

billboard Country Update

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SHABOOZEY

★ NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR ★



billboard Country Update

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BILLBOARD COUNTRY UPDATE

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Why The Relationship Between Country Artists And Songwriters Is More Symbiotic Than Ever

When the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame inducts seven new members on Oct. 6, it will recognize a mix of four artist-writers and three full-time composers.

That blend is appropriate—in modern-day country, the majority of hits come from getting an artist in a room with people who make a living strictly by writing.

It's a different world since the turn of the century, when the two worlds combined less often. Songs were primarily developed by professional songwriters, and the artist's job was often to find the material that best fit their specific voice and beliefs.

The entrants this year include artists **Emmylou Harris**, **Jim Lauderdale** and **Brad Paisley**, who is receiving his 2024 induction after requesting a deferment. The late **J.J. Cale**—best known for penning **Eric Clapton**'s "After Midnight"—is the fourth artist who will be honored, selected as a legacy submission.

The full-time writers include **Steve Bogard** ("Carrying Your Love With Me," "Praying for Daylight"), **Don Cook** ("Brand New Man," "Lady Lay Down") and **Tony Martin** ("Just To See You Smile," "Baby's Gotten Good at Goodbye"), who says no matter what artistic talents people bring to the process, everyone is a writer when the words are paired to music.

"Once you're in the little square room, you're just trying to come up with the best song," Martin notes. "Even the artists will become [full-time writers], too."

Still, artists are more involved than ever in that process. On

Billboard's Country Airplay chart dated Sept. 26, 16 of the top 20 songs featured both an artist and full-time writers among the credits. Three titles were created strictly by writers, and one song, **Riley Green's** "Don't Mind If I Do," was authored by an artist working alone.

Those numbers were significantly different 25 years ago. On the chart dated Sept. 30, 2000, artists and full-time writers co-composed just six of the top 20 tracks. Eleven were fashioned exclusively by full-time writers, while three songs—**Toby Keith's** "Country Comes to Town," **Travis Tritt's** "Best of Intentions" and **Vince Gill's** "Feels Like Love"—were the result of an

artist writing in seclusion.

There are several reasons for that change in authorship. The most obvious is financial: Songwriting provides an additional revenue stream for artists, many of whom operate at a loss before they reach headline status. But artists seem to increasingly want their songs to reflect their real lives. **Barbara Mandrell** and **Crystal Gayle**—classic country artists who never wrote any of their own hits—were known to tell interviewers that they were simply playing a part when they sang about cheating or heartbreak. Current country artists—who interact more frequently, and less formally, with their fan base through social media—are more intent on releasing music that fits their realities.

"I've written with a couple of artists that really weren't writers, but I would get their ongoing approval as we went along," Cook



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says. “That kind of helped form the song — ‘Yeah, I’ll sing that,’ ‘That sounds like me,’ ‘That doesn’t sound like me.’ That’s, to me, as good as co-writing. I mean, you’re leading me to where you need to go with the song. And that’s fine.”

The presence of an artist can also shape the musical components of a song. An appointment with **Carrie Underwood** is more likely to yield a piece with an expansive melodic range that builds to a crescendo during the final 30-60 seconds. A write with **Morgan Wallen** will probably result in a more linear melody and conversational phrasing.

Full-time writers have their own financial realities in mind as they navigate careers that are unpredictable and insecure — they’re more than happy to follow an artist who’s decisive about their brand.

“After you’ve written a lot of *your* songs — the songs that you want to write from your heart — then it ends up sometimes you just got a toolbox,” Bogard says, “and you want to make the other person’s songs the best songs they can be: the most commercial, the most heavy, the most heartwarming.”

Some relationships between a writer and a specific artist are crucial. **Mike Reid**, a 2005 inductee in the Nashville Songwriters Hall, racked up 11 **Ronnie Milsap** hits during the 1980s, including “Stranger in My House,” “Inside” and “Lost in the Fifties Tonight (In the Still of the Night).” **Bob McDill**, a 1985 Hall inductee, landed 14 **Don Williams** hits, exemplified by “It Must Be Love,” “If Hollywood Don’t Need You” and “Good Ole Boys Like Me.” **Dean Dillon**, who entered the Hall in 2002, has logged 16 **George Strait** hits.

Cook amassed 10 **Brooks & Dunn** hits, though he wasn’t simply adapting his skill set to the duo’s brand. The initial writing, he argues, established their sound and identity.

“Brooks & Dunn were not Brooks & Dunn until we wrote eight songs for their first album,” Cook recalls. “And the reason we wrote them is we couldn’t get anybody to play us their best songs because they didn’t know who Brooks & Dunn was. So it was a blessing that we had to sit down and figure it out.”

Artist co-writes tend to be hit-and-miss. If the song is tailored to one particular act who ultimately passes, it may not connect with a different artist. By the same token, fitting a song around an artist’s life gives it a greater chance.

