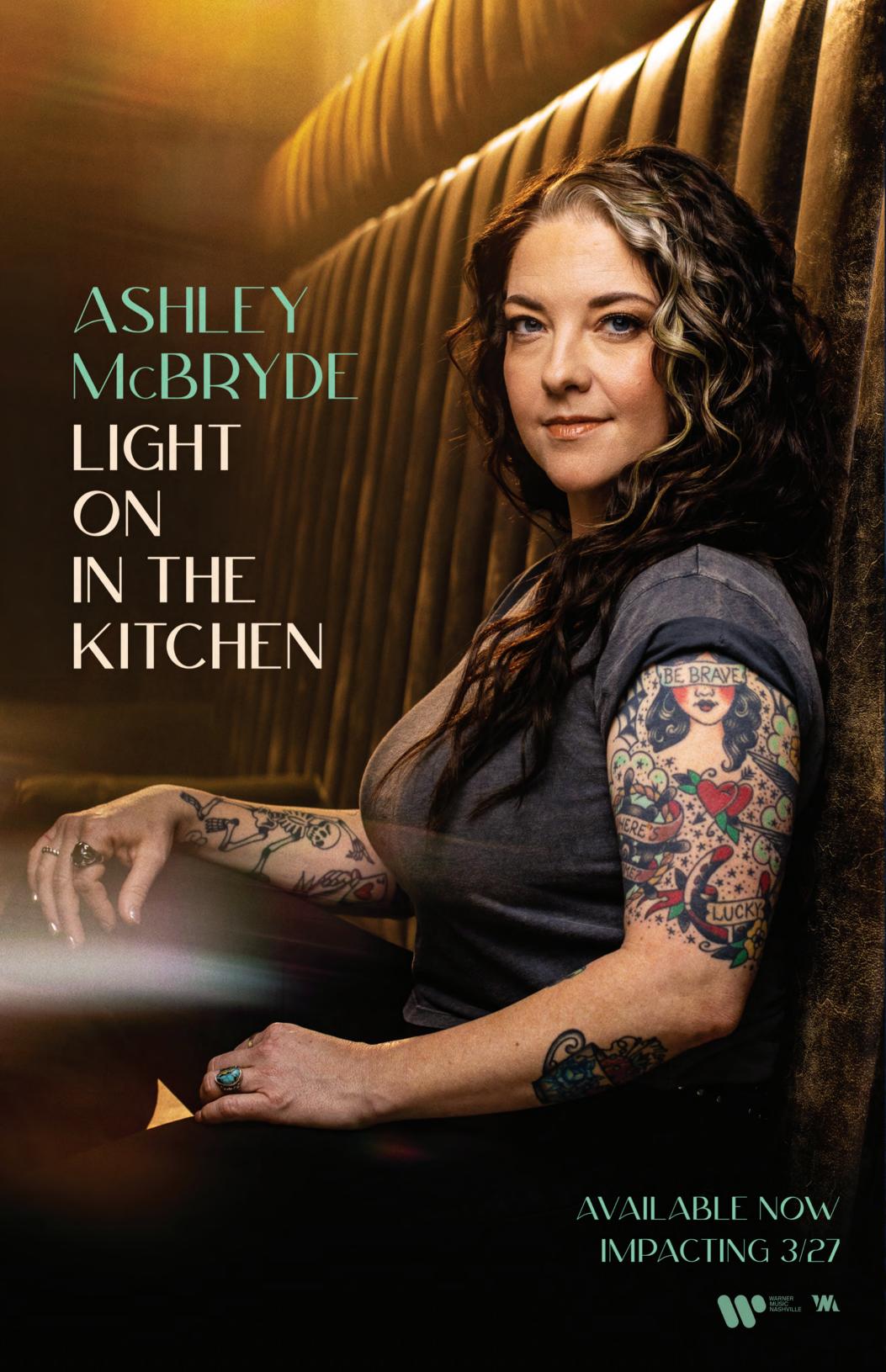




# The Erv Woolsey Company

Hey Mike.

It seems like it was only yesterday when we started working together, and here we are saying goodbye. You have always taken care of your staff and it showed. Your relationships with your artists speak volumes. Good luck with your new chapter in life and enjoy time with your family.









# Shirt Happens

Autumn House found a song called "You Look Good In My Shirt" written by Mark Nesler, Tom Shapiro and Tony Martin. I thought it was an absolute smash. Keith Urban liked it, but he didn't love it and didn't want to cut it. I made the same promise I make to everyone when we get in this spot: Let's cut it. If you hate it, I promise it will not be on your record. I will even pay for the cut and won't make you recoup it. Fortunately, I had Dann Huff right next to me agreeing it was a smash.

At the time, we had limits on how many compositions an artist could have on an album. If you went to 11 cuts, it was another 9.1 cents in royalty expense per album – controlled comp was a bigger deal back then. I almost always gave in when an artist wanted another track. This one was the opposite. I wanted it, and Keith didn't.

I was in a car on a promo tour with Jennifer Hanson, who is married to Mark Nesler. He's also her guitar player on the tour ... and he's in the back seat. Catino's driving. Keith calls and says, "Coach, I like the song, but I don't think I have room for it. I have 10 great cuts already." I asked if there was room if we went to 11. He hesitated, because he could tell I was trying to trick him. "Because, I will pay out of our pocket to have it on the album. I believe that strongly in it." He says, "Well, I guess so."

Really weird experience, because Nesler's in the backseat listening, though I'm not sure how aware he was. So, I turned around and said, "Based on the fact Keith doesn't seem to really appreciate the song, if I get it on the album, chances are extremely high it will never be a single. I can force it on the album, based on what you just heard me say to Keith, or I'll

give it back to you so someone else who might make it a single can record it. Up to you." He asked to hear it. So, I make Catino pull over, got into my bag in the trunk, pull out the CD, and we play it. Nesler says, "Jesus. I don't think anybody could cut it better than that. Anyone, anywhere. Yeah, let's put it on."

We ran out four singles on that album – *Golden Road* – and I was really pushing for "Shirt" as a fifth. Keith had another record on the way and wouldn't agree, so it was lost. But I told him I wasn't giving up – we'd put it on a greatest hits and make it a single. When we



Reign Is A Good Thing: Framing the issue with Luke Bryan.

finally did a greatest hits, we had 18 tracks, but Keith didn't want "Shirt." His logic was that it felt like going backwards. If it wasn't a hit four or five years ago, it feels disingenuous. Alright, fine. We put the hits out and didn't include it. We had a couple minor hits and had scanned 800,000 copies when Keith called.

"Coach, I've been thinking, and I'd like you to consider reissuing that greatest hits and putting "You Look Good In My Shirt' on it. I'll release it as a single." You've got to be fucking kidding me! I've got more than 700,000 people that have already bought it, so I'm somehow screwing them into buying another album unless we issue a CD single, which I hated doing. But we did both. The song was a four-week No. 1. At the party I said, "Some things you just can't keep down." I credited Autumn and Dann for staying with it and Keith for keeping his mind open even after it seemed like it was completely closed. That was a glorious moment for me.

Jimmy Harnen and Bill Catino plowed through the first Luke Bryan album with me. We did just enough to earn the right to do a second. Luke cut six sides, was convinced he had his first single, and wanted us to put it out while he finished the album. I listened to all six, and it wasn't there. I took it to Jimmy ... same reaction. I went back to Luke and [his manager] Kerri Edwards, and it quickly became very testy with a manager and artist who couldn't have been happier up to that point. We didn't talk for three weeks when Kerri called and asked for another meeting off site. They didn't want to come to my office – that's how bad it was.

