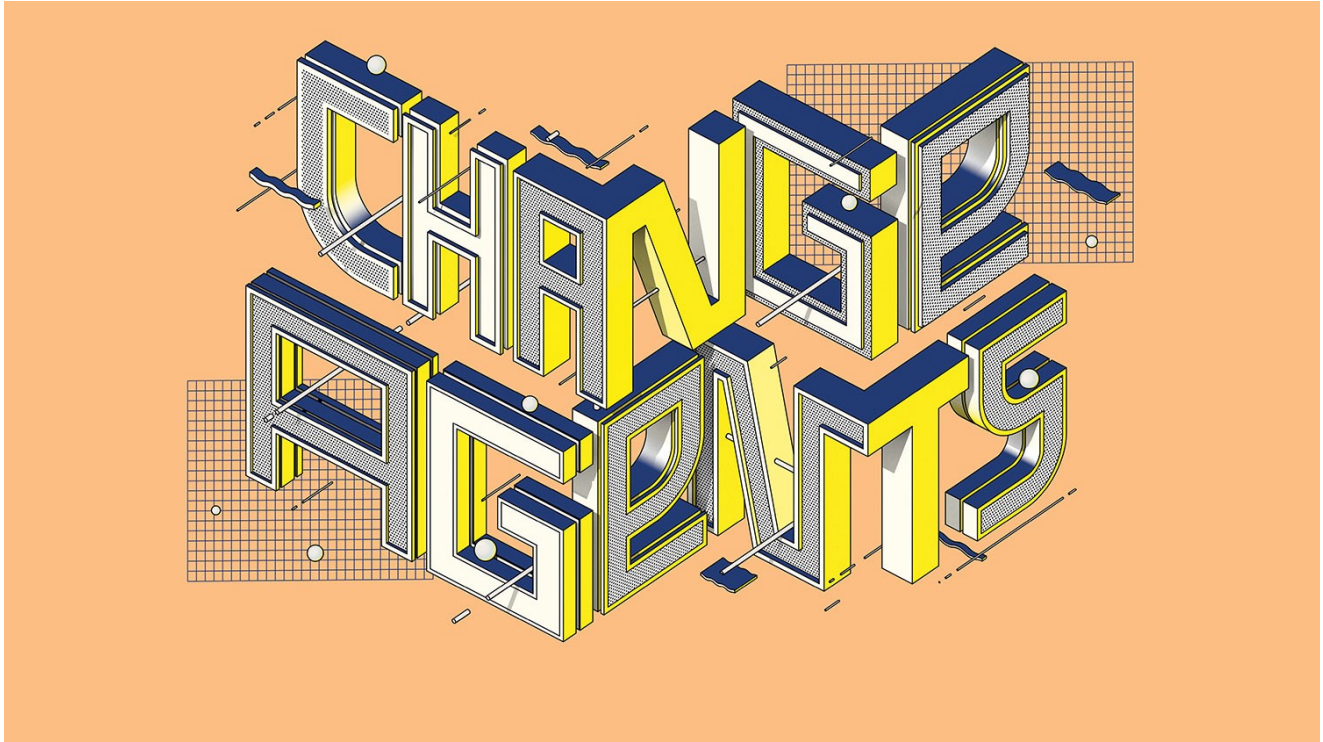


Billboard Change Agents: Leaders Stepping Up In A Year of Turmoil

b [billboard.com/articles/business/9517071/billboard-change-agents-list-2021](https://www.billboard.com/articles/business/9517071/billboard-change-agents-list-2021)

By Billboard Staff 1/28/2021



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Over the past year, the music industry began an extraordinary transformation.

Heavy-hitting task forces were assembled to tackle racial inequality amid a wave of national protests against police brutality, while music's biggest companies committed hundreds of millions of dollars to the cause. Artists and their managers, agents and promoters — many of whom saw their income plummet in the pandemic — were forced to reinvent their businesses as they sought relief from organizations fighting to help the live industry survive. Through it all, music professionals marched in the streets, encouraged people to vote in a historic election, brainstormed solutions on virtual panels and mourned the loss of family, friends and music legends to COVID-19.

In other words, it didn't feel much like a year for congratulating music's most powerful people on how powerful they still are. So instead of compiling the Power List that *Billboard* has published annually since 2012, we decided instead to honor some of the individuals changing the business — both by advocacy and by example — in our first Change Agents issue.

This is by no means meant to be a comprehensive list of music executives fighting for justice or changing the game. It does not, for example, include the heads of the major music groups, even though Universal Music Group chairman/CEO Lucian Grainge announced an initial \$25 million “Change Fund,” convened a social justice task force and promised more action to follow, while Sony Music Group chairman Rob Stringer drove the creation of a \$100 million Sony fund to fight racism around the world and Warner Music Group CEO Steve Cooper pledged to steer a \$100 million donation from owner Len Blavatnik to music industry charities and social justice as well. (The fund sizes and plans vary due to the different ways the three companies are structured.) Most of the people honored on *Billboard’s* most recent Power List, in fact, are not highlighted here, a choice that reflects no lack of advocacy or innovation on their part, but rather our own editorial decision to spotlight more of the individuals doing important work behind the scenes who might not be recognized on a traditional Power List, yet who could reshape music’s balance of power in the future.

This year’s Change Agents were selected by *Billboard’s* reporters and editors, who reviewed both news we covered and nominations the industry submitted in 2020 for all of *Billboard’s* lists, with particular attention to the advocacy efforts and movements that defined the year.

As the music business’ proud publication of record, *Billboard* will continue to closely track its shifting power dynamics: Holding up the mirror on a regular basis will be an even more valuable service for an industry truly committed to change. But we hope that by looking at the landscape differently in 2021, *Billboard* can better help sustain the enormous momentum of all of the ambitious, change-making efforts underway — and we look forward to celebrating the results, when we gather in person once more.

Towalame Austin

Executive vp philanthropy and social impact, Sony Music Group

Jeff Walker

Executive vp business and legal affairs, global digital business, Sony Music Entertainment

Tiffany R. Warren

Executive vp/chief diversity and inclusion officer, Sony Music Group

“This past year has been dominated by extraordinary struggles,” says Walker of the collision of the pandemic, the fight for racial justice, natural disasters linked to climate change, gun violence and “a bitterly divided political sphere.” They “all demand our attention,” he says, and “they will continue to dominate the 2021 landscape.” Walker joined Sony colleagues in seeking the repeal of New York state’s Civil Rights Law Section 50-A, which shielded the public release of police disciplinary records. (In June, Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed a bill repealing the law.) Austin, as part of Sony Music Group’s Social Justice Fund, spearheaded the launch of national, nonpartisan voter education campaign Your Voice, Your Power, Your Vote, focused on “educating individuals about the importance and power of exercising your right to vote,” she says. Sony’s Global Relief Fund addressed the needs of essential workers, homelessness and educational issues brought on by COVID-19, adds Austin. Warren’s 15-year-old group Adcolor, which promotes inclusion in creative businesses, held a virtual

conference in September with 8,400 professionals from 50 countries, drawing 150,000-plus views. “The greatest chance we have to truly change the world is in the place we spend the most time: work,” says Warren. “The goal is to create a community of diverse professionals.”

Lasting Change Requires: “Acknowledgement of what needs to be changed. Commitment to making that change. And discipline to carry out these changes.” - Austin

Jeffrey Harleston

General counsel/executive vp business and legal affairs, Universal Music Group; interim chairman/CEO, Def Jam Recordings

Ethiopia Habtemariam

President, Motown Records; executive vp, Capitol Music Group

Eric Hutcherson

Executive vp/chief people and inclusion officer, Universal Music Group

In response to calls for racial justice, UMG announced its Task Force for Meaningful Change on June 4. By connecting 40 executives from its different labels and business units around the world, UMG created “a space for real, honest and, at times, uncomfortable conversations that have led to incredible ideas, strategies and initiatives to drive long-term change,” says Harleston. Among UMG’s first moves: hiring former NBA human resources executive Hutcherson to run the company’s inclusion efforts. Citing mental health and wellness as another primary focus, Habtemariam adds, “I’m proud that we have a global organization being thoughtful about what real change looks like, what we have to do to get there and a commitment to see it through.”

President Biden Must Focus On: “The restoration of the most basic norms of human interaction — civility, empathy and compassion.” - Harleston

Dr. Maurice Stinnett

Head of global equity, diversity and inclusion, Warner Music Group

Elijah Seton

President of independent music and creator services, Warner Music Group

Temi Adeniji

Senior vp international strategy and operations, Warner Music Group

Stinnett — who has a divinity degree and a Ph.D. in education and organizational leadership — approaches issues of diversity with both ministerial passion and academic rigor. He joined WMG in August after leading diversity and inclusion initiatives for BSE Global, the parent company of the Brooklyn Nets and New York Liberty. He emphasizes WMG’s global position (“46 countries, six continents”) when he talks about making the company “a place where everyone feels like they belong,” and he speaks of the tragic events of 2020 as a historic moment when “everyone is paying attention and there’s real opportunity to make progress.” To that end, Stinnett says the \$100 million Warner Music Group/Blavatnik Family Foundation Social Justice Fund “puts us on the front lines of anti-racism, social justice and

cultural preservation.” Adeniji — who serves as a member of the board of directors for the fund — adds that creating a strategy for long-term grants “has compelled us to move beyond allocating capital and into truly understanding the nature of various methods of intervention, from direct services to advocacy.” And Seton — who is co-chair of WMG’s equity, diversity and inclusion council as well as the executive sponsor of the company’s LGBTQ+ employee resource group — calls Stinnett’s leadership “a game-changer for us.”

Lasting Change Requires: “Honesty, consistency, accountability and imagination.” - Stinnett

Brianna Agyemang

Co-founder, #TheShowMustBePaused; senior artist campaign manager, Platoon

Jamila Thomas

Co-founder, #TheShowMustBePaused; senior director of marketing, Atlantic Records

Equity for Black people working in the music industry was the cause that went viral when young disrupters Agyemang and Thomas launched #TheShowMustBePaused — and shut down the music business for a day — in early June. The pair issued a formal list of demands to music companies in September designed to “gain more room for growth opportunities for Black people” through transparency, accountability and recruitment, among other initiatives. As Agyemang and Thomas recently noted after being named *Billboard*’s Women in Music 2020 Executives of the Year: “We’re in this for the long haul.”