“We had a song with **Dierks [Bentley]** called ‘Long Trip Alone,’ and it had a line that he knew his wife would go crazy [over], ‘Rest beneath your smile,’” Bogard recounts. “So that song was a lock instantly because he said, ‘**Cassidy** is going to love that line, and we’ve got to finish this song.’ Every day is different.”

Ultimately, this year’s Songwriters Hall mix of artist-writers and full-time writers reflects a mutual need that’s developed in the creative community. Artists’ schedules are jammed — they can use every bit of help they can get. Writers, in the digital era, need hits more than ever since album cuts don’t generate income. Crafting the song to an artist’s abilities is advantageous.

“You like to think that you’re in the room because they like something that you do,” Martin says. “I’ve written with a lot of really good writers who are great singers but don’t necessarily have record deals, and the artist loves their singing, loves their melodic instincts, and so they’re there for that reason. You’re just looking for those creative wins that bring something new.” ●



Jordan Davis welcomed St. Louis radio executives when he performed Sept. 27 at the Chaifetz Arena. From left: KSD PD Dusty Panhorst, MCA Nashville director of Midwest promotion Donna Passuntino, Davis and WIL music director Marty Brooks.



Sammy Arriaga (right) competed among 12 finalists for the TikTok/iHeartRadio competition Next Up: Live Music on Sept. 26 at the iHeartRadio Theater in Burbank, Calif. With him is KIIS Los Angeles personality EJ.



Keith Urban (right) caught up with KXKT Omaha, Neb., PD/music director Hoss Michaels when he played the CHI Health Center on Sept. 27.

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FOR YOUR CMA CONSIDERATION

NEW ARTIST
OF THE YEAR

STEPHEN
WILSON
JR.



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billboardCountry Airplay

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ON THE CHARTS RUSS PENUELL rpenuell@billboard.com

Roll & ‘Stone’: Jelly Roll Notches Eighth Country Airplay No. 1

Jelly Roll earns his eighth No. 1 on *Billboard*’s Country Airplay chart as “Heart of Stone” (Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek) rises a spot to the top of the ranking dated Oct. 11, up 9% to 33 million audience impressions Sept. 26-Oct. 2, according to Luminate.

The Nashville native co-wrote “Heart of Stone” with producer Zach Crowell, Shy Carter and Blake Pendergrass. It’s the third single from Jelly Roll’s LP *Beautifully Broken*, which launched last October at No. 1 on both Top Country Albums and the all-genre *Billboard* 200. His previous album, *Whitsitt Chapel*, arrived in June 2023 and peaked at No. 2 on the country survey and No. 3 on the *Billboard* 200, solidifying his commercial breakthrough.



JOSHUA APPELATE/GETTY IMAGES

All eight of Jelly Roll’s singles promoted to country radio have now gone the distance, extending his perfect record on Country Airplay. His prior leader, “Liar,” topped the chart in February and led for six consecutive weeks, his longest reign. He boasts the longest active chart-topping streak among all acts. (Luke Combs linked the list’s longest uninterrupted run of No. 1 promoted singles both from the start and overall: 14, in 2017-22.)

Beyond radio, Jelly Roll has made inroads on multiple *Billboard* rankings. *Beautifully Broken*’s dual No. 1 start pointed to strong demand across streaming and sales, while Country Airplay chart-toppers such as “Son of a Sinner” and “Need a Favor” also registered on *Billboard*’s rock and alternative rankings. That activity includes four No. 1s on the Mainstream Rock Airplay chart, through “Liar,” underscoring how his music has connected with audiences outside the country format.

HEAVENLY ASCENT Jackson Dean hits the Country Airplay top 10 for the second time with “Heavens to Betsy” (Big Machine), which rises 11-10 (16.5 million impressions, up 7%). The Maryland-born singer-songwriter previously reached the region with his first entry, “Don’t Come Lookin’,” which peaked at No. 3 in December 2022; he co-penned both songs. ●

MOST INCREASED AUDIENCE			
TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	GAIN (IN MILLIONS)	
HEART OF STONE Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	+2.683	
I GOT BETTER Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	+2.647	
HOW FAR DOES A GOODBYE GO Macon/Broken Bow	Jason Aldean	+1.799	
COWGIRL Stoney Creek	Parmalee	+1.578	
BACK IN THE SADDLE Seven Ridges/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	+1.497	
BAR NONE MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	+1.244	
DARLIN’ Chase Matthew/Warner Music Nashville/WAR	Chase Matthew	+1.192	
AIN’T A BAD LIFE Fifty-One/Forty-Nine/Valory	Thomas Rhett Featuring Jordan Davis	+1.104	
DON’T MIND IF I DO Nashville Harbor	Riley Green Featuring Ella Langley	+1.086	
HEAVENS TO BETSY Big Machine	Jackson Dean	+1.041	