We went to Jeff Stevens' writing room, where they played me remixes of the same six sides. I said, "Guys, it's not the mixes, it's the songs." They're like, "Are you kidding me?" I ask what else they've got, and they played me another 10 songs they didn't think were good enough to make the top six. Nothing. I'm thinking, "Oh my God, his career's over." At this point, it's really quiet and nasty in the room. Everyone's looking at the ground. I asked one more time, "What else?"

Luke says, "Man, I got nothing. That's it. I got nothing. I mean, I've got some scratch demos I recorded of myself in my laptop, but that's all." I said, "Let's hear it." We listen to four or five. Nothing there. Then he plays one called "Rain Is A Good Thing." Everyone's looking at the floor and I went, "Stop. Stop." He presses stop, and he's just mad. He thinks I'm going to make fun of him. I said, "What's wrong with that?" "You like that?" he asked. "I didn't say I liked it. I wouldn't want to make a career out of those songs, but if you put that out now, that'd be a huge boost." Kerri said, "I kind of like it, too." We left feeling upbeat – good, but not incredible.

A week later, he gets with Charles Kelley and Dave Haywood to write "Do I." Holy shit. Unfortunately, it was right behind "Need You Now" on the charts. People were telling me to flip the two so Luke could get to No. 1, but I don't do that. But it finally got there the last chart of the year. Then we came back with "Rain," which was another four-week No. 1. Backto-back, that was an incredible 1-2 punch, and from that point on, we never looked back.

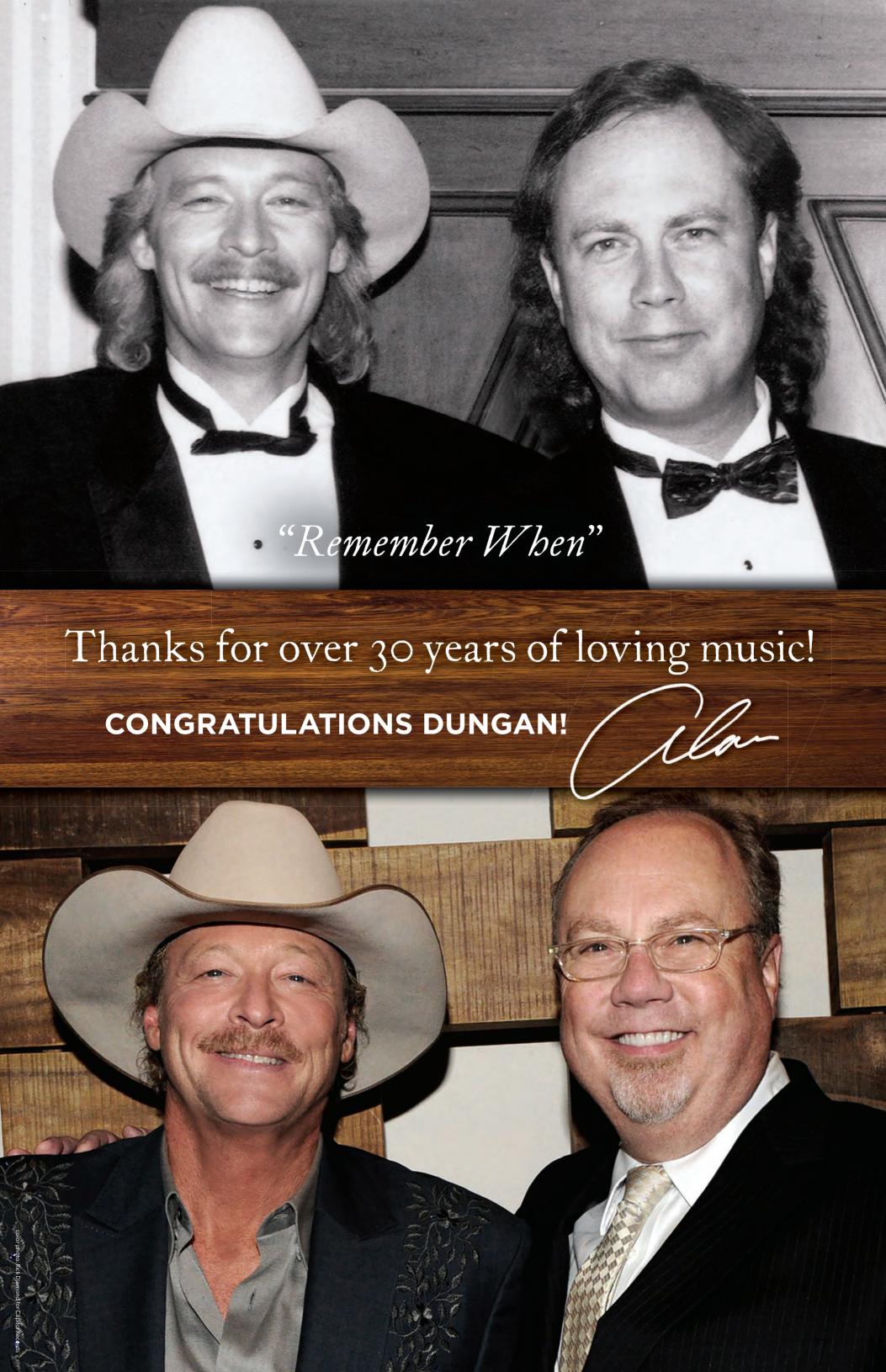
When Alan Jackson left Sony, he called and said he wanted to be back with me. "You do, do you?" "Yeah, I think so." "Do you remember that all we ever did was fight?" He was young and full of shit, and I was young and full of shit. He said, "Yeah, I do, but looking back, you were probably the only person in my life that was always honest with me. And I need that now." That played on my heartstrings and redefined our relationships from that point forward.

When we hired Van Haze to be one of our Capitol regionals, we put him on the road his very first day with an artist who was a notorious malcontent – a jackass in so many ways. On day two, Van calls into the



What the Fuch!

person at Capitol when I was there. One year after the holiday break, we exchanged small talk about vacation. She asked, "Do you know what day it is, Mike?" I didn't. "It's my 17th anniversary at Capitol." I had no idea. I told her that was fantastic, and we needed to celebrate. What about lunch? Her favorite restaurant was Cinco de Mayo, so I put it together really quick. I had a coconut head carved into a Pirate's face that I got at Disney World in my office, and I turned that into a trophy. I put on a goofy hat I got somewhere and bought poppers from the party store. We went to the restaurant to celebrate Cinco De Betso and have done it every year since. It serves two purposes: We drank in the middle of the day, because no one really wanted to come back to work the first week of January, and it reinforced the silly nature I wanted my companies to have.





# STORYTIME WITH MIKE DUNGAN



# About Mike...

**Tim DuBois:** Mike was the perfect person to bring into that crew of misfits we had at Arista. There wasn't anybody on the staff doing a job they'd had before, and Mike had as much record company experience as anyone. He was the ideal ornery big brother for that company.

He talked to me about starting that He-Man camping trip. It was January and like two degrees. I said, "You're a fucking idiot for taking all those guys out there, getting them drunk and thinking nothing's going to happen."

Every year, I had to do a review of the people who reported to me. Every year, I told him, "Get the fuck out of here and go home before 10pm every night. Quit working so hard; you're gonna kill yourself."