My Resolution For This Year: “Finding balance in an unbalanced world.” - Agyemang

Andy Bernstein

Founder/executive director, HeadCount

Peter Shapiro

Chairman, HeadCount; founder, Dayglo Presents

The nonpartisan HeadCount has partnered with musicians and festivals to help over 1 million music fans register to vote since 2004, but during 2020’s unprecedented election season, its pro-democracy mission “never felt more important,” says Bernstein, 49. With live events on pause, the organization brought its outreach online, participating in over 50 livestreams; partnering with companies like Spotify, Grubhub, Atlantic Records and ASCAP; and joining forces with artists like Cardi B to get out the vote. HeadCount also linked with Global Citizen in the fall for the Just Vote campaign, where fans who checked their voter registration status could win prizes like a signed guitar from Taylor Swift, dance lessons with Usher or even a happy hour with Quavo.

Lasting Change Requires: “Accountability, most of all to yourself. Headlines and accolades are great, but if you can’t quantify your impact and see it grow over time, you probably need to find another line of work.” - Bernstein

Binta Niambi Brown

Co-founder/co-chairman, Black Music Action Coalition (BMAC); founder/CEO, omalilly projects

Willie “Prophet” Stiggers

Co-founder/co-chairman, BMAC; CEO, 50/50 Music Group Management; co-founder, BreatheWithMeRevolution

Ashaunna Ayars

Co-founder/vice chair, BMAC; founder/CEO, The Ayars Agency

Caron Veazey

Co-founder/vice chair, BMAC; founder/CEO, Something in Common

Shawn Holiday

Co-founder/executive vice chair, BMAC; co-head of urban music, Columbia Records

Courtney Stewart

Co-founder/vice chair, BMAC; CEO, Right Hand; co-founder, Keep Cool Records

Damien Smith

Co-founder/treasurer, BMAC; partner, Full Stop Management

Jamil Davis

Co-founder/secretary, BMAC; co-CEO, The Revels Group

The BMAC launched in June during what became a year of reckoning for the music industry and society at large. Its goal: to ensure that racial reconciliation is not just a moment but a sustainable movement to bring about permanent change. “We organized and united a [200-plus] community of artist managers, attorneys and other industry professionals who have historically competed against one another to instead collaborate, share information, help one another and stand together in the face of injustice,” says Brown. Adds fellow board co-chair Prophet: “We’re working across genres, opening up the dialogue about systemic racism in the music business and taking a deep look at this buried reality to build an equitable industry and society.”

Lasting Change Requires: “Self-examination, understanding and allowing for a deep change of heart that enables us to see one another and show one another mercy and compassion. And Love.” - Brown

Cameo Carlson

Co-founder/treasurer, Nashville Music Equality; co-founder/president, mtheory Nashville

Beverly Keel

Co-founder/secretary, Nashville Music Equality; dean of media and entertainment, Middle Tennessee State University; co-founder, Change the Conversation

Kortney Toney

Co-founder/executive director, Nashville Music Equality; corporate sponsorship manager, Nashville Symphony; marketing consultant

Toney, 30; Keel, 54; and Carlson, 49, organized a Zoom panel for Blackout Tuesday “to help educate white people about the struggles and challenges that so many [Black people] have endured while just trying to live out their dreams” in the music industry, says Toney. That session led to the launch of Nashville Music Equality. The initial event, put together in 72 hours, “affected more than 1,000 people,” says Toney, and kicked off the group’s mission to create conversations that educate and provide resources “that will help people better understand the struggles that people of color face and in return create lasting impact.”

Lasting Change Requires: “Having people of color not only in the room but at the table where decisions are made.” - Toney

Daouda Leonard

Founder/CEO, CreateSafe

In a year when many artists scrambled to monetize their music on streaming platforms, Leonard, 40, offered them the information to do so. He and his team developed Record Deal Simulator, which was designed to open source music business knowledge and enable financial literacy. They also launched a mix distribution partnership with Apple Music (in beta) to help DJs make money on online platforms. “Royalty injustice and the need for financial literacy were exacerbated in 2020,” says Leonard. “Understanding where the money is, how to get it and how to calculate the value will continue to be a major theme.”

President Biden Must Focus On: “The global climate crisis. Much of what we experienced in 2020 was brought on by how we as a species treat the planet we live on.”

Josh Norek

Co-chair, Voto Latino Foundation Impact Council; president, Regalías Digitales

Norek, whose father was arrested for voter registration work 50 years ago, reinforced his long-standing support for Voto Latino by overseeing a coalition of over 300 artists, labels and executives to promote voter registration in a year in which the Latino vote tipped scales. At the same time, as president of music royalty collection firm Regalías Digitales, he pledged 20% of the company’s earnings and staff’s time to nonprofit organizations focused on civic engagement and civil rights.

Lasting Change Requires: “An ongoing commitment to volunteer and speak out against injustice. The threats to democracy and civil rights are constant, and one election cycle or a new president will not change that.”

Cristina Novo-Bernal

Founder, Conciencia Collective; owner, Artistry & Records

On June 26, a month after the police killing of George Floyd, Novo-Bernal — with the help of over 100 Latin artists and executives — launched Conciencia Collective, an alliance against racial and social injustice that hosts roundtable discussions featuring musicians, historians

and executives, in partnership with media company Mitú. “It was important to elevate the voices of artists to help educate and shine a light on injustices within our community,” says Novo-Bernal. “It’s important for us as humans to share different perspectives, but also find key insights from experts in the respective fields who wanted to share their insight and knowledge virtually during a time when people couldn’t be together physically.”

Lasting Change Requires: “Persistence, consistency and informing the public to make the right decisions.”

Steven Singer

Campaign director, entertainment division, UJA-Federation of New York

The UJA-Federation of New York sprang into action when COVID-19 struck, helping tens of thousands who have been in need of food during the pandemic. According to the New York State Department of Labor, the unemployment rate in New York City as of November 2020 stood at 12.1%, compared with 3.6% at the same time the year before. Since March, the Jewish philanthropic organization has allocated \$64 million in emergency relief, with more funding still to come. While the pandemic has “ripped open the gaps in society,” says Singer, “being able to engage the community and raise critical dollars has been super gratifying.”

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “How quickly the music industry mobilized. You see an astonishing outpouring of generosity and unity.”

Carmela Wallace

Founder, Live Free 999 Fund

Hsiao Ron Cheng
Carmela Wallace and Juice Wrld

To millions of fans, he was the superstar rapper Juice WRLD, who first scaled the Billboard Hot 100 in 2018 with the No. 2 hit “Lucid Dreams.”

To Carmela Wallace, his mother, he was Jarad Higgins, with whom she shared loving moments — and for whom she grieved after his death on Dec. 8, 2019, “due to oxycodone and codeine toxicity,” a medical examiner later ruled.

“Jarad and I were always close,” Wallace wrote in an open letter on Oct. 10, 2020, marking World Mental Health Day. “We liked to play pinball together. We had long conversations about his future and about the world in general. But like any mother and son, we had our issues. I wanted him to focus on school, but he was always more interested in music.”

Last April, Wallace established the Live Free 999 Fund to honor her son’s memory and help support programs that assist young people battling addiction, anxiety and depression.

In announcing the fund, she wrote: “Young people around the world were truly touched by Jarad’s music because he spoke to issues and situations in his music that resonated with them so deeply. I was aware of his struggles with addiction, anxiety and depression; we had many conversations about his challenges with these issues. I know he truly wanted to be free from the demons that tormented him. I made the decision upon his death that I was going to share his struggles with the world with the objective of helping others.”

The pandemic, Wallace recently told *Billboard*, “has interrupted our ‘normal’ and caused us all to walk in uncharted territory. Consequently, many people are experiencing fear, anxiety and depression.”

But there are resources available: The Live Free 999 Fund has set up a free, 24/7 text crisis line. And as more people struggle with mental health amid the coronavirus pandemic, Wallace says she plans to “extend the number of programs [we] support” this year.

Accomplishing lasting change, says Wallace, takes “a realistic plan, commitment and resources.”

Henry Cárdenas

Co-founder, Maestro Cares Foundation; CEO, Cárdenas Marketing Network

As the pandemic paused live concerts, Cárdenas focused even more on Maestro Cares, the foundation he co-founded with Marc Anthony. Construction continued on seven of its projects, including a care center for severely ill children in Peru and a home for children with renal disease in Chile, with a total of 21 initiatives on deck, including efforts with Bad Bunny and Maluma. “One of my objectives is to teach artists how to engage in philanthropy in Latin America, especially when it comes to children,” says Cárdenas. “I want to plant a seed in every town in Latin America.”

President Biden Must Focus On: “Assisting small businesses, especially in the music industry.”

Shawn “JAY-Z” Carter

Founder, Roc Nation

Jay Brown

Vice chairman, Roc Nation

Desiree Perez

CEO, Roc Nation

Roc Nation doubled down to fight racial injustice, supporting legal teams representing the families of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd, while leveraging its partnership with the NFL to raise awareness of racial and social justice issues. It created partnerships with Feeding America, Until Freedom and Gathering for Justice. “This year, we

strengthened our resolve to fight for those who don't have a voice," says Perez. "No matter what is happening, we have a platform to raise awareness and work to change the injustices in the system."

Lasting Change Requires: "Courage, conviction and commitment." - Perez

Kevin Mazur/Getty Images for Roc Nation
Jay-Z

Jason Flom

Founding board member, Innocence Project; CEO, Lava Media

As host of the podcast *Wrongful Conviction With Jason Flom* and a founding board member of the Innocence Project, Flom, 59, has advocated for prison reform and "decarceration" across the United States since the 1990s. In April, he wrote letters to a dozen governors "imploping them to release elderly, nonviolent and at-risk inmates," he says. "Yet our government's overall response has been one of deadly apathy." He adds that society needs to "totally reimagine the relationship between police and the people and communities they serve."

President Biden Must Focus On: "Making us all safer, healthier and more united by prioritizing education, health care and social services over mass incarceration and overpolicing."