MOST INCREASED PLAYS			
TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	GAIN	
HEART OF STONE Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	+925	
I GOT BETTER Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	+727	
HOW FAR DOES A GOODBYE GO Macon/Broken Bow	Jason Aldean	+605	
AIN’T A BAD LIFE Fifty-One/Forty-Nine/Valory	Thomas Rhett Featuring Jordan Davis	+429	
BACK IN THE SADDLE Seven Ridges/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	+420	
COWGIRL Stoney Creek	Parmalee	+383	
DON’T MIND IF I DO Nashville Harbor	Riley Green Featuring Ella Langley	+357	
HEAVENS TO BETSY Big Machine	Jackson Dean	+346	
BAR NONE MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	+306	
FAVORITE COUNTRY SONG Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	HARDY	+298	

RECURRENTS			
THIS WEEK	TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	TOTAL AUD. (IN MILLIONS)
1	JUST IN CASE Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	18.825
2	FRIDAY NIGHT HEARTBREAKER Capitol Nashville/MCA Nashville	Jon Pardi	15.813
3	I’M THE PROBLEM Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	13.889
4	HIGH ROAD YellaBush/Columbia/RECORDS Nashville	Koe Wetzel & Jessie Murph	12.860
5	THIS HEART Combustion Masters/RCA Nashville	Corey Kent	11.850
6	POUR ME A DRINK Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Post Malone Featuring Blake Shelton	10.969
7	LIAR Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	Jelly Roll	9.979
8	HOMETOWN HOME BMG/Galaxy Label Group	LOCASH	9.175
9	A BAR SONG (TIPSY) American Dogwood/EMPIRE/Magnolia Music	Shaboozey	8.293
10	PARK Hubbard House/EMI Nashville/Mercury Nashville	Tyler Hubbard	8.079

The logo for the Texas Regional Radio Report, featuring a stylized Texas map with the words "TEXAS Regional Radio Report" inside.

TEXAS REGIONAL RADIO REPORT

WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 2, 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	25	LAST COWBOY STANDING (Independent) ★★ 1 Week at 1 ★★	David Adam Byrnes	1640	58	11	12	16	BURN (RedPlay Media)	Guy Vincent	1187	28
2	4	22	IT AINT THE WHISKEY (Big Loud)	Jake Worthington	1565	160	12	15	17	BAD REPUTATION (River House)	Grant Gilbert and Hudson Westbrook	1144	95
3	3	15	WEATHERMAN (River House)	Hudson Westbrook	1491	34	13	16	17	UNINVITED GUEST (Independent)	Casey Chesnutt	1099	76
4	5	27	ARE YOU A REAL COWBOY (Independent)	Amanda Kate Ferris	1404	30	14	17	18	WATCH ME GO (Mirror Ball Records)	Caleb Young	1083	68
5	7	15	SWEET (Independent)	Bubba Westly	1384	37	15	14	25	COUNTY FAIR (Independent)	James Robert Webb	1075	-2
6	6	24	ADELINE (Independent)	Shane Smith & The Saints	1362	-1	16	18	16	BORN RUNNIN OUTTA TIME (Sony Music Group)	Lukas Nelson	1057	60
7	8	12	WHEN SHE KISSED ME (Almost Country)	Casey Donahew	1331	84	17	19	7	HIT THE HIGHWAY (Independent)	Bri Bagwell	1030	48
8	9	17	I MISS US (RedPlay Media)	Trevor Underwood	1289	66	18	22	15	THE OTHERS (Late August Records)	Cody Jinks	1020	101
9	10	15	LONELY OVER YOU (Warner Music Nashville)	William Beckmann	1243	31	19	21	8	ALWAYS FLOWERS (Independent)	Kylie Frey	982	62
10	11	15	TWO HANDS (Independent)	Pat Green and Corey Kent	1223	23	20	13	27	IF IT RAINS TODAY (Independent)	Matt Castillo	961	-144

