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LEGAL NEWS 04/3/2023

# Billboard's 2023 Top Music Lawyers Revealed

The best attorneys in the business are defending the rights of their clients, negotiating smart deals — and warily watching the rise of artificial intelligence.

By [Bill Donahue](#), [Thom Duffy](#)





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When artists, songwriters or music business executives face a legal challenge, they can't just shake it off.

Sometimes they need a good attorney. *Billboard's* 2023 class of Top Music Lawyers — nominated by their firms and peers, and chosen by our editors — are an essential resource for the music industry's rising artists, songwriters and superstars alike.

In courtrooms and boardrooms, their work last year involved conflicts over some of the hottest hits on the charts, song lyrics — and even tattoos.

Attorneys on this list took part in battles involving the originality of the lyrics to Taylor Swift's "Shake It Off," in a case that was settled in December without a final ruling; Ed Sheeran singing in a London courtroom to successfully prove he didn't steal "Shape of You" from an earlier song; Dua Lipa facing not one but two copyright suits over her smash hit "Levitating," the top **[Billboard Hot 100](https://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/)** (<https://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/>) song of 2021; Young Thug and Gunna's indictment in a gang-related case that cited rap lyrics to back state charges; and Cardi B taking the stand to convince a jury to dismiss claims, including privacy violation, from a California man whose back tattoo was Photoshopped onto the cover of her 2016 mixtape, *Gangsta Bitch Music, Vol. 1*.

Catalog sales continued to grow both more popular and richer, as 2023's top attorneys advised on the transfer of publishing or recording rights from creators such as Justin Bieber, Brad Paisley, Sonny Rollins and the estates of Juice WRLD, Leonard Cohen and McKinley "Muddy Waters" Morganfield, to name a few.

Clearly, attorneys stay busy. But they also take time to reflect on the broader state of the music business. For this year's Top Music Lawyers report, *Billboard* asked them not only about their clients and achievements but also about the balance of power in our industry and how it might further shift to those who truly drive its success — artists and songwriters.

We also asked attorneys what is the most pressing concern facing the music business in 2023. One topic, which was hardly mentioned a year ago, came up repeatedly: the rise of generative artificial intelligence, a technology that can create new content by drawing from existing data.

“Because the music industry was built substantially on the creative contribution from recording artists and songwriters, the concern is that AI-generated songs could take up space in the competitive market for music consumption and replace career artists,” says Craig Marshall, an equity partner of Myman Greenspan Fox Rosenberg Mobasser Younger & Light. “This also gives rise to a number of copyright issues that will have to be resolved. After all, copyright statutes were created to incentivize artists to create new works by protecting originality. Now it seems that AI is using that originality to replace human art.”

Previn Warren of the law firm Motley Rice expresses his concern succinctly: “This may be an existential moment for artists, not just the industry that supports them.” —*BILL DONAHUE and THOM DUFFY*

**Jeffrey Harleston**

*General counsel/executive vp of business and legal affairs, Universal Music Group*

**Saheli Datta**

*Executive vp/chief compliance officer and employment counsel, Universal Music Group*

**Steve Gawley**

*Executive vp of business and legal affairs and east coast label business development, Universal Music Group*

**Nicola Levy**

*Executive vp of digital business affairs, Universal Music Group*

**Alasdair McMullan**

*Executive vp of business and legal affairs/head of litigation, Universal Music Group*

**Michael Seltzer**

*Executive vp/head of commercial transactions for business and legal affairs, Universal Music Group*

In August, the major labels, including UMG, settled a yearslong lawsuit against internet service provider Bright House and its corporate parent, Charter Communications, over the ISP's liability for users uploading copyrighted works without permission — “a good old-fashioned copyright infringement case,” Harleston says. “Even in 2023, I think it's important that we reinforce and support the rule of law as it applies to copyright and the artists' ability to be compensated for their work.” That will continue, he says, as technology evolves, especially in “the AI discussion.” Harleston stresses the importance of “how we address these innovations in a way that's supportive of the music community.”

**Paul Robinson**

*Executive vp/general counsel, Warner Music Group*

**Brad Cohen**

*Senior vp/head of litigation/associate general counsel, Warner Music Group*

**Jon Glass**

*Senior vp/head of digital legal affairs, Warner Music Group*

**Maryrose Maness**

*Senior vp/deputy general counsel, Warner Music Group*

**Thomas Marcotullio**

*Senior vp/chief counsel, mergers and acquisitions and corporate law, Warner Music Group*

**Trent Tappe**

*Senior vp/deputy general counsel/chief compliance officer, Warner Music Group*

In the past year, WMG has renewed licensing agreements with Meta and SoundCloud; expanded with mergers and acquisitions in the United States, the Middle East and India; and won “substantial settlements and jury verdicts in copyright-infringement cases against ISPs,” Robinson says. But the biggest change was at the top of the company, as Robert Kyncl replaced Stephen Cooper. “Most of all, we’re proud of working with our board to ensure a smooth and efficient CEO search and transition process,” Robinson adds.

**The balance of power in the music business would shift toward artists and songwriters if...:** “It has already happened. Over the last six years, as a result of how the streaming economy has heightened competition for signings, artists and songwriters are seeing higher advances, higher royalty rates, lower delivery commitments and shorter rights retentions.” — Robinson

In late 2021, Sony Music Entertainment's legal team oversaw the acquisition of Bruce Springsteen's publishing and master- recording catalog for a reported \$500 million.

Mat Hayward/GI

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**Julie Swidler**

*Executive vp of business affairs/general counsel, Sony Music Entertainment*

**Stu Bondell**

*Executive vp of business and legal affairs, international, Sony Music Entertainment*

**Wade Leak**

*Executive vp/deputy general counsel/chief compliance, ethics and privacy officer, Sony Music Entertainment*

**Jeff Walker**

*Executive vp/head of business and legal affairs, global digital business, Sony Music Entertainment*

**Susan Meisel**

*Senior vp/corporate deputy general counsel, Sony Music Entertainment*

**Jennifer Womack**

*Senior vp of business and legal affairs, film, television and podcasts, Sony Music Entertainment*

Over the past 18 months, Sony's legal team oversaw two major deals: the late-2021 acquisition of Bruce Springsteen's publishing and master-recording catalog for a reported \$500 million and the acquisition of the distribution and artists services company AWAL from Kobalt in a deal worth some \$430 million, which received final regulatory approval in May. Swidler says of Springsteen: "This is an artist who has been with Columbia for his entire career and wants his legacy and future to stay with Columbia." On the AWAL transaction, she adds, "It's just one more opportunity for us to give artists different ways of engaging with us."

**Kevan Choset**

*Vp/associate general counsel/head of legal strategy, Spotify*

**Sofia Sheppard**

*Associate general counsel/head of global licensing and business development, Spotify*

**Darren Schmidt**

*Associate general counsel/global head of label licensing, Spotify*

**Lucy Bridgwood**

*Associate general counsel of global publishing, Spotify*

Spotify's legal team helped broker a settlement between major music streaming services and publishers and songwriters that set streaming royalty rates through 2027, "providing rate stability and avoiding another Copyright Royalty Board trial," says Sheppard. The team is concerned with helping artists build their careers when all streaming platforms collectively are ingesting over 100,000 tracks daily — and rising. "I believe that this makes it critical for platform providers and rights holders to work together," Sheppard says, "to provide artists, songwriters and users with the best possible discovery experiences."

**Gabe Fleet**

*Executive vp of business affairs/chief music licensing counsel, iHeartMedia*

As more industry attention turned toward the metaverse during the past year, Fleet led negotiations for iHeartMedia music licensing and strategy opportunities that included an iHeart-branded entertainment space in *Fortnite*, an iHeart world in Roblox and a partnership with Super League Gaming. The moves were part of an effort to help iHeart adapt to a changing digital ecosystem, says Fleet. "We have to find a way for services to be meaningfully profitable while also fairly compensating creators and copyright owners." In early March, Fleet joined law firm of Latham & Watkins as a partner in the connectivity, privacy & information practice.

**Antonious Porch**

*General counsel/chief diversity officer, SoundCloud*

**Ama Walton**

*Senior vp of music licensing and partnerships, SoundCloud*

SoundCloud's acquisition of AI company Musiio in early 2022 was a game-changer, according to Porch. The purchase both amplified the company's existing music intelligence capabilities and allows "further leverage of the platform's vast data to identify what's next in music trends and talent," says Porch. Musiio's business-to-business audio referencing search (that "listens"

to music) and its automated tagging and playlist tools will help SoundCloud identify talent and trends early, adds Porch. Walton worked on the company's fan-powered royalties (FPR) to oversee a more transparent option for artists to monetize directly on the platform and led the legal team on negotiations for SoundCloud's global licensing deal with Warner Music Group — the first major-label rights holder for the FPR payout model. Over 150,000 artists on the platform have been using the FPR system since the signing, with independent artists experiencing a near 60% increase in rates than with the traditional pro rata model, according to SoundCloud.

**Robert Windom**

*Chief counsel, content and services, Apple*

**Elizabeth Miles**

*Senior legal director, iTunes and Apple Music, Apple*

As leading attorneys at Apple, Windom and Miles share in the company's recent accomplishments, from Apple Music's partnership with the NFL for Rihanna's Super Bowl Halftime Show on Feb. 12 to the rise of the company's immersive spatial audio product. In announcing the company's results on Feb. 6 for the first fiscal quarter of 2023, Apple CEO Tim Cook revealed that it had reached a new milestone with over 2 million active devices in its installed user base, while its services business set a new revenue record of \$20.8 billion. Apple services include Apple Music and the company's other digital content: books, video, games and podcasts.



In February, to mark the announcement that Sting will be named a fellow of The Ivors Academy, Amazon Music exclusively released a demo of his track “If It’s Love” from his 2021 album, *The Bridge*.

Charley Gallay/GI

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**Stephen Worth**

*Associate general counsel/head of legal, Amazon Music*

**Cyrus Afshar**

*Associate general counsel, Amazon Music*

**Nicolas Gauss**

**Jon Cohen**

*Senior corporate counsels, Amazon Music*

While streaming platforms promote recording artists by default, Amazon Music is highlighting the work of songwriters through a global sponsorship with The Ivors Academy, the U.K. association for music creators, and plans to release live performances and interviews on its Amazon Music U.K. Twitch channel. In February, to mark the announcement of Sting being named an academy fellow of The Ivors — its highest honor — Amazon Music exclusively released a demo of Sting’s track “If It’s Love” from his 2021 album, *The*

*Bridge*. “In the coming years, our team will work hard to help advance the work of The Ivors, one of the world’s top songwriter associations,” says Cohen.

## **Michael Rowles**

*Executive vp/general counsel, Live Nation Entertainment*

Rowles points to Live Nation’s acquisition of Mexican concert promoter OCESA and integration of its business as “a big focus over the past year-and-a-half as we continue to expand globally to better serve artists and their fans.” The deal had been put together in 2019, then “got delayed for obvious reasons,” he says, “so finally getting the chance to successfully close the transaction and combine our businesses has been huge.” Looking at the broader issues facing the industry, Rowles says: “Artists need the ability to set the rules on how their tickets get to their fans. We’re already seeing laws strip their control away, giving scalpers more power. We recently launched fair-ticketing reforms with support from other top artist coalitions, managers, music labels and agencies to advocate for artists deciding the rules on how their tickets can be sold, transferred and resold. We’re doing everything we can to advocate for better laws for the sake of artists and fans across the country.”

## **Shawn Trell**

*COO/executive vp/general counsel, AEG Presents*

Trell is more than an attorney for AEG Presents, the promotion arm of Anschutz Entertainment Group. As COO, executive vp and the company’s top lawyer, he oversees new club construction, including spearheading the development of a 3,500-seat venue in Raleigh, N.C., with Kane Realty to serve as a flagship property in the fast-growing state.

**Peter Brodsky**

*Executive vp of business and legal affairs/general counsel, Sony Music Publishing*

**Michael Abitbol**

*Senior vp/head of U.S. digital, Sony Music Publishing*

**Nicole Giacco**

**Jonas Kant**

*Senior vps of business and legal affairs, Sony Music Publishing*

Sony Music Publishing's legal team closed numerous landmark deals and renewals with hit-making writers in the last year, including Ashley Gorley, Tainy, Anitta, Ryan Tedder, Danger Mouse and Måneskin. The team also expanded the major publisher's reach worldwide over the last year. "I'm excited that SMP has opened offices in emerging markets such as India and Nigeria," says Giacco. "Just as Spanish-language songs have become more mainstream in the U.S., I look forward to learning new music with regional influences and seeing those songs reach even more listeners." Next up? Giacco and her colleagues are finding ways to protect their songwriters as generative AI technology becomes mainstream. "It is important we evolve with new technologies like AI," she says.

**Angelica Merida**

*Vp of business and legal affairs and international and digital business development, Universal Music Publishing Group*

**Kerrigan Hennings**

**Ira Hoffman**

*Vps of business and legal affairs, Universal Music Publishing Group*

**Don Glista**

*Senior directors of business and legal affairs and creative affairs, Universal Music Publishing Group*

The lawyers at UMPG are proud to have closed numerous major agreements in the past year. “Our team has worked on deals for The Weeknd, the Juan Gabriel estate, Univision, the Elvis Presley estate, Neil Diamond and the Frank Zappa estate, just to name a few,” says Merida. The team is also paying close attention to AI: “With the broader adoption of music-centric AI,” she says, “it is more important than ever to ensure that the value of songwriters’ and artists’ creative contributions continues to be recognized and protected.”

In the past year, the team at Universal Music Publishing Group has worked on deals for The Weeknd, Univision, Neil Diamond and the estates of Juan Gabriel, Elvis Presley and Frank Zappa, just to name a few.

Frazer Harrison/GI

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**Peter Rosenthal**

*Executive vp/global head of legal and business affairs, Warner Chappell Music*

**Steve Butler**

*Senior vp of legal and business affairs, Warner Chappell Music*

Rosenthal and Butler have led the legal teams at Warner Chappell to think global. “We’ve worked hard to unify and increase collaborations,” says

Rosenthal. “This has led to highly impactful deals, including our acquisition of beloved Spanish artist Joaquín Sabina’s publishing catalog and our worldwide administration agreement with Mosaert, the independent creative label and publishing company founded by Belgian singer-songwriter-composer Stromae.” In addition, the executives helped to establish legal policies and strategies for Warner Chappell’s Web3 efforts including the company’s launch of Archives, a blockchain-powered digital museum that spotlights songs, and its partnership with Defient, a Web3 entertainment company.

