

billboard Country Update

BILLBOARD.COM/NEWSLETTERS

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BILLBOARD COUNTRY UPDATE

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Combustion Music Rides Unusual Business Plan As It Approaches 25th Anniversary

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When Combustion Music celebrates its 25th anniversary in January, owner **Chris Farren** expects the Nashville-based publishing company will be firing on all cylinders.

And maybe operating with an empty tank.

Like firms in nearly every sector of the economy, Combustion has been forced to retool its business model as the digital era has matured during the 21st century, and Farren has developed an unusual plan in which he typically sells off the firm's entire catalog about every five years, then begins rebuilding for the next sale when the projections make sense.

While the company's inventory isn't currently on the market, Farren believes a sale "will be imminent."

Neither Farren nor a pair of Nashville publishing insiders could name a similar firm that operates with the same game plan — if there is one, said one of those executives, it's "not common."

Farren started his music career as a songwriter, generating such '90s hits as **Deana Carter**'s "How Do I Get There," **Boy Howdy**'s "She'd Give Anything," **Kevin Sharp**'s "If You Love Somebody" and **Collin Raye**'s "If I Were You." He produced Carter, Boy Howdy and Sharp during their commercial peaks and, more recently, guided hits for Combustion signees **Corey Kent** and **Jameson Rodgers**. Farren also signed **Jeffrey Steele** ("Big Deal," "My Town") to his first songwriting contract, a move that started Farren's publishing journey.

"As a songwriter, I had sold some catalogs along the way, and

I realized I wasn't scared of that," Farren notes. "I found that the right deal could be really smart because it gives you money now and gives you money to invest for later, as opposed to just waiting for the money to come in."

Cash flow historically posed a major hurdle for indie publishers. When Farren and then-partner **Ken Levitan**, of Vector Management, founded Combustion in 2001, it typically took three to five years for a publisher to begin seeing income. The first revenue comes a little faster now from streaming companies, though the most substantial income is still performance royalties from radio broadcasts, and since most country hits take three to four times longer to reach their chart peaks than they did 25 years ago, the biggest income streams arrive about three months slower.

At its start, Combustion was designed as a publisher and label, with much of its focus on developing soundtrack albums. Although once profitable, sales of movie-music collections plummeted as consumers shifted to streaming individual songs. That's part of what spurred a change in the business plan.

Fortunately for Combustion, Farren is good at identifying young songwriting talent. During the Nashville Songwriter Awards on Sept. 23, contemporary Christian music's **Matthew West**, a Combustion writer, claimed his second songwriter-artist trophy, while **Ashley Gorley** ("You're Gonna Miss This," "All-American Girl"), a former Combustion affiliate, took home his ninth. In fact, Gorley, **Gordie Sampson** ("Jesus, Take the Wheel,"



COURTESY CHRIS FARREN

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BBB STONEY CREEK BMG LYRIC BODGE

“Just a Dream”) and rock band **Kings of Leon** were among the earliest signees for the company, which also counts **Zach Crowell** (“Body Like a Back Road”), **Blair Daly** (“Smile,” “Beer Money”), **Matt Jenkins** (“Cop Car,” “Song for Another Time”) and the late **Brett James** (“Something in the Water,” “I Hold On”) among its former writers. The current iteration includes Kent, Rodgers, **Brett Tyler** (“Man Made a Bar,” “Wild As Her”) and **Thomas Archer** (“Wind Up Missin’ You,” “Truth About You”). Two Combustion creatives, Archer and **Blake Bollinger**, were among the writers on Kent’s recent Country Airplay No. 1, “This Heart,” while Combustion composers **Nick Sainato**, **Chris McKenna** and **Jessica Farren** are part of the team behind **Josh Ross’** current single, “Hate How You Look.”

The writers are key to Farren’s catalog sales strategy. Publishers and composers split the rights to any title in their agreements. A Combustion sale transfers the publishing piece to the buyer, though the writers retain their own share. Meanwhile, the writers’ contracts remain with Combustion, so even as Farren sells off the copyrights, he keeps the talent that begins developing new titles for the next version of the catalog.

“We’re not starting with zero writers,” Farren notes. “We’re starting with zero songs.”

Once Combustion zeroes out the library, it also restarts with an established staff that’s incentivized to rebuild toward the next catalog sale. Farren offers employees a percentage of the revenue from those deals in exchange for a smaller weekly paycheck. All six current staff members have accepted that offer.

“It’s worked out well in every case,” Farren says. “It kept my overhead down. It kept me hungry. It kept us motivated. It kept us kind of aligned as a team—we’re all in it together and we all win it together.”

To collect their share, employees have to remain on the team through the sale’s consummation, an agreement that encourages continuity. VP **Chris “Falcon” Van Belkom** has been with Combustion 21 years; GM **Kelly Lyons** has been in place for nine years.