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

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	2	27	HEART OF STONE Bailee & Buddy/BMG/Republic/Stoney Creek	★★ No. 1 (1 Week)/ Most Increased Audience ★★ Jelly Roll	32.950	+2.683	9066	925	1
2	1	21	BOTTLE ROCKETS Triple Tigers	Scotty McCreery & Hootie & The Blowfish	30.353	-0.125	8712	107	2
3	5	15	I GOT BETTER Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen	27.420	+2.647	7694	727	3
4	6	28	BAR NONE MCA Nashville	Jordan Davis	24.805	+1.244	7282	306	4
5	3	29	HAPPEN TO ME Triple Tigers	Russell Dickerson	23.918	-2.391	6432	-710	6
6	4	36	GOOD NEWS American Dogwood/EMPIRE/Magnolia Music	Shaboozey	23.469	-1.509	5987	-309	8
7	7	44	DARLIN' Chase Matthew/Warner Music Nashville/WAR	Chase Matthew	22.417	+1.192	6404	292	7
8	9	10	BACK IN THE SADDLE Seven Ridges/Columbia Nashville	Luke Combs	22.280	+1.497	6604	420	5
9	8	33	AFTER ALL THE BARS ARE CLOSED Fifty-One/Forty-Nine/Valory	Thomas Rhett	20.748	-0.126	5202	-89	9
10	11	54	HEAVENS TO BETSY Big Machine	Jackson Dean	16.451	+1.041	4961	346	10
11	12	55	WHAT KINDA MAN MCA Nashville	Parker McCollum	13.522	+0.370	4309	233	12
12	13	19	SOMEWHERE OVER LAREDO Broken Bow	Lainey Wilson	13.317	+0.280	4508	151	11
13	15	39	COWGIRL Stoney Creek	Parmalee	13.280	+1.578	3548	383	17
14	14	30	3,2,1 Tucker Wetmore/Back Blocks/EMI Nashville/Mercury/Republic/Mercury Nashville	Tucker Wetmore	12.023	+0.300	3871	155	14
15	18	28	HOUSE AGAIN River House/Warner Music Nashville/WAR	Hudson Westbrook	11.975	+0.823	3601	224	16
16	17	17	GOOD TIMES & TAN LINES Leo33	Zach Top	11.506	+0.213	3684	183	15
17	16	29	HANDS OF TIME BigEG/EMI Nashville/Mercury Nashville	Eric Church	11.475	+0.056	4112	-104	13
18	19	12	DON'T MIND IF I DO Nashville Harbor	Riley Green Featuring Ella Langley	9.861	+1.086	3249	357	18
19	22	13	6 MONTHS LATER Megan Moroney/Columbia/Columbia Nashville	Megan Moroney	8.951	+1.008	2819	239	22
20	23	25	FAVORITE COUNTRY SONG Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	HARDY	8.590	+0.807	2832	298	21
21	21	36	IT WON'T BE LONG RECORDS Nashville	George Birge	8.528	+0.377	2959	27	20
22	20	38	STRAIGHT LINE Hit Red/Capitol Nashville/MCA Nashville	Keith Urban	8.412	+0.067	2974	110	19
23	26	19	STAY COUNTRY OR DIE TRYIN' Ten Point/Wheelhouse	Blake Shelton	7.581	+0.577	2760	276	23
24	25	41	TIME'S TICKING Valory	Justin Moore	7.572	+0.351	2370	74	25
25	29	3	HOW FAR DOES A GOODBYE GO Macon/Broken Bow	Jason Aldean	7.140	+1.799	2262	605	26
26	24	35	I DARE YOU Big Machine	Rascal Flatts & Jonas Brothers	7.082	-0.208	2645	-56	24
27	30	34	BETTER ME FOR YOU (BROWN EYES) Fugitive Recordings/Magnolia Music	Max McNown	5.523	+0.320	2057	99	28
28	28	43	GOLDEN CHILD Riser House	Meghan Patrick	5.390	-0.080	1955	-57	29
29	31	31	ENDS OF THE EARTH RECORDS/Columbia/RECORDS Nashville	Ty Myers	5.073	+0.267	1354	60	37
30	27	21	YOU HAD TO BETHERE Blue Chair/Megan Moroney/Columbia/Columbia Nashville	Megan Moroney & Kenny Chesney	4.844	-0.642	1863	-271	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. 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.