### **Christos Badavas**

*Executive vp/general counsel, SESAC Music Group*

Badavas and his team “operate in an increasingly global legal and business affairs environment,” encompassing performing rights, licensing and administration services, sonic brands and specialty music, he says. Last year, SESAC expanded Mint, its international online licensing joint venture with SUIISA, into Asia. “This fundamental shift in the scope of our department’s focus has required us to scale our policies and practices to accommodate the growth,” Badavas says. And because of that experience, Badavas also understands the implications of the rise of AI: “We need to make AI work for the creative community,” he says.

### **Tim Dadson**

*General counsel, SoundExchange*

In June 2022, SoundExchange sued streamer Slacker and its parent company, LiveOne, alleging they had failed to pay millions in royalties and late fees for the use of recordings. In October, the case was decided in U.S. District Court in California in SoundExchange’s favor, with the judge ordering Slacker to pay nearly \$10 million. The ruling also permanently barred the company from using the statutory license to stream music — an option automatically provided to internet radio companies such as Slacker — forcing it to negotiate

direct licenses going forward. Dadson calls the latter move “an unprecedented victory for creators.”

### **Kristen Johns**

*Chief legal officer, The Mechanical Licensing Collective*

The Music Modernization Act of 2018 created the Mechanical Licensing Collective to provide an urgently needed means for the blanket mechanical licensing of musical works to music streaming services and download stores. It has since distributed over \$1 billion in blanket royalties since April 2021 to more than 25,000 songwriters, composers, lyricists, publishers, administrators and ex-U.S. collective management organizations. “Our organization operates with an unprecedented level of transparency,” Johns says, “as demonstrated by the creation of its free, public database of more than 30 million musical works.”

### **Clara Kim**

*Executive vp/chief legal and business affairs officer, ASCAP*

On behalf of ASCAP’s “outrageously talented songwriters and composers,” Kim says, she has negotiated licenses with top streaming platforms such as YouTube, Netflix and HBO Max in deals that have generated historic levels of revenue. For six consecutive years, ASCAP has reported over \$1 billion in distributions. “We’re really proud that our concerted licensing efforts are paying off with higher rates for certain performances and resulting in increased royalties paid to ASCAP members year over year,” says Kim. On March 8, ASCAP reported a 14% increase in collections to \$1.5 billion, while also reporting that its funds available for distribution to songwriters and publishers grew 10.7% to \$1.4 billion in 2022.

### **Stuart Rosen**

*Senior vp/general counsel, BMI*

For its songwriting and composing members, BMI took action in federal rate court against the North American Concert Promoters Association in 2018, with court proceedings concluding in late 2022. According to BMI, royalty rates historically paid by the NACPA — which is the licensing representative

for promoters including Live Nation and AEG — did not reflect the value that songs bring to live concerts. The litigation highlights BMI’s “commitment to ensuring that our songwriters are fairly compensated for their musical contributions,” as songs are the “backbone” of the concert industry, says Rosen. “BMI sought a rate that reflects the value that our songwriters and composers bring to the multibillion-dollar live-concert industry, which is more in line with global models,” he says, “and captures the various ways the modern concert promotion business monetizes the use of our creators’ work.” A decision in the case March 28 awarded a 138% increase in rate to 0.5% of the event’s revenue. It also expands that revenue base to include a cut of concert hall VIP packages and box suites, tickets sold directly to the secondary market and servicing fees received by the promoters.

### **Danielle Aguirre**

*Executive vp/general counsel, National Music Publishers’ Association*

In August, the NMPA and the Nashville Songwriters Association International reached a settlement with music streaming companies in the Phonorecords IV rate proceeding that gave music publishers and songwriters a modest raise in royalty rates for the period of 2023 to 2027. “After seven long years of fighting with these digital music companies,” Aguirre says, “we found a way forward that provides the highest rates in the world and the highest rates in history — and will allow us to find new ways to work together to increase the value of songs.”

### **Ken Doroshow**

*Chief legal officer, RIAA*

Doroshow has achieved victories in piracy cases that have established “that stream-ripping services unlawfully circumvent technical measures designed to protect copyrighted works,” he says. “As piracy continues to evolve and becomes ever more technologically complex, it is critical to reinforce the

vitality of bedrock rules like Section 1201's anti-circumvention prohibitions [in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act], which the decisions in ... these cases achieved."

**Ryan McWhinnie**

*Vp of business and legal affairs, Merlin*

For Merlin's independent music company members, McWhinnie has taken the lead on several major deals at the licensing organization, with digital partners including Apple, Deezer, Meta and Spotify. He has also negotiated premium deals with the business-to-business platform STYNGR and provided music licensing solutions for video games and the metaverse. McWhinnie was also behind a deal with streaming giant FLO, which will help Merlin members reach a new audience in South Korea. Also, "2023 has already highlighted the breakneck speed at which AI continues to develop," says McWhinnie. "While traditionally the competition has been between majors and independents, in the future, it may well be between humans and algorithms."

**Kenneth Abdo**

**Paul Bowles**

**Cynthia Katz**

**Tim Mandelbaum**

**Michael Reinert**

**Leron Rogers**

**Alex Threadgold**

**Heidy Vaquerano**

*Partners, Fox Rothschild*

Beginning 35 years ago, in Minneapolis, Abdo built a nationally recognized entertainment law firm that merged with Fox Rothschild in 2017. Over the past 18 months, he has brokered catalog sales, renegotiated or negotiated



recording and publishing deals for John Driskell Hopkins (Zac Brown Band), Mick Mars (Mötley Crüe), Three Dog Night, Kool & The Gang, Hanson, Eric B. & Rakim and others. Vaquerano and Katz have advised their client HarbourView Equity Partners on high-profile acquisitions of music catalogs, including works from Incubus, Brad Paisley, Lady A and Sum 41. From the firm's New York office, Mandelbaum has guided the sale of the music publishing catalogs of Shannon Rubicam and George Merrill, including the Whitney Houston hits "How Will I Know" and "I Wanna Dance With Somebody," to Primary Wave. For the estate of McKinley "Muddy Waters" Morganfield, Reinert executed a renegotiation with Universal Music Group and an agreement with Sony Music Publishing to take over administration of the icon's catalog, including songs like "Mannish Boy," "Rollin' Stone" and "Got My Mojo Working." Among Rogers' numerous deals in the past year was negotiating a tour deal with Mary J. Blige for the Black Promoters Collective. A former DJ and label executive, Threadgold represents numerous independent labels, distributors and artists. He serves as outside general counsel to VP Records, helping the New York-based label deal with thousands of reggae, dancehall and soca artists. He is also outside general counsel for Symphonic Distribution, helping the digital distributor sign clients and acquire catalog.

## **Jenny Afia**

*Partner, Schillings International*

A leading privacy and reputation lawyer, Afia has a client list that includes Madonna, Adele, Elton John and Johnny Depp, but she highlights her recent crisis management for a performer, whose identity she could not disclose, who was the subject of false allegations that could have severely affected the artist's reputation and career. "Whilst the entirely unjust situation was emotionally scarring, thankfully justice prevailed and their career and fan base are deservedly intact," she says. In 2021, Afia led the team that won a London High Court privacy case for Meghan Markle against Associated Newspapers and successfully defended the Duchess of Sussex's victory on appeal.

## **Lisa Alter**

### **Katie Baron**

*Partners, Alter Kendrick & Baron*

Alter and Baron handled over \$3 billion in star-studded music acquisition deals during the past year-and-a-half, frequently for their client Primary Wave, including agreements for the works of Ray Manzarek and Robby Krieger of The Doors (for an undisclosed amount), Joey Ramone (for a reported \$10 million) and James Brown (for a reported \$90 million). Alter says the industry's biggest challenge is "increasing consolidation of content ownership in the music space," predicting a shrinking group of catalog owners could "cause a seismic shift in the balance of power."

**The balance of power in the music business would shift toward artists and songwriters if...:** "...legislators cared more about creative content and less about campaign contributions from DSPs." — Alter

## **Jonathan Altschul**

*Founding attorney, The Altschul Firm*

Altschul recently negotiated a “bespoke agreement between Warner Records and SM Entertainment” for the rights to K-pop girl group aespa’s new releases outside Asia, he says. “The unique structure of the agreement provided the resources that helped result in a No. 3 album debut on the **Billboard 200** (<https://www.billboard.com/charts/billboard-200/>),” says Altschul, referring to the group’s second release, *Girls*. “I also helped negotiate the agreement that led to aespa making its U.S. performance debut on the main stage at Coachella” in 2022.

**Ken Anderson**

**Jill Berliner**

**Ray Garcia**

*Partners, Rimon*

“We continue to represent a number of prominent and marquee artists in all aspects of their careers, including numerous Grammy winners and Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductees,” says Anderson, who continues to serve as general counsel and litigation supervisor to iconic acts including Beastie Boys, The Chicks and Ben Folds, as well as the estates of Mama Cass Elliot and Rock & Roll Hall of Fame nominee Warren Zevon. The most pressing concern facing the music industry, says Anderson, is “navigating the minefield of royalty transparency and fairness in streaming, subscriptions and international affiliate royalty retention. Digital exploitation is to the 2020s what record clubs were to the 1990s.”

**Peter Anderson**

*Partner, Davis Wright Tremaine*

Anderson — whose clients include The Weeknd, Mariah Carey, Sam Smith and the three major music groups — obtained a dismissal, affirmed by the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New York, for Authentic Brands in a case involving “Can’t Help Falling in Love,” made famous by Elvis Presley. The court ruled that the heirs of songwriter Hugo Peretti couldn’t use the termination right in the Copyright Act to regain control of the song. Since the termination right only applies to deals signed by creators themselves, the court said, the termination provision did not apply to the deal that sold away rights to the song. “The Court of Appeals limited those termination provisions to their plain

meaning, which is important for future cases interpreting those provisions,” Anderson says. “The Court of Appeals also concluded that plaintiffs’ interpretation would subvert Congress’ intent.”

**Craig Averill**

**Jeff Koenig**

**Joseph Serling**

**Jeff Worob**

*Partners, Serlings Rooks Hunter McKoy Worob & Averill*

One year after negotiating 50 Cent’s appearance during the Super Bowl LVI halftime show in 2022, the firm scored a Super Bowl 2023 win with Jack Harlow’s Doritos commercial — a follow-up to his viral Kentucky Fried Chicken partnership and 2022 New Balance collaboration. Of the challenges facing the industry, Koenig is concerned with the incorporation of “AI into the creation process. We could lose the human component that gives music its texture and lasting emotional appeal,” he says.

**Hector Baldonado**

*Founder/principal attorney, The Baldonado Group*

Baldonado’s client roster has grown to include the estate of Juice WRLD, rappers Lil Durk and Trippie Redd and several high-level executives. Negotiating a nine-figure catalog earnings sale, multiple label deals and renegotiating record and publishing deals are all familiar territory for him. The next challenge? “AI technology is of serious concern because of deepfakes and the possibility of copyright infringements,” says Baldonado.

**Christian Barker**

*Equity partner, Shackelford Bowen McKinley & Norton*

**Lauren Kilgore**

*Partner, Shackelford Bowen McKinley & Norton*

**Lauren Spahn**

*Attorney, Shackelford Bowen McKinley & Norton*

Barker reports closing over \$20 million in deals for the firm in the last year for Grammy Award-winning producer Byron Gallimore, songwriter Benjamin

Johnson, country artist Dipper (with Warner Records/Underscore Works) and Cinq Music Group, for which Barker signed on as outside legal counsel. “The major players in the music industry have a sacred responsibility to embrace diversity — of background and of thought,” Barker says. And those companies should be “promoting products and projects that inspire consumers to do the same in a positive and forward-thinking manner.”

### **Andrew Bart**

*Partner/co-chair, content, media and entertainment practice, Jenner & Block*

Representing the major music companies, Jenner & Block won a \$46.7 million jury verdict against San Marcos, Texas-based ISP Grande Communications Networks, which must pay Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, Warner Records and other labels for copyright infringement. The monthlong jury trial in Austin resulted “in a finding of willful infringement and a verdict against an ISP that took a blind eye to massive infringements by its subscribers on its network,” says Bart. Jurors found that Grande Communications was legally liable for the copyright infringement of its users and that it owed separate damages for each of the more than 1,400 songs that were pirated on the company’s network.

### **Richard Baskind**

*Head of music and entertainment, Simons Muirhead Burton*

Baskind heads the music team at London-based Simons Muirhead Burton, which worked on the recent management buyout of Primary Talent International from CAA. The surprise decoupling came less than a year after CAA closed the deal for the U.K. booking agency in a \$750 million acquisition of parent company ICM Presents. The new deal has Primary Talent, founded in 1990, returning to independent ownership, with more than 450 acts including The 1975, The Cure, Lana Del Rey, Noel Gallagher, Dropkick Murphys and Patti Smith. The firm also works with Sony Music Publishing, Nick Cave, Tom Grennan and management company Closer Artists, which counts George Ezra and James Bay among its clients.

### **David Beame**

### **Brian Mencher**

*Founding partners, Beame & Mencher*

In 2022, the firm continued to build on the success of 2020's One World: Together at Home and 2021's Global Citizen Live by bringing the Global Citizen festival to New York and Accra, Ghana, on the same day. The September event raised \$2.4 billion to help end extreme poverty, with Mencher leading the legal team to oversee global clearance rights, media deals and distribution and intellectual property considerations.



## **Jeff Becker**

*Chair of entertainment and media law practice group, Swanson Martin & Bell*

With an eclectic client list featuring Grammy-winning poet J. Ivy, singer-songwriter Natalie Jane, Shaquille O’Neal (as music counsel) and the estate of NFL great Walter Payton (name and likeness rights), Becker handles a range of challenges and opportunities. He recently signed producer Dru DeCaro to Position Music following his work on Em Beihold’s “Numb Little Bug.” He believes the industry’s most pressing issue is “short attention spans caused by short-form content.” Virality from a 10-second TikTok clip “often results in audiences and labels wanting instant gratification,” he says, then perhaps not engaging with artists beyond one song — or even part of one song.

## **David Bercuson**

*Founder, Bercuson Law*

Bercuson has long repped Luis Fonsi, Julio Iglesias, Gloria Estefan and Miami Sound Machine, as well as entertainers such as Cristina Saralegui, Adamari Lopez and Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, but says his most satisfying work is representing Farruko, as well as his management company and his indie label, from the onset of his career through his hit single “Pepas,” which spent 26 weeks at No. 1 on **[Hot Latin Songs](https://www.billboard.com/charts/latin-songs/)** (**<https://www.billboard.com/charts/latin-songs/>**). Farruko’s success has allowed Bercuson to “negotiate extremely favorable and lucrative artist, distribution and publishing agreements,” he says. It dovetails with his desire to educate indie artists, “with respect to their ability to navigate and work within the digital universe for advertising, promotion and marketing of their careers.”