Frank Liddell, who founded indie Carnival Music in the late 1990s, has routinely turned down offers to sell his catalog. But he noted that as publishing has grown more difficult in the streaming era, every business model that improves the outlook for independent companies is worth pursuing.

“Anybody can walk around and say, ‘We care about the music and that’s all we care about,’” Liddell suggested. “None of us would be in business anymore. So it’s a very delicate balance, and when somebody finds ... an engine or a vehicle to stay independent, to have another voice other than being a major, [that’s] necessary for our business to continue to flourish.”

Farren is optimistic that Combustion will be firing on all cylinders—creatively and economically—as the calendar rolls over in a few months to 2026, bringing a 25th anniversary with maybe two reasons to party.

“A payday as well as a celebration would be my goal,” Farren says. “That would be even sweeter to say: 25 years and everybody’s in a really good place. And they’re going to get a nice bonus.” ●



MARK LOGSDON

Lanie Gardner (center) checked in with two members of her label’s executive team, BBR Music Group/BMG Nashville executive vp of recorded music JoJamie Hahr and Frontline Recordings/BMG Americas president Jon Loba, when she performed at the Grand Ole Opry on Sept. 22.



Tyler Hubbard met up with WWQM Madison, Wis., morning talent Elizabeth Mary when he performed in Prairie Grove, Ill., on Sept. 19.



Mackenzie Carpenter announced on Sept. 22 that she signed with Rich MGMT, headed by founder Brendan Rich.

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BOTTLE ROCKETS

SCOTTY
McCREERY

HOOTIE &
the BLOWFISH



* 1

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‘Bottle Rockets’ Fire McCreery, Hootie And Triple Tigers To No. 1

Scotty McCreery and Hootie & The Blowfish climb two spots to the top of *Billboard*’s Country Airplay chart (dated Oct. 4) with “Bottle Rockets” (Triple Tigers), marking unique feats for McCreery; the band’s frontman, Darius Rucker; and McCreery’s label.

The single, which features newly recorded vocals from Hootie & The Blowfish built around their classic song “Hold My Hand,” credits 11 writers, including McCreery, Rucker and producer Frank Rogers. It increased by 14% to 30.5 million audience impressions in the Sept. 19-25 tracking week, according to Luminate. “Hold My Hand” was Hootie’s first major hit, reaching No. 10 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in 1995.

The ascent of “Bottle Rockets” to No. 1 puts Rucker in exclusive company with Tyler Hubbard. They are now the only artists who have ruled Country Airplay both as solo acts and with a duo or group, dating to the chart’s start in January 1990. Hubbard scored 16 leaders as one-half of Florida Georgia Line before earning the first of three solo No. 1s with 2022’s “5 Foot 9.” Rucker has collected nine No. 1s as a solo artist, beginning with “Don’t Think I Don’t Think About It” in 2008.

Triple Tigers, launched in 2016 as a joint venture between Thirty Tigers, Sony Music Entertainment-owned distributor The Orchard and Triple 8 Management, also notches a milestone. Directly following Russell Dickerson’s two-week reign with “Happen to Me,” “Bottle Rockets” gives the label its first successive Country Airplay No. 1s. To date, the imprint has powered 11 singles to the top: six by McCreery and five by Dickerson.

For the 31-year-old McCreery, “Bottle Rockets” is his first Country Airplay leader since “Damn Strait,” which spent three weeks at No. 1 in 2022. He wraps his quickest trip to the top spot: 20 weeks, nearly halving his previous fastest coronation (37 weeks for “This Is It” in 2018-19).



MC CREERY: JEFF RAY RUCKER; JIM WRIGHT

MOST INCREASED AUDIENCE			
TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	GAIN (IN MILLIONS)	
BOTTLE ROCKETS Triple Tigers	Scotty McCreery & Hootie & The Blowfish	+3.831	
I GOT BETTER Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	+2.348	
HEART OF STONE Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	+2.235	
DARLIN' Chase Matthew/Warner Music Nashville/WAR	Chase Matthew	+1.800	
BAR NONE MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	+1.373	
AIN'T A BAD LIFE Fifty-One/Forty-Nine/Valory	Thomas Rhett Featuring Jordan Davis	+1.322	
6 MONTHS LATER Megan Moroney/Columbia/Columbia Nashville	Megan Moroney	+1.292	
BACK IN THE SADDLE Seven Ridges/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	+1.075	
COWGIRL Stoney Creek	Parmalee	+1.044	
GOOD TIMES & TAN LINES Leo33	Zach Top	+0.789	