billboard Country Airplay

 AIRPLAY
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LUMINATE

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE Imprint/Label	Artist	AUDIENCE (IN MILLIONS)		PLAYS		
					THIS WEEK	+/-	THIS WEEK	+/-	RANK
31	32	23	WHAT HE'LL NEVER HAVE Curb	Dylan Scott	4.803	+0.102	2137	25	27
32	33	15	WEAK Valory	Preston Cooper	4.397	+0.160	1611	89	33
33	34	12	A SONG TO SING Vanner/Republic/Big Loud	Miranda Lambert & Chris Stapleton	4.279	+0.053	1673	49	32
34	35	46	WOULD IF I COULD Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	ERNEST	3.997	-0.105	1707	-22	31
35	36	23	THE FALL CoJo/Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Cody Johnson	3.987	+0.235	1249	105	39
36	37	24	I AIN'T COMING BACK Mercury/Republic/Big Loud	Morgan Wallen Featuring Post Malone	3.758	+0.091	1078	-6	43
37	38	25	HARD FOUGHT HALLELUJAH Brandon Lake/Essential/Lyric Ridge	Brandon Lake X Jelly Roll	3.474	-0.187	1200	15	40
38	39	18	ME & A BEER Harpeth 60	Chris Janson	3.236	-0.068	1486	34	35
39	40	26	TIL THE LAST ONE DIES Boss Moves/Black River	Chris Young	3.206	+0.175	1542	45	34
40	44	3	AIN'T A BAD LIFE Fifty-One/Forty-Nine/Valory ★★ Breaker ★★	Thomas Rhett Featuring Jordan Davis	3.181	+1.104	1056	429	45
41	42	30	WISH YOU WELL Music Soup/Interscope/MCA Nashville	Vincent Mason	2.727	+0.374	1354	99	36
42	41	19	SAME MOON Riser House/Columbia Nashville	Mitchell Tenpenny	2.660	-0.019	1096	35	42
43	43	16	WRONG HEARTS BMG/Galaxy Label Group	LOCASH	2.256	+0.175	1073	74	44
44	45	19	BAGGAGE Black River	Kelsea Ballerini	2.018	+0.234	1117	53	41
45	52	8	MAKING GOOD TIME Three Up Three Down/Columbia Nashville	Old Dominion	1.971	+0.584	861	83	49
46	46	10	NEVER CALL AGAIN Thrivin Here/Warner Music Nashville/WMN	Gavin Adcock	1.928	+0.184	940	53	46
47	47	20	PAPER UMBRELLAS McGraw/Big Machine	Tim McGraw Featuring Parker McCollum	1.769	+0.078	1320	4	38
48	50	17	DRINK WITH YOU Nashville Harbor	Brett Young	1.522	+0.039	886	22	48
49	51	20	BURNED DOWN HEAVEN Chase McDaniel/Big Machine	Chase McDaniel	1.502	+0.025	710	40	53
50	49	13	KID MYSELF Night Train/Broken Bow	John Morgan	1.476	-0.078	935	24	47
51	55	7	SEVENTEEN Columbia Nashville	Kameron Marlowe	1.330	+0.205	663	68	55
52	54	12	EASY TO LOVE Broken Bow	Dustin Lynch	1.301	+0.145	781	29	51
53	58	2	HATE HOW YOU LOOK The Core/Universal Music Canada/Mercury Nashville	Josh Ross	1.152	+0.273	662	133	56
54	53	10	I WISH YOU WOULD Valory	Mackenzie Carpenter Featuring Midland	1.119	-0.046	726	19	52
55	56	13	AMEN American Dogwood/EMPIRE/Magnolia Music	Shaboozey & Jelly Roll	1.092	-0.032	544	21	58
56	NEW		LONG LIVE COUNTRY Triple Tigers ★★ Hot Shot Debut/Breaker ★★	Shane Profitt	1.047	+0.240	684	58	54
57	60	9	NOT TELLIN' True To The Song/Nashville Harbor	Caroline Jones	0.962	+0.115	845	66	50
58	57	4	ALL MY EXES Mercury/Big Loud	Lauren Alaina Featuring Chase Matthew	0.929	-0.148	539	3	59
59	RE-ENTRY		USE ME Leo33	Zach Top	0.886	+0.050	68	-5	-
60	59	4	HEAVEN PASSING THROUGH Bossier City/Thirty Tigers/Akando	Turnpike Troubadours	0.844	-0.008	336	6	-



Mitchell Tenpenny was accompanied by his wife, fellow artist Meghan Patrick, when he performed during halftime of Detroit's NFL game on Sept. 28 at Ford Field. They're pictured with Roary, the Lions' mascot.



Alexandra Kay dropped by WKHX Atlanta when she played the Variety Playhouse on Sept. 26. From left: Wheelhouse director of national promotion Jennifer Shaffer, WKHX PD Mike Moore, Kay and WKHX afternoon host Lucas Phelan.

MEGAN MORONEY

FOR YOUR CMA CONSIDERATION



ALBUM
OF THE YEAR
AM I OKAY?

FEMALE VOCALIST
OF THE YEAR

MUSIC VIDEO
OF THE YEAR
"AM I OKAY?"

MUSICAL EVENT
OF THE YEAR
"YOU HAD TO BE THERE"
W/ KENNY CHESNEY

SINGLE
OF THE YEAR
"AM I OKAY?"

SONG
OF THE YEAR
"AM I OKAY?"

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voice in contemporary
country music
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AP



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

Eagles founding member Bernie Leadon signed a publishing deal with Warner Chappell Music in advance of the Oct. 10 release of *Too Late to Be Cool*, his first album in two decades. From left: WCM senior vp of A&R Greg Sowders and co-chair/CEO Guy Moot, Leadon, WCM co-chair/COO Carianne Marshall and Trevian Worldwide founder Trevian Kutti.

INDUSTRY EMPLOYEES STRUGGLING

It comes as no surprise to most music professionals, but MusiCares' fifth annual Wellness in Music (WIM) survey suggests that many of the industry's workers are at risk in significant areas of their lives.

Nearly 3,200 respondents offered insights on mental health, health care access and financial wellness within the music community.