Luke Bryan: Every year, he holds a campout at my farm's bass lake. I built a new dock and, to pay homage, I named it "Dungan's Dock." He told me that with all the accolades in his life, he never thought one of the top ones would be having a dock named after him. He proceeded to tell me that when he passes away, in the style of a Viking, he wants his body put on a big wooden raft that we will then push out in the lake before shooting a flaming arrow and lighting him up. I don't know if his wife Jane will allow that to happen, but knowing Dungan, he'll get it in writing. We may have to get state approval to burn a body on my lake.

**Cindy Mabe:** My favorite memory was when he first met Carrie Underwood backstage at the *Opry* before we signed her. He told her about his early Arista days when the *Opry* would have a sandwich maker who brought out bread, cheese and bologna to make sandwiches between sets. I guess the person was let go in a cost savings measure, and Mike called the *Opry* to bring the woman back, as sponsored by Arista. They said the woman was tired and wanted to retire ... he should just let it go.

Mike tried to get everyone to corroborate his story but no one, including Eddie Stubbs, could remember it. Fast forward from that moment: We are back at the *Opry* having just signed Carrie. Mike shows up in wardrobe and makeup as the bologna lady. Using a full British accent and wearing stockings, he serves vegetarian bologna sandwiches to Carrie and everyone else. He didn't come out of character all night long. One of Mike's greatest gifts is he loves to make people smile, and he almost always succeeded.

Keith Urban: The thing I've always loved about Mike, aside from his personality and all the rest of it, is he's one of the rare people who can see something before it's there and believe in an artist. He never seemed to have any problem signing someone and letting them do an album, then another, then another while they're finding themself. That kind of passion and belief is something that's slipping away really fast. Yet, it's really key for artists to find somewhere safe – almost like a modern-day version of a patron who believed in supporting the starving artist. He's done that over and over. In this day and age, that's the most important story about Mike.

office to report that there are problems. So, I called him back – barely knew him at this point – and he tells me about the previous night's dinner with radio where this artist was trashing the rest of the roster and the label. Van said everything was really uncomfortable. I said, "Okay, come home." "What? Really? What about the artist?" I'm like, "Get on the first flight and come home. Leave him." The manager calls later, "What are you doing?" I said, "I don't have time for that. And I don't even have time to arrange for him to come home. Fuck him. He can find his own way home."

There have been a few I've been proved wrong on. One was Lady A, who I wanted to release a ballad on as the last single from their first album. They really wanted "Run To You," and we had a healthy exchange about it. In the end, we decided to come with "Run To You," and, obviously, they were right. They stuck that up my ass the rest of our time together.



Feels Like Home: With Jane (c) and son Chris with wife Jennifer (r) and son Ben with wife Kate (l).

Darius is the greatest dad in the world – goes to everything. He called me from a talent competition at his kids' school where he'd just heard a band play. I can hear the noise in the room behind him. He goes, "You know that song, 'Wagon Wheel'?" I did; both my kids danced to it at their weddings. "I'm going to cut it." I said, "I don't know, man. It just feels like one of those songs that almost shouldn't be recut." He goes, "Fuck you, I'm going to cut it" and hung up. His producer Frank Rogers had the same response. His manager Doc McGhee felt the same way. Ha! Fuck me. I think Darius might have been right.

# People Mover

**I loved and appreciated** everything about [promo exec] Bill Catino, except for how rough and gruff he was. He could be really intense with people. It made me smile a little bit, because it reminded me of much of my career on the pop side, but it was not healthy for him or for us. I don't think he had ever worked for anyone that wasn't jamming him at every turn. I also worried he was going to have a heart attack, and I did not want that intensity to set the tone. Bill had a new contract coming up, so I had the lawyers put in a clause that he'd have to smile three times a day, and I had to see two of them. He comes back like, " $\dot{W}$ hat the fuck is this? I'm not signing that." And I said, "Then you don't get a new contract." He goes, "What kind of bullshit is this? This does not look good for me." I said, "It doesn't look bad for you. This is just how it's going to be." He signed it and became a happier, healthier man.



Dierks Bentley's parents were at an ACM party we had at a disco in Las Vegas. The place had concrete tables people would dance on, so I jumped on one, and Mary Hilliard Harrington took a photo of it. A week after I announced my retirement, I got a letter from Dierks' mom saying I had changed his life, how grateful she was ... and it had clippings about me and that photo. She had the picture. I called him amazed, and he goes, "Yeah, I know. She's always been that person." One of my favorite photos.

Dan Huff calls me the Velvet Hammer. He told my wife, "Mike has hit me over the head so hard, but because he's got that velvet coating around it, you're not totally destroyed. You understand what he's doing." I didn't know he called me that until my wife told me later.

There's a kid who works down the hall, Vipin Reddy, and every day when I walk out of my office, I see him down there behind his desk and scream "Vipin!" at the top of my lungs. It scares the shit out of everyone and makes everyone laugh. That's the dumb shit I will miss.



# CONGRATULATIONS MIKE

We've had lots of good adventures over the years, and I hope now you get the time to go on many more!

Thanks for all you've done for me and for Country music.

Love,





"Miles Dungan,

There aren't enough thank you's in the world.
You changed my life and I will be forever grateful.

I love you forever"



"Mike,

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the UMG family!"





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musicgives.org



# CONGRATULATIONS MIKE

-VINCE





# Frank Ray

# **STONEY CREEK**

My wife and I were having dinner, but she was using my phone to finish our application for a healthcare plan. [Adrian Michaels] was calling and calling, but we'd have to start the application over if the session timed out. When she finished I had five missed calls. When we finally connected, they had a big conference call to tell me about *New Faces*.

Being welcomed into such a great community, there's some validation to the hard work that my team and I have put in. As an independent artist or aspiring songwriter, you hope to get this badge of honor – being a part of *CRS* in general, but also on *New Faces*. Having that support from peers in the industry says a lot about the relationships we've built, the friendships we have, and the confidence people have in the music we're putting out.

As a Hispanic artist in the country music genre,

it means opportunity for not just me and my team, but for the culture and other aspiring Latino artists. *CRS New Faces* seems like such a small phrase, but the weight it carries is big.

I've got to learn how to keep my cool, because I'm a fan before anything else. There were so many incredible artists at *CRS*, and I have a tendency to walk up to people who I've admired or looked up to and ask for a picture. And they'd be like, "Hey, Frank, you're on this side of the fan booth, remember that."

Growing up, I spent a lot of time in Texas – Laredo and San Antonio – where my mom is from. Country radio, especially KCYY/San Antonio, was always on. I was always trying to emulate Tim McGraw ... people I listened to growing up. I was obviously a huge '90s country baby.

Even now, I'm just stuck to Country radio. People will say, "Check out this new song," and I go to try to stream it, and I have to pay the membership, because I've just been listening to Country radio the whole time. I have to get all these apps and stuff, – I'm so far behind the curve.

The first time I heard myself on the radio was in El Paso. We were doing a little acoustic performance at KHEY, and Patti Diaz said, "Hey, I wanted to be the first to let you know that we are going to add your song, and you'll hear it for the first time at the top of the hour." We were in the bus going to the next stop when it came on. To say I was an emotional wreck is an understatement. There's video. I was celebrating, then it hit me a ton of bricks and I was sobbing uncontrollably because it was such a full circle moment. I left that town and region to pursue this dream, and then the first time back we had a major song on Country radio. Incredible.

Towards the end of the song, the emergency broadcast system came over with a big ol' thunderstorm warning. It was so crazy – funny, though. I couldn't have scripted it any better.