MOST INCREASED PLAYS			
TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	GAIN	
BOTTLE ROCKETS Triple Tigers	Scotty McCreery & Hootie & The Blowfish	+1048	
BACK IN THE SADDLE Seven Ridges/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	+474	
BAR NONE MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	+472	
DARLIN' Chase Matthew/Warner Music Nashville/WAR	Chase Matthew	+431	
AIN'T A BAD LIFE Fifty-One/Forty-Nine/Valory	Thomas Rhett Featuring Jordan Davis	+430	
HEART OF STONE Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	+404	
I GOT BETTER Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	+403	
6 MONTHS LATER Megan Moroney/Columbia/Columbia Nashville	Megan Moroney	+363	
3,2,1 Tucker Wetmore/Back Blocks/EMI Nashville/Mercury/Republic/Mercury Nashville	Tucker Wetmore	+277	
COWGIRL Stoney Creek	Parmalee	+225	

RECURRENTS			
THIS WEEK	TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	TOTAL AUD. (IN MILLIONS)
1	JUST IN CASE Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	19.323
2	HIGH ROAD YellaBush/Columbia/RECORDS Nashville	Koe Wetzel & Jessie Murph	15.382
3	I'M THE PROBLEM Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	13.691
4	THIS HEART Combustion Masters/RCA Nashville	Corey Kent	13.660
5	LIAR Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	10.295
6	POUR ME A DRINK Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Post Malone Featuring Blake Shelton	10.107
7	HOMETOWN HOME BMG/Galaxy Label Group	LOCASH	9.119
8	PARK Hubbard House/EMI Nashville/Mercury Nashville	Tyler Hubbard	8.727
9	A BAR SONG (TIPSY) American Dogwood/EMPIRE/Magnolia Music	Shaboozey	8.261
10	LOVE SOMEBODY Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	8.189



TEXAS REGIONAL RADIO REPORT

WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER, 25, 2025

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE (Label)	ARTIST	TW SPINS	SPINS +/-	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE (Label)	ARTIST	TW SPINS	SPINS +/-
1	2	18	COWGIRLS RIDE (LuckySky Music) ★★1 Week at 1★	Tori Martin	1653	84	11	12	14	TWO HANDS (Independent)	Pat Green and Corey Kent	1200	34
2	3	24	LAST COWBOY STANDING (Independent)	David Adam Byrnes	1582	54	12	14	15	BURN (RedPlay Media)	Guy Vincent	1159	67
3	6	14	WEATHERMAN (River House)	Hudson Westbrook	1457	128	13	13	26	IF IT RAINS TODAY (Independent)	Matt Castillo	1105	-18
4	4	21	IT AINT THE WHISKEY (Big Loud)	Jake Worthington	1405	-50	14	15	24	COUNTY FAIR (Independent)	James Robert Webb	1077	4
5	5	26	ARE YOU A REAL COWBOY (Independent)	Amanda Kate Ferris	1374	35	15	19	16	BAD REPUTATION (River House)	Grant Gilbert and Hudson Westbrook	1049	111
6	7	23	ADELINE (Independent)	Shane Smith & The Saints	1363	41	16	16	16	UNINVITED GUEST (Independent)	Casey Chesnutt	1023	25
7	8	14	SWEET (Independent)	Bubba Westly	1347	31	17	18	17	WATCH ME GO (Mirror Ball Records)	Caleb Young	1015	44
8	9	11	WHEN SHE KISSED ME (Almost Country)	Casey Donahew	1247	26	18	17	15	BORN RUNNIN OUTTA TIME (Sony Music Group)	Lukas Nelson	997	16
9	10	16	I MISS US (RedPlay Media)	Trevor Underwood	1223	30	19	21	6	HIT THE HIGHWAY (Independent)	Bri Bagwell	982	120
10	11	14	LONELY OVER YOU (Warner Music Nashville)	William Beckmann	1212	29	20	1	16	CHEATIN' ON MY HONKY TONK (WVMN)	Randall King f/ Braxton Keith	965	-651

Texas Regional Radio Report Top 100 is compiled from weekly online playlist reports from 86 radio stations located in Texas and surrounding states, including reports from specialty shows, internet and satellite radio outlets. Songs are ranked by total plays. For tracking, complete chart methodology and more information, visit www.texasregionalradio.com, or contact Dave Smith at 972-252-8777. Copyright 2025, Texas Regional Radio Report