## **Josh Binder**

## **Jeremy Mohr**



## **Paul Rothenberg**

*Founding partners, Rothenburg Mohr & Binder*

Working with client Top Dawg Entertainment's TDE label to release SZA's RCA blockbuster *SOS* and the launch of her accompanying tour were among recent high points for the firm. Now based in Beverly Hills, Calif., and New York, it also represents Charlie Puth, Gunna, Logic, Marshmello and Chloe x Halle. Binder says that "free-flowing, unchecked misinformation" and the coming AI onslaught are concerning. "Artists are bombarded with misinformation," he says, "and are often left wondering what's actually true, making it nearly impossible to determine the best direction. And watch out — AI is going to make things much more complicated."

## **Marina V. Bogorad**

*Partner, Gerard Fox Law*

Bogorad served as lead counsel in one of the music industry's most significant, recent legal battles — representing songwriters Sean Hall and Nathan Butler as they accused Taylor Swift of stealing lyrics to her smash hit "Shake It Off" from an earlier song about "playas" and "haters." The case ended with a settlement in January, but not before Bogorad won a number of surprising mid-case victories that sent the case hurtling toward a trial. "This was an exciting issue to handle because there is a dearth of case law dealing with similarity of lyrics alone, which is what my clients claimed," Bogorad says.

## **Jason Boyarski**

### **David Fritz**

*Partners, Boyarski Fritz*

Representing an array of musical artists — from Joan Jett, Marc Anthony and Lil Kim to the estates of Earth, Wind & Fire's Maurice White and Prince — Boyarski and Fritz have a 360-degree view of the industry. "The ease [with] which recording artists can release their own music with do-it-yourself distribution tools makes music discovery as exciting and prevalent as ever," Boyarski says. "However, Spotify tells us that there are over 49,000 new songs added to the service every day, which means great music is sometimes lost in a sea of new music." He adds that the royalty structure to pay artists is

convoluted and becoming outdated. “The market-share payment system — versus a system of paying artists an actual portion of subscriber fees based on music use — is an issue that will continue to be debated in 2023.”

**John Branca**

**David Lande**

**David Byrnes**

*Partners, Ziffren Brittenham*

As co-executor of the Michael Jackson estate, Branca co-produced and helped finance the Broadway show *MJ*, which opened in February 2022. Branca has also handled major publishing transactions for clients including Brian Wilson, Enrique Iglesias and Fred Durst and assisted in estate management in the sale of Leonard Cohen’s music publishing catalog. He represented Primary Wave in its acquisition of the estate of James Brown; advised Authentic Brands Group about its rights to Elvis Presley, including assistance in the *Elvis* film; and negotiated a new distribution deal for the Bee Gees’ recording catalog with Capitol Records. Lande — whose clients include Olivia Rodrigo, Beyoncé, Shakira, Rosalía, Jennifer Hudson, BTS (through HYBE), SZA and Pharrell Williams — represented Justin Timberlake in the sale of his music publishing catalog to Hipgnosis for a value reported to be between \$85 million and \$100 million. With clients including Kelly Clarkson, Travis Scott, Blake Shelton, Pentatonix, Parkwood/Beyoncé, Jeff Bhasker and the estates of Eazy-E, Kurt Cobain, Tom Petty and Mac Miller, Byrnes has worked on deals including representation of Robby Krieger and the Ray Manzarek estate in the sale of their recording, publishing and other interests in The Doors.

David Lande of Ziffren Brittenham represented Justin Timberlake in the sale of his music publishing catalog to Hipgnosis.  
Paul Morigi/GI

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## **Alandis Brassel**

*Counsel, Scale*

Brassel — whose clients include CMG Records and artists 10Percent, Jordan Occasionally and Bubba Sparxxx — has been focusing on “the issue of equity” in his work, “whether it’s negotiating equitable deals for artist and songwriter clients, advocating for equitable royalty share and distribution for legacy artists or serving on the board of Nashville Music Equality and teaching in the Sony Black Music Certification Program.” He’s looking to apply that same foresight to “evolving technologies AI and Web3 to enhance the creators’ bottom line and the fan experience.”

## **William J. Briggs II**

*Partner, Venable*

Along with representing A-list clients like Stevie Wonder, Gucci Mane, DaBaby and Anita Pointer, Briggs has spent much of the last year representing “several celebrities — none named above — in high-stakes extortion matters, some of which [were] resolved with the assistance of law enforcement,” says Briggs. Looking forward to the future, Briggs says the music industry’s next battle is “reversion of masters to artists and artists’ control of content.”

**Jo Brittain**

**Simon Esplen**

**Chris Gossage**

**Gavin Maude**

**John Reid**

**Steven Tregear**

*Partners, Russells*

The London-based firm counts Coldplay, Glass Animals and the estate of George Michael among its clients. Russells, which was established in 1974, has represented many veteran artists since the start of their careers. In the last year, it has acted on behalf of several of the industry’s most important companies, including Universal Music Group, Warner Music Group, BMG, Kobalt and Sony Music Publishing. “Our work for these clients is wide-ranging commercial, corporate acquisitions and litigation work,” says Gossage, who heads a specialist team that oversees catalog and music rights sales. He says that side of the business remains healthy heading into 2023, “although it will face issues linked to the industry’s increased exposure to more general economic pressures.”

**Sandra Brown**

**Alan Clarke**

**Jerry Juste**

**Kendall Minter**

*Of counsel, Greenspoon Marder*

Greenspoon Marder is one of the firms representing the estate of Biz Markie in a case against the late rapper’s former manager, Jennifer Izumi, alleging trademark infringement and fraud, and theft of song royalties. (Izumi, in a

statement, said she “vehemently” denied the allegations and looked forward to proving them “completely false and defamatory.”) Greenspoon Marder also represents Lecrae, Philadelphia-based rapper 2Rare and producer-songwriter Dernst “D’Mile” Emile, among others. Brown says the growing use of AI could become a major concern for music creators: “Will AI-created music replace producers, songwriters and artists?”

**Vernon Brown**

*CEO/president, V. Brown & Company*

Brown maintains a formidable client list boasting Cash Money, Epic Records artist Pyrex and Republic Records producer ATL Jacob, who enjoyed success in 2022 after netting a Hot 100 chart-topper with Future’s “Wait for U,” featuring Drake and Tems. Despite Jacob’s prominent rise, Brown hopes budding producers can receive better payouts. “One of the most pressing concerns is fairness in artist and producer royalty agreements and payouts,” he says. “The current system is not beneficial to the creatives.” He also believes the scales would tip toward performers if digital service provider payments “were structured in a manner that was more favorable to new artists.”

**Ed Buggé**

*Partner, Hertz Lichtenstein Young & Polk*

**Ken Hertz**

**Jamie Young**

*Named partners, Hertz Lichtenstein Young & Polk*

With clients including Apple, Céline Dion, Gwen Stefani, Fleetwood Mac and Perry Farrell, the firm spent the last 18 months counseling on issues related to music, technology, dealmaking and touring, Buggé says. In addition to advising on catalog sales of both iconic and new recording artists that fetched prices in the range of eight and nine figures, the firm also provided counsel on the launch of music and media startups related to gaming, the metaverse, virtual reality and AI. The firm works with top talent that includes “Will Smith, H.E.R., Keke Palmer, Tom Morello and Melissa Etheridge on new media content, literary, theatrical — including Broadway, audio, film and TV projects,” Buggé says.

**Richard Busch**

*Partner in the litigation section/head of the entertainment and intellectual property sections, King & Ballow*

Busch represents Eight Mile Style, which controls musical compositions written in part by Eminem, in a copyright infringement action against Spotify involving over 240 musical compositions. The claim alleges some provisions of 2018's Music Modernization Act are unconstitutional. Busch's client portfolio also includes the estates of Robin Williams and George Carlin, as well as comedians Bill Engvall, Andrew "Dice" Clay and George Lopez. He represents the comedians in a lawsuit against Pandora for allegedly infringing their copyrighted literary works by distributing content without obtaining licenses to publicly perform or mechanically reproduce their routines. He's also representing Rick Astley in a suit against Universal Music, Yung Gravy and others for allegedly re-creating Astley's voice on "Betty (Get Money)" without permission.

**Matthew Buser**

*Founder, Buser Legal*

Buser negotiated the recording agreement for one of 2022's top breakout acts: the rapper GloRilla, who turned heads with "F.N.F. (Let's Go)" with Hitkidd, reached the Hot 100 top 10 with the Cardi B collaboration "Tomorrow" and inked a deal with CMG/Interscope. Buser also helped rising rapper Destroy Lonely secure his deal with Opium/Interscope, the label started by Playboi Carti. Working across a rangy roster of artists and producers, both veterans and newcomers, Buser's mission remains the same: ensuring that creators are "fully recognized as largely being the driving force behind successful records."

**Joe Carlone****Leslie Frank****Marjorie Garcia****Howard King****Scott McDowell****Peter Paterno****Michael Rexford**

**Jacqueline Sabec**

**Laurie Soriano**

*Partners, King Holmes Paterno & Soriano*

Soriano did legal work for Kim Petras in advance of the September release of her collaboration with Sam Smith on “Unholy,” which won the Grammy in February for best pop duo/group performance. Sabec sold the catalog of Huey Lewis and the News to Primary Wave and negotiated brand licensing deals for legacy artists including the Jerry Garcia Wellness line of hemp-derived CBD products. Frank and her team handled legal matters for the release of Skrillex’s double album release, *Quest for Fire* and *Don’t Get Too Close*. Paterno was honored by the Recording Academy with the 2023 Entertainment Law Initiative Service Award during Grammy Week. King reports that he resolved “an eight-figure commission claim against a major rock band and negotiated resolution of multiple disputes between bands and their labels, managers and, sometimes, former bandmates.”

**Rosemary Carroll**

**Michael Guido**

**Elliot Groffman**

**Rob Cohen**

**Gillian Bar**

**Renee Karalian**

**Ira Friedman**

**Paul Gutman**

*Partners, Carroll Guido Groffman Cohen Bar & Karalian*

Carroll continues to represent “meaningful and important artists who inspire” her, she says, including, among others, Patti Smith, The Strokes, Phoebe Bridgers, Iggy Pop, The Gaslight Anthem, Anohni and Natalie Merchant (the last four of whom are releasing new albums in 2023), as well as Lucinda Williams, who will publish a memoir, *Don’t Tell Anyone the Secrets I Told You*, in April. Groffman — who represents Eddie Vedder and Pearl Jam, Dave Matthews and Trey Anastasio, among others — saw client Brandi Carlile keep soaring this past year with her historic collaboration with Joni Mitchell at the Newport Folk Festival. He also negotiated newcomer Ben Goldsmith’s signing

to Sony Nashville. Guido worked with Cohen on the sale of Ultra Records to Sony Music and with Friedman on the sale of 12 Tone Records to Warner Music. Bar's clients include Michael Brun, "a brilliant writer-producer who has worked with J Balvin and Ed Sheeran. Brun is signed to Astralwerks for his own artist project," she says. Karalian negotiated Kid Cudi's tour deal with AEG and the launch of his Moon Man's Landing Festival, in partnership with AEG, in his hometown of Cleveland. Gutman worked with Eric Church on the creation of Solid Entertainment, a company bringing together Church's entrepreneurial ventures, co-launched with his manager, John Peets of Q Prime.



**Uwonda Carter**

**Donald Woodard**

*Founding partners, Carter + Woodard*

Carter + Woodard represented Summer Walker in connection with the release of her sophomore album, *Still Over It*, which debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 and charted 18 of its songs on the Hot 100. The firm also represented Metro Boomin in connection with the release of *Heroes & Villains*, which also debuted atop the Billboard 200. For client Lil Yachty, Carter + Woodard represented the artist in connection with the release of *Let's Start Here*. The set debuted at No. 1 on **[Top Rock Albums](https://www.billboard.com/charts/rock-albums/)** (<https://www.billboard.com/charts/rock-albums/>) and **[Top Alternative Albums](https://www.billboard.com/charts/alternative-albums/)** (<https://www.billboard.com/charts/alternative-albums/>) — and in the top 10 of the Billboard 200.

**Robert A. Celestin**

*Founding partner, The Law Offices of Robert A. Celestin*

**Tiffany Ballard**

*Of counsel, The Law Offices of Robert A. Celestin*

**Alicia Ferriabough-Taylor**

*Junior partner, The Law Offices of Robert A. Celestin*

**Camille Anidi**

**Chris Wellington**

*Associates, The Law Offices of Robert A. Celestin*

As co-counsel for the estate of Pop Smoke, and representing clients including the estate of XXXTentacion, along with Desiigner, 6ix9ine and Cashmoney AP, Celestin and his team negotiated international distribution for the 2022 Hulu documentary *Look at Me: XXXTentacion*, in addition to the companion documentary and album *In His Own Words: XXXTentacion*. Debuting at No. 1 on the **[Soundtracks](https://www.billboard.com/charts/soundtracks/)** (<https://www.billboard.com/charts/soundtracks/>) chart, *Look at Me:*

*The Album* also reached No. 17 on the Billboard 200. Among the most critical issues the industry faces today, says Celestin, is lack of artist development. “Record labels exclusively focus on analytics and trends as opposed to developing and nurturing artists to have sustainable careers,” he says.

## **Ross Charap**

### **Matthew Finkelstein**

*Partners, Arentfox Schiff*

Charap and Finkelstein represent Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones, together with their music publishing company Promopub. They played a key role in the U.S. Copyright Office’s recently proposed rule to ensure the Mechanical Licensing Collective pays streaming royalties to artists and songwriters who invoke their termination rights. The proposed new rule is both “fair and imperative,” says Finkelstein, who also represented BMG Rights Management in BMG’s acquisition of John Legend’s music publishing catalog and its acquisition of the late Harry Nilsson’s publishing catalog and income streams generated from his recordings.

## **Jacqueline Charlesworth**

*Principial, Charlesworth Law*

Charlesworth, whose résumé includes a role at the U.S. Copyright Office, focuses on transactional, litigation and policy matters for artists, songwriters, film studios, TV networks, digital companies and trade associations at the firm she founded in 2021. Much of her work focuses on copyright termination. Notes Charlesworth, “Practically every matter I handle involves some issue that Congress didn’t consider when enacting the termination provisions, which keeps it interesting.”