Mark Gillespie

CEO, Three Six Zero

Under the leadership of Gillespie, 39, Three Six Zero joined the Black Music Action Coalition. He supported employees as they educated themselves on racial justice issues and reached out to elected officials. His company donated to myriad Black Lives Matter-affiliated organizations and made Juneteenth a companywide day of reflection. "The movement has encouraged people to create change and demand accountability and question those in power, which has been long overdue and needs to remain an everyday priority," says Gillespie. These efforts must be paired with "discipline, real long-term commitment and trust in the people around you."

My Resolution For This Year: "To safely bring people together in as many ways as possible."

Laurent Hubert

CEO, Kobalt

Under Hubert, Kobalt supported its staff amid the pandemic with increased resources, stipends for remote working, Friday afternoons off and extended vacation time around the holidays. Hubert also helped lead the creation of a stronger, more inclusive environment by

implementing a diversity, equity and inclusion board and task force, mandatory unconscious-bias training and panels for staff. “This past year has been unlike anything before, and we’ve had to adapt like many in the industry,” he says. “We continue to actively bridge the gaps the pandemic” has created.

Lasting Change Requires: “Leadership that does not shy away from innovating and taking risks. There are no shortcuts to change and success.”

Ben Katovsky

COO, BMG

As chair of BMG’s global resilience team, Katovsky, 39, ensured the company’s employees around the world were protected while shifting to remote operations during the pandemic. The death of George Floyd in May was “a bitter reminder that amid short-term crises, we still face longer-term challenges.” Under Katovsky’s guidance, five years after abolishing packing and goods accounting deductions on digital products, BMG eliminated controlled-composition clauses in its recording deals and has started to review its historic contracts for evidence of racial inequities.

President Biden Must Focus On: “Strengthening trade and the special relationship between America and the United Kingdom post-Brexit.”

Ruth Martinez

Chief people officer, Concord

In September, Concord announced a \$10 million impact investment initiative to support music and theater projects by creators from underrepresented communities, while in November, the company hosted its inaugural Reading Day, where 64 virtual groups of employees across five time zones discussed social unrest, systemic racism, individual and collective responsibility, and how the company could better address those topics. “We don’t shy away from things because they’re hard or risky,” says Martinez, “and this was well worth the effort.”

My Resolution For This Year: “To try to have more balance in my own life. My job involves making sure everyone else is OK, so a year like 2020 has made it challenging to focus on much of anything else.”

Shauna Nep

VP philanthropy, SB Projects; executive director, Yael and Scooter Braun Family Foundation

“Because of the government’s lack of assistance to those who need it during the pandemic, nothing is more important than getting cash and resources directly to people who are struggling,” says Nep, who in the past year worked to channel support from Scooter and Yael Braun, as well as SB Projects’ management clients, to an array of organizations. Those

include GiveDirectly, National Domestic Workers Alliance, Opportunity Fund, Direct Relief, Black Voters Matter, New Georgia Project, Color of Change, Action NC and Make the Road Pennsylvania. Ariana Grande joined in during the fall, sending both food trucks to feed people at the polls with World Central Kitchen and a bus offering voters important information, in partnership with Desmond Meade and his Florida Rights Restoration Coalition.

Lasting Change Requires: “Continuously listening to those working on the issues day in and day out. And then significant and continued investment in those activists and organizations who are making the change.”

Steve Stoute

Founder/CEO, UnitedMasters, Translation

“The challenge that has been most important to me is not losing momentum around the realization that racism is part of the fabric of this country,” says Stoute. “We also must all look inside of ourselves to see how we can contribute to eradicating the spread of this virus.” In June, Stoute wrote to the Association of National Advertisers asking it to prioritize diversity and inclusion. “For years I’ve seen band-aid solutions that never really led to a serious, actual commitment to engaging with African American audiences,” he says. “There is more work to be done.” At UnitedMasters, he has emphasized empowering artists to “retain ownership of their art and remain independent” — a beacon for creators, “especially in this moment.”

Lasting Change Requires: “A real commitment. Companies need to empower a chief diversity officer who reports directly to the CEO. Is your board as diverse as it can be? I’m sure it’s not.”

Katie Vinten

Founder/CEO, Black Diamond Artist Management; co-founder, FACET Publishing, FACET Records

Vinten, 37 — an artist manager, music publisher and label executive — leads companies where the majority of her clients are members of underrepresented groups. While trying to educate herself and her team on racial justice issues, she also has an ongoing commitment to research autoimmune disease. (Vinten has a daughter with Type 1 diabetes.) In 2020, thanks to Vinten’s support, the JDRF annual gala, which raises funds for diabetes research, switched to a virtual event, with appearances by Bebe Rexha, JoJo and “Type 1 warrior” RaeLynn. “I’m so proud of being able to pivot and still raise valuable research dollars in an unprecedented time,” says Vinten. “Being an immune-compromised person from any ailment during this time has been very scary, to say the least.”

Artist I Most Want to See in Concert After the Pandemic: “It will always be John Mayer. Sorry, not sorry.”

Darcus Beese

President/CEO, Island Records

LaTrice Burnette

President, 4th & Broadway; executive vp, Island Records

Under Beese, Island went full speed ahead last year even amid the pandemic, with new music from many of its marquee artists: Jessie Reyez and Shawn Mendes released full-length albums; Skip Marley's debut EP arrived; and Demi Lovato dropped a number of singles, including "Commander in Chief," a scornful track aimed at former President Trump. "Content is still king — or queen," says Burnette, who is chair of the programming and curation committee of Universal Music Group's Task Force for Meaningful Change and was named president of the recently relaunched Island imprint 4th & Broadway.

President Biden Must Focus On: "The rehabilitation of our inner-city communities, which have been neglected for way too long." - Burnette

Jeff Burroughs

Senior vp marketing, Def Jam Recordings

Natina Nimene

Senior vp urban promotion and artist relations, Def Jam Recordings

As a member of Universal Music Group's Task Force for Meaningful Change, Burroughs has led the legislation and policy subcommittee, which partnered with such organizations as Color of Change, Voto Latino and Michelle Obama's When We All Vote. "Our goal is to help amplify their messages and lend our support in as many ways as possible," he says. Nimene, 40, spearheaded the voting initiative for the task force, working with Def Jam artists to encourage getting people to the polls in record numbers. "From 2 Chainz participating in Michelle Obama's ABC special *VOMO: Vote or Miss Out*, [to] Jeezy using his voice on National Voter Registration Day, there was nothing they wouldn't do," she says.

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: "The disparity between men and women in compensation and opportunity. As women, it's incredibly challenging to navigate the corporate ladder and advocate for fair and equitable compensation." - Nimene

Prince Williams/Wireimage

2 Chainz

Katina Bynum

Executive vp East Coast labels, urban, Universal Music Enterprises

Appointed to her current role in October 2019, Bynum was brought in to help develop strategic initiatives across the urban rosters for UMe's Republic, Island, Interscope and Def Jam rosters. As part of Universal Music Group's Task Force for Meaningful Change (and as

the head of UMe's specific task force), she says she's focused on "long-range planning — so when the pandemic is over and everyone returns to their lives, what has been put in place or accomplished continues to effect change."

My Resolution For This Year: "Not to forget 2020 and all the lessons I learned."

Steve "Steve-O" Carless

A&R, Republic Records; founder, SC Company

Marleny Reyes

Senior vp marketing, Republic Records

Republic Records scored last year's biggest musical successes, including The Weeknd's blockbuster *After Hours* album and two best-selling surprise releases from Taylor Swift. But equally important to the label, and executives like Carless and Reyes, has been the formation of the Republic Records Action Committee, created "to focus on internal education, social sustainability and informational context across an array of issues," says Carless, who co-chairs the committee with vp media/cultural impact and engagement Amaiya Davis. "It's our way of keeping ourselves accountable," he says. "Something we are very aware of and proud of at the same time."

President Biden Must Focus On: "Policies, solutions and more opportunities for small businesses. Entrepreneurship is what this country is built on, and the prosperity of those who endeavor to create their own means a lot to our communities." - Carless

Dave J Hogan/Getty Images
Taylor Swift

Blxck Cxsper

Founder, Trans Trenderz

During the pandemic, Cxsper started The Ghostly Beats Project, an initiative under their Trans Trenderz label that asks allies of the transgender community to donate studio time, beats and production assistance to up-and-coming Black trans artists. As a result, Cxsper has signed more and more trans artists to their label, giving voice to a community that has been historically marginalized. "Music has the power to humanize trans people in the eyes of society," they say. "Building a platform to elevate Black trans voices into the mainstream music industry is the way that I'm contributing my skills to help."

Lasting Change Requires: "Sacrifice."

Ethan Diamond

Co-founder/CEO, Bandcamp

As artists lost touring income, Diamond's team introduced Bandcamp Fridays, waiving the platform's revenue share on music sales and giving more money directly to artists on the first Friday of each month. As a co-founder of the company, Diamond has worked to ensure artists and labels are fairly compensated. "Supporting musicians for their work has always been the core of Bandcamp's mission, but that mission has felt especially important this past year," he says. "Since the pandemic hit, fans on Bandcamp have bought over \$150 million worth of music and merchandise directly from artists and labels. It has been inspiring to see."

Artist I Most Want to See in Concert After the Pandemic: "Fishbone."

Phylicia Fant

Co-head of urban music, Columbia Records

Melissa Thomas

Senior vp international marketing, Columbia/Epic Records

Fant helped organize Columbia's labelwide series of Zoom calls and virtual potlucks for staffers to "air their frustrations and confusions." But the 20-year industry veteran, who has worked at all three major-label groups, says the biggest cause "is the fight for equality." Thomas, 39, has committed to playing an "active role in the change we need to see in this world," she says, noting participation in such Sony-wide initiatives as the get-out-the-vote campaign Your Voice, Your Power, Your Vote and the music industry's Blackout Tuesday. Thomas also marched in protests in her home city of New York and in Washington, D.C., for the 57th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

My Resolution For This Year: "To be OK with being my authentic self and to do everything I can to promote the culture I'm deeply and proudly ingrained in." - Fant

EJ Gaines

Co-executive director, Motown Gospel; vp marketing, Capitol CMG

In addition to participating in Universal Music Group's UPLIFT mentorship program and encouraging the next generation of music executives, Gaines has proudly led Bonus Tracks Nashville, an initiative that creates industry pathways for high school students as an extension of Capitol's program. "I'm passionate about any conversation that invites people to listen and learn from one another," says Gaines, 39, a former entertainment lawyer who has championed gospel music during his 15-year career. "That's true for any issue — from race and religion to health and socioeconomics."