billboardCountry Airplay

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THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	AUDIENCE (IN MILLIONS)		PLAYS		
					THIS WEEK	+/-	THIS WEEK	+/-	RANK
1	3	20	BOTTLE ROCKETS Triple Tigers ★★ No. 1 (1 Week)/ Most Increased Audience ★★	Scotty McCreery & Hootie & The Blowfish	30.478	+3.831	8605	1048	1
2	2	26	HEART OF STONE Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	30.267	+2.235	8141	404	2
3	1	28	HAPPENTO ME Triple Tigers	Russell Dickerson	26.309	-5.872	7142	-1763	3
4	4	35	GOOD NEWS American Dogwood/EMPIRE/Magnolia Music	Shaboozey	24.978	-1.304	6296	4	6
5	5	14	I GOT BETTER Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	24.773	+2.348	6967	403	5
6	6	27	BAR NONE MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	23.560	+1.373	6976	472	4
7	9	43	DARLIN' Chase Matthew/Warner Music Nashville/WAR	Chase Matthew	21.225	+1.800	6112	431	8
8	7	32	AFTER ALL THE BARS ARE CLOSED Fifty-One/Forty-Nine/Valory	Thomas Rhett	20.874	-1.179	5291	-351	9
9	8	9	BACK IN THE SADDLE Seven Ridges/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	20.783	+1.075	6184	474	7
10	10	55	FRIDAY NIGHT HEARTBREAKER Capitol Nashville/MCA Nashville	Jon Pardi	16.915	+0.109	4928	-85	10
11	11	53	HEAVENS TO BETSY Big Machine	Jackson Dean	15.409	+0.415	4615	62	11
12	12	54	WHAT KINDA MAN MCA Nashville	Parker McCollum	13.152	+0.175	4076	187	14
13	13	18	SOMEWHERE OVER LAREDO Broken Bow	Lainey Wilson	13.037	+0.380	4357	111	12
14	16	29	3,2,1 Tucker Wetmore/Back Blocks/EMI Nashville/Mercury/Republic/Mercury Nashville	Tucker Wetmore	11.724	+0.729	3716	277	15
15	17	38	COWGIRL Stoney Creek	Parmalee	11.702	+1.044	3165	225	18
16	14	28	HANDS OF TIME BigEC/EMI Nashville/Mercury Nashville	Eric Church	11.418	+0.012	4216	150	13
17	18	16	GOOD TIMES & TAN LINES Leo33	Zach Top	11.293	+0.789	3501	175	16
18	15	27	HOUSE AGAIN River House/Warner Music Nashville/WAR	Hudson Westbrook	11.152	+0.076	3377	-105	17
19	20	11	DON'T MIND IF I DO Nashville Harbor	Riley Green Featuring Ella Langley	8.775	+0.021	2892	140	20
20	21	37	STRAIGHT LINE Hit Red/Capitol Nashville/MCA Nashville	Keith Urban	8.345	+0.215	2864	-24	21
21	22	35	IT WON'T BE LONG RECORDS Nashville	George Birge	8.151	+0.442	2932	211	19
22	26	12	6 MONTHS LATER Megan Moroney/Columbia/Columbia Nashville	Megan Moroney	7.943	+1.292	2580	363	23
23	23	24	FAVORITE COUNTRY SONG Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	HARDY	7.783	+0.409	2534	78	24
24	24	34	I DARE YOU Big Machine	Rascal Flatts & Jonas Brothers	7.290	+0.404	2701	160	22
25	27	40	TIME'S TICKING Valory	Justin Moore	7.221	+0.742	2296	183	26
26	25	18	STAY COUNTRY OR DIE TRYIN' Ten Point/Wheelhouse	Blake Shelton	7.004	+0.159	2484	8	25
27	28	20	YOU HAD TO BETHERE Blue Chair/Megan Moroney/Columbia/Columbia Nashville	Megan Moroney & Kenny Chesney	5.485	-0.020	2134	64	27
28	30	42	GOLDEN CHILD Riser House	Meghan Patrick	5.470	+0.699	2012	185	29
29	19	2	HOW FAR DOES A GOODBYE GO Macon/Broken Bow	Jason Aldean	5.341	-4.631	1657	-778	32
30	29	33	BETTER ME FOR YOU (BROWN EYES) Fugitive Recordings/Magnolia Music	Max McNown	5.203	+0.211	1958	26	30

COUNTRY AIRPLAY CHART LEGEND

RANKINGS

Country Airplay is ranked by total audience impressions for the week ending Sunday based on monitored airplay by Mediabase of 145 stations by Luminate. Audience totals on the chart are derived, in part, using certain Nielsen Audio-copyrighted Persons 12+ audience estimates (under license © 2025, Nielsen Audio). The list of all Country Airplay chart reporters can be viewed in Luminate's online platform.

TIES

On Country Airplay, if two songs are tied in audience, the song with the larger increase in audience is placed first.

BULLETS

Awarded on Country Airplay to titles gaining audience or remaining flat from the previous week. A song will also receive a bullet if its percentage loss in audience does not exceed the percentage of monitored station downtime for the format. Titles that decline in audience but increase in detections will also receive a bullet if the total audience erosion for the week does not exceed 3%.