## **Stephanie Chopurian**

*Partner, Greenberg Chopurian-Valencia & Associates*

Chopurian’s notable clients include Myke Towers, Arcángel, De La Ghetto, Gerardo Ortiz, Fergie and Ovy on the Drums, who recently produced Karol G’s history-making *Mañana Será Bonito*, which debuted atop the Billboard 200 as the first Spanish-language No. 1 album by a female artist. Chopurian’s firm

was also recently involved in Ovy on the Drums' label deal with Warner Music Latin, Towers' songwriter agreement with ASCAP, Sech's affiliation with BMI and Chenco Corleone's publishing agreement with Warner Chappell. Chief among Chopurian's concerns about the industry is "the failure to recognize the value of the songwriters and producers behind the music artists, because without those songwriters and producers, the artists themselves would not exist."

**Jay Cohen**

*Partner, Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison*

Representing clients including Sony Music Entertainment, the National Music Publishers' Association, Grupo Salinas, Charter Communications and ASCAP (the latter for over 25 years), Cohen's recent work has focused largely on creators' efforts to obtain fair pay. This includes ongoing discussions with the Department of Justice to modernize ASCAP's 80-year-old consent decree. Cohen is currently engaged in rate court litigation with the terrestrial radio industry as well, he says, "trying to obtain fair market compensation for creators whose music drives the economics of the radio industry."

**Jay Cooper**

*Founder, Los Angeles entertainment practice, Greenberg Traurig*

**Steve Plinio**

*Shareholder, entertainment and media practice, Greenberg Traurig*

**Jess Rosen**

*Co-chair of Atlanta entertainment and media practice, Greenberg Traurig*

**Bobby Rosenbloum**

*Chairman, global entertainment and media practice, Greenberg Traurig*

**Mathew Rosengart**

*Shareholder, media and entertainment litigation practice, Greenberg Traurig*

**Paul Schindler**

*Shareholder/senior chair of New York entertainment and media practice, Greenberg Traurig*

Greenberg Traurig represents acts including Britney Spears, Katy Perry, Kacey Musgraves, Arcade Fire, Kenny Chesney and Marc Anthony, as well as companies and organizations including Spotify, The Recording Academy, Meta, Lululemon/Mirror, Equinox Media/ SoulCycle and Epic Games (and its divisions, Bandcamp, Harmonix and *Fortnite*). In late 2021, Rosengart obtained a court order suspending James “Jamie” Spears as conservator of Britney Spears’ estate, ending his 13-year control of his daughter’s affairs. Last July, Rosengart obtained a court order defeating James’ motion to obtain Britney’s deposition while also obtaining a court order compelling James to produce documents and sit for his own deposition. In July and October of last year, he also defeated James’ efforts to unseal certain records of Britney’s. The court order that Rosengart obtained blocking Britney’s deposition, after a contentious hearing, was upheld on appeal in December 2022. The most pressing concern for the music industry, says Rosenblum, is the complexity of licensing music rights on a global basis. “The fragmentation of music publishing rights among publishers, performing rights organizations and collective management organizations — often on a country-by-country basis — together with the complexity of licensing from these multitude of rights owners/administrators, is continuing to result in billions of dollars being left on the table annually.”

**Roger Cramer**

*Of counsel, Winslett Studnický McCormick & Bomser*

Cramer, who represents five-time Grammy winner Robert Glasper, in addition to rappers Yeat, \$NOT and Eem Triplin, says he is “very proud of the work” his team did to release Glasper’s guest-heavy *Black Radio 3* (winner of this year’s Grammy for best R&B album), as well as three releases by 23-year-old Yeat: *2 Alivë*, *2 Alivë (Geëk Pack)* and EP *Lyfë*. The firm had to negotiate “scores of agreements,” Cramer says. *Black Radio 3* alone “required 45 separate agreements to complete delivery. My team works really hard and really well.” Triplin has an EP coming in the second quarter of this year. Meanwhile, Cramer emphasizes the need to pay non-mainstream artists “a bigger share of streaming revenue.”

**Sandra Crawshaw-Sparks**

*Senior partner/chair of the firm’s entertainment, copyright media practice*

*group, Proskauer*

**Anthony Oncidi**

*Partner/co-chair of the labor and employment law department/head of west coast labor and employment group, Proskauer*

Proskauer represents clients across the music industry, from The Recording Academy, Sony Music Entertainment and Warner Music Group to names like Madonna and Rick Rubin. But among the most significant cases they've handled recently was one brought by a former Live Nation employee, Oncidi says. "We represented Live Nation Entertainment against claims of discrimination, harassment, retaliation and wrongful termination," he says of the case, which was settled early this year. On what are the most pressing concerns companies face today, Crawshaw-Sparks says it's the challenge of figuring out how to embrace technology while stopping "rampant infringement of creative works."

**Sy Damle**

**Andrew Gass**

**Alli Stillman**

**Jonathan West**

**Joe Wetzel**

*Partners, Latham & Watkins*

Latham & Watkins counts among its clients major music companies and organizations including Spotify, Live Nation, Meta, Roblox, Pandora, iHeartMedia, the Digital Media Association, the National Association of Broadcasters and the Digital Licensee Coordinator. (The latter represents the digital music services in the licensing system created by the Music Modernization Act.) The firm represented Spotify in connection with the litigation and settlement negotiations over the price for mechanical rights for streaming services before the Copyright Royalty Board, "which ultimately resulted in a deal touted by both sides as a significant step forward for the industry," says Gass. Looking ahead, "sorting out the relationship between music rights owners on one hand and the AI sector on the other is the most pressing challenge facing the music industry," says Gass. "As with all conflicts

between new technologies and incumbent rights owners, it will be interesting to see how this one ultimately gets resolved.”

**Doug Davis**

*Founder, The Davis Firm*

In addition to working with clients Swizz Beatz, LL Cool J, DJ Snake, Kandi Burruss and others during the past year, Davis helped negotiate new leadership roles for Kobalt president/COO Jeannette Perez, Warner Chappell president Ryan Press and RCA Music Group executive vps Carolyn Williams and Karen Lamberton. He believes artists and executives must work closely in the immediate future to prevent major music and tech companies from marginalizing creators: “Without a collective intervention by the advocates representing the creators,” says Davis, “the corporate interests will steamroll the future of creatives and their heirs for greater quarterly profits.”

**The balance of power in the music business would shift toward artists and songwriters if...:**

“... the huge influx of capital by private equity and investment banks is deployed to recapture rights and copyrights from the major music companies for the benefit of creators. We are entering an era where artists, producers and songwriters have never been armed as well as they will be now to fight the majors to retake ownership.”

**Scott A. Edelman**

*Chairman, Milbank*

**Atara Miller**

*Partner, Milbank*

The firm successfully represented BMI in a five-week trial in federal court last fall against the North American Concert Promoters Association — the licensing representative for Live Nation and AEG, among others — to reset the rates paid to songwriters for the performance of their music at live concerts. The case was decided March 28 (see entry above on BMI’s Stuart Rosen). “The prior rates were first negotiated in the mid-1990s and were never adjusted to reflect the dramatic growth of live concerts over the last decade,” says Miller. “Live concerts are now a hugely important part of the music industry and incredibly profitable. Songwriters should get their fair share of the profits.”

The most pressing concern facing the music industry? “Finding ways to monetize music,” says Miller, “that allow new, developing and established songwriters and artists to earn a living wage.”

**Scott Edelman**

*Partner/co-chair of media, entertainment and technology practice group, Gibson Dunn & Crutcher*

**Orin Snyder**

*Partner/co-chair of global trial practice group, Gibson Dunn & Crutcher*

In addition to doing work for each of the industry’s big three music groups, Edelman scored a major win in March 2022 on behalf of Apple when he secured a rare major summary judgment on the issue of willfulness in three copyright infringement lawsuits relating to Apple’s iTunes Store. “The decision in Apple’s favor ... marks the first time a court has held on summary judgment that a digital service provider’s reliance on contractual representations from content providers can preclude a finding of willful infringement,” says Edelman. Meanwhile, Snyder handled matters for major artists including Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan and Lady Gaga, the latter of whom he advised in connection with a threatened copyright infringement lawsuit over her 2018 *A Star Is Born* smash “Shallow” — which, to date, has not yet been filed.

**Lawrence Engel**

*Head of music, Lee & Thompson*

Lawrence Engel of Lee & Thompson advised Harry Styles on all aspects of his Love on Tour worldwide trek, including arrangements with promoter Live Nation and merchandise contracts with New York-based Merch Traffic. Since launching in September 2021, the 132-date tour — which included a record-grossing 15-night residency at New York’s Madison Square Garden — has sold 3.1 million tickets, according to Billboard Boxscore. Scheduled to wrap July 22 in Reggio Emilia, Italy, the tour has earned \$401.6 million to date. London-based Engel’s other notable clients include Craig David, MNEK, Jessie J and Styles’ former One Direction bandmates Liam Payne and Louis Tomlinson.

Attorney Lawrence Engel of Lee & Thompson advised Harry Styles on all aspects of his Love on Tour worldwide trek.  
Lloyd Wakefield

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**Tim Epstein**

*Partner, Duggan Bertsch*



As the independent concert industry's top lawyer, Epstein is constantly working on behalf of his 1,000-plus clients, reviewing booking agreements for festivals, representing promoters in disputes and negotiating contracts for acquisitions and mergers. Last year, he put together the Suenos Deal on behalf of Baja Beach Festival with C3 Presents, creating Chicago's largest Latin festival at Grant Park, where Lollapalooza is held. He also represented Life Is Beautiful when *Billboard* parent company Penske Media Corporation purchased the event. He says his biggest concern in 2023 is getting artists more involved with promotion. "We need help from the artist selling soft tickets and have tried mandating social media minimums in our contracts," Epstein says, adding that agents and managers are hesitant to mandate social media promotion from their clients. "The artists need to do more to promote the festivals they are performing at in order to protect the live ecosystem."

**Paul M. Fakler**

*Partner, Mayer Brown*

Fakler is a go-to lawyer for digital music services' royalty rate-setting disputes before the Copyright Royalty Board and federal courts, counting SiriusXM, Music Choice and Google among his client roster. Fakler's biggest case right now pits his client Pandora against stand-up comedians who say they deserve a new stream of spoken-word royalties. Though not specifically a music case, Fakler predicts that the outcome "will have a significant impact on all music streaming services and record companies."

**Ilene S. Farkas**

*Partner/co-chair of the music group and copyright, media and entertainment litigation and music litigation practices, Pryor Cashman*

**James G. Sammataro**

*Partner/co-chair of the music group and media and entertainment litigation practice, Pryor Cashman*

**Frank P. Scibilia**

*Partner/co-chair of the music group and the copyright, media and entertainment litigation, music litigation and music transactions practices, Pryor Cashman*

**Benjamin K. Semel**

*Partner/co-chair of the music group and media and entertainment litigation practice, Pryor Cashman*

**Brad D. Rose**

*Partner/chair of the intellectual property group, Pryor Cashman*

**Donald S. Zakarin**

*Partner/co-chair of the litigation and music groups and media and entertainment litigation practice, Pryor Cashman*

Pryor Cashman advises all of the major labels and publishing companies, plus several major artists, including Justin Bieber, Ed Sheeran and Megan Thee Stallion. But it was the matters on which they advised the NMPA and the Nashville Songwriters Association International that Farkas says “were two of the most economically consequential proceedings in the music industry.” In the first remand proceeding, known as Phonorecords III, Pryor Cashman lawyers fought to obtain and uphold a rate increase for the mechanical streaming rates that songwriters and publishers received. In the second, Phonorecords IV, Farkas says, “We were able to negotiate a landmark settlement with the interactive streaming services — the first such settlement since 2012 — on the eve of trial, obtaining a further increase to the statutory rates.”

**Sidney Fohrman**

**Alex Weingarten**

*Partners/chairs, Willkie Farr & Gallagher*

**Shane Nix**

*Partner, Willkie Farr & Gallagher*

During the past 18 months, Willkie Farr & Gallagher have been working with a startup venture, backed by the holding company IAC, “in connection with the development of a digital marketplace for the buying and selling of securitized music assets on a regulated, public exchange,” says Fohrman. The firm represents Selena Gomez, Jamie Spears and TikTok, among others. The most pressing concern for the music industry? “The fact that most recording artists and writers do not make a living wage,” he says. “We, as an industry, should work collaboratively to ensure that all music industry stakeholders — from artists, writers, labels and publishers to distributors and companies innovating

music use — all thrive during these times of unprecedented music creativity and consumption.”

## **Karl Fowlkes**

*Founder, The Fowlkes Firm*

Last year, Fowlkes client BLXST stormed the Hot 100’s top 10 as a featured vocalist on Kendrick Lamar’s “Die Hard”; this year, client Synthetic reached similar heights as co-producer on Lil Uzi Vert’s energetic single “Just Wanna Rock.” Fowlkes also negotiated Synthetic’s co-publishing deal with 10K Publishing and Universal Music Group Publishing, plus helped Synthetic build their own publishing company, Hologram, which has signed nearly a dozen producers. Fowlkes says, “The Fowlkes Firm has shone as a producer-focused law firm empowering producers to step out of the shadows and build sustainable businesses.”

Last year, Karl Fowlkes’ client BLXST stormed the Hot 100’s top 10 as a featured vocalist on Kendrick Lamar’s “Die Hard.”

Michael Buckner for Billboard

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**John Frankenheimer**

*Chair, music industry, Loeb & Loeb*

**Derek Crownover****Debbie White**

*Vice chairs, music industry, Loeb & Loeb*

**Tiffany Dunn**

*Partner, Loeb & Loeb*

The firm negotiated a catalog sale and go-forward deal with Sony Music Publishing and Domain Capital Group for Ashley Gorley, who has written or co-written for Carrie Underwood, Bon Jovi, Blake Shelton and Dan + Shay. Sony Music Publishing is one of Loeb's corporate clients, along with Warner Music Group and Big Loud, while also serving acts such as Underwood, BTS, Morgan Wallen and Diana Ross. "The music industry continues to face challenges related to the changing nature of music consumption," says Frankenheimer. "The rise of streaming services and the potential of [non-fungible tokens (NFTs)], the metaverse and related valuation issues have disrupted traditional revenue models and raised questions about how artists and songwriters are compensated for their work."

**Adam C. Freedman**

*Founder, The Law Offices of Adam C. Freedman*

Freedman's clients include DJs Subtronics and AC Slater, music video producer and artist Glassface, director and photographer Louieknows, producer Einer Bankz and event promoter Space Yacht. He recently helped Steve James sell the rights to his publishing and recording catalogs and also closed publishing deals for several producers, including Bankz (Polo G's Hot 100 No. 1 "Rapstar"). Among pressing issues, Freedman notes "how difficult it is for independent artists and producers to simply get paid for the work they've done. Meanwhile, labels and publishers, especially the majors, don't seem to be [investing in] making it any easier."