Here are five key findings from the WIM survey:

- 11.4% of respondents reported suicidal ideation in the last year, more than double the general population.
- 20% knew a colleague who has been sexually harassed.
- 15% lack health insurance, double the uninsured among the general population.
- 35% have a chronic disease.
- 78% make less than \$100,000 and say they cannot cover their expenses during music work alone.

Go [here](#) for the full story.

—Paul Grein

RADIO & RECORDS®

Management firm Make Wake Artists is expanding, as founder and chief navigation officer **Chris Kappy** launches an in-house label concurrent with the company's 10th anniversary. **Alicia Mathews** is promoted to head of marketing and commercial partnerships after six years as an artist manager, and **Myles Hoffman** is elevated to marketing manager from marketing and label operations coordinator ... Riser House Entertainment established Riser House Rock, with **Jason Martin** installed as president. His most recent role was as Elektra vp of promotion. The executive team also includes A&R executive **Jim Kaufman**, who co-owns publishing company The Song Factory; and digital marketing and engagement manager **Sofia Barbetta**, promoted from marketing coordinator ... **Morgan Evans** signed with Virgin Music Group, with plans to release his next single, "Beer Back Home," on Oct. 10, and a full album in 2026 ... **Boy Named Banjo**, previously signed as a five-piece band with Universal Music Group Nashville, has rebranded as **Breakfield** and signed with Rounder as a four-piece ensemble. Its first music in the new deal, "Canyon Walls," was released Oct. 3 ... **Colleen Valkoun** joined iHeartMedia/Milwaukee as vp of sales, RadioInk.com reported. It marks a return to iHeart after a run as Milwaukee Radio Alliance president/GM. The iHeart cluster includes country **WMIL** ... **Kevin Rich** departed his role as Beasley Media Group vp of operations, according to RadioInk.com. He held the position for more than three years ... **WKKO** Toledo, Ohio, moved **Johnny D** to mornings from middays, RadioInsight.com reported. Taking the vacated shift is **Cliff Smithers**, who has worked at the station twice previously. Smithers is also listed as midday host on Cumulus classic country sister **WMIM** ... **KUZZ** Bakersfield, Calif., PD **Brent Michaels** moved to mornings, according to RadioInsight.com. In the process, he swaps roles with **Kenn McCloud**, who segues from mornings to afternoons ... The Country Radio Hall of Fame is accepting nominations for the class of 2026 [here](#) through Oct. 31.

'ROUND THE ROW

Entertainment attorney **Dennis Lord** joined the Gordon Law Group. A former songwriter — he co-authored **Travis Tritt**'s first hit, "Country Club" — Lord ran his own legal firm for the last eight years. Reach him [here](#) ... Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum vp of creative **Warren Denney** announced plans to retire in December following 18 years with the organization ... **Jackie Naparolo** joined Outback Presents as senior vp of entertainment strategy and development. She formed her own booking company, Richmond, Va.-based nightowl Promotional Solutions, in 2013 ... Nashville's Music City Center named **Kelli Donahoe** chief sales officer, replacing **Brian Ivey**, who is to retire after 29 years with MCC and its predecessor, the Nashville Convention Center. Donahoe was previously COO. With the move, **Elisa Putman** returns to her previous role, senior vp/COO, after 20 months in retirement ... Warner Chappell Nashville signed writer-artist **Brayden Stewart** to a publishing deal ... A year after co-hosting, **Lainey Wilson** will serve as the solo host of the 59th annual Country Music Association Awards on Nov. 19 on ABC ... **Toby Keith** was inducted Sept. 5 into the Cheyenne Frontier Days Hall of Fame in Wyoming. He joined 11 previous musical honorees, including **Garth Brooks**, **Roy Clark**, **Reba McEntire** and **Brooks & Dunn** ... The International Bluegrass Music Association is accepting applications for its 2026 Leadership Bluegrass program, slated for March 2-4, 2026. Apply [here](#) ... BMI renewed its agreement with C3 Presents, extending its presentation of a BMI Stage at the Austin City Limits Festival and Chicago's Lollapalooza through 2028 ... **Jana Kramer** and **Jessie James Decker** have roles in the movie *Karen Kingsbury's The Christmas Ring*, also featuring **Benjamin Hollingsworth** and **Kelsey Grammer**. The film debuts in theaters on Nov. 6 ... **Cody Johnson**'s COJO Championship Event will air Oct. 11 on the Cowboy Channel. The competition includes Johnson participating in team roping ... **Dierks Bentley** introduced ROW 94 Full Proof, the third edition in his line of whiskey, on Sept. 24 ... **Tyler Rich** published his second children's book, *Leave the Wolf Wild*, inspired by his gold-certified single "Leave Her Wild" ... **Jordan Davis**, **Tigirlily Gold**, **Colbie Caillat**, **Mitchell Tenpenny**, **LANCO** and **Mad-dox Baston** joined the list of participants in the Lucky Classic Celebrity Softball Game, a benefit slated for Nov. 16 at Nashville's First Horizon Park ... **Eric Paslay** presents Song in a Hat on Oct. 18 in Atlanta, joined by **Kristian Bush** and **Cyndi Thomson** in a songwriting event that lets audience members participate with the pros in creating songs for charity. Song in a Hat is part of the Harmony for Hope Gala, founded by **John Driskell Hopkins'** Hop on a Cure, a foundation that funds ALS research. Go [here](#) for more info ... Songwriters **Jeffrey Steele** ("What Hurts the Most," "My Town") and **Don Schlitz** ("The Gambler," "Forever and Ever, Amen") will join hosts **The Warren Brothers** at the annual Concert for Cumberland Heights on Oct. 29 at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium ... **Eric Church**'s Chief Cares is expanding its North Carolina housing project, Blue Haven, to provide homes to key community members — such as teachers, health-care workers and first responders — in addition to assisting families who lost their homes during Hurricane Helene ... A GoFundMe account was established Sept. 27 to assist **The Mavericks'** **Raul Malo** as the costs of his stage 4 cancer battle balloon. More than \$132,000 had been raised through Oct. 2. Go [here](#) to donate. ●