RECURRENTS

On Country Airplay, descending titles below No. 10 in either audience or detections are moved to recurrent after 20 weeks, provided that they are not still gaining enough audience points to bullet or if they rank below No. 10 and post a third consecutive week of (non-bulleted) audience decline, regardless of total chart weeks. Plus, songs that ascend to a peak between Nos. 1 and 5 will remain on the chart for one additional week even if dropping below No. 10.

HOT SHOT DEBUT

Awarded to the highest-ranking new entry on Country Airplay.

MOST INCREASED AUDIENCE

Most Increased Audience on Country Airplay lists the songs with the greatest week-to-week increases in total audience.

AIRPOWER

Awarded on Country Airplay to titles ranking inside top 20 in plays and audience rankings for the first time, with increases in both plays and audience.

BREAKER

Awarded on Country Airplay to titles achieving airplay (at least one detection) at 60% of reporting stations for the first time.

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billboard Country Airplay

 AIRPLAY
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THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	AUDIENCE (IN MILLIONS)		PLAYS		
					THIS WEEK	+/-	THIS WEEK	+/-	RANK
31	32	30	ENDS OF THE EARTH RECORDS/Columbia/RECORDS Nashville	Ty Myers	4.807	+0.254	1294	64	38
32	31	22	WHAT HE'LL NEVER HAVE Curb	Dylan Scott	4.702	+0.078	2112	83	28
33	33	14	WEAK Valory	Preston Cooper	4.237	+0.179	1522	51	34
34	34	11	A SONG TO SING Vanner/Republic/Big Loud	Miranda Lambert & Chris Stapleton	4.226	+0.234	1624	55	33
35	36	45	WOULD IF I COULD Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	ERNEST	4.101	+0.127	1729	51	31
36	37	22	THE FALL CoJo/Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Cody Johnson	3.753	+0.042	1144	67	41
37	35	23	I AIN'T COMING BACK Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen Featuring Post Malone	3.667	-0.323	1084	-49	42
38	38	24	HARD FOUGHT HALLELUJAH Brandon Lake/Essential/Lyric Ridge	Brandon Lake X Jelly Roll	3.661	+0.037	1185	16	40
39	39	17	ME & A BEER Harpeth 60	Chris Janson	3.304	+0.227	1452	77	36
40	40	25	TIL THE LAST ONE DIES Boss Moves/Black River	Chris Young	3.032	-0.004	1497	-17	35
41	41	18	SAME MOON Riser House/Columbia Nashville	Mitchell Tenpenny	2.678	+0.141	1061	-9	44
42	42	29	WISH YOU WELL Music Soup/Interscope/MCA Nashville	Vincent Mason	2.352	+0.076	1255	46	39
43	43	15	WRONG HEARTS BMG/Galaxy Label Group	LOCASH	2.080	-0.040	999	22	45
44	60	2	AIN'T A BAD LIFE Fifty-One/Forty-Nine/Valory	Thomas Rhett Featuring Jordan Davis	2.077	+1.322	627	430	56
45	47	18	BAGGAGE Black River	Kelsea Ballerini	1.784	+0.104	1064	39	43
46	48	9	NEVER CALL AGAIN Thrivin Here/Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Gavin Adcock	1.744	+0.157	887	30	47
47	46	19	PAPER UMBRELLAS McGraw/Big Machine	Tim McGraw Featuring Parker McCollum	1.691	-0.064	1316	-4	37
48	44	11	2 PAIR Zone 4/RCA Nashville	Kane Brown	1.570	-0.314	693	-49	53
49	50	12	KID MYSELF Night Train/Broken Bow	John Morgan	1.554	+0.146	911	28	46
50	49	16	DRINK WITH YOU Nashville Harbor	Brett Young	1.483	+0.059	864	28	48
51	52	19	BURNED DOWN HEAVEN Chase McDaniel/Big Machine	Chase McDaniel	1.476	+0.158	670	6	54
52	51	7	MAKING GOOD TIME Three Up Three Down/Columbia Nashville ★★ Breaker ★★	Old Dominion	1.387	+0.013	778	52	50
53	55	9	I WISH YOU WOULD Valory	Mackenzie Carpenter Featuring Midland	1.165	+0.133	707	44	52
54	53	11	EASY TO LOVE Broken Bow	Dustin Lynch	1.157	+0.067	752	30	51
55	56	6	SEVENTEEN Columbia Nashville	Kameron Marlowe	1.125	+0.103	595	15	58
56	54	12	AMEN American Dogwood/EMPIRE/Magnolia Music	Shaboozey & Jelly Roll	1.124	+0.071	523	-3	-
57	59	3	ALL MY EXES Mercury/Big Loud	Lauren Alaina Featuring Chase Matthew	1.078	+0.212	536	41	59
58	NEW		HATE HOW YOU LOOK The Core/Universal Music Canada/Mercury Nashville ★★ Hot Shot Debut ★★	Josh Ross	0.879	+0.273	529	93	60
59	RE-ENTRY		HEAVEN PASSING THROUGH Bossier City/Thirty Tigers/Akando	Tumpike Troubadours	0.852	+0.099	330	40	-
60	58	8	NO TELLIN' True To The Song/Nashville Harbor	Caroline Jones	0.847	-0.067	779	26	49