Artist I Most Want to See in Concert After the Pandemic: "Stevie Wonder. The pandemic has reminded me how precious and fleeting life can be. I want to see more legends onstage while we still have the chance."

Elliot Grainge

Founder/CEO, 10K Projects

Danielle Price

Senior vp business and legal affairs, 10K Projects

Grainge, 27, pledged \$500,000 in June to launch the independent label's first charitable division, 10K Together, aimed at addressing the issue of racial injustice "at a broader scale," says Price. With her help, 10K Together has since formed a paid internship program for Black youth, implemented the Creative Fund to give creatives of color startup capital for their projects and provided Thanksgiving meals from Black-owned eateries for hundreds of Los Angeles families, in addition to making several donations to support the Black Lives Matter movement.

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: "The impending start to the Mechanical Licensing Collective; I wish more people understood this milestone." - Price

Naji Grampus

Director of urban strategy, North America, The Orchard

The pandemic "removed the cloak of invisibility around many systemic issues that plague America, such as police brutality, health care and job security," says Grampus, 32, who helped lead an effort to repeal the New York state law that shielded the public release of police disciplinary records. The campaign garnered over 500,000 impressions and 18,500 signatures before reaching New York legislators. In June, Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed the bill that repealed the law. "Many record labels, artists and influencers shared and supported this campaign," says Grampus. "Any semblance of change begins with transparency."

President Biden Must Focus On: "Forgiveness of student loan debt. The paradigm has shifted in 2020, and the need to take out overwhelming debt in exchange for a degree seems obsolete."

L. Camille Hackney

Chief partnerships officer, brand partnerships, commercial licensing, Atlantic Records; head of global brand partnerships council, Warner Music Group; president, advisory board, Warner Music Group/Blavatnik Family Foundation Social Justice Fund

Lanre Gaba

GM/senior vp A&R, Atlantic Records

Hackney describes 2020 as a year of "dual pandemics." While COVID-19 forced global lockdowns, "the heinous murder of George Floyd brought the festering pandemic of systematic racism to the forefront," she says. "It served as a catalyst for so many to become active participants in the social justice movement." Gaba helped propel the success of Cardi B, Cordae, Roddy Ricch and Abir. Hackney, who works with the employee resource group of the Atlantic Black Coalition, is also president of the advisory board of the \$100 million WMG/BFF Social Justice Fund announced in June. "Helping change makers —

like Desmond Meade at the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition and Alicia Garza at Black Futures Lab, who fight every day for racial justice and social change — is incredible,” she says.

My Resolution For This Year: “Seek information. Make change. Walk more. Hug everyone — when it’s safe.” - Hackney

Kevin Liles

Co-founder/CEO, 300 Entertainment

Rayna Bass

Senior vp marketing, 300 Entertainment

300 Entertainment celebrated chart successes from Young Thug, Gunna and breakout star Megan Thee Stallion, who nabbed Grammy nominations for best new artist and record of the year for her “Savage” remix featuring Beyoncé. But Liles, 52, says 2020 was set apart by “creative expression, raising our voices and freeing our minds,” noting the launch of the company’s Social Justice League to combat police brutality and support victims with the goal “to be the example, not a statistic.” Liles also prioritized the fight to “retain our democracy, particularly the battle against voter suppression.”

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “The lack of diversity in the C-suite and corporations.” - Liles

Julian K. Petty

Head of business and legal affairs, Warner Records

Chris Atlas

Executive vp urban music and marketing, Warner Records

Warner’s signing of Keedron Bryant following the viral reaction to his track “I Just Wanna Live” was a call to action for the label, says Atlas, “to use the powerful words of the song and amplify its message around the world. With all of the net profits derived from sales of the song being paid to the NAACP, we continue to see this song as a beacon to empower the movement for social justice.” Moved by the issue of educational inequality, Petty and his family worked with Warner independent label partner Cmnty Culture “and donated funds to purchase several hundred laptops, noise-cancellation headphones and Internet access for kids in the Long Beach [Calif.] school district,” he says.

My Resolution For This Year: “To create a mentorship program within Warner Records and WMG for young, aspiring professionals.” - Atlas

Mark Pitts

President, RCA Records; CEO, ByStorm Entertainment

Tunji Balogun

Executive vp A&R, RCA Records; co-founder, Keep Cool

Carolyn Williams

Executive vp marketing, RCA Records

Longtime RCA executive Pitts was named president of the label earlier in January, with responsibility for driving its creative business operations and cultural initiatives. Balogun is a founding member of the Black Executive Excellence Association, which includes executives across several music companies, while his own imprint, Keep Cool, has created mental health programs and a mentorship program for young Black women. Like many Sony executives, Williams worked extensively on the voter registration campaign Your Voice, Your Power, Your Vote, helping lead marketing and creative for projects like the video that featured artists from Pharrell Williams to DJ Khaled to P!nk. “The fact we were able to partner with so many of our artists who shared our passion really made me proud,” says Williams, who is also a key player on the label’s Black Music Action Committee. “Everything from social justice to community stability to health care to education are all affected by how we vote.”

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “The strength and cultural significance of R&B music.” - Williams

Sylvia Rhone

Chairwoman/CEO, Epic Records

Cory Johnson

VP promotion, Epic Records

A trailblazing powerhouse since she became the first woman of color to lead a major label in 1994, Rhone says she was “compelled to expand on the activism I’ve undertaken my entire life” and helped launch Sony Music’s Your Voice, Your Power, Your Vote initiative. The campaign posted star-studded videos with DJ Khaled, Cyndi Lauper, Pharrell Williams and many others, but Rhone’s behind-the-scenes work included consulting with leaders such as Rashad Robinson from Color of Change, Van Jones, Alicia Garza of Black Future Labs, and Billy Wimsatt of Movement Voter Fund, among others. “Sometimes we overlook the importance of people on the ground working hard every day to change people’s lives,” she says. Johnson is on the board of Po’Righteous Teacher, which fights to eliminate the reading deficits that hold back boys of color.

Lasting Change Requires: “Radical honesty with oneself and others, true communication and collaboration, strategy and persistence. One protest is not going to change anything. Change is a daily commitment.” - Rhone

Frazer Harrison/Getty Images for EA Sports Bowl at Bud Light Super Bowl Music Fest
DJ Khaled

Chris Taylor

Global president of music and live, Entertainment One Music

For the chief of independent music company eOne, the summer uprising for racial justice created a “great awakening and demand for change that is seismic, not incremental,” says Taylor. His concern extends to mental health awareness and support, as well as pandemic relief for underserved communities. In response, eOne is doing unconscious-bias training across the whole company, and its teams are supporting 14 partnerships that help underrepresented groups gain access to creative industries through internships and paid classroom learning.

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “Fighting systemic racism and a pandemic should not preclude us from addressing systemic sexism in the music industry. We need to do a lot more to support women in our business.”

Pierre “P” Thomas

CEO, Quality Control Music

Kevin “Coach K” Lee

COO, Quality Control Music

Despite the success of Lil Baby’s protest anthem “The Bigger Picture,” a No. 3 Billboard Hot 100 hit, Lee says releasing music that spoke to the past year’s racial reckoning wasn’t easy. “There was finally a much-needed uprising, but navigating that while putting art out was tricky,” he says. “The challenge has been how to survive as a business during a time of such tumultuous change with these horrific moments in Black America.” Realizing the importance of this movement, the label also sought to raise funds for needs in its Atlanta community “like we always have,” he says.

Lasting Change Requires: “Heart, vision and being repetitive. You have to keep at it over and over before that change can set in for good.” - Lee

Steven Victor

CEO, Victor Victor Worldwide; senior vp A&R, Universal Music Group

Reeling from the death of George Floyd, Victor channeled his frustration with “systemic inequalities” in the United States to launch the Victor Victor Foundation. In partnership with the apparel brand Palm Angels, the foundation raised \$100,000 for public schools in Brooklyn and provided \$50,000 to the Know Your Rights Camp. The foundation also backed a \$25,000 grant for Brooklyn students through the Fund for Public Schools and helped support families in Brooklyn and Los Angeles by working with Tony Draper’s Feed Your City Challenge. “The lack of support and access to opportunities, especially within communities of color, has only been amplified by the global pandemic,” says Victor.

Lasting Change Requires: “Commitment, endurance and resilience.”

Nicole Wyskoarko

Executive vp/co-head of A&R, Interscope Geffen A&M

“George Floyd’s murder galvanized the industry around the issue of social justice and was a catalyst for real change to begin within our business,” says Wyskoarko, 42, who helped launch IGA Black Voices, a special group within the label to ensure the well-being of its Black employees. Through regular meetings, she says the group “has become a safe space [for members] to say how they feel, provide support and create new initiatives for the company to combat racism,” which helps inform her work co-chairing the institutional and internal change committee of Universal Music Group’s Task Force for Meaningful Change.

Artist I Most Want to See in Concert After the Pandemic: “I would love to go to a music festival where I can see as many of our artists in one place as possible.”

Justin Adams

Senior director of A&R/artist manager, TaP Music

As a member of the TaP Music team working with Dua Lipa and other internationally based artists, Adams helped explain “the gravity of what was going on in the States during the aftermath of George Floyd’s and Breonna Taylor’s murders,” he says. Internally, he hosted virtual town hall discussions, urging artists and managers to have “real, honest conversations about systemic racism both here and abroad,” while planning how artists could use their “platforms to be part of the solution.” He worked with the company’s new nonprofit division, TaP Futures, to find programs to support in the United States “similar to ones we’re committed to in the U.K.,” he says.

President Biden Must Focus On: “In 2019, my insulin pen cost \$150 out of pocket. When I had to get it replaced in the U.K., that same pen only cost 7 pounds [\$9.60]. Same insulin, same manufacturer.”

Elena Awbrey

Founder/artist manager, Moonshot Management

Awbrey, 39 — who recently launched Moonshot Management with such clients as Lauren Jauregui, Chika and Evil, among others — found ways to “amplify the diverse voices of my artists and the causes that drive them” in a year that she says “exposed the holes in the system.” Over the summer, Jauregui joined one of Conciencia Collective’s weekly chats to discuss LGBTQ and Black trans communities and their importance to music and Latinx cultures. “When I’m able to allow them to speak truth to power,” says Awbrey, “I know I’m amplifying their impact.”