**Sasha Frid****Louis "Skip" Miller**

*Partners, Miller Barondess*

Frid marked a string of legal victories in 2022, including a jury verdict on behalf of Virtual Sonics and its founders, Jeremy and Julian Soule, who were sued by former investors Scott and Skyler Mednick when they claimed they were owed millions in deferred compensation. “The jury returned a verdict in less than an hour, agreeing with our clients that the Mednicks got everything they were owed when they sold their interests to the company,” says Frid. Virtual Sonics, which specializes in developing digital music instruments, is part of a diverse client roster at Miller Barondess. The firm also represents Mötley Crüe, Smokey Robinson, Backstreet Boys and Five Finger Death Punch, among others.

**Jeffrey B. Gandel**

*Founder, The Law Office of Jeffrey B. Gandel*

The Electric Zoo’s lead outside counsel for the music festival’s entire 15-year history, Gandel’s client list also includes artists such as Acraze and Warren Haynes, and producers Gordo (Drake) and Angel Lopez (Jack Harlow). Among other recent feats, Gandel negotiated Acraze’s 2022 deal with Capitol Music Group and Thrive, while the DJ-producer’s “Do It to It,” featuring Cherish, snagged licensing deals for over 20 TV, film and commercial placements. Similar synch success happened for Gandel clients Duke & Jones, whose remix of “Jiggle Jiggle” (a collaboration with Louis Theroux) was among TikTok’s top songs of 2022.

**Eric German**

**Christine Lepera**

**Jeffrey Movit**

**Bradley Mullins**

**Gabriella Nourafchan Ismaj**

**David Steinberg**

**J. Matthew Williams**

*Partners, Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp*

Dua Lipa hired Lepera and her colleagues — who together form one of the top legal teams in the country for artists and songwriters facing copyright lawsuits — last year to handle two high-profile cases over her smash hit “Levitating,”

2021's year-end Hot 100 No. 1 song. The firm also geared up to rep Post Malone in a similar lawsuit over songwriting co-credits for his 2019 hit "Circles," but settled out of court in March. Their biggest win of the year, however, was a major appeals court ruling for Katy Perry that rejected a case regarding her 2014 Hot 100 chart-topper "Dark Horse." Lepera says the case highlights how musicians are "fighting back to preserve their independence and right to create with commonplace expression."

**Damien Granderson**

**Guy Blake**

**Elizabeth Moody**

**Colin Morrissey**

*Partners, Granderson Des Rochers*

Granderson Des Rochers helped usher K-pop heavyweight HYBE into the hip-hop market in February by handling its purchase of Quality Control, the Atlanta label representing Migos, Lil Baby, City Girls and Lil Yachty. The firm is concerned about the future of AI, says Morrissey, whose clients include rappers SoFaygo, Mike Dimes and MadeinTYO: "The complete uncertainty for creators, distributors and tech companies is sure to cause chaos." But he adds that traditional label models are "less necessary than ever" and, increasingly, "artists have freedom to get their art to the public."

Granderson Des Rochers advised HYBE on its acquisition of Quality Control, home to Lil Yachty, Migos, Lil Baby and City Girls.  
Scott Dudelson/GI

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## **Navarro Gray**

*Founding partner, The Gray Law Firm*

The Gray Law Firm recently handled contracts associated with Ronald Isley's latest releases and album, *Make Me Say It Again, Girl*, which included features from Beyoncé, 2 Chainz and Earth, Wind & Fire. The firm also represents notable R&B and hip-hop acts DD Osama, Internet Money and Lil Kim. According to Gray, the most pressing concern facing the music industry lies in supplemental income for recording artists. "Signed artists usually receive their advance and do not get additional monies from the label until the label decides to exercise its option," Gray explains. "Independent artists may rely on streaming monies on a month-to-month basis. Regardless if the artist is signed or indie, they need to come up with additional ways to create immediate supplemental revenue."

**Eric Greenspan**

**Jeffrey Light**

**Craig S. Marshall**

**Francois Mobasser**

**Aaron Rosenberg**

*Equity partners, Myman Greenspan Fox Rosenberg Mobasser Younger & Light*

**Audrey Benoualid**

*Partner, Myman Greenspan Fox Rosenberg Mobasser Younger & Light*

The firm's many clients include Red Hot Chili Peppers, Ariana Grande, Justin Bieber, Deftones, Grateful Dead, Jack Johnson and Yeti Beats, and its attorneys recently closed catalog sales for Bieber and Red Hot Chili Peppers. In January, Hipgnosis Songs Capital confirmed its deal to buy 100% of Bieber's publishing, as well as his artist royalties from his master recordings and neighboring rights, for more than \$200 million, according to a source familiar with the situation, making it the largest rights sale for any creator of Bieber's generation. It's also Hipgnosis' biggest acquisition to date, covering all 290 titles in Bieber's catalog released prior to Dec. 31, 2021, including his most recent album, 2021's *Justice*. In looking at the broader legal landscape, Myman Greenspan's Marshall is among those who express concern about the rise of generative AI. "Because the music industry was built substantially on the creative contribution from recording artists and songwriters, the concern is that AI-generated songs could take up space in the competitive market for music consumption and replace career artists," he says. "This also gives rise to a number of copyright issues that will have to be resolved."

**The balance of power in the music business would shift toward artists and songwriters if...:** "...true partnerships were formed between artists and labels — or other investors in music — to develop careers. As more and more artists learn that they can have a significant role in marketing and promoting their works independently, artist leverage could rise exponentially if they practice patience and rely on themselves more often, rather than jumping into a relationship with a partner who is chasing a song rather than a career." — Marshall



**Gary R. Greenstein**

*Member, Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati*

Greenstein, who is based in Washington, D.C., and specializes in technology transactions, represented Google before the Copyright Royalty Board in the Phonorecords IV rate-setting proceeding. The case ended in a negotiated settlement of rates to be paid by interactive streaming services for the use of music beginning in January. In his view, everyone should profit fairly: “The economics of the music industry need to change so that distributors can have a path to profitability, which will benefit all participants and not just a select few.”

**Pierre Hachar Jr.**

*Managing partner, The Hachar Law Group*

**Cody Pellicer**

*General partner, The Hachar Law Group*

The South Florida law firm represents Carin León, Justin Quiles and Dalex Chayanne, as well as Celia Cruz’s estate and the label Mr. 305, founded by Pitbull. They represent Frabian Eli in the litigation against his former management client, Latin trap star Anuel AA. One of the most pressing concerns in the music industry, according to Hachar, is “dealing with a saturated market where the formats for consuming music are constantly evolving and changing.” He urges that the power structure in the business would shift toward artists if “they kept control of their copyrights and learned how to effectively administer, market and monetize them.”

**Jonas Herbsman**

*Managing partner, Herbsman Hafer Weber & Frisch*

**Michael Frisch****Dorothy Weber**

*Partners, Herbsman Hafer Weber & Frisch*

After working on several catalog sales — including Regent Music and Jewel Music to Primary Wave — the firm oversaw the sale of jazz legend Sonny Rollins’ music rights to Reservoir in a deal that includes publishing and recording rights to the jazz legend’s music. “It was an honor to represent one

of the most decorated artists of all time,” Herbsman says of Rollins, who will turn 93 in September. Rollins received the lifetime achievement award at the 2004 Grammys and was feted by the Kennedy Center Honors in 2011.

The attorneys of Herbsman Hafer Weber & Frisch oversaw the sale of the publishing and recording rights of legendary saxophonist Sonny Rollins.  
Chuck Fishman/GI

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## **Lawrence Iser**

### **Jonathan Steinsapir**

*Partners, Kinsella Weitzman Iser Kump Holley*

An advocate for clients including Jackson Browne, Del Records and Third Side Music, Iser and his firm have for years pushed to give artists more control over their assets, from merchandise to streaming data. He represents music-funding service beatBread, which pays advances based on streaming royalties — leaving other revenue services untouched. “It is next to impossible for non-stars to make a living off streaming revenue,” says Iser. “While there are lots of avenues for new artists to distribute their music online, only the top artists will make substantial money.”

**Erin M. Jacobson**

*Attorney/CEO, Erin M. Jacobson*

Jacobson handled cases related to acquisitions, publishing, licensing, complex catalog terminations and the counseling of estate and legacy catalogs, with recent proceedings involving Elvis Presley, The Ronettes, iconic TV theme songs and holiday classics, among many others. But while her work focused on historic music, Jacobson identifies the industry's most pressing issue as one that's extremely of the moment: AI. "This is an emerging area that will present a lot of practical and legal challenges as new avenues of technology," she says.

**Neville L. Johnson**

*Founding partner, Johnson & Johnson*

Johnson & Johnson's roster includes Janet Jackson, guitarist Andy McKee and rising musical group Between Friends. But founding partner Johnson highlights the firm's work on behalf of musicians without star billing. Settling "a major class action" suit against the American Federation of Musicians and the Hollywood actors' guild, SAG-AFTRA, "returned millions of dollars to a nonprofit fund benefitting thousands of session musicians and vocalists," he says. For 2023, he believes "transparency in accounting" remains a pressing concern. Streaming, he notes, has "failed to adequately democratize its earnings, and artists are still being routinely cheated by industry middlemen."

**Russell A. Jones Jr.**

*Attorney, Law Offices of Russell A. Jones Jr. and Associates*

Jones, whose notable clients include Garth Brooks, Trisha Yearwood, Tim McGraw and Toby Keith, was key in negotiating agreements for Brooks' multiyear stadium tour that wrapped in August 2022. Jones notes that among the biggest challenges facing the music industry are "collection and equitable distribution of various royalty streams from [digital service providers], social media, all other digital exploiters and over-the-air radio."

**Joshua A. Kamen**

*Founder/owner, The Law Offices of Joshua A. Kamen*

Kamen negotiated new publishing deals for clients Nija Charles (a Grammy nominee for songwriter of the year and winner of the Hitmaker trophy from the National Music Publishers' Association and *Billboard*), and OZ, who charted eight songs in the top 20 of the Hot 100 in the past 18 months. He also negotiated various brand, tour sponsorship and merchandise deals for clients Giveon, City Girls, Teddy Swims, 6LACK and IDK. "I think we need to figure out how to get kids to meaningfully connect with new artists again and not just listen to music as the soundtrack to viral videos," Kamen says, adding that "building the right team around each artist" is also crucial.

**Jason Karlov**

*Chair, entertainment, media and sports practice group, Barnes & Thornburg*

**Joel Katz**

*Senior counsel, Barnes & Thornburg*

The clients of Barnes & Thornburg include Bob Dylan, John Fogerty, the Country Music Association and The Recording Academy, and senior executives such as Steve Carless, Monte Lipman, Randy Goodman, Mike Dungan, John Esposito and Scott Borchetta. The firm represented the NFL for Super Bowl LVI in 2022 and Super Bowl LVII earlier this year, including all production and guild matters, procurement of music rights, negotiating licenses and commercial agreements for live performances. Barnes & Thornburg also have been establishing the structure for the Grammy organization worldwide.

**Priyanka Khimani**

*Founder, Khimani & Associates*

Khimani's clients include some of the most prominent names in India's music industry. Bollywood royalty such as Shankar Mahadevan, Arijit Singh and the estate of playback singing legend Lata Mangeshkar, plus hip-hop stars Badshah, Divine and King are just a few who rely on her. In recent months, she has helped Divine license a sample of the title cut from the soundtrack of the 1993 film *Baazigar*, advised Canadian Indian rapper-singer AP Dhillon for his recent appearance at the inaugural edition of Lollapalooza India in Mumbai and guided the Berklee Indian Ensemble on clearances for its Grammy-nominated collaborative album, *Shuruaat*, which features nearly

100 musicians. Says Khimani, “Each of these has been unique in structure and involves a foreign counterpart.”

## **Russell L. King**

*Director, King Law Firm*

Maluma had a standout year in 2022, as King negotiated the launch of his client's mezcal, Contraluz; his smash burger chain, Dembow; an endorsement deal with Hugo Boss; participation in and recording of the official song for the World Cup; and participation in the 2022 Formula 1 Crypto.com Miami Grand Prix and related South Florida concerts. King says that live music "is back and stronger than ever after the pandemic. But the battle scars are very evident, with the parties requiring additional protection of their interests" with "risk minimization such as insurance."

## **Christiane Kinney**

*President/attorney, Kinney Law*

In the past year, Kinney was involved in a project with Blind Burners, a group of visually impaired artists and performers. Through her client Big Rock Creative, a virtual world was created in the metaverse, designed for Blind Burners and other similarly impaired virtual reality users. Next, Kinney is looking to protect her artists against the "fascinating but dangerous" rise of AI-generated artwork. "There will be a surge of copyright infringement claims filed in the not-so-distant future," she says, "in which many legal theories and issues will be tested."

## **Mark Kraiss**

### **Simon Goodbody**

*Partners, Bray & Kraiss*

Kraiss and Goodbody represented Ed Sheeran in last year's U.K. High Court copyright infringement trial over the singer's 2017 global hit "Shape of You." Sheeran and co-writers Johnny McDaid and Steven McCutcheon won after a judge ruled that the star hadn't copied the song from a little-known track by British artist Sami Switch. The victory "laid down a marker for those parties who may seek to use litigation as a tool to pressurize songwriters and

publishers into making settlement payments, irrespective of the merits of the underlying dispute,” the firm said in a statement. London-based Bray & Kraiss’ other clients include The Rolling Stones, Universal Music Publishing, Sony Music Publishing and rapper KSI.

**Evan Krauss**

**Daniel Shulman**

**Owen Sloane**

**Andrew Tavel**

**Partners, Eisner**

**Jordan Gutglass**

*Senior counsel, Eisner*

In addition to its work on behalf of clients Jon Batiste, G-Eazy, Boi-1da, PartyNextDoor, Matchbox Twenty/Rob Thomas, Sofi Tukker, the Aaliyah estate and others, Eisner recently represented boutique merchandiser Ceremony of Roses in its deal with Sony Music, announced in 2022, where the major label made a strategic investment in the company. The deal also included the launch of the brand as a new global merchandising, media, design and events company under the Sony umbrella. The firm continues to assist with and consult on the negotiation of Ceremony of Roses’ artist merchandising agreements at all levels.