Radio can expect the best body of work I've ever created to come out this year. And I mean that with every fiber of my being. This new music is the best representation of me – my personality, storytelling and songwriting in the party mode and energy you would see at a live show. I'm really proud and excited about it.



# **Jackson Dean**

# **BIG MACHINE**

I was having a burger with my day-to-day [Bridger Simons], and when he told me about *New Faces*. I thought, "Well, damn, I remember not even being able to get a laminate to attend last year." It's a hell of an honor.

The first time I heard my voice come through on a station, I was in a Detroit hotel where they had [WYCD] on. We had just gotten there a little while before and were heading out to dinner. We were walking through the lobby, it came on and we stood there and listened.

When I was 18, I got tired of living by another man's rules and moved to a shack with no heating or plumbing. There were probably some of the best times of my life. I'm having some good ones now, but the timing there was priceless. I went two years in there – two winters. I'll tell you ... it was cold, but I did it because I knew I could.

That's where I started writing a lot of the songs on the record. There's a mojo about that place, a little makumba, if you will. It was my father's room on my granddad's farm – an old tack room for horses that spent 40 years as a party den. There are a couple thousand signatures on the walls. From my uncle down to my brothers and then to me. It's a cool place to be.

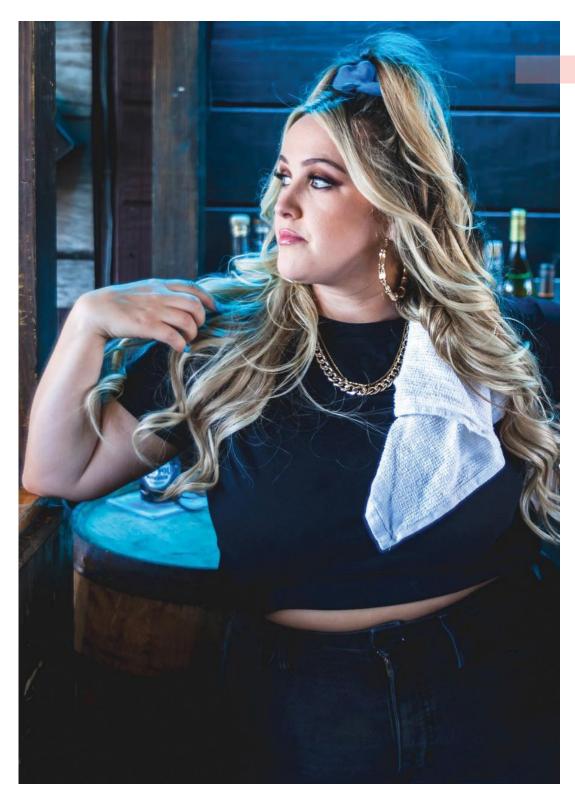
"Fearless" was Luke Dick's idea. We were two weeks away from going in the studio for the first time. John Sherwood and I walked into Luke's place. He had start of the chorus, a little drum program and said, "One word ... fearless." It fell out within an hour-and-a-half or so. I'm not huge on the social side. If I don't like it, it doesn't go. But, man, there's pressure to feed the beast. That's the business side of it. I'm a very much an in-the-flesh kind of person. I played more than 110 shows last year. Whether it's 100 people or 15,000, you took it to the people, and they saw it in the flesh. That is more the line that I'm interested in.

When I can take time off and the season is right, I'll go climb a tree stand. I do a little bit of leather work, too. I'm getting ready to make a couple wallets for friends of mine. I like wood burning, too. The first guitar I marked up was an old Martin. I bought it when I was 15, and I actually got two of the tattoos on my chest from that guitar. I'm in the middle of another guitar right now – eight or nine different



spirals across it and there's going to be a snake slithering through them all. Then I'll stain it black, so it comes out gray, then red, so it comes out purple and then blue, so it comes out like the blue of a gun. If I do it right, no matter which way the light hits, it will be a different color.

Greenbroke was just the tip of the spear of what we have coming and what I have left to give. I'm going to keep taking it to the people; we've been booking shows left and right. We're going out with Eric Church, Parker McCollum and Blake Shelton this year. A whole case of worms has opened up.



# **Priscilla Block**

# **MERCURY**

I'm still kind of freaking out about *New Faces*! This was a big goal, so I was over the moon when I got the call. As a new artist, that support and recognition from radio is such validation, like, "You're on the right path. We believe in you, and we're behind it."

A lot of people don't know this, but I moved to Nashville nine years ago fresh out of high school – a young girl with dreams of being an artist. I grew up such a big Taylor Swift fan – she was the one that made me feel like I could do it, because she was the young girl at the time popping.

A year into Nashville was a really hard time for me. I had a moment where I thought it might be time to go home, recupe and figure out what I'm doing with my life. I had a conversation with my sister debating what to do. As I was leaving work, *Taylor Swift* was driving by, and I happened to be wearing a Taylor Swift t-shirt that day. She pulled her car over to the side of the road and said, "Hey, oh my gosh, I love your shirt so much. Thank you." I was looking at her like a deer in the headlights, but it was everything I needed to keep going. That was seven years ago.

Everyone has their own path. I spent years and years playing

Everyone has their own path. I spent years and years playing at any bar that would have me and counting out dollar bills on my bed to pay rent. In 2020, the world was shut down, but I wasn't going to use the pandemic execuse so I decided to make as many fans as I could on the internet. Just so happened that it worked.

I wrote "Me Pt. 2" by myself at two in the morning. I'd gone to the bar and, as I was leaving, I passed my ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend. My heart just sank. Seeing her, I did a double take, like, "Whoa, she looks a lot like me." I went home that night, sat on the carpet, grabbed my guitar, and wrote, "I hope you're happy. You found Me Pt. 2." Probably the most country song I've put out.

As long as I can remember I've been a Justin Moore fan. Before I turned 21 I went to one of his album launches on Broadway, sneaking into bars he was hopping around to, playing different music at each. Fast forward, I met him at a radio show we both were on in Chattanooga. I told him that story and he was probably weirded out at the beginning, because we hadn't played the show yet.

Afterwards, he made found me and said, "I am so shocked. I'm such a big fan of you" and said to let him know if there was anything he could to help me. Literally four months later we got the call that he had a song he wanted me to be on. After I listened to "You, Me, And Whiskey," it was just such an easy yes. Obviously, I'm a fan, but I also kind of feel like I wrote that song. You know what I mean? We're not singing about champagne.

I've always been super confident. This industry can make you start feeling like you're not enough, and I never want to feel like that. That's what I'm leaving in 2022: self-doubt. Looking forward, everyone can expect a new single at Country radio and a lot of traveling. We just wrapped up my first headlining tour, which is crazy.

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WE LOVE YOUR LOVE THE MOST & WISH YOU COULD STAY A LITTLE LONGER.

CONGRATULATIONS MIKE!







# **Nate Smith**

# **ARISTA**

My first interactions with music were Garth Brooks, Michael Jackson and Elvis Presley. Then, as I got older, I listened to a lot of rock. Nirvana is probably my favorite band; I went through the emo phase, for sure. As I got older and wrote more songs, friends would say, "Your music has a bit of a country feel." It's the weirdest thing. My grandparents listened to a lot of country, so it was around. I connect with the storytelling and the emotion. The main reason I love country so much is because I can be exactly who I am. You can love God, and still drink, and no one's going to kick you out of the bar.