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “Artists who are their own videographers, engineers and accompaniment have thrived during lockdown.”

Jonathan Azu

Founder/CEO, Culture Collective

Azu launched the management firm Culture Collective in 2019 to apply his experience in ways that would not only benefit his clients but also promote diversity and inclusion in the music business — a mission that became especially important in 2020. Amid record unemployment caused by the pandemic, his company in January launched Diversity in Music, a philanthropic jobs database created specifically for people of color in the music industry. “Minority groups suffered joblessness at twice the rate of white counterparts, further intensifying an already massive diversity gap in the industry,” he says. “It’s hard to be what you don’t ever see, and I have dedicated myself to changing that and supporting causes that do the same.”

My Resolution For This Year: “To inspire the next generation of executives to learn, lead and make positive impacts on the future of our business.”

Alana Balden

Manager, Full Stop Management

Balden, 32, shares responsibility with the Full Stop team for clients Sara Bareilles and Lizzo, and spent 2020 fighting for racial justice and women’s reproductive rights, while also supporting front-line healthcare workers amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Full Stop supported the launch of Bareilles’ More Love campaign that encouraged fans to post their voting plans on social media. In March, Lizzo sent meals to over 70 of the hardest-hit hospitals in the country, and, on Juneteenth, she launched a fundraiser that took in \$200,000 for Minneapolis-based organizations and HeadCount. “The Black Lives Matter movement is something Lizzo has been living her whole life,” says Balden, “but she got especially active this year.”

Lasting Change Requires: “Perseverance.”

Cliff Burnstein

Peter Mensch

Co-founders, Q Prime Artist Management

Despite the touring shutdown, Q Prime maintained its payroll, health benefits and contributions to employee retirement plans, while making sure the firm’s acts — including Metallica, Foals, Eric Church, The Black Keys, Ashley McBryde, Muse and Cage the Elephant — “got the complete, full attention that they’ve gotten previously,” says Burnstein. He and Mensch prioritized contributing to voting rights organizations, including Eric Holder’s National Democratic Redistricting Committee and Stacey Abrams’ Fair Fight. “It’s an issue that is very important to both of us,” says Burnstein, who adds that pre-pandemic, “we were lucky enough to have Stacey stop by Q Prime New York for a town hall with the staff.”

President Biden Must Focus On: “Climate change — the issue of our time. It affects everybody in this country and everybody in the world.” - Burnstein

Bobby Campbell

Manager (Lady Gaga), Mermaid Music Management

Last spring, Campbell and his client Lady Gaga paused plans for their own project — her album *Chromatica* — to work toward a larger goal. In April, the Gaga-curated One World: Together at Home concert special/fundraiser raised over \$127 million and drew 20.74 million U.S. viewers. Those funds have since translated into food aid, personal protective equipment for front-line workers, rental assistance and schooling for millions of individuals affected by the pandemic. Campbell vows to continue “doing the hard work regularly, not only when it’s trendy or the thing to be doing.”

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “The mental health crisis in the music community. 2020 has only accelerated the impact that mental health issues are doing to so many of our peers and the depth of its harm.”

Shawn Gee

President, Live Nation Urban; manager (The Roots, Jill Scott)

Hsiao Ron Cheng
Shawn Gee

The heightened awareness in the past year of racial inequity — “both within society and specifically within the music business — resonated greatly with me,” says Shawn Gee, founder and president of Live Nation Urban and the manager of Jill Scott and The Roots. “As a Black man, these racial issues and noninclusive environments are things that I have lived with my entire life. As Black people, we’ve had to navigate our journey knowing the obstacles and potholes that we will face along the way because of the systemic issues that exist.

“In fact,” adds Gee, “part of the impetus for the formation of my venture with Live Nation over three years ago was to try and fill some of the voids that exist in live music for Black artists, executives and entrepreneurs. My conversation with [Live Nation CEO] Michael Rapino in 2017 as we talked about the viability of this idea was very intentional and honest.”

In October, Live Nation Urban announced it had compiled the Black Tour Directory, a comprehensive industry resource developed to bolster inclusivity and expand opportunities for Black professionals and Black-owned companies in the world of live music. This one-stop portal lists hundreds of qualified, experienced and trusted Black tour managers, production managers, sound engineers, lighting experts, stage/set designers, stage managers, techs, travel agents, caterers, tour accountants, bus companies, security staff and more.

As a board member of the Social Justice Fund established by Warner Music Group and the Blavatnik Family Foundation, Gee and Live Nation Urban are looking to make both immediate and long-term change.

“This generation of executives needs to plant the seeds, invest in the people and the programs, form the relationships, chip away at the glass,” says Gee, “and hopefully what will result is a better, more equitable situation for the next few generations.

Lucas Keller

Founder/president, Milk & Honey Music + Sports + Ventures

Keeping himself “very busy working from our kitchen table,” Keller, 36, says that Milk & Honey’s 95 clients — songwriters, producers, DJs, mixers and artists — have been fortunate enough to stay active during a challenging year, and it is his No. 1 priority to ensure that this doesn’t come at the cost of mental health. “We’ve spent a tremendous amount of time guiding our clients; finding new ways for them to work; finding specific, focused projects; and most of all, making sure they are in a good mental place,” he says.

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “The growth of the independent sector. So many great label-services companies have come to the forefront in the past couple of years, and we’re going to see more artists break while owning their rights.”

Anthony Saleh

CEO, Emagen Entertainment Group

Ebonie Ward

Partner, Emagen Entertainment Group

Saleh, 34, and Ward, the founding members of the Black Music Action Coalition, manage hip-hop and R&B artists like Future and Gunna, among others, largely staying behind the scenes. But this past year, they stepped up to promote change for the greater good, focusing on increasing voter registration, particularly in the Black community, and donating to charitable organizations, including food and clothing drives year-round.

Lasting Change Requires: “Patience. It will take a long time — longer than life itself — but don’t stop.” - Saleh

Wassim “Sal” Slaiby

Founder/CEO, SALXCO/XO Records

[Read the full cover story on The Weeknd and the XO Records brain trust here.](#)

Ty Stiklorius

Founder/CEO, Friends at Work

This past year, Stiklorius joined the Movement for Black Lives Artist Council in support of The BREATHE Act, which would divest tax money from policing. “We are loudly supporting defunding the police,” she says, “which I take to mean focusing on efforts that make sure our dollars go more toward services that help our communities rather than harm, punish and

deplete them.” She also joined the executive leadership council for the Black Music Action Coalition and saw her client and partner John Legend host December’s Global Citizen Prize Awards, which honors those fighting global poverty.

President Biden Must Focus On: “Reminding us that we have more in common than the issues that divide us. ‘Compromise’ and ‘middle ground’ should not be dirty words.”

David Stromberg

GM, Cactus Jack

Challenging the industry to give power back to creators, the GM of Travis Scott’s boutique label, and a founding member of the Black Music Action Coalition, has sought to make the music industry accountable for social justice while pushing the limits of promotion and marketing. “The fact that 2020 is Travis’ and Cactus Jack’s biggest year yet is a testament to the groundwork we put in leading up to this point,” he says. “We are launching things next year that I think are unprecedented and will hopefully continue to inspire.”

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “The cyclical nature of the music business. We are in the second era of ringtones, but presented by TikTok. Also, I imagine the record business immediately post-Napster was a lot like what touring and the agency business looked like this year. I’m interested in following the evolution of this cycle and how the business adjusts to unprecedented disruption.”

Abou “Bu” Thiam

Founder/CEO, BuVision Entertainment

Thiam knows that accomplishing lasting change means being present. While managing Kanye West has been monumental for Thiam, taking a “pause” during the pandemic has also given him an opportunity to build a closer relationship with his family. “Things got real this year,” he says, “and I think it was a real opportunity to really go deeper within and establish stronger connections.” He worked with West to establish a college fund for George Floyd’s daughter and donated \$2 million to Black resistance efforts and to cover legal fees for the families of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor.

President Biden Must Focus On: “Those exact words he said during his acceptance speech to the Black community. He said, ‘You’ve always had my back time and time again, and I promise you that I’ll have yours.’ So that’s exactly what we need — for him to have our backs.”

Jordan Wolosky

COO/GM, AG Artists

This year, “pulling out the roots of systemic racism” was top of mind for Wolosky, 33, and the Shawn Mendes Foundation. To stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, Mendes handed over his Instagram to young activists for an Insta takeover — amplifying the

message to the superstar's nearly 60 million followers. "Sometimes the best way to help," adds Wolosky, "is to step out of the way, uplift others who can speak more knowledgeably, listen and learn."

My Resolution For This Year: "Continue to learn from my newborn son. There's a lot of wisdom in that purity and his ability to only exist in the present."

Josh Gruss

Founder/CEO, Round Hill Music

After raising nearly \$600 million for acquisitions, including \$328 million with a public listing on the London Stock Exchange, Gruss says the tumult in the world made the company "take a strong look in the mirror and think, 'What can we do better to be more inclusive at Round Hill?'" The company hired a human resources director; created a diversity, equality and inclusion committee; plans paid internships; and is creating a scholarship to support students at Berklee College of Music. His staff helped him see things "that needed to change," says Gruss. "Openness to feedback, not being myopic and having some humility are all requirements for those that lead."

My Resolution For This Year: "To finish my degree from Berklee. I've been working on that for 22 years, but I have only five courses left to graduate."

Walter Jones

Co-head of A&R, Universal Music Publishing Group

UMPG tapped Jones to serve on the charitable giving committee for its Task Force for Meaningful Change, which "has donated to different organizations covering a wide spectrum of underserved communities," he says. But he's most proud of organizing the music publisher's own task force, alongside UMPG senior director of business and legal affairs Angelica Merida, director of global finance Stephen Francis and other UMPG employees "to help effect positive change both internally and externally," says Jones.

Lasting Change Requires: "Fearlessness and consistency."

Melanie McClain

A&R, Secretly Publishing

Making it her mission to diversify Secretly Publishing's roster with Black alternative voices since she arrived in 2019, McClain, 31, is also reaching out beyond the independent music company. In 2020, she created the Blurred Lines community on the invite-only social media app Clubhouse to help Black musicians learn about publishing, distribution, digital marketing, brand partnerships and blockchain from experts around the world. "The challenge to find supporters who are willing to invest in left-of-center Black musicians from across the diaspora is very important to me," says McClain.