**Dina LaPolt**

*Founder/owner, LaPolt Law*

**Sarah Scott**

*Managing partner, LaPolt Law*

The current McDonald’s campaign featuring Cardi B and Offset, and the release of new songs from The Kid LAROI through an immersive experience in Epic Games’ *Fortnite* are just two of the recent blockbuster deals negotiated by LaPolt and Scott, who also count 21 Savage, deadmau5 and Steven Tyler as clients. LaPolt also has been urging members of Congress to support the Restoring Artistic Protection (RAP) Act, which would sharply limit when any form of creative or artistic expression — including hip-hop lyrics — could be used as evidence against the creator of the works.

## **Todd Larson**

### **Benjamin Marks**

*Partners, Weil Gotshal & Manges*

Representing clients such as SiriusXM, Spotify, Twitter and AEG Presents, Marks and Larson have a front-row view of the industry's royalty battles. Citing his biggest case of 2022, Marks says his representation of AEG and the North American Concert Promoters Association against BMI in the BMI rate court in the Southern District of New York sets "the royalty rates paid by members of the [promoters association] for the public performance of songs in the BMI repertoire for the period from 2014-2022." The suit was decided March 28 and Marks says "the ruling is considerably closer to NACPA's rate proposal than BMI's."

### **Bernie Lawrence-Watkins**

*Founder, B. Lawrence Watkins & Associates*

It has been a banner year for Lawrence-Watkins' "Big Energy" client Latto. Her hit single peaked at No. 3 on the Hot 100, while parent set 777 reached No. 15 on the Billboard 200. In addition to negotiating clearances for 777 and Latto's appearances on Lizzo's The Special Tour, Lawrence-Watkins says she "negotiated various endorsement and live-performance deals with the likes of Steve Madden, Savage Fenty, Apple, Essence, WNBA, Wingstop, Sprite, Spotify and more." A best new artist Grammy nominee and *Billboard's* 2023 Women in Music Powerhouse honoree, Latto is part of a client roster at Lawrence-Watkins' firm that includes rising artists such as Baby Tate, Young Nudy and Doe Boy.

### **Shay Lawson**

*Founder/managing attorney, law firm of Lawson McKinley*

Lawson has served as a voice and advocate for the passing of the Decriminalizing Artistic Expression Act in California and for the RAP Act at the federal level to prevent the use of rap lyrics and creative expression as evidence of a crime. She says, "The fight for state and federal legislation is so important as artists continue to face unfair criminal scrutiny, arrests and charges solely based on lyrics and creative expressions."



**William R. Leibowitz**

*Founder, William R. Leibowitz Law Group*

Leibowitz has been in the thick of the music-asset acquisition boom for the last 18 months, representing both the publicly traded Hipgnosis Songs Fund and Hipgnosis Songs Capital — the private investment partnership vehicle between Hipgnosis Songs Management and Blackstone, handling the closing of rights acquisitions from Justin Bieber, Justin Timberlake, the estate of Leonard Cohen, Nile Rodgers, Kenny Chesney and Nelly Furtado. Besides representing the various incarnations of Hipgnosis, his other clients include INXS, Iron Maiden and Global Merchandising services.

**Kent Marcus**

*Owner/senior partner, Marcus & Colvin*

In addition to advising an eclectic list of recording artists, Marcus' clients include publishers and Web3 companies, giving him valuable perspective on what he calls “the possibilities versus the dangers of technology. Technology always moves faster than the industry.” Guiding Kings of Leon, Jason Aldean, Dierks Bentley, Molly Tuttle, Lainey Wilson, Joy Oladokun, Marcus King, Margo Price and Black Pumas, the firm looks to “give them the best protection and opportunity for success.” Recently, that involved brokering and closing a nine-figure deal for Aldean's masters to Spirit Music Group.

**Doug Mark**

*Founding partner, Mark Music & Media Law*

**David Ferreria****Harry Roberts**

*Partners, Mark Music & Media Law*

**Jaimie Roberts**

*Of counsel, Mark Music & Media Law*

Billie Eilish, FINNEAS, Ice Spice, Danny Elfman, Guns N' Roses and other top talent are part of the firm's diverse roster after Los Angeles-based Mark Music & Media Law merged with New York's Roberts & Hafitz at the end of 2022. Clients also include Warner Films' Water Tower Music, for which the firm negotiated music deals in Baz Luhrmann's *Elvis* and Warner Bros.

Pictures' forthcoming live-action *Barbie* directed by Greta Gerwig. Among Ferreria's top industry concerns: "Modernizing recording agreements and other contracts to keep up with the fast-paced and content-intensive nature of the industry."

Mark Music & Media Law counts Billie Eilish and her brother, FINNEAS; Ice Spice; Danny Elfman; and Guns N' Roses among its clients.

## **James E. McMillan**

*Managing partner, James E. McMillan; CEO, ART@WAR*

When McMillan's firm was engaged to represent a popular young drill group, his team faced the challenge of working with a group member who was a minor, "protecting his rights and interest for the long term on one hand, while attempting to seize his current opportunity in a fast-paced marketplace on the other," he says, calling that environment "a challenging terrain to navigate. It's easy for a minor to get caught up in the hype of flash cash, fancy clothes and social media fame. As stewards of his rights, our job is to do our best to protect his interests so that when the spotlight fades, he still has something to show for it." McMillan is among those fighting against the use of rap lyrics in criminal prosecutions. "California has passed legislation to address this issue," he notes. "The other states need to catch up."

## **L. Londell McMillan**

*Chairman/CEO, The McMillan Firm and NorthStar Business Enterprises*

McMillan is a co-owner of the business entity Prince Legacy — formerly the Prince estate — and his firm represents the catalog of late Mobb Deep member Prodigy, established acts Mount Westmore (the hip-hop supergroup of Snoop Dogg, Ice Cube, Too \$hort and E-40) and Doug E. Fresh, plus the NorthStar Music Group and McMillan-owned hip-hop magazine *The Source*. The firm has also secured co-publishing deals with Stargate and Pulse Music for emerging artists Kyla Imani and Lucas Santos. The latter is in keeping with McMillan's chief concern in the coming year: "Protection of artists' and songwriters' revenue streams and healthcare."

## **Ed McPherson**

*Founding partner/trial lawyer, McPherson*

With a client roster including Travis Scott, Frank Ocean, Justin Timberlake and Kelly Clarkson, McPherson considers "frivolous lawsuits" to be the industry's most pressing challenge, particularly "copyright lawsuits that stifle the creativity of songwriters and concert-related suits that will ultimately

cause ticket prices to increase so significantly that only a select few fans will be able to afford them.”

### **Robert Meitus**

*Managing partner, Meitus Gelbert Rose*

Working with artists such as Sufjan Stevens, Keb' Mo' and Nathan Johnson (composer for *Glass Onion* and *Knives Out*), Meitus says a pressing concern for the music business remains “gender and racial equity throughout the industry,” including record production, airplay, the Grammys and high-level employment opportunities in record labels, publishers, artist management and other companies. Meitus is also the co-founder of and legal counsel for Mandolin Software, which *Fast Company* recognized as a leading innovative music tech company for its products such as Fan Navigator, a comprehensive fan data platform.

### **Matthew Middleton**

*Founder/principal, Middleton Law*

Middleton helps his clients “navigate and take advantage of effective independent distribution models,” he says. Whether they’re forging new mainstream partnerships, such as rapper Sha EK signing with Warner Records last summer, or reasserting their indie cred (as Alabama hip-hop superstar Bleu did when he abruptly exited his management deal with a tweet just months before his newest release), Middleton’s clients have an attorney who is committed to “vigorously advocating for artists and songwriters to be compensated fairly,” he says. With Blackground Records, another client, Middleton also finds new generations of fans, as he did last April, when he set up a first vinyl pressing for the late Aaliyah’s self-titled 2001 release.

### **Michael Milom**

#### **David Crow**

*Partners, Milom Crow Kelley Beckett Shehan*

The firm, which represents clients including Keith Urban, Luke Bryan, Carly Pearce, Scotty McCreery, Kelsea Ballerini and Mickey Guyton, closed 13 catalog transactions during the past year, totaling over \$139 million. Milom

and Crow note that artist development remains an ongoing concern within the music industry, saying that there needs to be a balance between the pursuit of immediate social media metrics and long-term careers.

**Carron Joan Mitchell**

*Partner, Nixon Peabody*

**Farrah A. Usmani**

*Counsel, Nixon Peabody*

Among her many other clients, Mitchell handled all legal transactions on behalf of Brent Faiyaz, whose album *Wasteland* debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard 200. Honored as an ASCAP Woman Behind the Music in 2022, Mitchell sees transparency in the industry as an issue. “Luckily, many companies are taking notice and are creating platforms to enable more transparency with everything, from the deal structures to budget spends and accountings,” she says. Usmani’s diverse client roster includes genre-defying band Rainbow Kitten Surprise, booking agents and concert promoter Outback Presents. Usmani represented Outback Presents in its deals to secure the rights to produce and promote the 2023 tours of Rauw Alejandro and Romeo Santos. The next frontier is AI-generated music, she says, noting, “Those of us representing human artists and songwriters will have to stay ahead of the curve to ensure our clients have the opportunity to evolve in tandem with technology.”

Carron Joan Mitchell of Nixon Peabody handled all legal transactions on behalf of Brent Faiyaz, whose album Wasteland debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard 200.  
Todd Owyong/NBC/GI

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**Zia Modabber**

*Managing partner of the Los Angeles offices/chair of the entertainment and litigation practice, Katten Muchin Rosenman*

Lil Nas X, Stevie Wonder, Usher, Nine Inch Nails and the estate of Michael Jackson are just a few of the firm’s clients. “I’m fortunate to represent so many exceptionally gifted performers, including one of my longest clients, Trent Reznor,” he says. “Since we started together over 20 years ago, my role has evolved to where I now function as a sort of outside general counsel. He is an absurdly talented recording artist, songwriter and performer.” While compensating musicians fairly remains a pressing industry issue, Modabber says, “Look out for AI because it’s about to force a host of new challenges.”

**Lisa F. Moore**

*Principal, Moore Pequignot*

**Andrew Pequignot**

*Member, Moore Pequignot*

**Gary P. Adelman**

*Managing partner, Adelman Matz*

**Sarah M. Matz**

*Partner, Adelman Matz*

Moore Pequignot's attorneys represented Cardi B in a closely watched trial over accusations that the superstar rapper violated a California man's rights by photoshopping one of his tattoos onto a mixtape cover. After just an hour of deliberation, the jury sided with Cardi, clearing her of millions in possible damages. That was the second victory Moore Pequignot secured for Cardi in 2022, following a \$4 million defamation verdict against a gossip blogger who published lies about the rapper. On that case, the firm teamed with Adelman Matz's attorneys; that firm has also represented Migos, Khalid, DaBaby and A\$AP Rocky, as well as companies such as Beatport, HYBE and Justin Bieber's Drew House.

**Matt Oppenheim**

*Managing partner, Oppenheim + Zebrak*

**Scott Zebrak**

*Co-founding partner, Oppenheim + Zebrak*

**Jeff Gould****Alex Kaplan**

*Partners, Oppenheim + Zebrak*

While representing the three major music groups, the firm has continued to combat "copyright infringement and piracy from stifling the lawful ecosystem for enjoying music," Zebrak says, noting recent settlements in infringement cases against Charter Communications and Bright House, which involved more than 23,000 copyrighted works. Oppenheim + Zebrak has also brought copyright infringement suits against the music video app Vinkle and the video-sharing app Triller. It alleges that Vinkle "is built on a library of copyrighted musical works that Vinkle neither owns nor has obtained a license to use," says Zebrak, and charges Triller with "willful and unauthorized use of copyrighted sound recordings in Triller's commercial social media service" and "failure and refusal to pay millions of dollars in contractual licensing fees." Those companies contest the claims.



**Don Passman**

**Ethan Schiffres**

*Partners, Gang Tyre Ramer Brown & Passman*

**Gene Salomon**

*Managing partner, Gang Tyre Ramer Brown & Passman*

As the live market came roaring back after the pandemic shutdown, the firm was busy getting artists back in front of audiences, including Adele's sold-out Las Vegas residency, P!nk's upcoming tour, Taylor Swift's massive outing and even helping conductor Gustavo Dudamel shift from the Los Angeles Philharmonic to the New York Philharmonic. But for Salomon, the highlight was opening night for *A Beautiful Noise*, the Broadway jukebox musical based on longtime client Neil Diamond's life. "That Neil was able to get up and sing with the cast at the end," he says, "was a special moment."

**Michael Perlstein**

**Robert H. Lieberman**

*Partners, Fischbach Perlstein Lieberman & Almond*

The firm has been involved in numerous purchases and sales transactions involving master recordings and song compositions for various creators during the last 18 months, as well as numerous agreements involving complex copyright issues. While they decline to specify the parties in those agreements, Perlstein lists as clients Bob Dylan, Peggy Lee Associates, Edward Holland, the estate of Mac "Dr. John" Rebennack, Paul Simon and Sylvia Tyson; Lieberman cites clients including GoDigital and its Cinq Music Group subsidiary, E40, Strange Music and Run It Up Records.

**Adrian Perry**

*Partner/co-chair of music industry group/co-chair of entertainment and media industry group, Covington & Burling*

**Neema Sahni**

*Partner/co-chair of music industry group/vice chair of sports industry group, Covington & Burling*

**Jonathan Sperling**

*Partner/chair of music industry group, Covington & Burling*

Covington & Burling represents many of music's most powerful companies, including the three major music groups. Last year, the firm helped bring Universal Music Group into the Web3 era by representing it in partnership agreements with NFT marketplaces Curio, Snowcrash and *Billboard* (through Unblocked), while also advising the company on the formation of the NFT-backed band Kingship. Moving forward, Perry says the firm is concerned with "how economic headwinds and an associated decline in ad-based streaming revenue may impact revenue and licensing structures."

### **Chip Petree**

*Partner, Ritholz Levy Fields*

With clients ranging from country heavyweights Chris Stapleton and Brothers Osborne to roots-music masters Tyler Childers and Billy Strings, Petree's firm has worked to "enhance fan engagement in nontraditional ways" with unique brand partnerships, appearance agreements and live-music streaming deals, he says. "One example is Chris Stapleton's relationship with RAM Trucks," says Petree, who opened his firm's Nashville office in 2014. "Within the last two years, Stapleton's recording of the Al Green classic 'I'm a Ram' has been used in a RAM advertising campaign and a Super Bowl pregame spot that ran before Stapleton's widely praised rendition of the national anthem."