Vincent Mason hung with staff from KNIX Phoenix when he performed in the market on Sept. 20. From left: MCA Nashville director of Midwest promotion Donna Passuntino, Mason and KNIX music director/midday host Lois Lewis and PD/afternoon talent Reid Spivey.



Tracy Lawrence (center) presented a \$15,000 check to Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee on Sept. 16 as he doled out a total of \$85,000 in funds from his annual Mission:Possible campaign. With him are Second Harvest senior manager of supply chain Emily Kirkpatrick and director of operations Ryan Stanton.

SEAN O'HALLORAN

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BIG MACHINE LABEL GROUP 20TH ANNIVERSARY

Led by Founder, President and CEO Scott Borchetta, the Big Machine Label Group encompasses Big Machine Records, The Valory Music Co., Nashville Harbor Records & Entertainment, Big Machine/John Varvatos Records and publishing company Big Machine Music as well as its own digital radio station, Big Machine Radio. BMLG artists include superstars Tim McGraw, Thomas Rhett, Sheryl Crow, Rascal Flatts, Brantley Gilbert, and Lady A; chart-topping acts Justin Moore, Eli Young Band, Brett Young, Midland, Carly Pearce, Riley Green, Aaron Lewis, and Badflower. BMLG artists have received multiple GRAMMY, CMA, ACM, AMA, CMT, Teen Choice, MTV, Billboard, People's Choice and Brit Awards. Big Machine is the first-ever American label to align with terrestrial radio for performance royalty rights for its artists and is an industry leader in fighting for artist, songwriter, publisher and record company rights.

Big Machine Label Group created the Music Has Value Fund to provide assistance to nonprofit organizations that make music, aspire to make music, and access and appreciate music.

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NASHVILLE & NATIONAL TOM ROLAND tom.roland@billboard.com

Gavin Adcock took part in a KCYY San Antonio party thrown Sept. 17 at the Thirsty Horse Dance Hall & Saloon. From left: Sticks Management artist manager Saxon Curry, Cox Media/San Antonio director of branding and programming Christi Brooks, Adcock and Warner Music Nashville/WAR director of radio accounts James Marsh.

STAGECOACH RIDES AGAIN

Lainey Wilson, Cody Johnson and Post Malone will lead the pack as headliners at Stagecoach 2026 when the famed country fest returns to the Empire Polo Club in Indio, Calif., April 24-26.

The stacked lineup of performers for the Goldenvoice-produced event will also feature Bailey Zimmerman, Riley Green, Brooks & Dunn, Ella Langley, Red Clay Strays, Warren Zeiders, Nate Smith, Sam Barber, Gavin Adcock, Wyatt Flores, Hudson Westbrook and Cameron Whitcomb.

Passes for the 2026 Stagecoach will go on sale beginning Oct. 2, at 11 a.m. PT on the festival's website. Amazon Music returns as the livestream partner for a fourth year.

—Jessica Nicholson

RADIO & RECORDS®

Matt Vieira was named BMG senior director of Western U.S. promotion, expanding his existing role as Stoney Creek director in the same region. The move adds top 40, hot adult/contemporary and adult/contemporary promotion duties to his Stoney Creek responsibilities. Reach Vieira [here](#) ... Ian Munsick announced his departure from Warner Music Nashville in a Sept. 19 social media post, with plans to "roam independently" ... Meanwhile, six-piece Kentucky group **The Creekers** signed with WMN. The band includes guitarist **Allen Hacker**, bassist **Jagger Bowling**, cajon player **Ashton Bowling**, banjoist **Scott Sutton** and fiddler **Anna Blanton** ... Artist-writer **KC Bruner** signed as the flagship artist for Electric Feel. Her first work for the label, "Old Fashioned," was released Sept. 26 ... **Gary Brewer** signed a recording deal with the bluegrass Pinecastle label. An album with his backing band, **The Kentucky Ramblers**, is expected in 2026 ... **Gordon Mays** was named Connoisseur/Joliet, Ill., operations manager, RadioInk.com reported. The role includes oversight of country **WCCQ**. He was most recently brand manager at **WLDB-HD3** Milwaukee ... Skyview Networks promoted **Ethan Aragon** to senior executive director of insights from director and upped **Heather Baumanis** to executive director of business development and communications from communications and marketing manager, according to RadioInk.com. Skyview distributes *Country Top 40 With Fitz* ... **WKLI** Albany, N.Y., adds **Marissa Lanchak** in middays, beginning Sept. 29, RadioInsight.com reported. Operating as "Marissa on the Radio," the Albany-based Lanchak works remotely in multiple markets. Also joining the station's on-air roster is late-night talent **James "Tanch" Tanchyk**, who will continue to work middays as "JT" on **KUPL** Portland, Ore. ... Country Radio Broadcasters is accepting nominations for the Tom Rivers Humanitarian Award [here](#) through Dec. 5.