My Resolution For This Year: “Stay true to myself and pull people of color up with me.”

Jon Platt

Chairman/CEO, Sony/ATV Music Publishing

When Platt was appointed chairman/CEO of Sony/ATV in 2019, he became the music industry’s highest-ranking Black executive — and took action to foster more inclusion. That commitment took on even greater urgency following the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police in May. Platt penned an open letter soon after, calling on the music business to help “lead society out of crisis.” Reflecting on the issue of racial justice and equity seven months later, Platt remains unwavering in his belief that accomplishing sustainable change requires “discipline ... and the willingness to lean into what makes us feel uncomfortable.”

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “How hip-hop culture continues to drive the TikTok movement, yet a handful of mainstream ‘social media influencers’ have co-opted the culture — choreography and music — and are earning significant income.”

Ryan Press

President of A&R, U.S., Warner Chappell Music

As one of the founding members of the advisory panel of the Warner Music Group/Blavatnik Family Foundation Social Justice Fund announced in June, Press helps oversee the \$100 million effort to support education, music and campaigns against violence and racism. Inside Warner Chappell, he has worked to set up ongoing open discussions about racial justice. “I’ve really leaned into helping our company navigate everything that has been going on in the world,” says Press, “from how we work while in quarantine to the different ways we can move the needle on social justice, in and outside of the workplace.”

Lasting Change Requires: “Social justice to also bring about economic justice. If we really want to help historically underserved and marginalized populations around the globe, we need to focus on education and access to opportunity.”

Justin Shukat

Co-founding partner/president, Primary Wave Music

The pandemic caused “a very trying year for all of us,” says Shukat, 46, but it was the Black Lives Matter movement and related protests that spurred Primary Wave toward activism. “The industry took pause with its own #blackout moment,” he says. “But I kept wondering, ‘Is enough being done?’ ” That led to the formation of the company’s Racial Equality Task Force, which Shukat says is a force for change for Primary Wave. It includes a member from each department of the company and will hold educational seminars on bias, diversity and equality, with the broader goal of creating an independent publisher consortium, “where we partner with other players to turn the voice volume up on change within the industry.”

President Biden Must Focus On: “Listening to all and trying to unite our country.”

Rafa Arcaute

Co-founder, Desde Casa Estudio; vp A&R, Sony Music Latin-Iberia

Julio Reyes Copello

Co-founder, Desde Casa Estudio; owner, Art House

When the pandemic shut down live performances and recordings, producers Arcaute and Reyes Copello quickly realized that many of the musicians, producers and engineers they worked with were now unemployed. With the support of Sony Music Latin-Iberia, the two multiple Latin Grammy Award winners launched Desde Casa Estudio and paid those professionals to teach over 100 classes online that were seen by more than 10,000 students in the United States, Latin America, Portugal and Spain who could tune in free of charge. “We have special classes and chats from some of the most prominent names in our industry and roster,” says Arcaute, citing such stars as Maluma, Camilo, Carlos Vives and Fonseca.

Lasting Change Requires: “Vision, a plan, focus, sensibility and dedication.” - Arcaute

Ebro Darden

Global head of hip-hop and R&B, Apple Music

The most important thing to Darden, 45, during this year of upheaval has been “supporting Black activism and activists on the front lines, heightening the understanding of #DefundThePolice, consistently engaging people to understand the political process and holding elected officials accountable, all while unpacking white supremacy inside Apple and outside in society.” Through the summer, he used his morning show on WQHT (Hot 97) New York to speak with passion and purpose about the root causes of the protests in the streets, and in September, he co-created and hosted Apple’s first Rap Life Live event, which juxtaposed performances from Lil Baby, Rapsody, Wale and Nas — filmed on the empty campus of Howard University — with interviews with school activists. The point, says Darden, was to “show how the worlds overlap: music and the message.”

My Resolution For This Year: “Keep the momentum.”

Thaddaeus McAdams/FilmMagic
Rapsody

Marian Dicus

VP, global co-head of music, Spotify

“In a year when we have all been forced to pause, I have been fortunate enough to dedicate more time to causes that matter to me most,” says Dicus, including discrimination against Asian Americans, injustices faced by the Black community and the underrepresentation of women in the music industry. Dicus is lead sponsor for Spotify’s Asian American Pacific Islander employee resource group, through which she serves as a mentor, and also supports

her team's work around Black Lives Matter, which includes increasing and creating new programs for Black creators. "It's important to have diversity in the rooms where decisions are made, and I am glad that I can be that voice for the team," she says.

President Biden Must Focus On: "Support for independent music venues that have been affected by the pandemic."

John Farrey

Label relations manager, Amazon Music

Farrey, 31, helped launch a speaker series at Amazon focused on Black music history, including an "especially inspiring" lecture on Smokey Robinson by Clive Davis Institute chair Jason King. He also took to the streets in battleground states during the election for some "mask-to-mask" conversations with voters in Pennsylvania and Georgia. One needs "the courage to have a few doors slammed in your face because the door that opens will make a difference," he says. "Access to voting was a huge focus for me this year."

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: "Marshall Jefferson's essay about why he left DJ-ing was one of the most impactful articles I read this year. The dance and electronic industry still faces inequities, and Marshall's piece articulated these in a personal way."

Mary Kay Huse

Co-founder/CEO, Mandolin

When touring stopped, Huse, 40, and Mandolin co-founders Steve Caldwell and Robert Meitus realized the need to help artists stay connected with their fans. Mandolin's platform allows acts and venues to create and monetize content like livestreams and fan experiences; as certain local regulations have allowed, such clients as City Winery and the Ryman Auditorium have successfully offered hybrid in-person and digital shows. Mandolin also served as the livestream provider and platform for the Election Day #iVoted Festival, and will stream the 34th annual Tibet House US benefit concert in February. "Bringing the industry and the music back into people's lives," says Huse, "has been my sole driver."

Lasting Change Requires: "A combination of big thinking and tactical execution, in addition to the grit needed to power through the next unforeseeable challenge."

Vivien Lewit

Global head of artist relations, YouTube

Lewit helped launch the video streaming service's Black Voices Fund, which will provide \$100 million in grants over three years for the platform to acquire and produce original content by Black artists to tell their stories and expand their viewership. On Jan. 16, YouTube announced that 132 creators from across six countries are among the first group of grant

recipients. “We’re also working on creating special moments through video that bring to life celebrations of Black culture, identity and experiences from the perspective of Black artists and thought leaders in music,” says Lewit.

Richard Weitz

Agent, WME; co-founder, Quarantunes

Demi Weitz

Co-founder, Quarantunes

Richard Weitz, 51, a TV agent for WME (Tina Fey, Ricky Gervais), and his 17-year-old daughter, Demi, launched what became one of the most impactful good-news stories of the pandemic. The *Quarantunes* performance series has featured concerts by Kenny Loggins, Beck, Rick Astley, Seal, H.E.R., Chaka Khan, Barry Manilow, John Legend and numerous others. Co-hosted by producer James “Jimmy Jam” Harris III (Janet Jackson, Mary J. Blige) and legendary record executive Clive Davis, *Quarantunes* has raised more than \$16 million for over 30 charities, including the Equal Justice Initiative and Free America, which are both working to end mass incarceration in the United States.

President Biden Must Focus On: “The United States feeling like it’s the greatest country in the world again and that he cares about everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, race or religious beliefs.” - Richard Weitz

Jarred Arfa

GM, Artist Group International

The AGI GM is part of the company’s team that oversees Billy Joel’s record-breaking residency at Madison Square Garden in New York. Last March, Arfa, 36, contracted COVID-19, and while he has since recovered, he says he has “done tests and procedures for scientific data and research” related to the illness and raised awareness about “COVID long haulers.” “There is still widespread misunderstanding that if you survive the virus you will be completely fine in a few weeks, which is unfortunately not the case for a significant percentage of people who have caught the virus, including myself.”

President Biden Must Focus On: “Bringing much-needed sanity and humanity back to the White House.”

Lori Feldman

Chief marketing officer, Paradigm Talent Agency

Feldman joined Paradigm in September 2019 and leads brand partnerships and marketing. But when the pandemic hit, she began looking for new ways to generate revenue for the company to offset touring losses. Outside work, she also leveraged fund-raising efforts to support social-justice organizations whose “causes have been near and dear to me,” citing the Equal Justice Initiative and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. Closer to home, she focused on supporting Black-owned small businesses, raising enough money for King Seven Katering to

provide meals for hundreds of hospital workers in the Bronx. “It’s been moving to see that we directly impacted friends and strangers alike while providing some much-needed relief,” she says.

Artist I Most Want to See in Concert After the Pandemic: “R.E.M. I realize that’s highly unlikely, but a girl can dream.”

Samantha Kirby Yoh

Partner/co-head of global music, UTA

Kirby Yoh has supported organizations like Diversify the Stage — Noelle Scaggs’ initiative to bring more people of color, women and LGBTQ+ individuals into the concert industry — and is a founding board member of She Is the Music, the “industrywide movement to empower female creators. It is crucial for the industry to focus on increasing diversity, equity and inclusion in the music landscape,” she says. With its executive director Amelia Bauer, Kirby Yoh also co-founded Noise for Now, which raised \$290,000 for 16 organizations throughout the United States, including funds that help underresourced women access health care and clinics that provide reproductive health services.

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “The devastating impact on the venues and tangential businesses — crew, stagehands, catering and parking attendants.”

Yves C. Pierre

Jacqueline Reynolds-Drumm

Concerts agents, ICM Partners

When ICM employees began making donations to organizations on the front line of the Black Lives Matter movement, Reynolds-Drumm, 34, and Pierre were instrumental in getting the agency to match each contribution. The pair, who represent Rhapsody, Madison Beer and Baby Rose, were also founding members of Diversify ICM, which was created to combat internal inequities and foster participation in initiatives that support underserved Black communities.