Chip Petree of Ritholz Levy Fields has focused on brand partnerships for his clients, including a deal between Chris Stapleton and RAM Trucks.  
Gregory Shamus/GI

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**Daniel Petrocelli**

*Trial practice chair/firm vice chair, O'Melveny & Myers*

**David Marroso**

*General litigation practice head, O'Melveny & Myers*

**Leah Godesky**

**Terrance Dugan**

*Partners, O'Melveny & Myers*

One of the firm's clients, Global Music Rights, recently settled a yearslong legal dispute against the Radio Music Licensing Committee. The settlement followed the performing rights organization's 2016 antitrust lawsuit over music licensing fees that RMLC's 10,000 radio station members pay GMR's 100-plus songwriters, which include Drake, Pharrell Williams, Lizzo and Nicki Minaj. O'Melveny & Myers settled copyright infringement lawsuits against two terrestrial radio companies, Red Wolf Broadcasting and One Putt Broadcasting, earlier this year. Marroso says ticketing practices will be the

music industry's most pressing concern in 2023. "Government investigations and private litigation surrounding ticketing practices are expected to raise important questions about competition, market power and related issues," he says.

**Lee Phillips**

*Senior partner, Manatt Phelps & Phillips*

**Jordan Bromley**

*Partner/entertainment group leader, Manatt Phelps & Phillips*

**W. Joseph Anderson**

**Eric Custer**

**Gary Gilbert**

**Robert Jacobs**

**Beau Stapleton**

**Monika Tashman**

*Partners, Manatt Phelps & Phillips*

Manatt Phelps & Phillips handled two of the music industry's top deals of 2022: Dundee Partners' \$1.1 billion acquisition of Kobalt Capital Limited's music rights portfolio, KMR Music Royalties II, and Francisco Partners Management's move to obtain a majority stake in Kobalt Investment. Manatt's partners represent music clients including Pepe Aguilar, Paul Anka, Jackson Browne, Tracy Chapman, Death Cab for Cutie, Diplo, Dirty Projectors, The Drums, the Eagles, Major Lazer, ODESZA, Steve Perry, Thievery Corporation, Jack White, Brian Wilson, Neil Young and the estates of Burt Bacharach, John Lee Hooker, Rick James and Pop Smoke.

**Vince Phillips**

*Co-founder/partner, Arrington & Phillips*

**Aurielle Brooks**

*Senior associate, Arrington & Phillips; general counsel, Collective Gallery*

Representing YoungBoy Never Broke Again, Lil Baby (for his label, Wolf Pack Global), Bow Wow, Keri Hilson and other top clients, Phillips and Brooks have cleared a number of platinum- and gold-certified albums and singles, and negotiated TV deals and two national arena tours. Under their representation,

YoungBoy Never Broke Again's label secured a joint venture with Motown Records. The firm also brokered a catalog sale for the chart-topping rapper. According to Brooks, a major issue facing the music industry today is a lack of authenticity, coupled with demand for instant gratification. "Truly authentic talent and artistry seem to be harder to discern now more than ever," Brooks says. "The rise of TikTok and various outlets that allow a singular quick buzz to blossom is great for artists who have sat undiscovered for some time, [but] it is a cloudy indicator of what is true of this artist."

### **Tabetha Plummer**

*Founder, Plummer Law Group*

Plummer has been making money moves for a client roster that includes R&B singers Jhené Aiko and Ledisi, and Grammy-nominated producers Rex Rideout and Mike City. Her firm has helped hip-hop legend Snoop Dogg expand his portfolio to include a Skechers sneaker line and a Death Row cannabis brand. But even with those wins, she's increasingly concerned about "how streaming services pay writers, producers and artists," she says, as well as the emergence of AI technology in recorded music: "It creates a litany of other legal issues, beginning with who owns the copyright, name and image rights."

### **Michael Poster**

*Chair of music acquisitions and financing/partner, Michelman & Robinson*

In one of the most significant hip-hop deals of the year, Poster and his team spearheaded a majority stake acquisition in the publishing catalog of the late Chicago rapper Juice WRLD. The multimillion-dollar transaction also gave Opus Music Group majority ownership of the rapper's master-rights income from releases including five top five-charting albums on the Billboard 200. The deal was "a great example of how we're able to bridge the gap between private equity and corporate work," he says, "and rights issues, personalities and the complexities of the music industry."

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**Edwin Prado**

*Founder/CEO, Prado Law Offices*

Prado's name is synonymous with reggaetón and urban music, with a lengthy client list that includes Daddy Yankee, Don Omar and Anuel AA, as well as labels Pina Records, El Cartel and Glad Empire, and superstar clients Ricardo Arjona and Romeo Santos. The veteran attorney — who practices law in Puerto Rico, Florida and New York — had a particularly busy year, representing Daddy Yankee and Pina Records in breach of contract and copyright infringement cases, respectively, and handling the aftermath of the plane accident that killed producer Flow La Movie and his family. Prado also negotiated Nio García's complex exit from record label Flow La Movie and joined Pina Records founder Raphy Pina's defense team in post-appeal procedures related to his 2021 conviction on a federal gun charge.

**Gregor Pryor****Stephen Sessa**

*Partners/co-chairs, global entertainment and media industry group, Reed Smith*

**Joshua Love****Eric Marder****Edward Shapiro**

*Partners, global entertainment and media industry group, Reed Smith*

In addition to representing some of the most established global digital music companies, Pryor works extensively in music and Web3, advising pioneers such as Animoca, Unity, deadmau5's Pixelynx, Stationhead, Gala Music, BandLab, Audius, TSX Entertainment, Opulous and Frever. Sessa serves as Concord's outside counsel and has led all of the company's major publishing acquisitions, including the works of Phil Collins and Genesis, as well as Downtown Music, Iagem, Pulse, B Unique, Razor & Tie, Tams Witmark, Samuel French, Sikorski and many others. Love represented Seeker Music Group in all its major catalog acquisitions, including Christopher Cross, Troy Oliver and Run the Jewels, and Spirit Music Group when it acquired Jason

Aldean's catalog of recordings. Shapiro serves as counsel to Rihanna in all her endeavors, most recently handling her Super Bowl Halftime Show performance and new venture with PUMA. Marder, the firm's newest partner, also represents Roc Nation as outside counsel for music matters.

**William Ramsey**

*Partner, Neal Harwell*

Ramsey, whose past and present clients include Garth Brooks, Kane Brown, Miranda Lambert and Red Light Management, represented a number of acts in major trademark and copyright disputes over the last year. But he says his most gratifying work has been representing the Otha Turner Collection, which has been acquired by the National Museum of African American Music. In June, Ramsey hosted his 28th annual Ode to Otha fundraiser, a tribute to the Black fife-and-drum blues musician, which raised money for Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee. "Opportunities like this allow me to advocate for my clients — and friends — outside the courtroom so that together we can keep the legacy and impact of traditional music alive," Ramsey says.

**Rollin Ransom**

*Partner/co-leader of global entertainment, sports and media practice; global commercial litigation and disputes practice; managing partner of the Los Angeles office, Sidley Austin*

**Matthew Thompson**

*Partner/co-leader of global entertainment, sports and media practice, Sidley Austin*

Sidley Austin's client Universal Music Group had a major development in the closely watched litigation involving hundreds of artists who sued the label in a single lawsuit to regain control of their master recordings. Earlier this year, the firm obtained a denial of class certification with a federal judge in New York ruling that the case cannot proceed as a class action but rather each musician will have to file his or her own case. This latest ruling comes four years after "Missing You" singer John Waite filed a lawsuit — as lead plaintiff — over copyright law's termination right.

## **Berkeley Reinhold**

*Founder/owner, Reinhold Global*

Reinhold, whose firm specializes in entertainment, touring and music, serves as general counsel for Lollapalooza and offered guidance on its global expansion into Asia. The festival held its first shows in Mumbai, India, in January, marking the fest's seventh international territory alongside South America, Europe and North America. Reinhold's other notable clients include Live Nation, Global Citizen and such acts as Marc Anthony, Thievery Corporation and Winston House. She believes that climate change is the most pressing concern facing the live-events industry.

## **Elliot Resnik**

*Partner/chair of entertainment, Masur Griffitts Avidor*

Resnik's clients include Killer Mike and his hip-hop duo, Run the Jewels, as well as music agency All Things Go Music and the National Independent Venue Association. Some of Resnik's successes over the past year are supporting the release of *RTJ Cu4tro* — Run the Jewels' Spanish-language reimagination of its fourth album, in collaboration with several Latin artists — and the sale of Killer Mike's publishing to Reservoir Media, including his future works and back catalog. Looking ahead, Resnik keeps the fight for fair compensation to writers, publishers and performers top of mind, "ensuring we don't allow their rights to be undervalued in the coming transition to Web3 platforms."

## **Alexis Robinson**

## **Daniel Schnapp**

*Partners, Sheppard Mullin*

In the past 18 months, Sheppard Mullin, which represents Spotify, ASCAP, Peloton and Vevo, led Atlanta-based investment firm Domain Capital Group in acquiring multiple music catalogs including the works of Nashville hit-maker Ashley Gorley. The firm also guided Sony Pictures Television's purchase of Industrial Media, owner of the reality series *American Idol* and *So You Think You Can Dance*, among others. Looking ahead, Schnapp says the rise of "emerging technologies and innovative platforms" like virtual reality,



augmented reality and AI “will undoubtedly have a profound and potentially disruptive effect on the status quo.”

**Carlos Rodríguez-Féliz**

*Founder/managing partner, RodFel Law*

Rodríguez-Féliz — whose clients include RaiNao, Lenny Tavárez, Villano Antillano, Subelo Neo and Young Miko — says the most pressing concern in the industry is “how fast music is being consumed by fans and how demanding of music the public is in short periods of time.” Securing Antillano’s global publishing deal with Warner Chappell, Sech producer Cerebro’s deal with Kobalt and Tavárez’s publishing deal with Sony Music Publishing are just a few of his recent negotiations.

**Angela Rogers**

*Owner, Rogers Law Group*

Rogers’ firm negotiated multimillion-dollar client deals with Nike, Sprite, Adidas, UGG, Forever 21 and Bose during the last 18 months. “Major companies have always had a presence in the Black music space,” says Rogers, whose primarily R&B/hip-hop client roster includes Coi Leray, Nardo Wick, Tink, G Herbo, EST Gee, Jay Electronica and Marsha Ambrosius. “But in the past, artists would have to concede on either money or deliverables just for an opportunity to work with some of these brands. However, now we’re seeing corporate companies coming to the table with more lucrative and innovative deals that value the artists’ cultural impact.”

**Oswaldo M. Rossi**

*Founder/managing partner, Rossi*

**John R. Baldivia**

*Partner, Rossi*

The firm provided legal services to Colombian superstar Karol G, who had a top-grossing tour, a history-making Billboard 200 No. 1 album with *Mañana Será Bonito* and new brand deals with Corona and Google Pixel. Rossi also assisted with Noah Assad’s joint venture with Live Nation and the renewal of Bad Bunny producer MAG’s publishing deal with Warner Chappell and his

producer agreement for *Un Verano Sin Ti*. Baldivia says a pressing concern is “finding a way for the Latin music world as a whole to compete financially with the rest of the general market in all facets of the business.”

Oswaldo M. Rossi and his firm provided legal services to Karol G, who made history with *Mañana Será Bonito*, the first chart-topping Spanish-language album on the Billboard 200 by a female artist.

Denise Truscello/GI

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## **Todd Rubenstein**

*Founding principal, Todd Rubenstein Law*

Rubenstein recently negotiated several high-profile signings, including ThxSoMuch’s deal with Elektra, d4vd’s deal with Interscope and Jeleel’s deal with 10K Projects. “The process [of negotiating dv4d’s and ThxSoMuch’s deals] was a case study of the issues facing lawyers in 2022 to 2023,” he explains. “From insufficient rights to tracks licensed from online services, to deal roadblocks caused by provisions buried in the online indie distributor websites, to artwork pulled from Google without necessary rights, it has become harder for young artists to close record deals because of third parties.” Rubenstein’s firm also represents Khalid, songwriting-production duo The

Monsters and Strangerz, songwriter-producer Oak Felder and songwriter Theron Thomas, among others.

**Steven H. Sadow**

*Principal, Steven H. Sadow*

**Brian Steel**

*Founder, The Steel Law Firm*

When Young Thug and Gunna were indicted in May 2022 on accusations that they participated in a violent Atlanta street gang, they tapped veteran Georgia attorneys with extensive experience handling such cases. Steel, a well-known Atlanta criminal defense attorney who had previously represented 21 Savage, is serving as lead counsel for Young Thug in the ongoing trial, which started in January and is expected to run for months. Gunna hired Sadow, who also counts Rick Ross, T.I. and Usher as clients. Along with attorneys from the firm Garland Samuel & Loeb, Sadow helped Gunna negotiate a plea deal that allowed him to exit the case in December without cooperating with prosecutors.

**Daniel Schacht**

*Partner/music and intellectual property attorney, Donahue Fitzgerald*

In his eight years as a partner, Schacht has expanded Donahue Fitzgerald's clientele to include newer artists such as singer-songwriter mxmtoon, adding to its powerhouse roster of legacy artists including Santana, the Grateful Dead's Mickey Hart and songwriting duo Cynthia Weil & Barry Mann. Among many other matters, Schacht led the team representing Wixen Music Publishing in its suit against Triller, seeking over \$50 million in damages for copyright infringement. The case, Schacht says, was "successfully resolved in September 2022."

**Michael Selverne**

*Managing partner, Selverne Bradford*

Selverne doesn't disclose clients, but sources tell *Billboard* that he represents Round Hill Music, closing the company's music-asset acquisitions. In the past year, those have included a stake in the publishing catalog and a share in the

master royalties of Alice in Chains and both the publishing catalog and master royalties from David Coverdale, among other deals. While terms of those deals were not disclosed, *Billboard* estimates the deal for Coverdale's music assets carried a \$35 million valuation.

**Robert J. Sherman**

*Partner/co-chair, entertainment finance practice, DLA Piper*

Sherman was the lead attorney in Concord's historic \$1.8 billion music securitization of over 1 million copyrights. The asset-based security offering is the largest in terms of both size of issuance and number of assets. Apollo Global Management and Redding Ridge Asset Management structured the transaction and formed an investor syndicate led by Apollo-managed funds. Sherman believes one of the most pressing concerns for the industry is to expand the streaming revenue base internationally. DLA Piper's client roster includes Gold State Music, Epitaph Records and Multimedia Music.

**Jodie Shihadeh**

*Founder/owner, Shihadeh Law*

Shihadeh focuses on setting up clients (among them Dim Mak Records, Shenseea, Two Friends, EDEN and Matoma) for long-term success, negotiating deals that give them greater ownership of their creations and more favorable copyright reversion terms. She recently negotiated the immediate reversion of one notable songwriter client's entire 10-year publishing catalog, which her firm is now shopping. And she has a keen eye on tech and trends. "The industry is going to have a day of reckoning soon," Shihadeh says, "about its relationship with and reliance on TikTok."