Lionel Richie (left) took part in a live, one-hour interview with iHeartMedia personality **Bobby Bones** at Austin's Paramount Theatre for an installment of *Bones' Bobbycast*, in conjunction with the Sept. 30 release of Richie's autobiography, *Truly*.



Tucker Wetmore celebrated his Country Music Association nomination for best new artist with an industry event on Sept. 30 that included a first listen to new music. Joining him is Gatsby label founder **Jessie Jo Dillon**.

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**BEST CONTEMPORARY
COUNTRY ALBUM**

REBOOT II

**BEST AMERICAN
ROOTS PERFORMANCE**

**"ROCK MY WORLD
(LITTLE COUNTRY GIRL)"**
W/ MARCUS KING



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LUKAS NELSON



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"PRETTY MUCH"

ALBUM OF THE YEAR
AMERICAN ROMANCE

SONG OF THE YEAR
"AMERICAN ROMANCE"

BEST COUNTRY
SOLO PERFORMANCE
"PRETTY MUCH"

BEST COUNTRY
DUO/GROUP
PERFORMANCE
"DISAPPEARING LIGHT"
WITH STEPHEN WILSON JR.

BEST COUNTRY SONG
"AMERICAN ROMANCE"

BEST TRADITIONAL
COUNTRY ALBUM
AMERICAN ROMANCE

BEST AMERICANA
PERFORMANCE
"FRIEND IN THE END"
FT. SIERRA FERRELL

BEST AMERICAN
ROOTS SONG
"FRIEND IN THE END"
FT. SIERRA FERRELL

billboard Country Airplay Index

TITLE Publishing-Licensing Org.
(Songwriter) **Chart Position**

3.2.1 (Concord Copyrights, BMI/Jomil 10 Music, BMI/Native Notes Music, BMI/Warner-Tamela Publishing Corp., BMI/SugarPlum Songs, ASCAP/WC Music Corp., ASCAP (J.Miller, S.Oberstreet, J.Reynolds) **14**

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A

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Warner-Tamela Publishing Corp., BMI/Be A Light Publishing, BMI/Big Loud Mountain LLC, BMI/John Byron Music, BMI/Goat Island Bay Music, BMI/Songs By 10K HRS Publishing, BMI/3117 Music, ASCAP/Kobalt Songs Music Publishing LLC, ASCAP/Dragon Bunny Music, BMI/Sony Songs LLC, BMI (Thomas Rhett, J.C.Bunetta, J.Byron, J.Free, J.K.Hindlin) **9**

AIN'T A BAD LIFE Warner-Tamela Publishing Corp., BMI/Be A Light Publishing, BMI/Big Loud Mountain LLC, BMI/John Byron Music, BMI/Rare Publishing Worldwide, BMI/Songs Of Back Block Publishing, BMI/Sony Tunes, ASCAP/Poppy's Picks, ASCAP/Master Of My Domain Music, ASCAP/WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Big Loud Mountain Tunes, ASCAP/Mark Trussell Pub Designee, ASCAP (Thomas Rhett, J.Byron, A.G.Gorley, B.Pendergrass, M.Trussell) **40**

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AMEN Poorchoice Music Publishing, BMI/Songs Into Poems, BMI/Songs Of Kobalt Music Publishing America, Inc., BMI/Seth Ennis Publishing Designee, BMI/Jordan Gray Publishing Designee, BMI/WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Range Media Partners LLC, ASCAP/Essency Music Publishing, ASCAP/S2 Songs LLC, BMI/Songs Of Universal, Inc., BMI/Kevin Powers Publishing Designee, BMI/Baile's Ballads, BMI/BMG Platinum Songs US, BMI/Sony Songs LLC, BMI/Sea Gayle Ale House Music, BMI (C.O.Chibueze, J.B.DeFord, S.C.Cook, J.H.Foote, S.W.Ennis, J.Gray, K.J.Powell, N.Sastry) **55**