I moved to Nashville when I was 23, had a Christian record deal on the table and was writing songs for my first album. I didn't have a clue what I was doing. The deal fell through, but I ended up signing as a writer at Centricity Music Publishing. I wrote songs for other artists with no clue of what I was doing there, either.

I left Nashville and was really in a dark place. I was going through a divorce, as were my parents, so they weren't available to help me, emotionally. I moved back to my hometown, Paradise, CA, and was helping my brother with a worship band

for his youth group while working ICU and trauma at the hospital in Chico. We lost everything in the 2018 fire. My brother lost his place – their first house. I lost my apartment with everything I'd ever owned. I had to start over from scratch.

A buddy I knew from my first move to Nashville mailed me a guitar. I wrote a song about the fires, "One of These Days," flew to Nashville, recorded it and put it on DSPs to raise money for a single mom in town. After that, I started writing songs again. My buddies were like, "You should go back [to Nashville]." I ended up on a GoFundMe and moving back, even though I swore I never would. It has made me appreciate everything so much more. The biggest takeaway is I say yes to everything.

"Whiskey on You" was inspired by a break-up ... I've been through a few. Some people listen to my music and their first question is, "Who hurt you?" But we broke up, and I wasn't super excited about it, to say the least. I went to Jim Catino's lake house where a lot of songs have been written, and Russell Sutton had this whiskey line. We started working on it from there. We had a demo and took it back to Nashville to record, but it didn't have the same magic. So, we ended up just mixing the demo. The vocal you heard on the radio was two days after my breakup on a cheap mic in the kitchen of this lake house. That's about as raw as it gets.

Thank you, Country radio for embracing a new artist. I'm so grateful to be here; it doesn't even feel real, but I'm not the one who spun it 90 times a week and put it in power. I'm not the one who convinced their PD to play it. So, I want everybody to know how thankful I am to them for embracing my song.



# **Jelly Roll**

# **STONEY CREEK**

I got a call from the label telling me I'd been chosen for *New Faces* and honestly couldn't believe it. I had prayed that I had an impact this year, so to be recognized for it was unreal.

I was the youngest of four, so I grew up listening to all different kinds of music ... everything from hip hop to outlaw country ... James Taylor, Jim Croce, [Bob] Dylan, [Bob] Seger, Motown, oldies, you name it. My sister listened to nothing but rock. My influences are very eclectic, and you hear them in the music I create. You'll notice the rhythm and spirit of the music is all over the place.

I spent many years being a less-than-admirable human. I left a lot to be desired, to say the least. So, when I changed my life, it was a complete paradigm shift. I am proud of the man I have become, and my hope is that my story will inspire. My experiences have also taught me about compassion and taking the time to put your foot in the shoe of all sides.

Full disclosure: being an artist and a husband and father is one of the hardest balances in life. The best I can do is try to remember family means more than anything. Also, rooting myself in family keeps me grounded with a certain amount of humility.

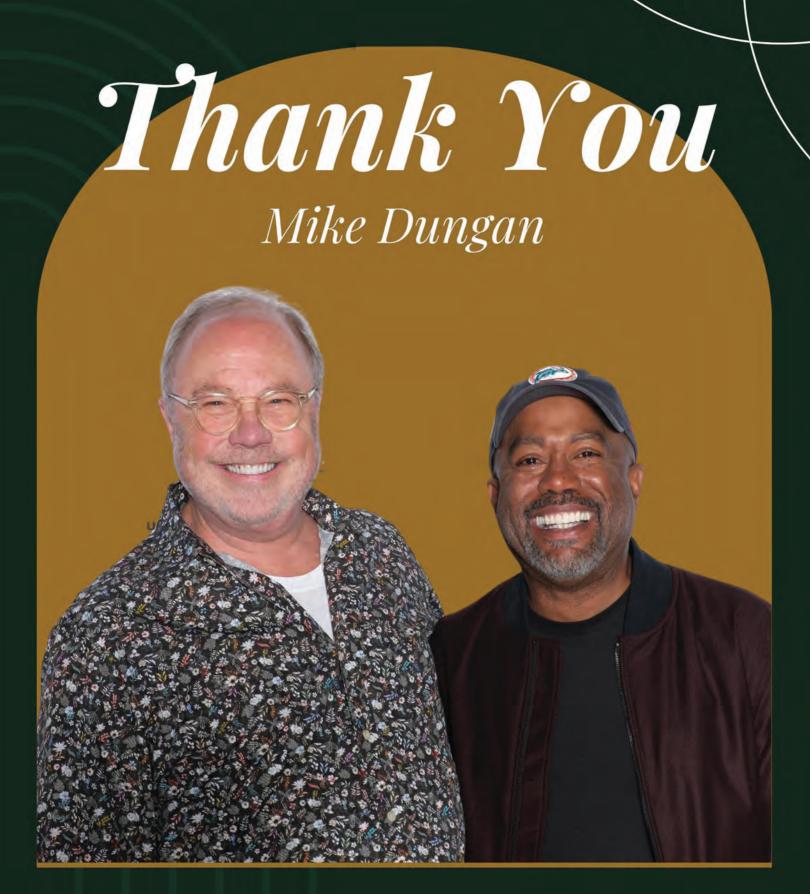
If I could go back and talk to the me that was incarcerated, I would tell him not to worry – it's not the end of the world, no matter how it feels in the moment, and that he should follow his heart. I would tell him to be careful and stop looking for acceptance and belonging in any place he can find it.

The only pressure associated with songwriting is the pressure to attempt to make an impact. Music is therapeutic ... it's meant to be there for us when we need it the most. At the end of the day, what's most important to me is that my music is remembered as honest, edgy, thought-provoking and therapeutic. That being said, my strongest writing style has always been, and will always be, three chords and the truth. And that is the epitome of country music.

My hope is that fans who began their journey with me in rap or rock discover country through my music. I grew up listening to country music, and it has had such an impact on me and a place in my heart, in my household and in my family.

When I stepped out onto the Bridgestone Arena stage as a headliner, the only thing I could think of and the only feeling I had was extreme gratitude. My father took me to that arena when it first opened. I took my daughter there her first time. To be able to headline it *and* sell it out was one of the most emotional nights of my career.

I'm finishing my debut country album right now, and I can promise my Country radio family that they will be proud of me, and they will be proud of the music and the spirit behind it. I'm most excited that this project was written to be an album. It's going to have a cohesive feel from track one to track 13. It's going to tell a story and embody an entire spirit.



Mike,

15 years ago, you made a longtime dream come true for me when you agreed to help me make a Country record. I never expected that dream to become as big as it has in the years since then, and I know you are a huge part of why it did. Thank you for everything you've done to support my career, and me as a person, in our time together. You have been an incredible champion of mine and an even better friend.