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “Forty-seven percent of 2021 Grammy nominations were women, and traditionally male-dominated categories were swept by females. These strides would not have been possible without the hard work of so many. Shout out to She Is the Music. Let’s keep it up.” - Reynolds-Drumm

Marissa Smith

Music agent, WME

Last year, Smith, 26, led WME’s new Virtual Appearance group, which confirmed hundreds of virtual shows alongside promoters and platforms for such acts as Dua Lipa, Culture Club, Hank Williams Jr., Lindsey Stirling and more. She played a key role in helping to create a diversity team in WME’s Nashville office to create mentorship opportunities and compile a

database for touring professionals. The Virtual Appearance group “held hundreds of meetings with technology companies to make sure that we are as knowledgeable as possible in this space for our clients, and it has really paid off,” says Smith. “We feel that virtual performances will remain a piece of some artists’ 360-degree approach long after the pandemic.”

Lasting Change Requires: “Thousands of small steps, and knowledge that there is no such thing as failure — there is only learning from mistakes and persevering.”

GARY HERSHORN/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock
Jennifer Lopez

Tom Worcester

Head of music brand partnerships, Creative Artists Agency

Angie Rho

Head of music business affairs, Creative Artists Agency

Over the past year, CAA learned the importance of being a full-service agency, as touring halted due to the pandemic. The company’s music brand partnerships department, headed by Worcester, closed over 300 deals that earned clients over \$40 million, including an extension of Jennifer Lopez’s role as Coach’s lead ambassador and Cardi B’s partnership with Balenciaga for its winter 2020 collection. For Rho, CAA’s music department’s lasting growth stemmed from its ability to expand through podcasts and in the Latin music sector. “We were able to produce virtual concerts in artists’ basements, shoot brand spots in their backyards and execute social media campaigns from their kitchen tables,” says Worcester. “This adaptability will likely change the way we do business.”

President Biden Must Focus On: “Consistency, across the country, as we make our way out of the economy slowing. It will be very difficult to get folks who have been out of work and struggling to work meaningfully again if we can’t count on the same or similar rules for how to conduct live events in different geographic markets.” - Rho

Manu Beers

Co-founder, Tomorrowland

Michiel Beers

Co-founder/CEO, Tomorrowland

The pandemic forced the Tomorrowland co-founders to cancel both a March festival at a French ski resort and the company’s signature event in Belgium in July. The dance festival company lost 90% of its turnover, but the brothers Beers rallied their team, and in two-and-a-half months created Tomorrowland Around the World, a pay-per-view digital festival featuring green-screen performances on an imaginary island by the likes of Katy Perry and Martin Garrix. “Creativity is something that can’t be stopped by a global pandemic,” says Michiel Beers. “I’m very proud of how resilient our team was to find new ways of bringing Tomorrowland into the new reality.”

My Resolution For This Year: “Live today, love tomorrow, unite forever.” - Michiel Beers

Dayna Frank

Board president, National Independent Venue Association; owner/CEO, First Avenue Productions

Stephen Sternschein

Co-founder/board treasurer, National Independent Venue Association; managing partner, Heard Presents

NIVA came together in early spring as a group of promoters with a great need but little political clout. By December, it had played a significant role in helping to pass the Save Our Stages Act, which will provide \$15 billion in federal aid to shuttered music venues, movie theaters and museums. When the pandemic first hit in March, Frank, Sternschein and their colleagues “created a national organizing structure from literally nothing, resulting in federal legislation designed to sustain the independent ecosystem through this crisis,” says Frank, owner of the First Avenue nightclub in Minneapolis. She lobbied her home-state senator Amy Klobuchar while Sternschein developed a relationship with Lyor Cohen and later launched the Save Our Stages virtual festival, which raised over \$1.8 million for venues in danger of closing. “It gave me hope,” says Sternschein, “that we could save ourselves using what we know best — music — if we all do it together.”

Artist I Most Want to See in Concert After the Pandemic: “All of them. I want to see all the concerts.” - Frank

Ali Harnell

President/chief strategy officer, Live Nation Women, Live Nation

On Blackout Tuesday, Harnell, 52, helped assemble a few hundred music business professionals on Nashville’s Music Row for a moment of silence for George Floyd, committing themselves to becoming anti-racist by learning and listening. In October, Live Nation Women launched the Beautiful Noise campaign, urging women to use their voices and votes, in honor of the centennial of women’s suffrage in America. It commissioned female songwriters to write the anthem “A Beautiful Noise,” performed by Alicia Keys and Brandi Carlile. “We can all performatively say we are committed to change,” says Harnell, “but it’s critical to create systems of accountability to ensure lasting change.”

My Resolution For This Year: “Stay focused on deep, measurable, tangible systemic change.”

Isabel Infantes/PA Images via Getty Images
Alicia Keys

Heather Lowery

President/CEO, Femme It Forward

Under Lowery, Femme It Forward seeks to eliminate systemic racism and sexism by celebrating, educating and empowering women and giving them a platform to share their voices on and off the stage. In partnership with Live Nation, Femme It Forward in June launched its Revolutionary Reads virtual book club to educate and empower women of color and allies, and, in December, started its Next Gem Femme mentorship program, which will provide 200 young women of color resources and opportunities to succeed in the music business, with 100 of those applicants coming from historically Black colleges and universities. “While we miss doing events more than ever and they will continue to be a core area we focus on, this year forced us to think of other ways to engage,” says Lowery. “In the long term, our community will be even stronger as a result.”

My Resolution For This Year: “To continue putting in meaningful work that will create lasting change. Our mission is a marathon, and we’ll celebrate every mile along the way while constantly pushing for our goal.”

Nadia Prescher

VP, National Independent Talent Organization; co-founder, Madison House

Prescher led efforts to raise awareness of the need for federal relief for independent booking agencies through the National Independent Talent Organization, which represents over 100 independent booking agencies, 140-plus management companies, 560-plus associated artists and over 280 other live touring entities. “Many of us have been working overtime to ensure that no stone is left unturned on the road to economic recovery,” says Prescher, who has emphasized how the pandemic has worsened racial income inequality. “The U.S. is still watching billionaires maximize their investments while artists and entertainers struggle to make ends meet. Gig workers and small businesses were the hardest hit.”

My Resolution For This Year: “To advocate for organizations centered around mental health, charitable services and social responsibility within our music community. Backline, The Rex Foundation and HeadCount are doing such incredible work on all of these fronts.”

Rhea Roberts-Johnson

VP ticketing, Goldenvoice/AEG Presents

Kyle Robinson

GM, The Novo, Goldenvoice/AEG Presents

Jarvis Smith

Ticketing manager, Goldenvoice/AEG Presents

The three AEG colleagues are part of the founding team of GV Black, which in July announced its mission “to help create initiatives to highlight the Black experience at our organization and expand representation of the Black community at Coachella.” For Smith, 32, “the most important moment has been addressing the lack of diversity within the live-music industry for Black women and men in executive and senior management leadership roles that go beyond just being entertainers.”

Lasting Change Requires: “Companies need to do the internal work of understanding the people of their organization and the personal challenges they face in their roles.” - Smith

Austin Whitney

President, Ten Fifty Entertainment

Ten Fifty provides accessibility services for events including music festivals, conventions and trade shows. But as live events moved into the digital realm, Whitney, who has used a wheelchair since 2007, shifted his focus toward digital access for individuals with auditory and visual disabilities. His nonprofit organization Accessible Festivals partnered with Coachella and Black disabled DJ Sabeerah Najee to “create a program designed to benefit Black, Indigenous and people of color with disabilities that is launching at the festival in 2021,” he says. And after months spent traveling around the country exploring national parks, he also started Inclusive Expeditions to help individuals with disabilities enjoy U.S. parks.

My Resolution For This Year: “To always remember how grateful I am for live music.”

Mark Yovich

President, Ticketmaster

Since March, Ticketmaster has been dealing with the daunting task of adjusting tickets for the thousands of canceled and rescheduled shows this past year, all while shifting to remote offices. At the same time, Yovich, 46, and his team have been figuring out how to safely welcome fans back to shows once the pandemic is over, and developed SmartEvent to help equip event organizers with the tools to meet evolving guidelines on capacity, distancing and other logistics while enabling contactless and mobile-centric features into the future. “We all miss events more than ever,” he says, “and once we’re back, we want to make sure Ticketmaster is delivering tools to help everyone enjoy even more of the game or concert in the moment.”

Artist I Most Want to See in Concert After the Pandemic: “I’ll be the first in line to see The War on Drugs when they return.”

Tony Coles

Division president, iHeartMedia Markets Group; president, Black Information Network, iHeartMedia

Tanita Myers

Director of news operations, Black Information Network, iHeartMedia

Protests and “the conversations they triggered” about systemic racism and injustice accelerated the creation in June of Black Information Network, a stand-alone business unit within iHeartMedia, says Coles. “The issues are not new, nor have they been resolved. However, I cannot think of a moment in my lifetime when so many people, from all walks of life, were collectively willing to say three words: ‘Black lives matter.’ ” The new entity is

building “the first 24/7 all-news network by and for the Black community,” he says, which will give “a voice to stories that have gone untold and bring a much-needed perspective to the news.”

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “The shift in creativity that will result from months of artists, producers and songwriters being isolated and using this time to develop new sounds.”

Connie Orlando

Executive vp specials, music programming and music strategy, BET Networks

Hsiao Ron Cheng

Connie Orlando

In June, the BET Awards went virtual for the first time due to the coronavirus pandemic, but the show was still jam-packed with stars. Alicia Keys, Roddy Ricch, Chloe x Halle, DaBaby, Jennifer Hudson, John Legend, Kane Brown, Lil Wayne and Megan Thee Stallion were among those who performed. In one of the most striking moments of the night, as DaBaby began his performance of his No. 1 hit “Rockstar,” he laid down on the ground with his hands behind his back while a white man in a police uniform pressed his knee onto the rapper’s neck — a reenactment of the death of George Floyd.

For over a decade, Connie Orlando has been the force behind BET’s tentpole events, including the BET Awards, which ended up drawing 3.7 million total viewers across networks, according to Nielsen.

“I understand that the power of my programming vision and artistic decisions play a major role in shaping the global perception of Black culture worldwide,” says Orlando. “So, for me, the social justice movement allowed me to shape programming that mirrored the visceral emotions around the protests and tributes in remembrance of the lives lost.”

She adds, “We are able to extend all our platforms to artists who, through their talents, become voices to the voiceless, amplifying the pain, frustration and anger fueling the social justice movement. I can look back with pride knowing we did everything we could to deeply entertain, inspire and empower our consumers during this transformative era.”