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BAR NONE Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Tape Room Hits, BMI/Artist 101 Publishing Group, BMI/Songs Of Kobalt Music Publishing America, Inc., BMI/Tape Room LLC, Series 1, ASCAP/Hunter Phelps Pub Designee, ASCAP/WC Music Corp., ASCAP/Kwsay Publishing, BMI/Writersonthecon Publishing, BMI/Warner-Tamela Publishing Corp., BMI (B.J.Johnson, H.Phelps, L.Vaughan) **4**

BETTER ME FOR YOU (BROWN EYES) Songs From The Penalty Box, BMI/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Max McNowin Music, BMI/Carver Music Publishing, ASCAP/Tunes Of King Pen, BMI/Ready Set Publishing, BMI (M.McNowin, J.Kenney, A.A.Suppelsa, T.K.Dabbs) **27**

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D

DARLIN' Hunter Huff Publishing Designee, BMI/Ciaran Wilkie Publishing Designee, BMI/Sony Tree Publishing, BMI/Verse 2, BMI/Droptime Music, BMI/Chase Matthew Music Publishing, BMI/Warner-Tamela Publishing Corp., BMI/Bridge 1 Music, BMI/Kobalt Music Services Ltd., PRS (Chase Matthew, A.Maxwell, H.Huff, C.Wilkie, J.Ake Angel) **7**

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HARD FOUGHT HALLELUJAH Brandon Lake Music, ASCAP/Music By Elevation Worship Publishing, BMI/Be Essential Songs, BMI/Also Also Industries, BMI/Baile's Ballads, BMI (B.M.Lake, S.Furrick, B.Hastings, C.J.Brown, J.B.DeFord) **37**

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WRONG HEARTS BMG Platinum Songs US, BMI/Websinger 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) **30**

FOR YOUR CMA CONSIDERATION

LAINNEY WILSON

ENTERTAINER OF THE YEAR

SINGLE OF THE YEAR
"4X4XU"

ALBUM OF THE YEAR
WHIRLWIND

SONG OF THE YEAR
"4X4XU"

FEMALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR

MUSIC VIDEO OF THE YEAR
"SOMEWHERE OVER LAREDO"



BMG

FOR YOUR CMA CONSIDERATION

BLAKE SHELTON

SONG OF THE YEAR
"TEXAS"

MUSICAL EVENT OF THE YEAR
"POUR ME A DRINK"
POST MALONE (FEAT. BLAKE SHELTON)



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25 Years Ago

George Strait Played It ‘Strait’ In A No. 1 Debut

In 2000, a self-titled project returned his name to the top of the charts

George Strait was 19 years into his time in the national spotlight before he finally released an album titled... *George Strait*. The 10-track collection debuted at No. 1 on *Billboard*’s Top Country Albums on Oct. 7, 2000, becoming the seventh of 17 career albums to lead the list in its first charted week. *George Strait* was also the Texan’s 16th album to reach the summit,

among 27 total No. 1s. It marked the 27th of 52 charted titles since he made his first appearance on the list with *Strait Country* in 1981. Produced by **Tony Brown** (**Reba McEntire**, **Vince Gill**), the self-titled disc yielded two top five entries on Hot Country Songs — “Go On” (No. 2) and “If You Can Do Anything Else” (No. 5)

— during a window when he was at his commercial peak. That summer, Strait completed his third stadium tour with an itinerary that included the inaugural concert at Nashville’s Nissan Stadium (then known as Adelphia Coliseum). This year, he played five stadium dates, co-headlining with **Chris Stapleton**. —TOM ROLAND

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REWINDING
THE
COUNTRY
CHARTS

Strait at Houston’s Enron Field in 2000.

				IMPRINT & NUMBER/DISTRIBUTING LABEL (SUGGESTED LIST PRICE OR EQUIVALENT FOR CASSETTE/CD)		
				No. 1/Hot Shot Debut		
1	NEW	1		GEORGE STRAIT MCA NASHVILLE 170143 (11.98/17.98) 1 week at No. 1	GEORGE STRAIT	1
2	1	1	8	SOUNDTRACK CURB 78703 (11.98/17.98)	COYOTE UGLY	1
				Greatest Gainer		
3	2	2	46	FAITH HILL WARNER BROS. 47573/WRN (12.98/18.98)	BREATHE	1
4	4	4	56	DIXIE CHICKS MONUMENT 69678/SONY (11.98 EQ/17.98)	FLY	1
5	3	3	14	BILLY GILMAN EPIC 62086/SONY (7.98 EQ/11.98)	ONE VOICE	2
6	6	5	9	AARON TIPPIN STREET 16601/INDEP WOOD (10.98/16.98)	PEOPLE LIKE US	1