I love you my brother! - Darius Rucker



Times





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# **ABBREVIATION KEY:**

A	Assistant	MP	Managing Partner
AC	Account Manager	MR	Music Row
AD	Artist Development	MW	Midwest
AE	Artist Engagement	N	National
AIP	Activator & Indicator	ND	National Director
	Promotion	NE	Northeast
AM	Administration	0	Owner
AMG	Artist Management	oc	Original Content
AP	Audio Production	OPM	<b>Operations Manager</b>
В	Business	P	President
BA	Business Affairs	PD	Production
BO	Booking	PR	Promotion
BR	Brand Strategy	PRM	Promotion & Mktg.
C	Content	PRS	Promotion Strategy
CA	Canada	PTM	Project Manager
CE	Central	PU	Publicity
CMS	Commercial Strategy	R	Regional
co	Coordinator	RA	Radio
CR	Creative	RC	Radio Consultant
CS	Chart Strategy	RD	Regional Director
CSI	Content Strategy	RI	Radio Initiatives
222	& Innovation	RM	Radio Marketing
CSO	Content Strategy Officer	RP	Regional Promotion
CT	Central	RS	Radio & Streaming
D	Director	RSGS	Radio Syndication
DE	Development		& Group Strategy
DI	Digital Digital Initiatives	RT	Radio Tour
DM	Digital Marketing	S	Secondary
DMS	Digital Media Strategist	SC	Senior Coord.
DS	Digital Streaming	SD	Senior Director
DSM	Digital Sales & Marketing	SND	Senior National Dir.
EA	Exec. Asst.	SE	Southeast
EC	East Coast	SM	Social Media
IM	Integrated Marketing	SR	Streaming
LC	Label Consultant	ST	Specialist
LR	Label Resources	SW	Southwest
M	Marketing	SXM	SXM Radio
MAS	Marketing &	SY	Radio Syndication
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# KINOW KINOW MUSIC

Spins, Streams & Scores

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# BENKLINE Serious Fun & CRIS LACY

our years ago, Warner Music Nashville Chairman/ CEO John Esposito began discussing his retirement internally, and laid out a succession plan for the company's leadership. On Jan. 1, EVP/GM Ben Kline and

EVP/A&R Cris Lacy officially began their tenures as Co-Chairs. Navigating that transition and pointing the label toward the future is an ongoing learning process they are clearly embracing.

# What were your reactions?

**CL:** We had a conversation with each other, because the first thing you want to know is if who you're putting together want to be together. I remember Ben saying, "I'm ready to do this. I want to do this with you. I'm ready. I'm excited. I feel like we're going to win."

**BK:** But we had to be completely on the same page, or else it doesn't work. Before we talked to each other, the thought was, "Wow, what an honor." We didn't see this coming.

# Did you have to set ground rules and division-of-labor? How long did that take?

**CL:** We're still doing it.

**BK:** There is probably an assumption that anything operational somehow falls in my world, and anything creative falls in hers. But she knows more about the day-to-day operations of this company than most people realize. And I try to stay informed in the creative space, because when you're leading a company, you need to know everything that's happening. And we both lean in on the things we've spent years doing, are particularly good at, and that have helped get us here.

CL: It's been fun getting Ben's input because, prior to this, we didn't have a lot of creative conversations. Our roles were more separate, but it didn't take my team long. The calendar flipped, and my A&R people were immediately emailing everything to Ben. The key is, it's very open and honest. There's mutual respect, but we are identifying on a consistent basis the ways we're different – both to have a better understanding of each other, but also to maximize what we bring to the company. It happens daily when we're sitting in a meeting or with a coach going over a hypothetical. It's about being present and recognizing when things we're working on outside the office are presenting themselves in the office. We are constantly focused on it.

**BK:** The music business in 2023 and the convergence of technology makes this a huge job with more spokes than ever before. So, it's incredibly helpful that we're not solving the same problems at the same time because that's not efficient. We love each other, but we're going to disagree and have battles. But I have more respect for Cris Lacy's knowledge and expertise in the songwriter-artist-song world than anyone else. I'm super comfortable leaning into the things I'm good at, knowing she's got that.

CL: Same for me, and the thing that shows up is safety. I feel safe, because I have no background in business structure or management. I've had some coaching and have managed, but people get degrees in these areas. Ben has managed large groups of people in several different iterations. Mine is smaller groups of creatives. I don't know how I would do this job if I didn't know Ben is holding up that end of it. Obviously, I'm learning that stuff, and we trade-off at times, but that's a really good place to start.

As big a job as running a label is, where is the tipping point between the benefit of splitting the role and the additional effort required in learning to work together and keep each other informed?

CL: I don't think the effort ever outweighed the benefit, because we've been working together at the same company for a long time. It wasn't bringing two people in who don't know each other. Espo built a really good company and system that's already working. We started with a leg up. BK: We got advice early on to have the first call we make every morning be to each other. "Here's what happened overnight or late yesterday. This is what I'm focused on today. Heads up, this is coming our way." That one little tip has proven to be invaluable. It helps me stop and consider decisions. Nothing is final until Cris and I talk. I've changed my mind overnight on certain things in anticipation of that call.

# Any other "a-ha" moments or advice you picked up as you worked toward this during those three under-the-radar years?

**BK:** There were a few corporate or global calls I'd never been invited to before. Like, "Hmm. That's curious."

**CL:** There was a dinner where we were courting an artist, and I remember being so excited because you could sit there and talk international all night long. I could really see the two different styles and how it was additive.

**BK:** But we weren't born into these roles. We already had really big jobs. I had been promoted into GM, so frankly was more concerned with the new departments that rolled up to me – getting to know those people and how it all works.





Cris, you mentioned coaching. Is that a regularly scheduled endeavor or something you can tap

CL: It's both.

**BK:** I've had an executive coach for a while. As a lifetime learner, it's something that's important to me – honest feedback from someone who's not in

# THE INTERVIEW

the middle of it or a direct report. Now, we have one we work with on top of that who can ask about a challenge we're facing together, as opposed to me asking my coach and her asking hers and hearing two different takes. I applaud the company for leaning in with resources.

CL: Also, this is a model that's worked for them.
[Warner Music Group CEO] Max Lousada has put this in place in the UK and Canada. Obviously,
[Atlantic co-heads] Julie Greenwald and Craig Kallman are a big success story. And then you've got Tom Corson and Aaron Bay-Schuck [heading Warner Bros. Records]. Max was able to say to us, "Here's some things you should think about," because he's seen it over the course of several years with different personality types. Little things like, "You definitely want to be close to each other in the same side of the building." He's been incredibly, proactively helpful.

# When the switch flipped, was it smooth, or did the volume immediately jump to 11?

**BK:** There's not been a huge increase in the last two months. A lot of stuff got turned over to us when we were announced last June. It's been more of a gradual build. As Cris said, I've had these departments under my purview for a while, so I've tried to spend the time since the announcement learning about the areas I don't know much about and the people I don't know as well. We are responsible for a really big P&L and 80 employees. Neither of us take that lightly at any point in any day.

CL: You can look at it one of two ways. Oh, my God, we're coming in after a pandemic, return to office and flex working. But my view is, if we can handle those kinds of challenges and still get the job done, our mettle has been tested. How do you continue to be the person you want to be through that? That's kind of exciting. There are also days you think, "Really? Could we go back to the eighties?" But more days than not, it's like, "Yeah. Damn! We all got through that one. Now we're good to go." Last year was focused on making sure it was about Espo and his sendoff. We made a conscious decision to wait and do our company offsite at the beginning of this year, because it felt like we needed to close the chapter properly.

**BK:** We also did it then so we could focus on our vision for growing this business, developing more superstars and nurturing the superstars we have. That felt invigorating and exciting. And Cris is so right ... the next global pandemic, we're going to be ready.

# What are the aspects of Espo's leadership you hope to carry through?

**CL:** His enthusiasm and ability to have fun everywhere is vital. One of the traps of this position is it can get very serious. Even though it's a serious job, really serious is not really creative. Nobody wants to be in the room with that. There's a big piece of Espo's joie de vivre – making it about music and connection – we can learn from.

**BK:** He also had this incredible ability to glide, no matter how many warships were firing on him. As we've made this transition, I've gained so much respect for that. A lot of leadership is having a steady hand. That is something I want to emulate for the rest of my professional life.