'ROUND THE ROW

Warner Chappell Nashville promoted **Kayce Russell** to manager of creative services and A&R operations, after serving the last four years as executive assistant ... Music-focused Nashville firm Gutt Law welcomed attorney **Lauren Davis** to the team. She previously worked as Big Machine Label Group's in-house attorney ... Nashville music reporter **Cindy Watts** announced her departure

from *American Songwriter* ... **Darius Rucker** co-founded a new band, **Howl Owl Howl**, teaming the **Hootie & The Blowfish** frontman with **R.E.M.** co-founder **Mike Mills** and **The Black Crowes** drummer **Steve Gorman**. The group's first music, "My Cologne," is expected Oct. 31 ... **Kasey Tyndall** signed a publishing agreement with Spirit Music Nashville and 2Mix Music ... Warner Chappell Nashville added artist-writer **Brayden Stewart** to its publishing roster ... Texan **Lane Smith** agreed to a songwriting deal with BMG Publishing ... The Country Music Association will shoot its 16th annual *CMA Country Christmas* special for ABC on Oct. 8 at Belmont University's Fisher Center in Nashville. The lineup includes **Jordan Davis**, **Little Big Town**, **Lady A**, **Riley Green**, **Parker McCollum** and **Megan Moroney** ... Bassist **Alison Prestwood** will be featured Nov. 22 in the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum's *Nashville Cats* series of musician interviews. She has recorded with **Blake Shelton**, **Tim McGraw**, **Frankie Ballard** and **LOCASH**, among others ... One of Canada's most successful country artists will be honored with a multi-artist concert, *The Music of My Life: An All-Star Tribute to Anne Murray*. The lineup includes **Trisha Yearwood**, **Martina McBride**, **Randy Travis**, **k.d. lang**, **Kathy Mattea** and **The Gatlin Brothers** on Oct. 27 at Nashville's Grand Ole Opry House ... Blackbird Studios co-owner **John McBride** teamed with the Guitar Center Music Foundation to create a Blackbird Music student monthly grant program. McBride announced the collaboration when he was honored Sept. 11 at a Guitar Center Foundation benefit ... The Women of Country, an all-female showcase founded by **Nicole Marchesi**, celebrated its 10th anniversary with a Sept. 18 show at 3rd & Lindsley in Nashville ... **Riley Green**, **Kassi Ashton** and **Jon Pardi** have been announced as guests for **Drake White**'s second Benefit for the Brain concert on Nov. 17 at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium ... **Tucker Wetmore**, **Chris Lane**, **American Authors**, **Tiera Kennedy** and **Ashland Craft** will perform for Wags & Walks Nashville, an Oct. 7 benefit at the city's SkyDeck. Wags & Walks has rescued 6,000 dogs in its first six years ... Hollywood & Mind holds its first Nashville event on Oct. 22, promoting mental health practices in the entertainment industry. Among the participants are **Ashley McBryde**, **Chase McDaniel**, **Maggie Rose** and songwriter **Ashley Gorley** ... **Brooke Eden**, **Sam Williams**, **Shelly Fairchild**, **Chris Housman** and **Meghan Linsey** are among more than a dozen artists participating in a Nashville Pride fundraiser — Get Out, Get Loud — on Oct. 5 at Marathon Music Works ... **Tim Montana** hosts his sixth annual American Thread Sporting Clays Shoot, a two-day benefit that starts with a Sept. 29 dinner concert at City Winery Nashville. Among the talent: **Colbie Caillat**, **Darryl Worley**, **Michael Ray** and **Lee Brice**. Go [here](#) for more info ... Songwriter **Sonny Curtis**, 88, died Sept. 19. Recognized as the writer-singer of "Love Is All Around," the theme for *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, Curtis also worked with **Buddy Holly**'s **Crickets** and earned a top 20 country hit with "Good Ol' Girls" in 1981. A 1991 inductee in the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame, he penned **Keith Whitley**'s "I'm No Stranger to the Rain," **The Bobby Fuller Four**'s "I Fought the Law," **Leo Sayer**'s "More Than I Can Say" and **The Everly Brothers**' "Walk Right Back" ... A celebration of life for late publicist **Kim Fowler** is set for 1 p.m.-4 p.m. on Oct. 19 at Juniper Green, 5022 Old Hydes Ferry Pike in Nashville. RSVPs are being accepted [here](#). 📍



Vince Gill and Carly Pearce were part of a panel discussion at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum on Sept. 18 in conjunction with the opening of a new exhibit, "Country's Grandest Stage: The Opry at 100." From left: museum CEO Kyle Young, Gill, Pearce, museum board chair Jody Williams and Opry senior vp/executive producer Dan Rogers.