And her personal music wish list, when the pandemic is over?

“After such a spiritually and emotionally draining year, I would love an evening of escapism with Sade, an entertainer who walks boldly in her authenticity, is committed to her artistry and is a perfect blend of grace as she delivers sultry harmonies,” says Orlando. “Her music is the poetic, soul-stirring and nurturing music that our souls and the world need to heal.”

Joshua “J1” Raiford

Director of hip-hop, Pandora; program director, Pandora Now, SiriusXM

The fight for racial equality, voting rights and the economic impact of the coronavirus on communities of color were Raiford's principal concerns in 2020. The Atlanta native engaged artists, influencers and music executives in conversation on the *Pandora for Brands* podcast and the *Top Shelf Show* on SiriusXM channel The Heat. Raiford made monetary donations matched by the company to organizations "geared toward helping Black people," he says, such as Morehouse College. He also encouraged voter registration on-air.

Lasting Change Requires: "Staying engaged politically, socially and economically; holding our leaders accountable regardless of party affiliation; and becoming the change you want to see."

Sherrese Clarke Soares

Founder/CEO, Tempo Music

Tempo Music, a partnership of Providence Equity and Warner Music Group, launched in 2019 with a high-profile catalog acquisition that included songs by Jeff Bhasker, Shane McAnally and Ben Rector, fueled by \$1 billion in investable capital. But Clarke Soares and Tempo have more than just deep pockets. "As a Black daughter, sister, mother and wife, I am keenly aware of the fight for Black lives and racial equity," she says, adding that Tempo has built a "diversity-inspired asset manager" that has a dimension and composition rare in private equity. "We care deeply about setting the table differently," she says, "which allows us to invest differently and be the change we want to see in the world."

Lasting Change Requires: "Conviction and bravery in the face of adversity. Putting values and people first even at the cost of a few extra points of return."

Tiffany A. Dunn

Office administrative partner, Nashville, Loeb & Loeb

Dunn has been putting in extra hours to support the needs of clients and co-workers during this past year. She is co-chair of the Women's Affinity Group at Loeb & Loeb, which provides networking, mentorship and professional and business development opportunities for women lawyers across the firm. But her efforts to help go beyond her office. "I am on the board of Porter's Call," an organization dedicated to providing aid to struggling touring artists. "There has been no other time when its services have been so wanted and needed," says Dunn, who is on the board of trustees of David C. Cook, which owns Integrity Music.

Lasting Change Requires: "Commitment. Sometimes that involves an uncomfortable amount of time and attention."

Damien Granderson

Partner, Granderson Des Rochers

Granderson has counted numerous artist and label change agents among his clients, including Quality Control Music, J Balvin, J. Cole, H.E.R. and Young Thug. But “during this unprecedented time,” he says, “it has been even more important to advocate for the voices of those underrepresented in the community.” He is a member of the Black Music Action Coalition and a board member of the Black American Music Association and The Center for Early Education. “I am committed to fostering inclusion and diversity in my community,” he says.

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “The lack of transparency regarding the distribution of streaming income in the music business. Artists should know how much labels and publishers receive from [digital service providers] — derived from exploiting their content — so they can better understand their value.”

Bob Moczydlowsky

Managing director, Techstars Music

Moczydlowsky calls Techstars, which was created in 2016, “the best and most reputable accelerator program for music-related startups in the world.” Before the pandemic, it invested \$120,000 total in selected companies. To meet what Moczydlowsky calls its “moral obligation” to foster equality and diversity, the company launched a diversity initiative to ensure that 50% of its future CEOs would represent diverse communities — especially people of color, women and LGBTQ+ populations — while providing an additional \$60,000 in matching investments. Techstars also welcomed its first Black-owned member company, Right Hand Music Group (Khalid), which will allow it to “be in a much better position to ensure people of all communities are represented on both sides of the table.”

Kris Ahrend

CEO, Mechanical Licensing Collective

Starting Jan. 1, the Mechanical Licensing Collective changed how music publishing works in the United States by collecting for distribution to publishers mechanical royalties from streaming services, as mandated by the 2018 Music Modernization Act. But the Nashville-based nonprofit was challenged during the pandemic on “how to spread the word,” says Ahrend, which was especially important, as the MLC can only disburse money to registered members. He took his message online with virtual events that reached almost 13,000 people. “We’ve assembled a dedicated and diverse team of almost 50 employees who have built and launched a brand-new industry organization from scratch,” says Ahrend. For the MLC, Ahrend also established four guiding principles, one of which is a commitment to diversity that is reflected in its staff makeup and industry outreach.

Artist I Most Want to See in Concert After the Pandemic: “Whoever is performing at The Bluebird Cafe in Nashville the first night it’s able to reopen.”

Michèle Ballantyne

COO, RIAA

Ballantyne, 54, advocated for COVID-19 relief measures as well as social justice and police reform “at both the federal and state level,” she says, noting the economic toll of the pandemic on the live-music industry. Her efforts helped lead to the passage of HR 7120, the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, in the U.S. House of Representatives in June, as well as the “successful repeal of 50-A in New York, a law that shielded records of police misconduct from the public,” she says. “What kind of society do we have without the basic promise of equal treatment and justice for all?”

Artist I Most Want to See in Concert After the Pandemic: “J Balvin. His concert experience is colorful and exudes pure joy, and that’s what we all need right now.”

Valeisha Butterfield Jones

Chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer, Recording Academy

Jeriel Johnson

Executive director, Washington, D.C., chapter, Recording Academy; executive sponsor, Black Music Collective, Recording Academy

Rigo “Riggs” Morales

Chair, Black Music Collective, Recording Academy; senior vp A&R, Atlantic Records

Butterfield Jones, Johnson and Morales are key movers behind the Recording Academy’s Black Music Collective. In 2019, Morales brought the idea for the initiative to Harvey Mason Jr., chair of the academy’s board of trustees and, since 2020, interim president/CEO of the academy. As the first BMC chair, Morales works closely with Mason, Butterfield Jones and Johnson in educating and activating the Black music community within the academy and the industry at large. “The last year has been one of the most challenging in many of our lifetimes,” says Butterfield Jones, who joined the academy in May. She has implemented a social impact/racial justice plan for the organization, which has included a partnership with Color of Change, the nation’s largest online racial justice organization. “The partnership spans several strategies, including the creation of the Black Music Collective, dedicated to the inclusion, recognition and advancement of Black music and its creators. This is just the beginning.”

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “The discussion surrounding COVID-19 relief for music creators deserves more widespread coverage outside of our industry bubble. Musicians were the first out of work when tours were canceled and will certainly be among the last to return, even as our nation slowly recovers and reopens.” - Butterfield Jones

Manolo Díaz

Senior vp, Latin Grammy Cultural Foundation

With schools closed and philanthropic events canceled, the Latin Grammy Cultural Foundation still awarded \$900,000 in music scholarships to Latino students around the world, as well as \$60,000 in instrument donations and \$20,000 in research and preservation grants. “Education is more essential than ever,” says Díaz. Artists including Juanes and Enrique Iglesias have sympathized with and supported the foundation’s mission. During Díaz’s tenure over the past six years, the foundation has helped 255 students and distributed \$5.8 million in scholarships, grants and donations. “With creativity and love, we were able to fulfill many virtual initiatives,” says Díaz. “No scholarship recipient stopped receiving our financial support.”

President Biden Must Focus On: “Protection and fairness to benefit music creators. The U.S. is, perhaps, one of the worst economic environments in the world for composers and performers.”

Portia Sabin

President, Music Business Association

Sabin took on leadership of the Music Business Association just six months before live events shut down and proceeded to help coordinate over 40 online sessions to “amplify diverse voices in the music industry,” she says. “The music business was built on the art of Black musicians and thus is uniquely poised to lead in lifting up Black voices, executives and artists if we have the collective will to do it,” says Sabin. “Diversity must become the norm in our industry and not an anomaly or a temporary fix. We can’t ever go back to an industry where panels, boards and decision-makers are exclusively white men.”

The Most Underreported Music-Biz Story of 2020: “Article 17 of the European Copyright Directive coming into effect” in 2021, which will make it easier for rights holders to protect their work online.

Stacy L. Smith

Founder, USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative

Smith’s work guiding the University of Southern California’s Annenberg Inclusion Initiative has revealed massive gender inequalities in the music industry in its landmark studies. Now, with racial justice at the fore, she says, “We have renewed our commitment to support the voices of women — particularly women of color — in all facets of entertainment.” That means the group has “accelerated our emphasis on studying executives of color in the music business with our long-term partners at Universal Music Group,” she adds. One bright spot from the initiative’s past work: “We are starting to see gains for women songwriters.”

President Biden Must Focus On: “Economic recovery. Racial justice. Climate change. And I am most interested in seeing Vice President Kamala Harris take on yet another mantle of leadership.”

Contributors: Trevor Anderson, Katie Bain, Alexei Barrionuevo, Dave Brooks, Ed Christman, Tatiana Cirisano, Leila Cobo, Mariel Concepcion, Stephen Daw, Frank DiGiacomo, Thom Duffy, Griselda Flores, Gabriella Ginsberg, Josh Glicksman, Paul Grein, Lyndsey Havens, Steve Knopper, Carl Lamarre, Robert Levine, Joe Levy, Jason Lipshutz, Joe Lynch, Taylor Mims, Gail Mitchell, Mia Nazareno, Melinda Newman, Glenn Peoples, Claudia Rosenbaum, Dan Rys, Jaelani Turner-Williams, Andrew Unterberger, Christine Werthman, Natelegé Whaley, Jewel Wicker, Nick Williams, Stereo Williams, Xander Zellner

Methodology: Billboard power lists are selective, with honorees chosen by Billboard editors. In the wake of an unprecedented year, Billboard’s editorial team chose to create our first Change Agents issue to take the place of the annual Power List. To select honorees for the Change Agents issue, the editorial staff reviewed our news coverage throughout the past year and all nominations for all lists submitted during 2020, with particular attention to information provided on advocacy efforts by individuals — those working for change to help the industry survive the pandemic and for change to address the causes of this moment, particularly in pursuit of racial justice. Broadly, we have not selected individuals recognized on Billboard’s most recent Power List. Please send feedback on the Change Agents issue to Thom Duffy, executive director, power lists, at thom.duffy@billboard.com.

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