**Larry Shire**

*Named partner/head of the film and television department, Grubman Shire Meiselas & Sacks*

**Kenny Meiselas**

*Named partner/head of the music department, Grubman Shire Meiselas & Sacks*

**Joe Brenner**

## **David Jacobs**

*Partners, Grubman Shire Meiselas & Sacks*

The legal powerhouse founded by Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee Allen Grubman has spent the past year-and-a-half on massive megastar deals: stadium tours for The Weeknd, Bruce Springsteen and Lady Gaga; Usher's Las Vegas residency; The Weeknd's upcoming HBO show, *The Idol*; Lizzo's Amazon show, *Watch Out for the Big Grrrls*; and multimillion-dollar catalog sales for Springsteen, David Bowie and Sting. "In this post-COVID-19 return to live performance, we have negotiated the biggest tour deals of 2022 and 2023," says Meiselas, who adds that "diversity in high-level leadership positions" is the industry's most pressing concern.

## **Simran Singh**

*Founder/managing partner, Singh Singh & Trauben*

## **Michael A. Trauben**

*Founder/partner, Singh Singh & Trauben*

## **Christopher Navarro**

*Partner, Singh Singh & Trauben*

Singh and his partners helped several marquee clients make major deals in the last year, including Marco Antonio Solís, whose Amazon documentary, *El Bukí: Las Letras de Mi Historia*, was released worldwide in December. The firm also oversaw the catalog acquisition, purchase and sale agreements for clients Ozuna and Duars Entertainment — and repped Daddy Yankee and his La Última Vuelta World Tour, which grossed \$197.8 million.

**The balance of power in the music business would shift toward artists and songwriters if...:** "...we routinely educate and inform artists and songwriters early on in their careers to create and implement strategic business strategies and structures, which take advantage of certain inherent rights and long-term monetization — many of which the majors have implemented for decades." — Singh

## **Stanton "Larry" Stein**

*Head of media and entertainment group, Russ August & Kabat*

## **Irene Y. Lee**

## **Ashley R. Yeargan**

*Partners, Russ August & Kabat*

The firm defended Drake and 21 Savage in a trademark infringement lawsuit that Condé Nast filed for their spoof of a *Vogue* cover to promote their 2022 album, *Her Loss*. (The promotional blitz also featured parodies of *The Howard Stern Show*, *Saturday Night Live* and NPR's *Tiny Desk* concert series.) The firm continues to manage over 5,000 brands and attendant rights as part of its role in protecting the intellectual property portfolios of artists such as Cardi B, deadmau5, The Kid LAROI, Mick Fleetwood and Tyga, and labels including mau5trap, DirtyBird, 10K Projects and Imagendary Studios. "It's not a new concern," says Stein, "but there continues to be a situation where the majority of artists are not being sufficiently compensated for their work, particularly given the proliferation of streaming and the extremely low per-stream royalty that they are paid."

## **Rachel Stilwell**

*Founder/CEO, Stilwell Law*

Stilwell Law has participated in multiple proceedings before the Federal Communications Commission on behalf of the musicFIRST Coalition and Future of Music Coalition on competition among audio delivery platforms. The firm also represents a mix of artists (LeAnn Rimes, Al B. Sure!, Noel Schajris), songwriters (Darrell Brown, Andre Merritt) and audio pros (Gavin Lurssen, Michael Romanowski, Paul Wolff, Tek O'Ryan). Stilwell cites the dominance of Ticketmaster and StubHub in the live-event ticketing space as the most pressing concern facing the music industry in 2023.

## **Michael Sukin**

*President, Sukin Colton Law Association*

Sukin, whose clients include the estates of Aretha Franklin, George Gershwin and Charles Aznavour, as well as St. Nicholas Music (the home of Christmas classics written by the late Johnny Marks), spent much of the last year reviewing the European Union Copyright Directive package as it applies to artists' rights. "The difficulty of protecting copyrights" remains a pressing concern, says Sukin, as well as "protecting pre-1972 recordings." The firm,

with offices in New York, London and Nashville, also represents S2BN, the Michael Cohl-led live-entertainment promotion and production firm.

**Ron Sweeney**

*CEO, Digital Disruption Entertainment*

Sweeney, who prefers not to name his clients, is known to have worked with James Brown, Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis, Swizz Beats and Lil Wayne, among others. At the moment, he's most concerned with quantity over quality in the business, notably "the number of records released daily and how it affects the ability to market and promote new artists," he says. The 40-year industry veteran believes power dynamics would shift if more artists reached stardom through "independent labels not connected to the majors," he says. "It's coming."

**Brandon E. Tatum**

*Managing attorney, The Law Offices of Brandon E. Tatum*

Tatum negotiated a groundbreaking NFT fashion capsule collection and branded comic book for a K-pop client he cannot name, pending confirmation of the deal. Tatum's other clients include SoundCloud, Gala Games/Gala Music, Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, Sleepy Brown and Teddy Riley.

**José J. Torres**

*Founder, Torres*

Torres keeps a low profile, but he is a key figure in Puerto Rico's music scene with superstar clients including Bad Bunny, Rauw Alejandro and La Buena Fortuna Music (which manages Kany García, Residente, Pedro Capó and Ile, among others). His expertise goes beyond individual artist contracts and routine legal matters. Last year, his firm assisted in closing a major strategic alliance between an independent label and a major U.S. label that "could potentially shape the next five years of new and upcoming Latin artists," says Torres. Of primary concern for 2023, he says, is AI and the "proliferation of new platforms that undervalue and minimize music and creators' rights."

**Adam Van Straten**

*Principal, Van Straten Solicitors*

Van Straten’s firm advised Warren Cuccurullo — a 2022 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee as a member of Duran Duran — when Mojo Music & Media acquired his catalog of songwriter and publishing rights, including Cuccurullo’s share of artist royalties and neighboring rights in Duran Duran’s top 10 Hot 100 hits “Ordinary World” and “Come Undone.” Other notable clients include slowthai, Leo Sayer, Koffee and KT Tunstall. In 2023, Van Straten predicts, labels and streaming services will face “increased scrutiny and pressure” to increase royalty payments to artists and songwriters. “The current position is tense,” he says. “We need to see greater transparency and an improved position for creatives.”

**James L. Walker Jr.**

*President, J. Walker & Associates*

Over the past year, Walker has continued winning high-profile cases, including 112 member Marvin “Slim” Scandrick’s trademark infringement case and the Andre Sims vs. DJ Camper copyright case. He was an investor in the recent Broadway revival of *The Piano Lesson* starring Samuel L. Jackson and *Ain’t Too Proud: The Life and Times of The Temptations*, the musical about the rise of the titular act. He says protecting copyrights in the digital age is among the industry’s most pressing concerns. “We are preparing articles, workshops and handouts in this area,” he says, “to guide the music and entertainment industry.”

**Previn Warren**

*Member, Motley Rice*

True to his firm’s motto — “Causes not just cases” — Warren represents clients such as SESAC and SoundExchange to ensure musicians earn a fair rate of return from tech and media companies. “I’m representing SESAC in a dispute with the broadcast radio industry to raise the rates that AM/FM should pay to play the compositions of artists as diverse as Bob Dylan and Glass Animals,” he says. Warren also notes that the rise of AI “may be an existential moment for artists, not just the industry that supports them. I think it presents significant issues that the industry will have to reckon with.”



**Douglas H. Wigdor**

*Founding partner, Wigdor*

**Michael J. Willemin**

*Partner, Wigdor*

The firm defeated a motion to dismiss made by the National Collegiate Athletic Association and various universities in connection with their clients' claims that the NCAA continues to violate the Fair Labor Standards Act by failing to pay student athletes the minimum wage. The firm's clients include former Recording Academy president/CEO Deborah Dugan; current and former NFL coaches Brian Flores, Steve Wilks and Ray Horton; model Tarale Wulff, who testified against Harvey Weinstein during his trial in New York; and former Fox associate producer Jennifer Eckhart. On another important topic, Willemin says: "While progress has certainly been made, we look forward to seeing continued advancement in diversity within the music industry, and particularly within its leadership."

**Marcus Wiggins**

*Founder, Wiggins Sports & Entertainment*

For the past 12 months, Wiggins — whose clients include Bully Park Records — has been working to recapture royalties for legacy artists New Birth, Dawn Silva (of Brides of Funkenstein), Elijah Baker (Tony! Toni! Toné!) and Jerome Brailey (Parliament-Funkadelic), as well as the label Total Experience (The Gap Band). "If I can assist those who were taken unfair advantage of, I will do my best to help," he says, hoping that the entire industry moves toward creating equity. Of key importance, Wiggins stresses, is for streaming income to fairly reflect streaming numbers.

**Richard C. Wolfe**

*Founding attorney, Wolfe Law Miami*

With notable clients including Maluma, Travis Scott, Menudo and Walter Kolm, Miami-based Wolfe says he has solved three major disputes between artists and managers in the last year (client Danny Ocean with his manager, client Indi-E Entertainment's Jorge Pino with singer Feid and one more he says is confidential). He views copyright termination claims becoming

“everyday issues for catalogs that are more than 35 years old” as one of the industry’s pressing concerns.

**Andrea Yankovsky**

*Founder, Yankovsky Law*

Specializing in intellectual property law for independent businesses and individual creators, Yankovsky makes protection and enforcement accessible. She prevailed in a Trademark Opposition Proceeding at the U.S. Trademark Trial and Appeal Board for client Masterdisk and implemented copyright enforcement strategies for streaming, resulting in takedowns and revenue gain for her clients (most of whom she declines to identify). She says her early experience as a recording engineer “provides a different perspective” and, in addition to bread-and-butter tasks like negotiating output deals and recapturing rights, she founded the OutHouse Counsel program, which is designed to provide indies with the same legal advice more readily available to major labels and their artists.

**Helen Yu**

*Founder, Yu Leseberg*

Yu negotiated client Paulo Londra’s 2022 label contract with Warner Music Latina after managing litigation that freed the Argentine rapper from label Big Ligas. The resulting album, *Back to the Game* — his first in three years — arrived in November. The firm also closed exclusive apparel deals for client Westside Merchandising with hip-hop supergroup Mount Westmore (Snoop Dogg, Ice-Cube, E-40, Too \$hort) as well as hip-hop magazine *The Source*. Yu’s diverse roster includes Ty Dolla \$ign, Diane Warren, Jeff Gitelman, Gerardo Ortiz, members of the Black Eyed Peas and Adrián Chaparro. Yu says that as the first Asian American woman to lead a music law firm, she is passionate about inclusion and creating opportunities for underdogs.

**Adam Zia**

*Owner/partner, The Zia Firm*

**Nate Kuo**

*Partner, The Zia Firm*

While continuing to represent Machine Gun Kelly, French Montana, 070 Shake and others, the firm helped singer-songwriter Starrah launch 3:02 Music Group — a publishing joint venture with Pulse Music Group that has since signed a number of rising artists. Zia calls it “an honor” to be part of his client achieving a long-awaited goal, “especially [her] being a Black, LGBTQ+ woman songwriter, artist and now CEO.” Fighting for higher compensation for songwriters is among Zia’s top priorities: “It remains too difficult for a majority of our songwriting community to earn a proper living, even if writing on successful songs,” he says. “Songwriters are too important to music to have such a small piece of the pie.”

Adam Zia's firm helped singer-songwriter Stannah launch 3:02 Music Group, a publishing joint venture with Pulse Music Group that has since signed a number of rising artists.

**Leslie Zigel**

*Partner/chair, entertainment, media and technology group, SMGQ Law*

**Javier Feito**

*Partner, entertainment, media and technology group, SMGQ Law*

Zigel and Feito represent Pitbull, Marco Antonio Solís and Carlos Vives, among other top stars, and recently served as counsel for Puerto Rican reggaetón duo Wisin & Yandel’s *La Última Misión* world tour, which included 14 concerts at the Coliseo de Puerto Rico José Miguel Agrelot. The firm also served as general counsel for Maffio’s label Alkatraks Records and as lead counsel for the 2022 Billboard Latin Music Awards and Latin American Music Awards for client MBS Productions. Zigel cites “the inefficiency of royalty collection and payment processes with the labels, music publishers, [digital service providers] and YouTube” as among the industry’s most pressing concerns. “It has led to several billions of dollars of monies being held in escrow due to misattribution of royalty recipients, incorrect split sheets and label copy.”

**Contributors:** *Trevor Anderson, Rania Aniftos, Cathy Applefeld Olson, Megan Armstrong, Chuck Arnold, Nefertiti Austin, Katie Bain, Steve Baltin, Karen Bliss, Starr Bowenbank, Dave Brooks, Anna Chan, Ed Christman, Leila Cobo, Mariel Concepcion, Stephen Daw, Elizabeth Dilts Marshall, Bill Donahue, Thom Duffy, Chris Eggertsen, Griselda Flores, Paul Grein, Amit Gurbaxani, Raquelle “Rocki” Harris, Lyndsey Havens, Gil Kaufman, Steve Knopper, Katy Kroll, Carl Lamarre, Cydney Lee, Elias Leight, Jason Lipshutz, Joe Lynch, Heran Mamo, Geoff Mayfield, Taylor Mims, Gail Mitchell, Melinda Newman, Jessica Nicholson, Paula Parisi, Ronda Racha Penrice, Glenn Peoples, Sigal Ratner-Arias, Isabela Raygoza, Bryan Reesman, Kristin Robinson, Jessica Roiz, Neena Rouhani, Dan Rys, Crystal Sheppard, Richard Smirke, Eric Spitznagel, Jaelani Turner-Williams, Andrew Unterberger, Jewel Wicker, Deborah Wilker*

**Methodology:** *Nominations for Billboard’s executive lists open no less than 150 days in advance of publication, and a link is sent to press representatives*

*by request before the nomination period. (Please email [thom.duffy@billboard.com](mailto:thom.duffy@billboard.com) for inclusion on the email list for nomination links and for how to obtain an editorial calendar.) Billboard's Top Music Lawyers for 2023 were chosen by editors based on factors including, but not limited to, nominations by peers, colleagues and superiors. In-house counsels were limited to the companies shown. Otherwise, Top Music Lawyers focused on outside counsels. In addition to information requested with nominations, editors consider attorneys' representation of clients with notable music industry impact. That impact is measured by metrics including, but not limited to, chart, sales and streaming performance as measured by Luminate and social media impressions, along with Billboard Boxscore, using data available as of Feb. 15.*

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## **Leading Law Schools of the Top Music Lawyers**

*The most frequently cited alma maters of the 2023 class of honorees.*