# What is the unique stamp you hope to bring to the company?

**BK:** Cris and I believe very strongly in disruption, because from it comes real creativity.

Labels aren't necessarily built off disruption, but we want to change that. We want people to speak up,

We are identifying ways we're different to have a better understanding of each other and to maximize what we bring to the company. J. - CRIS LACY

have crazy ideas and challenge the status quo. That's not in any way a slight to the past, it's just something we feel is critical to the next 10 years at Warner Music Nashville.

CL: We are an American music company. Everyone thinks, "Oh, it's country music, and country music is this small piece." We are a business of storytellers, which could be anything. I had a conversation with a manager who said, "If you're going after this particular artist, don't talk about Country radio." Why not? It's a great tool, right? We want to disrupt the idea of what's cool and what's not, what's done in Nashville versus the coastal labels. There's a myopic view of Nashville labels. We don't consider ourselves a box, which means we have to bring in artists outside of that. Fifteen years ago, country's demographic split was ... what?

**BK:** Seventy-five percent white male. The only demo split was hat versus no-hat.

CL: Right. That was a box of our own making. We have to solve that problem, and we're actively doing it. The thing I'm most proud about in this town is we are the last of the storyteller genres. Because of that, our umbrella's even bigger. People want to be here and participate in that. When we talk about international, we focus on Nashville's songwriter-storyteller. There are countries that consider this folk music because that's what represents the working person, the culture and customs that have been handed down. At its core, that is country music – the storyteller genre.

# Obviously, you are focused on this building and your roster, but you're also now captains of industry. So, how do you think country music is doing overall?

CL: We might be too concerned with what is or is not country. Some people have chips on their shoulder about that when the truth is they're all doing the same thing – speaking the language of a culture they grew up in and paying homage to people who came before. Whether it's Americana, Red Dirt or pop country, they're all just telling a story. Internationally, they don't know the difference. Maybe we need to get out of our own heads about it.

 $\mathbf{BK:}$  From 30,000 feet, we're doing pretty well. Two of the three biggest artists in America, Taylor Swift and Morgan Wallen, previously or currently call our genre home. If you expand into the top 10, you could add Chris Stapleton. We keep hearing about shorter attention spans and more fickle audiences, but our fan base tends to be engaged longer. When it works, it can become as big as anything else in this country. Meanwhile, it's a challenging time to develop the next batch of superstars. So many things are changing – the way we view DSPs is different than it was four years ago. Radio is still critical, but in different ways. It used to be the launchpad, but now is where the ship breaks off from the first stage on its way out of the solar system. We have the same headwinds as other genres, but I like where we are as a whole.

The continuing development of streaming you mentioned, the rise of TikTok, and Covid lockdown seem to have led to a prodigious, data-fueled signing streak at the majors. Are we overwhelmed with new artists, and are we struggling to find bandwidth for artist development?

CL: In the absence of the tools we normally used to sign artists, we used what we had. Everybody signed too much, and we've broken less. As an industry, we have to figure out how to come back to discernment and truly creative marketing plans. TikTok's not a marketing plan. DSPs are not a marketing plan. They're tools, but you still need brilliant, creative marketers, whether it's digital marketing or traditional marketing to build around interesting stories. When you spend a lot of time checking boxes, some of that gets lost. We know we can do all these technical things, but give me a creative way to tell the story. Meanwhile, Warner Music Nashville signed multiple artists with no data analytics – no music in the marketplace. We are in a town that, thankfully, still





# MIKE,

YOU HAVE NEVER CEASED TO INSPIRE US. WHETHER THROUGH A CONVERSATION, A STORY, A STUDIO HANG, A SHARED LOVE OF AN OLD SONG, OR A LATE NIGHT TEXT, MEME, JOKE, SATIRE, PARODY, OR TIKTOK.

WE ADORE YOU AND ARE ABSOLUTELY IN THE MIKE DUNGAN FAN CLUB FOREVER. THANK YOU FOR ALWAYS BELIEVING IN US.

HAPPY RETIREMENT, FRIEND.

LOVE, LITTLE BIG TOWN





has a great interwoven communication system of managers, publishers, and writers working to develop artists and artistry.

**BK:** We would be naive not to study the data, because it is so robust. Also, one of my all-time favorite quotes is, "All models are wrong, but some are useful." Who's interpreting the data that comes from the models? How are you using it? That's where we lean in differently and hopefully better than our competitors. Years ago, we were going in a direction on the next Dan + Shay single when "Speechless" raised its hand on streaming ... so we followed that path, which now speaks for itself.

This business has never done a good job of separating consumers from fans. They're not the same thing. Consumers move very quickly from song to song, artist to artist, moment to moment. Converting them into fans and subsequently superfans who scream through megaphones and grab two people to join them at the next show that's what it's about. When used correctly, data helps inform that conversion.

### Is the volume of artists too great to build passion and plans around?

BK: It's triage.

CL: The volume is insane. But I don't know if it's reacting to the data or the fact that you can see it all now. Maybe some of both. Before, somebody had to go to a bar, or the owner had to call and say, "This person is actually selling tickets. You should come see them." Now, very little of it is bad. Home studios – the ability to film themselves, practice 50 times and tune it up with ProTools - means they get really good in their teens ... or younger. The tech offers opportunity. Almost everything is now in the same place - good. What from this "good" needs to be signed right now on the chance it grows from good to great? People don't know, so they sign a lot of it and hope one does. Years ago, there was a little bit of good, but most of it was just bad. Anybody could see the difference. Much harder to discern now.

# What's your earliest or favorite memory of CRS?

**BK:** Years ago, I remember going to the disco party and thinking how cool it is having a community artists, labels, songwriters, radio - who can not take themselves too seriously and have that kind of fun. I don't know where else you would ever be able to pull that off. I love that nothing's off the table at CRS, from the issues discussed to letting our hair down. You always get a sense of people who love what they do and care deeply about this genre.

**CL:** Two things. I'm not saying this because he's signed here, but Blake Shelton's famous New Faces video. Second, as a publisher for 12 years, going to the Bridge Bar and being able to interact and start relationships with artists, producers, radio, managers - one of the few places I could go and get business done in that way. Everybody was invited and, as a

female song plugger, I didn't get invited to the golf games. But everybody could go to the Bridge Bar. BK: I think there's one guy who wishes that were different.

## From CRS to CMA and ACM, how do you see your roles in carrying forward a legacy of working together for the betterment of the whole industry?

**BK:** The story of country music is important to continue to tell and update. I'm newly on the CMA board and want to make sure I'm contributing and being part of the solution in a changing world. The CMA is an important trade body now and for the next generation. Show me another genre that pulls off something like CMA Fest, where 80,000 fans come to town, major brands do activations and the whole industry shares stages, backline and more. So unique. We are lucky as hell to have that.

We're both on the ACM board, and that show has moved from linear TV to online. Navigating that, continuing to wave the flag for the genre and getting artists to understand that value is something we're committed to being part of.

CL: I feel lucky I got to experience original Fan Fairs - moments where fans saw somebody up close - and

# **G**Radio used to be the launchpad but now is where the ship breaks off from the first stage on its way out of the solar system. "" DENI VIINIE

the care artists have taken with them. Garth signing for hours. I remember an artist who turned the fans moving air in her booth around to face the people standing in line. Preserving the camaraderie behind the music that we love is probably the most important thing we do.