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ISSUE DATE
10/25/25



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In November, *Billboard* will honor the most powerful people in the live entertainment industry at the Billboard Live Music Summit & Awards, which returns to Los Angeles on Nov. 3 as a must-attend event for the decision-makers and thought leaders shaping the future of the touring industry.

The 2025 Touring Power Players will be recognized in the Oct. 25 print issue of *Billboard* and celebrated at the Live Music Summit, which will include panel discussions and award presentations to the year's most visionary leaders worldwide.

Advertise in this issue to reach agents, artists, managers, venues, promoters and event producers and to congratulate the **2025 Touring Power Players**, as well as the **Legend of Live**, **Touring Artist of the Year** and **Executive of the Year**.

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billboard Country Airplay Index

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(Songwriter) **Chart Position**

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WRONG HEARTS BMG Platinum Songs US, BMI/Webstring Publishing, BMI/Lovelegend Songs, BMI/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Red Bandana Publishing, BMI/Super Big Music, ASCAP/Drag Drag Music, ASCAP/Round Hill Songs II, ASCAP (*P.C.Brust, C.Lucas, M.Dragstrem, J.Thompson*) **43**

Y

YOU HAD TO BE THERE Sony Timber Publishing, SESAC/Georgiano Music, SESAC/Major Bob Music, Inc., ASCAP/Warner-Tamela Publishing Corp., BMI/Speakers Go Boom Songs, BMI/Redneck Resume Music, BMI/Tack Mack Tunes, BMI (*M.Moroney, B.Williams, M.Carpenter, M.E.Carpenter*) **27**

billboard



TOP BUSINESS MANAGERS

On Nov. 15, *Billboard* will showcase the most in-demand business managers, whose financial expertise ensures their music industry clients invest (and spend) their money wisely.

Making money in the music industry is hard enough for artists and executives, which is why they turn to an elite few to help with financial profit and investment.

As a result of the rise of branding deals and streaming services, the task of managing artist income has become more complicated than ever, making the role of a music business manager invaluable.

Advertise in this issue and reach an elite group of influencers who guide their clients' financial fortunes and know a thing or two about how to invest their own money.

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CODA

REWINDING
THE
COUNTRY
CHARTS

60 Years Ago

Statler Brothers Pedaled
'Flowers' To Launch Career

In 1965, the future Hall of Fame group made its chart debut

When **The Statler Brothers** planted "Flowers on the Wall" on *Billboard's* 50-position Hot Country Songs chart dated Sept. 25, 1965, it marked their first week on the list.

The entry seeded a 25-year chart run for the Virginia-based Statlers, who harvested 33 top 10 singles, including four No. 1s, plus a spot in the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Written by tenor **Lew DeWitt**, the song cast a lonely character in sarcastic, post-breakup delusion. When **Johnny Cash** failed to show for a recording session, The Statlers — which included **Don Reid**, **Harold Reid** and **Phil Balsley** — took over the Columbia Studios to cut "Flowers."

The folk-tinged single reached No. 2 on Jan. 22, 1966, and took root at No. 4

on the *Billboard* Hot 100. DeWitt left the group because of health issues in 1982 and was replaced by **Jimmy Fortune**, but not before "Flowers" earned two Grammy Awards, including best contemporary vocal by a group. It also appeared on 1994's double-platinum *Pulp Fiction* soundtrack. "Flowers" returned to No. 6 on Hot Country Songs in a 2000 cover by **Eric Heatherly**. —TOM ROLAND

The Statler Brothers,
circa 1970.



46	31	AGAIN	13
		Don Gibson, RCA Victor 8589 (Acuff-Rose, BMI)	
47	—	ARTIFICIAL ROSE	1
		Jimmy Newman, Decca 31841 (New Keys, BMI)	
48	—	HONKY TONKIN' AGAIN	1
		Buddy Cagel, Mercury 72452 (Freeway & Black Jack, BMI)	
49	—	STOP THE WORLD (And Let Me Off)	1
		Waylon Jennings, RCA Victor 8652 (4 Star, BMI)	
50	—	FLOWERS ON THE WALL	1
		Statler Brothers, Columbia 43315 (Southwind, BMI)	