The reason we knew Chris Stapleton was the next big thing is because every writer in town wanted to tell you he was the best writer they ever wrote with. They were excited to share greatness with each other. That goes back to Harlan Howard sitting at a bar as writers came in to soak up his wisdom. We have a beautifully storied history of collaboration and mentorship – for the good of the craft, for the good of the song, for the good of great. That is the thing that is special about Nashville and country music, and it's the thing we have to fight like hell to preserve. Anything else is short-term greed.

I feel so strongly that it's our job to show the world this is actually how it should be done. We know it's unique. We know some people on the coasts don't understand. Why is this the way we do it? Actually, why isn't it the way everybody does it? The only way for it to remain this way is for us to preserve it. Greatness

comes from that. And it's also a hell of a lot more fun. BK: Wow. Scrap my fucking answer. Mine was off the record.

## Ben touched on it earlier, but what's your view of radio's shifting seat at the table?

**BK:** The first year I heard, "In five years, radio will be gone," was probably 2000. I never believed it. Radio is still a critical piece, and no one does radio better than this genre. I don't have to get into consolidation and the rest, but we want to adjust with radio. And we've done some reshuffling of how we interact to maximize the time our teams spend and the impact radio can have in a way that gives our artists the best chance to succeed. I'm not a doomsayer, and I chuckle every time I hear it. Radio is not going away in five years. It may have been the beginning of the marketing plan for the first 70 years of this business. That's no longer the case, but, weirdly, radio can be more selective now because of it.

**CL:** I can add nothing. We agree on that.

# What's your origin story? Is there a spark in your childhood that led you to be here now?

**CL:** As a kid, I always wanted to be a country music artist - to the point to where I changed my name and made everybody in my hometown call me Dusty Chevelle.

BK: What?

CL: I didn't tell you that?

BK: No!

CL: Yeah, I probably haven't said that much. But yes, for three years. I didn't know Chevelle was a car. **BK:** I drove a Chevelle.

CL: My dad's a mechanic and at one point said, "Why don't you just call yourself Rusty Pontiac?" But, I always knew this was part of my soul. The moment I decided. "Whoops, I should just be in the busine side," was at the Stagecoach Lounge in Nashville. I was singing Wynonna's "All Of That Love From Here," stopped in the middle of the song and realized, "Nope, I'm not good enough." What I'd done in my hometown was not even close to the level I needed to be here. I finished the song, shittily, and that was it. I've never told this to anyone.

**BK:** I played in a band that, for one of our gigs, didn't even plug me in, if that tells you anything. But I always loved the business side. I worked in a record store starting at age 15. I will never forget a probably 28-year-old woman coming in and asking, "What just came out?" I asked what she liked, she asked for recommendations, and I gave her a few including Robert Cray's Strong Persuader. The next week, she came back, and that continued on a weekly basis. I just loved turning people on to new music. When WPYX/Albany said they were about to play the first single from U2's Joshua Tree, I pulled my car over, because I knew I couldn't be driving - I had to be completely focused on the music. That was what drove me. And that I didn't want to work in a record store forever. I will never forget the impact of recommending music for that woman ... or the crush I had on her. The power of music and connecting people to it is what I love.

# **AARON GOODVIN**

Multi award-winning, double platinum-selling country star, Aaron Goodvin is wrapping up his first ever Canadian headline tour.

Aaron Goodvin's previous two albums have produced a number one Canadian single and several top 10's, scoring multiple CCMA and JUNO Award wins and nominations - notably winning the 2018 CCMA Songwriter of the Year. Aaron has a career total of 11 nominations.

Aaron is an incomparable singer/songwriter whose music resonates with fans worldwide. His songwriter credits include cuts by Luke Bryan, John Pardi, and Cole Swindell.

Aaron has more than 74 million streams and 140,000+ social media followers across all platforms. Look for the new release of the Aaron Goodvin/Ryan Kinder duet, "The Longer I Live".



# IAN FLANIGAN

Best known as a Team Blake finalist on NBC's The Voice, Flanigan is touring in support of his Reviver debut album STRONG. Tour dates include Summer 2023 shows opening for Parker McCollum. Flanigan's smoldering vocal style is on display on singles "Last Name On It" and "Under A Southern Sky", currently featured on CMT.



# BROOKE MORIBER

Brooke Moriber's powerhouse vocals and emotional songwriting are featured on a new single titled "Little Bit Of You." This is a song celebrating the spark in a relationship that still brings out the wild child in you. But it's also about raising a little hell on a Friday night with your partner in crime and never letting life get boring. "Little Bit Of You," was written by Brooke Moriber and Nate Walker, mixed by Craig Alvin and mastered by Greg Calbi and Steve Fallone at Sterling Sound.



# DAVID ADAM BYRNES

David Adam Byrnes has had 7 back-to-back # 1 songs on The Texas Regional Radio Report published by Billboard. With over 125 average tour dates per year, it's no secret why Taste of Country recently deemed him, "One of the Lone Star State's most intriguing artists".

# **BOWMAN**

One listen to the music of "Bowman" and you'll see why he's the one to watch!

The Philadelphia native has turned country music on its ear with his fresh sound, great songs and electrifying performances. With the help of producer Johnny Garcia, the two have come up with a unique sound in Country music. Some would describe this music as "Country with a touch of Soul and Funk to it"!

Bowman has been a Country fan all his life. Johnny Garcia reached out to him to invite him down to Nashville to record some Country. It was then Bowman decided to follow his true passion for music. Bowman's saying is "It's never too late to follow your dreams"... His band has incredible musicians who've played with country music royalty from Dolly to Reba, to Garth and the list goes on. "This band ROCKS," Bowman says. Having guys who have played with most of my heroes is an amazing feeling. We always bring a fun show with a little bit of something for everyone."

# HALLE PAYNE

Halle Payne is a musician and activist with a fierce passion for writing her way to a better and more beautiful world. In her debut EP, scheduled to be released in Q2, 2023, the Nashville-based singer-songwriter explores deeply held values, fights for joy amidst growing pains, and learns to float down the rivers of life with her face turned towards the sky.

Halle was raised on the spark, authenticity, and insight of her songwriting heroes, Brandi Carlile, Joni Mitchell, and Fiona Apple, and she is always seeking to imbue her work with deeper meaning, for herself and for her fans.



# IONE

lone, a 25-year-old singer/songwriter from Sioux City Iowa, started her singing career at the age of 12. Since that time, she has toured extensively throughout the Midwest developing her unique style. This led to her sharing the stage with several household names, including most recently BonJovi in 2022. Ione's powerful, soulful voice is undeniable whether singing her empowering alt rock compositions or more intimate heartfelt confessionals. Collaborating with longtime BonJovi engineer/producer Obie O'Brien, Ione's debut record, OCCURS TO ME combines the classic rock genre with lone's distinct vocal styling. OCCURS TO ME is a record that you'll want on your playlist.



KEENE
Steven Keene, singer-songwriter and New York poet-folkie, holds up an unflattering yet hopeful creative

mirror with his latest album Woke.

**STEVEN** 

Between his finely tuned pop-culture sensibility and an uncanny gift for executing an eloquent turn of phrase, Steven Keene has earned a solid reputation for consistently powerful and timely songwriting with the capacity to articulate the modern world's collective psychic ills through the more palatable context of art.

REVIVER ENTERTAINMENT GROUP IS PROUD TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE FOLLOWING COMPANIES REPRESENTING REVIVER RECORDS ARTISTS AT RADIO, MARKETING, SOCIALS, MANAGEMENT AND PUBLISHING.









# 

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